

Published quarterly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 3457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter September 8, 1930, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Indiana, under Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$1.00 a year in the United States, \$1.40 a year in Canada, \$1.50 in other countries. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet St., E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publisher's Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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# The Dance of Yesha

By GRACE KEON

*A coward sat on the throne of kings, and prayed that he  
might never yawn again*

**Y**ESHA, the maid, sang above her loom, and her voice was like the nightingale in the rose gardens of the Sultan. She was weaving her dower, her heart a flame of happiness. Beautiful and true were the thoughts of Yesha, beautiful and true the work of her fingers.

1

**T**HE Sultan yawned. A look of consternation spread across the faces of his ministers. A look of fear shot into the eyes of his courtiers. A look of dread might be observed in the furtive glances of the bronze-hued eunuchs. It was so unexpected. He had been watching the dancers swaying to the clash of cymbals, the thrilling pipe of flutes. His gaze had followed them with absorbed attention, for the dance was new. And then——

The Sultan yawned.

Horrible catastrophe! Moved by one terror, dancers and slaves dropped to the ground. Trembling they fell, faces covered. Trembling, the ministers and courtiers stood.

Silence. Absolute. Terrifying.

It lasted just one minute—but that minute meant life or death. Then a shriek clove the air—a shriek from the mouth of the Sultan. His eyes glared, his hands quivered.

"Away! Away! All of you! Where is Osmanli? Osmanli, come!"

A shuddering breath of relief burst from the human creatures prostrated before him. They left his presence, swiftly, silently, salaaming, rejoicing that he had not annihilated them. All went—

the dancers, the courtiers, the ministers—and eunuchs pulled close and tight the cloth-of-gold draperies; for when Osmanli the prophet talked with the Sultan none might see or hear.

And then, silently, the draperies parted and fell again as silently and there stood a tall figure. The Sultan shot forward in his seat, elbows on knees.

"Approach! Approach!"

The man came to the foot of the ruby throne. A prophet, indeed! White-haired, dark-skinned, with piercing eyes that flamed and burned and saw . . . and saw. . . .

"Osmanli, I ask thee, has the doom come upon me?"

The prophet stooped, crossing his hands, saying no word.

"Thou knowest the prediction of Jazur, that evil swineherd: 'Ere thou yawnest thrice, monster, thou shalt die!' Ai-ai! Osmanli! I have yawned the second time. So my doom is upon me?"

A craven and a coward sat on the throne of kings. Oh for the days when men of sinew held the power of the land and feared no enemy! This shivering poltroon knew naught of valor and in his hands lay the destiny of his race.

He kept no pretenses with Osmanli. When Osmanli's eyes met his their souls merged. He could conceal naught. Those eyes . . . like steady lightning . . . that pierced. . . .

Gaze met gaze. Osmanli regarded him intently. The tapers burned low, the incense smoked. A cool breath filtered in from some unseen source like the scent of a wind-blown flower.

"My lord, I see!" said the prophet, in a low tone. "Drop not thy gaze until I finish all. Within thine eyes a woman stands. Quiver not a lash or I lose the tale. Ah-h! 'Tis she! Yesha, daughter of Mahmoud! Lovely! Fair——"

His voice ceased, he breathed heavily, while the Sultan's hands were clenched in agony.

"Send for her," said Osmanli, regaining his composure. "She hath surpassing gifts. I know of them. She hath in her hands . . . thy destiny."

The Sultan had rested the prophet Osmanli, who had carried him in his arms when he was a boy. He trusted him. Now he clapped his palms together sharply and one of the bronze-hued statues behind the cloth-of gold came to life.

"I would have here at once the daughter of Mahmoud, Yesha, her name. Call her, and see that she is brought to my presence. Osmanli——"

Osmanli nodded then, and added a few low-spoken words. The eunuch withdrew.

"He said it, the dog!" fumed the Sultan. "Jazur! I can not forget! The third time, he said. Allah, what is this? And how can a dancing-girl bear a charm for me? But thou hast said it, Osmanli! I trust thee! I shall reward thee and her. I shall cover her with jewels! I shall——"

He said no more.

## 2

**T**HE moments went by . . . slowly . . . slowly . . . and the Sultan became more anxious, more nervous, closer to the breaking-point. But Osmanli made no sign, and moved not.

Presently a eunuch came. The Sultan sat up, staring eagerly. Behind the slave stood a slender figure. It moved slowly toward the ruby throne. And behind her

another eunuch bearing a burden across his two outstretched arms.

"Approach, maid!"

She came with arms extended, and bowed low, closer still, to the very lowest step.

"Thou art Yesha?"

"Yesha, daughter of Mahmoud, friend of Osmanli, the prophet."

"Come nearer. Kneel. Uncover thy face."

Osmanli, bending over, lifted away the silken tissue that enveloped head and face and form. For an instant the Sultan gazed.

"What jewel is this? Who is this maid?"

"Yesha, master and lord, daughter of Mahmoud."

"She is the fairest I have ever looked upon."

"Surely, my lord. She is thy thought, great one. Have I not beheld her in thine eyes? Thou hast given her life. She is thine!"

The flower-like face was bent. Fascinated, the Sultan leaned forward.

"Yesha——"

"My lord!" said a silvery voice. "Hast need of me? Shall I dance for thee?"

The Sultan shuddered.

"Nay, nay! 'Twas while those others danced that I——"

"Oh, master, but my dance is a prayer! And to him who looks upon it the great god Vishnu grants his heart's desire. Frame, therefore, the wish of thy soul, great king! I dance for the god!"

"Thou art—thou art——"

The Sultan was carried away by her beauty, her fire.

"Yesha, my lord, daughter of Mahmoud! Who will dance . . . for thee!"

"So, then!"

She swayed lightly. Her feet were like lilies and the golden circles and gleaming

jewels upon them like dewdrops set in flame. She lifted her arms and they were white jasmine drooping, and the strange perfume of her so filled the Sultan's senses that he wished to forget all else—all else but this daughter of Mahmoud. Yesha . . .

"Pray, my lord. . . ."

It was the warning voice of Osmanli, rousing him. The Sultan remembered—and in his heart he wished a mighty wish that he might never yawn again.

The eunuch spread the rug and went away, drawing the draperies close once more. Like a blossom in the gentle wind the fair daughter of Mahmoud began to dance. It was a dance the Sultan had never seen. It was the dance of a god.

And she sang:

"With mine own hands I spun the wool. With mine own hands I dyed the strands. The gift that brought him to me.

"Oh, heart of my soul . . . oh, my beloved. . . .

"With mine own hands I fashioned the steed, the proud steed that brought mine own to me.

"Oh, heart of my soul . . . oh, my beloved. . . .

"Behold the lions! They were of his house the symbols. He was strong, he was brave, he was mighty.

"Oh, heart of my soul . . . oh, my beloved. . . .

"And round and round about I set the angels that would keep guard between.

"Oh, heart of my soul. . . ."

Thus she chanted, stepping ever more and more lightly, her face aglow. Nearer and nearer she came, and the Sultan smiled. Smiled at her beauty, her tender-

ness. Now she knelt before him, at his feet, her slender arms touching him; her little hands were at his bosom, and he smiled, anticipating the sweetness of Yesha. . . .

Her voice did not lose its beauty.

"But thou didst take him, the heart of my soul! Thou didst have him scourged and flogged and tortured . . . and thus . . . and thus . . . do I requite thee for the death of Jazur, my beloved!"

Straight and true the little dagger went home. Straight and true through silken robe and fine steel mesh went its slender needle-point. Straight to the heart. The Sultan's smile froze upon his lips. He made no sound. He uttered no cry. He went out of life to the judgment of God.

"Osmanli!" breathed the maid.

Quietly the prophet curved the Sultan's right hand until it was clenched about the dagger, holding it there until the grasp was sure. Then he rolled up the rug and Yesha drew her veil closely.

"The Sultan rests," said Osmanli sternly to the eunuch. "Guard him well. Let no one enter."

The bronze statue salaamed before the prophet, whom he dreaded more than the Sultan himself.

**I**N THE archives of the land the tale was written of the king who had killed himself because of a sickness of the soul. No one said different. His brother succeeded him. Being just, but having a care for his own safety as well, he gave the prophet Osmanli a palace and slaves very far away.

The Sultan, however, had his wish. He never yawned again.