

A  
KING  
OF  
MARS

BY  
AVIS  
HEKKING





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*William Harry Hopkins*







# A King of Mars



*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

IN SEARCH OF JÉHANNE

\*.\* For Reviews of this Novel see end  
of this volume

JOHN LONG, LONDON

# A King of Mars

By  
Avis Hekking



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## Preface

Three years ago while wintering in Florence, we were in the habit of amusing ourselves during the long evenings with one of the thin heart-shaped pieces of wood, known as "Planchette."

Many a hearty laugh we had over the usual foolish answers to more or less silly questions, but we soon noticed that when my sister was present during the *séances* the uncanny toy wrote faster and more coherently.

One evening we asked Planchette to tell us something of life on other planets. It immediately began moving very rapidly over the paper, and in straggling ill-spelt sentences told of "The last rebellion in Mars," to quote its own words.

At the time of writing, my fingers were resting very lightly on the toy, and I was carrying on an animated conversation with my mother and sister. As I am incapable of writing and talking simultaneously, it is obvious that no conscious effort on my part caused Planchette to move.

I will only add that the following romance is based on the idea so strangely given me.

Sept. 27th, 1907

A. H.



## Prologue

"I'm sure we're going in the wrong direction," grumbled Wilson.

"You've said that before," observed John Harwood cheerfully; which, considering that it was raining in torrents and about ten at night, was somewhat surprising. His good temper only served to exasperate Wilson still more.

"I'm sick and tired of this," he said, stopping short. "I'm going back."

"Don't be an ass, I tell you we're on the right road; didn't you hear the man say so at the last farmhouse we stopped at?"

"I couldn't understand a word of his jargon, and doubt if you could," said Wilson sulkily, continuing onward nevertheless.

They walked on for some time without speaking, Harwood whistling under his breath, his cheery nature proof against the weather.



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The two young men were art students, and having scraped together a sufficient sum, had gone to Wales, it matters little to what part, where they found sufficient "stuff" to gladden their artistic souls.

They put up at a quaint inn in an unpronounceable village, and every day found them hard at work, sometimes near by, sometimes miles away, as the case might be.

On this especial day they had gone further afield, and turned their faces homeward at a later hour than usual. Becoming confused by the many winding roads, they found themselves at nightfall quite at a loss as to what direction to take. True, they had asked their way several times, but either they did not pronounce the name of their village in the true Welsh style, or the people they asked were particularly stupid; certain it was they could elicit no information.

To add to their misery it began to rain, and not having the price of a bed between them, they were obliged to push on.

Stopping once more at a farmhouse, where Harwood was able to procure some bread and cheese to stay their pangs of hunger, the farmer, rather more intelligent than his fellows, at last put them right. They had still several weary miles to go, and Wilson,

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whom the bread and cheese failed to solace, continued to grumble in a manner that sorely tried his companion's proverbial good-humour.

Stumbling over a stone, which almost sent his canvas and himself headlong into a good-sized puddle, Wilson uttered a word more forcible than polite.

"I wish to goodness you'd shut up your everlasting whistling," he snapped, "and throw a little light on to the subject."

"Sorry, old man," said Harwood, "but I've only about six matches left, and I want to keep those to——"

"Oh, all right," returned Wilson shortly, and stalked on.

The rain had ceased by this time, which fact Harwood commented upon, but was met by offended silence on the part of his brother artist. "If he wants to sulk like a confounded kid, why let him," was John's thought as they splashed onward. So for the next mile or so they carefully avoided exchanging remarks, each keeping a dignified silence. Wilson was somewhat ahead, and coming to a miniature pond which extended directly across the road and for some distance in front of him, he turned to the right where he could dimly discern a bank. He had not gone more than a dozen paces

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before he stepped off into nothing, and had only time to give a startled cry before he fell.

Harwood started violently as the sound of his companion's fall came to his ears, and he made his way carefully over the grass toward the place from whence his friend had disappeared.

"By Jove," he muttered. "He's fallen down the old quarry—we're on the right road after all."

Striking one of his precious matches, he peered over the edge, but could discern nothing.

"Wilson," he called. "Wilson, are you hurt?"

"No," came the answer from the depths. "At least I don't think so. I fell on a heap of rubbish."

"Don't try to move, old chap, I'm coming down," replied his friend.

No sooner said than done. Placing his painting materials on the ground, Harwood half scrambled, half slid down the steep bank. He found Wilson carefully feeling his arms.

"All right?" asked John anxiously. "Any bones broken?"

"I—I don't think so," returned his friend haltingly, evidently badly shaken. Then as full realisation of his mishap was brought home to him, Wilson asked anxiously for his paint-box.

"If it's smashed my sketch is ruined," he said. "Do look for it while I move around a bit."

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Harwood obediently searched as well as he could, stumbling over stones and rubbish, till at last he found it.

"It's a bit cracked, but not much hurt," he said. "But I can't find your easel, just hang on to this while I have another look—or rather feel."

Wilson took his box without a word, still too dazed to say much. He watched his companion, who by the feeble flame from a lighted vesta examined every foot of the narrow space.

A sudden exclamation brought Wilson to his feet.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Have you found it?"

"Yes," said Harwood, dropping the match hurriedly as the flame touched his finger. "It's sticking straight up in a hole."

He pulled the easel out as he spoke, and striking his last remaining match bent to examine the place where he had found it.

"There's something down there," he said, and lying flat he thrust his hand and arm down into the orifice.

"It's something round, not a stone, at least I don't think so," he said, dropping the object into his pocket. "We'll take a look at it later. We'd better think of getting out of this as soon as possible. Just give me your arm, I'll come back for the things."

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"Not much," said Wilson, seizing the box and easel. "I'm no blooming invalid," and he climbed up on to the road, closely followed by Harwood.

An hour later they were sitting over a fire in Harwood's room, dry and at peace with all men. Suddenly John bethought himself of the object he had pulled from the hole in the ground.

"Might as well look at the thing," he said, reaching for his jacket which was hanging from the back of a chair. "Beastly wet," he commented. "Where did I put it—ah, here."

He drew forth a round black polished object and threw it over to Wilson.

"Queer-looking thing," said the latter. "What is it, anyway?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," answered Harwood. "Looks like steel, doesn't it?"

"I say, there's something written on the thing," cried Wilson.

"No, where?" And both young men bent excitedly over the strange metal ball.

"It may be writing," said Harwood dubiously, after a long scrutiny. "But if so it must be Chinese, Russian, or some other outlandish language."

"Let me look," cried Wilson, advancing, and seizing the ball rather roughly as he spoke. To his great astonishment one half of it came away in his

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hand, leaving the other in Harwood's possession.

"Here's a rum go," he ejaculated.

John laughed outright.

"Some kid's toy," he said.

"No, but wait," he added, peering into the half he held. "There's something inside." Whereupon he proceeded to pull out the contents of the ball—a soft grey material, it appeared to be, which he handled rather gingerly.

"There's something written on this, too," he said after a minute. "Why, it's a tale or something. Let's see if I can make anything of it. I used to be fairly good at Greek at one time."

"Greek—what nonsense," said Wilson scornfully.

"Why not?" asked his friend. "It may be Greek as well as Russian, or—by Jove, there's English too!" he cried.

"English? Nothing strange about that, is there?"

But Harwood was busy examining the MS.

"Well, of all the strangest—" he commenced, forgetting for once to laugh.

"What?" asked his companion.

"Just listen to this, will you?" And Harwood began to read.

"To the people of England on the Planet called the Earth—greeting! This from one who inhabits Mars the Red.

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"This narrative which I now set forth, and which I purpose sending to you by the first of our new appliances by which we hope some day to be able to communicate with the Earth, tells of many of our customs and manners.

"It tells of my august master, the Wise King, one and absolute Ruler of this our Planet, and of the last rebellion against his law, aye, and of the Arch-Traitor who wrought much evil."

Harwood paused and looked up.

"Is that all?" cried Wilson excitedly. "Is that all?"

"No, there's the narrative to follow," said Harwood, laughingly.

"All a silly hoax, of course," he added.

"How do you know?" asked Wilson.

"Do you believe for an instant that a box that comes in two pieces at the slightest touch could be flung on to the ground with force enough to make a hole without breaking into atoms?"

"I might have touched a spring or something," persisted Wilson.

"Spring—what nonsense," laughed his friend turning over the pages as he spoke.

"Why here, man, is proof conclusive that the person who wrote the tale knew nothing about Mars. It speaks of a large body of water, and it is we

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known that there is precious little water in Mars. Also it tells of a storm, whereas there are no storms, wind or rain on the planet at all."

"Well, it will do no harm to read it," said Wilson.

"Right you are," and taking up the strange silken manuscript, Harwood read as follows.



## CHAPTER I

### THE COMING OF ZARMA

Aye, I can tell of that which happened during the reign of Amklu the Great, who so well as I, indeed, for was I not my lord's handmaiden and slave? Ah me! I am old now—although my face is still youthful, for we of Mars change but little with the passing of the years. Once, you must know, this the Red Planet, that ye call Mars, was divided into different nations, even as the Earth is to-day. Nations that had each a ruler, who was always warring against the other, until Mars was indeed the Red, being drenched in the blood of its inhabitants. But when Amklu the Great came to the throne he governed all, aye, even those who dwelt beyond the Great Sea, and whose speech even now is different from ours.

On a certain day, I was standing behind the King's throne in the Audience Chamber, where he was awaiting the arrival of some distinguished guests.

## The Coming of Zarma

From where I stood I could see through the marble columns, where the purple curtains were lifted, out into the street beyond. I was waiting, straining my eyes to catch a glimpse of the Guard of honour, my cheeks flushed and my heart beating quickly, for the Oracle had that morning predicted that I, Beylo, handmaiden to Amklu, would one day save a King's life, and would soon meet the man who was destined to be my heart's master. Aye, the Oracle had predicted this before Râl, the High Priest of the city, and many glances were cast toward me as I stood there, waiting for my destiny. And in my foolishness I dreamed of Zarma, the greatest of all men next to the King.

Who had not heard of him, indeed, the loved Governor of Valâh? And often I had longed to see him, the hero of a hundred different tales. How often I had imagined him, tall, and strong, with the chaplet of the gorgeous red-flower, so common with us, which he wore on his head.

The King turned and spoke to me with a smile, as I moved restlessly on the marble pavement.

"What ails you, Beylo?" he said; "are you still thinking of the Oracle's prediction?"

"Yea," I answered, flushing at his laughing tone, "even so."

"Think no more of it," he said. "How and in what way can you save my life?"

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"Master, the Oracle spake not of you; it said I would save a King's life."

"Is there then another King in Mars?" demanded my master, drawing his brows together.

I was saved an answer, for at that minute my quick eyes caught sight of the sun gleaming on the golden helmets of the Guard, who were just mounting the Palace steps.

"Behold, my lord's guests are coming," I cried, and stooped to gather up the King's robe, as he rose to welcome them.

As the crowd of young nobles came forward, through the long Hall, with their flowing draperies tinted purple by the rays of the setting sun, I scanned them all in search of Zarma.

At last there came one walking alone, upon whom I gazed with more interest than the rest, and my heart beat quickly, for he had come at last. Yes, there was the proud head, the dark hair crowned with the red-flowers, instead of the golden chaplet as was usual among nobles.

His robe was also crimson and by his side he wore a short sword incased in a scabbard of precious stones. Many of the nobles smiled when they saw this weapon, and indeed I wondered also, for of what use would it be against the all-devouring White Fire of the soldiers' guns?

He came on without heeding the looks and smiles

## The Coming of Zarma

of those who stood around, walking quickly, his fine eyes resting on the King's face with a half-humorous look. The King went forward to greet him with outstretched hands.

"Zarma," cried the King when he was near ;  
"Zarma! Is it thou?"

"Aye," he answered, "I have come, O King."

He glanced past the King, and his eyes looked into mine, and although his gaze rested on me but for a brief space I knew him for my master, then and forever.

But as I stood there, I was conscious of someone near me, and turning with a start, I saw a young noble, Anayra by name, not ten paces from me.

Handsome enough was my lord Anayra, but his face bore the impress of an evil nature, and I knew that he was one to be feared and shunned.

He smiled mockingly as I shrank back, for so strong was my aversion that despite myself I showed the sudden fear that overpowered me, although I am not one to be easily frightened.

The King by this time was seated upon his throne, with Zarma at his right. The last rays of the setting sun streaming in through the Great Entrance diffused a soft red glow throughout the whole apartment, and brought into bolder relief the dark beauty of the King's guest. Presently the heavy curtains

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were closed, shutting out the hum of the great city, and light, subdued and beautiful, shone from the lamps of divers shapes and exquisite workmanship which hung from the arched ceiling. Suddenly a soft booming sound filled the air, and echoed through the hall until the reverberations died away between the columns at the further end.

Again and yet again the sound gathered and was lost, drawing ever nearer, and presently fifty white-clad maidens appeared, walking two by two, ever and anon clashing small cymbals which they held. At their approach the King arose, and, bowing to his guests, led the way out of the apartment. And thus the gay company went forth, out between the lines of the maidens who stood facing one another, into the banqueting hall. I shuddered as Anayra passed me, and Zarma, the favoured guest, turned his head, looking inquiringly into my eyes, while I, lost in a sweet maze, cared but little for the passing of time and my many duties, until the King called me to myself.

"Beylo," he said, "are you dreaming? Twice you stumbled coming hither, and now I ask you in vain for wine."

I started and looked round in surprise, for the King and his guests were reclining around the long table, and my master was holding forth his drink-

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ing-cup for me to fill, regarding me with laughing eyes. Flushing deeply, I seized a pitcher of wine, but, catching Zarma's gaze fixed on me with more insistence than ever; I trembled so exceedingly that the ruddy liquor splashed over on to the King's hand.

A great laugh went up at my mishap, many asking what had become of my deft fingers.

"Look at her eyes," cried one young noble, "they are like stars."

"She is asleep and in a beautiful dream," quoth another.

"Tell us, Beylo, what your dream is like?" said a third.

I answered naught, but bent my head so that my hair fell over and shrouded my face.

I was kneeling beside my master, trying to wipe the red stains from his robe. "That will do, child," said the King at last, but I made no effort to rise, for my lord Zarma held a strand of my hair in his fingers, gazing at it curiously; and I felt I could not face the laughing glances of those around the table.

"Strange," muttered Zarma.

"Yes," said the King, "her hair is the colour of thine. I often tease her by telling her she resembles the blackamoor women who inhabit certain portions of the Earth."

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"It is not that I mean," answered Zarma. "Long years ago, when I was a boy, it was predicted that when I had grown to man's estate I should meet with a maiden—'dark of hair, and small as an Earth woman'—so said the Prophet, who would save me from a great danger. This maiden is the only one whom I have ever seen who answered the description."

"Well," said the King, "I make no doubt that this is the very maiden, but the only danger which menaces you that I can see is that you should get to love her."

"I do not think that is the danger the Prophet meant," said Zarma amid the laughter of the guests.

"I think my lord Zarma's heart is proof against a slave's wiles," sneered Anayra. Now there was an evil tale concerning Anayra, and the King had summoned him to investigate the matter.

"I know one who is not," said Zarma pointedly. "What of the maiden who flung herself into the sea, because a lord, going against the law, did so shame her that she dared not live?"

"And who was he who dared go against the law in a like manner?" asked Anayra insolently.

"I think you know his name, my lord," answered Zarma, composedly.

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"Nay, I know it not," cried Anayra, violently, "unless, indeed, it was Zarma!"

"Silence!" cried the King, "enough hath been said."

"Master," I said, springing to my feet, "enough hath not been said. My lord Anayra, shall I tell you the name of the villain who caused the ill-fated maiden's death?"

"Behold Zarma's champion," sneered Anayra. "I fear me it will not be long before a like fate befalls you, Beylo—"

He got no further, for Zarma sprang to his feet in spite of the King's restraining hand.

"By the Prophet Visaya, you shall take back your words!" he cried.

"Let be, Zarma, let be!" said the King. "I will see that he is punished."

But Zarma was already standing over his enemy.

"Back, my lord, back, for your life!" I cried, "the White Fire, the White Fire!" I had seen Anayra draw forth from his tunic a little shining metal stick, and I knew if he were not prevented he would in his mad fury annihilate not only Zarma but all who stood in the way.

You of the Earth know not the force of the dreaded White Fire. It is this alone that has done away with war in Mars, for none can stand against it. In



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the hands of an unscrupulous man whole cities could be destroyed. None were allowed to use it or to carry the guns, save the King's Guard.

In a few minutes all was confusion. Many of the maidens ran screaming away, but the young men who had sprung to their feet at my wild cry flung themselves upon Anayra, heedless of the danger, and in an instant his weapon was wrenched from him and handed to Amklu. My lord Zarma had summoned the guards, and Anayra the Traitor was led away, and for having broken the law he was banished to the Black Country. He never flinched nor besought pardon, but turned on the threshold and looked back at us.

"You win this time, Zarma," he said, "but look to it lest I win the next," and he was gone.

The King turned to Zarma, and held out his hands.

"Behold," said he, "the Prophecy hath even now come true. Since Beylo seems fated to save you from harm, I give her to you in gage of my friendship."

"I thank you," said Zarma, "and if the maiden will consent I accept your gift. Will you come, Beylo?"

But I could not find words wherewith to answer, so flinging myself on my knees before the King, I

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kissed the hem of his robe, and, seizing Zarma's hand, I placed it on my head in token that I accepted him for master, and then I fled from the room.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STORM

A few weeks later I stood on the deck of the air-ship "Azaël," looking down at the busy crowd on the landing platform. My new master, Zarma, who had come so strangely into my life, was talking eagerly with the King in the cabin. It was toward sunset, for the day had been very hot and my lord Zarma thought to travel through the cool night, arriving at Valâh, the capital of the land beyond the Great Sea, in the early morning. As for me, I should have preferred to make the voyage on one of the ships which I saw at anchor in the bay, but Zarma wished to return as soon as possible, so he chose to travel by the swifter air-ship.

Presently the King came to where I stood, and, as I bowed before him, took my hand and kissed my cheek.

"Farewell, Beylo," he said; "serve your new master faithfully, and remember that in the land

## The Storm

where you are going he is entire master under me, and his word is law."

"I will remember," I said sadly, for now the parting had come I realised how happy I had been in the Wise King's court. "Farewell, Master," and I bent my head and kissed his hand.

"Nay," said the King gaily, "be not so sad, Beylo. Think of the many wonders you will see, for Valâh is different in all respects from this my city of Cerva. Come, cheer up and smile, I wish to remember you as happy, and not downcast," and he lifted my head and looked smilingly into my eyes. I smiled back, and bade him farewell again, and watched him leave the ship, with Zarma in attendance. They spoke together for a space, and then embraced. Then my lord Zarma ascended on to the deck of the air-ship, and stood beside me, while the great wings filled out, and we rose softly in the air. I leaned far over the railing and waved my hand to the King, who stood watching us, as we rose higher and higher, until presently he was lost to view in the distance, and all I could distinguish was the blue of his mantle and the glint of the sun on his crown. In a little while even the fairy city of Cerva could scarcely be seen, but still the tiny spark glittered and shone like a star in the darkness.

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"So do his deeds shine, amidst the darkness of our lives," said Zarma in his deep, musical voice. I looked at him in surprise, for this had been my own thought. At that moment the sun went under a cloud, and the little shining spark was lost to view.

"I wonder what that portends," muttered Zarma, half aloud, a frown on his handsome brow.

"Naught, my lord," I answered, "I do not believe in omens."

"Do you not?" he said, looking at me with laughing eyes. I hung my head and flushed, for he seemed to read my very soul, and I wondered if he knew of the Oracle's prediction. He said nothing, however, and in a little while went into the cabin whither I attended him.

The table was laid for the evening meal, and I stood behind him, and served him while he ate. I was surprised to see that, apart from the men whose duty it was to see after the ship and control its course, there was no one on board except Zarma and myself. So he had come all the way from Valah quite alone, without the usual retinue of slaves and lesser nobles.

"Come hither, Beylo," said my new master, and when I had obeyed and stood close against his side, he added :

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“Be very careful to control your thoughts in my presence, for I have a strange and wonderful gift and am able to look into the minds of those who are in sympathy with me. Nay, do not blush,” he added, kindly; “your thoughts are as pure as a child’s. It was only to warn you to be careful, if ever you have a secret you do not wish me to know, never to think of it in my presence. And now eat.”

I trembled, more confused than I had ever been, and begged permission to leave the cabin.

“I have no hunger,” I stammered, scarcely daring to look at him. “Let me begone, I pray you.

“Have your own way,” he said, laughingly, “but be careful not to fall into space.”

“There is no fear of that happening, my lord,” I answered, and left him. I caught up a cloak from one of the seats as I passed, and wrapping it firmly about me I stepped out on to the platform. I caught my breath, partly in terror, for the wind had risen and was now blowing strongly, and partly in admiration. The sun had set and night had fallen suddenly, as it always does with us, but in the midst of the darkness which hung over us like a curtain, one fiery streak still glowed in the west to mark the passage of the bright and beautiful orb. It was as though a black cloak had been dropped before a wondrous light which still showed beneath

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the hem of the garment. As I gazed the brightness died away, and I was in total darkness. I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse of the moon or a star, but in vain. Nothing was to be seen, and an unreasoning terror took possession of me. It was as though I were staring into an empty grave ; or had I become suddenly blind ? I leaned over the railing and tried to catch a glimpse of the moaning restless ocean so far beneath me. The waves rose and fell monotonously, as I could tell by the sound, and suddenly, to my great relief, a faint line of phosphorous gleamed for an instant on the top of a huge wave. Then I was not blind after all, and I laughed tremulously to myself in the darkness. I stood for a long time gazing thus into the sea, and my cloak, which I had fastened around my neck, ballooned out behind me like the wings of a huge bird. The wind died down suddenly, and a strange quiet brooded over all. I unhooked my mantle and cast it on to the deck, gasping for breath, for the heat was oppressive. I had never left the city of Cerva before, and knew nothing of the terrible storms that caused such devastation on land and sea ; therefore, although the sudden stillness terrified me, I did not realise the meaning of it. The thought that our beautiful air-ship could be in danger never entered my mind. Away off on the horizon I could dimly see

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a little twinkling light, and I knew it was a ship ploughing its way over the Great Sea. As I watched it disappeared, as the ship sank into the hollow of a wave, and rose again to view. At that moment a shaft of light fell across the deck, and I felt myself clasped tightly in someone's arms.

"Beylo," said my master, in his grave voice, "come back into the cabin, child, there is danger."

"Danger!" I echoed, twisting my head so that I could look at him; danger, my lord, surely not!"

"Come," he said again for all answer, "there is danger I say, both from the elements and from man. Come, I cannot afford to lose so useful a slave."

"My lord!" I cried indignantly, springing back from his encircling arm, not stopping to inquire in my anger what his words meant. My cheeks burned and my eyes filled with tears. Never had the King, my kind master, spoken to me thus, and for a moment I wished myself back in Cerva.

"Beylo," said Zarma, sternly, "come, do not be foolish; there is going to be a terrible storm . . ." A sudden blast of wind took the words out of his mouth and almost threw me off my feet. The ship made a sudden lurch forward at the same time, and I thrust my hands out blindly to prevent myself from falling. Zarma caught me again, and, turning,



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started across the sloping deck to the cabin. I caught a glimpse of his face in the light streaming from the open door, and noticed that it looked white and set. I wondered dully why he, the man well-known for his bravery, should look so, for I did not realise our danger. We had almost reached the door, bending our bodies almost double in our efforts to resist the force of the wind, when I noticed a shadow fall between us and the light, and looking up I saw the figure of a man standing gazing at us. For a brief instant he stood so, and then the door slammed to. Zarma flung himself violently forward, but whoever the person was he had closed the door so firmly that all our efforts were in vain. So there we were, my lord Zarma and I, his handmaiden, on the little narrow platform in the teeth of the storm, with the wind howling and moaning about us as though delighting in the thought of its victims. I buried my face in my lord Zarma's cloak, all difference in our rank being swept away. We were only a maid and a man in great danger. He gathered me still closer with one hand, and clung tightly to the railing with the other. The wind died down for a second, and I raised my face timidly, and shaking the hair out of my eyes looked yearningly across the water. Countless lights shone out over the sea, an exclamation-

## The Storm

ation of joy broke from my lips. Zarma was looking also, but his face was like that of a statue in its whiteness. At that moment the ship's course was altered, and we headed straight for the lights.

"Saved!" I cried, clapping my hands.

"Lost!" muttered Zarma, "it is the Black Country!"

"The Black Country!" I echoed incredulously, and looked wonderingly into his face.

"Aye!" he answered, "we have traitors on board." I said nothing, but pressed closely to his side.

In a little time we were hanging over the rock-bound coast of the Black Country, and began to descend gently. Soon I could distinguish dark forms surrounding the landing-stage, and I shuddered, for I knew them to be criminals who had broken the law.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIGHT AROUND THE AIR-SHIP

In a few minutes the air-ship struck gently against the platform, and was made fast. A hoarse roar went up from those standing on the landing-stage, and was taken up by other dark forms packed closely together on the ground below. The cry echoed and re-echoed until it seemed as though the harsh sound must reach even the wise King's ears, safe in his goodly city of Cerva. I shuddered again, for there was something appalling in the bitter roar of triumph, and the upturned faces looked so cruel in the light of the torches. As soon as the ship was fast, several of the law-breakers leaped aboard and, laying hands upon us, forced us down the gang-plank. Zarma drew himself up proudly, and wrapping his cloak around us both stepped on to the landing-stage. Another roar went up as the crowd caught sight of him, and many began to climb the steps, and I gazed fearfully at the evil faces coming nearer, for I

## The Fight around the Air-ship

thought they meant to kill us.

Suddenly my lord Zarma leaned over the railing and addressed the crowd.

"You know not what you do," he said. "What mean you by laying hands upon the King's representative? If you hinder me from proceeding on my way, Amklu, the Great King, will punish you all in such wise that you will wish that you had cut off your right hands rather than have stopped me for an instant."

"Who are you?" asked one.

"Zarma, Governor of Valâh," he answered.

"Where is your crown, O Governor?" said the fellow with a laugh. "Where is your retinue? How comes it that you are travelling alone in this wise? More likely you have made away with Zarma, the King's friend, and for that deed we will keep you here for a space."

At that all fear left me, and I sprang forward.

But some one was before me—a tall, fair-haired youth, who cried in a loud voice:

"He is Zarma!"

"Yea," I echoed, looking at my unknown friend with grateful eyes. "He is Zarma, I swear it by the White Christ!"

"Keep quiet, my little maid," said a mocking voice at my elbow, and, turning with a start, I saw

## A King of Mars

the face of the arch-traitor Anayra.

He came close to Zarma, and looked him in the eyes.

"See you," he said in a low voice. "I said my turn would come, and, behold, it has come." And he smiled.

"Listen," he cried. "As ye know, I have come from the court of Amklu the Wise but three short weeks ago. Whilst there I often saw Zarma, the King's friend, and I swear by the Prophet Visaya that this man is not he. I know not who he is nor how he came on board the air-ship, but this I know by the crew's testimony—" here he motioned forward the men who had betrayed us—"this fellow, who claims to be Governor of Valâh, slew Zarma and flung him overboard. For that reason he was brought hither by these men whose duty it is to run the ship."

"It is false!" cried the youth again, in ringing tones.

For all answer Anayra lifted his hand as though to strike the speaker to the ground, but taken with a sudden trembling he staggered back with a pallid face. Calling the crew forward angrily, to hide his agitation, he questioned the men one by one, and they all swore to the truth of his words.

"My lord Zarma was sleeping," they said, "and

## The Fight around the Air-ship

this man," pointing to my master, "fell upon him, and, before we could come to his aid, slew him, and with the help of the maiden, lifted and threw the body into the sea. Therefore we brought them hither, for they have broken the law, and it is the Wise King's wish that all such be banished."

I looked at the speakers in horror and fear, for I saw they were believed.

"It is no wonder the maiden tried to defend this man," said Anayra with an evil glitter in his eyes. "No wonder, for she is his—"

Before the foul word could leave his lips Zarma sprang forward and forced him backward against the railing, and it took many men to loosen his grasp.

"What shall we do with him?" asked a brawny fellow, one of the first to drag Zarma away. "Shall we kill him?" he said, looking towards Anayra, who leant against the railing, his face deathly white and distorted with passion.

"Nay," he answered in a hoarse voice, after a few minutes' reflection, which seemed an eternity to me. "Nay, death would be too easy a punishment. Let him live as we have lived for so long. Let him live and labour as we have laboured—eating his heart out day by day and hour by hour. Yea, let him live, longing for freedom, let him watch in vain for a

## A King of Mars

sail—anything to carry him far from this barren country. Think how his proud spirit will be humbled and his dreams of glory crumble into dust ! Let him live, live, live ! ” He paused exhausted, and I drew back, appalled at the man’s ferocity.

As for Zarma, he appeared in no wise disconcerted, but taking my hand in his led me past Anayra, who treated him to a scowl so full of hatred and animosity that I trembled, fearing that, in spite of what he had just said, his rage would conquer him and he would give the order for Zarma’s death. Therefore I paused in an agony of fear, but my lord led me on down the steps without once looking back at his enemy standing above us. The crowd parted as we descended, and Zarma, drawing his rich cloak, the only dash of colour in all that sombre mass, around me in spite of my protests, went forth in this dreary land of the banished. We had reached the outskirts of the mob when a sudden burst of angry cries arrested us. Turning, we saw the small landing-stage literally bending under the weight of those who were pressing up the stair-way. Leaning over the ship’s railing I saw Anayra, who by his gestures appeared to be speaking to the crowd, but the uproar was so great I could not distinguish his words. Suddenly the stripling who had braved Anayra’s anger lifted his hand, and in the sudden

## The Fight around the Air-ship

silence that followed I heard his voice.

“He lies, do not listen to him!” he cried. “He has no intention of taking the news of Zarma’s supposed death to the King, for he knows he would not be believed. I tell you he is a traitor to us, his comrades in misfortune, even as he is a traitor to Zarma. He means to go to Valâh in disguise and govern in Zarma’s place——”

His voice was drowned in the hubbub that followed. Presently, however, the noise ceased, and again we heard the boy speak.

“Zarma was not killed,” he said.

I started and looked at my lord who was gazing straight ahead.

We could hear Anayra denying with wild gestures and in the name of the saints and Higher Lords the truth of the boy’s words. None would listen, however, and cowed by the threatening looks of those standing around, he held his peace and allowed the youth to proceed with his story.

“Anayra’s intention is to go first to Valâh, where he will spread the news of Zarma’s supposed death, charging the King with his murder. He hopes thus to incite the inhabitants of Valâh and the other cities of Wikna, the land over the sea, to rebellion against the King, hoping to defeat him and reign in his place. Long live Anayra the Traitor!”



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The cry was taken up, and more and more of those standing below scaled the stairs.

The crew of the "Azaël," under Anayra's command, struck blindly on the heads of the poor creatures who clung to the side of the air-ship, which, being suddenly lightened, rose a few feet in the air. The fair-haired youth clung desperately to the railing, however, and called to the others to help him. And, regardless of blows, they attempted to board the ship a second time, and were again repulsed.

Suddenly, as I had feared, the landing-stage broke with a horrible rending noise, and all were precipitated to the ground. At the same time the "Azaël," being suddenly freed from the weight of the clinging bodies, rose high in the air. A cry of horror broke from my lips as I descried the form of the unfortunate youth still clinging to the railing! Even as I gazed, the ship passed over our heads, looking like some giant bird, and Anayra with an oath struck the boy fiercely over the hands. With a cry of pain he released his hold and fell, striking the earth at our very feet.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE YOUTH SIDO

We both bent over the lifeless body of the poor lad, who lay in a crumpled heap, his head thrown back so that his round, full throat was exposed to view. We could just distinguish the whiteness of his face and arms glimmering faintly in the darkness, for the torches had been extinguished when the landing-stage broke. My lord Zarma attempted to straighten the boy's limbs, but desisted.

"I can do nothing," he said, "until we have light." And so we waited in silence, until presently a cool breeze swept by, causing me to shiver in spite of my warm mantle, and I knew that the dawn was at hand. The little wind moaned through the dark trees, standing so grimly against the black sky, and the groans of the wounded mingled with the wind's lament, until I was well-nigh weeping with the sadness of it. At last a welcome grey streak showed itself in the

## A King of Mars

eastern sky, and the long night was nearly over. Very soon we were able to distinguish the different landmarks, the desolate coast with the grey waters of the ocean dashing monotonously against the rocks, the trees, to the left of where we sat, twisted into such weird shapes that I almost believed they were evil spirits condemned to keep that form. I could see two gaunt poles where the landing-stage had been, and below a heap of wreckage, around which dozens of dark-robed law-breakers worked, drawing forth with infinite care the poor crushed bodies of those who but a short space ago had been so full of angry life. With a shudder I turned my eyes away from all this ugliness, that the soft light of early morning only served to enhance, and looked down at the inanimate form of the beautiful youth at my feet. Tears of pity filled my eyes, for his head had struck against a sharp flint and his golden curls were all blood-bedraggled. His right arm lay extended on the ground, bare to the elbow, white and blue-veined as a woman's, but his left arm was twisted in such wise that I knew the bone must be broken. He looked as though he had lain down and slept, for his lips were full and red and his limbs had not the stiff look of those whom death has touched. My lord Zarma was leaning over him, straightening his dress with as much care as

## The Youth Sido

though the poor boy could still feel.

"We must take him to some dwelling," he said, looking up at me.

"What! Is he not dead, then?" I cried.

"Nay," he answered, "his time hath not come yet. Can you spare your cloak, Beylo?"

For all answer I drew the crimson mantle from my shoulders, and handed it to my master, who wrapped it carefully around the boy's senseless form and lifted him gently in his strong arms.

I arose and stood by his side, and we began to walk in the direction of a cluster of small buildings that stood in the shadow of the trees. It was quite light by now, so that we easily made our way over the harsh grass that grew so plentifully all over the island. In a few minutes we reached the first of these dwellings, and, even as we advanced toward the door, two men came by carrying one who moaned and struggled in his agony. My lord Zarma stopped them as they drew near.

"Can you tell me where this youth dwells?" he asked.

"Yes," answered one of the men. "He dwells alone in the midst of the forest. Go straight on and you cannot miss the house. Poor lad, is he much hurt; how did it happen? He was not on the platform when it fell."

## A King of Mars

In a few words Zarma told of the lad's mishap. As he spoke the men's faces darkened, and even the poor wretch they were carrying raised himself to listen. "Ah!" said he who had spoken first, with a deep-drawn breath of hatred, "Anayra the Traitor got away, but he will be caught, aye, he will be caught, but he is clever and evil." He broke off and turned to the wounded lad. "Poor little Sido," he went on, looking, compassionately at the white face of the youth. "So he was hurt trying to proclaim the truth?" Suddenly he stopped and ran his eye over us both. "By Visaya the Great! Are ye not the strangers who were brought here so treacherously?"

"Aye," answered Zarma briefly.

"Are you then in very truth Zarma, the King's friend?"

"Yes," said my lord again.

"Then," cried the other who had not yet spoken, "although I broke the law and for that was banished here, yet I swear to stand your friend, if you will accept me as such—and will serve you faithfully and true."

"And I," said the first speaker.

"And I," feebly echoed the wounded man.

And thus it was that my lord Zarma gained the friendship of three, who, evildoers as they had

## The Youth Sido

been, were destined to help him through the trials that followed. My lord thanked them gravely, and we proceeded on our way. Soon we entered the shadow of the trees which waved their branches mockingly and moaned and whispered together. On and on we went through the strange forest, with never a flower nor a timid wood creature to enliven our way. On, over the harsh grass, that turned like serpents around my ankles, cutting the tender skin until the blood ran down. On and on through the gloom until I thought I should scream aloud in my terror.

Presently, to my great relief, we came to a little clearing on which stood a small dwelling like those we had left behind us. We entered, and found ourselves in what was evidently the living-room and a place to work in, for a heap of bright coloured cloth lay like a tangled rainbow on a table in a corner. A curtained door led into another room, which a glance told me was the sleeping apartment. My lord Zarma laid the boy on the couch, and as I brought a basin filled with warm water, began to bathe with deft and gentle touch the wound on the youth's head, and bound it up. Next he turned his attention to the setting of his arm, for all our nobles are skilled in surgery.

"Go, Beylo," said my master when this was

## A King of Mars

finished, "and see if you can find some wine. Warm it and bring it hither."

I went back into the apartment we had just left and through an archway on the opposite side which I had noticed when we entered. I found myself, as I had expected, in the room used for the cooking of food. The room was cool and lofty, the walls, floor and ceiling paved with a preparation which hardens into a semblance of stone. In one corner stood a cupboard, in which I quickly found a flagon filled with wine. Pouring a little into a cup I placed it on one of the numerous metal trays which projected from the wall, and, touching a small knob which turned on the heat, soon had it warm. Carrying it to my master, I held it while he inserted a spoonful between the boy's clenched teeth. After repeating the operation several times a faint colour came into his cheeks, he moved his head restlessly and presently opened his eyes. He gazed at Zarma questioningly, and then turned his eyes in my direction. A quick look of joy illumined his face, and he struggled to sit up. My lord placed his arm around the boy and supported him. For an instant he gazed thus at me, and held out his right hand, which I took in both of mine.

"Damia," he murmured, "Damia, my love!" His voice trailed off to sleepy nothingness, his head

## The Youth Sido

sank back, his eyes closed, and with a deep sigh he fell asleep, retaining my hand in his. Zarma turned to me with a smile.

"He will do now," he said, and, loosening the boy's grasp from my hand, led me gently away.

"You are tired," he said. "Come, you must eat and drink," and, although I shook my head weakly, he prepared food and drink with his own hands and brought it to me. He! my lord and master, Zarma, the Wise King's friend, ate with me his handmaiden as though I were his equal. After I had eaten and drunk, I felt a great drowsiness creeping over me, which I tried in vain to fight against, and presently my head drooped forward, and I felt myself gathered close in Zarma's arms, and although I was half asleep my heart was filled with joy. I was carried I knew not whither and laid softly down.

"Sleep, Beylo," said Zarma, gently unclasping my hands from about his neck. "Sleep, I will see if I cannot help some of the poor creatures over yonder," and he pointed in the direction from whence we had come. "Nay, do not be frightened," he added, as I attempted to rise from the couch, "I will return anon," and he moved away.

At the door he turned, a splendid figure against the darkness of the doorway, and waved farewell to



## A King of Mars

me. I was too drowsy to answer, and lay between sleeping and waking, listenining to the sound of his footsteps dying away through the forest. Presently I slept, but my sleep was troubled by visions of the scenes through which we had just passed. Again I saw the evil eyes of Anayra, and heard the despairing shrieks of those who were hurled to the ground by the breaking of the landing-stage. I awoke with a cry, and slept again, only to see Sido's body hanging in mid-air, with the shadow of the air-ship's wings upon him, like an evil bird. But presently the dream changed, and I saw the boy walking through a beautiful meadow with a fair woman by his side. They were speaking lowly together, and I stood watching with sad eyes, wishing and longing for a like happiness. And as they passed me hand in hand and crowned with myrtle, the boy bent his curly head close to the blushing cheek of the maiden, and again I heard the words :

“Damia, Damia, my love !”

## CHAPTER V

### THE BLACK COUNTRY

The sun was high in the heavens when I awoke. As I lay, with closed eyelids, still hazy with sleep, I thought myself back in the King's palace, in the high vaulted apartment that I shared with the other handmaidens. I stretched myself lazily, expecting every minute to hear the harsh voice of old Rena, whose duty it was to look after us, bidding us arise. The sun beat on my lids, causing my inner sight to swim in a rosy brilliancy. I lay thus for some time, letting my thoughts wander as they listed, when a sudden rustle near at hand caused me to open my eyes. Standing near my couch looking down at me was a beautiful youth. I stared at him for a time, wondering how he came there, but the sight of his bandaged head and useless arm recalled all that had happened, and I covered my face with my hands and rocked myself to and fro in sudden grief. I felt the boy's hand

## A King of Mars

touch my head in an inquiring way as though he feared I would vanish. At last he spoke.

"Who are you?" he said softly. "Why do you grieve; are you an Earth-woman?"

"Nay," I said, smiling through the tears that clung to my lashes. "Nay, I am the handmaiden of my lord Zarma."

The boy started and leaned nearer.

"Then you are the maiden whom I saw last night with the tall stranger? But I do not understand, how came I hither?" he added weakly. "I was carried away clinging to the 'Azaël,' and Anayra beat me over the hands and I fell—" He stopped short, and looked at me with wide questioning eyes.

In a few words I told of the breaking of the landing stage, of how he was borne high in the air and of his dreadful fall right at our feet. When I spoke of Zarma carrying him through the gloomy forest he drew a long breath.

"Zarma, my lord Zarma did that," he said. "Ah! they are right who call him bravest and best! Where is he now?" and he turned to me.

"He has gone to help those who were hurt when the platform fell," I answered. "He will be back anon."

## The Black Country

Suddenly the youth turned and left my side, and started toward the door.

"Where are you going?" I asked, springing from my couch and hurrying after him, for I saw he was not fit to stand.

"I must work," he answered, pointing to the patch of golden sunshine at our feet. "Behold! it is nearly the noon hour and I have done nothing."

"What must you do?" I asked. "You must not think of working."

For all answer he turned and led the way out of the room, I following closely after, into a small hall and from thence into the apartment I had seen first. He went to the table where lay the mass of coloured cloth. He held up a wondrous mantle of brilliant yellow that almost outvied the sun in brightness.

"Look," he said, holding it against him. "It is my duty to fashion these garments for the nobles, while I dress as you see," and he glanced down at his sombre raiment.

"We are not sent here to do nothing," he added sadly, catching my wondering look.

"But," I objected, "you cannot work with one hand."

"Oh, yes," he said with a smile, touching a small

## A King of Mars

instrument on the table which was attached to a curious square of metal, set into the wall. "Look," and with his uninjured hand he set the edge of the garment which he held under a narrow projecting shelf running the whole length of the strange instrument. Opening a small cupboard by the side of the table he produced what appeared to be a tangled skein of green and gold silk, and placed it also under the shelf on the top of the garment. Touching a hidden knob, the whole machine began to throb and buzz, little claw-like rods working up and down so rapidly my eyes could not follow their movements, and all the time the boy stood by, guiding the mantle with his one hand, watching with quick eyes, now and again touching with deft fingers other knobs, until of a sudden the instrument stopped its monotonous whirr and the youth withdrawing the bright-coloured cloth held it up to me.

"Behold," he said, and lo! where the rough edge of the material had been there now appeared a delicate green and gold tracery, beautiful in design and execution.

"How lovely!" I murmured, gently touching the finished mantle. "How I should like to do work like this."

"I will teach you," said the boy, "if you wish

## The Black Country

to learn. But now I must work, for I have lost many hours."

"You had better rest," I urged, glancing at his white face. "You are not fit to stand so long."

A look of terror came into his eyes.

"Nay," he said, "I dare not stop. Look here," and he motioned to the metal on the wall on which I saw the day of the month and the figure five where there had been a blank surface.

"What does it mean?" I asked in surprise, gazing up at the strange figures.

"It means I have worked five minutes," the boy answered, taking another bright coloured garment from the heap before him and setting it in the machine. "Every minute that I work is registered thus, and marked also on an inner plate. When I first arrived I had to work ten hours, which have been reduced to eight. I am afraid I shall not have finished until very late," he added with a smile, letting his eyes wander from his work to my face. "But," he said plaintively after a minute, "I do feel very tired," and he swayed and caught at the table with his sound hand. At this I ran forward and touched him.

"Listen," I said, "you must rest now and I will prepare you some food. "Nay," I added, as he strove to interrupt, "you can work this evening

## A King of Mars

if you are strong enough. Come," and taking his arm I led him away, he making no resistance, for he was wearied with the pain of his wounds. Soon he was lying on his couch, and after I had prepared food and brought it to him he fell asleep with my hand in his, and thus my lord Zarma found us two hours later when he returned.

That night as I lay half asleep, I heard the monotonous buzzing of the machine in the living-room, and knew that Zarma was doing the sick lad's work that no harm might befall him. And later I learned that as he helped Sido so he helped the other poor wounded wretches with their tasks that all might he well with them.

The next day the youth Sido could not leave his couch, and so day after day I tended him during my lord Zarma's absence, and when he at last slept I would leave his side and work at the bright-coloured garments, for my master had taught me the use of the strange machine. I loved to watch the beautiful designs grow under my fingers, and gazed with satisfaction on the recording surface above me each time another hour's work was added. For a week Sido lay thus; but there came a day while I was working in the adjoining apartment and singing to myself that I heard his voice above the buzz of the machine, calling weakly to me. I

## The Black Country

hurried to his side, overjoyed to find him in less pain, and soon he was able to take short walks into the strange forest, whose awful stillness chilled me like the clutch of death. It was during these walks that he told me how the island was governed, and of the different punishments.

"We are treated well," he said. "We are each given a dwelling, which we can share with a father or brother. When we first arrive we are taught what we must do, taught with patience and kind words."

"I wonder if the King knows that Anayra escaped and that Zarma is kept here against his will?" I said.

"Are not all things known to the King?" replied Sido. "Does he not know all that occurs throughout Mars?"

"But if it is true that Anayra hath gone to Valâh to usurp Zarma's place will he not destroy all the instruments used to transmit messages and prevent any person from leaving his court?" I said.

"The King will know soon," answered the boy; "for it will not be long before the Lords of Cerva come."

"Who are 'the Lords of Cerva'?" I asked, "and when do they come?"



## A King of Mars

“ They are four Councillors, high in favour with the King, and they come every twenty days, and sometimes unexpectedly,” answered Sido. “ Hush!” holding up his finger for silence, “ mayhap they have come.”

But it was only my lord Zarma coming towards us with a smile on his lips.

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW WE LEFT THE ISLAND

And so the days went slowly by, and each day Sido grew stronger, until he was able to help me with the work.

"For," he said one day when I attempted to take his place, "I have rested long enough, and as I told you, if I dally in idleness now that I am whole again, it will be known when the lords of Cerva come, and I shall be punished."

After that I let him work whenever he listed, and my heart warmed to the lad, who took his punishment so meekly and patiently, believing it just and wise. And often when my spirit would chafe at our detention in the island, the boy would comfort me with quiet words, and again teach me that all things are for the best, and what seems cruelty is often, nay always, for a purpose which we may never learn while alive.

"Look at my lord Zarma," he would say, "doth

## A King of Mars

he ever complain? And yet is he not like unto a king dethroned and cast among evil men?"

"No," I cried. "My master does not complain; nevertheless, he suffers; have I not seen—?" I paused, unable to proceed.

Sido too was silent, and when presently he spoke, it was of strange and mystic teachings, and I wondered, as I had many times before, how the wisdom of the Prophets had descended upon him.

"Sido," I said at last. "Answer me this, you who know so much. How comes it that we are not equal, that here in Mars slavery exists as it existed on Earth?"

The boy smiled.

"Is there anything equal in the whole of nature?" he asked. "Are the flowers equally beautiful? Are the beasts equally strong? Do the birds sing equally well? Why then should men hope to be equal? Is it not right that the lower should serve those who are in high places? You speak of slavery—were your duties irksome, were you ever punished, did you ever lack anything? No, believe me, little Beylo, we have almost, if not quite, risen to the heights we were meant to attain. Poverty is unknown, sickness almost, and if sin, alas! still exists, are we not seeking

## How we left the Island

to meet it as it should be met? Is it not better that those who break the law should be banished from the sight of man and here on this Island work out their just punishment? For all who err do it with open eyes, knowing what they do. Equal we are not, and never will be, but all are born with the knowledge of good and evil, and without inherited instincts to do ill as is the case on Earth."

"That may be true," I cried ; "but why does sin exist at all? Even now I wonder why my lord Zarma is kept here, and Anayra the Traitor allowed to take his place."

"Believe me, Beylo, it is for a reason ; a good one, no doubt, did we but know it," said the boy.

"So you say," I returned. "But must we wait for the slow years to drag by and Death hath claimed us ere we know the reason? Nay, it cannot be. I for one long for happiness, here on this Planet, long for it with all the fibres of my being!" and I flung out my arms in my eagerness.

"Tell me," I said, after a pause, "do you not wish to be happy also? Can it be that you who are so young have a cold philosopher's heart? Do you not wish for joy in this short, sweet summer's day, since you call life thus, joy which will be a prelude to the happiness to come in the Place of Light? Do

## A King of Mars

you not know, O wise youth, that life which seems short when joy touches it, is long, so very long, when sorrow goes hand in hand with it? Nay, Sido, we were meant to be happy, and I claim my share of joy!"

"Aye," said the boy, with a smile on his lips, "we were meant to be happy." He paused for an instant, and looked past me into the wood with an expression I had not seen before in his eyes. "We were meant to be happy," he repeated slowly; "for all creatures, whether they be here, on the Earth, or in any other Planet, have one glimpse of Paradise, and even though the rest of one's days be spent in bitter sorrow, even then it is good to have lived for that one glimpse."

"Oh!" I cried, "do you know the sweetness of love too?" I stopped and bit my lips in confusion at what I had said. Sido turned his head and looked at me.

"Yes," he said gravely, "I too know it," and a silence fell between us.

Thus many times he would speak of things that had often puzzled me, and I would wonder how one so versed in the deep philosophies, seemingly so pure and truthful, should be in such a place, and yet I forbore to question him.

The three men, Taro, Yämel, and Zal, who had

## How we left the Island

shown us the way to Sido's dwelling on the night of our arrival, would sometimes accompany my lord Zarma home, and I grew to know and like them, evildoers though they were.

One day, as we wandered through the forest, Sido looked at me and said :

"Beylo, you must wonder why I was sent hither, yet you have forborne to question me. Do you wish to know, will you listen if I speak?"

"Aye," I said, looking at him curiously. "Often I have wondered why you should be here. If it pleases you to tell me, I will gladly listen."

A great sadness came over the youth's face and he hesitated.

"From a child I was destined to lead a holy life," he said at last. "For I saw strange visions and oftentimes foretold events. So in my fifth year I was placed in the care of a great and good man—a Prophet—and was initiated into the Higher Mysteries. One year ago I was sent to a far country, governed by one whom you know well, that I might learn something of life other than the holy, peaceful one I knew. And I repaid my new master's kindness by treachery—" His voice quivered and he paused.

"I do not believe it," I cried. "Your sin, whatever it may have been, was not treachery."

## A King of Mars

"I do not merit your belief," he said harshly.  
"Next to murder what is the greatest crime?"

"Stealing and coveting that which belongs to another," I answered.

He smiled bitterly.

"That is what I did, I who should have been above such evil; I was tempted and fell, even as the veriest Earth-born youth might have done."

The bitter young voice ceased abruptly, and I looked at him breathlessly, unable to say a word; for I remembered the name he had murmured when he awoke from his swoon, and a certain Governor's Lady was called Damia——

And as I stood there gazing at him a sudden breeze moaned through the branches above our heads, and I heard a voice crying,

"Come, all ye banished, for the Lords of Cerva are at hand!"

I started and looked at Sido.

"Be not afraid," he said with a wry smile. "It is the signal. The hour of your deliverance has come." And he led me through the dark forest, over the harsh, coarse grass, in bitter silence.

When we emerged from the shadow of the trees we met my lord Zarma with Zal, Yämel and Taro, —the only men I had known beside the boy Sido in all the Black Country.

## How we left the Island

“So,” said my master, advancing to meet us, “you heard the signal. I was awaiting you. Come, we must hasten,” and he pointed to an air-ship coming swiftly towards the island, with the sun’s rays on the outspread wings. As we hastened in the direction of the new landing-stage I looked about me in curiosity, for, since we bore Sido’s inanimate form into the forest on the dim morning of our arrival, I had seen naught save the tall, gaunt, murmuring trees, and a tiny glimpse of the sky through their branches. As I looked I understood how the island had gained its name. As far as the eye could reach, earth, sea and sky partook of the same gloomy colour. The very grass—if the rank weed that covered the ground could be so called—seemed a dull grey: aye, even the dress of the law-breakers was of the same leaden tint. In a short time we had reached the platform and formed part of the crowd awaiting the ship’s arrival. In a few minutes it descended softly and stopped. A deep breath, like the rustle of the wind in a corn-field, swept over the multitude, and hope shone in the eyes of all. Presently four nobles stepped out on to the platform, and a cry passed my lips, for in their brightly robed forms and handsome faces I recognised them as being the Councillors of the city of Cerva, high in favour with the King.



## A King of Mars

I longed to rush forward and beg them to take us away out of the wilderness, which of a sudden appeared hateful to me. Sido, divining my project, held me back, and pointed with a smile to one of the Lords of Cerva who advanced to address the crowd. A vast silence fell over all that great multitude as he raised his hand.

"Men of the Black Country," he said. "In the name of Amklu the Wise, one and only King of Mars——"

He got no further, for I shook off Sido's detaining hand and sprang forward.

"My lord, my lord, my lord!" I cried, and sank to my knees.

The Councillor looked towards me, and started back.

"Beylo," he gasped. "Beylo, how came you hither? Where is Zarma?"

"Zarma is here," said my lord, stepping forward.

"Zarma!" cried the Councillors, staring at him in utter surprise. How came you hither in the Land of the Banished?" asked the first one at last finding his voice, and springing quickly down the steps he embraced Zarma, then led him to the three others.

I, not knowing what to do, remained at the foot

## How we left the Island

of the steps, with Sido and the two men, until my master called to us.

"Come hither, Beylo, Sido, Yämel, Zal and Taro," he said, and without speaking we mounted to the platform, watched enviously by the Law-Breakers.

On to the air-ship we were led, and when we were in the cabin, my lord spoke, telling how we had been brought to the Land of Darkness.

"Anayra hath gone to Valâh, where he has taken my place as Governor. By saying that I, Zarma, was slain through the King's fault, he will incense my people so that they will join him. When he is sure of them he will set sail for Cerva to dethrone the King our master and reign in his stead."

He ceased speaking, and stood waiting to hear what the Councillors would say.

"How know you of this?" they cried.

"I told lord Zarma," said Sido, advancing as he spoke. "I am one of the Banished, even as Anayra was, and on a certain night I overheard him speaking with one of the men he took with him."

At that the Councillors began to speak, each one advising a different thing, until my master, who had remained silent with compressed lips and stern, set face, turned to them.

## A King of Mars

"My lords," he said. "You counsel many things, some good, some bad. Listen then to my plan, and say if ye think it good. Grieved am I to the soul that Anayra should have led my people astray, but this being so, I shall prevent them from carrying out his evil intention—"

"Aye," broke in one of the Councillors impatiently; "that is what we would all do, but in what way?"

"By going to Valâh and learning the Traitor's plans," answered Zarma.

A silence followed his words. Then one cried out that a madness had fallen upon him, and of a truth I was tempted to believe it.

"My lord Zarma," said the Head Councillor, with a short laugh; "you may be sure Anayra hath posted his own men at all the landing-stages on the coast; if you go thither and are recognised by the officer in charge——"

"I shall not be recognised," observed Zarma quietly; "for I shall go in disguise. When I have learned what I wish to know, I will find the means to send word to the King. At all costs war must be averted."

A murmur of horror drowned his voice.

"War!" cried one. "No war is possible with us. It would mean a carnage, Cerva destroyed—"

## How we left the Island

our master slain—" he paused.

"Even so," observed Sido. And for that reason lord Zarma's plan must be carried out. Two hundred years have passed since the last rebellion, and since then there has been no bloodshed. If we wish to go still further in our progress, we must prevent Anayra from surprising Cerva, for if he does so, Mars will be plunged in horrors indescribable and peace will no longer exist."

We had listened quietly to the youth, but when he ceased speaking, the Head Councillor sprang to his feet.

"But how to go about it," he cried. "We dare not waste time by returning to Cerva—"

"And the disguises?" I ventured timidly.

He turned and looked at me.

"The disguises," he echoed blankly.

Then his face cleared.

"That is easily arranged," he said; "for in a few minutes the ship will arrive to bear away those of the Banished who have been pardoned, or who have finished their sentence. We shall find what we require on board."

"But what of me—and Sido?" I asked.

"You are to accompany me," answered my master. "All of you, but of that we will speak anon."

## A King of Mars

He arose as he spoke and looked from one of the windows.

“Behold the ship has come,” he said. “ Shall we descend ? ”

## CHAPTER VII

### VALAH

A few hours later we were skimming over the beautiful country of Wikna towards Valâh, its capital. We had left the sea behind us, and it could just be seen, a silvery streak, in the distance. I stood alone on the forward platform, shading my face from the sun's rays with my uplifted hand. I smiled as I noticed the heavy bracelets on my arm and looked down for the twentieth time at the shimmering length of my robe, which fell in straight folds to my feet. I flung my head back proudly and laughed to myself as I pictured Anayra's surprise upon our arrival in the capital. Who indeed would recognise Beylo, handmaiden and slave to Zarma, in the silk-clad figure I now presented? My feet were encased in sandals crossed over the instep with golden thongs set with gems. They were made so cunningly that several inches were added to my height, and my short

## A King of Mars

stature, at which so many had marvelled, was no longer remarkable. I held myself erectly, and gazed ahead with a feeling of satisfaction and without fear, for I knew I should not disgrace my master. I had seen no one since I had retired to put on my disguise which my master had given me, therefore when on a sudden a wondrous figure, all clad in purple and gold, came towards me, I uttered a cry of surprise and instinctively bent my head.

"How now, Beylo," said the voice of Sido, "do you not know me?"

"Is it you!" I gasped, looking at him in surprise. "I should not have known you had you not spoken."

"Nor I you, were I not sure there was no other maid on board," he rejoined.

"Is it so?" I asked with satisfaction, still gazing at him and hardly able to credit my eyes that this royal figure with the golden coronet on his brow could be the stripling I had known on the Island of Darkness.

"Aye," he said, "and yet I liked you better with your simple garments and flowing hair than in this wondrous robe and glittering gems."

"But why?" I asked petulantly, for I thought my dress became me and my heart was filled with pride.

## Valah

"Be not afraid," said the boy smiling. "You are very fair, and your eyes gleam brightly under your coronet," and he touched the diadem which encircled my forehead.

I smiled at him, my vanity being appeased.

"Oh, Sido!" I cried, "turn around that I may look," and I clapped my hands in admiration, as he revolved slowly in obedience to my behest.

And as we laughed together like children there came towards us the man Taro, and a great change was also in him; for the sombre dress of the dwellers on the island had been removed and he now wore a slave's robe of white and crimson, and his hair, which was of a fiery reddish hue, had been dipped in some preparation which had changed its colour. He came forward awkwardly enough, grinning sheepishly, and bowed low before us with his hands folded on his breast. I started at his salutation, for it was in that manner I had bowed all my life before my superiors.

"My lord Zarma requests your presence, Lady," said the fellow, "and yours also, my lord," he added turning to Sido. I stared stupidly at him, incapable of giving an answer, and hardly believing my own ears. Sido, however, seeing my embarrassment, spoke for me.

"Tell your master we will be with him immedi-



## A King of Mars

ately," he said. "Come, Lady," and he extended his hand, which I took, and walked forward like one in a dream.

As for Taro, he stared at him for a minute, evidently startled at the sudden accent of command coming from one he had known as a simple youth, and then bowed low and hurried ahead.

When we reached the cabin the door was thrown open by Yämel, who also wore the crimson and white slave's robe, as did the third man who was called Zal.

At the table was seated my master, and near him the four young lords, even as I had seen them an hour or so ago. I gazed at my master as he sat so quietly there, and as he turned his face towards me I repressed a cry with difficulty, for the face was no longer the face of my lord Zarma, the King's friend. He appeared older and graver and his hair which was as dark as a raven's wing, and therefore apt to attract attention among a people where blonde heads were the rule, was now of a light brown. He had discarded the crimson robes he was so fond of wearing, for a gown and mantle of cloth of gold encrusted with gems—a truly regal figure. I hesitated a moment on the threshold, not knowing whether to bow or not, and at last withdrew my hand from Sido's grasp and crossed them both on

## Valah

my breast, gazing at my master the while with questioning eyes.

"By the White Christ," laughed one of the young nobles, "the maid looks like a queen."

"Tell me," he continued, turning to me, "how did you know my lord Zarma? Doth his disguise change him so little that all may know him? In that case it is no use proceeding further on our way.

I did not answer, but still gazed at my master.

"Nay," said Sido quietly, again answering in my stead. "My lord Zarma is changed in such wise that we might not have known him if you had not been here."

"And who are you?" questioned the young Councillor, failing to recognise the boy.

"I am Sido," he answered quietly, and while the four nobles gathered round him with many expressions of surprise I, forgetting my wondrous dress, my jewels, forgetting all save that I was Beylo, handmaiden and slave, slowly bowed before my master. At this Zarma sprang to his feet and led me forward.

"By the Prophet Visaya!" he cried, "I scarcely know you. Ah, you are most wondrous fair—nay, do not blush," as I hung my head, my soul filled with confusion and delight at his words. "Behold!

## A King of Mars

I defy Anayra and all his false court to recognise either you, Sido, or myself. Is it not so?" and he turned towards his friends.

"Aye, aye," they answered laughing.

"And now," said my master, becoming grave of a sudden, "listen to the plans we have made, that you may know how to act so that the Traitor may be blinded and not recognise you. Listen. For the nonce I am Governor of Ku-Yâh, the country which lieth to the west of the King's land. You, Beylo, whose name henceforth will be Yslaïka, are my wife." I gasped and groped blindly with my hand, which he took and gently held, and there was that in his grasp which brought me to myself, but my heart was beating so wildly and my ears so filled with a sound like the ringing of many bells, that I scarcely heard his next words.

"Therefore, remember," he continued, "never to bow before me nor by word or look show that you are inferior to me in any way. You have seen many noble ladies and therefore should be able to do as they do. I am called Ramâh, and Sido is my brother—neither he nor the three men yonder," and he nodded towards Taro, Yâmel and Zal, "need change their names, for Anayra only knew their faces. Remember to play your parts well, for our safety lies therein, and our lives will be for-

## Valah

feited at the first false step. Look up, Yslaïka, and tell me you are not afraid."

I lifted up my eyes to his, and when I saw his expression, kind and grave as ever, the wild hope which had sprung up in my heart died down, and I was able to answer quietly, without the least trace of my momentary confusion.

"Fear not, my husband, I understand and will not disgrace you."

At that the young nobles burst out laughing, even the three slaves joining in, but Zarma remained grave.

"It is well," he said, "you will not forget. Give me your hand, Sido, my brother," and as the boy placed his hand within his my master knitted his brows, examining him from head to foot.

"It is a marvel," he said, as though thinking aloud. "His very face is changed."

Sido smiled.

"All will be well, fear not," said the youth.

"Are we not nearing our destination?" he added. "The ship is slowing."

Even as he spoke there came a cry from the lookout.

"Valâh, the city of Valâh!" And presently the air-ship came to a stand-still.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ANAYRA

At a signal from Zarma, the three slaves advanced and flung open the cabin door, and my master, taking me by the hand, and followed by Sido and the four young nobles, stepped forth on to the forward platform. A wondrous sight met my eyes. The huge landing-stage, which was all of shining marble, was crowded with soldiers, and my heart leapt with fear when I noticed that their weapons consisted of the guns used by the King's Guard. How and in what manner they had procured them was never known, but I understood as I gazed at them the wisdom of Zarma's plan of action, for the dreaded White Fire in the hands of such men could easily demolish the fair city of Cerva if the slightest resistance were offered.

I stood lost in admiration, for the scene was one of the utmost brilliancy. In every direction were

## Anayra

waving banners, and beautiful maidens, while the air was filled with the sound of martial music.

And as I stood thus gazing, there came one toward us in wondrous robes with a wand of some high office in his hands, and he bowed low before us as we stood there. In a few words he explained his mission, and begged to know from whence we came and who we were. My lord Zarma listened courteously, and when the other had finished answered in this wise :

"I am Ramâh, Governor of Ku-yâh, and this is the lady Yslaika, my wife." I bowed my head as he spoke.

"This youth," continued Zarma, presenting Sido, "is my brother, and these others are my friends. We have come hither, having heard of the doings of Anayra, to join ourselves to him, and if he will accept our services we will help him to the best of our ability. As it happens, we have dwelt many years in Cerva, so we may be able to advise Anayra in many things. In proof of what I say, behold !" and he stretched forth his hand and displayed a ring and bracelet set with stones as red as the fire's glow and engraven with strange figures. I started back in surprise, as Anayra's emissary bent to examine the writing upon the ring, for in the fleeting glance I had of it I had recognised the

## A King of Mars

well known badge of the city of Ku-Yâh, for I had often seen the Governor of that city at the Wise King's court. I wondered how Zarma had come by it, for I knew that the ring and bracelet possessed by each Governor were never duplicated, and I had not heard of the true Governor's death. And then again, I disliked to think that Zarma had lied. I gazed at him as he stood at my side, so straight and proud, and at sight of his face, noble and true, I knew that to save his own life he would not stoop to a falsehood, although he might do so to avert the catastrophe that threatened his master.

But still I was not satisfied, and Sido, seeing, no doubt, my trouble, spoke low into my ear.

"What is it?" he whispered, and when I had explained, he smiled.

"Your master has spoken the truth in all things, as you will know later. So be comforted, little friend."

We had no time for further words, for we had come to where a chariot stood waiting; not the ancient, cumbersome machines known to the Earth's history, but a cunningly devised vehicle of the same shape, running so quietly that it appeared to be skimming the sod.

All fear of the future left me as I sat in the

## Anayra

gorgeous chariot, and I laughed aloud as we swept through the streets, past crowds that hailed Anayra King. I glanced at Zarma, and I saw by the line of his mouth and his gloomy eye that his thoughts were sad, and that it pained him to see these his people so soon under the domination of another. But Sido, who was near us, placed his hand on my master's shoulder, and at the touch Zarma turned, and there was a smile on his lips and his brow was no longer heavy with bitter thoughts.

In a short time we drew up before the Palace of Anayra the Traitor, and I drew a long breath, even as I looked at the wondrous beauty of the architecture, for I knew the trial had commenced. In a second the slaves, Zal, Yämel and Taro, leapt to the ground and helped us to alight, and soon we were mounting the steps which were all of shining crystal, flanked on either side with statues of the same material, and so beautifully fashioned that I had to look twice to persuade myself they were not living maidens. Between each statue was an urn, gleaming with strange prismatic lights, from which softly burning flames rose towards heaven. And lo! as I gazed the flames changed from red to a rich purple and again to yellow, so that the soldiers standing near were bathed in an ever-changing radiance. By this time we had reached the Great



## A King of Mars

Entrance and were ushered through halls gleaming with gems and beautiful marbles, so that my head swam with the sight of so much beauty. What struck me the most was the intense silence which brooded over all, accustomed as I was to the laughter and gaiety of the Wise King's court. Wherever we passed were soldiers and maidens, but all were as quiet as though struck dumb, and gazed at us with sidelong glances. My breath came heavy and thick, and my limbs trembled under me, for a horror of this beautiful palace and all that it held descended on my soul, and I put forth my hand timidly and slipped it through my lord Zarma's arm. He looked down at me for a second with his grave smile, and pressed my hand gently, so that I was reassured, and no longer feared.

Presently we came to where a velvet curtain hung before a marble arch, guarded by soldiers. Slaves ran forward and drew back the heavy folds, and we stood on the threshold of the Great Hall. I caught my breath sharply and closed my eyes after the first glimpse, for the place was literally blazing with lights and jewels. I felt myself drawn forward gently, and I followed with hanging head and stinging eyes until, after what seemed to me an interminable journey through the same intense

## Anayra

silence, we stopped, and raising my head I gazed straight into the evil face of Anayra the Traitor. He was seated on a raised daïs, surrounded by his guard. His dress was of the utmost magnificence, but in spite of having attained his heart's desire, his expression was that of a man who is harassed and worried beyond endurance. He bent his dark gaze to us kneeling there before him, as the slaves called our names. As he caught sight of Zarma he half rose from his throne, and bending forward eagerly scanned his face, while a look, half of doubt, and half of recognition, crossed his features. My lord Zarma bore his scrutiny with the utmost composure, but I was trembling in every limb, for I knew what it would mean if we were discovered. The Traitor's face was twisted with anger and bitter contempt, and he was about to speak when Sido, who had remained in the rear of our little party, advanced until he stood directly in front of us, and placing one foot on the lowest step of the daïs he looked steadily into Anayra's angry eyes.

Presently the Traitor's gaze wavered and fell—he appeared confused and passed his hand over his brow, and at last he spoke.

“I bid you welcome, my lord,” he said graciously, and he bent and raised Zarma. Then I was led forward and presented, the four young

## A King of Mars

nobles and Sido bowing in turn. By this time I was feeling exhausted by the constant strain and fear of detection, and it was only the pressure of my lord Zarma's hand upon mine which kept me from screaming aloud.

When we were seated upon the daïs by the Traitor's side, I looked down the long hall with the line of immovable soldiers and slaves, as one in a dream, and I dimly heard through the roaring in my brain my master telling our host the reason for our presence and offering his services. It was then I noticed that Sido was not with us. Where was he? I wondered dully, looking about me with weary eyes, but he was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly I swayed forward from where I sat, and Anayra with an exclamation rose and came towards me.

"What is it, Lady?" he asked in alarm, but I shrank away from him with a loathing I could not control.

"Do not touch me!" I cried, disregarding Zarma's anxious questions. "Do not touch me!"

Anayra put his arm about me and lifted me. With a scream I pushed him from me and fell forward as all became dark around me.

It seemed to me that I was caught up and

## Anayra

whirled I knew not whither; up, up, until I was surrounded by the blue ether, and our planet Mars shone afar off, a tiny glittering star. I was conscious of a feeling of lightness and power, such as I had never dreamed possible, but a great sadness overwhelmed me in the midst of my extraordinary freedom of motion. I struggled blindly to return to the body which I had left plunged apparently in a trance or swoon, struggled with all my puny might against the unseen forces which were dragging me ever onward away from the happiness which I felt sure awaited me on the planet I had left. Onward and onward, until Mars was but a spark in the distance. I seemed to know that if I lost sight of it I could never more return, and in my despair I strove to call dumbly upon the Prophet Visaya. Suddenly my mad flight was arrested, and I felt myself falling—falling as the stars fall on a summer's night—until, with a sharp agony that seemed to rend my very soul, I struggled up through the waters of oblivion and with a cry awoke. I found myself lying on a couch in a magnificent apartment. Around me were gathered Sido and the four young nobles, together with the Traitor; young slave girls were standing near with restoratives, and holding my hand in his was Zarma.

## A King of Mars

As I opened my eyes they all leaned towards me with many murmurs of sympathy, and Anayra with courteous words expressed his pleasure at my recovery, and although I still hated him with a bitter hatred, yet I was able to thank him and tender my excuses for my odd behaviour, till presently he withdrew.

As soon as he had gone Zarma leaned over me and stroked the hair from my forehead.

"Yslaïka, Yslaïka," he said, and at the sound of the unfamiliar name I remembered the part I was to play, how before Anayra's court I was my master's wife, and a shiver ran through me, for it seemed almost more than I could bear.

"Yslaïka, what was it? Was it the heat and fatigue? We feared we had lost you, for you seemed like one newly dead." He turned and motioned to the slaves to withdraw, and as soon as we were alone he cried :

"Sido, Sido, where did you go? Between Beylo's strange trance and your sudden flight I have been half crazed with anxiety, not knowing what had happened."

"Yes," I said, "where did you go, Sido?" and I lifted myself on my pillows to see his face.

Sido waited before replying. At last he said:

"There is a great danger here in this palace,

## Anayra

and we must be on our guard."

"A danger!" I cried, springing up. "Speak, speak, what is it?"

The others clustered round him and he told his tale.

"There is one here who knows us," he said gravely. "One of the soldiers, a renegade from the Wise King's court. He recognised Beylo and the four nobles, and as I stood beside Anayra on the daïs I saw him come forward from among his companions, and I knew that if he denounced us it would mean the failure of our mission and perhaps our death—even the destruction of Cerva, for there is no knowing what Anayra in his fury would do. Therefore, while you were deep in conversation with the traitor, I left with the intention of speaking with the fellow—"

"What good would that have done?" asked one of the nobles.

"I have a strange and wondrous power when I choose to use it," said the boy quietly. "Call it magnetic force if you wish—"

"No one saw me go," he continued, "save the slaves and the guards. By this time the rogue who had recognised us had left his fellows and was advancing with the evident intention of imparting his knowledge to his master. He stopped in his

## A King of Mars

walk when he saw me come, and watched me with defiant eyes.

“ ‘Think not to deceive me,’ he whispered fiercely as I approached. ‘You are impostors—in spite of her silken robes I recognise Beylo, slave and handmaiden to your so-called Wise King—and he who styles himself Ramâh, Governor of Ku-yâh, is no doubt the slayer of Zarma, to whom the slave was given by your king in token of friendship.’

“Anayra had evidently lost no time in telling his foul lie of the supposed murder of my lord Zarma, and I saw I must hurry if the rascal’s mouth was to be closed; therefore I looked long and steadily into his eyes, using all my power, and willing him to forget.

“The fellow shifted uneasily under my gaze, and at last moved towards the curtains at the further end. Slowly, slowly he went, backward step by step, not daring to take his eyes away from mine, and I followed through the files of the slaves and soldiers until we passed under the archway, and then before I could stop or hinder him, with a sudden effort which sent a shiver through him, he turned and fled, and although I have searched through chamber after chamber I did not find him.”

There was silence for a few minutes, then one of

## Anayra

the nobles, the youngest, Osza by name, asked :

“What shall we do now ? If he denounces us we are as good as dead.”

As for me, I said nothing, for I felt sure we were lost indeed, and I stared in dumb misery at the faces of those around and wished we were back in the Black Country again. Zarma paced thoughtfully to and fro.

“Did you succeed in causing the fellow to forget ?” he asked at last, stopping before Sido.

“I know not,” the boy answered humbly. “I did my best and put forth all my power, but he fled from me, and I do not know how long the effect may last.”

“Master, master,” cried the slave Yämel, kneeling before my lord Zarma, “why should we fear this man ? Let Sido describe him to me and I will find him and close his mouth for ever—”

“Yämel !” cried my lord in a terrible voice, “well I know that for my sake you would banish yourself for ever from all life of beauty, with a black sin upon your soul, yet not to save the lives of these my friends who are so dear to me would I let you sully your hands with the blood of a fellow-creature, commit the crime of crimes which would cause you to descend to the lowest depths !”

A silence fell upon us after Zarma’s last words, a



## A King of Mars

silence fraught with fear and trembling on my part, and many ungenerous, aye even sinful thoughts, crossed my mind. What mattered it whether Yämel killed this man who was shadowing us? Why should we suffer the daily fear of detection when the slave with one quick blow could free us? Yämel, of course would be punished for the deed, but what then?—So ran my thoughts until I saw my master's eyes fixed upon me in sad reproach, and with a start I realized that he could read my mind like an open book, and my cheeks grew hot with shame.

At last he spoke and said:

"Let us go to Anayra and tell him that one of his guards imagines that we are other than we are, and thus treating the matter as a jest we may disarm his suspicions in case the fellow should speak."

"Oh, no!" I cried involuntarily, for I remembered the half-troubled look of recognition which had crossed Anayra's face at sight of us, and his expression of hatred as he was about to speak denouncing us, when Sido interfered. Would not the slightest word or look on our part arouse again his slumbering suspicions? Better far to run the risk, and hope that the spell that Sido had laid upon the guard would last until our work was done

## Anayra

and we safe back at the Wise King's court.

But my lord would not listen to me, and presently I was left alone.

And thus our life began in that wondrous yet terrible palace, where every shadow held a lurking foe. We did not set eyes upon the soldier again, since the day upon which Sido had followed him out of the Great Hall. Nevertheless, I did not breathe freely, nor could I enjoy the beauties of the city, and I longed for the day when we could depart and our mission be over.

## CHAPTER IX

### MYSTA THE SLAVE

There was one I feared and hated even more than I did Anayra, and that was the high dignitary who had received us upon the day of our arrival. He was the Traitor's friend and counsellor in all things. I learned that he was to be Governor of Valâh upon Anayra becoming King, in fact, he was already called the Head Governor. Whenever he came near me, I trembled in spite of myself, and I think he knew of my dislike and dread, although I tried to hide it, speaking to him ever with courteous words, despite the effort it cost me to do so.

One day, as I sat alone in my chamber gazing idly through the open window to the bay beyond, there came a young slave-girl and said my master awaited me. Now this young maiden, whose name was Mysta, loved me, and as she stood ready to attend me I saw that she was trembling exceedingly. I

## Mysta the Slave

took the girl by the shoulders and drew her gently towards me.

“What is it, Mysta?” I asked. “What hath happened that you should tremble so? Has my lord Anayra been harsh with you?”

The girl looked about her with frightened eyes, and pointed without speaking to the boats in the harbour.

I followed her gaze, and saw with a sinking heart that they were being made ready for departure, and I knew right well what that portended—the invasion of Cerva and the seizure of the King’s person, for Anayra, not content with usurping the throne, intended humbling Amklu into the dust. I shuddered, for I realised what a dreadful scourge the Traitor’s entrance into the doomed city would mean if the King were not warned of his coming. The slave girl saw my movement and caught my hand.

“Lady, Lady!” she cried, “know you not what those boats mean? Do you not hear the cries acclaiming Anayra King? Ah, Lady, I know not whom you consider rightful king of this our Planet, or whether you are in truth friend to Anayra, and believe the evil tales he has told—for they are monstrous lies and slanders!” She stopped and looked at me. “You know my thoughts, Lady,” she added, “and my life is in your hands; but

## A King of Mars

rather than bow before Anayra, my master though he be, and salute him as King, I would take my life or his!—you will not betray me,” she said, “for I have read the hate in your eyes for Anayra the Traitor, and for that look I thank you,” and she knelt at my feet and kissed the hem of my robe. I looked at her kneeling there, my thoughts in a whirl. Dare I trust her and confide my anxiety and fear for the King’s safety, as well as the reason for our presence here in the Traitor’s city? How I longed for someone of my own sex with whom I could speak openly and without fear! But I put a curb on my desire for sympathy, and told the slave girl to prepare me for my lord Zarma’s presence. The girl obeyed and while she was robing me I questioned her as to the reason of her hatred of Anayra, and why she remained in his court if she experienced such dislike at being near him. Mysta paused in the act of placing the chaplet of pearls upon my head, and I saw her face in the mirror in front of me, white, with the eyes blazing in passion.

“Did you ever hear of the unfortunate maiden who flung herself into the sea for the shame that Anayra put upon her?”

“Aye,” I answered, gazing into the girl’s angry eyes. “I have heard the tale.”

“She was my sister,” said Mysta, with her lips

## Mysta the Slave

close to my ear. "My sister—that is all. You can now believe in my good faith when I say that I am ready to do anything, aye, even to laying down my life, if I can see Anayra humbled and punished for his evil deeds."

"How do you know that we are not in very truth your master's friends, and that I shall not go to him with your tale?"

"Friendship doth not shrink from the touch of the loved one, as I have seen you shrink, Lady, at Anayra's approach," said the girl quietly, and she would have touched my hand with her lips, but I flung my arms about her neck and kissed her on the cheek.

"Call me not Lady," I whispered, "for I am nought but a slave, and handmaiden to my master, lord Zarma, whom men call Ramâh." And in a few words I told of our mission and all that had befallen us from the time of our departure from the Wise King's court. The girl, as she listened, kept her glowing eyes fixed on mine, and did not once interrupt, although I saw that the tale surprised her greatly. When I had ceased speaking she did not immediately break the silence, and I waited patiently for her words, for I felt sure she had some plan in view. Suddenly she raised her head.

"What you have told me is strange indeed," she

## A King of Mars

said, "and it is now time to act. You say that your master, the true Governor of Valâh, has become the confidant and adviser of Anayra, and if this is so he has without doubt learned of the Traitor's plan to sail for Cerva to-morrow or at the most in two days' time. We of the household have already been warned, and I am to accompany him upon the journey, for he has exalted me above all the other handmaidens," and the girl's eyes blazed as she spoke. "Now," she went on, "something must be done to warn Amklu the Wise of our approach."

So busy had our tongues been that the minutes had slipped away and I had entirely forgotten my lord Zarma's message until I heard my name called. Raising my eyes I saw my master standing in the doorway, and I leapt to my feet in confusion and ran to him.

"My lord, my lord," I cried, taking his hand, "forgive me if I tarried, but I have heard great news and gained a friend who will help us, for now we stand in great need of aid. Come hither, Mysta, that I may present you to my master."

My lord Zarma raised his finger to his lips to enjoin silence, thinking no doubt that I had for a minute forgotten that in the eyes of the court I was Yslaïka his wife. But my heart was light at having found a friend, one of my own station, before

## Mysta the Slave

whom I need not fear to be myself. So I turned to my lord, and in a few words told him of what had passed between us. "Therefore," I added, "there is no need of so much caution, and I am once more, if only for a time, Beylo, my lord's hand-maiden," and I would have knelt before him if he had not prevented me. He looked at the girl standing silently before us, and questioned her in his grave voice.

"Beylo has been imprudent perhaps," he said, studying her face, "but I know how hard it has been for her, poor child, and I am sure her pure heart has not misled her in judging you to be sincere. If you are in very truth sister to the unfortunate maiden whom Anayra wronged, then indeed there can be no love for him in your heart, and although the law enjoins us to bear no hate towards a fellow-creature, I cannot find it in my mind to blame you for wishing to revenge the honour of your poor dead sister. Therefore, henceforth I count you one with us in our mission of showing the Traitor as he is before any great evil hath been done. Hard and bitter hath it been to me to see my people led away by this evil man, and great pain have I felt to pass amongst them unknown and forgotten, aye, forgotten, albeit I laboured for them and governed them in as good and



## A King of Mars

honest a fashion as I could, copying to the best of my ability our master, Amklu the King. Many times have I felt tempted to throw my disguise from me and appear in my true light, as Zarma their lawful Governor, but I knew I should not be believed, and Anayra's guard, brought with him from the Land of Darkness, are his creatures body and soul, and would, if I spoke, fling themselves upon me. Yet I do not despair of regaining my people, for their hatred of the King arises from the belief in his having made away with me." He ceased speaking and a look of sadness filled his eyes, and my heart yearned for him in his grief.

Mysta came forward and stood before him.

"My lord," she said, "I thank you for your belief and trust, and I swear to be true to you and aid you in everything as far as I am able." and she raised her hand to Heaven in her earnestness. At that moment Sido entered, but stopped at sight of us.

## CHAPTER X

### MYSTA'S TALE

Zarma turned to him and begged him to call the four young Councillors. Sido obeyed, and when they had all assembled my master re-told to them Mysta's story, and of her offer to aid us in any way she could.

"It is well that we have this friend," he added, for our position here is becoming more difficult every hour. Anayra, I fear, is getting ready for immediate departure, and if the King is not warned in time he will be seized and a battle will ensue, which would mean the destruction of this vast civilization which we have built through long years of work. This maiden, through her knowledge of the court and her insight into the workings of Anayra's mind, can without a doubt find some way in which to help us." The four Councillors looked at one another with doubt written on their faces, and I saw that they feared a trap on the part of

## A King of Mars

Anayra, and that the girl was sent to spy upon us.

At last Osza, the youngest, spoke.

"My lord Zarma," he said, "I do not wish to insult this maiden by doubting her good faith, but on the other hand it appears to me that we have been very imprudent to say the least, considering the danger with which we are surrounded. Admitting the possibility of her being a creature of Anayra, see you not that we are lost?"

Mysta stepped forward with a look of passionate grief on her face.

"Listen," she said, "I can understand that it is difficult for you to believe, coming as I do with only my word—a word of a slave,—to convince you. Nevertheless, although it tears my heart to speak of it, I will tell you of my sister's shame and her death, and in such a way as will remove all doubt from your minds concerning the truth of my words." She paused and clasped her hands tightly to her breast as though to still its pain.

"Two years ago," she began, "when my lord Zarma was still Governor of Valâh and all the country round, we were very happy and dreamed not of the shadow which was to fall upon us. We live in a lonely and beautiful spot on the coast some leagues from here. My father is the director of the fisheries of this coast, the privilege having been

## Mysta's Tale

granted to his father as a reward for his services. As you know, it is a great privilege, and he it is who provides all the country on this side of the Great Sea with fish. Of course he has many youths under him who pack the fish every morning and carry them to Valâh and the smaller cities. Both my sister and myself loved to watch the catching of the fish, and the constant hum of the machinery mingling with the roar of the waves and the merry voices of the youths was music to our ears.

“One day a new youth arrived and said he had been sent by a great noble from the city, and asked my father to employ him. Now I had noticed him some days previous passing and repassing our dwelling, and although he was handsome and well appearing I liked him not, and told my father so, but he laughed at me and the next day the youth was enrolled. And so the days passed, and it did not take very long to see that he loved my sister or professed to do so, and as for her, poor maid, I think she loved him from the first. My father I could see, did not object, for as I have said, the young man was handsome and seemed earnest enough in his love for my sister; moreover he was a hard worker. But I was oppressed by a horrible fear, I knew not why, and one night I was so

## A King of Mars

uneasy I could not sleep and the boom of the sea sounded louder in my ears than usual, so, leaving my couch, I approached the window, thinking the fresh air would quiet me. As I reached the window a gasping cry startled me, and I leaned out, thinking one of the boys might have hurt himself on the rocks below. There was no moon and it was quite dark, so I could make out nothing, and I gazed, striving in vain to pierce the blackness, when suddenly I thought I heard my sister's voice, wild with terror, calling me. I ran into her room, which was adjoining mine, and groped my way to her couch. What was my horror to find it deserted, and as I again passed my hand over its surface I heard my sister call a second time.

“Without waiting for more I roused my father, and in less than ten minutes he stood beside me beneath my sister's window. He uttered a cry, for the light which he turned on revealed only too clearly a ladder resting against the open casement of my sister's room. There were footmarks on the ground where we stood, but we soon lost trace of them, so bidding me remain where I was, my father went towards the building where the youths slept. In a short time he returned, his face grey and old, and told me that my sister and her lover had disappeared in one of the small air-ships used for

## Mysta's Tale

transporting the fish to the different towns and cities. All that night we and the workmen searched for my lost sister, but in vain, and we never saw her again until her dead body was washed up not far from our dwelling. My poor mother was wild with grief, and I swore in my heart not to rest until I had traced her destroyer and punished him for his crime, so I set out for the city of Valâh with the intention of laying the case before my lord Zarma, the Governor of our province. I said no word to my parents of my plan, but left our dwelling in the grey of the summer's morning and walked the long weary distance to the city.

"The news of my sister's death had already reached the town, for in every street people had gathered and were speaking of it with bated breath, for such a tragic ending to a sweet young life had been unknown for many a long year. As I passed I often inquired my way to the Palace, for I had never set foot in Valâh before; and when I said I was sister to the murdered girl great sympathy was shown me, and many escorted me on my road. Suddenly a great shouting in the distance announced the passing of the Governor, and my heart beat quickly when I heard it, and I once more prepared the words with which to greet him. Before

## A King of Mars

long he came in sight in a gilded chariot. He was followed by a great concourse of people, but I had eyes for naught but his kind face. Those with me were pushing me forward and bidding me speak. As I hesitated, an old woman, bent with age, stumbled forward before my lord Zarma, who stopped, thinking she had some petition to offer him. As she stood there a man mounted upon a fiery steed, some great noble from his dress, rode forward through the crowd, and his horse, being an unmanageable and fiery beast, reared and struck the poor old woman to the earth. It all happened in an instant, and my lord Zarma leapt to the ground and bore the inanimate form of the woman to his chariot. He then turned towards the man who had caused the disaster and spoke coldly, bidding him come to the Palace that night. As for the noble, when my lord Zarma had left, he turned towards us with an oath, and I recognised in the face black with passion Anayra the Traitor, my sister's betrayer.

"I started forward with a cry, but was held back and carried, in spite of my struggles, into a house near by. I was surrounded by sympathetic on-lookers, who, in answer to my wild queries, informed me that the noble with the handsome evil face was Anayra and when I cried out that he had

## Mysta's Tale

caused my sister's death and that I would have vengeance, they quieted me saying the Governor should know all and the traitor be punished. I think I was crazed for a time, and when I was once more myself, I was in my father's house, whither I had been brought. By that time my lord Zarma had gone across the Great Sea to the Wise King's court, and in his train went Anayra. I had the comfort, however, of knowing that my sister's sad death, as well as the name of her betrayer, must have reached the ears of our Governor, and I made no doubt but that Anayra would be punished for his deed.

“ Still, I looked forward to my lord's return, and the days passed slowly and sadly. At last news came, such news as roused me from my lethargy. Anayra had returned, accompanied by many men as unscrupulous as he, and with downcast eyes and a feigned sorrow had told that blackest of lies—the Wise King's supposed ill-treatment of Zarma and of his, Zarma's, subsequent death when he was on his return journey. As proof of his words, he produced the crew of the ‘Azaël,’ who swore one and all to the truth of what he had said. And while the poor deluded people were bewailing the death of their Governor and uttering threats in their pain and grief against the Wise King, Anayra



## A King of Mars

stepped forward and offered to govern them and to lead them to the King. As I say, the people were mad; they burst into loud cheering and accompanied him to the Governor's Palace.

"As for me, I was wild with grief and shame when I heard the news, and I formed the plan of becoming one of Anayra's household, hoping in some way to become acquainted with my lord Zarma's fate. Thus, after obtaining permission of my parents, I set off for Valah, and after a time was enrolled as a slave in the false Governor's household. I have risen gradually and am now first slave; and when you, my lord, appeared at this court, I recognised you in spite of your disguise, and I swore in my heart to help you if it were possible."

She ceased speaking and bowed her head, and a silence fell upon us all, for we were thinking of the evil which Anayra had brought upon us.

And as we stood thus, busy with our thoughts, a slave summoned my lord Zarma to the Traitor, and without a word he left us, and we who were left looked at each other in fear and trembling, wondering what the summons could portend.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ESCAPE OF OSZA

And thus we waited in uneasy silence until at last my lord Zarma returned. His face was grave, and we instinctively drew near to him, waiting for him to speak.

"We leave at dawn to-morrow," he said at last, breaking the silence. "To-morrow Anayra goes to Cerva to usurp the throne. And we, his counsellors and friends," he smiled bitterly as he spoke, "must accompany him." He struck his clenched fist upon the table and his face grew haggard. "Know ye not what will happen if the King is not warned?" he cried, looking at us fiercely. "Can ye not see the destruction of the city, the inhabitants killed, aye, even the King himself slain and we obliged to bow our heads before the Traitor? Nay, I swear this shall not be!" and he paced the chamber in his excitement. "There is murder within my heart—aye, you may stare, you who sit like moon-

## A King of Mars

struck fools! I tell you before such an evil shall come to pass, I will slay Anayra with my own hands!"

"And bring destruction upon us all," said Mysta quietly. "Nay, my lord, you know not the mischief Anayra hath wrought. Not alone has he surrounded himself with the worst of an evil crew who are devoted to him, but he has so worked upon the feelings of your erstwhile subjects that they would rend limb from limb any who dared lay hand upon their master. Nor would Anayra's death prevent his plans from being carried out. Twelve of his ministers have sworn in case of his death to carry on his evil work. The head one is to become Governor and ultimately King if Anayra fails. No, believe me, the web is too widely spread. You cannot help the King by killing the Traitor, no, some other plan must be devised."

"Some other plan!" cried my master. "If we could but think of one. How can you sit so still, staring before you! Have ye no wits? I shall go mad with it all, mad,—mad!" and he smote his brow with his hand. "By the Prophet Visaya, have you no thoughts!"

Sido came forward and put his hand on Zarma's shoulder.

"Give not way to such frenzy, my lord," he said

## The Escape of Osza

gently. "It is not thus Cerva can be saved. The King must be warned."

"Aye," said my master, speaking quietly once more. "The King must be warned. Yet how can that be? Are we not caught and held fast in Anayra's powerful net?" And he groaned.

Silence fell upon us again, and I was turning impossible plans over and over in my mind when suddenly the slave Mysta arose and approached Zarma, who sat plunged in thought.

"My lord," said the girl, "I have thought of a way by which the King can be warned without Anayra's knowledge."

"Speak, girl speak!" cried my master, seizing her hand. "Lose not a moment; for we have but the night before us."

The girl glided to the door and after assuring herself that we were alone, she returned and disclosed her plan.

"Occasionally I have been allowed to return home on short visits, and this night after the banquet I will go to Anayra and beg leave to remain with my parents until he has become King. Without doubt he will grant my request, and I will go to my father and acquaint him of what has befallen. I will beg him to allow me to start for Cerva in one of our small air-ships before morning—"

## A King of Mars

"Impossible!" cried Osza. "How think you to evade the vigilance of the guards? How can you hope to leave without attracting attention?"

"My lord," answered Mysta, "I will find the means—"

"I doubt it not," said Zarma kindly. "But know you how to manage the air-ship?"

"Yes," answered the girl.

"But have you the necessary strength—?"

"No," cut in Sido; "she has not."

"My lord! implored Mysta.

"Hush," said the youth. "I have a better plan yet. My lord Osza, you shall wear one of this maiden's robes and go in her place; and you, Mysta, will impersonate lord Osza—Anayra would not notice the slight difference in height, since he speaks with no one save my lord Zarma. I do not think either of you need fear detection."

"It is a risk," muttered the eldest Councillor, after a pause.

"But even should the air-ship be observed I doubt if it would attract attention, since Mysta's father is in the habit of sending the ships out in the early morning. At any rate, it is our only chance," said Osza hopefully, as we separated.

Shortly after we were summoned to the evening banquet, which seemed longer and more tedious

## The Escape of Osza

than ever before, but at last it was over, and I was free to go as well as the four Councillors ; my lord Zarma and Sido, however, remained at Anayra's request to speak, no doubt, of the invasion of Cerva.

As I sat alone in the perfumed darkness of my chamber some time after, my thoughts dwelling on our departure, I wondered whether Mysta had succeeded in obtaining Anayra's permission to absent herself. I could still hear the voices of the sailors on the ships, and approaching the casement I saw that the Palace gardens were lighted up even more beautifully than usual, and here and there groups of gaily attired nobles and ladies were deep in conversation. As I stood thus, I heard my name, or rather my assumed name, spoken softly, and turning saw the white robes of Mysta through the gloom. In an instant I had lighted the apartment, and called to the girl.

"Have you succeeded, Mysta?" I asked, as she came slowly toward me.

"Yes, Lady," she answered very low, but her voice trembled with suppressed laughter, and I looked at her in surprise, and then laughed too, for it was the face of the young lord Osza under the slave's head-dress.

"When do you start?" I asked when I had finished admiring him, and where is Mysta?"

## A King of Mars

"I am waiting to say farewell to my lord Zarma," answered the youth, "and as for Mysta, she begged me to remain until she had returned. She left me some time ago." He had hardly spoken before my master, Sido and the three Councillors entered, followed by Mysta. They all laughed and exclaimed over Osza's appearance, which did much toward making him lose sight of the peril of the undertaking. The time has come, however, for him to set out on his journey, and Mysta came forward to give him some last instructions.

"I have said farewell to all my fellow slaves," she said, "so remember, my lord, not to answer if you are spoken to while yet in the Palace. Pull the head covering well over your face and pass on, and none will wonder, for that was ever my way. Remember to go to the northern entrance of the city, and if questioned show the passport signed by Anayra. When you reach my father's house go straight as I have told you to the apartment on the left as you enter, and do not disclose your true identity until you are alone with him."

She ceased speaking and none broke the silence for a few minutes, then Zarma went forward and kissed my lord Osza on the cheek, and one by one we came forward and bade him farewell, and

## The Escape of Osa

delivered many messages for our King, Amklu the Wise, and then he turned and went through the arched doorway out of our sight.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE JOURNEY

For a time after Osza's departure we attempted to talk on divers subjects, but we all, with the exception of Sido, were anxious as to the young Councillor's success, and I for one kept imagining that he had been recognised and brought back to face Anayra's wrath. At every laugh or sound of voices speaking together which rose to us from the gardens below, I trembled ; so at last, as all efforts at conversation failed, we separated for the night.

I was awakened the next morning ere it was dawn by a young slave girl, and as soon as my toilet was completed I descended the marble steps into the Great Hall where my lord Zarma, Sido and Anayra were already gathered. The morning greeting passed between us, and as soon as the Councillors entered, Anayra led the way to where chariots stood to carry us to the harbour beyond. I stole an anxious glance over my shoulder at

## The Journey

Mysta who in young Osza's robes stood conversing with her companions. Indeed for the next few days she effaced herself as much as possible, although I doubt whether the Traitor would have recognised her even had he seen her, for he never noticed those who were low in rank. So my fears were entirely set at rest on that score, at least, and I looked about me as we moved rapidly through the streets. Early as it was, the road to the harbour was crowded with people, my lord Zarma's erstwhile subjects, and strange and impossible as it may seem, they cheered Anayra and evoked blessings on his head as he passed.

Presently we came to the wharves, where the stately palace-like ships were waiting to carry us to Cerva. There seemed to be a very large fleet, and I wondered who were to fill so large a number, but a hoarse cheer which saluted us as we mounted the gang-plank proved them to be crowded with the soldiers of the vast army that Anayra had trained. Indeed, from the bridge of our boat I could see the men in their shining accoutrements waving their weapons and shouting as the Traitor advanced. Three other ships besides our own were filled with the nobles and ladies from the Palace. The new King was taking his court with him.

## A King of Mars

Presently my attention was drawn to the sailors, who were running to and fro making ready for departure. The sun had risen by this time, and the men stood by the tall thin rod in the centre of the ship, wherein was stored the magnetic power which would make it move when the captain gave the signal for departure. On shore, beside a corresponding rod, stood an old man, the officer in charge, his eyes fixed on the captain. Suddenly the latter raised his hand, and in an instant the spring in each rod had been touched, which caused the silver cap which protected the top to descend, and lo! at the point of the rod appeared a flame that burnt steadily upwards. Over the magnet on the quay shone a light and so over all the ships gathered in the harbour, until, it seemed as though the stars from heaven had descended to light us on our way.

Presently we began to creep through the water, impelled onwards by the unseen power; our journey had begun.

In a few minutes we had left the wharves with their marble buildings far behind, and soon the land itself faded from view, and we were out on the boundless ocean. I stood on the bridge, apart from the gay chattering groups of Anayra's immediate household, and looking back at the fleet of vessels

## The Journey

following in our wake, I prayed in my soul that all might be well.

Onward we went, steadily, in spite of the leaping waves and wind, and still I remained staring at the wild sea until my lord Zarma came to lead me to my apartment. I soon saw that even here at sea the ceremony and splendour of Anayra's court was kept up, and the evening meal in the brilliantly lighted hall, with the slaves and musicians in attendance, was longer and more varied than usual. Dish succeeded dish until I grew tired of the constant passing and repassing of the slaves and leaned back amongst the cushions. I think my restlessness and anxiety showed itself in my face, for Anayra looked at me.

"Lady," he said, "you seem ill at ease. What is ailing you?"

"Nothing, lord," I answered faintly, ashamed of having betrayed myself, and presently to my relief Anayra led the way to the deck. It was brilliantly lighted by thousands of coloured lamps, and the scene was one of such beauty that I drew in my breath with pleasure. The sky overhead was a deep and wonderful blue dotted with stars, and the moon was just rising, so that the leaping waves reflected her light. Suddenly my attention was attracted by several small craft coming seemingly

## A King of Mars

out of the darkness towards the boats in our wake, and watching I saw the spark on the magnet disappear and felt the vessel stop, and presently those on the smaller craft swarmed up the side assisted by the soldiers. I saw my lord Zarma clench his hands at the sight, and I asked him timidly what it meant.

"Look," he said for all answer, pointing to the east from whence the boats had come, and there I saw the well known dark outline of the Black Country, and the thought flashed across me that Anayra the Traitor had set free all the law-breakers, and I shuddered, for I knew not what, atrocities these men of evil might commit. Sido, who was also gazing out into the darkness, came to my side, just as Anayra approached us.

"Are you looking at my reinforcements?" he asked with a searching glance, as though he hoped to find how much we knew of the evil land, now rapidly becoming a spot on the horizon.

"Yes, my lord," I answered without a tremor. "Are they more soldiers?"

"Yes," he answered, his brow clearing.

"But, lord," I said, "have you not enough soldiers without these?"

"No, Lady, for we know not what resistance the King may offer. I must be able to cope with what-

## The Journey

ever force he puts forward," answered the Traitor. "I must not fail if I wish to avenge the death of my lord Zarma, my predecessor," and he laughed in so evil a manner that I felt my forces leaving me again.

"But, lord Anayra," I said faintly, "from all I have heard the King was ever kind and good."

"Ah, Lady, you have been deceived concerning him, as indeed almost all were. I grant you he could smile when it served his purpose, but I myself suffered from his bitter injustice," and he told again how the King had banished him, but according to his tale he had done no wrong.

I felt choked and longed to cry out my hatred for the man beside me, but my lips were sealed.

My master's face was terrible in his anger, and he took a step forward as though to smite Anayra to the deck, but Sido interposed and led him away.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DESERTED CITY

The following day passed quietly, but on the morning of the third a cry of "Land!" brought me early on deck. By the time I reached it the city of Cerva could be seen, white and sparkling, ahead of us. A cry of hatred and triumph came to my ears from the other ships, and looking back I saw the soldiers already gathered in rows on the decks. Except for that one cry they were silent, and so still they might have been statues of carved marble. Again my eyes were drawn to the city we were so rapidly approaching—there were the wharves I knew so well, the landing-stage where I had last seen the King when I had left Cerva with my lord Zarma. All this I saw through a sudden mist which obscured my sight as I gazed at all the familiar buildings. So intent was I that I did not see the nobles gesticulating and speaking with Anayra until Zarma came to my side.

## The Deserted City

"Beylo," he said softly, "pray that Osza warned the King, else yonder white streets will be the scene of a great and terrible carnage."

"I do pray," I answered, bowing my head.

Suddenly the voice of the Traitor came to my ears, excited and hoarse.

"My lords," he cried, stretching out his hand to the stately city, "behold your new King's home! Is it not a fair sight? Finer and more beautiful than our city over the sea—aye, more beautiful than all the cities of Mars—and it is mine, all mine!" and he laughed aloud. The nobles bowed before him and did him homage as though he were King in truth, elected by the Higher Lords to rule over our Planet. My heart sank as I saw him standing there so strong in his evil pride, and I prayed within me that he might be smitten ere he set foot in Cerva's white streets.

At that moment Anayra came towards us, flushed and excited.

"My lord," he said to Zarma, "I count on you to lead us through the city, for none know it so well as you. Is it not a fair sight?" he continued, his voice rising. "I knew not the capital was so beautiful, though I have been here often. For now I am master, my lord!" and again he laughed.

We were entering the harbour by this time and



## A King of Mars

the slaves were bringing the luggage preparatory to landing. The soldiers on the other ships again broke into a cheer, and I saw the shining barrels of their terrible guns. The unaccustomed silence in the harbour and on the wharves appalled me for a moment; where were the busy men, the vessels, the air-ships soaring like giant birds against the sky? The Traitor and the nobles were too excited to notice anything strange in the intense quietness, and as our ship came at last to a standstill Anayra turned and led me with much ceremony down the gang-plank through the ranks of bowing courtiers and slaves, and thus we were the first to stand upon the wharves.

A cry of "Hail! Hail to our King!" greeted him as he stood looking back at his followers, and my heart was light, for I knew the King, Amklu the Wise, must have left the city with all its inhabitants. I was able to smile at the Traitor, as though gladdened by his triumph. In a few minutes the courtiers gathered around us as we stood there, according to their rank. First, Zarma and Sido, then the nobles and ladies and the four young Councillors. The soldiers of the first three ships were being formed in lines further down the wharves by those in command, and as each ship was unloaded another took its place, until presently

## The Deserted City

the whole vast army stood in serried ranks almost as far as the eye could reach. In the meantime the ivory and gold chariots stood waiting, and as Anayra took his place in the first one, where he had already handed me, a burst of martial music greeted him. And as he bowed in recognition of the tribute, for a moment I also was stirred with excitement. What power possessed the evil man that he could so sway those around him, that they bowed to his will?

As soon as Zarma and Sido had joined us the Royal Guard surrounded our chariot and we moved forward. Slowly and cautiously, however, for Anayra feared a surprise. It never entered his head that the true King would not dispute his, Anayra's, entrance into Cerva, and the silence appeared to disquiet him for the first time. His uneasiness passed however as the army moved forward. The steady tramp of thousands of feet put life once more into the city. As each regiment passed Anayra the soldiers saluted, and their stern, set faces relaxed at sight of their master.

In the ranks I saw many of the law breakers from the Black Country, and of all the evil faces theirs were the worst.

The streets were absolutely deserted, and the

## A King of Mars

dwelling seemed asleep, so quiet was everything. Strange it was to me to see this once animated capital without movement of any kind, and I dropped my voice to a whisper as though it were a city of the dead. Strange to say, the Traitor never once suspected the truth and seemed to expect an ambush at every corner, so slowly did we creep along. He kept us busy answering his many questions regarding the buildings we passed, and kept exclaiming at the beauty of what he was pleased to term *his* city.

We had passed three of the largest theatres and innumerable gardens without meeting a soul, and had almost reached the centre of the town when Anayra showed signs of uneasiness.

"It is strange," he muttered half aloud, "hath the King fled?"

"I think it likely, my lord," answered Zarma, "mayhap your plan reached his ears, and fear entering his heart he dared not meet you, and fled at your approach."

"Coward!" cried Anayra, angry at this unexpected news. Half his triumph fell if the King were not there to witness it and to bow before him. He had so long dreamed of humbling the man he hated into the dust that the pleasure of entering Cerva was spoiled for him; I think, nay, I am sure,

## The Deserted City

he longed for some resistance on Amklu's part that he might kill him and his followers, and he ground his teeth with rage at the thought that the King had escaped him.

"How did the news reach him?" he cried. "But I will follow him! Does Amklu think to escape me? I doubt not he is plotting against me, and he may descend upon me at any moment. But I shall thwart him yet!" and he cursed in his rage. "I shall send runners to every city on this side of the Great Sea, aye, and others shall scour the country in every direction with air-ships carrying the strongest of the observation glasses next in force to those through which the Earth is studied! —I say he shall not escape!"

Thus he raged, and my heart fell. How indeed could the King's hiding-place escape being discovered under the search the Traitor was to organise?

We were advancing rapidly by this time, since Anayra had lost all fear of the King's presence, and we had almost reached the largest of all the Temples, the one in which the Oracle had spoken to me on the day I first saw Zarma. The Traitor was still venting his rage in bitter words against the King, and so sure was he that there was no one in the whole Great City beside himself and his

## A King of Mars

followers, that when a voice, clear as a bell, called to him to listen, his bitter words were frozen on his lips in surprise and terror, and he paused.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ORACLE

Instinctively we turned and looked toward the Temple. On the lowest step stood an old man clad in white, the chief priest of the city, and behind him stood ten of the lesser priests; the only friends of Amklu the Wise left in Cerva. I was filled with a great joy, for it seemed to me our way would be made clearer with these good men to advise us. My joy was short-lived, however, for Anayra, recovering from his fright, ordered the Guard to cover the priests with their guns.

"Come," he cried, "well met, Sir Priest. Tell me where mine enemy is, Amklu the erstwhile King? Why is he not here to do homage to me?"

"Sir," answered Râl, for he it was, "sir, Amklu the King desired not to meet with one who is his avowed enemy. Therefore he hath withdrawn from this his city, leaving the government to you

## A King of Mars

and your followers until the time is ripe for him to return."

"Nay, that he shall never do!" cried the Traitor, all his anger returning, "for I shall slay him for the affront he put upon me, and I shall indeed govern in his place, not only this city alone but the whole of our Planet. Aye, and my children shall rule after me," and he shook his clenched fist at the little group of priests. Râl listened unmoved at the Traitor's tirade, nor did he answer, which exasperated Anayra still more.

"Do you hear me, you fool?" he screamed. "I tell you Amklu shall kneel in the dust before me, and I will smite him as he kneels, and this I swear by the Temple itself, so take heed to my oath!"

"Nay," said the priest, totally unmoved, "this you shall not do—for a space you shall play at King, for so it is written, but in the fulness of time Amklu will return, and you shall be dead when he comes. Take heed, take heed," he added, raising his voice, "you are on an evil road, turn back ere it be too late, no other chance will be offered you. Now you can choose, but when your choice is made then you must abide by it."

The Traitor laughed scornfully.

"Do you think to turn me back so easily, Sir Priest? Am I a child or a white-faced maid to

## The Oracle

tremble at your croakings? I have sworn to slay Amklu and to reign in his stead, and I abide by my oath."

The priest bowed his white head.

"So be it," he said slowly, "I have spoken."

"A truce to this folly!" cried Anayra impatiently, "where has your master Amkla the coward hidden himself? Come, answer, for silence will profit you but little."

Râl looked at him steadily.

"Think you I would betray my master?" he said.

The Traitor smote his hands together in rage.

"Aye!" he cried savagely. "You will betray him as you say, or join those who have gone before, I also have spoken!" and he laughed bitterly.

The old priest raised his head proudly.

"Anayra," he said, "think not to frighten me. You threaten and bluster in vain. You can no more send me into the World Immortal until the call goeth out for me than cause this Temple to move at your bidding."

"That we shall see anon," answered Anayra. "Think not to save your master by refusing to tell me of his hiding-place, for I shall cause every city in this continent to be searched. Aye, every spot wherein a man may hide. And he shall be brought



## A King of Mars

hither loaded with chains and I shall kill him."

"That you shall never do," said Râl quietly.

"Shall I not? Do you think I have not those who will do my bidding? Look about you, old man!" and Anayra motioned with his hand to the chariots behind him filled with bright robed nobles all listening intently to the conversation, and to the vast army which wound, like some great serpent of forgotten ages, away down the road we had come until it was lost to view in the distance.

"Aye," said Râl, "I see men over whom a glamour hath been thrown, yet I tell you that one day these same followers of yours will turn against you as you have turned against Amklu the King!"

"I swear by Visaya that shall never be!" cried Anayra, white with rage. "Come, you dotard, I will give you one more chance for life. Once more I ask, where is your master?"

"I will not tell," said the priest. There was silence for a moment, and then the Traitor turned toward his guard.

"Shoot me down yonder fool!" he said in a hoarse voice.

A shudder went through the nobles at this order, and even the soldiers looked ill at ease. I uttered a cry of horror and shrank back against Zarma for protection.

## The Oracle

"Have no fear," he whispered reassuringly.

The soldiers of the Guard, who all this time had covered the old man with their guns, seemed almost frightened at the order, and shifted uneasily under Anayra's gaze. They could not so soon shake off their old teachings. So they stood, with the guns held awkwardly, and looked at one another. Anayra watched their hesitation with glittering eyes, and called the Captain to him.

"Did you hear my words?" he asked. "Shoot down yonder priest."

"Lord, I dare not," half whispered the fellow, plainly in fear of his master, but not moving to carry out his commands. The Traitor looked at him fiercely, and stooping suddenly wrenched the gun from the captain's hands.

"Since you will not do my bidding give me the gun!" he cried, and raised the weapon.

Zarma, who all this time had been but a silent witness, touched Anayra's arm.

"My lord," he said, "bethink well of what you are about to do. If you touch the spring of your gun you will destroy the Temple, aye, and all that part of the town which lies beyond it. If, as you say, yonder old man merits death, were it not better to proceed with him to the Palace and have him slain painlessly, rather than to utterly destroy so

## A King of Mars

many buildings which grace this city of Cerva?"

The Traitor, however, was in too great a passion to heed Zarma's words, and angrily shaking off my master's hand, he again raised his weapon and touched the spring. There came a roar and a blinding flash as the dreaded White Fire leapt forth. I closed my eyes, not to see the terrible death which awaited the little white-robed group, nor could I bear to look upon the destruction of the Temple. But as I stood thus a cry of surprise and terror caused me to raise my head, and lo! the priests stood safe upon the steps, and the only sign of the passing of the fire was shown in the golden gates of the Temple, which were so melted and twisted by the great heat that very little remained of them. A murmur of "Miracle! A Miracle!" was to be heard on all sides, and I for the first time remembered that when the building was finished one of the Higher Lords had descended amongst the priests as they prayed, and blessed them and their work. Therefore, the building was sacred and indestructible. Anayra had not moved since he had attempted to murder Râl, but gazed with wild eyes into the cool dark depths of the Temple, exposed to our view by the melting of the gates. Suddenly a soft and wondrous music filled the air, and I shuddered, for I knew the Oracle was at

## The Oracle

hand. At the Altar a blue flame descended and as we watched, a Form was seen in the midst of the flames and a Voice, which I had heard once before, rose in clear tones above the music, exclaiming:—

“Anayra! Anayra! Again art thou warned. Repent and turn back, for I say unto thee naught but evil shall follow if thou dost persist. For thou hast gone backward and forgotten the teachings and the law, and for that shalt thou be punished—turn back and redeem thyself, Anayra!”

The Voice ceased, and the music died slowly away, and presently the Form disappeared and naught was seen but the sinking flames, and still Anayra stood, his eyes fixed on the Altar. At last he roused himself and laughed wildly.

“Repent, repent!” he cried in evil mockery. “Thus do I answer!” and we rushed onward to the Palace.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE TRAITOR KING

Not a word was spoken on the road, and the whole vast concourse, awed by what had passed, moved onward in utter silence. Anayra was troubled in spite of his laughter, and muttered to himself, ever and anon shaking his clenched fist in the air, maddened with rage.

How my heart beat when we came in sight of the King's Palace, so full of sweet and bitter memories for me. As we passed through the great Portal my steps took me unconsciously toward the handmaidens' quarters, where I had spent so many years of my life, and it was only when Sido, ever watchful, followed and touched me on the arm that I was recalled to myself.

"Oh, Sido," I cried, clutching his hand, "how will it all end?"

"Beylo," he answered softly, "have faith and fear not, all will be well," and he led me back to

## The Traitor King

where Anayra stood in gloomy silence. The Traitor raised his head at my approach and roused himself with an effort.

“Come, Lady, he said with a smile, and, taking my hand, he conducted me to the gorgeous State Apartments where guests of honour were lodged, and soon I was alone with my thoughts of the past. For a time I sat still, thinking of the King my master, now an exile from his Palace, and in spite of Sido’s promise that all should be well with us I dared not look forward into the future. At last, however, a slave girl, one who had waited upon me since Mysta had left, came forward to robe me for the mid-day meal, and I knew that my brief respite was over and that I was once again Yslaika, my master’s wife, and my heart grew sad within me. As I descended to the banqueting-hall, Anayra came forward to lead me to my place, and although he had donned the royal robes and wore the diadem which I had last seen on the brow of Amklu the Wise, he was still morose and cast half shrinking glances behind him as though in fear. When all the nobles and ladies were shown to the posts of honour reserved to them according to their rank, with one accord they rose to their feet, and the cry of “Hail! Hail! to King Anayra!” burst forth, and was taken up

## A King of Mars

by the soldiers without. Then only did the traitor smile.

As the banquet progressed and the conversation grew general I allowed my attention to wander, and for the first time noticed that I occupied the same place that Zarma had on that memorable evening when Anayra had insulted him and attempted to take his life. I remembered how my master had sprung forward to prevent the Traitor from uttering the foul sneering words which would have caused me to blush for shame. Yes, it was for me, Beylo, handmaiden to King Amklu, that Zarma had risked his life, and the wild hope, which I had tried so hard to stifle, again rose up within my heart, and I turned to seek my master's gaze with my own. But he was listening to Anayra's conversation, no thought of me was in his soul, and I leaned back wearily, full of bitter sorrow, and longed for the quiet days when I was indeed Beylo, before Zarma's arrival. I forced myself to listen to Anayra's talk, trying to lead my thoughts elsewhere. As it happened, the Traitor was telling of his last visit to the Palace, but, according to his tale, he had done no evil, but in trying to restrain a young noble who was enraged at some speech of Zarma's, the King had falsely accused him of carrying one of the guns and had caused him to

## The Traitor King

be banished. This was the tale as he set it forth before us all, adding how the King had smitten Zarma to the ground, and my heart leapt as I heard a murmur of hatred against the King, which rose like the sound of wind amongst the trees. Here and there a woman's averted face told of sorrow, and when the Traitor spoke of Zarma's supposed death, an angry cry followed his words. At the sound my master started and gazed into the faces of his erstwhile subjects, and I half rose from my place. Surely since they felt so keenly the death of their Governor they would side with us if we should declare ourselves; but a second glance at their faces convinced me that they, in spite of their affection for Zarma's memory, would hesitate to risk Anayra's anger and face his soldiers should occasion arise, and I sank back with a sigh. At that moment, at a sign from Anayra, the captain of the Guard who had refused to fire at the priests was brought in. He, although knowing he had incurred his master's anger, approached quietly, with no sign of fear, and stood facing the Traitor, awaiting his doom. For a time Anayra looked at his prisoner without speaking, and all the anger of the morning leapt up again within him and rendered his face horrible to see. At last he turned and spoke to the company at large.



## A King of Mars

"You see this man," he said, "and ye all witnessed his disobedience to my word this morning. For that he shall be punished, for my commands shall be respected. I ask ye all in what his punishment shall consist? Come, speak," and one by one the nobles rose from their places and spoke, and as each cruel sentence fell from their lips I understood that for the sake of pleasing Anayra the Traitor they would barter their souls—aye, return once again to the evil past from which we had risen after countless years. And I shuddered to think how soon the teachings and the law were forgotten.

The Traitor listened intently, his face betraying the pleasure he felt, and when they had finished speaking he asked my master what punishment he would give. Zarma appeared to think deeply, and then he spoke.

"Lord," he said, "why should you punish this man? For in refusing to harm the priests he was but obeying the law."

"But," objected Anayra, "am I not master? and doubtless he is the one who sent word to Amklu acquainting him with my plans, for how else could he have known? Is my word to be set at naught? I tell you, my lord, this shall not be! This fellow shall be punished according to his deserts, therefore

## The Traitor King

I beg you to advise me upon the subject."

"Since you intend to punish this man I bid you to banish him to the Black Country if need be, for a space, until your anger has fallen," answered Zarma, after a pause, and I knew he had some plan for setting the prisoner free, and was comforted. The Traitor did not answer, but ordered the Captain to be removed until he had decided as to his punishment. I felt vaguely uneasy, for I feared Anayra's cruelty, and I knew he was capable of anything, now that his pride was roused. For that day at least the prisoner was safe, and during the afternoon I was summoned to visit the city. So we set forth through the deserted streets, taking the direction of the ancient barracks and prisons in disuse for many years and only kept as monuments of a forgotten time. What was my astonishment to see the soldiers busy putting these buildings in order. Anayra, seeing the looks which passed between us, answered our unspoken question.

"Since disobedience hath already sprung up there must be a place of punishment here in the city," he said with a smile, "and I doubt not it will be filled ere long. The barracks have fallen woefully into decay and must be restored for the use of one portion of my army. The rest will camp

## A King of Mars

on the plain before the city to prevent any approach from that side.

Nothing was said in answer to this speech, and we returned to the Palace saddened by this glimpse of the new reign.

The next few days passed quietly enough, although Anayra seemed wild and strange at times, and never, in his journeys about the city, would he venture near the Temple where he had heard the voice of the Oracle, and I knew he had not yet recovered from his fright.

On the third day Zarma, Sido, the four young Councillors, and some of the higher nobles were summoned to Anayra, and when my master returned one glance at his face showed me something had happened.

"What is it?" I cried, clasping my hands, "are we discovered?"

"No," answered Zarma, "But Anayra hath condemned the captain to a terrible punishment, upon the advice of the Head Governor. Both hands are to be cut off, and he is to be thrown into prison for ten years!"

At hearing this sentence I cried out in horror, and covered my face with my hands.

Zarma, at sight of my distress, came forward, and bending over me, whispered :

## The Traitor King

“Courage, Beylo; this deed shall not be done. Sido and I will prevent it.” My master then told me that Anayra intended to wait before the carrying out of the sentence until the other boats from Valâh had arrived, for he wished to make a public example of the man. So for a space he was safe.

During all this time the Traitor had scoured the vast continent from end to end in search of the King’s hiding-place, but in vain; and every evening those he had sent out in the air-ships reported that even with the most powerful glasses naught could be seen of either the King or his court; it was as though he had been rendered invisible. All this contrived to throw Anayra into a greater moodiness, and his wild looks frightened all those with whom he came in contact.

As may be supposed, we were anxious about the King, and waited impatiently for Osza’s return. I had contrived to have speech with Mysta, who impersonated the young Councillor with success, and I believed without exciting suspicion. She told me that the troops were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the boats from Valâh, and they were expected in a day.

“My lord Osza will probably mingle with the crowd as the people come from the boat and all will

## A King of Mars

be well," she said, "but if he fails to return I fear me I shall be detected and then we shall be lost indeed."

I would not allow myself to think of such a possibility. We were so constantly in danger that I no longer feared. It seemed to me that all *must* be well, and although Anayra filled me with disgust and horror and the twelve Governors as well, being one and all evil men, yet I so masked my feelings as to be able to converse quietly with them without showing my aversion. Anayra overwhelmed me with attentions, so that I was scarcely ever absent from the different reunions, and in that way I learned much of his ideas on the future government of Mars, and I saw with terror that the law and teachings were to be set aside as naught. The Traitor no longer listened to Zarma's counsels, but inclined his ear more and more to his Head Governor, he who was to become King and carry out Anayra's ideas in case of his failure. This man's creed was one of hardness and cruelty, he it was who had advised Anayra to wreak such a terrible punishment upon the unfortunate captain, and I detested and feared him with all the strength of my soul.

The day after my conversation with Mysta I was summoned to attend one of Anayra's meetings, and

## The Traitor King

when I entered the Audience Chamber I found Zarma, Sido and the Traitor's chief counsellors already gathered. I was shown as usual to the post of honour beside Anayra, and listened in silence to the debate going on. The new King, as I suppose I must call him, was for reviving one of the ancient laws concerning the adornment of the person. He, unlike the Wise King, was fond of sumptuous apparel, and during the short time he had been in Cerva he had ordered all his followers, down to the slaves and waiting-women, to appear ever in the most gorgeous robes, and Zarma, Sido and myself, who still wore the dress suited to our rank, seemed totally out of place amongst the gaudily coloured crowd. Anayra, who had caused the magnificent Palace of a long race of kings to be changed according to his fancy, was now anxious to enforce a law bidding all his subjects to wear gold embroidered vestments, jewels, etc., on pain of punishment if they refused. Zarma, as may be supposed, objected forcibly, saying that such a law could only encourage personal vanity and other evils. Anayra and the Governor, however, refused to listen, and I saw that once again my master was to be vanquished, and I well understood that the Traitor's wish was to abase and bend Zarma to his will. At that moment a messenger hurried into the room, cutting

## A King of Mars

short all further argument by saying the ships were in sight. Without another word in reference to the subject under discussion, Anayra led the way to the marble court before the Palace, and calling for the barbaric litter which he had caused skilled workmen to refit and polish after its long sojourn in the museum, he mounted, after first handing me into it, in spite of my begging to be allowed to go with my master in a chariot. As I shrank away from the Traitor, gazing with eager eyes through the curtains at Zarma, I meditated springing to the ground, but the bearers had lifted the ancient structure to their shoulders, and the chance was gone. How I hated and feared the pleasure-loving Traitor by my side! How quickly we were sinking into the dead Past!

My thoughts were all too rudely interrupted. Seizing my hand the Traitor broke into a torrent of words.

"Lady," he cried hoarsely, "I love you; have mercy."

I wished to cry out, but could not. With a great effort I commanded my terror.

"My lord," I stammered. "I pray you wait—I—" but he interrupted—

"Ah, then you will listen later? You will not turn from me?"

## The Traitor King

To my great relief we came in sight of the wharves, where a crowd of nobles and soldiers had already gathered, and the Traitor ceased speaking, releasing my hands. In the distance the great ships could be seen coming through the water with inconceivable swiftness, and ere long the first one entered the harbour and came gracefully alongside the wharves. Anayra descended from the litter and handed me down. To my relief he went forward through the bowing groups to welcome those who were coming to Cerva. My master Zarma came to my side, but I said nothing of what had occurred, fearing his anger. We eagerly scanned each young maiden, hoping to see lord Osza's face beneath the head-dress. He was beside us ere we were aware of his approach and not daring to do more than wring his hands, we gradually withdrew from the gaily dressed crowd, followed at a respectful distance by Osza, and it was only when we were in Zarma's chariot on our way to the Palace that we dared to question him as to our King's hiding-place. He in his turn asked us how we stood with the Traitor, and at Zarma's answers his young girlish face took on a grave look.

"I fear me things are going but ill in every way," he said, "and we cannot be too much on our guard."



## A King of Mars

We did not answer, for we were in sight of the Palace.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE DANGER DRAWS NIGH

Entering, we went straight to the handmaidens' apartments, where we found Mysta, no longer in the robes of a Councillor but in her own dress once more, so that in spite of my anxiety I was moved to laughter to see the young noble and herself dressed exactly alike. Lord Osza, however, lost no time in resuming his own raiment, and the change completed, he returned and held out his hands to Mysta.

"Maiden," he said, "I wish to convey to you the Wise King's thanks as well as my own for your timely help, for had the King not been warned of Anayra's approach, all the inhabitants of Cerva would have perished. As it is they are safe in different cities. The King himself, together with his court, hath retired to a little village on the coast, from whence he sees the air-ships of Anayra seeking him. I have remain-

## A King of Mars

ed in that quiet spot since my departure from Valáh. Yesterday, as the time for the arrival of the Traitor's ships had come, I hurried hither under cover of the night, and hid myself on the wharves. It was an easy task to mingle with those leaving the ships, but I missed Anayra in the crowd."

"What of my parents?" asked Mysta, after a pause.

"They are well, and send you their blessing," answered Osza, and would have said more, but the sound of many voices warned us that the Traitor was near, and we left the apartment to welcome him. Yet I was troubled, for I had surprised a look in Mysta's eyes when Osza took her hand which spoke of love for the youth, and I resolved to question her if possible, and if my surmise were true I would speak to my master upon the first opportunity. She should not suffer as I had done if I could help it.

I was walking beside Zarma, followed by the two others, busy with these thoughts, when he startled me by taking my hand in his.

"Beylo," he said, "are you then suffering? What ails you?" For a moment I could not answer, so confused were my ideas. I had forgotten that my lord Zarma could read my thoughts,

## The Danger Draws Nigh

and in my forgetfulness I had nigh betrayed my secret.

My master saw my embarrassment, but put it down to another cause than the true one.

"Can it be that you love Sido?" he asked. "Answer me, Beylo, it is for your happiness I speak, and you have no reason to feel shame if it be true."

I lifted my head proudly and faced him.

"My lord," I said, "I love Sido as I would a brother, and take no shame to myself for it; but believe me it is not that which causes my sufferings. Do not ask me the reason, master, for I cannot tell you and it would grieve me to refuse you aught, and if I told you it would be beyond your power to help me." And I bowed my head to hide the tears that rose to my eyes. No more was said, for Anayra had entered the Palace, surrounded by the group of courtiers. Mysta ran forward, and, dropping on her knees, kissed her master's hand, and he raised her kindly, asking her how she had missed him at the wharves, believing this, his favourite slave, to have arrived on the ships. She was spared the need of answering, for Sido came forward from amongst the crowd of nobles and saluted her in his turn, and, strange to say, Anayra did not resent the interruption.

## A King of Mars

That evening, amid cries of "Hail to Anayra! Long life to our King!" we entered the vast banqueting hall. The Traitor in advance, with me by his side as usual, and immediately following came Zarma, Sido and the Head Governor.

During the meal Anayra paid me many fulsome compliments, and under cover of the hum of conversation begged me to tell him when he could see me in private. I turned my eyes toward Zarma, who seeing my discomfort, leaned forward and addressed Anayra. With a sinking heart I noticed the Traitor's marked rudeness to my master, who pale with anger half arose from his seat, but sank back again with a muttered excuse. It was Sido who by a word preserved the peace, and calmed the anger ready to leap forth, and my heart went out to him in gratitude. At last, pleading fatigue, I begged Anayra to allow me to withdraw, and, gaining his consent, I went to my apartment and sat down to consider our situation. I saw that the danger which had menaced us for so long was drawing nearer, and I longed for some one to advise us as to which was the wisest course to take. Next to my apartment was the one occupied by the young Councillor Osza, and hearing footsteps within I thought he had gone thither; resolving to ask him if anything had happened

## The Danger Draws Nigh

further, I went to his door, but was startled by the sound of a sob. Could it be that he had some secret grief? Without hesitating I pushed aside the silken curtain before the door and entered. The room was softly lighted, and I made out a white-robed figure kneeling by the side of a couch, with its arms flung forward and the head half hidden in the mantle which the young Councillor generally wore, as though to stifle the sounds of his sobs.

I hurried to his side and touched his shoulder.

"Lord Osza!" I said, "what ails you?"

The figure started to its feet, and what was my surprise to see the white, tear-stained face of the maiden Mysta.

I said no word until I had led her into my own apartment.

"Now," I said, "what is it, girl? You love Osza I know, but why despair? You are not uncomely, mayhap he will learn to love you—"

"It is not for that I weep," gasped the girl, "but he is taken, imprisoned by the Traitor, and I know not what will happen!?"

"Imprisoned!" I stammered; "nay, it is not possible, Anayra would not dare."

"It is the truth," answered Mysta despairingly.

## A King of Mars

"But what had he done?" I asked, "and where are Zarma and Sido?—imprisoned as well?" and I caught at a table to steady myself.

"Nay," said a voice from behind me. "We are safe, as yet." And Zarma and Sido entered the apartment. I ran towards them and clasped my lord's hand in mine.

"Master, master, master!" I cried, trembling from fright. He saw I could not stand, and lifted me in his arms, soothing me as he might a frightened child.

"There, there, little one, tremble not so!" he said, "we are safe."

"But what has happened?" I asked again. "What had he done to incur Anayra's displeasure?"

"Naught, save cry shame to the Traitor when he taunted me for a coward," answered Zarma, "and Anayra, to show his greatness, caused the lad to be seized and imprisoned for an example to others."

"But did no one attempt to save him?" I asked, looking at him reproachfully.

"It was I who prevented it," said Sido. "Had we attempted to interfere, Anayra would have turned on us. Nevertheless, both lord Osza and the captain shall be saved. To-morrow they are to be brought forth and publicly punished, yet I say

## The Danger Draws Nigh

unto you this shall not be, for I shall prevent it."

"How can you save them?" I cried. "It is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," he answered proudly.

"Sido," said my master, laying his hands on the youth's shoulder, "promise me that you will do nothing rashly, we may succeed in calming Anayra's rage—"

"My lord," broke in the boy; "I think I can save both the captain and your friend; I can but try. I promise you, however, to proceed with caution. Should I fail in my mission—" he paused a moment, and remained deep in thought; then his face cleared and he added:

"Listen; the Traitor may vent his anger on you should I succeed in freeing his prisoners; in that case send word to the head priest Râl, who will come to your assistance."

"Will you not tell me what you doing?" asked Zarma.

"No, my lord; I will tell you nothing. Anayra will of a certainty question you; it is better, therefore, that you should know nothing of the matter."

Zarma smiled.

"Do you think I would tell?" he asked. "Still, you are doubtless right. I know I can depend on



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you, and I will ask nothing further concerning your plans."

And thus the conversation ended.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

The following morning at a very early hour I arose from my sleepless couch, and after robing myself sat by the window. Presently I heard footsteps outside my door, and looking out I saw my master, pacing to and fro, evidently deeply worried and harassed.

I called to him softly, and he turned, his brow clearing. "Good morrow," he said in a low tone, following me into my chamber. "How comes it that you are awake so early?"

"I could not sleep, my lord," I said.

"Nor could I," he acknowledged with a half smile.

He remained silent for a time, and stood looking frowningly before him, then turned to me.

"I am worried beyond endurance," he said abruptly. "It seems impossible to hope to lead Anayra. He listens more and more to the Head

## A King of Mars

Governor, and seeks ever to anger me. He hath turned against me, and I can do no more. Also the three that I befriended, Taro, Zal and Yämel, have left me. None are faithful save the Councillors, Sido—and you.”

I laid my hand on his arm.

“Master,” I said gently, although it hurt me to be ranked last and least of all his friends, “Master, do not lose hope. You say that Anayra has turned against you and speaks rudely. Have you not noticed that he treats others even as he does you?”

I sank my voice almost to a whisper.

“My lord,” I continued; “the Traitor by not carrying out his promises has caused many to murmur. Often I have heard your name mentioned in tones of regret by the lords of your old court. They too have grown tired of Anayra’s ways. And I tell you the time is coming when you will be able to reveal yourself to them in perfect safety.”

Zarma drew a long breath.

“Ah, Beylo,” he said. “If I dared believe that my people would once more turn to me, I could face anything.”

He had hardly finished speaking when a sudden commotion throughout the Palace startled us, and suddenly the door flew open, and a slave entered

## The Hour of Darkness

with a face white with terror, saying that Anayra desired us to come to him instantly, together with the three remaining Councillors. At this summons I gazed at my master in fear, for the thought crossed my mind that Sido had been imprisoned. I, however, followed my lord, and soon we were in the Throne room, where Anayra, his body-guard and all the principal nobles were gathered. The Traitor was in such a passion that he could scarcely speak, and I shrank back from him in fear. Zarma went forward composedly as though naught was the matter, and bowed his head in salutation. Anayra gazed at us with eyes blazing with fury.

"My lord," he said at last, "you will doubtless be pleased to hear that your two friends have escaped from the prisons."

"Escaped!" I echoed, hardly able to credit my ears, so impossible it seemed, yet I knew full well who had set them free.

"Yes!" cried the Traitor. "And woe to you if you had aught to do with it!"

I felt myself grow cold at his words; but Zarma answered nothing and gazed at Anayra contemptuously.

At that moment the keeper of the prison was ushered in, together with the soldiers who guarded the vast building.

## A King of Mars

Upon being questioned they said that during the night a man approached the prisons and spoke with the sentinels. His questions were answered courteously, and that is all the guards could remember, until they discovered that the prisoners had escaped.

The keeper told practically the same thing. Hearing the unknown visitor mounting the steps leading to the cells where Osza and the captain were confined, he hurried forward, thinking it must be some one in high authority to have succeeded in penetrating thus far. Recognizing Sido, the Keeper bowed low, when to his dismay he found himself unable to withstand the youth's gaze, and in a few minutes could not move hand or foot or cry out.

This then was their tale, at which Anayra scoffed.

"Granted that the strange noble"—(the Keeper did not know Sido's name)—"had the power you say, do you expect me to believe that he passed quietly out with the two prisoners without exciting wonder or comment? No; you, my lord Ramâh, bribed these wretches. And I swear that, noble though you are, you and these your tools will be punished as befits your treachery."

At this a murmur arose among the nobles, and

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taking courage at the sound I sprang forward to address them, but my master was already speaking.

"My lord Anayra," he said; "you accuse me of setting the prisoners at liberty, but your accusation is false. I do not deny that I rejoice in their escape——"

"Enough!" cried Anayra violently. Then turning, he questioned the three Councillors, who had listened in undisguised astonishment to the foregoing scene. It was only then that the Traitor King noticed the absence of Sido.

"My lord Zarma, I see not your brother," he said; "where is he?"

"I do not know," answered Zarma quietly. "I have not seen him since he bade me good-night yester-eve."

Anayra, too enraged to speak, motioned to a slave, who hastily left the hall.

Returning a few minutes later, the man said that the lord Sido was not in his apartment, nor had he slept there that night.

"Search the Palace," cried Anayra furiously. "Woe, woe to ye all if he be not found!"

The slave hurried off in terror to carry out his orders, and the Traitor turned to us.

"Think not to escape, my lord," he said with a

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sneer. "For although your brother has freed my prisoners, yet shall you suffer, for doubtless you were aware of his intention and aided him."

"Lord king," I said, taking my courage in two hands. "How could my husband have left my side without my knowing it? He has passed the night with me."

The Traitor's eyes glittered.

"That I know is not true," he said. Then his gaze softened and he spoke more gently. "I crave your pardon for frightening you, but the prisoners have escaped and someone is responsible."

I said no more, but shrank back, conscious of a burning face.

My lord Zarma took my hand, and I looked gratefully up at him, feeling his desire to comfort me.

At that moment the slaves returned.

"Well," said Anayra, "hath the Palace been searched?"

"Yea, lord," they answered.

"And my lord Ramâh's brother is not here?" asked the Traitor.

"Nay, my lord."

Anayra said no word at this answer, but his face was terrible to see. He then caused the whole city to be most rigorously searched, but all to no

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purpose, neither Sido nor the men he had saved were to be found.

During the long, weary hours of the search I sat with my master, not daring to remain alone. We were placed under a strict guard, and were virtually prisoners, although treated with great respect.

Even the girl Mysta was not allowed to attend us, nor did we see the three young Councillors. At last we were again summoned to Anayra, who was so quiet in his manner that I dared hope all would be well. His first words, however, dispelled all such ideas.

"My lord Zarma," he said, his eyes glittering, "since your brother has disappeared, I arrest you unless you can give me some clue as to his whereabouts."

"That I am unable to do," answered Zarma, "for I know not whither he has gone, nor would, I tell you if I could."

"That I know full well," said the Traitor, in the same quiet voice, "yet there is still a chance for your safety," and his eyes fell on me.

"Oh speak, lord King!" I cried, clasping my hands.

The Traitor gazed steadily at me for some minutes without breaking the silence, but at last, turning his eyes to Zarma, he said slowly:



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"In the old days, long ago, there was a law on the putting away of wives."

My master flushed hotly, nevertheless he answered calmly :

"Aye, there was such a law, but it was abolished long ago."

"Yet do I mean to revive this law," said Anayra softly, "for when a man covets his neighbour's wife, it is meet that he should obtain her without sin."

"Oh! thou foul villain!" cried my master, springing forward, his anger breaking out at last. "Do you think I do not understand? But I would indeed be as foul as you should I buy my liberty at such a price!"

What more he would have said I know not, but fearing he might betray his identity in his just anger I took his hand in mine, and pressed it to enjoin silence, and, turning to the Traitor, I said,

"Lord, I understand what it is you wish. Should I consent to become your—" I stopped, unable to utter the word.

"My wife," said Anayra, in the same soft tones.

"Your wife," I went on, almost in a whisper, my face burning with the shame of what I saw in Anayra's eyes, "will you promise to set my husband

## The Hour of Darkness

and his friends at liberty and escort them to the coast ? ”

“ I swear it,” said Anayra.

“ Nay ! I say it shall not be done ! ” cried Zarma again, but I motioned him to keep silence, and begged the Traitor to allow us to be alone for the space of half an hour to consider the matter.

As soon as we were again in my apartment my master took my hands in his and looked sternly at me.

“ Beylo,” he said, “ do you think I will buy my freedom at the expense of your honour ? You shall not do this thing—do you hear ? ”

“ Master,” I cried, “ what matters it that my body should be sacrificed to yonder villain so that you are free ? Who am I that you should hesitate ? ” But I begged in vain, aye, and knelt to him. At last he made me swear that I would give up all thought of freeing him in that way, and, sick at heart, I gave the desired promise. Nothing further passed between us, but my thoughts were very bitter, this, then, was the end of all things, and I writhed with agony as visions of my master undergoing the most terrible punishments filled my mind.

Presently, the half hour of grace being over. Anayra himself came to us.

“ Well ? ” he said, looking keenly at us.

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"I go to my prison," answered Zarma quietly, "the lady, my wife, cannot buy my poor life at a price so high."

It would seem that Anayra expected this answer, for, clapping his hands, six soldiers entered the chamber and closed around my master, and he, true to his rôle of fond husband, held me for one blessed instant in his arms.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FAITHFULNESS OF YAMEL

And thus was my lord led away from my sight. As he disappeared through the door and I stood, still gazing after him with aching eyes, a sound caused me to turn, and I saw the Traitor before me.

"Lady," he said, coming near me, "I give you until nightfall to-morrow to reconsider your decision."

For all answer I shank away in horror, and with a bow he left me.

Alone with my bitter grief for a time I could do naught save bemoan our evil fate, but at last, rising from the floor, where I had thrown myself in my agony, I remembered Sido's advice.

"Send word to the High Priest Râl."

Better still, I would go myself. Wrapping a cloak about me to hide my rich dress, I started to the door. There, however, I found a sentry, who

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gently but firmly refused to let me pass.

"Am I then a prisoner?" I cried indignantly; "let me forth, fellow, at once."

"Lady, I dare not," he made answer, "for such are my orders."

"How long am I to be kept here?" I asked.

"Until to-morrow at nightfall," the man answered.

So Anayra knew I would leave no stone unturned to rescue my master, and he intended to give me no chance to effect Zarma's escape until the respite set by him had elapsed. I stood there with the cloak about me, thinking rapidly. At last I turned and on the threshold of my apartment looked back.

"Have the slave Mysta sent to me," I said, and closed the door.

A few minutes after a young maiden appeared, and asked me respectfully what I desired.

"Where is Mysta?" I asked.

"In attendance on my lord King," she replied. "I am here in her place—can I do aught?"

"Let refreshments be brought," I said at last, for I was feeling faint and ill, not having as yet broken my fast. The girl bowed and retired, and presently returned with two other slaves, who, after laying out a sumptuous meal, left me at my desire.

## The Faithfulness of Yamel

As I ate I pondered over what I had heard. I was no longer plunged in the black despair as at first. I did not yet believe that I should be denied egress from my chamber, and after summoning the maidens to clear away the remains of the meal, I ordered them to tell Anayra that I wished to speak with him.

They informed me, however, that I could have no speech with him until the next evening, so seeing it was useless, I bade them depart. Alone once more I went to the windows, wondering if I could not escape in that way, but they were too far from the ground to think of climbing down; besides I could see that sentries had been stationed in the garden below me. Truly, the Traitor had taken all possible precautions to keep me safe.

I think a madness came over me then. I recollect calling and screaming for assistance, and beating my head with my fists to still the pain. I must have lost consciousness, as I did upon my arrival in Valâh. Opening my eyes after a period of insensibility, I found myself on a couch, and kneeling by my side was Yâmel, the slave.

Now it so happened that since our advent in Cerva the three men whom we had saved from the Black Country had kept themselves apart from us, so that I saw them but rarely. Moreover, they

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seemed to have forgotten all that we had done for them, and joined themselves to Anayra, which was a source of great bitterness to Zarma. Gradually they had succeeded in obtaining positions in the army, and at last they became three of the body-guard of the new King, and were seemingly much attached to him. Thus I was more than surprised to find Yämel in my apartment. He saw my distrust, and, sinking to his knees, he seized my hand and kissed it.

“Lady,” he said, “you must have thought me as great a traitor as Anayra himself, but I knew from the beginning, when the false King listened so eagerly to the advice of the Head Governor, that a time would come when you and my lord Zarma would need friends about you. Therefore I and my two comrades wormed ourselves into the confidence of Anayra and obtained positions about his person. He trusts us, strange as it may seem, and placed me on duty here to-night. I must hurry, for if it is discovered that I have left my post I will be put to death. Listen, Lady, Anayra has placed a strict guard until to-morrow evening; I can help you but little, although I shall do all in my power—”

“Let me pass out,” I cried, springing to my feet.  
“Let me pass out.”

“Indeed, Lady, were it in my power I would do

## The Faithfulness of Yamel

so. But I am not alone, there are others on guard as well. Hearing you fall, I was sent to see what had occurred. I refused at first, fearing to arouse suspicion should I appear too willing."

"If you cannot set me free, you cannot help me," I said in despair.

"Unless I can carry a message to someone for you," he answered.

"To the High Priest Râl," I cried excitedly. "Carry a message to him and all will be well. Tell him what has happened, that we are prisoners. He can help us if he will. Go, go!" and I pushed him to the door.

"Lady, it shall be done," he said and went away.

I was too excited to stay still, so paced to and fro excitedly until at dusk two slaves entered with my evening meal, and after I had eaten left me to whatever repose I might find.

Towards morning I fell into an uneasy sleep and only awoke when the sun was high. I lay quiet a few minutes trying to collect my thoughts, then memory returning, at last I raised myself hurriedly.

Even as I did so there came a knock at the door, and Yâmel entered, together with the slaves who had waited on me the night before. While the two maidens were occupied in daintily setting forth my



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breakfast the man contrived to let me know that he had gone to the Temple.

“ But Râl was not there,” he whispered. “ I left the message with one of the other priests—”

He had no time for more, as the slaves having finished asked me for further orders.

The day passed slowly, although the Traitor sent musicians to cheer me. I was tempted to ask their aid, but after trying unsuccessfully to learn something concerning my lord Zarma I desisted. I would not show my impatience and terror, although at times I thought the madness of the previous day would again descend on me, and it was only by a strong effort of will that I succeeded in remaining quiet. With a sinking heart I counted the slow hours and watched the shadows grow longer. Soon Anayra would be with me for my answer; and I knew that despite my lord's commands I would agree to his proposal. Could I remain passive while my master, the man I dared love, was tormented and slain? Ah, no, rather than that I would give myself to the Traitor, since he so desired it. A shudder passed over me at the thought and I closed my eyes.

But perhaps Râl would come in time to save me? At the sudden hope I sprang to my feet. A quick glance from the window showed only too clearly

## The Faithfulness of Yamel

that the sun was setting. With a long sigh I dropped my hands, which I had clasped to my breast. Ah well, it was all over, the priest had not yet returned, and I must face this alone. After all, what was I worth that I should hesitate? Despite my promise to my master, I would do what the Traitor asked. But before becoming his, I should insist on escorting Zarma and his friends well on their way to freedom, for I did not trust Anayra to keep his word unless I myself saw my lord safely on board a ship.

But what would my master say when he knew that I had broked my promise and intended giving myself to the Traitor?

And at the thought of facing his anger and reproaches, I lost my courage and fell sobbing on to the couch.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ANAYRA'S WOOING

So deep was I in my misery that I did not hear the door open, nor was I aware that anyone had entered, until I felt a hand placed softly on my bent head.

Lifting myself hurriedly, I came face to face with Anayra. With difficulty I choked the cry that rose to my lips.

"My lord," I said as calmly as I could; "why have you come to disturb my privacy?"

"Lady," he said hoarsely. "It is the sunset hour."

Seeing my fear, he stood away and I sank back upon my couch. He stood still, looking down at me moodily, his face pale and drawn, his breath coming in heavy gasps.

"Why were you weeping?" he said at last.

"Because I am sad at heart and grieve for my lord's imprisonment," I answered.

## Anayra's Wooing

"It is within your power to set him free, lady, if you will."

"How so?" I answered, more to gain time than anything.

He struck his hands together angrily.

"Hear me," he said. "Do not seek to play with me; we understand each other perfectly. If you give yourself to me, I will set free Ramâh, your husband, also his friends; aye, and see them safely on their way!" He paused. "Do you agree?"

"Lord King," I answered presently, hoping against hope that Râl the priest would yet come. "Lord King, how know I that you will keep your word? You hate my lord, although he has ever tried to be of service to you. You wish him ill; how then dare I trust you? For often have you promised, what indeed have you not promised? Only *you* know; and how have you kept your plighted word?"

The Traitor caught his breath suddenly, and pressed his hand against his side as though in pain. I shrank back, fearing that he meant to do me an injury.

He noticed the movement and came nearer.

"Lady," he said. "All that you say is true. Many times have I broken my word, and for that

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I am doubtless reaping a just punishment."

"What mean you?" I cried, breaking in upon him.

He gazed at me a moment with sombre eyes.

"I mean that the nobles of Zarma's court, that I brought hither from Valâh, have turned against me, murmur, dare to openly criticise me and my Governors——"

"Oh, my lord," I said, again interrupting. "If this is indeed so, why do you not turn away from the Head Governor? He is a harsh and evil man. —If you would but follow in Amklu's footsteps all would be well——"

I got no further.

"Enough said. I swore to become King of Mars, and this I have accomplished. Although these nobles sneer and whisper behind my back now, yet in the beginning they followed when I, Anayra, but lifted my hand. But they shall learn that I am still master——"

He was restlessly pacing the floor as he spoke.

"Aye, and that I still know how to punish. The vast army I have drilled are faithful to a man, the populace as well. Shall I then bow my head in despair because a handful of nobles murmur?"

Again he drew in his breath with a sudden sharp sound, wiping his forehead as he did so. By this

## Anayra's Wooing

time it was almost dark, but I could still discern his white robed figure.

"Lady," he said abruptly, in a softer voice. "Although I have broken my word to others, yet you may trust me. What I have said I will do. I swear it. Do you not see that I love you? I am King, you shall be Queen, and who knows but what I will listen to you more even than to the Head Governor?"

He laughed as he spoke, and I shuddered slightly, pondering over what he had said. Strange as it may seem, I felt a sudden pity for this misguided man. That he loved me I did not doubt. Could I not hope to lead him if I did as he desired?" As our rightful King made no attempt to regain his throne, Anayra would continue to reign in his stead. In that case, since he loved me, might I not influence him, prevent him from sinking into the evil Past?

Suddenly I heard him groan, and I started to my feet.

"What is it, my lord?" I asked. "You are in pain. What ails you?"

"Nothing," he answered harshly.

Nevertheless, I saw that he was suffering, and my heart leapt.

He came close to me and took my hand.

## A King of Mars

"Lady," he said. "Your answer; what is your answer?"

"Lord King," I faltered. "Give me yet a few minutes."

"You have had two days. Give me your answer now. Either you give yourself to me, or Ramâh your husband will die in the most terrible tortures."

"Have mercy!" I gasped, sick with horror.

Suddenly he clasped me in his arms. "Enough of this," he said roughly. "Will you agree to my wish, yes or no?"

Thoroughly alarmed at his passion, I began to struggle against him, yet without making a sound. Of what use to cry out, I thought despairingly, since there were none to hear?

"I love you, I love you!" he repeated again and again, holding me to him, then all at once he released me and staggered back, his hands at his throat. In an instant I had the apartment flooded in light, and turned to look at him, still gasping and breathless from my struggles. The Traitor had collapsed and lay across the couch, breathing heavily, his face livid, down which great drops of moisture were trickling.

"Call the guard," he gasped faintly. "I suffer," and he groaned.

I hurried to the door and looked out. Instantly

## Anayra's Wooing

a soldier approached. "My lord Anayra is in great pain." I said, "and lies helpless. Call the surgeons immediately."

With that I stepped back into the room and again approached Anayra.

"The surgeons will soon be here, Lord King," I said. He tried to smile up into my face, but could not.

"How you must rejoice," he whispered. "But your husband is still in prison—" he paused, closing his eyes. At that moment three nobles entered the room, accompanied by Anayra's body slaves, and between them they lifted their master.

"What of the Lady Yslaika?" asked one. "What is your will concerning her, my lord?"

"Let her remain here until I have recovered," gasped the Traitor. "She is not to blame for this; I was in pain before I came hither. Guard her carefully, but with all courtesy—" he broke off.

"Lord King," I said, following him to the door. "What of my husband?"

"He will remain in prison, until——" He looked at me without completing his sentence, and I drew back with a shudder.

When I was alone I staggered to the window, feeling as though I should suffocate, and fell on my knees.



## CHAPTER XX

### HOW I BETRAYED MYSELF

While I crouched on the floor, in a half swoon, I could dimly hear the passing of many feet, the sound of voices in the distance, and I knew that the news of Anayra's sudden sickness had already reached all ears.

What would happen? I wondered dully. Suppose he should die!

The sudden thought sent the blood flowing evenly through my veins once more. I sat up quickly. "At least it is a respite," I said to myself, "and I may yet find the means of freeing Zarma." When I tried to stand, I found that I still trembled, but I forced myself to walk across the floor, and even as I approached the curtain which hung before the arched doorway, I heard a knock.

"Râl!" I cried, throwing wide the door, but it was Yâmel the slave, not the priest as I had hoped.

## How I Betrayed Myself

"Lady, I come for your commands," he said loudly, and motioned to me.

"Enter," I said, and the fellow obeyed, carefully closing the door after him. "What news?" I cried excitedly when we were alone. "How is Anayra; what has happened!"

"Anayra is in the hands of the surgeons. It is thought that he hath been poisoned?"

"Poisoned!" I gasped.

He nodded.

"Aye; and as no one has served him save Mysta, she is sure to receive a terrible and swift punishment as soon as he has recovered sufficiently to speak."

"Mysta!" I cried aghast. "No, it is not possible."

"And yet poison has been administered; she had a greater reason than others for wishing him ill," observed Yämel.

"We must save Mysta, if this is true," I said. "We cannot let the poor maid suffer—" I broke off with a despairing gesture as I realised how helpless I was.

"But what can I do?" I groaned. "Yämel, if you are indeed faithful, find a way to warn the girl; she must be saved." And I clutched his arm in my eagerness.

## A King of Mars

"Oh, my lords, save my master, save my husband—"

A deep murmur followed my words, but no one moved.

"Will you do nothing?" I cried passionately.

It was the Head Councillor who brought me to myself.

"Lady," he said gravely. "Remember that although we no longer acknowledge Anayra King, yet the soldiers and probably the populace are his to a man. Should we be too hasty, we would without doubt find ourselves prisoners as well as my Lord Ramâh, thereby benefitting him but little. As it is, I and my brother Councillors have not been allowed to leave the Palace since your husband was led away. Even should Anayra die—"

"There remains the Head Governor," observed one of the nobles moodily.

"What! do you intend staying quietly here while your friend is a prisoner!" I cried scornfully.

"Will you not at least make an effort? You, sirs, say you cannot leave the Palace, is this the case with these others as well?"

"No; so far, at least, we can go abroad as we wish," said the noble who had first spoken. "But, Lady, even should we go to the prisons, how could we hope to enter?"

## How I Betrayed Myself

I stood with bent head, thinking rapidly. At last I drew a long breath.

"I shall find the means," I said. "And as for you, my lord Councillor, I will lead you and your two friends from the Palace. Few know this vast building as well as I, for was I not handmaiden and slave from my childhood to Amklu the Wise—?"

I broke off as the Head Councillor made a sudden gesture. But it was too late: I had betrayed myself at last; so summoning all my courage to my aid, I broke the breathless silence that followed my words.

"Since I have spoken I will not draw back. No high-born lady am I, but handmaiden and slave, as I have said. My name is Beylo, and I was given to my lord Zarma by our king—"

"Zarma!" The cry broke forth from all, and the name seemed to break the spell.

"Where is he?" they cried, surrounding me. "Where is the Governor of Valâh, our beloved master, whom we so speedily and shamefully forgot?"

"Did not the Traitor say he had died?" I asked.

"We now know it to be a lie," they answered, pressing still closer.

I raised my hand to still their cries.

## A King of Mars

"Know ye not the true name of my master; oh, blind, blind——"

"Zarma!" they cried excitedly, and an indescribable tumult followed, in spite of the Head Councillor's frantic efforts to preserve silence.

So great was their ardour that they were for going straight to the prisons, although but a few minutes before they had preached prudence.

I placed myself before the door.

"Listen," I said, raising my voice to make myself heard. "To go thus to the prisons is madness. As the Councillor said, you would find yourselves prisoners, were you to attempt so much as accost one of the guards. Since my lord Sido contrived to set lord Osza at liberty you may be sure Anayra has the prisons more strongly guarded than before. Besides, should you go through the streets in a body, you would excite interest and probably be followed."

"That is true," observed one of the nobles. "But how then do you propose entering the prisons?"

"I shall dress myself as a slave once more," I said. "At least I shall be able to learn something concerning lord Zarma."

"But how to free him?" asked the head Councillor.

## How I Betrayed Myself

“I do not know,” I answered despairingly. “If only Râl the priest had received my message—Yamel,” I continued, turning to look for the slave, “are you sure that the priest to whom you spoke will remember to tell the High Priest of our plight?”

I received no answer.

“Yâmel is not here,” said the Councillor.

And while I stood trying to form some new plan, a cold hand touched mine, and turning with a start I saw the white face of Mysta.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HOW I SAVED A KING'S LIFE

"Mysta!" I cried, "Mysta!" and clasped her hands in mine, overjoyed to see her, and forgetting for the moment that she was suspected of having administered the poison to Anayra.

"Lady," said the girl breathlessly; "I entered by yonder door," pointing to the one that led into the Audience Chamber. "I heard your words—"

"Was anyone else in there?" asked the Head Councillor frowningly. "If so, it will not be long ere we go to join lord Zarma—"

"No, lord, I was alone," answered Mysta. "You desire to free your friend; I know not whether you will be able to enter the prisons even had you the keys—"

"The keys!" I echoed. "I had not the thought of that. Tell me where they are and when once I have them in my possession it will

## How I Saved a King's Life

be strange if Beylo finds not the way to free her master."

"The keys are kept by the Traitor, who since the escape of lord Osza never allows them out of his sight; he carries them on his person," said Mysta.

A dead silence followed her words until at last several of the younger nobles sprang toward the door, but I stopped them with a gesture.

"My lords," I said, "I will get the keys myself. Remember that I am the Lady Yslaïka to Anayra, and that he loves me—" I hesitated for a moment, trying to form some plan. "Sirs, if I fail then there will be no need for others to try, since it will mean that it is impossible. In less than half an hour I shall know whether we dare hope. In the meantime go to the prisons—not of course all together, but in such a way as not to arouse suspicion. Go in chariots, or on foot, passing the prisons casually, but remain near in case I require your help. Ladies, I must beg you to remain in the Palace—"

At that they cried out, and it took all my powers of persuasion to pacify them and overrule their objections. When that point was gained I continued:

"Mysta, take the three Councillors to the hand-



## A King of Mars

maidens' quarters, without being seen if possible. I do not think that the door which leads to the slaves' private gardens is guarded."

"No," said Mysta, "it is not."

"Very well. As no men are allowed in that portion of the Palace, you must be wary. From thence proceed to the gardens and await me there. Fortunately no slaves are likely to be about at this hour. And now farewell, my lords; wish me joy of my venture."

I moved toward the door by which we had entered as I spoke.

The Head Councillor, however, laid a detaining hand on my arm.

"Lady," he said. "How can we let you go thus? It is a dangerous mission at the best—"

"It is to save Zarma," I replied, and shaking his hand off, left them.

As I passed quickly through the Palace, I looked keenly at the soldiers, fearing they might have heard our excited voices, but as they paid but scant attention to me, I decided that they had heard nothing.

As I mounted the splendid staircase, I looked back at the apartment I had left, and I saw two or three nobles talking lightly together pass out and down towards the lower floor.

## How I Saved a King's Life

I knew then that they would follow out my injunctions, and went on with a lighter heart. As I passed by the arched doorway leading to my sleeping chamber, I wondered whether the bound and gagged sentinels had been discovered yet, but there stood two soldiers on guard even as they had been, and I rubbed my eyes in surprise.

But only for a moment, for one of the soldiers turned and looked at me, and I saw it was Zal.

"That was Yämel's idea," I thought and passed on.

Knowing that Anayra had spread abroad the report that I was suffering from a fever, I drew a veil over my face, not to be recognized.

Having thus no fear of detection, I went steadily on my way until I found myself before the Royal Apartments.

For an instant I paused, my hands clasped over my wildly beating heart. The thought of the part I was to play unnerved me. I wondered as I stood there, how I was to obtain the keys of the prison cells, if, as Mysta had said, the Traitor had them on his person. Perhaps they had been taken from him while he lay half-conscious, in that case I knew my mission to be fruitless. Still, I would have to enter to find out.

## A King of Mars

The officer on guard regarded me curiously. "My lord is better," he said. "The surgeons say he will recover."

"May I enter?" I asked eagerly.

The man hesitated, then shook his head.

"Indeed Lady, I dare not," he said apologetically.

I flung back the veil which covered my face, and he started in surprise.

"Lady Yslaïka!" he said. "But I understood, I thought that you were—"

"A prisoner?" I asked, then bit my lips at my slip.

"No, no," he answered wonderingly. "Why should you be a prisoner when my lord the King worships the very ground you walk on?"

Evidently Anayra had not hidden his passion for me.

"What did you think?" I questioned imperiously, as the man hesitated.

"It was said that you were ill of a fever," he said at last.

I smiled, as though at a good jest.

"Oh, the blindness of men," I said; "if my lord Anayra had but spoken, he would have learnt the cause of my distress—" I paused, and half veiled my face as though in confusion.

"Enter, Lady," said the officer, stepping aside.

## How I Saved a King's Life

"Since you bring good news to our lord the King, doubtless he will recover more quickly.

Without more ado I entered the ante-chamber, and from thence into a large airy apartment. Here I found the surgeons speaking together in low tones, while the Traitor's body slaves stood near, ready to carry out any of the nobles' commands. Standing with his back toward me, was the Head Governor, peering eagerly through the gold embroidered curtain into a room beyond, which I guessed was Anayra's sleeping chamber. Even in the quick glance I threw him, I noticed that he held something which he ever and anon fingered, but what it was I could not see, for he had it half hidden in a fold of his robe.

At my entrance the surgeons turned quickly. Then one approached me. "Lady," he said, "I must beg you to retire. Lord Anayra is still in grievous pain—"

I lifted my veil so that he could see my face, and placed my fingers on my lips to enjoin silence.

He would have spoken notwithstanding, but again I motioned to him and led the way to the further end of the apartment where we should be left out of earshot.

"Lady Yslaika," he said ; "did not the King give commands that you should remain in your apart-

## A King of Mars

ment until he had recovered? I know not how you left it—”

“My lord,” I whispered, “were you not a friend of the Governor of Valâh?”

The noble started, and looked hastily around.

“A friend to Zarma?” I persisted.

There was silence for a space.

“Aye,” he said at last with a deep sigh. “A true friend. But why speak of him now, Lady?”

“A friend,” I said. “And yet you bow before yonder—Traitor!” pointing to Anayra’s sleeping apartment.

“Truly, my lord, you forgot your friend full soon.”

The surgeon flushed and moved uneasily.

“This is not the time to speak of these things,” he said.

“This is the time,” I rejoined. “I believe you to be an honest man, my lord. I know that if you joined yourself to Anayra it was because of his promises, because of his vow to punish lord Zarma’s murderer—”

The noble recoiled.

“How know you this?” he gasped. “Who are you?”

“Slave and handmaiden to lord Zarma,” I answered briefly.

## How I Saved a King's Life

"Slave and—!" he broke off staring at me.

"Yes," I said, laying my hand on his arm. "And my lord Zarma lives—"

"Lives!" gasped the surgeon, yet retaining sufficient presence of mind not to raise his voice.

"And lies even now imprisoned by command of Anayra, and I am here for the prison keys!" I concluded.

"But how—Zarma—I do not understand," muttered the noble.

So in a few quick words I told him all that had occurred, and when I spoke of Anayra's treachery, his face darkened, so that I feared he would betray us both in his anger.

"My lord," I said presently. "I have put myself into your hands—"

He stopped me.

"Hush," he said. "You are safe so far. I am with you heart and soul."

So saying, he led me to where the others stood.

"My lords," he said. "This Lady is here at lord Anayra's bidding."

At that the Head Governor turned.

"Who is she?" he asked, eyeing me curiously. "Let her unveil herself first." And he came towards me.

## A King of Mars

At that moment the Traitor's voice reached us, faint and gasping.

"Who speaks without there?" he said.

"It is the King; he will recover," said the surgeon. "Go, Lady," and he pushed me toward the curtains.

The Head Governor cast a malevolent glance at me as I passed him, but dared not prevent me from going.

The apartment wherein I now found myself was dimly lighted, but I could see the white face of Anayra the Traitor amongst the pillows.

"Who is there?" he gasped.

I did not answer, but advanced with trembling steps to the great State bed, and knelt down.

"I trust my lord is better," I said in a half whisper, unveiling my face as I spoke. Anayra gave a great start and would have spoken, but I clasped his hand and continued hurriedly,

"My lord, I have disobeyed your commands. I am here because I could not remain quiet knowing you were suffering." And I bent my head until my lips touched his hand, although I shuddered to do so.

"Yslaïka," he gasped, "Yslaïka!"

Then memory returning he asked how I had left my apartment since it was guarded.

## How I Saved a King's Life

"Ah, lord King," I sighed; "neither guards nor bolts can keep a loving woman—" I let my voice trail off to silence, fighting the sudden horror that possessed me.

"Yslaika," he murmured, trying to raise himself. "Is it indeed so; have you learned to love me?"

"My lord, why else were I here?"

"To beg for your husband's liberty," he rejoined with quick jealousy.

I shook my head, and smiled at him.

"That were indeed foolish," I said. "Why should I thus risk your displeasure and gain nothing in return? Of course my lord will free Ramâh and escort him and his friends to the coast? I do not desire to face his scorn.

"Why not put them to death?" asked Anayra eagerly, scanning my face as he spoke.

I repressed a shudder.

"Nay, dear lord," I cried. "Did you not say you would listen to me rather than to the Head Governor? This is a thought worthy of him. Nothing good can come from a deed of blood."

As I spoke I looked towards the arched doorway, and noticed the curtains swaying to and fro. I knew well who was listening, and a sick fear crept



## A King of Mars

over me, so that I trembled and caught at the coverlet with nervous fingers.

"What is it, Yslaïka?" asked the Traitor anxiously.

"Nothing," I answered faintly. "The thought of bloodshed always affects me thus."

"Thou foolish maid," murmured Anayra. "But it shall be as you wish; Ramâh and his friends will be set at liberty, and then—" He paused and feebly lifted a strand of my hair.

"Yslaïka," he said after a pause. "You have made me happier than I ever thought to be, aye, and done more to give me back my strength than my lords in there with their various appliances." He smiled as he spoke.

"Kiss me, Yslaïka," he said; "kiss me in token of your love."

I drew back despite myself, but the thought of Zarma gave me fresh courage and I rose unsteadily to my feet.

"Anayra," I said, anxious to gain a few minutes respite. "Anayra, you will not punish the guards who allowed me to leave my apartment?"

"Nay," he answered. "Nor yet will I punish the girl Mysta who poisoned me—"

"My lord, my lord, she did not do it," I cried. And then I stopped short; for there within easy

## How I Saved a King's Life

reach of the Traitor's hand lay an embroidered pouch containing I felt sure the key of Zarma's cell.

Without more ado I bent over Anayra. With a gasping cry he drew my head down to his face, and kissed me on the lips.

My hair fell over and shrouded us both, and placing my hand on the bed as though to steady myself, I deftly withdrew the coveted pouch.

Suddenly I was aware that some one had entered the room, and tearing myself roughly from the Traitor's embrace, I turned to confront the Head Governor, who was creeping towards us with Zarma's sword, which had been given up when my lord entered the prison, clenched tightly in his hand.

He sprang upon us before I could cry out, but slipping to the floor I reached up and caught his arm. Anayra threw his body to one side, and rising to his knees grappled with the would-be assassin, screaming for assistance.

In an instant the apartment was filled with soldiers and slaves, who lost no time in disarming the Head Governor.

The Traitor lay back utterly spent, and looked at the prisoner with such hatred and fury that the man absolutely quailed.

## A King of Mars

“Take him to the prisons,” he gasped with white lips. “The other eleven Governors as well—let them be put to death.”

I did not wait to hear more, but fled wildly through the Palace, and did not draw breath until I stood trembling in the handmaidens' quarters.

## CHAPTER XXII

### AN UNFORTUNATE MEETING

Fortunately the place was deserted, and it took me but a few minutes to throw off my gorgeous raiment and jewels, clothing myself once again as a slave, with the usual head-dress.

I hid my discarded garments, and opening the door which led on to a small balcony overlooking the gardens, hastily descended the steps. The gardens were in darkness, and someone approached me softly through the perfumed night. It was Mysta.

"This way," she whispered, guiding me. "The Councillors are awaiting us by the gate."

We hurried on without speaking further. By the gate which led on to a street back of the Palace were the Councillors, their white robes hidden by cloaks. In a few minutes we were in the street, walking quietly in the direction of the prisons.

As we went, I told them in a few breathless words

## A King of Mars

all that had occurred. When I spoke of the Head Governor's attempt to take Anayra's life, and how I prevented him from committing the crime, Mysta paused in her walk.

"Why did you stop him, why?" she asked.

"I do not know," I answered. "It was the impulse of a moment."

"You are right," said one of the Councillors; "you only followed the law. At the same time the Traitor may be willing to—"

"To what?" I cried scornfully, "He loves me and will only hear of Zarma being set at liberty if I become his property, his toy. Think you Anayra will forgive the attempt I am going to make this night? I do not trust him, I have the keys and will make use of them if it is possible."

"Hush!" whispered the Head Councillor, for we were nearing a brilliantly lighted square, and unconsciously I had raised my voice.

I said no more, and we hurried on in silence.

Presently, as we approached the prisons, we became conscious of a murmur of many voices, and before long we found ourselves caught in a crowd that almost swept us off our feet. At first I struggled fiercely against the mob, but found it impossible to make any headway.

I was somewhat reassured by the sight of Mysta

## An Unfortunate Meeting

and the Councillors a short distance in front of me. The Head Councillor turned and called to me, but I could not hear what he said.

"Where are you going?" I asked a woman near by.

"Have you not heard?" she answered breathlessly. The Governors have attempted to assassinate our lord the King, and he has given orders that they are to be put to death this night in the prison courtyard. That is why we are going thither."

"But can we enter?" I asked, a sudden hope surging within me.

"Aye," said the woman. "As many as the courtyard will hold. Lord Anayra wishes them to die in public."

"Horrible!" I murmured to myself with a shudder.

Just as I was being carried through the prison gates into the court, I heard my name called.

Thinking it was one of the Councillors, I searched for them with my eyes, but they were too far away for me to have heard them had they spoken.

"Beylo," said the voice again, with a mocking inflection.

By this time the crowd was fighting and pushing

## A King of Mars

for the best places near a hastily built platform, on which stood the wretched men who were so soon to lose their lives.

By dint of using all my force, I was able to struggle out of the mob, and found myself breathless and dishevelled in comparative solitude.

For the third time I heard my name called, and I trembled with an unknown dread.

“Beylo, Beylo, where is the Lady Yslaïka?”

The voice seemed to come from my very elbow. Turning with a start, I came face to face with the soldier who had recognised us at the Palace in Valâh, and who had been prevented by Sido from denouncing us.

For a space I stood bereft of movement. Then at last, force returning, I stretched out imploring hands.

But the man had already left my side and was hurrying to the gate. He paused and waved his hand derisively to me, and I sprang forward, crying:

“Come back, come back!”

“Silence!” cried several voices imperatively, and just then the new keeper of the prisons began to address the people from the platform.

The Head Councillor, who had silently approached, touched me on the arm.

## An Unfortunate Meeting

"What is it?" he whispered; "what has happened?"

I clutched him eagerly.

"The soldier," I gasped. "The one that knew us at Valáh, I have just seen him!"

"Are you sure?" asked the Councillor anxiously.

"Yes, yes!"

At that he looked grave.

"We must enter the prison now," he whispered, "and free lord Zarma, for if as you say it was the soldier, he has gone to Anayra to denounce us."

"But how can we hope to enter?" I wailed, pointing to a door that led from the courtyard into the building, and before which a couple of soldiers were stationed. But even as I looked, I saw the two remaining Councillors with Myster approach the door, aye and enter. I could scarcely believe my eyes, and feeling my hand clasped, stumbled blindly towards the two soldiers, dragged onward by the Head Councillor.

The crowd was strangely silent by now, and I felt sure that we were observed. I hesitated, and half turned to look back, but was prevented from doing so by my companion.

We had reached the door by this time, and the two soldiers, with a barely perceptible gesture,



## A King of Mars

stood aside for us to enter. I saw then that they were Taro and Zal, and was not surprised therefore to hear Yämel's voice from the archway bidding us hasten. Scarcely were we within the narrow passage of the ancient building, than we heard a sudden shrill cry, followed by a roar from the populace, taken up by those in the street so that it echoed and re-echoed for several minutes. It was then I knew what the ominous silence had meant. The Governors were dead.

The Head Councillor came quickly to my side and motioned for the keys; but I would not give them up, and under Yämel's guidance threw open the first cell. A dozen prisoners were within, who shrank and cowered as we approached, but my lord Zarma was not amongst them. Yämel spoke to them as he was able for the din outside, and the poor trembling wretches followed him eagerly from the cell, and dispersed in every direction. And this happened to all those I set at liberty, for many were the prisoners.

As I was mounting the stone steps to the floor above, whither a number of the liberated prisoners and the Councillors had preceded me, I heard a faint commotion both above and below. I paid but little attention to the outcry, thinking it a part of the noise that still continued in the city, but when

## An Unfortunate Meeting

I reached the passage overhead, I saw a number of soldiers, the warders and guards of the prisons, struggling with the escaped prisoners.

I scarcely paused in my search, knowing well they would be overpowered, and continued to throw open door after door.

At last, in a larger cell than the others, I found my master.

With a cry of joy I ran forward and seized his hand.

"Master, master!" I cried, "Come, you are free!"

"Free!" he echoed, "free!" Then passing his hand over his brow he looked at me as though doubting the evidence of his senses.

"Why, Beylo," he began. Seeing the many faces at the door, he started violently.

"Is it true?" he cried. "Am I in truth free?"

"Aye," shouted the Councillors, crowding around and shaking him by the hands. "Free as air, and all through Beylo's courage. You are free and among friends."

A cry of "Zarma, Zarma!" resounded through the building, and my master was dragged by a hundred welcoming hands into the passage. At the doorway he shook himself free for a moment and turned to where I stood.

## A King of Mars

"Beylo," he said, with a great tenderness in his voice; "little Beylo."

I would have run to him, but remembering that I was no longer worthy, shrank back with a sob. The Head Councillor slipped his arm through my master's and drew him on.

"Come," he said; "we must not waste time if we would escape."

I followed after, and pushed my way through the crowd of prisoners that blocked the passage.

My master was free at last, and I had opened his cell, but all my joy had fled now that I had accomplished my mission. For I realised how immeasurably below him I was. When I was Beylo, undefiled by any unworthy thought, I dared hope for his love, but now that I had stooped to subterfuge, and willingly bore the pollution of Anayra's kiss, I felt impure, unfit for any good man's love.

So filled was I with sad thoughts that I scarcely realised where I was, until a sudden cry roused me.

"Courage, push all together!" shouted a hundred throats.

With a start I looked up. We were in the courtyard, my master in the centre surrounded by the group of nobles that I had bid await me near the

## An Unfortunate Meeting

prisons. They must have entered with the mob, and found means to remain after the keeper and the soldiers had cleared the court. These latter by the way had been seized and bound, as their companions on guard in the prisons had been.

The cry that had first roused me was repeated, and I then saw that a number of the escaped prisoners and nobles were striving to hold the huge gates, which were gradually being forced open by some tremendous pressure from without. I could hear the laboured breathing of those who were struggling, nay, almost the cracking of muscles strained nigh to breaking. At last, with a cry of triumph, Zarma himself managed to shoot the huge bolts home, and with difficulty turned the ponderous key. "Back to the prison," he shouted, and gradually the nobles and prisoners obeyed, rushing past me into the building. But I would not go, not as yet grasping what had occurred.

I heard a voice from the street commanding that Zarma, the Councillors, nobles and the 'maiden called Beylo' were to be taken alive, by order of the King. Then I realised that Anayra, upon hearing the soldier's tale, had immediately sent his guard to arrest us. Probably he had discovered the loss of the keys, and I could imagine his rage upon learning that "Ramnâh" was none other than

## A King of Mars

the man he had so grievously injured, and the "Lady Yslaïka" naught but a slave.

The courtyard was almost deserted, only Zarma and the Councillors remained. Already the gates were showing signs of yielding. In a few moments they would come crashing to the ground. Then, and only then, did Zarma turn.

Catching sight of me he cried to me to hasten; but I did not move. I watched him approach, and when he was near, he stretched out his hands and caught me in his arms, murmuring something about me being "a foolish maid."

With a gasp I clasped him about his neck and burst into tears. In a moment we were safe in the passage, and looking over his shoulder, I had a blurred vision of the courtyard, vast and empty, save for the bound forms of the keeper and the soldiers, and those other still forms on the platform, before the door was closed.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### HOW ZARMA WAS BESIEGED

Leaving his companions to fasten the heavy doors my master carried me rapidly to the cell he had but lately vacated, and seating himself on the couch, soothed me as though I had been a child.

"Beylo, Beylo, why this grief?" he asked, "why do you weep so bitterly?"

"My lord," I sobbed, trying to control my thoughts while in his presence. "I hoped you were free, and now—"

"That is not worth weeping for," he said gently; "at least I am quit of the close confinement that was so hard to bear. It will be long ere Anayra's soldiers break in upon us—these ancient walls were built to withstand just such attacks. You heard what was said; they must take us alive; therefore they will not dare use their guns. Never fear, Beylo, we will yet find the way to escape long before the soldiers capture us."

## A King of Mars

He had put me gently from him, and I knew he was speaking partly to reassure me.

"But I have not yet heard how you got possession of the keys," he said, drawing his brows together. "The Councillors told me how you managed to leave your sleeping chamber after the sentinels had been bound; but they did not tell me how you persuaded Anayra to give you the keys—will you not tell me now?"

I was silent.

"Beylo," said my master, after waiting vainly for me to speak. "I cannot believe that you stooped to anything evil. Rather would I continue in my prison cell, than learn that you had done aught that you are ashamed to tell me of. I know full well that you would give your life for your master—"

"Lord Zarma!" cried the Head Councillor from the doorway.

"What is it?" asked my master.

"They wish to parley with you," said the Councillor. "Quite like the old days that we read of in the histories," he added with a smile, as they left the cell.

When I was alone I covered my face with my hands. Oh, it was bitter, bitter. I knew now what I had lost, for Zarma's tenderness and the

## How Zarma was Besieged

look in his eyes, proved to me more than any words could have done, that what I had so longed for had come to pass—he loved me—or rather was on the verge of loving. And now, by my own action, I had become unworthy of him.

Rousing myself with an effort I ran across the narrow passage and entered a cell opposite to the one I had left and which overlooked the street. I could see the vast crowd, and one, an officer, was evidently addressing my lord Zarma, who I judged, was in a cell directly beneath me. I could not look down on account of the bars, but I could hear his voice, grave and full as ever :

“What you ask is impossible,” he said.

“But,” urged the officer, “bethink you, my lord, by refusing to surrender, you will so anger our King, that when you ultimately fall into his hands, as you are bound to do, your punishment will be more severe—”

“I thank you for your warning,” said my master, “yet will I not surrender. I take it we are in comparative safety, since it is the King’s wish to capture us living. Besiege the place as you will, you and your soldiers ; we may yet escape you.”

“One word more before I bid you good even.” He paused an instant. “Will the terms offered to me be extended to my followers as well ? ”



## A King of Mars

"My lord, you are the one the King most desires to capture, but if your followers will surrender this night, they will doubtless receive the same mercy—" he too paused, and instinctively I knew what that mercy would mean and I shivered.

There was silence for a moment, but I think my lord must have spoken to his companions, for suddenly the prison rang with a great shout:

"Zarma, Zarma! We will not leave you!" and again: "Zarma!"

The officer bit his lip and bowed. "So be it," he said briefly, and gave some order to his men.

I wondered as I stood there, how and in what manner they would attack us. It almost seemed, so great was their number, that they would crush the walls as easily as I could crush a tinted sea shell.

The prison faced a broad avenue, at the end of which was the Palace, gleaming with hundreds of lights.

Suddenly, as I watched, I saw an air-ship rise softly from the gardens, and my heart stood still. Suppose they were going to attack us from above. Then I remembered that when the Traitor was restoring the prisons, he caused the roof to slope abruptly downwards from a ridge as sharp as any

## How Zarma was Besieged

knife. The entire roof was then painted with a preparation that we call '*cela*,' in our language—when dry it is as slippery as glass and harder than any metal or stone yet discovered. Of course this was done to prevent the crew of an air-ship from landing on the roof, as Anayra had a constant fear that some attempt would be made to free the men he had imprisoned.

"Beylo," called my master from the doorway, interrupting my musing.

"Yes, master," I answered going toward him.

"Come with me," he said gently, taking my hand.

On the floor below I found the Councillors and several of the nobles seated around a table in one of the larger cells overlooking the street. They rose when I entered, and led me to a seat, although now that I was Beylo once again, it did not seem to me that I should be treated with the same amount of deference, due to the 'Lady' Yslaïka. I think my face showed too plainly what was passing within my mind, for my lord, who was seated near me, spoke.

"What is it, Beylo?" he asked. "Surely you are not afraid?"

I looked at him in astonishment. Had he then lost the power of reading my thoughts? Under

## A King of Mars

my gaze he flushed slightly, and touched my hand almost timidly.

I drew a long breath of delight—he loved me. But again all my joy fell as I thought of how I had pandered to the Traitor's passion. It would have been less bitter had my master been free in very truth, then I should not have felt that my sacrifice had been in vain.

Very gently I withdrew my hand from his.

"No, my lord," I answered, "I am not afraid."

"Beylo afraid!" laughed the Head Councillor; "then let us dub ourselves cowards one and all."

A general laugh went up at this, and by a strong effort I regained control of myself.

"For the moment," said my master presently, "there is nothing to fear. The doors are strong, built in a time when such sieges were common. Food we have in plenty, though how long this coarse fare will last it is impossible to say. I cannot see how our besiegers will capture us. Obviously they will not use their guns as we are to be taken alive. Air-ships cannot enter the prisons from overhead, nor are the windows sufficiently wide to allow the passage of a man's body, even were the bars removed. Only two ways can I think of—they may take the cannon from the museum and train them against the

## How Zarma was Besieged

prisons. This was often done with great success in ancient times, nor did these cumbrous weapons always utterly destroy buildings—there was a faint chance that a few of the inmates might escape with their lives.”

“I doubt whether they will attempt this mode of capturing us,” said a noble, “it is far too risky.”

“Then the only thing to do is to starve us into submission,” said Zarma. “In no other way will we be taken—and before that happens we may escape.”

He rose and approached the window.

The mob is dispersing,” he said, “but the soldiers are surrounding the prisons. I am glad that *cela* has been used on the walls and roof, else I think they would tear our prison down, stone by stone, until they reached us.” He laughed as he spoke, but there was a worried look in his eyes when he again joined us.

“How many are we altogether?” he asked.

“About two hundred counting the prisoners,” answered a Councillor.

“Two hundred against so many,” I said bitterly. “And we should never have been penned in like this had the soldier who recognised us died in Valâh.”

## A King of Mars

There was a silence after my words, and although I was conscious of my master's disapproving glance, I did not care.

"That is past and done with," he said a little wearily. "In the meanwhile, all we can do is to keep watch, and repulse as well as we are able any attack that may be made." He paused a moment. "If I thought that by giving myself up you would go free—"

"Zarma, Zarma!" cried his companions rising hurriedly to their feet. "Where you go we follow!"

And while they thus stood around him there came a strange sound through the air, a whir like nothing I had ever heard, and one of the nobles fell back against the wall with a faint exclamation. As we looked at him in surprise a red spot grew and spread on his white robes over his right shoulder.

"The siege has commenced in earnest," cried my master, hurrying to him. "Out with the lights," he commanded, and in an instant we were in darkness, save for the light outside.

"What was it?" I cried in terror.

"They are using the ancient firearms," answered Zarma grimly; "but with no intent to kill. They think to disable us—" He was hurriedly binding

## How Zarma was Besieged

the wound as he spoke. When that was done he left the cell, and we could hear him issuing orders to those on duty in other parts of the prison.

As a result the small army set to work fastening heavy boards over the windows, leaving only small loopholes for air and light. We were now in total darkness, but only for a few minutes, as Zarma thought it sufficiently safe to turn the lights on in the passages.

The night was by this time far advanced, and my master after setting a guard both above and below, gave orders that they were to be relieved in a couple of hours and he himself took the first watch. The wounded noble was tended, his wound properly dressed, and when that was done, Zarma turned to me and bid me retire.

He himself led the way to a cell he had set aside for my use, in a more sheltered quarter of the prison. It had been made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, and after thanking him gratefully, I closed the door and sank on to the couch. A great and overpowering lassitude weighed me down, but I did not feel the slightest inclination to sleep. After lying still for some time, I arose and groped my way to the window. I gazed through the tiny loophole, and found I was facing the Temple of the Oracle. I

## A King of Mars

could see the glittering roof in the distance, and again I thought of the High Priest Râl, wondering where he could be that he did not come to our aid. Presently my thoughts ran together, and I dropped my head on my extended arms, and my last conscious sensation before I slept was the cool night air on my cheek.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### I BECOME A SOLDIER

Voices outside my door broke into my dreams. I stirred, and suddenly awoke, only to find myself so chilled and stiff that I could scarcely move. Through the loophole I could see a patch of grey morning sky, but it was still too dark to distinguish much in the street below. I wondered hazily why the city was no longer illuminated. Surely it was too early to extinguish the lights.

Zal's voice, speaking abruptly, brought me to myself with a start.

I stretched my cramped limbs and groped my way to my couch.

"It is all very well," said Zal, "but we should have thought of that."

"Could we not open the doors, telling those on guard to lock and bar them securely after us, and—?"

"And be captured the minute we found ourselves



## A King of Mars

outside," said Yämel scornfully, breaking in upon Taro's words.

I held my breath. Were these men traitors, why did they wish to leave us?

I sprang to my feet and threw open my door.

The passage was dimly lighted, and the three men, still in the uniform of Anayra's guard, were talking earnestly together. They swung around as the door opened, and looked confusedly at one another.

"I have heard part of what you said," I observed severely at last. "Something concerned with the opening of the prison doors. What does it mean, do you then meditate leaving us?"

"Lady," said Yämel, stepping forward, "do you think us traitors?"

I looked long and earnestly into his honest face.

"No," I answered, "for have you not proved yourselves to be true? Tell me rather what plan you were discussing."

"Only this," said Yämel who was ever the foremost to speak; "when I placed Zal and Taro before your door at the Palace, so that the absence of the real sentinels might not be noticed, I bade them come directly to the prisons when they were relieved. This we did, joined the soldiers surrounding the Governors, and were ordered to

## I Become a Soldier

guard the prison doors. We were not suspected of friendliness towards you—" He paused and moved uneasily.

"In fact, we often spoke in feigned contempt, for which I ask your pardon. The rest you know; we aided you to enter the prison, and helped you throw open the cells. The mistake we made was remaining in the prisons with you."

"What do you mean?" I cried. "What could you do were you outside the walls?"

"Lady," he answered. "Often in passing through the city I have heard many outcries against Anayra and his cruelty. Also I have, while conversing with men and women of the people, led them to speak of lord Zarma. Invariably they spoke with deep affection and grief at his supposed death. It needs but very little to cause them to break into open rebellion—were I free, I would go among them and let them know that Zarma is alive and here."

"I understand," I said. "But, Yämel, bethink you if the populace should break into rebellion, Anayra would not scruple to have them killed. Think of the frightful carnage—"

Yämel shook his head.

"I doubt, Lady, if the Traitor would use the White Fire for fear of utterly destroying Cerva,

## A King of Mars

also he wishes above all things to take lord Zarma alive."

A sudden thought struck me, and I drew a long breath.

"Who guards the doors below?" I asked.

"A number of the prisoners."

"Lord Zarma is not about?"

"He hath retired but now," was the answer.

"Think you the doors could be opened sufficiently to thrust forth a man, bound and helpless?"

The three men looked curiously at me for a minute.

"Aye," said Zal. "I think it could be done."

"And the doors made fast before our enemies could gain an entrance?" I persisted.

Again they hesitated.

"It could be done," answered Yämel; "although it would require great stealth. But why these questions?"

"Because," I answered excitedly, "I intend to don one of your uniforms, then you will bind and secure me as you did the prison guards, and thrust me outside—"

They interrupted with many expostulations, but I cut them short.

"Dangerous? Of course; that I know; yet will I do it. How think you we can escape? How

## I Become a Soldier

long think you our food can last? Do as I say, I am not afraid. I shall say I am one of the soldiers you captured. I will stain my face, cut short my hair. Oh, do you not see it is our only chance?"

And thus, by dint of much talk, I at last persuaded them to do my bidding. Yämel divested himself of his uniform in an adjoining cell, and I donned it hastily, rolling up my own garments, which I slipped under the coverlet on my couch, and on the pillow I placed the long strands of my severed hair, so that it looked in that dim light as though I of a truth lay there.

With shaking fingers I laced my tunic, and the shining breastplate, stained my face with some pigment that Zal brought me, aye, and indicated the budding beard of young manhood.

At last I was ready, and left my cell, absurdly conscious of my bare limbs.

Down the stairs we crept, and to the great doors. Fortunately it did not take long to persuade those on guard to agree to our scheme. In fact at first they verily believed me to be what I seemed, and would have struck me down had not Yämel interposed.

They bound me hand and foot, most thoroughly and harshly, as I bid them. The cords sank into my flesh, but I bit my lips and was silent, knowing

## A King of Mars

it would be but for a time. Then when all was ready they took me up, and promising me faithfully to say nothing to Zarma or the Councillors, very softly drew back the bolts and bars and hastily thrust me forth into the grey light of the morning.

Instantly there was a rush, and I could hear the bullets from the ancient firearms our enemies carried striking the earth beside me.

But the doors were fastened, and fearing to be trampled upon or shot, I rolled to one side, crying out as I did so :

“ Hold, comrades ! ”

There was an immediate lull, then a series of questions and exclamations when they found me.

My helmet had fallen off, and one of the soldiers restored it to me when they had loosened my bonds.

“ Ah ! ” I said, stretching my arms vigorously ; it is good to be free.”

How came you in the prisons ? ” asked one suspiciously.

“ I was overpowered and bound by the prisoners,” I answered as quietly as I could despite the wild beating of my heart. “ You almost killed me, comrades,” and I laughed.

“ We thought it strange that they should thrust a bundle forth ; we did not imagine it to a liv-

## I Become a Soldier

ing man. Why did you not cry out and so warn us as the doors were opened—?”

“Yes, and have my throat slit,” I answered scornfully.

It was quite light by this time, and I looked about me.

The courtyard was filled with soldiers, all with the ancient firearms that they had used against us the night before.

The heavy gates were lying on the ground, where they had been thrown during the attack, and the street without was patrolled by soldiers, who kept the populace at a distance.

Early as it was, the city was stirring, and I knew that before night fell my master would either be free or a prisoner.

I was the centre of an excited group, and presently an officer, pushing his way past the men, approached me.

“What has happened; who are you?” he queried.

I saluted, and answered that I had been captured in the prisons, bound and thrust forth, which was true enough.

“Why?” asked the officer quickly; “is their food low, why did they wait until now to get rid of you?”

## A King of Mars

"Because," I answered, "when they captured and bound my comrades last night, the prisoners overlooked me in their efforts to repel your attack. This morning they discovered me, and thought it time to get rid of an undesirable member of their community." I laughed lightly as I spoke. "The fact is," I continued, "they did not want to have to guard me.

"Preferring to run the risk of being captured solely for the sake of getting rid of you," observed the officer sneeringly. "A likely story. How do I know you are not one of the prisoners yonder?"

For a moment my heart stopped beating, but I faced him steadily for all that.

"Admitting I am, and mad enough to leave the prison walls where at least I was safe, what could I gain by coming among you?" I asked.

"What is your name?" he asked abruptly; "I do not know your face."

"Raimo," I answered, naming a youth, a hare-brained young soldier whom I knew.

"Raimo," said the officer thoughtfully; "was he not on guard in the Palace yesterday?"

"Yes," answered one of the men, "and came hither when the governors were executed. He disappeared, and has not been seen since."

I smiled covertly, for this same Raimo had

## I Become a Soldier

been one of the sentinels placed to guard me by Anayra, and had been bound, gagged and locked in my apartment by the Councillors and nobles who had set me free. Also I felt pretty sure that when Anayra discovered that I had tricked him, he would vent his rage on the hapless sentinels. I thought it likely that they had been banished; at any rate I took the risk.

"I disappeared," I observed, "because I was captured as I have said. "Ask whether I am not Raimo," and I turned and faced the soldiers.

Almost all of them stared at me without recognition; it was evident that Raimo was a stranger to them. There was one, however, whose face I knew—one of the Palace guards. He started when I asked the question, and opened his lips to speak. I gazed at him steadily.

"Ask if I am not Raimo," I said again.

The soldier made a sudden gesture. "He is Raimo," he said. "I know him well, he and I were on duty in the Palace yesterday."

"It is well," said the officer briefly.

I suddenly felt myself become weak, now that the strain was over, and staggered back.

"What ails you?" asked the officer.

"I am hungry," I muttered.

Therefore I was given food to eat, and presently,



## A King of Mars

while I ate, sitting on the platform where the execution had taken place the evening before, the soldier who had befriended me approached.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

I glanced quickly around, and finding that we were not observed, bent towards him.

"I am one who is in great danger," I said. "Do not betray me, comrade."

He hesitated. "But," he stammered at last, "if you are in truth a friend of lord Zarma's, as I believe—" he paused. "I said you were Raimo," he added; "do you not see that I am betraying our lord the King by aiding and abetting you, if you have come hither to spy upon us?"

I put my hand on his arm and drew him back towards me.

"I am one whom you knew as the 'Lady Yslaika,'" I said in low tones. "Now, will you betray me?"

He started back in horror.

"No," he said. "You need not fear me."

I grasped his hand gratefully. "You will not regret it," I said. "What is your name?"

"Jeva, at your orders, Lady," he answered.

"And I am Raimo," I laughed gaily.

But as I held his hand in mine, glad that I had gained a friend, I heard the tramp of advancing

## I Become a Soldier

feet, and looked enquiringly at Jeva for explanation.

"The regiments that were encamped on the plain," he whispered. "Lord Anayra commanded them to enter the city, the attack is about to begin."

## CHAPTER XXV

### I GAIN A FRIEND

And as I sat there listening to the tramp of that vast host, the officer who had interrogated me came hurrying to us.

My companion and I saluted, and stood waiting for his commands.

"Raimo," he said abruptly. "Since you have been inside yonder prison, you can give me some information concerning Zarma and his rabble. Are they armed? What food have they? what is their number?"

He paused for my reply before continuing.

"They are armed with ancient swords, knives and clubs found in the dungeons below," I answered, "and will make good use of them, I doubt not. Food and water they have in plenty. Their exact number I cannot tell, only a few hundred, I should judge. Also, as the prison is well built and solid, the walls almost impregnable since they

## I Gain a Friend

are covered with 'cela,' I do not see how you—we will be able to effect an entrance."

"We will have Zarma a captive before night-fall," said the officer. "Were it not for our lord King's positive commands to capture Zarma alive, we should have demolished the building by now. Not with the White Fire, since lord Anayra loves this his capital, and would not destroy one portion of it, but with the cannon, battering-rams, explosives, all the paraphernalia of ancient warfare. Nevertheless, to-night Zarma and his friends will be brought before our King."

"But how will they be captured?" I cried eagerly.

"That you will know in good time," replied the officer. "And now make ready to report to lord Anayra in person."

"Report to lord Anayra in person!" I gasped.

The officer looked at me sternly.

"Do you question his commands?" he said. "Jeva, do you see to it," he added, and turned on his heel.

Again we saluted, and when he had gone I sank back against the platform and covered my face with my hands.

"What shall I do?" I muttered. "I dare not face Anayra."

## A King of Mars

"Hush!" said my companion kindly. "Have courage; neither he nor anyone will recognise you; have no fear."

I turned impulsively to him.

"Jeva," I said hoarsely; "how and in what manner do you intend to capture Zarma?"

For answer he stood up.

"Come," he said briefly; and we passed into the street.

There was a strange noise and whir as though of machinery in motion; I could hear the sound even above the usual city murmurs, and the tramp of the soldiers. We were passing in front of the prison, and I looked up. I could of course see nothing, save the boarded windows, but I knew that there were many eyes watching us from behind the screens, and I wondered whether my lord Zarma was there as well.

"Where are we going?" I asked my companion.

"We are almost there," he answered.

There were crowds in all the streets, but they were kept at a distance by the soldiers. I heard my master's name pass from mouth to mouth, as Jeva and I passed by these groups, and I thought of Yamel's words, and wondered whether I could depend on the populace to help us.

We were approaching an open square, and the

## I Gain a Friend

strange noise I had noticed grew louder as we advanced. Presently I saw above the heads of the soldiers guarding the enclosure, tall steel rods rising upwards; I heard the sounds of quick commands, mingled with the thud of falling earth and stone, and I turned again to Jeva.

"What is it?" I asked helplessly.

"They are tunnelling under the streets to the prisons," he answered. "It is half done already; the rest will be done by hand, as it will make less noise, they are working on the other side as well," he answered.

Ah, then my heart died within me. If Zarma were not warned, he would be caught like a rat in a hole. Even if he were warned, what good would that do, how could he hope to hold the place against these mighty hosts?"

I think I cried out in my despair, for Jeva whispered me to be careful.

I turned to him fiercely.

"I must save them," I murmured, "I must. Help me, Jeva; you will not betray me? Help me to save them."

The young man flushed.

"Lady," he answered in a whisper; "you I will not betray, but I am in my lord Anayra's service."

"In yon Traitor's service!" I cried scornfully.

## A King of Mars

“What spell hath he cast over you to make you deny Amklu the King?”

“Amklu was neither just nor ‘the Wise,’” he answered hotly. “Did he not unjustly banish our lord Anayra—did he not—?”

“No!” I cried; and I told him the truth of the matter—how Anayra had attempted to take Zarma’s life, and how I had cried out and thus saved my lord, and how Amklu banished the Traitor.

Jeva listened intently, and when I had finished, drew a long breath.

“If this be true,” he murmured; “if this be true—”

“It is true,” I cried. “Anayra hates my lord and swore to punish him, as he has sworn to punish Amklu. I tell you I witnessed the whole thing, and suffered at Anayra’s hands as well.” And I told him I was not the Lady Yslaïka, but Beylo, and of the days we spent on the Island of Darkness through Anayra’s treachery.

He gasped in utter surprise as I proceeded; then when I asked him if he were not from Valâh, he answered no, that he came from an island near the mainland, and that he had never known or seen Zarma.

We were going towards the Palace now, as it

## I Gain a Friend

was necessary for me to report to the Traitor, much as I hated to do so. And as we went I continued to speak earnestly to Jeva, until at last he swore to help me.

"Are all the soldiers faithful to Anayra?" I asked; "are there none among them who have been honest men, once loyal to Amklu our King?"

"Only a few hundred—mayhap two or three thousand, I do not know exactly how many that we could perhaps count upon to aid us in the case of need. But almost all are the criminals from the Black Country, whose only thought is one of greed.

We were passing a group of artisans, who ceased speaking as we approached. I looked at them searchingly, and went boldly among them.

"News of Zarma," I murmured, looking neither to the right nor to the left. One huge fellow placed himself in my path.

"What name did you mutter, soldier?" he asked.

"I said 'Zarma,'" I answered.

"What name is that in the mouth of one of lord Anayra's guards?" he said with a short laugh.

"Wore you a King's robe would you in truth be King?" I asked.

He gaped at me a moment.



## A King of Mars

"Then you are not—?" he began.

"I am a subject of Amklu the King, and friend to Zarma," I said, knowing I could speak freely.

The fellow's face darkened.

"Zarma is dead," he said; "and through Amklu's fault, although it is whispered that he is kept a prisoner."

"Zarma liveth," I said earnestly. "He liveth and is a prisoner."

The man started back in amazement.

"Do you speak the truth, boy?" he asked.

"I swear it by the White Christ." I lifted my hand as I spoke.

"Lord Zarma is in the prisons, besieged by Anayra's army. If he is captured what think you will be his fate?"

"How know you this?" The man looked at me searchingly.

"Because I too was in the prisons but an hour or so back," I answered.

"Now," I continued; "if ye be not slaves body and soul to Anayra, if in very truth you once loved the Governor of Valâh, prove it this day."

"How?" asked the man.

"Spread the word through the city that Zarma lives," I said. "Throw off the Traitor's yoke for once and all. Seek out those who are true to Amklu

## I Gain a Friend

once more. Be wary, if you would in truth save Zarma; remember that he liveth.'

At that I left him, for a company of soldiers were approaching.

"Out of the way," I said harshly, pushing through the men with whom I had been conversing, in feigned annoyance.

"Whither away, comrades?" called one of the soldiers as we passed.

"To the Palace," I answered over my shoulder.

"You have taken the first step," said Jeva, after a pause.

"Aye," I answered briefly; "pray that it may do some good—that my lord may be saved."

As we approached the great entrance, I hesitated and hung back, again conscious of my attire, that instead of flowing skirts my legs from the knee down were bare save for the cross garterings of the sandals.

Jeva, noticing my hesitation, spoke loudly to me.

"What," he said; "a brave lad to fear to enter because forsooth your garments are dusty."

One soldier of the Royal Guard smiled, and eyed me curiously as we mounted the steps. Once within the Great Hall I stopped short.

"Jeva," I gasped, "Jeva; I dare not face

## A King of Mars

Anayra, for he will see that I am not Raimo."

"Nay," said my companion soothingly. "Lord Anayra lies in a darkened chamber, for the poison hath rendered him weak. If you speak low all will be well.

"Jeva," I said again; "but Raimo was on guard before my door, and was bound by the Councillors who freed me. Surely Anayra had him punished most direly when it was discovered.

Jeva smiled.

"He was not punished because he was not found."

"Not found!" I cried. "But I saw him and his companion thrust into my sleeping chamber, which was locked.

"Aye; but when I saw Zal and Taro on guard I knew that something must have happened to Raimo, for he had told me that he had received orders to guard the Lady Yslaika. I spoke to Zal, who was friendly with me, and asked where Raimo was. But both he and Taro said they had been on guard for the last two hours, and expected to be relieved before long. I knew they lied, and so I waited until—"

"Well?" I cried as he paused.

"Until they were relieved," he continued smiling; "and then managed to enter the apartment

## I Gain a Friend

by the window without being seen. I found Raimo and his companion bound and gagged. I freed them."

"You freed them!" I echoed, bewildered.

"Remember if questioned to say you freed yourself and went to the prisons."

We were mounting the stairs, and were continually meeting others, so that I dared no longer question my companion. Only when we paused before Anayra's apartments I ventured to ask if Jeva thought the Traitor would be likely to punish me.

He answered not if I gave him information regarding Zarma.

The sentry on guard accosted me.

"Your business?" he asked curtly.

"I have been ordered to report to lord Anayra," I answered, in as deep and mannish a voice as I could muster.

"Pass in," he said, standing aside.

I pushed aside the curtains and entered, followed by Jerva.

In the ante-chambers I found several high dignitaries, and the surgeons.

Again our business was asked.

Upon hearing my answer, a body slave was sent in to Anayra, and returned saying that I was to go to him immediately.

## A King of Mars

I hesitated, trying to gain courage. Only a few hours before I had stood in these very rooms, had listened to the Traitor's words of love, and had tricked him. No wonder I trembled.

"Go," whispered Jerva ; "be not afraid."

I walked quickly towards the door ; passing the surgeon who had helped me, I touched his arm. He looked at me inquiringly.

"My lord," I said in a low voice, "Zarma is safe—as yet."

And before he could speak, I left him.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE PEOPLE TO THE RESCUE

The Traitor's room was darkened, only a subdued light shone from the lamps. I stood before the curtains and saluted, striving to control my agitation.

"Come hither, Raimo," said Anayra in a weak voice.

I advanced tremblingly until I stood by his couch, where he lay, still too feeble to leave it.

"So," he said; "you allowed yourself to be overpowered and bound while on duty. Why did you not cry out?"

"They attacked me so suddenly, lord," I answered in a low tone.

I waited for his next words, wondering whether he recognized my voice.

"And then, fearing my anger, you fled—" he observed, after a pause.

## A King of Mars

"Nay, my lord, I feared your scorn," I said boldly.

"How did you get free?"

"My bonds were loosened and I cast them from me."

"Whither did you go?" asked the Traitor, curiously, as it seemed to me.

"To the prisons, my lord."

"What! did you expect to prevent lord Zarma from escaping single-handed, you who were caught and bound by a few nobles?"

I hesitated before replying, for I could not tell how much Anayra suspected, or whether he was playing with me preparatory to having me punished.

"Well," said the Traitor; "as I understand, you were bound by the prisoners, whom the Lady Yslaika—" he gave a bitter laugh as he mentioned the name—"set free, and you were thrown into the courtyard this morning. If that is so, tell me what you have seen concerning my lord Zarma."

So in a few words I told him what I had already told the officer.

"And what of the Lady Yslaika?" he asked when I had finished.

"My lord," I said, "she grieves that she did not succeed in freeing Zarma, and she fears you, my lord."

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At that Anayra's rage broke forth.

"And she may well fear me," he cried fiercely. "She tricked me, played with me, with me, Anayra, the King! The shameless woman; let her weep and tremble, for this night she and her lover will be punished in such wise that the news will go forth to all parts of the Planet; aye, it will even reach the ears of the coward Amklu in his hiding-place."

He had raised himself as he spoke, and now he fell back panting, his hands tightly clenched as though he had his enemies in his grasp.

"Lord King, it is said that the Lady Yslaïka saved your life," I ventured.

Instantly his expression softened.

"Aye," he said in a more gentle voice. "She saved my life of a truth," he paused a moment. "But she tricked me," he cried, all his rage returning; "and I loved her," he added.

"Lord King, if you love her, can you see her suffer?"

He glanced at me so keenly that I fell back, fearing he recognized me despite my disguise.

"Can I see her suffer?" he panted. "Verily that can I, boy, and laugh thereat! Thus will all learn that none may taunt Anayra with impunity."

He lay silent for a time as though unconscious of my presence, then turned his eyes to me.



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"In view of the news you brought, I will pardon you," he said slowly. "I will not banish you, as I had it in my mind to do. This night, perhaps sooner, Zarma will be in my power—" again he paused, and appeared to sink into insensibility.

He roused himself with a start.

"Did you notice aught strange in the weapons the soldiers use?" he asked.

"My lord they are carrying the ancient guns, that kill yet do not destroy streets and houses."

"As the White Fire does," he said. "And for fear of evil to follow I have done away with the White Fire, only the old guns are carried now."

"Done away with the White Fire, my lord!" I exclaimed.

Anayra nodded impatiently. "Aye," he said. "How is it possible to fight and conquer with such guns, when by so doing whole cities are destroyed? Verily Mars would be but one vast ruin. No, I intend to conquer Mars even as the Earth was overrun and conquered, by firearms such as the Earth folk use, such as were used here many years ago."

"Then you intend to overrun Mars?" I asked, echoing his words stupidly.

"Yes," he said; "that I intend to do. See you not that I am not King in truth until the

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whole of our Planet acknowledges me as such? News has come that the other cities murmur and are on the verge of rebellion. I will show them who is master; I did not hesitate to destroy my own officers when I knew them to be traitors, neither will I hesitate to punish others who go against me."

I was growing weary and most anxious to leave, yet not daring to move until he should dismiss me. For the moment I did not grasp the full significance of what I had heard. That the Traitor should have abolished carrying the guns of the White Fire amazed me, but his wish to conquer Mars and cause himself to be acknowledged as rightful King, by force if need be, amazed me still more. The tremendous ambition of the man now stood revealed. He would not scruple to send his armies against city after city, until for very weariness and horror he would be hailed King. Again I saw only too plainly whither we were drifting, and I wondered why I had saved his life. Yet had he died, the Head Governor would have taken his place and even greater evil would have resulted.

Anayra's next words took me by surprise.

"Do you believe in the Oracle's predictions?" he asked.

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I stared at him, and he repeated the question sharply.

"Yes, lord," I answered.

He laughed scornfully.

"So you are yet another fool," he said. "What is the famous Oracle, the blue flames, the whole theatrical performance, but a trick practised by the priests to awe the credulous? Did not the Oracle predict that Amklu would return to his own, and hath he returned?"

I did not reply, and he continued after a pause.

"Even this morning, almost before dawn, the Oracle spoke—"

"The Oracle spoke, my lord!" I cried excitedly; "what was the prediction?"

He frowned and turned his head wearily.

"The Oracle said that my power is waning. True I lie here well nigh helpless, but my work is carried on nevertheless. So soon as Zarma is captured, my armies will march against the cities that refuse to acknowledge me—" At that moment a curious subdued roar from without broke in upon his words. He raised himself furiously and called to his slaves. They entered hurriedly, accompanied by the surgeons and officers.

"What is that noise?" asked Anayra. "If it

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is an uprising, do you not know how to cope with it?"

An officer entered without ceremony, dashing the velvet curtains aside. He panted as though he had been running.

"Lord King," he cried! "the populace has risen. The palace is surrounded—"

"Shoot them down!" cried Anayra angrily. "Why do you come prating to me, do you not know your duty?"

"They too are armed, my lord, moreover they are thousands strong. I have given orders to barricade the Palace."

"Send for the troops. They can be taken in the rear and destroyed!"

I waited to hear no more, but left unceremoniously.

In the ante-chamber I found Jeva awaiting me.

He caught my hand, and together we ran through the gorgeous rooms and down the stairs.

"What has happened?" I gasped.

"Your friends of the people have risen," he answered; "thanks to you."

The noise was deafening by this time; cries of frightened slaves and ladies mingled with the frantic commands of the officers, the hurrying tramp of the Royal Guard, taking the positions assigned to them, and over all that steady ominous roar.

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Jeva was making for the Great Entrance, which was already barricaded, but I pulled him back.

"Where are you going?" I panted.

"To help defend the doors," he answered, looking at me in surprise.

"I go to my friends," I retorted; "I will save Zarma yet."

And I turned on my heel and left him.

Even now I did not see how I could leave the Palace. Remembering Jeva's story of how he entered my apartment, I wondered whether I could climb from thence into the gardens. To go through the slaves' quarters was not to be thought of, and one glance from a window convinced me of the impossibility of descending thus. Was I to be captured by the very people I had incited to rebellion, I wondered, as I turned once more into the Great Hall.

Feeling a touch on my shoulder, I turned. It was Jeva.

"Come," he said; "since you wish to leave the Palace."

"It is impossible," I answered despairingly.

He smiled.

"Not so impossible as you may think, he answered; and led the way through the crowd and up the stairs. I followed in bewilderment, through

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passage and apartment, until we reached a part I did not know. My companion paused before a door, and throwing it open bade me enter.

I did so, and found myself in a well-appointed apartment, which opened into a sleeping chamber. We were at the top of the Palace, and going to the window I could see that we overlooked the gardens.

As yet the rebels had not gained them, but I knew it was but a matter of seconds ere they were overrun.

I could see the rioters themselves coming from all sides, and I cried out for joy at the sight, for I knew them to be my master's friends. And even as I looked, their hoarse roar resolved itself into words.

"Zarma, give us back Zarma!" was their cry.

"They are coming near, we must hurry if we wish to escape," said Jeva.

Going to the window he leaned out and whistled in a peculiar manner.

Instantly I heard a whirl of wings, and a small air-ship rose from the shadow of the trees below.

"Now you know how the sentinels escaped," said Jeva with a smile. "Pray that your friends may not see us; it will be awkward should they shoot at us."

By this time the air-ship was on a level with the

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window, manned by a stern-looking individual, who saluted without speaking.

"Where to?" he asked when we were seated in the car.

"Take us to the prisons, eh, Raimo?" said Jeva. The man pursed his lips.

"If yonder rabble do not see us," he said, nodding downwards as he spoke.

I clutched Jeva's arm as we skimmed through the air. I had never been on so small a ship, and the luxurious car in which we sat rocked and trembled, a fragile barrier indeed between ourselves and the ground, I thought.

My companion laughed lightly, and patted my hand.

"It is all right," he said. "Many a trip have we taken together, my bonny ship and I."

He had hardly finished speaking when there came a cry from below, and gazing fearfully downwards, I saw that we had reached the extremity of the gardens and were hovering over the street.

"They have seen us," remarked the engineer tranquilly. "When will you get a stronger ship, as I advised, young master? We would then be able to rise much higher and go at a far quicker pace—"

His words were cut short by a yell of triumph,

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and I saw a sudden puff of white smoke rise from below.

"They are firing at us," said the fellow angrily. "Curse those ancient guns that our lord has thought fit to use once more."

"Go down among them," I said; "Jeva, order that we go down."

A bullet striking the woodwork but a hand's-breadth from me emphasized my remark.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### OF OUR FLIGHT

Jeva looked at me as though he thought I had become suddenly mad.

"What, go down among that rabble," he exclaimed; "say rather to get out of range as quickly as possible."

Just then I felt a sudden burning pain shoot through my leg. I had been hit, though not badly, for the bullet had buried itself in the bottom of the car.

I staunched the blood as well as I was able, and turned to Jeva, who was bending anxiously over me.

"You see that we cannot get out of range," I said; "let me speak to them, then we shall be able to descend without fear."

For all answer he bent down and detached the portable mouthpiece belonging to an instrument used for hailing air-ships when at a distance.

## Of Our Flight

I raised it to my lips and spoke clearly.

"Friends," I said, "do not shoot. I am the youth who told of Zarma's imprisonment."

A sudden cry of "Zarma!" proved that I had been heard.

"Ask your leader—the one who spread the news—if I speak not the truth. In proof of my trust in you, I and my two friends will descend," I continued.

Jerva shook his head with a smile.

"I think you must enjoy running into danger," he said; "however, I obey; go down, Nezo—"

"Yes, master." And the man obediently caused the ship to descend.

Again I looked over the side. The rebels were gazing up at us, with the exception of those who had surrounded the Palace. When they saw that we were descending they cheered us loudly, and welcoming hands helped us to alight as soon as the ship touched ground.

When it was seen that I had been hurt, many were their exclamations of sorrow at the mishap. Presently the man whom I had bid rouse the populace, the rebels' leader, pushed his way through his followers.

"It is done," he said excitedly, waving his hand towards the people. "We have thrown off

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Anayra's yoke. The only King is Amklu—but you are hurt," he said, breaking off; "how did it happen?"

"Why, since your army thought fit to fire at us," I said lightly, "how could we hope to escape scathless?"

"We thought it was Anayra," he said in excuse; "had we known—"

"The Traitor is chained to his couch," I broke in. "He is too ill to rise. Yet beware, for although those within the Palace are but few, yet they are armed and will not scruple to fire at you."

"Have they the White Fire?" asked the man anxiously.

"No," answered Jerva; "they have naught but the old guns like those you carry."

"But the soldiers have been sent for," I said; "hark! They are on the way now."

Instantly the leader issued quick commands, and his men hurriedly got themselves into some sort of order. But I trembled, knowing that blood would of a surety be spilt.

"Bethink you of what you do," I cried to the leader. "There will be blood shed if you stand against them. Why, half of your men are not armed," I added, as I glanced at those near by.

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The fellow smiled.

"Fear not, boy," he said cheerfully. "There may be a little blood let, but it is in a good cause. But no one will be seriously hurt—I have my own plan, and my men know how to deal with the soldiers. But I should advise you to leave before the game begins if you would save Zarma."

Strange as it may seem, I had for the moment forgotten my master—now, however, my one wish was to reach him. All thought of the danger to which these men were exposed, left me—the only idea that remained was to go to the prisons, regardless of all else.

I turned to Jeva.

"To the prisons," I said. "Can we go in the air-ship, think you?"

"And gain the amount of attention we did before? no thank you," he answered.

"On foot then," I cried; "and quickly."

I started off without another word. Already the fight had begun, as sundry cries and shots testified. We must avoid the soldiers if possible; so I limped as quickly as my wounded limb would let me, through street after street, well away from the Palace, until I had put considerable space between me and the tumult.

I paused to draw breath, when hearing quick

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footsteps, I turned ready to grapple with anyone who attempted to interfere.

To my relief it was Jeva and his man.

"You disappeared so suddenly that I lost sight of you," he said with a smile. "How is your wound?"

"It is nothing," I said; "let us on."

We turned towards the prisons, keeping well away from the centre of the city, often stopped by women asking for news of the revolt, so that it was some time before we came in sight of the building. Suddenly Jeva burst out laughing, and said at my of surprise

"A good many of the soldiers have joined the people."

"No!" I said, stopping in my walk.

"Oh yes," he returned gleefully. "I waited to see what would happen. Just as the foremost ranks were preparing to shoot, the rebels' huge captain put up his hands and cried:

"If you fire we will do the same, and there will be many dead and wounded. All we want is our rightful King, Amklu the Wise, and Zarma, Governor of Valâh, who is now a prisoner. Down with Anayra the Traitor! At them, men!"

"At that," continued Jeva, "the rebels literally threw themselves upon the soldiers, grappling

## Of Our Flight

with them, and causing them to fall to the ground, so that the ranks were in the utmost confusion. To add to the medley, a great many soldiers left their fellows and joined the people, crying out as they did so, 'down with the Traitor! Long live Amklul!'" And my companion burst into another roar of laughter at the recollection.

I smiled in sympathy, although I scarcely cared what became of our allies, so long as they kept the soldiers occupied a sufficient time to enable my master to escape.

Jeva noticed my abstraction, and grew grave.

"Lady," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper, "do not think, because I speak lightly as one youth to another, that I forget what is due to a maiden——"

"Jeva," I interrupted, "I am for the moment Raimo, and you are my good comrade and friend——"

"Look!" he cried, pointing excitedly toward, the prison that we were rapidly approaching.

I raised my eyes, and then broke into a run, forgetting the pain of my wound, for the boards had been removed from the windows of the principal cells, and there in full view, a target for our enemies' guns, stood my master.

He was talking quickly and excitedly, but we

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were too far to distinguish the words.

"Oh," I cried to Jeva as we ran, "why does he expose himself thus—he will be killed."

"I think not," panted my companion, "for some of our—your friends are coming to the rescue."

He spoke the truth, for just as the soldiers left to guard the prison were preparing to fire, a detachment of rebels came hurriedly on the scene from opposite directions, and threw themselves upon our enemies.

By this time we were under the windows, and above the tumult and cries of our partizans, I heard my lord's voice.

"Where is she?" he was saying. "Woe to ye all if so much as a hair of her head be touched."

"Jeva," I cried, "he is speaking of me!" and clasped his hand convulsively.

"Escape, my lord, while you can," roared a burly artisan, who was struggling with two of the guards.

Zarma, as though not fully comprehending what had taken place, stared down at the fighting men, and it was not until the Head Councillor took his arm and spoke to him, that he left the window.

I stood staring at the empty space where my master had been, as though expecting him to

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return. Jeva brought me quickly to my senses, and ran past me, calling to me to follow.

I dashed into the courtyard, and joined my comrade and his man before the prison door, and I began to beat frantically upon it with my fists, calling to my lord to open. I heard his voice within, giving quick commands, till suddenly without warning, the doors were flung open, and Zarma came forth at the head of his followers. Seeing me, he struck me to the earth, crying :

“ Out of my way, fellow, lest I do you harm.

As I fell I saw confusedly Jeva start forward and catch my lord as he passed, arresting him in his mad flight. And as I strove to rise, for I had struck my head and was dazed, I felt myself gathered close in my dear lord's arms, and heard his voice crying to me to forgive the blow, and many tender loving words. I tried to struggle down out of his encircling arms, with the dim notion that I should not listen until I had expiated the sin of Anayra's kiss—for sin I felt it to be. But so utterly spent was I that I could not move, and murmuring I know not what, I closed my eyes and laid my head on my master's breast.

Of what followed I have but a dim recollection—I heard confused cries, and felt myself being carried I knew not whither, nor cared. Gentle hands re-



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moved the hot helmet and stroked the hair from my eyes. I raised my heavy lids and saw Mysta's face bending over me.

I attempted to lift my hand to her cheek, but could not. My brain clearing, I was conscious that we were no longer moving, and that my lord was breathing quickly and hurriedly.

"Master," I said feebly, "put me down, I can walk."

For all answer he gathered me closer, and again I drifted off.

When I once more regained sufficient consciousness to know what was passing—probably only a few minutes later—we were in the midst of a dense crowd, who with cries of joy and acclamations cheered us.

"Hail, hail to Zarma!" they cried.

I turned my head weakly, and saw that we were surrounded by a vast concourse of men, many of whom bore evidences of a struggle.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Beylo, Beylo, are you better?" cried my master anxiously; "ten minutes have you lain thus—"

A sudden tremendous uproar broke into his words, followed by cries of pain.

The Head Councillor looked sharply the way we had come, but could see nothing, owing to the mob

## Of Our Flight

that followed us forming a huge body-guard.

"Hurry, hurry, lord Zarma!" he said. "Give me the maid."

"I will not," answered my lord briefly.

Again the cries, and now the crowd surged angrily in the opposite direction, trying to reach their comrades in the rear.

"Down with Anayra, down!" they roared, and we found it difficult to make any headway, although the Councillors continually cried to them to give way that we might proceed.

"Where are we going?" I asked weakly.

"To the coast," gasped Zarma; "if we can gain it."

"Are there no air-ships or chariots to carry us us thither?" I asked excitedly.

"No," answered Jeva who was near. "We tried to find a vehicle of some kind, but could not. So far our allies have held the soldiers at bay, but I fear they can do so no longer."

"They shall not capture you," cried a man nearby, overhearing the youth's remark. "We will be a living target to their guns, aye, and die ere ever they lay hands on you."

We had almost reached the ancient gate of the city, and through the huge arch I could see the boundless plain, and I sighed, so vast did it appear,

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so many weary leagues ere we could gain the coast.

"Why did we not go to the wharves?" I asked.

"We did, but there are no boats," responded one of the Councillors. "We go to the coast in the hope of finding a vessel of some kind to take us to the King."

I gasped.

"It is so far," I murmured; "and oh, my lord, you are so weary."

My master answered nothing, but set his lips firmly together.

Another cry burst forth, a cry so full of pain that Zarma paused on the very threshold of the gate.

"Take you the maid," he said hoarsely to the Head Councillor, placing me within his friend's arms.

"She is so light, she scarce will tire you," he added with a smile, then he looked deep into my eyes.

"Beylo," he said, "you have saved my life at the peril of your own. I cannot thank you as I would; words are but weak and time presses—"

He waited an instant for the tumult to cease before continuing.

"My sweet, my sweet," he said, and taking

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my hands in his, kissed them before I could pull them away.

“Guard her with your lives,” he said,” to the little group of his friends; and turned away.

“Master, master,” I cried, stretching out my hands; “where are you going?”

“To give myself up,” he made answer; then holding up his hand to quell the murmur that broke forth, he added,

“I cannot let these, my newly recovered subjects, suffer for my sake. At the worst, I shall but die. Carry my love to our King, tell him I longed to see his face again. He will understand. Farewell—”

And he turned quickly from us, disregarding our entreaties, aye, even gently disengaging my hands from his robes, for I had struggled to the ground and limped after him, sobbing and imploring him to go with us.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE HERMIT OF THE RUINED TEMPLE

“Zarma, Zarma, whither do you go?”

The words fell slowly, apparently from the gateway.

Turing with a start, I saw the High Priest Râl in the shadow of the arch. There he stood like a phantom in the light of the late afternoon. His robes were dusty as though he had walked for many hours, but he held himself upright despite his age, without showing evidence of any fatigue.

My master, who had also turned, gazed at the frail white figure in utter surprise, but recovered himself quickly.

“Lord Râl,” he said. I go to give myself up—can I allow these my people to suffer because of me?”

Those near us turned to listen to Râl’s reply, so that for a space there was silence—only the tumult far in the rear still continued.

## The Hermit of the Ruined Temple

"You are going against the commands of the Oracle," said the priest slowly. "Why should you disobey? And you, O people, who at a nod from the Tyrant bowed your heads and forgot your King and your Governor, why should you thrust yourselves in the way of the guns in vain resistance?"

"We will not betray our master a second time," cried the mob; "he shall not be taken while we live!"

"O, fools of little faith!" said Râl quickly, his eyes flashing. "Think you that you could save him were it written that he should die? And you, Zarma, do you think to surrender and perish since it is written that you shall live? Strive not to fight against the will of the Higher Lords. It is enough. Take you these your friends and the two maidens, and go your way. And you, subjects to Zarma under the King, offer no resistance to those who seek your master's life. It is not for you to punish nor yet to offer your bodies to death before your time. Back! Back!"

I could scarcely believe my ears, and for a moment no one spoke.

"Lord Râl," I cried at last, dropping to my knees. "Will you abandon us? Oh, my lord, we are in very great peril, and do you bid these our friends to turn aside and no longer aid us? If that

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be so, surely you will help us ; stretch forth your hand, my lord, and command our enemies to leave us in peace."

Râl smiled very kindly at me kneeling there. "Daughter," he said ; "you credit me with more power than I possess."

"But," said Jerva, "you stood alive after the passing of the White Fire."

"True, my son," replied the priest ; "but I stood on the steps of the most holy temple—no harm, however great, could touch me there."

At that I rose hurriedly to my feet.

"Why did we not go thither?" I asked in despair.

"We could not, the way was blocked," answered the Head Councillor.

Heartrending cries again came to our ears, and Râl came forward.

"How now," he cried sternly, his voice gathering volume and power, so that it rang out over all the clamour. "I bid ye desist. Stand aside, and no evil will come to you. Already blood hath been shed. Stand aside ; I, Râl, do so command you!"

There was a silence, followed by many conflicting cries and murmurs.

"Râl speaks—obey—then will our master die—down with Anayra!"

## The Hermit of the Ruined Temple

Zarma came to my side and took my hand.

"We will obey you, lord Râl," he said quietly. Then to those surrounding us he added :

"Do you obey him too ; pass the word that Zarma, your rightful Governor, so desires it."

The priest came to my master and raised his hand in blessing.

"Go to the ruined temple on the plain," he said ; "there you will find one who will help you, one greater than all—"

He ceased speaking and stepped back, and my lord, without a word, left the city.

One of the Councillors took my other arm, and thus supported I hurried on. Turning my head, I perceived Râl still standing in the shelter of the archway, looking after us, while the crowd, who had done such good work in our behalf, had dispersed, leaving the street clear. My heart sank at the sight. Why had not Râl helped us, of what use was it to take refuge in the ruined temple, deserted these many years ?

Instinctively I raised my eyes to my master's face, craving the comfort he only could give.

But he looked down at me gravely, not apparently comprehending my fear.

"What is it, little maid?" he asked tenderly ; and again I felt a shock of surprise at the evidence



## A King of Mars

that he could no longer read my thoughts.

I made no answer, and we continued our flight for some time in silence, I with set teeth, trying by force of will to keep down the pain and fatigue that well-nigh overpowered me.

Suddenly Mysta uttered a cry. "We are pursued!" she gasped.

Looking back we saw that it was so. A number of soldiers were advancing with inconceivable swiftness, while rising from Cerva were two large airships also in pursuit. We redoubled our speed, although I felt it to be well-nigh hopeless. "Oh why did Râl send us thus to our death?" I questioned.

The ground was very uneven, and full of pitfalls, and we tripped several times. Suddenly my foot caught in a tangled mass of weeds, and I fell heavily. A quick pain like a sudden flame shot up my injured limb, and I cried out. Zarma had by this time lifted me, but the anguish of standing was unbearable, and I clung to him not to fall.

"Master," I said. "It is finished, I cannot walk. Proceed without me, I beg."

Zarma said no word, but setting his teeth, bent and raised me in his arms, in spite of my protests. For the first time in my life I was glad of my small

## The Hermit of the Ruined Temple

stature and light weight, as I felt the fast beating heart of my master and heard his labouring breath. Soon, however, the pain rendered me partially unconscious, so that I knew nor felt naught. Now and again I strove to rouse myself, and tried to master the agony by the force of my will, only to groan with lips that strove in vain to remain silent.

A cry from Mysteria roused me.

"The temple, the temple!" she cried, and I knew we were safe, and with a sigh I let my tortured body sink into forgetfulness.

When I came to myself I was lying on a bench in a small chapel. Bending over me was an old man, with a long white beard that flowed like silver over his breast.

He was holding a goblet to my lips, and as I met his eyes glowing and fervent, a great trembling seized me and I would have risen had he not prevented me.

"Drink, my daughter," he said gently.

I obediently swallowed the clear sparkling water.

"Lord," I gasped, looking fearfully up into his face; "who are you?"

"A friend," he answered tenderly; "I am here to serve you."

## A King of Mars

"But the soldiers," I cried, sitting up in the support of his arm; "they will soon be here. Where is my master?"

Even as I spoke I heard the sound of footsteps outside and Mysta, prostrated near the altar, moaned.

The Head Councillor entered hurriedly.

"They have come," he cried. "We have barricaded the door as well as we are able—I have come in search of you, Sir Hermit, for Râl said you would aid us—"

A sudden blow resounded on the door, while from overhead there came a grinding sound which betokened that the air-ships had found a landing-place. I turned frantically to the old man and clutched his robes.

"Save my lord," I cried, "save Zarma, never mind me, save my master!"

He smiled dreamily and gently detached my clinging fingers. On the threshold he paused.

"Remain here without fear," he said; "I will send lord Zarma to you."

Listening to those blows without, I hid my face in my hands, rocking myself to and fro.

"Beylo, little Beylo, look up," said my master's voice, the voice I loved so well, and raising my eyes I saw Zarma standing near.

## The Hermit of the Ruined Temple

I put out my hands and he clasped them and held them close.

"Oh, my lord," I wailed, "I prayed the hermit to save you, to hide you away where none could find you—"

"And I begged him to do the same for you," he whispered.

"Master," I said reproachfully, "would I consent to save myself, think you, and leave you in danger?"

He smiled very tenderly and sat down by my side.

"And think you I would save myself and leave you to be captured," he said with gentle mockery.

"Oh, my lord, you are Zarma, Governor of Valâh, while I am naught but a slave," I said with a sob.

"The woman I love," he said in a vibrating voice, and bent toward me.

"My lord!" I gasped, "my lord! Nay, I am not worthy, for I led Anayra to think I loved him. I bent above him to receive his kiss, I lied and deceived him—as I would do again to save you," I added defiantly.

"Beylo," cried Zarma, "I worship you above all women, all unworthy am I of what you have done for me, yet if you will, if you can—" He did

## A King of Mars

not complete his sentence, but knelt at my feet.

"Zarma," I sobbed, "Zarma!"

He rose and taking me in his arms crushed me to him with murmuring broken words, and kissed me on the lips, thus washing away Anayra's defiling touch for ever.

I scarcely heard the murmur from without, nor was I conscious that Mysta had left us, until a Councillor came running in.

"A miracle!" he cried excitedly, "a miracle!"

"Aye, a miracle!" exulted Zarma. "Beylo loves me!"

The Councillor smiled.

"I knew that," he said; "but I speak of the soldiers."

Instantly my lord stood upright.

"What has happened?" he asked sternly. "Have the soldiers affected an entrance? If so—" he paused and turned to me.

"You are not afraid?" he asked.

I shook my head, smiling.

"Not now," I said; "for we go together."

He encircled my neck with his two hands.

"It will be easy," he said. "You will not suffer in Anayra's torments. Kiss me once more."

And although I knew it to be a farewell embrace, I raised my face to his, content, knowing I should

## The Hermit of the Ruined Temple

die quietly with little or no suffering.

It was the Councillor who rudely interrupted, laying hand on my lord and forcibly dragging him from me.

"My lord Zarma, have you gone suddenly mad?" he asked roughly. "No one is going to die, at present, at least. Come with me, I have been sent to fetch you."

The youth spoke sternly, and Zarma, bowing his head without a word, took my hand in his and led me in silence from the chapel.

Up a flight of broken stone steps, out upon a half-ruined tower we went, and then paused in utter astonishment.

The Councillors, Jeva, Mysta and Nezo stood in a little group at one side, and on the edge of the platform, near the broken parapet, was the hermit. He was speaking, and his hands were uplifted as though in prayer.

"Return to your homes," he said quietly, "for behold! no evil can you do to these who are now under my protection."

I wondered why the soldiers did not laugh and shower insults upon the old man, and approaching the edge I looked down.

A strange sight met my eyes. The soldiers stood looking up at us in utter silence, making no

## A King of Mars

further effort to capture us. They had broken down the door and the weak barricade, and yet they stood there making no motion to enter. Only their leader seemed struggling to speak, to give some order. I could see him moistening his lips preparatory to issuing some command, but no words came.

The hermit stood with upraised hands, but now his eyes were raised to heaven and his lips moved as though in prayer.

A faint noise overhead caused me to look up.

Hovering above us was one of the air-ships, the other I could perceive in the distance, returning to Cerva. And as I looked I saw an evil-faced man lean far over and take aim with his gun at the white figure of the hermit. Zarma, who had followed my gaze, sprang forward.

"Have a care," he cried, but even as he spoke, I heard the report of the gun, and screamed in sudden fear.

The holy man turned to us smilingly, although it seemed as though the bullet must have struck him.

The soldier who had fired fell back in sudden panic, and said something to those with him.

In a few minutes the ship rose through the air, ever higher, until it was but a speck in the blue.

## The Hermit of the Ruined Temple

Then, and then only, did the hermit show any sign of anger.

His eyes blazed, and extending both arms in the direction the air-ships had taken, he cried :

“As ye are now, thus shall you remain all through the night.”

And lo! under his gaze the soldiers below stiffened and became as statues. Only their eyes, filled with an indescribable fear, proved them to be living men. And the air-ships, now scarcely to be seen, did not vanish, as they should have done—they, too, had become stationary.

And as I beheld this miracle, a great wonder filled my soul, and I fain would have knelt at the hermit's feet.

He began to speak again, softly and with a wondrous look on his face, as though he communed with the Unseen.

“O Great Spirit,” he murmured. “Purify and cleanse all thought of revolt and evil from the hearts of those who are still under the influence of that most unhappy Traitor. Let all once more be in harmony, that Mars may go yet onward until in time it becomes the most perfect Planet. And receive in forgiveness the unhappy spirit of Anayra which even now is leaving the body it inhabited.”



## A King of Mars

As he spoke, a flame swept across the sky over Cerva, and falling illuminated the vast dome of the King's Palace.

Mysta was on her knees, her hands clasped on her breast. The others stood in awed silence. Only my lord spoke.

"Who are you that work such miracles?" he cried.

The hermit smiled.

"He who has come hither to help you in your peril," he said. "And now let us on, for we have still some distance to go."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### HOW I SAW THE LADY DAMIA

Down the worn steps we went, and through the ranks of silent soldiers, and as I gazed into their faces where only the eyes were living, a trembling seized me for having touched the mysteries of the Unknown.

As we advanced a vague sadness descended upon me at the silence of my companion. What was passing in his soul? Did he regret his words and his kiss when we stood on the edge of the shadows of death? I remembered how proud he was, and noticing the sombre expression of his face, pale in the light of the waning day, I felt the tears rise to my eyes, for who was I to hope that he should continue to love me?

The tears rolled down my cheeks at the thought, although I thanked him in my heart for that one moment of bliss.

My wound was beginning to pain me, but I set

## A King of Mars

my teeth and limped on. Presently I stumbled, and at my exclamation of pain, my master turned to me.

"Beylo," he said, and his voice was gentle, but lacked the warmth of a half hour before, "Beylo, I am sure you are suffering. If the pain grows worse I will again carry you."

"Indeed no, master."

For answer, he drew me to him, and placing his arm about me half carried, half supported me. If he noticed my agitation, he said naught, for which I was thankful. We were near the sea by this time, for I could hear the sound of the waves on the beach, and strove to regain control of myself by evoking the image of the King, Amklu the Wise, whom I should see in but a short time now. But my sorrow was too deep, and I longed to be alone. The plain stretched itself interminably before us, and although the sound of the surf filled our ears, the sea was not yet in view, hidden, no doubt, by the rolling sand before us. I went on, supported by Zarma, as one in a dream, my temples beating furiously, and my throat contracted, rendered half unconscious by the pain I was enduring.

"O Lord Visaya, help me, help me!" I muttered half aloud.

The tall figure of the hermit turned and looked

## How I Saw the Lady Damia

back at me, and a great peace descended upon me, so that I was free from suffering.

I withdrew my arm from my master's, in spite of his endeavour to retain it, and thus we continued side by side. Suddenly those who were ahead uttered a cry, and my lord Zarma and I, joining them a minute later, I stood staring in absolute surprise, for there, riding majestically at anchor, was a wonderful white ship.

"Whence comes it?" asked my master excitedly; "I did not think to find a ship here."

"How did you hope to leave the coast?" asked the hermit with a smile. "The Wise King sent it when he heard of your plight."

"But how—why—?" stammered the Head Councillor.

"Lord Râl went to Cerva to bring you hither while I awaited you at the ruined Temple, where once a most holy man dwelt; we did not of course know that things had come to such a pass."

"Yet a message was sent to the Temple of the Oracle acquainting lord Râl of the fact," said one of the Councillors; "is it not so, Beylo?" he asked, turning to me.

"Yes," I said; "Yämel went, but lord Râl was absent; the message was left with one of the other priests."

## A King of Mars

"And we were sure it would be transmitted to Râl immediately," said Zarma, carefully helping me down the sand bank toward the beach.

"Anayra caused all the long distance transmitters to be destroyed," said the hermit; "therefore no news reached either the King or Râl."

I drew a long breath.

"Ah," I cried, "that of course explains it all. But we have suffered, oh, we have suffered——"

"See," exclaimed Jeva; "they are sending a small boat for us." And he started on a run for the shore, waving and cheering madly.

It was true—a large pleasure craft, built on beautiful lines, came rapidly towards us.

And as we too hastened to meet it, we heard a soft cheer come to us over the water. Looking towards the ship, I saw a crowd waving kerchiefs and leaning far over the railing.

In a few minutes we were in the small boat and were being rowed swiftly toward the white ship. And as we approached I could distinguish many well-known and friendly faces among those gathered to welcome us.

Suddenly Mysta uttered a little cry of joy, and looking, I saw the happy face of young lord Osza gazing down at us.

Soon we were on board, the centre of a welcom-

## How I Saw the Lady Damia

ing crowd, who surrounded us, asking us innumerable questions, exclaiming over our adventures, laughing at my boyish garb, all at one and the same time.

And in the midst of this confusion, young Osza came with shining eyes and outstretched hands to where Mysta was standing, and drew her from my side.

A pang shot through my heart as I watched them, and I looked anxiously for my master, hoping against hope that he still loved me, that it was not all a dream. But he was in the hands of his friends, all nobles of the Wise King's court there to welcome us, and he had no eyes for me.

The hermit, too, was nowhere to be seen, and a sudden feeling of desolation swept over me.

And then I heard a welcoming cry from all, and turning with a start, I saw a young maiden, scarcely older than myself, whose silver and grey dress showed that some one dear to her had gone to the Place of Light. Her sad eyes showed that, in spite of her knowledge of her dear one's happiness, yet she could not quite put away her own sorrow at her loss.

I saw my lord Zarma go hastily towards her and kneel, taking her hand in his as he did so.

"Hail, Lady Damia," he said, and kissed her hand.

## A King of Mars

I started violently when I heard her name. Damia, the maiden whom Sido had confessed to having loved, although she was already a wife.

"Greeting, Zarma," she returned, in so sweet a voice that tears rose to my eyes. "Right glad am I to see you here safe at last. Our King as well as I, and all your many friends, feared for your safety, when we heard of Anayra's increasing evilness, also when that wonderful young mystic, Sido—" she lingered over the name—"came to the King's hiding-place with Osza and the captain whom he had liberated, we knew that the Traitor would accuse you of freeing his prisoners."

Zarma who had risen, answered gravely and courteously, and the two drew apart.

All was in readiness for departure; already the official in charge of the giant magnet had his hand on the spring, which he touched at the Captain's command.

I looked up at the glittering spark at the top of the high rod, and thought of that other departure from Valâh, when I had sailed with the Traitor to capture Cerva.

Truly, I thought bitterly, I was happier then. At that time I was content to love Zarma at a distance, content to serve him in every way in my power. But now that he had held me in his

## How I Saw the Lady Damia

embrace, had spoken of his love for me, I knew that eternal regret would be mine at having tasted such sweetness only to lose it. Why, oh why, did not my master tighten his grasp on my neck. I would have died happy with his kiss on my lips.

The ship was moving rapidly by this time, and the laughing groups were gradually dispersing. I watched them with envious eyes from the corner whither I had hidden myself.

"Why, little Beylo," said a voice near me.

Turning, I saw Sido, graver and older looking, but still the youth whom I had tended on the Island of Darkness.

"Sido, Sido!" I cried, grasping his hands. "He is saved, Zarma is saved. Oh, Sido—!"

He saw my agitation, and drew me to him affectionately.

"Come with me, little comrade," he said. "I will show you to your apartment so that you can rest."

He led me toward the stairs as he spoke.

"I have just met Zarma and Lady Damia—" he paused on her name, even as she had done when speaking of him.

"He told me how nobly you had aided him, of your daring venture in the costume you wear to the Palace; of your wound. He is seeking you, why



## A King of Mars

did you hide yourself away?"

I did not answer, so he continued lightly, telling all that had befallen him after he had left the prisons with Osza and the captain.

"We went to the Temple of the Oracle," he said. "For there we were on sacred ground. We remained hidden for some hours, and left garbed as priests, and contrived to escape from the city. We reached our King's hiding-place in safety. I did not know until later that the High Priest had himself left Cerva."

"I sent for him to aid us as you told me, but he was absent," I said.

"We did not know, for no news reached us. At last Râl himself appeared before the King, and when I saw him I asked for news of you, then it was I knew he had not seen you.

"But why did he go?" I said wearily, pausing for a minute before the door of the apartment which Sido said was mine. "He must have known we would be in great peril after your departure."

"He said he had gone to obtain aid from a most holy Prophet, that he alone could help us."

"That must have been the hermit of the ruined temple," I said.

"The hermit," echoed Sido; "what hermit?"

And then I told him of how we had been saved

## How I Saw the Lady Damia

from the soldiers and of the miracle we had witnessed. As he listened a great awe was visible on the boy's face, and turning he left me.

## CHAPTER XXX

### HOW MYSTA'S SISTER WAS AVENGED

I found Mysta in the room reserved for my use, and she insisted upon serving me. I was so utterly weary that I put myself into her hands without a word. She was filled with joy at the happiness that had come to her, and spoke incessantly of young Osza's love and the wonder of it.

"But you know what it is, Beylo," she said. "Lord Zarma was half mad with grief when he discovered you had left the prison. He berated those who guarded the doors, and vowed he would punish them if evil befell you. Ah, Beylo, true and noble he is above all others—except one—" she smiled as she spoke. "How happy you must be how happy——"

"Oh, yes," I answered wearily; "I am happy."

Mysta was evidently puzzled at my tone, for she suddenly knelt and placed her arms about me.

## How Mysta's Sister was Avenged

"What is it?" she asked, "what is troubling you, dear friend?"

I stroked her cheek and tried to smile at her.

"What indeed should trouble me, silly one?" I asked, half bantering; "I am tired, that is all. Have I not everything in the world to cause me joy?"

"Aye," she said musingly; "indeed you have all that life has to offer, for you love and are loved." She paused and looked at me wistfully, evidently hurt that I did not confide my trouble to her.

I lay on the couch, wrapped in a long loose robe, and stretching forth my hand, I touched her hair caressingly.

"Will you not leave me for a space?" I asked; "I think I could sleep."

"Are you not coming to the banqueting hall?"

I shook my head.

"No, Mysta," I said. "I am too weary to move, nor can I eat. All I desire is silence."

"But a surgeon must attend to your wound," she objected. "I will send some one to you."

"Oh, leave me, leave me," I cried in desperation and turned my head on my pillow, closing my eyes to hide the rising tears.

She said no more, and lying with closed eyes I

## A King of Mars

thought she had gone, as I heard the door softly opened.

"Beylo, Beylo," said the grave voice I loved so well. "What is it?"

Looking up through tears, I saw lord Zarma bending over me.

"Nothing, lord," I faltered, drying my eyes hastily and trying to compose myself.

"Mysta came to me and said you appeared suffering and so weary, so very weary. Poor little one, weary you must be indeed, but you are troubled; will you not tell me what it is?"

I was mute and stared up into his face, but my thoughts cried out to him: "Zarma, Zarma, is your love but a passing whim? Why then did you speak to me? Better to have left me as I was, better never to have spoken."

He could not read my mind as once he had done, for looking at me for a minute or so, he sighed, and very gently began to remove the bandage from my wound, in spite of my remonstrances.

He re-dressed it in silence, and when he had finished sat on a low chair by my side.

"Beylo," he said; "did you notice the Lady Damia?"

"Aye, master," I answered.

"Call me not that," he rejoined quickly. "I

## How Mysta's Sister was Avenged

am no longer your master."

I bit my lip, not daring to speak for fear of weeping.

"Is she not beautiful?" he asked after a pause.

I nodded.

"Know you who she is?"

"Yes," I answered in a low voice. "She is wife to the Governor of Ku-Yâh."

"The Governor of Ku-Yâh died before I left King Amklu's court," answered Zarma; "did you not hear me call myself the Governor of his province, aye and see the ring and bracelet that I still wear?" and he stretched forth his hand for me to see.

I raised myself on my elbow and looked wonderingly at them.

"Then, lord, you are in truth Governor of Ku-Yâh, even as you told Anayra?"

"Did you doubt it?" he asked in surprise; "did you not know that it was to confer that honour upon me that our King called me to Cerva?"

I shook my head.

"No, lord," I said. "I knew it not."

"How did you think I obtained these badges?" he asked, touching the ring and bracelet.

"I wondered how they had come to be in your

## A King of Mars

possession," I answered confusedly.

"Did you not know that I was returning to Valâh to name a vice-Governor to rule in my place?"

I shook my head again helplessly. My lord smiled, noting my surprise, then relapsed into gravity.

"The Governor of Ku-Yâh died, as I have said, and his wife, the Lady Damia, came to Cerva soon after our departure from thence. When Osza brought the news concerning Anayra's intention of invading the capital, the Lady Damia accompanied the King to his hiding-place, where she has remained ever since. You have heard, of course, that nothing was known of our plight?"

"Yes," I said; "and that accounts for no one coming to our aid. I cannot understand lord Râl leaving Cerva when he did, just at the time when we were in the most danger."

Did you not know that he went to ask help of a most holy Prophet?" asked my master. "For the Oracle had commanded him to do so."

"If such a wonderful and holy man exists, he should have come to our aid," I cried hotly. "Why should he allow such evilness to continue, if indeed he had the power to prevent it?"

My lord looked at me and smiled gravely, even

## How Mysta's Sister was Avenged

as one does at a child who has said or done some foolish thing.

"Little Beylo," he said; "always questioning the reason for this or that occurrence that you cannot understand."

"But—" I commenced, flushing at his smiling rebuke.

A sudden faint cry, coming to us from across the water, caused Zarma to spring to his feet, cutting short my intended criticism of the Prophet's conduct. At the same time I felt the ship slow down and finally stop altogether.

My master had pulled the curtain aside from the window, and stood looking out.

"What is it?" I asked.

"We are not far from the shore," he answered. "Just opposite the promontory known as 'the Scarlet Mount.' I can see nothing, the shore seems deserted."

I rose and joined him.

We were as he said, quite near the coast. I could hear the sound of the waves on the beach, and distinguish the line of white foam even in the light of fading day. The point of land opposite us was one blaze of red, owing to a dense growth of the vivid scarlet flower that my lord Zarma loved.



## A King of Mars

But there was no sign of life. Presently I saw one of the small boats being rowed towards land.

"There must be some one requiring help," I said. "Some fugitive, perhaps. What more can have occurred in Cerva?"

My master made no reply, and together we watched the boat rapidly approaching the shore.

Several of the crew sprang lightly up the steep sand bank and reappeared a few minutes later supporting three figures. They were soon in the boat, which was pushed off and headed for the ship.

Although I strained my eyes, I could not see whether the fugitives were men or women, nor yet whether they were injured. They lay back, apparently too exhausted to speak or move, that much I could see.

Presently the boat came alongside, and the occupants were being helped on board.

I could hear the sound of many voices talking together, and felt the ship vibrate as it was once more set in motion.

There was an excited murmur, rising and falling, and my lord went to the door.

Suddenly there came the sound of someone running in the passage without, and Myster

## How Mysta's Sister was Avenged

appeared in the doorway, her face white, her eyes blazing excitedly.

"The Traitor is dead!" she cried hoarsely, "my sister is avenged!"

"Dead," I echoed, "dead!"

She nodded.

"Aye, dead, dead!" she said, throwing her hands above her in a kind of frenzy. "Oh, Great Spirit, I thank thee!"

My lord laid his hand on her arm and led her into the room.

"How know you this?" he asked.

"Yämel has just brought the news," answered the girl, speaking more calmly.

I stared at her, thinking she raved.

"Yämel! Why he and the other two remained in Cerva," I said.

"Indeed no," answered Mysta. "They became separated from us in the crowd, but meeting lord Râl, he told them whither we had gone, and without waiting for more they left the city, hurrying in the direction of the Scarlet Mount, desiring to be the first to carry the news to our lord the King. They arrived in time, but are so exhausted they can scarcely speak."

At that moment a slave girl knocked at the door.

## A King of Mars

Upon my bidding her to enter, she bowed and said :

“The Lady Damia requires your presence, my lord.”

“Tell the Lady I will be with her soon,” answered Zarma.

“Beylo,” he added, turning to me. “You will rest quietly now and presently I will return. Perhaps I will have some news for you, for the Lady Damia has promised to answer a question I asked her a short time ago—and a great deal of happiness depends on what her answer will be, both to herself and to me.”

He paused to throw a soft covering over me, and straightened my pillow.

“Rest gently,” he said, “so as to be able to greet your master the King upon the morrow.”

“Thank you, lord,” I gasped, and when he had gone, I turned and buried my face deep in the pillow his dear hand had touched.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### VISAYA, THE PROPHET

Mysta came timidly to my side.

"Oh, Beylo, Beylo," she said. "I did not know, how indeed could I guess? No wonder you grieve, but how I must have hurt you."

I did not answer, and she began smoothing my hair, speaking gently to me as she did so.

"You are so brave, you will try to put this from you. I could not do it, but you can. Even will you be able to greet the Lady Damia, aye, and rejoice with her—"

"Ah, forbear," I cried in a strangled voice.

She paused a moment, but continued nevertheless.

"Do not yet despair, mayhap we are mistaken. My lord Zarma loved you, of that I am sure; if his troth was plighted, why then did he speak to you as he did?"

"Mysta," I cried, "enough! My lord Zarma

## A King of Mars

will do what is best, of that I am sure. Who are we to criticise him? Nothing can take the memory of his kiss from me, nothing—in time I will forget, but for the moment I suffer—” My voice broke, but I struggled on. “Whatever my lord does is right, remember that, Mysta.”

She came forward and kissed me and the tears stood in her eyes as she did so. Nor did she try to stay me when I went towards the door. I felt suffocating and wanted to be alone under the sky.

In the passage I met Jeva. He no longer wore the uniform of Anayra’s Guard, but was dressed as befitted his rank. He paused an instant when he saw me, then hurried forward.

“Why, Lady,” he cried; “I did not know you. How pale you are; how is your wound, are you in pain?”

I forced a smile with stiff lips.

“I am weary of my apartment,” I said, “and fain would be in the open air—that is if I can escape observation, for I am not in a condition to meet anyone.”

“The deck is deserted,” he replied, “come.”

And taking my arm he led me up the broad stairs and on to a raised portion of the forward deck.

I drew a long breath, for I could not fail to respond to the beauty of my surroundings, despite my

## Visaya, the Prophet

misery. I found myself in a veritable garden, with cunningly devised paths between banks of flowers and blossoming shrubs. Indeed, were it not for the water around us and the shore slipping by so quickly, I could almost have thought myself in a portion of the King's own garden in Cerva. For this white floating palace was one of the King's pleasure ships, not one of the huge mercantile vessels used for crossing the Great Sea.

Jeva guided me to a bench heaped high with cushions, upon which I sank with scarcely a word of thanks. A wild flowering vine had twined itself above and around the bench, making a perfect bower. Near by a tiny fountain threw a perfumed spray into a marble basin. Almost I could imagine that I heard the twittering of birds.

The voice of the sailors at work on the deck beneath us came softly to our ears. But for that and the murmuring sea, it was utterly still.

I lay quiet, mercifully without thought, and had almost forgotten my companion's presence, when he broke the silence.

"Lady," he said, "you have doubtless heard the news?"

I roused myself with an effort.

"Yes, that the Traitor is dead—peace to his soul.

## A King of Mars

“Amen!” said Jeva; “heard you how he died?”

I shook my head.

“Those of the rioters who had surrounded the Palace were at last routed by the soldiers, so Yämel says, for the rebels’ captain did not wish to lead his men into unnecessary danger. But nevertheless, many were wounded, and there were some who continued to fight and struggle together when lord Râl entered Cerva. He went amongst them, begging them to desist, crying out against them, repeating the words of the law and the teachings, until at last the combatants paused in their fighting to listen. It was not difficult to gain their attention after that. Soon he was the centre of a huge crowd composed of rebels and soldiers alike. He spoke of our Wise King, and of Mars under his rule, then he showed the evil that Anayra had done, and how if he continued in the manner in which he had commenced his reign, only great and lasting wickedness would result, and much more in the same vein. Before long a murmur ran through the mass of beings, until a general cry of ‘down with the Traitor!’ was heard. Even Anayra heard it from his apartment, and asked the meaning of it.

“No one dared to tell him—you know that he had scarcely a friend among them all. Then suddenly the cry was repeated in the Palace itself, and before

## Visaya, the Prophet

anything could be done to prevent it, a band of slaves rushed up the Grand Stairs. Anayra was in a fury fearful to see, and gave orders to kill the slaves after having tormented them, but as no one moved to carry out his commands, he flung himself from his couch, and just as the foremost slave entered the Royal apartment, he threw up his hands with a hoarse cry and fell dead. As soon as the news got abroad, with one accord the people cried, 'long live Amklu!'

"The wounded men were carried to the hospitals, and a rush was made to destroy the horrible slaughter-houses, for as you know, the Traitor had revived the ancient habit of eating the flesh of animals. Others started to restore the long distance transmitters. They worked with a will, soldier and rebel side by side, so that when our King returns to his own, he will find Cerva as he left it."

"I am indeed glad," I said when he paused, and again we were silent.

The young man had seated himself at my feet and was idly pulling a flower to pieces.

Presently he looked up.

"Lady," he said in a low voice, "I have something to say; forgive me if I am presumptuous."

"What is it?" I asked, smiling at his earnestness.



## A King of Mars

Jeva did not seem to know how to proceed, and under my eyes he flushed.

"I love you," he blurted, then as I held up my hand to stop him, rose to his knees and seized my hand.

"No, Lady, let me speak I beg. It is no idle passing fancy, for long I have watched you, admired you, aye, and loved you. How often have I paused before your door hoping to hear some sound from within. And yet I knew it was wrong. But when I learned this day that you are free—oh, you are immeasurably above me, I know it, but—"

"Jeva," I said softly, breaking in upon him. "You must not, indeed you must not. Remember I am only a handmaiden."

"I care not!" he cried hotly.

"I know it, Jeva. But my heart is not free, and therefore I am indeed sorry for you, for I know what it means to love in vain—" Despite myself my voice faltered.

"Oh, Lady," cried the youth; "I did not know, forgive me for having spoken. I would not add to your sorrow. Will you allow me to stand your true friend?"

"You are generous," I said, pressing his hand. "Yes, we shall always be friends and comrades."

## Visaya, the Prophet

Think of me as I was this morning, as Raimo, your comrade-at-arms."

I tried to laugh, but could not, and the young man with great delicacy withdrew, without appearing to notice my agitation. As he left I asked him to give orders that the part of the ship where I was might not be illuminated at the approach of night.

So I lay there alone, thinking of many things, watching the sun disappear behind the low coast line, watching the stars come out one by one, doing all in my power to rouse myself from my misery.

From time to time ripples of light-hearted laughter and music would float up to me through the darkness, and I found myself wondering what *they* were doing. A heavy sigh from somewhere near caused me to start. I turned my head, and could just distinguish a dark figure leaning against the railing, someone in as heavy a mood as myself and who had come hither to escape the gay company below. I wondered which one of the nobles and ladies was so heart-sick as to require solitude. I had thought to be the only sorrowful one on the ship; apparently I was mistaken.

Again a deep sigh, almost a groan, came to my ears. Surely it was not right for me to be witness to another's hidden grief, and so I moved restlessly. At the rustling sound the figure turned quickly.

## A King of Mars

"I crave your pardon, I thought I was alone——"

"Sido!" I cried.

"Why, Beylo," he answered in surprise. "What are you doing here in the dark?"

"I grew weary of my apartment, and so I came hither," I said as lightly as I could. "But what are you doing, Sido?"

He did not answer, but came toward me, carefully feeling his way.

When he reached my bench, he seated himself on the ground, even as Jeva had done.

"Beylo, why do you grieve?" he asked softly.

"Sido, why are you unhappy?" I retorted.

He did not answer for a minute or so, but leaning his head against the bench, remained staring straight before him, until I touched his hair lightly. He roused at that and turned to me.

"Do you remember what I told you one day on the Island of Darkness?" he asked abruptly.

"Of your so-called sin?" I asked. "Yes, of course I remember, nor could I understand why you were banished for so little."

"I was not banished," he said harshly; "I went of my own accord, or rather at the advice of my old master, the Prophet of whom I have told you—I did it hoping to clear my soul, for I sinned more than another would have done in my place, for

## Visaya, the Prophet

I had lived a holy life and studied the Higher Mysteries, therefore what would not be sin for others is sin for me."

"But that is not just," I cried.

"It is more than just," he answered.

"But I do not understand why you should be unhappy, for you have regained your freedom."

"But not my peace," he rejoined. "Oh, Beylo, you know, surely you must have seen—"

"The Lady Damia?" I asked. "Indeed I have known it this long time, for you murmured her name when you were hurt, you held my hand and called me Damia. But why should you torment yourself? She is free, there is nothing either in the law or the teachings forbidding us to re-marry if we feel so inclined' when we are widowed. Therefore, go to her, and——"

I stopped short, remembering Zarma's words when he left me.

"Ah," said the youth: "you pause, for you at last realise how impossible it is for me to go to her until I am free of my sin."

"Oh," I cried impatiently; "you talk as though you had done something evil, committed murder at the very least. Where is your sin, as you call it, now that she is free?"

"You do not understand," said the boy wearily.

## A King of Mars

"Why do you not go to the hermit of the ruined temple for advice? He is a good and holy man, able to perform miracles; he must be somewhere on the ship."

"So he is, in the chapel."

"Then go to him," I cried.

"I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because," he said slowly; "the hermit, as you call him is none other than my master, the holy Prophet with whom I studied."

"How do you know, since you have not seen him?" I asked.

"Because none other is capable of performing the miracle you witnessed."

"Then all the more reason why you should go to him for help," I said. "What is his name?"

"Visaya, Prophet and Servant of the Most High."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### HOW MY LORD BROUGHT LIFE TO ME

I looked at him in amazement, trying to see his face.

"Are you jesting?" I asked.

"Does one jest when speaking of something holy?"

"But the Prophet Visaya!" I exclaimed. "How is it possible. Why, I thought he had gone to the Place of Light long ago."

"You thought he had died?" asked Sido. "Yes, that was the common supposition."

"But where has he been these many years? Often have I been told of his good deeds of his holy life, and always he is spoken of as one dead."

"And yet he lives, as you have seen," persisted the youth. "Have you never heard speak of one who went from city to city seeking those who were troubled in spirit? Ask the three men whom you knew on the Island of Darkness, who it was that

## A King of Mars

came from time to time to console and teach those who were banished. The happy and the pure knew him not, for they required no help. Only now when Anayra has caused such evilness to arise has he come among us once again. The Traitor himself was approached by the Prophet, but he repulsed the holy man, and continued on the road he had chosen."

"But," I exclaimed; "if he has such power, why did he allow the evil to arise?"

"He is not omnipotent," said Sido. "He can only guide and advise."

"Why do you not go to him?" I asked after a pause; "go to him and asked his advice."

"I am ashamed," he answered in a low voice. "How can I tell him that I failed in the test, how can I go to him and say that waking or sleeping her image is ever before me, aye, even when in the Black Country, when it was a sin to think of her, I loved her. How can I tell my master this?"

I was silent, for I knew it was impossible to convince him, we did not look at the subject in the same light.

This youth with the faculty of foretelling events, brought up as a mystic, imbued with holy teachings, had fallen at his first temptation, for so he

## How my Lord brought Life to Me

deemed it. Whereas I considered that he had but followed the humanity in him, nor had he sinned in loving the Lady Damia. I felt sure that he had not spoken of his love to her, and doubtless upon discovering it, he had fled in horror. I could imagine the boy seeking out the Prophet and pouring forth the tale of his spiritual wrongdoing, and then going to the dreary Land of the Banished in the hope of finding forgetfulness.

Poor Sido !

Thinking of what his grief would be later, when he knew that which I had learned so short a time before, brought my own sorrow before me more plainly than ever, and I rose unsteadily to my feet.

"Sido," I said ; "will the holy Prophet see me if I go to him ? I would find peace, and I could ; I, too, am most unhappy——" my voice broke, so that I could say no more.

Instantly he was all sympathy, and rising hurriedly took my hand.

"What is it, Beylo ?" he asked tenderly. "Will you not tell me your grief ? Are we not friends, almost like brother and sister ? Dear heart, confide in me that I may help you."

"Oh, Sido, I cannot," I cried with a sob.

"Why not ?" he asked. "Mayhap I can guess," he added, drawing me to him. "You love lord



## A King of Mars

Zarma," he whispered; "that I have known for long, but why this grief?"

"Because," I faltered, then hesitated, knowing that my next words would cause him bitter pain.

"Because—? Why? He loves you, and if he has not yet spoken—"

"Ah, do not!" I cried. "Sido, I too thought he loved me. I thought so until I saw him with the Lady Damia and heard him say—"

I felt the youth start violently, and stopped short.

"Heard him say what?" he demanded.

"Nothing," I rejoined hurriedly; "I did not mean to speak."

"You have gone too far to draw back now," he said, in a quiet tone, but I could feel him trembling and his hands were like ice in my grasp.

"You must speak, I have a right to know."

So I told him of Zarma's words when he left me to seek the Lady Damia.

"He could only mean one thing, Sido," I wailed, clinging to him.

He put me gently from him.

"Poor child," he said tenderly; "I am sure there is a mistake somewhere; I will seek out lord Zarma—"

"No!" I cried, clutching at him. "Do not, I beg."

## How my Lord brought Life to Me

"I must, for my own peace as well as for yours," he said, with a quaver in his voice that went to my heart. And with that he left me.

The moon had risen, and I could see the youth's white-clad figure as he made his way to the steps.

Left alone I remained staring up at the heavens; then as a strong shudder swept over me, I roused myself.

I looked down at the brilliantly lighted deck below. Before long it would be invaded by the gay laughing company. I felt I could not bear to see my lord's devotion to the lady Damia—at least not yet. And the thought of my apartment caused me to shudder. Alas, no solace from grief was to be found there. Where, indeed, could I find peace? I no longer felt inclined to seek out the Prophet, I shrank from speaking of my trouble to one so far above me. How trivial it would appear to him.

Hearing voices I shrank back, then went through the flowering paths to the prow. There I was hidden from observation. I folded my arms on the railing and looked down at the silvery sea. How beautiful it was under the light of the moon. The scent of the flowers rose like incense around me. Suddenly I sickened at the sight of so much beauty. I looked at the coast, at the quiet sea and brilliant sky. A breathless calm everywhere, save in my

## A King of Mars

own soul. Would the Great Spirit forgive were I to cast the gift of Life from me? I could not suffer more than I suffered now——

A bench stood near by, I pushed it close to the railing and climbed upon it.

Standing thus it needed but a quick outward spring, and then——

Would the splash be heard? At all costs I must not be rescued. Again the sound of music was wafted over the sea. Now was the time.

I placed one foot on the railing as though on a step.

I did not say a prayer, I knew I was unworthy; so only murmuring my lord's name, I poised myself for the fatal spring.

Quick footsteps sounded near by; I turned my head and saw a figure hurrying toward me.

I had forgot that the moon was shining directly on my white robes. Oh, why had I not been left alone for a moment or two?

I looked longingly at the cool ripples; I still could do it, and I drew myself up.

And then I felt myself clasped close, heard my master's voice, felt his breath on my cheek——

With a choking cry I struggled to free myself.

“Oh, my lord, release me,” I sobbed.

“What is it, beloved?” he whispered, gathering

## How my Lord brought Life to Me

me to him even as he had done that morning.

"Did you not know you were in danger? If I had lost you, ah, if I had lost you!"

He carried me to the bench I had left and laid me gently among the pillows, then knelt with one arm under my head.

"Dear heart, what is troubling you?"

I did not answer, and my thoughts surged madly.

"Will you not tell me? I went to seek the Lady Damia—" I strove to rise, but he held me gently but firmly, so that I could not move.

"Nay, but listen," he continued. "She gave me the answer I so desired, which has made me happy, and you too will rejoice."

I think I cried out at that, for he soothed me tenderly; then scrutinized my face as well as he could in the moonlight.

"Can it be that you love Sido in spite of what you told me?" he asked anxiously.

"Love Sido?" I echoed in amazement.

"If you do not, why should the fact of the Lady Damia promising to accept him cause you such grief?" he asked sternly.

"The Lady Damia promising to accept Sido!" I gasped

"Why else did I seek her out? Long ago Sido

## A King of Mars

confided in me, and when I saw her on the ship, I vowed to help the boy in his love if I could, that is why I went to her. Why, sweetest, how you tremble, what is it?" he added in quick alarm.

I fought the weakness that threatened to overpower me.

"Then you do not love her?" I cried.

"I love the Lady Damia? What do you mean?"

"Oh I thought—I thought—," I stammered incoherently, and fell to weeping, whether for joy or weakness I could not say.

My lord waited until I had recovered somewhat, then taking my two hands, bent over me.

"Did you doubt me, beloved?" he asked gently.

I could not answer, but smiled tremulously.

"Was your grief for that reason?" he asked, his voice quivering.

His grasp tightened on my hands, and he bent still lower for my answer.

"I was foolish, lord," I said faintly. "I thought your troth was plighted to the Lady Damia, and oh, I suffered—"

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I dared not—but I called to you, cried out to you in my thoughts."

"I can no longer read your mind," he said.

"Not since I first began to love you."

## How my Lord brought Life to Me

He bent and kissed me with sudden passion.

"When I found you had left the prison I was like a madman," he said, his voice vibrating.

"I knocked at your door without being answered, and at last bade Mysta enter your cell. Her cry caused me to follow—I found your hair—" He paused and drew from his breast the locks I had cut off.

"Throw them away, lord," I cried, "for now you have me."

He smiled, and replaced the hair in his tunic.

"What were you doing with one foot on the railing?" he asked.

"My lord," I faltered, "I was in such pain, that I—"

"No, no!" he cried; "not that! Nor that!"

Voices near by roused us.

Without rising my lord turned his head.

"Who is there?" he called.

"Oh, lord Zarma," cried Sido joyfully.

He came to us leading the Lady Damia by the hand, and as they stood thus side by side, radiantly happy, the memory of the dream I had had on the Island of Darkness came back to me.

"She loves me," exclaimed Sido; "she loves me, lord, think of it! And my joy is owing to you,

## A King of Mars

for had you not given me the courage to seek her out, I should never have known."

"Ah yes, but you would," answered Damia smilingly; "for when lord Zarma told me that you loved me but dared not speak, I vowed to tell you myself at the risk of being thought—" She broke off with a little laugh.

"Oh, Sido, why did you not tell me before?" she asked reproachfully; "you left Ku-Yâh suddenly, one night, without a word. Why did you not tell me before of your love?"

"How could I?" asked the boy, "how could I when—?"

"Did you fear my lord's anger? He knew, for I had told him. Think you he was angry? Not so; he stroked my cheek as I knelt before him.

"'Dear one,' he said, 'Love is a precious gift. You are doubly blessed, for you have my love as well as this youth's. Should I go to the Place of Light (if I prove worthy), while you are still young, fear not to speak of your love. He will return.' And when he lay dying, he again called me to him. 'Remember what I have said,' he whispered; then taking my hands in his, he kissed me once and so left me."

The tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke, and her lips quivered pitifully.

## How my Lord brought Life to Me

"My dear lord," she whispered, looking up to the starry heavens; "my dear lord."

Sido put his arms about her, and she turned and hid her face in his breast.

Suddenly I cried out, for there before me, standing near the fountain, stood the hermit, and I had not heard him approach.

Sido turned hurriedly and seeing the holy man, went towards him.

Kneeling, he stretched forth imploring hands.

"Master, I have failed," he said. "I have tried to do my work well, and have suffered and toiled—yet have I failed, for oh, my Father, I confess my fault. Damia reigns still in my soul."

The Lady went forward and knelt beside him.

"If he deserves further punishment and penance, then will I go with him," she whispered.

The Prophet raised them both very tenderly.

"Children," he said, "you have suffered, therefore whatever sin there was has been washed away. You, Sido, my beloved disciple, fled to the Land of Darkness to escape temptation—therein lies your fault. You should have remained and gone bravely to Damia's lord, and told him all, even as she did. But you are forgiven. Cherish one another—to you also I say this, Zarma and Beylo:



## A King of Mars . . . . .

“Remember the law and the teachings.

“Son Sido, I bid you farewell—mayhap you will find as much work to do in your new wedded life as I in my solitude. You have great gifts; use them well.”

Then laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, he led him to us.

“Lord Zarma, I give you back your brother.”

“His brother!” I cried in astonishment.

“Aye,” cried my lord, drawing the youth to him. “Mine own brother, from whom I parted unwillingly enough, although I knew he was going into the keeping of one better able to care for him than was I.”

I listened in utter bewilderment, and many things came back to me. The look of longing that I oftentimes saw on my master's face when he turned to speak to Sido; his grief when the youth was hurt, the gentleness with which he tended him when he lay injured. And then my lord's words upon arriving in Valâh, ‘This is my brother.’

“My brother!” faltered Sido, looking up into Zarma's face.

My lord kissed him on the brow.

“Didst not know me, nor remember me during all the time we were together?” he asked wistfully.

## How my Lord brought Life to Me

"I was so very young when I left our home," answered Sido, "that although I knew I had a brother, by degrees I forgot him. I could no longer recall his face."

"Did you not remember my name," asked my master, with a smile.

"Dear brother, what did I call you when I was a child?"

My lord thought a moment and then laughed.

"I remember now," he said, "you could not pronounce my name, and so you called me 'Za'—"

"And by that name alone I remembered you," interrupted Sido.

"I did not associate Zarma the King's friend, with the brother I so dimly remembered, but whom I always loved," and he clasped my dear lord's hands in his.

I looked at them both, my heart too full for words. The great blessing of love had come to me, and I had gained a brother as well. Truly I had every reason to be happy.

The Prophet smiled gravely and lifted his hand in benediction.

"Cherish one another," he said again and left us, passing tall and white-clad through the flowers.

. . . . .  
And after a time Sido and Damia withdrew,

## A King of Mars

leaving my lord and I together. With thoughts too deep for words we remained under the stars, my love and I, until we saw, in the morning light, the grassy slopes of the King's hiding-place, and Amklu the Wise descending to meet us with outstretched welcoming hands.

THE END

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