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The Captain of the Janizaries By JAMES M. LUDLOW

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time, "but I have not returned yet; at least my return must not be known to the troops until the morning. We will take your tongue out if you tell any one I am back without bidding."

"You speak the Servian excellent well, captain."

"One must get used to it and every other tongue in commanding such a mixed crew as the sultan gathers into his army," said Constantine.

"You janizaries are wonderful men," replied the soldier. "You know all languages. There was the little aga I once—"

"No matter about that now," said Constantine, interrupting him. "I want you for a special duty. Can I trust you to do me an errand? If you do it well, you will be glad of it hereafter."

"Aye, sire, with my life, and my lips as mute as the horse's."

"I captured a girl last night. She knows something I would find out by close questioning. I must have her brought to the rear."

"Aye, the girl Koremi holds?"

"Yes, tell Koremi to loiter a little with her until I come up. We must not go far from this defile before I find out what she knows if I have to discover it with my dagger in her heart, for there are traitors among us. Last night there were Arnauts dressed as Moslems in the light."

"That I know," said the soldier, "for I tripped over a fellow myself hiding in the bushes who swore at me in good round Arnaut tongue. I ran him through and found a glaur corselet under his jacket."

Constantine took the ropes which held the horses the man was leading and, bidding him to haste, but be cautious that no one but Koremi should know the message, followed slowly behind.

It was nearly an hour later when the form of the soldier appeared in the road just before him.

"Right!" said Constantine.

"Right!" was the response, first to the assumed captain, then repeated to some one behind him. Two other forms appeared, one of them a woman.

Anticipating his orders, the second trooper untied a rope from about his own waist and handed it, together with the rein of the horse the woman rode, to Constantine. Then, making a low obeisance, the two troopers withdrew a little distance to the rear.

to extreme danger against the slightest reference to herself as the young Mara de Streeses and that she should insist upon her identity as the daughter of the Servian peasant Milosch and the sister of Constantine.

"My rough arms have often cradled thee," said Kablovitch, "but now you have a nobler and stronger protector in our country's father, the great Castriot. To him you must go, for it is no longer safe in these lonely valleys. Under his strong arm and all watchful eye you will be amply protected. There are nameless enemies of the old house of De Streeses whom we must avoid as vigilantly as we avoid the Turks."

It was determined that Constantine should make a detour with her and approach Stetigrade from the south, giving out that they were fugitives from the lower country, which the enemy had also been raiding.

The colonel stated to his under-officers, in hearing of the men, that the young Turk was really one of Castriot's scouts and that the young woman was an accomplice. Borrowing from one and another sufficient Albanian costumes to substitute for Constantine's disguise, Kablovitch dismissed the couple.

Two days later a beautiful girl, accompanied by her brother, who was as unlike her as the thorn bush is unlike the graceful flowering clematis that festoons its limbs, both of them in apparent destitution, refugees from near the Greek border, entered the town of Stetigrade. By order of the general, to whom their piteous story was told by Kablovitch, for he had chanced, so he said, to come upon them as they were inquiring their way to the town, they were quartered with a family whose house was not far from the citadel.

CHAPTER XIII. THE battlements of Stetigrade lay, like a ruffled collar, upon enormous shoulders of rock rising high above the surrounding country. Over them rose, like a massive head, the citadel with its bartizans projecting as a crown about the brow.

The assaults which Sultan Amurath launched against the place had been as frequent as the early summer showers, and his armies were beaten to pieces as the rain rebounded in spray and ran in streams from the rocks. The chagrin of the baffled sultan reflected itself in the discouragement of his generals and the demoralization of their men. The envy of the leaders of the other corps and branches of the service was excited against the janizaries, to whose unrivalled training and daring were due whatever minor victories had been won and whatever exploits worthy of mention had been performed.

A lofty tent, whose projecting center pole bore the glittering brass crescent and star and before the entrance to which a single horse tail hung from the long spear, denoted the headquarters of a sanjak bey. In front of the tent walked two men in eager and not amiable conversation. The one was the bey, whose huge turban of white, inwound with green, indicated that his martial zeal was supplemented by equal enthusiasm for his faith and that he was no less a champion against the infidels the tool of a more monotonous though more satisfactory pilgrimage to Mecca. His companion was an aga of the janizaries, second only in rank to the chief aga.

The latter was speaking with a wrath which his courteous words but ill concealed:

"I do not impugn your honor or the sincerity of your motives, Caraza Bey, in making your accusation against our Captain Ballaban, but the well known jealousy which is everywhere manifested against our corps compels me to believe not a single word to the discredit of him or any of the Yeni-Tscheri without indubitable proof."

"But your upstart captain's guilt can be proved, if not to your personal satisfaction at least before those who will not care to ask your assent to their judgment," replied the other, not attempting to veil his hatred of the aga any more than his purpose of crushing the one of whom they were speaking.

"What will the lies of a whole sanjak of your hirelings avail against the honor of a janizary?" replied the aga. "The janizaries will take no suggestion from any but the padishah."

"A curse on the brag of the janizaries! The arrogance of the Christian renegades needs better warrant than Ballaban can give it," sneered the bey. "If you like, let the matter rest as it is. The whole army believes that one of your dervish capped heroes—the best of the brood, I imagine—deserted his comrades in battle, and all for the sake of a captive girl."

"It is a lie!" shouted the aga, drawing his sword upon him.

The attitude of the two officers drew a crowd, who rushed from all sides to witness the duel. Both were masters of sword play, so that neither obtained any sanguinary advantage before they were separated by the arrival of the chief aga, who forbade his subaltern to continue the conflict. Upon hearing the occasion of the affray the chief said:

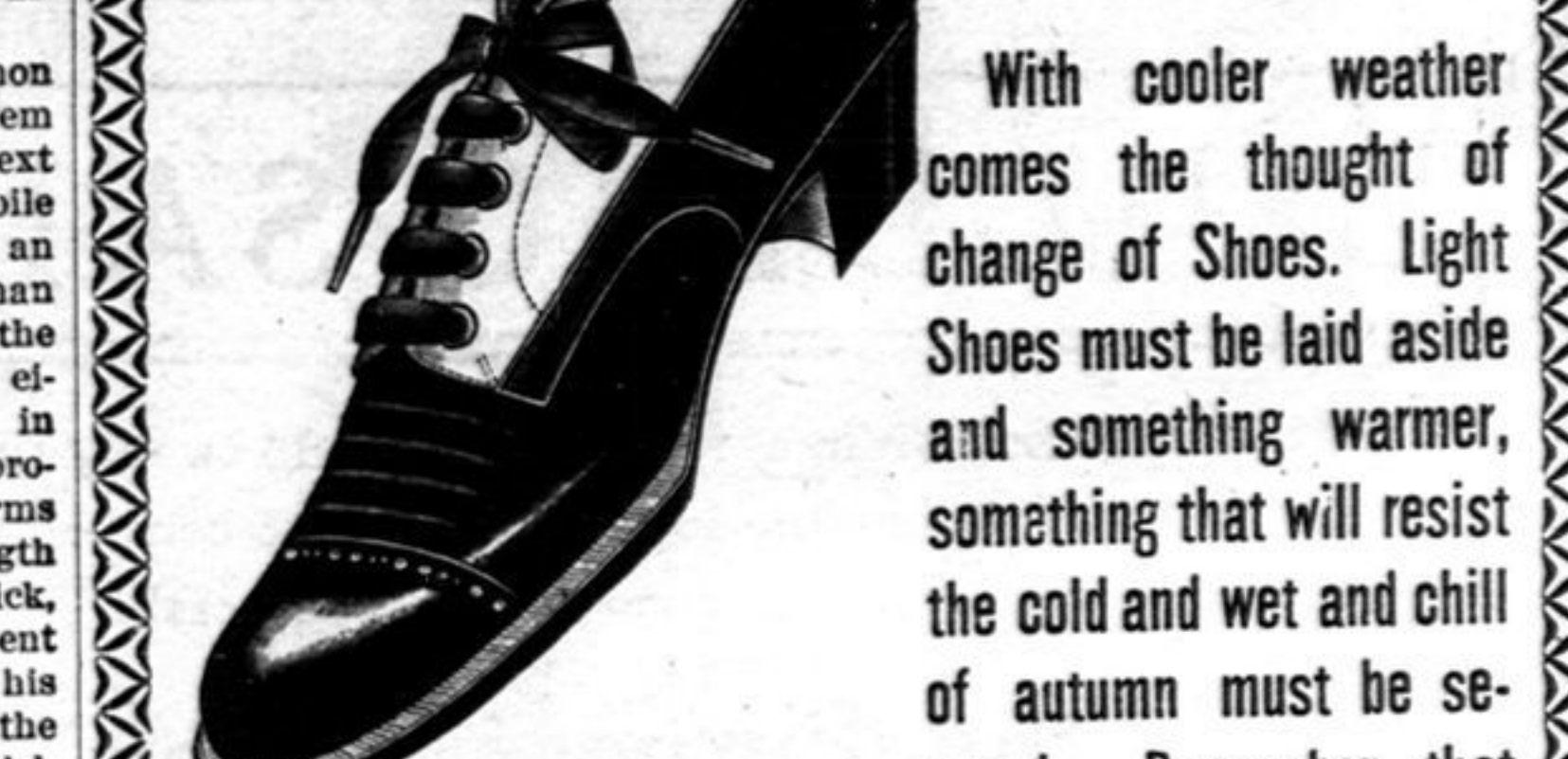
"The trial of Captain Ballaban shall be had, with the publication of the fact that Caraza Bey has assumed the position of his accuser, and in the event of his charge proving false he shall atone for his malice by submitting to a punishment the captain may indicate, and the force of the janizaries shall execute it, though they cut the throats of his entire command in order to do it. We must first vindicate the honor of the corps and then take vengeance upon its detractors. I demand that Caraza Bey make good his charge tomorrow at the sixth hour or accept the judgment of coward and villain, which our court shall then proclaim to the army."

At the appointed time on the day following the tent of the chief aga was the gathering place of the notable officers of the corps. The canvas sides of the tent were removed, making it an open pavilion and inviting inspection and audience from any who desired to approach. A divan was at one side and made a semicircle of about half the tent. Upon this sat the chief aga, his cushion slightly raised above those at his side, which were occupied by the agas of lower rank.

The chief aga waved his hand to an attendant, and the military court was formally opened. Several cases were disposed of before that of Captain Ballaban was called.

The expectation not only of common soldiers, but also of officials, led them to crane their necks to look at the next comer. Even the ordinary immobile features of the chief relaxed into an expression of anxiety as a young man walked down the aisle made by the reverent receding of the crowd to either side. He was not graceful in form. His body was beyond the proportions of his legs, though his arms compensated for any lack in the length of his lower limbs. His neck was thick, the head round, with full development of forehead, though that portion of his face was somewhat concealed by the short, bushy masses of red hair which protruded beneath his rimless janizary cap. His face was homely, but strongly marked, evincing force of character as clearly as the convolutions of his muscles evinced animal strength and endurance. The brightness of his eye atoned for any lack of beauty in his features, as did his free and manly bearing make ample amends for deficiency in grace of form. Altogether he was a man to attract one's attention and hold it pleasantly.

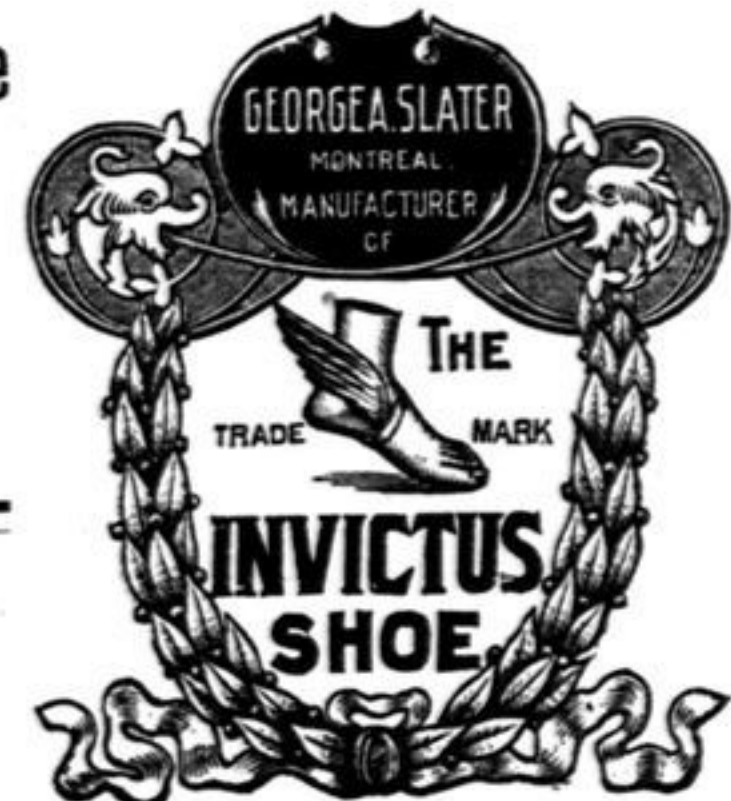
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"Constantine!" there, and now quite a plot of grass was growing from the soft soil. The eye could not discern it for the darkness was rayless. But Constantine remembered the grassy stretch was just beyond the point of rock they were passing. The horses were walking slowly, being allowed by their riders to pick their way along the stony road. Halting them at a few yards' distance, they