

Jerusalem 1908: In the household of the Ottoman Governor

Selma Ekrem



Selma Ekrem. Source: *Selma Ekrem, Unveiled* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1931).

*Editor's Note: Selma Ekrem was the daughter of Ali Ekrem Bey, the Ottoman mutassarif (governor) of Jerusalem during the years 1906-1908, and the granddaughter of Muhammet Namik Kemal, the illustrious poet, journalist and social reformer (1840-1888). Namik Kemal's writings influenced the positions of his son Ali Ekrem and Selma's writings, but his main impact was on the formative ideological orientation of the Young Turks movement, and on Mustafa Kemal personally. Her father, Ali Ekrem, played a crucial role in the establishment of Beersheva as a modern garrison city, as well as in the administrative reform of the Jerusalem district. In her autobiography, *Unveiled*, published in 1931, Selma identified herself as a "liberated Muslim woman" and described Palestine during the anti-Hamidian revolution as a land of "ignorance filled with gloom, religion and filth" (Oyku Potuogu-Cook). Although still a young girl in Jerusalem, Ekrem's retrospective memoirs are permeated with a modernist Orientalist vision of Palestine, seen through the eyes of her Armenian nanny and francophone mother. She was raised in Istanbul and Jerusalem, but spent her mature years in the US where she became a promoter and publicist of a Kemalist modernity. In her introduction to the memoirs Carolyn Goffman identified Ekrem's most striking achievement in *Unveiled* as "her shrewdly ironic juxtaposition of the 'exotic' world of a Muslim Turkish female with the commonplace events of family life as experienced by young girls of any Western nation." Her views of pre-war Jerusalem were at once Ottoman modernist, Turkish nationalist, and neo-Islamic. Goffman refers to Ekrem's view of modernity, in which*

“the urban center is superior, [reflecting] an imperialist outlook that jars with the universalism she advocates elsewhere. The attitude towards the Ottoman ‘other’ also appears markedly in her portrayal of the post-WWI ‘non-Turkish’ population whom she views, at least temporarily, as treacherous outsiders.” In the selections below, taken from the 1930 reprint of her autobiography, obvious errors have been corrected, and Turkish words italicized. Otherwise all the spellings and usages have been kept as in the original.

Christmas in Jerusalem

Jerusalem, the city of monks and priests, of deep-throated bells and stately churches, where every spot is sacred, where every corner breathes old legends. Jerusalem, the gray city of religion, where centuries of prayers have cast upon it a heavy air of sorrow. Pilgrims throng from all over the world to this city of mysticism and fanatical beliefs. It is a city where races have come and gone, where many hatreds are still burning, where Christians look at each other with deep-rooted suspicion, where they swear at Jews and Jews swear at Christians. It is here that religion is marred with battle. Heads bowed meekly in prayer are raised fiercely, the worshipers and priests of the different sects of the Christian religion spring at one another’s throats. Knives are flashed, blood flows, and people lie dead until the Turkish soldiers come to restore peace between the followers of the one religion.

Jerusalem is a city that many races have fought over and three great religions have claimed, each holding it sacred and wanting it for its own. A city perched on a hill amid bare desolate gray hills where the olive trees grow. A city of dirt and dust, of odd stone houses and crooked streets. Jerusalem lay before us, drawing us with its unknown magic. My mother was busy fixing the house, receiving the downpour of guests, but we children wandered through the streets with Mlle. Lucy and my old nurse.

The people in the streets were fascinating. There were many priests, each order of the Catholics wearing a different costume, some in brown, others in white, some going in sandals and some in bare feet. The Greek priests strode in somber robes with tall chimney-like hats, their long hair twisted in a knot at the back of their heads. Then there were groups of Russian pilgrims, old and young, with the fever of religion burning in their eyes. They wore high boots, tight trousers, long belted coats and Russian kalpaks, caps of astrakhan. The women wore loose skirts with a long tunic, and a cloth over their heads tied under their chins and hanging down behind. These pilgrims had come from far-off Russia, huddled together on the bare decks of ships, after they had saved kopek upon kopek to feed their souls on the altar of Jerusalem. The poor ones walked from Jaffa to Jerusalem, a bundle hanging from a stick slung over their shoulders, and in each bundle there was always a teapot, without which a Russian cannot live.

The Arab men wore long white robes with black *mashlahs* (something like kimonos)



Abla, Bera'at, and Selma Ekrem, Jerusalem 1908. *Source: Ekrem family collection.*

and dirty towel-like head coverings. The women wore loose white *tcharshafs* but they threw back their veils and showed their faces. Sometimes groups of them came from the many villages lying round the city, the village men in loose long blue tunics, the women too wearing trousers and veils thrown carelessly over their heads showing their hair and faces. They were followed by children with hardly any clothes on, running in the dust, and back of the family trotted always the faithful donkey. Sometimes we would see groups of Arab girls in a row, straight as arrows, swinging their arms, and on their heads they would carry big baskets filled with eggs, cheese, and milk which they brought from their village. How gracefully they walked, holding their heads proudly, the basket never wavering, held there by the magic of long practice. Then there were Arab women returning from the fountains carrying on their heads earthenware jugs filled with water. Not a drop would spill while they walked swaying and chatted in guttural tones, raising a cloud of dust with their bare feet.

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“Mademoiselle,” I asked timidly, “how do the Arab women carry those jugs on their heads? Are they glued on?”

Everyone laughed at me and I felt the red glow of shame mounting to my head.

“Allah only knows how they do it,” put in my old nurse. “It must be very difficult.”

There and then I decided to practice in the secret of my room. I did, but with disastrous results. The jug went crashing to the floor and my old nurse came in to scold me.

“But I am trying to be an Arab girl,” I excused myself.

“It is lucky hanoum effendi did not see you,” grumbled nurse, gathering all the

broken pieces. I was so cowed that I did not try again to acquire the magic of these women. It was their secret and their glory, and they could keep it to themselves.

Another day we wandered to the old walled city, the ancient part of Jerusalem still protected by thick fortifications. People lived here in houses so small one could not even call them houses, some made of hastily gathered stones with a window or two, some even without roofs. Here Moslem Arabs and Christian Arabs mingled with Jews, though the Jews had their separate quarters all over the city. The women were all in white *tcharshafs*, even the Christian women covered their hair and faces in the city, while in the villages the Moslem girls were careless and showed theirs, and no one objected or tried to change them. Lucky girls, who were free as the wind, walked so proudly swaying their bodies, and laughed in such mouthfuls showing their glittering white teeth.

The Jews were queerly dressed. There were two kinds of Jews—the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim.

“Look, look at this old man,” Mlle. Lucy twittered, “isn’t he funny enough to make you die of laughter?”

An old Jew was coming toward us. He was dressed in a long purple velvet coat and his white tunic showed from beneath. He had on a velvet cap of the same color bound with fur. From beneath his cap two curls fell on his cheeks. These curls were sacred to every Sephardim Jew, and they all wore them, old ones, young ones, and children. We all looked at the old Jew, fascinated. He shambled along with shoulders hunched as if centuries of hatred had crushed him to the ground.

“Nurse, why do the Jews have curls?” I asked.

But no one seemed to know. Maybe it was their secret, jealously guarded. The Jews were peculiar. Nurse had told me once that if you asked a Jew how many legs a cat had, he would always answer three and a half, and never say four. The reason for this stubborn answer no Jew would ever divulge. So it was with their curls, coiled so carefully over each cheek.

Purple velvet and blue tunics, white-sheeted women, naked babies, gray donkeys, all mingled and filled the narrow crooked streets. And in and out of the motley crowd moved the priests, the hermits with ragged beards, the Russians in their creaking high boots.

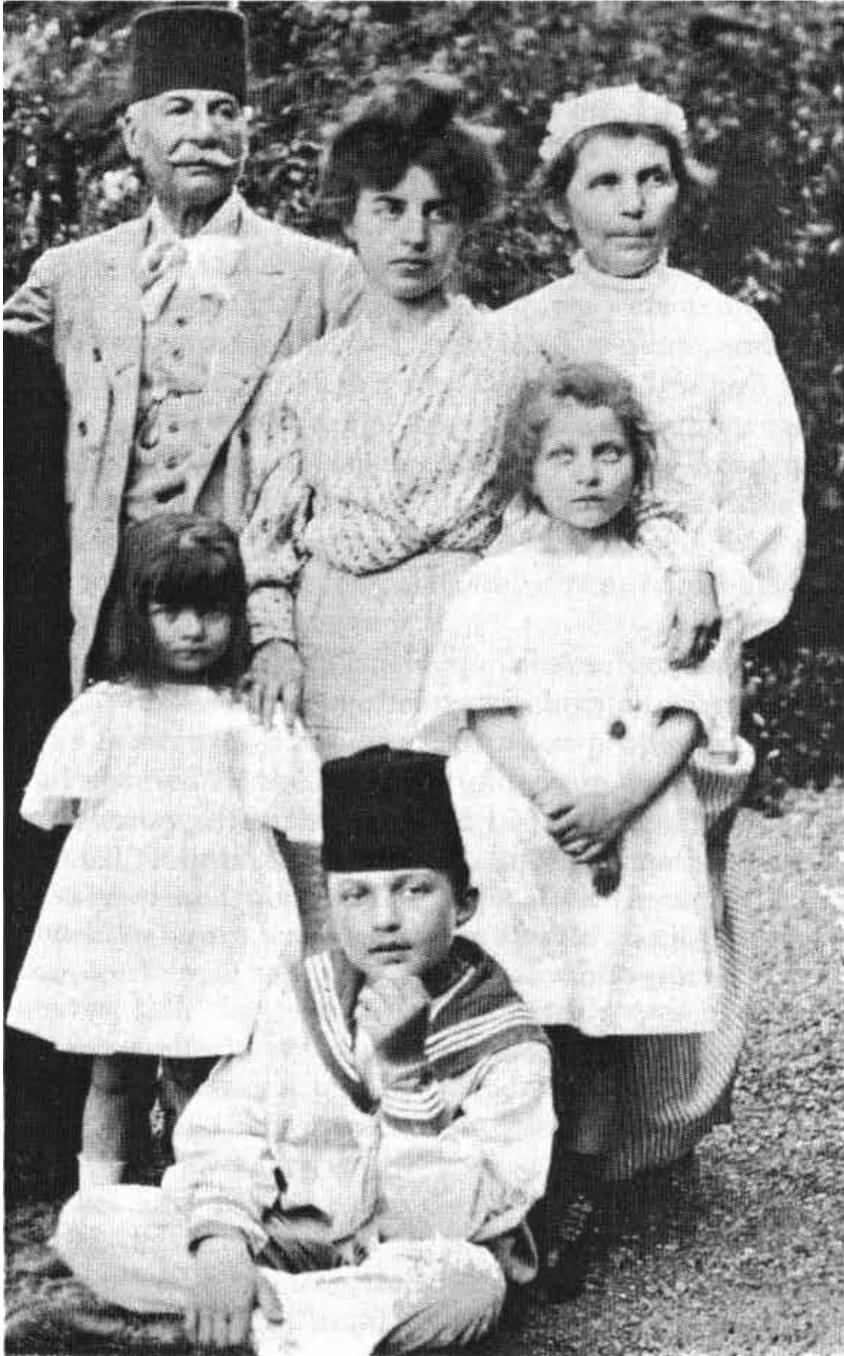
One afternoon a carriage came to the door and mother and we children went for a drive, with Mlle. Lucy and nurse following in another carriage. We passed through the cobbled streets till we came to a dirty road where the dust rose in clouds, covering us from head to foot and turning my mother’s black *tcharshaf* gray. We came upon a hill and were told by our driver that here Christ had ascended to heaven.

“Mother,” I asked, “who is Christ?”

“He is a prophet,” answered my mother.

“But Mohammed is the prophet,” I objected.

“There have been many prophets,” my mother explained. “Mohammed is one, Christ is another, and there are prophets who came before them.”



Selma Ekrem (bottom right) with her brother, sister, mother, Armenian nanny and an unknown family friend. *Source: Selma Ekrem, Unveiled.*

“But I thought, mother,” put in my sister, “that Christ was the prophet of the Christians only.”

“No, my dear,” answered mother. “He is a prophet too in the eyes of all Moslems. We revere him and believe in him and in all the other prophets too.”

“But the Christians don’t believe in Mohammed,” answered sister, who knew so much and had silenced me.

“It shows their prejudice,” replied mother.

Then Christ was a prophet, but what were prophets? Magicians, probably, since people stood in awe of them and spoke their names in venerating whispers.

We stood on the hill and the spot where Christ had ascended to heaven was shown to us. I stood near it and wondered. How do people go up to the sky? Was there a ladder or did the angels come and take them? Maybe that was what my elders meant by death. To be taken up to the blue sky by soft-winged angels with sweet faces would be a pleasant journey, I thought. Would the angels come down for me too? I wondered.

When we drove back home, I went to find my old nurse, the source of all knowledge.

“My little nurse, will I go up to heaven as Christ did?”

“Child, what makes you say these things? Only the prophets rise after they are dead.”

“Nurse, tell me about Christ the prophet, was he a man?”

Nurse was puzzled how to answer me. “Christ,” she said finally, “was the Son of God.”

The Son of God, the One Eye and the One Ear. The whole thing worried me intensely. I found in my mind vague ideas of prophets and their lives and decided to put the whole question before my mother when I could catch her by myself. Above all I wanted to know what could these prophets be, whether they had shape and form like the fairies and djins or whether they were clouds with magical power.

In front of our house was a big building with a watchtower and beautiful gardens, called “Moskofia.” Here the Russians of Jerusalem lived and to it came groups of Russian pilgrims. I could see them arriving from morning to night. At daybreak we could hear them singing. Men and women joined their voices and sang haunting beautiful Russian hymns. The air would be filled with these melodies of snowbound Russia. Each morning the voices sounded stronger, increased by many pilgrims.

For Christmas was coming and Jerusalem was thrown into a fever of commotion. Pilgrims from all over the world were crowding now to the city. The churches were overflowing, the streets were packed, and pilgrims wandered in search of a corner to sleep at night.

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At Bethlehem we were welcomed by the mayor and drove to his house. The house was crowded with Arab women who had come to pay their respects to my mother. They all spoke Arabic and we could not understand a word. The women were dressed oddly in rough hand-woven material, brilliant reds and blues. The young girls wore thin veils covering their hair even though they were Christians. The married women

were distinguished by a peculiar headdress, a tall bonnet-like creation over which was thrown a veil gathered below the chin.

We were served candy and sweet sirups, which the daughters of the mayor passed to us themselves. The talk round us grew. Then we were called in for lunch, an interminable feast during which I counted twenty courses. We had chicken and meat drowned in heavy spicy sauces, pastries and vegetables, heavy desserts stuffed with pistachios, and all the varieties of fruits that grew in the country. We were gorged with food, our hostess urging us to take second and third servings of each course, and looking as if she were wounded to death when we refused.

After coffee we drove to the famous church built round the stable where Christ was born, a church which is the constant cause of quarrels between the Catholics and the Orthodox Christians. Every sect has its own limited portion of the church and no one could pass from one to the other. If a worshiper of one sect put his foot over into the portion of another, then the priests claimed that as their own. A strict watch is kept over the boundaries.

It was this church and its quarrels which served Russia as a pretext to attack Turkey and start the Crimean War. The dispute was begun as to where Christ's head had fallen. The Catholics claimed that the sacred spot was in one part of the church while the Orthodox insisted that it was in another. This led to violent quarrels and battles royal. Russia sided with the Orthodox while the Catholics roused the Arabs and told them the Tsar was using this as a pretext to take Jerusalem. This led to the Crimean War, and at its end the European powers declared that the church should be in the hands of the Turks and that the Turkish government should assign the place where Christ's head had fallen. The government declared that the sacred spot was in the middle of the church and there a gold star was worked in the stones. Two Turkish soldiers guarded it from morning till night year after year. The Christians, of course, still used the church and divided it as of old among the different sects.

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That night we returned to Jerusalem, the ride had chilled me and I was shivering. The city looked somber like a still pool. But beneath its stagnant waters of deathly calm the tortured hatreds of thousands might be writhing in passion. For the first time Jerusalem stood before me menacing and terrible. We had come here for peace and quiet, but were these to be found? This city of a thousand hatreds might turn against us as the white turrets of Yildiz palace had always turned.

The gray stone house looked dark, mysterious and for a moment it looked like the house we had left back in Constantinople. The bell rang loudly and started echoes of fear in my heart.

We found my father with a dark brooding face and this did not surprise me, for I had been waiting for an evil to burst out of the dark night. He hardly greeted us and hurried out to the *selamlık*. We could hear quick footsteps, the banging of many doors and policemen that dashed to the house and rode off again, their horse's hoofs echoing wildly in the night.

Once more gloom was upon us. My mother started her restless pacing and we children watched her wide-eyed. Could it be that Sultan Abdul Hamid had come to torture us again? Maybe my father would be arrested and dragged away.

Late in the night my father came to us. He lighted a match pensively and smoked his cigarette. We knew he was worried by the way he poured forth columns of smoke.

“What has happened, Ekrem?” mother asked, and into her voice crept that nervous shrill note.

“It is trouble, always trouble,” my father broke out.

“No wonder Sultan Abdul Hamid consented to send me to Jerusalem. This city, it is hard to manage with all its religions and hatreds. The people are like a river held back by a dam, any moment the surging waters may break it and cover us all.”

My father stopped, but my mother was insisting to know this fresh trouble that threatened us.

“The trouble is great because I know Jerusalem, I know the fanatical people, a word is a spark to their feelings,” my father was saying. “While you were away at Bethlehem, an officer came galloping to the house and wanted to see me. He looked tired and dusty and in his eyes I read fear. The story he told me might throw someone else into a fit of laughter but here in Jerusalem laughter is not possible even for the slightest things. Late towards the evening a Russian pilgrim entered the church of Bethlehem and threw himself with religious fervor on the golden star. The church was crowded with people, the soldiers on guard seeing the pilgrim deep in his prayers drew a little apart. But these prayers lengthened and finally the pilgrim rose and was lost in the crowd. The soldiers growing suspicious drew near the star and discovered that a piece of gold had been worked out and carried away. Immediately the soldiers ran to the officer in charge and the event was dashed to me.”

It was a serious matter, my father was talking of bloodshed and death. The stealing was bound to be known and the Russian pilgrim could not be arrested for no foreigners of any nationality could be tried by Turkish courts because of the capitulations which Europe had forced upon Turkey. The different races would be at each other's throats. Worse might happen.

“Bethlehem was the cause of the Crimean War,” my father was saying. “This very same star had been stolen and Jerusalem had risen indignant. The Catholics cried out the Orthodox had stolen the star that belonged to them because it had a Latin inscription on it. The Orthodox were indignant at this accusation and Russia, who needed a pretext to interfere in Oriental questions, declared that she would uphold the rights of the Orthodox. France, on her side, supported the Catholics. England did not like Russia's interference in Jerusalem, formed an alliance with Turkey and France and the Crimean War was declared.”

We listened to him awed. What would this second stealing lead to? The air was charged, Europe had an eye on Turkey and needed but the slightest excuse to fall upon her.

“The pilgrim must be found,” my father broke out, “and I shall drag the piece of gold from his hands. I shall hold these people in check and cork their bottles of hatred.”



Mehmed Namick Kemal (1840-1888) Selma Ekrem's grandfather - revolutionary figure and 'father' of Ottoman romantic nationalism. *Source: Portrait Gallery of the Perry-Castañeda Library of the University of Texas at Austin.*

The words of war and death chased sleep from my eyes, I had seen the eager pilgrims pressing close to one another in Bethlehem, I had looked into their demented eyes and now these faces rose before me. I saw them running with knives flashing in their hands. And back of them in the darkness I could see the sinister face of Sultan Abdul Hamid.

The next few days we lived hectic hours. My father was away all the time and the chill of uncertainty had descended on us. No longer did we children sing the Christmas carol we loved. Nurse could not comfort me, for she too had a serious troubled face.

My father went to the Russian consul, whom he knew and had helped. He told the consul about the stealing and emphasized the danger. The Russian

consul decided to help my father. All over Jerusalem the pilgrim was hunted and finally he was identified by the two soldiers. He was brought before the consul and my father. The pilgrim denied the whole story. He was threatened with excommunication but still he held firm. The consul then tried gentler means. He would give the pilgrim gold and a free passage to Russia if he would give up the bit of star he had stolen. But the pilgrim stood stubbornly silent. Then the consul opened wide his eyes and made threatening gestures, his words hissed like the lash of the knout. The pilgrim was cowed and he succumbed and handed over his booty.

The gold was fixed in its place in the dead of night, the few snatches of gossip were quickly smothered and my father came to us with a sigh of relief.

Once more Jerusalem had been saved, and the different nationalities mingled, keeping their hatred and suspicions in their eyes. Christ had been born again in Jerusalem and the exaltation lingered in the air. Only the church bells tolled a little mournfully, tired of so much ringing.

Before me now stood a different city. Jerusalem was no longer the harbor of our suffering spirits. Instead it rose before me like a dragon with mouth aflame. The lure of its oddness and of its adventure was now also the lure of fear. These people I saw in the streets, packed in churches, they could rise and trample us down. Knives were flashed too quickly in Jerusalem.

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Christos Anesti

The thought had come to us strongly, now, that we were really exiles in this somber city of tears, bound to its barren rocks by the whim of a sultan. We were held in a vise, struggling alone and helpless, for the governor of Jerusalem could not have real friends among the high church and state dignitaries. One could not trust a smiling face or a hand stretched in friendship.

My father had realized this from the first day that we had come to Jerusalem. He had told us about his first night in the city, but it had been more of a funny story to us then.

When we had come to Jerusalem, some months before, it was late in the evening. During our first supper in the city my father had seemed preoccupied and worried. At nine-thirty of the night he was told that the consul general of France had come to pay him a visit. My father went to the *selamlick* to receive him. After the first greetings the consul started by saying:

“France, as you know, is the greatest friend of Turkey, and it goes without saying that the French consul is the greatest friend of the governor. I also knew your predecessor who told me a great deal about you.” And he continued talking friendship for an hour, the words Holy Sepulchre, Bethlehem, Gethsemane, passing and repassing without end.

Second visit, close upon the heels of the first, consul general of Russia, a tall man coughing all the time, nervous, quick in anger but with a good heart. Here is a new friend for my father, how many proofs of his friendship he brings forth!

“It is the Emperor of Russia who is the greatest friend of his majesty the sultan,” he says in his nervous way. “It is Russia who saved the Turkish Empire when the other powers were intent on division. We must become friends, for you can depend upon me.”

Only he, apparently, could tell the truth to the new governor and inform him about all the different questions. Then the words Gethsemane, Holy Sepulchre, Russian pilgrims, the great Russian church Moscovite, came in and out of the conversation.

He goes at last, it is midnight, but the third visitor is ushered in. He proves to be the consul general of Italy. How amiable he is. A thin small man with a laughing face and with such courteous manners.

Assuredly he is the greatest friend of the governor. It is easy to explain, since Italy has always remained neutral in Oriental questions. Italy is only concerned with the Catholic clergy in Jerusalem. Could the governor find a better and more disinterested friend?

At last he goes also, my poor father is preparing to go and sleep when the door opens and a giant priest comes in. His eyes flash, his enormous nose shadows his face but he seems good-natured. He presents himself, the first dragoman of the Armenian patriarchate.

“It is easy to see,” he begins, “that only the Armenians are the most loyal subjects of the Turkish Empire,” etc., etc.

One-thirty, my father is tired but the arrival of a second priest keeps him in the



Ali Ekrem Bey, Governor of the Jerusalem Province 1906-1908. *Source: Selma Ekrem, Unveiled.*

room. This one is thin and long with cunning face and gestures. What a devoted subject he is, what a man capable of sacrifice! The Greeks, but it is only they who are the best and most devoted subjects of the empire, etc., etc.

Twenty minutes to two, arrival of a queer personality, wearing an odd costume with two curls falling on both cheeks. He is cold, restrained but courteous. He is the representative of the foreign Jews, who are not subject to the Turks.

At last the poor governor has found a real friend! The foreign Jews, but they are the most disinterested and the quietest people in Jerusalem.

Three o'clock lets in another Jew. An old man with a long beard, eyes speckled with mischief but amiable and oily mannered. He is the representative of the Turkish Jews.

"Take care, your excellency," he begins, "of that rogue of a Jew who was just leaving and have confidence only in your humble slave."

Four o'clock: my father runs away at last and goes to bed. But can he sleep? He is up at dawn. He goes before the window. What a splendid city is stretched before him, with its old fortress, its churches and its two big domes of Omar's mosque and the Holy Sepulchre. The houses are all of stones and olive trees cluster round. The sun is reflected on the gilded towers of the great Moscovite church and throws a golden light all over the city.

"Ah," sighs my father, "if only I did not have so many friends in Jerusalem."

All these high dignitaries, who had come to my father with offers of friendship, were steeped in intrigues, eager to grasp more power in the Holy Land. And behind them stood the different nationalities they represented quick to flash out and hard to pacify. The European powers had their eyes on Turkey, and the Holy Land was a constant pretext for turmoil and a seething evil. My father had to work among these people, see through their intrigues, win their confidence if possible, find a remedy for all evil and keep the Holy Land quiet. It was not an easy matter.

The people of Jerusalem were different from any people we had ever known, we could see this almost every day. It was at the feast of St. John that I realized this difference again and had my first fear of a crowd. We had gone to Jericho to witness the "Throwing of the Cross" ceremony. Early in the morning we set out for the Jordan. Masses of pilgrims had flocked to the banks of the famous river. The Greek patriarch did not attend the ceremony but he had sent one of his cardinals to represent him. A place was reserved for us and we sat, mother drawing her black *tcharshaf* a little over her face, while we children gathered round her. Farther away the pilgrims stood, masses of them, and before us, close to the shore, was an ungainly rowboat, filled with priests. The Greek consul, resplendent in his gold-braided uniform and befeathered three-cornered hat, stood by a venerable cardinal whose long white hair was twisted in a knot at the back of his head, and who wore the black chimney hat peculiar to Orthodox priests, and over it a black veil floating behind him. He had on gorgeous yellow brocaded robes embroidered with gold and soft colored silks. Near him were other dignitaries of the church, some in purple robes, others in somber black.

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Easter, the Great Festival, was drawing near . . . Jerusalem was one long shiver of excitement. The tramping of pilgrims echoed through the days and at night their chanting floated over the city. The pilgrims were afire to see every holy nook and stone and the priests saw to it that these were many.

“Here Jesus Christ laid his hand. Give us money and you shall see.”

“In this place the Virgin Mary had a vision. Give us money and you shall see.”

Money rolled out of pockets into grasping fingers, the pilgrims gave all they had, and night and day they tramped and prayed. The crowds undulated and flowed. Some of the pilgrims, afraid to lose one tinsel of a ceremony, slept in the Holy Sepulchre in separate places reserved for them. And after they left the priests washed the church with soap and water.

Easter revolves round the great church of the Holy Sepulchre. This church too is divided into different sections and each belongs to a different sect of the Christian religion. Here, also, a strict watch is kept over the boundaries. Blood has flowed here and people have died. The Turkish governor is responsible for the keeping of peace and whenever there is a great ceremony he has to attend it with armed soldiers.

So, as Easter drew near, our hearts were squeezed and every night we children scanned father’s face to see if trouble were brewing. We did not have long to wait. One night we understood that the pot of trouble had boiled over.

The Kopts, the Christian Egyptians, had imported twenty-four young Kopt boys from Egypt and had trained them to sing in high piercing voices. One day, while there was a service in the Holy Sepulchre, these Kopt children started to sing and their voices rose like shrill sirens that drowned the voices of all the worshipers of other sects. This happened the next day and then the next again. The Kopt children grew stronger in their shrill singing. The other worshipers were patient for a while though they fumed and stormed. But seeing that the Kopt children were growing bolder and noisier, they sent delegates to my father. The delegates stated the case solemnly, keeping their anger in check.

“We cannot hear ourselves pray, your honor,” they complained, “this cannot continue, the Kopt children must be silenced.”

My father knew well it could not continue. He knew that tempers would flash out like lightning. He sent a letter to the Kopt patriarch asking him to silence the children. But the next day the chorus sang louder than before. Once more the complaints poured on my father’s head and this time the venerable priests had murder in their eyes.

My father took his worry to us and his troubled face cast a shadow on us again. He as governor must find an immediate remedy for this evil.

“What am I to do?” My father paced the floor. “How am I going to silence these Kopt children? The Kopt patriarch has been oily but he has found a hundred excuses for the chorus. The other nationalities are losing patience.”

“But what can they do, Ekrem?” mother asked. “They cannot murder each other over such a silly question.”

“Can’t they, can’t they?” my father burst out. “Little you know these people. One day someone’s temper will break like a cord pulled too tight, he will swear out loud.

The swearing will lead to fist playing and that to the flash of knives. They will murder each other with a vengeance, all that pent-up rage will burst open like a boil. My ears have been filled with these stories and battles royal since I came here. And there is no one who will help me in this matter.”

I watched the crowds from the window, each gesture, each word I suspected. I saw evil in the faces, even in those of the servants in the house. No one could be trusted, my father had said. At night I dreaded to go to bed. That dark room where flickered a pale candle held a terror for me. If nurse went out after putting me to bed I would cry out after her:

“My little nurse, don’t leave me, sleep does not enter my eyes.”

”Allah, Allah, and is this a new style you have brought out of your bag? Close tight your eyes and sleep will drift to them.”

“But this darkness breaks the cord of my heart. Nurse, stay with me, I am afraid,” I would plead.

“Of what are you afraid?” nurse asked. “Gather your mind to its right senses and sleep.” But she, too, seemed in a hurry to leave this uncertain darkness and go to the light and the voices of people.

My father was losing his appetite and his sleep. The second letter to the Kopt patriarch had had no effect. Finally an old bent-down Turkish official came to my father and said:

“There is only one way of silencing these brats, but I do not know if your honor will take the remedy that I have to offer.”

“What is it, for Allah’s sake?” asked my father.

“It is to follow your predecessor’s method.”

“And what was that?”

“He used the stick in emergencies,” replied the old official, “and it worked like magic. Your honor can send a few soldiers to the church and order them to spank the Kopt children. They will disperse like quicksilver.”

The next day the soldiers entered the Holy Sepulchre and found the boys singing their shrillest. They were spanked by the Turkish soldiers. The priests moaned, the children yelled and ran away and all the other worshipers laughed and rejoiced.

The affair did not end there. The Kopt patriarch, furious, telegraphed to Constantinople and stated that the governor was a murderer. The government was flustered and the minister of the interior sent telegram after telegram to my father asking him what he had done to upset the Kopts in this fashion. My father’s shirts were aflame and he answered:

“Acted according to predecessor.”

Meanwhile the delighted Catholics, Greeks, Armenians sent telegrams to the government, all stating that they were pleased with their governor and that he was the best they had ever had. Constantinople was pacified and dropped the whole matter. The Kopts rumbled in fury but they were cowed and the trebles were silenced.

. . . Jerusalem had grown gaunt with its forty days of fasting and its incessant praying. At the end of the forty days the Greek patriarch was to make his solemn entry into the Holy Sepulchre.

We all went to witness this event. When we came to the courtyard of the Holy Sepulchre it was crowded with people, they were nose to nose and breath to breath, with eager eyes and trembling bodies. We squeezed through the crowd and found our places and waited for the procession with this mass of humanity. Words shook this sea of people and ripples ran eagerly from face to face.

“Here they come, they come,” one long shout was raised and suddenly every church bell pealed loudly, cleaving the air in fierce leaps, clanging in deep tones and thin trebles.

Slowly, and with majesty, the procession marched and came before us to the thousand outbursts of the bells. The priests came in columns of two lines, each holding a lighted candle in his hands. Some were dressed in black robes, others in brocades with jewels and gold that flashed in the noonday sun. Six hundred priests, they marched slowly with measured steps, an endless row of solemn faces and flickering candles. Behind came all the consuls in resplendent uniforms, keeping time to the slow rhythm of the bells. Then came the Greek patriarch himself, a figure of such richness that my eyes puckered as I looked at him. He had on his head a huge crown covered with precious stones, the gift of the Tsar of Russia, a heavy crown that was worth a fortune. He had on gorgeous brocaded robes, with a long train which eight choir boys lifted off the ground. In his hand he held a long jeweled cross. And back of him marched a crowd of priests and the Turkish soldiers in blue uniforms. And back of the soldiers came the madness of the crowd, pushing, elbowing and tearing one another.

The lines broke out, people were trampled and I was almost squeezed to death. The sky seemed to lie heavily on the earth and the air had grown thin with the breathing of thousands. And still the procession marched solemnly. It was like a wild dream, a world of beauty and richness true only in fairy tales. The brocades rustled, the jewels sparkled and the people pressed close together and over this endless chain of solemnity came the long tortured peals of the bells.

Wild-eyed like any pilgrim I gazed at the procession that was luring me onward with the surging crowd. Then amidst this furor of sounds I heard, dimly at first, a rich lingering voice that seemed to come from another world.

“Allah Ekber, Allah Ekber.”

The voice pulled me out of this wildness that was like a whirlpool sucking me down. I lifted my head and saw the slender minaret of a small mosque that was stretched with eagerness to the sky. On its laced balcony I saw the dark-robed muezzin with his hands lifted to his head calling the faithful to prayer. Now his voice rose stronger in the air.

“Allah Ekber, Allah Ekber, God is Great, God is great.”

One by one the priests entered the Holy Sepulchre, the bells panted breathlessly and the Greek patriarch marched slowly, holding himself rigid under the heavy crown of jewels that weighed him down. The voice of the muezzin still lingered in the air and

I could see a dimly lighted mosque crowded with silent and bowed figures.

After the ceremony we were leaving the Holy Sepulchre with my mother. The narrow streets were so crowded that if one dropped a needle it would not fall to the ground. In dim corners, under protecting eaves, I saw strange shapes in tatters, hiding and crouching in the dark. Curiously I moved a little toward one and stood still, horror-stricken. A hideous face flashed before my eyes, but before I had time to move, my mother had run to me with a cry and had pulled me away, her face white.

“Allah preserve us,” she cried out as she pulled me away, “don’t go near these people again.”

“Who are they, mother, are they beggars?” I asked.

“They are lepers,” she answered in such a hollow voice that it went through me and my blood turned to water with fear.

I did not know what a leper was but my mother’s voice frightened me. I had seen them often round the Holy Sepulchre and sometimes their faces had been covered. But the shape in the corner haunted me. What was so terrible about it? Then in a flash I realized that the face of the leper did not have a nose.

On Easter Saturday the Holy Light falls from the sky, and this is one of the most important ceremonies, to which my father had to go and we were going with him. The ceremony is in the afternoon and the Holy Light is supposed to fall from the sky on the tomb of Christ.

When we entered the Holy Sepulchre a growing rumble like thunder fell on my ears. The church was dim and in the half light of candles. I saw masses of heads, one on top of the other, heads squeezed between windows, in cornices, surrounding the big dome like blind candles. There were heads that seemed to float in the air whose bodies were lost in a tangle of bodies. The big church was so packed that there was no place for a blade of grass. Seats had been sold by the priest at exorbitant prices.

Soon the patriarch’s special bell tolled and he came followed by his procession of cardinals and priests. The patriarch was dressed all in white. When he entered the church the voices thundered louder and tremendous thrills shook the people so that the church seemed to sway. Back of him came quietly the Turkish soldiers, guns in hand and bayonets fixed. They surrounded the tomb of Christ in thick columns and waited patiently.

The sight of them woke the constant dread in my heart. Only these soldiers between us and the people in the church. We had heard how the people had fought and the soldiers had to intervene at previous Easters, and the thought that this might happen again made me hold my breath.

Then a wild commotion pulled my eyes away from the soldiers. The Greek patriarch was marching round the tomb of Christ followed by the chanting priests and the excitement of the pilgrims. The chanting grew louder, Russians, Greeks, Arabs swayed in prayer. Three times the patriarch went round the tomb and at the third time the candles were extinguished one by one, only one faint light glimmered by the tomb of Christ. The patriarch extended his arms and these were tied by a cord. Then he entered the tomb of Christ and the door was sealed after him. Everyone felt an urge

to move, an urge to pry. The patriarch was waiting in prayer for the Holy Light to fall from the sky and with him waited this mass of people, the darkened church and the air heavy with breath.

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Then of a sudden the door of the tomb opened and the Greek patriarch came out with two lighted candles. The Holy Light had fallen from the sky. The people pressed forward like madmen, each person holding in his hand thirty-two candles. All ran towards the light in suffocating masses but the Turkish soldiers kept them at bay, their bayonets reflecting the trembling flicker of candlelight. The soldiers prevented these people from trampling each other. They came towards the light in small groups and their faces were lit with a glow. From the gallery the people shouted and pressed one another. Candles were lowered by cords and the priests lighted them. It was a battle as to who should light his candle first. The candles flickered like stars in a summer's night and soon the Holy Sepulchre was a huge tremendous flame that wavered. The smoke rose in black columns and spread over the church. And at the sight of the candles and the black volumes of smoke I cried out in fear: "The church is burning, mother."

But who heard my cry? The noise in the church was intolerable and I felt it pound in my head like a hammer.

One of the candles in the patriarch's hand was put before the tomb of Christ to burn the whole year, and the other was sent to the Tsar of Russia. A messenger would speed night and day with the Holy Light in his hands, crossing mountains and drifts of snow till he came to the Tsar with the candle still burning in his frozen fingers.

This Holy Light from the sky is a cure for all evils. That night when we went home I saw our Arab maid sticking a lighted candle, which she had brought from the church, into her breast to stop it from aching. Later the wife of the French consul told my mother that she had seen an ailing baby held naked over the sacred fire, to cure it of a disease.

"It does not burn one who has faith," our Arab maid had told us when asked if the fire did not hurt her.

At midnight there was another ceremony in the Holy Sepulchre. We children had begged hard to go, and mother finally consented. Sleep was rubbed away from my eyes at the sight of the people. Once more the pilgrims and priests prayed, incense was burned, the brocades glittered. With the first faint glow of dawn, the Patriarch cried out:

"Christos Anesti, Christ has risen."

"Christos Anesti, Christos Anesti," the thousands burst out while the Holy Sepulchre lay bathed in the soft tones of the dawn.

Christ had risen and on Easter Sunday the Orthodox Greeks did not greet one another with the usual "good morning" but each burst out to the other with the joyous news, "Christos Anesti." The news spread from mouth to mouth all over Jerusalem, the words echoed in houses and nooks. And once more Moslems, Christians and Jews mingled in the streets while the bells kept up their chorus:

"Christos Anesti, Christos Anesti."

Revolt and the Refuge of Home

Jerusalem was thrown into agitation. People crowded the streets shouting and pushing, and our house echoed the trailing thunder of the roaring of guns.

“Do you hear that?” my father asked as he came in to where mother and we children were sitting. “It means that the rumor is true and that the constitution has been granted in Turkey.”

“A constitution granted by Sultan Abdul Hamid?” My mother shook her head. “I would sooner believe that man could fly to the moon than that Abdul Hamid could allow the nails of his despotism to be clipped. It must be another terrible trick of his.”

“But it is true,” father answered, “Sultan Abdul Hamid has been forced to recognize the Union and Progress Party. And if this continues the sultan will be a puppet on the throne.”

“Sultan Abdul Hamid a puppet?” My mother laughed. “He will find a way, jingle his gold to the greed of upstarts, that man of a hundred plans and means.”

This was the eventful year of 1908. Abdul Hamid, after thirty-three years of tyranny, was to succumb to a power greater than his own. And this marked the beginning of his downfall. It seemed unbelievable. Sultan Abdul Hamid, who with a flutter of his hands could shake Constantinople and the whole of Turkey, now lay trembling in his palace. But this news fell on my ears like a pack of meaningless words tossed carelessly by the wind. What was a constitution to me? Just another of those long hard words that I must learn and not forget.

This event, which seemed to stir my parents, had been accomplished by a group of men who called themselves the Union and Progress Party. To understand the growth of this party one must skip a great many years in the history of Turkey. The French Revolution had awakened a group of patriots who wanted to reform Turkey. Later these patriots formed the Young Turk Party to which prominent men belonged. My grandfather, Namick Kemal, was one of those glorious Young Turks, lost in dreams, suffering and struggling. They had wrung reform after reform from sultans, they had cried out to the people to wake up and take their liberty which the sultans were grasping. They had been exiled, imprisoned and even killed.

When Abdul Hamid came to the throne most of these men were dead or were exiles in corners of Turkey. Gradually and secretly another Young Turk Party was organized and gained thousands of followers. Unfortunately the leaders of this second party were neither great nor honest, nor were they, as before, the prominent educated men of the country.

One day Turkey was astonished to hear that the Young Turks, who now called themselves the Union and Progress Party, had murdered Sultan Abdul Hamid's governor of Monastir. The sultan sent a detachment to arrest the leaders then in Salonika. But the soldiers had been gained beforehand by the Unionists and they threw down their arms and joined the party. Two Unionists came to Constantinople and forced Abdul Hamid to grant them a constitution. A parliament composed of Unionist deputies was formed and Turkey's fate seemed to be in the hands of these new men.

This bloodless revolution had been accomplished with rapidity, for the army had joined the Unionists and the people followed like sheep.

The next few days Jerusalem was in a whirl of patriotic and political commotion in contrast to its usual religious feelings. This had neither bells nor incense, but the shouts of the people and the waving of banners. To the Arabs, this was a revival of a long cherished hope, their independence. Words of liberty and freedom had penetrated their skins. They wanted to be free not only of Sultan Abdul Hamid but of Turkish rule. Once they had been independent and powerful, and why not again? As the days lengthened, Jerusalem lay whispering. Officials who, for one reason or another, had been dismissed by my father had come to the front. People with suspicious pasts, a lot of schemers with their eyes on the rich pockets of Jerusalem, began to talk against my father. Who was the governor anyhow? Just a tool of the sultan. Was it fitting that the son of Namick Kemal should work under the tyrant sultan? These ruffians were pushed forward by a group of speculators. During the two years' governorship of my father they had had no opportunity to satisfy their thirst for money. My father would not hear of dubious deals, he did not grasp the rich soils from the Arabs neither did he allow others to do so. The intrigues of these people with the unrest of the Arabs had broken my father's spirit. He who had worked hard had been honest and just, so this was his reward. He felt he did not want to see Jerusalem again. But at that time there was a law that governors could not resign, because many of these posts served as places of exile in disguise.

"But I shall find a way," my father was saying, his face dark and hurt.

And one day he read to us a telegram with his face puckered with mischief.

"To the honorable Grand Vezir. Your humble slave has worked faithfully for his majesty the sultan all these years. I am sure of my reward. Will his majesty give me permission to return to Constantinople so I can publish my father's books?"

Sultan Abdul Hamid must have been very upset when he read the telegram. He did not want the books of Kemal published in this critical moment. Some time later my father received a telegram in which it was stated that his majesty was much pleased with the governor of Jerusalem and to reward him for his excellent work the sultan was appointing him governor general of Beirut.

Once more the trunks came down, the furniture was wrapped in paper. Mother had added to her collection wonderful pearl inlaid Arabian sets which were hard to pack. The clothes were piled in trunks and moth balls were thrown in them. The house lay upset and uneasy. We were going to Beirut, another adventure lay before us. Once more we would come face to face with a strange city and feel the thrill of it flashing through us. My father had to sell our horses, carriage, and my sister's gray donkey. This upset her and she melted into tears. My prize possession was a gold watch, shaped like a heart, which I had received from the Armenian patriarch, a venerable man about a hundred years old who had to be carried wherever he went.

We were a little sad amidst our tumult of packing. There were many friends we were leaving behind. No more would the church bells toll us to sleep, no more would we wander among the gray streets of Jerusalem and witness ceremonies as enchanting

as fairy tales.

A big crowd came to see us off and there were flowers waving in the air. Some cried, others begged us to come again, sister was in tears over her donkey. She was sure he would miss her and put his head sadly to one side. We passed through crowds of people and they all seemed sorry to see us going.

At Jaffa it was hot, so hot that we felt ourselves melting away with the heat. There was thunder in the air, the suspicion of a storm. The sea was too calm and the sky hung over it like black amber. Once as the boat left Jaffa, the winds came galloping to welcome us, like loosened demons. The boat rose and fell in the arms of an angry sea.

Storm and wind at sea and dark menace at the city of Beirut. We had landed awed and silenced with the din of the storm in our ears to find on the quay dark faces pressed close to one another, red fezzes waving in the air menacingly. Beirut stirred with an anger of its own, deep among its masses of humanity. Arab faces scowled at us.

Our luggage had been dumped on the quay but there was not one *hamal* in sight. The *hamals* had gone on strike. They shouted liberty and independence in the numerous coffeehouses and sipped the hours away in a dream blue with smoke. Then we looked for policemen but they too were striking! A city without policemen and dark with an evil that wormed secretly in the hearts of these Arabs.

Beirut was unruly and demoralized. The previous governor had fled with his life while the Arabs had spat on his face and insulted him. Then crowds had run to the prisons, opening wide the doors; thieves, ruffians and cutthroats swarmed the streets, inciting the people to revolt, to throw the city into turmoil and create a ripe field for their energy. And back of this spirit of evil lay the stuffy breathless summer day that crushed one with its fiery heels.

The city was hostile, raised like a dragon ready to snap its jaw at us. With fear in our hearts we stood, apprehensive and tired. Finally some ruffians were found who would take care of our luggage. A few of them swarmed round mother's piano. The piano was lifted slowly then crashed down again on the quay. The startled strings wailed in pained choruses. And to this day I can hear the thunder of reproach from our old piano. The men stood with malice on their faces and joyous glitter in their eyes. They had done it purposely and now they stood arrogantly before us, defying us to speak. Would the anger of vibrating strings run through the Arabs and send them into frenzy? One can never be sure of an Arab when he is excited.

My father sent us away to the general's quarters where we were going to stay for the night. But he remained on the quay with our helpless luggage, a piano that still vibrated its hurt feelings and the Arabs who were stubborn and hostile.

That night sister and I lay curled in one big bed that smelt of mothballs. Ice cream had been given to soothe us. But the heat of night was too intense, and drove us into agitation. A night of fear again, even worse than those in Constantinople. The shadows of fear might close upon us once for all.

The next day we moved to a hotel, my father called the mayor of the city and asked him to find a suitable house for us. My father was so preoccupied that we hardly saw

him. My mother was all nerves again while we children made ourselves small and hid in corners. The strikes continued and the heat did not waver an inch.

The first day when my father left the hotel to go to the governmental house, he found about a hundred dusky faces grouped round the door. Eyes small with bloody splotches, white headgear awry. And when my father was among them they shouted lustily in Arabic, "Long live liberty." But the cry was menacing, like the challenge of lightning to the earth heralding the storm of thunder.

The next day hundreds of throats were parched with the cry of:
"Long live liberty."

Soon the hundreds grew into thousands, and these clustered near the hotel, filling the streets, and my father had to fight his way through them.

From the window of the hotel we watched him and the cords of our hearts were broken with fear and worry. There was nothing to be done, these Arabs listened neither to tail nor to head. Lawless everyone of them, they had ears only for the shouts of intriguers.

We were shut in our hotel rooms to the heat and mosquitoes that devoured us. The magic of a new city hung before us, unpluckable and thus sour as sour grapes. Not once did we leave the hotel, not once did we wander among the Arabs that crowded the streets. And every night the sad discouraged faces of our elders drew away every desire of laughter and joy.

My father finally decided to leave Beirut. He did not like the Arabs that waited for him at the hotel door. That torrent of madness could not be checked and he was not going to endanger all our lives. But above all, he knew that these Arabs wanted independence and an end to Turkish rule, and he for his part would not rule where he was not wanted. So, risking the sultan's fury, he sent his resignation to Constantinople and bought our tickets for home. The last day in Beirut the mayor rushed to the hotel, which overlooked the harbor, and he said:

"Your honor, I have just found a beautiful house for you."

"But I have found one first," replied my father.

"How can it be, your honor? I have looked everywhere," answered the mayor, flustered. "Where is this house, may I ask?" I

"There," replied my father pointing to the boat at anchor in the harbor.

Before us stretched again the city of mosques and minarets, the golden city of Constantinople. Sunshine, cooled with fresh breezes, and the blue of the Bosphorus wiped from our memory the brooding anger of swarthy faces. Beirut lay waiting for another victim while the blue of the sky and the blue of the waters sang to us a happy welcome. We were home again and the hundred smells of flowers came to us like a rippling wave of sweet scent.

We were going to stay with my grandfather, my mother's father, for a time, on his big estate up the Bosphorus. How I loved my grandfather's house. And now that he is dead and the family scattered, this house keeps in its spacious rooms the echoes of days gone by, of joy that can never come back. It has been my friend all these years, a kind friend who saw me grow up and helped me with its sunshine and flowers. Not

a transient acquaintance whose flitting face arouses one's interest and later mingles with many other faces dimly seen and dimly felt. The years have torn relentlessly at the beauty of the big white house; the gardens, once a paradise of flowers, now lie in tangled masses of grass and weeds. The rooms become puddles with each rain and the north wind blows through its cracks in winter. But I shall keep my love for it, a love that can never change and will burn steadily like the holy light before the tomb of Christ in the Holy Sepulchre.

On top of a long steep hill stands the big house, its eyes forever on the blue of the Bosphorus and the green of the hills. A series of moss covered slippery steps lead to the ponderous gate of the garden. Its black austere frown is covered by wisteria in the spring; like a mass of purple cloud it falls to the ground. But the scent of wisteria greets you long before, at the foot of the hill it comes upon you like a promise of fairy land. The wisteria is the first smile of the house. And when the black gate is pushed back you are sure of the beauty to come, of the friendly faces of gardens and flowers.

Once the black gate is crossed, the world has been shut out, this is a dream of beauty that other eyes cannot see or guess. The high walls stand jealously watchful and rear their indifference to casual glances. The gardens inside stretch in terraces, rising higher and higher until you have the blue of the sky in your eyes and the glory of the Bosphorus in the hollow of your vision. The gardens ramble from one legend to another. Down near the gate stand the twin shrubby gardens, holding hands over a little wooden bridge. Rows of many colored carnations in vases, like multicolored ribbons on children's heads, stand round an iron grille. Higher up stands the rose garden with its huge pond full of croaking frogs and its sedate lawns and paths. Near the pond there is a thick cluster of trees where nightingales spread a feast of music through the nights of spring. Beyond are the hothouses filled with fragile twigs and big lemon trees whose scent goes to one's head. There are other little discreet gardens, some where only violets hide their heads from hands eager to pluck them. One on top of the other stand the fruit and vegetable gardens, the minute forest of chestnut trees that turn gold and red in the autumn. There are also vast chicken coops, the kennels for hunting dogs and a cunning house for two deer which my father sent from Jerusalem. And topping this variety of gardens and colors stand two ancient pine trees that rustle and moan with each wind. There are such fairy lores in these gardens, such wonders to be discovered.

The white house stands amidst this world of gardens catching the sun in all its windows and opening to us a world of high-ceilinged rooms, rooms that are big as boats and where one can sail the seas of one's imagination.

We were reaching this world of house and gardens. Our relatives had come to meet us and carriage after carriage stopped, daunted by the hill. Up the steep hill we ran, laughing over every stone that rolled under our feet. And with the stones rolled the laughter of our relatives, eager for our faces.

Grandfather's house was a mixture of East and West. Here he lived like a patriarch of old surrounded by his family, his numerous attendants and their children. Every room was crowded with people, the house was always alive with laughter and with

voices. If one face was sad and drawn there were many others who laughed and wiped away the sad lines. And through it all my grandfather dominated the house, the figure round which everything revolved and which held the house together. He had brought to this Eastern atmosphere his Western ideas and culture that made him different from other people whom I had known.

The gate closed behind us and we were in this haven of quiet. The menace of Beirut could not follow us. And from here one could not feel the shadows of Yildiz and of fear.