

Uarda : a Romance of Ancient Egypt — Volume 07 eBook

Uarda : a Romance of Ancient Egypt — Volume 07 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XXIX.

At last the pioneer's boat got off with his mother and the body of the dog, which he intended to send to be embalmed at Kynopolis, the city in which the dog was held sacred above all animals;

[Kynopolis, or in old Egyptian Saka, is now Samalut; Anubis was the chief divinity worshipped there. Plutarch relates a quarrel between the inhabitants of this city, and the neighboring one of Oxyrynchos, where the fish called Oxyrynchos was worshipped. It began because the Kynopolitans eat the fish, and in revenge the Oxyrynchites caught and killed dogs, and consumed them in sacrifices. Juvenal relates a similar story of the Ombites—perhaps Koptites—and Pentyrites in the 15th Satire.]

Paaker himself returned to the House of Seti, where, in the night which closed the feast day, there was always a grand banquet for the superior priests of the Necropolis and of the temples of eastern Thebes, for the representatives of other foundations, and for select dignitaries of the state.

His father had never failed to attend this entertainment when he was in Thebes, but he himself had to-day for the first time received the much-coveted honor of an invitation, which—Ameni told him when he gave it—he entirely owed to the Regent.

His mother had tied up his hand, which Rameri had severely hurt; it was extremely painful, but he would not have missed the banquet at any cost, although he felt some alarm of the solemn ceremony. His family was as old as any in Egypt, his blood purer than the king's, and nevertheless he never felt thoroughly at home in the company of superior people. He was no priest, although a scribe; he was a warrior, and yet he did not rank with royal heroes.

He had been brought up to a strict fulfilment of his duty, and he devoted himself zealously to his calling; but his habits of life were widely different from those of the society in which he had been brought up— a society of which his handsome, brave, and magnanimous father had been a chief ornament. He did not cling covetously to his inherited wealth, and the noble attribute of liberality was not strange to him, but the coarseness of his nature showed itself most when he was most lavish, for he was never tired of exacting gratitude from those whom he had attached to him by his gifts, and he thought he had earned the right by his liberality to meet the recipient with roughness or arrogance, according to his humor. Thus it happened that his best actions procured him not friends but enemies.

Paaker's was, in fact, an ignoble, that is to say, a selfish nature; to shorten his road he trod down flowers as readily as he marched over the sand of the desert. This



characteristic marked him in all things, even in his outward demeanor; in the sound of his voice, in his broad features, in the swaggering gait of his stumpy figure.

In camp he could conduct himself as he pleased; but this was not permissible in the society of his equals in rank; for this reason, and because those faculties of quick remark and repartee, which distinguished them, had been denied to him, he felt uneasy and out of his element when he mixed with them, and he would hardly have accepted Ameni's invitation, if it had not so greatly flattered his vanity.



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It was already late; but the banquet did not begin till midnight, for the guests, before it began, assisted at the play which was performed by lamp and torch-light on the sacred lake in the south of the Necropolis, and which represented the history of Isis and Osiris.

When he entered the decorated hall in which the tables were prepared, he found all the guests assembled. The Regent Ani was present, and sat on Ameni's right at the top of the centre high-table at which several places were unoccupied; for the prophets and the initiated of the temple of Amon had excused themselves from being present. They were faithful to Rameses and his house; their grey-haired Superior disapproved of Ameni's severity towards the prince and princess, and they regarded the miracle of the sacred heart as a malicious trick of the chiefs of the Necropolis against the great temple of the capital for which Rameses had always shown a preference.

The pioneer went up to the table, where sat the general of the troops that had just returned victorious from Ethiopia, and several other officers of high rank, There was a place vacant next to the general. Paaker fixed his eyes upon this, but when he observed that the officer signed to the one next to him to come a little nearer, the pioneer imagined that each would endeavor to avoid having him for his neighbor, and with an angry glance he turned his back on the table where the warriors sat.

The Mohar was not, in fact, a welcome boon-companion. "The wine turns sour when that churl looks at it," said the general.

The eyes of all the guests turned on Paaker, who looked round for a seat, and when no one beckoned him to one he felt his blood begin to boil. He would have liked to leave the banqueting hall at once with a swingeing curse. He had indeed turned towards the door, when the Regent, who had exchanged a few whispered words with Ameni, called to him, requested him to take the place that had been reserved for him, and pointed to the seat by his side, which had in fact been intended for the high-priest of the temple of Amon.

Paaker bowed low, and took the place of honor, hardly daring to look round the table, lest he should encounter looks of surprise or of mockery. And yet he had pictured to himself his grandfather Assa, and his father, as somewhere near this place of honor, which had actually often enough been given up to them. And was he not their descendant and heir? Was not his mother Setchem of royal race? Was not the temple of Seti more indebted to him than to any one?

A servant laid a garland of flowers round his shoulders, and another handed him wine and food. Then he raised his eyes, and met the bright and sparkling glance of Gagabu; he looked quickly down again at the table.

Then the Regent spoke to him, and turning to the other guests mentioned that Paaker was on the point of starting next day for Syria, and resuming his arduous labors as

Mohar. It seemed to Paaker that the Regent was excusing himself for having given him so high a place of honor.



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Presently Ani raised his wine-cup, and drank to the happy issue of his reconnoitring-expedition, and a victorious conclusion to every struggle in which the Mohar might engage. The high-priest then pledged him, and thanked him emphatically in the name of the brethren of the temple, for the noble tract of arable land which he had that morning given them as a votive offering. A murmur of approbation ran round the tables, and Paaker's timidity began to diminish.

He had kept the wrappings that his mother had applied round his still aching hand.

"Are you wounded?" asked the Regent.

"Nothing of importance," answered the pioneer. "I was helping my mother into the boat, and it happened—"

"It happened," interrupted an old school-fellow of the Mohar's, who himself held a high appointment as officer of the city-watch of Thebes— "It happened that an oar or a stake fell on his fingers."

"Is it possible!" cried the Regent.

"And quite a youngster laid hands on him," continued the officer. "My people told me every detail. First the boy killed his dog—"

"That noble Descher?" asked the master of the hunt in a tone of regret. "Your father was often by my side with that dog at a boar-hunt."

Paaker bowed his head; but the officer of the watch, secure in his position and dignity, and taking no notice of the glow of anger which flushed Paaker's face, began again:

"When the hound lay on the ground, the foolhardy boy struck your dagger out of your hand."

"And did this squabble lead to any disturbance?" asked Ameni earnestly.

"No," replied the officer. "The feast has passed off to-day with unusual quiet. If the unlucky interruption to the procession by that crazy paraschites had not occurred, we should have nothing but praise for the populace. Besides the fighting priest, whom we have handed over to you, only a few thieves have been apprehended, and they belong exclusively to the caste,

[According to Diodorous (l. 80) there was a cast of thieves in Thebes. All citizens were obliged to enter their names in a register, and state where they lived, and the thieves did the same. The names were enrolled by the "chief of the thieves," and all stolen goods had to be given up to him. The person robbed had to give a written description of the object he had lost, and a declaration as to when and where he had lost it. The stolen



property was then easily recovered, and restored to the owner on the payment of one fourth of its value, which was given to the thief. A similar state of things existed at Cairo within a comparatively short time.]

so we simply take their booty from them, and let them go. But say, Paaker, what devil of amiability took possession of you down by the river, that you let the rascal escape unpunished.”

“Did you do that?” exclaimed Gagabu. “Revenge is usually your—”



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Ameni threw so warning a glance at the old man, that he suddenly broke off, and then asked the pioneer: "How did the struggle begin, and who was the fellow?"

"Some insolent people," said Paaker, "wanted to push in front of the boat that was waiting for my mother, and I asserted my rights. The rascal fell upon me, and killed my dog and—by my Osirian father!—the crocodiles would long since have eaten him if a woman had not come between us, and made herself known to me as Bent-Anat, the daughter of Rameses. It was she herself, and the rascal was the young prince Rameri, who was yesterday forbidden this temple."

"Oho!" cried the old master of the hunt. "Oho! my lord! Is this the way to speak of the children of the king?"

Others of the company who were attached to Pharaoh's family expressed their indignation; but Ameni whispered to Paaker—"Say no more!" then he continued aloud:

"You never were careful in weighing your words, my friend, and now, as it seems to me, you are speaking in the heat of fever. Come here, Gagabu, and examine Paaker's wound, which is no disgrace to him—for it was inflicted by a prince."

The old man loosened the bandage from the pioneer's swollen hand.

"That was a bad blow," he exclaimed; "three fingers are broken, and—do you see?—the emerald too in your signet ring."

Paaker looked down at his aching fingers, and uttered a sigh of relief, for it was not the oracular ring with the name of Thotmes III., but the valuable one given to his father by the reigning king that had been crushed. Only a few solitary fragments of the splintered stone remained in the setting; the king's name had fallen to pieces, and disappeared. Paaker's bloodless lips moved silently, and an inner voice cried out to him: "The Gods point out the way! The name is gone, the bearer of the name must follow."

"It is a pity about the ring," said Gagabu. "And if the hand is not to follow it—luckily it is your left hand—leave off drinking, let yourself be taken to Nebsecht the surgeon, and get him to set the joints neatly, and bind them up."

Paaker rose, and went away after Ameni had appointed to meet him on the following day at the Temple of Seti, and the Regent at the palace.

When the door had closed behind him, the treasurer of the temple said:

"This has been a bad day for the Mohar, and perhaps it will teach him that here in Thebes he cannot swagger as he does in the field. Another adventure occurred to him to-day; would you like to hear it?"

“Yes; tell it!” cried the guests.



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“You all knew old Seni,” began the treasurer. “He was a rich man, but he gave away all his goods to the poor, after his seven blooming sons, one after another, had died in the war, or of illness. He only kept a small house with a little garden, and said that as the Gods had taken his children to themselves in the other world he would take pity on the forlorn in this. ‘Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked’ says the law; and now that Seni has nothing more to give away, he goes through the city, as you know, hungry and thirsty himself, and scarcely clothed, and begging for his adopted children, the poor. We have all given to him, for we all know for whom he humbles himself, and holds out his hand. To-day he went round with his little bag, and begged, with his kind good eyes, for alms. Paaker has given us a good piece of arable land, and thinks, perhaps with reason, that he has done his part. When Seni addressed him, he told him to go; but the old man did not give up asking him, he followed him persistently to the grave of his father, and a great many people with him. Then the pioneer pushed him angrily back, and when at last the beggar clutched his garment, he raised his whip, and struck him two or three times, crying out: ‘There—that is your portion!’ The good old man bore it quite patiently, while he untied the bag, and said with tears in his eyes: ‘My portion—yes— but not the portion of the poor!’”

“I was standing near, and I saw how Paaker hastily withdrew into the tomb, and how his mother Setchem threw her full purse to Seni. Others followed her example, and the old man never had a richer harvest. The poor may thank the Mohar! A crowd of people collected in front of the tomb, and he would have fared badly if it had not been for the police guard who drove them away.”

During this narrative, which was heard with much approval—for no one is more secure of his result than he who can tell of the downfall of a man who is disliked for his arrogance—the Regent and the high-priest had been eagerly whispering to each other.

“There can be no doubt,” said Ameni, that Bent-Anat did actually come to the festival.”

“And had also dealings with the priest whom you so warmly defend,” whispered the other.

“Pentaur shall be questioned this very night,” returned the high-priest. “The dishes will soon be taken away, and the drinking will begin. Let us go and hear what the poet says.”

“But there are now no witnesses,” replied Ani.

“We do not need them,” said Ameni. “He is incapable of a lie.”

“Let us go then,” said the Regent smiling, “for I am really curious about this white negro, and how he will come to terms with the truth. You have forgotten that there is a woman in the case.”

“That there always is!” answered Ameni; he called Gagabu to him, gave him his seat, begged him to keep up the flow of cheerful conversation, to encourage the guests to drink, and to interrupt all talk of the king, the state, or the war.

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“You know,” he concluded, “that we are not by ourselves this evening. Wine has, before this, betrayed everything! Remember this—the mother of foresight looks backwards!”

Ani clapped his hand on the old man’s shoulder. “There will be a space cleared to-night in your winelofts. It is said of you that you cannot bear to see either a full glass or an empty one; to-night give your aversion to both free play. And when you think it is the right moment, give a sign to my steward, who is sitting there in the corner. He has a few jars of the best liquor from Byblos, that he brought over with him, and he will bring it to you. I will come in again and bid you good-night.” Ameni was accustomed to leave the hall at the beginning of the drinking.

When the door was closed behind him and his companion, when fresh rose-garlands had been brought for the necks of the company, when lotus blossoms decorated their heads, and the beakers were refilled, a choir of musicians came in, who played on harps, lutes, flutes, and small drums. The conductor beat the time by clapping his hands, and when the music had raised the spirits of the drinkers, they seconded his efforts by rhythmical clippings. The jolly old Gagabu kept up his character as a stout drinker, and leader of the feast.

The most priestly countenances soon beamed with cheerfulness, and the officers and courtiers outdid each other in audacious jokes. Then the old man signed to a young temple-servant, who wore a costly wreath; he came forward with a small gilt image of a mummy, carried it round the circle and cried:

“Look at this, be merry and drink so long as you are on earth, for soon you must be like this.”

[A custom mentioned by Herodotus. Lucian saw such an image brought in at a feast. The Greeks adopted the idea, but beautified it, using a winged Genius of death instead of a mummy. The Romans also had their “larva.”]

Gagabu gave another signal, and the Regent’s steward brought in the wine from Byblos. Ani was much lauded for the wonderful choiceness of the liquor.

“Such wine,” exclaimed the usually grave chief of the pastophori, “is like soap.”

[This comparison is genuinely Eastern. Kisra called wine “the soap of sorrow.” The Mohammedans, to whom wine is forbidden, have praised it like the guests of the House of Seti. Thus Abdelmalik ibn Salih Haschimi says: “The best thing the world enjoys is wine.” Gahiz says: “When wine enters thy bones and flows through thy limbs it bestows truth of feeling, and perfects the soul; it removes sorrow, elevates the mood, *etc., etc.*” When Ibn ’Aischah was told that some one drank no wine, he said: “He has thrice disowned the world.” Ibn el Mu’tazz sang:

“Heed not time, how it may linger, or how swiftly take its flight,
Wail thy sorrows only to the wine before thee gleaming bright.

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But when thrice thou st drained the beaker watch and ward
keep o'er thy heart.
Lest the foam of joy should vanish, and thy soul with anguish smart,
This for every earthly trouble is a sovereign remedy,
Therefore listen to my counsel, knowing what will profit thee,
Heed not time, for ah, how many a man has longed in pain
Tale of evil days to lighten—and found all his longing vain.”
—Translated by Mary J. Safford.]

“What a simile!” cried Gagabu. “You must explain it.”

“It cleanses the soul of sorrow,” answered the other. “Good, friend!” they all exclaimed.
“Now every one in turn shall praise the noble juice in some worthy saying.”

“You begin—the chief prophet of the temple of Atnenophis.”

“Sorrow is a poison,” said the priest, “and wine is the antidote.”

“Well said!—go on; it is your turn, my lord privy councillor.”

“Every thing has its secret spring,” said the official, “and wine is the secret of joy.”

“Now you, my lord keeper of the seal.”

“Wine seals the door on discontent, and locks the gates on sorrow.”

“That it does, that it certainly does!—Now the governor of Hermothis, the oldest of all
the company.”

“Wine ripens especially for us old folks, and not for you young people.”

“That you must explain,” cried a voice from the table of the military officers.

“It makes young men of the old,” laughed the octogenarian, “and children of the young.”

“He has you there, you youngsters,” cried Gagabu. “What have you to say, Septah?”

“Wine is a poison,” said the morose haruspex, “for it makes fools of wise men.”

“Then you have little to fear from it, alas!” said Gagabu laughing. “Proceed, my lord of
the chase.”



“The rim of the beaker,” was the answer, “is like the lip of the woman you love. Touch it, and taste it, and it is as good as the kiss of a bride.”

“General—the turn is yours.”

“I wish the Nile ran with such wine instead of with water,” cried the soldier, “and that I were as big as the colossus of Atnenophis, and that the biggest obelisk of Hatasu were my drinking vessel, and that I might drink as much as I would! But now—what have you to say of this noble liquor, excellent Gagabu?”

The second prophet raised his beaker, and gazed lovingly at the golden fluid; he tasted it slowly, and then said with his eyes turned to heaven:

“I only fear that I am unworthy to thank the Gods for such a divine blessing.”

“Well said!” exclaimed the Regent Ani, who had re-entered the room unobserved. “If my wine could speak, it would thank you for such a speech.”

“Hail to the Regent Ani!” shouted the guests, and they all rose with their cups filled with his noble present.

He pledged them and then rose.

“Those,” said he, “who have appreciated this wine, I now invite to dine with me tomorrow. You will then meet with it again, and if you still find it to your liking, you will be heartily welcome any evening. Now, good night, friends.”

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A thunder of applause followed him, as he quitted the room.

The morning was already grey, when the carousing-party broke up; few of the guests could find their way unassisted through the courtyard; most of them had already been carried away by the slaves, who had waited for them—and who took them on their heads, like bales of goods—and had been borne home in their litters; but for those who remained to the end, couches were prepared in the House of Seti, for a terrific storm was now raging.

While the company were filling and refilling the beakers, which raised their spirits to so wild a pitch, the prisoner Pentaur had been examined in the presence of the Regent. Ameni's messenger had found the poet on his knees, so absorbed in meditation that he did not perceive his approach. All his peace of mind had deserted him, his soul was in a tumult, and he could not succeed in obtaining any calm and clear control over the new life-pulses which were throbbing in his heart.

He had hitherto never gone to rest at night without requiring of himself an account of the past day, and he had always been able to detect the most subtle line that divided right from wrong in his actions. But to-night he looked back on a perplexing confusion of ideas and events, and when he endeavored to sort them and arrange them, he could see nothing clearly but the image of Bent-Anat, which enthralled his heart and intellect.

He had raised his hand against his fellow-men, and dipped it in blood, he desired to convince himself of his sin, and to repent but he could not; for each time he recalled it, to blame and condemn himself, he saw the soldier's hand twisted in Uarda's hair, and the princess's eyes beaming with approbation, nay with admiration, and he said to himself that he had acted rightly, and in the same position would do the same again to-morrow. Still he felt that he had broken through all the conditions with which fate had surrounded his existence, and it seemed to him that he could never succeed in recovering the still, narrow, but peaceful life of the past.

His soul went up in prayer to the Almighty One, and to the spirit of the sweet humble woman whom he had called his mother, imploring for peace of mind and modest content; but in vain—for the longer he remained prostrate, flinging up his arms in passionate entreaty, the keener grew his longings, the less he felt able to repent or to recognize his guilt. Ameni's order to appear before him came almost as a deliverance, and he followed the messenger prepared for a severe punishment; but not afraid — almost joyful.

In obedience to the command of the grave high-priest, Pentaur related the whole occurrence—how, as there was no leech in the house, he had gone with the old wife of the paraschites to visit her possessed husband; how, to save the unhappy girl from ill-usage by the mob, he had raised his hand in fight, and dealt indeed some heavy blows.

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“You have killed four men,” said Ameni, “and severely wounded twice as many. Why did you not reveal yourself as a priest, as the speaker of the morning’s discourse? Why did you not endeavor to persuade the people with words of warning, rather than with brute force?”

“I had no priest’s garment,” replied Pentaur. “There again you did wrong,” said Ameni, “for you know that the law requires of each of us never to leave this house without our white robes. But you cannot pretend not to know your own powers of speech, nor to contradict me when I assert that, even in the plainest working-dress, you were perfectly able to produce as much effect with words as by deadly blows!” “I might very likely have succeeded,” answered Pentaur, “but the most savage temper ruled the crowd; there was no time for reflection, and when I struck down the villain, like some reptile, who had seized the innocent girl, the lust of fighting took possession of me. I cared no more for my own life, and to save the child I would have slain thousands.”

“Your eyes sparkle,” said Ameni, “as if you had performed some heroic feat; and yet the men you killed were only unarmed and pious citizens, who were roused to indignation by a gross and shameless outrage. I cannot conceive whence the warrior-spirit should have fallen on a gardener’s son—and a minister of the Gods.”

“It is true,” answered Pentaur, “when the crowd rushed upon me, and I drove them back, putting out all my strength, I felt something of the warlike rage of the soldier, who repulses the pressing foe from the standard committed to his charge. It was sinful in a priest, no doubt, and I will repent of it—but I felt it.”

“You felt it—and you will repent of it, well and good,” replied Ameni. “But you have not given a true account of all that happened. Why have you concealed that Bent-Anat—Rameses’ daughter—was mixed up in the fray, and that she saved you by announcing her name to the people, and commanding them to leave you alone? When you gave her the lie before all the people, was it because you did not believe that it was Bent-Anat? Now, you who stand so firmly on so high a platform—now you standard-bearer of the truth answer me.”

Pentaur had turned pale at his master’s words, and said, as he looked at the Regent:

“We are not alone.”

“Truth is one!” said Ameni coolly. “What you can reveal to me, can also be heard by this noble lord, the Regent of the king himself. Did you recognize Bent-Anat, or not?”

“The lady who rescued me was like her, and yet unlike,” answered the poet, whose blood was roused by the subtle irony of his Superior’s words. “And if I had been as sure that she was the princess, as I am that you are the man who once held me in honor, and who are now trying to humiliate me, I would all the more have acted as I did to

spare a lady who is more like a goddess than a woman, and who, to save an unworthy wretch like me, stooped from a throne to the dust.”



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“Still the poet—the preacher!” said Ameni. Then he added severely. “I beg for a short and clear answer. We know for certain that the princess took part in the festival in the disguise of a woman of low rank, for she again declared herself to Paaker; and we know that it was she who saved you. But did you know that she meant to come across the Nile?”

“How should I?” asked Pentaur.

“Well, did you believe that it was Bent-Anat whom you saw before you when she ventured on to the scene of conflict?”

“I did believe it,” replied Pentaur; he shuddered and cast down his eyes.

“Then it was most audacious to drive away the king’s daughter as an impostor.”

“It was,” said Pentaur. “But for my sake she had risked the honor of her name, and that of her royal father, and I—I should not have risked my life and freedom for—”

“We have heard enough,” interrupted Ameni.

“Not so,” the Regent interposed. “What became of the girl you had saved?”

“An old witch, Hekt by name, a neighbor of Pinem’s, took her and her grandmother into her cave,” answered the poet; who was then, by the high-priest’s order, taken back to the temple-prison.

Scarcely had he disappeared when the Regent exclaimed:

“A dangerous man! an enthusiast! an ardent worshipper of Rameses!”

“And of his daughter,” laughed Ameni, but only a worshipper. “Thou hast nothing to fear from him—I will answer for the purity of his motives.”

“But he is handsome and of powerful speech,” replied Ani. “I claim him as my prisoner, for he has killed one of my soldiers.”

Ameni’s countenance darkened, and he answered very sternly:

“It is the exclusive right of our conclave, as established by our charter, to judge any member of this fraternity. You, the future king, have freely promised to secure our privileges to us, the champions of your own ancient and sacred rights.”

“And you shall have them,” answered the Regent with a persuasive smile. “But this man is dangerous, and you would not have him go unpunished.”



“He shall be severely judged,” said Ameni, “but by us and in this house.”

“He has committed murder!” cried Ani. “More than one murder. He is worthy of death.”

“He acted under pressure of necessity,” replied Ameni. “And a man so favored by the Gods as he, is not to be lightly given up because an untimely impulse of generosity prompted him to rash conduct. I know— I can see that you wish him ill. Promise me, as you value me as an ally, that you will not attempt his life.”

“Oh, willingly!” smiled the Regent, giving the high-priest his hand.

“Accept my sincere thanks,” said Ameni. “Pentaur was the most promising of my disciples, and in spite of many aberrations I still esteem him highly. When he was telling us of what had occurred to-day, did he not remind you of the great Assa, or of his gallant son, the Osirian father of the pioneer Paaker?”



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“The likeness is extraordinary,” answered Ani, “and yet he is of quite humble birth. Who was his mother?”

“Our gate-keeper’s daughter, a plain, pious, simple creature.”

“Now I will return to the banqueting hall,” said Ani, after a fete moments of reflection. “But I must ask you one thing more. I spoke to you of a secret that will put Paaker into our power. The old sorceress Hekt, who has taken charge of the paraschites’ wife and grandchild, knows all about it. Send some policeguards over there, and let her be brought over here as a prisoner; I will examine her myself, and so can question her without exciting observation.”

Ameni at once sent off a party of soldiers, and then quietly ordered a faithful attendant to light up the so-called audience-chamber, and to put a seat for him in an adjoining room.

CHAPTER XXX.

While the banquet was going forward at the temple, and Ameni’s messengers were on their way to the valley of the kings’ tombs, to waken up old Hekt, a furious storm of hot wind came up from the southwest, sweeping black clouds across the sky, and brown clouds of dust across the earth. It bowed the slender palm-trees as an archer bends his bow, tore the tentpegs up on the scene of the festival, whirled the light tent-cloths up in the air, drove them like white witches through the dark night, and thrashed the still surface of the Nile till its yellow waters swirled and tossed in waves like a restless sea.

Paaker had compelled his trembling slaves to row him across the stream; several times the boat was near being swamped, but he had seized the helm himself with his uninjured hand, and guided it firmly and surely, though the rocking of the boat kept his broken hand in great and constant pain. After a few ineffectual attempts he succeeded in landing. The storm had blown out the lanterns at the masts—the signal lights for which his people looked—and he found neither servants nor torch-bearers on the bank, so he struggled through the scorching wind as far as the gate of his house. His big dog had always been wont to announce his return home to the door-keeper with joyful barking; but to-night the boatmen long knocked in vain at the heavy door. When at last he entered the court-yard, he found all dark, for the wind had extinguished the lanterns and torches, and there were no lights but in the windows of his mother’s rooms.

The dogs in their open kennels now began to make themselves heard, but their tones were plaintive and whining, for the storm had frightened the beasts; their howling cut the pioneer to the heart, for it reminded him of the poor slain Descher, whose deep voice he sadly missed; and when he went into his own room he was met by a wild cry of



lamentation from the Ethiopian slave, for the dog which he had trained for Paaker's father, and which he had loved.

The pioneer threw himself on a seat, and ordered some water to be brought, that he might cool his aching hand in it, according to the prescription of Nebsecht.

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As soon as the old man saw the broken fingers, he gave another yell of woe, and when Paaker ordered him to cease he asked:

“And is the man still alive who did that, and who killed Descher?”

Paaker nodded, and while he held his hand in the cooling water he looked sullenly at the ground. He felt miserable, and he asked himself why the storm had not swamped the boat, and the Nile had not swallowed him. Bitterness and rage filled his breast, and he wished he were a child, and might cry. But his mood soon changed, his breath came quickly, his breast heaved, and an ominous light glowed in his eyes. He was not thinking of his love, but of the revenge that was even dearer to him.

“That brood of Rameses!” he muttered. “I will sweep them all away together—the king, and Mena, and those haughty princes, and many more— I know how. Only wait, only wait!” and he flung up his right fist with a threatening gesture.

The door opened at this instant, and his mother entered the room; the raging of the storm had drowned the sound of her steps, and as she approached her revengeful son, she called his name in horror at the mad wrath which was depicted in his countenance. Paaker started, and then said with apparent composure:

“Is it you, mother? It is near morning, and it is better to be asleep than awake in such an hour.”

“I could not rest in my rooms,” answered Setchem. “The storm howled so wildly, and I am so anxious, so frightfully unhappy—as I was before your father died.”

Then stay with me,” said Paaker affectionately, and lie down on my couch.”

“I did not come here to sleep,” replied Setchem. “I am too unhappy at all that happened to you on the larding-steps, it is frightful! No, no, my son, it is not about your smashed hand, though it grieves me to see you in pain; it is about the king, and his anger when he hears of the quarrel. He favors you less than he did your lost father, I know it well. But how wildly you smile, how wild you looked when I came in! It went through my bones and marrow.”

Both were silent for a time, and listened to the furious raging of the storm. At last Setchem spoke. “There is something else,” she said, “which disturbs my mind. I cannot forget the poet who spoke at the festival to-day, young Pentaur. His figure, his face, his movements, nay his very voice, are exactly like those of your father at the time when he was young, and courted me. It is as if the Gods were fain to see the best man that they ever took to themselves, walk before them a second time upon earth.”



“Yes, my lady,” said the black slave; “no mortal eye ever saw such a likeness. I saw him fighting in front of the paraschites’ cottage, and he was more like my dead master than ever. He swung the tent-post over his head, as my lord used to swing his battle-axe.”

“Be silent,” cried Paaker, “and get out-idiot! The priest is like my father; I grant it, mother; but he is an insolent fellow, who offended me grossly, and with whom I have to reckon—as with many others.”



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“How violent you are!” interrupted his mother, “and how full of bitterness and hatred. Your father was so sweet-tempered, and kind to everybody.”

“Perhaps they are kind to me?” retorted Paaker with a short laugh. “Even the Immortals spite me, and throw thorns in my path. But I will push them aside with my own hand, and will attain what I desire without the help of the Gods and overthrow all that oppose me.”

“We cannot blow away a feather without the help of the Immortals,” answered Setchem. “So your father used to say, who was a very different man both in body and mind from you! I tremble before you this evening, and at the curses you have uttered against the children of your lord and sovereign, your father’s best friend.”

“But my enemy,” shouted Paaker. “You will get nothing from me but curses. And the brood of Rameses shall learn whether your husband’s son will let himself be ill-used and scorned without revenging him self. I will fling them into an abyss, and I will laugh when I see them writhing in the sand at my feet!”

“Fool!” cried Setchem, beside herself. “I am but a woman, and have often blamed myself for being soft and weak; but as sure as I am faithful to your dead father—who you are no more like than a bramble is like a palm-tree—so surely will I tear my love for you out of my heart if you —if you—Now I see! now I know! Answer me-murderer! Where are the seven arrows with the wicked words which used to hang here? Where are the arrows on which you had scrawled ‘Death to Mena?’”

With these words Setchem breathlessly started forward, but the pioneer drew back as she confronted him, as in his youthful days when she threatened to punish him for some misdemeanor. She followed him up, caught him by the girdle, and in a hoarse voice repeated her question. He stood still, snatched her hand angrily from his belt, and said defiantly:

“I have put them in my quiver—and not for mere play. Now you know.”

Incapable of words, the maddened woman once more raised her hand against her degenerate son, but he put back her arm.

“I am no longer a child,” he said, “and I am master of this house. I will do what I will, if a hundred women hindered me!” and with these words he pointed to the door. Setchem broke into loud sobs, and turned her back upon him; but at the door once more she turned to look at him. He had seated himself, and was resting his forehead on the table on which the bowl of cold water stood.

Setchem fought a hard battle. At last once more through her choking tears she called his name, opened her arms wide and exclaimed:



“Here I am—here I am! Come to my heart, only give up these hideous thoughts of revenge.”

But Paaker did not move, he did not look up at her, he did not speak, he only shook his head in negation. Setchem’s hands fell, and she said softly:



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“What did your father teach you out of the scriptures? ‘Your highest praise consists in this, to reward your mother for what she has done for you, in bringing you up, so that she may not raise her hands to God, nor He hear her lamentation.’”

At these words, Paaker sobbed aloud, but he did not look at his mother. She called him tenderly by his name; then her eyes fell on his quiver, which lay on a bench with other arms. Her heart shrunk within her, and with a trembling voice she exclaimed:

“I forbid this mad vengeance—do you hear? Will you give it up? You do not move? No! you will not! Ye Gods, what can I do?”

She wrung her hands in despair; then she hastily crossed the room, snatched out one of the arrows, and strove to break it. Paaker sprang from his seat, and wrenched the weapon from her hand; the sharp point slightly scratched the skin, and dark drops of blood flowed from it, and dropped upon the floor.

The Mohar would have taken the wounded hand, for Setchem, who had the weakness of never being able to see blood flow—neither her own nor anybody’s else—had turned as pale as death; but she pushed him from her, and as she spoke her gentle voice had a dull estranged tone.

“This hand,” she said—“a mother’s hand wounded by her son—shall never again grasp yours till you have sworn a solemn oath to put away from you all thoughts of revenge and murder, and not to disgrace your father’s name. I have said it, and may his glorified spirit be my witness, and give me strength to keep my word!”

Paaker had fallen on his knees, and was engaged in a terrible mental struggle, while his mother slowly went towards the door. There again she stood still for a moment; she did not speak, but her eyes appealed to him once more.

In vain. At last she left the room, and the wind slammed the door violently behind her. Paaker groaned, and pressed his hand over his eyes.

“Mother, mother!” he cried. “I cannot go back—I cannot.”

A fearful gust of wind howled round the house, and drowned his voice, and then he heard two tremendous claps, as if rocks had been hurled from heaven. He started up and went to the window, where the melancholy grey dawn was showing, in order to call the slaves. Soon they came trooping out, and the steward called out as soon as he saw him:

“The storm has blown down the masts at the great gate!”

“Impossible!” cried Paaker.



“Yes, indeed!” answered the servant. “They have been sawn through close to the ground. The matmaker no doubt did it, whose collar-bone was broken. He has escaped in this fearful night.”

“Let out the dogs,” cried the Mohar. “All who have legs run after the blackguard! Freedom, and five handfuls of gold for the man who brings him back.”

The guests at the House of Seti had already gone to rest, when Ameni was informed of the arrival of the sorceress, and he at once went into the hall, where Ani was waiting to see her; the Regent roused himself from a deep reverie when he heard the high-priest’s steps.



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“Is she come?” he asked hastily; when Ameni answered in the affirmative Ani went on meanwhile carefully disentangling the disordered curls of his wig, and arranging his broad, collar-shaped necklace:

“The witch may exercise some influence over me; will you not give me your blessing to preserve me from her spells? It is true, I have on me this Houss'-eye, and this Isis-charm, but one never knows.”

“My presence will be your safe-guard,” said Ameni. “But-no, of course you wish to speak with her alone. You shall be conducted to a room, which is protected against all witchcraft by sacred texts. My brother,” he continued to one of the serving-priests, “let the witch be taken into one of the consecrated rooms, and then, when you have sprinkled the threshold, lead my lord Ani thither.”

The high-priest went away, and into a small room which adjoined the hall where the interview between the Regent and the old woman was about to take place, and where the softest whisper spoken in the larger room could be heard by means of an ingeniously contrived and invisible tube.

When Ani saw the old woman, he started back in horror; her appearance at this moment was, in fact, frightful. The storm had tossed and torn her garment and tumbled all her thick, white hair, so that locks of it fell over her face. She leaned on a staff, and bending far forward looked steadily at the Regent; and her eyes, red and smarting from the sand which the wind had flung in her face, seemed to glow as she fixed them on his. She looked as a hyaena might when creeping to seize its prey, and Ani felt a cold shiver and he heard her hoarse voice addressing him to greet him and to represent that he had chosen a strange hour for requiring her to speak with him.

When she had thanked him for his promise of renewing her letter of freedom, and had confirmed the statement that Paaker had had a love-philter from her, she parted her hair from off her face—it occurred to her that she was a woman.

The Regent sat in an arm-chair, she stood before him; but the struggle with the storm had tired her old limbs, and she begged Ani to permit her to be seated, as she had a long story to tell, which would put Paaker into his power, so that he would find him as yielding as wax. The Regent signed her to a corner of the room, and she squatted down on the pavement.

When he desired her to proceed with her story, she looked at the floor for some time in silence, and then began, as if half to herself:

“I will tell thee, that I may find peace—I do not want, when I die, to be buried unembalmed. Who knows but perhaps strange things may happen in the other world, and I would not wish to miss them. I want to see him again down there, even if it were

in the seventh limbo of the damned. Listen to me! But, before I speak, promise me that whatever I tell thee, thou wilt leave me in peace, and will see that I am embalmed when I am dead. Else I will not speak.”



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Ani bowed consent.

“No-no,” she said. “I will tell thee what to swear ’If I do not keep my word to Hekt—who gives the Mohar into my power—may the Spirits whom she rules, annihilate me before I mount the throne.’ Do not be vexed, my lord—and say only ‘Yes.’ What I can tell, is worth more than a mere word.”

“Well then—yes!” cried the Regent, eager for the mighty revelation.

The old woman muttered a few unintelligible words; then she collected herself, stretched out her lean neck, and asked, as she fixed her sparkling eyes on the man before her:

“Did’st thou ever, when thou wert young, hear of the singer Beki? Well, look at me, I am she.”

She laughed loud and hoarsely, and drew her tattered robe across her bosom, as if half ashamed of her unpleasing person.

“Ay!” she continued. “Men find pleasure in grapes by treading them down, and when the must is drunk the skins are thrown on the dung-hill. Grape-skins, that is what I am—but you need not look at me so pitifully; I was grapes once, and poor and despised as I am now, no one can take from me what I have had and have been. Mine has been a life out of a thousand, a complete life, full to overflowing of joy and suffering, of love and hate, of delight, despair, and revenge. Only to talk of it raises me to a seat by thy throne there. No, let me be, I am used now to squatting on the ground; but I knew thou wouldst hear me to the end, for once I too was one of you. Extremes meet in all things—I know it by experience. The greatest men will hold out a hand to a beautiful woman, and time was when I could lead you all as with a rope. Shall I begin at the beginning? Well—I seldom am in the mood for it now-a-days. Fifty years ago I sang a song with this voice of mine; an old crow like me? sing! But so it was. My father was a man of rank, the governor of Abydos; when the first Rameses took possession of the throne my father was faithful to the house of thy fathers, so the new king sent us all to the gold mines, and there they all died—my parents, brothers, and sisters. I only survived by some miracle. As I was handsome and sang well, a music master took me into his band, brought me to Thebes, and wherever there was a feast given in any great house, Beki was in request. Of flowers and money and tender looks I had a plentiful harvest; but I was proud and cold, and the misery of my people had made me bitter at an age when usually even bad liquor tastes of honey. Not one of all the gay young fellows, princes’ sons, and nobles, dared to touch my hand. But my hour was to come; the handsomest and noblest man of them all, and grave and dignified too—was Assa, the old Mohar’s father, and grandfather of Pentaur—no, I should say of Paaker, the pioneer; thou hast known him. Well, wherever I sang, he sat opposite me, and gazed at me, and



I could not take my eyes off him, and—thou canst tell the rest! no! Well, no woman before



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or after me can ever love a man as I loved Assa. Why dost thou not laugh? It must seem odd, too, to hear such a thing from the toothless mouth of an old witch. He is dead, long since dead. I hate him! and yet—wild as it sounds—I believe I love him yet. And he loved me—for two years; then he went to the war with Seti, and remained a long time away, and when I saw him again he had courted the daughter of some rich and noble house. I was handsome enough still, but he never looked at me at the banquets. I came across him at least twenty times, but he avoided me as if I were tainted with leprosy, and I began to fret, and fell ill of a fever. The doctors said it was all over with me, so I sent him a letter in which there was nothing but these words: 'Beki is dying, and would like to see Assa once more,' and in the papyrus I put his first present—a plain ring. And what was the answer? a handful of gold! Gold—gold! Thou may'st believe me, when I say that the sight of it was more torturing to my eyes than the iron with which they put out the eyes of criminals. Even now, when I think of it—But what do you men, you lords of rank and wealth, know of a breaking heart? When two or three of you happen to meet, and if thou should'st tell the story, the most respectable will say in a pompous voice: 'The man acted nobly indeed; he was married, and his wife would have complained with justice if he had gone to see the singer.' Am I right or wrong? I know; not one will remember that the other was a woman, a feeling human being; it will occur to no one that his deed on the one hand saved an hour of discomfort, and on the other wrought half a century of despair. Assa escaped his wife's scolding, but a thousand curses have fallen on him and on his house. How virtuous he felt himself when he had crushed and poisoned a passionate heart that had never ceased to love him! Ay, and he would have come if he had not still felt some love for me, if he had not misdoubted himself, and feared that the dying woman might once more light up the fire he had so carefully smothered and crushed out. I would have grieved for him— but that he should send me money, money!—that I have never forgiven; that he shall atone for in his grandchild." The old woman spoke the last words as if in a dream, and without seeming to remember her hearer. Ani shuddered, as if he were in the presence of a mad woman, and he involuntarily drew his chair back a little way.

The witch observed this; she took breath and went on: "You lords, who walk in high places, do not know how things go on in the depths beneath you; you do not choose to know.



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“But I will shorten my story. I got well, but I got out of my bed thin and voiceless. I had plenty of money, and I spent it in buying of everyone who professed magic in Thebes, potions to recover Assa’s love for me, or in paying for spells to be cast on him, or for magic drinks to destroy him. I tried too to recover my voice, but the medicines I took for it made it rougher not sweeter. Then an excommunicated priest, who was famous among the magicians, took me into his house, and there I learned many things; his old companions afterwards turned upon him, he came over here into the Necropolis, and I came with him. When at last he was taken and hanged, I remained in his cave, and myself took to witchcraft. Children point their fingers at me, honest men and women avoid me, I am an abomination to all men, nay to myself. And one only is guilty of all this ruin—the noblest gentleman in Thebes—the pious Assa.

“I had practised magic for several years, and had become learned in many arts, when one day the gardener Sent, from whom I was accustomed to buy plants for my mixtures—he rents a plot of ground from the temple of Seti—Sent brought me a new-born child that had been born with six toes; I was to remove the supernumerary toe by my art. The pious mother of the child was lying ill of fever, or she never would have allowed it; I took the screaming little wretch—for such things are sometimes curable. The next morning, a few hours after sunrise, there was a bustle in front of my cave; a maid, evidently belonging to a noble house, was calling me. Her mistress, she said, had come with her to visit the tomb of her fathers, and there had been taken ill, and had given birth to a child. Her mistress was lying senseless—I must go at once, and help her. I took the little six-toed brat in my cloak, told my slavegirl to follow me with water, and soon found myself—as thou canst guess—at the tomb of Assa’s ancestors. The poor woman, who lay there in convulsions, was his daughter-in-law Setchem. The baby, a boy, was as sound as a nut, but she was evidently in great danger. I sent the maid with the litter, which was waiting outside, to the temple here for help; the girl said that her master, the father of the child, was at the war, but that the grandfather, the noble Assa, had promised to meet the lady Setchem at the tomb, and would shortly be coming; then she disappeared with the litter. I washed the child, and kissed it as if it were my own. Then I heard distant steps in the valley, and the recollection of the moment when I, lying at the point of death, had received that gift of money from Assa came over me, and then I do not know myself how it happened—I gave the new-born grandchild of Assa to my slave-girl, and told her to carry it quickly to the cave, and I wrapped the little six-toed baby in my rags and held it in my lap. There I sat—and the minutes seemed hours, till Assa came up; and when he stood before me, grown grey, it is true, but still



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handsome and upright—I put the gardener’s boy, the six-toed brat, into his very arms, and a thousand demons seemed to laugh hoarsely within me. He thanked me, he did not know me, and once more he offered me a handful of gold. I took it, and I listened as the priest, who had come from the temple, prophesied all sorts of fine things for the little one, who was born in so fortunate an hour; and then I went back into my cave, and there I laughed till I cried, though I do not know that the tears sprang from the laughter.

“A few days after I gave Assa’s grandchild to the gardener, and told him the sixth toe had come off; I had made a little wound on his foot to take in the bumpkin. So Assa’s grandchild, the son of the Mohar, grew up as the gardener’s child, and received the name of Pentaur, and he was brought up in the temple here, and is wonderfully like Assa; but the gardener’s monstrous brat is the pioneer Paaker. That is the whole secret.”

Ani had listened in silence to the terrible old woman.

We are involuntarily committed to any one who can inform us of some absorbing fact, and who knows how to make the information valuable. It did not occur to the Regent to punish the witch for her crimes; he thought rather of his older friends’ rapture when they talked of the singer Beki’s songs and beauty. He looked at the woman, and a cold shiver ran through all his limbs.

“You may live in peace,” he said at last; “and when you die I will see to your being embalmed; but give up your black arts. You must be rich, and, if you are not, say what you need. Indeed, I scarcely dare offer you gold—it excites your hatred, as I understand.”

“I could take thine—but now let me go!”

She got up, and went towards the door, but the Regent called to her to stop, and asked:

“Is Assa the father of your son, the little Nemu, the dwarf of the lady Katuti?”

The witch laughed loudly. “Is the little wretch like Assa or like Beki? I picked him up like many other children.”

“But he is clever!” said Ani.

“Ay—that he is. He has planned many a shrewd stroke, and is devoted to his mistress. He will help thee to thy purpose, for he himself has one too.”

“And that is—?”



“Katuti will rise to greatness with thee, and to riches through Paaker, who sets out tomorrow to make the woman he loves a widow.”

“You know a great deal,” said Ani meditatively, “and I would ask you one thing more; though indeed your story has supplied the answer—but perhaps you know more now than you did in your youth. Is there in truth any effectual love-philter?”

“I will not deceive thee, for I desire that thou should'st keep thy word to me,” replied Hekt. “A love potion rarely has any effect, and never but on women who have never before loved. If it is given to a woman whose heart is filled with the image of another man her passion for him only will grow the stronger.”



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“Yet another,” said Ani. “Is there any way of destroying an enemy at a distance?”

“Certainly,” said the witch. “Little people may do mean things, and great people can let others do things that they cannot do themselves. My story has stirred thy gall, and it seems to me that thou dost not love the poet Pentaur. A smile! Well then—I have not lost sight of him, and I know he is grown up as proud and as handsome as Assa. He is wonderfully like him, and I could have loved him—have loved as this foolish heart had better never have loved. It is strange! In many women, who come to me, I see how their hearts cling to the children of men who have abandoned them, and we women are all alike, in most things. But I will not let myself love Assa’s grandchild—I must not. I will injure him, and help everyone that persecutes him; for though Assa is dead, the wrongs he did me live in me so long as I live myself. Pentaur’s destiny must go on its course. If thou wilt have his life, consult with Nemu, for he hates him too, and he will serve thee more effectually than I can with my vain spells and silly harmless brews. Now let me go home!”

A few hours later Ameni sent to invite the Regent to breakfast.

“Do you know who the witch Hekt is?” asked Ani.

“Certainly—how should I not know? She is the singer Beki—the former enchantress of Thebes. May I ask what her communications were?”

Ani thought it best not to confide the secret of Pentaur’s birth to the high-priest, and answered evasively. Then Ameni begged to be allowed to give him some information about the old woman, and how she had had a hand in the game; and he related to his hearer, with some omissions and variations—as if it were a fact he had long known—the very story which a few hours since he had overheard, and learned for the first time. Ani feigned great astonishment, and agreed with the high-priest that Paaker should not for the present be informed of his true origin.

“He is a strangely constituted man,” said Ameni, “and he is not incapable of playing us some unforeseen trick before he has done his part, if he is told who he is.”

The storm had exhausted itself, and the sky, though covered still with torn and flying clouds, cleared by degrees, as the morning went on; a sharp coolness succeeded the hot blast, but the sun as it mounted higher and higher soon heated the air. On the roads and in the gardens lay uprooted trees and many slightly-built houses which had been blown down, while the tents in the strangers’ quarter, and hundreds of light palm-thatched roofs, had been swept away.

The Regent was returning to Thebes, and with him went Ameni, who desired to ascertain by his own eyes what mischief the whirlwind had done to his garden in the

city. On the Nile they met Paaker's boat, and Ani caused it and his own to be stopped, while he requested Paaker to visit him shortly at the palace.



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The high-priest's garden was in no respect inferior in beauty and extent to that of the Mohar. The ground had belonged to his family from the remotest generations, and his house was large and magnificent. He seated himself in a shady arbor, to take a repast with his still handsome wife and his young and pretty daughters.

He consoled his wife for the various damage done by the hurricane, promised the girls to build a new and handsomer clove-cot in the place of the one which had been blown down, and laughed and joked with them all; for here the severe head of the House of Seti, the grave Superior of the Necropolis, became a simple man, an affectionate husband, a tender father, a judicious friend, among his children, his flowers, and his birds. His youngest daughter clung to his right arm, and an older one to his left, when he rose from table to go with them to the poultry-yard.

On the way thither a servant announced to him that the Lady Setchem wished to see him.

"Take her to your mistress," he said.

But the slave—who held in his hand a handsome gift in money—explained that the widow wished to speak with him alone.

"Can I never enjoy an hour's peace like other men?" exclaimed Ameni annoyed. "Your mistress can receive her, and she can wait with her till I come. It is true, girls—is it not?—that I belong to you just now, and to the fowls, and ducks, and pigeons?"

His youngest daughter kissed him, the second patted him affectionately, and they all three went gaily forward. An hour later he requested the Lady Setchem to accompany him into the garden.

The poor, anxious, and frightened woman had resolved on this step with much difficulty; tears filled her kind eyes, as she communicated her troubles to the high-priest.

"Thou art a wise counsellor," she said, "and thou knowest well how my son honors the Gods of the temple of Seti with gifts and offerings. He will not listen to his mother, but thou hast influence with him. He meditates frightful things, and if he cannot be terrified by threats of punishment from the Immortals, he will raise his hand against Mena, and perhaps—"

"Against the king," interrupted Ameni gravely. "I know it, and I will speak to him."

"Thanks, oh a thousand thanks!" cried the widow, and she seized the high-priest's robe to kiss it. "It was thou who soon after his birth didst tell my husband that he was born under a lucky star, and would grow to be an honor and an ornament to his house and to his country. And now—now he will ruin himself in this world, and the next."



“What I foretold of your son,” said Ameni, “shall assuredly be fulfilled, for the ways of the Gods are not as the ways of men.”

“Thy words do me good!” cried Setchem. “None can tell what fearful terror weighed upon my heart, when I made up my mind to come here. But thou dost not yet know all. The great masts of cedar, which Paaker sent from Lebanon to Thebes to bear our banners, and ornament our gateway, were thrown to the ground at sunrise by the frightful wind.”



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“Thus shall your son's defiant spirit be broken,” said Ameni; “But for you, if you have patience, new joys shall arise.”

“I thank thee again,” said Setchem. But something yet remains to be said. I know that I am wasting the time that thou dost devote to thy family, and I remember thy saying once that here in Thebes thou wert like a pack-Horse with his load taken off, and free to wander over a green meadow. I will not disturb thee much longer—but the Gods sent me such a wonderful vision. Paaker would not listen to me, and I went back into my room full of sorrow; and when at last, after the sun had risen, I fell asleep for a few minutes, I dreamed I saw before me the poet Pentaur, who is wonderfully like my dead husband in appearance and in voice. Paaker went up to him, and abused him violently, and threatened him with his fist; the priest raised his arms in prayer, just as I saw him yesterday at the festival—but not in devotion, but to seize Paaker, and wrestle with him. The struggle did not last long, for Paaker seemed to shrink up, and lost his human form, and fell at the poet's feet—not my son, but a shapeless lump of clay such as the potter uses to make jars of.”

“A strange dream!” exclaimed Ameni, not without agitation. “A very strange dream, but it bodes you good. Clay, Setchem, is yielding, and clearly indicates that which the Gods prepare for you. The Immortals will give you a new and a better son instead of the old one, but it is not revealed to me by what means. Go now, and sacrifice to the Gods, and trust to the wisdom of those who guide the life of the universe, and of all mortal creatures. Yet—I would give you one more word of advice. If Paaker comes to you repentant, receive him kindly, and let me know; but if he will not yield, close your rooms against him, and let him depart without taking leave of you.”

When Setchem, much encouraged, was gone away, Ameni said to himself:

“She will find splendid compensation for this coarse scoundrel, and she shall not spoil the tool we need to strike our blow. I have often doubted how far dreams do, indeed, foretell the future, but to-day my faith in them is increased. Certainly a mother's heart sees farther than that of any other human being.”

At the door of her house Setchem came up with her son's chariot. They saw each other, but both looked away, for they could not meet affectionately, and would not meet coldly. As the horses outran the litter-bearers, the mother and son looked round at each other, their eyes met, and each felt a stab in the heart.

In the evening the pioneer, after he had had an interview with the Regent, went to the temple of Seti to receive Ameni's blessing on all his undertakings. Then, after sacrificing in the tomb of his ancestors, he set out for Syria.

Just as he was getting into his chariot, news was brought him that the mat-maker, who had sawn through the masts at the gate, had been caught.



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“Put out his eyes!” he cried; and these were the last words he spoke as he quitted his home.

Setchem looked after him for a long time; she had refused to bid him farewell, and now she implored the Gods to turn his heart, and to preserve him from malice and crime.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Three days had passed since the pioneer’s departure, and although it was still early, busy occupation was astir in Bent-Anat’s work-rooms.

The ladies had passed the stormy night, which had succeeded the exciting evening of the festival, without sleep.

Nefert felt tired and sleepy the next morning, and begged the princess to introduce her to her new duties for the first time next day; but the princess spoke to her encouragingly, told her that no man should put off doing right till the morrow, and urged her to follow her into her workshop.

“We must both come to different minds,” said she. “I often shudder involuntarily, and feel as if I bore a brand—as if I had a stain here on my shoulder where it was touched by Paaker’s rough hand.”

The first day of labor gave Nefert a good many difficulties to overcome; on the second day the work she had begun already had a charm for her, and by the third she rejoiced in the little results of her care.

Bent-Anat had put her in the right place, for she had the direction of a large number of young girls and women, the daughters, wives, and widows of those Thebans who were at the war, or who had fallen in the field, who sorted and arranged the healing herbs. Her helpers sat in little circles on the ground; in the midst of each lay a great heap of fresh and dry plants, and in front of each work-woman a number of parcels of the selected roots, leaves, and flowers.

An old physician presided over the whole, and had shown Nefert the first day the particular plants which he needed.

The wife of Mena, who was fond of flowers, had soon learnt them all, and she taught willingly, for she loved children.

She soon had favorites among the children, and knew some as being industrious and careful, others as idle and heedless:



“Ay! ay!” she exclaimed, bending over a little half-naked maiden with great almond-shaped eyes. “You are mixing them all together. Your father, as you tell me, is at the war. Suppose, now, an arrow were to strike him, and this plant, which would hurt him, were laid on the burning wound instead of this other, which would do him good—that would be very sad.”

The child nodded her head, and looked her work through again. Nefert turned to a little idler, and said: “You are chattering again, and doing nothing, and yet your father is in the field. If he were ill now, and has no medicine, and if at night when he is asleep he dreams of you, and sees you sitting idle, he may say to himself: ‘Now I might get well, but my little girl at home does not love me, for she would rather sit with her hands in her lap than sort herbs for her sick father.’”



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Then Nefert turned to a large group of the girls, who were sorting plants, and said: “Do you, children, know the origin of all these wholesome, healing herbs? The good Horus went out to fight against Seth, the murderer of his father, and the horrible enemy wounded Horus in the eye in the struggle; but the son of Osiris conquered, for good always conquers evil. But when Isis saw the bad wound, she pressed her son’s head to her bosom, and her heart was as sad as that of any poor human mother that holds her suffering child in her arms. And she thought: ‘How easy it is to give wounds, and how hard it is to heal them!’ and so she wept; one tear after another fell on the earth, and wherever they wetted the ground there sprang up a kindly healing plant.”

“Isis is good!” cried a little girl opposite to her. Mother says Isis loves children when they are good.”

“Your mother is right,” replied Nefert. “Isis herself has her dear little son Horus; and every human being that dies, and that was good, becomes a child again, and the Goddess makes it her own, and takes it to her breast, and nurses it with her sister Nephthys till he grows up and can fight for his father.”

Nefert observed that while she spoke one of the women was crying. She went up to her, and learned that her husband and her son were both dead, the former in Syria, and the latter after his return to Egypt. “Poor soul!” said Nefert. “Now you will be very careful, that the wounds of others may be healed. I will tell you something more about Isis. She loved her husband Osiris dearly, as you did your dead husband, and I my husband Mena, but he fell a victim to the cunning of Seth, and she could not tell where to find the body that had been carried away, while you can visit your husband in his grave. Then Isis went through the land lamenting, and ah! what was to become of Egypt, which received all its fruitfulness from Osiris. The sacred Nile was dried up, and not a blade of verdure was green on its banks. The Goddess grieved over this beyond words, and one of her tears fell in the bed of the river, and immediately it began to rise. You know, of course, that each inundation arises from a tear of Isis. Thus a widow’s sorrow may bring blessing to millions of human beings.”

The woman had listened to her attentively, and when Nefert ceased speaking she said:

“But I have still three little brats of my son’s to feed, for his wife, who was a washerwoman, was eaten by a crocodile while she was at work. Poor folks must work for themselves, and not for others. If the princess did not pay us, I could not think of the wounds of the soldiers, who do not belong to me. I am no longer strong, and four mouths to fill—”

Nefert was shocked—as she often was in the course of her new duties—and begged Bent-Gnat to raise the wages of the woman.



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“Willingly,” said the princess. “How could I beat down such an assistant. Come now with me into the kitchen. I am having some fruit packed for my father and brothers; there must be a box for Mena too.” Nefert followed her royal friend, found them packing in one case the golden dates of the oasis of Amon, and in another the dark dates of Nubia, the king’s favorite sort. “Let me pack them!” cried Nefert; she made the servants empty the box again, and re-arranged the various-colored dates in graceful patterns, with other fruits preserved in sugar.

Bent-Anat looked on, and when she had finished she took her hand. “Whatever your fingers have touched,” she exclaimed, “takes some pretty aspect. Give me that scrap of papyrus; I shall put it in the case, and write upon it:

“These were packed for king Rameses by his daughter’s clever helpmate, the wife of Mena.”

After the mid-day rest the princess was called away, and Nefert remained for some hours alone with the work-women.

When the sun went down, and the busy crowd were about to leave, Nefert detained them, and said: “The Sun-bark is sinking behind the western hills; come, let us pray together for the king and for those we love in the field. Each of you think of her own: you children of your fathers, you women of your sons, and we wives of our distant husbands, and let us entreat Amon that they may return to us as certainly as the sun, which now leaves us, will rise again to-morrow morning.”

Nefert knelt down, and with her the women and the children.

When they rose, a little girl went up to Nefert, and said, pulling her dress: “Thou madest us kneel here yesterday, and already my mother is better, because I prayed for her.”

“No doubt,” said Nefert, stroking the child’s black hair.

She found Bent-Anat on the terrace meditatively gazing across to the Necropolis, which was fading into darkness before her eyes. She started when she heard the light footsteps of her friend.

“I am disturbing thee,” said Nefert, about to retire.

“No, stay,” said Bent-Anat. “I thank the Gods that I have you, for my heart is sad—pitifully sad.”

“I know where your thoughts were,” said Nefert softly. “Well?” asked the princess.

“With Pentaur.”



“I think of him—always of him,” replied the princess, “and nothing else occupies my heart. I am no longer myself. What I think I ought not to think, what I feel I ought not to feel, and yet, I cannot command it, and I think my heart would bleed to death if I tried to cut out those thoughts and feelings. I have behaved strangely, nay unbecomingly, and now that which is hard to endure is hanging over me, something strange-which will perhaps drive you from me back to your mother.”

“I will share everything with you,” cried Nefert. “What is going to happen? Are you then no longer the daughter of Rameses?”



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“I showed myself to the people as a woman of the people,” answered Bent-Anat, “and I must take the consequences. Bek en Chunsu, the high-priest of Amon, has been with me, and I have had a long conversation with him. The worthy man is good to me, I know, and my father ordered me to follow his advice before any one’s. He showed me that I have erred deeply. In a state of uncleanness I went into one of the temples of the Necropolis, and after I had once been into the paraschites’ house and incurred Ameni’s displeasure, I did it a second time. They know over there all that took place at the festival. Now I must undergo purification, either with great solemnity at the hands of Ameni himself, before all the priests and nobles in the House of Seti, or by performing a pilgrimage to the Emerald-Hathor, under whose influence the precious stones are hewn from the rocks, metals dug out, and purified by fire. The Goddess shall purge me from my uncleanness as metal is purged from the dross. At a day’s journey and more from the mines, an abundant stream flows from the holy mountain-Sinai,” as it is called by the Mentut—and near it stands the sanctuary of the Goddess, in which priests grant purification. The journey is a long one, through the desert, and over the sea; But Bek en Chunsu advises me to venture it. Ameni, he says, is not amiably disposed towards me, because I infringed the ordinance which he values above all others. I must submit to double severity, he says, because the people look first to those of the highest rank; and if I went unpunished for contempt of the sacred institutions there might be imitators among the crowd. He speaks in the name of the Gods, and they measure hearts with an equal measure. The ell-measure is the symbol of the Goddess of Truth. I feel that it is all not unjust; and yet I find it hard to submit to the priest’s decree, for I am the daughter of Rameses!”

“Aye, indeed!” exclaimed Nefert, “and he is himself a God!”

“But he taught me to respect the laws!” interrupted the princess. “I discussed another thing with Bek en Chunsu. You know I rejected the suit of the Regent. He must secretly be much vexed with me. That indeed would not alarm me, but he is the guardian and protector appointed over me by my father, and yet can I turn to him in confidence for counsel, and help? No! I am still a woman, and Rameses’ daughter! Sooner will I travel through a thousand deserts than humiliate my father through his child. By tomorrow I shall have decided; but, indeed, I have already decided to make the journey, hard as it is to leave much that is here. Do not fear, dear! but you are too tender for such a journey, and to such a distance; I might—”

“No, no,” cried Nefert. “I am going, too, if you were going to the four pillars of heaven, at the limits of the earth. You have given me a new life, and the little sprout that is green within me would wither again if I had to return to my mother. Only she or I can be in our house, and I will re-enter it only with Mena.”



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"It is settled—I must go," said the princess. "Oh! if only my father were not so far off, and that I could consult him!"

"Yes! the war, and always the war!" sighed Nefert. "Why do not men rest content with what they have, and prefer the quiet peace, which makes life lovely, to idle fame?"

"Would they be men? should we love them?" cried Bent-Anat eagerly. "Is not the mind of the Gods, too, bent on war? Did you ever see a more sublime sight than Pentaur, on that evening when he brandished the stake he had pulled up, and exposed his life to protect an innocent girl who was in danger?"

"I dared not once look down into the court," said Nefert. "I was in such an agony of mind. But his loud cry still rings in my ears."

"So rings the war cry of heroes before whom the enemy quails!" exclaimed Bent-Anat.

"Aye, truly so rings the war cry!" said prince Rameri, who had entered his sister's half-dark room unperceived by the two women.

The princess turned to the boy. "How you frightened me!" she said.

"You!" said Rameri astonished.

"Yes, me. I used to have a stout heart, but since that evening I frequently tremble, and an agony of terror comes over me, I do not know why. I believe some demon commands me."

"You command, wherever you go; and no one commands you," cried Rameri. "The excitement and tumult in the valley, and on the quay, still agitate you. I grind my teeth myself when I remember how they turned me out of the school, and how Paaker set the dog at us. I have gone through a great deal today too."

"Where were you so long?" asked Bent-Anat. "My uncle Ani commanded that you should not leave the palace."

"I shall be eighteen years old next month," said the prince, "and need no tutor."

"But your father—" said Bent-Anat.

"My father"—interrupted the boy, "he little knows the Regent. But I shall write to him what I have today heard said by different people. They were to have sworn allegiance to Ani at that very feast in the valley, and it is quite openly said that Ani is aiming at the throne, and intends to depose the king. You are right, it is madness—but there must be something behind it all."



Nefert turned pale, and Bent-Anat asked for particulars. The prince repeated all he had gathered, and added laughing: “Ani depose my father! It is as if I tried to snatch the star of Isis from the sky to light the lamps—which are much wanted here.”

“It is more comfortable in the dark,” said Nefert. “No, let us have lights,” said Bent-Anat. “It is better to talk when we can see each other face to face. I have no belief in the foolish talk of the people; but you are right—we must bring it to my fathers knowledge.”

“I heard the wildest gossip in the City of the Dead,” said Rameri.

“You ventured over there? How very wrong!”



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"I disguised myself a little, and I have good news for you. Pretty Uarda is much better. She received your present, and they have a house of their own again. Close to the one that was burnt down, there was a tumbled-down hovel, which her father soon put together again; he is a bearded soldier, who is as much like her as a hedgehog is like a white dove. I offered her to work in the palace for you with the other girls, for good wages, but she would not; for she has to wait on her sick grandmother, and she is proud, and will not serve any one."

"It seems you were a long time with the paraschites' people," said Bent-Anat reprovingly. "I should have thought that what has happened to me might have served you as a warning."

"I will not be better than you!" cried the boy. "Besides, the paraschites is dead, and Uarda's father is a respectable soldier, who can defile no one. I kept a long way from the old woman. To-morrow I am going again. I promised her."

"Promised who?" asked his sister.

"Who but Uarda? She loves flowers, and since the rose which you gave her she has not seen one. I have ordered the gardener to cut me a basket full of roses to-morrow morning, and shall take them to her myself."

"That you will not!" cried Bent-Anat. "You are still but half a child— and, for the girl's sake too, you must give it up."

"We only gossip together," said the prince coloring, "and no one shall recognize me. But certainly, if you mean that, I will leave the basket of roses, and go to her alone. No—sister, I will not be forbidden this; she is so charming, so white, so gentle, and her voice is so soft and sweet! And she has little feet, as small as—what shall I say?—as small and graceful as Nefert's hand. We talked most about Pentaur. She knows his father, who is a gardener, and knows a great deal about him. Only think! she says the poet cannot be the son of his parents, but a good spirit that has come down on earth—perhaps a God. At first she was very timid, but when I spoke of Pentaur she grew eager; her reverence for him is almost idolatry—and that vexed me."

"You would rather she should reverence you so," said Nefert smiling.

"Not at all," cried Rameri. "But I helped to save her, and I am so happy when I am sitting with her, that to-morrow, I am resolved, I will put a flower in her hair. It is red certainly, but as thick as yours, Bent-Anat, and it must be delightful to unfasten it and stroke it."

The ladies exchanged a glance of intelligence, and the princess said decidedly:

"You will not go to the City of the Dead to-morrow, my little son!"

“That we will see, my little mother!” He answered laughing; then he turned grave.



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"I saw my school-friend Anana too," he said. "Injustice reigns in the House of Seti! Pentaur is in prison, and yesterday evening they sat in judgment upon him. My uncle was present, and would have pounced upon the poet, but Ameni took him under his protection. What was finally decided, the pupils could not learn, but it must have been something bad, for the son of the Treasurer heard Ameni saying, after the sitting, to old Gagabu: 'Punishment he deserves, but I will not let him be overwhelmed;' and he can have meant no one but Pentaur. To-morrow I will go over, and learn more; something frightful, I am afraid—several years of imprisonment is the least that will happen to him."

Bent-Anat had turned very pale.

"And whatever they do to him," she cried, "he will suffer for my sake! Oh, ye omnipotent Gods, help him—help me, be merciful to us both!"

She covered her face with her hands, and left the room. Rameri asked Nefert:

What can have come to my sister? she seems quite strange to me; and you too are not the same as you used to be."

"We both have to find our way in new circumstances."

"What are they?"

"That I cannot explain to you!—but it appears to me that you soon may experience something of the same kind. Rumeri, do not go again to the paraschites."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Early on the following clay the dwarf Nemu went past the restored hut of Uarda's father—in which he had formerly lived with his wife—with a man in a long coarse robe, the steward of some noble family. They went towards old Hekt's cave-dwelling.

"I would beg thee to wait down here a moment, noble lord," said the dwarf, "while I announce thee to my mother."

"That sounds very grand," said the other. "However, so be it. But stay! The old woman is not to call me by my name or by my title. She is to call me 'steward'—that no one may know. But, indeed, no one would recognize me in this dress."

Nemu hastened to the cave, but before he reached his mother she called out: "Do not keep my lord waiting—I know him well."

Nemu laid his finger to his lips.



“You are to call him steward,” said he.

“Good,” muttered the old woman. “The ostrich puts his head under his feathers when he does not want to be seen.”

“Was the young prince long with Uarda yesterday?”

“No, you fool,” laughed the witch, “the children play together. Rameri is a kid without horns, but who fancies he knows where they ought to grow. Pentaur is a more dangerous rival with the red-headed girl. Make haste, now; these stewards must not be kept waiting!”

The old woman gave the dwarf a push, and he hurried back to Ani, while she carried the child, tied to his board, into the cave, and threw the sack over him.

A few minutes later the Regent stood before her. She bowed before him with a demeanor that was more like the singer Beki than the sorceress Hekt, and begged him to take the only seat she possessed.



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When, with a wave of his hand, he declined to sit down, she said:

“Yes—yes—be seated! then thou wilt not be seen from the valley, but be screened by the rocks close by. Why hast thou chosen this hour for thy visit?”

“Because the matter presses of which I wish to speak,” answered Ani; “and in the evening I might easily be challenged by the watch. My disguise is good. Under this robe I wear my usual dress. From this I shall go to the tomb of my father, where I shall take off this coarse thing, and these other disfigurements, and shall wait for my chariot, which is already ordered. I shall tell people I had made a vow to visit the grave humbly, and on foot, which I have now fulfilled.”

“Well planned,” muttered the old woman.

Ani pointed to the dwarf, and said politely: “Your pupil.”

Since her narrative the sorceress was no longer a mere witch in his eyes. The old woman understood this, and saluted him with a curtsey of such courtly formality, that a tame raven at her feet opened his black beak wide, and uttered a loud scream. She threw a bit of cheese within the cave, and the bird hopped after it, flapping his clipped wings, and was silent.

“I have to speak to you about Pentaur,” said Ani. The old woman’s eyes flashed, and she eagerly asked, “What of him?”

“I have reasons,” answered the Regent, “for regarding him as dangerous to me. He stands in my way. He has committed many crimes, even murder; but he is in favor at the House of Seti, and they would willingly let him go unpunished. They have the right of sitting in judgment on each other, and I cannot interfere with their decisions; the day before yesterday they pronounced their sentence. They would send him to the quarries of Chennu.

[Chennu is now Gebel Silsileh; the quarries there are of enormous extent, and almost all the sandstone used for building the temples of Upper Egypt was brought from thence. The Nile is narrower there than above, and large stela, were erected there by Rameses II. his successor Merneptah, on which were inscribed beautiful hymns to the Nile, and lists of the sacrifices to be offered at the Nile- festivals. These inscriptions can be restored by comparison, and my friend Stern and I had the satisfaction of doing this on the spot (Zeitschrift fur Agyptische Sprache, 1873, p. 129.)]

“All my objections were disregarded, and now Nemu, go over to the grave of Anienophis, and wait there for me—I wish to speak to your mother alone.”

Nemu bowed, and then went down the slope, disappointed, it is true, but sure of learning later what the two had discussed together.



When the little man had disappeared, Ani asked:

“Have you still a heart true to the old royal house, to which your parents were so faithfully attached?” The old woman nodded.



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“Then you will not refuse your help towards its restoration. You understand how necessary the priesthood is to me, and I have sworn not to make any attempt on Pentaur’s life; but, I repeat it, he stands in my way. I have my spies in the House of Seti, and I know through them what the sending of the poet to Chennu really means. For a time they will let him hew sandstone, and that will only improve his health, for he is as sturdy as a tree. In Chennu, as you know, besides the quarries there is the great college of priests, which is in close alliance with the temple of Seti. When the flood begins to rise, and they hold the great Nile-festival in Chennu, the priests there have the right of taking three of the criminals who are working in the quarries into their house as servants. Naturally they will, next year, choose Pentaur, set him at liberty—and I shall be laughed at.”

“Well considered!” said aid Hekt.

“I have taken counsel with myself, with Katuti, and even with Nemu,” continued Ani, “but all that they have suggested, though certainly practicable, was unadvisable, and at any rate must have led to conjectures which I must now avoid. What is your opinion?”

“Assa’s race must be exterminated!” muttered the old woman hoarsely.

She gazed at the ground, reflecting.

“Let the boat be scuttled,” she said at last, “and sink with the chained prisoners before it reaches Chennu.”

“No-no; I thought of that myself, and Nemu too advised it,” cried Ani. “That has been done a hundred times, and Ameni will regard me as a perjurer, for I have sworn not to attempt Pentaur’s life.”

“To be sure, thou hast sworn that, and men keep their word—to each other. Wait a moment, how would this do? Let the ship reach Chennu with the prisoners, but, by a secret order to the captain, pass the quarries in the night, and hasten on as fast as possible as far as Ethiopia. From Suan,—[The modern Assuan at the first cataract.]—the prisoners may be conducted through the desert to the gold workings. Four weeks or even eight may pass before it is known here what has happened. If Ameni attacks thee about it, thou wilt be very angry at this oversight, and canst swear by all the Gods of the heavens and of the abyss, that thou hast not attempted Pentaur’s life. More weeks will pass in enquiries. Meanwhile do thy best, and Paaker do his, and thou art king. An oath is easily broken by a sceptre, and if thou wilt positively keep thy word leave Pentaur at the gold mines. None have yet returned from thence. My father’s and my brother’s bones have bleached there.”

“But Ameni will never believe in the mistake,” cried Ani, anxiously interrupting the witch.



“Then admit that thou gavest the order,” exclaimed Hekt. “Explain that thou hadst learned what they proposed doing with Pentaur at Chennu, and that thy word indeed was kept, but that a criminal could not be left unpunished. They will make further enquiries, and if Assa’s grandson is found still living thou wilt be justified. Follow my advice, if thou wilt prove thyself a good steward of thy house, and master of its inheritance.”



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“It will not do,” said the Regent. “I need Ameni’s support—not for to-day and to-morrow only. I will not become his blind tool; but he must believe that I am.”

The old woman shrugged her shoulders, rose, went into her cave, and brought out a phial.

“Take this,” she said. “Four drops of it in his wine infallibly destroys the drinker’s senses; try the drink on a slave, and thou wilt see how effectual it is.”

“What shall I do with it?” asked Ani.

“Justify thyself to Ameni,” said the witch laughing. “Order the ship’s captain to come to thee as soon as he returns; entertain him with wine— and when Ameni sees the distracted wretch, why should he not believe that in a fit of craziness he sailed past Chennu?”

“That is clever! that is splendid!” exclaimed Ani. “What is once remarkable never becomes common. You were the greatest of singers—you are now the wisest of women—my lady Beki.”

“I am no longer Beki, I am Hekt,” said the old woman shortly.

“As you will! In truth, if I had ever heard Beki’s singing, I should be bound to still greater gratitude to her than I now am to Hekt,” said Ani smiling. “Still, I cannot quit the wisest woman in Thebes without asking her one serious question. Is it given to you to read the future? Have you means at your command whereby you can see whether the great stake—you know which I mean—shall be won or lost?”

Hekt looked at the ground, and said after reflecting a short time:

“I cannot decide with certainty, but thy affair stands well. Look at these two hawks with the chain on their feet. They take their food from no one but me. The one that is moulting, with closed, grey eyelids, is Rameses; the smart, smooth one, with shining eyes, is thyself. It comes to this—which of you lives the longest. So far, thou hast the advantage.”

Ani cast an evil glance at the king’s sick hawk; but Hekt said: “Both must be treated exactly alike. Fate will not be done violence to.”

“Feed them well,” exclaimed the Regent; he threw a purse into Hekt’s lap, and added, as he prepared to leave her: “If anything happens to either of the birds let me know at once by Nemu.”

Ani went down the hill, and walked towards the neighboring tomb of his father; but Hekt laughed as she looked after him, and muttered to herself:



“Now the fool will take care of me for the sake of his bird! That smiling, spiritless, indolent-minded man would rule Egypt! Am I then so much wiser than other folks, or do none but fools come to consult Hekt? But Rameses chose Ani to represent him! perhaps because he thinks that those who are not particularly clever are not particularly dangerous. If that is what he thought, he was not wise, for no one usually is so self-confident and insolent as just such an idiot.”

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:



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Age when usually even bad liquor tastes of honey
How easy it is to give wounds, and how hard it is to heal
Kisra called wine the soap of sorrow
No one so self-confident and insolent as just such an idiot
The mother of foresight looks backwards

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