

The Shadow of the Padishah – Part 1 – Through the Desert

**Excerpt from
The Shadow of the Padishah
Part 1
Through the Desert**

Karl May – Translated by Michael M. Michalak

Chapter 5

It was that time of day when the Egyptian sun blazed with searing intensity and anyone who was not compelled by necessity to be in the open took shelter beneath any available cover and strove to find coolness and consolation.

I too was resting on a divan in my rented apartment, slurping spiced mocha and reveling in the aroma of spiced *djebeli*, which wafted from my pipe. The solid, windowless exterior walls offered some defense against the sun's burning rays. Nile water evaporated through the porous sides of the clay pots that stood everywhere about the room, making the atmosphere bearable - so effectively in fact that I noticed very little of the usual noontime commotion.

The scolding voice of my servant Halef Agha came from outside.

Halef Agha? Yes, my worthy little Halef had become an *Agha* - a Lord, and who had bestowed this honor upon him?

Amusing question! Who other than he himself!

We had reached Egypt via Tripoli and Kufarah, there we visited Cairo - which the Arabs classically call *el Masr* - the Capital, or more preferably *el Kahira* - the Victorious. We then traveled up the Nile as far as my limited resources would permit, thereafter renting an apartment for a prolonged rest. I would have been more than happy here if the otherwise fine divan and carpets were not also home to a multitude of jumping, biting

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beings, of which good old Fischart [Johann Fischart ca. 1546-1590] wrote:

“*Mich bizt neizwaz, waz mag daz seyn?* [Something is biting me, what may it be?]”

And from whom one learned that apart from the large-eyed *Pulex casins* and the red *Pulex musculi*, there were also the most enjoyable *Pulex irritans* and the furious *Pulex penetrans*. Sadly I must say that Egypt is not the hunting ground of ‘*irritans*’, but rather of ‘*penetrans*’, and I need not add that my *kef* - my noon rest, did not pass without interruption.

In any event, the scolding voice of my servant Halef Agha arose from outside, rousing me from my reverie:

“What? How? Who?”

“The *effendi*.” came the bashful reply.

“You want to disturb the *Effendi el Kebihr* - the great Lord and Master?”

“I must speak with him.”

“What - you must? Now, during his *kef*? Has Lucifer - Allah protect me from him! - Filled your head with Nile sludge, that you cannot comprehend what it means to be an *effendi*, a *hekim*, a man that the Prophet has endowed with wisdom, so that he can do all things, even raise the dead, if you can tell him the cause of death!”

Ah well, I will have to admit that Halef had changed a lot whilst in Egypt! He had become exceedingly proud, consistently abrupt and an unashamed braggart, and in the Orient that is saying a lot.

In the Orient, every German is considered to be a great gardener and every foreigner is regarded as being an excellent marksman or an eminent healer. Now it so happened that whilst in Cairo I rather unfortunately came into possession of an old, partially stocked, homeopathic apothecary from Willmar Schwabe [manufacturer of herbal medicine and other natural products]. I had experimented here and there, and had administered five kernels of one-thirtieth potency to strangers and acquaintances; and then during the Nile trip I had prescribed

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for my fellow passengers' imagined ills a knife-point of milk-sugar. Thus with incredible speed I became known as a doctor who, in league with *Shaitan* and with the aid of three kernels of durum wheat, could bring the dead back to life.

This notoriety had created a kind of delusion of grandeur in Halef's mind, which luckily did not hinder him in the performance of his duties as my trusted and attentive servant. That he was the principal contributor to the promotion of this reputation was self-evident; he was wholly in the ignominious vice of the late Baron Münchhausen senior and he further tried to bolster his image with his coarseness, the latter threatening to become a standard of his behavior. So he had, amongst other things, purchased a Nile-whip with his meager earnings, without which he was now never seen. He knew Egypt from an earlier visit and declared that nothing could be accomplished without such a whip, proclaiming that it could achieve more than courtesy or money, the latter of which I was indeed short of.

"God preserve your speech, *Sihdi*," I heard that pleading voice again; "but I really must see and speak with your *effendi*, the great doctor from Frankistan."

"You may not disturb him now."

"It is very important, otherwise my master would not have sent me."

"Who is your master?"

"He is the rich and mighty Abraham-Mamur, may Allah grant him a thousand years."

"Abraham-Mamur? Who is this Abraham-Mamur, and what was the name of his father? Who was the father of his father and the father of his father's father? To whom was he born and where do they, who gave him his name, live?"

"That I do not know, *Sihdi*, but he is a mighty Lord, as his name says."

"His name? What do you mean?"

"Abraham-Mamur, *Mamur* means 'leader of a province', and I tell you he was truly a *Mamur*."

"Was? He is no longer?"

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“No.”

“That is what I thought. Nobody knows him, even I, Halef Agha, the courageous friend and protector of my master, have never heard of him and never seen the tip of his tarboosh. Go away, my master has not the time!”

“Please tell me, *Sihdi*, what must I do to gain an audience with him!”

“Do you not know the sound of the silver key, with which the places of wisdom are unlocked?”

“I have this key with me.”

“So turn the key!”

I listened attentively and heard the soft clinking of what sounded like silver pieces.

“One *para*? Indeed, I say to you, that the cleft in the lock is bigger than your key; which does not fit because it is too small.” Halef indignantly responded.

“Then I must enlarge it.”

Again I heard the soft metallic sound of small silver pieces. I did not know whether to laugh or be vexed. This Halef Agha had become an extraordinarily sly porter!

“Three *para*? Good, now one might at least inquire what it is you wish to tell the *effendi*.”

“He must come with me and bring his magical medicine.”

“Fool, what is wrong with you! For three *para* I shall coax him to give away his medicine, which is brought to him on the first night of every new moon by a white fairy?”

“Is this true?”

“I, Hajji Halef Omar Agha, Ben Hajji Abul Abbas Ibn Hajji Dawud al Gossarah, say it is. I have seen it myself, and if you do not believe me, then you will meet my *kamtshilama* - my Nile-whip!”

“I believe it, *Sihdi*!”

“That is fortunate for you!”

“And I will give you another two *para*.”

“Give them to me! Who is ill in the house of your master?”

“That is a secret, which only the *effendi* may know.”

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“Only the *effendi* may know? Villain, am I, who have also seen the fairy, not an *effendi* as well? Go home; Halef Agha will not be insulted!”

“Forgive me, *Sihdi*; I will tell you!”

“I care not. Get out of here!”

“But I implore you . . .”

“Go!”

“Shall I give you another *para*?”

“I will not take one anymore!”

“*Sihdi*?”

“But two!”

“Oh, *Sihdi*, your brow radiates compassion. Here, accept these two *para*.”

“Good! So who is ill?”

“The wife of my master.”

“The wife of your master?” asked Halef with curiosity. “Which wife?”

“He has only this one.”

“And he was supposed to have been a *Mamur*?”

“He is so rich that he could have a hundred wives, but he loves only this one.”

“What is wrong with her?”

“Nobody knows; but her body is ill, and her soul is even worse.”

“*Allah kerihm* - God is merciful, but I am not. I stand here with this Nile-whip in my hand and long to beat your back with it. By the beard of the Prophet, your mouth utters such wisdom, as though your sense fell overboard during your trip on the river. Don't you know that a woman has no soul and therefore cannot enter heaven? How can the soul of a woman be ill - even more so than her body?”

“I do not know, but I was told so, *Sihdi*. Let me in to see the *effendi*!”

“I shall not do it.”

“Why not?”

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“My master knows the Koran and despises women. The most lovely pearl of womanhood is to him but a scorpion in the sand. His hand has never touched the garment of a woman. He may love no earthly woman, otherwise the fairy would never come again.”

I had to commend Halef Agha's talent; my admiration grew moment by moment, despite this though I felt like giving him a taste of his own Nile-whip.

The response came: “You must know, *Sihdi*, that he will not be permitted to touch her costume, nor see her body. He may only converse with her through a screen.”

“Truly I am amazed at your clever words and the wisdom of your speech. Does it not occur to you that it is precisely because of the screen that he cannot talk to her?”

“How so?”

“The healing power that the *effendi* shall radiate will not reach the woman because it will be blocked by the screen. Go away!”

“I cannot leave because I will receive one hundred strokes on the soles of my feet if I do not bring the wise *effendi*.”

“Thank your kind master, you slave of an Egyptian, that he illuminates your feet with his favor. I do not wish to cheat you of your fortune. *Salaam aaleikum*, Allah be with you and receive the hundred well!”

“Yet let me say one more thing, courageous Agha. The master of our house has more moneybags in his treasury than you can possibly count. He has ordered me to fetch you also and you shall be given a *bakhshish* - a gift, so generous that even the Khedive of Egypt could not equal it.”

At last this man had recognized Halef's soft spot and chosen to use it to his advantage, as one should always do when dealing in the Orient. The little master of my domain altered his tone at once and in a very friendly voice answered:

“Allah bless your tongue my friend but a *piaster* in my hand is preferable to ten bags in someone else's hand. Your hand,

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however, is meager, like a jackal in a snare or like the desert facing Mokattam.”

“Do not hesitate to follow the advice of your heart, my brother!”

“Your brother? Think again - you are a slave and I am a free man, companion and protector of my *effendi*! The advice of my heart remains undecided. How can a field bear fruit, when so few drops of dew fall from heaven!”

“Here are three more drops!”

“Three more? I will see if I am permitted to rouse the *effendi*, if your master will truly provide such *bakhshish*.”

“He will indeed.”

“So wait!”

Now finally he is convinced that he is ‘permitted to rouse’ me, that clever fox! Still, he was only bargaining according to local custom, however much of a bad habit that might be, so in one sense he could be excused, especially considering that what he demanded of me for his services was hardly worth speaking of.

What sparked my interest in the affair was the fact that I was required for a female patient rather than a male. However, since a Moslem, apart from the wandering nomadic tribes, does not permit the inhabitants of his harem to be seen, the patient must be an older woman rather than a younger one, who, perhaps because of quality of character or spirit, enjoyed the special love of Abraham-Mamur. Halef Agha entered.

“Are you asleep, *Sihdi*?”

The rogue! Here he called me *Sihdi*, and outside he caused himself to be addressed likewise.

“No. What do you want?”

“Outside is a man who wishes to speak with you. He has a boat on the Nile and says that I should accompany you.”

The clever scoundrel only added this last to ensure himself of the promised *bakhshish*. I did not wish to embarrass him and behaved as though I had heard nothing of his conversation.

“What does he want?”

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“Someone is ill.”

“Is it urgent?”

“Quite, *effendi*. The soul of the patient is ready to depart this earth. That is why you need to hurry if you wish to keep it here.”

Hmm, he was not a bad diplomat!

“Let the fellow enter!”

Halef walked out and pushed the messenger through the door. He bowed deeply, pulled off his shoes and waited humbly, until I was ready to speak with him.

“Come closer!”

“*Salaam aaleikum!* - Allah be with you! Oh master, let your ears be open to the humble plea of a lowly servant.”

“Who are you?”

“I am a servant of the great Abraham-Mamur, who lives upstream from here, by the river.”

“What do you wish to ask of me?”

“A great agony has come over the house of my master, because Güzela, the crown of his heart, is in the shadow of death. No doctor, no fakir and no wizard have been able to slow the pace of her illness. Then my master, may Allah bring him joy, heard of you and your fame and that death flees from your voice. He sent me to you with this message; ‘Come and take the dew of ruin from my flower, then shall my gratitude be sweet and bright like the gleam of gold’.”

This description appeared a bit pretentious for an aged woman.

“I do not know the place where your master lives. Is it far from here?”

“He lives on the shore and has sent a boat for you. In one hour you shall be with him.”

“And who will bring me home?”

“I.”

“I will come. Wait outside!”

He picked up his shoes and withdrew. I got up, threw on another garment and took my small case containing aconite,

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sulfur, pulsatilla and all the other items that can be had in abundance from any apothecary. Within five minutes we were sitting in a boat that was propelled by four oarsmen. I was lost in thought, but Halef Agha was as proud as a 'pasha of three horsetails'. In his belt he carried the silver-plated pistols that were given to me in Cairo and a sharp burnished dagger; in his hand he held the ever-present Nile-whip, the most effective instrument with which to secure his esteem, reverence and regard with the local populace.

Certainly the heat was not agreeable, but the upstream movement of our transport provided us with a cooling breeze.

We traveled past durum, tobacco, sesame and senna plantations, in the background palm trees reached skywards. Further upstream were open flats covered with low mimosa and sycamore scrub; finally in the midst of desolate barren rocks and thousand year old stone blocks that were strewn all about, arose a square wall, in which there must surely be an entrance.

As we pulled alongside, I noticed that a small canal led under the wall from the river, ensuring that the occupants had access to vital water without needing to leave their abode. Our guide strode ahead, led us around two corners to the side farthest from the water and gave a signal at the gate located there, which soon opened in response.

The face of a black man grinned at us, but we paid little heed to his deep, floor-sweeping bow and strode past him. I did not expect to find architectural beauty in this splendid Oriental building; I was, therefore, not surprised by the bare, unadorned windowless facade that confronted me. The climate of this land had ravaged the old walls; this was not a dwelling I would have recommended for a frail, sick woman.

Some time ago there had been ornamental foliage adorning the space between the outer wall and the building, this had provided the inhabitants with a pleasant diversion; these plants were now long wilted and parched. Wherever the eye could see there was a stark forbidding bleakness, and only the flocks of swallows, which nested in the numerous cracks and fissures of

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the building, brought some life and movement into the sad drear scene.

The messenger led us through a dark, low gate into a small courtyard, in the middle of which was a well. Here the canal that I had noticed earlier ended; the builder of this lonely house was clever enough to ensure the supply of those elements that are vital in the blistering climate of this land. At the same time I noticed that the building was designed to withstand the yearly flooding of the Nile without damage.

The inner walls of the courtyard had many wooden gratings, behind which the rooms that served as guests' quarters were certainly located. I did not have the time to admire this place, instead I gave my servant a wink, indicating that he should wait there with the apothecary case that he carried, and I followed the guide into the *selamlük* of the house.

We entered a spacious room, high-ceilinged and dusky, the subdued and pleasing light filtered through the grated window openings. The tapestries, arabesques and ornaments gave the room a lived-in appearance and the clay cooling pots in their niches created a pleasant atmosphere. A balustrade divided the room into two sections, the immediate area being for the servants and the hindmost for the master and visiting guests. The elevated rear area sported a wide divan, which reached from one corner to the other, and upon which Abraham-Mamur, the 'bearer of many satchels', reclined.

He arose as we entered, but remained, as was the custom, before his seat. Since I was not wearing the traditional footwear of the region I was unable to remove it in the customary manner, I therefore stepped across the costly carpet unmindful of my leather boots and sat down by his side. The servant brought the requisite coffee and the even more important pipe, and life could now continue.

I naturally examined this man's pipe first, because as anyone acquainted with the Orient knows, one can learn a great deal about the owner from his pipe. The silver wire-bound tube was long, aromatic and heavily gold-plated, certainly it had cost

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a thousand *piasters*. Even more expensive was the amber mouthpiece, which consisted of two parts that were joined by a gemstone-encrusted ring. This man appeared to truly possess ‘many satchels’; still this was not reason enough for me to be overly impressed, as many an owner of such a pipe as was worth ten thousand *piasters* had obtained their riches by squeezing their bonded subjects. Thus it was a more valuable exercise to scrutinize his face!

Where had I seen these elegant and noble, yet in their disharmony, diabolical, features before? His small unblinking, extraordinarily astute eyes bored incisively into mine and then expressed a look of cold satisfaction.

Violent, burning passions had etched grievous traces upon this face; love, hate, vengeance and ambition had all alternately aided in dragging a great character into the gutter and infused the countenance of this man with an indefinable aura, which to the good and pure is a certain warning sign.

Where had I encountered this man before? I knew I had seen him somewhere; I must only remember where; but I suspected that it had not been under cordial circumstances.

“*Salaam aaleikum!*” The words resounded slowly from behind the splendidly full, dyed-black beard.

The voice was aloof, toneless, lacking life or spirit; to hear such a voice was like feeling a cold shiver running down one’s spine.

“*Aaleikum!*” I replied.

“May Allah cause balm to flow from your footsteps and honey to drip from your fingertips so that my heart no longer hears the voice of my sorrow!”

“God give you peace and let me find the poison that gnaws at the essence of your happiness.” I answered his greeting, since not even a doctor may ask about the wife of a Moslem without violating courtesy or custom.

“I have heard that you are a wise *hekim*. Which *Medresse* (higher school of the Orient) have you attended?”

“None.”

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“None?”

“I am not a Moslem.”

“No? What then?”

“A *Nemsi!*”

“A *Nemsi!* Oh, I know the *Nemsi* are clever people; they know of the philosophers’ stone and the abracadabra, which drives away death.”

“Neither the philosophers’ stone nor the abracadabra exist.”

He looked coldly into my eyes.

“You do not have to hide anything from me. I know that the wizard may not speak of his art and I have no intention of enticing it from you, all I require is that you use it to help me. How do you drive the sickness from a being, through words or with a talisman?”

“Neither by word nor with talisman, but with medicine.”

“You shall not hide from me. I believe in you, although you are no Moslem, your hand is endowed with victory as though the Prophet had blessed you. You will discover the sickness and defeat it.”

“The Lord is almighty; He can save or corrupt, and only to Him belongs that honor. But if I am to help, speak!”

This direct invitation, to reveal a critical household secret was abhorrent to him, even though he must surely have been prepared for it; at once he tried to hide his weakness and followed my invitation:

“You are from the land of the infidels, where it is no shame to speak of the daughter of a mother?”

I felt myself inwardly amused by the circuitous way he referred to his wife, but I remained grave and answered rather coldly:

“You want me to help you but you insult me?”

“In what respect?”

“You call my homeland the land of the infidels.”

“But you are infidels!”

“We believe in God, the same God whom you call Allah. In your opinion I am an unbeliever; from my vantage point I

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could rightly call you the same; but I do not because we *Nemsi* never violate the rule of courtesy.”

“Let us not speak about belief! The Moslem may not speak of his wife; but you will permit that I speak of the women of *Frankistan*?”

“I permit it.”

“If the wife of a Frank is ill . . . “

He looked at me, as though he expected a comment; I indicated that he should continue.

“So, if she is sick and takes no food . . .”

“None?”

“None at all!”

“Go on!”

“Then loses the sparkle in her eyes and the fullness of her cheeks - if she is tired but no longer knows the delight of sleep . . .”

“Go on!”

“When she can stand only with support and only walk slowly, almost crawling - shivers with cold and burns with heat . . . “

“I am listening. Continue!”

“Is frightened and flinches at every sound - when she wishes for nothing, desires nothing, hates nothing and trembles with every beat of her heart . . .”

“Go on, go on!”

“If her breath is as shallow as that of a small bird - if she neither laughs nor cries, nor speaks - if she utters no word of joy and no word of pain and does not even notice her sighs - if she shuns the light of the sun and at night cowers in the corners . . .”

Again he looked at me, and in his fervent eyes I recognized fear, which apparently fed and grew with the recounting of each symptom of the malady. He must love the patient with the last dim and desperate fire of his almost desolate heart; and here he had unwittingly exposed his whole relationship to me.

“You are not yet finished!” I said.

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“If she at times expels a sudden cry, as though a dagger were plunged into her breast - when she unceasingly whispers a foreign word.”

“What word?”

“A name.”

“Go on!”

“If she coughs and afterwards blood flows over her pale lips

...”

He now stared at me with such apprehension that I realized my verdict was a judgment for him, one that offered liberation or annihilation. I did not hesitate to give him the latter:

“She will die.”

He sat motionless for some moments, as though struck, then he jumped up and stood before me stretched to his full height. The red fez had slipped off his shorn head, his pipe had fallen from his hand; his face twisted with conflicting emotions. It was a strange and terrible face; it resembled that image of the devil rendered by the hand of Doré [Gustave Doré (1832-1883), was probably the greatest illustrator of the 19th century. One of his most impressive works was *The Illustrated Bible*]. Not with tail, cloven hooves and horns, but with the highest symmetry of bodily structure, every facial feature bestowed with beauty, and yet the features, in their entirety, so repulsive, so vile, so diabolical. His eyes rested upon me with a look of horror that changed to anger and was finally replaced by undeclared malice.

“*Giaur!*” he thundered.

“What did you call me?” I asked coldly.

“*Giaur!* I said. You dare to tell me this? You dog! The whip shall acquaint you with who I am and the fact that you must obey my commands. If she dies, you die; but make her well and you shall demand from me whatsoever your heart desires!”

Slowly and with great composure I arose, stood upright to my full height before him and asked:

“Do you know what the greatest shame of a Moslem is?”

“What?”

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“Look down at your fez! Abraham-Mamur, what does the Prophet and the Koran say with regard to exposing the shame of your head to a Christian?”

In the next instant he had covered his head and with dark rage suffusing his face he had ripped his dagger from his sash.

“You must die, *giaur!*”

“When might that be?”

“Now, at once!”

“I will die, when it pleases God, not you.”

“You will die now. Say your prayers!”

“Abraham-Mamur,” I replied as calmly as before, “I have hunted bears and swam after hippopotami; the elephant has heard my shot, and the lion – the ‘strangler of herds’, has felt the sting of my bullet. Thank Allah, that you are still alive, and ask Him to subdue your heart. You yourself are not able to because you are too weak and you will die if it does not happen at once!”

This was a new insult, harsher than the first, and with a twitching jump he made as if to grab me but pulled back at once when he saw the flash of the weapon in my hand, which one must never place out of reach in these lands. We stood opposite each other, and since he had dismissed the servants as soon as the coffee and pipes had been served, so that they would not overhear our delicate discussions, we were alone. With my brave Halef close at hand I did not have the least cause to fear the inhabitants of this old house. If necessary the two of us could have dealt with the few men that lived here; but I had a fair idea of the fate of the afflicted woman, and had begun to develop an uncommon interest in this. I had to see her and if possible, exchange a few words.

“You would shoot me?” he asked furiously whilst indicating my revolver.

“If necessary.”

“Here, in my house, on my divan?”

“Certainly, if I am forced to defend myself.”

“Dog, it is true, what I first suspected when you entered!”

“What is true, Abraham-Mamur?”

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“That I have seen you before.”

“Where?”

“I don't know.”

“When?”

“That I don't know either; but one thing is certain, it was not a friendly encounter.”

“Just as today, I would be surprised if this meeting ends agreeably. You called me ‘dog’, and I say to you that the very moment after you utter that word again, my bullet will rest in your brain. Remember it well, Abraham-Mamur!”

“I will call my servants!”

“Call them, if you want to see their corpses lying dead around you.”

“Oho, you are not God!”

“Not God but a *Nemsi*. Have you ever felt the hand of a *Nemsi*?”

He laughed contemptuously.

“Take heed that you do not feel it! It is not bathed in rose oil like yours. Nevertheless, I will leave you the peace of your home. Live well. You do not wish me to conquer death; may your wish be fulfilled; *rabbena chaliäk* - the Lord keep you!”

I holstered the revolver and stepped towards the door.

“Stay!” he called.

I strode on.

“Stay!” He called in a commanding tone.

I had nearly reached the door and did not turn around.

“So die, *giaur*!”

Now I turned instantly and had just enough time to lunge sideways. His dagger flew past me and buried itself deep into the paneled wall.

“Now you are mine, knave!”

With these words I leaped towards him, seizing him as he came within my grasp, I hoisted him up off his feet and hurled him at the wall.

He remained there for some seconds before he gathered himself and arose. His eyes were huge, the veins on his brow

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were swollen to bursting point and his lips were blue with rage; but I held my revolver on him, and he halted reluctantly before me.

“Now you have met with the hand of a *Nemsi*. Do not dare to provoke it again!”

“Allah!”

“Coward! What is it called when one asks a doctor for help, insults him with words and then tries to murder him when his back is turned? The belief of such a person has little worth!”

“Sorcerer!”

“What?”

“If you were not a sorcerer, my dagger would have hit you, and you would not have had the power to throw me about!”

“Now! If I were a sorcerer, I would have saved your wife *Güzela*.”

I spoke that name with forethought. It had the desired effect.

“Who spoke this name to you?”

“Your messenger.”

“An infidel may not speak the name of a believer!”

“I only speak the name of a woman who may be dead tomorrow.”

Again he looked at me with an icy stare, then he clapped his hands before his face.

“Is it true, *hekim*, that she may be dead tomorrow?”

“It is true.”

“Can she not be saved?”

“Perhaps.”

“Don't say ‘perhaps’, say ‘certainly’. Are you willing to help me? If she recovers, then demand what you will of me.”

“I am willing.”

“Then give me your talisman or your medicine.”

“I have no talisman, and medicine I cannot give you now.”

“Why not?”

“A doctor can only heal the sick if he is permitted to examine them. Come let us go to her or let her come to us!”

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He fell aback as though hit by a punch.

“*Mash Allah*, are you crazy? The spirit of the desert has burned your brain if you are unaware of what you demand. The woman that is seen by a strange man is condemned to die!”

“She will surely die if I am not permitted to go to her. I have to measure the pulse of her heart and obtain answers to many questions that concern her illness. Only God is all-knowing and need not inquire of anyone.”

“You truly do not heal through a talisman?”

“No.”

“And neither by word?”

“No.”

“Or by prayer?”

“I pray for the suffering; but God has already given us the means with which to heal.”

“What means are these?”

“They are flowers, metals and minerals, the juices and forces of which we extract.”

“They are not poisons?”

“I do not poison the sick.”

“Will you swear to it?”

“Before any judge.”

“And you must talk with her?”

“Yes.”

“What about?”

“I have to ask her about her illness and about everything that surrounds it.”

“And not about other matters?”

“No.”

“You will pose every question to me first, to see if it is acceptable?”

“I am satisfied with that.”

“And you must also touch her hand?”

“Yes.”

“I will permit it for one whole minute, no longer. Must you see her face?”

The Shadow of the Padishah – Part 1 – Through the Desert

“No, she may remain veiled. But she must walk up and down in her room a number of times.”

“Why?”

“From her gait and posture much can be learned that concerns her illness.”

“I permit it and will now fetch her.”

“That will not do.”

“Why not?”

“I have to see where she lives; I need to examine her chambers.”

“For what reason?”

“Because there are illnesses that can be attributed to unsuitable quarters and only the eyes of a doctor can detect these.”

“You really wish to enter my harem? (The Arabian word harem means literally ‘the holy, invulnerable’ and it is used by Moslems to describe the women’s quarters, which are separated from the rest of the rooms in the house.)”

“Yes.”

“An infidel?”

“A Christian.”

“I will not permit it!”

“Then she will die. *Salaam aaleikum*, Peace be with you and yours!”

I turned to go. I had already noticed from the description of the symptoms that Güzela suffered from an acute illness of the mind, but I behaved as though I believed that her illness was merely physical. Though as I suspected that her affliction was caused by the domination of this man, I still needed to clarify everything in my mind. He let me reach the door, then he called:

“Stop, *hekim*, stay. You shall enter the chambers!”

I turned and walked back without betraying my satisfaction. I had triumphed and was more than pleased with his disclosure as it revealed a great deal to me, much more than I would have been able to discover from a European. The love that this Egyptian bore, its consequences and concerns was indeed quite

Karl May – Translated by Michael M. Michalak

exceptional if he was willing to expose himself in this manner. The grim resentment he felt towards me was clear in his every expression. I was the unavoidable intruder into the mysteries of his inner sanctum, and I nurtured the conviction that even if I should heal the sick woman I would be leaving behind an unwavering enemy, especially since he, like myself, was of the opinion that we had already met under hostile circumstances.

He left to arrange things himself as no servant must suspect that he permitted a stranger entrance to the sanctuary of his home.

He returned after some time. There was an expression of firm, defiant resolve in the way he pinched lips and a look of ill-concealed hatred in his eyes as he instructed me:

“You shall go to her . . . “

“You already agreed to that.”

“And see her chambers . . .”

“Naturally.”

“And her person . . . “

“Veiled and cloaked.”

“Must you also speak with her?”

“That is necessary.”

“I permit you much too much, *effendi*. But by all the salvation of all the heavens and by all the agony of all the hells, the moment you utter one word that I do not consent to or do the slightest thing that is not acceptable, then I will kill her. You are strong and well armed, that is why my dagger will not be pointed at you but at her. I swear this by all the *surat* of the Koran and by all the caliphs, whose memory Allah may bless!”

He had come to know me and thought that this insurance was more effective than the boastful threats directed at me. Besides it never occurred to me to offend him within his rights; his behavior did, however, strengthen my opinion that his relationship with the patient had a sinister aspect.

“Is it time then?” I asked.

“Come!”

He proceeded to lead the way and I followed behind.

The Shadow of the Padishah – Part 1 – Through the Desert

First we passed through several dilapidated rooms, within which a menagerie of fauna lived out its entire existence. Then, by way of a chamber that appeared to serve as a reception area, we entered a room that bore all the signs of being a woman's apartment. All the items that lay roundabout strongly suggested a feminine presence.

“These are the chambers that you wished to view. See if you can spy the demon of the sickness within!” Abraham-Mamur said with a derisive grin.

“And the apartment next door . . .?”

“The patient is within. You shall see it also, but I must first satisfy myself, that ‘the Sun’ has covered her face before the eyes of a stranger. Do not dare to follow me, instead await my return in peace!”

He exited the room and I was left alone.

So here at last was Güzela. The name meant ‘the Beautiful’. This circumstance and the Egyptian’s entire manner caused me to doubt my earlier presumption that this matter concerned an older person. I let my gaze sweep the room. It was entirely identical to the room of the master: the balustrade, the divan and the niches containing the clay cooling pots.