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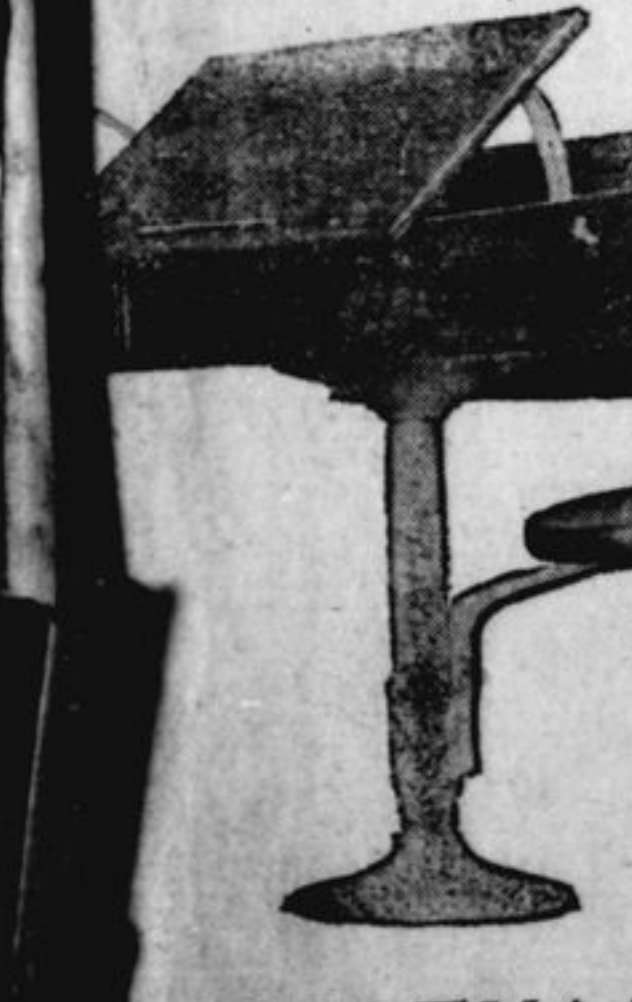
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# A SOLDIER OF COMMERCE

By JOHN ROE GORDON  
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CHAPTER I.  
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF AN AMERICAN.  
THE senior member of the firm  
of Townsend & Burdick, man-  
ufacturers of windmills,  
pumps and other appurte-  
nances of that nature, was serenely  
contemplating in his New York office  
the increased revenues he would re-  
ceive from the large sales to be made  
by Harvey Irons, their hustling, en-  
ergetic representative in Russia. The  
last letter written by Mr. Townsend  
to Mr. Irons was to the effect that the  
latter's suggestion that a market could  
be had in Russia was a good one and  
for him to use his own judgment.

Thereafter there were no letters sent  
between the senior member and the  
agent, but cablegrams, mostly convey-  
ing large orders, frequently came from  
Mr. Irons, and other cablegrams, con-  
veying money, were sent by Mr. Town-  
send. Orders came from St. Peters-  
burg, Moscow and other cities. As  
time went on the increase of business  
gave warrant for the roseate hue of  
Mr. Townsend's dreams.  
While Mr. Townsend was contem-  
plating his happy future he was start-  
led at receiving the following mes-  
sage from Paris:  
Expelled from Russia. Going back an-  
other way.  
IRON.

As Mr. Townsend was somewhat  
hazy on the subject of Russia and had  
no information as to how Irons had  
gone in on his first visit, it can easily  
be imagined that Mr. Townsend had  
very little idea of what the other way  
of going back chosen by Mr. Irons  
might be.  
He cabled to Harvey Irons as fol-  
lows:  
What do you mean? Answer at once.  
TOWNSEND.

He waited in vain for an answer.  
He became greatly perturbed and con-  
ferred with his partner.  
“I tell you, Burdick,” he said, “Irons  
must be in trouble. I can learn nothing.  
There is something left unex-  
plained.”  
“There always was,” said Mr. Bur-  
dick. “Irons is a man who acts ac-  
cording to what he finds on the spot.  
We can't sit in New York and tell him  
what to do in Russia. If he says he is  
expelled and is going back, he is going  
back. Leave him alone.”  
“I can do nothing else,” said Mr.  
Townsend, “as I do not know where  
he is.”

“I do. He is in Russia. Just wait.  
You will get big orders from Russia  
yet. Irons against the entire police  
of the empire. My confidence in him  
is so unshakable I believe—well, I'll  
bet you a thousand dollars he turns  
up all right with Russian orders.”  
“I'll not take the bet. I share your  
confidence. We'll wait.”  
And so they waited.  
Hafiz Effendi sat crosslegged on a  
divan watching the passing show.  
Hafiz Effendi was himself a part of the  
show, but this did not concern him.  
Hafiz was morose.  
“Curses upon the Muscovite!” he  
muttered as he drew long breaths from  
his chibouk and watched an elderly  
Georgian and his daughter pass by.  
“The new law is in effect and the  
bride for the prince not yet obtained.  
And Mizik, the officer of the ameer, will  
soon be here to ascertain the truth.”  
Hafiz Effendi had not traveled all the  
way from Constantinople simply to  
witness the fair at Tiflis. Hafiz had  
made his wealth in the business of sup-  
plying wealthy Osmanli with pretty  
Circassian or Georgian girls for their  
wives, and his income had been rudely  
stopped by the new order of the czar.  
The hated Muscovite government had  
interdicted the trade in women which  
had made Circassia and Georgia in-  
famous.

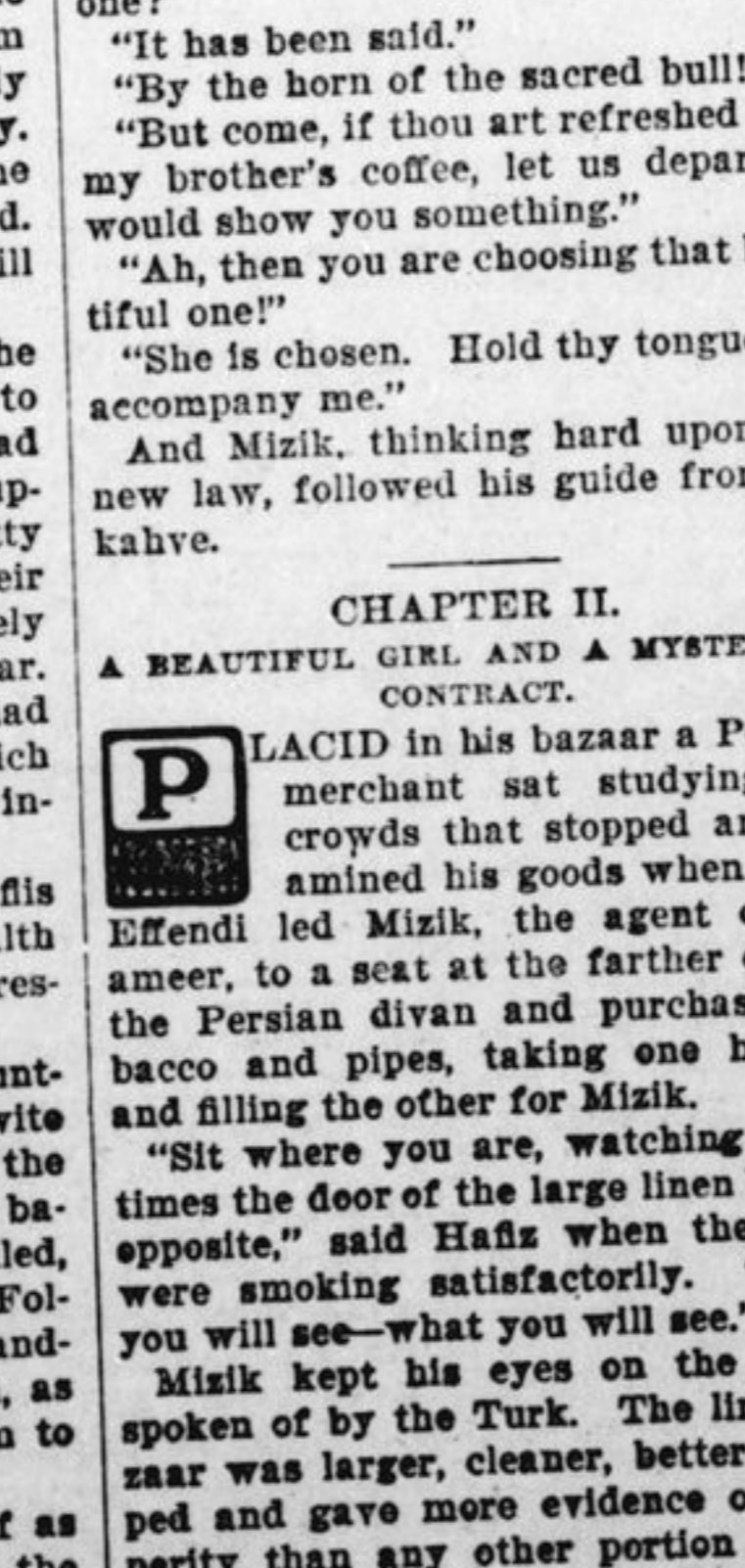
Here was the annual fair at Tiflis  
under full sway, and all the wealth  
and beauty of the Caucasus were pre-  
sent.  
Hafiz Effendi shook his head, grun-  
ted another curse against the Muscovite  
and then, placing his chibouk in the  
care of Muley, the keeper of the ba-  
zaar, wandered, or, rather, waddled,  
following in his wake was a tall, hand-  
some young officer, whose uniform, as  
well as his accent, proclaimed him to  
be from St. Petersburg.  
“Ah,” said this officer to himself as  
he saw the frown on the face of the  
Turk, “our friend Hafiz seems indig-  
nant. He eyes every pretty woman  
with something like greed. I'll keep  
my eye on him.”

For Captain Sergius Orskoff was in  
command of the department of the  
service that had for its object the ob-  
literation of the slave trade between  
the Caucasus and Persia and Turkey.  
Men from all parts were at Tiflis, ex-  
hibiting in the bazaars furs and coats  
of rare wools from Persia, silks from  
China, costly pipes of every conceiv-  
able shape and size carved by hand by  
the men of Trebizond, shoes from Mas-  
sachusetts, knives from England—in-  
deed, the products of the world were  
brought out that those who walked  
could see and perchance purchase.  
Hafiz Effendi turned and saw the  
dark eyes of Captain Orskoff fixed

said, with his usual Turkish saluta-  
tion. “It is one that brings the world  
together.”  
“Good enough; but remember there  
is nothing sold here save what is ex-  
hibited for sale.”  
The Turk opened his eyes wide, as if  
in astonishment. “Who could have  
asked more? Is there not enough?” he  
asked, gazing at a pretty Circassian  
who passed with a soldier.  
“Yes, it seems enough; only remem-  
ber,” said Orskoff, walking off with  
scant courtesy.  
“Figs! Dogs! These Muscovites are  
unbearable!” growled Hafiz.  
He left the busy portion of the fair,  
went to the baths, returned to the ba-  
zar kept by his friend Muley and re-  
sumed his pipe. The passing show  
seemed endless. Officers in brilliant  
uniforms, merchants, women of every  
degree, crowded the thoroughfares.  
The reverie of Hafiz was interrupted.  
“How is the day? Does the sun shine  
full upon thee, O Hafiz Effendi?” asked  
a soft voice at his side. He beheld  
a warrior of some peculiar race, dark  
skinned and gayly uniformed.  
“Ah, hast thou come, O Mizik? The  
day is well. The sun never fails to  
shine upon the faithful,” replied Hafiz.  
“It is so, O wise and mighty Hafiz.”  
“And how is my friend, the great and  
heaven born ameer of Bokhara?” asked  
Hafiz.  
“Our lord is well, but he is growing  
impatient that thy mission has not  
yet been fulfilled. It was told to me  
in the sacred precincts of the palace  
to come to Tiflis, seek out Hafiz Ef-  
fendi and ascertain if he has found  
what the ameer wishes.”  
“The prettiest woman in all Geor-  
gia,” said Hafiz, with a smile.  
“For the bride of our young Prince  
Davonce. And thou hast been prom-  
ised much wealth, Hafiz Effendi.”  
“It is true, and I have found the  
young woman. But the accused Mus-  
covite ruler has made a new law which  
prohibits the sale of the women. We  
must work slowly and with caution.”  
“Then is the thing that is so near  
the heart of my lord, that his son shall  
have the most beautiful bride in the  
world, an impossibility?”  
“I did not say it was an impossibil-  
ity,” said Hafiz testily. “It is danger-  
ous. Speak in a low tone. Better  
come to the kahve kept by my brother.  
There we can talk.”  
Hafiz led the way to a coffee house,  
where they resumed their chat.  
“While you are in Tiflis look not up-  
on the women,” said Hafiz. “The Mus-  
covite emperor has made this new law,  
and there are soldiers to spy upon us  
and compel us to obey. It is absurd,  
for these women are happier when in  
the luxury their Osmanli husbands  
give them than with these pigs and  
dogs, who are rude and have no  
wealth.”  
“But why has the czar made this  
law?”  
“Because he likes not the fact that  
our princes have more than one wife.”  
“And has he, the ruler of the great-  
est country on earth, not more than  
one?”  
“It has been said.”  
“By the horn of the sacred bull!”  
“But come, if thou art refreshed with  
my brother's coffee, let us depart. I  
would show you something.”  
“Ah, then you are choosing that beau-  
tiful one?”  
“She is chosen. Hold thy tongue and  
accompany me.”  
And Mizik, thinking hard upon this  
new law, followed his guide from the  
kahve.

CHAPTER II.  
A BEAUTIFUL GIRL AND A MYSTERIOUS  
CONTRACT.  
PLACID in his bazaar a Persian  
merchant sat studying the  
crowds that stopped and ex-  
amined his goods when Hafiz  
Effendi led Mizik, the agent of the  
ameer, to a seat at the farther end of  
the Persian divan and purchased to-  
bacco and pipes, taking one himself  
and filling the other for Mizik.  
“Sit where you are, watching at all  
times the door of the large linen ba-  
zaar opposite,” said Hafiz when the pipes  
were smoked satisfactorily. “There  
you will see—what you will see.”  
Mizik kept his eyes on the object  
spoken of by the Turk. The linen ba-  
zaar was larger, cleaner, better equip-  
ped and gave more evidence of pros-  
perity than any other portion of the  
fair within sight. Bales of finest linen  
were displayed. Near the end of a long  
table could be seen an elderly merchant  
in Georgian costume watching his sev-  
eral employees handle and sell his  
goods.  
“That, my friend from Bokhara,”  
said Hafiz, “is Ignatz Biarteklis, the  
richest merchant in Tiflis.”  
“And will he supply that for which  
I came?”  
“He will.”  
“Good. Why do we not go to him in-  
stead of sitting idly here?”  
“For the excellent reason, my friend,  
that he does not know he is going to  
perform this generous act.”  
Mizik shook his head again. He did  
not understand this slow and laborious  
method. His way, the way of his peo-  
ple, would have been to attack Tiflis  
and take what was wanted. Mizik had  
learned the power of the arm

that reaches from St. Petersburg to  
the Caspian. Suddenly he started from  
his seat.  
“Curses!” said Hafiz. “You will be  
shot, and you will have me shot by  
the Muscovite. There he is.”  
“There she is!” said Mizik breath-  
lessly.  
“There he is, as I have spoken. His  
eyes are not now turned this way, but  
hold yourself with calmness. Orskoff  
knows things when he sees them.”  
At that moment the officer men-  
tioned, who had been sauntering along  
the crowded street, stopped to speak to a  
girl who had come to the door of the  
bazaar of Ignatz Biarteklis. She was  
a girl who would cause others than  
Mizik to stare. Her complexion was  
like the blush of a peach. Her eyes  
were black and shaded with long, silky  
lashes. Her hair was long and fell in  
a raven fold below her waist. She  
wore a tall, bejeweled headdress that  
made her seem almost statuesque.  
From her shoulders a long, elegant  
covering of lace barely hid a gown  
that might have come from Paris. On  
her feet were tiny patent leather shoes  
from the bazaar of the Jewish trader  
two doors away. Upon her fingers were  
valorous rings—diamonds, rubies and  
sapphires. Jeweled bracelets were up-  
on her wrists. Her form was elegance  
endowed with human life. The com-  
bination of the modern and the charac-  
teristic dress of her people made so  
charming a tout ensemble that all who  
passed the bazaar paused to gaze at  
the girl.  
“Would that one content the mighty  
prince of Bokhara?” asked Hafiz slyly.  
“Would she? She is fit for the wife  
of a ruler of gods! Who is she?”  
“That, my friend, is the daughter of  
Ignatz Biarteklis.”  
“Her name?”  
“Koura.”  
“Sons of heaven! Would he part  
with her?”  
“Rather with his life.”  
“Then of what avail is all our talk?”  
Hafiz noted the dejected look on  
Mizik's face.  
“My friend, thou art not experienced  
in the world,” he said. “I have spoken.  
That is to be the wife of the son of the  
ameer.”  
“Our heaven born lord will lead you  
with the jewels of the earth.”  
“I intend that he shall. It is for no  
small amount that I take this risk.  
Look the other way. The accursed  
Orskoff is turning.”  
As the handsome soldier moved away  
the girl smiled archly at him, and he  
saluted her in courtly fashion.  
“I will drink his blood!” muttered  
Mizik.  
“Be careful, my friend, that he does  
not drink yours,” said Hafiz. “That  
man knows how to fight. His sword  
is no stranger to the hearts of his ene-  
mies. Come, let us move along. I do  
not wish to be seen too long opposite  
that bazaar. There will be a stir when  
the thing is known.”  
Again they went to the kahve kept  
by the brother of Hafiz.  
“Let us, my friend, talk over this  
matter,” said the Turk after ordering  
coffee.  
“I came for that,” said Mizik shortly.  
“I do not need to ask that your  
mouth be kept shut,” said Hafiz. “If  
our purpose were known, it is possible  
that the great ruler of all the tribes of  
the Caucasus would send his armies to  
sweep your people from Bokhara.”  
“Let them come; we are very power-  
ful!”  
Hafiz grinned derisively.  
“Nevertheless keep your tongue sil-  
ent. Now, admitting that I am cap-  
able of getting the girl and conveying  
her as far as the Caspian, how shall I  
deliver her to you?”  
“On the Caspian there is a vessel  
manned by brave men from the ameer's  
dominion. They are Taujiks, as I am,



The girl smiled archly at him.  
and so resemble the races inhabiting  
this country that no suspicion will be  
aroused. They are faithful to the  
ameer.”  
“How can the vessel be distinguish-  
ed? Has it a name?”  
“There is no name. It is a long, black  
vessel purchased from the Persians.”  
“Tell me the name of the captain.”  
“His name is Karakal.”  
“Good. Then when I find this vessel  
whose captain is Karakal I can go on  
board with my charge and proceed to  
Bokhara.”  
“Certainly.”  
“But I do not intend to do anything  
of that kind, my friend. That would  
be inviting my enemy Orskoff to slay  
me. Can Karakal be trusted to convey  
the girl to Bokhara and give her to the  
ameer?”

“Indeed, yes.”  
“Very well. Leave the matter in my  
hands. I will go after the thing is  
done to Bokhara to obtain my reward,  
with you as my guide and to swear  
that I deserve it.”  
“But how will you get the girl and  
how will you get to the Caspian?”  
“I have not yet determined that most  
important matter. I will visit you to-  
morrow, or, if you wish, I will be  
pleased to see you here. I may have  
a plan then.”  
“Very well,” said Mizik, with a crest-  
fallen air. “I can be trusted.”  
“I will see you tomorrow.” And Ha-  
fiz Effendi waddled out of the kahve.

CHAPTER III.  
THE BOAT ON THE KUR.  
ONE of the wharfs on the  
Kur river, near Tiflis, a pe-  
culiarly shaped vessel lay  
moored. It was a substantial  
enough vessel for the purposes for  
which it was used—to convey mer-  
chandise from one port on the Caspian  
or its rivers to another. It had just  
brought a cargo of goods to the bazaars  
at the fair. It had a high curved  
prow, with a strange looking carving  
as a figurehead. It was broad amid-  
ships, and at the stern a high deck cov-  
ered the cabin accommodations. It  
was manned by dusky sailors, and the  
captain was Hassan, a Turk from Con-  
stantinople.

Hassan was a man well along in  
years and had taken to the Caspian wa-  
ter trade as the best means of making  
sufficient wealth with which to settle  
down in his home at Stamboul and en-  
joy himself. Unfortunately for Hassan  
the trade had not proved as profitable  
as he expected, because the Russian  
government had given rights and priv-  
ileges—concessions they called them—  
to a German company to run a line of  
steamboats from port to port. Hassan's  
field—or sea—of activity was therefore  
limited to those occasions when the fair  
at Tiflis or a sudden rush of goods to  
Astrakhan made the usual boats unable  
to accommodate the increase of trade.  
A caravan from Trebizond had  
brought to one of the Caspian ports a  
vast amount of goods for the fair, and  
Hassan had succeeded in getting some  
of the overflow for his vessel. Having  
delivered these goods to the Persian,  
Russian, Jewish and Turkish mer-  
chants to whom they were assigned,  
he lay at the wharf trying to pick up a  
return cargo.  
The night of the day on which Hafiz  
Effendi and Mizik, from Bokhara, had  
met, Hassan strolled on the upper deck  
at the stern of his vessel smoking a  
cigarette. He was disconsolate and  
was seriously contemplating leaving  
the river and getting back to the Cas-  
pian, for his chances of obtaining a  
cargo for any Caspian port seemed  
slight.  
Suddenly a figure clad in a long  
black coat, bent and bearded like the  
usual trading Jew at the fair, stole  
from behind the shadow of a ware-  
house on the wharf and came cautiously  
toward the vessel. Hassan, bracing  
himself and pulling from the folds of  
his garments a dagger, advanced to  
the edge of the deck.  
“What do you desire, stranger?” he  
asked loudly.  
“In the name of Allah, hold your  
tongue!” came a reply in low tones.  
“It is I.”  
“By that voice I should say it was  
Hafiz Effendi,” said Hassan hopefully,  
for he knew that if Hafiz Effendi had  
business that necessitated a disguise  
it would pay well.  
“I am Hafiz,” said the old slave tra-  
der as he walked upon the deck. “Are  
we alone?”  
“Sufficiently alone to talk. The men  
are asleep.”  
“Let us sit down and talk. I have  
come with an offer that no man who  
is not a fool will refuse. Hassan, hast  
thou a wife?”  
“Thou knowest well I have two.”  
“Are they well cared for?”  
“I am poor and should have but one.  
I was once better supplied with  
wealth.”  
“As I thought, my friend. Allah be  
praised that you have so good a friend  
as I to think of you at a time when  
your purse could again be filled. How  
would you like to earn a thousand gold-  
pieces of 25 piasters each by taking a  
certain person down the Kur to the  
Caspian?”  
“By the prophet's beard! A thou-  
sand pieces of gold! Hast thou come  
to make me rich?”  
“It is that if what I ask is done. A  
thousand pieces of 25 piasters in gold.”  
“In the name of Allah, what cargo  
hast thou found?”  
“A woman, one who will be a prin-  
cess. Harken, Hassan. In Tiflis there  
is a certain young woman beautiful as  
a goddess. Like a marble statue is she.  
Pure white is her skin and like velvet.  
One caress from her lips would turn  
you from the Koran. She is desired in  
holy marriage by a certain prince.”  
“And she desires that I convey her to  
his palace?”  
“Nay; she desires nothing. She does  
not even know.”  
“Why does not the prince ask her to  
accompany him to his palace?”  
“For two reasons, Hassan. One is  
that the prince is not here and would  
not set his foot upon the dominions of  
the hated Muscovite. The other is that  
were he to do so the father of this  
young woman would spurn him, for  
the Muscovite does not regard his fa-  
ther as a king.”  
“Thou speakest either of the khan of  
Khiva or his enemy, the ameer of  
Bokhara.”  
“It is of Bokhara I speak.”  
“That is sufficient. No good Mus-  
covite would consent to that.”  
“But this young woman is not a Mus-  
covite. She is a Georgian.”  
“Hela! That is different! A Geo-  
gian would sell his wife.”  
“This man will not. I have in the  
past tried to obtain from him the con-  
sent to the marriage of his daughter

with a wealthy Osmanli. He will not  
consent.”  
“He hates us?”  
“Perhaps. It is not that alone, but  
she loves a Muscovite, the hated Or-  
skoff, that captain of the Muscovites  
who has watched us and prevented  
our trade. She loves him. I saw them  
together, this very day.”  
“Is he rich?”  
“I know not. I did not come to buy  
of him. But let us get to our business.  
Did you not sell to Ignatz Biarteklis a  
certain portion of your cargo?”  
“Allah! Mohammed! Is it the daugh-  
ter of Biarteklis of whom you speak?”  
“The same. The prince of Bokhara  
desires her for his wife, and of my own  
knowledge she is promised to be the  
wife of Captain Orskoff. But we can  
secure the girl for the prince, and a  
thousand pieces of gold will fall mys-  
teriously into your pocket.”  
“Oh, thou great and wily dealer in  
fair women, tell me how I can obtain  
this rich reward!”  
“Is it not possible that somewhere  
in this vessel are goods that have been  
overlooked and that Biarteklis would  
buy?”  
“You mean—that I am to say that  
such is the case?”  
“Exactly. You know that his daugh-  
ter always accompanies him to pur-  
chase goods.”  
“I know. Well, what then?”  
“Go to the bazaar. The bands are  
still playing. There is still life in the  
fair, for it is not yet midnight. Tell  
Biarteklis that you have discovered  
some of the finest linen hidden in the  
bottom of the vessel and that you must  
start from here before morning, as an  
important business demands you at  
Astrakhan.”  
“By the beard! I know not what  
plan you have, but a thousand pieces  
of gold are not picked up in a year.  
What will you do in the meantime?”  
“Await you here.”  
“Very well. I will go.”  
Hassan put aside his ordinary gar-  
ments and replaced them with his best,  
which he always wore to the bazaars.  
He bade Hafiz adieu and walked away.  
Ignatz Biarteklis was about to close  
his bazaar when the well known figure  
of Hassan walked in.  
“My friend,” said Hassan, “I have  
come in a great hurry to see you. It  
could have been nothing but the great  
admiration I have for you and your  
lovely daughter that would bring me  
here at this hour. But as I was about  
to sail for the Caspian I discovered in  
the bottom of my vessel bales of the  
finest linen—better even than I brought  
you last—from the looms of that fair  
country in the north that makes the  
finest linen. It was not, like the last,  
assigned to you, but was placed on  
board for me to sell to any one who  
would purchase. I do not wish to tar-  
ry till the morning, for I have a cargo  
awaiting me at Astrakhan. I have al-  
ready got my vessel in readiness to  
sail, and the men are having their last  
good sleep until we reach the Caspian.  
I thought of you, as you have been my  
friend. You have made many pur-  
chases. Will you not come and look at  
the linen, that I may at once set sail?”  
“But it is night,” said Biarteklis. “In  
the morning I will see it.”  
“Nay, I cannot wait. I have just  
time to reach Astrakhan to take this  
cargo, which will be a rich one.”  
“I must call my daughter. It is her  
delight to accompany me and examine  
goods and make purchases.”  
He called Koura. Hassan gulped  
down an exclamation as he saw her  
beauty.  
“What is it, father?”  
“This good Hassan, who brought us  
some of our best goods, is about to  
start for the Caspian and has discov-  
ered in his vessel some of the finest  
linen he brought to sell. He asks that  
we go look at it. If we do not, some  
one else will get it. It is late, and the  
wharfs are dangerous. What do you  
say?”  
“As for the lateness of the hour, it  
must not interfere with a good pur-  
chase. Hassan can walk the wharfs,  
and with him we should be safe.”  
“Well spoken,” said Hassan.  
They were soon ready to start. The  
streets of the fair were almost desert-  
ed. The last band had stopped its  
blare, and the lights were being extin-  
guished in the bazaars. The coffee  
houses alone showed signs of life. The  
merchant accompanied Hassan to the  
wharf and on board his vessel. He led  
them to the cabin and offered wine.  
Biarteklis sat in the cabin and his  
daughter near him. Hassan, looking  
over the merchant's shoulder, saw the  
figure of Hafiz Effendi. He obeyed a  
signal.  
“Permit me to depart and bring the  
linen,” said he and walked out.  
“It is strange, father,” Koura was  
saying, “that I see no evidence that  
Hassan has made preparations to start.  
No sail is raised.”  
“He told me the men were taking a  
good sleep before starting. I believe!”  
A scarf was thrown around Koura's  
mouth and her eyes were blinded with  
folds of silk. She heard a groan from  
her father as Hafiz Effendi rushed up-  
on him and buried a dagger in his  
heart.  
“Quick! Fasten the girl! Bring me  
ropes!” he whispered to Hassan, who  
was horrified at the terrible act.



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