

# The Mystery of the Persian Heiress

By ROBERT NAUGHTON.

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It was the Walkure night of the Niebelungen Ring series at the Metropolitan Opera House, four years ago, as I remember distinctly, that this unusual entanglement came to light. Rand and I were in the company of General and Mrs. Edward Blashfield, and were chatting in the box after the second act, when an usher came up behind Rand and said:

"Mr. Lawrence Rand? There is a gentleman in the next box who wishes to see you for a moment."

With an apology Rand left us, and almost immediately I heard the sharp click of a rubber band against the palm of his hand, a little innocent-appearing signal which we often used, and supposing that he wanted me, I too left the box and entered the next one.

With his chair hitched up close to the one in which sat Rand was a man of remarkable appearance. Of medium height and slender, with a dark olive skin, flashing blue eyes and a wealth of straight, black hair, splendid teeth and extremely fine features, he was easily recognized as an Oriental of high caste. His forehead and certain facial lines indicated a fine mind and a delicate, romantic, sensitive nature. His age was about thirty-eight. Rand was endeavoring to repress an excited out-pouring of some narrative, evidently until I could hear it also.

"Mr. Duncan, this is the honorable Khan Nadjian, whom you will recall as the importer and expert in Persian rugs. His place is just around from the club. He has a difficult problem for us, and as he speaks Italian better than English I need you badly. Otherwise, I should not have called you away from our friends."

Reducing the statement of the noble Persian to important facts in their proper proportion, the story was as follows:

For ten years he had occupied the second and third floors of a house in East Sixty-third street, a building from the tower, a Mrs. Terrance Malvern. At present, Mrs. Malvern had been gone from the house for a period of four months on a visit to a married daughter, leaving the establishment in charge of her brother, a middle-aged person named John Coughlan, a helpless, dependent sort of individual, likely to do the most childish and foolish things.

The first floor of the house was occupied by a bachelor surgeon, Dr. Justin Huntley, a specialist in gun-shot wounds. There was an old colored maid-of-all-work who came about the first floor each morning to care for the apartments of the two bachelors. She never left the basement after ten o'clock each day, unless summoned, and Nadjian never left the house until after eleven.

For three months his apartments had been entered in his absence by some unknown visitor as regularly as he left the house, the unknown nearly always disturbing, very slightly, some of the small objects in his library, as if looking for papers among his private documents. Several times he had returned in fifteen minutes with the purpose of catching the intruder, only to find that the unknown had come and gone. There were but two means of entrance to the house, the basement door opening on the arway at the street, and the door to the doctor's floor, approached by the steps from the street. There was a vacant lot on the east side of the house, and an air shaft ten feet wide on the west side, between the house and a towering apartment structure, which shut off access to the roof.

The skylight was secured with a strong Yale lock, the key to which lay among many others in a locked drawer of Nadjian's desk. The back of the house was barred at all apertures with an iron trellis work.

For a week a trusted clerk from the rug store had seen no one coming or going from either of the front doors. Yet signs of visitation were apparent when Nadjian returned each day. It was proof conclusive, therefore, that either Dr. Huntley or John Coughlan was clandestinely endeavoring to get possession of something valuable which they knew, or imagined, Nadjian to have among his effects. There were many rare tapestries, pieces of damascened plate, paintings on ivory, antique jewels and other articles, both large and small, of high value, yet nothing had ever been taken away.

"And now, you see, gentlemen," Nadjian concluded, "I have told you everything. I have absolutely nothing that either my dear friend, the doctor, or the miserable Coughlan could want that they have not had every opportunity for taking, but one of the other persists in coming to my rooms secretly. If Coughlan—poor, he is a slow fool, and I do not care. If Dr. Huntley, I am grieved; I am hurt, I am mortified to the depths. I should not want to live, for he is more to me than my brother. Such a friend as the heart of man could hope to find one out of a million of these human wretches—so I'll not give up my comrade—Mon Dieu, but I must know, or I shall go mad. I must know at once!"

Rand and I exchanged glances. Nadjian's sincerity and feeling were evident. On the face of things the case was not important, in the least, save as Nadjian's peace of mind depended on its solution, and as it presented a most alluring mystery to us. Before passing, I should add that Nadjian, having heard of Rand, had been on his track since five that afternoon and had only caught up with him at the opera.

"If we returned home with you tonight, Khan Nadjian, we should reach your house after twelve. Where would John Coughlan be in the natural course of events?"

"In bed in the basement."  
"And Dr. Huntley?"  
"He always retires at eleven, unless we play at cards."

"Very well, with your permission we will go home with you. Yes? Duncan, will you telephone to Tom Rahway to pack a suit case with our clothes for tonight and tomorrow, and take his post opposite Khan Nadjian's house, watching who comes and goes, and waiting our arrival."

Then he begged Mrs. Blashfield's permission to have the Khan join our party, and after the opera we three drove to Sixty-third street. We found the house quite as Nadjian had told us, distinctly detached, with the two entrances. The entire front was illuminated by a street light directly opposite. In the shadow of the steel post lounged the huge, brawny figure of the Sioux student, the suit case at his feet. The block was deserted, save for him and us. Rand called him over, found no one had entered or left the house, and sent him directly away. The doctor's apartments and the basement were dark.

Within doors we saw that each floor had its hall, with four rooms to the floor, all opening on the halls. The doctor's rooms had wooden doors.

In the Khan's apartments privacy had been sacrificed to art and there was no means of shutting them off from the hall. The doors had been removed and the doorways hung with jade and steel bead portieres. His first floor, the second floor of the house, consisted of four rooms, all furnished in an Oriental taste that was most luxurious. The Khan's own bed chamber, in an alcove of which he had his bath, was decorated as the interior of a Cingaisian house. The front chamber on this floor was fitted to represent a bazaar in Turkestan. The dining room was paneled with carved black woods in imitation of the cabin of an ancient Chinese junk. The library, which was the first room entered off the hall and which then led, by three doors, into the dining room and the front and rear bed rooms, was the most fantastically decorated of the four. It was designed to represent the forest camp of some northern sheik, the trunks of trees being book-cases, while the vistas in the walls were sliding panels with books behind them. The desk in the center of the room was a huge sandstone rock, hollowed out to accommodate drawers which opened up at the touch of a knob. Grass mats carried out the effect on the floor and in one corner of the room, as if supported on a rock and a fallen tree was a bed roll of rich stuffs, making a surprisingly solid and comfortable couch.

The upper floor was in reality an attic, one room of which was fitted up as a bed room. The skylight already mentioned gave light to the upper hall.

"What cigarettes do you smoke?" asked Rand suddenly.

"Always Teofani. So does the doctor."

"Does Coughlan smoke a Greek Theopoulou? Here is the butt of one, still warm."

The Khan's eyes seemed about to start from his head. He could scarcely answer that he did not know what Coughlan smoked, but stood with his eyes fastened on the bit of cigarette, following Rand's gaze at the smoke still floating about the ceiling.

"Have you a spool of black silk thread?" inquired Rand.

The Khan said he had not.

Rand walked slowly through the rooms of the floor until his eyes lighted on a red silk cord supporting an ancient Tartar dagger.

"May I take that cord?" said he.

The Persian loosened the cord and gave it to him.

Rand led the way back to the library, and cutting a section three feet long from the cord, unrolled the twist and gave us each a strand.

"Let us sit down here under this strong light and carefully separate each thread of the smallest possible division. I want fifty threads of silk as nearly like a spider's film as I can get them."

For an hour we worked at the difficult, tedious task in silence. The threads then lay stretched on a sheet of blotting paper, clinging lightly to its fuzz.

"I hope you will understand me, Khan Nadjian, when I say that for perhaps some days I must have absolute control of these two floors, your movements inside the house, and, in fact, every detail of your establishment, if you wish me to solve this problem for you. Are you willing to undergo some probably severe inconveniences?"

The Persian vowed he was willing to endure torture if need be.

"Very well, then," answered Rand. "Sit down at your desk and go over your papers and correspondence just as you usually do; in fact, as if you felt yourself perfectly safe from intrusion, while Mr. Duncan and I make a detailed survey of the other rooms. First, however, conduct Mr. Duncan to the skylight, which I noticed was reached by a closet stairway, and allow him to look at it carefully."

I knew Rand had some little plan which he was not willing that Nadjian—perhaps I also—should know.

We returned in about ten minutes and he was still sitting smoking, apparently just as we had left him. I observed, however, that almost all of the little quasi invisible threads of silk were gone from the blotting paper. There were ten, perhaps, left.

"Remember, work for the next half hour over your private papers exactly as you would if you felt yourself in the most complete security. At the end of half an hour go to your room and retire. In the morning go out by the hall door. Do not enter this room on any mission. Remain at your store until you hear from me or from Mr. Duncan. Leave your papers carefully

on the desk. If you wish, Mr. Duncan will occupy the bed-room on the floor above, for I shall shortly leave the house. So, I shall bid you good-night. Now, we will go upstairs, Duncan. Good-night, Khan Nadjian."

The Persian bade us a gracious good-night, and we went upstairs. "Now," said Rand, "if he follows my instructions we are safe from intrusion. We will go down and see what evidence he has supplied us. Please do not enter the library but stand in the door way until I have finished."

We went down to the library and I stood in the door as Rand had requested while he took out his lens, turned on all the lights and went over the room like a beagle on a fresh scent; examining the floor, the strange furniture, the trunks of the imitation trees and finally the papers on the table. For fully five minutes he stood gazing at these papers. Then he got down on his hands and knees on the floor and began carefully stroking his hand back and forth, moving backwards until he came to one of the tree bookcases in the wall. There he drew himself up with that relaxed look of satisfaction on his face that I had so often seen there when the day's work was ended and to his satisfaction. He then came to the doorway in which I was standing.

"Come on, Duncan," he said. "We're all right now. Wait till I stretch these remaining threads across these bead curtains. Now no one can enter the library without leaving a record. In the morning I will appear at the basement door and keep the old servant below stairs. You remain in your room until you hear Nadjian go out and then stand your ground until you hear sounds in the library. I am going to leave to you the honor of capturing this intruder but I shall not be

in a great feeling of relief rushed over me. Rand, thinking I had followed his bent the night before, had merely said "read the story in the threads." I had thought only of those on the portieres and in the halls, and I had very nearly bungled the entire scheme.

I began my survey, moving around the room to the left. Where the threads were straight they had been undisturbed, and where disturbed or carried away, the mysterious visitor had passed. Rand had thus tracked Nadjian's movements in the room during our absence the night before, and the stroking he had done had been merely to once more straighten the threads.

I found nothing disturbed until I came to a certain tree. It had evidently been opened to examine the books within. From it a pathway of disturbed strands extended directly to the Arab campstool before the desk. The lens showed that feet had dragged them toward the tree in approach and then looped parts of them the other way on the return. The portieres to front had not been disturbed.

The library was absolutely empty. I could see from the doorway into each of the other three rooms and I was equally sure no one was there. Yet the room was full of blue smoke that hung in wreaths and rings in the sunlight. The papers on the table were untouched, as far as I could see, but in the tray lay a fresh Theopoulou, and, I touched my finger up to it. It was still warm.

I stood perfectly motionless for fully ten minutes, trying to think what my next move should be, when, suddenly, I saw one of the threads lying at my feet where the light struck it strongly. Looking more closely I saw they were laid systematically about the floor.

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nap began to smoke a hand shot out and smothered the fire—a little hand bearing many jewels—the white, slender hand of a woman!

I had no trouble in lying still for some minutes, paralyzed by sheer amazement. Then my brain began to work. The whole hypothesis had been wrong—our whole hypothesis, no, Khan Nadjian's and mine, for though I had not the remotest idea what Rand's had been, I had every reason to be sure now, from the process he had pursued that it did not coincide with that of the Persian. But, whatever the explanation of this affair, I was in a deeper quandary than I had been before I hit on the expedient of the burning cigarettes. I had as game for the chase an unknown woman to whose identity there had not been indicated the slightest clue in anything we had seen or that Nadjian had said. Doubtless Nadjian would not know who she was if I hauled her out and held her until he could be summoned. Again, he might be either guilty or innocently involved in some plot or scandal which my precipitate action on my part might bring to a crisis that would be bad for him. I was puckering my brows severely and was just about to rise when a dirty, greasy person in a jumper, with a wrench and a pot of red lead in one hand, appeared in the doorway.

"Where is the bathroom on this floor?" he said.

Only the quivering corners of the mouth made me certain it was Rand. "Just beyond that door, my man," said I indifferently.

Rand's eyes swept the place like lightning. He followed the thread trail to the couch instantly, saw the two little burned spots and the cigarette stubs opposite the knot hole. It puzzled him not more than ten seconds.



A VERY ANGRY AND BEAUTIFUL GIRL.

far away. It depends upon your own ingenuity to read the story you will find written in the threads."

Then throwing his coat over his shoulders and putting his opera hat rakishly over one ear he waved me good night, and was gone noiselessly down the heavily carpeted stairs.

I slept well, waking about nine o'clock with that strange, confused sense one has upon opening the eyes in unfamiliar surroundings. Going to my doorway I could hear Nadjian stirring about in his bed room, some one walking up and down on the doctor's floor and in the basement, a man's and a woman's voices, presumably Coughlan and the housekeeper, engaged in some trivial discussion. The acoustic properties of the house certainly were marvelous, but many of the older New York houses are so built that one can hear anything from bottom to top, but not vice versa.

In about an hour I heard Nadjian leave his room, go downstairs and out. I was now on the qui vive despite the fact that I faced the prospect of going through the morning's work without breakfast. Would the strange and mysterious intruder make his usual morning visit? Would he be able to elude my own watchfulness as well as the trap which I knew Rand was laying, but the exact nature of which I was in ignorance.

Sometime later, it seemed like an hour, although on consulting my watch I found it was not more than twenty minutes, I heard the doctor's door open and close. Then I smelled the strong odor of an Oriental cigarette wafted in from the hall. I heard no ascending footsteps but, it may have been my imagination, I thought I heard a light step on the stair from my floor to the Khan's first floor.

I waited a few minutes and then noiselessly tiptoed down the stair to have a look at the silk thread.

It was carried away. The intruder was trapped. But where was Rand? My two hours were not up. Should I enter the Khan's apartments and confront the visitor? The smoke of the Oriental cigarette rolled out of the doorway. I heard nothing of Dr. Huntley or his floor. I was sure now that he was the trespasser. My anger at this evident treachery of the Khan's trusted friend rose at the thought and, regardless of what effect it might have on Rand's plans, I brushed aside the portieres and stepped in to the Persian's library, my hand on my revolver, and fully expecting a disagreeable encounter.

No one had entered Nadjian's bed room, or come from it, and, in fact, there was nothing that had been visited in the room except the desk and the tree mentioned, save the couch. No one had lain on it, however. A thrill ran through me as I saw that the disturbed thread track leading to it was dragged in one way only.

The man I was hunting had left the desk hurriedly, dropping the cigarette in the tray, had moved to the couch and had not gone away. He must still be there. He was not on top of it. He must be under it.

Yet the slide appeared to be a solid tree with no aperture, save one large knot-hole. I had cornered my game and did not know how to close in. I might easily drag him out, but what then? I was satisfied it was Dr. Huntley and not Coughlan. The Khan had been mystified merely because he did not wish to humiliate the doctor. By a little slowly I might find out which it was without letting my man know that he had even been suspected, let alone neatly caught, by Rand's cunning devices.

Making a careless noise with a newspaper taken from the shelf hung on a tree, I strode over to the couch, re-examining the silk threads, confirming my first observations, and stretched myself at full length on the bed roll. I took the tray with me to more minutely examine the cigarette stub. I lit a cigarette, and by fixing my attention on it I grew very still and distinctly heard a slight stir below and the rapid breathing of some one undergoing suppressed excitement. I was right. My man was there.

Still, the problem was how to decide whether it was the doctor or Coughlan without leaving the room and giving him a chance to escape.

Suddenly I had to make myself rigid to keep from starting to my feet. I had, while thinking deeply, dropped my lit cigarette on the grass mat beside the couch. It had begun to smoulder, and out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of a hand thrust out to hastily extinguish the incipient conflagration. Another cigarette; another fire; another appearance of the hand in self-preservation, and I would get a look at the hand. That would be enough.

Acting my part carefully, I rattled my paper, tossed about, and missed fire on two matches as I lit my cigarette. I enjoyed it for about five minutes, and then dropped it with a red coal on the end, fairly in front of the knot-hole. As soon as the grass

mat began to smoke a hand shot out and smothered the fire—a little hand bearing many jewels—the white, slender hand of a woman!

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Nadjian, wonder written on his face, stepped into the room.

"You sent for me?" he asked of me, not recognizing Rand in the plumber at his desk.

"I telephoned half an hour ago for you to come at once. I was talking from this young lady's apartment," said Rand.

From her apartment, half an hour ago! How was that possible when he had been in the house, as I knew positively, ever since he came in when I lay on the couch?

"Who is this young lady?" asked the Khan, eyeing her with very evident admiration.

"Sit down and I will tell you. You can supply the final explanation. Her name is Ione Melonon. She is twenty years of age; was born in Beirut, the daughter of P. Melonon."

"Peresene Melonon's child?"

Rand disregarded Khan Nadjian's breathless exclamation.

"For three months you have watched Khan Nadjian leave his house and have then entered his rooms, always remaining as long as you wished or dared, searching his books and papers for the few old scraps of rough notes and maps which you knew he possessed and which contain the secret of wealthy turquoise mines near Nishapur, Persia."

The Khan leaned forward in his chair as if about to leap on Rand.

"We would have worked more easily if he had confided these facts to us. I suspected he was holding something back and last night allowed him to point out the way to his own secret by tracking his steps on the floor. Then I found the papers and here they are."

"You were hoping, Miss Melonon, that some day he would leave them out, but you were not careful about putting everything you disturbed back in its exact place. When you were trapped you hid until you could make your escape, under that couch where Mr. Duncan caught you. You were also very careless about cigarettes and ashes for, when on the next floor listening, you dropped many ashes in one spot, and you left cigarette stubs at least twice too often. I cannot quite understand why you smoked so steadily in these rooms. You smoked very little in your own."

"Because when smoke is in my room and I draw door open, smoke blows queer."

"Ah, very clever. The upward draught, as well as your ears, warned you. That is good, isn't it, Duncan? It was the movement of the smoke that attracted my attention to your means of entrance. You see, Khan Nadjian, she has been on your track, has taken apartments on a level with your roof, in the flatness neighboring you, has a light steel extension crane which she thrusts out from the top of her window after she has seen your departure from the house, and then she daintily swings over to your roof on a short rope. How did you get this key which you left in the skylight lock?"

"I find out they locksmen of they house and pay them."

"You are a clever woman, Miss Melonon, and a brave one to cross that gap between this house and the next. I have just used your method twice in the last hour. Please forgive my disturbing your little things in your room to get the information I needed. Now, Khan Nadjian, the case is ended so far as Mr. Duncan and I are concerned. You may call in the police if you wish and we will give the needed testimony. I would like to hear, however, since you seem to know, how Peresene Melonon is, or was, for by the mourning frame on his picture in mademoiselle's rooms I take it he is dead."

"Yes, he is dead, almost as many years as this poor girl has been alive. She may have been born since he died before the mouths of the guns in Tobrnan. He was my best friend, though many years my senior. We were prisoners together after he had found those turquoise fields—prisoners on false charges, and I escaped. I did not know he had a child, though I found his wife's grave in Damascus ten years ago. I am an exile, but I will go back to the turquoise fields some day. No, Mr. Rand, there is no need for the police; this poor girl and I will settle this matter between ourselves."

And they did, for about a month later they were married, and not long since I saw a paragraph in the Engineering News saying that an English syndicate had paid a huge sum and would exploit the fields.

Essence of Politeness.

A recent writer upon the attributes of good society, who shows plainly that his ears are as long and pointed as his language is snug and mobbish, declares that the air of politeness and good breeding can be acquired only by the severe repression of the emotion. The natural expression of feeling is hopeless, vulgar and plebeian. The mummy is the ideal of the real aristocratic snob. If you cannot remain glum and bored when your baseball hero makes a four-bagger and brings in three men; if you can remain impassive when wife tells you that mother-in-law is coming for a three-months' visit; if you can yawn while you propose to the girl whose money you are after; in fact, if you cannot cultivate a boorish rudeness you are not qualified to shine or ossify as a "gentleman," according to the definition of our long-eared, snobbish friend. But cheer up; we poor devils of the vulgar herd have our compensations.

The Overadvertised Chameleon.

It is popularly supposed that the chameleon possesses the power of assuming all the colors of the rainbow, but, as a matter of fact, its capabilities in that line are somewhat restricted, inasmuch as certain colors are quite beyond its attainment, says Harper's Weekly.

The chameleon can, however, pass through a series of yellows, grays, greens and browns until it reaches a color almost black; and, unlike the leopard, the chameleon can and does change its spots. The chief causes of these rapid changes are anger, excitement, fear, heat and cold.

In the full blaze of the summer sun the chameleon takes on a blackish hue, with pale, pinkish yellow spots and a central stripe.

## MARCUSE, CALIFORNIA, LAND FOR PROFITABLE FARMING.

Marcuse Colony, located in Butte County, which is in the heart of the Sacramento Valley, is fast coming to the front as a farming community in which nearly every agricultural product known may be successfully raised without irrigation.

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A Clew.

"How did the accident happen?" asked the reporter on the scene of the railway horror, the Cleveland Plain Dealer records.

"Somebody stopped the train by pulling the airbrake cord," answered the conductor. "So the second section ran into it. It will take six hours to clear the track so that we can go ahead."

"Six hours?" shrieked a passenger. "And I was to be married today!"

"Have you any idea who pulled the rope?" continued the reporter, disregarding the interruption.

"I didn't have until now," whispered the conductor. "But what do you think of that fellow that just butted in? I'll sic the detectives on him."

His Criticism.

An old man stood on the street corner in Cherryvale when the trolley stopped and let off a woman passenger. She had on a linen dress, a Panama hat, champagne-colored hose and strapped pumps. "Gosh!" exclaimed the old man. "I'd spend less money on my bonnet and buy some socks."—Cherryvale (Kan.) Journal.

Putting on Airs.

Mrs. Flubber is a very superior person.

"Oh, very. You'd think she had been to a half dozen coronations."

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Peoria, Ill.—"I wish to let every one know what Lydia E. Pinkham's remedies have done for me. For two years I suffered. The doctor said I had tuberculosis, and the only remedy was the surgeon's knife. My mother bought me Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and today I am a healthy woman. For months I suffered from inflammation, and your Sensitive Wash relieved me. Your Liver Pills have no equal as a cathartic. Any one wishing proof of what your medicines have done for me can get it from any druggist or by writing to me. You can use my testimonial in any way you wish, and I will be glad to answer letters.—Mrs. CHRISTINA KERN, 106 Mount St., Peoria, Ill.

Another Operation Avoided.

New Orleans, La.—"For years I suffered from severe female troubles. Finally I was confined to my bed and the doctor said an operation was necessary. I gave Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound a trial first, and was saved from an operation.—Mrs. LILY PRYOR, 1111 Korler St., New Orleans, La.

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