

The Insane Root

A Romance of a Strange Country

By Mrs. Campbell Praed

CHAPTER I

THE AMBASSADOR'S PHYSICIAN

In the Abarian Embassy in London, Isàdas Pacha lay sick unto death. He was an old man, and upon several previous occasions when he had been stricken by illness it was thought that he could not recover. Nevertheless, when newspapers and Cabinets were speculating upon his probable successor, he had invariably risen up from his bed and had again handled the reins, continuing to transact the duties of Ambassador to the Court of St James's entrusted to him by his Imperial master.

He was greatly in the favour of his Emperor, and was, after his own fashion, a power in the courts of Europe. Though it was said, and indeed with truth, that most of the business of the Chancellery was carried on by his clever, fascinating and ambitious first secretary, Caspar Ruel Bey, it was the brain of Isàdas Pacha which inspired despatches, the hand of Isàdas Pacha—that shrivelled, forceful hand—which gave the last decisive touch to the helm.

Isàdas Pacha was old and had lived an unholy life. He had loved many women—the prey of some, the tyrant of others—had drunk much wine, had gambled and fought and rollicked, had nourished revenge upon the fruit of diabolical knowledge, had strange byways of intrigue, vice and of wisdom where was little good and much evil. He had, in fact, to quote an austere London surgeon who attended him, violated every law of health, morals and religion, and was a standing disproof of the power of those laws. For his marvellous vitality and his commanding intellect had brought him successfully through a varied career, to what now-at its close, seemed the very zenith of influence and popularity. Nor were the influence and popularity undeserved. He had been a faithful servant to an effete and demoralised civilisation—a state which from its geographical position was at that time one of the chief factors in Christian and Mahometan policy. He had done his country's work—not always righteous—in many lands, and had felt the pulse-beats of many nations. He had the wile of the East and the common sense of the West, and was consulted by both in hours of crisis and difficulty. The decorations heaped upon him had been genuinely won, and only a week before his illness, the last and crowning order of merit—the highest gift in his sovereign's power to bestow—had been sent him with an autograph letter from that sovereign, by whom he was both loved and trusted. The ideal of an autocratic sovereignty was the ideal to which Isàdas Pacha clung. It had ruled his actions; and the glittering jewel which represented it, was now placed by his desire, at the foot of his bed, and solaced his dying hours. Thus, a strong and lasting devotion had been inspired in him by the original of an oil painting—the portrait of a man with regular, refined features, dark haunting eyes, and an expression of the most profound melancholy, the most utter satiety to be seen on human countenance—which hung at the end of the long suite of reception rooms in the Embassy, its frame surmounted by the jewelled and gilded insignia of Eastern monarchy. This was the portrait of his most sacred Majesty, Abdullulah Zobeir, Emperor of Abaria.

It was in obedience to this devotion that Isâdas Pacha, when taken ill at a watering-place to which his doctors recommended him, had desired that he should be brought back to London in order that he might die under the Imperial flag.

The floated limply over the grey roof and straight unlovely walls of the Embassy. There was scarcely a breath of wind in the heavy, exhausted London atmosphere—the atmosphere of a London August. Certainly it was only the first week in August and Parliament was not up, and there was a stream of smart carriages drawing up in front of the corner house of that dull, old-fashioned London square, one patch of which had been for so long a piece of Abarian territory. From the carriages tired footmen alighted, and cards were left and inquiries were made. In some cases the answers to the inquiries were brought out and repeated to beautifully-dressed ladies, past their youth maybe—ladies whom presumably the Pacha had loved or admired. The Pacha was witty and amusing, while his position was such that women still liked to be admired, even loved, by him, though he was not very far from eighty. In other instances the inquiries were evidently merely perfunctory—official tributes to his diplomatic status. Royal messengers came and received with a becoming expression of concern the doctors' bulletin, and minor royalties called personally. One or two great ladies, still in London, left bouquets of flowers or scribbled on their cards messages of sympathy. All these were carried to the ante-chamber of the Pacha's room that he might himself be made aware of these marks of attention, upon which he laid much store. And the old man, even his great sickness, gloated over the cards and the flowers and the royal messages of sympathy.

It was just after one of these great personages had called and departed, that a quiet doctor's brougham drove up to the Embassy. There had been other doctors' broughams there already. Specialists had been summoned in conjunction with the Pacha's regular attendant; but in August, many of the principal London physicians are out of town. Perhaps it was partly on this account, partly because he had already met privately and had interested the Pacha, partly because he was the cousin of Ruel Bey the first secretary, that Doctor Marillier had been called in.

Doctor Marillier was not a great London doctor—one, that is to say, who has won his position step by step and in accordance with the traditions of the College of Physicians and all the written and unwritten laws of British medical etiquette. Though to all intents and purposes, he was British, he belonged by descent to a Jersey family. His mother was a Greek and her sister had married the father of Ruel Bey, a man whose exact nationality it would have been difficult to determine. Doctor Marillier had taken his degree in Paris, and had subsequently practised in Algeria, where he had imbibed some out-of-the-way theories of medicine from his friend, that very singular Eastern physician known as the Medicine Moor. He had never followed the beaten track, and though during the last year or two he had settled himself as a consulting physician in London, he was looked upon as something of a quack by his medical brethren and suspected of unprofessional practices. Early in his career he had acknowledged himself, in a series of articles written under the shadow of the Salpêtrière, a follower of Charcot. Then he had become an eager disciple of the astronomer Flammarion, and later, an avowed student of hypnotism according to the methods of the Nancy school. Probably he would never have gained notoriety in London, had it not happened that by chance he was called in to an important public personage, and had cured that personage in defiance of the verdicts of other well-known physicians. This cure had caused him to be talked about. Moreover, his relationship to the delightful first secretary at the Abarian Embassy, had brought him into some social prominence.

Doctor Marillier's cousin, Ruel Bey, was one of the most popular young men in London. It was he who made the balls at the Abarian Embassy a feature of the London season. He acted

well, he sang well, he danced divinely. In those days, the cotillon had just become a fashionable craze, and no hostess of the great world thought her entertainment complete unless Ruel Bey organised and led the figures. Doctor Marillier did not dance the cotillon, did not sing, did not act, had not that peculiar charm of manner which is found in both men and women of mixed nationality, but he had gifts of his own, powers of his own, even a certain odd charm all his own.

Lucien Marillier stepped out of his brougham and rang at the great double door of the Embassy. The door was opened on the instant; the hall-porter being the one servant in the house whose office at that time was no sinecure. Incongruously, as some people thought, there was no touch of the East about the Pacha's establishment. His hall-porter was like the hall-porter of all other persons to whom such a functionary is indispensable, and sat in a chair that might have been built—probably was built—in the reign of Queen Anne. For the Embassy had Adams ceilings and Georgian staircases, and panellings removed from a mansion in Bloomsbury, and it had been decorated and furnished in the early Victorian epoch, and was all loftiness, mahogany, gilding, bareness and anachronisms, with, all through, a touch of foreign lands and a suggestion, mainly under the surface, of the sensuous East.

The butler, with his following of footmen, who appeared in answer to Doctor Marillier's request that Ruel Bey might be informed of his arrival, was a bland, portly, and wholly English official, quite in keeping with the Adams frieze and the early Victorian decoration.

He ushered the visitor into a room leading off the central hall and there left him. Doctor Marillier waited. His portrait might have been drawn as he stood perfectly immovable against the marble mantelpiece. A short man, with shoulders disproportionately broad in regard to his height, thick, and slightly hunched. Out of the ungainly shoulders rose a head which, though ugly, would, had it been placed upon a commanding form, have made Doctor Lucien Marillier one of the most distinguished-looking men of his day. A striking head, with darkish hair getting grey at the temples, combed back from an intellectual brow and cropped close behind; rugged features, a thin, slightly beaked nose, and lips sharply curved, extremely flexible, the upper one in its defined lines and firm moulding, showing will, order and logic, the under one, protruding ever so little, hinting at the emotional; the face clean-shaven and giving a curious impression of greyness; the skin fine, the jaw strong, a cleft in the centre of the chin; the eyes grey, keen, penetrating, somewhat pale and cold, with a black line round the iris, and changing, when feeling was aroused, to a grey like that of dull steel. The hands were capable, deft, strong and tender, with broad, soft fingers, long and square at the tips, and a full flexible thumb—the typical doctor's hands.

A door opening at the end of this room disclosed the Chancellery, a long, sombre room, decorously busy, where fezzed heads were bending over writing-tables set here and there beneath the windows. Ruel Bey himself could be seen, through a second folding door, in an inner and more luxuriously-furnished apartment, where he was writing hastily.

Presently he rose, saying a word or two in French to one of the *attachés*, and coming through the outer room, he closed the door behind him and advanced with outstretched hands to greet his cousin.

'A thousand pardons. It was absolutely necessary it I should leave a despatch ready to be copied. The Pacha's seizure throws a great deal upon me. You understand, Lucien?'

'Perfectly. Your credit at the Court of Abaria depends upon the way in which you deal with this crisis, eh?'

'Oh, as to that!' The young man shrugged his shoulders in the inimitable French manner. 'Isàdas left most things to me, but his was the responsibility. The Emperor was satisfied while

Isàdas signed and, as he believed, inspired. It's extraordinary the confidence they have over there in Isàdas. But now that he cannot sign! . . . And the whole wasps' nest of intriguers will be buzzing round the Emperor's ears. . . . Well, the time is not ripe! His Excellency must *not* die, Lucien. For my sake do what you can to save him.'

'I will do what I can, not for your sake, but firstly for the sake of my profession—secondly, for that of Isàdas Pacha himself, and thirdly, for that of European interests. Not to speak of the Emperor of Abaria, who relies at this political juncture upon his representative's appreciation of the English national temperament.'

Doctor Marillier spoke coldly. His deep voice vibrated when he alluded to the sacred obligations of his profession. His accent had a burr, due probably to his foreign extraction. 'Don't let us waste time,' he added. 'Take me to the Pacha.'

Ruel Bey nodded and immediately led the way up the broad staircase, stopping, as he passed through the ball to speak to the butler, desiring him to inform Mademoiselle Isàdas that Doctor Marillier had come.

The double doors of white and gold leading to the reception-rooms seemed to be guarded by a large stuffed leopard looking as though it were about to spring. Marillier stopped for a moment before it. He had been told that it was from the spring of this very leopard that Isàdas Pacha had saved the Emperor of Abaria, and thus earned the monarch's lasting gratitude.

'Mademoiselle Isàdas will wish to speak to you, said Ruel Bey to his cousin. 'She told me last night that she had great faith in you and that she believed you would cure the Pacha.'

'I trust that I may justify Mademoiselle Isàdas's faith,' replied the doctor, 'but the Pacha is an old man.'

'Yet he has the vitality of the devil. Ffolliot and Carus Spencer gave him over last time, and he recovered notwithstanding. But do what you can to reassure Rachel Isàdas. She is genuinely distressed at the thought that he may die, and, from the mere mundane and selfish point of view, well she may be.'

Doctor Marillier looked at the young man keenly and not altogether approvingly.

'Why? I ask from the mundane point of view.'

'Oh, well, her position would be different. One can never tell how far she would be provided for. Isàdas Pacha has lived like a rich man, but he has never been wealthy, and I believe there is a law in the republic of Avaran which requires that half a man's possessions must go when he dies to his legitimate kin. You know of course that Isàdas is Avaranese by birth, and I have no idea whether he has disposed of his family estates or if they were confiscated in the revolution. His real name is Varenzi, and Isàdas, so to speak, an official title. Though the Abarian Government employs few Abarians, it insists that its officials shall, technically speaking, be Abarian. By the way, however, talking of the law of inheritance in Avaran, I have never heard that Is-das has a single—legitimate—relation.'

Again Doctor Marillier's keen eyes searched his cousin's face. They were standing in the first of the- reception-rooms, a desert of gilding and upholstery, with a huge crystal chandelier in the centre, and at one end, just over the two men, that melancholy and haunting portrait of the Emperor of Abaria. A message had been sent apprising the Ambassador's nurse of Doctor Marillier's arrival.

'You imply what I have not altogether understood. I have only seen Mademoiselle Isàdas once—at the last ball here. I gleaned then that her position was equivocal. What is her exact relation to the Pacha?'

Again Ruel Bey shrugged, and the shrug was eloquent.

‘The world will tell you that she is his niece—when it speaks officially. But all the world knows that she is not his niece, and would not hesitate to say so—unofficially. But even officially she is not recognised. It is a significant fact that Mademoiselle Isàdas has not attended one of the Queen’s drawing-rooms, and that she does not wear the order of the Leopard and the Lotus which the Emperor of Abaria always presents to a daughter of an ambassador, or to an officially-recognised niece of an ambassador, when she is the only lady in the Embassy—in that case even to the wife of the first secretary.’

Doctor Marillier made a gesture of extreme disapproval.

‘I dislike to hear you speak in that way, Caspar. You gave me the impression that you wanted to marry Mademoiselle Isàdas.’

Ruel Bey smiled.

‘The wife of an aspiring Minister, a potential Ambassador, must be, like Cæsar’s wife, above suspicion—at any rate, as regards her social antecedents. I confess that I should prefer to marry a lady with no haziness about her parentage. . . . But—we are human, Lucien, and a pair of lovely eyes is apt to play the deuce with such prejudice.’

At that moment a nurse advanced towards the door of the second reception-room. Here were massed the bouquets, and here lay the cards and notes sent by royal, diplomatic and social admirers of the Pacha. Doctor Marillier at once proceeded to the door of the Ambassador’s bedroom, which opened off the furthest apartment of the suite—that which was his usual sitting-room. Ruel Bey remained in the second reception-room idly sniffing at a bouquet of orchids and sprigs of scented verbena. Here also, as he waited, an illustrator might have found subject and opportunity. In odd contrast to his cousin the doctor, striking as was the personality of each, Ruel Bey had the face and form of a Hermes—the Apollos seem mostly insufficiently virile for comparison. One could, however, imagine Ruel Bey with winged feet, and the muscular development presumably to be associated with an Olympian messenger. Certainly he might have been modelled as a Hermes, save for his Bond Street get-up, his moustache and the fez. The fez, however, gave a certain outlandish distinction, and its deep red enhanced the brilliancy of his dark eyes, the clearness of his olive skin, and the sheen of a few curling tendrils of dark hair showing beneath it on neck and brow. As one looked at him one thought instinctively of grape leaves, of honey-throated song, of the love of women, and the glory of young-limbed strength. Yet though here was the old joy in life of the Olympians, there was something, too, of the later Hellenism, something of modern Greek craft, a touch of imported Eastern sensuousness; much, too, of self-interest. That was to be read at moments, in the shifty gleam of his full, soft eyes, in the ripeness of his fruit-like mouth, in certain charming mannerisms that did not breathe a whole-hearted sincerity. He was less of a man’s than of a woman’s man.

Women are intuitive, but where they love and admire, they do not analyse. Probably few of the great ladies who petted him, of the nobly-born women who would have married him had he been a little richer, a little more highly placed—or of the less frailer creatures who idolised him for a year, a month, a week—were capable of analysing Ruel Bey. He appealed to the senses of women, not to the soul.

CHAPTER II

RACHEL

The door into the vestibule opened. There was a light step upon the parquet of the outer reception-room. Ruel Bey put down the bouquet, detaching a sprig of verbena, which he fastened into his buttonhole. His hand trembled as he did so; he knew the step, and he wanted to gain time and to conceal his agitation. Presently he looked up, apparently frank, bright, welcoming. A girl approached through the ornamented folding doors.

‘Monsieur Ruel,’ she began in formal, hesitating accents; then glancing round and seeing that he was alone, advanced less timidly. He put out his hand, and with that grace and charm which all women loved, drew her to a seat.

‘Dearest,’ he murmured.

She shrank a little.

‘No. . . . I don’t think you ought. . . . Your cousin is here.’

‘I have told him you wished to speak to him. If anyone can save the Pacha, it is Lucien Marillier.’

‘I knew that. . . . I felt sure of it. He will not mind telling me what he really thinks.’

‘I will leave you alone with him when he comes out. He will tell you the truth—as far as doctors ever I tell the truth. Remember that Excellency is an old man.’

‘Poor *Excellence*,’ said the girl, softly. ‘It must be hard to lie, perhaps dying, and to be—so unloved.’

Ruel Bey waved his hand over the heaped flowers and the array of cards. ‘He is honoured, and that is better than being loved.’

‘Do you think so? Oh, no, Caspar, you don’t really think so.’

‘No,’ he answered, coming closer to her, and bending forward so that his lips touched her hair, ‘I don’t think so—when I look at you.’

The girl did not answer. She seemed to be pondering his words, and not altogether with satisfaction. He withdrew a pace or two, and leaning against the mantelpiece, his cheek upon his hand, looked down upon her admiringly as she sat at the corner of the fireplace in a large-armed, gilded chair. She was very beautiful. The most ambitious of men might well consider it more important to be loved by her than honoured by the world.

Her absolute claims to beauty set aside, there was something peculiarly attractive, and, at the same time, peculiarly pathetic, about this girl. She showed race in every line of her. Was it from the Pacha or from her mother that this was inherited? She was called the Pacha’s niece; she bore his name; it was supposed that she was his brother’s child. And yet, in the accounts printed of the Pacha’s lineage and career, no mention was made of his brother. Besides, Ruel Bey had said, and all the world knew, that Isàdas was the titular name given with the honours that Emperor had conferred. He belonged to a family before it became a republic, had supplied rulers to the island kingdom of Avaran. The revolution had driven him thence, and in all the vigour of his manhood Count Varenzi had entered the service Abdullulah Zobeir, the youthful Emperor of Abaria. His brother’s child, had there been one, would have inherited the name of Varenzi, but Rachel had never been known save as Mademoiselle Isàdas. That pathetic look in Rachel Isàdas came from the blending of evident dignity of race with an expression wistful, deprecating, shadowed, as of one impressed by a certain incongruity in her position, and not entirely free from a dread of being slighted, were she to assert that position. Mademoiselle Isàdas’s proud little head had a

timid droop; her slender form, in spite of its stately carriage, a shrinking air, as though she dreaded and wished to avoid observation; her eyes a startled, almost beseeching gaze, when she was suddenly addressed or taken notice of by a stranger.

Her head looked small for her body, though she was tall and very slight. Her throat, too, was unusually slender. She had pretty, soft, dark hair, the brown which shows reddish glints; her face was oval, the nose finely chiselled and a little short; the upper lip short too and extremely sensitive, like that of a child, alone in the world's fair, and scarcely knowing whether to laugh or to weep. The eyes were brown, soft, and plaintively appealing, with something of the expression in the eyes of a St Bernard dog.

They were not the bright black eyes of the Avaranese, but had a suggestion of the East in their long almond-shaped lids and their dreamy intensity when her face was in repose, though they would light up at moments with a childlike gladness, and had, too, the limpid purity which one sees in the eyes of a child.

Suddenly now, she glanced up at Ruel Bey's face. The two looks met, and both underwent a curious change. In both pairs of eyes a flame was kindled. A magnetic impulse drew the man and woman together. She had risen, and now moved, frightened, it seemed, of that very impulse, half evading his outstretched arms. A dimple in her throat attracted him. He put his lips to it, brushing the satin skin as if savouring its sweetness, and ardently kissed the flower-like hollow at the base of her throat.

'I love you,' he whispered.

Trembling slightly, she shrank away from him, and stood with bent head and cheeks faintly red. Again, he would have embraced her, but she refused the caress, not without dignity.

'I love you, sweet,' he repeated.

'You say so . . . but . . . ' she spoke with hesitation. 'It is not fitting that you should tell me so in this way. It is not the custom.'

'The conventual custom!' he said, with a laugh. 'Dear nun, we are in London—not in the convent.'

'I wish that I were back in the convent,' she said, 'for many reasons.'

'But you would not wish to be a nun?' he asked.

'No. I have not a vocation. But one is safe in the convent.'

'And you are not safe here? Is that what you mean?'

'I was peaceful in the convent,' she exclaimed. 'I was not torn and troubled and frightened by strange thoughts and feelings—feelings I had never known before.'

'Foolish one, is it of the feelings that you are afraid? Why fear what is the only thing worth living for—love?'

'There should be peace in love, joy in love—not terror and unrest.'

'Yet you love me, Rachel? You cannot deny it?'

'I don't know. How can I tell? Your love is not the love I have dreamed of—read of. It is not holy, pure, spiritual. It is not—' she stopped short.

'Not the love you have read of in the journals of Saint Theresa—or in the Meditations of St Thomas à Kempis? No, I grant you that. It is a more human sort of thing. A thing of the world—possibly of the devil—not of the Church.'

Rachel shrank again, and there was puzzle and deeper dread in the straight gaze of her brown eyes.

‘Oh, it is when you say things like that—it’s that strain in you which makes me afraid. Why should you say “not of the Church—possibly of the devil?” I don’t understand. The blessing of the Church, should be upon all true love. Marriage is a sacrament.’

Ruel Bey gave the nameless gesture—the instinctive gesture of the sceptic. ‘How many London marriages are what you call a sacrament? But I don’t want to argue that point. It is enough for me that I love you. Your prayers, dear saint, may call down the ecclesiastical blessing. Assuredly mine -will not. I am content—for the moment—with love itself, love in its least spiritual aspect, its most human joy.’

The girl blushed more deeply. She was struggling to get out some words which were difficult.

‘I suppose that you feel as a man feels. I cannot tell. But—I don’t know what it is in you that draws me, almost against myself, and then repels me. You do not speak of love as—’

‘As Saint Theresa and St Thomas à Kempis speak of it?’ he rejoined with tender raillery. ‘No. I speak of it as the diplomat, as the man of cities, as one who belongs to the world of men, and not to the cerulean heaven, must speak of love. I have blood in my veins, not celestial lymph. I would clasp the flesh rather than adore the spirit. I love you as the old Greeks loved, as the modern man loves—not after the fashion of the mediæval monk. Except Fra Lippo Lippi. He had the courage to carry off his nun. I give him grace, and salute her memory.’

Ruel Bey laughed and touched his finger tips, blowing a kiss to the fair, frail Madonna whom Lippi had loved and painted, with that enchanting mannerism which, in the drawing-rooms of a certain set of women, had gained him the reputation of culture of a kind.

Still Rachel had not said what she wished to say; and still the red in her cheeks, which was that pale red peculiar to such a type, deepened, and her speech faltered.

‘I did not mean what you seem to think. I cannot explain myself to myself—how much less to you! I have told you that you draw me to you—and yet, at the very moment, it is as though an invisible barrier were placed between us. And I do understand. Though you laugh at the conventual customs, I am not so ignorant as you fancy of the ways of the world. You forget that, though it is only a few months since I left the convent, I am nearly twenty-five, and that is not very young. I have had friends among girls who were married, and I have seen how such things are arranged even in London. You . . . It is now two weeks since you . . . told me that you loved me. I have no mother—no one but my uncle, and he seems strange and far away—but he is my guardian. And . . . and . . . you have not asked me from him.’

‘My child, is it that which is troubling your simple soul! The foreign blood in you speaks, as well as the French bringing-up. You expected a *conseil de famille*—the bargaining about settlements—the exact amount stipulated for pin-money—all the ordinary preludes of matrimony. Well, let me tell you frankly that I have no private means; that it has always been expected I should marry a fortune instead of bestowing one; that, in short, from the worldly point of view, there would be many difficulties; that for the moment—till I am appointed Minister to the Court of—some little minor kingdom—and that’s a poor enough basis of negotiations in the matter of pin-money and settlements—I can’t—’

‘Oh! No! No!’ the girl interrupted, overcome with shame. ‘How could you suppose that I thought of such things? You know . . . you know . . .’

‘I know that you are adorable. I know that I love you. I know that when we are alone together, I cannot bow and give you my finger tips as if we were dancing a minuet. I know that the temptation of that fascinating dimple, and of those sweet lips, remind me somehow of the Song of Solomon, can’t be resisted. I know that I want to sip the honey, to snatch the joy, and to forget the sordid details which, in any case, dear, should not be forced into the critical hours of a

serious illness. Wait! Listen to what Marillier has to say. I think I hear him coming out now from the Pacha's room. I will leave you to have your talk.'

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTOR AND THE WOMAN

The girl sat down again resignedly, pale now, not greatly reassured, still, obliged to confess that there was reason in Caspar Ruel's words, and partly ashamed of what she thought he must have fancied her own grasping attitude.

'Forgive me,' she murmured, and he gave her a long, ardent look, kissed her hand, and went out through the folding doors, just as the curtains separating this room from the Pacha's sanctum were drawn aside by the nurse for Doctor Marillier to pass through.

Rachel rose at his entrance and advanced. As she faced him, her eyes eager, her whole countenance moved and softened by the emotion she had been experiencing, Marillier was almost taken aback by her extraordinary beauty. He stood awkwardly, the hunch of his shoulders accentuated by his hesitation, his strong face reflecting both sides of his nature, the human and the professional. He had been deeply interested in the Pacha's case. His brain was working out theories; he was weighing the forces of disease and life with which he had to deal. For the moment he had forgotten everything else, and the sight of Rachel, setting into vibration chords in him, of which he had hardly suspected the existence, was unexpectedly disturbing.

'Doctor Marillier, she said, with her air of timid self-possession—of withdrawal into her own sanctuary which was so marked when she spoke to a stranger, 'Ruel Bey said you would be kind enough to tell me exactly what you think of the Pacha's condition.'

She held out her hand, not waiting for him to answer. 'Though I did not speak to you, I think we have seen each other before,' she went on. 'I am Rachel Isâdas; of course you know.'

'Yes,' he replied, it seemed to him mechanically. 'Of course I know.'

'And you were at the Pacha's last ball?' she said.

'Yes.'

He remembered her well, and the indefinable attraction she had even then had for him—the curious pity that he had felt, and his vague wonder about her; for it had struck him as strange that she should be at once, so near to the Pacha and yet outside the state and ceremony with which on this occasion he was surrounded. There were no other ladies belonging to the Abarian Embassy, for none of the secretaries were married. She was a comparatively new arrival on the scene, it being her first season in London, thus the fact of her isolation, so apparent to him, might not have impressed the casual crowd. He recalled the scene—the great gilded ballroom, with mirrors at intervals along the walls, reflecting back the lights and diamonds, the forms and faces, all the throng of beautifully-dressed women and of men in uniform with ribbons and orders on their breasts. The Pacha had stood just outside the doorway, above which was a great emblazoned shield with the Star of the Empire and a motto in the pictorial Abarian character, receiving his guests as they came and passed through to the ballroom. The Pacha's breast glittered with many decorations; in truth he was the most picturesque and striking figure present. It seemed almost by design that he was so stationed as not to admit of another person between himself and the door, and the people entering, might not at first have noticed the tall slender girl a pace within, who stood behind the Pacha, and who looked, as Marillier had put it to himself, like an angel dropped down from heaven.

An angel not entirely at ease, however, but bewildered by the situation in which she found herself, and unconsciously realising that, though making a tiny part of this splendid world of fashion and diplomacy, she nevertheless did not belong to it. His physician's eye told him that she was nervous, and that it was by the greatest effort that she maintained her calm dignity. For she was very dignified. Her quietude, her simplicity, the slight droop of her head, and her involuntary shrinking from observation which, erectly though she held herself, was so evident to him, only enhanced the dignity. How beautiful she looked! Her brown eyes shone like stars. Her clear pale cheeks, slightly tinged with pink, reminded him of the inner petals of a certain white rose, her long slender neck of the white calyx of a tropical flower, and the sensitive lips with their pathetic droop, a thread of scarlet, were, in the phrase used by Ruel Bey, as the lips of that fairest among women in the Song of Solomon. She had worn a white satin gown with soft fillings and draperies, and some lilies at her breast. She carried a bouquet of the same Eucharis lilies, and round her neck was a single string of pearls, her only ornament. She had no orders nor ribbons, and her little head bore neither stars nor tiara. So she stood, an exquisite and, to him, pathetically forlorn figure, and no one seemed to remark the pathos and forlornness of her except himself.

Once or twice, the Pacha would turn and informally introduce her to some lady whom he greeted, but she was not presented to the greatest of the royal ladies whom the Pacha had descended the stairs to welcome, and it had been quite clear that, officially speaking, she was not recognised. Doctor Marillier observed that one great lady, a lesser light among the royal people, looked at the girl with a motherly curiosity and kindness, and made an occasion to notice her. That royal lady was ever afterwards endeared to the heart of the doctor, and he had been pleased with the grace of Mademoiselle Isàdas's curtsy, and the soft shy lighting up of her pensive face. Later on, when the dancing began, a bevy of would-be partners crowded round the girl, and after that, he had only seen her as she whirled round in a waltz or played her part in the cotillon led by Ruel Bey. He had noticed his cousin's admiration, and a word or two that he had by chance overheard pass between them, made him feel sure that Ruel Bey loved the Ambassador's niece and desired to marry her.

He was hardly aware, as his memory went back to this scene and the thoughts it had evoked, how awkwardly he stood now after that monosyllabic 'Yes,' and how long the girl, too shy to ask him more directly his professional opinion, waited for him to deliver it.

At last she said, seating herself again in the big gilded chair, and motioning him to a settee opposite,—

'Doctor Marillier, you will tell me how you find the Pacha—what you really think of his state?'

'That is a little difficult for me to put into clear words, Mademoiselle Isàdas.'

'Perhaps,' she went on, 'you are afraid; you think it may be too great a shock for me to hear the truth. But I would always wish to know the truth about a thing that concerns me deeply, even though it might be a shock.'

He remembered those words of hers long afterwards. At the time, he was gauging her with those keen doctor's eyes, weighing in his mind, her capacity to bear the shock of a cruel truth, and he came to the conclusion that her words were literally true, and that she was one of those women with whom a doctor may be candid.

'I ought perhaps to tell you,' she said, mistaking the motive of his slight hesitation, that if—if you thought ill of his condition, the shock would not be so great to me as though I had lived always with the Pacha, as though I were his daughter, or had been his companion for many years.

I have been just a few months at the Embassy, and before that, I can only remember seeing the Pacha three or four times when he came to my convent. So we have not been very close to each other. I don't want you to think,' she added hastily, 'that I am not sincerely attached—that I do not appreciate the Pacha's great goodness to me. He is all I have in the world, and if *Excellence* were taken away, I should be lonely indeed.'

The little note of emotion in her voice touched him inexpressibly. She must in very truth be lonely if the loss of that cynical, selfish old reprobate would be the loss of her only natural protector.

'I trust, Mademoiselle Isâdas, that his Excellency will be spared to you for a little while yet, if I am correct in my diagnosis, and am permitted to carry out the treatment I propose. In fact I may say that I am sure his life can be saved—for the present.'

'Can anyone be sure?' she said wistfully, struck by the masterfulness of the man's tone. 'Only God can be sure. But oh! Doctor Marillier, I am very thankful for what you say, and I believe it. You make me feel that you would not speak like this unless you were confident of your power.'

'I *am* confident,' he replied. 'I will tell you why. You say that no one can be sure but God; and it may be that we doctors have a different conception of the Force which made life and ordained death than that which has been taught you in your convent. Perhaps it is that we have no conception at all; that we are agnostics in the true sense of the word; that ecclesiasticism is to us so much mummery, and creeds and dogmas all equally meaningless and unsatisfactory. But there *is* a Force we cannot deny, a Something outside ourselves which rules life and decrees death, and it is only when, in some dim manner which I can't explain even to myself, I come into relation with this Force—only then that I can be sure. That does not always happen; it happens rarely. But when I have made my diagnosis and am sure, not the whole College of Physicians against me would shake my opinion. I *can* cure the Pasha. For how long I will not say. He is a very old man, and already his life has reached the ordinary span.'

Her look of wistful wonder deepened to one of childlike trust.

'You are strong,' she said. 'I like a man to be strong; and there are so few—so very few men upon whom one can lean.'

'You might lean upon me,' said Doctor Marillier, 'and I should not fail you. Of that, too, I am sure.'

He bent a little forward, and as he uttered the words, put his two hands down flat upon his knees as though to emphasise the declaration. She could not help noticing his hands.

'You are strong,' she repeated; 'your hands are strong.'

'They ought to be,' he answered; 'they have performed many difficult operations.' And then he was inwardly jarred by his own professional plain-speaking. This was not the way to talk to a young delicate girl. What should she know about operations? His bluntness did not appear to have struck her. She was interested, and her eyes remained still fixed upon those firm deft hands.

'If I were very ill, and needed to have an operation performed that would cure or kill me, I would ask you to do it,' she said; 'that is, if you said to me, I know—'

'If I said, "I know that I can cure you"!' he returned. 'Oh, then it would be easy to trust me, for doctors do not say "I know" about operations unless they feel sure. But if I said, "I do not know, and you must run the risk of life or death," what then?'

'I would trust you still,' she replied. 'And it might be,' she added thoughtfully, 'that the trusting would not be so difficult, nor the uncertainty so hard to bear. I do not think that life is very good, and sometimes one might almost prefer death if it were God's will. Then one would be sure of being happy.'

‘That is what your Church teaches you. You are a Catholic, of course? So am—so was I. But how about Purgatory?’

‘Perhaps,’ she said, ‘to some, life is the worst Purgatory God will call upon us to endure.’

He gave a queer little laugh.

‘That’s true. I wouldn’t ask a worse Purgatory for my bitterest enemy, supposing I had one, than certain portions out of my own life. I, too, have known what loneliness is, Mademoiselle Isàdas. . . . But this is not business, and I don’t know why I’m talking to you in such an odd way. You must think me a queer sort of doctor. Yet I’m very glad we’ve talked so, for it makes me understand you better. Your saying that you would trust me if I said “I know” in the case of an operation, or, what is better, if I said “I don’t know,” makes it much easier for me to tell you that the Pacha’s life depends upon an operation that I wish to perform and which I know will succeed. Perhaps I should say that it depends even more upon an after treatment which I fancy few English physicians would endorse. . . . But there’s no use in talking technicalities to young ladies—they wouldn’t understand them.’

‘I don’t want technicalities. You are quite right, I shouldn’t understand them,’ she said, with her sweet girl’s laugh, that sounded to the doctor like distant bells over snow. ‘I trust you absolutely, Doctor Marillier, and thank you—thank you. You have lifted a weight from my heart. Now I can be almost happy again.’

‘Almost happy!’ The sense of pathos in connection with her, returned to him with that ‘almost.’ He got up; she rose too, and the girl and this man stood facing each other as the other man and the girl had faced each other. Ruel Bey had towered a head and a half above this tiny head upon its calyx throat. As Doctor Marillier stood erect, with frame squared, his strong, determined face was, if anything, on a lower level than her own. The contrast came upon her with an odd impressiveness. How was it possible that the two men were so nearly related? In temperament, in character, no two beings could be more apart. And each man in his way had a forcefulness which she could not withstand. She felt, in a frightened manner, that Ruel Bey would exercise complete control over one side of her nature, and that side, the one she least comprehended. Another side of her would, she knew, be affected to an enormous degree by Doctor Marillier, and this side she was not afraid of, though it, too, she did not quite understand.

He took her hand in his. The little sensitive hand, which seemed to him like a bundle of nerves tied together, thrilled at his touch—thrilled for a second only, then quieted under the consciousness of mastery and of restfulness. His medical knowledge told him that he could healthfully magnetise the girl. Certain nerves in her, responded sympathetically to a power which he was aware he could wield. That power was in himself and yet was outside himself. He associated it in some way with the Force of which he had spoken, and which was his synonym for her conception of God. Doctor Marillier did not believe in the Churches’ God, but he believed in a Force, just as he believed in the law of gravitation, in the law of chemical affinities, of mental affinities, such as were exemplified in telepathy and hypnotism, in the law of evolution, in certain other even more subtle, more occult laws, that his medical experience had compelled him to recognise—mysteries of the universe only to be attributed to the action of a First Cause, expressed by words and symbols that were but words and symbols, and after all, never really touched the heart of the mystery. These were realities to be admitted, but not to be explained as either spiritual or material—though his tendency, as that of most scientists, was to the explanation that all is matter in a more or less rarefied form. Rachel Isàdas herself was sensible of the soothing effect of his touch. She withdrew her hand slowly. ‘You feel strong,’ she said. ‘Yes, I trust you.’

‘Trust me always. Trust me in the matter of this operation upon the Pacha. There you are safe. I can be trusted in the most elementary sense because *I know*. But trust me, too, where *I don’t know*.’

‘Doctor Marillier, that seems a strange thing for you to say to me on the first occasion of our speaking together, and yet, though it is strange, it is natural.’

‘It is natural,’ he answered, ‘because it comes out of that faculty I possess of seeing with my inner eyes things beyond. Don’t ask me to explain the faculty. That way madness lies. I do not attempt to reason about it, even to myself. But it is a fact—one that I have tested sufficiently to have scientific evidence of its truth. It is natural for me to bid you trust me, because this inward vision foreshadows a time when you will be required to trust me, and when perhaps—I can’t say—but when probably *I shall not know*. Of this, however, I am certain—in the end, your trust will be justified.’

A spirit seemed to him to be looking out of her eyes.

‘I, too,’ she answered, ‘have something—I cannot call it inward vision. I can only call it instinct. Something which draws or repels me, encourages or warns. I can rely upon it almost always.’

‘Almost always!’ he repeated. ‘There should be no “almost” There is no “almost” with me. If I am standing by the bedside of a patient doomed by the Faculty to death, and that inward vision shows him to me safe and sound—there is no question, it *is* so. If, on the other hand, I see Death at the back of even a trifling ailment, that also is sure, and I do not question, because I know that to Death my science must bow.’

‘You speak of patients—they are not a part of you. I have heard before, that a doctor is only unerring when he does not love. But if you loved—then could you be sure?’

Marillier was silent. If there were a spirit in the girl’s eyes, one seemed to be peering forth into futurity from his. Their grey had deepened to the colour of a mountain-locked pool.

‘Could I be sure? I cannot tell you, for till this day of my life I have never lived beyond the restrictions of reason and science. My interests have been centred in my profession, Mademoiselle Isàdas, for circumstances have limited them. I have never known love.’

‘Till this day of my life.’ He had uttered the words deliberately, and while he uttered them, the inward monitor seemed to be pointing out to him their immense significance. To Rachel Isàdas they had no such significance. They seemed the ordinary expression of a cool-headed, steel-hearted scientist, who had not had time for the softer emotions. She knew he was unmarried; she fancied that Ruel Bey had told her that he was himself Marillier’s nearest relation. The remembrance spurred her speech.

‘But you have—is it true that you are the only one of your name?’

‘Quite true. My father was an only child and an orphan; my mother had one sister. Ruel Bey is that sister’s son. He represents to me, therefore, all the ties of kindred.’

‘But—’ she hesitated again. ‘Ruel Bey is lovable.’

Marillier interrupted her sharply.

‘You find him so, Mademoiselle Isàdas?’

The girl started as if he had struck her, and the blood rushed to her face. She recovered herself and replied,—

‘That seems an even stranger thing to say to me.’

‘I do not think so. At the Pacha’s ball his admiration of you was evident enough. I was naturally interested in observing how you received his attentions. Perhaps it would be well that I should tell you what he himself does not know—I am not a poor man and he is my heir. If you

loved and consented to marry him, and the provision made by the Pacha or required by the Pacha were riot adequate, I would supplement it.'

The trouble spread over Rachel Isàdas's face—the faint alarm.

'Oh, I don't know—I don't know.'

'Tell me,' said Marillier, 'is it with him as with me—when you don't know, can you trust?'

'I don't know—I don't know,' she repeated helplessly.

The sight of her perplexity roused in Marillier something of which he had never before been conscious.

'If you can't trust him you may trust me. That's perhaps the meaning of the foreshadowing I have about you. I'll be true to it. Trust me, Mademoiselle Isàdas! Trust me; and by the Force that you call God, I'll protect you against him, if need be; against your own heart, if need be. If need be, too, against myself.'

Before she realised the meaning of his words, while still under the spell of the look he gave her out of those clear grey eyes, in which it seemed that two little electric sparks suddenly blazed, Rachel Isàdas found herself alone. He had abruptly turned from her and vanished through the open half of the folding doors. When she looked through them she was confronted by the sensuous face with its fateful Eastern melancholy, its terrible satiety of the flesh, which gazed out at her from the eyes of the Emperor of Abaria.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ISÀDAS PACHA.

The operation was over. It had been wholly successful, and a new cure was added to those which were rapidly making Doctor Marillier famous. But there were dissensions among members of the Faculty; the Pacha's regular physician in especial was opposed to Marillier's view of the case. Isàdas Pacha, however, decided the matter. Quickly comprehending the situation, his brain became alert as ever, and that wonderful power in him of diagnosing men, to which his brilliant diplomatic career was largely attributable, now made itself felt.

Isàdas, after the consultation, requested to be left alone with Marillier. It was a strange interview, during which the Pacha's gleaming eyes shining out of cavernous orbits from beneath the wrinkled brows remained fixed upon the face of Marillier, reading the man's soul as, it seemed to the doctor, no human eyes had ever before read that closed book. The Pacha discussed his own symptoms, weighed the arguments of the consulting physician and surgeon, demanded reasons and details, and the grounds which Marillier had for his conclusions, differing as they did from those of Mr Ffolliot and Dr Carus Spencer. In his questions he displayed a knowledge, not only of ordinary medical science, but of certain occult methods taught in the East, but not generally admitted in Western schools, which greatly surprised the doctor. Still more surprised was he when, after he had explained his proposed treatment, the Pacha remarked in that deep yet faint voice, which seemed already as though it issued from a tomb,—

'I see that you have studied under the Medicine Moor.'

Marillier started.

'It is true; but I did not know, Excellency, that you were acquainted with that singular personage.'

A grim expression—an odd distortion of the features as by a spasm of pain—passed over the Pacha's face as he answered,—

‘At one period of my life I knew the Medicine Moor intimately. I have spent days with him in the Kabyle hills. His was, as you say, a singular personality. He knew many secrets of Nature and effected some wonderful cures. If he were alive I would send for him now, for I believe that if my life is to be prolonged he could do most to prolong it. And yet—’ A dreamy note came into the old man’s voice; he paused, and the distortion of his features was more painful, while the gleam in his eyes hardened and intensified.

‘And yet,’ he went on, ‘in my greatest emergency, that science, that skill in which I trusted, failed me.’

Marillier said nothing. He felt that here he was treading upon the thin crust of a still active volcano.

‘They failed me,’ the Pacha continued, ‘as skill and science must always fail when emotion prevents the will from aiding them. I cannot altogether blame the Medicine Moor, though I think he might have done more. Even the dread sentence—as he put it, “Will of Allah”—might have been defied. Had I but understood then the power of human will—’ The metallic glare in the old man’s eyes flickered. Weakness of the body overpowered him for a minute or two. Marillier administered a restorative and presently he went on.

‘Doctor,’ he said, ‘do you not know that there are two supreme forces by which man may, to an almost incredible extent, control his own destiny. Those forces are Love and Will.’

Marillier smiled a little grimly.

‘Love!’ he repeated. ‘That force at least is not within my control.’

‘Yet you are one of those so constituted as to be able to absorb and concentrate subtle energies of Nature. Take an old man’s prophecy. Believe that you have capacity to draw down power to accomplish your desire. Do not, as was the case with me, realise that capacity when it is too late.’

There was a short silence. Marillier’s grim look had given place to a puzzled one. The Pacha watched him carefully. Presently the old man spoke again, this time with fiery determination.

‘Now to business. If I live, we will talk of these things by-and-by. I foresee that we shall have interesting subjects in common. Doctor Marillier, I have decided. I place myself unreservedly in your hands. Save me for a few years, a few months—it may be even a few weeks. Strange as it may seem to you, I still find life sweet. The Immensities spread beyond, yet I cling to this prison of flesh. I know that there is one master to whom all must bow—the master Death. When Death gives his sentence its execution cannot be delayed. But in my case the fiat is perhaps not yet delivered. Stay it for awhile if you can. Have no hesitation. Act. Perform the operation you propose. Carry out the after treatment you have described. I care not a jot for the opinion of Ffolliot and Carus Spencer, since they do not offer me life. They may go to the devil. They shall hear from my own lips, however, that I consent to what they consider useless and dangerous. Have the goodness to ring.’

A strange scene followed. The Pacha summoned, as though to his deathbed, Mademoiselle Isâdas, the first secretary, his body servant and others of his immediate *entourage*, including a man of law; and in their presence had it affirmed by the physicians that he was in full possession of his mental faculties—a point they could not dispute.

He then, in the most courteous terms, announced his intentions, and took leave of the physicians, who departed, indignantly repudiating responsibility, and leaving Marillier in possession of the case.

Before the operation, the Pacha again spoke privately to Marillier, placing in his hand a sealed packet inscribed with directions that the enclosure should be delivered to his Majesty the Emperor of Abaria.

It is possible that I may die under the knife,' he said, 'though I do not think it likely. Will you do me the favour of keeping this letter until the operation is over. If successful, you will return it to me. If not—, He paused, and for a few moments seemed to be calculating possibilities.

'I know that the operation will be successful,' said Marillier. 'How long you may live after it, Pacha, depends, as you have said yourself, upon whether Death has or has not, delivered his sentence. I believe that you will live.'

'Nevertheless,' replied the Pacha, 'I should prefer that the letter were in your keeping. It is important, and it is of a personal and strictly private nature. I do not care to run any risk of its being found and sent in the ordinary official course. It must be delivered by private messenger into my Emperor's own hands. Within the outer covering you will find another letter addressed to the Grand Chancellor, who is my friend, by which an audience will be assured. You will also find a sum of money amply sufficient to cover all professional loss and expenses incurred, but totally insufficient as an expression of my gratitude for the fulfilment of a most sacred trust. Will you undertake this trust?'

Doctor Marillier hesitated. He had no mind to be mixed up Abarian state intrigues. The Pacha Eagerly waited for his reply.

'If you will permit me, Excellency, to suggest—surely, since the document is a State matter, and of importance, your first secretary, my cousin Ruel Bey, would be a more proper custodian than I.'

The Pacha blazed out in fury. An imprecation was smothered before he could find utterance.

'Have I not said that it is a private and personal matter, and that I do not wish it to reach his Majesty in the ordinary official course? And what do you think of me? Where is your penetration? Do you not credit me with at least *some* knowledge of the nature of men? Ruel Bey is the last person I should choose for such a trust. I ask you to take charge of this letter in order that it may run no risk of falling into the hands of my first secretary. I have studied Ruel Bey. I know to what heights his ambition soars. I have read his pleasure-loving nature. He has Greek blood in his veins—'

'And I also,' quietly observed Marillier.

'But you have none of the modern Greek characteristics. Forgive me, doctor. In my diplomatic career I have had reason to distrust Greek subtlety. And I am an autocratic old man, unaccustomed to be contradicted or argued with. Besides, you know I am ill—I am very ill.'

The confession of weakness appealed to Marillier much as the confession of fractiousness from a wayward child might appeal to one who held the temporary place of guardian to the child. He gently put his hand on the old man, and his touch seemed to soothe the Pacha and to give him strength. But Marillier said nothing. He wondered whether the Pacha was aware of the attachment between Ruel Bey and Mademoiselle Isâdas, and the old man's next words seemed to answer his question.

'I have been watching Ruel Bey closely—more closely than he has any idea of. I have seen the conflict between passion and ambition . . . and I have seen the influence he is exercising upon Mademoiselle Isâdas,' went on the Pacha, while it struck Marillier as odd that he should speak of his niece in so formal and indifferent a fashion.

'Let Ruel Bey marry Mademoiselle Isâdas if he pleases, or let him not marry her if he so please—assuming that it be also the pleasure of mademoiselle to marry or not to marry Ruel Bey. That is equal. I place no compulsion on either in their wooing. I wait to give my consent or my refusal as conditions dictate, when the matter is referred to me. But I may die before I am referred to. That is also equal.'

The old man had lapsed into French, a frequent habit at the Embassy, though English was the usual medium for social converse.

‘Nevertheless,’ he continued, ‘this is important, for I may tell you that Ruel Bey has emissaries at the Abarian Court, and his ambition does not stop short at the attempt to succeed me. That will be as the Fates decree, and as his Majesty may decide; but it is important that Ruel Bey should have no temptation placed in his way to discover the contents of this document if I die before he and Mademoiselle Isàdas have made up their minds to marry or not to marry.’

The Pacha sank back exhausted. Clearly, he was unfit for further discussion. Something in the old man’s tone, in his cold-blooded allusion to Rachel Isàdas, in his hint that the letter affected her destinies in connection with those of Ruel Bey, caused Marillier’s heart to leap and made him decide to accept the responsibility. He thought it possible that Isàdas Pacha also suspected the disinterestedness of Ruel Bey’s love for Rachel, and that he intended to put that love to the test, while at the same time guarding the girl in some manner of which Marillier could have no definite notion, but with which the letter to the Emperor of Abaria was evidently concerned.

‘I will take your letter, Excellency,’ he said. ‘I feel that I may safely accept the trust, and am prepared to fulfil it. For I am confident that I shall not be called upon to do so, and that before long this letter will be returned into your hands.’

* * *

Marillier’s statement proved to be the case. Isàdas Pacha received back his letter as soon as the doctor pronounced him out of danger. His convalescence, however, was slow. Even Marillier, while he sedulously pursued the treatment which was as necessary as the operation had been, sometimes asked himself whether he had not been too sanguine, and whether Death were not merely awaiting a convenient season for carrying out the already pronounced sentence. This thought seemed vaguely also in the old man’s mind. He was gay, cynical, apparently not concerned with any idea of making his salvation, causing thereby some uneasiness to the Catholic priest who attended him; and yet the sense of impending finality was upon him, and often he would preface some witty and unusually sacrilegious story with the remark, ‘Before I join the Immensities I must tell you this anecdote, which will amuse you.’ And then would follow some cleverly-pointed profanity, which generally had the effect of driving away Nurse Dalison and leaving the doctor alone with his patient.

Nurse Dalison was a lady trained in surgical cases, who had worked for some time under Doctor Marillier, and had been chosen by him to supersede the Pacha’s former nurse as being possessed of a good manner and tact, and therefore more likely than another to adapt herself to the patient’s peculiarities. He had reflected also that she might prove an agreeable companion to Rachel, who, except for her own maid, was without female company at the Embassy.

Nurse Dalison was graceful and sympathetic. Tall, slender and refined-looking, she had the sensibility of a woman towards the sufferings of man or beast, but the nerve of a man where her professional duties were in question. She was at once practical and romantic, therefore the luxury and social importance of the Embassy, the distinction of the Pacha and the timid sweetness of Rachel appealed to her worldly wisdom and to her imagination. Moreover, she was professionally interested in the success of Doctor Marillier’s methods.

One of her chief recommendations to the Pacha was that she had a good French accent and read aloud extremely well, but Marillier was often amused when he paid his calls to see the pained and bewildered expression on Nurse Dalison’s face as she read to the Pacha from some

one of his favourite authors, and the evident relief with which she put down the book on the doctor's entrance.

The Pacha would give a sardonic smile from among his cushions. Upon one occasion he remarked,—

'My thanks, nurse: we'll continue later. I hope that I am helping to assuage your thirst for Eastern knowledge. Mrs Dalison is devoted to the East, doctor. She once nursed an English *attaché* through a broken leg at Constantinople. That gave her a taste. I am introducing her to *The Arabian Nights*—not the original version, *bien entendu*—but a most discreet translation; and entertaining, nurse, eh—entertaining?'

'Oh! very entertaining, Excellency. Most quaint. Only not quite English in the way of putting things, you know,' pleaded the nurse; then turning to Marillier, 'It is in French. Reading things in French makes *such* a difference.'

The Pacha chuckled.

'Dear Mrs Grundy! She is a most curious lady, your Mrs Grundy. She will leave the newspapers in the schoolroom; she will bowdlerise Shakespeare; she will put the Old Testament unexpurgated into her young daughters' hands; but she won't stand *The Arabian Nights*—except in French.'

Marillier laughed and relieved Nurse Dalison's embarrassment by asking for her report. Most days, after this was given, he remained for a chat with Isàdas.

Thus a good many hours were passed by Marillier in the Ambassador's private sitting-room—that room at the end of the suite which adjoined his bedroom, and which was separated from the other apartments by folding doors and heavy velvet curtains. Here the old man, as he got better, would sit in state, clothed in a gorgeous dressing-gown, his red fez surmounting the keen, wrinkled and yet indescribably-attractive face—so old and yet ever young with the immortal youth of intellect and of a psychological capacity for passion, scarcely weakened by the impossibility of material gratification. To the doctor, he was a strange—occasionally a revolting—study, as he told his stories of amours and intrigues in the cynical manner of an Eastern sensualist turned philosopher. Then quickly perceiving the effect he produced, Isàdas would launch upon some wholly intellectual stream of talk, astonishing Marillier by his learning, and more especially by the grasp he had of occult subjects, out-of-the-way bits of knowledge in relation to the properties of plants and minerals, the meaning of old myths and superstitions, and the practical application of these in modern medicine, which was to Marillier a subject of unflinching fascination.

The Pacha's room was lined on one side with cabinets of Eastern design, gem-crusted and of extraordinary value, and with bookshelves containing rare editions, mostly of works on mysticism, as well as many old manuscripts and parchments in Hebrew, Arabic and other characters with which Marillier was unacquainted. He had seen such manuscripts inscribed also as some of these were, in astrological figures, in the library of the Medicine Moor.

On the other side of the room, flanking the fireplace, and in ironic contrast to these treasures, were ranges of ledges on which, closely massed, were photographs and portraits of lovely women—the acknowledged beauties of most of the European capitals, and of others, fairer and perhaps more frail, who presumably had not such social distinction. One of these, a snap-shot, taken evidently by artificial light, of an Eastern dancer, attracted Marillier's attention. The attitude was one of incomparable seduction, yet with nothing in it of coarseness, while the face of exquisite Oriental loveliness had a fascination which seemed not of the earth and yet not of heaven, but rather of the soulless under-world. This was the idea which came into Marillier's

mind. The face seemed that of some spirit enchained to flesh by a love which only in satisfying its mortal claims could attain deathless peace. The Pacha did not at once answer his question concerning the photograph; the old man's eyes took that far-away gleam which, as Marillier had found occasion to observe, usually precluded the revelation of a side of his nature not apparent to most people. Marillier spoke of his own vague fancy about the photograph, and the Pacha nodded approvingly.

'You are right. I am glad to see that you have intuition of a certain kind. One does not often meet with it. That little picture represents my own sudden conviction of truths I had always doubted, and which I then realised—unfortunately too late. I'll tell you something about it—the whole story is too long, and if it were not, I am bound to secrecy in some of its details. You have lived in Algeria, and you knew the Medicine Moor. Well, it is not improbable that you have heard of a peculiar sect living in the Kabyle hills, who still worship, according to almost prehistoric rites, the Great Generative Power in the Universe, and who use the same symbols as are found graven on the monoliths of Yucatan—symbols which belong to a civilisation and a faith extinct in that region centuries before the Spanish conquest. Have you heard of this sect?'

'I have heard of the people,' Marillier replied. 'I was interested, just lately, in tracing the correspondence you speak of between the hieroglyphs of Central America and those of Northern Africa. But what has that to do with this portrait of the dancer?'

'I will explain as far as I can. Nearly twenty-five years ago, there came into my life a phase of utter scepticism—a sense of abandonment by all spiritual powers, whether of good or evil. The desire of my soul had been taken from me beyond the possibility of recall, and all other things were as nothing to me—neither God nor the devil of greater or lesser account, for I scarcely believed in either.'

The Pacha's sepulchral voice vibrated as if it were the echo, Marillier thought, of some bygone agony which had well-nigh rent body and spirit asunder.

'I am not sure,' the Ambassador went on, 'that I now acknowledge God and the devil as anything more than the opposite poles of an unknowable force, which, for anything I can tell, may be blind, unreasoning, relentless as its material counterpart, electricity. Then, all was as naught to me; and yet, I would, for the mere sake of sensation, and especially for certainty of something beyond matter, have penetrated Hades, or pledged a phantom Helen. It was in this mood that I fell in with some members of that particular sect I spoke of. My curiosity, my intellect, were aroused. I was present at one of their evocatory ceremonies, held to the strains of music which is indescribable, and which, once and for all, made me realise the truth of that science of vibrations which has been practised by all occultists from time immemorial. You know that strains of music, in varying and peculiar rhythm, played a large part in the Mysteries of old, as well as in all necromantic ceremonial. Witness the mere modern instances of snake jugglery and Obi-worship. Anyone who has studied these subjects must acknowledge that phenomena can be produced through the operation of certain vibrations of sound upon corresponding vibrations in the unseen universe.'

'Of course,' said Marillier, 'there must be X sounds as there are X rays. We need only the apparatus by which to test them.'

Again the Pacha nodded. His voice had now become more even, and had its usual metallic resonance.

'Well, to go on with my story. I attended, as I said, one of the evocatory ceremonies of that particular sect. I may not speak of the rites, but I may say that the spectacle was one of the weirdest and most impressive I ever witnessed, and, as you may now imagine, I had already gone

through some strange experiences of the kind. I wanted to be convinced of the existence of something beyond matter, and I had my wish, though not to the gratification of any personal desire. A phantom Helen—that dancer, whose picture you see, photographed by myself—was called forth from the vapours above earth or the deeps of the underworld—which, I cannot tell—to prove to me the might of those forces I spoke to you of not long ago—the two supreme forces, Love and Will. She was doubtless an emanation from the Vital Energy which creates and maintains life on the universe, and it was shown to me how, by means of love and will,—the indestructible principle may be drawn upon and used by those who have been initiated into a special form of magic, so that by it, life can literally be infused into that which was dead and inanimate. Had I but known the secret a few months earlier, I, too, might have tasted, if but for one short hour, the fruit of my heart's desire.'

Again the Pacha's voice thrilled his listener with that echo of bygone passion and pain.

'But it was too late! God or Satan mocked my unavailing agony, and if I had never before understood the full meaning of that hackneyed phrase, "The irony of Fate," I understood it then. With my own eyes I beheld that fair phantom, vitalised from the central source of life, pour living fire from her warm bosom into the cold breast of a corpse. I saw her, in one glowing kiss upon the lips of a dead old man, restore the dried-up mummy to youth and vigour, to the joy of life and the ecstasy of love. So, for rapturous moments that to him and her might well have seemed eternity, the dead man lived. The moments passed; the phantom vanished; the dead became lifeless once more. But to me the great secret of Nature had been revealed, and I knew the latent power which exists in man, and by which, if he has learned the way, he may almost master his destiny. Had I practised that power in earlier manhood, I, too, might have called down the Promethean fire. Had I learned the magic evocation—had I conquered my own weakness and turned love from my tyrant to my slave—had I, in truth, loved with such knowledge as well as such intensity, that, to secure my desire, I could have put forth my very soul in an effort of will which neither man nor angel nor demon might have gainsaid—oh! if I could have done this—'

The Pacha's skinny fingers beat the coverlet in a feeble paroxysm of excitement, and for a moment or two he seemed, as he had himself phrased it, to be face to face with the Immensities.

'Marillier,' he resumed more quietly, 'if I could have done this, I, too, standing by the corpse of one who, living, was to me as the vision of distant heaven, and dead, the realisation of hell, might in a kiss have instilled life into the inanimate form, and lifting it breathing to my breast, have drunk of immortality! It is the mystery of mysteries, doctor, that transfusion of life into death by the magic of love. Ponder it. Yearn for its key—the key which you hold almost in your hand—and by the strength of your will, wrest its secret from God or Nature or the Devil—what matter whose it be, so that you make it your own. But remember that, to accomplish such an end, you must project your very soul, as it were, out of your body upon the object of your desire. Take the prophecy of an old man who has overstepped the border of an unknown land. The desire will be born in you—the germ already lies in your heart; the hour of struggle will arrive, and with it the force, if you choose to put it forth, which will give you the mastery. Bear in mind the words of one who has failed.'

The Pacha's wrinkled eyelids drooped over his brilliant eyes, and but for his quick breathing, he himself might have been taken for a corpse. While he spoke strange emotions surged up in Marillier's breast. He, too, seemed on the borderland of a region hitherto untrodden. A fierce craving seized him and an immense regret. The regret found utterance.

'Look at me, Excellency,' he cried. 'Compare me with such a man as, say, Ruel Bey, your first secretary. Is it likely that I shall ever inspire love, much less subdue it, to serve my desires,

though it is true that I have always despised its lower gratifications. The only love I could ever feel would be one all-embracing—a blending of flesh and spirit, and yet unsatisfying; for though I might give my all to save the woman I loved suffering, I could scarcely dare to claim any recompense.’

The Pacha opened his eyes and scanned the strong moved face, the thick-set, awkward figure. As he studied Marillier a faint smile hovered about his lips.

‘That is the love which conquers,’ he said. ‘Wait till your time comes and then recall my words. The hour, the desire and the knowledge will arrive together. In my case the hour and the desire ran a race with knowledge, and were stopped on their course by Death. Knowledge won the goal at last, and knowledge has served this body, and has given glory and power and a certain sense of satisfaction to a career that would otherwise have been barren. We are told that when matter ceases to be, it changes into a higher form. I have found the process reversed. In my case, spirit has degenerated into matter. Twenty-five years ago I had a soul; I too, scorned the lower loves. I understood that spiritual love of which you speak. Then the soul died, but the flesh flourished exceedingly. In fact, I have barely regretted the loss of an ideal. So agreeable, indeed, has matter proved, as a substitute for spirit, that I am extremely anxious to retard its disintegration. And it strikes me that you are forgetting the patient, doctor, and that my medicine is due. I had intended to-day to show you some uncanny possessions of mine that I mean to leave you in my will as a token of gratitude for keeping me in the world a little longer. Another time, however. Will you ring? I am inclined to sleep. And do you, as you pass through, ask a cup of tea from Mademoiselle Isàdas, whom you will, no doubt, find at this time in the outer *salon*. Should Ruel Bey be with her, inform him, please, that this week’s despatches are to be brought to me in good time for corrections, and send him about his business to the Chancellery.’

CHAPTER V

‘I WONDER WHY’

The heavy curtains of the Pacha’s sitting-room closed behind Marillier, and with a dazed sensation, as though he had been breathing some heady Oriental perfume, he lingered for a moment or two in the second reception-room, which was now used as a sort of ante-room to the Ambassador’s private apartments. It was strewn with flowers, and had the usual row of cards of inquiry laid upon the inlaid centre table. The *portière* which divided this from the further and more generally used drawing-room, was slightly parted; he could hear the rattle of tea-cups, the gentle tones of Mademoiselle Isàdas, and the mellow voice of Ruel Bey. So absorbed were the two, that they did not hear the approach of Marillier, and he, standing with the curtain in his hand, could see the scene framed as if it were a picture.

A pretty picture. The tea-table was set beneath a tall palm, of which one of the fronds hung over the portrait of the Emperor of Abaria, casting a shadow upon the refined features and the melancholy eyes with their haunting, world-wearied expression. As Marillier’s gaze dropped from the Emperor’s portrait to the face of the girl below it, he was struck in a sudden and, as he thought, incongruous fashion by a faint similarity, an indescribable likeness in the oval contour of both faces, and in the shape, and, he fancied, the expression of the eyes. He could not define the likeness to himself, but accounted for it upon the supposition that Mademoiselle Isàdas must be, upon her mother’s side, of Oriental descent.

He had, of course, seen her many times since the occasion of their first interview; indeed, it had become almost a habit that when leaving the Pacha he should, after his afternoon visit, receive a cup of tea at her hands; but beautiful as she had always seemed, never had her beauty struck him so forcibly as to-day. There was a tinge of pink upon her cheeks, and a brighter light shone in her eyes, while at the same time, he noticed a suggestion of emotion, held in check, no doubt, by the presence of the butler, who was only now closing the door behind him. Marillier wondered at the sudden tightening in his own chest as he guessed the cause of the emotion. Ruel Bey was standing by the tea-table, his Greek head thrown a little back, his eyes lowered towards Mademoiselle Isâdas, as he held towards her in one hand a peach, in the other a bunch of purple grapes, and asked her which she would prefer.

She chose the peach, and he seated himself and began to peel it, while just then Rachel perceived Marillier.

She welcomed him with her soft, friendly smile—no words. It was one of Mademoiselle Isâdas's peculiarities that her eyes and smile were often more eloquent than her utterance. She made him his tea, Russian fashion, as he liked it, and pressed cakes upon him—little wafers encrusted with nougat.

'Do you know,' she said, 'these are made after a receipt I brought with me from the convent. We were allowed to have them upon certain *fête* days, and when we had specially-favoured visitors—not that this often happened to me.'

'So you had not many visitors?' asked Marillier, helping himself to a wafer.

'No, not many. During all those years, they were so few that I could count them on my fingers. Thanks, monsieur,' as Ruel Bey handed her the peach, and with a new sensation of delight Marillier watched her little white teeth meet in the luscious fruit.

'How is the Pacha?' asked Ruel Bey

'Better,' replied the doctor. 'A little tired just now and going off to sleep. By the way, he asked me to tell you that he wants the despatches brought him in good time for correction.'

Marillier did not add the last part of the Pacha's injunction. It was not necessary, for the first secretary got up at once.

'Then I must go down to the Chancellery, for I am altogether behindhand. A thousand thanks, mademoiselle. You will permit me to find you here this evening when I come to the Pacha after dinner? It would be delightful to have some music.'

Marillier saw the two pairs of eyes meet. Ruel Bey's full of ardent beseeching and of a meaning at which he could only guess: the girl's troubled, he fancied reproachful.

'I don't know,' she answered. 'Sometimes my singing annoys *Excellence* instead of pleasing him.'

'That is only when you sing Irish songs,' said Ruel Bey, lightly. 'Mademoiselle, two things puzzle me. How have you—brought up in a foreign country—learned to sing Irish melodies with an *entrain* that seems born of the very soil, and, in truth, with the faintest touch of the Irish brogue, which is the most fascinating of all accents in a woman's speech? And why should our cold, cynical *Excellence* show angry emotion over "Love's Young Dream"—the effect of which he might be supposed to have forgotten. But no—' and, with a whimsical shake of the head, Ruel Bey sang softly,—

'He'll never meet
A joy so sweet
In all his noon of fame.'

Another glance at Rachel, and the whimsical manner changed to one of scarcely-veiled tenderness as he sang on, still more softly,—

'That hallow'd form is ne'er forgot
Which first love trac'd;
Still it lingering haunts the greenest spot
On memory's waste.
'Twas odour fled
As soon as shed;
'Twas morning's winged dream;
Oh, 'twas light that ne'er can shine again
On life's dull stream.'

A quiver passed over Rachel Isàdas's sensitive features. Marillier saw that she was thrilled to the quick by a peculiar emotional note in the voice of Ruel Bey, and he thought of what the Pacha had said concerning the power of musical vibrations. Then came, too, into his mind a remembrance of what Tolstoi has written on this subject in his novel *The Kreutzer Sonata*. There was silence for a few moments. Mademoiselle Isàdas, recalled by Ruel Bey's reiterated question, uttered in a tone of daring which annoyed Marillier, said gently,—

'I cannot tell why the Pacha should have been so moved as he was the other evening by those words. But for myself, it is not strange that I should be able to sing Irish melodies, even with a touch of the brogue, as you say. We had an Irish nun in the convent, and she taught me how to sing that very song, which was one of many that I found in an old bundle of music left me by my Irish mother.'

'Your mother?' exclaimed Marillier, startled out of his previous theories.

'Yes; my mother was an Irishwoman,' answered Mademoiselle Isàdas, 'but, of course, I cannot remember her, for she died in Algeria soon after I was born.'

Both men gave an involuntary exclamation. To both, the mystery of the Pacha's emotion seemed solved. But Marillier felt still a little perplexed, and unconsciously his eyes were again lifted to the portrait of the Emperor of Abaria. How then could he have detected the trace of Oriental descent in the features of Mademoiselle Isàdas? And it was there! Now that he had once observed this, it appeared to him to proclaim itself remarkably. Yet the Pacha, he knew, belonged to an old Avaranese family.

Again, Marillier was annoyed with Ruel Bey for his daring, knowing the thought which must be in the young man's mind as well as in his own.

'And you do not remember your father either, mademoiselle?' asked the first secretary.

'No, answered the girl, simply. 'No one has ever spoken to me about my father. I know nothing of him. I suppose he must have died before I was born. That, at least, is the explanation I have given myself. When I once asked *Excellence* to tell me about my father he seemed to shrink so from the subject that I concluded it was a painful one to him and I never asked again. After all,' she added with an unconscious cynicism, which seemed to Marillier infinitely pathetic, 'when one has been alone from babyhood there is no great need to distress the living by questions about a parent for whom his child had no existence.'

'That is true,' said Ruel Bey. 'Isàdas Pacha would be the first, I imagine, to appreciate your sound philosophy. Mademoiselle, I shall bring up my violin this evening in the hope of having some music. For the moment, adieu.' He stooped and raised the girl's little hand to his lips. 'Excuse me, Lucien,' he added. 'we shall meet to-morrow.'

Ruel Bey went down to the Chancellery, and Marillier Mademoiselle Isàdas were left alone. She offered him some more tea; he accepted it mechanically and mechanically also ate some grapes she which handed him.

‘Mademoiselle Isàdas,’ he said suddenly, ‘my cousin is more fortunate than myself. I have never heard you sing.’

‘That wish can be very easily gratified, doctor,’ she answered with the sweet friendliness she always showed him. ‘But I must not sing just now, for if the Pacha is going to sleep, it would disturb him. I wish I could do something better than that to prove to you my gratitude.’

‘What have I done, mademoiselle, that can deserve your gratitude?’

‘You have saved *Excellence*. His death would mean a sad loss to me.’

‘And yet you are not greatly attached to your uncle,’ said Marillier, bluntly.

‘Am I not? How deeply you read into people’s minds! That, I suppose, comes of your power of diagnosing patients. I have heard that it is wonderful.’

‘I am right then?’

She hesitated, but seemed compelled to frankness by his searching eyes.

‘The Pacha frightens me,’ she said in a low tone. ‘Sometimes he repels me, and yet sometimes he almost fascinates me. I have often tried to analyse my feelings towards him, and I cannot. I think that I could love him if he only cared for me.’

‘You think he does not care for you?’ asked Marillier, intensely interested in the girl’s confession.

‘I feel that there are moments when he positively hates me,’ replied she. ‘I have never said this to anybody; not even to—’ she paused and blushed. He filled up the gap.

‘Not even to Ruel Bey?’

‘No,’ she almost whispered.

‘Are you frightened of Ruel Bey too?’ he asked, with a roughness of which he was scarcely aware till the girl’s startled eyes met his own.

‘Why do you ask that?’ she said agitatedly. ‘Is there any reason for your question—any reason why I should not feel myself safe with Ruel Bey?’

‘So that thought has occurred to you, and there have been moments in which you have feared the fascination of Ruel Bey?’

‘Oh, that is true—that is true!’ she cried. ‘How is it that you know? Doctor Marillier, there is no reason why I should fear Ruel Bey; there *can* be none. Tell me that I may trust him.’

‘I cannot tell you that, Mademoiselle Isàdas, for I—I do not know. Your own pure instinct must that question. Trust your instinct, and remember what I said to you the first time we ever talked together. Trust me also, for I will defend you against him if need be; and, if need be, even against myself.’

‘There could be no need for that,’ she answered, and, as in their first interview, a childlike faith in himself which stirred the depths of his heart, shone from her eyes.

‘Mademoiselle,’ he cried, ‘tell me this—only this. Do you love Ruel Bey?’

A deep flush suffused Rachel’s cheeks; her eyes dropped, and she reared her small head with, as he fancied, something of outraged dignity. He had the sense of virginal pride aroused in her, of maidenly passion which had been unwarrantably laid bare.

‘That,’ she said, ‘is a question which no one but he has any right to ask.’

‘I am answered,’ said Marillier, gently, and yet with some bitterness. ‘I am rebuked for my presumption as I deserve to be. And yet I have some claim to your confidence and his; for, as I told you before, if practical difficulties should arise to interfere with your joint happiness, it might

be in my power to smooth them. He may be—*is* your lover, your future husband; think of me, to whom he stands in nearest blood relation, as your friend. Forgive me,' he went on, and ventured to touch the hand which Ruel Bey had kissed. 'I am much older than you, Mademoiselle Isàdas—older than the man you love; and then, my profession, and all the graver interests of life which it forces me to consider, removes me from the circle of ordinary acquaintanceship, even of ordinary friendship. Grant me its privileges; they shall not be abused. I am deeply sympathetic with you. I long to know more of your inner feelings. If I understood them, I might be able to help you in circumstances we can neither of us fully foresee. The power to do this would be a compensation for the loss of joys, which from the conditions of my life have been forbidden me. To be of service to you, no matter in what capacity, under what limitations, would be one of the greatest pleasures I could know.'

She was moved by his appeal, and her slim fingers grasped his, as a child's fingers might grip the strong hand of one whom it recognised as a protector of its weakness. Again he was thrilled by contact with, as he phrased it, that little bundle of nerve fibres.

'I thank you,' she said. 'I trust you, as my friend—my best friend.'

'That is agreed.'

He held her hand for a moment against his breast, and she could feel his heart throb, but he did not kiss it as Ruel Bey had done. Then he released it, laying it gently back upon the tea-table.

'We understand each other, and we are friends—always. Mademoiselle Isàdas,' he added in a different tone, 'it seems to me that you have not many friends.'

'You are right,' she answered. 'I have scarcely any friends, as you would use the word. None at all in London.'

'And yet you must have made friends since you came to the Embassy, among the English ladies whom the Pacha knows.'

She shuddered slightly.

'I think I must be different in my thoughts and feelings from the ladies whom the Pacha knows. And you are mistaken if you think that they come to see *me* at the Embassy. Of course they come very often; but they talk chiefly to the Pacha and to the secretaries, and they admire the trophies and the leopard outside, and the Abarian shields, and ask to have the inscriptions translated; and they say it is all very foreign and interesting, and they look at me strangely, and some patronise me in a way I do not like—as though I were a part of the foreign *mise-en-scène*—odd and rather interesting too. But that is all. They do not make friends with me.'

Marillier mentally went over his own list of women acquaintances. He too had few intimate friends. He did not know one woman of the world whom he could ask to befriend Mademoiselle Isàdas. He regretted that he had lived like a hermit absorbed in his profession and his books.

Mademoiselle Isàdas went on,—

'There has scarcely been time to know anyone intimately. It is only three months since I came to London. That was the middle of the season, when everyone was busy. Then we went to Scarborough and the Pacha got ill. But it does not matter. I am used to feeling lonely; only I can't help missing the convent life sometimes and the dear nuns.'

'Yet that life must have been cramped and depressing for one so young, who was not a nun,' he said.

'Cramped and depressing?' She gave a little laugh. It seems to me that London life—its banal fashionable life—is much more cramped and depressing. My nuns were not at all the kind of persons you might imagine. They were full of intellectual interests. The Reverend Mother was wonderful. She had been a great lady; she knew the world and yet was not of it. Many well-born

girls were educated at the convent; and the Reverend Mother and the Sisters were quite proud when their girls made good marriages. You see we were not out of the reach of Parisian echoes.'

'I see. It seems strange to me that you were not one of those fated to make what you call a good marriage. Did you never go away from the convent?'

Rachel blushed slightly.

'I stayed with my friends in their homes sometimes; but I had no thought of marriage. I could not marry unless I loved. It would have been impossible for me to marry as some of the girls did. All were not happy; the outside brilliance meant very little in reality. I had one or two friends who wrote to me afterwards, and they were miserable—miserable. I always said to myself that, at least, should not be my fate. At one time I thought I had a religious vocation, but it was not so. The Reverend Mother herself questioned me and pointed out to me that I did not understand my own nature and that I should be making a mistake. She told me that I should wait and cling to my ideals and hold myself apart till the time came, if it were God's will that it should come, when my heart would be really touched.'

The girl's eyes dropped; she took up from a worktable near her a doll she had been dressing, no doubt, when Ruel Bey interrupted the occupation, and her fingers played with it in a manner intensely feminine.

'This is for the Children's Fete at the convent on New Year's Day,' she said. 'I used always to dress the dolls. The Sisters said I did it better than any of them, and I am going to send a boxful this year. Each doll is to represent a flower. This'—and she held up the dainty wax thing for him to admire—'is one of the family of anemones. There will be red and pink, and pale and dark blue, and mauve and purple. You know how the anemones grow under the olive trees in the South? There were woods and olive groves round my convent.'

'Where was your convent?' asked Marillier.

'Not very far from Toulon. The Convent of the Assumption. You may have heard of it?'

'No,' said Marillier, touched and amused by the girl's simplicity. What should he know about convent schools for girls?

'I thought it possible,' she said, 'because, for one thing, the music was so famous. People used to come a long way to the services. And there were lay Sisters who went about as nurses, and who were sent for to nurse sick people—Catholics—at Hyères and some of those winter places. And beside, I heard you telling the Pacha that you had lived in Algiers, and this convent was connected with one in Algiers, where I was taken as a little baby and kept till I was old enough to be sent over to the school.'

'You were born in Algeria,' said Marillier, thoughtfully. 'And your mother was an Irishwoman? You don't remember your mother, Mademoiselle Isàdas?'

'I have told you; she died a fortnight after I was born.'

'So the Pacha has been your only guardian—your only relative? He ought not to hate you, mademoiselle. That is a strange fancy of yours.'

'I cannot help it,' she answered in the low, timid voice in which she spoke of her relations with the Ambassador. 'Do you remember my telling you that I had a sort of second-sight, something like that which you described to me by which you know whether your patients will live or die.'

'Stay!' he said. 'I spoke too confidently. I told you at first that I *knew* in connection with the Pacha. Now I am obliged to tell you frankly that I cannot say I *know*.'

'Do you mean,' she said, with a startled glance up at him from the doll she was still caressing with her fingers, 'do you mean that you are not certain whether *Excellence* will live or die?'

‘Yes, I am obliged to say that I am not certain. I hope and think he may live for several years yet, but my power of diagnosis in his case seems curiously blurred. I cannot say I know.’

There was a little silence.

‘I am very, very sorry,’ she murmured distressfully. ‘Do not think too much of it. I will do all that my medical science enables me to do. Beyond that, trust and wait. I was obliged to say this, because I must be true to you, and I could not let you remain under even the slightest misapprehension. But I bade you trust me. Trust me still.’

‘Yes, I will trust you.’

‘And now go on telling me. You spoke of your inward vision in regard to your feeling that the Pacha had no real love for you.’

‘Love! Oh, no, no. It has never been love, but I have interested him. He has felt, too, that he has a *duty* to perform towards me. I have read all that in his face. It was the sense of duty that made him come and see me when I was twelve years old. He was then Abarian Ambassador to the Court of Italy. I shall never forget the expression of his eyes when he took my hand and looked into my face.’

‘He was moved at the sight of you?’

‘Yes, strangely moved. I could tell that. And he seemed to be searching for something. I wondered afterwards if he was trying to find a likeness in me to somebody he had loved—or hated. I wondered if that could have been my father, and if he had hated him. For, oh! Doctor Marillier, he *did* find something which made him hate me.’

‘Surely you must have been mistaken. Or, if there were that momentary feeling, it must have passed?’

‘Yes, it passed. After a little while he became, just—*Excellence*, as you know him, only younger and handsomer. But the strange thing is, Doctor Marillier, that even when I knew that he hated me I did not hate him. I was sorry for him. Every time he came to see me, though I shrank from him at the time, I always felt sorry when he went away. And when at last, he sent for me to come here, though I was miserable at leaving the Reverend Mother and the Sisters, and the dear old happy life, I was glad in a curious way—glad at the thought of being with him and of perhaps doing something to make his life less lonely. He has never, you know, had wife or child of his own.’

‘He has had other things,’ said Marillier.

‘Oh, yes, he has had power and grandeur and the confidence of his Emperor and the friendship of princes. He has had everything, I suppose, that a successful diplomatist could have desired. But what has it availed him now that he is going into the darkness? And he loves life.’

‘Yes, he loves life,’ repeated Marillier, his mind going back to the talk he had had with the Ambassador a little while back. ‘I will do what I can, mademoiselle, to preserve his life for him.’

‘I should have liked,’ she said thoughtfully, ‘to make the darkness lighter for poor *Excellence*, but he still hates me, Doctor Marillier; he hated me the other evening when I sang that Irish song. And I wonder why! I wonder why!’

Marillier echoed the words ‘I wonder why!’