

DAUGHTER OF THE ORIENT

Charlotte Marie Victoire Jorelle turned in front of the mirror. She liked what she saw. A light transparent blouse, as white and fragrant as the flowers of the jasmine framing her window, discreetly showing off her physical advantages. The long-cut sleeves were trimmed with delicate Parisian lace, ensnaring her narrow wrists.

A forge of flat-hammered golden platelets, woven together with filigree chain links, lay around her neck like a cloak. A pair of powder pink harem pants swirled around her hips. Golden embroidery and pearls, drop-shaped like tears turned to stone, graced the waistband of her pants, in the belt a dagger, its diamond-tipped handle catching the light of the setting sun and throwing back glittering sparkles upon the ceiling. A sleeveless bolero of fine burgundy camel wool and embroidered with silk threads of the same color completed her outfit.

Charlotte brushed her long, dark hair, slowly, diligently, the chocolate-colored splendor cascading like a waterfall down her back. She opened the wooden casket in front of her and removed a gold-plated band which she handed to her maid, who weaved it into the curls let loose, lending an additional shine to Charlotte's appearance. Charlotte emphasized her charcoal eyes with kohl. A few tweaks in her cheek made them bloom in shy pink.

Happy with her appearance Charlotte stepped onto the terrace and was greeted by the admiring glances of her husband. Every time Félix Guillaume Jorelle saw his wife, he marveled that he could call such an exotic being his own. He first met Charlotte when he took up his post as the second Drogman at the French consulate in Aleppo. A Drogmann was a mediator between the languages of this East and the Occident. And the interface between both cultures. Charlotte was married to the first Drogmann Jean Joseph Antoine Derché at the time. When Derché died, it was a matter of honor for Félix Guillaume to ask for the hand of the young widow and mother.

Charlotte descended from the wealthy Venetian Durighello family. As the youngest member of this merchant dynasty with little prospect of inheriting the family fortune, her father, Angelo Durighello, left Italy towards the end of the 18th century, seeking his fortune in Aleppo. Aleppo was a trading city in the Ottoman Empire, on the brink of flourishing into a thriving center of commerce. The trade route between East and West ran right through the city, merchants and traders from the Orient and Occident met in the souk, the vibrant heart of the city. In the hustle and bustle of the market, they bargained with each other, bought and sold spices, exquisite silk, precious ebony or rare gemstones. Merchants like Angelo Durighello, delivered the merchandise to European centers to quench the growing thirst for luxury goods of their inhabitants from a distance.

Félix came from a family of impoverished winegrowers. When the income of the

family winery could no longer feed the family, his father Francois left Mery-sur-Oise, the village where his ancestors settled centuries ago and began working in the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His mentor not only supported him, but made sure, that his sons, Félix Guillaume, Jean-Jacques Francoise and Joseph Hélois, enjoyed an education, otherwise reserved for nobility, opening the doors for the boys to enter the diplomatic service.

Charlotte looked into the distance. The first fall storms had washed away the dust of the summer from plants and houses. Small white foam crests on the sea, dissolving into nothing, when they reached the shore, remained as the last witnesses of the weather of the past days. In the port of Beyrouth, ships, waiting to be unloaded moved up and down on the waves, nervous like frightened birds. Others were preparing for the long sea voyage with which they would bring their much sought-after freight, into the metropolises of Europe, awaited by the wealthy and beautiful.

Behind the harbor, the summer residence of the French consul perched upon a slight elevation. Beneath it whitewashed houses sticking the slopes, like honeycombs to a tree. In between the houses silvery olive groves glittered in the evening sun. Charlotte turned her back to the sight and viewed the table that was set for her guests in the wooden gazebo in the garden like a hawk observing his prey. A poet and his entourage had announced their arrival this evening. They would be guests of the Consulate's residence for a few days before they could move into their own quarters. Alphonse Lemartine, the poet, was accompanied by his wife and ten-year-old daughter.

The sound of horse's hooves clattering heralded the visitors' approach. A pale man, dressed in a light summer suit, emerged from the coach, followed by a woman in a heavy turquoise taffeta dress and a lively blond-laced child. Félix Guillaume welcomed the arrivals and led them to the terrace where Charlotte was waiting for them. It was the poet's first trip to the Orient, and although he had read a lot about his destination, Charlotte's oriental appearance astonished him. He had never seen a woman in pants and was left speechless by her sight. Later, in his travel journal, Lemartine wrote admiringly, that the women of the Orient enjoyed a freedom that European women never would.

Félix Guillaume inquired his guest after his trip. After the poet's portrayal of the harsh cruise, the company sat down at the heavily laden table for a sumptuous French style evening meal. The mixture of the Oriental and the Occidental fascinated Lemartine and the conversation turned to the virtues of French and Oriental culture. Comparisons were made, and the parties concluded that both cultures resided in excellent harmony. Then the discussion turned to the enumeration of common and non-common acquaintances.

Bored by the discourse of the adults, the poet's daughter turned her attention to the Nubian servants. Full of admiration she watched the ebony-skinned women as they served food with an inborn elegance and cleared away empty plates and bowls. Timidly, she reached out to one of the women to stroke her velvety skin. The woman stopped next to the child and wound a turban around the child's head with the colorful silk handkerchief she had wrapped around her hips. The red threads of the scarf hung down like emerald

chains, caressing the girl's radiant heart-shaped face. For the first time, Lemartine sensed the delicate bud of femininity concealed in his child's body.

The conversation turned to poetry, and Lemartine quoted from his poems and works of contemporary French poets. Charlotte, devoted to oriental poetry, translated passages from Ottoman volumes of poetry. Lemartine looked at her. The light rising moon sparked off a copper-colored fire in her hair. A light breeze rose. The candles flickered, their soft light caressing the face of the hostess. Charlotte's eyes were now as deep and infinite as the darkness of night.

"Nature is much more poetic than any poet could ever be," Lemartine whispered to her. "At this moment, at this hour, in this place, in the light of the rising moon, Madame, with your water-pipe in your hand and the diamond dagger in your belt, you set a much better example for poetry than the imagination can ever do." Upon that Charlotte bent over to and asked him in a husky voice, if he could write down a few lines for her. He rose and appeared shortly afterwards with the poem "Daughter of the Orient" in his hands.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The persons in the story are historically documented persons. The story is based on true events.

Charlotte Durighello was born November 24th, 1809 to the Venetian merchant Angelo Durigello and his Dutch-French wife Celeste Vailhen in Aleppo. She married Félix Guillaume in 1829 in Paris. Charlotte died June 27th, 1875 in Paris. She was buried together with her third husband **Gustave Adolphe Haagein** the [Père-Lachaise Cemetery](#), in which many celebrities have found their final peace.

Felix Guillaume Jorelle was the son of Francoise Jorelle and Marie Piérette Merlot born in 1804 in Paris. He died in 1859 in Alexandria, Egypt after more than 30 years in the diplomatic service.

Jean Joseph Antoine Derché was Charlotte's first husband. The couple had a son **Jean Joseph Antoine Derché** (1828 – 1878).

The couple's son **Ange Francois Jorelle** (1830 - 1877) followed in his father's diplomatic footsteps. Other sons of Charlotte and Félix Guillaume were Richard and Guillaume. Richard worked as an agent of the Austro-Hungarian Lloyd in Jeddah in the 1870s. Nothing is known about Guillaume.

Their daughter **Stéphanie Jorelle** (about 1854 - about 1931) married **Percy Sinnett-Smith** (1850 - 1904), son of William Sinnett-Smith, a British Doctor of Medicine and Harriette Eliza Oates in Naples. Percy was a merchant and Egyptophile.

Alphonse Lemartine was a well-known French poet and politician. He was married to an English artist. Their daughter Julia died on the way to Palestine. His wife returned home after their daughter's death. Lemartine

himself finished the journey as planned. His book "Pilgrimage to the Holy Land" was written after the trip. He wrote the poem "Daughter of the Orient" during his stay with the Jorelle family.

© 2018 EGIZIA FAMILY / Barbara Ras Wechsler