

## Chapter 6

Ali had long cherished a violent passion for Zobeide, the wife of his son Veli Pacha. Having vainly attempted to gratify it after his son's departure, and being indignantly repulsed, he had recourse to drugs, and the unhappy Zobeide remained in ignorance of her misfortune until she found she was pregnant. Then, half-avowals from her women, compelled to obey the pacha from fear of death, mixed with confused memories of her own, revealed the whole terrible truth. Not knowing in her despair which way to turn, she wrote to Ali, entreating him to visit the harem. As head of the family, he had a right to enter, being supposed responsible for the conduct of his sons' families, no-law-giver having hitherto contemplated the possibility of so disgraceful a crime. When he appeared, Zobeide flung herself at his feet, speechless with grief. Ali acknowledged his guilt, pleaded the violence of his passion, wept with his victim, and entreating her to control herself and keep silence, promised that all should be made right. Neither the prayers nor tears of Zobeide could induce him to give up the intention of effacing the traces of his first crime by a second even more horrible.

But the story was already whispered abroad, and Pacho Bey learnt all its details from the spies he kept in Janina. Delighted at the prospect of avenging himself on the father, he hastened with his news to the son. Veli Pacha, furious, vowed vengeance, and demanded Pacho Bey's help, which was readily promised. But Ali had been warned, and was not a man to be taken unawares. Pacho Bey, whom Veli had just promoted to the office of sword-bearer, was attacked in broad daylight by six emissaries sent from Janina. He obtained timely help, however, and five of the assassins, taken red-handed, were at once hung without ceremony in the market-place. The sixth was the messenger whose arrival with the news had caused such dismay at Ali's banquet.

As Ali reflected how the storm he had raised could best be laid, he was informed that the ruler of the marriage feast sent by Moustai, Pacha of Scodra, to receive the young bride who should reign in his harem, had just arrived in the plain of Janina. He was Yussuf Bey of the Delres, an old enemy of Ali's, and had encamped with his escort of eight hundred warriors at the foot of Tomoros of Dodona. Dreading some treachery, he absolutely refused all entreaties to enter the town, and Ali seeing that it was useless to

insist, and that his adversary for the present was safe, at once sent his grand-daughter, the Princess of Aulis, out to him.

This matter disposed of, Ali was able to attend to his hideous family tragedy. He began by effecting the disappearance of the women whom he had been compelled to make his accomplices; they were simply sewn up in sacks by gipsies and thrown into the lake. This done, he himself led the executioners into a subterranean part of the castle, where they were beheaded by black mutes as a reward for their obedience. He then sent a doctor to Zobeide; who succeeded in causing a miscarriage, and who, his work done, was seized and strangled by the black mutes who had just beheaded the gipsies. Having thus got rid of all who could bear witness to his crime, he wrote to Veli that he might now send for his wife and two of his children, hitherto detained as hostages, and that the innocence of Zobeide would confound a calumniator who had dared to assail him with such injurious suspicions.

When this letter arrived, Pacho Bey, distrusting equally the treachery of the father and the weakness of the son, and content with having sown the seeds of dissension in his enemy's family, had sufficient wisdom to seek safety in flight. Ali, furious, vowed, on hearing this, that his vengeance should overtake him even at the ends of the earth. Meanwhile he fell back on Yussuf Bey of the Debres, whose escape when lately at Janina still rankled in his mind. As Yussuf was dangerous both from character and influence, Ali feared to attack him openly, and sought to assassinate him. This was not precisely easy, for, exposed to a thousand dangers of this kind, the nobles of that day were on their guard. Steel and poison were used up, and another way had to be sought. Ali found it.

One of the many adventurers with whom Janina was filled penetrated to the pacha's presence, and offered to sell the secret of a powder whereof three grains would suffice to kill a man with a terrible explosion--explosive powder, in short. Ali heard with delight, but replied that he must see it in action before purchasing.

In the dungeons of the castle by the lake, a poor monk of the order of St. Basil was slowly dying, for having boldly refused a sacrilegious simony proposed to him by Ali. He was a fit subject for the experiment, and was successfully blown to pieces, to the great satisfaction of Ali, who concluded

his bargain, and hastened to make use of it. He prepared a false firman, which, according to custom, was enclosed and sealed in a cylindrical case, and sent to Yussuf Bey by a Greek, wholly ignorant of the real object of his mission. Opening it without suspicion, Yussuf had his arm blown off, and died in consequence, but found time to despatch a message to Moustai Pacha of Scodra, informing him of the catastrophe, and warning him to keep good guard.

Yussuf's letter was received by Moustai just as a similar infernal machine was placed in his hands under cover to his young wife. The packet was seized, and a careful examination disclosed its nature. The mother of Moustai, a jealous and cruel woman, accused her daughter-in-law of complicity, and the unfortunate Ayesha, though shortly to become a mother, expired in agony from the effects of poison, only guilty of being the innocent instrument of her grandfather's treachery.

Fortune, having frustrated Ali's schemes concerning Moustai Pacha, offered him as consolation a chance of invading the territory of Parga, the only place in Epirus which had hitherto escaped his rule, and which he greedily coveted. Agia, a small Christian town on the coast, had rebelled against him and allied itself to Parga. It provided an excuse for hostilities, and Ali's troops, under his son Mouktar, first seized Agia, where they only found a few old men to massacre, and then marched on Parga, where the rebels had taken refuge. After a few skirmishes, Mouktar entered the town, and though the Parganiotes fought bravely, they must inevitably have surrendered had they been left to themselves. But they had sought protection from the French, who had garrisoned the citadel, and the French grenadiers descending rapidly from the height, charged the Turks with so much fury that they fled in all directions, leaving on the field four "bimbashis," or captains of a thousand, and a considerable number of killed and wounded.

The pacha's fleet succeeded no better than his army. Issuing from the Gulf of Ambracia, it was intended to attack Parga from the sea, joining in the massacre, and cutting off all hope of escape from that side, Ali meaning to spare neither the garrison nor any male inhabitants over twelve years of age. But a few shots fired from a small fort dispersed the ships, and a barque manned by sailors from Paxos pursued them, a shot from which killed Ali's admiral on his quarter-deck. He was a Greek of Galaxidi, Athanasius Macrys by name.

Filled with anxiety, Ali awaited news at Prevesa, where a courier, sent off at the beginning of the action, had brought him oranges gathered in the orchards of Parga. Ali gave him a purse of gold, and publicly proclaimed his success. His joy was redoubled when a second messenger presented two heads of French soldiers, and announced that his troops were in possession of the lower part of Parga. Without further delay he ordered his attendants to mount, entered his carriage, and started triumphantly on the Roman road to Nicopolis. He sent messengers to his generals, ordering them to spare the women and children of Parga, intended for his harem, and above all to take strict charge of the plunder. He was approaching the arena of Nicopolis when a third Tartar messenger informed him of the defeat of his army. Ali changed countenance, and could scarcely articulate the order to return to Prevesa. Once in his palace, he gave way to such fury that all around him trembled, demanding frequently if it could be true that his troops were beaten. "May your misfortune be upon us!" his attendants answered, prostrating themselves. All at once, looking out on the calm blue sea which lay before his windows, he perceived his fleet doubling Cape Pancrator and re-entering the Ambracian Gulf under full sail; it anchored close by the palace, and on hailing the leading ship a speaking trumpet announced to Ali the death of his admiral, Athanasius Macrys.

"But Parga, Parga!" cried Ali.

"May Allah grant the pacha long life! The Parganiotes have escaped the sword of His Highness."

"It is the will of Allah!" murmured the pacha; whose head sank upon his breast in dejection.

Arms having failed, Ali, as usual, took refuge in plots and treachery, but this time, instead of corrupting his enemies with gold, he sought to weaken them by division.