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Slaves

Captured by pirates

Two Short Stories

Slaves

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Slaves

Captured by pirates

by Joseph A. Altsheler



Preface

These two stories deal with men who became slaves after being captured at sea by pirates.

The problems associated with piracy in the early nineteenth century continued for some years and finally ended with the United States sending naval forces to Tripoli (during the term of President Madison).

Both stories were published early in Mr. Altsheler's career; "Old Tom of Nantucket" in February 1897, and "A Problem of the East" in November of the same year.



Old Tom of Nantucket

Abdallah ben Jussuf did not seek to conceal the trouble which lay heavy upon him, and as he strode about the deck of his ship the sailors took care that they never came within reach of the long, beautifully curved yataghan with the silver hilt that he wore in his belt. Abdallah ben Jussuf's right hand wandered more than once to his favorite weapon, and the brown sinewy fingers fitted themselves lovingly around the silver hilt, but there was no need for the sailors to fear him. Wrath he had a plenty, but it was stewing and steaming for the Christian dogs, and not for the Faithful, the pious followers of the greatest of the prophets. Abdallah ben Jussuf had made the pilgrimage, and it would ill become a devout Mussulman to raise his hand against his brethren.

But there was good cause for the wrath that consumed his soul. Abdallah ben Jussuf was

known as the boldest and aye, hitherto, the luckiest of captains that sailed out of Algiers. Many a time had he returned to port with a shipful of treasure and Christian slaves, the spoil of his hand. Many a time had the Dey commended him as one who increased the wealth and glory of his master and who won favor from Allah by his faithful service in the cause of the true religion. He even remembered the Dey's words when he set out in the Hafiz upon his cruise. Nor did he forget how the hope of bountiful spoil and many captives had flamed high in his breast when he heard those words.

For the first time the wind of favor had failed to fill Abdallah ben Jussuf's sails. Allah had turned his face away from him. He and his crew seemed alone upon the sea. Sail where they might, they could find no sight of Christian vessel. Day after day the Hafiz sailed forward and then back, then tacked and cruised here and there and crossed the lines of travel which Abdallah ben Jussuf knew the Christian ships were accustomed to take. But the crew of the Hafiz saw nothing save the blue sea under them

and the blue sky overhead.

The devout Mussulman forgot none of his duties. In vain did he pray four times a day and turn his face toward Mecca. Still not a sail. Allah sent neither spoil nor captive into his hand. He looked upon his ship, and the sight was good. Not a finer corsair floated the crescent flag. And his crew? There they were, a numerous and hardy band, bare of foot and arm, dark of face, strong of muscle, and bold of heart. Some polished guns, others toiled at the spars and rigging: all carried wide-mouthed pistols and keen-edged yataghans in their belts. The eyes of Abdallah flashed with pride as he looked upon his dusky horde. He knew them. He had seen them, knives aloft, swarm over the decks of the Christian ships and slay the infidels who dared to oppose them. But Abdallah ben Jussuf also knew that, like the lions, they must be fed, or by and by when hunger gnawed they would turn and rend their keeper. He knew, moreover, that the Dey, his master, back in the city, was waiting for the treasure and slaves he expected his faithful servant Abdallah ben Jussuf to bring to him, as he

had done many times before. But now he had neither the treasure nor the captives; and how could he return to his master and face him empty-handed? The Dey was seldom merciful to those who brought him nothing.

Thus the reasons were many and good for the discontent that preyed upon the vitals of Abdallah ben Jussuf. He took his strong marine glass which had come in the French tribute and which his master, the Dey, in a moment of high approval, had presented to him, and swept the wide circle of the sea in a prayerful search for a Christian sail. But he saw nothing to rejoice his heart. Overhead the little white clouds floated peacefully in a sky of blue; the sea, a bed of turquoise, tinged with lighter streaks where the waves broke, lapped lazily against his ship. The glare of the red sun beat down on ship and sea. Save for his own vessel, the ocean was silent and lonely. Abdallah ben Jussuf's heart sickened. He walked back and forth for a little while longer, and then called a sailor.

“Ibrahim,” said the captain, “go thou below and bring before me the Christian dog, my slave.”

Then Ibrahim went and brought Old Tom of Nantucket. Years ago, perhaps half a dozen, perhaps eight or ten, the corsairs had taken Old Tom out of a merchant schooner. He was a stout, likely fellow, and they made of him a slave to toil and to moil and to serve the children of the Prophet. Do not think that Old Tom of Nantucket, who had been a man-o'-war's-man in his time and had fought hilt to hilt on a bloody deck, submitted humbly to such a fate. But in the old African city to which they took him they had persuasive ways with their slaves. If there had been any Christian to listen Old Tom of Nantucket might have told tales of the bastinado and the torture, and then again he might have said nothing, for, like many another of his kind, Old Tom was a man who loved not a long tongue.

But here he was, bent and brown and looking meek and obedient enough when he came before his master, Abdallah ben Jussuf, captain of the good corsair Hafiz.

There was a frown on the face of Abdallah, and his fingers lingered on the hilt of his yataghan, as he said to Old Tom—

“Dog of a Christian, thou knowest that we have been sailing hither and thither for a long time and we see not a sail. The Christian ships are in the habit of passing this way, but we cannot find them. We have neither booty nor captives, and my men murmur. We are like those who wander in the desert and search for sweet water and find it not. Why is it? Hast thou bewitched the ship with thy Christian prayers?”

Old Tom, having a great fear of witchcraft himself, and not being a man of free speech in the best of times, was taken much aback, and looked around at the sea and the sky before replying.

“Answer!” thundered Abdallah ben Jussuf, as his fingers clasped over the hilt of his yataghan. “Thou art my slave, and if thou hast thrown a spell upon the ship thou shalt die under the torture for it”

“Nay,” said Old Tom, “I am an honest man-o’-war’s-man fallen into an evil plight, and I know naught of such things.”

“Is it not here, or near here, that the ships from thy country going to Italy and the lands beyond

are accustomed to pass?”

Old Tom said that it was. Over there, just beyond the horizon, where the Spanish coast lay, he had been taken himself, and that was not an event he was likely to forget.

Abdallah ben Jussuf meditated awhile, with his hand still on the hilt of his yataghan. Then he told Ibrahim to take Old Tom below again, and when he had gone he resumed his discontented watch over the ocean looking and longing for a sail.

Old Tom felt some relief when he had been escorted below, for he did not like the manner of Abdallah ben Jussuf. Life was not of great value to him, but somehow he clung to it still, and he dreamed of a day when he should again be a trig man-o'-war's-man aboard the good sloop Eagle, with Boatswain Ben Collins, his trusty chum, by his side. Many was the time Old Tom had lamented his folly in leaving the Eagle and sailing in a merchant-ship, to fall into the hands of the corsairs. Then, as his visions of Boatswain Ben and the Eagle faded and hope waxed weak, he would wonder if the stanch sloop still sailed the ocean. One night he dreamed that he had seen

her lying on the bottom of the sea, with dead men on her decks. The white face of his chum, Boatswain Ben Collins, stared up at him.

For days after he dreamed that dream Old Tom was so slow in his work that Omar more than once prodded him with a knife to make him more lively. Omar was the chief cook of the Hafiz, and it was the business of Old Tom of Nantucket, once a man-o'-war's-man, to wash the pots and kettles. Old Tom was glad there were no other Christians on board the ship to see him in his humiliation and behold the state into which he had sunk. Even should he escape he doubted if he could ever hold up his head again before his chum, Ben Collins, the boatswain.

The Hafiz sailed about for two more days, and all the while the wrath of Abdallah ben Jussuf increased. And something like fear mingled with his wrath, for he knew that his master, the Dey, was not wont to be appeased with vain tales and excuses, and when the spoil and the captives were not forthcoming would treat him as Abdallah ben Jussuf himself had treated more than one slave who had fallen into his hands.

Moreover, the dark faces around Abdallah ben Jussuf grew darker, and the murmurings grew louder. Sidi Mohammed, the second in command, came to him and suggested a dash upon the coast of Spain.

“We can fall upon a village at night,” he said, “and carry off the women. The Spanish girls are fair, and would bring a fine price in the slave-market.”

But Abdallah shook his head. Upon the sea, where blood left no stain, he was ready to dare anything, but he cared not for adventure upon land. He feared that his master, the Dey, would not approve, for the times were not as they were of old, and some of the rights of the Faithful had been abridged.

While Abdallah was in this mood Old Tom of Nantucket was not a pleasing sight to him. The sailor’s face reminded him too often of the object of his cruise and his failure to attain that object. He thought several times that the application of the bastinado to Old Tom would divert his own feelings and those of his crew; but on second thoughts he would let the matter pass. The slave’s

work was of value, and, as Allah held out no prospect of more slaves, it was not worth while to injure him.

But on the third day there came a change of fortune. Allah could not be forgetful always of his children. The sailor at the mast-head, peering out over the ocean, saw a brown speck on the rim of the horizon. Though but a common sailor and entitled only to a common sailor's share, his heart thrilled at the sight, and he returned thanks to Mahomet, for he knew the brown speck was a ship, and he believed that it would be a prize. But he looked again and still again, in order to be sure that his joy had not been premature, and then he hailed Abdallah, who stood on the deck below, and told him of the ship.

The joy of Abdallah was not inferior to that of the man at the mast-head, but it did not become one of his gravity to show it in his face and manner. He turned and looked at the brown speck upon the horizon, which was now visible even from the deck, and presently he called out—

“Canst thou see the vessel well enough, Hamet, to tell what she is?”

“She looks like a trading-ship, my lord, but I can tell nothing more as yet,” replied Hamet from the mast-head.

It was the habit of Abdallah to prepare for all things, and he would not be guilty of any neglect which might let a rich prize slip through his fingers. The men were summoned to quarters: a fierce crew they were, with their muskets and pistols and crooked knives, and their eyes gleaming with the lust of blood. The cannon were loaded, the ship was trimmed for action, and every man was ready for the fray which was to bring him booty.

“Allah has been kind to us at last,” said Abdallah to Sidi Mohammed, who stood at his side; “for, see, the stranger ship comes nearer, and she will surely fall into our hands. Verily the Prophet watches over the true believers and delivers their enemies unto them.”

Then he watched the ship through his glass, and by and by he told Sidi Mohammed that he believed she was Amerikano. At this Sidi Mohammed rubbed his hands and remarked that it was well, for it was a long way to the land of

the Amerikano, and the ship would not make such a journey without being well loaded. A pleased expression came over Abdallah's face, but it was followed by a frown, for he looked around at his ship and he saw that the appearance of the Hafiz was likely to give alarm in those suspicious days to any peaceful merchant-vessel. Some of the Amerikano ships were very swift. This, perchance, being one of them, might outsail the Hafiz and escape, to the great loss of Islam, and especially of Abdallah ben Jussuf and his crew, of whom there were no more devout followers of the true faith.

Abdallah walked the deck for a few minutes, and then the right course came to him. He ordered the men away from the rail and made them conceal themselves about the deck of the ship. Some lay behind the boats or in them. Others crouched behind heaps of cordage or lurked at the head of the stairways. The ship bore a hundred cutthroats with arms in each hand, but they were visible only to those who stood upon her own deck. Her masts and rigging looked like those of a Spanish or Italian ship. Before sailing

away from port Abdallah had been wise enough to provide for that.

When everything had been arranged to suit his critical eye, Abdullah had Old Tom brought before him. He pointed to the distant ship, and asked of the American—

“Dost thou see the ship yonder?”

“Ay, ay, sir,” said Old Tom; “I see her. What is she?”

“That is for you to say. Is she not one of the ships of thy nation? Is she not Americano?”

There was a queer sensation at the heart of Old Tom, which surprised him. He believed that he was long since dead to sympathy and all kindred feelings; but the ship was now near enough for him to see floating over her a flag which he knew and loved. The two vessels were sailing down the sides of a triangle, and unless one or the other altered her course they would meet at its point.

Old Tom gazed long, and the queer sensation came over him again. There could be no mistake. Through the glass which Abdallah had forced him to use he could see every star and stripe on

the flag when the wind unrolled its folds. There was the ship, sailing peacefully on and bearing her unsuspecting crew into certain death or slavery. Old Tom looked around at the lurking devils on the Hafiz, and the queer sensation at his heart grew stronger.

Abdallah whispered to Sidi Mohammed, who went below and came back presently with an old violin and bow that had been saved from some former prize. Abdallah tapped the silver hilt of his yataghan, and, pointing to the violin, said to Old Tom—

“Thou knowest the use of the instrument, for we have heard thee. Sit upon the boat here, where thou canst be seen from the other ship, and make thy Amerikano music. We would let them know that friends are near who would bear them company.”

Abdallah’s smile was full of satisfaction, and Sidi Mohammed nodded approval. Old Tom looked again at the distant ship and the flag he loved, and shook his head.

“Mebbe I’ve consorted with robbers and

pirates so long that there ain't much of human natur, leastways of the human natur that is good, left in me," he said; "but I'm darned ef I'll draw my countrymen into your bloody hands."

It was said in Abdallah ben Jussuf's tongue, but that is how it would have sounded in Old Tom's own dialect. The corsair's eyes flashed, and he drew his yataghan. Then he thought better of it and thrust his weapon back in his girdle.

"Dog of a Christian," he said, "thou art my slave and must obey my commands. Thou refusest? Well, I have ways to make thee."

Abdallah called to his men and gave them some orders. Four stout fellows seized Old Tom and threw him upon his back.

"Carry him behind the boat there," said Abdallah, "and try the bastinado."

Old Tom resisted and struggled in the grip of the men, but his efforts were of no avail. His feet were bared, and a fifth man came with a club. Abdallah stood over him, and asked—

"Wilt thou obey my orders and make the music?"

Old Tom sullenly snook his head. Abdallah gave a sign, and the club descended upon the soles of the bare feet. The whole form of the prostrate man shrank and shivered, but no sound came from his lips. The club descended again and again, and the blood broke through the bruised flesh and stained the deck. Human endurance was passed, and a groan broke from the lips of Old Tom.

“Wilt thou do as I say?” asked Abdallah.

Old Tom still shook his head, and the club descended again. Then the old sailor fainted with pain and exhaustion. A dish of sea-water was thrown in his face, and he revived.

Abdallah then commanded them to lift him up until he could see the strange ship.

“Thou
seest the
ship
yonder,”
said
Abdallah.
“We



The ship yonder

would make a prize of her. Do as I bid thee, or thou shalt be put to the torture again.”

The ship was now much nearer, and Old Tom looked at her long and keenly. He stroked his bruised feet, and then he said to Abdallah ben Jussuf—

“It’s a hard thing that you ask of me, to draw my own countrymen into a snare, but that club of yours is more than I can stand. Give me the fiddle, an’ I’ll do it.”

“Sit upon the boat there, where they can see thee plainly,” said Abdallah, “and do thou be sure that thou dost not give them warning, or by the beard of Mahomet I will cut thee to pieces myself.”

Old Tom climbed painfully into a conspicuous position on the boat, and fixed the violin under his chin. Abdallah crouched behind the boat, and drew his yataghan.

“Play, play, thou dog of a Christian!” he exclaimed, as he reached up and prodded Old Tom in the calf of his leg with his yataghan. Old Tom drew the bow across the violin and began an

old tune, "The World's Turned Upside Down." His fingers were somewhat stiffened, but he drew fair music from the violin. While he played he watched the other ship, and Abdallah, crouched behind the boat, did the same.

The Hafiz looked as peaceful and harmless as an ordinary Spanish or Italian trading-vessel. A few men strolled lazily about the deck, and, perched high above the concealed crew, Old Tom of Nantucket sawed industriously upon the fiddle. Sails were spread over the cannon. The tompions were in the port-holes, and there was nothing visible to arouse even the fears of the most suspicious on the other vessel. It was merely a lazy ship with a lazy crew floating placidly on under a summer sun.

The American ship seemed to be lulled into perfect confidence and security; but she looked like an untidy vessel at best. Some of her sails hung awry. There was a litter about her decks. A man with a straw hat sat on a stool by the rail, lazily smoking a pipe. Another man swung in a hammock, and three or four sailors slouched about the deck.

“Do they appear to suspect us?” asked Abdallah of Old Tom.

“I can see naught to show that they do,” replied the seaman. “It looks like a lazy, sleepy crew over thar. You might sail right through ’em before they knowed it. God forgive me for drawin’ ’em on to destruction!”

“Allah himself wills the punishment of the infidel,” said Abdallah. “Play on, thou dog, and beware that thou sayest and doest nothing to alarm them.”

The two ships slowly neared each other. It was not Abdallah’s plan to sail directly for the American, for fear of alarming her. He kept on down his side of the triangle; the prize remained true to her original course, which would be sure to bring them together.

Out over the waters floated the queer old tune that Old Tom played on the violin. On the American ship they could hear the strains, for one of the sailors danced a few steps, and the man in the hammock sat up to listen. He looked intently at the Algerine, gave some orders to the sailors,

and in a few minutes the ship sheered off a bit.

“He suspects us! Play faster! Play faster!” exclaimed Abdallah, as he prodded Old Tom again in the leg with the keen knife-point.

Old Tom plied the bow with a vigor worthy of his younger days. Abdallah altered the course of the Hafiz a bit, until she was approaching the American as fast as before. But the prize seemed to have got over her alarm. The man lolled back in the hammock again. The other on the stool still stolidly smoked his pipe. The light-footed sailor began to dance again.

When they were within hailing distance the man on the stool pulled his pipe out of his mouth and called out—

“What ship is that?”

“Do not answer,” exclaimed Abdallah to Old Tom. “Let them think we are Italian or Spanish and do not understand their tongue. Play on.”

Old Tom shook his head. The man hailed a second time, and when Old Tom shook his head again, he put his pipe back to his mouth and resumed smoking as calmly as if it made no

difference to him whether he got a reply or not.

“The prize is ours! The prize is ours!” exclaimed Abdallah, exultantly. “See, Allah bringeth him into our hands.”

Sidi Mohammed, crouching near, nodded approval, and scores of fierce black eyes gleamed with joy. Abdallah gave a signal to his helmsman. The course of the Hafiz was altered, and she bore down directly upon the prize.

“Now, my children,” shouted Abdallah, springing to his feet, scimitar in hand, as the two ships almost touched. “Forward, by Allah, and the ship is ours!”

The pirates rose up in a swarm, but at the same moment the man on the stool uttered a cry in his strange tongue and leaped back. The black muzzles of a dozen cannon were thrust suddenly through the portholes of his ship. There was a tremendous rolling broadside, a sheet of flame, and the huge balls of iron crashed and tore their way through the Hafiz and beat down the men on her decks. There was an awful moment of suspense, then the Hafiz shivered, reeled far over

on her side, filled with water, and went down in a whirlpool.

“How on airth did ye know us, old partner?” asked Boatswain Ben Collins an hour later of Old Tom of Nantucket, who leaned, exhausted but happy, against a coil of rope on the deck of the stanch sloop Eagle, where the sailors had put him when they dragged him from the water.

“Did you think I’d ever forget the old ship?” said Old Tom. “She was too far away for me to know her the first time I saw her. But when they fetched me up for the second look I knowed her in a second. I guessed what ye was up to. So I jest drewed them bloodhounds on to their death, when they thought I was drawin’ you to yours.”



A Problem of the East

John Sanford was in a state of felicity until the wind failed and his ship lay becalmed in the sea that rims the northern coast of Africa. The voyage out from Boston had been quick and full of good omens; the trading venture in Sicily had been attended by good luck and skillful conduct, and now he was on his way home with much gold and silver locked in the strong box in the cabin. But the brand new republic of which he was a brisk citizen had been somewhat lax lately in paying its allotted share of tribute money to his nearest neighbors, the pious Moslem corsairs. And his ship was too small and his crew too few to repel serious attack from a people who showed scant courtesy to the Declaration of Independence and the rights of man, except as supported by a fine show of muskets and wide-mouthed cannon.

So he cursed the wind, or rather the lack of it, that held his ship in the center of a grilling world,

like an apple roasting before the fire and waiting to be eaten, and tried vainly to extract comfort from the second mate. That worthy, one Old Tom of Nantucket, leathery of skin, stolid of face, and great in experience, dashed buckets of sea water on the deck, and between dashings shut one eye and gazed industriously toward the continent of Africa. He knew the place he was in, and he knew that no good would come out of that shore.

Two days and two nights the ship swayed on the ocean. In the early morning watch of the second night Sanford saw something over toward Africa that twinkled like a star; but, Old Tom, after watching it intently for about five minutes, said it was a signal fire. Then he hunted up the first mate and told how, if anything should happen to him, the money that was to his credit in the bank at Nantucket was to be disposed of.

The coming of the day brought a whiff of wind, and the blue sea water began to crumble away on either side of the ship's prow. As the currents of air filled the sails, from the southeast two ships appeared, which Tom at once named as "Barbary pirates out following their trade."

Larger of hull and with much more spread of sail than Sanford's vessel, they gained upon her so fast as to leave them no resort but to try the strong arm. The ship carried a six-pounder, and there was a musket for each man. The crew had not shipped to fight; but neither had they shipped to be martyrs, and they took the muskets in willing hands. Sanford himself aimed the six-pounder at the decks thick with brown-faced and forbidding men and succeeded in sending a ball into the thickest huddle. But a moment later both the corsairs bumped against Sanford's ship, their crews sprang upon his deck, then as the captain tried to raise his pistol, a thrill as of death shot through his head, and he fell like one smitten by a bolt from God.

When Sanford was able to hear and to feel and to see again, he found himself lying with a very sore head at the bottom of a long boat. Some brown men in Eastern habit were pulling at the oars and other such men reposed in idleness and silence on the seats. Old Tom of Nantucket and all the companions of his own race and whiteness of skin were gone.

It was not for nothing that Sanford had sailed the seas and learned the ways of nations. At once he understood that life had been left in his body that it might serve the uses of another. There were slaves in Sanford's own country, despite its Declaration of Independence and its agreeable assertions about the rights of men, but they were black and stupid, and it never occurred to him that they cared. But he was a white man, one of the ruling race, a son of the new republic of freedom that had arisen in the West like a star shooting up to the zenith. The thought gave a wrench to Sanford's heart and he groaned with such agony that his Moslem captors looked curiously at him. Then they laughed, and he who laughed loudest kicked him in the side. Sanford's hands were unbound and his first impulse was to give a blow for the kick. But he reconsidered and remembered that one could be a slave and yet not want to die. So he merely crouched closer against the side of the boat.

In an hour or two they landed on that Africa of which Old Tom of Nantucket had spoken to him words evil in import. When he took the first step

upon the soil of the unhappy continent he felt as if the fetters of his slavery had been bound upon his ankles, for, from one of his captors, an English-speaking Mohammedan, he learned that the few of his crew who had survived were taken to be slaves, and that he was reserved as a present to the Bashaw.

And as he plodded at the heels of a camel, in the center of the caravan, his own country seemed distant, dim, unattainable. The dust of the desert made a crust in his throat and spread a film over his eyes. A mortal weariness struck him in the limbs. Once when he lagged the leader reached down from a camel's height and lashed him across the back with the thong of a whip. Sanford did not cry out, but he felt then the bitterness of the life that is worse than death.

In three days they reached the capital, where the ruins of old Rome, the broken bones of the past, which neither the drifting dust of the desert nor the tawdry town of the modern Moor could hide, gained solemnity and majesty from the meanness and bitterness of the things that surrounded them. But the mind of Sanford turned

not to the past. His were the thoughts of a slave who wonders what kind of a master the future will give to him.

It had been a fruitful summer, and much Christian wealth and many Christian captives had been gathered in the capital by faithful captains when Sanford was presented to the Bashaw. The autocrat was in complacent mood, and he looked not unkindly upon his new slave. Sanford was tall, and straight, and sightly, and the Bashaw made him a servant in his palace instead of sending him to the galleys or to toil in the fields with the lash over him. There were many things that Sanford could do which would be of use to a potentate who knew not the civilization of the West, and in time Sanford, with a new-born wisdom—he had seen the bastinado in practise—was doing them. Sometimes the thought vaguely passed through his mind that principle is merely a matter of place and circumstance; but he did not stop to inspect the subject too closely.

The profits of such conduct accrued fast, and Sanford rose in Mohammedan grace. He could do special duty; when he learned the native tongue

he was of great value in translating the tales of captives newly taken. As he smoothed his temper and bent his back the load of slavery became lighter and some of it slipped off.

Sanford had reached a position which in the West would be called secretary to a great man, when he saw the Bashaw's fourth and favorite wife, Zuleika. It was some trifling knowledge of medicine that he had picked up on his voyages that caused him to be sent into the harem to cure Zuleika's headache. When he saw her he did not wonder at the Bashaw's fondness, for she was Circassian, as fair of skin as his own countrywomen, and pleasant to the eye that loves beauty.

Sanford's success in the practise of medicine raised him a degree further in the esteem of his master, who was not without gratitude or an eye for merit. The Caucasian became a privileged man in the palace, and the face of the Bashaw's favorite wife was not hidden from him, though the black eunuch, Mukhtar, who was chief guard of the harem, was always present when he saw her. It was on one of his healing visits that she

told her history, which was short and without romance. She had been reared for the market with the care that would be bestowed upon any other animal that may have a future and considerable value. When she last saw her parents they were loudly and joyously counting the silver that was her price, and she left them feeling neither joy nor sorrow. Displayed for sale again in the slave market at Stamboul, she had been bought by an agent of the Bashaw and brought to his capital. The story of her life since then ended in the harem walls.

Apparently the Bashaw was but one of the incidents of a colorless life. Her face, though it had traces of the Greek profile, expressed neither joy nor sorrow, only the immemorial apathy of the East. How different, reflected Sanford, were the women in his own young country—the country which was growing dimmer to him every day. Were men and women merely the creatures of place and circumstance? The thought was not so vague now.

At one of these interviews it occurred to Sanford to tell Zuleika of his own country and the

women of his race, for some shreds of the pride of the West still endured in him. And as the mind and imagination of Sanford had become supple and agile in the service of the Bashaw, he painted the picture of the West in intense colors. He told of a land in which there was to be neither master nor slave, and the one man was to be as good as the other. In all this the woman was to have a just part. She was not bought or sold, and she shared almost equally with man the glory and fulness of the world.

Zuleika listened at first without comprehension. The thing was too strange to be believed.

“And thou sayest the woman is the equal of the man in thy country?” she said. “Nay, it cannot be. It is contrary to the will of Allah. One man is slave and another man is master, but the woman was made to be the servant of the man.”

But a tale that is often told gains strength with the telling and finds belief at last. Sanford watched with interest the first signs of intelligence in Zuleika’s mind. It was the benevolent curiosity with which the gardener

looks at the tender shrub that has grown from the new and strange seed that he has buried in the mold as an experiment.

“I should like to see this country of thine of which thou tellest such marvelous tales,” said Zuleika one day when black Mukhtar stood frowning at the length of her interview with Sanford. “Then I should know whether the things thou tellest are true or are but words of thine own making, like the tales of the Arab jugglers who come to the palace. Shall I ever go there?”

And when Sanford told her he did not think it had been decreed by Allah—

“Then why dost thou talk to me so much of thy country?” asked Zuleika. “I can never know whether thy words are the words of truth, or are said but to deceive or to amuse me.”

But Sanford was now too supple to be daunted by mild reproofs. He called heaven to witness that he told the thing that was and not the thing that was not. And the woman, though she doubted, was willing to hear more.

It was about this time that Sanford did a great

service for the Bashaw. The Bashaw was a just man according to his race and creed. As became a devout follower of the Prophet he was zealous in fitting out ships to prey upon the commerce of the infidel. He remitted his set share of tribute to Constantinople with promptness and fulness of measure. He never used the lash and the bastinado on his white slaves more than was necessary. He said his prayers four times a day, and drank no wine in the sight of other good Moslems. There was no reason why the Bashaw, when he left this world, should not dwell in the seventh heaven with Mahomet, and bask in the smiles of the houris that make the delight of paradise.

But all these meritorious qualities did not prevent a palace plot from being formed against the Bashaw. One evening about dusk, when Sanford lingered near a rose tree that grew beside the fountain in the palace yard, he heard the conspirators planning their blow. The Albanian, Stavoros, whose valor had won him the command of the Bashaw's body guard, was the leader. Hassan, the Bashaw's nephew, who, the plot

succeeding, was to mount the throne in his uncle's place, seemed no less eager. Most of the eunuchs and the officers of the body guard had been corrupted, and the next evening, when the Bashaw walked in the garden under the palm trees, he was to be sent into the presence of the Prophet by the saber of Stavoros.

When the conspirators left the garden, Sanford, brushing from his face the sweat of apprehension, entered the palace. He deliberated some time. To be concerned in Mohammedan intrigue was a matter of unrest and danger. But then it was apparent that he could gain nothing by an exchange of masters. On the contrary, he might lose. This reflection was decisive. He prayed an audience with his master and then told him all that he had heard by the fountain.

The Bashaw acted with more than Eastern promptness. The conspirators were seized as they slept. "I have lost a nephew," said the Bashaw to Sanford the next day at the decapitation of the plotters, when the head of Hassan fell on the marble floor, "but thou shalt take his place."

Being now a man of high trust, Sanford was

able to meet Zuleika oftener, which was much to his satisfaction, as he wished to see his experiment put to a thorough test. Mukhtar still watched him suspiciously; but if it came to a contest between them, it was probable that the eunuch and not Sanford would lose his head. Such knowledge as this made Sanford bold and Mukhtar cautious.

About this time Zuleika, who before had merely listened in an apathetic silence while Sanford talked, began to ask questions. These questions were about woman, the woman of the West, her liberty, her power, and her place in the world. These were the questions that Sanford wished her to ask, and he answered them all with the dexterity and pliancy of an Eastern courtier.

Sanford thought, too, that he noticed a gradual change in her appearance. There was some light in her eyes at last. They expressed emotions. She seemed to have curiosity about life and the world. This was, naturally, gratifying to a man of enterprising temper. There are few who do not like to see the success of their efforts.

There were further evidences of progress. One

day, when the watchful Mukhtar was away, she handed to him a pink rose.

“I am learning the customs of thy world,” she said. “There, so thou sayest, if a woman like any one she may show it. She is not a slave, thou sayest. I know not that what thou tellest me is true, but thy tales have pleased me, and I would hear more.”

Sanford was too wise to show what the favorite wife of the Bashaw had given to him. For such, he knew, if caught, the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He became more cautious, but he did not refrain from seeing Zuleika. These interviews were pleasant, and he was loth to give them up. He could see that they were pleasing to Zuleika also, for there was a glint in her eyes when he came.

The sloth of the life in the palace was disturbed by the fate of the Bashaw’s third wife. The lady’s charms were fading, and the Bashaw had long been neglecting her for his favorite, Zuleika. Left much alone, she had looked with favor upon an officer of the Iwdy guard. The wise and faithful Mukhtar had observed all, and by and by he

reported to his master. After that the lady and the officer were seen no more by man. It was whispered in the harem and among the slaves of the palace that they had been sewed up in sacks and dropped into the sea. Such was the practise on the Bosphorus, and it became the Sultan's vicegerents to do likewise. Mukhtar, who received his due meed of praise from his master, said nothing. But there seemed to be more significance in his glance when he looked at Sanford.

Upon Zuleika this tragedy had a surprising effect. Sanford did not see her until two weeks after its occurrence, when it had become to the others in the palace as one of the things of the ancient time, but she had not forgotten it.

“Would this have been the fate of a woman in thy country?” she asked. “Ah, it is as I told thee. In our land the woman is but the slave of the man. She pleases him to-day, and to-morrow she is cast away like a ragged garment. Perhaps I will be cast away also when I lose the beauty that my master values.”

Sanford knew that she saw the truth. Doubtless

she had seen it already, for this fact is obvious to the woman of Islam, but she had never comprehended it before, as keen and cruel in its nakedness as a bare sword. He told her again that in his country the husband could have but the one wife, and the wife was the equal in the law with her husband. He said, moreover, that the man who had grown up in the Western belief and had been molded by it, never could become aught else. He cited himself. He said that though now of the East, it would be possible for but one woman to hold his heart. She should be his sole sultana, the one star in the heavens that shone for him. He rather prided himself upon this Eastern metaphor, and thought that it would impress Zuleika.

“If all the men of thy country are as thou sayest thou art,” said Zuleika, “then indeed the Western women are fortunate.”

The Bashaw was sunk in luxury and sloth. His triumph over the conspirators made his power secure for a time at least. The terror of it and the recollection of those headless bodies would not pass away for another half year. So he took his

ease with Oriental dignity, and the new Western ideas that were turning about in the unaccustomed brain of his fourth wife came not within his notice.

Sanford was growing fairly content with his slavery. His backbone acquired a flexibility which he would have deemed impossible when he was a free American captain on his own ship. The Declaration of Independence, the rights of man, and all the other noble ideas and aspirations that had filled the minds of the men he knew at home were gone like a feeble glimmer of summer lightning. He accepted his present life as the order of things destined for him.

There was another American slave in the city. Sanford had heard of him for his name had been spoken in the palace, but he had never seen him. This man had not the adjustable or judicious temperament of Sanford. He had not bent himself into the Eastern ways and he had paid the price in toil and pain. He was not a stranger to either the lash or the bastinado. Once or twice Sanford had thought of trying to see him, but then he concluded it could not do any good to either. The

man was perverse and foolish and it was his own fault that he made for himself such a rough bed to lie in.

But one day Sanford heard interesting news about the other captive. It seemed that he had friends at home who had gathered together all the money they had to spare, and after long searching, through the friendly agency of one of the European consuls, had succeeded in finding him and buying him out of slavery.

The man was to be sent in a Spanish vessel to Barcelona. Thence he would sail for America and home. The day before his departure he was brought to the palace and Sanford saw him. His name was Phineas Peden, and his native place was Salem, Massachusetts. He was a tall, thin man of fifty, with sharp, uncompromising features. Without much education, and born and bred in poverty, he was full of religious fervor and despised the heathen and the infidel and everything that appertained to them. Out of the influences of the East the stern, unyielding spirit of the West had come as cold and keen as a bayonet point.

Peden welcomed Sanford with joy and pity. It had been long since Peden had looked upon the face of his own kind and he hung over his countryman like a father over a recovered son.

“And how long hast thou been a captive in the hands of the infidel?” he asked, speaking in the style of one who had often preached at the revival meetings in his own country and who was noted for his fervor.

Sanford told him.

“Evidently thou hast fared somewhat better in body than I have,” said Peden, “but to the soul it is the same. In all their doings and all their ways these people savor of evil and are evil. Islam is wicked in the sight of the Almighty and is festering in its decay and corruption. Have no part in this life, my son, for it can only defile and ruin thee.”

After some further talk about this debasing Oriental life, Peden passed to the joyful anticipations with which his heart was filled.

“I thank the Almighty every day that He will permit me to see that land again,” said Peden,“

and I would die content and thanking Him if He had no other blessing in store for me. Thou, too, my son, must look forward night and day to a like deliverance, for how otherwise couldst thou endure this captivity in the hands of the Philistines?”

With such exhortations and encouragement he filled the ears and mind of Sanford. The last words of the zealot to him as he left the place were :

“I go before thee, my son, but I will await thee there.”

He pointed exultingly to the West.

Though he was gone his figure remained in the imagination of Sanford as vivid as reality. He was strangely and deeply stirred. The Puritan's words had cut to the marrow. All his old life, his happy childhood, the freedom and ease of his young manhood, the noble impulses that he had seen in the people around him, returned to him. How pure that old life seemed to him now that he was in the midst of the garish colors of the East and breathed its poison-tainted atmosphere! He felt

superior to place and circumstance. Fate had tricked him strangely, but he would stand firm again and prove himself worthy of his birthright and better than those whom chance had made his masters.

The old man had touched some spring in his nature which set the rusty machinery to work, and now that it was started he could not stop it. Stirred anew by the breezes from the West much of the Eastern suppleness that he had acquired with such facile skill slipped away from him. Twice he offended his master, and when at the second offense the Bashaw cursed him for an infidel dog, black Mukhtar who heard it bent his head and muttered that to all who wait Allah brings opportunity.

The rebuke of the Bashaw showed Sanford by how uncertain a tenure favor was held in the East. He was forced at last to think of the future and what the end would be.

John Sanford had acquired wisdom and, since life had changed its tints for him again, he determined to alter his position to fit the new color of that life, or rather the old color come

back again. He would escape. He, too, would see again the land of his birth, and would become once more a free man, with his face to the stars.

But escape was not such an easy matter even for a preferred slave. He might walk almost as he pleased in the palace yard and the palace garden, but beyond these limits he had not passed in months, save in the train of his master. Moreover, he knew that the watchful eye of Mukhtar was always on him. He planned with restless mind for days but could see no way. At last he decided to tell Zuleika. Her influence might help him, and confident in his knowledge of women he believed that, at least, she would not betray him.

Zuleika heard him through with patience.

“Thou wouldst return to that country of which thou tellest me so much?” she said. “I do not wonder at thy wish if it is all as thou sayest. If thou goest, who then will be left to tell me of these wonders?”

That was a phase of the matter which had not occurred to Sanford. Some other Christian slave, he suggested, might take his place.

“Others may come,” she said, “but there will be none whose stories will please me like thine. But I will help thee to return to thine own land and thine own people. I give my promise.”

This pledge brought much joy to Sanford, for the Eastern woman is full of cunning and he believed that Zuleika would use it for him. Two days later when he saw her again she told him that everything was prepared for his flight.

“There is a guard,” she said, “an Arab who watches at the gate in the southeast corner of the garden wall. Him I have befriended, and on the second night after to-day at an hour before midnight he will leave his post and flee to the desert which he longs for as thou longest for thy home. Then the gate will be unguarded and thou mayest pass out. Go through the city to the westward and stop by the ruined mosque that overlooks the sea. There thou wilt find a boat with a sail and provisions. Set the sail for the Christian coasts and trust the rest to Allah.”

On the second night, a half hour before the appointed time, Sanford was in the garden armed with a dagger in case of sudden attack. He had

prayed, not to Allah, but to his own Christian God for a dark night; and the clouds that hid the stars showed that his wish would be granted. He started across the garden, keeping in the shadow of the palm trees. The water splashed in the fountain and a song bird raised a lone note. It was the same fountain beside which he had heard the conspirators talking, and when some stray rays of light seeping through the palm trees disclosed a dark figure standing near it, Sanford was chilled to bone and heart, for he thought it was the ghostly figure of one of the dead conspirators.

Nor did the warmth return to his heart when he looked more closely and saw that it was the black eunuch, Mukhtar. Mukhtar seemed to be listening, and he held his drawn sword in his hand. It was the weapon that Stavoros had loved, presented after his execution by the Bashaw to his faithful Mukhtar.

Sanford doubted not that Mukhtar was watching for him. Nor did he doubt what the result would be should Mukhtar find him. A strange weakness in the backbone, which he had not known before he was captured on the ship,

seized him. His mind sought to master his nerves. He told himself what he was, where he was born, and of his birthright of freedom, but the flesh was too weak. He could not look upon Mukhtar's sword and say that he knew not fear. He cowered under the palm trees and trembled as a child that is frightened of the night. He put his hands upon his face to shut out the sight of the naked sword, and when he took them away again they were wet. The song bird had hushed his note, and there was no sound but the murmur of the fountain and the soft rustling of a western breeze among the palm trees.

Mukhtar stood with raised face and listening ears at the fountain. The sword was held outstretched with rigid wrist, as if ready for a blow. Presently the black plunged it to the hilt in the water. Then he drew it slowly out and held it up in the faint light, while the bubbles flowed down from hilt to point and dropped on the ground. Then he wiped the blade on his tunic and walked away from the fountain.

Sanford thought Mukhtar was coming towards him, and he sank almost prone upon the ground.

He shook with a chill, as if the blood in his veins had frozen, and burrowed in the grass like a crawling beast. He was not then of the West that he boasted, straight, free, and with upraised face.

Mukhtar stopped again near the palm trees and listened. He did not see the abject figure that lay in the dusk, and was striving to thrust itself into the earth. Soon he replaced the sword in his girdle and, walking with heavy step, went into the palace.

It was the sound of the eunuch's departing footsteps that roused Sanford from his stupor. The garden was empty, save for himself. He rose, wiped the bitter mucus from his lips and ran toward the Southeastern gate. He put his hand upon the gate, and it swung wide. Zuleika had been true to her promise, and the guard was gone. Sanford gasped with joy, but a hand was placed lightly upon his arm, and he shriveled up again, falling weakly against the wall.

"Fear not," said a gentle voice. "Thou art not betrayed. It is I, Zuleika."

"Zuleika!" exclaimed Sanford, "why have you

come here? You risk both our lives.”

She retained her hand upon his arm and lifting her veil looked him in the eyes with eyes that were luminous.

“What do I fear?” she said. “I am going with thee. In the country of which thou hast told me so much there is the one husband and the one wife, and thy law seems to me to be right. Once a bird came to a maiden in a garden and sang to her sweet songs every day. And when she grew to love the bird it turned into a beautiful youth. Even so with me. I have listened to all thy tales. I love them and him who has told them. Come, we will fly together to thine own land.”

This was beyond the reckoning of Sanford. In a breath he realized how unfit she was for the life she proposed to find.

“It is impossible for us to go together, Zuleika,” he said. “Everything to which I return will be strange to you.”

“It is nothing,” she said. “Thou hast my love, and I will follow thee across the seas.”

Pity dwelt for a moment in Sanford’s breast.

But it was no time for delay. The gate was open, and if he would find freedom he must seek it.

“Come,” he said to Zuleika, “We will try the future together.”

They passed through the gate and met Mukhtar on the other side. The strength of a man deserted Sanford. He could bear neither the sight of the naked sword nor the malice triumphant in Mukhtar’s eyes. But not so Zuleika! Her hand went to her bosom, and whipping out a dagger, she leaped with the agility of a cat within Mukhtar’s guard before he could raise his sword. She thrust the dagger three times in his breast, and the eunuch fell still holding the great sword in his stiff fingers.

Sanford shrank back. A horror and a dread of this fierce and reckless woman possessed him. He shuddered at the ghastly heap in the dusk, that was once Mukhtar.

“You have killed him!” he said between his dry lips. “This is murder, and you, you, a woman!”

“A woman! Yes,” she said, still holding the bloody dagger in her hand, and confronting him

with exulting face. "A woman who dares to strike for the man she loves. I said I loved thee, and I have proved it. I am no longer a toy of the harem, but a woman, bold like a man, such as those of thine own country. I have a right to boast of what I have done. Come, it is time to flee."

She spoke in fearless tones, and seizing his hand drew him away. Sanford followed as obediently as a little child, not daring to look back at the man she had struck down.

Only when they had gained the shadow of the ruined mosque that overlooks the sea, and found the boat tied to a rock on the shore, did he feel himself a man once more. At that sight all the old and familiar instincts of the sailor returned to him. The sea, so long his home, beckoned again to him with friendly greeting.

The doing of a once familiar task restored confidence to Sanford. He trimmed the sail with a practised hand, and the boat bore away to the Northwest.

When the sun rose out of the ocean, and the gray veil of the heavens turned to blue, Zuleika,

for the first time in her life, was beyond the sight of land, and the knowledge of it made her shiver, like one whose hold on the edge of a precipice is slipping.

“It seems wider than the desert,” she said to Sanford.

“So it is,” said Sanford cheerfully; “but don’t be afraid, like the desert it ends somewhere. Europe is not so very far away. This stiff breeze ought to carry us there in good time.”

Africa and slavery having gone down behind the convex curve of the sea, Sanford became sanguine of mood and voluble of speech. He talked rapidly of America and the things that he would do there. He wondered what the people who used to know him would say when they saw him coming back like one newly risen and with the mold of the grave upon him. He jested and laughed at their surprise, and finally sang an old lilting song of the fishermen who go up to the Grand Banks. Then he began to tell of the West again, and the picture had the deepest rose tinta that could be drawn from his imagination.

Zuleika was silent. She sat as if trying to span the mystery of the great new world toward which she was going. The blood of Mukhtar was not on her soul. She had forgotten him, as she would the insect crushed beneath her feet.

Toward noon they saw a sail and Sanford was divided betwixt a great hope and a great fear. It might be European or it might be Mohammedan. In time it passed on without seeing them and slipped under the rim of the horizon, and Sanford did not know whether to mourn or to rejoice. At night a calm came and their boat lopped gently in the swell of the sea. Neither slept. They were surrounded by the splendors of a southern night, and Sanford pointed out the stars of the sailors and told the names by which they were called in his hard Western tongue.

The calm continued the next day, and when the sun had reached the zenith a dry, burning heat enveloped them, the sail blistered at the touch. For the first time Sanford looked anxiously at the water jar. Enough for four days. But a wind or a friendly ship might come before then. In the afternoon there was a wind that brought hope, but

it did not last long and left them anchored on the breathless ocean.

Two more days passed with slight whiffs of wind, and no sail either of friend or enemy. The bottom of the water jar was dry now, and their tongues cracked. That night they prayed, Sanford to the Christian God, Zuleika to the Moslem Allah.

The next day they began to sink into a stupor. The light of the sun was so intense that red atoms seemed to float in the air.

“Which way is thy country?” asked Zuleika.

Sanford pointed to the West. “But it is far off now,” he said.

“We have trusted in Allah,” said Zuleika. “We are in his hands.”

“So be it,” said Sanford, unconsciously adopting the manner of the old Puritan.

The Captain of the schooner, Red Wing, returning from Palermo to New York, saw afar a

black splotch on the sea, which he knew to be a boat. The course of the ship was turned toward it. A boat was lowered under the charge of the first mate, and the crew pulled with strong stroke to the derelict. The Captain saw them take out two figures and then return to his ship. To his hail the mate replied:

“There are two, a woman and a man. The breath has gone from one of them. The other will come through, I think.”

The figures were lifted on board, and the ship, bearing the two, sailed on into the red blaze of the setting sun, the better one living and the other dead.



● Credits

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