

## ZULEIKA.

BY HJALMAR HJORTH BOYESEN.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

A NORSEMAN IN STAMBOUL.



COLONEL RING was a Norwegian officer who had entered the Sultan's service. In the war of 1877-78, between Russia and Turkey, he distinguished himself on many occasions and won the friendship and admiration of his general, Osman Pasha.

After the retirement of the victorious Russians, Colonel Ring desired to take his leave and return to his own country; but the Sultan begged him to remain and detained him from year to year, for he found great advantage in the Colonel's services, and became attached to him personally. The frank and open manner of this blue-eyed Norseman, in whom he had complete confidence, was particularly pleasing to the somber and suspicious ruler of the Moslems, surrounded as he was by dangers and intrigues.

Colonel Ring soon had an opportunity to demonstrate his good faith; for it was he who discovered the formidable conspiracy of palace officials, whose design it was to assassinate the Sultan and proclaim his nephew Ishmael.

Prince Ishmael, who was the oldest son of the harem and heir to the throne, was a boy of sixteen. He was quite innocent of any connection with the conspiracy in his behalf. It was owing to the Sultan's fondness for Colonel Ring that the Prince was permitted to pass much of his time in the company of the Colonel's son Claude.

The Prince was a tall, slender lad, with a dark complexion and large inscrutable black eyes. He looked sickly, and though he had tutors who instructed him in many things he was not overburdened with learning.

The poor fellow was never allowed to do anything that he liked to do, and though he was to be the ruler of the Ottoman Empire, he could not have bought the liberty to play leap-frog, run a foot-race or turn hand-springs with all his splendid possessions.

He was never left alone for a minute by day or by night, and the elaborate manner of bows and prostrations and salutations which every one must go through who approached him, made his life a burden to him. When Claude Ring, introduced for the first time, refused to kneel or to perform any of the antics which Turkish custom required, the Prince was seized with a great liking for him and asked him to come back often.

It was a great annoyance to Ishmael that he could not learn to sit a horse well. Riding with a master, in a ring strewn with tan-bark, was exceedingly wearisome to him, and neither martial music nor respectful praise nor blame could make him hold his body erect and carry himself like a warrior and the future ruler of an empire.

Prince Ishmael's bearing was listless and self-conscious. His arms and legs were loosely hung on their joints, and in spite of his gorgeous, gold-embroidered uniform he made an impression of weakness rather than of strength.

Claude Ring, though by half a year his junior, weighed ten pounds more than the Prince, and with his broad chest, strong, wiry limbs and well-knit frame, was greatly his physical superior.

Claude's horsemanship was so good that it occurred to Ishmael's head tutor that the young Norseman might perhaps be able to teach something of his skill to the Prince. The Sultan found the suggestion a good one, and gave his consent.

From that time on a change came over the Prince's behaviour.

He copied, in innocent fashion, Claude's bearing and manner, particularly the ting of his head and his turn of speech. Little by little, as he rode at Claude's side, in the parks and suburbs of the city, along the smiling shores of the Bosphorus, he began to open his heart to his companion.

Claude told him about his childhood in Norway, about the shells, and conchs with which he played on the beach, making believe that they were cows and horses; about the fish he caught, and the smores he set for thrush and partridge, and the little mill-wheels, made with his own hands, which he set going in the little waterfalls of brooks and ruidlets.

No tale of the Arabian Nights could have been more wonderful to Ishmael than these simple narratives of boyish sport. He longed with all his heart to be a boy instead of a prince.

About a month after his engagement as Prince Ishmael's companion, Claude was summoned to an audience with the Sultan. He could not imagine what the Commander of the

Faithful wanted of him, and feared that it meant something unpleasant. He waited for half an hour in an ante-room of the palace, and was then ushered into the presence of a dark, sad-looking man of about forty years, who wore a gold embroidered fez on his head, and the breast of whose coat was ablaze with diamonds.

'I wish you to accept a reward for your kindness to Prince Ishmael,' said the Sultan, having nodded in response to Claude's respectful greeting.

'Kindness, Your Majesty, ceases to be kindness when it is rewarded,' answered the boy.

The answer seemed to please the Sultan. He smiled in a sad but friendly way and said:

'When you are older, my boy, you will learn that a Sultan cannot accept a kindness from any man. He must spoil it by paying for it.'

'If that is so, Your Majesty, I submit. I will accept whatever it may please Your Majesty to give me.'

'You are an excellent horseman. How would a fine horse please you?'

'Nothing would please me better.'

'Then you may go to my stables to-morrow, and there you shall select any horse that you like except my saddle-horse, Nonreddin.'

'I thank Your Majesty with all my heart.'

The Sultan made a slight motion of dismissal with his hand. Claude made a profound bow and backed out of the audience room.

Mudir Pasha, the Sultan's Master of the Horse, called on Claude the next day, and conducted him to the Imperial Stables. The boy spent the entire forenoon examining one splendid horse after another, as it was led out before him and put through its paces. He had tried many fine horses, and was half-ashamed of his indecision, when he caught sight of an exquisite animal in a box-stall, in a remote corner of the stable.

'Please open that window,' he said to the groom, 'and have the kindness to lead that horse out, so that I may look at it.'

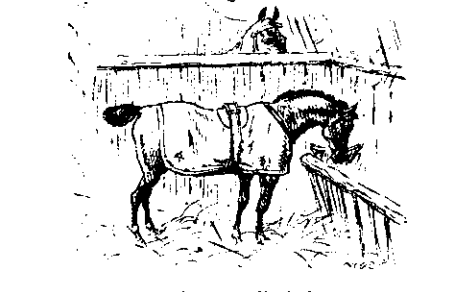
From the glance the groom exchanged with the Master of the Horse he soon perceived that there was some design in keeping this animal, as far as possible, out of sight.

'Oh, you don't want that vixen,' said the equerry. 'She is the most vicious beast in the whole stable.'

'Never mind,' Claude replied. 'I should like to have a look at her anyway. What is her name?'

'Zuleika.'

Zuleika was led out into the court-yard before the stable, and Claude's heart thrilled at the sight of her. She was a dapple-grey Arabian mare, not very large, but of noble



shape, and with a head so exceedingly beautiful that it was impossible to look at it without being filled with earnest admiration of it. There was fire and intelligence in her black eyes, and an alertness and restrained vigour in the small, silky, forward-pointed ears, which showed her mettle.

Her slender legs were absolutely faultless. Claude fancied he could see them bearing him across the country at a graceful canter or a long, striding trot.

He put his hand gently on her shoulder and limbs, and she gave a quick start as if she resented it. Claude was greatly pleased with her. She was a princess if ever there was one. Never did noble blood declare itself more plainly in shape and look and demeanour.

The shy, resentful glance she gave him, as he ran his hand down along her hind-legs, did not disturb him. She had a personality, this lovely beast, not the mere passive docility of what is called a good horse, but a sensitiveness like that of an intelligent human being.

'I think this will be my choice,' said Claude to the Master of the Horse. 'I'll ride her home now, if you'll kindly lend me a saddle.'

'Don't be rash, young man,' the Turk replied, with a malicious laugh. 'You'd better try the mare before you make up your mind.'

'All right,' said the boy: 'but my mind is made up already.'

It made Claude a trifle uneasy to remark the by-play of swift gesticulations and glances which went on between Mudir Pasha and his underlings when they supposed they were unobserved. It began to dawn upon him that he had selected the most precious horse in the Imperial Stables, and he knew enough of the Turkish character to be aware that a 'Gisour,' or Christian, would not be permitted to carry off such a prize if these men could prevent it.

He therefore took the precaution, when the mare was returned to him, to examine the buckles of the various straps and to push his hand under the saddle.

He thought for a moment that his suspicion had been groundless. But as he inserted his finger under the saddle-

lining he felt a scratch, as of a sharp metallic point. A steel rowel, shaped like a bar, with a dozen keen needle-points, had been so placed that the very instant he added his weight to the saddle, the cruel needles would pierce into the back of the horse.

Claude had been too long in Turkey to be astonished at this exhibition of treachery. He knew, too, the folly of showing the man's wrath which he felt. With the utmost coolness he pulled out the rowel, and without the moving of a muscle in his face, tossed it away.

Having tightened the saddle-girth he then mounted Zuleika, and raising his hat to the Master of the Horse, was about to gallop away.

Scarcely had he turned his head when the riding-whip which the Turk held in his hand whizzed through the air and cut with vicious force across the haunches of the mare.

With a wild snort Zuleika reared, tossed her head in the air, whirled about the court with furious swishing of tail and clatter of hoofs, and struck out madly with her hind-legs; but seeing that her rider still held her with his powerful knees as in a vice, she gave a bound that almost wrenched him from his seat, and then shot out of the gate.

'He is a dead man,' said Mudir Pasha to the equerry, as he lighted a cigarette and hung the match on the pavement.

'Allah is great,' answered the groom. 'He will not let a Gissour carry off the pride of the Moslems.'

It looked for a while as if the Turk's prophecy were to come true.

Zuleika dashed away through the narrow, winding streets with a blind and headlong speed, leaving over all obstacles. Now she upset a pedlar's cart, now she knocked down a soldier, and now she made havoc in a pack of street dogs that had congregated at a corner.

Like a continuous salvo of musketry sounded the sharp, furious hoof-beats upon the stone pavement, as with outstretched neck, ears laid back, foaming bit, and distended nostrils the excited animal darted away past shops and bazaars, past gardens and villas, and out into the open country.

Now Claude had the wide country before him with broad avenues and little traffic. It was simply a question of grit and endurance. He seemed to perceive a slight slackening of Zuleika's speed, though she was yet rushing on at a desperate pace. It was still impossible to bring her to a stop.

On his left the shining Bosphorus expanded, like a burnished mirror. From the villas along the water-front piers ran out into the strait.

A daring thought flashed through Claude's brain. What if he gave Zuleika a bath in the Bosphorus? That would cool her ardour and bring her to her senses before she had run herself to death. With him to think was to do, and in a moment Zuleika was headed for the water. She beat a quick tattoo on the boards of a pier, and then plunged with a tremendous splash into the Bosphorus.

It was a stratagem for which she was wholly unprepared, and she had not swum a dozen rods before there was a sudden relaxation of effort, and she quietly turned her head about toward her rider, as if to see what manner of man he was.

'Zuleika, my beauty,' he said, leaning forward and patting her neck, 'it was not I who struck you, you lovely creature; no indeed, it was not I.'

In her effort to turn her head, Zuleika swallowed some salt water and began to cough. He soothed her again and patted her, talking to her as he would to a wilful child, and headed her gently for the shore. But, unhappily, the strong current through the strait was too much for the exhausted animal. Claude perceived that the shore, instead of drawing nearer was moving away from him. Was he being swept out to sea?

With quick resolution he flung himself off Zuleika's back, and taking the rein between his teeth swam with powerful strokes at her side.

Claude began to repent of his recklessness. He saw unmistakable evidence of exhaustion in Zuleika.

There were no boats near by, though there were some not very far away. One of these seemed to have caught sight of him and to be tacking toward him, for a slight wind had sprung up and swept with light undulations over the smooth strait.

The question was now whether Zuleika could keep afloat until the boat overtook them. The current which had dealt so treacherously with them was now serving them well, for it was carrying them in the very direction from which the boat was coming.

But Zuleika's body settled deeper in the water. She panted violently, and now and then a very human groan broke from the depth of her powerful breast.

They drifted steadily toward the boat. Claude was now near enough to decipher the crescent moon in the imperial arms on the sails, which were of yellow silk. That was odd, indeed. There was no one in Turkey except the Sultan and Prince Ishmael who had the right to display those arms.

The yacht was presently within hailing distance, and a young man, in whom he instantly recognised the Prince, raised a field-glass to his eyes and cried out:

'Why, it is Claude! Claude, my friend, what are you doing in the middle of the Bosphorus?'

'Swimming,' said Claude.

'Do you want to be taken aboard?'

'Should not object, if you can also take my horse.'

Prince Ishmael spoke to the sailing-master, who was seen to shake his head.

'We can't get the horse aboard,' he said to Claude: 'but we can tow him ashore.'

'Thank you.'

'But you come aboard yourself.'

'I can't. I prefer to keep my horse company.'

Two ropes were now flung overboard, and Claude managed to attach one to the ring of Zuleika's bit, while he secured the other under his own arms. The breeze freshened a trifle: the yacht again hoisted her sails, which she had let fall. With gentle speed she towed the two swimmers toward a bit of beach, about a mile below where they had taken their first plunge. There they landed safely.

Claude forgot to express his thanks to Prince Ishmael, so anxious was he about Zuleika's condition. She had won a place in his heart; their friendship had been cemented by danger.

Zuleika trembled like a leaf, as she stood dripping at the roadside, and Claude did not think it best to return to the city with her before she had rested. He walked her slowly up and down. Fortunately the day was warm and sunny, and there was no danger of her catching cold.

The exquisite beauty of her head, the slenderness and delicacy of her form, and the noble proportions of her whole