

An Egyptian Princess — Volume 05 eBook

An Egyptian Princess — Volume 05 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XIV.

The next day Nitetis removed to the country-house in the hanging-gardens, and began a monotonous, but happy and industrious life there, according to the rules laid down by Croesus. Every day she was carried to Kassandane and Atossa in a closely shut-up litter. Nitetis soon began to look upon the blind queen as a beloved and loving mother, and the merry, spirited Atossa nearly made up to her for the loss of her sister Tachot, so far away on the distant Nile. She could not have desired a better companion than this gay, cheerful girl, whose wit and merriment effectually prevented homesickness or discontent from settling in her friend's heart. The gravity and earnestness of Nitetis' character were brightened by Atossa's gaiety, and Atossa's exuberant spirits calmed and regulated by the thoughtful nature of Nitetis.

Both Croesus and Kassandane were pleased and satisfied with their new daughter and pupil, and Oropastes extolled her talents and industry daily to Cambyses. She learnt the Persian language unusually well and quickly; Cambyses only visited his mother when he hoped to find Nitetis there, and presented her continually with rich dresses and costly jewels. But the highest proof of his favor consisted in his abstaining from visiting her at her house in the hanging-gardens, a line of conduct which proved that he meant to include Nitetis in the small number of his real and lawful wives, a privilege of which many a princess in his harem could not boast.

The grave, beautiful girl threw a strange spell over this strong, turbulent man. Her presence alone seemed enough to soften his stubborn will, and he would watch their games for hours, his eyes fixed on her graceful movements. Once, when the ball had fallen into the water, the king sprang in after it, regardless of his costly apparel. Nitetis screamed on seeing his intention, but Cambyses handed her the dripping toy with the words: "Take care or I shall be obliged to frighten you again." At the same time he drew from his neck a gold chain set with jewels and gave it to the blushing girl, who thanked him with a look which fully revealed her feelings for her future husband.

Croesus, Kassandane and Atossa soon noticed that Nitetis loved the king. Her former fear of this proud and powerful being had indeed changed into a passionate admiration. She felt as if she must die if deprived of his presence. He seemed to her like a, glorious and omnipotent divinity, and her wish to possess him presumptuous and sacrilegious; but its fulfilment shone before her as an idea more beautiful even than return to her native land and reunion with those who, till now, had been her only loved ones.

Nitetis herself was hardly conscious of the strength of her feelings, and believed that when she trembled before the king's arrival it was from fear, and not from her longing to behold him once more. Croesus, however, had soon discovered the truth, and brought a deep blush to his favorite's cheek by singing to her, old as he was, Anacreon's newest song, which he had learnt at Sais from Ibykus

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"We read the flying courser's name
Upon his side in marks of flame;
And by their turban'd brows alone
The warriors of the East are known.
But in the lover's glowing eyes,
The inlet to his bosom lies;
Through them we see the tiny mark,
Where Love has dropp'd his burning spark"

—Paegnion 15

And thus, in work and amusement, jest, earnest, and mutual love, the weeks and months passed with Nitetis. Cambyses' command that she was to be happy in his land had fulfilled itself, and by the time the Mesopotamian spring-tide (January, February and March), which succeeds the rainy month of December, was over, and the principal festival of the Asiatics, the New Year, had been solemnized at the equinox, and the May sun had begun to glow in the heavens, Nitetis felt quite at home in Babylon, and all the Persians knew that the young Egyptian princess had quite displaced Phaedime, the daughter of Otanes, in the king's favor, and would certainly become his first and favorite wife.

Boges sank considerably in public estimation, for it was known that Cambyses had ceased to visit the harem, and the chief of the eunuchs had owed all his importance to the women, who were compelled to coax from Cambyses whatever Boges desired for himself or others. Not a day passed on which the mortified official did not consult with the supplanted favorite Phaedime, as to the best means of ruining Nitetis, but their most finely spun intrigues and artifices were baffled by the strength of king's love and the blameless life of his royal bride.

Phaedime, impatient, mortified, and thirsting for vengeance, was perpetually urging Boges to some decided act; he, on the contrary, advised patience.

At last, however, after many weeks, he came to her full of joy, exclaiming: "I have devised a little plan which must ruin the Egyptian woman as surely as my name is Boges. When Bartja comes back, my treasure, our hour will have arrived."

While saying this the creature rubbed his fat, soft hands, and, with his perpetual fulsome smile, looked as if he were feasting on some good deed performed. He did not, however, give Phaedime the faintest idea of the nature of his "little plan," and only answered her pressing questions with the words: "Better lay your head in a lion's jaws, than your secret in the ears of a woman. I fully acknowledge your courage, but at the same time advise you to remember that, though a man proves his courage in action, a woman's is shown in obedience. Obey my words and await the issue in patience."

Nebenchari, the oculist, continued to attend the queen, but so carefully abstained from all intercourse with the Persians, that he became a proverb among them for his gloomy,

silent ways. During the day he was to be found in the queen's apartments, silently examining large rolls of papyri, which he called the book of Athotes and the sacred Ambres; at night, by permission of the king and the satraps of Babylon, he often ascended one of the high towers on the walls, called Tritantaechnes, in order to observe the stars.

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The Chaldaean priests, the earliest astronomers, would have allowed him to take his observations from the summit of the great temple of Bel, their own observatory, but he refused this offer decidedly, and persisted in his haughty reserve. When Oropastes attempted to explain to him the celebrated Babylonian sun-dial, introduced by Anaximander of Miletus into Greece, he turned from the Magian with a scornful laugh, saying: "We knew all this, before you knew the meaning of an hour."

Nitetic had shown Nebenchari much kindness, yet he took no interest in her, seemed indeed to avoid her purposely, and on her asking whether she had displeased or offended him, answered: "For me you are a stranger. How can I reckon those my friends, who can so gladly and so quickly forget those they loved best, their gods, and the customs of their native land?"

Boges quickly discovered this state of feeling on the part of Nebenchari, and took much pains to secure him as an ally, but the physician rejected the eunuch's flatteries, gifts, and attentions with dignity.

No sooner did an Angare appear in the court of the palace with despatches for the king, than Boges hastened to enquire whether news from the Tapuri had arrived.

At length the desired messenger appeared, bringing word that the rebels were subdued, and Bartja on the point of returning.

Three weeks passed—fresh messengers arrived from day to day announcing the approach of the victorious prince; the streets glittered once more in festal array, the army entered the gates of Babylon, Bartja thanked the rejoicing multitude, and a short time after was in the arms of his blind mother.

Cambyzes received his brother with undisguised warmth, and took him to the queen's apartments, when he knew that Nitetic would be there.

For he was sure the Egyptian girl loved him; his previous jealousy seemed a silly fancy now, and he wished to give Bartja an opportunity of seeing how entirely he trusted his bride.

Cambyzes' love had made him mild and gentle, unwearied in giving and in doing good. His wrath slumbered for a season, and around the spot where the heads of those who had suffered capital punishment were exhibited as a warning to their fellow-men, the hungry, screeching crows now wheeled, in vain.

The influence of the insinuating eunuchs (a race who had never been seen within the gates of Cyrus until the incorporation of Media, Lydia and Babylon, in which countries they had filled many of the highest offices at court and in the state), was now waning, and the importance of the noble Achaemenidae increasing in proportion; for Cambyzes

applied oftener to the latter than to the former for advice in matters relating to the welfare of the country.

The aged Hystaspes, father of Darius, governor of Persia proper and cousin to the king; Pharnaspes, Cambyses' grandfather on the mother's side; Otanes, his uncle and father-in-law. Intaphernes, Aspathines, Gobryas, Hydarnes, the general Megabyzus, father of Zopyrus, the envoy Prexaspes, the noble Croesus, and the old warrior Araspes; in short, the flower of the ancient Persian aristocracy, were now at the court of Cambyses.

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To this must be added that the entire nobility of the realm, the satraps or governors of the provinces, and the chief priests from every town were also assembled at Babylon to celebrate the king's birthday.

[The king's birthday was the principal feast among the Persians, and called "the perfect feast." Herod. I. 133. Birthdays were held in much honor by the ancients, and more especially those of their kings. Both the great bilingual Egyptian tablets, which we possess (the Rosetta stone, line 10 of hieroglyphic text; Gr. text, line 46. and the edict of Canopus ed. Lepsius, hieroglyphic text 1. 3. Gr. text 1. 5.) mention the celebration of the birthday of one of the Ptolemies; and even of Rameses II., so early as the 14th century B. C. we read: "There was joy in heaven on his birthday."]

The entire body of officials and deputies streamed from the provinces up to the royal city, bringing presents to their ruler and good wishes; they came also to take part in the great sacrifices at which horses, stags, bulls and asses were slaughtered in thousands as offerings to the gods.

At this festival all the Persians received gifts, every man was allowed to ask a petition of the king, which seldom remained unfulfilled, and in every city the people were feasted at the royal expense. Cambyses had commanded that his marriage with Nitetis should be celebrated eight days after the birthday, and all the magnates of the realms should be invited to the ceremony.

The streets of Babylon swarmed with strangers, the colossal palaces on both shores of the Euphrates were overfilled, and all the houses stood adorned in festal brightness.

The zeal thus displayed by his people, this vast throng of human beings, —representing and bringing around him, as it were, his entire kingdom, contributed not a little to raise the king's spirits.

His pride was gratified; and the only longing left in his heart had been stilled by Nitetis' love. For the first time in his life he believed himself completely happy, and bestowed his gifts, not only from a sense of his duty as king of Persia, but because the act of giving was in itself a pleasure.

Megabyzus could not extol the deeds of Bartja and his friends too highly. Cambyses embraced the young warriors, gave them horses and gold chains, called them "brothers" and reminded Bartja, that he had promised to grant him a petition if he returned victorious.

At this Bartja cast down his eyes, not knowing at first in what form to begin his request, and the king answered laughing: "Look, my friends; our young hero is blushing like a girl! It seems I shall have to grant something important; so he had better wait until my birthday, and then, at supper, when the wine has given him courage, he shall whisper in

my ear what he is now afraid to utter. Ask much, Bartja, I am happy myself, and wish all my friends to be happy too." Bartja only smiled in answer and went to his mother; for he had not yet opened his heart to her on the matter which lay so near it.

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He was afraid of meeting with decided opposition; but Croesus had cleared the way far him by telling Kassandane so much in praise of Sappho, her virtues and her graces, her talents and skill, that Nitetis and Atossa maintained she must have given the old man a magic potion, and Kassandane, after a short resistance, yielded to her darling's entreaties.

"A Greek woman the lawful wife of a Persian prince of the blood!" cried the blind woman. "Unheard of! What will Cambyzes say? How can we gain his consent?"

"On that matter you may be at ease, my mother," answered Bartja, "I am as certain that my brother will give his consent, as I am that Sappho will prove an ornament and honor to our house."

"Croesus has already told me much in favor of this maiden," answered Kassandane, "and it pleases me that thou hast at last resolved to marry; but never-the-less this alliance does not seem suitable for a son of Cyrus. And have you forgotten that the Achaemenidae; will probably refuse to recognize the child of a Greek mother as their future king, if Cambyzes should remain childless?"

"Mother, I fear nothing; for my heart is not set upon the crown. And indeed many a king of Persia has had a mother of far lower parentage than my Sappho." I feel persuaded that when my relations see the precious jewel I have won on the Nile, not one of them will chide me."

"The gods grant that Sappho may be equal to our Nitetis!" answered Kassandane, "I love her as if she were my own child, and bless the day which brought her to Persia. The warm light of her eyes has melted your brother's hard heart; her kindness and gentleness bring beauty into the night of my blind old age, and her sweet earnestness and gravity have changed your sister Atossa from an unruly child into a gentle maiden. But now call them, (they are playing in the garden), and we will tell them of the new friend they are to gain through you."

"Pardon me, my mother," answered Bartja, "but I must beg you not to tell my sister until we are sure of the king's consent."

"You are right, my son. We must conceal your wish, to save Nitetis and Atossa from a possible disappointment. A bright hope unfulfilled is harder to bear than an unexpected sorrow. So let us wait for your brother's consent, and may the gods give their blessing!" Early in the morning of the king's birthday the Persians offered their sacrifices on the shores of the Euphrates. A huge altar of silver had been raised on an artificial hill. On this a mighty fire had been kindled, from which flames and sweet odors rose towards heaven. White-robed magi fed the fire with pieces of daintily-cut sandal-wood, and stirred it with bundles of rods.

A cloth, the Paiti-dhana, was bound round the heads of the priests, the ends of which covered the mouth, and thus preserved the pure fire from pollution by human breath.

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[The Persians were ordered to hold this little square piece of cloth before their mouths when they prayed. It was from 2 to 7 fingers broad. Anquetil gives a drawing of it in his Zend-Avesia. Strabo speaks of the Paiti-dhana p. 733. He says the ends of the cloth used as a covering for the head hung down over the mouth.]

The victims had been slaughtered in a meadow near the river, the flesh cut into pieces, sprinkled with salt, and laid out on tender grasses, sprouts of clover, myrtle-blossoms, and laurel-leaves, that the beautiful daughter of Ormuzd, the patient, sacred Earth, might not be touched by aught that was dead or bleeding.

Oropastes, the chief Destur,—[Priest]—now drew near the fire and cast fresh butter into it. The flames leapt up into the air and all the Persians fell on their knees and hid their faces, in the belief that the fire was now ascending to their great god and father. The Magian then took a mortar, laid some leaves and stalks of the sacred herb Haomas within it, crushed them and poured the ruddy juice, the food of the gods, into the flames.

After this he raised his hands to heaven, and, while the other priests continually fed the flames into a wilder blaze by casting in fresh butter, sang a long prayer out of the sacred books. In this prayer the blessing of the gods was called down on everything pure and good, but principally on the king and his entire realm. The good spirits of light, life and truth; of all noble deeds; of the Earth, the universal giver; of the refreshing waters, the shining metals, the pastures, trees and innocent creatures, were praised: the evil spirits of darkness; of lying, the deceiver of mankind; of disease, death and sin; of the rigid cold; the desolating heat; of all odious dirt and vermin, were cursed, together with their father the malignant Ahriman. At the end all present joined in singing the festival prayer: "Purity and glory are sown for them that are pure and upright in heart."

The sacrificial ceremony was concluded with the king's prayer, and then Cambyses, arrayed in his richest robes, ascended a splendid chariot drawn by four snow-white Nicoean horses, and studded with topazes, cornelian and amber, and was conveyed to the great reception-hall, where the deputies and officers from the provinces awaited him.

As soon as the king and his retinue had departed, the priests selected, for themselves, the best pieces of the flesh which had been offered in sacrifice, and allowed the thronging crowd to take the rest.

The Persian divinities disdained sacrifices in the light of food, requiring only the souls of the slaughtered animals, and many a poor man, especially among the priests, subsisted on the flesh of the abundant royal sacrifices.

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The prayer offered up by the Magian was a model for those of the Persian people. No man was allowed to ask anything of the gods for himself alone. Every pious soul was rather to implore blessings for his nation; for was not each only a part of the whole? and did not each man share in the blessings granted to the whole kingdom? But especially they were commanded to pray for the king, in whom the realm was embodied and shadowed forth. It was this beautiful surrender of self for the public weal, that had made the Persians great. The doctrines of the Egyptian priesthood represented the Pharaohs as actual divinities, while the Persian monarchs were only called "sons of the gods;" yet the power of the latter was far more absolute and unfettered than that of the former; the reason for this being that the Persians had been wise enough to free themselves from priestly domination, while the Pharaohs, as we have seen, if not entirely under the dominion of the priestly caste, were yet under its influence in the most important matters.

The Egyptian intolerance of all strange religions was unknown in Asia. The conquered Babylonians were allowed by Cyrus to retain their own gods, after their incorporation in the great Asiatic kingdom. The Jews, Ionians and inhabitants of Asia Minor, in short, the entire mass of nations subject to Cambyses remained unmolested in possession of their hereditary religions and customs.

Beside the great altar, therefore, might be seen many a smaller sacrificial flame, kindled in honor of their own divinities, by the envoys from the conquered provinces to this great birthday feast.

Viewed from a distance, the immense city looked like a gigantic furnace. Thick clouds of smoke hovered over its towers, obscuring the light of the burning May sun.

By the time the king had reached the palace, the multitude who had come to take part in the festival had formed themselves into a procession of interminable length, which wandered on through the straight streets of Babylon towards the royal palace.

Their road was strewn with myrtle and palm-branches, roses, poppy and oleander-blossoms, and with leaves of the silver poplar, palm and laurel; the air perfumed with incense, myrrh, and a thousand other sweet odors. Carpets and flags waved and fluttered from the houses.

Music too was there; the shrill peal of the Median trumpet, and soft tone of the Phrygian flute; the Jewish cymbal and harp, Paphlagonian tambourines and the stringed instruments of Ionia; Syrian kettle-drums and cymbals, the shells and drums of the Arians from the mouth of the Indus, and the loud notes of the Bactrian battle-trumpets. But above all these resounded the rejoicing shouts of the Babylonian multitude, subjugated by the Persians only a few short years before, and yet, like all Asiatics, wearing their fetters with an air of gladness so long as the fear of their tyrant was before their eyes.

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The fragrant odors, the blaze of color and sparkling of gold and jewels, the neighing of the horses, and shouts and songs of human beings, all united to produce a whole, at once bewildering and intoxicating to the senses and the feelings.

The messengers had not been sent up to Babylon empty-handed. Beautiful horses, huge elephants and comical monkeys; rhinoceroses and buffaloes adorned with housings and tassels; double-humped Bactrian camels with gold collars on their shaggy necks; waggon-loads of rare woods and ivory, woven goods of exquisite texture, casks of ingots and gold-dust, gold and silver vessels, rare plants for the royal gardens, and foreign animals for the preserves, the most remarkable of which were antelopes, zebras, and rare monkeys and birds, these last being tethered to a tree in full leaf and fluttering among the branches. Such were the offerings sent to the great king of Persia.

They were the tribute of the conquered nations and, after having been shown to the king, were weighed and tested by treasurers and secretaries, either declared satisfactory, or found wanting and returned, in which case the niggardly givers were condemned to bring a double tribute later.

[At the time of which we are writing, the kings of Persia taxed their kingdom at whatever time and to whatever extent seemed good in their own eyes. Cambyzes' successor, Darius, was the first to introduce a regular system of taxation, in consequence of which he was nicknamed "the shopkeeper." Up to a much later period it still remained the duty of certain districts to send natural products to the court Herod. I. 192. Xenoph. Anab. IV. 5.]

The palace-gates were reached without hindrance, the way being kept clear by lines of soldiers and whipbearers stationed on either side of the street.

If the royal progress to the place of sacrifice, when five hundred richly-caprisoned horses had been led behind the king's chariot, could be called magnificent, and the march of the envoys a brilliant spectacle, the great throne-room presented a vision of dazzling and magic beauty.

In the background, raised on six steps, each of which was guarded, as it were, by two golden clogs, stood the throne of gold; above it, supported by four golden pillars studded with precious stones, was a purple canopy, on which appeared two winged discs, the king's Feruer.

[The Feruer or Ferwer is the spiritual part of every man-his soul and reason. It was in existence before the man was born, joins him at his birth and departs at his death. The Ferwer keeps up a war with the Diws or evil spirits, and is the element of man's preservation in life. The moment he departs, the body returns to its original elements. After death he becomes immortal if he has done well, but if his deeds have been evil he

is cast into hell. It is right to call upon the Ferwer and entreat his help. He will bring the prayer before God and on this account is represented as a winged disc.]

Fan-bearers, high in office at the court, stood behind the throne, and, on either side, those who sat at the king's table, his relations and friends, and the most important among the officers of state, the priestly caste and the eunuchs.

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The walls and ceiling of the entire hall were covered with plates of burnished gold, and the floor with purple carpets.

Before the silver gates lay winged bulls, and the king's body-guard-their dress consisting of a gold cuirass under a purple overcoat, and the high Persian cap, their swords in golden scabbards glittering with jewels, and their lances ornamented with gold and silver apples, were stationed in the court of the palace. Among them the band of the "Immortals" was easily to be distinguished by their stately forms and dauntless bearing.

Officers, whose duty consisted in announcing and presenting strangers, and who carried short ivory staves, led the deputies into the hall, and up to the throne, where they cast themselves on the ground as though they would kiss the earth, concealing their hands in the sleeves of their robes. A cloth was bound over the mouth of every man before he was allowed to answer the king's questions, lest the pure person of the king should be polluted by the breath of common men.

Cambyses' severity or mildness towards the deputations with whose chiefs he spoke, was proportioned to the obedience of their province and the munificence of their tribute-offerings. Near the end of the train appeared an embassy from the Jews, led by two grave men with sharply-cut features and long beards. Cambyses called on them in a friendly tone to stop.

The first of these men was dressed in the fashion of the Babylonian aristocracy. The other wore a purple robe woven without seam, trimmed with bells and tassels, and held in at the waist by a girdle of blue, red and white. A blue garment was thrown over his shoulders and a little bag suspended around his neck containing the sacred lots, the Urim and Thummin, adorned with twelve precious stones set in gold, and bearing the names of the tribes of Israel. The high-priest's brow was grave and thoughtful. A white cloth was wound round his head, the ends of which hung down to the shoulders.

"I rejoice to behold you once more, Belteshazzar," exclaimed the king to the former of the two men. "Since the death of my father you have not been seen at my gate."

The man thus addressed bowed humbly and answered: "The favor of the king rejoices his servant! If it seem good unto thee, to cause the sun of thy favor to shine on me, thine unworthy servant, so hearken unto my petition for my nation, which thy great father caused to return unto the land of their fathers' sepulchres. This old man at my side, Joshua, the high-priest of our God, hath not feared the long journey to Babylon, that he might bring his request before thy face. Let his speech be pleasing in thine ears and his words bring forth fruit in thine heart."

"I foresee what ye desire of me," cried the king. "Am I wrong, priest, in supposing that your petition refers to the building of the temple in your native land?"

“Nothing can be hidden from the eyes of my lord,” answered the priest, bowing low.
“Thy servants in Jerusalem desire to behold the face of their ruler, and beseech thee by my mouth to visit the land of their fathers, and to grant them permission to set forward the work of the temple, concerning which thine illustrious father (the favor of our God rest upon him), made a decree.”

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The king answered with a smile: "You have the craft of your nation, and understand how to choose the right time and words for your petition. On my birthday it is difficult for me to refuse my faithful people even one request. I promise you, therefore, so soon as possible to visit Jerusalem and the land of your fathers."

"By so doing thou wilt make glad the hearts of thy servants," answered the priest; "our vines and olives will bear more fruit at thine approach, our gates will lift up their heads to receive thee, and Israel rejoice with shouts to meet his lord doubly blessed if as lord of the building—"

"Enough, priest, enough!" cried Cambyses. "Your first petition, I have said it, shall not remain unfulfilled; for I have long desired to visit the wealthy city of Tyre, the golden Sidon, and Jerusalem with its strange superstitions; but were I to give permission for the building now, what would remain for me to grant you in the coming year?"

"Thy servants will no more molest thee by their petitions, if thou grant unto them this one, to finish the temple of the Lord their God," answered the priest.

"Strange beings, these men of Palestine!" exclaimed Cambyses. "I have heard it said that ye believe in one God alone, who can be represented by no likeness, and is a spirit. Think ye then that this omnipresent Being requires a house? Verily, your great spirit can be but a weak and miserable creature, if he need a covering from the wind and rain, and a shelter from the heat which he himself has created. If your God be like ours, omnipresent, fall down before him and worship as we do, in every place, and feel certain that everywhere ye will be heard of him!"

"The God of Israel hears his people in every place," exclaimed the high-priest. "He heard us when we pined in captivity under the Pharaohs far from our land; he heard us weeping by the rivers of Babylon. He chose thy father to be the instrument of our deliverance, and will hear my prayer this day and soften thine heart like wise. O mighty king, grant unto thy servants a common place of sacrifice, whither our twelve tribes may repair, an altar on the steps of which they can pray together, a house in which to keep their holy feasts! For this permission we will call down the blessing of God upon thine head and his curse upon thine enemies."

"Grant unto my brethren the permission to build their temple!" added Belteshazzar, who was the richest and most honorable and respected of the Jews yet remaining in Babylon; a man whom Cyrus had treated with much consideration, and of whom he had even taken counsel from time to time.

"Will ye then be peaceable, if I grant your petition?" asked the king. "My father allowed you to begin the work and granted the means for its completion. Of one mind, happy and content, ye returned to your native land, but while pursuing your work strife and contention entered among you. Cyrus was assailed by repeated letters, signed by the

chief men of Syria, entreating him to forbid the work, and I also have been lately besought to do the same. Worship your God when and where ye will, but just because I desire your welfare, I cannot consent to the prosecution of a work which kindles discord among you.”

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"And is it then thy pleasure on this day to take back a favor, which thy father made sure unto us by a written decree?" asked Belteshazzar.

"A written decree?"

"Which will surely be found even to this day laid up in the archives of thy kingdom."

"Find this decree and show it me, and I will not only allow the building to be continued, but will promote the same," answered the king; "for my father's will is as sacred to me as the commands of the gods."

"Wilt thou allow search to be made in the house of the rolls at Ecbatana?" asked Belteshazzar. "The decree will surely be found there."

"I consent, but I fear ye will find none. Tell thy nation, priest, that I am content with the equipment of the men of war they have sent to take the field against the Massagetae. My general Megabyzus commends their looks and bearing. May thy people prove as valiant now as in the wars of my father! You, Belteshazzar, I bid to my marriage feast, and charge you to tell your fellows, Meshach and Abednego, next unto you the highest in the city of Babylon, that I expect them this evening at my table."

"The God of my people Israel grant thee blessing and happiness," answered Belteshazzar bowing low before the king.

"A wish which I accept!" answered the king, "for I do not despise the power of your wonder-working great Spirit. But one word more, Belteshazzar. Many Jews have lately been punished for reviling the gods of the Babylonians. Warn your people! They bring down hatred on themselves by their stiff-necked superstition, and the pride with which they declare their own great spirit to be the only true God. Take example by us; we are content with our own faith and leave others to enjoy theirs in peace. Cease to look upon yourselves as better than the rest of the world. I wish you well, for a pride founded on self-respect is pleasing in mine eyes; but take heed lest pride degenerate into vainglory. Farewell! rest assured of my favor."

The Jews then departed. They were disappointed, but not hopeless; for Belteshazzar knew well that the decree, relative to the building of the temple, must be in the archives at Ecbatana.

They were followed by a deputation from Syria, and by the Greeks of Ionia; and then, winding up the long train, appeared a band of wild-looking men, dressed in the skins of animals, whose features bespoke them foreigners in Babylon. They wore girdles and shoulderbands of solid, unwrought gold; and of the same precious metal were their bow-cases, axes, lance-points, and the ornaments on their high fur caps. They were

preceded by a man in Persian dress, whose features proved him, however, to be of the same race as his followers.

The king gazed at first on these envoys with wonder; then his brow darkened, and beckoning the officer whose duty it was to present strangers, he exclaimed "What can these men have to crave of me? If I mistake not they belong to the Massagetae, to that people who are so soon to tremble before my vengeance. Tell them, Gobryas, that an armed host is standing on the Median plains ready to answer their demands with the sword."

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Gobryas answered, bowing low: "These men arrived this morning during the sacrifice bringing huge burdens of the purest gold to purchase your forbearance. When they heard that a great festival was being celebrated in your honor, they urgently besought to be admitted into your presence, that they might declare the message entrusted to them by their country."

The king's brow cleared and, after sharply scrutinizing the tall, bearded Massageta:, he said: "Let them come nearer. I am curious to know what proposals my father's murderers are about to make me."

Gobryas made a sign, and the tallest and eldest of the Massagetae came up close to the throne and began to speak loudly in his native tongue. He was accompanied by the man in a Persian dress, who, as one of Cyrus' prisoners of war, had learnt the Persian language, and now interpreted one by one the sentences uttered by the spokesman of this wandering tribe.

"We know," began the latter, "that thou, great king, art wroth with the Massagetae because thy father fell in war with our tribe—a war which he alone had provoked with a people who had done naught to offend him."

"My father was justified in punishing your nation," interrupted the king. "Your Queen Tomyris had dared to refuse him her hand in marriage."

"Be not wroth, O King," answered the Massagetan, "when I tell thee that our entire nation approved of that act. Even a child could see that the great Cyrus only desired to add our queen to the number of his wives, hoping, in his insatiable thirst for more territories, to gain our land with her."

Cambyses was silent and the envoy went on. "Cyrus caused a bridge to be made over our boundary river, the Araxes. We were not dismayed at this, and Tomyris sent word that he might save himself this trouble, for that the Massagetae were willing either to await him quietly in their own land, leaving the passage of the river free, or to meet him in his. Cyrus decided, by the advice of the dethroned king of Lydia, (as we learnt afterwards, through some prisoners of war) on meeting us in our own land and defeating us by a stratagem. With this intention he sent at first only a small body of troops, which could be easily dispersed and destroyed by our arrows and lances, and allowed us to seize his camp without striking a blow. Believing we had defeated this insatiable conqueror, we feasted on his abundant stores, and, poisoned by the sweet unknown drink which you call wine, fell into a stupefied slumber, during which his soldiers fell upon us, murdered the greater number of our warriors and took many captives. Among the latter was the brave, young Spargapises, our queen's son.

"Hearing in his captivity, that his mother was willing to conclude peace with your nation as the price of his liberty, he asked to have his chains taken off. The request was

granted, and on obtaining the use of his hands he seized a sword and stabbed himself, exclaiming: 'I sacrifice my life for the freedom of my nation.'"

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"No sooner did we hear the news that the young prince we loved so well had died thus, than we assembled all the forces yet left to us from your swords and fetters. Even old men and boys flew to arms to revenge our noble Spargapises, and sacrifice themselves, after his example, for Massagetaen freedom. Our armies met; ye were worsted and Cyrus fell. When Tomyris found his body lying in a pool of human blood, she cried: 'Methinks, insatiable conqueror, thou art at last sated with blood!' The troop, composed of the flower of your nobility, which you call the Immortals, drove us back and carried your father's dead body forth from our closest ranks. You led them on, fighting like a lion. I know you well, and that wound across your manly face, which adorns it like a purple badge of honor, was made by the sword now hanging at my side."

A movement passed through the listening crowd; they trembled for the bold speaker's life. Cambyses, however, looked pleased, nodded approvingly to the man and answered: "Yes, I recognize you too now; you rode a red horse with golden trappings. You shall see that the Persians know how to honor courage. Bow down before this man, my friends, for never did I see a sharper sword nor a more unwearied arm than his; and such heroic courage deserves honor from the brave, whether shown by friend or foe. As for you, Massagetae, I would advise you to go home quickly and prepare for war; the mere recollection of your strength and courage increases my longing to test it once more. A brave foe, by Mithras, is far better than a feeble friend. You shall be allowed to return home in peace; but beware of remaining too long within my reach, lest the thought of the vengeance I owe my father's soul should rouse my anger, and your end draw suddenly nigh."

A bitter smile played round the bearded mouth of the warrior as he made answer to this speech. "The Massagetae deem your father's soul too well avenged already. The only son of our queen, his people's pride, and in no way inferior to Cyrus, has bled for him. The shores of the Araxes have been fertilized by the bodies of fifty thousand of my countrymen, slain as offerings for your dead king, while only thirty thousand fell there on your own side. We fought as bravely as you, but your armor is better able to resist the arrows which pierce our clothing of skins. And lastly, as the most cruel blow of all, ye slew our queen."

"Tomyris is dead?" exclaimed Cambyses interrupting him. "You mean to tell me that the Persians have killed a woman? Answer at once, what has happened to your queen?"

"Tomyris died ten months ago of grief for the loss of her only son, and I have therefore a right to say that she too fell a sacrifice to the war with Persia and to your father's spirit."

"She was a great woman," murmured Cambyses, his voice unsteady from emotion.

"Verily, I begin to think that the gods themselves have undertaken to revenge my father's blood on your nation. Yet I tell you that, heavy as your losses may seem, Spargapises, Tomyris and fifty thousand Massagetae can never outweigh the spirit of one king of Persia, least of all of a Cyrus."

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"In our country," answered the envoy, "death makes all men equal. The spirits of the king and the slave are of equal worth. Your father was a great man, but we have undergone awful sufferings for his sake. My tale is not yet ended. After the death of Tomyris discord broke out among the Massagetae. Two claimants for the crown appeared; half our nation fought for the one, half for the other, and our hosts were thinned, first by this fearful civil war and then by the pestilence which followed in its track. We can no longer resist your power, and therefore come with heavy loads of pure gold as the price of peace."

"Ye submit then without striking a blow?" asked Cambyses. "Verily, I had expected something else from such heroes; the numbers of my host, which waits assembled on the plains of Media, will prove that. We cannot go to battle without an enemy. I will dismiss my troops and send a satrap. Be welcome as new subjects of my realm."

The red blood mounted into the cheeks of the Massagetan warrior on hearing these words, and he answered in a voice trembling with excitement: "You err, O King, if you imagine that we have lost our old courage, or learnt to long for slavery. But we know your strength; we know that the small remnant of our nation, which war and pestilence have spared, cannot resist your vast and well-armed hosts. This we admit, freely and honestly as is the manner of the Massagetae, declaring however at the same time, that we are determined to govern ourselves as of yore, and will never receive laws or ordinances from a Persian satrap. You are wroth, but I can bear your angry gaze and yet repeat my declaration."

"And my answer," cried Cambyses, "is this: Ye have but one choice: either to submit to my sceptre, become united to the kingdom of Persia under the name of the Massagetan province, and receive a satrap as my representative with due reverence, or to look upon yourselves as my enemies, in which case you will be forced by arms to conform to those conditions which I now offer you in good part. To-day you could secure a ruler well-affected to your cause, later you will find in me only a conqueror and avenger. Consider well before you answer."

"We have already weighed and considered all," answered the warrior, "and, as free sons of the desert, prefer death to bondage. Hear what the council of our old men has sent me to declare to you:—The Massagetae have become too weak to oppose the Persians, not through their own fault, but through the heavy visitation of our god, the sun. We know that you have armed a vast host against us, and we are ready to buy peace and liberty by a yearly tribute. But if you persist in compelling us to submit by force of arms, you can only bring great damage on yourselves. The moment your army nears the Araxes, we shall depart with our wives and children and seek another home, for we have no fixed dwellings like yours, but are accustomed

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to rove at will on our swift horses, and to rest in tents. Our gold we shall take with us, and shall fill up, destroy, and conceal the pits in which you could find new treasures. We know every spot where gold is to be found, and can give it in abundance, if you grant us peace and leave us our liberty; but, if you venture to invade our territory, you win nothing but an empty desert and an enemy always beyond your reach,—an enemy who may become formidable, when he has had time to recover from the heavy losses which have thinned his ranks. Leave us in peace and freedom and we are ready to give every year five thousand swift horses of the desert, besides the yearly tribute of gold; we will also come to the help of the Persian nation when threatened by any serious danger.”

The envoy ceased speaking. Cambyses did not answer at once; his eyes were fixed on the ground in deep thought. At last he said, rising at the same time from his throne: “We will take counsel on this matter over the wine to-night, and to-morrow you shall hear what answer you can bring to your people. Gobryas, see that these men are well cared for, and send the Massagetan, who wounded me in battle, a portion of the best dishes from my own table.”

CHAPTER XV.

During these events Nitetis had been sitting alone in her house on the hanging-gardens, absorbed in the saddest thoughts. To-day, for the first time, she had taken part in the general sacrifice made by the king’s wives, and had tried to pray to her new gods in the open air, before the fire-altars and amidst the sound of religious songs strange to her ears.

Most of the inhabitants of the harem saw her to-day for the first time, and instead of raising their eyes to heaven, had fixed them on her during the ceremony. The inquisitive, malevolent gaze of her rivals, and the loud music resounding from the city, disquieted and distracted her mind. Her thoughts reverted painfully to the solemn, sultry stillness of the gigantic temples in her native land where she had worshipped the gods of her childhood so earnestly at the side of her mother and sister; and much as she longed, just on this day, to pray for blessings on her beloved king, all her efforts were in vain; she could arouse no devotional feeling. Kassandane and Atossa knelt at her side, joining heartily in the very hymns which to Nitetis were an empty sound.

It cannot be denied, that many parts of these hymns contain true poetry; but they become wearisome through the constant repetition and invocation of the names of good and bad spirits. The Persian women had been taught from childhood, to look upon these religious songs as higher and holier than any other poetry. Their earliest prayers had been accompanied by such hymns, and, like everything else which has come down

to us from our fathers, and which we have been told in the impressionable time of childhood is divine and worthy of our reverence, they were still sacred and dear to them and stirred their most devotional feelings.

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But for Nitetis, who had been spoilt for such things by an intimate acquaintance with the best Greek poets, they could have but little charm. What she had lately been learning in Persia with difficulty had not yet become a part of herself, and so, while Kassandane and Atossa went through all the outward rites as things of course and perfectly natural to them, Nitetis could only prevent herself from forgetting the prescribed ceremonials by a great mental effort, and dreaded lest she should expose her ignorance to the jealous, watchful gaze of her rivals.

And then, too, only a few minutes before the sacrifice, she had received her first letter from Egypt. It lay unread on her dressing-table, and came into her mind whenever she attempted to pray. She could not help wondering what news it might bring her. How were her parents? and how had Tachot borne the parting from herself, and from the prince she loved so well?

The ceremony over, Nitetis embraced Kassandane and Atossa, and drew a long, deep breath, as if delivered from some threatening danger. Then ordering her litter, she was carried back to her dwelling, and hastened eagerly to the table where her letter lay. Her principal attendant, the young girl who on the journey had dressed her in her first Persian robes, received her with a smile full of meaning and promise, which changed however, into a look of astonishment, on seeing her mistress seize the letter, without even glancing at the articles of dress and jewelery which lay on the table.

Nitetis broke the seal quickly and was sitting down, in order to begin the difficult work of reading her letter, when the girl came up, and with clasped hands, exclaimed: "By Mithras, my mistress, I cannot understand you. Either you are ill, or that ugly bit of grey stuff must contain some magic which makes you blind to everything else. Put that roll away and look at the splendid presents that the great king (Auramazda grant him victory!) has sent while you were at the sacrifice. Look at this wonderful purple robe with the white stripe and the rich silver embroidery; and then the tiara with the royal diamonds! Do not you know the high meaning of these gifts? Cambyses begs, (the messenger said 'begs,' not 'commands') you to wear these splendid ornaments at the banquet to-day. How angry Phaedime will be! and how the others will look, for they have never received such presents. Till now only Kassandane has had a right to wear the purple and diamonds; so by sending you these gifts, Cambyses places you on a level with his mother, and chooses you to be his favorite wife before the whole world.' O pray allow me to dress you in these new and beautiful things. How lovely you will look! How angry and envious the others will feel! If I could only be there when you enter the hall! Come, my mistress, let me take off your simple dress, and array you, (only as a trial you know,) in the robes that as the new queen you ought to wear."

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Nitetis listened in silence to the chattering girl, and admired the gifts with a quiet smile. She was woman enough to rejoice at the sight, for he, whom she loved better than life itself, had sent them; and they were a proof that she was more to the king than all his other wives;—that Cambyses really loved her. The long wished-for letter fell unread to the ground, the girl's wish to dress her was granted without a word, and in a short time the splendid toilette was completed. The royal purple added to her beauty, the high flashing tiara made her slender, perfect figure seem taller than it really was, and when, in the metal mirror which lay on her dressing table, she beheld herself for the first time in the glorious likeness of a queen, a new expression dawned on her features. It seemed as if a portion of her lord's pride were reflected there. The frivolous waiting-woman sank involuntarily on her knees, as her eyes, full of smiling admiration, met the radiant glance of Nitetis,—of the woman who was beloved by the most powerful of men.

For a few moments Nitetis gazed on the girl, lying in the dust at her feet; but soon shook her beautiful head, and blushing for shame, raised her kindly, kissed her forehead, gave her a gold bracelet, and then, perceiving her letter on the ground, told her she wished to be alone. Mandane ran, rather than walked, out of the room in her eagerness to show the splendid present she had just received to the inferior attendants and slaves; and Nitetis, her eyes glistening and her heart beating with excess of happiness, threw herself on to the ivory chair which stood before her dressing-table, uttered a short prayer of thanksgiving to her favorite Egyptian goddess, the beautiful Hathor, kissed the gold chain which Cambyses had given her after plunging into the water for her ball, then her letter from home, and rendered almost over-confident by her great happiness, began to unroll it, slowly sinking back into the purple cushions as she did so and murmuring: "How very, very happy I am! Poor letter, I am sure your writer never thought Nitetis would leave you a quarter of an hour on the ground unread."

In this happy mood she began to read, but her face soon grew serious and when she had finished, the letter fell once more to the ground.

Her eyes, whose proud glance had brought the waiting-maid to her feet, were dimmed by tears; her head, carried so proudly but a few minutes before, now lay on the jewels which covered the table. Tears rolled down among the pearls and diamonds, as strange a contrast as the proud tiara and its unhappy, fainting wearer.

The letter read as follows:

"Ladice the wife of Amasis and Queen of Upper and Lower Egypt, to her daughter Nitetis, consort of the great King of Persia.

"It has not been our fault, my beloved daughter, that you have remained so long without news from home. The trireme by which we sent our letters for you to Aegae was detained by Samian ships of war, or rather pirate vessels, and towed into the harbor of Astypalaea.

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"Polykrates' presumption increases with the continual success of his undertakings, and since his victory over the Lesbians and Milesians, who endeavored to put a stop to his depredations, not a ship is safe from the attacks of his pirate vessels.

"Pisistratus is dead," but his sons are friendly to Polykrates. Lygdamis is under obligations to him, and cannot hold his own in Naxos without Samian help. He has won over the Amphiktyonic council to his side by presenting the Apollo of Delos with the neighboring island of Rhenea. His fifty-oared vessels, requiring to be manned by twenty-thousand men, do immense damage to all the seafaring nations; yet not one dares to attack him, as the fortifications of his citadel and his splendid harbor are almost impregnable, and he himself always surrounded by a well-drilled body-guard.

"Through the traders, who followed the fortunate Kolxus to the far west, and these pirate ships, Samos will become the richest of islands and Polykrates the most powerful of men, unless, as your father says, the gods become envious of such unchanging good fortune and prepare him a sudden and speedy downfall.

"In this fear Amasis advised Polykrates as his old friend, to put away from him the thing he held dearest, and in such a manner that he might be sure of never receiving it again. Polykrates adopted this advice and threw into the sea, from the top of the round tower on his citadel, his most valuable signet-ring, an unusually large sardonyx held by two dolphins. This ring was the work of Theodorus, and a lyre, the symbol of the ruler, was exquisitely engraved on the stone."

"Six days later, however, the ring was found by Polykrates' cooks in the body of a fish. He sent us news at once of this strange occurrence, but instead of rejoicing your father shook his grey head sadly, saying: 'he saw now it was impossible for any one to avoid his destiny!' On the same day he renounced the friendship of Polykrates and wrote him word, that he should endeavor to forget him in order to avoid the grief of seeing his friend in misfortune.

"Polykrates laughed at this message and returned the letters his pirates had taken from our trireme, with a derisive greeting. For the future all your letters will be sent by Syria.

"You will ask me perhaps, why I have told you this long story, which has so much less interest for you than any other home news. I answer: to prepare you for your father's state. Would you have recognized the cheerful, happy, careless Amasis in that gloomy answer to his Samian friend?

"Alas, my husband has good reason to be sad, and since you left us, my own eyes have seldom been free from tears. My time is passed either at the sick-bed of your sister or in comforting your father and guiding his steps; and though much in need of sleep I am now taking advantage of night to write these lines.

“Here I was interrupted by the nurses, calling me to your sister Tachot, your own true friend.

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“How often the dear child has called you in her feverish delirium; and how carefully she treasures your likeness in wax, that wonderful portrait which bears evidence not only of the height to which Greek art has risen, but of the master hand of the great Theodorus. To-morrow it will be sent to AEgina, to be copied in gold, as the soft wax becomes injured from frequent contact with your sister’s burning hands and lips.

“And now, my daughter, you must summon all your courage to hear what I need all my strength of mind to tell—the sad story of the fate which the gods have decreed for our house.

“For three days after you left us Tachot wept incessantly. Neither our comforting words nor your father’s good advice—neither offerings nor prayers—could avail to lessen her grief or divert her mind. At last on the fourth day she ceased to weep and would answer our questions in a low voice, as if resigned; but spent the greater part of every day sitting silently at her wheel. Her fingers, however, which used to be so skilful, either broke the threads they tried to spin, or lay for hours idle in her lap, while she was lost in dreams. Your father’s jokes, at which she used to laugh so heartily, made no impression on her, and when I endeavored to reason with her she listened in anxious suspense.

“If I kissed her forehead and begged her to control herself, she would spring up, blushing deeply, and throw herself into my arms, then sit down again to her wheel and begin to pull at the threads with almost frantic eagerness; but in half an hour her hands would be lying idle in her lap again and her eyes dreamily fixed, either on the ground, or on some spot in the air. If we forced her to take part in any entertainment, she would wander among the guests totally uninterested in everything that was passing.

“We took her with us on the great pilgrimage to Bubastis, during which the Egyptians forget their usual gravity, and the shores of the Nile look like a great stage where the wild games of the satyrs are being performed by choruses, hurried on in the unrestrained wantonness of intoxication. When she saw thus for the first time an entire people given up to the wildest and most unfettered mirth and enjoyment, she woke up from her silent brooding thoughts and began to weep again, as in the first days after you went away.

“Sad and perplexed, we brought our poor child back to Sais.

“Her looks were not those of a common mortal. She grew thinner, and we all fancied, taller; her complexion was white, and almost transparent, with a tender bloom on her cheek, which I can only liken to a young rose-leaf or the first faint blush of sunrise. Her eyes are still wonderfully clear and bright. It always seems to me as if they looked beyond the heaven and earth which we see.

“As she continued to suffer more and more from heat in the head and hands, while her tender limbs often shivered with a slight chill, we sent to Thebes for Thutmes, the most celebrated physician for inward complaints.

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"The experienced priest shook his head on seeing your sister and foretold a serious illness. He forbade her to spin or to speak much. Potions of all kinds were given her to drink, her illness was discussed and exorcised, the stars and oracles consulted, rich presents and sacrifices made to the gods. The priest of Hathor from the island of Philae sent us a consecrated amulet, the priest of Osiris in Abydos a lock of hair from the god himself set in gold, and Neithotep, the high-priest of our own guardian goddess, set on foot a great sacrifice, which was to restore your sister to health.

"But neither physicians nor charms were of any avail, and at last Neithotep confessed that Tachot's stars gave but little ground for hope. Just then, too, the sacred bull at Memphis died and the priests could discover no heart in his entrails, which they interpreted as prognosticating evil to our country. They have not yet succeeded in finding a new Apis, and believe that the gods are wroth with your father's kingdom. Indeed the oracle of Buto has declared that the Immortals will show no favor to Egypt, until all the temples that have been built in the black land for the worship of false gods are destroyed and their worshippers banished.

[Egypt was called by its ancient inhabitants Cham, the black, or black-earthed.]

"These evil omens have proved, alas, only too true. Tachot fell ill of a dreadful fever and lay for nine days hovering between life and death; she is still so weak that she must be carried, and can move neither hand nor foot.

"During the journey to Bubastis, Amasis' eyes, as so often happens here, became inflamed. Instead of sparing them, he continued to work as usual from sunrise until mid-day, and while your sister was so ill he never left her bed, notwithstanding all our entreaties. But I will not enter into particulars, my child. His eyes grew worse, and on the very day which brought us the news of your safe arrival in Babylon, Amasis became totally blind.

"The cheerful, active man has become old, gloomy and decrepit since that day. The death of Apis, and the unfavorable constellations and oracles weigh on his mind; his happy temper is clouded by the unbroken night in which he lives; and the consciousness that he cannot stir a step alone causes indecision and uncertainty. The daring and independent ruler will soon become a mere tool, by means of which the priests can work their will.

"He spends hours in the temple of Neith, praying and offering sacrifices; a number of workmen are employed there in building a tomb for his mummy, and the same number at Memphis in levelling the temple which the Greeks have begun building to Apollo. He speaks of his own and Tachot's misfortunes as a just punishment from the Immortals.

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“His visits to Tachot’s sick-bed are not the least comfort to her, for instead of encouraging her kindly, he endeavors to convince her that she too deserves punishment from the gods. He spends all his remarkable eloquence in trying to persuade her, that she must forget this world entirely and only try to gain the favor of Osiris and the judges of the nether world by ceaseless prayers and sacrifices. In this manner he only tortures our poor sick child, for she has not lost her love of life. Perhaps I have still too much of the Greek left in me for a queen of Egypt; but really, death is so long and life so short, that I cannot help calling even wise men foolish, when they devote the half of even this short term to a perpetual meditation on the gloomy Hades.

“I have just been interrupted again. Our great physician, Thutmes, came to enquire after his patient. He gives very little hope, and seems surprised that her delicate frame has been able to resist death so long. He said yesterday: ‘She would have sunk long ago if not kept up by her determined will, and a longing which gives her no rest. If she ceased to care for life, she could allow death to take her, just as we dream ourselves asleep. If, on the other hand, her wish could be gratified, she might, (though this is hardly probable) live some years yet, but if it remain but a short time longer unfulfilled, it will certainly wear her to death.

“Have you any idea for whom she longs so eagerly? Our Tachot has allowed herself to be fascinated by the beautiful Bartja, the brother of your future husband. I do not mean to say by this that he has employed magic, as the priest Ameneman believes, to gain her love; for a youth might be far less handsome and agreeable than Bartja, and yet take the heart of an innocent girl, still half a child. But her passionate feeling is so strong, and the change in her whole being so great, that sometimes I too am tempted to believe in the use of supernatural influence. A short time before you left I noticed that Tachot was fond of Bartja. Her distress at first we thought could only be for you, but when she sank into that dreamy state, Ibykus, who was still at our court, said she must have been seized by some strong passion.

“Once when she was sitting dreaming at her wheel, I heard him singing softly Sappho’s little love-song to her:

“I cannot, my sweet mother,
Throw shuttle any more;
My heart is full of longing,
My spirit troubled sore,
All for a love of yesterday
A boy not seen before.”

[Sappho ed. Neue XXXII. Translation from Edwin Arnold’s Poets of Greece.]

“She turned pale and asked him: ‘Is that your own song?’

“No,’ said he, ‘Sappho wrote it fifty years ago.’

“Fifty years ago,’ echoed Tachot musingly.

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“‘Love is always the same,’ interrupted the poet; ‘women loved centuries ago, and will love thousands of years to come, just as Sappho loved fifty years back.’

“The sick girl smiled in assent, and from that time I often heard her humming the little song as she sat at her wheel. But we carefully avoided every question, that could remind her of him she loved. In the delirium of fever, however, Bartja’s name was always on her burning lips. When she recovered consciousness we told her what she had said in her delirium; then she opened her heart to me, and raising her eyes to heaven like a prophetess, exclaimed solemnly: ‘I know, that I shall not die till I have seen him again.’

“A short time ago we had her carried into the temple, as she longed to worship there again. When the service was over and we were crossing the temple-court, we passed some children at play, and Tachot noticed a little girl telling something very eagerly to her companions. She told the bearers to put down the litter and call the child to her.

“‘What were you saying?’ she asked the little one.

“‘I was telling the others something about my eldest sister.’

“‘May I hear it too?’ said Tachot so kindly, that the little girl began at once without fear: ‘Batau, who is betrothed to my sister, came back from Thebes quite unexpectedly yesterday evening. Just as the Isis-star was rising, he came suddenly on to our roof where Kerimama was playing at draughts with my father; and he brought her such a beautiful goldeng bridal wreath.’

[Among the Egyptians the planet Venus bore the name of the goddess Isis. Pliny II. 6. Arist De mundo II. 7. Early monuments prove that they were acquainted with the identity of the morning and evening star. Lepsius, Chronologie p. 94.]

“Tachot kissed the child and gave her her own costly fan. When we were at home again she smiled archly at me and said: ‘You know, mother dear, that the words children say in the temple-courts are believed to be oracles.’ So, if the little one spoke the truth, he must come; and did not you hear that he is to bring the bridal-wreath? O mother, I am sure, quite sure, that I shall see him again.’

“I asked her yesterday if she had any message for you, and she begged me to say that she sent you thousands of kisses, and messages of love, and that when she was stronger she meant to write, as she had a great deal to tell you. She has just brought me the little note which I enclose; it is for you alone, and has cost her much fatigue to write.

“But now I must finish my letter, as the messenger has been waiting for it some time.



"I wish I could give you some joyful news, but sadness and sorrow meet me whichever way I turn. Your brother yields more and more to the priests' tyranny, and manages the affairs of state for your poor blind father under Neithotep's guidance.

"Amasis does not interfere, and says it matters little whether his place be filled a few days sooner or later by his successor.

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“He did not attempt to prevent Psamtik from seizing the children of Phanes in Rhodopis’ house, and actually allowed his son to enter into a negotiation with the descendants of those two hundred thousand soldiers, who emigrated to Ethiopia in the reign of Psamtik I. on account of the preference shown to the Greek mercenaries. In case they declared themselves willing to return to their native land, the Greek mercenaries were to have been dismissed. The negotiation failed entirely, but Psamtik’s treatment of the children of Phanes has given bitter offence to the Greeks. Aristomachus threatened to leave Egypt, taking with him ten thousand of his best troops, and on hearing that Phanes’ son had been murdered at Psamtik’s command applied for his discharge. From that time the Spartan disappeared, no one knows whither; but the Greek troops allowed themselves to be bribed by immense sums and are still in Egypt.

“Amasis said nothing to all this, and looked on silently from the midst of his prayers and sacrifices, while your brother was either offending every class of his subjects or attempting to pacify them by means beneath the dignity of a ruler. The commanders of the Egyptian and Greek troops, and the governors of different provinces have all alike assured me that the present state of things is intolerable. No one knows what to expect from this new ruler; he commands today the very thing, which he angrily forbade the day before. Such a government must soon snap the beautiful bond, which has hitherto united the Egyptian people to their king.

“Farewell, my child, think of your poor friend, your mother; and forgive your parents when you hear what they have so long kept secret from you. Pray for Tachot, and remember us to Croesus and the young Persians whom we know. Give a special message too from Tachot to Bartja; I beg him to think of it as the last legacy of one very near death. If you could only send her some proof, that he has not forgotten her! Farewell, once more farewell and be happy in your new and blooming home.”

CHAPTER XVI.

Sad realities follow bright anticipations nearly as surely as a rainy day succeeds a golden sunrise. Nitetis had been so happy in the thought of reading the very letter, which poured such bitter drops of wormwood into her cup of happiness.

One beautiful element in her life, the remembrance of her dear home and the companions of her happy childhood, had been destroyed in one moment, as if by the touch of a magician’s wand.

She sat there in her royal purple, weeping, forgetful of everything but her mother’s grief, her father’s misfortunes and her sister’s illness. The joyful future, full of love, joy, and happiness, which had been beckoning her forward only a few minutes before, had vanished. Cambyzes’ chosen bride forgot her waiting, longing lover, and the future queen of Persia could think of nothing but the sorrows of Egypt’s royal house.

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It was long past mid-day, when the attendant Mandane came to put a last touch to Nitetis' dress and ornaments.

"She is asleep," thought the girl. "I can let her rest another quarter of an hour; the sacrifice this morning has tired her, and we must have her fresh and beautiful for the evening banquet; then she will outshine the others as the moon does the stars."

Unnoticed by her mistress she slipped out of the room, the windows of which commanded a splendid view over the hanging-gardens, the immense city beneath, the river, and the rich and fruitful Babylonian plain, and went into the garden.

Without looking round she ran to a flower-bed, to pluck some roses. Her eyes were fixed on her new bracelet, the stones of which sparkled in the sun, and she did not notice a richly-dressed man peering in at one of the windows of the room where Nitetis lay weeping. On being disturbed in his watching and listening, he turned at once to the girl and greeted her in a high treble voice.

She started, and on recognizing the eunuch Boges, answered: "It is not polite, sir, to frighten a poor girl in this way. By Mithras, if I had seen you before I heard you, I think I should have fainted. A woman's voice does not take me by surprise, but to see a man here is as rare as to find a swan in the desert."

Boges laughed good-humoredly, though he well understood her saucy allusion to his high voice, and answered, rubbing his fat hands: "Yes, it is very hard for a young and pretty bird like you, to have to live in such a lonely corner, but be patient, sweetheart. Your mistress will soon be queen, and then she will look out a handsome young husband for you. Ah, ha! you will find it pleasanter to live here alone with him, than with your beautiful Egyptian."

"My mistress is too beautiful for some people's fancy, and I have never asked any one to look out a husband for me," she answered pertly. "I can find one without your help either."

"Who could doubt it? Such a pretty face is as good a bait for a man, as a worm for a fish."

"But I am not trying to catch a husband, and least of all one like you."

"That I can easily believe," he answered laughing. But tell me, my treasure, why are you so hard on me? Have I done anything to vex you? Wasn't it through me, that you obtained this good appointment, and are not we both Medes?"

"You might just as well say that we are both human beings, and have five fingers on each hand and a nose in the middle of our faces. Half the people here are Medes, and if I had as many friends as I have countrymen, I might be queen to-morrow. And as to



my situation here, it was not you, but the high-priest Oropastes who recommended me to the great queen Kassandane. Your will is not law here,”

“What are you talking about, my sweet one? don’t you know, that not a single waiting-woman can be engaged without my consent?”

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"Oh, yes, I know that as well as you do, but . . ."

"But you women are an unthankful race, and don't deserve our kindness."

"Please not to forget, that you are speaking to a girl of good family."

"I know that very well, my little one. I know that your father was a Magian and your mother a Magian's daughter; that they both died early and you were placed under the care of the Destur Ixabates, the father of Oropastes, and grew up with his children. I know too that when you had received the ear-rings, Oropastes' brother Gaumata, (you need not blush, Gaumata is a pretty name) fell in love with your rosy face, and wanted to marry you, though he was only nineteen. Gaumata and Mandane, how well the two names sound together! Mandane and Gaumata! If I were a poet I should call my hero Gaumata and his lady-love Mandane."

"I insist on your ceasing to jest in this way," cried Mandane, blushing deeply and stamping her foot.

"What, are you angry because I say the names sound well together? You ought rather to be angry with the proud Oropastes, who sent his younger brother to Rhagar and you to the court, that you might forget one another."

"That is a slander on my benefactor."

"Let my tongue wither away, if I am not speaking the truth and nothing but the truth! Oropastes separated you and his brother because he had higher intentions for the handsome Gaumata, than a marriage with the orphan daughter of an inferior Magian. He would have been satisfied with Amytis or Menische for a sister-in-law, but a poor girl like you, who owed everything to his bounty, would only have stood in the way of his ambitious plans. Between ourselves, he would like to be appointed regent of Persia while the king is away at the Massagetan war, and would therefore give a great deal to connect himself by marriage in some way or other with the Archemenidae. At his age a new wife is not to be thought of; but his brother is young and handsome, indeed people go so far as to say, that he is like the Prince Bartja."

"That is true," exclaimed the girl. "Only think, when we went out to meet my mistress, and I saw Bartja for the first time from the window of the station-house, I thought he was Gaumata. They are so like one another that they might be twins, and they are the handsomest men in the kingdom."

"How you are blushing, my pretty rose-bud! But the likeness between them is not quite so great as all that. When I spoke to the high-priest's brother this morning . . ."

"Gaumata is here?" interrupted the girl passionately. "Have you really seen him or are you trying to draw me out and make fun of me?"



“By Mithras! my sweet one, I kissed his forehead this very morning, and he made me tell him a great deal about his darling. Indeed his blue eyes, his golden curls and his lovely complexion, like the bloom on a peach, were so irresistible that I felt inclined to try and work impossibilities for him. Spare your blushes, my little pomegranate-blossom, till I have told you all; and then perhaps in future you will not be so hard upon poor Bogen; you will see that he has a good heart, full of kindness for his beautiful, saucy little countrywoman.”

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"I do not trust you," she answered, interrupting these assurances. "I have been warned against your smooth tongue, and I do not know what I have done to deserve this kind interest."

"Do you know this?" he asked, showing her a white ribbon embroidered all over with little golden flames.

"It is the last present I worked for him," exclaimed Mandane.

"I asked him for this token, because I knew you would not trust me. Who ever heard of a prisoner loving his jailer?"

"But tell me at once, quickly—what does my old playfellow want me to do? Look, the western sky is beginning to glow. Evening is coming on, and I must arrange my mistress's dress and ornaments for the banquet."

"Well, I will not keep you long," said the eunuch, becoming so serious that Mandane was frightened. "If you do not choose to believe that I would run into any risk out of friendship to you, then fancy that I forward your love affair to humble the pride of Oropastes. He threatens to supplant me in the king's favor, and I am determined, let him plot and intrigue as he likes, that you shall marry Gaumata. To-morrow evening, after the Tistar-star has risen, your lover shall come to see you. I will see that all the guards are away, so that he can come without danger, stay one hour and talk over the future with you; but remember, only one hour. I see clearly that your mistress will be Cambyses' favorite wife, and will then forward your marriage, for she is very fond of you, and thinks no praise too high for your fidelity and skill. So to-morrow evening," he continued, falling back into the jesting tone peculiar to him, "when the Tistar-star rises, fortune will begin to shine on you. Why do you look down? Why don't you answer? Gratitude stops your pretty little mouth, eh? is that the reason? Well, my little bird, I hope you won't be quite so silent, if you should ever have a chance of praising poor Boges to your powerful mistress. And what message shall I bring to the handsome Gaumata? May I say that you have not forgotten him and will be delighted to see him again? You hesitate? Well, I am very sorry, but it is getting dark and I must go. I have to inspect the women's dresses for the birthday banquet. Ah! one thing I forgot to mention. Gaumata must leave Babylon to-morrow. Oropastes is afraid, that he may chance to see you, and told him to return to Rhage directly the festival was over. What! still silent? Well then, I really cannot help you or that poor fellow either. But I shall gain my ends quite as well without you, and perhaps after all it is better that you should forget one another. Good-bye."

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It was a hard struggle for the girl. She felt nearly sure that Boges was deceiving her, and a voice within warned her that it would be better to refuse her lover this meeting. Duty and prudence gained the upper hand, and she was just going to exclaim: "Tell him I cannot see him," when her eye caught the ribbon she had once embroidered for her handsome playfellow. Bright pictures from her childhood flashed through her mind, short moments of intoxicating happiness; love, recklessness and longing gained the day in their turn over her sense of right, her misgivings and her prudence, and before Boges could finish his farewell, she called out, almost in spite of herself and flying towards the house like a frightened fawn: "I shall expect him."

Boges passed quickly through the flowery paths of the hanging-gardens. He stopped at the parapet end cautiously opened a hidden trap-door, admitting to a secret staircase which wound down through one of the huge pillars supporting the hanging-gardens, and which had probably been intended by their original designer as a means of reaching his wife's apartments unobserved from the shores of the river. The door moved easily on its hinges, and when Boges had shut it again and strewed a few of the river-shells from the garden walks over it, it would have been difficult to find, even for any one who had come with that purpose. The eunuch rubbed his jeweled hands, smiling the while as was his custom, and murmured: "It can't fail to succeed now; the girl is caught, her lover is at my beck and call, the old secret flight of steps is in good order, Nitetis has been weeping bitterly on a day of universal rejoicing, and the blue lily opens to-morrow night. Ah, ha! my little plan can't possibly fail now. And to-morrow, my pretty Egyptian kitten, your little velvet paw will be fast in a trap set by the poor despised eunuch, who was not allowed, forsooth, to give you any orders."

His eyes gleamed maliciously as he said these words and hurried from the garden.

At the great flight of steps he met another eunuch, named Neriglissar, who held the office of head-gardener, and lived at the hanging-gardens.

"How is the blue lily going on?" asked Boges.

"It is unfolding magnificently!" cried the gardener, in enthusiasm at the mere mention of his cherished flower. "To-morrow, as I promised, when the Tistar-star rises, it will be in all its beauty. My Egyptian mistress will be delighted, for she is very fond of flowers, and may I ask you to tell the king and the Achaemenidae, that under my care this rare plant has at last flowered? It is to be seen in full beauty only once in every ten years. Tell the noble Achaemenidae; this, and bring them here."

"Your wish shall be granted," said Boges smiling, "but I think you must not reckon on the king, as I do not expect he will visit the hanging-gardens before his marriage with the Egyptian. Some of the Archimenidae, however, will be sure to come; they are such lovers of horticulture that they would not like to miss this rare sight. Perhaps, too, I may succeed in bringing Croesus. It is true that he does not understand flowers or doat on

them as the Persians do, but he makes amends for this by his thorough appreciation of everything beautiful."

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“Yes, yes, bring him too,” exclaimed the gardener. “He will really be grateful to you, for my queen of the night is the most beautiful flower, that has ever bloomed in a royal garden. You saw the bud in the clear waters of the reservoir surrounded by its green leaves; that bud will open into a gigantic rose, blue as the sky. My flower . . .”

The enthusiastic gardener would have said much more in praise of his flower, but Boges left him with a friendly nod, and went down the flight of steps. A two-wheeled wooden carriage was waiting for him there; he took his seat by the driver, the horses, decked out with bells and tassels, were urged into a sharp trot and quickly brought him to the gate of the harem-garden.

That day was a busy, stirring one in Cambyses’ harem. In order that the women might look their very best, Boges had commanded that they should all be taken to the bath before the banquet. He therefore went at once to that wing of the palace, which contained the baths for the women.

While he was still at some distance a confused noise of screaming, laughing, chattering and tittering reached his ears. In the broad porch of the large bathing-room, which had been almost overheated, more than three hundred women were moving about in a dense cloud of steam.

[We read in Diodorus XVII. 77. that the king of Persia had as many wives as there are days in the year. At the battle of Issus, Alexander the Great took 329 concubines, of the last Darius, captive.]

The half-naked forms floated over the warm pavement like a motley crowd of phantoms. Their thin silken garments were wet through and clung to their delicate figures, and a warm rain descended upon them from the roof of the bath, rising up again in vapor when it reached the floor.

Groups of handsome women, ten or twenty together, lay gossiping saucily in one part of the room; in another two king’s wives were quarrelling like naughty children. One beauty was screaming at the top of her voice because she had received a blow from her neighbor’s dainty little slipper, while another was lying in lazy contemplation, still as death, on the damp, warm floor. Six Armenians were standing together, singing a saucy love-song in their native language with clear-toned voices, and a little knot of fair-haired Persians were slandering Nitetis so fearfully, that a by-stander would have fancied our beautiful Egyptian was some awful monster, like those nurses used to frighten children.

Naked female slaves moved about through the crowd, carrying on their heads well-warmed cloths to throw over their mistresses. The cries of the eunuchs, who held the office of door-keepers, and were continually urging the women to greater haste,—the screeching calls of those whose slaves had not yet arrived,—the penetrating perfumes and the warm vapor combined to produce a motley, strange and stupefying scene.

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A quarter of an hour later, however, the king's wives presented a very different spectacle.

They lay like roses steeped in dew, not asleep, but quite still and dreaming, on soft cushions placed along the walls of an immense room. The wet perfumes still lay on their undried and flowing hair, and nimble female slaves were busied in carefully wiping away, with little bags made of soft camels' hair, the slightest outward trace of the moisture which penetrated deep into the pores of the skin.

Silken coverlets were spread over their weary, beautiful limbs, and a troop of eunuchs took good care that the dreamy repose of the entire body should not be disturbed by quarrelsome or petulant individuals. Their efforts, however, were seldom so successful as to-day, when every one knew that a disturbance of the peace would be punished by exclusion from the banquet. They had probably been lying a full hour in this dreamy silence, when the sound of a gong produced another transformation.

The reposing figures sprang from their cushions, a troop of female slaves pressed into the hall, the beauties were anointed and perfumed, their luxuriant hair ingeniously braided, plaited, and adorned with precious stones. Costly ornaments and silken and woolen robes in all the colors of the rainbow were brought in, shoes stiff with rich embroidery of pearls and jewels were tied on to their tender feet, and golden girdles fastened round their waists.

[Some kings gave their wives the revenues of entire cities as "girdle-money" (pin-money).]

By the time Boges came in, the greater number of the women were already fully adorned in their costly jewelry, which would have represented probably, when taken together, the riches of a large kingdom.

He was greeted by a shrill cry of joy from many voices. Twenty of the women joined hands and danced round their smiling keeper, singing a simple song which had been composed in the harem in praise of his virtues. On this day it was customary for the king to grant each of his wives one reasonable petition. So when the ring of dancers had loosed hands, a troop of petitioners rushed in upon Boges, kissing his hands, stroking his cheeks, whispering in his ear all kinds of requests, and trying by flattery to gain his intercession with the king. The woman's tyrant smiled at it all, stopped his ears and pushed them all back with jests and laughter, promising Amytis the Median that Esther the Phoenician should be punished, and Esther the same of Amytis,—that Parmys should have a handsomer set of jewels than Parisatys, and Parisatys a more costly one than Parmys, but finding it impossible to get rid of these importunate petitioners, he blew a little golden whistle. Its shrill tones acted like magic on the eager crowd; the raised hands fell in a moment, the little tripping feet stood still, the opening lips closed and the eager tumult was turned into a dead silence.

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Whoever disobeyed the sound of this little whistle, was certain of punishment. It was as important as the words “Silence, in the king’s name!” or the reading of the riot-act. To-day it worked even more effectually than usual. Boges’ self-satisfied smile showed that he had noticed this; he then favored the assembly with a look expressive of his contentment with their conduct, promised in a flowery speech to exert all his influence with the king in behalf of his dear little white doves, and wound up by telling them to arrange themselves in two long rows.

The women obeyed and submitted to his scrutiny like soldiers on drill, or slaves being examined by their buyer.

With the dress and ornaments of most he was satisfied, ordering, however, to one a little more rouge, to another a little white powder to subdue a too healthy color, here a different arrangement of the hair—there a deeper tinge to the eyebrows, or more pains to be taken in anointing the lips.

When this was over he left the hall and went to Phaedime, who as one of the king’s lawful wives, had a private room, separated from those allotted to the concubines.

This former favorite,—this humbled daughter of the Achaemenidae, had been expecting him already some time.

She was magnificently dressed, and almost overloaded with jewels. A thick veil of gauze inwrought with gold hung from her little tiara, and interlaced with this was the blue and white band of the Achaemenidae. There could be no question that she was beautiful, but her figure was already too strongly developed, a frequent result of the lazy harem life among Eastern women. Fair golden hair, interwoven with little silver chains and gold pieces, welled out almost too abundantly from beneath her tiara, and was smoothed over her white temples.

She sprang forward to meet Boges, trembling with eagerness, caught a hasty glance at herself in the looking-glass, and then, fixing her eyes on the eunuch, asked impetuously: “Are you pleased with me? Will he admire me?”

Boges smiled his old, eternal smile and answered: “You always please me, my golden peacock, and the king would admire you too if he could see you as you were a moment ago. You were really beautiful when you called out, ‘Will he admire me?’ for passion had turned your blue eyes black as night, and your lip was curled with hatred so as to show two rows of teeth white as the snow on the Demawend!”

Phaedime was flattered and forced her face once more into the admired expression, saying: “Then take us at once to the banquet, for I know my eyes will be darker and more brilliant, and my teeth will gleam more brightly, when I see that Egyptian girl sitting where I ought to sit.”

“She will not be allowed to sit there long.”

“What! is your plan likely to succeed then? Oh, Boges, do not hide it any longer from me—I will be as silent as the grave—I will help you—I will—”

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"No, I cannot, I dare not tell you about it, but this much I will say in order to sweeten this bitter evening: we have dug the pit for our enemy, and if my golden Phaedime will only do what I tell her, I hope to give her back her old place, and not only that, but even a higher one."

"Tell me what I am to do; I am ready for anything and everything."

"That was well and bravely spoken; like a true lioness. If you obey me we must succeed; and the harder the task, the higher the reward. Don't dispute what I am going to say, for we have not a minute to lose. Take off all your useless ornaments and only wear the chain the king gave you on your marriage. Put on a dark simple dress instead of this bright one; and when you have prostrated yourself before Kassandane, bow down humbly before the Egyptian Princess too."

"Impossible!"

"I will not be contradicted. Take off those ornaments at once, I entreat you. There, that is right. We cannot succeed unless you obey me. How white your neck is! The fair Peri would look dark by your side."

"But—"

"When your turn comes to ask a favor of the king, tell him you have no wishes, now that the sun of your life has withdrawn his light."

"Yes, that I will do."

"When your father asks after your welfare, you must weep."

"I will do that too."

"And so that all the Achaemenidae can see that you are weeping."

"That will be a fearful humiliation!"

"Not at all; only a means by which to rise the more surely. Wash the red color from your cheeks and put on white powder. Make yourself pale—paler still."

"Yes, I shall need that to hide my blushes. Boges, you are asking something fearful of me, but I will obey you if you will only give me a reason."

"Girl, bring your mistress's new dark green robe."

"I shall look like a slave."

"True grace is lovely even in rags."

"The Egyptian will completely eclipse me."

"Yes, every one must see that you have not the slightest intention of comparing yourself with her. Then people will say: 'Would not Phaedime be as beautiful as this proud woman, if she had taken the same pains to make herself so?'"

"But I cannot bow down to her."

"You must."

"You only want to humble and ruin me."

"Short-sighted fool! listen to my reasons and obey. I want especially to excite the Achaemenidae against our enemy. How it will enrage your grandfather Intaphernes, and your father Otanes to see you in the dust before a stranger! Their wounded pride will bring them over to our side, and if they are too 'noble,' as they call it, to undertake anything themselves against a woman, still they will be more likely to help than to hinder us, if I should need their assistance. Then, when the Egyptian is ruined, if you have done as I wish, the king will

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remember your sad pale face, your humility and forgetfulness of self. The Achaemenidae, and even the Magi, will beg him to take a queen from his own family; and where in all Persia is there a woman who can boast of better birth than you? Who else can wear the royal purple but my bright bird of Paradise, my beautiful rose Phaedime? With such a prize in prospect we must no more fear a little humiliation than a man who is learning to ride fears a fall from his horse."

And she, princess as she was, answered: "I will obey you."

"Then we are certain of victory," said the eunuch. "There, now your eyes are flashing darkly again as I like to see them, my queen. And so Cambyses shall see you when the tender flesh of the Egyptian shall have become food for dogs and the birds of the air, and when for the first time after long months of absence, I bring him once more to the door of your apartments. Here, Armorges! tell the rest of the women to get ready and enter their litters. I will go on and be there to show them their places."

.....

The great banqueting-hall was bright as day—even brighter, from the light of thousands of candles whose rays were reflected in the gold plates forming the panelling of the walls. A table of interminable length stood in the middle of the hall, overloaded with gold and silver cups, plates, dishes, bowls, jugs, goblets, ornaments and incense-altars, and looked like a splendid scene from fairy-land.

"The king will soon be here," called out the head-steward of the table, of the great court-lords, to the king's cup-bearer, who was a member of the royal family. "Are all the wine-jugs full, has the wine been tasted, are the goblets ranged in order, and the skins sent by Polykrates, have they been emptied?"

"Yes," answered the cup-bearer, "everything is ready, and that Chian wine is better than any I ever tasted; indeed, in my opinion, even the Syrian is not to be compared to it. Only taste it."

So saying he took a graceful little golden goblet from the table in one hand, raised a wine-pitcher of the same costly metal with the other, swung the latter high into the air and poured the wine so cleverly into the narrow neck of the little vessel that not a drop was lost, though the liquid formed a wide curve in its descent. He then presented the goblet to the head-steward with the tips of his fingers, bowing gracefully as he did so.



The latter sipped the delicious wine, testing its flavor with great deliberation, and said, on returning the cup: "I agree with you, it is indeed a noble wine, and tastes twice as well when presented with such inimitable grace. Strangers are quite right in saying that there are no cupbearers like the Persian."

"Thanks for this praise," replied the other, kissing his friend's forehead. "Yes, I am proud of my office, and it is one which the king only gives to his friends. Still it is a great plague to have to stay so long in this hot, suffocating Babylon. Shall we ever be off for the summer, to Ecbatana or Pasargada?"

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"I was talking to the king about it to-day. He had intended not to leave before the Massagetan war, and to go straight from Babylon into the field, but to-day's embassy has changed matters; it is probable that there may be no war, and then we shall go to Susa three days after the king's marriage—that is, in one week from the present time."

"To Susa?" cried the cup-bearer. "It's very little cooler there than here, and besides, the old Memnon's castle is being rebuilt."

"The satrap of Susa has just brought word that the new palace is finished, and that nothing so brilliant has ever been seen. Directly Cambyses heard, it he said: Then we will start for Susa three days after our marriage. I should like to show the Egyptian Princess that we understand the art of building as well as her own ancestors. She is accustomed to hot weather on the Nile, and will not find our beautiful Susa too warm.' The king seems wonderfully fond of this woman."

"He does indeed! All other women have become perfectly indifferent to him, and he means soon to make her his queen."

"That is unjust; Phaedime, as daughter of the Achaemenidae, has an older and better right."

"No doubt, but whatever the king wishes, must be right."

"The ruler's will is the will of God."

"Well said! A true Persian will kiss his king's hand, even when dripping with the blood of his own child."

"Cambyses ordered my brother's execution, but I bear him no more ill-will for it than I should the gods for depriving me of my parents. Here, you fellows! draw the curtains back; the guests are coming. Look sharp, you dogs, and do your duty! Farewell, Artabazos, we shall have warm work to-night."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Death is so long and life so short
No man was allowed to ask anything of the gods for himself
Take heed lest pride degenerate into vainglory

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