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In the curtained vastness of the priestesses' apartments all was silent as the night drew on. Exhausted by the long day of horror and fatigue, Miriam lay wakeful, waiting for the summons of Hadar. She had been carried to this safe retreat when she had sunk, swooning, at the foot of the idol, and during the long hours of the afternoon had been compassionately soothed and tended by the women of the temple. But now they slept, and she alone kept counsel with her heart and summoned all her faith and courage for the approaching hour. The horror of the mysterious fate which awaited her dwelt in the mind of the girl, like some hideous dream, formless, undefined, but infinitely terrifying. The young Jewess abhorred

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with the deep prejudice of her people all the falsehood and hypocrisy of the idol worship of the Babylonians, and her soul was filled with an invincible disgust and terror of the priests. But at last she knew her helplessness, and vainly tried to comfort her fainting courage with faith in the God of her people,—with trust in the promises of Arrion. But she had seen him carried away by the guard, helpless, like herself in the power of the priests and the King. Over her soul waves of horror and despair swept at will, and sometimes she would weep, then cry aloud frantically to the women, begging them to let her go. But to all her questions they gave her answers, enigmatical and baffling, turning from her with smiles and whispered words. Sometimes they would attempt to soothe her crying with songs and gentle speech, while they ministered tenderly, with a strange homage, half pity, half jealousy, to this Jewish maiden, who was so exalted above them. But at last,

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wearied out with her importunities and tears, they had left her to her sleepless vigil, and alone she awaited the hour of midnight. The air in the room was cool and fragrant, no sunrays ever entered that curtained darkness; the massive walls were pierced only with small windows let in at the top of the doors, and the shadows were mysteriously illumined with hanging lamps of curious design which lit into bright relief the strange figures in the tapestries, the procession of figures on the painted walls. Her eyes strayed upward from the sleeping women who lay about her in the ancient dress of the priestesses of the temple, to the painted women on the wall, who seemed in the flickering light of the fantastic lamps to be moving before her in the varied occupations of the temple. She followed the figures in the frieze, marking each group, with a mechanical interest, seeking to beguile her despairing thoughts. There moved in profile a bearded priest

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in his flounced dress and hanging veil, in the act of pouring a libation at the altar; two women in the flowing robe of the priestesses were pictured behind him, holding psalteries on which they seemed to pluck the solemn music Miriam had so often heard. Then came a procession of youths in the short-sleeved tunic of the Babylonians, leading thick-necked bulls to be slaughtered for the sacrifice; and then a long procession of dancing women in dresses which left arm and shoulder bare, and floated gracefully from their brown and slender limbs. Their feet in their scarlet sandals seemed to Miriam even now to be moving in the dance; the lights from the lamps shone on their gilded tambourines and illumined the dark eyes which shone with a strange semblance of life in the surrounding enamel. Ah! they were moving from the wall, coming towards her, dancing and waving their arms! She rose to her feet with a faint cry, turning again to look at the living women

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who slumbered near her. Not one had stirred. The lights in the lamps burned low and cool little puffs of wind blowing in from the surrounding heavens stirred the heavy curtains. She looked again upon the figures on the walls. They were quite still. Was she going mad? She sank upon the floor, covering her eyes with her hand and listened to the loud beating of her heart.

Suddenly the silence was disturbed by a sharp knock upon the door. Miriam sprang to her feet, alert and trembling. The women stirred slowly from their sleep, yawning and stretching their brown arms. The blows were repeated; the insistent sound startled them to obedience and they moved to the door and, unbarring the heavy bronze fastenings, it swung slowly outward. In the flaring light of torches Miriam saw the bearded face of Hadar and the white robes of his attendants.

"Come forth, Miriam," the harsh voice of Hadar penetrated into the silence of

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the chamber. She emerged from the shadows of the room and stood before him on the terrace. The women veiled their faces, bowing low before him, and in silence withdrew into the temple chamber. The door closed slowly on its heavy hinges, and Miriam was alone with the priests.

"Miriam," said Hadar, the hour is come. Within the shrine Bel awaits his bride. It is the appointed time."

The girl looked up into the face of Hadar. It was flushed with wine and his large black eyes gazed upon her with a pitiless expression, greedy and implacable. She shrank back from him in an agony of fear, looking wildly about her with a blind instinct of escape. The attendants of the priest guarded the edge of the parapet, and stood in a forbidding line along the descending stairway. The steps which led upward alone were free. The eyes of the priest still held her captive, his terrible gaze burned deep into the white spirit

of the girl, she closed her eyes and for a moment stood silent, trying pitifully to collect her terrified thoughts. "Arrion, Arrion!" she uttered his name mutely to her fainting heart, but the vision of his despairing face as he was carried away by the guard alone visited her distress. The iron clasp of the priest was on her arm, and blindly she mounted the stair. At the door of the shrine the attendants left Hadar, and as he drew the shuddering girl within and closed the door, their retreating steps could be heard slowly descending the stairway. Within no sound disturbed the stillness of the night. The golden couch, the golden table, glittered in their massive splendour. The slim flames in the tripods at the corners of the room illumined with their changing light the jewelled ceiling, and Arrion, motionless in his hiding-place, gave no sign, but held his breath, in mingled gratitude and fear, knowing that the hour of Miriam's ordeal was at hand. Slowly, step by step, the

priest led the terrified girl to the couch, forcing her to mount upon the carved stool, which stood beside it, until she lay cowering among the cushions. He turned and set fire to the heap of frankincense which lay piled upon the table. Soon a wreath of smoke began to mount up into the room. Heavy, fragrant and intoxicating it curled and circled in the silence of the golden shrine. To the eyes of the frightened girl, the priest's figure seemed to expand, towering above her in his sacerdotal robes like some evil spirit in a dream. Alone, as she believed herself to be, she helplessly covered her face from his terrible threatening eyes. A mysterious terror held her captive. Hadar was standing now at the centre of the golden table, and had turned his back upon the girl, but Arrion, whose eyes still watched him from the curtain, could see that he had lit the lamp and was heating the iron. Its triple point began to glow with a rosy light. Thicker and more intoxicating grew the

fragrant smoke of the incense. The figures of Miriam and the priest were almost concealed in its encircling misty folds. Suddenly a red flame blazed up and cast a lurid light upon the bearded face of Hadar.

He turned and approached her with noiseless steps, the smoking iron in his hand. With a cry Miriam leaped from the other side of the couch and fled toward the window. In an instant more Hadar would be upon her. She gathered her garments together up to her choking throat and looked full into his face as he came on. Her feet seemed fastened to the floor, and as she gazed, as if charmed by a reptile, into the fiery eye-balls of the priest, glaring red upon her face from the smoke-shadows of the incense, listening to the hiss of the iron appallingly clear in the deadly silence, her thoughts whirled dizzily. A vision of her mother, of her home appeared before her. She could see Tirzah and Judith at the loom, could hear the sound of the shuttle, her mother's

voice as it called upon her name— "Miriam." This was not she. It was a dream, this horror! Nearer he came, until the heat of the iron puffed into her face, which looked back at him beautiful and terrified as a Maenad's. Then suddenly he covered his eyes with his hands and with a crash the iron fell to the floor.

"I cannot, I cannot," he cried in a shaken voice. "By Bel thou art too fair. Then falling upon his knees before the quivering girl, he cried, "Listen, oh, listen! There is but a moment. The King cometh. Miriam, come. There is no woman like to thee. We will flee together."

He rose and clasped her in a hungry, fierce embrace, his eyes flaming, his quick breath on her face. "Come, O fairest! Thou shalt be mine. Together we will leave this cursed city. To thine own country will I go with thee, together we will rule over thy people and thy God shall be my God." He released her sud-

denly, pointing with a gesture of contempt at the horned figure of Bel which towered up into the night. "Think not that I, Hadar, believe in Bel, nor any of these idols. In my heart I mock at them, horned monsters, evil demons! I loathe them and their false worship, bloody sacrifices, vain oblations, shameless feasts. By them I ruled this blind and foolish race. Behold, I despise them all. As a rent garment I renounce them. But thee I worship!" He stood before her, tall and commanding, and held out his hands with a splendid gesture of power and pride. "Thy words inflamed me, Miriam, when thou stood'st before me, thou alone, defying me and all my gods. Wouldst be the plaything of a harem, the fancy of an idle King? With me shalt thou be Queen and Princess. We shall have power over the souls of men, and they shall worship us. Come! Tarry not! At this moment Artaxerxes mounts the stair." He grasped her hand.

"Touch me not, false priest," she cried, restored to courage by her hatred and contempt. "I loathe thee and all thy kind. Let me go. I fear thee not."

Hadar gazed upon her as she stood before him contemptuous and unafraid, and his passion turned instantly to revengeful fury.

"I have thee, girl," he whispered in a low voice of menace. "Think not to escape me."

She sprang to the window.

"Never," she cried, "I will cast myself from the tower."

With a low cry he intercepted her. "No! no! But never shalt thou be the King's. Die thou shalt, but by my hand!"

He drew his dagger and once more clasped her. Her shriek rang out into the night and amid the smoke of the incense which curled thickly about them the gleam of his weapon flashed above her breast.

At this instant Arrion with a cry rushed

from his concealment. One bound and his hand was at the throat of the priest, and he had dashed him against the wall while Miriam, fainting with terror and overpowered by the heavy fumes of the incense, sank to the floor.

"Blasphemer," shrieked Hadar, "how camest thou hither? Beware how thou touchest the holy priest of Bel."

"Vile traitor," answered Arrion, between his clenched teeth. "False to thy gods and to the King, thou wouldst add murder to thy crimes?"

"Who has her, holds her. She is mine," hissed the priest.

Slowly, slowly the athletic youth forced him towards the door, his iron clasp binding him helplessly. No word issued from their clenched lips, naught but their quick and laboured breathing filled the room, as struggling to the death, Arrion forced the priest, step by step out upon terrace and so to his knees. Then still holding him he spoke into his face:

"Monster! Brute! I have thee! Thou shalt die." His hands stole upward till joyfully the strong young fingers closed about the throat of the priest and he turned the terrible face backwards until the blood-shot eyes glared up into his face.

"Murderer! Blasphemer!" gurgled the choking voice. "The curse of Bel,—of Bel"—the voice died in the throat. Arrion dragged him to the foot of the statue.

"Let Bel help thee," he shouted, his laughter ringing madly into the silent vault of the sky. "Let thy god save thee." And with a last effort he bent the bearded head far over the outermost edge of the parapet. "Pray to thy god in hell, in hell where thou goest," he cried and dashed him down. Free from the strangling hands, the throat of the priest gave forth one choking cry of rage and horror; then there was silence and Arrion stood alone upon the parapet. He looked over

the edge far down the stupendous walls of the temple. A dull sound, sullenly echoed in the silence, reached his ears. He stood a moment, breathless, and then turned and re-entered the shrine.

Miriam still lay face downward on the floor. He fell on his knees beside the girl, once more loving and fearful. He buried his face in her dress and kissed her hands. Then tenderly he bent and raised her in his arms, and as he gazed lovingly upon her, the white lids slowly lifted and she looked up into his face. He clasped her closely and moved towards the door.

"Haste, love, haste," he murmured in her ear. "There is but a moment. The King cometh."

"Hadar?" asked Miriam, shuddering and looking back into the empty shrine.

"Where is he?"

"False priest! I have sent him to his gods," he answered in a joyful whisper.

"Haste, I hear a footstep on the stair."

He pushed aside the curtains of the door-

way and emerged with the girl in his arms upon the outer terrace. Suddenly he paused and uttered a cry, for there at the threshold stood the imperial figure of the King.

In the clear starlight they could plainly see his face. Artaxerxes was before them. He had doffed his royal tiara and the heavy robes of state, and from the feast he came alone and unattended, clad only in a flowing robe of white which fell in folds of classic grace about him. In his majestic height and beauty the King was never so dazzling, the imperial lover never so lovable. His startled gaze fell upon Arrion as he stood before him, with the girl in his arms, and his voice rang out sharply in the silence of that lofty height.

"Arrion," he said sternly, "how camest thou here? Knowest thou not 'tis death to any but the high priests and the King himself to enter the most holy shrine of Bel?"

Arrion and Miriam knelt before the King.

“O Artaxerxes, live forever!” appealed the youth, “and if ever thy servant hath found favour in thy sight, listen now to his prayer.”

“Where is Hadar?” the voice of the King angrily interrupted him. “Where is the priest of Bel?”

“Listen, O King!” answered Arrion. “Hidden among the trees in the upper terrace thy servant heard Hadar when he gave thee his oath, but he would have broken his word to thee. O Mighty King! He was the vilest of traitors! Chide not thy servant, for he has—”

“What hast thou done boy? Speak; where is the priest?”

Arrion looked into the face of the King and rising to his feet confronted him.

“I have slain him,” he said. “He was false to thee.”

“How was he false to me? Speak, I hear thee.”

“He besought her on his knees. From the curtain of the shrine where I was

hiding I saw him, and when she defied him he cried out that she should not be thine, and then, O King! his dagger was at her breast!—I killed him,—I cast him from the tower.”

A struggling look of anger and of shame convulsed the face of Artaxerxes as he gazed upon the fearless face of Arrion and upon the helpless girl.

“Traitor!” he muttered, furiously, and then “How couldst thou overpower him?”

“Is it not well, O King?”

“’Tis well, Arrion. He has perished as he deserved, but thou, rash boy, I gave thee into the hands of the guard. How didst thou escape?”

“I tripped him,—’twas but a lumbering slave,—and I fled hither.”

“But the sentries at the palace gates! The priests at the doors of the temple! How didst pass them?”

Arrion fell again upon his knees and lifted to the King’s gaze the signet of Themistocles. “O Artaxerxes,” he said

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falteringly, "this signet gave me passage. Thou knowest it well. 'Twas thine and thou gavest it,"—he paused—"to one whom once thou lovest."

Artaxerxes took the ring from Arrion's hand and looked closely at it in the uncertain light. 'Tis the signet of my father," he exclaimed in a low and earnest voice. "I gave it to Themistocles. Did he give it to thee, Arrion?"

"Just as he died, O King! he gave it, and he bade me show it to thee with the prayer that thou shouldst show mercy to us."

"I sorrow much that he has gone from me. Thou wert with him, Arrion?"

"Even so, O King! To the end I was close beside him. Arrion bowed his head and kissed the feet of the King. "He is gone from us and we are helpless. Be merciful to us, O King! Be merciful."

Artaxerxes looked long at the youth and maiden kneeling at his feet, and suddenly as a cloud passes in the heated sum-

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mer skies, the beautiful face cleared and a look of sudden peace and compassion took the place of the angry frown. He bent and lifting Miriam by the hand he looked into her face.

"Miriam, thou lovest him?"

"As my own soul, O King!" she answered.

"Thou hast no wish for the splendour of the palace? I would give honour to thee, Miriam."

"Not to me, O King! Not to me!" she answered in a low voice. "I am the humblest of thy servants. Let me go."

"What is thy will, Miriam?" The voice was strangely gentle.

She turned to Arrion. "To live with Arrion among my own people."

Artaxerxes looked again with a strange expression of longing and regret upon the face of Miriam, which, never so beautiful, looked hopefully towards him radiant with love and joy.

"Be it so, Miriam," he said with a