

GRACIOSA

by ANNE DUFFIELD

"Love Knows Not Caste, Nor Sleep a Broken Bed"—But Middle Age, Calculating, Masterful, May Take the Glow Away and Kill a Youthful Romance

TO those who knew Egypt superficially she appears a land of two sharp contrasts—namely: the rich and cultured class, in which is comprised the class official, and the picturesque native element. We who know her well, however, know that between these two, a sort of second stratum, lives a huge and heterogeneous colony drawn from all the races of Europe.

They are Austrians, French, Italians, Maltese, Greeks from the islands, natives of Gibraltar—industrious, pushing, prosperous, rearing big families, intermarrying until all trace of original ancestry is hopelessly confused, speaking a dozen languages fluently and none correctly; a laughing, wholesome polyglot crew; children of the sun, who as yet have not lost their inheritance of strong vitality.

For some obscure reason this reckless mixing of bloods produces some of the prettiest women in the world; and in the case of Graciosa Reynolds this rule carried beyond all precedent—almost, indeed, beyond credulity. Looking at Graciosa, you felt that no one could be as lovely as she appeared. "It simply isn't done," was the confused thought that rose in the minds of the Englishmen who encountered her occasionally in the streets, while the French, a simpler race, smacked longing lips and dubbed her, in their succinct tongue, a sugar plum.

Graciosa's father was, or claimed to be, an Englishman. His origins were obscure. He had been placed as a young child at one of the schools of the French brothers, instructions being given that he was to take the name of Reynolds and claim English nationality. His schooling fees until he should be sixteen were paid in a lump sum to the superior; after that, apparently, he was to shift for himself.

The kindly brothers, who, in their cloisters, know more of the outside world than the world outside knows of itself, accepted the forlorn little creature with equanimity. He was not the first to come to them thus ambiguously and assuredly would not be the last.

He did exceedingly well during his years with them, and later when he began his fight with the world at large. He entered one of the minor government departments and rose quickly. He was a likable chap with an air of unmistakable breeding, and might, it was said, have commanded in time a social position equal to his official one had he not, at twenty-five, wrecked all chance of that by what was termed among the English residents a disastrous marriage.

Graciosa's mother was a Miss Natalia Minola, one of a big, untidy, rollicking family who lived in an obscure suburb of Cairo. They were partly Italian, partly French, partly God knows what. They chattered Italian among themselves—when they were not chattering French, or Greek, or Arabic.

Natalia, the youngest daughter, was just seventeen when young Reynolds first saw her. She was a lovely creature of rounded contours, skin like a ripe peach, hair the color of sherry wine, and wide, lambent, sherry colored eyes. It was love at first sight with both, and within five weeks of their meeting he had married and brought her to the rambling, whitewashed house with its great straggling garden which he had taken on the bank of the river.

If he missed the clubs and the select tea parties of Cairo society, thus forfeited for the sake of his wife, he gave no sign. Natalia and her native servants kept his house in a haphazard but delightful fashion; his meals were hot and well served, his comfort sedulously studied. And if his pretty wife spent her days in a loose gown with her lovely hair in plaits and her bare feet thrust into her lovely slippers, gossiping with her scores of relatives and her servants, she was always fragrant and sweet, freshly bathed, and charmingly dressed when he returned at evening.

Having no friends, no influence, no "pull" of any sort, Reynolds worked with intense application and found an infinite easement in the complete relaxation that was his at home. Then, when they had been married two years, came the baby daughter, and the man asked no more of earth or heaven.

From the first Graciosa was of an exceptional loveliness, and her beauty flowered with each advancing year. She had her mother's hair and the same big eyes with that lambent flame behind them, but she had stolen her father's dark brows and lashes. Her lashes, indeed, were extraordinary, very long and thick and curling upward distractingly. They gave an unreal, a theatrical look to the pure little heart shaped face with its small, straight nose and warm, crimson mouth. Her skin was very fair, with the sheen of satin; her feet and hands slender and beautifully shaped. If she had a fault it was that she was not quite tall enough, but that, in the eyes of men, is an endearing fault in woman. At the end of the war, when she was seventeen, she was, beyond all question, a perfect, lovely thing.

She had been sent to a good French school in Alexandria and numbered many French and Greek and Turkish girls among her acquaintance; the English women, of course, would have none of her. But beauty such as hers could not be hidden from the eyes of Englishmen, and it was the winter following the armistice that she met young Alistair Kerr-Owen, tenth Lord Venture.

They met at a charity ball given at one of the hotels, Lord Venture being with a party of English



Sitting with Graciosa on a gayly patterned prayer rug.

friends, Graciosa with some of her own dark haired, bright eyed tribe.

The girl was dressed rather too elaborately, in pale green tulle; a dress cut very low, from which her white and gold rose like a challenge.

"Who is that?" the young officer demanded.

"That—O, her name is Reynolds, I believe," a friend made answer negligently.

"Reynolds—English? But why is she dancing with dagoes?"

"They're the only people she knows. Her mother is a Levantine of sorts—frightful crowd—father not a bad chap; but—well, there it is, you see."

BUT young Lord Venture did not see; or, rather, he saw Graciosa and nothing else. He insisted upon an introduction, which his friend contrived most reluctantly, and asked her for a dance. The child, blushing, tremulous, consented. An English officer! A title! Her small heart fluttered; above the too low line of her bodice you could see a tiny pulse beating like an imprisoned bird.

They danced, and danced again. Then the man suggested that they should go out into the veranda to see the pyramids in the moonlight. The air was warm and still; the desert lay like a lake of silver stabbed by the sharp, black shadows of the great tombs.

"What is your name?" Alistair asked her as they seated themselves in two basket chairs in a palm-banked corner. "You ought to be called after the sweetest flower that grows."

"My name is Graciosa," she answered simply.

"Graciosa." He repeated it softly. "Graciosa. But, you are English?"

"O, yes," she replied quickly in her faintly clipped speech, "my father is an Englishman."

"I would like to meet your father—and your mother," the young man said impulsively. "Will you let me come and see you, Graciosa?"

"O," the little hands fluttered, "do you really mean it?"

"But of course I mean it. May I come tomorrow?"

Her eyes, with their startling extravagant lashes, were lifted to his as he answered in the formula prescribed by her French teacher of deportment. "I am sure that my parents would be very happy to make your acquaintance, Lord Venture."

And at the quaint, prim little speech the man had much ado not to catch her to his heart then and there.

He arrived promptly at half-past four on the following afternoon and was shown into the big, pink-washed drawing room with its cool tiled floor bright with camel's hair rugs. His first sensation was that he was being received in a conservatory, for the room was filled with roses.

They stood in vases and in tall red jars; they floated in brass bowls and were heaped in the wide English fireplace. Even the tea table was trimmed with them exactly, as he was quick to note, as the

table in the restaurant at Mena house had been trimmed the evening before.

"Good Lord," thought Alistair in sharp distaste. An older man must have been amused, touched, but Lord Venture was very young and he was neither touched nor amused. The profusion of fanned him; the heavy sweetness of the air—the reek, as he expressed it inwardly—was an added offense. Then his eyes rested upon Graciosa and, as it had happened last evening, he forgot everything else.

Graciosa had risen upon his entrance; Natalia, with obvious effort, remaining seated as her daughter had anxiously instructed her. They were both in white; short plaited skirts of heavy hand woven silk and little loose overblouses of crepe de chine. Their stockings were of white silk and they wore white slippers, absurdly small, with heels four inches high. Natalia wore also a twist of tiny Alexandria pearls, Graciosa a string of jade whose lovely apple green enhanced the fairness of her skin and brought out the lights of her tawny hair.

"By Jove!" thought Alistair, seating himself after the preliminaries in a basket chair facing mother and daughter. Only himself knew what he had dreaded to find in the mother; anything, indeed, but this; this pretty, soft-tongued, wholly adorable young creature. They were both of them perfect, simply.

And so, he decided swiftly, was their setting. Too many flowers? Nonsense. It suited them, this riot of color and scent; it was the only possible background.

TABLE of CONTENTS:

JUGGERNAUT	Page 1
<i>The opening installment of a smashing new daily serial—By Alice Campbell.</i>	
GRACIOSA	Page 2
<i>A short story of exotic Egypt and aloof England—By Anne Duffield.</i>	
HIGH CHIVALRY	Page 4
<i>Achmed Abdullah's stirring serial reaches a new peak of excitement.</i>	
THE RED KNIGHT OF GERMANY	Page 5
<i>Floyd Gibbons' life story of Baron von Richthofen.</i>	
FASHIONS	Page 7
<i>"Street and Travel Togs"—By Corinne Lowe.</i>	
TEMPTING MENUS	Page 7
<i>By Jane Eddington.</i>	

Next Week:

"Riding the Whirlwind"

Helen R. Hull writes of a henpecked husband who miraculously becomes a dominant male.

He drank his tea, strong and sweet—he did not care for sugar in tea—and ate rich sugar cakes—he disliked all sweets—with avidity, feasting his eyes upon the beauty of the two young women before him. They were both very shy, very breathless, very formal. Natalia, indeed, was in an agony of embarrassment and when he had valiantly finished his third sickly cup Alistair, partly in pity for her, but principally because, charming though the mother was, he yet wanted the child to himself, asked Graciosa to show him the garden. She assented eagerly and led him out through the long French doors, swaying on her ridiculous little heels.

THE garden was long and rambling, surrounded by whitewashed walls, against one of which the bronze-blue waves of the Nile lapped idly. It was planted from end to end with orange trees, now in full flower, with their shining leaves and here and there a round ripe fruit glowing amid the waxen blooms.

Under the trees and along the paths and clambering up the walls among the clematis vines were hundreds of roses, and here and there, in a sunny space, stood flaming clumps of poppies and beds of scented pink and white stocks. A rim of small leafless trees, tipped by clusters of purple flowers, outlined the farthest wall, and a pergola, starting abruptly in the middle of a path and leading to a gate that opened upon the water, was covered by a creeper with thick, dark lance-shaped leaves and balls of scarlet berries. No breath of air was stirring, and the hot sun stung the fragrant blooms till the air was faint and heady with their perfume.

Like a man struggling for sanity before the engulfing waves of delusion, Lord Venture struggled against the spell of that garden. He told himself that it was all untidy, extravagant, riotous, and profuse, but it was of no avail. Bemused by the color and the hot sweet scents, he succumbed to it utterly, and once again it seemed the perfect setting for lovely Graciosa.

Tripping along beside him in her white dress that was so entirely correct (and her high-heeled shoes that were so wholly wrong), she seemed one with the flowers and the joyous sunshine; and bending over her with a smile that lit his cold young face most charmingly he said, "You ought never to leave this garden; it fits you completely; I cannot picture you anywhere else."

To which Graciosa, with that literal directness that characterized her speech and was oddly at variance with her appearance, replied simply, "I never have been anywhere else. I was born in this house."

In the weeks that followed Lord Venture, to the despair of his friends and increasing bemusement of his own heart, came daily to that tangled garden. And he came at all hours.

In the frail early mornings when the air was cool and a gossamer mist veiled earth and sky he was there, stopping his horse at the gate in the wall and hurrying in under the orange trees to where

Graciosa, her cheeks deeply flushed, her eyes still dewy from sleep, waited for him with old Fatma, her nurse, beside her holding a cup of fragrant, steaming coffee in her wrinkled hands.

And in the burning afternoons when the birds slept and even the restless river ran slow and silently he was there, sitting with Graciosa on a gayly patterned prayer rug under the arch which gave upon the water, watching the sparkle of the waves, the palms on the farther bank, the native boats with their sails like swallows' wings and their chattering, multicolored crews.

And in the hushed and breathless evenings when the leaves made fantastic shadows on the paths and the floors stood white and motionless in the moonlight and the air was so sweet that every breath was a separate and distinct delight, he was there, walking with Graciosa, watching the pure little face with its tender mouth and deep shadowy eyes; her hand, small and warm, close clasped in his.

To the remonstrance of his friends he paid no heed. He had met Reynolds and found in him a man of breeding, with a quiet, cynical humor that was not unattractive. Natalia he found delightful always, gentle, childlike, and pretty. He caught a glimpse now and again of others of the tribe: a dark eyed boy with a flashing smile and a glorious voice; a shy girl or two, giggling and peering; but for the most part he saw the world through a glass darkly, his whole being concentrated upon the beautiful child who had brought him suddenly a glory and a rapturous warmth such as he had never dreamed of experiencing.

He was, of course, ripe for the experience. Three years in Flanders—a month in Palestine—then the garden and Graciosa.

As for her, she lived in a dream. Alistair's title lent him a romantic quality and Alistair himself appealed strongly to her imagination. He was at this time just twenty-two; tall and lean, with a keen, dark face and very straight, black hair. If the deep gray eyes in their too close setting showed a hint of meanness, she could not see it. If the beautiful mouth under the clipped mustache and the small, white chin had the lines of a weak will, she did not perceive it. He came invested in his glory of an English officer, an English nobleman, and when he asked Graciosa to marry him she consented with rapture.

It was, for both, a time of enchantment; a fairy time, a fiery wooing in that old, old garden.

It was, however, a time of less enchantment for Graciosa's family. True, they felt the honor that was being offered their little one; were, indeed, half stunned by it; but what they gained in grandeur they sadly lacked in comfort!

Gone were the old easy days of loose wrappers and haphazard meals and cozy gossip in the kitchen veranda. With Alistair apt to appear at any moment, they must be dressed and ready to receive him. The rich and satisfying afternoon coffee, cus-