

XVII

DARKNESS AND DAYBREAK IN PERSIA

ONE can never forget the first sight of a Moslem woman—that veiled figure, moving silently through the streets, so enshrouded that face and form are completely concealed. Men and women pass each other with no greeting or token of recognition, and if a wife accompanies her husband, she never walks beside him, but at a respectful distance behind, and neither gives a sign that they belong together.

A woman's first instinct is to efface herself. Even the poor, washing clothes in the street at the water-course, pull their tattered rags over their faces. The Persian expression for women, "those who sit behind the curtain," shows that their place is silence and seclusion. When the closed carriage of a princess passes, her servants, galloping before, order all men to turn their faces to the wall, though all they could possibly see would be carefully veiled figures. The beggar sitting on the ground at the street corner is equally invisible under her cotton *chader*, as with lamentable voice she calls for mercy on the baby in her arms.

During the month of mourning, we often pass a brilliantly lighted mosque, where men sit sipping