

Standish Burt L.

**Dick Merriwell's Pranks: or,
Lively Times in the
Orient**



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Burt L. Standish

Dick Merriwell's Pranks; Or, Lively Times in the Orient

CHAPTER I – IN THE BOSPORUS

The steamer had crossed the Sea of Marmora and entered the Bosphorus. It was approaching Constantinople. On the right lay Asia, on the left Europe. Either shore was lined with beautiful mosques and palaces, the fairylike towers and minarets gleaming in the sunshine.

The deck was crowded with people eagerly gazing on the bewitching scene. From that point of view it was a land of enchantment, strange, mysterious, fascinating. Shipping from all quarters of the globe lay in the splendid harbor.

Among the crowd on deck were two boys who were making a European tour in charge of Professor Zenas Gunn, of the Fardale Military Academy, from which one of the students had been unjustly expelled. This was Dick Merriwell, the younger brother of the former great Yale athlete and scholar, Frank Merriwell.

With Dick was his chum and former roommate at Fardale, Bradley Buckhart, of Texas.

"What do you think of it, Brad?" asked Dick, placing a hand on the shoulder of his comrade, who was leaning on the rail and staring at the bewildering panorama.

Buckhart drew a deep breath.

"Pard," he answered, "she beats my dreams a whole lot. I certain didn't allow that the country of the 'unspeakable Turk' could be half as beautiful."

"Wait until we get on shore before you form an opinion," laughed Dick. "It certainly is beautiful from here, but I have reasons to believe that things will not seem so beautiful on closer inspection."

"Then I opine I don't care to land!" exclaimed Brad. "I'd like to remember her just as she looks now."

"Hum! ha!" broke in another voice. "I don't blame you, my boy. Isn't she beautiful! Isn't she wonderful! Isn't she ravishing!"

"All of that, professor," agreed the Texan.

Professor Gunn, who had joined them, readjusted his spectacles and thrust his hand into the bosom of his coat.

"I have admired her for a long time," he declared. "In fact, ever since my eyes first beheld her intellectual and classic countenance. Her hair is a golden halo."

"Eh?" grunted Buckhart, in surprise.

"Hair?" exclaimed Dick, puzzled.

"Her eyes are like limpid lakes," continued Zenas.

"Eyes?" gasped both boys.

"Her mouth is a well of wisdom."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Dick.

"Her teeth," went on the professor – "her teeth are pearls beyond price."

"Is he daffy?" muttered the Texan.

"And her form has all the grace of a gazelle. She is a dream of enchantment. Every movement is a poem. I could worship her! I could spend my life at the feet of such a woman listening to the musical murmur of her heavenly voice."

"Look here, professor," said Dick, "what is the matter with you?"

"I'm enthralled, enchanted, enraptured by that woman."

“What woman?”

“Why, the one we are talking about, Sarah Ann Ketchum, president of the Foreign Humanitarian Society, of Boston, Massachusetts. Who else could I be talking about?”

“Oh, murder!” exploded Brad. “Wouldn’t that freeze you some!”

Both boys laughed heartily, much to the displeasure of the professor.

“Such uncalled-for mirth is unseemly,” he declared. “I don’t like it. It offends me very much. Besides, she may see you laughing, and that would harrow her sensitive soul.”

“Professor, I didn’t think it of you!” said Dick, trying to check his merriment. “You are smashed on the lady from Boston – and you’re married. Have you forgotten that?”

“Alas, no! I can never forget it! But do not use such vulgar and offensive language. ‘Smashed!’ Shocking! You do not understand me. She is my ideal, my affinity, the soul of my soul! Yet I must worship her from afar; for, as you say, I am a married man. I have talked with her; I have heard the music of her voice; I have listened to the pearls of wisdom which dropped from her sweet lips. But I haven’t told her I am married. It wasn’t necessary. Even if I were to know her better, even if I were to become her friend, being a man of honor, that friendship would be purely platonic.”

“Rats!” said Brad. “You’re sure in a bad way, professor. Why, that old lady with the hatchet face would scare a dog into a fit.”

“Bradley!” exclaimed Zenas indignantly. “How dare you speak of Miss Ketchum in such a manner! She is a lofty-minded, angelic girl.”

“Girl!” gasped Dick. “Oh, professor! Girl! Oh, ha, ha, ha! She’s sixty if she’s a minute!”

“Sixty-five!” asserted Brad, slapping his thigh and joining in the merriment.

“Stop it!” spluttered the old pedagogue. “She’s looking this way now! She’ll see you laughing. She’s had trouble enough with that little, dried-up, old duffer from Mississippi, who has followed her about like a puppy dog.”

“You mean Major Mowbry Fitts?” said Dick.

“Fitts – that’s the man. They’re all majors or colonels down in Mississippi. He’s no more a major than I am a general.”

“But he’s a fire eater,” declared Dick. “He is a very dangerous man, professor, and you want to be careful. He’s fearfully jealous of Miss Ketchum, too. Followed her all the way from the United States, they say. I’ve seen him glaring at you in a manner that has caused my blood to run cold.”

“Let him glare! Who’s afraid of that withered runt! Why, I could take him over my knee and spank him. I’d enjoy doing it, too! What is he thinking of? How can he fancy such a superbly beautiful woman as Miss Ketchum could fancy him, even for a moment! Besides, he is a drinking man, and Miss Ketchum is a prohibitionist. She told me so herself.”

“Be careful that she doesn’t smell your breath after you take your medicine, professor,” advised Dick. “But I suppose there is no danger of that now, for the voyage is practically ended.”

“Yes,” sighed Zenas. “We soon must part, but I shall always carry her image in my heart.”

“This certain is the worst case I’ve struck in a long while,” said Brad.

“She comes!” breathed Zenas, in sudden excitement. “She comes this way! Behave yourselves, boys! Be young gentlemen. Don’t cause me to blush for your manners.”

Miss Sarah Ann Ketchum, tall, angular, and painfully plain, came stalking along the deck, peering through her gold-rimmed spectacles, which were perched on the extreme elevation of her camel-back nose.

“Steady, Brad!” warned Dick. “Keep your face straight.”

Miss Ketchum had her eye on the professor; he had his eye on her. She smiled and bowed; he doffed his hat and scraped. Like a prancing colt he advanced to meet her.

“Does not this panoramic spectacle of the Orient arouse within your innermost depths unspeakable emotions, both ecstatic and execrable, Professor Gunn?” asked the lady from Boston. “As you gaze on these shores can you not feel your quivering inner self writhing with the shocking

realization of the innumerable excruciating horrors which have stained the shuddering years during which the power of the Turk has been supreme in this sanguine land? Do you not hear within the citadel of your soul a clarion call to duty?

"Are you not oppressed by an intense and all-controlling yearning to do something for the poor, downtrodden Armenians who have been mercilessly ground beneath the iron heel of these heartless hordes of the sultan? I know you do! I have seen it in your countenance, molded by noble and lofty thoughts and towering and exalted ambitions, which lift you to sublime heights far above the swarming multitudes of common earthy clay. Have I not stated your attitude on this stupendous subject to the infinitesimal fraction of a mathematical certainty, professor?"

"Indeed you have, Miss Ketchum!" exclaimed Zenas.

"Oh, wow!" gasped Buckhart, leaning weakly on the rail. "Did you hear that flow of hot air, Dick?"

"I did," said Dick, concealing a smile behind his hand. "That sort of Bostonese has carried the old boy off his feet. Brad, the professor has lost his head over the lady from Boston, and it is up to you and me to rescue him from the peril that threatens him. He is in danger, and we must not falter."

The steamer was swinging in to her mooring, but Professor Gunn was now too absorbed in Miss Ketchum and her talk to tell the boys anything about the two cities, that of the "Infidel" and that of the "Faithful," which lay before them.

A man with a decidedly Oriental cast of countenance, but who wore English-made clothes, paused near the professor and Miss Ketchum, seemingly watching the boats which were swarming off to the steamer.

"Look, pard," whispered Buckhart. "There's the inquisitive gent who has bothered us so much – the one we found in our stateroom one day. He's listening now to the professor and the Boston woman. I'll bet my life on it."

"I see him," said Dick, yet without turning his head. "Brad, the man is spying on us."

"I certain reckon so, and I'm a whole lot sorry we let him off without thumping him up when we found him in our stateroom."

"He protested that he got in there by accident."

"And lied like the Turk that he is!" muttered the Texan. "I'd give a whole bunch of steers to know what his name is."

"He's up to something. I found his name on the list of passengers."

"What is it?"

"Aziz Achmet."

"I knew he was an onery full-blooded Turk. His cognomen proves it."

"He's a subject of the sultan, beyond question. Something tells me we are going to have trouble with that man."

"Well, he wants to lay his trail clear of mine," growled Buckhart. "I'm getting a heap impatient with him, and I'll be liable to do him damage if he provokes me further by his sneaking style."

A little man with a very fierce, gray mustache and imperial came dodging hither and thither amid the passengers, caught sight of Miss Ketchum, hastened forward, doffed his military hat, and made a sweeping bow.

"Madam," he said, "it will affo'd me great pleasure to see yo' safely on shore."

"My dear Major Fitts," said Sarah Ann, "I am truly grateful for your gallant thoughtfulness. Professor, permit me to introduce you to Major Mowbry Fitts, of Natchez, Mississippi. Major, this is Professor Zenas Gunn, principal of Fardale Military Academy, a very famous school."

"Haw!" said Professor Gunn, bowing stiffly.

"Ha!" said Major Fitts, in his most icy manner.

Then they glared at each other.

"Your solicitude for Miss Ketchum was quite needless, sir," declared Zenas. "I am quite capable of looking out for her."

"Suh, yo' may relieve yo'self of any trouble, suh," retorted the man from Natchez.

"I couldn't think of it, sir, not for a moment, sir," shot back the professor. "It might be trouble for you, sir, but it is a pleasure for me."

"The old boy is there with the goods," chuckled Brad.

But Major Fitts was not to be rebuffed in such a manner.

"Considering your age and your physical infirmities, suh," he said, "I think Miss Ketchum will excuse yo'."

That was too much for Zenas.

"My age, sir!" he rasped, lifting his cane. "Why, you antiquated old fossil, I'm ten years younger than you! My infirmities, sir! You rheumatic, malaria-sapped back number, I'm the picture of robust, bounding health beside you!"

"Gentlemen!" gasped Sarah Ann, in astonishment and dismay.

"Don't yo' dare threaten me with your cane, suh!" fumed the major. "If yo' do, suh, I'll take it away from yo' and throw it overbo'd, and yo' need it to suppo't your tottering footsteps, suh."

"I dare you to touch it, sir!" challenged the irascible old pedagogue, shaking the stick at the major's nose.

Fitts made a grab, caught the cane, snatched it away, and sent it spinning overboard.

A moment later Zenas grappled with the man from Natchez, doing it so suddenly that the major was taken off his guard and sent flat upon his back on the deck, his assailant coming down heavily upon him.

Miss Ketchum screamed and fled.

In a moment Dick had the professor by the collar on one side while Brad grasped him by the collar on the other side. They dragged him off and stood him on his feet, although he vigorously objected and tried to maintain his hold on the other man.

"Here, here, professor!" exclaimed Merriwell; "you are disgracing yourself by your behavior."

"He threw my cane overboard, the insolent, old, pug-faced sinner!" raged Zenas. "I'll take its value out of his hide!"

The other passengers in the vicinity were looking on in mingled wonder and enjoyment, many of them being aware of the cause of the encounter between the two old chaps.

"See the kind of a scrape your foolish infatuation for the woman from Boston has led you into," said Dick, in the ear of the professor. "Brace up! The passengers are laughing at you."

Brad had assisted Major Fitts to rise. The little man was pale, and his eyes glared. He stood on his toes before Zenas, at whom he shook his fist, panting:

"Suh, this is not the end of this affair, suh! Give me your address in Constantinople, suh, that I may have a friend wait on yo'. This outrage shall be avenged in blood, suh!"

Dick was between them. He turned to the major.

"You have both made yourselves ridiculous," he said. "It shall go no further. If you are not ashamed, I am ashamed for you."

"I demand satisfaction!" palpitated Fitts. "I am from Mississippi, and no man can give me an insult and escape without meeting me in a duel."

"The gentleman is quite right," said the soft voice of Aziz Achmet, as the Turk stepped forward. "Under the circumstances the affair must be settled in a manner that will satisfy his wounded honor. If he needs a friend, I shall take pleasure in representing him."

"Thank yo', suh," said the major. "I accept your generous offer, suh, and appreciate it."

"Wants a duel, does he?" cried Zenas. "Well, he can't frighten me that way! I'll go him!"

"And I shall take great pleasure, suh, in shooting yo' through the heart," declared Fitts. "Yo' will make the eleventh to my credit, suh."

The mooring being completed, a great gang of men swarmed on board and took the steamer by storm. They were a struggling, snarling, shouting pack of Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Jews, and Italians, who literally fell on the bewildered passengers, as if seeking to rend them limb from limb. They raged, and shouted, and pushed, and in this confusion Dick and Brad managed to hustle the professor away, Fitts and Aziz Achmet being lost in the throng.

"Come now," said Dick, "let's get on shore in a hurry and see if we can't keep clear of Major Mowbry Fitts, unless you are anxious to get yourself carved up or shot full of lead. He means business, and he really wants to fight you in a duel. You were in a nasty scrape, professor."

"But my honor – " began Zenas.

"Was satisfied when you floored him handsomely before all the passengers. Let it go at that."

They found their baggage, and then Dick selected, amid the howling mass of human sharks, a fellow with a dirty red fez and a huge hooked nose.

"Do you speak English?" he asked.

"I spik all languages, Italian, Grek, Tergish, Yarman – "

"That will do," said the boy. "Here is our luggage. Look after it and get us into a boat."

In some marvelous manner it was accomplished. They descended a ladder into a swaying boat, and their luggage followed them like magic. Then came the dragoman Merriwell had selected, and soon they were on their way to the shore.

"Thank fortune!" laughed Dick. "I hope we have seen the last of Aziz Achmet, Major Fitts, and Miss Sarah Ann Ketchum."

CHAPTER II – IN PERSIA

When they reached the pier they found themselves confronted by several Turkish officers, who immediately began questioning them. Their passports were scrutinized doubtfully; and it began to appear that there would be a long delay, during which all their luggage would be overhauled and examined piece by piece.

Then Mustapha, the dragoman, whispered a word in Dick's ear, and directly the boy slipped some money into the hand of one of the officers, whose manner toward them underwent a most surprising change, for he politely assured them that their baggage would not be opened and that there need not be the slightest delay. They were at liberty to leave the custom house at once and take their belongings with them.

Barely had they passed from the custom house when they suddenly found themselves surrounded, as it seemed, by people from all the tribes of the earth. This throng was made up of street venders who were peddling all sorts of goods, sugared figs, sandals, grapes, bread, clothes, and all of them shouting in a babel of tongues that was deafening and bewildering.

"Whoop!" cried Brad. "Talk about an Indian pow-wow! This beats it a mile! You hear me gurgle!"

When these peddlers would have charged on the Americans Mustapha warned them off and held them at bay, shooting violent remarks at them in a dozen different languages. With his aid they succeeded in passing through the thick of the throng without suffering physical violence.

"Well, I certain thought I was due to lose my scalp that go!" laughed the Texan. "Pard, you sure did a right good thing when you engaged this gent to pilot us. He knows his biz a plenty."

"Richard," said the professor, "I must compliment you on your acumen and discernment. It has aroused within my innermost depths unspeakable emotions of profound admiration which I am incompetent to adequately express –"

"Hold on, professor!" cried Dick. "Leave that kind of gas to the lady from Boston, and talk in your usual sensible manner. Up to the present occasion you have been running things, but your encounter with Major Fitts left you in such a condition that I saw something had to be done, and so I tried my hand."

"With flattering success, my boy – with flattering success. Why, young as you are, I believe you could get along anywhere – in any country or clime."

"Thanks, professor. We'll let it go at that."

"What is that chap with the can and wooden mugs selling?" questioned Brad.

"That is a water seller," exclaimed Zenas.

"Water? Wow! Is water so dear on this range that they can peddle it?"

"Water is the beverage of the Turk. He never touches intoxicants. Unspeakable he may be, but he has that virtue."

"That may be true," said Dick; "but he doesn't keep his streets clean."

In truth they had emerged into a labyrinth of dark, narrow, and filthy streets, all the charm of the place having disappeared as soon as they were fairly on land. The mosques and towers had vanished, and their surroundings were decidedly repellent. Everywhere was mud, and garbage, and dogs. Of the latter there seemed to be hundreds upon hundreds of every breed and description.

"They are the street cleaners," explained the professor. "Here no one harms a dog, for if it were not for them the city would become too filthy for human beings to inhabit."

"Well, I certain am not as much stuck on Constantinople as I was," growled Brad.

"I must remind you," said Zenas, "that there is really no such place as Constantinople. The European quarters of the city is called Pera, while the Moslem quarter is Stamboul."

"Perhaps Brad isn't stuck on it," said Dick; "but I am. If this mud gets worse I shall be stuck on it to such an extent that I can't perambulate. Look here, Mustapha, have we got to foot it all the way to our hotel?"

"No, effendi; we tak' tram car, we tak' horse – you choose."

Even as he spoke they came to a street corner where several saddled horses were waiting, after the manner of cabs in an American city.

"Me to the broncho!" cried Brad.

"There is the tram car," said Dick, with a motion.

The car was seen a short distance away, and the professor favored choosing that method of conveyance. Mustapha, however, for all that he had invited them make their choice, argued against it, explaining that half the car was reserved for ladies and that the other half was always crowded to suffocation.

Therefore they decided on the horses. Soon they were mounted and on their way up the long hill to Pera.

Although much of its beauty had vanished, the strange sights and sounds of the city keenly interested the American lads. They beheld people of many nationalities, yellow-coated Jews, with corkscrew curls, Bohemians, Nubians, Chinamen, Englishmen – all hastening on their various ways.

Pera proved to be a city quite modern in appearance, made up mostly of monotonous four-storied houses, new hotels, and shops filled with machine-made Oriental goods. The houses were flat-roofed and nearly all of them had balconies with cast-iron railings.

At last they arrived at their hotel, where they settled with Mustapha, who settled in turn with the owner of the horses.

"When I come next?" asked Mustapha. "You need interpreter dat spik languages well. I tak' you all ofer efrywheres. You haf much troubles you try go 'thout good dragoman."

By this time the professor had fully recovered, and he made arrangements with the dragoman, who then took his departure.

In the hotel they were turned over to a huge tattooed Nubian, his midnight blackness made more pronounced by the snow-white garments he wore. The Nubian conducted them to their rooms in the upper story, where their luggage was presently brought. Finding the rooms fairly satisfactory, with windows overlooking Pera, the Golden Horn, and giving them a view of the Turkish city beyond, they prepared to settle down and be satisfied.

First Dick took a long survey of the scene that could be beheld from the most advantageous window. From that point he could look away onto Galata and Stamboul, and again he was enchanted by the spectacle. The sun was shining on the palaces, mosques, and tall minarets, it was lighting the ripples of the Golden Horn, and over all was the superbly blue sky which defies the skill of the greatest artist.

Dick heaved a deep sigh.

"Strange that it all should seem so beautiful from a distance and that the beauty should so quickly vanish on close inspection," he said. "In this case it is indeed true that 'familiarity breeds contempt.'"

"That sure is right," agreed Buckhart. "All the same, we'll proceed to get familiar with it, I reckon."

They next indulged in the luxury of a bath, taking turns, and all felt decidedly refreshed.

A call brought the Nubian, and they were informed that they could be served with anything they wished in their rooms, if they were willing to pay the extra charge.

After considerable discussion, they ordered a meal. There was sufficient delay to whet their appetites, and then the Nubian and an assistant reappeared, a table was spread, and they sat down to eat.

"A fried boot leg would taste good to me now," declared the Texan. "That being the case, I reckon I'll manage to get along on the fodder they supply here."

But everything proved more than satisfactory. There was enough, and it was good.

During the meal the giant black man stood ready to wait on them. When not serving them, he folded his tattooed arms across his massive chest and regarded them steadily with his eyes. When they had finished the assistant reappeared, and the table and dishes were removed.

"I sure would hate to have that gent place his paws on me in violence," observed Buckhart. "I opine he's some powerful."

"He looks like a Hercules," said Dick.

"He made me extremely nervous," confessed the professor. "I think I'll inform the proprietor that we would much prefer having some one else attend us while we are here."

"Don't!" exclaimed Merriwell. "I rather fancy the Nubian."

They lounged about for a time after eating, but finally the professor made an excuse to leave the boys, saying he would return soon.

"Pard," chuckled Buckhart, when Zenas was gone, "the old boy did get a plenty smashed on the woman from Boston."

"I'm glad we got him away from her – and from Major Fitts."

"And I'm glad we won't be bothered any more by that sneaking Turk, Aziz Achmet, who seemed spying on us. Wonder what Aziz took us for. I believe he was some sort of Turkish confidence man. He was a heap eager to act as Major Fitts' second in a duel."

"Think of Zenas Gunn in a duel!" exclaimed Dick, and they laughed heartily.

After a while Merriwell became worried over the professor's protracted absence. Going to the door, he stepped outside.

He stepped into full view of two men, who were whispering in the shadows of a draped alcove. One was the giant Nubian.

The other was Aziz Achmet, the mysterious Turk!

CHAPTER III – THE PERSISTENCE OF ACHMET

There was something decidedly ominous and sinister in the behavior of the coal-black giant and the silent, secretive Turk, who were whispering there in the shadows. In spite of himself, Dick felt a sudden faint chill, like an icy breath, sweep over him.

He stood quite still and regarded them steadily. They saw him, and their whispering stopped. The eyes of the tattooed black man seemed to gleam with a baleful fire, but his dark face remained as unchangeable as marble.

Slowly a strange smile overspread the countenance of Achmet. With a quick, silent step, he advanced toward the boy. He spoke in a low, soft tone:

“So you are safely here, my lad? I see no harm has befallen you.”

His English was almost perfect.

“What are you doing here?” demanded Dick. “This is not a place in which one of your faith should choose to linger, with the City of the Faithful so near. Indeed, I have been told that the better men of your religion never deign to contaminate themselves by setting foot in this place, which is polluted by the infidel. Your conduct is suspicious, to say the least.”

“It is seldom one who may not be well suspected is in such haste to suspect another,” retorted the Turk, still with that strange, faint smile which was very annoying to the boy.

Indignation swelled within Dick’s heart, for now he was fully satisfied that they were being spied upon by this man.

“Look here,” he said, “you’ll get into trouble if you continue to follow us about.”

“Be careful that you do not get into far more serious trouble.”

“There is no reason why we should get into trouble, for we have a way of minding our own business.”

“Then you are the first Americans I have seen who have that excellent habit,” retorted Achmet, in a manner that became more and more insulting.

Had Dick not learned by example and practice to control his temper, he might have lost his head. He kept cool, however – outwardly, at least.

“It is plain you have been spying on us,” he said. “We caught you in our stateroom on the steamer – ”

“An accident.”

“An accident, perhaps, that we caught you. It was no accident that you were there. What’s your game, man? You are up to some rascally business.”

“I like not your lack of politeness, boy. I am not the one to answer questions. It is you who should explain, but I will talk with the man whom you call professor.”

“I don’t know whether you will or not.”

“I demand to see him.”

“You will have to find him.”

“Is he not in those rooms?”

“No.”

“Let me see.”

The manner of Achmet plainly denoted that he did not believe Dick.

“We have engaged those rooms and paid in advance for them,” said Merriwell, still holding himself in check. “We are entitled to privacy in them, and we have no intention of admitting strange and suspicious visitors, especially a Turk of your questionable behavior.”

“You refuse me admittance?”

“Decidedly.”

Aziz Achmet made a quick sign to the black giant. Instantly the Nubian strode forward. Dick made a move to retreat, but the arm of the black man darted out and one powerful hand seized the lad. Merriwell had not overestimated the probable strength of the tattooed man, for, with scarcely an effort, it seemed, the boy was lifted from his feet and placed to one side.

Achmet quickly advanced to the door, flung it open, and entered the room.

Brad Buckhart had caught the hum of voices outside and was crossing the room to investigate when he found himself face to face with the Turk.

“Waugh!” exclaimed the Texan, in surprise.

“Pardon, boy,” said Achmet, still maintaining his quiet manner and soft speech. “I would speak with the professor.”

“Is that so?” said Brad. “Well, whoever invited you to walk in all unceremonious and chirklike? It strikes me that you are some forward in your deportment. Where’s my pard?”

“Here!” cried Dick, who had been released by the Nubian, and who now hastened into the room. “This man forced an entrance. He has dogged us here, Brad.”

“Dogged is a proper word for it, I reckon!” grated the Texan, beginning to bridle. “Forced his way in, did he? Well, I judge we’ll just shoot him out on his neck and teach him a bit of common decency!”

He proceeded to strip off his coat in a very businesslike manner.

“Hold!” commanded Achmet. “You will regret it, you infidel whelp, if you place your vile hands on me!”

“Whoop!” roared the Westerner. “We’ll sure see about that right away! Come on, partner!”

But now the Nubian stalked into the room, apparently ready to take a hand in the encounter, and Achmet called attention to him.

“This man alone,” he declared, “is more than the equal of twenty boys. He once slew a strong man with a single blow of his fist. If you lift a finger against me he will rend you. Be careful!”

In spite of this warning Buckhart would have pitched in; but Dick had better judgment and hastened to restrain his friend.

“The black man is dangerous, Brad,” he said, in a low tone. “Unless we use deadly weapons, he can master us alone. Besides that, we do not wish to kick up an uproar unless forced to do so. Steady, old man!”

“Whoop!” cried Brad. “This business is making me sizzle a heap!”

“It is an outrage, and we’ll enter a complaint.”

“You bet your boots!”

“That is your privilege,” smiled Achmet, in his half-sneering way. “When I am through, you may complain as much as you like; but first bring forth the professor, that I may question him. Why is he hiding?”

“Hiding? Do you think he would hide from you?” exclaimed Dick. “I tell you he is not here. Look for yourself.”

“And be right careful that none of our belongings stick to your fingers,” growled the Texan. “We’ve been robbed in various ways from London all the way here; but this is the first time any one has tried the game open and brazen, like this.”

“You are not in the least danger of being robbed,” assured the Turk. “I invite you to watch me, in order that you may see you have no complaint of that sort to make.”

He then looked into the adjoining room, and the bath.

“Well, are you satisfied?” demanded Dick.

Achmet showed a trace of annoyance and disappointment. He stated that he had been told by the Nubian that the professor was there, and further that he was sure Zenas Gunn had not left the hotel since his arrival.

“Which makes it plain that he has played the spy on us right along,” said Dick, addressing Brad, but not lowering his voice.

“Sure!” rasped Buckhart.

“I will wait for his return,” said the Turk. “While I am waiting, perhaps you will inform me what business has brought you to this country.”

“Our business is none of your business,” declared Dick.

“Of that I will judge when I am satisfied that I have learned your business.”

“We are traveling.”

“For what purpose?”

“To see the world.”

“Two boys and an old man. In Italy your behavior was suspicious. You disappeared from Naples in great haste, without explaining why you left so suddenly or whither you went.”

“Great tarantulas!” muttered Brad. “He’s even got track of us as far back as that.”

“In Venice you were concerned in some singular and unaccountable things, and in Greece you had dealings with lawless characters. Had you remained in Athens, you must have explained your actions to officials of the city government. You left there, also, in haste.”

Dick wondered that the man should know so much of their movements.

“It seems,” continued Achmet, “that in various places the police have been warned against you; but that in each instance they sought to find out about you only to find you suddenly departed.”

“This certain is a plenty interesting!” gasped Buckhart. “What does it mean, pard? Can you tell?”

Dick had been thinking swiftly. His hand fell on his friend’s arm.

“Brad, it is the work of Bunol and Marsh, our bitter enemies. They were sore because we fooled them by getting the Budthornes out of their power. They have lost track of Dunbar Budthorne and his sister, Nadia, but have managed somehow to keep trace of us, and have tried to cause us as much annoyance as possible.”

“I opine you’re right, Dick,” nodded Buckhart. “That’s just it. I wouldn’t be surprised to see those two onery varmints turn up any time. Well, they’ve succeeded in making a lot of fool work for a lot of fool people, and this is the first time we’ve been touched by it.”

Achmet had listened to their words with a manner of mingled interest and doubt. It was plain that he did not understand, and he was on the point of questioning them further when the sudden sound of excited and angry voices reached their ears through the partly open doorway.

“The professor!” cried Dick. “Something is doing, Brad! Come on!”

“Lay the trail, pard! I’m at your heels!”

They rushed forth and ran toward the point from which came the sound of those voices.

“You’re a miserable, crawling worm! You’re a whisky-soaked, dried-up, offensive squid! You have annoyed the lady by your obnoxious attentions, and they must cease!”

It was the voice of Zenas.

“Yo’, suh, are a long-eared jackass, suh, and I demand satisfaction fo’ your insults, suh!”

“Major Fitts!” exclaimed Dick, in dismay.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen!” shrilled another voice. “This is scandalous! You must not quarrel over me! It is shocking to my delicate sensibilities. I cannot permit it!”

“And Sarah Ann, sure as shooting!” cried Brad.

At the head of the stairs were three persons. Zenas Gunn was shaking his fist down at Major Fitts, while the major was shaking his fist up at the professor. Miss Ketchum had her hands clasped in an attitude of despair, while she implored them to desist.

Dick halted, folding his arms.

“Now what do you think of that?” he muttered, in disgust.

"It certain is some annoying," chuckled Buckhart, pausing with his hands resting on his hips. "Shall we pitch in, pard, and break it up?"

"I'm tempted to let those two old fools have it out," said Merriwell.

"Good idea! Mebbe it will cure them both."

"Take your fist away!" snarled the professor, knocking the hand of the little man aside.

"Don't yo' strike at me, suh!" panted the major, his face red as a boiled lobster, and his gray mustache bristling.

"Strike at you!" retorted Zenas scornfully. "If I ever struck at you, you human wart, there wouldn't be anything left of you but a grease spot!"

"Oh, please, please stop!" sobbed Sarah Ann, trying to get hold of them and force them apart.

"Yo' had better hide behind a lady's petticoat!" raged the man from Mississippi.

"Hide behind nothing!" retorted Gunn, giving Miss Ketchum an embrace and looking over one shoulder, while he reached over her other shoulder to again shake his fist at Fitts. "She is trying to keep me from annihilating you."

Finding herself in the professor's embrace, Miss Ketchum screamed and seemed on the point of fainting.

"Oh, Moses!" laughed Buckhart. "Look at that, pard – just look!"

"I see," said Dick, also convulsed. "The professor isn't losing the opportunity to hug Sarah Ann, and it makes the major bloodthirsty."

Fitts danced round in an endeavor to get hold of Gunn, but the latter skillfully turned so that he kept Miss Ketchum's limp form between them.

"Unhand that lady!" rasped the man from Mississippi, fairly frothing. "How dare yo' behave in such a manner!"

"Oh, go back to your kennel!" advised Zenas.

The major caught hold of Sarah Ann and managed to dance round until he could get his hands on the professor.

"Release her!" he commanded.

Miss Ketchum straightened up a little.

"Such a shocking scandal!" she sobbed.

"Yo' have compromised her, suh!" panted Fitts. "Yo' shall pay the penalty with your life, suh!"

"I've stood just as much of this as I can!" grated Zenas. "I'll just throw you downstairs!"

Which he attempted to do, while Sarah Ann again tried to part them. On the top stair both lost their balance. Wildly they grabbed at something as they toppled. The right hand of Zenas caught Miss Ketchum. The left hand of the major closed on her, also. Then all three toppled, a shriek of terror escaped the woman, and down they went.

Bump, bump, bump-ety-bump!

Tangled in a most astonishing manner, the three seemed to bound like a huge rubber ball from stair to stair. At intervals legs and arms shot out from the mass and described half circles in the air. The woman continued to scream, the professor yelled, while the major grunted and gasped with every thump. It sounded as if the entire hotel was falling.

"Oh, say, pard, this is awful!" cried Buckhart, rushing toward the stairs.

"I'm afraid the professor will be somewhat dented," said Dick, also losing no time.

Thud! crash!

The trio landed at the bottom of the stairs.

Sarah Ann struck in a sitting posture, with her skirts outspread. She was minus a wig and a full set of false teeth, and she presented a ludicrous spectacle of wreck and despair. Both men were beneath her, and having landed on them she did not seem to be seriously harmed.

Dick and Brad bounded down the stairs and reached her.

"Are you hurt, madam?" questioned Merriwell, his natural chivalry causing him to express anxiety for her first.

She spoke, and strange were the mumbling sounds which issued from her toothless mouth. "I've sost my seesh in thish dishgrashful affairsh," she answered. "Be sho kindsh to reshtorsh my seesh, pleash."

"Here madam," said Dick, picking up something, "are part of them."

"And here, madam," said Brad, also picking something up, "are the rest of them."

She hastily slipped them into her mouth, while Mowbry Fitts began to kick and shout.

"Let me get up!" he called, in a muffled voice.

"Be quiet," said Miss Ketchum, "until I have arranged my toilet."

Her head was almost entirely devoid of hair.

"Perhaps this may assist you," said Dick, discovering her wig and handing it to her.

"Help!" called the husky voice of Professor Gunn. "I'm smothering! I can't breathe!"

"You don't deserve to breathe," said Miss Ketchum, calmly adjusting the wig. "You are two indecent creatures, and I am sure you have disgraced me forever."

Major Fitts was becoming frantic.

"I'm dying!" he groaned.

"I'm dead!" came faintly from Professor Gunn.

By this time scores of guests had reached the spot and stood asking questions. Others were coming. The whole house had been aroused.

"Dick," said Brad, "I do believe the professor is smothering! She's sitting on his head, and his struggles are growing weaker."

"Lift her, Brad," said Merriwell.

They caught hold of her and stood her on her feet.

"Water!" gasped the professor.

"Whisky!" wheezed the major.

They lay on their backs, having managed to roll over, gasping for breath.

Miss Ketchum looked down at them with an air of contempt.

"I hope," she said, "that the proprietor has you both locked up as lunatics! You are the worst old fools I ever saw! So there!"

Then, declining assistance, she hurried up the stairs.

CHAPTER IV – THE CHALLENGE

The final words of Sarah Ann ere she pranced up the stairs did much to revive the professor and the major. They sat up and looked at each other. The expression on their faces was comical in the extreme.

“She meant you, sir!” rasped Gunn.

“She meant yo’, suh!” snapped Fitts.

“I think she plainly included both of you,” said Dick; “and I fancy it is the opinion of all present that she hit the nail on the head.”

“I don’t know about the nail,” groaned Zenas; “but I’m sure something hit me on the head. And that woman – that heartless jade – sat on me! She nearly finished me!”

“Had she completed the job,” declared the major, “it would have been a blessing, suh. It would have disposed of a pestiferous, weak-minded, addle-pated, goggle-eyed – ”

“Hold on! Stop right there!” cried Zenas. “That will do! You have reached the limit, sir – the limit!”

“Yo’ may think so, suh; but yo’ll find this is far from the limit. I am a man of honor, and I demand satisfaction. I demand blood!”

“He’s a butcher!” chuckled Brad.

“You have it already,” said Zenas. “Your nose is bleeding, sir.”

“You know what I mean. I demand that you meet me in mortal combat. You escaped me once, but you shall not escape again. I caught you sneaking around the door of Miss Ketchum’s room and – ”

“I caught you there, you fabricator!” flung back the professor.

At this point the proprietor of the hotel appeared on the scene and promptly announced that he would not have such things in his house. He threatened to eject them both, whereupon Dick hastened to assure the angry man that he would take care of the professor and see that there was no further disturbance.

Then Dick and Brad lifted Zenas to his feet and started him up the stairs, one on either side.

“You shall hear from me again!” cried the major, in defiance of those who had raised him and were dragging him away.

“Bah, sir!” Zenas flung over his shoulder.

“Boo, suh!” Fitts hurled back.

“Slowly, slowly, boys!” groaned the old pedagogue. “I feel as if all my joints were dislocated and half my bones were broken. It’s a wonder my head is not mashed flat, for that woman – that creature – sat on it! Then she called me an old fool!”

“But,” said Dick, “you know you could spend your life at her feet, listening to the musical murmur of her heavenly voice.”

“Her voice sounds like tearing a rag!” sneered Zenas. “She’s all skin and bones, and – ”

“Why, professor!” interrupted Brad. “I heard you assert that her form had the grace of a gazelle.”

“Never – never said it! She’s a hatchet-faced old – ”

“Tut! tut!” chided Dick. “You know you admired her the first time you beheld her intellectual and classic countenance.”

“Now stop it, boys! Did you see her glare at me with those fishy eyes?”

“Awful!” exclaimed Dick. “You called her eyes limpid lakes.”

“I deny it! I deny it! And she has false teeth, for I heard her mumble that she lost them when she fell.”

“You distinctly stated,” reminded Buckhart, “that her teeth were pearls beyond price.”

“I think they cost about eleven dollars a set,” estimated Dick.

“And her golden halo of hair came off in the shuffle,” said the Texan. “She’s as bald as a billiard ball.”

“Say no more!” entreated Zenas. “Get me to my room and spread me on the bed. Boys, if you ever tell of this – if you ever even mention it again – I’ll send you both back home!”

By this time they had reached their rooms, and they helped the old fellow to the bed, on which he slowly sank, groaning as if in great distress.

“Bring me my medicine, Richard,” he entreated. “I must have a small dose. You will find it in my medicine case. The leather-covered flask, Richard. That’s it. Never mind pouring any. I’ll take it directly from the flask. It is a harmless tonic, and I need it greatly just now.”

He took a long pull at the leather-covered flask. After that he lay back and closed his eyes for a moment. Suddenly they popped open and he exclaimed:

“To think that creature should call me an old fool!”

“But you know pearls of wisdom drop from her sweet lips,” laughed Dick.

“And she is a lofty-minded, angelic girl,” added Brad.

“Get out of here, you two rascals!” cried the old man. “You’re laughing at me, you ungrateful scamps! Do you want to drive me crazy? Leave me to meditate on the frailty of human flesh.”

The laughing lads retired to the adjoining room.

“Well, one good thing happened,” said Dick; “it cured him of his foolishness over Sarah Ann.”

“He sure is well cured,” agreed Buckhart.

There came a sharp knock on the door. Before they could open it, it was flung wide by the giant Nubian, and Aziz Achmet again entered the room.

“This is too much!” exclaimed Dick. “I’ll call the proprietor and see if we are to be annoyed by this man in this outrageous manner.”

“Wait a moment, boy,” advised the Turk, still maintaining his cool and insolent manner. “I am here on most important business. Professor Gunn has been challenged to mortal combat by Major Fitts, and I have come as the representative of the major to make arrangements for the affair of honor.”

“Well,” said Dick, “you may return and tell that little blusterer to go to a warmer clime! Professor Gunn is not a fighting man, and he will not meet Major Fitts in a duel.”

“Hold on – hold on, Richard!” called the professor, who was beginning to feel the influence of the “medicine” from the leather-covered flask. “Don’t be so hasty! I want you to understand that I am no coward! That withered old pippin can’t frighten me! No, sir! If he wants to fight a duel, I’ll meet him, and I’ll give him all he wants of it!”

“Professor, you – ”

“Stop, Richard – stop right there! I know my own business. If I were to let that mistake from Mississippi drive me into my boots I’d never after have the face to look at my own reflection in a mirror.”

“But a duel, professor – a real duel – ”

“I know. It’s all right. I’ll show him the kind of stuff I’m made of, I will! He thinks he’ll frighten me, but he’ll find out he can’t jar me a bit. I’ll meet him with weapons of any sort. I’ll meet him anywhere!”

“Whoop!” cried Buckhart. “The old boy means it, pard, and I reckon he’ll make good!”

“Mowbry Fitts will find out that I’ll make good,” said Zenas. “He can’t send his representative here and frighten Zenas Gunn, of Fardale. Fix it up, Richard. You shall be my second. I leave it all to you. That unfortunate fall shook me up, and I’m a trifle dizzy. I’ll retire again. But this gentleman had better tell old Fitts to prepare for his funeral. That’s all he’ll be good for when I am through with him.”

Then Zenas again retired to his room.

Aziz Achmet waited. Dick Merriwell thought swiftly.

“Where and when shall this duel take place?” he asked.

“There is an old cemetery a short distance up the street,” said the Turk.

“Well?”

“It will be an excellent place for the meeting.”

“And the hour?”

“Daybreak to-morrow, if it suits you.”

“That’s all right.”

“The weapons – ”

“We have the choice of weapons,” interrupted Merriwell.

“And you choose swords – or pistols?”

“We will not only choose the weapons, we’ll provide them,” said the boy. “I’ll have them on hand, Mr. Achmet.”

“But it is customary to settle all these little details in advance, boy.”

“You have forced this affair on Professor Gunn. I guarantee that he will be on hand at the appointed time to-morrow morning. I also guarantee that he will have the weapons. If you’re not satisfied with that, get out of these rooms and cease to annoy us further.”

“That’s business!” cried Buckhart.

Achmet seemed to think a moment, but he finally bowed, retreating gracefully toward the door.

“It is only a single point,” he said, “and I shall advise my principal to concede it. But I wish you to understand that we shall be on our guard for trickery, and I’ll see that Major Fitts has a fair and even chance.”

Then he passed through the door, which the Nubian closed.

CHAPTER V – IN THE CEMETERY

When Pera was swept by fire but one thing in the burned portion remained practically unchanged. It was an old cemetery. It is there to-day, in the midst of the city of modern buildings, and this cemetery was the spot chosen by Aziz Achmet for the duel.

To this old graveyard in the dusky light of morning came three persons. One was an old man, haggard and pallid; the others were boys. The boys each carried a basket carefully covered by a cloth.

Professor Gunn had scarcely closed his eyes in sleep that night. He tried to sleep, but his “medicine” ran out, and without its soothing influence he wooed slumber in vain. During the greater part of the night he had walked the floor of his room or sat writing at a little table.

Beneath the dismal cypress trees which filled the cemetery it was still quite dark.

“Boys,” whispered the professor, as they paused on the point of entering, “can you see anything of them?”

“Can’t see much of anything,” answered Dick, “only what looks like a lot of drunken ghosts.”

In truth the graveyard seemed filled with reeling, ghostly forms, but, on closer inspection, these were found to be tombstones. The human appearance of these lurching stones was explained on closer examination, for it is the custom of the Turks to carve the stone above the grave of every man so that its top is crowned either with a turban or a fez. Seen in a dim light, the tilted stones looked remarkably like staggering human forms, robed in white.

“Boo!” muttered Buckhart, shrugging his broad shoulders. “This sure is a spooky old place.”

Both boys heard a sudden sound like rattling dice. They discovered it came from the professor, whose teeth were chattering loudly.

“Keep a stiff backbone, professor,” advised Dick. “It will all be over in a short time.”

“Ye-yes,” faltered Zenas, “it will all bub-bub-be over fuf-fuf-for me. Richard, I fuf-fuf-feel that I am gug-gug-going to fuf-fuf-fall.”

“Nonsense! Why, you were bold as a lion last night when Achmet called.”

“Bub-bub-but that was lul-lul-last nun-nun-night,” chattered the shaking old fellow. “Besides, I had tut-tut-taken some tut-tut-tonic. I wush I ha-ha-had sus-sus-some nun-nun-now.”

“It sure is a shame you ran out of tonic,” said Brad. “But you won’t be any good whatever unless you get a brace on. You’ve got to fight Fitts now.”

“Yes, you’ll have to give him fits,” said Dick, making a poor pun. “You can’t back out without being branded as a coward, after which you’d never again dare look at your own reflection in a mirror.”

“I know it,” sighed Zenas; “but I was a fool to be so bub-brave last night! That woman is responsible for it all! If I dud-dud-die, my blood will be on her head!”

“But you’re not going to fall,” declared Buckhart.

They finally succeeded in leading him into the gloom of the cemetery, and he seemed greatly relieved when they ascertained beyond doubt that Major Fitts and his second had not arrived.

“Perhaps they won’t come at all,” said the old pedagogue eagerly.

“Perhaps not,” agreed Dick; “but I wouldn’t count on that, for I believe Achmet will bring the major.”

But the professor was hopeful as well as anxious. He watched the gray light of morning sifting through the cypress branches and bringing out the ghostly tombstones with more and more distinctness. Then he began to fear.

“I – I think there is no doubt about it,” he said, at last. “He is not coming, boys. He’s a bluffer. He tried to bluff me, but he failed.”

Having arrived at this conclusion, he rapidly grew indignant.

“This thing is outrageous!” he blustered – “outrageous, I say! Why, the craven little whippersnapper! Just think of it, he hasn’t the courage to come here like a man and meet me in mortal combat!

He is a coward – that's what he is, a coward! A fire eater, indeed! Bah! The next time I meet him, I shall tweak his nose! Yes, sir, tweak it!"

In the dim, gray light Dick and Brad exchanged glances. Neither laughed, but both felt like it.

"I'm tired of waiting," declared Zenas. "The time is past. He isn't coming, and we may as well return to the hotel."

"I think we had better wait a little longer," urged Dick.

"But what's the use. It's morning now, and that craven from Mississippi is not on hand. I'll warrant he is hiding beneath his bed this very minute."

"I opine you're mistaken, professor," said Brad dryly. "If I ain't a heap mistaken, here he comes now."

"Where?" gasped Zenas.

"There," said the Texan, motioning toward three dim figures which were entering the cemetery and approaching. "I reckon it's Major Fitts, accompanied by two friends."

"Oh, Lordy!" groaned the professor, growing limp and leaning on Dick's shoulder, all the bluster taken out of him in a second.

Once more Merriwell urged the old pedagogue to brace up.

"Don't let him see you're afraid," he urged. "Do stiffen up, professor!"

"Richard," groaned Zenas, "I had a premonition that my time had come. Here, Richard, take these papers. One is my last will and testament. The other is a fond adieu to my wife. Poor Nancy! how I pity her! She'll never see me again! Tell her how I perished, Richard. Perhaps some time – when I'm gone – you may think – of me. It is a fearful thing – to perish – in a foreign land – far from – the loved ones – at home."

The old man choked and could speak no more.

The three persons were now quite near, and by the dim light the boys could recognize the short figure of Major Fitts. Aziz Achmet had the major by the arm and seemed talking to him earnestly in low tones. The third man carried a small hand case, and seemed like a surgeon.

Fitts and the surgeon stopped a short distance away, while Achmet advanced swiftly, with his usual soft step.

"I see you are here, gentlemen," he said.

"We are," returned Dick; "but we began to think you were not coming. Professor Gunn is anxious to have this affair over in order that he may take a bath before breakfast."

"A bath!" said the Turk. "Before breakfast?"

"Yes; he always has his morning shower or sponge."

"But he may not need one this morning."

"I reckon he will," muttered Buckhart, to himself. "If Fitts' aim is any good, the professor sure will need one a heap."

"Major Fitts," said Achmet, "is inclined to be magnanimous."

"Indeed?" said Dick questioningly.

"Yes; he wishes me to say that he has no real desire to slay one of his own countrymen."

"Kind of him!"

"And, therefore, if Professor Gunn will apologize, he will overlook the insult and spare him."

"I – I think I had better do it, Richard!" whispered Zenas.

"Mr. Achmet," said Dick stiffly, "you will kindly inform Major Fitts that he has quite misunderstood the situation. Tell him that unless he immediately apologizes in the most humble manner Professor Gunn insists that the affair be carried through to the bitter end."

"To the bitter end!" put in Buckhart. "That's the stuff!"

The Turk bowed.

"Then there is nothing else to be done but to arrange the preliminaries. I will speak to the major a moment."

As soon as Achmet's back was turned the professor seized Dick and almost sobbed in his ear: "Richard, Richard, why did you do it? My blood will be on your head!"

"Hush!" returned Dick. "Don't you see the major is frightened worse than you are? Achmet has dragged him here, and he's ready to take to his heels and run for his life."

"Wh-what?" gasped Zenas, straightening up as if electrified. "Are you sure?"

"No question about it. Achmet is having a difficult time to hold him now."

It was a fact that Mowbry Fitts was very much disturbed. He protested that there might be a mutual understanding through which the affair could be dropped. All the way to the cemetery he had hoped that the professor would not be there and would fail to appear. He now declared that Achmet was responsible for the whole wretched affair.

"It is a shame that two highly intelligent men, two eminently respectable citizens of a great and glorious country, should meet here, suh, in this wretched old cemetery, suh, and slaughter each other in cold blood," he said.

Achmet shrugged his shoulders.

"I am quite surprised in you," he declared. "I thought you a brave man. The other American is waiting and anxious. If you show the white feather now, you will be branded the rest of your life as a coward."

At last the major seemed to brace up. He announced that he was ready for the worst.

By this time it had grown quite light outside, although there were still deep shadows in the cemetery.

Again Achmet turned to the professor and the boys.

"We are ready," he said. "Where are the weapons?"

The surgeon was kneeling on the ground, having opened his case. He was laying out his instruments on a white cloth.

"If you are ready, we are," said Dick. "The weapons are in these baskets. You may select either basket you choose. Let the major remove his coat in order that his arms may be free and unhampered. Professor, strip."

Smothering a groan, Zenas permitted Brad to assist him in removing his coat. Major Fitts also took his coat off.

Achmet hesitated when invited to choose one of the baskets. He feared a trick and inquired if the weapons in one basket were identical with those in the other. Dick assured him that there was not the slightest difference.

"I selected them myself with the greatest care," asserted the boy. "They are good and strong."

"And rank," muttered Buckhart softly.

"Let the major and the professor stand ten paces apart," said Dick. "At that distance, they should be able to hit each other once in three shots, at least. Let them begin firing at the word and continue until one or the other falls, cries enough, or the ammunition is exhausted. Brad, pace the distance."

Buckhart did so promptly, but his paces were very short. He made a mark with his heel for Zenas and another to indicate the position of the major.

In the meantime Achmet had selected one of the baskets and carried it to the point where his principal was to stand. Dick placed the other near the spot marked for the professor. Neither of the duelists knew the sort of weapons decided on, and both watched with great anxiety the uncovering of the baskets.

Taking note of Achmet's movements, Dick removed the cloth from the professor's basket at the same moment that the Turk lifted the covering of the other basket.

Both baskets were filled with eggs!

"Eggs?" gasped Fitts.

"Eggs?" breathed Gunn.

"Eggs-actly," chuckled Brad Buckhart.

“Why, I – I don’t understand!” faltered the professor.

“What does this mean, gentlemen?” demanded the major. “Will yo’ kindly explain it?”

“Having the choice of weapons,” said Dick, “I decided on eggs, good and rank. Here they are. Only fools fight duels over trivial things with deadly weapons. With these eggs you cannot kill each other, but you can soak each other to your hearts’ content and thus satisfy your wounded honor.”

“But, suh, I never heard of such a thing, suh!” exploded Fitts. “It is ridiculous!”

“All right,” returned Dick. “If you object, I have brought these.”

He produced two huge pistols.

“One,” continued Dick, “is loaded. The other is not. You shall toss for choice. Then you shall stand at arm’s length, place the pistols against each other’s breast, and pull the triggers at the word. A moment later one of you will be a dead man, while the other will be unharmed. Does that suit you better, major?”

“It’s unusual – decidedly unusual, suh! No, suh, it does not suit me at all, suh! I prefer the eggs.”

“Good!” whispered Zenas. “So do I!”

“Then take your positions, gentlemen,” ordered Dick.

Aziz Achmet threw up his hands, shaking his head in a baffled manner.

“Oh, these Americans, these Americans!” he muttered, retreating. “I had hoped they might destroy each other, which would save me further trouble with them. Now they are going to fight a duel with rotten eggs! Pah!”

The surgeon hastily threw his instruments into the case, which he closed and picked up, also retreating to get out of probable danger of being hit by one of those eggs.

The professor and the major got ready for action. Each picked up as many eggs as he could hold in his left hand and took one in his right.

“Are you ready, gentlemen?” asked Dick, also backing off a little, an example followed by Brad.

“Ready!” answered both.

“Then – fire!”

Whizz! Spat!

The major missed, but the professor’s aim was accurate, and he struck Fitts fairly in the centre of his white shirt bosom. The man from Mississippi staggered and clapped his hand to his nose.

“Oh, whew! Oh, murder!” he gasped. “That was not an egg! If it was it was laid two thousand years ago!”

Whizz! – another one flew past the major’s ear. This aroused him, and he got into action once more. Eggs flew through the air with increasing rapidity. While stooping to get a fresh supply of ammunition from his basket, Zenas was struck fairly on top of his bald head. The yellow mass splattered in all directions.

A strong odor filled the air, reaching the nostrils of both Dick and Brad, who were laughing heartily.

“Great horn spoon!” gurgled the Texan. “For a duel this sure beats! Look at ’em, pard! The professor got it in the neck that time! There – he hit the major! They’ll be sights in a minute!”

Dick was laughing in his old, rollicking way.

“Oh, ha, ha, ha! Go it, professor! Soak him! That’s the way! Ha, ha, ha!”

Never had that grim and gloomy cemetery resounded with such shouts of merriment.

“Oh, I’ll fix him!” cried Zenas. “I’ll teach him a lesson! I’ll teach him to challenge me! I’ll – Murder! I’m blinded!”

In truth he had been struck fairly between the eyes, and the mass that splattered over his face completely blinded him.

“Teach me, will yo’, suh?” triumphantly shouted the major. “Oh, I don’t know!”

Dick was gasping for breath.

“Brad, it’s t-too much!” he laughed, holding onto his sides. “Ha, ha, ha! It’s too much!”

Professor Gunn wiped his sleeve across his eyes. Then he tried the other sleeve and succeeded in clearing them.

"Have yo' got enough, suh?" demanded the major. "Cry quits, suh, if yo' have."

"Never – never while I live!" grated Zenas.

"Then I'll have to finish yo', suh. I offered yo' – "

He said no more, for at that instant an egg thrown with all the force Zenas Gunn could command struck him full and fair in the mouth.

The little man went down as if shot.

"Whee!" shrilled the professor. "Got him then!"

Fitts kicked and floundered and then rolled over on his stomach, lifting himself to his hands and knees. The sounds he emitted were trying on those who heard him.

At this juncture two ladies suddenly appeared on the scene, having approached during the excitement without being observed. They were Sarah Ann Ketchum and an Englishwoman whom she had found in the hotel and induced to accompany her to the scene of the duel.

Major Fitts had written her a passionate note of farewell, telling her about the duel, where it was to be fought and when. This he had intrusted to a servant to be delivered that morning. The servant had not waited for Miss Ketchum to rise, but had rapped at her door until she got up and received the message. When she comprehended its contents she lost not a moment in dressing and getting the other woman to accompany her to the scene of the "deadly" meeting.

When she saw Major Fitts on his hands and knees, giving utterance to those distressing and terrible sounds, she shrieked and ran forward.

"Oh, heavens!" she cried. "He is slain! He is wounded unto death! He is dying! Hear him gurgle, and groan, and gasp for breath! It is a horrible tragedy!"

"Great horn spoon!" exclaimed Buckhart. "Sarah Ann is on deck, pard."

"She has arrived too late to prevent the fearful deed," said Dick.

The lady from Boston saw Professor Gunn. She shook her clenched hands at him and screamed:

"You murderer! You have killed the poor major! You have slain the idol of my heart!"

"Great Cæsar!" gasped Zenas. "So she acknowledged that human wart as the idol of her heart! Well, she may take her idol, eggs and all!"

Sarah Ann fell on her knees beside the major, clasping him in her arms.

"Poor, poor hero!" she sobbed. "Tell me where you are wounded."

"Fo' the love of goodness, go 'way!" gurgled Fitts thickly.

"What is this horrid odor?" she exclaimed chokingly. "It is frightful!"

"Turkish cemeteries always smell that way, madam," huskily declared the major. "Please go 'way! Please let me die in peace!"

"Never! I will remain by you until the last! I will – But I can't endure this terrible odor! I'm growing faint! And what is this sticky substance all over your clothes?"

"That's blood – pure blood."

She held up her hands. The light was now sufficient for her to see.

"But it's not red – it's yellow!"

"That's the color of my blood, madam. I've had yellow fever. Do go 'way!"

"But it smells – it smells – Why, it's everywhere! It's on the ground!"

"I've shed gallons of it already. I beg yo' to leave me!"

"And those brutes are permitting you to bleed to death! What monsters!"

She began to grow hysterical. The language she applied to the professor made him wince. It also aroused his resentment. When she repeatedly called him a murderer he finally decided that the limit had been reached. Prancing over to her, he shrilly cried:

“Madam, you are needlessly wasting your sympathy on that little runt. He’s not seriously harmed, I assure you. We did fight a duel, and I am the victor; but we did not engage with deadly weapons, and Major Fitts is not dying.”

“Not dying? Did not use deadly weapons? Why – why, what did you use?”

“Eggs, madam – rotten eggs; and I am proud to say that I pasted him with them in a most scientific manner.”

“Eggs?” screamed Miss Ketchum, springing up and looking at her besmeared hands. “Rotten eggs? Then this is not his blood!”

“Hardly,” assured Zenas.

“Oh, horrible! Disgusting! It is perfectly shameful and outrageous! Look at my hands! Look at my waist! And the smell! I’m going to faint! Catch me!”

“Not on your life!” exclaimed Gunn, backing off. “I’ve learned my little book.”

She did not faint. Instead, she stiffened up like a ramrod and denounced both the duelists in scathing and scornful terms. Once more she declared that both were fools, and finally she fled, accompanied by the Englishwoman.

CHAPTER VI – THE SIGHTS OF STAMBOUL

“Well, boys,” said Professor Gunn, some days later, as the trio were lounging in their rooms after the midday meal, “what do you think of Constantinople? Have you seen about enough of it?”

“Well, we have seen a great deal,” confessed Dick. “It is a fascinating and bewildering place, with its narrow, dirty streets, its swarms of people of many races, its veiled women, its dogs, its palaces and watch towers – in short, its thousands of strange sights.”

“It is a whole lot queer,” nodded Buckhart. “It gives me a right odd feeling to stand beside a mosque and see a muezzin come out on the balcony of a minaret and utter the call to prayer. The way he chants it kind of stirs something inside of me: ‘God is great; there is but one God; Mohammed is the prophet of God; prayer is better than sleep; come to prayer!’ Oh, I’ve got her all down fine, and I’ll never forget the words nor how they sound.”

“I suppose there are lots of places we have not seen, together with plenty of interesting things,” said Dick. “The thing that I’ll remember longest is the dance of the howling dervishes.”

“You bet that was a corker!” exclaimed the Texan, sitting up. “I opine I’ve got good nerves, but it certain came near driving me crazy to see them, a full dozen, just whirling and whirling like tops.”

“Then when they began to chant and howl!” said Dick. “The way they wailed, and groaned, and cried, ‘Allah, hough! Allah, hough!’ was enough to disturb nerves of steel.”

“But the finish was the worst, when all the whirlers had their eyes set and their lips covered with foam. No more howling-dervish shows for me!”

“Nor me, pard!”

“Well, when you youngsters get tired of Constantinople we’ll move on,” said Zenas.

“I sure would like to know whatever became of Major Fitts and Miss Ketchum,” said Brad.

“Never mind them!” exclaimed the professor hastily. “It was a great relief when they both took themselves out of this hotel after that – after that encounter in the cemetery.”

“After your bloody duel, professor,” laughed Dick. “That was a fearful encounter, from which you came forth the victor.”

“But somewhat damaged myself,” confessed Zenas. “Boys, you want to remember what will happen to you if you ever relate that affair to any one.”

Buckhart grinned.

“Miss Ketchum was some excited when she arrived on the scene of action. She thought the major was dying. I don’t wonder, for the sounds he emitted after being struck in the mouth by that egg sure sounded like he was coughing up the ghost.”

“She certainly was disgusted when she found the major’s yellow blood was smashed rotten eggs,” said Dick.

“She had the stuff all over her hands after putting her arms about him. Partner, that was a great racket!”

“Hum! haw!” coughed the professor. “Of course, on the major’s account I was willing to carry out the programme and use eggs, but it was beneath my dignity, and I should have preferred a regular duel with pistols or swords.”

“Professor!” exclaimed Dick. “Why, you know you were somewhat timid over the result before you learned what sort of weapons were to be used.”

“Because I did not wish to have human blood on my hands. It was entirely for Major Fitts that I was worried.”

“I opine,” said Brad, “that old Aziz Achmet was just about as disgusted as any one. It is my judgment that the old pirate wanted to see the professor and the major carve each other up, though just what his reason for it was I can’t say.”

“He disappeared at the same time when Sarah and the major vanished,” said Dick. “He was becoming a nuisance, and I thought we might have no end of trouble with him while in this place. However, I fancy he found out he was wasting his time spying on us. I’m still confident that Bunol and Marsh caused us to be placed under surveillance by the Turkish secret police.”

“The Turkish secret police?” exclaimed Zenas. “You don’t mean to say – ”

“There is such a body, and Aziz Achmet belonged to it. We were suspicious characters, and he watched us. But I have an idea that he finally decided that we were exactly what we represented ourselves to be, ordinary travelers. Miss Ketchum, however, belongs to a society that is seeking to investigate and correct the wrongs of the Armenians in Turkey, and, therefore, Achmet transferred his attention wholly to her.”

“Good gracious!” spluttered the professor. “Although she turned out to be a hatchet-faced old maid, I hope no harm has come to her in this heathen land.”

“Don’t you worry,” laughed Dick. “Major Fitts will look out for her. All I ask is that he keeps her away from us.”

“I don’t think the major wants to see us again,” chuckled Brad. “I’m sure he wouldn’t fancy having the story of that duel get back to Natchez, Mississippi.”

“Well, boys, shall we spend the afternoon in talk, or shall we go out and see something?” asked the professor.

They quickly decided that they were ready to go out, and once more rose the question of what they should see.

“I have it!” cried the old pedagogue.

“Name it,” urged Dick.

“The Underground Palace.”

“What’s that?”

“You haven’t heard of it? Good! It’s the very place for us to visit this day. Wait; I’ll send for Mustapha. Hope he’s not engaged, for we must go over into Stamboul, and I do not fancy visiting that place without a good guide and interpreter.”

“I should say not!” exclaimed Dick. “If ever there was a place just made to get lost in it’s Stamboul, with its maze of narrow, crooked, unnamed streets and unnumbered houses.”

“Correct, pard,” agreed Brad. “I can get lost quicker and a heap sight worse in Stamboul than on a trackless desert. We sure must take a dragoman if we’re going to amble over there.”

So the black Nubian, who seemed always waiting for a call, was summoned and instructed to send out for the dragoman engaged by Dick on their arrival, to pilot them from the steamer to their hotel.

In less than thirty minutes Mustapha appeared, salaming in true Turkish fashion, the tassel of his fez sweeping the floor.

“I here, effendi,” he said, addressing the professor. “What you haf of me?”

“We want to visit Stamboul.”

“I good dragoman. I guide you, effendi.”

“Our purpose is to see the great underground cistern sometimes called the Underground Palace.”

“Effendi, go not! Keep from there!” Mustapha showed great concern.

“Why should we not go there?” questioned the professor. “It is one of the great sights.”

“You haf for your life some valuemant?”

“Certainly; but what can there be dangerous about a visit to the Underground Palace?”

“Maybe you haf not hear it, effendi?”

“Have not heard what?”

“One time some Engleeshman go there. They nefer come back.”

“What happened to them?”

Mustapha made a gesture with his hands indicative of vanishing into the air.

"Who answer it the question?" he said.

"Well, well!" muttered Zenas. "What do you think about this matter, boys?"

"My interest is aroused now," answered Dick. "I want to see this mysterious place."

"That's right, pard. I'm sure some wrought up to see it myself. Of course we'll go."

"Too young to haf wisdom," said Mustapha, with a gesture toward the boys.

"Come on, professor!" cried Dick. "If this dragoman will not act as guide for us, we can easily secure another."

Instantly Mustapha hastened to assure them that he would be only too glad to act as their guide; but that they should pay him before visiting the Underground Palace, as they might never return, in which case he would lose his honestly earned due by neglecting to collect ahead.

They agreed to pay him in advance, and soon they set out from the hotel in Pera, eager to see the mysterious place that was said to hold so much of mystery and danger.

In the afternoon sunshine Stamboul was magnificent when seen from a distance. But when they had crossed the Golden Horn and plunged into the city all its impressiveness vanished. At intervals they came upon some splendid mosques, but mosques were far more impressive when seen from the proper distance.

Mustapha knew his business, and he conducted them to the place where they could descend and inspect the Underground Palace, but he declined to enter with them. For that purpose he called another man, with close-set, shifty eyes and a thin-lipped mouth.

"This dragoman, Bayazid," he said. "He tak' you."

"Is he trustworthy?" asked the professor, with a slight show of nervousness.

"You not find one more so, effendi."

So Bayazid, or "Pigeon," as he was called in English, was engaged to show them the Underground Palace.

"I haf very good boat, effendi," he declared.

"Whatever is that?" asked Buckhart. "Do we have to take a boat?"

"You will see," answered Zenas.

The entrance was somewhat like that of a sewer, but there were stone steps leading down into the darkness of the place. The guide found and lighted two torches, which it seemed were kept for the use of those who wished to visit the Palace.

"Say, this is some boogerish!" said Brad, as they found themselves in a dark and damp cemented passage.

"The old city was built above a huge system of cisterns," explained the professor. "Their purpose was to guard against a famine of water in time of war. Some of the old cisterns are dry now and are used by silk spinners. We shall visit one that still contains water."

"But I thought we were going to see a palace," said Dick, in disappointment.

"You shall see one – so called."

The passage echoed to their tread, while their voices came back hollowly, as if hidden imps were mocking them.

But the boys were quite unprepared for the spectacle that suddenly met their gaze. They came from the passage into a mighty vaulted chamber, stretching away into an unknown distance and filled with a shadowy maze of marble columns, row on row. The floor of this wonderful place was smooth as a mirror and seemed black as ebony, save where the light of the torches fell on it. There it glittered, and gleamed, and shimmered.

Exclamations of astonishment and wonder broke from the lips of the two lads. The professor grasped them, one with either hand, and stopped them abruptly.

"We can't go farther on foot," he said.

“Eh? Why not?” asked the Texan, in surprise. “Look at that floor! Wouldn’t it be great to dance on! It’s smooth as glass and – ”

“You would get your feet wet if you attempted to dance on that,” declared Zenas.

“What? Why – why, it’s water!”

“Exactly.”

“But – but it looks black everywhere except where the light strikes directly on it.”

“Because no other ray of light reaches this place.”

Dick stooped and dipped his hand in the water, which reached to their very feet.

“Well, this is worth seeing!” he declared.

“This was constructed by Constantine more than fifteen hundred years ago,” explained the professor. “Think, boys, what you now behold is the work of man, yet it remains practically the same as when constructed fifteen centuries ago.”

“It looks like a partly submerged cathedral,” murmured Dick. “One can fancy all its worshipers and priests as drowned in that flood of black water. In fancy I seem to see their restless spirits floating above the surface of the lake, away, away yonder in the unknown distance. How large is it, professor?”

“There are three hundred and thirty-six of those marble columns, arranged in twenty-eight rows. I fancy the real reason why Mustapha refused to enter here is because of the many legends and tales told concerning the place. It is said that these vaults often echo to hollow laughter, and that the place is haunted by the ghosts of murdered sultans of past ages, whose places were usurped by the very monsters who intrigued to bring about the murders. Some claim that the spirits of the beautiful women destroyed by jealous sultans are doomed to float forever here above the surface of this buried lake, and that occasionally one of them is seen by a visitor for a single fleeting instant, then goes wailing and sobbing into the black distance.”

“Well, by the great horn spoon, I don’t know that I blame Mustapha for not coming here!” exclaimed Brad. “It’s the most spooky old hole I ever struck.”

At this juncture Bayazid inquired if they wished to take a boat and venture out a short distance on the water.

“Certainly,” answered Dick, at once. “I think it will be a novel experience, and I want to go. If Brad does not – ”

“Hold on, pard!” cried the Texan. “Wherever you go I go, you bet your boots! Mebbe I don’t like it a heap, but I’m with you.”

Bayazid left them and moved a short distance to the right. They watched him and saw the light of his torch fall on a black boat that lay motionless at the edge of the black lake. He stepped into the boat and soon brought it to the shore at their feet.

Dick and Brad followed the professor into the boat, which was large enough to accommodate two more persons, if the party had included them.

Bayazid had placed his torch in a socket that seemed arranged for it. He suggested that the others should extinguish theirs, as too much light close at hand would blind them, instead of making it possible for them to see better.

They accepted his suggestion, and slowly the boat slipped out upon the bosom of the soundless lake.

Suddenly there was a whirring rush through the air, and something brushed past the head of the professor, who uttered a squawk of alarm, struck out wildly with both hands and fell over backward off his seat to flounder in the bottom of the boat.

“Howling tornadoes!” gasped Buckhart. “Whatever was that?”

“A bat, effendi,” answered Bayazid.

Dick laughed.

“Goodness!” palpitated the professor, as he finally struggled up to his seat. “I confess it did frighten me, boys. Made me think of those restless ghosts which are said to wander forever above the bosom of this lake. Hadn’t we better go back?”

“Which way shall we go?” asked Dick.

They looked around. On every hand they saw nothing but marble pillars, shadows, and grim darkness.

“Waugh!” muttered the Texan. “I confess I couldn’t follow the back trail.”

“But Bayazid knows the way, don’t you, Bayazid?” anxiously asked the professor.

“I know it, effendi,” was the assurance. “Trust me.”

“I – I’m very glad you do!” breathed Zenas. “I think we will return at once.”

But Dick urged that they should go on a little farther, as Bayazid was thoroughly familiar with the place and there was no danger that they would become lost.

Brad always stuck by Dick, and the two overruled the old pedagogue.

Therefore Bayazid paddled slowly on. Had they seen his face they might have become suspicious and alarmed, but the shadows hid the crafty and treacherous look his countenance wore.

Finally they paused again, amid the labyrinth of pillars. Without the guide, not one of them could have told which course to follow in order to return to the point from which they started.

Suddenly Bayazid uttered an exclamation and stood up in the boat, staring into the darkness beyond his passengers.

Involuntarily the trio turned their heads to look, wondering what it could be that the guide saw.

Barely were their heads turned in that manner when the treacherous guide snatched the torch from its socket and plunged it into the water. There was a hissing sound and instant darkness.

CHAPTER VII – LOST ON THE BURIED LAKE

Dick Merriwell had brought along a revolver. He drew it in a moment and held it ready for use, expecting something to happen in the Stygian darkness of that terrible place.

Professor Gunn cried out to Bayazid, demanding to know the meaning of his act.

“Get hold of the onery varmint!” advised Buckhart. “Let me put my paws on him!”

The Texan floundered about, rocking the boat somewhat.

“Be careful, Brad!” warned Dick. “You don’t know what he will do! It may be intended for a joke, just to frighten us, and it may be intended for something else. I have a pistol. Keep away from him and let me do the business.”

“Pup-pup-perhaps it’s pup-pup-part of the regular pup-pup-programme,” chattered Professor Gunn. “Pup-pup-perhaps they always pup-pup-put out the tut-tut-torch when they have pup-pup-passengers on this old underground pup-pup-pond.”

“Be quiet,” directed Dick. “Bayazid.”

He called to the guide, but there was no answer.

“Bayazid!”

Again he called. His voice echoed hollowly in the unseen arches above their heads.

“Why doesn’t the blame fool answer?” growled Buckhart.

“Strike a match, Brad,” directed Dick. “I’m holding my revolver ready for use, and I’ll shoot, if necessary, the moment I can see what to shoot at.”

The Texan lost little time in producing a match, but when he attempted to strike it he failed, the brimstone breaking off. Three matches were used before one burned. The light flared up, Buckhart holding it above his head. Its glow fell on the old professor and the two boys, and simultaneously they made an amazing discovery.

They were alone in the boat!

Bayazid, the guide, had disappeared!

Dick had his revolver ready for action, and he was standing in a half-crouching position, peering over the head of Buckhart at the place in the boat lately occupied by the guide.

“He’s gug-gone!” gasped Zenas.

Brad dropped the match, and again they were buried in darkness which seemed to oppress them like an awful weight.

“Great catamounts!” said a voice that sounded strange and husky, but which Dick recognized as that of the Texan. “Where has he gone? What does it mean, partner?”

“It means that we are the victims of trickery of some sort,” answered Dick, speaking in a low tone.

“It means that we are deserted to perish on the bosom of this awful buried lake!” came from the professor, in something like a moan. “I am to blame! I brought you here!”

“But whatever could be the object?” questioned Brad, in a puzzled tone. “If it’s robbery – ”

“It’s a plot – a plot, boys! We are objects of suspicion. That agent of the secret police suspected us of something. In this awful city to be suspected is to be doomed.”

“I can’t realize it yet,” muttered Dick. “How could the guide get out of the boat?”

“I’ll strike another match, pard,” said the Texan. “Keep your gun ready for use.”

“There are other torches,” reminded Dick. “We placed them in the bottom of the boat. Find them, Brad, and light one.”

During the interval that followed the Texan was heard feeling about the bottom of the boat. After a time he confessed:

“I can’t seem to get my paws on them. I’ll have to use another match. The light will show us where they are.”

Another match was lighted, but, though it was held and moved about to illumine the bottom of the boat, not a torch was discovered. When they realized that the extinguished torches were gone they sat up and looked into one another's eyes by the last gleams of the exhausted match, which Buckhart held until the blaze scorched his fingers.

For some moments silence followed.

Floating there on the motionless bosom of that black lake, no sound came down to them from the great city overhead. The stillness was appalling, yet all feared to speak, dreading the sound of their own voices.

Finally Dick asked:

"How many matches have you, Brad?"

"Not over four or five more."

"And I have none. How about you, professor – have you any?"

"Not one," was the despairing answer.

Suddenly Buckhart grated:

"I'd like to get my paws on the treacherous dog who deserted us in this fix! I'd certain fit him for a funeral! You hear me affirm!"

"I'm still unable to account for his action," said Dick. "If his object is robbery, surely he has taken a strange way to go about it."

"Perhaps he's counting on frightening us good and plenty," observed Brad. "Mebbe when he thinks we're so frightened that we'll be glad to cough up liberal he will appear and offer to conduct us back to the outer world."

"Let's call to him," eagerly suggested the professor. Then he lifted his voice and called loudly. When he had repeated the cry three times, they listened.

"Didn't you hear a distant answer?" asked Dick.

"I judge whatever we heard was an echo," said Brad.

After a time they lifted their voices in a united shout, and then listened to the mocking echoes which fled from pillar to pillar and died in the unknown distance.

"No use!" moaned Professor Gunn. "I am satisfied that we are doomed! We'll never leave this place alive, and our fate will forever remain a mystery!"

"I'm sure that was no echo!" exclaimed Dick, as far away in the darkness they seemed to hear an answer to their repeated shouts. "Be still and let me shout."

When he had lifted his strong, clear voice all hushed their breathing and listened.

There was a short interval, and then out of the black distance came a faint, far-away answer.

"Some one did shout, pard!" exclaimed the Texan. "It's a dead-sure thing!"

Excitedly they all joined in the hail that followed. The answer was more distinct.

Dick had found an oar, and he slowly propelled the boat in the direction from which the answering cries seemed to come. Occasionally they bumped against the marble pillars, but these collisions did no damage.

Soon they could hear the answers to their cries and knew they were drawing nearer to the unknown person or persons who were thus responding.

Suddenly a tiny gleam of light showed amid the pillars at some distance.

"Looks like that's a match, pard," observed Buckhart. "I reckon I'll strike one, too."

He did so, but the other light disappeared even as he held his own above his head. Apparently his match was seen, for the voice of a man reached them, urging them to come in that direction.

By answering call for call they continued to draw nearer to the strangers, for they soon heard enough to satisfy them that at least two persons besides themselves were afloat on the bosom of that buried lake.

"One is a woman!" asserted Dick.

Lifting his voice, he asked:

“Who are you?”

“We are Americans. Who are yo’?”

“We are Americans, too.”

“What are yo’ doing here?”

“We are lost – deserted by our guide.”

“So are we. How many of yo’ are there?”

“Three. How many of you?”

“Two; and somebody shall suffer fo’ this outrage! Somebody shall pay the penalty fo’ it! I’ll have satisfaction as sho’ ’s my name is – ”

“Major Mowbry Fitts, of Natchez, Mississippi,” finished Dick.

“That’s my name, suh! But yo’, suh – why, is it possible that yo’ are – ”

“Professor Zenas Gunn, accompanied by Dick Merriwell and Brad Buckhart. Is Miss Ketchum, of Boston, with you?”

“I am here,” answered the well-known voice of Sarah Ann. “We have passed through a most awful and excruciating experience, the faintest remembrance of which will forever seem like a fearful nightmare. I am glad you have found us, for now you can assist us in getting out of this frightful place.”

“I am sure we would like to do so,” said Dick; “but, unfortunately, like yourselves, we do not know which way to turn. How did you get here?”

The major explained as the two boats bumped together, and floated thus. Like the professor and the boys, he and Miss Ketchum had visited the lake in company with a guide, who had vanished in a mysterious and unaccountable manner. They fancied they had been afloat for days on the bosom of the lake, and they were in a pitiful condition of collapse and fright, although the major had braced up wonderfully for a time.

“This seems to be the usual manner of treating visitors,” said Dick.

“We’ve used our last match,” said the major. “I lighted it a few minutes ago. We had been saving it. I am afraid we will never be able to escape. I have about given up hope.”

“It is the work of that terrible Turk who urged you into the duel with Professor Gunn, major,” said the woman from Boston. “He warned us to leave Constantinople, but we refused to go, and he told us we would disappear mysteriously.”

“Are you speaking of Aziz Achmet?” asked Dick.

“That is what he calls himself.”

“Then you have seen him since the morning of the duel?”

“Seen him!” indignantly exclaimed the major. “We have seen him everywhere, suh. He has followed us and watched us wherever we went. We couldn’t make a move that he wouldn’t turn up. Twice he told us that we must leave the city and the country.”

“I wish now,” confessed Miss Ketchum, “that we had obeyed him. Don’t you, major?”

“Well,” answered the little man, with a touch of reluctance in his voice, “I must confess, madam, that I believe it would have been much better fo’ us if we had obeyed.”

Barely were these words spoken when, in the pall of darkness near by, a voice demanded:

“Are you ready to depart now? Will you depart at once? Do you, one and all, swear by your God that you will lose no time about going?”

Needless to say, the sound of that voice affected them all much like a sudden clap of thunder on a clear and sunny day. The woman gave a little scream, the major uttered a smothered oath, the professor gasped for breath, while both Dick and Brad sat bolt upright, their nerves tense.

“Answer at once!” commanded the unseen speaker. “It is your only hope of escaping. Among the Armenians we have enough so-called missionaries, and, therefore, the woman from Boston is not wanted. In the other boat are the old man and the boys against whom the secret police have been warned. It will be easy to cause all of you to vanish from the face of the earth; yet if you pledge yourselves to leave Turkey, you shall be spared.”

"I tell you one thing," spluttered Zenas Gunn eagerly, "I've seen all of Turkey I care to see, and I'll give you my pledge to leave within twenty-four hours, taking the boys with me."

"I'll go – oh, I'll go!" promised Miss Ketchum.

"And if she goes," said Major Fitts, "I shall accompany her."

"Swear it!"

The trio were willing enough to do so.

A few moments later a light gleamed a short distance away, and then three torches were lighted. Within twenty feet of them was another and larger boat, containing four persons, three of whom were guides. The fourth was Aziz Achmet. One of the guides was Bayazid, who grinned at the professor and the boys, as if he thought the whole thing a fine joke. Another was the guide who had accompanied the major and the woman from Boston.

Achmet did not touch an oar. He sat in dignified silence as his companions slowly brought the boat close to the others.

"Mr. Achmet," said Dick, "although we dislike to leave Constantinople under compulsion, Professor Gunn has given his pledge, and we shall stand by it. There is one thing, however, that we would like to have explained. How did our guide disappear in such a mysterious manner?"

Achmet shrugged his shoulders a bit. At first he seemed disinclined to answer, but apparently he suddenly decided to do so.

"It was very simple, boy," he said. "Your guide stepped from your boat into this one, which he had seen floating in the shadow of a pillar. I was in this boat, with these other guides, and I gave him a signal that he understood. Immediately he extinguished the torch. That threw you into confusion. This boat silently approached, and Bayazid stepped into it. In the same manner Yapouly left the other boat."

"Thank you," said Dick. "It was altogether too easy!"

"A heap!" growled Buckhart.

CHAPTER VIII – ON THE WAY TO DAMASCUS

They succeeded in securing passage on a steamer that left the port the following day. Major Fitts and Miss Ketchum left by the same steamer.

“I hope yo’ will congratulate me, professor,” said the major, as proud as a peacock. “Miss Ketchum has consented to become Mrs. Fitts as soon as we reach the United States. I’m sorry fo’ yo’, suh; but yo’ never really had a show, suh.”

“That’s right, major,” smiled Dick. “He didn’t have a show, because he is already – ”

“Don’t you dare tell I’m married!” hissed Zenas, in the boy’s ear.

“He is all ready to carry out his plan to penetrate the wilds of Africa, where it would be impossible for him to take a bride, and he could not bear to be parted from one so young and charming as Miss Ketchum, were he to have the good fortune to capture her.”

“Saved your life, you rascal!” whispered Zenas, and then hastened to bow low to the coy and confused lady from Boston.

At Beirut the party split up, the professor and the boys going to Damascus, a distance of ninety-one miles, which was covered by an excellent narrow-gauge railroad, built by Swiss engineers.

“We’re off, boys!” cheerfully exclaimed the professor, as the train finally started. “We’ll soon be in the oldest city in the world.”

“Do you mean Damascus, professor?” inquired Dick.

“Of course I mean Damascus! We’re not bound for any other place, are we? Did you think I meant New York? Did you fancy I was speaking of Hoboken? Hum! Haw!”

“But there is no absolute proof that Damascus is the oldest city in the world. There may be older cities in China or India.”

“There may be,” admitted the old pedagogue; “but we do not know about them. At least, Damascus is the oldest city we know anything about.”

“That is quite true. If you had said that – ”

“Now look here, Richard, you are inclined to be altogether too wise. You keep yourself too well posted about the countries and places we visit, and thus you deprive me of the privilege of imparting information to you. It isn’t right. You make me feel that I am not earning my stipend as your guardian and tutor during this trip round the world. You place me in an embarrassing position. I wish you would feign ignorance, if you cannot do anything else.”

Dick laughed.

“All right, professor; I’ll try to reform. But it was your advice to us that we should post ourselves in advance on each place we visited, and I’ve been obeying instructions, that’s all.”

“Haw! Hum! You’re inclined to be too obedient – altogether too obedient. Now here is Bradley – I haven’t observed that he has wasted much time reading up about different countries and cities.”

“Sure not,” admitted the Texan. “It’s a heap too much trouble, for I know I’ll hear about the places from you and Dick when we hit ’em. This yere country sort of looks familiar.”

“It does,” nodded Dick. “To me it looks like Southern Colorado or Northern New Mexico. It’s a land of irrigation. The mountains, the plains, the foliage, the mud houses, everything but the people, remind me of that portion of our own country.”

“Quite true,” agreed Zenas Gunn; “although the fertile spots here have all been taken up and cultivated. For instance, look there, boys – look at that mountainside.”

Gazing from the window as the train sped along, they could see the side of a mountain walled up in terraces like gigantic stairways, to prevent the soil from being washed away by the rainfalls. These terraces were planted with grapes, figs, olive and mulberry trees. On many of these terraces laborers were at work propping up strange-looking trunks, which were six or seven feet high. In places these trunks could be seen reclining in rows on the ground, looking strangely like sleeping soldiers.

“Those are grapevines,” exclaimed the professor. “In the fall they cut them down to that height and lay them flat on the ground, as you see them. They are now beginning to prop them up. They will be irrigated and dressed, and then new branches will shoot out in all directions and cover the soil and bear fruit.”

As the train wound in and out of the gorges, clinging to the mountainsides, they beheld many strange and interesting things. Laborers were setting out mulberry trees in long trenches. Other laborers were digging the trenches, three men working a single shovel. One of the men manipulated the shovel, holding the handle and driving it down into the soil. Two others lifted it out with its load, doing so by pulling at ropes attached to the shovel just above the blade. They all worked together with astonishing ease and skill. Great hedges of cactus stretched along the railroad in many places. They gazed with interest at the old-fashioned irrigating canals. They beheld men plowing with the same sort of crooked stick that was used for that purpose in Bible times. But there were no farmhouses scattered over the country, for the people still lived in villages, as they did in former days, when it was necessary for neighbors to band together for protection.

For a great portion of the way the railroad followed the old caravan trail, and all along this trail were scattered trains of camels and donkeys, loaded with all kinds of goods, such as silk, cotton, grain, machinery, poplar trees, fuel, and other things. Petroleum, however, seemed to form the greater portion of many a cargo.

The sun shone from a cloudless sky.

Brad Buckhart was strangely silent. He gazed out of the window in an abstracted manner, paying very little attention to what the professor and Dick were saying.

Finally Dick began to joke him about his unusual manner.

“Don’t worry, Brad,” he laughed. “We’ll overtake her soon. We may find her in Damascus.”

“Her?” grunted the Texan.

“Yes.”

“Why, who – ”

“Nadia Budthorne, of course. Her last letter told you she would visit Damascus and then proceed to Jerusalem, in company with her brother. You can’t fool me, old man. You have been counting on overtaking her somewhere in the Holy Land. Don’t deny it.”

“All right,” said Buckhart, his face flushed, but his manner a bit defiant; “I won’t deny it, Mr. Smarty. You sure have hit it all right. I – ”

At this moment the whistle of the locomotive shrieked a wild alarm and the brakes were applied violently. Something was wrong. The train came to a stop.

And just outside the window of the compartment occupied by the old professor and two boys a dead camel lay stretched on the ground, blood flowing from several horrible wounds. The animal’s pack was broken open and the goods scattered in all directions.

Not ten feet from the camel lay a gorgeously dressed, black-bearded Arab, likewise apparently dead.

“Whoop!” cried Buckhart. “There certain have been some doings here! I opine the camel tried to butt the train off the track, somewhat to the grief of Mr. Camel.”

Men now came running toward the spot, all greatly excited. They were principally camel drivers and like men from a caravan. They gathered about the prostrate Arab and made a great demonstration. Their gestures toward the train were very threatening.

One of the guards flung open the door of the compartment occupied by our friends.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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