

# The Lady of the Lattice

By Sax Rohmer

The interior of the room was very dark, but with the aid of the electric torch which I carried I was enabled to form a fairly good impression of its general character, and having now surveyed the entire house I had concluded that it might possibly serve my purpose. The real ownership of many native houses in Cairo is difficult to establish, and the unvarnished Egyptian from whom I had procured the keys may or may not have been entitled to let the premises. However, he had the keys; and that in the Near East is a sufficient evidence of ownership. My viewing the place at night was dictated by motives of prudence; for I did not propose unduly to impress my personality upon the inhabitants of the Darb el-Ahmar.

Curiosity respecting the outlook at the rear now led me to enter the deep recess at one end of the room, which boasted an imperfect but not unpicturesque *mushrabîyeh* window. Moonlight slanted down into the narrow lane which the window overhung and cast a quaint fretwork shadow upon the dusty floor at my feet. Idly I opened one of the little square lattices and peered down into the shadowy gully beneath. The lane was silent and empty, and I next directed my attention to a similar window which protruded from the adjoining house.

A panel corresponding to mine stood open also in the neighboring window; and by means of a soft light in the room I detected the head and shoulders of a woman, who, her arm resting upon the ledge, surveyed the vacant night.

By reason of her position, whilst her hand and arm lay fully in the moonlight, her face and figure were indistinct. I, on the contrary, was clearly visible to her, and although I knew that she must have seen me she made no effort to withdraw. On the contrary, she leaned artlessly forward as if to gaze upon the stars, permitting me a sight of her unveiled face and of a portion of her shapely neck.

Her eyes, as is usual with Egyptian women, were large and fine, and as is usual with all women, she was aware of the fact, casting glances upward and to the right and left calculated to exhibit their beauty.

The coquetry of her movements was unmistakable; and when, lifting a pretty arm, she brushed aside a lock of hair which overhung her brow and uttered a tremulous sigh, I perceived that I had found favor in her sight.

And indeed the graceful gesture had inclined my heart towards her; for it had served to reveal not only the symmetry of her shape but the presence upon her arm, immediately above the elbow, of a magnificent bangle in gold and lapis-lazuli, which, if I might trust my judgment, was fashioned no later than the XIXth dynasty! Clearly the house next door, and its occupant, were the property of some man of wealth and taste.

There is a maxim in the East—"Avoid the veil"; and to this hitherto I had paid the strictest attention. Soft glances from *harêm* windows usually leave me cold. But the presence of an armlet finer than anything in the Treasure of Zagazig placed a new complexion upon this affair, and the connoisseur within me took the matter out of my hands.

Across the intervening patch of darkness our glances met; the girl's dark lashes were lowered demurely, then raised again, and the boldness of my unflinching gaze was rewarded by a smile. Thus encouraged:—

“O daughter of the moon,” I whispered fancifully in Arabic, “condescend to speak to one whom the sight of thy beauty hath enslaved.”

“I fear to be discovered, Inglisi,” came the soft reply; “or willingly would I converse with thee, for I am lonely and wretched.”

She sighed again and directed upon me a glance that was less wretched than roguish. Evidently the adventure was much to her liking.

“Let me solace your loneliness,” I replied; “for assuredly we can conceive some plan of meeting.”

She lowered her eyes at that, and seemed to hesitate; then—

“In the roof of your house,” she whispered, often glancing over her shoulder into the room beyond, “is a trap—which is bolted. . . .”

Footsteps sounded in the lane beneath—whereat the vision at the window vanished and the lattice was closed; but not before the girl had intimated by a gesture that I was to remain.

Discreetly withdrawing into my dusty apartment, I endeavored to make out the form of the intruder who now was passing underneath the window; but the density of the shadows in the lane rendered it impossible for me to do so. He seemed to pause for a the and I imagined that I could see him staring upward; then he passed on and silence again claimed that deserted quarter of Cairo.

For fully half an hour I waited, and was preparing to depart when a part of the shadows overlying the projecting window seemed to grow blacker, and I realized with joy that at last the lattice was reopening, but that the room within was now in darkness. Whilst I watched, remaining scrupulously invisible, a small parcel deftly thrown dropped upon the floor at my feet—and my neighbor’s window was reclosed.

Closing my own, I picked up the parcel. It proved to be a small ivory box, which at some time had evidently contained *kohl*, wrapped in a piece of silk and containing a note. Returning to the lower floor I directed the light of my electric torch upon this charmingly romantic billet. It was conceived in English and characterized by the rather alarming *naiveté* of the Oriental woman. I give it in its entirety.

“To-morrow night, nine o’clock.”

## II

My cautious inquiries respecting the house in the Darb el-Ahmar led only to the discovery that it belonged to a mysterious personage whose real identity was unknown even to his servants; but this did not particularly intrigue me; for in the East the maintenance of two entirely self-contained establishments is not more uncommon than in countries less generously provided in the matter of marriage laws. After all the taking of a second wife does not so much depend on a man’s religious convictions as upon his first wife.

Reflecting upon the probable history of the armet of lapis-lazuli, I returned to Shepherd’s in time to keep my appointment with Joseph Malaglou—a professed Christian who claimed to be of Greek parentage. I may explain here that it was necessary to provide for the safe conduct through the customs and elsewhere of those cases of “Sheffield cutlery” which actually contained the scarabs, necklaces, and other “antiques,” the sale of which formed a part of the business of my firm. Joseph Malaglou had hitherto successfully conducted this matter for me, receiving the goods and storing them at his own warehouse; but for various reasons I had decided in future to lease an establishment of my own for this purpose.

He was waiting in the lounge as I entered, and had he been less useful to me I think I should have had him thrown out; for if ever a swarthy villain stepped forth from the pages of an illustrated "penny dreadful," that swarthy villain was Joseph Malaglou. He approached me with outstretched hand; he was perniciously polite; his ingratiating smile fired my soul with a lust of blood. Fortunately, our business was brief.

"The latest consignment is in the hands of my agent at Alexandria," he said, "and if you are still determined that the ten cases shall be despatched to you direct, I will instruct him; but you cannot very well have them sent *here*."

He shrugged and smiled, glancing all about the lounge.

"I have no intention of converting Shepherd's Hotel into a cutlery warehouse," I replied. "I will advise you in the morning of the address to which the cases should be despatched."

Joseph Malaglou was palpably disturbed—a mysterious circumstance, since, whilst I had made no mention of reducing his fees, under the new arrangement he would be saved trouble and storage.

"As delay in these matters is unwise," he urged, "why not have the goods despatched immediately, and consigned to you at my address?"

There was reason on the man's side, for I had not yet actually leased the house in the Darb el-Ahmar; therefore—

"I will sleep on the problem," I said, "and communicate my decision in the morning."

I stood on the steps watching him depart, a man palpably disturbed in mind; indeed his behavior was altogether singular, and could only portend one thing—knavery. I think it highly probable that the Ottoman Empire had a certain claim upon Joseph Malaglou. He was one of those nondescript brutes whose mere existence is a menace to our rule in the Near East. He openly applauded British methods, and was the worst possible advertisement for the cause he claimed to have espoused. Altogether he left me in an uneasy mood; so that shortly after the third, or daybreak, call to prayer had sounded from Cairo's minarets on the morrow, I had arranged to lease the house in the Darb el-Ahmar for a period of three months, in the name of one Ahmed Ben Tawwab, a mythical friend, and had instructed Joseph Malaglou accordingly.

Other affairs claimed my attention throughout the day; but dusk discovered me at my newly acquired house in the quaint street adjoining the Bâb ez-Zuwêla. I procured the keys from the venerable old thief who had leased me the premises and learned from him that a representative of Joseph Malaglou had been admitted to the house earlier in the evening, in accordance with my instructions, and had delivered a load of boxes there.

Thus, on opening the door, I was not surprised to find the ten cases from Alexandria lying within, neatly labelled:

To Ahmcd Ben Tawwab,  
Darb el-Ahmar,  
Sukkarîya,  
Cairo.

Ascending to the top floor, I mounted the rickety ladder and unbolted and opened the trap. A cautious glance to the right revealed the fact that little difficulty existed in passing from roof to roof; for in Egyptian houses these are flat and arc used for various domestic purposes. I consulted my watch: the hour of the tryst was come.

And even as I learned the fact, from my neighbor's roof sounded the faint creaking of hinges and out into the moonlight stepped an odd figure—that of the lady of the lattice, dressed in a “European” blue serge costume which had obviously been purchased, ready made, in the bazaars! She wore high-heeled French shoes upon her pretty feet and her picturesque hair was concealed beneath a large Panama hat, from the brim of which floated one of those voluminous green veils dear to the heart of touring woman and so arranged as to hide her face. Only the gleam of her eyes and teeth was visible through the gauze.

I assisted her to step across, wondering since she was thus attired, to what crazy expedition I was committed.

“Please do not kiss me,” she whispered, speaking in moderately good English, “Fatimah is listening!”

Such ingenuousness was rather alarming.

“But,” I replied, “you have left the trap open.”

“It is all right. Fatimah has locked the door of my room and will admit no one, because I have a headache and am sleeping!”

Resting her hand confidently in mine, she descended the ladder into the adjoining house, and, removing the veil from her face, looked up at me.

“You will be kind to me, will you not?” she asked.

I suppose a lengthy essay upon the mentality of Oriental womanhood would serve no purpose here, therefore I refrain from inserting it. Seated upon the chests in the room below, Mizmûna—for this was her name—confided her troubles with perturbing frankness. She had conceived a characteristically Eastern and sudden infatuation for my society; nor am I prepared to maintain that she would have remained obdurate to anyone else who had been in a position to unbolt the door which offered the only chance of escape from her prison. The house of mystery, she informed me, belonged to a person styling himself Yûssuf of Rosetta (a name that sounded factitious) and she hated him. For two months, I gathered, she had been in Cairo, during which she had never passed beyond the walls of the neighboring courtyard. And the object of her nocturnal adventure was innocent enough; she wanted to see the European shops and the tourists passing in and out of the big hotels in the Shâria Kâmel Pasha!

### III

It was as we passed along the Shâria el-Maghribi, where I had pointed out the St. James's Restaurant, better known as “Jimmy's,” I remember, that Mizmûna uttered a little, suppressed cry, and clutched my arm sharply.

“Oh!” she whispered fearfully, “it is Hanna! and he has seen me!”

With frightened, fascinated eyes she was staring across the street, apparently at a group of curiously muffled natives—and her whole body was trembling.

“Quick!” she said, pulling me urgently, “take me back! if they find me they will kill me!”

“But if they have already seen you—”

“Oh! take me back,” she entreated piteously. “Hanna must not find out where I live.”

Here was mystery; but evidently my first dreadful theory that Hanna was Mizmûna's husband had been incorrect. Apparently he was not even acquainted with Yûssuf of Rosetta. But whoever or whatever he might be, I silently cursed the lapis armlet which had led me to involve myself in his affairs, as I hurried my companion across the Place de l'Opera and homeward.

We were come indeed unmolested but breathless, as near our destination as that nameless street beside the Mosque of Muayyâd, when Mizmûna suddenly stopped, uttered a stifled shriek, and—

“Oh, save me!” she panted, winding her arms about my neck. “Look! Look! in the shadow of the mosque door!”

Panic threatened me for one fleeting moment; for this part of Cairo is utterly deserted at night and the mystery of the thing was taking toll of my nerves; then firmly unclasping the trembling arms, I pushed Mizmûna behind me and snatched out my Colt automatic . . . as a group of muffled figures became magically detached from the shadows that had hidden them; and began silently to advance.

I raised the pistol.

“*Usbur!*” I cried “*âuz eh?*” (Stop! what do you want?)

They halted at once; but no answering voice broke the uncanny silence in which they regarded me. Mizmûna plucked at my arm.

“Quick! Quick!” she whispered tremulously, “the keys! the keys!”

I was swift to grasp her meaning.

“My right pocket!” I whispered in answer.

The girl’s shaking hand groped for the keys, found them; and, uttering no parting word, Mizmûna darted off along the Sukkarîya, which here bisects the Darb el-Ahmar. An angry muttering arose from the little knot of oddly muffled figures, but not one of them had the courage to attempt a pursuit of the fugitive. Keeping my back to the wall of the mosque and feeling along it with one hand outstretched, I began to back away from the attacking party; intending to take to my heels along the first lane I came to.

This plan was sound enough; its weakness lay in the fact that I could make no proper survey of that which lay immediately behind me. The result was that I backed into someone who must have been stealthily approaching from the rear.

I knew nothing of his presence until he suddenly threw himself upon me from behind, and I was down on my face in the dust! My pistol was jerked out of my hand, and, still preserving that unbroken disconcerting silence, the muffled group bore down upon me.

I gave myself up for lost. My unseen assailant, who seemingly possessed wrists of steel, jerked my right hand up into the region of my shoulder-blades and pinioned my left arm so as to render me helpless as an infant. Then two of the muffled Nubians—for Nubians the moonlight now showed them to be—raised me to my feet, and the grip from behind was removed.

That I had unwittingly intruded upon the amours of some wealthy and unscrupulous pasha I no longer doubted; and knowing somewhat of the ways of outraged lovers of the Fast, the mental vision which arose before me was unpleasing to contemplate. Yet even the extravagant picture which my imagination had painted fell short of the ferocious reality. For even as I was lifted upright, in the grasp of my huge guards, a door in the side of the neighboring mosque burst open, and there sprang into view an excessively tall, excessively lean and hawk-faced old man carrying a naked scimitar in his hand.

He possessed eyes like the eyes of an eagle, and a thin, hooked nose having dilated, quivering nostrils. In three huge strides he reached me, towered over me like some evil *ginnee* of Arabian lore, and raised his gleaming scimitar with the unmistakable intention of severing my head from my trunk at a single blow!

I think I have never experienced an identical sensation in my life; my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth; my heart suspended its functions; and I felt my eyes start forward in their sockets.

I had not thought my constitution capable of such profound and helpless fear, nor had I hitherto paid proper respect to the memory of Charles I. I would gladly have closed my eyes in order that I might not witness the downward sweep of the fatal blade, but the lids seemed to be paralysed. Never whilst memory serves me can I forget one detail of the appearance of that frightful old devil; and never can I forget my gratitude to that unseen captor, the man who had seized me from behind, and who now, alone, averted the blade from my neck.

Over my head he lunged—with an ebony stick—and skilfully; so that the pointed ferrule came well and truly into contact with the knuckles of my would-be executioner. The weapon fell, jingling, at my feet . . . and a slim, black-robed figure was suddenly interposed between myself and the furious old Arab.

It was Abû Tabâh!

Dignified, unruffled, his classically beautiful face composed and resembling, in the moonlight, beneath the snowy turban, that of some young prophet, he stood, one protective hand resting upon my shoulder, and confronted my assailant. His eyes were aglow with the eerie light of fanaticism.

“It is written that the wrath of fools is the joy of Iblees,”<sup>1</sup> he declared.

Their glances met in conflict, the eagle eyes of my aged but formidable enemy glaring insanely into the fine, dark eyes of Abû Tabâh. The Arab was by no means quelled; yet presently his glance fell before the hypnotic stare of the mysterious *imâm*.

“The Prophet (may God be kind to him) spared not the despoiler!” he said heavily. “With these, my two hands”—he extended the twitching, sinewy members before Abû Tabâh—“will I choke the life from the throat of the dog who wronged me.”

Abû Tabâh raised his hand sternly

“This matter has been entrusted to *me*,” he said, staring down the enraged old man. “If you would have me abandon it, say so; if you would have me pursue it, be silent.”

For five seconds the other sustained the strange gaze of those big, mysterious eyes, then folded his arms upon his breast, audibly gnashing his large and strong-looking teeth and averting his head from my direction in order that spleen might not consume him. Abû Tabâh turned and confronted me.

“Explain the cause of your presence here,” he demanded, continuing to speak in Arabic, “and unfold to me the whole truth respecting your case.”

“My friend,” I replied, steadily regarding him, “I am eternally your debtor; but I decline to utter one word for explanation until these fellows unhand me and until I am offered some suitable excuse for the outrageous attack upon my person.”

Abû Tabâh performed his curiously Gallic shrug of the shoulders—and pointed, with his ebony cane, to my pinioned arms. In a trice the Nubians fell back, and I was free. The infuriated old man directed upon me a glance that was bloodily ferocious, but—

“O persons of little piety,” I said, “is it thus that a true Moslem rewards the generous impulse and the meritorious deed? To-night a damsel in distress, flying from a brutal captor, solicited my aid. I was treacherously assaulted ere I could escort her to a place of safety, and all but murdered by the man who would appear to be that damsel’s natural protector. Alas, I fear to contemplate what may have befallen her as a result of such vile and foolish conduct.”

Abû Tabâh slightly inclined his body resting his slim, ivory hands upon his cane; his face remained perfectly tranquil as he listened to this correct, though misleading statement; but—

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<sup>1</sup> Satan.

“Ah!” cried the old man of the scimitar, adopting an unpleasant, crouching attitude, “perjured liar that thou art! Did I not see with mine own eyes how she embraced thee? O, son of a mange, that I should have lived to have witnessed so obscene a spectacle. Not content with despoiling me of this jewel of my *harêm*, thou dost parade her abandonment and my shame in the public highways of Cairo! . . .”

In vain Abû Tabâh strove to check this tirade. Step by step the Sheikh approached closer; syllable by syllable his voice rose higher.

“What!” he shrieked, “is it for this that I have offered five thousand English pounds to whomsoever shall restore her to me! Faugh! I spit upon her memory!—and though I pursue thee to the Mountains of the Moon, across the Bridge Es-Sîrat, and through the valley of Gahennam, lo! my hour will come to slay thee, noisome offal!”

He ceased from lack of breath, and stood quivering before me. But at last I had grasped the clue to this imbroglio into which fate had thrust me.

“O misguided man,” I replied, “grief hath upset thine intelligence. Again I tell thee that I sought to deliver the damsel from her persecutor, and, perceiving an ambush, she clung to me as her only protector. Thou are demented. Let another earn the paltry reward; I will have none of it.”

I turned to Abû Tabâh, addressing him in English. “Relieve me of the society of this infatuated old ruffian,” I said, “and accompany me to some place where I can quietly explain what I know of the matter.”

“Assuredly I will accompany you to such a spot,” he answered suavely; “for whilst, knowing your character, I do not believe you to be the abductor of the damsel Mizmûna, a warrant to search your house was issued an hour ago, on a charge of *hashish* smuggling!”

#### IV

There are certain shocks that numb the brain. This was one of them. My recollection of the period immediately following those words of Abû Tabâh is hazy and indistinct. My narrow escape from decapitation at the hands of the ferocious Arab assassin and the tangled love-affairs of that aged Othello became insignificant memories. (I seem to recollect that we left him in tears.)

My next clear-cut memory is that of walking beside the mysterious *imâm* along the Darb el-Ahmar and of stopping before the closed door of my newly acquired premises!

The street was quite deserted again. Those muffled Nubians who seemed to constitute a body-guard for my inscrutable companion had disappeared in company with the bereaved Sheikh.

“This is your house?” said Abû Tabâh sweetly. My habit of thinking before I speak or act asserted itself automatically.

“I recently leased it on another’s behalf,” I replied.

“In that event,” continued the *imâm*, “unless the information lodged with me to-night prove to be inaccurate, that other must speedily proclaim himself.”

He tested the cumbersome lock, and, as I knew would be the case, since Mizmûna had recently entered, found it to be unfastened, opened the door and stepped in.

“Have you a pocket lamp?” he asked.

I pressed the button of my electric torch and directed its rays fully upon the stack of boxes. It was the great sage, Apollonius of Tyana, who said “loquacity has many pitfalls, but silence

none"; therefore I silently watched Abû Tabâh consulting the label on the topmost chest. Presently—

"Ahmed Ben Tawwab," he read aloud; "is that the name of the friend on whose behalf you secured a lease of this house?"

"It is," I answered.

"If you will rest the light upon this box and assist me to open one of the others, I shall be obliged to you," said Abû Tabâh.

Knowing, as I did, that this strange man was in some way connected with the native police and with the guardianship of Egyptian morals, I recognized refusal to be impolitic if not impossible. But, as we set to work to raise the lid of the chest, my mind was more feverishly busy than my fingers.

Ere long our task was successful, and the contents of the chest lay exposed. These were: two hundred Osiris statuettes, twelve one-pound tins of mummy heads . . . and *fifty packets of hashish*.

Silence was no effort to me now; I was dumbfounded. The musical voice of my companion broke in upon my painful reverie.

"The information upon which I now am acting," he said, "reached me to-night in the form of a letter, bearing no address and no signature. The suppression of this vile *hashish* traffic is so near to my heart that I immediately secured the necessary powers to search the premises named, and was on my way hither when I observed you (although I did not at once recognize you) in the act of escaping from a group of my servants who had been detailed, some weeks ago, to trace a missing damsel known to be in Cairo. Concerning your share in that affair I await a full statement from your own lips; concerning your share in this I can only say that unless Ahmed Ben Tawwab comes forward by tomorrow and admits his guilt, I must apply to the British agent for a formal inquiry. Is there anything that you would wish to say, or any action you desire that I should take?"

I turned to him in the dim light. Habitually I am undemonstrative, especially with natives. But there was a nobility and an implacable sense of justice about this singular *religieux* which conquered me completely.

"Aba Tabâh," I said, "I thank you for your friendship. I have committed a grave folly; but I am neither an abductor nor a *hashish* dealer. This is the work of an unknown enemy, and already I have a theory respecting his identity."

"Can I aid you—or do you prefer that I leave you to pursue this clue in your own way?" he asked tactfully.

"I prefer to work alone."

"The affair is truly mysterious," he admitted, "and I purpose to spend the night in meditation respecting it. After the hour of morning prayer, therefore, I will visit you. *Lîltâk sa'îda*, Kernaby Pashma."

"*Lîltâk sa'îda*, Abû Tabâh," I said, as he stepped out of the door.

Slowly and stately the *imâm* passed down the street; and the *ginnee* of solitude reclaimed that deserted spot. A night watchman, *nebbut* on shoulder, passed along the distant Sukkarîya. A dog howled.

I re-entered the doorway conscious of a sudden mental excitement; for an explanation of the anonymous letter had just presented itself to my mind. The owner of the neighboring house must have detected my rendezvous with his lady-love, have investigated the contents of the cases, and denounced me from motives of revenge! That the villainous Joseph Malaglou had been in the

habit of smuggling *hashish* into Egypt in my cases of “cutlery” was evident enough and accounted for his reluctance to fall in with the new arrangement; but my bemused brain utterly failed to grapple with the problem of why, knowing their damning contents, he had permitted these ten cases to be delivered at my address. Moreover, how my worthy neighbor—who had evidently abducted Mizmûna from the old man of the scimitar—had learned my real name was another mystery which I found no leisure to examine. For I had but just set foot again within the ill-omened place when there came a patter of swift, light footsteps—and out from behind the fatal stack of boxes ran Mizmûna, and threw herself into my arms!

“Oh, my friend, my protector!” she cried distractedly, “what shall I do? Yûssuf has discovered our plot! Fatimah, that mother of calamities, has betrayed me, and I dare not return! I am an outcast; for although I was stolen from the Sheikh Ismail without my consent, how can I hope for his forgiveness?”

Such a flood of sorrows and confidences overwhelmed me, and I placed a silent but deathless curse upon the lapis armlet which had brought me to this pass. Mizmûna sobbed upon my shoulder.

“Yûssuf has planned your ruin as well as mine,” she said brokenly. “For it was he who denounced you to the Magician.” (As “the Magician” Abû Tabâh was known and feared throughout Lower Egypt.) “Oh that I might return to the house of Ismail where I lived in luxury in a marble pavilion, guarded by Hanna and a hundred negroes, where I possessed the robes of a princess and was laden with costly jewels!”

So very human and natural an ambition met with my hearty approval, and, upon consideration of the word-picture of his domestic state, the old man of the scimitar rose immensely in my esteem. How my malevolent neighbor had succeeded in abducting Mizmûna from such a fortress I failed to imagine. But I began to see my way more clearly and hope was reborn in my bosom.

“Fear nothing, child,” I said to the weeping girl. “You shall return to your marble pavilion and to the care of that worthy, if somewhat hasty man, from whose arms you were torn. And now inform me—where is Yûssuf?”

Mizmûna raised her face and looked up at me, her long lashes wet with tears, but the slow, childish smile of the Eastern woman already curving her red lips.

“He is in his own room destroying papers,” she said.

“Who told you this?”

“Ali, the *bowwab*, who is faithful to me—and who hates Fatimah.”

“Is the trap rebolted?”

“I know not.”

“Remain here until I return,” I said, seating her upon one of the boxes. “Where are my keys!”

“I bid them upon the ledge of the window, beside the door yonder.”

Taking then from this simple “biding-place,” I locked the door to give Mizmûna courage, and, taking the lamp with me, began to mount the stairs, first assuring myself of the presence in my pocket of my Colt automatic, which Abû Tabâh had restored to me.

The ray of my lamp shining out ahead, I came to the crazy ladder giving access to the trap. I climbed up, raising the trap, and gazed upon the jeweled dome of midnight Egypt. Dire necessity spurred me, and I walked across to the adjoining trap, care-fully inserted two fingers in the iron ring and pulled. It was not fastened below! Inch by inch I raised it, and, finding the room beneath it to be in darkness, opened the trap fully and descended the ladder.

I flashed the light quickly about the place; then stood staring at what it revealed. My heart began to beat rapidly, for in that dirty attic I had found salvation . . . and a further clue to the mystery of all my misfortunes.

It was a *hashish* warehouse!

Taking off my shoes, I thrust one into either pocket of my jacket, and, perceiving that the house was constructed on a plan identical with that adjoining it, I crept downstairs to the apartment of the *mushrabîyeh* window. A heavy curtain was draped in the doorway, but I could see that the room within was illuminated.

I drew the curtains slowly aside and peeped in. I saw an apartment that had evidently been furnished very luxuriantly, but which now was partially dismantled. In the recess formed by the window a low table was placed, bearing a shaded lamp. The table was littered with papers, account books and ledgers; and, seated thereat, his back towards the door, was a man who figured feverishly. I stepped into the room.

“Good evening, Yûssuf of Rosetta,” I said; “you do well to set your affairs in order.”

## V

Swiftly as though a serpent had touched him, the man in the recess leaped to his feet and twisted about to confront me.

I found myself looking into a hideous, swarthy face—blanched now to the lips, so that the cunning black eyes glared out as from a mask—into the hideous swarthy face of *Joseph Malaglou!*

The store of *hashish* in the upper room had somewhat prepared me for this discovery; yet, momentarily, the consummate villainy of the Greek had me bereft of speech. As I stood there glaring at him, he began furtively to grope with one hand along the edge of the *dîwan* behind him. Then, suddenly, he became aware of the pistol which I carried—and abandoned the quest of whatever weapon he had sought, swallowing audibly.

“So, my good Malaglou,” I said, “you sought to make me responsible for your sins, my friend? I perceive now how the Fates have played with me. My very first conversation with your charming protégée—”

He bit savagely at his black moustache, advanced upon me; then, his gaze set upon the Colt, he stood still again.

“. . . was reported to you by the traitorous Fatimah,” I continued evenly; “and, when, on the morrow, I advised you of my new address, the identity of the hitherto unknown Romeo who had raised his eyes to your Juliet became apparent. You doubtless had designed to unpack my boxes for me as you have been in the habit of doing; but green-eyed jealousy suggested how, by the sacrifice of only one consignment of *hashish*, you might wreak my ruin. I disapprove of your morals, Malaglou. My own code may be peculiar, but it does not embrace *hashish* dealing; therefore, Malaglou, you are about to take a sheet of note-paper—bearing your office heading—and write from my dictation. . . .”

“And suppose I refuse? You dare not shoot me!”

“You little know my true character, Malaglou. But I should not shoot you, as you say; I should introduce you to a gentleman who is very anxious to make your acquaintance—the venerable Sheikh Ismail.”

The effect of this remark greatly exceeded my most sanguine expectations. I think I have never seen a man so pitifully frightened.

“The Sheikh . . . Ismail!” gasped Joseph Malaglou. “He is in Cairo?”

“He has generously offered me five thousand pounds for your name and address.”

“Ah, my God!” whispered Malaglou. “Kernaby, you will not betray me to that fiend? You are an Englishman and you will not soil your hands with such a deed!”

To my dismay—for it was a disgusting sight—Malaglou fell trembling upon his knees before me. The threat of shooting had had no such effect as the the name of the Sheikh Ismail. My respect for that really remarkable old ruffian rose by leaps and bounds.

“Get up,” I said harshly, “and, if you can, write.”

He obeyed me; the man was almost hysterical. And, very shakily, this is what he wrote:

“I, Joseph Malaglou, also known as *Ahmed Ben Tawwab*, confess that I am a dealer in *hashish* and spurious antiques, which I have been in the habit of storing at my warehouse in Cairo, and also in my private residence in the Darb el Ahmar. Finding it desirable to enlarge the facilities of the latter, I induced the Hon. Neville Kernaby, who is ignorant of my real business, to lease for me a house which adjoins my own, as I did not desire it to be known that I was the lessee. Subsequently, learning that the suspicions of the authorities had been aroused, I anonymously denounced Kernaby, thus hoping to avert suspicion from myself and cause his arrest as the consignee of the cases which had been delivered at the new premises.”

“Very good,” I said, when this document had been completed. “You understand that you will now accompany me to the central police station in the Place Bâb el-Khalk and sign this confession in the presence of suitable witnesses? You will doubtless be detained; therefore in the interests of your safety, we must arrange that Mizmûna be hidden securely until the case is settled. Oh! set your evil mind at rest! I shall not betray you to the Sheikh; unless—” I looked him squarely in the eyes—“any whisper of my name appears in this matter!”

“But where is she?” he said hoarsely.

“She is hiding in the adjoining house.”

“I have a small place at Shubra where I can conceal her.”

“Very well. I will bring her here and permit you to make suitable arrangements, but let them be complete; for if Ismail should find the girl and thus discover your identity, nothing could save you—and you will be unable to leave Cairo (I shall see to that) until the case is settled.”

## VI

It was on the following evening, as I sat smoking upon the terrace of the hotel and reflecting upon the execrably bad luck which pursued me, that I observed Abû Tabâh mounting the carpeted steps with slow and stately carriage. He saluted me gravely and accepted the seat which I offered him.

My plan had run smoothly; Malaglou had given himself up to the authorities, but had been released upon payment of a substantial bail. Mizmûna was concealed at Shubra, and I was flogging my brain in a vain endeavor to conjure up a plan whereby, without betraying the villainous Greek and thus causing him to betray *me*, I might secure the Sheikh’s reward—or, at least, the lapis armlet.

“Alas,” said Abû Tabâh, “that the wicked should prosper.”

“To whose prosperity,” I inquired, “do you more especially refer?”

He regarded me with his fine melancholy eyes.

“You have an English adage,” he continued, “which says, ‘set a thief to catch a thief.’”

“Quite so. But might I inquire what bearing this crystallized wisdom has upon our present conversation?”

“The man, Joseph Malaglou,” he replied, “learning of the hue-and-cry after a certain missing damsel—”

I remember I was about to light a cigar as he uttered those words, but a dawning perception of the iniquitous truth crept poisonously into my mind, and I threw both cigar and matches over the rail into the *Shâra Kâmel* and clutched fiercely at the little table between us.

“And of the reward offered for her recovery,” pursued the *imâm*, “denounced to us, one Yûssuf of Rosetta, a man owning a small house at Shubra. Yûssuf had fled, and the only occupant of the place was the missing damsel Mizmûna. Alas that fortune should so favor the sinful. The abductor, the despoiler, escapes retribution; and the traitor, the informer, the dealer in *hashish* is rewarded.”

The Turk has signally failed to rule Egypt; but there are certain Ottoman institutions which are not without claims, as I realized at that moment in regard to Joseph Malaglou: I was thinking, particularly, of the bow-string.

“Already,” said Abû Tabâh, with his sweet but melancholy smile, “the heart of the Sheikh Ismail inclined toward the damsel, for whom his soul yearned; and has not it been written that he who heals the breach betwixt man and wife shall himself be blessed? Behold the reward of the peacemaker—which I design as a gift to my sister.”

I was unable to speak, but I became aware of a bitter taste upon my palate as, from beneath his robe, the smiling *imâm* took out the armlet of gold and lapis-lazuli!