

Uarda : a Romance of Ancient Egypt — Volume 05 eBook

Uarda : a Romance of Ancient Egypt — Volume 05 by Georg Ebers

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Contents

Uarda : a Romance of Ancient Egypt — Volume 05 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	7
Page 3.....	9
Page 4.....	11
Page 5.....	13
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	18
Page 9.....	20
Page 10.....	22
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	26
Page 13.....	27
Page 14.....	28
Page 15.....	30
Page 16.....	32
Page 17.....	34
Page 18.....	36
Page 19.....	38
Page 20.....	39
Page 21.....	41
Page 22.....	43

Page 23.....	45
Page 24.....	47
Page 25.....	49
Page 26.....	51
Page 27.....	53
Page 28.....	55
Page 29.....	57
Page 30.....	59
Page 31.....	61
Page 32.....	63
Page 33.....	65
Page 34.....	67
Page 35.....	69
Page 36.....	70

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
CHAPTER XX.		1
CHAPTER XXI.		6
CHAPTER XXII.		14
CHAPTER XXIII.		24
ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:		31
Information about Project Gutenberg		32
(one page)		
(Three Pages)		34

Page 1

CHAPTER XX.

As Nemu, on his way back from his visit to Ani, approached his mistress's house, he was detained by a boy, who desired him to follow him to the stranger's quarter. Seeing him hesitate, the messenger showed him the ring of his mother Hekt, who had come into the town on business, and wanted to speak with him.

Nemu was tired, for he was not accustomed to walking; his ass was dead, and Katuti could not afford to give him another. Half of Mena's beasts had been sold, and the remainder barely sufficed for the field-labor.

At the corners of the busiest streets, and on the market-places, stood boys with asses which they hired out for a small sum;

[In the streets of modern Egyptian towns asses stand saddled for hire. On the monuments only foreigners are represented as riding on asses, but these beasts are mentioned in almost every list of the possessions of the nobles, even in very early times, and the number is often considerable. There is a picture extant of a rich old man who rides on a seat supported on the backs of two donkeys. Lepsius, Denkmaler, part ii. 126.]

but Nemu had parted with his last money for a garment and a new wig, so that he might appear worthily attired before the Regent. In former times his pocket had never been empty, for Mena had thrown him many a ring of silver, or even of gold, but his restless and ambitious spirit wasted no regrets on lost luxuries. He remembered those years of superfluity with contempt, and as he puffed and panted on his way through the dust, he felt himself swell with satisfaction.

The Regent had admitted him to a private interview, and the little man had soon succeeded in riveting his attention; Ani had laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks at Nemu's description of Paaker's wild passion, and he had proved himself in earnest over the dwarf's further communications, and had met his demands half-way. Nemu felt like a duck hatched on dry land, and put for the first time into water; like a bird hatched in a cage, and that for the first time is allowed to spread its wings and fly. He would have swum or have flown willingly to death if circumstances had not set a limit to his zeal and energy.

Bathed in sweat and coated with dust, he at last reached the gay tent in the stranger's quarter, where the sorceress Hekt was accustomed to alight when she came over to Thebes.

He was considering far-reaching projects, dreaming of possibilities, devising subtle plans—rejecting them as too subtle, and supplying their place with others more feasible and less dangerous; altogether the little diplomatist had no mind for the motley tribes

which here surrounded him. He had passed the temple in which the people of Kaft adored their goddess Astarte, and the sanctuary of Seth, where they sacrificed to Baal, without letting himself be disturbed by the dancing devotees or the noise of

Page 2

cymbals and music which issued from their enclosures. The tents and slightly-built wooden houses of the dancing girls did not tempt him. Besides their inhabitants, who in the evening tricked themselves out in tinsel finery to lure the youth of Thebes into extravagance and folly, and spent their days in sleeping till sun-down, only the gambling booths drove a brisk business; and the guard of police had much trouble to restrain the soldier, who had staked and lost all his prize money, or the sailor, who thought himself cheated, from such outbreaks of rage and despair as must end in bloodshed. Drunken men lay in front of the taverns, and others were doing their utmost, by repeatedly draining their beakers, to follow their example.

Nothing was yet to be seen of the various musicians, jugglers, fire-eaters, serpent-charmers, and conjurers, who in the evening displayed their skill in this part of the town, which at all times had the aspect of a never ceasing fair. But these delights, which Nemu had passed a thousand times, had never had any temptation for him. Women and gambling were not to his taste; that which could be had simply for the taking, without trouble or exertion, offered no charms to his fancy, he had no fear of the ridicule of the dancing-women, and their associates—indeed, he occasionally sought them, for he enjoyed a war of words, and he was of opinion that no one in Thebes could beat him at having the last word. Other people, indeed, shared this opinion, and not long before Paaker's steward had said of Nemu:

“Our tongues are cudgels, but the little one's is a dagger.”

The destination of the dwarf was a very large and gaudy tent, not in any way distinguished from a dozen others in its neighborhood. The opening which led into it was wide, but at present closed by a hanging of coarse stuff.

Nemu squeezed himself in between the edge of the tent and the yielding door, and found himself in an almost circular tent with many angles, and with its cone-shaped roof supported on a pole by way of a pillar.

Pieces of shabby carpet lay on the dusty soil that was the floor of the tent, and on these squatted some gaily-clad girls, whom an old woman was busily engaged in dressing. She painted the finger and toenails of the fair ones with orange-colored Henna, blackened their brows and eye-lashes with Mestem—[Antimony.]—to give brilliancy to their glance, painted their cheeks with white and red, and anointed their hair with scented oil.

It was very hot in the tent, and not one of the girls spoke a word; they sat perfectly still before the old woman, and did not stir a finger, excepting now and then to take up one of the porous clay pitchers, which stood on the ground, for a draught of water, or to put a pill of Kyphi between their painted lips.



Various musical instruments leaned against the walls of the tent, hand-drums, pipes and lutes and four tambourines lay on the ground; on the vellum of one slept a cat, whose graceful kittens played with the bells in the hoop of another.

Page 3

An old negro-woman went in and out of the little back-door of the tent, pursued by flies and gnats, while she cleared away a variety of earthen dishes with the remains of food—pomegranate-peelings, breadcrumbs, and garlic-tops—which had been lying on one of the carpets for some hours since the girls had finished their dinner.

Old Hekt sat apart from the girls on a painted trunk, and she was saying, as she took a parcel from her wallet:

“Here, take this incense, and burn six seeds of it, and the vermin will all disappear—” she pointed to the flies that swarmed round the platter in her hand. “If you like I will drive away the mice too and draw the snakes out of their holes better than the priests.”

[Recipes for exterminating noxious creatures are found in the papyrus in my possession.]

“Keep your magic to yourself,” said a girl in a husky voice. “Since you muttered your words over me, and gave me that drink to make me grow slight and lissom again, I have been shaken to pieces with a cough at night, and turn faint when I am dancing.”

“But look how slender you have grown,” answered Hekt, “and your cough will soon be well.”

“When I am dead,” whispered the girl to the old woman. “I know that most of us end so.”

The witch shrugged her shoulders, and perceiving the dwarf she rose from her seat.

The girls too noticed the little man, and set up the indescribable cry, something like the cackle of hens, which is peculiar to Eastern women when something tickles their fancy. Nemu was well known to them, for his mother always stayed in their tent whenever she came to Thebes, and the gayest of them cried out:

“You are grown, little man, since the last time you were here.”

“So are you,” said the dwarf sharply; “but only as far as big words are concerned.”

“And you are as wicked as you are small,” retorted the girl.

“Then my wickedness is small too,” said the dwarf laughing, “for I am little enough! Good morning, girls—may Besa help your beauty. Good day, mother—you sent for me?”

The old woman nodded; the dwarf perched himself on the chest beside her, and they began to whisper together.

How dusty and tired you are,” said Hekt. I do believe you have come on foot in the burning sun.”

“My ass is dead,” replied Nemu, “and I have no money to hire a steed.”

“A foretaste of future splendor,” said the old woman with a sneer. “What have you succeeded in doing?”

“Paaker has saved us,” replied Nemu, “and I have just come from a long interview with the Regent.”

“Well?”

“He will renew your letter of freedom, if you will put Paaker into his power.”

“Good-good. I wish he would make up his mind to come and seek me—in disguise, of course—I would—”

“He is very timid, and it would not suggest to him anything so unpracticable.”

Page 4

“Hm—” said Hekt, “perhaps you are right, for when we have to demand a good deal it is best only to ask for what is feasible. One rash request often altogether spoils the patron’s inclination for granting favors.”

“What else has occurred?”

“The Regent’s army has conquered the Ethiopians, and is coming home with rich spoils.”

“People may be bought with treasure,” muttered the old woman, “I good— good!”

“Paaker’s sword is sharpened; I would give no more for my master’s life, than I have in my pocket—and you know why I came on foot through the dust.”

“Well, you can ride home again,” replied his mother, giving the little man a small silver ring. “Has the pioneer seen Nefert again?”

“Strange things have happened,” said the dwarf, and he told his mother what had taken place between Katuti and Nefert. Nemu was a good listener, and had not forgotten a word of what he had heard.

The old woman listened to his story with the most eager attention.

“Well, well,” she muttered, “here is another extraordinary thing. What is common to all men is generally disgustingly similar in the palace and in the hovel. Mothers are everywhere she-apes, who with pleasure let themselves be tormented to death by their children, who repay them badly enough, and the wives generally open their ears wide if any one can tell them of some misbehavior of their husbands! But that is not the way with your mistress.”

The old woman looked thoughtful, and then she continued:

“In point of fact this can be easily explained, and is not at all more extraordinary than it is that those tired girls should sit yawning. You told me once that it was a pretty sight to see the mother and daughter side by side in their chariot when they go to a festival or the Panegyrai; Katuti, you said, took care that the colors of their dresses and the flowers in their hair should harmonize. For which of them is the dress first chosen on such occasions?”

“Always for the lady Katuti, who never wears any but certain colors,” replied Nemu quickly.

“You see,” said the witch laughing, “Indeed it must be so. That mother always thinks of herself first, and of the objects she wishes to gain; but they hang high, and she treads down everything that is in her way— even her own child—to reach them. She will

contrive that Paaker shall be the ruin of Mena, as sure as I have ears to hear with, for that woman is capable of playing any tricks with her daughter, and would marry her to that lame dog yonder if it would advance her ambitious schemes.”

“But Nefert!” said Nemu. “You should have seen her. The dove became a lioness.”

“Because she loves Mena as much as her mother loves herself,” answered Hekt. “As the poets say, ‘she is full of him.’ It is really true of her, there is no room for any thing else. She cares for one only, and woe to those who come between him and her!”

Page 5

"I have seen other women in love," said Nemu, "but—"

"But," exclaimed the old witch with such a sharp laugh that the girls all looked up, "they behaved differently to Nefert—I believe you, for there is not one in a thousand that loves as she does. It is a sickness that gives raging pain—like a poisoned arrow in an open wound, and devours all that is near it like a fire-brand, and is harder to cure than the disease which is killing that coughing wench. To be possessed by that demon of anguish is to suffer the torture of the damned—or else," and her voice sank to softness, "to be more blest than the Gods, happy as they are. I know—I know it all; for I was once one of the possessed, one of a thousand, and even now—"

"Well?" asked the dwarf.

"Folly!" muttered the witch, stretching herself as if awaking from sleep. "Madness! He—is long since dead, and if he were not it would be all the same to me. All men are alike, and Mena will be like the rest."

"But Paaker surely is governed by the demon you describe?" asked the dwarf.

"May be," replied his mother; "but he is self-willed to madness. He would simply give his life for the thing because it is denied him. If your mistress Nefert were his, perhaps he might be easier; but what is the use of chattering? I must go over to the gold tent, where everyone goes now who has any money in their purse, to speak to the mistress —"

"What do you want with her?" interrupted Nemu. "Little Uarda over there," said the old woman, "will soon be quite well again. You have seen her lately; is she not grown beautiful, wonderfully beautiful? Now I shall see what the good woman will offer me if I take Uarda to her? the girl is as light-footed as a gazelle, and with good training would learn to dance in a very few weeks."

Nemu turned perfectly white.

"That you shall not do," said he positively.

"And why not?" asked the old woman, "if it pays well."

"Because I forbid it," said the dwarf in a choked voice.

"Bless me," laughed the woman; "you want to play my lady Nefert, and expect me to take the part of her mother Katuti. But, seriously, having seen the child again, have you any fancy for her?"

"Yes," replied Nemu. "If we gain our end, Katuti will make me free, and make me rich. Then I will buy Pinem's grandchild, and take her for my wife. I will build a house near

the hall of justice, and give the complainants and defendants private advice, like the hunch-back Sent, who now drives through the streets in his own chariot.”

“Hm—” said his mother, “that might have done very well, but perhaps it is too late. When the child had fever she talked about the young priest who was sent from the House of Seti by Ameni. He is a fine tall fellow, and took a great interest in her; he is a gardener’s son, named Pentaur.”

“Pentaur?” said the dwarf. “Pentaur? He has the haughty air and the expression of the old Mohar, and would be sure to rise; but they are going to break his proud neck for him.”

Page 6

“So much the better,” said the old woman. “Uarda would be just the wife for you, she is good and steady, and no one knows—”

“What?” said Nemu.

“Who her mother was—for she was not one of us. She came here from foreign parts, and when she died she left a trinket with strange letters on it. We must show it to one of the prisoners of war, after you have got her safe; perhaps they could make out the queer inscription. She comes of a good stock, that I am certain; for Uarda is the very living image of her mother, and as soon as she was born, she looked like the child of a great man. You smile, you idiot! Why thousands of infants have been in my hands, and if one was brought to me wrapped in rags I could tell if its parents were noble or base-born. The shape of the foot shows it—and other marks. Uarda may stay where she is, and I will help you. If anything new occurs let me know.”

CHAPTER XXI.

When Nemu, riding on an ass this time, reached home, he found neither his mistress nor Nefert within.

The former was gone, first to the temple, and then into the town; Nefert, obeying an irresistible impulse, had gone to her royal friend Bent-Anat.

The king's palace was more like a little town than a house. The wing in which the Regent resided, and which we have already visited, lay away from the river; while the part of the building which was used by the royal family commanded the Nile.

It offered a splendid, and at the same time a pleasing prospect to the ships which sailed by at its foot, for it stood, not a huge and solitary mass in the midst of the surrounding gardens, but in picturesque groups of various outline. On each side of a large structure, which contained the state rooms and banqueting hall, three rows of pavilions of different sizes extended in symmetrical order. They were connected with each other by colonnades, or by little bridges, under which flowed canals, that watered the gardens and gave the palace-grounds the aspect of a town built on islands.

The principal part of the castle of the Pharaohs was constructed of light Nile-mud bricks and elegantly carved woodwork, but the extensive walls which surrounded it were ornamented and fortified with towers, in front of which heavily armed soldiers stood on guard.

The walls and pillars, the galleries and colonnades, even the roofs, blazed in many colored paints, and at every gate stood tall masts, from which red and blue flags fluttered when the king was residing there. Now they stood up with only their brass

spikes, which were intended to intercept and conduct the lightning.—[According to an inscription first interpreted by Dumichen.]

To the right of the principal building, and entirely surrounded with thick plantations of trees, stood the houses of the royal ladies, some mirrored in the lake which they surrounded at a greater or less distance. In this part of the grounds were the king's storehouses in endless rows, while behind the centre building, in which the Pharaoh resided, stood the barracks for his body guard and the treasuries. The left wing was occupied by the officers of the household, the innumerable servants and the horses and chariots of the sovereign.

Page 7

In spite of the absence of the king himself, brisk activity reigned in the palace of Rameses, for a hundred gardeners watered the turf, the flower-borders, the shrubs and trees; companies of guards passed hither and thither; horses were being trained and broken; and the princess's wing was as full as a beehive of servants and maids, officers and priests.

Nefert was well known in this part of the palace. The gate-keepers let her litter pass unchallenged, with low bows; once in the garden, a lord in waiting received her, and conducted her to the chamberlain, who, after a short delay, introduced her into the sitting-room of the king's favorite daughter.

Bent-Anat's apartment was on the first floor of the pavilion, next to the king's residence. Her dead mother had inhabited these pleasant rooms, and when the princess was grown up it made the king happy to feel that she was near him; so the beautiful house of the wife who had too early departed, was given up to her, and at the same time, as she was his eldest daughter, many privileges were conceded to her, which hitherto none but queens had enjoyed.

The large room, in which Nefert found the princess, commanded the river. A doorway, closed with light curtains, opened on to a long balcony with a finely-worked balustrade of copper-gilt, to which clung a climbing rose with pink flowers.

When Nefert entered the room, Bent-Anat was just having the rustling curtain drawn aside by her waiting-women; for the sun was setting, and at that hour she loved to sit on the balcony, as it grew cooler, and watch with devout meditation the departure of Ra, who, as the grey-haired Turn, vanished behind the western horizon of the Necropolis in the evening to bestow the blessing of light on the under-world.

Nefert's apartment was far more elegantly appointed than the princess's; her mother and Mena had surrounded her with a thousand pretty trifles. Her carpets were made of sky-blue and silver brocade from Damascus, the seats and couches were covered with stuff embroidered in feathers by the Ethiopian women, which looked like the breasts of birds. The images of the Goddess Hathor, which stood on the house-altar, were of an imitation of emerald, which was called Mafkat, and the other little figures, which were placed near their patroness, were of lapis-lazuli, malachite, agate and bronze, overlaid with gold. On her toilet-table stood a collection of salve-boxes, and cups of ebony and ivory finely carved, and everything was arranged with the utmost taste, and exactly suited Nefert herself.

Bent-Anat's room also suited the owner.

Page 8

It was high and airy, and its furniture consisted in costly but simple necessities; the lower part of the wall was lined with cool tiles of white and violet earthen ware, on each of which was pictured a star, and which, all together, formed a tasteful pattern. Above these the walls were covered with a beautiful dark green material brought from Sais, and the same stuff was used to cover the long divans by the wall. Chairs and stools, made of cane, stood round a very large table in the middle of this room, out of which several others opened; all handsome, comfortable, and harmonious in aspect, but all betraying that their mistress took small pleasure in trifling decorations. But her chief delight was in finely-grown plants, of which rare and magnificent specimens, artistically arranged on stands, stood in the corners of many of the rooms. In others there were tall obelisks of ebony, which bore saucers for incense, which all the Egyptians loved, and which was prescribed by their physicians to purify and perfume their dwellings. Her simple bedroom would have suited a prince who loved floriculture, quite as well as a princess.

Before all things Bent-Anat loved air and light. The curtains of her windows and doors were only closed when the position of the sun absolutely required it; while in Nefert's rooms, from morning till evening, a dim twilight was maintained.

The princess went affectionately towards the charioteer's wife, who bowed low before her at the threshold; she took her chin with her right hand, kissed her delicate narrow forehead, and said:

"Sweet creature! At last you have come uninvited to see lonely me! It is the first time since our men went away to the war. If Rameses' daughter commands there is no escape; and you come; but of your own free will—"

Nefert raised her large eyes, moist with tears, with an imploring look, and her glance was so pathetic that Bent-Anat interrupted herself, and taking both her hands, exclaimed:

"Do you know who must have eyes exactly like yours? I mean the Goddess from whose tears, when they fall on the earth, flowers spring."

Nefert's eyes fell and she blushed deeply.

"I wish," she murmured, "that my eyes might close for ever, for I am very unhappy." And two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

"What has happened to you, my darling?" asked the princess sympathetically, and she drew her towards her, putting her arm round her like a sick child.

Nefert glanced anxiously at the chamberlain, and the ladies in waiting who had entered the room with her, and Bent-Anat understood the look; she requested her attendants to

withdraw, and when she was alone with her sad little friend—"Speak now," she said. "What saddens your heart? how comes this melancholy expression on your dear baby face? Tell me, and I will comfort you, and you shall be my bright thoughtless plaything once more."

Page 9

"Thy plaything!" answered Nefert, and a flash of displeasure sparkled in her eyes. "Thou art right to call me so, for I deserve no better name. I have submitted all my life to be nothing but the plaything of others."

"But, Nefert, I do not know you again," cried Bent-Anat. "Is this my gentle amiable dreamer?"

"That is the word I wanted," said Nefert in a low tone. "I slept, and dreamed, and dreamed on—till Mena awoke me; and when he left me I went to sleep again, and for two whole years I have lain dreaming; but to-day I have been torn from my dreams so suddenly and roughly, that I shall never find any rest again."

While she spoke, heavy tears fell slowly one after another over her cheeks.

Bent-Anat felt what she saw and heard as deeply as if Nefert were her own suffering child. She lovingly drew the young wife down by her side on the divan, and insisted on Nefert's letting her know all that troubled her spirit.

Katuti's daughter had in the last few hours felt like one born blind, and who suddenly receives his sight. He looks at the brightness of the sun, and the manifold forms of the creation around him, but the beams of the day-star blind its eyes, and the new forms, which he has sought to guess at in his mind, and which throng round him in their rude reality, shock him and pain him. To-day, for the first time, she had asked herself wherefore her mother, and not she herself, was called upon to control the house of which she nevertheless was called the mistress, and the answer had rung in her ears: "Because Mena thinks you incapable of thought and action." He had often called her his little rose, and she felt now that she was neither more nor less than a flower that blossoms and fades, and only charms the eye by its color and beauty.

"My mother," she said to Bent-Anat, "no doubt loves me, but she has managed badly for Mena, very badly; and I, miserable idiot, slept and dreamed of Mena, and saw and heard nothing of what was happening to his—to our—inheritance. Now my mother is afraid of my husband, and those whom we fear, says my uncle, we cannot love, and we are always ready to believe evil of those we do not love. So she lends an ear to those people who blame Mena, and say of him that he has driven me out of his heart, and has taken a strange woman to his tent. But it is false and a lie; and I cannot and will not countenance my own mother even, if she embitters and mars what is left to me—what supports me—the breath and blood of my life—my love, my fervent love for my husband."

Bent-Anat had listened to her without interrupting her; she sat by her for a time in silence. Then she said:

“Come out into the gallery; then I will tell you what I think, and perhaps Toth may pour some helpful counsel into my mind. I love you, and I know you well, and though I am not wise, I have my eyes open and a strong hand. Take it, come with me on to the balcony.”

Page 10

A refreshing breeze met the two women as they stepped out into the air. It was evening, and a reviving coolness had succeeded the heat of the day. The buildings and houses already cast long shadows, and numberless boats, with the visitors returning from the Necropolis, crowded the stream that rolled its swollen flood majestically northwards.

Close below lay the verdant garden, which sent odors from the rose-beds up to the princess's balcony. A famous artist had laid it out in the time of Hatasu, and the picture which he had in his mind, when he sowed the seeds and planted the young shoots, was now realized, many decades after his death. He had thought of planning a carpet, on which the palace should seem to stand. Tiny streams, in bends and curves, formed the outline of the design, and the shapes they enclosed were filled with plants of every size, form, and color; beautiful plats of fresh green turf everywhere represented the groundwork of the pattern, and flower-beds and clumps of shrubs stood out from them in harmonious mixtures of colors, while the tall and rare trees, of which Hatasu's ships had brought several from Arabia, gave dignity and impressiveness to the whole.

Clear drops sparkled on leaf and flower and blade, for, only a short time before, the garden by Bent-Anat's house had been freshly watered. The Nile beyond surrounded an island, where flourished the well-kept sacred grove of Anion.

The Necropolis on the farther side of the river was also well seen from Bent-Anat's balcony. There stood in long perspective the rows of sphinxes, which led from the landing-place of the festal barges to the gigantic buildings of Amenophis III. with its colossi—the hugest in Thebes—to the House of Seti, and to the temple of Hatasu. There lay the long workshops of the embalmers and closely-packed homes of the inhabitants of the City of the Dead. In the farthest west rose the Libyan mountains with their innumerable graves, and the valley of the kings' tombs took a wide curve behind, concealed by a spur of the hills.

The two women looked in silence towards the west. The sun was near the horizon—now it touched it, now it sank behind the hills; and as the heavens flushed with hues like living gold, blazing rubies, and liquid garnet and amethyst, the evening chant rang out from all the temples, and the friends sank on their knees, hid their faces in the bower-rose garlands that clung to the trellis, and prayed with full hearts.

When they rose night was spreading over the landscape, for the twilight is short in Thebes. Here and there a rosy cloud fluttered across the darkening sky, and faded gradually as the evening star appeared.

"I am content," said Bent-Anat. "And you? have you recovered your peace of mind?"

Nefert shook her head. The princess drew her on to a seat, and sank down beside her. Then she began again "Your heart is sore, poor child; they have spoilt the past for you,

and you dread the future. Let me be frank with you, even if it gives you pain. You are sick, and I must cure you. Will you listen to me?"

Page 11

“Speak on,” said Nefert.

“Speech does not suit me so well as action,” replied the princess; “but I believe I know what you need, and can help you. You love your husband; duty calls him from you, and you feel lonely and neglected; that is quite natural. But those whom I love, my father and my brothers, are also gone to the war; my mother is long since dead; the noble woman, whom the king left to be my companion, was laid low a few weeks since by sickness. Look what a half-abandoned spot my house is! Which is the lonelier do you think, you or I?”

“I,” said Nefert. “For no one is so lonely as a wife parted from the husband her heart longs after.”

“But you trust Mena’s love for you?” asked Bent-Anat.

Nefert pressed her hand to her heart and nodded assent:

“And he will return, and with him your happiness.”

“I hope so,” said Nefert softly.

“And he who hopes,” said Bent Anat, “possesses already the joys of the future. Tell me, would you have changed places with the Gods so long as Mena was with you? No! Then you are most fortunate, for blissful memories—the joys of the past—are yours at any rate. What is the present? I speak of it, and it is no more. Now, I ask you, what joys can I look forward to, and what certain happiness am I justified in hoping for?”

“Thou dost not love any one,” replied Nefert. “Thou dost follow thy own course, calm and undeviating as the moon above us. The highest joys are unknown to thee, but for the same reason thou dost not know the bitterest pain.”

“What pain?” asked the princess.

“The torment of a heart consumed by the fires of Sechet,” replied Nefert.

The princess looked thoughtfully at the ground, then she turned her eyes eagerly on her friend.

“You are mistaken,” she said; “I know what love and longing are. But you need only wait till a feast day to wear the jewel that is your own, while my treasure is no more mine than a pearl that I see gleaming at the bottom of the sea.”

“Thou canst love!” exclaimed Nefert with joyful excitement. “Oh! I thank Hathor that at last she has touched thy heart. The daughter of Rameses need not even send for the

diver to fetch the jewel out of the sea; at a sign from her the pearl will rise of itself, and lie on the sand at her slender feet.”

Bent-Anat smiled and kissed Nefert’s brow.

“How it excites you,” she said, “and stirs your heart and tongue! If two strings are tuned in harmony, and one is struck, the other sounds, my music master tells me. I believe you would listen to me till morning if I only talked to you about my love. But it was not for that that we came out on the balcony. Now listen! I am as lonely as you, I love less happily than you, the House of Seti threatens me with evil times—and yet I can preserve my full confidence in life and my joy in existence. How can you explain this?”

Page 12

"We are so very different," said Nefert.

"True," replied Bent-Anat, "but we are both young, both women, and both wish to do right. My mother died, and I have had no one to guide me, for I who for the most part need some one to lead me can already command, and be obeyed. You had a mother to bring you up, who, when you were still a child, was proud of her pretty little daughter, and let her—as it became her so well-dream and play, without warning her against the dangerous propensity. Then Mena courted you. You love him truly, and in four long years he has been with you but a month or two; your mother remained with you, and you hardly observed that she was managing your own house for you, and took all the trouble of the household. You had a great pastime of your own—your thoughts of Mena, and scope for a thousand dreams in your distant love. I know it, Nefert; all that you have seen and heard and felt in these twenty months has centred in him and him alone. Nor is it wrong in itself. The rose tree here, which clings to my balcony, delights us both; but if the gardener did not frequently prune it and tie it with palm-bast, in this soil, which forces everything to rapid growth, it would soon shoot up so high that it would cover door and window, and I should sit in darkness. Throw this handkerchief over your shoulders, for the dew falls as it grows cooler, and listen to me a little longer! —The beautiful passion of love and fidelity has grown unchecked in your dreamy nature to such a height, that it darkens your spirit and your judgment. Love, a true love, it seems to me, should be a noble fruit-tree, and not a rank weed. I do not blame you, for she who should have been the gardener did not heed—and would not heed—what was happening. Look, Nefert, so long as I wore the lock of youth, I too did what I fancied—I never found any pleasure in dreaming, but in wild games with my brothers, in horses and in falconry; they often said I had the spirit of a boy, and indeed I would willingly have been a boy."

"Not I—never!" said Nefert.

"You are just a rose—my dearest," said Bent-Anat. "Well! when I was fifteen I was so discontented, so insubordinate and full of all sorts of wild behavior, so dissatisfied in spite of all the kindness and love that surrounded me—but I will tell you what happened. It is four years ago, shortly before your wedding with Mena; my father called me to play draughts.

[At Medinet Habu a picture represents Rameses the Third, not Rameses the Second, playing at draughts with his daughter.]

Page 13

You know how certainly he could beat the most skilful antagonist; but that day his thoughts were wandering, and I won the game twice following. Full of insolent delight, I jumped up and kissed his great handsome forehead, and cried 'The sublime God, the hero, under whose feet the strange nations writhe, to whom the priests and the people pray—is beaten by a girl!' He smiled gently, and answered 'The Lords of Heaven are often outdone by the Ladies, and Necheb, the lady of victory, is a woman. Then he grew graver, and said: 'You call me a God, my child, but in this only do I feel truly godlike, that at every moment I strive to the utmost to prove myself useful by my labors; here restraining, there promoting, as is needful. Godlike I can never be but by doing or producing something great! These words, Nefert, fell like seeds in my soul. At last I knew what it was that was wanting to me; and when, a few weeks later, my father and your husband took the field with a hundred thousand fighting men, I resolved to be worthy of my godlike father, and in my little circle to be of use too! You do not know all that is done in the houses behind there, under my direction. Three hundred girls spin pure flax, and weave it into bands of linen for the wounds of the soldiers; numbers of children, and old women, gather plants on the mountains, and others sort them according to the instructions of a physician; in the kitchens no banquets are prepared, but fruits are preserved in sugar for the loved ones, and the sick in the camp. Joints of meat are salted, dried, and smoked for the army on its march through the desert. The butler no longer thinks of drinking-bouts, but brings me wine in great stone jars; we pour it into well-closed skins for the soldiers, and the best sorts we put into strong flasks, carefully sealed with pitch, that they may perform the journey uninjured, and warm and rejoice the hearts of our heroes. All that, and much more, I manage and arrange, and my days pass in hard work. The Gods send me no bright visions in the night, for after utter fatigue—I sleep soundly. But I know that I am of use. I can hold my head proudly, because in some degree I resemble my great father; and if the king thinks of me at all I know he can rejoice in the doings of his child. That is the end of it, Nefert—and I only say, Come and join me, work with me, prove yourself of use, and compel Mena to think of his wife, not with affection only, but with pride." Nefert let her head sink slowly on Bent-Anat's bosom, threw her arms round her neck, and wept like a child. At last she composed herself and said humbly:

"Take me to school, and teach me to be useful." "I knew," said the princess smiling, "that you only needed a guiding hand. Believe me, you will soon learn to couple content and longing. But now hear this! At present go home to your mother, for it is late; and meet her lovingly, for that is the will of the Gods. To-morrow morning I will go to see you, and beg Katuti to let you come to me as companion in the place of my lost friend. The day after to-morrow you will come to me in the palace. You can live in the rooms of my departed friend and begin, as she had done, to help me in my work. May these hours be blest to you!"

Page 14

CHAPTER XXII.

At the time of this conversation the leech Nebsecht still lingered in front of the hovel of the paraschites, and waited with growing impatience for the old man's return.

At first he trembled for him; then he entirely forgot the danger into which he had thrown him, and only hoped for the fulfilment of his desires, and for wonderful revelations through his investigations of the human heart.

For some minutes he gave himself up to scientific considerations; but he became more and more agitated by anxiety for the paraschites, and by the exciting vicinity of Uarda.

For hours he had been alone with her, for her father and grandmother could no longer stop away from their occupations. The former must go to escort prisoners of war to Hermonthis, and the old woman, since her granddaughter had been old enough to undertake the small duties of the household, had been one of the wailing-women, who, with hair all dishevelled, accompanied the corpse on its way to the grave, weeping, and lamenting, and casting Nile-mud on their forehead and breast. Uarda still lay, when the sun was sinking, in front of the hut.

She looked weary and pale. Her long hair had come undone, and once more got entangled with the straw of her humble couch. If Nebsecht went near her to feel her pulse or to speak to her she carefully turned her face from him.

Nevertheless when the sun disappeared behind the rocks he bent over her once more, and said:

"It is growing cool; shall I carry you indoors?"

"Let me alone," she said crossly. "I am hot, keep farther away. I am no longer ill, and could go indoors by myself if I wished; but grandmother will be here directly."

Nebsecht rose, and sat down on a hen-coop that was some paces from Uarda, and asked stammering, "Shall I go farther off?"

"Do as you please," she answered. "You are not kind," he said sadly.

"You sit looking at me," said Uarda, "I cannot bear it; and I am uneasy—for grandfather was quite different this morning from his usual self, and talked strangely about dying, and about the great price that was asked of him for curing me. Then he begged me never to forget him, and was so excited and so strange. He is so long away; I wish he were here, with me."

And with these words Uarda began to cry silently. A nameless anxiety for the paraschites seized Nebsecht, and it struck him to the heart that he had demanded a human life in return for the mere fulfilment of a duty. He knew the law well enough, and knew that the old man would be compelled without respite or delay to empty the cup of poison if he were found guilty of the theft of a human heart.

It was dark: Uarda ceased weeping and said to the surgeon:

“Can it be possible that he has gone into the city to borrow the great sum of money that thou—or thy temple—demanded for thy medicine? But there is the princess’s golden bracelet, and half of father’s prize, and in the chest two years’ wages that grandmother had earned by wailing lie untouched. Is all that not enough?”

Page 15

The girl's last question was full of resentment and reproach, and Nebsecht, whose perfect sincerity was part of his very being, was silent, as he would not venture to say yes. He had asked more in return for his help than gold or silver. Now he remembered Pentaur's warning, and when the jackals began to bark he took up the fire-stick,

[The hieroglyphic sign Sam seems to me to represent the wooden stick used to produce fire (as among some savage tribes) by rapid friction in a hollow piece of wood.]

and lighted some fuel that was lying ready. Then he asked himself what Uarda's fate would be without her grandparents, and a strange plan which had floated vaguely before him for some hours, began now to take a distinct outline and intelligible form. He determined if the old man did not return to ask the kolchytes or embalmers to admit him into their guild—and for the sake of his adroitness they were not likely to refuse him—then he would make Uarda his wife, and live apart from the world, for her, for his studies, and for his new calling, in which he hoped to learn a great deal. What did he care for comfort and proprieties, for recognition from his fellow-men, and a superior position!

He could hope to advance more quickly along the new stony path than on the old beaten track. The impulse to communicate his acquired knowledge to others he did not feel. Knowledge in itself amply satisfied him, and he thought no more of his ties to the House of Seti. For three whole days he had not changed his garments, no razor had touched his chin or his scalp, not a drop of water had wetted his hands or his feet. He felt half bewildered and almost as if he had already become an embalmer, nay even a paraschites, one of the most despised of human beings. This self-degradation had an infinite charm, for it brought him down to the level of Uarda, and she, lying near him, sick and anxious, with her dishevelled hair, exactly suited the future which he painted to himself.

"Do you hear nothing?" Uarda asked suddenly. He listened. In the valley there was a barking of dogs, and soon the paraschites and his wife appeared, and, at the door of their hut, took leave of old Hekt, who had met them on her return from Thebes.

"You have been gone a long time," cried Uarda, when her grandmother once more stood before her. "I have been so frightened."

"The doctor was with you," said the old woman going into the house to prepare their simple meal, while the paraschites knelt down by his granddaughter, and caressed her tenderly, but yet with respect, as if he were her faithful servant rather than her blood-relation.

Then he rose, and gave to Nebsecht, who was trembling with excitement, the bag of coarse linen which he was in the habit of carrying tied to him by a narrow belt.

“The heart is in that,” he whispered to the leech; “take it out, and give me back the bag, for my knife is in it, and I want it.”

Page 16

Nebsecht took the heart out of the covering with trembling hands and laid it carefully down. Then he felt in the breast of his dress, and going up to the paraschites he whispered:

“Here, take the writing, hang it round your neck, and when you die I will have the book of scripture wrapped up in your mummy cloths like a great man. But that is not enough. The property that I inherited is in the hands of my brother, who is a good man of business, and I have not touched the interest for ten years. I will send it to you, and you and your wife shall enjoy an old age free from care.”

“The paraschites had taken the little bag with the strip of papyrus, and heard the leech to the end. Then he turned from him saying: “Keep thy money; we are quits. That is if the child gets well,” he added humbly.

“She is already half cured,” stammered Nebsecht. “But why will you—why won’t you accept—”

“Because till to day I have never begged nor borrowed,” said the paraschites, “and I will not begin in my old age. Life for life. But what I have done this day not Rameses with all his treasure could repay.”

Nebsecht looked down, and knew not how to answer the old man.

His wife now came out; she set a bowl of lentils that she had hastily warmed before the two men, with radishes and onions,

[Radishes, onions, and garlic were the hors-d'oeuvre of an Egyptian dinner. 1600 talents worth were consumed, according to Herodotus. during the building of the pyramid of Cheops—L360,000 (in 1881.)]

then she helped Uarda, who did not need to be carried, into the house, and invited Nebsecht to share their meal. He accepted her invitation, for he had eaten nothing since the previous evening.

When the old woman had once more disappeared indoors, he asked the paraschites:

“Whose heart is it that you have brought me, and how did it come into your hands?”

“Tell me first,” said the other, “why thou hast laid such a heavy sin upon my soul?”

“Because I want to investigate the structure of the human heart,” said Nebsecht, “so that, when I meet with diseased hearts, I may be able to cure them.”

The paraschites looked for a long time at the ground in silence; then he said:



“Art thou speaking the truth?”

“Yes,” replied the leech with convincing emphasis. “I am glad,” said the old man, “for thou givest help to the poor.”

“As willingly as to the rich!” exclaimed Nebsecht. “But tell me now where you got the heart.”

Page 17

"I went into the house of the embalmer," said the old man, after he had selected a few large flints, to which, with crafty blows, he gave the shape of knives, "and there I found three bodies in which I had to make the eight prescribed incisions with my flint-knife. When the dead lie there undressed on the wooden bench they all look alike, and the beggar lies as still as the favorite son of a king. But I knew very well who lay before me. The strong old body in the middle of the table was the corpse of the Superior of the temple of Hatasu, and beyond, close by each other, were laid a stone-mason of the Necropolis, and a poor girl from the strangers' quarter, who had died of consumption—two miserable wasted figures. I had known the Prophet well, for I had met him a hundred times in his gilt litter, and we always called him Rui, the rich. I did my duty by all three, I was driven away with the usual stoning, and then I arranged the inward parts of the bodies with my mates. Those of the Prophet are to be preserved later in an alabaster canopus,

[This vase was called canopus at a later date. There were four of them for each mummy.]

those of the mason and the girl were put back in their bodies.

"Then I went up to the three bodies, and I asked myself, to which I should do such a wrong as to rob him of his heart. I turned to the two poor ones, and I hastily went up to the sinning girl. Then I heard the voice of the demon that cried out in my heart 'The girl was poor and despised like you while she walked on Seb,

[Seb is the earth; Plutarch calls Seb Chronos. He is often spoken of as the "father of the gods" on the monuments. He is the god of time, and as the Egyptians regarded matter as eternal, it is not by accident that the sign which represented the earth was also used for eternity.]

perhaps she may find compensation and peace in the other world if you do not mutilate her; and when I turned to the mason's lean corpse, and looked at his hands, which were harder and rougher than my own, the demon whispered the same. Then I stood before the strong, stout corpse of the prophet Rui, who died of apoplexy, and I remembered the honor and the riches that he had enjoyed on earth, and that he at least for a time had known happiness and ease. And as soon as I was alone, I slipped my hand into the bag, and changed the sheep's heart for his.

"Perhaps I am doubly guilty for playing such an accursed trick with the heart of a high-priest; but Rui's body will be hung round with a hundred amulets, Scarabaei

[Imitations of the sacred beetle Scarabaeus made of various materials were frequently put into the mummies in the place of the heart. Large specimens have often the 26th, 30th, and 64th chapters of the Book of the Dead engraved on them, as they treat of the heart.

will be placed over his heart, and holy oil and sacred sentences will preserve him from all the fiends on his road to Amenti,—[Underworld]— while no one will devote helping talismans to the poor. And then! thou hast sworn, in that world, in the hall of judgment, to take my guilt on thyself.”

Page 18

Nebsecht gave the old man his hand.

“That I will,” said he, “and I should have chosen as you did. Now take this draught, divide it in four parts, and give it to Uarda for four evenings following. Begin this evening, and by the day after to-morrow I think she will be quite well. I will come again and look after her. Now go to rest, and let me stay a while out here; before the star of Isis is extinguished I will be gone, for they have long been expecting me at the temple.”

When the paraschites came out of his but the next morning, Nebsecht had vanished; but a blood-stained cloth that lay by the remains of the fire showed the old man that the impatient investigator had examined the heart of the high-priest during the night, and perhaps cut it up.

Terror fell upon him, and in agony of mind he threw himself on his knees as the golden bark of the Sun-God appeared on the horizon, and he prayed fervently, first for Uarda, and then for the salvation of his imperilled soul.

He rose encouraged, convinced himself that his granddaughter was progressing towards recovery, bid farewell to his wife, took his flint knife and his bronze hook,

[The brains of corpses were drawn out of the nose with a hook.
Herodotus *ii.* 87.]

and went to the house of the embalmer to follow his dismal calling.

The group of buildings in which the greater number of the corpses from Thebes went through the processes of mummifying, lay on the bare desert-land at some distance from his hovel, southwards from the House of Seti at the foot of the mountain. They occupied by themselves a fairly large space, enclosed by a rough wall of dried mud-bricks.

The bodies were brought in through the great gate towards the Nile, and delivered to the kolchytes,—[The whole guild of embalmers]—while the priests, paraschites, and tariclleutes,—[Salter of the bodies]— bearers and assistants, who here did their daily work, as well as innumerable water-carriers who came up from the Nile, loaded with skins, found their way into the establishment by a side gate.

At the farthest northern building of wood, with a separate gate, in which the orders of the bereaved were taken, and often indeed those of men still in active life, who thought to provide betimes for their suitable interment.

The crowd in this house was considerable. About fifty men and women were moving in it at the present moment, all of different ranks, and not only from Thebes but from many smaller towns of Upper Egypt, to make purchases or to give commissions to the functionaries who were busy here.

This bazaar of the dead was well supplied, for coffins of every form stood up against the walls, from the simplest chest to the richly gilt and painted coffer, in form resembling a mummy. On wooden shelves lay endless rolls of coarse and fine linen, in which the limbs of the mummies were enveloped, and which were manufactured by the people of the embalming establishment under the protection of the tutelar goddesses of weavers, Neith, Isis and Nephthys, though some were ordered from a distance, particularly from Sais.

Page 19

There was free choice for the visitors of this pattern-room in the matter of mummy-cases and cloths, as well as of necklets, scarabaei, statuettes, Uza-eyes, girdles, head-rests, triangles, split-rings, staves, and other symbolic objects, which were attached to the dead as sacred amulets, or bound up in the wrappings.

There were innumerable stamps of baked clay, which were buried in the earth to show any one who might dispute the limits, how far each grave extended, images of the gods, which were laid in the sand to purify and sanctify it—for by nature it belonged to Seth-Typhon—as well as the figures called Schebti, which were either enclosed several together in little boxes, or laid separately in the grave; it was supposed that they would help the dead to till the fields of the blessed with the pick-axe, plough, and seed-bag which they carried on their shoulders.

The widow and the steward of the wealthy Superior of the temple of Hatasu, and with them a priest of high rank, were in eager discussion with the officials of the embalming-House, and were selecting the most costly of the patterns of mummy-cases which were offered to their inspection, the finest linen, and amulets of malachite, and lapis-lazuli, of blood-stone, carnelian and green felspar, as well as the most elegant alabaster canopi for the deceased; his body was to be enclosed first in a sort of case of papier-mache, and then in a wooden and a stone coffin. They wrote his name on a wax tablet which was ready for the purpose, with those of his parents, his wife and children, and all his titles; they ordered what verses should be written on his coffin, what on the papyrus-rolls to be enclosed in it, and what should be set out above his name. With regard to the inscription on the walls of the tomb, the pedestal of the statue to be placed there and the face of the stele—[Stone tablet with round pediment.]—to be erected in it, yet further particulars would be given; a priest of the temple of Seti was charged to write them, and to draw up a catalogue of the rich offerings of the survivors. The last could be done later, when, after the division of the property, the amount of the fortune he had left could be ascertained. The mere mummifying of the body with the finest oils and essences, cloths, amulets, and cases, would cost a talent of silver, without the stone sarcophagus.

The widow wore a long mourning robe, her forehead was lightly daubed with Nile-mud, and in the midst of her chaffering with the functionaries of the embalming-house, whose prices she complained of as enormous and rapacious, from time to time she broke out into a loud wail of grief—as the occasion demanded.

More modest citizens finished their commissions sooner, though it was not unusual for the income of a whole year to be sacrificed for the embalming of the head of a household—the father or the mother of a family. The mummifying of the poor was cheap, and that of the poorest had to be provided by the kolchytes as a tribute to the king, to whom also they were obliged to pay a tax in linen from their looms.

Page 20

This place of business was carefully separated from the rest of the establishment, which none but those who were engaged in the processes carried on there were on any account permitted to enter. The kolchytes formed a closely-limited guild at the head of which stood a certain number of priests, and from among them the masters of the many thousand members were chosen. This guild was highly respected, even the taricheutes, who were entrusted with the actual work of embalming, could venture to mix with the other citizens, although in Thebes itself people always avoided them with a certain horror; only the paraschites, whose duty it was to open the body, bore the whole curse of uncleanness. Certainly the place where these people fulfilled their office was dismal enough.

The stone chamber in which the bodies were opened, and the halls in which they were prepared with salt, had adjoining them a variety of laboratories and depositaries for drugs and preparations of every description.

In a court-yard, protected from the rays of the sun only by an awning, was a large walled bason, containing a solution of natron, in which the bodies were salted, and they were then dried in a stone vault, artificially supplied with hot air.

The little wooden houses of the weavers, as well as the work-shops of the case-joiners and decorators, stood in numbers round the pattern-room; but the farthest off, and much the largest of the buildings of the establishment, was a very long low structure, solidly built of stone and well roofed in, where the prepared bodies were enveloped in their cerements, tricked out in amulets, and made ready for their journey to the next world. What took place in this building—into which the laity were admitted, but never for more than a few minutes—was to the last degree mysterious, for here the gods themselves appeared to be engaged with the mortal bodies.

Out of the windows which opened on the street, recitations, hymns, and lamentations sounded night and day. The priests who fulfilled their office here wore masks like the divinities of the under-world. Many were the representatives of Anubis, with the jackal-head, assisted by boys with masks of the so-called child-Horus. At the head of each mummy stood or squatted a wailing-woman with the emblems of Nephthys, and one at its feet with those of Isis.

Every separate limb of the deceased was dedicated to a particular divinity by the aid of holy oils, charms, and sentences; a specially prepared cloth was wrapped round each muscle, every drug and every bandage owed its origin to some divinity, and the confusion of sounds, of disguised figures, and of various perfumes, had a stupefying effect on those who visited this chamber. It need not be said that the whole embalming establishment and its neighborhood was enveloped in a cloud of powerful resinous fumes, of sweet attar, of lasting musk, and pungent spices.

When the wind blew from the west it was wafted across the Nile to Thebes, and this was regarded as an evil omen, for from the south-west comes the wind that enfeebles the energy of men—the fatal simoon.

Page 21

In the court of the pattern-house stood several groups of citizens from Thebes, gathered round different individuals, to whom they were expressing their sympathy. A new-comer, the superintendent of the victims of the temple of Anion, who seemed to be known to many and was greeted with respect, announced, even before he went to condole with Rui's widow, in a tone full of horror at what had happened, that an omen, significant of the greatest misfortune, had occurred in Thebes, in a spot no less sacred than the very temple of Anion himself.

Many inquisitive listeners stood round him while he related that the Regent Ani, in his joy at the victory of his troops in Ethiopia, had distributed wine with a lavish hand to the garrison of Thebes, and also to the watchmen of the temple of Anion, and that, while the people were carousing, wolves

[Wolves have now disappeared from Egypt; they were sacred animals, and were worshipped and buried at Lykopolis, the present Siut, where mummies of wolves have been found. Herodotus says that if a wolf was found dead he was buried, and Aelian states that the herb Lykoktonon, which was poisonous to wolves, might on no account be brought into the city, where they were held sacred. The wolf numbered among the sacral animals is the canis lupaster, which exists in Egypt at the present day. Besides this species there are three varieties of wild dogs, the jackal, fox, and fenek, canis cerda.]

had broken into the stable of the sacred rams. Some were killed, but the noblest ram, which Rameses himself had sent as a gift from Mendes when he set out for the war—the magnificent beast which Amon had chosen as the tenement of his spirit, was found, torn in pieces, by the soldiers, who immediately terrified the whole city with the news. At the same hour news had come from Memphis that the sacred bull Apis was dead.

All the people who had collected round the priest, broke out into a far-sounding cry of woe, in which he himself and Rui's widow vehemently joined.

The buyers and functionaries rushed out of the pattern-room, and from the mummy-house the taricheutes, paraschites and assistants; the weavers left their looms, and all, as soon as they had learned what had happened, took part in the lamentations, howling and wailing, tearing their hair and covering their faces with dust.

The noise was loud and distracting, and when its violence diminished, and the work-people went back to their business, the east wind brought the echo of the cries of the dwellers in the Necropolis, perhaps too, those of the citizens of Thebes itself.

"Bad news," said the inspector of the victims, cannot fail to reach us soon from the king and the army; he will regret the death of the ram which we called by his name more than that of Apis. It is a bad—a very bad omen."

“My lost husband Rui, who rests in Osiris, foresaw it all,” said the widow. “If only I dared to speak I could tell a good deal that many might find unpleasant.”

Page 22

The inspector of sacrifices smiled, for he knew that the late superior of the temple of Hatasu had been an adherent of the old royal family, and he replied:

“The Sun of Rameses may be for a time covered with clouds, but neither those who fear it nor those who desire it will live to see its setting.”

The priest coldly saluted the lady, and went into the house of a weaver in which he had business, and the widow got into her litter which was waiting at the gate.

The old paraschites Pinem had joined with his fellows in the lamentation for the sacred beasts, and was now sitting on the hard pavement of the dissecting room to eat his morsel of food—for it was noon.

The stone room in which he was eating his meal was badly lighted; the daylight came through a small opening in the roof, over which the sun stood perpendicularly, and a shaft of bright rays, in which danced the whirling motes, shot down through the twilight on to the stone pavement. Mummy-cases leaned against all the walls, and on smooth polished slabs lay bodies covered with coarse cloths. A rat scudded now and then across the floor, and from the wide cracks between the stones sluggish scorpions crawled out.

The old paraschites was long since blunted to the horror which pervaded this locality. He had spread a coarse napkin, and carefully laid on it the provisions which his wife had put into his satchel; first half a cake of bread, then a little salt, and finally a radish.

But the bag was not yet empty.

He put his hand in and found a piece of meat wrapped up in two cabbage-leaves. Old Hekt had brought a leg of a gazelle from Thebes for Uarda, and he now saw that the women had put a piece of it into his little sack for his refreshment. He looked at the gift with emotion, but he did not venture to touch it, for he felt as if in doing so he should be robbing the sick girl. While eating the bread and the radish he contemplated the piece of meat as if it were some costly jewel, and when a fly dared to settle on it he drove it off indignantly.

At last he tasted the meat, and thought of many former noon-day meals, and how he had often found a flower in the satchel, that Uarda had placed there to please him, with the bread. His kind old eyes filled with tears, and his whole heart swelled with gratitude and love. He looked up, and his glance fell on the table, and he asked himself how he would have felt if instead of the old priest, robbed of his heart, the sunshine of his old age, his granddaughter, were lying there motionless. A cold shiver ran over him, and he felt that his own heart would not have been too great a price to pay for her recovery. And yet! In the course of his long life he had experienced so much suffering and wrong, that he could not imagine any hope of a better lot in the other world. Then he drew out

the bond Nebsecht had given him, held it up with both hands, as if to show it to the Immortals, and particularly to the judges in the hall of truth and judgment, that they might not reckon with him for the crime he had committed—not for himself but for another—and that they might not refuse to justify Rui, whom he had robbed of his heart.

Page 23

While he thus lifted his soul in devotion, matters were getting warm outside the dissecting room. He thought he heard his name spoken, and scarcely had he raised his head to listen when a taricheut came in and desired him to follow him.

In front of the rooms, filled with resinous odors and incense, in which the actual process of embalming was carried on, a number of taricheutes were standing and looking at an object in an alabaster bowl. The knees of the old man knocked together as he recognized the heart of the beast which he had substituted for that of the Prophet.

The chief of the taricheutes asked him whether he had opened the body of the dead priest.

Pinem stammered out "Yes." Whether this was his heart? The old man nodded affirmatively.

The taricheutes looked at each other, whispered together; then one of them went away, and returned soon with the inspector of victims from the temple of Anion, whom he had found in the house of the weaver, and the chief of the kolchytes.

"Show me the heart," said the superintendent of the sacrifices as he approached the vase. "I can decide in the dark if you have seen rightly. I examine a hundred animals every day. Give it here!—By all the Gods of Heaven and Hell that is the heart of a ram!"

"It was found in the breast of Rui," said one of the taricheutes decisively. "It was opened yesterday in the presence of us all by this old paraschites."

"It is extraordinary," said the priest of Anion. "And incredible. But perhaps an exchange was effected.—Did you slaughter any victims here yesterday or—?"

"We are purifying ourselves," the chief of the kolchytes interrupted, for the great festival of the valley, and for ten days no beast can have been killed here for food; besides, the stables and slaughterhouses are a long way from this, on the other side of the linen-factories."

"It is strange!" replied the priest. "Preserve this heart carefully, kolchytes: or, better still, let it be enclosed in a case. We will take it over to the chief prophet of Anion. It would seem that some miracle has happened."

"The heart belongs to the Necropolis," answered the chief kolchytes, "and it would therefore be more fitting if we took it to the chief priest of the temple of Seti, Ameni."

"You command here!" said the other. "Let us go." In a few minutes the priest of Anion and the chief of the kolchytes were being carried towards the valley in their litters. A taricheut followed them, who sat on a seat between two asses, and carefully carried a casket of ivory, in which reposed the ram's heart.

The old paraschites watched the priests disappear behind the tamarisk bushes. He longed to run after them, and tell them everything.

Page 24

His conscience quaked with self reproach, and if his sluggish intelligence did not enable him to take in at a glance all the results that his deed might entail, he still could guess that he had sown a seed whence deceit of every kind must grow. He felt as if he had fallen altogether into sin and falsehood, and that the goddess of truth, whom he had all his life honestly served, had reproachfully turned her back on him. After what had happened never could he hope to be pronounced a "truth-speaker" by the judges of the dead. Lost, thrown away, was the aim and end of a long life, rich in self-denial and prayer! His soul shed tears of blood, a wild sighing sounded in his ears, which saddened his spirit, and when he went back to his work again, and wanted to remove the soles of the feet

[One of the mummies of Prague which were dissected by Czermak, had the soles of the feet removed and laid on the breast. We learn from Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead that this was done that the sacred floor of the hall of judgment might not be defiled when the dead were summoned before Osiris.]

from a body, his hand trembled so that he could not hold the knife.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The news of the end of the sacred ram of Anion, and of the death of the bull Apis of Memphis, had reached the House of Seti, and was received there with loud lamentation, in which all its inhabitants joined, from the chief haruspex down to the smallest boy in the school-courts.

The superior of the institution, Ameni, had been for three days in Thebes, and was expected to return to-day. His arrival was looked for with anxiety and excitement by many. The chief of the haruspices was eager for it that he might hand over the imprisoned scholars to condign punishment, and complain to him of Pentaur and Bent-Anat; the initiated knew that important transactions must have been concluded on the farther side of the Nile; and the rebellious disciples knew that now stern justice would be dealt to them.

The insurrectionary troop were locked into an open court upon bread and water, and as the usual room of detention of the establishment was too small for them all, for two nights they had had to sleep in a loft on thin straw mats. The young spirits were excited to the highest pitch, but each expressed his feelings in quite a different manner.

Bent-Anat's brother, Rameses' son, Rameri, had experienced the same treatment as his fellows, whom yesterday he had led into every sort of mischief, with even more audacity than usual, but to-day he hung his head.

In a corner of the court sat Anana, Pentaur's favorite scholar, hiding his face in his hands which rested on his knees. Rameri went up to him, touched his shoulders and said:

"We have played the game, and now must bear the consequences for good and for evil. Are you not ashamed of yourself, old boy? Your eyes are wet, and the drops here on your hands have not fallen from the clouds. You who are seventeen, and in a few months will be a scribe and a grown man!"

Page 25

Anana looked at the prince, dried his eyes quickly; and said:

"I was the ring-leader. Ameni will turn me out of the place, and I must return disgraced to my poor mother, who has no one in the world but me."

"Poor fellow!" said Rameri kindly. "It was striking at random! If only our attempt had done Pentaur any good!"

"We have done him harm, on the contrary," said Anana vehemently, "and have behaved like fools!" Rameri nodded in full assent, looked thoughtful for a moment, and then said:

"Do you know, Anana, that you were not the ringleader? The trick was planned in this crazy brain; I take the whole blame on my own shoulders. I am the son of Rameses, and Ameni will be less hard on me than on you."

"He will examine us all," replied Anana, "and I will be punished sooner than tell a lie."

Rameri colored.

"Have you ever known my tongue sin against the lovely daughter of Ra?" he exclaimed. "But look here! did I stir up Antef, Hapi, Sent and all the others or no? Who but I advised you to find out Pentaur? Did I threaten to beg my father to take me from the school of Seti or not? I was the instigator of the mischief, I pulled the wires, and if we are questioned let me speak first. Not one of you is to mention Anana's name; do you hear? not one of you, and if they flog us or deprive us of our food we all stick to this, that I was guilty of all the mischief."

"You are a brave fellow!" said the son of the chief priest of Anion, shaking his right hand, while Anana held his left.

The prince freed himself laughing from their grasp.

"Now the old man may come home," he exclaimed, "we are ready for him. But all the same I will ask my father to send me to Chennu, as sure as my name is Rameri, if they do not recall Pentaur."

"He treated us like school-boys!" said the eldest of the young malefactors.

"And with reason," replied Rameri, "I respect him all the more for it. You all think I am a careless dog—but I have my own ideas, and I will speak the words of wisdom."

With these words he looked round on his companions with comical gravity, and continued—imitating Ameni's manner:

“Great men are distinguished from little men by this—they scorn and condemn all which flatters their vanity, or seems to them for the moment desirable, or even useful, if it is not compatible with the laws which they recognize, or conducive to some great end which they have set before them; even though that end may not be reached till after their death.

“I have learned this, partly from my father, but partly I have thought it out for myself; and now I ask you, could Pentaur as ‘a great man’ have dealt with us better?”

“You have put into words exactly what I myself have thought ever since yesterday,” cried Anana. “We have behaved like babies, and instead of carrying our point we have brought ourselves and Pentaur into disgrace.”

Page 26

The rattle of an approaching chariot was now audible, and Rameri exclaimed, interrupting Anana, "It is he. Courage, boys! I am the guilty one. He will not dare to have me thrashed—but he will stab me with looks!"

Ameni descended quickly from his chariot. The gate-keeper informed him that the chief of the kolchytes, and the inspector of victims from the temple of Anion, desired to speak with him.

"They must wait," said the Prophet shortly. "Show them meanwhile into the garden pavilion. Where is the chief haruspex?"

He had hardly spoken when the vigorous old man for whom he was enquiring hurried to meet him, to make him acquainted with all that had occurred in his absence. But the high-priest had already heard in Thebes all that his colleague was anxious to tell him.

When Ameni was absent from the House of Seti, he caused accurate information to be brought to him every morning of what had taken place there.

Now when the old man began his story he interrupted him.

"I know everything," he said. "The disciples cling to Pentaur, and have committed a folly for his sake, and you met the princess Bent-Anat with him in the temple of Hatasu, to which he had admitted a woman of low rank before she had been purified. These are grave matters, and must be seriously considered, but not to-day. Make yourself easy; Pentaur will not escape punishment; but for to-day we must recall him to this temple, for we have need of him to-morrow for the solemnity of the feast of the valley. No one shall meet him as an enemy till he is condemned; I desire this of you, and charge you to repeat it to the others."

The haruspex endeavored to represent to his superior what a scandal would arise from this untimely clemency; but Ameni did not allow him to talk, he demanded his ring back, called a young priest, delivered the precious signet into his charge, and desired him to get into his chariot that was waiting at the door, and carry to Pentaur the command, in his name, to return to the temple of Seti.

The haruspex submitted, though deeply vexed, and asked whether the guilty boys were also to go unpunished.

"No more than Pentaur," answered Ameni. "But can you call this school-boy's trick guilt? Leave the children to their fun, and their imprudence. The educator is the destroyer, if he always and only keeps his eyes open, and cannot close them at the right moment. Before life demands of us the exercise of serious duties we have a mighty over-abundance of vigor at our disposal; the child exhausts it in play, and the boy in building wonder-castles with the hammer and chisel of his fancy, in inventing follies.

You shake your head, Septah! but I tell you, the audacious tricks of the boy are the fore-runners of the deeds of the man. I shall let one only of the boys suffer for what is past, and I should let him even go unpunished if I had not other pressing reasons for keeping him away from our festival.”

Page 27

The haruspex did not contradict his chief; for he knew that when Ameni's eyes flashed so suddenly, and his demeanor, usually so measured, was as restless as at present, something serious was brewing.

The high-priest understood what was passing in Septah's mind.

"You do not understand me now," said he. "But this evening, at the meeting of the initiated, you shall know all. Great events are stirring. The brethren in the temple of Anion, on the other shore, have fallen off from what must always be the Holiest to us white-robed priests, and will stand in our way when the time for action is arrived. At the feast of the valley we shall stand in competition with the brethren from Thebes. All Thebes will be present at the solemn service, and it must be proved which knows how to serve the Divinity most worthily, they or we. We must avail ourselves of all our resources, and Pentaur we certainly cannot do without. He must fill the function of Cherheb

[Cherheb was the title of the speaker or reciter at a festival. We cannot agree with those who confuse this personage with the chief of the Kolchytes.]

for to-morrow only; the day after he must be brought to judgment. Among the rebellious boys are our best singers, and particularly young Anana, who leads the voices of the choir-boys.

"I will examine the silly fellows at once. Rameri—Rameses' son—was among the young miscreants?"

"He seems to have been the ring-leader," answered Septah.

Ameni looked at the old man with a significant smile, and said:

"The royal family are covering themselves with honor! His eldest daughter must be kept far from the temple and the gathering of the pious, as being unclean and refractory, and we shall be obliged to expel his son too from our college. You look horrified, but I say to you that the time for action is come. More of this, this evening. Now, one question: Has the news of the death of the ram of Anion reached you? Yes? Rameses himself presented him to the God, and they gave it his name. A bad omen."

"And Apis too is dead!" The haruspex threw up his arms in lamentation.

"His Divine spirit has returned to God," replied Ameni. "Now we have much to do. Before all things we must prove ourselves equal to those in Thebes over there, and win the people over to our side. The panegyric prepared by us for to-morrow must offer some great novelty. The Regent Ani grants us a rich contribution, and—"

“And,” interrupted Septah, “our thaumaturgists understand things very differently from those of the house of Anion, who feast while we practise.”

Ameni nodded assent, and said with a smile: “Also we are more indispensable than they to the people. They show them the path of life, but we smooth the way of death. It is easier to find the way without a guide in the day-light than in the dark. We are more than a match for the priests of Anion.”

Page 28

"So long as you are our leader, certainly," cried the haruspex.

"And so long as the temple has no lack of men of your temper!" added Ameni, half to Septah, and half to the second prophet of the temple, sturdy old Gagabu, who had come into the room.

Both accompanied him into the garden, where the two priests were awaiting him with the miraculous heart.

Ameni greeted the priest from the temple of Anion with dignified friendliness, the head kolchytes with distant reserve, listened to their story, looked at the heart which lay in the box, with Septah and Gagabu, touched it delicately with the tips of his fingers, carefully examining the object, which diffused a strong perfume of spices; then he said earnestly:

"If this, in your opinion, kolchytes, is not a human heart, and if in yours, my brother of the temple of Anion, it is a ram's heart, and if it was found in the body of Rui, who is gone to Osiris, we here have a mystery which only the Gods can solve. Follow me into the great court. Let the gong be sounded, Gagabu, four times, for I wish to call all the brethren together."

The gong rang in loud waves of sound to the farthest limits of the group of buildings. The initiated, the fathers, the temple-servants, and the scholars streamed in, and in a few minutes were all collected. Not a man was wanting, for at the four strokes of the rarely-sounded alarum every dweller in the House of Seti was expected to appear in the court of the temple. Even the leech Nebsecht came; for he feared that the unusual summons announced the outbreak of a fire.

Ameni ordered the assembly to arrange itself in a procession, informed his astonished hearers that in the breast of the deceased prophet Rui, a ram's heart, instead of a man's, had been found, and desired them all to follow his instructions. Each one, he said, was to fall on his knees and pray, while he would carry the heart into the holiest of holies, and enquire of the Gods what this wonder might portend to the faithful.

Ameni, with the heart in his hand, placed himself at the head of the procession, and disappeared behind the veil of the sanctuary, the initiated prayed in the vestibule, in front of it; the priests and scholars in the vast court, which was closed on the west by the stately colonnade and the main gateway to the temple.

For fully an hour Ameni remained in the silent holy of holies, from which thick clouds of incense rolled out, and then he reappeared with a golden vase set with precious stones. His tall figure was now resplendent with rich ornaments, and a priest, who walked before him, held the vessel high above his head.

Ameni's eyes seemed spell-bound to the vase, and he followed it, supporting himself by his crozier, with humble inflections.

The initiated bowed their heads till they touched the pavement, and the priests and scholars bent their faces down to the earth, when they beheld their haughty master so filled with humility and devotion. The worshippers did not raise themselves till Ameni had reached the middle of the court and ascended the steps of the altar, on which the vase with the heart was now placed, and they listened to the slow and solemn accents of the high-priest which sounded clearly through the whole court.

Page 29

“Fall down again and worship! wonder, pray, and adore! The noble inspector of sacrifices of the temple of Anion has not been deceived in his judgment; a ram’s heart was in fact found in the pious breast of Rui. I heard distinctly the voice of the Divinity in the sanctuary, and strange indeed was the speech that met my ear. Wolves tore the sacred ram of Anion in his sanctuary on the other bank of the river, but the heart of the divine beast found its way into the bosom of the saintly Rui. A great miracle has been worked, and the Gods have shown a wonderful sign. The spirit of the Highest liked not to dwell in the body of this not perfectly holy ram, and seeking a purer abiding-place found it in the breast of our Rui; and now in this consecrated vase. In this the heart shall be preserved till a new ram offered by a worthy hand enters the herd of Anion. This heart shall be preserved with the most sacred relics, it has the property of healing many diseases, and the significant words seem favorable which stood written in the midst of the vapor of incense, and which I will repeat to you word for word, ‘That which is high shall rise higher, and that which exalts itself, shall soon fall down.’ Rise, pastophori! hasten to fetch the holy images, bring them out, place the sacred heart at the head of the procession, and let us march round the walls of the temple with hymns of praise. Ye temple-servants, seize your staves, and spread in every part of the city the news of the miracle which the Divinity has vouchsafed to us.”

After the procession had marched round the temple and dispersed, the priest of Anion took leave of Ameni; he bowed deeply and formally before him, and with a coolness that was almost malicious said:

“We, in the temple of Anion, shall know how to appreciate what you heard in the holy of holies. The miracle has occurred, and the king shall learn how it came to pass, and in what words it was announced.”

“In the words of the Most High,” said the high priest with dignity; he bowed to the other, and turned to a group of priests, who were discussing the great event of the day.

Ameni enquired of them as to the preparations for the festival of the morrow, and then desired the chief haruspex to call the refractory pupils together in the school-court. The old man informed him that Pentaur had returned, and he followed his superior to the released prisoners, who, prepared for the worst, and expecting severe punishment, nevertheless shook with laughter when Rameri suggested that, if by chance they were condemned to kneel upon peas, they should get them cooked first.

“It will be long asparagus

[Asparagus was known to the Egyptians. Pliny says they held in their mouths, as a remedy for toothache, wine in which asparagus had been cooked.]

—not peas,” said another looking over his shoulder, and pretending to be flogging. They all shouted again with laughter, but it was hushed as soon as they heard Ameni’s well-known footstep.

Page 30

Each feared the worst, and when the high-priest stood before them even Rameri's mirth was quite quelled, for though Ameni looked neither angry nor threatening, his appearance commanded respect, and each one recognized in him a judge against whose verdict no remonstrance was to be thought of.

To their infinite astonishment Ameni spoke kindly to the thoughtless boys, praised the motive of their action—their attachment to a highly-endowed teacher—but then clearly and deliberately laid before them the folly of the means they had employed to attain their end, and at what a cost. “Only think,” he continued, turning to the prince, “if your father sent a general, who he thought would be better in a different place, from Syria to Kusch, and his troops therefore all went over to the enemy! How would you like that?”

So for some minutes he continued to blame and warn them, and he ended his speech by promising, in consideration of the great miracle that gave that day a special sanctity, to exercise unwonted clemency. For the sake of example, he said, he could not let them pass altogether unpunished, and he now asked them which of them had been the instigator of the deed; he and he only should suffer punishment.

He had hardly clone speaking, when prince Rameri stepped forward, and said modestly:

“We acknowledge, holy father, that we have played a foolish trick; and I lament it doubly because I devised it, and made the others follow me. I love Pentaur, and next to thee there is no one like him in the sanctuary.”

Ameni's countenance grew dark, and he answered with displeasure:

“No judgment is allowed to pupils as to their teachers—nor to you. If you were not the son of the king, who rules Egypt as Ra, I would punish your temerity with stripes. My hands are tied with regard to you, and yet they must be everywhere and always at work if the hundreds committed to my care are to be kept from harm.”

“Nay, punish me!” cried Rameri. “If I commit a folly I am ready to bear the consequences.”

Ameni looked pleased at the vehement boy, and would willingly have shaken him by the hand and stroked his curly head, but the penance he proposed for Rameri was to serve a great end, and Ameni would not allow any overflow of emotion to hinder him in the execution of a well considered design. So he answered the prince with grave determination:

“I must and will punish you—and I do so by requesting you to leave the House of Seti this very day.”

The prince turned pale. But Ameni went on more kindly:

“I do not expel you with ignominy from among us—I only bid you a friendly farewell. In a few weeks you would in any case have left the college, and by the king’s command have transferred your blooming life, health, and strength to the exercising ground of the chariot-brigade. No punishment for you but this lies in my power. Now give me your hand; you will make a fine man, and perhaps a great warrior.”

Page 31

The prince stood in astonishment before Ameni, and did not take his offered hand. Then the priest went up to him, and said:

“You said you were ready to take the consequences of your folly, and a prince’s word must be kept. Before sunset we will conduct you to the gate of the temple.”

Ameni turned his back on the boys, and left the school-court.

Rameri looked after him. Utter whiteness had overspread his blooming face, and the blood had left even his lips. None of his companions approached him, for each felt that what was passing in his soul at this moment would brook no careless intrusion. No one spoke a word; they all looked at him.

He soon observed this, and tried to collect himself, and then he said in a low tone while he held out his hands to Anana and another friend:

“Am I then so bad that I must be driven out from among you all like this —that such a blow must be inflicted on my father?”

“You refused Ameni your hand!” answered Anana. “Go to him, offer him your hand, beg him to be less severe, and perhaps he will let you remain.”

Rameri answered only “No.” But that “No” was so decided that all who knew him understood that it was final.

Before the sun set he had left the school. Ameni gave him his blessing; he told him that if he himself ever had to command he would understand his severity, and allowed the other scholars to accompany him as far as the Nile. Pentaure parted from him tenderly at the gate.

When Rameri was alone in the cabin of his gilt bark with his tutor, he felt his eyes swimming in tears.

“Your highness is surely not weeping?” asked the official.

“Why?” asked the prince sharply.

“I thought I saw tears on your highness’ cheeks.”

“Tears of joy that I am out of the trap,” cried Rameri; he sprang on shore, and in a few minutes he was with his sister in the palace.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Ask for what is feasible
I know that I am of use
Like the cackle of hens, which is peculiar to Eastern women
Think of his wife, not with affection only, but with pride
Those whom we fear, says my uncle, we cannot love

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Page 34

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(Three Pages)

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Page 35

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Page 36

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