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Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
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Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt  
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Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
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Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Kralik Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Strachwitz Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschchow  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke  
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# **The Strange Adventures of Mr. Middleton**

Wardon Allan Curtis

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*The Strange Adventures of Mr. Middleton*



## **The Manner in Which Mr. Edward Middleton Encounters the Emir Achmed Ben Daoud.**

It was a lowering and gloomy night in the early part of the present century. Mr. Edward Middleton, a gallant youth, who had but lately passed his twenty-third year, was faring northward along the southern part of that famous avenue of commerce, Clark Street, in the city of Chicago, wending his way toward the emporium of Mr. Marks Cohen. Suddenly the rain which the cloudy heaven had been promising for many hours, began to descend in great scattered drops that presaged a heavy shower. Mr. Middleton hastened his steps. It was possible that if the dress-suit he wore, hired for the occasion of the wedding of his friend, Mr. Chauncey Stackelberg, should become imbued with moisture in the shower that now seemed imminent, Mr. Cohen, of whom he had hired the suit, would not add to the modicum agreed upon, a charge for pressing it. But if his own suit for everyday wear, which he was carrying under his arm with the purpose of putting it on at good Mr. Cohen's establishment, should become wet, that would be a serious matter. It was, in fact, his only suit and that will explain the anxiety with which he scanned the heavens. Suddenly, Pluvius unloosed all the fountains of the sky, and with scarcely a thought whither he was going, Mr. Middleton darted into the first haven of refuge, a little shop he happened to be just passing. As the door closed behind him with the tinkle of a bell in some remote recess, for the first time he realized that the place he had entered was utterly dark. His ears, straining to their uttermost to make compensation for the inability of his eyes to be of service to him in this juncture, could no more than inform him that the place was utterly silent. But to his nose came the powerful fragrance of strange foreign aromas such as he had never had experience of before,—which, heavy and oppressive in their cloying perfume, seemed the very breath of mystery. All traffic had ceased without, as the night was well advanced and the rain beat so heavily that the few whom business or pleasure had called abroad at that hour, had sought shelter. But though the rain now fell with a steady roar, Mr. Middleton, perturbed by a nameless disquiet, was about to rush forth into the tempest and seek other shelter, when a door burst open and, outlined against a glare

of light, stood a gigantic man who said in a deep, low voice that seemed to pervade every corner of the room and cause the air to shake in slow vibrations, "Salaam aleikoom!" Which being repeated again, Mr. Middleton replied:

"I do not understand the German language."

A low, musical laugh greeted this remark and the laugh resolving itself into a low, musical voice that bade him enter, Mr. Middleton found himself in a small boudoir of oriental magnificence, facing a young man in the costume of the Moslem nations, who sat cross-legged upon a divan smoking a narghileh. He was of perhaps twenty-six, somewhat slight, but elegant of person. His face, extremely handsome, betokened that he was a man of intelligence and sensibility. Two brilliant, sparkling eyes illumined his countenance and the curl of his carmine lips was that of one who while kind—without condescension and the odiousness of patronage—to all whom the mischance of fate had made his inferiors in fortune, would not bend the fawning knee to any whom the world calls great. Behind him stood a giant blackamore, he of the voice that had saluted Mr. Middleton. The blackamore was dressed in crimson silk sparkling with an array of gold lace, but his immense turban was snowy white. Against his shoulder reposed a great glittering scimeter and a dozen silver-mounted pistols and poniards were thrust in his sash.

Presently the young man removed the golden mouth-piece of the narghileh from his lips and regarding Mr. Middleton fixedly, remarked:

"There is but one God and Mohammed is his Prophet."

Now this was not the doctrine Mr. Middleton had been taught in the Methodist Sunday School in Janesville, Wisconsin, but disliking to dispute with one so engaging as the handsome Moslem, and having read in a book of etiquette that it was very ill mannered to indulge in theological controversy and, moreover, being conscious of the presence of the blackamore with the glittering scimeter, he began to make his excuses for an immediate departure. But the Moslem would not hear to this.

“Mesroure will bear your garments to Mr. Cohen. From your visage, I judge you to be a person I wish to know. I take you to be endowed with probity, discretion, and valor, and not without wit, good taste, and good manners. Mesroure, relieve the gentleman of his burden.”

Whereupon Mr. Middleton was compelled to state that it was the garment on his back that was to go to Mr. Cohen, though he feared this confession would cause him to fall in the estimation of the Moslem. But the stranger relaxed none of his deference at this intimation that Mr. Middleton was not a person of consequence.

“Mesroure, take two sequins from the ebony chest. The price the extortionate tailor charges, is some thirty piastres. Bring back the change and a receipt.”

“Salaam, effendim!” and Mesroure bowed until the crown of his head was presented toward his master, together with the palms of his hands, and in this posture backed from the room, leaving Mr. Middleton speculating upon the wonder and alarm little Mr. Cohen would experience at beholding the gigantic Nubian in all his outlandish panoply. While changing the dress suit for his street wear, from a back room came the sound of the blackamore moving about, chanting that weird refrain, tumpy, tumpy, tum—tum; tumpy, tumpy, tum—tum; which from Mesopotamia to the Pillars of Hercules, from the time of Ishmael to the present, has been the song of the sons of the desert. What was his surprise when the blackamore emerged. Gone were his turban, his flowing trousers, his scimitar, pistols, and poniards. He had on a long yellow mackintosh, which did not, however, conceal a pair of black and white checked pantaloons, a red tie, and green vest, from each upper pocket of which projected an ivory-handled razor.

“Don’t forget the change, Mesroure.”

“No indeed, boss,” replied the blackamore, whistling “Mah Tiger Lily,” as he departed.

The Moslem provided Mr. Middleton with one of those pipes which in various parts of the Orient are known as narghilehs, hubble-bubbles, or hookabadours, and seeing his guest entirely at his ease, without ado began as follows:

“My name is Achmed Ben Daoud, and I am hereditary emir of the tribe of Al-Yam, which ranges on the border of that fortunate part of the Arabian peninsular known as Arabia the Happy. My youngest brother, Ismail, desirous of seeing the world, went to the court of Oman, where struck by his inimitable skill in narration, the imam installed him as royal story-teller. But having in the space of a year exhausted his stock of stories, the imam, who is blessed with an excellent memory, discovering that he was telling the same stories over again, shut him up in a tower constructed of vermilion stone quarried on the upper waters of the great river Euphrates. There my poor brother is to stay until he can invent a new stock of stories, but being utterly devoid of invention, only death or relenting upon the part of the imam could release him. Hearing of his plight, I went to the imam with the proposition that I seek out some other story-teller and that upon bringing him to Muscat, my brother be released. But the imam exclaimed that he was tired of tales of genii and magicians, of enchantments and spells, devils, dragons, and rocs.

““These things are too common, too everyday. Go to the country of the Franks and bring me a story-teller who shall tell me tales of far nations, and I will release Ismail, and load him with treasure.’

““My Lord,’ said I, ‘peradventure no Frank story-teller will come. To guard against such eventuality, I will myself go to the lands of the Franks, there to learn of adventures worthy the ear of your highness. This I will do that my brother may be released from the vermilion tower.’

““Do this, and I will give him the vermilion tower and make him grand vizier of the dominions of Oman.’

“As hereditary emir of the tribe of Al-Yam, I am prince of a considerable population. My revenues are sufficient to support life becomingly. But desiring to escape attention, and moreover, feeling that I could better get in touch with all classes of the population, I have established here in Chicago a small bazaar for the sale of frankincense and myrrh, the balsam of Hadramaut and attar of roses from the vales of Nejd, coffee of Mocha—which is in Arabia the Happy—dates from Hedjaz, together with ornaments made from wood grown in Mecca and Medina. Such is my stock in trade.

By day, Mesrour and I dress like Feringhis. But at night, it pleases us to cast aside the stiff garb of the infidel for the flowing garments of my native land. Mesrour then delights to make the obeisances my rank deserves, but which in the presence of the giaours would excite mocking laughter. I have prospered. I have made acquaintances and have learned of many adventures. But I have made no friends. I have been much prepossessed by your bearing and feel that I would like to have you for a friend. I am also desirous of observing the effect of the tales of adventure I have been collecting. I need to acquire skill in the art of narration, and accordingly, I must have someone to tell them to, a person whose complaisance will cause him to overlook the faults of a novice. I am exceedingly anxious to have the distinguished honor of your company and if you have any evenings when you are at leisure, I should be only too glad to have you spend them here."

"I can come this day week," said Mr. Middleton.

"So be it. On that occasion I will tell you the tale of The Adventure of the Virtuous Spinster. I have not asked you your calling in life, for I am utterly without curiosity — —"

"I am a clerk in a law office," said Mr. Middleton, quickly, "where I perform certain tasks and at the same time study law, and it is my hope to be soon admitted to the bar."

Prince Achmed regarded him earnestly for a moment, and then withdrew to return with a sandalwood case in his hands. This he opened to disclose a leathern-bound volume. Upon the cover was stamped a great gilt monogram of letters in some strange language. The edges were stained a brilliant and peculiarly vivid green. The pages were of fine pearl-colored vellum, covered with strange characters in black. Each chapter began with a great red initial surrounded by an illuminated design of many colored arabesques. It was indeed a volume to cause a book-lover to cry out with joy.

"Here is all the law man needs, the sacred Koran. Here is the beginning and end of law, the source of regulations that ensure righteous conduct, the precepts of Mohammed, prophet of Allah. If other laws agree with those of the Koran, they are needless. If they disagree, they are evil. Study this guide of life, my friend, and there will be no need to worry your brain with tomes of the presumptuous

wights who from their own imaginings dare attempt to dictate laws and impiously substitute them for the laws revealed to Mohammed from on high. Accept this gift and study it.”

With the sandalwood case containing the precious volume of the law under his arm, Mr. Middleton departed. After the lapse of three days, finding no immediate prospect of learning the Arabic language, and fearful of offending Prince Achmed if he returned the book, and having no possible use for it, he took it to a bibliophile, who exclaiming that it was the handiwork of a Mohammedan monastery of Damascus and bore on the cover the monogram of the fifth Fatimite caliph, and was therefore a thousand years old, he told Mr. Middleton that though it was worth much more, he could offer him but five hundred dollars, which sum the astonished friend of Achmed received in a daze, and departed to invest in a well located lot in a new suburb. Having no use for the sandalwood case after the Koran had been disposed of, he presented it to a young lady of Englewood as a receptacle for handkerchiefs.

Mr. Middleton said nothing of these transactions when on the appointed evening he once more sat in the presence of the urbane prince of the tribe of Al-Yam. Having handed him a bowl of delicately flavored sherbet, Achmed began to narrate *The Adventure of the Virtuous Spinster*.

## The Adventure of the Virtuous Spinster.

Miss Almira Johnson was a virtuous spinster, aged thirty-nine, who lived in a highly respectable boarding-house on the north side. Her days she spent in keeping the books of a large leather firm, in an office which she shared with two male clerks who were married, and a red-headed boy of sixteen, who was small for his age.

On the evening when my tale begins, Miss Almira, tastefully attired for her night's rest in a white nightgown trimmed with blue lace, was peeping under the bed for the ever-possible man, the nightly rite preliminary to her prayers. She fell back gasping in a vain attempt to scream, but not a sound could she give vent to. The precaution of years had been justified. *There lay a man!* He was habited in a very genteel frock-suit, patent-leather shoes, and although it must have caused him some inconvenience in his recumbent position, upon his head was a correct plug hat. The elegance and respectability of his garb somewhat reassured Miss Almira, who was unable to believe that one so appalled could have secreted himself under her bed for an evil purpose, when a new fear seized her, for arguing from this assumption, she concluded he must have been placed there by others and was, in short, dead. Whereupon, having to some degree recovered possession of herself, she was opening her mouth to scream at this new terror, when the man spoke.

"Listen before you scream, I pray thee, beauteous lady, darling of my life, pearl of my desires, star of my hopes."

The strangeness of the address and the unaccustomed epithets caused Miss Almira to forbear, for she could not hear what he had to say and scream at the same time, and, moreover, she remembered how twenty years before, Jake Long had fled, never to return to her side, when after telling her she was the sweetest thing in the world, she had screamed as his arms clasped about her in a bearish hug.

"Fair lady, ornament of your sex, hear the words of your ardent admirer before you blast his hopes."

As he uttered these words, the stranger extricated himself from his undignified position and sat down in a rocking chair before the

bureau. Miss Almira was more than ever prepossessed as she saw he wore white kid gloves and that in his shirt front gleamed a large diamond. He removed his hat, disclosing a heavy crop of black hair. He had blue eyes and a strong, clean-shaven face.

"For some time I have observed you and wondered how I was to realize my fondest hopes and make your acquaintance. All day you are in the office, where the two married men and the red-headed boy are always *de trop*. My employment is of a nature that takes me out nights. In fact, I teach a night school for Italians. To-day being an Italian holiday and so no school, and as there is a possibility I shall soon leave the city for an extended season, I have been unable to devise any other means of declaring myself before the time for my departure. Pray pardon me for the abruptness and importunity of my declaration, pray forgive me for the unusual way which I have taken to secure an interview alone with you. But if you only knew the ardor of my love, my impatience—oh, would that our union could be effected this very night!"

Ravished by the elegance of the stranger both in his outward seeming and his converse, melted by the warmth of a romantic devotion almost unknown in these degenerate days, though common enough of yore, Miss Almira paused a moment in the proud compliance of one about to gladly bestow an inestimable, but hardly hoped-for gift, and crying, "It can be done, it shall be done," threw herself into the cavalier's arms.

"How so?" asked the stranger, after Miss Almira had disengaged herself at the elapse of a proper interval.

"Why, the Rev. Eusebius Williams has the next room. We will call him."

"But," said the stranger, "I thought the occupant of the next room was Mr. Algernon Tibbs, a gentleman from the country, who has recently sold a large number of hogs here in the city and has been ill in his room for a space by reason of a contusion on the head from a gold brick, which was, so to speak, twice thrown at his head, once figuratively as a ridiculously fine bargain which he refused to take, and again when the owner, angered, struck him with the rejected gold."

"I see," said Miss Almira archly, "that in planning for this, you have tried to study the lay of the land; but be gratified, sir, for the lucky chance which prevented a sad mistake. Mr. Tibbs and I do occupy adjoining rooms. But the one Mr. Tibbs occupies is really mine. To-day we exchanged and I will remain here for the four or five days Mr. Tibbs is to be in the city. He has a large sum of money in his possession, so we all infer. At any rate, he was afraid to sleep in this room, where there is a fire escape at the window, and took mine, where an unscalable wall prevents access. Suppose the Italian holiday had been last night and you had come then. He would then have taken you for a robber, notwithstanding that anybody could see you are a gentleman."

For the first time did Miss Almira become conscious she was not robed as one should be while receiving callers, and blushing violently, she leaped into bed, whence she bid the stranger retire for a bit until she could dress, when they would invoke the kindly offices of the Rev. Eusebius Williams.

"Your name," she called, as the stranger was about to retire.

"My name," said he impressively, "which will soon be yours, is Breckenridge Endicott."

"Mulvane," said Mr. Breckenridge Endicott to himself, noiselessly descending the stairs, "what if she had screamed before you had pulled yourself together and thought of that stunt? You didn't get old Tibb's money, but you did get—away."

Mr. Endicott tried the front door. To his apparent annoyance, there was no bolt, no knob to unlock it, and key there was none. In the parlors, he could hear the voices of boarders.

"No way there, Mulvane," said Mr. Endicott. "I'll go into the kitchen and walk out the back door. If there's anybody there, they'll think me a new boarder."

But he started violently and stood for some moments trembling for no assignable reason, as he saw in front of the range a fat German hired girl sitting in the lap of a fat Irish policeman.

"No go through Almira's room to the fire escape. But perhaps I can get out on the roof and get away somehow. She can't have

dressed so soon," and he ascended the stairs to run plump into Miss Almira, who popped out of her room, resplendent in a rustling black silk.

"Oh, you impatient thing," said Miss Almira, shaking a reproofing finger. "I put this on, and then I thought I ought to wear something white, and so came out to tell you not to get impatient waiting, and why I kept you so long," and back she popped.

"You are up against it, Mulvane," said Mr. Breckenridge Endicott, sitting disconsolately down upon the stairs. "Hold on, just the thing. Why, as her husband, you'll live here unsuspected and get in with old Tibbs. Why, the job will be pie. It won't be mean to her, either. When you just vanish, she'll have 'Mrs.' tacked to her name, and that'll help her. It will be lots of satisfaction. They can't call her an old maid. 'Better 'tis to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.' I'll give her some of the boodle. She isn't bad looking. Wonder why nobody ever grabbed on to her. If I had enough to live well, I'd marry her myself and settle down."

The Rev. Eusebius Williams, with ten dollars fee in his right pantaloons pocket, and the radiant Almira, did not look happier during the wedding ceremony than did Mr. Breckenridge Endicott.

It was seldom that Mr. Endicott was absent from the side of his wife during the next few days. Occasionally pleading urgent business, he left her to go down town with Mr. Tibbs, whom he was seeking to interest in a plan to extract gold from sea water, a plan upon which Mr. Tibbs looked with some favor, for as presented by Mr. Endicott, it was one of great feasibility and promised enormous profits. In the setting forth of the method of extraction, Mr. Endicott was much aided by his wife, who overhearing him in earnest consultation with Mr. Tibbs bounded in and demanded to know what it was all about. Mr. Endicott demurred, saying it was an abstruse matter which should not burden so poetical a mind as hers. But Mr. Tibbs set it forth to her briefly. Having in her youth made much of the sciences of chemistry and physics, to the great amaze and admiration of Mr. Endicott, she launched into a most lucid explication of the practicability of the plan, leaving Mr. Tibbs more than ever inclined to venture his thousands.

"By Jove, she'll do, Mulvane. Why cut and run? Take her along. She is a splendid grafter," said Mr. Endicott to himself, as he and his wife withdrew from the presence of Mr. Tibbs. "My dear," he continued aloud, "I was overcome by respect for the way you aided me. You are indeed a jewel. I had never suspected you understood me, knew what I was, until you came in and explained that sucker trap. You are a most unexpected ally. You perceive clearly how the thing works?"

"Why, of course, Breckenridge. I have not studied science in vain, though I do not recall what part of the machine you call 'sucker trap'. Doubtless the contrivance marked 'converter,' in the drawings. Of course I understood you, right from the first, a noble, noble man, and so romantic. But Brecky, dear, why let other people share in this invention? Why not make all the money ourselves and become million, millionaires? I shall build churches and libraries and support missionaries. Why let Mr. Tibbs, who is a somewhat gross person, enjoy any of the fruits of your genius?"

Whereupon Mr. Endicott's face took on an expression of deep disappointment, disillusionment, and sorrow, until seeing his own sorrow mingled with alarm reflected on his wife's face, he presently announced that they would depart on their wedding journey by boat for Mackinac three days hence.

"I shall stop fiddle-faddling and settle the business which delays me here, at one stroke. The old simple methods are the best."

As Mr. and Mrs. Breckenridge Endicott were entering their cab to drive to the wharf, Mrs. Maxon, the landlady, came hurriedly with the scandal that Mr. Algernon Tibbs had been found in his room in the stupor of intoxication.

"Why, he might have been robbed while in that condition," said Mrs. Maxon.

"He will not be robbed while under your roof," said Mr. Endicott gallantly. "He is safe from robbing now. He will not, he cannot, I may say, be robbed now."

The sun was touching the western horizon as the steamer glided out of the river's mouth. The wind lay dead upon the water, and for a space the pair sat in the tender light of declining day indulging in

the pleasures of conversation, but at length Mr. Endicott led his wife to their stateroom.

"On this auspicious day, I wish to make you a gift," and he handed her a thousand dollars in bills. "My presence is now required on the lower deck for a time. Be patient during my absence," whereupon he embraced her with an ardor he had never shown before and there was in his voice a strange ring of regret and longing such as Almira had never listened to. It thrilled her very soul and bestowing upon him a shower of passionate kisses and an embrace of the utmost affection, their parting took on almost the agony of a parting for years.

"Where the devil is that coal passer Mullanphy, I gave a job to?" said the engineer on the lower deck. "Is he aboard?"

"His dunnage is in his bunk, but nobody ain't seen him," replied one of the crew.

"Who the devil is that geezer in a Prince Albert and a plug hat that just went in back there, and what the devil is he up to?" said the engineer again, as a black-clothed figure passed toward the stern.

A few moments later, a sturdy man in a jumper and overalls, his face smeared with grime, peered cautiously around a bulkhead, and seeing nobody, stepped quickly to the side of the vessel, bearing a limp and spineless figure in a black frock and silk hat. With a dextrous movement, he cast the thing forth, and as it went flopping through the air and slapped the water, from somewhere arose the voice of Mr. Breckenridge Endicott crying, "Help! help! help!"

Mrs. Endicott, full of dole at the absence of her spouse and oppressed with a nameless disquiet, had paced the upper deck impatiently, and at this moment stood just above where her beloved went leaping to his doom. With one wild scream, she jumped, she scrambled, she fell to the lower deck, colliding with a man leaning out looking at the sinking figure. Down, with a vain and frantic clutching at the side that only served to stay his fall so that he slipped silently into the water under the vessel's counter, went the unfortunate man.