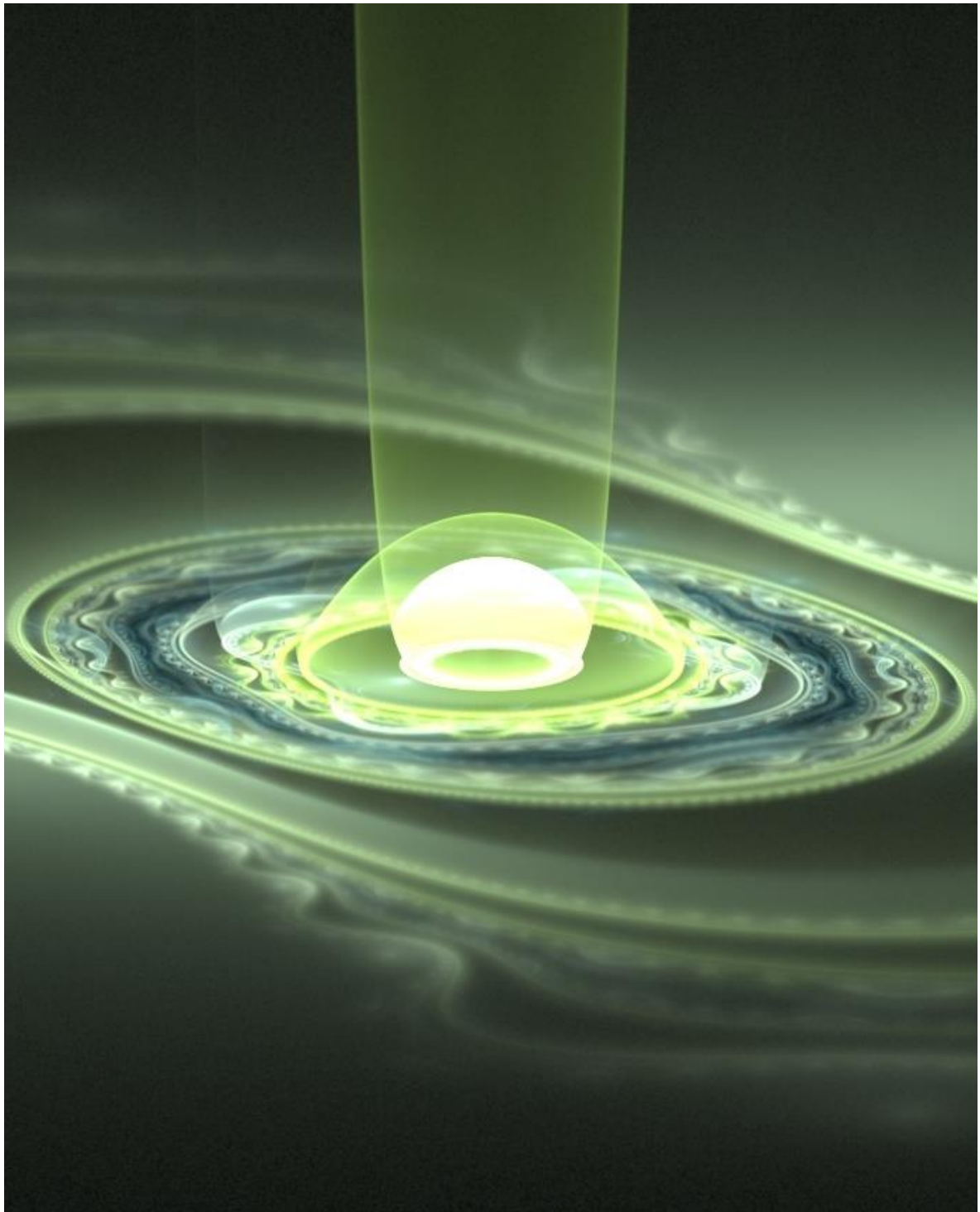


*Madame Blavatsky on  
The Luminous Circle*



## A mystical story of the wonderful powers of the divining girl of Damascus<sup>1</sup>

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A THEOSOPHICAL TALE TOLD BY AN OLD TRAVELLER IN THE FAR EAST — A MAGIC MOON — WHAT WAS SEEN THEREIN — THE DERVISHES OF CONSTANTINOPLE — A DWARF'S TRANSFORMATION

We were a small party of merry travellers. We had arrived at Constantinople a week before from Greece, and had devoted fourteen hours a day to running up and down the steep hills of Pera, visiting bazaars, climbing to the tops of minarets, and fighting our way through armies of hungry dogs, traditional masters of the streets of Stamboul. Nomadic life is infectious, they say, and no civilization is strong enough to destroy the charm of unrestrained freedom when it has once been tasted. For the first three days my spaniel, Ralph, had kept at my heels, and behaved like a tolerably well-educated quadruped. He was a fine fellow, my travelling companion and most cherished friend; I was afraid to lose him, and so kept a good watch over his incomings and outgoings. At every impudent attack by his Mohammedan fellow creatures, whether demonstrations of friendship or hostility, he would merely draw in his tail between his legs, and seek in a dignified and modest manner protection under one or the other wing of our little party. He had shown from the first a decided aversion to bad company, and so, having become assured of his discretion, by the end of the third day I relinquished my vigilance. This neglect was speedily followed by punishment. In an unguarded moment he listened to the voice of some canine siren, and the last I saw of him was his bushy tail vanishing around the corner of a dirty, crooked street.

Greatly annoyed, and determined to recover him at all hazards, I passed the remainder of the day in a vain search. I offered twenty, thirty, forty francs reward for him. About as many vagabond Maltese began a regular chase, and toward night we were assailed in our hotel by the whole troop, every man of them with a mangy cur in his arms, which he tried his best to convince me was the dog I had lost. The more I denied, the more solemnly they insisted, one of them actually going down upon his knees, snatching from his bosom an old corroded image of the Virgin, and swearing with a solemn oath that the Queen of Heaven herself had appeared to him and kindly shown him which dog was mine. The tumult had increased so as to threaten a riot, when finally our landlord had to send for a couple of kavasches<sup>2</sup> from the nearest

<sup>1</sup> [In her *Scrapbook*, Vol. I, p. 118, H.P. Blavatsky made a notation in blue pencil above this title to the effect that this was her "2<sup>nd</sup> story." — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

<sup>2</sup> [In Hindi, *kavash* means shield.]

police station, who expelled the army of bipeds and quadrupeds by main force. I was the more in despair, as the headwaiter, a semi-respectable old brigand, who, judging by appearances, had not passed more than a half-dozen years in the galleys, gravely assured me that my pains were all useless, as my spaniel was undoubtedly devoured and half-digested by this time, the Turkish dogs being very fond of their toothsome Christian brothers.

The discussion was held in the street, at the door of the hotel, and I was about to give up the search for that night, when an old Greek lady, a Phanariote, who had listened attentively to the fracas from the steps of a neighbouring house, approached our disconsolate group and suggested to Miss H \* \* \* , one of our party, that we should inquire of the Dervishes concerning the fate of Ralph.

“And what can the Dervishes know about my dog?” inquired I, in no mood to joke.

### **The “Holy Men”**

“The holy men know all, Kyria (madam)!” answered she, somewhat mysteriously. “Last week I was robbed of my new satin pelisse, which my son had brought me from Brusa, and, as you all see, there I have it on my back again.”

“Indeed? Then the holy men have also metamorphosed your new pelisse into an old one, I should say,” remarked a gentleman of our company, pointing to a large rent in the back, which had been clumsily mended with pins.

“And it is precisely that which is most wonderful,” quietly answered the Phanariote, not in the least disconcerted. “They showed me in the luminous circle the quarter of the town, the house, and even the room in which the Jew who stole it was preparing to rip and cut my garment into pieces. My son and I had barely the time to run over to the Kalindjikoulosek quarter and save my property. We caught the thief in the very act, and both instantly recognized him as the man shown us by the Dervishes in the magic moon. He confessed, and is in prison now.”

Not understanding what she meant by the luminous circle and magic moon, but not a little mystified by her account of the divining powers of the “holy men,” we felt so satisfied that the story was not wholly a fabrication that we decided to go and see for ourselves on the following morning.

The monotonous cry of the Muezzin from the top of a minaret had just proclaimed the noon of the day as we, descending from the heights of Pera to the port of Galata, with difficulty elbowed our way through the unsavoury crowds of the commercial quarter of the town. Before we reached the docks we had been half deafened by the shouts and incessant, ear-piercing noises, and the Babel-like confusion of tongues. In this part of the city it is useless to expect to be guided by either house numbers or names of streets. The location of any desired place is indicated by its relative proximity to some other conspicuous building, such as a Mosque, bath or European storehouse; for the rest one has to put his faith in Allah and his prophet.

## Dervishes at Home

It was with the greatest difficulty, therefore, that we finally found the British ship-chandler's store in the rear of which we were to look for the place of our destination. Our hotel guide knew about the Dervishes as little as ourselves; but at last a Greek urchin,<sup>1</sup> in all the simplicity of primitive undress, consented for a modest copper *bakshish*, to lead us to the dancers.

We arrived at last, and were shown into a gloomy and vast hall, which appeared to me like a vacated stable. It was long and narrow, the floor was thickly strewn with sand, as in a *manège*,<sup>2</sup> and it was lighted only through small windows under the cornices of the ceiling. The Dervishes had finished their morning performances, and were evidently resting from their exhausting labours. They looked completely prostrated, some lying about in corners, others sitting on their heels, staring vacantly, in mute contemplation of the Invisible Divinity, as we were informed. They appeared to have lost all power of speech and hearing, for none of them responded to our questions until a gaunt giant-limbed fellow, in a tall pointed cap, which made him appear over seven feet high, emerged from an obscure nook.

Informing us that he was the chief, he remarked that the holy brethren, being in the act of receiving orders for further ceremonies of the day from Allah himself, must not be disturbed. But when the interpreter had explained to him the object of our visit, which concerned himself alone, he being the sole proprietor of the "divining rod," his objections vanished, and he extended his hand for the alms. Upon being gratified, he beckoned two of our party, signifying that he could not accommodate more at once, and led the way.

## The Sibyl's Retreat

Plunging after him into the darkness of what seemed a half-subterranean passage, we were led to the foot of a tall ladder reaching to a chamber under the roof. We scrambled up after our guide and found ourselves in a wretched garret, of moderate size, destitute of all furniture. The floor, however, was carpeted with a thick layer of dust, and cobwebs festooned the walls in profusion. In one corner we perceived something which I mistook, at first, for a bundle of old rags; but the heap presently moved, got on its legs, advanced to the middle of the room, and stood before us, the most extraordinary-looking creature that I ever beheld. Its sex was female, but it was impossible to decide whether she was a woman or a child. She was a hideous-looking dwarf, with a head so monstrously developed that it would have been too big for a giant; the shoulders of a grenadier; the bosom of a Normandy wet nurse;<sup>3</sup> and the whole supported on two short, lean, spider-looking legs, which trembled under the disproportionate size of the trunk as she advanced. She had a grinning countenance, like the face of a satyr, and it was ornamented with letters and signs from the *Koran*, painted in bright yellow. On her forehead was a blood-red crescent; her head was crowned with a dusty *tarboosh*;<sup>4</sup> the lower extremities covered with large Turkish

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<sup>1</sup> [Street child.]

<sup>2</sup> [French for a riding academy.]

<sup>3</sup> [A buxom woman who breast feeds and cares for another's child.]

<sup>4</sup> [Arabic for Turkish-style hat or fez.]

trousers; the upper portion of the body wrapped in dirty white muslin, barely sufficient to conceal one-half of its deformities. This creature rather let herself drop than sat down, in the middle of the floor, and as her weight came upon the rickety boards it sent up a thick cloud of dust, which invaded our throats and set us to coughing and sneezing. This was the famous Tatmos, known as the Damascus Oracle!

### The Magician at Work

Without losing time in idle talk, the Dervish produced a piece of chalk, and traced round the girl a circle about six feet in diameter. Fetching from behind the door twelve small copper lamps, and filling them with a dark liquid contained in a vial which he drew from his bosom, he placed them symmetrically around the magic circle. He then broke a chip of wood from the half-ruined panel of the door, which bore evident marks of many a similar depredation, and, holding the chip between his thumb and finger, began blowing on it at regular intervals, alternating with mutterings of weird incantation; suddenly, and to all appearance without any apparent cause for its ignition, there appeared a spark on the chip, and it blazed up like a dry match. He lit the twelve lamps at this self-generated flame. During this process, Tatmos, who until then had sat altogether unconcerned and motionless, removed her yellow *babouches*<sup>1</sup> off from her naked feet, and throwing them into a corner, disclosed, as an additional beauty, a sixth toe on each deformed foot. The Dervish then reached over into the circle, and, seizing the dwarf's ankles, gave a jerk as if he had been lifting a bag of corn, raised her clear off the ground, and stepping back, held her head downward. He shook her as one might a sack to pack its contents, the motion being regular and easy. He then swung her to and fro like a pendulum until the necessary momentum was acquired, when, letting go one foot and seizing the other with both hands, he made a powerful, muscular effort and whirled her round in the air as if she had been an Indian club.

My companion had shrunk back into a corner in fear. Round and round the Dervish swung his living burden, she remaining perfectly passive. The motion increased in rapidity, until the eye could hardly follow her body in its circuit. This continued perhaps for two or three minutes, until gradually slackening the motion, he stopped it, and in an instant had landed the girl upon her knees in the middle of the lamp-lit circle. Such was the Eastern method of mesmerisation as practised among the Dervishes.

### In a Trance

And now the dwarf seemed entirely oblivious of external objects, and in a deep trance. Her head and jaw dropped upon her chest, her eyes were glazed and staring, and altogether her appearance was hideous. The Dervish then carefully closed the wooden shutters of the only window, and we would have been in total obscurity but that there was a hole bored in it, through which entered a bright ray of sunlight, which shot through the darkened room and shone upon the girl. He arranged her drooping head so that the ray should fall directly upon the crown, after which, motioning us to remain silent, he folded his arms upon his bosom, and fixing his gaze upon the bright spot, became as motionless as an image of stone. I, too, riveted my

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<sup>1</sup> [Arabo-musulman slippers.]

eyes upon the same spot, and followed the proceeding with intense interest, for I had seen something similar before, and knew what beautiful phenomena to expect.

By degrees the bright patch, as if it had drawn through the sunbeam a greater splendour from without and condensed it within its own area, shaped itself into a brilliant star, which from its focus sent out rays in every direction.

A curious optical effect then occurred. The room, which previously had been partially lighted by the sunbeam, grew darker and darker as the star increased in radiance, until we found ourselves in an Egyptian gloom. The star twinkled, trembled, and turned, at first with a slow, gyratory motion, then faster and faster, expanding and increasing its circumference at every rotation until it formed a brilliant disc, and we lost sight of the dwarf as if she herself had been absorbed into its light. Having gradually attained a vertiginous velocity, as the girl had when whirled by the Dervish, the motion began decreasing, and finally merged into a feeble vibration, like the shimmer of moonbeams on rippling water. Then it flickered for a moment longer, emitted a few last flashes, and assuming the density and iridescence of an immense opal, it remained motionless. The disc now radiated a moon-like lustre, soft and silvery, but instead of illuminating the garret, this seemed only to intensify the darkness. Its edge was not penumbrous,<sup>1</sup> but, on the contrary, sharply defined like that of a silver shield.

### The Magical Shield

All being now ready the Dervish without uttering a word, or removing his gaze from the disc, stretched out a hand and taking hold of mine, he drew me to his side and pointed to the illuminated shield. Looking at the place indicated, we saw dark patches appear like those upon the moon. These gradually formed themselves into figures, which began moving about till they came out in high relief in their natural colours. They neither appeared like a photograph nor an engraving; still less like reflection of images on a mirror; but as if the disc were a cameo and they were raised above its surface and then endowed with life and motion. To my astonishment and my friend's consternation we recognized the bridge leading from Galata to Stamboul, spanning the Golden Horn from the new to the old city. There were the people hurrying to and fro, steamers and gay caïque<sup>2</sup> gliding on the blue Bosphorus; the many-colored buildings, villas and palaces reflected in the water; and the whole picture illuminated by the noonday sun.

It passed like a panorama; but so vivid was the impression that we could not tell whether it or ourselves were in motion. All was bustle and life, but not a sound broke the oppressive stillness. It was noiseless as a dream. It was a phantom picture. Street after street and quarter after quarter succeeded each other; there was the Bazaar, with its narrow, roofed passages, the small shops on each side, the coffee house, with gravely-smoking Turks; and as either they or we glided past them, one of the smokers upset the narghile<sup>3</sup> and coffee of another, and a volley of soundless in-

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<sup>1</sup> [A partial shadow, as in an eclipse, between areas of complete shadow and complete illumination.]

<sup>2</sup> [Brightly painted traditional Turkish fishing boat.]

<sup>3</sup> [Water-pipe smoking, also known as hookah or shisha.]

vectives caused us great amusement. So we travelled with the picture until we came to a large building, which I recognized as the Palace of the Minister of Finance. In a ditch behind the house and close by to a Mosque, lying in a pool of mud, with his silken coat all bedraggled, lay my poor Ralph! Panting and crouching down as if exhausted, he seemed dying; and near him were gathered some sorry-looking curs who lay blinking in the sun and snapping at the flies!

I had seen all that I desired, although I had not breathed a word about the dog to the Dervish, and had come more out of curiosity than with the idea of any success. I was impatient to leave at once to recover Ralph; but as my companion besought me to remain a little while longer, I reluctantly consented.

### Thinking of Him

The scene faded away, and Miss H \* \* \* placed herself in her turn nearer by the side of the gigantic Dervish.

“I will think of *him*,” whispered she into my ear, with that sentimental tone which young ladies generally assume when referring to a “him.”

A long stretch of sand; a blue sea, with white caps dancing in the sun; a great steamer, ploughing her way along past a desolate shore, and leaving a milky track behind her. The deck is full of life; then men busy forward; the cook, with his white cap and apron, coming out of his galley; uniformed officers moving about; passengers on the quarter deck flirting, lounging, or reading; and a young man we both recognize comes forward and leans over the taffrail.<sup>1</sup> It is — *him*!

Miss H \* \* \* gives a little gasp, blushes and smiles, and concentrates her thoughts again. The picture of the steamer fades away in its turn; the magic moon remains for a few seconds pictureless. But new spots appear on its luminous face; we see a library slowly emerging from its depths a library with green carpet and hangings, and book-shelves around three sides of the room. Seated in an armchair by the table, under the chandelier, is an old gentleman writing. His grey hair is brushed back from his forehead, his face is smooth-shaven, and his countenance has an expression of benignity.

“Father!” joyfully exclaims Miss H \* \* \* .

The Dervish makes a hasty motion to enjoin silence. The light on the disc quivers, but resumes its steady brilliancy once more.

### Wonderful!

We are back in Constantinople now; and out of the pearly depths of the shield forms our own apartment in the hotel. There are our papers and books lying upon the bureau, my friend’s travelling-hat in a comer, her ribbons hanging on the glass, and on the bed the very dress which she had exchanged when we started out on our memorable expedition. No detail was lacking to make the identification complete; and, to prove that we were not seeing something conjured up in our own imaginations, there lay upon the dressing case two sealed letters, the very handwriting upon which my friend recognizes. They were from a very dear relative of hers, from whom she had

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<sup>1</sup> [The aftermost railing around the stern of a ship.]

expected to hear at Athens, but had been disappointed. The scene faded away, and we now see her brother's room, with himself lying upon the lounge, and the servant bathing his head, which, to our horror, we see bleeding!

We had left the boy perfectly well one hour before; but upon seeing his picture my companion uttered a cry of alarm, and seizing me by the hand dragged me towards the door. Down below we rejoined our guide, and hurried back to our hotel.

The boy had fallen downstairs and cut himself badly on the forehead; in the room, on the writing desk were the two letters which had been forwarded from Athens, letters she had seen in the disc and recognized, and the arrival of which had been so impatiently expected. Ordering the carriage, I drove hurriedly to the Minister of Finance, and alighting with the guide went right to the ditch I had never seen but in the magic room. In the middle of the pool, badly mangled, half famished, but still alive, lay my beautiful spaniel, Ralph!<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE LUMINOUS CIRCLE) I pp. 177-86