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Volume II
Anthology of
Eastern Love



EASTERN LOVE



ANTHOLOGY OF EASTERN LOVE

I



ENGLISH VERSIONS BY
E. POWYS MATHERS



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VOLUME XI

•



JOHN RODKER
FOR SUBSCRIBERS
LONDON, 1929

THESE LAST TWO VOLUMES ARE

for

H. M. S.

MOST GRACIOUS OF ILLUSTRATORS, WHO HAS
INSURED FORTY-EIGHT PAGES OF
EASTERN LOVE AGAINST
MORTALITY

THIS THE ANTHOLOGY OF EASTERN LOVE,
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VOLUME I

MADE IN ENGLAND

CONTENTS

Eleven Turkish Poems :

He 3

The Tomb at Rak 4

The Three Cypresses 5

A Love Song 6

The Stream 9

• *Stamboul* 10

• *Laughters* 12

• *Grief and Desire* 13

After Possession 15

Your Mouth 17

A Love Song 18

A Garden of Kisses :

Kisses in Alger 25

Kisses in Oranie 53

• *Kisses in Tlemcen* 67

Kisses in Constantine 78

Kisses in the Desert 89

The Green Paper Lantern :

Delights 115

Desires 118

A Garden 121
Black Sleep 124
Walters 127
Delicate Smallness 130
Wine-Cups 133
Fans 136

Two Folk Tales of Lao :

The Wife of the Sweet Player 141
The Girl who was Kind to Women 145

Three Light Turkish Tales :

A Singer Among the Persians 149
An Idyl at the Bath 161
Approved Adultery 164

• *Eleven Turkish Poems*

(Chosen and translated from 'L'Anthologie de l'Amour Turc' of Edmond Fazy & Abdul-Halim-Memdoub and 'Les Colombes des Minarets,' by Franz Toussaint.)

I

He

HE COMES, WITH THE SURPRISE OF A MOON
Out of the clouds, and Love throws her arm
about the hearts of all men.

I never sighed until I knew him ; but now my
weeping tastes of blood. I have slain lions and
terrified Captains ; but now I am the slave of a
boy, glancing like a young deer.

If he shuts his eyes, when we sit in the light of
the sun together, I am plunged in darkness ; also
his eyes are the two jewels of my Kingdom.

As the song of a fountain woos all memory of
the desert, so his voice woos all my care away
from me. He is my fountain and my lute, the
shadow where my sleep is calm.

I would bow myself before him, if Allāh were
not, saying : ‘ You are my God ! ’

(Selim I, 1465—1520.)

II

The Tomb at Rabk

THE PLAIN OF CHALDIRAN SAW ISMAIL FLEE
before my standards, and the walls of Gizeh
saw Tuman perish beneath my arrows.

A garden bathed by the moon saw Selim tremble
for love before a mocking mouth, and a pavilion,
more eminent henceforth than Sugut, saw him
perish beneath the arrows of a laughing eye.

Osman overcame Kara-Issar, and Murad won
his thirty-seven battles. Bayazid broke the
Franks at Nicopolis, and Mohammed the First
set free Baghdad. I put down Syria and Egypt,
I am chained in the curls upon a head perfumed
with youth.

The tomb of Ibn al-Hassan is in Mosul, and
Baghdad holds the body of Zobeide. The body
of Najd ed-Din lies at Sari, and Rabk, where I
knew that boy, is built about the tomb of my
old loves.

(Selim I.)

III

The Three Cypresses.

THREE BOYS AS SLIM AS CYPRESSES, AND
with eyes as black as cypresses, and with
their hair in rings like the leaves of cypresses,
dream in a garden full of the Roses of Sadness.

Their master cannot decide among them, for
how should he fasten the rope of the boat of his
heart to one rather than to another of his
cypresses ?

Spring succeeds to Winter, and in the place of
the sobbing tempest there comes laughing peace ;
but the Rose in the garden of Sadness gives forth
a perfume that the breeze carries not, and my
three cypresses grow drunk by breathing it.

(Selim I.)

IV

A Love Song

IT MAY BE THAT YOU WILL NEVER READ these verses. How should a tuberose hope in her thicket that her scent will rise up some night and trouble the moon? I write my verses in a low room; it would be a palace if you were in it. But you are far away from me, scenting a city. Its name has the flaming outline of a jewelled collar, now that it holds you.

You are far, but if you were further, yet would my house be all of paradise. And if you came back to it, surely it would turn again to the small house you knew, when paradise was in your eyes for me.

I love you, and I say the word over and over, because it is my food and drink, and the cool bath and comfortable fire for me. The world is smaller than love: twilight falls about the word and drowns it, when I doubt that you love me; but when I am lost in hope, dawn kisses the word.

He who loves not as I love you, has not known living, and he who loves not as I love you, has not known death. There is but one who shall

• • *A Love Song*

live for ever, he who has died in your heart.
You have but to smile to raise your lover from
the dead, O prodigal of marvels. •

Let the sun and the moon and the constellations
of the stars cease turning, and let all men curse
me deep, so that you love me.

I cast myself into the ocean of love, and his waves
did not draw me under : I met them with the
speaking of your name. But now my strength
has gone, and I call upon you.

Far from the tempest of this world there is a
garden, whose roses neither Autumn nor Winter
shall ever find. My heart is that garden, and
its roses are born for you : when you are not
breathing them they are red like blood ; they
are as white as snow when you lean over them.

The wounds that you have dealt me are mouths
crying my thanks to you. Quick with all your
arrows into my heart ! I die because of them,
but only of drunkenness.

The sun has no concern except to seek you, O
my night, as Majnun sought for Laila. The
birds have no concern except to sing for you,
my dawn, as the flutes in the palace of Dameghan
sang but for Nazmi.

Eleven Turkish Poems.

Would you call me a fool, my friends, and try to
shame me? If she unveiled before you, you
would regret your censure, and only reproach
me that I have not loved her more.

(Fuzuli, middle 16th century.)

V

The Stream

IT IS A SONG AND A PERFUME, STARRED BY
day with narcissus petals and flowered with
stars by night.

It is so little that I may cross it at one step when
you are calling me over ; it is wider than the
sea when you sign me not to come to you.

It is a song and a perfume when you are smiling ;
it is a pestilent gulf, and I hear the howling of
hell rise up from it, when your eyes are veiled
with tears.

(Fuzuli.)

VI

Stamboul

THEY TELL OF STAMBOUL THERE, OF HER mosques and her palaces and her bright waters, Stamboul and her glories there.

Is she at the other end of the world? Those doves will be above her by to-morrow morning. Is she at the other end of happiness? My thought reaches Stamboul before I have finished saying Stamboul, and the sea of my happiness has no map for me.

Let others hasten to your mosques and your palaces, your bright waters and your glories, O Stamboul; let others be vexed with impatience to know your delights. My shadows shall not move among the shadows of your cypresses, my voice shall not sound among the voice of your fountains, my smile shall not answer to the smiling of your flowers.

The clouds above Kilia build me mosques and palaces; your mosques and palaces would be savage huts thereby, Stamboul. The crystal of the love tears of my darling would shame your bright waters.

Stamboul

They tell of Stamboul there, Stamboul and her
glories there. Here stays my darling and her
sweetness,

(Anonymous, 18th century.)

VII

Laughters

THE WINDS OF LOVE DANCE IN HER EYES,
and all the music in the song of hope is
leaping upon her lips. She runs as a bride
through a world of ecstasy, where the light is
laughter.

Fifteen years of joy have blown her to a living
flame, an adoration ; she is an indifferent sun
that does not set, and each spark of her is
laughter.

In the garden of her soul at twilight I can see
the joys laughing, as they pursue long sorrows.

Men think these laughters must be her lips,
since they so clearly implore the mouth of Love,
that each may be turned by a miracle into a
red kiss.

(Jenab Shehabuddin, born c. 1870.)

VIII

Grief and Desire

MY HEART IS AT REST WITH YOU. IF I were a singer, I would give you ineffable words, as to the soul of a sister. If I found a silken thread of inspiration, I would fasten many rare emotions to my song, before I gave it.

If your voice were my rhythm, my song would have a deep music, new to poetry.

To make a sufficient song for you, I should have to remember all your words and write them.

I have put aside my griefs, hoping thereby to give a coloured and desirous life to my song of you.

I have cut away a laughing piece of my life, that there might be a soul in this small song. But if you look into the heart of my words, you will see the glance of a dying man in each of them.

Since it has calm meaning and its words are quiet, flitting like birds, and constant as the flowers, I do not know why this lost singing should seem as bright as day to me, as wonderfully silent as the night.

Eleven Turkish Poems

I would have the songs and the flowers of the world sent to you, as from myself. I would receive the disappointments of the world, if they came from you.

Your reproaches are wrapped in a smile, and a tear is mixed with each of your angers. A perfumed grief, reeling in my soul, tells me of the transcendent clay that made your body.

When you murmur words of nervous vexation, I want to cry : ‘ Encore, encore ! ’ as in a théâtre. I cannot help thanking you for your reprimands, that weep as they come singing.

I have wiped away a further tear, finding that I could pardon you. You are the only perfectly amorous, sensitive, beautiful girl on earth.

(Jenab Shehabuddin.)

IX

After Possession

I HAVE SMELLED YOU SO SECRETLY THAT you still seem to me a small and virgin rose.

While we drank the wine of lying together, and your body was a whirlwind, your soul looked down, smiling upon its fall. She floated above your body like the soul of a stranger.

As I drew near to possession, the picture I had made of you became more real and strange to me. It showed so high above my eyes that I said to the possession of your body: 'It is a lie.' And to-night, when my happiness has turned to truth, I would still cry to my happiness: 'It is a lie.'

While I am walking hand in hand with desire in your love's orchard, some distant smile from you seems to be saying: 'Come to me in the orchard of my love.'

While your thin body kisses the tenderness of my breast, the voice of your picture calls from afar off, bidding me come.

I listen to the music of that invitation, and my heart is troubled. I can think of myself as the

Eleven Turkish Poems

guest of a single night, passing between your
arms.

My sight is not satisfied by looking upon my
lust with you ; somewhere above the life of my
great joy in your body, I am seeking life.

(Jenab Shehabuddin.)

X

Your Mouth

THE SINGING OF YOUR WORDS IS TO BE heard on a bended knee ; it persuades the voice of my complaint. A land of silence lies in the night of my life ; it is suddenly peopled by the singing of your mouth.

I keep illusion about me because of the words of your mouth, for they stay with me after our hands have parted in farewell. When I count over the echoes of the words of your mouth, I cannot believe that I am alone in my bedroom.

Your words leave a perfume of consolation. The music of the miracle of living flutters from your mouth, begetting, on the dark body of my night, a starry joy.

Your mouth is a lie, but it is a lie so musical that it sets my heart to dancing. My heart dances to your false music, for your mouth has wrapped my life in a thin gauze of hope.

(Jenab Shehabuddin.)

XI

A Love Song

WE HAVE FORGOTTEN THE JOY OF THE tavern. Let us be free and live again, keeping the stranger from our company.

Pour out the wine, boy, and bring me a glass of it for my heart. There is but one word of true evil, and that is *Enough*. Is there not a drop left in all the bottles ?

Let us have no vain modesty, sole treasure of the world, no vain modesty.

Pour out the wine, boy, and bring me a glass of it for my heart.

Is it a desire for sleep or drunkenness that lies on him ? His silver body rests upon me, let it rest well !

Pour out the wine, boy, and bring me a glass of it for my heart.

Might I lose reason and imagination and thought together, might the strength be stricken from me to think at all of myself, I should have lost sorrow.

A Love Song

Pour out the wine, boy, and bring me a glass of it for my heart.

At last I have you, thing of paradise. I have long desired you. To-day I dare to confess to you, I have long desired you.

Your silver neck has stricken away my reason. Who could have hoped such things? At last I hold your robe. I have long desired you.

Dawn is breaking. Give yourself to my flame and a little diminish it. Leave these fashions and delays for another time. I have long desired you.

My heart went out to your beauty for days enough. My patience and my life died down together. I have long desired you.

Why do you weep? O heart, tell me your sorrow. I have no desire for your silence. Tell me your sorrow, heart.

For whom are you weeping, and why do you lie ruined in my arms? O heart, tell me your sorrow.

What is this stupefaction? I should like to know the cause of this stupefaction; therefore, O heart, tell me your sorrow.

Eleven Turkish Poems

You are walking in the sky these days. What wind has lifted you ? Is there no cure for your sorrow ? Tell me your sorrow, heart.

You have left the gardens with their roses, and now you would flee from me also. I begin to be tired of you. O heart, tell me your sorrow.

I am the more surprised, the more I think of it. All the world loves you, and they only make it a crime in me to love you.

The people of our time, heart, want to blame something. They speak about me when I drink wine. They only make it a crime in me to love you.

I raise a pillar of sighs. O moon, is there no mercy in you ? They only make it a crime in me to love you.

You are beautiful, and I have no other fault on my conscience, and yet they only make it a crime in me to love you.

Your face is a rose disturber of integrity, deserving the jealousy of the sun. You have added a light to your beauty by shaving, a sun now free from clouds.

. . . *A Love Song*

Surely the faces of women are pleasant, but the taste of cheeks that have been newly shaved is better. A glance is no satisfaction to my eyes, since you have added a light to your beauty by shaving, a sun now free from clouds.

Your ear is red a little ; bring it forth. Let the rose be brought forth from the jacinth. The razor has lifted the dust from the roses ; you have added a light to your beauty by shaving, a sun now free from clouds.

My strength melted when I saw you, and you should not torture me. Let me breathe the scent of your cheeks, just for this moment. You have added a light to your beauty by shaving, a sun now free from clouds.

He lures his lovers with hope, and they fall into a pit of false promise. One day you will repent this trick of yours, for too much running away from us may weary.

Why do you not end my martyrdom, or if I am your slave, why do you not free me ? Have you never heard tell that too much running away from us may weary, heart ?

Unbutton your vest, that these eyes may see a silver body, and above all remember that too much running away from us may weary us.

(Jenab Shehabuddin.)

A Garden of Kisses

(These sophisticated sketches are the work of a cultivated Algerian, and first made their appearance in Alger somewhere about 1913. The author brought out a lithographed French version at the same time. Unlike many modern works of the same kind, 'A Garden of Kisses' was actually composed in Arabic. The French rendering was afterwards enlarged and re-issued in France, and it is from that text that these versions have been selected and translated.)

KISSES IN ALGER

I

Self-Portrait of the Sherif Soliman

MY GRANDFATHER RODE AT THE RIGHT hand of Abd-el-Kadir, and fought wonderfully against the French ; but, though I believe in God, I am a son of France. I learn Latin at the same school as those petulant youths from the Faubourg Bab-Azzoun and from Moustafa, and I cry ' Long live the Republic ! ' at evening on the fourteenth of July, before the great mosque with its uncountable torches.

I am descended from the Prophet. I am a young Sherif of a glorious tribe of the Djebel-Amour, that scours the Sahara of Oran. If I wished I could make a claim to the throne of Morocco.

But I prefer to smoke cigarettes or to fall into a dream over some line of Virgil, adoring the light green ocean and the mountains of the Kabilie.

An Egyptian mage has taught me the art of illuminated writing ; I could copy the Koran in the Fishers' Mosque ; but I prefer to write my own feelings and the thoughts which are myself. Our noble Arabic tongue is so supple that it will express all modern shades, obeying the reed pen of the Sherif Soliman.

I passed my babyhood in a little house in the

A Gard'en of Kisses.

Rue des Lotofages, and an old man servant used to tell me stories of the time before the conquest, passionate, fanatical, bloody stories. But now we live in a new apartment on the boulevard.

My uncle Abdallah is not at all severe with me ; he lets me wanton at my will after my classes. He does not consider anything to be of importance except lessons in grammar, prosody and Arabic literature. Provided my Kairote professor is content with my progress, the learned Abdallah smiles at me and gives me a great deal of pocket money.

I am fifteen years old, and my magnificent body is as precocious as my intellect. I have a slender and elastic waist, the chest of a wrestler and the limbs of a centaur. The whiteness of my oval face finely contrasts with my glittering black eyes and hair that is deeper than the wine of Homeric libations. I am the only one of all my race without a receding forehead.

A morning or so ago my comrade Lucien prayed me with his cornflower-coloured eyes at the gymnasium ; he almost swooned when he saw my white arms on the parallel bars ; he faltered and fainted like an amorous virgin ; the usher had to send him to the infirmary.

Every evening the rich Musulmans, each in an immaculate burnous and gold-embroidered sleeve-

• • *Kisses in Alger*

less jacket, sign to me on the Place du Gouvernement and under the arcades of Bab-Azzoun and even on the quay where I stand waiting the return of the Sirens.

Yesterday, while I was eating olives at the Turkish café in the Rue de la Marine, indolent Sidi Youcef, the prince of our Moorish youth, he who is descended from a chief of the Argonauts, sat down beside me and engaged me in conversation. He tried to fascinate me with his violet eyes, he showed me precious stones and invited me to go with him to his house in the Kasba to choose the most delightful for myself. In the tender voice of a marabout wheedling his favourite disciple, he said over and over again to me :

‘Come, Soliman ! All our handsome English winter guests belong to me. Follow their example and you shall be so happy. I will guide you to mysteries of which your European comrades have never heard. So, Come !’

But I refuse all that sort of thing. I rather disdain such pretty minions as Lucien, and keep my rearward maidenhead intact. You have to be a woman to caress me there.

II

Of Blood on Roses

THE EXCELLENT OLD WOMAN HAS COUNTED my gold pieces; now she transfers them from her right to her left hand, and raises a blue curtain.

I understand.

Mimi waited the Sherif Soliman, naked among cushions and glimmering stuffs upon a red divan.

She flung her arms about my neck and kissed my eyelids, and nibbled my cheek and sucked my mouth and undressed me with pretty gestures, telling me her story.

Mimi was born twelve years ago beneath a palm tree on the banks of the clear oued at Bou-Sâda; and since she was delightful they sent her to make her fortune at Alger. Her nurse had scraped together all she could for her love garments and the furnishing of her room.

I plundered the rose baskets and heaped petals of roses on the red divan. Then I took my betrothed about the waist.

I was naked upon a naked Mimi, and felt firm flesh under a skin as soft as cream, cool breasts with points and rounded thighs my hand made harder. I saw a reddish-gilded beauty spot on her white throat that utterly enchanted me.

Kisses in Alger

The nuptial cry rose in the half dark.

The negress had been watching us from behind the blue curtain ; she hurried to Mimi and cared for her as a mother.

My little wounded one was crying no longer ; she smiled and seemed proud that a Sherif had deflowered her.

I have smoked a Turkish cigarette and watched a drop of blood drying on the sulphur-coloured petal of a rose.

III

The Dancer

I MET FTOHMA UNDER A JAPANESE MEDLAR tree in a garden of El-Biar.

She is the niece of the keeper of the orange trees of Ben-Sahnoun. All the quick boys at the little school court her as occasion offers ; but she puts out her tongue at their eye-glances and repulses all they say. This does not mean that she is so foolish as to be chaste ; she has had so many lovers since her babyhood that she does not remember her virginity ; but she has an abundant horror of the Roumi.

The orchard trembled with a hint of morning airs, and the brushed flowers opened.

Ftohma appeared to me in a chemise of light mauve gauze, sleeveless and frank. She darted a pair of those oblong breasts which I prefer, in an utter liberty.

She told me of the drought, of the empty cisterns, and of the rain God did not send ; of a Kabyle coiner, a negro sorcerer with the evil eye, and of a marabout from Ouargla who cured every ill.

My smile encouraged her.

For my lonely benefit she mimed one of those belly dances that shorten the agony of our consumptive winter guests. She half-opened her mouth and showed me glistening teeth. I threw

, . *Kisses in Alger*

her a handful of gold pieces, and she shook her hips. She twisted with such true ardour that she found the climax two or three times before she fell on her knees quite close to me, naked among the ruins of her garment.

‘ O Sherif, give me a medlar ! ’ she said roguishly, and Soliman aped the proverbial generosity of Hâtim-Taï. He took little Ftohma on his lap, and gave her two medlars instead of one, and also a vast banana.

IV

Mouni

IT WAS VERY FINE ON THAT SUNDAY IN MAY, at Sidi-Ferredj, Sidi-Ferredj with its shining memory of the debarkation of the French army.

I got by heart the inscription on the gate of the fort, and fell to musing upon that date of innovation : the 14th of June, 1830. I recalled the gay invasion of this solitude, which had thought itself so far from all the world. I praised King Charles X and General de Bourmont for giving back her freedom to the sea, and thanked them for beginning that work which has culminated in the Sherif Soliman, who is French at heart.

But a little girl with wine-black hair distracted me from politics. She greeted me as she passed, and showed me her thighs. Then she turned about and her laugh fascinated me. I could see nothing but the henna of her gums.

Is she the queen of the valley of roses, or some favourite from the mysterious garden of Cheddad-ibn-Ad ? Rather she is a beggar girl ; but a Mussulman of taste would give all the treasures of Fortunate Arabia for one kiss from her.

O amber issue of the depths of India ! O pearl that the merchants with small eyes have not yet tested with fat fingers ! I followed the laughing child to the edge of the cliff, we nested behind

Kisses in 'Alger

a sandhill facing the tideless bay ; only God and the more curious of the Jinn had sight of us ; it seemed we had been borne to some Polynesian island.

Mouni would amuse a senile Shah of Persia : she has only seen her vintage eight times, and has no breasts, but her innocence is utterly forgotten.

The water was warm and we bathed, and Mouni enticed and provoked and played upon me.

She came laughing out of the sea and fled across the sand, but I caught her and threw her down with such frenzy that she scratched her left shoulder upon a cactus.

We sat hand in hand on the high cliff, over the rim of the void. One false movement, one second of vertigo or folly, and we should have been two broken bodies on the rock below. Solemnly I intoned : ‘ Mouni, shall we die together ? ’

‘ No, O Sherif, O sweet master ! I am your servant and I adore you ; I wish you to take me back to the city, and give me the robe and the pearls you promised me ! ’

Then it was my turn to laugh, and I threw the little trembling body down again, over the rim of the void.

Merïem's Fingers

DURING THE INTERVAL AT SCHOOL THIS morning, Lucien whispered to me: 'I thought of you last night, O Soliman, and I knocked out the brains of Charles the Bald three times, because of you !'

Poor Lucien ! He should go to the house of Merïem, the Egyptian, and she would save him from such foolishness.

Merïem is eight years old and has the face of a leopard, tender and beautiful, and the limbs of Eros, and the voice of Mary Magdalene seducing the prophet Jesus.

She was born somewhere in Nubia, on the banks of the Nile, and was thirteen months old when her mother, Sâknah the dancer, left with her for Algeria with a lieutenant of Spahis.

Now Sâknah has died of a consumption, and if you ask me who is the most expert harlot of the Kasba, I answer : ' Merïem.'

I read the epigrams of Martial as I waited for my subtle Merïem, naked upon a couch in a room of lighted rose-red candles and sleeping flowers.

Merïem came to me naked also, as is her custom ; there were rubies about her ankles, emeralds on her wrists ; she wore a collar of pearls and a

. . *Kisses in Alger*

girdle of chastity closed by an abraxas. It should be graven with the inviolable seal of my name-sake Soliman-ben-Daoud, the Glorious King; for Merïem has vowed to be wedded as a virgin, and only prostitutes her tapering hands.

Merïem of the long impure fingers came to me upon the black divan.

She found her favourite position, one arm about my neck and the other free ; she gave me a sister's tongueless kiss upon the mouth, and then began.

The candles guttered, petals fell from the vases, and I sang litanies of her special art to busy Merïem :

' Suave-handed Merïem, blood-thirsty-fingered Merïem, your hand slackens its speed and hardly brushes its prisoner ! Merïem, your fingers grip their fainting prey, and will not free Lesbia's unhappy sparrow in spite of tears ! Light-handed, heavy-fingered Merïem ! Merïem, your hand is a white rose dancing about a honey-coloured bird ; your fingers weigh like Fate ! Merïem the consoler, Merïem the torturess, have pity ! Merïem, your little Soliman melts in thanks ! Merïem, break off in the name of Allâh, and will you not take your ghoul's eyes away from mine ? You are breaking and emptying me, stealing my youth !

' O my turtle dove of Egypt, let us stay for

A Garden of Kisses. .

hours ! I am blessing your dry and silky hand, and your fresh fingers. Do not stop, virgin of Nubia, for I forget the cares and memories of a boy among your sentimental waterfalls.'

I had to fall silent.

Meriem spoke, without losing sight of her task for a single moment.

She taught me certain songs of the Libyan desert, that Sâknah sang on her death-bed. She questioned me about mummies and the great Sphinx, with the seriousness of some patriarch's wife, consulting an oracle near a fountain at sunset.

Meriem went on chattering till her arm grew tired ; she let me doze, and I dreamed that I had been condemned to have water falling, drop by drop, upon my breast, until the last Judgment Day. I woke with a start, filled by a passion for vengeance ; but the girdle thwarted me. I kissed Meriem on the dimple in her right cheek, and ran home to Mimi.

VI

Bedra the Beggar-Girl

THE FRENCH BARRACKS IN INDO-CHINA ARE infested by little boys who will do all that is asked of them, and even more, for a sou.

They have a deep instinct to weary out men from beyond the sea ; they are clever and cat-like, greedy and infinitely patient. Soldiers become accustomed to using these quick maggots, that is why there are so many wide, blazing eyes in hollow faces in the barracks in Indo-China.

Bedra the beggar-girl is rather like these little Asiatic monsters. Since she is only six, her breasts play no part in her business ; but, because of the triple entrance to her small olive body, and because of her dimpled hands and her arm-pits smelling of red carnation, she has already become the octopus, as it were, of our young tubercular visitors.

That she does not refuse silver or gold, goes without saying ; but she is ready with every complacence for a sou, and even throws in inventions of her own for that. For a franc she would astonish an Irish Lord.

These young men come from Europe and America with their terrible coughs, seeking a cure or, at least, a certain relief and some lengthening of their days. Our winter sun excites them,

A Garden of Kisses.

and Bedra, the child murderess, brings on their agony.

I find this Bedra with her shameless eyes amusing.

We first saw each other on the hill, in that little wood all lovers know. She came out from a tangle of bushes, and a horrible fit of coughing broke the calm of the twilight.

‘Be quiet,’ she whispered. ‘It is a Russian Prince, just come from Paris.’ The scent of the terebinth went to our heads, and I showed Bedra the superior virtue of a Sherif’s zebb, and of a breast without disease, in a neighbouring thicket.



VII

Halima and the Bird of Paradise

MY COUSIN HADJ'-ALI, WHO IS AS GREAT A traveller before Allāh as even Tavernier, has brought back a bird of paradise to his Gulistan in the Bou-Zarēa.

This quick jewel of emerald and brown and cloudy green, and gilded green and blue green, of yellow and white and orange and soft purple, lives in an ebony cage with thick gold bars. He is a poem in colours and in the wedding of colours, and he resumes in himself the beauties of all the birds. Some fresh delight shows in each attitude, in each small movement.

At dawn he salutes the sea and the mountains by beating his wings. Then he makes his toilet, sleeking each feather with his beak in careful detail. He washes twice a day in his bowl, but never goes down to the bottom of his cage except for this bath, for he is frightened of soiling his beauty. He is ever attentive of its splendour, and if he sees a stain, even at the end of his longest feather, he is not content until he has cleansed it. He adores himself, and delights to be admired, and looks at himself passionately in the mirror.

Halima is like my cousin's bird of paradise. She lives in a brothel in the Rue El-Akhdar, and

A Garden of Kisses . .

is the most beautiful girl of Alger, and knows it well. She takes as much care of her skin as a sculptor of his latest-handled nymph.

When we have asked for her and she has received us, lying on her elbow between two pillars of the Moorish gallery on the first floor, we think her a ghost from the golden days of Grenada, and dream of the Alhambra and its secret women.

At a gold price I had her come out on a morning of hot 'sunshine, and carried her off to the Gulistan of Hadj'-Ali.

My cousin is in Morocco, but the blacks have been ordered to keep the villa and the garden at my disposal.

I crowned myself with scarlet roses, and wedded a garland of tea roses to Halima's gleaming hair, and we played nakedly on a bed of white roses, facing the ebony cage with the gold bars.

At first the bird of paradise looked upon us ; but presently he turned and sulkily hid himself in a corner of his palace.

' See, he is jealous of you,' I said, and Halima smiled for very happiness and bent down. She so tyrannically gave me Atalanta's kiss to Meleager among the heaped roses that it seemed my life escaped me drop by drop.

VIII

The Six Little Kabyles

I HAD JUST MET SOME OF THE BOARDERS from my school, on the Place du Gouvernement, going for a walk ; they differed in appearance certainly, but were all pretty enough to eat ; yet none of them troubled me. Some of them thought fit to turn back, but the Magnificent—such is my nickname among them—would answer none of their glances.

The weather suggested adventure, so I mounted my mare Al-Borak, whose mane is a black lightning. I climbed to El-Biar and followed my favourite way in a dream and at a footpace : it is the double path from El-Biar to Ben-Sahnoun. Folk seldom take it.

Al-Borak went in fine pride among the flowers and grasses. So charming is that path that we expect to see the intimate orchard of some Prince of the Jinn at the end of it ; we are almost astonished not to find Sâdi by the side of it, talking philosophy with some chosen pupil.

On our left silent properties flowered with boards, saying : ‘ Beware of the man-traps ! ’ Soliman is no trespasser, but he was caught ; he fell into a man-trap and rejoiced in it.

My second pleasant meeting of the day occurred at a loop of the green way.

A Garden of Kisses.

Six little girls were walking in a crocodile, the smallest last, behind the eldest of them. And this time I hastened to be turned aside, Each of the six little girls was dressed in a short chemise with holes in it, and all had white teeth and limbs of topaz yellow.

The first had a brown chemise and a Persian turquoise at her throat, worn for a talisman. The second had a mauve chemise and a sucking-mark, if I mistake it not, on her right shoulder. The third wore a red chemise, and had a black birth-mark on her left thigh. The chemise of the fourth was of red gold, and there was a small, provocative cleft in the middle of her chin. The fifth was dressed in blue and had a turned-up nose. The sixth wore green, and a wild poppy was bright in her hair.

Al-Borak halted, and the little girls did the same. The six of them smiled, and I began to question them: 'Who are you?' It was the third, the shrewdest of them, who thus answered: 'We come from the mountain. We are six little Kabyle girls from the same village. A tribe burnt all the huts, and the men escaped; so our uncle's wife led us as far as Ben-Sahnoun, and left us there, telling us go beg. What is your name, beautiful Lord? My name is Yamina.'

The pandering breeze lifted her red garment,

Kisses in Alger

and I answered gaily : ' I am the Sherif Soliman, O orphaned doves, and I will take you with me.' I turned Al-Borak, and the six little girls followed her frisking paces in their crocodile.

I had hired a villa near the café of Hydra, where an ataxic Lord had died some time before. A sort of virgin forest hid the house with eucalyptus and plane-trees, and great weeping willows.

- While a Soudanese groom took charge of Al-Borak, an Irish girl saw to the washing and scenting of my little strangers.

I waited with a cigarette between my lips, in a great room which is solely furnished, apart from my rocking-chair, with a large scarlet divan and many mirrors.

The six little girls were walking in a crocodile, the smallest last, behind the eldest of them ; but now they were naked.

The first smelt of new-mown hay, and the second of roses, the third, who was Yamina, smelt of lily-of-the-valley, and the fourth of mignonette. The fifth smelt of Parma violet, the last of mauve iris.

I rang, and five bare maid-servants answered me ; then I also undressed.

I concerned myself with Yamina, and let my maid-servants give a love lesson to the five, and for a full three hours the mirrors reflected these things.

A Garden of Kisses .

Then we comforted ourselves with wine from Bougie and a great couscous, and afterwards I fastened a purse full of gold round the neck of every little girl, and sent them back to their uncle's wife.

u

IX

Hashish Overcome

A CERTAIN SMALL CAFÉ AT OULED-MENDIL, on the side of the Dahel, is the favourite goal of my solitary walking.

I sit in the shade of a sycamore between my brothers, who doze there, side by side, all the day long, and abstract myself in contemplation.

Ouled-Mendil is my belvedere, from which I evoke the past and the future of my land. Sometimes I look upon the coupure of the Chiffa and the pass of Mouzaïa, two fields where my grandfather rode excellently beneath the standard of our glorious Emir, Abd-El-Kadir-ben-Mahied-Dine. Sometimes I look upon the paradisaical plain of the Metidja, that France has fertilised.

But on that Spring-like Autumn morning quite other images came to me.

I was in Arab dress and lay in my usual place, my back being against the sycamore; but I had just read certain pages of Suetonius again, and was smoking a mixture of Syrian tobacco and yellow hashish leaves in a Persian pipe.

The orange trees of my delightful Blida hid from me behind hilarious ghosts. Sometimes that clown Caligula had himself made a god and offered a flamingo or Numidian fowl at his own hideous statue, and prayed the moon to

A Garden of Kisses

come and sleep with him. Sometimes the red-cheeked Domitian closeted himself apart for affairs of state, and impaled flies by the hour on a bodkin, or spitted them in a row on a long needle, a terrible little grill.

I took in enough of the last of the smoke to fill my lungs ; then sneezed and laughed aloud.

I made strange and obscene gestures to these Imperial ghosts.

Many of my brothers were only dozing. I woke them crying : ' Caesar, Caesar, Caesar ! ' They carefully observed my extravagance, and will tell me of it one of these days ; but now they affect to ignore it.

Weariness overcomes me and I wrap myself in my burnous. I lie down among my indulgent brothers and take sleep.

The freshness of the evening drove away my brothers and I slept alone beneath my sycamore, while the little café woke to life and was lighted, and someone sang the exploits of Antar to my marvelling neighbours.

Suddenly I felt two very little naked arms meet like a ring of serpents about my neck, and a child's narrow mouth trouble my lips with twenty kisses. I opened my eyes and stretched

Kisses in 'Alger

myself; I pushed away this embrace of me quite gently, and sat up.

A Kabyle child stood facing me, pretty and clean; through the rents in her dust-coloured rags, I could see this easily.

The honey mouth of the girl began to chatter to me :

‘ I am called Rosa. I am the daughter of Ahmed the basket-maker. My uncle Omar makes jewelry in a village of the Djurdjura. He is rich, but my father is poor. That is why I am very nice to Lords like you, O Sherif.’

My strident hashish laugh rang out in the green twilight. I gave Rosa a gold coin, which she knotted in her chemise; then I lay on my side and drew her small, cat-like head down upon me.

Rosa cheered and revived and strengthened my flaccidity, with all the hungry art of a Parisian expert, and I looked at the landscape with dilated eyes.

The chill influence of the hashish was overcome, and Soliman never poured himself as on that Sunday evening. The same full and deluding moon that Sappho and Ibykos had worshipped now kissed the peak of the Chenoua just at the end of my horizon, with her mauve rays.

Mimi is Setting Forth

THE FIRST SORROW I HAVE KNOWN SURPRISED me yesterday like a thief, stunning me with the blow of a bludgeon behind the head.

I was soothing body and soul at the Bath in the Rue Sidi-Ramdan. The Mzabi had never done his work so well, his soaping and rubbing and epilation ; never had my relaxation been so sweet in the 'Lords' Room, on a mattress scented with lavender, and the triple pleasure of sherbert and Morocco tea and the cigarette.

Alas, alas, the curtain was raised, and Massrour stood before me ; his hands were crossed on his belly, a respectful servant waiting to be questioned by his master.

Massrour is my confidential eunuch. He was born on the bank of the Blue River, near Khartoum, and his long limbs and slender waist make him look like some figure of hieroglyph. But he wears the Stambouline of his brothers at the Yildiz Kiosk with an air of very modern elegance, and his head, carrying its fez in the Turkish fashion, astounds by the pure Greek of its design. I myself named him Massrour, in honour of my dear Thousand Nights and One Night. His thoughtful fidelity caused me to choose him as a guardian for

, , *Kisses in 'Alger*

Mimi: he watches over my treasure with the untiring perspicacity of a griffin, in our Villa of Violets on the flank of the hill at Moustaфа.

I kept the etiquette of pashas, and went on smoking for several minutes. But a tear began to trickle down the impassive face of Massrour, and I broke silence; 'Mimi Hanin is well, is she not? To-night I shall sleep at the Villa of Violets.'

A second tear increased my agony; and Massrour stiffened and replied:

'May God save Mimi Hanin! Come quickly, O Sherif! Our horses are pawing the ground at the gate of the Bath. My adorable mistress has had fever since this morning. She is talking all kinds of absurdity and with gesticulations of her hands. The Franciscan Sister, for whom I sent, can hardly keep her from leaping out of bed, or breaking her head against the wall. Come quickly, O Soliman!'

Massrour and I galloped on the road to Moustaфа, toward the Villa of Violets.

XI

Farewells

THE DOCTOR HAS LEFT ME WITHOUT WRITING out a new prescription; he shook his head and took hold of both my hands. Those who are learned in the city know little of these lightning diseases that kill the children of the desert. I went back into the room of her agony and found that the delirium had passed for a time. Mimi was smiling, white in the arm of the red pillow; the good sister of St. Francis whispered in my ear, and then retired with chaste discretion.

She is fifteen years old and has to die; a dull pallor as of wax has replaced her crystal clarity, but the beauty spot of my dreams red-gilds a little pit in her white throat still, and the lips which smile at me, perhaps for the last time, and the eyes that smile with the lips, are even more passionate than on our bridal day.

Mimi knotted her fading arms about my neck, and murmured: 'You will pray for my small soul, O Sherif, will you not, when you go to my native land, to Bou-Sâda under the palm trees, by the clear oued?' "

I promised her this prayer, and Mimi went on more softly, guiding my timid hand along her hot body:

.. *Kisses in Alger*

‘To-morrow I shall have a relapse, and die. I feel it. But to-night I am more loving than on the day when you deflowered me. Do you remember our first grip? Open the window and lie down beside me, sweet my Soliman! Let us make a last exchange before the separation.’

I obeyed, and we drew great breaths of the strengthening pine grove. We resumed each memory of our love in that last hour with a tender and savage care. The shiverings of that mortal fever increased the violence of our pangs; our spirits unified in an illusion of eternal marriage.

XII

Mourning

MASSROUR AND I HAVE BURIED HER AT Bou-Zaréa, in face of the sea. She sleeps under the seventh cypress in the alley leading to the pool of the ibis, in the Gulistan of Hadj'-Ali, of my cousin.

The tears of Soliman came down as red as the seeds of the pomegranate, and with a whisper like the rain.

KISSES IN ORANIE

I

The Negress with the Heart of Gold

SOLIMAN IS THE MOST HANDSOME SPAHI IN the African army, and so he amuses himself at Oran and about it, as if he were a chief of Kurdish brigands in a palace harem on the Bosphorus.

The immaculate marabout Sidi-Mohammed-al-Hâouri, that brother in the spirit of St. John the Baptist—he was right when he spoke of Oran as the city among cities of adultery and prostitution.

I am myself solicited from morning till night, from night till morning.

Sometimes an old, humpbacked, slovenly Jewess, wearing an ox-blood shawl that shows her macaw's beak of a nose only and her great black eyes, offers me the most exciting of her co-religionists. I mean that very Judith in the dress of Damasked Broussa silk I so admired on the Promenade de Létang just now, at the military music.

Sometimes an Andalusian in seafaring clothes that may have once been white, and wearing the remnants of a handkerchief for turban—but yet as proud as a successful bullfighter—

A Garden of Kisses .

leans over to my ear beneath the arch in the Rue d'Orléans and whispers in a voice that seems dropping honey :

' Come with me, Sherif, and I will take you to the house of a manola from Cadiz. She is fourteen, and has been keeping her virginity, her double virginity for your Excellence.'

And just now, as I was bargaining with a Moroccan Jew more filthy than his own frock-coat, for an ivory trifle from Guinea, he dared to speak to me of a Greek youth and a virgin moon. I struck him with such irritation that he lost his black bonnet ; and then ran to Bambara, the negress of my choice.

I love the children of Cham, they are dark but their hearts are golden. They are bawds from the breast, and give themselves with art and faith to the fortunes of happy lovers. They are the foes of separation, and seem to have something akin to magic in all that concerns the illicit or emotional. Bambara grins like a scarecrow, but is an angel. It was she who got me Safia.

II

Nella of Sorrento

THE SETTING SUN BECKONED TO ME AND I adored him, wandering on the new jetty, dreaming of the departure of the Argonauts and the return of Ulysses and the song of the Sirens ; but a sail that had not been there the night before distracted me from this silent worship.

She has come from Italy with a Virgin at her prow, and is called *Argo*. She is out of Castellamare-di-Stabia. A sailor sings some Neapolitan, or is it a Sicilian catch, on board of her.

Do you understand, by chance, the shade of my emotion ? I have never seen that land, and never shall see it ; because I am too African to cross the sea. But my mother, who is France, has nourished me with Latin culture. Nothing Italian can come near me without begetting a sympathy that is near to tears.

The sailor still sings on the *Argo's* poop, and now a maiden voice is answering him from somewhere in the boat. Leaning over so close toward this second voice that I could leap on to the *Argo's* bridge, I listened.

The voices were silent, but a miracle came forth on deck. She was, perhaps, fourteen,

A Garden of Kisses.

with a proud forehead and the walk of a goddess. She wore a sea shawl and a dress of flame, and sauntered to the poop, so that the singing sailor laughed at her with his white teeth. Suddenly she saw me leaning over above her, dreaming and desiring ; she cast me hatted in a glance and turned her back and went down by the hatch away from me.

I shall never have Nella of Sorrento, for she is the only daughter of Orlando, and he owns the boat. She is betrothed to a handsome boy at Capri, and all of the crew of the Argo watch over her virtue, knife in hand.

III

Sulks

I LOVE NELLA OF SORRENTO, AND SHALL love her for many weeks ; I have to console myself for her by abusing the pleasures of Safia's bed.

Our little dwelling near the Fort Saint-André looks over the Moorish city ; it is a small square house of one storey, bright with a crimson wash. The courtyard belongs to a blue Angora cat ; but he does not mind our sleeping in the vine shadow.

At evening, when I have night leave, I linger on the terrace under the moonlight, and Safia climbs my knees to entertain my dreaming. I seem to see Nella of Sorrento panting with pleasure under her Capri lad, and he also is naked. My brows draw down and, even at the moment when lithe Safia relieves my weariness, I take her neck in my two hands. I tighten and tighten them, as if she were a Spanish criminal. She weeps, pitifully lolling out her tongue, but is not angry. She is not even surprised. As soon as I let her go, she smiles silently at me and presses her willing, slavish cheek against my breast. Am I not her master by some natural law, which she must obey, not seek to understand ?

A Garden of Kisses .

But the stars mock at me, and we go to bed.
Safia's delicate breasts are still sore from my
murderous fingers: she is peculiarly submis-
sive.

IV

Trifling

SAFIA AND I SAUNTERED ACROSS THE CITY. Some barbarian has killed the tree that used to shade the fountain in the Rue Philippe ; but the place pleases me still, for I have recaptured, by talking to the old men there, a memory of Hassan, the tobacco-merchant. He had his humble stall in that street, and became the Bey of Oran, until the French occupation, and had the supreme delight of dying at Mecca.

This tale might have come straight from The Thousand Nights and One Night, and it is a constant marvel to Safia. Her eyes open no wider when I seat her naked in an empire chair and, kneeling before her, give her that morning kiss that Erinna the Rhodian gave to Sappho.

The naughty child falsely compares my zebb to the minaret of the mosque of the Pasha, which gets so thin as it rises ; and we burst together into a laughter so loud that one of our brothers, lying beneath the gallery behind the wall, wakes to bid us be silent. We are thirsty, and drink in the Place d'Orléans, while I explain to Safia the arms of the city of Oran, engraven above the fountain : the muzzles of a gold lion passant, charged with a radiant sun of the same. There was something a little

A Garden of Kisses

fantastic about my commentary : the gold lion is the zebb of the Sherif Soliman, and the sun is Safia's treasure.

But I had my revenge for the minaret, for the child understood me, and caught my left fist, and set my palm incontinently on the sun.

V

Tlemcen on the Horizon

THE OUTSKIRTS OF ORAN KNOW US WELL. If the dwarf palms and the halfas and the wild jujube plum trees could speak, they would tell infinite tales of furious yet delicate kisses. I call the shadows of the Ravin Vert to witness, and the great salt lake, where was a Roman temple to Osiris. I call the marble race-course of the Sultans of Tlemcen to witness, and the Queen's bath. I cured a hint of rheumatism there, and then provoked my companion to bring back the pain.

But I never took docile Safïa so madly as on that plateau from which you can see Tlemcen far away.

I had no thought for Isser, running below me in its bed of reeds ; the eyes of my spirit and the eyes of my flesh were busied with Tlemcen, the life work of Kings, the door of the R'arb, the Eastern key. Surely I was as exalted as Safïa's happy breasts when I melt in her. To see white and imperial Tlemcen rise from the shadows of night and then, ah, not to die, but live and worship her under the rising sun at the foot of her mountains, day after day for ever !

But I turned aside and helped Safïa put on her

A Garden of Kisses

veil, and gave the blacks a sign that we would return ; for the hour is not yet that I may go down to Tlemcen.

That mystical city of the West is a joy held in reserve, and I will not deflower it. Soon I shall return to civilian life and utter freedom of action. Then, if God pleases, I shall pass a year in the frame, in the setting of Tlemcen, and be myself The Portrait of a Young Lord of the Good Old Time.

VI

The Three of Us

ZOHRA IS THE COUSIN AND TENDER FRIEND of my Safia, and, thanks to the magical stream of Hammam-bou-R'ara, she has at last had the son she so desired.

As she is not herself feeding the small Youcef she is ripe again for love by now. Oranie changes colour under the kiss of Spring, and the three of us take churching walks together. We thanked God yesterday among the flowering lianas of the oasis, watered by that strangely fecundating stream. This morning we came to Lalla-Mar'nia at the door of the desert of Angad, on the hostile line of Morocco.

The two friends have left me to go and pray on the tomb of the holy Lalla-Mar'nia, the black basket-maker, who inaugurated a kind of golden age in this warlike land.

I stood facing that splendidly historic plain and thought of Marshall Bugeaud and the victory of Isly, of the irrigation canals at Oudjda—so near that surely we must take it soon—and of the great day when Fez fell by the Franco-Algerian army.

I found Safia and Zohra naked side by side, in our room at the inn, mingling their black hair on the same mat. Zohra was smoking a Turkish

A Garden of Kisses

cigarette, but Safia was so on the watch that she managed to press many nibbling kisses on the lips of our little friend.

As soon as I came to them, Zohra clapped her hands, crying :

‘ Be very welcome, O Magnanimous ! We have played the Sherif and the virgin six times, each being thrice the bride and thrice the groom ; but none of that was very amusing. We were even constrained to use that symbol which brings luck to the harems of Egypt ; it vexed but did not satisfy. We have eaten hors-d’œuvre, and our appetite is the greater.’

VII

Canticle of Departure

O FRETTED MINARET OF TROPICAL NE-
droma, flexible neck of Safïa giving
herself !

O Mosque of the Pirates, O light to guide the
Northern Argonauts toward the golden fleece
of our barbaric past !

Breasts of Zohra, as cool in summer as water
from an earthen cooler !

Koubba of Sidi-Brahim, where our holy Emir
surrendered to General Lamoricière !

. Filial glances of Safïa, lying upon my shoulder !

Nemours, where Abd-el-Kader offered his black
mare to the Duc d'Aumale !

Zohra's fluctuating back, gone mad beneath
my fingering !

Bright waters in the valley of the tribe
Mimoun !

Safïa's resilient paps, thrice hardening and
softening to the pang while I die once.

Plane-trees and fountains of Sidi-bel-Abbès !

Well-plucked and most expert armpits of Zohra,
with many inventions !

Maskara Ravine of the Hachem, and the green
terrace of the Chareb-er-Rih !

O blood of Safïa, sweet to suck, when she was
wounded by a prickly-pear-cactus !

A Garden of Kisses

Sunk road of Mazouna, where my two friends
walked out to meet me in moonlight, their
arms about each others' waists, between two
flower hedges !

Laughing fan of Zohra, to refresh my zebb
on torrid July noons !

O Ouaran-Senis, O King with the blue peaks
of Atlas for your ministers and the plain of the
Chélif for your favourite girl !

Toes of the left foot of Safia : surely they
could kindle desire upon a corpse !

O juniper trees of many-watered Dahra !

Insidious hinges of the arms of Zohra, lying
on her elbows !

Green boat of the fig-merchant : he had Apol-
lonian muscles !

Oh, farewell !

Soliman is a Spahi no more ; he has given
kind presents of separation to Safia and Zohra,
and is as free as the lion of the desert, the hot
wind of the desert.

Oh, Farewell !

I leave you for the chief of my dreams, a year
of women at Tlemcen. Geographies are wrong
to list Tlemcen as a simple city in the province
of Oran : Tlemcen is the town with the chosen
soul, she is part of the beyond of the beyond,

KISSES IN TLEMCEN

I

The House of the Seven Women

YOUTH FLEES AS SWIFTLY AS A NERVOUS deer, and to hold it back would be but to ape that madman who restrained a torrent with his garments. I must press each minute as a ripe lemon, and take the last drop of its pleasure.

My house at Tlemcen is a jewel from the day of the Almohades ; it totters and crumbles in a dying street, like the old ramparts. I had it restored by a French architect who had seen Grenada.

Alone at morning on my terrace, in the almost mountain air, with my chibouk beside me, I look upon the war-weary rocks of Lella-Setti and a far grove of terebinths. I imagine the aphrodisiac odour of the terebinths so clearly that I think I smell it.

So it frequently happens that I clap my hands seven times, and Massrour's second-in-command, a eunuch of the Soudan with the chest of a Hermes, appears and salutes me soldier-fashion, and works a device that can change the terrace to a square tent of yellow damask.

And I go on slowly puffing at my Turkish pipe.

A Garden of Kisses

The negro finishes devising my Summer harem : he spreads the cushions and carpets and muslin scarves and blossoming flowers, and the flowers drop their petals over the silks. Then he makes the crooning of a turtledove among palm trees and I go down to my ablution.

When I return, I find my seven little Tlemcen mistresses, Khadidja and Amina, Rokaïa and Zaïnab, Hafsa and Djoouaïria and Lili, playing a prelude with finger trifles to the piercing, devouring follies which shall follow after.

There are three women pairs, and the seventh gives herself to the pretty negro ; his eyes shine queerly as if, by the refinement of his castration, he tasted some strange cerebral pang unknown to us.

Now the eunuch retires with reverence.

There are always three women pairs until the evening : but they shift and are implacable. I take each of the young things an hour, and turn and turn about.

Lili and Djoouaïria and Hafsa and Zaïnab and Rokaïa and Amina and Khadidja are lawfully mine, and live together under my roof with me ; but never a breath of quarrel troubles my repose. Flattering Massrour says this miracle is due to an energetic impartiality, the impartiality of a Sherifian zebb.

II

An Errand in the Ghetto

WHEN I THINK OF KHADIDJA'S HAUNCHES, as I walk in the Place d'Armes, my foot stays suspended, and the superficial Europeans think I am drunk on hashish.

When a pilgrim sees Khadidja dreaming upon her elbows on the terrace of my house in Tlemcen, he turns aside from the road to Mecca and abjures the Faith, and kneels to worship an idol.

Much shall be pardoned Daoud the Hunchback because he got me Khadidja.

And how quick it all was ! An old unknown woman, who had accosted me as I came out of the Great Mosque, guided me through the labyrinth of the Ghetto ; the air stank of Jewish sweat and every other kind of rottenness ; I had to bend double to avoid hitting my head against the joists ; but we reached our goal at last. The wall, pierced with a single hole by way of window, was plastered with cow-dung. We went down into the basement as into a cave ; a naked child was scratching himself on the stair.

Daoud began to tremble theatrically at sight of me ; but I reassured him with a smile : then he showed me the photograph of a nine-year-

A Garden of Kisses

old virgin : a family living on the mountain wished him to sell her for them : and it seemed to me that the sun had come into that subterranean burrow.

I sent Massrour to pay the Jew, and that very night the woman brought Khadidja. She so delighted me that I deflowered without undressing her, in the presence of my marvelling eunuch.

III

An Interrupted Lesson

AMINA, THE DAUGHTER OF MY NEIGHBOUR, was a scornful gazelle treading alone and daintily the path of love. Though I sighed as many sighs as straws on a tempest, as powder flashes in battle, as men who have died since Adam, Amina affected not to know it. But a bag of gold seduced her mother, the widow of a slipper-maker.

Wise little Amina was set on making a position for herself; now that I have bought her for her weight in gold, she is adorable to me.

She has very brightly shining eyes, and a boundless historical curiosity.

I delight to sit in my courtyard, under the shadow of a pomegranate, and, with the help of a Latin translation, to read what I consider the most beautiful of all ancient poems, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius. But little by little the murmur of the fountain drowns me.

Then Amina comes to perch herself on my knee, with the soft movement of a cat, and wakes me with kisses upon the eyelids and asks me questions. She wants to know if Tlemcen really used to have seven walls and thirteen iron-studded gates, and if the Black Sultan was very terrifying to see, and whether

A Garden of Kisses.

the learned 'Abd-er-Rahman-ibn-Kaldoun used truly to sleep alone in his hermitage at Sidi-bou-Médine.

I answer as well as I can, and the little rogue wriggles for joy and throws her gracious naked arms about my neck. They smell of Indian nard.

Suddenly I realise that my delightful burden has risen in air. My little hidden brother, red-headed Soliman, by sitting up and begging for his rights has done this thing.

The history lesson is postponed until the 'morrow, the fountain tunes itself to other exercises, and here Amina is the master.

Soliman Yawned Upon

IV

ZAÏNÂB IS A LITTLE SILENT PRINCESS FROM Turkey, and her cheeks have exactly the tint of Spring moonlight on the Bosphorus ; they contrast with the severity of her great dark eyes. She is so taciturn that, when I am with her, I almost seem to chatter.

The day I received her from Stamboul we walked to the pool of Aïn-el-Hout, and the fishes that swim there in gold and mother-of-pearl and silver scales moved my small virgin to marvel. So I told her the tale of the daughter of the Lord of that place : how she had undressed and was about to bathe in the pool, when Djafar, the son of the Sultan of Tlemcen, pursuing a gazelle, appeared before her. The exquisite naked body tempted him, and he leaped ; but Aïcha dived with a prayer to God to save her virginity, and God turned her into a fish with gold and mother-of-pearl and silver scales.

Zaïnab smiled, and we took a lustful bath together. Then, coming up out of the water, I did that cruel and tender thing to her, among the flowers of the oasis, that Djafar would have done to poor Aïsha.

Sometimes my garrulity annoys the small Zaïnab, troubling her Turkish dreams.

A Garden of Kisses

Just now we were sitting alone on the terrace of a Moorish café, a little before twilight, and Zainab had her eyes fixed on the imperial profile of our Tlemcen. I teased her by telling an adventure of Sindbad the Sailor, at great length, until she suddenly leaped upright, standing upon my knees, and gave me the strangest yawn.

Invitation to Death

THE SULTAN YAKOUB-AL-MANSOUR THE AL-mohade once sent for the illustrious Andalusian marabout Abou-Median. Abou-Median, under the name of Sidi-Bou-Medine, is still the patron saint of Tlemcen.

As the old man was drawing near to our Queen of the Mar'reb, he suddenly came upon Al-Eubbad, a greeting oasis of olives and wild ivy and figs, of pomegranates and virgin vines and waters running swiftly among flowers. 'How well it would be,' he cried, 'to sleep in this small Eden until the Judgment Day!' God heard him, and he died in a few minutes, murmuring: 'Immense is Allāh!'; and his companions gave him the burial which had seemed so good to him.

Hafsa of the cool hands wishes to die young, and has expressed the desire of the saintly Sidi-Bou-Medine. She loves herself to the point of swooning among the flowered grasses of the Al-Eubbad, while I take Zāinab or Khadidja in sight of her. But we mock her longing, and Rokaïa says she will live as long as the stork on the minaret.

Djoouaïria's Treason

WHEN IT RAINS OR THE DAY CLOUDS OVER suddenly, I press my naked self to naked Djoouaïria, to warm at her ; the velvet light of her face would shame the fires of Paradise. She is as it were luminous : if she showed herself at night to some Musulman, lost in the lanes of the Ghetto, he would find his way again.

Yet this Djoouaïria, whose belly burns me when I lay my weary cheek against it, has more melancholy at heart and dreaming soul than the cool-handed Hafsa even.

She is the sister of an artist who carves the wood of guns ; she is the daughter of a saddlemaker and a Christian woman : she speaks French and reads novels. Yesterday, in an olive grove, she said to me :

‘ O Sherif, I wish I could die this Autumn, watching the sunset on an Italian lake ! ’

I punished her for this double treason, to life and to our Africa. I threw down the little fleeing half-breed under an olive tree and fetched a louder, wilder and more sorrowful cry from her than on our bridal night.

VII

Lili Forgotten

I AM LEAVING TLEMCEN TO-MORROW BY THE Gate of the Coursers.

To-day I had my last walk and took the small Lili, with me, the youngest of my seven Delights, Lili with the eyes of ultramarine.

In her sheer joy at the beauty of the farewell present she had had from me the child was laughing: she laughed at the fountains and the streams on the hills, at the dark-brick houses, at the towers and crenellations of the rampart, at the forest girdle that decks the Queen of Cities. She laughed at the springs in the Bois de Boulogne, and at the aloes on the steep path which took me on my farewell pilgrimage to the tombs of Al-Eubbad.

I was absorbed in silence and contemplation, for I wished to carry away some strong memory of the charm of Tlemcen. I shall not say farewell to Tlemcen, for I shall not leave her without a picture, a perfume, a harmony to live with me henceforward, to make me better, to lift me to God.

I did not touch the little Lili.

KISSES IN CONSTANTINE

I

The Feast of Fools

O CIRTÀ OF THE NUMIDIANS, AIRY CONSTANTINE, city of the ravine and of passions, city of French heroes !

I visited my friend, the silk-merchant, in the Rue Combes. We had been talking with the syndic of the auctioneers and the comptroller of the sale of things of price ; but they left us to direct an auction of jewels and garments on the Place des Caravanes. So we sat alone in the shop and drank our coffee, and did not say a word to one another.

I was thinking of the attack on the 13th of October, 1837, and of that terribly-wounded Colonel de Lamoricière, and of Colonel Combes, who died with two bullets in him, announcing victory to the Duc de Nemours.

But it is really the young girls of to-day who interest Ismail, and who interest me : in a crowd of good-natured negresses and hawkers, of water-sellers and oil-sellers, Spahis and Turcos and judges, and commentators of the Book, we could sometimes see one of those Jewesses who are more beautiful in Constantine than anywhere, and sometimes a Moorish girl who

Kisses in Constantine

bathed us in temptation sheerly with her blue veil.

Yesterday we sat Turkish-fashion on a Smyrna carpet in the Mosque of Sidi-el-Akhdar, and dreamed of the voluptuous palaces of the King Micipsa, and of his Greek minions. But this evening a sort of access of gaiety excites us to pluck the present. Therefore we improvise a Feast of Fools with a band of friends and make a tour of the native brothels and beat up the Kabyles.

II

My Orthodoxy

MY HOUSE IS OF SIMPLE BRICK WITH A wooden door, but it is founded on Roman stones, and above the threshold is the print of a negress's vast hand, dipped in ram's blood, to avert the evil-eye.

Also it is the house of an unruly happiness.

At times of torrential rain or snow I pass whole days naked with Omm-Aïmane who has ingenious strands of hair, and Omm-Habiba of the greedy lips, and Omm-Djamal with expert armpits, and Omm-Kolthoum and her close and favouring breasts, and with Omm-Hâna of the hungry haunches, with the convulsive thighs of Omm-Mabed, and Omm-Serine of the inventive heels.

But I send away my dear, my tender-faced Ismail, although he does not want to go, when such things happen ; for Soliman is faithful to his principles of orthodoxy.

III

Saouda's Toy

BY SIDI-ABD-ER-RAHMAN, MAY BLINDNESS strike me if I know aught so delightful to the sight and touch and hearing, and to the taste and smell, and to that unnamed other sense which poets have, as the threefold garden of the palace of Hadj'-Ahmed !

The last Bey of Constantine had a civilised, delicate soul, and I linger for hours together, with my little Saouda, in his galleries. Her body is as supple as a bamboo, and the skin of her fingers softer than lawn.

We are alone, for the keepers are taking their siesta. Saouda's eyes are too much ringed already. I explain her the frescoes, from which the human body is so religiously excluded ; I explain her the naval battle and Stamboul and Mosr and Iskandaria.

Saouda is all attention and understanding, and seems to give her languorous regard to the designs.

But while I meditate on Don John of Austria, and the weariness of the Sultan, and the scarlet tongue of a fine black eunuch kneeling before a bare white virgin, and on all the secrets of Egyptian women, little Saouda hunts for young Soliman, mad little Soliman, and wakes him and unswaddles, and takes and wags him into the open.

IV

A Simian Peril

I SHOULD LIVE TO THE LAST CROONING OF the last dove, in this land where so many Roman citizens died at over a hundred.

I am taking a Numidian cure in this natural sanatorium at Aïn-Kerma, and the epitaphs attesting the death at a hundred and twenty of Cassius Gracilis, at a hundred and twenty-five of Julia Gaetula, and at a hundred and thirty-one of Julius Abdeus, give me to hope long hopes. Besides, I was wise enough to bring only one woman with me, and that of the most restful kind.

Henda makes all her glances from under lowered lids. She is the daughter of a Mussulman prostitute and a Corsican with Greek blood in him. He was at that time the handsomest lad in the village of Sidi-Merouan. Her uncle Khaïreddine, who sold her to me, does excellent business in the Rue Vieux at Constantine, selling haiks to the mountain folk and gandouras to the townsmen, to say nothing of aphrodisiacs and monstrous instruments of pleasure, specially manufactured for Lords who find excitement in buying things on the sly. I find that Khaïreddine has by no means cheated me: his burnous from Sousa fits me to per-

Kisses in Constantine

fection, and his Henda is the pearl of companions for a slightly over-ridden Sherif.

She does well in bed, and is willing for much ; but neither by word nor look, by touch nor exhibition, will she entice me, for she knows I wish to restore my strength, and is helping me discreetly.

This 'morning, unfortunately, we have come visiting the gorges of the Châbet-el-Akhra together. I am listening to the oued Agrioun moaning in his gulf, but a band of monkeys is setting Henda the worst possible example, and I fear for to-night.

Bordeaux Wines

TO-DAY IS THE FEAST OF BACCHUS, THE feast of the killer of care, in my Sherifian house. There have been twelve of us, that is to say Omm-Aïmane, Omm-Habiba, Omm-Djamal, Omm-Kolthoum, Omm-Hâna, Omm-Mâbed, Omm-Sirine, Henda, Saouda, my Ismaïl and the faithful Massrour and myself, all on a great purple horseshoe couch, about a feast that would have pleased Maecenas.

At first we each drank a solemn glass of Falerian, in honour of my delectable Horace ; but this Campanian drink seemed to me but so-so, and Ismaïl, who has been recently in Bordeaux, called it, quite simply, swipes.

So we went on to more serious matters. One after the other, we took an Yquem of 1876 and a Château-Latour, a Château-Lafitte and a Contet and a Château-Margaux, and Rieussec and Haut-Brion and Mirat, and a Leoville-Poyferré of 1874 and a Royne-Vigneau.

The nine girls are sleeping very drunk among the cushions.

Massrour has visions and is talking to himself : it seems that he sees the clouds ringing Mount Edough to announce a flood, and the gold grapes shaking on the vine branches in the

Kisses in Constantine

oasis of Salah Bey. He hears the Pisan gate turning on its hinges in ancient Bougie. He wrecks a basket of roses with his fist, and shouts that neither Cairo nor Baghdad can in any way be compared with En-Naceria. He tries to stand up, but wavers and falls. He goes down among the sleeping girls, his feet in Omm-Aïmane's hair and his unconscious face on the naked thighs of Saouda.

Ismail and I talk of the immortality of the soul, discussing, drop by drop, a dry Teneriffe having topaz shadows. It has been thirty years in bottle.

VI

The Golden Ass Eclipsed

WE ARE ON PILGRIMAGE TO MDAOUROUCH, the Roman Medaura, the land of Apuleus the sorcerer.

I have a brotherly love for these African poets, for Tertullian and Arnobius and Apuleus, magnificent, fiery, terrible men, drunk with the light and the desert wind.

Satiha, who was my yesterday's woman, is with me; she is the daughter of Thououaiba the embroideress, and of a coral-fisher. I made her a woman at ten o'clock last night, with a single movement.

This Autumn morning comforts and raises us; there is a sensual spirit stirring.

Satiha smiles as she looks at the far-away lace edge of the Tunisian peaks, and I, seated upon a stone of a Byzantine palace, read in the *Metamorphoses* again that adventure of Lucius, when he was an ass, with one of those matrons to whom the largest sort of cudgel would have seemed too small. I delight in the details, including that passage which over-moderate commentators declare to be spurious.

'Why are you laughing, O strong Sherif?' said Satiha. So I told her the whole story, and then asked, as a jest, if she would be

Kisses in Constantine

frightened of a white ass, say, from Baghdad.

Satiha also laughed, and answered :

‘ How can you of all people ask me that, O gifted Sherif ? A girl who has given gay shelter to Red Soliman would smile at three contiguous asses surely ? ’

VII

Retreat

FAREWELL, ALGER AND CONSTANTINE, FARE-
well, Oranie and Tlemcen, and ,farewell,
civilisation !

I am still young enough and very rich, yet I
mock at all save my sudden but irrevocable
resolution.

For me the free, proud life of the Sahara, and
galloping in sand-storms, and the warlike loves,
and contemplation and meditation until death
call me.

KISSES IN THE DESERT

I

Alya not Weary in Well-Doing

I WOULD ASSEMBLE ON SOME JOYOUS rhythm of my own inventing, words as perfect as the pearls of the necklace of Alya, not weary in well-doing.

She came to meet me the day before yesterday under the date palms at Ouargla. Her cheeks shone under her veil, and her shift was of yellow silk. Yet, at the least breath of air upon it, surely it would have tortured her skin, for that is so delicate.

I murmured good-day, and she answered: 'Go your ways, O Sherif, for I am busy.'

Then she showed me her moving haunches, and they were gilded like a sandhill. She made signs, ignoring my presence, to a negress in blue rags turning a scarlet spindle on a white terrace.

I counted the minutes of the next night. Surely my hair would turn quite grey? But at dawn, with two great-hearted companions, I carried Alya away on a racing camel with scarlet housings.

And now Alya is not busy save about my fantasies. She is the spirit of my tent, and her

A Garden of Kisses'

coral bracelet lights me to happiness. In spite of my deep experience, I utterly admire her growing breasts, and the hair that falls to her ankles. She is Cairo in splendour, and a gracious coffee into which I have suggested pounded cardamom, a cooling stream, and the chosen star group in the night of my dreams. .

II

A Pleasing Contrast

WE COULD QUENCH THE THIRST OF A pilgrim with water of the quantity of the tears of my friend Kazim ; his heart trembles in his ribs ; a devil beats a tambourine upon his head, and another devil is hammering nails into his nipples. His fair one, the girl with the tinted palms, fled from him last night : she sailed, as it were, across the ocean of the sand, and her camel rolled like a ship at sea upon it.

I console poor Kazim as best I may, and then I look at Alya. She is like the young and holy antelopes of Kaf, or would be if she had not a soft speaking voice in which all human tenderness is sighing. Her carriage is so noble that she might well belong to the family of Noah, yet, with devotion as of a slave from birth, she ceaselessly offers me the white teeth of her purple mouth. They are sisters of the camomile, bathed by the storm we had.

One is not unfaithful to Soliman, called the Magnificent.

III

The Two Cousins

INDEED I AM FOND OF ALYA AND HER cousin, Raïhâna. They cling to their lord as the vines cling to the almonds and to the peaches of Tiout. They have the pensive wisdom of a Saint of Aïn-Sefra, they remind me, as it were, of some religious leader of the Ouled-Sidi-Cheikh; and count no more than seventeen years between them.

This warm freshness has brought the Spring. Alya's hair waves like the branches of a date palm, and the tressed curls of Raïhâna are not unlike the great tail feathers of a male ostrich. Their eyes are princes of Black Magic, and the tinting of their cheeks is borrowed from the Autumn moon. Their breath is marjoram and their skin musk pear. When they chase each other on horseback about the hill, it is a game of shooting stars; their mercy lies in veiling, for their white necks would banish sleep from all oases.

If Raïhâna or Alya fled from my tent, tears would burst forth from me as rain from a lightning-wound in a great cloud. Massrour would hear me groaning as a Bedouin groans when his thigh has been smashed by a bullet. In a moment I would languish, useless as a

Kisses in the Desert

sheathed knife, and feel the worms gnawing my bones already.

Then, suddenly, I would leap upon my racing camel, and find my rival, and thrust my vulture-winged lance deep in his breast.

Happily the cousins are not like that.

One day I caught two little gazelles asleep, and brought them home in my burnous. When they woke, they trembled before Soliman, yet rubbed themselves against him. Raïhâna and Alya have much the same timid tenderness; they shiver from head to foot when I stand with my eyes downcast, and when I wink their liver changes place. But their welcoming words to me are pleasanter than the milk of a camel pastured on aromatic grasses.

I praise these two diamond cousins.

Neither the number of the marvels of creation, nor the number of the prayers of man since Adam, nor of the complaints of little camels eager to suck, nor of the drops of ocean, nor of musky gazelle droppings on the desert, nor of the lines of the poets, nor of returns and separations, nor of the movements of the wind in the tops of palm trees, nor of thunder claps out of dark clouds, has equalled the number of the kisses and laughters of us three living together.

IV

Coffee in the Tent

THE SOLEMN HQUR HAS COME FOR THE preparation of coffee in my tent that stands open to the Summer moon.

O pomegranate trees of El-Asla, O gold sand-hills, O El-Kantra, silver mouth of the desert, and palm trees of Biskra ! My two women and the excellent Massrour will remember you to-night, while I tell them beautiful stories.

I am making that brew for all of us, which livens both intelligence and emotion.

I choose the finest berries, and sift them of impurity ; I roast these chosen fruits very slowly, and grind them, and boil them in water from our most noted spring. The Mocha turns yellow and transpires ; it is a chrysolite, rejoicing our eyes, and it spreads its ambered smell across the oasis. The small bubbles are emeralds, the big bubbles are like the eyes of an astonished child.

The froth dies down, and coffee is ready. I pour it into a pot holding saffron and cloves and nutmegs, and chives and cardamom ; then I strain it quickly into another pot, for fear of possible bitterness, while Raïhâna and Alya and Massrour listen in delight to its gurgling, as of nectar.

· *Kisses in the Desert*

I serve the coffee in Faghfour glasses that a Turkish Pasha gave me. Would you not say it was the heart's blood of an amorous poet ?

What waking of us all in the silent night !

The girls' grow talkative. Alya compares the desert to a panther skin, and Raïhâna, who has somewhat travelled, compares the waves of our sand here to the waves of the Mediterranean.

Massrour, whom I suspect of having eaten a little paste of hashish, makes us a revelation. That most holy Abd-el-Kadr-ed-Djilani appeared to him at Biskra in the Great Mosque on the margin of the everlasting well, and dictated the rules of a brotherhood for harrying Unbelievers.

I shrug my shoulders and sing a long anecdotal poem. It concerns the seventy different kinds of dates grown in the land of the Ziban. Then I interrupt myself suddenly, crying :

' Raïhâna and Alya, my bright doves, my innocent gazelles, be very careful. If you were to flee from my tent with some bold boy or paunchy merchant, I would invoke the aid of Him who made His Sevenfold Paradise. I would find you, if you had crossed the sea to China. My stallion Hârgan is pawing the ground and flourishing his grey tail. My red camel wearies to pursue some foe. My sword would give

A Garden of Kisses

one whistle, and you lie without heads and without tombs ! ’

Massrour grinned largely, but the cousins sobbed and, with the emotion of their breasts, swelled their striped silks.

So I sat between Alya and Raïhâna, and consoled them in the major mode. Now we await the dawn, drinking a Persian wine which has the taste of roses.

Salama

TOG, WHO IS THE LORD OF THE OASIS next to mine, has seven daughters.

This morning I went to draw water at the spring in his garden, and Salama of the deep blue eyes, who is the youngest of his seven delights, lay in wait for me and clung about my neck and kissed me. I hesitated, but Salama explained :

‘ Take what is yours, O Sherif. A dozen chiefs have asked me in marriage, but I am more innocent than the new pigeons at Mecca, or a child in swaddling bands, and I would love you until the hour when Israfil sounds his trumpet for us.’

I answered gravely :

‘ You must pardon me, small Salama, little azure eyes, but I dare not. My tenderness for you is one of those things cut in a living rock, which neither wind nor water nor time can ever alter.’

The tiny virgin blushed red and lowered her eyes ; but then she looked at herself in the mirror of the stream, and I returned her kiss.

Tog has given me Salama for a wife. God turn the age of this splendid old companion to lusty youth !

VI

Insomnia

THIS NIGHT SHOULD BE DELIGHTFUL TO satiated merchants, men who can sleep.

I wake and suffer, for I have a disease that the fortitude of all other men could not endure. It is a passion making me ridiculous, a woman's face scoring my heart as an Indian sword would, and fetching the soul out of my body like a water-wheel. I fall into a light sleep and dream that a happy bird is guiding me to the Pleiades. Then it thrusts its claws into my flank, and drops to earth, as swiftly as a spider at the end of her thread.

I am between the pincers and the brace, and therefore my body dwindles like the point of a reed pen when a scribe is sharpening it. Sometimes I howl like a famished wolf, and sometimes I mourn lowly, like some old camel shut in a stable after its usefulness.

Massrour lectures me, and I send him about his business.

'Be quiet!' I say. 'The Great Wall of China is between me and your babble. And damned be any who takes me to task or thinks me mad. O Massrour, is it lawful for a fine woman to kill a Sherif? Does she find her authorisation in the words of the Prophet, or in some classical

Kisses in the Desert

commentary on the Book? I tell you, Massrour, that there is no God but God, and that the rebellious Wadah is his Prophetess! The cure for my torture is beneath the veil of Wadah. Though all the daughters of the Bedouin and the noble put themselves naked to my hand, I would still choose Wadah. Wadah is as stubborn as a tiger, and has stolen my sleep. Massrour, unless you are an absolute, bloody ass, you will get me Wadah!'

VII

Soliman's Prayer

DEHÂMA HAS WELL-PAINTED EYES, AND vexes my soul. Her haunches are great enough, and yet her walking is so light that she would leave no mark on fresh butter. Her cheeks are somewhat like flashes of lightning, licking the heavy rain clouds in the night. Her scent excites me.

I wished her welcome, and murmured in her ear :

‘Refresh me with a kiss of your pointed teeth, I ask no more.’

‘I fear your indiscretion.’

‘I swear that I will say nothing at all about us to any one. Only God is watching us, and he is very pitiful to lovers.’

Afterwards the call to prayer came to me in vain, it was between the breasts of the new friend that I made mine.

Dehâma, you are a ring-dove and the smell of a King's coffee ; you are a pomegranate tree with fruit, and the camel of all camels for long riding.

VIII

Caprice

THAT WHICH IS WRITTEN WOULD COME TO us, though we were hidden in a box.

Omm-Akâb had no fear of God before her eyes, and she said nay to me. Then the sun came into the Sign of the Twins, and the birds and the flowers and the hot pebbles and the beetles fleeing from my nightshade-coloured mare, or from my cock-necked camel, seemed to deride me.

Yesterday a compassionate negress brought me this virgin of great refusals.

When she is unveiled, Omm-Akâb is as the torch of a pilgrim, guiding the caravan. She smells like a meadow in an undiscovered valley, and the skin of her belly is as cool as a new dress brushed by the Eastern breeze. Her glances are as sure to their mark as the shooting star that killed the spying Jinni.

Omm-Akâb is not without fault, however; her humour is as variable as a peacock's robe.

Yet I come back to her as a falcon to his point; and, when she turns her back in a sulk and tresses her hair, so that I may see her naked haunches, I punish or reward her. Call it which you will, I do it faithfully, however hard she presses them together.

IX

Enthusiasm

KHAIZOURANE HAS LARGE AND LONELY eyes, and is so gifted that they have taught her the Koran, as if she were a lad of promise.

I have eaten the best honey out of France, but none of it tasted so sweet as the water of Souheïja's mouth.

When Ena undoes her hair, my tame dove croons in the shade of an indulgent leafage, .
But I prefer Gadir, because she is a small Diana, a huntress. Weeks have gone by since my last warlike riding in the desert. When the snake is forbidden water, his poison increases ; I am as a viper that has slept a long time in the dry sand.

Come, Gadir ! Let us saddle our white and near-red camels, and give the signal to our fifty comrades.

But God forbid we meet that bat of a Bedouin, with the pocket full of false keys ! He rides a chestnut mare with a docked tail, and says that the hair about my temples is growing grey, and that you, all of you, are beginning to be unfaithful. I would thrust the two edges of my long lance into his groin. Let his Fate set him aside from me !

X

Philosophy

YOUTH HAS TURNED HER BACK ON ME without farewell, shall I run after her? It would be the act of a fool, who blows on a dead hearth.

The rope of trial is tighter and tighter about the neck of every man, and old age is worrying even Soliman with his teeth.

How beautiful were the years of my past; and is it possible that I shall not live their like again? The grey hairs about my temples increase in the sight of all.

The fiery wind drives these yellow birds toward a mirage, and the heat of Summer is throwing all his knives. Surely it is the hour for weary siesta.

I laugh at the heat, and call my friends to saddle; I am a burning coal and shall never crumble to ashes. I shall rest in Paradise, if I am tired when I get there, but in this present Algerian heaven, this Sahara of my love, I would rather be endlessly busy with women of wavering haunches.

My strength and my beauty remain, and I continue in the activity of my choice. I leave regret and nostalgia to foreign poets, because the falcon knows his point of honour, and,

A Garden of Kisses

having flown in the high air, will never creep.

At evening twilight yesterday the doves spoke to me of Omm-Hamda, who is as beautiful sitting as standing ; a caravan is taking her to the South.

Let us be off ! My blue and grey camel will come up with them. I must have the lips of Omm-Hamda, darkened with indigo, and her right cheek, because there is a sprinkle of stars there.

Asba and the Orchard

WE HAVE PLAYED ON SEVEN TAMBOURINES all night, Massrour and my women and I. Shall I sleep now? Here is the first turquoise light, and the sound of the pilgrims' horn, and the good morning of the purple doves, and the good morning of my young friend Fâdil, as he mounts his sand-coloured dromedary. Its red eyes glitter, and it goes so fast that the dust spins a cloak about its handsome rider. I shall not sleep.

I am making an irrigation ditch in my orchard. A girl in a violet chemise came up to greet me.

'Who are you?'

'My name is Asba. I am the niece of Madjid, the cook.'

'I know him only too well, he uses mutton fat instead of fresh butter in the date cakes. May he wake in another world! But you yourself please me. Come, let us play together!'

'I am not beautiful, O Sherif. No Bedouin would want me, even if I lay down naked on the pilgrim's way.'

'Is not your waist as slim as the waist of my Turkish coffee-pot? Look at yourself in the

A Garden of Kisses

stream, then come into the shadow of this date tree.'

'I am frightened. If my uncle surprised us . . .'

'He would fall into the cistern. He is already the greatest cuckold in the oasis ! Let him but show his stunted back ! Massrour shall scrape him like a galled camel, with a broom and a knife. You may well laugh : we shall bandage his sores with arsenic and sulphur and Syrian pitch !'

Asba was silent, so I lifted her chin and kissed her teeth. I grew drunk on the scent of her hair, and breathed the roses of her cheeks, which had been so white. I excel in my movement of the main piece in the chess of love. My zebb carries as straight as a French sporting gun, but has more than two shots.

I wanted to go for a ride, but Asba, lying upon me under the date tree, coaxed me, saying :

'First give me eight kisses on the point of my left breast, then promise to come here to-morrow morning, and not to fall in love with any of my sisters or with my cousins.'

'I swear by the Kaaba and by Him who planted the hills that I have never loved another, and that the most radiant dwellers in the green garden of El-Hazâ could not seduce me from Asba !'

Asba laughed.

XII

Two Sisters

SPRING IS KISSING THE SAHARA, AND DJOLbane and Djinane are playing at ball.

Djinane has hyacinth hair, and her sister's eyes are the colour of deep shadows.

I like them equally, for Djinane's hair is my sun in Heaven, and the eyes of Djolbane are the Black Stone before which I kneel in prayer. If I could split my heart in two, I would give half to each.

I urge my chestnut barb to a gallop, and consider gaily :

'The solution is simple enough, I will take them both to my bed this evening.'

XIII

Sênét's Arms

THE HOT WIND AND THE CRICKETS RAVISH the harvest, and the wound in my heart is Sênét and her arms ; she is the daughter of Meammar, she is killing me with her absence. Happily I was inspired to give a flask of palm wine and a scent-bag and a purse to Sênét's nurse, Omm-Nâzil, a kind and excellent old bawd.

Omm-Nâzil took me into Sênét's tent, and hid me behind a curtain : I came out from it when the maiden was dreaming upon her bed that I was there.

Dishevelled and naked, urging aside the final gauzes with her knee, she guarded her breast with those arms of hers, and was whispering : ' I am frightened, nurse, for Soliman is here, and no girl has resisted him. A Jinni told me just now, as he embraced me.'

Five minutes later Sênét had become my wife, and laughed through her tears. A camel with gold stirrups carried us through the night, more swiftly than an Abyssinian griffin.

XIV

Sahala

THE YOUNG OF LIONS AND FALCONS ARE like lions and falcons, Sahala is the only daughter of Mâdrid, the blacksmith, and is quick and hot.

They wanted to marry her to a nigger prince, but the plan offended me. It stung my heart like a scorpion. Sahala was nobly rebellious and complained to Massrour. Therefore, while they were cutting the throats of the sheep for the wedding feast, I picked a quarrel with the tar-faced abomination and sent his head fifteen paces away from me with my scimitar.

Now Sahala smacks me when I come near her, because I have been neglecting her a little.

XV

Wisdom

I AM HAPPY IN THE DESERT WITH MY WOMEN.
I do not smoke any more now, preferring the poems of Horace to the best sorts of Turkish tobacco. In my intervals between love and reading, I hold friendly symposia, pleasant discussions of the far, sweet rhapsodist.

His Ultimate Wish

ANOTHER AUTUMN HAS GONE WITH THE
 A wind behind the sandhills. How often
 shall I see the date harvest come again ?

Where is the Africa of Pomponius Mela and
 Salinius, the Africa of marvel ? Where are the
 Atlantes, who cursed the sun and had no dreams,
 and the headless Blemyes ? Where are the
 Lotus Eaters and the Aegipans and the satyrs ?
 Where are the astronomer elephants, and the
 hyenas who knew magic ?

But the desert endures, and I give myself up
 with a joyous heart to the will of God. And
 this is my last word :

They say that Pindar died in the arms of his
 friend Theoxenes, whose eyes were as bright
 as marble. I would wish to send out my soul
 toward the laughing kiss of a Mimi, a certain
 small Algerian girl.

The Green Paper Lantern

(Written in Chinese by J. Wing, 1876-1925, and selected by himself. These verse renderings were made from his own rough English translations, and were for the most part seen and approved by him.)



Delights

I DID NOT ASK ANOTHER MIRACLE FOR MY DAY
Than you undressing beside me
White under the sunlight ;
But, look, also, the scarlet moss
Has turned the water to wine
In our pool.

Yellow moon goes up
With the smell of night water among rushes.
Evenings that withered like flowers,
We have brought to Barbara
Hours of winter-grey, but also
The green of the evergreen varnished in warm
rain.

2

An emperor of my people
Looked above pillars of green porcelain
And yellow roofs
Up to the faint sky of Spring.

Then he said to the gardeners of glass flowers
' Let the cups be of that blue
Between grey clouds after rain.'

The Green Paper Lantern

How could those venerable eyes
Have seen Barbara's eyes looking
Through the mist above a tea-cup ?

3

The square small garden of my paper
Has turned blue in the night-fall,
But my pen works late among the flowers.

It is written that Li Po, being drunk,
Sought to gather the stars and the moon
To scent the bed-chamber of his mistress
And so was drowned.

And I caught cold yesterday
Cutting wisteria,
Standing in the dew by the North wall,
For Barbara.

The heavy blue waters of the night
Have flooded through the scarlet rocks
Of the sunset,
Filling the valley.

Delights

The flowers are grey as in water,
The scarves of mist quiver like seaweeds.
I expect bubbles in the wake of a bird
That swims across the window.

Barbara walks with a tawny candle
On the pavement of the sea.

Desires

5

MY MIND WAS AN IVORY BOX
Before you came ;

Carved with sayings,
Holding a scentless pellet
Of green burning-gum.

But now
Half the earth is filled
With the sweet eternal smell of pain,
And the box is empty.

6

You have crushed the blood
Of yellow rose petals
Extravagantly between your tall white breasts
For nothing.

You have threaded fire-coloured
And peacock-coloured ribbons in your under-
clothes
For nothing.

Desires

Your safeguard is
That you will not do anything else
For nothing.

When you sat in your dark chair
Ripe with fat fruits of yellow and red silk,
Alive with blue lithe animals,

Pressing your scented rose-ended
Peach-coloured feet against my face,
I was humiliated, as you desired.

But when your male friend
Talked to me about Eastern learning
I was more humiliated.

8

There falls
The summer-tinted coast line,
A miracle of varied cliffs,
Green and brown shadows strongly lighted,
Into a silly changeless sea.

The Green Paper Lantern

And we who intended to be cliffs
And miracles of shadow
Suppose, sweet infinite red-haired ocean
With breasts,
That it is not your fault.

9

A purple flag-flower I looked down
Into the water of your soul,
A silver trickle in the hills.

You wooed down to you and caught
One of my leaves.

I am a splintered mash
Of green and water and mauve
Eaten by the black teeth of the rocks.

A Garden

10

A THOUSAND NASTURIUMS
Blowing the fire-coloured music of their
trumpets,
Putting forward green shields,
Walk up the path beside me.

Under their brass hangers
They move long legs of green
With my slow feet.

In the yellow rooms of hot hearts
They shook their golden hands
When I came back to them.

11

My mauve dancer, columbine,
Hoisted her pale green flare
And spread her trefoil carpets
Of crushed emerald.

She leapt in the wind
On the powdered purple of her feet.

121

The Green Paper Lantern
Below an airy Tyrian skirt
Silken yellow
Leads to white nakedness.

12

You swagger from your dry tree,
Setting apricot vans against the wind,
Hibiscus.

Your heart is blood,
Your white quill comes out of blood
As if you fed on the murder
Of dark roses.

The tips of your glad flames
Rise from a fibre of powdered starlight
And you are merry.

13

Green chochera
Lies like a knot of bullfrogs
In the coloured herbs.

Under equable light
She blares the secret of a birth

A Garden

Blotched by yellow poisoned sun
Dripping through green darkness
Of damp enormous trees.

14

The lily of the lady,
The mild white architecture
Of six doors,

A narrowing shrine
Leads to a faint green mystery,

Behind her sea-tinted altar
Six priests of splintered gold
Wait the annunciatory bee.

Black, Sleep

15

THE SWALLOWS ARE WONDERFULLY.
Quick shuttles passing across my window,

Weaving a silk picture
A fight of poppies against roses.

But after the second pipe
The poppies and roses kiss,
Overwhelmed by the blue air.

16

My old friend
Gave me this Japanese pipe,
This dark key.

Little green women behave amusingly
Along the stem ;
The rosy bowl is carved into that symbol
Which he, my old enlightened friend,
And I and all men venerate.

It is for birthdays only.

124

Black Sleep .

17

Let me not rise
Up with this dark fume too far.

To rise so far is good,
But after that is like chimney smoke
To blow sideways,
Away from this close place I know,

The unstained wood, the bright square glass
And little-girl-flowers of this plot,
And to go sideways
And to see new sickening eternal prospects.

18

There were black flies
When I took out from his place Darkness,
The pipe given by my friend.

Now green honourable birds
Are flying about the stove.

Oh, to compose a message
For the green birds to carry to my friend
Before they turn to flies again.

125

The Green Paper Lantern

19

This smoke will not count time.

They will not wait for me,
And will not start without me,
Their nourishing dinner :

Wicked sweet tongues of nightingales
Cooked in lunar wine,
And mulberries
From pairs of trees bending one to the other
On a shore beyond a sea.

Waters

20

THE BREAKERS FAR TO THE LEFT AT NIGHT,

Foreign cannons splintering long ago
Bamboo junks of the two-sword men.

Lines of black slaves
Running up the beach,
To fall exhausted forward.

They carry bar-silver against their breasts,
It drags them down in this Spanish sea all night.

21

The flower-crowned captain of my boat
Looks down into green and black water.

See, faint gold carp and purple fan-fish
Which float below two eyes,
Black crescents holding child stars of silver.

Over all swims
That lithe white uncaught fish
The March moon.

127

The Green Paper Lantern

22

When we came to the water
Let down like slips 'of white and dark gold
 amber
From fall to fall of the purple hill,

She saw naked immortals
Throwing off green Greek clothes of grass
And diving from a stone.

I saw water let down
Like slips of white and dark gold amber
(Under red mountain-ash berries)
From fall to fall of a purple hill.

23

I went down into the sea by the Pescadores
And climbed on to the white sand
Dripping with green wine.

But, ah, to me the going down
Into that holy, that yellow river,
And the nice observances,
And to eat that night at home.

Waters

24

In the unmoving water
That brims this old quarry of grey stones

I have watched an olive-brown perch
Parading his black bars,
Flirting and floating an open orange fan.

Each stick of it was thorned and cruel
Like the fans of emperors
And young girls.

Delicate Smallness

25

THREE YEARS AGO

I could spin various tops
Better even than the masters of song ;
And for this I think you loved me.

Even if I spin Tu Fu to-day,
The gold green-banded,
Catch him on his cord
And dance him on the wine-cup's edge,

You are away learning from silly lips
The Love me at Evening song.

The wine-cup and the cord remain.

26

Your short hair
Is coloured like the small feathers of a partridge,
And your mind is a white lamp.

And you are always dancing
In that strange light.

130

Delicate Smallness

I would almost rather
Salute the blood-coloured womanhood
Which is your heritage
By a kiss without feeling,
As if it were a small son
Who was born dead.

27

I have painted abominable devils
For your great delight,
Yellow apes with alligators' heads
And scarlet spots ; blue mouths.

But now that you demand
A picture of ourselves playing together,
What shall I put down ?

A band of cherry-coloured fire
Across black paper ?

28

Your childishness is a gold hill,
There is a sheer fall from it
Into the cloudy monotonous sea.

131

The Green Paper Lantern

You dance high in a small blue vesture,
With white arms catching at the sky
And feet hardly touching the gilt earth.

You dance swift and sweet and warm
To the edge and back again.

You will assuredly grow up,

But my child
Shall play bright games always
In a mouldering crimson nursery.

Wine-cups

30

WHEN I FELT NOTHING IN FRONT OF ME
But too much lighted days
I asked my two friends to drink :
One who is married and would be a boy
Going light-footed about the world,
And one who loves a fire-lipped white-breasted
Girl and is lonely. Five green bottles
Emptied of their gold blood
Stand desolate on the floor ;
And one friend has gone away
With light feet about the world,
And one friend lies fire-kissed
Holding tall white breasts ;
And I feel nothing in front of me
But too much lighted days.

31

Not the black thoughtful soul of poppies
Nor any woman nor any god
Turns me for long from a balanced smiling,
A polished cultivation.

But a thing born of yellow grain
Can turn me and ride me and make me mad.

133

The Green Paper Lantern

If life were as long as love
I might not be so docile
Under my rider.

32

Dawn with bubbles in it,
And lilac sunshades that pretend
A fevered interest,

A world of airy amber
In which I walk with girls
Who turn and go,

This is champagne,
A fragment of a moment,
Sad on green grass.

33

Of port I used to think
The blacker wine the better,

But now by winter fires
The white ash chars off
And the hot light red sticky wine

Wine-cups

• Brings to me old emotions of love,
And to you thoughts of orange-coloured
Scented foxes.

•
34

• I want to be purified
Before I touch you with my tongue again,
Sombre wines of old China.

• Even if I drank bowl for blue bowl
With the Seven Drinkers of the Fir-tree Pond
I would be seeking emotion,

You seeking eternity
And they.

FADED LACQUER OF GOLD,
A discreet bird with black plumes
Hovering over debate :

*A great wind
Hardly vexes the green sea . . .
A breath of perfumed air . . .*

In old quiet
Tremulous ivory
Hands.

Pastoral,
Daisy-painted,
The colour of shallow water :

*The sweetest silence
Is the silent fall of scarlet fruit
On high rain-splashed drowsy grass.*

Stained with face-paint,
It hides the absence of a blush
In breathless flaring light.

Fans

37

A little mourning trifle
Of white paper :

*This is my last,
For he is preparing me a fan
Of star-shot silk.*

Angrily broken
By a masterful boy,
Scarcely wept upon.

38

A purple and orange
And green vanity,
A puff of laughing love :

*White fingers
That will pick the violets
In your heart.*

A maimed bird-of-paradise,
It flutters in the fat hand
Of my landlord.

The Green Paper Lantern

59

Itself a green garden
Smiling with companionable flowers,
A silk solitude :

*I abide in my garden,
I abide in my garden,
I abide in my garden.*

Splashed with bitter crimson
On the Imperial sand
Beside that dreamer.

Two Folk Tales of Lao
(Selected and translated from 'Baisers
d'Orient' by Jean Hervez.)

The Wife of the Sweet Player

THERE WAS ONCE A WOMAN MORE FAIR than virtuous, who had a very strong and beautiful young man for her lover, and passed pleasant moments with him without her husband having the least suspicion of it. This husband was a musician of considerable merit, or so at least his wife kept on insisting to him ; and thus it became his custom to take his guitar, which was his favourite instrument, and to sit below his verandah while his wife went to bed, playing sweet melodies that might have melted a buffalo. This was the chosen moment for the unfaithful wife to receive her lover, and the two of them would give themselves up to their dalliance to the sound of music. From time to time she would cry out in ecstasy :

‘ But this is heavenly, my love ! Ah, I am dying ! This is pleasure indeed ! I pray you go on, go on for ever ! ’

And the delighted husband would continue to excel himself, until the lover left his mistress weary with kisses.

They practised this trick for a long time, but at last grew weary of it, as we grow weary of everything. Then the young woman conceived another caprice, which was to deceive her husband during a meal. So when the two were

Two Folk Tales of Lao

eating their rice at table one day, she suddenly rose, saying :

‘What a scatterbrain I am, love. I have forgotten the ginger. Go on with your dinner while I fetch some. I will be back in a moment.’

She went out and met her lover in a neighbouring field, and then returned to her husband.

‘Do you know what happened to me?’ she said. ‘Oh, you would have laughed if you had been with me! While I was pulling up the ginger, the stalk broke in my hands, and I fell down flat on my back. Look, my back is all covered with earth.’

The simple husband laughed with all his heart, and dusted his wife’s back with the best will in the world.

But next day, when she would have played the same trick on him, he stopped her, saying :

‘What, more ginger? You are making fun of me. Where are you going? Tell me the truth.’

‘If you really want to know the truth,’ she answered, ‘I am going to my lover.’

‘That is a very naughty joke,’ he said. ‘I insist on you telling me where you are going. I am not blind, and if you had a lover I would most certainly know all about it.’

‘You do not believe me,’ answered the wife,

The Wife of the Sweet Player

‘but I tell you that next time I go to my lover you yourself shall tuck up my skirt for me.’

‘I pray you stop this evil joking,’ grumbled the man. ‘Of course I do not believe what you say, but your words are painful to me.’

This made the wanton all the more determined to carry out her audacious pleasantry. Next day she told her lover to go and hide in the privy and, after having made this arrangement, went indoors and was pleasant to her husband.

‘You have been so kind to me,’ she said, ‘that I want to spoil you to-day. I am going to make you one of those cakes you love so much.’

Then she set to work to knead the dough with such good will that she became covered almost to the elbows with it.

Suddenly she ceased her kneading and began to twist herself about.

‘Oh, what a terrible colic!’ she cried. ‘I cannot wait any longer. I must run to the privy. Quick, quick, tuck up my skirt, for my hands are all covered with dough!’

As soon as her husband had tucked up her skirt, she disappeared.

Some days later this shameless person said to her man with a laugh :

‘What is your jealousy worth at all? It does not prevent me from deceiving you.’

‘How?’ asked the husband, beginning for the

Two Folk Tales of Lao

first time to feel somewhat uneasy. 'I watch you so carefully that the thing does not seem possible.'

'Pooh, listen! The other day, when I was kneading dough for your cake, did you not yourself tuck up my skirt and let me run to the privy where my lover was waiting for me?'

The unfortunate husband was thrown into amazed confusion. At last, having no further doubt of his wife's unfaithfulness, he consoled himself, saying:

'Surely a woman who wishes to deceive her husband will always succeed in doing so. Nothing can prevent her. God himself has said that man feels his passion three times a day, and woman seven times. Therefore a woman will always deceive a man, whatever the place and occasion.'

The Girl who was Kind to Women

PEIT MOKOT SAW A PRINCESS BATHING, dressed only in the splendour of her nakedness, and was so much moved that when she departed he followed her with his tutor.

Now the latter soon became most anxious to calm the excitement of his pupil, so, when he saw a rich Chinese approaching in an ox wagon, and that the wagon contained a daughter being taken to her betrothed, he hid his pupil in a hut in the wood, telling him to lie down and to cover his naked body carefully. Then he went forward to meet the Chinese, and begged him to allow his daughter to come and help his own young wife, who had been overtaken by the evil of childbirth. The little Chinese girl followed the tutor, and as they went along the latter begged her to let him know, as soon as the child was delivered, whether it were a girl or a boy.

The child went inside the hut, lifted the robes, and recoiled in consternation, crying : ' It is a boy ! It is a boy ! '

Peit Mokot took her in his arms and covered her with kisses, until she was silent : or if not quite silent, only sighing.

In a minute the pretty traveller came forth from the hut, and the tutor asked her :

Two Folk Tales of Lao

‘ Can you tell me its sex for certain ? ’

‘ Quite certainly a boy,’ she answered, laughing.
Then she went to find her father and her
betrothed.

Three Light Turkish Tales

*(Selected and translated from the
volume 'Turquie' by Gustave Le
Rouge in Marius Boisson's 'En-
cyclopédie de l'Amour'.)*



A Singer Among the Persians

IN THE CITY OF HAMADAN THERE LIVED A young Turk of remarkable beauty. He was strong and well-made, sang pleasantly, played finely upon the mandoline, and was welcomed everywhere.

One day he left Hamadan to seek his fortune among strangers, and arrived at the city of Ispahan with his songs and his mandoline for sole provision. Wandering about the streets, he came at last to the shop of an apothecary, who invited him to enter. He accepted this invitation and sat down by the side of the worthy chemist, who was pleased to question him about himself. When the singer had satisfied the Persian's curiosity, the latter gave him food and drink, and then said :

‘ If you wish to make your fortune here, you have only to take your mandoline and walk about the roads of the city. When in any place you perceive the odour of a good kitchen and joyful drinking, enter boldly and say that you are a singer. The guests will be delighted and bid you remain. When you have given them a taste of your talent, your reputation will spread through the whole of Ispahan, and your fortune be made.’

The singer thanked him for his good advice and,

Three Light Turkish Tales

being resolved to follow it, took leave of him at once ; but it was not until noon that he found any persons suitably engaged in eating and drinking. At that hour he entered a narrow lane, to rest himself in the shade of it, and there saw a great and beautiful house, under the wall of which he at once sat down. While he was admiring the richness of the architecture about him, a little window opened above, and he saw a woman's face, as it might have been the moon, shining upon him. At once the delightful owner of it opened the window further and, leaning out, called down :

‘ What are you doing there ? Is there anything you wish ? ’

‘ I am a stranger and a singer,’ he answered.

‘ What would you say, then, if you were given an excellent meal, well moistened, in company of a pretty woman ? ’

‘ That is just what I was seeking, O lady. That is just what I have been hunting for all over the city.’

The woman opened the door, and the singer mounted to an exquisite room, where he was served with a rich collation. He ate with appetite, but by no means forgot to respond to the furtive caresses which the woman bestowed on him. These went so far and so quickly, from kisses to other matters, that the young man was

A Singer Among the Persians

soon at the high tide of happiness. But, while the lovers were thus occupied, the husband returned, and the woman had only just time to hide her guest in a rolled-up carpet, which stood in a corner of the room.

As soon as he entered to his wife, the husband noticed that the cushions of the couch had been disturbed and smelt the odour of spilt wine. He questioned the woman about these things, and she answered calmly: 'One of my friends came to see me, and we drank a little flask of wine together. She has only just gone.'

Her husband believed her and, after a little further conversation, left her to go about his business. Now this unfortuate man was none other than the apothecary who had given the singer such good advice. The latter came out from his carpet and made violent love with his lady until nightfall. As soon as it was dark, she gave him a gold piece as a sign of her great satisfaction and bade him return on the morrow. He swore that he would not fail her and departed.

He went first to a bath and afterwards to a caravanserai, where he slept like one dead all night. It was only next morning that it occurred to him to visit his friend the apothecary. When he did so, the abused husband greeted him

Three Light Turkish Tales

cordially, and was eager to hear how he had fared on the previous day.

'I owe you many thanks, brother,' said the singer, 'for you gave me most excellent advice.' And, with that, he told the whole story in detail.

'We rode without saddle or bridle,' he added with a great laugh, 'and, strange to say, it was the rider who became the steed. We were faring at full gallop when the benighted husband knocked at the door. I had to clap my yataghan back in its sheath, and roll myself up in a carpet. But the silly fellow soon left us, and we went on horning him, with a thousand giggles and kisses.'

This tale gave the apothecary to think, and he bitterly regretted his advice to the singer. Also he began to conceive vehement suspicions concerning the chastity of his wife. Yet he judged it prudent to dissemble, and contented himself with asking the young man what his mistress had said to him when they parted.

'She invited me to return to-day. I am on my way to her now, and only stopped for a moment to give you my news and satisfy you that I was doing well.'

Then the singer departed, as if he had no time to lose.

The apothecary hastened to shut up his shop,

A Singer Among the Persians

and ran to his house. He knocked at the door a few moments after the singer had crossed the threshold.

Taken thus again by surprise, the young woman shut her lover in a great chest and arranged the lid of it carefully. Her husband entered in a state of wild-eyed consternation, and ran straight to the rolled-up carpet in the corner. Then he visited the whole house, room by room, while his wife sat calmly upon the chest, until he became thoroughly confused in mind.

‘It is quite possible,’ he thought, ‘that, though the house described to me was very like my own, it may have been another’s, and the wife may have been another’s and not mine at all.’

Calmed by this reflection, he returned to his shop, while the singer came forth from the chest. He resumed his interrupted conversation with his hostess, and the two of them set themselves to the same exercises as on the day before. When night came, the woman gave her lover a second piece of gold and dismissed him, after making him promise to come again on the morrow.

The singer sought out his friend the apothecary betimes next morning, and was cordially received. When he was asked to detail his doings of the previous day, he said :

‘We were very busy when that idiot of a

Three Light Turkish Tales

husband came again. She hid me in a chest, and sat on it all the time he was turning the house upside down to find me. But when he left, she took off every one of her clothes, and we continued.'

The apothecary now saw that it must indeed have been his own house and his own wife, but he did his best to hide his anger, and only asked: 'What are you thinking of doing to-day?'

'I am going back to my mistress. I only stopped, for a moment, to give you my news and satisfy you that I was doing well.'

With this, he departed.

All the fires of jealousy blazed in the chemist's heart. He shut his shop, ran to his house, and knocked at the door.

The woman told the singer to roll himself up afresh in the carpet, which she had already carried into another room. The apothecary entered, darting furious glances at the big chest, and ran straight across to open it. Then, finding nothing there, he ransacked the house from top to bottom without the least result.

After a moment of indecision, he became convinced once more that the house of which the singer had told him was certainly not his own. He blamed himself for his unworthy suspicions,

A Singer Among the Parsians

and his wife's innocence shone out at him as clear as day. He returned chirping to his shop, and, as soon as he had gone, the singer came forth from his hiding-place, and the games of those two began afresh. On this occasion the woman gave her lover one of her husband's best shirts and then, after arranging a further meeting for the morrow, bade him farewell.

Next morning the singer visited his friend the apothecary and, after giving him a full account of his exploits of the day before, ended by saying :

'My fair was sweetly caressing me with her agile and dimpled hands, when the buffalo of a husband came unexpectedly and was at great pains to examine the chest. Then he rummaged the whole house from top to bottom like a madman ; but after he had gone, I took his wife in my arms again and we practised a thousand tender follies. Look at this shirt : she gave it to me yesterday.'

This time the apothecary was utterly convinced that it was in his own house that the crime had taken place, for he recognised his shirt past peradventure. Yet he put a bridle upon himself and merely asked : 'Are you going back there ?'

'Most certainly I am, dear brother,' answered the singer. 'I only stopped for a moment, to

Three Light Turkish Tales

give you my news and satisfy you that I was doing well.'

With this, he departed.

The apothecary hastened to shut up his shop, and while he was doing so, the singer came to the house of his mistress. He began at once to wrestle joyfully with her and, having succeeded in oversetting her upon the couch, was about to pluck the fruits of victory, when she prevented him, saying: 'That is not the path for to-day.' And she laughed and whispered.

Turning with the agility of an eel, she guided him to his pleasure by a harder and as yet unknown road. This game delighted both of them, and they were swimming upon a sea of blisses when the husband knocked at the door. The woman had only just time to hide her lover in the kitchen oven, and when she opened the door, her hair was in disorder and she was still very red. The apothecary at once brutally trussed her, thinking that he had but to put forth his hand in order to find some still warm proof of her misdemeanour. But his finger encountered no guilty moistness at all. He ought to have explored the other side, but he never thought of doing so. Instead, he ran through the house like a madman, searching every possible receptacle except the kitchen oven.

A Singer Among the Persians

Then he sat down to think, and the result of his cogitation was the resolve not to leave his home until the following morning.

Soon the singer began to get tired of his prison, and at last left it, thinking that the husband had already gone. But happily, before seeking his mistress, he took a peep through a crack in the kitchen door, and was stupefied and ashamed to see his friend the apothecary. Yet, though he was annoyed at the evil turn he had unwittingly done to one who had been kind to him, he still had to think what he should do.

The great door was locked, and he was therefore compelled to escape by the roof, from which he reached the terrace of a neighbouring house. Unhappily the people of it heard him and led him into the presence of the owner, who, being an Afghan, began to rain blows on him.

‘I am not a thief,’ cried the musician, ‘but a stranger who earns his livelihood by singing songs. I heard tell of you and have come to sing you something.’

At once the other folk in the house rescued him from the Afghan, who did not wish to hear any song at all and kept on insisting that he ought at least to stun him. They led him into another room and, after serving him with refreshments, begged him to sing to them. They rejoiced in his songs and in the beauty of his voice,

Three Light Turkish Tales

especially one of the Afghan's little slaves. 'She was so delightful that he fell in love with her.

'When my masters have gone to bed,' she whispered to him, 'I will come to you.'

The singer went on regaling his listeners until late in the evening, and then the Afghan departed, taking his slave with him.

It chanced that, a short while afterwards, the Afghan left his room and the wind blew out the light he carried. In the dark, he made a false step and fell down. Hearing the noise of this, the singer thought that it had been made by the little slave coming to find him. He ran to the man, lifted him, and pressed him tenderly to his heart with many kisses; but the Afghan, who was not accustomed to such sweetness, seized him round the waist and roused the house with his cries, shaking and pummelling his prisoner all the while. Lights were brought, and the singer was recognised. The Afghan dragged him out into the courtyard, bound him to a tree, and departed.

Hearing all this noise in the neighbouring yard, the apothecary leaned out of his window and, perceiving the lights, became once more suspicious. 'The fellow must have escaped that way,' he said to himself.

So he took a ladder and climbed the wall.

While he was coming down on the other side,

A Singer Among the Persians

the little slave, who had slipped from her room under cover of the confusion, freed the singer from his bonds.

As soon as the apothecary gained the courtyard, he lighted a lantern which he had brought with him and went forward, brandishing an enormous cudgel. The singer and the slave climbed up the ladder which the unfortunate husband had left against the wall, entered his house, and threw down the ladder after them. His wife received them in her arms with much laughter and cordially embraced them both.

While she was thus welcoming them, the Afghan, seeing a light in his courtyard, also armed himself with a cudgel, and came down furiously. When he saw that his prisoner had escaped, he at once supposed the apothecary to be an accomplice and fell upon him. The latter put down his lantern and met his foe bravely ; the two heaped curses and blows upon each other.

The pretty slave laughed until she cried and, not wishing to miss one detail of the fight, went to the window. She leaned out of it, with her body arched and her haunches prominent, in so provoking an attitude that the singer accepted it as an invitation, and hastened to profit by it. The girl met his assault with the best grace in the world ; also, without the least touch of

Three Light Turkish Tales

jealousy, the apothecary's excellent wife came near and seconded their efforts with her kisses. The three rejoiced together at their pleasure within doors and at the spectacle of the two champions outside. At the exact moment when the singer came to the peak of delight, carrying the child with him, the Afghan and the chemist, after an equal battering, fell to the ground together in the courtyard.

On the advice of the apothecary's wife, the singer and the little slave left the house at once and departed from Ispahan on the following morning. The two cuckolds lay in bed for a month, one of them eternally persuaded that the other had connived at the abduction of his slave, and the other equally certain that the first had tried to penetrate by night into the virtuous apartments of his wife.

An Idyl at the Bath

I WOKE AT DAYBREAK, AND WEARINESS FROM the orgy of the night before began to torture my head. With considerable effort I walked as far as the baths, my belt loose, and my breast open to the air. Staggering at every pace, I reached my destination and took a reserved place in one of the corners.

And then I saw, God be my refuge !, the scourge of the world. The boy came toward me and dazzled me like the sun in his coming.

His floating hair was in disorder, as the sleep of any friend of his must be. The look upon his face was one of illness, such illness as must lie upon the soul of his lover. His body was whiter than new silver, and as suave to the touch as a withered rose. His body was like a reed that has come to birth.

Was he paste of the moon or essence of the sun ? Was he a crystal stem or a pearl-fruited tree ? His body and his cheeks, his proportion and mouth and breasts, his preference and his tendency and his wine speech : these made a perfection of colour and symmetry, the sum of all grace and beauty ; these made the absolute illumination of all eyes.

But I understood that this youth had some remorse at his heart, or some fire burning it ;

Three Light Turkish Tales

and I became very curious to know what could so afflict a refuge of all graces. Whatever chances, I said to myself, I am going to be brave enough to ask him the cause of his sorrow. What happiness if he answer me kindly, and if he scold me, what delight !

I said suddenly :

‘ O sun of grace ! We would rather have your hair than Tartary ermine. Can a breast that shines so more than silver deserve to be thus oppressed ? When you appear the world is confused and troubled ; but how can confusion and trouble touch you also ? What is the reason of your unhappiness ? Will you not deign of kindness to inform your slave ? ’

When this rose garden heard my words, he answered sighing, as a nightingale near by a rose might answer :

‘ The unhappiness my tongue has made in this world gives me a destiny, and it is as the destiny of a bulbul or of a sugar-worded parakeet.

‘ Listen : we made a feast ; and because a beautiful girl pressed us, we drank glasses of raki. And when the gaiety was at its height, we talked of poems.

‘ They spoke of a singer called Nedim. Ah, may he be taken in the laces of my hair ! An old man read some lines by Nedim. He read

An Idyll at the Bath

them again. And they took my heart so utterly that will and resistance fled from me.

‘ Then I said to myself: I will make a vow, swearing upon the hilt of my sword, that when I meet this Nedim I will give him two kisses.

‘ My grief is that I do not know where Nedim lives, and cannot keep my vow.

‘ And, even if at the end I found him, he might outrage my oath by refusing my kisses. He might be ashamed, or play the hypocrite.

‘ How can I keep my promise? Will it always hang unloosened about my neck? ’

Stupefaction stiffened me as if I had been a wall, and I babbled :

‘ Young flower, let a thousand and a thousand slaves such as this Nedim be destroyed for you ! What magic had his lines that they should have taken an angel out of Paradise ? ’

Then said the youth :

‘ They were lines in praise of Ibrahim Pasha.’

‘ Then it is very strange,’ I answered, ‘ that you should have met me.’

‘ Are you, oh, are you, Nedim ? ’

‘ No, silver rose garden, I am Ibrahim Pasha.’

Approved Adultery

A RICH MERCHANT OF STAMBOUL, AN OLD man and a widower, had one son whom he loved tenderly. As soon as the youth reached the age of puberty, his father married him to a girl of exquisite beauty and considerable wit; but unhappily she had, over and above these qualities, a large share of the fault of her sex.

The marriage had not long taken place when a certain young lord, passing by chance beneath the bride's balcony, saw her unveiled and became lost in love for her. With word and gesture he gave her to understand his passion, and the young woman told him by a sweet smile and a sweeter sigh that she was not insensible.

Next day the lover paid a great sum to an old woman to carry a message of love to the young wife. And the latter received her very ill and cursed her roundly. Then, so that she might not be seen by any one, she bade her leave the house by a disused aqueduct which led from the gardens to the outer world.

When the old woman gave the lover an account of her reception, he was in no way dashed by it, for he perfectly understood that the road by which his messenger had been expelled was the

Approved Adultery

road his clever mistress meant him to take to come to her. . .

He made his way into the gardens by the ruined aqueduct at a suitable hour and, as he had hoped, found his fellow-conspirator waiting for him Beneath the shade of a lemon tree. As soon as she saw him, she threw herself into his arms ; and the two lovers tasted, for a great part of the night, most tender dalliance.

This wanton meeting was followed by a second, and then by a third, and then by an ocean of others, until, little by little, the lovers forgot all prudence and made such frequent use of the aqueduct that the husband's father, who lived in the same house, began to suspect his daughter-in-law of straying from the path of wifely conduct. He spied on the two lovers and surprised them one evening, overcome by amorous fatigue and foolishly allowing themselves the sweets of sleep.

The old man, who was as jealous on his son's account as he would have been on his own, resolved to convict the adulteress in undeniable fashion. Therefore, instead of waking her, he subtilised from her wrist a bracelet which her husband had given her, and took it away with him, that it might be evidence against her.

When she woke, the girl noticed her loss and suspected the author of it to be her father-

Three Light Turkish Tales

in-law, since she knew that her husband was sleeping soundly. Realising her danger, she swiftly dismissed her lover and regained her husband's bed. She woke him from his deep sleep with a few adroit caresses, as if she were a prey to violent desire. Then she led him into the same garden that had been witness of her misconduct, and the two spent the rest of that night on the grass by the side of a murmuring fountain. The man never found his bride so prodigal of mad kisses, or so appreciative of the pleasure which he gave her.

Before re-entering the house, the wicked woman pretended to discover the loss of her bracelet for the first time, and said that she must in some way have dropped it in the grass as she lay by her husband's side.

As soon as it was light, the father-in-law hastened to tell his son of what he had seen and, for proof, showed him the bracelet. But the young man did not believe a word, and only laughed at the accusation.

'It was I myself,' he said, 'lying with my wife in the bower where you found us. She is no more unfaithful than I am. Another time, if you must interfere in someone's affairs, let them be your own. The defence of my honour and the virtue of my wife are solely my concern.'

Approved Adultery

Grieved at such blindness, the father resolved to convince his son by any means.

Now, in the square of that city, there was a porphyry fountain basin which had been built by certain magicians; and the water of it had this virtue, that it could discover lies. If a woman claimed that she was wrongly accused of adultery, she would be thrown into the basin. Then, if she were lying, she went to the bottom, and if she were telling the truth, she floated on the top.

As head of the family, the angry old man called upon his daughter-in-law to submit to this test, and, in her embarrassment, she racked her brains to find some means by which she could appear innocent. At last, after long reflection, she told her lover to dress himself up as a madman and to throw himself into her arms at the very moment when she was about to submit to the fatal water.

The young man, who was anxious above all to save the honour of his mistress, willingly agreed to play the madman in the public square. He ran thither, dressed in eccentric rags, and laughing wildly. Then, profiting by the stupefaction of the gathered crowd, he took his mistress in his arms, and gave her a series of resounding kisses. He was soon driven off her with sticks, and all who witnessed the scene

Three Light Turkish Tales

were certain that the man had escaped from an asylum.

After this the accused went forward to the firm of the basin and, in a firm but modest voice, proclaimed :

‘I swear before the God who hears me and by the Prophet who made our law, and before the husband whom I am said to have offended, and before his father, my accuser and my judge, I swear before all you who hear me, that I have never touched the body of any man except that of the husband Heaven gave me, and that of the unhappy young man who has just insulted me before your eyes. May this water punish me if I have sworn falsely.’

So saying, she threw herself into the magic basin, and the waters bore her up in sight of the people, for the cleverness of her oath made up for the virtue which it lacked. The crowd without exception declared itself for her, and she returned to her house triumphantly, on the arm of the husband who had never doubted her.

The father-in-law held stubbornly to his opinion, for he always seemed to see his daughter-in-law lying on the grass beside a man who was not her husband. Therefore he continued to watch her as vigilantly as before, but the lover, who was much less mad than he had shown himself to the crowd, and his mistress, made wise by

Approved Adultery

the danger she had run, had already put an end to their meetings.

None the less, the old man's activities as a spy did not relax, and he acquired such a reputation for watchfulness that the Sultan came to know of it and thought that here at last was the ideal guard for the royal harem. Being quite sure that age had already produced the same effect on his body as a surgical operation would produce in others, the Sultan did not hesitate to appoint him his Kishlar-aga, or chief eunuch.

Flattered by his important appointment, the old man fulfilled his duties with remarkable severity, so that all trembled before him. His eyes seemed to be able to see clear through from the threshold of the seraglio to the most secret apartment of the furthest odalisk.

One night, as this terrible Kishlar-aga made his usual round, he saw the prince's elephant coming towards him with his keeper on his back. The animal halted just below the balcony of the favourite Sultana, a lattice opened, and the elephant, seizing the woman in his trunk, set her down gently upon his back, by the side of the keeper. After a suitable time, she regained her balcony by the same means she had used in descending.

The Kishlar-aga was at first mightily astonished, and then he could not help laughing at the

Three Light Turkish Tales

excellent goodwill of the animal, at the bravery of the Sultana, and at the good fortune of the keeper. This adventure taught him that the Sultan himself was really in no better case than his own son. Therefore he consoled himself and resolved to keep the Queen's secret better than he had kept his daughter-in-law's.

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