

strangely slow and lagging, and in truth, there remained but little time before the clock should drop twin pebbles to announce the second quarter of the day. The sun was rising in the sky, when Tirzah, watching at the gate, suddenly called out in joy:

"I see her, Mistress. Miriam cometh. 'Tis the litter of the Queen."

Up the long avenue it came, between the windowless, painted walls of the tall houses, an open litter, drawn by mules, whose tasseled tinkling harnesses made a pleasant music in the echoing street. One eunuch guided the mules, another held a golden umbrella above the heads of the two women who reclined on the scarlet cushions, while a slave girl waved a long fan of ostrich plumes before their faces to cool the heated air, and to ward off the many flies which buzzed about them in the sunlight. A joyous spectacle! for it was indeed Miriam following soon her messenger. But who was this who

was conducting her? A figure royally clad and laden with this sparkling weight of gems? Mariamne heeded not, she saw only the girl, who leaped lightly to her feet as the litter drew up to the open gates and fled into her mother's arms. Speechlessly Mariamne clasped her recovered child, while the tears stole from under her closed lids and wet the smooth cheek of the girl and thus for a moment they stood, a moment of silent joy, keenly alike to grief. Then Mariamne raised her eyes, and saw under the lifted veil of her who stood beside her daughter, the beautiful face of Amytis, sister of the King. Many rumours of the splendid beauty and caprices of this princess of the house of Xerxes had penetrated to the retirement of the widowed Mariamne, but never had she or any of her household looked upon her face before. The splendid eyes, darkened to a deeper brilliancy and lengthened after the modish fashion of the Egyptians to a longer oval, looked kindly now upon Ma-

riamne, as she knelt and kissed the hem of her dress, the petulant red lips smiled with an indulgent condescension upon the maidens standing awe-struck and silent in the presence of the royal beauty.

"Rise Mariamne," said Amytis laying her hand upon the kneeling woman. "I have brought thy daughter to thee. Be not afraid," and she turned to Miriam who came to her side in obedience to her smile.

"The way was long from the palace, and the sun riseth in the sky. I am athirst and weary. Wilt give me to drink?"

Overcome by the favour of the Princess and her gracious remarks, Mariamne hastened to lead Amytis to a seat under the shadow of the house beside the flower-strewn table, and her maidens poured water over the sill in honour of her coming and with low obeisances offered her fruit and wine.

But Miriam flitted about her home, childishly happy and free. Bending to

her dog, who gamboled about her, her long curls hanging about her face, she spoke gayly to him and caressed him. Running lightly up the stairs which led without the house, she paused midway and called and crooned to the doves who perched in the balcony above her.

Amytis turned to look upon her, a curious, reluctant admiration in her eyes. The beauty of this Jewish girl was singularly noble and arresting. Dark liquid eyes as gravely tranquil as a child's were set under brows arched like a goddess'. In repose her face had a mysterious gravity, an enchanting serenity and sweetness, as if she thought of things afar, but it was mobile and changed as quickly as an April sky. She had been serious enough when first she fled into her mother's arms, but now her eyes were lit with sparkling, child-like joy. Standing there above them in the brilliant sunshine, with her doves fluttering about her, she seemed the very spirit of returning Spring. Her young

voice rippled from her rosy, smiling lips like a bird's song. Mariamne still looked towards her royal guest, who turned again and spoke to her.

"Look, Mother Mariamne, look! The doves all know me," the fresh young voice called out. "Come, my bright eyes! Come to Miriam!" Fluttering, a dove flew down and perched upon her shoulder.

"Look, Mother! Do look!" the girl cried again. "Ah! my faithful bird, well hast thou brought my message." And she caressed its smooth dark head with grateful words. Then with a rush of wings the others flew about her, peering in her face, lighting on her shoulders, and on her young, white arms, which curved to hold them to the light.

Tirzah and Judith looked towards their young mistress with adoring eyes, but Mariamne and her royal visitor were in deep converse and Miriam, looking down upon her, saw that her mother's face was grave.

"Come down, Miriam. Come, my sweet one," said Mariamne, looking towards her daughter. "The Princess would have speech with thee." Still holding the messenger dove perched upon her outstretched hand, the maiden stepped lightly down the stair. The golden fringe of her dress swayed about her slender, sandalled feet. The blue texture of her light scarf fell back from her white arms, the long, dark hair, blue-black and shining as the wing of her dove, swept in curling shadows back from the tender, joyful face, as, confident and happy, she came to her mother and knelt beside her where she sat. Amytis, leaning back upon the cushions of her chair, looked out from under her half-closed eyelids upon the girl and her mother, with a lazy imperial smile. The beauty and innocence of the young Jewess pleased her fancy and it suited her for the moment to further the wishes of her royal brother. Too deeply versed in the scandalous and often bloody intrigues

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of the court, this little episode flattered her sense of power and occupied an empty day.

Mariamne bent anxiously to her daughter's uplifted face and watched gravely its expressions.

"Amytis brings me a strange message for thee, Miriam," she said, "thou hast not thought of what it may be?"

"No, Mother," answered the girl, "the Princess is wondrously kind."

"I would be kinder," said Amytis. "Listen, Miriam, thou hast found favour in the eyes of the King, honour above all that cometh to women may be thine, wilt listen?"

The girl's face grew grave and pale. "O, lady, what meanest thou?"

"I mean," Amytis rose and with a royal gesture held her hands to Miriam, "My brother loveth thee, he would exalt thee to be his queen."

Miriam turned a frightened glance up to her mother's face. "O, my mother,"

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she cried, and covering her face with her hands, she crouched lower against the knees of Mariamne.

Amytis looked for a moment upon the girl, and astonishment grew to anger in her face:

"What meaneth this," she cried, "is it thus the messenger of Artaxerxes is received in the house of his subjects? Is it thus ye welcome the favour of the great King?"

Miriam cast herself at the feet of Amytis.

"O, lady, be merciful to me! I am sore afraid. I know not what to answer thee. Why should a Jewish maiden be chosen for the King?"

"Thou art fair," said Amytis, her dark face softening, "my brother loveth thee, be not afraid."

"But, Hadaspia, the Queen," she faltered.

Amytis interrupted her imperiously. "What knowest thou, girl, of the will of

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Artaxerxes? I tell thee, thou shalt be exalted above all women in the harem, all honour shall be thine."

Miriam bowed her head again and was silent.

"Mariamne," Amytis spoke again impatiently, "What meaneth this silence, speak to thy daughter."

Mariamne's face was white and fearful, but she rose and stood before the Princess and gravely answered.

"O, Amytis! Princess, let not thy anger fall upon her. I know not how to force my daughter. From a child she was gentle, gentle as her doves, but never could we move her from her will, be patient with her and she will answer thee."

"Be it so then," replied Amytis, "if the sister of the King must wait the maiden's pleasure," and with an amused smile she gazed upon the lovely child. "Like thy mother, then, I wait thy answer, Miriam!"

The girl looked up and seeing the in-

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dulgent smile on the beautiful face, she took courage and throwing out her hands in supplication,

"O! Princess," she said, "thou art kind, spare thy handmaiden, I would not be a queen."

"Not be a queen?" Amytis' widely opened eyes gazed in astonishment at the mutinous uplifted face, "and wherefore?"

Miriam was silent again, but slowly over the lilylike whiteness of her face a bright flush mounted, like sunlight over snow, illuminating, telltale, as if the maiden spoke.

Amytis was a woman, versed in caprices, and gazing into the girl's eyes, she read her secret.

"Ah!" she said slowly, in a deep breath. "I see thy reason. 'Tis plain, by Ishtar, why thou wouldst not be a queen." Her lips curled haughtily. The girl's eyes filled with tears, but still she spoke not. Anger and curiosity gleamed in the eyes of Amytis.

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"Tell me his name," she cried suddenly, "the name of him thou lovest. I would know it."

Mariamne's motherly hand stole out to hold that of her daughter, solicitous to help her. "Tell her, daughter," she said to the hesitating girl.

Miriam's head drooped lower. "'Tis Arrion, the Cupbearer," fell faintly from her lips.

"Arrion! 'Tis Arrion?" Amytis' voice was startled. A strange look of interest, of resentment, grew in her face, and as she looked down at the beautiful girl at her feet the smile on her lips grew bitter-sweet and menacing.

"Truly! A pretty couple! How is it that thou lovest him? 'Tis a willing maiden truly! Not a month at the palace and no speech with him. Still silent? Thou hast seen him secretly? How can this be? Doth he love thee, Miriam, thinkest thou?"

Miriam rose to her feet beside her

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mother, all her young face blazing with wounded pride, but when she tried to speak Mariamne checked her gently.

"Her father gave her to our kinsman Arrion," she answered with a grave dignity. "Ere his death they were betrothed, according to the customs of our people."

"Ah, be it so then," answered Amytis, with a hard laugh, "I will tell Artaxerxes that my mission findeth no favour with thee. 'Tis a sorry message and a dangerous." Her face was flushed and ominous, and she turned to her attendants, beckoning with an imperious gesture.

"It is time that we should return to the palace."

Miriam looked a moment keenly at the beautiful petulant face, and with a flash of thought, womanly, impulsive and courageous, she knelt again and clasped the dress of Amytis.

"Princess!" she cried appealingly, all her fair face ablush and archly smiling. "Tell me, wouldst thou give up love be-

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cause thou wert commanded, even by a King?"

The two women looked at one another, princess and subject maiden, and the truth spoke loud between them.

Many times had the will of her royal brother been defied by the capricious beauty, whose wayward charm was ever victorious. Like Artaxerxes she was headstrong and self-indulgent, but responsively generous and at moments noble. The loveliness and the spirit of the girl at her feet flew to her heart. The splendid eyes flashed an instant like swords in sunshine, then she laughed aloud.

"I, Amytis? Never, never," she cried, "thou speakest truth. But 'tis well for thee, my girl, that Amytis is thy messenger." She turned to Mariamne.

"Trust me," she said. "If the will of Amytis may avail, I will restore thy daughter to thee. She shall not wed the King."

Mariamne gazed with wonder at this

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woman who could at one moment command and threaten, and at the next so graciously forgive, and speechlessly she bowed and kissed the jewelled hand.

"May the God of our fathers protect thee. O, Amytis, may the favour of heaven abide with thee."

"I thank thee, Mariamne, and for thy daughter's sake I will protect thy house. But now give her again to me. 'Tis near the second quarter of the day; we must return. Miriam must pass the days of her service at the palace, but have no fear, she shall be guarded safely in the apartment of Hamestris. I will watch over her, and when the term of her service is full, I will conduct her to thee. There are other maidens for the harem of the King."

Then she veiled her face and motioned to her attendants. So with reluctant farewells Miriam left her home and wondering and silent, Mariamne and her maidens, lingering at the gate, watched their departure down the echoing street.