

forgive the insult if Inarus is delivered over to the queen, and not even the arts of Amytis will avail to turn away his vengeance. Thou knowest, Arrion, that the King hath no such general. Megabysus is strong in Syria; all the province will be at his back. Let the King beware!"

"Canst thou not warn the King, Themistocles?"

"I have not seen his Majesty of late, for all night upon the temple tower I have watched with the priests for the eclipse. But thou art ever at the palace. Artaxerxes plays at dice, thou sayest."

"Ever at dice with Hamestris, and yesterday I heard the eunuchs whispering, it was for the life of Inarus they played."

"Ah, 'tis too likely," said Themistocles, with a deep sigh. "The king is wearied of Hamestris' tongue and thinks to end the matter thus. 'Tis madness, Arrion, 'tis madness."

Thus they spoke, Arrion and The-

mistocles, as they neared the city gates. Nothing was heard but the dip of the oars, the gentle rippling of the stream. As they rested together on the cushions of their boat, they grew silent under the reposeful beauty of the night, speaking little while they floated down the stream. The stars hung sparkling like golden lilies in the quiet sky.

"Hast marked the planet deities?" asked the Greek after a pause. "Perhaps they are divine, we know not, but surely they are glorious to-night. Dost mark Ishtar, queen of stars? She is as radiant as a virgin chosen for the King. And dost see the moon-god Sin, how he has furled his glory? He is like a folded lily-bud, all whitely faint and pale, and bends towards Ishtar like a suppliant lover, methinks he sighs for her as Artaxerxes pines for Miriam, and chooses thus to hide his glory."

"Miriam?" Arrion started. "Miriam? Didst thou say Miriam?"



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The aged Greek looked sharply at his young companion. They were floating now past the great outer wall, which cast a gigantic shadow over the river. The gate with its jagged teeth sank sullenly behind the barge as it passed through. The boatmen had set blazing torches at the bow to guide them, and as they emerged from the great shadow of the wall, the light falling on Arrion, showed a face as white as carved ivory.

"Miriam, yes. She whom the Babylonians call Ishtar after their goddess. Knowest thou of her, Arrion? The fame of her beauty runs wide about the city. She is wondrously instructed as an acolyte of the temple, so I hear. No equal hath she," he looked at Amytis where she lay, "no, not even our royal princess."

"I know a Miriam," Arrion answered slowly, "a maiden of my people, gently nurtured and instructed, but guarded very closely by her mother. This cannot be she. How could the King—" he stopped

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hesitating. "Her father's name?" he demanded suddenly, "Speak."

"Zamanadin, the merchant," answered Themistocles, "and he is dead."

There was a silence. Arrion's head sank upon his breast.

"What meaneth this Arrion? Didst thou not know that the people call her Ishtar, and that for a full moon she has been in the palace?"

"No, no," answered Arrion, in deep excitement, "I knew naught of it."

"Didst thou hear no rumour that Ishtar had been seen walking in the streets of Babylon?"

"Yes, I heard it, but I paid no heed, for the city is ever rife with the report of signs and wonders. It was she, Miriam?"

"So Alorus told me, and 'twas the Princess doubtless gossiped with him. 'Tis not to be wondered at, my lad, thou knowest our King—when the fame of her beauty reached the palace Artaxerxes sent for this maiden, and she is now a prisoner in the



harem of Hamestris. Hadaspia's star wanes faintly, I doubt not the Jewish maid will soon be exalted to her place as reigning queen. 'Tis strange thou hast heard naught of this. When I was young, Arrion, as thou, methinks I was better informed in these soft matters. Would I might see this fair lily of thy garden."

"Thou knowest, Themistocles," said Arrion, trying to control his shaking voice, "except at the feast of the New Year, the women do not leave the harem. I heard indeed that Artaxerxes wearied of the queen; I heard the eunuchs babbling of a new beauty. O, master," he burst suddenly into a smothered cry, "I dreamed not it was she."

Themistocles' smile of curiosity changed to an expression of grave concern, and he bent and looked in Arrion's face. "What is she to thee, Arrion?"

"Her father was my kinsman," he answered almost fiercely, "ere he died he betrothed the maid to me."

"To thee?" Themistocles' voice was troubled and reproachful. "And thou hast kept this secret from me?"

"O, master!" 'twas too deep within my heart. As the high heavens she is pure. Ah, no, I could not speak of her."

Themistocles bent a puzzled look upon his young companion. "How comes it, Arrion, that thou art ignorant she had left her home?"

Arrion bent his head. "I have been straightly hindered from my monthly visit to her. Nehemiah has been absent at Susa. The King's cupbearer, as thou knowest, must be ever at his side."

"True, Arrion, and thou hast no message from her?"

"None, master, none. She may send no message to the outer world, once she is within her prison. O, Themistocles! what can I do? Why should she be summoned to the palace? Are there not enough maidens among the Persians and Babylonians?"



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"The harem of Artaxerxes is no place for a free-born Jewish maiden," replied Themistocles, "And I know, Arrion, 'tis no honour to the women of your people: but a worse fate might be hers."

"A worse! O, master, what meanest thou?"

"Didst know that Niotis, the high priestess, was found lifeless in the temple yester morn?"

"Yes, yes, I heard it, on the golden couch. Was she slain? And what has that to do with Miriam?"

"As thou knowest, Arrion, Niotis was old and the priests were weary of her."

"Liars and beasts! I heard the rumour."

"As I told thee I passed the night upon the tower watching for the eclipse, and in the darkness I heard them whispering, Hadar and Ashpenaz, the high priests of the temple. They also had heard the rumour of her beauty. Thou knowest also that when the high priestess dies, one

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among the maidens of the city is chosen to take her place, to sacrifice at the altar in the temple and at night to mount the winding stair which leads from stage to stage without the ziggurat. There the high priest,—'tis cruel, Arrion,—brands her upon the forehead with the sacred sign of Bel. Then alone, marked with his sign she waits her bridegroom in the upper shrine. There is the golden couch, the golden table, with its offerings and viands spread for the God. Thou knowest?"

"I know, Themistocles," answered Arrion, twixt his set teeth, "and well I know that no God descends to that couch and table. But the King's will is mighty even against the priests. He will not give her up to them?"

"'Tis the same, I fear," replied Themistocles, "whether she be wife or priestess first. The King's she will be, the priests perhaps may wait."

"Ah, Themistocles, Themistocles,"



cried Arrion in terror, "can no one save her?"

Themistocles put his hand on Arrion's shoulder and looked into his troubled face.

"Thou lovest her so dearly, Arrion?"

The youth was silent for a moment, then throwing himself at Themistocles' feet, he looked with a frank confidence into the grave and kindly face.

"As my own soul, Master."

"And Amytis?"

Arrion bent his head, a dark flush mounting to his cheek, then he looked fairly at Themistocles.

"I did not forget Miriam. Always from our childhood, she was mine. My thoughts flowed ever deeply with my love for her. But she was absent from my sight, and the Princess,—” he paused a moment, "thou knowest, Themistocles, her eyes full often smiled upon me."

"Yes, yes," replied the Greek indulgently, "I know Arrion, 'tis not strange, and now,—"

"O, master! My heart is bursting. She is mine, the maid is mine! They may not take her from me."

Themistocles looked at Arrion's face so youthful and winning in its frank abandonment, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. "Does the King know of this, Arrion?" he asked gravely.

"None hath known it, Master, if I told not thee."

"Yet he loves thee, Arrion."

"I dare not tell him. What am I? His favourite while I please him. Thou knowest Artaxerxes, would he resign her to a servant in his palace, now that she hath found favour in his sight?"

Themistocles looked with a mixture of curiosity and affection upon his young companion.

"Is she fair? Tell me, Arrion, how seemeth she?"

"She is tall, Themistocles, and gravely beautiful as an evening sky. Her eyes are like a river pool at night, dark and yet



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shining where it reflects the stars,—her voice, how shall I tell thee? 'tis like the sound of lutes and dulcimers afar. When she speaks, my soul hears and all the drops of my blood rush to obey her."

Themistocles smiled as he listened, but his eyes were grave.

"And wise is she, they say, as wise as beautiful?"

"Wise, yes, from a child she seemed to know all that her father, all her masters taught her; yet simple and gentle as her doves."

"She loveth thee, Arrion?"

Arrion's voice choked in his throat.

"Oh, all unworthy, yes. She hath known none but me, and when last I left her at the threshold of her door, she bent, my queen of stars, and kissed the dust from off my sandal."

Themistocles' eyes brimmed over with tears, his warm heart touched to quick compassion, but he lingered to reply. He knew too well the caprices of the vo-

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luptuous King, the power and corruption of the priests.

"Have patience," at last he said, "have patience. The King has need of counsel and of service, and if the life of Inarus is given to Hamestris, he may have need of generals. Wait. I may find a way to help thee, but if not,—if there be no way?"

"Then I will help her to a lesser evil," answered Arrion, desperately, "Miriam shall never suffer such a fate."

"Wiser counsels, wiser counsels," repeated Themistocles, compassionately, caressing the youth's dark curls. "See, we have reached the palace gate; Artaxerxes' attendants await thee."

The boat drew up to the steps which led down to the river's brink. Within the gate stood a guard of slaves and eunuchs holding torches to light the way. In the distance rose the terraces of the King's palace, gleamed the gilded splendour of the guardian bulls, speading mighty wings and raising their solemn priest-like faces



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to the sky. Arrion alighted with Themistocles, and followed the King and Amytis as they walked towards the palace.

"Ah, Themistocles," sighed Arrion, raising his young face to the soft radiance of the dawning day, "Ah, Master! Spring is sad."

III

It was the first quarter of the day. The water-clock had dropped a single pebble into its resounding basin, and the courtyard of a large dwelling in the Jews' quarter echoed faintly to this matinal music. It was the house of Mariamne, widow of Zamanadin, a banker among the captive Jews, who had grown rich in the abundant commerce of Babylon. Dying in full manhood, he had left this large house and an ample fortune to his widow and to Miriam, his only child.

To comfort her solitude and occupy the long days of her widowhood, Mariamne continued her busy occupations and had become proficient in the art of weaving the brilliant carpets for which Babylon was famous, and with which it was her pleasure to adorn her house. She excelled also