

The Unspeakable Turk

A Tale of the Greco-Turkish War.
By George Horton, Author of "A Fair Brigand," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

John Curtis, a young American who chances to be in Athens at the outbreak of the Greco-Turkish War, joins a filibustering expedition to Crete. The little vessel is wrecked, but Curtis, accompanied by Lieutenant Lindholm, a soldier of fortune, and a Cretan, Michael, reach the island safely. They arrive at a village, and are cared for by the inhabitants. Curtis, however, has his eyes on a girl named Panayota, the priest's daughter. In a few days word comes of the advance of the Turks under Kostakes toward the town. The Cretans gather to the arms, the men fighting and the women and girls keeping up a beacon fire. Thirty Turks are killed, but Michael is badly wounded, and Panayota is captured by Kostakes.

CHAPTER XII.

"Hark!" said Curtis, who was sitting in the door of the paragona. "What's that?"

"I didn't hear anything," replied Michael.

"I did. I believe it was a gun. It was a faint throb in the air. There it goes again. There they go!"

"No mistake, it's the time. They're coming rough," said Michael, rising upon his elbow. "The Turks will be here pretty quick, now, I think."

"Hello," cried Curtis, "there comes the demarch. There he goes into that house. Now he comes out—there he goes into another—what's up, I wonder? Here he comes!"

Kur Nibrolaki looked in at the door. His face was flabby with fatigue and his under lids had dropped perceptibly, enlarging the red pits beneath his eyes into shadows.

"What is it? What is it?" asked Curtis, who had not clearly understood the few hurried words addressed by the demarch to Michael.

"They're nearly out of cartridges. They can't hold the pass over a hour longer. They're going to shoot the women and children down to the sea. The village owes a lot of caliques there. Then the men will retreat last, fighting, shooting all the time."

"But what are you quarreling about?" "Oh, nothing. Nothing at all."

It did not take the Ambelakians long to pack up. The most treasured belongings were thrown into blankets, which were rolled into the beam through the door, and then, away for the ravine and the sea!

A mother dashed by the house with a babe under her left arm and a bundle over her right shoulder. Another dragged two frightened children along the stony street, clutching tight a tiny wrist with each hand. An aged couple doddled by, the man with feeble and palsied hand striving to support the woman, who clung to a frame containing two bridal wreaths. From amid the faded orange blossoms smiled the unshining eyes of a "mountain" girl. Another woman, a mad's work lasts so much better than man's—herself—and, these bridal wreaths are saved for a lifetime in Crete.

The confusion grew to frenzy. A parrot-like chatter of shrieks and cries filled the air. A florid housewife stumbled and wheeled down the street, carrying a pair of long-handled coffee stew pans. She did not know what they were, but had seized them through habit. Another bore a cheap chromo, representing skin-clad hunters thrusting spears into a number of colossal polar bears. She ran and jabbed her knee through the picture, but the hunters and rams ran on with that. Scrips, or bags of pied and brightly-colored wool, of which two or more are to be found in every Cretan peasant's house, were hanging from the arms and shoulders of many of the fugitives.

The demarch came in again, accompanied by Lindholm and a stalwart mountain. The Greek held a gun in his left hand, in the grim of his face, the lack-lacked face his eyes looked unnaturally blue. But they were no longer childlike. It was rather the blue of an angry sea.

"Panayota's taken," he said to Curtis. "I know it."

"There's nothing to be done now except to rally the men and rescue her. The demarch did not like a man in despair. He seemed, on the contrary, exalted by a great resolve.

"We will get together and fall upon Kostakes like a thunderbolt. We'll not let him get far. And if he gets away of her head." He doubted his ponderous fist and shook it. Then he whirled about briskly and gazed at Michael.

"We take you somehow," he said. "We'll be as quick as we can. They'll kill you if you stay here."

"I not go," replied Michael. "I have said it to the demarch. Take two strong men to carry me. They better be fighting. Leave a gun with me. When they find me I kill two, three Turks. Hat had ha! By God, I surprise them! So I die!"

"Come, no more of this damned foolishness," said Lindholm, "take him by my back and the shepherd here take you," turning to Curtis.

But Curtis had been thinking very fast, and the bright image of his beautiful and high-spirited heroine in the hands of the Turks had sharpened his wits to an extraordinary degree.

"Look here, Lindholm," he said, speaking very rapidly. "I'll stay here and look out for Panayota. There won't kill me. I'm a noncombatant, and the Turks won't be so apt to abuse the girl when there's a foreigner amongst them. Help me to the wine cave, I'll hide there till the right moment and then I'll give myself up."

Lindholm saluted.

"I would not have asked it," he said, "but I'll take you to the wine cave. I'll tell the officer you're a newspaper correspondent. That's the safest thing."

The firing had ceased entirely for several minutes. Now rapid footsteps were heard. Looking toward the door, Curtis saw a Cretan shepherd going by. He was running low to the ground, carrying his gun horizontally, like a man hunting or being hunted. Another and another passed.

"We have five minutes now," said Lindholm, holding out his arms to Michael. "They have given up the pass. Come! Must I take you, or will you come on my back?"

"I come," replied Michael, "to the wine cave."

Lindholm knelt by the divan and Michael sat down. The shepherd here take you," turning to Curtis.

"This is a damned shame! You're a heavy blackguard to treat a girl in that way. If I had you alone about five minutes I'd show you what I think of you!"

Two or three soldiers sprang forward, and a petty officer half drew his sword, but Kostakes, astonished at hearing a language which he did not understand, but which he surmised to be either German or English, motioned them back.

"Qu'etes vous monsieur, et que faites vous ici?" he asked in the French which he had learned at the High School at Candia.

"Je suis Americain, correspondant du New York Age," replied Curtis.

"Ah, charmé! charmé! Comment dites vous en Anglais? Welcome. Je suis Kostakes effendi. Capitaine de cavalerie, a votre service!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Curtis did not find it so easy to express his feelings in this smiling officer, with the straight large nose, dazzling white teeth and cordial manner, who wore an inverted red flower-pot for a hat. French is no language for a self-proclaimed man to swear in, anyway. Besides, one doesn't learn a vocabulary suitable to critical occasions in Volendorf. All Curtis could think of was "lache," "sacre bleu," and "carabina." The first did not seem appropriate, the second lost its force by translating itself in his mind into English, and he wasn't certain whether the last was French, Spanish or Italian, so he said:

"Is this lady a prisoner of war?" And Kostakes answered, earnestly, "My love for you brought me here. Have no fears. You shall be treated like a Queen. Not a hair of your head nor of your father's shall be harmed. All I ask is a little love in return."

She made no reply. She did not even look up. Curtis felt a great spasm of rage contract his heart, and a queer sickness swept down upon him. He wanted to kill Kostakes; he did not know exactly why. The man certainly had a right to love the girl; it is any man's inalienable right, established from the beginning of the world, to love any girl; and the protestations of protection were exactly what Curtis wanted. But somehow they made him sick and mad. In the midst of all this killing, why couldn't he do a little for himself? Then Kostakes bent lower and attempted to lift Panayota's hands to his lips. She threw his arm from her with horror, and

meorous and persistent fuillade, were heard.

"Now I think they come through," muttered Lindholm, breathing into a tube. Michael was breathing in tremulous, faint groans between his set teeth. Then he mercifully fainted, and remained unconscious until the weeds, panting with Michael, hounded through the arbor into the dim cave.

The demarch ran to his wine barrels, and pulling an empty one around, passed it with the butt of a musket, using the weapon as though it were a battering ram. Michael was shoved into the barrel as tenderly as possible and the broken pieces were laid in beside him. Then they pushed the tun back into place, with the open end against the wall.

"And you?" said Lindholm, turning to Curtis, who was sitting upon the table where the shepherd had dropped him. "Save yourselves!" cried the American, pointing to the door. A shepherd, standing behind the plantain tree, was aiming at something about the ceiling. They seemed to have been from behind. As he instinctively threw forward his arms to save himself from falling, his elbows collapsed and his hands fell limply at his sides, like a body that had been dead before his body reached the ground.

Lindholm snatched his musket from the table and ran from the cave, followed by the demarch and the sturdy soldier. They slipped into a corner, behind the huge oil crock. The sound of firing continued, but no one came into the cave. Ten minutes, 20 minutes passed by. They seemed hours to the American. Occasionally he heard a sput, sput against the outside of the soft wall. Once a fitful like the hissing of a cat, was followed by a humming sound, as if some one had crawled through the sand, sang in through the open door.

It did not occur to him that these things were dangerous.

"I must see what they are doing," he said. "It's a good fight."

He slid around the smooth, cool crock and leaned out from his hiding place. He could see nothing but a strip of the slender door, and a huge vine, straggling in the trunk of a tree. He jumped back just in time to save himself. The cave was poured full of Turks, bringing Panayota and her father. The officer, young, slender and very handsome, dropped into a chair and laid his unsheathed sword before him on a table. The soldiers fell respectfully back, leaving the girl and the priest standing before him. He raised Amphites slunk in the background with Panayota's Cretan knife in his hand. It was he who had led the way to the women, by a round-about path.

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