

Arabah-el Madfunah.
Dec 25th 1929.

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Dear Mother & Father.

49

Yesterday I spent the strangest Xmas eve you can ever imagine. We were just putting the finishing touches to ~~our~~ our decorations after the evening meal when Ahmud Ibrahim called to offer compliments, & enquire if we would like to attend a wedding festival. as you can imagine we were delighted. we collected a suitable following of servants with lanterns & set out. I took a little satin bag I had made, as a present & Miss B took a Woolworth necklace. upon making further enquiries we learnt that we should not see the bride as she will not arrive until tomorrow at the conclusion - it seems the two families provide entertainment for their various friends for several days before the real event. As soon as we reached the village we heard the music of the pipes & drums. & after several turns through the narrow village streets we came upon a truly picturesque sight. the gathering was held outside a large house, the company sitting in a wide circle on the ground, our host received us most courteously & invited us to seat ourselves on the divan reserved for guests of

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honour. After we were settled & the various compliments had been exchanged, the music began again. The performers squatted on the ground among the guests. The flute player had a zumara with the peculiar drone, it is a delightful instrument heard in the proper surroundings. The huddled figures in their multicoloured draperies, the brown faces with keen eyes glittering in the lamp light, the rapt attention, & an occasional murmur of Ya Allah! after a favourite melody, in such a setting one can appreciate the beauty of the soft clear notes of the zumara with the hum of the drone forming a sort of undertone, & the rhythm of the drum. There was a slight pause in the proceeding & the musicians quickened their time, & a tiny dancing girl was lifted over the heads of the spectators & set down in the centre, she was the little sister of the young bridegroom, she was only six years old, & she was the best dancer in the village. Her mother, a famous dancer had trained her as soon as she could walk. This tiny thing danced the old Arabian dances, twisting her little figure in perfect time to the music, she wore a white dress with silver ornaments at the waist, her hair hung in long plats, & each plat had an ornament & tassel tied on to it & she had a coloured handkerchief

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3
 tied on her head. her little feet were bare, she danced so long that we were afraid she would be overtired, but her father assured us she was not tired, because she was so happy to dance before honoured guests at her brother's wedding.

Afterwards two men got up & danced, balancing long sticks across their shoulders, & after them came the star turn, a well known piper & singer, the piper was a Soudanese, he had the father of Zumareras, it was over 5 ft long & had a deep bass humm, it was wonderful to see him blow out his cheeks, never have I seen cheeks extend to such a size, greater even than those of cherubs on tombstones. the singer sang the old Arabian love songs, he held one hand as a shield to his mouth as if to make his voice carry, with the other he pleaded, entreated or emphasised, & he directed his songs to us, I have no doubt we should have been covered with confusion & blushes if we could have followed all the words, fortunately we didn't, but we guessed a lot, the man was a perfect actor & had a deep rich voice, no wild yells, but beautifully modulated & flexible to a degree; he certainly made the most of his unique opportunity of singing his passionate love songs

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4

To two visible & unveiled females who so obviously appreciated his performance. We noticed a very worried look on Sandic's face, he was evidently wondering how much we understood, he is very proper in quite a European way where we are concerned & of course one can't expect a real Arabian love song out in the desert to be modified to suit European ears. It was all very thrilling & we were very sorry when midnight came & we felt bound to depart. We left our gifts to the bride with the bridegroom's father.

Mr Beazley has gone to Luxor for the Xmas holidays, he wanted to escape from us for the time being, he doesn't take the slightest interest in the natives & their customs, he refuses to even try to learn Arabic, & is altogether rather a bore, so we were not sorry when he decided to take himself off for 5 or 6 days of his leave. We now have Miss Jonas, the secretary of the E.E.Soc staying for four days, she is a dear & is enjoying everything thoroughly, it is her first visit to Egypt.

There was great excitement today, at breakfast we exchanged gifts. I gave Miss C four of the nicest of

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5

the stock of handkerchiefs^{sic} you passed over to me. I sort of felt she was going to give me something & I didn't want to come to the table empty handed. I was right too; she gave me the daintiest pale pink cambric nightie, handmade & embroidered in Italy; she is the most generous person in every way, & most delightful to work with. For Nannie I had made a magnificent pair of garters out of some shoulder strap ribbon (this is why I had to write for more) all puckered on elastic, this was a huge joke, as her stockings are always coming down. I gave Capt C. a purse I had made out of cuttings from the white gloves. He has ordered a present for me, but it hasn't arrived yet. We are quite like a happy family party now. After breakfast we prepared the things for the tree, we had about 10 lbs of mixed sweets a huge bag of nuts & 70 oranges. & 70 handkerchiefs we expected about 60 odd children & provided for some extra in case we had miscalculated, as it happened, over 80 came, we had to hastily supplement^{sic} from our own stores & make a few adjustments, but fortunately no child went away empty handed.


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6
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7
 might use some of the wood that we have for heating our bath water. with this wood 3 small fires were started, & the company arranged itself into three circles. & the singer & piper walked backward & forwards among them singing a verse to each in turn, can you imagine it! the squatting figures round the fires, stretching out their hands to the flames. the tall figure of the singer bending over them singing his songs, & the portly Soudanese strutting round with his 5 ft zumara, waving it right & left as he played, sometimes raising it as if he was addressing the stars. When a favourite song was being sung, all the company clapped their hands softly in rhythm, & repeated the refrain after each verse.

One of the guests showed us a very good trick. he spread a rug on the sand & laid a small cushion on the rug. Then he put a tall glass bottle full of water (without a cork) on his head, & without holding it in any way he walked round the rug, then knelt on it, & gradually worked himself round until he was stretched out full length like this  then he got the cushion in his teeth & raised himself erect again, all

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without touching the bottle or spilling a drop of water. He then repeated the performance replacing the ~~bott~~ cushion on the rug again. The show turn of the evening was the little play our men had made up themselves.

I don't know when I have laughed so much in my life. Old Ahmud, who is called the Father of Moustaches had got himself up as a fat, self important Pasha, & he held a court of justice sitting on a large packing case turned upside down; - a woman, (man disguised of course) came to plead her case, & in a shrill wailing voice she told how her goat had been stolen, a goat that gave 3 pails of milk a day. The accused pleaded that he had a right to the goat as the woman had been one of his wives but he preferred to keep the goat. The Pasha said he must be put in prison until he loved his wife properly, so they shoved him under the packing case, & he began to wail about the discomfort & the bugs, & how much he loved his wife & there was a most touching love scene between the man in the packing case & the wife

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outside, but the Pasha wouldn't listen, then the man began to heave the case up & down & finally tipped the Pasha off & escaped & there was a general scuffle & every one began to bang each other with lighted palm branches & sparks flew all over the place. The prisoner escaped in the confusion. so the Pasha condemned every one to be executed & soon there was a nice pile of corpses heaped up in front of him.

Then an awful afreet (ghost) came & scared the Pasha into a fit, & all the corpses got up & danced round him. There were lots of other incidents but the plot was a little complicated & my Arabic very limited, so I can hardly attempt to describe them. The men had contrived their costumes out of the rubbish out of the packing cases & some were remarkably ingenious. The party broke up about midnight.

I will have to continue my Xmas adventures in a later letter as I want this to catch the mail tomorrow.

Much love to you both.

Your affectionate daughter
Myrtle.

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