

CHAPTER XI

‘ADIEU, EXCELLENCE!’

Isàdas Pacha lay in state in the ballroom of the Embassy. They dressed him in full uniform, and placed him on a scarlet bier. His orders glittered in the light of the tall candles which shed their glow upon his dead face, and all round the bier, flowers were heaped. At the foot, was a great wreath in the Abarian colours, beside that one sent by the Queen, and surrounded by tributes from other royalties. The wreaths spread over the floor, and a narrow pathway was made among them at the side of the bier for those who came close to take their leave of the dead Ambassador. The heavy scent of the flowers pervaded the house. Above, in the darkened reception-rooms and in the Pacha’s chamber, all was still. Below, in the Chancellery, there was much business done; telegrams arriving every few minutes, despatches written, messages sent—Ruel Bey superintending all the arrangements, and taking entire command of the affairs of the Embassy.

He had not seen Mademoiselle Isàdas, who remained in her own apartments, but he wrote to her in lover-like terms frequent little notes. It might have seemed that during this self-enforced separation he was less fortunate than Marillier, who, in semi-professional capacity, more than once had some conversation with her. Now the girl appreciated Marillier’s forethought, for it was by his suggestion that Nurse Dalison was asked to remain at the Embassy as long as it continued to be Mademoiselle Isàdas’s home. Rachel had grown to like much this sympathetic woman, who never said or did the wrong thing, and had the knack of adapting herself to tragic conditions with a cheerfulness that made them cease to seem tragic. She took possession of a room next to Rachel’s sitting-room, and the two women, avoiding for the time the great drawing-rooms, lived entirely in this more retired part of the house, scarcely seeing anything of the life of the Embassy which went on busily on the floor below.

Ruel Bey received a shock when he learned the contents of the late Ambassador’s will, which had been opened by the lawyer and executors in view of funeral directions. The surprise accounted some what for his attitude towards Mademoiselle Isàdas, and he had not decided within himself whether it was a relief or an irritating responsibility. In any case the man’s worldly wisdom and his ambitious hopes of advancement kept him from committing himself to any premature declaration.

For Mademoiselle Isàdas had not been acknowledged either as the Pacha’s niece or as his daughter. She was spoken of as ‘the daughter of Rachel O’Hara, deceased,’ and styled ‘Rachel, commonly called Isàdas.’ No legacy was left her beyond some jewels of value, and the Moorish palace near Milianah, in Algeria, the title-deeds of which had been given to her. To Ruel Bey was left a small sum and a few personal belongings of his chief; to Marillier the contents of various cabinets and bookshelves, and also a ring set with a very fine diamond. All the rest of his property, so the will set forth, Isàdas Pacha bequeathed to his beloved master the Emperor of Abaria, to be apportioned according to the Emperor’s will and discretion in the manner concerning which he—Isàdas—had already made a humble petition of his sovereign.

Rachel felt no resentment, and wondered why Ruel Bey wrote indignantly of the Ambassador’s unjust neglect of her claims. What claims had she? None, she assured him in her pitiful little reply. The Pacha, she said, had dealt most generously by her. But she did not tell Ruel Bey in her letter, of the last interview she had had with the old man, and of his parting gift of money. She felt a little hurt that Ruel Bey had not at once assumed the right of an accepted lover. She had fancied that he would disregard etiquette, and insist upon seeing her, even in these early days of

mourning. Had he done so, she thought, she might have explained to him something of her feeling for the Pacha, and her apparently excessive grief for his loss. Then she blamed herself for having expected so much of Ruel Bey. He was right, she said, to think of conventions, all the more so because of her unprotected position. And he was not acknowledged as her accepted husband, though he had called himself her lover; there had been no word of their marriage; he had never demanded her of the Pacha. Ah! why had he not done so? Surely in those last weeks, when the operation was over, and there could have been nothing unseemly in approaching her guardian on the subject, he might, had he greatly cared, have asked the Pacha's permission to woo her openly. And now, could it be that he wavered—that he did not think her rich enough, grand enough to be his wife? If he truly loved her, would he not break down mere worldly barriers—would he not mount the stairs and ask for her, and press her to his heart?

It was true, she knew, that he had much diplomatic business on hand. But was that sufficient to engross his thoughts completely? And then she asked herself what would become of her if he failed her now. How could she bear it if he deserted her? For she loved him. Even when his eager wooing alarmed her maiden reticence, and his kisses seemed almost too bold in their fervour, the caresses were nevertheless sweeter than she dared confess to her own soul. She felt it would kill her if she discovered that Caspar did not really love her. All day, in her quiet room, she thought of him, recalling his words, his looks, his wonderful power of fascination. Did he fascinate other women as he had fascinated her, and did he inspire other women with that nameless fear which, argue against it as she might, seemed to chill her even at moments of his most ardent protestation? She wished that he were more her friend, perhaps, and less her lover. No, how could she wish that—when, if not her lover, he could be nothing. If he were not her lover, she would rather never see him more. That was the strange thing.

She thought of Marillier. How different were the cousins; how different was her own attitude towards the two men. The one she loved, the other she trusted. Yes, she trusted Marillier, and she leaned upon him as she had never leaned upon anyone in her life. She felt that he would always tell her what was true and right; she knew instinctively that he would rather die than commit a dishonourable action; she knew instinctively too, that if he loved, nothing else would count in the scale with his love. This was a man on whose loyalty a woman might stake her existence. No doubt of *this* man could ever enter her mind. He was not one who would think of some petty convention, if he knew that she was lonely and suffering, and that his presence would comfort her. And Marillier's presence did comfort her in an abstract sort of way. She seemed to be inwardly strengthened by his look, his touch; she was always sorry when he left her, always glad when he came back. Oh! why had she not that sense of security in her love for Caspar—a love which she often fancied was more of a pain than a joy?

She did then consult Marillier as the Pacha had bidden her. She described to him that last scene upon the night of the old man's death, and in the pleasure his sympathy gave her she hardly noticed how embarrassed were his replies to her questions and surmises as to who her father could be—this potentate whose will concerning her must be awaited with respectful patience. She asked him whether he thought it would be well for her to go back to her convent in the South till her future should be more decided. And then her own embarrassment came in the way of counsel, for she knew that whatever Marillier's opinion might be, she could not decide upon anything till she had some insight into the mind of Ruel Bey. The thought struck her with a stab, that perhaps she would be wiser not to attempt to see Ruel Bey, but to go away and let him, if he chose, come and seek her. Marillier answered evasively that nothing could be settled till after the

funeral, and that, in any case, there was no need for her to leave the Embassy while Nurse Dalison kept her company.

He came by-and-by, to ask her if she would go into the ballroom and bid farewell to the dead man lying there in state.

‘I have been afraid to go,’ she whispered. ‘Oh! I cannot bear the scent of the flowers. I think the scent of those flowers will always be with me. And I have never seen anyone dead.’

‘It is not terrible,’ answered Marillier. ‘He looks very calm and stately. Gentler and nobler than he ever looked in life.’

‘I will come,’ she said; ‘but I like best to think of him as he was that last night, when he put his hand on my head and spoke to me as though he cared for me a little.’

She followed him into the silent room with its bowed watchers, its tall wax candles, its gloom and solemnity; the great crimson bier in the centre half hidden by flowers, the still form in glittering uniform, with the flag and the star of Abaria over his head, surrounded by all the paraphernalia of rank and office, lying above the massed blossoms. Rachel paused for a minute at the doorway, and nervously clutched Marillier’s arm.

‘I have come here once or twice, but I could not go closer. *That is not Excellence*. There is something . . . something . . . I cannot describe it . . . a sort of *tourbillon*. . . . It seems to rise . . . the flowers . . . everything . . . oh, I cannot bear it,’ she said piteously, and making a gesture with her hand that moved Marillier. And, in truth, the odour of the flowers—gardenias, roses, lilies—deep-scented hot-house blooms—made, as she described it, a kind of whirlwind of perfume which might well turn a delicate girl giddy.

There were several persons in the death chamber, gliding one by one at the side of the bier, and making a silent reverence as they passed and departed. Ruel Bey was one of these. He and Rachel approached the bier almost together. Marillier hung back when he saw his cousin, for jealous pride made him shrink from obtruding himself upon the lovers’ jealous resentment—indeed, a feeling akin to hatred of Caspar—made him turn away and stand outside the death-room. He had seen the glance interchanged between the two who had not met for several days. Passion answered passion in the look. Rachel, he knew well, was blind and deaf to everything except the joy of meeting the man she loved. She did not notice that he, who was only her friend, had left her side. Ruel Bey moved eagerly towards the girl, but not a word was spoken. The two clasped hands, and stood together gazing upon the dead man. Then Ruel Bey made his salute. ‘Adieu, *Excellence*,’ he said, not without emotion.

Rachel, still clinging to Caspar’s fingers, detached with her other hand a bunch of violets from the bodice of her black gown. She kissed the flowers, and, with a movement infinitely touching, bent over and laid them between the folded palms upon the dead breast. Then she stooped lower, and put her lips to the marble forehead. ‘Adieu, *Excellence*,’ she murmured, and, shivering slightly at the cold contact she sank against Ruel Bey’s encircling arm.

Marillier could bear no more. He saw Caspar press the girl close to his heart, and support her towards the door; then he hurried down the corridor, and passing through the room which had been the Ambassador’s bedchamber, and which opened upon the landing, he entered the sitting-room beyond. Here he flung himself into the armchair in which the Pacha had died, and for the first time, realised to the full his love for Rachel Isàdas and his hatred and distrust of Ruel Bey. He fought with his passion as though it had been an evil thing, trying to convince himself at the same time of its futility.

‘I am nothing to her—nothing—nothing. As soon as she saw him I was blotted out of her existence. I am nothing, nothing,’ he repeated, ‘and Caspar is everything. She loves him, and only through him can I help her.’

Presently the man straightened himself, and a steely look of fixed resolve came into his eyes. His hands were clenched upon the arms of the chair with a grip of iron.

‘So be it,’ he cried. ‘If Caspar be worthy of her he shall make her happiness. But *if he be unworthy*—by God, I will kill him before he shall be able to do her a wrong.’

He got up from the chair and paced the room towards the folding doors, over which the velvet curtains hung. Suddenly he paused, for his eye had fallen upon the gold box containing the mandrake, which he had not taken away in obedience to the Pacha’s directions. He had forgotten it in the confusion following the Ambassador’s death, and this was the first time he had entered the room in which it still lay upon the table where he had himself placed it, when he had removed it from the dead man’s knee. He determined to take it away with him as enjoined, and open it upon the morrow, after the remains of the Pacha had been laid in the tomb. For to-morrow was the day of the funeral.

As he took up the box, and was about to pass with it through the curtains, and along the suite of reception-rooms, he heard a voice in the ante-chamber which immediately arrested him. It was the voice of Ruel Bey.

‘Dearest, you are alone. You are absolutely friendless, you are penniless—’

‘No, not penniless, Caspar. I have told you—Mademoiselle Isâdas’s sweet tones were broken with sobs.

‘Practically penniless !’ Ruel Bey repeated. ‘What are a few jewels—none of value—and a dilapidated Moorish palace in a place where it is impossible for you to live? Are you going to bury your youth and your beauty in an old tower in the Kabyle mountains? Beloved, it cannot be; it shall not be while I am alive to protect and adore you.’

Marillier’s impulse, when his cousin began to speak, had been to draw aside the curtains and make his presence known to the pair. But something in Ruel Bey’s words—or was it the manner of their utterance?—checked the impulse, and caused him to hesitate and stand uncertain what to do. He had scarcely time to analyse his own motives when Caspar continued, and the involuntary eavesdropper, his former vague suspicions stirred into new activity, remained rooted to the spot, no scruple of honour now deterring him from satisfying himself as to their having foundation in fact.

‘My lonely one,’ the caressing voice went on, ‘this is no place for you, a young and beautiful girl, quite friendless and unchaperoned among a set of secretaries and *attachés*—and you know what the Eastern ideas of women are! As long as the Pacha was alive you were comparatively safe, but now even I, your lover, could not be sure of protecting you from insult. You must leave this house. You must trust yourself to me, and let me find you another home.’

‘But not now, Caspar,’ the girl answered in glad but wondering accents. ‘It is so soon. There would be a great deal to arrange, and Doctor Marillier said that as long as Nurse Dalison was with me, I need not go away.’

Caspar uttered an impatient exclamation.

‘Lucien is a fossil. What does such a man know of the ways of the world and of what is fitting for a girl? He never goes out in London; he has no notion of the gossip there is already about you and your ambiguous position in the Embassy.

‘My ambiguous position!’ she repeated. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘There is no need that you should. I was wrong to use the word. Forget it. Yet even in the short time that you have been in London some things must have struck you. You must have noticed how few women of the Pacha’s acquaintance have called on you or asked you to their houses.’

There was a short pause. Marillier’s blood boiled. He wondered if the dart had pierced Rachel’s shield of innocence. It was in him to rush forward and thrust the coward who had shot it for his own evil purposes, out by the neck from the girl’s presence. But he restrained his wrath. He would make himself yet more sure of Ruel Bey’s intention; and so he waited in breathless anxiety for Rachel’s reply.

It came in a low, hurt voice.

‘You mean kindly,’ she said. ‘You want me to know the truth, and I cannot blame you though the truth is painful. It is true that my position has been ambiguous, but perhaps it will not be so for very long.’

‘What do you mean?’ he asked eagerly.

‘I cannot say any more now. I know nothing myself except this—the Pacha himself told me on that last night, that my father was not dead as I had been led to believe.’

Ruel Bey gave a low laugh. Marillier knew that the man fancied he understood. The confession had trembled, perhaps, on the old man’s lips. Isàdas’s heart may have melted for a moment and been steeled again before he gave it fuller utterance. That was what Caspar said to himself.

‘Yes, her father was alive *then*,’ thought Caspar.

‘Why do you laugh?’ said the girl.

‘Because it is of so little consequence to us whether your father is alive or dead,’ he answered readily. ‘It makes no jot of difference in my love for you.’

‘You *do* love me, Caspar?’ Her voice was plaintively glad.

‘Have I not told you so a thousand times, oh! sceptical one? Do you want a proof that I love you? Look—look at your own face in the glass before you, and say if any man who had blood and not lymph in his veins could resist it. Do I love you! Is not this an answer? *So* much, and *so* much. Your lips, sweet! Why do you hide your head? Why should you be shy with me now?’

‘I will believe you, Caspar. I will never doubt you again. But I have been so lonely. I wondered why you did not come. Only one little flight of stairs that you used to mount many times a day when you brought despatches for *Excellence* to sign! And then always a word, a look, sometimes many words, for me. I lived on our meetings, Caspar, in those dreary days. I did not know that they were food to my poor starved heart till lately, when they ceased.’

‘And do you not understand why they ceased?’

‘I knew there was a great deal of business in the Chancellery. I could hear the murmur of it even here. And I knew, too, that *Excellence* was lying dead. Oh! Caspar, never let me see a dead face again. I cannot bear it.’

‘You shall never, if I can prevent it, look on a sight that distresses you. It was like cold-blooded Lucien to bring you there.’

‘Oh, no, don’t say that. I wanted to go. I was glad that I saw him once more. And if I had not gone, oh! Caspar, when should I have seen *you*?’

‘In a few hours, when the funeral was over, and I could feel that I was free to think of my own joy. But you understood my little notes?’

‘They seemed cold.’

‘My heart was burning. I dared not give vent to my longing. I should have remembered, to my Own detriment and yours, that only a small flight of steps, as you said, separated us. But surely You must have known? How could I have had your name bandied about amongst the secretaries,

the messengers the crowd of newsmongers! You can't conceive what it has been these last days. Official business, instructions from Abaria, that Medianah affair again, and I alone capable of dealing with it. So much the better, however, for my chance of promotion. Then the journalistic ghouls! The mere thought of you in such associations seemed desecration.'

'But you did think of me, Caspar?'

'Every hour; every minute. You are the background of my life. Through all the worldly turmoil your love shines as a ray from heaven.'

To the woman, his words rang true, and were as balm to a heart which had been wounded. To the man who was listening, they seemed false as hell. There was a silence, eloquent of caresses.

'You are so good,' Rachel murmured. 'No, I know you never meant to hurt me. I want to assure you of that, my Caspar. And besides, one should never allow oneself to be hurt by the truth. Do you think I cannot appreciate your wish to spare me, and yet to make me understand what it is well I should know? And, as you said, what does anything matter when you love me? Nothing can make any difference in our love. I suppose it was that feeling which really upheld me during all these dreadful months when my pride revolted terribly against my position here and the manner of the people who came to the Embassy. For I did realise it, Caspar, though I couldn't understand it at first. Then I supposed it was because the Pacha, who seemed all powerful, showed so plainly that I was only here on sufferance, and that he disliked the sight of me.'

'May the old man suffer in Purgatory for his cruelty and injustice,' cried Ruel Bey.

'No, no! You must not speak so; it is wicked. And I—oh! you may think it strange, but I cared for the Pacha even then. I wanted to be a daughter to him, and his cold looks were like knives in my heart. If it had not been for you I could not have borne my life. But now that I know more, I can understand the Pacha better. Think, dearest, and you will sympathise, because you love; think that he loved my mother, and she preferred another man to him—another man who may have wronged him. I cannot tell; he was my father, and I ought not to speak ill of him. But think, think, and then judge *Excellence* more gently. I am not very like my mother; he told me that. I am more like my father, whom he hated. But think, Caspar, how good his heart must have been to have brought me up and educated me; then to have had me in his house when he could not look at me without being reminded of the secret sorrow of his life. Do you remember that night when he gave Doctor Marillier the box and called us to witness the gift, and how he drove me from his sight?'

'Yes. By the way, I wonder what the box held. It's all a mystery to me,' went on Caspar, vehemently. 'Why should the old man have taken the trouble to tell you that story at the last? Why have brought you here at all? He had the craft of the devil, Isâdas. What if State jealousy were at the bottom of his scheme, a scheme to entrap one whom he knew was his rival in the Emperor's favour, and whom he feared might be his successor.'

'Caspar, I cannot follow your thoughts,' the girl said in bewilderment. 'I know that I am very stupid. Of whom are you speaking? Can it be yourself? I'm quite ignorant of State intrigue.'

'Remain so, my pretty saint. Would I change one hair of your head? Would I instil one drop of serpent's guile into your pure heart's blood, the blood which flows quicker at my voice, which rises and reddens your cheek at my wish? Why hide the blushes, dear? Do I not know that your pulses beat only for me? They are so lovely, those blushes, delight of my eyes. I am not sure how I like you best—pale or rosy.'

Had Caspar's face been turned towards the door he might have seen the curtains stir, might have discovered that a man stood there driven to almost uncontrollable fury.

Marillier waited on. There was no treason in listening. On that point he was certain; he had Rachel's honour to guard, and he held in mind the oath he had taken. But it seemed to him that a moment more and he must be maddened by the whispered cajoleries, the sound of endearments, the specious arguments of which it was so clear to him that Rachel did not understand the drift.

'You make me think of Eastern gardens,' continued Caspar, 'of moonlight upon marble, of plashing fountains, and an orange-tree canopy overhead. My citron flower! I love those creamy blossoms with their petals like a woman's skin, and their luscious perfume. Do you remember the first bouquet I gave you? I had sent south for it, and chose it of citron flowers because you reminded me of them, and I loved them best. Ah, my dearest! why stay in this cold country? Do you not detest the damp, grey fog, and the grim houses with their melancholy air of respectability? Are you not pining for sunshine, and blue sea, and laughter; the song of birds, and all that makes life worth living? Why remain in this dreary house so full of the savour of death, where the old man's cruel presence must always haunt you? Let me take you back to glad France?'

'I have thought of that, Caspar. I was only waiting. You, too, think that would be best?'

'Best? Yes, certainly. Let me take you. I can manage it. We need not delay very long.'

'Oh, yes, yes!' she cried. 'I do detest England. Who would live in this cold gloom if they could fly to the South? Why should I not go to Algeria, Caspar? Only, it would be a long way for you to come and see me. Well, there is my convent—that is where I meant to go, and the dear nuns would let you visit me, perhaps, or else—Ah, well! I don't know. But it need not be for very long, my Caspar.'

'What? You are forced to admit that the dear nuns might be scandalised if I presented myself and requested that I might spend a few hours alone with my sweet saint! No. I have a better plan. That little corner of France is very pretty and poetic, no doubt; but it is a long way from my duties—a tiresome journey. And the nuns! I have already told you that my tastes do not incline to a parade of sanctity. I'm too human for that. What do you think, dearest, of a much shorter pilgrimage and a more earthly shrine? I have a little *entresol* in Paris—a box. I lived in it when I was in the Abarian Embassy there. I have kept the place. I go over to it occasionally when I want a whiff of free air to drive the fog out of my throat. It's pretty; you'd like it—close to the Champs Elysées. There's a decent *concierge*; his wife would take good care of you. I'd get you a maid, companion—whatever you preferred. Better not take your own woman, she seems to smack rather severely of the nunnery. I want you to see life—the life of cities—the opera—theatre—society, if you wished; but I think you would not wish for overmuch of that Listen! Don't say me nay till you have heard all my plan. I would take you over and instal you. Then when things were settled here—when the new Ambassador is appointed—are you speculating, mademoiselle, as to whom that is likely to be? In any case, when I am assured of promotion under whatever conditions—well, then, I would join you, and then we might make definite plans.'

'Definite plans?' she repeated. 'You mean our marriage. But how could I—Till we were married ought I to live in your house? And our marriage, Caspar. I am not prepared; you are not prepared—'

'That is true, my wise saint. I am not prepared. Seriously, dearest, I am glad you see it in this light. Seriously, it would be madness if I were to marry you now—or, shall I say, announce our marriage—till the new appointments are made. My prospects would be jeopardised—and yours. But there need be no difficulty as long as you trust me—as long as you believe in the sincerity of my devotion. Paris is not London. And that is one advantage of your ambiguous position—'

pardon me for the phrase, you yourself have used it—no one in this city is likely to ask what has become of the “so-called” Mademoiselle Isàdas. As for the Parisian world, it has forgotten me; or if not, I can give a new address to my friends in it. No one there, will know anything but that a beautiful lady—if they observe her goings and comings—now lives in an *appartement* which was once tenanted by a servant of the Abarian Government, but which is, presumably, no longer his property; and, in any case, who would care if he be seen entering and leaving? Might it not be supposed that the business of his country prevents that Abarian gentleman from enjoying more than stolen tastes of his charming wife’s society? Need one advertise one’s marriage in the newspapers? Matrimony is a mere legal formality, sweet nun, though I know you consider it a sacrament. For me, love is the sacrament, and marriage only the outward symbol. But the symbol shall be a sacrament for me, too, if you please, and none the less so if our wedding take place a little sooner or a little later. Sweet, the whole gist of the matter is, do you love me?’

‘You know that I love you, Caspar. How else could I promise to be your wife?’

‘Then if you love me, you must also trust me; the one condition pre-supposes the other. Allow me to play the knight-errant and rescue you from this ogre’s castle, and as soon as may be. Is there so much trust required in the man you love, that you should hesitate to let him arrange your journey and escort you to your destination? The only thing is that we must keep our own counsel. Say nothing even to Lucien. Sweet, I am jealous of Lucien. I have a shrewd suspicion that you have captivated the grave doctor, and that he would oppose, as far as lay in his power, our pleasant projects. Time enough to tell him when the deed is done, and you are made mine irrevocably. Why should we court gossip? We would travel by the night express. If you are wise you will let it be assumed that you are returning to your convent, or even going to take possession of your Moorish palace—some day we will see it together. But for the present, dearest, we will go no further than Paris. Speak! Give me your promise. No, I take *it—thus.*’

Marillier knew that she was in his arms. He could hear murmured words. Then he seemed to know that she had released herself.

‘Caspar, I love you, and you have said what is true—since I love you I must trust you absolutely, entirely. It would be a sin against my love if I could doubt yours for me. And I don’t know why, or what, I should doubt. As you say, it would only be delaying our marriage for a little while. And you are right; the air of this house is full of death and sorrow. England is all gloom and oppression, and I am an alien in the land. You shall take me away if you will—you shall go with me to Paris if you please; but for the rest—don’t ask me to decide now. I cannot. I can think of nothing but the joy of having you back again, of knowing that you love me. It is all strange and bewildering, this plan of yours; I don’t quite like it. It is not that I don’t trust you. My heart, I love you, and I will do anything that you ask, believing you would never ask me to do what was unwise or wrong. But I am troubled, Caspar; I—I am afraid . . .’

The curtains parted. Marillier stood in the opening. He seemed to bristle like a grim grey wolf whose young is threatened. His teeth showed between his drawn lips, and his eyes gave a flash as of a sword leaping from its scabbard. For ten seconds he looked at the pair without speaking. Caspar had his back towards him; he was holding the girl’s hands, and she was gazing into his eyes, beseeching him with hers to reassure her vague doubt, to still the conflict in her between love and something which made her shrink from him, while yet he held her fascinated. Marillier thought of a little bird before a serpent. He made a movement forward, and Rachel started and looked at him, uttering a cry of confusion as she dropped Caspar’s hands.

Caspar was confused too, and his eye fell before the indignant gaze of his cousin. But he recovered himself quickly, and laughed in his light way.

‘Have pity on Mademoiselle Isàdas’s nerves, Lucien. They have had a good many shocks lately. You seem to me a poor sort of doctor to take her first into that horrible death-room, and now to burst in upon her in this manner. What is the matter with you? You seem disturbed.’

Marillier pointedly ignored him.

‘Mademoiselle Isàdas, forgive me,’ he said. ‘I am sorry that I startled you by my sudden appearance. I ought to have taken better care of a nervous patient. You are my patient just now, remember, and you will let me advise you to go to your own room and put yourself into Nurse Dalison’s care.’

Rachel made a meek little movement with her head, and without a word left the room.

Caspar and Lucien faced each other. The former spoke.

‘May I ask, my honourable cousin, how long you have been playing the eavesdropper? I see,’ he added brutally, with a glance at the box in Marillier’s hand, ‘you have been carrying away your booty; but that is hardly an excuse for listening behind the curtains.’

‘I have listened to some purpose,’ retorted Marillier. ‘For the first time I know you in your true colours. Caspar, you are the son of my mother’s sister, yet I tell you that you are a scoundrel.’

Ruel Bey flushed a brick red, and his arm went out as though he would have struck the other man. But it dropped, and he turned off the situation with another laugh.

‘We are both inclined to be melodramatic, I see. Perhaps, however, it is pardonable in the conditions, and I make some allowance for natural jealousy. No doubt you heard Mademoiselle Isàdas avow her preference, and are annoyed at her choice of one so much less worthy, you would say, than yourself. But there’s no accounting for the tastes of women. I trust that I may be permitted to justify that of her whom I adore. As for your abominable insinuation—well, Doctor Lucien Marillier, if I were not the son of your mother’s sister, I should feel myself compelled to send you my seconds this evening and to ask you to cross the Channel and meet me on the Calais sands as soon as might be convenient after the business of to-morrow. But I am the son of your mother’s sister—which seems to me a roundabout way of stating a plain fact; moreover, you will admit that it is not exactly seemly to pick a quarrel within a few paces of where the late Ambassador of his Majesty of Abaria is lying in state. Moreover, for other reasons, I don’t intend that you shall fire a bullet into me; and so, cousin, I will wish you good evening.’

CHAPTER XII

THE DEAD HAND

The funeral was over, and the mortal remains of Isàdas Pacha were laid in the earth. He had desired to be buried in the place where he died, not in Abaria or the island of his ancestors, so a grave was dug in the Catholic cemetery at Kensal Green. It was a grand procession which left the Embassy. The spirit of Isàdas must have been glad, if it were hovering near, to see the homage paid to its earthly casket. And indeed to Marillier, who was in a strange mood that morning, haunted by the old man’s mystic utterances, and racked with the emotion he had endured after overhearing the scene between Ruel Bey and Rachel, it seemed that the Pacha’s spirit might well be present at this imposing ceremonial—that ironic spirit scoffing, amused, interested, yet all the time, not unmindful of the daughter of his old love, and at the last, stretching forth the dead hand he had spoken of to save her from sorrow.

The day was gloomy beyond description, as November days are apt to be. A grey fog enveloped that part of London—not a thick brown fog closing one in like a wall, but a ghostly

spreading mist, which made the houses loom in gigantic proportions along the street, and the people walking and the carriages and carts look as though great shadows had descended and taken to themselves forms. The scarlet tunics of a detachment of the Guards which the Queen had sent, made the only definite block of colour in the leaden mist which filled the square, until the coffin was borne down with its covering pall of flowers, while the men in uniforms and decorations round it and the crimson fezzes of the secretaries blended at in a variegated mass, and then dispersed, as the mourners followed the dead chief in due order.

A flash of steel pierced the fog, as the Guards presented arms to him who would never again, after this day, receive an earthly salute. The band played the Dead March, and the procession passed through lined streets. For it was a great sight, and the funeral of an ambassador does not take place every day. The Queen was represented and all the greater royalties, while several princes attended in person. There, too, were the members of the various foreign Embassies, the Ministers of the Crown, and, indeed, almost all the notable men in London. Isâdas Pacha had been a popular figure in society, as well as a clever diplomatist.

As the coffin was taken out of the hearse the mourners formed themselves into line. No blood relation of the late Pacha being present, Ruel Bey, in virtue of his official position, took the place of chief mourner. The members of the Abarian household followed him closely, and with them Marillier, as the physician in attendance upon the late Ambassador, and the young medical man who had assisted him in the critical operation of some weeks back, and who had shared with him to the end the responsibility of the case.

Marillier's mind was a chaos of conflicting thoughts. Foremost among these was the impression, of which he could not rid himself, that the old man's spirit hovered above the *cortège*, controlling every incident and whispering intimately into his own ear words of warning and injunctions to hold himself in readiness for whatever might occur, confirming him *in* the conviction which had leapt to him during his night's agony, that he, and he alone, was left to fulfil the dead man's will, and that upon him rested the responsibility of saving and protecting Rachel O'Hara's helpless daughter. This feeling was so strong upon him that it gave him a sense of illusion. Ruel Bey's striking form in the rich Abarian uniform, walking ahead of him in the procession, at once heightened the illusion and gave force to reality. The first secretary won the approval and admiration of all who witnessed his tactful and dignified performance of the duty that had devolved upon him. More than one of those present, saw in him the future ambassador, or at least a diplomatist whose career was assured. The representatives of royalty, the English Ministers, the members of the foreign Embassies, approached him with cordiality, even a certain deference. His demeanour was perfect, yet to Marillier, all through, it masked the designs of a fiend. Marillier's excited fancy saw in Ruel Bey the enemy of Isâdas, and of Rachel O'Hara's daughter. It was true that Ruel Bey was the Ambassador's temporal representative, but to Marillier, it seemed that he himself was, by the Pacha's own choice, the true deputy of the old man who was gone, and that Isâdas's spirit was now urging him to realise his responsibility, and was pointing out to him that, as he had been chosen as the sole repository of the secret of Rachel's birth, through him alone, could the dead hand smite for the girl's salvation. Rachel's hitherto sole protector had gone for ever from mortal ken, but Marillier felt that the mantle had fallen upon his own shoulders, and he stood ready to fulfil to the uttermost this sacred trust. As the line of mourners, leaving the grave, reformed, a sudden darkness fell. The fog, which had been grey before, was now black, and through it, glimmered linkmen's lanterns and the hurriedly lighted lamps of waiting carriages.

The long rows of equipages drawn up in the open space by the gate which was guarded by a cordon of policemen, began with difficulty to take up their owners; and the space appeared one moving shadow in which were monstrous shapes with small red eyes twinkling. Hoarse cries resounded, and the names of great personages were bawled forth as in the confusion of the departure from some fashionable gathering. Just in front of the cemetery, and in the street opening upon it, traffic had been stopped during the procession for certain fixed hours, but there had been delay; the hour of closure was past, and vans and cabs approaching the scene, were obliged to turn back, finding progress stopped, so that a block happened, and in the darkness the *melee* threatened to be serious. A road was being repaired just beyond the police cordon, and now, a traction engine started suddenly into work. Its roar and the puff of red smoke which accompanied it, alarmed the horses in a waiting carriage at the end of the middle row. They darted forward with the carriage swaying behind them, breaking the line, and causing a horrible displacement. Panic spread. Voices of coachmen were heard above the tumult calling to their neighbours and trying to soothe the frightened animals in their charge.

Marillier's brougham stood at the back, and he and the medical assistant with him were with difficulty making their way towards it, when the excitement began and prevented them from going further. Ruel Bey called out peremptory commands as he accompanied a very great personage to the door of his carriage, a personage whose word might make or mar his own diplomatic destiny, and Ruel Bey in any distracting circumstances, remained susceptible to such considerations. Just as the great personage had stepped into his carriage and the footman had taken his place on the box a pair of maddened beasts dashed down the road. There sounded the crash of a collision, and one of the horses belonging to the carriage beside which Ruel Bey still stood, reared, kicked over the traces, and would have bolted, causing greater damage besides endangering the life of a power in European politics, had not Ruel Bey, alive to the situation, sprang to the horse's head, seized the rein, and after considerable effort, brought the beast to bay. But as he struggled in the uncertain light, foam from the terrified horse's mouth spurting on to his face and almost blinding him, he was caught by the pole of another carriage turned crosswise, and obliged to loose his hold. The released animal reared again, but the coachman had it now in grip. It kicked out wildly, and Ruel Bey was struck to the ground and trampled under its hoofs. There was a rush of roughs, and two policemen pulled Caspar, bleeding and unconscious, on to the pavement, while several occupants of carriages put out their heads and called, asking if there were a doctor anywhere near.

By the light of a street lamp just above Marillier had seen every detail of the occurrence. He knew that his cousin had been kicked on the head and that the injury must be serious. Through his dreamy realisation of what had happened, there flashed the fancy that to this end his own steps had been barred by the throng. Had he found his carriage sooner, he would not have known of the accident. Another wild thought flashed. Did the Pacha's spirit dominate events still? Was this the work of the dead hand?

He answered the call at once, however, in his clear, authoritative manner, the trained habit of the doctor triumphing over the emotional man, and all his professional instinct on the alert. He explained quietly that he was the physician of the late Ambassador, that Ruel Bey was his cousin. He, with his medical assistant, he said, would take charge of the case and convey the injured man in his brougham at once to his own house, which was on the way to the Embassy.

The great person, who was visibly concerned, professed himself grateful and satisfied, and presently, extricated from the block, drove off. Order was soon restored. Marillier and the young assistant, who was a silent, fair man, absorbed in his work, shy of great people, and devoted body

and soul to Marillier, whom he considered the one and only medical authority of the day, carried the unconscious first secretary as best they could, with the help of policemen, to the doctor's brougham now in readiness. Ruel Bey was placed on the front seat, and the doctor and his assistant supported him as far as possible in order to save him from being jolted. The coachman received orders to go as quickly as was practicable by a quieter route to Marillier's house in Harley Street, but the density of the fog made movement necessarily slow at first. Every now and then from the lips of Caspar a feeble groan escaped, like that of a wounded animal—a mere sound of physical distress, with no consciousness in it. The sound brought to Marillier a thrill of disagreeable association, for, since the scene of the day before, he had sedulously avoided all intercourse with his cousin. He endeavoured to turn his thoughts by remarking to his companion upon some technical aspects of the case. In such cursory inspection of the hurt as had been possible, it seemed clear to both that an injury to the brain was to be apprehended, and that probably an operation involving the lifting of a portion of the skull would be necessary.

The hurried diagnosis was confirmed by a fuller examination in Marillier's consulting-room. This was in a wing built out at the back of the house, which contained besides, laboratories and a small operating-room divided from the rest of the apartment by a movable partition of ground glass. On the other side of the partition, was a white-tiled space, the high~ operating-table, with its movable supports for the limbs and head of the patient, and lighted from above with electric globes and reflectors, standing in the centre.

Marillier turned on the lights and ran his eye over the array of sponges, instruments, antiseptics, bandages, and different kinds of surgical appliances kept always in readiness. There was, of course, a supply of hot water, and the place was heated to a pleasant temperature.

In the larger room, which, now that the folding partition was drawn, lay open to the operating chamber, a fire blazed, and here the electric light, scattered and more closely shaded, made a lesser illumination. Caspar lay stretched on the couch, to all appearance lifeless, for the moaning had quite ceased. The consulting-room was very quiet, shut off as it was from the rest of the house, and when the door was closed, absolutely secure from intrusion. It was a comfortable apartment, with some fine old cabinets of English make, oak bookshelves filled with books, and a great writing-table with the doctor's armchair behind it, opposite to the one in which patients seated themselves when they came to face the penetrating eye of the physician.

On an oak table, between the screened space of the operating-room and the sofa on which Caspar lay, stood the gold box containing the mandrake, which Marillier had placed there on his return from the Embassy the previous day. It occurred to him that the Pacha had bidden him open the box as soon as possible after the funeral, and he decided to do so by-and-by. He had other, more imperative, things to think of now, and he resolutely put aside every thought of Isàdas, of Rachel, and even of Ruel Bey, except as a patient who demanded immediate attention.

Now the surgeon and doctor of medicine held paramount sway over the man, and this in an almost sub-conscious manner, the result of long control over nerves when the business of his profession was concerned. For the moment, his rival was a case, one of unusual scientific interest—no more.

He looked again at the wound, passing his deft fingers over it—a touch here, a pressure there, his brows knit, his lips pressed so closely that they made one thin line accentuating his strong jaw. He went on with certain medical preparations in silence, except for a brief direction delivered at intervals to his assistant. Then he stood deep in thought. Presently he said abruptly to the younger man,—

‘It must be done, Heathcote—the sooner the better.’

Heathcote nodded.

'You see—' there followed some technical explanations. 'It is a question of preserving his sanity. That splintered bone must be raised from pressing on the brain, and that without delay. I have often done the operation of trephining, as you are aware. I have no hesitation in saying that, in this case, it will be successful. I *know*.'

'That is enough,' replied Heathcote. 'For you to say "I know" means certainty of success.'

'Let us waste no time,' Marillier went on. 'We can get through the operation—you and I—at once, here. There's nothing else imperative for this afternoon?'

Heathcote looked at a tablet of engagements, reading out names and hours.

At one of the names Marillier stopped him.

'You can attend to him. By that time I shall not need you. Now we will begin.'

The two proceeded in a cool, business-like way with their arrangements. The body of Caspar was laid upon the operating-table. Presently the air was filled with the sickly fumes of chloroform.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AVATAR

Much of Marillier's success in the operation of trephining was due to a dressing, at once antiseptic and healing, the secret of which he had learned when practising in the East, and which, notwithstanding experiment and discussion, was not favoured by English surgeons. It had been duly applied, and the bandages arranged. There was every ground for hope that life and reason were saved to Ruel Bey.

Marillier stood alone over the body of his cousin, which, still under the influence of the chloroform, had been removed to a couch at the foot of the operating-table. He had dismissed Heathcote, having decided that it would be better to do himself all that was necessary than to entrust the work to his subordinate.

For the first time since Caspar had been brought into the consulting-room, Marillier remembered that the man whom he had saved was, in very truth, his bitterest enemy, remembered that in restoring to Caspar his intellect and powers of fascination, he was in reality sharpening a weapon that should pierce the heart and destroy the honour of the woman he loved.

He looked down at Caspar's handsome face and finely-moulded form. Inwardly, he contrasted this perfection of physical beauty with the mental picture of himself which he carried in recollection—the grey, rough-hewn face, the thick-set figure with its ungainly gait. There was nothing in such a personality to attract a young girl's fancy, to turn the heart of a loving woman from the man she adored. It came upon him with a shock, that this was the thought consuming him, burning into his soul—the desire to take Rachel from Caspar in order to possess her himself, and not for her well-being primarily, but for the satisfaction of his own desire. He had partly realised the strength of his passion on the previous day, but it had not then gripped and held him in its naked might as it gripped and held him now.

Completely overcome by it for the moment, he felt, as he gazed upon the motionless form of his rival, that he would willingly barter every advantage, everything in the world that he held most dear—his scientific reputation, his power of healing, his knowledge, all the acquirements that he had struggled for and mastered during years of self-denying application—everything would he give that he might win the heart of this girl. He felt that he hated Caspar, and yet he

yearned madly to possess Caspar's charm and power of winning love; he yearned to inform with his own will and his own spirit this fine fleshly mould inhabited by Caspar's soul. He knew himself intuitively, to be a truer man than Caspar. He felt that, given the opportunity, he could make Rachel love him, and with a more abiding love than that which she had given to Caspar. He longed to bring forth Rachel's grander qualities, and to transform her from a half-developed girl into a noble-hearted woman. As he dwelt on this thought, the less worthy impulse subsided. No, it was not for mere selfish gratification that he wished to win Rachel. He loved her with his higher, and not with his lower, self. The longing to grasp and hold her at any cost was an outside prompting, having no root in the real man. Rachel's pure image expelled the baser instinct. Were Caspar dead, he told himself, he would be content to wait, to worship, and to patiently serve till, of her own free will, she gave herself to him.

If Caspar were dead! To all intents Caspar *was* dead. During the course of his studies and experiments in the working of anæsthetics, Marillier had satisfied himself that in an ordinary operation under chloroform, mental consciousness is not entirely separated from the body, but remains in close connection with it, as in the less profound dream condition; whereas, in the case of an operation touching the brain, the seat of reason, when an anæsthetic is administered, the soul is, in very truth, driven forth for the time from its earthly tenement, by the fact that a process of vital reconstruction is taking place, so that the body during that period is performing automatically its natural functions. Marillier remembered having discussed this question with the Pacha, who had quoted some of the theories of the Medicine Moor.

And now, a cold perspiration rose on Marillier's forehead, as he was suddenly assailed by a temptation which seemed, indeed, the suggestion of the old man's godless spirit to which evil and good had been—in his own phraseology—merely opposite poles of a force unknowable as its lower counterpart, electricity. Why should he recall the soul of Caspar? Why not leave it to join the Wandering Ones? Then Rachel would be saved, and he himself, with no obstacle between them, might gain her for his own.

He battled with the temptation. He beat it down—throttling it before the suggestion could put itself into definite shape. He walked away from the couch, and returned again. Surging thoughts swept his being. The murderous impulse conquered, making place for a thousand other imaginings, utterly wild and fantastic, one thought dominant—that he could change places with Caspar—that he might woo Rachel in Caspar's body, animated by his own soul.

Certain words of the Pacha floated back to him—he scarcely knew by what connection of ideas. The old man's voice echoed in his ear. He seemed to hear it once more, as he had heard it during the interviews when the Pacha had talked to him of the mandrake; at first, cold, sarcastic, gibing, then vibrating with the intensity of conviction, of supernatural dread. One by one, bits of sentences framed themselves in his memory:—*'There are two forces in Nature by which man may to an almost incredible extent control his own destiny. . . . By means of Love and Will, the Vital Energy which creates and maintains life may be drawn upon and used by those initiated into a certain form of magic.'* . . . And then the echoing voice quivering with that strange emotion which had revealed itself to Marillier, and perhaps among all men, to Marillier only, went on, *'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 that you hold almost within your hand. . . . There are men capable of concentrating in themselves and employing the subtle forces of the Universe. . . . By the strength of your own will wrest this secret from God, or Nature, or the Devil. . . . The desire will be born in you; its germ already lies in your heart. The hour of struggle will arrive, and the force shall rise within you—you choose to put it forth—that shall*

give you the mastery.' The force? What force? The might of will—the power of desire? Had not Marillier's aim for years been to cultivate his will? But never yet had the supreme opportunity for test presented itself. He had never hitherto desired anything with sufficient intensity. But now! The Pacha had bidden him remember his prophecy. . . . Will! . . . Yes, the Pacha had prophesied truly. He felt the power growing within him. . . . It uplifted him. . . . It filled him. . . . He had a sense of potency indescribable. . . . Now he understood the meaning of mystic utterances. . . . Man had in himself the germ of godhead. . . . Man might create—man might accomplish miracles—restore the dead to life—change the outward form of the spirit—subdue all to himself—make himself verily a god. . .

His brain seemed to be bursting; it reeled under this new and extraordinary consciousness. Was he going mad? Had the fumes of the chloroform affected him in a manner of which he had no previous experience? Marillier flung wide apart the glass folds of the partition, and walking rapidly to the end of the consulting-room, threw open the window, and drew in long breaths of fog-laden air. They seemed to calm his excitement, but he still paced the room with quick, eager steps. Again his eye was caught by the gold box on the table. Involuntarily he went to it, and his fingers played about the lid.

As he touched it, words of the Pacha again recurred to him—their talk about the mandrake, and of other Eastern superstitions. He knew that the Pacha had believed firmly in the magical properties of the root, in its power to confer physical attraction upon its possessor and the gift of women's love. Isâdas had implied that from the date upon which he had wrenched the mandrake from the ground, he had possessed the faculty of inspiring love in the breast of any woman upon whom he pleased to exercise it. He had died in the absolute conviction that he owed his worldly renown and prosperity to the influence of the mandrake; and not only this, but that the mandrake had actually transferred to himself the vitality of which he had robbed it. He had implied also that, when he died, the mandrake would take back its life to itself and all its magical qualities, and that these might be made to serve the will of its new possessor.

Mad superstition! Well had the mandrake been named 'the insane root.' Thinking thus, Marillier, scarce consciously, pressed the topaz beneath which lay the spring, and the lid of the box flew open. The silken wrapper was slightly displaced; he could see a portion of the mandrake's form—an arm laid bare, which to Marillier's fervid imagination seemed to twitch and slightly move. He tore away the coverlet. . . . And then he staggered and shrank back, for here was confirmation of all that he had deemed impossible and but the raving of a disordered brain. Here was living proof—yes, *living* proof that there was truth in the old superstitions, and that the Pacha had told him no fairy tale. Or could it be, as Isâdas had said, that he had in himself the capability to absorb and concentrate those hidden energies of Nature by which, if legend and history were not to be rejected, men have in all time worked seeming miracles; and hence then this sensation which he felt of wondrous capacity, of superhuman endowment. Had *he* instilled life into the mandrake?

For the root was certainly alive. When he touched it the soft, fleshy substance of its body stirred and pulsed; the grotesque features were agitated by a sort of infantile and most gruesome spasm. He lifted it from its box, and as he did so, the brown tentacle with its rudimentary hand closed round his finger.

Marillier was seized with horror, and another wild fancy came into his mind—the notion that in this creature he beheld his own guilty thought which had thus personified itself. He stood for several moments holding the mandrake away from him, cold with supernatural awe. Presently the horror passed, and he said to himself that the thing was a natural monstrosity, one of Nature's

failures, or perhaps another of the strange but authenticated links between the vegetable and the animal orders of creation. He held it nearer till it rested on his breast. Then, like the Pacha, he seemed to feel the thrill in it. So holding it, he walked to the couch on which Ruel Bey was stretched.

Was the man dead? He appeared so, but Marillier knew that in a short time, if nothing should prevent it, consciousness would return. Now his former passionate hatred and revolt at the physical beauty of the man, in comparison with his own ungainliness, burned anew, seeming to derive fresh intensity from the life of the mandrake, while he fancied that the mandrake's vitality waxed warmer and stronger from the raging fire in his own breast. Jealous longing mastered him. Why should Caspar return to work that evil which he, who loved Rachel with a love that Caspar was incapable of, would sacrifice eternity to avert? And how was he discharging the trust which Isâdas had laid upon him? Were he to restore Caspar, to what end would the dead hand have interposed?

No, he was prepared to risk all. Only let the mandrake's magic be tested, and a miracle be wrought. Let him be Caspar—Caspar's spirit remaining exiled, and he in possession of the body which had won Rachel's love—that he might clasp Rachel in his arms and know the full sweetness of her kiss upon Caspar's lips.

Simultaneously, other words of Isâdas Pacha flashed back upon his memory:—*'Remember that to accomplish such a result you must project your very soul, as it were, out of your own body upon the object of your desire.'*

He would do this. As he summoned all his strength, he became aware of a stronger, more pulsating thrill in the thing which clung to his breast. Then a strange giddiness overpowered him. He felt himself falling, and for a time he knew no more.

* * *

He was conscious again, but at first, in an odd faint way, with a stirring about his heart, and a queer pain in his head. He moved feebly. There was the impression of something unexpected having happened to him. He seemed to be coming back slowly and with difficulty. A distant roaring sounded in his ears, like the dashing of far-off breakers against a cliff. He tried to move his lips. His feet pressed on something soft; he thought he must be in his bed, but presently knew that he was partly dressed. He put out one hand; it touched the wooden support of the operating-table. The electric lamps above it, glared down upon him from their burnished shades. He saw the tiled walls and the other small table with an array of his own surgical instruments and appliances—the basin, the blood-stained towels. Then he remembered that there had been an operation, and that he had performed it upon his cousin. The incidents of the day crowded back in a confused medley upon his over-wrought brain; the funeral, the accident; the sense of Isâdas's hovering spirit, and of the dead hand beckoning him; his temptation; his mad desire to exchange places with Caspar—to woo Rachel with Caspar's body, but with his own mind.

The mandrake! He remembered that too, remembered the last strange thrill of it, which seemed to have blended with the life in himself. And then the dizziness and the darkness. He must have fainted. He put his hand to his breast feeling for the horrible thing, but it was not there.

He raised his head. What was he doing here on the couch at the end of the operating-table? It was Caspar's body which he and Heathcote had placed there. He knew that the operation had been quite successful. The Medicine Moor's famous antiseptic—a decoction from the stalk of the banana, the secret of which that strange person had learned in his travels from South-Sea Island

natives—had been applied. Marillier was satisfied; he had never known dangerous complications occur after its application. He remembered everything distinctly. He lifted himself into a sitting posture and stared around him, and now down on the floor beside the table. What was that he saw huddled on the tiles? A man's form—the body bent, the face lying sideways, one arm outstretched, the hand spread. He recognised the hand. He recognised the shape of the limbs—the short neck, the thick high shoulders, the massive head, the rugged profile. It was his own face, his own form, upon which he gazed!

And beside the man's form, as though it had fallen from his breast, lay the little brown thing—the root in half-human likeness—the mandrake.

A glimmering of the truth rushed upon Marillier, for if his body was lying there why was he conscious of lying here? Why should he be on the couch beside the operating-table. *What was that?* And if that were his own body, who was *this*?

He looked along the space beyond the drawn, glass partitions and straight into a mirror fixed between the windows at the further end of the consulting-room. Reflected duskily, but with sufficient distinctness, he saw himself—no, not himself, but Caspar.

That which had contained his soul lay lifeless on the ground, but the body of Caspar lived, and he lived in it. He had longed to be Caspar, and ho!—he *was* Caspar! The magical properties of the mandrake had been proved; the Pacha's prophecy was verified; the hour and the opportunity had come.

His desire had been granted. He had wrested from Nature the great secret. By the force of Love and Will, he had made himself master of his fate; and he might now control, not his own destiny alone, but that of the woman he loved.

CHAPTER XIV

FRIEND AND LOVER

One thought rose uppermost in Marillier's mind when he realised the extraordinary transformation which had taken place. It was that Rachel must be spared if possible the shock of learning simultaneously the accident to her lover and the death of her friend.

He had already taken some precautions, having at the cemetery gates instructed the secretaries and some members of the Embassy household to keep from Mademoiselle Isàdas news of the mishap to Ruel Bey, and of the injured man's conveyance to his own house until he should be able to satisfy himself as to the extent of the mischief. He told them that, later on, he would personally report at the Embassy. Little did he think at the moment what would be the nature of the report. Yet, on the surface, the explanation would be comparatively easy. He would go to the Embassy, not as Doctor Marillier, but as Ruel Bey, and there he would tell Rachel and the members of the staff that an operation had been performed—to this Heathcote, the assistant, would bear testimony—and that when restoring the patient to consciousness after the administration of the anæsthetic, Doctor Marillier had been by some unaccountable accident overcome by fumes of chloroform, and had fallen in a syncope which proved fatal. The natural inference would be that Marillier was a victim to half-suspected heart disease. He himself remembered that incident at the Embassy a short time back, when both Rachel and Ruel Bey showed alarm at his apparent indisposition, and Caspar had taxed him with overworking a weak heart, and had made him drink the liqueur as a restorative. Rachel would no doubt recall that episode, and would accept the theory of heart disease without a question.

But now he must act. There was no time to be lost. Heathcote would be returning presently, and on medical grounds, would oppose his purpose. Weakened though his body was by the operation and consequent nervous shock, the transferred vitality from a frame comparatively healthy enabled Marillier to collect his energies and to rise from the couch. He looked at the hunched-up form which had been himself, with a mixture of emotions. But here his training in self-control stood him in good stead; and among these familiar surroundings of his late personality he was Lucien Marillier the physician, rather than Caspar Ruel, of whose physique and temperament he was becoming vaguely conscious.

He knew that, later on, this consciousness might prove bewildering. At present the grim necessity of the situation caused him to rise above it. He at once felt the desirability of concealing the mandrake which lay a few inches from the prostrate form. Taking it up reluctantly, and with an involuntary shudder lest the little brown tentacle might again close round his finger, he replaced it in its box. But the root was once more flabby and pulseless. Seeing that it showed no sign of movement, and remembering the Pacha's belief that only with the extinction of his own life would that of the mandrake return to itself, Marillier wondered if the mandrake's force had indeed been again poured forth for the benefit of its new owner, or whether it had been wholly expended upon the magical deed just accomplished. He gave himself, however, no further time for speculation. An impulse of loathing made him spread the coverlet hastily over the grotesquely-human shape, and snap the lid of the box with a feeling that he could never again desire to open it. He locked the box up carefully in one of the oak bureaus. Then he made some steps forward into the consulting-room, and glancing up, beheld his bandaged head and disordered figure in the mirror which had first reflected him as Ruel Bey. The sight brought to him still more the reality of the situation. He rang the bell, and in a minute his servant, who, cautioned by Heathcote, was on the watch, answered the summons. The man stared as though a ghost were risen before him, for he beheld, as he thought, standing there confronting him, Ruel Bey, whom he had last seen carried in a state of unconsciousness into the surgery, and upon whom he knew an operation of more or less serious nature had been performed. Marillier pointed to the operating-room, and to the dead body huddled upon the floor. He could scarcely speak. When he did so, his voice was husky with agitation and he clutched at the mantel for support. While he was trying to explain what had happened, Heathcote, who had hurried back from his professional visit, turned the handle of the door, and at sight of the man whom he had left, as he believed, motionless upon the couch, drew back also as though he beheld a ghost.

'You see,' Marillier stammered, 'I awoke . . . That is what I found.'

Heathcote gave an exclamation of horror as he looked in the direction which was indicated by the outstretched hand of, as it appeared, Ruel Bey.

'What is it?' he cried. 'What has happened?'

'See for yourself. He is dead.'

'But how—how? It is impossible.'

'I cannot tell you how. I must go to the Embassy. I must break this horrible news. Have the kindness to order the carriage at once.'

'You cannot go to the Embassy,' said Heathcote.

'It would be endangering your life.'

Marillier laughed strangely, and pointed impatiently to the form on the tiled floor.

'Attend to him. That is *your* business. Let me attend to mine. I tell you that I must go.'

Heathcote, too horrified to expostulate further rushed to the body of his friend and began to make unavailing efforts for its revival.

‘Order the carriage at once,’ repeated Marillier to the butler.

‘The carriage is waiting, sir,’ replied the man. ‘It brought back Mr Heathcote.’

Marillier hurriedly adjusted his dress, the man assisting him. He was as pale as a corpse; a bandage still swathed his head, and the uniform he wore was tumbled and awry. He was then helped out of the consulting-room, got into the brougham, and calling to the coachman, ‘The Abarian Embassy—quick!’ was driven rapidly the short distance which lay between it and Harley Street.

* * *

Rachel Isàdas sat alone in the inner reception-room before a blazing fire. Nurse Dalison had gone out, and she had come to this room in the half hope, half fear that Caspar might find her there on his return from the funeral. The afternoon was cold, and the desolation in her heart made her feel still colder. She leaned forward in her big chair, hugging the warmth. The blazing logs brought her a dull sense of comfort and cheer, as the flames danced in the mirror behind her and on the polished furniture, shedding an illusory glow on her pale face. But they only seemed to make her eyes sadder and her slim, black-clad form more pathetic and childish.

Her mind was full of strange forebodings. She was thinking now of her last interview with Caspar; indeed, there had been scarcely a moment when she had not thought of it. She had then intuitively felt something in Caspar which she did not understand, and which faintly revolted her; this she was forced to acknowledge to herself, and yet, in spite of the feeling, Caspar formed the sum of her future. Without Caspar, she could make no plan of existence—nay, she would hardly care to exist. In a few days at latest, she must decide whether to accept or to refuse his proposition—one from which she instinctively shrank, but which she dared not decline. Her own forlornness oppressed her. She had no one to whom she could turn for advice; and though she longed to consult Marillier, Caspar had expressly forbidden her to mention the matter to his cousin. Even without that prohibition, she felt that it would be difficult in this instance to confide in Marillier. For her age, she was extraordinarily simple-minded and unworldly, this convent-bred girl, but her woman’s instinct stirred and cautioned her. Marillier was her friend; he had vowed to befriend her if need be; but there were some things one could not speak of to the closest friend, and this was one of them. It was her secret and Caspar’s. Her face burned as she remembered that Marillier had seen her almost in Caspar’s embrace, and that seemed to make confidence still more impossible. Besides, Caspar had bidden her be silent, and Caspar’s word was law. Nevertheless, she was puzzled by Caspar’s reasoning, and, though not knowing the cause, her maiden soul rebelled against Caspar’s manner of wooing. She wavered, torn with doubts which her tenderness would scarcely allow her to put into form.

There had been many carriages drawing up at the entrance to the Embassy; she heard the sound of footsteps and of opening and closing doors below, and knew that the funeral *cortège* must have returned, that the body of Isàdas was laid away, and that the business of the Chancellery was going on—the business of reporting the events of the day and registering the possible diplomatic significance of all that had taken place. A lull followed, broken by the drawing up of Marillier’s brougham, but this Rachel did not hear, nor did the hurried explanations in the hall reach her ears, or the brief talk which took place between Marillier and Ahmed Bey, secretary next to Ruel Bey, who, in the absence of his superior, had taken command of affairs. She heard nothing, knew nothing, till footsteps sounded in the larger room beyond her—footsteps that she seemed to recognise. Then the double doors were burst open, the curtains pushed aside, and

Marillier, or as he appeared to her, Caspar, her lover, stood arrested for a moment on the threshold.

He was stopped by a suffocating sense of dread, and by his own eager longing, of which he was now overpoweringly conscious. Rachel turned, half rising from her chair, the love in her face blending with some uneasiness, evoked by her recent reverie. She did not seem at first to realise that he had been hurt; he had forbidden that she should be told, and it was not now apparent, for he had made an arrangement of his fur-lined coat which the butler in Harley Street had insisted upon his putting on,—drawing up the collar about his throat so that the bandage was almost hidden, and only his white face emerged from between the fur and the fez which covered his head. As he advanced, she sprang to her feet.

‘Caspar!’ she cried, holding out her hands uncertainly, the red mounting to her brow. She felt in a vague way that something momentous had happened or was about to happen.

He came close, seized her hands and kissed them, and put his arms round her, bending his face to hers, but suddenly drew back, and bowing reverentially before her, again kissed her hand in the manner of a subject doing homage to his queen. He held her a little way from him and gazed at her with an intense devotion in which there was all the time this, to her, unwonted reverence. She did not understand it, but it seemed to her the very answer to her thoughts. Now that she was alone, unprotected, the Pacha laid in his tomb, Caspar, she thought, showed himself indeed in true knightly fashion. Womanlike, with a little laugh which had in it a glad ring, she lifted her hands and with unmistakable affection placed them upon either side of his face and laid a little kiss, light as a butterfly, upon his cheek. Then he dared to gather her close to him.

‘Dearest! Dearest! Dearest!’ The words broke from his bursting heart, in which pent-up passion mingled with humility and deep tenderness. She was his. He had won her; she was his own; he had but to prove himself worthy and he might hold her for evermore.

Heaven helping him, he vowed in his inmost soul that he would so prove himself, hallowing this shell of Caspar by the holy fire of his love, till she in her turn should learn to love him as she had never loved Caspar. At the thought his senses reeled. Long and silently their lips met. It seemed to him that the purest and sweetest yearnings of his life were fulfilled in that kiss.

Presently he put her back in the chair and knelt by her side, a strangely different wooer from the self-assured Caspar she had hitherto known.

‘Rachel,’ he said, and hesitated. It was the first time he had called her by her name, and not yet could he utter it glibly.

‘Rachel,’ he repeated, dwelling with caressing cadence on the syllables, and lowering his voice as though he were pronouncing a sacred word. ‘Rachel! Oh, what a beautiful name it is!’

The girl laughed again, moved and glad, for this new mood of his, pleased while it surprised her. She felt drawn out of her usual shrinking timidity.

‘Have you just discovered that?’ she asked, with the faintest touch of coquetry. ‘I fancied you did not care very much for my name. You have called me by so many others that were more—more—’ she paused and reddened again.

‘More—? Tell me,’ he questioned.

‘More fantastic,’ she answered shyly, and drew back, her fingers playing lightly upon his coat sleeve, half expecting, half dreading one of those accesses of fervid demonstration to which Caspar was liable. But it did not come, and she wondered whether she had done anything to displease him. She could not think that, however, seeing the great love in his eyes, the almost solemn worship expressed in his face. His extreme paleness struck her, and now she perceived the bandage he had been at pains to conceal.

‘Dear!’ she exclaimed in alarm. ‘What has happened to you?’

Marillier’s face grew graver. The critical moment had come. He hesitated.

‘I—it is nothing—only an accident.’

‘An accident!’ she cried. ‘You have been hurt?’

‘A mere tap from a horse’s hoof I am plastered up, you see. There was a crush in the fog and I fell among the carriages. They put me down in Harley Street on the way back, and Lucien—my cousin—’ he stammered confusedly. ‘Lucien Marillier doctored me.’

She noticed his confusion.

‘There is something more, Caspar—something you are hiding from me.’

‘Yes, there is something more. I don’t want to hide it from you. I came to you at once, in order that you might not hear the news suddenly. Don’t be alarmed. It is something that you will be sorry for, but it will not affect you very deeply.’

‘What do you mean? Don’t palter with me. Is it that you are more seriously hurt than you now seem to be? That would be as bad news as any you could break. But I don’t believe it’s that.’

She rose abruptly to her feet, and, putting one hand firmly on his shoulder, attempted to examine his head as well as she could, without removing the bandages, but he caught her hands and put her back in the chair.

‘My love, I assure you that my hurt is no great thing. I shall soon be all right. What I have to tell you does not concern me—personally.’

Again he hesitated. The explanation was more difficult than he had anticipated.

‘Is it someone else who has been hurt? You need not mind telling me. Nothing matters much now that I know you are safe.’

He had always underestimated her feeling for himself as Marillier, nevertheless her words gave him a stab, confirming as they did what he had been telling himself on the way to the house—that her friendship for the doctor had been of the most ordinary kind, and that the loss of Lucien Marillier would be of no great moment to her so long as Caspar remained. His mind, however, was becoming clouded. The clear gaze of her brown eyes, so soft and solicitous, seemed like a magnet drawing away his reasoning faculties. He feared that if he did not at once plunge into his story he might lose control over himself and give Rachel some inkling of the strange truth. This must be prevented, though he knew that, whatever he said, she would only think he was talking wildly, and that his brain had become disordered by his accident. He half wondered if it were the case; if the whole episode of the mandrake had not been hallucination, and involuntarily, he glanced upward, rose to his feet, and looked deliberately into the mirror above the fireplace.

No, there was no delusion. It was Caspar he beheld, not Marillier. With the certainty thus forced upon him, and the effort of rising, he became faint and staggered slightly. In spite of the physical weakness, one feeling was strong in his mind. He must frame his tale plausibly enough to secure his own position, and thus place speculation beyond question.

Rachel was frightened.

‘Oh, what is it? Tell me,’ she pleaded. ‘But you mustn’t stand there. You look so ill. My Caspar! If only Doctor Marillier were here he would know what to do; he would tell me the truth. It is no use shaking your head. I know that you must be suffering.’

‘It is nothing, nothing,’ he protested. ‘Only the shock, believe me.’

The girl gently led him to the chair in which she had been sitting.

‘Lean back here,’ she said. ‘Let me come beside you, then talk to me, talk to me, Caspar.’ She bent over him and softly caressed his hands. ‘You look better now. I don’t feel so afraid about

you. And you need not mind what you say to me. I can bear anything, so long as I have you safe. Now tell me, but first let me ring for some wine; that will do you good, for you look faint.'

He checked her as she was rising.

'No; I want nothing. And what I have to tell you isn't much after all.' He spoke in broken sentences, making strong but jerky gasps after self-mastery. 'You won't mind . . . I was foolish to think for a moment that you would mind. . . . As you say . . . you have Caspar. . . . What does anyone else's fate matter to you? Caspar is with you. .

Caspar can never forsake you now. .

'Oh, my dear! my dear!' she exclaimed. 'You are not yourself. You speak so strangely. I know that you must have been more hurt than you will allow.'

'No . . . I was kicked. I told you—' He tried to recover himself and to speak coherently. 'They took me to Lucien's house—Lucien took me; he did something to my head. . . . I was unconscious. . . . He had given me chloroform. . . . When I awoke it was he who was unconscious. . . . He was lying on the floor. . . . He had fallen, do you see? . . . The chloroform was spilled, I suppose, and he had a weak heart, you remember?'

Rachel stood up. She looked petrified.

'I don't understand. Do you mean that he—that he—? Oh! no, it can't be that'

'He is dead. Lucien Marillier died. He fell . . . he was lying huddled on the floor. There was no life in him . . . it was gone . . . and I came . . . I came to tell you. . . . I was afraid. . .'

The girl's eyes lost their soft look. They grew terrified and full of pain. She stood silent for a few moments, motionless, till the whole sense of what he had said, broke upon her. Then she kneeled suddenly on the ground before his chair, and with a pathetic gesture laid her head upon his knee, uttering a low moan of distress.

'Oh, my friend! my friend! He was the best friend I ever had; so true to me. And I trusted him—I cared for him so much.'

Even in his bewildered condition Marillier's heart thrilled with joy. She had cared for him! She might have loved him, perhaps, if there had been no Caspar. The treasure he had gained was greater far than he had hoped for. Her trust, her friendship, ay, her love, it might be, were all his. As Caspar he had won her, but it should be by the strength of Marillier that he would hold her.

He put out his hand and stroked her bent head twice or thrice. Stooping, he laid his lips upon it; the contact of her hair seemed to intoxicate him. He could feel her slender body shaken with sobs as she leaned against him. Gathering up all his strength, he put his arms round her and drew her close, holding her head back with one hand so that her face was uplifted and her eyes met his. Closer still he held her, and all the yearning in his heart found voice as in his double nature he pleaded with her.

'Trust me, beloved. Let me be friend and lover in one. Think of me not only as Caspar who loved you for your beauty and your sweetness and for all the joy you gave him, but as Lucien too, your friend, your adorer, to whom you were as something holy, to be revered, guarded at the sacrifice of his life, at the risk of his soul. My beloved, think of me so, not as some mere light wooer, not as the gay, careless Caspar of yesterday, but as one whom you have changed into a nobler man; as one whom your love has lifted nearer to the level of yourself I swear to you, Rachel, that though as Caspar I love you, as Lucien I honour you, and as Lucien I will protect you, asking nothing in return but that which of your own sweet impulse you give freely. Dearest, forget all the wild talk of yesterday which distressed you. Forget that foolish, that ill-judged plan. You shall go with me to Paris whenever it pleases you that I shall become your husband; or you shall stay in England and I will minister unto you at a distance if you choose. I will prove myself

worthy of you; I will obey your slightest wish, your smallest scruple. No queen shall receive homage such as I will pay you, my soul's beloved, beside whose happiness, the whole world counts as nothing.'

Rachel's sobs subsided. She lay in his arms against his breast with a sense of peace and happiness stealing over her such as she had never known before in all the ardour of Caspar's caresses. These, she felt, were not Caspar's kisses, and yet it was the lips of Caspar which touched her cheek. These were not the words of Caspar, yet it was Caspar's voice that uttered them. She no longer felt that instinctive shrinking which had made her dread the renewal of Caspar's entreaties; she forgot even her grief for Marillier in this new blessedness.

'You don't want me to go to Paris? You are not minding about your prospects—the appointment? You will not ask me what you asked yesterday?'

'I will ask you nothing; I have sworn it. Of your own free will you shall give me my heart's desire.'

'But you wish it, Caspar; you wish that I should be your wife? You love me . . . and I . . . I . . .'

'You love me? Say it, dearest.'

'I have told you that I love you, but you did not seem to wish yesterday that I should—be married to you . . . for a long time yet'

She blushed deeply as she spoke, and her voice was so hesitating and so low that he could hardly hear the words. She had withdrawn from his clasp and was again kneeling on the ground before him.

He bent forward; he tried to raise her, but his strength would not permit. He would have kneeled at her feet instead of her being at his. Something of this thought burst from his lips. He could only kiss her hand, entreating her forgiveness. The plan of yesterday, had he not told her, was foolish and wicked, a wrong to her sweet maidenhood. Her instinct had rightly shrunk from it. Never more would he insult her by any such propositions. Not through him, should her life be made more difficult. He would marry her to-morrow if only she would consent. This was his heart's desire, for which, all unworthy, he waited, but yet dared not ask. For her sake, even more than for the sake of his own joy, he longed for the right to protect her; he longed to lift her beyond even the suggestion of an equivocal position. But not at the cost of her own inclination; not—his voice failed him. He could only again mutely kiss her hands.

The girl was sobbing softly. Her whole heart went out to him more fully than ever before. She realised that a great change had come over her lover—Caspar—a change for which she could not account, of which she fancied it might be wrong of her to take advantage; some passing phase of emotion, perhaps, prompting him to an attitude that later he might regret. But she could not doubt his sincerity. Her impulse was to throw herself into his arms, to bid him take her, do with her 'as he would, marry her now or not as he pleased. But the very change in him made her uncertain. What had caused it? And then the thought flashed across her that, perhaps, Lucien had influenced him. She had left them alone together the day before. Lucien must have overheard her talk with Caspar, and no doubt he had remonstrated with him afterwards. Now, like a sharp blow, came the realisation that Lucien was dead; that her friend, her counsellor, was gone from her. And how could she have forgotten him, even for a moment? For in listening to Caspar's passionate pleading she had allowed herself to forget. A great compunction seized her.

'Oh! if Doctor Marillier were here!' she cried again. 'My friend! My dear friend in whom I could always trust. I like to hear you say, Caspar, that in you I have him also, for indeed, as you speak to me like this, I seem to feel him in you—his noble nature, his strength and goodness—all

that I cared for in him. But still you are my lover, not my friend, and you cannot judge as he could judge for yourself and for me.'

Anew, her words thrilled sweetly in Marillier's dazed ears. He tried to reassure her, but speech died on his lips. He longed to tell her that it was only her enemy, not her friend, who had passed away, that the friend still lived in the lover, that he was himself both lover and friend. Perhaps, had not his utterance failed him, he might have spoken thus, and have earned for himself only a doubt of his sanity, for he was in no mood to weigh the wisdom of his words. Fortunately for his chances of winning Rachel, his strength was almost spent; he had no longer the power of expression, and could only murmur terms of endearment, and feebly stroke her hair.

'I had forgotten him for the moment,' she went on in her remorse. 'It was heartless of me. I thought only of you, and of the joy of those dear words. If he were alive, you would now let me tell him our secret? You would not forbid me as you did yesterday? And he would advise me for your welfare, dearest; he, who was so wise and so just, would not let me sacrifice you to myself.'

Marillier was aroused at her words, and gripped as it were his fading senses.

'Sacrifice! Oh! my love! My love! If you could know! Have I not said that you are my life? Worldly advancement is nothing to me. To hold you in my arms as my own would be worth heaven. To have the right to protect you—to give you my name—to know that you are mine, and that no power can take you from me! oh! that seems to me the height of human happiness; and if that could be now—at once—before you leave England; if I might guard you, and care for you now in your loneliness—is it impossible, Rachel? I ask only the certainty that you are legally mine, no more; for the rest I will wait. Rachel, will you marry me—as soon as it can be arranged?'

His tone, and the deep sincerity of his words uttered so haltingly, carried the girl out of herself. Her own love welled up in a tide that was irresistible. She put her arms round him and raised her lips to his. The kiss was her answer, but he would have more.

'Speak to me,' he murmured. 'My beloved, tell me that it shall be as I ask.'

'It shall be as you ask,' she replied with solemnity. 'I am yours to take when you will. I will marry you, Caspar, now—or next year—as you think best, for you are my beloved, and my heart is in your keeping.'

Their lips pressed again, and then she felt a sudden relaxation of his muscles, and his form, inert in her arms, fell back helplessly against the chair. She knew that he must have fainted, and terrified, darted to the electric bell, and sent a shrill ring echoing through the house. Then she knelt at Marillier's feet, chafing his hands and wildly kissing them, while she called upon him as Caspar in vehement entreaties that he would awake and answer her. She feared that he too was dead, and that instead of gaining in him lover and friend as he had said, she had now lost both. The entrance of the servants who came in answer to the bell scarcely checked her outburst of emotion. She had been completely unnerved by the strain of the last few weeks, and was no longer mistress of herself. In face of this new calamity, she did not care if all the world knew what were her feelings towards the unconscious man. As his betrothed wife, she thought, she surely had a right to tend him.

The room was soon a scene of prompt and anxious action. Nurse Dalison had come back, and now drew Rachel aside, and did her best to comfort her. The poor girl continued to sob out her regrets that Doctor Marillier was not there; he would have known what to do, he would have restored his cousin. But Doctor Marillier was dead, and what other doctor could she trust?

'Mr Heathcote is here,' said Nurse Dalison; 'and we have sent for Doctor Carus Spencer.'

Heathcote had followed his patient to the Embassy, horrified at the risk he was running. It was Heathcote who had told Nurse Dalison, and confirmed to the secretaries the news of Marillier's death; he was broken-hearted at the loss of his friend and master, but he felt that he had done all he could, and the dead must be left, since the living needed him more imperatively. Now, while Nurse Dalison soothed the weeping Rachel, Mr Heathcote issued rapid orders, and in a few minutes Marillier was borne to the chamber which had been Ruel Bey's.

CHAPTER XV

DOCTORS DIFFER

The Abarian Embassy was thrown into a state of consternation by the accident to Ruel Bey; indeed, one might have found it somewhat demoralised for the moment, by the three disasters coming so quickly one after the other. Marillier's sudden and tragic end did not, it is true, affect the business of the Chancellery, but his relationship to the first secretary, and his frequent attendance at the Embassy during recent months, had made him seem almost a part of its staff. Besides which, from that quality of forcefulness which he possessed, the members of the household had come in a certain sense to rely upon him, and his loss, hardly yet realised, fell upon all with the shock of calamity.

The Ambassador's death had been a great event—in fact, a national event; but he had been long ill. It had been expected, and as regards practical workings, his loss was just now of less importance than the disablement of Ruel Bey. The first secretary and *Chargé d'Affaires*, as he now became, handled the helm deftly, and there was no one who could take his place. Ahmed Bey, the secretary next to Ruel in order of seniority, though clever, ambitious, and most eager to seize this opportunity of advancement, was young, had only lately been appointed, and was by no means capable of dealing with European and Eastern complications, or of directing here in London the difficult course of Abarian diplomacy. He was in fact more on a level with the two beneath him, and a wide gap had always been recognised between his official status and that of Caspar. He had a fearsome awe of the responsibility which now devolved upon him, and which he discussed with the secretaries below him as they talked together, wondering what would happen, how long Caspar would be ill, whether he would indeed recover. For with an injury to the brain, who could say how far permanent might be his disqualification. Ahmed Bey looked more like a Parisian dandy than a serious diplomatist; he was a dapper little man, faddish in his dress, and had an attractive face, with bright eyes and nicely-curved moustache. He thought himself very clever, and was convinced that he could impress the authorities by his ability; so, though nervous, he was pleased and excited, determined to come up first in the scramble, but in reality in great danger of ruining his prospects by some mistake arising from the ignorance of self-conceit.

They were all speculating as to who would be the new ambassador. There were rumours that the post would be conferred upon Ruel Bey, and this was not altogether pleasing to the under-secretaries, who, as was natural, were a little jealous of their brilliant colleague, and would have preferred an outsider. It was thought that this accident might possibly shake Caspar's chance of the appointment; there was a tendency among the secretaries to make much of the accident in the reports, and all were eagerly waiting the verdict of the two doctors Nurse Dalison had sent for, before committing themselves to a preliminary telegraphic announcement

Evening was creeping on. Heathcote had done what he could for the sick man who was lying in a state of unconsciousness, from which it was considered improbable that he would revive before some hours had passed. At length, Heathcote, full of his own keener grief and deeper anxiety, went back to the house in which his dead friend lay, and where much business was awaiting him. He had concluded that the doctors, Carus Spencer, and Ffolliot, the Pacha's former attendants, and as Heathcote knew, bitterly opposed to Marillier's methods—a fact which made him unwilling to meet them—would be immediately in attendance. By a coincidence, however, both were at the time engaged in a consultation in the suburbs, and could not at once be got at. They arrived late, and received only such version of the affair as Nurse Dalison had heard from the lips of Heathcote. They were astonished to hear of the death of Marillier; but, as both frankly stated, this event did not concern them so much as the condition of his patient, which was now their business. Both questioned the wisdom and the manner of the operation, and Nurse Dalison, who was devoted to Marillier, felt incensed at their comments, but could not resent them. The injury was examined, fresh dressings substituted, and it was arranged that a male attendant should be sent to watch the injured man, who remained unconscious. Till he recovered from this state of insensibility little could be done.

Before the doctors left the house Nurse Dalison requested their professional offices for Mademoiselle Isàdas, who from a fainting fit had fallen into a condition distressingly hysterical. The nurse intimated that there were emotional complications; that Ruel Bey and the Ambassador's niece were lovers, and that the poor girl had been entirely broken down by this double shock of the death of her friend Doctor Marillier and the accident to her *fiancé*. Mr Ffolliot was severely scientific—a surgeon—an authority on brain injuries, a man of note and also of iron, whose reputation rested mainly on his insusceptibility to sentimental considerations. Doctor Carus Spencer, on the contrary, was a type of the sympathetic doctor, the trusted recipient of aristocratic confidences, and well acquainted with West-end medical scandals. In him the hearts of troubled wives, husbands, and fathers had their trust, and his latitudinarianism made him all the more welcome in fashionable boudoirs and bedrooms. He had heard some of the gossip about the Ambassador's niece—whom he, with the rest of the world, believed not to be his niece. The Pacha's will had been a topic of talk; the legacy to the Emperor of Abaria giving food for conjecture. Doctor Carus Spencer was not loath to attend Mademoiselle Isàdas, who had on previous occasions interested him greatly, and the love affair at which Nurse Dalison hinted, stimulated his interest. In Ruel Bey, provided that Marillier had not bungled the head injury fatally, by, as he termed it, an operation of doubtful wisdom and some quack lotion not known in European surgery, Doctor Carus Spencer scented a future ambassador, and an instrument that might be effectively wielded in his own intrigues for a baronetcy. He saw Rachel, murmured discreet words of consolation, prescribed a composing draught, and departed, leaving Nurse Dalison in command.

His visit made Rachel understand that she had betrayed, perhaps compromised herself, and, to a certain extent, it restored her self-control. Her efforts to command her nerves were pathetic. She allowed herself to be put to bed, swallowed the draught, and begged only that Nurse Dalison would from time to time let her know how Caspar progressed, and whether there was any return of consciousness. The nurse kissed her, told her all that she could of the doctor's opinion, not hiding the blame they cast on Marillier, but echoing sincerely the girl's plaint, 'Oh! if only *he* were here.'

It was a comfort to Rachel to know that in Nurse Dalison she had at least one whom Marillier had trusted; only she wished that the nurse had in her partisanship spoken out more boldly of the

doctor who had trained her. But that was not Nurse Dalison's way. She was steady, reliable, an automaton in obedience to orders—therein had lain her claim to Marillier's confidence—a refined and entirely well-meaning woman, but she was famous for her tact, and was sufficiently diplomatic not to offend the powers of the day. Marillier was dead, she mourned him truly, won Rachel's heart by her tears—the two had wept together—but Mr Ffolliott and Doctor Carus Spencer were alive, and might in many future cases be her masters. 'My dear,' she said, 'it made my blood boil to hear our poor friend, who was a better doctor and a more ' skilful surgeon than all the Carus Spencers and Ffolliotts of London put together, spoken of in that way. And to call that special antiseptic of his, which is really wonderful in its effect, a quack lotion! But what *could* one do?' (Nurse Dalison italicized freely.) 'Mr Heathcote will explain all about the operation, and I know that Doctor Marillier would never have done it unless he had been absolutely sure. I have no doubt whatever that it saved Ruel Bey's life. Only, of course, he would never have allowed the patient to get up and come here immediately after it. That was sheer madness, and it's just marvellous that it hasn't killed the dear man. I'm not surprised that the doctors are afraid of meningitis or cerebral hemorrhage. But now, don't you be nervous, for *that* isn't going to happen. I'm certain that he'll pull through all right. This isn't the only case of trephining that I've nursed for Doctor Marillier, and I *know* that it's his first dressing which takes away the risk of complication. I shall say nothing, but I shall go on as though I were under the orders of our dear dead friend. And, besides, my dear, we will both say our prayers. I am *convinced* that Providence watches over unselfish lovers. He was thinking of you, not of his own danger. Poor fellow! *How* I sympathise with him in his feeling that he must rush at once to you. But there's no denying that it was a *terribly* imprudent thing to do.'

'Oh, I ought to have seen! I ought to have known!' cried Rachel in deep self-reproach. 'I was not like him, I was thinking only of myself But he said he wasn't seriously hurt'

'Naturally he would say so; he wouldn't want to frighten you. I think it was just *beautiful* of him. But one *must* accept the consequences of such devotion, though his indifference is his best chance of overcoming them. They are not going to end seriously, my dear; and as long as they don't you should be *thankful* for his self-sacrifice; it's the best guarantee he can give you of married happiness.'

She prattled on, knowing that her talk was medicine to Rachel.

'I daresay he didn't in the least realise the conditions. He must have been quite overcome by the shock of seeing his cousin lying dead at his feet—and he just risen from the operating-table. The whole story sounded too gruesome when young Heathcote told it to me. I'm so sorry for that young man. He *adored* Doctor Marillier, and he is full of talent himself, but just a little emotional and blind to his own interests. He shouldn't quarrel with Spencer and Ffolliott, but he will, I know he will. I wish I could warn him before he sees them to-morrow. Naturally they didn't like being turned off the Ambassador's case to give place to—Of course, I can't call dear Doctor Marillier an *outsider*, but we know he went through a totally different training from that of the ordinary English doctor. And then that Medicine Moor whom he thought so much of! Well, you *couldn't* expect a Fellow of the College of Physicians, who had never heard probably of the Medicine Moor, to bow to his authority. He'd class him, no doubt, with Avicenna and people of that kind in the Middle Ages. In fact, you *couldn't* expect a conventional London physician to jump at out-of-the-way ideas—could you, now? No, dear, I think we must make allowance for the opinion of Carus Spencer and Ffolliott There is a *good* deal to be said on their side. And one must remember, too, that notwithstanding Doctor Marillier's treatment, the Ambassador died. That was quite in the order of Nature at his age—but still he *did* die.'

So Nurse Dalison contrived a special plea on both counts. She was deeply sympathetic with Heathcote, and loyal in her way to the dead Marillier, but she always prided herself upon seeing 'the other side' in matters concerning her profession. No doubt there was both justice and common sense in her attitude, but it jarred on Rachel, and did something towards strengthening her efforts at self-control. During the night, Nurse Dalison glided at intervals to Rachel's bedside. The girl awakened soon after midnight from her drug-bought doze, and lay all through the small hours waiting for the nurse's report, which was always the same—'Still unconscious.' The attendant engaged by Ffolliott was there, nourishment was given in spoonfuls and just swallowed—that was all. There was no more to be said. The same report continued during the earlier part of the next day. The doctors came in the morning, and Heathcote met them by appointment. He himself was not yet qualified as a physician, and moreover, would have objected to working with men antagonistic to his late master, and who were going against the treatment Marillier had started, and would have continued had he been alive to carry on the case. Then, too, Heathcote had never liked Ruel Bey, and beyond professional interest in the operation at which he had assisted, was not deeply concerned in the matter of his recovery. In truth, Heathcote was too bowed down by his own grief to care greatly what happened to anyone else. He told the story of the accident and of the operation at Marillier's house, dwelling upon the necessity for prompt action, which the doctors questioned. They remarked that it was strange Marillier should have undertaken so great a responsibility unfortified by another's opinion, at which Heathcote replied hotly that it had never been Doctor Marillier's habit, when sure of his ground, to fortify himself by other Opinions.

Doctor Carus Spencer observed blandly, 'It would have been safer—much safer, my dear friend, as the results have proved. But continue, pray continue.'

Heathcote asserted warmly that were any bad consequences to follow, they would be due, not to ill judgment or inefficiency on Marillier's part, but to Ruel Bey's rash action immediately after the operation. He then related how, after it had been successfully concluded, he himself had left the surgery, and had returned to find the patient risen from the operating-table and violently insisting upon going to the Embassy, while Marillier, to his horror, lay dead upon the floor.

'And the cause of death?' put in Doctor Carus Spencer, sweetly. 'Heart failure, I understand; no doubt following upon the inhalation of chloroform during the administration of the anæsthetic. Strange—strange! No doubt there will be an inquest. My dear sir, I presume that Doctor Marillier's relatives will investigate this occurrence.'

Doctor Marillier had no relative,' replied Heathcote, 'but his cousin, Ruel Bey.'

Doctor Carus Spencer rubbed his whiskers reflectively, and Mr Ffolliott, who had been watching Heathcote with his keen eyes, listening attentively, but asking no questions, interposed,—'Our business is not so much with Doctor Marillier's unfortunate collapse and the circumstance attending it, as with its consequences and those of the operation he performed upon our patient, Ruel Bey.'

He then put some technical questions, which Heathcote answered shortly, irritated by the surgeon's impassive manner. But Doctor Carus Spencer was not so easily quenched; the social side of his profession weighed with him almost as much as the scientific, whereas Mr Ffolliott was a scientist on the hard and fast materialistic lines, and disdained social aspects. Doctor Carus Spencer expressed suave regret at the sudden extinction of a medical career which had promised to be both brilliant and useful—he weighed his words—in spite of a tendency to unprofessional methods and dangerous innovations, with which, he added, in the case of the late Ambassador, he had reluctantly and from a sense of duty, been compelled to dissociate himself. He had not

believed that such methods would be successful, and had not been surprised, though sincerely sorry, that the Pacha had not long survived Doctor Marillier's operation. Heathcote flared up in —hot defence of Marillier, exclaiming that what Doctor Carus Spencer called dangerous innovations and unprofessional methods had, as surely the whole faculty must acknowledge, the sanction of foreign authorities in medicine and surgery.

'Such as the recently deceased Medicine Moor, a quack on mystic lines, whose methods I have lately had the privilege of hearing something about from a gentleman whom he treated in Algeria. Astrology, I understand, played a large part in them.' Mr Ffolliott spoke with impatient sarcasm.

Doctor Carus Spencer bristled fussily, but he was always benevolent. 'My dear friend, you are yet young in the profession, and your admiration for the late Doctor Marillier has all my sympathy. Believe me, I like and admire you for championing his unorthodox theories, but take the advice of one who, in the course of a long and varied professional career, has learned with reason to distrust modes of treatment not ratified by scientific experiment: Our late friend Doctor Marillier had genius; I am the first to acknowledge it. His genius carried him through difficulties which to others might have been insurmountable. His personal force; his enthusiastic belief in himself, enabled him to perform cures that without those aids could not have been accomplished. That leaning towards the occult, the unprovable, is the modern snare. Even Charcot and Liébault—'

But Mr Ffolliott mercilessly interrupted, and again brought his colleague back to the business in hand. The two doctors were an odd contrast to each other, each one a type in his way of the successful London healer. Carus Spencer was short, fussy, inclined to stoutness, with a thick black moustache and short black whiskers; a man of words, persuasive and conciliatory, eminently calculated to deal with nervous women, yet robust enough in speech to inspire the average man with immense confidence. He was a sportsman also, which was in his favour with men, and his August holiday was mainly devoted to grouse, which he shot on the moors of sundry aristocratic patients. A man of the world was Carus Spencer, but with a special aptitude for the domesticities. Ffolliott, on the other hand, was scientific, and nothing but scientific. Report called him a vivisectionist of a somewhat milder order than Paul Bert, and women shuddered at him. He was lean and long bodied, with a hawk nose and singularly piercing eyes. He did not talk much, but what he said was to the point, and he observed minutely, admitting nothing beyond the physical.

Heathcote left the doctors, feeling guiltily that he had failed in loyalty to the dead, and had gained no credit from the living. The patient was still insensible; it was only towards the close of the day that he lapsed into a lethargic sleep, which the doctors considered a hopeful sign, but from which he could not be roused. His attendant watched him continuously, administering nourishment at intervals, and Nurse Dalison kept an intermittent watch. There was for Rachel another night of anxious waiting, but by this time, the girl had become stronger, and was better able to hide her heart rending anxiety. Nurse Dalison, deeply pitiful and slightly curious, tried to make her talk about her engagement, adroitly alluding to her relations with the late Pacha, commiserating her loneliness, and hinting vaguely at future plans, and the possibility of Rachel herself occupying the position of Abarian Ambassadress.

Nurse Dalison was quite in touch with the gossip of the Chancellery, and congratulated her charge on the brilliant prospects of her *fiancé*. The nurse's talk, sympathetic and even well-bred as it was, put Rachel on her guard, while yet she was grateful and soothed by the sense of having gained a woman friend. Nurse Dalison seemed to her a worldly replica of that Irish nun who had

taught her to sing Moore's melodies with the national accent. She was quite ready to talk of the convent, of her dead counsellor Marillier, of everything but Ruel Bey—save as a patient. In that character she discussed him eagerly. She made Nurse Dalison repeat every word the doctors said when they came, and listened greedily to each scrap of news from the sickroom. After a little while, Nurse Dalison humoured her, and held her peace on other subjects; she was really fond of Rachel, and partly understood her mood. Late in the evening, she came to tell her that the sick man had recovered consciousness, but the doctors were in the room; and she hastened back, leaving the girl in an ecstasy of happiness at the bare intelligence, which as yet was all she had. When Nurse Dalison returned to Ruel Bey's chamber, the patient had just spoken, had asked where he was, and what had happened. Doctor Carus Spencer stood at the side of the bed holding Marillier's pulse, and peering through his spectacles into the sick man's face, while he reassured him as one might a frightened child. Ffolliott said nothing, but leaned over the foot of the bed, watching every movement and noting every expression that passed over Marillier's face. The surgeon's eyes were alert, interested; at the same time he was puzzled. There were one or two things in the patient's demeanour which he had not expected. Marillier's brain was dazed; he could remember nothing. He thought of himself only as Marillier, if he thought of himself at all, and could but feebly wonder why he was in this strange room, and what had caused his bodily sensations. He tried to raise himself, but became aware of his helplessness. His right hand and arm moved at first aimlessly, and then sought the seat of sensation, his head, and found that it was bandaged. A glimmering consciousness came to him of the operation he had performed upon Caspar—he did not yet realise that he was Caspar and not Marillier—and he was annoyed at discovering that the bandages were not as he himself would have arranged them. He uttered an angry exclamation and found words. Who had been meddling? Why was not the dressing as he had placed it? Here he made use of a technical expression which struck Mr Ffolliott as surprising in the mouth of Ruel Bey; it was this expression which had roused the surgeon's interest and curiosity. But he was still silent.

Marillier asked again why had not the dressing been left as he had put it? Surely it must be evident that he had intended to guard against hemorrhage? He made some medical remarks. The surgeon and the doctor looked at each other, but did not answer him.

Doctor Carus Spencer pressed the pulse, relaxed his fingers, looked at his watch, and let the sick man's hand down gently on the bedclothes, nodding across at Ffolliott.

'Better than I expected. Rapid, of course, and slightly feverish. My dear friend, you mustn't scold the doctors. We are doing our best. You have had a nasty accident, and have been sometime unconscious, but now I am glad to say there is no danger to be apprehended. Only keep quiet; don't excite yourself. Of course the dressing is as it should be. You must have confidence in your medical attendant. I think I may say that the best skill in London is at your service. It is Mr Ffolliott himself who dressed and bandaged the wounds.'

'Ffolliott!' The sick man gave a feeble groan; it seemed almost of disgust. Mr Ffolliott bent forward.

'You prefer Doctor Marillier's style of dressing?'

The sick man stared strangely.

'Why—naturally.'

'Naturally, of course,' sweetly interposed Doctor Carus Spencer. 'He was your cousin, and no doubt you had a high opinion of his skill, as we all had. But he—unfortunately, Doctor Marillier's services are not now available. Submit yourself, dear friend, and pray allow some

merit to English methods of surgery and some honour to Mr Ffolliott, who has certainly proved himself worthy of it.'

'That is nonsense,' said Marillier. 'Take off the bandage, please, and put on the old dressing. If it had been left I should not feel as I do now. I—I—' His speech became confused. He stared wildly. 'What has come over me? God! I don't know myself. Who is this? What is this?'

His brain seemed to him bursting. It was as if two floods of consciousness, of memory, met each other, dashed against each other, mingled in confusion that was maddening. It seemed to him that he was in truth being driven mad, and a sudden frenzy of terror seized him. He tore at the bandages, and would have removed them but that Mr Ffolliott's strong arms held him down. He struggled, argued the point of treatment in scientific terms which amazed the two doctors, and finally fainted.

The doctors thought it wiser to humour the patient by re-dressing the injured part in the manner Doctor Marillier had employed. Happily they were able to do this by the aid of Nurse Dalison and of the information Heathcote had given them.

Mr Ffolliott in especial was puzzled. The sick man had objected in the coherent incisive manner of one who knew what he was talking about, not as a man in delirium, and certainly with a knowledge of medicine and surgery not to be expected in that brilliant diplomatist and man of fashion, the first secretary. They accounted for this afterwards by supposing that Caspar might, perhaps, at the beginning of his career have studied medicine with his cousin, and so have imbibed Lucien Marillier's peculiar theories. This, at least, was Carus Spencer's idea. Mr Ffolliott said little, and that little had to do with latent impressions and unused brain cells.