

The Fortieth Door

SYNOPSIS.

Jack Ryder, a young American, is doing some excavating in Egypt, and is induced by Jimmy Jeffries, a pretty American tourist he has known, to attend a masked-ball at her hotel. He obtains a Scotch costume from a friend, Andrew McLean, an attaché of the English government, and at McLean's he hears the story of a French scholar who disappeared in the desert fifteen years before. The man was reported dead, and a wife and baby girl were left; now the inheritance of an estate made it suddenly important to hunt up the child. But all trace is gone. McLean shows Ryder a miniature portrait of the young Frenchman, very carefully mounted. At the ball, Ryder is fascinated by a mysterious young girl in a Mohammedan costume who will give no hint of her identity. He follows, as she slips away, and finds she is the daughter of Tewfik Pasha, a Turkish official in the neighboring palace. The hereditary consul of her secluded life has led the girl to this escapade.

SECOND INSTALLMENT.

PARTING IN THE GARDEN.

"WHAT about your mother?" he asked her, "Is she—?"

"She is dead," the girl told him, with a drop in her voice.

And after a long moment of silence, "When I was so little—but I remember her, O indeed, I do. She was French, monsieur."

"O! And so you—"

"I am French-Turk," she whispered back.

"That is very often so—in the harems of Cairo. She was so lovely," said the girl wistfully. "My father must have loved her very much; he never brought another wife here. Always I lived alone with my old nurse and the governesses."

"You had—lessons?"

"O, nothing but lessons—all of that world which was shut away so soon. French and English, and music and the philosophy—O, we Turks are what you call blue stockings, monsieur, shut away with our books and our dreams. And our memories—we are so young and already the real world is a memory. Sometimes," she said, with a tremor of suppressed passion in her still little tones, "I could wish that I had died when I was very young and so happy when my father took me traveling in Europe. I played games on the decks of the ships. I had my tea with the English children. I went down into the hold to play with their dogs."

She broke off, between a laugh and a sigh. "Dogs are forbidden to Moslems—but of course, you know, if you have been here two years. And emancipated as we may be, there is no changing the customs. We must live as our grandmothers lived, though we are not as our grandmothers were."

"With a French mother, you must be very far from what some of your grandmothers were."

"My poor French mother!" whimsically the girl sighed. "Must I blame it on her—the spirit that took me to the ball? Tomorrow this will be a dream to me. I shall not believe in my shamelessness. And you, too, must forget—"

"Forget?" said Ryder under his breath.

"Forget—and go. Positively you must go now, monsieur. It is very dangerous here."

"It is." There was a light dancing in his hazel eyes. "It is more dangerous every moment—"

"But I mean—" her confusion betrayed itself.

"But I mean—that you are magic—black magic," he murmured, bending over the black domino.

The crescent moon had found its way through a filigree of boughs. Faintly its exploring ray lighted the contour of that shrouded head, touched the lovely curves of her arched brows and the tender pallor of the skin about those great wells of dark eyes. From his own eyes a flame seemed to pass into hers. Breathlessly they gazed at each other like dim shadows in a garden of still enchantment.

And then, as from a palpable clasp, she tried to slip away. "Truly, I must go! It is so late—"

Ryder's heart was pounding within him. He did not recognize this state of affairs; it was utterly unrelated to anything that had gone before in his merry, humorous, rather clear sighted, and very young life. He felt dazed and wondering at himself, and irresponsible, and appalled; but deeper than all

else, he felt eager and exultant and strangely, furtively determined about something that he was not owing to himself, something that leaped off his lips in the low murmur to her, "but tomorrow night—I shall see you again—"

She caught her breath. "O, never again! Tonight has no tomorrow—"

"Outside this gate," he persisted, "I shall wait—and other nights after that. For I must know—if you are safe."

"See, I am very safe now. For if I were missed there would be running and confusion."

He only drew a little closer to her. "Tomorrow night—or another—I shall be waiting."

She moved, her head in denial.

"Neither tomorrow nor another night."

He only drew a little closer to her. "Tomorrow night—or another—I shall come to this door—"

"It must not open to you. It is a forbidden door—"

"There are thirty and nine doors in your life, monsieur, that you may open, but this is the forbidden—"

"I shall be waiting," he insisted. "Tomorrow night, or another—"

She moved her head in denial.

Again their eyes met. He bent over her. He knew a gleam of sharpst wonder at himself as his arms went swiftly round that shrouding drapery, and then all duality of consciousness was blotted out in the rush of his young madness. For within that drapery was the soft, human sweetness of her; his arms tightened, his face bent closer, and through the sheer gauze of her veil his lips pressed her lips.

Some one was coming down the walk. Footsteps crunched the gravel.

Like a wraith the girl was out of his arms. In anger or alarm, his whirling senses could not know, although it was their passionate concern. But his last gleam of prudence got him through the gate he heard her locking after him.

And then, for her sake, he fled.

Nearer sounded the footsteps on the gravelled walk, and in frightened haste the girl drew out the key from the gate and slipped away into the shrubbery, grateful for the blotting shadows. At the foot of a rose bush she crouched to thrust the key into a hole in the loose earth, covering the top and drawing the low branches over it.

"Aimée," came a guarded call, "Aimée?"

Still stooping, she tried to steal through the bushes, but the thorns held her and she stood up, pulling at her robes.

"Yes, Miriam?" she said faintly, and desperately freeing herself, she hurried forward towards the dark, bulky figure of her old nurse, emerging now into the moonlight.

"Alhamdulillah—Glory to God!" ejaculated the old woman, but cautiously under her breath. "Come quickly—he is here—thy father! And thou in the garden, at this hour! But come," and urgently she gripped the girl's wrist as if afraid that she would vanish again into the shadows of the shrubbery.

Aimée felt her knees quake under her. "My father!" she murmured, and her voice died in her throat.

Had he discovered? Had some one seen her slip out? Or recognized her at the ball?

The panic stricken conjectures surged through her in dismay confusion. She tried to beat down her fear, to think quickly, to rally her force, but her swimming senses were still invaded with the surprise of those last moments at the gate, her heart still beating with the touch of Ryder's arms about her, of that long, deep look, that kiss—beyond all else, that kiss!

Little rivers of fire were running through her veins. Shame and proud anger set up their swift reactions. O, what wings of wild, incredible folly had brought her to this! To be kissed like—like a dancing girl—by a man, an unknown, and American!

How could he, how could he! After all his kindness—to hold her so lightly. And yet there had been no lightness in his eyes, those eager, shining young eyes, so gravely concerned.

But she could not stop to think of this thing. Her father was waiting.

"He came in like a fury," the old nurse was panting, as they scurried up the walk together, "and asked for you—and your room empty, your bed not touched! O, Allah's ruth upon me, I went trotting through the house, mad with fear. Up to the

roofs, then down to the garden, sending him word that you were dressing, that he should not know the only child of his house was a shameless one, devoid of sense."

"But there is no harm in a garden," breathed the girl, her face hot with shame. "Tonight was so not—"

"Is there no breeze upon the roof?"

"But the roses—"

"Can roses not be brought you? Have you no maids to attend you?"

"I am tired of being attended. Can I never be alone—"

"Alone in the garden! A pretty talk! Eh, I will tell thy father, I will have a stop put to this—hush, would you have him hear?"

she admonished, in a sudden whisper, as they opened the little door at the foot of the dark well of spiral steps.

Like conspirators they fled up the staircase, and then with fumbling haste the old nurse dragged off the girl's mantle and veil, muttering at the pins that secured it. She shook out the pale, flowered chiffon of her rumpled frock and gathered back a strand of her dark, disordered hair.

"Say that you were on the roofs," she besought her.

For a moment the girl put the warm rose of her cheek against the old woman's dark, wrinkled one.

"But you are good, Dadi," she said softly, using the Turkish word for familiar old servants.

With a sound of mingled vexation and affection Miriam pushed her ahead of her into the drawing room.

It was a long, dark room, on whose soft, buff carpet the little gilt chairs and sofas were set about with the empty expectancy of a stage scene in a French salon. French were the shirred, silk shades upon the electric lamps, French the music upon the child rosewood piano.

And then, as if some careless property man had overlooked them in changing the act, two window balconies of closely carved old wood, solidly screening mashrabiye, jutted out from one cream tinted wall, and above a gilded sofa, upholstered in the delicate fabric of the Rue de la Paix, hung a green satin banner embroidered in silver with a phrase from the Koran.

Tewfik Pasha was at one side of the room, filling his match case. He was in evening dress, a ribbon of some order across a rather swelling shirt bosom, a red fez upon his dark head.

At his daughter's entrance he turned quickly, with so sharp a gleam from his full, somewhat protuberant black eyes that her guilty heart fairly turned over in her.

It made matters no more comforting to have Miriam packed from the room.

She would deny it all, she thought desperately. No, she would admit it, and implore his indulgence. She would admit nothing but the garden. She would admit the ball. She would never admit the young man.

With conscious eyes and flushing cheeks, wearily aware of dew drenched satin slippers and an upsetting hammering heart, Aimée presented the young image of irresolute confusion.

To her surprise there was no outburst. Her father was suddenly gay and smiling, with a flow of pleasant phrases that invited her affection. In his good humor—and Tewfik Pasha liked always to be kept in good humor—he had touches of that boyish charm that had made him the enfant gâté of Paris and Vienna as well as Cairo and Constantinople. An infant no more, in the robustly round forties. His cheerful self-indulgence demanded still of his environment that smiling acquiescence that kept life soft and comfortable.

And now it suddenly struck Aimée, through her tense alarm, that his smile was not a spontaneous smile, but was silently, uneasily asking his daughter not to make something too unpleasant for him, that something that had brought him here, at an unprecedented midnight, that had kept him waiting until she, supposedly, should rise and dress.

If it were not then a knowledge of her escapade—?

The relief from that fear made everything else bearable. She was even able to entertain, with a certain welcome, the alternative alarm that he had decided to marry again—that nightmare from whose realization the unknown gods (or more truly, the unknown goddesses of the Caléne demimonde) had assisted to save her.

There was a furtive excitement about him

that fanned the supposition.

Then, quite suddenly, the illuminating lightning cut the clouds.

"My dear child, I have news, really important news for you. I have not been cussing your future," said Tewfik Pasha staving with stern nonchalance ahead of determinedly unaware of her instant stilling of attention, "I have by no means neglected of it. Today—indeed, tonight there has been a consummation of my plan. It is not to every daughter that a father may hurry with such an announcement."

Her first feeling was a merciful relief. She knew nothing then of the ball! She could breathe again. It was her marriage that brought him.

Not at all. This is a serious affair, you understand—the devil of a serious affair!"

and for the first time she felt she heard the accents of his candor.

But again he was back to voluble protestation. This man was really an old friend. He boggled over the word, then got it out resolutely. A man he knew well. Not a young man, perhaps—certainly he was not going to hand his only daughter to any boy, a mere novice in life—but a man who could give her the position she deserved. Not only a rich man, but an influential one.

"I have always indulged you, Aimée," he said at last, without looking around at her. "I hope you are not going to make me infernally sorry."

He looked about. His daughter was sitting very still upon the gilded sofa beneath the banner of Mahomet, as he regarded her two great tears formed in her dark eyes and ran slowly down her cheeks.

With a sound of impatience he jumped to his feet and began to pace up and down the room.

This, he pointed out heatedly to her, was what a man got who indulged his daughter. This is what came of French and English governesses and modern ideas. After all he had done—more than any other father! To sit and weep! Weep—at such a marriage!

What did she expect of life? Was she not as other women? Did she never look ahead? Had she no pride, no ambition—no hopes? Did she wish never to marry, then, to become an old maid like her English companion?

"I am but 18," she said quivering. "O, my father, do not give me to this unknown—"

"Unknown—unknown! Do I not know him?"

"But you promised—"

Angrily he gestured with his cigar. "Do I know what is good for you or do I not? Have I your interest at heart—tell me! Am I a savage, a dolt—?"

"But you do not know what it is to be unhappy. I beg of you, my father. I should die with such a life before me, with such a man for my husband. I am too French, too like my mother—"

"Ah, your mother! Too French, are you? But what would you have in France?" he demanded with the bursting appearance of a man making every effort to restrain himself within reasonable bounds. "Would not your parents there arrange your marriage? You might see the fiancé," he caught the words out of her mouth, "but only for a time or two—after the arrangements—and what is that? What more would you know than what your father knows? Are you a thing to be exhibited—given to a man to gaze at and appraise? I tell you, no. You are my daughter. You bear my name. And when you marry you marry in the sanctity of the custom of your father—and you go to your husband's house as his mother went to his father."

"Timidly she protested, "But my mother—and you—"

"Do not speak of your mother! If she were here she would counsel gratitude and obedience." He turned his back on her. "This is what comes," he muttered, "of this modernity, this education."

He pitched away his stub as if he were casting all that he hated away with it.

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By Mary Hastings Bradley

Was it still the same night? Were the violins still playing, the people dancing in their fairland of freedom? Was that young man in the Highland dress, that unknown American, was he back there dancing with some other girl?

What was it he had said? Tomorrow night, and another night, he would be there, in the lane. As if she would come! As if she would demean herself, after his rude affront, to steal again to the gate, like a gardener's daughter!

Her thoughts were so full of him. And now she had this new horror to face, this marriage to Hamdi Bey. Did her father dream she would not resist? It was against such a danger that she had long ago stolen a garden key, a key to the outer world in which she had neither a friend nor a plastro to save her.

"My dear father," she said entreatingly, "please do not tell me that you really mean—that you really think you would like to—that you would consider—this man."

He turned on her a sudden direct, confessing look.

"Aimée, I have arranged this matter," he added heavily, "Tonight. That is what I came to tell you."

In the silence that settled upon them he finally ceased his effort to ignore her shocked dismay. He abandoned his airy pretense that the affair could possibly evoke her enthusiasm. He sucked at his cigar like a rather sullen little boy.

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she had dreamed. She felt a surge of panic at the immensity of the trouble before her.

"But, my father, if you love me—"

"No, my little one, if you love me!"

With sudden assumption of good humor over the angry red mottling his olive cheeks, he came and sat beside her, putting his arm about her silently shrinking figure.

"I am a weak fool to stay and drink a woman's tears, as the saying goes," he told her, "but this is what a man gets for being good natured. But, tears or not, I know what is best. Come, Aimée, have I not ever been fond of you?"

He patted her hand with his own plump one where bright rings were sparkling deep in the encroaching flesh. Aimée looked down with a sudden wild dislike. That soft, ingratiating hand, with its dimples and polished nails, which thought it could pat her so easily into submission.

It was nothing to him, she thought, chok- ingly, whether she was happy or unhappy. He had decided on the match—perhaps he had foreseen her protests and plunged into it, so as to be committed against her entreaties—and he was not stopped by any thought of her feelings.

After all her hopes! After all he had promised!

But she sold herself that she had never been secure. Beneath all her trust there had always been the slant fear, slipping through the shadows like a serpent. Some instinct for character, more precocious than her years, had whispered through her fond blindness, and initiated her into foreboding.

"Come now, my dear," she said heartily, "this is a surprise, of course, but after all you will find it is for the best—much for the best—"

His voice died away. After a long pause, "You may make the arrangements," she told him in a still, tenacious little voice. "But you cannot make me marry him. I will never put on the marriage dress. Never wear the diadem. Never stir one step within his house."