

The Honorable Fools

By Achmed Abdullah

A story of love that was stronger than hate—even in a land of magnificent hates

Illustrated
by John
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Flanagan

IF YOU describe Mehmet Yar, the city-bred, you describe Ali Hassan, the country-bred. The first was captain of horse in the army of His Majesty, the Grand Khan of High Tartary, while the other was chief of the Abdali tribe whose small stone houses stippled a fair valley tucked snugly into the yellow, brittle swash of the steppe far east of Samarkand.

They were tall men both, brisk men and hearty, a bit hard in the look, a bit braggart, with storm-gray eyes that never narrowed at the sight of danger, and prey to stubborn, self-hurting pride. Twin brothers they might have been. But—and this happened before they were striving for the full, red, terrible thing called love of woman, striving with the tense passion that stops for neither sleep nor supper nor mercy—they hated each other.

As sweet as honey was this hate, as bitter as gall. Yet until the end their blades remained in their scabbards like doves in a cote.

For there was fear.

Not fear of each other. But fear of what would happen, so swift and cruel, to what was most dear to them: in the chief's case to his tribe, and, where the captain was concerned, to his younger brother back home in Samarkand. Fear well-grounded, since neither could forget the memory of a day, a few years earlier, when the Grand Khan of High Tartary, lolling against the cantle of his saddle, his leathery face curled in a smile half-morose and half-ironic, had been surveying his troopers' handiwork; broken swords and daggers, splintered lances, bodies of man and horse and camel stark and lifeless, and already the vultures dipping low.

THE Grand Khan saw, pitied, shuddered a little, then shrugged his shoulders. He abhorred strife. But—he thought—what was he to do? He was the ruler of this land. Its weal was his duty. And these Abdali—arrogant, lawless, thumbing their noses at decent authority, ambushing caravans, raiding to the very gates of Samarkand . . . why, he told himself, peace was a white thing, but must at times be mulched in blood to make it grow more sturdily. . . .

He turned to Ali Hassan, erect before him, his haughty face raised at a keen angle on the square, flagging chin. He pointed at the battlefield.

"You have learned the lesson of peace—and the harsh price of peace?" he asked in a purring voice.

"Peace only because you are the stronger," came the vanquished rebel's reply.

"But peace that you swore upon the Koran. If you break this oath—ah—I warn you. . . ."

"I am not afraid."

"Of course you are not for yourself. But what about your people? You love them, eh? Very well. Hear me give oath: If you deviate a hair's breadth from the clean path of peace—if ever again you show your teeth—by Allah!—I shall make this land a crimson

shambles for jackals to roam in. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Good!" The Grand Khan turned away from Ali Hassan. "Mehmet Yar!" he called.

"My lord?" The captain stepped forward and salaamed.

"The bravest of the brave you are, a prince among tall warriors and storied heroes. But you are like this Hassan. Your pride, too, is as bloated as a drunkard's nose. Seven times, during our ride through the steppe, you fought duels because of trivial insults. Once you spoke insolent words to my first-born and threatened him with naked steel. Can you blame me that hereafter I consider your presence unwelcome in my pleasant city of Samarkand?"

"Exile?" the captain demanded stiffly.

"Exile with high honor since bravery, be it ever so reckless, must have its reward. I appoint you governor over the Abdali. By the way," he went on while the other bowed his thanks, "you heard the warning I gave to Ali Hassan?"

"I did, My Lord."

"The same applies to you. You, too, are not afraid of death. But there is your younger brother. He is dear to you?"

The captain inclined his head.

He thought of his younger brother, the gentle scholar, an alien to the world's clashing, factious turmoil, quite unlike himself . . . and how he loved him, had always, since their parents' passing away, been father and mother to him. . . .

"Dearer than my salvation he is to me," he replied.

"Let him be dearer to you than your pride. For"—the Grand Khan's voice rose shrilly—"I desire peace. I want no private feuds, no bragging, bloody duels. Or else—remember your brother! Be pleased to remember that my executioners are skilled at removing heads!"

He smiled at the two men, captain and chief.

"Here you are—both as full of beggarly pride as an old turban is of dirt. Very well. Be as proud as you please. Hate each other all you please. But—no deeds of violence. If you disobey—you know the punishment."

And he galloped away, followed by his officers, while Mehmet Yar and Ali Hassan stood there, proud, silent, until finally the former—perhaps because the victor, he could afford to be generous—spoke jovial words:

"It is in my mind that you are the very one I would choose to ride with side by side. Let us be friends!"

"We are enemies."

"No longer. There is peace."

"Peace of the hand, not peace of the heart. You are the conqueror, I the conquered."

"Who can prevent what fate has writ-

ten on the forehead? Come," Mehmet Yar repeated, "let us be friends!"

The other did not reply.

"What is it to be between you and me?" asked the chief after a while.

"There is safety only in silence."

"Aye! Silence—and hatred—between you and me—always!"

And they bowed to each other with stilted, false urbanity and went their ways, Ali Hassan taking the road down to the village of his clan, Mehmet Yar to a small oasis, on the rim of the valley, where his copper-faced Mongol troopers were making camp.

SO THE years passed. Years of unabated hate and silence. Years, by the same token, of peace while the land prospered under the captain's stewardship, with new trails blazed through the steppe, stout bridges built to span rivers, caravans trading profitably, and bounteous crops. A traveler seeing at night the smoke wreaths from cozy hearths linger on the air, might have said:

"Here, by Allah, is happiness!"

But it brought no happiness to Mehmet Yar. All it meant to him was crushing loneliness.

Of course he had his troopers. They were loyal, good-natured. But they were Mongols, aliens, speaking an uncouth tongue; savages recently, and rather forcibly converted to a travesty of Islam—and what had he in common with them?

What he needed was a friend with

whom to converse during his hours of leisure of the things dear to his Tartar mind; horses, poetry, perhaps a stirring retelling of former, epic deeds of prowess . . . and less than a spear's toss away dwelled the Abdali. City-bred, he—and they country-bred; yet men of his own race.

They could not avoid speaking to him on affairs of local administration. Otherwise, whenever he met them, there was none to wish him the decent time of day. For there was his covenant with Ali Hassan that silence meant safety, and the latter's order to his tribe:

"Peace I have sworn. Peace I shall keep. But no more than peace. He is the enemy. I hate him. Let silence be about him like a cloak."

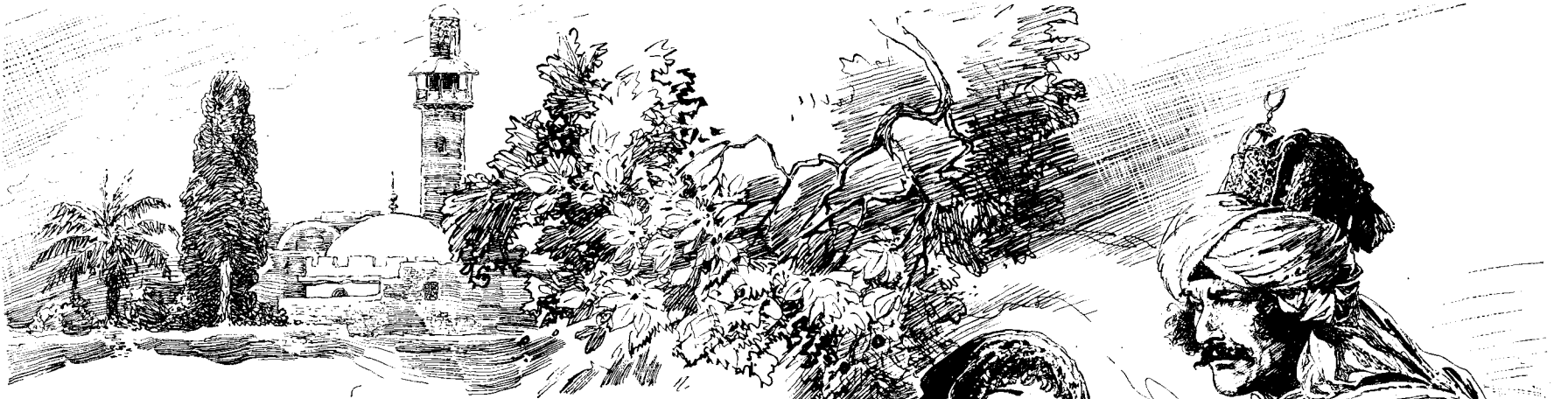
So there was none even to give him a friendly look—with the exception of Khaizaran, the priest's gray-haired old wife, who occasionally would flutter an eyelid at him as if to say: "I am sorry for you."

And then one day there was an end to silence, if not to hate, when to the valley came a russet-haired girl whose name was Kothra, which means Born-in-a-Green-Place.

Here, in her name, you have the gist of her story.

For had she been city-bred or country-bred hers would have been a proper Moslem name: Ayesha or Miriam or, be-like, Zemzem. But she was wilderness-bred, belonging to one of the small, scattered clans that cared for neither trade





nor husbandry, that summer and winter, with sky serene and sunny or the snow thudding down in blinding eddies, roamed through the steppes and hills.

Kothra, whose parents were dead, had been following her clan's fortunes—and, presently, misfortunes—as, crossing the steppe not far from the Abdali valley, a tornado overtook them and killed all except herself.

Ali Hassan, looking for strayed cattle, came upon her half buried in an avalanche of sand. Her left ankle was badly sprained and swollen, her body a mass of cuts and bruises. He carried her to his home, gave her food and shelter, bandaged her wounds; and it was the law of the steppe that, waif and founding of this same steppe, she must hereafter be captive to his sword, his slave if he wished, his concubine or wife—whatever way his fancy happened to go. Wife, in his case—because he was a clean gentleman and because he loved her from the first.

"Marry me!" he said.

"No. I do not love you."

"My love is enough for the two of us."

"I like you too much to marry you—without love."

"But—"

"No, no!" she interrupted impatiently. "Do you not understand our Tartar tongue? No, no, no!"

"I could make you mine by force."

She looked at him, a slow smile curling her lips.

"You will not do so."

"How do you know?"

"Because you love me."

He inclined his head.

"As the Lord liveth"—he exclaimed—"but you are right, O crusher of hearts!"

Such, then, was this man's generosity; and Kothra was grateful.

"I like you! I do!" she said.

BUT she did not reckon with his harsh pride. For when she asked him to be yet more generous, to grant her full freedom and permit her to leave the valley after her wounds had healed, he replied that here she must remain. As his slave? Of that he had no notion. There would be no work for her, no herding of goats nor milking of cows nor carding of wool.

"Then why—why. . . ?"

"To see you each day of my life—to dream—and wait—and hope. . ."

"In vain!" she cried. "Never my lips to touch your lips!"

"Nor ever your lips to touch of another man's lips!"

She implored. He did not budge. She stormed, insulted. He did not care. And when she threatened that, as soon as her ankle was well, she would run away, that the wilderness would welcome and hide her, he laughed. She would be well watched, he informed her; and should she run away the Abdali would find her and bring her back.

Then, as he bent over her to arrange

her cover, she struck him across the face with her hard little fist and sobbed:

"I hate you!"

A few days later she was up and about, hobbling on two sticks through the village streets where the Abdali women—since gossip is quick-blown, wide-blown from house to house—stared after her and made audible comment.

"What can he see in her?" shrilly demanded the mother of three unmarried daughters.

"Allah—what is she with her airs and graces but a whelp of the wilderness?" cried Khaizaran—who should have been tolerant and kindly, being an old woman and the priest's wife.

Kothra heard. She did not mind. She was indeed rather pleased at the women's envy and jealousy. She smiled—was still smiling when, turning the corner of the mosque, she found herself confronted by Mehmet Yar, who had come to the valley to see about taxes.

He had heard of her from his troopers, she of him through Ali Hassan, who nightly poured out his heart to her and had told her about the Grand Khan's warning and the covenant of silence. Now they saw each other; they were alone, seemed hidden from the world's turmoil in the little copse behind the mosque . . . and is it not strange that, as quickly as love had come to Ali Hassan, so quickly love came to Mehmet Yar?

"By the prophet," he thought, "but this is one whose face is like a baffling sweet melody of spring!" And, being the sort of man with whom to see was to feel, to feel was to act or, at least, to speak, he held out a detaining hand as she was about to pass and said:

"There is one thing that I cannot deny."

"What is this thing?" she asked.

"The matter of your mouth, O delight."

"Eh?"

"A slender, red mouth for which a man would do great deeds and sin great sins. And"—coming a step nearer—"one thing more—"

She looked at him. Her heart drummed.

"Yes. . . ?" she whispered.

"I would kiss you. Only . . ."

"Only. . . ?"

"You might run away."

"How can I—with my foot injured—and me hobbling along so clumsily on two sticks. . . ?"

He took her in his arms. Their lips met. She heard the humming of his blood in her own veins with a steady reverberation, a puissant rhythm and

measure. A shiver ran through her like a network, immensely delicate and immensely strong, of a million feathery touches.

"There is a dream in me," she heard him say, "of the first gold of morning dancing through the window and lighting on a pillow with russet hair tossed upon it and a rounded cheek upon a hand like milk. I love you!"

"And I love you!"

"Will you marry me?"

"None else, O king!"

Kothra was frightened and yet thrilled as she saw both men's hands reach for their sword hilts

"When?"

"Today."

"Neither today nor tomorrow nor ever at all!" cut in a harsh voice that drove the lovers apart—that cleared the mist of passion from Mehmet's brain when he saw Ali Hassan approaching, stepping softly and craftily as a great leopard might.

Kothra was frightened and yet thrilled as she saw both men's hands reach for their sword hilts.

"By my honor," (Continued on page 32)

300 Dresses a Year

By Paul Poiret

TO THE dismay of many charming ladies—and most of them are never more deliciously charming than when dismayed—and the consternation, I fear, of many harried husbands, I have set 300 dresses a year as the requirement of the well-dressed woman.

That sounds like quite a lot—almost too many. But it really isn't, when you consider that every costume should fit the hour and the place and the occasion. Your smartly dressed woman will not wear the same costume when she lunches at the Ritz as in the morning when she is buying her shrimps. Nor indeed the costume she wore at the Ritz when she lunches at one of the less pretentious hostelrys, in a private home or, shall we say, in a speakeasy?

It is, alas, too true that there are not many whose incomes allow of their providing their wives with 300 gowns every twelve months. The cost could be quite staggering—and not infrequently is. But before the alarmed husband starts slipping this Collier's behind pillows or tearing out this page, lest his wife should read it and launch a campaign, let me point out that there are tricks in all trades—even in the ancient trade of appearing charming.

In the first place, one dress, with a little imagination and originality and forethought, may easily be made three or even four costumes. Changing a sash, an ornament, turning a lapel or switching a blouse may accomplish wonders.

Good taste too is no longer a matter of money. Though I, to use your American phrase, say it, as shouldn't, charming little gowns may be picked up by women of limited income for as little as \$15 and \$25 each. I know, for I have seen them in your shops. They may be copies; they may be originals. And more often than not they require a little fixing, the removal of an offending touch here and there to make them better suited to the individual.

But therein lies the trouble. So few American women have imagination and originality or, having those qualities, are willing to use them. I see it in Paris. Our French women come into the salon and they demand something suited to their individualities—something new and different. They will suggest changes. Or combinations of two costumes to make one that pleases them.

American women are different. Show them something that everyone is wearing at Longchamps or Deauville or Palm Beach and they want it instantly.

But we must be practical. In America we must be very practical indeed. So let us assume that the American wife is

A different thing entirely appears with a narrow belt in place of the sash and the addition of a lamé jacket and another hat

Not a decent stitch to your back? Tut, tut, my dear. If that's so it's wholly your own fault. If you had real imagination and a spark of ingenuity, you'd have 300 dresses a year. No, no. Not a word, now. Paul Poiret of Paris says so and you can have them without increasing your clothing budget—much

willing to use her imagination a little, to shop around a great deal and to buy dresses for as little as \$15 each. Even that, if you figure on 300, runs to \$4,500 a year—a bit steep.

But the law of compensation enters into it. Because the woman whose husband's income is limited does not run around as much as the wealthy woman, she will need fewer costumes. She goes to fewer places, at fewer times.

The stenographer or working girl

needs two or three costumes, chosen with taste, and all her requirements are met.

So it's not as terrible as it sounds, is it? And then I hinted at one costume taking the place of four or five. Well, this can be done particularly with afternoon and evening dresses. Remove the sleeves, for instance, of a tasteful afternoon frock and you have an acceptable evening costume, with a change of jewelry, stockings and shoes. Simple!

Many a sports costume for the country needs only the substitution of a blouse for a sweater to become a charming walking suit for town.

But vision is needed in shopping for these things. When the dress is selected, the shopper should have in mind the possibilities of converting it.

Then, a woman of imagination can do wonders working with a home dress-maker. Ideas are to be found everywhere.

A Chinese print may offer a suggestion for a hand bag. A vase, for a choker: A French telephone even may have lines that offer hints for a becoming hat, when properly translated.

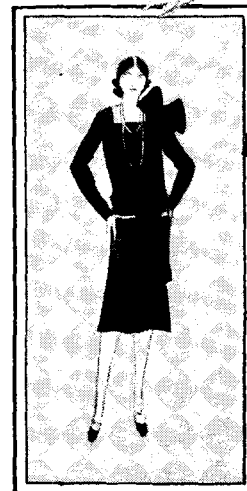
You see, in the creation of costumes, nature has set no precedent. Herself, she provided

none. So we have to reach out to other objects and translate their lines and their beauty into garments.

I can go through a museum and come away with countless ideas that later can be translated into charming things. But most women going through a museum acquire only a set of impressions but have no idea how to make use of them.

I wonder if your young people,

Sleeves, sash and bows at wrists, all removable, and a panel, lined and made so as to be detached at neckline, make this dress equal three or four



Remove the sleeves, loop the sash through the belt in back, detach the corner of the panel, add a chiffon flower and—you have an evening gown

The appearance is radically changed by putting the bow on the shoulder, removing the wrist bows and adding a long necklace to change neckline

The bow is used in still a different way, a lace bertha is added and the dress becomes almost elaborate

Drawings by
Robert
Patterson

