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The Captain of the Janizaries

By JAMES M. LUDLOW

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of our service, which he would keep with dead lips rather than live to tell them. But I shall be his witness, and you, my brothers, shall be his judges. Captain Ballaban was recalled from the raid by our brother, Sinam, aga of the division to which the captain belongs; but, alas, the sword of Scanderbeg has loosed Sinam's soul for flight to paradise, and he could not testify to this man's fidelity. But I know the order of Sinam. In this very tent it was written. And, though the faithful messenger who carried it was slain in after conflict, the order was executed by Captain Ballaban to every tablet," tapping his forehead as he spoke.

"Ballaban! Ballaban!" cried the multitude, lifting the brave fellow upon their shoulders.
"Death to Caraza Bey! Down with the lying villain!" rose the cry, the crowd beginning to move, as if animated by a common spirit, to seek the envious commandant of the neighboring corps. But they halted at the tent side, waiting for the sign of permission from their chief, who by the motion of his hand forbade the assault which would have brought on a terrific battle between the janizaries and their rivals throughout the army.
"We shall deal with Caraza Bey hereafter if his shame does not send him skulking from the camps," said the chief, resuming his sitting posture and restoring order about him.
"Summon the witnesses again," he proceeded.
"You, Lovitch, testified truly as to Captain Ballaban's absence and may go, but you twin rascals who swore to his escape with the girl, your heads shall go to Caraza Bey and your black souls to the seventh hell. Executioner, do your office!"

"Hold!" cried Ballaban as the man drew his scimiter. "Upon my return to the company I found my fair captive gone and under such strange circumstances that I can see that these good fellows may be honest in what they have stated. I bespeak thy mercy, sire, for them."
"Captain Ballaban's will shall be ours," replied the chief, with a wave of his hand, dismissing the assemblage. As the crowd withdrew he said, "My brothers, the agas, will remain, and Captain Ballaban."
The sides of the tent were put up. The guard patrolled without at a distance of sixty paces that no one might overhear the conversation in the council.

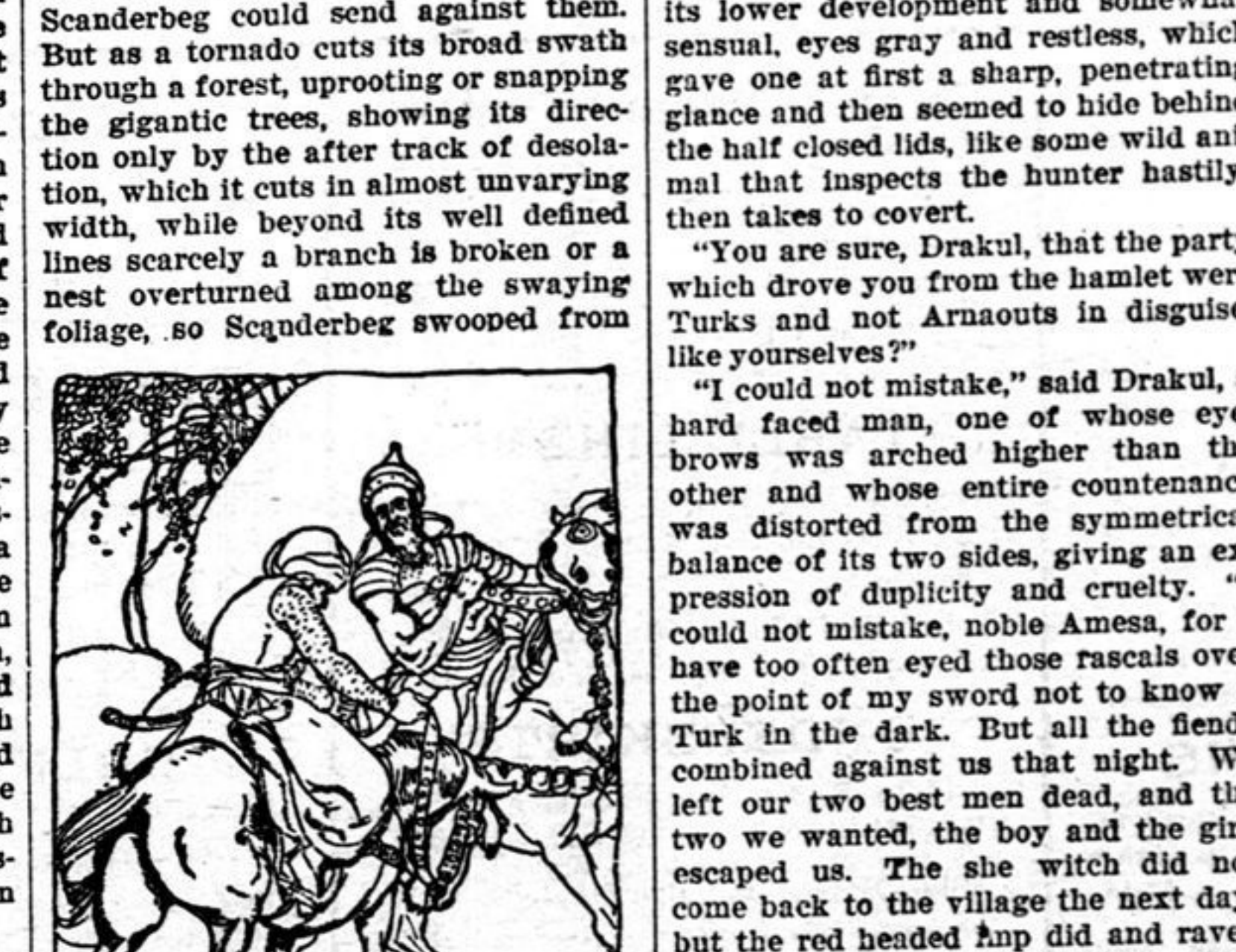
CHAPTER XIV.
"H AS Captain Ballaban any explanation of this conspiracy against him?" was asked.
"None!" was the laconic reply. But after a moment's pause he added: "Perhaps there was no conspiracy, except as our jealous neighbors are willing to take advantage of every unseemly circumstance that can be twisted to point against any of the Yeni-Tscheri. This may explain something. The girl that I captured at the gliaour village was no common peasant. Her face, as lit by the blazing konak, was of such beauty as I have never seen except in some dreams of my childhood. Her voice and manner in commanding me to liberate her were those of one well born or used to authority. It was well that that dull headed Koremi or she might have bewitched me into obeying her and letting her go. My belief is that the girl was rescued. It may be that our men were heavily bribed to give her up or that some personated myself and demanded her and that the story of my return may be thus accounted for, but I cannot see any treachery in Koremi's manner. If she was of any special value to Scanderbeg he would find some way of running her out, though he had to make a league with the devil and assume my shape to do it."
"But," said the second aga, "Caraza Bey's insult was none the less, if your surmise be true. We must wash it out in the blood of a hundred or so of his hirelings tomorrow."
The chief shook his head.
"But," continued the second aga, "the jealousy of our corps must be punished. You see how near it came to losing for us the life of one of our bravest. Caraza Bey must fight me tomorrow."
"Bravo!" cried all, while one added, "And let the challenge be public. That the entire force of the Yeni-Tscheri be on hand and all the troops of the Beyler Bey of Anatolia, and—lowering his voice—"we can manage it so that the fight become general and teach these reptiles of Asiatics that the Yeni-Tscheri are the right hand and the Beyler Bey of the empire!" said another.
"Aye, are the empire!" said another. "Let us have a scrimmage that will be interesting. The war with Scanderbeg is getting monotonous. One day he comes into our camp like a butcher into a slaughter pen, and the next day we are marched out to him to be slaughtered elsewhere. It requires one to stand this sort of life. Yes, let's do a little fighting in our own way and get rid of some of this soil

"I thank you for your counsel, aga," replied Ballaban, his face coloring as deep as his hair. "But there was one thing I saw with a waking eye."
"And what was that?"
"That there was but one well of water in the town of Sfetigrade, the one in the citadel court. But another thing I didn't see, though I searched the place for it, and that was a dog to throw into the well, or I would have thirsted the superstitious garrison out. They have eaten up the last cur."
"Then the surrender must come soon," said the aga.
"No," replied Ballaban, "for the general Moses Goleme came into the town as I was leaving, driving a flock of sheep which he had stolen from us, for he had cut off an entire train of provisions which had been sent to our camp from Adrianople."
"Then I must have you off at once on another errand, captain. You see yonder line of mountains off to the northwest. It may be necessary to shift the war to that region for awhile. Ivan Beg, the brother-in-law of Scanderbeg, has raised a pack of wild fiefs among those hills of his and is driving out all our friends. Nothing can stand against him unless it be the breasts of the Yeni-Tscheri. Scanderbeg may compel us to raise the siege of Sfetigrade, for he bleeds us as daily like a leech. A diversion after Ivan Beg will at least be more honorable than a return to Adrianople. Now I would know exactly the passes and best places for fortification in Ivan's country, and you, captain, are the man to find them out. You should be off at once. Take your time, and spy thoroughly, making a map and transmitting to me your notes. And while there feel the people. It is rumored that the young chieftain, Amesa, is restless under the leadership of Scanderbeg. If a dissension could be created among these Arnaouts, it would be well. Amesa has a large personal following in that north country, for his castle is just on the border of it."
"But," replied Ballaban, "I must first pluck the beard of that cowardly Caraza Bey!"

"No! I forbid it. Your blood is worth more in your own veins than anywhere else. I should not consent to your risking a drop of it in personal combat with any one except Scanderbeg himself."
The fight between the second aga and Caraza Bey did not take place. That worthy was conveniently sent by Sultan Amurath, who had learned of the feud, to look after certain turbulent Caramanians, and leaving behind him a wake of curses upon all janizaries, from the chief to the pot scourers, he took his departure for the Asiatic provinces.
Had he remained, the Turks would have had enough to occupy them without this gratuitous melee, for during the night scouts brought word that Scanderbeg had massed all his forces that were not behind the walls of Sfetigrade at a point to the east of the Turkish lines. Hardly had the army been faced to meet this attack when scouts came from the left, reporting serious depositions on that flank. Amurath in the uncertainty of the enemy's movement divided his host. The Asiatics were given the northern and the janizaries the southern defense, either of them outnumbering any force Scanderbeg could send against them. But as a tornado cuts its broad swath through a forest, uprooting or snapping the gigantic trees, showing its direction only by the after track of desolation, which it cuts in almost unvarying width, while beyond its well defined lines scarcely a branch is broken or a nest overturned among the swaying foliage, so Scanderbeg swooped from

CHAPTER XV.
UPON the southern slope of the Black mountain—that is, on the rising uplands which lead from Albania to Montenegro—lay the ancient and princely estates of the De Streeses. A dense forest of pines spread for miles, like a myriad of gigantic pillars in some vast temple. They seemed to support, as it were, some titanic dome surrounded with pinnacles and turrets, a huge cluster of jagged rocks, which was called by those who gazed upon it from leagues away "The Eyrle." In the midst of these great monoliths and hardly distinguishable from them rose the walls of the new castle which the vojvode, or chief, Amesa, had built upon the ruins of that destroyed at the time of the massacre of its former possessor.
The horse of the vojvode stood within the court, his head drooping and the white sweat foam drying upon his heated flanks. His master paced up and down the inclosure, engaged in low but excited conversation with a soldier.
The vojvode was of princely mien, tall, but compactly built, face full in its lower development and somewhat sensual, eyes gray and restless, which gave one at first a sharp, penetrating glance and then seemed to hide behind the half closed lids, like some wild animal that inspects the hunter hastily, then takes to covert.
"You are sure, Drakul, that the party which drove you from the hamlet were Turks and not Arnaouts in disguise, like yourselves?"
"I could not mistake," said Drakul, a hard faced man, one of whose eyebrows was arched higher than the other and whose entire countenance was distorted from the symmetrical balance of its two sides, giving an expression of duplicity and cruelty. "I could not mistake, noble Amesa, for I have too often eyed those rascals over the point of my sword not to know a Turk in the dark. But all the fiends combined against us that night. We left our two best men dead, and the two we wanted, the boy and the girl, escaped us. The she witch did not come back to the village the next day, but the red headed lup did and raved like a hyena when he found the girl missing. I watched him as he suddenly went off, doubtless to some spot they both knew of. The young thief stole the clothes off a dead Turk. The next day we spied him again, this time with that Arnaud-Kabilovitch, Albanian-Servian, forester-colonel or whatever he may be, who came back when Castriot did. The fellow escaped us a second time."
"Track him! Track him!" cried Amesa spitefully. "I will make you rich, Drakul, the day you bring me that fox's brush of red hair from his head."
"I have tracked him and could take you to the very spot where he and the girl are today," said the man. "Come this way, my noble Amesa," leading him to the side of the court commanding a far stretch of country to the northwest. "Now let your eye follow Lake Scutari along the left shore, then up the great river. Not two leagues from the mountain spur that bends the stream out of your sight, at the hamlet, just off the road into your Uncle Ivan's country—"
The stargeshina has a red goller like a turkeycock? I know every hut in the hamlet," interrupted Amesa. "But why think you she is there?"
"Why? I have seen her and him with her. I followed the fellow day after day. Once I saw him yonder on the spur. He clipped the bark of a tree and in the smooth spot cut a line. A little beyond he did the same thing. He spied this way and that way with all the pains one would take to pick a way for an army. Then he took a roll

"You and your beast are well matched," cast to west through the very center of the Turkish encampment, gathering up arms and provisions and strewing his track with the bodies of the slain. By the time that the Moslems were sufficiently concentrated to offer effective resistance the assailants were gone.
At the head of the victorious band Scanderbeg rode a small and ungainly but tough and tireless animal, like most of the Albanian horses, which were better adapted to threading their way down the pathless mountain sides than to curvetting in military parade, their lack of natural ballast being made up by the enormous burdens they were trained to carry.
The figure and bearing of Scanderbeg, however, amply compensated the lack of martial picturesqueness in his steed. He was in full armor except that his sword arm was bare. His beard of commingled yellow and gray fell far down upon the steel plates of his corselet. His helmet, stuck far back upon his head, showed the massive brow, which seemed of ample height from the Albanian custom of clipping short or shaving the hair off from the upper forehead.



"Yes, it was a dream of yours, no doubt, captain," said the chief, "for when a young fellow like you once gets a fair woman in his arms, as you say you had her in yours the night of the raid, she never gets out of the embrace of his imagination. He will see her everywhere and go about trying to hug her shadow. Beware illusions, captain! They use up a fellow's thoughts, make him too meek eyed to see things as a soldier should."
"I saw one thing which gave me a hint I may use some day. At a village the women were carrying water from a spring far down in a ravine, though there was a fine flowing fountain quite near them. It seems that a dog had got into the fountain about a month before and was drowned. These Dibrans believe that if any one should drink the water of such a spring before as many days have passed as the dog has hairs on his tail the water will make his bowels rot and his soul go into a dog's body when he dies."
"The next night I spent inside the walls of Sfetigrade."
"No!" cried the chief. "Why, man, you must fly the air with the witches!"
"Not at all. I have some acquaintances in that snug little place. That night I lodged with a worthy family of Sfetigrade, pretending that I was a poor fugitive from the very town we had raided a few nights before, and I saw there the very captive I had taken. She lay asleep on a cot just within a doorway, unless I was asleep myself and dreaming, as I half believe I was."

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