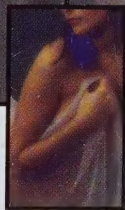




BLUE  
MOON



*The*  
ODALISQUE

RICHARD MANTON


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She also learnt not to walk in such places after horse-exercise, when she wore her blouse and jodhpur riding-pants. Without fail there was always one swarthy Arab or another who followed her, feasting his eyes on the shape of her young figure in this costume. She noticed one or two others turn their heads, as if trying to see behind her. At first she supposed that the saddle had left some tear or blemish on the seat of her pants. But it was plain that the tomboyish cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom in the white cotton of tight pants had excited such perverted admiration. She walked faster and at last ran from the place, avoiding the smiles of the men who watched her. Through her mind ran echoes of hints and murmurs among the English wives at Cairo. She had overheard whispered suggestions of slave-girls made to resemble pageboys by their masters and put to abominable sexual uses. That the men who followed her had such thoughts about Jenny was never in doubt. Even safe in her own room again, she shuddered at the possibility of the men who wanted to enjoy her body in such an unnatural manner, their pleasure increased by leaving her soiled and humiliated. Such things she thought were impossible in England. It was the heat of the degenerate East that bred these repulsive desires.



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*The*  
ODALISQUE.

THE ROMANCE OF AN ENGLISH GIRL  
IN THE MAHDI'S HAREM



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RICHARD MANTON



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Manufactured in the United States of America

**ONE:**  
**BEAUTY AND**  
**THE BEAST**



# CHAPTER ONE

THE UNIFORMED GUARDSMAN in his red tunic, royal blue trousers, and tall fur shako stiffened to attention. As if it were a parade-ground movement, he reached for the bar of the main door and drew it back smartly. General Elphin, the senior of the two officers, acknowledged the courtesy by a casual salute. With his aide-de-camp, Lord Algernon Regis, at his side he went down the War Office steps and crossed Whitehall.

In the misty London afternoon of the December day, the two staff officers kept step smartly. The first white glare of evening gaslight touched the traffic of black hansom-cabs and twopenny buses, their horses restive between the shafts on the long route from Liverpool Street to Victoria Station. From Trafalgar Square down to Westminster Bridge, the length of Whitehall was packed with the lumbering horse-buses and the quick-stepping hansom as the Christmas season began. On the open decks of the buses the tall-hatted passengers sat close and upright as if in a church pew. The harness stirred and the hooves clattered. From Sir Charles Barry's ornamental iron lamps, the flame of the gas made the advertisements on the sides of the horse-buses gleam as if wet with rain. *Nestle's Milk Food for Infants. Adams's Furniture Polish—The Oldest and the Best. Parkins and Cottos Travelling Bags. Elliman's Royal Embrocation.* On the corner of Parliament Square, outside the brightly-lit windows of the Prince of Wales public house, a group of scarlet-tunic'd recruiting sergeants waited in forage caps and white pipe-clayed belts.



Still perfectly in step, the two officers walked through the courtyard of the Horse Guards. At either side, the plumed and silver-helmeted Lifeguards stiffened in their saddles. With a metallic slither, the two swords left their scabbards in well-drilled precision and were brought smartly before the face. Again General Elphin returned the salute. The swords were whipped down again and sheathed. The general and the aide-de-camp walked through and out on to the damp misty space of Horse Guards Parade. Beyond the winter trees of St James's Park and the lake, the outline of Buckingham Palace was inset by long shafts of window-light. To one side, a line of coloured lamps in Piccadilly was just visible through the branches of the Mall.

"You go to St James's Square, do you?" the general asked crisply. "To the Langhams?"

"I am make up Lady Mary's table for dinner tonight, sir. John Horsfall was to have been there. But now there is a division in the House of Commons tonight over the new Electoral Reform Bill. St James's Square is a little too far for the division bell to call him."

General Elphin grunted, as if he understood but might disapprove. Their footsteps rang clear and cold on the stone of the vast ceremonial parade ground.

"My compliments to Sir William and my love to Lady Mary," he said wryly. "You may tell them I should have come too, had I been able. A division in the House is nothing to what we shall have to contend with this evening at Devonshire House. This damned business of General Wolseley must be settled. Lord Hartington means to recommend him to the Queen as Adjutant-General, in addition to the knighthood. All this for a man who has no more idea of war than chasing a few naked tribesmen or frightening away a gang of evil-smelling Gypoes. What the devil he would make of a real war against France or Germany, I have no idea. Nor has he."

"Will Hartington get his way?"

Lord Elphin pulled a face.

"I hope my presence at dinner in Devonshire House this evening may prevent it. Dammit, Algy! Imagine what would become of us with Gladstone as Prime Minister, Hartington as Secretary-at-War, and Sir Garnet Wolseley as Adjutant-General! Three men in a boat and all pulling different strokes. And you may be sure Sir Garnet does not mean to stop there. He has enough young officers about him—the Wolseley Ring, they call themselves now. The day the old Duke of Cambridge steps down, they mean to hoist Wolseley aloft as Commander-in-Chief. A pretty pickle we shall find ourselves in. There will not be a man left on the General Staff except his favourites."

They crossed the quiet stretch of the Mall beneath the trees, the lamplit railings of the palace far distant at one end and the buildings of Admiralty Arch separating them from Trafalgar Square. Lord Elphin led the way, almost bounding up the Duke of York's Steps and into the bright gaslit square of Waterloo Place, flanked on either side by the grand Regency columns of the Athenaeum and the United Services Club.

"I have General Wolseley to thank for my honeymoon," said young Lord Algernon with a laugh. "He has made the Nile safe for travellers by thrashing the Gypso army at Tel-el-Kebir."

Lord Elphin grunted again.

"Then you had best persuade young Jenny to a quick wedding. There is Gladstone who thinks empire is a moral abomination. And then there is Harty-Tarty as Secretary-at-War but who cannot endure the thought of firing a charge of buckshot into the backsides of a bunch of trouble-making niggers. And pulling the other way you have Wolseley who sees his path to glory over the bodies of unarmed tribes."

"Be fair, Uncle Elphin," said Lord Algy with a laugh. "The Arabi Pasha at Tel-el-Kebir had been armed to the teeth by the damned Turks before Wolseley thrashed him."

Lord Elphin would not have it.

“Let Wolseley try meeting Bismarck’s Prussians at Sedan, my boy. Then we shall see how much he and his precious Ring know about making war. Still, enough of that. I mean to spend an hour in the club before going on to Devonshire House. Tell me, tomorrow, how you find the Langhams. And please inform Lady Mary that I have every intention of joining them for Christmas down at Orchard Portman. Assure her of that!”

Lord Algernon with his fair mutton-chop whiskers brought his hand up to his gold rimmed staff-officer’s hat and saluted his uncle. General Elphin returned the compliment, swung round and marched up the steps of the United Service Club, whose tall elegant windows gave a handsome view of a fine ceiling cornice and full-length portraits of Crimean generals in their dress uniforms.

Algy Regis crossed the busy traffic of Pall Mall and walked quickly in the direction of St James’s Square. Towards Piccadilly, the shopping streets were bright with strings of coloured lights, hung out like gaudy boiled sweets for the festive season. Along Pall Mall, the Italian organ-grinder was pumping out his tunes, a pair of monkeys dancing on the hooded barrow which had the look of an old-fashioned funeral-cart. Lord Regis dropped a small coin in the man’s outstretched cap. Where the wide streets led towards Piccadilly and St James’s Palace, the advertisements on the buses were all for the latest luxuries and amusements. *Chocolat Menier. Hotel Victoria, Baden-Baden. The Savoy Operas. Errard Pianos. Haymarket Theatre: The Maid of the Mill, A Drama in Three Acts. Iolanthe, or the Peer and the Peri.*

Despite the chill evening fog that had begun to gather, there was a warmth and reassurance in the brightly-lit streets. The fur-coated women and the silk-hatted gentlemen with their silver-knobbed canes, the mounted sentries at the Horse Guards and the shop-windows of Piccadilly bright with good things. Lord Algernon thought of the

bloodied desert sand of Tel-el-Kebir, the broken square and the slaughter of the regiments under a burning African sky at Isandhlwana, the defeat of an imperial army by Boer settlers at Majuba Hill. How far removed such conflicts seemed from the gaiety and comfort at the heart of the Empire!

He thought of his uncle's denunciation of General Sir Garnet Wolseley. It was absurd, of course. Uncle Elphin belonged to another generation—the generation of George, Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief and cousin to the Queen. Commander-in-Chief because he was cousin to the Queen, was how most of his critics saw it. The Duke, warming his large bottom before the Horse Guards fire, had a simple and unchanging view of military matters. "Any change, at any time, for any purpose, is almost certainly a profound mistake," he would announce when some new policy was advocated. "Show me the change in military organisation which has not created more problems than it has solved."

Algy smiled. To such men as the Duke and Lord Elphin, the ruthless professionalism of Wolseley and his "Ring" of young officers was a crime against the rules of civilised warfare. But Algernon Regis felt sure that he had been right in one matter. It was thanks to Wolseley's routing of the Egyptian rebel army at Tel-el-Kebir that the River Nile was now safely in British hands and the entire region at peace. That, in turn, made possible the honeymoon voyage of Lord Regis and his bride-to-be, from Port Said to Khartoum.

Algernon Regis paused at the crossing by St James's Square while a swan's neck carriage with a pair of high stepping bays turned from the busy traffic of Pall Mall. The clatter of hansom-cabs, horse-trams, and twopenny buses, the shouts and whip-cracks of wagon-drivers fell behind as he walked into the square and round two of its sides. The clubs and hotels of the busy thoroughfare gave way to a scene of domestic prosperity.



Turning their backs upon the thoroughfares of Pall Mall and the Haymarket, Jermyn Street and Piccadilly, the tall eighteenth century houses looked inward upon the central gardens. Behind the railings of these central lawns, the great chestnut trees rose stark and leafless in the chill vapour of the December evening. Above the roofs and chimneys of the square, the moon was veiled by a gathering fog.

The pillared mansion in the corner of the square was Langham House. It had an air of brightness and sociability. Small wonder that Lady Mary would say ruefully from time to time that she might as well be running a more famous establishment of the same name—the Langham Hotel. Lord Algernon Regis walked slowly up the handsome flight of balustraded steps to the front door. He rang the bell and waited for the servant to admit him.

In the outer hall with its pair of Corinthian columns in polished black marble, Lord Regis was handing his overcoat to the footman when he saw the drawing-room door move slightly, revealing a tiny chink, immediately closed again. A thin bright line of brilliant light, instantly eclipsed. Beyond that door he pictured the familiar interior. Tall windows and long lace curtains. In December there were also the winter curtains, drapes of purple satin bound back with broad sashes. The walls were flanked by Chinese vases on which fiercely-moustached warriors contended against green serpents and armies of other regions. Cushioned ottomans and gilt-wood chairs stood tapestried and inviting on the patterns of the Afghan carpets. From the Indian prints to the African ivories, the drawing room of the Langhams' town house boasted the trophies of imperial conquest.

The drawing-room door opened a little wider. Through the opening squeezed a young woman of twenty or so. She had a rather tomboyish prettiness with her cropped brown tresses, the firm prettiness of her face, and her thoughtful brown eyes. These qualities were enhanced by her present



costume. Jenny had been riding in the park that afternoon and was still wearing the blouse and jodhpurs of the excursion. The blouse hinted at breasts that were full and firm, quite a strong young back and a waist that was trim without being emaciated. The brown jodhpurs were the most revealing costume worn on a girl's lower limbs. They showed a hint of sturdiness in the width of her young hips, a strength in her thighs, and a slight seductive weight in the cheeks of Jenny's bottom. As she called softly to her visitor, her voice had a remarkably full and seductive quality.

"Algernon! Algy! Here I am! You see? I always know your knock even before Rogers opens the door. Now, then. First things first, because I must go and dress for dinner this instant! You're not to go into the drawing-room yet. Mama doesn't want her preparations being spied at. She insists upon that. We are all to wait quietly and then be dazzled when the time comes for the grand opening. Five minutes more. The gong will sound and we shall all be admitted to find the table set for tonight. You understand?"

Lord Algernon smiled and looked down at the girl without saying a word. How pretty and innocently provoking she was. She was his Jenny, and he had long promised himself that she should be his bride. The tousled brown hair whose curls clustered so appealingly. The firm and rather resolute features that were so prim and pretty at the same time. The brown eyes that had a look of exciting apprehension when she was talking to a man, as if she could not quite trust him—or perhaps could not quite trust herself!

All this was to say nothing of the girl's strong young figure, the shapely lines of her sturdy young hips and the promise they gave of honeymoon pleasures to come. She would spread herself without fuss to be ridden, he thought, and breed easily when the time came. He stood there silently for a moment returning her smile and enjoying the happy look shining in her bright eyes. Long after she had

finished speaking, he could hear the soft and insinuating music of her voice. How full it was of promise and temptation, a tone that said more to him than a host of words.

In almost every way, it appeared, Jenny had shown that she loved him. But if that were so, why did she withhold the truest sign of all? He frowned a little without realising that he had done so and his face was set in a line of doubt. The girl looked at him quickly and something like alarm appeared in her brown eyes, as if perhaps she feared he might be unwell.

“What is the matter, Algy? For goodness’ sake! Tell me what it is. I’d rather know if something’s really wrong. No! It’s nothing serious, is it? Are you angry because I shut the door of the other room and wouldn’t let you in just now? Oh, this is all too silly for words. I want to know what’s the matter.”

Lord Algernon Regis smiled.

“Silly girl!” he said, scolding her in pretence, “I was just a bit browned off because I promised Uncle Charles de Vane that I’d come and fetch you for an hour before dinner. Just long enough to drive to Portman Square and meet him while he’s in town. Now that’s impossible. I know what your mother’s five minutes means. Half an hour or more. Anyway, the upshot is that Uncle Charles isn’t dining with us tonight. But he’s heard all about you and so I was to fetch you for his inspection and approval. That’s all. It can’t be helped, pretty Jenny. Can it?”

Jenny slipped her arm through his.

“And of course you shall fetch me, my dear,” she said, pretending to consider the matter seriously, “I shall be ready in five minutes. Mama’s five minutes. You’re not to disappoint her. She loves her surprises as much as you love—whatever it is you love. You know she’d be hurt if we went off now and you never had the chance to admire the way she’d laid out the dinner-table. You won’t spoil that for her, will you, Algy? I know you won’t. A little

patience, now. If not for my sake, then for hers. Next week we shall all be down at Orchard Portman and you won't have another chance to impress her for three or four weeks."

"Little fraud!" he said gently, inclining his head towards her.

Jenny laughed.

"That's better," she said, "better than the look you had a moment ago. Enough to turn milk sour and frighten a girl out of her wits."

She broke from him and led the way, half running and half dancing towards the curve of the fine staircase.

"Come on!" she called, impatient and laughing. "We'll go to the upstairs drawing-room. You can give me your advice about the Christmas presents I've chosen for everyone."

In the long upstairs drawing-room that overlooked the misty square, they walked under a branch of mistletoe that hung from the first chandelier. Lord Algernon slid an arm round Jenny's warm young waist in her thin silk blouse. She struggled a little, laughing and trying to push him away. Still he held her, aware how close he was to exploring her. He had never touched her bare skin, apart from her hands and her face when he kissed her. Yet now it would take only a movement, in her present costume, and he might have her breasts in his hands. If he managed only a thrust under the waistband of the jodhpurs, he would feel his hands running over the silken smoothness of Jenny Langham's bottom-cheeks. At the mere thought of it he felt the heat and stiffness of his manhood. And he knew that the excitement of fondling Jenny's sleek, rather muddy-skinned nudity would have caused his passion to boil over there and then. Surely if he wanted to fondle her bare backside so badly that, in itself, would give her pleasure.

"We must crush this rebellion," he said breathlessly, holding her under the mistletoe sprig. "We can't have fine old Yuletide customs ignored."

She would still have broken away, Algernon thought, but his strength was the greater. With eyes downcast, Jenny at last put her face up to be kissed. Algy Regis stooped over her, still holding her tight. The kiss that he took was a lover's kiss, forcing her lips with his tongue, tasting Jenny as he made her taste him. He gagged her protests with this kissing and saw close to him the startled widening of her brown eyes as she mewed with dismay and tried to push herself from him.

When he let her go, Jenny sprang back from him, rubbing her lips on the back of her hand. Her eyes crinkled with the first sign of tears.

"Algy! How could you!"

There would be no tears. Algy knew it. There was a hardness in Jenny Langham that he had become increasingly aware of that autumn. She did not act like a girl who has another lover. Had that been the case, she would surely tell him so and end their engagement. The young Lord Regis wondered if she was cold, as some women are towards men. Perhaps the coldness was born in her, so that she was helpless to do anything about it. Or was she one of those girls, about whom he had read but never encountered, who can find love only in the arms of another woman?

At first he had been shocked and apprehensive at these signs of rejection. Now he was angered. Turning with a shrug, he studied a fine portrait by George Barrett of a lady in a blue dress holding a child to her skirts. He sensed that Jenny was standing several feet behind him, shoulders hunched and pocket handkerchief dabbing at her eyes in a display of distress. The little hypocrite!

"You don't love me, then," he said, stating the truth rather than questioning her.

"Oh, Algy! How can you say that!"

"I say it, Jenny, because I'm not the fool you take me for! How else should I account for your tears and your terror—your disgust indeed? You should have seen your-

self pulling back as you did! A girl that loves a man—a girl that's to marry a man—returns his kiss! She doesn't run from him! Unless she prefers someone else."

"Algernon!"

But now he turned to her, his face pale and strained with anger.

"I don't choose to be made a fool of, Jenny. Will you still be so particular when we're married? Well? Will you? Is kissing—real kissing—always going to revolt you? And what of the rest that must happen between us? How am I to believe anything except that either such love between men and women disgusts you—or that you prefer someone else to me?"

Resolute young woman though she was, Jenny flinched at his questions as if they were blows.

"Algy! Please! How can I answer you, when you behave like this? When we're married, it may be different. I can't tell. But there are some things that still frighten me a little, perhaps because I don't fully understand them. I know that what must be, must be, between husband and wife. But you must give a little too, my dear. What is asked of a woman by her husband, for the sake of love, is the greatest sacrifice she can make. A woman consents to it only for the sake of love. A woman who gives herself in that way without love is only to be pitied for her sufferings. Or else she must be the most abominable wretch."

Framed by the tall window of the upstairs drawing-room with its corded curtains of green velvet, Lord Algernon Regis shook his head.

"How can you think it, Jenny?" he asked more softly. "How can you believe that love between men and women is all suffering and sacrifice? Who tells you such nonsense? What you think you will suffer in marriage is an illusion. What I suffer now by your coldness is reality."

"Then you have only to wait until we are married and you will find happiness," she said quickly.

"And the disgust that you show in your face when I hold you in that way? What am I to think of it?"



On the floor below them, a gong was struck three times. His question was to receive no answer from the girl.

"Mama wants us to inspect her dinner arrangements," Jenny said brightly, suddenly putting from her the memory of their quarrel. "We shall go down now. Then I shall go and dress. After dinner we shall drive to Portman Square and you may present me to your Uncle Charles. Will that satisfy you?"

Lord Algernon stared at her in astonishment. She had put the subject from her, as if it was a disagreeable matter never to be referred to again. Jenny's brown eyes shone with sudden good humour. Her anger had apparently gone, leaving no trace of ill-will towards him. Her lover was suddenly awkward and embarrassed, as no doubt she intended he should be. They went downstairs together.

At the dining-room door, Lady Mary extended her arms in a gesture of proud proprietorship, as if waiting to be complimented. The servants were ranged in a row along the wall. Both the table and the sideboard had been draped with white linen, set with cut-glass and silver. In their vases and bouquets, the rare orchids added a faint perfume to the harsh white glare of the gasolier, suspended by a fine chain from the centre of the ceiling. Jenny took her lover's hand. She led him forward, as if no word of disagreement had ever passed between them.

But Algernon Regis felt a profound unease. There were stories murmured and hinted at in London society of young women who had married men such as he, while harbouring an aversion to the act of love and even to the mere presence of the male sex. As soon as the ceremony was over and the honeymoon beginning, the dupe learnt his mistake. His promised happiness was turned to a life of misery within a few hours. His young bride remained a married virgin. And he, poor fellow, might blow his brains out rather than reveal his folly to the world.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE SMALL INFORMAL dinner had almost ended at Langham House. Algernon Regis and Sir William had taken their sorbet and the decanter of port into the fine wrought-iron conservatory that opened across the courtyard at the rear of the ground-floor rooms. Sir William had never discarded the habit of treating his fruit or pudding as separate from the main meal. It was a habit acquired when he was a Cambridge undergraduate at Trinity three decades before, when men of his college still remembered the customs of the regency and King William.

The high-domed conservatory had the look of an Arabian folly, built in the "Eastern" craze of the Prince Regent's seaside Pavilion at Brighton. It served as a heated greenhouse, overarched by ferns and broad-leaved trellis-climbers, and also as Sir William's billiard-room. A full-sized table with its bagged net pockets and green baize stood to one side on the tiled floor. The warm air that filtered through the boiler vents gave a dank and tropical oppression to the room. In the chill December night, its humid warmth condensed and clouded the panes of ornamental glass.

With his cousin Wentworth Pugh of the Colonial Office, Sir Rupert Deere, QC, Judge of the Court of Admiralty, and Captain Lord Algernon Regis, Sir William discussed the scandals of the day. A row was brewing in the House of Commons over proposals to raise the age of sexual consent for women from thirteen to sixteen. Sir William did not like it.

“You reduce your breeding stock, sir,” he said irritably when Mr Pugh found merit in the idea. “You reduce it in that part of the female population which is the most healthy and vigorous. If a woman of the lower orders is to have a short expectation of life, she had better breed early or she may not live to breed at all. You might find manufacturing districts where the expectation of life is only to the age of seventeen. It seems a bit hard if they may not have their fling until their sixteenth birthday! Hey? A bit hard, Cousin Wentworth? Hey? You would make them nuns as well as barren, would you not? And I’ll be damned if they would thank you for that. The little sluts will spread their legs for a man at thirteen or fourteen whatever your laws may say! And how are you to prevent ’em? Hey?”

The conversation languished. Sir William announced that they would join the ladies in the drawing-room. Lady Mary and her daughter, as well as Mrs Pugh and Lady Deere, had withdrawn there to be attended by Atkins the footman and Tilly the maid with water ices and coffee. As the four men entered the drawing-room, Jenny’s rather tousled crop of brown tresses was bowed over a magazine from which she was reading aloud. She frowned a little with concentration in the effort of reading from columns of densely packed newsprint. Lord Algernon saw that the Christmas Number of *The Illustrated London News* lay open on her knee. Its cover was a mass of dark-green holly and white snow patterned by red berries and gold inset.

“In a great and decisive battle on Tuesday the thirteenth, at five o’clock in the morning, Sir Garnet Wolseley’s column of fifteen thousand men met the rebel army of Arabi Pasha. The column had made a night-march of six miles from Kassassin to Tel-el-Kebir. In a great and decisive battle, General Wolseley’s force routed the Egyptian rebels. In less than half-an-hour after arriving they stormed the fortified positions held by Arabi Pasha’s army of twenty-two thousand men and forty pieces of artillery. The enemy force was completely dispersed. Arabi Pasha fled, leaving the road open to Zigazag and Cairo. . . .”

She stopped reading this celebration of recent history as the others came in and sat down. Algy nodded.

"Uncle Elphin hasn't much time for Wolseley or his army-reform politics. But he admits the fellow has saved the day in the Middle East. You may sail the length of the Nile from Port Said to Khartoum now, safe as you might stroll down Pall Mall."

"Safer, indeed," said Sir Rupert Deere, stretching his long lawyer's legs and easing his belly in the tapestried chair. "Johnny Chamberlain had his pocket picked on the steps of the Travellers Club last week. Young Archie Tarrant's boy was set upon within yards of Marlborough House and his watch taken."

"Wolseley won't have it," Algy said. "He protests that he is dissatisfied with our administration of Egypt. Uncle Elphin would take Jenny and I on his Nile voyage after the wedding. But I suppose Wolseley might put a stop to such things. If the steamers don't run, we shan't go."

Jenny frowned.

"But if Uncle Elphin is a general, the same as Sir Garnet Wolseley is a general, who is Sir Garnet to say he can't go?"

Sir Rupert laughed at her simplicity. But it was Algy who explained.

"Because, darling Jenny, they are two sorts of generals. Uncle Elphin is a major-general. Wolseley is a lieutenant-general—and that's senior."

Jenny looked sulky.

"But a major is more than a lieutenant, isn't he?"

Algy smiled at her.

"Not when they're generals. It's Wolseley that has the last word. Believe me."

Jenny closed the magazine.

"I believe you," she said crossly. "It just seems a silly lot of nonsense to me, that's all. They're all generals. I should have thought that was good enough."

"Would that it were, my dear," said Sir Rupert with

another laugh. "Would that it were. The politics of the country and the management of the War Office might run a lot smoother without our best commanders quarrelling over such differences of rank."

Jenny got up and returned the magazine to the fine walnut reading-table with its barley-twist legs and mother-of-pearl inlay.

"I think it's silly," she said firmly. "And if Algy is going to take me to meet his Uncle Charles, I should like to go now."

Lady Mary nodded and watched her daughter go out. She laid a hand on Algernon's arm.

"You must be patient with her, my dear," she said quietly. "For a little while."

The young man smiled as if he understood. Jenny returned presently, muffled in her furs. Set against her soft young face and cropped tresses this costume gave her a seductively cuddly look.

"Promise not to stay too late, my darling," said Lady Mary as Jenny kissed her on the cheek. "We shall have the journey to Orchard Portman tomorrow."

"I promise for her," Lord Algernon said, taking and kissing the hand of his prospective mother-in law. "It's only nine o'clock now. From here to Portman Square will not take us long. I shall bring her back before midnight. Never fear."

A hansom-cab, called by the footman, was waiting in the corner of the square at the foot of the steps. The two young people got in. Without a word, the driver whipped up his horse and started off at a good pace. Piccadilly and the streets of shops nearby were filled with busy, swarming crowds of pedestrians, each loaded with numerous parcels. The shops and their windows were brilliantly lit. Their doors seemed to open and shut continuously. The shopmen darted to and fro, quick to serve the throng of customers whose numbers overflowed on to the pavements outside. Working people, for months past, and been



economising on their expenses, depositing their savings shilling by shilling in the "Christmas Clubs." Now they had withdrawn the money and were spending it without a care on the provisions for Christmas dinner and the presents to be given on Boxing Day to their family and friends.

The cab rolled north along Bond Street, where the jewellers' windows glittered under their electric lamps. Algernon took Jenny's hand and caressed it lightly. He studied her in the faint reflection of light from the street. Jenny! The lightly tousled tresses of brown hair that scarcely did more than touch her collar at the back while clustering a little, so prettily on her forehead! The firm-boned young face with its pretty mouth and chin! The steady look of her brown eyes! She nestled up to him on the buttoned-leather seat. So cold, so chaste, he thought, and yet such a flirt!

She could not endure to be touched nor kissed properly. Yet when they danced, he could feel a natural sensuality in the pressure of her strong young body. As he held her in his arms for the waltz or the polka, her nostrils seemed to flare and he felt a quiver in her limbs. It would serve her right if he was to ravish her as she deserved—even to thrash her with his riding-whip before bedding her on the honeymoon night!—for leading him on and then rejecting even his lover's kisses. The kisses she permitted were no more than the pecks on her cheek which her own parents or even her uncle might have given her.

Jenny deserved to be taught a lesson, Lord Algernon thought. He had every intention of being her teacher. In his present mood, he declined to wait until their marriage. He would have her now. Tonight. Then she might reject him if she chose. At least he would escape the disaster of taking a frigid bride if she broke with him now.

The hansom was swinging down Oxford Street. Despite the lateness of the hour, the shops here were also blazing with light. Rows of carriages and cabs were drawn up along the famous promenades. They crossed Regent Circus. Using the end of her umbrella, the girl was just

pushing up the little trap in the roof of the cab to attract the attention of the driver on his perch above them. But Algy grasped her arm and the lid fell shut again. She struggled a little, still trying to stop the cab.

"Don't you see?" she gasped, resisting a little but not yet understanding. "He's taking us the wrong way!"

Algernon held her back against the seat.

"He's going the way I told him. Sit back, Jenny, and relax. I want to talk to you—seriously. I can't do that in the presence of your family, nor even in front of Uncle Charles."

She stopped struggling but there was no mistaking the tension in her body. Such a plaintive little-girl voice it was now!

"You frighten me, Algy! You act so strangely. If you must tell me something, tell me now. I'm quite sure the driver won't overhear you."

"Presently, Jenny," he said softly, still holding her. "We shall talk more easily in the place where I'm taking you."

Jenny stared at him in the faint reflection of light, searching, as if trying to see his face and read his thoughts.

"As you wish," she said feebly. Nevertheless, she withdrew the hand that he had been stroking. After that, she made no further attempt to oppose him before they reached their destination. After all, it would hardly do for her to jump from the cab and return home alone. Better to hear him out than to start a scandal.

The cab turned another corner and entered the narrow thoroughfare of Wardour Street, leading into the crowded and garishly-lit heart of Soho with its coffeeshops and Italian restaurants. Algernon lifted the little trap of the roof with the knob of his cane and ordered the driver to rein in his horse. They stopped outside a small hotel. The hall-porter came forward with an expectant and obsequious look.

Jenny took in every detail with nervous eagerness. The

hotel had once been a private house and it bore a look of respectability. But, she admitted to herself, it was an air of contrived respectability. The varnish of the front door was a little too shiny and the foyer seemed a little too cosy. The chairs and sofas appeared too fully padded and the carving of the furniture was vulgarly ornate. Above all, the plum-coloured velvet hangings were deeply folded and obtrusive. They made her think of the scandalous reports of white slavery in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, of places where girls were strapped down and their submission enforced while the velvet muffled their screams.

Her suspicions were absurd, of course. Her companion was well-known to her family and they were in one of London's busiest streets. There was no danger of kidnap and white slavery! Yet she could not help noticing that the porter who showed them in behaved with a familiarity and a fawning manner towards Lord Algernon Regis. Algy had been here many times before, she supposed. It was as if the two men—master and servant—shared an understanding that was fit only for scoundrels.

At that moment, the proprietor of the hotel stepped forward. He was a curious type, a little bald-headed Swiss with enormous hands. There was a knowingness in his eyes and his smile. He was just the man to offer useful advice of the sort that petty criminals give to others trying to remain just on the right side of the law. And in this, Jenny was right. When the Marlborough Street magistrate fined him for taking in guests without luggage, this little hotel proprietor would recoup the amount easily by small additions to his guests' daily bills. If the charge was more serious, then it was his "manager" who appeared before the court. The manager was an obliging fellow who would be liberally compensated for any fine or short term of imprisonment imposed upon him.

Leading his guests to the first floor the proprietor opened a door and stood back. Algernon nodded at him and followed Jenny into the room. Then the young Lord Regis

turned the key in the lock to prevent interruptions. The electric light revealed a bright clean bedroom with fresh-looking wallpaper and curtains. But the first thing that drew the girl's attention was the bed itself, with its copper rods and mother-of-pearl rings, its embroidered silk counterpane and its general air of boudoir impropriety. No bedroom she had been in before had ever contained such an object as this.

Jenny stood at the centre of the room, motionless and uncertain, the electric light catching the sheen of her light brown collar-length tresses. There was an air of page-boy innocence in her looks which added to the suggestiveness of the scene. Algernon turned, the colour rising in his face, and took her in his arms. She pulled free without a word, very stiff and upright as she backed towards the door.

With a grimace of impatience, he snatched at her wrists, holding them very hard and very tight, hurting her by the strength of his grip. Jenny's brown eyes widened. The pretty features of her firm young face were strained and taut, her cheeks growing paler. He slipped his hand up her arms until he was pushing her by her shoulders towards the bed. Winding one arm round her waist, he pressed against her, trying to kiss her. Jenny's hands instinctively contracted like birds' claws as she strove in vain to gouge the skin of his face with her nails. Whatever affection there had been before was gone now, from both these young people. Jenny could think only of escape from him, at once and for ever. Algernon cared nothing for the future but he meant to have her now—across the ornate bed of the bawdy-house boudoir!

"I would rather you killed me!" she gasped, struggling against him as his intention became clear.

"No you wouldn't." He was almost laughing now. "There isn't a woman anywhere that would rather be killed, whatever they may say. Don't be a little fool, Jenny. We're to be married, aren't we? There's nothing

going to happen in this room that won't happen the first night we're together then!"

"Stop it!" she cried. "Let me go!"

"Don't be a little fool!" he panted again. "You wouldn't feel very flattered if I took you at your word and left you alone! Would you?"

Jenny made no reply, beyond her panting and her continued struggling against him. But in a while her strength was going to be exhausted. Twisting, lunging, bending, she strove to break free of him.

"Algy! If you have any respect for me. . . . ! Any feeling for me. . . . !"

He said nothing, still trying to push her down on the bed. She could hear the breath surging in his lungs. The short cut of her brown hair left Jenny's neck partly bare and she could feel upon it the warm moisture of his breath, the thick and strong-smelling breath of a stallion with a mare. It was more than she could endure. She managed to twist away in his arms so that he was behind her, bending her forward now. The thin silk was drawn tight at the rear. Lord Algernon's hot, stiff manhood pressed against the shape of the tomboyish cheeks of young Jenny Langham's bottom. The bitch was asking for it now, he thought, and she was going to get it.

Jenny bowed her head further, wanting only to be rid of the odious breath, the moist vapour, that scorched her bare neck from behind. He bent her further. Now he had hold of both her wrists in one hand, while his other hand was preparing himself for the outrage he proposed to commit upon her. With all her strength, she wrenched away from the single hand that held her. With a howl of revulsion, she broke free.

There followed a wild chase round and round the table. It was a pursuit which under other circumstances might have appeared comic. Jenny ran in a circle without attempting to change direction, her arms held up in front of her face as if to avoid the sight of her attacker. Giddy and



distraught, she would crash into a piece of furniture, stagger and fall, then pull herself up, only to knock against the wall and bruise herself. The man, at once ridiculous and hideous with his frantic gestures and his suit now unbuttoned, pursued her with utter determination. At last he seized her again. He tried to lift her, as if to carry her to the bed. But at that moment he staggered and turned paler. His features were drawn and rigid in a strange spasm. His eyes rolled in his head and it seemed that he was sightless for that instant.

Jenny understood nothing for a moment, except that the danger was past. She was still frightened and yet the threat was withdrawn as this convulsive change came over him. For the time being, she remained standing rigid at the centre of the room, immobile with terror and revulsion. Lord Algernon Regis was rearranging his dress, his back to her as he dipped the corner of a towel in the water-jug. Jenny bent forward a little, as if to watch what he was doing. When he had finished and stood upright again, it was she who spoke. Her voice was gentle, as if they both understood that his need and her danger were over.

"I want to leave . . . to leave here . . . now . . . Are you ready to go?"

She went across to the oval glass of the dressing-table and patted her hair into place. Algernon said nothing as she went to the door and unlocked it. He followed her down the stairs and spoke briefly to the proprietor, who seemed suddenly tense and uneasy, as if he knew that the seduction had gone badly. Several gold sovereigns changed hands and Lord Algernon followed the girl outside, where the hansom was still waiting.

"You may send it away," Jenny said to her escort, "I will go nowhere with you in a cab again. So that there shall be no scandal and no talk, I will keep our appointment with your Uncle Charles. Otherwise, I shall return to St James's Square. Whichever it is to be, I shall walk. For the rest, it is quite understood that everything is over between us. You realise that, I trust?"

Lord Algernon took a step back from her and then a step forward again, as they stood on the Soho pavement upon which the red and yellow lights of the cafés and coffee-shops were reflected. A barrel organ in the distance began playing "Believe me, if all these endearing young charms." Algernon Regis tried to clasp the girl's hands in his own. He looked truly penitent and there was an edge of tears in his voice.

"Jenny! Darling Jenny! Please forgive me!"

She shook her brown cropped tresses as a sign of refusal. More urgently, the young officer pleaded his case.

"But I love you, Jenny. . . . I tell you, I love you. All this was only because I love you. . . . If I did not love you, Jenny. . . ."

"Impossible," she said quietly. "You have no idea of what love is. Sensuality, I daresay, and beastliness! The first condition for true love is the respect that a man shows to a woman."

"Love sets no conditions, Jenny. There is passion. What is love without passion?"

She sighed, as if weary of the conversation.

"If you love me, Algernon, then say no more about it. Not a word more. I am utterly exhausted. We will keep our appointment with your uncle, if you like, for the look of the thing. And there let it end."

Algernon Regis was sufficiently master of himself to see that the appointment must be kept. To return to St James's Square, after an hour's unaccounted absence in a hansom cab, would be hard to explain. He was aware that a scandal in the Langham household was bound to come to the ears of his other uncle, Lord Elphin. Once that happened, his military career as well as his proposed marriage would be in peril. Better to save what could still be saved.

"It shall be as you wish," he said quietly. "We shall keep our appointment with Uncle Charles. It would be impossible to return without having done so. After that, we must decide what is to happen."

But Jenny would say nothing in response to this. The young woman had decided in her own mind what was to happen for the future. There was no persuasion in the power of Algernon Regis nor any member of their families that could alter her decision now. Other women might see charm and wealth in young Lord Regis. But Jenny had seen him that evening as a beast in rut. He had been frightening and menacing. Perhaps she could have forgiven that and submitted to him as her master. But he had also looked ridiculous and contemptible, chasing her round the room with the absurd erection poking pathetically out of his unbuttoned trousers. It was this ridicule and contempt that had destroyed him as her lover.

The walk from Wardour Street to Portman Square was all the more miserable by contrast with the bustling preparations for the festive season that filled the shops of Oxford Street. They came at last to the elegant terrace of tall Georgian houses with the fine wrought-ironwork of their balconies. Algernon rang the bell and the handsome front-door was opened by Charles de Vane in person.

## CHAPTER THREE

THERE WAS SUCH gloom between the two young people that only Charles de Vane's effervescent enthusiasm saved the day. He had been with Wolseley at Tel-el-Kebir and more recently in the Sudan, where "Chinese" Gordon had been appointed the Queen's governor-general. Two weeks earlier he had returned to London with reports for the intelligence department of the War Office and, particularly, for his brother-in-law Lord Elphin.

On the whole, relations were distant between the two brothers-in-law, whose ages differed considerably by virtue of Elphin's marriage to a very young wife. Charles de Vane admired the efficiency and ambition of Sir Garnet Wolseley. Lord Elphin was an old War Office man, an officer of the General Staff whose loyalty was to the Duke of Cambridge and to things as they had been in the past. However, both were agreed that the Middlesbrough election of 1879, bringing to power the liberal and vacillating old man Gladstone, had been a disaster for the nation and still more so for the Empire.

Uncle Charles led the way through to his dining-room, where he had not long finished his meal and where the servants had set out fruit, nuts, and port wine for his guests.

"Sit you down!" he said cheerfully, "sit you down, the pair of you! Let me look at the beautiful Jenny. My congratulations, Algernon, and blessings on you both. You're a lucky fellow, Algy, and I said so the minute I

saw her photograph. She's an honour and credit to us all. I'm a bit of physiognomist in my way, you know. And I tell you that girl's heart is as kind as her face is pretty. What?"

The gallant captain poured a glass of ruby port for each of them. Then he mounted his favourite hobby-horse.

"Now, I'll tell you what you should do, my boy. With Her Majesty's gracious permission, you must take service in Egypt. Come and join our fellows in the Sudan. We need some decent officers and brave soldiers out there. If your chaps think they can finish off the Mahdi and his black devils with nothing but a few cowardly regiments of Egyptians, they'll find their mistake soon enough. That's Gladstone's wishful thinking. Sanctimonious old humbug that he is! Your Egyptian *fellaheen* talks brave enough, when the enemy's out of sight. At the first whiff of gunpowder, you won't see 'em for dust. And Gladstone won't get involved. Doesn't like the sound of imperialism. And what's the upshot? English officers trying to lead a rabble of Gyppees. Like mounting the champion jockey on the back of a mule. Eh?"

Algernon managed a smile at this. He set down his glass.

"And what's to become of Jenny, Uncle Charles? A fellow can't marry and then desert his bride for years to come. By Jove, he can't."

Charles de Vanè chuckled.

"Take the girl with you. She's not a milkmaid, is she? Look at her. There's a young woman of spirit. Get spliced quick as you can. And then come out to Cairo, the pair of you. Join one of the steamers on the Nile and come to see me in Khartoum. Easy as taking the train down to Brighton."

"I don't know about that, Uncle Charles," Jenny said with an uneasy laugh.

"Stuff and nonsense, m' dear. You needn't stand idle. I daresay those pretty little hands of yours are nimble enough.



If the worst happens, we shall need level-headed young women to manage the nursing of our wounded. What? Nothing in the world helps a sick man to health as much as a woman's care. I saw one or two of the field-hospitals last year. Some hard-bitten wild-eyed trooper would fly into a passion, snatch the medicine-bottle out of the Surgeon-Major's hand and smash it against the wall. But the minute that man heard a woman's voice, he would smooth down and act good as gold. Nothing like a woman for finding that a soft answer turns away wrath. Eh? A woman has the gift of words that go straight to the heart of such a ruffian and bring tears of comfort to his eyes. That's why we need women there, my dear. Good women. I've seen a fellow gulp down a medicine that he'd throw through the window if the Surgeon-Major brought it to him. But because it's held in a woman's hand, he'll drink it to please her. That's the psychology of it. We've got Miss Nightingale and her sisters of mercy to thank for that. The mere presence of a woman at the bedside raises the morale of a wounded man. And there's nothing like morale for healing a fellow's wounds."

As Charles de Vane talked, Jenny gazed at him. Despite the horror of the Wardour Street room an hour before, she was smiling at the gallant captain as he spoke. His boyish chatter relieved the tension of her nerves and the heated thoughts of her brain. There was so much obvious good nature and enthusiasm in him.

But while she listened and took in every word, another part of her mind brooded on the treachery of Algernon Regis. How impatient she had been for his arrival that afternoon. How eagerly she had run out into the handsome hallway of Langham House when she heard his peremptory incisive knock, ready to be taken into his arms. And then how quickly he had tried to conceal something in his look, as if he had never meant her to see it. She had thought nothing of it at the time, believing that he was merely uneasy about a matter of his own. And then he had

kissed her in that horrible way, as they stood together in the upstairs drawing-room.

Worst of all there had been the trap—the hired room in Wardour Street. He had arranged it long before, he must have done. Algernon Regis had planned her ruin, as carefully as he might have planned their wedding ceremony or their honeymoon. It had not been done in the heat of passion, after all. In her heart she might have forgiven the overflow of powerful emotions. But the room in the Wardour Street Hotel had required cold calculation. Cold and cruel. He had intended to defile her in a place that had witnessed scenes of debauchery she could scarcely imagine. In her mind's eye, she saw again the frenzy of his sudden, accidental release, his clothes disordered and his face contorted by ugly spasms. Love, he had called it. But it was not love. Jenny understood enough about love to recognise its presence—or its absence. This had been cold-hearted cunning of the basest kind, planned in advance and without mercy. It was worse, worse than anything she had imagined. She would die rather than be tied to such a man for the rest of her life. Her mind was made up—inflexibly and unalterably.

But as she thought all these things, she smiled gently at Uncle Charles.

“The voyage would do the pair of you a world of good,” he was saying. “Take me, for example. I’ve been in London a couple of weeks and I can feel the effect on my lungs. A London winter is the worst thing in the world for a man’s health. And an English education is almost the worst thing for a girl’s well-being. I grant you it develops a girl’s physique and turns out good housewives with all the social graces. But it tells them little about life and mankind. The Continentals teach their girls to be wary of men. Here we teach them to trust. Girls are ignorant of men. When it comes to flirtation, girls are cruel because they have no idea of the passions they rouse and the pain they cause. Then, on the wedding-night, their lack of

knowledge makes most brides seem victims of a terrible vengeance. They have not much idea of what to expect. And what they experience seems like nothing but pain and humiliation at the hands of their partners."

Charles de Vane refilled his glass and studied it, turning it against the light.

"How much better," he resumed, "that they should travel and learn, be educated by example as well as precept. The opportunities are there. You take my advice, my young friends. Choose Egypt and the Nile for your wedding-trip. You shall come back wiser and happier. And I shall be happier, too, for having had you as my guests."

There was no mistaking the eagerness that this produced in Algernon's face. Uncle Charles had said just the things that might persuade Jenny of her foolishness. But there was no time to discuss the idea of a honeymoon on the Nile. Young Lord Regis had promised to have Miss Langham home before midnight. When they left Portman Square, she still refused to go by cab with him. They took the Underground to Piccadilly and came out near Jermyn Street with only a little distance to walk to St James's Square.

As the door of Langham House was opened, Algernon murmured to the girl.

"Uncle Charles is right, you know. You forgive me, don't you, Jenny? Forget and forgive?"

"I have no more to say about it, Algy."

"But you must, Jenny. One word. One word to give me a little hope."

"Understand me, Algy. If I spoke such a word, it would come from my lips and not from my heart. You ask me to forget? Very well, I forget. Let us both forget about one another. It is quite the best thing. Indeed, it is the only thing that remains. Take my hand as a friend, Algy, and let us part friends. Good-bye."

The door closed between them. Jenny walked up the broad sweep of the handsomely curved staircase, holding

herself stiff and erect. Soon she was in her own room, a boudoir carefully arranged and prettily decorated. Throwing a wild look around her, her tense nerves relaxing, she barely had time to dismiss the maid who was waiting there before bursting into tears.

With her elbows on the lace-cover of the dressing-table and her head buried in her arms, she wept long and copiously. Relief came at last as her heart overflowed and the tension fell away. A numbness spread through her brain until she cried and cried without truly remembering why. The light of the electric lamp filtered through her fingers and almost hurt her by its brilliance. Jenny looked up, the lashes of her brown eyes dewed by tears, which caused the light to blur and sparkle in all directions.

A feeling of exhaustion overcame her. Though she had been the victim that evening, she thought only of how to make amends for the happiness that her family and her friends must now lose. There would be no wedding, no celebrations. As if she had been to blame for driving Algernon to assault her, Jenny thought of generosity, of self-denial and sacrifice. She thought of Algernon and even mourned the loss of him. But then a feeling of nausea and repulsion filled her at the memory of what he had attempted. Jenny began to nourish a horror of the male, a profound contempt and loathing for the passions of the flesh. It was humanity as a whole that she wanted to serve. She longed to show impersonal love and impersonal tenderness. The affection that filled her heart so powerfully must be lavished on the sufferings of the whole world.

This state of reflection lasted only for a while. Then, taking her almost by surprise, her tears began to flow and she lay sobbing on the pink silk cover of the bed. By the time that she pulled herself together, the traffic of the square outside had fallen quiet and frost had rimmed the trees in the central gardens. The bulls-eye lamp of the helmeted policeman on the beat glimmered across the wide spaces. Further off, there was the rumble of iron-rimmed

wheels along the wide avenues of Piccadilly and Pall Mall, the market-carts carrying their morning supplies to Berwick Street and Covent Garden.

It was a week later when Captain Charles de Vane received a letter at his rooms in Portland Place. It had been posted from Orchard Portman, the country house of the Langhams in the heart of Somerset. He read it and shook his head, as if its contents made no sense to him at all.

“Dear Uncle Charles—if you will let me call you that. I want to be your niece but I can never be Algernon’s wife. I shall never marry—neither him nor anyone else. Do not ask me why—no questions, I beg you, dear Uncle Charles. Will you take me with you to Egypt and the Nile? I have made up my mind that I shall go there and do what I can to help in nursing the sick and wounded among our soldiers.

Jenny Langham.”

Charles de Vane thought about the strange turn of events for the rest of the day. In his ignorance, it seemed to him that the quarrel between the two young people could not be as serious as the letter suggested. Girls were apt to be extreme after a tiff and to announce their separation from the whole of mankind forever. Captain de Vane decided that he would write next day, telling Jenny not to be a silly girl but to embrace the prospect of such a marriage and come to Egypt as his guest. He would use politer language but that would be the gist of his message.

Next day at breakfast, he opened the pages of the *Morning Post* and was perusing the announcements in the “Personal” column. An item caught his attention.

“The marriage previously announced between Lord Algernon Regis of The Albany, London W.1. and Miss Langham of St James’s Square, London S.W.1 will not now take place.”

Captain de Vane shook his head and sighed. He went



through to his study. On the blotter of his desk lay an envelope addressed to Miss Langham, urging her to make it up with Algy Regis. In half an hour more, it would have been posted. But the captain took it up and tore it in quarters. Then he sat down and wrote a second letter to the young woman. He doubted that her enthusiasm for tending the sick and wounded would survive the reality of battle and disease. All the same he wrote to her, promising to see what could be done about suitable employment under Sir Evelyn Baring, Her Majesty's Consul-General at Cairo.

## CHAPTER FOUR

CAPTAIN DE VANE WAS no anchorite. He would have been the very first to admit it. At the same time, he was fully conscious of the danger in attempting to succeed with Jenny where his nephew had failed. It would not suit well with his new role as Uncle Charles. In any case, de Van  had made his plans. Other soldiers of empire contented themselves with tailing a bit of brown-skinned female flesh. Charles de Vane had no hard and fast rules in the matter. In general, though, he preferred home-grown delights.

This preference crossed his mind as he stood with Lieutenant Tremaine and Captain Armstrong on the Royal Pier at Southampton. Officers returning with their ladies to Cairo were allowed a choice of routes. Some preferred to take the boat-train from Charing Cross to Dover and Calais. Then from Marseille they would cross the Mediterranean to Alexandria. De Vane had chosen the longer crossing from Southampton to Rouen and Paris. An express to Brindisi would then shorten his Mediterranean journey.

Charles de Vane had taken the latter route, at the request of Jenny's family. They had chosen it for the convenience of their country house at Orchard Portman, in the heart of Somerset, and consideration for the girl's own comfort.

The Royal Pier at Southampton was bustling with travellers and onlookers. Two red-funnelled paddle-steamers with fancy wrought-ironwork and fairy gracefulness had been

chartered as ferries for Rouen, smoke now rising straight and black from their funnels. In the background, the evening promenaders watched the show, the men in their pastel suiting and tall hats, the women in long rustling silks and coloured parasols. Dogs pranced or sniffed and little girls bowled their hoops.

To one side were the little kiosks of the pier with their dainty fretwork and suggestion of oriental frivolity. Several young women lounged and slouched beside them. This group of shop girls was being taken out to Cairo to keep canteen for the regiments. Charles de Vane watched them with amused scepticism. It was common knowledge that such young scrubbers as these offered themselves for canteen-keeping in the hope of earning a dowry by high-class prostitution among the officers. Lizzie and Annie, Fiona and Kim were a different breed from Jenny with her middle-class ideals of doing good. It was Lizzie and Annie who caught his attention just then.

They were both twenty-one or twenty-two years old. Annie was the shorter of the two with a rather pinched elfin face, sensually heavy-lidded blue eyes, and lank fair hair that hung just short of her shoulders. Lizzie was every bit as much of a young tart as her companion, he thought. But she was a bigger girl with pre-Raphaelite pretensions. Though her pale face was rather round and her features almost bold enough to be crude, Lizzie had styled her light red hair in a mane of little ringlets, like one of Mr Rossetti's models. It was unlikely that any officer would marry either of the girls. But they might expect to be kept in some luxury by a military lover, first in Cairo and even in London afterwards. By then they would have milked the poor devil of enough tin to set themselves up as owners of a cigar divan or as sellers of theatrical prints and sporting papers.

Even the two blondes, Fiona and Kim, failed to hold his attention. De Vane's taste had always been for young women of a better class, who gave themselves just as

randily and for mere love of the game. He turned away and directed his attention to the loading of trunks and hat-boxes, checking his list to see that all the luggage which he and Miss Langham had brought was now accounted for.

By next morning, the red-funnelled steamers had crossed the Channel, entered the Seine at Le Havre, and were beating their way up the broad river to the misty mediaeval skyline of Rouen. After that it was a short journey by express rail to the Gare St Lazare. There followed a flash and glitter of Paris from the window of a cab, the elegant length of the Boulevard Hausseman with its displays of spring fashions, to the Gare de Lyon. Then came the longer journey by Basle and Como to the north Italian plain, Milan, Bologna, Ancona, and at last the southern winter heat in the busy port of Brindisi.

Throughout the journey, Jenny was polite but uncommunicative. Though she was grateful to him for his help, Charles de Vane was not truly her type of man. Nor was she his type of young woman. Her earnestness was too much for him. His worldly flippancy overcame her and wearied her in the end. But he was courteous and caring, which made the days of travelling much easier to endure. It was more than a week after their departure from England when the engine telegraph rang half-speed astern from the bridge of the steamer *Stella Maris*, as she approached her moorings in the great harbour of Alexandria. The passengers felt relieved to be in sheltered waters. The crossing from Brindisi had been made disagreeable by the familiar short ground-swell of the eastern Mediterranean and the chopping seas that followed.

It was impossible for Jenny to believe, standing on the afterdeck under a white tarpaulin, that there could be anything here but safety and security. They had steamed past four magnificent ironclads of the Mediterranean Squadron, anchored outside the harbour, gun-muzzles massive enough to blast Alexandria and Cairo in pieces. The Admi-

ral's flag flew from the despatch-boat *Helicon* that bobbed out to meet them. Of all the passengers on the *Stella Maris*, the most distinguished was Lord Northbrook, returning to Egypt as Her Majesty's High Commissioner. Across the calm glittering water rang the hoarse boom of a battleship's salute in honour of his arrival. On the decks of HMS *Camperdown*, a white-uniformed band of Royal Marines was playing *Hearts of Oak* and *Rule Britannia*. In such surroundings the *Stella Maris* dropped anchor in the inner harbour.

While the distinguished arrivals went ashore, the girl on the after-deck was sheltered by tarpaulin from the heat of the Egyptian sun. She stood there, watching the little bum-boats with their brown-skinned oarsmen and tasselled white canvas awnings, bustling between the sally-port of the ship and the quayside. The dockside was dominated by the Hotel Continental with its verandahs and shuttered windows. On the quayside stood Egyptian *fellaheen* in white European suits and black-skinned Nubians whose skirts were as colourful as any woman's. It was a scene that promised romance and adventure. Everywhere the blinds were drawn out and shutters closed against the glare. Under their iron arcade, Grindlay's Bank, the English Provisions shop, and the tobacconist selling Cairo Cigarettes looked dark and cool as caves.

A few minutes later, Captain de Vane arrived to guide his protégée ashore. There was a brief glimpse of the flat sandy beach to either side of Alexandria, a touch of humid heat, a smell of ill-drained streets, and then the afternoon train which carried them to Cairo in time for dinner that evening. The flat steamy terrain of a fertile delta gave way to the first stretches of sand, scooped and hollowed into a strange moonlit landscape. Hardly had the muddy vegetation of the shoreline dropped away behind them, it seemed, than the fierce ordeal of the desert began.

The weeks at Cairo were a strange experience for the girl whose adventure was beginning. Captain de Vane and



her military friends were preoccupied much of the time in assembling provisions and transports for the Nile journey. To walk alone in the city was not possible, its inhabitants showing deference and cunning in equal portions towards their English masters. But there were courtesy visits to the Khedive in the Abdin Palace with music and fireworks after dinner. With a suitable escort there were expeditions to the Bazaar with its sellers of carpets in their tarbushes and long white gowns, its smells of hot metal and strange cooking, the smoke of hookahs and incense.

By no means all Jenny's experiences of the great city were agreeable. She had found herself staring at a man in the bazaar, not realising how directly she had caught his eye. He was a tall black Nubian, supple as a snake, with an expression that was simultaneously fawning and insolent. His dress was a patchwork of filthy multi-coloured rags. This tall black figure had been an idler in the bazaar of Cairo or on the quaysides of Alexandria and Port Said. When necessity obliged him, he had been a deckhand on coastal vessels. More lately, he was known as a procurer for the whores of the capital and a professional bully.

Noticing the curious gaze of the beautiful English girl, he smiled a broad-lipped smile that revealed the ivory perfection of a magnificent set of teeth. Wriggling suggestively nearer, he cupped a hand to beg *baksheesh*, murmuring suggestions of blatant indecency to his victim. Jenny would not have been the first young woman of her race to taste his favours. He had known the loins and mouth of a rich merchant's wife or a tourist's lady. Female caprice is sudden and bizarre in the land of the Pharaohs. Stories that are stranger for being true tell of wives of consuls and even ambassadors' ladies who are seized by a mad caprice to try the love of a dark-skinned servant—a dirty wretch into the bargain—the stench of foul sweat about him strong enough to make a common sailor's doxy vomit.

Jenny, suddenly frightened at the interest she had roused, stepped backwards and put herself under Captain de Vane's

protection once more. Her escort raised his stick and took a step forward, the Nubian diving hastily among the crowds and stalls of the bazaar, disappearing there.

"Impudent scoundrel!" said Charles de Vane contemptuously. "You must take better care, my dear. That's how all those fellows behave in a place like this."

She also learnt not to walk in such places after horse-exercise, when she wore her blouse and jodhpur riding-pants. Without fail there was always one swarthy Arab or another who followed her, feasting his eyes on the shape of her young figure in this costume. She noticed one or two others turn their heads, as if trying to see behind her. At first she supposed that the saddle had left some tear or blemish on the seat of her pants. But it was plain that the tomboyish cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom in the white cotton of tight pants had excited such perverted admiration. She walked faster and at last ran from the place, avoiding the smiles of the men who watched her. Through her mind ran echoes of hints and murmurs among the English wives at Cairo. She had overheard whispered suggestions of slave-girls made to resemble pageboys by their masters and put to abominable sexual uses. That the men who followed her had such thoughts about Jenny was never in doubt. Even safe in her own room again, she shuddered at the possibility of the men who wanted to enjoy her body in such an unnatural manner, their pleasure increased by leaving her soiled and humiliated. Such things she thought were impossible in England. It was the heat of the degenerate East that bred these repulsive desires.

Other occasions were far more pleasant and no less instructive to the young woman.

It was during a visit to the Abdin Palace that the ladies withdrew after dinner, leaving the gentlemen to their conversation. Yet as Jenny and the wives of several English officers talked and drank tea with their hostess, it was possible to catch the wail of quarter-tone music, the beat of the tambourine. Perhaps the Khedive's wife knew that

the curiosity of her guests would be provoked by it. As soon as one of them inquired what it might be, the mistress of the place touched a finger to her lips and led them from the room. They passed down corridors and through arcades of moorish keyhole arches, until they came out into a gallery overlooking the main vestibule. The gallery was screened from the vestibule by the most intricate marble latticework, making those who stood there invisible to the Khedive and his guests sitting below.

The Egyptian master and the English officers were sitting round the central design of the marble floor. At that moment the wail of the quarter-tone flute had stopped and there was a pause in the entertainment. The hostess murmured that a beautiful young Asian dancer, Jeevan, had finished her performance and was about to be followed by another. The men sitting below looked round as a young woman appeared between the arches at the far end of the vestibule. She was twenty-two or twenty-three years old with the intelligent look of a young woman from a subject-race who perhaps improves her learning and her prospects in the Reading Room of the Central Museum or some such public institution. The Khedive murmured her name and the echoes carried it to the gallery. Nabyla. . . . Nabyla . . . Nabyla Justo. . . . Nabyla Justo. . . . Nabyla Justo. . . . Though her European masters might have dismissed her by some abusive term, she had a classic Levantine beauty. Her features were well-defined, her dark eyes showing passionate intensity. Her sleek black hair was brushed to her shoulders in a slight wave. At that moment, she was wearing tight blue trousers and a red singlet, the pants smooth as a second skin.

As she walked before the men in her clinging pants, the arch and wiggle of Nabyla's rounded trouser-seat seemed to tense and mould the dark blue cloth in a sequence of shifting and shimmering temptations. This rear view showed Nabyla Justo's bottom-cheeks as being firm yet resilient

and her thighs nicely shaped. Her lustrous black hair and tawny beauty completed the promise of her young body.

It was impossible to say whether she was a slave-girl of the Khedive or a show-girl hired for the occasion. In the light of what followed, it was to be hoped that Nabyla was a slave at the absolute disposition of her master. In the shadow of the arches, as if using the space for a dressing-room, Nabyla pulled the red singlet off over her head, releasing the bobbing shape of her spruce young breasts and leaving herself naked above the waist. Then she hooked her thumbs in the waist of her blue pants, wriggled them down and stepped out of them. She came forward and stood barefoot at the center of the marble floor, the Khedive and his guests sitting at its edges. By now, Nabyla Justo was naked except for a pair of black silk knickers that were very tight and rather brief. She twirled before the men, as if for their approval. Her tawny-skinned thighs were sensuously agile, beautifully rounded yet neat and firm. The scandalous little panties were no more than a black triangle at the front, covering the pretty trimming of dark hair that crowned her sex. At the rear, they had been cut outrageously tight and brief, arching up on either side of her agile young backside, so that the Arabian-gold smoothness of Nabyla Justo's bottom-cheeks was mostly bare. By their tightness and brevity, Nabyla's knickers made her young body appear more sexually suggestive than if she had been entirely naked, which was no doubt what her master intended.

The unseen musicians began to play, the flute's wail rising in quarter-tones and the tambourine beating out the rhythm of the dance. Nabyla twined her arms above her head. She began to round her hips gently and squirm her knees together. To one side of the hall she showed the passionate gaze of her dark eyes, the breathless parting of her lips, the supple arching of her smooth young belly. To those behind her, she offered the rounding and cheek-to-cheek writhing of her tawny-skinned bottom.

The Khedive and his English guests alike watched her keenly, as if anxious to miss nothing of Nabyla's self-arousal. The girl turned with gliding steps, arching back and shaking her bare shoulders in a vigorous breast-bobbling rhythm. Gently she went down on her knees, head back and pert young breasts still shaking with the energy of her movements as the English officers leant forward a little for a closer view. She held herself like this, eyes staring almost sightless at the high arched vaulting above her, shaking and shimmering, tensing and writhing. Then she bowed forward, as if to lick clean the tiles over which they walked, hips raised from her heels. In the tight brief seat of the shiny black panties, Nabyla Justo's backside assumed a spread-cheeked vulgarity.

Writhing to her feet like a snake, she hooked her thumbs in the waist of her briefs and drew them down. Standing first on one leg and then the other, she hooked her knickers off with a prettily awkward gesture, so that she now danced entirely naked before the men. What would have been condemned in England as the performance of a whore was regarded in the East as an excitingly lascivious tribute and submission by such girls to their masters.

With a controlled writhing of her hips and a flesh-creasing roll of her firm young belly, Nabyla passed before the two rows of chairs. She hung her head back and widened her knees, arching back to show the intimate dark-haired folds of her sex. Coming forward again, she bent tighter and tighter. Her forehead went down level with her knees, until she looked back at the men through the arch of her firm tawny thighs. The cheeks of Nabyla Justo's bottom were tightly rounded and parted, offering unashamedly to her master's guests a full view of her forbidden rear cleavage. Though she would not be given to any of them to use in this way, Nabyla's dance acknowledged the forms of submission that she knew she must make.

After that she sank to her knees and drew herself at full



length on the floor in a suggestive twisting and writhing of her legs, as if simultaneously fawning before them and bringing herself off in the excitement of her slavery. Whether it was finely acted or simply genuine, only the girl could say. But there followed a shuddering spasm, scaling the heights of ecstasy and falling back into contentment at last, as Nabyla Justo came to the climax and release of her passion.

While the other women smiled and talked of what they had seen, Jenny remained wondering and uneasy. It would be preposterous to suppose that Algernon Regis had ever expected her to behave as the Arab beauty had just done, with such indecent and contemptible abandon. Yet there was something in Nabyla Justo's performance which told a profound truth about the feelings of men for women. At that moment, Jenny decided, it was a truth upon which she would postpone judgment.

On the following day, in company with her escort, the young woman climbed to the Citadel with its splendid views across the city to the desert beyond. The fanciful and elaborate gilt-work of many minarets gave a light and florid grace to Cairo when seen from such a height. But these towers of the Moslem faith were of little significance compared with the view westwards across the broad Nile to the desert and the great shapes of the Pyramids. The fortress itself still contained the lions of Egypt, now caged as they never had been fifty years before. As the party walked away, Captain de Vane turned to Miss Langham.

"Mr Brandon and I have been invited to the house of a slave agent this afternoon. It is scarcely a place for young ladies but the opportunity is never likely to be given you again. I would not encourage or persuade you to come, but you may do so if you wish. It will teach you more about the customs of the country than any number of books or lectures."

"I should like to come," the girl said. "Or, rather, I

shall not like coming but I will do so, if you think it worthwhile."

The heat of noon diminished and the shadows lengthened in the thick dusty peach-coloured light of the declining sun. With Mr Brandon and Captain de Vane, Jenny set out on one of the strangest journeys to be undertaken by any Englishwoman of her age and class. Had Captain de Vane been less of a cad or an adventurer, his young protégée might have remained in ignorance of how other women in other cultures often passed their lives.

The closed carriage brought the three travellers to the Cairo bazaar. A servant walked ahead, clearing the crowd from the road before the horses with a long staff. This time, they penetrated far more deeply into the shadowy market, coming out at last in a rough square among white-washed buildings and tented stalls. Jenny Langham noticed that a dozen girls in simple knee-length dresses stood at the centre, in the charge of a man with a long whip. One of the girls was black as a Nubian. Two were light-skinned enough to be Italian or Provençal. It was only when they passed more closely that she saw each girl's wrists strapped together and held at the level of her breasts by a chain from the leather collar round her neck. The girls were sixteen or eighteen years old, to judge by their appearance. There was no doubt that they were either offered for sale by the man with the whip or else had just been bought by him.

She looked again. The girls were being led away. In that case the man had just bought them. Whether for his own harem or to sell again, it was impossible to say. So far as Jenny could judge, he was middle-aged and at least double the age of some of the girls who were now his possessions. The young woman shuddered instinctively. Captain de Vane, seeing this, wondered whether he had been wise to bring her on his afternoon voyage of discovery. But it was important to her, he thought. It was not merely a tourist's curiosity that must be satisfied. Jenny had also embarked

upon a more important voyage of self-discovery. The captain entirely approved of that and would encourage it.

The carriage stopped outside a shaded doorway belonging to an obscure whitewashed building, somewhere beyond the tented booths of the bazaar. With Mr Brandon and Captain de Vane, Jenny got down and was escorted by way of a bare and evil-smelling staircase. At the top, beyond a doorway, they entered a richly-carpeted hallway, the walls hung with Persian miniatures and the tables set with inlaid vessels of beaten brass. Their host was a gravely-bearded Egyptian of the *fellaheen* class, dressed in a red tarbush and cream European suit.

Ismail, for that was the man's name, seemed distinctly put out at the sight of the young woman. But Mr Brandon insisted that she must stay, unless the three of them were to leave. Ismail consented. No doubt he supposed that by showing off his premises and his wares to the two English officers, he would gain protection against any interference by the Anglo-French administrators who now controlled the finances and the effective government of his country.

As they passed down the corridor, there was a glimpse through the slats of wooden blinds, showing an interior courtyard with a well at its centre. The visitors also heard, unmistakably, the sound of English voices and laughter from a room close by.

Ismail led them into an ante-chamber whose red-tiled floor was covered by rush-matting.

"Wait, please," he said firmly.

They stood there without saying a word. Jenny was nearest to the window and able to look across the corner of the shaded courtyard.

"Look at her, the randy young bitch!" said an English voice.

At first she might have supposed that the man was referring to her. But as she looked across the corner of the yard, she was able to see into the open window of a room at right angles to the one in which she and her companions

waited. The sun, reflected from glass, was directed through that open window like a spotlight on the stage of the Alhambra or the Bedford Music Hall. She could not see the men who spoke distinctly in the languid accents of the English officer-class. The sun fell on the object of their amusement.

A tawny skinned girl was bending over, as if to touch her toes. She was naked but visible only from the waist downward. A heavy velvet curtain had been lowered and bound round her waist to hide the upper part of her body. Her skin was silky smooth and coloured the pale gold of Asia.

Then Miss Langham heard the voice of Ismail who now seemed to be in the room with the invisible Englishmen.

"If you wish her, Mr Danby, she is yours at the price that was agreed. Her name is Daxa, she is nineteen years old and a virgin. If you do not wish her, then I must offer her elsewhere."

One of the other men laughed.

"You damned old rogue, Ismail! She's had her arse thrashed with a cane. Look, you can still see the marks. I'll wager that was to make her take her first man. Damned if she's a virgin!"

Jenny listened in horror at hearing a British officer talk in such a manner—so crudely and callously—about the girl. Ismail answered for all the world as if he had been personally insulted.

"Daxa's bottom was caned to ensure her good behaviour, not because she had disobeyed."

Jenny stared from a little distance at the Asian girl's nudity, the lower curve of a slim young back, lithe haunches, trim young thighs. There was no doubt that across the demure tawny cheeks of Daxa's bottom there were three or four fading imprints of a bamboo cane.

"Pull her rear cheeks apart," said one of the young officers, "I daresay someone has been busy with young Daxa's arsehole."

“Very well,” Ismail said, his pride still offended. “But I assure you it is not so. You know me Captain Bilton. You know that I have never cheated you.”

Mr Brandon began to talk and Jenny lost the remainder of the conversation in the other room. She understood with deepening horror that Daxa had been presented to her admirers in this fashion, the curtain corded round her waist, so that they might be able to inflict all manner of depravity on the girl’s lower body without her ever being able to see them or identify them. Surely that was it?

After several more minutes, Ismail returned and bowed them into another room. A servant brought dark bitter coffee and sweetmeats, setting these on little tables beside the chairs of the visitors. Ismail clapped his hands. Without a word from him, two black Nubians brought in the girl, her Asian colouring seeming almost pale by contrast with their ebony skins.

Even before the slave-dealer spoke, Jenny knew that this was Daxa. She was a girl of the Indian subcontinent, standing about the height of a man’s shoulder. The black sheen of her hair was combed from its central parting to fall with a slight wave to the level of her shoulder-blades. She had just brushed it back into place, revealing the delicate beauty and the dainty whorls of her ears. Her complexion was pale coffee, accompanying a pretty heart-shaped face, neat features, a straight nose and chin. Her dark brows were finely marked, the slight ellipse of her Asian eyes being distinguished by a deep brown fullness of their pupils. The high cheekbones gave these eyes an almost lynx-like abandon.

Jenny stared at the girl, her thoughts in a turmoil of dismay at the fate to which Daxa had been condemned. The high clear forehead suggested nobility. The velveteen softness of the lips hinted at sensual warmth. She was wearing tight cotton pants and an Indian cotton shirt, whose looseness could not conceal the lines of her slim young back, trim shoulders, and the firm youth of her



breasts. The pants were cut low on her hips like a harem dancer's. When she turned it was just possible to see the first hint of the anal-cleavage separating the cheeks of Daxa Patel's bottom.

What the effect of the girl's appearance might be on the other two visitors, Jenny dared not think. She struggled to devise means by which Daxa might be bought, rescued, somehow saved from the fate of slavery to which she was now condemned. The horror of these rooms in Cairo was immeasurably worse than anything Jenny had known with Algernon Regis. That hotel in Wardour Street was innocence itself compared with the place where she now found herself. How harmless did Algernon's attempt on her appear, when set against the fate in store for this darker skinned girl. There would be no struggling and no chasing round the bedroom. The cane would be fetched and the girl strapped down if necessary. Daxa Patel's bottom-cheeks would be bamboo'd or pony-lashed until she screamed her promises of obedience and submission to the most perverted and abominable commands of her master's guests.

"If she is to be sold, I should like to buy her."

There was sudden silence in the room at these words. It was Jenny who had spoken them.

"I need a maidservant," she insisted. "This one will do very well."

That she had said something out of place seemed evident at once. Ismail assumed a faint smile of embarrassment, while the two Englishmen looked seriously concerned. It was Mr Brandon who put her right.

"That is impossible, Miss Langham. Quite out of the question."

"I have money. If more is needed, I can have it wired from London. It would be in Grindlay's bank in Cairo a week from now."

Brandon shook his head.

"Money is not the objection, Miss Langham. You are

not of the Moslem faith. Nor are you a man. To hold such a slave-girl as this, you would have to change both your creed and your sex."

"But that is absurd!" She flared up now at all of them, finding her two English friends accomplices in iniquity. "There are English officers who use girls of this sort in the worst houses of Cairo!"

"They do not own them, however," Mr Brandon said. "That is the point. They may be used but they remain the property of the master of that house."

"Then it is wicked—as well as absurd. Can nothing be done?"

"I think," Brandon said to Ismail, "it would be better if the girl were withdrawn for the moment."

The Nubians led Daxa away. The girl's lustrous black hair swept her shoulders once as she looked back finally at Jenny. In Daxa's dark eyes there was gratitude and pity for one who understood so little of the world.

"We should go," Brandon said to Captain de Vane. "It was a mistake and wrong to bring the young lady to a place like this."

Though her blood seethed at the outrage to Daxa's womanhood, Jenny went silently to the carriage with them. She bit back her fury as she heard Brandon dawdling behind them, apologising again to Ismail for their misjudgment in bringing such a guest.

Charles de Vane, in the carriage, laid his hand gently on the young woman's.

"It will not do, Jenny. There is much in the world that would be abominable, if it were to happen in England. But when in Rome, you must do as the Romans do. It will do no good to a girl like that if you berate her master or the system of the country."

She shuddered at his touch.

"It is appalling! Wicked and savage!"

"So it would be in London, my dear. But in London you dance with a man at a Park Lane ball. His arm is

about you. Your bodies touch. He may even feel the naked flesh of your shoulder. Perhaps you ride alone with him in a hansom-cab. There are parts of the Levant where such conduct is more wicked than anything you have seen today. There are men and women—the majority of them—who would stone you to death for such behaviour.”

“The customs of the country!” she said bitterly. “You will tell me next that I have much to learn.”

“You have, my dear,” he said gently. “And if you do not, all your good resolutions and your travelling will be wasted. Change the world, if you can. But you never will, unless you learn at first.”

She was so savagely angry with his complacency that she did not speak to him for the rest of the day. Only when they left the Sodom of Cairo for their Nile journey did Jenny soften once more and behave in her usual manner. However repugnant the truth, he had spoken it. Jenny decided that she was grateful to him, after all, for such honesty.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRST STAGE of the journey from Cairo to Khartoum was undertaken by overnight train to avoid the heat of the day, leaving after dinner and arriving at Sint by seven o'clock the next morning. Everywhere round the river bank and the railway sidings there were the signs of a military expedition being prepared. Piles of camel-saddles and grain bags, firewood and ammunition boxes were being loaded into barges to be towed up the broad Nile by the river steamers.

At this hour of the morning, the air was still soft and cool. Captain de Vane's party was shown to cabins on the paddle-steamer *Ferooz*, formerly the yacht of the Khedive of Egypt. A score of other officers had gone aboard as well as their servants, including two of the girls whom de Vane had noticed at Southampton, Lizzie and Annie. Against the sluggish current of the Nile, it would beat upstream towards Khartoum at the rate of seven knots, doing a hundred miles a day on an uninterrupted run. The sprightly steamer passed the lumbering troop-carriers with several companies of infantry aboard. These transports were slowed still further by having to tow four large iron supply-barges each, the tub-like shapes lashed together two-and-two.

On the *Ferooz*, it seemed as if night and day had been exchanged. Darkness brought a delicious cool air to the river, while the blazing sun weighed down body and soul with a terrible lassitude during the hours of daylight. The heat penetrated clothing and even the wooden sides of the

vessel. To touch metal was like plucking a hot coal from fire. At night, as the moonlight sparkled on the ripples and the steamer was moored to the bank, the travellers sat out on the deck or in their cabins, portholes open to catch the cooler air.

Jenny was content to sit on deck in one of the rocking chairs, her feet playing in her loose slippers as the cooler breeze eddied round them. Sometimes Captain de Vane was with her and sometimes it was the other young officers who kept her company. She seemed almost ghost-like in the silvery moonlight as it caught the diaphanous clouds of flowing muslin that formed her frock and touched the cropped brown curls of her hair. To either side of the broad river stretched the pale undulating landscape of the desert, beautiful and terrible in its vast silence. The young people sat or lounged on deck, talking and laughing until the first green light in the east signalled the early dawn. Then they would go down to their cabins and sleep as long into the growing heat of the day as the air would permit.

Even the most courtly young officers were content with talk and laughter. One or two sought whatever pleasure could be had from the more sluttish shop girls who followed the regiments as canteen assistants or in some other menial capacity. Lizzie and Annie were among these. But a girl of that class was careful not to compromise herself too soon. She turned away or lowered her eyes, tightening her lips censoriously as the gaze of a young subaltern was directed full upon her. It was not modesty that made her do so. The young slut was biding her time until she could sell in the best market.

Four of these dispossessed shop-girls had been obliged to share one of the steamer's cabins. The two blondes, Fiona and Kim, easily contrived to seem demure and well-behaved. Not so Lizzie and Annie.

The fair hair was strained back from the elfin impudence of Annie's face and the heavy-lidded sensuality of her blue



eyes. Tied with a black velvet ribbon, her fair silken tail fell over her collar and a few inches down her back. Though this little wriggler was neither fat nor plump, there was a suggestive width to her hips and her breasts were carried high.

Lizzie, the taller of the two was even more obviously a tart, in Captain de Vane's view. High cheek-bones gave a narrower and more greedy look to her mascara-lashed eyes. The bold features and parted lips, the pert young chin and painted face told one what she was. Yet the manner in which her dark red mane of ringlets was bound back by a headband to fall clustering behind her shoulders was an indication that Lizzie thought a good deal of herself. Absurd though it might seem, she would be no less than the model for great paintings and cultured admiration. That was not to be. At a lower level, however, the sight of Lizzie and Annie in a shop window would draw the attention and slow the pace of many a passing gentleman!

Even had the time been right, it would have been difficult for either of these two girls to give herself to one of the officers without attracting notice in the confines of the steamer. Neither Lizzie nor Annie would risk it, nor would a prudent young subaltern with promotion on his mind. Such a young gentleman does not choose to tell the world of his passion for a little scrubber like one of these two window-dressers or counter-jumpers. The consequence was that Annie and Lizzie found themselves confined a good deal to each other's company. Like Fiona and Kim they were not averse to playing boy-and-girl together while there was no man in prospect. There grew a tacit agreement between the four that they should separate into couples. Fiona and Kim would remain in the cabin. Annie and Lizzie would slip down the passageway to a vacant berth at the far end. Their knowledge of shipbuilding was so slight that they made a profound mistake. The uncurtained portholes at the rear of this berth did not look over the stern and across the open river. There was a little well-

deck aft of the cabins, seldom used during the voyage, which gave a direct view into the berth through these apertures.

It was Captain de Vane's Egyptian servant, Ibrahim, and the cabin-boy Saleh who discovered the delights to be seen by spying from the little well-deck. Being a careful fellow, young Saleh had at first kept the secret to himself. It was only when Ibrahim took a stroll along the upper deck and glanced down, seeing a movement in the shadows of the little well-deck, that he became suspicious. It was widely supposed that agents of the Mahdi had kept the river steamers in sight and a general fear of Arab spies had spread among the passengers.

Ibrahim, creeping up on his imagined spy, discovered only the adolescent cabin-boy. Saleh soon exonerated himself. He had seen light where no light should have been. A prudent fellow, he had gone to investigate. The swarthy lad did not care to mention that his investigations had continued for several nights before this and that he had not so far informed his master that the after cabin on the main deck was being improperly used.

On those previous nights, Saleh had waited with heart beating quickly as Annie and Lizzie slipped into the cabin. The two girls had already removed their outer clothes and were dressed only in cotton singlets and close-fitting cotton pants. As Annie with her chignon of fair hair bent over to straighten the mattress, her backside widened, its cheeks separating hard in a most womanly spread, though without any more surplus flesh than during her girlhood. Lizzie in her tight cotton pants was longer in the leg but fuller round the haunches. There was a pert rearward thrust of her hips and when she bent over it was intriguing to see that the full-rounded cheeks of Lizzie's bottom were deeply separated in a manner that was profoundly suggestive.

Now Ibrahim stood beside the servant-boy and watched the performance of the two girls through the porthole. The mattress in the empty cabin was the arena of combat.

Lizzie was lying on her side, Annie kneeling over her. Lizzie's mane of redhaired ringlets had been shaken back and held by a scarf which she wore as a headband. The crude randiness of her features was turned to her companion and her skirt had been discarded. Lizzie's knickers were a pair of skin-taut pants in white cotton and she still wore these. Annie had also shed her skirt and blouse. She was dressed in short singlet and knickers similar to the other girl's.

As the two Arab servants watched, Annie knelt astride Lizzie with her head towards the redhaired girl's feet. Lizzie, lying on her back, shifted her bare pallid thighs apart and bent her knees up. Above Lizzie's face, Annie's bare and firm young thighs were straddling wide, the shape of her pussy-flesh moulded by the skin-warm web of her tight cotton knickers. While Annie lowered her face, Lizzie drew up her well-spread knees, offering her cotton clad femininity to Annie in an upward squat.

Each girl looked for a moment with loving eyes on the white cotton-clad intimacy that the other presented. Yet neither could quite summon up the nerve to pull down either the other girl's pants or her own. It was the bold-featured redhead with her mane of ringlets who first hugged Annie's hips, drawing her down a little so that she could kiss the soft lightly-haired feminine flesh through the body-warmed cotton web. Annie bit back a trembling breath at the feel of it. Perhaps nothing as good or exciting as this had ever happened to her before. She lowered her face as if from bashfulness or perhaps so that she might touch her lips to the tight cotton pants between Lizzie's bare pallid thighs. But Annie could not quite bring herself to kiss her girl-friend there yet. Instead, she began to stroke Lizzie gently through the tight cotton. Then Annie tickled the most sensitive button of feminine flesh with light and quick circles of her finger-tip. Lizzie's firm but weightier thighs moved in a light spasm of excitement and she released a long uneven breath.

Ibrahim breathed to the cabin-boy that there must be no interference yet. He wanted Annie and Lizzie to work one another up almost to the point of no return before they were interrupted. In such a state, they would be brought confused and yearning to judgment. And in such a state their discovery by Ibrahim would have a truly shattering effect upon them, which was far the best thing. Ibrahim's eagerness was almost beyond control. He was thoroughly looking forward to the events that lay ahead, the forfeit the two girls must pay in order that their misconduct should be kept secret. With this comfortable thought, he gave himself up as a spectator to the performance on the mattress.

Annie was a quieter and less impulsive girl by nature. She was the more secretly lascivious of the pair, yet she was also the more diffident and timid. But twenty-two-year-old Lizzie had long since lost all modesty in the matter of taking her knickers down—both in marriage and in illicit passion. Lizzie had the randiness of her kind, bold-faced and hard. Yet constant arousal by her own fingers since she was twelve or thirteen years old and her master's demands had dulled her a little. She was less exquisitely sensitive to kisses and caresses of her sexual flesh than a more careful girl like Annie.

As the two Arab servants watched from the darkness beyond the uncurtained portholes, Lizzie turned her face without seeing them, the mane of russet ringlets brushing the mattress, her face showing the pleasure-mask of her bold profile, open mouth and closed eyelids. She reached up and drew down the waistband of Annie's knickers, laying bare the extreme spread of the elfin blonde's hips and bottom-cheeks, the light haired love-nest between the trimmer shape of her thighs. Annie cried out faintly as the bigger girl's tongue slipped into her. At the same time, Lizzie was pushing down her own knickers and spreading herself for Annie.

It was an unequal battle. Lizzie was daring and shameless. Annie remained more timid and inexperienced, de-

spite her determination to free Lizzie from her frustration. Lizzie flicked and tickled expertly with her tongue. Her hard-faced randiness was almost expressionless, as if to torture the other girl by such ecstasy were second nature to her. Annie let out muffled cries and whimpers, driven mad by Lizzie's loving. She kissed here and there at random on the long pale thighs, on the fuller swell of Lizzie's bottom-cheeks, and almost everywhere but in the right place.

Despite the wild lewdness of their conduct, it was impossible for Ibrahim not to smile at the comedy of experience and innocence being acted out on the mattress. Annie at length composed herself sufficiently to nuzzle her lips high up on the inner smoothness of Lizzie's thighs, tasting the mineral-splashed pearly smoothness of the red-haired girl's body. At the same time, Annie's fingers settled down to a gentle stroking of Lizzie's love-nest in its sleek fur.

Ibrahim gave a signal. There followed one of those touching scenes, performed so often when guilty couples are caught in the act. From the two Arab servants there was smiling satisfaction, followed by stern demands. From the two girls there was astonishment, shame, reproach of the men for their hard-hearted interruption of feminine intimacy, and at last a fearful realisation of what lay in store.

Ibrahim supposed that the sentence he passed upon the two girls was one which they might have begged for. When the air of his cabin was sufficiently cooled by the night air from the surface of the river, he proposed that they should visit him there in turn. It might be Annie with her sly elfin randiness. The next night it would be Lizzie with her mane of dark red ringlets bound in a knotted pigtail down her back, as if she was ready for bed. Late in the morning, the cabin door would open an inch, as if someone was making sure that the passageway was empty. A moment later, the scurrying of a girl's bare feet, the



opening and closing of another door, concluded the night's drama.

On the following night, he summoned Annie. Though the girl went to him, the sequel was not at all as Ibrahim envisaged. From behind his cabin door there were syllables of refusal, a soft wrestling sound, cries from Annie which were muffled as if her mouth had been packed with a towel or a scarf. Then there was a curse from Ibrahim. The door flew open and Annie flung herself out into the passageway, snatching up her pants by the waist. She ran down the soft carpeted floor, disappeared, and slammed her own cabin door behind her. Next day it was observed that Ibrahim had four raking marks down one side of his sallow face. It was assumed that a cabin-boy had perhaps resisted his sodomitic advances. English officers did not interfere in the ways of native passion. There was quiet satisfaction that Ibrahim had received his just punishment from an unwilling lover. There the matter ended, except for Ibrahim who studied his blood-raked face in the glass and swore a cruel revenge.

During the voyage upstream to the Fifth Cataract, a few of the subalterns managed to console themselves with dreams rather than reality. Hidden in their private travelling-cases among notepaper and private correspondence might have been found a choice volume printed in English at Paris or Brussels, bought on the journey to while away an hour or two of tedious foreign service. In one cabin lay the story of a suburban college, offering the choice of a sly little minx like Denise Wilson among the junior girls or an adolescent hoyden like Maureen Moat among the seniors. In another might be found the disciplinary training of a disobedient shop-girl or a rebellious young bride.

Such volumes were passed from one friend to another with a smile and a recommendation. There was no disapproval by Colonel Butler or their seniors. The colonel smiled at a quaint inconsistency in the moral code that approved the butchery of native tribes by the soldiers of

the Queen but looked aghast when those same soldiers read of the prison cane used across the pearly bottom-cheeks of Linda Jennings or the proud backside of an arrogant young woman like Sue Webb. Colonel Butler himself passed to Captain de Vane a summertime tale of the Sylvester maidens, a pair of rebellious teenagers under amorous discipline by a middle-aged admirer.

By no means all the leisure of the young subalterns was devoted to such frolics in the pages of fiction. Within a few days, the *Ferooz* was moored at Luxor. Parasols were spread and carriages with tasselled canopies were ordered. By this means, the officers and their ladies toured the great pillared remains of Karnac and the ruins of ancient Thebes. These expeditions were undertaken either at first light when the air was still cool and fresh, or else at twilight when the heat still shimmered over the baked stones and the last fire of the desert sun was reflected far in the western sky. But darkness came quickly in such equatorial latitudes. Only the romance of the ancient ruins by moonlight compensated for the cool and clear outlines of temples and pillars at dawn.

Two hundred miles above Luxor and five hundred from Cairo, the *Ferooz* moored alongside the British camp at Assuan. The white tents were pitched in neat rows among the palm trees upon a narrow ledge of the river bank. But the rolling desert had gone. On both sides the river was enclosed by steep and craggy hills, baked brown in the equatorial heat. Here and there an ancient watch-tower stood upon heights overlooking the wide curve of the Nile. To those English travellers who had never before sailed further south than the German rivers or Swiss lakes, it was as if the most majestic stretch of the Rhine had been set down under a fierce African sun.

Jenny and her companions had only to look upon the scene in order to know that the soft decadent world of Egypt was behind them and the savagery of Africa had begun. Where a barren island divided the stream, the

forbidding figures of the Abu Simbel temples seemed to bar their way like sentinels.

It was at Assuan that the passengers on the *Ferooz* heard their first rumours of war. It came from Suakim on the Red Sea coast, where a Royal Navy squadron had landed cavalry and infantry for a second Sudanese expedition. The bandit army of Osman Digma had torn up and burnt the wooden sleepers from the railway that was intended to connect the port with the Nile above the Fifth Cataract. The native rebels were tearing up these sleepers faster than the Royal Engineers could lay them again.

“General Gordon knows too little about the psychology of your average Fuzzy-Wuzzy,” said Colonel Butler quietly at dinner in the saloon of the *Ferooz*. “He may believe that he has friends among the tribes when they are at peace. But he will find too late that he has no friends left among them now that the trouble has begun.”

## CHAPTER SIX

AMONG THOSE WHO gathered on the deck of the *Ferooz* in the fresher breeze of night, one word and one name was spoken with increasing frequency. *Mahdi*. Who he was and what he might be was a mystery, even to an educated young woman of Miss Langham's kind. It was Charles de Vane who enlightened her.

"The Mahdi is little less to the people here than the ruler of the universe. He is their deity. If he tells them that the bullets of the English regiments are powerless against the bodies of the faithful, they will believe him. They also believe that he has the power to prophesy and work miracles. Cannon balls fired at him and his army will melt like water. Lions and wild beasts will lie down and lick his feet. Any man—or woman—who dies for him will go straight to paradise and taste pleasures beyond description. As for his enemies, he has only to snap his fingers and plagues will descend upon them. Their destruction is inevitable."

Jenny frowned in the darkness, as the firefly glow of cigarettes and cigars appeared here and there among the loungers on the deck.

"But who is he?"

"Our fellows in the Intelligence Department describe him as a dirty little monk with bare feet and ragged pants. A beggar and a rabble-rouser. A man with nothing to lose who will not hesitate to bring the world down around him. In the past, the Sudan has been nothing but a collection of

tribes at war with one another. But General Gordon would only agree to be its Governor-General if slavery was abolished. Slavery is not only part of their ancient customs, it is their principal trade and source of income. At a stroke, this decision united them all against Gordon and British influence in their land. It required only a fanatic like the Mahdi to appear as their leader against the European infidel."

Jenny was silent for a moment.

"And what do you think?" she asked quietly. "How is such a man to be dealt with?"

Charles de Vane smiled and the reflected light from the river caught his handsome profile.

"I think he is a fraud and a scoundrel. To say the least, he is a monstrous hypocrite who parades his holiness in public and enjoys the pleasures of his harem in private. But he is no ordinary hypocrite. I think he is a consummate actor. Lord Elphin told me confidentially of a memorandum in the Intelligence Department. This fellow is no Mahdi at all but the son of a wealthy family. It is even whispered that he was sent to England to be educated in his real name. He was educated there like the son of a successful baboo at Eton and Balliol. Now, seeing the trade in slaves threatened, he resorts to this ruse to save it. If there is no more slavery, his family is ruined. Lord Elphin believes that if Gordon could be quietly removed, we might come to an understanding with this so-called holy fanatic. We should guarantee not to interfere with the ancient ways of the Sudan, in return for an alliance which put the country under Anglo-Egyptian sovereignty. By that means we should secure our interests in the Middle East against any intrusion by the French or the German Emperor. Believe me, my dear girl, we shall have to secure ourselves before long. A map of Africa which is British red from the Cape to Cairo may please people in London. But in Paris or Berlin it is a red rag to the French and Prussian bulls."



Jenny said nothing in reply to this. The politics of the Sudan were beyond her. She understood only that a heathen savage in a loin-cloth had stirred up the ignorant tribesmen of the nation against their rulers. It was against her gentle nature to wish harm to any of them. At the same time, as the poet had written, "We have got the Maxim gun which they have not." Batteries of Royal Horse Artillery, regiments of Lancers and Hussars, battalions of infantry brought by railroad from Cairo to Khartoum would cut to pieces the naked and pathetic lines of the Mahdi's army.

With this assurance in her mind, she turned the conversation to other topics. Politics consisted of matters about which she did not know and did not greatly care. The odious Mr Gladstone, as her father Sir William called him, had been returned to power at Middlesbrough in the General Election several years before. Jenny had once heard the oily melodious voice of the aged Prime Minister and had seen the silver-haired figure with his actor's presence and cultivated nobility of manner. But he would destroy them all, her father insisted, by his taxes and his madness over Ireland. Whether he did or not, Jenny decided that she had no means of preventing it. No woman in England was permitted to vote at an election. Nor did she suppose that the system would change if every woman in the country were to cast a vote. It was what her father called "tosh."

"I daresay if reinforcements were called for, Algy Regis might be sent out as aide-de-camp," Captain de Vane said hopefully.

"I hope not, Uncle Charles."

He laughed at this.

"Oh, come, my dear! You know I'm not the one to inquire into other people's secrets. But whatever tiff there may have been between you, I can't suppose it was as serious as all that."

The river rippled away, astern of the moored steamer.

"On the contrary," said the girl quietly, "something

extremely serious happened. Come what may, it is best that Algernon Regis and I should never see one another again."

"Come what may?" There was no mistaking the incredulity in his voice. "I only wish you might understand the dreadful sound of those words, my dear. Indeed, I almost think I am as much to blame as Algy for this state of affairs. You quarrelled with him the very day I arrived in London. That day at lunch, at the Travellers Club, I tried him with a bottle of the 'widow' and two of the best old Châteauneuf-du-Pape in their cellars. It was wrong of me to invite you that same evening, forcing you into his company when he was a little heated with wine. I daresay you found him rather too ardent as a lover. Quite enough to frighten a prim young English miss and make her think the end of the world was coming."

Jenny shook her head in the darkness. She caught her breath and then there was the unmistakable sound of sobbing. Charles de Vane put his hand gently on her arm.

"I had no wish to vex you, my dear. . . ."

"No," she said, gulping her tears, "but I never thought Algernon would be brute enough to talk to other people of what happened between us."

"He said nothing of the kind," Captain de Vane interposed hastily. "Not one word, upon my oath. It was plain enough without that. Algy Regis has kept as mum as you yourself."

Jenny let out another self-pitying sob and Charles de Vane stroked her muslin-clad arm to soothe her.

"Your English education has left you in ignorance of many things, my dear," he murmured. "It leads you to see human behaviour from a false point of view. There is a French saying, you know. Every man has within him a sleeping beast. Sometimes, in the presence of a beautiful woman, that beast is woken. But when the woman grows indignant at it, she is usually in the wrong. Do you know why? Because it is almost invariably she who gives the nudge that rouses it."

"Uncle Charles!" Jenny's tears were startled from her suddenly. "You can't believe that I . . . that I . . ."

He smiled softly at her.

"I believe, my dear young Jenny, that you are the purest-minded girl in the whole of England—let alone the whole of Egypt and the Sudan. But you are also one of the prettiest and most charming. Prettiness and charm are enough to go to the head of a young staff officer like Algy. And I believe something else, while we're on the topic. The most innocent girl in England may get a little carried away. I mean, she may take flirtation to the limit and drive a man over that limit in the end. Is he entirely to be blamed if he cannot hold back then? Civilisation is a fine thing, you see. But in our case it has confined young women within the limits of flirtation, while a man's urge is to press beyond them."

"I am not to blame for that," she said, rather bitterly.

"Of course not," Charles de Vane continued to stroke her arm in a soothing paternal fashion. "You are beyond all blame, my dear. But in justice to Algy Regis, in case you should meet again, I beg that you will consider the matter just a little from his point of view. At this very moment, in this savage continent of Africa, murder and rape, torture and even cannibalism are being inflicted in the name of tribal civilisation. It is a dark and evil place, by our standards. But the benighted savages of this dark continent believe in the values of their civilisation as truly as you do in your own. They would laugh at the absurdity of your protests if a fine warrior chose to take you by force and father a child upon you. He would be congratulated upon his wisdom and they would mock you as a fool. Yet that is civilisation to them and your ways are degeneracy and barbarism. In such a world, was the crime of Lord Algernon Regis so black that it cannot be forgiven?"

There was a pause.

"I forgive him," Jenny said at last, "I forgive him as much as you wish. But I do not wish to see him again. I

could never be his wife. It is in my power to forgive. But it is beyond my power to forget or to persuade myself that I could ever love him again."

They sat there silently watching the boatman on a *dahabieh* as he hoisted the sails and began slipping through the water, the vessel heeling over a little in the night wind. From the dark shore came a song, a slow and melancholy chant. The voice was a woman's, soft and melting through the cooler air of darkness. The distance gradually increased but the same clear voice still broke in on the calmness of the dark water, mounting up and up towards the star-strewn expanse of the African sky.

"It is a funeral chant," Captain de Vane said quietly. "The poor woman is bewailing one of her family."

The *dahabieh* kept tacking ahead of them on its way upstream. Now and again a rattle of cordage could be heard across the smooth water, and the straining of the canvas as it bellied to the wind. In the stillness the river current lapped along the vessel's hull. Crocodiles rose to the surface and showed their monstrous misshapen heads above water. Along the banks, between the tall stems of the date palms, scurried troops of jackals. Sudden bursts of wild sardonic laughter echoed discordantly in the distance, the cry of the prowling hyena. Then a mighty roar extinguished all other sounds. The silence returned as the echoes died, profound and vast. After a moment the roar was repeated, indignant, mournful, insistent. It was the majestic sound of the wild, the lion in heat calling to his mate.

Bending gently to the breeze, the graceful *dahabieh* slid softly over the starlit waters of the Nile towards the distance of the Sixth Cataract.



**TWO:**  
**KHARTOUM**





## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SUN WAS setting in splendour behind the crest of the hills beyond the city walls. There was a moment of pale, fleeting twilight, then a sort of fluttering shudder, the death agony of the expiring day above Khartoum. An instant later, all was dark. The sombre sky, which had assumed an almost greenish tint, was pricked out with stars. At their centre rode the great circle of the full orbed African moon.

The flat terrace roofs on the tops of the houses broke into a pattern of moving shadows as their inhabitants came out in search of cooler air. Presently the voice of the Muezzin began melodiously calling the faithful to prayer. The bells of the Mission Church began to ring the Angelus. By now the streets that led to the Mosque were thronged with a pressing crowd. The great doors were thrown open to receive the throng of True Believers. Then once more the streets fell silent and lonely.

A flock of vultures winged across the city in their evening patrol. Every night they passed over, without fail, crossing the Blue Nile from the Island of Tuti and descending on Khartoum. Their bald necks craned forward as they perched and their beaks rattled against the bones of their carrion. They overlooked nothing, turning greedily the heaps of offal and garbage in the roadways. The few passers-by at this hour paid them little attention. Their voracity made them excellent scavengers, clearing the city of rotting flesh. Rather than interrupt

the ghoulish banquet of the beak in the dying entrails, the true believer would step out of their way so that they might not be put to flight.

Jenny sat on the housetop, her arms resting on a low parapet as she gazed out into space. After all her travelling and her high expectation of adventure, she felt only weariness and disappointment. Was there to be nothing more than this? As a guest of "Uncle Charles" in the heart of Africa, she had found Khartoum to be merely a copy of European society. Its season was in full swing, or so it seemed to the girl. The English and Europeans at Khartoum had created a world with all the faults and foibles of London or Paris. There were the same sham friendships, the same artificial and self-seeking hospitality.

Society in Khartoum consisted of consuls and merchants with wives who had been educated in the same fashionable schools. They shared the same ideas as to what was proper behaviour and what was not. They had the same petty prejudices that they would have nourished in Mayfair or the Faubourg St Germain. At their evening receptions, the identical phrases were repeated and they imitated one another's gestures or poses.

These habits were accompanied by rivalry among women over matters of dress. There were waspish compliments and cat-like exchanges of glance. Spite masqueraded as good nature and envy was paraded as admiration. Jenny's days and nights had been filled by such engagements, in which snobbery was the driving force.

Some of it was grotesque, to be sure. Mrs Watson, the wife of a rich American trader, had more gold in her teeth than in the bracelets on her wrists! She was for ever laughing, without any cause other than the opportunity of displaying this curious wealth, as a pretty girl might have laughed to show her charming mouth. But Mrs Watson came from the Deep South, as the smallness of her hands and feet suggested. An excessive enjoyment of candies and sugar had ruined her teeth. The gaps were stopped with

gold—gold everywhere. A more bizarre sight could hardly be imagined than a pretty woman smiling her hideous yellow smile, shot with the iridescent gleam of the gold that her mouth was paved with.

The Austrian consul's wife was scarcely much better. She could think and talk of nothing but her husband's indigestion. The poor man's diet was limited to soups of various kinds, for which his wife was always and eagerly searching out new recipes. The Greeks in Khartoum talked of music and nothing else, as it seemed to Jenny. At least she supposed it was so, for they seldom spoke any language but their own. Jenny had begun to learn Arabic, so that she might talk to the other nationalities in this *lingua franca* of the city by that means but she found that even those who learnt the language had nothing whatever to say in it. As for the Greek women, she felt uneasy in their presence. The perfumes with which they saturated their hair and even their bodies had an air of degeneracy.

The menfolk were little better. The Sudanese themselves were always grave, solemn and taciturn. The European diplomats were worse, always imagining that their trade endowed them with grace and wit. Watson, the American consul, was a mere uneducated boor. He had no conversation beyond money and statistics and no interest beyond the prevailing price of cotton. Garilopoulos, the Greek consul, was a middle-aged Adonis still panting after anything in a skirt. The only man among them who had not displeased her was the French consul, Dufour. He was a Parisian who had first come to the Sudan to represent a Marseille business house. He was bright and amusing, which made Jenny value his company. But there was nothing among any of them to make her notice a change from the old tired society of Europe from which she had hoped to escape.

It was the dark-skinned native population which interested and, indeed, fascinated her. She felt attraction and repugnance at the same time, without truly knowing why.

Jenny had an urge to spy upon their lives and habits, an urge which she felt was morbid and shameful. She had learnt enough colloquial Arabic to talk to the servants without difficulty. Sometimes, she would try to pry into every detail of their household lives. Then she would feel an unaccountable panic, which made her avoid all contact with them for a time. The girl knew that she did not like them as she might like her own race, finding that there was an animal quality about them which unnerved her.

Sensual pleasure seemed to be the only prize upon which they set a value. Even their religion aimed merely at the attainment of Mahomet's Paradise of physical pleasures. All their ambitions, their single-minded worship of wealth and power were directed simply towards the satisfaction of the cravings of the belly. At the same time, their calm and deliberate cruelty revolted her. She could not begin to understand their women, who showed such timid and cringing humility before a man, revering him as the undisputed lord and master of their lives.

As she leant upon the parapet of the house-roof in this mood of self-pity, there was a sudden clamour from below. Jenny looked down into the lamplit street. A tall Nubian in flowing white robes, had just knocked a girl down. As she sprawled on the earth, face-down, looking fearfully back over her shoulder, he lifted her skirt at the rear and threw it up to her shoulder. Without a word, he raised his *kourbash*, a whiplash of hippopotamus hide. The girl was crying out and pleading for mercy, the sleek ovals of her buttocks laid bare. But she did not resist. She did not even try to roll away or cover her backside with her hands. Jenny recognised the tall Nubian as one of the natives appointed by the Governor-General's magistrates as "policemen" to keep civil order in the streets.

The whitewashed house-wall rang to the sharp impacts of the whip across the tawny smoothness of the girl's buttocks. She shrieked and squirmed until the Nubian had given her fifteen tail-lashes. Then, as if she knew that



there was a *coup de grace* and what it must be, she pushed herself up on all fours. She made no further attempt to rise until the policeman had administered a sound kick whose toe went between her hind cheeks. Then she scrambled up and stumbled off into the darkness, howling a lament for her smarting flesh.

Jenny recognised the girl, as well as the Nubian. Though she did not know her name, she had been assured that this was the problem child of a widow in the city, the father having been killed in the Khedive's skirmishes with the Mahdi. The girl would prostitute herself to earn a little money. With this she would buy enough "marissa," as the date-wine of the country was called, to have her reeling in the streets. When sober, she would ply her trade of prostitution quietly. When drunk, the swarthy child would curse and sneer at every passer-by. At last she would be seized by one of the Nubians. Thrown down, her skirts pulled up for her, she would receive fifteen blistering stripes of the hippopotamus whip across her bare bottom and a lusty kick up the backside to send her on her way. Next morning, she would wake with a head throbbing from "marissa" and her bottom swollen and smarting so that she could scarcely walk without limping.

Jenny watched the drama in the street below, feeling a natural pity for the poor girl and an amusement at the way in which Sudanese customs allowed such stripping and such summary justice. To be sure there were chastisements of girls in England, but those occasions were decorous in the extreme. Jenny recalled Mrs Walter's room in the school house, the long adjustable trestle table upon which the culprit lay, the long white shift worn so that the buttons were down the back and only the minimum exposure required. Then there was the protracted and earnest warning, the moral judgment. And only at the end of that was the spray of birch twigs taken from its cupboard. Six strokes were delivered with measured care, or twelve if the offence warranted it. And when the bill for the term's

school fees was sent to the girl's father, a small addition appeared at the foot of the column headed "Sundries." It was entered as "Twigs—Sixpence." Such was the justice of the English school system. It was closer to the penal system of the Sudan than its supporters cared to admit.

Jenny's bill had only once contained the item, "Twigs—Sixpence." The young woman smiled at the thought now, dimly aware that the punishment had not diminished her attachment to Mrs Walter in the least. At thirteen, Jenny felt such a bond that the birching secured the affections of woman and child more firmly still.

She roused herself from her thoughts as Captain de Vane appeared on the roof-terrace. He sank down on a heap of cushions, and crossed his legs *à la Turque*. One of the servants brought his *nargileh* pipe with its long tube and he stuffed it with *latakieh*, the black tobacco of Smyrna. On top of this tobacco the servant laid a lighted pastille of scented charcoal. Then the man knelt down and puffed out his cheeks, blowing hard to get the pipe well alight. Charles de Vane took it from him at last and breathed in the fragrant smoke with a smile of quiet contentment. But despite such contentment, his arrival on the roof meant that he had news to tell. Presently he removed the flexible tube from his mouth.

"I hear he is in Cairo. I daresay he will be coming here soon."

"Who will?" Jenny asked softly. "Not General Gordon?"

"General Gordon be hanged! He has not gone anywhere to come back from! He sits like Achilles sulking in his tent—but for the difference that Achilles had an army outside and Gordon has none."

For the first time there was a note of despair in his account of the Governor-General. Jenny, forgetting the topic that had been started previously, sought reassurance.

"They say General Gordon has such prestige that he is as good as an army in himself."

"I daresay they do." There was no mistaking it. Charles

de Vane was on edge about the general's reputation. "Unfortunately for him, Gordon's prestige is nothing outside Khartoum—or in it—compared with that of the Mahdi. The news is that Hicks Pasha's army has been routed by those black devils and Hicks himself probably killed. It doesn't threaten Khartoum immediately but it won't help. The Arabs and the blacks are impressionable by nature. You can win 'em easily—and lose 'em just as quick with a bit of bad news. So much for prestige!"

Jenny paused a moment. Then she said,

"But, in that case, who is in Cairo?"

"You can't guess?"

"You don't mean Algernon Regis?"

Charles de Vane smiled in the darkness.

"It was none of my doing, I promise you. But since it is to be, can you not put your fears aside? Is there no way of arranging things between you?"

Jenny sat there, her head bowed and the starlight catching the crop of her lightly-waved brown hair. Captain de Vane waited for answer. When there was none, he went on,

"I promise you, my dear, I know nothing whatever about your tiff with Algy. At the same time, I have my suspicions as to what it may have been. When we spoke about it on the journey, you gave most of the game away. But if I'm right, need you be so desperately obstinate with him? Surely you can't have stopped loving him in the course of a single evening. As for Algy, he can't mention your name without showing that he worships the ground you walk on . . ."

"Enough, Uncle Charles, enough!" she pleaded without raising her head. "If I imagined . . . thought for one moment. . . . that you had asked him to come out to Khartoum . . . I should start home this very night."

He stretched forward and touched her arm.

"Dear Jenny! How foolish you are! Do you imagine that you can leave the Sudan as if you were taking the train

from Paddington down to Orchard Portman? At any rate, you need not leave on my account. I never asked Algy Regis to come out here. It is not in my power to do so. He has been posted here with Major Strachey. They are part of the liaison force to open negotiations with Osman Dinga and clear the route to the Red Sea at Suakim. By that means, we shall have a port and a railway to supply us at a fraction of the distance from Cairo. It would finish the Mahdi at a stroke. So long as Algernon Regis is on the General Staff, you must expect that he will be given diplomatic missions of this kind. There is no sense in making objection to the realities of war. He is to be sent here first. From here, he must make his way east towards Suakim and Osman Dinga's rebels."

"I know nothing of all that," the girl said miserably.

Captain de Vane drew his hand away.

"Then let me tell you, my dear. In his letter to me, Algy says that he is to be given sleeping quarters in the Governor-General's palace here. He will not stay with me, for the very reason that he will not let you see him unless you choose. But you must take pity on me, my dear. You must tell me what answer to make. Will you see him or not?"

"I will do as you think best," she murmured.

Charles de Vane snorted with exasperation.

"I cannot tell him that! You must say yes or no. Would it be such an insult to your dignity to see him in this house?"

"Then let him come."

"And is he to hope? Is he to hope that time may have softened your anger?"

"No!" she said sharply. "It never will. I will never marry him! Never!"

All her weariness was gone as the images of that dreadful hour in the Wardour Street hotel passed through her mind. She got to her feet, nostrils quivering, head thrown back, firm and resolute in her decision.

Charles de Vane was amused rather than convinced. His lips moved in a sceptical smile. As Jenny walked away across the roof, he waved the flexible stem of his *nargileh* pipe and murmured to himself.

"Excellent! Algy need only plead his case a little now—and he will win the day. Let Jenny Langham give him a fair hearing and the battle is almost won."

But even before Jenny had left the roof terrace, her attention was caught by sounds loud enough to bring her back. A series of appalling screams rose from a compound at the end of the garden. Before they could make out what was going on, the screams had stopped. Instead there was a sound of laughter, the laughter of savages that rang loud and bestial as they struggled among themselves. One of the captain's servants came up to the roof with the two actors in the garden drama. The first was a swarthy adolescent lad, his body trembling violently as he lifted eyes wide with terror towards his companion. She was an Arab skinned girl in her twenties, by the name of Shaida, with a rather heavy look of lazy sensuality in her young face and figure. She stood stiff and motionless before the chair of her English master, as if in contemptuous silence.

The Europeans looked up at Shaida, the randy young wog bitch, as they spoke of this young woman in their private conversations. Her black hair was rather tousled, its tresses long enough to lie between her shoulder blades and stray untidily over her forehead after her exertions. It grew full enough at either side to cover her ears, softening the strong features of her tawny-skinned face a little. It was a full and quite rounded face with a well-set nose and luscious lips painted mauve. Shaida's eyes under the arch of her dark brows were fierce and direct. The English officers privately liked the look of the young whore's figure. Shaida was dressed in blue cotton pants and tunic-top. Like her face, there was a rather heavy look of voluptuous sensuality to her breasts and hips, as well as to the cheeks of Shaida's backside. A man might scruple at



fathering a child on this Asian girl but he might spend copiously in the hot infertile soil of Shaida's bottom without risk of such an accident. The truth was that Shaida was made to be used in such a fashion. As they sat in judgment, the men stiffened a little at the thought of the fun they might have in punishing the young slut.

A native servant explained what had taken place. Instead of yielding to a man, as such a girl should, this young Amazon had a masculine streak in her nature and preferred to take her partners by force. She deplored the servitude which tradition had imposed upon young women of the East. Shaida saw herself as a new mistress of her fate. Any man who attempted to take her was repulsed with kicks and bitings, scratches and gougings. Instead she subdued her chosen lovers with her violence and cruelty, as if determined to make mankind the submissive instruments of her savage pleasures. In this vengeful lechery she was never satisfied until she saw the blood upon the skin of her victim.

That evening, the adolescent youth beside her had taken her fancy. What followed could have no other name but rape of the boy by the young woman. The girl threw herself upon him, working roughly and brutally with him. Grasping his member in one hand, she brought it twitching to life despite its terrors. At the same time, her tickling fingers attended to the lad behind, guessing that he might have been made to act the feminine part in the frolics of the camel drivers on their long desert crossings. He had struggled and protested. But Shaida had tickled, intruded a finger and brought him to attention at a bound. Then this Arab-skinned Messalina had straddled her prey and ridden with such vigour and such skinning effect upon him that the lad's screams woke the first alarm among the neighbours. But the young Amazon was not content. Stuffing his loin-cloth in his mouth, she raked his bare flanks and thighs with her nails to drive him harder. Her teeth nipped and drew blood on his shoulders and neck. The poor



fellow bucked and reared like a wild pony on a tether. By this wildness, however, he brought the wicked tawny-skinned Arabess release in the end.

The case was not the worst to be brought before Charles de Vane. Concealed by the darkness he smiled and shrugged. The boy had been the victim of a sexual outrage but he had, after all, reached the age of puberty. This was Africa, not Bond Street nor the Rue de Rivoli. It happened that the young Arab-tan bitch who stood before him had initiated the young fellow, rather than a girl of his own age. But there would be justice and vengeance of the sort that nature provided. Later on, the boy would take his revenge upon womankind for having been so roughly handled himself at his first experience of sexual passion with Shaïda. There was not the least doubt of it, nor that the sufferings of womankind at his hands had been inspired by a woman's treatment of him. A girl in the future, screaming in bewilderment at the sadistic manner in which she was being ravished or flogged by this fellow, would have the present specimen of her sisterhood to thank for her sufferings. That was the justice of the natural order, which cared nothing for the agony of the individual.

It seemed that such vengeance would not have to wait until the boy found his opportunity. Most of the men who looked at her now would have been delighted to take Shaïda to a place where they could be alone with her and where they would be free to inflict the sentence she deserved. Strapping down and stripping bare, the whip and the red-hot tickler seemed to be their common thoughts. There were cellars below the building from which Shaïda's screams would not be heard. Fortunately for her, the girl was judged by Captain de Vane with a sense of correctness. De Vane looked up at the tall tawny-skinned wench. He saw the flash of hatred in her eyes and the contemptuous movement of her lips.

"Take her down to the stable," he said to the two Nubians. "Handcuff her wrist to the iron ring in the wall

but put the straw mattress for her to lie on. Keep her naked. Tomorrow at noon, take her into the yard and assemble all the other servants there. Give her thirty strokes with the lash across her bare backside."

He gazed sardonically at the Asian beauty of the young woman as he passed sentence upon her. It required only the authority of a white skin to condemn Shaida as he had done. When she heard him, the young Amazon seemed to draw herself up in an attitude of impregnable dignity. Her expression remained scornful and contemptuous as her glance took in the white-skinned unbelievers who had condemned her to such pain and shame. But there was a curiosity in the direction of her most venomous resentment. As the two Nubians led her away, the savage heathen beauty twisted her head and shoulders, spitting a curse back at the figure of Jenny Langham.

"That's how they all are," said Charles de Vane wearily to his companions. "I call them beasts rather than human beings. To think of giving freedom to such savages is the greatest mistake to be made. They must bow to the yoke of imperial rule. They are fit for nothing else."

Jenny was still uneasy and shivering in the colder air when visitors were announced. The first to arrive were Anser, the Austrian consul, and his wife. Frau Anser was beaming with satisfaction at the recipe for a new soup with which she was to tempt her husband's feeble digestion. Young Mrs Watson of the gold teeth joined them in the middle of Frau Anser's explanation. Then Garilopoulos, the Greek consul, appeared. As was his usual custom, he began a long description of the day's commercial operations in the city. But while he talked to the little group, his dark velvety eyes scarcely ever left Jenny's face. He lavished such fond lascivious looks upon her and showed such eagerness and obsequiousness in obliging her that he made her shiver with disgust.

So this lofty roof-terrace, under the star-patterned sky of the East, was where the commonplace European officials

of Khartoum assembled in a manner no different to Paris or London. The men soon began to talk of General Gordon and the Mahdi.

"For my part," said Garilopoulos indifferently, "I believe most of these black devils will be only too happy to make peace while they have the chance. With Gordon established in Khartoum, all the brave Emirs and their ragged Princes will desert their Mahdi. They'll come cringing to make their submission to Gordon, or to the Khedive in Cairo."

Charles de Vane shook his head.

"I wish that were so. These black devils as you call them, are a gang of fanatics. They believe in their Mahdi far more absolutely than the Old Guard ever did in their Emperor Napoleon. Added to that, these particular fanatics are brave and warlike, better armed than they have ever been, eager for plunder."

There was a silence at this which seemed to imply assent from those who had not so far spoken. It was Wilson, the American cotton planter, who began the conversation again.

"What I want to know is which government takes responsibility for civil losses. If the rebellion spreads and the Egyptian cotton fields are destroyed, is the damage made good by the British or the Egyptians?"

De Vane's mouth twisted with wry amusement at the foolishness of the question.

"I should postpone the question of damages until we know whether anyone is left alive to make the claim. If Hicks Pasha and his Egyptians have been defeated, as the rumours suggest, the only remaining way out of Khartoum may be east to the Red Sea, across the caravan route that leads from Berber to Suakim."

"Unless Khartoum should stand a siege," Anser suggested.

Charles de Vane nodded.

"But if we are to stand a siege, I would rather have a single regiment of British fusiliers than all the Egyptian armies that Gordon can muster."

The men fell silent and the chatter of their wives and womenfolk at the far end of the terrace was now audible to them in the stillness. Mrs Wilson was holding forth shrilly about the wickedness of the young Amazon's attack on the adolescent boy.

"Quite the most disgusting thing of its kind! Torturing a mere child in such a way! Did you see how he trembled as he was led away? From what I hear, she did things to him that are better imagined than described."

"They are worse than beasts," Frau Anser said quietly. "Not that I have the least desire to watch the whipping given to the young whore. I don't complain of its severity, of course. Better the shameless harlot should have her backside skinned raw than that she should dare to repeat such lewdness and brutality. If there were any chance that she might escape punishment, I would give orders myself to have the whipping carried out upon the young nigger bitch."

"I think we should all come tomorrow to watch her punished," Mrs Wilson said, the sound of a smile on her lips. "In Georgia and South Carolina it was expected that citizens of good standing would attend when a black servant-girl was whipped. Even as children we used to go and watch the faces that the nigger girls made while they were getting the cow-hide strap across their posteriors. There was a beautiful African-tan negress flogged like that once, a tall and graceful creature called Monnelia, the beautiful 'Belle Sauvage' as they called her. It was a pleasure to watch her naked. But it was not just a nigger-girl like Monnelia. White girls, too, were whipped for transgressing. White-skinned girls Louise Neville with her slicked back hair and saucer eyes and Tania Nicoll with her clustering curls and tomboy figure were both nineteen years old when their backsides tasted the lash. But where is the use of such examples being made if no one sees them? I promise you, there is no need to fear a husband or a wife watching such ordeals. The men listened to Tania Nicoll's screams

and then went home to do their duty to their wives as they had not done since their honeymoons. And to hear Louise Neville or Tania Nicoll screaming under the whip made them the most amorous and loving husbands in the world. Wives have nothing to fear from their husbands attending these judicial whippings. Indeed, they reap the harvest!"

Jenny intervened quickly.

"I don't think we should need examples of that kind. If we do, then I think they should be reported rather than witnessed."

Frau Anser sighed.

"Such a vile country this is. But at least you can punish a servant-girl properly here, as you never dare in Europe. If you were to make the slightest criticism of your parlourmaid in Vienna, she would pitch her apron at your head and probably throw the plate after it."

Young Mrs Wilson laughed again.

"But this is not Vienna, my dear! And so we shall all meet here tomorrow at noon, as agreed, and see the young nigger wench whipped."

But next morning, to Mrs Wilson's great disappointment, it was discovered that the young tawny-skinned ruffian-girl had somehow lubricated her wrists with soap, slipped her handcuffs and escaped from Captain de Vane's cellar. Vengeance was postponed indefinitely, it seemed. Yet even Jenny Langham could not help hoping that Shaida might be discovered and the punishment inflicted on her with the greatest possible severity while the ladies of Khartoum looked on.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

WITH THE COMING of autumn in Khartoum the river was in flood. The waters of the Nile as it formed its semi-circle round the city were thick and green in colour, deeply impregnated with rich slime. Great clods of mud came floating down the current from the Abyssinian highlands, swirling round and round in the swollen stream. They were borne away down the river, from cataract to cataract, to fertilise the valley of Egypt. Even the streets of Khartoum sounded in quiet moments to the never-ceasing roar of rushing waters.

Several times in the milder warmth of late afternoon, Jenny set out on horseback with Frau Anser, Mrs Watson and two native grooms to see at close quarters the splendid sight of the river in flood. On the first occasion, Captain de Vane rode with them. After that they were attended by their Arab grooms. In Jenny's case, it was the young man Abu who attended her at the stables, helped her to mount and rode with the others behind the European ladies.

There was nothing about Abu's conduct that gave Jenny a specific cause for complaint. On the other hand, there was something in the gentle brown eyes that made her uneasy, as if every movement of his gaze was a caress upon her bare skin. She avoided his admiring glance, always keeping her fair-skinned and firm-featured young face averted. Her mouth was pressed in prim disapproval and her eyes narrowed a little. Though the other women rode side-saddle, they were older than she. Jenny had



always been in the habit of taking horse-exercise astride. For this, she wore the smooth tight cotton of white riding-pants that shaped her lower figure almost as plainly as if she had sat naked on her mount. She had learnt the un wisdom of parading in this costume at Cairo. But Khartoum was less cosmopolitan, she thought, and therefore less prey to the degenerate aberrations of over-refined culture. All the same, because the riding-jeans allowed her to straddle the horse they were infinitely more suggestive than the most daring side-saddle skirt. The same suggestion was echoed in her tight tan boots which sheathed her lower legs almost up to her knees.

Jenny's figure had a proud young maturity which she showed off to advantage. Her light brown hair was gently waved and quite thick. She still wore it cropped at her collar, shaped to her head, clustering on her forehead and forward to cover her pretty ears. This curly crop provided a soft setting for her firm and neatly-cut features. The older women were apt to think of her privately as an appealing young tomboy, a good-natured little rogue, a delicious little tease. Others who observed her closely saw that there was a firm resolve in Jenny's pretty face.

At twenty years old, her figure in tight riding-pants had a firm and well-exercised look with its rather tomboyish robustness. The tight jeans and close-fitting boots that she wore for riding shaped the robust young legs and thighs and the firm proud cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom. Despite its rather sturdy fullness, Jenny Langham's bottom was one of her most attractive and sexy features for any man who chanced to be walking behind her. The outline of the stretched cotton briefs she wore underneath the tight white twill was well-delineated by the close fit of her riding-pants. To complete her outdoor riding-costume, she wore a short blue tunic over a white cotton blouse.

To men of the more common sort, it seemed that Jenny spoke like a young teacher, having a rather prissy cultivated voice and a cool manner. Abu himself had the

wisdom of the Arab in judging her character. He went straight to the secret of Jenny's sexual conduct, as no European or American would ever do. In her usual behaviour she was smiling and polite with men of her class, but it was always the amiable good nature that fends off sexual passion. Yet the tight-fitting riding-pants—so revealing of her hips, bottom, and thighs—were worn for an unconscious purpose. If she walked through the streets to the stables, it was quite common for a man who had never seen her before to follow her, entranced by Jenny's robust young hips and thighs, and the sturdy cheek-swell of her young backside in the straining white cotton of her riding-pants.

It would be in keeping with her moral pretensions to ignore the very existence of such followers and so she seemed to do. Yet Abu was quick and skilled in judging the foibles of womanhood. He could see by tell-tale glances and quickening pulses at the girl's throat or temples that she was secretly thrilled by such lewd and intrusive walking after her. No man would dare to lay a finger on her in such a public place. So Jenny Langham enjoyed the full excitement of being fondled by their thoughts and probed by their lascivious eyes without having to submit to a single stroking or unbuttoning in reality. Abu guessed that the girl's own excitement certainly fed upon the knowledge that such men were to be tantalised by the sight of beauty they would never be permitted to possess.

Such was the girl whom the Arab servants were to attend on these afternoon excursions. The mere presence of their long and stout tools near her was suggestive and—to tell the truth—it was never out of Jenny's mind. While disdaining such fine black lovers, it perhaps excited her to exert the power of stiffening them hopelessly in their own tight riding-breeches.

Abu licked his lips at the sight of her striding to her mount. Jenny's thighs had that erotic fullness of a girl who is not quite long enough in the leg for elegance but invites

a rough and tumble of passion. For the fine-built Arab who walked behind her, the same was true of the self-assured swell of Jenny Langham's bottom-cheeks in the tight white riding-pants as she walked with a slight writhing and rolling of self-assurance towards her mount. Poor Abu could scarcely keep his hands off Miss Langham's arse.

But the Arab groom was right in his belief that the taunting was deliberate. Annie, who had been deputed to act as lady's maid by Charles de Vane's influence, could have told Abu that Jenny had not left her bedroom without first checking her rear view in the mirror as well as her front. She knew perfectly well that her backside swelled as fully and firmly in the tight white cotton as if she had been naked. When she looked over her shoulder into the glass, Jenny saw that her seductive posterior cheeks showed clearly through the tightness of the pants cotton. Algy Regis had read her character truly in this respect.

Despite all Jenny's preparations, there was a convenient hypocrisy whereby she enjoyed the status of a maiden pure, *sans peur et sans reproche*. If poor Abu, walking dutifully behind her, felt his tool get stiff and excited by the view she offered him, he was a lewd and filthy animal. If he should so far forget himself as to stroke or fondle her, let alone slip his hand inside Jenny Langham's knickers and fumble or ravish her, the English martial law of Khartoum would sentence him to a military gallows and make him carry his own coffin to the chosen tree outside the walls.

To understand this was to understand how easily the Arab world understood the tricks of this young woman, whom London society judged to be prudent and reserved in her dealings with mankind. But Abu was wrong in one respect. It was not only London society but even Miss Langham herself who suffered from the illusion that she was behaving entirely as the privilege of womanhood and femininity permitted. For that, she well deserved the vengeance that Arab masculinity wished upon her.

At the stables, Abu knelt and cupped his hands for her to mount. Miss Langham bowed her crop of light brown curls and looked down at the stirrup he had formed for her. Then she lifted her sleekly-booted calf. The groom was well taught in these matters, knowing just when to rise a little. The girl curved her body forward over the saddle a little to swing her other elegant leg astride it. In that moment, her hips swelled out and Jenny Langham's tightly-clad bottom-cheeks and parted thighs strained and surged before his face. The humid and intimate perfume of her loins and backside in the sultry day seemed just ripe enough to tease his nostrils. Abu dreamt of what he would do to these areas of her anatomy if ever she were within his power, barbaric pleasures that would cause Jenny to cry out with the intensity of her pleasure and anguish.

He showed none of this in his face, as she settled her young hips' weight on the saddle and her thighs astride it. Those hips were spread wider now as the saddle strained her thighs apart and the cheeks of Jenny Langham's backside appeared suggestively fuller. Abu took the reins and walked the bay horse forward. Then he swung astride his own mount and rode obediently behind the young mistress, eyes languishing and thoughts fierce with unspeakable desires.

It was not the custom for any of the women to speak to the servants who attended them. They rode across the flat sedge between the city and the river among the whispering of the tall reeds that had been dried and browned in the sun of October. The strong light of the summer day glittered and flashed like a silver burning-mirror, pin-points of fierce brilliance dancing far out across the swirling water. The great sweep of the Nile seemed to stretch from one horizon to the other.

It was on these afternoon rides that Jenny saw something of the Arab quarter of Khartoum. The stench caught her by the throat and she touched her handkerchief to her nose, having prudently scented it with lavender water in

her bedroom. The odour of the little streets and alleys was one of putrefaction and perfume. Women sat in the doorways of their mud-walled houses, weaving lengths of alfa grass to make mats, baskets, even fishing-nets for the river. A few of them sat idly, combing out their coarse hair and curling it into a mass of tiny ringlets. Here and there a girl would be seen painting a design on a crude clay pot.

While the women worked, the men of the Arab quarter seemed content to lie at ease, even at the sides of the road itself where heaps of garbage and filth had been collected. Jenny felt a feminine indignation at the manner in which the Arab world put its women to work so that the men might indulge their idle sensuality. If the dark-skinned loungers moved at all, it was only to kiss and fondle some girl who had been put to work by them. They were animals, she thought as she watched the men of the native quarter, ungoverned by any ordinary rules of decency or responsibility.

The relationship of the European women with the native servants who attended them on these occasions was an odd one. Egyptians and Sudanese were subject to the laws of their own countries, neither of which was the colony of a European power. Yet the finances of Egypt were controlled by the British and French commissioners, her army commanded by British officers. The Khedive was an impotent princeling, the puppet of foreign masters and the object of abuse by Moslem zealots. As for the Sudan, its governor-general was an appointment of the powers in London and Cairo. While no English court had civil jurisdiction, the native population was subject to arbitrary punishment at the hands of foreign officers.

Abu had been tormented by visions of Miss Langham as he lay in his solitary bunk at night. Was he a filthy black devil or did the girl torture him purposely by parading in her short blue coatee and tight white riding pants? The next time he walked behind her to the stables, Abu's soft



dark eyes played lasciviously over her young body. The collar-length shingled tresses of her light brown hair claimed his attention, the pretty tilt of her nose and chin in profile as she glanced aside. His gaze travelled down to the slow climbing strides of her tightly clad young thighs, the slight tomboyish sturdiness, the firm full cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom making a full double swell in the skin-smooth seat of her white twill riding-pants.

Abu licked his lips, longing to kiss the seductive shimmering cheek-swell of Jenny Langham's arse. As she walked, her hips moving in an alternating rhythm, one cheek of Jenny's behind swelled full and round, the other contorting and contracting. Since she could not see him, Abu slipped one hand down inside his pants at the front. His eyes fawned on Jenny Langham's backside and its voluptuously squirming cheeks while he played secretly on his own stiffened Cupid-flute.

By the time they reached the yard, where the stable-boy held the horse ready, poor Abu was in a state he could hardly conceal. Worse still, there seemed to be fire and fury whirling in his head. He felt a surge of desire that was beyond the power of reason to control. It was impossible for the girl of twenty to be unaware of this. It was true that his pants were covered by his long white tunic but Abu knew now that her tormenting of him had been deliberate. Had she turned round suddenly, Jenny might have seen that his manhood was protruding from his pants and remained concealed only by the buttoned length of the tunic itself.

Abu had wisdom enough not to attempt an assault upon her. He cupped his hands as usual, while she grasped the saddle-pommel and raised an elegantly-booted leg. She pulled up and forward. The cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom swelled full and smooth in the tight cotton, the surge of her young backside almost touching Abu's face. Even a slight bulge of her sexual flesh appeared in outline between the rear of her thighs. He paused for an ecstatic



moment, longing and loving Jenny Langham's bottom, its fullest swell, the inward curving and meeting of her buttocks, the rude dividing crack, the softer and fatter flesh low down on the rear cheeks, where it offered shimmering feminine voluptuousness.

Abu's strength failed and the girl slipped back. His face was a cushion against which the tomboyish cheeks of Jenny Langham's backside sat in all their squirming fullness. His lips kissed, nuzzling and mouthing the smooth body-warmed cotton. The girl fell back against him further, losing her hold on the saddle, so that now she sat hard against his lap. Jenny gave a startled gasp, for she had felt something hard and hot. Abu moaned and shuddered as his hard cherry-head lay against the skin-tight cotton over one cheek of Jenny Langham's arse. His passion boiled over helplessly in warm drenching squirts.

She pulled herself up and on to the saddle, startled but moving so quickly that she did not yet feel what had happened to her. It was Abu who saw with dismay and fascination the tell-tale darkness of spreading moisture on one swelling seat-cheek of the tight white riding-pants. He had given Jenny Langham a beautifully wet bottom but the twenty-year-old girl did not realise it until she sat firmly in the saddle. The incident was trivial and the accident to the girl herself was trivial enough. But that a young Englishwoman should be so "insulted" by the sperm of an Arab groom was exaggerated into a criminal offence by the laws of Empire.

Jenny said nothing yet but she rode only as far as her rendezvous with Frau Anser and Mrs Watson. Then she cancelled her engagement with them and returned to Captain de Vane's house. In the evening, she took young Mrs Watson aside and explained that Abu had assaulted her in a most indecent manner while she was mounting her horse. It was impossible for Jenny to lay such a complaint directly before Colonel Butler, nor was it necessary. That night, caressing her elderly husband in bed, the foolish

young Mrs Watson murmured the allegation and begged him to intercede with the colonel. Next day, Mr Watson spoke to Colonel Butler, man to man.

The matter was serious but it was not one for which the colonel could have an Arab servant put to death out of hand. Being less than that, it did not even require that Abu should be tried before a military court or given a hearing of any kind. In the case of a "nigger," as a Sudanese was termed by British officialdom on these occasions, such offences were punished by a mere command from the colonel himself. He gave instructions that Abu was to be stripped, flogged, and then turned out of the house.

Two sergeants of the Egyptian garrison saw to the details. A long bench was set in the yard. Abu was stripped of all clothing but a "jock-strap," whose pouch contained his genitals and whose ribbons were tied round his waist with another running back between his legs, up between his buttocks, knotted to the waistband at its rear.

The prisoner was made to kneel astride the bench and lie forward along it. His wrists and ankles were tied to its frame by stout cord. He was strapped down at the waist and a cloth was suffered in his mouth, secured there by a cord between his teeth and tied at the back of his neck. There was little the poor fellow could do but roll his eyes at his two executioners, who grinned back at him as if assuring him that he would get all he deserved.

Abu's torment was the greater, in one respect. The girl he had "insulted" was permitted to ride over to the barracks and witness his punishment. In tight polished knee-boots and still tighter riding-pants, Jenny swaggered past. It was as if she had deliberately chosen to taunt her victim. His mouth crammed with the gag, Abu's eyes followed her. Jenny's proud rear cheeks squirmed and shimmered a little with the energy of her stride. Despite the torment that was about to begin, the pouch of Abu's jock-strap at his loins filled taut until a distinct bulge strained the material. He twisted his head round as Jenny stood to one side,

never taking his eyes off the tomboyish figure of the twenty-year-old girl with her lightly waved tresses of cropped brown hair.

One of the troopers took the lash, which was a short-tailed thong about two feet in length. Its handle was of cunningly-worked ivory in the shape of a smooth-headed phallus. He dipped the butt in oil and stooped over the victim with his back to Miss Langham so that she could not see precisely what was being done. Abu's backside received an indignity which made him howl with rage into his gag as he lay there strapped down and helpless. Yet the rhythmic movement of the trooper's hand seemed only to increase the tightness of the swell in the pouch of the jock-strap.

The girl, impatient for vengeance to be executed on her behalf and not understanding what the preliminary delay might mean, turned about and studied her boots. Something displeased her and she stooped to flick it off. Abu, already in a parlous state, was presented by the broadened and fattened cheek-swell of Jenny Langham's bottom in the skin-tight pants of white cotton as she bent over. For a full minute she was innocently preoccupied with dusting off her boots in this posture. The little shiftings of her posture served only to emphasise the fullness of her rear cheek-swell, the curving in of the two hemispheres and her suggestively outlined anus-crack, the fatter and more sensuous flesh lower down on her bottom-cheeks. A groan and a shudder broke from Abu, the cloth of the jock-strap pouch suddenly darkened with moisture and the cotton was hanging slacker. When Jenny turned and saw something of this, she regarded the "criminal" with fine distaste.

The second trooper picked up the whip, while the first counted the strokes from one to fifty. Abu's body jerked in a spasm of pain at each cut of the lash across his bare buttocks. His rear cheeks contorted and creased urgently as if to contain the naked agony. The Egyptian trooper with the whip grinned at him, chuckled and then made the air

sing once more with the crack of the black serpent. The two executioners made no attempt to conceal their enjoyment in what they were doing. There was an excitement in the air of the barrack yard that no one could explain precisely. It was not quite sexual and yet it was something more than moral satisfaction at seeing justice done.

The girl looked on, intrigued by the bestial spectacle. She could not tell whether Abu cried out or screamed, for the wad in his mouth reduced all his protests to a distant bellowing. When the whip cut the skin of his buttocks the first time, the assistant executioner fetched a bucket of heavily salted brine. By the time that the whipping was over there were half a dozen thin cuts in the skin of Abu's hind cheeks. The assistant took careful aim and tipped the pail so that the scorching brine ran into their rawness. Abu bellowed louder still.

When it was clear that the spectacle had ended, Miss Langham walked closer to gloat upon the wretch who had dared to "insult" her, as the phrase was when an English girl took exception to the behaviour of an Arab male. She walked round him. Abu's eyes gazed at the straining cotton on the weight of Jenny Langham's thighs. He watched the rear-cheek swagger of Jenny Langham's bottom-cheeks. The girl stood over him, at first with contempt. Then as she looked, the wet pouch at his loins began to swell again like a balloon being inflated. Incomplete though her experience of mankind's desires might be, she had seen enough of life between cows and bulls on the manor farm at Orchard Portman to know the significance of this swelling and stiffness.

Jenny gave a gasp of dismay as she stood there and realised that she was the inspirer of this disgraceful development. She hissed out at him that he was a filthy beast and a disgusting creature. Their eyes met only once, but despite his predicament, it seemed that Abu triumphed over her after all. It crossed her mind that an incorrigible animal would have undergone the gelding knife for such

conduct. She had heard it whispered that such men as Abu were made eunuchs of in their own tribes. But the same whispers assured her that the cruelty of such castrated servants towards the slave-girls in their charge was beyond description. Nothing but the man's death would protect her from vengeance in the end. Or, rather, Jenny went back to her room that night and brooded in bed upon the truth that vengeance begets vengeance by inevitable logic.

Yet in the turmoil of warfare, such revenge was no longer an exact science. It was exacted impartially from any man or woman of the enemy. When Abu settled accounts for the barrack yard ordeal that he had suffered, any whiteskinned girl would do as his victim—even a white man. It was impossible for him to believe that he would ever be fortunate enough to have Jenny herself in his power. Yet it was natural that he should hope for such poetic justice in the end.

As for Jenny herself, she had no cause to put the reality of vengeance to any further practical test. But she felt a passionate and equivocal anger towards Abu. She had a curiosity to spy upon the wretch who had defiled her, perhaps to recall additional complaints and have him whipped again for those offences. Indeed, it would have pleased her. But Abu had gone, dismissed in rags by the troopers at the barracks. Whether he would die in the streets or find his way to the Mahdi's camp was of no concern whatever to those who had judged and condemned him. He was of no use to them. Let the Mahdi feed him, if the imposter was fool enough. Neither Jenny Langham nor Colonel Butler would ever refer to him again. The girl shuddered, as if with relief, at the news of his departure. But ghosts are not so easily exorcised. The scene in the barrack yard was one that plagued her dreams and haunted her waking fantasies.



## CHAPTER NINE

DRIVEN FROM THE household of Captain de Vane, Abu was never to be seen there or in the streets of Khartoum again. The matter of his crime was so delicate that no open discussion of it ever took place among the Europeans. Jenny knew that Colonel Butler had heard the full story and ordered the punishment. It was like an infinite logical regression, precise and punctilious as a minuet. The colonel knew that Miss Langham knew that he knew—and he knew that she knew that he knew that she knew. But the social formalities between the sexes was such that Colonel Butler betrayed neither by word nor glance that he was aware of what had occurred between her and Abu. The Arab groom's name was never to be mentioned and, indeed, it was soon as if he had never been in the household's employment.

What became of him was not known at the time—nor indeed for some months afterwards. As Colonel Butler thought to himself, he might die in the gutter or crawl through the harsh white sunlight to join the Mahdi's followers. Whichever it might be was a matter of complete indifference. But still the victim of the Arab groom's insult could not dismiss Abu from her thoughts. Jenny felt a cruel satisfaction in remembering that the sight of her tightly clad hips and backside had caused Abu's sperm to ejaculate involuntarily on two very different occasions. Had he made love to her in the course of this she would have been revolted. As it was, she felt that she had tri-



umphed over him in a double sense, bringing him sexual torment as well as the agony of the lash. She had avenged herself and her sex for the conduct of such men as Lord Algy Regis.

It was on the following evening that Jenny sat with Frau Anser, Mrs Watson, and the French consul, Dufour, on Charles de Vane's roof terrace. The sun had set and the vast silent expanse of star-pointed sky arched over the city and river. Neither Charles de Vane nor Colonel Butler had been present at dinner. The English officers of the Khar-toum garrison had received a summons to the Governor-General's residence that afternoon, where Gordon was to take them into his confidence at last. Ten o'clock had struck from the tower of the Mission Church before there was a sound of footsteps and the two men appeared. Charles de Vane was carrying a sheet of paper in his hand.

"Here we have it," he said sourly. "General Gordon's answer. An infallible prescription for a lasting peace in the Sudan."

The others looked up at him, not understanding at first that Captain de Vane meant just what he said.

"General Gordon's proclamation," said Colonel Butler, "made with the full authority of the government in England. It will be published in the gazette and proclaimed to the world tomorrow morning. Gordon comes with full and unconditional power to offer an amnesty to the rebel army of the Mahdi."

"Bravo!" cried the foolish young Mrs Watson, clapping her little hands, "Then there is an end to the civil war."

Colonel Butler stared at her.

"Think so, ma'am? Think that, eh? The Mahdi's followers regard him as divinity, a being who is supernatural. One does not offer an amnesty to the gods, Mrs Watson. And those who think themselves gods will despise you if you do."

The poor foolish young woman sat silent and abashed.

"There is worse than that," Charles de Vane said quietly. "Gordon undertakes that the Egyptian army will evacuate its garrison in the Sudan and withdraw behind its own frontiers."

"But will that not bring peace?" whimpered the young woman.

"Would that it might," said Charles de Vane softly, "I hope I may be wrong but I believe it will bring disaster. If the armies are withdrawn, what will become of the emirs and pashas? They will be at the mercy of the Mahdi and his followers, who will be the great power in the land. Indeed, he will be the only power in the land. These emirs and pashas must either make their peace with him or have their throats cut. In either case, the few British regiments in the Sudan will be left to bear the brunt of the attack. There can be no treaty there. We are the unbelievers and the holy man will make no peace with us. Gladstone and Hartington do not understand the first thing about such a situation as this."

"Why?" asked Dufour more calmly. "If the Mahdi holds the countryside, what can we matter to him?"

Captain de Vane offered more words of cold comfort.

"The Mahdi is not a Sudanese patriot but a leader of Pan-Islam. If he has the Sudan, he will look towards Egypt and Cairo. When he has Cairo, he will look towards Damascus and Algiers. When he has those he will look further east to the Indus and south to the Sahara. In five years from now his authority may extend over half the coast of the Mediterranean. His hand will control the British route to India through Suez. That is what neither Gladstone nor Hartington in London nor General Gordon in Khartoum can understand. They both make the mistake of supposing that he is some native brigand of the kind who has been pacified in the past."

There was a silence on the starlit rooftop of the white city. It was Charles de Vane's tone, rather than his words, which rang a knell of doom for those who listened to him.

"And us?" Frau Anser inquired, "What does General Gordon propose for us?"

"Nothing," said the captain softly. "When British power is rendered impotent because Gladstone's conscience cannot bear the stigma of imperialism, a price must be paid by others, not by the Grand Old Man himself. We are those others. Several of our officers tried to press this argument upon General Gordon this afternoon. He would not have it. The poor fellow cannot see the danger facing him. He believes that his own prestige is sufficient to cow the Mahdi. In consequence, I predict that Khartoum will be under siege in a few more days."

Again they sat in silence, while the significance of this descended upon them.

"The women," Dufour said quickly. "At least the women must be evacuated."

This time it was Colonel Butler who intervened.

"Our Governor-General does not see the necessity. In one respect he is right. We have no guarantee of safe passage down the Nile. If the enemy were to strike towards the river first, rather than at the city, one of the other towns like Berber or Metemmeh might easily fall to his troops. Our intelligence informs us that the Mahdi has a number of field guns, captured at the defeat of Hicks Pasha and elsewhere. He has enough renegade Egyptian gunners to use them. If he holds the river lower down or even on the opposite bank at Omdurman, a steamer could not pass without sustaining damage and casualties, perhaps even being wrecked or grounded. In that case, the women as well as the men would be his prisoners. Whether or not Gordon is right in his strategy, he is correct in judging that our civilians are safer by remaining in Khartoum."

"For how long?" asked Frau Anser.

Again it was Colonel Butler who sought to reassure her.

"We have a force at Suakim, two hundred miles to the east on the Red Sea coast. There is a Royal Naval squadron, as well as horse and foot. They are pushing a railway

across the desert to Berber. Captain de Vane and a patrol will set out tomorrow to scout the track across the desert in that direction. It would be an arduous route for evacuation, but not impossible. If our friends could meet us half way, it offers our best hope."

Dufour and the women sat silently, thinking of the long desert ordeal. Presently Jenny led the two consuls' wives downstairs to the drawing-room where cool fruit-drinks had been prepared. In the absence of the women, the men talked more freely.

"I have no wish to disparage General Gordon," said Colonel Butler quietly, "but all experience of the Arab teaches me that concessions will be regarded as weakness. And weakness is despised by the tribes and the emirs alike. Gordon knows China and the Equatorial provinces. He neither knows nor understands Khartoum or Cairo—much less the Mahdi. This proclamation of his is an open invitation to treason. I do not say there are traitors among the Egyptian and Sudanese garrison of Khartoum. But among the civil population—merchants as well as proletariat—the Mahdi already has too many sympathisers. After this, he will win a good many more. He has won the first round—and they will see it. And where the civilians go, the native garrison may follow."

"Come what may," said Charles de Vane quietly, "we must prepare for a siege and the possibility of evacuating the women under military protection to Suakim. To speak candidly, I regret that there should be any women of our own here. But since they are here, it is best to make them safe until a means of evacuation can be guaranteed."

Only the French consul, Dufour, could cheer their spirits at this.

"A siege is not the end, my friends. I was a boy in Paris during the Prussian siege of 1870. It was disagreeable, I grant you, when we were reduced to eating the cats and dogs from the streets. But in a country of this sort, the privations of the besiegers may be worse than those suf-

ferred within the city. There are no such fertile plains and railroads for supply in the Sudan, as Bismarck's army had then."

"A city is not easy to occupy," Watson added. "London or Paris would swallow up an army and leave it at the mercy of the citizens. The greater damage in our southern states during the Civil War was caused through vindictiveness after they had been occupied. It was true even at Atlanta. You may shell a city for a hundred years with field artillery and mortars before you reduce it to rubble. When its people realise that, they will have some idea of their strength."

Neither the colonel nor the captain had the heart to rob these poor people of the little comfort that was left to them. But Colonel Butler could not repress one word of warning.

"The Europeans and the Americans are somewhat more highly civilised than the Sudanese. It may be only a veneer at times, but it was always the policy of the Prussians and the Union Army to respect women, as they are not respected in the wars of the native tribes. Demands would be made of our own fair creatures that they would die rather than concede."

Dufour shook his head and smiled.

"Women, my friend, are much the same the world over. You know the Egyptian tax collector at Berber—Rastif Ali? He keeps a brothel in the town and buys slave-girls for it from the Djaalin. As a representative of the Egyptian government he deplores in public the existence of slavery. As the keeper of a brothel he profits by it. Now, it sometimes happens that one of his girls rebels because a customer requires her to submit in a filthy way. Rastif brings her to her senses with prolonged whip-lashing across her bare backside. After that she submits to the man's demand, swooning and languishing as it were the joy of her life. When times are prosperous the female sex proclaims its independence and demands its rights. But



when matters change for the worse, it is adaptable and submissive enough."

"Such women have no proper pride, no self-regard," said Colonel Butler, a little embarrassed at the turn the conversation had taken. "I cannot imagine a single woman of my acquaintance who would humiliate herself by such submission."

Dufour drew at his cigar and smiled.

"When Paris was besieged, colonel, I knew women who were pretty and proud. Then the hunger and the deprivation began. They let themselves be trained in debauchery by men they would once have despised. Then they went out upon the streets, to rival one another by prostituting themselves so that they might keep their seducer in comfort. In my experience, a woman's pride submits to a man who truly means business. And the curious thing about those whom I observed—scores of them—was that they liked it all the more because in the end they wanted to be bullied and humiliated. A woman becomes what the man wishes her to be . . ."

Watson intervened.

"I won't have that, Dufour! By George, I won't!"

But the Frenchman shrugged.

"I speak of what I know, Monsieur. A woman is tamed by the man and by her circumstances. In this country she is subdued by the lash. In the great cities of Europe, it is hunger or poverty that masters her. But poverty or the lash produce very much the same result in the end."

Colonel Butler was still uneasy.

"You will allow, Monsieur, that there are women *and* women."

The consul laughed.

"I will allow what you please, colonel. But the two sorts are very much alike when faced with circumstances which they cannot alter. Sisters under the skin, as your poet says."

While the talk continued on the roof terrace, the crowds



began emerging from the Great Mosque into the lamplit streets. They soon proceeded to divide into groups. At the centres of some of these groups, a natural leader began haranguing those around him with theatrical gestures and appalling grimaces. These orators had the natural Oriental gift of mimicry, relying as much on movement as upon speech to make their meaning clear. The other promenaders stood round them, listening intently. From time to time there was a grunt of approval but nothing more.

Each time that a European or even an Egyptian appeared at the end of the street, the orator stopped dead. But all the while he looked at this interloper from under dark and knitted brows, drawing his white robe closer about him, the turbaned head bowing a little as if to conceal his face. Directly the coast was clear, the street-corner gathering was reconvened and the speech continued. Charles de Vane had seen this many times. He knew that Colonel Butler was right. Treason was hatching at these impromptu political speeches. The adherents of the Mahdi—the emissaries of El-Obayd, as they called his camp—had begun to show themselves openly in the streets. Among the rich traders of the city, who sensed which way the dice must roll in the fortunes of war, there were some who had begun a secret correspondence with El-Obayd. Whatever fate might lie in store for the women of Khartoum, these nimble merchants had made their peace with the man they expected to greet as conqueror.

In the days that followed, Charles de Vane was not a member of the evening gatherings on the roof terrace. He had ridden out with a patrol of trained scouts to see for himself the possibilities of escape on the desert caravan route from Berber to Suakim. So great was the distance of the patrol that he was not expected to return for two weeks. So great was the danger that he might not return at all.

The situation at Khartoum was serious but by no means hopeless. The day after Charles de Vane's departure, it

was announced that General Gordon had opened negotiations with the Mahdi. The general required the release of certain European captives held in the rebel camp. To promote this, Gordon had sent the Mahdi a number of presents, superb cloth of Eastern manufacture, as well as magnificent brocades and satins woven by the House of Liberty in London. The general conferred upon his enemy the title of Sultan of Kordofan and the power to hold slaves for the present. On this basis, Gordon urged the discussion of a treaty between them.

But the messenger returned from El-Obayd with a discouraging reply. The Mahdi was no fool and scorned the gift of titles and powers which he was capable of taking for himself by force. He offered Gordon the choice of surrender or destruction. The next day, the Governor-General still continued to smile and assure those around him, repeating his desire to be the negotiator of peace in the Sudan. But at the same time his engineers prepared gun emplacements for the defence of Khartoum.

In Charles de Vane's absence, his friends still came to comfort and reassure his pretty young guest, Miss Langham. But when the ladies had withdrawn, Colonel Butler's briefings of the consuls was far from comforting or reassuring. More emissaries had been secretly despatched from El-Obayd to foment treason in the streets of Khartoum. The merchants and chief citizens, whatever their sympathies, were now thoroughly frightened at the prospect of general destruction and the loss of all their wealth. They reproached Gordon with doing nothing to save them. Better surrender at once than put up a futile resistance which would merely enrage the Dervishes and provoke atrocities.

The great man received all these representations with a kindly and enigmatic smile. It was said that he told them to hope for the best, though admitting that the city would now have to stand a siege.

"And the effect of that," said Colonel Butler next night, "will be to turn the trickle of sympathisers to the

Mahdi's ranks into a flood. Even the men of property see no hope but that. There is no one left to save the city but the Egyptian garrison, our officers, and detachments of two British regiments."

On the day after this, the systematic training of the Egyptian troops began, their details marching to and from the parade grounds. The engineers proceeded with the fortification of the city walls, dragging into place the available artillery, and digging several new wells to ensure an adequate supply of water when the siege began.

"Defour is right in one thing," said Colonel Butler to the consuls. "It is easier to defend a city than to lay siege to it. We have the wells and the Mahdi does not. Our patrols have seen the camp at El-Obayd and a vast gathering of women, children, and slaves. There is near-mutiny there from the lack of water. Let 'em try another week of that and see how they like it."

Next night the news was better still.

"The Mahdi is defeated. He sent his warriors against the Nubians of the highlands, who refused to pay their taxes to him or pledge their allegiance. They received his tax collectors with a hail of sticks and stones. Now they have driven back his troops."

But the defeat proved short-lived. Even before the colonel could tell his friends, rumours swept the city of a sudden advance by the Mahdi's force, moving its entire camp from El-Obayd to Rahad. At such short range, he could now send out an advance guard under the command of Mohammed Abu Girgh to attack the ramparts of Khartoum itself. Supported by the cannon, captured from Hicks Pasha, this force was led by the cruel and fanatical Djaalin. Their exultation in victory was excelled only by their excitement at the promise of the rape and plunder which the great city would offer them. Masters of the slave trade, they bore a bitter grudge against General Gordon and the white infidels who had tried to deprive them of their livelihood. All that might now turn to their profit.

The Mission Church and other buildings were requisitioned as hospitals for the coming siege. Jenny, true to the promise she had made to "Uncle Charles," volunteered her assistance as a nurse. The confusion and peril all about her were far from what she imagined the circumstances of her ministrations might be. As yet, she was not called upon. Then she was asked to assist in setting out rows of *angarebs*, the little string beds in use among the Sudanese.

During the following night, the city was woken by the howl and crash of artillery shells, the first explosions lighting the city in fitful bursts of flame. But by dawn there was no sign of the attackers. The casualties were few, caused mainly by falling masonry. It was Colonel Butler who brought the hardest news to bear.

"There is a despatch from Charles de Vane's patrol. Berber has fallen to the rebels. We have lost our river route to Egypt and Cairo. Charles and his men are cut off from us. They are riding towards Suakim to bring reinforcements."

That night, Jenny lay in bed and knew that she was alone in her peril. If the worst should happen, the fate of men and women would be equally terrible. But it would be a different fate, for the women's sex made them subject to barbarities of a characteristic kind. She thought of captive beauty at the mercy of a savage and triumphant conqueror. Despite the heat of the room in which she slept, she shivered at the images which such speculations stirred in her mind.

## CHAPTER TEN

THE SIEGE CAME, as Jenny Langham's friends had predicted. Yet life for the Europeans of Khartoum altered very little at first. The isolation of the city from Cairo and London dragged on among rumour and indecision. To break the deadlock in which he was held, General Gordon resolved to try a bold stroke. He made a vigorous sortie from the beleaguered garrison with a battalion under Colonel Butler's command. This attack upon the besiegers by those whom they were besieging was so contrary to the timid mentality of the Arab that it took the enemy completely by surprise. Abu-Girgeh, who commanded the rebel force immediately outside Khartoum, was severely wounded. The Dervishes, formidable in attack, proved feeble in defence and ran away at the first sign of the Egyptian troops with their British officers. By this cowardly abandonment of their positions, they suffered a massacre that might have been averted if they had stood to their guns.

For a brief period, the siege of Khartoum was lifted and the Mahdists retreated in extreme disorder. Yet the seizure of the town of Berber and other points on the Nile still cut off the Sudan from Cairo and reinforcements. Of the party that had set out from Berber to Suakim on the Red Sea, no more was heard. General Wolseley with the relief column was still far down the river on the long march from Cairo, frustrated by the indecision of Gladstone and the Liberal government.

It was during this respite that justice was done to a young native woman who surely deserved it. When the Mahdi's advance guard was driven back, a number of his supporters in the city believed his cause might be lost. At least they concluded that he could take only the countryside and not the centres of population. Accordingly his spies and sympathisers began to slip out at night, through the defences, and make their way towards Rahad. It was impossible to prevent this. Indeed, the prevailing opinion of their defection was "good riddance to bad rubbish."

From time to time a rebel man or woman would be caught by the patrol and sent on the way with a hearty kick up the backside. A few were detained and brought back. Among these was the young woman Shaida who had escaped from Captain de Vane's custody several weeks before while awaiting punishment for her "rape" of a teenage boy. It now seemed that she had lived as mistress of an Egyptian commissary, from whom she tried to wheedle information to pass to the Mahdi's spies.

For the second time, Shaida was brought before Colonel Butler in Jenny's presence. She stood before them in the hall of Charles de Vane's villa, the colonel and Miss Langham sitting at a table for all the world as though a court-martial had been convened. Her wrists were cuffed behind her back and two Egyptian troopers in fez, tunic and baggy trousers escorted her in. Shaida's tousled black hair still clustered down between her shoulder-blades and over her forehead. The strong full curve of her young face was still marked by the directness of her brown eyes, the black arch of her brows, the bold line of her nose and her brightly-painted lips. She was dressed in the blue cotton of her short jacket and pants. The slight voluptuous weight of her hips and thighs was well suggested by this costume.

Shaida showed defiance and apprehension at the same time. She had good reason for both. The tawny-skinned girl had escaped the punishment of having her bare buttocks whipped on the previous occasion and it was under-



stood by all concerned—including Shaida herself—that she would be whipped now for that first offence. The purpose of the present “tribunal” was to decide the amount of extra whipping or other punishment that she would get for escaping her first flogging. In addition, she would be whipped further for her attachment to the Mahdi’s cause.

Such punishments would never have been inflicted on a white-skinned woman by the military authorities. But an Eastern girl like Shaida was thought of as a “nigger bitch” by those authorities and treated accordingly. The native Arabian or Asian tan of her bare body was not to be spared.

Colonel Butler heard the evidence against her from the commander of the patrol. He added his own report of her crime against the Arab boy. His judgment was succinct.

“There is nothing here to warrant the extreme penalty of putting her to death, though it is lack of opportunity and not disinclination which has prevented the young slut from committing such a crime. However, we have no leisure to keep her a prisoner and I will not have soldiers detached to guard her when they might be better employed defending the city. With Miss Langham to see that a woman’s justice is done to a woman, I uphold Captain de Vane’s command that Shaida receive twenty strokes of the whip across her bare buttocks for her offence against the Arab boy. Care is to be taken that the whip does not fall across her back. However, the area to be whipped may include the rear of her thighs as far down as the backs of her knees.”

Jenny, with the paler tan and tomboyish tresses of an English girl was staring at Shaida as if fascinated by the thought of the whip being used upon her bare flesh with such calm precision. There was also something in Jenny Langham’s brown eyes which suggested a shudder at imagining what she herself must have felt, had she been the one who stood and heard such sentence pronounced upon her own fair-skinned body.

"For the second offence of escaping while under detention and waiting to be punished," said Colonel Butler, "I shall add ten strokes of the whip."

He looked up at her, trying to see into Shaida's eyes as she lowered her head and her black tresses fell about her face. Colonel Butler was eager to see the effect upon her at this promise of an extra degree of torture. He also wished her to know by the exchange of glances that he had not finished yet. She looked up at last, as if unable to bear the silence and the suspense. The colonel met her gaze, his mouth tight and quizzical with a vindictive amusement.

"For the offence of carrying secrets to the enemy, I shall add a further twenty strokes of the whip to be given in the same manner, making fifty in all. I have sanctioned this degree of severity as an alternative to a capital penalty, whereby Shaida would be hanged in the garrison grounds. The sentence of whipping is to be carried out tomorrow in the barrack yard. Two of the troopers shall be detailed for it. The kneeling-bench will be used and she is to be strapped down. So that she shall not be overheard in the street, she is also to be gagged. The punishment will be upon her bare posteriors with a short woven lash."

He waited as if to see whether Jenny would demur, but there was no word from her. Instead, she was staring at Shaida, as if trying to share the horror that must have clutched the Moslem girl's entrails. Yet in her own person, Jenny betrayed an approval verging on excitement at the dark and secret ritual to which she hoped to be a witness.

The barrack yard of Khartoum was at the centre of the military compound near the Governor-General's palace. It was a hard sand-strewn rectangle surrounded by wooden buildings on two storeys. The upper floor was approached by steps and a gallery running round all four sides. Upon the rail of this gallery, several British officers lounged, watching the spectacle below. Under the gallery, groups of Egyptian soldiers gathered in the shadows, as if anxious to share in the occasion without being seen and ordered away.

Colonel Butler said nothing to Jenny as to whether she chose to be present. But when a young Englishwoman arrived at the garrison guard-room, the colour of her skin and her race were enough for the Egyptian sentries. She was shown to a room on the ground level, looking into the yard. It was a battalion office with a desk, a table and several wooden chairs. No one came to her there. Though Colonel Butler witnessed Shaïda's punishment from his own room, he affected not to know whether Miss Langham was present. Indeed, he never spoke to her about the Arab-skinned girl again.

The reason was paradoxical and its morality was wholly English. It was entirely proper for Jenny, in a room on her own, to see Shaïda's nudity and the lash employed upon it by two Egyptian troopers. It was no more than might have been seen eighty years before when women were still publicly whipped in England under English law. But it would have been grossly improper for a man to have been there and watched in Jenny's company. Shaïda's nudity and the whipping itself would then have become a matter of the greatest indecency.

As for Colonel Butler, he protected himself. If Jenny should complain of what she saw, the colonel might point out gently that the impropriety was hers for sneaking in where a woman had no business to be.

Because it was a woman who was to be dealt with Jenny Langham felt that her presence was entirely proper. It was not as if a man had been stripped for punishment, when there was a danger of seeing his penis and even his erection. An exception had been made in the case of Abu, where it was regarded as Jenny's right to attend and see her "assailant" punished. Colonel Butler had said privately to Charles de Vane that a man who commits such a crime should be confronted by his victim while he suffers. But Jenny had been shocked by that disgusting display of bulging virility in the canvas jock-strap at his loins, which Abu could not check. The fact that he could not control it

confirmed in her mind that men of his race were no better than animals in their dealings with women.

Miss Langham felt no compunction about witnessing the present chastisement. Surprisingly, she did not find it indecent that the two Egyptian soldiers should act as executioners and flog a girl like Shaida. Had they been ordered to hang Shaida for her crimes, no objection would have been raised. A flogging was a lesser penalty and therefore less objectionable. Once again there was the question of race. Both the girl and the two men were natives, not Europeans. To Jenny in her present frame of mind, they belonged to a species quite different from hers. It was as illogical to complain of two native men flogging a native female as to be shocked if they applied the whip to the rump of a filly they were riding.

By the time that Jenny entered the deserted battalion office it was ten in the morning and the heavy bench had been set out in the shade of the yard. It was not intended that the torment of the fierce sun should be part of the penalty. Shaida was brought out presently. She was entirely naked under a blanket worn as a makeshift cloak and fastened at her neck. Her wrists appeared to be strapped together in front of her. She walked reluctantly with her head lowered and her black hair falling untidily about her face.

The two uniformed troopers brought her to the bench. One of them put a hand to the girl's neck and the blanket fell to the hard sandy earth. Shaida's body-skin was a dusty Arabian gold. As the curve of her chin and her face suggested, there was a somewhat heavy look to her breasts and thighs, hips and backside. Those who watched her standing there were now confronted by the sallow Eastern tan on the rather slack voluptuousness of Shaida's bottom-cheeks.

She was still angry and stubborn when ordered to kneel on the square cushion. But her escorts carried rifles with bayonets fixed. The one behind her put the bayonet point

to Shaida's buttocks and let her feel its touch. The shock of this made her clench inwards so that her belly curved out a little. The other man touched his bayonet tip in Shaida's belly-button and pricked her lightly. Though the anger was still in her face, she bowed her head and knelt, offering no resistance when they made her lift her hips from her heels and lie forward along the bench on all fours. As she did so a tiny dark crimson bead glistened in her belly-button as proof that one pricking had drawn a tribute from her obstinacy.

They strapped her down tightly with a broad black harness belt round her bare waist. Leather cuffs held her wrists to the forward legs of the heavy bench. The Arabian tan of her bare voluptuous thighs required another strap, pinioning her legs together. Last of all her feet were held by an ankle strap. It only remained for one of them to take a damp rag from his pocket and wad it into her mouth, while the other fixed it in place by a cord between the girl's teeth, knotting it at the nape of her neck.

As if to outrage her still further, they opened a small kitchen barrel of soft pork-dripping. One of them stood astride her, his hands filled with the soft pale grease. Then he spread it over her nude flesh from her neck down to her heels. With one of her breasts in each of his hands, he spread the fat to a sleek sheen. Taking two more handfuls, he worked it over Shaida's belly, round her waist and up her back. She made shrill noises into her gag at this filthiness, the insult to her culture and her femininity. His smearing left her bare tawny arms shining as if running wet from a bath.

Moving back a little, he began to grease her flanks and hips, moving down the Eastern voluptuousness of her thighs to her heels. The most intimate attentions he left until last, though assuring the furious and desperate girl that she was going to receive them. First he slipped a hand between the slight olive-tan heaviness of her thighs and massaged her there with the pork-dripping. Then with two



handfuls he smeared the fatter sallow tan of Shaida's bottom-cheeks. The pretext for such greasing was to protect her Asian-tan nudity from the fierce sun. But the flogging-bench had been placed carefully in the shade.

When Shaida's bare skin had been smeared with the salt fat, the two men smiled and said something to her. Then they walked away. Only now was it apparent that Shaida was to be made to wait for her punishment. She was helpless to escape it, strapped down on all fours along the heavy bench. Her slightly heavy curves shone sleek with the grease, only her face having been spared. It gave her a more sensual and voluptuous appeal, a lazy and heavier look to her thighs, a suggestively fatter swell to the cheeks of Shaida's bottom.

The salt fat was not long in attracting the more savage flies of the Nile mud. Though she tensed and twitched, her nude beauty was soon dotted with black gad-flies. They perched on the pretty indentations of her spinal column, on her flanks and thighs. Several were drawn to the sallow cheek-swell of her bottom. To the amusement of several onlookers a few began to insinuate themselves between the cheeks of Shaida's behind. Strapped down as she was, there was little the girl could do to prevent herself being explored in this lewd manner, which added to the amusement of those who very much wanted to see her punished for her rape of the Arab boy.

Almost half an hour passed before the two Egyptian troopers in fez and baggy-trouser uniforms returned to the culprit. The first executioner was carrying the ornamental lash of woven leather, whose use was customary on these occasions. He made Shaida look at it properly, showing her the ivory handle of the whip which was carved in the clear shape of a fine upright penis. When she tried to turn her face away, he drew her head back cruelly with her tousled black hair held firmly in his fist. He held Shaida until she looked most forlornly at the carved replica of male power over the female. He stooped over her, parting



the slight sallow-tan fatness of Shaida's bottom-cheeks with the device. The girl was conveniently greased by the kitchen dripping. Shaida mewed into her gag as the veins stood out on the man's forehead with the effort of forcing her behind on the rounded head of the carved ivory. Though a rather voluptuous beauty, she was tight there.

At last she gave a harder mew of anger and the trooper smiled, the ivory handle disappearing between the sleek and fattened Eastern tan of Shaida's bottom-cheeks. While Shaida's olive-skinned thighs tensed with trapped energy against their restraining straps, the Egyptian trooper made her feel the stretching of her behind on the ivory handle and the alarm as it entered deeply, then withdrew a little and entered again. He put her to five or ten minutes of this mocking ordeal, keeping up a steady rhythm. At last he withdrew it, allowing Shaida's rear entrance to go urgently small and tight again.

Standing back, no longer mocking or smiling, the trooper drew the short lash through his fingers, raised it high behind his shoulder and cracked it down across the full swelling globes of Shaida's buttocks. The walls of the yard rang with the sharpness of the stroke as the fierce leather tail cracked and clung round the sallow-tanned and fattened curves of Shaida's bottom. She tossed her tousled black hair, trying to crane round at him, and screamed into her gag.

Again the whip caught the light, kissing Shaida's bottom with the naked agony of skinning leather. She tensed her buttocks desperately but there was nothing she could do to ward off the worst of the punishment she had earned. The rails above were crowded with Egyptian and British officers who had come to watch justice done. Some were there from a sense of righteous indignation at the girl's immoral conduct. Others had come to enjoy the sight of a native girl like Shaida bare-bottomed and to feel the exhilaration of seeing the whip smack agonisingly across her olive-skinned backside while they heard the muted frenzy of her screams.

Jenny watched with a mixture of dismay and fascination. Not for a moment had she doubted that the whip was a proper form of punishment. It was the means of discipline in every school, in prisons and reformatories, even in the homes of England. But there was an ambiguous sense of satisfaction now. It could not be denied that by the time the thrashing was over, Jenny's pulse beat faster as if with excitement. The explanation was veiled from her conscious thoughts in some way. She preferred that it should be so. Yet the experience of seeing a native girl like Shaida whipped sadistically had an effect upon the young Englishwoman that was inexplicably exciting as well as profoundly disturbing.

While Shaida was getting the whip and the officers were grinning at the sight of the young bitch having it across her full golden-tan bottom-cheeks, a very different scene was in preparation some miles across the desert. The forces of the Mahdi had begun to gather at Rahad for their decisive assault upon Khartoum.

This enormous camp looked like a sea of haystacks, with its crowds of *tokuls* or straw huts roofed with thatch. Every Friday was the rebel Field Day. From the first light of dawn above the horizon sand-hills the war drums were heard beating hoarsely. There followed the harsh tones of the horns or *ombeya*, an instrument fashioned from the hollow trunk of an elephant, audible from one end of the vast camp to the other. At this sound the rebel troops at once assembled by regiments under the different banners of their leaders. The Khalif Abdullahi was *Reis-el-Gesh* or Generalissimo. His division was the *Raya-ez-Zargha* and carried a blue standard.

The *Raya-el-Khadra* or green banners were commanded by the Khalif Ali Wad Helu, while the red flags, or *Raya-el-Ashraf*, the banner of the nobility belonged to the division of the Khalif Mohammed Sherif. In addition to these banners, each Emir or Prince had his own individual flag. No sooner had the great war drums sounded, accompa-

nied by the melancholy notes of the *ombeya*, than the Emirs hurried to their posts, and aided by the *Mukkadums*, their subordinate officers, marshalled their men in due order. The division of the *Raya-ez-Zargha*, its banner flapping in the wind, deployed into line, facing to the east. Then the division of the *Raya-el-Khadra* took up its position on the other side, facing west. The *Raya-el-Ashraf* paraded to the north.

The dark-skinned Dervish hordes were thus drawn up on a vast square, open to the south, ready to acclaim their Prophet. Mounted on a white camel, he passed slowly along the front of each formation, greeting them in the sacred phrase,

“Allah yebarek Kum—The blessings of Allah be upon you.”

Many strange stories passed from mouth to mouth among the soldiers of that camp. One man would declare that he had seen Mahomet in the flesh, riding beside the Mahdi and talking to him. Another would announce that he had heard the chant of celestial voices, songs of victory and promise. And there were others who would vow that they had noticed clouds in the sky, plainly formed from celestial wings and evidently intended to guard the Mahdi's regiments against the heat of the desert sun.

But the Mahdi was doing more than hold reviews. He had taken Berber by storm. Once that town was in his hands, much of the northern Sudan was in his power and Khartoum was absolutely cut off from the British regiments in Egypt. At Khartoum, the loss of Berber had caused widespread alarm among the native population and had badly shaken the nerve of the Egyptian garrison.

General Gordon himself never flinched, confident of eventual success. He hinted that the column under Lord Wolseley's command was already within striking distance of the city. But the days passed without a sign of the red-coated regiments. Steamers were despatched upstream and down, furrowing the waters of the Nile and peppering

the Mahdi's forces on the river bank with shot and shell. For the time being, confidence was restored, at least to the Europeans of the beleaguered city. The Governor-General even succeeded for a while in convincing the Egyptian auxiliaries that they need hold on only a little longer to win the day.

Yet Gordon knew better than anyone how fast treason was spreading through the city with every hour in which Wolseley's column failed to appear. From the high terrace of his palace he had been able to see with his naval telescope that the loyal Sudanese sent out to drive off the Mahdi's advance guard were actually fraternising with the enemy. These mercenaries returned to the city, unaware that their behaviour had been discovered. Their leaders were immediately shot. In this way, General Gordon made fresh enemies out of the friends and comrades of the men whom he sentenced to death.

To keep up the spirits of his men, the Governor-General kept the military bands continually playing and gave concerts in the gardens of his residence. To these entertainments he invited the population, regardless of the ceaseless thunder of the cannonade.

All the fashionables of Khartoum were crowded under the old lemon trees and tall sycamores of the palace gardens, walking in a continuous circle about the kiosk at its centre. Conversation was interrupted only for an instant when the heaviest of the siege artillery boomed out from the ramparts. Then the orchestra would play some sentimental tune, often a German melody adopted and popularised in England.

"Thou pretty eye, thou lovely star,  
Thou art so near, and yet so far . . ."

The smartly uniformed officers and the women in their ribboned dresses and hats, parasols on their shoulders, promenaded as in Hyde park or the Cremorne Gardens.

But all this time the whole army of the Mahdi was moving upon the city by forced marches. Khartoum was closely surrounded on every side. Abu-Anga was the commander who led the first attack. Pushing forward his trenches between the river bank and the Fort of Omdurman, he overran the outer defences in that quarter. Abu-Anga was a negro of the Dongola tribe, the same to which the Mahdi himself belonged. He was the son of a liberated slave and one of the three Khalifs whom the rebel "Prophet" had named to be his own successor one day.

The siege grew closer. The hardships of the garrison became more grim. There was no food but what had been gathered and preserved for some time. Frequently the native population filled the streets beseeching the soldiers to open the gates and surrender Khartoum to the Mahdi. But still General Gordon clung to his hope. Despite the despicable and vacillating policy of the Prime Minister, Gladstone, who would sacrifice the lives of the gallant defenders. Despite the bloody skirmishes by which Lord Wolseley's relief column was beset. Despite all this, he believed that the English regiments would appear before Khartoum. They would fall in judgment upon the Dervishes. Gordon himself would lead his troops out and complete the destruction of the Mahdi and all his evil power.

So the situation remained in December and the turning of the year.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE FALL OF Khartoum, when it came, was more than the taking of a city. It was greater even than a shock which reverberated through the Empire from the Arctic wilderness of the Canadian north to the stifling Palladian grandeur of the Viceroy's palace in Calcutta. It was the reversal of moral order and the triumph of horror to those who were its victims. Had Jenny Langham known what lay in store for her, she would have begged the last of her countrymen to fire a bullet through her brain or run his sword through her heart.

But fate took such decisions from her hands and made her its slave.

It was a moonless night when the Dervishes took Khartoum. They crossed the Nile in silence from the Fort of Omdurman. For this they had to thank their spies who had discovered a ford just below where the city ramparts had been breached by wind and weather. The river was in flood and its overflow had undermined the wall at that point. A section of the rampart had begun to crumble into the stream.

No European army would have attempted such an approach. For that reason, the damage done to the rampart by the Nile's overflow had seemed unimportant. No one had informed Gordon of the wall's collapse. So much else occupied his mind that there seemed no reason to trouble him about it. But to the Mahdi's warriors, the breach was large enough and the remains of the ruined wall easily



scaled. The guards at that point were taken completely by surprise, even before the alarm could be raised. Even before they could volunteer to change sides, their throats were cut by the shadows swarming up behind them.

Ten minutes more and the same shadowy figures of the rebel force began to flit through the streets of the city. Then the footsteps gathered and quickened. A great cry broke out as the invaders sought their promised booty. From wall to wall the cry echoed, growing louder as the first insurgents were reinforced by the dark battalions who swarmed through the breach in their wake. Their leaders had assured them that Khartoum was full of treasure. Among the gold and rich silks of the white man's wealth, they would find the greatest prize of all. The fair and silken skin of his most beautiful women. There would be slave-women enough for the bed of every man in the victorious army. They soon discovered that the Mahdi had deceived them in this, as in so many other things. But by then his power over them was absolute and none dared to rise against him.

“Lil Saraya! Lil Saraya! To the Palace! To the Palace!”

Too late, General Gordon and his officers were woken by the shouts. Gordon went up on to the palace roof and saw the extent of the disaster. It was now after three in the morning. Returning to his quarters, he dressed in his white uniform with all his medals pinned upon it. Time was short. He sent a command to the engineer of the last river-boat, the *Ismailia*, to get up steam so that at least the white women of the city might be saved. But it was already impossible for this officer to leave his house.

The Egyptian troops laid down their arms and were slaughtered on the spot by the Dervishes with wild cries and the moonlit gleam of their cutlass blades. The Sudanese guards were not killed but driven like cattle through the streets to the prison and there stripped of all they had.

In the palace itself, the invaders had broken into the basement rooms and killed every servant who was to be

found there. Then, at 3.30 with the dawn almost breaking, Gordon himself appeared at the top of a wide flight of steps leading down into the courtyard. He was alone now. At the first alarm, he had ordered every man to leave him and find what safety there was.

From the courtyard, the Dervishes looked up in silence for a moment at the white clad figure of the great imperial ruler. Two or three of them started up the steps towards him. Gordon continued steadily until he was looking directly into the eyes of his first enemy.

“Where is your master, the Mahdi?”

These words, spoken in their own language, were his last. His adversary, a powerful African negro, sprang towards him. There was another moonlit flash of razor-edged steel. Gordon toppled forwards, struck to the heart by the tip of the lance. With that, the mob gathered courage and pressed upon the fallen hero, howling and brandishing their weapons. But the defender of Khartoum was already dead and their own leaders drove back the heathen savages. One of the Mahdi's officers gave an order. A soldier stepped forward, lifting his sabre in both hands. The blade flew down, beheading the corpse at a single stroke. The officer himself took a pikeman's lance, of the kind that had been driven into Gordon's heart. Lowering it, he stuck the pale but bloodied head upon its point. The red blood gleamed in the light of their torches. With victory assured, the procession set off to bear this gruesome trophy to the Mahdi's tent.

Those men and women who were the victims or booty of war tried in vain to hide themselves in the cellars of their houses or among the trees of the gardens. By now the gardens were full of Dervishes and it was growing light. They were in every street and every house. With Colonel Butler and the French Consul, Dufour, Jenny and the two camp followers, Lizzie and Annie, had taken refuge in Charles de Vane's brick cellar. It was cool and dry.

Despite its racks of bottles, the lamplight on the brick vaulting gave it the look of a sinister mediaeval chamber.

From the upper world of the courtyard and the street outside came muffled shouts, indistinct rumblings and half-heard explosions. These were the sounds of massacre and destruction, faint echoes of the sack of Khartoum.

Butler and Dufour guarded the mouth of the passageway, each with his revolver ready. A half-deadened rumbling grew closer and soon men's steps were heard, echoing from the brick vaulting itself. There was a crash as if the pursuers had overturned one of the bottle-racks.

The first shots from Butler and Dufour rang like thunder in the narrow space. There were shouts and a confused struggle, a sound like musket butts against woodwork. After that, there were no more shots. Several figures in white with turbans on their heads gazed at the three terrified young women. The skins of these warriors shone coal-black in the lamplight and their teeth gleamed white.

Then there was a surging, as if a crowd had entered behind these first spear-carrying warriors. An Emir, a perfect type of the Nubian negro, stood at the front. He was more than six feet in height, the crisp black hair of his head uniting with a fine beard. He looked at the three girls, each in turn, and then his gaze came back to Jenny. His lips parted in a smile and he nodded at her gently, as if they both understood what must happen now. It was not cruelty nor barbarity but an unwritten law of siege and conquest, to which womankind must submit.

He saw before him this girl of twenty with her collar-length crop of light brown tresses, her prim but pretty features and the tomboyish swell of her body's curves. Because she had fled in little more than a bodice and pants, Jenny's agile young body was well displayed to this tyrannical admirer. He had fought and might well have died to gain such a prize. Though her fate was to be a cruel one, the emir had the justice of nature on his side. Right was on his side, as it had been on the side of

Colonel Butler when the bare olive-skinned voluptuousness of Shaida's tan bottom-cheeks writhed and flesh-creased under the snakeskin whip. It was foolish to dispute the right of authority in both cases and the need for Shaida and Jenny to suffer as they must.

There was a convenient alcove in the brick passageway. However hard Jenny would have struggled against her seducer in a Wardour Street hotel, the universe was now turned upside down. The rules had changed in a moment and, because she could not deny her deepest feminine instinct, Jenny knew it.

But she could not easily endure what followed. In the shadow-play of torches on the brick walls she could see other robed figures and she heard a guttural laughter of triumph. While she stood petrified, the leader of the Dervish group came forward. He hesitated a moment and there was uncertainty in his eyes. This English girl with her tomboyish looks and the cropped tresses of her light brown hair belonged to the masters of the city, the race who had brought authority and command. To lay hands on her was a crime that would not be forgiven if the rule of those white masters should ever be restored.

He reached out and laid a strong hand on her shoulder, pushing her back towards the brick alcove which would allow them scant privacy from the onlookers. However reluctant she might be, the girl did not resist. Perhaps, even now, she did not fully comprehend what must happen to her. But still her instinctive feminine nature accepted what the rules of war and conquest required of her.

It was only as he pushed her down on her back and began to rummage at the waist of her pants that Jenny uttered a wild cry of distress. He stifled this at once with his lips on her mouth, making her breathe in the pungent scents of her body. The girl went very still and, for a moment, it might have seemed that she had fainted. When he drew his face away a little, she gave a louder cry as he began to draw her pants down and fondle her. His hands

found the full firm cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom, her thighs, and then the flinching sexual flesh between them.

For the Nubian, there had been other experiences of captive women after battle. It was Jenny's dismay, rather than her weakness, which undermined her resistance. She did not need to be told that if she tried his patience too far, they would rip her belly up with a sabre or cut her throat. In the quiet of St James's Square, she would assure herself that death was preferable to a ravishing of this kind. But now that death was so close and in so many hideous forms, she trembled at it. These were men in the conquering army who would not hesitate to truss her in a squat, run a pike up Jenny Langham's backside, hoist her aloft upon it and plant the shaft of the spear in the ground so that she sat above their laughter, contemptuously impaled in a prolonged final agony.

Braver women than she would have yielded in the face of such terrors. But still there was an ordeal to face. Her prostrate body jerked and she gave a shriek—the proof of virginity—as he knelt between her widened knees and thrust home. There were murmurs of approval at this, for the taking of virginity was a greater honour than mere ravishing. Jenny's loins had been eased by horse-riding and exercise but still she paid a certain price.

For a time the onlookers heard her cries getting wilder at what she was made to endure. Her nerves were drawn to their highest tension. And because they were so, her naked flanks began to quiver with spasms that betrayed a feeling of intense and almost delirious pleasure. She lay with thighs spread wide and feet raised, her knees bent up as her native ravisher toiled at her. His hands were under the cheeks of Jenny Langham's backside, fondling and urging, prying and poking. Surges of pleasure and discomfort alternated. Then the man's head went back. He snarled between clenched teeth in a fury of pleasure. His passion began to pulse in her loins as Jenny quivered violently and fainted away.



She was thus spared the sight of her companions lying lifeless in the passageway of the cellar. Her captors carried her off through the streets of Khartoum. From every side came the sound of gunfire as the few surviving defenders made their last resistance. Dimly she heard the prayers of victims, the cries and groans of wretches under torture for the pleasure of their new masters. The city was burning. There were bursts of savage laughter, flames licking upwards amid whirlwinds of sparks. She was carried on a rough litter out of the city and across a stretch of open country bordering on the Nile, a sandy plain dotted with clumps of alfa grass. By the time that she came to her senses fully, the sun was blazing high in a sky of deepest blue. It was clear that they thought her too great a prize to be impaled or put to the sword just yet. Whether she would welcome or curse that respite remained to be seen.

By the riverside, perhaps a mile or two from the city was an open yard enclosed only by palings. Jenny was pushed into it. She found herself with a number of other captive women. There were Copts, Nubians, and Greeks. All were silent and deadly pale, grief and anxiety depicted on every face. They were too shocked even to exchange words between themselves. The majority sat, squatting on their heels, and rested.

Farther off was a crowd of warriors, agitated and noisy as they gathered together. Fresh booty was continually arriving from the looted city to be shared between them. Yet, in the distance, it seemed as if fighting might still be going on. There were single explosions of cannon and isolated volleys of musketry. But from the camp itself there was a tide of shouting and argument, overlaid by the rolling of the great war-drums and the harsh clarion calls of the *ombeya*.

Beside a clump of yellow mimosas, surrounded by his Emirs, the Mahdi sat at breakfast on a sheepskin. Before him were spread water-melons and slices of flesh cut from a young camel, which he ate raw. Even while he was



eating, the turbaned leader gave his brief peremptory orders. He divided the plunder and distributed the captive women among his followers, though generally reserving the most beautiful women for himself. He settled disputes and dealt with offenders. Sentences were pronounced and punishments assigned. None of this interrupted his meal for more than a few moments. Traitors were handed over for execution by a single stroke of the sabre, while the warriors shouted, "Môt! Môt! Kill them! Kill them!" Obstinate women were taken away to be whipped into obedience.

Jenny lay on the sand in the calico drawers and bodice, which were her only covering. Her body was seized by twinges of discomfort shooting from its most intimate parts. Hunger and thirst tormented her as the day wore on. How absurd her resistance to Algernon Regis seemed now. How ridiculous were her protests in the Wardour Street hotel that far-off night. She might be ravished by a dozen of the most loathsome creatures around her and have her throat cut afterwards, for all she knew. How much better to have yielded that night in London and been there now, riding among the parasols in the Park or dressing for the first ball of the Season in Park Lane or Portman Square. Then she realised the stupidity of this dream. Despite the heat of the desert where she lay, it was winter in London now. There would be no parasols in the Park and no Season for several months to come.

She started abruptly and opened her eyes as a hand fell roughly on her shoulder. Two of the tall Nubians prodded her to her feet and led her into the Mahdi's presence. Her appearance produced a murmur of astonishment and delight from the surrounding Emirs. Each of them privately longed to have her assigned to him as his reward for services rendered to the leader in the long campaign against the infidel. Jenny looked back at them, astonished. She saw their eyes sparkling with the most bestial desires. Yet she was so weary and hungry, pale and shaken, that she

could scarcely think of anything else but her bodily cravings for food and rest. So fierce were the pangs of hunger, indeed, that they overcame everything else. She grew oblivious of her disgrace and shame as a woman, even of the hot pain that still lingered after the violation she had undergone.

The Mahdi stared at her without speaking. His attendants stood round, their very breath heavy with desire for her. But surely he would keep this young woman for himself with her fair skin and proud face, her brown eyes and the tomboyish tresses that had been trimmed at her collar. She would be led away to his *Beit-el-Maal*, that treasure-house and pleasure-dome where he collected all that pleased him. It contained gold and silver from his conquests, armaments, precious silks and food, slaves of both sexes, even the severed heads of his vanquished foes. And there he also kept his harem of beautiful slave-girls who had come willingly or against their will in the wake of his victories.

Like the others who gazed upon her now, the Mahdi saw in Jenny's eyes the look of a girl who stood dizzy with horror at the sights she had seen and who now believed herself in the hands of demons. There would be no rescue, no rushing in of mounted regiments to scatter the horde of heathen savages and carry her off to safety. At last this proud girl had begun to discover the fate of womankind in defeat. But it was only a beginning of that discovery. Jenny Langham's apprenticeship to servitude and humiliation had far to go.

The men before whom she stood had been dining. On the tables in the tent there were dishes of poultry and white rice that smelt deliciously of the milk it had been cooked in. There were joints of roast meat, browned by the fire, red meat with rich gravy, juicy meat so tender that it would almost melt against the teeth. There were cakes of *dourrha*, still hot from the oven, giving off a

tantalising odour that proved they had been cooked to a turn.

Such sights and smells were a torture worse than any whipping or hot iron. They finally overcame her. Jenny went down on her knees, in weakness and supplication. The Mahdi nodded to the man before whose chair she knelt. This smiling Emir took one of those cakes with a slice of rich succulent meat upon it, the gravy soaking into the *dourrha* itself. One of the guards held her arms behind her as the Emir reached out the food towards her. Jenny Langham fed from his hand, like a tame bitch under his table. She had lost all pretension and pride now. They would do as they wished with her, that was decided. The onlookers knew this and grinned, as if to reassure her that her humiliation would be enforced to the uttermost. The Emir fed her from his hand until her head hung and she could take no more.

The guards pulled her to her feet again, the calico drawers dropping to her ankles since her hands were not free to hold them. She stood there while the Mahdi and his warriors stared at the firm pale lines of her lower limbs, the slight weight of her thighs, the curve of her hips and a suggestion of fatness in the robust cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom. There was nothing she could do to prevent this examination. Perhaps she was even glad of it. At least her life was not to be immediately forfeit.

The dark-skinned warriors looked their fill. Then her hands were released. She hesitated a moment before reaching down and pulling up her calico drawers, like a little girl who may fear that she is not to do so without the permission of her governess. And in this very hesitation she confessed that dominion over her own body and her own actions had passed into the hands of others. It was her first lesson in the meaning of slavery. But it was by no means her last.

The Mahdi waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal. He said something in guttural Arabic which the girl did not

catch. Then, as if for her benefit alone, he repeated it in heavily accented English.

“Take her away and put her with the others. We will decide in a day or two what is to be done with her.”

She was led from the tent. In the space outside were several women of the Asiatic races who had not been at the taking of Khartoum and who seemed to enjoy privileges and freedom of a kind. Jenny saw with a start that one of them was Shaida, whose whipping she had condoned and witnessed. Their eyes met and in that moment Miss Langham sensed a cold and vindictive triumph in the other girl's expression. The shock of it and the promise of retribution to come almost caused her to swoon in the arms of her Nubian escorts.

**THREE:**  
**WOMAN AND HER**  
**MASTER**





## CHAPTER TWELVE

IT WAS ON the following morning when Jenny's guards escorted her with the other women to the palace of Beit-el-Maal. General Gordon, on his first arrival at Khartoum, had tried to flatter the Mahdi out of rebellion by creating him Sultan of Kordofan and Lord of Beit-el-Maal. But the Mahdi knew quite well that this and every other title of its kind would fall to him by virtue of conquest. The gesture had done nothing but increase his contempt for Her Majesty's Governor-General.

The palace of Beit-el-Maal by the White Nile was a place of marble paving and enclosed courtyards, where fountains played and where sunlight was reflected back again into the arcades of moorish archways. Stone lattice-work, fine as Nottingham lace, divided the cool dark rooms with an air of privacy spied upon.

The guards who escorted the captive women there, consigned Jenny to Fardji, the trusted eunuch of the conqueror's harem. Fardji was of the Coptic race, tall and fat as many eunuchs are. He was perfectly bald, for it was his habit to pluck the hairs from his head every morning as well as from his chin. His voice was a childish treble and he always kept it at the same note, sometimes commanding and sometimes shrill. Fardji was conscious of the great honour conferred upon him, as a man who was to rule his master's women. He seemed possessed of a calm and dignified manner, an air of mastery tempered by moderation.

By a long-established custom, the new arrival was not permitted to enter the buildings of her master's harem until she had been bathed and cleansed. For that reason, Jenny was given into the eunuch's custody before reaching the slave-quarters of the palace with its high blank walls on the outer world and its domed splendour. It was on the outskirts of the surrounding camp that Fardji received the girl from her escorts and ordered her to follow him. Jenny looked at him without replying. To disobey was out of the question.

By this time she was one among hundreds of captive women. Nine out of ten were African or Asian. The rest were European beauties preserved from slaughter to serve the pleasure of whichever Emir should be awarded them. On Jenny's arrival, Fardji led the way to the *zariba*, an enclosure of thorny cactus with thirty or forty *tokuls*, as the little straw huts were called, which had been ranged in regular rows about the residence of the eunuch himself. Within this larger hut the floor was of fine sand, strewn with mats and sheepskins. In one corner stood a full-sized European bath, no doubt looted in the course of conquest.

A number of women were sitting on the mats or lounging on piles of cushions. They chattered incessantly without for one moment interrupting their conversations as they dipped their hands into bowls of sugary sweetmeats, rice cooked in milk, and soft sticky conserves of fruit. It was not in the least like the grand bejewelled harem visions of English painters, which Jenny had seen at the Royal Academy exhibitions. There were no fine pillars and moorish archways here. No richly beaten brass or golden lamps. These splendours were reserved for the palace of Beit-el-Maal itself.

Yet there was the air of a harem about it—the promise of what was to come. Amongst twenty or thirty women there were Circassians fair as lilies with great limpid eyes. There were tawny-skinned girls from India or the Asian

sub-continent. There were tall and slender Nubian girls with skins of ebony and figures that were simultaneously soft and lithe. There were coppertoned women from Abyssinia, gracefully moulded as if by the sculptor's hand. Among them were several Copts, yellow-skinned and chubby-cheeked. This collection of half-naked beauty went on talking and laughing and stuffing themselves with bonbons. They showed no surprise at Jenny's arrival. She was not the first fair-skinned European slave-girl to pass into that harem—nor would she be the last.

It was Fardji who dispersed them. He spoke once. They looked up and scattered, like a flock of startled doves, running off to the far entrance of the building. At the eunuch's command, they were scared and dumb. Fardji watched them, his hand on the carved handle of the long leather whip which hung from his belt.

When the place was cleared, he clapped his hands twice. A maid appeared and Jenny was able to catch the name Amelia. The girl might have been Greek or even Italian. Though her figure had a hint of voluptuousness about it, she moved with a graceful undulating walk. Taking possession of the English slave-girl, Amelia began to undo the bodice and loosen the drawers, undressing Jenny with a familiarity that no maidservant in London ever showed to a grown woman. Jenny could only say,

“Why? What are you doing?”

There was no reply as Amelia bowed the dark curls of her head and pushed the drawers down a little. Frightened and angered, Jenny backed away from her.

“Stand still!” It was the eunuch's shrill command. “Learn to be more obedient. You will appear before your masters presently. Before you do so, you must be bathed and perfumed.”

Jenny stared at him, dismayed by his reference to her masters. It seemed there might be more than one. Was she to be their common property like a pavement whore? In her imagination she assumed a harem slave-girl had only one master.

"You have not been chosen yet," Fardji said, his hand resting on the butt of his leather whip which he wore like a sword through his belt. "Why make trouble now? If you learn to please a master, your life may be pleasant enough. But you must learn to do as you are told. That is the first rule of your life here. You must learn it now. If you refuse, then your resistance must be broken with the whip."

"Why? But why?" Jenny was still holding herself back from Amelia.

Fardji's expression did not change as he looked down at her, his head shaved bald and his face beardless.

"A slave-girl does not question the commands given her. It is enough that they are given. This whip has tamed girls more rebellious than you. Even Amelia was a tigress by comparison with you. Her resistance endured two weeks of having her bare backside kissed morning and night by the lash. I doubt whether you would hold out as long as she. It would take a night of torment, perhaps the following day and the night after that. But then, I assure you, you would beg me to give you commands so that you might obey them."

The words seemed to stun her. Jenny lowered her face and allowed the maid to strip her naked. She walked with Amelia across the carpets and sheepskins to the bath which had been filled with tepid water. There she stepped in and sank down. All her resistance was over. Future commands might sting her into defiance if they were extreme enough. But never again would this tomboyish young woman of twenty years old offer systematic defiance to her captors. She turned her body this way and that, just as Amelia wished. The soap was rubbed upon her and lathered with a sponge, her hair shampooed. When she stepped from the bath, Jenny stood naked while her body was wiped dry and oiled, first with the fragrance of sandalwood, then attar of roses.

Fardji had watched it all, crouched in a corner. Now he got up and went to a coffer of inlaid pine. From this he took a pair of green morocco sandals embroidered with gold thread and a broad waistband of Indian silk. He watched Jenny put them on, the waistband adjusted with Amelia's assistance. Then the maidservant hesitated, comb in hand. Jenny's light brown hair had been shingled so that it curled forward a little on her forehead and was shaped to her head almost as if it had been a helmet. Its lightly-waved tresses were long enough only to lie upon her collar. It would have been impossible to tie it up in thin wiry curls which was the style of many native Sudanese girls.

The eunuch waved his hand, indicating to Amelia that Jenny was to comb it herself, in her usual manner. When she had finished this and returned the comb to the maid, the fair-skinned girl waited to see what costume she would wear apart from her sandals and waistband. Fardji beckoned her forward and clipped a brass bangle on each wrist. Then he commanded her to come to the next room. Without a word, Jenny followed him. The far doorway led to another section of the building where there might be a dressing-room and closets hung with the long silk skirts of the Sudanese women. A skirt and bodice of scarlet and gold paisley was chosen for her. By an irony of conquest, the material had formed part of General Gordon's generosity to the Mahdi upon his arrival. In this splendid but meagre attire, she was to meet her ordeal.

But Jenny's humiliation soon assumed new proportions. She was led, like a beautiful captive in the triumph of a conquering general, across a wide space like a parade-ground, towards the great gates of the palace of Beit-el-Maal. They were panelled in beaten bronze with strange designs in bas-relief, like the doors of Renaissance baptis-tries illustrated in the art magazines that had been delivered to St James's Square. The shade of the palace rooms

seemed black as night at first, after the harsh burning blue of the desert sky and the white brilliance of African sand.

They came to the end of a corridor that was flanked by keyhole shapes of moorish arches. The eunuch pushed her through the doorway into a wide vestibule, arcaded at ground and first floor level with a narrow balcony. It seemed to be a place of display and spectacle.

At the centre of the smooth marble paving stood a round ottoman, far larger than in any London drawing-room or Cairo salon. It was quite six feet in diameter. Sitting on it, dressed only in sandals and waistband of the kind Jenny was wearing were a dozen other girls. One or two had the beauty of Asia, one or two were white as Miss Langham herself. The others were Sudanese girls, no doubt taken as booty at the sack of Khartoum. All were naked apart from their waist-length bodices, their skirts lying on a table at one side.

A command was given, ordering the new arrival to undo her skirt and lay it with the rest. Jenny hesitated. Fardji drew the whip from his belt. With a shiver that was seen by the others, the prettily tousled brunette undid her skirt and let it fall. Fardji did not use his lash on her fair-skinned nudity, though he would greatly have enjoyed doing so. For the moment he contented himself with drawing the cold leather tail lightly across the firm tomboy cheeks of Jenny Langham's bottom.

The terror of that threat subdued her modesty. She bent down to pick up the fallen skirt. Fardji stepped back a little. He made no attempt to conceal from the girl that he was having a good look at the spread-cheeked view of Jenny Langham's backside as she stooped. With her eyes lowered, she walked across and draped the skirt with the rest on the table. Then she returned and sat down among the other girls. A furtive glance showed her that the two shopgirls who had exchanged honest work for camp-following were among them. Annie and Lizzie. They were



the only other survivors that she recognised since the dreadful last night. Whether she felt dismay or hope in their company, only Jenny herself could have said.

After a few more minutes, one of the Mahdi's Emirs entered, a man who had been in the leader's hut when Jenny knelt to receive her first taste of food. He said something in a loud voice. The girls who understood him lay on their backs, their heads towards the centre of the round ottoman. Jenny did the same. The wisdom of the harem believed in training female captives to obedience collectively, like a class of schoolgirls. A young woman on her own might be outraged at such commands and would perhaps resist them. But one girl alone would be unlikely to resist when she saw that twenty others were obeying. She had only to copy them. It was prudent to mingle European girls with African and Asian, so that the natural obedience of the dark-skinned beauties would undermine any rebellion by their fair-skinned companions in slavery.

Fardji stood in the space at the centre of the divan. He clipped a light chain to each of the bangles on the girls' wrists and looped the other end round a pole where he stood. The result was that each girl, as she lay on her back, had her wrists chained to this post somewhere above her head.

There was a pause. Then the Emir spoke again. This time several of the girls drew their knees up to their breasts so that they lay almost as if squatting. The spread of thighs and hips in this manner exposed the sex fully and blatantly to a viewer who walked round the circle of the ottoman.

Fardji spoke sharply to Jenny.

"Do as Pabi does, the girl next to you."

Pabi was another Asian girl with the looks of a natural coquette. Her dark hair was brushed close and short round her head, brushed up a little, and worn in a plait down her back. The silken tawny complexion of her face was more

clearly revealed by this. Pabi's rounded high-boned cheeks and chin were animated by the ellipse of dark eyes that were hard and calculating. Her mouth was pretty but there was a vicious line to it. Her young figure was good, firm and well-formed.

Nature had given her the look and manners of a slut, or a tart as she might be more kindly called by Algernon Regis and his brother officers. No man would take her as his sole female companion. No man would want a harem of girls all like her. But every man who possessed a harem would like to have two or three girls of Pabi's wicked sensuality for variation.

This Asian coquette drew her brown knees up like the other girls, exposing the underview of her squat to those who toured the circle of the divan. Jenny was obliged to copy her. The effect of twenty young women lying like this was provocatively lewd. As the Emir walked round the circle of the girls hugging their knees, he paused to view each pair of spread thighs, each softly-haired sexual anatomy.

There was a pause. Fardji said something in Arabic and then in English.

"Stay like that! All of you!"

It was difficult for the girls, lying on their backs in this manner, to see quite what was happening. There was a pause for a minute or two. Then the Emir and the eunuch drew back, as if in deference to higher authority. There was a voice that belonged unmistakably to the Mahdi himself. And there was a young woman's voice.

Slowly the Mahdi and the young woman walked round the circle of the leather divan. From time to time they stopped. It was then that the girl who attracted their attention would utter a gasp or a shivering cry as the sensitive lips of her sex were fingered apart, their secrets explored, the flesh stroked to see how long it was before she moistened with excitement even at the most impersonal mastur-

bation. Often, as the fingers were drawn away, the other girls heard the victim emit a low syllable that might have been longing or despair. Soon it was the turn of the Asian girl lying next to Jenny. Pabi let out a long sigh and worried her lips between her teeth as the fingers of the young mistress parted the folds of her sex, stroking and probing for the master's benefit. In their own language, the Mahdi approved what he saw.

"She responds well. She will give pleasure eagerly but she will seek it eagerly as well. There must be a check upon her behaviour with other women or with the eunuchs. If she misbehaves, she will have to be curbed in the usual way. It shall be done at the first sign that she is misbehaving on her own or with other girls."

It was impossible not to envy the Mahdi his next subject. In her present posture, Jenny's robust young thighs seemed to swell full and smooth. Because her sex was more lightly-haired than that of the African and Asian girls, its lips and cleft were more easily seen. The Mahdi made sounds of approval. Then the woman's fingers parted the lips gently to show their secret places. Jenny flinched away as if at the touch of a hot coal. But the manner in which her wrists were chained above her head made it easy for the servants to hold her. Moreover, the threat of the whip soon subdued her.

Though it was true that she had often touched herself there in the innocent rituals of bathroom and bedroom, she had never felt such a caress as this. It roused feelings in her that were simultaneously repugnant and seductive. She loathed the enforced caress that robbed her of dignity, yet almost swooned at the excitement of it.

There was another pause. It seemed as if the visitors had withdrawn. Fardji said something in his own language. Then he spoke to Jenny.

"Do as Pabi does again."

Pabi, her wrists still chained to the central post, had lowered her legs and was turning over on to her belly.

Then she slid down until she was kneeling on the marble floor, lying forward over the divan with her arms stretched to its centre. The other girls had done the same. Jenny followed their example with obvious reluctance. But she had been allowed no alternative and the wisdom of the harem was correct in this. She would obey more easily when she could assure herself that she bore no responsibility for it.

The view of the divan had changed. As the Mahdi and his companion returned to inspect the girls kneeling forward over the leather, it was a circle of bare bottoms that confronted them. Yet even this impersonal display prompted varying reactions by the master of the harem. Standing behind Pabi, he could not be unaware that the short crop of upward brushed hair was twisted so that she looked slyly back at him. There was a natural randiness in this self-confident young Asian slut. The olive tan of Pabi's bottom-cheeks and the rear view of her thighs had been suggestively and almost wantonly presented to him. In public, Pabi would talk of her dignity and the rights of her young Asian womanhood. But, in the power of such a master, this hypocrisy was stripped away. Pabi showed a lascivious submission to his orders that was her true feminine character.

There was no resistance when the mistress of the girls fondled and parted the Asian tan of Pabi's bottom-cheeks, allowing the master to examine her most intimate rear anatomy. It was evident that Pabi would present no problems of obedience, even when her bottom was used as if she had been a page-boy. Her faults would be of the opposite kind, a passionate nature so strong that she would spoil herself and the other girls through over-indulgence in feminine vice.

How different was the case with Jenny. The master gazed at her as the fair-skinned girl was drawn forward against her will, kneeling over the leather divan. She could not bear her face to be seen in this moment of her

greatest humiliation. Her master saw only the close cut tresses of light brown hair, tousled a little, as the girl kept her face hidden. His hands travelled over the slight tomboy robustness of her bare pale hips, the rear of her strong thighs and the slight heaviness of Jenny Langham's bottom-cheeks. It was natural that he would spend some time fondling and examining a proud young captive of her race and colouring. Such a girl was a rarity in the harem and highly-prized in the market where young slave-women were auctioned.

So his hands wandered, firmly overcoming all resistance and tightening. Without compunction, he pressed apart her rear cheeks and studied Jenny Langham's arsehole. Perhaps he would never choose to make use of this rear entry to the hot tight pleasures of her bottom. But the parting of the cheeks of her backside was essential in order to assure her that she had lost all right over her own body and therefore all privacy. For several minutes, while the mistress pressed the girl's rear cheeks apart for him, her new master enjoyed a view of Jenny Langham's rear anatomy which she would have blushed to allow her bridegroom on her wedding night.

Because resistance was impossible, she could only continue to hide the shame in her face by avoiding his gaze. He spoke a little to her in English, so that the girl might understand. He approved the slight sturdiness of her thighs and hips. He admired the full and rather tomboyish cheek-swell of Jenny's bottom. The tone of his comments hinted at the various sexual uses to which she must be put.

Even when he had finished examining her, Jenny was obliged to remain positioned like this for a while. He had yet to give his attention to Annie, Lizzie, and the others. Of half a dozen counter-jumpers and window-dressers who had turned camp-follower, these were the only two to be seen. The likes of Fiona and Kim had met some other fate.

Annie with her collar-length of lank fair hair, the heavy-



lidded sensuality of her elfin face, was quite small-built. Yet he paused to admire her for longer than any gazer into shop windows. Annie showed a lithe young figure, her buttocks spreading and parting easily. His eyes and fingers were occupied with her for some while. She offered no protest. Those who walked round the circle of bottoms presented by the kneeling girls understood why. Annie's was one of several bare backsides that bore the red imprints of bamboo. She had already been caned by one of the eunuchs to punish some trivial act of disobedience. The nicely-rounded cheeks of Pabi's dusky bottom bore similar marks. In her case, however, it had been done because her face and figure betrayed her as a pretentious but promiscuous young bitch.

It was half an hour from the time when the girls took their positions on the divan until their new master finished his tour of inspection. All that time, the eunuch Fardji stood at the centre of the divan, in the space at its core, waiting to execute whatever command might be given him. His services were not required until the end, when the Mahdi himself ordered him to unfasten the wrists of the new slave-girls from the central post.

With their hands free, all the kneeling girls eased themselves from their cramped kneeling posture as the master walked away. Jenny, turning and standing up, was in time to see the mistress who accompanied the Mahdi. The young woman was one of several favourites who superintended the "shampooing" of his body every day by chosen concubines. This young *umm-el-hareem*, the queen of the harem, was no other than Shaida, the cruel and lascivious creature whom Colonel Butler had had flogged under Jenny Langham's supervision.

The look of dismay in Miss Langham's eyes brought a smile to Fardji's face.

"Accounts shall be settled," he said, as if reassuring her. "In this place we believe the truth of the proverb. Vengeance is a dish which people of taste prefer to eat



cold. Shaida was required to suffer under your laws. Justice requires that you must suffer under the caprice of such a wicked young mistress.'"

As Jenny walked away with the other girls, he noticed that the shock of seeing her sworn enemy and the ordeal of the Mahdi's rude inspection caused her legs to tremble. And this also made Fardji smile at the manner in which fate and the fortunes of war had turned the tables on such a disdainful fair-skinned beauty. Master and mistress alike were to have their sport with the self-possessed beauty of Miss Langham.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TWO DAYS AFTER the fall of Khartoum a pair of steamers was signalled on the Nile, to the east of the Island of Tuti. These river-craft represented the advance guard of Lord Wolseley's relief expedition, sent reluctantly and tardily by the Gladstone government. This was the rescue expected in vain by General Gordon. The two ships came on at half-steam, not knowing whether the city was still in Gordon's hands or had been taken by the Dervishes. But very soon both the vessels were under heavy fire from the forts of Omdurman, where the renegade Egyptian gunners manned a dozen pieces of field artillery taken at the defeat of Hicks Pasha. In their support the Mahdi's dark-skinned regiments rushed wildly to the river bank. The native women were the most excited of all, brandishing sticks and shouting shrilly, "Môt lil Inglez!—Death to the English."

The two steamers swung round, their paddles frothing the river water as they headed downstream. In half an hour longer they had faded in the distance, pursued by the long luminous trail of shells from the batteries of Omdurman. All hope of rescue for years to come faded with the last distant image of the two boats.

That night, Jenny was to enter the bedroom of the Sultan of Kordofan, as General Gordon had been pleased to call the Mahdi. Dressed in a blue silk bodice and white skirt, naked beneath them, she was led up a flight of wide marble steps. Twelve Nubian guards in uniforms laced

with gold stood at intervals upon this palace stairway. Through fine arches to either side there were glimpses of splendid tapestries, furniture of Aubusson Louis XVI, old Persian carpets and French Empire plate. Much of this was tribute sent to the Mahdi by the French and British governments, in the hope that he might be bought off by expensive trinkets.

The door of the bedroom stood open, its walls draped with hangings of blue and gold. At the centre, the bed rested on a huge dais in the shape of a boat with carved bronze figures round it. A canopy to match the silk of the wall-hangings, draped with real lace and surmounted by immense white ostrich plumes, rose dome-like above the bed. There were two secretaires, a psyche glass with huge columns, a white and gold couch with a little white and gold table, all in Empire style. On the dressing-table lay a complete toilet-set in gold and tortoiseshell.

The bathroom beyond was like a Greek temple. An arch in the same stone rose canopy-like over the centre, as if enshrining a massive solid-silver bath. Between the marble columns on either side were draperies of real lace. In these recesses stood toilette tables of carved onyx and a divan covered with gold lace.

As the young woman entered the splendid bedroom, two of the uniformed Nubians stepped in behind her and closed the door. They stood there, guarding the threshold until their master should arrive. During the minutes that followed, they neither spoke nor looked at the fair-skinned young woman who waited there. At last there was a footfall outside. The two uniformed guards stiffened to attention. Then the door was thrown open. The Lord of Kordofan entered with his trusted eunuch Fardji. The master stared at Jenny for a while, taking in the crop of light brown tresses, the open youthful charm of her prim face, a certain weight in her thighs and hips, a sturdiness in the swell of her backside.

“This is one who will serve better when she knows the

power a master wiolds," he said, turning towards Fardji, "She will improve by being made to taste humiliation. Before the night is over, she must submit to me. But her pride must be broken first. Let Shaida thrash her."

Jenny stood there, as if stunned with dismay, her eyes on the Mahdi's face. As Shaida was sent for, the fair-skinned slave took a step forward and sank to her knees before her new master. She clasped her hands, as if pleading. She even tried to kiss the hem of his robe. But he drew it away and pushed her back. At that moment, Fardji returned with Shaida, the Arab girl's features strong and a little crude, the dark hair tousled loose about her head.

"Take the punishment-strap and give this whore twenty licks of it across her bare backside," said the Lord of Kordofan.

Shaida bowed her head obediently.

"Shall I take her and thrash her among the other women, as an example to them?"

"No," said her master. "Do it here on the bed. At once."

He sat on one of the Empire chairs as the two uniformed men seized the arms of the fair-skinned girl. Fardji undid the skirt while they held her and drew it clear, leaving Jenny naked apart from the waist-length bodice of red and gold silk. A renewal of shame at her nudity before these men and the other young woman gave Jenny strength to pull her wrists free and fold her hands over the brown hair of her loins. But the two uniformed guards drew the hands away again, smiling as they did so. They were almost compelled to drag her to the bed, where they threw her face-down on the fine silk and lace, before tying her wrists to the pillar at its head. They drew her legs wide apart and tied her ankles to opposite corners at the bed's foot. Despite her wild appeals, Jenny now showed the soft-haired lips of her sex in the most blatant manner.

Shaida came forward with the tailed strap in her hand. It was made of thin leather, two feet long and several inches

broad, cut into tails at its end. She measured her distance. Jenny and Shaida were of much the same age. Yet there was a coarseness and a hardness in the face of the tawny-skinned girl. Shaida had been chosen to superintend the Mahdi's pleasures because she could be lecherous and perverse at one moment, then brutal with her own sex at another. Many an English gentleman would have envied her such power over the nude charms of the girl on the bed. The cheeks of Jenny's bottom were as pale and robust as those of many a working-girl who is spanked in this manner. The face that she twisted round, alarm and dismay in the features that had been so calm and self-assured, added a charm to the occasion.

A white brilliance of the chandelier caught the speeding black leather as if it were a thunderbolt. The strap rang across the bare cheeks of Jenny's backside like a pistol-crack. Her body jerked against the bonds holding her and then she cried out. The pain of a strap wielded so viciously on her bare buttocks exceeded anything she had ever felt when punished as a child at home or school. She uttered a piercing scream at the second echoing blow and then a howl of anguish at the third. The Mahdi watched, impassive as a carved guardian of the pyramids.

Unceasing and unremitting, the strap rang out across the flinching pallor of Jenny's behind, torturing her with a scalding anguish. It slashed and smacked, making the pale bottom-flesh jump and quiver. The split tails of the flat leather curled agonisingly round the smooth inner surfaces of her splayed thighs. Jenny shrieked and pleaded, sometimes in wordless frenzy and sometimes in the words of submission to which punishment-rooms and the cells of female prisons have so often echoed.

"No more! . . . Oh, please! . . . No more! . . . Shaida! . . . Shaida! . . . I can't! I can't bear any more! . . . Oh, master! Mighty Lord of Kordofan! Please make her stop! . . . If you want me to love you, save me from her! . . . I'll do anything you command! Truly I will! . . . Not

across my bottom again! . . . Shaida! Stop! Oh, please stop! . . . Just for a minute . . . I'll love you, if you'll only stop! . . . I'll kiss you, Shaida! . . . I'll love you as you command me . . . No! . . . No! No! . . ."

The guards could scarcely suppress their smiles. The crop of light brown tresses threshed this way and that as Jenny tugged unavailingly at the straps that held her wrists and ankles to the bed's frame. Shaida shook back the dark hair from her tawny strong-featured face. She took careful and cruel aim again with the strap, deliberately thrashing Jenny hard across the backs of her robust young thighs. The Mahdi watched impassively from his chair while the other three men caught Jenny's wild-eyed gaze with sardonic smiles. It was not the first time that the sumptuous bedroom had rung with screams of a girl being thrashed into obedience.

After ten strokes there was a pause, broken only by Jenny's groans and several incoherent phrases mingled with the sobs and sighs in which she breathed out the agony of her smarting flesh.

"I'll do it!" she cried out suddenly, seeing Shaida raise the strap once more. "Whatever it is! Let me do it! Please! Let me do it!"

It was gratifying to hear Miss Langham brought to obedience so quickly. But the Mahdi, who had witnessed such scenes a thousand times, would not have shortened her ordeal for anything. As the cruel punishment-strapping continued, he watched her closely. There was no doubt that the fair-skinned beauty was suffering. But in the midst of it he sensed in her an illicit and half-recognised thrill of voluptuous abandon. Perhaps it was merely the experience of being naked among several men, feeling the cooler air on her bare thighs and hips. Perhaps it was the hectic and fearful excitement of the nude anguish which the strap inflicted. It would be wrong to say that the thought of the beating excited Jenny to pleasure. But there was physical excitement of apprehension as the speed of her pulse showed.



So Jenny howled and sobbed with the smart of it. But she writhed as if with an undercurrent of sexual desire. The Mahdi could not take his eyes from her. This ordeal of being thrashed exhausted her in much the same way as sexual pleasure. The spanking had warmed her spirits. Her gasps were those of languorous craving as much as of mere pain. Her writhing suggested a girl who was wild for the embraces of a man, though the suggestion would have been repugnant to her.

Shaïda was coming to the conclusion of her task. A sharp smack of the leather caught Jenny across the backs of her calves, making her arch her head back as far as the restraining leather would permit. The strap flashed down again, catching the inside of her thighs high up, so that the split tails flicked up her belly as high as the navel. The remaining strokes fell hard across Jenny Langham's bottom, drawing the shrillest scream of all from her as the split tails caught her between her rear cheeks.

The Mahdi stood up, his eyes glowing. His eyes seemed half-closed and his nostrils were flared. His body quivered slightly and his fists were clenched. Everything about him seemed to promise an instant and savage onslaught. He made a sign to Fardji, who unfastened Jenny's wrists and ankles. The eunuch, the two guards and Shaïda withdrew, leaving the conqueror alone with his prey.

Jenny lay there trembling, face-down on the rich silk and lace. Her tomboy buttocks were scarlet and there were several vivid prints of the strap across the rear of her thighs. Jenny had twisted her face round, the prim but pretty features towards him, the cropped brown tresses having a slight perverse suggestion of the girl playing the street-urchin.

But her master ignored this. He lowered himself, stiff and hard. It did not surprise him to find her moistening already in the aftermath of the beating and the anticipation of sexual relief. He took her from behind between her thighs, straining her in his arms as if he would stifle her.

He turned her face round by holding a handful of her light brown hair, though Jenny was in a state where no force was required to ensure her obedience.

As he kissed the tear-wet lips, he felt his kisses returned. Her nostrils quivered, as if she might be trying to breathe the odour of him deeply. The shock of his masculine flesh, dark-haired, against her tortured backside and legs swollen from the tanning-strap, caused a spasm in her that seemed to be of excruciating delight. Who could tell? Yet there seemed no pretence on the girl's part as Jenny opened herself to him with shuddering pangs of the most frenzied voluptuousness.

She responded to the vigour of his thrusts with backward pushings of her own buttocks and hips. He rode long and energetically. He felt that Jenny had come before him, not with a feigned climax to hurry his pleasure but with the spontaneous overflow of feminine passion. What she had refused to Lord Algernon Regis in St James's she now poured out abundantly for this savage lord of the desert.

When he had responded by flooding her with the pulse of his own tribute, they lay still coupled, the warm spanked flesh of Jenny Langham's bottom-cheeks pressed into the hairy hollow of his loins as he impaled her. The girl's buttocks and thighs were glossed with sweat from her exertion and the warmth of the desert night. She lay like a submissive doe covered by the buck, a mare guarded and mounted by her stallion. Rescue and dignity meant no more to her after such ravishing, though this was a truth that Jenny did not dare to acknowledge to herself just yet.

Her master drew away at last and walked through the marble archway to the Grecian splendour of the bathroom. Two coal-black Nubian slave-maids entered with brass vessels of warm water and rich oils. When they had attended the Lord of Kordofan, they turned to Jenny, still lying on her belly over the fine bed. There was sponging and scenting, caressing and washing, which served only to rouse her once again. But the two dusky wenches turned

and left. In a moment more the Mahdi himself came from his bath in fresh robes. He spoke no word to Jenny. He did not so much as look at her. In the world of the harem she deserved no acknowledgement. She was no wife, merely a concubine. Her status was no more than that of a shapely vessel into which he had discharged the surplus of his passion.

Only when she understood that did Jenny comprehend the extent of her slavery. She was a mere possession of this new master. If he chose to sell her or mark her as his property with a hot iron on the rump, as common slave-girls are marked, she had no say in the matter. If he chose to have her pruned between the legs with a sharp knife to curb her self-caressing or even to have her strangled by the eunuch's silk noose because she no longer appealed to him, she had no right of refusal nor even of protest. Her sole reason of existence was to give pleasure to a man who might treat her with the most inflexible brutality. He might also indulge her. But if he did so, it would be to increase his own pleasure rather than to minister to hers.

These truths became clear in her mind gradually in the days that followed. Though they might inspire terror in her at certain moments, they did not diminish the exquisite pleasure that she felt in the way that she was made use of.

It was not intended that she should lie alone all night in that finely-furnished room. No more than ten minutes after the Lord of Kordofan had taken his departure, the door opened again. It was Shaida who entered. Jenny turned over in dismay upon the bed but this time the darker beauty carried no strap nor any other instrument of discipline. She took Jenny by the hand and led her out through the open door, towards the women's quarters. The flight of marble stairs was empty now, though the torches in their iron brackets still flamed brightly. Jenny remained naked but for the short silk bodice just covering her breasts and ending at her waist.

Shaida led her to a more plainly furnished room where

this young mistress of the other girls had her own bed. She drew Jenny down upon it, making the fair-skinned beauty lie with her head towards the bed's foot. There were no preliminaries and no pretexts. Shaida drew one knee up so that she opened the voluptuous spread of her tawny thighs. In the code of harem conduct there could be no excuse for Jenny's refusal, since she must still be feeling in a sexy mood from her submission to her master.

Nor did she attempt refusal, knowing that the whip would command her obedience if necessary. Lying head-to-tail with her female partner on the bed, her hand gently stroked the Asian tan of Shaida's thighs. Had anyone told Jenny, a few months ago, that she would ever make love with another girl, she would have treated the suggestion as absurd and indecent. Now, to her surprise, she found it easier than giving herself to a man. Gently she stroked Shaida's dark-haired sex, gazing at it with wonder and seeing the tawny thighs part wider as Shaida cocked one leg up higher. As this stroking continued, Jenny also kissed gently up and down Shaida's thighs. Where she kissed, she then tickled the other girl with the tip of her tongue.

Shaida lay there, a naked and indolent Arabian Venus of twenty, receiving Jenny's caresses and kisses but giving nothing in return. Jenny was a slave and had no right to expect such a return. She began to kiss the softer inner surfaces of the sallow thighs, as high up as she could, tasting the mineral tang of the splashes that had touched there in the course of the day. She made a cunning saddle of her fingers, tickling and probing as the young Asian mistress rode it. Her face was no more than eighteen inches from Shaida's backside and the rear opening of her thighs. Jenny saw in every detail the growing excitement of the warm-blooded girl. There was such tension in Shaida's thighs and such cheek-creasing and contorting of Shaida's bottom as she rode harder and breathed quicker.

Once or twice Shaida began a perfunctory stroking of

her slave-girl's thighs and sex, or fondled the muddy pallor of Jenny Langham's tomboyish bottom-cheeks. But she made no attempt to rouse or satisfy the girl systematically, nor did Jenny greatly want her to. It was Jenny who was the active partner now, giving as she was commanded. Even in this—and without thinking about the matter consciously—she was acquiring the mentality of a slave.

Before long, Shaida began to moisten in the heat of the caress, yielding the slippery dew of her excitement to Jenny's fingers. She groaned and quivered in her anticipation. Without pausing to consider, Jenny craned her head forward and kissed the sleek wetness of those intimate lips. She was now excited by an act that she would once have regarded as the greatest humiliation. Shaida reached back and pressed her slave-girl's head so that Jenny should not draw away nor cease to kiss. When they paused at length, Jenny nuzzled gentler kisses on the heavier sallown-tanned cheeks of Shaida's bottom. All the vulgar associations of the seat of Shaida's knickers or the thought of Shaida's bottom pressing the toilet-seat served only to add a perverse thrill to Jenny's self-abasement.

They began again, Jenny's fingers acquiring skill by an instinctive feminine response to Shaida's quivering thrusts. When Shaida began to come at last, it was no more dignified than the outpouring of the Lord of Kordofan had been. Yet the basest functions were invested with desire and delight by the erotic currents that ran through the two naked bodies. Shaida groaned and murmured, then cried out and shuddered, as if in a seizure. She jigged and grunted, moving faster and faster. Finally, with a wild sob, she fell limp across the bed.

But it was only a little past midnight and the light in that bedroom burnt until it began to grow pale in the first flush of Arabian dawn. Jenny made ample reparation for her part in the whipping that Shaida had received in the barrack yard. She caressed and tasted the Asian girl's sex over and over. Then Shaida herself, with a malicious and

imperious resolve, thrust her sallow tan backside in a fatter spread towards Jenny's face. Decency was cast aside in a way that was perhaps only possible between two girls when the eyes of mankind were not upon them. Jenny kissed the cheeks of the voluptuous olive-skinned backside and between them. Her tongue was required. Long before the two girls fell asleep in the cool light of early dawn, the tastes of Shaida's bottom ran with those of her sex in Jenny Langham's saliva.

There was no depravity that the Lord of Kordofan would deny himself. To have two girls who were capable of love-making in this way was a matter of some pride to the master of the harem. Yet over them hung the constant threat of his displeasure if they should spoil themselves for their duty in his own bed. This was a great preoccupation with him. It would not do for the world to hear that he could not manage his concubines in the time-honoured way.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN THE WEEKS that followed, Jenny's life was spent in the marble arcaded rooms of the harem, lit by reflected sunlight from a world that was scarcely seen. The courtyards of the harem looked up only to the harsh azure brilliance of desert sky with no window on to the outer life of the palace. The slave-girls slept communally in long rooms that were like the dormitories of English girls' schools, though furnished plainly with rush-matting and simple beds down either side. There were day-rooms where the girls passed their waking lives, apartments of red-patterned carpets, lamps of beaten brass, and woven hangings which gave these quarters the air of a drawing-room or a parlour.

Every evening, the harem dormitories filled with the chatter and laughter of the other young slave-women. Those with whom she shared the long room were almost all African or Asian. Of Annie and Lizzie, the camp-followers of Khartoum, there was no sign. At first, Jenny's companions stared askance at her, as if fearing she might be a spy. Then, forgetting all constraint, they paired off together according to their several preferences. A young Copt girl, a cunning and mischievous-looking child of twelve or thirteen with sharp eyes, was posted near the door to keep watch.

It was important that someone should give warning of the approach of the master or one of the eunuchs. Like an English school, girls who were caught misbehaving together could expect a taste of whip-leather across their

bare buttocks. Repeated offences of lesbianism or masturbation were more severely dealt with. Slave-girls were not permitted to spoil themselves for their master's pleasure by these practices, which left them more flaccid and insensitive to his use of them. In the culture of the harem, the most intimate pruning was carried out on persistent offenders to ensure that they had nothing left to play with. Thereafter, they would find release only under the attentions of a man. Jenny shuddered at such stories and kept her thoughts to herself.

But every night the little games began as soon as the girls thought themselves safe. First of all there were frolics, kisses, playful slaps, and furtive ticklings in the other beds. These were accompanied by peals of laughter and long-drawn sighs of wantonness. They watched one another. The eyes of the onlookers sparkled with expectation and the promise of pleasure. When a strapping Dongola negress tumbled a pretty little Circassian on her back and threw herself head-first upon her, the assault was greeted by screams of merriment. The little Copt girl at the door hushed them with a warning gesture. After that each pair of girls set to work in imitation of the fine black wench and her pretty fair-skinned partner.

One of them wanted Jenny. It was Jhumur a rather serious-faced but pretty Asian girl of tawny complexion who chose the fair-skinned and tomboyish young woman. She came and crouched at the English girl's bed, took the young Englishwoman's hand and smiled tenderly at her. Lost in thought just then, Jenny took no notice. Jhumur plucked up confidence. She leant forward and gave her a kiss. In an instant the fair-skinned beauty sprang from the bed and drew back against the wall. Jhumur watched her in sheer astonishment. Then she stood 'reproachful and dejected. The English officers visiting the bazaars would have dismissed Jhumur as "a nigger whore" for her forwardness. The amusement of the other girls in the harem dormitory was gentler and it was Jenny whose conduct caused puzzled smiles.

The other girls abandoned their caresses and embraces for the moment. They slid from the beds they shared, still smiling. Jenny tried to evade them and reach the door but there were far too many of them for that. Their arms enfolded her gently at first. Then they bore her resolutely down upon the bed and her struggles began. But it was far too late. Her body was pinned down by a dozen willing hands and scissored between the sheen of bare thighs. They held and pinioned and straddled her until they could do exactly as they wished with her.

While the tousled head threshed to and fro, they stroked and caressed her, urging her to relax and enjoy what must be done. Jenny Langham's panties were drawn down her tensing thighs and those sturdy young thighs themselves held open a little more for Jhumur. Jenny gave a shudder and a groan of despair as Jhumur's Asian fingers began to stroke her flinchingly sensitive feminine flesh. But the other girl was merciless in her love and Jenny screamed out, as if in panic, at the strength of her own feelings. In wild cries she threatened to betray their lesbian amours to the eunuchs, earning them the cruellest punishments. But the soft voices of the other girls hushed her shrillness and calmed her, even while Jhumur's fingers worked her up in the most cunning fashion.

They still held her down by the shoulders and waist but they let her legs go. There was no danger in this. Jenny was wanting it more and more, thighs wide and knees bent up, so that Jhumur's fingers could tease her more intimately. Jenny was even trying to ride her sex on the hand of the loving young Asian girl. At last the vaulted marble of the arcades echoed the soft frenzy of her cries as Jenny came off on Jhumur's stroking fingers. There were smiles on every side. Jenny had resisted and pleaded. But once the masturbation had begun she had wanted it more and more until the excruciating release of her sexual climax. The smiles meant one thing. Jenny had undergone a true initiation. Next time there would only be a token

resistance, the time after that none at all. Soon she would be wanting it openly and eagerly, every night and all night. There would be plenty of partners for a fair-skinned girl of her sort.

Jenny lay curled on her side, naked as the rest of them, wet with excitement. All around her the other girls were at play, two to a bed. Amongst them were black women and pale, copper-toned and yellow, all young and most of them pretty. Some of them had seen their towns and villages destroyed, their menfolk butchered. Then these girls themselves had been driven into captivity like cattle by the trader's whip. Small wonder that they turned from the horrors of that experience to the escape of love with another girl in a harem bed.

This was the one consolation left to them but it was a comfort that they were compelled to seek from one another. Here and elsewhere in the harem there were two hundred girls who existed only to serve the pleasure of one man. Small wonder they had to compensate each other for the long weeks in which each girl waited her turn for a summons to the Mahdi's couch. The tension of their pleasure and the naughty excitements of arousal were increased by the thrill of danger and the punishment that would be inflicted by a sadistic eunuch like Fardji.

The lamps grew dimmer as midnight passed and a sense of sleepiness and satisfaction filled the room in the small hours of morning. In the fading glow Jenny Langham saw the other naked girls in a score of wanton postures. She heard the breath of kisses, the cries of passion and the gentle music of amorous sighs. Such things no longer disgusted her, for she was too weary to be offended. Her body was exhausted by sexual assault and sore from punishment. Yet as she fell into a doze it seemed that her body was also palpitating in hot voluptuous dreams in which she almost died of the pleasure between her thighs while her gaze studied the whip which the ravisher had left on the table.

For the man who was now her master Jenny felt an adoring love that was half fear, an ardent longing that was half terror. When he returned and ordered her to his couch, she opened her arms and spread her thighs for him with every sly word and gesture, every suggestion of a lewd posture that she could summon up. The wanton postures of the girls in the beds around her became her example and many of those girls themselves were her teachers. She became the perfect slave-girl, the *saraya* or concubine of concubines. She was obedient to every wish of her master and docile under his command.

But even the harem was not cut off from news of the world outside. There were gusts of madness in the camp of the Dervish warriors. The Mahdi preached indifference to the good things of this world, urging austerity and sacrifice, while he gave himself secretly to the most voluptuous pleasures that the harem could devise. Victory brought a savage gust of madness in its wake. The Lord of Kordofan made a pit at Beit-el-Maal to be filled with the heads of his enemies which the sun tanned like mummies. Among the dark skins of the grinning dead were the paler features of General Gordon and the unfortunate Hicks Pasha.

Khartoum itself was ordered to be demolished, so that the stone might be used to beautify and enlarge the Mahdi's own capital of Omdurman on the far bank of the Nile. Little by little he had acquired this taste for luxury and sensuality, a barbarous and yet refined opulence. It was now the sacred feast of Ramadan. Yet while the days were devoted to fasting and prayer, the instant the sun had disappeared, the palace was bright with feasting and debauchery to follow. Riches of every kind were lavished on the furniture and decoration of the harem but the Mosque was still nothing except a vast *zariba*, an enclosure. It was open to the sky and formed of thorny cactus and mimosa trunks.

But while the people stood, eagerly expecting the appearance of the Mahdi, the prophet himself was still feast-



ing upon the delights of his harem. Its court was crammed with women, from little Turkish girls not eight years old, showing frail and slender limbs, to tall and slender negresses with the arms of Amazon warriors. The harem contained women of all sorts. But these were merely the spoils of war, the *ghenima*, the despised band of concubines. They existed only as his instruments of pleasure, of less true value than beautiful vessels of beaten bronze.

Round the inner enclosure of the harem there ran an open space. Near its entrance there was always an eager crowd of Dervishes and the men of Ansar, waiting for their leader to appear. But the Mahdi lay within the harem, stretched at full length on a magnificent Kordofan bed-carpet, his head resting on a heap of cushions covered in embroidered silk. He was dressed in a shirt of fine linen and wide Turkish trousers, a silken *tekia* covering his shaven head. Twenty or thirty of his slave-women stood round him. Some fanned him and kept off the flies, for which purpose they waved great feathers about his face. Others were there to tickle the soles of his feet and the palms of his hands in a soft lascivious manner.

While these concubines soothed his tired flesh, Shaida's duty was to be bold and depraved. She was made for the part with her robust young figure, her strong features, the full rounded face, the tousled dark hair overlapping her collar and falling on her forehead. Shaida's obedience was to kneel over him, open his robe and take the stiff erection in her mouth. Her own pants were pushed down by the other girls so that as the Lord of Kordofan shuddered with excitement at the tricks of her tongue, the gilt-framed Psyche mirrors reflected for him the slight hanging weight of her breasts, the suggestion of stockiness in her thighs, the sturdy bare back and the spread of her hips, the full-cheeked Asian tan of Shaida's bottom.

She sucked with her hand circling the base of the erection, preventing it from intruding so far that it forced the slight retching sounds from her throat. At last there was a



tension and a spasm. Then the Lord of Kordofan flooded Shaïda's tongue with his sperm, obliging her to swallow the tribute meekly and with gratitude. Proud and vindictive though she might be with other girls in her power, Shaïda shared the submissive fatalism which girls of her race display under the orders of a man who is their tyrant and absolute master.

Little by little the Lord of Kordofan slipped into a gentle doze and then into a deeper sleep after this delicious sexual exercise. Shaïda must wake him at last to tell him that the people awaited only his presence to begin their prayers.

Half a dozen of the younger slave-girls would raise and support him while sandals of red morocco were brought and put on his feet. Then the girls would take off his fine shirt and silken *tekia*. Shaïda would assist him to dress in his Dervish costume—a dirty *djibbeh* surmounted by a shabby turban.

Slowly and solemnly, the Lord of Kordofan began his progress to the Mosque. The by-standers threw themselves on the earth and kissed his footprints as passionately as he had kissed one olive-skinned swelling cheek-mound of Shaïda's arse as the girl turned away after sucking him. To the cooler marble rooms of the harem the ruler returned as soon as possible. Once again dressed in his silken robes he gave himself up to the pleasures of the table. After that, the hours before dusk were spent with half a dozen young slave-women, skilled in the refined delights and rarely-tasted sensations of elaborate sensuality.

But the easy availability of pleasure had made him increasingly capricious and cruel. His body had grown jaded by voluptuous extravagance and he had begun to seek abnormal pleasures with his captive women. Aphrodisiacs were administered to revive his fainting nerves and inspire him with wanton desires. The punishments he ordered to be inflicted upon his girls were frequent and were carried out in such a manner as to excite him by the spectacle. For the smallest fault his young women and

even little girls were stripped naked and sadistically whipped in his presence. He listened intently and with growing appetite to their screams. The sight of the lash-marks and the ruby trickles down their buttocks and thighs revived his voluptuous energies.

Sometimes he would choose a young female slave and summon four of his guards from the Ansar. Then he would shut himself up with these four guards and the girl of his choice. While he looked on, the guards were ordered to torture their female victim by skilfully mingling pain and pleasure. Torture and the lash alternated with love. Finally, with quivering flesh, bruised and swollen from the whip and the rough caresses of the guards, mad with pain and intoxicated by lust, the girl was dismissed to captivity again, either to be sold to another master or disposed of in some other manner.

The threat of being treated in such a way was sufficient to curb Jenny's pride and resentment. Little by little, she grew to accept her state of slavery and to be stirred by her master's alternating vigour and gentleness. She showed herself fond and submissive towards him. Asian girls like Shaida and Pabi, Massoumeh and Jhumur were naturally perverse yet skilled in making love. They came from a culture in which such girls were educated to be prudish in the street but shameless in the bedroom. From them she learnt the art of cunning insinuation and soft caresses. It was no worse than many a "free" girl was obliged to do when sold in the marriage market of the London season. Better that such things should be taught by girls to one another than learnt awkwardly in the arms of an impatient and inexperienced bridegroom. Yet from the distance of Beit-el-Maal, it was possible to see the hypocrisy of feminine self-esteem in England or the United States. As time went by, Jenny felt less reason to envy these so-called liberated women who now seemed to her to be as much slaves as Shaida or Pabi.

But another change had taken place in the young wom-

an's mind. It nagged her with an underlying disquiet, though she tried to dismiss it from her thoughts. She had had a brutal thrashing with the strap on her first night in the harem, upon the Mahdi's orders. Jenny certainly did not want to be thrashed again. Yet the memory of it seemed to stir her in ways that she tried for a long time to ignore or repress. But it would not do. An element that she could not precisely define would have been taken from her pleasure in making love if she knew that the threat of the strap and the whip had been removed. There was a strange joy in recalling the anguish of her first punishment. She made love to her master with greater abandon because he had the resolve to order her to be whipped. Six months ago, such a truth would have been incomprehensible to her. The thought that she would have married a man in London more eagerly because he was not afraid to whip her when necessary would have seemed more laughable than indecent. But Beit-el-Maal had taught her a truth about herself more profound than any that London had to offer.

Because there were so many slave-girls at Beit-el-Maal, her nights in the Mahdi's bed were few enough. The rest of the time she was occupied by thoughts and glimpses of her companions. One of these was the Asian girl Pabi with her rounded face and high-boned prettiness, the wide almond eyes and the dark hair worn close round her head and brushed up a little. There was much about Pabi that suggested self-importance and disobedience, coquettishness and perversity. It seemed that Pabi resented her captivity and brooded on this resentment, in a place where such brooding was futile.

Even to Jenny, it seemed absurd that such an obvious young whore as Pabi should set so high a price upon her own importance and her own right to come and go as she pleased. This Asian coquette would have been out of place anywhere but in a harem. She was promiscuous in her dormitory masturbation with other girls and wanton in making love to herself.

She was warned several times by the eunuchs but Pabi was possessed of the idea that she had certain feminine rights, including the right to use her own body as she chose and to dispose of it as she wished. But in the culture of the harem such playing with herself and over-indulgence with other girls was regarded as childish and rebellious. In the warmth of the climate this frequent arousal—two or three times a day—led to a certain flaccidity and slackness. It would deprive her body's opening of the tightness and resilience that her master required. It would dull Pabi's responsiveness to him in bed. The frequent and easy sexual release upon her own fingers or on the fingers and tongues of other girls would also make Pabi lazy. Such easy ways must be prevented, in order that Pabi worked harder in bed with her master to achieve with him the only release permitted her.

In any other place but the harems of Arabia and the palace of Beit-el-Maal such a philosophy would have been received with horror—and with outrage on behalf of feminine pride. But there was no need for pretence here. It would have been possible to dispose of Pabi in a summary fashion by the knife or the noose but this would have been a waste. However, the evening came when she was called to her master's presence in a way that suggested something other than bedroom pleasures. She was not seen again by the other girls for several weeks. By the time she returned, Pabi was very different in temper and disposition. They had made a proper woman of her by removing childish temptation once and for all.

It was Fardji who revealed to Jenny the nature of Pabi's enforced compliance, for he had been there to witness it.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PERHAPS A GIRL of Pabi's sort would have fared better or, at any rate, differently, had it not been for the events which overtook Beit-el-Maal within a very short time of the Mahdi's victory. The Lord of Kordofan himself fell sick. Little by little he had grown obese. His heart beat weakly and uncertainly. The charlatans whom he had around him as his "corporeal physicians" diagnosed fatty degeneration of the tissue. But rumour suggested that he was being poisoned by a vindictive favourite in the harem. If the accusations were correct, it was a fair-haired Italian girl Sabrina or "Sabry," who was his downfall.

How had solemn little Sabry contrived to procure a supply of arsenic and keep it undetected? How did she manage to mix the poison successfully with the sweetmeats her master feasted himself upon? By her Italian guile and feminine earnestness she knew how to set about the business cautiously and mysteriously. With a smile on her lips she was working the tyrant's death, administering the drug in small but constantly repeated doses. At first the Mahdi had never seemed so well. His breathing was deep and free, his appetite excellent. He held himself erect, his body was light and active. Every vital function was intensified and he had never felt himself in such a mood for love. Not only her teenage loins but even Sabry Branchini's bottom and tongue received the tribute of his passion. He thought there was some aphrodisiac power in the fair-skinned Italian girl, some charm she possessed that was



superior to his other women. He redoubled his caresses, while she increased the dose of poison.

Soon his vitals were eaten away. He vomited constantly and his brain was on fire. The heart especially was terribly affected and he declared that he felt it shrinking within him hour by hour. He died in the mortuary room that he had had constructed long before, as the chamber in which he intended to spend his last hours. He urged those about his bedside to remain faithful to the Khalif Abdullahi, his chosen successor. When death overcame him at last, the body was washed and wrapped in a winding-sheet. The young Italian bitch Sabrina raised heart-rending cries, tearing her hair and in every way making an admirably acted pretence of the deepest grief.

At the very foot of the couch of death, the Mahdi's uncle, Abmed-ouad Suleiman, dug the grave, assisted by the three Khalifs. Outside the building, a long-drawn tumult of groans and lamentations rose to the heavens. The people bewailed their lost Leader, their departed prophet. The corpse was sprinkled with perfume and lowered into the grave, on which each mourner cast his shovelful of earth, murmuring, "Ya Rahman! Ya Rahim!—Merciful master! Gracious master!"

The palace of Beit-el-Maal became a plaything of the new Khalif Abdullahi and his cronies. It was not possible to prove murder against the Italian girl. But suspicion was enough. She was visited by two of the Khalif's guards and taken to a certain room. Her fate was decided by the Khalif but it was postponed for an hour or so while she was punished first in the more usual way. The bare cheeks of Sabry Branchini's bottom were whipped until the arms of the two hangmen ached. Penalties of a similar kind occupied them from the last flush of sunset in the sky until the first green light of dawn. Only then was the silk cord looped round her throat and drawn inexorably tight.

In the harem, Jenny and the other girls heard that the two brawny Arab executioners had first whipped and then



strangled Sabry Branchini for her suspected crime. The new Khalif had been wise in this command. His other concubines heard, trembled, and obeyed. In the world beyond, there were already murmurs of civil war between the Ashraf, who were disappointed kinsmen of the dead Mahdi, and Abdullahi's faction, including his own tribe. He was a member of the Bagaras, olive-complexioned Arabs chiefly employed in cattle-breeding. He was also acclaimed by the negro soldiers of the Djedediah. Rebellion against him withered and died.

Abdullahi's power and his accession were proclaimed by a rolling of drums like thunder. Perched upon a platform in front of the noble façade of the palace, two strong-armed slaves beat on the great war-drum of the Khalifate, known as El Mansoura—The Victorious. Soon its deep slow note was answered by the more lively voices of smaller instruments, sounding from the four corners of the city. But the solemn sonorous roar of El Mansoura, the enormous kettle-drum with sides of solid copper, still dominated all other sounds. The crowds gathered before the palace, accompanying the drum-roll with a monotonous chant of defiance to the Khalif's enemies. "Nakeltoum!—May you be eaten up! Naketoulkoum!—May you be cut to pieces!"

The great black banner of the Khalif floated on the wind, surrounded by other flags, while every man of the Ansar ran to take up his appointed place. Four more kettle-drums, the daughters as they were called of El Mansoura, were hoisted on the backs of camels to head the march. Next came four ombeya players, blowing with might and main into the great elephant tusks. Soon the Khalif himself appeared, perched on a magnificent camel. The animal's white coat was soft as silk and the beast was led by the massive figure of Ouad Beschir, whom Abdullahi had chosen for his squire. His bodyguards, the muzalemin, followed him, mounted and all wearing coats of mail and

polished helmets wrapped round with a red turban. Then came the regular cavalry, and then the infantry, thirty thousand muskets, the bayonets flashing in the beams of the rising sun. Last of all, a host of hangers-on brought up the rear, armed with pikes and cutlasses.

The martial discipline of the new regime replaced the last decadence of the Mahdi in camp and harem alike. Girls like Jenny and Pabi existed only to serve their master's pleasures and any distraction from this was to be punished and prevented. It was Pabi who presented the greater challenge, for Jenny had resisted most of the promiscuous lesbian caresses in which the majority of the other girls indulged. She had made love with Shaida because the girl was mistress of the others and there could be no refusal without cruel punishment. Apart from Shaida, she had spurned the advances of the other concubines, though sometimes longing to yield to a seductive bare-thighed Nubian girl or a randy Turkish maid.

The Khalif considered the challenge that Pabi's promiscuous conduct presented. The Asian girl's rounded face with the high-boned cheeks and dark shining eyes of Eastern beauty under the arch of their brows was powerfully seductive, even to members of her own sex. The pretty mouth and the coquettish shortness of dark hair confirmed her promiscuous playfulness. The new Lord of Kordofan to whom she had been bequeathed gave his orders. Pabi's wanton behaviour was to be curbed by the skill of a wise woman, as the duenna Karima was known. Unless such steps were taken, Pabi would spoil other girls as well as herself. Karima was summoned to the palace of Beit-el-Maal as she had been a hundred times before when such measures were required.

On the evening appointed, Pabi was dressed in a waist-length tunic, ending in a tight leather belt. From the waist down her tawny body was naked. The ceremony was to take place in a marble-tiled room of the harem. This room

was without windows or any apertures in the plain rose-tinted stone of its walls, apart from the door and a single opening through the wall to the adjoining chamber. This opening was at waist-height in the wall. It was no more than twelve inches high and eighteen inches wide.

The waist-high hatchway was designed so that the girl who was to receive Karima's attention must stand in the windowless room, bending tightly forward through the aperture with the upper half of her body concealed. Indeed her head and shoulders, as well as her arms, were in the next room. Those who had charge of Pabi gave her no choice in this matter. There was a brief struggle with an inevitable outcome, Pabi was soon bending over so that her head and shoulders were on the far side, her bare hips, backside and legs presented to Karima and the eunuch Fardji on the near side. No doubt her mouth had been well-wadded and her arms fastened at full stretch, her head supported and a bottle of restorative *sal volatile* held close to her nostrils. But Karima saw none of that. To enforce stillness of her hips and legs, a black strap was drawn tight round the Asian girl's thighs, just above her knees, and another round her ankles, holding her firmly to rings in the hatch-wall.

A wooden partition was lowered to touch the small of her back and was then locked in place. A heavy velvet curtain was corded tightly round Pabi's waist, so that no light nor sound carried from one room to the next. Karima saw the Asian girl only from the waist down. This helped to ensure that the duenna worked impassively and without compunction. There must be no vindictiveness nor spite, but also no relenting nor misgiving. Karima had no cause for hesitation nor remorse. She never saw more of her subject than the rather heavy-cheeked olive tan of Pabi's bottom, her bare hips and the thighs whose parting was an easy rear approach to her femininity. A girl who was no more than a bottom, a pair of thighs, hips and legs to the

woman who dealt with her was the best subject. The wildness of her mouth was never heard. The frenzy of her eyes was never seen.

It was also thought best that Pabi should never know the identity of the woman who dealt with her. By this means all thoughts of vengeance, all fury and resentment were rendered futile. It would have been unlikely, in any case, that such an encounter would have occurred even accidentally. But by removing all possibility of revenge, it was more likely that Pabi would accept what had happened. Karima had carried out such orders on many girls in the past, their skin tones ranging from palest European to darkest African. Being long accustomed to this she had no compunction in doing her duty once more upon this anonymous concubine, especially since she could do so unaffected by the girl's desperation. There was wisdom in preventing Karima from being distracted by Pabi's frenzy. It would have been much crueller to have made the ordeal longer by Karima's hesitation or by half-measures which then had to be improved upon.

Pabi could not quite keep still in her panic, for the eunuch Fardji had told her just beforehand what was going to happen. Her feet twisted one way and the other as she bent through the hatch, moving the few inches that her thighstrap allowed. The urgent cheek-creasing of Pabi's Asian-tan arse and the movements of her legs made her look like a restive filly under correction between the shafts.

Before beginning, Karima took a bamboo cane that was long and supple. She touched it across the bare olive-tan of Pabi's bottom to prepare her. Then the Persian woman brought the bamboo flashing down across the tawny rear cheeks with a smack like a ring-master's whip. The Asian tan of Pabi's bottom-cheeks tensed and creased urgently. Karima flexed the bamboo, aimed, and thrashed again—and yet again—across the girl's rather fatly-presented backside. Twelve or fifteen strokes, like a reform school caning, marked Pabi's arse before Karima paused.

The woman's fingers slipped between the girl's legs, coaxing back warm secret folds. Fondling, caressing, finger-tickling, she made Pabi's toes curl with an exquisite torment of arousal and alarm. Karima's face was impassive with the arched beauty of dark eyes, the falling forward of her black hair. Pabi soon writhed with arousal, pressed knees twisting side to side as far as the strap round her sleek olive-tan thighs allowed.

There was a thin-bladed metallic resonance. The light caught a fine edge. Karima let the cold of it touch high on the rear of Pabi's tan-skin thighs. She held it there, making the Asian girl wait for what was going to happen. The spilling of Karima's dark hair as she looked down did not hide the steady passion in her eyes. She slid a hand under the Asian girl's bare belly as if to feel the fluttering of panic and the quickened pulse. But Karima still made the girl wait longer, heightening the panic skilfully, ignoring the urgent tightening together and flesh-creasing of Pabi's tawny-skinned bottom-cheeks in alarm.

Karima continually fingered back the warm folds, fondling and choosing. Skilled in female passion, she had brought a first arousal from her victim. Even in the rising panic, she coaxed Pabi skilfully towards a final shuddering release. Then Karima's mouth tightened. With her blade hand there were firm steady movements between the Asian girl's legs, the pruning and trimming of troublesome femininity. It lasted only a few seconds, trimming away the teasing bud and pruning hard the sensual womanhood. Despite the wadding, there came a distant but intense frenzy.

"She still needs more," Karima said quietly to Fardji. "Half-measures are cruellest."

Quick movements with the hand followed for another minute or two and there was a second muted shrillness. By the time Karima had finished, Pabi's legs had given under her and she lay limp through the aperture.



On several evenings in the weeks that followed, Pabi was presented to Karima, bending once more through the aperture so that the older woman never saw anything of the girl above the waist. The Asian coquette was frantic at discovering what had been done to curb her self-caressing and seduction of other concubines. Karima tried to calm and distract her anonymous but pretty-figured pupil. She stroked the sallow heaviness of Pabi's bottom-cheeks. Her fingers slipped between, stroking and tickling. She fondled the girl's olive-tan backside, rousing and teasing the sensitive nerves of the rear cleavage. It was here that Pabi must also learn to be sensitive to a man's intrusion from now on—and eagerly responsive if she could train herself to accept it. A slim glass probe dipped in oil entered her behind easily. It slid in and out, doing things that Pabi would find perversely rousing. Karima's promise to sensitise the girl in such places that suited only male passion was fulfilled. After several prolonged sessions of this kind, Pabi's resistance, the rear tightening and refusal had stopped.

Karima explained to Fardji that the impossibility of easy relief between her thighs would drive a warm-blooded girl of Pabi's culture to extremes of perversity.

"Girls in her condition grow mad for release of their tension. They provoke a whipping, if there is no other way. She will sometimes be like a she-cat on heat, but quite unable to relieve her feelings without a man's deep insertion. Despite the torment of the whip, even that will calm her a little if there is nothing else. She will spend the energy of her frustration in wildness under the lash. Then she will be exhausted and quieter."

"A girl like this is often spoilt and self-indulgent," Karima said on the next occasion. "She must be broken in properly like a new filly."

And then Pabi was broken in by Karima. For the next hour the bare white walls of the room rang with the sharpness of the whip smacking across the rounded olive-



skinned cheeks of Pabi's bottom. A connoisseur of such occasions might regret that the precautions prevented him from hearing Pabi scream. But the vicious imprints of the woven snakeskin marking her rear cheeks told their own story. Karima could not see the wild eyes nor hear the shrillness. But next day there was no doubt. Pabi was calmer than at any time since Karima had made "a man's woman" of her in the harem way.

After this, Pabi passed into the possession of her new master. Karima had worked according to his instructions. He was a man who sought an enjoyment more perverse than that of a passion for men or women. It pleased him to take such girls as Pabi and make them serve him as page-boys or stable-lads. Pabi's dark hair was trimmed off at her nape, leaving the casually brushed and closely moulded cut that high-lighted the seductively rounded impudence and high-boned prettiness of her face. Like several others in this class, Pabi's costume consisted of a blouse and skin-tight pants in white cotton, so tight at the seat that she could scarcely have sat down in them. By this appearance she was to flaunt those charms her master preferred and she must provoke him to make use of her.

Little provocation was needed. His harem contained a score of such young women trained to serve him in the same way. When he chose her for his night's pleasure, it was the high-boned prettiness of Pabi's face that caught his attention, the urchin impudence in the ellipse of her dark eyes matching the shorter crop of upward brushed hair.

Pabi was sacrificed on her first night with him. The scene of the drama was that regal bedroom whose walls were draped with hangings of blue and gold. At the centre, the bed rested on a huge dais in the shape of a boat with carved bronze figures round it. A canopy to match the silk of the wall-hangings, draped with real lace and surmounted by immense white ostrich plumes, rose dome-like above the bed.

Pabi, in her short white blouse and skin-tight white pants, was positioned by the eunuchs to await her master. She was made to lie on her belly over the pillows. Fardji's hands felt round Pabi's waist as he undid her tight white pants. They were such a close fit that he had to tug them down over her hips side to side, until he worked them down to her thighs, the Asian-tan bottom-flesh of Pabi's hind cheeks swelling fuller as the constriction was drawn clear. The girl herself lay still and even lifted her hips a little from the bed to assist him.

Fardji took a fine porcelain dish from the dressing-table. He scooped a dollop of the greasy tallow and placed it on the little dish. Then he chose a phial containing strongly perfumed attar of roses. He tipped this until the tallow grease was pungently and sweetly scented. With the little dish in his hand, he came over to the bed and set it down. Fardji took the sweetly perfumed unguent and spread it amply between the Asian-tan swell of Pabi's bottom-cheeks.

The Khalif entered, dismissed the eunuchs, and went to his chosen pleasure without delay. His excitement seemed heightened at the thought of using—or misusing—Pabi in this way. The natural tightness of her anus ensured that Pabi's bottom gave him as much pleasure as a page-boy might have done, while the girl added a natural feminine response at having a man's erection inside her. This lewd and vulgar use of Pabi's backside took place in surroundings of the greatest opulence, the two secretaires and the Psyche glass with huge columns, the white and gold couch with a little white and gold table, the complete toilet-set in gold and tortoiseshell.

The sight of the round impudent face and and high-boned prettiness in the Asian girl's features was reflected for him in the gold-pillared Psyche glass. This inspired him and the tightness of Pabi's bottom upon his stiffness hardened him still further. Best of all he might discharge his passion upon such hot infertile soil without the least

danger of spoiling his page-girl's urchin shape by unwanted breeding. The Khalif bred by his wives, not by his concubines. The eunuchs who spied upon the scene spread the word that Pabi had been thoroughly cured of her lesbian yearnings and had become a proper man's woman. Karima in her wisdom had assured that Pabi would play alone no longer for she had nothing left to play with. A man's deep searching was necessary to her pleasure now. The eunuchs assured their acquaintances that Pabi had enjoyed losing her backside's virginity. On future occasions they swore that when she saw her master's weapon uncovered, Pabi's young bottom itched with the excitement of having it.

When the sex was over on that first night, the bare Asian-tan cheeks of Pabi's bottom were thrashed by her master with a stable-whip while she was still sprawling arse-upwards over the bed. He thrashed her as a driver would thrash a delinquent camel-boy, for that was what she had now become to him. With interludes for other indulgence, the whipping lasted a full hour and it was necessary to tie Pabi's wrists to a bed pillar before it was over. But the loyal Fardji and his assistants swore that that was how a master must treat a girl of Pabi's kind in whom he took such an interest. A young minx like Pabi, who expected the whip from a passionate master, respected him the more for it.

They added what they had really seen. Whenever Pabi was brought in future to her master's bedroom and saw the whip lying on the gilt chair, she would kneel and kiss up and down the length of the lash. She would even lay it on the bed, kissing it and pressing it to her face, as she sprawled bottom-upwards and was ridden by her master. Fardji did not give the whole truth of this. Pabi might hate and fear the lash. But she had been warned that she must do everything in her master's bedroom to enhance his pleasure, even his pleasure in whipping her. Had she failed or refused, Pabi would have been taken to a room where

her manners might be improved by a teasing of her back-side and thighs with a red-hot tickler.

It was rare for a girl to attract such usage and only Pabi's Asian coquettishness had earned it. She was summoned only once in a month or two to her master's bed, for he had two hundred other slave-girls, each beautiful and each trained in wanton postures and lascivious tricks to please him. Jenny heard of such things and shuddered. But the Khalif showed no interest in her as yet. It seemed that Miss Langham was being reserved for a destiny of more importance. What it might be, she could not yet guess.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DESPITE HIS TREATMENT of Pabi, it seemed that the Khalif showed an increased respect for Jenny and young women of her quality. His admirers called him a just man who treated his slave-girls as they deserved. Under the harsh laws of Arabia, Pabi had earned her ordeal by promiscuous flirting and her seductions of the other concubines, as well as by a self-important assertion of what privileges she thought due to her. Even Shaïda fell from favour in the end for her wilful pride. There was a scene witnessed by Jenny and the others, the desperate rear-cheek creasing of the voluptuous sallow-tanned bottom-flesh as Fardji's whip cracked and snaked fifty times across the bare swell of Shaïda's backside.

Nothing of this sort happened to Jenny. Instead she was allowed a degree of liberty that might have been impossible for a darker-skinned girl. There was logic in this. A white girl without friends or assistance would hardly try to escape across hundreds of miles of searing desert heat. For Jenny, that would be synonymous with failure and death by the torments of thirst.

Under the supervision of Fardji, the young Englishwoman was permitted to go out into the city, though cloaked and veiled. In the markets she could talk to other women in the Arabic that she had begun to learn. There was little news of the outside world, for these women were as confined in the city as she in the harem. The largest market of all was the slave market and this she was forbidden to enter be-

cause no woman was allowed into it unless she was to be sold. Rich men would spend a good deal of time there, even when they had no intention of buying, for the amusement of seeing the girls paraded before them. But Jenny became an observer of life in the busy grain market and in the great square where the peasants came to sell their vegetables, patronised by cooks and women of the lower orders.

After a month or two more, the girl was permitted to ride on horseback with Fardji leading her. Her favourite destination was the riverside quarter of the jewellers' shops. The Mahdi had prohibited such trade as worldly pomp and vanity. In those days women could wear nothing but mother-of-pearl or coral. But now the jewellers filled an entire street along the river bank, selling baubles of gold and filigree work, to say nothing of gems and pearls. These traders were quick to bring out their most precious wares and make the stones flash in the sun, hoping to tempt this favoured concubine of the Khalif and through her wheeling the Lord of Kordofan himself.

But such excursions seemed only to emphasise the new master's lack of interest in his fair-skinned slave. The loins of his wives, the backsides of Shaida and Pabi and their Asian rivals received the tribute of his sperm. Jenny received nothing but his permission at second-hand that she might go here or there under the strict supervision of Fardji and a groom. It was plain to the young Englishwoman that the Khalif had no interest in her. And yet she must remain a prisoner of the harem.

How long was this to continue? If she was not wanted by him, might he not send her back to Cairo or even to London? But even as she thought of it, the idea of such a return filled her with doubt. But if she was not to be returned, would she be disposed of in some other way? Must she grow old, wither and die in the palace of Beit-el-Maal? Troubled and undecided, she waited for his command.

After several months of this freedom, the market-visits



with Fardji came to an end. Once again, Jenny was confined within the marble apartments of the harem. The fountain played in the little arcaded courtyard with its dark-leaved trees in wooden tubs, the heady air of orange blossom under that searing square of blue sky which was all that the slave-girls now saw of the outside world. In the warm humid air of the shaded rooms the body perfume of nude female flesh mingled with sweet florid scents sprayed lightly upon it.

Without receiving an explanation, Jenny knew that her confinement once again in this place was not accidental. Something had happened that she could not guess, some event in the world beyond the harem. Three or four weeks<sup>4</sup> passed and then Fardji ordered her to prepare for another excursion. She entered the room where her riding costume was laid out. This time it consisted of a blouse and jodhpurs in white cotton twill with a cloak that would cover her to the hips. The young woman could not help thinking that it was very like the page-boy costume in which Pabi was made to wait upon her master. But if that was the fate in store for her, she surely would not be going out with Fardji. All the same, the white riding-pants fitted tight as a skin on the robust curves of Jenny's hips and thighs. Had they not been stitched with stout thread down their rear seam, the pants might have split open as she sat down on the saddle.

Fardji led her out on the horse, across the square with the peasants selling their vegetables and beyond the street of jewellers by the river. It was an area where she had been before, the more spacious dwellings and grounds of cattle-breeders and horse-trainers. The eunuch led her under the arch of a modest little manor house—as it might have seemed by English standards—and into a courtyard.

When the girl asked her escort why they had come to this place, Fardji shrugged. He replied that this was the house of a man who had risen from adversity under the English and from neglect by the Mahdi to become Master

of Horse under the Khalif Abdullahi. More than that Fardji would not say. He seemed to think the matter of little importance.

He helped the girl down from the horse as two servants in white tunics approached. Touching their fingers together, they made a deep salaam of respect to the Khalif's chief eunuch. A few words were exchanged in an undertone. Then one of the men took a light collar-chain and clipped it round the girl's neck. He clipped a similar bracelet chain on either wrist. Finally, he fastened the bracelets to a chain that ran up to her collar, so that Jenny's hands were unable to reach behind her or move below her breasts.

The servants ordered her forward towards the house. Their eyes dwelt on the pert young nose, the high-boned cheeks and lovely mouth, the demure chin and steady eyes. The light brown tresses shingled to her head and cut at collar length were something of a novelty in coiffure to them. The manner in which the hair was combed aside, aslant one side of her forehead, added to this gentle appeal. Fardji had unclipped the cloak from her neck to make it easier to attach the collar-chain, so that the girl appeared in her blouse and tight white riding-pants. As the two servants followed her to the house, they studied her figure. Though she was not a particularly tall girl, she was worth their attention. The tight riding pants emphasised the full robust shape of her thighs and hips, the proud and self-assured cheek-swell of Jenny Langham's bottom.

They followed her into a light airy vestibule, grinning at the rounding and parting of the girl's rear cheeks as she climbed the slope to the door. After the brightness of the day outside, it took Jenny a moment to see clearly the figure of the man who stood waiting. His eyes alone conveyed a message of triumphant desire and vindictive satisfaction. It was Abu, who in the days of his misfortune had been a white man's groom. As such, he had once touched her and Colonel Butler had had him flogged for it.

And Jenny, dressed in much the same white riding pants as now, had posed before him, as if to mock him while he was almost naked over the bench waiting for the whip. And helpless in his excitement at her, Abu's sperm had soaked the jock-strap that he was made to wear for decency.

Small wonder that the Khalif had given orders for Jenny to be dressed as she now was. It was the precise costume suited to Abu's vengeance. And vengeance was long overdue. He had suffered his ordeal for being naturally excited by Jenny, dressed in jodhpurs when he attended her afternoon rides to the Nile bank at Khartoum. He had suffered for daring to touch her—not hurting, not stripping, merely touching her—or rather touching her clothes. This was in a world where thousands had been butchered by the race that decreed such punishment and thousands more by the race to which Abu belonged. Slaughter, pillage, destruction were instruments of policy on a grand scale. But that Abu had touched Jenny with no more violence than shaking her by the hand was a matter for the gravest punishment on behalf of outraged feminine dignity.

Fardji was standing behind her as she gazed at her accuser.

“You did not expect it, young woman?” the eunuch asked, in his rather high-pitched monotone. “A man who is a mere servant to your people may rise among his own. The man you despised as a mere groom is the most gifted trainer of horses in this city. He is worth more to his people than all your great men at Khartoum were to yours. He has risen in the service of the new Khalif and earned his master's favour. And did you truly believe that fate would not avenge him upon you? He saw you at the grain market several weeks ago. Sooner or later he would have seen you. Sooner or later the wheel of fate would have spun. Now it is the Khalif's wish that you should pay the price for your cruelty and arrogance. He has decreed that Abu shall exact that price from you.”

Fardji waited in the vestibule but took no part in what

followed. Abu's two servants seized the girl and marched her to another room. There was a large Egyptian settee of gilt scrolls and green velvet at its centre, rich Persian carpets in blue and gold on its floor and walls. A saddle had been set on the broad settee. They pushed Jenny towards this, made her lie forward over it, then fastened her down. Her arms were drawn out at full stretch, her wrists held by leather cuffs to the frame of the settee. A broad strap round her waist held her down over the saddle itself.

To have Jenny in his possession in such a manner was the sweetest vengeance Abu could have asked. The two grooms had fastened her by the wrists and waist so that she was stretched forward, lying on her belly over the hump of the leather saddle. The girl had twisted her face to him, the shingled crop of light brown curls in some disorder. Such an appealing young face it was, too, with its pert nose and chin, the openness of its look and the dismayed parting of the lips. But Abu's eyes were on the swelling and skin-tight seat of Jenny's pants. She was a healthy and energetic young woman, whose firm hips and legs still showed a tomboyish quality in her thighs and backside. The smooth rear swell showed a pair of bottom-cheeks fully rounded and suggestively parted in her present position.

Despite the desire that he felt for her and despite the vengeance that he naturally intended to inflict upon her, Abu remained impersonal in his dealings with her. His servants undid the girl's pants at the waist and stripped them down, the pallor of Jenny's bottom-flesh swelling free a little after such tightness and constraint. Abu had every reason to give Jenny a hard time. Yet he was gentler with her than he need have been. He was going to use the tightness of her behind as she deserved but his servant brought a tin of grease like rose-scented brilliantine. He smeared it as thickly between the girl's twenty-one-year-old buttocks as honey in the comb.

Then the servants held her bare legs to prevent her

kicking back at the man who was going to make use of her. The girl emitted a wild constrained mewling against the hand that covered her mouth. Abu knelt astride her, his hot stiff manhood parting her rear cheeks. Her thighs tensed vainly against the hands that held them. There was a moment of pressure, resistance, and then pressure increased until Abu felt the tightness of Jenny's arse engulf him. He threaded her deeply upon his manhood, enjoying it all the more because he knew that she would feel the tool very big in such a tight place.

Her protests, muffled by the hand across her mouth, were not shrill. Rather they formed a howl of despair at being forced to submit for the first time to what she had been taught to regard as a young woman's worst degradation at the hands of a man. The servants twisted her head round so that she must look sidelong at Abu, enabling him to enjoy the crestfallen beauty of her prim nose and chin, her pretty cheekbones and quiet eyes, the short sweep of light brown tresses. Once or twice she uttered a muffled keening of alarm at the depth of his hard-tipped intrusion. Unable to resist driving deep between the pallid tomboyish cheeks of Jenny's bottom, Abu caused a turmoil in her entrails that she felt all the way to her belly button. But he also knew that after several weeks of this use, her resistance would diminish and then cease. There would be no more sobs and pleadings, no more defensive compression together of the rear cheeks or urgent tightenings of Jenny Langham's arsehole. Indeed, he had no objection to such tightenings of alarm now when he was safely impaling her, for they added to his pleasure. But resistance would be over in a few weeks. Then, slowly and against her feminine instincts, she would begin to respond. She might do so merely to satisfy a man who had power to strangle her if she displeased him. Or she might do it because the repeated stimulation of her nerves in so sensitive an area had begun to stir a morbid excitement that she need no longer ignore.



Content in these thoughts and urgent to give her what she deserved, Abu rode faster. He drove deep and released the thick warmth of his tribute in the depths of Jenny Langham's bottom. Then he lay there like this a moment longer, kissing her neck and ears, fondling her backside and thighs. But he did this for his own pleasure, speaking no word of passion or desire to her.

The girl still lay over the hump of the saddle like this half an hour later when Abu took from his groom a three-foot riding-switch of black leather. Its handle was the thickness of his thumb. From that, it tapered to a tip that was no more than a quivering pencil-point fineness. In addition to the leather cuffs holding her wrists and the stout waist-belt, they pinioned her ankles to the settee frame and drew a strap tightly round her lower thighs. A convenient cloth wadded her mouth.

Abu touched the quivering switch lightly across the pallid cheek-swell of Jenny's bottom. Though she had been spanked like a naughty schoolgirl when Shaida used the strap, Jenny had never felt the whip at all, let alone across her bare buttocks. Much as she dreaded it, she had no idea of the intensity of the torture that Abu was now going to inflict upon her.

Abu was well used to breaking in the most rebellious filly by use of this same whip across her hind quarters. He took a savage wrist-flexing aim and brought the whip down in its flash of black light. It landed across the pallid cheek-quiver of Jenny Langham's bottom with an ear-splitting impact. Her wild cry rose shriller as the naked agony of it swelled to an unendurable crescendo. The whip made the air sing again, branding Jenny's backside with one searing stroke after another. He caught her high across the tops of her thighs, then agonisingly across the lower and fatter cheek-swell of Jenny's arse. She froze with the intensity of the torment and then screamed with all the power of her lungs into the hand that covered her mouth.

He whipped her buttocks, her thighs, Jenny's tomboyish



bottom-cheeks again, her bottom twice more, her thighs, Jenny's arse with half a dozen savage strokes, her thighs again, always returning to Jenny's backside. If the hand had not been covering her mouth, Jenny would no doubt have screamed out her reproaches for whipping her so sadistically when he had just made passionate love to her young bottom. But reproaches of that kind would merely have made the servants smile at how much the girl had to learn about her state of slavery.

The walls of the room rang to the echoes of the whip thrashing across the full cheek-swell of the young woman's backside. There came a moment, long after this as the whip branded her afresh. The man who held her felt her head droop and the girl, punished beyond endurance, drooled against his fingers. But this temporary swoon was not permitted to prevent the rest of the sentence being carried out. One of the servants, smiling softly, used his hand to fondle between her legs, coaxing and restoring her by a method that caused her to come to her senses with a start.

The discipline was resumed. The full pallid swell of Jenny's bottom-cheeks surged and contorted as she wallowed arse-upwards over the saddle. She writhed as frantically as any little girl getting her first spanking at school and, indeed, her screams would have rivalled a little girl's shrieks had it not been for the hand that muffled her.

When the whipping was over, the girl was in no state to walk or ride, nor even to have her pants pulled up again. She continued to lie face-down over the saddle, so that her head dangled down one side and her feet on the other. Jenny's bottom-cheeks were skinned crimson and wealed by the lash, which had also printed several stripes across the backs of her thighs. No wife and few concubines were displayed in such a manner. She had been whipped as a whore might be whipped.

The house servants and the Arab women of the estate were permitted to see the example that the girl offered.

There was much crowding round to view the state she was in. Men looked earnestly and young women smiled. But the envy and resentment of older women was vividly shown. The cheeks of Jenny's bottom were spat upon until they trickled thick with the contempt of a dozen elderly crones. In this state she remained when Fardji entered again. Jenny was sobbing uncontrollably and wept out a reproach against her master for the cruel punishment he had made her have at Abu's hands.

Fardji seemed surprised by her words.

"The Khalif Abdullahi is nothing to you now. You cannot imagine that he would wish to make use of you after what has happened to you this afternoon. You are no longer a concubine of his household. Such a privilege would be absurd now. Before you were brought here to be dealt with, the Khalif resigned all claim upon you. He acknowledges that there is only one man who has a right to possess you as he chooses. That man is Abu. It is to Abu alone that you must make amends by submission to him for the rest of your life. He shall dispose of you as he chooses in his bed, on the auction block, or with the noose. But whatever his choice may be, the Khalif has given you to him, unreservedly. Make your peace with Abu. He is your master now."

The shock of this revelation checked her sobs, though her eyes clouded with astonishment. Yet Fardji spoke the truth. What the Khalif Abdullahi had decided remained logical and just. So long as Abu required retribution, Jenny could belong to no other man.

Fardji took his leave. Abu returned with his servants. He gazed at the beaten and humiliated girl on the settee. Then he ordered them to unstrap her hands and waist, her ankles and thighs. Alone with her, naked under his robe, he stood over her as she lay there. Her crestfallen young face stirred his pity and desire. The cheek-swell of Jenny's bottom was furnace red from the whipping and running with the spittle of the old women. The sight of this caused

his manhood to part the robe, not twelve inches from the girl's face. Jenny drew towards him. The collar-length tresses of her light brown hair brushed his loins as she rounded her lips over the knob and drew in the length upon her tongue. With all the skill she could muster, caring nothing for her own taste as well as his upon the swollen hardness, Jenny made her submission, which was the only choice left to her.

When that day's drama was at an end, vengeance was accomplished. Abu had never been a cruel man by nature. Nor was he towards this concubine. If he chose on some nights to make Jenny play the part of a page-boy in his bed, this was something from which the girl herself learnt to derive a hectic though morbid thrill. From time to time she was whipped. As a rule she had earned the punishment. Sometimes, it was clear that it was merely Abu's amorous caprice.

By such means, the Arab trainer of horses mastered this self-centred and arrogant young woman. Even had she yearned to be rescued from her fate, any hope of an advance into the Sudan by Anglo-Egyptian regiments remained a chimera as summer followed winter and winter turned to spring. Jenny passed from rebellion to submission. After a while, she progressed on the last and most significant stage of her mental progress. She needed and wanted to be mastered, in the sense that life without a master would have been impossible to her. Sometimes she trembled but far more often she adored. It was not Abu himself whom the young woman longed for but the spectral figure of the ruler of women with his savage passions, implacable demands and passionate punishments of her. How could she go back to St James's Square, Orchard Portman, and Lord Algernon Regis after what she had known at Khartoum and Beit-el-Maal? Who, indeed, would want her, used as she had been by her captors?

In her discovery of the native language she learnt that the same word signified both the man's penis and the

bridle of the rider or driver. Jenny smiled privately at this tribute to the trainer of horses. Abu was the master who drove with the whip if necessary and guided her by the bridle's command. How outlandish it would have seemed to the feminine self-confidence of London or New York! And yet how it was reflected in all the savage animal nature that she saw everywhere about her in the African animal kingdom. When she understood such things, Miss Langham knew that there could be no relationship between the sexes but that of woman and her master.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AFTER THE EVENTS at Khartoum and the strange drama of life and death which followed, the regiments of the British army remained absent from the Sudan for many years. Immediately after the failure of Lord Wolseley's relief column to reach Khartoum and save General Gordon, Wolseley himself had landed with a force of British troops at Suakim on the Red Sea coast. But these regular troops were supplemented too hastily by untrustworthy native irregulars, who fled in the face of Osman Digma's rebels. Lord Wolseley withdrew his men within the fortifications of Suakim and abandoned his plan for reaching Khartoum by an attack from the east. By then, in any case, the essential purpose of such an attack had been frustrated. General Gordon was dead. The men and women of Khartoum had gone down in slaughter or passed to captivity.

It was not until twelve years later that a punitive expedition under Major-General Sir Horatio Kitchener avenged the death of General Gordon by routing the Sudanese rebels in the "camel Derby" at the battle of Omdurman. The tomb of the Mahdi was destroyed upon Kitchener's orders and the corpse thrown in the Nile. The skull alone was preserved, being sent to the Royal College of Surgeons in London as a curiosity, upon General Kitchener's orders. At first, Kitchener had wanted the skull mounted as an inkstand and the dead Mahdi's fingernails mounted as a trophy for his London club. But he had bowed to the express disapproval of Her Majesty the Queen towards this

proposal. For his obedience to her desires, he was created the first Field Marshal Lord Kitchener of Khartoum.

There was an end to rebellion in the Sudan, though it came too late to save most of the victims. The Emirs and Pashas and Mullahs who had fawned upon the Mahdi in his hour of triumph now fawned with equal alacrity upon Lord Kitchener. But Kitchener used them and despised with the same degree of distaste as the Mahdi had shown so many years before.

In the years of darkness that followed the fall of Khartoum and the death of General Gordon, there remained one British presence in the Sudan. This was a force of irregular troops led by such brave spirits as Colonel Valentine Baker, late commander of the 10th Prince of Wales Hussars. There was little armed conflict between these scouting parties and the native population. The Mahdi's death and the accession of Abdullahi had brought about a state of armed truce.

During this time, a young subaltern of Colonel Baker's patrol was riding alone near the river, north of Berber and more than two hundred miles short of Khartoum. It was a no-man's-land of desert and thorn, either side of the Nile, where the vast distances separated the rebel Emirs under Abdullahi from the Egyptian regiments and British officers who ventured out from Wadi Halfa or Abu Hamed. The young subaltern was riding alone, dressed in the robes and turban of a native nomad. He was in no danger. The ordinary folk of the countryside felt no further animosity against his kind, so long as it was one man riding alone. Indeed, the young officer would even find welcome and hospitality from time to time.

The heat of the day, reflected in the colourless burning-mirror of the sky, had grown beyond endurance. Making for an outcrop of rock, he took advantage of its shade. There was a great stillness all about him as he uncorked the webbing-covered water-bottle, filled his mouth from it, then spat the water out upon the pale sand. After he had



rested for half an hour, he got up and walked a little way in the shadow of the rock, conscious that someone else was in the vicinity. Far off, it seemed to him, he had caught a syllable or two of voices and had heard the clink of harness. He came to the end of the outcrop, peered round it, and then drew back a little from its corner.

Hidden from him by that angle, there was a rough canvas shelter, a day-tent such as desert travellers erect for an hour or two against the heat of noon. It was cut from canvas of broad stripes in green and gold, stretched over poles of bamboo. The servants of this lord of the camel-train who occupied the shelter were busy elsewhere. He was alone, or very nearly so, with one of his concubines. It was a scene that might have been painted by Benjamin-Constant or Gérôme, but for the attitude of the figures, which would hardly have been seen outside a scandalous French print or the crude imagination of Holywell Street.

The well-dressed Arab was reclining in a canvas chair, dressed in his long embroidered robes. These robes hung open sufficiently at the front for his member to protrude with the rigidity of a flagpole from a balcony. Before him, on all fours, knelt a girl whose veil had fallen back from her head, revealing a short cut of light brown tresses and the firm prettiness of a fair-skinned face. Her features were neatly and primly cut, yet there was strength and self-possession in her brown-eyed glance. She was dressed for coolness and privacy in a single layer of cotton, a dress that came down loosely from her neck almost to her ankles. As the subaltern looked he saw that the young woman had circled the base of the tan-skinned erection gently with her forefinger and thumb. Her mouth opened softly over the knob and she began to suck in a slow languorous movement. The Arab let out his breath in a long exclamatory sigh. Jenny, for she it was whom the subaltern found serving her master Abu, kept her hips raised from her heels.

In a moment more her master stretched out his foot and

hooked up the hem of the girl's dress, throwing the loose cotton high up over her waist so that her legs and hips were left bare. As the young officer's eyes adjusted to the darkness of the tent's interior, he saw that a wide bow-framed mirror, no doubt looted from an English bedroom at Khartoum, had been propped on the ground behind the girl by one of the servants. As the master sat there he might look down at the girl's collar-length tresses moving while her mouth was filled by the truncheon of his flesh. Or he might lift his gaze and study in the glass a naked rear view of Jenny on all fours as she served him. There could be no doubt that the bare pallor of the sturdy cheek-swell of Jenny's backside seen in such a posture would stiffen and harden him still further.

Fascination and prudence held the young officer spell-bound. To rush in and attempt rescue where he was outnumbered so greatly might lead to the death of the girl as well as his own. But he was also fascinated at the sight of an English girl, a proud and self-possessed creature of twenty-one or twenty-two, humiliating herself in this way without any apparent resistance or resentment. There was no eunuch with a whip standing by to avenge his master if the girl disobeyed. There was no vizier with a noose to strangle her or a blade to cut her throat if she rebelled against this portly Arab master who was twice the girl's own age.

It needed no great prescience to guess the outcome. From time to time the master uttered a breathless command from his throat. The girl would shift her knees a little further apart to show her sex more fully, if that was what he wanted. Or, if he commanded it, she would hollow her waist down and thrust her hips back fuller and rounded. The robust young mounds of her buttocks swelled in this posture and were drawn harder apart so that Jenny's full rear view was shown in the mirror.

Whatever it was that he wanted, she did it without shame or demur. At last, he gave a groan and his body arched back a little in rigid spasm. His hands thrust down

on the girl's head, as if to prevent her drawing away. He thrust his loins forward hard, forcing several small retching sounds from the girl's throat as the firm bulk of his manhood filled her. His tension broke in an irregular movement as the warm passion flooded out over Jenny's tongue and she consumed it without a word of protest.

Presently, the master roused himself, stood up and turned away. The girl remained alone for that moment in thought or uncertainty. Then she stood up, adjusted her clothes, and in that movement saw the young subaltern who stood about fifty feet away. Though he was dressed in the robes and turban of a nomad, his face revealed him for what he was. But the girl's reaction was curious and contradictory. She looked startled at first, quite as if she might rush towards him. Then something in her thoughts seemed to check the impulse and she turned away to follow her master, as if she had seen nothing of the intruder.

The poor young fellow, so innocent in the ways of womankind, was quite nonplussed. He went back to his noon camp, mounted, and rode after the caravan of the heathen lord. He passed it an hour later and saw the young woman plainly. There was a veil of some sort over her head but it did not conceal her face as she rode beside Abu.

The lord of the caravan saluted the young traveller courteously as they passed. There was even time for the young man to encounter again the eyes of the English girl who had so debased herself before her harem tyrant an hour or two before. But the girl, when no one else was looking at her, held the young man's gaze steadily and shook her head slowly and significantly. It was as plain as if she had said to him,

"I know what you are thinking. I know that you mean well and would like to rescue she whom you think of as a damsel in distress. I know that you would like to take me from here. But it will not do. It will not do at all. The time is far too late for that."

He could do nothing but ride on. Returning to Colonel Baker's camp, the young cavalry officer told his story, though omitting those details that he could not repeat without a blush. The report was noted, among many others of a similar kind. But nothing was done by the War Office when informed by Colonel Baker of the possibility that the young woman had found her happiness in being the slave of such a master. It was not a sentiment that his superiors would accept from the colonel. Lord Hartington and his advisers knew of Colonel Baker's propensity for fairy-tales and untruths, as they called them. And they knew that his imagination was easily fired by the erotic and the seductive. Best to leave him be.

The reason for this reflected as much upon the sexual mores of England as did the fate of Miss Langham. Colonel Baker, who now commanded a ramshackle bunch of irregular troops in the desert, had once been the most fashionable soldier in England, Lieutenant-Colonel of the 10th Prince of Wales Hussars. But five years before the fall of Khartoum the commander of this most renowned cavalry regiment in the army had suffered a grievous misfortune which left him eligible for nothing but mercenary service of a distinctly shady kind.

Travelling by train from camp in Aldershot to Waterloo, he had found himself alone in a first-class carriage with Miss Dickinson, a young lady who was a stranger to him. The train was halted by a signalman short of its London terminus, after the man had seen the figure of a young lady on the runningboard outside the carriage door, clinging to the handle and screaming as if she was being done to death by inches.

Miss Dickinson swore that Colonel Baker had attempted to commit upon her a sexual assault of the most dastardly kind, while they were alone in the first-class carriage. He had sat beside her as they talked, then put his arm about her and kissed her. Her terror at such a thing and her delicate sensibility made it impossible for her to remain in

his presence. There was no communicating corridor in the train and she had been unable to escape except by opening the door and scrambling out on to the running board.

Though he was an intimate of the Prince of Wales, nothing could save Colonel Baker from public disgrace. But whether or not Miss Dickinson was a lady, Colonel Baker was a gentleman. When he was tried for indecent assault at the Central Criminal Court, he forbade his attorney to cross-examine the girl. What lies she told—and for whatever purpose—were to remain unchallenged. Better it should be so than that the colonel should be known as one who had caused public humiliation to a member of the fair sex.

The result might easily be guessed. This officer of spotless reputation was convicted. He was sent to prison for a year and dismissed from his command of the 10th Hussars. Indeed, he was cashiered and dismissed the service by order of the Commander-in-Chief. But the strangest truth of all came several years later. One who had known the colonel and been present at his trial paid a visit to a brothel in Paris, a select house of excellent reputation. While he was there, he came face-to-face with Miss Dickinson who, under a *nom de guerre*, was a rising star of the establishment.

Had the colonel's illicit kiss in the first-class carriage so destroyed her moral fibre that she had fallen to this? Or had she always been an accomplished immoralist, well-paid to assist in Valentine Baker's destruction? Those who knew the truth said little, for it would no longer do their friend the least good. But the colonel had a more famous brother, Sir Samuel Baker. He it was who had discovered the source of the Nile when Speke and others had failed. He it was who had taken as his second wife a slave-woman bought from the auction block in Budapest. There were many who abominated him for this and many who envied and resented his success as explorer and geographer. The



plot against his brother was a cheap and easy way to ruin the name of the entire family.

Valentine Baker had served under the Sultan of Turkey in the war against Russia, as well as in the Sudan irregulars. But he was not a man to be easily believed in a stranger story concerning a woman. His own history weighed against him in the matter.

For that reason the strange encounter with Miss Langham remained a secret from the English public. She and Miss Dickinson, though unlike in so many respects, shared the aura of improbability. Valentine Baker and Abu-Anga, also unlike in many respects, had been unscrupulously defamed and punished by the spite of those two young women.

General Kitchener was less concerned than the colonel with such matters as the fate of English concubines. Whatever reprisals might be taken against the rebellious leaders of the Sudan in other respects, the marble harems of palaces like Beit-el-Maal remained inviolate. Unlike the destroyers of Khartoum, the British army did not make war upon the women of the enemy. That being the case, this strange remote world of captivity and sensuality guarded its secrets.

To be sure, it was known that young European women languished in such places. Many years after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, when the native rebellion had been utterly expunged from consideration, the Raj and his Memsahibs were welcome guests of the great Indian Maharajahs. The women alone were permitted to take tea with the inmates of the harem. Some of them returned with curious reports of concubines now in their middle years but fair-skinned, blond, and blue-eyed. These slave-women spoke little or no English. Yet they were English in appearance as if they had been born in Mayfair or Oxford. Indeed it was impossible that their origins could be anywhere outside Europe.

The truth was inescapable. In the massacre of English families at Meerut or Cawnpore so many years before,



these little girls had been hidden by loyal native servants or otherwise escaped the immediate fury. Orphaned by the war, they had been eagerly traded by the dealers in female flesh. Within the harem of an Indian master they were brought up and educated to serve his pleasures. What little they might have known of their own language or origin was soon forgotten. They were as perfectly slaves at sixteen or eighteen as their darker-skinned female companions.

Not for one moment was it suggested that they should be "rescued" after so many years. It was too late. What could be done with them, if they were set at liberty? They would have appeared as freaks in English society. Better to leave them to the life they knew.

When this was understood the Memsahibs felt easier in their minds. They need do nothing. It was their duty to leave matters as they were.

Surely the same was true of Jenny, for the young woman recognised that truth in the glance that she gave the young English officer. How could she go back to the life of St James's Square and Orchard Portman? What place was there for such a girl in the dances of the London Season, the garden parties at Buckingham Palace, the race meeting of Royal Ascot, Henley Regatta, the Croquet Tournament at Hurlingham? Jenny would be known as the girl who had been ravished by the brutal soldiery of the Mahdi, buggered over the silk couch of the harem, flogged naked by a heathen savage. The best she could hope for was a life of strict retirement behind lace curtains among the colonnades of Cheltenham or the quiet squares of Hove, attended by a maid servant and spoken of in whispers.

But there was another truth which the men and women of her social rank in England would have found less easy to accept. Jenny had no wish to return to them. To be sure, she had been beaten and abused. But though she had no wish that she should be beaten and abused again, it was better to suffer these things from a master than never to have a master at all. She had drunk of Nile water, as the

Arab proverb says, and therefore would go back for more. Once, in the years that followed, she spoke to a well-intentioned officer from the expedition that rid the Sudan of the Mahdi's influence, once and for all.

"Do what a woman may, she cannot alter her fate. She cannot even govern her own heart. The man who forces her to bow to his will is her master. And she loves the despot who can make himself obeyed."

The officer stared at this strange woman. Yet Jenny's tone was such that she commanded belief in her words. The officer believed them. And as he listened, his eyes betrayed an envy for the man who could master such a young woman so completely. This British officer, the representative of the greatest military power in the history of the world, would never know such pleasure with womankind. All around him were men whom he despised as ignorant savages. And yet they had known that pleasure with supreme intensity every night of their adult lives. When he knew this, the young officer argued no further, dismissing the young woman to her beloved bondage for ever.

**AFTERWORD:  
HORRORS OF  
THE HAREM**

**By Richard Manton**



## AFTERWORD: HORRORS OF THE HAREM

APART FROM THE adventures of the heroine in *The Odalisque*, a good deal of fact and fantasy has contributed to the secrets of the seraglio and the horrors of the harem. The truth has been quite as remarkable as the fiction. The image of girls being abducted, shipped south or east, and sold into harems complete with long gauze panties and bells on their toes is a cartoonist's joke. But even in our own time, the joking has been a nervous cover-up for reality.

On 22 May 1966, the *Sunday Mirror* reported that a dozen high-school girls, aged fifteen or sixteen, had been on an educational cruise to Morocco. Stopping over at Tangier, they stripped off their clothes, slipped on bikinis and went splashing into the sea. As they emerged, breasts and bottoms quivering in wet bikini nylon, thighs shining bare, a talent scout for the thriving trade in slave-girls approached. "Name your price," he said to the astonished teacher in charge of them. "I want to buy them all." A dozen white schoolgirls would fetch a high price, enough for the teacher to live comfortably on his share. Attractive French teenage girls, according to the *London Evening Standard* seven years later, in July 1973, were being sold for \$10,000 each.

At the other end of the commodity market the *London Times* reported on 6 June 1973 that slave-girls in the Punjab were being sold for no more than \$200-\$300 each, the trade being so common. On 23 May 1975 the

same paper gave evidence of this in reporting the sale of "50 teenage girls" as a group, bought by "a wealthy Middle Eastern buyer."

Partly in response to this, Scotland Yard smashed a "Girls for Sheikhs" racket in London during 1975, though on 2 August the *Daily Telegraph* added that the trade still flourished. It reported that 20%-30% of all white-skinned girls who took jobs as dancers or club hostesses in the Middle East were destined to disappear into the perfumed bondage of the harem.

Revolutionary regimes seem no less eager than the decadent autocracies they replace to maintain the slave-girl system. Scandal hit Tanzania when the four Marishi sisters—Iranian schoolgirls aged fourteen to sixteen—were seized and shared out by political power-brokers. Rescued at last, they spoke of sexual ordeals and bedroom thrashings.

Marxist Mozambique devised a system in 1976 by which white female offenders were consigned to labour camps where they cleared ground for game parks. The *Daily Telegraph* described how the girls "have to strip" for work and are ruled by corporal punishment. But this was surely learnt from European example. Fact and fiction alike show female reformatories and detention centres of the past as harems for those who ran them. Unlike the pashas and the sultans, however, the reformatory masters and mistresses swore that it was a highly moral duty for which they deserved to be honoured and well paid.

Even the most sanctimonious harem-owner never had the gall to try that appeal on the public. Instead, the very rich among them devised pleasures extravagant enough to bankrupt all but the mightiest Wall Street corporations. Their sexual fantasies were often even more extravagant than their expenditure.

Gone are the days, in fact and fiction, when slave-girls paraded in veils and gauze pantaloons on the auction platform while the prospective buyers looked on and twinkled. Though the beach be Eastbourne rather than Tangier, the



prize offered by Sally and her elder sister in *Pearls of the Orient* is almost a ringer for the *Sunday Mirror* report. A talent scout with a camera watches the youngsters on behalf of the white-slave syndicate.

The younger sister, Sally, had a lively prettiness of high-boned cheeks, a pert little nose, and a mouth that laughed easily. Her fair hair was worn shorter as a matter of cleanliness. There was something of the female cherub's rounded coiffure with curls at the edges. She adorned the slipway very becomingly. A good many middle-aged gentlemen must have eyed her! The little tart had stripped to a bikini swimsuit in grey and white check. This showed a smooth young back, lightly suntanned, with a fine delicate bone-pattern. Her young thighs were straight and firm, though feminine enough and lightly golden from the sun.

Her breasts were ripening nicely in the bra cups of her swimwear. The bikini briefs showed that Sally Fenton's bottom had a tension and elasticity in its cheeks which made for beauty in a girl of her age. She was a cheeky little imp, lithe and agile as a boy, her waist narrow, her belly flat and lightly muscled. Hers were not the first bare shoulder-blades or legs seen upon a Sussex beach. But her laughter was shrill and derisive, straight from the London back streets. So was that of her elder sister, Jane.

Sally was an active and graceful youngster. She stood in the shallows and practised her diving. From a standing position, she would dive forward and down in a sort of aquatic somersault. When her head and shoulders disappeared, the taut-cheeked seat of Sally Fenton's bikini-pants would break the surface, streaming wet like the pelt of a pretty young seal-pup.

Back on the slipway, her wet hair hanging in disarray round her head, she stooped for the towel.

Her admirer swung the camera so that Sally's taut young backside filled the frame. He saw the firm agility of her straight slim legs and the lithe young cheeks of Sally Fenton's bottom in a skin-tight wetness of bikini pants. The camera recorded a full-plate close-up.

The youngster bent over, her pretty cherub tresses well-soused. Water glistened on the light gold of her slim and straight young back, as well as down the firm and agile shape of her adolescent legs. To see her bending with the seat of the thin swimming briefs wet-tight, each of her trim young buttocks separately shaped must have put ideas into the minds of most men on that Sussex beach.

Before you can say "knock-out drops," this cheeky little imp and her lumpish sister are doomed to perfumed bondage. In terms of the Eastern auction trade they offer a tax-free profit of about \$50,000 dollars, fourteen-year-old Sally Fenton representing the top end of the harem market. But the trade is not all nymphet, in fact or fiction, and the talent scout for a well-balanced seraglio might slow his step as he passes a store whose windows are being set out by a rather vulgar well-built girl of nineteen. The case is illustrated by the fate of the heroine in *Noreen: A Strapping Young Trollop*. Mr Hardman, landowner, judge, master of a private reformatory, employs the nineteen-year-old girl as a window-dresser in his store. The narrator describes her appearance before the Union Street idlers.

Noreen knelt behind the glass with her back to the street, sitting on her heels, working the cloth on the floor with a determination that matched the firm set of her jaw and the wide points of her cheekbones. She was dressed in snug-fitting cotton singlet and the faded blue of tight jeans. A waist-belt of brown leather drew the thin denim smooth and tight over

her hips and thighs. The sturdy young slut responded to admiration with indifference or a contemptuous flick of her level fringe of dark hair.

To reach further, she lifted her hips and went forward on all fours, the collar-length of her lank dark hair falling loose about her face.

Noreen's bottom-cheeks filled the tightened jeans smooth and taut. She was strongly-made rather than plump. Her thighs had the lightly-muscled line of a well-exercised working-girl. The leather waist-belt pulled the washed-out denim of the jeans still tighter on her rear cheek-curves.

How suggestive was this rear view she presented to the street! The faded jeans were skin-smooth, shaping the firmly-stretched mounds of Noreen's buttocks. As she knelt on all fours, the stout central seam of the jeans-seat was drawn deep and taut between the double-swell of Noreen's bottom-cheeks so that the slight lower-fatness of them almost closed over it. The tight fit of the jeans strained the seam forward under her legs almost parting the lips of her sex where its soft flesh was clearly moulded by the tight denim between the rear of her thighs. Her backside in such a posture appeared robust and full-cheeked but firm and well-shaped at the same time.

Under the guise of moral reformation, Noreen is marched off to an establishment where high walls, locked doors, and a regime of erotic discipline are intended to prepare her for a private harem. Elsewhere, as the romance of *Elaine Cox* suggests and the reality of the *Sunday Mirror* and Tanzania confirms, no modern harem is complete without its contingent of teenage schoolgirls. A dastardly fellow by the name of Raoul is scouting on behalf of a sinister slave-dealer beyond the Danube when he notices the youngster bending to her labours in the reformatory garden.

The tight smoothness of her blue-grey working-trousers presented most suggestively the slight heaviness of her adolescent thighs and the full tomboy cheeks of Elaine Cox's fifteen-year-old bottom. Just then she tossed back her fair hair and turned the broad oval of her snub-nosed face with an impudence no sadist could resist. Raoul felt the challenge of inflicting final severities on a rebellious youngster like Elaine.

## 2

But the wildest fiction appears tame compared with the history of real-life harem spectaculars.

In the days of the great Oriental empires, there lived a nobleman with a secluded estate laid out in extensive gardens. Each day, in his carriage and pair, he drove along the shady paths, past tropical blooms, ornamental lakes, and garden-temples. There was nothing unusual in this except that his stable of young mares was a harem of beautiful girls.

Sultan Ibrahim of Constantinople, as well as Mulay Ishmael, and a host of lesser men acted out the same harem fantasy. Even Themistocles of Greece shared the enthusiasm for harnessing a naked slave beauty between his shafts. In the East, light carriages were designed like rickshaws with shafts joined across the front. The harnessed girls bent to their task, wrists and collars attached to the crossbar. Further back, a broad strap was drawn tight between the shafts, running under their lower bellies. It kept their backs straight and their bottoms facing the rider.

Rusticello of Pisa, revealing this practice to Western Europe, assured the world that the nobleman on his secluded estate treated his pony-girls with great kindness and affection. Other enthusiasts found their attention wandering from the garden scenery to the seductive hip-swaying

and buttock-squirming of the labouring girls. For many of these masters, the temptation to reach for the pony-whip seems to have been almost irresistible.

Such fantasies seldom became reality, even in the privacy of harems or closed brothels. A rarity on the stage was the enactment of such a scene in the Paris production of Fernando Arrabal's play *Barrabas* in 1965. Yet the secrets of the traditional harem-trade were revealed by men like the traveller and historian A. W. Kinglake who penetrated the sale-rooms of Cairo where white slave-girls were paraded for prospective buyers.

Because Europeans heard the more lurid harem stories, they imagined that such places must be filled with girls torn shrieking from their families and carried off by savage tribesmen or silk hatted white-slavers. The more common truth was that girls were educated from birth in the hope that they might be chosen for some seraglio of the rich and the powerful. Parents in the East were happy to have a daughter taken off their hands and provided for. The girls themselves were eager for the promised luxuries of harem life. The sultans and pashas made no complaint.

At fourteen or fifteen, these girls joined the harem's Académie de l'Amour, a finishing-school which taught the social graces with emphasis on bedroom etiquette. Each budding Venus was taught at the hands of an older woman. Under the guidance of this mistress, the new girl learnt the anatomy of her own body and its uses in love-making. But she was also taught more traditional deportment. She learnt how to walk gracefully and sit elegantly, as well as how to position herself in the most appealing manner.

Lesbian tendencies were encouraged by this education and yet often frowned upon by the sultans and pashas who believed that female masturbation spoilt its practitioners for pleasure with men. Yet the gentle and loving relationship between women was one of the positive benefits of the harem tradition. An adolescent girl would fall deeply in love with the woman who initiated her in the Académie



de l'Amour. In the bad old seventeenth-century days of Ibrahim I in Constantinople, girl-friends refused to betray one another even when under torture by the sinister Kislár Aga or the Black Eunuch.

Once a girl was chosen to share her master's bed, she was prepared with great ceremony. Accompanied by two naked handmaidens, she stood before the other harem girls and was undressed for their approval. She went naked to the chair of each of the older women and turned this way and that for their inspection. She knelt and kissed their hands after each examination. When she was led to her master's room, she would find another girl waiting there to keep a record of events, in case a child should be born nine months later. In the Far East, it sometimes happened that a pretty maidservant was present when a nobleman enjoyed his concubine. She waited on the couple and was occasionally required to assist the happy pair in their love-making.

To ensure her master's pleasure, the slave-girl was supposed to be passionate, responsive, and yet submissive. Fresh from the hands of the other women, she was eager to produce the finest erection and the most abundant orgasm that the pasha had ever known. It was at this stage that the erotic dance became a preliminary to sex. Sometimes it was performed by yet another girl who was not to be the object of her master's passion.

There were literally hundreds of such dances, though the "Dance of the Coins" was for obvious reasons popular with the girls. In a sultry room, the girl danced nude before the pasha's chair. She used a very small space, immediately in front of him, almost brushing his knees as she arched and writhed her body. Arms twining above her head, thighs and belly moving rhythmically, she knelt slowly with her legs open and her head thrown back, her firm breasts thrust up naked. Rising again, she edged her body's profile round until the erotic wriggling of her hind-cheeks faced the man. She bent over fully in this posture



before turning again and sinking in a posture of sexual submission with her thighs spread.

The energy of this repeated dance pattern produced a lather of perspiration over the girl's body. When her skin was shining with the gloss of her own sweat, tiny coins, already wet with saliva, were pressed to her damp skin at breasts, belly, hips, and buttocks. Some were lodged in her most intimate crevices. She then repeated her dance—over and over with frantic energy. Slave-girl though she might be, all the coins which were shaken loose became hers. Naturally, the girl's writhing became wilder and she opened herself more fully in bending and spreading as she strained after such a prize.

By no means all these dances were performed by sinuous Asian houris in the entertainment of the harem reader. Among fair-skinned sisters in slavery, some showed off their charms under burning skies, others in the more bizarre and criminal harem of reformatory institutions.

Such a juvenile beginner in the art of harem dance in fiction is Jane Mitchener. Her excerpted appearance as a white slave in *Elaine Cox* describes her as an appealing youngster with a firm open face, a direct gaze in her brown eyes, straight dark hair almost touching her shoulders and brushed in a slanting little fringe on her forehead. Her figure is supple and forming nicely, though her development has some way to go. She has a rounded chin and a nice but rather provocative smile. There is charm in the way she tilts her jaw slightly and sets her teeth on her lower lip, teasing her admirers like a little vamp.

Jane was made to dress in a harem dancing-girl costume and perform seductively before the chair of her young master. She appeared deliciously doubtful and appealing. They had made her dress in pretty little shoes, an embroidered breast-halter to leave bare her belly and the small of her back. She wore an imitated harem diadem in a helmet-curve upon

her head and a pair of tight brief panties, made of translucent apple-green nylon.

Rachel led the youngster aside. She took the bottle of liquid soap from the handbasin and tipped it on a sponge. She pressed this over the seat of Jane Mitchener's knickers. By the time Rachel finished, the filmy nylon clung tighter, as well as wet and glossy, to the prim little cheeks of Jane Mitchener's backside.

In a delightfully inexperienced way, Jane turned her back to the stable-apprentice and began her harem dance. There was an appealingly uneasy look in her steady brown eyes and the firm open features of her fair-skinned face. Under the narrow slanting fringe of her dark and lank collar-length hair, she looked increasingly dismayed at the effect her bottom-rolling must be having on her young master. Her teeth touched her lower lip prettily, in apprehension this time rather than in mockery.

Jane Mitchener's bottom rounded towards the stable-apprentice in charming innocence. She arched and writhed the lithe innocence of her young buttocks. She bent forward a little and the slippery wet nylon clung smooth as drumskin to the trim resilient cheeks of her young arse. Even without being told, she was also squirming her bare juvenile thighs upon her own sensitivity in a squeeze-and-rub, squeeze-and-rub rhythm.

The boy licked his lips, looking up and down to admire her slim bare arms, her young belly taut and flat to exaggerate the backward jut of her hips, the fledgling beauty of her tense young thighs. As she squirmed her rear cheeks with such endearing inexperience, the feminine promise of Jane Mitchener's bottom was not quite fulfilled. At the end of the dance, as she was required to bend forward and offer the most alluring rear view to her young tyrant in his

chair, I watched his face. He studied Jane Mitchener's young backside, spread-cheeked in the tight translucent nylon as she bent submissively for his approval.

Before long, Jane's arms are still twining above her head but with her wrists tied to a rope from the ceiling-beam. The stable-apprentice trains her to dance more seductively, using a thin leather strap, eighteen inches long and two inches wide, split into tails at one end—the spanking-strap of the reform school. The high roof echoes to Jane Mitchener's forlorn rising cries.

Though she was such a pretty little thing, the rear-cheek swelling and creasing of Jane Mitchener's fourteen-year-old bottom in the thin skintight gloss of translucent nylon panties was tantalising. The punishment-strap smacked hard across the demure cheek-rounding of Jane Mitchener's bottom. It caught the youngster's bottom a second time—and a third. A savage belt across the backs of her thighs. Across the wet seat of Jane Mitchener's knickers. Behind her knees. Bare legs again. Across Jane Mitchener's bottom. Her bottom again. . . .

The dance-lesson pauses for the lad to take off Jane Mitchener's knickers, lock the door to prevent interruptions, and wet the strap. The walls ring with the sharp smack of leather on her bare fledgling bottom-cheeks and to Jane Mitchener's screams. Her fate makes slavery in harems of the East seem preferable. The lad was given Jane as a pet, for services to his master, over that strapping young trollop of nineteen, Noreen, a window-dresser in the store. She injured her master after her abduction. The lad pleaded hard to be chosen to inflict the final penalty. He was one of the Union Street idlers who watched her polishing on all fours, studying the seat of her tight jeans, the rear bulge of her sex, the sturdy cheeks of Noreen's

bottom, dreaming his sadistic dreams. In her captivity he spied earnestly on Noreen with her pants down, both in the punishment-room and the toilet. His wish was granted. He fondled and then whipped the bare cheeks of Noreen's bottom sadistically. Then he strangled Noreen with a leather collar, earning his master's gratitude.

No self-respecting pasha would make a present of Jane to a mere lackey, not even in gratitude for strangling a rebellious and strapping young trollop like Noreen. The beginners were reserved for the master and even Jane would have been taught the art of pleasing her owner in bed. A girl was expected, for example, to know the technique of "milking" a man with her thigh-movements so that his climax, when it came, should have greater force. The Eastern custom of binding girls' feet in childhood was said to have the effect of developing the thighs more strongly, thus enabling them to intensify the man's pleasure.

A night in the harem bedroom was usually passed in one form of intercourse—genital, anal, oral—ingeniously embellished, rather than in a variety. It was quite rare for the girl to take the man in her mouth. When this happened it was not a preliminary but the style for the whole night. Its use was confined to occasions when the master "felt lazy."

At the other extreme, men like the famous Haroun-al-Raschid would show their energy by taking two girls at once to bed and allowing both of them to rouse him. When he and the two girls were thoroughly worked up, Haroun would oblige them to fight naked like a pair of alley-cats for the honour of his attentions. They duly fought with teeth, nails, and fists. They scratched and bit and tore at each other until one was beaten into submission. Then the winner, panting in her triumph and bearing the marks of battle on her nude body, would ride her master.

The great problem facing many an anxious pasha was no

secret. As many as 400 girls might be locked up in the sexual hot-house of the harem at Constantinople or Algiers. There was only one man with whom they were permitted to relieve their frustrations. Lesbianism was a perennial difficulty for the pasha, worse still when some of his girls were young and innocent at fourteen while others were sexually experienced and unscrupulous in their twenties. The reverse side of this troublesome coin was masturbation by the girls in the warm and tedious luxury of harem life. Languid sexuality bred a frustration that was too seldom relieved by their master's attentions alone.

Whatever their ages, when two sexually mature slave-girls were compelled to bed together in the harem dormitory, the result was predictable. Sly glances developed into long communicative stares. Then, in the darkness, as one of them tried to relieve her tension without assistance, she would feel another hand on her own. According to one observer, Bassano da Zara, olive-skinned beauties from Turkey and fair-skinned young women from Greece fell in love with each other as passionately as any boy and girl.

New slave-girls of fourteen or fifteen were quickly partnered. The harem baths of Bassano's day were notorious for such lesbian seductions. The older woman would follow the innocent teenager and watch her strip. A fifteen-year-old who had yet to experience a man would keep her eyes lowered "with a charming affectation of modesty," while her admirer led her into the water. There the older woman would begin to fondle her, the start of a process that ended weeks later with the youngster "completely in love" with her seductress.

The traditional bathing routine of the harem might almost have been designed to encourage lesbian friendships. Each girl was made to keep her vagina and anus free of hair by submitting to depilation at the hands of a female partner in one of the cubicles at the baths. Accidental arousal might have occurred in any case. But these sessions easily became lazy hours of morning masturbation.



To assist the removal of hair a red ointment called *rustrum* was used which had such an irritant effect on the sensitive areas that highly-strung girls were said to swoon under the caresses of a lesbian partner's knowing fingers.

The kind of delinquency that the pashas were supposed to dread is illustrated by the forbidden passion of two captive slave-girls in *Summertime*. Both are unwilling recruits who have been abducted and consigned to the harem of their master Saleh. Brigid is a lithe and agile redhead of twenty-three with the figure of a dancer. Judith is a graceful and willowy nymph of sixteen with a veil of nut-brown hair framing a face of pale oval beauty and fine hazel eyes. Having served as waitresses at a harem banquet, they linger and lie down together for the night on the table among the debris. Saleh returns secretly at dawn. Imagine the poor fellow's chagrin at what he sees. Enough to break the heart of a conscientious and dedicated harem sadist.

Mistress and pupil sprawled naked together in a most ungainly attitude, Judith with her veil of nut-brown hair thrown back, biting her lip gently with the intensity of her pleasure. All the calm beauty of the elegant sixteen-year-old nymph had gone and her face was racked by the exquisite pangs which betrayed the true sexual passion of a woman for a lover.

Brigid had one arm round Judith's fair-skinned waist to curb her writhing of pleasure a little. Her other hand was busy between those long and graceful young thighs of purest pallor that relaxed and opened innocently to this expert caress. The agile redhead with the firm and fair-skinned nudity of a dancer, was conditioning Judith to pleasures with a woman that the victim would soon be unable to renounce. In any female society as cosmopolitan as the harem in its tastes, there were even girls of her own age who would enjoy giving Judith lessons in the art of lesbian love. Saleh thought of the two



Broad Green schoolgirls, Linda Jennings, the sly and sensuous little blonde, whose pearly-smooth young bottom-cheeks must feel his whip next day, and the *gamine* auburn-cropped fourteen-year-old Valerie Bishop, whom he proposed to train with a birch-rod.

Brigid and Judith had been making love together on the table for much of the night. Saleh saw by the look of relaxation and fulfilment on the face of the sixteen-year-old nymph that Judith had climaxed on the more experienced fingers of the older girl. They were both in a gentler and affectionate mood now, playing with one another's bodies as little girls play with toys or dolls. Even for the most demure teenage girl like Judith Terry there was a fascination at the prospect of exploring every hole and corner of another young beauty, tickling a sensitive spot or intruding a playful finger.

Now the two lesbian lovers lay head to tail, each having her eyes and lips level with the loins and backside of the other. There was no doubt that the two slave-girls were having fun with each other. They sucked one another's sensitive adornments, and trilled their tongues in places of excruciating responsiveness. Judith was running her tongue nimbly in the soft-haired paradise between Brigid's thighs. At the same time, Brigid had made Judith present herself in an upward squat. The tongue of the firm-faced young redhead ran everywhere along the cleavage from the base of Judith's spine to the guardian clitoris at the portal of her sex. The seduction was cunning and remorseless, Brigid playing in the sensitive dell and not even hesitating to insinuate her tongue-tip in the tight posterior dimple. Judith was squatting fuller, as if to admit the intruder as far as possible. Saleh heard the long-legged elegant nymph of sixteen come to her climax with such cries of

release that nothing short of drugged stupor could have quietened her.

All passion had been spent. Judith and Brigid lay among the guttered candles and the debris of the banquet, still naked in their gentle embrace, eyes closed in dreamy recollection of the love-making they had just shared. The light shone full on the silken red tresses of the older girl's hair and the lightly sun-tanned gloss of Brigid Price's bare thighs and hips. Inspired by the joy of release she had shared with Judith, her young body with its dancer's grace and agility displayed a living sheen that only the excitement of gentle but cunning kisses can awaken.

Pashas of the last century like Khalif Bey thought such harem lesbianism charming and commissioned popular European painters like Courbet to portray it. Sultans like Ibrahim I reacted brutally to suggestions that his slavegirls should find pleasure anywhere but in his own bed. He regarded it as a slur upon his manhood. Harem discipline was always strict but never more so than when a master suspected a girl of spoiling herself for his pleasure by masturbating alone or with a lesbian lover—or even by flirting with a eunuch. Precautions of every kind were taken. One Venetian traveller discovered that a suspicious Sultan had given orders for all cucumbers to be sliced up before they were put on the dinner-table for his girls.

Lesbianism might be difficult to prevent but still more insidious was the problem of solitary masturbation by the pasha's slave-girls. Living in the atmosphere of constant sexual suggestion and arousal, it was even more common for a girl to relieve her frustration in this way than with another young beauty. And it was even more difficult to prevent except by drastic measures.

Among the other recruits to the harem of fiction, Margarita in *Villa Rosa* is a hot-blooded Spanish girl of seventeen who presents this very problem to her master.

First seen as a language student on the English coast, she is destined to be the slave-girl of a harem master. The problem with Margarita is that she is too passionate to be restrained from making love to herself as her desires overflow. We see her first walking back from class.

Margarita was a forceful and good-looking Spanish girl of seventeen or so whom one could imagine doing well in her studies. In Terminus Road that led from the sea, I noticed several girls and one or two boy-friends walking in a row ahead of me. There was something about one of the girls that held my attention. It was the slight seductive fullness of her figure in dark blue sweater and the denim smoothness of tight pants. I could see nothing of her face yet, only the sleek black hair swept back plainly to cluster below her collar. As I overtook the group, I saw a badge with the word "Espana" and her name, "Margarita," on the rucksack she was carrying on her back. I recognised the strong features of her Hispanic-tan face, the tall brow, the rounded chin and firm mouth, the dark eyes behind big-framed summer glasses, the dark hair combed back clear to give a stronger and nobler look to her gaze.

Yet there was passion in her look, and even in the strong full movement of her thighs and backside as the smoothly tightened denim pants displayed her.

The danger of Margarita as a harem slave is immediately apparent to the man who spies upon her when she prepares for bed and thinks she is alone.

To see Margarita standing naked before her wash-room mirror like this was to find the qualities of her mind reflected in her figure. She was a well-built girl, her back and shoulders warm with the tan of Barcelona or Valencia. Her breasts had a proud up-

ward thrust and her belly was firmly-muscled. Her back was finely shaped and sleek, the olive-skinned cheeks of Margarita's bottom being a little heavy and therefore lascivious in their appearance. Her thighs had the same look, which suggested strength and lassitude at the same time.

She watched herself for a moment more, then reached for the soap and ran some water. Beginning at her shoulders, she spread the sheen of wet soapiness over and down her body. Her hands fondled her breasts until, as she drew them away, the mirror betrayed the erection of her nipples. Her fingers returned to these hard yet sensitive buttons of flesh, which she excited further without a change of expression on her face. There was no shame in Margarita, only a frank curiosity about her own body and the pleasant sensations of such caressing.

Holding the soap in her left hand, she smoothed her right palm down her belly in a slow circling rhythm of comfort. When the lather shone upon it she began to work it into the dark triangle of hair which crowned her sex.

Looking away from the mirror, head down like a little girl just scolded by her teacher, Margarita shifted her knees apart a little. Her fingers slowly spread the sheen of lather up the inner surfaces of her thighs. A warm-blooded Spanish girl of seventeen or eighteen masturbates impetuously—and so it was with Margarita. As I watched her, she used her second hand. It spread the wet sheen of soapy slipperiness over the warm Hispanic tan of Margarita's bottom-cheeks, the small of her back and the rear of her thighs. Then it seemed that she needed that hand to support herself as she manualised with a muted resonance of wet flesh between her legs.

At last she looked up, the black hair just long enough to touch her shoulders as it spread along

them at the back. Her knees were pressed tight and the slight heaviness of Margarita's sallow buttocks clenched together, as if to imprison a delicious surge of erotic excitement. I waited a moment to see what she would do. Without bothering to reach for the towel, still sleek with moisture from waist to knees, she stretched out on the bed. She lay there naked, on her side, facing the mirror and with her back to the window.

Even had I not been able to see her face in the mirror, as well as the way she plagued herself with her busy fingers between her thighs, the rear view of this naked Spanish student-girl would have betrayed her guilty self-indulgence. The sleek and soapy-wet seat gave a smooth and flawless gloss to the paler olive-skinned tan of Margarita's rear contours, making her show the lazy swell of her backside most suggestively. On the curve of the Spanish girl's smooth rear cheeks the film of moisture caught the light with a sheen like silk. Wet and sleek, the olive-skinned gloss gave a suggestively fuller and fatter look to the cheeks of Margarita's sallow-tanned bottom-swell.

In Margarita's case, the same extreme measures are taken as with Pabi to end her self-indulgence. Without this, says the wise woman who curbs her, the Spanish girl's life in the harem would be one of constant reprimand and punishment, with the same remedy or worse having to be employed in the end.

But the fantasies of fiction are not an exact match for reality. Surely, somewhere, there must be pashas who enjoy seeing a young woman making love to herself. This is more likely to be so if she is a promiscuous and experienced slave-wife of twenty-five or thirty whose performance is worth watching. In *Luxor Nights*, a young wanton in her late twenties is displayed by her captors to

harem buyers and the representatives of the white-slave trade.

Lesley was a fair-skinned young woman of twenty-seven or twenty-eight, wilful and spoilt, with modern views and errant ways. She was educated and emancipated, pretentious and promiscuous. In appearance she was quite a tall young woman, a figure firmly mature from marriage and well-controlled child-bearing. To signal her emancipation from female submissiveness and moral convention, she wore her fair hair in a boy's pudding-basin cut with a parted fringe. She had clear fair-skinned features, dismissive blue eyes and the sulky resolve of mouth and chin which often accompanies wilful conduct in such a modern young *garçonne*.

In the case of this self-possessed young woman, there is amusement in spying on her as she makes love to herself, her self-indulgent passion getting the better of her even while she lies alone on the marble-topped examination-table of the sale-room. Dressed only in a short white singlet and honey-toned nylon panty-tights, she has been made to sit in a hollow at one end of the marble table. Lesley is untouchably sensitive between the legs from prolonged sexual caressing and also needing to release a more mundane torrent. Driven beyond self-containment by another long session of plaguing fingers her flood escapes her and she is obliged to sit in this pool of her own making, like a naughty little girl. A moment later, she lies on her side on the marble table, held by collar and chain, her back to the onlookers. She believes herself alone and in any case hidden from them by a curtain. A servant tiptoes forward smiling, a finger to his lips to hush the voyeurs.

Gently he lifted the curtain to reveal the female captive's rear view, from the waistband of her tights



to the backs of her knees. The firm contour of her hip-swell and rear cheeks, the lithe grace of her thighs.

The wet seat of the tights stretched like translucent skin on the erotic maturity of the young wife's buttocks, moulding their fullness and drawn deep into the suggestive anal crack between. The onlookers saw the pearly swellings of Lesley Hollingsworth's bottom-cheeks tensing and slackening in a slow, languorous rhythm. Her taut thighs whispered together in the wet mesh. A young woman of her age and build, in such a pose, shows an intimate glimpse between the rear of her legs. They saw her fingers working back, rubbing and squeezing, stroking and fondling.

They shared her intimate and secret moments as the moody young wanton caressed herself. Lesley Hollingsworth masturbated in a cool and self-indulgent way, reflecting her character. Disdainful of male admirers and self-regarding, she seemed to assert her rights rather than to achieve ecstasy. From time to time she paused to draw a long breath through her parted lips. With an impatient little movement she shook into place the long parted fringe of her perversely plain pudding-basin crop of straight fair hair. The onlookers smiled and returned their attention to the full-moon pallor of the cheeks of Lesley Hollingsworth's bottom in the wet gloss of translucent tights. She had the backside of a mature young Venus at twenty-seven or twenty-eight, who has had marriage and kids but now launches out on a new and more promiscuous life. She was an arrogant young bitch who peevishly announced her right to give herself when she chose and deny the pleasures of her body when it pleased her.

Like Pabi seen by Karima in the novel, Lesley Hollings-

worth is an arse and a pair of thighs to the onlookers. Only her rear view is seen and even that is only shown from her waist to her knees.

She had no idea they were watching her as she roused herself with dreamy fingers. They let her continue, wanting her tantalisingly close to her climax before they stopped her. Glossy and suggestive, her wet tights shaped the cheeks of her behind in that fuller and fatter manner. The swelling and rounding of her pearly-fleshed arse-orbs grew extremely seductive as she squirmed and panted. She was a pretentious young bitch who thought a lot of herself. This gave greater enjoyment in prying into the secret moments of her woman's pleasure, to see her excitement glisten on the mesh of the tights between her legs. It was all the more amusing to imagine her response when she realised she had offered this display of self-caressing between her thighs and that the smiling voyeurs had enjoyed the fattened swelling and writhing, the ecstatic tightening, the lewd tremors and vulgar rounding of the cheeks of Lesley Hollingsworth's arse! They cautioned the servant not to alarm her by moving the curtain higher. They could see all they wanted. The wet seat of the tights was skin-smooth. As the urchin-cropped Venus-wife writhed in her pleasure, every tensing and flesh-creasing of Lesley Hollingsworth's bottom-cheeks and thighs was excitingly clear.

Grinning with delight they craned forward to get the best view of Lesley's fingers running and twiddling, tickling and teasing herself, for she lifted her upper leg clear of the other a little to enjoy herself more. Regular sex on her own or with a man, since she was in her teens, had taught her all the tricks and thrills that such fiddling and fondling of her most sensitive feminine flesh could devise. She lay with

eyes closed as if she dreamed of a lover's caress. She breathed more quickly through her open mouth, turning over a little more on her belly, swelling her backside out more fully as she pleased herself harder between the legs. They allowed the older woman to judge the moment when Lesley's masturbation had almost brought arousal to crisis. That moment arrived. The duenna brought the spanking-strap down in an ear-stunning smack of leather across the wet cheeks of the tights. The young wanton froze in dismay and anguish, frantic to finish herself off, yet caught and prevented at the crucial moment.

## 4

A young woman in the harem who paraded blatantly in an urchin-crop or with boy-short hair was inviting trouble—or excitement, according to her tastes. There was no doubt that other girls would welcome such boyish or unisex style—but so might her master. Sir Richard Burton was by no means the first to point out that a warm climate and over-indulgence in masturbation led to a certain vaginal slackness. Many pashas, even without homosexual leanings, were tempted to try the naturally greater tightness of the girl's anus. They did not share the European's horror of unnatural conduct. No English or French sonneteer would mention a young woman's backside in listing her beauties. An Arabian admirer would praise her face, breasts, legs, and also her bottom as the target of his desire. A lady from the *Arabian Nights* insinuates that even a homosexual can enjoy himself as easily with a girl as with a boy, the reason for the Khalif's choice of Pabi. The ideal slave-girl for this would certainly have "lips like wine, a figure supple as a reed, ivory-smooth breasts and thighs pale as pearl." But this female adviser slyly urges the admirer to watch "how the girl's hind cheeks swell out

seductively, rising and falling as she walks, touching and parting at each step."

Harem masters who might have shunned such conduct with a boy were eager for girls like Pabi whose cropped hair emphasised the cheeky face and saucer eyes of the female street urchin. Such girls served as a "ghulaumeeyeh," a woman who dresses as a page-boy for her master's pleasures. "She knows two tricks," says the Arab maxim, "Face-Up and Bottom-Up." This practice of anal intercourse with women was known in the harem as "zeyr-ozubber," politely translated by the Latin "Venus aversa." The aim of the girls who practised it was often to win the right to be a boy with the other girls by consenting to be a boy with the master, too—thus keeping everyone happy.

*Luxor Nights* describes this in the case of the self-possessed and disdainful young woman with her high-crowned urchin-crop of fair hair whose enforced surrender of her "rear virginity" to her master is a night of high drama in the story. She is seen on the day after her first unwilling submission.

Next day, Lesley was self-conscious and thoughtful in his presence. The dismissive arrogance of her clear fair-skinned features, the sulky weight of her mouth and chin was a little woebegone and self-pitying. The firm pearly pallor of her erotic maturity was not to be hidden as she waited on him in his room. He gave orders that she was only to wear her short white singlet and knee-boots. Because she was bare from the waist-belt holding her singlet to the boots at her knees, it was possible to observe closely the movements of her thighs as she walked and the way Lesley held the full-moon pallor of her firm-cheeked bottom. Lesley sat down with great care on the padded velvet of the little chairs, almost perching on the flank of her hip as if to avoid pressure on her behind. She walked with a certain unease, as if

trying to hold her rear-cheek movements in check. When she waited on him at dinner, still naked but for her short belted singlet and tall boots, her sudden slight tensings and glances assured him that Lesley was still plagued by the lingering sensations and fleeting discomforts of what he had done as she lay on her belly over the pillows on the previous night. When she thought she was not being watched, her hand would sometimes slip behind her as she touched her backside and tested the effect of his ravishing.

This pleased him. She would feel the effects of his mastery of her for a day or two. He watched Lesley with her cool disdain and perversely plain pudding-basin crop, as she stooped to the ice-safe in the floor. She shook clear her long parted fringe and gave a peevish self-pitying glance back at him. As she stooped, the posture presented the bare fatter-cheeked swell of Lesley Hollingsworth's bottom. The way in which he was studying it assured her that her backside's future was decided. She would be told to forget marriage and kids, even to forget her femininity. This young married woman of twenty-eight with kids of her own would receive his passion as if she had been an overgrown delinquent page-boy.

It was only possible for her to reach the cool-safe by bending very tightly over a rail. As she did so, her thighs firmed out, her bare hips broadened and her rear cheeks rounded proudly. The posture showed her figure as a young woman's who had done her duty in the marriage bed and given a couple of infants to the world before abandoning conventions for her own right to love as she chose. But her extreme bending posture also caused her firm pale buttocks to part. Despite regular sex in marriage and a couple of well-ordered pregnancies, the dark vortex of Lesley Hollingsworth's arsehole looked very

small and tight. The hardening of his penis as he studied this was sadistic as well as amorous.

Her task took several minutes giving ample time to admire this view. Because it looked so tight and vulnerable Lesley Hollingsworth's arsehole strengthened these tyrannical ideas in the man who watched her.

The tyranny seems more potent than the lechery in the this case. Perhaps it was this sense of enforcing the extreme form of feminine sexual submission that made "Venus aversa" such a hit with the master of the harem. To Lesley's horror, he commands her after dinner to prepare for a repeat performance. Outraged feminine dignity is only overcome by the servants strapping her down, kneeling tightly forward over the padded leather scroll at one end of the sofa.

Despite her panic, he made the spreading of the vaseline between the full-moon pallor of her buttocks last for half an hour. His fingertips smeared and stroked and probed. He knew how sensitive and uneasy she must be. But he wanted to heighten her panic and responsiveness. His busy fingers fiddled with Lesley Hollingsworth's arsehole while her perversely exciting pudding-basin cut of fair hair twisted this way and that. Uneasy as she was from the previous night, the captive Venus could scarcely contain her alarm at what was going to be done to her. Writhing in her straps, the moon pallor of her bottom-cheeks smoothed against his hands as she squirmed. As his fiddling with Lesley Hollingsworth's anus forced her a little, he felt the breath of her bottom's rude retort on his fingertips before she could check herself.

She liked to think of herself as educated and emancipated. Because she was such a pretentious



and snooty young bitch it was good to make Lesley feel the tool so much bigger in such a tight place. The feel of it there must dominate her thoughts and apprehensions. It was a lesson that she needed to be taught. Even a man who chooses to make use of such a young woman's backside will usually respect the private depths where the more vulgar functions of the female rear anatomy are seated. But he pressed hard, forcing from her a soft cry of dismay and fright as the smooth round knob invaded even this sanctum of privacy and decency in Lesley Hollingsworth's twenty-eight-year-old bottom! There was a certain rudeness there of which she must have regretted not having been given the chance to unburden herself before being brought to this room. The vaselined knob probed knowingly, allowing no reticence to Lesley in her behind's menial secrets. Even in her outraged femininity and her ordeal of captivity, it was this self-possessed young woman who must bear the embarrassment and humiliation by her enforced submission.

And because the young woman is fastened conveniently, bottom-upwards over the padded scroll, a prolonged lesson in obedience is afterwards given with a pony-lash.

There was a moment between midnight and dawn. The pretentious young woman had twisted round her pudding-basin crop of fair hair and was looking back over her shoulder with such a woebegone and self-pitying appeal. Her wrists were still strapped to the sofa frame, her waist secured and her thighs pinioned. The full-moon pallor of Lesley Hollingsworth's bottom had writhed to the tempo of the whip and she had tasted her own tears on her lips. The dismissive blue eyes still flooded over and the cool arrogance of the firm fair-skinned face was a study in mournful

reproach under the long parted fringe of her boy-cropped hair, the sulky mouth turned down forlornly.

From the back of the strap that held her down by the waist to the back of the other black strap drawn tight round her thighs the pony-lash had skinned her wickedly. Her chastiser had just paused to massage the rear cheeks of this promiscuous young wife with heavily salted kitchen fat to make her whipped buttocks smart more severely. The firm maturity of her sore rear cheeks shone deeper red and sleek with grease, which gave a suggestively fuller and seductively fatter look to the cheeks of Lesley Hollingsworth's bottom. Even in the pause, the young wanton's backside writhed in a crimson full-cheeked swell as the scorching torment of the salted fat sank into the whipped flesh and blazed more fiercely. Her writhing gave a more sexy look to the rather fatly-presented flame-toned cheeks of Lesley Hollingsworth's arse. Her bum-cheeks parted as she surged and squirmed, revealing a telltale vaseline smear between them.

The stretching of Lesley's behind by her master's amorous passion had been enforced, but the sight of a girl who had undergone unnatural ravishing gave her a lewd and wanton appearance. This and the tomato-red blushes with crimson streaks on Lesley Hollingsworth's backside would make the whipmaker smile and the hangman lick his lips. Strapped down as she was, the rather fatly-presented and smartingly skinned bare cheeks of Lesley Hollingsworth's bottom offered a target too seductive to ignore. Because her behind smarted untouchably, one might suppose her chastiser would take pity on her. But the cheeks of Lesley Hollingsworth's arse were temptingly positioned. She was not an innocent virgin but an erotically mature and sexually experienced young woman. Regular sex in the marriage-bed and elsewhere, plus

the labour of child-bearing, made her better able to endure the torture of the snakeskin pony-lash across her bare buttocks. Moreover, she would be supremely responsive to the whip in her present state. He pulled up the singlet-hem, well clear of her bottom and hips. Then he picked up the trailing lash again and studied the seductively blushing cheek-swell of Lesley Hollingsworth's arse-target which the sullen young woman was obliged to offer him.

By no means all the slave-girl romances involving "Venus aversa" end with a scene of this kind. But there is a characteristic sense of triumph by the master which exaggerates, though not by very much, the more normal idea of the male's "conquest" of the female in love. It is this state of mind rather than the precise physiological details that count most, like the "La tuve in el culo" boast of contemporary Latin American machismo which describes the very same triumph with a woman.

Just before tearing up the chastiser's membership-card of the human race for whipping this sulky and peevish slave-wife, it might be instructive to remember the reaction of European ladies in Turkey during the Crimean War. As guests at tea with sultan or pasha, they encountered the wilful and coquettish manners of such slave-girl odalisques. Their opinion was unqualified. Someone—these ladies themselves, perhaps?—should use "a good English birch-rod across the bottoms of the minxes." Indeed, these female visitors took a great interest in harem whippings. The birching-block, the girl fastened over it on all fours with legs strapped together, was introduced as a matter of decency and efficiency. It was a moral improvement upon the old-fashioned flogging-horse or bench of the harem, where the girl straddled it and thus showed her sex to the eunuch who punished her.

The decision to make certain slave-girls act the part of Venus aversa with their master was not confined to the

harems of Arabia and the Middle East. In China, the *Chin P'ing Mei* describes the same practice. One young slave-girl beauty sealed her fate by bending in thin silk pants to attend to the ribbons of her shoes. Or was it a deliberate posture to attract her master's interest? A few minutes later, she was lying face-down over the bed-cushions with a handkerchief wedged between her teeth to bite upon, in case the ordeal or the excitement made her clench them so hard that she damaged them. Instead of the familiar use of vaseline or its equivalents elsewhere, the girl's behind was first lubricated with a sulphur cream which would make her more lively as she tried to ease the irritant heat by vigorous movement. At last, the master's storm of passion began deep in her entrails. According to the narrator, "the girl had little room for an ejaculation." Fortunately, he adds, she was in no position to refuse it.

The heroine of *Elaine Cox* is destined for a dark fate in a sinister slavehouse beyond the Danube. But this adolescent tomboy is first of all undone in that *alter ego* of the Anglo-Saxon harem dream, the reformatory. The girl is described as a shouting striding adolescent, defiantly tossing the lank fair hair worn loose to her shoulders from its central parting. The broad oval of her face with the narrowed eyes and thin lips is "a study in snub-nosed insolence." The picture is completed by her uniform of white school blouse and tie, a pleated grey skirt worn short enough to lay bare most of the sturdy pallor of her thighs. The aspiring white-slaver begins by following her home from school, waiting for a friendly puff of wind to waft up the skirt and display the tomboy cheeks of Elaine Cox's bottom in her school knickers of white stretch-briefs. For lack of anything better, he even loiters near the house where she lives—for the thrill of seeing Elaine Cox's knickers on the wash-line.

Not surprisingly, when the lucky fellow at last has her in his power as reformatory master and knows that she will never be free to complain, he makes a bee-line for "Venus

aversa." The method insures him against the danger of her pregnancy and the inquiries that may follow. Being a ruffianly girl and well-used to conventional sex with the boys in her class beforehand, Elaine makes little objection. To have the master under her influence seems a good move. The sequel, however, seems likely to be bad news for her.

Every night, this fifth-form girl is summoned to the bedroom of the reformatory master, as he wistfully recalls.

For the first hour or so, I had her lying on the bed with her back to me, my own face level with her hips. The white stretch-briefs which were Elaine-Cox's schoolgirl knickers lay discarded with her short pleated skirt on the floor. She wore only her white school blouse and striped tie. I tucked up the tail of her blouse and studied the full pale cheeks of Elaine Cox's tomboy bottom. At leisure, I fondled those robust adolescent thighs, kissing and lipping them. I grew as familiar with the anatomy of Elaine Cox's fifteen-year-old backside as with the lines of my own hand. I kissed the rear of her thighs at the top. I kissed the full pale swell of her sturdy young bottom-cheeks. The youngster lay there without protest. My kissing of Elaine Cox's bottom excited me greatly. My fondling of the full pallor of her bottom-cheeks was always the prelude to parting them.

I summoned her to my bed almost every night for the six weeks. It was dawn before she left. I always exercised Elaine Cox's backside before sleep. Usually I woke her in the darkness of the small hours to have it again. I used her behind so long and demandingly before midnight that I exhausted her and she scarcely woke properly on these later occasions. But I allowed no excuse for tiredness and fondled the robust schoolgirl cheeks of Elaine Cox's bottom to rouse her. I parted them and presented the swollen



cherry-head. Half-consciously and instinctively, she arched her adolescent backside towards me, even making a slight responsive rhythm without waking properly.

With a vulgar and insolent youngster of her sort, there was no need to withdraw at the last moment. I made her take the tribute as fully as possible, my sperm squirting as deep as I could manage in Elaine Cox's bottom. The girl was contemptuous of adult disapproval of her bad behaviour. But she grew alarmed that my stretching of her behind—twice a night—would do her some permanent harm, however slight. She murmured this into the pillow as she lay on the bed with her back to me, wearing only blouse and tie.

She could not see my face. I smiled to myself with satisfaction at the predicament I had got her into. A grown woman would know better but Elaine Cox was still uncertain of her doubts. She was not yet wise enough to challenge the authority of adult pronouncements in such matters. I stroked the cool bare swell of her bottom-cheeks. She tossed back her lank fair hair and turned the broad oval of her snub-nosed face questioningly to me with its narrowed eyes and thin lips. I reassured her, determined that she should not escape the consequences of this misconduct.

"You're not properly used to it yet, Elaine. It does no harm at your age. A lot of big fifth-form girls play fast and loose with their behinds like this to please their boy-friends without the risk of having a baby." I fondled her sturdy young schoolgirl backside a moment more.

"Turn on your belly, Elaine. Get ready for another session of it. A pillow under your loins to make your bottom swell bigger. You feel uneasy afterwards because you're still too tight. You must



have it more often, so that it gradually eases you. Then you'll find it simple to do this with your boy-friend or a man."

There was natural reluctance but no rebellion as I pressed for admittance.

"Keep quite still, Elaine. Relax your bottom-cheeks for the vaseline."

I did not reveal the inconvenience she might feel in later years. As I enjoyed myself in the next half hour, I knew she would have cause to remember these sessions when it was too late. The excitement of the thought made my tool swell bigger in the tightness of her behind. Thinking of it afterwards, as we lay there, I wanted Elaine Cox's tomboy bottom again almost at once, excited by the alteration to her rear anatomy that I was causing. I would give the little scrubber something to remember me by.

"Lie right over the pillows again, Elaine. You've never had it a second time a few minutes after the first, have you? That ought to excite you! Don't tense yourself, Elaine. Do as your told. That's better. I'll strap you down for it otherwise!"

My brain was on fire with eagerness. By giving Elaine Cox cause to remember every day as a woman these passionate nights of her young bottom's downfall as a schoolgirl of fifteen, I would retain a possession of her even after seeing her for the last time.

As it happens the three Cox girls, Elaine and two sisters, are destined for the sinister house beyond the Danube whose owner takes them one by one to a mysterious room from which he returns alone, in the best tradition of the fairy-tale ogre. Elaine's adult problems are prevented by his fatal passion for her, but this hardly invalidates the sentiments of her reformatory lover.

One might reprove the bedroom manners of such fantasy tyrants as these but there was worse to come. The darkest side of harem life was so dark in reality that no fictional melodrama could rival it. The Sultan Ibrahim of Constantinople makes the fictional heroes of the Marquis de Sade seem like faint-hearted amateurs. Inspired by a pathological suspicion of illicit sex between his slave-girls, he had the suspects tortured by his Black Eunuch, the Kislar Aga. Dissatisfied with the result, Ibrahim then ordered that 280 girls should be disposed of. They were tied into weighted sacks, placed in rowing-boats, and towed out from Seraglio Point to the nearest deep water of the Bosphorus. A strong tug upon each rope tilted the little boats. The weighted sacks slithered overboard to disappear below the murky waters.

This outrage was kept secret for a while. Then a ship's diver had occasion to be sent down in the area. He was hauled to the surface, gibbering with fright. He had come face to face with a forest of weighted sacks, each standing upright and swaying with the current. Every one of them had revealed the outline of a dead girl. Soon after this, women got their revenge on Ibrahim. He was deposed and strangled with a bow-string—on the orders of his mother, who was weary of being this particular boy's best friend.

The same undesirable urges overwhelm the harem tyrants of erotic fiction, though with a new slant. Given the chance, the civilised master of the reformatory-harem behaves no better than the Arab masters who are condemned by whites throughout *The Odalisque* as heathen savages. The case is illustrated by the fate of the heroine in *Noreen: A Strapping Young Trollop*.

Noreen is the sturdy firm-figured window-dresser in jeans and singlet, the lank collar-length of dark hair and fringe setting off her firm-featured young face, its resolute chin, brown eyes and wide-boned cheeks. In the world of

such fantasies, no one doubts that a sturdy and defiant nineteen-year-old girl like Noreen is going to find herself under her master's discipline, en route for white slavery. Every kind of use is made of her by him, for he is a landowner and justice as well as cultivator of fine art in his library and Beauty of Bath apples in his orchards. In the harem his uses of her and the chastisements he gives her would be unimportant. But the young window-dresser cannot be permitted to leave the reformatory and tell tales of the things done to her.

The catastrophe occurs in a woodland glade, where Noreen is strapped down on all fours over a bench for her master to take his afternoon pleasure. Kneeling behind her, he enjoys her as *Venus aversa*. Then, withdrawing, he at once presents the offending member to Noreen's lips, determined that she shall learn her own taste as well as his. Submitting under threat of a red hot cheroot behind her, Noreen's final humiliation and anger drive her to close her teeth on the intruder.

Her ultimate defiance incurs the ultimate penalty and removes the possibility of Noreen ever finding her way out and telling tales. The stable-apprentice, who has earnestly watched through the skylight of the punishment-room Noreen being whipped—and spied upon Noreen in the girls' toilet through window-chinks—pleads hard to perform the necessary task, while the girl remains on all fours over the bench. His confession of how he used to admire her in the store window as she bent or knelt to her work in skin-smooth jeans assists his case. The look in his eyes as he sees Noreen from the rear while she kneels over the bench confirms his sincerity. His wish is granted. In addition, he is later rewarded for his zeal by being given the fourteen-year-old dancing-pupil Jane Mitchener as his pet. The scene in the woodland clearing where Noreen kneels over the bench must be concluded by sunset. But that is six hours away and the time available lets the stable-lad's imagination run riot.

The glade rang like a circus ring to the echoes of whip-smacks across the bare cheeks of Noreen's backside as the sun declined. The extremes now employed were only possible because her fate was decided. Then the air was scented with cigarette smoke. The lad knelt behind the young window-dresser, brushing away a little ash that fell on her hip. He kissed over the broadened swell of Noreen's bottom-cheeks and between them. Each kiss was long and searching, nuzzling and teasing her rear cheeks. Where his lips touched, he then gave her a red-hot thrill. Before long, the swelling pallor of Noreen's backside tensed and squirmed desperately at the menace of every teasing kiss. He stood up from his fierce enjoyment at last, several cigarette butts trodden in the turf.

At last, he knelt behind the culprit, kissing her ear and murmuring into it. Claire the redhead and Vivienne the soft brunette had not so much as drawn his attention while he watched Noreen at her chores. Now the stiffness of his tool pressed against the bare cheeks of Noreen's bottom. His hands held the laces of her leather collar. Breathless with exertion, he drew them tight, slowly and almost lasciviously. Lying over her with that same look of tender concern, he held the collar tight and hard like this for several long minutes until he felt that Noreen's forfeit was paid at last.

More realistic than these dramas are activities which a harem regime would smile upon but which are consigned elsewhere to a dark criminal underworld. The two troublesome sisters Sally and Jane never make it to the auction room because the white-slavers cannot keep their hands off the merchandise.

A benefactor of the institution promised to train

her if Sally and her sister Jane were released into his care. On the long journey, he and two cronies supervised the pretty criminals in a trailer. The benefactor reported next day that the sisters had escaped under the pretext of needing the toilet at a cafe. But the secret route was remote moorland, far from any cafe.

Sally turned on her back without fuss, cotton briefs and denim skirt removed. She opened her slim thighs and raised her knees, offering what her admirer asked. Jane egged them on with lewd laughter. Then it was Jane's turn. The rather lumpish adolescent was less willing but accepted her fate.

The third man refused to go where others had been. Sally struggled but the first two men made her bend tightly forward over the table. They secured her and left her to her admirer. He studied her cherub-curved fair hair, narrow waist, the fine pattern of vertebrae under the sundusted gold of her slim young back, the gossamer silkiness of her flanks and lithe hips, a budding womanhood in the trim-cheeked youthfulness of Sally Fenton's bottom.

He did not attempt the tightness of Sally Fenton's behind without perfumed oil. But he was prodigiously sized and knew the consequence for cheeky Sally. He muffled Sally's high-pitched panic and was deaf to Jane's dismay, as the elder sister watched. He sought devastation beyond remedy. His big tool sounded Sally Fenton's bottom deeply and sundered her irreparably. He rode her to ruin, treating her as an unwilling honeymoon bride. Plundering her young bottom, he kissed her fine-bladed shoulders and slim bare back.

He whispered amorous taunts in her ear. Knowing she felt the havoc inside her, he urged her to accept her fate. He spurred her with playful rear-cheek smacks. By the time he finished, matters were past



mending with her. The girls were not seen after their "escape." The telling of tales could not be risked. So the drama moved to a climax. At dusk there was sinister excitement in the camper, extreme commands enforced and cords tightened by strong hands. Two burdens were carried to a remote stretch of peat-bog. A pair of little tarts like Sally Fenton and her sister were not sought for when they disappeared.

A good deal of such harem fiction depends upon the outrageousness of the heroes, rather like the hero of Sade's fiction whose great contribution to medical science was to make childbirth more difficult. The smaller imprints of the Paris underground press in the 1950s, in the tradition of the Opera Press and Zane Meritte's *Voodoo*, specialised in such surreal monsters. Matters which were treated solemnly in books like *The Story of O*, such as the heroine's agreement to wear the mark of her master, are treated as commonplaces of the slave-trade. Indeed, at one time they were.

Mandy is described as a tousled fair-skinned brunette with just a hint of red in her dark hair. She appears sturdily built and has been brought up as a common working-girl. Even at twenty-five she possesses a cheeky and tomboyish manner, to match the firm and self-assured robustness of her figure as a young woman with a baby to her credit. She is depicted as a mature and strongly-built young Amazon with long legs, sturdy thighs and hips. She appeals by the firm features of her face or the provoking amusement in her brown eyes as she exchanges banter with a man. The tresses of her lightly waved brown hair cluster loose and in slight disorder on her forehead and round her collar.

Crossing the room, on her first appearance, with the self-assured stride of her bare and buxom thighs, she seems like a young Amazon about to swing wide astride the saddle with the robust weight of her hips. As she turns her face and shakes back her brown collar-length tresses,



there is a certain urchin vulgarity in the firm set of her fair-skinned features, the play of her tongue on her lips, the playful glance of her brown eyes. She is portrayed as "Mandy striding bare-thighed and sturdy, Mandy cheeky with tongue on lips, Mandy full bottom-cheeked and bending to some chore."

The risk of presenting such harem melodrama as the wearing of the pasha's insignia is that it topples over into the absurd. To avoid this, it is not seen nor heard directly but by way of a chance recording.

The background of the recording had the resonance of a torchlit subterranean vault at night. Someone remarked that the pasha's possessions must bear his mark. There was soft wrestling and gasping. At last, a man's breathless laugh of relief. Someone remarked that Mandy kneeling over bare-bottomed looked a strongly built young Amazon, well-ridden by the male since she was a teenager and, consequently, able to bear whatever was required by them. There was more wrestling and wild protest through a mouthful of "cotton pudding," as Mandy Worth's knickers were used to quieten her. Her continued muted outbursts provoked a sharp smack on the feminine swell of bare rear-cheek flesh.

Four coin-sized marking-discs, were mentioned, two to be placed each side where the broadened swell of Mandy's rear cheeks curved in together. The prints would be hidden when she stood upright, revealed as she bent over.

A harsh pant of bellows, stirring coal in the bars of a brazier. Mandy's soprano panic was a wadded mewling. Her tension against restraining straps was a creak of supporting timber. Her writhing panic was an urgent smoothing of bare belly on polished wood. A sudden vulgar "raspberry" sounded from her behind, as if Mandy put her tongue to her lips and

blew. Another bare fat-sounding rear-cheek smack reproved her. Having a baby had given a sleek full-cheeked seductiveness to Mandy Worth's backside. One man suggested that the bare cheeks of Mandy Worth's bottom, naturally fattened by her posture on all fours, looked as if she was begging for a taste of the prison cane. There was laughter

The light rattle of a bamboo being picked up. Mandy Worth at twenty-five, the tousled brunette tresses, the firm impudent playfulness of her face and brown eyes, the sturdy swell of her pale bottom-cheeks. Thirty sharp swishing impacts and wadded shrillness. Murmurs of amusement. A bamboo cane across the bare swelling bottom-cheeks of a young Amazon of twenty-five was an occasion for smiles rather than solemnity.

Several minutes later came a metallic stirring of coals and a murmur of approval at the brightness of the glowing disc. A pause. Wadded urgency of "No!" through tight padding. Even this caused gentle amusement. They had witnessed the same frenzy many times before when the disc was pressed to the bottoms of willowy nymphs like Tracey Hope or tomboys like Sandra Williams. They knew how natural Mandy's panic was. But feminine panic and frenzy would never soften such men.

"It glows cherry-bright now," a man said. "Use it like that. Her hips straight and Mandy Worth's bottom facing the brazier properly. On the left side first, where the cheek curves in."

Mandy's alarm mewed as the little disc rattled against the metal bars. The recording caught the air of excitement at the printing of the glowing disc in such a suggestive place! That it should be between the firm swelling pallor of Mandy Worth's bottom-cheeks added a natural sexiness to it for the men. There was a flesh-whisper as Mandy's collar-length

brown hair brushed her bare shoulders while she twisted her head wildly.

A murmur of admiration as the disc was pressed to the inward cheekslope. A man's voice counted slowly to twenty, and Mandy's keen-edged mewing rose in a wild uneven arpeggio. It surged more frantically, as if Mandy tried to force her shrillness through the cotton web. The outburst faded, though the man still counted. The wood creaked as if Mandy's nude weight lay suddenly limp and bottom-upwards across it. The slow count ended, as if the man was reluctant to finish. Coals stirred at tinny metal coming to rest again. Half-heard sentences came through the pant of bellows.

A long pause. Plaintive mewing on one side, amusement and rear-cheek smacks from the other. After ten minutes, another light stirring of coals against shimmering brazier-bars. This ominous sound caused a most unladylike raspberry of panic from Mandy's rear vent. Another rear-cheek smack to reprimand her. Rattle of tinny metal on coals. Urgent mewing of keen-edged panic, as the cherry-bright glow approached.

A sharp bottom-smack indicated which cheek it was to be. There was wild trapped mewing and the same man's voice counting to twenty, more slowly this time as if teasingly prolonging her ordeal. His tone suggested that he was watching very closely the press of the marking disc on Mandy's inward rear-cheek flesh. He seemed to sniff closely at her tail, breathing the skin-warmed air of Mandy Worth's bottom contentedly. There was a pause in the count and the soft sound of the touch of lips to skin. A connoisseur might note that the intensity of the ordeal would give the finest silken sheen of an electric tension to the pearly smoothness of Mandy Worth's bottom-cheeks. There was no doubt that the man who counted was a connoisseur nor that he felt a

growing passion for this young working-girl Amazon. He now enjoyed the curious and rare thrill of kissing the cheeks of Mandy Worth's bottom while the glowing coin-sized disc was making its mark and the flesh tension of her rear cheeks rivalled the finest sleekest silk.

Whether these harem melodramas are absurd or sinister, the cartoonist's joke or the desperation of captive beauty depends on taste. They have elements of both. Certainly the harem of myth, of Delacroix and Valentino, depends on a combination of the seductive and the sadistic, the loving and the lethal. Whatever its status in reality, the myth requires all those elements. Return to Brigid the red-head and Judith the nude nymph of sixteen on the banquet table. Their nakedness is printed with night-long kisses and tingling from mutual caresses. That is the harem. Or there is Jenny in the opulent boudoir with the Mahdi, the ostrich plumes above the bed and her nudity reflected in the gold-pillared psyche glass. That is the harem too. But the harem can never be just ordinary life in fancy dress. One of its most potent ingredients is the sinister, whether it be Ibrahim stalking the palace of Topkapi to uncover and punish illicit passion or Raoul with his sinister slave-girl house somewhere—probably a long way—beyond the Danube. To that retreat he conducts the three sisters. And one by one he leads them to that sinister room from which he returns alone. The room is built over a drop to rocks a thousand feet below, where predators snuffle for food, and contains a trap-door through which defunct victims are tumbled. Once again, it might be a designer villa for a fairy-tale giant. His first view of Elaine, before acquiring her from the corrupt reformatory master, is of the girl bending to her gardening tasks.

The tight smoothness of her blue-grey working-trousers presented most suggestively the slight heavi-

ness of her adolescent thighs and the full tomboy cheeks of Elaine Cox's bottom. Just then she tossed back her fair hair and turned the broad oval of her snub-nosed face with an impudence no sadist could resist. Raoul felt the challenge of inflicting final severities on a rebellious youngster like Elaine.

The sequel is not described, the narrator learning of it only through several photographs, taken after the finale when the trap door is open. All three of the sisters meet the same fate, strangled on successive nights.

Though he concealed the noose of strong black silk, it was ready from the start of his night with the youngster. He was provided with ingenious syringes and disciplinary implements. A cunningly woven lash, used only on the rumps of the most obstinate fillies, had first been tested thoroughly on the bare cheeks of Elaine Cox's fifth-form backside. Then the silk was drawn tight. Now there was a bar across the open trap, Elaine motionless over it, head and feet dangling together, the tomboy cheeks of her bottom facing up. Before this Elaine had been dressed for a last photograph—and before the guilty evidence was tumbled through it had been taken. A little pair of cream silk panties for a girl younger than Elaine had been pulled up into place, too small to cover the full pale swell of the cheeks of Elaine Cox's bottom completely. They would fit a mournful little girl, having a black lace hem and black tear-drop pattern. The juvenile prettiness of Maxine Cox's little panties on the bigger arse of her adolescent sister gave a suggestive look to the full cheek-swell of Elaine Cox's backside even now.

Raoul's villainy exceeds anything in the harem, Maxine escaping none of the attentions given so lovingly to Elaine.

But the legend of the harem needs him, as surely as the palace of Beit-el-Maal needed the Mahdi and the Khalif Abdullahi. Would Brigid and Judith have enjoyed their naked writhings on the littered banquet table with quite such excitement, had it not been for the dread that Saleh, whip in hand, might enter and thrash them for their sexual wantonness? Sadly, in the modern world, the harem tyrant is an endangered species. And like most species in that plight, his only hope is to be rounded up and bred in captivity. The game-reserve of novels and movies is, after all, his ultimate destination.



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