

# COSMOPOLITAN

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*whose stories of  
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are known and loved  
throughout the land*



&  
Sonnets of Today  
by BERTON  
BRALEY,  
*the poet who  
writes equally well of  
flats,  
flappers  
&  
flowers*

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The Harrison Fisher cover of this issue without lettering mailed on receipt of 25 cents

Achmed Abdullah's  
story of Love and Kismet on a  
Starlit Roof Top of Algiers

# The Tale the Drum Told

Illustrations by

Lui Trugo

**O**FTEN in after years, in a distant part of the world, Pitts Burton would remember the happening.

He would remember it vividly, at length, in detail, even now that the pain and futility of it had passed; too, he would remember it at incongruous moments, in the midst of a gay dinner party, or driving his ball from the first tee of the Sleepy Hollow links, or perhaps during a walk up Fifth Avenue, as though his spirit had winged back and crashed into an air pocket of memory. And with it would come to his ears the ghost of Mahdi Ibrahim's drum; its thud and drone, the tok-tak-tok, staccato, tenuous, increasing, then a solid wall of sounds, suddenly receding in a way that seemed sinister, like a riddle of incomplete achievement—his life, and the woman's fate.

Of course he remembered his house in Tugurt, in the heart of the Arab town, with its flat roof a little higher than the sea of roofs which tossed about it, the near distance dominated by the green poem of the Shafyieh mosque, the rim of the street barred by a screen of dark, lanky palms driven straight into the fox-brown earth like iron candlesticks, and beyond them the bazaar quarter, a snailshell containing all the windings of traffic and barter.

He had come to Tunis to stay a week; had remained to stay out the season.

For he liked the land, the people, the faith. It was all so uncomplex; that praying Arab whom he could see from the roof top where he spent the cool evening hours—what a close intimacy with his God!



What a nonchalance of dreamy sensuousness in those delicate faced, delicate robed Tunisian dandies who strolled down the street! What a superb harmony and singleness of purpose in all this land!

It seemed as if the irking soul had gone out from it and blended back with the surge of the desert. It gave a sense of complete ease and disburdenment.

It made a minimum demand on the intellect. It disregarded the mechanical chaos, the hysterical mental charnel house of the Occident, and wrote simple things—wrote them large and bold and clear upon a background of vast spaces and vague distances.

Yes. He had liked it from the first; had remained, though he said to himself that sooner or later he would return to America, that this half year was going to be only an interlude, a sentence in brackets, not meant to influence the flowing tale of his life.

He never knew how Mahdi Ibrahim had happened to come up that evening. But there he was as he had often seen him in the market square, squatting on slippered heels, the flat, rush woven basket a few feet away.

"Snakes, yah Sidi?" he asked. "They dance when I order them. What to see?"

"Sure they don't bite?"

"Not as long as I beat the drum, Sidi." "And if you stop—"

The Arab shrugged his shoulders. "*Fi aman'illah.*" he said—"we are all in the guardianship of God."

"Small consolation!" smiled Pitts Burton.

But he settled himself

comfortably in the shadow of the high marble parapet that circled the roof, preparing to watch. At his back, by standing on tiptoes and craning his neck, he could see the roof top of the next house and beyond it others, flat, white, stretching away into the lavender misted evening, gradually blending into the distance without a break.

The neighboring house had been empty until this morning when an Arab family had moved in with a great deal of hustle and confusion and laughter. A rich and orthodox Shareefian clan, evidently—for the women had driven up in a carriage with tightly closed wooden shutters, supervised by a gigantic Kisslar Agassi, or head eunuch; a band of Jewish musicians had blared a pæan of welcome; market porters had come, carrying baskets of roses and hyacinths and geranium leaves and digitalis, while other porters had balanced the household goods on turbaned heads—chairs and mattresses and French mirror wardrobes, gaily painted chests, kitchen utensils, brass pestles and mortars, huge zinc trunks and beds and ivory inlaid taborets, rugs, pillows, *derboukas* and *rebubas*, yellow faience plates and copper braziers. A dozen negresses, swinging pails and brooms, had invaded the front gate amidst triumphant shouts of "yoo-yoo-yoo"; and early in the afternoon, regarded with superstitious and admiring eyes by all the neighborhood, a white-haired, shriveled negro had squatted on the threshold to propitiate the scorpions that swarm in old Arab houses. He had been surrounded by the magic properties of his craft—a ragged end of carpet, three torn conjuring books, a small bag of sand, another filled with dried beans, and a square, battered, shiny box on which he seemed to put especial value and which on closer inspection, Burton, who had joined the throng, had discovered to be an ancient cocoa tin.

The negro had spent an hour over his incantations—"to make peace with the scorpions," Nadj Omar, Burton's houseboy and dragoman, had explained, "so they won't bite. Also to bring luck to the house of Si Mohammed el-Busiri."

"Is that my new neighbor's name?"

"Yes," Nadj Omar had replied; adding in the amazing mixture of English slang which he had picked up from tourists and during a journey as stoker to Liverpool and back, "No end bloody swanky family—descendant of the Prophet and all that sort of rot—eh what, old dear?"

Even now Burton still heard a commotion behind the parapet—a heavy dragging of furniture; a girl's high laugh; a faint shimmering and brushing of guttural voices; the Kisslar Agassi's peaked falsetto as he berated a female servant:

"What manners be these, *yah oudj al-qahss*—O countenance of misfortune! *Allah ijiblah rebha rama*—may Allah send an earthquake to destroy thee!"

A woman's sniffling whine. Then:

"O almost entirely destitute of shame!"—the exclamation mark being supplied by the sound of a hand evidently coming into violent contact with bare flesh.

Burton laughed. He turned to the snake charmer.

"Proceed, Mahdi Ibrahim!"

"*Fi aman'illah!*" repeated the latter piously.

He altered the position of his head so that it jutted sharply into the rays of the dying sun, showing a dead-white face that rose from the pointed black beard like a sardonic Chinese vignette. His left hand disappeared in the burnouse, came out with the drum. He rose to a kneeling posture, sank back on his heels, swaying from side to side like a chained jungle beast. He raised the drum on its thin silver chain. It commenced swinging, right, left, right, left, like a pendulum.

It was small, the size of a child's head, of a dull mottled ivory with a tiny orifice covered by a tightly stretched skin. He beat it with gentle, dry taps, alternating thumb and palm of his right hand; and presently the drum spoke:

Tok-tak! Tok-tockety-tak!—with a hiccougny, syncopated rhythm. Tok-tocko-tok!—insistingly.

He stared at the basket with a fixed, dreamy immobility. His lips opened.

"Hayah—ho!" he said in a wiped-over, purring voice; then, a little more loudly: "Come! Dance for me! Come, *yah bent*—O daughter!" And with sudden ferocity: "Come, *yah ikhs ya'l khammar*—O thou drunkard! Jew! Christian! Uncouth wart!"

The top of the basket gave a convulsive tremor.

Tok! sobbed the drum as with far thunder—tok-tocko-tok-tocko-tok . . . and again the top of the basket stirred, heaved; until all at once it was raised a few inches and a flat, wicked, triangular head appeared; a second; a third. They swayed from side to side, trying to locate the sound

Tok-tok!

Three glistening lengths of rope plopped down. They coiled; uncoiled.

Never for a moment did Mahdi Ibrahim stop beating the swinging drum—left, right—tok-tak—rhythmically; and somehow Burton was not afraid. Somehow he felt soothed and happy as if a gentle hand had taken from his soul the weight of his body. His eyes opened; closed; opened. He saw a few feet away the snakes' eyes glimmering like mica discs with a filmy overglow; saw the tongues shoot out, reddish black, nervous, quivering; saw the steely whips of bodies glide across the roof top with a wavy motion, a pitiless stretching of strength and cruelty, the black spots on the stripes of their sulphur-yellow, scaly skins glittering like crescents of evil desire.

The drum sobbed with a nasal cadence, with tiny, breathless pauses. The snake charmer stared.

"Come!" he said. "My bride! My love! Come, my scented! sprig of jessamine and myrrh!" And to a nine foot male snake: "Please deign to come, O great king! O my lord! O elephant!"

Still the drum kept swinging, zumming, calling, relentless, resistless; and as if hypnotized the snakes came nearer, drawing their white bellies across the roof top with a noise of dry leaves rustling in the meeting of winds. They separated. They formed a half circle about Mahdi Ibrahim. Suddenly, as if in concerted attack, they lifted a foot of their bodies from the ground, swaying and jerking. Their jaws opened wide, exposing sneering, bluish black gums. They bloated the loose skin on their necks so that it was like curved golden shields with sable spots. They shot out their perverse flat heads, the eyes piercing in the direction of their old enemy, man, tonguing and hissing with the inherited hate and fear of a thousand generations of snakes. But calmly, dreamily, Mahdi Ibrahim stared at them. A silent battle it was, for mastery, for life and death, with the eyes the only weapon and the drum—the tok-tak-tok of the swinging ivory drum.

Then as Burton watched, first one, then another, then the third snake moved; right, left, right, following the pendulum of the drum, dancing, gyrating, circling; right, left, right; drunk with the thumping, droning rhythm, with Mahdi Ibrahim's blurred call: "Dance—hayah—dance!"

And they danced faster and faster until one, then another, then the third stretched exhausted on the ground, their flat eyes closed, their striped bodies shuddering as with the weakening aftermath of a great passion.

"Ho!" cried the Arab.

He slid the drum back in his burnouse, rose, pounced upon the snakes, picked them up, two in his right, the male reptile in his left hand, crammed them quickly into the basket, closed it, tied it with a stout rope and turned to Burton with a smile and an outstretched hand.

"Is the Sidi satisfied?" he asked in the fluent English which he had learned years earlier in an American circus.

"Bully! Here you are." There was the clink of money "But—"

"Yes, Sidi?"

"I've seen you do your little parlor trick before. You usually get the brutes up again—force them to do a second dance."

"I could not today."

"Oh?"

"The other music, Sidi! It interfered with my drum—made the snakes nervous."

"What other music?"

"Can't you hear?" Mahdi Ibrahim pointed to the parapet in back of the American.

The latter listened.

"You're right!" he said suddenly as, with a thin, tremulous distinctness, the pizzicato twanging of a one stringed guitar drifted up, sobbing softly through the gathering night that dropped with the thick, lazy dew of the tropics, jeweling a thousand spider webs, painting the palms a silvery pastel shade, clothing the spiky cactus clumps in the garden with a robe of lemon and elfin green.

"Hush!" he whispered as the guitar coiled into a maze of baroque dissonances, an embroidery of fantastic, chromatic arabesques, as a woman's voice picked up the lilting melody and tossed it high with an abandon of eerie, wailing, minor harmonies:

"*Yah bent! yah bent!*  
*Akh idjibleq erradjed . . .*"

The accompaniment lifted and quivered. It wafted as with the scent of roses. It swished like a naked wind across the sweep of the desert: "*Yah bent! yah bent! . . .*"



"*Yah amri!*" said Janina in her low, throaty voice. "O my life! *Yah aini*—O my soul!"

The voice sobbed, rose higher and higher to a clear, bell-like note, rested there trembling, like a butterfly on a leaf, dropped a full octave: "*Ahh idjibleq . . .*"

It rose again with the rush and surge of a wave, with an

infinite, throbbing joy of the senses, then stopped, cut off suddenly in mid-air as clean as with a knife, leaving a stark void of silence; and Pitts Burton gave a little shudder. Somehow the song had seemed to him pregnant with a vast, symbolic appeal,

had seemed to hold the very soul of this Arab land, the red days, the black-winged nights and the gold-dusted sands that crept to the south.

He pulled himself together, feeling rather like a fool. Never had he suspected in himself such an overwhelming emotional reaction to music, and so he was a little ashamed and smiled sheepishly at the snake charmer.

"Pretty, eh?" he asked, knowing that the word was ludicrously inadequate. "What was it?"

"A love song, Sidi. A love song of the Black Tents, the Bedouin——" And then suddenly, as Burton turned to the parapet, about to raise himself and look down: "No, no! You mustn't!"

"Why not?"

"The woman who sang—she is on the roof top—the roof top next door!"

"Sure enough. That's just why I want to——"

"No! She may be unveiled!"

"Let's hope so."

"But"—the other was shocked to the depths of his narrow Moslem soul—"this is an Arab town—there are the customs——"

"All right!" laughed Burton. "You are deliciously Mid-victorian, quite like my uncle, the Bishop." And when Mahdi Ibrahim looked surprised, catching the words without their meaning, he slapped him on the shoulder and cried: "Don't you worry. I'll behave."

Mahdi Ibrahim picked up his basket. "Shall I come back," he asked, "and make the snakes dance again?"

"Drop in any time."

"The salute, yah Sidi!"

"So long, old boy!"

But as soon as the other had left Burton turned once more to the parapet. He drew himself up carefully, inch by inch. He looked down.

The roof top of the house of Si Mohammed el-Busiri was directly beneath his, only a few feet away, the outer walls touching. It lay sharp and clear in the sun's crimson afterglow, heaped with a profusion of silken rugs and pillows in rich blendings of purple and maroon and peacock-green. There were a number of taborets with sweetmeats and bottles of perfume, a silver hubble-bubble pipe and a dwarf peach tree in full bloom set in a square pot of turquoise-blue Persian porcelain. In the center stood a *mazah*, a sort of pergola, closed on three sides with screens of fretted marble, while the fourth was covered by a curtain of brown wool embroidered with silver.

As he looked the curtain moved and a woman stepped out, a guitar in her hand.

She was dressed in a long kaftan of mauve silk with a *man-souryiah*, an overdress, of spidery lace. Her tiny feet were in orange velvet slippers stitched with golden crescents. Her black hair was twisted up in an orange silk handkerchief bordered with seed pearls.

He saw her face very clearly as she raised her chin to look at the sky where Orion, slanting and immense, was tilting across the crest of dropping night, while here and there the minor constellations were brushing out of the ether like points of silver pricked in a purple canopy. She seemed very young; perhaps seventeen, he said to himself, or eighteen—no more. She was of a light golden complexion, the even texture of her skin enhanced by the blue tattoo mark on her forehead and by the great diamond nose stud fastened to her left nostril. Her keen, large eyes seemed even larger through the curved frame of her immense black brows.

She crossed the roof top with the swinging gait of the desert

bred, and at every step the elastic cords and smooth, long muscles of her bare throat moved rhythmically. Different, he thought her, from the women he had known in America. The magic of tropical stars had ripened her. The motley pageantry of tropical skies had shaped her young body.

He held himself perfectly quiet, so quiet and silent that he could hear the flutter of a moth's wings that sped past him. The woman was now directly beneath him, and a scent drifted up as, a strand of her hair escaping from under the handkerchief, she caught up the loose lock with a gesture of her rounded arm. It was not the scent of perfume or flowers but the scent of the woman herself, the aroma of her warm young body; and again, as before when he had listened to her song, a shudder ran through him, of fear—too, of longing, unformed yet overwhelming. He felt the blood in his veins singing with a puissant rhythm.

The next second, before he could drop from sight, her glance met his. She stared up at him from beneath half closed lids. He felt the look physically. It touched his heart and body together. It stirred him, unreasonably, like some great awakening, like the facing of a riddle which he must read to the end.

She stood very still, yet poised on her toes, ready to dart away should he move. Her eyes opened to their full width. Her nostrils quivered nervously, like those of a mare, causing the diamond nose stud to twinkle with a million rainbow facets. Her kaftan, caught by the tail end of the desert breeze, slid to one side, exposing a soft shoulder.

Burton heard his own breath come rapidly, staccato. He felt his imaginings drive along like a sheet of flame, rippling through his body in a huge red wave. A strange tumult as of some ecstasy of long forgotten, again remembered primitive savagery invaded him, honeycombing his wire-drawn, respectable soul, melting down the walls of his civilizational resistance. He could not turn his eyes away. He wanted to speak; to say—anything. Could not utter a sound.

Then he heard a voice at his elbow:

"Sidi Burton!"

With a jerk of his whole body he turned, grasping the parapet in back of him with both his hands, and blinked stupidly. Nadj Omar, his houseboy and dragoman, bowed before him.

"She's rather jolly well corking, eh what?" he asked with impudent familiarity.

"You——" Burton was angry; less at having been found out than because he heard on the roof behind him a rushing of slipped feet and thought that the dragoman had frightened the woman away. His rage choked him. He clenched his fists.

"Si Mohammed knows how to pick out his wives," continued the other imperturbably; and seeing the expression of anger in his master's eyes changing to curiosity, he added: "Janina is his youngest wife. How do I know? I am a *youte*, a bazaar boy. The tongue is my weapon and the ear my shield—right-o! Throw me in the river—and I rise with a fish in my mouth!" He looked over the parapet. "She's gone. Too jolly damn bad. Still—*rchbi ma ighlq bab hatta ihul bab*—God does not close one door without first opening another. You want to meet her, Sidi? How much you pay? Two hundred francs? I am not a Jew or an Armenian that I should bargain! One hundred and ninety——"

"Go to the devil!"

Pitts Burton left the roof top, while Nadj Omar smiled. He put his head on one side, considering. Then he stepped close to the parapet and whistled—two high notes, followed by a fluttering tremolo and ending in a throaty gurgle, exactly like a crane calling to its mate. He waited, listening tensely; repeated



Every day Pitts Burton rode into the vaulted silences of the Sahara.



High in the west gleamed a sickle moon of delicate ivory. A jackal crossed the far desert, swiftly, grayly, like an evil thought. From the hectic maze of the bazaar quarter came a very faint rubbing of drums and wailing of reed pipes.

Pitts Burton heard. He could not find sleep for a long time; tossed nervously on his bed. The thought of the woman would not leave him.

Love? Perhaps. Desire? Doubtless.

But too, negatively, the fear of middle age. He dreaded it. It meant patent lotions for the hair and patent medicines for the liver. It meant dowagers in purple velvet at dinner, and a rise both in his weight and his handicap at golf. It spelled flannel underwear and hot springs and stodginess and respectability—not by preference but by *force majeure*.

And youth meant romance.

Romance—why!—he had missed it all through life; had sneered at it; had buried it beneath the stony drag and smother of business, ambition, self-consciousness, fear of his own and his friends' ridicule. His had been the common school logic in which all the truths stand behind one another, neatly marshaled and labeled. Flotsam—that's what he had been—flotsam on the tide of other people's opinions and prejudices.

Romance! He needed it; wanted it. Why not, he said to himself, why not? There had been the woman's eyes, with the suggestion in them of infinite dreams, infinite sweetness, infinite thrills.

Why not—why not? He had been a fool to jump down Nadj Omar's throat. The dragoman was all right; a little too familiar perhaps with his mixture of English slang and Arab proverbs, but loyal and shrewd. He would know a way. Why—he had even suggested that for a few hundred francs he might . . .

So Burton fell asleep, to be wakened by Nadj Omar who came with the breakfast tray and smiling words:

"Ripping day, Sidi! You dream of Janina, eh?"

Burton sat up. Morning lay through the room with a brocaded mantle of rose and silver.

"Oh!"—he yawned. "Janina——" He rubbed his eyes.

"Damn pretty, Sidi!"

"I'll say she is." The American sipped his coffee.

"Her husband is old," continued the other. "Also weak. Also trusting. Also a fool."

And, master psychologist, he let the matter drop until that evening when, the snake charmer having come, performed and left, Burton once more watched the neighboring roof top. Janina was sitting cross-legged on a pillow. She did not look up. She twanged her guitar, and again the flame of desire burned through Burton's soul and set his heart to beating fearfully, hammering against his ribs, leaving him breathless, without volition, without resistance.

The dragoman stepped to his side.

"The lady Janina likes your face—right-o!" he said with calm directness.

"How do you know?"

"The Kisslar Agassi told me—the head eunuch. No end clever chap—my word! Once he lost a she-camel and four years later knew her colt by its foot."

Burton laughed.

"It is now nine o'clock," the other went on.

"Well?"

"Si Mohammed's other two wives are very old and very fat. They are asleep. They hide their leaky tongues in their snore." He lighted a cigarette. "The Kisslar Agassi is at the back door—waiting——"

"But—how——"

For answer the dragoman hummed a current Tugurt bazaar song:

"*Noosiq yah alli man andeq khoog achqiq.*

*Khoog achqiq khooh ed-douro——*"

which he translated into:

"I tell thee, O thou who hast no real brother,

Thy real brother is the dollar!"

"How much?" asked Burton.

"Two hundred francs—perhaps a little more afterwards, Sidi."

Burton felt slightly disgusted, felt tempted to draw back. But he shook his head. Romance—it was waiting for him; and after all, he thought, it was no better or worse than tipping the headwaiter in a New York restaurant and sending him across the waxed floor to a woman dining alone, with a word scribbled on a visiting card.

"All right," he said.

He followed the dragoman downstairs, through the garden, to the back door of Si Mohammed's house. The Kisslar Agassi was waiting. There was talk in guttural, explosive Arabic, the clink of money, and the eunuch's pudgy hand grasping Burton's and drawing him across the threshold.

"Come, yah Sidi. Be careful."

Then a rapid crossing of darkened rooms, a mounting of darkened stairs, a rustle of curtains, a heavy odor of musk and attar of roses, somewhere the sound of a sleeper snoring rumbly, sluggishly, a final word:

"I shall watch, Sidi."

And Burton found himself on the roof top of Si Mohammed's house. Janina rose and came up to him, the moonlight glinting down her black tresses, gleaming with (Continued on page 114)



"At times," said the head eunuch.  
"memory is a hangman's noose."

## The Tale The Drum Told

(Continued from page 100)

diamond points in the somber orbit of her eyes. He heard his own voice stammering, ludicrous:

"You—you speak English?"

"A little—and a little French——"

"And I know about two words of Arabic."

She laughed.

"I shall teach you more," she said. "Listen. Repeat after me: *Aqarbi h'ulana, anna sehauff Janina barka, maqueh fathma lashor!*"

"What does it mean?"

"Repeat!" she insisted; and word for word, clumsily, haltingly, his lips echoed the strange sounds.

"Please tell me what it means."

"It means: I swear by Allah that I shall see only Janina, and no other woman!" Then he kissed her.

He never knew how and when he parted from her. There was just a vague memory of the Kisslar Agassi looming up with warning words to hurry because day was near, a quick descent and crossing of rooms where morning was beginning to shoot in with a ghostly wedge of white, a dash across the garden.

At noon he woke up. There was in his soul the knowledge of something sweet and strange that had taken possession of him, heart and body, and somehow a sense of immense sadness; there was in his mouth the sweetness of wild honey, with a bitter after taste to prick the tongue and set the nerves to longing; and again that night he saw her.

Earlier in the evening the snake charmer had come. He had dismissed him curtly.

The Kisslar Agassi took him to the roof top. She came up to him with the magic of her touch.

"*Yah amri!*" she said in her low, throaty voice. "O my life!"

He saw her almost every night, except on those rare occasions when Nadj Omar brought word that Si Mohammed's other two wives were on the roof; and so the days passed into weeks. They had little to talk about. At times, of course, he tried to speak to her, to ask her questions about herself. But she seldom opened her lips except to kiss him or whisper words of love.

"Tell me of what you think, dear," he would ask.

"*Yah amri—O my life!*" she would reply. "*Yah aini—O my soul!*"

Then a flood of passionate words, in Arabic, in quaint French, in the little English which she knew; and after a while he gave up asking her questions. She was right, he said to himself. There was no truth but that of the senses, God given. Such was now the single thought which dominated him.

Occasionally Mahdi Ibrahim came and squatted on the roof top and beat his drum—tok-tak-tok—forcing the snakes to dance drunkenly. But as a rule Pitts Burton dismissed him, impatiently, curtly. For he had begun—quite unreasonably, he owned up to himself—to dislike the snake charmer's hawkish, sardonic face. He wondered if the man knew. If he did, he did not let on. Only once he made a certain cryptic allusion.

"If Allah proposes the destruction of an

ant, He allows wings to grow upon her!" he said one evening, apropos of nothing, as from the neighboring house drifted up the wailing of Janina's guitar.

By this time the year had swooned into the sharp, glaring summer of North Africa, with myriads of bundles of vegetation transformed in a day into fully expanded leaves and riotous, blazing flowers, and dead in another day; with the birds opening their beaks in a painful effort to gasp for air; with a splintering, jaundiced heat that veiled the levels; and the very desert a carpet of bloom. All day long Burton sat behind closed shutters, coming out only in the evening and sitting at Janina's feet, looking dreamily at the rainbow twinkle of her diamond nose stud, listening dreamily to her soft words:

"I love you, *yah aini!*"

"And I love you, small Janina!"

"Why do you love me, *yah amri?*"

"Oh—just because——"

"And I love you for the same reason—O my life—my soul—O eyes of my soul!"

Another week passed and summer was over. The desert came into its own again, with chilly night breezes which swept the yellow sands into shifting, carved waves, which clothed the rock waste with a fitful, scraggly, fantastic tangle of tamarack and drinn and dwarf acacia.

Every day Pitts Burton rode his little blue-mottled stallion out into the desert. He left Nadj Omar at home, preferring to be alone with the great peace and the enormous, vaulted silences of the Sahara, with no sign of human habitation except, occasionally, a camel rider looming on the horizon, a ragged Bedouin boy driving his goats toward brackish water and green food, or a similar bit of desert flotsam. The strength of the yellow sands came to him with a mighty sweep, a feeling of triumphant elation, a falling away of the useless burdens of life, the useless thoughts, the useless worries and ambitions. It seemed to him that he was being purged of his past—his too human, too complex past. This new life had come to him with a sort of effortless, elemental, cosmic power. His days, immensely simple, seemed charged to the brim with an overwhelming loveliness, a radiant, stainless happiness and cleanliness; and there were the nights. There was Janina. He loved her, and she loved him. Why did he love her? Why did she love him? What did it matter? What did anything matter?

When, with the sun below the horizon and the sky a frosted magic of purple and silver, he returned from the desert, he spurred his stallion to a furious gallop in the last few miles. He wanted to see Janina, to hold her in his arms, to look into her black eyes, to kiss her red lips.

He loved her. She loved him.

And then one evening, as he crossed the garden and gave the prearranged signal at the back door—two short knocks followed by a long, low drumming—the Kisslar Agassi appeared on the threshold and motioned him away.

"Oh—are Si Mohammed's other wives on the roof top?"

"No, Sidi."

"Then—why? Is Janina sick?"

"She is dead, Sidi!" And the Kisslar

Agassi closed the door in Burton's face.

In the next few seconds, that passed all scale of time, Burton lived through a series of emotions too vivid for remembrance of gesture, of action, of thought. He did feel. But it was as if he felt it in another man's body, a stranger's. This stranger gave a strangled cry; he passed through certain absurd physical details—a foot that was "asleep," a hat that fell on the ground, a mosquito that bit savagely and was savagely crushed, shaky legs that crossed the garden with short, broken steps, a body that stumbled through the hall and dropped into a chair; and then out of the whirlwind and the tumult a figure came and looked down upon him, with words softly, pitifully spoken.

"I ran after you to tell you. You did not hear me, Sidi."

"Is it true—Nadj Omar?"

"Yes, Sidi."

"You—oh!" Burton sat up. "You lie—you lie! You are crazy—" Then he read the truth in the other's eyes. An ashen pallor spread to his very lips. His voice shook: "Oh God!"

"It came suddenly this afternoon," said the dragoman, forgetting the English slang of which he was so proud, speaking gently as he might to a child. "A fever. Then death. Come, my master!" He forced Burton to rise. "A woman is a woman, and fate is fate. Who can escape what is written on the forehead? *Bismillah irrahman errahmin!*" he mumbled plausibly as he saw that Burton was tottering, about to fall. "Take my arm. Sit on the roof. It is cool and sweet there, and I will bring you a glass of fig wine—iced, as you like it."

Burton hardly heard. Unresisting, he accompanied Nadj Omar to the roof top.

He sat down and stared into the west with stony eyes. A chill wind sobbed from the desert. It rattled dimly in the palms and blew the sand in conical whirls. A sad, sleepy night crept over the roofs of Tugurt with black fingers. From a puddle, where a camel had wallowed, rose an evil odor. He had the confused sensation of pain that wrapped about his soul as with the curling sting of a whiplash.

Dead. How? Why?

Perhaps—the suspicion came suddenly—Si Mohammed had found out, had . . .

No, no—came the second thought—it was on him, the man, that the husband's revenge would have fallen first.

Death. There was the fact.

"*El ouad*—destiny!" whispered Nadj Omar, who had come up with a glass of fig wine.

Dead. There was the fact. His life shook upon its foundations. Now that he had lost her, his heart was like a house without any light where his thoughts wandered about, lonely children afraid of the dark. So he sat there all that night until the mists of morning rose and coiled. The mists of the desert! The mists in his own heart! They echoed this day to the tolling of the death gongs that came from the house of Si Mohammed el-Busiri, to the sobbing of the tomtoms, the wailing of the negresses. The next day he sat there and the next, knitting his riven soul to hold the pain in his breast. He ate mechanically what the dragoman put before him. He saw the burial cortege leave the house of Si Mohammed, and his

heart's remembrance followed the tiny body in the big coffin; followed it, followed it back to the evening when he had first heard her lilting song—"yah benti, yah benti!"

Darkness stalked over his soul. Grief was about him like an iron wall from which there was no escape. He spent evening after evening on the roof top, staring at the place where once had been his paradise.

Speech, action, thought, all seemed to him alike useless and vain, not worth the effort of hand or brain. Go back to America? And to what purpose? There was always in his heart the fact of Janina's death. Why had she died? How?

"Fever!" the dragoman told him, often, patiently. "Just a fever, Sidi."

So the short winter passed, and December brought the beginning of the Saharan spring with soft winds and blue nights and golden days and the melody of the young year, like a slow sob of melting harmonies. And one evening Mahdi Ibrahim, whom he had not seen since before Janina's death, came on the roof top with his basket.

"Snakes, yah Sidi!" he asked. "Shall I make them dance for you?"

Pitts Burton shrugged his shoulders.

"All right—" It made no difference. Nothing made any difference.

Mahdi Ibrahim squatted down. His left hand disappeared in the burmose, came out with the drum. It commenced swinging, left, right, left, like a pendulum, as he beat it with gentle, dry taps.

Tok-tak! spoke the drum. Tok-tock-tak!—with a hiccup, syncopated rhythm. Tok-tak-tok!—insistently, while the snake charmer stared at the basket with dreamy immobility. Tok-tak-tok!

And presently a flat, wicked head appeared from beneath the top of the basket; a second; a third. The snakes plopped down. They began to dance, swaying, circling, gyrating, following the pendulum of the drum.

Tok-tak-tok!

Desolate in an empty world of grief, Burton listened and stared, with eyes too hot for tears, yet with a coldness of ice upon his very heart.

Tok-tak-tok!

The memory came back to him, through the low roll of the drum, of Janina's love song:

"*Yah benti, yah benti,  
Akh idjibleq erradjel . . .*"

He heard the embroidery of fantastic, chromatic arabesques, the abandon of eerie, minor harmonies:

"*Yah benti, yah benti . . .*"

He heard the voice rising higher and higher to a clear, bell-like note, with an infinite, throbbing joy of the senses, naked and unashamed: "*Akh idjibleq . . .*"

Tok!—said the drum. He heard its rhythm within the rhythm of Janina's voice; heard the vibrating tok-tak-tok within the edges of Janina's wailing cadences. The two sounds blended; they joined hands above the snakes' flat, glistening eyes, and a bleak terror invaded the hidden corners of Burton's heart as the beating of the drum seemed to cease, as from the drum itself came Janina's song, sobbing, unearthly:

"*Yah benti, yah benti,  
Akh idjibleq erradjel . . .*"

He thought of her, her crimson lips,

her black eyes, the twinkling diamond nose stud. He stared. Then, suddenly, he screamed. He rose to his feet, stumbling, tottering, his hands outstretched.

"The drum!" he cried. "Give it to me!" "Hush—for the love of the All-Merciful!" came Mahdi Ibrahim's whisper, warning, yet in it a lilting accent of elation. "Death is on the roof top, yah Sidi!" as one of the snakes flopped down, nervous, frightened out of its drunken rhythm.

"The drum! Give it to me!" repeated Burton in a high, cracked voice.

He jerked forward. He saw the male snake move, glide, directly beneath his feet, heard the hiss distinctly; and even in that moment of stark, enormous horror, horror too great to be grasped, horror that swept over and beyond the barriers of fear, he still heard the song come wailing from the inside of the drum, calling him, luring him on:

"*Yah benti, yah benti . . .*"

He tore it from the other's hand. He looked at it. It was of a dull, mottled yellow, no larger than a child's head. Then he began shivering all over as if in an ague. Cold sweat ran down his face as he saw that it was a human skull, the eye sockets and ear holes and nose openings closed with minutely fitted pieces of ivory, a skin stretched tightly across the place where the mouth had been, and, fastened by a silver wire to the left nasal bone, a diamond that twinkled evilly.

And in after years, when the memory of the thing came back to him, in the midst of a gay dinner party, or driving his ball from the first tee of the Sleepy Hollow links, or perhaps during a walk up Fifth Avenue, he could never explain, not even to himself, what happened during the next few seconds. It was like one of those incredible incidents which loom out of the dark without beginning or end.

There was just the snake charmer's warning cry, "Look out, Sidi!" changing rapidly into a bitter laugh of triumph, a sibilant, cutting: "Hayah! If Allah proposes the destruction of an ant, He allows wings to grow upon her!"—another voice, the dragoman's, "Quick!"—the sharp bark of a shot. Suddenly his knees seemed to give. The roof top heaved like the bow of a ship. The drum in his hand swung to and fro in a blazing yellow pendulum. He felt a dull jar as he fell on his knees and rolled over.

When he came to he found himself on his bed, in his own room. He lay still for a moment. Then he opened his eyes. Through the semi-darkness he saw a white-robed figure standing above him. He recognized Nadj Omar's vulpine features, heard the man's voice:

"No harm done, Sidi. I came—shot the snake just in time. No end jolly lucky for you—my word! Wait. I shall bring you a glass of fig wine."

The dragoman left, and Burton stretched himself in utter lassitude. His hand came in contact with something cool and smooth. He lifted it up. It was the drum. Shudderingly his knuckles brushed across the place where the mouth had been, trembling over the tightly spanned skin.

"*Yah aini!*" he seemed to hear. "*Yah aini!*—O my soul!"—as with the ebbing of a far, high spring tide.



Money for having the sense to appreciate you. *Quelque femme*, I'd say. By the way, have you seen John lately?"

"Not since Tommy died."

"Well, there's another of the saints!" said Irene. "He's pretending now he doesn't know we were on a wild party that night and that he saved our reputations. He won't talk about it, so don't try to thank him. Tommy's estate is going through Sanders's office and John's no end busy. He's getting acquainted with Ward—funny how things work out! But if John has any idea about you and Ward he never lets on."

"He's probably done some thinking," Grace replied soberly. "John isn't stupid."

"He's my idea of a prince, if you ask me! He's making a big hit with my family; mother thinks he's the grandest young man who ever came up the pike."

### III

Roy came home for a week-end but only after his mother had written him repeatedly urging a visit. He had really been at work—Mrs. Durland had this from the dean of the law school—but his enthusiasm for the profession his mother had chosen for him was still at low ebb. He wanted to find work on a newspaper; he wanted to go West; anything was preferable to setting up as a lawyer in an office of his own. It was disclosed that Mrs. Durland had arranged to mortgage the house to raise money with which to establish him. But it was the definite announcement of her purpose to bring Roy's wife home immediately after commencement that precipitated a crisis in Ethel's relations with her family.

The baby would be born in August and Mrs. Durland contended that the family dignity would suffer far less if Roy announced his marriage when he left the university and joined his wife in his father's house at Indianapolis.

Ethel was outraged by the plan. She would not live under the same roof with that creature; and she availed herself of the opportunity to tell Roy what she thought of him. He had always been petted and indulged, and this was the result!

"I never thought you'd really do it, mother," Ethel's voice rose shrilly. "I didn't think you'd be cruel enough to visit this shame on me. I've told Osgood the whole story. I felt that was the only honorable thing to do and he's been splendid about it. We've been engaged since Easter and he's ready to marry me at any time. I've had all I can stand! Osgood has an offer in Cincinnati and we can be married tomorrow and I can leave this house of shame."

Stephen Durland raised his head and coughed. Roy announced that he was going downtown. The front door slammed and Mrs. Durland burst into tears.

"You don't think—you don't think Ethel means she's going?"

"I certainly hope she means it," said Grace wearily. "Osgood's not a bad fellow and maybe he can beat some sense into her!"

### IV

GRACE had never been in New York before and Miss Reynolds gave her every

opportunity to see the sights. The investigation of devices for housing business women Miss Reynolds pursued with her usual thoroughness. She accepted no invitations in which Grace could not be included, with the result that they dined or had luncheon in half a dozen private houses, and were entertained in fashionable refectories and at exclusive clubs.

"You're so good to me!" Grace said one night when they reached their hotel after a dinner at the house of an old friend of Miss Reynolds's. "But sometimes—sometimes, Cousin Beulah, when your friends are so kind and treat me so beautifully I can't help thinking that if they knew about me—"

"My dear Grace, this busy world's a lot kinder than it gets credit for being! Come here and let me look at you a minute. You are finding yourself? Don't feel that the world would condemn you even if the world knew. We're all more tolerant than we used to be."

They had visited a community house on the East Side one morning and were driving to Washington Square for luncheon.

"We're a bit early for our engagement," Miss Reynolds remarked as they reached Broadway. "We've got half an hour to look at Trinity."

They entered the church and sat down in a pew near the door. A service was in progress and Grace at once fixed her attention on the chancel.

The minister's voice reciting the office, the sense of age communicated by the walls of the edifice, all had their effect on her. She felt singularly alone. The heart-ache that had troubled her little since she left home again became acute. Here was peace, but it was a peace that mocked rather than calmed the spirit . . .

" . . . We humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men . . . "

The mournful cadence of the prayer only increased her loneliness. She was like a child who, watching night descend in a strange place, is overcome by a stifling nostalgia. Her throat ached with inexpressible emotions and her heart fluttered like a wild bird in her breast.

She knew she wanted Trenton; nothing else mattered; no one could ever fill his place . . . She bowed her head and her lips trembled.

A man walked hesitatingly down the aisle and slipped into a pew in front of her. Apparently he was one of the many who were seeking relief from the world's turmoil. She remained motionless, staring. It was unbelievable that it could be Trenton and yet beyond question it was he.

His coming was like an answer to prayer. When he was ill, he had written:

"One day at twilight . . . I thought of you so intently that I brought you into the room . . . "

She remembered that he had once told her that his New York office was near Trinity. Perhaps it was his habit to drop in as he passed.

Miss Reynolds, turning the pages of a prayer book, evidently had not noticed him. Presently she glanced at her watch and nodded that it was time to go. As they paused in the entry to look at the bronze doors Grace decided not to tell her friend that Trenton was in the church; but suddenly he stood beside them.

"This is surely more than a coincidence," he said, smiling gravely as he shook hands.

"I pass here every day, but I hadn't been in before for years. But today—"

They walked together to the gate, Grace silent, Miss Reynolds and Trenton discussing the weather to cover their embarrassment. Grace, still awed by his appearance, thought he looked careworn.

"I have a taxi here somewhere." Miss Reynolds was glancing about uncertainly when the machine drew in at the curb.

"Are you staying in town long?" Trenton asked as he opened the cab door.

"Only a few days," Miss Reynolds replied guardedly. "Grace and I are here on a little business. I wonder—"

Without finishing the sentence she stepped into the car and gave the Washington Square address. Trenton, rousing as he realized they were about to leave, bent forward and took Grace's hand.

"It's so good to see you!" he said steadily. "I'm going West tonight. Mrs. Trenton's been very ill; she's in a sanatorium in Connecticut." Then, aware that he couldn't detain them longer: "Miss Reynolds, I'm sure you and Miss Durland will take good care of each other!"

"Good by," said Grace faintly and watched him disappear in the crowd.

"I was going to ask him to come and dine with us," said Miss Reynolds when the car was in motion, "but I changed my mind and now I wish I could change it again!"

"I'm glad you didn't," Grace answered. "It would have been a mistake."

"Well, perhaps," said Miss Reynolds; and Trenton was not referred to again.

But all the rest of the day Grace lived upon the memory of his look, his voice. He was still in a world she knew; any turn of the long road might bring him in sight again.

### V

A WEEK in Chicago followed a fortnight in New York and Grace had filled a large portfolio with notes and pamphlets bearing upon Miss Reynolds's projected home for business girls. Her mother's letters had kept her informed of family affairs and she was prepared to find Ethel gone and Roy's wife established in the house.

For Sadie, the new member of the family, Grace formed an immediate liking. The girl was so anxious to be friendly and to do her share of the domestic labor and so appreciative of kindness that she brought a new element of cheer into the household.

Grace found that her position as secretary to Miss Reynolds was far from being a sinecure. She was present at all the conferences with the architect who had now been engaged, and when the announcement of the new club for business girls could no longer be deferred it fell to Grace's lot to answer the letters that poured in upon Miss Reynolds.

One day in June Grace went to Judge Sanders's office on an errand for Miss Reynolds. It was merely a matter of leaving an abstract of title for examination but as she was explaining what was wanted to the office girl John Moore came out of one of the inner rooms.

"Caught in the act!" he exclaimed. "I've just been hankering to see you. Can't you give me a few minutes, right now?"

She was in a hurry but when he earnestly protested that he really had business with

her she followed him into a room whose door was inscribed "Mr. Moore."

"That looks terribly important, John," she said, indicating the lettering. "Onward and upward!"

"Well," he said when they were seated, "Mr. Kemp's death has thrown a lot of business into the office and some of it that doesn't require much brain power they leave to me. Mr. Trenton just left a few minutes ago. He came in to see if I'd go down into Knox County to inventory a coal mine Kemp owned. I'm getting a lot of little jobs like that."

She smiled, as he wanted her to, at his boyish pride in his work. She derived a deep pleasure from the thought that Trenton had just been there. Trenton would appreciate John's fine qualities; they would properly value each other's qualities and talents.

"Maybe you don't know," John went on, "and maybe I oughtn't to tell; but right here on my desk are the papers for your father to sign away his rights in his motor patent and his formula for that non-breakable spark plug porcelain you probably know about. Your father's coming in tomorrow to sign up. Mr. Trenton has left a check here for advance royalties that will pay the Durland grocery bill for some time to come!"

"John, do you mean it! I'd been afraid Mr. Kemp's death would end all that."

"Trenton's the whole cheese in that business now and he knows what he's doing. He says those two things are bound to earn your father a lot of money."

"Father certainly deserves any success that may come to him. I'm so glad for him and mother. And just when things at home don't look particularly bright!"

"Roy? Well—that boy has no more business in the law than I'd have in a millinery shop. I sneaked him up here last Sunday and had Mr. Trenton take a look at him. You know Roy's a smart, likable chap, with a friendly way of meeting people and I thought maybe there might be a job somewhere in the Kemp organization that he'd fit into."

"I don't know," began Grace dubiously.

"Oh, Roy jumped at the idea! Mr. Trenton's taken a fancy to him; in fact they liked each other immensely. Well, the upshot of the interview is that Roy's going to get his sheepskin and then go right into Kemp's factory for six months to get an idea of the business and then transfer to the sales department."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Grace. "Why John, that's glorious! You don't know how relieved I am!"

"You're not half as relieved as Roy is to dodge the law," John chuckled. "He wanted me to ask you to spring the news on his mother."

"John, I'll do it tonight—and thank you; oh, thank you for everything!"

## VI

STELLEN DURLAND had money in bank and was reasonably sure of a good income for the remainder of his life. The Kemp publicity department had given wide advertisement to his discoveries, and several technical journals had asked for photographs of the inventor, the taking of which Grace supervised. He continued to appear dazed by his good fortune and Grace, for years familiar with

his moods, was mystified by his conduct.

One evening when they were alone on the veranda she asked a question about affairs at the factory, really in the hope that he would speak of Trenton. When he had answered perfunctorily that everything was running smoothly and that they would be ready to put the new motor on the market in six months he remarked that Trenton was away a good deal.

"His wife's sick and down East somewhere. I guess he's had a lot to worry him. When he's in town he works hard."

"Mr. Trenton's certainly been a good friend to you, daddy. But of course he wouldn't have taken your patents if they hadn't been all they promised to be."

Durland turned his head to make sure they were not overheard and said in a low tone:

"I'd never have got those things right, Grace. That evening you came out to the shop with those people Trenton stayed all night and straightened me out on points that were too much for me. He worked with me a good many nights to get things right. He oughtn't to give me the credit."

"Now, daddy, that's just like you! Of course they're all your ideas! But it was fine of Mr. Trenton to help you round them out."

"It was more than that, Grace," Durland stolidly persisted.

This, then, was the cause of her father's preoccupation and the embarrassment with which he had been hearing himself praised. It was Trenton's genius, not his, that had perfected the motor. Something sweet and wistful like the scents of the summer night crept into her heart. She was happy, supremely happy, in the thought that Trenton had done this—given her father the benefit of his skill—and for her! But her father's confession moved her greatly. The light from the window fell upon his hand which seemed to symbolize failure as it hung inert from the arm of his chair.

"Oh, lots of inventors must accept help from experts when they've got as far as they can by themselves!"

Durland shook his head impatiently. "I couldn't have done it!" he said huskily. "I don't understand even now how he got the results he did!"

"Oh, pshaw!" she exclaimed with a happy little laugh. "No man would ever be so generous of his talents as all that; men are not built that way!"

But she knew that it was true, and that it was because Trenton loved her that he had saved her father from another and crushing failure.

## VII

GRACE and Trenton were holding strictly to their agreement not to see each other; but through Irene, who got her information from John, she was able to keep track of Trenton's movements. Once, as she waited for the traffic to break at Washington and Meridian Streets, Trenton passed in a car. Craig was driving and Trenton, absorbed in a sheaf of papers, didn't lift his head. He was so near for a fleeting second that she could have touched him. This, then, was to be the way of it, their paths steadily diverging; or if they met it would be as strangers who had ceased to have any message for each other.

Sallie's baby was born in August and

Roy manifested an unexpected degree of paternal pride in his offspring. The summer wore on to September. Now and then as she surveyed herself in the mirror it seemed to Grace that she was growing old and that behind her lay a long life time, crowded with experience. She felt herself losing touch with the world. Miss Reynolds, with all her kindness, was exacting. Grace saw no young people and her amusements were few. Irene, who watched her with a keenly critical eye, remarked frequently upon her good looks, declaring that she was growing handsomer all the time.

Unless all signs failed Irene and John were deeply in love with each other—the old story of the attraction of apparently irreconcilable natures.

"I've told John everything—all about Tommy, of course, to give him a chance to escape," Irene confided. "But I didn't jar him a bit. That man's faith would make a good woman of Jezebel. John's already got some little jobs—secretaryships of corporations that Judge Sanders threw his way. He thinks we can be married early next year and I'm perusing the real estate ads. I've got enough money to make a payment on a bungalow as far from Shipley's as a nickel will carry me and there'll be a cow and a few choice hens. Back to the grass, dearie! That's our battle cry."

"Oh, it's just marvelous!" cried Grace. "You and John are bound to reach the high places. You've got just the qualities John needs to help him get on. When he goes into politics after a while you'll be a big asset."

"I think I *might* like a few years in Washington," Irene replied meditatively. "I've already joined up with a woman's political club to learn how to fool 'em all the time."

## VIII

IN THE middle of September Miss Reynolds proposed to Grace that they go to Colorado to look at the mountains. She insisted that Grace had earned a vacation.

They established themselves in a hotel that commanded a view of a great valley with snowy summits beyond and Grace tramped and rode and won a measurable serenity of spirit. Miss Reynolds may have thought that amid new scenes the girl would forget Trenton, but the look that came into Grace's eyes at times discouraged the idea. Then one evening as they sat in the hotel office reading their mail Miss Reynolds laid a Denver newspaper on Grace's knee and quietly pointed to a headline: "Death of Mary Graham Trenton."

The end had come suddenly in the sanatorium where Mrs. Trenton had been under treatment. Her husband, the dispatch stated, was with her when she died. "She was ill when she was at my house," remarked Miss Reynolds. "She was frightfully nervous and seemed to be constantly forcing herself. I never saw such tired eyes!"

"I'm sorry," Grace murmured faintly. "I didn't know—I had no idea——"

She was numbed, bewildered by the news. She had thought that Mrs. Trenton was feigning illness to arouse her husband's pity; perhaps in the hope of reawakening his love. It had never occurred to her that she might die.

As soon as possible Grace excused herself and went to her room, where she flung herself on the bed and lay for long in the dark, pondering. In spite of her emphatic request that he would not write she had hoped constantly to hear from him; and his silence she had interpreted as meaning that he had found it easy to forget. She now attributed his silence to the remorse that had probably assailed him when he found that Mrs. Trenton was hopelessly ill.

## IX

GRACE had been home a week when she received a letter from Trenton, written in Pittsburgh. He was closing up his home; looking after the settlement of Mrs. Trenton's estate. She had bequeathed her considerable property to the societies for social reform in which she had been interested. He hoped to be in Indianapolis shortly, he wrote, and continued:

"My thoughts in these past weeks have not been happy ones; but I must turn now to the future. In my dark hours I have groped toward you, felt the need of your leading hand. I love you. That is the one great fact in the world. Whatever I have left to me of life is yours; and it is now my right to give it . . . It was my fate, not my fault that I learned to love you. Nothing can change that. Let me begin over again and prove my love for you—win you as it is a woman's right to be won, in the world's eyes. I want you to bear my name; belong to me truly, help me to find and keep the path of happiness."

She did not understand herself as the days passed and she felt no impulse to reply. She loved him still—there was no question of that—but she tortured herself with the idea that he had written only from a chivalrous sense of obligation. Trenton was free; but she too was free; and marriage was an uncertain quantity. She encouraged in herself the belief that to marry him would be only to invite unhappiness. While she was still debating with herself, she learned from Irene that Trenton was again in town.

The new club for business girls, which Miss Reynolds had decided to name Friendship House, was in process of furnishing and was to be opened on Thanksgiving Day.

"The girls can make their own rules," said Miss Reynolds. "But I'm going to have one little rule printed and put in every room and worked into all the doormats—just two words—Be Kind! If we'd all live up to that this would be a lot more comfortable world for everybody."

Being so constantly at Miss Reynolds's Grace had heard the Bob Cummings mentioned frequently. The merger had obliterated the name from the industrial life of the city; the senior Cummings had gone West to live with his older son and Miss Reynolds had spoken frequently of the plight in which the collapse of the family fortunes had left Bob. Evelyn came in one morning to see Grace.

"We've sold our house. It was mine, you know. And I've got about a thousand a year. So I'm turning Bob loose at his music. He's already got a job as organist in Doctor Ridgely's church and he's going to teach and do some lecturing."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Grace warmly. "And I know that Bob will be perfectly

happy. I've wanted to tell you how sorry I am about the—the business troubles."

"Well, our difficulties have brought Bob and me closer together, and our chances of happiness are brighter than on our wedding day; really they are! I'm saying this to you because you know Bob so well. And I think you'll understand."

Grace was not sure that she did understand and when Evelyn left she meditated for a long time upon the year's changes. She had so jauntily gone out to meet the world, risking her happiness in her confidence that she was capable of directing her own destiny; but life was not so easy! Life was an inexorable schoolmaster who set very hard problems indeed!

## X

IRENE, pretending to be jealous of Miss Reynolds, declared that there was no reason why Grace, in becoming a philanthropist, should forget her old friends. This was on an afternoon when Grace, in Shipley's, to pick up some odds and ends for Friendship House, looked in on the ready to wear floor for a word with Irene. She accepted an invitation to accompany Irene and John to a movie that night.

"John will have to work for an hour or so but we can get in for the second show. You just come up to Judge Sanders's office about eight and we can have an old-fashioned heart to heart talk till John's ready. You never take me into your confidence any more."

"I don't have any confidences; but if I had you wouldn't escape!"

"You're not seeing Ward, I suppose?" Irene asked carelessly.

"No," Grace replied with badly feigned indifference. "I haven't seen him. I have no intention of seeing him again."

"I suppose it's all over," said Irene, stifling a yawn.

"Yes, it's all over," Grace replied a little testily.

"Strange, but Ward just can't get that idea! Of course he's had a lot to do and think about and he'd never force himself on you."

"No; he wouldn't do that."

"Ward's a free man," said Irene dreamily. "He'll probably marry again."

"Irene! It was silly for me to be as crazy about him as I was. That freedom I used to talk about was all rubbish. We can't do as we please in this world—you and I both learned that! And afterward—after all that happened I could never marry Ward. And it would be a mistake for him to marry me—a girl who—"

"Grace Durland," interrupted Irene with lofty scorn, "you are talking like an idiot. You're insulting yourself and you're insulting Ward. I know a few things! He wrote to you, and he telephoned you at Miss Reynolds's twice and asked to see you and you refused. Don't let Miss Beulah Reynolds intimidate you! She took you to Colorado hoping you'd forget."

"Miss Reynolds is perfectly fine!" Grace flared. "She's never said a word against Ward!"

"No, she wouldn't need to say it! She's just trying to keep you away from him. I'm not knocking Beulah—she's all right; but when there's a man in the world who really and truly loves you and is eating his heart out just for a sight of you, you can't just stick your nose in the air and pretend you don't know he's alive."

Grace had been proud of her strength in denying Trenton the interview for which he had asked; but she left Irene with an unquiet heart. Trenton was lonely. It might be that she was unjust in not accepting his letter as the honest expression of his love and good will. She knew that she was guilty of dishonesty in trying to persuade herself that the nature of their past association made their marriage impossible. It was an untenable position and she despised herself for her inconsistency.

She looked forward eagerly to the promised talk with Irene—Irene was always consoling—and after supper she hurried downtown and was shot upward in the tall office building. She found Irene and John sitting opposite each other at a large flat-top desk. Irene was helping John to compare descriptions of property but she would be free in a moment. John showed Grace into the big library.

The dingy volumes on the shelves impressed her with a sense of the continuity of law through all the ages. She glanced idly at the titles. Torts, Contracts, Wills, Injunctions—there must, in this world, be order, rule, law! Life, nobly considered, was impossible without law. It was the height of folly that she had ever fancied herself a rebel, confident of her right to do as she pleased. She had made her mistakes; in the future she meant to walk circumspectly in the eyes of all men. She envied Irene her happiness with John; as for herself, love had brought her nothing but sorrow and heartache.

Her speculations were interrupted by the rustle of papers in the adjoining room. The door was half ajar and glancing in she saw a man seated at a desk, busily scanning formidable looking documents and affixing his signature.

Absorbed in his work, he was evidently unaware that he was observed. Her heart beat wildly as she watched him. She stifled a desire to call to him; checked an impulse to run to him. Irene had played a trick upon her in thus bringing her so near to Trenton! Her face burned; she would escape somehow. He might think she had suggested this to Irene. As she watched him he lifted his head with a sigh threw himself wearily back in his chair, and stared at the wall. No—she would not speak to him; never again would she speak to him! Panic-stricken, she turned and began cautiously tiptoeing toward the hall door with no thought but to leave the place at once. But, the door gained, her heart beat suffocatingly; she could not go; she did love him; and to run away—

She stole into the room without disturbing his reverie and laid her hand lightly on his shoulder.

"I couldn't go—I couldn't leave you—"

Then she was on her knees beside him, looking up into his startled eyes.

He raised her to her feet, tenderly, reverently, gazing eagerly into her face.

"How did you know!" he cried his eyes afloat.

"I didn't know; it just happened! I saw you—and I couldn't run away!"

"Oh, say that again! I've missed you so! You can't know how I've missed and needed you!"

"Do you—do you love me," she asked softly, "as you used to think you did?"

"Oh, more—more than all the world!"

THE END