



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.  
IN GUISE OF THE ORIENT.

**T**HIS is the story which Bernard Fane told me one afternoon as we sat sipping China tea on the terrace of the Heliopolis Palace Hotel, just after we had finished a round upon the neighboring links:

The life of a master at the training college is beastly uneventful, taken all round; not even your keen sense of the romantic could long survive it. The duties are not very exacting, certainly, and in our own way, I suppose we are empire builders of a sort. But when you ask me for a true story of Egyptian life, I find myself floored at once.

We all come out with the idea of the mystic East strong upon us, but it is an idea that rarely survives one summer in Cairo. Personally, I made a more promising start than the average. An adventure came my way on the very day I landed in Port Said; in fact, it began on the way out.

On my first trip out, then, I went aboard at Marseilles, and saw my cabin trunk placed in a nice deck berth, with the liveliest satisfaction.

Walking along the white promenade deck, I felt no end of a man of the world. Every Anglo-Indian that I met seemed a figure from the pages of Kipling and when I accidentally blundered into the ayas' quarters, I could almost hear the jangle of the temple bells, so primed was I with traditions of the Orient—the traditions one gathers from books of the lighter sort, I mean.

You will see that in those days I was not a bit blase; the glamour of the East was very real to me. For that matter, it is more real than ever, now. Near or far, the East has a call which, once heard, can never be forgotten, and never unheeded. But the call it makes to those who have never been there is out of tune, I have learned, or rather it is not in the right key.

Well, I had a most glorious bath—I am sybarite enough to love the luxuriance of your modern liner—got into blue serge, and felt no end of an adventurer. There was a notice on the gangway that the steamer would not leave Marseilles until ten o'clock at night; but I was far too young a traveler to risk missing the boat by going ashore again. You know the feeling?

Consequently I took my place in the saloon for dinner, and vaguely wondered why nobody else had dressed for the function. I was a proper Johnny Raw, but I enjoyed it all immensely, nevertheless. I personally superintended the departure of the ship, and believed that every deck hand took me for a hardened globe-trotter. When, at last, I sought my cozy cabin, all spotlessly white, with my trunk tucked under the bunk, and, drawing the little red curtain, I sat down to sum up the sensations of the day, I was thoroughly satisfied with it all.

Gad, novelty is the keynote of life! Don't you think so? When one is young, one envies older and more experienced men, but what has the world left of novelty to offer them? The simple matter of joining a steamboat, and taking possession of my berth, had afforded me thrills which some of my fellow passengers—those whom I envied the most for the stories of life written upon their tanned features—could only hope to taste by means of big-game hunting, now, or other farfetched methods of thrill giving.

It wore off a bit the next day, of course, and I found that once one has settled down to it, ocean traveling is merely floating hotel life. But many of my fellow passengers—the boat was fairly full—still appealed to me as books of romance which I longed to open. And before the end of that second day I became possessed with the idea that there was some deep mystery aboard. Since this was my first voyage, something of the sort was to be expected of me; but it happened that I stood by no means alone in this belief.

In the smoking room, after dinner, I got into conversation with a chap of about my own age who was bound for Colombo—tea planting. We chatted on different topics for half an hour, and discovered that we had mutual friends—or rather, the other fellow discovered it.

"Have you noticed," he said, "a distinguished-looking Indian personage, who, with three native friends, sits at the small corner table on our left?"

Hamilton—that was my acquaintance's name—was my right-hand neighbor at the chief officer's table, and I recollected the group to which he referred immediately.

"Yes," I replied; "who are they?"

"I don't know," answered Hamilton, "but I have a suspicion that they are mysterious."

"Mysterious?" I asked.

"Well, they joined at Marseilles, just before yourself. They were received by the skipper in person, and two of them were closeted in his cabin

for twenty minutes or more."

"What do you make of that?"

"Can't make anything of it, but their whole behavior strikes me as peculiar, somehow. I cannot quite explain, but you say that you have noticed something of the sort yourself?"

"They certainly keep very much to themselves," I said.

Hamilton glanced at me quickly. "Naturally," he replied.

Not desiring to appear stupid, I did not ask him to elucidate this remark, although at the time it meant nothing to me. Of course I have learned since, as every one learns whose lines are cast among Orientals, that iron barriers divide the races. But at the time I knew nothing of this.

During breakfast on the following morning, I glanced several times at the mysterious quartet. They had been placed at a separate table and were served with different courses from the rest of the passengers. I was not the only member of the company who found them interesting; but the Anglo-Indians on board, to a man, left the native party severely alone. You know the icy aloofness of the Anglo-Indian?

My second day at sea wore on, uneventfully enough; the bugle had already announced the hour for dressing, and the deck outside my berth, where I had ordered my chair placed, was practically deserted, when something occurred to turn my thoughts from the four Indians. It was a glorious evening, with the sun setting out across the Mediterranean in such a red blaze of glory that I sat watching it with fascination, my book lying unheeded on the deck beside me. Right and left of me men occupying the other deck cabins had lighted up, and were busily dressing. Right aft was a corner cabin, larger than the others, and suddenly I observed the door of this to open.

A slim figure glided out on the deck, and began to advance toward me. It proved to be that of a woman or girl dressed in clinging black silk, and wearing a yashmak! She had a richly embroidered shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, and in that coy half light she presented a dazzlingly beautiful picture.

It was my first sight of a yashmak, and, because it was worn by a marvelously pretty woman, the thousands seen since have never entirely lost their charms for me. I could detect the lines of an exquisitely chiseled nose, and the long, dark eyes of the apparition were entirely unforgettable. The hand with which she held her

shawl about her was of ivory smoothness, and, like a little red lamp, a great ruby blazed upon the index finger.

With her high-heeled shoes tapping daintily upon the deck, she advanced; then, suddenly perceiving that the promenade was not entirely deserted, she turned, but not hastily or rudely, and glided back to her cabin.

I have endeavored to outline for your benefit the state of my mind at this period, hinting how keenly alive I was to romance of any sort, provided it wore the guise of the Orient; so it will be unnecessary for me to explain how strong an impression this episode made upon me. The Indian party was forgotten, and as I hastily dressed and descended to dinner, I scarcely listened to Hamilton when he bent toward me and whispered something about the "strong room."

My look was roaming about the spacious saloon. Even in those days, I might have known better; I might have known that no Mohammedan woman would take her meals in a public saloon. But I was too dazzled by my memories to summon to my aid such fragments of knowledge respecting Eastern customs as were mine.

## CHAPTER II. LIKE A PHANTOM.

WELL, some little time elapsed before I saw or heard anything further of the *hourî*. I began to settle down to the routine of the trip, and—you know how news circulates through a ship—it was not long before I knew as much as any of the other passengers.

Hamilton was a sort of filter through which it all came to me, and, of course, it was not undiluted, but colored with his own views. The lady of the *yashmak*, he informed me, was a member of the household of a wealthy Moslem in the neighborhood of Damascus. She was traveling via Port Said, taking a *khedivial* boat from there to Beirut.

Hamilton was a perfect mine of information, but his real interest was centered all the time in the party of four Indians.

"They are emissaries of the Rajah of Bhotona," he informed me confidentially. "The mystery begins to clear up. You must have read about a month ago that Lola de l'Iris was selling some of her jewelry and devoting the proceeds to the founding of an orphanage or something of the

kind; quite a unique advertisement. Well, the famous Indian diamond presented to her by one of the crowned heads of Europe was among the bunch which she sold; and after staying in the West for over fifty years, it is again on its way back to the East where it came from."

I began to recollect the circumstances now; the historic Indian diamond—I do not know Hindustani, but the name of the diamond translated means "Lure of Souls"—had been in the possession of the dancer for many years, and its sale for such a purpose had turned the limelight upon her most enviably. It was a new idea in advertising, and had proved an admirable success.

So the four reticent gentlemen were the guardians of the diamond. In normal circumstances this might have been interesting, but, as I have tried to make clear, another matter engrossed my attention. In fact, I was living in a dream world.

Of course, my opportunity came, in due course. One evening, as I mooned on the shadowy deck—which was quite deserted, because an extempore dance was taking place on the deck below—*she* came gliding along toward me. I could see her eyes sparkling in the moonlight.

At first I feared that she was going to turn back. She hesitated, in a wildly alluring manner, when first she saw me sitting there watching her. Then, turning her head aside, she came on, and passed me. I never took my eyes off that graceful figure for a moment.

Coming to the rail, she leaned and looked out toward the coast of Crete, where silver tracing in the blue marked the mountain peaks; then, shivering slightly, and wrapping her embroidered shawl more closely about her shoulders, she retraced her steps. Not a yard from where I sat, she dropped a little silk handkerchief on the deck!

How my heart leaped at that! The rest was a magical whirl; and ten seconds later I was chatting with her. She spoke fluent French, but little English.

She appealed to me in a way that was new, and almost irresistible; it was an appeal quite Oriental—sensuous, indescribable. Of course, I cannot hope to make you understand; but it was extraordinary. I felt that I was losing my head; the glances of those long, dark eyes were setting me on fire.

Suddenly, she terminated this, our first tête-à-tête. She raised her finger to her veiled lips, and glided away into the shadows like a phantom. A sentence died, unfinished, on my tongue. I turned,

and looked over my shoulder.

Gad, I got a fright! A most hideous Oriental of some kind, having only one eye, but that afire with malignancy, was watching me from where he stood half concealed by a boat. My lily of Damascus was guarded!

Humming, with an assumption of unconcern, I strolled away and joined the dancers below.

### CHAPTER III. A GUEST UNREWARDED.

THAT was the beginning, then. I hated to think how short a time was at my disposal; but since, the very next morning, I found myself enjoying a second delicious little stolen interview, I perceived that my company was not unacceptable.

What? Yes; I had lost my head entirely. I admit the fact.

It was an effort to speak of ordinary matters, topics of the ship; my impulse was to whisper delicious nonsense into those tiny ears. However, I forced myself to talk about things in general, and told her that the famous diamond, Lure of Souls, was aboard.

This was news to her, and she seemed to be tremendously interested. Her interest was of such a childish sort, so naive, that a project grew up in my mind at that very moment. It was hardly a matter of so many words; there was nothing definite about the thing at all, and this, our second interview, was cut short in much the same manner as the first.

*"Ssh! Mustapha!"* she had whispered.

With those words, and a dazzling smile, this jewel of Damascus, who interested me so much more deeply than the rajah's diamond, departed hurriedly—and I turned to meet again the malignant gaze of the one-eyed guardian.

The sort of romance in which I was steeped at that time flourishes and grows fat upon incidents of this kind. I have searched my memory many a time since then for some word or hint to prove that the conversation about the diamond was opened and guided in a desired direction by the lady of the yashmak; but, excluding transmission of thought, I could never find any evidence of the kind—have never been able to do so.

Certainly my memories of that period are hazy except in regard to Nahèmah. If I were an artist, I could paint her portrait from memory without the slightest error, I think. She occupied my thoughts to the exclusion of all else.

But the project was formed and carried out. Hamilton was one of those popular men who seem born to occupy the chair at any kind of meeting at which they may be present; he organized almost every entertainment that took place on board.

At first he was not at all keen on the idea. "There are all sorts of difficulties," he said; "and one doesn't care to ask a favor of a native. At any rate, one doesn't care to be refused."

But I had set my heart upon gratifying Nahèmah's curiosity, and, with the aid of Hamilton, it was all arranged satisfactorily. The native guardians of the diamond were rather flattered than otherwise, and a select little party of the "best" people on board met in the chief officer's cabin to view the Lure of Souls.

The difficulty in regard to Nahèmah was readily overcome by Hamilton, the energetic, and Doctor Patterson's wife "took her up" for the occasion in a delightfully patronizing manner. The four swarthy, polite Orientals were there, of course; several other ladies in addition to Mrs. Patterson, Nahèmah, the chief officer, myself, Hamilton, and a sepulchral Scotch curate, the Reverend Mr. Rawlingson, whom I had scarcely noticed hitherto, and whose presence at this "select" gathering rather surprised me.

The sea was like a sheet of glass, and this was the hottest day which I had yet experienced. It was about an hour before lunch time when we gathered to view the diamond; and Mr. Brodie, the chief officer, exercised his subtle humor in a series of elaborate pantomimic precautions, locking the door with labored care, and treating the ladies of the company to Bluebeard glances of frightful intensity.

At last one of the Indians took out the diamond from its case—which had been brought from the strong room a few minutes before. It was a wonderful thing, I suppose, of quite unusual size, and it sparkled and gleamed in the sunlight streaming through the open porthole in an absolutely dazzling fashion.

I had ranged myself close beside Nahèmah. Each of us was permitted to handle the stone. It was I who passed it to her, Mr. Rawlingson having passed it to me. She held it in the palm of her little hand, and her eyes sparkled with childish delight as she bent to examine the gem.

Then a very strange thing happened. From somewhere behind me—I was sitting with my back to the porthole—a dull, gray object came leaping and twirling; and a scorpion—I have never seen a

larger specimen—fell upon Nahèmah's wrist!

She uttered a piercing cry, dropped the diamond, and brushed the horrid insect from her wrist; then she fell swooning into my arms.

A scene of incredible confusion followed. The four Indians, ignoring the presence of the scorpion, dropped like cats upon the floor, seeking for the Lure of Souls. Mrs. Patterson and I carried Nahèmah to the sofa hard by and laid her upon it. Just as we did so the scorpion darted from between the end of the sofa and the wardrobe, and the chief officer put his foot upon it.

Ensuing events were indescribable. Since the diamond had not yet been picked up, obviously the cabin door could not be unlocked; so in the stuffy atmosphere of the place it was a matter of some difficulty to revive Nahèmah. Meanwhile, four wild-eyed Indians were creeping about at our feet—like cats, as I have said before.

In the end, just as the girl began to revive, it became evident that The Lure of Souls was missing. A pearl shirt button, the ownership of which we were unable to establish, was picked up, but no diamond.

The chief officer showed himself a man of priceless tact. He rang for the stewardess and the ladies were shepherded to a neighboring, vacant cabin. Then the door was relocked, and Mr. Brodie proceeded to strip, placing his garments one by one upon the little folding table for examination. He was not satisfied until every man present had overhauled them. We all followed his example, the Reverend Mr. Rawlingson last of all. The Lure of Souls was still missing.

Then we gave the chief officer's cabin such a searching as it had never had before, I should assume. Our quest was unrewarded. Meanwhile, the ladies had been submitted to a similar search in the adjoining cabin; same result.

With great difficulty we succeeded in hushing up the matter to a certain extent; but the captain's language to the chief officer was appalling, and the chief officer's remarks to Hamilton were equally unparliamentary.

Hamilton seemed to consider that he was justified in placing the whole blame upon me, which he did in terms little short of insulting. The four Indians apparently regarded all of us with equal suspicion and animosity.

I could not foresee the end. The thing was so sudden, so serious, that at the time it banished even thoughts of Nahèmah from my mind. I anticipated that we should all find ourselves arrested when we

reached Port Said.

Later in the day Hamilton walked into my cabin and placed a little cardboard box upon the dressing table. It contained the crushed body of the scorpion.

"Where did that scorpion come from?" he asked abruptly.

It was a question which already had been asked fully a thousand times, yet no one had discovered an intelligent reply. I shook my head.

"It came from the open porthole," he replied, "and as it's a thousand to one against a scorpion's being aboard, somebody was carrying it for this very purpose—somebody who was on the deck outside the chief officer's cabin and who threw the scorpion into the cabin."

"But such a deadly thing——" I began.

"Have a good look," said Hamilton, turning the insect over with a lead pencil; "this one isn't deadly, at all. See, its tail has been cut off!"

I looked and stifled an exclamation. It was as Hamilton had said. The scorpion was harmless.

#### CHAPTER IV.

#### IN THE ROOM BELOW.

AFTER that day I never once set eyes upon Nahèmah again until we arrived at Port Said. Then I saw her preparing to go ashore in one of the boats. I managed to join her, ignoring the scowls of her one-eyed attendant, and we arrived at the quay together. Right there by the water's edge a most curious scene was being enacted. Surrounded by two or three passengers and a perfect ring of uniformed officials, Hamilton, very excited, watched his baggage being turned out upon the ground. He saw me approaching.

"Hang it all, Fane," he cried, "this is disgraceful. I don't know upon whose orders they are acting, but the beastly police are searching my baggage for the diamond."

I thought it very extraordinary and said as much to the Reverend Mr. Rawlingson, who was one of the onlookers.

"It is very strange, indeed," he said mildly, turning his gold-rimmed spectacles in my direction.

A moment later, to my horror and indignation, Nahèmah was submitted to the same indignity. The crowd had been roped off from the part of the quay upon which we stood, and I could see that the whole thing had been arranged beforehand in some

way—probably by wireless from the ship. Curiously, as I thought at the time, my own baggage was not examined in this way, but I was detained long enough to lose sight of Nahèmah and her one-eyed guardian.

When I got to the hotel I indulged in some reflection. It occurred to me that Hamilton was bound for Colombo, which made it seem rather singular that he should have had his baggage put ashore at Port Said.

I should have liked to search the town for my lady of the yashmak, but having no clew to her present whereabouts, I realized the futility of such a proceeding. My last thought before I fell asleep that night was that some day in the near future I should visit Damascus.

I saw very little of Port Said, for we had arrived in the early morning and I was departing for Cairo by a train leaving shortly before midday. I wandered about the quaint streets a bit, however, and wondered if, from one of the latticed windows overhanging me, the dark eyes of Nahèmah were peering out.

Although I looked up and down the train carefully, I failed to find among the passengers any one whom I knew, and I settled down into my corner to study the novel scenery. The shipping in the Canal fascinated me for a long time, as did the figures which moved upon its shores. The ditches and embankments, aimlessly wandering footpaths, and moving figures which seemed to belong to a thousand years ago, seized upon my imagination as they seize upon the imagination of every traveler when first he beholds them.

But my story jumps now to Zagazig. The train stopped at that city; and, walking out into the corridor and lowering a window, I soon was absorbed in contemplation of that unique place. Its narrow, dirty, swarming streets; the millions of flies that boarded the train; the noisy veneers of sugar cane, tangerines and other commodities; the throng beyond the barriers gazing open-mouthed at me as I gazed open-mouthed at them—it was a first impression, but an indelible one.

I was not to know that it was written I should spend the night in Zagazig; but such was the case. Generally speaking, I have found the service on the Egyptian state railway very good, but a hitch of some kind occurred on this occasion, and after an hour or so of delay, it was definitely announced to the passengers that owing to an accident to the permanent way, the journey to Cairo could not be continued until the following morning.

Then commenced a rush which I did not understand at first, and in which, feeling no desire to exert myself unduly, I did not participate. Half an hour later I ascertained that the only two hotels which the place boasted were full to overflowing, and realized what the rush had meant. It was all part of the great scheme of things, no doubt; but when, thanks to the kindly, if mercenary, offices of the International Sleeping Car attendant, I found myself in possession of a room at a sort of native khan in the lower end of the town, I experienced no very special gratitude toward Providence.

I have enjoyed the hospitality of less pleasing caravanserais since; but this was my first experience of the kind and I thought very little of it.

I killed time, somehow or other, until the dinner hour; and the train, which now reposed in a siding, became a rendezvous for those who desired to patronize the dining car. Evidently no sleeping cars were available—or perhaps that idea was beyond the imagination of the native officials—and having left a trail of tobacco smoke along the principal native street, I turned into my apartment which I shared with ants, mosquitoes, and other things.

An examination of my room by candlelight revealed the presence of a cupboard, or what I thought to be a cupboard; but opening the double doors, I saw that it was a window, latticed and overlooking a lower apartment. In the room below was a table and a chair—so much I perceived by the light of an oil lamp which stood upon the table. Then, stifling a gasp of amazement, I hastily snuffed my candle and peered down eagerly at an incredible scene.

#### CHAPTER V. WITH MUCH RELUCTANCE.

**N**AHÈMAH, no longer veiled, was sitting at the table and opposite her was the hideous wall-eyed attendant. They were conversing in low tones, so that, strive as I would I could not overhear a word. You ask me why I spied upon the lady's privacy in this manner? It was for a very good reason.

Midway between the two, upon the rough boards of the table, lay the Lure of Souls, twinkling and glittering like a thing of incarnate light!

I observed that there was a door to the room below, almost immediately opposite to the window

through which I was peering; and this door was opening very slowly and noiselessly. At least, I could hear no noise, but the one-eyed man detected something, for suddenly he started up and did a remarkable thing. Snatching the diamond from the table, he clapped it into the eyeless cavity of his skull and turned in a twinkling to face the intruder.

Then the door was thrown open, and Hamilton leaped into the room. I could scarcely credit my senses. Honestly, I thought I was dreaming. Hamilton's whole face was changed; a hard, cunning look had come over it, and he held a revolver in his hand. Nahèmah sprang to her feet as he entered, but he covered the pair of them with his revolver, and, pointing to the one-eyed man, muttered something in a low voice. Rage, fear, rebellion, chased in turn across the evil features of the Oriental; but there was something about Hamilton's manner that cowed.

Manipulating the sunken eyelids as though they had been of rubber, the guardian of the veiled lady slipped the diamond into the palm of his hand and tossed it, glittering, on to the table.

Hamilton's expression of triumph I shall never forget. One step forward he took and was about to snatch up the gem when out of the dark cavity of the doorway behind him stepped a second intruder. It was the Reverend Mr. Rawlingson.

The reverend gentleman's behavior was most unclerical. He leaped upon the unsuspecting Hamilton like a panther and jammed the muzzle of a revolver into that gentleman's right ear with quite unnecessary vigor. "You have been wasting your time, Farland!" he snapped, in a voice that was quite new to me; "that is, unless you have turned amateur detective."

He made no attempt to reach for the diamond, but just held out his hand, and, with his eyes fixed upon Hamilton, silently commanded the latter to hand over the gem. This Hamilton did with palpable reluctance. Mr. Rawlingson, who, though still clerically garbed, had discarded his spectacles, slipped the stone into his pocket, snatched the revolver from Hamilton's hand, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the open door. Hamilton shrugged his shoulders and walked out of the room.

For scarce a moment did Rawlingson's eyes turn to follow the retreating figure, but the chance was good enough for the one-eyed man, who launched himself through space like nothing so much as a kangaroo, bearing Rawlingson irresistibly to the floor! With his lean hands at the

other's throat, he turned his solitary eye upon Nahèmah and muttered something gutturally. After a moment's hesitation she ran from the room.

Twenty seconds later I was downstairs, and ten seconds after that was helping Rawlingson to his feet. He was considerably shaken and boasted a very elegant design in bruises which was just beginning to reveal itself upon his throat; but otherwise he was unhurt.

"I have lost her, Mr. Fane!" were his first word's. "She knows this part of the world inside out. I have no case against Farland, but I am sorry to have lost the woman."

Was my mind in a whirl? Did I think that madness had seized me? The answers are both in the affirmative. I was staggered.

I always go to pieces with this part of the yarn, being an unpractical narrator, as I have already explained; but I may relieve your mind upon one point. I never saw Nahèmah and the one-eyed man again, nor have I since set eyes upon Hamilton. Mr. Rawlingson, the last time I heard from him, was in similar case.

The explanation of the whole thing was something of a blow to me, of course. The lily of Damascus who had fascinated me so hopelessly, was no Eastern woman at all. She was a Frenchwoman, I believe—at any rate they had a long record up against her in Paris. She had gone out after the Lure of Souls, and very ingeniously had made me her instrument.

As Mr. Rawlingson explained to me, what had probably taken place was this: The harmless scorpion, specially trained for some such purpose, had been thrown into the chief officer's cabin from the open porthole by the one-eyed villain. That had been the cue for Nahèmah to drop the shirt button, and, while the occupants of the cabin were in confusion, to toss the diamond out on to the deck where her accomplice was waiting. The search of their effects had been futile, of course; no one had thoughts of searching the eye cavity of her Eastern companion.

Where did Hamilton come in? Hamilton was one James Farland, an American crook of the highest accomplishments, known to the police of the entire civilized world. He, too, had gone out for the Lure of Souls, but the woman, his professional competitor, had proved too clever for him.

The Reverend Mr. Rawlingson? He was Detective Inspector Wexford of New Scotland Yard.

