

Percy B. St. John



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Gulnair, The White Slave

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or,

The Yankee lad and the Mohamedan.

by

Percy B. St. John

Autor von ›The Steam Raft,‹ ›The Farmer's Son,‹ ›The Haunted Mansion,‹ ›The Haunted Mill on the Marsh,‹
›Mark Bradley,‹ ›Tim Woodruff,‹ etc. etc. etc.

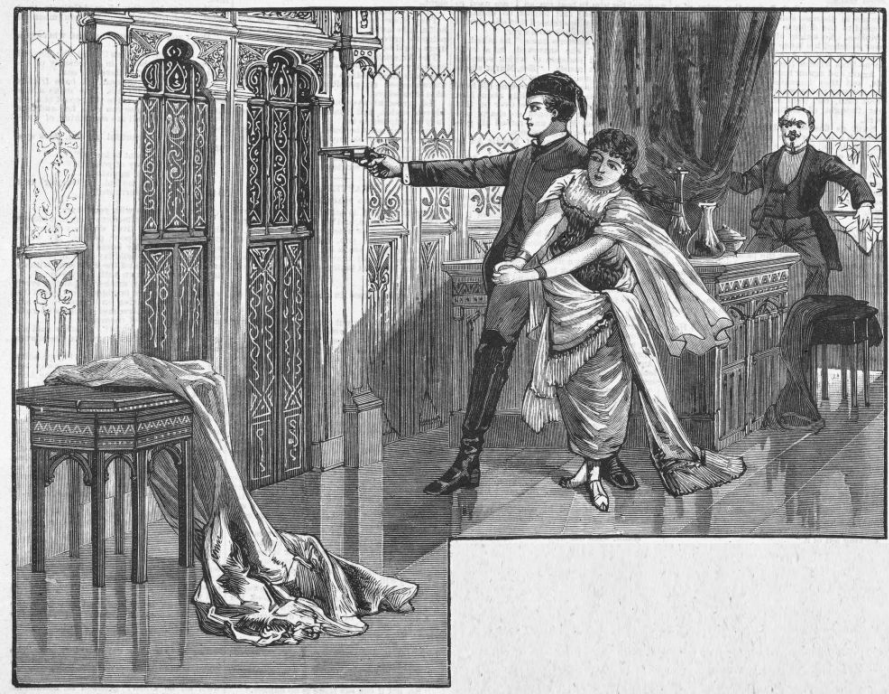


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CHAPTER I. *A SINGULAR ADVENTURE.*

HAL, I don't like this heathenish country. I wouldn't give an acre of our glorious America for all this outlandish empire.«

»It's new to us, Hank; wait till we come to know it better, and your opinions may undergo a change.«

»Not apt to, my boy. A land where the women don't dare show their faces, and the men look as sullen as pirates, is not the kind to win my heart.«

»It's their custom, Hank.«

»Yes, and a beastly custom it is, That old black-whiskered fellow who passed us just a moment ago with two long pistols and a dagger, I'll bet is a robber.«

»You can't always judge by appearances, Hank. He may be a peaceable merchant who goes armed to protect his property.«

»Well, I am glad we are armed to protect our lives. I don't fancy these wild mountains myself,« and Hank shrugged his shoulders and looked about a little uneasily.

»Why, Hank, if I didn't know you was brave as a lion, I should come to the conclusion you were a coward. What makes you nervous?«

»Didn't you see the half dozen dark faces looking at us from over the bluffs. we passed about a mile back?«

»No.«

»Had you seen them, you might have had cause to be a little nervous yourself.«

»We needn't fear them, for see we are already in sight of Constantinople. You can see the spires and minarets just across the hills.«

»So we can,« Hank answered with a sigh, »but I don't feel much safer in the city than I do out here among the mountains. But, Hal, I came with you to stand by you through thick and thin, and I'll do it. I promised your mother that I wouldn't desert you, and I won't if it takes my head off.«

The person addressed as Hal was a young fellow about eighteen years of age. He had a bold blue eye and an open manly countenance, and his look, manner and language were decidedly American, notwithstanding he was in Turkey, mounted on a Turkish horse.

His companion, Hank, was four or five years his senior, with nut-brown hair, dark skin, and eyes that were almost black. While he was as brave and cool in the hour of peril as his companion, he evinced more restlessness and nervousness on the eve of danger than his younger companion.

Hal Brigham was the son of a New York merchant, and having completed his education he determined to travel a few months in Europe. His traveling companion, Hank Foss, was a fellow-schoolmate from Boston, an orphan with very little property, whose expenses on this journey were borne by Hal's father, that he might be a companion to his son.

The young men had been for a month in Turkey, and on this occasion had gone on an expedition among the mountains to a small village, and were on their return to Constantinople. At noon that day their guide's horse became lame, and Hal Brigham feeling fully confident that they could reach the city alone, decided to go off and leave him.

They occasionally passed small caravans of merchants, mountaineers, or bandits, they could not decide, and Hank looked upon their lowering brows, dark eyes, and gleaming teeth with no little distrust.

»I half believe that guide was only shamming about. his horse being lame,« said Hank, after a few moments' silence.

»Why, Hank? Why would he be shamming?« Hal asked.

»Just for an excuse to get behind us, and then off to the mountains to notify some band of robbers that we are on the road.«

»But we can reach the city to-night. See, we are almost there now, the spires can be seen plainly glittering in the light of the declining sun?

»Oh, well, I am not afraid of them if they do attack us, but it is well enough to be on our guard, you know.«

»So it is; and we are on our guard all the time. But, Hank, if you would think less about these people and more about the beautiful scenery by which we are surrounded, you would enjoy our travels far more than you do.«

Before Hank could make any response a wild shriek rose on the air. It came from around a bend in the road, which led around an abrupt spur of the mountain. It was a female voice and the cry was one of the greatest agony, but the person uttering it was so completely concealed by the bend of the road that she could not be seen.

Hal turned his eyes with a questioning look upon his companion, and Hank's nervousness in a moment was gone.

The indignation and manliness of the two young Americans prompted them to go to the aid of the sufferer, and gathering up their reins in their hands they spurred their somewhat jaded horses to a run.

»It's more of their barbarous conduct,« cried Hank.

Hal only knew that it was the voice of a female in distress, and his whole being was roused to the defense and protection of the helpless. No knight of the days of chivalry ever couched his lance with a nobler intent than these young Americans galloped to the scene from whence the cry of distress came.

Again and again those shrieks rose on the air, and they increased their speed. They did not stop to ask what danger might lie in their path, but went in, be it life or death, nor thought of halting to consider their peril.

Swift as flashes of thought, they thunder through a narrow pass around a sharp turn, and are in full view of a small valley in which is being enacted a scene that was enough to make the blood of any American boil.

A Turkish merchant was seated in a palanquin which had been placed upon the ground, doubtless by his orders, while one of the black eunuchs was striking a beautiful Caucasian girl, of not over sixteen summers, with a whip.

The bearded Turk was speaking very angrily and doubtless directing the laying on of the blows, while the other black slaves stood by as a sort of guard over the palanquin.

Though neither Hank nor Hal could understand a word that was said, yet from the actions and gestures they fully comprehended everything.

»Watch the rascals at the palanquin, Hank, and I'll down the black scamp who is beating the girl.«

They had each drawn a revolver, and Hal Brigham threw himself from the saddle at the side of the eunuch who was engaged in the castigation, and at his

feet touched the ground he struck the black a blow with the butt of his pistol which felled him to the earth.

The poor little creature who was being so cruelly punished cast a glance at her deliverer, and reading true nobility in his young face, sprang to him for protection.

Hank was not behind. his companion, though he remained in the saddle. He struck one man down with his pistol, and then with the rein in his teeth and a revolver in each hand, he covered the Turk in the palanquin and his other slaves.

The Mussulman was at first inclined to make resistance, and laid his hand on one of the long-barreled pistols in his belt, when Hank cried, in sharp, unmistakable tones:

»Drop that, you old cross-eyed son of a gun, don't you dare to draw it, or I'll shatter that gourd skull of yours, until there will be nothing left of it.«

Whether the man understood a word Hank said or not is decidedly doubtful. But the emphasis and manner were not to be mistaken, and the terrified Mussulman dropped his pistol in the bottom of the palanquin.

As for the carriers of the palanquin, who were blacks, as we have seen, they were apparently paralyzed with fear.

For the time being, the American boys held complete sway, for the old 'Turk dared not move, or even open his lips; but how long could this state of affairs exist?

CHAPTER II.

IN A DILEMMA.

Like a brother who has rescued a younger sister, Hal Brigham took the poor frightened little creature in his arms, and assured her she should not be maltreated any more. In his excitement he had forgotten that the girl did not understand a word he was uttering.

She raised her soft dark eyes filled with tears to his, and he thought that he had never seen so lovely a face in all his life. Her raven black hair had broken from its confines and fallen in wavy masses about her shoulders. Her veil had been torn aside, and her garments slightly disarranged, yet Hal noted only the most matchless beauty-and helpless innocence in the girl.

»Don't be afraid; the rascal dares not touch you.«

She turned her eyes toward the palanquin, where the terrified yet enraged Turk sat. The Mohammedan stroked his beard and gave utterance to some deep tones, which the Americans did not understand.

The girl spoke very excitedly, very quickly, but not a word could either of the young Americans understand. At last he spoke to her in French:

»Oh, I know what you say now,« she answered. 'I am glad you speak that tongue.«

»And I am glad you understand it,« said Hal. »Does he or these understand French?«

She shook her head.

»Then we need have no fear of them; we can talk freely. Who are you?«

»Gulnair.«

»Gulnair who or what?«;

»Only Gulnair, the poor little slave,« she sighed, bowing her head and sobbing in such a manner that it touched the hearts of the Americans far deeper than they had yet been moved.

»A slave! Are you a slave?«

»Yes, monsieur, a slave —«

»But you are not black.«

»No, I am a white slave. Whites as well as blacks are slaves in this country.«

»And this man is your master?«

»He is.«

»And had he ordered you to be beaten?«

»He had.«

»The old scoundrel deserves to die.«

»No, no, monsieur, do him no harm. Do not, if you hope to leave here alive. It is not unusual for him to beat me, so I am used to it,« and she sighed and looked so unhappy that Hal inwardly determined that she should be the slave of the Turk no longer.

»What's your master's name?« he asked.

»Khedir Ali,« she answered, in a voice every word and cadence of which sounded like the sweetest music. »See, Murat whom you knocked down, is recovering.«

The eunuch rose to his feet, rubbing his head with his hand, and staring wildly about him.

»Here, get over on this side, over on this side,« cried Hank, in tones so sharp and authoritative that Murat understood his gestures and went over to the others.

»You shall be the slave of Khedir Ali no longer,« said Hal.

»What do you mean?« the girl asked, filled with amazement.

»You are free.«

»Free!«

It was a word new to her vocabulary. Freedom was something she had never yet known although she might have had dreams of it in the past.

»Yes, Gulnair, you shall be free, to go where you please, to live as you please, and be beaten by no one.«

She reflected for a moment or two as if in doubt, and then shook her head.

»No, no, it can't be done,« she sighed. »He would kill me.«

»I will protect you against him.«

»You can't—you don't know him—you don't know my Story, for if you did, you would not dare attempt this.«

»Your story is doubtless an interesting one, but I will not listen to it now. I will take you to America where there is freedom for all.«

Again the Mussulman stroked his long, black beard-and muttered some guttural accents.

»He is swearing by his beard: to kill you, and a Mohammedan never breaks his oath,« said the beautiful Gulnair. —

Hank, still keeping the Turk covered with his revolver, dismounted, and in a moment had taken all the arms from the Mussulman and his attendants. Turning to Hal the irrepressible Hank said:

»Now, old boy, whatever you have made up your mind to do, we had better do in a hurry, for I can tell you that we've got no extra time to spare in this business. We must light out of here.«

As Hank addressed his companion in English, Gulnair, of course, did not understand him.

»Hank, what are we to do with her!«

By their glances she knew they were speaking of her, and her large dark eyes were raised in mute appeal.

»Leave her, of course,« said Hank. 'It's more than our lives are worth to bother with the women of this country.«

»But she is that wretch's slave, and I will not leave her.«

»But you must.«

»I will not.«

»What, Hal, have you lost your senses? Don't you know that you will lose your life?«

»I am going to free her or die in the effort.«

»Hal—Hal—have you gone crazy? Why boy, it's certain death — —«

»Then I'll die. I don't ask you to share this danger with me. Go back to the city, and I will stay and die with her.«

»This is folly, Hal——«

No, no—I tell you it is not. Never would I have any peace of mind if I left this poor girl a slave in the power of the barbarians. Take the horses and go to the city and we will fly to the mountains and run our chances of escape.«

Hank knew his companion too well to dream of attempting any further persuasion. He took in the situation in a moment and said:

»Well, if you are determined to stand by the girl all right. I promised to stand by you, and I'll do it, live or die. But the mountains are not the safest place for us. Here, mount, take the girl up behind you and we'll go at a gallop to the city. Once get her at our French boarding-house and we can easily disguise her some way, and get her on board the Aurora and take her to America.«

»Then you concur in my plan of rescuing her?«

»Yes, if nothing else will do you but rescue the girl.«

»I assure you that nothing else will.«

»Mount quick and ride for life. »These rascals are on foot and can't catch up with us.«

»If they follow we will shoot them like so many wolves,« said Hal; placing Gulnair in the saddle and springing upon the horse: behind her.

He wheeled the horse about and told Gulnair to inform her master in his own language that he would be killed if he attempted to follow them.

They galloped away, leaving the old Mussulman and his terrified slaves. The former was swearing by all the powers of Allah that he would be revenged on the Christian dogs.

No sooner were the Americans out of sight, than Khedir Ali and his four slaves were on their feet, and following them at a rapid walk.

»Hank, how are we to get her inside the city?« Hal asked.

»Well, I hadn't thought of that,« said Hank.

»She is not veiled, and will be seen; that of itself is enough to rouse the suspicions of these people.«

They had left the Mussulman far behind, and were thundering down the rocky road toward the city gate, which was almost in sight.

»Halt! said Hal.

They drew rein. The city gate was not half a mile away, but concealed by a small palmetto grove. The voices of a party of soldiers could be heard coming out of the gate.

Two Americans with a white slave, would certainly excite their suspicions. In a few moments these soldiers would be in sight, and there seemed no possible way for them to hide themselves.

Hal turned his eyes in helpless appeal upon his companion, and Hank returned the glance fully as helpless as she.

Something must be done, and yet both were powerless to devise any plan to escape discovery from the soldiers.

They were in a dilemma, from which they seemed incapable extricating themselves.

CHAPTER III.

THE HIDING PLACE DISCOVERED.

NECESSITY is said to be the mother of invention, and we might call it a true as well as wise proverb.

»I tell you, Hal, we've got to do something or we are in for it.«

»I have it,« Hal answered, opening a pair of saddle-bags and taking out a long blue coat and a cap.

»What?«

»Take the horses in and we will come on foot.«

»How?«

»I will have her put these on, and she will be so disguised they won't know her.«

»Where shall we meet?«

»At the Frenchman's house. We'll stay there while you can go to the Aurora and tell Captain Newton all, and get ready to sail at any moment.«

Although Hank did not wholly approve of the plan, he had none better to offer, and the clank of arms told him that the Turkish horsemen would soon be in view.

Hal Brigham had already dismounted and taken Gulnair from the horse. To the girl's, astonishment she was soon enveloped in a large blue coat which almost entirely concealed her, while a curious little French cap was drawn low over her head.

»Go on, go on, go on,« said the Yankee boy to his companion, who, although he had started toward the gate, did so rather reluctantly.

»Hank put his horses to a gallop and was soon out of sight, while Hal followed his companion rather leisurely.

Gulnair, helpless, and dependent, was puzzling her own little brain as to what her rescuer was doing. She turned her large dark eyes upon him as if to assure herself again by a glance into his face, and he said, in French:

»They will not know you?«

»I believe—I understand,« she answered. She was trembling violently, and he took her hand in his to assure and strengthen her.

A small squad of Turkish dragoons now came in sight, and galloped by them without giving them a moment's attention.

When they were gone Gulnair raised her beautiful face to Hal's once more and asked:

»Where are we going?«

»To a friend's in the city,« he answered. »Are you afraid?«:

»No, not if you say there is no danger.«

Such confiding trust only made Hal. redouble his determination to complete his determination to complete his noble work of giving the white slave her freedom.

»Here is the gate.« he whispered in her ear at last, as they came in sight of the great gate to the city. »Don't be frightened — don't tremble.«

She gave him an assuring glance, and side by side they walked boldly to the entrance to the city. Several people who were lounging about, gave them curious stares. Gulnair's garb was rather curious, and when Hal saw the eyes of the people whom they passed turned upon it with more than ordinary interest, he began to have fears that she would be recognized; or her curious costume easily lead a pursuer upon them.

»Take my arm, Gulnair,« he said. »We must travel more rapidly.«

The streets of Constantinople are narrow, dirty and crooked. In many places they are dark almost at noonday. Hal Brigham had been in the city sufficiently long to be thoroughly acquainted with every part of it.

He took the white slave a circuitous route to the house of Monsieur Beaumont with whom he was stopping. Monsieur Beaumont answered the ring of the bell. The chandalier had just been lighted in the hallway, and the little French gentleman started back with wonder.

»Mon Dieu! Monsieur, who have we here?«

»Never mind, Monsieur Beaumont, I will not get you into trouble. This lady wants a room.«

»But isn't she a Caucasian mademoiselle?«

»Never mind what she is. We will go to your private parlor for the present. Send our dinner there; and in two or three hours we will leave you, monsieur. You shall be well paid for all you do. Don't allow any one to know we are here.«

The devout little Frenchman crossed himself, became very nervous, and expressed a fear that his house would be pulled to pieces on account of these reckless Americans, but conducted Hal and Gulnair to the parlor.

»Now go and bring our dinners,« said Hal.

The Frenchman bowed and took his departure.

»Monsieur Americano,« said Gulnair, in a sweet, plaintive voice. »Do you mean to take me away?«

»Don't you want to go to a land where you will be free???

»Oh, so much, so much!« and she clasped her small white hands in an ecstacy of delight. But I don't believe you can.«

»Listen to me, Gulnair. I have friends here who will die for me. One owns a fine schooner, which can leave your coast in a few hours. I can disguise you as a boy and take you aboard. But tell me something of yourself.

She fixed her beautiful yet sad, dark eyes upon him and said:

»What do you want to know?«

»Tell me the story of your life.«

»It is a sad story, monsieur ——«

»Won't you call me Hal, fair Gulnair? that is my name,« he interrupted.

»If you wish it.«

»I do; but go on with your story.«

»My earliest recollections were of a mountain home, where I lived with my father and mother, who were poor people. My father was a Shepherd. My home was a neat little cottage, where the wild ivy grew in profusion around the doors, and the birds sang with delight from early dawn until dewy eve.

»I remember my mother, a patient, lovely woman, whose face brightened my infant life. One day I was playing on the mountain side when some dark, fierce men, armed with guns, came along. One of them said:

»What a pretty child?? Another said she would bring a handsome price on the market in a few years.

»I grew afraid, and wanted to run home, but they seized me, carried me away, and after two years' wandering brought me here, where I was sold to a kind Turkish lady. She taught me the Mohammedan religion, and I was given an education in French, learned music, painting, and other accomplishments.

»But my kind master and mistress died, and I was again put upon the market and sold to Khedir Ali. I have tried to please my master, but he has decided to add me to his large number of wives, and because I rebelled, he has had me severely beaten. He made me accompany him on this journey to the mountains, and swore by his beard that he would beat me every mile of the way back home if I refused to enter his harem——«

A loud noise, a confused knocking and shouting at the door put an end to further conversation.

»»What does that noise mean?« cried Hal, as Monsieur Beaumont burst in the room.

»Oh, I'm undone,« wailed the Frenchman, wringing his hands. »Old Khedir Ali and half a hundred soldiers are at the door ready to pull it down. They demand

you—they will kill you.«

The youth heard the loud knocks at the door and angry shouts, and turned to the Frenchman:

»Can we not escape at the rear?«

»No, no, the house is surrounded.«

The wild shouts at the door increased. The knocking became heavy blows from an ax, which madé the house tremble to its center.

»Oh, saints preserve me! we'll all be killed, we'll all be killed!« groaned M. Beaumont, wringing his hands.

»Gulnair, we will die together,« said Hal, winding his left arm about the white slave and drawing a pistol with his right. His lips were bloodless, but firmly compressed, and he did not tremble, while his eye flashed with deadly determination.

CHAPTER IV.

HAL AND HANK.

The heavy strokes at the door at last culminated in a crash. The door had fallen, and the Turkish horde, with yells that were deafening, burst in the house, and rushed up the narrow stairway where the brave boy stood ready to give his life for the defenseless white slave.

Gulnair fixed her eyes upon him and was about to speak, when he said:

»Have no fears, poor girl, we can die together.«

»But it is not necessary—I will go back- I will be beaten again if it will save your life.«

No, a thousand times no!« cried the indignant youth. »I would rather die a hundred deaths than that another blow should be laid upon those shoulders. Gulnair, I have six lives here,« he held up his pistol, »Four are for them, and two for us.«

But Hal had an enemy to his plans on whom he had not counted.

Alphonse Beaumont was a wily, scheming Frenchman who had made a small fortune by his shrewd trading in the Turkish capital. He determined that this youthful American should not injure his business..

Khedir Ali was one of his customers, and he dared not do aught against the rich old Turk.

Better sacrifice his American guest than have his house plundered, burned, and perhaps himself murdered.

At the moment Hal raised his pistol to fire, Alphonse Beaumont sprang on him from behind and struck up his arm. The shot whistled into the wall, the Frenchman seized his arm and shouted aloud in Arabic for help.

Khedir Ali and a dozen others ran to his aid.



In vain the American boy struggled to free himself; the wiry arms of the Frenchman held him fast. Gulnair cast a terrified glance at her only protector, and then sank in wild despair upon her knees, expecting to meet her fate.

»Coward, traitor!« gasped the struggling youth, striving in vain to use his revolver.

But his cries were quickly hushed by a giant Turk striking him a heavy blow on the head with the butt of his pistol. Hal seemed to feel his skull cracked and crushed beneath the blow, and sank down upon the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

Before the blow fell: upon his head, and while his excited faculties were yet busy; he heard a shriek, which he recognized as the despairing cry of poor Gulnair, the beautiful white slave.

When Hal recovered consciousness, he was lying upon the floor in the dark corridor at the landing. His head was bathed in blood, and he had a cut upon the scalp, the result of a blow from some hard instrument. He was very weak at first, and hardly able to rise, even to a sitting position, but after many efforts succeeded.

Then he gazed about him for several moments, wondering where he was and how he came there. By dim degrees the past with its awful realities came fresh to his mind, and he began to make an effort to rise.

Old Khedir Ali and his myrmidons had hurried away with their captive, evidently believing they had either killed Hal or so anxious to hasten the white slave away to her captivity that they did not give him a second thought.

It took several efforts before he was enabled to rise to his feet, and when he did, his head was heavy, and he was so dizzy he scarce could stand. He leaned against

the dark wall and pressed his hand to his forehead. His strength was rapidly returning.

On the floor lay his revolver, just as it had fallen from his hand.

»Those cowardly Turks must have left in a hurry,« said Hal, as his eyes growing more accustomed to the darkness made out the pistol. They did not even disarm me.«

It required some minutes more, and several efforts before he was enabled to walk. His head was heavy, and felt as if it had suddenly grown as large as a bushel measure. He found it difficult to keep it on his shoulders. When he stooped to pick up his pistol he fell over, and it was some time before he was able to rise again.

But the indomitable determination of the American was his chief characteristic, and he found himself growing better at every effort. He finally got upon his feet, with the revolver which he found loaded.

»The Frenchman—the cowardly. Beaumont, where is he?« Hal hissed through his teeth. » The traitor deserves a traitor's fate. Had he not held me I would have killed old Khedir Ali, and rid Gulnair of his persecutions.«

Hal went to the head of the stairway and sat down. The house was very dark and quiet. Night had set in, and the house had not been lighted. Where were the people—where was Beaumont?«

From his position at the head of the stairway, Hal could see out at the front door. He even heard footsteps of people upon the street, but with these there seemed to be a sort of subdued hush, which was oppressive to the wounded boy.

At last steps came along the street, which sounded different from the others. It was the clear, ringing tread of a youth, and a moment later he heard quick steps ascending the stairway.

»Hank! Hank!« gasped Hal.

»Hal! good gracious! what's the matter?« Hank cried, staring at his companion.

»They have been here,« said Hal, »and carried her off!«

Have they hurt you?«.

Yes, they struck me, and have cut my head.«

Then Hal told his companion what had happened on his arrival.

»Where is Beaumont?«

»I do not know.«

»This is too bad—too bad! I have seen Captain Newman, and he has. given his consent that we may take passage in his vessel. I just came for you.«

»It's too late.«

Are you strong enough to come with me?« asked Hank,

»Yes—I can come.«

Hal rose to his feet and found that he could walk, though rather unsteadily. They went down the broad stairway, and when the hall below was reached, the wounded youth stopped and said:

»Hank, I am not going to give this up yet. Let us find Beaumont, and try to wring some information of the missing slave from him.«

Though Hank's better judgment told him that it was not best to linger long about the place, yet he could not refuse the earnest entreaty of his friend.

They entered a door on the left, and found the room disarranged as if the occupant of it had left it in great haste. Then they went to the next apartment, and behind a pile of furniture saw a curly head and pair of great black eyes peering at them.

»Traitor!« cried Hal, bounding forward and leveling his pistol at the cowardly Beaumont.

»Oh, monsieur—monsieur, don't, don't, sacre! diable! turn that aside. Don't shoot, good monsieur,« wailed Beaumont, sticking his head under the furniture and trying to crawl out of sight. »I did the monsieur no harm.«

»Alphonse Beaumont—why need you lie!« cried Hal. »I know you—and you should know me by this time. Where is the white slave, Gulnair; speak quick, or as true as I have strength in my arm I will send a bullet through your brain.«

»Oh, monsieur—monsieur, I beg of you ——«

»No—no, not a word, where is she?«

»Gone with Khedir Ali.«

»Where did he take her?«

»To his harem.«

»Is she his wife?«

No, but the Khedir Ali will make the mademoiselle his wife. Oh, dear me, good monsieur, will you please turn that pistol aside? I am so afraid of it.«

Hal staggered back as if he had received a blow.

Many were the stories he had heard of the cruelties and barbarisms of Turkish harems. Miserable as Gulnair was as the wife of the horrid old Khedir Ali, she would be ten times more miserable than his slave. The face of the youth was so deathly pale that in the dim light of the solitary taper it was real ghost-like. The terrified Frenchman seemed to read certain doom in that deathly white face, and in a piteous tone he began:

»Oh, monsieur, good monsieur, I have been so very bad, so very indifferent, will you forgive me?« and he wrung his thin, bloodless hands in a most supplicating

manner.

But the American boy, heartily disgusted with the hypocrite, turned away and said:

»Hank, will you go with me?«

»Yes, Hal.«

»Anywhere?«

»Anywhere you ask. Anywhere you lead.«

»I knew you would, brave fellow. Come on and leave that eraven Frenchman; I will settle with him yet.«

With this the two boys left the house. The eyes of the Frenchman brightened as soon as they were gone, and with a shrewd, cunning smile upon his face he said:

»I will watch them; there may be some money—I may find out something for which Khedir Ali will pay me.«

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERY OF THE MOSQUE.

Hal, what do you intend doing?»

»My intention is to thwart that old black villain, and free the white slave or die,« the young American answered, while his eyes flashed with determination.

»But you are not going at it in a crazy, hair-brained manner, I hope?»

»I don't know what you may call it, Hank, but I am going straight at the business with the intention of succeeding or dying—with more chances of death than success—but I am going into it coolly.«

They had reached the street several moments before the above sentence was uttered, and had walked hurriedly along until they came to a narrow place where the balconies, built out over the pavement, seemed to almost touch in mid-air. There was no one in sight on this narrow street, and the boys were walking hurriedly even as they discussed their plans, and kept their hands on their pistols, having their eyes and ears open to every sight and sound.

»I don't blame your determination, Hal,« Hank answered; »but if you expect to liberate the white slave why not go about it coolly, and exercise your common sense all the way through.«

They stopped, and Hal, fixing his eyes on his friend, said:

»Hank, do you intend to stand by me?»

»Yes—if you will use judgment. Courage is all right, but foolhardiness is nonsense.«

»Well, perhaps it would be a little foolhardy to attempt to storm the castle of a Turk in Constantinople; what would you suggest?»

»I would suggest that we go somewhere, disguise ourselves, and get on the watch, bide our time, and finally set a trap that will catch the Turk.«

Where were they to go, how were they to disguise and watch Khedir Ali? Fortunately Hank Foss knew where the house of the Turk was, and told his friend. Hal would have his friend take him to it at once that he might see it. Finding it all dark, they left it and went aboard the Aurora, Captain Newton's vessel, that was lying in the port.

The captain was astonished and alarmed at the scrape the young men were in, but he was devoted to Hal Brigham, and had a heart too tender for his head, so that it melted down by the pathetic story of the white slave, and he grasped the hand of the youthful narrator and swore to lay in the harbor until she was on board, if he lay there until the keel of his vessel absolutely rotted away.

»Make this ship your headquarters, shipmates,« said the warm-hearted sailor. »I will keep the stars-and stripes afloat, and it is more than any Turk living dare do to haul them down.«

The boys were induced to turn in and get what sleep they could. At early dawn Hal was up and burning with anxiety to go ashore. But Hank and the captain decided that all should remain on board until afternoon, when the two boys might, disguised as Dutch sailors, go ashore.

A Dutch ship from Amsterdam was in port, and they could easily pass themselves for Hollanders, especially as both spoke the language quite fluently.

Disguised as Holland sailors, the boys went on shore, and wandered about the city, gradually nearing the home and harem of Khedir Ali. The great building with its long, low wings, arched and glittering skylights of stained glass was reached, and the two pseudo sailors wandered about it in apparent idle curiosity.

Once a black eunuch came from the harem with a scimeter and gazed threateningly at the young men, causing them to go a few blocks away. But it was only to return, and for two days and nights the pretended Dutch sailors were almost constantly near the home of Khedir Ali.

It was early in the evening of the third day of their watch, when they suddenly saw a small, lithe figure glide from the harem and dart across the street. Who was it? Could it possibly be one of Ali's wives, leaving the harem at the risk of her life? She halted at every few steps and glanced uneasily about her, as if she did not altogether feel certain about her safety.

But she came on straight to the corner where Hal and Hank were standing, and motioning them to follow her went down a dark narrow street.

»What does she mean?« Hank asked.

»For us to follow,« Hal answered. »Come-let us go.«

»She may be luring us on to death.«

»And she may be leading us to Gulnair's hiding place. Let us take the chances.«

Though Hank knew that his companion was reckless._dangerously reckless—he had promised his parents to be his protector in danger, and without a word followed him.

The small lithe form, in the beautiful Turkish costume, her veil over her face, led them down the street a considerable ways, and then stopping waited for them to come up.

»What do the monsieurs want?« she asked in French.

»Are you from Khedir Ali's harem?« Hal asked in the same language.

»Oui, monsieur.« » Yes, sir.«

»Do you know Gulnair, the white slave?«

»Oui, monsieur.« The woman spoke French sufficiently well for the boys to understand her. »The white slave, Gulnair, said I would find you here, and that you spoke French. She said that I was to tell you she was to be taken to-night to Khedir Ali's harem.«

»What—is that old wretch going to make her his wife?«

»He is. He is to take her to the mosque which you have noticed to-day being so highly decorated.« The boys had noticed an old mosque not many blocks away that afternoon, which was being gayly decorated and festooned, as if it was to become the scene of some grand celebration. The old mosque had been a mystery to Hal Brigham, and he was so startled by the solution of it that he staggered as if a blow had been dealt him. The woman waited a moment and said:

»When the bells ring and you see the lights from the spires and minarets she said you were to come.«

Hal grew sick at the thought. Come, yes, come to almost certain death. He turned his eyes upon his friend, whose face was so pale that it looked in the darkness as if it might be of snow.

»Hank, are you willing to try it with me?«

Hank was a cool-headed fellow, but his love for his friend and his promise to Hal's parents made him desperately venturesome.

»Yes, Hal, if you cannot be induced to give up the white slave—I will die with you.«

»Hank, I can't give her up. That pleading look in her eyes would haunt me to the day of my death if I did. Oh, Hank, you didn't see her then as I did—or you would be with me heart and soul.«

»I am with you heart and soul.«

They had spoken to each other in English, which the woman, of course, did not understand. When they turned to speak to her again, she was gone. Doubtless having delivered her message, she had disappeared.

While they were looking for her, and before they had spoken again to each other, there came a wild clang of bells, and the boys hurried away toward the old mosque.

»Can't we get in first?« said Hal.

»We will try.«:

They ran, and were soon in sight of the great building. Various colored lights were burning in the front part, above the archway. All around the old mosque it

was so dark that they were quite up to it before there was any danger of being discovered.

The building had all the appearance of being deserted, and but for the lights and bells ringing they would believed there was no one in it. But the great folding-doors were thrown Open, and the Yankee boys hastened across the narrow stone court and under the great frowning portals.

They found themselves in a sort of vestibule, very dark, but from a gauze-like screen door pencils of light could be seen. With their youthful American impetuosity they threw open the door and entered the great cathedral-like apartment.

But this was also unoccupied. Only one light, that one nearest the door, was burning, if we except the altar fire, which was eternally kept lighted to show some departed soul through the dark regions of purgatory into eternal bliss and sunshine.

The boys were disappointed and amazed.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTERRUPTED FLIGHT.

Have we come too soon?« said Hal in an awe-inspiring whisper.

»I don't know—we know nothing of the customs of these people, and of course we don't know whether this marriage ceremony is celebrated inside this place or out.«

But at this moment a noise as of some one chanting seemed to come from the rear end of the building, The boys had only time to conceal themselves behind some pews, when a panel of the wall seemed to glide upward, revealing a door, and a priest in long robes came in, followed by others carrying lighted wax tapers.

After them came a procession of women headed by two black eunuchs, and followed by two more. The women were all veiled save one in the center, who was evidently the bride. She wore a loose white robe, fastened at the waist by a pink sash. One glance, and both the Americans recognized her as Gulnair, the unfortunate white slave. She had been weeping, but tears seemed to only add to her remarkable beauty.

Attended by two more priests came the hateful old Khedir Ali, going to the side of the weeping Gulnair, the horrid old Turk seized her hand.

»Oh, no, no, no!« the girl cried in French.

»Hank, I won't stand this any longer,« cried Hal, starting to his feet.

»By the eternal, I won't either!' roared his impulsive friend.

Never leaped a pair of hungry tigers upon their prey with more ferocity than these young Americans upon Khedir Ali and his companions. Never fell a bombshell that produced more consternation.

A blow from the butt of Hal's revolver felled Khedir Ali senseless to the floor. One of the eunuchs ran toward the American lad with uplifted sword, but a shot shattered his arm und made him drop his weapon. Hank was not a whit behind, and had floored one priest and two of the eunuchs, when the others, taking fight, ran away, crying:

»Amerikanos! Amerikanos!'«:

Poor Gulnair was too much frightened to run, and it was several seconds before the bewildered slave could recognize her rescuers.

»Let's get out of here now just as soon as we can,« said Hank.

Hal knew that any delay would be dangerous,. and placing his arm about Gulnair dragged her away from the fatal altar toward the door. She turned her

eyes upon him in questioning wonder, but permitted herself to be taken from the abominable place.

They were nearing the dark vestibule when a panel in the wall on the left suddenly shot upward, and the woman who had met them earlier in the evening in the dark street stepped out, and in French said:

»Come this way.«

Intuitively they followed her, and found themselves in a dark passage. She took Hank's hand and led the way, and Hal with Gulnair followed. The passage grew lighter as they advanced, until they could see quite well, but there were no visible lights. It seemed as if the light came from some great chandelier behind screens or curtains.

At last they emerged into a dark street, and the veiled guide hurried them along many blocks in strange parts of the city where they had never been before. After an hour's travel they stopped before a humble-looking house, made after some antique model. Their guide informed them that a Circassian lived here, that they could obtain shelter within, and would be protected. She went to the door, opened it, and was met by a large black-whiskered man, who looked as if he might be a Circassian brigand.

She was kindly greeted, and after a short conversation in Circassian all were invited into the house. Their guide threw her veil aside, revealing a face that was remarkable for its beauty and resemblance to Gulnair. She told them they could stay here, and that the dark-skinned man, who was her friend, would keep their secret until they could escape with Gulnair from the city.

»But I want to go at once,« said Hal. »The Aurora is ready to sail the moment we get on board.«

»You couldn't reach the bay to-night. Every place is guarded. Wait a few days,« and she left him.

The boys could do nothing but wait, but their place of concealment soon became an irksome prison to them, and the restless, impatient spirits of the youthful Americans pined for freedom. Most of the time was spent in the presence of the white slave for whose liberty they were risking their lives.

The more they came to know her, the more determined were the brave Americans to give her her freedom. Never had they met a more beautiful being, or one with a sweeter disposition.

»What would you have done if Khedir Ali had forced you to marry him?« asked Hal one day.

»I should never have been his wife,« she answered.

»How would you have prevented it?«

»See this,« and she held up a very small stiletto, which seemed only a toy; in fact, it was not larger than a bodkin. »The point is very sharp, and it's poisoned. One touch of it—a mere seatch would kill in ten seconds.«

»Throw it away—throw it away, the thing is dangerous,« said Hal.

»No, I may need it. Sooner than be Khedir Ali's wife I will use it on himself and myself.

She returned it into the neat velvet cushion-like scabbard and placed it under the folds of her dress.

»Where did you get it?«

»Zulanio, the sixty-seventh wife of Khedir Ali, gave it me.«

»And did he want to make you his sixty-eighth wife?« Hank asked in amazement.

»Yes, monsieur.«

»I would think he would find he had enough without adding another. In America one woman is as much as much any man can manage, and sometimes more. Great Scott! just think of a man having sixty-seven wives a-gabbling away on Woman's Rights or the Woman's. Christian Temperance Union! Wouldn't a fellow feel like going out and committing suicide?«

Of course Gulnair knew nothing of the subjects of which Hank was speaking. She only knew woman in the degraded form of wife or slave.

»Isn't Gulnair the prettiest girl you ever saw?« Hal asked Hank when they were alone in their room.

»The prettiest except one.«

»What other is her equal?«

»Zulanio is her superior in beauty.«

»She is very pretty, but not her superior nor her equal,« said Hal, after a few moments' silence. pes

»Well, as she is another man's wife, I shall not quarrel with you,« said Hank with a laugh.

That afternoon the boys ventured to take a short stroll upon the street, for the confinement of the house was unbearable. The stroll was fatal to their plans, for they had not gone three blocks before the keen eyes of Alphonse Beaumont had discovered them—by accident, of course—and he shadowed them back to their hiding-place and hurried off to inform old Khedir Ali.

It was late in the evening when the boys came in from their walk. The sun was down and darkness was gathering over the city. Zulanio and Gulnair were both patiently waiting for them. The former told them that she had brought disguises

and male attire for all, and that they would that night escape to the American vessel, and sail for life and freedom.

»Will you go, too?« Hank asked, fixing his eyes on Zulanio. '

»Yes, if monsieur will take me.«

»You can depend upon it I will,« and seizing her hand he gave it a warm grasp which spoke more than his words possibly could.

An hour later, disguised as Turkish sailors, on their way to the bay to board the American vessel, Hank, with Zulanio at his side, was in front with Hal and Gulnair in the rear.

The girls made very pretty Turkish boys, and but for the trembling hand of the white slave, which Hal held in his, would he have known that she was excited.

They had not gone more than a dozen blocks when, just as they were entering a dark street, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by Turkish soldiers, seeming to rise up out of the earth. Before, behind and on each side was a row of glittering steel.

»What does this mean?« Hal cried.

»Amerikanos!« shouted a voice, which was recognized as Khedir Ali's, and at the same time the quick eye of Hal discovered him with the treacherous Alphonse Beaumont at his side.

»Lost!« groaned Hank.

»Let us sell our lives dearly,« said Hal.

The boys raised their pistols and fired.

CHAPTER VII.

A PRISONER.

The flash of fire and stunning reports from the pistols of the Americans were accompanied by yells from the armed horde of Turks who surrounded them. The momentary light from the flash of the pistols gave them a glimpse of the dark faces of those hideous Turks in front. The reality was more terrible than imagination could have pictured them.

One of those fierce monsters fell, which seemed to enrage the others who, with flashing swords and fixed bayonets, pressed around on every side.

»You infamous dogs!« roared Hank, presenting his pistol first at one and then at another, causing them to fall back in turns. But never was there a pack of ravenous wolves more furious or hungry for blood than these barbarous Turks. Why didn't they by a volley of musket shots put an end to the Americans at once? Hal and Hank both expected it until they learned by the signs and shouts of old Khedir Ali that the women were not to be harmed.

Some one lighted a great flaming torch, the flaring light of which revealed the wild-eyed, angry barbarians. Old Khedir Ali stood a little in the background, and at his side the false Frenchman, Alphonse Beaumont.

»Shoot that Frenchman,« cried Hal, who was apparently as cool as if he was at a social gathering. »He has been the cause of our secret being discovered.«

Hal fired himself and missed Beaumont. Hank next sent a shot at the cringing coward, which grazed his cheek and wounded one of the hideous villains just behind him. Alphonse, now fully satisfied that they were shooting at him, began to howl and beg for mercy.

»Kill him! kill the coward!« cried Hal, and his next shot struck the Frenchman's arm.

*Oh, mon die! Monsieur, save me, save me!« yelled the cowardly Frenchman, leaping behind old Khedir Ali.

The momentary distraction of the Americans from their hostile foes was, however, fatal to their hopes. With a yell the horde of Turks, who were every moment increasing, rushed on them. Hal was struck a blow on the forehead by some blunt instrument, and, stunned as he was, and blinded by blood, he wound an arm about Gulnair, and fired his pistol until every cylinder had been emptied.

He had a dim consciousness of fighting against overwhelming odds; of being forced to his knees, while blows were rained upon him. At last Gulnair was torn from his grasp, and he fell unconscious upon the muddy pavement.

In the struggle, the torch fell and was extinguished, plunging all of them into Plutonian darkness. The Turks were angry, and determined to annihilate the two Americans, who had made such resistance. Blows were struck indiscriminately in the dark; men were knocked down.

Hank felt some one seize his hand and pull him aside the moment the torch was extinguished, and with a dagger in his right hand, his left held by Zulania, he crept away among the Turkish soldiers, crawling, running, and sometimes fighting his way through the throng, and up a dark street.

When the torch was at last relighted and the Turks found but one prisoner, they were furious. Gulnair, the white slave, however, had not escaped, and old Khedir Ali was amply repaid for his discomfiture and even danger.

At the opposite side of the street from where Hal Bringham lay insensible, was the Frenchman Beaumont, his cheek all bloody from a flesh wound, and his arm streaming from Hal's pistol shot.

»Ah mon dieu, sacre diablo—exterminate him, Monsieur Ali; see what he has done for me,« groaned the Frenchman.

When Hal Bringham regained consciousness he was lying on a pile of straw in some dungeon, so dark that he could see nothing. He experienced the usual confusion, common to persons awaking and finding themselves in a strange place. His head ached from the blows upon it, and every muscle seemed bruised and sore.

He rose to a sitting position and found himself heavily fettered.

»What means this?« he said to himself trying hard to gather up his scattered faculties. By dim degrees the past was recalled. First was his recollection of his parents, his departure from home upon a tour around the world. Light was now breaking in on his mental vision, and rapidly his mind followed up the chain of recollections, bringing him down to the attack.

»I am a prisoner,« he groaned, and Gulnair is again in the power of that abominable old Khedir Ali. »Oh, I would rather die—yes, a thousand times, than that she should again fall into his hands.«

He made an effort to rise, but sank back on that heap of miserable straw. He was still weak, and his hands and ankles were heavily loaded with iron chains.

For several moments he reclined upon the straw in a semi-conscious, and semi-bewildered state. His mind, like his body, seemed feeble and incapable of withstanding the crushing weight upon it.

»Where's Gulnair? Where is Hank?« the youth asked himself, at last sitting bolt upright.

By an extraordinary effort he managed to rise to his feet. His strength was now rapidly returning, and he found that he could stand, even with the weight of his heavy clanking chains upon him. After several moments he made an effort to walk.

The first movement produced a hollow clanking which filled the cavern-like apartment with echoes that seemed to chill the blood in his veins. He could only step a few inches, as the shackles on his ankles seemed to hobble him. Ten of those short steps and he found himself stopped by a chain fastened to a belt about his waist. He had gone the length of his tether, and could only retrace his steps.

Thus he spent hours—how long he could not say. His irons became a burden upon him, sitting or standing, and he began to feel that he could not much longer endure this miserable existence. In the agony of his soul he groaned:

»Oh, must I end my life here in this miserable dungeon? End a life begun under such brilliant circumstances? I would give everything I have, even my life, to set the white slave free.«

He might die here of starvation, he might be put to death by the most horrible tortures, and his friends never know anything about it. When he fully realized how utterly helpless he was, his heart seemed to sink within him, and he sank back upon the straw in despair. There was not a ray of hope for him.

Hours glided by on leaden wings, and he was finally aroused by hearing the tread of feet without. He did not know whether it was some watchman in the hall, some executioner come to drag him to the block, some assassin, or the fancies of a half-maddened brain. But he was finally fully convinced, for he heard a key thrust into the lock. The heavy bolt was shot back, and a ray of light streamed into his dark apartment.

Hal had not dreamed that he could be so blinded by the light. He clapped his hands over his eyes, and it was some moments before he could look up.

When his vision became accustomed to the light, he saw before him a large powerful black man, dressed in Turkish costume, wearing a short sword about his waist, and carrying a tray, on which was some fruit and barley cakes in one hand, and a lamp in the other.

»Ugullola appobaso!« said the black, but his language was worse than Greek to Hal.

»I don't understand you!« he said, in English, German and French, but the black shook his head, saying:

»At tat tellina Mexikano,« (I don't understand the American.) Then he repeated »Ugullola appobaso,« and went through the form of eating, so that Hal rightly concluded that he was saying he had brought him something to eat.

Hal made signs that he could not eat with his hands so heavily manacled, and his jailer drew his sword, a heavy, ugly-looking cimeter, and placed it against the wall. Then he stooped and unfastened the manacles about his wrists.

Placing the food before the prisoner, he stood over him, sword in hand, while he ate. As may be supposed, Hal did not have a very keen appetite. He had been several hours without food, however, and sinking nature demanded some support.

He continued to eat almost in despair, occasionally casting a glance at the guard over him, and wishing that he would even talk in his terrible gibberish. Though incomprehensible, it was a relief to break the monotony of the awful silence. But the black continued to glower at him through the flickering uncertain light, holding the lamp in one hand and the sword in the other. At last he could eat no more. He had really eaten much longer than he eared to, in order to keep that grim jailer in his presence with the light; for disagreeable as he was to look upon, he was preferable to the Plutonian darkness.

»Bolboa dino?« (Have you eaten?) said the black, and Hal guessing at his meaning nodded yes, and the fellow again locked his handcuffs on, and taking up the tray, left the prisoner again to darkness and despair.

CHAPTER VIII.

ZULANIO'S SCHEME.

Sveral days passed with Hal in this dreary confinement. To him it seemed ages. He felt that the end was rapidly drawing nigh. He was losing his appetite, and was losing flesh, and would ere long perish.

One day the black came, and taking off his irons, motioned him to follow.

»It has come at last,« thought Hal. I am now being led away to execution.«

He was too weak from his close confinement in the foul prison to walk very rapidly. His guide spoke to him frequently in his own tongue, but his voice seemed far a way and unintelligible. He followed from a sort of instinct, until he came to a sort of a subterranean apartment, evidently a jailer's room, where the black opened a door and motioned to him to enter.

The apartment was lighted by a candelabra, and plainly furnished. In the center stood a woman with her veil thrown aside. He recognized her as Zulanio, one of the many wives of Khedir Ali.

»Monsieur, has it faired ill with you?« she said in French.

»It has,« he answered. »Am I being led to execution?«

»No, to freedom—on conditions.«

»That I will abandon Gulnair, and leave her to hopeless slavery; if so you can lead me on to death; I will never do it.«

She smiled and said:

»The same dauntless spirit; dungeons and starvation will not curb it.«

»No!« he replied with some of the old spirit flashing from his manly eye. »I am for humanity, and while that girl is a slave and I free, I shall be making efforts to give her her liberty. Death alone will keep me from giving her her freedom.«

»That is just what I wanted to hear you say,« replied Zulanio. »I have decided to devote my life to liberating the poor white slave, and I wanted you to help me.«

»I will do it-what can I do lead me to her.«

He was all eagerness to start, and had made two or three steps toward the doer when she stopped him by a wave of her hand.

»Wait until the proper time,« she said. »We can do nothing now, you are too weak. Be seated,« and she pointed to a table near which was an ottoman. He sank down upon the ottoman, and then she addressed the black who hurried away and soon brought him an excellent repast of cakes, baked meats, vegetables, fruits and wine.

When he had regaled himself on these articles and drank a glass of wine he felt his blood bounding through his veins. It was as if he had suddenly awakened and found himself a new man. He felt as strong as ever he aid.

»Now can't we go?« he said.

»No-it is not time yet—you are too impatient.«

»But there is danger in delay. It may soon be too late.«

»No, it will be too early if we go now. Monsieur is too impetuous. The season is not ripe for us—the time has not come. You are not so strong as you think. Wait awhile; all would be ruined now, by going too soon.«

»Zulanio, tell me, please tell me, how you can do so much? How can you take me from the prison?«

»Money, monsieur,« she answered with a smile. »I have bribed the jailer, and while Khedir Ali thinks you lying in the dungeon, you will be laying plans and carrying them out for the freedom of Gulnair.«

»Who is this Guilnair—she is no Turk? What is she to you, that you do so much for her?«

»I only know her story as she has told it to you, and—and I know not why, but I feel here,« pointing to her heart, »that she is very dear to me. Ah, I would save her from the horrors of harem life if I could.«

»We can, and shall. Where is she now?«

»Khedir Ali has not seen her since the night of her capture.«

»Where is she?«

»At the house of one of his friends, Tomorrow night he is to wed her at the mosque, the first ceremony having been interrupted.«

»And I powerless to prevent it. Great Heaven, what must I do?«

»Follow my instructions. I will disguise you and take you with me to the harem. We will enter together. You shall be near Khedir Ali's apartment, and when the new bride is brought in then rescue her.«

»Can I?«

»If you can no other way—death!«

»Aha! I understand. I will do it. But my friend, Hank Foss, what became of him? Was killed on that night?«

»No.

»He escaped?«

»Yes.«

»Have you seen him?«

»Quite frequently, After Gulnair was captured 'and: you knocked down, I seized his hand. The torch had been extinguished and I led him away to another: part of the city to a friend, whom I could trust, a Circassian, and left him.«

»And our friend, Abel Lazoni? Did they raid his house?»

»Yes, but Abel was too shrewd for them. He had already retreated to the mountains, where his band was.«

»What! Is Abel a bandit?»

»Yes—a bandit chief—but he is a good man. They have made a bandit out of him.«

»How?»

»By oppression—by selling his children into slavery. By destroying his home, and stealing his goats. He resisted the sultan's soldiers, and they sought to kill him.«

»I wish the Christian nation would overrun this country, and abolish such a government.

Zulanio sighed. For her there was no hope of anything better than to be a slave of the harem. She had only the one hope to cheer her in her dark life, and that hope was that she might be instrumental in procuring the liberty of poor Gulnair. It was the one bright spot for her to hold dear in her memory.

aa How long must we remain here?» said Hal.

»As hour yet. We cannot go until it is dark and they have gone to the mosque.«

»Can we gain admission?»

»I have bribed the guard.«

Hal knew that these rascally Turks could be bought for gold, but being an American, unable to speak their language, he was at a disadvantage, and unable to approach them.

Hurried footsteps were heard: coming toward their door. There was something in the very tread of those feet which seemed alarming to Hal. He glanced at Zulanio and saw she was pale.

She started to her feet just as the door opened and that horrible black who had been Hal's jailer looked into the apartment. His features were a picture of alarm, and Hal knew that he had made some appalling discovery.

He spoke to Zulanio in the horrid Turkish gibberish, worse than Hottentot to Hal, and she, with a suppressed scream of fear, turned to the American youth and said:

»Khedir Ali has come to pay you a visit. Allah preserve us, what are we to do?»

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE HAREM.

Hal Brigham was always cool in the hour of danger. His mind was actively at work forming a plan to thwart the old Mohammedan.

»Where is Khedir Ali?« he asked.

»Up in the room above.«

»He is on his way to the mosque, and stopped to see me before he goes to his wedding?«

»Yes, yes,« and she was wringing her hands in an agony of dread.

»Then our course is easy. Take me back to the dungeon, and put on my irons.«

She began at once giving instructions to the black in her native tongue, and in a moment Hal was being led on his way to the dungeon. The heavy fetters were again put upon him, and he sat down upon the heap of straw.

He had been there but a few moments when he heard the sound of footsteps, and knew that Khedir Ali was approaching his door. A sudden thought entered his mind, that perhaps the fierce old Mussulman might take it into his head to kill him.

Hal was powerless to make any resistance. What a fool he was to have placed himself again in the power of the cruel Khedir Ali, when he was at liberty to have defended himself.

But he was in for it, and resolved to make the best he could out of it. The door was thrown open, and the Mohammedan entered, bearing a light in his hand, which he held above his head, while he glared down at the captive. Hal's head was bowed until his chin rested on his chest.

The Turk muttered something in his own language, winding up by saying, »Christian dog,« and turning about went away. Hal was not long alone before he heard footsteps again approaching, and this time it was Zulanio who entered his dungeon.

»It is all right now,« she said.

»The black entered and removed the shackles.

»May he not betray us?« Hal asked, giving the negro a significant look.

»No—no, he dares not. Having accepted a bribe from us it would be death to him now to desert us. Khedir Ali would kill him for what he has already done.«

They hurried from the cavern to the apartment where he had been before. Zulanio said it was well that Khedir Ali had been in such haste to get to the

mosque that he had not taken notice that some one had dined in the room which he passed through.

»Did he see you?« Hal asked.

»No, I was crouched away in a closet, and had a cocked revolver in my hand to shoot him had he discovered me.«

»Can you get weapons for me?«

»Yes—here,‘« she said, opening an escritoire, and taking therefrom a belt which contained a brace of revolvers and a dagger, which she gave him.

»Buckle that about you—now, I will bring you a female costume.«

»A female costume—he asked in astonishment. » Am I to dress as a woman?«

»Certainly—how else do you expect to enter the harem?«

»You said something about a disguise, but I did not things you wanted to make a woman out of me.«

»No other disguise would admit you.«

»But won't I be rather tall?«

»Rather—yet there are plenty women in Constantinople equally as tall as you are.«

She hastened from the room and soon returned with robes and veils, and Hal quickly attired himself as a Turkish lady.

»Won't they think it odd for a strange woman to enter the harem?«

»No,« she answered. »The eunuchs pay but little attention to women. They seldom ask that a veil be lifted, that they may see a face. It is our only hope.«

He donned the female attire rather slowly and somewhat awkwardly, frequently having to call upon Zulanio to come to aid him.

At last, however, he was attired in the costume of a Turkish woman, and they went up a flight of steps and out upon the street. It was a dark night.

The streets of Constantinople are narrow, and none the best. Sometimes they found them so dark that they were compelled to grope their way.

»I hear footsteps,« said Hal.

»Where?«

»Coming toward us from up the street.«

She heard them too, and they both halted and listened. There was a heavy tramp of men—evidently soldiers—and soon two great flaming torches were discovered carried at the head of the procession.

»We'll be discovered,« said Hal, beginning to thrust his hand under his robe for his pistol.

»No, no, come with me! There is no danger of discovery.«

She drew him back under a projecting balcony into the recess of a door, where they would probably be safe from observation, and if discovered, might be supposed to be inmates of the house.

As the procession drew nearer they saw that it was a body of soldiers marching before, behind and at each side of a sedan in which a young woman was sitting.

They were evidently an escort or guard for the lady. Though her face was veiled, the contour of her form bore evidence to her youth and beauty.

Hal's breath was coming quick. His heart was bounding wildly, and he grasped Zulanio's arm, saying:

»Is it she—is it Gulnair?«

»Hush?« gasped Zulanio, frightened lest his intense feeling might betray them. »Say nothing—do nothing that will excite attention.«

»But it is Gulnair!«

»You will lose our last hope of saving her if you do not keep quiet.«

»I will be quiet, but——«.

»It is no time now to act.«

»Are they taking her to the mosque?«

»Yes.«

By this time the sedan and 'its occupant was opposite the place where our two friends were crouching, fearing and trembling lest they should be detected. At the same time Hal's heart was bounding with indignation, and he at one time could scarce repress his desire to attack the guard and make a mad effort to rescue the white slave.

But common sense and the firm grasp of Zulanio checked him, and he allowed the sedan with its living victim to pass on.

When it was out of sight, Zulanio led him back to the street, which was so dark now that the torches were gone that neither of them could see their hands before them.

After many wanderings through dark, narrow streets, they at last came to a door which opened into the rear entrance to the harem.

Darkness concealed the great building. All that was visible was a part of a wall, a door with a portal above. There was not a human being to be seen until Zulanio had stepped upon the small porch-like platform, when a man seemed to come from the darkness and stood before them.

Zulanio recognized him despite the darkness as the eunuch who stood guard there.

She spoke to him, and he opened the door. The eunuch had violated his instructions, and to go out at this hour.

Once inside they entered a large elegant corridor brilliantly lighted and ornamented with an Oriental splendor that dazzled the eyes of the astounded Hal.

At this moment a eunuch whose silence had not been bought by Zulanio, came down the corridor. He saw them, and demanded to know where they had been. Zulanio attempted an explanation, when the eunuch suddenly cried in Arabic:

»What have we here, a strange woman? I will tear off her veil and see.«

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW BRIDE.

Hold Murat! Touch that veil and you die!« cried Zulanio, her eyes flashing in rivalry to the bright stiletto she had drawn, and was flourishing before the face of the astonished eunuch. »You know you are forbidden to touch the veils of women of the harem under pain of death.«

»But she does not belong here.«

»How know you? Is not Khedir Ali constantly taking new wives to himself?«

»But she is not the new wife. She is not Gulnair, whom I have seen, and who is not so tall.«

»Stand back, dog Murat, or die,« and Zulanio drawing herself up to her full height, her eyes scintillating even through her veil, she stepped in front of him, and held the dagger threateningly before his eyes.

The eunuch shrank back and said:

»You have been out late—you went on the street without the permission of your master. You brought in a strange woman; when he returns from the mosque with his new bride I shall report to him what one of his wives has done.«

He spoke very slowly, with great firmness and decision. She answered him without the least perturbation.

»You will do nothing of the kind.«

»Why?« he asked. »You have not bribed me.«

»No, but you are Murat, the brother of Asman.«

»Yes.«

»Bribery is death. Asman was bribed. Inform on me and your brother dies.«

The eunuch started with an exclamation of horror. These brothers, rascally as they were, loved each other, They would die for each other, and to threaten one was to threaten the other. From the first Zulanio had believed that she held the winning card, and now she knew it.

»Dog! dare breathe a word against me and oer head shall come from his shoulders!«

Murat fell upon his knees, and, with hands clasped, began begging for his brother, and Zulanio, bidding him rise, continued:

»He can live; he shall live, and be rewarded, as so shall you, if you keep a silent tongue in your head, but dare you breathe a word and you die.«

»I will be silent as the hills.«

»Take this purse of money as your reward if you preserve silence, and bear in mind it will now be death to both of you if you do not, for you, too, have accepted a bribe.

Zulanio was shrewd enough to know that she had the rascally eunuch as soon as he had accepted the bribe. Murat seized the purse almost eagerly, and without another word left the corridor. The woman Zulanio seemed to exercise some wonderful power over the slaves of the harem. She was a person of great magnetism, and to speak was to be obeyed.

For a long time she had been the favorite wife of Khedir Ali, but now that he had taken a fancy to this new woman, the Circassian—the white slave—she knew that her reign as queen of the harem was over.

Hal had not, of course, understood a word that was said, as they spoke in the Turkish language. By their manner and gestures, however, he knew that they had effected some kind of a compromise, by which the danger for the present was averted.

»What was it? Did he threaten us?« asked Hal, who had stood with one hand on a pistol under his loose robe ready to shoot the black should he attempt to penetrate his disguise.

»Danger is over—he is on our side!« said Zulanio.

»Can the rascal be trusted?«

»Yes?«

»I believe him to be a deceitful, lying dog.«

»Yes, but he dares not betray us now. He has the krike money in his hands. To touch it is death—he has done so.«

»Well, I am glad we have some hold on him.«

»But we have no time to wait here or discuss this longer,« said Zulanio. »Come on—but I want to exact one promise of you.«

»What?« he asked.

»Promise me you will not kill Khedir Ali?«

She had removed her veil, and her beautiful face was upturned to his in a most pleading manner.

»Why do you ask that? Has he not been very cruel to you?« said Hal.

»Yes, he has been a cruel master, indeed, but I would not have him harmed, unless-unless—«

»Unless what?«

»Unless it becomes necessary to liberate Gulnair.«

»He shall be spared, unless it becomes necessary to free Gulnair, or to do it in self-defense,« said Hal.

Despite the fact that the woman hated the tyrant, she felt for him some sort of sympathy, which might be called love.

They entered a large sitting apartment, where a number of Khedir's wives were sitting unveiled upon divans, engaged in smoking cigarettes and talking. Hal noticed that many of them were very beautiful. Their life of idleness, however, had given a peculiar pallor to their faces, quite in contrast with the rosy-cheeked Yankee girl.«

Society among the inmates of the harem means simply smoking cigarettes and pipes and the most trivial amusements. Instead of the sparkling conversation and pleasant music with which the ladies of America entertain each other, horrible screamings, the monotonous noise of drums and the clang of tambourines are here the solace of woman in her hours of ease. The boasted luxury of the palaces offers in it no attraction to a refined nature. This life makes people prematurely old. A woman of thirty has passed her meridian. No one works unless compelled to it, as tranquillity of mind and person best pleases the Oriental taste.

Hal, by the advice of Zulanio, still retained his veil over his face. He gazed upon those slaves of the harem, some of whom were young and pretty, and wondered how the civilized world surrounding Turkey could permit such an abomination.

Zulanio hurried him on. The women cast curious glances at the strange personage who had entered the harem, but concluded that it was only another victim of Khedir Ali, who had been brought there by Zulunio.

They came to a small room that adjoined the apartment of Khedir Ali.

This apartment was usually occupied by Ishmail, the faithful eunuch who personally attended to the wants of Khedir Ali.

»Now your course is very plain,« said Zulanio, after explaining to him the rooms, the entrances and exits. »You will have to use boldness and judgment. Ishmail is strong and about your size. He will come into his room immediately after he returns from the mosque with his master. You must be within and capture him, change clothes with him and disguise yourself as Ishmail.«

»But can I-?«

»You must. It is your only chance, your only hope.«

»But the noise—he may cry out before I can choke him to silence.«

»Oh, the women will be singing and pounding tambourines in honor of the now bride, so that he will not be heard.«

Hal understood the course marked out, and determined that if boldness would make it a Success, he would succeed. He went to Ishmail's apartment and sat down

upon his divan, his pistol in his hand, to await the return of the Turk with his new bride.

What was to be done when he had assumed the garb of the eunuch, he did not know, but somehow he felt that Zulanio was waiting just without somewhere, and that she would direct his actions and show him when and how to strike.

He grew tired waiting. The nervous strain was intense—was terrible, almost unendurable, and he would have felt a combat against overwhelming odds to be a relief.

But the moments crept slowly over, each seeming to the anxious, waiting youth an age.

He asked himself the question: What would he do if he should succeed in making the eunuch captive? But he could not answer. It was too dark for him to see before him, nor could he plan in advance. He could only wait, patiently wait, and see what the result would be.

At last the monotonous silence was broken by a noise in the distance somewhere. A little ripple of excitement could be heard approaching nearer and nearer.

He started to his feet. It was the return of the master with his new wife.

His slaves and other wives came to the front entrance, and began their horrid screeching and pounding tambourines and tom-toms—This uproar continued, approaching nearer and nearer.

A small transom at the side of the door in which some of the stained glass had been broken out enabled Hal, who had taken his place at the side of it, to see out into the broad corridor. »

Down the broad hall, furnished and lighted as only a Turkish hall can be, came old Khedir Ali, followed by two eunuchs half leading and half dragging Guinair, the new bride. Hal's blood boiled with indignation, and he gnashed his teeth in fury.

»Heavens! can such outrages be permitted?« he gasped. »This shall not!«

CHAPTER XI.

A BOLD STROKE.

Never had Hal Brigham seen such an expression of despair and utter woe as was depicted on the face of Gulnair, the new bride.

Wedded to a man whom she despised, and forced to become his, even though death would have been preferable, the poor girl bewailed her fate and begged Allah to relieve her by taking her from earth.

It was all Hal could do to restrain his natural inclination to rush forth and strike the master and eunuchs dead at his feet and rescue the white slave. But it was not Zulanio's advice, and was, therefore, not for the best.

He bided his time, and the procession passed on to the door of Khedir Ali's apartment, where they disappeared, and he was unable to see them. The horrid screeching and pounding of tambourines were, however, kept up.

Suddenly Hal heard the tread of footsteps near the door. Some one was approaching.

He crouched himself close into a corner, and the next moment the door opened and a black eunuch entered. It was Ishmail, the faithful servant of the master of the harem.

Hal Brigham gathered up all his strength. Every muscle was rigid as steel and he bounded forward like a panther upon its prey, fixing his fingers firmly about the thick neck of the eunuch.

»Adzento bel dotto!« cried the black, struggling hard to free his throat from the clutch of the American youth, but in vain. Hal knew that the success of his plan and his own life depended upon conquering the eunuch.

The black's knees began to weaken and he gradually sunk down upon the floor; in a moment he was unconscious.

Hal was at first at a loss what to do with him, but after a little reflection he decided to bind and gag him.

He knew not how to do it; but he had not long been master of the situation when the door opened, a slight form glided in, and a now familiar voice said:

»Monsieur, how have you succeeded?«

»Well, so far, Zulanio; but what am I to do with him—kill him?«

»No, no, monsieur, do not shed blood unless unavoidable.«

»Then what shall I do? I have no cords or gags for him.«

»I have thought of all that,« she answered, and she took from under her robe some cords and some handkerchiefs, which she advised Hal to twist into knots and

insert in the prisoner's mouth.

»Is he conscious yet?« she asked.

»No.«

»He must not see me here when he recovers.«

»Well, you can go—but what must I do when I have tied him?«

»Remain here until you hear three raps on your door.«

She was gone, and he made haste to tie the prisoner's arms and legs firmly, and to gag him so he could make no noise.

This done he removed the eunuch's clothes and put them on himself. They were of about the same height, and the garments fit Hal. There was near at hand some powders and paints, and Hal was not slow to understand their purpose. He took up the brushes, and by the aid of the mirror began to color his face and paint it, to look like the eunuch.

Hal was an expert in make up, and soon he had so nearly assumed the color, complexion and appearance of the man whom he was designed to represent that an expert could hardly have detected the counterfeit.

The Moslem slave had begun to come to his senses, and he fixed his great dark eyes upon the man who was assuming his position in wonder and terror. Hal went coolly about his business, touching up his face here and there with paints, and growing every moment more and more like the eunuch.

As Ishmail lay on the floor tied hard and fast he must have thought that he was looking at his second self.

At last he had completed his task and stood at the door awaiting the signal.

It came—three distinct raps—and he opened the door, and giving the prisoner another look to make sure of his safety, Hal went out. Zulanio was awaiting him, and drawing him aside in a whisper said:

»Are you willing to make a bold stroke?«

»Yes,« he answered.

»The boldest stroke of your life?«

»I am.«

She looked about her to assure herself that they were alone. He grew rather impatient, and asked:

»What am I to do?«

»Nothing more nor less than go into the room where Khedir Ali is, bind and gag him, and bring Gulnair here. He is now drinking a toast to his new wife.«

»When I bring her here—how will we escape?«

»I have' prepared everything. Depend on me. A carriage is waiting for us.«

His heart gave a great wild leap and he took new hope. He began to see his way clear. If that old Mohammedan was all that stood between himself and safety he had little to fear.

But Khedir Ali was a giant in size and strength and was not to be despised.

He went quietly to the door of the sumptuous apartment and saw a sight that made him more tiger than man. Sitting at the table, her head bowed in her hands, was the beautiful white slave, while on an ottoman on the opposite side sat Khedir Ali, smoking his hookah and talking to his new victim.

What he said was, of course, unintelligible to Hal, but he could tell from the effect it had upon the white slave, that he was upbraiding her.

»Monster—wretch!« thought the youth, »I itch to get my clutches upon you!«

The Turk at last rose and went to another apartment to get a decanter and some glasses to drink the toast to his new bride.

Now was the time for Hal to act, and he was not slow to accept the situation. He stepped lightly into the room, and going to the side of Gulnair, stood for a moment listening to her low, heavy sobs and moans. But she did not notice him, and he did not intend to make his presence known, but with vengeance whetted anew, he darted across to a heavy damask curtain, behind which he ensconced himself, His hand came in contact with the wall.

Something he touched swayed, and upon examination, he discovered that it was a cimeter hanging by the handle upon the wall. He took it down and grasped it with his right hand.

Peeping through the damask curtains, he saw the Mohammedan return to his ottoman by the table, and sitting down upon it, his legs crossed under him like a tailor at his bench, he began to pour out wine and jabber away at Gulnair.

One glass was filled and pushed over to the white slave, with an injunction, Hal knew, for her to drink her husband's health.

She only shook her head and sobbed and groaned.

Khedir Ali was unaccustomed to even the most petty rebellion to his tyrannical wishes, and became angry. He drank a glass of wine, but it seemed to only arouse his anger more than before.

He drank another, and another, and another glass, and still she, Gulnair, the woman whom he had deemed the most beautiful being in the world, and the one whom he in his wild, barbarous way loved, refused to drink his health.

He was excited, he was furious, and he railed at her in a way that made her shudder.

Hal was concealed at the Mohammedan's back, and stood like a panther ready to spring upon him.

The merchant rose to his feet, and his voice, hoarse with indignation, he began to upbraid the cowering, crouching woman.

»Ishmail, Ishmail!« he called to his eunuch. Ishmail in his apartment heard him, but was unable to make any reply.

Finding that his slave would not come to beat the obstinate girl, the old wretch swore by his beard that he would do it himself.

But as he took a step toward her, a form leaped lightly and swiftly from the curtains behind him, and down came the pommel of the sword with such crushing force on the head of the Turk that he fell senseless to the floor.

»Have you killed him, monsieur?« asked Zulanio, hastening into the apartment.

»No; only stunned. Cords and gags, quick!«

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE MOUNTAIN PASS.

Gulnair, alarmed by the blow and fall of the body, had started up, but was too much stupefied with wonder to comprehend it all.

On the floor, stunned and bleeding, lay the Turk, and Zulanio was at the side of Ishmail talking to him in French, and he—wonders—answered her in the same language.

But no, it was not the eunuch's voice, but deep, manly, familiar tones, and she now recognized Hal. Brigham in his disguise.

Starting to her feet the poor girl with a cry of joy sprang at him, and placed her arms about his neck, saying:

»Save me—save me!«

»I will,« he answered.

It was the appeal of an injured, innocent girl; the beseeching of a white slave begging for freedom, and his manly heart answered the appeal.

»We have no time to spare,« said Zulanio. »Be quick, tie him, gag him, and away.«

»Where are the cords? Where are the gags?«

»Here.«

She gave him some hempen cords, and handkerchiefs with which to form gags, and with these he quickly bound the insensible Turk, and gagged him to prevent any outcry, and left the room with Gulnair half fainting, almost too weak to walk, leaning upon his arm. Zulanio took from the insensible Ali the key to the room, and locked him within.

»He'll be safe for hours,« she said.

»Where now?« Hal asked.

»Follow me.«

She led the way down, a different passage from that they had come, meeting no one save some of the women of the harem, who never stopped to ask questions, when they finally came to a door at which the same eunuch who had admitted them was sitting.

Zulanio spoke to him and he rose and opened it for them. Then they went out and the door was closed. Here they were in a sort of a court and before them a great high wall with a gate.

At the gate was a sentry, who looked rather suspiciously at them. He halted them in Arabic and demanded to know whither they went at this unseemly hour.

Zulanio answered him and said that they had been permitted by the lord of the harem to take a stroll.

The sentry declared it false and swore by Allah they should not go, and stood with his musket in hand to forbid their passage. She spoke rapidly to Hal in French explaining the situation. He asked if the gate was locked. She answered that it was only bolted on the inside, and that the carriage waited on the outside?

The guard's musket was at a ready and his thumb on the hammer. Hal knew that but one course was left. Quick as thought he drew a pistol and fired. The guard fell, and seizing him he jerked open the gate, threw the body outside in the shadow of the gate, hurried the girls out and closed the entrance.

All this was done in a moment; and before any alarm could be raised within. Before them was a carriage, to which Zulanio hurried them.

»Inside here, quick!«' she said.

Hal gallantly opened the door and handed in the ladies, springing in after them. The vehicle was large, roomy and dark as midnight.

Scarce were they within when it bounded away with a jerk, and thundered on along street after street.

Hal soon discovered that there was a fourth person in the vehicle, but it was not until a well-known voice said:

»Well, Hal, old boy, you have turned up alive and all right at last!« that he recognized it was his companion and friend, Frank Foss.

»Hank! Hank! is it you?« he asked, feeling for his friend, and finally clasping his hand.

»Yes.«

»Where have you been?«

»I have been hiding in some outlandish place, guarded and watched over by the girl Zulanio.«

»Are you going with us?«

»Yes.«

»Monsieurs should not talk, as we may be heard,« said Zulanio. They said no more.

Then the carriage rattled along in the darkness, rolling and bouncing over the stones. They were unable to see anything, and only the clatter of hoofs and the roaring, crashing sound of wheels broke the stillness.

The imaginations of the excited occupants were the keenest at this time. The recent adventures and narrow escapes of Hal, Zuliano and Gulnair might well quicken their imagination. Every sound they thought a pursuer.

The carriage rattled along, creaking on its groaning, rusty springs, and Hal was sure that he could hear the sound of horses galloping, galloping, galloping behind them, and coming nearer and nearer, until just at the point where he thought they must surely overtake them, when, by a sudden jerk, they seemed to drop behind, or the carriage give a lurch ahead and they would be as far apart as ever.

But it only proved to be his imagination. They were not pursued, and at last overcome by his long trials he leaned his head against one side of the coach and slept.

How long he slept he did not know, but it must have been some time. He opened his eyes and found the carriage still going at a rolling, bounding, jolting rate over the rocks.

But they were beyond the city walls and rattling over the hills.

»Where are we, Hank?« he asked in English.

»We are somewhere near the foot hills, or bottom of the mountains.«

»Why didn't she take us to the Aurora?«

»Because the Aurora has left the harbor.«

»Left the harbor and us to our fate. I would not have thought that Captain Newton would have done it.«

»Nor would he could he have avoided it. But the truth is, Constantinople became too hot for Captain Newton, and he is now cruising about in the Mediterranean.«

Day dawned and they were in a wild, mountainous country. A dozen bold, hardy mountaineers were seen ahead of them, and in their midst was their old acquaintance, Abel Lazoni, the Circassian.

»Look, look, bandits, bandits,« said Hank.

»They will not harm us,« said Zulanio.

Abel greeted the party with a smile and seemed to have been expecting them. He spoke to Zulanio and told her the vehicle could go no further, and that they would find breakfast awaiting them at a cottage about a mile around the spur of the mountain.

The vehicle was discharged, and our friends went to the cottage, where a breakfast was prepared. Here they waited, resting two days, seeing nothing of Abel Lazoni. Then, with a Circassian boy for a guide, they set out to cross the mountains, and make their way to Austria, Russia, or some Christian nation.

They toiled on for several hours, when they discovered, to their alarm, that they were pursued. The boy informed them that there was a narrow pass ahead through

which they must make their way. They pressed on to the pass with a hundred Turks, headed by old Khedir Ali, below and in plain view. Climbing the mountain is slow and laborious work. The boys were compelled to help the girls, and almost drag them. The boy ran ahead, and when almost in sight of the pass he came back, and said in French:

»The pass is full of armed soldiers. They'll fight; we'll all die.« The enemy was before and behind them.

»Is there no other way by which we can go around them?« Hal asked.

The boy shook his head.

CHAPTER XIII.

TAKEN UP.

But one thing is left for us to do?» said Hal, coolly unslinging his repeating rifle.

Hank understood him, and following his example, said:

»We'll make this pass another Thermopylae.«

»I am going to ae that old wretch Khedir Ali, and if I can kill him I will die easy.«

Though the boys spoke in English, it was evident that Zulanio and Gulnair understood their meaning. Perhaps they understood it more from their threatening gestures and from the expression on their faces than their words. Both were startled and turned gazelle-like eyes in silent appeal toward their protectors.

»It's no use,« said Hal, who had grown desperate. »The Turks intend to kill us unless we kill them, and we can spare no one now.«

The latter was addressed to the girls in French. They said nothing, but buried their faces in their hands.

Their pursuers were yet three-quarters of a mile below them, following up the only path which led to the off-set or bench of the mountain, where our friends were standing.

They had for the present disappeared. behind a projecting bluff covered with trees, shrubs and vines, which momentarily hid them from view, but ere long it was certain that they would be on them. The winding, wandering path adown that mountain-side was narrow, and about one hundred and fifty paces below it was so narrow that not more than three men could walk abreast.

»It will be some time before they will be here,§ said Hal to Hank. »Now, you can guard that point, and I will go up to the pass above and reconnoiter, I cannot get the notion out of my head that we can find a better place for making a stand a little way up the mountain.«

»Go ahead, and I will watch here.«

Hal hastily explained to Gulnair his object in leaving them, and hastened away with the little Circassian boy to reconnoiter the pass and see if there were any chance of forcing a passage.

The boy trotted along a few paces in advance of the Yankee lad, his bright black eyes sweeping the mountain path as he ran. Hal had his rifle in his hand, ready to defend himself should they make an attack on him from above. Occasionally when

a high point or projecting ledge was reached he would glance down at the band of Turks below to see what progress they were making.

Khedir Ali evidently knew that the boys were armed, for he did not push his forces very rapidly up the slope. Realizing that it was death to some of them, they were very cautious, halting at every few paces and holding consultations.

»It will be an hour before they come within gun-shot at that rate,« said the youth, turning to follow the Circassian boy.

The little fellow had gained a point from which he had a view of the pass below, and being close behind a huge boulder, was waiting for Hal to join him.

»See them, monsieur,« he whispered in French, as soon as Hal! reached his side. »Diablo! there is a great army.«

The boy pointed across a narrow, sharp ledge of stone through the pass to a plateau upon the other side not half a mile away, where some twenty or thirty dark-skinned Turkish and Persian soldiery were sitting and standing upon the plateau holding their long muskets in their hands

»We are caught like rats in a trap,« said Hal, gnashing his teeth with vexation. »Isn't there no other way out except this pass?«

»No, monsieur,« the boy answered.

»But this path to the left?«

»It only goes two hundred paces along the ledge to a plateau, where there is a stone wall a hundred feet high on three sides and a precipice on the other that's about five hundred feet deep.«

Hal glanced nervously up and down the path, at the soldiers across the pass and the Turks down the mountain-side, and said:

»I believe we've got time to explore the path. That plateau may afford an excellent fortress for us from the Turks. Stay here and whistle if you see them moving this way.«

Swift as a roebuck he ran up the pathway to the narrow ledge. The path was covered with bushes, but when he came out upon that ledge of rock he was visible all along the mountain side, down to the valley below. Khedir Ali saw him up that dizzy height, and commanded some of his most skilled marksmen to bring him down. Hal could see the little puffs of smoke from below, but in this dizzy height he knew he was safe from their bullets. Neither bullets nor reports reached him, and he hastened along the narrow ledge, on the verge of the fearful precipice, to the platform, which he found broad and long enough to hold a hundred men.

On every side, save the precipice below and the very narrow ledge by which he had come, was a perpendicular wall of stone fully a hundred feet in height.

»This is the point to make our defense from,« said Hal, hurrying down the sloping ledge. His appearance out upon the mountain side was the signal for half a dozen more musket shots from below, but not a bullet hit him.

»Have they moved up toward the pass?« he asked of the boy whom he found still watching at the boulder.

»No.«

»They perhaps do not know of our presence. Did you hear the shots below?«

The boy shook his head.

»Then the soldiers beyond the pass did not. Let us hasten down to our friends and get them up here.«

»Maybe the monsieur had better leave me to watch this pass?«

»It's a good idea, boy; stay here and sound your mountain whistle the-moment you see the enemy making a move this way.«

Hal ran down the path, which was covered with shrubs that almost completely concealed him from view.

He found Hank and the girls where he had left them, the former with cocked rifle waiting by the side of a large stone higher than his head.

»Have you seen them since I left?« Hal asked.

»Only one or two were in sight, but I heard them below firing at some one.«

»It was me.«

»Did they see you?«

»Yes,«

»Well, I am glad they didn't hit you. We will have warm work with the rascals soon, for although I can't see them, I know they're not far away, and creeping up the mountain side.«

»There is a better place above to defend than this.«

»Where?«

»On the plateau about two or three hundred yards above here. Let us get the girls up there.«

»Wait a moment.«

Hank-suddenly lifted his gun to his shoulder, moving a little closer to the stone.

One, two, three sharp reports from below rang out, and bullets came zip, zip, zip through the air, some of them grazing the great stone.

Hank did not flinch, but his rifle spoke a moment later and a death cry answered it.

Hal was also straining his eyes down the mountain side, and catching a glimpse of a head and shoulders from behind a pile of crumbling rocks, brought his gun to his face and sent a bullet whizzing toward them.

When the smoke had cleared away the head and shoulders had disappeared. Five minutes rolled by and not another sight was caught of an enemy. They had learned by dear experience that the American boys were marksmen not to be despised.

»Hank, we had better get the girls up to the plateau above, where we can defend the pass much better than here,« said Hal.

The idea was thought by Hank to be a good one, and he suggested that Hal and the girls take the lead, while he covered their retreat with his gun.

Hal knew that the enemy were spread out over the surface of the mountain below them, that they were furious at the resistance which had already been made, and would send a volley of leaden hail at them the moment any portion of their body was exposed.

He informed Gulnair and Zulanio of their danger and urged them to creep low to the earth.

»Don't show your heads above the rocks and shrubbery,« he said, »or they will become targets for Khedir Ali's bullets.«

The slow and wearisome ascent began. Hal had no fears on his own account, but for his charges he became nervous and anxious.

»Be careful, keep your head low——« But he neglected his own, and at this moment a shot came whistling through the air which grazed the brim of his hat.

Hank fired again, and his shot brought forth a howl of agony.

On, up and on——« cried Hal in French. »They are pressing us closely, and we will have no time to spare.«

On, on, up among the crags and peaks they pressed, until they came in view of the little sentry perched behind the gigantic boulder watching the body of Turks beyond the pass.

»The fighting has commenced below, monsieur,« said the boy, as Hal, with the girls, joined him.

»They are shooting at us down there,« Hal answered. »Why don't Hank come?«

»There comes the monsieur,« and he pointed to a figure creeping rapidly up the path.

»All right!« Hank called out to his friend. »Where shall we go?«

»To this path on our left,« Hal answered. »And we will have to be lively, for we shall have a regular broadside poured upon us when we turn along that ledge

under the bluff.«

Every one present appreciated what Hal said, even the little bare-footed, bare-headed Circassian boy.

For a moment it was a debatable question in Hal's mind who should go first. At one moment he thought it would be best to send Gulnair and Zulanio first, as they might get over the barren ledge, where they would' be fully exposed to the fire of the enemy, perhaps before they were discovered. At the next it seemed best to go first himself, and draw the fire of the enemy, and let them come over while their guns were empty. This last plan was finally adopted, and he bade Hank and the girls wait.

»Be careful, Hal,« cried Hank, remembering the promise he had made the lad's parents. But Hal was already gone up the steep and thorny path. Hank holds his breath as he sees his friend step out upon the narrow ledge, which he knows brings him in full view of the enemy. He starts across the dangerous pass, which is so narrow that but one person can walk it at a time, and has not gone a dozen paces ere the whole side of the mountain rings with musketry.

Right in the middle of the pass he halts to send back two or three spiteful shots, and then moves on. »Why don't he go faster?« thought Hank. »Heavens! it is raining bullets about him.«

But see, he goes on now. He hugs the wall, against which pelting balls are striking thick and fast.

»Oh, Heaven, he is hit,« cries Hank, as he sees Hal clasp his hand to his side, and reeling backward, clutch at the wall of stone.

But it is only a spent ball, and recovering before he plunged over the precipice, he leaped along the narrow ledge, and was soon safely on the broad plateau. Wheeling about, he fired two or three more shots, taking aim so as to make them effective, and causing the Turks nearest to keep their heads behind the rocks.

»Come on over—come quick!« he shouts back to his companions, and they are not slow to comply. The girls come first, and not a shot is fired at them, and Hank and the boy follow.

But now from behind the rocks below come little spurts of whitish smoke, and bullets begin to whiz past their ears. The boy grows excited, and gets too near the edge of the precipice.

»Look out—keep nearer the bluff!« shouts Hal, firing at the Turks who are visible below. But the boy is excited. A bullet strikes his heel and he utters a yell of pain as he clasps his wounded foot in his hand, which is changed to a cry of horror as he loses his ballance and plunges down the precipice to destruction.

Hank hurries across and the four stand safe upon the plateau, but all are so horrified that neither utters a word.

Though temporarily safe, they all realize that their danger is not over. They have a horde of bloodthirsty Turks who will never cease to besiege them until they have made them captive or starved them to death. They come up to the ledge and open fire, which is kept up, and then the Turks retire to starve them out, knowing they cannot escape.

Hal and Hank were waiting and watching with rifles ready, when suddenly a noise was heard above. Looking up they saw what seemed to be a great tub, such as are used by miners, descending suspended by a rope.

A voice from above cried out in French:

»Get in all of you!«

The tub came down to the platform, and the beleaguered were not slow to understand what it meant. All took their places in the tub; it began to rise and they were taken up.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABEL LAZONI.

As the great tub in which they were being drawn to the top of the bluff above was evidently in the hands of strong men, it was steadily yet swiftly hurried up into the dizzy height above the platform.

Who their rescuers were the Yankee boys could not imagine, nor did they stop to inquire. They were taking them, as it were, nn of the very clutches of the terrible Khedir Ali.

»Wouldn't we make a good mark, if they should see us?« said Hank.

»Yes, and they will see us,« Hal responded.

Hal was correct, for they had been lifted but about half way to the bluff above when the whole mountain side seemed to quake with the yells and shouts of the enraged Turks lying behind the bushes and rocks along the mountain side.

A score of white puffs of smoke issued from the bushes and stones, and the bullets came whizzing through the air.

One struck the thick, strong wood of the tub and half-imbedded itself. Another struck the thick rope above them, and oh, horror of horrors, cut half the strands in twain, thereby weakening the rope.

Hal uttered a terrified cry Hank said:

»Be quiet—don't sway the tub—everything depends on that.«

Those above did not know their danger as they drew them upward. Other shots were fired by the Turks, but the distance was too great to render them effective.

With abated breath, parted lips and wildly beating anxious hearts the boys watched the weakened rope above their heads, while the terrified girls covered their faces with their hands.

Fiber after fiber of the rope parted where the bullet had struck it and the straws began to stretch. Hal and Hank knew that in a few moments it would break and the four be dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

»Haste, haste, in Heaven's name, or we will be dashed to pieces. The rope is breaking!« Hal screamed, forgetting that the men above did not understand a word of English.

But if they did not understand his words, his excited manner told them that something was wrong.

They were now nearing the top of the bluff and could see a dozen dark, brawny, heavily bearded men pulling away at the rope hand over hand, as if their own lives depended on it. It was evident that they were used to pulling friends up the

bluff. Hank remembered that some one among them spoke French, and he called their attention to the injured rope.

»Oui, monsieur—we see it,« a voice returned. They were at the top of the ledge; the strands were stretching, breaking, and ten seconds later the rope would have broken, but just at the opportune moment a hook descended, caught into the great ring below the cut rope, and they were lifted to the plateau above.

»You are safe, monsieurs!«

The speaker was Abel Lazoni. A dozen dark bearded men, armed with muskets and ponderous pistols and daggers, stood about Lazoni. All doubts and suspicions as to Lazoni's calling gave place to the certainty that he was a brigand.

But, brigand as he was, he was their friend and not so much to be dreaded on this occasion as were the soldiers of the Sultan under Khedir Ali.

»We owe our lives to you,« Hal answered, shuddering with horror when he realized how narrow their escape had been.

The shouts and yells of rage which came up from below reached the ears of the fugitives.

»They can howl,« said Lazoni. »The eagle is in his eyrie and safe from them.«

»Is there no other way to reach this bluff?« asked Hal.

»None that they know of; come.«

At this word of command his men wheeled into line, single file, and with Abel in front, the others following, marched off across the plateau, which widened out until it was several miles in area, and covered with quite a dense forest. Here the banditti lived.

They found huts which were quite comfortable. A colony of outlawed people had sought the isolated plateau, and here lived free from any dread of the armies of the Sultan. They were apparently as inaccessible to their enemies as if they had been located on the moon.

The boys discovered that these outlaws, after all, were not such a bad class of people. Many had left their country on account of political dissensions. Others had fled to escape the tyranny of the Sultan, and, as is not unfrequently the case with an absolute monarchy, where the monarch is a tyrant, some of the outlaws were the best people there were in the nation. There were brigands there who had once been honest merchants, but being so unfortunate as to have a beautiful daughter who had been seen by the Sultan, on some dignitary, had been compelled to select the mountains and outlawry to save their children from the horrors of harem life.

The outlaws were a hardy race of mountaineers who knew every secret pass in the mountains. By preconcerted signals they were enabled to warn each other of danger from the near approach of soldiers.

Our party was taken to the house of Abel Lazoni, who lived in the largest hut in the colony. A small field near was cultivated by the brigand chief, though they mostly existed by plunder. Here grew a few vegetables and some barley, however, for the benefit of the chief.

»You can stay here as long as you like,« said Abel, when he had taken them to his home. Abel's two wives met them very friendly. They wore no veils over their faces, and were dressed in the simple mountain costume.

Here our friends remained several days, taking strolls about the forest and occasionally shooting a chamois with which the mountains abounded. A lofty mountain peak inaccessible anywhere save from the plateau rose up on the east side.

They had been there about a week, when Hal was suddenly awakened from a sound sleep about midnight one night by Hank.

»What's the matter?« he asked, rubbing his eyes.

Me Here, take this and come quick!« handing him his rifle. ' Khedir Ali and his army have gained the plateau, and we are going to have a fight before daylight.«

CHAPTER XV.

KHEDIR ALI'S CAMP.

Hank, is that so?» cried Hal, now fully awake, springing from his couch and beginning to dress.

»It is.«

»How did they gain the plateau?»

»I don't know, it's a mystery.«

»I thought it inaccessible.«

»So did I.«

»Where is Abel Lazoni?»

»Mustering his bandits together just as rapidly as he can, and making every arrangement possible to fight the forces of Khedir Ali.«

»Where is Khedir Ali now?»

»On the north side of the plateau. They have been here all night it seems in gaining it, and all their men are not there yet.«

Hal dressed hurriedly, and buckled his belt of cartridges about his waist.

»Your pistols—don't forget them!» said Hank.

»You have yours?»

»Yes.«

»We will need them.«

»It will probably be a hand-to-hand fight.«

Hal and Hank were both well supplied with ammunition, and had the very best make of arms.

As they emerged into the small clearing in front of the house, they found a full moon shining from a cloudless sky, flooding the forest with silver light.

Two slight forms—their great dark hair streaming in the night wind—met them at the door. They were unveiled and the moonlight seemed to enhance their beauty.

»What is it, monsieur?» Gulnair asked, seizing Hal Brigham's arm. She had been roused by the slight noise and confusion, »Tell me, monsieur, is it Khedir Ali?»

»It is?»

»Where is he?»

»On the plateau.«

»And they told me he could not come here.«

»There was some mistake.«

»But maybe we are betrayed. Maybe Abel Lazoni intended it thus.«

»I think not, Gulnair. I believe they are our friends—see, they are even now mustering the men to go and fight the Turkish soldiers.«

Mountaineers could be seen running about from hut to hut, rapping on doors and rousing the peeping, brigands. The men accustomed to flights and fights were silently, but quickly, springing from their beds and seizing their guns.

The moon shone peacefully and bright upon the scene, bringing out into plain view the stately old forest and the grand majestic mountain peaks, by which they were surrounded.

»Where is he—where is Khedir Ali?« Gulnair asked.

»They are at the north end of the plateau,« Hank answered.

»He is then ten or twelve miles away.«

»Yes.«

Hal insisted on the girls retiring to their rooms and going to sleep. They were reluctant to do so, but the American boys assured them that they would be their defenders.

»You can do no good with us,« said Hal to Gulnair, »we will fight Ali and drive him and his myrmidons off the plateau, then make our own escape if it be possible. But if the worst comes we can but die.«

»I have this,« said Gulnair, holding up a pistol. »I will take my own life rather than they shall make me prisoner. Better death a thousand times than be the slave of Khedir Ali.«

»I do not blame you, Gulnair, but let that be the last chance. Don't—for Heaven sake don't do that, unless it becomes absolutely necessary.«

»I shall not,« she answered. He then induced her to go into the hut near, with Zulanio, and he and Hank went to Abel Lazoni who with a dozen dark-skinned brigands were but a short distance away.

»How is it, Monsieur Lazoni,« said Hal, in French, »that the Turks gained the plateau?«

»They have discovered our secret pass,« he answered.

»I supposed that that wasso securely concealed that there was no danger of their finding it.«

»Ay, monsieur, it was,« said Abel, shaking his head gravely. »The pass was safe enough, and they never would have found it but for a traitor.«

»A traitor—do you mean you have a traitor in your camp?«

»I do.«

»Who is he?«

»Alas, we know not, monsieur, We will give many hundred ducats to find him.«

»I suppose you would deal summarily with him?»

»Yes, monsieur. We will bind him hand foot and hurl him over the precipice.«

The boys shuddered, but said that the punishment would be just.

»How many men has Khedir Ali with him?« Hal asked.

»I don't know, monsieur, but we have sent spies to find out.«

Abel then spoke to his dark-skinned, black-bearded bandits, and they shouldered their muskets and in files of four, started off through the forest path.

Hal and Hank followed them.

The moon shone brightly from a cloudless sky, and lighted up the woods, even where the branches and leaves were the thickest, so they were enabled to distinctly see their way.

They had not gone more than a mile or so, when they came to a mountain brook where they called a halt, and the men sat down upon the ground, their muskets perpendicularly between their knees.

The murmur of running waters were the only sounds which broke the silence. The moon was slyly stealing along the sky as the night wore away. Those grim dark men looked more like statues than animated creatures, they sat still and silent.

A feeling of awe crept over the American boys, and they began to wonder why they were waiting. When Hal was awakened by Hank, he supposed that the enemy was almost upon them, and when he learned that they were twelve miles away, he was astonished.

He saw Abel Lazoni squatted upon the ground, his heavy black beard in strange contrast with his marble-like face, and crept to his side.

»Can I talk to you?« he asked.

»What would the monsieur say?« the brigand chief asked.

»May not the forces of Khedir Ali get around and get to the huts before we meet them?«

»No, monsieur—there is no other way. We will go soon, monsieur.«

Then a silence came upon the scene, and they sat and waited, while the moon was slowly creeping athwart the sky.

At last the faint tread of footsteps was heard, coming through the woods toward them. Every head was raised and every man instantly on the alert.

The bare arms Of the brigands dropped to their sides, and Hal knew that each man hold a thumb on the lock of his musket.

But a few moments elapsed, and then two dark forms silently leaped over the brook and came toward Abel.

The chief did not rise to his feet. They sat down by his side, and one of them said:

»We have been to the camp.«

»How many are they?« Abel asked. They spoke in the Turkish language, which was afterward translated to Hal and Hank.

»I don't know,« answered the bandit. »There were about twenty on the plateau with more probably in the pass.«

»Twenty, we need not fear.«

Then Abel was silent a long time, turning over several plans in his mind. At last he rose to his feet, addressed a few words to his lieutenant, and touching Hal on the shoulder said in French:

»Come, monsieur, with me.«

Hal was astonished, yet he felt impelled to obey. He rose to his feet without a word. Hank felt partially inclined to object, but having implicit trust in Abel Lazoni, did not do so.

Abel led the way across the brook and halting, turned about and said:

»Will the monsieur make any risk for Gulnair which I will take?«

»I will,« Hal answered. »Any take I will also.«

»I am going to Khedir Ali's camp.«

»Alone?«

»No, with you.«

»Dare we do that—will we not be shot?«

»We must run our chances. It is a bold measure, monsieur, I know, but it is our only hope of success. The mission on which I am about to engage I dare not entrust to any of my men. They are ordinarily brave—yes, brave as lions—but not brave enough to accomplish this. Besides it will take a coolness which they do not possess. If this plan succeeds we will defeat Khedir Ali. If it fails we will all die, or go to Turkish dungeons.«

It required but a moment for Hal Brigham to make his decision.

»I will go with you, Abel,« he said. »I will dare whatever you dare.«

»Then come on.«

He turned aside from the path, and, along a rocky, wooded piece of land, led the way. Hal Brigham was an athletic youth, and had long been accustomed to exertion and exposure, but this herculean mountaineer was too much for him. Abel had been accustomed to the mountains and hardships all his life, and on this

occasion, when the life and liberties of himself and his loved friends depended upon his exertions, he was untirable.

They had gone about four miles over this rough, uneven road, climbing over rocks and creeping through thickets, when Hal said he was exhausted and could go no further.

»We will rest, then,« 'said Abel, throwing himself upon a large slab of moss-covered stone.

Hal sank down by his side, panting for breath, while the perspiration was streaming from his face.

»We will not have much further to go,« said Abel.

»Is the camp near?«

»Yes, very near.«

»How far?«

»Not over a mile.«

Hal wiped his streaming face with his handkerchief, and turned his eyes up toward the moon, which was peacefully smiling down the western decline. It would be several hours yet until morning, and much might be accomplished:

Half an hour passed and Abel asked in a whisper:

»Are you sufficiently rested now to go on?«

»Yes,« Hal answered.

They rose and silently and more slowly continued their journey.

The farther they went the more caution Abel Lazoni exercised. Such wonderful skill in woodcraft did he exhibit, that Hal was amazed. He seemed to possess the power of moving unseen without a breath of noise. As he flitted from rock to rock, from tree to tree, not a particle of sound from his footfalls could be heard, and Hal was sometimes unable to see him.

At last they could see smoldering camp-fires in the distance, and crept so near that they could even see dark recumbent forms lying upon the ground wrapt in slumber. A sentry on duty was plainly outlined near a tree. Abel turned to Hal and whispered:

»Stay right here, until I come for you, unless you hear a cricket cry. If you do, come toward it.«

There is a peculiar sort of a cricket in these mountains, which utters snarp, shrill shrieks, Hal had heard them, and said he would understand the signal.

What were the intentions of Abel Lazoni, Hal had not the slightest idea. The giant Circassian glided on, and he next saw him within the radius of light that surrounded the camp.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ATTACK.

Hal Brigham held his breath and watched Lazoni. How had he managed to pass the guard whom he had seen standing between him and the dull glow of the camp-fire. A few moments passed in silence, and then Hal noticed the guard walking a little out from the camp holding his musket ready to fire, while he peered into the darkness. Behind, grim and giant-like, rose the brigand chief, seeming to come right up out of the earth.

He glided noiselessly forward, crouching like a tiger ready to spring upon its prey, and a moment later he made a tremendous leap, and both the sentinel and brigand disappeared from sight.

The whole transaction had been so noiseless that the sleeping Turks were not awakened. Hal stood waiting in breathless suspense, for he was hardly able to make out the result of the Circassian giant's adventure. After a few moments, however, he heard a slight rustling sound near, and a moment later the voice of the Circassian giant whispered in his ear:

»Monsieur, it is all right.«

He stepped out from a thicket, carrying in his arms as if he had been a child the insensible sentry. »Come,« Abel whispered, and led the way a short distance behind to a large rock, behind which he halted and waited a moment for his captive, whom he had choked almost to suffocation, to regain consciousness.

»What are you going to do next, Abel?« Hal asked.

»Find out how many Khedir Ali has, and attack them while they sleep,« Abel answered.:

The captive soon regained consciousness, and as he spoke French, their conversation was carried on in that language.

»Why did Khedir Ali come to the mountains? Speak, dog, or you die!« Lazoni hissed in his ears.

»To find his wives,« was the answer.

»He intends to kill us, too, does he not?« asked Abel.

»No, but he will kill the Christian dogs,« said the captive.

»How many men has he?«

»Forty-five. There are twenty on the plateau, and twenty-five in the rocky pass below, who were not able to find their way up the mountain before dark came. As soon as it is morning they will climb to the top of the plateau, and all will make the attack on the village of the mountain bandits.«

»Come with me, dog. If you have lied to me I will kill you.«

He rose and dragged the prisoner to his feet.

»What are you going to do?« Hal asked.

»We are strong enough to whip them in detail. The men on the plateau we will attack as soon as I can bring up my forces, then we can manage those in the pass. We will fire at them from behind rocks and throw stones down upon them until we have killed them all.«

»Do we have to go back to the brook and come here again?« asked Hal. »I don't believe I can walk it.«

»Then stay here. I am used to tramping in these mountains and never get tired of it. They will not wake until we come and you can rest here.«

Hal thought he would be perfectly safe, and told Abel he would wait.

He sat down in the shadow of the great rock with his back against it and waited, his face bowed in his hands. Morning lights were Core up in the east—it would ere long be day.

Hal was dozing; when a hand suddenly seized him by the collar of his coat.

»What—what is it?' he asked, struggling to free himself. But half a dozen dark forms were flitting about him, and dark weapons were at his face and breast.

Strange tongues cursed him in words low but deep. He could only recognize the word Allah, as it was uttered again and again.

The horrified youth recognized that he was a prisoner.

He was quickly dragged from the stone to the camp-fire, where a score of turbaned, dark-bearded Turks gathered about him, and among them he recognized his old enemy, Khedir Ali.

»Christian dog!« cried the Mohammedan, striking Hal's face with his open hand such a blow that it made him stagger.

Fierce imprecations in a tongue that was worse than Greek came to Hal's ears, and he saw a dozen sharp daggers pointing at his breast.

Day was dawning, and darkness was being dispelled by the brilliant orb which was soon to appear and reign supreme.

The fire was replenished by the Turks; and the bright blaze lighted up the woods, showing the narrow dark pass below, by which they had gained the plateau. Hal Brigham was taken aside' by Khedir Ali, who: held a large Turkish pistol in his hand.

»My time has come,« the Yankee boy thought. Then he made the heroic resolve to die game. »Shoot, you old rascal,« he said aloud,in English. »I defy you. You will never make me implore your mercy.«

The old Turk was furious, and seizing Hal by the throat choked him almost to suffocation. In his superhuman struggles he burst the bands off his hands, and quick as thought at the old Turk a blow that staggered him.

Hal made a tremendous bound into the dark woods, expecting every second to be riddled with bullets. The shots which he knew would come were much longer in coming than he expected.

But at last a rattling volley rang out on the air, and bullets passed on each side of him. One pierced his hat.

The woods were filled with shouts. Had a hundred American Indians suddenly given utterance to a war whoop, the sleeping echoes could not have been more suddenly or rudely aroused than they were.

Hal ran as he had never run before in his life. The ground was rough and rocky, and he staggered and stumbled at almost every step—still he tore his way through the brambles at a rate of speed which a mountain roe would not have been ashamed.

Shot after shot whistled through the bushes, some shattering the bark from the branches of the trees, and others clipping off the smaller branches and leaves, which fell about Hal's head and shoulders.

He dashed his foot against a stone and fell headlong into a ditch that was just before him. He was stunned, and gave up all hope of escaping.

His pursuers were still on his track. He could hear them coming nearer and nearer.

Suddenly a shot rang out in the woods before him. What did that mean?

The Turks were checked in their pursuit, and half a dozen more shots brought them to a standstill.

»Lazoni—Lazoni!«

Wild was the cry that went up on the air.

The name of the terrible mountain brigand had never failed to strike terror to the hearts of those who heard it.

Hal now understood that his friends had come and attacked the Turks.

As he started up to a sitting position, some one sprang through the tall reeds and bushes on his right, and by the aid of the increasing light he made out the form of Hank Fass holding a rifle in his hand.

»Hello, Hal, old boy,« he cried, »have the Turks hit you?«

»No—I fell.«

»Hurt.«

»Only a bruise—I am all right now,« said Hal starting to his feet.

»I am glad of it for we have attacked the Turk dogs, and we are liable to have a warm time with them.«

»let me see—I left my gun by the big rock—I don't believe they got it.«

»Get it quick, for you will need it.«

The momentary lull in the attack was now over. A shout and volley of shots made the woods, rocks, and hills ring with echoes.

CHAPTER XVII.

VICTORY.

Hal, found his rifle lying upon the ground behind the great rock where he had been made captive.

So sudden had been his capture, and so sudden and unexpected his escape, that the Turks under Khedir Ali had not even thought to remove his pistols.

»I am ready for battle now,« he said, as soon as he had secured his gun.

»Come on. How many men has Khedir Ali?«

»I suppose twenty here and twenty-five below.«

There was no time to enter into any further explanation. The fight in the woods was growing warm. The forces of Khedir Ali and Abel Lazoni were well matched in numbers, skill and valor, and the contest threatened to be a long and desperate one.

When our friends came up with Abel, they found the Circassian giant crouching behind a large rock reloading his musket.

Hal and Hank found shelter with him, the mass of stone being amply sufficient to hide them. All along in the woods behind trees and blocks of stone lay the followers of Khedir Ali, blazing away at the Turkish soldiery.

»If their reinforcements come,« said Hal, »won't they be able to crush us?«

»Yes, monsieur. We must make short work of this fight.«

»How?«

»Get their guns empty and then sound the charge. My men understand me, and reserve their fire.«

Hal saw Khedir Ali hurrying about in an excited manner and fired twice at him, but owing to his being constantly on the move, he missed the old rascal. But his bullets came so near him that Khedir became a little alarmed, and took care to pat himself out of range of that dangerous marksman.

The Turkish soldiery like Abel's mountaineers were lying or crouching behind the rocks. The flash of guns were almost incessant, and the morning being very still, no air scarcely stirring, the smoke hung like a pall over the woods. - Day had dawned and the sun was risen above the mountain-tops, lighting the forest on the plateau in which the hot skirmish was raging.

Suddenly Abel Lazoni placed a whistle to his mouth, and sounded a shrill blast which was distinctly heard above the rattling crash of fire-arms.

With tremendous yells, each of the brigands sprang to his feet, and like so many demons leaping from the earth, dashed forward upon the Turkish horde.

Khedir Ali uttered a shout of alarm and his men, true as steel and brave as lions, leaped from their covers to form a line and resist the charge of the mountaineers, but their guns were empty, and most of their pistols they fired at random under the excitement, of the unexpected charge.

Hal and Hank were seized. by some overpowering excitement, and with shouts and cheers equal to any of the half savage mountaineers, they became conscious of rushing headlong amid blinding smoke, flashing gun and whistling shots.

They seemed utterly devoid of fear.

Every one realized that it was victory or death, and that in order to achieve victory they must dash right down at once upon the Turks and drive them from the field.

Each man was a host in himself, and their charge was irresistible.

The Turks broke and fled in every direction, more than half of them plunging headlong down into the narrow pass.

Hal saw two or three dark forms lying in the grass or among the rocks, but among none of them did he recognize Khedir Ali. He asked himself if the old rascal had escaped or was lying dead among those bushes with others, but the question could not be answered.

»Come on, come on!« shouted Lazoni in French, which most of his followers understood. »We have got them in the pass now, and must not give them a moment to come back upon us. We can kill them all in the pass.«

He gave a few words of instruction to the members of his band and they divided, one half going on one side of the pass and one half on the other.

Hal and Hank followed Lazoni. Two hundred paces the pass became a chasm, not over ten feet wide and fifty deep. A great boulder or mass of stone lay on the side of it, as if it had been placed there on purpose. So nearly was it balanced that Hal and Hank knew at once that a dozen strong arms could send it thundering down into the chasm below.

Down below not over a hundred and fifty paces, could be seen the Turks and soldiers huddled together. Lazoni and half a score of his men placed their brawny shoulders against the great mass of rock, and by one tremendous push sent it down with a thundering crash into the pass below.

Then he directed half of his men on this side the chasm to run further down the pass beyond, where the Turks were gathered in a mass, not a little alarmed and bewildered at the trap in which they were caught. It was not an uncommon affair for those who attempted to pursue the mountain bandits to get in trouble in this way. Those hardy mountaineers were acquainted with every part of the

mountains, and every secret pass, and when they caught their pursuers in a trap like this, there was no quarter expected.

Though they outnumbered the brigands, they were wholly at a disadvantage. While they were huddled together like frightened sheep, there came a loud »boom, boom, boom!« in their rear, and great masses of stone, each weighing hundreds of tons, fell into the narrow defile, cutting off all hope of escape. Their only show now was to scale the almost perpendicular wall on: every side, which, under the steady fire of the mountaineers, was almost impossible.

When the brigand chief had succeeded in getting his enemies where he wanted them, the gigantic Circassian mounted a hillock and gave utterance to a shout which rang out far and wide among the mountains.

The shout was the death knell of the imprisoned Turks, There went up from the pass such a wail of despair as the American boys had never heard before in their lives.

Right and left, overhead and all along the pass, rang out rifle shots, filling the narrow, canyon with reverberating echoes, which shook the mountain. The mountaineers began rolling stones down upon the heads of the unfortunate Turks. They returned the fire but almost at random, as they could only occasionally see a head peeping Over the precipice.

Hal and Hank were averse to taking human life, and though they had both had several struggles with the enemy in which they had struck mortal blows, it was always when they themselves were at a disadvantage.

»Well, Hal,« said Hank, »it is time for us to take a hand.«

They had been standing back from the canyon upon the plateau, and had seen nothing as yet of the desperate struggle that was raging therein.

»Come on,« said Hal, cocking his repeating rifle.

They advanced until they had a good view of the pass or canyon.

Huddled together about one hundred and fifty yards away, were a number of wretches who were making desperate, but altogether hopeless endeavors to defend themselves. They were covered with dust, enveloped in smoke, and scarce looked like human beings.

Turning their guns toward the bunch of men, the boys quickly emptied their magazines. and retired, without waiting to note the effect of their shots.

Hal refilled the magazine of his rifle and threw himself upon the ground.

»Aren't you going back?« asked Hank.

»No; I've had enough of it,« Hal answered. »They do not need us and those fellows seem to delight in such work. Let them do it.«

»I agree with you,« Hank answered. »Let us get a little further away. The uproar about here is terrific.«

Hal sprang to his feet and went with his friend about two hundred paces up the slope toward the grand plateau and sat down upon the ground.

»Those fellows are hardly human,« said Hal, as he looked down upon the scene below and noted with what infinite delight the mountaineers continued to pour in their fire upon the almost helpless Turks of Khedir Ali, »I have sympathy even with a Turk when he is trapped and utterly helpless.«

»So have I, but those men have not. It seems to be a war of extermination with them. After all, Hal, may it not be because neither you or I have had the provocation those men have or we might be as bloodthirsty as they.«

»I would go to Abel Lazoni and plead for the lives of the poor wretches if I thought it would do any good, but they are bent on slaughter and it would do no good.«

»Is old Khedir Ali down there among them in that death-trap?« Hank asked. »I can't feel much sympathy with the old rascal, even if he does get his brains blown out, for I shall feel as if he deserved his punishment.«

»So will I; but Hank, that contemptible little Frenchman, Alphonse Beaumont, deserves to be shot much more than any of those Turks. He, as a Christian, should have befriended us, but instead, he betrayed us. The wretch deserves a thousand deaths.«

»He does, and if he had come with them to-«

»He did, Hank.«

»How do you know?«

»I saw him.«

»Down in the pass?«

»No.«

»In the fight on the bluff?«

»No, but when I was a prisoner.«

»What, among the Turks?«

»He was, for I saw him as sure as I see you now.«

»Did he speak to you?«

»No, the cowardly wretch did not speak with me, but stood aloof; but I recognized him despite his Turkish disguise.«

For a moment the boys were silent, and Hank then asked:

»I wonder why he came with them? Was it revenge for our wounding him in the streets of Constantinople.«

»No, the cowardly dog is too base and ignoble, to even harbor revenge. He came here prompted solely by desire for gain. He is here because he has been hired. It is for gold that he came, and for no other purpose.«

»The wretch—I wonder if he is among those doomed wretches down in that death pass?«

»Unless he lies up among the rocks and shrubs above he must be.«

»Let us go up there and see.«

They went up the rocky slope to the first battle ground, and though they searched the thorn bushes and rocks thoroughly, the Frenchman was not to be found among them.

»He must be down in the pass,« said Hal.

»Then he is doomed.«

The firing now ceased, and wild shouts went up on the air.

»The fight is over,« said Hank.

»Which means that every man in that pass has fallen,« his companion answered. Hal made no response, and a few moments later Abel Lazoni appeared, followed by his band, shouting:

»Victory! victory!«

CHAPTER XVIII.

GULNAIR AGAIN A CAPTIVE.

Khedir Ali staid with his men even after he knew that marksmen among the mountaineers were making especial efforts to take his life, but when the charge was made he knew all was lost, and determined if it were possible to save his own life.

He fled to the left, leaping across a rocky chasm, and ran a fourth of a mile through the woods over stony, uneven ground. Then he halted in a thorn thicket and listened.

»If my reserves will only press on up the pass,« the Turk said, »they will yet defeat the robbers.«

A lull in the firing followed, and old Khedir began wondering what was the cause of it. The sound of footsteps fell upon his ear, and a moment later he saw a man coming through the woods toward him, Though attired like a Turk he was a Frenchman, and Khedir recognized him as Alphonse Beaumont, his employe and unscrupulous ally.

»Aye, Monsieur Khedir Ali!' gasped Alphonse, almost out of breath, »it was a most terrible fight. I did not at first know, monsieur, that I would get away with my head, but I am here, monsieur.«

»Did any of my men escape?« the Mohammedan asked.

»Some of them, my good monsieur, but I don't know how many.«

»Allah be praised. We will yet sweep these mountain brigands from the face of the earth; but, Alphonse,.why is this delay? Why are they so still? I[hear nothing of them.«

»I know not, Monsieur Khedir, as I am your friend, and hope for your continuous friendship, I know not.«

At this moment the shouts and rapid discharge of firearms down-in the rocky pass told that the scene of conflict had been changed.

»Aye, monsieur, they are now fighting in the pass—they are fighting in the pass,« said Alphonse.

The sounds of footsteps coming toward them were heard, and a moment later three more of Khedir Ali's myrmidons joined them. A few moments later another was picked up, and all being armed, they formed six formidable men.

The fight in the pass below was growing hotter every-moment, and the Turks having full knowledge of the grounds had little hope for their friends; but Khedir

Ali was true to them, and proposed that they go down among the hills and rocks and attack Abel Lazoni's forces in the rear.

»Don't do it, monsieur, don't,« said the cowardly, treacherous Frenchman. »We will only be cut to pieces if you do. We can all get away from here. They have the pass and we have the bluff and big tub with which the mountaineers let themselves up and down the bluff. Besides, the monsieur came for the mademoiselle. She is at the village of the mountain brigand. All the men are gone away to fight at the pass, and we can take her and escape by the big tub, and go to Constantinople before the fight in the pass be put to an end.«

Old Khedir Ali thought the plan an excellent one. He cared nothing for the men in the pass if they escaped it would all be right, and if they died in the combat they were no more than so many dogs to him.

With the five armed men at his heels, he pressed on through the woods and finally came in sight of the cluster of huts on the mountains. There they halted, and Khedir Ali sent the Frenchman and another forward to reconnoiter.

The sun was by this time two or three hours high, and the women and slaves could be plainly seen going about among the houses attending to their domestic ares.

Alphonse Beaumont was well adapted to the business in which he was engaged. He possessed the faculty of worming his way along from tree to tree, from rock to rock, unseen, until he was near enough to see every one. Carefully he noted every person in the cluster of huts, and outside of one feeble old man and two helpless cripples, he saw that there were no people around, save the women and children.

»It is very good luck—decidedly fine,« he said to himself, rubbing the palms of his hands together with infinite delight. »I will haste me to tell Monsieur Khedir Ali, and verily he will pour his gold into my pockets.«

He went quickly to Ali's side and said:

»Monsieur, you are fortunate oh, monsieur, you are decidedly fortunate.«

»Have you seen her?« asked Khedir Ali.

»That I have, monsieur,« he answered, »and there are no men about save one very old man and two who have been crippled doubtless by the Sultan's soldiers. We will meet with no resistance.«

»Then let us rush at once upon her and carry her away captive.«

Gulnair and Zulanio did not retire at once to bed to sleep on reaching their hut. They sat in the darkness holding each other's hands and occasionally whispering their hopes and fears. The former were few, and the latter many. It was many hours—to them it seemed many ages—before daylight began stealing through the small windows.

Then they went out to listen, perhaps they might hear some sounds of strife in the distance. But the conflict that was raging was too faraway. The sun rose in the heavens bright and clear, the birds sang and the mountain at that time had never seemed so peaceful and quiet.

The mountain women, who were accustomed to scenes of danger like the present, were going about their daily household duties as if nothing had occurred. Their husbands and friends had gone to fight their battle, and they knew not whether they would ever return or not, and yet they had learned not to borrow trouble.

There were two women, however, who were anxious and nervous about the success of the mountaineers. They were Gulnair and Zulanio. Their success meant their own liberties; their defeat meant slavery or death.

»I cannot but blame myself for this trouble,« said Gulnair sadly. »If it had not been for me this trouble would not have all happened. Then to think of the misery and perhaps death I have brought upon these people. Oh, Zulanio, it would have been better—far better— had I died, or contented myself with a life of slavery.«

»Do not blame yourself too harshly, sister,« said Zulanio. »You were the creature of some very unfortunate circumstances. All may yet be well—do not borrow trouble.«

Gulnair took from her bosom the small pistol which she carried there, looked at it a few moments, and asked herself how long it would be before she would have to use it on herself.

They were in the grove, having gone some little distance from the houses, hoping to hear something of their defenders. A voice from the thicket suddenly called to her in French:

»Mademoiselle it's a friend.«

Not recognizing the voice, but knowing that it was in the language in which Hal and Hank addressed her, Gulnair ran rapidly toward the spot.

A dark form sprang from the thicket, and seizing her arms, held her fast. She made a desperate effort to reach her pistol, and even got it partly from her bosom, but it was knocked from her hand, and she lifted in the arms of the hated Khedir Ali himself, and hurried from the scene a captive.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MOUNTAIN CHASE.

Hal and Hank learned from the Circassian that the conflict in the pass was over, and that every one of their enemies had perished.

Nothing was now left but to return to their homes.

»Do you think any of the Turks escaped?« Hal asked.

»None.«

»Was Khedir Ali among the slain?«

»No.«

»Then he has escaped.«

»Was he among them?«

»He was.«

»How know you?«

»I saw him when prisoner.«

It then occurred to them that as Khedir Ali had escaped, perhaps others had also.

»I think, Monsieur Abel, we would well go to the huts; this Khedir Ali and his myrmidons may take it, into their heads to go ahead of us and make trouble.«

»You speak wisely, Monsieur American,« said the Circassian; »and we shall go at once.«

The giant Circassian sounded his mountain horn, which called his men together about him, and they set out together. They had not gone far before they came upon one of their wounded mountaineers, who had crawled out a hole in the rocks, where he had fallen.

He spoke to Abel in the Moslem tongue, which the Americans did not understand. Abel seemed to become greatly excited, and for a few moments they conversed in an excited manner. Their faces and gesticulations indicated that something was wrong:

»What is it?« Hal asked.

»He says that Khedir Ali and five men passed him as he lay wounded in that hole,« said Abel.

»Where were they going?«

»Straight to our houses.«

»Did he hear them say anything?«

»Yes, but most, Khedir Ali said was to a Frenchman, and in the language of the Franks that he could not understand. But he did hear them speak of the white slave, Gulnair. Khedir intends to steal her while we are fighting, and escape in the tub over the precipice.«

»Then we must go—we must run at once.«

Hal and Hank had neither had their breakfast, but they did not think of hunger. Their anxiety to reach Gulnair and Zulanio before Khedir Ali and those cut-throats overtook them, outweighed hunger and fatigue. They had slept but half the night, and the march of twelve miles had been over the roughest, stoniest kind of ground.

Both were bruised and sore from innumerable wounds, but they seemed as fresh as when they started.

»Hank, let's not complain if we break our legs over these abominable rocks,« said Hal,

»Mine are almost broken now,« said Hank.

»But Gulnair is in danger. Haste—don't stop to think of sore feet or bruised shins.«

They did haste, but about half way they overtook another wounded mountaineer, who was slowly making his way toward the collection of huts.

»Have you seen Khedir Ali and his men?« asked Abel.

»Yes, they went past here, and I seeing them coming, got out of the way until they had passed, for I knew they would slaughter me if I should be found.«

»Did they go straight ahead.«

»They did.«

»How long since.«

»They must be fully two miles ahead of you,« said the wounded mountaineer.

When this had been translated to Hal, he turned to Abel and said:

»We will not overtake them before they reach the huts.«

»No, that would be utterly impossible,« returned Khedir. »They are too far ahead of us.«

»Is it nearer to the bluff than to the huts?«

»Yes.«

»Is there a nearer path, a cut off, by which we can reach it?«

»There is.«

»Lead us to it.«

Abel started along the mountain path at a trot, bounding over stones and obstacles with a fleetness and agility which seemed never to tire. Hal and Hank

were next him, and after them came the members of the Circassian's band all at a trot.

They had gone about half a mile, when they came to a path which led off to the right.

Down this narrow defile, winding in and out among the rocks and bushes, around hillocks and down narrow dells, the giant Circassian led the way at a swinging gait, which seemed never to tire. On, on and on, followed by Hal, Hank, and the other mountaineers, at a run.

The boys breathed heavily. The perspiration was streaming from the faces of the American boys, and they were panting for breath; but neither of them lagged or complained of exhaustion.

»It's a life and death matter,« Hal thought, and I will die rather than she shall be dragged back a captive to Constantinople.«

The way was rough, and in places the path so narrow that one could scarcely squeeze through between the rocks and bushes, and to the boys it was sometimes a miracle how the giant mountaineer managed to get through at all.

But he somehow got through the narrow places more easily than smaller men. He ran always a few rods ahead, and despite the desperate determination of Hal and Hank, he frequently had to stop for them.

»How far are we from the bluff now?« Hal asked.

»Four miles,« the Circassian answered.

Four miles yet to go, and their clothes already wet with perspiration. But they ran on, on and on. Birds flitted by out of the bushes and the mountain hares fled from before them and still they ran on.

»How far are we now from the bluff?« Hal asked.

»Three miles.«

»Three miles! and they have doubtless reached the huts.«

»Yes.«

»How far is it from the huts to the bluffs?«

»Two and a half miles.«

»A half a mile the start of us.«

»They have; but they will be encumbered with a prisoner,« said the mountaineer.

»That is in our favor.«

And they ran on—ran with the speed of madmen. The sun rose higher and his hot rays beamed down with merciless fury upon the travelers. Hal and Hank found

the perspiration dripping from their faces, and their breathing became at every moment more labored and difficult.

They came to an open part of the country where the mountain breeze fanned their cheeks and greatly relieved them. They ran on, and on, down into the rocky woods again.

»How far now?« Hal asked, in a voice somewhat indistinct.

»Two miles.«

»Two miles yet. Oh, will we be too late?«

»Not if you can hold up.«

»I will if I die.«

The long chase over the mountain was telling, however, even upon the rugged mountaineers. They were lagging behind and blowing hard. Only the tireless herculean Circassian seemed to never weary. His powerful limbs were like huge machinery which nothing save time would wear out.

He continued his long sweeping trot with even strides over the rough ground, never seeming to tire.

»How far now?«

»One mile.«

On, on, and on they ran, the hot blood rushing in great thumping jerks through their veins. Hal's head grew heavy, the world seemed a mist before him, and he was hardly able to keep on his feet, and yet he ran on, and on, staggering and stumbling as he ran; but keeping on his feet.

»How far?« he asked, panting for breath.

»Half a mile.«

Only a half a mile. But could they make it?«

The American boys were now scarce able to stand. Their clothes were saturated with perspiration, and the sweat even dripped from their faces.

Before them loomed up the spur of a hillock, and the giant Circassian, who seemed as fresh as when he first left his mountain hut at midnight, said:

»Once around that spur of the mountain and we will be in full view of the pass. If they are in sight we can see them.«

They ran or rather staggered on like a train running at a rate of speed greater than it could stand.

On, on, around the spur, and in full view of the long level stretch of plateau at the top of the bluff, up which they had been drawn.

»Do you see them?« Hal asked.

»No.«

»Thank Heaven, we are in time.«

»Yes.«

But a moment later the great mountain chief cried:

»No, by Allah! They are even now at the tubs. See!«

Down close to the edge of the vast precipice could be seen clustered together a half a dozen or more dark figures.

Hal had a field-glass which Hank had given him, and raising it to his eyes, swept that part of the plateau even as he ran.

At the bluff he at last made out the tall, giant-like form of Khedir Ali, holding the white slave with one hand, and his drawn sword in the other.

»Are we in rifle range yet?« Hal asked.

»No.«

Again he raised his glass and swept the plateau next the bluff.

The features of the hateful, cowardly face of Alphonse Beaumont, who seemed to be the principal genius who was planning and dictating the means of escaping with the beautiful white slave.

They have not been discovered as yet; but now as they are in rifle range Alphonse sees them, and shouts:

»Mondieu—parblieu, monsieur, see, we must be quick. Diablo is come.«

Khedir Ali, raising his eyes, sees a dozen dark mountaineers. and the two Americans coming toward him..

»Haste—haste—quick, get the tub over.«

One of his followers seizes the great tub and drags it to the edge of the precipice, when a bullet from Abel's gun goes through his arm and he drops it with a howl. The tub fell and rolled over the precipice, but was held by the rope suspended some ten feet below.

»Hold!« cried Hal, dropping upon one knee and leveling his gun at the part of the rope which was over the edge of the bluff. He took a quick but sure aim, and his finger pressed the trigger.

A sharp report rang out on the mountain air, and the rope was cut in twain by the whizzing shot, and the tub fell down, down to the rocks below.

Old Khedir Ali realized what had been done, saw that they were surrounded by overwhelming numbers, and their only hope of escape cut off. With a yell of baffled rage, he seized Gulnair in his arms as if she had been an infant, and raised her above his head to throw her over the cliff and dash her to pieces on the rocks below.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

Hal realized that in order to save Gulnair from an awful death he must execute the finest piece of marksmanship he had ever yet done. It was nothing less than to shoot Khedir Ali as he held the girl above his head to dash her over the precipice.

Hal raised his rifle, holding it in hands that were as steady and immovable as the rocks about him; and when he had a good bead upon the head of Khedir Ali while he was yet three paces from the edge of the bluff, his finger touched the trigger. A little white puff of smoke, a sharp, stunning report, and Khedir Ali, who was not expecting this, staggered backward and sank upon the ground.

Gulnair, who had swooned with fright, lay helpless and motionless at his side.

The boys, followed by the mountaineers, ran forward and the Turks fled in every direction.

Alphonse Beaumont threw himself down upon his knees and began to beg for mercy.

»Oh, monsieurs—good monsieurs, do have mercy on me—I am but a poor man trying to pick up an honest living, indeed, that is all.«

»You are a beauty of honesty,« said Hank with a sneer.

»Kill him,« cried Abel, who thought the contemptible coward little worthy the steel of himself, while four Turks were still at large. 'Kill him, Americans, and we will go after the others.«.Then turning to his companions he said: »See that no one escapes.«

Away they went, while Alphonse continued to bawl and beg for mercy. Hal devoted himself to restoring Gulnair to consciousness, and Hank stood guard over the unscrupulous Alphonse.

»Oh, spare me, monsieur, and I will be your slave, indeed I will.«

»Alphonse Beaumont, you are a cowardly, treacherous dog,« said Hank, »and I feel that I would do you a good turn to throw you over the bluff.«

»Oh, monsieur, indeed do not, indeed, I am the best friend you ever had, I would die for you.«

»You may have a chance to; I shall not harm you myself; but I can not answer for Abel Lazoni. His oath is to slay all who reach this plateau, and he has no confidence in you.«

At this Alphonse began to scream, bewail his fate, beat his head frantically against the earth.

At this moment the rapid discharge of firearms from the woods told that the mountaineers had overtaken the fugitives. It was a matter of short work. They were shot down and left in the woods for vultures and wild beasts, and their pursuers returned to where Alphonse was wildly begging and imploring his life.

He grew even more frantic at their approach and tried to cling to Hank.

But Abel Lazoni seized him in his arm of iron and dragged the treacherous coward away behind some rocks. Hal and Hank turned their faces from the screaming, begging traitor.

A few moments later the report of a pistol rang out on the air, and the screams died away in a groan, and a heavy body tumbled over the bluff.

Gulnair had fully recovered, and after a short rest our friends returned to the huts.

There was no danger of further pursuit at present, and they began to talk and plan for leaving the country.

It was decided at last that Hank with a single guide was to go to the city of Constantinople and find Captain Newton of the *Aurora*, who was still lying in the harbor, and bring the ship to a certain uninhabited point on the Mediterranean coast, where Hal and the girls were to be.

One evening Gulnair told the story of her capture when a child in her little mountain cottage, and of being taken to Constantinople, and sold into slavery.

Abel Lazoni listened to her simple yet touching narrative with marked interest, and at the conclusion, the giant Circassian cried:

»Allah be praised, my child—my own little Gulnair found, found once more! My heart has long told me that you were very near and dear to me; and now, you are my own little long-lost Gulnair!«

He then explained that he was the mountain shepherd from whom the girl was stolen, and it was an evening of general rejoicing. Hal offered all who would go with him a free passage to America, and Gulnair's father was not long in making up his mind to quit his native mountain and a life of outlawry and go to America. Zulanio had already determined to go to America also.

Next day Hank set out for Constantinople, being let down the precipice by means of ropes. A single guide went with him.

The Circassian chief, Hal, and both girls, under a strong guard, set out by another route for the Mediterranean coast. They went down the mountain precipice by means of one of the great vats, and then through many hidden secret passes, took their course along the mountains.

It took several days to descend the slope, and then, when they had reached the low lands, the guards were discharged.

Gulnair's mother had been dead for some years, and her father had no ties to bind him to a life of danger and outlawry which must have but one termination, a felon's death.

Gulnair was not willing to give up her newfound father so easily, and she had persuaded him to go with them to the land of freedom, where no cruel sultans, kings or tyrants could oppress them.

Hal and Hank had added their entreaties to hers.

»I have heard much of that glorious land of America,« he said, »and many times when I was goaded under the lash of tyrants, or hiding from them in the mountains and caverns, have I wished myself in that blessed land of freedom. We often talked of America, when in our mountain fastness. But,« he added sadly, »I wish that the journey had been taken before my darling Tabestka, Gulnair's mother, had died.«

Next morning the little party engaged a kibitka and driver, and were taken to the point on the Mediterranean coast agreed upon. They were there but a day or two when the Aurora hove in sight and picked them up.

The voyage to America was uneventful. The time was employed by the American boys in teaching the Circassians the English language, and by the time they reached Boston, all could speak it quite well.

We have little more to add. Hal and Gulnair after a few years, when he had reached full maturity, and she had acquired a thorough English education, were married. Hank had also taken a fancy to Zulanio, and they were married. Hal's father set up the two boys in the mercantile business in a Western city, and they are doing well.

A giant old grizzly bearded farmer in Illinois, who has grown prosperous in cattle raising, is Abel Lazoni, the father of **»GULNAIR, THE WHITE SLAVE.«** And thus we take leave of all our characters—trusting that they may continue as prosperous and happy for many years as they now are.

[THE END.]

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