The Unspeakable Turk

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

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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 Lindbohm, a soldier of fortune, and a native Cretan, Michali, reach the island safely. They arrive at a village, and are cared for by the inhabitants. Curtis has injured his foot on a sea urchin. He is nursed by 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 in the pass, the men fighting and the women and girls keeping up beacon fires. Thirty Turks are killed, but Michali is badly wounded, and Panayota is captured by Kostakes. The Cretans retreat to the sea. Kostakes plunders the town, taking the old priest and Panayota along as prisoners. Curtis, representing himself as a newspaper correspondent, also accompanies the Turks.

CHAPTER XVI.

It did not require a trained eye to see that the Greeks had defended themselves stubbornly and had inflicted much more injury than they had suffered. Curtis counted 25 dead Turks in the defile. The continual dread that his horse should step on them kept him in a state of nervousness. But the animal evidently was possessed of as keen sensibilities as his temporary master, for he avoided the corpses with the most patent aversion. At a turn in the pass, behind a jutting rock, lay two Greeks. Curtis fancied this must have been the place where Michali had received his wound. It was evident that a well-organized and desperate stand had been made here, because in the narrowest part of the pass, only a few yards distant, lay seven Turks in a heap. Glancing back at the two dead Greeks, under the impression that he recognized one of them, the American beheld a sight at once noble and disgusting. The priest, lingering and leaning toward his slain compatriots, was making the sign of the cross with solemn gestures, the while he cried in tones sorrowful and defiant:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believest in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever loveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Panayota, her glorious eyes streaming with tears, both her white hands clasped to her bosom, was looking to heaven and silently praying. Curtis felt his soul uplifted. The narrow walls of the ravine changed to the dim aisle of a cathedral, he seemed to hear a grand organ pealing forth a funeral march.

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

When he opened his eyes he found himself in hell. Two or three Turks, grinning with diabolical hate and derision, were spitting at the dead Cretans. The soldier immediately behind Papas-Malecko was jabbing him in the back viciously with the butt of his musket, while another touched him playfully between the shoulders with the point of a bayonet. The priest shrunk from the steel with a gasp of pain, but turned back as he stumbled along chanting:

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen!"

A little further on they came upon a sight which made Curtis reel in his saddle—the bodies of the seven peasant girls who had leaped over the cliff. Four lay together in a heap. Of the remaining three, one had fallen face down upon a rock, and her long hair, shaken loose, rippled earthward from the white nape of her neck. Another was sleeping the last sleep peacefully, her head upon her outstretched arm, a smile upon her lips; and still a third lay upon her back. This one seemed to have suffered, for there was a look of terror in the staring eyes, and a stream of scarlet blood had congealed upon the ashen cheek. Again the priest lifted his voice:

"I am the resurrection and the life," but the solemn chant was this time interrupted by a shriek from Panayota. Curtis, who had resolutely turned his face from the scene of fascinating horror, looked quickly back at the sound. A slender young girl had arisen upon her elbow from the heap of four, and was stretching her hand imploringly toward the priest. The hand was brown and chubby, but the arm from which the flowing sleeve had slipped away was very white and shapely. She was dying even then, but the blessed words of her mother's faith and her mother's tongue had pierced her swooning ears, and she had paused at the very threshold of death for the priest's benediction. A Turkish soldier thrust her through the neck with his bayonet, and her head dropped softly upon the bosom of a dead fellow.

"But this is barbarous," cried Curtis. "The civilized world shall know of this. Barbarous, I say, uncivilized—you an officer? A gentleman? Bah!"

"But monsieur is too violent and hasty," replied Kostakes. "Irregularities happen in all armies. The man shall be punished."

"If he is to be shot," said the American, "please put me in the firing squad! I'd like nothing better than to put a hole through that vermin."

Emerging from the pass, they came to a steep, wooded ravine, and their path led through an aisle of tall pine trees. The feet of the soldiers made no noise on the carpet of fallen spines. They found four more dead Turks and picked up two that were wounded. After about an hour of forced marching the ravine spread out into a beautiful sunlit valley, whereon the new plowed ground lay in patches of rich, brown, terra cotta and black loam. The vines were just putting forth their pale green sprouts. The laborers had been surprised in the act of heaping conical mounds about the roots, and an occasional discarded mattock betokened hasty flight. Poppies lifted everywhere their slender stemmed, scarlet beakers—such glasses in shape as are fit to hold the vintage of the Rhine. The little slopes were set thick with candelabras of the ghostly asphodel, whose clusters of pale-pinkish, waxen flowers seemed indeed to belong to regions where the dear sun is but a memory. Scattering fruit trees, in the full revel and glory of their snowy bloom, called to each other with perfume. It was somewhat after noon now, but they stopped neither to eat nor rest. Curtis' foot began to pain him fearfully, but he made no sign. In the midst of such desolation, he felt pain to be a trivial thing. The vines were here, but where were the tollers? The pear trees were in bloom, but where were the laughing children, the wives and maidens with wine and bread for the midday feast? Once they passed a shock-headed boy of 14, or possibly younger, lying dead in a vineyard, with his mattock beside him, and later in the day they came upon a plow in the unfinished furrow. One of the oxen was dead, and the other great beast had struggled to his feet and stood patiently beside the body of his mate. Entangled in the harness, he was unable to get away, but moved his head slowly from side to side, like a pendulum, snorting occasionally to blow the oozing blood from his nostrils.

After that their path led for a way through a field of half-grown wheat. Around nearly every shoot the sweet wild pea had twined its graceful spiral, bravely lifting the pretty blue of the flowers among the pale green of the grain. When the wind swept over the field it looked like changeable silk.

Toward sunset they came within seeing distance of a white village on a mountain side. A vast olive orchard surrounded it, and a dozen or more dark, green cypress trees pointed heavenward among the houses, like spires.

"Voila, monsieur," cried Kostakes, gaily. "There we shall rest tonight, and shall find time to eat. Are you hungry?"

CHAPTER XVII.

An air of indescribable sadness hangs over a deserted town. Any one who has ever passed through a shepherd village, from which the inhabitants have gone for the Summer, expecting to return again when the first shows of Autumn drive them down from the mountains, has experienced this feeling—if he be capable of feeling anything. Here is the fountain, where the slender, merry maidens met at sundown to gossip and fill their water jars; here is the cafe, where the old men gathered together under the plantain tree and smoked and dreamed of the long ago; here is a secret nook, guarded by sweet poverty vine, where lovers held tryst in the fragrant twilight. But all is lonely, lonely.

Galata was deserted because its inhabitants had fled two days before from the terrible Turk. Thanks to a timely warning, most of the people had succeeded in getting away, though an occasional corpse proved how narrow had been the escape of the entire population from sudden doom.

Kostakes and his little troop now marched through an olive orchard, whose gnarled and venerable trunks had perhaps witnessed the cruelties of the only oppressors worse than the Turk—the haughty, treacherous and inhuman Venetians; they climbed a flight of steps cut in the natural rock, and followed a street paved with cobblestones from the walls of partly ruined houses to the village square.

Here the men stacked arms and dispersed among the houses, looking for temporary quarters. Curtis could not help admiring the soldierly way in which everything was done. In 10 minutes after their arrival the square looked like a little Indian village filled with wigwams of muskets, and sentries were pacing patiently up and down at all possible places of approach. This was evidently a town of considerable importance, as some of the houses facing the square were two-storied, and in one or two instances the projecting beams supporting the balconies were of carved marble. The fountain, too, that stood beneath the disheveled willow, whose roots drank at the overflowing waters, was of marble.

Panayota and her father were led to a respectable-looking house facing the fountain and two sentries were stationed before the door.

"Ah, well," said Kostakes, amiably, to Curtis; "we shall be quite comfortable here, eh? Will you do me the honor to dine with me?"

"I shall be delighted," replied the American. "It is I who shall receive the honor."

"No, no! I protest, monsieur. It's quite the other way. We'll have a table set here under this tree. Ah, we shall be quite cozy. Voila! I shall be able to offer you some fresh cheese. If there's anything left, trust to my men for finding it!"

A soldier was dragging a stuffed goatskin from the door of a grocery. At a sign from Kostakes he set it on end, and ripped open the top with his knife, disclosing the snowy contents.

"Voila, monsieur! And no doubt we shall be able to find you some excellent wine, though you must excuse me from joining you in that. Mahommetans do not drink wine."

Kostakes leaped lightly to the ground and gave his horse to an orderly. Kostakes was a handsome young fellow, almost boyish, and yet with an insolent, aristocratic air. His features seemed to combine sensualism and cruelty with a certain refinement. His lips were too thick and too red, and his chin was square. It was evident at a glance that his under front teeth closed even with the uppers. His nose was his cruel, sensitive feature. It came down straight from his forehead, thin as a knife-blade, and the nostrils had a way of trembling when he talked. Curtis threw his good leg over the horse's mane, and sat, woman-fashion, eyeing the Turk. He could not, somehow, reconcile this gentlemanly, smiling young officer with the nightmare that continually haunted him—Michali, in the burning building, wounded and screaming vainly for help. There was a sort of ghostly relief in the reflection that the poor fellow must have been over his sufferings long ago. But to burn to death! Ugh! How long does it take a man to burn to death?

"Does your foot pain you?" asked Kostakes, with genuine solicitude. "If those barbarian Greeks had not shot my surgeon—very cruel people the Greeks, especially the Cretan Greeks. When you know them better you will find that they are not half-civilized."

"If you will let one of your men help me dismount," said Curtis, "I will take a wash. I am glad to see that dinner is so nearly ready. I assure you I am half-famished."

"One of my soldiers, monsieur! I would never permit such a thing. I will help you myself. So—so! Ah! How is the foot?"

The American placed the wounded member on the ground and attempted to bear his weight upon it. To his surprise, it seemed much better. But a happy thought, an inspiration, took possession of him. He seized the leg tightly with his hands above the knee, and sank upon the edge of the water basin.

"I—I believe it's worse," he groaned.

"Allah forbid!" cried the Turk. "It is from the long ride. When you have rested it will be better. Now let us wash and eat something—a soldier's frugal meal."

Curtis attacked the repast with the zest of a ravenous appetite. The salt cheese, the brown bread and the country wine seemed to him viands fit for the gods. The orderly brought several heads of long Italian lettuce, which he washed at the fountain and cut lengthwise. They ate it like asparagus or celery, dipping it in salt. The American thought it delicious, and rightly. He would never again be able to relish the pale, tasteless chips sold in America for lettuce at brigand prices. Panayota and her father were also eating.

"Sensible girl," thought Curtis; "means to keep her strength up. We'll outwit these Turks yet."

He touched glasses with Kostakes, who was disposed to be convivial, albeit in water.

"Do you know, Monsieur le Capitaine," he said, "I cannot decide which is the greater sensation—the pleasure of eating or the pain of my foot. Do you think, if blood poisoning should set in, you have anybody here who could amputate it?"

"Now, Allah forbid!" cried the Turk again. "By day after tomorrow we shall reach a Mahometan village, and there we shall find a doctor."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Curtis shared the quarters of his amiable host, Kostakes effendi, in the front room of the grocery. Panayota and her father slept next door. The American's bed consisted of blankets laid upon two tables, placed side by side. As the blankets had been prodigally bestowed, he found the couch sufficiently comfortable. He lay on his back, with his arms under his head, gazing out into the moonlit square. Despite the fatigue and excitement of the day, he was not the least particle sleepy. The Cretan night was too intense. The moonlight, wherever it fell, was passionately white, and the shadows of things were as black and distinct as though sketched in charcoal. Rows of soldiers wrapped in their blankets were sleeping in the square. Occasionally one sat up, looked about, and then lay down again. Once, when he was about to drowse off, he was roused to consciousness by a faint mewing overhead, and calling softly:

"Kitty! Kitty!"

The mewing ceased, for Oriental cats are summoned by means of a whistle between the teeth, similar to the sound made by a peanut roaster.

"That's the grocer's cat," mused Curtis. "Poor animal, she doesn't know what's happened. She was asking me as plain as day, 'Do you know where my folks are?' Now, the dog probably went with the old man, but cats are different—the cat and the mortgage stick to the old homestead. I must make a note of that. Let's see. How do the Greeks call their felines? 'Ps-whs-whs,' That's it. Ps-whs-whs!"

A scrambling overhead, and a bolder "meouw!" awarded the effort. Pussy was betwen the tile roof and a covering of reeds that, nailed to the rafters, answered the purpose of lath and plaster.

"Ps-whs-whs!"

"Meouw!" still more confidently, and the sound of cautious feet on dry reeds. Kostakes sat up on his table and rubbed his eyes.

"Are you awake, too, monsieur?"

"Meouw!" said pussy again.

"Ah, the cat keeps you awake. If I were a Greek, now, I should order it killed, but we Turks are very merciful. I will order the sentry to drive it away."

"No, no, I beg of you. I was holding a little conversation with it. I cannot sleep, my leg pains me so. I fear that gangrene is setting in."

"Allah forbid! It is from the fatigue. We shall have a surgeon soon." Kostakes was too good a soldier to keep awake.

"Good night again, monsieur," he said, and turned over.

Outside the nightingales were calling each other from far, tremulous distances. The waters of the fountain splashed and gurgled unceasingly. Curtis' senses became more and more acute. Sounds that he could not hear a moment ago became audible now, without growing louder. He heard the plying of axes, and once the sound of a hammer, followed by laughter.

"What the deuce are they up to?" he muttered. "Are they building a fortification of any kind? I've got to do some tall thinking in the morning. Somehow or other I must get away with that girl. But how? How? I'll make Kostakes believe I'm lamer than I really am, and he won't watch me so close. But I must have an opportunity. No man can do anything without an opportunity—and that isn't so bad either. I must make a note of that in the morning. Let's see, what's that other thing I thought of? H'm—hang it, I've forgotten it."

"Meouw!" said kitty.

"That's it, by Jove! Cats and mortgages."

For fully an hour the American invented and discarded schemes for escaping with Panarota. He tried to think of passages in novels describing the rescue of captive maidens by heroes like himself, but fairy tales of enchanted carpets and wishing caps persisted in running through his head, to the exclusion of more practical methods.

"I must watch for an opportunity," he exclaimed aloud, bringing his fist down upon the table. "If I can't do any better I'll stick to Kostakes till we get to Canea, and then I'll put the matter in the hands of the English Consul. Hello! What's that!"

He was sure he heard a dull, crushing blow, followed by a moan and the sound of some one falling. He listened for a long time, but heard nothing more, and yet he was conscious of a sense of horror, as though he had just awakened from a nightmare. He pinched himself.

"I'm awake," he thought, "and yet I feel as though a murder had been committed. Lord, but I'm all haired up! If this keeps on I shall turn spiritualistic medium. I wonder if I can see the folks at home?" And he shut his eyes and fixed his mind upon his father and mother.

"Let's see, now, what time of day is it in Boston?"

He was awakened from his revery by the voice of Panayota, violent and pleading, by turns; one moment mingled with sobs and the next angry. She was demanding, "Where is my father?" and asking for Kostakes. The latter sat up and listened for a moment. Then hastily buckling on his belt and throwing his cloak over his shoulders, he went out. Curtis, who was not undressed, followed him. As he passed through the door, one of the guards seized him, but he struck viciously at the soldier and cried so angrily, "Let go of me or I'll punch you!" that the Captain looked around and spoke two or three words sharply to the guard, who released him. Suddenly remembering that he was very lame, he sat down upon the edge of the fountain. Panayota was standing in the door of her lodging, in the full moonlight. Her attitude, her voice, her face, were eloquent of terror and despair. As soon as she saw Kostakes she stretched her arms towards him and cried:

"Don't let them kill my father. Bring him back to me, please, please!"

"Why, certainly, my own Panayota. You know that I would not harm you of any one belonging to you. But where is your father?"

"He asked the guard to bring him a drink of water, and the guard told him to come out and get it. And he hasn't come back. O Mother of God, help! help! Don't let them kill him!"

"I see it all," cried Kostakes; "he has escaped," and he questioned the bystanding soldiers in Turkish.

"Yes, my Panayota. He has taken advantage of my kindness. I ordered that he be not bound and that he be treated with every consideration—for your sake, dear Panayota!" Here his voice became low and tender, and he moved nearer. The Turk was, indeed, a gallant figure in the moonlight, leaning gracefully on his sword, the cape of his long military cloak thrown back over his shoulder.

"You hear the men; they say that he darted away and that they ran after him, but could not catch him. Had it been anybody else they would have shot him down. But I had ordered them not to injure him under any circumstances. This I did for you, my Panayota, because I love you. It is you who—"

"Murderer!" screamed Panayota, leaning toward him with a look of pale hate, the while she fixed him with a long accusing finger. "Murderer—Oh, don't deny it! Coward! Liar! You come to me red with my father's blood and talk to me of love. Apostate! Renegade! Where is my father, eh? You perjured Greek, where is my father?"

"MURDERER!" SCREAMED PANAYOTA, LEANING TOWARD HIM WITH A LOOK OF PALE HATE.

Stepping down from the door, majestic as a goddess, she advanced toward Kostakes with arm extended.

He shrank slightly from her and looked uneasily to right and left, to avoid her eyes.

"But, my dear Panayota, you shouldn't give way to your temper like that. You wrong me, really you do. I assure you your good father has escaped."

She dropped her arm heavily to her side.

"Yes," she replied, solmenly, "escaped from a world of murderers and liars. Gone where there is no more killing and burning; where there are no Turas and no renegades—gone. Kostakes effendi, where you must meet him again, with the brand of Cain upon your brow."

Turning, she walked back to the house, but stopped in the door and said:

"Do you know how those are punished in hell who renounce the religion of Christ and become Turks? And what torture awaits you, renegade and murderer of a Christian priest? Kill, kill, give up your life to deeds of blood. Never think of forgiveness for such as you. Your place in hell is already chosen. They are even now preparing the torments for you. O God," and she raised her hands as one praying, "may this man's deeds find him out, in this world and in the next. May he be haunted night and day for the rest of his life. May he die a violent and shameful death, and his memory be held in disgust. May his soul go to the place of torment, and be tortured forever. For he has renounced the Son of God, and has slain his holy minister!"

She disappeared within the house, and Curtis heard her sobbing in the darkness, "Papa! Papa!"

Kostakes filled the cup which hung from the pillar of the fountain by a chain, and took a long drink. He was trembling so that the tin vessel rattled against his teeth.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed, observing Curtis. "Did you ever see anything so unreasonable as a woman? Here is her father run away, and she accuses me of killing him, and consigns me to eternal torment. Really, she has made me quite nervous. If I were not innocent, I should really fear her curses." And he took another drink of the cool water.

Curtis thought of the dull, crushing blow and the groan that he had heard, and he involuntarily moved a little away from the handsome and affable Kostakes, who had sat down by him on the rim of the basin.

"What do you keep the girl for, anyway?" he made bold to ask. "You surely would not force her to join your—your harem, against her consent?"

Kostakes sighed.

"Monsieur," he said, "is a poet. He will understand and sympathize with me. I love Panayota. I would make her my sole wife in honorable marriage. I desire no other woman but her. Bah! What are other women compared to her? Is she not magnificent? I could not help loving her, even just now, when she was cursing me. It is true that I am part Greek by extraction and that I was baptized into the Greek church, and that I have become a Turk. But what is religion compared with love? Panayota is all the heaven I want. I am willing to turn Greek again and have a Christian wedding, if she would take me."

"Aren't you conducting your courtship in rather a violent manner?" asked the American. "In my country, your conduct would be thought, to say the least, irregular."

"Have you in English the proverb, 'All things are fair in love and war?'"

"Certainly."

"Well, you see, this is both love and war. I have possession of Panayota, and I mean to treat her so well that she shall love me. Not a hair of her head shall be touched until she marries me of her own free will."

"But your wives?" asked Curtis. "How many have you of them?"

The Captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Three," he replied. "Dumpy, silly creatures. A Mohametan has not much difficulty in getting rid of his wives."

Curtis arose.

"If you will help me to the house," he said, "I will try to get a little sleep."

Kostakes sprang to his feet.

"Lean on my shoulder," he said. "So, so, how is the leg?"

"Bad, very bad. I'm really worried about it. Do I bear down on you too heavily?"

(To be continued.)

A Desert Tragedy.

'Twas even, and Fatallah's eldest born,
Zimri the Beautiful, excellent of earth,
Frowned when he heard the wissokaja sing,
And the light tinkling of the foo khaloom,
Faint echoing from the tulloks in the kayf,
Filled him with dole. The Tarboosh on his head,
Gay with the kosoomo of the hill, he doffed,
And to the dryby with the gombas on,
He gave the shadoof that his father wore.
He leaned a space upon his khoja khul,
With long, deep-breathing rest.
Then, once again,
Journeyed across the desert, though his soul
Fainted within him. Weary and sore of foot
He toiled to reach the isle of waving palms
That marked the fair oasis and its peace.
His heart grew stronger than the leopard's paw.
When 'neath his feet he felt the springy turf,
Beside the palm-crowned well he knelt and drank.
Then, blessing Allah for his gracious aid,
Sat down upon a gumwood stump to rest.

Then he arose again.
A sad, sweet smile, such as he wears who dreams
At break of dawn. From his parted lips
There fell the desert cry, a long, shrill wail,
Like a steam siren with the mouthpiece cracked,
And every key wide open.

The Beddoee girls—
Old Beddoee's twins, from Beddoee Corners—
Heard Zimri sing; started; uprose,
And scooted for tall timber. Frighted birds
Added their clamor to the dolorous din,
And all the Desert from Beersheba
To far-off Dan—or Daniel—knew
Zimri the Beautiful had cut down on a wasp;
One of the steel-blue kind,
Carrying a short-range bodkin aft;
Loaded for bear; as it might be, in short,
A bare bodkin.

—R. J. Burdette in Los Angeles Times.

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*8:30 A. M.		*6:30 P. M.
*6:00 P. M.	Albany passenger	†10:10 A. M.
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