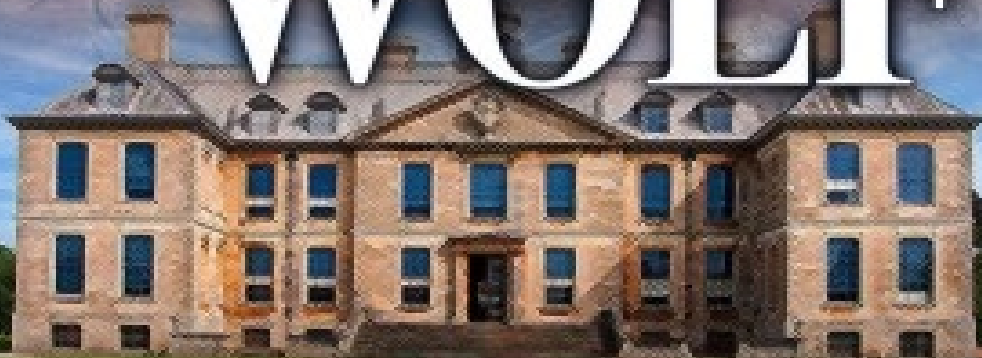


LORD
RICHARD'S
DAUGHTER

"A master storyteller."
—PUBLISHER'S
WEEKLY

USA TODAY
BESTSELLING
AUTHOR

JOAN
WOLF



LORD RICHARD'S DAUGHTER

To leve my frinds, my fortune, my attempts,
To leve the purpose I so longe had sought
And holde both cares, and cumforts in contempt.

—Sir Walter Ralegh

December 1814

The Dowager Duchess of Crewe stood in the doorway of her drawing room and contemplated the man who had requested an interview with her. She had recognized his family name immediately: it was one of the most ancient in England. But she did not recall ever having met this particular Champernoun before.

He was standing with his back to her, apparently absorbed in a portrait that was hanging on the far wall. He looked to be extraordinarily tall. “Mr. Champernoun?” she inquired, a trifle imperiously.

The man turned and she knew at once she had never seen him before. One would not forget that face. He was dressed correctly, in buff pantaloons and blue superfine coat, but somehow he did not look quite civilized. His straight, ebony-colored hair was a trifle too long. He smiled, showing very white teeth, and crossed the room, greeting her in a voice that was deep, educated, and indefinably loaded with authority.

The beautiful old woman nodded graciously in response. “I do not believe we have met,” she said pleasantly, “but of course I know your name. Are you related to the Earl of Denham?”

“He is my cousin.”

“I see.” She smiled at him. “What may I do for you, Mr. Champernoun?”

“I have brought you something, Your Grace. From Egypt.” He was speaking slowly, almost carefully.

“Ah,” said the duchess, comprehension dawning. “Egypt.” She thought he might almost have passed for an Egyptian himself, with that black hair and those straight black brows. But his height gave him away. And his eyes. Meeting them full, the duchess felt a little shock of surprise. One did not expect to find such a brilliant blue-green looking out of that deeply sunburned face. She couldn’t quite read the expression; it might almost have been pity. “Have you brought me news of my son?” she asked sharply.

“I have brought you your granddaughter,” he answered.

“Julianne?” the old woman said on a note of fear. “What is Julianne doing in England?”

“I brought her with me on my ship. I am in England on a mission for the pasha.”

“Is my son dead?” The duchess’s voice sounded harsh in her own ears.

“Yes, Your Grace,” came the grave reply. “I am sorry to have to tell you that he is dead. She felt a strong hand under her arm and in a minute she was sitting on the sofa. “Let me procure you a glass of wine,” he was saying. She shook her head but he did not seem to notice. The butler came into the room and in a short time a glass of Madeira was in her hand. “Drink it,” said a calm voice and she did.

She put the glass down. "I am all right now." She spoke with dignity. "It was the shock." She turned and looked at the man who was sitting now in a chair close by. After a moment she asked collectedly, "What happened to Richard, Mr. Champernoun? Was it the natives or the fever?"

There was an almost imperceptible pause before he replied. "The fever, Your Grace. He was in a very primitive part of Abyssinia when he became ill, I believe he did not suffer long."

"I see."

"Your granddaughter will be able to tell you more details. She was with him at the time."

The dowager duchess rose to her feet. "You were looking at his picture when I came in, Mr. Champernoun." She walked across the room to stand before it herself.

He followed her. "I wondered if it were Lord Richard. I did not know him myself."

The two of them stood for a moment in silence, regarding the portrait before them. It was of a young man dressed in a black coat and holding a book in his hand. However, it was not the pose but the face that riveted the eye. John Champernoun thought that he had never seen modern features that so closely resembled the ideal classic Greek beauty. "Is it like him?" he asked.

"It doesn't do him justice," his mother replied. "Next to Richard, Apollo would have looked second-rate. And what good did his looks ever do him? He went into the Church, a perfectly appropriate profession for a second son, but was he satisfied with the excellent living he had here at Crewe? No. Richard could never be satisfied with normal life. He had to have a cause."

Champernoun looked from the duchess's face back to the pictured face of her son. Lord Richard was indeed beautiful, but Champernoun was not surprised at the character his mother gave him. That stem young face did not look gentle or yielding. There was something implacable in the line of the straight classic nose, in the Athenian purity of mouth and chin and brow. He himself knew something of Lord Richard from his daughter and he was curious to see if Richard's mother's assessment would be similar. "However did the son of a duke come to be a missionary in Africa?" he asked.

The duchess's mouth tightened. "He began as an active member of the antislavery movement; that was where he met Mr. Wilberforce and his friends. Richard was one of the founding members of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East. The idea was to concentrate anti-slavery efforts on Africa, where the traffic was most extensive. But they could get no one to go out to East Africa. Richard wanted to go. We fought with him for years and finally, in 1809, we could hold him no longer. He went and with him he took Judith, his wife, and Julianne, who was fourteen at the time."

"East Africa is hard on women and children," Champernoun said noncommittally.

"I begged him to leave Julianne with me, but he would not listen. The comforts and amenities of life had no meaning for Richard. His soul was always straining after higher things. He could not rest, and he did not approve of others' resting either. Certainly not his wife or daughter. Judith died after only a year."

There was silence in the room for a full minute, then the duchess turned to John

Champernoun. "I was very angry with Richard, but I learned to forgive him. He could not help what he was. He was, I suppose, a great man. But he was not a comfortable man. He was not a good son or husband or father. Poor Julianne. What a life she must have led!"

There was suddenly an expression on the lean, dark face before her that caught the duchess's attention. "I believe Miss Wells is something of a strong character herself," he said.

"She always adored her father," sighed the duchess. Then, giving herself a visible mental shake, she turned to the present. "How did you come to be in my granddaughter's escort, Mr. Champernoun? You said you did not know my son."

"No, Your Grace, I did not. Lord Richard, as you know, was charged with creating a series of twelve mission stations along the banks of the Nile from Alexandria to Abyssinia. He was not far from Harar when he became ill and died. He left your granddaughter completely unprotected. She managed to get to Harar, and fortunately I happened to be in the city—in disguise, of course. As I said, it was fortunate I was there. A blond unveiled girl walking on the streets of a Moslem city does not go unnoticed. Harar, besides being a sacred city, is also a center of the slave trade. Fair-haired women are deeply prized in Africa."

"Oh my God." The duchess looked horrified.

"She is all right, but she had a very unpleasant experience, Your Grace. I brought her back to Cairo with me, and then when Mohammed Ali—the Egyptian Pasha—asked me to undertake a mission to London as his representative, it seemed the perfect opportunity to bring Miss Wells home."

"Do you mean Julianne has been in your company, unchaperoned, for all that time?" The duchess looked even more horrified than she had at the suggestion of the slave market.

Champernoun regarded her with amusement. "She has been perfectly safe, Your Grace. I managed to control my animal instincts."

"So you say," the old lady returned tartly. "It is what everyone else will say that concerns me."

"There is no reason for anyone at all to know that Julianne has been in my company. As I told you, I was in disguise when I was in Harar. No Christian may enter a Moslem holy city, you understand. And no one in Cairo knew of her presence. The crew of my ship will not talk." He smiled at the duchess with calculated charm. "I suggest you say that your granddaughter was escorted to France by a Frenchwoman to whose care she was commended by Lord Richard. There are plenty of French in Egypt now. And, if you can procure some respectable woman for me quickly, I will escort both Miss Wells and chaperone here tomorrow. We will announce we have come from France."

The duchess looked at him doubtfully and his eyes suddenly narrowed. "If you want me to marry your granddaughter, I will," he drawled, a note of contempt in his deep voice. "But like Lord Richard, I am not the material out of which good husbands are made. I like my freedom too much. Miss Wells can do much better."

"I am sure she can," said the duchess, stung by the note in his voice. "Very well, Mr. Champernoun, I will go along with your arrangements. I am quite sure Julianne

former nurse will be willing to act as chaperone. She lives in a cottage on the grounds of Crewe. Where is Julianne staying?"

"At the King's Inn, Harwich."

"Mrs. Brightling will be there by evening."

There was a gleam of what could have been mockery in those sea-blue eyes, but his voice was perfectly courteous as he answered, "Yes, Your Grace," and took his departure.

Chapter Two

My hopes cleane out of sight, with forced wind
To kyngdomes strange, to lands farr off adrest.

—Sir Walter Raleigh

Julianne arrived at the Dower House of Crewe the following day accompanied by Mrs. Brightling, her old nurse, and by John Champernoun. Mr. Champernoun did not stay long and the duchess watched closely as he made his farewells to her granddaughter. The two of them were very composed and quite properly formal. Nothing in their outward appearance did anything to contradict the story Mr. Champernoun had told her the previous day. But there was something there, something unspoken and subterranean, that the old woman sensed in the air between the beautiful fair-haired girl who was her granddaughter and the tall, dark, and unnervingly masculine man who had been Julianne's escort.

After Champernoun had left, the duchess turned to her granddaughter with gentle concern. "Are you all right, my love? You have had a terrible experience, I fear."

There was an odd, almost blind look in Julianne's eyes and it took a moment before they appeared to focus on her grandmother. "I beg your pardon, Grandmama?" she said faintly.

"Julianne, was Mr. Champernoun —ah, did he treat you respectfully? He didn't hurt you in any way, did he?"

Julianne's wide darkly lashed eyes were now steady on her grandmother's face. "No, he did not hurt me," she said very calmly. The faintest of smiles quirked the corner of her mouth. "I can't say he treated me respectfully, however. That would be doing it a bit too brown. I doubt if Mr. Champernoun treats *anyone* respectfully, Grandmama."

"Yes, I can believe that," the dowager duchess said with comical exasperation.

Julianne laughed. "Mr. Champernoun is rather a law unto himself, I'm afraid. Papa once called him a renegade and I suppose he is. He is also a mercenary. But he was very kind to me. I shudder to think what would have become of me but for him."

The dowager duchess looked very bleak. "Your father is greatly to blame, my dear. It was bad enough to tear you away from your home, your friends, your country— but then to go and die leaving you totally unprotected in the middle of Africa! No other man but Richard would have done such a thing."

"He did not mean to die," said Julianne wearily. "And you knew Papa, Grandmama. He never even thought of such a thing happening. He never thought of the things that concern other people."

"I know that all too well," snapped Lord Richard's mother. There was a moment of silence, then the dowager duchess's features relaxed and she smiled at Julianne. "Well, you are with me now, my love. Safe. And I mean to take very good care of you."

"Thank you, Grandmama. It is good to be here."

"Would you like some refreshment or shall I show you to your room?"

A glimmer appeared in Julianne's strangely luminous eyes. "Do you know what I would like more than anything in the world, Grandmama?"

“What is that, my love?”

“A bath!”

The dowager duchess laughed and began to walk toward the stairs. “Then a bath you shall have. Come along and I’ll show you to your room.”

The steaming tub in front of the fireplace looked marvelous to Julianne’s deprived eyes. Impatiently she allowed her grandmother’s maid to undress her, anxious to submerge herself in the hot soapy water. It took the maid’s startled exclamation as she drew Julianne’s dress off her shoulders to divert her attention from the pleasure of the tub. “Oh, Miss Wells!” the maid cried. “Whatever happened to your shoulders?”

Julianne knew what was there even before she looked; she had seen the marks there the morning. In the excitement of her homecoming she had forgotten them, but now, as she looked slowly down at her upper arms, she saw that they had not faded during the course of the day.

Julianne had extremely delicate skin, fair and close-textured like a baby’s. The dark ugly bruises were very clear against its white silkiness. The bruises showed, to Julianne’s uneasy eyes, the unmistakable outlines of a man’s hard fingers. She looked up to find the maid’s horrified gaze still on her shoulders. “It’s all right. I almost had an accident and one of the sailors grabbed me. He saved me from a nasty fall, but I was left with this legacy.” She was relieved to hear that her voice sounded normal; her heart, however, was hammering.

“He must have been very strong, miss, to have done that,” said the maid.

“Yes,” said Julianne. There was very faint color in her cheeks. “He was.”

After her bath she dressed in her blue merino dress again and was sitting having her hair done when the dowager duchess came back into the room.

“Don’t you have another dress to change into, Julianne?” her grandmother asked. “That one, I regret to tell you, is sadly unfashionable.”

“Is it?” responded Julianne composedly. “I rather like it. John bought it for me in Harwich and I am afraid it is the only one I own.”

The duchess’s ear registered that “John” immediately. “What were you wearing before you entered Harwich?” she asked suspiciously.

Julianne grinned. “Turkish trousers.”

“Trousers!”

“Yes. And they are most amazingly comfortable. I assure you I parted from them with a pang.”

“Trousers,” said the dowager duchess again, this time with loathing. Julianne chuckled. “Tomorrow, my dear, we will see about getting you some clothes,” the dowager duchess went on, ignoring Julianne’s unseemly mirth. “I do not think you need to wear mourning; Richard has been dead for almost half a year. No. Some lavenders, perhaps. And white.” She tilted her head and looked appraisingly at her granddaughter. Julianne’s hair was darker than her father’s, more a honey than silver blond, but it was thick and shining and dressed now in a stylish mode by Parker, the dowager duchess’s abigail, it looked beautiful. She did not have her father’s celestial blue eyes. Julianne’s were of a cool shining gray, peculiarly luminous, widely spaced, and large, with surprisingly dark lashes and brows. She was tall, with a long slender neck and magnolia fair skin.

“You have the Wells looks,” the dowager duchess said to her with pardonable pride. “That is at least one good thing that Richard did for you.”

“Papa did a number of good things for me, Grandmama,” said Julianne quietly. “We both of us have got to try to remember that.”

Her grandmother took her shopping for clothes and took her up to Crewe to meet her uncle the duke, his wife, and his children. One of her cousins, Caroline, was a year younger than Julianne and the two girls were thrown together a great deal that winter. For the first time in her life Julianne led the life that a girl of her age and class and family would normally lead in the English society of her day. She and her cousin were to be presented to society in the spring and a great deal of their time was spent preparing for this great event.

Julianne was grimly determined to forget the past and throw herself into the future her grandmother was planning for her. The most immediate goal of the dowager duchess’s campaign was to find her granddaughter a husband, and this was a plan Julianne was not at all averse to. It seemed to her that a husband and a home of her own were what she most wanted in the world. She was tired of wandering, tired of rootlessness, tired of always being a stranger. John had once said to her, “Home wherever night finds me.” But that wasn’t good enough for her. She wanted security. And she wanted a man who could give her the security she craved—a man who would in no way resemble John Champernoun.

Julianne spent a remarkable amount of time that winter trying not to think about John Champernoun. She visited her aunt, rode with Caroline, and went to the shop with her grandmother. She revised and reorganized the diary she had kept during her years in Africa. And she entered with determined enthusiasm into all her grandmother’s plans for her coming London season.

The event that launched Julianne into London society was a ball, which was given jointly by the dowager duchess and the present Duchess of Crewe in honor of Julianne and her cousin Caroline. It was a very lavish affair, attended by all the right people, and was pronounced by so eminent a critic as Lady Jersey to be a great success. Julianne was a great success as well. She wore a gown of pale blue crepe over a white satin slip and looked, her grandmother thought mistily, rather like a lily. Certainly the dozens of young men to whom she was introduced regarded her with blatant admiration.

None of the young men made a reciprocal impression upon Julianne, however. In fact, out of the entire evening there was only one person who stood out in her memory.

She was sitting on one of the gilt chairs surrounding the dance floor waiting for one of the ubiquitous young men to bring her a glass of punch when an older man than the boys she had danced with all evening came over and sat beside her. “Miss Wells, I’m Robert Southland,” he said. “Your aunt introduced me earlier.”

“Oh, yes,” she replied vaguely. Her Aunt Elizabeth had introduced a host of men to her this evening. She smiled politely and said, “Are you enjoying yourself, Mr. Southland?”

The man shrugged. “They’re all the same, these crushes.”

Julianne laughed. “Oh dear. That isn’t a very encouraging thing to say to a girl

whose fate it is to attend them all.”

He grinned at her. He had an open good-natured face with bright brown eyes. “I understand you and your father spent a good deal of time in Egypt,” he said.

“Yes,” she responded cautiously. “We were there.”

“You didn’t by any chance meet a man called John Champernoun?” he asked.

At the mention of that name Julianne felt her heart turn over. “Why, yes,” she answered faintly. “I met him—briefly.”

“I understand he’s become quite a fixture with the pasha,” Southland said. “We were together on the *Tigre* in 1799, you know. I was there when John pulled Mohammed Ali out of the sea. Ali was one of the Albanians who had come to Egypt with the Turkish expedition against Napoleon. Bonaparte routed them at Abouki. The sea was filled with fugitives swimming for their lives and John fished out Mohammed Ali. They became good friends after that.” He shook his head in wonderment. “Whoever would have thought that that half-drowned fugitive was destined to become the future Pasha of Egypt.”

“I doubt if destiny was the only factor,” Julianne said dryly.

He grinned. “Not destiny, eh, but John. You know, it’s a damn good thing he chose to stay in Egypt. If he had come home he would certainly have been hanged by now. Goes his own way, does John. Makes his own laws. Best natural fighter I ever saw. I often thought Wellington would have given half his staff in exchange for John if he ever seen him in action. I still don’t know why he wasn’t in the army. Seems the natural place for a man of his talents.”

“I doubt if he could stand the discipline of the army,” said Julianne, betraying a deeper knowledge of their subject than she had originally confessed to. “He’s not a man you can push into a mold.”

“That is true,” agreed Mr. Southland with a reminiscent grin. “I remember him at Acre.” He whistled in amazement.

There was a pause. “I did not know John had been at Acre,” said Julianne.

Mr. Southland shot her a suddenly shrewd look. “Well, he was. I should go so far as to say he had a good deal to do with our success.”

Acre was one of the most famous sieges of the late war; a small contingent of Turkish led by Sir Sidney Smith’s crew of the *Tigre* had held out for almost two months against the entire French army and had handed Napoleon his first defeat.

As Julianne and Mr. Southland watched the young man who was threading his way around the dance floor toward them, two glasses of punch in his hand, Southland continued speaking. “We were both with Sir Sidney Smith until 1801 when the British pulled out of Egypt. I went home, found I had inherited some money and left the Navy. John stayed in Egypt. He was having too good a time to leave, he told me. Actually, I think he was up to his neck in the power struggle that ended with Mohammed Ali being named pasha. I remember not being very surprised when it finally happened.”

“No,” murmured Julianne. “One wouldn’t be, I suppose.”

The young man had reached them by now and she smiled, accepted the punch, introduced the two men, and after a few minutes Mr. Southland excused himself and went off to the card room.

After all the guests had left, the duchess crowed over Julianne's success. "Emilia Cowper promised to send around vouchers for Almacks," she told Julianne. "And Mr Drummond Burrell complimented me on your looks and behavior—and *she is very difficult to satisfy, my love. And*" - this was said as if it was the biggest coup of all - thought young Lord Rutherford seemed very taken."

Julianne smiled absently. "He was very nice, Grandmama."

The old woman looked at her seriously. "Rutherford is the oldest son of the Earl Minton. He is undoubtedly the biggest catch presently on the marriage mart."

"He was very nice," Julianne repeated obediently.

The duchess yawned. "I am tired, my love. I'll bid you good night and seek my bed. You must do the same. I think we will be having visitors tomorrow and I want you to be looking your best."

Julianne kissed her grandmother's soft, scented cheek and walked with her up the stairs to their bedrooms. But after her maid had left the room, Julianne got out of bed, put on a warm robe, and went to sit by the fire.

John. For months now she had been trying not to think of him. But she had only to hear his name mentioned tonight and so much of what she was trying to forget had come rushing back. She closed her eyes and his face was vividly present to her memory: lean, dark, strong, lit by those brilliant, strangely light eyes. So strong was his image that she was vaguely surprised not to find him there when she opened her eyes.

She poked the fire, sat back in her chair, and for the first time since they had parted she allowed herself to think of the things that had happened to her in Africa after the death of her father. She had not told her grandmother the true story, and she had determined that she would forget it herself. But though she had tried, Julianne had not forgotten. She sat now before her comfortable fire and let herself remember the strange and extraordinary circumstances that so many months ago had thrown her into the path of John Champernoun.

Chapter Three

...captive into Africa.

—Christopher Marlowe

Lord Richard Wells was killed by a lion in Abyssinia. He and his daughter Julianne had been staying with a local king, who upon further acquaintance had proved to be a full-fledged tyrant. Lord Richard had refused to grovel before him as commanded, and Mutesa had consequently refused to provide guides and porters so the Wells party could not continue on its way. They were forced to remain with Mutesa for five months and one evening Lord Richard wandered out of camp, his Bible his only companion. When she realized he was gone, Julianne had taken a gun and followed. She heard her father cry out and ran as fast as she could toward the sound. She shot the lion as it was savaging her father's body, but she was too late. Lord Richard's neck was broken.

After his death, Mutesa sold Julianne to the next Arab slave traders to pass through his territory.

The slavers took her to Harar, a Moslem holy city and center of the slave trade in Abyssinia. Here she was sold again to other traders who were taking slaves to Cairo. Julianne was a fair-skinned blonde and the Mamelukes of Egypt were always looking for fair women to add to their harems. She would command a very high price in Egypt.

Because she was valuable goods, she was treated well and the trip from Harar to Cairo was not as hellish for her as it was for the unfortunate black slaves who traveled with them. In all her time with the slavers no man attempted to assault her. Virgins commanded more money.

For Julianne the entire experience was a nightmare from which she continually prayed she would awaken. Like her father she had condemned the slave trade, and the traffic in human beings so prevalent in Africa had horrified her. But never had she dreamed that she would be one of the poor unfortunates she had so pitied! It was not possible that she, Julianne Wells, could be sold into some man's harem as if she were chattel. When she got to Cairo she would escape, she told herself, trying to keep her courage up. She would escape and seek sanctuary from one of the Christians who still lived in the city. She thought of the Cairo slave market, of the women she had seen standing almost naked side by side in pens waiting to be sold, and she shuddered.

She was not sent to the slave market. She was brought to a big house near the Cairo citadel and turned over to a black eunuch. He took her to a very large room filled with other young women, all of whom turned to look at her curiously as she entered. Julianne for her part surveyed them with wonder. There were a number of Circassians as blond as she and several stunning black girls whom she recognized as Ethiopians. The girls had two things in common. They were all dressed in almost transparent shirts and ankle-length Turkish trousers and they were all beautiful.

Julianne was at the house near the citadel for almost a week. During that time she was relentlessly bathed and groomed and painted with cosmetics. She was not going to be sent to the slave market, the other girls told her. She would be offered at

private sale held for the benefit of the powerful Mamelukes, who for centuries had been the real rulers of Egypt.

Julianne knew about the Mamelukes. They were the descendants of Christian slaves who had been brought to Egypt to staff the armies of the sultan. The slaves in turn had become the enslavers and the fighting and intrigue among the Mamelukes had made any kind of organized governmental administration impossible. The Mamelukes had no ties of blood or of interest with the native Egyptians, and for centuries had plundered the country for their own aggrandizement. They were still a powerful presence in Egypt, even under the strong-willed Pasha Mohammed Ali. They were the men who would be looking to increase their wealth and prestige by the addition of a blond slave girl to their harems, and so a special private sale had been arranged for their convenience.

The other girls were pleased and flattered by what they regarded as the honor of their special status and they assumed Julianne must feel the same. Her Arabic was fluent and she made no attempt to tell her masters or her new companions that she was English. She remembered vividly the English expedition against Egypt that had taken place shortly before she and her parents had left for Africa, and she remembered as well the harsh anti-British sentiments they had encountered in Cairo when they first arrived. She had heard the stories of how Mohammed Ali, after defeating the British at Alexandria, had ridden through Cairo between avenues of British heads impaled on stakes and of British prisoners being exhibited in chains before being sold as slaves.

There was still no British embassy in Cairo to which she could appeal, and Julianne did not think her nationality would win her any sympathy from the Arabs into whose hands she had fallen. They thought she was Circassian and she left the misconception uncorrected.

The sale took place in the evening in one of the rooms of the house in which she had been kept for six days. They did not go out at all into the teeming, crowded streets of Cairo, where she might have flung herself out of a carriage and escaped. The elder Arab woman who had been in charge of her regimen throughout the week made sure she was properly attired for the occasion. She was dressed in a silk shirt and Turkish trousers, and the lines of her body were clearly visible through the thin silk fabric. Her lips were artfully reddened and her eyes were outlined with kohl. Her long hair, shining as it had not done in five years, was worn loose to her waist with ribbons laced into it. The other girls were dressed in a similar fashion and then they were brought into a large room where about twenty men reclined on silken cushions.

It was the worst experience of Julianne's life, worse even than the shock of being sold into slavery the first time. She felt the eyes of all those men raking her body, stripping her naked, and she was so outraged and humiliated she thought she would die. She could not look at any of them, but kept her eyes resolutely aloof, fixed on some point in space only she could see. It seemed to go on forever. They were bidding, she realized, and felt hands touch her shoulder, her breast, her hair.

After what seemed to her an eternity it was over and the girls were taken from the room. Julianne, however, did not return with them to her original quarters. "The lord wants you to be taken to his palace immediately, Shajaret ed Durr," the black eunuch

told her. Shajaret ed Durr was the name she had been given by the elderly Arab slave mistress. It meant "spray of pearls." They put her into a sedan chair and sent her on her way.

It was dark but the streets of Cairo still streamed with people. Julianne looked out between the curtains of her chair, but what she saw did not reassure her. The people who passed around her chair were ragged and filthy. The dirt of the streets was incredible. And even if she had found the courage to try to make her escape into the twisting alleys and filthy lanes, the two armed men who walked on either side of her chair clearly showed her that escape was impossible.

She was taken to one of the palaces around Lake Ezbekiah. The dam had been cut a month before, and the great lake, filled now with the Nile flood, shimmered in the moonlight. The armed guards escorted Julianne inside and she was surprised to find she was being taken into the main part of the palace and not to the harem. A tall, grave turbaned man took her to a luxurious silk-hung room and left her with the information that "the lord will see you shortly."

Julianne was not easily frightened. She had walked through the ominous silence of the African jungle with scarcely a qualm. She had shot a charging elephant to death as well as the lion that had killed her father. She had clubbed a crocodile and barely escaped an angry hippopotamus, and though her heart had quickened on all those occasions, and she had felt fear buzz in her veins, it had not been the paralyzing terror that washed over her now.

Out in the jungle she had been a part of nature, and death was all around. The animals killed each other for food. They killed when they, or their young, were threatened. Man too killed when he needed food or when he was threatened. It was a part of the vast, magnificent, beautiful reality of Africa, and she had accepted it.

But this was different. There was nothing clean and elemental about this silk-hung room or this low divan heaped with cushions. There was a sound and Julianne looked with fear-darkened eyes toward the door. She would infinitely have preferred to face a lion than the man who stood there on the threshold.

He was very tall, much taller than the ordinary Arab. He wore ankle-length cotton trousers belted by a long sash, a white shirt, and striped vest. On his feet were soft leather slippers that made no sound as he crossed the room toward her. "Greetings, Shajaret ed Durr," he said in Arabic.

"Greetings," Julianne replied breathlessly in the same language. She raised her chin and stiffened her back. No matter what happened she determined he should not see that she was afraid. He stepped a few feet from her and she forced herself to meet his eyes.

She was startled by the brilliant blue-green gaze that looked back at her out of that dark face. Then she remembered—of course, he was a Mameluke, a descendant of Christian slaves; he was not an Arab at all. Courageously she sustained that sea-blue blaze, her own eyes wide with the effort of it. His eyes left hers and thoughtfully looked her up and down. Julianne felt herself go white and then red.

"What nationality are you?" he asked, still speaking in Arabic.

"Circassian," she replied firmly.

He raised a black brow and began to walk toward her again. Before she could

prevent herself, she stepped backward. The wall was right behind her; she felt it press against her. He put his hands flat against it, on either side of her, and regarded her closely with narrowed eyes. His face was only inches from hers. "Then I was wrong," he said in the unmistakable accent of Great Britain. "I thought you were English."

Chapter Four

Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by blood and field;
Of hairbreadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach;
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery ...

—Shakespeare

The shock of his words caused Julianne's breath to catch audibly in her throat. She stared up at him in astonishment, taking in his lean strongly planed face. He did not look at all English. He looked—dangerous. The blue eyes above her suddenly glinted with comprehension and amusement. "Well?" he asked inexorably. "Are you?"

Julianne bit her lip and shifted her gaze to his chin. It was dented by a distinct cleft. His voice had sounded cultured. "Yes," she said. "I am."

He stayed where he was for another moment, his face still very close to hers. Then he pushed himself away from the wall. "I thought so," he remarked neutrally. "Or you doesn't see skin like that in Africa."

Instinctively she raised a hand to her cheek. "Circassians are fair-skinned," she protested defensively. She could breathe more easily now that he had moved away from her.

"I was not referring to your coloring."

"Oh," she said blankly, not having the vaguest idea what he was talking about.

He didn't enlighten her. His thick black hair had fallen forward over his forehead and impatiently he pushed it back. "Will you kindly explain to me what the devil a gentleman like you is doing in a slave auction in Cairo?" He sounded distinctly irritable.

"Being sold," she returned tartly. She didn't like his tone.

There was a long silence in which they regarded each other measuringly. Julianne felt her heart begin to hammer again. She was a fool to provoke him, she thought. He looked tough and ruthless as well as dangerous. Then, abruptly, he smiled. "So you were." His voice was surprisingly mild—pleasant even.

The menace she had felt was suddenly gone from the room and she found herself looking at a charming, handsome stranger who sounded exactly like an English gentleman. The change left her feeling a little lightheaded with relief. "It's a long story," she said rather unsteadily, "and I think I need to sit down."

"Have a cushion," he said hospitably. Then, when she dropped down to the floor and bent her head for a minute: "Do you want a glass of wine? Are you going to faint?"

At that she looked up. "No, I am not going to faint."

"Good." He dropped to a cushion himself with an ease that bespoke long familiarity with the ways of the East. "I didn't think you were the fainting type."

"I'm not." She sounded annoyed.

He nodded and there was a faint smile in the brilliant blue-green of his eyes. "Well?" he prompted softly. "I'm listening."

Julianne took a deep even breath, conscious that the tension had left her muscles

as well as the room. "My father was an English missionary here in Africa," she began agreeably. "His task was to create a series of mission stations along the East African coast. He was killed by a lion a few months ago in Abyssinia, and the local king, a very unpleasant man who had refused to supply us with porters and bearers, sold me to some Arab slave traders. I was taken to Harar, where I was sold again to a trader who was bringing slaves to Cairo. He was the man who sold me to you."

His face was expressionless. "Not a very pleasant experience," he murmured.

"No. But I had it much easier than the black slaves. They suffered terribly."

"For how long were you and your father in Africa?"

"Five years."

"Five years!" There was profound surprise in his voice. "Do you mean you have been traveling throughout Africa for five years?"

"Yes."

"Holy God." He stared at her in open astonishment. "You can't be more than eighteen."

"I am nineteen."

"How far did you travel? To Abyssinia?"

"No, we went south as far as Zanzibar."

"On foot?"

"On foot. It is difficult to carry on missionary work from a ship."

He smiled sardonically. "Were you very successful in spreading the Word?"

"We had very little success," she replied serenely. "We did, however, see quite a bit of Africa."

The sardonic note vanished. "I'll bet you did. I'm sure you went where no white man has been before. I envy you." There was no doubting his sincerity. "Who was your father?" he asked curiously. "For that matter, who are you?"

"My father was Lord Richard Wells. I am Julianne Wells."

"Lord Richard Wells. Good God—wasn't he the duke's son who came out a few years ago?"

"Yes."

He pushed the thick hair back out of his eyes again and looked at her with raised brows. "Well, well, well," he said softly. "It isn't often that one finds the granddaughter of a duke at a slave auction."

"No, I suppose not," she agreed evenly. "Nor does one often find an English gentleman on the purchasing end of such a market."

His mouth quirked a little. "True." Then, as she didn't say anything but continued to regard him steadily, he grinned. "My turn, you think?"

"Yes, I think so."

The smile left his face but still lingered in his eyes as he said, "My name is John Champernoun. I came out to Egypt fifteen years ago with the English expedition against Napoleon, and I have been here ever since. At present you might say I am an adviser to the pasha."

"I see," she said slowly. Then she frowned a little in concentration. Hadn't she heard her father speaking once of some "renegade Englishman" who was training Mohammed All's armies? "What do you do for the pasha?" she asked cautiously.

“For the past year I’ve been engaged in helping to put down the Wahabi uprising in Arabia. In fact, I haven’t been in Cairo above a week. It was just chance I happened to be at that auction. Khalil Derwish Bey, one of the Mameluke overlords, wished to go and as I was dining with him I went along to be polite. When I saw you I was convinced you were English.”

It sounded very much to Julianne as if John Champernoun were indeed the renegade her father had condemned so roundly. She replied slowly, “I still don’t quite understand how you were so certain of that. No one else doubted that I was Circassian. I speak Arabic very well.”

“I told you your skin gave you away,” he said in his deep voice. Then, as she opened her mouth to protest again, he continued calmly, “I’m not talking about its color but about its texture. And then, too, there was the expression on your face.”

By now she was feeling extremely puzzled. “My expression?”

“Yes. Aloof, withdrawn, *noli me tangere*. You looked”—his white teeth flashed briefly in amusement—“like a snow queen dressed up as a houri. Not at all Circassian.”

The corners of Julianne’s mouth deepened in acknowledgment. “I was not enjoying myself.”

“No, I don’t imagine you were.” He rose to his feet with easy, animal grace. “Well, suppose I shall have to see about shipping you home to England. You have someone to go to, I presume.”

“Yes, my grandmother.” She rose too and was again surprised by how tall he was—taller even than her father had been.

“One thing still puzzles me,” he said now. “Why did you conceal the fact that you were English? The pasha is anxious to remain on friendly terms with England. He would have had very good reason to see you safely restored to your noble relations.”

She looked at him skeptically. “The last time I was in Cairo, Mr. Champernoun, there was a great deal of alarming talk about how Mohammed Ali had beaten the English at Alexandria and then ridden his horse in a triumphal procession between the chained bodies of captive English soldiers who were waiting to be sold into slavery. I did not think my nationality would gain me any sympathy with the pasha or his supporters.”

His sunburned features looked grim. “Did you hear that story in Cairo or in London?”

“I ...” She frowned in concentration and thought back. “It was in London, suppose,” she finally said slowly. “But there was an ugly anti-English sentiment in Cairo when we arrived. Of that I am certain.”

“Yes, I can believe that. But I can assure you, Julianne, that there were no English soldiers sold into slavery by the pasha. Mohammed Ali is fully aware of the importance of keeping Britain’s goodwill. When Fraser evacuated from Alexandria after the Treaty of Tilsit was signed, the pasha released all the British prisoners who had fallen into his hands. All that was left were the heads of a few decapitated British soldiers which were decorating the pleasure grounds of Ezbekiah. Barbarous, true, but it was not that long ago that we stuck heads up on London Bridge.”

“If what you say is true, how did the other story get started in London?”

“Well, for one thing, British public opinion is against Mohammed Ali. He has put down the Mamelukes and the Mamelukes are popular in Britain. The press likes to dwell on their Oriental splendor and the fact that they fought against Napoleon. The fact that they have plundered and raped Egypt for centuries means nothing to the first British reading public. It would much rather read about how Mohammed Ali eats babies for dinner than about the economic havoc Mameluke rule has wreaked on Egypt.” His mouth grew grim. “Even in the Ottoman dominions it would be difficult to discover a people more oppressed, an economy more decayed.”

Julianne was surprised by the bitterness of his voice. “When you first came into the room I thought you were a Mameluke,” she said softly.

A singularly unpleasant expression crossed his face. “Well, I’m not.”

She shivered a little. “I read Volney before we came to Egypt and I remember something he wrote about the Mamelukes. ‘Strangers among themselves, they are not bound by the bonds that bind other men. Without parents or children, the past has done nothing for them; they do nothing for the future.’”

“That sums them up perfectly.”

She frowned a little. “I do not understand what he means by saying they have no parents or children, though.”

“The Mamelukes are children of Christians whose parents sold them into slavery for profit,” he explained. “They were trained as a military guard, and centuries ago one of the Mameluke captains seized the sultanate and made himself master of Egypt. From then on the Mamelukes ruled in Egypt. The successor of each sultan was usually secured by the violent death of his predecessor. Lesser Mameluke chiefs ruled the provinces under a kind of feudal system. But there was no hereditary system of power. The strong prevailed and the weak fell by the wayside.”

His nostrils flared. “The ruling passion of any Mameluke is self-interest. It’s as simple as that. He is not Egyptian so he feels no ties to the people of this country. His sons are to him what he was to his father: a threat. The result of this pitiless pursuit of self-interest is that for six hundred years they have held Egypt in a tyranny which nobody in the world, except the very misinformed British government, has ever attempted to condone.”

There was no mistaking the genuine disgust in his voice. “And Mohammed Ali is different?” she asked softly.

His straight black brows rose slightly and he looked down at her, a gleam of amusement in his eyes. “He is different. I won’t try to tell you he is a great humanitarian, because he’s not. But he wants to bring Egypt out of the Middle Ages and into the modern world and to do this he has instituted quite a few necessary reforms.”

“And you are helping him?”

“Yes. I am helping him.”

“By training his armies?”

His eyes narrowed. “That is one of my duties.”

She longed to ask him if he had led the siege against the British in Alexandria, but she didn’t quite dare.

“Well, I will be extremely grateful if you can find the means to transport me home.”

to England," she said instead. "My grandmother will repay you for any expenses, I am certain."

He made a dismissive gesture. "It may take a little time for me to make the arrangements. In the meantime I think it would be best if we kept your presence here a secret. If there was a respectable Englishwoman I could turn you over to, I'd do it at once, but there is no one." He gave her a mocking smile. "Your reputation would be irreparably damaged if it became known you were staying with me, I fear."

"Then we must be discreet," she said serenely, meeting his eyes with composure.

He smiled a little crookedly. "Not much frightens you, does it?"

"Not much," she replied with perfect truth. Then she too smiled a little. "But I was frightened when you came into this room. More frightened than I've ever been in my life."

"You didn't look it."

"No. Well, one has one's pride."

"So I gather." He glanced around the room. "You will be perfectly free here in this house to go where you wish. Please make yourself comfortable. I'll have Fatama get you some clothes, although"—and his eyes glinted—"from my point of view, what you have on is very nice indeed."

Julianne was immediately conscious of the curves of her body, so clearly visible to his knowing eyes through the thin fabric of her clothing. She felt the telltale color begin to stain her cheeks and her eyes fell. "No one will bother you," he said, with an undertone of amusement in the deep pleasant voice. "Just don't go out."

"I won't," she promised. "And thank you, Mr. Champernoun."

"Call me John. We'll probably be seeing a bit of each other in the next few weeks."

He turned to leave and she said quickly, "I left some things—papers, notes—at the other house. Could you send for them?"

He looked surprised. "However did you manage to hang on to your papers?"

"It wasn't easy."

"I imagine not. I'll send Said over there in the morning."

"Thank you," she said. "John."

He smiled a little in acknowledgment but made no reply as he left her alone in the beautiful silken room.

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