

The Captain of the Janizaries

By JAMES M. LUDLOW

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The considerateness of Ballaban led him to select the house of Phranza as the place to which Morsinia was taken. The noble site and substantial structure of the mansion of the late chamberlain commended it to the sultan for the temporary harem, and the familiar rooms alleviated, like the faces of mute friends, the wildness of the grief of their only familiar captive.

Constantine after his escape from the sultan's tent, where he had been taken for the demented Ballaban, was unable to enter Constantinople before it fell. His heart was torn with agonizing solicitude for the fate of Morsinia. He knew too well the determination of the dauntless girl in the event of her falling into the hands of the Turks. Filling his dreams at night and rising before him as a terrible apparition by day was that loved form a suicide empurpled with its own gore. Yet love and duty led him to seek her, or at least to seek the certainty of her fate. He therefore disguised himself as a Moslem and mingled with the throng of soldiers and adventurers who entered the city under its new possessors. He wandered for hours about the familiar streets that perchance he might come upon some memorial of her. The secrets of the royal harem he could not explore, even if suspicion led his thought thither. The proximity of the residence of Phranza was guarded by the immediate servants of the sultan, so that he was deprived of even the fond misery of visiting the scenes so associated with his former joy.

In passing through one of the narrowest and foulest streets, the only ones that had been left undisturbed by the vandalism of the conquerors, he came upon an old woman, hideous in face and decrepit, whom he remembered as a beggar at the gate of Phranza. From her he learned many stories of the last hours of the siege.

According to her story, she had gone among the first to St. Sophia. When the Moslems entered they tied her by a silken girdle to the person of the grand chamberlain and, amid the jeers of the soldiers, marched them together to the hippodrome. She remembered the sultan as he rode on his horse—how he struck with his battle hammer one of the silver heads of the bronze serpents and cried, "So I smite the heads of the kingdom!" Just as he did so he turned and saw her in her rags tied to the courtly robed lord and in an angry voice commanded that the princely man be loosed from contact with the filthy hag. Phranza was taken away, but nobody cared to take her away. She was trampled by the crowd, but lived. And nobody thought of turning her out of her hovel home. She was as safe as a rat when the robbers have killed the nobler inmates of a house.

The woman said that she had heard that the daughter of Phranza was sent away somewhere to an island home. But the Albanian princess—yes, she knew her well, for no hand used to drop so bountifully the alms she asked or said so kindly, "Jesu pity you, my good woman!" as did that beautiful lady. The beggar declared that she stood near her by the altar in St. Sophia. "She looked so saintly there! There was a real aureole about her head as she prayed, so she was a saint indeed. Then she raised her dagger!" But the wretched watcher could watch no longer, though she heard her cry so wild that she would never cease to hear it.

The beggar ceased her story. All her words had cut through her listener's heart as if they had been daggers.

"It is well!" he said. "I will go to Albania. Among those who loved her I will worship her memory, and, under Castriot, I will seek my revenge."

CHAPTER XXX.

MORSINIA'S fears and her horror at the anticipated life in the harem were not confirmed by its actual scenes. Except for the constant surveillance of the Nubian eunuchs and female attendants there was no restriction upon her liberty. She passed through the familiar corridors and rested upon the divan in what had been her own chamber in better days. Other female captives became her companions, but among them were none of those belonging to Constantinople. Suburban villages were represented, but most of the odalisks were Circassian beauties whose conduct did not indicate that they felt any shame in their condition.

To Morsinia's diversion one was introduced into the harem who spoke her own Albanian tongue. This newcomer was of undoubted beauty, so far as that quality could be the product of merely physical elements. It was of the kind that might bind a god on earth, but could never help a soul to heaven.

This woman's vanity did not long keep back the story of her life. She told of her conquest of the village swains who fought for the possession of her charms, of the devotion of an Albanian prince who took her dowryless in preference to the ladies of great family and fortune and would have bestowed upon her the heirship of his estates, of how she was stolen away from the great castle by a company of Turkish officers, who afterward fought themselves for the privilege of presenting her to the mother of the sultan, for it was about the time of the Bamedian feast, when the

sultan's mother made an annual gift to her son of the most beautiful woman she could secure. The vain captive declared that the jealousy of the odalisks at Adrianople had led the kishlar aga to send her here to Constantinople.

"And who was the Albanian nobleman whose bride you had become?" asked Morsinia.

"Oh, one who is to be king of Albania one day, the vojvode Amesa."

"Ah," said Morsinia, "this is news from my country! When was it determined that Amesa should be king?"

"Oh, every one speaks of it at the castle as if it were well understood. And when he becomes king then he will claim me again from Mahomet, though he must ransom me with half his kingdom. Yes, I am to be a queen, and indeed I may be one already, for perhaps Lord Amesa is now on the throne. And that is the reason I wear the cord of gold in my hair, for one day my royal lover will put the crown here."

The bedizened beauty rose and paced to and fro through the great salon. The pride which gave the majestic toss to her head, however it would have marred that ethereal form which the inner eye of the moralist or the Christian always sees and which is called character, only gave an additional charm to her, as the delicate yet stately comb of the peacock adds to the fascination of that bird.

As the other women gazed at this self assumed queen of the harem the green fire of jealousy flashed alike from black eyes and blue. The straight, thin noses of the Greeks for the moment forgot their classic models and dilated as if in rivalry, while the straight mouth of the daughter of the Nile writhed in indescribable curves, indicative of commingled wrath, hatred, pique and scorn.

At this moment the purple hangings which separated the salon from the open court were held aside by the silver staff of the eunuch in charge, and the young sultan stood as a spectator of the scene.

"Ah, Tamlich," cried he, addressing the black eunuch, "you were right in saying that the great haremlik at Adri-



The young sultan stood as a spectator of the scene.

anople, with its thousand goddesses, could not rival this temporary one for the fairness of the birds you have caged in it."

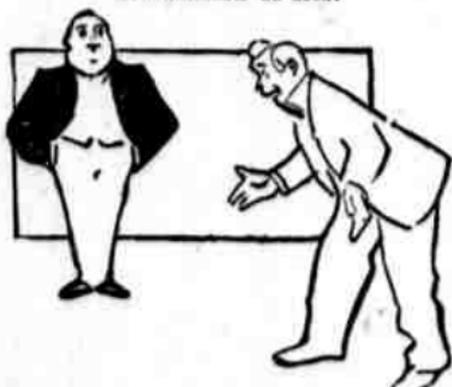
The women made a salutation with the right hand just sweeping the floor and then pressed consecutively to the heart, the lips and the forehead, a movement denoting reverence and at the same time giving field for the display of the utmost grace of motion.

The padishah passed among these his slaves with the license which betokened his absolute ownership, stroking their hair and toying with their persons according to his amiable or insolent caprice. Morsinia, however, was spared this familiarity. The sultan himself colored slightly as he addressed her a few words in Greek, of which language, in common with several others, he knew enough to act as his own interpreter. His questions were respectful, all limited to her comfort in her new home. With Elissa, the queenly Albanian, he was at once on terms of intimacy.

As the sultan withdrew the eunuch Tamlich remarked to him:

"My surmise of your excellency's judgment was verified. Said I not that the two Arnauts were the fairest? And did I not behold your majesty gaze longest upon them?"

No Friend of His.



"I hear that you said I was the biggest fool in town."

"No, sir; I did not. I do not credit you with enough ingenuity to take front rank in any profession."—Chicago Tribune.