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Edited by Zeyneb Hanoum and Grace Ellison

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CHAPTER I
A DASH FOR FREEDOM

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CHAPTER I

A DASH FOR FREEDOM

A FEW days after my visit to the Désenchantées at Fontainebleau, which is described in the Introduction, I received the following letter from Zeyneb :

FONTAINEBLEAU, *Sept.* 1906.

You will never know, my dear and latest friend, the pleasure your visit has given us. It was such a new experience, and all the more to be appreciated, because we were firmly convinced we had come to the end of new experiences.

For almost a quarter of a century, in our dear Turkey, we longed above all for something new ; we would have welcomed death even as a change, but everything, everything was always the same.

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[More information](#)

24 A DASH FOR FREEDOM

And now, in the space of eight short months, what have we not seen and done! Every day has brought some new impressions, new faces, new joys, new difficulties, new disappointments, new surprises and new friends; it seemed to both of us that we must have drunk the cup of novelty to its very dregs.

On Sunday, after you had left us, we talked for a long time of you and the many subjects we had discussed together.

Sympathy and interest so rarely go hand in hand—interest engenders curiosity, sympathy produces many chords in the key of affection, but the sympathetic interest you felt for us has given birth on our side to a sincere friendship, which I know will stand the test of time.

We felt a few minutes after you had been with us, how great was your comprehension, not only of our actions, but of all the private reasons, alas! so tragic, which made them necessary. You understood so much without our having to speak, and you guessed a great deal of what could not be put into words. That is what a Turkish woman appreciates more than anything else.

We, who are not even credited with the possession of a soul, yet guard our souls as our

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[More information](#)

A DASH FOR FREEDOM 25

most priceless treasures. Those who try to force our confidence in any way, we never forgive. Between friend and friend the highest form of sympathy is silence. For hours we Turkish women sit and commune with one another without speaking. You would, I know, understand this beautiful side of our life.

Since our departure from our own country, and during these few months we have been in France, from all sides we have received kindness. We were ready to face yet once more unjust criticism, blame, scandal even; but instead, ever since we left Belgrade till we arrived here, everything has been quite the opposite. All the European papers have judged us impartially, some have even defended and praised us, but not one censured us for doing with our lives what it pleased us.

But in Turkey what a difference! No Constantinople paper spoke of our flight. They were clever enough to know that by giving vent to any ill-feeling, saying what they really thought of our "disgraceful" conduct, they would draw still more attention to the women's cause; so we were left by the Press of our country severely alone.

The Sultan Hamid, who interested himself a

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[More information](#)

26 A DASH FOR FREEDOM

little too much in our welfare, became very anxious about us. Having left no stone unturned to force us to return (he had us arrested in the middle of the night on our arrival at Belgrade on the plea that my sister was a minor, and that both of us had been tricked away by an elderly lady for illicit purposes) he next ordered that all those European papers in which we were mentioned should be sent to him. As our flight drew forth bitter criticism of his autocratic government, he must, had he really taken the trouble to read about us, have found some very uncomfortable truths about himself. But that was no new régime. For years he has fed himself on these indigestible viands, and his mechanism is used to them by now.

I need not tell you that in Constantinople, for weeks, these forbidden papers were sold at a high price. Regardless of the risk they were running, everyone wanted to have news of the two women who had had the audacity to escape from their homes and the tyranny of the Sultan Hamid. In the harems, we were the one topic of conversation. At first no one seemed to grasp the fact that we had actually gone, but when at last the truth slowly dawned upon

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A DASH FOR FREEDOM 27

them, the men naturally had not a kind word to say of us, and we did not expect it would be otherwise. But the women, alas! Many were obliged officially to disapprove of our action. There were a few, however, who had the courage to defend us openly; they have our deepest and sincerest gratitude. But do not think for a moment that we blame or feel unkindly towards the others. Have not we, like them, had all our lives to suffer and fear and pretend as captives always must do? Could they be expected to find in one day the strength of character to defend a cause however just, and not only just, but *their own*—their freedom.

Yes, my friend, we ourselves have lived that life of constant fear and dissimulation, of hopes continually shattered, and revolt we dared not put into words.

Yet never did the thought occur to us that we might adapt ourselves to this existence we were forced to lead. We spent our life in striving for one thing only—the means of changing it.

Could we, like the women of the West, we thought, devote our leisure to working for the poor, that would at least be some amusement to break the monotony. We also arranged to meet and discuss with intelligent women the question

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28 A DASH FOR FREEDOM

of organising charity, but the Sultan came down upon us with a heavy hand. He saw the danger of allowing thinking women to meet and talk together, and the only result of this experiment was that the number of spies set to watch the houses of "dangerous women" was doubled.

Then it was that we made up our minds, after continual failure, that as long as we remained in our country under the degrading supervision of the Hamidian régime, we could do nothing, however insignificant, to help forward the cause of freedom for women.

I need not tell you again all the story of our escape; it is like a nightmare to me still, and every detail of that horrible journey will remain clearly fixed in my mind until death. Shall I tell you all that has happened to us since? But so much has been said about us by all sorts and conditions of men and women, that you will no doubt have already had an overdose. Yet I thought I understood, from the sympathetic interest you showed us the other afternoon, that there was much you would still like to hear. Have I guessed rightly? Then there is nothing you shall not know.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

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A DASH FOR FREEDOM 29

What a long and interesting letter ! and from a Turkish woman too ! Several times I read and re-read it, then I felt that I could not give my new friend a better proof of the pleasure that it had given me, than by writing her at once to beg for more. But I waited till the next day, and finally sent a telegram—"Please send another letter."

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