

Omar of Ispahan

By Sax Rohmer

I

"I hear that the Harêm Suit is occupied," said Sir Bertram Collis, bustling up to me as I sat smoking in the gardens of a certain Cairo hotel, which I shall not name because of the matters that befell there. "Daphne is full of curiosity respecting the romantic occupant."

"Don't let Lady Collis be too sure," put in Chundermeyer, "that there is anything romantic about the occupant."

"Your definition of romance, Chundermeyer," I interrupted, "would probably be 'a diamond the size of a Spanish onion.'"

Chundermeyer smiled, but it was a smile in which his dark eyes, twinkling through the pebbles of horn-rimmed spectacles, played no part. I must confess that the society of this unctuous partner in the well-known Madras firm of Isaacs and Chundermeyer palled somewhat at times. He, on the other hand, was eternally dropping into a chair beside me, and proffering huge and costly cigars from a huge and costly case. This sort of parvenu persecution is one of the penalties of being recognized by Debrett.

"As a matter of fact," I continued, "the occupant of the Harêm Suite is no less romantic a personage than the daughter of the Mudîr (Governor) of the Payûm."

"Really!" said Chundermeyer, with that sudden interest which mention of a title always aroused in him. "Surely it is most unusual for so highly placed a Moslem lady to reside at an hotel?"

"Most unusual," I replied. "Of course such a thing would be inconceivable in India; but the management of this establishment, who cater almost exclusively to tourists, find, I am told, that a 'harêm suite' is quite a good advertisement. The reason of the presence of this lady in the hotel is a diplomatic one. She is visiting Cairo in order to witness the procession of Ashûra, peculiarly sacred to Egyptian women, and it appears that, having no blood relations here, she could not accept the hospitality of any one of the big families without alienating the others."

"By Jove!" said Sir Bertram, "I must tell Daphne this yarn. She'll be delighted! Come along, Kernaby; if we're to have tea at Mona House, it is high time we were off."

I left Chundermeyer to his opulent cigar without regret. That he was an astute man of affairs and an expert lapidary I did not doubt, for he had offered to buy my Hatshepsu scarab ring at a price exactly ten per cent below its trade value; but to my mind there is something almost as unnatural about a Hindu-Hebrew as about a Græco-Welshman or a griffin.

Of course, Daphne Collis was not ready; and, Sir Bertram going up to their apartments to induce her to hurry, I strolled out again into the gardens for a quiet cigarette and a cocktail. As I approached a suitable seat in a sort of charming little arbor festooned with purple blossom, a man who had been waiting there rose to greet me.

With a certain quickening of the pulse, I recognized Abû Tabâh, arrayed, as was his custom, in black, only relieved by a small snowy turban, which served to enhance the ascetic beauty of his face and the mystery of the wonderful, liquid eyes.

He inclined his head in that gesture of gentle dignity which I knew; and:

"I have been awaiting an opportunity of speech with you, Kernaby Pasha," he said, in his flawless, musical English, "upon a matter in which I hope you will consent to aid me."

Since this mysterious man, variously known as "the *imám*" and "the Magician," but whom I knew to be some kind of secret agent of the Egyptian Government, had recently saved me from assassination, to decline to aid him was out of the question. We seated ourselves in the arbor.

"I should welcome an opportunity of serving you, my friend," I assured him, "since your services to me can never be repaid."

His lips moved slightly in the curiously tender smile which a poor physiognomist might have mistaken for evidence of effeminacy, bending towards me with a cautious glance about.

"You are staying at this hotel throughout the Christmas festivities?" he asked.

"Yes; I have temporarily deserted Shepheard's in order to accept the hospitality of Sir Bertram Collis, a very old friend. I shall probably return on the Tuesday following Christmas Day."

"There is to be a carnival and masquerade ball here to-morrow. You shall be present?"

"I hope so," I replied in surprise. "To what does all this tend?"

Abû Tabâh bent yet closer.

"Many of your friends and acquaintances possess valuable jewels?"

"They do."

"Then warn them—individually, in order to occasion no general alarm—to guard these with the utmost care."

My surprise increased. "You alarm me," I said. "Are there rogues in our midst?"

"No," answered the *imám*, fixing his melancholy gaze upon my face; "so far as my knowledge bears me, there is but one, yet that one is worse than a host of others."

"Do you mean that he is here—in the hotel?"

Abû Tabâh shrugged his slim shoulders. "If I knew his exact whereabouts," he replied, "there would be no occasion to fear him. All that I know is that he is in Cairo; and since many richly attired women of Europe and America will be here to-morrow night, of a surety Omar Ali Khân will be here also!"

I shook my head in perplexity.

"Omar Ali Khân?" I began.

"Ah," continued Abû Tabâh, "to you that name conveys nothing, but to me it signifies Omar of Ispahân, 'the Father of Thieves.' Do you remember," fixing his strange eyes hypnotically upon me, "the theft of the sacred *bunco* of Nefîseh?"

"Quite well," I replied hastily; since the incident represented an unpleasant memory.

"It was Omar of Ispahân who stole it from the shrine. It was Omar of Ispahân who stole the blue diamond of the Rajah of Bagore from the treasure-room at Jullapore, and Omar of Ispahân"—lowering his voice almost to a whisper—"who stole the Holy Carpet ere it reached Mecca!"

"What!" I cried. "When did that happen? I never heard of such an episode!"

Abû Tabâh raised his long, slim hand warningly. "Be cautious!" he whispered; "the flowers of the garden, the palms in the grove, the very sands of the desert have ears! The lightest word spoken in the *harêm* of the Khedive, or breathed from a minaret of the Citadel, is heard by Omar of Ispahân! The holy covering for the Kaaba was restored, on payment of a ruinous ransom by the Sherîf of Mecca, and none save the few ever knew of its loss."

For a time I was silent; words failed me; for the veil of the Kaaba, miscalled "the Carpet," is about the size of a bowling-green: then—

"In what manner does this affair concern you, Abû Tabâh?" I asked.

“In this way: the daughter of the Mudîr el-Fáyûm is here, in order that she may be present on the Night of Ashûra in the Mûski. For a Moslem lady to stay in such a place as this”—there was a faint note of contempt in the speaker’s voice—“is without precedent, but the circumstances are peculiar. The *khân* near the Mosque of Hosein is full, and it is not seemly that the Mudîr’s daughter should live at any lesser establishment. Therefore, as she brings her two servants, it has been possible for her to remain here. But”—his voice sank again—“her ornaments are famed throughout Islam.”

I nodded comprehendingly.

“To me,” Abû Tabâh whispered, “has been entrusted the task of guarding them; to you, I entrust that of guarding the possessions of the other guests!”

I started.

“But, my friend,” I said, “this is a dreadful responsibility which you impose upon me.”

“Other precautions are being taken,” he replied calmly; “but you, observing great circumspection, can speak to the guests, and, being forewarned of his presence, can even watch for the coming of Omar of Ispahân.”

II

The effect of my news upon Lady Collis was truly dramatic.

“Oh,” she cried, “my rope of pearls. Mr. Chundermeyer only told me last week that it was worth at least two hundred pound more than I gave for it.”

Mr. Chundermeyer had made himself popular with many of the ladies in the hotel by similar diplomatic means, but I think that if he had been compelled to purchase at his own flattering valuations Messrs. Isaacs and Chundermeyer would have been ruined.

“You need not wear it, my dear,” said her husband tactlessly.

“Don’t be so ridiculous!” she retorted. “You know I have brought my Queen of Sheba costume for to-morrow night.”

That, of course, settled the matter, so that beyond making one pretty woman extremely nervous, my campaign against the dreaded Omar of Ispahân had opened—blankly. Later in the day I circulated my warning right and left, and everywhere sowed consternation without reaping any appreciable result.

“One naturally expects thieves on these occasions,” said a little Chicago millionairess, “and if I only wore my diamonds when no rogues were about, I might as well have none. There are crooks in America I’d back against your Persian thief any day.”

On the whole, I think, the best audience for my dramatic recitation was provided by Mr. Chundermeyer, whom I found in the American bar, just before the dinner hour. His yellow skin perceptibly blanched at my first mention of Omar Au Khân, and one hand clutched at a bulging breast pocket of the dinner-jacket he wore.

“Good heavens, Mr. Kernaby,” he said, “you alarm me—you alarm me, sir!”

“The reputation of Omar is not unknown to you?”

“By no means unknown to me,” he responded in the thick, unctuous voice which betrayed the Semitic strain in his pedigree. “It was this man who stole the pair of blue diamonds from the Rajah of Bagore.”

“So I am told.”

“But have you been told that it was my firm who bought those diamonds for the Rajah?”

“No; that is news to me.”

“It was my firm, Mr. Kernaby, who negotiated the sale of the blue diamonds to the Rajah; therefore the particulars of their loss, under most extraordinary circumstances, are well known to me. You have made me very nervous. Who is your informant?”

“A member of the native police with whom I am acquainted.”

Mr. Chundermeyer shook his head lugubriously.

“I am conveying a parcel of rough stones to Amsterdam,” he confessed, glancing warily about him over the rims of his spectacles, “and I feel very much disposed to ask for more reliable protection than is offered by your Egyptian friend.”

“Why not lodge the stones in a bank, or in the manager’s safe?”

He shook his head again, and proffered an enormous cigar.

“I distrust all safes but my own,” he replied. “I prefer to carry such valuables upon my person, foolish though the plan may seem to you. But do you observe that squarely built, military looking person standing at the bar, in conversation with M. Balabas, the manager?”

“Yes; an officer, I should judge.”

“Precisely; a *police* officer. That is Chief Inspector Carlisle of New Scotland Yard.”

“But he is a guest here.”

“Certainly. The management sustained a severe loss last Christmas during the progress of a ball at which all Cairo was present, and as the inspector chanced to be on his way home from India, where official business had taken him, M. Balabas induced him to break his journey and remain until after the carnival.”

“Wait a moment,” I said; “I will bring him over.”

Crossing to the bar, I greeted Balabas, with whom I was acquainted, and—

“Mr. Chundermeyer and I have been discussing the notorious Omar of Ispahân, who is said to be in Cairo,” I remarked.

Inspector Carlisle, being introduced, smiled broadly.

“Mr. Balabas is very nervous about this Omar man,” he replied, with a slight Scottish accent; “but, considering that everybody has been warned, I don’t see myself that he can do much damage.”

“Perhaps you would be good enough to reassure Mr. Chundermeyer,” I suggested, “who is carrying valuables.”

Chief Inspector Carlisle walked over to the table at which Chundermeyer was seated.

“I have met your partner, sir,” he said, “and I gathered that you were on your way to Amsterdam with a parcel of rough stones; in fact, I supposed that you had arrived there by now.”

“I am fond of Cairo during the Christmas season,” explained the other, “and I broke my journey. But now I sincerely wish I were elsewhere.”

“Oh, I shouldn’t worry!” said the detective cheerily. “There are enough of us on the look-out.”

But Mr. Chundermeyer remained palpably uneasy.

III

The gardens of the hotel on the following night presented a fairy-like spectacle. Lights concealed among the flower-beds, the bloom-covered arbors, and the feathery leafage of the acacias, suffused a sort of weird glow, suggesting the presence of a million fire-flies. Up beneath the

crowns of the lofty palms little colored electric lamps were set, producing an illusion of supernatural fruit, whilst the fountain had been magically converted into a cascade of fire.

In the ball-room, where the orchestra played, and a hundred mosque lamps bathed the apartment in soft illumination, a cosmopolitan throng danced around a giant Christmas tree, their costumes a clash of color to have filled a theatrical producer with horror, outraging history and linking the ages in startling fashion. Thus, St. Antony of the Thebaid danced with Salome, the luresome daughter of Herodias; Nero's arm was about the waist of Good Queen Bess; Charles II cantered through a two-step with a red-haired Vestal Virgin; and the Queen of Sheba (Daphne Collis) had no less appropriate a partner than Sherlock Holmes.

Doubtless it was all very amusing, but, personally, I stand by my commonplace dress-suit, having, perhaps, rather a ridiculous sense of dignity. Inspector Carlisle also was soberly arrayed, and we had several chats during the evening; he struck me as being a man of considerable culture and great shrewdness.

For Abû Tabâh I looked in vain. Following our conversation on the previous afternoon, he had vanished like a figment of a dream. I several times saw Chundermeyer, who had elected to disguise himself as Al-Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet of Khorassan. He seemed to be an enthusiastic dancer, and there was no lack of partners.

But of these mandarins, pierrots, Dutch girls, monks, and court ladies I speedily tired, and sought refuge in the gardens, whose enchanted aspect was completed by that wondrous inverted bowl, jewel-studded, which is the nightly glory of Egypt. In the floral, dim-lighted arbors many romantic couples shrank from the peeping moon; but quiet and a hushful sense of peace ruled there beneath the stars more in harmony with my mood.

One corner of the gardens, in particular, seemed to be quite deserted, and it was the most picturesque spot of all. For here a graceful palm upstood before an outjutting *mushrabîyeh* window, dimly lighted, over which trailed a wealth of bougainvillia blossom, whilst beneath it lay a floral carpet, sharply bisected by the shadow of the palm trunk. It was like some gorgeous illustration to a poem by Hafiz, only lacking the figure at the window.

And as I stood, enchanted, before the picture, the central panels of the window were thrown open, and, as if conjured up by my imagination, a woman appeared, looking out into the gardens—an Oriental woman, robed in shimmering, moon-kissed white, and wearing a white *yashmak*. Her arms and fingers were laden with glittering jewels.

I almost held my breath, drawing back into the sheltering shadow, for I had not hitherto suspected myself of being a sorcerer. For perhaps a minute, or less, she stood looking out, then the window closed, and the white phantom disappeared. I recovered myself, recognizing that I stood before the isolated wing of the hotel known as the Harêm Suite, and that Fate had granted me a glimpse of the daughter of the Mudîr of the Fáyûm.

Recollecting, in the nick of time, an engagement to dance with Lady Collis, I hurried back to the ball-room. On its very threshold I encountered Chundermeyer. I could see his spectacles glittering through the veil of his ridiculous costume, and even before he spoke I detected about him an aura of tragedy.

"Mr. Kernaby," he gasped, "for Heaven's sake help me to find Inspector Carlisle! I have been robbed!"

"What?"

"My diamonds!"

"You don't mean—"

"Find the inspector, and come to my rooms. I am nearly mad!"

Daphne Collis, who had seen me enter, joined us at this moment, and, overhearing the latter part of Chundermeyer's speech:

"Oh, whatever is the matter?" she whispered. As for Chundermeyer the effect upon him of her sudden appearance was positively magical. He stared through his veil as though her charming figure had been that of some hideous phantom. Then slowly, as if he dreaded to find her intangible, he extended one hand and touched her rope of pearls.

"Ah, heavens!" he gasped. "I am really going mad, or is there a magician amongst us?"

Daphne Collis's blue eyes opened very widely, and the color slowly faded from her cheeks.

"Mr. Chundermeyer," she began. "But—"

"Let us go into this little recess, where there is a good light," mumbled Chundermeyer shakily, "and I will make sure."

The three of us entered the palm-screened alcove, Chundermeyer leading. He stood immediately under a lamp suspended by brass chains from the roof.

"Permit me to examine your pearls for one moment," he said.

Her hands trembling, Daphne Collis took off the costly ornament and placed it in the hands of the greatly perturbed expert. Chundermeyer ran the pearls through his fingers, then lifted the largest of the set towards the light and scrutinized it closely. Suddenly he dropped his arms, and extended the necklace upon one open palm.

"Look for yourself," he said slowly. "It does not require the eyes of an expert."

Daphne Collis snatched the pearls and stared at them dazedly. Her pretty face was now quite colorless.

"This is not my rope of pearls," she said, in a monotonous voice; "it is a very poor imitation!"

Ere I could frame any kind of speech—

"Look at this," groaned Chundermeyer, "as you talk of a poor imitation!"

He was holding out a leather-covered box, plush-lined, and bearing within the words, "Isaacs and Chundermeyer, Madras." Nestling grotesquely amid the blue velvet were six small pieces of coal!

Chundermeyer sank upon the cushions of the settee, tossing the casket upon a little coffee table.

"I am afraid I feel unwell," he said feebly. "Mr. Kernaby, I wonder if you would be so kind as to find Inspector Carlisle, and ask a waiter to bring me some cognac."

"Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?" whispered poor Daphne Collis.

"Just remain here," I said soothingly, "with Mr. Chundermeyer." And I induced her to sit in a big cane rest-chair. "I will return in a moment with Bertram and the inspector."

Desiring to avoid a panic, I walked quietly into the ball-room and took stock of the dancers, for a waltz was in progress. The inspector I could not see, but Sir Bertram I observed at the further end of the floor, dancing with Mrs. Van Heysten, the Chicago lady whom I had warned to keep a close watch upon her diamonds.

I managed to attract Collis's attention, and the pair, quitting the floor, joined me where I stood. A few words sufficed in which to inform them of the catastrophe, and, pointing out the alcove wherein I had left Chundermeyer and Lady Collis, I set off in search of Inspector Carlisle.

Ten minutes later, having visited every likely spot, I came to the conclusion that he was not in the hotel, and with M. Balabas I returned to the alcove adjoining the ball-room. Dancing was in full swing, and I thought as we passed along the edge of the floor how easily I could have checked the festivities by announcing that Omar of Ispahân was present.

The first sight to greet me upon entering the little palm-shaded alcove was that of Mrs. Van Heysten in tears. She had discovered herself to be wearing a very indifferent duplicate of her famous diamond tiara.

I think it was my action of soothingly patting her upon the shoulder that drew Chundermeyer's attention to my Hatshepsu scarab.

"Mr. Kernaby!" he cried—"Mr. Kernaby!" And pointed to my finger.

I had had the scarab set in a revolving bezel, and habitually wore it with the beetle uppermost and the cartouchc concealed. As I glanced down at the ring, Chundermeyer stretched out his hand and detached it from my finger. Approaching the light, he turned the bezel.

The flat part of the scarab was quite blank, bearing no inscription whatever. Like Lady Collis's rope of pearls, Mrs. Van Heysten's tiara, and Chundermeyer's diamonds, it was a worthless and very indifferent duplicate!

IV

Never can I forget the scene in that crowded little room—poor M. Balabas all anxiety respecting the reputation of his establishment, and vainly endeavoring to reason with the victims of the amazing Omar Khân. Finally—

"I will search for Inspector Carlisle myself," said Mr. Chundermeyer; "and if it cannot find him, I shall be compelled to communicate with the local police authorities."

M. Balabas still volubly protesting, the unfortunate Veiled Prophet made his way from the alcove. I cannot say if the inspiration came as the result of a sort of auto-hypnosis induced by staring at the worthless ring in my hand—the stone was not even real lapis-lazuli—but a theory regarding the manner in which these ingenious substitutions had been effected suddenly entered my mind.

Three minutes later I was knocking at the door of Chundermeyer's room. I received no invitation to enter, and the door was locked. I sought M. Balabas; and, without confiding to him the theory upon which I was acting, I urged the desirability of gaining access to the apartment. As a result, a master key was procured, and we entered.

At the first glance the room seemed to be empty, though it showed evidence of having recently been occupied, for it was in the utmost disorder. Perhaps we should have quitted it unenlightened, if I had not detected the sound of a faint groan proceeding from the closed wardrobe. Stepping across the room, I opened the double doors, and out into my arms fell a limp figure, bound hand and foot, and having a bath-towel secured tightly around the head to act as a gag. It was Mr. Chundermeyer!

I think, as I helped to unfasten him, I was the most surprised man in the land of Egypt. He was arrayed only in a bath-robe and slippers, and his bare wrists and ankles were cruelly galled by the cords which had bound him. For some minutes he was unable to utter a word, and when at last he achieved speech, his first utterance constituted a verbal thunderbolt.

"I have been robbed!" he cried huskily. "I was sand-bagged as I came from my bath, and look—every one of my cases is gone!"

It was M. Balabas who answered him.

"As you returned from your *bath*, Mr. Chundermeyer?" he said. "At what the was that?"

"About a quarter-past seven," was the amazing reply.

"But, good heaven!" cried M. Balabas, "I was speaking to you less than ten minutes ago!"

“You are mad!” groaned Chundermeyer, rubbing his bruised wrists. “Have I not been locked in the wardrobe all night!”

“Ah, merciful saints,” cried M. Balabas, dramatically raising his clenched fists to heaven, “I see it all! You understand, Mr. Kernaby. It is *not* Mr. Chundermeyer with whom we have been conversing, in whose hands you have been placing your valuables, it is that devil incarnate who three years ago impersonated the Emîr al-Hadj, in order to steal the Holy Carpet; who can impersonate anyone; who, it is said, can transform himself at will into an old woman, a camel, or a fig tree; it is the conjuror, the wizard—Omar of Ispahân!”

My own ideas were almost equally chaotic; for although, as I now recalled, I had never throughout the evening obtained a thoroughly good view of the features of the veiled Prophet, I could have sworn to the voice, to the carriage, to the manner of Mr. Chundermeyer.

The puzzling absence of Chief Inspector Carlisle now engaged everybody’s attention; and, acting upon the precedent afforded by the finding of Mr. Chundermeyer, we paid a visit to the detective’s room.

Inspector Carlisle, fully dressed, and still wearing a soft felt hat, as though he had but just come in, lay on the floor, unconscious, with the greater part of a cigar, which examination showed to be drugged, close beside him.

* * *

As I entered my room that night and switched on the light, in through the open window from the balcony stepped Abû Tabâh.

His frequent and mysterious appearances in my private apartments did not surprise me in the least, and I had even ceased to wonder how he accomplished them; but—“You are too late, my friend,” I said. “Omar of Ispahân has outwitted you.”

“Omar of Ispahân has outwitted men wiser than I,” he replied gravely; “but covetousness is a treacherous master, and I am not without hope that we may yet circumvent the father of thieves.”

“You are surely jesting,” I replied. “In all probability he is now far from Cairo.”

“I, on the contrary, have reason to believe,” replied Abû Tabâh calmly, “that he is neither far from Cairo, far from the hotel, nor far from this very apartment.”

His manner was strange and I discovered excitement to be growing within me.

“Accompany me on the balcony,” he said; “but first extinguish the light.”

A moment later I stood looking down upon the moon-bathed gardens, and Abû Tabâh, beside me, stretched out his hand.

“You see the projecting portion of the building yonder?”

“Yes,” I replied; “the Harêm Suite.”

“Immediately before the window there is a palm tree.”

“I have observed it.”

“And upon the opposite side of the path there is an acacia.”

“Yes; I see it.”

“The moon is high, and whilst all the side of the hotel is in shadow the acacia is in the moonlight. Its branches would afford concealment, however; and one watching there could see what would be hidden from one on this balcony. I request you, Kernaby Pasha, to approach that *lebbekh* tree from the further side of the fountain, in order to remain invisible from the hotel. Climb to one of the lower branches, and closely watch four windows.”

I stared at him in the darkness.

“Which are the four windows that I am to watch?”

“They are—one, that immediately below your own; two, that to the right of it; three, the window above the Harêm Suite; and, four, the extreme east window of this wing, on the first floor.”

Now, my state of mystification grew even denser. For the windows specified were, in the order of mention, that of Inspector Carlisle, who had not yet recovered consciousness; of Mr. Chundermeyer; of Major Redpath, a retired Anglo-Indian who had been confined to his room for some time with an attack of malaria; and of M. Balabas, the manager.

“For what,” I inquired, “am I to watch?”

“For a man to descend.”

“And then?”

“You will hold your open watch case where it is dearly visible from this spot. Instant upon the man’s appearance you will cover it up, and then uncover it, either once, twice, thrice, or four times.”

“After which?”

“Remain scrupulously concealed. Have the collar of your dinner jacket turned up in order to betray as little whiteness as possible. Do not interfere with the man who descends; but if he enters the Harêm Suite, see that he does not come out again! There is no the for further explanation, Kernaby Pasha; it is Omar of Ispahân with whom we have to deal!”

V

Perched up amid the foliage of the acacia, I commenced that singular guard imposed upon me by Abû Tabâh. Did he suspect one of these four persons of being the notorious Omar? Or had his mysterious instructions some other significance? The problem defied me; and, recognizing that I was hopelessly at sea, I abandoned useless conjecture and merely watched.

Nor was my vigil a long one. I doubt if I had been at my post for ten minutes ere a vague figure appeared upon the shadow-veiled balcony of one of the suspected windows—that of Major Redpath, above the Harêm Suite!

Scarcely daring to credit my eyes, I saw the figure throw down on to the projecting top of the *mushrabîyeh* window below a slender rope ladder. I covered the gleaming gold of my watch-case with my hand, and gave the signal—*three*.

The spirit of phantasy embraced me; and, unmoved to further surprise, I watched the unknown swarm down the ladder with the agility of an ape. He seemed to wear a robe, surely that of *the Veiled Prophet!* He silently manipulated one of the side-panels of the window, opened it, and vanished within the Harêm Suite.

Raising my eyes, I beheld a second figure—that of Abû Tabâh—descending a similar ladder to the balcony of Inspector Carlisle’s room. He gained the balcony and entered the room. Four seconds elapsed; he reappeared, unfurled a greater length of ladder, and came down to the flower-beds. Lithely as a cat he came to the projecting *mushrabîyeh*, swung himself aloft, and as I watched breathlessly, expecting him to enter in pursuit of the intruder, climbed to the top and began to mount the ladder descending from Major Redpath’s room!

He had just reached the major’s balcony, and was stepping through the open window, when a most alarming din arose in the Harêm Suite; evidently a fierce struggle was proceeding in the apartments of the Mudîr’s daughter!

I scrambled down from the acacia and ran to the spot immediately below the window, arriving at the very moment that the central lattice was thrown open, and a white-veiled figure appeared there and prepared to spring down! Perceiving my approach:

“Oh, help me, in the name of Allah!” cried the woman, in a voice shrill with fear. “Quick—catch me!”

Ere I could frame any reply, she clutched at the palm tree and dropped down right into my extended arms, as a crashing of overturned furniture came from the room above.

“Help them!” she entreated. “You are armed, and my women are being murdered.”

“Help, Kernaby Pasha!” now reached my ears, in the unmistakable voice of Abû Tabâh, from somewhere within. “See that he does not escape from the window!”

“Coming!” I cried.

And, by means of the palm trunk, I began to mount towards the open lattice.

Gaining my objective, I stumbled into a room which presented a scene of the wildest disorder. It was a large apartment, well but sparsely furnished in the Eastern manner, and lighted by three hanging lamps. Directly under one of these, beside an overturned cabinet of richly carved wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, lay a Nubian, insensible, and arrayed only in shirt and trousers. There was no one else in the room, and, not pausing to explore those which opened out of it, I ran and unbolted the heavy door upon which Abû Tabâh was clamoring for admittance.

The *imâm* leaped into the room, rebolted the door, and glanced to the right and left; then he ran into the adjoining apartments, and finally, observing the insensible Nubian upon the floor, he stared into my face, and I read anger in the eyes that were wont to be so gentle.

“Did I not enjoin you to prevent his escape from the window?” he cried.

“No one escaped from the window, my friend,” I retorted, “except the lady who was occupying the suite.”

Abû Tabâh fixed his weird eyes upon me in a hypnotic stare of such uncanny power that I was angrily conscious of much difficulty in sustaining it; but gradually the quelling look grew less harsh, and finally his whole expression softened, and that sweet smile, which could so transform his face, disturbed the severity of the set lips.

“No man is infallible,” he said. “And wiser than you or I have shown themselves the veriest fools in contest with Omar Ali Khân. But know, O Kernaby Pasha, that the lady who occupied this suite secretly left it at sunset to-night, bearing her jewels with her, and he”—pointing to the insensible Nubian on the floor—“took her place and wore her raiment—”

“Then the Mudîr’s daughter—”

“Is my sister Ayesha!”

I looked at him reproachfully, but he met my gaze with calm pride.

“Subterfuge was permitted by the Prophet, (on whom be peace),” he continued; “but not lying! My sister *is* the daughter of the Mudîr el-Fáyûm

It was a rebuke, perhaps a merited one; and I accepted it in silence. Although, from the moment that I had first set eyes on him, I had never doubted Abû Tabâh to be a man of good family, this modest avowal was something of a revelation.

“Her presence here, which was permitted by my father,” he said, “was a trap; for it is well known throughout the Moslem world that she is the possessor of costly ornaments. The trap succeeded. Omar of Ispahân, at great risk of discovery, remained to steal her jewels, although he had already amassed a choice collection.”

Someone had begun to bang upon the bolted door, and there was an excited crowd beneath the window.

“You supposed, no doubt,” the *imám* resumed calmly, “that I suspected Major Redpath and M. Balabas, as well as Mr. Chundermeyer and the English detective. It was not so. But I regarded the room of M. Balabas as excellently situated for Omar’s purpose, and I knew that M. Balabas rarely retired earlier than one o’clock. Even more suitable was that of Major Redpath, whose illness I believe to have been due to some secret art of Omar’s.”

“But he is down with chronic malaria!”

“It may even be so; yet I believe the attack to have been induced by Omar of Ispahân.”

“But why?”

“Because, as I learned to-night, Major Redpath is the only person in Cairo who has ever met Mr. Chundermeyer! I will confess that until less than an hour ago I did not know if Inspector Carlisle was *really* an inspector! Oh, it is a seeming absurdity; but Omar of Ispahân is a wizard! Therefore I entered the inspector’s room, and found him to be still unconscious. Major Redpath was in deep slumber, and Omar had entered and quitted his room without disturbing him. I did likewise, and visited Mr. Chundermeyer’s—the door was ajar—on my way downstairs.”

“But, my friend,” I said amazedly, “with my own eyes I beheld Mr. Chundermeyer gagged and bound in his wardrobe! I saw his bruised wrists!”

“He gagged, bound, and bruised himself!” replied Abû Tabâh calmly. “With my own eyes I once beheld a blind mendicant hanging by the neck from a fig tree, a bloody froth upon his lips. I cut him down and left him for dead. Yet was he neither dead nor a blind mendicant; he was Omar Ali Khân! Oblige me by opening the door, Kernaby Pasha.”

I obeyed, and an excited throng burst in, headed by M. Balabas and Inspector Carlisle, the latter looking very pale and haggard!

“Where is the man posing as Chundermeyer?” began the detective hoarsely. “By sheer sleight of-hand, and under ye’re very noses”—excitement rendered him weirdly Caledonian—“he has robbed ye! I cabled Madras to-day, and the real Chundermeyer arrived at Amsterdam last Friday! As I returned with the reply cable in my pocket to-night I became so dizzy I was only just able to get to my room. He’d doctored every smoke in my case! Where is he?”

“I assisted him to escape, disguised as a woman, some ten minutes ago,” I replied feebly. “I should be sincerely indebted to you if you would kick me.”

“Escaped!” roared Inspector Carlisle. “Then what are ye doing here? Pursue him, somebody! Are ye all mad?”

“We should be,” said Abû Tabâh, “to attempt pursuit. As well pursue the shadow of a cloud, the first spear of sunrise, or the phantom heifer of Pepi-Ankh, as pursue Omar of Ispahan! He is gone— but empty-handed. Behold what I recovered from ‘Mr. Chundermeyer’s room.’”

From beneath his black *gibbeh* he took out a leather bag, opened it, and displayed to our startled eyes the tiara of Mrs. Van Heysten, the rope of pearls, and—my Hatshepsu scarab!

Ere anyone could utter a word, Abû Tabâh inclined his head in dignified salutation, turned, and walked stately from the room.