

*BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON*

great stairway of the temple. With a deep breath of thankfulness that the hour had come at last, Arrion entered the shrine and with hand on dagger he concealed himself behind the curtain and waited for the priests and Miriam.

XIII

At the moment when Arrion, staggering with fatigue, had set his foot upon the topmost shrine, Amytis in the palace lay alone upon the tumbled cushions of her couch. Curled up like a tigress she lay, her burning eyes shining with a sombre light from out the shadows of her darkened chamber. A single lamp of fragrant oil cast a flickering light upon the flushed face of the eunuch who slumbered heavily at the entrance. Save this one guard, Amytis had banished her attendants from her presence. The curtain which hung over the doorway swung slowly to and fro, the golden rosettes which weighted it clicked with a monotonous regularity upon the marble pavement. Without the air was nearly motionless even in the shad-



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owed court. The brooding sky was a clear indigo, lit by blazing stars which hung so near they seemed to hover in the treetops like a drift of fiery flowers. The fountains lisped their silver rhythms invitingly in the fragrant night, but Amytis lay within, for she was ill content.

Never had the indulged Princess been so angry and so unhappy. Miriam was at this very moment in the temple, a helpless victim of the priests. The white girl Amytis had so hated would no longer trouble her, and Arrion, he too was imprisoned in the darkness under her very feet, tortured with thoughts whose bitterness was worse than any death. Surely hate could devise no richer vengeance. But this was not joy which tore at her heart. Surely she was not weak enough to be sorry. She, Amytis! The beautiful face of the girl as she rode fearlessly among the frantic multitudes, with its vision of undaunted purity and courage, tormented her mind, and Arrion's calm contempt of

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her even in the moment of her triumph,—the memory of that look pierced her heart like a burning sword. What was there in these two young creatures which could not be subdued, this something which still eluded her? Amytis had seen slaves and captives put to torture and to death, but this high courage was quite new to her. She tossed restlessly upon her couch. Liberty and power were hers, but youth, but love,—ah! these she lacked, and for these she envied them with a burning hate and bitterness. Amytis was still magnificently beautiful, but age, like night, descends rapidly under the blazing eastern skies and she knew too well that soon both youth and beauty would be gone. It was for this that she had so loved the lad who had given her the only refusal of her long life of revel and of triumph. And love! There was something in that look which Arrion and Miriam gave each other there above the roaring multitude which she had never seen. What did it mean?



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She rose impatiently and began to walk up and down her chamber. Try as she might she could not banish these thoughts. They made a mockery of her triumph. Never could she forget that moment of humiliation when her utterance of the name of Miriam had driven Arrion almost from her arms. He had shuddered at the thought of the girl's belonging to the King, her brother, and now a worse fate was hers. It would not have harmed the young Jewess, so thought the angry Princess, to be exalted to the head of Artaxerxes' harem. The King might have made some bargain with the priests by which the jealous people could have been deceived. Amytis knew this well and would have aided her brother in such a plan. But after the insult which Arrion had put upon her, she kept silence, not even questioning the King, wondering at his supineness, but being more than content to let the girl go to her fate. In any case Arrion should not have her. She

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stopped in her uneasy walk and looked out upon the night. How stifling it was within! How slow the heavy hours! She rang a little bell and the eunuch approached, rubbing his sleepy eyes. Commanding him to follow her she stepped without into the garden. The fountain still lisped in liquid murmurs and sleepy birds cooed under the tree-roofs, but a duo of discordant monkeys mocked the still star-shine in an angry staccato. Amytis impatiently veiled her face and crossing the court, passed into one of the long corridors of the palace. At the door of the King's banqueting room she stopped an instant, looking within. The guests had all departed and attendants were picking up the empty wine-cups and extinguishing the lights. Amytis walked restlessly along the corridor and turning a corner encountered a group of excited soldiers surrounding a tall Ethiopian who was in evident distress.

With her veil closely wrapped about



her face she tried to walk by them, but the Princess was too well known to pass unperceived, and they were standing under one of the blazing torches of bitumen set high against the wall to light the corridors of the palace. As she came near they recognized her. The soldier to whom the Ethiopian was evidently explaining the cause of this excitement was the same one to whom the King had given Arrion in charge. Amytis stopped as she perceived this and the soldier approached her, bending to the floor.

"What does this mean?" she asked imperiously. "How darest thou prevent my passage?"

"Pardon, Princess, but it was into my charge that thou gavest the lord Arrion—"

"Even so," she answered with angry impatience, "and thou didst conduct him to the palace dungeon, didst thou not? Speak."

"Yes, your Highness, and left him

guarded under lock and stancheon in the deepest cell beneath the palace."

"Well! he remaineth there, I suppose. What is this to me?"

The trembling soldier laid his face in the dust, for well he knew the temper of Amytis.

"Speak!" she cried again. "Detain me not."

"The King's cupbearer has escaped," he answered at last in a low, frightened voice.

"Escaped!" Amytis answered quietly with sudden and ominous calm. "And how?"

The man rose to a kneeling posture pointing to the Ethiopian who had turned a livid grey under his brown skin. "The guard saith that as he opened the door of the cell to enter and give him to drink that he knocked him senseless tripping him upon the stones of the dungeon, and that when he came to himself his prisoner was no longer there."



"Ah, 'tis a likely tale he telleth," answered Amytis with a shrill laugh, as she looked with contempt upon the Ethiopian. "Arrion overpower that giant! 'Tis absurd, impossible."

The Ethiopian here began to relate how it happened, repeating with a frightened reiteration the story of the soldier.

It was true then, he had escaped. No use to stop and parley.

"Rise," she said to the terror-stricken soldier, "and thou, slave, get thee to the dungeon thou hast so ill guarded. Well for thee, I do not have thy head. Begone, prevent me no longer."

In another instant her hurrying feet had carried her out of the palace. That girl again! Was there ever such a piece of provoking beauty! All Babylon had assembled to gaze upon her, she was coveted by the priests, desired by the King, loved by Arrion, who could work miracles for her sake. Nothing was more certain than that he had escaped from prison and gone

to the temple to save her. Anger and jealousy raged again in her heart as she fled rapidly through the outer court of the palace, past the gates and out into the city street. It was madness for her to venture thus into the streets at night with this solitary attendant. What matter? She must get to the temple without an instant's delay, warn the priests, find some way, whatever it might be, to stop Arrion, to prevent his saving the girl from Hadar. Amytis knew what he would try to do. She could see him now, mounting the temple tower, struggling with the priest. And he was strong, he had overpowered the prison guard, had saved her own life. Ah! only to reject her love and gratitude, her hurrying breath choked in her throat, "Never, never would she forgive him." She sped on breathlessly with her attendant, past the flaring torches which cast a wavering shadow over their two figures as they hurried rapidly along.

On, on, she fled through the thick dark-



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ness. There was no moon, only the stars which shone brightly through the sultry night. A heavy silence seemed to brood over the exhausted city. Scarcely a passer-by in all the silent streets. They kept ever in the shadows crossing the wide thoroughfares to skirt the towering walls which guarded the banks of the river. In the silence Amytis could hear the rushing of the water flowing rapidly in its deep and narrow channel. But with all her haste it was midnight and past when finally she arrived at the temple gate. The surrounding walls cast a deep belt of blackness over the empty streets. But above she could see the mighty stages of the temple rising with its thousand steps far up into the sky, and at the top the shining shrine lit by its flaring fire. At the gate she was forced to unveil her face before the astonished priest who, shrinking, let her pass. At the first stage of the temple she stopped, looking within as Arrion had done upon the drunken revel

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of the priests. She was in time. Not one had left the hall of sacrifice. With a deep breath she veiled her face again and bade the eunuch pause. Not even he should know her errand. She stole out upon the broad first stage of the temple, slipping cautiously towards the first flight of steps, when suddenly she was startled into a terrified stillness by a gurgling, awful cry. She stopped and looked up, then with shriek she covered her face with her hands and sank trembling to her knees, and when she looked again, ah, horror! what was this mangled, blood-stained mass which lay before her? Amytis was a woman accustomed to sights of terror and of violence, but even she grew sick and weak as any child as she gazed at the corpse of Hadar, fallen at this instant from the height. One glance, then rising to her feet, she listened for a sound from the temple where the priests were singing and shouting in their drunken revelry. "By all the Gods," she whis-



pered, hardly conscious that she spoke, "if they have heard, there is no power great enough to save his murderer from their fury." She shrank back into the shadow, her knees shaking with terror. It was Arrion, Arrion, and none other who had cast Hadar from the tower. Should she tell the priests?

A sudden light fell upon the broad terrace. Ah! some one had heard the cry, the fall. She would wait one moment more. A couple of priests reeled from the open doorway of the temple. At this instant Amytis darting from the shadow intercepted them, threw the veil from her face and cried aloud:

"Thou seest, 'tis Hadar, the high priest of the temple, and the murderer, wouldst know his name? 'Tis Arrion, Arrion," her voice rose to a shriek, "he has cast him from the height."

A cry of rage and fury burst from the throats of the drunken priests, and in another instant rushing to the doorway of

the temple they cried aloud to the band of their companions who emerged upon the terrace, a raging murderous throng.

"Stop," cried Amytis, "thou wouldst avenge the slaughter of Hadar?" she looked fearlessly upon their flushed and evil faces and her own was lit by a wild flame of joy. "Come then. I will lead the way. At this instant he descendeth from the height."

"Tear him asunder," they cried, "kill, kill, avenge!" and with a roar like the raging of wild beasts they followed Amytis up the stair.