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THE SIRDAR'S CHESS-BOARD.

I WAS married in the autumn of 1856 to a husband about fifteen years older than myself—an Indian officer, whose name subsequently became well known in connection with the dark days of the Indian Mutiny. I was an officer's daughter, and, like other young English women bred to regimental life, was an expert horsewoman, unaffected by fatigue, ready for anything that might "turn up" in a life of military adventure.

Colonel Effingham had been long enough a bachelor to be somewhat "set in his ways," as an old servant in our family phrased it; but I loved him all the better for his scrupulousness, his exactitude, his delight in order, and his sense of strict propriety in little things.

To my great delight he received orders to execute some military commissions in Persia, and to visit, on the way to northern India, the strong city of Herat, for the purpose of holding diplomatic communication with certain disaffected Afghan chiefs who had hill forts on the frontier of Afghanistan.

We landed at Joppa in the early spring of 1857, visited the Holy Places, and proceeded by caravan route to Damascus. There we stopped several days, not merely to enjoy the beauties of the City of Roses, not merely to buy horses and to organize our travelling party to Bagdad, but because Damascus is a city famous for chess-playing, and my husband, who was well known in the Café de la Régence and in the London chess clubs, was anxious to measure himself with Oriental players. He never travelled without his portable pegged set of chess-men, and although I was by no means of the same force as himself (no woman, I believe, has ever been a *great* chess-player), I could play well enough, if he gave me sufficient odds, to make a respectable *pis-aller*.

From Damascus we went to Bagdad, where I first was introduced into a harem, and derived little edification from the giggling, romping, coarse familiarity of its inhabitants. However, these ladies were royal *odalisques*, not ladies of high rank, wives, mothers, and grandmothers in respectable families.

Next we pushed on to Ispahan, through a province in which the English were more feared than beloved at that period, England having just concluded a very

expensive and very useless war with Persia, by which she wrested from her the Afghan city of Herat, and restored it to an Afghan chieftain.

At Ispahan our party was increased by a young Frenchman, M. Jearé Désiré Croisset, who had come out to Persia in the suite of an ambassador. He was an artist, travelling at present for travel's sake, or rather that he might make some sketches—preparing himself, he said, "for the Salon of 1858," where, indeed, he finally achieved the success he hoped for by some Oriental interiors. I omitted to say that Lieutenant James Bruce, my husband's acting secretary, made one of our party.

After leaving Ispahan we travelled nearly due east toward the mountain chain that divides the fertile valley of Herat from the Persian frontier.

One evening toward sunset, after a hard day's ride, we found ourselves in a gloomy gorge of the dividing range between Persia and Afghanistan. We had skirted for several days past the great desert of Khorasan. A barren and desolate landscape stretched behind us. No verdure brightened the brown bare ground. Nothing grew in that parched soil except the bleached and blasted stems of the *asafetida* plant, which looked like the bare bones of a skeleton.

We were very much fatigued. Indeed, I was hardly able to sit upright on my horse, Malek, a tall, maneless Turcoman animal, for which my husband had exchanged the lovely gray Arab of the Syrian desert which had carried me to the Persian capital. We had three men-servants with us, five sumpter-mules, with what Croisset called *ces brigands* of muleteers, the worry of our existence, and a Persian guard, under charge of a ferocious-looking non-commissioned officer called a *gholam*, a fellow with immense riding-boots that he pulled off in our presence, dyed hands and feet, enormous mustache turned up to his cheek-bones, a lofty hat of lamb-skin, and an arsenal of offensive weapons. Poor fellows! they probably lived better with us than ever they had done in their lives, for very little pay trickles from the Shah's coffers into the pockets of his privates, and the commissariat of the Persian army is maintained on a basis of starvation.

All at once in the distance, lighted up by reflection of the sun, which had dropped behind the hill-tops to the west of us, we beheld the rough walls of a hill fort about seven miles off. Much cheered by this sight, we hastened forward, and as we rode on, watching with apprehension the rough bowlders in our path, we occasionally gave a glance upward at the rugged majesty of the hills, that often seemed to stand across our road and bar our further journey.

Suddenly there came in sight a party of horsemen (fifteen or twenty), descending in single file a steep path which debouched into the road that we were travelling. They had seen *us* long before we had caught sight of *them*, and no sooner were they upon level ground than they formed a broken line and came rapidly toward us.

"You need not be afraid, Sophia," said my husband. I was not in the least afraid, but I think experience rarely modifies a man's early accepted theories about women. "It is a party from the fort above. They are evidently on no hostile errand."

As my husband said this, the chiefs of the band rode in advance of their suite. One was a fine old Oriental gentleman with a white beard, the other an extraordinarily picturesque young man, dressed with great care, and apparently about twenty. He wore a loose cloak made of the long hair of the mountain goat, but underneath it was a European frock-coat beautifully embroidered. Round his waist was a priceless shawl of soft and varied tints, from which peered the butts of a pair of silver-mounted pistols, and the jewelled handle of a dagger. He had a sword of Oriental make, and at his back hung an English fowling-piece. His turban was another beautiful shawl put on to the best advantage. He wore buff riding boots made after the pointed fashion of the fourteenth century, and managed his horse with extraordinary grace and vigor. The suite, too, as they rode up, vied with each other in feats of horsemanship.

When fifty yards from our party the leaders threw themselves suddenly from their saddles, and their followers with their cruel Afghan bits reined back their horses. We halted, and our gentlemen dismounted. I covered my face and bust with a large thick veil of green *barège* given to me for that purpose by the wife of an American missionary whom we met at Jerusalem.

My husband and his two friends were at

once embraced by the Afghan gentlemen, and returned the salutation. Then, after exchanging a few words in Persian, all remounted, and the leaders of the hill party, having sent one of their horsemen forward, turned round, not without remonstrance from my husband, and proceeded to escort us up the path down which they had just come.

"*Figurez vous, madame,*" said M. Croiset, as he reined his horse in at my side, "that this is the young chief Abdul Reschid Khan, on his way to be married!"

"Then, surely," I exclaimed, "his politeness is not going so far as to disappoint his bride to welcome strangers?"

"His hospitality will only postpone the wedding ceremonies a few hours. He says that they will last a week before he claims his bride. *La belle fiancée* inhabits another mud fort beyond that range of hills. Abdul Reschid was required not to appear there till this evening. *D'ailleurs* he is himself one of those banished Afghan chiefs with whom M. le Colonel is to hold communication. Yet I wonder how his recreancy will be taken by *madame la belle mère*, or, for that matter, by the fair Hafiza."

When we reached an open space of level ground on the top of a steep rise, Abdul Reschid halted us, and my husband took the opportunity to bring him up and introduce him to me. To my great delight, he could talk intelligible French, having shared with the Shahzede at Teheran lessons in the language of diplomacy and civilization, given by a sort of sub-secretary in the suite of the French ambassador.

When this had been explained to me I no longer felt it necessary to muffle myself in green *barège* in deference to Oriental feeling.

Slowly ascending in the gloom of the gorge, we could see, for it was just sunset, that on its upper edge glowed patches of reflected light, and that parallel with the path along which we rode brawled a fierce mountain stream, leaping from rock to rock, with black dark pools between them. Our *gholaum* had to dismount and lead my horse. Even then we could hardly keep him on his feet, for Persian shoeing is a mere flat sole of iron—which accounted, my husband said, for the expression "solid-hoofed" applied to Asiatic horses in the *Iliad*.

At length we emerged on smooth and

open ground, and Abdul Reschid, following the example set him by our French friend, took his place beside me. The old man was his uncle, and spoke only his own language and Persian; Abdul Reschid himself was chief amongst his people.

I lost no time in regretting the inopportune moment of our arrival, telling him how sorry we were to break in upon his marriage.

He hoped we might delay a week, and honor the festivities with our presence.

I was wild to accept the invitation, and told him we would certainly do so if I could persuade my husband. But even as I spoke I thought it very unlikely Colonel Effingham would be able to indulge me in this fancy, as he had business with several other hill chiefs, amongst them an exiled member of the legitimate royal dynasty of Afghanistan living in the hills beyond Herat; and advice he had received, both at Damascus and Ispahan, made him very impatient to get back to India.

At last the fort, which we had lost sight of for some time, appeared again quite near us, built where the gorge opened out into a level space, a mile and a half wide. After an abrupt descent on to this little plain, we forded the stream beside which we had ascended, the Afghans watering their horses as they crossed it, and galloping them ferociously for ten minutes afterward, to improve, as Abdul Reschid told me, their wind and speed.

There were old guns on the old parapet of the fort, which no doubt looked like the stronghold of some Mouser of the Middle Ages. The structure was of rough, coarse, sun-dried bricks, crumbling in many places.

As we passed through the massive gateway of the outer works into the first courtyard, we found ourselves surrounded by a crowd of retainers of the family. The men were hearty, well-looking young fellows, clad in sheep-skin; the women were wrapped up in white veils and coarse blue drapery. By this time I was again muffled in the green barège of the missionary lady. We continued to ride through a sort of market-place or bazar, where there seemed to be as many beggars and fakirs as sellers and buyers, and soon we came to the great moat that guarded the citadel.

Over this we passed upon a draw-bridge, which was lowered at our summons, and soon we were in the inner quadrangle.

Abdul Reschid, coming to my side, helped me to dismount, and led the way into the interior.

There then seemed some delay in finding some one to take charge of me, and after lingering in an empty room, where my gentlemen did not join me, Abdul Reschid himself led me through long, crooked, and ill-lighted passages to a short flight of stone steps which led down into an inner yard. There, at a small door on the left, we were received by an ugly black woman, and I was conducted into the presence of the mother and the aunt of Abdul Reschid.

Harem life is very much the same in all places. In general, the Frankish visitor is received in state, and is shown all the wealth, splendor, and jewelry that can be collected or even borrowed for the occasion; but here there was little welcome and no display.

My arrival was a disappointment. The lady-mother was evidently greatly disturbed by the fact that her son had been turned back on his wedding journey. The harem had had a great deal to think about for many weeks, and therefore had not the usual curiosity to inspect a Feringhee lady. Why the old ladies and their attendants had not gone themselves to the wedding, or even if they proposed to go next day, I never knew. They spoke no language I could understand, for though, like a "daughter of the regiment," my speech was pretty polyglot, neither Persian nor Afghan was among my accomplishments. I was very tired too, and what I wanted most was a warm bath, which I contrived to ask for by signs. This occasioned sour looks and voluble consultations. The truth was, the *hammaum*, or bath chambers, of the establishment were just then wanted for the gentlemen, whose comfort, of course, had to be considered before that of a woman.

At last I was conducted through the courtyard to a sort of out-house, attended by all the women of the *anderoân*, except the two old ladies, and there found a negress with a vessel of hot water, which she proposed to dash over me as I stood upon a stone. I could not consent to take my bath in public in that fashion, and so had to decline the refreshment, but I succeeded in getting hold of the warm water, with which I effected partial ablutions.

The greatest trial to travellers in the East is at all times the want of privacy. Everywhere people crowd upon you. An

Oriental may be said never to be alone, and as probably centuries have produced little change in the habits of the East, "one can understand," says an Eastern traveller, "the expression of the Bible about our Lord's retiring apart to pray, on a mountain-top, or in a garden." There is no help for it—no remedy. One can only ignore the truth, and proceed as if privacy existed.

To my further regret and mortification I was in no condition to make a creditable appearance among Oriental ladies. I was dizzy with weariness. My cloth habit was travel-stained and worn, and I had very little finery in the "mule's burden" of a wardrobe that alone I was permitted to add to our *impedimenta*. However, I had one blue silk dress with handsome lace upon the sleeves and neck, and in this I proceeded to array myself, in spite of my great weariness, all the ladies and servants of the *anderoûn* fingering every article I took out of my valise before I put it on.

We had the usual black coffee, the usual offer of pipes, a water-melon, and some trays of sweetmeats. I needed more substantial food, and was nearly starved. I saw nothing of my husband, and no place seemed to be assigned to us to sleep in. I grew as nervous and out of spirits as possible.

At last, at half past ten, as my watch told me, the heavy leathern curtain at the door of the apartment was lifted, and Abdul Reschid came into the room. His women gave a sort of little scream when they found I did not veil myself, but he advanced smiling, and seated himself beside me on the divan.

"M. Croisset tells me," he said, "that you can paint pictures, and he prays you, upon his behalf, as I do upon mine, to take some sketches of these ladies for both of us."

Tired as I was, I could not refuse this favor to a bridegroom who to his hospitality had postponed his bride. I got out my color-box and drawing-block, and succeeded in pleasing both the young chief and his women. Two or three of them were picturesque, though only servant-girls, but the manners of the *anderoûn* seemed to place all its inmates on a footing of familiarity.

"Ah!" said the young chief, "how I wish you could have painted for me the picture of Hafiza! My mother tells me she is beautiful. Fair almost as a daugh-

ter of Feringhistan, eyes large and softly brown and golden tinted, like a dove's eyes, her hair low upon her forehead."

"Will you bring her to live here?" I asked.

"Yes—to my mother."

"I should not like that," I said; "we Western wives prefer to have our households and our husbands to ourselves."

"But Hafiza is not old enough to give laws to a harem. It needs judgment, experience, and discretion. The mother regulates everything concerning domestic life in the family of a follower of the Prophet. Hafiza will occupy herself with her own beauty, and with binding fast to her the heart of her husband."

"Well, at least she will escape," I thought, "the cares of the first year of married life—that sudden plunge into the responsibilities of matronhood in which many a young happiness sinks never to rise."

"The life of the *anderoûn* must be very monotonous—very dull sometimes," I ventured to say to him.

"We of the new generation but too often find it so," he answered, replying from the man's stand-point, "and it is because of the want of education for our women. Some of my friends who have been admitted to intercourse with ladies like yourself complain of the attacks of melancholy and disgust they now experience in the harem. The abject submission that prevails among our women destroys love, they tell me, at its very birth, and I have known cases where the tedium of domestic life has led to a taste dishonorable in all ways to a Mussulman—a taste for forbidden liquors. However," he added, brightening, "I intend to educate Hafiza. I saw something of the lady of the French ambassador, and of the ladies of her suite, some years ago in Persia. I have a dream that my Hafiza may become like those incomparable women. While I lead my present life, removed from war and politics, it will be a delightful task to elevate and instruct her."

I thought of the Marquise de la Vallette, the French ambassadress of whom he spoke. I had known her in Paris. She was by birth an American; the most perfect woman of the world (in its best sense) I had ever seen. Skillful in business, perfect in dress, charming in society, as warm-hearted as she was beautiful, gifted with purest taste and perfect tact, esteemed by

women for what she did, and loved by men for what she was, I thought a little Afghan or Persian girl ran small chance of being modelled on *her* pattern. Abdul Reschid, however, gave little time for my reflections. He was eager to ask my advice how to set about the education of Hafiza. His plans reminded me of a zealous little girl I had once known, who, having undertaken to instruct a negro child in reading, began by teaching her to spell rhinoceros. In vain I recommended simplicity, and very brief lessons. In vain I pointed out how much her culture necessarily must depend on her disposition and capacity. No disciple of Jean Jacques could have been more bent on marking elaborate lines upon a *tabula rasa*. I promised, however, to send him some of the elementary school-books prepared by the English government for native pupils in India.

Our conversation was so curious, the ideas he had picked up from his French teacher, and from observing the fascinating ambassadress, were so crude, revolutionary, and provoking, so lax in the wrong places, so stringent where we never should have laid down rules, that I shook off my fatigue, and felt awake again.

It was past midnight, and there seemed no preparation anywhere for sleeping. Suddenly a great noise broke in upon the stillness. Something was happening in the fort outside its women's chambers. I sprang to my feet, and clutching Abdul Reschid violently by the arm, I cried, "Your people are murdering my husband!"

The Afghan women flung themselves on me and Abdul Reschid, uttering wild exclamations of rage and terror. They probably thought the Feringhees were murdering *their* people. For a moment Abdul Reschid stood speechless; then, shaking us all off, he turned toward the door. Before he reached it, however, the leathern curtain was lifted up, and the black guardian of the *anderoôn*, her face ashy with the news she had to communicate, fell down upon the threshold, and spoke something in Persian. The chief uttered an exclamation, and rushed through the door. I tried to follow him, not for a moment imagining anything but that a quarrel with our own people must have led to a free fight or a massacre; but the black woman pushed me

rudely back, and the others rushed at me with fierce gestures, angry tongues, and inflamed faces. What they said I could not understand. In vain I struggled to get out of the apartment. The negress was telling something that enraged them more and more.

What I suffered in that *mauvais quart d'heure*, while in imagination I beheld my husband and his companions lying slaughtered in the court-yard, no one can imagine.

Meantime the noises in the fort went on increasing. I heard the clash of weapons, the tread of horses on the loose planks of the draw-bridge, and then suddenly my husband's voice, giving some orders in Persian. I fell upon my knees and thanked God for His mercy.

At that moment Abdul Reschid and his uncle came into the harem. The latter took no notice of me; the former approached me.

"Madame," he said, perceiving my disordered dress and my pale features, "there is nothing for you to fear. The grief and the disgrace are all for me—for me and for my people. I have a feud with another hill chief in these mountains. He has this evening carried off my bride—my Hafiza. He captured my messenger, and, assured of my absence, presented himself with his band at dusk before her father's stronghold. There they mistook him for the bridegroom and his followers. He gained admittance, and rushing to the apartments of the women, he bore away Hafiza. Had I been upon the road—even upon the road—I might have saved her. Now I go to pursue the robber. Her father waits for me without, and we join forces. Your husband heads his escort; he and his friends will go with me."

"May I see my husband first?" I cried.

"Come, then," he said. And taking a hurried leave of his mother and aunt, he led me, wrapped in my green veil, into the court-yard.

What a scene of the Middle Ages! Some were mounting in hot haste, some buckling on their weapons and defensive armor; everything was crowded into a little space; horses were trampling, men shouting, in thick darkness or in the smoky glare of torches. I stood aside, expecting to be trampled down at every moment.

My husband joined me. "It is all as he has told you," he said. "I am very

sorry. The only reparation I can offer is to ride with him; but I hardly suppose we can overtake the robbers. Croisset and Bruce go too, and we may test the doubtful valor of the *gholam* and his people. I shall leave Porson" (his English soldier-servant) "with you, and be back as soon after daybreak as I can. Porson will see that the men have their mules loaded, for we must push on at daybreak. Farewell, dear Sophia. I am sorry to leave you."

I clung to him with tears and kisses, which perhaps he attributed *all* to my fears for his safety. If he did, he did me more than justice. They were not *all* for my husband; some were for myself. I dreaded to be left to the awful loneliness and dumbness of that prison, with no one near me but excited, half-civilized, angry women; for I could see they held our inopportune arrival to be the cause of their chief's misfortune.

I crept back into the *anderoân*, and there sat down. After a while the servant-women began to draw out mattresses and to lay them on the floor. The ladies of the harem stretched themselves upon them in full dress. I took possession of one, and replacing my blue silk by a white wrapper, I too lay down, when shortly fatigue triumphed over excitement, and I fell asleep.

I was roused in the morning by the black duenna of the establishment, who, without waking the others, signed to me to follow her. In one of the dark corridors I found my husband.

"No news," he said. "It is impossible to come up with them. The young man has gone on, hoping to intercept them by a short cut through the mountains. Fosters, Fenwicks, and Musgraves—their riding and running must have resembled ours last night. But now we must be off at once. Are you ready?"

"I shall be in five minutes," I replied.

"Have you anything you can offer the old ladies as a present?—needles, scissors—anything European?"

"Pins in a pincushion?"

"The very thing."

"I have a Tunbridge-ware box, too, for postage stamps, with a Queen's head on its top."

"Very good—diplomatic and official—the portrait of her Majesty. I will leave my gold pen for Abdul Reschid, and am sorry enough to part with it. I have giv-

en the old woman very handsome backshish, and she will conduct you here when your dressing is over."

The old ladies condescended to accept my presents, which seemed to give more satisfaction than I had expected. I also distributed three rows of pins among the attendant maidens.

When a mile from the fort we halted, and Porson got us breakfast. I told my husband my adventure; but as I had been perfectly safe all the time, my tremors did not produce on him the impression I expected. On his part, he said, they had done nothing—*could* do nothing. Croisset, who was much excited, and very sympathetic, said he had spoken with a man who had seen Hafiza carried screaming from the fort in the arms of a robber. He confirmed Abdul Reschid's account that she was fair, being probably the daughter of a Circassian mother.

Three days later we descended from the hills into a broad and level plain, through which flowed a wide, clear river, whose sparkling waters were conducted, by an intricate system of irrigation, to the very base of the rocky hills. The soil was as fertile as a river delta, and far as the eye could reach the plain was dotted with forts and villages. Unhappily the last siege of Herat had been so recent that the crops that should have been ripening for the harvest had not that year been planted. The Persian troops the year before had ploughed and sown large fields with grain and rice, and reaped them, too, while the siege lasted. Around the city the land was furrowed by trenches, but there was no stint even then of fruit in this delicious valley. Nearly every kind of European fruit was abundant, grapes (growing to a size I had never seen before), plums, peaches, apples, and pears.

About eight miles from the spot where we entered the valley stood the city of Herat, with its straight lines of sun-burned brick walls, and its square, lofty citadel rising some hundreds of feet above the plain. Beyond the walls, too, were extensive ruins of what had once been suburbs, also the remains of a large building erected as a place of education, with columns richly carved, and ornamented with still brilliant mosaic arabesques.

The Sirdar of Herat at this period was the Sultan Ahmed Khan, unfavorably known during the Afghan war to the British troops by the name of Sultan Jan.

After the war he had lived in exile at the Persian court, and had always been considered the bitter foe of the English, so that when by the late treaty Persia, sore from her defeat, was empowered to choose a ruler for the principality of Herat, he was very naturally fixed upon. To the surprise of every one, however, the Sirdar completely changed his policy on ascending his throne. He courted the English alliance, he became the fast friend of the English, and continued so until he died of apoplexy in 1860.

We rode into Herat, hot, dusty, and fatigued, and took up our quarters in a ruinous old building called the English Mission-house, because there an English political mission had recently had its abode. The building was as exposed, uncomfortable, and desolate as an empty caravansary. We found shelter in it for the first night, however. The next morning my husband, with M. Croisset and Mr. Bruce, waited on the Sirdar.

When my husband came back from that interview he seemed greatly dispirited. To all my questions he replied briefly that the Sirdar had received him with great friendliness, and had been much pleased with a present of handsome firearms sent to him from the Home Office in England; that he was to spend that evening in his company at his tumble-down *serai* in the citadel, and that I was invited to accompany him.

There was nothing alarming in all this. I questioned him further, and after a while I learned that the Sirdar had given him unpleasant news from India; that he felt it his duty to hasten forward and rejoin his regiment, and that the sooner he could get his visit paid to the Afghan prince then living under the protection of a tribe of freebooters in the mountains, the sooner we could be *en route* for the remainder of our journey.

"Shall we start for the hills to-morrow, then?" I asked, a little dolefully. I had looked forward to a comfortable rest at Herat, and was, indeed, worn out by constant riding.

"There's the rub," said my husband. "The Sirdar has not yet been able to establish his authority in the hills. He will send a strong escort with me, but it will not be under my command. I might go and return within a week if I took no luggage, and only Bruce with me."

"Not me, Charles?"

"Dear wife," he said, "I am miserable at the thought of leaving you behind me. But you are a soldier's wife, you know. You have kept your promise faithfully, thus far, that you would never be a drag upon your husband. Croisset will stay, and Porson, and the Sirdar invites you to be the guest of his head wife, a Turcoman lady, and to pass your time among his women."

My heart sank within me. A week in a harem, with its *emmi*, its familiarity, its noise, its dirt, its want of privacy and delicacy! Then, too, for a whole week I should be dumb, no better than an idiot or an animal. It was not probable that any one in this inland place could speak any of my languages.

"Oh, Charley!"

But those words, "You have never been a drag upon me *yet*," determined me. I nestled closer to my husband, who was sitting on the divan with his arm around my waist, and said, as firmly as I could, "I accept the Sirdar's invitation."

That evening, after the muezzin's summons of the faithful to their prayers, we went to the *serai*. The Sirdar received us in a room which had little furniture. Some divans round the walls, some tables covered with thick carpets, some other carpets like them under foot, were all that it contained.

Ahmed Khan was a good-looking dark man about forty-five, with pleasant manners tending to joviality. To my surprise and great delight, I found he could speak a little Levantine Italian, familiar enough to me, as my father's regiment had once been in garrison at Malta.

We were received, of course, with pipes, coffee, and sweetmeats, the former being offered us straight from the attendants' mouths. Bruce and Croisset were there besides ourselves. They got on comfortably, as they both spoke Persian. The Sirdar was full of talk, not alluding, of course, to that part of his history which connected him with the massacre of our people at Cabool in 1841, nor to his riding at the head of some hundreds of Afghan horsemen against us in the Sikh war. He talked about the late siege of Herat by the Persian forces, about the future policy of his principality, about Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor's mission in his capital, and finally he related how he had been imprisoned by the savage Vizier of Bokhara twenty-seven years previously in the same

prison as poor Captain Stoddart. The Sirdar had got away disguised as a melon seller, and Stoddart's gallant bearing in misfortune had so much impressed him that he had offered to share with him his chances of escape, and had procured a disguise for him. But Stoddart would not leave his dungeon secretly. Every day he expected deliverance at the hands of his government. That deliverance never reached him. The brave and trustful Englishman paid with his life for his confidence in the power of the English name.

All this was interpreted to me by Croisset. After a while the Sirdar and my husband began to speak of chess, and a beautifully inlaid board was brought forward, together with the most elaborately carved chess-men I had ever seen.

I sat looking at the game, and as nobody spoke to me, indulged my own thoughts during its progress. Croisset and Bruce smoked, and probably conjugated the verb *s'ennuyer*. My husband beat the first two games, and then allowed the Sirdar to beat him. He was a good player, but not equal to my husband.

At ten o'clock my husband rose. It had been settled I should remain after he left, as he would start before daybreak in the morning. He led me into a recess apart. I hung upon his neck with frantic kisses.

"You won't mind it so much, dear Sophia," he said, "now that you have seen the Sirdar. You are to have a chamber to yourself. I ventured to tell him that that was always the custom with us, as English ladies needed privacy. Remember, dear, do nothing that will shock their prejudices. Efface yourself for these few days as much as possible. I thought you a little hasty under the roof of Abdul Reshid. Oh, by-the-way, Sophia, don't mention his name to the Sirdar. He has never made his submission. I have cautioned Croisset not to say we visited his stronghold on our journey. Don't be afraid, my love. Nobody here will harm you. Ahmed sincerely seeks the friendship of our government. Croisset is to stay at the Mission-house, and Porson with him. If you need either, the Sirdar will send for them. Good-by, my darling wife. Get into no scrapes. Don't let vain fancies run away with you. Don't allude to politics. Don't shock their prejudices. Don't mention Abdul Reshid. My dear—dear—precious wife!" And he kissed me with the fervor

that a woman loves so dearly from her husband.

Returning to the Sirdar, he took courteous leave of him, and pressed my hands again as he went out of the room. Croisset at parting whispered, "I hold myself at your orders, madame, night and day. I have discovered the apartments of the *anderoûn* are in the eastern tower of the citadel, looking toward the Mission-house. If at any time you need me, hang your red scarf from the parapet, and I will find some way of procuring an interview."

"If I need you, I will send a message to you through the Sirdar," I replied, stiffly. Croisset looked crest-fallen, and without replying left the room.

When they were gone, the Sirdar courteously turned toward me, and taking me by the hand, led me across the audience-chamber to a low doorway.

"I greatly fear," he said, "you may not like the bustle, noise, and other disagreeables of the harem. I do not myself. I have therefore caused to be prepared for you an apartment separate from those of my women. I hope you will often give me the pleasure of conversing with you. They can not converse. They are stupid. You will find them dull, as I do," he added, as we found ourselves before a leathern curtain, lifting which we entered the apartments of his women. These, as I afterward found, consisted of one principal room and five or six small chambers, in which cooking, eating, sleeping, dressing, and everything else belonging to domestic life were carried on.

The chief lady of the harem came forward as we entered. She had been beautiful, but she was dreadfully bedaubed with paint, black, white, and red. Her hands were stained yellow, so were the soles of her feet, though they were then thrust into embroidered slippers. Her eyebrows were unnaturally arched and black, being painted and stained high up upon her forehead. Her hair was black, though very little of it showed. Being the daughter of a Turcoman chief, she wore the costume of her people, a long wrapper of red silk, open on the breast, which was only partially concealed by a chemisette of silk gauze. Her head-dress was most wonderful. It was like a canopy fastened to the head, rather than like a head-dress—an elaborate frame, out of proportion to the picture. It was composed of many scarfs and handkerchiefs, the former cashmere,

and rich red, the latter silk, Persian, and many-colored. These were entwined with yards and yards of sheerest India muslin. Over her forehead, for a foot above her face, hung strings and strings of golden coins, and stuck about the head-dress, apparently to keep its materials in their place, were sprays of diamonds, gold pins, and more bezants and sequins. Round her throat were several tight collars of jewels and large pearls.

As this lady and I could not converse, all we could do was to stare at each other's finery, like shy, strange children, and exchange a compliment or two through the Sirdar as interpreter.

"They can't talk much. They are very stupid," he said again to me, with a little sigh. But here the conversation, such as it was, was broken in upon by the entrance of three more wives, followed by a troop of little children and servant-women.

The children at once threw themselves upon the Sirdar, who caressed them affectionately. The women, whether slaves or cooks or wives, got round me in a group, and began to finger me. Not *all*, however. There was one poor girl, tall, beautiful, with auburn hair and a blonde Circassian look, who seemed to shrink away from all the rest, and kept her eyes riveted upon the Sirdar's countenance.

I heard one of the group call her "Hafiza"—that first drew my attention toward her.

Among those who surrounded me I noticed one who looked like a Hindostanee woman. I addressed her in that language, which my husband had been teaching me, and she answered me in a strange mixture of broken English and Hindostanee. Here was a new channel of communication. The Sirdar seemed very glad to give up his office of interpreter. He immediately ordered that she should attend me during my stay, and make her bed in my apartment.

Finding conversation still difficult (for my Hindostanee was as imperfect as her English, both being about equal to a school-girl's French after one quarter's instruction), I bethought me of suggesting some music to the company. The Sirdar, on discovering my wish, ordered one of the women to bring a lute and to perform on it. What she executed was very ugly, and had little harmony to my ear. When she had finished I took her instrument, and contriving to extract music enough

from it for an accompaniment, I began to sing a negro melody. It delighted their uncultivated tastes. It went straight to the hearts of all of them. "Way Down upon the Swanee Riber," "Uncle Ned," who lived so long ago, "Miss Lucy Neal," and the disjointed history of Susanna, with her buckwheat cake, her banjo, and her tears, followed each other. I had to explain in broken Italian *patois* to the Sirdar the events in the biography of Uncle Ned, his infirmities and strange appearance, the sad history of Lucy Neal, the "yaller gal," and of the letter with the jet-black seal delivered to her forsaken lover; but "Susanna" and "The Old Folks" were too hard for me. Then I tried "God save the Queen" and "Isle of Beauty," but these did not strike a chord of sympathy among my auditors.

At last the party was broken up by the retirement of the Sirdar, who had resigned to me his own sleeping-room, and who was to sleep upon a divan in his audience-chamber. I was conducted to my apartment by the ayah, who had once served an English lady in India.

My room was in the eastern angle of the citadel, and looked, as Croisset had foretold it would, toward the Mission. The walls were cracked in many places, and presented a ruined and crumbling appearance. There were two windows, narrow and long, glazed with oiled paper, but one pane had been torn out, so that I could look down on the town. There was also the luxury of a wooden shutter.

Water had been sprinkled over the mud floor, and the whole had been lately swept, though hardly cleansed. At one end was spread a thick felt carpet; on this lay an enormous red silk pillow. My own bedding had been brought in from the Mission-house, and my ayah soon arranged things as she had learned to do for her English lady.

"Who is that girl they called Hafiza?" I said to her as she undressed me.

"Wild girl. Strange girl from the hills. Just come," she answered.

"Just come?" I cried, throwing down my comb and turning toward her—"just come—from the hills? Who brought her?"

"Mir Abbas Ali from the hills gave her yesterday to his Highness the Sirdar."

"A robber chief?" I cried, recognizing the name Mir Abbas Ali as one I had heard uttered by the women of Abdul Reschid in their fury. "Was she going to be mar-

ried to a young chief in the hills? Has she uttered the name of Abdul Reschid?"

"She has spoken but few words since she came last evening."

"What is the Sirdar going to do with her?"

"His Highness has said nothing. I think he has not deigned to look upon her."

Just at that moment came the recollection that Abdul Reschid was a name forbidden by my instructions; that he and his uncle were esteemed rebels by the Sirdar; that I should disobey my husband, and possibly get everybody into a scrape, if I mixed myself up with the young chief and his Hafiza.

I declined the further services of my ayah, but told her to get her bed and spread it before the door. Then I stood looking through the torn window-pane at a light in the Mission-house, where I greatly feared my husband was spending the remainder of his night writing dispatches. Before dawn I heard a stir below me. A strong party of Afghan horsemen were pouring over the draw-bridge. Lights began to move in the court-yard of the Mission. The riders halted. My husband must have joined them. A light went back into the Mission-house. It was extinguished. With a heart full of apprehension I crept to my lonely couch, and watered its silk cushion with my tears.

The next day passed very much as I had expected. I got Hafiza into my chamber, and put a few cautious questions to her through the ayah. I had no doubt she was Abdul Reschid's fair Hafiza, but she was inexpressibly timid, cowed, and on her guard. Neither of us could make much of the other. I observed in the harem that the women all appeared to snub her or to shun her. They evidently expected her place in the establishment would be that of an inferior.

What a strange life is that of the harem! Those in the West who dream about it always connect it with luxury, magnificence, and voluptuousness. But imagine a common "keeping-room" used as a sleeping-place at night by cooks and kitchen-maids resting from their labors; with children, troublesome and dirty, who have repeatedly to be whipped to bring them to any order; gloomy, for the light is always imperfect; close, with foul air, yet pervaded by draughts from broken doors and ill-built chimneys. The expression on most

of the women's faces soon grows vapid. There is no religious life among them—no zeal for moral principles. Their children occupy but weary them. They care for them chiefly as stepping-stones to power and to the favor of their husbands. Rarely indeed has a mother in a harem any comfort in her boys. They early become insolent, and tyrannize, "by right of conquest and by right of birth," over the little sisters and half-sisters, who are their abject victims.

Over all presides the head wife or the husband's mother.

Dressing, bathing, playing at childish games, and mismanaging the children seemed the perpetual employments of the Sirdar's ladies. Had they lived in a large city they could have gone out into the town, shopped like their sisters in Christendom, paid or received visits, had picnics, under charge of eunuchs or duennas, in pleasant places; but here in Herat they were such terribly great ladies that almost all these resources were cut off from them. Tingeing their finger-nails with henna occupied a good deal of their time, and some seemed to enjoy *kef*, the *dolce far niente* of smoking. But the whole of them seemed destitute of ideas. Indeed, what had they to form ideas from? Their animal wants were satisfied; they had no aspirations. Why should they labor, when that labor had no object?

"Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object can not live."

It was an unspeakable relief to me when the Sirdar came to visit us that evening. Again the children climbed upon his knees, and half smothered him with their caresses; again I sang, and two of the women danced with castanets, rarely lifting their feet up from the floor, but swaying from the hips with the whole body. I did not like the exhibition much, and was glad when the Sirdar asked me to play chess with him.

The board was being set out, when two of the children became troublesome. The Sirdar frowned.

"It is very noisy here," he said. "I fear my head would play me false to beat you. Would you play with me in my own room?"

"I will, certainly. May I take the ayah?"

So we moved into the Sirdar's audience-chamber, and sitting in the place my husband had occupied the night before, I ac-

cepted the first move, and we began the game. We were of nearly equal force. The fight was long and very interesting. The Sirdar won.

We leaned back in our seats, exhausted with our close attention to the game. I toyed with one of the carved chess-men.

"There is in the *anderoûn* a young girl, a native of these hills, who interests me," I said at length to his Highness.

"A slave, sent a present to me by my ally Mir Abbas Ali," said his Highness.

Here the conversation paused. I was no she-diplomatist, and did not know how to carry it on. At last I said, examining the chess-board inlaid with ivory, sandal-wood, and silver, "There are sixty-four squares on this board, your Highness."

"Yes," he replied, smiling.

"I could cut it so that there would be sixty-five."

"Impossible—against reason," he replied, and laughed.

"I could," I persisted.

"Mashallah! What can not the Feringhees do? But that's impossible."

"Let the ayah get me my scissors and a sheet of paper from my chamber."

He motioned to the ayah, who went in search of them.

"If I succeed, what will your Highness give me as a forfeit?" I said, looking as coquettish and persuasive as I dared. "In Feringhistan it is customary in such cases to reward a lady."

The Sirdar accepted without debate the precedent I improvised as a custom of Feringhistan.

"I will give you whatever you may ask," he replied, still smiling.

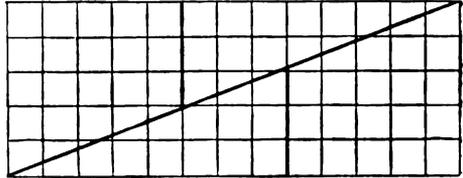
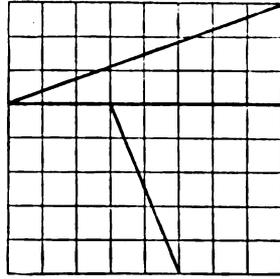
I thought of Herod and Salome, and answered, smiling in my turn: "It will not be anything very great. I shall not ask the head of a friend, or the half of your Highness's kingdom; but what I ask I want, *molto—moltissimo*."

By that time the ayah returned, bringing my scissors and a sheet of letter-paper. This I easily folded into sixty-four squares. The Sirdar counted them.

"Now see," I said, and with three snips of my scissors, in place of eight times eight squares, there lay before the Sirdar five times thirteen, sixty-five squares in all.

"God is great! It is magic!" said the Sirdar.

The ayah approached, but could not even comprehend enough to see the wonder. The Sirdar called in some of his of-



ficers from the anteroom, and I amused myself by their amazement.

It was wonderful! Could I explain it?

Not in the least. I only knew that it was so.

Would I give him the papers?

Of course I would. He could perform the same feat as often as he pleased.

"And now," said the Sirdar, when his courtiers had retired, and we were again alone, "what do you ask?"

"Will your Highness give me the strange girl from the hills—your slave Hafiza?"

"Mashallah! What do you want her for?"

"I am alone. I have no waiting-woman."

"Take the ayah."

"I prefer Hafiza."

He seemed to hesitate.

"If your Highness really does not wish to part with her, I withdraw my—"

"No. I am willing to give her to you. But she seems sulky—ill-conditioned. What can you do with her?"

What could I say? I dared not breathe the name of Abdul Reschid. I trembled at the thought of doing mischief. I faltered out perhaps the most foolish thing I could have said to him.

"My husband shall decide when he returns. I will make her over to my husband."

The Sirdar laughed aloud. "Mashallah!" he exclaimed. "You English are most wonderful. Who can understand your customs? I have been told that that was not the way in English families."

Again he laughed—a hateful laugh: at least I thought so, for a mesmeric perception of his thought flashed into me like a stroke of electricity, and I perceived the strange idea with which I had inspired him.

I blushed. That did not mend the situation. I attempted to explain. I said I only waited Colonel Effingham's advice to decide on what to do with her. But how could my broken dialect convey the sense of this correction to an Oriental, who imagined that by instinct and by human nature he had understood me perfectly? I was ready to burst into tears, but that would explain nothing. I was prohibited from mentioning the name of Abdul Reschid. All I could do was to assume as much dignity as possible, and withdraw to my own chamber.

Never shall I forget the misery, perplexity, and shame of that long night. I had attained my object. Like many another woman I had ridden at it straight, without regarding consequences, and had leaped all barriers—a resolute woman almost always can do that—and now I had (excuse the vulgarism) to foot the bill for what I had accomplished. In the silence of my chamber conscience called upon me to remember my husband's advice at parting: "Efface yourself; get into no scrapes; be silent as to Abdul Reschid; respect the social and religious prejudices of the Mohammedans."

Instead of this I had been forward in my intercourse with the Sirdar; and as to *scrapes*!—how on earth was I to dispose of Hafiza? how communicate with Abdul Reschid? how extricate myself out of a tangled web of Afghan, Persian, Russian, Indian, and English policy? And—question of all most pressing at that moment—how could I summon Croisset to a conference? Croisset alone could help me in this strait, and how should I contrive a secret interview with Croisset?

I lay awake on my uneasy bed pondering these perplexities. I dared not compromise myself by making the signal Croisset had suggested from the bastion. After all, he was a Frenchman—half Bohemian from his calling. What might he not do if he got into the harem? He was wild, I knew, to do so. What disguise might he not assume—and *be discovered in*?

I thought of my husband—so strict in

his propriety—the soul of honor, the mirror of diplomatic dignity—what would he say, what *could* he say, to a wife who had compromised him in a Mohammedan harem both conjugally and diplomatically?

Like sudden cramps, sharp twinges, painful pricks, came recollections of the Sirdar's laugh—of Rachel and of Bilhal.

I sprang up in my bed as these thoughts pierced me to the quick. I uttered incoherent exclamations; I lay down again to think; I started up in a fresh access of those stinging, tingling memories, my face aflame with blushes in the dark, my hands clinched, my heart bursting, as I thought of the now hateful cause of all this worry and humiliation, the unconscious, innocent Hafiza.

Morning dawned, and I had not made up my mind how to take counsel with Croisset.

"There are so many happy accidents, and only *one* would save us!" cried my heart, quoting an old French lady on the eve of the Revolution. Would not Providence interfere and give me *somehow* a private interview with my French friend? When Providence assists us in self-confident un-straightforward dealings, it generally appears to be upon the principle of helping our sins to find us out.

On this occasion, before I was quite dressed, came an old woman from one of the many Hindoo merchants of the city. She had brought Persian silks and scarfs for me to look at, and while unfolding her wares, put into my hand a note upon Lubin-scented French paper with a pale pink tinge.

"*Madame, me voici à vos ordres. Je les attends au cour, en habit de syce,* avec Malek, votre cheval. Ayez la bonté de descendre, et de me les confier. Avec la plus haute consideration.* CROISSET."

"Is my horse below with a groom? This woman says he is," I said to the ayah, who had been absent a few moments from my chamber.

"Yes." She had orders to tell me that the groom thought the horse was lame, and he wanted a powder of Feringhistan for the sick animal.

I veiled myself and descended to the court-yard, where scant courtesy, I knew, was to be expected from soldiers and horse-boys to a woman.

* Indian horse-boy.

There I found my Turcoman horse standing with a *syce*, got up in a sort of Anglo-Indian livery. As I made a pretense of examining Malek's foot I whispered, "Good Heaven! suppose you are found out, M. Croisset?"

"I have no fears, madame. Why did you summon me?"

"I never summoned you. I intended to do so this morning through the Sirdar, the proper channel. As wife of Colonel Ellingham I can have no part in these compromising disguises."

"I certainly saw your red signal, madame, about daybreak, above the parapet of the bastion."

"It must have been the red robe or the red head-dress of the Sirdar's chief wife, then. But as you *are* here, let me tell you something, let me consult you."

"I listen to you, madame."

"The bride of Abdul Reschid is in this harem."

"Hafiza?"

"Yes; she was brought in twenty-four hours ago by Mir Abbas Ali. The Sirdar has given her to me. Now how can we get word to Abdul Reschid?"

"I will go, madame, myself."

"How can you go without compromising me and yourself too? Remember it must be a secret mission. The Sirdar will be asking where you are."

"I will ask his permission to make a hunting expedition."

"Yes, and he will send an escort with you."

"Bah!"

"At any rate, you can not go alone. The hills are alive with rebels and robbers."

"I'll take our valiant *gholaum* and his Persians."

"We dismissed them at the frontier."

"True, but they followed on our track. They have deserted, and are at the mission. They have been plotting how to get back into the service of M. le Colonel. I'll take them into my pay. We will set off before the Sirdar misses us."

"Suppose he asks for you?"

"Then Porson shall inform him I am sketching in the hills, and am under the protection of a familiar *genie*. Sketching is done by witchcraft in the eyes of a Mohammedan."

"Well, then, I have spent all night in planning for you. Tell Abdul Reschid to hurry forward and to lie in wait upon

our route somewhere in the hills. He can descend upon our party in some narrow pass and carry off Hafiza."

"It is perfection, madame. A *roman* in action. I shall be off immediately."

"And," I said, authoritatively, perceiving some of the Sirdar's officers watching our colloquy, "you will take care that Malek has his powder in a hot mash; and" (in a lower voice) "for Heaven's sake take that stone out of his hoof as soon as you can get him home."

Malek limped off at this, carefully led by his attendant, and I returned to the apartments of the women. Then I was at once surrounded by all the women of the place. The Sirdar had communicated to his favorite wife my supposed intentions with respect to Hafiza, and what could I say to alter their ideas, without any language to express myself in?

The harem highly applauded. This was a matter they could all understand—a touch of nature that appeared to make the English woman their kin. They set up a theory that I was a childless wife, who was devising this expedient to make herself of value in the eyes of her husband. In a harem nothing is so contemptible or so forlorn as a childless woman. I think it sad enough myself, even in Christendom, and may remark, *en passant*, that although I was spared the terrible anxiety of helpless children during the Indian mutiny, there are young officers now in the service of the Empress of India who call me "mother."

Hafiza had wholly altered her demeanor. Her supposed new fate had been communicated to her. All the ladies congratulated her and complimented her. The Sirdar had given orders she should be fitted out with handsome clothes, and sent her coins and jewels from his treasury. The harem was full of sales-women sent by the Hindoo merchants of Herat with finery for her selection. Hafiza was all-glorious; I was bowed down with shame, repentance, and anxiety.

What could I do? I dared not mention Abdul Reschid even to Hafiza. Poor Croisset! I had launched him on a sea of perils. I dared not think about his danger. Hafiza must be got rid of as soon as possible. Oh, that I had never interfered!—had never set up to be the *Dea ex machina* in a Mohammedan love story!

I tried to get Hafiza quietly into my own room; being now my slave, I pre-

sumed I could control her. Not a bit of it! She set me at naught, which I now know to be one of the privileges of a slave who has got the upper hand of mistress or of master. She despised me; she sneered at me.

Oh! how I began to detest her eyebrows of Indian ink, her vapid dough-faced countenance! Had I been a Mohammedan or Hindoo woman, really afraid of this girl's influence, I could almost imagine myself breaking the sixth commandment by suicide or murder!

I feigned that I was ill at last, and went to bed. Hafiza continued *de se paonner*—to peacock herself—(I know no English word for it) before the harem. I was really growing ill. I had high fever. Day and night I was troubled by all kinds of fears. Croisset's mission, Abdul Reschid's ambush, haunted my imagination—and my husband's disgust and displeasure! On the other hand, Croisset's failure, perhaps death; diplomatic complications; no news of Abdul Reschid; Hafiza for life saddled upon me!

I declined medical assistance. I said I had medicine from Feringhistan. Of course the harem, after I said this, left me no peace till it had begged away my last pill and my last potion, though it must have required a robust faith to believe in remedies so manifestly inadequate to relieve their possessor.

Of poor Croisset I could hear nothing. My husband had left me on a Thursday; when the next Tuesday came round they brought me word about dusk that he was in the reception-room, and that the Sirdar had sent for me.

I dressed as rapidly as possible, and soon was with him. Politely, but as formally as another Washington, my husband received me. My nerves were so high-strung that I could hardly bear the self-control that etiquette prescribed to me. He was not willing to compromise his conjugal dignity by caresses before Mohammedans. He only whispered, as he clasped me by both hands, "How pale you are, my Sophy!"

"Oh, Charles! I am so thankful you are safe! Never leave me again. All goes wrong without you."

"Has not the Sirdar been kind to you?"

"Kindness itself; all respectfulness and consideration. But I am not fit to live without you, my own Charley."

I found my husband was eager to set

off (if I could only bear the journey) the next morning.

"Oh yes," I said; "I shall not keep you waiting."

"But where is Croisset?"

Where was Croisset indeed? That question brought on an explanation. Oh, my sins! He had not been heard of since he stole away into the hills on a sketching expedition.

"I can not wait for Croisset," said my husband. "Will your Highness take steps to see about his safety? I must leave him behind."

"Charles," I whispered, "you must buy another horse. The Sirdar has given me a slave girl. I should like to take her with us."

"You will find her a great encumbrance. Could you not have avoided taking her? It is very important we should push on."

"I can not help it now, dear," I said, sadly.

Then, fearing he had pained me by his tone of discouragement, he immediately proceeded to take measures to procure a horse for her.

I did not return to my husband's care that night, but slept in the harem. When we started the next morning I was greatly concerned to find that the same guard of Afghan horsemen that had gone up into the hills with my husband and Mr. Bruce were to accompany us for three days, so that if Abdul Reschid attacked us, according to my programme, there would probably be bloodshed.

All that day we rode over the plain and through the hills, and never a chance I found to address a word in private to my husband. The chief of our escort had two hawks with him; there were plenty of black partridges, teal, and wild-ducks, and occasionally an antelope. Whenever any game was put up at our approach, a hawk was slipped, and seldom failed to bring down the fluttering quarry. Ashawk and partridge fell, a horseman would dart forward, seize the two birds, secure the hawk, and then, with Mohammedan ceremonies, complete the death of the victim.

The day was one of trouble, anxiety, and self-rebuke to me, and probably was equally disappointing to Hafiza. My husband took no notice of her. Poor Croisset! where could he be?

Toward dusk, as we were riding rather wearily, we came to a little opening in the

hills, in the midst of which stood a tall tamarisk-tree. Beneath it was encamped a party of rough horsemen, a *cafflah*, or small caravan, with its horses picketed in a circle, within which they had lighted a fire, and were preparing to pass the night without any other covering than a riding cloak of coarse cloth or a sheep-skin.

When we came on this encampment, one or two of the party—large, fair men—came forward and courteously offered to give us the right of choice for our encampment if we meant to pass the night there. They said they were horse-merchants returning from a fair at Kurra-*chee*, and appeared anxious to sell one or two of their horses—noble animals all of them—to the gentlemen of our party.

My husband, Mr. Bruce, and the officer of the Sirdar admired the animals exceedingly. Their masters, as if eager to conclude a bargain, sprang on their backs, and proceeded to give proofs of the merits of their horses. This stimulated our Afghan escort, unwilling to be outdone by horse-dealers, and soon all over the little plain a mimic fight was taking place, in which each horseman, fighting independently of his comrades, attacked or retired as he pleased. One of these horsemen, who wore under his cloak a close-fitting tunic of dark blue, particularly attracted my attention. With reins hanging loose from his saddle-bow, he urged his horse until it almost flew. Suddenly he swooped toward us. A jerk, a struggle, a shriek, and two strong arms had seized Hafiza. A shout of "*N'ayez pas peur, madame!*" in the voice of Croisset, came at the same moment from another horseman. Before our Afghan escort had any idea that anything was meant but mimic fight, the party was over the brow of a low hill that was half a mile away from us. Our horses

were all blown. Those of the raiders were fresh.

"Charles! Charles!" I cried, flinging myself upon my husband, "stop the pursuit. Don't let them fire. I will tell you everything. This attack is all my fault. It is made at my suggestion. Oh, I am so thankful! That roughest man in the great goat-skin cloak was M. Croisset."

A few shots were fired by our men from the hill-top, but Abdul Reschid's followers were picked horsemen. They skimmed like swallows over hill and plain.

The officer in charge of our escort did not for some time notice we had lost one of our party. Then it was too late for pursuit, and it only remained for me, in the stillness of our tent, hiding my face upon my husband's breast, to tell my story.

"We may be thankful that it ended as it has," he said. "But never again, dear wife, interfere with Mohammedan customs or European diplomacy."

"Never! never!—oh, I never will again!" I exclaimed, fervently. "I never will try again to do a good-natured thing for anybody."

"This is not the first time I have heard you make that resolution, and on the first temptation you have always broken it," he answered, smiling. "But Croisset?—are you sure he is all right?"

"I am certain he called out to me."

Sure enough, a few hours after the moon rose he and his *gholaum* and two Persians rode into our camp, professing to have followed us since noon from Herat, and to have been detained by some picturesque antiquities the artist had discovered on the side of a mountain.

I never knew if Abdul Reschid succeeded in his design of educating Hafiza. My impression of her capacity for instruction was by no means favorable.

THE WILD ROSE.

TO A YOUNG FRIEND.

FAIR are the flowers the tardy Spring,
At last fulfilling all our hope
With largess late, is wont to fling
Along our Northern slope.
For us the cowslip sheds its gold;
For us the May-flower breathes perfume;
And in our meadows, low and cold,
White violets bloom.