

THE STRANGE STORY OF AHRINZIMAN

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SECOND EDITION

CHICAGO
THE PROGRESSIVE THINKER PUBLISHING CO.
1908

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THE VISION IN THE DESERT.

THE STORY OF AHRINZIMAN

TOLD BY HIMSELF

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of Ahrinziman, the Persian — what life hath taught him of the Soul; life lived on Earth and life of ages in the Abyss and in the Heavens of the Beyond.

To each one comes life's lessons in different form. Let him that would learn the meaning of this tale attend to these words that he may the better understand, and let him that is but the idle hearer of a story pass them by.

He who would write truly the history of any Soul must take into account the prenatal conditions, that is, those which have preceded its conception into mortal form.

A Soul germ is but an incomplete unit until it touches the Plane of Earth Life, because until then it is still wanting in one, at least, of the elements which go to form the Perfect Whole. And although at the death of the earthly body the Soul would appear to cast off entirely its purely earthly attributes with the earthly shell, which, like the husk of the wheat, has concealed the grain within, yet it does not do so. From every one of the lower faculties it has retained the Spiritual germ, and these germs of the grosser propensities may be called, for lack of a better term (there being no word in the English language which exactly expresses this element, and this element only, in the Soul), the "Animal Soul," since they are typified in Man's lower, or animal, propensities and are the "Soul" elements of these propensities. Therefore, the idea which has prevailed among many religious faiths, that at death there is a complete severance between the Animal Soul and the higher Spiritual faculties, is an error as absurd as it is pernicious, because men are thereby led to give undue prominence to the purely intellectual and moral faculties and to cramp and neglect the due, proper, and judicious develop-

ment and regulation of the faculties of this Animal Soul, which is truly not only an immortal part of the Soul itself, but quite as needful as any other to its complete evolution.

The Animal Soul contains all those elements which give force to the character. Strength to will and to act with decision. Power to command and to contend. Perseverance to struggle and battle with the trials of the Earth life here and with the contending forces of the Spiritual World hereafter. All the elements which go to make Man great in a physical as well as moral sense are born of the passions of this Animal Soul, and no one ever emerged from the condition of the Dreamer and Visionary into the active agent for the fulfillment of his dreams unless he cultivated the powers of his Animal Soul as fully as those of his moral and intellectual ones.

The love of conquest, the thirst for power from purely selfish and greedy motives, becomes in the properly developed Spirit of the higher spheres the strength by which he protects his weaker brethren, and by which he contends with the Powers of Evil to overthrow them—a strength and force of will which are developed first in the rapacious conflicts of the Animal Soul during the life of Earth and of the lower spheres.

From the equal development of all three of man's Moral, Intellectual, and Physical attributes are born those seeds which spring up into the beautiful flowers of a truly Spiritual character.

All the lower propensities of Man's Soul have each their spiritual seed, and although when unduly developed and unequally balanced by the development of Man's higher nature and uncontrolled by his moral and intellectual powers these lower propensities bring suffering and destruction on all sides, yet their very excess of development creates a force of character which (when the higher attributes become equally developed and in their turn the controlling powers of Man's Soul) will send the Soul upwards with a velocity and a strength of flight equal to that with which the evil propensities dragged it down, and these natures will possess a grandeur of character, a power and breadth of thought, which, when combined with the perfections of the higher Soul enable their possessors to become rulers in the Spiritual World.

Our teachings are that the Soul, in its passage downwards from the central source of life, travels through all the intermediate

spheres by a series of what may be termed "Births," since it clothes itself in each sphere with something appertaining to that sphere which is requisite to the completion of its individuality, and when it touches the Earth sphere, and comes in contact with the material organisms of its mortal parents, it obtains the last elements necessary to form the Perfect Whole. At this stage it has completed the first half of its pilgrimage and assumed all those materials from which it is to evolve an individual consciousness for itself, and becomes at the moment of its final birth into Earth life a responsible being, to reap the reward or suffer the penalties of its own actions.

From this stage (the Earth life) it proceeds upwards through a series of Deaths; *i. e.*, castings off of the grosser husks from which it has extracted the Spiritual germs (which husks are no longer needful or useful to the Soul). There are some who object to the word "Death" as signifying to the ordinary mind a condition of decay. Very good; let them, by all means, if they prefer it, say that the Soul returns through the second half of the cycle of its progress through a succession of re-births; only, let them also remember that the process of Death, or disintegration of the form which the Soul has left (a process not experienced until the Soul has entered the Earth life), is no less essential to its progression. This is because so long as a shell once inhabited by a Soul (be it a mortal, an astral, or an envelop of any of the higher spheres) retains any cohesion in its particles, so long will it act as a weight, retarding the Soul's progress to a higher sphere; the ties between a Soul and its envelop remaining in a greater or less degree as long as the envelop retains any impression of the Soul's individuality.

The sooner, then, that the Soul's envelop is disintegrated and dispersed into the elements of the sphere in which it was formed, the sooner will the Soul be free from all ties to it, and able to rise into the higher sphere for which it has become fit. Hence the reason that Fire, the most powerful and purifying disperser of atoms, was used by the Ancients of my country and of others to hasten the process of Death, which is disintegration. Hence the reason that the earlier Fire-worshippers, as they have erroneously been called, paid homage to the Divine Fire, or Source of Life, which the Sun and earthly fire were thought to symbolize. Heat is life; cold is death; and it is

the antagonism between them which makes fire so valuable an agent in dispersing the dead elements of a body which the Soul has ceased to animate.

The Soul then at birth passes into matter and the full measure of its descent being thus accomplished, it arises from it as a glorious resurrection, ascending stage by stage until the full cycle of its progression being completed, it assumes a God-like state, subordinate only to that of the Supreme. But so great, so vast, so far-extending, is the limit of the orbit of the Soul's progress, that it is impossible, even in thought, to follow it from the first departure from the sphere of the Divine till its return to it again. Neither can we know or even guess at the possible future of the Soul which has attained to the God-like condition, and the first cycle of whose development has thus been accomplished. So far we can see, and no farther, but what we do see gives us an earnest of our hope that as we climb to each mountain-top of knowledge a fresh Land of Promise shall lie open before our eyes.

Upon the threshold of life stand two Angels — the Angels of the Light and of the Dark Spheres — and it is their task to observe into which sphere the Star of the Soul that has just been born ascends. These two Angels are represented as weaving eternally the light and dark threads to produce the golden or the somber texture that is to prevail in the web of the Soul's existence, the happy or sorrowful days of its life. And as a man leads a moral or an immoral life, so will he draw down to him from the light or the dark spheres good or evil, light or dark qualities with which to endow the Soul which shall be transmitted into life through him, and thus will his children be in affinity with the light or dark spheres, and so will the stars of those spheres rule or control their destinies and be the dominating influence in shaping their lives.

These two spheres of light and dark qualities exist eternally because they are the antithesis of one another, the poising scales which keep the balance of progress even and hold up each other by the equality of their power, causing between them that friction which prevents stagnation, the true death of progress, and resembling (the light and the dark, the good and the evil) two great millstones which, grinding on eternally, free the Soul from the rough rocks of ignorance and the coarse dross of purely material desires.

To the student of the Spiritual firmament these two spheres appear to revolve round two mighty stars — the star of each typifying by its color the distinction between the qualities bestowed by each — while another, a third star with its spheres, seems to hover ever between them, reflecting in its rays a blending of color drawn from the higher qualities evolved from the influence of both.

In the spheres of the Star of pure unsullied light are found the dwelling places of those Souls who have been uncontaminated by any earthly sin. They have but touched upon the borders of Earth life, and so have attained conscious existence only to pass onward. They have not known Earth life save for a brief period during which mortality has clothed their Souls, but in which their consciousness has been too slight to enable them to learn any of Earth's lessons. They are free from sin because they have never felt temptation. Their garments are unsullied by the mire of life because they have never felt the cravings of their animal Soul for those things through which it derives its nourishment. In them the Animal Soul entirely slumbers; the strength and power with which its development endows the Soul who has conquered its temptations and made it subject to the higher self is not theirs, for they have never shared in life's conflicts, and the fierce fires of passion have never been kindled in their hearts.

In the pure white and silver rays of the Star which dominates this sphere there are found no traces of any color, no shadow of a darker, deeper tint, no warmth, no glow of passion: all is pure and perfect in its purity as the driven snow, and as cold, for those whom no earthly passion has ever sullied live in a land of dazzling silver light where there is no sun; no fire has ever warmed them, no shadow darkened their lives, no regrets from their own lives or from the lives of others have saddened or touched them; no green moss of hallowed memories hides their sorrowful or sinful past, as moss and ivy cling to and cover up the broken stones of an earthly ruin, veiling its ragged fissures with a tender touch, and hiding its marred and broken walls and its disfigured beauties. No flowers but the snow white flowers of purity and the pale blue and silver blossoms of truth bloom in the lands of the snow white spheres: all is pale and colorless like the lives of its Angels and its Saints. Those who live here cannot enter into man's joys and sorrows, his sins

or his triumphs over sins, his hopes and ambitions, his disappointments, his anguish and despair, for they have felt none of these things. For them the gates of Paradise are open continually and they can behold the fair things within, but they cannot behold at all the dark gates of Hell. All that is beautiful, all that is pure in Art, in Music, in Literature, in Science, yea, in all Life, lies open before their eyes, and they can read of the beautiful in everything: but of the dark books of sorrow and suffering and sin they cannot read one line, and their sight cannot behold material things save very dimly, for material life has been a sealed book to them.

Thus even in the beauty of their lives there is a want. Perfect as they would seem, their lives are yet incomplete, since one half of their Souls still slumbers, and it is for such as these that reincarnation has been thought an aid, and for such Souls as these the process of assuming the earthly body which has been prepared for them will be different from that of a Soul which has not yet attained a conscious life.

There are others who are sent to learn Earth's lessons by so closely and completely identifying themselves with some Soul of the same sex already incarnate in the flesh, and which is, in all its tastes and aspirations, in closest affinity with their own, that through all its earthly life and trials they may share the same emotions and the same experiences. To make the experience valuable to the disincarnate Soul they must become in all essential respects as one, and share as twins the material development given to them by Mother Earth. Even then the disincarnate Soul will but imperfectly learn its lesson, and the full meaning of sorrow and suffering and trial. It will feel but the *reflected* emotion of its twin Soul, never its fullest and deepest anguish, its warmth of passion, its depths of despair; and therefore it is that many celestial teachers would bid the Soul return to Earth and in its own proper person live the life of Earth.

The sphere of darkness is dominated by a deep Red Star, which glows like the heart of a furnace, surrounded by black and blood tinged rays. In the regions dominated by this Star all appears clouded with a black sulphurous smoke, and all vegetation is withered up by the blasting fires of unrestrained passion and unchecked desires. The dry ashes of burnt-out volcanic lives have buried the blossoms of the Soul beneath their scorching dust, and the withered sticks of what were once

the trees and shrubs of good intentions and good desires stand out like gaunt sentinels to mark where the purer life of the Soul once flourished. The desolation of despair, of crushed and blighted hopes, is shed around on everything. The dark rivers of bitter tears shed by tardy and unavailing regret alone water that sad land, and their scalding streams can never fertilize it, but only add to its dead seas another rolling wave where already there are too many flowing over the sad ruins of the city of the Soul.

Yet in the fierce glowing fires within the heart of the Star a healing balm is found by those who have the fortitude and courage to seek it; a purifying bath, in which the pure gold of the Soul is refined and freed from the alloy of gross and material passions. And from this purifying crucible the Soul shall come forth to rise to the spheres of that glorious third Star which gleams, golden rayed and crystal clear, above both the other Stars, even as the Golden Star is the Crown and Diadem of the heavenly spheres. From this Star dart many rays tinged with all the colors of the rainbow, which sparkle like the jewels in a victor's crown. The crimson rays no longer typify the passions of the Soul, but its tenderness and its love. The blue and white no longer show alone its purity, but its truth and constancy. The soft green denotes its sympathy, the violet its regal power, the Gold its spiritual strength.

The dwellers in the spheres of the Golden Star have all learned the lesson of Earth life. They have all cultivated the sympathies as well as the purity and intellect of their Souls, and none enter its gates who have not learned in their own lives to suffer and be strong that they may sympathize with and strengthen others.

In the complex nature of man and the conditions of his Earth life it is but seldom that we see the distinct characteristics of each of these Stars clearly defined, and as a rule men partake in a greater or less degree of the attributes of both the light and dark spheres. Those who show either class of qualities in an abnormal degree, so that they stand forth as great moral teachers, or as cruel and degraded tyrants, are decidedly the exceptions.

And yet it is the exceptional lives which stand forth for all time from the lives of their fellow men, like pictures painted upon large canvases in broad, strong touches, whose meaning can be read even by the most ignorant, while the delicate minute finish of a miniature, requiring a close inspection and a knowl-

edge of its workmanship to reveal its beauties, is lost upon the world at large.

The minute lives of ordinary men and women are no less useful and beneficial than those of exceptional characters, but they do not serve the same purpose in the lessons afforded by them. It is the lives of those who are great, either in their virtues or in their vices, which mark the progress which the world has made, and serve either as beacons to warn others of the shoals and rocks and quicksands upon which their own lives were wrecked, or as guiding stars to light the Soul upon its Heavenward way.

In this "Story of Ahrinziman" will be found the record of such an exceptional life. In it will be shown, not alone the evils wrought by himself, but those for which others were responsible, the threads of whose lives were interwoven with his own; and also the blossoming into baleful flowers of those seeds of ambition and pride, of passion and intrigue, of revenge and murder, which were sown ere he was born, and which bore such terrible fruits, not alone for him himself to feed upon, but for all those whose hands had sown the seeds and whose actions had nourished them.

In the story of his Earth life will be told how these seeds were sown, and in his experiences in the Spirit World will be shown what fruit was reaped from each seed, and what share of the harvest each Soul whose hands had sown them had to garner into the storehouse of his memory and his life.

THE STORY OF AHRINZIMAN

PART I

PROLOGUE

When El Jazid, King of Persia, returned from a successful campaign against the Greeks, he brought with him a captive maiden of the most surpassing beauty and the most exquisite grace and charm, a captive destined to reign over the heart of the mighty monarch as its sole queen, and to cause the powerful king to bow before the potent sway of love as her most abject slave.

And yet this maiden was gentle and timid as a wild fawn, and ignorant of all artifice as a little child.

In the devastating march of the Persian conqueror a splendid Temple of the Greeks had been plundered, its priests slain, and its vestals carried off to become the prey of their conquerors.

Among the captives brought before El Jazid to see if perchance there were any who would find favor in his eyes, there were none so beautiful as Cynthia, the daughter of Archelaus, a maiden of barely fifteen years of age, who had from her infancy been dedicated to the service of the Gods. Like a child she had lived within the temple walls, ignorant of all things beyond them; ignorant alike of the passions which stir the hearts of men, of the joys unspeakable, the woes unfathomable, that spring from their loves and their hates, their ambitions and their pride; ignorant of all the tender joys of relationship, and of the varied hopes and fears which fill the hearts of those who dwell amidst the whirlpool of life, and learn in the struggle for existence the force of the latent powers within the soul.

Cynthia was terrified like a child at being brought before the monster who had slain or taken captive all those among whom her brief life had been spent, and yet she was without that fear of death which inspired the terror of her companions,

for she had lived all her life with the Dead, she had held communion with them as with near and dear friends, and thus the word "Death" had no meaning of fear for her. But she felt bewildered and full of dread of this unknown and powerful being who inspired grief and fear in all around her.

And when the eyes of the king beheld how fair she was, and when he felt the strange thrill of love and admiration which the sight of her beauty inspired, he bade all others to depart that he might speak alone with this beauteous maid. And as Cynthia raised her soft dark eyes to the King's face to read therein her fate, she felt neither fear nor terror, but only a sense of wonder, and a dim consciousness that her heart was stirred by an emotion unknown before.

When all had left the king's presence but the lovely Greek, he arose from his throne of state, and, approaching his captive, took her hand and gazed into her calm, childlike eyes; and as he did so he felt abased at the thought of the fate he had at first destined for her, and ashamed at the baseness of his own desires. Involuntarily the haughty conqueror knelt at the feet of this young maiden and kissed, like a humble slave, the hem of her robe and the soft white fingers of her fair hand.

At the touch of his lips the soul of the woman awoke in Cynthia, and the days of her childhood were forever past. She tasted of the first fruits of the tree of knowledge, and felt for the first time a shadowy sense of the power which love can exercise over the hearts of women and of men, for in her heart there was the first throb of that awakening love which was to make for her and for the king the reality and the tragedy of their lives. The days of her dreaming were over. From henceforth she was to live the real life of Earth, and to descend from those mystic mountains of the Soul whereon she had communed only with the Past; she was to live henceforth on the lower plane of life, the true existence of the Present.

And for El Jazid also, a new era had begun: he, too, was to learn how all-powerful can be the sway of love as distinguished from mere passion; how even ambition and the love of conquest could sink into secondary things and be as feather-weights in the balance. He who had treated all women as playthings with which to amuse the idle hours, learned to hang upon every word, every look, of his lovely captive, and to obey her every wish. When he was exiled from her presence he was restless

and unhappy until he could return to her again. He assigned to her the most gorgeous tent, the most luxurious litter to travel in, slaves and attendants innumerable, who were bidden to study her every wish as though she had been the Queen herself. And for it all he exacted no favors save such as she willingly gave.

And Cynthia herself, when the first wonder at the strangeness had passed, gave back to the king a love as deep and tender as his own; yea, even more tender, for to the innocent affection of a child she joined the infinite tenderness of a woman. In her pure soul ignorant of all passions, the king's love awakened a mingled feeling of gratitude and love, which showed itself in an anxious desire to please him in all things; and, with the unerring instinct of affection, she learned a thousand ways in which to touch his heart, so that ere long, had she but chosen, she could have become the most powerful person at his court.

El Jazid's first idea had been to marry Cynthia and raise her to the position of his second queen, but reflection caused him to abandon that idea as endangering, it might be, her very existence. For the king had a queen already: a beautiful, haughty princess, the daughter of one of his most powerful neighbors and richest ally, and a woman whom he knew would brook no rival in his affections or sharer of his throne, and he felt that Cynthia's life would be a brief one did Queen Artemisia know of his infatuation for her. Had Cynthia herself desired to become the acknowledged wife of the king, her influence over him was so great that there is little doubt he would have braved even the anger of his proud queen and the enmity of her haughty family to make her so, but she was innocent and ignorant as a child of the world's standards of rank and honor: ambition and power had no meaning for her, and she had no sense of the inferior position she held as simply an acknowledged favorite of the king.

Within the temple walls Cynthia had seen none save those few attendants who waited upon her and the aged priests under whose instructions she had grown up. She regarded the king as a wise and powerful being, whose ability to make all around him bow to his will gave him a position akin to that which she had associated with the idea of a God. Her ignorance of the true relations of men on Earth towards each other was as great as was her power of seeing and describing the beauties of the far-off spirit spheres, and she never thought of resisting or ques-

tioning any wish of the man whose devotion had won her heart and whose power had subjugated her mind. Of herself she never thought, because all self had been so steadily repressed and so thoroughly neutralized that she had become but the pliant echo of the thoughts of others that were transmitted through her. Her own individuality had been so early and so long repressed that she had lost the power of thinking, either for or of herself. Placed in the temple in her infancy, she had remained almost an infant in heart and mind.

To El Jazid, accustomed to the intrigues and self-seeking ambitions which tainted the atmosphere of a court, the strange, dreamy innocence of the young Greek came as a rest and a relief. Her arms were a refuge to which he could escape when the cares of state and the incessant intriguing among those who sought to raise themselves in his favor became a burden and a weariness. From Cynthia he heard of none of these things, but she would tell him wondrous stories of her Dream-World, and the beautiful visions she had seen, the bright and glorious beings with whom she had held converse, and would paint with playful childish pleasure the future she imagined for them both when the ties of Earth should no longer chain their souls.

In yielding to the king's love she had in a measure descended to his level and taken upon her the conditions of his life, so that she no longer beheld the glories of the higher spheres. Their gates were closed to her, but she still possessed the power of foreseeing things which lay near the Earth, and although her absorption in the happiness which filled her life made her in a measure blind even to these things, she was yet able to relate to the king much concerning himself, and to warn him of more than one threatened disaster.

Thus between a dream life and a life of active reality did the king and Cynthia spend the first few months of their strange union. El Jazid lingered afar from his kingdom, although the necessities of conquest no longer constrained him to do so, and was loath to return to his palace at Agbatana and to the queen, whose jealous eyes he feared might discover his secret attachment.

He was, however, soon aroused from his dreaming. A messenger arrived one day, travel stained and exhausted with his riding, bearing to the king the announcement that the Queen had borne him a son, an heir to the throne, and that she bade him leave all else and hasten to her side.

With mingled feelings of joy and apprehension the king read the letter. This event, which had been hoped for in vain for several years, and which would once have filled him with the greatest joy and pride, quickening anew all his love for the mother of his child, was no longer the greatest desire of his ambition, and awakened no feelings towards the Queen but one of regret that her son must ever come in succession before any which his beloved Cynthia, the true queen of his heart, might bear him. The letter also, couched in terms of the fondest affection, read like a reproach from one whose love he had well nigh forgotten. Return to the Queen he must, but ere doing so it was necessary that he should provide for the safety of Cynthia, and for her rejoining him as soon as possible.

In this emergency he bethought him of his chief commander, Ben al Zulid, a man of noble and intrepid character, upon whose fidelity he knew he could rely even in so difficult and delicate a matter. After a short conference between them it was agreed that the safest thing was for the king to appear to bestow the beautiful Cynthia upon his favorite general, together with a small palace which closely adjoined the king's own apartments in his palace at Parsagherd, and which might almost have been considered to form part of its outer buildings. Between the king's apartments and this small palace it was resolved to construct a secret passage underground, with two hidden doors, one at either end, and the method of opening which was to be known to the king alone. Al Zulid was commissioned to bring a cunning artificer from Hindustan, at that time much celebrated for such kinds of workmanship, to construct the passage and the spring by which the doors should be made to open and close. Meanwhile, Cynthia was to be taken care of by Al Zulid, and treated by him with as much respect as though she was in reality the queen: neither he nor any of his household were to see her, the attendants given to her by the king, upon whose fidelity he could rely, being alone allowed to wait upon her.

In return for these services the King bestowed upon Al Zulid much treasure, and raised him to a still higher position of honor than he already occupied.

This agreement Ben Al Zulid kept with the most scrupulous exactness, and a delicate regard, not alone for the position and welfare of the beautiful Cynthia herself, but also for the best interests of the King.

Having thus confided the care of his Beloved to his friend the King made all haste to return to the Palace at Agbatana, where his impatient and proud Queen awaited him.

Had beauty been sufficient to win and hold the King's heart, then surely had he remained captive to the charms of the fair Artemisia, for she was one of the most beautiful of women. Nature had lavished upon her intellect and beauty, its fairest gifts. Of commanding stature yet slender form, her supple, perfectly rounded limbs might have formed the model for a sculptor, while the finely cut features, the lustrous dark eyes, the perfectly arched eyebrows, the clear pallor of the skin, the full exquisitely moulded red lips, were rendered yet more beautiful, and more alluring to the eyes of most men by the air of haughty pride and queenly dignity which pervaded their expression. The sensuous droop of the full lidded eyes, the gleam of anger which at slight provocation shot from them, the full strong chin and jaw, with the quick tightening of the shapely mouth when roused to anger, would all have been signs of temper unheeded by most men, or else would only have served as incentives to them, to try whether they could not conquer the heart of this proud beauty, and make those haughty lips whisper fond words for their ears alone, and those dark eyes brighten at their approach. Thus had it once been with El Jazid. Artemisia had roused his passions and charmed his senses and allured his lower Soul, but her beauty had been powerless to awaken the love of his higher self, the purer and truer love she had been unable to win; Cynthia, and Cynthia alone, could do that, and at her touch the lower, coarser love of the King for Artemisia had melted like a castle of cloud and mist before the glowing beams of the noon-day sun. Thus when El Jazid reached Agbatana, and beheld again the wondrous sensual beauty of his haughty Queen, the mother now of his child, it awoke but a faint echo of the old passion, a feeble return of the old warmth. And though his words were as tender, and full of affection as of old, his phrases as complimentary, his attentions as carefully studied, the heart of the proud, passionate woman, hungering for love and thirsting for devotion, detected at once, the hollowness of his set phrases, the emptiness of his honeyed words, his formal caresses, the artificiality of his endearments, and in vehement anger and disappointment refused to be satisfied with the pretence of a love which her woman's instinct told her she had somehow lost.

To El Jazid, she said nothing to show that she perceived any difference in his manner, but she sought to win back from the returned husband, the devotion of the lover who had left her less than a year before. She used every art of which she was mistress, and used them in vain, and she felt it was no longer possible for her to keep his love, since between their hearts some barrier had risen which no attentions on the King's part could hide.

And still, while he remained with her she made no sign, dissembling with oriental caution the anger that she felt; but when, after a brief stay, and with a slender, ill-acted show of regret, for El Jazid was but a poor dissembler, he had left her again, declaring that he must return to his army, the anger of the slighted woman broke forth in a violent storm of rage, and she felt a fierce thirst for vengeance upon the woman who had stolen from her the King's heart, and usurped that first place in his thoughts which belonged by right to his Queen alone.

She felt certain that there was some woman; nothing else could have so changed the King's manner to her, and she was seized with a wild determination to learn who this unknown beauty could be, and to behold one whose charms had proved more potent than her own, strong enough to draw El Jazid from the side of the Princess, who had distinguished him above her many suitors and conferred upon him the honor of becoming the husband of the proud Artemisia. Wounded love struggled in her heart with wounded pride, and from the conflict was born a hatred as deep and all-absorbing as the love had been.

When the first burst of passion was over Artemisia, with the craft of her oriental nature, resolved to conceal her suspicions from El Jazid, and to act towards him as before, in order that she might better accomplish her revenge upon him and his new favorite. She set spies to follow the King, and report to her his every movement, and it was not long ere she learned of the existence of Cynthia, and of the devotion El Jazid had shown to her, although so quietly had she been taken away by Al Zulid, and so effectually had he hidden her, that no trace of her whereabouts could be found. None knew what had become of her, nor by whom she had been taken away. The King's own visits to Cynthia being now made with the utmost secrecy and caution, the spies of Queen Artemisia were for a time completely baffled.

Meanwhile, the making of the secret passage between the

two Palaces at Parsagherd was being rapidly hurried forward. The Hindoo artificer, whom the King's large bribe had tempted from his own country, was assisted in his work by a clever, black slave only. The care taken in making the passage was so great that all the workmen were brought from a great distance and carefully prevented from holding any communication with persons employed in the Palace itself. When the work was at length completed, these foreign workmen and the Hindoo artisan were carefully escorted back to their own country, the poor black slave, alone, being left behind. This unfortunate man, belonging to the city of Agbatana, and being employed about the Palace, it occurred to the King that the safest thing to do was to put him to death, lest at any time he should be tempted to betray the secret of the passage, and orders were therefore sent for his execution, the life of one poor slave being but a feather's weight in the balance compared to the preservation of an Emperor's secret.

When all was at last completed, Al Zulid installed himself and his household in the house assigned to him, and then brought Cynthia safely to the part of it which had been prepared for her, and which was surrounded by high walls, and everything which it was thought could serve for her protection. Shortly after this, the court was moved to Parsagherd, and the King was once more able to visit his beloved freely, and, as he believed, unsuspected.

To the Queen, he maintained always the same scrupulously careful show of devotion, and so well did Artemisia act her part, so carefully did she dissemble her wrath, that El Jazid imagined his secret was in no immediate danger of discovery, and gave himself up to the unrestrained enjoyment of Cynthia's society, scarce observing as he otherwise might have done, the smouldering fire which gleamed in the eyes of Artemisia, when he pleaded the cares of state as a reason why he could not devote more of his time to her.

Yet not so easily was the death of even a poor slave to pass over unavenged. It was but a seed, and a small one, in that harvest field of sorrow which was to surround poor Cynthia. Yet that seed became a Upas tree whose branches were to blight at their source the well-spring of hope and love and maternal tenderness which had sprung up amidst the cramped and blighted affections of a heart which had been denied all the natural ties of earthly kindred, all interests which might have abstracted her thoughts from the contemplation of Heavenly things. The tender joys, the

soft sweet holy thoughts of expectant motherhood, were awakening in Cynthia's Soul, and with a trembling, half fear half hope, she looked forward to the unfolding of a tiny life within her own, the blossoming into life of a little emblem of their love; hopes which gave a new soft light to her eyes and imparted a new meaning to her love for El Jazid.

One evening as the sun was setting and the twilight shadows were gathering over the valley that lay below, Cynthia and El Jazid were seated together upon a low divan; and her head rested upon his shoulder in the sweet abandonment of happy love; her long dark hair hung loose upon her shoulders and as the King caressed it with loving touch he spoke to her of those new hopes which filled with happiness both their Souls.

Suddenly Cynthia whose dreamy eyes had been gazing into El Jazid's turned her head towards the hangings in the corner of the room where was the secret door, and with a fixed stony look of fear, such as one sees in a bird which is fascinated by a snake, she seemed to be following the passage of something or someone along the wall. Then clutching the King's arm, with a low cry and an almost frenzied expression of terror, she exclaimed, "Oh look! look! It is that black shadow of a man again! He is creeping, creeping, towards us, with the most awful look of hatred in his eyes! He fixes them upon me, and I feel as though I could not move, could not escape from him! Oh! save me from him! Save me from him!" and with a cry she fell insensible into El Jazid's arms.

In vain did the King, thoroughly alarmed lest it should be some spy who had found the secret of the passage, search the hangings, the walls, everything. He could see nothing to account for her alarm, no means by which anyone could have entered, and though he had followed the direction of Cynthia's eyes and seen where she had pointed he could see nothing to explain the fright. The secret spring was intact, the door fast closed, yet Cynthia had seemed to see the figure come from there. Where it had gone was a mystery, yet El Jazid had too great a belief in her powers of beholding unseen things to doubt that she had truly seen something, and its invisibility to his own eyes greatly added to his superstitious apprehensions.

To revive and to soothe Cynthia was his first care. He dare not call any of her attendants as he did not wish his presence there suspected, and it was some time before she was sufficiently restored to calmness to allow him to leave her. When he did so

it was nearly dark, and in order to see his way through the passage he lighted a small lamp.

He had almost reached the door leading into his own apartments when by the feeble light of his lamp he saw a black shadow in front of him, resembling the crouching figure of a man. To draw his dagger and to stab at it was the work of a moment, for only some meditated treachery could cause anyone to have followed him into this passage. To his surprise the weapon, and also his hand and arm, went through the figure, and at the same moment his lamp seemed to be extinguished by a blast of cold air; as it went out he saw the figure roll over and then rise and, as it seemed, envelope him like a cloak, and it required all his efforts of strong will and undaunted courage to free himself from the nameless, shapeless thing which he now knew to be nothing earthly, and as he thrust it from him with all his force it seemed to vanish with a wild unearthly cry of rage.

Convinced that the being he had encountered was some evil genie, El Jazid consulted the court astrologers and wise men, and also the Priests at to what could be done to protect himself and, what was still more important, his beloved Cynthia from the approaches of this horrible thing.

The advice he got was to the effect that this being evidently a Spirit of darkness, one of the devils of Ahriman, it would be desirable that El Jazid should at once set forth upon a pilgrimage to the Temple of Baku, and bring back from there a vessel lighted by the sacred fire which arises from the earth and burns there continually. This would combat the evil power of Ahriman, and draw down to his aid the good Angels of ORMUZD, and thus would the sacred fire possess a double efficacy for keeping at bay all the ghouls and genii of the dark kingdom.

From Cynthia the King parted with the utmost reluctance. Only the assurance of the Priests that it was needful that he himself should go, and in his own person pay homage at the sacred altar, would have induced him to leave her at such a time and under such circumstances. To Ben Al Zulid he confided her, with the oft repeated warnings to guard the secret door and above everything to keep a special lamp containing the sacred fire ever burning in the room, and station fresh guards round her apartments.

Cynthia herself was most unwilling to allow the King to leave her. She was filled with the most anxious fears, the most terrible apprehensions, and dreaded to lose sight of him even for a few

hours. Still her belief in the advice of the Priests at last overcame her fears, and with much emotion Cynthia and the King parted.

For some days nothing occurred to justify Cynthia's fears, and Al Zulid watched over her safety with a care and devotion only second to that of the King himself, so that she grew gradually ashamed of her fears and more confident, and began to amuse herself picturing El Jazid's return.

Thus the time passed, and it was calculated that the King must already be well advanced upon his homeward way, when one evening as Cynthia lay upon her cushions, wearied out with anxious watching for him, she fell asleep.

She had slept but a short time, and was alone for a few moment the attendant having but just left the room, when the hangings before the secret door were drawn aside by a hand, a real living hand, a woman's firm white shapely hand bejewelled with many rings, and the Queen herself stepped into the room. Drawing near to the couch of the sleeping girl she stood looking upon the rival who had stolen from her the King's love. Cruel hatred gleamed in her eyes, and her white hands were clenched in a fierce desire to clutch the fair white throat of the beautiful girl and strangle her. Yes! this girl was beautiful. Perfect in all respects as was she herself, and with a subtle charm in her beauty which the powerful Queen could never hope to rival. Instinctively she felt the source of Cynthia's power over El Jazid, and she ground her teeth in silent rage as she drew a step nearer to the couch, at the same time making a sign with her hand to a slave who was behind her.

Perhaps it was the proximity of her foe that awakened her, or it might be that her Guardian Angel sought to save her even then; be it as it may, Cynthia woke with a scream of terror and sprang from the cushions, uttering sharp cries for help as the slave sprung upon her and plunged his cruel dagger into her shoulder and white throat ere the affrighted attendant could rush to her aid; the slave himself being almost cut to pieces by those who hurried into the room. The Queen, leaving her minion to his fate, had retired into the secret passage and closed the door, and there was therefore nothing to show how or by what means the murderer had entered.

In truth Artemisia had been for many days and weeks trying to discover by what secret means the King visited her rival, for that she was somewhere near and that he saw her daily Artemisia was

convinced. She learned that Al Zulid possessed a very beautiful and mysterious inmate of his seraglio, and guessed that his house might well be chosen as the asylum for El Jazid's favorite. With a woman's capacity for receiving and profiting by impressions and ill-defined and apparently groundless suspicions, she had become convinced that there must be some secret passage somewhere, and aided by the vengeful Spirit of the murdered slave she had spent the time of El Jazid's absence in searching for it, and, still guided by the Spirit of the man whose knowledge of its secret had cost him his life, had at last, that very day, found it.

It was this Spirit whom Cynthia had seen, and whom El Jazid had encountered hovering around the cause of his untimely end, and who had led the Queen to seek her rival's room at a moment when she was alone and unprotected.

Thus did the first seeds bear their fruits, and send forth shoots to poison yet other lives.

* * * * *

Cynthia was not dead, although fatally wounded, and Al Zulid sent in all haste to hurry the King, hoping that haply he might still be in time to receive her last breath.

She lay almost unconscious, but it seemed as though she could not die till her beloved came.

As day dawned the attendants saw the end was drawing near. The grey shadows of death were gathering fast upon her fair face; her eyes were glazing, and all seemed almost over, when the King, covered with the foam from his horse and the mire from the roads, haggard and distracted with grief, arrived at last. At his touch Cynthia's eyes opened once again; her white lips tried to utter his name, and her dying hand to clasp his, but even as they did so the silver cord was loosed, and the Soul of the gentle, murdered Cynthia sank to rest.

* * * * *

And in the hour my mother died, I, Ahrinziman, was born. The moment of her death was also the moment of my entrance into life.

Not amidst joyous congratulations and happy hopes fulfilled was I ushered into life, but amidst bitter tears and wailings of grief; amidst anger, revenge, and strife. War and murder and jealousy had shadowed me before my birth, and the Star of my destiny arose upon the horizon of Earth tinged with the blood red rays of the Fiery Star.

THE STORY OF AHRINZIMAN

PART I

SOWING THE SEED

CHAPTER I

THE DAYS OF BOYHOOD

My earliest recollections are of a lonely herdsman's hut among the Caucasian mountains, where, under the care of my foster parent and amidst the peaceful obscurity of my humble surroundings, my childhood's days were passed.

None knew who my father was, nor whence I came. I had been brought to the valley as an infant of scarcely a month old by a Persian, whom the shepherd and his wife had nursed when badly wounded two years before, and who had passed through their valley with a few of his soldier companions. Little was known even of this man, but from his dress and costly armour it was judged that he must belong to the higher ranks of the King's army. He had brought me himself, unaccompanied by any one, and had left a large bag of money to pay for the cost of my maintenance, saying that so long as I was well cared for and kindly treated my foster parents should never want for flocks and herds of their own to tend, nor gold with which to dower their children, but that no attempt must be made to learn whose son I was, nor why I was thus given into the care of strangers.

Twice after that this man came to enquire after me, and to see that I was thriving well in that wild mountain valley, and then for several years he came no more. However, as far more than sufficient money had been left with me to provide for all my wants, no great surprise was felt at this. Indeed the gold given had been so considerable a sum that from a humble tender of other men's flocks my foster father was able to purchase a fine flock of his own.

and to remove from the tent where he had dwelt to the little stone building which I remember, and which, though it seems but a poor humble place to my thoughts now, was yet the summit of his ambition. Thus he and his wife had every reason to tend me well.

They had a numerous progeny of their own, some older and some younger than myself, but by them, even in our childish games, I was always treated with a certain degree of deference, as being of a superior rank to themselves. And thus I learnt early to rule, even in my small world, and to exact from others a submission to my wishes which did much to develope in me that love of command which I had inherited from my royal ancestors.

Apart from these considerations, I had certain peculiarities of taste and temper which served to widen the barrier between myself and those whose care supplied to me that love of kindred that I have never known.

I was a strange wayward boy, subject to violent bursts of passion, and full of vague longings for I knew not what; striving always for some state of happiness that was for me unattainable; thirsting ever for more knowledge, and fretting against the narrow limits of my little world.

When I grew wearied of the rough games of my companions, and tired of watching the habits of the many animals my foster parents reared, I would wander away by myself into the mountain passes of that half cultivated land, and throwing myself down upon some grassy mountain top would watch the clouds and sky and glorious sun, until the lonely and desolate region around would appear to grow instinct with life, and myriad forms of every kind of aerial beings would people the solitude, moving around me and floating between me and the rising or setting sun, for it was at early dawn or sunset that I beheld these shapes most often and most clearly.

Again at noonday, as I watched the clouds sail over the sky, their shapes would change for me into castles and palaces and wondrous oceans with white winged ships and huge galleys sailing across; into huntsmen and horses, into warriors engaged in battle, into horses and hounds and swift antelopes. Whole panoramas would unroll themselves before my eyes, until it was no longer cloud shapes I was watching but the wonders of a celestial world.

Then when darkness fell, and I lay in my little room, I would behold a glorious Star, like unto one of the Stars of Heaven, that would seem to approach nearer and nearer to me, and expand and

expand, till my whole room was bathed in its silver light, and I myself enveloped in its dazzling brightness. In the heart of the Star I would see the most radiant Angels, their white and glistening robes shining as though powdered with silver dust, and in their hands they would bear wreaths of silver palm, with blue and white flowers. Troops of bright Peris or spirit children would assemble and dance around me in the light of the Star. Lovely maidens with long floating tresses of hair and snow-white arms would glide in and out before me in all the mazes of the most graceful dances I have ever beheld. Soft strains of music would float to me, borne by some passing Zephyr from the Spirit Land, and lovely glimpses of scenery like unto the white and glistening regions of some fairy land of the Blessed would appear to my eyes for a few moments, and then fade away to give place to another scene of delight. Then on a sudden my Star would grow pale and dim, and vanish, leaving me alone in the darkness once more.

When I was between ten and twelve years old my visions took a new shape; instead of seeing such troops of Spirit forms I began to see only one — a woman — a very lovely woman, almost like a girl, whose presence seemed to move my heart with a strange feeling of emotion, between the most intense sorrow and the greatest joy. While she was visible I felt happy; when she faded away I felt as though the light of my life had gone with her, and I would be seized with an intense longing to break free from my earthly body and follow her. At first she would appear to lie floating in the heart of the silver Star, as though she were asleep; her eyes were closed and her head drooped upon her shoulder, while her arms hung limp and powerless at her side. Her face was the most lovely one imaginable, and a great wealth of dark hair hung loosely on her shoulders. On her head she wore a single Silver Star, and in the heart of this Star there was a drop of crimson dew, like a ruby, while her white robes were bordered by silver stars, and below them there came a border of crimson, that seemed to me at first to flow from two red spots, one on her neck and the other on her shoulder. She neither smiled nor spoke to me for a long time, but her presence always woke in me the same strange emotion, and her coming must have stopped that of the other Spirit forms, for I saw them no more; the scenery would be there at times, the troops of dancing children, never.

Again and again I saw her, and at last one day her eyes opened

and she appeared to be awake, for she gazed at me with wondering dark eyes, strangely like my own. By degrees she grew more and more awake, and would smile sweetly at me, and then one night she drew near and touched me.

But Oh! with what painful emotion her touch filled my Soul. I wept in bitterest anguish, and my tears caused the Star to fade and she vanished away, and not for long did I behold her again.

For long I kept these visions to myself. I shrank instinctively from sharing my secret with anyone; but at last I told my foster mother, and she was much disturbed by my recital, fearing that my beholding these things must portend the death of someone, or trouble of some sort. She also feared there must be something unearthly and strange about me, and in her anxiety she first gossiped about the matter with all her neighbors, and then decided to consult the Priests of a little Hill Temple five miles away, built upon one of the highest mountains where it could catch the first and last rays of the rising and setting sun.

By the Priests she was somewhat reassured as to my probable origin, which she had begun to fear must be due to the influence of some of the genii, and that possible I was not mortal after all. She was advised to bring me with her, that they might judge for themselves whether my visions were of the delusions of Ahriman and his fallen Angels, or whether they were truly sent from the Angelic spheres and betokened the possession of prophetic powers.

In this way I was first brought under the notice of these Priests, and amongst them I soon found a congenial friend in the person of one of the brothers of the humbler order of Priesthood. He was a man of about forty years of age, an enthusiast and a visionary, and one well calculated to develope in me all these strange powers of divination I had inherited from my mother. By this Priest I was taught to read and write in the Zend characters, and to decipher the hieroglyphics upon the rolls of illuminated sheep-skin whereon were recorded the histories of other Faiths than our own. He taught me also to read the meanings of many of the symbolical pictures carved and painted upon the various vessels in use in the service of the Temple.

From him I learned also of the teachings of the great Zerdusht (or Zoroaster, as some call him), and of the pure doctrines and reformed sect founded by him.

He also taught me that it was possible to acquire the art of leaving the earthly body, and wandering at will through the Spirit

spheres, even as had been done by the great Zerdusht himself in order that he might bring back from thence the teachings of the higher Spirits. To do this required a long and severe apprenticeship to spiritual things, and could only be safely practised by those within the precincts of a Temple or other holy spot. (* See note B.)

Besides these things he spoke to me of many other mysteries, into which he said it would not be lawful to initiate me unless I had first become one of the neophytes of the Temple. He told me that such powers as mine were clearly intended to be dedicated to the service of God, and so worked upon my imagination and enthusiasm for occult things that I was all eagerness to be taken into the Temple as he and the other Priests advised. This was, however, impossible without the consent of the man who appeared to be my guardian, and matters had to be left in abeyance till he should come again to inquire about my welfare.

Two years passed ere this event, and meanwhile my constant visits to the Temple, and the unusual and rare knowledge I was thereby acquiring (and of which I was so proud that I did not keep it to myself, but boasted of it to my companions) had excited the jealousy and anger of our little community. Although my foster parents and their children, from motives of interest and affection, might defer to me and be proud of my learning, it was otherwise with those who had nothing to gain or lose from the favor of my unknown protector, and the neighbors and their sons naturally resented my peculiarities and airs of superiority. I was growing a tall strong lad, and my quick temper and overbearing ways towards those I deemed my inferiors made me more enemies than friends.

First it was said that I was clearly the off-spring of some intrigue, since my parents were ashamed to acknowledge me: truly a pretty fellow to give himself airs over them! Then when my visions were known and talked about by my foster mother it was said I must be the child of some of the genii, and not mortal at all; that the simple Aboukir and his wife had been imposed upon by this stranger, who, they averred, had doubtless foisted some changeling upon them! Vague stories of all kinds began to circulate. It was said I had been seen wandering about the hills after dark (which was in part true), and that it was true I belonged to the class of ghouls and vampires. The hour and the day on which I had been brought to the village were found to be unlucky,

and marked with a black stone, and all the misfortunes of the tribe were attributed to my influence, since it was thought I possessed the evil eye. Ere long I began to be avoided by one and all, and though the good Priest, on hearing of these stories, called upon the headman of the tribe and told him I was destined to the service of the Temple, his visit only served to make the stories against me to be whispered instead of spoken aloud to all the world.

At first I felt most bitterly hurt by these things, and all the philosophic consolations bestowed upon me by my friend the Priest Abubatha failed to comfort me. Then my pride awoke, my imperious temper asserted itself, and I repaid their dislike with tenfold contempt and scorn.

Thus I became more solitary in my ways than ever, for ill-natured gossip once started is not easily laid to rest, and the gulf between myself and my fellows became only wider as time passed on.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO STRANGERS

I was thirteen years old when the man who had brought me to this valley came again, and my foster father Aboukir told him of my visions and my visits to the Priests in the Temple, but of the whispered stories against me he said no word, fearing lest he should be deprived in consequence of the care of me.

The stranger pondered the matter over for a short time, and then sent for me to speak with him. But I could not be found, as I had gone away upon one of my long rambles over the mountains, and the stranger left, promising to return shortly.

A few weeks after this, when I was alone in the house, my foster father having gone to attend some distant flocks, and my foster mother to gossip with her neighbors, I was aroused from my studies by hearing the trampling of horses' feet, and looking out I beheld two horsemen dismounting at our door. Their rich

dresses and richly caparisoned steeds proclaimed them to be of high rank. One was a rather short but very broad shouldered and powerful looking man, whom I had no trouble in recognizing from my foster parent's description as the mysterious stranger who had brought me there.

The other was much taller and more slender, though also a powerful looking man. His face was partly covered by a thick black beard, and his expression was, even to my childish eyes, very sad and grave.

The beauty of the horses greatly attracted me, for I was very fond of all animals, but especially of horses, and I had early learned to ride and to excel in all the simple feats of horsemanship practised by the hill tribes, who are largely engaged in rearing horses as well as sheep and goats.

But I had never seen such beautiful horses as these, such graceful, pretty creatures, that stood arching their glossy necks and tossing their long manes and pawing the ground in their impatience, and I drew near the tall stranger's horse to stroke and caress it, staring at the two men with wondering eyes as I did so.

"Where are the herdsman Aboukir and his wife?" asked the short stranger.

I told him, and said I would go and fetch them, but he stopped me, and said it did not matter, for that it was the boy Ahrinziman they had come to see.

All this time I was stroking the horse and patting it, and it seemed to like my touch, for it grew quiet under it. The short stranger noticed this, and added "Thou art a bold boy surely, to be so ready to touch another man's horse."

"I am not afraid of anything" said I, frowning at him, for I liked not his tone of banter.

"See there, O Sire! whom did the boy resemble then?" said the short man, "We need no herdsman's wife to tell us whose son this is."

"You are right," answered the other, and then he added with a sigh, "He is like her also, he hath her eyes; surely he will be like her in other ways." Then turning to me he said:

"Wouldst thou like to be a soldier, since thou dost fear no man?"

"I had rather be a Priest, for then I should live in the Temple, and no one would dare to jeer at me; all men would pay me respect; I would be a Priest and a Prophet like unto the great Zerdusht,

and all men would do homage to my powers. I would not be a soldier, for a soldier has always to obey orders; there is ever one above him; even the Commander must obey the King, and I would not bow to any man; rather would I have all men harken unto me."

The short man laughed. "Behold!" said he, "how loudly he crows already!" But the other answered me gravely.

"How dost thou know, Ahrinziman, that thou couldst become a great Prophet?—Are there not many within the Temples whose lives are ever humble?—There hath been but one Zerdusht: how can thine ambition make thee think to become as great as he?"

"Because the Priest Abubatha says that since the days of Zerdusht there have been few who beheld the things of the Spirit world with the clear eyes with which I see them. He thinks that were I to devote myself now to the service of the Temple I might become almost as great a seer as Zerdusht. Who knows but that I would surely become as great as he, when I am as old as he was when he began to prophesy?"

"Thou art not wanting in ambition, truly Oh Ahrinziman! "Yet tell me of the visions of which thou dost speak, that we may judge from whence they come."

Then I told him of all those things which I had seen; of the lovely Spirits and the bright Star and the glowing pictures and last I told him of the White Angel as I called her. He questioned me much concerning her, and seemed much agitated when I told him how she had looked at first; and when I spoke of the two red spots that gave the red bordering to her robes his face darkened with anger as well as sorrow, and he clenched his hands and appeared moved to much passion.

Then I told him that of late the red spots were gone, although the red border remained, and that she was awake now and smiled on me, and had touched me once, but that her touch gave me suffering and pain, although I longed always for her to come to me again. And when I told him this he put his hand upon my shoulder, and bade me look up at him and tell it all to him once more. And as I did so he kept his hand upon me, as though to assure himself who it was that was speaking to him.

As I finished my recital for the second time a sudden impulse caused me to clasp his hand in mine, and raising it to my lips I kissed it passionately. It was as though for that instant the most

intense love for him took possession of my Soul, and I could have embraced him and wept over him in mingled joy and sorrow.

But he was a stranger to me, and I was afraid, and the impulse passed away.

As I kissed his hand he cried out in agitation, "God of my Fathers! that was her action exactly! that was her way with me!" and he took his hand from me and covered his face with his mantle as he turned away. Yet I could tell that he was weeping, for he spoke not, but strode back and forth as though wrestling with his sorrow, while the other man walked away from us into the house, as though in respect to his emotions.

After a little while the tall stranger came back to me, and taking a thick richly wrought gold chain from his neck he flung it over my head, saying, "Show that to your White Angel when she comes again, and ask her if she has no word, no sign, to give me?"

Then he kissed me many times, embracing me with much tenderness, while I clung to him and prayed that he would take me with him, though I knew not who he was. But he put me away at last and turned to summon his friend, saying to me, "Not yet, Oh beloved child of my lost Cynthia; not yet; but soon shalt thou come unto me and be the comfort of my sad days."

Then they went forth and mounted their horses and rode away, while I stood looking after them, and especially after the tall stranger who turned to look at me many times, till a bend in the mountain pass hid them from my sight.

Then I went into the house, and on the table I found a bag of gold and a message written, which I could now read, to say that nothing was to be done till the strangers came again; and I guessed it had been left by the short man while we were speaking.

CHAPTER III

I ENTER THE TEMPLE

DURING many weeks we looked for the return of the strangers, but they came not. But I saw my White Angel again.

She came one night and stood smiling and looking upon me from the heart of the Silver Star; then she drew near to me, and though she did not touch me she raised the chain, which I had always worn since the tall stranger gave it to me, to her lips and kissed it, and I thought she said "Tell him that." And she faded away again, and was lost in the light of the Silver Star.

Soon after the strangers' visit the monotony of our life was broken by the arrival in our village of one of the tribesmen who had gone to fight in the Sultan's army, and who now returned too crippled to serve any longer. He brought with him much treasure, plundered no doubt during the time of service, and he soon established himself in a fine tent with a wife, whose dress and ornaments became the envy of all her neighbors. And he also bought a fine flock of sheep and goats.

Chance brought me across this man, although as a rule I avoided the village, and very soon a kind of friendship sprang up between us, for the man had many strange tales to tell of his adventurous wanderings, and the exciting scenes of war, and I was greedy for all stories of that world which lay beyond our mountains, and of which I thought much oftener since the visit of the two strangers.

I had begun to waver in my desire to be a Prophet, and as I listened to the tales told by the soldier my imagination became fired at the thought of the stirring life a soldier led, and the strange countries and people that he saw, and but for the influence of my friend Abubatha over me I should have thought seriously of changing my ambition, and adopting a more exciting life than that of a Prophet.

In truth I was but little fitted to form a right judgment upon the merits of either mode of life.

Nearly six months passed, and then one evening a hurried messenger arrived upon a weary horse, bringing a ring which they

remembered the short stranger to have worn, and a message that "The ring was sent in token of the authority of the messenger, and was to be kept until the owner came himself to claim it, and they were to lose no time in placing me within the precincts of the Temple."

Then the man rode away again, and thus was my fate decided.

The next day I was taken to the Temple, and formally received by my friend and the other Priests. And after all, instead of hailing this event with joy, as I should have done some months before, I felt instead a feeling of disappointment and foreboding of some sorrow.

I did not enjoy the happiness of my beloved friend's society long. Within a year from my admission to the Temple he died quite suddenly, leaving me once more without one congenial friend. I had thought he would at least come back to me from the shadow land, as my White Angel came, but I never saw him, and not till I myself passed over to the world of Spirits did I learn why.

The other Priests were kind to me, but not the sympathetic friends that Abubatha had been, and I lost my spirits and grew very sad after his death.

Then there came another change, and for me a harder one still. I was sent, why, I was not told, from the little mountain Temple to the far larger and far more important one of Amurath. And then began for me a long and weary and monotonous period which, were I to describe it in detail would but weary those who read my story. This Temple of Amurath was a very different place to the little lonely one amongst the mountains of the Caucasus, and its Priests were far more wealthy and autocratic than the humble kindly men I had known, and once fairly dedicated to the service of God I found life to be a very different thing from what it had been during the pleasant friendly intercourse I had held with my beloved friend.

A severe regimen of lonely vigils and prolonged fasts was imposed upon me, the great object of my training being to subdue the desires of the flesh and turn my mind from all earthly thoughts to the contemplation of Heavenly things. For this purpose all intercourse with the world outside the Temple walls was prohibited to me. Had my friend Abubatha been alive I should not have felt this to be so great a privation, but I had no sympathy with any of these Priests, and I yearned so intensely to see my friend again, that this, and the severe strain of the training imposed upon a

growing lad, caused my health to give way, and I became so seriously and even dangerously ill that my instructors were obliged to relax their rules and suspend my development for a considerable time, and allow me to wander freely about within the precincts of the Temple. To go outside the walls was impossible, the great gates being only opened to admit egress or ingress of the processions of the Priests, and those who, like myself, were reserved as the mediums through whom the oracles were to be given, were never allowed to join in them, and seldom even to mix with each other, lest we might thereby impair the purity of our gift by absorbing the ideas of someone on Earth. We were only allowed to see the Priests; men, who not possessing the power of divination themselves were yet the instructors and regulators of the lives and visions of those hapless sensitives who possessed these gifts.

During the period of my illness my visions departed or became so confused as to be valueless, and when I returned to health I found that they had assumed a new form. My White Angel and the troops of dancers I never more beheld, but instead I would see grave majestic men in priestly robes, bearing long scrolls in their hands, who showed me the answers to questions asked of them by the earthly Priests by means of pictures and by messages conveyed in symbolical language, scarcely understood by myself, but whose meanings were interpreted by the Priests, and, I am very certain, often wrongly interpreted and distorted to suit their own peculiar idiosyncrasies, and to dovetail into their own theories.

That my powers were very great was fully recognized, and I was therefore more completely isolated from my companions than ever in order that no influence from them might blend with the oracles given through me — a wise precaution theoretically, but one whose usefulness was greatly nullified by the constant presence and influence around the clairvoyants of these strong-minded positive-ideaed Priests, with their fixed theories concerning most things, and their desire to make all revelations coincide with them. They forgot that their ideas were even more likely than those of my fellow neophytes to color my visions and interpose a barrier between my clear sight and the Spirit communications.

Another mistake they made was taking these clairvoyants into the Temples before they had acquired any knowledge of the true relations of material life, and imagining that ignorance was necessarily purity of thought. Innocence and ignorance are

often synonymous, but the innocence which springs only from ignorance is but a poor shield against the influence of evil powers. These ignorant beings might be like children in innocence, but they were also like them in mental development, and had all the failings and weakness of children as well as their virtues, all the illogical imperfect standards of judging things, and all the undisciplined unregulated passions. And like children, or half developed Souls, they could only come into direct communication with the Spirits of the Silver Star, whose own ignorance of mundane affairs did not fit them to become very wise counsellors. The influence of the *mortal* Priests might and did give a more practical bias to these imperfect revelations, but their influence did not come from the *Spirit* side of life, and only served to confuse what did.

Hence arose that condition of error and confusion which as time went on became so marked as to discredit the Oracles altogether, and led to the final overthrow of those systems of religion of which they formed so important a part.

The prophets who led a more natural life and mingled with their fellow men might, and often did, color their prophecies with the thought emanations of those around them, but their visions, being drawn from the practical experiences of life, were of a certain practical value, though — owing to the fact that prophets who could thus mingle freely with other men were not of the highest order — their source of inspiration was limited to the first and second spheres, and their visions were therefore far from being as beautiful and elevated as those of the mystics secluded within the Temples.

The spiritual laws which govern the various forms of divination, and which explain the causes of the different degrees of power, I shall enter into more fully at a later stage of my history, when I had come to understand them more fully myself.

To return now to the experiences of my life in this Temple. I may point out that a Sensitive or Medium is of necessity one who feels readily all the influences which prevail around him or her. The Material, being the strongest influence, will be felt first and in the most dominant degree, hence the Priests in the Temple were themselves responsible for many of the things I saw or heard, and their constant influence about me shut out as with a thick veil of materiality the more spiritual visions which I had beheld as a child when quite alone.

The long exhausting fasts, the lonely vigils, intended to sub-

jugate the flesh, served only to weaken the tie between it and the Spirit to such a degree that it was no longer possible for the Spirit to impress upon the body a clear picture of what it beheld. If it did so at all it was as a broken and imperfect communication, which resembled in its grotesqueness the jumbled pieces of some puzzle picture shaken together in any fashion.

To obtain a true communication from the Spirit to the body, when the Spirit has so far detached itself as to be able to wander away into the Spirit World on its own account and penetrate the mysteries of Spirit life, it requires that body and Spirit shall be in perfect working order and in possession of the best of its powers; otherwise the earthly body becomes like a hard lump of clay, instead of a pliable wax-like mould, capable of receiving the impress of the spiritual brain at the moment of its return to the earthly envelope. If the impression is not at once conveyed a more recent sensation will take its place, and the first idea, if stamped upon the brain at all, will become confused with the second one, and thus become imperfect and misleading.

A body in perfect health and in perfect touch with the Soul inhabiting it is soft, warm, and pliable, as all can feel for themselves. A body which is dead is rigid and cold, and no longer capable of expressing the Soul's emotions or experiences, because it is no longer capable of having the stamp of these feelings engraved like a picture upon the tablets of the earthly brain. And a body weakened by starvation is a body partially dead, in a greater or less degree, and therefore not able to receive a clearly stamped impression of purely spiritual things.

It should be remembered that while it is attached in any way to the earthly envelope the Soul has to draw its nourishment through the organism of the earthly body, and from mortal things it must extract the spiritual essence wherewith to renew the spiritual substance of its spiritual body, even as the earthly body is renewed and sustained by earthly food; so that if the earthly envelope is starved the Soul suffers with it, and is thereby weakened. Without doubt it is a fatal error to over-indulge the earthly body, but it is a no less fatal error to neglect or starve it; for it is the true adjustment of an equal balance between the animal and spiritual halves of the Soul which is needful to afford the best conditions under which to study spiritual things, and to receive spiritual revelations.

Thus it will be seen how great is the error of supposing that it

is necessary to starve the earthly body in order to subdue it and prevent it from hampering the immortal Soul.

Oh! great is the folly of man in imagining that he can improve upon God's handiwork! or that if the cravings of the material body serve only as a clog upon the higher aspirations of man's Soul the Supreme Wisdom would have endowed him with such a body at all!

CHAPTER IV

MY FLIGHT FROM THE TEMPLE

To a youth such as I was, full of life and exuberant spirits, with a vigorous constitution and an impetuous and vehement temper, the life of the Temple soon became insupportable. I was at an age when the blood is warm, and courses swiftly through the veins, and the passions are strong, requiring to be educated and regulated, not simply suppressed. I required a life of action, and I thirsted for love and friendship, and they condemned me to a loveless, joyless, stagnation, which might have suited some valetudinarian whose days of action were over, and whose blood was cold and sluggish, and who only sought a peaceful resting place wherein to await the great change.

I hungered for knowledge, and they gave me crumbs of mystic lore, that left me starving and ignorant as before.

I was full of the wildest ambitions, the keenest desire for power, and they sought to make my mind and body alike subject to the will and caprices of petty tyrants, whose narrow lives and cramped dogmatic minds unfitted them to control the destiny of the meanest slave!

They starved my Soul. They cramped my thoughts. They well nigh extinguished life itself in pursuit of their pet theories, and in their attempt to train me down to think and see as they did. As well might they have taken a young eaglet from its lofty mountain nest and sought to make it lead the life of a barn-door fowl!

What wonder then that my Soul revolted, and that being strong

in mind as well as body I could not submit, like many of the unhappy neophytes around me, to sink into a mere tool, a poor shadow of other men's thoughts!

At first I wrestled with myself, and strove to be content. I thought it was the temptations of devils which assailed me with this giant "Discontent." But my clear intellect could not thus be satisfied with a sophism, a formula, doled out to all those whose minds revolted from a state of existence for which they were unsuited, and I grew at last to be so desperate in my desire for freedom that right or wrong I vowed I would be free! no man, be he Priest or layman, should shackle me!

When the timber is dry it wants but a spark to start a great conflagration, and a mere spark, a chance word spoken in the grave, pompous, monotonous tones of the High Priest was enough to fan my smouldering revolt into flame.

He thought fit to reprove me for some trifling lapse of duty, and I answered him, to his astonishment and anger. He quickly imposed a penance of so many days of fasting and solitude, whereon I told him that I would not obey him, that I hated the Temple and its rules, and I hated him! I would go forth to be free! free!

In great wrath he told me such a thing was impossible: "None who enter the Temple's walls ever leave them again to return to the life of ordinary men, Oh! vain and presumptuous youth. A temper like unto thine needs much discipline to subdue it, and here there are means strong enough to do so, and those who have the power to use them. Great is the penance such discontent as thine doth merit. Such blindness to the blessings and privileges thou hast enjoyed deserves severe punishment, and shall receive it. Terrible is the fate which thou hast incurred by thine impious discontent and desire to quit the service of the Temple; yea, even death itself hath been awarded for such words as thou hast spoken."

He delivered himself of these words in a hard, rasping, monotonous voice, and his manner and cruel want of sympathy with my feelings so maddened me that, excited as I already was, I turned upon him, and trembling in every limb with passion, sought to push past him and leave the little cell. But he barred the way, and tried to thrust me back. Whereon, reckless now in my revolt, I struck him to the earth, and stepping over his prostrate body fled for dear life, well knowing what penalty must await one whose sacrilegious hand had struck down a Priest.

I met no one on my way to the gates, for it was the hour at which most of the inmates of the Temple were at private meditation or reposing. The gates were shut fast, and for a moment I thought that I was lost. Then I beheld a tree whose branches hung over the wall low enough for me to reach them with an active spring, and soon I had swung myself by their aid on to the wall and dropped down on the other side. I then ran for dear life, on and on, stopping neither to look back nor where I was going, only thankful that there were no signs of pursuit behind me.

For some hours I ran on, and at last, overcome by exhaustion, I stopped and gazed around me. I was among great mountains, whose dark passes and many precipices might easily afford me a hiding place. How far from the Temple I was I could not guess, but from the efforts I had made and the number of hours I had struggled on I thought it must be far behind me. Whether I had killed the Priest, or only stunned him, I did not much care; I was still too angry to think much of it. And as I gazed up at the clear star-lit sky above me, and watched the glittering canopy studded with its myriad sparkling gems of light, a wild feeling of exultation filled my Soul, for I was free at last!

CHAPTER V

THE TRIBESMEN OF THE HILLS

I was so much exhausted by my exertions that, feeling myself in comparative safety, I lay down upon the ground and was soon fast asleep.

The sun was already high in the heavens ere I awoke, and with my return to consciousness my naturally healthy appetite asserted its claims with so much persistence that I was fain to risk the danger of discovery and seek for some one from whom I could buy food.

I had lain down upon a mountain side to sleep, and below me there lay a wide valley wherein a herd of sheep and goats were browsing, while the herdsman's tent could be distinguished almost directly beneath the spot on which I stood.

I had no money, and nothing of value to offer in exchange for such things as I desired save the gold chain I wore round my neck. From this, by the aid of a sharp stone, I broke off two of the massive links, and then made my way into the valley. The herdsman was absent, but his wife, after a brisk barter between us, agreed to give me a suit of her husband's clothes and some goat's milk and cakes in exchange for my gold links. I felt sure the woman was cheating me and giving me very little for what I gave her, but her many questions embarrassed and alarmed me, and I was anxious to hurry on once more.

As soon as I had got fairly out of sight of the valley I sat down and ate ravenously; then, putting on the shepherd's clothes, I made my neophyte's dress (which I knew would betray me and make it easy to trace my flight) into a bundle, and looked about for the most effectual means of disposing of it.

I was near the edge of a precipitous mountain gorge, at the bottom of which I could dimly discern a small streamlet rushing over its rocky bed. As it appeared practically inaccessible, I resolved to throw my clothes down there, and in order to make them fall the more securely I filled the bundle with lumps of rock, tying them up as well as I could, and then threw them over. In my haste I had not tied them very securely, and as they fell some of the stones tumbled out, lightening the bundle so much that instead of falling straight down, as I had hoped, they were caught by the wind and blown on to a ledge of rock about half-way down, where they lay half-spread out, and looking, to my chagrin, remarkably like a figure which had fallen over the precipice.

I was so much disturbed by this mishap that I thought of climbing down to dislodge them, but I soon found this was impossible, owing to the steepness of the over-hanging rocks, and I was obliged to go on and leave them where they lay. Little did I guess that to this incident I was to owe at once my immunity from pursuit and the loss of a valuable protector.

As I had left the shepherd's valley in a westerly direction I now resolved to double back, and passing behind it again to make my way towards the South, hoping that if the shepherd's wife had watched me she would thus be thrown off the trail.

For two days I journeyed on, resting for a few hours in the heat of the day and at night, and then hurrying on again. On

the evening of the second day I found myself among a low range of foothills, beyond which lay a sandy desert. Here I resolved to lie down and rest before attempting to cross it. I had not slept long before I was rudely awakened by the glare of torches held before my eyes, and the loud whisperings of about a dozen rough-looking men who had just discovered me. I tried to spring up and escape, but was at once seized, and a couple of long knives were brandished within an inch of my face, while a torrent of abuse, in the barbarous dialect of one of the Hill Tribes, was poured upon me.

Seeing that resistance was worse than useless, I resigned myself to my fate, relieved in part to find that these men were at least not emissaries of the Priests sent to capture me. They were very angry at finding nothing of value upon me, for I had taken the precaution of hiding my gold chain in the high-peaked sheep-skin cap I had got from the herdsman's wife. After feeling me all over several times without any result, I heard them begin to discuss the advisability of cutting my throat and throwing me over the rocks, or else taking me as a captive to the Chief, and I thought it high time to put in a word upon my own behalf. So I said:

"Be not so angry, O Friends! that I have nothing of value upon me wherewith to reward you for capturing me; rather give me your pity, since I am a poor fugitive who has fled from one danger only to encounter another still greater. Behold! I am as a field of stubble that hath been well reaped already, and which has nothing left to reward the labors of the after-gleaners."

"By the Powers of Evil, thou art right," said one; "yet even stubble is useful to burn, and thou shalt be set to work for us if there is no other use we can put thee to. Who art thou, and whence hast thou fled?"

I thought within myself that half a truth is better than a whole lie, so I replied:

"I am a youth who has struck his master, and thus was I obliged to fly."

At this they laughed, and one struck me upon the back playfully, yet somewhat too hard to be pleasant, saying:

"Hast thou done that? Then it was well done, and who knows but that there may be good and useful stuff in thee, after all! We will take thee to our Chief, and he shall decide thy

fate." Saying which they proceeded to bind me hand and foot, and having mounted me upon a horse they turned away from the desert and rode through the Hills for some time. At last, just as the sun arose, we paused at the entrance to a high rocky gorge, and as I looked up to greet the rising orb of day I breathed an earnest prayer for deliverance from this new danger.

Here they bandaged my eyes and lifted me from the horse, leading me, as I could feel, up a steep pathway which wound up and down for some distance, and at last, after much stumbling and slipping, owing to my being unable to see where I was stepping, I found myself upon level ground once more. The bandage was now taken from my eyes, and I found myself on the edge of a very wide plateau high up among the Hills. A great many handsome tents were dotted about the grassy plain, and many sheep, goats, and camels were quietly feeding there, while a number of handsome horses were tethered before their owners' tents, making altogether quite a gay and prosperous scene.

As we approached the largest and most richly decorated tent, a young girl came out, carrying a smoking dish of lamb's meat and freshly cooked rice. She stopped to look at us, and especially favored me with a glance from her black eyes, which made my heart, unused as I was to the society of women, beat with great rapidity. I bowed low to the girl as I returned her look, and did my best to make my eyes express what my lips did not dare to utter. Whether by accident or design, I do not know, but at this juncture her veil became disarranged, and ere she had replaced it I had obtained a very fair glimpse of her face, with its full red lips, plump chin, and pink-tinted cheeks, and as she hastily gathered the veil together I was ushered into the presence of the Chief, a large, powerful, and decidedly fat and coarse looking man in gaudy raiment, plundered no doubt from some luckless caravan.

To his interrogations as to who I was, I told the same tale as before, only suppressing the fact that my master had been a Priest, for I feared that the superstitious dread which even these wild lawless men felt for the Priesthood would render them unwilling to shelter me if they knew that I had fled from a Temple. I had resolved to throw myself upon the generosity of the robbers, and to ask permission to remain for a time with them, should I see that there was any fair prospect of my request being granted. I argued that since I was myself an outlaw and

a fugitive I was more likely to find a safe asylum among men who were also outside the pale of the law than anywhere else.

How matters might have gone with me I do not know, but as I was telling my story the Chief's daughter, who proved to be the girl I had seen outside, came in, and having listened to my recital was so much prepossessed in my favor as to interpose with her father on my behalf, and to such good effect that I was offered the choice of being set at liberty or of joining the band and becoming one of these marauders myself. I need hardly say that I at once chose the latter alternative, as I could see I was fully expected to do.

The idea of the bold free life led by these men so fired my imagination, even as the tender glances from the dark eyes of the Chief's daughter had inflamed my heart, that I expressed my desire to be admitted into the band in such happy language as to cause all the robbers to applaud my address, and welcome me as a worthy comrade.

From this time the star of my destiny seemed rapidly in the ascendant. I was presented with a handsome young horse and a set of arms, and invited to test my prowess with those around me. In the mountain life of my childhood I had learned to ride and to excel in all those arts of horsemanship practised by the Hill tribes, and from the wandering soldier who had returned to our valley I had learned to use my weapons as a soldier should: thus I acquitted myself so well that I won yet further distinction.

In very truth my exhilaration at finding myself once more free, and mounted upon a swift horse able to fly like the wind across the plains, would well have helped me to surmount far greater difficulties than any I encountered; while all my natural instincts in favor of war and its arts awoke when I found myself no longer surrounded by peaceful shepherds or pious Priests, but by those who made warfare their trade, and robbery and murder their profession.

After this I was able not only to hold my position with these robbers, but even to become so popular a favorite that I was finally chosen as the husband of the Chief's daughter and successor to the Chief, who, being rather old and somewhat lazy, and moreover having no son to succeed him, desired some one to relieve him of the more laborious part of his duties. Before my advent the most likely candidate for this honor was a man named Hadji, and it may readily be supposed that my rapid

rise into favor was as gall and wormwood to him, and that all my attempts to conciliate him were in vain.

This wife who was thus bestowed unexpectedly upon me and whose name was Dilferib was comely, but scarcely as beautiful as I had thought from the stray glimpses permitted to me when she had partly unveiled her face, and her beauty, such as it was, was but the beauty whose charm is of youth. Her bold black eyes, her slim and cypress waist, her pink cheeks and long black hair, were distinctly charms of Earth and not of Heaven. She was a forward girl, and soon developed into a coarse woman. Her mind was dull; her intellect limited; her instincts petty and selfish; while her temper was decidedly waspish. Her strongest characteristics were a love of dress and gossip. Her sentiment for me had been a passing fancy for a handsome youth different from those around her, and she soon wearied of me, as I did of her. She was utterly incapable of entering into any of my flights of fancy, or understanding the poetic glamour I sought to throw around my ideal of true love. She cared for me only so long as I fed her vanity with words of flattery, and her love of finery with handsome clothes. Very soon I wearied of her vulgar blandishments, while her want of refinement jarred upon me at every turn, and her charms palled upon my fastidious taste.

Then, too, I grew tired of the paltry distinction of being a leader of a petty mountain tribe of ignoble marauders, thieves of other men's goods. The constant intriguing of Hadji filled me with anger and contempt, and when my wife proceeded to say that she questioned whether, after all, Hadji were not the better man of the two, and that she feared she had made a mistake in selecting me, I resolved to give her an early opportunity of trying him as my successor.

The Hills around me seemed to shut me in and stifle me, and I longed to go forth into the wide world once more and measure myself with other men, even with the great ones of the Earth, that I might find where my true position was amidst the bustle of an active life, larger and broader in its interests than any I had yet known.

I question whether at this time the sovereignty of the whole Earth would have satisfied the cravings of that boundless ambition which was awake within me, and I know the limits of the known Universe would not have been wide enough to limit my

incessant thirst for greater knowledge of every kind, especially for a knowledge of that unseen world of which I had beheld such wondrous glimpses, and whose mysteries I longed the more intensely each day to explore.

For two years I lived amongst these mountain robbers, and during that time no signs of pursuit had reached me, so that from the Priests of Amurath I now felt comparatively safe. My beard had grown full and thick, and with my change of dress so altered my appearance that I scarcely feared recognition.

I therefore resolved to take the first chance of leaving my present life, feeling very certain that my wife would soon console herself for my disappearance by wedding the artful Hadji, whom I wished all joy of his acquisition!

My opportunity soon came. We were sent to intercept a rich convoy of merchandise, sent from Bokhara to Teheran, to the King. We did not, however, win the easy victory we expected, for the King had armed his servants well, and sent, moreover, some soldiers to protect his goods, so that after a sharp fight some of our band were killed and the rest took refuge in rapid flight, myself being one of the first to quit the field as soon as the mêlée had fairly begun.

Once free from the hilly ground I gave my horse free rein, and was soon galloping swiftly across the wide sandy plain.

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO WAYS

Soon after midnight a silvery crescent moon rose in the sky, and by its light and that of the silver stars I rode on, till moon and stars began to pale and the grey dawn of another day appeared.

All around me as far as the eye could reach there lay nothing but this wild wilderness of sand, rolling in undulating billows like waves upon the sea, while in the dim distance the Hills which I had left far behind lay like faint blue specks on the horizon.

I rode onward for some time, till as the scorching rays of the rapidly rising sun rendered further progress almost impossible, I drew near to a small clump of date trees, beneath whose scanty shade my horse and I lay down together to rest.

When I awoke the sun had already set, and the grey shadows of approaching night were gathering fast over the desert, for so far South was I there was but little twilight.

To me the evening hour has always been a time when a sense of mystery and awe steals over the Soul, and fills it with the subtle suggestion of strange and unknown things, whose shapeless forms, hovering in the air, unseen yet not unfelt, are akin and yet different to ourselves.

As I led my horse from beneath the trees I beheld before me two paths, stretching across the desert, where path there was none: the one bright and shining as though paved with snow-white stones led to the Westward, as though to follow the track of the setting sun. The other path stretched towards the South, and its outline was dim, misty, and dark.

At the parting of the ways stood two figures, like unto Angels with wings: the Spirits of the Light and Dark Spheres.

The one who stood upon the shining path was like a fair young man, his robes white and sparkling as with silver stars. All was fair and open to behold. The way seemed easy, and it led to lands of glorious silver light on the far horizon.

The other Spirit was dim, indistinct, and shrouded with a sombre veil. His face was half averted, and with one hand he drew his mantle over it, while with the other he beckoned to me. This figure seemed to express to me, Power, Majesty, the successful pursuit of forbidden knowledge, the satisfaction of ambition, the glowing passion of gratified desires. His shadowy half averted face drew me to him with an intense longing to rush forward and uncover that shrouded countenance, that I might gaze upon the mysteries, be they beautiful or horrible, blessed or accursed, which he thus hid from me. And as I involuntarily took a step forward towards him my choice seemed made—the figures vanished, and to the South I resolved that I would go.

It was as though the good and evil influences of my life had contended with each other for dominion over my Soul, and for the time the Evil had won. Many times as I rode Southward was I tempted to turn back, but as often did I put the thought

away from me and ride on. For good or for ill I was fated to taste of that knowledge whose mysteries the Angel of Darkness had half revealed and half hidden from my sight.

CHAPTER VII

JELAL-ÛD-DÎN THE SORCERER

For four nights I rode on, resting always during the heat of the day, and on the morning of the fifth day I beheld the towers and walls of a large city rising in the far distance. I was so overjoyed at this that I spread out my arms and bowed low upon my horse's neck in a salutation of welcome to it, and hurrying on my wearied steed I was able to reach it ere mid-day.

I had never been in a city before; I had seen nothing larger than a mountain village; for although in my journey to the Temple of Amurath from the Caucasian mountains I had passed near the royal city of Teheran, the Priests in whose charge I travelled had not permitted me to enter the walls.

As soon, therefore, as I had enjoyed a short rest and attended to the welfare of my horse I sallied forth to explore the wonders of the place, and after wandering for some hours through the narrow streets I found myself at sunset on the outskirts of the city, and in front of the Temple, which stood upon a slight eminence and was approached by a long flight of handsome steps. I ascended these that I might gain a last glimpse of the sinking sun, but I did not venture to enter the doors, fearing lest I might be recognised, and also because I had an uneasy half belief that were I, an apostate who had laid violent hands upon an annointed servant of the Gods, to venture within the sacred precincts, some terrible vengeance of the offended Deity would be visited upon me. I therefore hurried down the steps again without delaying to take more than one look at the sun, and was crossing the open ground with head bent down when the shadow of a man fell across the path before me, and a voice saluted me in very good Pehlvi but with the accent of a stranger.

Somewhat startled, I looked up, and beheld a man of about forty who was utterly unknown to me, and whose countenance repelled even while it attracted me. He was dressed in a robe of very dark silk, bordered with red and yellow stripes. On his head he wore a close fitting white cap, with long lappets hanging to the shoulders striped with narrow bands of black; a narrow band of black passed round the head, and on the top there was a crescent shaped ornament of gold, with a spike rising from the middle, and having a curious resemblance to three horns. In his hand he carried a long black wand, tipped with gold. His complexion was almost black, and his large brilliant black eyes seemed to glow with a sombre fire that had no softness in their depths. His lips were full, his features high and of the Assyrian type, while a long straight black beard covered and concealed his cheeks and chin. As I regarded him with some surprise and uneasiness he spoke again, saying:

"Nay, start not, nor question whether I mean harm to thee. I come rather to befriend, and to offer thee a home in this strange city, if thou dost care to listen to a proposal I would make for thy benefit and mine own. Marvel not that I sought thee out, for, behold! I can read thy future, even as I have read in part thy past. The Book of Destiny is an open page before mine eyes, and in it I perceive that thou shalt some day sit upon an Emperor's throne, even as thou wearest now an Emperor's chain around thy neck—yea, do I also see that two of its links are missing, skillfully as thou hast joined them again. The broken chain is, methinks, an ill omen of thy success, but I cannot behold thine end as yet."

Involuntarily I put my hand to my bosom to feel for the chain, which I wore most carefully concealed there, but no part of it was visible, and I was but the more startled by the man's knowledge of it, and I said:

"What is it to thee, O Stranger, whose gold I wear? Why art thou concerned with the business of another?"

He gave a low sardonic laugh that had no mirth in it, as he replied:

"Because the Star of thy Destiny hath crossed the path of mine, and I know that we are fated to learn much more of each other. Because, also, I see that thou dost possess the gift of Divination, and powers which are of inestimable value to those who know how to use them. I would enroll thee in my service,

and train thy gifts that they may be of use to thee and me. Thou hast a thirst for knowlege: Behold! I can give thee knowledge beyond aught that thou canst dream of now. I can reveal to thine eyes mysteries that have been hid from all but the most favored few, and I can guide thy steps upon the dark pathways of the nether world, whereon only such bold spirits as thou and I would dare to tread. All these things can I show to thee and in return I ask that for a season thou shalt serve me, to learn a secret which concerns me much."

"And who art thou who makest such boundless promises? How shall I know that thou hast these powers which thou dost claim?"

"I am Jelalûd-dîn," said he, haughtily. "Some men call me the Sorcerer, others the Good Doctor, others again the Caster of Magic Spells. There are none within this city who would dare to doubt my power. I have long sought for one with gifts like unto thine, and lo! when I beheld thee upon the Temple steps I came out to meet thee."

"Nay," answered I, impressed in spite of myself by his words; "Nay, but I see no visions now." For in truth I had seen none since my flight from the Temple.

"Hadst thou no vision when thou wert under the date trees?" said Jelalûd-dîn, slowly fixing his dark eyes upon my face. "If thou sawest no vision why, then, didst thou choose the Southward path?"

"Now I know that thou art in very truth a Sorcerer," cried I, "for I was alone upon the desert; no eyes beheld that vision but mine own; where then wert thou?"

"In mine own chamber, gazing upon thy Star, and upon mine own. For thy strange Star drew near unto mine and then receded, and I put forth my will to draw thee unto me, for I knew that the hour of our meeting was at hand."

Jelalûd-dîn paused, and turning from me began to trace a figure on the ground with the point of his wand, while I, startled, bewildered, uncertain what to do, stood silently watching him. His words had awakened in me a most keen desire to know more of so extraordinary a man. The danger which I instinctively felt lurked in such knowledge as he possessed only made me the more eager to penetrate the mysteries of these unhallowed powers. I had heard of men who practised forbidden arts, and possessed powers transcending in many respects

those of even the most favored Prophets of the Oracles themselves, and my bold thoughts had many a time strayed longingly upon the forbidden path, for I desired, with all my Soul to raise even a corner of the dark veil which hid the knowledge of these dangerous things.

And Jelalûd-dîn looked up at me and said: "It is because thou thinkest such knowledge as mine is of the powers of evil that thou dost hesitate to answer me. Yet are not all things which are mysterious called by the unlearned 'evil'? Is it not ignorance which is the true evil, and cannot those who know how to do so pluck even from the poison flowers their sting, leaving behind only the harmless blossoms? Join me if thou art willing for a time, but I seek in no way to tie thee. I am no Priest, to fear lest thou shouldst steal the secrets of a Temple, or tell to the World how full of frailty are these vaunted teachers of other men!"

He spoke in mingled accents of scorn and passion, and his eyes glowed with a fierce fire of hatred when he mentioned the Temple. After a brief pause he added:

"Thou hast shown thyself bold in the things which are of Earth, be then as bold to search out the secrets which are not of Earth. Yet I will urge thee no more, for I have fulfilled my part in seeking speech with thee, and if thou art to join me then must thou seek me for thyself."

"Where shall I find thee," said I, "if I desire to join thee when I have thought over all that thou hast said?"

"Thou shalt find me in mine own house: all men know which is the house of Jelalûd-dîn. But if thou seekest me it must be when the stars have climbed the sky, and night's dark mantle doth enshroud the Earth."

I assented to this, and bowing low to each other we parted, but ere Jelalûd-dîn turned away I saw that with his sandalled foot he rubbed out carefully the signs he had been tracing on the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

SHADOWS OF THE FUTURE

It was shortly before midnight when I sought the house of Jelalûd-dîn. It had readily been pointed out to me in the evening, but I found that no one was anxious to tell me much about its owner. All men seemed to fear if not to dislike him, and while they told me he was wealthy and learned they forebore, with the caution of Orientals, to express any opinion as to his moral character, and I could perceive that my inquiries for him had caused me to be regarded with suspicion.

Jelalûd dîn's dwelling was a large low stone building, with one lofty tower rising from the middle, and affording a magnificent view of the stars by night and of the flat, slightly undulating country by day. It was situated in a retired part of the city, close to one of the outer walls, and was surrounded by a large uncultivated garden enclosed by very high walls, all these circumstances tending to add to its seclusion and to the mystery enveloping the character of its owner.

My summons at the gate was answered by a Nubian slave, who was indeed the Sorcerer's sole attendant, and I was conducted through the wilderness of a garden to a small door in a side wall near the tower. Here I was left while the slave announced me to his master. In a little he returned, and I was shown through a narrow passage to an ante-room, and then into a large oblong apartment where Jelalûd-dîn awaited me.

The room betokened the character of its inmate, for instead of the rich hangings and luxurious cushions and soft carpets of a Persian house of that class, its walls were covered by strange objects of all kinds. The skulls and bones of animals and men; the dried bodies and skins of reptiles; huge vampire bats, and strange beasts. Bundles of dried herbs and gigantic tropical plants and grasses hung on the walls, intermixed with long rows of shelves holding every variety of earthen jars, crucibles, and retorts, and huge vessels of rough metal containing various

chemical and strangely perfumed mixtures, with lumps of rock, and specimens of various earths and stones, and crystals in the rough state, and the plumage of rare birds, all grouped together in strange confusion. Another wall was covered by little shelves holding rolls of parchment, carefully tied; and near these hung a curious looking dress of filmy black gauze, spangled with small stars and queer hieroglyphics in gold thread, worked upon it by the deft hands of some embroideress. Beside this dress were two wands crossed, one tipped with gold and having a golden star on the top, and the other tipped with silver, and having a crescent intertwined with a triangle surmounting it. A couple of tiger skins were spread upon the floor before a large tripod, upon which some sweet-scented powder was burning. Dark curtains of heavy silk hung before the doors and window, and in one corner of the room a low archway seemed to lead to a narrow stair giving access to the tower. In one corner a small lamp was suspended, throwing a feeble glimmer of light across the room, and beside the lamp, seated upon a pile of cushions, was Jelal-ûd-dîn himself.

As the slave retired the Sorcerer arose and saluted me, saying to me in the Assyrian language, which my friend Abubatha taught me to understand, "I bid you welcome," and signing me to seat myself upon another pile of cushions beside his own he produced a jar of rare wine and some costly sweetmeats and invited me to partake of his hospitality, adding that "when we had broken bread together I would no longer, he felt sure, distrust him." He also suggested that for the future we should converse in the Assyrian tongue, since I understood it, in order that no chance eavesdropper should be able to overhear our remarks. "For," said he, "even in the house of Jelal-ûd-dîn the walls have ears, and I perceive through yonder wall that my slave Taki is even now striving to learn the purpose with which thou hast sought me, and it were well to use a language he doth not understand, since in this world one half of mankind is ever more intent upon attending to the affairs of their neighbors than looking well after their own, and he who would differ in his habits from those around him must expect to be surrounded by spies, and they who will speak evil of him are many. Were I to go forth now I should find Taki far from the door, and yet do I see that he is even now upon his knees before it, straining every nerve to hear us. Taki is but a wretched slave, a dog

whom I might slay to-morrow; yet hath not even the infinitesimal sandfly power to poison with its sting, although thou mayest kill it the next instant? and such as Taki spread abroad throughout the streets the things done in secret within the chamber. Let us then converse in the Assyrian tongue, since it is mine own language and thou also dost understand it."

He then took the jar of wine and filled a cup which was carved in a most beautiful manner from the pure rock crystal, and set round with gems whose priceless value my experience with the robbers enabled me to know. Having first put this to his own lips he handed it to me, doing the same in like manner with the cakes and sweetmeats, to show in how high esteem and honor he held me.

Having finished this repast Jelal-ûd-dîn arose, and taking the lamp he searched carefully the outer room, and fastened the door, doing the same with the one in the inner chamber where we sat. He then placed the lamp behind a screen where its light was scarcely visible, and returned to me, carrying in his hand a small round disc of polished black marble, whose surface reflected like a mirror. Across this he passed his hands several times, and placing it within a curiously wrought frame of gold, whereon were engraved numerous cabalistic signs, he gave it into my hands, saying: "Look now into this mirror, and say whether Jelal-ûd-dîn hath restored thy powers of vision unto thee."

I took the black disc and held it between my hands, fixing my eyes upon it as I had been wont to do in the Temple with the crystals given me by the Priests, and as I did so a grey mist, like smoke, passed over the dark polished surface; a violent trembling seized my limbs, and a wind as of ice blew over me and seemed to freeze my blood, and stop for a moment the beating of my heart.

As these feelings passed the face of the black mirror became clear, and I beheld a face—a man's face. Oh! Powers of evil! can any mere words describe that face, or paint at once its majestic beauty and its awful fiendlike expression? The eyes were fixed upon mine own, and as I gazed steadily upon them they looked back an answer to my questioning thoughts. The face varied in its expression, and the lips moved, though no sound came from them, and I seemed to sense, rather than hear, each word as it was spoken. It appeared to say:

"You ask who am I? Behold! I am the Angel of Darkness whom thou didst see upon the desert plain. No veil hides now my face, and since thou canst thus steadily return my gaze I know that thou hast courage to behold the wonders of my sphere: wonders which my servant Jelal-ûd-dîn shall reveal unto thee."

The lips ceased to move, the eyes closed, the dark filmy veil covered again the face which faded slowly away, leaving the black surface of the mirror clear again.

I could not move a limb. I could make no motion even with my eyes, which were fixed in a stony stare upon the mirror, even as I myself was fixed like a rigid statue to the spot whereon I stood.

Again the mist passed over the dark mirror, and this time it showed to me a woman's face, beautiful as the dawn! lovely as some fallen Peri of Paradise! I say 'as of some fallen Peri,' for she bore upon her brow that Blood Red Star which is the symbol of the fallen Angels, and amidst her dark hair the Star of Darkness gleamed as a jewel in a diadem. Her glorious eyes were veiled by long dark lashes, yet their gleam of passionate love transfixed my own as the magnetic glance of a snake doth fascinate a bird. Her coral lips were wreathed in smiles, yet were they as the smiles of one who can entrance but never charm, and her expression was that of a refined and subtle sensuality, as evil as ever marked the looks of the most ensnaring syren of the lowest Hell. Her features were perfect in all their proportions, delicately chiselled as a statue of purest alabaster, and lovely as the spirit of a dream. But over all there hung the same stamp of subtly suggested evil, lurking one knew not where, yet marring to the eyes of the Spirit the beauty which charmed the senses.

As I continued to gaze her face seemed to cease to smile; it leered at me, and her fairness was like a mask that hid the treacherous nature of the Soul. But in spite of this my heart was stirred with the most violent passion, the most intense desire to possess her, which was as far as the wide poles are asunder from that pure and beautiful ideal of love which I had hitherto cherished and which Dilferib had so utterly failed to satisfy. And while I looked upon this woman I knew that she was no mere vision, nor even a disembodied spirit that I beheld, but a living, breathing inhabitant of Earth, whose life would yet be linked unto my own, for that in the Book of our Destinies so it was even written.

My intense desire to touch this woman caused me to lift my hand, when lo! the spell which held me was broken and all vanished from my sight.

The low mocking laugh of Jelal-ûd-dîn broke upon my ear and as I turned almost fiercely upon him in my disappointment, he said in a tone of great bitterness, and with the slow measured speech as of one in a dream:

"Yea, even so it is with thee. The charm of love is still the potent spell; thou hast not tasted yet of its hollowness. Thou hast not learned how the fires of passion can sear and wither up the heart, till naught but its empty shell is left. Take up the mirror once again, and I will show thee other things more worthy man's ambition."

Mechanically I turned to look at the black disc again, and once more the smoke-like mist passed across its surface and the cold breeze chilled my blood and stopped the beating of my heart. But the feelings were fainter, and the pictures more dim and indistinct, not clear as before, for I had broken the threads of communication between myself and the Other World, and the visions were marred by the hasty joining of the links.

As pictures traced in smoke I first saw a man seated upon a winged horse, with a winged helmet upon his head and a spear held out before him, as though he charged upon a foe. I saw him fall from his horse and lie trampled in the dust, while a whole legion of warriors appeared to ride over his prostrate body. Then I saw the man and horse arise and spread their wings, and soar away beyond the power of my sight to follow.

I saw a woman draped all in sombre black lie writhing upon the ground in mortal agony, yet not able to die. I saw her drag herself along the ground of what seemed a narrow passage like a tomb, and tear with her finger nails at the hard walls, and dig like a wild beast at the hard ground, in frantic efforts to get out, till I could bear the sight no longer; and then she vanished.

I saw a man lie dying on a bed, surrounded by many courtiers, and many slaves, yet calling always for some one who came not unto him.

I saw this picture give place unto another, wherein there was a throne, and three figures contended for it. First one sat thereon then seemed to fall from it and lie writhing on the ground in the fearful agony of violent death. Then the second figure ascended the steps of the throne, but ere he could seat himself I saw him

stagger and cast his arms up as though fighting many foes, ere he fell dead beside the throne. Then I saw the third man cast himself in the Royal Chair, and a curtain fell between him and myself.

Next I saw a procession of veiled figures pass me, all turning away their heads as they drew near, till one woman came, and raised her veil, and I beheld the face of a woman of exceeding beauty; the beauty of the late summer of life, the mature charms of one past youth yet handsome still. But the face, though handsome, was cruel, and her glance seemed to wither my heart and turn my blood to ice. She gave me a mocking triumphant smile of vindictive hate ere she let fall her veil and passed on.

And last of all I saw a black figure crawl like a snake along the ground toward me, and as I gazed it seemed to spit out its venom at me, and show me the face of a black slave, quite unknown to me, as were all the figures in my visions.

This last picture vanished. I raised my eyes from the mirror, and Behold! the room was full of misty forms, human and yet inhuman in their shapes; dim as smoke wreaths, yet none the less distinct and palpable to my sight. They floated round Jelal-ûd-dîn and myself, yet they touched us not, nor came within the circle around us. In Jelal-ûd-dîn's hand he held the mystic wand, tipped with the triangle and the crescent, which he extended at arm's length to keep them back, uttering some words in a tone of command in a strange unknown tongue. And as he waved them away they receded from us, and vanished like a cloud of dark mist, till Jelal-ûd-dîn and I stood there alone.

CHAPTER IX

MY EVIL GENIUS

The day was breaking as I left the house of Jelal-ûd-dîn and the contrast between the clear light shed around by the rapidly rising sun, and the dark mysterious room which I had left, was like that between Good and Evil. Yet even as I saluted the orb of day, true symbol of Purity and Life, I did not waver in my deter-

mination to accept the offer which the Sorcerer had made me. I had opened the Book of Forbidden Mysteries and looked within, and it was impossible for me to close it again till I had learned the knowledge contained within its pages. The very dangers involved in its pursuit gave to it only an added zest to my adventurous spirit. For what bold explorer of unknown paths was ever yet deterred from following them out by a knowledge of the treacherous nature of the ground he sought to traverse? Everyone believes that in some fashion Luck will especially befriend him, and that where others have met destruction he will yet be safe.

It is of the very nature of such studies as Jelal-ûd-dîn was engaged upon that their fascinations once felt cannot again be shaken off. I accepted the Sorcerer's proposals the more readily because he, reading aright my haughty, impetuous temper ever impatient of control, sought to impose no open restrictions upon my perfect freedom of life. He invited me to join him as an equal, a friend and a pupil, and allowed me to cheat myself with the belief that therefore neither my mind nor my body would be subject to him in any way. And yet, had I not been already blinded by the strong magnetic attraction exercised by this man, and dominated by his masterful intelligence, I should have realized how powerful was the spell he had cast over me, and how completely his will had subordinated mine, so that, to all appearance free, I was in truth his slave already.

I brought my horse with me to Jelal-ûd-dîn's house, and suffered no one but myself to attend to the faithful animal, no other hand but my own to touch it. And many were the long rides I enjoyed, as we sped like the wind across the wide plain. Had I been asked to resign my horse and live shut up, as in the days I spent in the Temple of Amurath, I should soon have wearied of the confinement, but Jelal-ûd-dîn, in his wisdom, sought not to trammel the freedom of my movements, and I came and went as I listed, rode or studied as I felt inclined. All he exacted from me was an oath that under no circumstances, while my life on Earth should last, would I impart to another the mysteries I had learned from him—an oath which I faithfully kept during my mortal life, and which I only break now because Jelal-ûd-dîn himself no longer desires that I should keep it.

My Master devoted himself first to instructing me in the various methods of using my psychic powers, and showed me how to make them subordinate to my will. In the Temple I had

been the blind, often the unconscious, instrument whose powers were used by others. Jelal-ûd-dîn taught me how to use them myself, and initiated me into the mystery of leaving my body at will and roaming through the Spirit Spheres, and holding communion with their inhabitants. He warned me, however, never to attempt this unless he was with me, as I had not yet attained to the degree of knowledge and power which would render me safe in doing so. I pressed him very earnestly to give me this knowledge, but he would not do so, although he promised that later on he would in all respects satisfy my desires. He declared that as yet the time had not fully come when it could be imparted to me, and I felt when he said this what I had felt more than once before, that he showed me enough to make me of use to himself, and to whet my appetite for more, yet always held in his own hands a certain reserve of knowledge which kept me dependent upon him.

He would send my disembodied Spirit to visit certain places and people of whom he desired to obtain secret information, and was able to obtain from me perfectly clear descriptions of what I beheld or heard, although I myself, on waking from my semi-trance, only retained a confused consciousness of where I had been. Not till long afterwards did I learn to what use he put the knowledge he gained.

When I first saw Jelal-ûd-dîn I thought, as I have said, that he was about forty years of age, but when I came to know him I changed this estimate, for ten times forty years would not have sufficed for the accumulation of all the knowledge and experience which he had acquired, and I was not surprised to learn that he was one of those strangely gifted beings who, having discovered the secret of how to defy the assaults of time and arrest the decay of the earthly body, are able to prolong their earthly lives for an indefinite period. What this secret was he did not impart to me, nor did he show any desire to speak of his past history, but from many little circumstances I gathered that there had been incidents in that past which filled his Soul with intense bitterness towards all in a position above him, and gave him an antagonistic feeling to most of his kind. And while he thirsted always for more and more power to control the forces of the Unseen Universe around him, it was chiefly in order that through their aid he might humiliate the powerful Rulers of men who sought his help, or whom he was able indirectly to influence.

Jelal-ûd-dîn's occupations were many and secret, and his wonderful reputation for skill, both as a magician and as a practitioner of medicine, was due to no mere charlatanism, but to a real and profound knowledge, not only of the anatomy of the human body, but of chemistry, and the action of the various drugs which he prescribed. He carried on a perfectly legitimate and even beneficial business in curing many people of wounds and diseases which would have appeared to be fatal, and while he exacted a handsome reward for these services from the rich he gave time and skill for nothing to those who were poor, and was ever generous in assisting the truly unfortunate, so that he had fairly earned the title given him by many of the "Good Doctor." Well would it have been for him and his immortal welfare if he had confined the use of his power to such ends, but with the paradoxical contradictions of this man's strange character, he was as ready, or even more so, to use his skill in furthering an evil as a good purpose, and were the payment made to him sufficient to tempt a strange avaricious love of hoarding which he showed, he would kill even more readily than cure.

He had a large number of clients who sought his aid either to remove troublesome rivals or to blight the prospects of those against whom some spite was cherished. He also sold certain love potions, which really did cause those who drank them to exhibit, at all events for a time, the most intense passion for one towards whom they had previously shown indifference or dislike. He cast spells over some, and sold charms and amulets to others, which certainly appeared to possess the virtues he claimed for them. To my inquiry whether there was indeed power in the drugs he sold, and the charms and spells he cast, he replied with his sardonic smile:

"In the little phial I gave to yonder love sick maid who hath but just left us there was naught but a little water and some drops of a powerful drug, which soothes the nerves and calms the brain, and produces that pleasing sensation of repose which is the first essential to the thorough enjoyment of amorous thoughts. But that phial and its contents have been subjected to my magnetic influence, and have absorbed so much of my personality that they now form a focus to which my thoughts can travel, as on a slender thread of magnetic communication. I can thus project my will unto the person who has drunk of my drug, and I can cause him or her to feel the sensations I desire they should feel, in a greater or

less degree, according as I am able to enter into their sphere, and then in very truth they will exhibit those emotions which I have desired that they should show; they will feel sorry or glad, ill or well, at my bidding."

And with his amulets and charms it was the same. In them there would be certain chemical properties calculated to assist the effects he desired, but it was the intellect and powerful will of the Sorcerer himself which gave them their strongest virtue. The powerful magnetism of a man like Jelal-ûd-dîn once imparted to a wand or ring or other article will remain so long as the object lasts in an entire state, or until a more potent influence is brought to bear upon it. It is this magnetic influence which constitutes the peculiar virtue of these charms, because it makes of the object so magnetised a powerful focus of attraction for a number of Astral creatures of every kind. These, being once attracted to the object, cling to it, much as iron does to loadstone, and the possessor of one of the magic (or magnetic) charms can, if he but possess the requisite knowledge, use the Astral beings who have been brought under the dominion of the original possessor's influence to carry out any desire which he, the actual holder of the charm, may wish.

Many a time have I beheld these phantasmal beings hovering around Jelal-ûd-dîn and myself as we sat poring over ancient parchments which he had obtained from the archives of Magicians who had long since passed from their earthly bodies, but whose magnetic influence still clung around these embodiments of their thoughts and studies. But as I only beheld these Astral beings dimly, and as the explanations of their nature and powers which Jelal-ûd-dîn gave me were mixed with a good deal of error as well as much truth, I shall reserve my account of them till the second half of my story, when I myself beheld them with the clear unveiled eyes of the spirit, and learned how difficult was the attempt to study them from the mortal side of life, where the earthly envelope imposes so many restrictions on the sight and hearing of the Soul.*

It is not given to many mortals to behold these Astral forms of life at all. The faculty which would enable man to do so is seldom found in more than the germ state during the life of the Soul in the spheres of that planet upon which it has found incarnate life. Many Spirits who have passed the first stage of earthly

*See note I as to obsessions.

existence cannot even perceive them. They assure those mortals with whom they communicate that such forms of life do not exist, their limited knowledge (and ignorance that it is limited) preventing them from realizing that a still more etherealized form of sight than they, even as Spirits, possess, may be needful to show these things which are invisible to them even as the things of the Spirit World are invisible to mortal eyes. To behold clearly, and to judge truly, the nature of these aerial phantoms of the astral plane requires a peculiar and very irksome process of development, which few mortals would care to undergo, while fewer still possess the needful qualities of super-refined Soul-sight.

That which has been denominated "Astral matter" exists not alone in the spheres around the planets but extends through all the Universe, constituting in fact a hitherto unrecognized element of that Universe. The term "Astral matter" (so called for lack of a better word to express the difference between Spiritual and Material matter), is used to describe that coarsest and most gross form of Astral Life found in the Earth Plane and in close proximity to material life, whose elements mix largely in the formation of those Astral bodies which form a second shell, as one may say, to the Soul, during its life on Earth and on the Earth Plane. This gross form of Astral Life being mixed largely with physical atoms may be, and often is, perceived by clairvoyants of a low degree of power, and being thus seen is often mistaken for the true Soul-envelopes of those who have passed from Earth life, and who may even have passed to the second sphere, leaving this Astral shell to disintegrate alone.

Jelal-ûd-dîn and those great teachers of the occult under whom he had spent many years in patient study, were only able to search into the mysteries of this intermediate race of beings with the imperfect powers of their earth-encumbered Spirits, and although they learned much concerning those beings, who approach most closely in their constitution to man himself, they were yet ignorant of the more subtle, more refined, and more intellectually created Astrals who constitute the REAL danger attending the intercourse of man and these semi-human powers. He who would seek to make them his slaves, and to use them as tools for the furtherance of his own selfish purposes, should understand all the laws, many and complex as they are, which regulate the existence of such beings; and who so tries to control them without such perfect knowledge is like a man who sleeps sur-

rounded by deadly explosives, that a single chance spark may ignite and cause his utter destruction.

A perfect understanding of these Spiritual laws, wherein lies man's safety from the assaults of these Astral powers, can only be gained in the spheres of Spirit life, and it is therefore never safe for Mortals to attempt in any way to control these Beings. Those who have done so in the past have, sooner or later, in Earth or Spirit life, paid to the full the dread penalty of their temerity.

CHAPTER X

DRIFTING DOWNWARDS

As soon as darkness approached Jelal-ûd-dîn and I began our studies. He would draw around us with his magic wand certain figures of triangles, circles, and other devices, till we were walled in by an invisible barrier against our invisible foes. As my clairvoyant powers developed I perceived that from the point of his black wand a faint blue flame of spiritual ether flowed as he traced out each figure. The degree of materiality possessed by this flame being in exact proportion to that of the Astral beings around us, served to keep them beyond its barrier, for Jelal-ûd-dîn traced upon the ceiling, as upon the floor, his mystic circles, so that these two walls of flame, spreading downwards and floating upwards, formed a cage of spiritual fire within which we sat secure, while outside prowled, like wild beasts of prey, those strange and horrible creatures which the powerful magnetism generated during our experiments attracted, as moths are attracted to the flame of a candle. The faint blue flames would glimmer around us till day dawned, when the glorious purifying rays of the sun would illuminate the Earth and put to flight those creatures of darkness and night.

While surrounded by our circles of mystic fire I would behold many visions, and more than once did I see the face of the woman whose charms had so entranced my senses. But although I strove with all my powers to discover who she was and where she lived, no sign was ever given to guide me to her, although every-

thing I saw tended to prove the reality of her existence. To my inquiries Jelal-ûd-dîn would reply that when he consulted the stars on my behalf the result was ever the same, and showed that the hour of my meeting with her was not yet come, that it was indeed some distance away. "As yet" said he, "she doth appear to me as a maid of tender years; thou hast beheld her as she will be when thou dost meet. But rest tranquil, oh, most impatient youth! Possess thy Soul in patience, for thou canst no more hurry on the hands upon the dial of events than thou canst delay them, and at the appointed time shall thy destiny and hers be fulfilled."

Neither was he able to explain those other visions which he had caused me to see. It was one thing to will that the future should be shadowed out before me, and another to rightly interpret the meaning of the things I saw.

Thus in following out first one branch and then another of mystic lore did time glide on for us so swiftly that four years passed ere I had well marked its flight. Each day I sank more completely under the dominion of Jelal-ûd-dîn's will; each day did I hesitate less and less at following his example and his counsels, even when in my heart I knew them to be evil. From the first some instinct had whispered to me to beware of this man, but I put aside the warning voice and allowed myself to deteriorate more and more under his influence. I had never learned the lessons of self-control and self-restraint, and if I desired a thing I did not hesitate to possess myself of it. In the Temple my nature had been repressed and crushed: in no respect taught and trained. That knowledge of myself and of the consequences which result from our own actions, which might have served as a certain restraint upon the too exuberant passions of my youth, had never been given to me. My life with the robbers of the Hills had not tended to elevate my moral perceptions, and the teachings of Jelal-ûd-dîn were still less calculated to do so. He, for certain reasons of his own, desired above all thing to degrade me to his own level, and I had no shield with which to resist the temptations with which he assailed me. As I sank downwards so did he unmask yet more and more his real character, and show me first one dark plague spot and then another. The vices of gluttony and drunkenness did not tempt either of us; but are there not other vices even more degrading? The secret habits we indulged in at this time were such as to lower us below the level of the irresponsible brutes, even while the cultivation of our intellectual powers enabled us

to control the services of those Earth-bound Spirits, and those denizens of the Astral Plane, whose moral condition placed them on as low a level as ourselves.

Thus did my evil genius drag me down with him, till we had well nigh sunk into the pit of corruption together.

I had become almost like a machine in the hands of this man; he had but to command and I obeyed. He would bid me behold certain things, or visit certain places, and if it was within the limits of that sphere to which I had sunk, I would at once pass into the trance state and give him the desired information.

My mind and my body at last became alike enfeebled by the constant strain put upon them, and I made ever a fainter resistance to the influence of Jelal-ûd-dîn.

Let no one ever resign the sovereignty of himself, his mind or body, into the hands of another, be he Priest or layman. For a man's freedom is his Divine Prerogative, and he who yields it to another is more abject than the lowest slave.

CHAPTER XI

THE SECRET OF JELAL-ÛD-DÎN

It was in the beginning of the fifth year of my residence with Jelal-ûd-dîn that I learned at last the real reason why he had sought me out, and had directed all his ingenuity to bringing me down to a spiritual level with himself.

I had soon learned that he had lived for a number of years far beyond the bounds of the ordinary space allotted to man, but I did not guess that he no longer found the means he had previously used for this end capable of producing the desired effect, and that each day he was growing more feverishly anxious to learn the secret of their failure.

I had observed from the first a very curious change which passed over Jelal-ûd-dîn at times, and which of late had grown much more marked. In the early morning he would appear fresh and young looking, but as evening drew on he would gradually change, growing years older in appearance in a few hours; his

hands in particular greatly showed the appearance of age, growing withered, shrunken, and yellow as old parchment, such as one sees in the hands of very old people; for it is a strange fact that the hands will show age even when the face remains comparatively young.

In the fourth year of my residence with the Sorcerer this change instead of only coming on occasionally, began to appear almost every day, and his face would even grow haggard and old while I was looking at him. On such occasions he would at once dismiss me, and shut himself up alone for some hours, reappearing with his youth again restored. Yet I could see that he was daily consumed with a growing anxiety on the subject.

At last one day as we were sitting together his head fell forward suddenly, his body shrank and shrivelled up into the semblance of a mummy rather than a man, while the change which passed over his face was so ghastly and horrible that I shrank back in horror and alarm. He could not speak, but he signed to me with his old imperiousness of manner to leave the room, while the foam of passion gathered upon his lips, and his hands were clinched together in an agony of helpless wrath as he sank upon the floor.

So great was my subjection to him that I did not venture to remain and offer to help him, but I hovered about outside, till I heard a scratching, scraping noise, followed by my master's voice speaking in faint and feeble tones to some invisible Beings; then, as the voice grew stronger, I strode away to my room.

I did not venture down for some hours, and when I did so I found Jelal-ûd-dîn seated on his cushions and looking once more like his former self, save for a certain haggard drawn look on his face, and a nervous twitching of his hands.

"Ahrinziman," said he, "I regret that thou shouldst have seen me under the influence of that strange mishap, but it may be that after all it will help thee the better to understand what I desire to tell thee. Thou hast been for four years my companion and pupil. To thee have I confided secrets I have shown to no other mortal, and therefore I would confide to thee yet another secret more precious than any thou hast yet learned.

"Thou knowest that I have already lived far beyond the limits of the life lived by ordinary men, but thou dost not know that five centuries have passed since first mine eyes opened to the light of Earth. In those years I have renewed again, and ever yet again, the vital fluid which holds together the atoms of the mortal body;

thus have I kept at bay the cold clutch of Death, whose icy hand doth separate the Spirit from its covering and send it forth to I know not what dark depths of Hell. For those who have dared, as I—and thou also—to lift aside the veil which hides the darkest secrets of Ahriman and his Angels, there awaits upon the black shores of Death's stream many a vengeful fiend whose power we have defied, and whom I at least have subjected to my will and made my slave, but to whom I myself may become subject when I enter those realms where they, and not I, shall reign supreme. Judge then, if such as I am dare to die? Think, whether unto me all means are not lawful whereby I may retain my hold upon this earthly body that serves as my shield against these evil powers with which I have tampered, and whom I have defied? Wonder not that I seek from thee, Oh! my worthy pupil, the help which thou alone canst give. I have trained thee for four years; thou dost behold now that sphere wherein lies the knowledge I desire, and to-night thou and I must seek it together. I cannot longer delay the time. I can no further prepare thee, for each day I lose more rapidly the vitality I have acquired, and each time that I consult the stars I perceive that the span of my life has shortened by many days. The means I have used successfully for many years of the past have begun to fail me now. I lose my life forces more rapidly than I can renew them. Something is required that was not required at first, and thou must find out for me what that element is. To-night, as I have said, we shall seek for it. Meanwhile do thou gaze into yonder black mirror again, and let the invisible ones around us show thee what shall be the outcome of our experiment; shall success or failure be my fate?"

His eyes glittered as he said this, with the glare of a hungry wolf that would fain tear in pieces anything whose destruction might give him the desired food, and I thought within myself he would have slain a hundred men if he could but extract one precious drop of Life from each. I recoiled from him, and took up the mirror as he commanded, and waited while the mist passed over its face.

"What dost thou behold?" cried my Master impatiently.

"I see," said I, "naught but a black cloth or curtain. I see every fold of its drapery, but it rises not to show me anything behind."

"Oh! Powers of Ahriman!" cried Jelal-ûd-dîn in a voice of entreaty, "Oh! Ye Angels of the Dark Spheres whom I have

served! Raise, I pray thee, but one corner of this veil, that we may know the secret thou dost hide, and learn whether life or death is hid behind that veil for me. Ahrinziman, look yet again, dost thou behold yet nothing?"

I looked steadily at the mirror, yet the vision changed not. No corner of the black curtain was raised, and I told Jelal-ûd-dîn so. And even as I did so the curtain itself faded out, leaving no picture there. In vain I waited; nothing more appeared.

Jelal-ûd-dîn wrung his hands in bitter disappointment. Then rousing himself he said:

"Be it even so, since the Oracles are dumb to me. I must be patient till to-night. I shall send Taki a two days' journey from the city, that he may not spy upon us, and then thou and I together will wrest from the Powers of Darkness this secret that they so jealously guard from mine eyes. Go thou and seek repose, that thou mayest gather up all thy powers, for, methinks, that curtain which they have shown is the symbol of silence, and they will answer no questions that we ask now."

I bowed low to my Master and left the room. But although I said nothing to him, I had my own thoughts as to the meaning of the vision. For to me the curtain had not seemed like unto the curtain of silence, but rather it resembled to my eyes a Funeral Pall.

CHAPTER XII

THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

As soon as the black slave Taki had fairly started on his journey, and it grew dark, Jelal-ûd-dîn took me into the garden, and leading me to the fountain showed me where he kept his treasure and some of his most valuable manuscripts concealed. For he had always the fear that some day his house might be attacked, and he himself glad of a hiding place for his wealth as well as his person. Those who engage in such practices as Jelal-ûd-dîn make of necessity many enemies, who would be only too glad of an excuse to attack and plunder them.

My Master first drained all the water out of the marble basin, and then showed me how to raise one of the large squares that paved the bottom. We saw before us a narrow flight of steps, and on descending them I found myself in a small oblong chamber like a vault. Here were a number of iron bound chests of very massive construction, which evidently held the wealth which the Sorcerer had accumulated during his extraordinary life. In other chests of lighter make there were a number of parchment rolls. Jelal-ûd-dîn took out three of these rolls, and then with my assistance carried up one of the massive chests into the house, taking the precaution, however, to close the stone before we left the fountain.

The weight of the chest rather surprised me as we brought it in, and the contents surprised me still more, for it appeared to be full of large lumps of heavy metal, like a mixture of lead and silver. These my Master put into a large smelting pot over a small furnace in his room, and as soon as the mass became molten he poured it into a large mould. All the time it was melting he continued to chant, in a low, monotonous voice, an incantation, as I imagined, to those Powers of Evil whose aid he sought. Having made all arrangements for cooling the metal which he had poured into the mould, he led me up the narrow stairs to the tower, saying that those whom he had summoned to his aid him must be left to do their task alone.

Having reached the tiny chamber at the top of the tower he drew the heavy hangings across the openings of the windows, and having thus shrouded us in darkness he bade me look at his hands and tell him what colors were visible to my clairvoyant sight as emanating from them.

"Each color which thou wilt see doth show the presence of certain essences which go to form the complete life fluid, by whose agency the particles of the body are held together. If they are all equally balanced then is the life force strong and vigorous, but if any are faint and pale then will the body exhibit signs of disease, and if any of them fail altogether, so that the spectrum becomes incomplete, then must death follow within a brief period, for each element is needful to hold the whole in combination. I am conscious that one or more of these elements is wanting in a great degree to myself; which ones I cannot myself discover. Do thou look then and tell me."

For some moments I could behold nothing. The extreme

darkness made it impossible to see with my physical eyes, and for a short time my clairvoyant sight seemed gone from me. After about half an hour of anxious watching I began to see a faint cloud of mist hovering around the place where Jelal-ûd-dîn stood. This grew into two long tongues of parti-colored flames, which seemed to pour out of his extended hands. The complete rainbow-band was visible, on the top the blue-white light was a mere thread, while the crimson at the foot was as a wide torrent of flame. The blue was small, and the gold mixed with dark streaks, like a stream that has become muddy.*

Jelal-dû-dîn's delight was great when he found that I could see this. It seemed to revive his drooping hopes and renew his courage.

"Behold," said he, "thy gifts are of a great and priceless value, Ahrinziman. Many seers have I tried, but none could behold this vital rainbow with such clearness as thou hast done. Many see it in part, but few indeed can subdivide those parts into distinct threads of color. Some behold only the prevailing color of each individual person whose spectrum they can discern; few can recognize that all colors must be present in the aura of every man, or else he would die. They see the prevailing colors and think that is all there is to see, and that therefore the full rainbow is not present in all animated nature. Do thou rest passive now, while I ask a yet further test from thy powers."

*The life of Man is sustained by a fine etheric fluid composed of three elements—the animistic or mental life essence—the astral fluid or magnetism of the intermediate magnetic plane between soul and body and the aura or aroma of the physical plane—the material essence of physical organic life. The blending of these three constitute the perfect psychic or mediumistic nature!—an unequal proportion of any of the three causes a certain disturbance in the equilibrium which renders the mortal either too sensitive or too irresponsive to spiritual influences.

The whole process of materialisation and de-materialisation depends on the balancing of the three elements and their action on one another.

Thus one who has a superflow of the magnetic fluid may cause objects to move around him without contact and yet cannot help spirits to appear in material form; again one with a strong mental essence but a deficiency of the other may see and hear the visitants of the other plane or project themselves into other planes yet cannot cause the materialisation of any psychic body. Yet put the two extremes together and add the soul essence and aromal essence to them and you can create life in the physical form instantly. But the permanence of such a material apparition will depend entirely on the amount of soul essence with which you can endow your creation.—F. W. THURSTAN, M. A.

He now approached me and drew some figure upon the floor in front of where I stood, and I saw the blue flame as it flowed from his wand tracing it in lines of light. Then he made some passes over me, and the flames of crimson fire which flowed from his fingers seemed to scorch my brain, and cause a stupor to pass over me, and numb my limbs, till I grew fixed rigidly to the spot whereon I stood. And as in a dream, yet a dream with all my faculties in fullest consciousness, I heard Jelal-ûd-dîn call upon the Angel of Darkness to appear.

The tower seemed to rock with an earthquake. A rolling, rushing noise as of an approaching army of the Unseen was heard and I saw a brilliant Star of Crimson Fire pass through the roof and rest upon the floor. From its heart there arose the figure of a man: a tall majestic man, clothed from head to foot in a long black mantle. He seemed to rise and rise before me, till he stood a dark, distinct figure surrounded by rays of fire. He drew aside the covering from his head and face, and I beheld once more the fearful countenance of that Angel of Darkness I had seen on my first visit to Jelal-ûd-dîn.

I was so completely entranced that I could not move even an eyelid, but I could see and hear all that passed, and I knew that the Being who stood before me now was no mere vision reflected to me from the face of a magic mirror, but the actual Spirit himself, clothed with a materiality that would have made him visible to any mortal sight, surrounded as he was by that dull glow of crimson light.

As Jelal-ûd-dîn prostrated himself before him, the Dark Angel said in a low, deep tone:

"Thou hast summoned me, and lo! I am here. What dost thou desire of me?"

"Oh, Great Spirit! Powerful Angel! I ask from Thee the boon of a yet longer life on Earth, and I conjure Thee, by the many years in which I have served Thee, that thou shouldst reveal to me what are the means whereby I can attain the boon."

"Art thou certain that the life of Earth is so sweet a thing that thou hast no other desire than to prolong it?" said the Angel, fixing his sombre eyes on Jelal-ûd-dîn's face.

"Yea," answered the Sorcerer humbly, "Yea, above all things do I desire it, for I know what the life of mortality is, but who can paint to me the life of that unknown World beyond the Tomb."

"It is enough," answered the Angel. "In so far as lies in my

power I grant thee thy petition. But know, oh man of Earth, that Life and Death are not within my power to give. Neither Angel nor Mortal can bestow that, since they are the gifts of the one Supreme Being alone, before whose almighty will the angels of the Light and Dark Spheres alike must bow. What I can give to thee is the knowledge of the means whereby life may be sustained, and thou thyself must use them to the appointed end, be it for good or evil unto thee."

He struck the floor thrice with his foot as he spoke, and where his foot had rested I perceived a small thick roll of parchment rise, as though it rose through the floor. To this he pointed, saying:

"Read thou that scroll and follow the directions it gives thee, and thou shalt hold within thy grasp the secret which means Life or Death for thee. I bid thee not 'farewell,' oh, Jelal-ûd-dîn, my worthy servant! for I foresee that we shall meet again ere long."

He drew his mantle once more over his face, then extending his arms like wings above his head, the Dark Angel seemed to rise and soar from the tower, till the black clouds of night shrouded him from sight.

I awoke from my trance, to behold Jelal-ûd-dîn thrusting the precious roll within his robe, jealously guarding it even from my eyes.

"Oh, Ahrinziman!" he cried in a tone of great exultation, "thou art indeed of priceless value to me. Little did I ever hope that such success as this would crown my researches. Dost thou know that this scroll I have received is in the veritable writing of the greatest Master of our magic art that ever lived? It hath been said that when at last, weary of the life of Earth, he laid himself down to die, he made those around him vow to place this papyrus roll between his dead hands and bury it with him in the tomb, that none might learn the secret he had discovered. It was also said that this man had discovered the grave of Adam, the forefather of all mankind, and that in the same grave where rest the bones of Adam this great Magician was laid to rest. Vainly have I and others sought for this tomb, that we might possess ourselves of the secret of life which the dead Master held within his dead hands. Yet ever in vain have we sought it, for who knoweth where is the grave of Adam, and how should one discover what so powerful a Magician desired to keep secret? And now, behold in mine own hands I hold this mystic scroll, and thou and I together shall test its virtues to-night. Thou art worthy of great

recompense, Ahrinziman, for by thy power was the Angel able to manifest himself to me. For years have I held communion with him, yet was it ever imperfectly. His words came to me as thoughts, whose meanings I could but guess. To-night for the first time he hath spoken in the direct voice unto me, and for the first time I have beheld him clearly. And, Oh! most precious gift of all, he hath given unto me this wondrous scroll. Verily, Ahrinziman, thou shalt choose from my treasure chests such riches as thou dost desire, and I will show thee the secrets of many wondrous things. But come, let us descend, for the work of the Dark Spirits will now be finished in the chamber below, and we have yet much to do ere day shall dawn."

We accordingly returned to the Sorcerer's room, where we found the large smelting cauldron, which he had cast from the rough lumps of metal in the box, ready now for use. The exhilaration of my Master was so great, and his excitement so keen, I scarcely knew him, and I thought unto myself that it was no good omen of success; for when our hopes are highest is oft the time when misfortune is nearest to our hand, and an exaggeration of expectancy, like unto Jelal-ûd-dîn's is most oft the fore-runner of a great disaster.

Jelal-ûd-dîn trimmed carefully his lamp, and placed it on the table beside him. Then, having first thrown certain herbs into the cauldron, and added some chemicals from hermetically sealed jars which he had brought from the vault beneath the fountain, he placed the whole mixture over the fire in the brazier, and bade me watch for one hour that it did not stop simmering, while he himself sat down to read the precious papyrus scroll.

For about an hour he read on, and as I watched him from time to time I saw his face change its expression from one of expectation to doubt and even fear, while he glanced over at me uneasily, lowering his eyes the moment they met mine, as though he dared not meet my questioning gaze. Yet as often as I looked up I would find him regarding me again with the same curious uneasy expression.

At last he rose, and thrusting the scroll within his bosom, approached the fire, and having tested the contents of the cauldron declared that it had reached the first complete stage of preparation. He therefore transferred it to another vessel suitable for distilling the liquid, and as it rose in steam let it fall drop by drop into a golden bowl beside the fire.

Jelal-ûd-din now proceeded to trace anew upon the floor his protecting wall of Spiritual fire, and threw a handful of sweet scented powder into the brazier. As the smoke arose from it I saw a grey misty shape recoil from the precious cauldron, and with a gesture of menace disappear. As I told Jelal-ûd-din this he gave a sigh of intense relief, saying:

"I did not behold yonder shape, yet I sensed his presence, and I knew that were he to touch the golden bowl all our labor would be wasted. I was too long absorbed in the reading of that scroll, and had well nigh suffered one of the evil Spirits to break in upon us. See, now, as this mixture distills I will tell thee why it was that I left the metal pot to be manipulated by the Dark Spirits who wait upon me. As I left it, it was but made by mortal hands, and would have held only the material part of these ingredients I put in it. The Spiritual essence that I desire above all things to preserve would have escaped. The Elixir of Life would have evaporated. Thus did I leave the Spirits of Darkness to work upon the pot, and make it suitable for our work of darkness. Each time that cauldron is made use of it must be destroyed and cast afresh. Thrice already have I thus used it—who knoweth how many more times I shall do so?

"Ahrinziman, do thou withdraw a little from me for a time; sit yonder, near the window, for I have that to do which I must do alone, and at the right moment I shall again summon thee to draw near and lift the vessel down with me."

He spoke in a voice of constraint, and again avoided meeting my eyes, while his hands trembled as with an ague as he signed to me to withdraw. His manner also had changed. The state of exhilaration had passed, and he looked haggard and anxious and ill at ease.

I withdrew to near the heavily curtained window and seated myself upon some cushions, to watch the progress of events, suspecting strongly that my Master did not desire that I should behold all he did, although he required my presence in the room.

CHAPTER XIII

MY ANGEL OF LIGHT

Nearly an hour passed. Jelal-ûd-dîn hung all the time over the precious pot and its contents, scarce turning to look at me, but muttering strange incantations from time to time, and making with his wand mystic figures in the air, or throwing fresh scented powder into the brazier. He seemed to be absorbed in his experiment, and almost oblivious of my presence. My clairvoyant sight seemed unusually clear, for I beheld around us more distinctly than ever, the cloudy phantoms of the Astral Plane, who seemed to float around the room and pass through the walls and ceiling and rise up through the floor as though the solid masonry had been a barrier of water or of air. Only the ring of magic fire kept them away from us, and as the precious liquid simmered in the vessel they appeared to gather in ever thickening clouds, pressing forward upon one another until those next the flaming ring were almost forced through it by the pressure from behind.

How shall I describe the multiform variety of strange, grotesque and horrible creatures that I saw? Some large, and towering like giant phantoms over all the rest; others, winged like unto a mixture of men and dragons; creatures that resembled wild beasts in their bodies, yet had the faces of men; imps and dwarfs; some all huge heads with scarce any bodies; others, all large bloated bodies and no heads. Phantoms that were in all respects like unto men and women, yet of bodies so unsubstantial that they seemed to dissolve like smoke wreaths, and then form into shape again. Beings that were like all the fantastic creations of man's wandering thoughts, and yet possessing each its own individuality, its curious resemblance to the human type. Wild and horrible looking human Spirits, Earth-bound and miserable, mingled with this phantom throng, and fought with them in a fierce desire to approach and grasp this precious essence of Life. Huge misty shapes drew near, like and yet unlike to men, and hovered like brooding Spirits of Evil around the fiery ring. Here

and there a head or arm, a foot or face, would suddenly receive materiality from the powerful atmosphere of material magnetism which we had generated around us, and vivified with the emanations from the precious Life-giving Elixir; and with the materiality this head or foot or face would become distinct and visible to Jelal-ûd-dîn's sight as well as to mine, causing him to re-double his precautions and replenish his wavering circle of fire, through which the wild Phantom horde threatened at every moment to burst in a great torrent of destroying fiends of Darkness.

Distant rumbling as of thunder resounded above us and approached us, as fresh and yet ever fresh hordes of black Spirits gathered round. The house appeared to rock and sway with the assaults of this mighty multitude of unknown foes, and as time passed on, and drop by drop of the precious mixture fell into the golden bowl, the excitement around us seemed to approach a climax, and each moment, methought, would be our last.

And now a change passed over the vital fluid distilling into the golden bowl. A crimson cloud arose above it, then changed into rose color, and faded into a delicate pink; then changed again to violet and lilac, then into blue, green and yellow, and lastly into silver and white, till a glow as of a rainbow cloud hung above the mystic jar containing it.

At this moment I became conscious that in the darkness of the curtains where I sat there gleamed a Star—a faint Star, yet there it shone! And as I turned to gaze at it I saw again my Angel of Light, unseen through all the long years since my childhood, but visible again at last. She looked not however as I had seen her before, radiant and bright, her robes glittering with Silver Stars. She was dim and misty, as though I beheld her through a cloud of mist. Her face, too, was sad. Her eyes looked as though she wept. Her long garments seemed to cling to her, as though drenched with her own tears. She held out her arms to me imploringly, and beckoned to me to come.

And I arose to follow her, for I could not resist the pleading of her looks, and my heart was stirred at the sight of her by the old passionate feeling of love and longing to clasp her to my heart. I forgot the experiments. I had well nigh forgotten Jelal-ûd-dîn, as I rose to follow my White Angel from that dread room of mystery and fear.

As I raised a corner of the curtain to pass out, I looked back. There stood Jelal-ûd-dîn, bending like an old, old man as he

stooped over the precious golden bowl, almost filled now with the drops of life-giving fluid. His hands were out-stretched like the claws of a bird of prey that waits to clutch its expected food. His eyes were fixed with greedy expectancy upon the last few drops as they slowly fell one by one into the bowl. He seemed lost to all thoughts but the one great thought of self-preservation. Above his head floated the rainbow cloud, around him glimmered the ring of pale blue flame, and outside the fierce Phantoms fought like maniacs in their frantic efforts to break through.

I dropped the curtain and passed out, impelled by a power stronger than my sense of fidelity to Jelal-ûd-dîn, stronger than any influence I had yet felt, and followed the figure of my White Angel as she led me on, floating before me, her head half turned to see that I still followed, until we reached the place where my horse was stabled. There she paused, and pointing to the door, vanished from my sight.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAGIC SCROLL

As my White Angel disappeared I remembered my Master, and full of remorse at having thus abandoned him I hurried back to the house.

As I entered the room I saw that the mystic circles of flame had died out, although the fire still burnt in the brazier, and by its light I saw that the vessel for distilling the Elixir lay on the floor; near it lay the golden bowl, overturned and empty, save for a single drop of the Golden Fluid. Beside it lay the Sorcerer himself—dead. It did not need that I should look at his distorted limbs, twisted and contorted in all the agonies of a violent death; at his eyes, starting from their sockets and staring in wide open fear of some unknown thing of terror; at his half open mouth from which the swollen tongue protruded, and from which some drops of black blood oozed, to tell me that he was past all human aid. His robe had fallen back from one arm, which was bent above his head as if though to ward off an attack. On the bare wrist were

the marks of giant fingers, scorched and burnt into the flesh like the marks from a hot iron; and on his throat were marks of a similar hand, which had evidently strangled him.

I drew back from the fearful sight in horror and remorse, and my first thought was to fly from the accursed place. Then I bethought me of the Sorcerer's many valuable manuscripts, containing in some of them knowledge that was of priceless value, and not all evil, embodying as it did the patient researches of many years of labor in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and I knew that so soon as Jelal-ûd-dîn's death should be discovered his house would be pillaged and his papers destroyed or carried away.

I resolved, therefore, to place them for safety in the vault beneath the fountain, until opportunity was afforded to me to take them away. I accordingly put as many of them as I could there, taking with me three, which I knew referred only to the practice of the medical art. I also took with me the black wand and the magic mirror.

Having gathered up my own possessions, which were in my room, together with some gems of value which Jelal-ûd-dîn had at various times given to me, I returned to the room where the dead man lay, and was about to leave the house when my eyes fell upon the rapidly stiffening figure of the unfortunate Sorcerer, and I thought that I would throw a cover over the ghastly face. I could not bring myself to touch him, to close those staring eyes or straighten those twisted limbs, but as I took up one of the tiger skins to place over him I saw the papyrus scroll within the bosom of his robe, and filled with curiosity to read its secret, I drew it out and thrust it into my girdle. As I did so I could not but notice that the same extraordinary change which had once at least, to my knowledge, passed over the living body of the Magician had come over it now. Since I had first beheld it the dead body had begun to shrink and shrivel up. The yellow skin hung in a thousand creases on the shrunken frame. The look of age was beyond anything one could imagine, and in that shrivelled withered form it was difficult to recognize Jelal-ûd-dîn. It was as though he was turning into dust before my eyes, and I wondered as I looked down upon him whether there would be more than a heap of bones, a little dust and a pile of clothing, by the time the black slave Taki returned and his master's death was discovered. It was as though the Earth was claiming all at once the decaying body of which it had been so long defrauded.

As I turned away and left the dead Magician amidst the paraphernalia of his mystic art, which had proved so powerless to save him from the grim hand of Death, I felt as if the spell which had hung over me for four years was broken at last, and I had awakened as from a dream, restored to my freedom of will once more. It appeared as though a sudden access of life and vigor filled my veins. The strange lassitude that had of late oppressed me with a feeling of having all my limbs weighed down by invisible weights, and which deprived me of the energy to think or plan for myself, was gone. I felt once more that I could do or dare, not as the tool of another, but as one who fights and labors for himself.

As I passed into the grey light of morning I thought of that other morning four years before, when I had come from my first visit to Jelal-ûd-dîn in that house of darkness, and passed into the clear light of the dawning day; and I questioned within myself whether the knowledge I had gained had indeed been worth the price I had paid for it, resolving, as I thought over all these things, that I would turn to a good use on behalf of my fellow men the wisdom I had learned amidst so much evil.

Having saddled my horse I lost no time in quitting the city, for I knew that under the circumstances of Jelal-ûd-dîn's death, at a time when he and I had been alone together, it would be impossible to convince any one that I was innocent of his murder, and I resolved to put a wide space between myself and the dead man before the death should be discovered.

I rode onward, avoiding all villages and towns, till night fell, when I encamped upon a rocky eminence, and lighted a fire with brushwood to keep away the beasts of prey which prowled around. I did not venture to sleep, although I was growing terribly fatigued by the excitement and the exertions of the past day and night, but I lay down beside my horse, and drawing the papyrus roll from my girdle resolved to keep myself awake by reading it, which, thanks to my studies with Jelal-ûd-dîn, I was able to do.

It began by setting forth the various means by which the vital fluid could be renewed, and in what substances it could be found in the purest state. Then it gave some directions for extracting it, and went on to explain, that for those who had already renewed their span of life to thrice the period allotted unto man it required a stronger and yet ever stronger degree of power in the vital Elixir to enable the atoms of the body to hold together. It then went on to say that, as with each renewal of life the crumbling body

required yet more and more of the vitality to be incessantly poured into it as food, the writer advised that either the fast decaying body should be abandoned and a fresh body from which the lawful Spirit owner had been ejected, should be taken possession of, or else that some young and vigorous person, in whose veins the blood yet coursed warm and red and full of vitality, should be kept in close proximity to the seeker after perpetual life, in order that the young fresh life should feed with its magnetism the one whose body was old, and thus save it from the too rapid waste of the precious fluid it had absorbed.

"Or," said the manuscript, "if thou dost prefer it, thou seeker after endless life, thou canst suck as a vampire-spirit the life from many a slumbering mortal, returning to thine own mortal covering ere dawn to renew its life with the life thou hast thus gained. Yet beware that you dost not try this means of sustaining life after thou hast for the fifth time drunk of the great Elixir, for by the time thou hast tasted of it for the fifth time thou canst no more with safety leave thy crumbling shell, else will it turn into swift decay and leave thy Spirit without mortal covering. There be some that claim that they can construct anew a body for themselves. Yea, and it is even so. Yet this body will hold together for so brief a space of time it were not possible to cling to Earth by such means. From time to time the Spirit may manifest itself through such a body, but it can enjoy none of the pleasures of the Earth life while in it, since all its efforts must be directed to preserving it from disintegration. If, then, thou dost desire to live the life of mortal men, then thou must steal a body from another, or else steal from many the mortal life-essence which shall sustain thine own.

"There is yet a third and darker way by which those who find they cannot possess themselves of the body of another may yet steal from him his young, fresh life. Let there be an Elixir made, the strongest and most powerful that can be distilled, and when the rainbow cloud shall form, and the last golden drops fall within the bowl, let the man with strong young life throbbing in all his veins draw near and touch the vessel wherein is contained this strong Elixir, for as the stronger body doth attract the weaker, as the larger draws to it the smaller, as the loadstone draws to it the iron, so will the powerful life within the bowl draw to it the life contained within the mortal body of the youth, and as the mortal body, deprived thus suddenly of its young life, shall sink upon the

ground, he who can drink at once of the grand Elixir shall absorb both the life that was contained within the body of the youth and that contained in the magic liquid—so shall he renew his life for yet another hundred years, or it may be even more. Yet let him beware! The Powers of Darkness are not mocked, for behold

* * * * *

I had read so far, and was about to turn the page, when from the darkness of the night there came forth a hand! A gigantic hand, that terminated at the wrist, which grasped the papyrus scroll and snatched it from my hold, vanishing with it as suddenly as it had appeared.

Thus did the secrets it contained remain in greater part a secret still.

But I had read enough. I knew now why Jelal-ûd-dîn had been so disturbed by the reading of it, and why he no longer dared to meet my gaze. And I recognized with an emotion of thankfulness the sudden death from which my Angel of Light had saved me.

CHAPTER XV

I MEET ZULEIKA

I made my way through Persia into the Hill country of Afghanistan, and in the city of Herat I took up my abode. I had resolved to practice as a professor of the medical art, and with the knowledge taught me by Jelal-ûd-dîn I wrought many successful cures. With the darker mysteries I tampered not, for the horror of my Master's death was yet strong upon me; and although I kept his magic wand and the mirror, and certain other things, I did not use them, and such gifts of Divination as I possessed I used at this time only to aid me in my work of healing those who came to me for help.

Ere long I made for myself an honorable reputation, and was sent for by even the highest class of citizens, and for a time I re-

mained quietly and contentedly living as one highly respected and esteemed.

And now I bethought myself of taking unto me another wife. I had learned from the manuscripts of Jelal-ûd-dîn how to guard my body when my Spirit should be absent from it, and I had taken occasion to go thus unknown to visit the wife whom I had left among the robber tents in the mountains of Persia.

I found her, as I expected, already wed unto my rival Hadji. The old Chief was dead, and Hadji ruled in his stead over the tribe, while Dilferib ruled with no gentle hand over Hadji.

I therefore felt myself to be at liberty to find another partner, and began to look round at all the fair maidens whose parents I knew. My idea of love had been somewhat sullied in my life with Jelal-ûd-dîn. Women no longer appeared such sacred divinities to me, and I had begun to despair of ever meeting one who could inspire in my heart a romantic attachment. Little did I dream that the crisis of my life, so far as love was concerned, was so near at hand.

There was an Arabian merchant in the city with whom I was somewhat intimate, and on my mentioning my desire to find a wife, he invited me to visit his family. He had, he said, three daughters, each of whom was esteemed to be beautiful, and I might choose, if I pleased, one of them.

Accordingly I was invited to a feast, after which these maidens were each in turn to unveil before me.

The merchant had a niece as well as three daughters, and as the youngest daughter had already set her affections upon a youth, it was agreed among the girls themselves that the niece should quietly take her place without telling the merchant, for as the youngest daughter was considered the most beautiful it was feared that I might select her.

The niece, whose name was Zuleika, was the orphan daughter of the merchant's brother, who had settled in Turkey and married a Circassian lady of great beauty but faithless disposition, who had escaped with her lover, leaving behind the little daughter who was their only child. At the father's death this girl had been adopted by the good merchant, Abou Hassan, and brought up with his own daughters.

I need not dwell upon the entertainment given to me by the merchant, nor describe the charms of the two elder daughters, whose blushing faces were momentarily unveiled to my eyes with-

out exciting more than a passing sensation of admiration for their comeliness.

The third girl, whom the merchant imagined to be his youngest daughter, drew her veil very slightly aside, showing to me a face which surpassed the others in beauty of feature and perfection of coloring. But it was not her loveliness which caused the sudden throb of my heart, the quick rush of blood through all my veins, but the fact that as this third maiden unveiled before me I recognized the long sought for face of the girl I had seen in the magic mirror, on that eventful night when I had first visited Jelal-ûd-dîn.

CHAPTER XVI

MY MARRIAGE WITH ZULEIKA

The worthy merchant Abou Hassan was somewhat chagrined when he found that his niece and not his daughter had been selected to become my wife, and he was angry at the trick which had been played upon him. However, being somewhat of a philosopher, he consoled himself with the reflection that in any case it was well that Zuleika should be provided for, and gave his assent to our union not ungraciously. I pressed for an early marriage, for if the mere reflection of this girl's face projected to me in a mirror had so entranced my senses, her bodily presence had doubly enchained my heart, and I was consumed by the most impatient desire to marry her with as little delay as possible.

Of the strange warning against her which her appearance in the mirror had conveyed to me, I thought but little, attributing to the influence of Jelal-ûd-dîn's room all that had conveyed a suggestion of evil in Zuleika herself. She was but a young girl brought up in the strict seclusion of her uncle's home, and it was impossible to look at the guileless innocence of her lovely face, with its modestly drooping dark eyes that would scarce raise themselves to look at me, and still associate a thought of evil with her. No! I felt sure she was an Angel of goodness and purity,

and I longed with all my soul to hasten the day which should make her my own.

The jewels which had been given to me by Jelal-ûd-dîn were, as I have said, of considerable value, and I had thought it as well to part with them to a merchant who dealt in precious stones. I had, moreover, made a good deal of money by the practice of the healing art, so that I was in a position to make my presents to the bride and her family both numerous and costly, and I was accordingly treated with a corresponding amount of favor. Zuleika herself I did not again behold unveiled, but I was permitted several interviews in the presence of her family, and the impression she had made upon me was, if possible, deepened each time.

At last all the many customs and ceremonies attending a marriage in the East had been complied with and I was permitted to take my bride home to my own house at last. The time which followed was one of such intense happiness, of such an intoxication of love, that even now, after all this lapse of time, I sigh as I look back upon it, and would fain, were it but possible, recall again, if but for an hour, the illusions and the bliss of that time. That Zuleika should love me as much as I loved her was not to be expected. Only in the perfect union between twin souls is found the perfect unity of love, and Zuleika was in many respects the opposite of my true ideal, although she had so completely usurped the place of it that I could no longer dream of any perfections which were not possessed by her. She was clever, witty, and full of resources. She never palled upon nor wearied me, as poor Dilferib had done. Zuleika seemed to divine my thoughts ere I could utter them, and gratify my wishes when they were but half formed in my own mind. Although ignorant of life, her intuitions were so keen she never appeared awkward or at a loss, even under the most trying circumstances. By nature a coquette, she learnt almost at once the arts by which women enslave men, and make the cleverest and most worldly of us mere puppets in their hands. She was an actress by instinct, and it came more easily and naturally to her to feign an emotion than to feel one, for she was herself incapable of real deep feeling of any kind, save in-as-much as she desired always to enjoy the highest measure of comfort possible for herself. She could not understand the absolute devotion with which I worshipped her, the passionate jealousy I suppressed at beholding her bestow her caresses upon even a pet bird, lest I should be thereby robbed of even a little of the

love I desired to make all my own. She never guessed how I hungered for her kisses, how I trembled and how my heart beat with the wildest emotion at every touch of her soft hand. Through how many long nights have I lain awake, unable to sleep by reason of the fever of thoughts which burnt like fire in my brain, watching her as she lay serenely asleep in my arms, noting every feature of her face, every shadow of expression, and wondering of what she dreamed, longing with passionate vehemence to know her thoughts, and whether her dreams were of me and of my love. I would have given so much to read her thoughts, and to know what share I had in the emotions of her soul. But although she could read my thoughts, hers were a sealed book to me, of which I could never, with all my powers of divination, read one line.

I think there were times when my vehemence bewildered and wearied her. I exacted so much that she grew at last to be somewhat tired of the endless demands I made upon her love. Her little bits of acting were done listlessly, and in my disappointment and suspicious jealousy I would reproach her with coldness and indifference, till her large, beautiful eyes would regard me in languid astonishment. She was quite happy, why could not I be so? she would ask, and then she would rouse herself to bestow upon me the coveted caress, which for a time removed the cloud from my brow, the suspicion that she was indifferent to me from my heart.

I do not think it is ever possible for natures such as mine to be perfectly happy upon earth, where the clouds of uncertainty, the disappointments and disillusionments that are inseparable from all earthly things, perpetually afford food for jealousy and suspicion, and where the hunger of the heart seldom finds full satisfaction. But in spite of many drawbacks I think that during the first years of my union with Zuleika I tasted as full a measure of happiness as ever falls to the lot of mankind; and certainly had I known what the years which followed were to bring to me I should have valued the comparative happiness of that time still more highly than I did.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SON OF ARTEMISIA

I had been married a little over three years, and although no child had been given to crown my hopes I was too deeply in love with Zuleika to feel this as a great disappointment, dearly as I loved children and greatly as I had desired to have a child of my own.

My fame as a physician had spread for many a mile around Herat, and I was sent for by the highest officials of the Court of the Afghan Princes. I was not greatly surprised, therefore, to receive a summons to attend at the Palace, as a young kinsman of the Ameer had been seized with violent convulsions which no one was able to relieve. The Grand Vizier, who was one of my patients, having mentioned my name to the Prince, I was sent for in all haste.

On being shown into the chamber where the sufferer lay I found that he was a young man of about my own age, handsome but somewhat effeminate looking, and evidently weak of will. A glance at him showed me that this was no common case of epilepsy, but that the unfortunate Prince was the victim of a form of Demoniac possession, which is far more common than is usually supposed. To my clairvoyant sight it appeared as if a black spirit of a low type was making frequent and violent efforts to withdraw the rightful possessor of the young man's body, and enter into that covering himself, much as one man may forcibly wrench another's cloak from off his shoulders in spite of his efforts at resistance. The fearful contortions of the Prince were caused by the resistance of his half conscious spirit against the would be despoiler.

Hastily uttering some words which I had learnt from Jelal-ud-dîn, and knew to possess a powerful effect upon spirits of this class, I advanced slowly towards the Prince, keeping my eyes steadily fixed upon the dark being struggling with him, and throwing all the powers of my will into my determination to make

him release the young man. The dark being cowered down before me, uttering fearful howls of rage, which, owing to the closeness of the rapport between them seemed to come from the unfortunate young man. As I laid my hand upon him, however, he became suddenly silent, his limbs relaxed and he fell in a dead faint upon the floor, while the dark spirit seemed to crawl like a snake along the floor, wriggling its body away like a reptile. As it withdrew it turned its head and looked at me, seeming to spit out its anger like venom upon me, and showing to my astonished eyes the face of a black slave. The face and the action were so exactly those of the vision shown me in Jelal-ûd-dîn's mirror, that for half a moment I had almost forgotten the poor patient, till the voice of the Ameer himself recalled me to a recollection of where I was.

A few simple remedies soon restored the young man to his senses, and although terribly exhausted he soon began to regain his strength.

In reply to my inquiries, I was told that he had been subject to these attacks for some years, and when under their influence exhibited symptoms which had alarmed and distressed his family so much that they feared for his reason if not for his life, since the last few attacks had reduced him to so terrible a condition of exhaustion it had been feared that each convulsion would prove his death struggle.

I was highly praised for my successful treatment, dismissed with a very handsome present, and commanded to visit my patient again the next day. My friend the Vizier assured me, as he conducted me from the room, that my fortune was made, since the young Prince whom I had relieved was no less a person than the only legitimate son of the King of Persia.

On visiting my illustrious patient next morning I found him quite recovered, and contrary to his experience after former attacks, very little the worse for the present one, and I was again highly complimented upon my skill.

For a week I continued my daily visits, and then was sent for once more in a hurry because the Prince of Persia had been again seized with one of these strange and (to those around him) unaccountable fits of convulsions, although on this occasion the seizure was much less violent.

As before, I found the cause to be the near approach of the black spirit, who although the influence of my strong will inter-

posed a barrier between him and the Prince that prevented him from again touching him, was yet able to draw near enough to exert a considerable influence over him.

Since my first encounter with this dark being I had studied one of Jelal-ûd-dîn's valuable manuscripts, and was therefore better able to deal with the obsessing spirit, whom I quickly banished in a very summary fashion, without throwing the patient into a state of unconsciousness.

I was now invited by the Prince to enter his service, and attach myself permanently to his suite, either as a physician or in any other capacity I might prefer.

"Surely," said the young Prince, "you have not spent all your days as a student of deep mysteries. Methinks thou hast more the bearing and appearance of a soldier than a follower of that art of healing which seemeth most appropriate to gray hair and slow blood. Thine eyes, my friend, did glisten I noticed as thou beheldest the warriors who paraded before us the other day, and I observed that thou didst sit upon thy steed as one who hath learnt to maintain his seat in the saddle under all difficulties."

The blood mounted to my cheek, and the recollections of the wild, free life of the mountains awoke in my mind as I listened to this speech, and I bowed low to the Prince, as I answered proudly, "I have been many things in even my short life, Most Gracious Sire, and methinks I could yet handle a sword and spear in a manner which would not disgrace even a soldier of your Highness.

"Wouldst thou then care to follow my fortunes, not only as my trusted physician, but as one of my fighting, men? If so thou hast but to express thy desire and I shall grant it to thee, for of a truth do I feel that I owe my life and my reason unto thy skill, and I would fain reward thee as a Prince should."

For one moment I was so delighted at the prospect of an active life and the chance of winning distinction on the field of battle, that I was about to accept the Prince's offer. But I thought of my wife, and of how I was to leave her. How I would have to part from her entirely for a time; and my love and my jealous fears proved stronger even than my ambition. With a low bow, expressive at once of my sense of the honor which the Prince wished to bestow upon me, and of my deep obligation to him, I answered, "Sire, it is with the utmost reluctance that I hesitate to avail myself of the honor proposed to me. There is

no career I would desire more than that of arms. But I have ties which bind me more strongly than ambition, and, if your most Gracious Highness will pardon the seeming indifference to the favor offered to me, I would choose rather to continue in my present career, since to follow your Highness through the present campaign I must leave this city of Herat."

The Prince frowned, and seemed greatly annoyed by my answer. Princes are not wont to find their favors so coolly received, and he answered coldly, "It is enough, Sir Physician thou art dismissed from our presence."

"Oh, Ahrinziman," said my friend the Vizier, in a low voice, as we left the presence chamber, "verily thou wert born under an unlucky star, since thou hast not the wit to avail thyself of the favor of Princes when it is showered upon thee. Who, or what, is this wonderful attraction that keeps thee in Herat, when fortune points the way to Persia?"

"It is my wife," said I, unguardedly. "I could not take her with me on the long, forced marches of the Persian army, as they go to quell the revolts in this distant province, and I like not to leave her behind me."

"Thy wife," said he, laughing, "if that is all it is not impossible that thou mayest follow the Prince of Persia yet. Surely thou couldst arrange for her safety and seclusion in some way?"

"I know not," replied I stiffly. "But I have already given my answer to the Prince, and been dismissed by him. The matter is therefore at an end."

The Vizier laughed again, and his eyes twinkled slyly as he said, "Go to, Ahrinziman, tell thy wife of the offer thou hast refused, and see if she will commend thy devotion to her."

As we had now reached the outer door I parted from the Vizier without further remarks, and as I hurried home I resolved to tell Zuleika and see if she were truly pleased to think I was not going to leave her. The Vizier's words had awakened an uneasy suspicion which half slumbered in my mind, and I was by no means too certain that Zuleika would give me the thanks for refusing the Prince's offer which I felt I merited.

And the Vizier was right. She heard me with a mixture of surprise and pleasure till I told her how I had refused the proposed favor and elected to remain in Herat, and then she expressed her disappointment in no measured terms, reproaching me with

having no ambition, no desire to rise in life and take a position which would raise her as well as myself.

"A learned man is all very well in his way, no doubt," added she, "but the practice of healing will never raise thee to the position in the state which thou, as a warrior distinguished by the favor of a Prince, might attain. Thou hast told me oft that in thine early days the practice of arms was familiar to thee. Why then dost thou not avail thyself of so good a chance of adopting war as thy profession, especially as by so doing thou couldst still practice thy healing art upon the person of the Prince, and such of thy comrades as had the ill-luck to be wounded."

I was so much offended at this address that I scorned to explain to her my real reason, for I thought she showed but little anxiety about my personal safety, and was somewhat too eager to send me away from her. I was leaving the room in hot anger when she called me back, saying, "Return here, Ahrinziman, thou art so impetuous and so quick of temper I see that thou art offended at my frank speech, and dost think I am careless of thy life. But it is not so. For I deem that thou bearest a charmed life, and I do not fear that even in battle harm would come to thee. Moreover," she added, touching my cheeks and beard caressingly with her finger tips, for I had returned to her side, "I am so proud of thee, and so sure thou dost only want opportunity in order to become as great as thou dost deserve to be, I would fain have thee to accept a chance like this, which fortune hath surely sent in thy way in order to help thee to that position in life to which I am most certain thou dost by right of birth belong."

She had touched now upon a subject about which I was somewhat sore, for I felt most keenly the mystery which surrounded my birth and parentage, and I would have given much to know to whom I of right belonged. My pride and my ambition caused me always to cling to the belief that I might be the son of the man who had given me the chain and spoken those strange words of affection to me. I was sure he was a person of distinction, but I knew not where to search for him. Nor was I sure that he would welcome me, for he had never come to see me but that one time. I had told Zuleika a great part of my history, only suppressing such portions as I thought it safest to abstain from confiding to anyone. She was very discreet, and capable beyond most of her sex of keeping her own counsel and another's secrets, and she had soon drawn from me all but what concerned my

flight from the Temple and Jelal-ûd-dîn's death. That I had practiced the arts of magic she knew, though not that my instructor in them was dead, and she had heard of my life in the mountains when a boy, and of my having joined the marauders of the hills for a time. Ambitious herself, she had fed the flame of my ambition, and encouraged me in the belief that some day I should attain a position worthy of what she held to be my distinguished parentage. And in alluding thus to my birth and my ambitions she knew that she was advancing the strongest possible argument in favor of accepting the Prince of Persia's offer.

"Thou dost not need to urge me to consider again the chance I have missed, Zuleika, for I should have at once accepted it but for the thought of leaving thee. Now it is too late. I have declined it, and I shall not again sue for its renewal. I care not to solicit the favor of any man, be he Prince or King."

"Nay, but he may offer it to thee again, and if so thou wilt accept it, and when thou dost return a victorious conqueror I shall reward thee in any way thou dost desire most, and I will show thee how proud Zuleika is of her beloved."

She looked up at me with so much witchery in her dark eyes, and touched me so lovingly, that my gloomy suspicions were dispelled, and I embraced her in my joy and kissed her passionately.

Thus was my career changed; for, as Zuleika thought, the Prince was too anxious to have me with him to give up the idea lightly, and overtures were made to me through the Vizier, which I now accepted with a mixed feeling of pleasure and reluctance, of satisfaction and foreboding of some coming evil.

My forebodings were not however fulfilled very quickly. Zuleika went to reside under her uncle's care during my absence, and when the time of our parting arrived showed the amount of emotion which was becoming on such an occasion. She perhaps a little overacted the part, but she did it very gracefully, by no means disfiguring her charming countenance with an excess of tears, yet making up by appropriate expressions of her feelings in words for any lack there might be of them, and I left reassured as to her fidelity to me. I did not, however, suspect that my wife had already been seen by the Prince of Persia, and that it was only his sense of the gratitude he owed me which prevented him from trying to possess himself of her. The Vizier, having repeated to the Prince my remarks about my attachment to my

wife, he had conceived a desire to see the lady, and to judge for himself of the power of her charms. By bribing some of my servants the Vizier had contrived that the Prince should conceal himself in my garden, and behold Zuleika when she was walking there alone and unveiled.

Zuleika was supposed to be ignorant of this little plan, but in truth she had been cautiously informed by one of her women, and it was by her connivance that it was carried out, the idea that the Prince wished to see her secretly having fired her imagination and flattered her vanity.

The expedition to which I was attached was one sent to quell a revolt in one of the minor dependent provinces, and the Prince had been given the command by his father as much to remove him from the court as to afford him a chance of distinction. I soon learnt from those about the Prince that he and his father were not always upon the best of terms, since the Prince sided with his mother, between whom and the King there had been a marked coldness, almost amounting at times to open enmity, for many years. The Ameer of Afghanistan, being a kinsman of Queen Artemisia, had allowed the Queen and her son to retire more than once to his court, leaving the King of Persia for considerable periods, and Queen Artemisia was more than suspected of engaging in constant, though hitherto unsuccessful, plots to dethrone her husband and place her son upon the throne.

Prince Selim himself, was, as I had seen at first, somewhat weak of will and easily dominated by those around him, and the strong will of his mother kept him in constant subjection to her wishes; the more so as there was a strong, even passionate, attachment between them, while towards the King the son felt an indifference and almost dislike, born no doubt of the divided feeling between his parents.

To me the young Prince soon showed a strong disposition to attach himself, partly due to the influence I had to gain over him in order to protect him, and partly to a feeling that I was to be thoroughly relied upon as his faithful follower, as in very truth at that time I was.

We experienced some sharp fighting and had by no means an easy task in suppressing the revolt, and once engaged in the realities of warfare I found little time to think of domestic matters. The stir and bustle of a camp were very congenial to me, and there was pleasure in serving with highly trained regular troops

far superior to fighting in a promiscuous mêlée with an insubordinate mountain tribe where each man thought himself as good as his leader, and where little or no discipline prevailed.

All my instincts of a warlike nature revived. I learned the various arts of strategy from the experienced General who served nominally under the Prince, but who was in truth our real leader; and as I was high in favor with Prince Selim I was rapidly advanced from one post of honor to another, those who envied my success deeming it well to feign a friendship for me if they did not always feel it.

My knowledge and skill as a physician made me of still more importance, not alone to the Prince, but to my comrades, and for a considerable time I appeared to justify Zuleika's belief that I bore a charmed life, for I escaped any serious wound.

At last, however, I had the misfortune to receive a dangerous thrust from a spear, and as I lay on the ground some of my comrades' horses were driven in the tide of battle over me where I lay, and I was still further injured by their hoofs, so that the fight, being at last gained by our side and the enemy beaten back, I was picked up scarcely alive and carried to my tent, where I lay for many weeks in extreme danger.

At last I began to rally, and the siege of the city we had attacked being by this time over, I was granted leave to return to my own home in the city of Herat to rest and recover my strength.

My reception by Zuleika was all that I could desire, and more than repaid me for the separation and suffering, while I could not but wonder how I had so long been content to lead a quiet studious life in that dull hill city.

CHAPTER XVIII

MY PRISONER

On my return to the army I found that all was in a state of bustle and confusion in consequence of the news that had just been received of the sudden and unexpected death of the King of Persia, and the consequent necessity for the immediate return of his son. The Prince, or, as I must now call him, the King, was about to set out upon his return to the city and palace where his father had died, and I, as a matter of course, was expected to accompany him.

We had reached to within two days' journey of the city, and were resting for the night, when a messenger arrived with a letter from Queen Artemisia to her son, after reading which he summoned me to his presence, and addressing me said:

"Ahrinziman, thou art I believe faithful to me. Among all around me thou art the one I would most readily trust as being truly faithful to my interests, and therefore I desire to send thee to receive the charge of a prisoner who hath been found conspiring already against me, and whom my mother hath thought fit to arrest and send to the fortress of ———. But as he is a man who held great power under my father, and was very popular among the soldiers, it were unwise to confide the charge of him to any who have been his friends in the past, and I desire, therefore, to send thee with a troop of horsemen to conduct him to the fortress, where thou shalt hand the charge of him over to the Governor, who hath already received instructions how to deal with his prisoner. Thou wilt start at once, and the messenger who brought this letter will conduct thee to where the prisoner now awaits thy coming. Thou wilt then join me at Parsagherd."

I bowed low to the King, and having kissed the hand which he extended to me in token of my fidelity, I went forth to make my preparations.

A sharp ride of a few hours brought us to where a company

of soldiers were encamped with their prisoner awaiting us, and I took over the command, sending the officer and his soldiers back to the city by order of the King.

It was already dark when I did so, and as the prisoner was much muffled up by a large cloak I did not take much notice of his appearance at the time. Scarcely had the other soldiers departed when a message was brought to me to ask if I would grant my prisoner the favor of a few minutes interview. Accordingly I repaired to the tent in which he was confined, and lifting the curtain aside from the doorway entered.

As the prisoner, a powerful man who was heavily ironed, stood up and advanced to meet me I saw his face for the first time, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, for I recognized him at once as the man who had taken me to the herdsman's hut when I was an infant—the man above all others best able to solve for me the mystery of my birth.

"Thou art surprised," said he coolly, "so was I when I saw thee but now. I sent for thee because there is a matter of much moment which I have to confide to thine ears, and also because I think when thou hast heard my narrative thou wilt feel that at least it should not be thy hand which conducts me to a captivity that I know but too well will end only with my death. Queen Artemisia and I are too old and too deadly enemies for her to spare me now, when fate has delivered me into her hands. I saw thee when thou arrived, and though thou art changed somewhat since thou wert a boy, thou bearest too close a resemblance, both in feature and in gesture, to thy father for anyone to doubt thou art in truth his son."

"Thou dost speak of my father. I pray thee tell me who he was, for long have I desired to learn from whom I spring?"

"Didst thou then never guess whose son thou art?"

"No, save that I believe it was the man who came with thee to see me when I was a boy. He who gave me this chain," said I, drawing it forth to show him, "must have been my father. But if so why did he show so little care for me? Why did he come but that one time to see his son?"

"Dost thou not even yet guess who that man was, nor why he of all men dared not acknowledge his favorite child? Then must I tell thee, Ahrinziman, that thy father was this King of Persia who hath died so recently, and if thou wilt grant me the time I will tell thee his story and thine own, and thou shalt judge if the lot of Princes is ever one to be envied."

He then told me the history of my parents, and of the murder of my poor mother, much as it is related in the Prologue to this story of my life, and went on to say:

"It was impossible to find any proofs of Queen Artemisia's share in thy mother's death, but the King had very little doubt in his own mind as to the hand which had dealt him this terrible blow, and when the Queen met him as he went to his own apartments from his beloved Cynthia's deathbed, he shrank from the caressing touch with which she sought to welcome his return, and dissemble her own feelings, as though some loathsome thing had touched him, for to his sight her hands seemed dyed red in the blood of his murdered Cynthia.

"His expression and his gesture were enough for the Queen. She drew back haughtily and turned away, and from that hour there was naught but a thinly veiled enmity between them. She could no longer hope to regain his love, and the dignity of her position forbade her quarreling openly with her husband, but she could and did embitter his life with the secret intrigues against him which she encouraged, and she was able to estrange the affections of his legitimate son, and make her child side with her on all occasions.

"As for Cynthia's child, the whole thoughts of the King were directed to finding some safe asylum where Queen Artemisia should never discover him, and it was therefore given out to all that the child was dead, while in truth I myself took him, as thou dost know, to that worthy herdsman whose wife had nursed me a few years before. The King himself could not for a long time bear the thought of seeing thee, it revived so keenly that terrible grief for thy mother's loss, from which he ever strove to win oblivion. Not till I told him of thy visions, and how thou hadst surely seen her spirit, did he desire to behold her child. When he left thee it was with the full intention of arranging some plan whereby he could bring thee to live with him, without exposing thee to such a fate as had befallen thy mother. But he was suddenly called away to Egypt by an insurrection there, and we deemed it best for thee to send thee to the Temple, since that would at least afford thee a safe asylum.

"It had been thy father's thought to train thee to the profession of arms, and to keep thee near himself, but when difficulties of all kinds began to gather thickly around him, he took another thought, and decided to let thee follow thy desire of

becoming a Prophet of the Temple. He had a hope that thereby he might still be able to see much of thee, while the sacredness of thine office would give thee the strongest possible protection against any plots of the Queen, even should she learn of thine existence. Moreover thy father thought that the death of his beloved Cynthia was a judgment upon him for having taken unto himself one who had been dedicated to sacred things, and he thought to appease the offended Deity by giving to the service of the Temple her only son. Thine own desire seemed to point yet more strongly to this being the right course to follow.

"We were absent from Persia for some years, and when at last we returned the King's first care was to send me to the Temple of Amurath, to which he had caused thee to be sent, that I might inquire as to thy welfare. There I learnt that thou hadst struck down one of the High Priests and fled. Search had been made for thee and thou hadst been traced to a shepherd's tent, where thou hadst given two links of a gold chain (which I well knew to have been given thee by the King) for food and clothes. Thou wert followed in thy flight to a precipice, over which it was believed that thou hadst fallen, since those who pursued thee beheld thy white robes, and, as it seemed, thyself, lying upon the rocks. It was impossible to recover thy body, so the attempts to do so had to be abandoned, and the Priests, believing that the vengeance of the Gods had overtaken thee, forbore to make further search.

"The King and I mourned thee as one dead, until a few weeks before thy father's death, when a strange rumor reached us concerning one named Ahrinziman, who was in attendance upon the Prince of Persia, and who had shown great medical skill, being also thought to execute many of his cures by the aid of certain gifts of divination which he possessed.

"We had heard of the wonderful cure wrought upon Prince Selim by thee, but thy name was not mentioned till one came from the camp who knew thee well, and his description of thee, and of the name thou wert known under, caused to thy father the greatest agitation. He decided to recall his son immediately, in order that thou mightest accompany him. Then he heard that thou hadst left the camp and returned to thine home for a season, and it had been arranged that I should seek thee out, when the King was seized by his sudden and fatal illness: an illness of whose cause, methinks, I could find another explanation than that which the learned men around the patient gave."

Al Zulid paused, overcome by his emotion, and then continued: "Shortly before his death thy father, who called repeatedly upon the name of his lost son, sent for me and for a scribe, and in my presence and that of the Vizier dictated a decree by which he left the kingdom unto thee, his son Ahrinziman, should it be proved that thou wert still living. For he believed that were it to pass to the Prince of Persia it would be equivalent to leaving it to the Queen, since her son is entirely under her influence and governance, and El Jazid did not consider it would be well for Persia that Queen Artemisia should in effect reign over it through her son. In the event of my finding that thou wert really dead the kingdom was left unto a third son, who like thyself was his illegitimate offspring. To the son of Artemisia thy father left wealth sufficient for all his needs, even on the most Princely scale. He left him one of his principal Palaces and much treasure, but the government of his Kingdom he desired should pass into other hands than those of Artemisia and her son.

"For sight of thee, Ahrinziman, he ever mourned, and when he heard of the great military powers thou hadst displayed, and of thy popularity with the army, he felt that wert thou indeed his son thou wert only justifying the opinion he had formed of thy character from that one interview he had with thee, and that thou wouldst make a successor to himself under whom Persia would increase in her greatness.

"As for himself, Ahrinziman, he ever labored as one from whose life the zest had fled, and whose heart was ever a prey to an abiding sorrow, which sapt at its roots the seed of ambition, and rendered as dead sea fruit all the triumphs, all the conquests, that he attained. Thus the promise with which his reign began was never fulfilled, and he acquired a character of weakness which was due rather to listless indifference to the struggles for power of those around him."

As I looked at Ben Al Zulid I felt that he spoke the truth, and it did not require much knowledge of mankind to convince me that the nature of the man before me was essentially an honest one. Had even gratitude to him for his care of my boyhood not influenced me, I should still have felt a reluctance to sharing in consigning him to captivity, and I was greatly agitated, not alone at what he had told me of my parents, but at the strange chance which had placed him in my power. My duty to the King who had trusted me was clear, but did I not owe some duty to this

man also? Could I hand him over to the certainty of captivity and death?

While I considered, Al Zulid spoke again.

"Dost thou desire," said he, "to know where is this decree of which I speak? Behold it is in the hands of the Grand Vizier Babadul. He was more fortunate than I, and had warning in time to flee from danger, taking with him not alone the decree, which had been entrusted to his care, but also the scribe who wrote it. Therefore Queen Artemisia may suspect that it contains matter adverse to her interests and those of her son, but she can have no certain knowledge of its contents, and in arresting me she hath but acted upon a vague suspicion, without proof to support it. Yet do I know well that the man to whose keeping she hath consigned me will not trouble himself to look for proofs of my guilt or innocence when the Queen commands my death. He is but a creature of her own, only too ready to do her bidding.

"But as for thee, Ahrinziman, if thou dost desire a kingdom, thou must seek out Babadul quickly, or else he will seek for this third son of thy father, and set him up against Artemisia. There be many who will join his standard, or thine, for there are many who like not the rule of Artemisia and her weak-willed son. The haughty Queen hath made many enemies."

"Nay," answered I, "but I dare not be the one to wrest the kingdom from the grasp of Selim and his mother, since honor and friendship alike forbid it. To the Prince I owe many a favor. He hath shown me kindness and distinguished me with marks of honor at a time when I was obscure, and when we knew not there was any blood relationship between us. How, then, can I avail myself of this decree, and turn like a traitor to rend the hand which has showered favors upon me? How can I thrust from his throne him to whom I have sworn fidelity? The prospect tempts me much. There is no height to which I would hesitate to climb, no position too exalted for the ambition of my own desires, but I cannot climb onto a throne by trampling down the rights of my patron."

"Be it so, since thou dost regard it in that way, but at least satisfy thyself of the truth of what I have told thee, by seeking out Babadul and beholding this decree which makes of thee a King. And remember, if thou dost not use its powers against Prince Selim, another will; one who hath not thy scruples. Beware, moreover, of ever trusting Artemisia or her son. They

may load thee with favors to-day, yet to-morrow, if it served their own interests better, they would consign thee to a dungeon cell. The wolf is not more savage than Artemisia; the hyena not more treacherous, nor the fox more cunning than this Queen, who, did she but once know whose son thou art, would rend thee in pieces in her bitter long-nourished hate, no matter what sacrifice thou hadst made for the sake of her son. Trust her not, and trust not her son; for, verily, as the sun shines in heaven, so doth the hatred of Artemisia towards thy mother and thy father burn like an ever scorching fire, whose flames will consume thee some day."

The earnestness with which Al Zulid spoke impressed me in spite of myself, for it seemed as though his words were as the words of one inspired, and I resolved to take heed of this Queen, and to keep from her all knowledge of my parentage. I thought that I could play with a two-edged sword and yet not cut myself, but who can foresee the tricks which fate may play him, or who can guard against the decrees of destiny.

When the first selfish thought of myself and my concerns had passed, I remembered Ben Al Zulid and his present position, and I said to him, "But what of thee, my friend, cannot I help thy fortunes in anyway? I owe thee also too much to lead thee to thy death, yet how can I be the one to release thee? What can I do? Wouldst it avail, thinkest thou, for me to intercede with the King for thy release?"

Al Zulid laughed a scornful laugh as he replied, "As well might thou ask a cat to spare the bird within its clutches as ask Artemisia to forego her revenge upon me for my share in the past. No, I would not have thee sue for my life to the son of Artemisia. Rather would I die a thousand deaths," said he passionately, "but if thou wouldst befriend me give me a sharp, long knife, that I may conceal it about my person, and mount me to-morrow on the fleetest horse thou hast, and I will do the rest for myself. None will know that thou hast helped me. Thou canst take all ostensible precautions thou dost choose for my safety, for if I have but my long knife and a swift steed, to-morrow's sun shall see me dead or once more free. I am too old a soldier to be caught again easily, and had it not been that Artemisia's soldiers came upon me at a time when grief had well nigh deprived me of my wisdom, I should not so readily have been taken by them."

"Well, then," said I slowly, "I will see that the horse thou shouldst ride to-morrow shall fall lame before we start. There is but one led horse with us now, that is mine own favorite steed. I value it as the apple of mine eye. I never ride it in battle lest harm should come to it, yet will I see that thou art mounted upon its back to-morrow. Wert thou my father I could do no more for thee, for this horse is fleet of foot as the fleetest horse of the desert, and if thou dost ride well, and choose the time of thy flight discreetly, he will be a swift horseman who overtakes thee.

"We start an hour before dawn. Ere the light becomes bright thou mayest make thy bid for freedom."

Al Zulid bent his head, and taking my hand in his kissed it, in token of his deep gratitude, and then turned away overcome by his emotion.

As I turned to leave Al Zulid he said, "Ahrinziman, son of my beloved master, if we meet not on earth again I would fain repeat to thee 'Beware of Artemisia! Tarry not at the court of her son.' For thee there may be many brilliant prospects elsewhere, even though thou wilt not stretch out thine hand to grasp thy father's kingdom. If thou wilt show this ring unto Babadul and tell him that Al Zulid gave it unto thee as a token, he will, for the love which he as well as I bore to thy father, help thee to prospects as fair as any Prince Sielm can offer to thine ambition. Farewell. Thy horse shall be returned safely to thee if I escape, but no words can ever express my gratitude, no favors I can bestow can return this service that thou hast done me."

"Nay, speak not of it. It is I who should speak of thanks to thee. I owe thee too much already, and it is but in a poor fashion I seek to repay thee even a part of my debt," I replied. We then saluted each other with much emotion, and I went forth from the prisoner's tent to seek a few hours' repose.

CHAPTER XIX

QUEEN ARTEMISIA

Some time before we started I arose, and under pretense of examining the horses took care to lame slightly the one Al Zulid was to ride, in order to have a pretext for mounting him on my own favorite steed, leaving a soldier with the lame horse at a small village near.

It was still dark when we started, and as the road lay through a mountain gorge we were obliged to ride in single file. I myself rode on ahead, leaving the prisoner to ride in the middle of the small troop of soldiers. Just as we reached the head of the pass, and the road widened out across the extensive plain, beyond which lay another deep ravine, the first streak of daylight was dawning in the East. As we emerged from the deep shadow of the hills I had an impression that it was here my prisoner intended to make his dash for liberty, and I accordingly spurred on my horse and gave the order to advance rapidly. As we broke into a quick gallop I saw the prisoner and his guards were skirting the edge of a small ravine, whose precipitous sides were covered thickly with brushwood. I did not think it wise to watch him, so began to converse with the soldier who rode nearest to me.

All at once there was a loud shout and a sharp scuffle, and I saw two soldiers and their horses rolling down the sides of the ravine, where they were partly caught and their fall broken by the brushwood. The prisoner, who had somehow managed to free his hands, taking advantage of the surprise and confusion, wheeled his horse round and fled across the plain, where in the semi-darkness it was difficult to follow him.

Of course we gave chase, but, as I well knew, my fleet horse soon carried him beyond pursuit, and the friendly veil of darkness prevented us from seeing accurately where he went. He was, moreover, well acquainted with the country, and I was not, and although I feigned the greatest anxiety to pursue him, I contrived to confuse our route still further, and after a time we had to give up the chase.

I debated within myself whether I would return to the King and confess how very inefficiently I had performed the duty entrusted to me, or whether I would also make my escape. I finally decided to face the situation, and trust that the value of my former services would palliate the King's anger at my present failure.

Fortune favored me at this juncture, for on reaching the Palace at Parsagherd, and before I could tell of the escape of my prisoner, I was met by an anxious messenger who had just been despatched to hurry my return. The King had been seized with another and far worse attack of convulsions. None of those who were present could do anything, and the Queen and those around feared each moment must prove the young King's last, so fearful were his struggles and convulsions. Had I lost a hundred prisoners the necessity for my skill would have excused me from blame.

I at once did as I had done before, and succeeded in freeing Selim from the obsessing spirit, but it was by no means so easy a task, and my conversation with Al Zulid enabled me to guess why. I had little doubt that the dark spirit was that of the unfortunate murdered slave.

I did not at this time, however, know precisely where the secret passage was situated, nor that the King was in the very apartment out of which it opened.

When at last the patient had recovered, his own anxiety that I should not again leave him was so great that he made me the most flattering offers of every kind, for while he was annoyed at the escape of Al Zulid, he was not disposed to visit his anger upon one whose skill was so necessary to his own safety. I on my side felt almost constrained to accept his favors and remain with him, first because neither he nor I could hold ourselves responsible for that enmity between our parents in which we had no share, and secondly because however much I might and did recoil from any intercourse with the Queen, who I had no doubt was the murderer of my innocent mother, I hardly felt that I had a right in consequence to abandon the King to the terrible fate which I, more than any other, knew to be hanging over him. I could see that it only wanted an opportunity to enable the black spirit to obtain complete possession of him, and I felt a certain professional interest in pitting my skill and knowledge against the powers of darkness arrayed against me. I perceived that it was

no longer only the one dark obsessing spirit against whose attacks upon my patient I had to guard, but that behind him there gathered a horde of evil influences, who used the dark spirit as their weapon of active attack; beings whom Artemisia herself, in the hour when she had stooped to revenge and murder, had gathered about her, and whose influence was the heritage she gave her son.

To me there was a certain fierce pleasure in combating these dark beings, and beholding them retire baffled and subdued by the force of my own will. It was as though I alone defended a fortress from the assaults of many foes, and as each time I, and not they, conquered, I felt like a commander who has beaten back the enemy.

Thus I had a double reason for remaining with the King. Gratitude, and a certain affection for one thus dependent upon me, were added to the desire to free him entirely from his dark and unseen foes.

In the first hurry of my arrival I had not noticed the Queen, although she was in her son's room, and on my taking charge of the patient she had retired to her own apartments, and now sent word that she desired an audience with me, a command which I obeyed with a mixture of curiosity and reluctance.

The Queen received me in her own private apartments, and as she was closely veiled I had no opportunity of seeing her face. As she signed to me to approach her I recognized the haughty gracefulness of gesture which had been described to me. I felt instinctively the power and determination of the woman's character. As a matter of course I bowed low to her, but I did so with a hauteur equal to her own, and the passionate anger which welled up in my heart at the sight of her, and the thought of my poor mother's fate, made it well nigh impossible for me to control my emotions sufficiently to answer her with respect. To what she ascribed my manner I know not, but in her anxiety about her son, which was the one soft spot in her hard and proud nature, she did not pay much heed to it, but began to question me closely as to the causes of his illness and the remedies I could prescribe.

I answered her cautiously and briefly, and took care to leave the matter in as much mystery as before, while I assured her that in a short time I hoped to cure her son.

"If thou canst do that there is nothing thou shalt ask which shall not be granted unto thee. There is no height to which

thine ambition can aspire which shall be too great for thee to attain. My son is to me the one green spot in the desert of my life, and on him who can preserve that son for me I will bestow the equivalent of a King's ransom," said the Queen in a voice of deep emotion.

"Nay, Queen Artemisia, it needs not that anyone should bribe me to give my best services unto the King," answered I haughtily, "I have done, and I will do, all that lies within the skill of mortal man, yet must we ever leave the issue to higher power. Despair not though again the fit shall seize him, for each time is shall be with less strength I trust, and the interval shall be longer between."

"I shall trust my son to thee," said she, "but in order that thou shouldst not leave him even for a day, I would desire that thou take up thine abode within the Palace. Apartments suited to thine office, and to the rank that thou shalt hold, will be assigned to thee, and thou shalt bring thy family to dwell here, and to follow with thee when the King shall remove his court elsewhere. I have given orders that all means to transport thy family and thy household treasures shall be at thy immediate disposal, and I bid thee not to delay in sending for them, since I must constrain thee to remain with the King henceforth. All that thou canst desire of wealth and treasure is already bestowed upon thee, and thou shalt find that Artemisia knows how to provide as a Queen should for those she desires to honor."

She then drew a costly ring from her finger and placed it upon mine in token of her favor, and though my flesh crept at her touch, as though a reptile had touched me, I could not refuse the gift, and had to conceal my feelings as best I could, since I was resolved to remain with her son and fight out the battle I waged on his behalf.

CHAPTER XX

MY VISION IN THE MIRROR

In accordance with the Queen's desires, no less than my own, I went to bring Zuleika and all my possessions to the magnificent apartments in the Palace which had been assigned to me. Zuleika and her family were much gratified by the splendid litter and train of servants and soldiers who were sent to conduct her. Had she been a Princess she could not have been treated with greater honor, and while I flattered myself that all this pageant was intended as a mark of honor to myself, it was in a great degree due to the admiration which the King had conceived for my wife on the one occasion when he had seen her in the garden at Herat. Had I had the slightest suspicion that he had ever seen her, I would have died a thousand deaths rather than have allowed her to come to me, but I was ignorant of his secret passion for her, and imagined that his sole thought in sending for her was to gratify me.

As for Zuleika herself, she was like one intoxicated with the grandeur of her position. She had always been ambitious, but her thoughts had never soared to a height such as this, and towards me, as the fortunate man who had raised her so high, she displayed a warmth of attachment which for the time was in all respects real, and I was raised to the seventh heaven of bliss by her many expressions of devotion.

Zuleika was, as I have already said, naturally reticent, and not given to that indulgence in gossip which is the bane of her sex, and I had therefore, in the hours of our love and confidence, confided to her much of my history. I now took the precaution to warn her against allowing Queen Artemisia to gain any knowledge concerning myself and my antecedents from her, telling her that for many reasons it would affect me, not only injuriously, but even cause me personal danger were the Queen to learn more of my life than I had chosen to tell myself. I felt that Zuleika's own affection for me, and her own self-interest, would keep her from being betrayed into placing any confidence in the Queen,

after my having thus warned her, and I knew that Zuleika was far too clever and too discreet to allow herself to be entrapped into telling what she desired to keep secret.

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I was anxious to gain more knowledge concerning the best means of keeping the King in the satisfactory state of health which he had enjoyed since my return to him, and therefore bethought me of the parchments which I had buried in the vault in Jelal-ûd-dîn's garden. The city was but a day's ride from Parsagherd, and I therefore resolved to go and bring some of them away with me.

Al Zulid had returned my horse to me secretly by a messenger who brought word that he was in safety in a Greek city in Asia Minor, where I should find word of him at any time I desired to seek him out.

I took with me a small box in which to carry back the parchments, should I be so fortunate as to find them undisturbed, and mounted on my favorite horse I set out at a rapid pace for the city where Jelal-ûd-dîn had dwelt.

I reached it at nightfall, and found that the house was much as I had left it, save for the dust and decay which had gathered there in the few years which had passed. The superstitious fears with which the magician's house was regarded, together with the mysterious disappearance of its owner, had served to preserve it from pillage, except as regarded the costly furniture and rich hangings. These had all been carried away, but the chemicals in the jars remained, and also the curiously preserved specimens of dead animals, etc., while the house itself was intact, and the secret hiding place beneath the fountain had not been discovered. The place was, indeed, avoided by everyone.

As time pressed I quickly took out those manuscripts which I saw would be of use, and closing the stone returned to the house. As I crossed the wilderness of a garden I thought I heard stealthy steps following me, and a sound as of some one sighing. I could see nothing, however, and concluded it must have been a fancy. I entered the room where my former master had sat with me so often, and in which he had died, and having selected certain jars of chemicals which I packed up with the manuscripts in the box I had brought, I was about to leave, when I bethought me of the magic mirror which I usually carried about me, and curious to

know how those I had left at Parsagherd were getting on during my absence, I drew it out to look into its dark surface. "Surely," thought I, "I shall see something in this room, whose whole atmosphere was saturated with our mystic studies. Surely if the dead master can return to his pupil from that dark bourne to which he was so unwillingly hurried, he will return in this room where we worked so long together."

Scarcely had these thoughts passed through my mind when I saw the mist gather on the mirror's polished surface, and as it passed I saw two figures, a man in a rich dress whose back was towards me, but whose height and figure somewhat resembled my own, and a woman, whose head, when I first looked, rested upon the man's shoulder, while her arms were twined around his neck, and her whole attitude was one of clinging affection. She raised her head and looked, not at me, but at the man whom she caressed, and I saw her face was the lovely face of my wife, Zuleika. But not as I had seen it last, soft and tender, and with the innocent look of a petted child. She wore the evil smile, she gave the man beside her the alluring tempting glance, which I had seen the first time I had ever beheld her image in the mirror in this room, and I shuddered as I saw it stamped upon her face again.

"Who was the man?" I asked myself, as a chill suspicion gathered in my heart. "Who was it? His figure was like my own. Surely the mirror showed me Zuleika as she would receive me a few hours hence. That evil smile was not hers; it was born of the evil atmosphere of this room, which tainted all I beheld in it. Zuleika could never look like that! It was a false libel on her! And yet again, who was the man? Was it myself?"

As if in answer to me, the man turned his head, and I saw the face was not my face, but the King's.

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In my furious anger I dashed the mirror upon the ground, and stamped upon it with the iron-shod heels of my sandals, till I had ground it into a thousand pieces, crying out that it was a false and lying mirror, a cheating worthless reflector of the unseen things. And as I stormed and raved in my passion I seemed to see a phantom form rise up and glide along the wall towards me, and the face as it turned to me was the face of the dead Jelal-ûd-dîn himself. Not the face as I had known it in life, but as I had known it in death, distorted and horrible.

The low, mocking, sneering laugh of the dead man fell upon my ears, and his voice seemed to hiss out to me in a fierce whisper, "Wait! Wait and see whether my mirror hath lied to thee! Wait till all thy warm affections have turned to bitterness and gall! Till all thy bright hopes lie like withered leaves around thee! Till the most sacred vows to thee have been broken, and thy trust betrayed! And thy ruined life shall cry aloud for vengeance, and in thine agony thou shalt call upon those powers of evil, whose aid thou dost now despise, for help to crush those who have wronged thee—and then say whether the visions Jelal-ûd-dîn hath shown thee were true or false!"

The phantom faded as the words died away like a faint echo, and I stood alone in the room, with the shattered fragments of the broken mirror scattered around me.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GATHERING OF THE STORM

On the afternoon of the day on which I had gone to visit the house of Jelal-ûd-dîn, Queen Artemisia sat alone in her apartments, gazing from the windows over the city which lay beyond the Palace walls, and musing anxiously over the news of a formidable insurrection amongst her son's subjects, which had just reached her. The banished third son of El Jazid, accompanied by the former Vizier, Babadul, and the fugitive General, Ben Al Zulid, had entered Persia, and their standard had already been joined by many who disliked or feared Queen Artemisia and her son. Her anger against me was kindled afresh by this news, and had it not been that she believed my presence necessary to the safety of her son she would have ordered my arrest and execution.

"Surely," thought she, "we have wise men at the Court of Persia whose knowledge is equal to that of this stranger? The secret power he wields is doubtless due to some magical art. Could I but discover what it is there are plenty of learned men in Parsagherd who could cast this spell as successfully as Ahrin-

ziman. I shall seek out this wife of his, and learn from her what are his secret habits, and from whom he hath gleaned this secret power. It is said that this is the same man who, as an unknown youth, came unto a magician and dwelt with him until both mysteriously disappeared. The clothes of the magician were found lying in a little heap, as though he had cast them off and there lay beside them naught but a little black dust; the man himself had vanished, though whether he had left the earth or but transported himself unto another place, none of his neighbors could tell. 'Tis a strange story, yet methinks there are wondrous resemblances between the description that was given me of the arts used by the vanished magician and the youth who was his pupil, and those which Ahrinziman doth practice. Could I then find where the master magician dwelt I could afford to dispense with the services of his pupil Ahrinziman. And I would like well to humble this proud man, who treats me, not as a Queen, but with almost the air of an equal. He dislikes me even as I hate him—why, then, should I and my son be under obligations to his skill?"

She rose and paced to and fro like a caged tigress, as she thought of these things, and of yet another and more deadly reason she had for hating me. It was but a suspicion as yet, but each day it assumed the stronger appearance of a certainty in her own mind. There were times when she was startled by the resemblance I bore in gesture and in looks to the dead El Jazid. Those tricks of manner which are often used unconsciously, and inherited from our parents, were very marked in me, and others besides the Queen had noticed them. Artemisia had never believed in the story of my death as an infant, and the news of this insurrection was coupled with the statement that Ahmed, the third son of El Jazid, was claiming the throne by virtue of a decree signed by the King before his death, in which there was mention of the child supposed to be dead, but thought by El Jazid to be yet living. Nothing more definite could the Queen learn as yet, but it was enough to turn her suspicions into certainty.

"Oh, ye Gods!" cried she, passionately; "Oh, ye Gods! Have I so long waited for my full revenge to find it in my hands at last? Can it be that this is indeed the son of that Greek girl who stole my husband's love, and cast a blight over all my life? He doth bear a most wondrous resemblance unto the king, yet

there are times when he looks at me with her eyes, and I see again the glance of half wonder with which she regarded me ere fear filled her soul, and she fled in terror from the dagger that killed her. A thousand times have I seen her thus. She haunts me like a dim shadow: dead always, since I killed her; phantom-like, since she hath no more existence—but a shadow from which I cannot free myself; a phantom I can never lay to rest. And in this her son, for of a surety he is her son, I see again her face and El Jazid's reflected to me. I might kill him any hour, but what is death? A momentary pang, and all is over; the victims are gone where thou canst reach them no more, while thou art left to eat out thine heart in a slow agony through the long years of thy life. I killed the Greek girl in mine angry haste; rather should I have killed El Jazid and let her live on, that I might make her suffer, and taste, as I have, all the bitterness of scorn and neglect. Fate would seem to have delivered unto me her son; and Fate shall help me to extract from him and from his ruined and empoisoned life the salve which can alone soothe the bitterness of my heart."

She ground her teeth and shook her clenched hands above her head in her savage desire, and struck her breast in passionate anger, as she thought over the fierce agony of her slighted love, and the scornful contemptuous manner of the dead king towards her. Well, indeed, would it have been for me and for mine had I paid more heed to the warning Al Zulid had given me, not to trust myself in Artemisia's power.

Zuleika had been in the Palace for a week only, and had not yet seen the Queen, when a gracious message from Artemisia filled her with a conflict of emotions in which gratified vanity held the largest share. She hastily attired herself in the most gorgeous raiment she possessed, and made an attempt to decorate the apartments. She then went forth to receive her Royal visitor at the entrance to them.

When the Queen had been conducted to the seat of honor which had hurriedly been arranged for her, Zuleika made a deep obeisance of respect, and prostrated herself at Artemisia's feet with a truly wonderful imitation of the manners of the Queen's attendants that did credit to her powers of mimicry.

The Queen, who was all impatience to see my wife, commanded Zuleika to unveil, and as she drew aside the veil, with which in a spirit of coquetry she had concealed her features,

the Queen uttered an exclamation of surprise and satisfaction; for she saw that Zuleika was indeed very beautiful. Her girlish loveliness had matured into still more perfect charms since her marriage. Artemisia signed to her to seat herself at her feet, and, having dismissed the attendant women, thus addressed her:

"I had thought to have visited ere this the wife of one whom my son delighteth to honor, but the cares of state are many, and my time hath been fully occupied. Of a truth I must commend the taste of thine husband, for thou, Zuleika, art lovely enough to have found favor in the eyes of any man, were he even the King himself." She fixed her keen eyes upon Zuleika as she said this, to note whether she would betray any confusion at the mention of the King's name, but Zuleika, ostensibly to express how overwhelmed she was by the condescension of the Queen, but in reality to hide a tell-tale blush which mantled her cheeks for a brief moment, bowed almost to the ground, and spread out her hands in the most profound salaam before the Queen.

"Your Highness does me too much honor," said she, as she rose up. "I am not worthy of these favors which are showered upon me."

"Thou art doubtless a stranger to the ways of a Palace, then, yet thou hast the manner of those who are not altogether unacquainted with the presence of the great," said the Queen, in flattering tones. "Whence didst thou come, before thou and thy husband dwelt in Herat?"

"Nay but, your Highness, I know no city but Herat, where I lived with my Uncle from a child."

"And thy husband, is he from Herat also?"

"Ahrinziman hath been a traveller, most gracious Queen; who can say from what place those who travel much come?"

"Truly; yet he must have been born somewhere. Where did his parents reside?"

"I know not. Ahrinziman is one of those who have known little of a parent's love."

"Even as he hath spent his youth somewhere he hath learnt the arts of healing and of war in some school. Dost thou know so little of thy husband as not to know these things concerning him? If so, thou art a model wife to trust, a mirror of wifely discretion," said the Queen, irritably.

Again Zuleika prostrated herself before the Queen ere she

replied. "Ahrinziman hath studied in so many schools it were hard to say to which to give the honor of his success, or even to remember where they all were, since I am but an unlearned person, and know not where all the cities and countries are of which men speak."

"Thou mayest be unlearned, but thou art no fool, I do well perceive, and thy discretion does thee honor," said Artemisia, with a show of indifference she was far from feeling, "but if thou dost desire to rise in my favor, and that of the king, thou and thy husband would do well to trust us with the history of his past. Methinks I can do Ahrinziman service which will discharge in part the debt of gratitude I owe him, but to do so it is needful I should learn of what country he is. Can Persia claim him as her son?"

"I have always thought he is a Persian, Gracious Queen, but I will surely ask him."

"Do so, only do not say the Queen desired to know, for I design an honor for him, and would not have him to know of it till all be complete. Thou art one who would grace well the highest position, Zuleika, and thou must ever count upon the friendship of Artemisia to raise thee to it. I am glad to have seen thee. Thou and I must see much of each other."

Artemisia rose, and summoning her maids prepared to return to her own apartments, parting from Zuleika with every mark of favor she could bestow, so that Zuleika was charmed with her Royal visitor and her head was filled with a hundred ambitious dreams.

Scarcely had the Queen left when another messenger arrived, this time from the King, bearing a most beautiful basket of roses, amidst whose fragrance there reposed a magnificent necklet of pearls, which the King begged Zuleika to accept as a mark of esteem from himself. The slave who brought it added mysteriously that Zuleika would do well to take a walk at sunset in the garden, and to visit the little summer house at the further end of the enclosure, wearing the King's present to show that she had accepted it.

The moon had risen in the evening sky, and its light silvered as with a glittering sheen the leaves and flowers around the King and Zuleika. It flooded with its soft radiance the fair

garden, yet left the summer house in which they stood in deepest shadow. As the moonbeams fell upon the necklet of pearls which lay beside them, the King took it and clasped it round Zuleika's lovely throat, while he bent down again and yet again to press passionate kisses upon her lips. And then it was that she responded to his caresses even as I beheld her in my vision in the mirror.

CHAPTER XXII

ZULEIKA QUIETS MY FEARS

I rode homeward as though a thousand devils pursued me, the vision I had seen haunting me in spite of all my efforts to discredit it, and making me half mad in my apprehension for Zuleika's safety.

When I arrived at my own home Zuleika came forth to meet me with so well acted a show of affection and pleasure that I felt ashamed of my fears. To my anxious inquiries as to how she had fared in my absence, and whether she had seen anything of the King,—for I was so jealously unhappy I forgot to hide my feelings, and wished to see whether she would show any embarrassment at the mention of his name,—she raised her fine eyes to my face in languid surprise, and without the slightest trace of embarrassment said somewhat coldly:

"The King? What have I to do with the King? Didst thou desire that I shouldst see him?"

"I desire?" said I. "No! a thousand times, No! But I half feared his curiosity might prompt him to see thee, and I had, moreover, a strange vision in which thou seemed to speak with him."

"A vision," said Zuleika, contemptuously, "and if thou hadst a vision, am I to be suspected? Nay, but thy jealousy carries thee too far, Ahrinziman, thou art beyond all reason." And she turned her back upon me as though to leave the room in her indignation. But I followed her, and with many apologies

strove to make my peace with her vowing that she was an Angel of truth and goodness, and I was a jealous fool, whose love rendered him, even as she said, unreasonable. And so we made it up, and Zuleika got out her harp and sang to me, and did all that was possible to show how she welcomed my return, till I vowed to myself that of a truth the mirror must have lied and it was well I had destroyed it.

Although Zuleika affected to know nothing of the King, she told me of Artemisia's visit, and amused me much by mimicking the whole scene, acting the part of the Queen with a haughty gracefulness that was but half acting. She so assured me of the discretion she had shown in answering the questions of the Queen that I had small apprehension when in a few days she was sent for to visit Artemisia.

When Zuleika entered the Queen's apartments she found her surrounded by costly treasures of every kind: rich silken stuffs, interwoven with gold thread, and spangled with glittering jewels; fine veils of snowy gossamer; fabrics elaborately embroidered; priceless ornaments of rare workmanship, scattered on every side, while the Queen herself, as she rose and advanced a few steps to meet Zuleika (a mark of the greatest honor she could give) made a striking contrast to the ambitious girl whose aspiring mind made her already picture herself as occupying the position of the proud Artemisia. The one born to rule, and surrounded from her cradle with all the appanages of royalty, beautiful still with the ripened beauty of the mature summer or early autumn of life, taller than the ordinary height of women, and though far from being stout, yet enough so to give a more majestic appearance to her handsome figure—a Queen in every gesture, every thought.

The other, smaller, slighter, with the fragile delicate beauty of a blush rose, the graceful caressing manner of a child, yet with an ambition as keen, a heart as proud, a temper as indomitable as that of the haughty Queen, before whom she was constrained to affect a humility she did not feel; with a cunning as deep, an intellect as keen, as Artemisia's own, and a capability of accommodating herself to the circumstances of the moment which the impatient Queen did not possess; and with a calm indifference to all but her own interests, an insensibility to all deep emotions which the passionate elder woman could not have understood. Artemisia could act when it suited her

purpose, and feign a friendliness she did not feel to hide her real intentions, but with her the graciousness was forced, the deception a matter of study, and an effort to herself; while with Zuleika the acting was instinctive,—she was always acting, always posing to herself as well as to others. In the solitude of her own chamber she posed to herself as the possessor of an emotional character as foreign to her real nature as fire is to ice. She depicted passions as she had seen them displayed by others, and mimicked the most intense manifestations of love or hate, joy or despair, without feeling the smallest throb of these emotions herself.

It was because she was a mere mimic, and not truly an actress, that she failed to arouse in others the answering sympathy which can alone be awakened by the perfect actors or actresses, who themselves feel vividly for the time all the intensities of passion which they depict. Zuleika was a mere mimic, and in her mimicry her real inner nature had no share, her soul no part; and this was the reason that her deepest protestations of love left my heart still in doubt; her most carefully acted devotion left me still suspicious and distrustful, for while I argued that she showed me all the affectionate attention a husband could desire, my instinctive sense of the unreality of her loving words and soft caresses kept my heart restless and unsatisfied.

In the struggle these two women, who both sought to wield power through their influence over the King, were pretty equally equipped, the qualities possessed by each being balanced very evenly, for while Zuleika's youth and beauty, her art, and her perfect coolness of temper gave her certain advantages over the Queen, the latter had the influence of years, the ties of long affection, the habit of obedience to her in the past, to aid her, and had it not been for the interposition of a power, with whose influence neither had reckoned, it is impossible to say which would have been the victor, or which would have had to yield to the supremacy of the other. As it was, they each affected a friendliness they did not feel, and each believed they had deceived the other.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE KING'S FAVORS

Soon after Zuleika returned from her audience with the Queen I was summoned to attend the King, and sent on a mission which took me away for a few hours of the evening. On my return I went as usual to take my parchments from their box, for I was deeply interested in reading those I had at last brought from my dead master's house. They contained a most curious description of the means whereby the spirits of the Astral plane, and the multiform beings of an evil nature who hover around the earth, could be controlled and made to serve man as humble if dangerous servants—a knowledge which Jelal-ûd-dîn had withheld from me. I had almost finished the manuscript, and thought I would do so before I slept.

When, however, I opened the box I perceived that they had been disarranged. They were not in the order in which I had placed them, and on taking them into my hands I at once became conscious of a fresh influence pervading them. Some one had been to the box. Some one had discovered my hiding place, and my treasures were no longer safe.

Much agitated by this discovery I resolved to lose no time in placing them in a fresh place of concealment, and taking the box with me I went out, and mounting my horse again rode away unattended to a lonely spot a few miles from the city. Here I buried the box under some wild tamarisk bushes, and, having carefully removed all traces of my having done so, returned unobserved to my apartments in the Palace.

Who it was who had found out my manuscripts I could not guess. Zuleika I did not suspect, and the influence of the person who had been handling them was a strange one to me. Doubtless, thought I, some servant hath done it, and finding the box contained no money left it alone. I wished now I had not so hastily destroyed the magic mirror in my anger, for it might have shown me something. My own powers were not available unaided, because the bustle and confusion of my present life,

my anxieties and worldly thoughts, had impaired them so much that I could no longer command my visions, or behold things I wished to see save in fitful uncertain glimpses. The mirror had aided my weakened powers, and formed a means of reflecting in a semi-material manner the multitudinous events that were taking place around me, or had shadowed forth those which were approaching. I had now no means of forewarning myself of the plots and machinations which were gathering around my path, and the dim sense of coming evil which oppressed my soul only served to render my own unaided powers still less fit for use. All my dreams were broken and disturbed, and the pictures in them were like distorted reflections in the broken fragments of the mirror, which in my passion I had destroyed. All the omens around me seemed to point to some great misfortune, or even to death; whose, I could not see, but I felt that my own fate was involved with that of others. That atmosphere of the Palace oppressed me. The manner of Zuleika was so artificial in its semblance of affection that I began to suspect her. The King, whose mind I could often read, gave me the feeling that he was meditating some treachery towards me, how or in what way I could not see. The Queen I had always felt to be my enemy, as I was hers, and I had little doubt that she was planning some mischief against me.

In this state of affairs I resolved to leave the Palace and the King, and to seek out Al Zulid and learn what he could do for me.

Well would it have been had I but done so promptly, and left the very night I found my parchments had been tampered with. But I hesitated. I wished Zuleika, as a matter of course, to be the companion of my meditated secret flight from the Palace, and she refused to go. She was most indignant at what she termed my folly, my insanity, in proposing to throw away the favor of the King, the position of honor which I had enjoyed for such a very few weeks, and all because, forsooth, I had had dreams, suffered from forebodings, and was, suspicious and distrustful! She assured me of the favor the Queen had shown her, but she did not add that the King and she had met daily, and that his favors had considerably outweighed in value those bestowed by the Queen. She coaxed me, she soothed me, she practised all her arts to tranquillise my mind, and so great was her magnetic power she succeeded in lulling me into a species

of mental torpor, though she could not beguile away my apprehensions.

In truth, she was seeking to gain time. She did not wish to put herself absolutely in the power of the King till she was very sure that the foundations of her influence over Selim were secure, and strong enough to bid defiance to any assaults of the Queen or any other person. She did not want me to come to any harm—she was not heartless enough for that—but she did want to get me out of the way as quietly as possible, since I had become a barrier between her and her ambition. She had never really loved me, and, strange as it may seem, she had conceived a passion for the King, born principally of her admiration for his power and wealth. She wanted me to go away, but she had no idea of accompanying me. Events had hurried on so fast that it was not yet two months since Selim had ascended the throne; scarcely two weeks since Zuleika had arrived from Herat, and yet the current of our lives was bearing us on in a rapid rush towards a mighty whirlpool of destruction. The impatience of the King was precipitating the crisis of Zuleika's fate, which she was vainly striving to delay.

In less time than a week from the time when I had discovered that my parchment scrolls had been inspected, I was sent for by the King, and informed with many flattering speeches that it was his desire to appoint me Governor of a distant province for a short time, in the absence of the present Governor. "Ahrinziman," said he, "if for these few weeks thou dost find that the cares of Government are to thy taste, on thy return we can think of some position about the Court to suit thee, and this experience will give me excuse for appointing thee unto it. For myself, I feel now so well I think I can dispense with thy constant presence for a short time, and when thou dost return thou shalt find we have not forgotten thee in thine absence. I have here a letter, written and signed with mine own hand and seal, which thou shalt give unto the Governor whose place thou art to occupy for a brief season. It tells him how highly I esteem thee. As for thy wife, Ahrinziman," he added, coloring confusedly, for my eyes were intent upon his face, and his own fell before my gaze, "As for thy wife, my mother will charge herself with the care of her till thy return. She hath conceived a great liking for her. Surely thou wilt feel that she is safe in the charge of the Queen?"

I bowed to him in silence, for my thoughts were in a tumult, and I could not trust myself to speak.

He handed to me the letter I was to deliver to the Governor, and as he did so his hand shook as the hand of one with a palsy, while his eyes sought the floor, and he said in uncertain tones:

"Ahrinziman, it is because of my friendship for thee that I send thee on this mission. It is that I may have excuse to confer upon thee yet higher honors. Thou art of too great value to myself for me to send thee forth without good reason, and I shall await with impatience the hour of thy return, Oh, my friend."

His words were the words of friendship, but I knew that he lied to me, for I could read his thoughts. Though I could read at the time the thoughts of none other around me, I could read his, and I knew that he lied, for in his heart he said that I should never return, since he was only sending me to find, not honor but my grave.

In my anger at his ingratitude and treachery I would have drawn my dagger and stabbed him to the heart as he sat there, for he and I were alone; there was none to witness our audience. But I restrained myself, and though my fingers played with the hilt of my dagger, and mine eyes gazed at him with a steady look of scorn, till he quailed beneath their glance and thought to summon his guards, I drew not my weapon. I contented myself with a haughty bow to him as I said:

"Oh, Sire! Well do I know how to value the favors of Kings, and greatly do I thank thee for this last, this crowning mark of thy honor and thy regard."

Then I went forth, and sought Zuleika, that she and I together might leave this Palace of evil omen.

Again and again I sought to take her with me. Nay, in my anger and suspicion I even tried to take her by force, for she refused to go with me. She wept and implored that I should leave her where she was. She vowed she believed in the friendship of the Queen, and she refused to believe that any harm was meant to me, and at last when I tried to force her away she turned upon me in hot anger, and vowed she would rouse the Palace with her screams if I did not go and leave her. "Wait," said she, "and if thou dost not return I will go to thee, but I shall not be hurried thus away for thy foolish fancies, thy unworthy suspicions of thy best friends."

At last I was so angry that I left her, saying in my wrath

that if her heart was with her new friends rather than with her husband, they might keep her body with them also; but in mine own mind I vowed to myself that if they sent me away I would return unseen, as I well knew how to do, and would learn the meaning of their strange desire to be thus rid of me.

It was early morning when I set forth, and all that day I rode on at the head of my troop of soldiers, and it was as though all the black devils of hell rode with me, so full of bitter anger was my heart, so bent was I upon my scheme of vengeance. "For," said I to myself, "if Zuleika be false to me, if she hath stayed while I am sent away in order that she may become the plaything of the King, verily as there is a sky above our heads, as certainly as there are powers of evil around us, it shall be no common revenge that I shall exact from those who have wrought the ruin of my life. And by the powers of Ahriman, they shall die, each one. The devils of the darkest hell shall drag them down there together. If truly thou hast spoken to me, Oh my dead master, if thy mirror lied not when it showed unto me the vision of Zuleika and the King, then of a truth will I call on thee and thine unseen servants of Darkness to aid me in my revenge."

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I had scarce quitted the Palace half an hour ere Zuleika, who was all impatience to possess herself of my mysterious parchments, went to look in the former hiding place for them. As I had been led to imagine that I was only to be absent for a short time she did not suppose I would take them with me, and she was still further reassured upon this point by seeing that I departed without any box resembling the one she knew to contain the coveted scrolls. Her dismay may be imagined when she found the hiding place empty and the papers and box gone!

She turned deadly pale, and for the first few moments it seemed to her that all was lost, for I must have grown suspicious and taken them with me. The glance which the court Astrologer had obtained of the papers had been too hurried to allow of his mastering their contents in a way to prove of any practical value, and who knew what I might do were my suspicions fully aroused. Zuleika flattered herself that she had sent me away, angry, no doubt, but yet in ignorance of the fact of her infidelity to me, and she hoped that ere I discovered it she would make her position with the King so secure as to enable her to defy

my anger. She even hoped that she might be able to evade all consequences of her treachery.

Now, however, with the scrolls gone as well as myself, how were they to protect the King? At any moment he might be taken ill again, and her fine castle might tumble about her ears. She dared not tell Artemisia of the loss, but she sent for the court Astrologer, and with many wiles beguiled him into promising to help her in keeping the disappearance of the papers a secret till it was possible to obtain possession of them again. This he assured her he had a very safe plan for doing, although he declined to tell her what it was, merely assuring her that there were others besides her husband who could cast spells and cause missing property to be found. This man had no particular love for me, as indeed he could hardly have, seeing how I had supplanted him and cast discredit upon his skill, and he was only too ready to assist in hastening my downfall. He sought out the King, and with much caution informed him that from studying the stars he perceived that it would not be possible that I should be allowed to continue my journey; were I to do so disaster would overtake his majesty. "Oh, Sire!" said the Astrologer, "while he lives, danger will menace the person of the King, for so did it appear in my vision, and only with his death will the life of your majesty be secure."

The Astrologer prostrated himself before the King, but even while his head was bent down his cunning eyes were striving to read the effect his words had produced upon his master.

As for Selim, he was visibly disturbed, and after twisting nervously at the fringe of his sash for some moments, he replied:

"Thou sayest that were Ahrinziman once dead his power would cease and I should be safe. To secure this it needs not that we should recall him, for, behold, I have myself thought his power boded no good to me, and though he carries with him a letter of friendship to deliver unto the Governor, I have sent a swift messenger before him with another, wherein I have directed that he be imprisoned and slain. It needs not that we recall him. I desire not his return."

The Astrologer started with surprise at this speech, and answered: "True, Oh King, yet the Governor of that city hath no knowledge of occult things. He will slay Ahrinziman, without doubt, but he will not extract from him first the knowledge we desire. Ahrinziman will die without releasing your High-

ness from his spell, so that the last state of your Majesty will be worse than the first. Had my august Master thought fit to consult me, his humble slave, I would have warned him of this danger. Now I only pray that Ahrinziman may be recalled, in order that ere he die we may force him to withdraw his spells, and disclose the source of his secret power. It needs not that he should approach your majesty, or guess why he hath been recalled."

Again the King hesitated, then fear for his own safety, and a feverish desire to put an end to his present state of suspense, prevailed, and summoning his scribe he gave the required order for my return, and a messenger was sent in hot haste to bring me back, on the plea that the King had forgotten something he desired to tell me. The crafty Astrologer returned from his audience well pleased, for he did not doubt that he should now be able to get me into his power, and force me by means of torture to disclose where I had put the missing parchments.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DARK ANGEL'S HELP

At nightfall we pitched our tents on the outskirts of the Great Salt Desert, and so soon as I had seen to the arrangements for the repose of my escort, I retired to my own tent, and gave strict orders that I should on no account be disturbed.

As soon as all was quiet around me, save for the measured tramp of the sentry before the door of my tent, I took from my bosom the scroll which I had last brought from the secret repository of my dead master, and trimming the little lamp which burned in my tent, sat down to try to read over again all that it said about the methods of controlling the mysterious forces of the Astral plane. I had a vague confused idea of turning those powers into an instrument to execute my meditated vengeance, but in the agitated state of my mind I felt it impossible to think out any plan clearly, or to still the wild throbbing of my brain.

I would have given anything now to possess again the magic mirror which I had destroyed; I wanted to see Zuleika, to learn what were her real motives in remaining behind. In vain I tried to read the scroll; the characters danced before my eyes, and only a word here and there could I decipher. I thrust it from me at last, and rose to pace backwards and forwards in the little tent, as a relief to my restlessness.

I had taken but a few turns when the sound of a deep sigh, uttered as if in mockery of my own, saluted my ears, and in the farther corner of the tent I saw a dim, black, shadowy figure, shrouded in a mantle. It seemed to waver and grow faint, then gather together again, and become more distinct, yet always with the appearance of being a mere reflection, a veritable shadow thrown upon the curtains of the tent. For several minutes I watched it in silence, then I called aloud, though in a low voice, "Who art thou? From whence hast thou come?"

The shadow grew darker, stronger, more sharply defined for a moment, and as I gazed I recognised the majestic figure, the regal poise of the shrouded head which I had seen in the veiled Angel of Darkness which I had beheld so long before on this very desert plain. There was no figure visible this time, only this dark shadow of its form, veiled and shrouded as before.

A soft mocking laugh came like a distant echo to my ears, and the sound of a far-off voice seemed to speak this answer to my question:

"*Thou* dost ask who I am? *Thou*, who shouldst know me well, since I have constituted myself the guide of thy life, and have helped on the accomplishment of thine ambition. Thou didst desire to climb, and thou hast climbed high already, although thou hast not yet reached the pinnacle of thy desire. My hand hath helped thee up step by step, and now in the hour of thine anguish thou dost still hesitate to call upon me for aid. Thy heart is sore. Try, then, the sweet balm of vengeance which I can offer thee to soothe its pangs."

"Thou dost speak of vengeance, Oh thou Angel of Accursedness. Canst thou show me how to pierce a Palace wall, and drag from its shelter those who I deem have wronged me? Canst thou show me, and show me truly, what my wife doeth now? Of whom she dreams? I would know the truth as it appears unto the eyes of God. Canst thou, whose powers are evil, show me that which is true?"

The figure seemed to rise up before me, till it towered above my head, and casting back the mantle bade me look upon the face of the dark Angel, and gaze into his eyes. And as I strove to do so there came a face, as living and distinct as mine own, into the shadowy form; the eyes looked with steady gaze into mine own, until it seemed as though they would scorch me with the lightning of their glance; the haughty brows frowned at me in mingled rage and scorn, and from the compressed lips these words came hissing in a fierce whisper:

"Can I show thee those things which are true, thou dost ask? Dost thou think all that is evil must be false? Is there not the germ of truth in all things? Yea, even in that which would have seemed the grossest falsehood to thee once, hath it not been proved already there was truth? I am an Angel of Darkness, and in mine own dark realm I reign supreme, over beings as vile and evil as any in our dread kingdom of Hell, but in all my court there are no liars; they who lie must even seek another King, since I have naught in affinity with them. Search the Spirit World from end to end, if thou canst even in imagination do it, and thou wilt ever find that like draws unto like; treachery seeks unto it its fellow traitor; but even in the lowest depths, such as thou and I have no affinity with the mean liar, the snake-like friend, who stabs in the dark, while his face smiles unto thee by day. Behold! I am a Ruler in Hell. I am as evil as is the most evil of the Angels of Ahriman. Murder and War, Bloodshed and Revenge, Destruction and Fear, follow in my train; but Falsehood knows me not; Deceit flies before my approach, and if I show thee aught there will be at least truth in what I show.

"Thou wouldst see thy wife? Behold her now."

He waved his shadowy arm, and in the corner of the tent there appeared a crimson star, held in a circlet of gold like unto a crown. Around the star a grey mist like a veil appeared to float, and as it grew thinner and thinner the star shone out with brighter rays, and by its light I saw that the circlet of gold encircled a woman's head. More and more transparent grew the misty veil, and I saw—Zuleika. She appeared to stand before a mirror of polished steel, and to poise her head gracefully, first on one side and then upon the other, while she watched the jewel sparkle amidst her long floating hair; and her face was wreathed in smiles as she admired her own beauty reflected in the burnished steel.

She was attired in her richest dress, the dress which Artemisia had given her, and her bare arms and throat sparkled with jewels which I had never seen her wear. "From whence had she obtained them?" I asked in my jealous anger.

As though in answer to my thought, she raised one hand to her lips, and kissed with passionate delight a ring she wore—a man's ring. Oh, powers of Heaven! I recognised it then. It was the King's Signet Ring. She spread out her hands and looked at it, as a child admires a new toy. She coquetted with her own reflection; she pouted, she frowned, she smiled, yea, she even half blushed, and drooped her eyes in sweet and modest confusion, as though she parried the advances of a too ardent wooer. It was not my wife I looked at then, but some young shy maid, who dreams for the first time of love.

Suddenly her manner changed, as a fresh mood seized her. She threw up her head in haughty grace; she walked a few steps forward and then back, as though she were a Queen; she held out her hands, as though to raise some suppliant; she signed imperiously to an imaginary companion to begone, and turned away with a contemptuous frown, and a proud toss of her head, worthy of a Queen. Then she changed again. She became all radiant smiles, all bewitching rapture, and held out her arms as though to embrace some one, while her lips murmured, not my name, but that of Selim.

So realistic was the vision that in my rage I rushed forward, dagger in hand, to stab her to the heart, and like a thing of mist she vanished, and I stood alone in my tent.

Even the shadow of the Dark Angel had vanished, but his voice was still audible to me, and as I drew back, trembling with anger and disappointment, he said:

"Thou dost know now how false is this daughter of the Serpent, and thou wouldst desire to kill her. If so thou canst only do so in thine own material body. The powers which I wield have no influence over her, or over that false Queen who killed thy Mother, and hath ruined thine own life. They belong not to the sphere wherein I rule, and the stars of those two women dominate thine, so that on the spiritual plane of thine earthly lives they shall prevail against thee. To avenge thy wrongs upon them thou must obtain power of a material kind, and while I can aid thee to obtain this, I cannot affect their welfare, either materially or spiritually. With Selim it is different; he

hovers between two spheres. He hath certain affinities with thee, through thy common father, and he is already subject to their influence. If thou dost desire to visit the Palace at Parsagherd, do so now.

"Draw around this earthly body of thine the signs used by the master Jelal-ûd-dîn, that it may rest safely till thy return. Then go forth in thy spirit form, and judge for thyself if I have shown thee truly the nature of this woman whom thou hast so madly loved. Go, and my servants shall go with thee."

The voice ceased, and I took up mechanically the black wand that I carried always with me, and traced out upon the floor the protecting circles. Then wrapping myself in my mantle I laid my body down as though to rest, while in my heart there was the most fierce tumult of emotions, and in my soul the chill despair of my dead hopes, the fearful agony of withered love.

CHAPTER XXV

MY REVENGE

For the first time in my experience I was fully conscious of the process by which a spirit can leave the earthly envelope to roam untrammelled through the earth plane. As I withdrew myself from my mortal covering I felt like one who throws off a cloak, and after two or three slight tremors of the muscles I stood forth in my spirit form, free from my material body, save for a fine thread of gossamer-like texture, which still attached me to it, and kept it animated by my life fluid.

In all my previous experiences I had been unconscious during the change, and had awakened, as one wakes from sleep, to the knowledge of my spiritual surroundings. But on this occasion it was as though I had stepped forth upon a new stage of life, and as I did so had withdrawn the curtain which veiled its scenes and actors from my mortal sight.

Around me I perceived the spiritual counterparts of all material things, but they no longer appeared as they had done to my

mortal sight. Some were infinitely more beautiful; others had lost all trace of their earthly beauty, by reason of their spiritual defilement. My own body, as it lay before my eyes, looked as I was wont to see myself, but it appeared veiled by clinging cobwebs, like garments dipped in some scorching corrosive fluid, and stained with mud; and on looking at my spirit form I perceived that I was clothed in a like manner, while the haggard wildness of my features had been transferred from the clay-like image of myself upon the ground to the living, suffering spirit.

I passed my hand across my brow, to clear my brain and steady my wavering thoughts, then "willing" that I should visit Zuleika, I felt myself rise and rush through the air. As I hurried onward I beheld around me, above and below, myriads of strange beings of every shape and kind. Those phantasmal creatures I had beheld so dimly before were distinct and clear to my vision now: spirits like unto myself, human in their forms and in their natures; some bright as radiant Angels, others dim and dark and full of woe. All around me, on every side, were multitudinous forms of life: man, beast, and bird; fishes and reptiles; plants; flowers; all like and unlike to those of material earth life. Stars glowed above me; lights flashed up and down; all was rush and hurry and turmoil; and there was neither rest nor peace anywhere. Like the waves of a mighty ocean the life of the astral plane surged to and fro.

As I rushed onwards I saw that I was accompanied by a great train of spirits; weird creatures of phantom shapes, and the human spirits of dead men and women of evil lives. Onward with me they rushed, howling, shouting, crying, yelling out wild imprecations and fierce cries for vengeance upon all mankind, gesticulating like a set of maniacs, and fighting with each other like a pack of wolves. Laughing and screaming in fiendish joy at the thought of the sport which awaited them; waving their long, skinny arms to cheer me on, and mouthing at me with their hideous faces; shrieking curses upon each other and upon me, even while each one struggled to get the foremost place beside me, that they might the more enjoy the expected scene.

Above all this wild throng I saw the floating form of the Dark Angel, poised upon his outspread wings like a majestic bird of prey, who watches the battle from afar that he may swoop down only to carry off the spoil which others have gathered for him. And as the tide floats driftweeds onward upon its restless bosom,

so were I and my wild escort floated on upon the current of my fierce and murderous desires.

We reached the Palace and city of Parsagherd, and hung like a black cloud over it for one brief moment, ere we all sank down through roofs and walls which no longer offered any obstruction to our passage. We entered the outer court which led to my own apartments, and passed along the passage to that inner chamber where Zuleika had slept in my arms so many times. At the door I paused, and like a rushing torrent that meets with an obstruction in its path, the rush and hurry of my feverish thoughts seemed checked.

I could not enter. The memory of our past love, the thought of all the sweetness of those vanished hours, rose up as a barrier between me and my revenge. The goodness and purity, the faith and trust, of the dead past, were like white Angels with outstretched wings to bar the way against sin and murder. I paused. I wavered for a moment in my wild thirst for vengeance. I half turned back, and dropped the curtain I had begun to draw aside. Another moment and my good Angel would have conquered, and I should have left my meditated deed undone.

But at this critical moment, while the scales trembled in the balance, the voice of Zuleika, of my faithless wife, fell upon my ears, speaking in soft dulcet tones fond words of love unto my rival. With a furious cry of wrath I tore aside the curtain from the doorway, and looked in.

There she sat, attired as I had seen her in the vision in my tent; the jewelled circlet in her hair, the rich dress, the sparkling gems, the King's ring upon her finger, all exactly as I had seen it. And now upon her face there was the evil, seducing smile; the shameless glance of the temptress was in her eyes, and she looked as I had seen her first in Jelal-ûd-dîn's mirror.

And Selim sat beside her. His arms encircled her. His lips were pressed to hers, again and yet again, in passionate kisses.

I could bear no more. With frantic haste I rushed upon them, forgetting that as a spirit I was invisible, and all my angry words inaudible. Me they saw not, but a violent trembling seized the King; a cold wind as of ice enveloped Zuleika, and she drew back from her lover in a sudden alarm. I tried to grasp the King. I tried to strangle him. But to my astonishment my hands made no impression upon him. It was as though I had become an intangible shadow myself. My hands glided off his body, as

though the protecting armour of his material form offered an impervious wall against all my attacks. I drew my dagger, or rather the spiritual counterpart of the dagger, which I usually wore: my dagger was like myself, a shadow, beside the strong covering of the material shell.

Furious with helpless rage, I stamped upon the ground, and to their ears, muffled by the flesh, my steps gave out no sound. Fear filled both their hearts, but it was a nameless fear of the unknown.

In my hot anger I called aloud for some power to aid my vengeance, and the mocking laughter of the Dark Angel answered me, as he said:

"Oh, fool! Fool! To think that thou, as a spirit, couldst penetrate the thick armour of mortality. But behold those who can! See whom I have sent unto thine aid."

A cloud enveloped us all; a cloud as black as the darkest storm cloud of night, as dense as a stream of filthy black mud. And in the midst of its darkness I beheld strange hideous gigantic forms; frightful creatures like human apes; their hands like giant hands; their arms like flails; their bodies short and misshapen, like some fearful abortions of human birth. These creatures wrestled and fought as they enshrouded us with their foul dark atmosphere, and then the foremost of them grasped the King with a grip of iron, and strangling him in an instant, as a dog would kill a rat, flung his quivering body upon the ground at Zuleika's feet, and like a wave of darkness the foul creatures were gone as suddenly as they had come.

Fierce as had been my desire for revenge, I shuddered at the horrible scene, and scarce conscious of anything but the horrible face of the murdered King, I rushed away from the fatal spot.

CHAPTER XXVI

I AM PROCLAIMED KING

It was well that I returned so quickly to my earthly body, for I found that a horrible looking low earth bound spirit was already touching it, and striving to take possession. The protecting ring

of astral fire had died out in one place, and through this gap the dark spirit had entered. In my wrath I rushed forward, almost annihilating the wretched creature with the withering scorn of my glance, and he cowered down abjectly at my feet and slunk away, while I, re-entering my body with a violent and painful shock, awoke with the feeling of having dreamed some dreadful nightmare vision, and it was some moments before I collected my thoughts sufficiently to realize that my late experience had been no dream, but a dread reality.

While I was thinking over what had passed I heard a hurried whispering outside my tent, then the curtain was raised cautiously and some one looked in. With an exclamation of pleasure I sprang up, for I recognized my father's faithful friend Al Zulid. I had sent a messenger to him when I left Parsagherd, but I had not hoped that he would meet me so soon, and after the terrible adventure of the last hours his presence was doubly welcome, for I had resolved to confide all to him, and to be guided by his counsel.

He greeted me with much affection, and heard with a sympathy very welcome to my sore heart the story of my wrongs, and of the vengeance I had already exacted for them in so strange a manner.

"Said I not unto thee to beware of Artemisia? Did I not warn thee, Ahrinziman, not to trust them for an hour? Verily do I believe that the Queen hath had a large share in the accomplishment of thy dishonor, and of a truth thou and I shall pay off together the debts we owe her. But it will not be wise to let others know that thou hast in effect slain the King. We must act as though we believed him still to be alive, and it will be time enough to speak of him as dead when others shall tell us of it."

"Thou dost not believe that he is dead? That I have seen him die even as I tell thee?"

"I think, friend, that thou hast had a troubled dream, mayhap. Perchance it may be even as thou sayest, but till I know from others that Selim hath died, and died even as thou sayest, I cannot well believe so strange a thing. Think not that I despise thy vision. Frown not so angrily upon me, son of my dead master, for I do not doubt thou hast seen something. The gifts of divination are thine by right of birth, even as the throne of Persia shall be thine, but I think that thine agitated frame of mind may have colored thy vision, and given it a more extreme ending than hath belonged to it in truth. But come, thou art awake now. The

time for dreams is past, and if thou wouldst avenge upon Artemisia thine own wrongs, and those of thy parents, we must lose no time. Prince Ahmed is with me, and so are our followers, for we were on the march to Parsagherd when thy messenger met me, and I turned aside to seek thee. Come and see Ahmed with me, for he hath dreamed of reigning, since thou wouldst not take thy father's place, and he will not much like to resign his dreams in thy favor. Yet must he even do so, for thou art first. Thy name comes before his, and I swore to El Jazid that should I find Ahrinziman yet in life I would devote all my influence, all my power to place thee, the favored son, upon the throne of Persia."

"I thank thee, Al Zulid," said I, grasping his hand with much emotion. "Thou art indeed the truest of true friends, but can not we arrange with Ahmed so that he shall not be wholly disappointed? Cannot we share the kingdom? Cannot he and I reign each over a part, in unity not in enmity? I confess that I do now desire to reign. Love is dead for me, but Ambition may yet be my God and Power my Idol. I may still seek in public life the solace of distinction. Persia shall be my mistress, since I have now no wife, and care for the greatness of my country shall fill the void left in my heart. Besides," added I, grinding my teeth with rage, "besides that, have I not my revenge still incomplete? Shall I not grasp at power that I may wrestle upon more equal terms with Artemisia? Her son is dead, whether thou dost believe it or not, for I have seen him die; but he is only one, and they who have wronged me were three. Lead me to thy troops, and to Prince Ahmed, and what seems wise and right I will do, for I must no more delay to take up the heritage which is mine by right of birth and deed of gift."

"Good, Ahrinziman, King of Persia. But it must not be thou who dost seek Ahmed; he must come to thee, and I will bring him hither."

So saying he went forth, and presently returned accompanied by Ahmed and the principal officers of his army, as well as the Vizier Babadul. My tent was lighted only by a small lamp, but a light watch fire burned outside, and as Al Zulid held back the curtains of my tent, its rays fell full upon my face and figure. As I stepped forth to meet Ahmed, and to assure him that my desire was to divide the Kingdom with him, not to claim the whole for myself, the light from the fire illuminated my features and Babadul and the Generals with him, who had known my father well, uttered

an exclamation of surprise, for the likeness to my dead father, not alone in feature and figure, but in gesture and speech, was so strong they could almost have believed it was El Jazid himself who stood again before them. Only it was like El Jazid as he had been in youth, ere care had furrowed his brow and sorrow dimmed the lustre of his eyes and the pride of his carriage.

As for Ahmed, he regarded me in sullen astonishment and anger. He refused my proffered hand, and bowing haughtily said:

"I cannot share the Kingdom with thee. It is mine or it is thine, but I at least will have no divided inheritance. I will owe to the courtesy and policy of no man the power which must be mine by right or not at all. I withdraw myself and my claims since Ben Al Zulid and Babadul have found thee, who are named before me in my father's decree. But I claim for myself perfect freedom of action. I will owe no allegiance unto thee." Then turning upon his heel he strode from the tent, and mounting upon his horse rode away.

As soon as he was gone the others crowded around me, each eager to assure me of their fidelity, and then Al Zulid advised that we should go forth, and that I should show myself unto the troops, to whom he had already explained who I was, and why he had turned aside from his march to meet me.

Among the soldiers, and with the populace in Persia, Ben Al Zulid was a great power. He was a favorite with everyone. His powerful physique, his splendid military talents, his undaunted courage, his success as a commander, all contributed to make him popular with a warlike people, while his unswerving fidelity and his noble nature won him the trust and confidence of all who knew him. I verily believe that had he chosen to grasp the regal sceptre for himself, instead of for me, he would have been elected to the throne with acclamations of joy.

As it was, when he led me forth mounted upon my favorite horse and surrounded by the Generals who had led the army of my late father through so many successful campaigns, and presented me to the assembled troops as the true King, appointed by El Jazid himself to succeed him, there went up a great shout of "Long live the King Ahrinziman! Long life to the son of El Jazid! Down with Queen Artemisia and her feeble son! Long may a King reign who can restore the fading glory to Persia!"

The day was breaking and the red rays of the rising sun

flashed redly upon the waving spears and nodding plumes of the great cavalcade of warriors before me, as the whole army collected by Al Zulid shouted forth my name and greeted me as their new King, and for one brief moment the triumph of my ambitious desires seemed as a solace to my wounded heart, and the first sip from the cup of power, sweet to my lips. And then there rose before my eyes again the vision of Zuleika, as she had hung so fondly on my rival's breast and whispered her words of love to him, till he changed into the horrible, distorted, hideous corpse I had seen lying at her feet. Then did all my thoughts of triumph turn to dust and ashes; all my exultation to bitterness; all the sweetness of the cup of prosperity to gall and wormwood, even as I tasted that first sip.

I bowed as one in a dream. I bowed mechanically in answer to the ringing cheers; and as Al Zulid gave the order to resume the march to Parsagherd he put his hand upon the bridle of my horse, and bending down his head, whispered:

"Awake! Awake! Ahrinziman. Leave thy dreams of love and disappointment behind thee, for a new life, the life of action and of power, lies before thee, and it shall bring consolation even for a woman's fickle smiles. It is the time to act, not to dream of that dead past of thine affections."

CHAPTER XXVII

I ENTER MY CAPITAL

When Zuleika recovered from the first shock of dismay and horror at seeing the lover she was caressing die in so sudden and so unaccountable a way, in so terrible a manner, her first thought was of the danger to herself at being found with the dead body in her sleeping chamber. She had seen nothing of me, or of those horrible phantoms who had killed Selim. She thought he had died in convulsions. She felt a dim belief that I was in some way responsible for the catastrophe, but she had no idea that I had been actually in the room. What to do she did not know. She could not touch Selim's body now, fond as she fancied she had been of him ten minutes before. Neither dare she leave it

where it lay, to be found in her room by Artemisia. Trembling and sobbing she sought out the trusty slave who had tended her from a child, and who had brought to her first the knowledge of the King's admiration when she was at Herat. To this woman she related what had happened, and after a short conference it was agreed that Selim's body should be taken through the secret passage by which he had entered Zuleika's room, and laid upon his own bed, there to be discovered by his own attendants, who would fancy he had died suddenly in the night. Zuleika and the faithful slave dared not summon anyone to aid them in their task, but fortunately the slave was a large, powerful woman, while the King, though tall, was a slender man, and not heavy, so that while the woman carried the poor contorted body in her arms, Zuleika, with much fear and trembling, helped to support it, and between them they carried it through the short passage and laid it upon the bed.

They then shut the secret doors, and Zuleika, who was by this time almost in hysterics, was laid upon her own couch and tended by the faithful slave, who kept all others away from the bedside, lest the state of Zuleika's mind, her wild weeping and great terror, should arouse suspicion.

Thus did the night pass, and with early morning the King's death was discovered by one of the attendants, who ran in great alarm to call the Queen.

Consternation reigned everywhere.

As for Artemisia, she was like a tigress that hath been robbed of her young. In her frantic grief she hung over the dead body of her son, and refused to believe that he could be dead. She kissed the poor swollen, livid lips; she caressed the senseless head; she strove to straighten the twisted limbs, to warm the icy body by contact with her own passionately throbbing heart; she held her dead child in her arms, and rocked him on her bosom, as though he were still the infant upon whom she had lavished all her love, and to whom she had turned in her slighted affection.

She turned like a wild beast upon all who tried to touch the dead man, or draw her away from him. For hours she continued her wild, useless efforts to restore him, forgetting, fortunately for Zuleika, all else, in her attempts to revive her son. Then, at last, the full measure of her woe broke upon her mind, and with a mad shriek of grief, a frantic cry of despair, she sank insensible upon

her son's body, while the wild wail of her attendant maidens rent the air in lamentations over the dead Selim.

It was by this time late in the afternoon. I and my troops had reached the Palace of Parsagherd. We had met the messenger sent by Selim to recall me, and his presence gave me a good pretext for entering the city quietly, without appearing to know aught of what had befallen the King.

We met no opposition anywhere, scarcely did our appearance excite surprise. The awful events in the Palace filled the public mind, to the exclusion of all other things. Everywhere were scattered groups talking over the strange death of Selim, the news of which had spread like wild-fire through the city. Even when we reached the Palace gates no one opposed our entrance, when I showed the keepers of the gates the order for my return.

Ben Al Zulid had turned very pale when he heard the news of Selim's death, and had exchanged a hurried glance with me. but he was careful not to betray our previous knowledge, and we rode into the court yard of the Palace unopposed, amidst a throng of bewildered soldiers and courtiers.

Not with cries of joy was my coming welcomed, but as I drew near to the Palace door there fell upon our ears the long, wild, lamentation, the mournful cry of the Queen's women, as they raised the death wail over the murdered King.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MY WIFE

A short conference took place between Al Zulid and the leaders of the late government. The decree of El Jazid was exhibited to them, and it was made plain to the minds of Artemisia's friends that I had behind me a power strong enough to support my claims. The death of Selim left no pretext for opposing my elevation, and whatever might be the secret feelings of those about Selim's court, it was evidently not thought wise to display any animosity towards me. Moreover I was not without friends, even among the late King's courtiers, and these all hoped to share in my prosperity.

Thus was my elevation to the throne accomplished without any violent opposition, and even Artemisia herself had no excuse for interfering with me.

The obsequies of Selim were conducted with much splendour (as is the custom in the East). Artemisia, who was still half frantic in her grief, remained unmolested in her own apartments, attended by her women, and unaware of my arrival, since I shrank from intruding upon her at such a time, and resolved to defer my revenge against her till a more fitting season, merely ordering that she should not be allowed to leave the Palace.

Zuleika I had not seen. She also was in effect a prisoner. She had heard with wonder, not unmixed with alarm, of the strange events which were taking place, and of my sudden elevation to power. Her first thought was regret that she had not been faithful to me, her second, relief in remembering that I was in all probability ignorant of her falsehood. And as she recovered a little from the shock of Selim's death she began to consider how best to turn the unexpected change to her own advantage. She wondered that I had not come at once to see her, as she felt sure my first impulse would have been under ordinary circumstances. She felt somewhat uneasy at my strange absence, but hoped it might be due to other causes than displeasure. She wished she had not been quite so angry with me when we parted, and at last resolved to send word to me, to ask if I had forgotten Zuleika. Meantime she had attired herself in her simplest yet most becoming manner, and removed as far as possible all traces of her late agitation.

I had only just awakened from a short sleep of utter exhaustion when Zuleika's message was brought to me, and it was some minutes ere I realized all the changes which had taken place. When I did so my anger against my faithless wife revived in all its bitterness.

As I entered the room Zuleika, who was resting upon her cushions, hurried forward with much show of delight to greet me. It was early morning, and she was but half dressed. Her beautiful hair hung loose upon her shoulders; her white round arms and neck were bare, and her pretty feet were thrust hastily into her slippers; her dark eyes looked unusually large and wistful by reason of the paleness of her face. Her hands trembled as she strove to gather her veil around her and fasten her robe, but she turned to me with a smile as sweet and innocent as of old, and put out her arms caressingly to embrace me.

But I drew back from her haughtily, and looked at her coldly and sternly, even while my heart gave a wild throb of anguish, and I would have given all the earth to know she was yet true to me, and that all the terrible past was but an awful dream. My voice choked and trembled as I said to her:

"You forget. It is not your husband, Ahrinziman, who has returned to you, but the King of Persia. What did you desire of him?"

Zuleika's arms dropped to her sides, and her large childlike eyes filled with tears; real tears, no doubt, as she replied:

"Oh, Ahrinziman! I thought thou wouldst ever be the same to me. I thought not that thou wouldst keep thine anger thus. We parted in anger it is true, but I thought thou wert unreasonable in thy suspicions; and see, I have wept such bitter tears since thou didst leave me, without one kiss, and now thou art as cold as ice to me. Can it be that thou dost love me no more? That thou no longer carest for my love since thou art become the King?"

She looked not like a guilty wife, but like a pleading child, as she spoke thus to me, and I had almost begun to believe in her again, I so longed to take her to my heart, and hear her say she loved me. I took a step toward her, and my face softened, and mine eyes filled with tears. And then, Oh God! if I have sinned had I not grave provocation, for there upon the carpet between us lay the King's signet ring—the ring he had given Zuleika, and which she had worn upon her slender finger at the fatal moment when I had seen her in his arms. In the hurry and agitation the ring had fallen from Zuleika's finger, which was much too small to wear it, and had lain unnoticed upon the floor, to rise up like a silent accusing witness of her falseness and my dishonor.

I started as though an adder had stung me, and picked up the ring, and holding it out to her said:

"Oh, Woman! Fair and faithless! Oh smooth faced liar that thou art! Thou sayest that thou wept for my departure, when it was the lover who died even at thy feet for whom those tears were shed. If thou knowest nothing of Selim how comes his ring, his Signet ring, within thy sleeping chamber? The chamber that should be sacred to thee and me alone. Perjure thyself no more. Seek no further to deceive me, for behold, I saw thee with him, and I saw him die, even as thou didst see him die, at thy feet. Oh, most false of women, who couldst lie in my

arms and whisper words of love into mine ears, when thou hadst already deceived and dishonored me. Thou shalt die. Yea, of a truth thou shalt die, and go to Hell to seek for thy paramour."

I drew my dagger, and would have stabbed her to the heart, but she uttered a piercing cry and fell at my feet, kissing them like a slave, and grovelling on the ground in abject terror, while she pleaded for life—only life. Then was my wrath turned to contempt, and I spurned her from me with my foot, and drew my sash which she had grasped in her agony of fear, away from her hands, as though her touch defiled me.

"Thy life, vile harlot! What is the value of a life such as thine? Thy life! Is it so dear a thing to thee? Then live till thou art old and grey and withered, and all those charms with which thou hast beguiled men's hearts are turned to hideousness, and thou art known for what thou art, a woman without virtue and without shame. Live! Yea, thou shalt live, but thou shalt enjoy the fate thou and thy betrayer planned for me. Thou shalt go to a prison, not to the palace of thy dreams."

I turned away. I could not trust myself to look on her again, as she lay sobbing on the ground in all the abandonment of her terror and despair, lest my heart should soften and she should beguile my soul once more.

When I returned to my apartments I found Al Zulid awaiting me, with the news that Queen Artemisia had fled during the night from the Palace.

"It is perhaps as well that she hath done so," said he, "since we could not have retained her as a prisoner without raising around us a hornet's nest of her powerful kindred, who would be only too glad of a pretext to attack us. As it is they have no excuse for doing so, and so soon as thou art securely seated upon the throne of Persia we shall have ample opportunity of avenging upon Artemisia our mutual wrongs, and of humbling even to the dust this proud Queen. First grasp with a firm hand the regal power and all else will follow."

"Doubtless it is even as thou dost say, Al Zulid, but, Oh! friend, to one whose wrongs burn the heart as do mine, it is hard to wait, even for an hour, ere I may satiate my thirst for vengeance. Upon Artemisia we may yet avenge ourselves, but can aught restore to me the happiness which I have lost for ever? Can anyone give back to me my wife, in her innocence and purity?"

“Art thou so sure, Ahrinziman, that she was indeed innocent in thought, as well as in fact, ere Artemisia and her son tempted her to fall? Methinks that virtue must be of a poor quality which yields to the first assault, and that love but a base counterfeit which fades before the glitter of a King’s crown. For thee it is a bitter awakening from thine illusion, but if Zuleika had no true love for thee doth it matter so much whose hand hath drawn aside the veil from her real nature? Think not that I fail in sympathy with thee because I speak thus, or that I know not how sore thy heart doth feel, how empty is this hour of thy triumph, since she who should have been the chief sharer of its pride hath proved so faithless. I would but arouse thee from dwelling upon the past, which thou canst not alter, and bid thee turn to that future which is yet thine own, and which thou canst shape to compensate thee at least in part, for the disappointment of thine affection. Let Persia henceforth be thy mistress, and the prosperity of thy people thy chief thought.”

CHAPTER XXIX

ARTEMISIA AND AHMED

In sending Zuleika to the fortress in which I intended she should pass her days, I allowed her, as a special favour, to take with her the faithful negro woman who had nursed her as an infant, and who ever showed a devotion to her mistress which was worthy of a more grateful object. It was this woman who had helped Zuleika to remove the dead body of King Selim from her chamber, and who possessed more of Zuleika’s confidence than any other person. This slave, whose name was Bamba, soon contrived to ingratiate herself into the favor of the humbler guards at the fortress, and was allowed to pass in and out with comparative freedom, a circumstance which inspired Zuleika with a plan for making her escape.

To one like my discarded wife the solitary imprisonment to which she was condemned was almost as terrible a thing as death itself. To feel her youth and her beauty withering away between

four gloomy walls; to have no companion but a humble slave; no fine dresses, no costly jewels to wear, no glittering baubles to toy with, no pretty things to surround her, no one to pay her homage, none to envy or to flatter; this was indeed a bitter fate, and the feelings of the vain, selfish, frivolous beauty towards me were full of the most intense hate. For was it not I who had sent her to this awful prison? My scorn and contempt when I had spurned her from me with my foot had galled and wounded her vanity as my love had never been able to touch her heart. My bitter words rankled in her mind, though my words of fond endearment had made but little impression. The dim sense she had of the truth in my angry speech stabbed her to the quick, disturbing that good opinion of herself which she had ever cherished, and shaking her perfect faith in her own amiability, her own beauty, her own worth. Anything she had done she had fully justified to herself in her own mind, and my outspoken words she regarded as a deadly insult to her self-respect, and an outrage upon her self-love which was unpardonable. I had despised her. I had rejected her attempts at a reconciliation. I had heaped contempt and injury upon her, and for me she felt a vehemence of petty spite which for the first time in her life brought her to the verge of feeling a strong, passionate emotion. At last her tepid, selfish nature was roused into some throb of hot anger, some sense of the strength of the passions which can stir the human heart, and next to her desire for freedom was the desire to revenge upon me what she was pleased to call her wrongs.

As day after day passed on, and the weary weeks changed into months as weary, she paced to and fro in her prison like a pantheress in her cage, planning how to get free. At last the ease with which Bamba could enter and leave the fortress suggested a scheme to her mind. Gold and jewelry she had none. Everything of value which might have served to bribe her guards to help her had been taken away. Friends she had none, save this one poor slave, yet in her devotion Zuleika possessed a treasure more potent than any gold, more valuable than any jewels. If Zuleika sighed for freedom Bamba would hesitate at nothing to procure it, did she but know how to set to work, and when Zuleika called her to her and told her of a plan, Bamba acquiesced at once.

"See now, good Bamba," said Zuleika, "it is now four terrible months that we have endured the life of this prison. It might well be four years; to me it seems an eternity. I can support

this life no longer. For so desperate a case we must try a desperate remedy.

"As for thee, thou must find means to reach Queen Artemisia. I have no money to give thee, so thou must even beg thy way. If thou art missed I shall pretend to great concern for thee; I shall show great anger, and say thou, even thou, hast deserted me in my captivity. I shall ask daily for thee, and weary them with my importunities for news, that they may not suspect that I have sent thee from me. If Artemisia will help, let her give thee gold, for a golden key will open even a prison door, be it well applied. And surely the Queen will help to free me when thou dost tell her of all that I will do, all that I can tell."

Bamba prostrated herself at Zuleika's feet, and kissing them, vowed that if it was possible for one poor slave to move the heart of Artemisia, Zuleika should have the chance of freedom. Then, after a few more directions from her mistress, set forth upon her long pilgrimage.

With infinite labor and difficulty the poor faithful woman found out the Queen, who had taken refuge with some of her kinsfolk, and who had been joined by Prince Ahmed, with whom she made common cause against me.

Very eagerly did she listen to the tale told her by poor Bamba, and after a little consideration as to the best means of helping Zuleika, she sent a eunuch of her court with a large amount of money to accompany Bamba, and help her to effect Zuleika's deliverance.

Having given orders that they should bribe liberally those who kept the prisoner, she also sent word to Prince Ahmed, who happened to be at the time absent from the Palace, bidding him to go and see what assistance he could render, and how swiftly he could bring Zuleika to the Queen.

"Help this woman," said she, "by all means in thy power, for in so doing thou wilt help both thyself and me. Through this woman's aid I trust to be avenged upon the man who hath robbed me of a son, and thee of a Kingdom."

CHAPTER XXX

THE ESCAPE OF ZULEIKA

It was a hot, sultry day. The sun poured down its burning rays upon the wide stretch of sandy plain. The scorching dust blistered the skin, and the fierce glare from the white sand blinded the eyes of the weary travellers who struggled painfully across the arid wilderness, known as the Great Salt Desert. The wretched camels they bestrode seemed scarce able to drag their limbs another pace, while the terrible thirst which consumed alike the poor animals and their riders, was rendered the more unbearable by the sight on the horizon of a small clump of date trees, which marked the presence of one of the few wells of that almost waterless region; a well which neither camels nor travellers seemed destined ever to reach.

Two of these unfortunate people were women, the third was a Nubian slave, one of those useful men who are found in attendance upon the harems of the East.

As one of the wretched camels sank in a dying condition upon the hot sand, the woman who had been mounted upon it extricated herself from the poor animal, exclaiming in a fretful tone to the slave who hurried to her assistance:

"Trouble not about me, it is vain to hope that we can escape from this horrible desert. And after all what doth it signify to any where the bones of the unfortunate Zuleika rest. I can struggle no more, and like this wretched camel, which might surely have struggled yet a little further, I must even lay me down upon the sand and die."

She gave an impatient kick with her foot to the luckless camel, whose failure at such a time inspired her, not with pity for its sufferings, but annoyance and disappointment for herself; and then, with more vigor than is usually shown by one at the point of death, she walked a few paces away and threw herself upon the ground. The other woman, who was no other than Zuleika's faithful slave Bamba, had by this time also dismounted, and with a solicitude akin to that of some faithful dog, strove to shield

her mistress from the fierce rays of the sun with her own body, while the man, after a short conference, set forth alone to seek for water at the distant well.

Hours passed ere the man returned, and during that weary time Zuleika sank from a state of fretful complaining into a semi-unconsciousness between sleep and utter exhaustion, the poor woman beside her being also overcome.

At last the sun sank, and the short twilight gave place to the darkness and coolness of night. Then the stars came forth and the moon rose, and by its light the dark forms of several vultures could be discerned hovering near the dying women, and descending upon the carcass of the dead camel, making night more terrible than the day with their hoarse cries, and filling the heart of the half-conscious Zuleika with dread and horror.

With the horrible instinct of their species the vultures knew that neither of the women was yet dead, and they hovered near, waiting till the final moment of dissolution ere they attacked their prey.

Then, as the night wore slowly on, there came another sound than the vultures' cries to break the stillness. It was the trampling of horses' feet, and the sound of men's voices shouting, as they sought for the deserted women. The Nubian slave had been fortunate in his quest, and had found, not alone the water that he sought, but the encampment of Prince Ahmed and his troops.

Zuleika heard the voices as one hears in a dream. She heard them approach and then die away, yet she could not rouse herself enough to give one feeble cry in answer. She knew the sounds betokened life and hope, yet could not make a sign to guide them to her. Again and yet again they drew near, then died away again till at last the black cloud of vultures hovering above the dead camel and the dying women caught the eyes of the seekers, and with a loud shout the horsemen galloped forward.

Another moment and Zuleika's rigid limbs were being chafed by friendly hands, and water was poured drop by drop between the swollen lips. Her veil had been drawn aside, and as she revived her eyes met those of a handsome young man, none other than Prince Ahmed himself, who had ridden to her assistance when he heard who it was who lay dying in the desert.

With tender care Zuleika was placed upon one of the horses and supported by the Prince, who was much struck by her exceed-

ing beauty, and as she had now revived sufficiently to sit up when thus supported, Ahmed lost no time in returning with her to his followers, and setting forth with my fugitive wife.

As for the poor faithful Bamba, she was past all aid, and expired even while her rescuers stood over her.

CHAPTER XXXI

MY ENEMIES

In one of the upper chambers of her kinsman's house Artemisia awaited the coming of Zuleika. Since she had sent her servants forth to help her the Queen had never ceased to watch for her arrival, even long before it was possible that she could even have escaped. A hundred times a day would Artemisia wander to the casement and look forth over the broad stretch of country it commanded, to see if there was any sign of the expected cavalcade. Those who had known the beautiful Queen in the days of her glory found it difficult to recognize her now, so greatly was she changed. Twenty years of ordinary life would not so have aged her. The clear pallor of her skin had changed to a dull leaden hue. The handsome aquiline features had become sharp and prominent, and bore the semblance of a bird of prey. The cheeks, once so round, so smooth, were sunken and wrinkled. The white forehead furrowed. The perfect figure wasted and angular, while the eyes wandered restlessly to and fro, and glittered with a wild fire that was almost that of insanity. The long masses of dark hair, once so admired, so carefully arranged, so becomingly dressed, now hung loose and neglected upon her shoulders, giving an added wildness to her appearance.

Ever and anon as she wandered aimlessly back and forward she struck her bosom with her clenched hand, uttering a low, strange moan as of some animal in pain, and calling again and again upon the name of her dead son.

"Oh, Selim! Selim!" she wailed, "where art thou now, my son? Hath Paradise opened its gates to thee, and left me behind

to drag out mine existence alone? Can it be that Ahriman hath taken thee, because thou wert my son, and I have sinned so that the gates of Heaven can never open at my touch? I would even that thou shouldst go to Hell rather than to Heaven, yea even though it were to the sufferings of Hell, for then thou and I should meet. Can Paradise have a place for thee? Within its gates I can never enter. If thou, Oh my son, mine only son, dost love thy mother even as she loves thee, thou wilt welcome the dark depths of Hell and all its horrors where thou wouldst dwell with me, rather than the glorious scenes of Paradise where we would be parted. Oh Selim, child of my soul! Beloved of all my loveless years, do thou return to me, or let God have mercy upon me and let my soul go forth to thee."

She sank upon the floor with a long wailing cry of anguish, and rocked herself backwards and forwards in her despair, calling now in softest caressing tones and anon with frantic wildness upon the lost Selim.

Suddenly she was aroused from her solitary grief by the sound of bustle and excitement in the court yard below. There was the loud trampling of horses, and the sound of men's voices, and as she sprang up and hurried to the window she beheld Prince Ahmed assisting a closely veiled woman to alight from her horse, and in the graceful veiled figure she had no difficulty in recognizing Zuleika.

With an exclamation of savage joy Artemisia hurried from the room, and meeting the party on their way to her, they all returned together to the room, the once stately Queen laying aside all attempts at Royal state in her eager haste and fierce longing to know what Zuleika could tell her.

To Artemisia she therefore said that she felt sure I had caused Selim to be slain, even if I had not, with my own hands, killed him, for I had boasted to her that I had seen him die.

"Who," cried Zuleika, "knows better than the unhappy Zuleika what fearful spells Ahrinziman can cast over those he would destroy, what dread powers he can call upon to aid him in his wicked designs. Have I not, alas! known for years how terrible were the things he could do, yet was my tongue always tied, and myself constrained by the influence he had over me. I thank God that the spell is broken at last, and that I can speak freely to your Highness, and say that the hand which slew thy son was the hand of Ahrinziman."

Artemisia gave a shrill laugh of derision as she heard the conclusion of Zuleika's speech, and her voice was fierce with anger as she replied:

"If thou hast no more than that to tell me thou needst not have come so far, thou mightest have lain and rotted in thy prison ere I would have sent help to thee. For long I have known that Ahrinziman killed my son with his foul spells. In the hour Selim died I knew it, and I live now only that I may bring this murderer to a fate as tragic, and an end more lingering and painful, than was the end of my poor son. If thou canst tell me what were the means whereby this husband who hath cast thee off, thou paltry schemer, used to procure his ends, speak on, but if not, if thou hast no more to tell me than I know already, then, by the Heavens above us, thou shalt find thou hast but changed one prison for another, one condition of sorrow for one yet more hopeless. Trifle not with me. Thou didst lead my son unto his death. But for thee and thy hateful charms he had been alive now to bless my life, not dead and cold and gone to leave me in despair."

Her voice shook, and she ended her angry speech in a wild burst of sorrow for her son, while Ahmed and Zuleika, scarce knowing how to answer her, stood silently by. The Queen's mood changed, and she turned again to Zuleika with mock courtesy, as she said:

"Come now, tell me all thy news, rehearse to me the story of thy life with this most wonderful Ahrinziman. Or stay, I should perhaps rather tell thee the latest news. I forgot that thou in thy captivity canst have heard but little of his fine doings. It must surely give thee pleasure to know that this man, to whom thou wert so true, so exemplary a wife, hath risen to the loftiest height of power and popularity since he cast thee off. All men praise him: all say that since the days of Darius the Great there hath not arisen a King so fit to add to the glories of Persia and restore to her that position among nations which was slipping from her. They praise his military talents, his dauntless courage, his tact and kingly address. They praise his person, and say how handsome is this man, how gracious, how full of resource, how capable of governing how strong of will, yet how generous of purpose. Do I not speak truly, Ahmed? Is it not thus that men speak of the man who hath thrust thee aside, and whom thou in thy turn wouldst pull down from his high estate? Doth it not please thee

to think he is so popular that thine own chance beside his is but small? Thou art alike the illegitimate offspring of El Jazid, but unlike thee, Ahrinziman was the chosen son, the well beloved of my once husband, while thou wert set aside. Surely it must give thee pleasure to know it was for no unworthy object? And for thee, Zuleika, most beautiful, most graceful of courtesans, thou must feel pleasure to know that Ahrinziman hath taken unto himself six of the most beautiful maidens in all Persia, to fill that place in his heart which thou didst hold alone? When he wearies of the charms of one he can try the fascinations of another, whereas thou hadst charms enough to hold his fancy by thine own beauty alone. Thou mightest have been as great a Queen as the most royally born, had it not been that thou didst bestow thy valuable affections upon my son—my murdered son. Oh, thou fool! Thou vain fool! Thou wretched trifler with men's hearts," said the Queen, lapsing again into her hot anger, "haste thee and tell me all thou hast to tell, for the same air cannot be breathed by thee and me, thy presence stifles me, and thou hadst best be swiftly gone."

Trembling with apprehension, yet watching anxiously the face of Ahmed to know what help she might expect from him, Zuleika told of my life with Jelal-ûd-dîn so far as she knew it. What she had to say sounded vague and trifling before such fierce impatient questioning as Artemisia subjected her to, and she felt that her sole hope must now be in the good offices of Prince Ahmed on her behalf, and after a few moments of terrible suspense Zuleika burst into a passion of tears, and was overcome by faintness, half real and half assumed, as an escape from further questioning, while she petitioned to be allowed a few hours in which to recover from her fatigue and collect her thoughts.

The angry Queen therefore called one of her women and bade her conduct Zuleika to a chamber where she could rest for a little. As she was about to leave the presence of Artemisia Zuleika contrived to make a sign to the Prince that she desired to speak with him, and as he gave her a gesture of acquiescence in return, Zuleika departed a little reassured.

Zuleika had been resting for scarcely half an hour when Prince Ahmed came to visit her, and in her then state of suspense and anxiety it was almost a relief that he came so soon.

Yet Zuleika was at heart afraid of Ahmed. She felt instinct-

ively that the love she had inspired in the heart of this man was a very different feeling from that with which the poor weak minded King Selim had regarded her, or the chivalric devotion which had made her almost a sacred being in my eyes. Ahmed was a man of coarse, determined character, and Zuleika felt only too conscious of her own helpless, forlorn position. She struggled hard however to hide her apprehensions, and to maintain her own dignity as long as possible, that she might make better terms for herself.

As Ahmed entered Zuleika rose to receive him, and prostrating herself at his feet said:

"I sought an interview with thee, Oh Prince, because in thy help and in thy generosity must the sole hope of the unhappy Zuleika be. The Queen, who I thought would befriend, seems like unto one distraught; the death of her son would seem to have affected her brain, since she raves when she speaks upon that subject, and says things which are but the offspring of her own wild suspicion."

Zuleika's fine eyes filled with real tears as she thought on her hard fate, and she raised them to Ahmed's face with the timid, suppliant look of a frightened child. But Ahmed was not one to be so easily moved, and he replied coolly:

"Distress not thyself to explain these things to me, fair Zuleika. Wert thou doubly guilty thou hast charms enough to cover all thy failings! I do indeed perceive that thou canst expect no secure asylum from the Queen, but in my seraglio thou wilt be safe even from her anger, and there thou canst forget the past."

"Thou dost do me great honor, Oh Prince! and I am not ungrateful unto thee, but I would fain ask whether it is an honorable asylum that thou dost offer me? Mine honor is all that hath been left to me; wonder not then that I would still guard it even with thee."

Ahmed frowned, as he replied hastily: "What wouldst thou have? Thy position shall be as honorable as any of my other women, thy jewels as fine, thy robes as costly, thy comforts as well studied. But if thou dost ask if I will make thee a Queen, even as report sayeth Selim would have done, thou art somewhat too ambitious! Thou dost forget that I am Prince Ahmed, the King Ahmed it should be by right, and I wed but the daughter of a King. Thou canst find an asylum with me, but it is I, not thou,

who shall dictate the terms. In thy present position it seems to me, most beautiful Zuleika, thou hast but scant choice."

"And thou, Prince Ahmed, hast but scant generosity, or thou wouldst not thus remind me of it," cried the mortified Zuleika, almost weeping.

"Nay, then," replied Ahmed, "dry those tears. A man loves not to see a woman's tears, and if thou dost accommodate thyself to circumstances thou mayest have other things wherein thou canst indulge thine ambition. Thou canst tell me of this Ahrinziman, and of his life ere he met the magician. It seemed to me that thou didst keep something from the Queen; reveal it now to me, and Ahmed will not forget to reward thee well. Smile upon me once more, Zuleika, for though I will make no promises to thee, I vow thou shalt have no reason to regret trusting thyself into my hands."

Then falteringly and with much hesitation Zuleika told him all she knew, all she suspected, and suggested how her information might be used for Prince Ahmed's advantage.

The Prince regarded her with much admiration. "Verily," said he, "thou art a clever woman, and a discreet one. It is well thou didst not tell this to Artemisia, for she would have published it to all the world before the right time. She is not to be trusted now, and thou and I must keep our own counsel. I will seek out this robber tribe, and doubtless we shall have the means ere long of showing this Ahrinziman to the world as an impostor. Not that either thou or I believe him to be one, he hath too strong a likeness unto my father for that, and Al Zulid is not one to be deceived; but it will serve our purpose to affect to believe it, and if we kill Ahrinziman men can believe he was El Jazid's son or not, as they choose. Our purpose will have been gained. Of a truth thou art clever to think of this, and to keep it to thyself for so long; thy beauty is not the most dangerous of thy many charms after all." And Ahmed advanced towards Zuleika with a look of admiration so bold, so insolent, that she burst into a passion of angry tears, for she felt that the cup of her degradation was full at last.

CHAPTER XXXII

ABUBATHA'S WARNING

It was night, and in my Palace of Parsagherd I rested alone within my private chamber. I had come that day from Teheran, expecting to meet Al Zulid, but he was delayed upon his journey, and I was alone in the Palace, save for the presence of my attendant soldiers and my slaves.

Six months had I reigned, and in the pursuit of ambition I had found a certain measure of solace for my wounded love. Artemisia had spoken truly when she had described my life and prospects to Zuleika, but none save myself knew how much my heart still longed to welcome back my faithless wife, nor how little the charms of other women had been able to banish the memory of my hours with her. I had not yet heard of her escape, for the fortress to which I had sent her was in a remote corner of Persia, and those who had guarded her were not too eager to send me word of her flight. The rich bribe given by Artemisia caused her captors to regard with some indifference my wrath, since it would enable the chief offenders to quit Persia ere I could seek vengeance upon them for their lack of trust.

As I reposed upon my couch I watched the stars peep out one by one and glitter in the dark canopy of the night sky, and my thoughts wandered back to the days of my boyhood, when the stars had seemed to me almost as companions, and when I had watched for that other star whose coming betokened the presence of my White Angel. Ah! how far away now it seemed, those days of innocence and trust. How wide the gulf between myself and then. How great had been my fall from the pure aspirations of those days to the sordid ambitions which now filled my thoughts. Power and Pleasure had become my Gods; self-gratification my idol. If I sought to do my best for my country and my people, it was that I might reap the rewards of greatness through the gratitude of my people. The pure unselfish patriotism which animated Ben Al Zulid, and made him indifferent to his personal interests, superior to all temptations to enrich or aggrandise

himself, was a different feeling to that which inspired me. In all my schemes, in all my efforts, the animating, dominating feeling was self-interest and personal ambition. My people should be great, my country prosperous, because it was *my* country, and its glory reflected its lustre upon my own life. What had been done by the greatest Rulers should be done by me, and if possible I would do more, for I would fain have been the greatest of all Rulers myself. Nothing could daunt me, no difficulties deter, because the greater the difficulties the greater the glory of overcoming them. To my ambitious thoughts the conquest of other nations was but a matter of time and determination, and if, as I often imagined, the Dark Angel whom I had seen was in truth helping me to the dominion he had promised, it only required that I should follow where events seemed to open the path before my feet, in order that I might avail myself of his help, in a sphere where the Dark Angel of the Blood Red Star reigned as a mighty King.

Now and again my dreams of glory would be broken by the vision of Selim, whom I, in intent if not in act, had murdered; and like a dim wraith, no more material than are the clouds that float across the sky, the face and form of my victim would hover near, distorted and disfigured by the agonies of his violent death, even as I had seen the wraith of Jelal-ûd-dîn on the day when I had visited his deserted house, and seen my vision of Zuleika and Selim in the magic mirror. The forms of both these haunting shapes bore the impress of the same violent death, and I had little doubt were due to the same unseen agency. Not often, however, did these ghosts of my past obtrude themselves upon me, and I was so much absorbed in the active life of material existence that I had but little time to think of my occult studies.

To-night, however, the spirit world seemed strangely near to me once more. The gates so long closed were again ajar. My senses were so abnormally acute that the distant sounds in the Palace fell with startling distinctness upon my ears, and the far off hooting of an owl sounded like the warning note of a feathered sentinel. Very gradually and imperceptibly I sank into a state of slumber, and then the unconsciousness of sleep gave place unto a vision.

Methought I walked within a fair garden, wherein bloomed the fairest flowers of earth; and away beyond the garden I could behold the blue misty outlines of a lofty range of hills. A clear

stream flowed at my feet, and soft trees waved their green branches above my head. Then, even as I gazed upon this fair scene, dark storm clouds rose and swept over the sun-lit garden, enveloping all in their darkness. The clear crystal stream changed into a rushing, roaring muddy river, whose dark waters rose and rose till they had engulfed me, and I was swept from the fair garden and borne downwards on the rushing, roaring stream's thick, muddy water. I was swept on and on. It seemed to me I travelled on that dark flood for an immense time, yet it could only have been a few moments of earthly time. At last I found myself being borne past some mighty rocks which reared their dark heads above the turbulent stream, and in my fear and anguish I grasped hold of one great rock as I was swept past. With the grasp of despair I held on to it, although the dark waters well nigh swept me away, and at last a tiny star appeared from the blackness above me, and as the star flickered o'er my head, a voice said: "Hold on and raise thyself, for thine own hand must raise thee up, even as thine own hand hath caused thy fall."

With frantic haste I struggled to arise and to free myself from the clinging weeds, the long rope-like grass and reeds which grew in that sullen stream and held me like ropes of iron. And at last I seemed to rise and shake myself free, till one limb after another was released, and I stood upon the hard, sharp surface of the rock in safety.

Then did I behold a figure beside me wrapped in a mantle of silver grey that sparkled as with many glittering drops of dew, which like tiny stars of light bespangled the spirit's robes. As I looked, the veil which had hid the face was drawn aside, and I beheld the features of my long lost friend, the dear companion of my boyhood, Abubatha.

His face shone with a radiance like the halo around a saint; his smile was sad and tender, and his voice low and musical as a silver bell, as he spoke these words to me:

"Oh, Ahrinziman, my beloved friend! Dear youth whom I loved as a son, I pray thee think of holier things than the vain pleasures of the earth. Turn to nobler thoughts than the thought of selfish ambition. Nourish not this longing for revenge, for thou art more than avenged already, did thou but know it, and the sordid thirst to inflict suffering upon those who wrong thee is as these dark weeds which imprisoned thy limbs; and evil thoughts are like yon rushing stream that bears men to destruc-

tion. None can enslave thee but thyself. None can have dominion over thy soul unless thou thyself give them the power. Assert that sovereignty over thyself which is the divine prerogative of all mankind, and yield not thyself a subject to any, be it to the dark Angels or to thine own evil passions. Awake my son! Arouse thyself, for enemies draw near thee! Yet is the enemy thou shouldst dread most of all thine own undisciplined passionate heart."

I tried to rush forward and touch the figure as he ceased to speak, but he faded and was gone ere I could move, and I awoke with a shock to find myself standing with outstretched arms in the middle of my room.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SECRET PASSAGE

When I succeeded to the throne of Persia I had caused to be closed up the wing of the Palace at Parsagherd in which my mother and Selim had alike met their deaths; and in order that none might use again the ill omened secret passage I caused the door opening into the late King's rooms to be built up. The other door I left untouched, since no one was likely to use it, as the fatal chamber into which it opened, being thought to be haunted, was avoided by all.

On this night, however, this deserted wing of the Palace was no longer in solitary darkness. Access to it from outside had been obtained through a private entrance known only to Artemisia, and now Ahmed, Artemisia, Zuleika and a slave in attendance upon Ahmed, glided softly and swiftly through the silent and neglected rooms.

Ahmed had lost no time in following out the idea suggested by Zuleika. He had hunted up my history with the robber tribe. He had seen Dilferib and the artful Hadji, whom he found ready to assist him in his plans.

The same night Ahmed had arranged that emissaries of his own should be scattered through all the principal towns in Persia,

to circulate simultaneously a garbled and strange account of my history and doings, showing how I was the vilest of men.

This, and much more, did Ahmed cause to be circulated concerning me, but so artful was he that he did not circulate these tales until he had so carefully laid his plans to compass my death that there was little fear that I would ever have the chance of explaining my actions or contradicting these wild stories, so near the truth yet so false in reality.

Ahmed was accompanied by a slave, a strange deaf and dumb creature, with whom he could communicate by signs so perfectly that it was seldom the deaf mute failed to carry out all Ahmed's instructions correctly, while his affliction made it impossible for him to betray easily his master's secrets.

To-night Ahmed had entered the Palace by this secret way, in order that he and the slave might open from the inside one of the smaller gates to admit a large body of his soldiers, who, fully armed and prepared for a fierce resistance, awaited his summons. In the East treachery of every kind is the great evil Rulers and ruled alike have most to fear, and treachery and bribery had both been at work to render certain soldiers of my own guard ready to make but a mere feint of resistance when this small gate should be attacked. A larger body of Ahmed's troops were to attack the principal entrance the moment that a given signal should announce to them that their comrades had gained an entrance to the Palace, and it was calculated that when thus surprised and assailed from within and without my own guards would have but a poor chance of successful resistance, while I myself would be assassinated ere I had well realized my danger.

As Ahmed and his dumb slave hurried onward, followed by the Queen and Zuleika, this conversation took place in dumb show: Ahmed, who carried a tiny lamp to see the way, making signs to his peculiar confidant which would not be understood by the others:

"Dost thou see the Queen, slave? Mark well that to-night thou shalt give her a potion so strong that she shall wake no more from her sleep. To one so crazed as she, methinks it were a kindness to help her to find that death which would seem to have forgotten her."

Then to himself Ahmed added, "I would not have a hell-cat like Artemisia about my court for all the wealth and glory of

Persia. I would never know when she might take a fancy to stick her claws into me."

In order to reach the wing of the Palace where I dwelt it was necessary to pass through the rooms which Selim had assigned to me when I was in his service, and as they approached the one in which Zuleika had slept, and Selim died, she drew back and hesitated to enter it. A shudder of fear passed over her, for to her eyes it appeared for a moment as though the contorted body of the murdered man yet lay upon the floor, a dread thing of fear she could not pass. Moreover she had begun to repent of her intention to be present to see me die. She had thought it would be sweet to her to be thus avenged upon me for my scorn of her. But now that the critical moment was so near, she drew back, and felt that she could not go on. She could not look upon death again. The memory of Selim as he lay dead at her feet was too horrible to her. She stopped, as Ahmed and his dumb slave passed out at the upper doorway, leaving her alone with Artemisia in that fatal room. Ahmed was too absorbed in his own purpose, and the Palace was too dark, for him to notice whether the two women were following him closely or not, and he passed on without missing them.

Zuleika's impulse was to turn and fly by the way they had entered, but ere she could do so Artemisia laid her hand upon Zuleika's arm, and said in a low tone of great melancholy, yet with more sanity than she had shown of late:

"Doth it fill thee with sorrow, even as it does me, to enter this Palace again, to picture to thyself the happy hours as well as those of sadness which we have known within its walls? I could almost say the ghost of my dead son stood near us now, and that I had but to stretch out my hands to touch him. Doth it seem the same to thee?"

Zuleika shuddered and drew back from the Queen, as she glanced around apprehensively.

"Oh no! No! There is surely no one here but thee and me. It is too horrible to think that the dead might come to us. Let us away from this dreadful room. I cannot go on. I cannot see Ahrinziman die! I cannot think of death, and a violent death, again."

At the mention of my name Artemisia's mood changed to one of passionate frenzy, and in a fierce eager whisper she hissed into Zuleika's ear, while she grasped her arm like a vice:

"Thou dost fear to see Ahrinziman die, thou paltry, weak-minded fool? Thou dost shudder at the thought of death within these walls wherein died my son? I tell thee the whole atmosphere is full of death. It taints the air we breathe, as though this Palace were a charnel house. The ghosts of those who died within this room are with us now, and they mock and point at us with their skeleton fingers, and gibe at us with their dumb lips. Thou art in the presence of death now. Its black mantle falls like a shadow around thee, as though it would enwrap thee in its sable folds, and yet thou sayest thou dost not want to see Ahrinziman die? Oh Powers of Hell! And thou! Thou art afraid!" she cried, her madness growing into a fit of frenzy; then changing to a chuckle of laughter, she suddenly released Zuleika's arm. "Thou art afraid! Afraid! If so, go! Go! See what a fine means of escape there is for thee! Far better than returning alone through yon dark rooms, wherein of a surety thou wilt die of fright ere thou dost reach the gates. See, my sweet Zuleika, my timid, gentle fawn, enter thou at this small door, and it will take thee straight to a room which opens into the great Hall, beside the great doors of the Palace, which are thronged even now by our followers who will soon be pouring into the Hall, for the dumb slave will have opened by now the door and let them in. Come and enter in, that thou mayest be safe, for I must hurry on lest I miss the fine sport for which I have waited now so long."

The Queen held open the little door into the secret passage as she spoke, and Zuleika, frightened and anxious to escape from the mad woman beside her, hastily entered the passage, counting that she would be able to get out at the other door, for she did not know I had walled it up. But Artemisia knew it.

With a wild shriek of insane laughter which rang through the deserted rooms and reached even to where I sat, Artemisia shut the door upon Zuleika and fastened it upon the outside, dragging some heavy furniture before it to make it the more secure to her frenzied mind.

"Oh sweet! Sweet! Sweet is this hour to me," she cried through the closed doorway. "Rich, rich shall be thy reward, fair Zuleika! Long mayest thou enjoy the harvest of all thy wiles and all thy petty schemes. Thou wilt have ample time to enjoy the memory of the past, for thou shalt lie and rot within these walls, and all thy fair beauty with which thou didst beguile

my son unto his death shall turn to loathsome decay ere one shall come to succour thee! Die! Die! like a rat in a trap, a toad in a hole, and in thy death agonies remember that it is thus that Artemisia hath rewarded thee.”

Then, like a maniac, laughing and muttering to herself, Artemisia rushed after the others, while the unfortunate Zuleika, realizing the horrors of her position, uttered shriek after shriek of alarm and agony; sounds which, alas! brought none to her aid, for did they not come from the haunted part of the palace, and only inspired with superstitious terror those who heard them. None thought they came from a human being in mortal extremity, for none knew that aught in human form would venture into those fatal rooms, and soon the sound of Zuleika's shrieks were drowned in a yet greater tumult.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CURTAIN OF DEATH

I was still musing upon my vision, and wondering to what danger Abubatha's warning pointed, when on the stillness of the night there broke first the muffled sound of Artemisia's wild laugh and then Zuleika's frenzied shriek, and as I grasped my scimitar and hurried to the door to see from whence these sounds came I found myself face to face with the forms of Ahmed and his dumb slave, while the room behind him became quickly filled with the stealthily creeping figures of a number of men.

I tried to defend myself, and for a few moments my skill as a swordsman enabled me to keep my assailants at bay, but what can one man do against twenty, and though my shouts brought my guards in a few moments around me, and roused the whole palace, the soldiers of Ahmed had found entrance in a half a dozen places. My guards fought well, but they were confused and without any settled plan of defence, while Ahmed's men were carrying out a carefully arranged scheme. Desperate was the resistance we made. My soldiers fell beside me fighting to the last, while I myself, though wounded by many a spear thrust,

contrived to fight my way into the larger room where the battle was thickest, and strove to rally my guards. But there I succumbed, overwhelmed by numbers and mortally wounded.

For a brief moment I lost consciousness, then I revived to find myself almost alone, while the tide of battle had swept past me towards the great Hall. As I opened my eyes I saw that the grey dawn of day was breaking, and the dim light from the casement fell across the floor where I lay. I could not raise myself, I could not move. My life blood was flowing from my many wounds and forming a deep red pool upon the floor, and as I raised my fast glazing eyes from it I saw a woman's figure stoop over the crimson pool, and dip her hands in the warm blood as though she were washing them, while to herself she kept muttering and laughing in soft, exultant tones of pleasure. With a start I recognised Artemisia, and grasping my dagger I made a frantic effort to raise myself and stab her where she knelt. But my feeble hand fell powerless by my side, my dying grasp relaxed, and I sank back upon the ground in the last agony of the great change which men call death. And as my eyes closed I saw Artemisia bend forward over me, with the cruel, vindictive smile of gratified malice, even as I had seen her do in my vision so long ago, and the last thing mine earthly sight beheld was the look of mingled hatred and fiendish triumph in the eyes of Queen Artemisia. The legacy I bore with me to the spirit world was the legacy of our fierce hate.

Thus fell the curtain of death upon the first act of that drama which had been begun in our earthly lives, and which was yet to be acted out upon the wider grander stage of the spirit world. For as we had sown the wind, so verily was each one of us to reap the whirlwind.

END OF PART I

THE STRANGE STORY OF AHRINZIMAN

PART II

THE REAPING OF THE HARVEST

CHAPTER I

THE AWAKENING IN THE ABYSS OF INFERNO

From a Death-sleep of years my Soul at last awoke to a renewal of its conscious individuality. For as a fruit that is plucked untimely from the tree must be ripened by artificial means ere the living seeds within can attain the degree of development necessary to their germination, so the Soul which is hurried from the earthly stage of life before the Spiritual body is sufficiently developed to serve as the medium for its sustainment must lie like a germinating seed within the green husk of its Astral envelope until the gradual ripening of the truly Spiritual germ, and the consequent decay of the mere Astral husk or shell, shall, in accordance with a law of all nature, release the Soul-seed which has lain sheltered within the protecting envelope till it was ripe for the life of the Spirit World.

The Souls of all who die before they have lived the full span allotted to man are not necessarily cut off from the tree of life in an unripened state. Many who thus seem to die too soon have already reached the measure of the experience Earth was destined to give them. They have gathered their ripened sheaves, and for them the dagger of the assassin, the sword of the enemy, the chill hand of pestilence, or the seemingly untoward accident, was but the key that unlocked for them the gloomy portals of that gate whose Guardian Angel men call Death.

It was but to a dream consciousness in the astral world that my soul at first awoke—a nightmare compared to the clear and,

serene consciousness of the spirit that has attained to its true life in the spirit spheres, but yet a terrible reality to the self that was emerging from its deep sleep.

Have you never, when your soul has been weighed down by some oppression, passed through horrible scenes and agonies of experience that were as realities at the time, yet emerged at last into the serene waking into the fresh dawn light of another day? But what if you could not wake, and your painful oppression continued its sense of reality for years and years!

In my case my earthly life was an unfinished story, a half-written page, whose blurred message and half-learned lessons required that my Soul should hover near the Earth to learn completely.

In the darkness of the Astral Plane, upon the Earth yet not of the Earth, lay my Soul in its death trance, for several years absorbing unconsciously the atmosphere of earthly magnetism which was needful to sustain its life, and ripen that Spiritual envelope through which I was again to manifest my individuality.

Such was the penalty I paid for the great debasement and passions from which I had not freed my Soul when it was hurried from its earthly tenement—the debasement of my licentiousness when living with Jelal-ûd-din and the passions of earthly pride and murderous revenge that dominated my Soul through its brief career, and still dominated it against Selim, Zuleika and Artemisia. While my soul still burned with the fire of this wild passion it remained in the domains of my Dark Angel in the regions of Inferno—the astral spheres beneath the Earth Plane.

But why dwell at length over the horrible episodes that now seemed part of my life. Let it suffice to show that these experiences are all bound by a definite law of correspondence, and to warn my fellow beings against the consequences of similar acts of Earth life. *As thou sowest, so shalt thou reap.*

In a mighty cavern of the Astral Plane my Soul awoke at last, and as one who arouses himself from a troubled sleep I turned and gazed upon my surroundings. I thought at first that I had dreamed a troubled dream in which I had been slain, so real and solid to my sight and touch were the grim walls of rock on either side.

Then memory awoke, and I remembered that it was in the Palace of Parsagherd that I had died.

I looked around me and saw that vague, shadowy shapes

were flitting about in the semi-darkness, and a chill fear fell upon my Soul, for I felt that I was indeed dead, and this the world of the Dead that I beheld, and of which I had become a part.

Clearer and clearer to my sight grew the misty forms; sharper and yet sharper were the sounds which fell upon my ears, at first like faint echoes heard in dreams, then with the fullness of material sound. Veil after veil of gauze-like vapor, which appeared to hang between me and my surroundings, seemed slowly to rise, and reveal to my eyes the wonders of the dread Astral Plane wherein I lay.

I was still shuddering at the thoughts suggested to me, still thinking with remorse of the days of my own moral degradation, when I had lived with Jelal-ûd-dîn and indulged in practices that I now knew to have borne such awful fruit, when I was aroused from my thoughts by the sudden inrush of a crowd of Spirits, who came yelling and laughing into the cavern where I lay.

These last arrivals were so like mortal men and women that I had no trouble in recognising them as disembodied human beings like myself. In them there was no lack of intelligence, but it was intelligence which had been used for evil and not for good purposes, and the fierce light of passion, the dull glow of hatred, the sullen bitterness of despair, gleamed from their eyes and traced their marks on every feature.

These beings gathered around me with angry cries, coarse taunts, and savage shouts of welcome, hailing me as a comrade and reviling me as being to the full as worthy of damnation as themselves. As I shrank back in horror from their clumsy, ferocious embraces they began to assail me with cries of anger and savage blows, shrieking out to me to look at myself and see in what respect I differed from them, by what right I dared to hold aloof from such good company?

Rousing myself by a mighty effort of my will from the trance-like spell which bound me, I sprang up from the hard rock whereon I lay, and hurling aside the nearest of my assailants rushed from the dark cave along a narrow passage to a wide plain that lay beyond. As I fled I heard the wild crew whom I had left begin a violent quarrel among themselves, which for the moment caused me to be forgotten.

CHAPTER II

IN THE INFERNO; THE VALLEY OF THE GENII

For a short time I felt myself hurried onward, I could neither see nor guess where. I appeared to glide over the ground and float in the air, impelled forward by some unseen force. Then my journey was suddenly arrested, and I found myself standing in a wide misty valley, shut in by dark, lofty hills which rose on every side, while above my head thick clouds of inky vapor hung like a funeral pall. Dark forms of gigantic stature hovered around me with outstretched wings, their dimly outlined forms being those of men, while their wings were shaped like those of mighty birds. Impalpable as smoke wreaths were they, and yet distinct as figures carved from tinted glass, and as transparent. As these phantom forms floated to and fro around me they crossed and recrossed each others' paths, mingling their dark bodies like streams of vapor, yet each emerging from the contact in as perfect a form as though they had been made of iron. Some of these beings were of enormous size, and bore the impress of individual intelligence in their faces, while others were diminutive and attenuated in figure, and almost vacant in expression.

At first these figures were seen by me as through a curtain of dark mist, but even while I gazed on them I felt the same curious impression of curtain after curtain of gauzy vapor being raised around me which I had felt on awakening in the cavern, and one by one the features and forms of these hovering shapes became distinct to me.

I saw that each figure bore upon its forehead a tiny Star, like a spark of light, each of a different color, and the shadowy robes which enveloped each form seemed to glitter like the many colored scales upon a dragon's body in the dull glow of light from these tiny Stars, while the outstretched wings that were in shape like unto the wings of a bird were as gossamer and transparent as a spider's web.

As the mists around me rose and floated like clouds away I noticed that all around me there was a circle of these strange

beings, not so large as were many of the others, yet huge hovering phantoms compared to my own stature. To my surprise I saw that the features of each bore so close a resemblance to my own that they looked like replicas of myself, only the expression was different in each case, and represented each the influence of a different passion, even as each phantom shape differed in size and in the color emitted from its tiny Star.

One which bore a pale white light was small, and seemed at times to melt almost away. Another, whose light was green was also small, and something whispered to me that these represented, the first the quality of unselfishness, and the second the passion of envy. The Star of a third was yellow; a fourth's pale blue; a fifth's lilac; a sixth's purple; while the seventh Star was a deep crimson red. The Genie with the purple Star was large and towered above his fellows, and to my thoughts he symbolized the boundless ambition that grasps at Royal Power. The Crimson Star upon the brow of the seventh Genie glowed like a living coal, and the fierce murderous gleam in the bloodshot eyes, the tiger-like ferocity of his expression, told me at once that here was the embodiment of the passions of hatred and revenge and murder. Equal in size unto the Genie of Ambition, this being was even more instinct with vitality and power. Near to this seventh Spirit there hovered a grey and almost shapeless form, with shrouded head and veiled face, that like an attendant shadow dogged the footsteps of the Genie of Revenge and followed every movement that it made. This grey shape, vague as yet and featureless, almost formless and half created, I knew to be Remorse, whose shadow ever haunts Revenge, but whose whisperings are ever powerless to stay his hand.

And as I gazed upon the wavering, circling figures of these embodiments of man's passions, a voice again breathed to my Soul the interpretation.

"Behold now these, the attendant Genii of thy life, who symbolise each a passion of thy Soul. Born into life when thou wast born; fed and sustained by the life of thy passions; destined to grow or to fade, to endure or to perish, according to the strength of the vitality and power with which thou hast supplied them. Look upon them well, and ask thyself whether they shall be thy servants or whether thou shalt yield thyself unto them as a slave; whether thou shalt rule them or they shall rule thee. Turn thine eyes from the contemplation of thine own passions and see the

structures which have been reared by the passions and desires of other men. For, behold! Thou art in the Phantom Valley of the Genii of men's Souls, and around thee are the mighty works which the ambitions, the greed, the jealousy and the anger, the envy and the hatred, the despair and the hope, the selfishness and the unselfishness of myriads of men have created, to endure as monuments of their past lives long after they who created them shall have passed on to other spheres. The true Genii whom men call to their aid are but these embodiments of the passions of mankind; the power they wield is but the resistless force of the great ocean of thought waves which ebb and flow to and from the Earth continually, and bear man to sorrow or to joy, to good or evil deeds according as he chooses to commit himself to one or the other of the mighty currents of passion that sweep around the Soul. These Genii live in these waves of passionate thought as fish swim in the sea. Were they transported to where the fiercer passions no longer sway the Soul they must perish and dissolve like vapor in the sun. Yet here upon the great Earth Plane they have a distinct existence, and they act and re-act upon man, suggesting thoughts to him, even as a higher intelligence, be it good or evil, shall direct them. Soulless and perishable, no more material than the thoughts men breathe, they yet possess a mighty power over those who yield themselves unto their passions.

"Hast thou considered how great, how enduring, is the power of a single thought sent forth to influence the lives of all to whose minds it is repeated? If so, canst thou wonder that the thoughts, the passions, the desires of man, should thus become endowed with an almost independent life, and become in this etherealised atmosphere almost material beings? Think on these things, for in the life that lies before thee now thou shalt again be called upon to choose thy path, to be the architect of thine own Destiny, and as thou shalt suffer the one or the other of thy passions to sway thee, so shall thy pathway turn to Darkness or to Light, to Heaven above or to the depths of Hell below."

The voice ceased. I gazed around me and perceived that the valley was full of light. The mists were gone, and around me on every side rose Palace after Palace of colossal size, yet aerial and transparent as the fleecy clouds upon a summer sky, rainbow hued, and glistening in the dazzling light that now filled the valley, till they looked like fairy palaces in a dream. The delicate pillars, the graceful porticoes, the golden gates, the snow white

roofs, all distinct and clear yet fragile as a gossamer and aerial as rainbow tinted vapor. Vast beyond the power of sight to follow appeared the confines of this valley. Stretching onward and ever onward were these cities of men's thoughts and hopes, their passions and desires, floating like cities built in the clouds: while in and out, backward and forward through these colossal buildings floated the mighty Genii whom I had so dimly seen at first.

Here there would be a Palace of blood red marble, its windows glowing like furnaces, its gates like white hot iron; around this there hovered myriads of Genii of the Blood Red Star of Revenge.

Beyond that there glittered the purple and golden Palace of Ambition, and next it the green and copper-tinted Palace of Envy and Jealousy.

Each Star and each passion had its corresponding Palace, which seemed to afford a dwelling place for the Genii of that Star. The glow of light that filled the valley was like prismatic waves, changing to every hue of the rainbow and suffusing the scene with first one glow of color and then another.

I gazed on the strange scene with a mixture of wonder and delight as Palace after Palace was revealed to my sight. And then suddenly, even as I gazed, it all crumbled into dust. The walls of the Palaces were shattered as by an earthquake, and a foul swamp seemed to open and swallow them up. The radiant light gave place to a misty vapor, heavy and foetid as though it blew from an open graveyard, pestilential as from a plague stricken city of the dead. The heavy mist rolled on like a sea till it shut me in on every side, and wrapped me round as with a mantle of darkness.

CHAPTER III

THE DOWNWARD PATH AND THE DARK ANGEL

As the darkness shut me in I heard a voice that I recognized to be the voice of Queen Artemisia, calling aloud and invoking curses upon my name. At the sound of that voice my recollec

tion of the past and of my death grew suddenly clear. The memory of all my unsatisfied ambitions, all my unfulfilled hopes, all my many wrongs, my ruined life, my dishonored wife, my murdered mother, my own untimely end, surged like a sea of passion across my Soul. Silhouetted like pictures traced in fire and blood I saw the events of my life thrown upon the dark screen of mist around me. The last picture of all was that of Artemisia as she sat beside my dying body and dabbled her hands in my life's blood.

The bitter hatred of that moment, the impotent and unconquered thirst for the revenge of which I had been so long baulked, awoke with ten fold power within my Soul, and with a great cry of rage I rose to my feet, and stretching forth my hands I called aloud to Heaven and to Hell in the name of Justice to grant me vengeance! Yea, though it should take a thousand years to accomplish, and though the slaking of my thirst should sink my own Soul to the lowest depths of Hell.

As I uttered my impious prayer the ground beneath my feet trembled as though a mighty volcanic shock had shaken it. A great chasm opened before my feet, and a great gulf seemed to separate me from the spot whereon I had stood. There was the rushing sound as of a great host, the hurried flight of myriads of winged creatures towards me, and then a great blaze of red light. The sudden glow as of a mighty Star seemed to rend the mantle of darkness around me, and like a figure of flame, clad in robes of crimson and purple, I saw the Dark Angel once more.

No longer veiled was that majestic countenance. As clearly as the sun lights up the Earth at noonday did the fiery light which surrounded him illuminate each feature, and show me how the fierce flames of passion had seamed and scarred every feature, marring the beauty of what even yet was a type of the most perfect manly beauty. The eyes almost scorched me with the intense passion of their gaze, yet did I not flinch from their regard, but answered him with a look almost as proud and passionate as his own.

The deep, full tones of his voice seemed to vibrate through my Soul and awaken yet fresh echoes of anger within me, as he said:

"Behold, I am come! Say in what manner I can assist thee."

And I answered him:

"Oh, Angel of Darkness! I seek revenge upon mine enemies.

I desire to reign here as a King, since I can no longer reign on Earth. I look to thee to aid me, since thou art mighty, and thou hast responded to my call."

"And dost thou not fear," said he slowly, "to call upon the Dark Angels to help thee? Doth not the terror of Death lie even yet upon thy Soul, since thou art in Death's Kingdom? Hast thou no longings left for Heaven, since thou art so ready to plunge thyself into Hell?"

"In Heaven Artemisia doth not dwell. She can no more enter there than can I myself. Whether she is yet on Earth I know not, but this I know, that I am surely in Hell and here will I await her till she and I have adjusted the bitter measure of the debt between us. I could not live in Heaven were its doors to open to me now, and know that by entering therein I resigned my chance of meeting her. Paradise could have no joys for me while the fires of Revenge consume my Soul."

The Dark Angel laughed a bitter savage laugh of exultant malice, as he replied:

"Of a truth thou art worthy to become one of my followers! Even I can feel no deeper hate than thine! But tell me, what wilt thou give me in exchange if I grant thy wish? Wilt thou sell thyself to be my slave?"

"Thy slave? No! I have said that I would be a King! Is any man truly a King who holds himself the slave of one even so powerful as thou? I could not promise to be the slave of any, for I could not keep that promise; and dear as is my vengeance to my Soul I cannot make false promises to attain it. If thou wilt aid me I will give thee the best service that is mine to give. I will serve thee till the debt is paid, with interest a thousand fold. I will sit at thy feet as one who sits at the feet of a great master, and I will serve thee as a soldier serves his general. More I cannot say, for more I would not do. If thou wilt not give me thine aid then must I find other means to gain mine ends, for if I have to live through all the ages of eternity to gain my desires I shall not cease to strive for them."

For some moments the Dark Angel answered me not, but fixing his hollow eyes upon my face gazed at me with a look half wondering and half sad. Then with a deep sigh he said:

"Eternity! But Oh, man! Fresh from Earth life, can it be that thou dost indeed realize what an Eternity can mean? Ah, no! None can, save those who have watched the slow ages roll

on unchanging and unchanged. I might refuse thee aid upon the terms which thou dost offer, but I am attracted by the boldness of thy spirit which hath much in affinity with mine own, and as I have aided thee in the past, so will I aid thee again—to work out thine own damnation and garner for thyself the bitterest fruits of the tree of knowledge.

“Behold the followers whom I will assign to thee, and if thou canst control so wild a crew, and bend their wills to thine, then of a truth shall thou be worthy to reign with me in these dark spheres!”

He waved his hand, and as one sees the tail of a comet stretching far out across a night sky, so did I see a vast train of fiery Spirits sweep downwards to the glowing Star which encircled the Dark Angel. Then did he wave his hand thrice over my head, as though in some awful mockery of a benison, while his voice rang out in strident tones this command unto his followers:

“Serve ye this man, this newly arrived son of mortality. Teach him the secrets of the Dark Spheres, and serve him even as ye would serve me.

“Fare ye well, or rather fare ye ill, for naught but evil comes to those who seek the gifts and friendship of the Dark Angels.”

CHAPTER IV

I MEET MEGABYZUS

As the Dark Angel vanished I turned to look at the motley band of servitors which he had assigned to me, wondering much how I was to learn the qualities and capabilities of each, and how, without such knowledge, I was to control this volcanic mass of sentient beings which gathered around me like a great ring of evil, standing aloof from personal contact in attitudes of respectful fear.

While I contemplated them, as a general surveys the forces at his command, an aged Spirit stepped out from the throng and prostrated himself at my feet in a salutation of the most abject humility. His figure though bent with age was large and power-

ful, his hair and beard long and flowing and white as snow. His face, yellow and crinkled as old parchment, bore nevertheless the stamp of great intellectual power. The eyes which looked up at me from their hollow sockets were bleared and dull, and watched my face with the furtive cunning of a ferret. A dull ferocity of suppressed passion was expressed in the tightly compressed lips and hard lines about the mouth, while the whole countenance bore the impress of the most degraded sensuality and wickedness, and yet there were traces in his face of a Spirit that had once been noble and that had some kinship to my nature.

As I signed to him to rise, and bade him speak, he stood up, but still keeping his head bowed before me, said:

"Most Gracious Prince—for only to a Prince would our great Master, the Dark Angel, assign so great a train as he hath given thee—most Gracious Prince, if it pleases thee to hear me I would fain instruct thee in all things concerning these wondrous Beings of the Astral Plane who are assigned to thee as servants. Behold, on Earth I was a mighty Sorcerer, who once, alas! followed knowledge for its own sake. Then I was tempted, and I fell, and turned my knowledge to evil purposes alone. Thus have I come here, and therefore must I dwell within these dark regions. Yet even here Knowledge is Power, and by its aid I bend to my will those whom I desire to serve me. I have studied here upon this further shore of the dark River of Death the subjects which engrossed my thoughts on Earth, and in correcting many errors I have gained a degree of power undreamed of in the life of Earth. Much of this knowledge I will impart to thee, since it is the command of the Dark Angel that I should do so. I will be thy guide through these dark regions, and none can guide as well as he who hath himself traversed in Earth life every step of the winding paths of forbidden knowledge."

"And, if I may ask the questions, who wert thou in thine Earth life? How long hast thou been a dweller in these spheres?"

"Alas! Ages upon ages have I dwelt here. The Earth was but young when I was born into its life, and though I lived for many centuries beyond the allotted span of man's days, yet was my long life but as a mere drop in the great ocean of time through which I have existed. Who was I? Ask not that question. Let my name and memory be buried in oblivion. Let none know what is the fate of one who was esteemed the wisest magician of his age. But if thou wouldst know somewhat of my personality

I may tell thee that it was I who wrote the parchment scroll that was taken from the grave of Adam and given unto thy Master Jelal-ûd-dîn, and it was I who snatched that scroll from thy hand when thou didst sit beside thy watch-fire on the lonely plain, and sought to read the secrets never meant for thine eyes to see."

He paused, and his voice trembled with passion as he spoke, while the dull eyes lighted up for a brief moment with the fire of youth and anger as he thought of the great secret I had so nearly stolen from the keeping of the dead. Then the fire died out of voice and eyes, and the dull impassive expression of calm malignity came upon his face once more, and he stood silent at my side.

"And didst thou then ever influence my Master Jelal-ûd-dîn in his studies, for he admired the teachings of thine Earth life much?"

"Jelal-ûd-dîn I have influenced at times," he replied, "but it was difficult to impress him clearly. With a great thirst for occult knowledge, he did not possess the needful powers, and he was so fond of studying the records of those who had explored the path before him, so ready to adopt all their teachings as infallibly correct, that I found it impossible to correct through his agency the errors for which I was responsible, and which arose through the imperfect sight which is the bane of all who would explore the wonders of the unknown world of the Astral Plane from the Earthly side of life. Few, very few, who possess the needful clearness of sight ever learn how to use it successfully. Still fewer have the indomitable will and the unquenchable thirst for knowledge which will carry them through all the dangers and trials and disappointments, and the infinite toil and labor, involved in these studies.

"The gifts of etherealised Soul-sight are seldom or never combined with the sterner qualities of the great student; therefore it is that the student has to depend upon the revelations given him by others. His data are all based upon the supposition that these Soul-seers have told him truly and correctly all they saw, and in most cases, even where all possible care has been taken, the clairvoyants will see either a reflection of a *mixture* of their own thoughts with the visions shown, or the thoughts of those who are their earthly teachers.

"Thou hast served in a Temple in thy youth. Thou must know that though I am evil, yea, very evil, as are all those who serve the Dark Angel, yet in my thirst after knowledge I ever

sought for truth, and only truth, and the love of the true knowledge is yet strong within me, the desire to impart it is as great as ever.

"Therefore, when I beheld thee, and read the intense passion of discontent which consumed thy Soul, the wild longings of Ambition, the fierce thirst for Independence and for Power, I was attracted to thee, and I sought by all means to draw nearer and still nearer, that I might draw thee from the shelter of the Temple's walls and turn thy footsteps till they should cross the path of my pupil Jelal-ûd-dîn. I sought to guide thee to him, and though other influences intervened to delay my purpose for a time, I at last succeeded. Hadst not Ambition and thy desire for Earthly grandeur been a stronger influence than thy thirst for knowledge I should have tried through thee to give to the world the teachings I could not give through Jelal-ûd-dîn."

Again was his face lighted up by the enthusiasm awakened by this subject, which, even amidst the hopelessness of his awful surroundings, had power to awaken his interest and beguile his thoughts for a time from a sense of his degradation.

I could not refrain from contemplating the strange character of this man, who, essentially evil in all other desires, could yet retain so pure a love of truth in the pursuit of knowledge. And I asked myself whether this one ray from the Star of Truth might not some day, perhaps prove a rope of light to raise him even from this dark sphere.

CHAPTER V

MY OLD MASTER; TEACHINGS ON THE DEMATERIALIZING OF OBJECTS AND THE PROLONGATION OF LIFE IN EARTH BODIES

"Thou dost speak of Jelal-ûd-dîn," said I, "where is now this man? What hath become of his Spirit? How has he passed the time which hath elapsed since his death? I would fain know of these things, and also by what agency he met his death?"

"Come with me and I will show thee Jelal-ûd-dîn," he replied.

"But first dismiss thy many followers, for we do not require their presence, and thou canst recall them to thee at will."

I bethought me of some of the expressions by which Jelal-ûd-dîn had been wont to summon or dismiss these low Astral Spirits whom he had learned to control, and making use of one of them I saw all the strange beings who had hung around us while we talked suddenly vanish like a dark cloud. Then taking me by the hand, the Spirit who was guiding me rose in the air, and as I followed with him I saw that we were travelling by a widely ascending spiral path to a large globe that I knew to be the Earth. In a very few moments we alighted upon it, and I found that we were in the deserted garden of the house which had belonged to Jelal-ûd-dîn.

But what a different place it seemed when viewed from the Spiritual side of life! No mere decay of years could have so appallingly stamped upon it the evil nature of the deeds of which its walls had been the silent witnesses. The corruption of those who had dwelt there seemed to have infested the house as with the plague of leprosy, and draped the walls in the foul shimmer of a stagnant pool whose waters hid the still more loathsome corruption of the decaying corpses of murdered men. The garden was a vast wilderness of poisonous weeds. Rank, unholy trees, exhaling an odour more deadly than the baneful upas tree, had sprung up around the house. The whole air was tainted with an infection more subtle than that of a plague, more swift in destruction than the most deadly gas. In the great branches of these trees huge birds of prey sat brooding, like vultures enjoying the rank odour of the carrion below. Horrible creatures of every conceivable shape and kind crawled or fluttered amongst the poisonous weeds. Awful beings of the Astral Plane sought shelter within the crumbling walls of the accursed house, and wraith-like figures of the many mortals whom Jelal-ûd-dîn had poisoned and killed by divers means haunted the deserted rooms and wandered through the silent passages, attracted by the magnetism of the man whose arts had killed them.

Could I have cried aloud unto mankind and proclaimed how terrible a plague spot was this house, and how deadly a miasma breathed from its decaying walls, I would have bade them level it to the ground and consume it and the foul garden in one great funeral pyre, and scatter the ashes to the four winds of Heaven, rather than leave it thus to become a focus of corruption from

whence exhaled a poison more destructive than any earthly poison could be; a center from which could radiate the influences most fatal to the Spirit.

But I was dead. To my voice all mortal ears were deaf for ever more.

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As I turned from the house something large and dark rose from the ground beside the fountain, and began to drag itself along the ground with slow and painful movements of its body, like those a snake makes as it wriggles along. Something, that as it drew near I saw to be in size and form like unto a man, clothed in dark rags like tattered cobwebs. The face was bent towards the ground, and the hands, like claws, were used to dig into the ground as the figure drew itself slowly towards me.

Then the head was raised for a moment to look at us, and as with a savage cry of rage the figure raised itself slightly to look more closely, I recognized the swollen and distorted features of my late Master Jelal-ûd-dîn. Fiercely he struggled to rise up to attack me, but his limbs were powerless to bear his weight, and with a moan of savage anguish he sank on the ground once more, and made frantic efforts to wriggle to my feet to clutch at me.

Horried at the sight of his awful condition, I addressed him, and asked him why he displayed such animosity towards me, since I had come to see him in all friendliness.

"Friendliness!" he hissed out savagely in hoarse, broken gasps, "what friend of mine wert thou to leave me at the very instant when success was about to crown the efforts of many years? What friendship hadst thou, who could desert me at that crisis, and consign me to this worse than death? Avaunt! or I will rend thee in a thousand pieces! Were I but able I would tear thee limb from limb."

"Nay, be not so savage with me," said I, "thou dost forget, surely, that to give thee the life thou didst crave meant that I should die instead of thee. I knew not this when I left thee alone, 'tis true. I did but follow the fair vision of my Guardian Angel, who led me from thy room, and that thou wert dead ere I returned filled me with remorse and sorrow, until I read the first part of the mystic scroll. Then did I see the fate thou hadst meant for me, and which engulfed thyself instead. Yet, Oh my once master,

let us forget the past, and tell me whether there is aught I can do to help thee now?"

Jelal-ûd-dîn's answer was a savage snarl like a wild beast's as he turned and wriggled away from us again, and disappeared behind the broken fountain.

The Spirit beside me, who was known in the Spirit World by the name of Mansur, touched me on the arm. "Behold!" said he, "Jelal-ûd-dîn hath gone into his treasure house, there to resume his watch over the baubles which he hath collected in his Earthly life, and which he doth not yet know to be valueless to him now. He thinks that thou art yet in the body of the flesh, for his sight, like his other powers, is but imperfect, and he fears that thou art come to steal some of his treasures."

Then I remembered how I had already come and taken away certain Parchment Scrolls, dreaming that the dead had no longer property in the goods that once belonged to them, and I resolved to go to where I had hidden them and restore them to Jelal-ûd-dîn since he still valued them so highly. My thought must have been read by Mansur, for he laughed derisively as he said:

"Go to, thou too honest thief! Go and look at those hidden scrolls, for it is no longer possible for thee to lift one corner of the very least of them. Thou art in the Spirit body now, and canst not affect aught which is still enclosed in its material shell as in a locked treasure case."

"But to return to Jelal-ûd-dîn. Tell me why it is that he crawls thus upon the Earth? Surely the reason is not alone because his life was evil?"

My companion laughed a mirthless laugh, as he replied, "I see that thou dost think that I am myself to the full as evil as he was, yet I grovel not upon the Earth. Even so. But it is not because of his many sins that he crawls thus, or else the Dark Spheres would be peopled by human reptiles. No. But Jelal-ûd-dîn when he sought to prolong his life far beyond the ordinary life of man did not know that thereby he was imprisoning his Spirit in the mortal shell long after it had grown too confined to hold it. If thou dost take a growing child and place it in a box that fits tight over all its limbs, so that it can neither develop nor make use of its muscles for its own support, then will the body of that child become deformed; its muscles and its limbs will wither away, and it will either die or become like one stricken with a palsy, whose impotent limbs can in no wise obey the

desires of its mind. So hath it been with Jelal-ûd-dîn. So is it with all who seek ignorantly to change nature's laws. By clinging to the mere Earthly shell, because it seemed to him a means of life, he retarded the development of the Spirit, and so crippled it that many years, yea, many centuries, must elapse ere it regains the full vigor that should belong to a man endowed at first with such strength as was his. Look upon me! Behold my grey hairs, my bent form, and know that I also, when I renewed again and again my Earthly life made the mistake Jelal-ûd-dîn did, and it hath taken me these many centuries of Spirit life to win back even the strength I now possess, which, after all, is but that of an old man, and wonder not that I sought to destroy all traces of that manuscript in which I detailed the means which had led to mine own destruction. Sin hath me in her clutches. The love of evil, the desire to enjoy still the sinful pleasures of mine animal Soul is yet so strong in me that I would not exchange my present lot for all the pure joys of Paradise, were it possible that its gates would open to me now. I have not one desire in affinity with the pure lives of the Saints of Paradise. The gulf between us is impassable. Therefore think not that it was with the thought of doing even one good action that I snatched that scroll from thine hand lest thou should learn the secret it contained. No! It was only that I desired not that the monstrous error of supposing that *to renew the poor earthly shell was to endow the immortal Spirit with fresh life* should be any longer associated with ME or MY studies. For thee and for Jelal-ûd-dîn I cared not. The Dark Angel, who is my Master here, might have led you both into the bottomless pit of destruction and I should not have raised one finger to prevent him. But when he took that misguiding scroll from the grave where I deemed it hidden for ever, and sent it forth to propagate AN ERROR in MY name, then was my wrath aroused, and I rested not till I had torn it from thy keeping.

"Let us go hence," he added after a pause. "Let us go hence, for as yet thou canst do no good to Jelal-ûd-dîn. Only time can help him. If thou hast any other one thou dost desire to see, think of them, and thine own desire will take us there."

Then I bethought me of Prince Ahmed, who had slain me, and of the faithful friend Ben Al Zulid, who had come too late to save me. And lastly I thought of Zuleika, and longed to know her fate, and whether she had shed even one tear over mine untimely end.

CHAPTER VI

I FIND ZULEIKA

As Mansur had said, my thoughts carried us to Agbatana, where I beheld Ahmed in all the glory of his position as King. Towards him my feelings were not particularly bitter. He had ever been an open foe, and in my death did but carry out the policy I had expected of him. We had each played our game to gain a throne. He had won and I had lost—that was all. I paused not long with him. An unseen shadow I stood among his throng of courtiers, and but for the recollection of myself which my presence caused to some among the crowd, none felt any consciousness of my presence.

From the Palace my thoughts carried me far away to a small fortress in the mountains. Here I found that Ben Al Zulid had retired, and was spending the evening of his life in the calm studies of a philosopher, and though my presence and touch could not make him conscious that my Spirit stood beside him in very fact, he nevertheless seemed to feel that I was somehow near him, for he got up, and looking half uneasily over his shoulder to where I stood, said in a low tone:

“Strange! Strange indeed is this feeling that comes over me! I could almost have vowed that the Soul of my dead Master’s much loved son Ahrinziman had returned to Earth again. Methought he was here but now. I had almost forgotten he was dead, alas! like all whom I have loved.”

He sighed deeply and turned again unto his books, while I glided from the room, moved almost to tears by the sound of affection in his voice.

The image of Zuleika rose before me now, and I soon found that I was entering the Palace of Parsagherd, and floating towards the haunted wing.

As with the house of Jelal-ûd-dîn, this part of the Palace wore, to my Spiritual eyes, the stamp of more than mere mortal ruin and decay. The hangings upon the walls were ragged and stained with blood, and bore, as pictures engraved upon them the scenes

of treachery and murder enacted within the rooms. The floors of polished marble were slippery with pools of blood, and deep holes like pitfalls seemed to gape on every side. I crossed over to the secret passage, and there within it beheld Zuleika sleeping, clothed in the black mantle which had enshrouded her in my last vision in Jelal-ûd-dîn's mirror. For I knew now, alas! that it was she whom I had seen imprisoned as in a narrow vault, tearing up the ground with her finger nails, and beating on the hard walls in her death agony. Alas! And alas! I read all the fearful story as I looked at the grim walls wherein her terrible struggles for liberty, her slow agony of starvation and dreadful death, were all mirrored. None had guessed that she was imprisoned there. Few had even missed her. And not till Ahmed, roused at last from his conquests to the memory of the woman he had professed to love, inquired for her, did it at last dawn upon anyone that she and not some lost Spirit from the dark regions had uttered those terrible shrieks which for days had rung through the deserted wing and penetrated like faint echoes to the other part. Then when Ahmed caused the place to be searched none knew the secret of the hidden door. There were no cries now to guide them, for the silence of the place was the silence of Death. Thus even Zuleika's body was never found, and her fate remained a mystery whose solution could only be guessed by the shuddering seekers for her.

When I entered the passage I saw at the further end, next the door which led to the rooms once occupied by King Selim, the crumbling skeleton of a woman, robed in the ragged remnants of a black mantle, the fleshless hands still clutching at the fatal door which I had caused to be walled up, little dreaming whose death trap it was to prove. Near this crumbling Earth-body there lay the Spirit of Zuleika, attached to it by a fine thread of magnetic ether. Like the Earthly body it was wrapped in a ragged robe of black, of which it seemed the counterpart. A corner of this robe was drawn over Zuleika's head and face, veiling it from my eyes.

I drew near to her with feelings of the deepest emotion, for though as I gazed at her crumbling form I knew that the passionate love with which I had once regarded her was dead, slain by the knowledge of her falseness, it was not possible to feel towards her as towards any other woman. The tie between us had been too sacred, too tender. No man who has once truly felt the holy

emotion of a pure love can ever regard with indifference the woman who has lain within his arms, and borne to him the most sacred relationship of all. Yea, though that woman may prove as false as sin. Though she may have trampled on his affection as on a worthless rag, and trifled with his heart as a child toys with a plaything. For the man who has once truly loved her she will ever be surrounded with the halo of the infinite tenderness of a love that has no counterpart save in the still purer, holier love of a mother for her child.

In mine anger when I first knew of her falseness and my dishonor, I could have killed Zuleika with mine own hand, but even had I done so her death would have filled me with an infinite anguish of remorse so soon as ever the fatal deed had been done. And now as I looked down upon her and knew that she, too, was dead, and by what means she had died, my heart was torn by the violent passion of anger and sorrow. I loved her no longer as I once had done. Could she have risen before me in all the pure beauty of her earthly days I should have still drawn aloof from her, knowing her nature as I knew it now. But nevertheless my heart was hot against her murderess, and I could have cried aloud with anguish when I thought of her cruel sufferings ere she died. If aught could have added fuel to the fire of my anger against Artemisia the sight of Zuleika would have done so, and I vowed a yet more fearful oath to sacrifice all other things unto my purpose of Revenge.

Trembling with emotion I drew near to Zuleika, thinking to raise gently one corner of the robe which hid her face, that I might gaze but once again upon the features so dear to mine eyes in the long past days on Earth. Ere I could touch her, however, the veil that shrouded her face became transparent as gauze, and revealed to mine eyes, not the lovely features of my once wife, but the shrunken, withered face of an old, old woman, stamped with an expression of vice and shame such as one sees on some wretched woman of the streets, who hath sold herself for gold.

"Ye Powers!" I cried in horror, "is this Zuleika's Spirit after all, or have I made some strange mistake?"

Then I looked again, more closely, and I saw that it was indeed the Zuleika I had loved. The features were the same, but the blighting hand of sin and treachery had rested on them, stamping on them the true impress of the shallow, sensual Soul beneath the once fair exterior. The expression was the same as she had

ever worn in Jelal-ûd-dîn's mirror, only now there were no charms of feature to redeem its hideousness.

I turned away, saddened at the sight, and filled with my passion against the woman whose hand had helped to shed such ruin around me.

I willed to see her next, that I might stand face to face with her once more.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEA OF PASSION; TEACHINGS ON THE SEPARATION OF SPIRITUAL SPHERES; WE PLOT AGAINST ARTEMISIA

I found myself standing at last beside a lone sea, whose dark billows dashed furiously upon the mighty rocks which like a wall of iron shut it in. Here and there were bleak patches of sandy shore, like barren resting places amidst a wilderness of jagged rocks and stormy waves. A furious hurricane, whose hot breath was like the scorching blast of a sirocco, seemed to rage there eternally, driving the mighty waters upon those towering rocks with the re-echoing roar of thunder, and scattering great volumes of spray far over the wild dark plains that lay beyond this troublous sea. Storm clouds hovered overhead, and the fiery magnetism cast off from the stormy Souls of those who had created this scene of passion rent the sky in all directions with their lightning flashes, while the deep, reverberating roll of the giant waves and wind fell on the ear unceasingly.

Great as is the range of the Spiritual sight compared to that of mortal life, it was yet too limited to show me the extent of this vast ocean that stretched away beyond the powers of even my thoughts to follow.

I climbed to the highest point of a lofty rock and looking along the far-extending shores beheld at last, at an immense distance, a solitary woman's figure, that I felt, with a sudden rush of savage joy, to be that of Queen Artemisia.

Quick as thought I sped towards her, but when I came near I found that some invisible barrier through which I could by no means pass separated me from her. In vain I sought to get nearer;

a wall of iron kept me back, and no efforts of mine could break through it. Furious with rage I at last gave up the useless attempt. A mocking laugh at my side made me turn round, to behold Mansur beside me.

"Waste not thy powers in useless efforts," said he, "for thou art on the confines of two spheres, and thou canst not pass from the one unto the other. Between thee and Artemisia there is a barrier of antagonistic magnetism, which to thy Spirit body is even more impassable than a wall of stone would have been to thy mortal envelope. If thou wouldst attack thine enemy it must be by other agency than thine own hands. To do so thou wilt need the help of those Beings whom the Dark Angel hath given thee as servitors, and such knowledge of their attributes and the laws which govern them as I only can give thee. Thy Spiritual magnetism and Artemisia's are as diametrically opposite as the two poles; as antagonistic as two gases which can in no wise blend, so violent is the force of their repulsion. Neither of you can by any means come again into personal contact with the other, unless you can indeed restore the conditions of Earth life. For in the Earth Life all spheres are mingled, and the gross materiality of the Earthly envelope enables those whose magnetisms are intensely antagonistic to draw near unto each other, even as thou mayest imprison the two opposing chemical gases in separate vessels and thus bring them into a closeness of proximity impossible to them when free. Dost thou imagine that were it possible for Artemisia to meet thee she would not herself have long since sought thee out? On the night when thou wert slain she also died, from poison administered by the orders of Prince Ahmed. Unlike thee her Spirit was fully ripe for the great change. She awoke almost at once, as one wakes from slumber, and since that hour she has not ceased to call upon thy name. She thirsts as much or more than thou for the long deferred meeting with thee, her great enemy, and she cannot understand wherefore thou hast not obeyed her summons. She is ignorant of all laws pertaining unto Spiritual conditions. Such studies have no attraction for her. She thinks only of what the Priests have taught her, and cares not to gain even the most elementary knowledge of that state of existence in which she now finds herself. Behold her now, and mark well what fruits her crimes have borne for her, and then will I show thee how thou mayest add yet another drop unto the full cup of her bitterness."

As he pointed to the restless figure of the Queen, Mansur passed his hands slowly over my head, and then it was as though a clearer measure of sight had been given to me, for I not only saw Artemisia herself, but the multitude of Beings which thronged around her every footstep. I heard moreover every word she uttered.

"Look now," said Mansur, "see how those haunting shapes dog her footsteps, each the embodiment of a past crime. She does not know that they are things of air, mere creatures of her thoughts, reflections thrown upon her own aura as an image is thrown upon the surface of a mirror. She thinks each horrid shape is real; a sentient being like herself, and knows not were she to turn and face them calmly, to contemplate them steadily, they would melt like mist. See how each angry vengeful thought hath shaped itself into a giant phantom in her mind. See yonder Shade dipping its gory hands again and yet again into a deep pool of blood! Behold, it is but the picture which memory gives back of herself as she sat beside thee in thy dying hour. See yon crowd of Hellish Imps that scream and shriek around her; they are the curses she hath heaped on others' heads, and which have now come back to her. Each one but repeats her own words; each does but embody her own thoughts when she uttered them. Again, see yonder that white floating figure. Dost thou recognize it, with its stony Angel face as of a slumbering child and its white robes dyed with the fast flowing blood from the wounds in neck and shoulder? 'Tis the wraith of thy murdered Mother. Nay, start not. The pure Soul is not there; she rests in Paradise. That floating phantom is but the last fading remnant of the Astral shell cast off long since by the risen Soul, and only retained thus long in its integrity by the constant thoughts of Artemisia herself, who can in no wise free herself from the memory of her victim. She thinks it is the Spirit that haunts her, and hath haunted her through these many years. She doth not know that between herself and the murdered Cynthia there exists an antagonism as great as between herself and Cynthia's son, and that it is therefore impossible that their Souls can ever meet in the Spirit sphere. She can behold yon crumbling Astral shell even as she might have beheld the poor Earth body she destroyed, but unless Cynthia could re-clothe herself in an Earthly body Artemisia can never again behold her Spirit. As for this haunting shell, were only Artemisia to have courage enough to touch it it

would crumble beneath her hand, and turn to ashes for the first breeze to scatter.

"Artemisia is alone by this wild sea. Naught haunts her but her own foul thoughts, her own murderous deeds. Yet in the vividness with which they are presented to her eyes doth thou not perceive how one who hath the knowledge of how to create such shapes may torment her yet more sorely? See now, she calls upon her son, her only son, the one thing that can awaken still the tender emotions of her Soul. Mark with what frantic despair she calls on him, realizing that even Death hath not bridged over the gulf created by Death between them. Canst thou think of no means here to be revenged upon her, to make her suffer even as she hath made thee? Hast thou not felt that even the oblivion of Death, the mere dropping of its dark veil between thee and the object of thine affections, were a mercy compared to the worse than death which hath separated thee from thy beloved? Doth it not then occur to thy mind that thou couldst so torture Artemisia through these pictures that she would almost pray in her anguish to be left rather to the present uncertain knowledge of her son's fate, to the still cherished hope that he is in Paradise? Thou canst do nothing to the Queen herself. Her own state of misery is too deep for thee to add one feather's weight unto the burden. But in her thoughts of her son she finds the one faint hope that yet glimmers amidst the darkness of her despair. On Earth she thought that she would fain he had gone to Hell, so that she might see him again. Now that she herself is here the Mother's Soul recoils from such a fate for her adored child. She would rather dwell here herself for all eternity than drag him down even for one hour, and though she calls thus frantically upon his name, she does so only in the hope that a far-off glimpse of him may at last be accorded to her, not with the desire to bring him into the same condition as herself."

Mansur drew closer to my side, and clutching my arm as in a vice, hissed into mine ears:

"Dost thou not understand me yet? Art thou so dull of thought as not to see that thou canst slay even this one hope, this one faint alleviation of Artemisia's lot by casting thy spells upon her? I will even show thee how it may be done, and how thou mayest drive her to despair beside which her present state were as Paradise."

The fierce cruelty of this Spirit's look and voice appalled me

as he whispered his suggestions in mine ears. Yet was mine own anger against the Queen so deep that even while I shuddered at the suggestions of the Dark Spirit I yet felt loth to refuse his aid.

As before, he must have read my thoughts, for with a bitter sneer he said:

"Thou art a pretty one to vow vengeance against thine enemy, and then when the way is shown to thee shrink like a timid babe because its darkness appalls thee! Wander through these realms and see what pity they who reign here show to one another, and then ask thyself if thou art fit to lord it over Hell's Dark Spirits? He who would reign here must leave Remorse behind, must part with the last lingering shadow of compunction, or his weakness will cause him to be hurled under foot and trampled down like the wretched slaves whom thou shalt see thick as leaves in Autumn, cumbering the ground on every side, and serving like beasts of burden those whose stupendous wickedness hath raised them above all lesser sinners!

"Come, return with me now unto the sphere in which thou wert before, and I will show thee what manner of servants the Dark Angel hath given thee."

CHAPTER VIII

THE VENGEANCE PACK OF INFERNO; HOW TO DOMINATE THEM; INTELLIGENCE RULES IN HELL AS WELL AS IN HEAVEN; HOW ASTRAL SPRITES AFFECT HUMANITY; DISEASE POISONS

Under the guidance of Mansur I soon found myself again on the spot where I had had my interview with the Dark Angel. At the command of my fiendish guide the strange and fearful creatures who were to serve as instruments of my vengeance gathered from all directions and clustered around us once more.

Some were like unto the dragons of fable, whose huge bodies were like the combination of several monstrous reptiles. Others were like wolves, and horrible mixtures of more than one species

of ferocious beasts. Horrible vultures of gigantic size swooped down to join the throng. All the most loathsome creatures known on Earth were reproduced here, with still more repulsive blending of the evil qualities of each. There were some creatures like unto black cats in the shape of the bodies, yet with flat, wide heads and two enormous teeth like tusks which projected from either jaw, while the small teeth were sharp and jagged like the teeth of a saw, and they had claws of extraordinary size and sharpness. I could well fancy these creatures tearing their prey to pieces in the most horrible manner with such teeth and claws. They attracted my attention especially because there were so many of them, and because they hung around me more closely than did any of the other distorted representations of animal life on Earth.

These Astral animals and birds seemed a distinct and almost material class in themselves. The semi-human impish looking creatures which I have described as being the creations of the passions of men's Animal Souls came next in order. Then there were low, Earth-bound Spirits who were distinctly human, and who had lived an Earth life of much evil and degradation, but who, because of the fact that they possessed Souls, were of a degree of intelligence far beyond the other Soulless creatures. Some of these unfortunate Earth-bound Spirits were, however, of so very low a type of human life, so slightly developed in intellect, that it required a fine perception to distinguish between them and those who were semi-human and Soulless.

Above this class of Earth-bound Spirits I saw others, far superior in their intellectual development, far more unmistakably responsible individuals, but who were of so repulsively evil a type of wickedness that it was impossible not to shrink from all approach to contact with them. Despite the savage, bestial expression on their faces, despite the horrible resemblance they bore in action, and even in some cases in feature, to the wild beasts around me, I knew that these were indeed the Spirits of men and, alas! of women, for there were among them some hideous travesties of womanhood. That they were born as the offspring of lives of the most revolting cruelty and wickedness on Earth, and that the higher faculties of their Souls should be literally still in the germ state, only made the sight of them the more terrible, since immense periods of time must of necessity elapse ere those undeveloped seeds of good within their Souls would begin to grow.

As Mansur pointed them out to me he said: "Behold those Beings whose cowardly cruelty makes of them the most abject and yet the most dangerous of thy slaves! If thou wouldst dominate them thou must possess the most unceasing watchfulness, the most relentless determination; and should they hesitate to obey thee thou must at once consign them to the most cruel punishments at the hands of their savage fellows. If thou dost show to them one atom of pity they will cease to fear thee, and will turn to rend thee in pieces at the first chance. Remember, that in this sphere their strength of body is ever greater than thine, because they possess a more dense degree of materiality than thou. This is their sphere, and thou art in a manner an intruder. If thou art to reign here it must be by the force of thy will, the power of thine intellect, the degree of thy knowledge of Spiritual laws, not by mere brute force, for the strength of such Beings as those around thee is stupendous! Were they once freed from the restraint that is ever exercised over them in Spirit life by the higher intelligences, these Beings possess a strength sufficient to destroy all the forms of life on Earth which are higher than themselves. At present they may be said to be imprisoned in the limits of this sphere, and amongst creatures of their own kind. To enable them to act upon the inhabitants of any other sphere, or to affect the material things of Earth life, it is necessary that they be brought under the influence of the will of some Spirit or Mortal strong enough and intelligent enough to counteract the will force which now holds them in bondage. Once they are fully dominated by some powerful Spirit, either in or out of the flesh, they can be used like a mass of puppets, and when they are brought into contact with certain magnetic conditions in Earth life they possess a force sufficient to enable them to move large obstructions as one would lift a feather.

"Their magnetism may be said to resemble a powerful explosive gas, whose expansive force can shatter the strongest masonry, and the pressure they can bring to bear upon the mortal envelope of man would be great enough to crush his Earthly body into a shapeless mass, as though the chariot wheels of the great God of Thunder had passed over it.

"With Jelal-ûd-din thou didst see somewhat of the powerful nature of certain chemical fumes that he distilled, but thou canst but faintly conceive as yet of the vastness of the hidden powers in nature, and still less canst thou realize that, compared with the

powers possessed by Spiritual nature, those of the material Earth are but as children's playthings. In all the wondrous tales told of the miraculous things which have been wrought by the power of Magic the basis of the power called into action was this influence of the master mind of the magician upon these almost material Astral Beings. Under the controlling will of their Master they did mighty works, transporting objects to a great distance, or acting as a destroying force upon some enemy. Most often their aid has been invoked solely for purposes of evil, for as a rule those who sought their aid did so in order to grasp at boundless power, and minister to their all-absorbing ambition. Yet there is no reason why their services should not be made use of for good as well as for evil, save that, drawing such a force as this around a mortal brings up from the dark depths of the infernal regions a countless host of kindred Spirits, whose influence it is difficult to shake off again. When I tell thee that these Beings are dominated by the wills of the higher intelligences I mean not alone that higher intelligence which is devoted to goodness and purity. Evil is in all respects as powerful as Good. The HIGHER DEGREE of knowledge and intellectual power belongs to Evil as much as to Good, and the mind can travel as far and as fast in the one direction as in the other during its pursuit of knowledge. Do I not know this only too well! But as the nature of these particular classes of Astral Beings is essentially evil, it follows that they are more often controlled by the evil intelligences with whom they are in affinity than by the Good, to whom they are antagonistic."

"What then," I asked, "protects man on Earth from these Beings, since thou doth suggest they have the power to affect material things?"

"I said unto thee that UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS they had the power. That is to say, they have it when there is a mortal brought into proximity to them in whose aura they find the highly magnetic essence of which I told thee before, an essence which supplies to them the link between the materiality of man and their own state, that subtle form of ether which, as I said unto thee, serves to hold in combination the material atoms of the human body, and which, when it surrounds these beings, gives to them for the moment almost the density of mortals, so that they can bring their extraordinary magnetic power to bear upon mortal things. Thou thyself possessed this subtle essence in thine Earth

life, and in its spiritualised form it is in thine aura now. It is a power whose use thou dost not dream of yet, but which can serve thee in Spirit life even as it would have served thee on Earth hadst thou but known how to use it. It was because the essence was present with thee that thou didst see the hands and faces, the figures even, of the strange creatures which hovered around thee and Jelal-ûd-dîn during thy studies, and it is those mortals who possess this magnetic aura who have most to fear from the proximity of these Astrals."

"But," said I, "doth not the fact that the aspirations of mankind are towards Good rather than Evil, so that the preponderating influences around man tend to good, serve to protect him in a measure from evil?"

"Yea, thou art right," replied Mansur, "yet Evil is still a mighty power upon the Earth, and when thou hast steeped thy Soul deep in its pleasures, how hard it is to shake it off! How difficult to rise to higher things! How bald and tame seem the joys of the pure and good!"

He sighed, and I could not help thinking that perhaps after all he was not so far as he imagined from all appreciation of those purer joys. Then the softer mood passed, and he turned to me again with the zest of a true teacher in expounding his views unto an eager pupil, and continued his discourse.

"Now that thou hast seen these Beings thou wilt not wonder that in calling such unto their aid the daring mortals who have sought to subjugate them are so often themselves destroyed by the very force they have called up. He whose will releases these Spirits from their bondage to the higher intelligences, in order that they may become the unseen tools with which he wreaks his animosity upon a fellow mortal, is apt to forget that he hath created a link between himself and these Astral Beings which he may be afterwards powerless to sever. Do you see how the restless throng are chafing already at the restraint put upon them? How they long to be at some Hellish work again! Mark those great bags, like huge black spiders' webs, that some of them carry. See, I will suffer them to follow out the thought which hath come unto their minds."

Mansur waved his hand, and instantly the dark throng of human and semi-human Beings rushed upon the hideous animals around them, and despite their teeth and claws thrust a number of them into the great nets. Then, amidst much yelling and

quarrelling they made a ring, and tumbling the savage creatures out of the bags pell-mell on the top of each other, prodded and buffeted them till the whole angry mass were tearing each other to pieces like a lot of hungry rats and wolves. As the creatures tore at one another the most frightful vapor arose, the most sickening odour, the most poisonous stench possible to imagine. I felt myself becoming stifled, and looked at Mansur to see whether he was playing some diabolical trick upon me. But he drew from his robe a long slender wand, and waving it slowly before us created a wind which blew the poisonous stench away.

"It is as well that thou hast smelt that sweet savour," said he, "because now thou canst judge how deadly unto the Spirit is the magnetism thrown off from these creatures. Thou canst understand how a sensitive mortal exposed to their subtle influence would sicken and die, none could tell wherefore, because no mortal sense is keen enough to detect this poison. Thou hast heard that poison can be dropped into the heart of a rose, so that the scent of the flower shall hide the death-giving odour, and the fair beauty of the flower tempt the victim to wear it.

"The most subtle poisons are the most deadly, and it is these poisons which act directly on the Spirit. The Earthly envelope is designed as a shield to the Spirit in the Earth life, even as the more Spiritual bodies of the succeeding stages protect the Soul in those more advanced conditions of its existence. If then the Earthly envelope be so far penetrated by the Spirit that an abnormal degree of sensitiveness is experienced, it stands to reason that this thinner envelope leaves the Spirit exposed to the action of these subtle influences, and liable to be injured by them to an extent from which the more grossly enveloped Spirit is protected. The poison of disease cannot be detected by the power of sight, yet it is none the less present in the atmosphere, and as with increasing knowledge upon Earth men will be able to detect the approach of the destroying pestilence, so with a more universal knowledge of magnetic laws men will become at last able to detect the approach of those more subtle poisons which produce the Spiritual pestilences by infusing their deadly vapors into the atmosphere of Spiritual life."

CHAPTER IX

THE PLOT UNFOLDED; WE VISIT SELIM; SUFFERING
FOR THE SINS OF A MOTHER

"And how dost thou intend to use these creatures for the furtherance of thy plans against Artemisia?" said I to Mansur at last, for in his delight at finding one who took an interest in his discourse he seemed to have forgotten all but the scientific aspect of the subject.

As my question recalled him to the original purpose of our meeting the dark, fiendish expression passed again over his face, and with a low chuckle of diabolical cunning he said:

"Artemisia hath escaped all knowledge of this sphere—the Astral circle of the Earth plane—because she hath sunk to one below it, as thou also wouldst have done had it not been that in thine Earthly life thou didst form many links between this sphere and thyself. We cannot take these companions around us to the Queen, and thus cheer her solitary hours with their sportive gambols! But Selim is yet within the confines of this sphere. He hovers around the Earth plane, and we can visit him. Thou hast much influence over him, for in thine Earth lives it was well established. Moreover, ye are the offspring of one father, and between you there is not so great a measure of antagonism as between thee and Artemisia. She hath escaped our clutches, but her son is here and we can visit him. He is in our power. Thou canst surround him with all the horrors which the hellish creatures beside us can wreak upon their victims. Thou canst paralyse his will with the strong force of thine own, which could ever dominate his. Thou canst give him over as a helpless captive into the hands of these beings around us, and of a surety 'twill be fine sport to see what they will do unto him! Then through him thou canst project unto Artemisia the knowledge of his condition; his thoughts will reach her though thine cannot. If thou dost direct the thoughts of Selim unto his mother, and will that he desires her to behold his state, then will the picture of Selim be thrown upon the mirror-like atmosphere around her, and

appear as real to her eyes, as objective and as near as do her own thoughts, which at present fill all her mental horizon. Through Selim she will behold thee, and will learn that thou hast him in thy clutches, while she herself is powerless to aid him in any way. Dost thou not think it is a pretty scheme? Doth it not seem to thee that thou wilt extract a far keener anguish from Artemisia by torturing her son than if thou couldst touch herself? For herself, she would defy thee! Her Spirit is as courageous and as dauntless as thine own, woman though she be! But when thou doth touch her son she will have no power to do aught; her Spirit will be broken, and she will sue to thee for mercy like the veriest slave. There will be no depths of humiliation to which thou canst not reduce her, if only thou dost secure her son, her only son!"

He spoke in such a tone of savage, exultant triumph that I recoiled involuntarily from him, even while I ground my teeth in rage and nodded my acquiescence in his plans, for I could not but remember that Selim was the man who had dishonored me, and repaid my services with the blackest treachery.

"Selim is but a poor creature," said Mansur, "a foe scarce worthy of our spears, yet is the wrong he hath done thee a bitter one indeed. The conditions of his Earth life made him a King, yet in the Spirit World he is little more than a precocious child, weak minded and of evil tendencies. Between his parents there was no real affinity, no Spiritual union. The attraction exercised by each was merely that of their animal Souls; therefore in their son thou dost behold only the transmission of the lower qualities of the parents, while the lack of true affinity causes Selim to be like an ill-constructed harp, not one of whose strings canst thou bring into tuneful harmony with another. Thou canst not blend his qualities so that they make a perfect whole. One contradicts another continually, even as between the higher natures of the parents there was continual friction, though the glamour which was cast over both by the purely magnetic attraction of their animal Souls prevented them at first from feeling this. Had the inharmony of relation between the parents been but a few degrees greater Selim would have been an idiot. As it is he had enough sense to pass for an intelligent responsible Being in the eyes of those whose interest it was to be indulgent to his failings. Behold him now, stripped of all the false glitter of Royalty and dependent upon himself for the surroundings he creates."

Mansur pointed to a flickering spark of light at an immense distance from us, and by steadily watching it I saw at last that it illuminated a minute picture of the Palace of Parsagherd and the rooms occupied by Selim. Presently the picture grew clearer, as though a strong glass reflected it to me, and I perceived that to Selim's eyes it bore the same appearance as in his Earth life, save that the furniture, the walls, and hangings, all looked cracked and stained with muddy patches and torn. In the centre sat Selim himself, on a throne he had built for himself from the fragments of a larger one which lay scattered about as though by an earthquake shock. The crown upon his head and the gold of his ornaments were tarnished like his honor, and his robes were soiled and draggled like the once purity of his Soul. He himself presented a curious appearance, for in stature and face he was like a child, though his body was bent and his countenance furrowed like those of an aged man. The feeble yet vicious expression of his mouth, with its full red lips half open and the weak chin covered by a few thin, straggling hairs in place of his once luxuriant beard, added yet another touch to the general picture he presented of weak minded vanity.

Behind him there lurked the hideous figure of the black slave from whose obsessing Spirit I had sought to free him on Earth. The expression of this Spirit was savage to the last degree, and he appeared to spend his time crawling backwards and forwards through the fatal secret passage, as though unable to withdraw himself from its attraction.

Around Selim himself I saw a great many dark figures, whose forms much resembled those of the Genii I had beheld in the mystic valley; and mingling with them were certain Spirits of a low type who seemed to have been slaves in Earth life, and who were now attracted to the Court and waited upon Selim under the confused impression that they were still in their Earthly bodies. These last Spirits he seemed to see, but to the presence of the others he was oblivious.

"Behold," said Mansur, "in Earth life Artemisia drew around her by her angry, vengeful thoughts a whole host of dark Spirits whose influence shadowed her son even from his cradle. They gathered around him and sucked away his Spiritual life, so that the Spirit body grew stunted and feeble, and even the Earthly envelope suffered in sympathy and became feeble and ailing. They instilled foul thoughts into his mind, and they used his

body as a medium whereby they could enjoy over again those material pleasures for which they still craved. Thus was the private life of King Selim one of much degradation and shame without the Spirit of Selim himself being conscious of it.

"To use the body thus it is needful to dispossess the rightful Spirit, which is thus left in an unconscious state in close proximity to its envelope, as thou dost already know. Had Selim been a conscious participator in the iniquities wrought by the agency of his Earth body his state now would be akin to that of the dark Spirits around us. As it was he suffered in the enfeebled condition of his body for the use thus made of it without knowing to what agency it was due. In Spirit life he hath but the development of a child, yet is his Spirit body worn and aged by the vices of the man. Time will equalize all things, and will give to him the growth of his Spirit into manhood. Then will it be for him to use his powers for his own elevation or degradation, as the temper of his mind shall incline him.

"Call him unto thee now. Draw him unto this sphere that thou mayest show him how richly thou canst recompense him for all the favors he showered on thee, and on thy WIFE!"

Mansur laughed again and again as he said this, with a scornful glee that so maddened me I could have struck him to the earth had he not withdrawn from me even as he uttered his sneer at the mention of my wife, and though my contempt for Selim had well nigh extinguished my anger against him the words of Mansur kindled my passion once more to fever heat, and I called aloud upon the wretched Selim to come unto me with all speed.

Thrice I called, and ere the summons was well repeated for the third time I beheld Selim at my side.

Bewildered at thus suddenly finding himself in my presence, and uneasy at the recollection of his own treachery towards me, the wretched Selim addressed me in trembling querulous tones, into which he tried in vain to infuse a little of his old royal dignity, and asked why I should have summoned him thus.

"Thou mayest well ask that, thou miserable semblance of a man," replied I scornfully. "Thou mayest well wonder why I should desire the presence of so poor a worm of Earth as thou, thou false viper, who couldst even turn to sting the hand stretched forth to rescue thee! It may be that thou hast even forgotten that from so contemptible a dog it was possible I would demand

a reckoning when the day of our reckoning at last should come. Dost thou imagine that I have forgotten one tittle of the wrongs inflicted on me by thee, and yet more foully by thy mother Artemisia?"

As I uttered the Queen's name I suddenly beheld her image before me reflected in the air, even as one beholds a mirage in the desert, though the scene reflected may be far away. I not only saw this reflection of Artemisia but I saw pictured beside her the reflections of myself and Selim. She had pushed back the long wild black locks of her disheveled hair with one hand, and with the other she shaded her eyes as she looked fixedly at my reflection. That of Selim was as yet so faint and dim by reason of his thoughts not being yet fully concentrated upon her that she did not perceive him. Me she addressed in tones of savage hate, saying "Is this indeed thou, Ahrinziman? Thou illicit spawn of a miserable Greek slave, who didst deem, forsooth, that thou wert fit to be a King! Art thou come at last in answer to my calls for thee?"

"Yea, Oh Woman! I am come at last to settle the great debt between us. Let not thy foul lips utter the name of mine Angel Mother, slain by thee, lest thou shouldst add another drop unto the cup of my wrath, too full already, and of whose bitterness thou shalt drink even to the last dregs in a fashion thou dost little dream of yet. Hath it not been said of old that thou shalt demand an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth? But I say to thee that thou shalt repay me with thy sufferings an hundred fold for all that thou hast made me and mine suffer. Think of my tender Mother and her cruel death! Think of Zuleika, sacrificed to thy malice, and to the passion of thy son! Think of the slow agony of her death as hour by hour hope died within her heart, and the fierce pangs of hunger and despair destroyed inch by inch her mortal life! Think of the horror of such a death, and marvel not that since thou art beyond my powers of vengeance I should take it from thy son. Behold he is here. I have summoned his Spirit unto me, and I show him to thee now that thou mayest see his sufferings, while thou art as powerless to save him one pang as I was to save one of thy victims. Behold, thus do I let loose the powers of this dark sphere upon thy son."

I waved my hand towards the wretched Selim, and like a pack of wild beasts the whole savage multitude rushed upon

him and attacked him with teeth and claws and hands, human and inhuman monsters alike eager to tear him to pieces.

But it was not my purpose to so quickly end the scene. I desired to prolong the agony of Artemisia and her son, and ere they had done more than wound Selim's Spirit I forced the savage creatures to retire again, bidding the low cruel Spirits that were human once to approach him one by one and amuse themselves with him, even as a cat plays with a mouse. As for Selim, he lay upon the ground in a helpless agony of fear, uttering cries unto his mother, whom he now thought he saw beside him, to save him.

Then I saw Artemisia striving to break through the wall between us, even as I had once striven to break through to her, and when at last she realized that she was powerless to reach us she gave utterance to a cry of such supreme anguish, such intense despair, that I wavered in my fell purpose, and almost involuntarily arrested the advance of those who were torturing Selim.

The sacredness of the Mother's love, the sufferings through which a woman gives birth unto her child, the Divinity of that holy tie, all rose up before my mental vision and forbade me to torture a Mother through the tenderest, holiest, emotion of her Soul. Yea, even though she had sinned against me as deeply as had Artemisia.

At this very moment when revenge was within my power, when I might have drugged myself to satiety with the sight of my enemies' sufferings, I gave up the contest, and allowed the opportunity to slip from my grasp. My hand, stretched out to destroy, fell powerless at my side, paralysed by the agony of the Mother's cry for mercy for her child.

It required all my power to drag off the savage dark Spirits I had so nearly let loose in all their malice upon Selim. All the force of my strong will was scarce adequate for the task, but at last I saw them gather like an evil crowd of vultures and sink slowly down from sight. Then I waved my hands over the wretched Selim and bade him be free from me forever, whereupon he too vanished.

As he disappeared a tremendous flash of lightning rent the sky, a mighty clap of thunder shook the ground, and I beheld the furious countenance of the Dark Angel as he towered above me in his wrath.

"Behold," said he in a deep voice of intense wrath, "Behold, I have done my part, I have given thee the boon that thou didst crave, and like a capricious child thou hast flung it from thee because thy mood has changed! Thou art a mighty one to think to rule in Hell! Thou, who canst not keep thy fell purpose for one hour! Behold, I have fulfilled my share of our bargain, now must thou fulfill thine!"

For one brief moment I beheld the fearful fiend, then a great chasm opened beneath my feet and engulfed me. Down and down I sank in the awful darkness. It seemed to me that I was sinking down forever!

CHAPTER X

THE KINGDOM OF THE DARK ANGEL; DOOMED TO
THE BLACK PIT; HOW WILL POWER SAVED ME;
THE SPORT OF THE ANGELS OF INFERNO;
THE ORIGIN OF DARK ANGELS; WHY
THEY ARE BEYOND MORTAL KEN

At last my downward journey was suddenly arrested, and I found myself in what appeared to be a vast black pit. Walls of jagged rock rose up on all sides, and through the darkness I could dimly perceive that they extended to a great distance all around me.

As I tried to rise and stand upon my feet, I found that my limbs were loaded with ponderous chains, and it was only with great difficulty and after many efforts that I was at last able to raise myself to an upright position. To walk seemed impossible, so heavy were my fetters.

As I became accustomed to the darkness I began to see that I was not alone. Huge phantoms hovered near me with outspread wings, and as my sight grew clearer I saw that upon the forehead of each there glowed a single spark of crimson fire, while their faces were instinct with the strong life and power with which the force of my own passions had endowed them. As I looked again and again upon these hovering shapes that loomed through

the darkness like avenging spectres, and approached ever nearer and nearer to me with threatening gestures, I recognized them to be the Genii of Revenge and Hatred, of Cruelty and Murder, which I had seen in the phantom valley of the Genii. Now these strange beings had grown to twice their former size, and possessed a degree of intelligence and a power of action more than double that which they had possessed before.

They gathered around me like destroying angels, and hemmed me in on every side, while yet fresh and ever fresh phantoms floated down to swell the throng. The glittering, scale-like robes they wore seemed to wrap me round and crush me, as the Anaconda crushes the body of its victims. The dull sparks of fire that shot from their fierce eyes seemed to pierce my brain as with a hundred knife stabs. Their hot breaths were like the fumes from a furnace upon my cheeks, and their talon-like claws were extended to tear my flesh. Suddenly I bethought me of the words of Abubatha when he had spoken to me in the last dream I had on Earth: "None can have dominion over thy Soul unless thou thyself give them the power." And I said unto myself "shall I, who am immortal, suffer these Soulless beings of the Astral World to assault me and tamper with my freedom? Is it not I who should dominate them, and hold them as mere servants of my will?"

I stamped my fettered foot upon the ground and stretched forth my manacled hands towards these hideous shapes, crying unto them, "Avaunt! Ye foul fiends of evil passions! Avaunt ye! Get ye gone unto thine own habitations, for I will yield my Soul unto such influences no more!"

As I uttered these words the chains which I had thought had bound me fell asunder and left me free, while the dark shapes rolled like a foul mist away, leaving me standing alone in the dark pit.

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How long I remained in the darkness I know not, but it seemed a long time, for my thoughts travelled over and over again through all the events of my Earth life and my experiences in the Spirit World. My memory gave me back picture after picture, till I could bear the recollections no longer, and I arose to wander through the darkness and find whether there was no outlet to my prison.

Round and round the black, rocky walls I wandered, but there was no possible means of escape that I could find. It appeared to me that I thus wandered in the darkness for what must have been weeks of earthly time. Nothing could I see but myself and the black rocks around me; no sound broke the stillness but the sound of my own voice as I called from time to time, in hopes that some other voice would answer me, yea, even though it might be the voice of the Dark Angel himself.

At last, in despair, I sat down upon the hard ground, and the oblivion of sleep fell upon my senses, rendering me for a time unconscious of my terrible position.

After a long sleep I awoke to hear a voice calling me, which I recognized to be that of Mansur. It appeared to come from above me, and said:

"Aha! Ho, Ahrinziman! Art thou indeed enjoying thy slumbers in this fair Kingdom which our great Master hath given thee? Dost thou enjoy thy sovereignty over the only things in this land which thou art fit to control? Or doth thy curiosity prompt thee to see a little more of the wondrous sphere of which thou hast become an inhabitant? Behold, the Dark Angel summons thee unto his presence, that he may gauge the value of the service thou didst offer him."

Mansur laughed, as though my condition afforded him much amusement, and then in answer to my inquiries as to how I was to obey the Dark Angel's summons, he let down a rope, up which I climbed till I found myself standing beside him on an extensive plateau of hard soil, plentifully bestrewn with ashes.

The thick, heavy atmosphere above us, the dark night sky and heavy clouds, prevented me from seeing far in any direction, but as I followed my conductor I observed the towers and buildings of a vast city looming through the blackness before us. Here and there great tongues of lurid flame shot upward from the earth, but their light only served to illuminate the space immediately around, showing numberless dark figures of Spirits which danced around the flames and hurried to and fro as though intent upon some business.

As we drew near the city I saw that it resembled closely a great capital of the Eastern Empire. The mighty domes of the Palaces glowed with the dull crimson of monster fires within, and from the lofty towers flaring beacons of blood red light flung their rays across the dark plains. At every step the feet sank deep

into the thick ashes of burnt out passions which strewed the ground, and the close stifling sulphurous smoke that rolled upwards in great clouds continually was scorching as the breath of a colossal furnace.

Myriads of Spirits of every shade of color and every race of people passed us, engaged in every variety of task, and in every condition of abject misery it was possible to conceive. Some served as beasts of burden to their more powerful fellows, and were driven on with savage blows and imprecations. Others were tormented by those around them, that their contortions of agony might amuse the spectators.

Everywhere and on all the buildings there was the same stamp of foulness and ruin and decay. The stones of the street seemed to ooze with blood, and the walls to drip with it. The whole fearful scene was lit up by the flaring beacons on the lofty towers, as they flashed their red light through the all pervading darkness.

Before the inner courtyard of the largest Palace I beheld an immense square, wherein an enormous multitude of Spirits congregated, as though awaiting the arrival of some powerful personage. The interior of the square was arranged like a vast amphitheatre. At one side there was a throne, which glowed like burnished copper. It was supported by black marble pillars, and approached by a flight of fifty marble steps. At the sides of each step there knelt the headless figure of a Spirit; the heads, which had evidently been struck from the bodies with a scimitar, were placed between the knees of the figures. Impassive and motionless they knelt, and but for the eyes which moved at times, as though watching those around them, I should have imagined that they were mere images of stone. To my inquiring glance Mansur replied:

"These Spirits represent a pleasing pastime indulged in by our Master, the Dark Angel, during his Earthly existence. These Spirits were all captives in war, and at a festival such as this we are about to attend, the Dark Angel, then Emperor of an Eastern Kingdom, of great power, caused these men to be bound in a kneeling position such as you see them in now, and directed that the most skillful swordsmen of his army should ride towards them at full speed and with their scimitars sever the head from the body at a single stroke, and any swordsman who failed to cut off the head at the first blow was at once decapitated himself as a clumsy bungler, unfit for his master's service. These figures you see here are but the remaining few of the many thus killed. They

were once numbered by hundreds, but gradually, as the thirst for vengeance upon their conqueror died out of their hearts, they passed out of these dominions, and the mere Astral shells they left behind became, as you will see, a decoration of our Master's Palace."

He pointed to the Palace behind, and looking intently at it I saw with a shudder that the whole front was garnished at a distance of a few feet apart, with decaying Spirit bodies of men, all headless and all kneeling like those upon the steps, the horrible appearance they presented in their mouldering, repulsive condition being indescribably revolting. I wondered it did not make the Dark Angel shudder every time he entered his Palace to see these gruesome sentinels lining his walls. And yet the rest of the building was after all in keeping with this fantastically horrible decoration. Queer ghastly shapes were outlined on it everywhere, and silhouetted in shades of grey and crimson upon the black stones.

I was still examining the fearful Palace when a heavy black curtain that hung before the principal door was drawn aside by invisible hands, and as the glare of fiery light within the Palace lit up the entrance, I saw a strange procession come out.

First there came a motley mass of Spirits who seemed mere slaves attending on the Emperor. These flung down what looked like the skins of wild beasts torn reeking from the living animal, to serve as a carpet for the Emperor and his suite. Next there came a band of minstrels with cymbals and harps in their hands, but as every instrument was out of tune, every string either twisted or broken, and every cymbal cracked, the noise they extracted was a torture to the ear. Nevertheless they played on to the delight of the Emperor, who seemed to enjoy the annoyance this ear-splitting symphony inflicted upon the more sensitive nerves of those around him. A great many Spirits, whose dignity of bearing proclaimed them personages of importance, accompanied the Emperor, who towered over all around him, not only in the magnificance of his stature and the proportions of his figure, but also in his intellectual powers. His robes were of a deep purple, almost black, and with a crimson border that looked as though it had been dyed in human blood. Upon his head he wore a Crown of Flame, that flickered or grew bright as the softer or fiercer emotions stirred his Soul. In the front of the Crown there gleamed a blood-red Star, like a gigantic ruby, whose rays shot out like spears dipped in blood.

By the side of this Spirit whom I at once recognized as the Dark Angel, there walked another Spirit, almost as tall and almost as powerful, whose dress resembled the other's in all respects save that his crown glittered like a Crown of Steel, and his star was green as an emerald, and the bordering of his robe had a green shimmer like the scales of a serpent's body.

From the shoulders of each of these two Spirits there rose what seemed to my eyes like folded wings of dark gossamer. At first I thought they grew to the shoulders, but on a closer examination I saw that they were but a part of the drapery.

How can I describe the faces of these two powerful dark Spirits? How find mere words to express at once the all pervading wickedness, the stamp of sensuality, of cruelty, of hatred to all things on Earth, or in Heaven and Hell, that was impressed upon their countenances? Or how describe the subtle charm they seemed to exercise over all around them? How can I show to mortal eyes the strange perfection of form and feature, that was yet so indefinitely marred by the hideousness of the Souls within? The language of man seems poor and expressionless when one seeks to show by its aid the ethereality and yet the tangibility of the Spirit body, the strange likeness and yet unlikeness to the mortal form, the powerfulness of the personality and yet the aerial nature of its envelope. Only those who have once seen a glimpse of these angels of the Dark Spheres can fully realize how subtle and how great is at once the attraction and repulsion which they exercise over all those who behold them.

Beside these powerful beings, whose evil natures were so colossal as to raise them above all around them, the other dark Spirits seemed mere insignificant impersonations of wickedness, and I realized at last what a King in Hell must mean! To my eyes the Angel of the Blood Red Star seemed so much above even his companion angel that I took him to be none other than Ahriman himself, the great Prince of Evil, and I said so to Mansur.

"Nay, Ahrinziman, thou art wrong. Those who would endow the great PRINCIPLE of Evil with a personality are wrong. He hath no more a form or shape which can be discerned by mortal mind, or personified in the image of a man, than hath the great principle of Good, whom men designate the Supreme God. No eye, be it of mortal or of Spirit, hath ever seen them, and of their ultimate nature none can tell, since all alike are ignorant of it. The Angels of Paradise worship the Divine Idea of Goodness

under the name and symbol of 'ORMUZD,' even as we in these dark spheres bow ourselves and yield up our wills to the great principle of Evil whom we call 'AHRIMAN.' And in doing so is it not enough for us with our limited powers to know that we choose thereby the Upward or the Downward path? Can we hope that to our strivings after Truth all Knowledge can at once be revealed? Man rushes too often to hasty conclusions, formed from the imperfect glimpses he hath seen of these Angels of Light and Darkness, and those whom we have thought to be the All Powerful Supreme God, or the great Embodiment of Evil, were but Angels of either the Light or Dark Spheres, such beings, in fact, as are before us now, whose mighty force of will when exercised either for Good or Evil compels all lesser wills to bend before their decrees.

"The Angels of Light mine eyes have not beheld since the days of mine own youth on Earth, when I was vouchsafed dim glimpses of their glorious forms. For thou mayest know that I was dedicated unto the Priesthood. Temptation assailed me, and I fell, transgressing my vows and fleeing at last from the Temple where I served. Then did the love of occult knowledge appeal to mine ambitions, and led me yet further astray, till the serpent of Evil—as men call their own base desires in the hope that they thus transfer a share of their responsibility to the personification of the Evil principle—extinguished the good, and only the charms of the senses now allure me. The only Angels I can see are such as these; yet do I know that in the bright spheres there are Angels the glory of whose Kingdoms no words of man can paint."

"Are these angels, then, a separate creation from man?" I asked. "It hath been taught that the Angels in Heaven rebelled against 'ORMUZD' and were cast forth. Are these Beings before us some of those fallen Angels?"

"Thou mayest call them fallen Angels if thou dost desire, for if a man sin doth not the Angel that is within him fall into subjection to his lower nature? But if thou dost mean that these were ever angels dwelling in the Heaven of the Bright Spheres, then I tell thee No. For no conquest is possible there. The very harmony by which they exist, and which is the very essence of the difference between them and us, forbids aught of contest in their Spheres. These Angels of Darkness, like Kindred Angels of Light, are alike the offspring of mortality. All have once known

material life upon some planet, but in ages so remote that there are no records left to man of their histories.

"It hath been told to me, but I know not whether it be true, since I know only what the experiences of the Dark Spheres can teach, that the Dark Angels do in time cast off the scales of Darkness and arise from sin, and through paths whose ways are extended beyond our power to follow they ascend at last to the state of the Bright Angels, and reign in the glorious realms of the Golden Star. But inasmuch as the evil they have wrought hath been colossal, even so must the path of their repentance be colossal in its difficulties, and the sum of their atonement almost beyond the power of our thoughts to conceive. Even for such as I am the path of Repentance seems so long and hard, stretching as it does through all the many centuries in which I have lived and sinned, that though there are times when I turn my longing eyes towards it, in weariness of the scenes around me here, I hesitate and shrink back from its difficulties and its infinite toil and suffering. The gross pleasures of my senses still enthrall me, and even my thirst for the higher knowledge of the Spheres of Light cannot draw me to the path by which alone I can hope to win it. If at times my Divine Soul is awakened by the thought of the unexplored wonders that the Light Spheres must contain, and which my intellect ever tells me would repay me for all my sufferings, my animal Soul drowns the pure whisperings with its fierce clamorings for those gross pleasures which only the Earth can afford to it, and again and yet again I return to Earth and seek the control of an Earthly body as a means of gratifying the all potent demands of that baser self which is too strong for the higher aspirations of my better nature. Thus do I chain myself within these spheres. Thus have I sunk to where I dwell now, and if I seek to rise it can only be by drawing up with me step by step all those whom I have drawn down. Their number is legion, and each one is as a great load of iron that I must raise even as I raise myself. NOT ONE can I neglect or leave behind.

"Wonder not, then, that I stand as one stands shivering on the banks of an icy stream, hesitating to plunge into that cleansing flood which flows over difficulties and through lands of suffering which it appalls me to contemplate. And if it must be thus with me, such as I am, who though, as ye may think, have sinned almost past redemption, what must be the task of Repentance to

these mighty Rulers? What the periods of time through which they will have to labor?"

"And yet it hath been taught by certain of our Prophets that there was ultimate redemption even for the fallen Angels. The Prophet Zerdusht, whom some have deemed to be the re-incarnation of the great Zoroaster himself, taught even that it was so."

"Yea, and of a truth he was a wondrous teacher and a mighty Prophet. I wonder not that men thought him the ancient founder of the Persian Religion come to Earth again, for in my wanderings o'er the Earth Plane I have many a time and oft stayed my flight to listen to his teachings, and when I did so I ever beheld the Spirit of the mighty Zoroaster himself enveloping Zerdusht as with a mantle, and inspiring him with the thoughts to which he gave utterance. And yet even Zerdusht could scarce conceive how stupendous a task Redemption must prove unto these Dark Angels. The mortal sight ever dimmed the perfection of the Spiritual vision, and though he grasped much of the truths imparted unto him, yet a certain measure of their most subtle essence was of necessity lost. Moreover Zerdusht, like all Prophets, started with certain beliefs founded upon the Earth; recorded teachings of the great Zoroaster which of necessity partook of the imperfections of those Earthly conditions under which they were given. For, great as was the Founder of the Religion of thine own Father's country, oh Ahrinziman, neither he nor any Prophet of any race could entirely rise above that cloud of materiality which ever obscures in a greater or less degree the vision of those on Earth who seek to penetrate the mysteries of the Higher Spheres. So long as Man the Spirit preserves any ties to the Earthly body he has inhabited, so long will its Earthly nature obscure the clearness of his Spiritual sight, and those seekers after knowledge who have thought to wander through the Spirit World and view its wonders and its mysteries with their Spiritual eyes while they yet remained in the Earthly envelope in its integrity, have fallen into yet greater errors than any others, because the dual nature of the sight they thus exercised served to confuse their vision of both sides of life. Like a couple of weights hung at either end of a floating stick these two forms of sight weigh down both faculties of the mind at once, and even as it would be impossible for either end of the stick to rise into the air or float on the surface of the water while thus weighted; so

the mind, embarrassed by the two forms of sight, sinks beneath waves of error and confusion."

"But," said I in astonishment, "doth not a clairvoyant in the flesh, whose Spiritual sight is for the time unveiled, behold Spiritual things while yet attached unto his Earthly body? Have not I myself wandered through the spheres while thus attached to my body by a magnetic thread?"

Mansur laughed a low, soft laugh as he replied: "Thou mayest have wandered through the Earth Plane, and even have caught a glimpse of the second Spheres that lie above and below the Earth Plane, but thou didst not pass higher or lower than its first circles. Thou didst imagine without doubt that thou didst visit Spheres of wondrous exaltation when thou didst behold thy visions in the Temple, but in very truth till all ties between Man and Earth be severed the Soul of man cannot penetrate beyond this second Sphere, which like a twin belt of light and dark encircles the great Earth Plane. What the clairvoyant beholds are the scenes of the higher or lower Spheres projected upon his mental sight like pictures from the MINDS of SPIRITS who dwell in those Spheres. For the time being these Spirits so dominate thy mental vision that the sense of thine own individuality is lost, and thou dost imagine that it is THOU who seest with thine own eyes the scenes these Spirits looked upon. Thou mayest say that thou art taken in spirit into these scenes, and in one sense it would be true, but thy Spirit doth not travel from earth to them. When thou wert in the Temple this controlling mind was either that of the Priest who stood by thy side while thou wert in the trance condition, or that of some Spirit in close accord with him. It might even be that the minds of both Priest and Spirit influenced thee at once, if they were both in accord with each other and with thee. With Jelal-ûd-dîn it was I who projected the images upon thy mind, for I so dominated Jelal-ûd-dîn that in his studies he had learned to sink his own will altogether and keep his mind in abeyance while thou wert in thy trance. He knew enough to know how great is the need for such passivity in those who surround the Earthly clairvoyant. Thus his mind became for the time as colorless as a globe of clear water, and had it not been that death intervened between us I should, through thine aid, have been able to give him the teachings he sought, and shown through pictures which I would have projected upon thy mind, the true conditions of Spirit life in those spheres which I have myself beheld.

"As for thee, Ahrinziman, thou shalt behold the Spirit World for thyself, and shall wander in spheres where I, alas! may not enter. I have consulted the stars on thy behalf, and lo! I perceive that thy Star is already in the ascendant. As for Jelal-ûd-dîn and myself, our paths lie yet through darkened ways. In my control of him I dragged his moral nature down for the satisfaction of mine animal passions, even while I elevated his intellectual powers, and Jelal-ûd-dîn I must raise ere I can take one upward step myself. We are alike wallowing in the mire of our own corrupt desires, and I question whether either of us will ever have a sincere wish to rise to better things."

He spoke as though he was uttering his own thoughts aloud rather than addressing me, and I could see that he had almost forgotten my presence.

CHAPTER XI

MANSUR'S SACRIFICE TO SAVE ME

Our further conversation was interrupted by a burst of the ear-splitting music, which announced that the sport was about to begin. The two Angels having ascended the marble steps, and seated themselves upon two bronze seats in the form of winged beasts, an immense canopy of black and crimson was held above their heads by a number of slaves. At a signal from the Angel of the Red Star the arena became filled with savage animals, or rather the spiritual counterparts of what had been such animals in Earth life.

They appeared to rise from the ground as though they had been imprisoned in it, and at once, and with great ferocity, attacked each other, while the dark, degraded spirits who formed the spectators began excitedly to wager themselves and such possessions as they had upon the chances of the different brutes they had selected.

This part of the entertainment was, however, of short duration; the real interest of the show was yet to come.

As soon as victory had declared itself in favor of one of the animals, it was at once caught in a big net and drawn to one

side of the enclosure, and when the last contest between brute and brute was over a number of human spirits were driven like cattle into the enclosure, the nets were withdrawn from the savage spirit animals, and a fierce contest between them and the spirit men took place, closely resembling similar contests on Earth, only that as one brute after another was killed fresh ones were brought from the caverns below and let loose upon the unhappy men till the arena looked like one vast shambles.

Here no quarter was given, nor expected, and both sides fought till their antagonists were a mere mass of bloody fragments, even as I had seen on the occasion of the conflict between the animals of the Astral Plane.

I was still watching with feelings of mingled aversion and surprise, when Mansur touched my arm, and drawing me aside from the rest of the throng, led me to a small cavern which seemed hollowed out of the black earth beneath the crowded arena.

My conductor's manner had undergone a considerable change since he had discoursed so philosophically with me a short time before. He was visibly agitated, and seemed torn by two conflicting emotions, one of which caused him to wish to do me a friendly turn, and the other to fear the possible consequences to himself.

"See, Ahrinziman," said he, "the Dark Angel is in much wrath with thee, for he looked to draw Artemisia here with thee, and now he thinks she will escape him. Thou wilt be called upon shortly to take thy place with others in yonder scene of savagery. Thou wilt have to depend upon thine own powers for victory. But seek not to fight them with the weapon of thy brutish strength, for, lo! in mere brute force the lower animal is superior. Fight them with the weapons of thy intellect and thy will. Subjugate them by the force of thy higher nature, thy stronger Soul!"

He paused and looked around with an expression of furtive cunning ere he continued hurriedly, drawing as he spoke a small slender black wand, not two feet long, from his sleeve and putting it in my hand: "Behold I will even give thee this, the greatest gift anyone could give thee here. See, it is the sceptre that was used by a great Spirit who once dwelt within this sphere, and ruled with a power that transcended even that of our Master the Dark Angel, before whom thou must appear. Long hath the owner of this wand departed from this sphere into higher regions;

he is one of those who hath elected to climb the upward path, despite its toils, but this wand bears yet the influence of his personality, and carries with it the power of his stupendous will. If thou dost hold the point of it in thine hand and suffer the wand itself to rest upon thine arm, under the powerful spell that it doth exercise even these savage brutes must tremble before thee, and even the Dark Angel himself will scarce prevail against thy will.

"I may not say more, for already they come to fetch thee, and I may not be found with thee lest I draw upon myself the anger of our Master."

He thrust his gift into my hand and was gone before I could thank him, and while I was examining the slender wand the little cavern was suddenly invaded by a number of dark spirits of the most revolting type, who came to drag me before the Dark Angel.

Instead of allowing them to seize me, however, I signed to them to stand back, and said that I would follow them if they preceded me.

A savage laugh greeted my suggestion, but when they found that they could not touch me, after making several attacks, they drew back snarling like a pack of wolves, and signed to me to follow them through an opening into the Arena, which brought us out in front of the Dark Angel's throne.

CHAPTER XII

HOW DEATH IS POSSIBLE EVEN IN HELL; MANSUR'S FATE

Strange indeed was the scene upon which mine eyes rested as I stepped into the Arena. The great masses of dark smoke which rose continually from the ground in clouds like steam, hung overhead, and were tinged with the red reflections from the blood-stained ground, and the fiery light from many beacons and flaring torches which blazed on all sides, and were fed, not with material fuel, but with the burning passions of the spirits around me.

What had become of the Souls, the immortal parts of those

who had contended in the battles I had witnessed I knew not, but the mangled remains of their spirit bodies strewed the Arena in all directions. For Mortals must know, that while the Soul is the truly immortal and indestructible part of man (or animal or plant), the mere body in which it is clothed for the time being, whether it be the body of the Earthly stage of life, or the more ethereal envelope that enfolds it during the so-called spiritual stages of existence, is in no sense lasting. The *body* can be destroyed in Spirit life as in Earth life, and its entire destruction is in truth its Death, for it and the Soul can never be united again once they are separated, and a body deprived of its vivifying Soul must disintegrate and be resolved again into the atoms of which it was formed. If the body of a Spirit be so battered and bruised, so rent in pieces that it can no longer serve to shelter the Soul, then by a violent severance between the two the Soul is freed from the Spirit body, just as it would be freed from the Earth body, and passes into yet another stage of its existence, there to re-clothe itself in a fresh body taken from the elements that compose the new sphere in which it finds itself.

The natural life of the Earth body is by far the shortest in duration, and a Spirit body of any sphere may often continue for centuries to serve as the envelope of its Soul, that is, if the Soul remains in a state of development suitable only for that particular sphere. As soon, however, as the Soul is ready for a higher stage of life it must cast off its envelope, be it of the Earth or Spirit spheres, even as a nut casts off its outer husk that the kernel within may be free to expand and grow.

With some Souls these processes of deaths, from that of the Earth body onward, are gentle and gradual, and only like passing through a quiet sleep, to arise in a new sphere clothed in the new body of the Soul. With others, the body is shattered by violence, and torn from the Soul amidst suffering and struggle. Yet in all cases the result to the mere body is the same: it goes to its decay and death, while the Soul it hath released passes onward to a new stage of its immortality.

Thus it will be seen that Death reigns in the Spirit World over the Spiritual envelope of the Soul, even as he reigns on Earth over the Earthly body. And as the Earthly body is destined to return to the elements of the Earth in the form of dust, so does the spiritual envelope return to the elements of each sphere from which it was taken.

Let not those who may read this story of my life and wanderings in the Spirit world wonder that I should describe the Deaths of Spirits. I describe but the deaths of their bodies, as I might describe the death of a mortal body on Earth. Death hath no dominion over the Soul in Earth or Spirit life, but because the sight of one clothed in the garments of Mortality, or of some particular sphere, cannot follow the flight of the Soul as it leaves the envelope which Death hath just claimed for its own, it hath been imagined by some that the Soul exists not, and that all there was of the friend we loved, or the foe we hated, lies in the poor rigid form which Death hath touched and turned into decay.

I knew the body to be a mere shell. My studies had taught me that it was in all respects distinct from my true self. I had parted with one body already. I cared not to linger in so fearful a sphere as this in which I now found myself, and yet, so strong is the attachment between the Soul and its envelope, so great the tenacity with which the two cling together, that as I faced that bloody scene of carnage and thought I also was doomed to such a death as that of those whose remains I saw before me, I grasped yet more firmly the means of escape which Mansur had given me, and turned to face the Prince of Darkness, strong in my determination not to yield to him one inch, until I should be literally overborne by his superior power.

As I raised my eyes to look upon the Dark Angel I saw that the pillars which upheld the canopy above his head were formed of men's bodies, round which huge serpents had twisted their supple forms, and as they met my gaze each serpent opened its jaws and shot out at me its forked tongue, charged with deadly poison, while their green eyes glittered with the reflection of their Master's hatred.

As for the King of Evil himself, he rose to his feet, and pointing at me said in a voice of scornful anger:

"Behold, now, I have prepared a fresh diversion for ye all, for this man is no common knave, like unto those wretched beings whom my beasts have torn to pieces. This is one whose thoughts soar to Heaven and fall back into Hell. This is a man who thought himself fit to be a King, yea, even a King in Hell! Oh, Ye Powers of Darkness, think of it! Imagine this man thinking to reign over aught that lives in these vile lands, when already his heart sickens at the sight of yonder fair scene

before us! When he hath not strength of purpose strong enough to resist a woman's scream of anguish! He asked to reign, and, behold, I gave him yonder dark solitary pit for his Kingdom! the only spot here over which he was fit to reign. He offered me his service, his faithful service, if I would grant him his revenge, and, behold, already he repents him of his bargain, and thinks how he may escape from me. What value, think ye, hath the service of such a man? He vowed to fight for me as a soldier serves his general, but what use could I make of so craven a Soul? With whom can I set him to contend, save these lower brutes, to which his carcass may serve as a plaything and a meal!"

He stamped his foot, and instantly six savage tigers rose through the ground and rushed at me. But I pointed at them my finger, whereon there rested the point of the little wand, and they crouched down before me, growling but submissive, watching me as a cat watches a bird, yet not daring to advance one step. In vain did the dark spirits crowd round and goad them on. In vain did they strive to reach me themselves. A wall seemed to surround me like a ring, and while I kept my determination, and held fast by the wand, none could pass. They hurled themselves at me; they flung spears; they tried to float above me and drop huge stones and masses of burning metal. The demoniacal spectators literally yelled with joy and excitement at the unexpected sport. Multitude after multitude of the Dark Angel's followers gathered round me, and above me, and sought to break through the mystic ring and tear me to pieces. Hordes of wild beasts, and men as savage, gathered from all sides, and it required all the power of my will to hold them at bay and retain my grasp of the wonderful wand. But the taunting words of the Dark Angel had aroused the spirit of the warrior within me, and I felt that I hurled defiance at his head every time he sought to beat down my determination with his own.

In a voice hoarse with passion, he called for legion upon legion of his dark hosts, and against them all the invisible ring around me remained impregnable.

Suddenly a thought struck the Dark Angel, and with a fearful cry of rage he called for the unfortunate Mansur to be brought before him.

"Vile Caitiff!" he cried, "this is thy doing! Thou hast

given unto this man some secret power that enables him to defy me thus. I cannot discern what it is, for a light like unto a diamond Star cometh ever between us, but I know that from thine hand the gift has come. It is thou, traitor, who hath dealt me this blow, and thus do I reward thee: let thy body be torn limb from limb by these creatures that thy pupil yonder doth defy, and may thy wretched carcass be strewn as dust over this dark plain, for thou art no longer fit to serve me."

The unfortunate Mansur, who had been whirled into the presence of his Master by the violence of the will that summoned him, cast one despairing glance at me, and uttered one sharp cry of horror. The next instant he was engulfed in the awful sea of diabolical beings, and ere I could collect my thoughts, or make one effort to save him, he was literally torn into a thousand pieces before mine eyes, the horrible creatures who had slain him fighting with each other over every fragment. I tried to rush to his rescue, and I held out the potent wand before me to try to clear a passage, but it was all over in a moment before I could advance more than a step, and the only effect of my agitated effort was to break the spell around myself, and leave me for the moment defenceless.

Before the dreadful devils who had destroyed Mansur could take advantage of this, however, the Dark Angel with the Green Star interposed on my behalf, and proposed to his companion that they should try their skill at chess, in order to decide who was to dispose of me.

"Behold, this man hath made a good fight," said he. "He hath qualities not unworthy of a foe's steel. I will play thee for his Soul, and if I win thou shalt hand him over to serve me."

"Nay, he shall be my slave; he shall labor in the depths of this earth sphere till that haughty spirit which defied even my power be broken, and he owns me as Master. I will not play thee for him," replied the still furious Angel of the Red Star.

The other fixed his steely eyes upon his companion's face, and said: "Thou dost forget. His vow was to serve thee as a soldier, not as a slave. I pray thee re-consider thy determination not to play for him, for thou canst not enslave him, thou canst only make him serve thee as a soldier serves. He belongs not to thy Kingdom, save in as much as he voluntarily sold himself to thee: thou canst but claim the measure of thy bargain from him."

The Angel of the Red Star rose from his seat once more, and casting down what looked to me like his javelin at the feet of the Angel of the Green Star, he cried out:

"Be it so! Since thou hast thought fit to question the limits of my power we will even play our game for this man's body; for his Soul thou thyself doth say we cannot play, but for the possession of his body, and for the right to such service as he can be forced to give, we will even play. Let the one who wins take him, and then let us fight, not with these paltry toys in mere sport, but in deadly earnest, that we may test whether thou or I are the stronger Angel here; whether I shall take instruction from thee as to what I can do, or whether thou shalt learn to keep silence when I have issued my decrees."

The other Spirit frowned angrily, as he stooped to pick up the gage, then thrusting his own javelin into the head of the bronze figure of a winged beast which supported the throne of the Angel of the fiery Star, he said:

"Let my weapon rest there till I come as a Conqueror over thee, to pluck thee from thy seat, and teach thee that thou dost not reign as the sole King of Hell."

The fiery Crown of the Angel addressed seemed to glow like a circlet of white-hot steel, and dart out its flames like arrows to stab the other while he spoke, but he himself said nothing, but only signed with the old haughty majesty of manner to his foe to seat himself again to begin their game.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE AND MY FATE; THE SECOND DEATH

I shall not enter into all the details of the game the two Dark Angels played, as each contended with almost equal skill. At last a slight chance decided the contest in favor of the Angel of the Green Star.

While the game was in progress I had remained unmolested at the foot of the steps leading up to the throne, while the enor-

mous mass of horrible spirits who had torn my poor friend Mansur to pieces, hung like a cloud of evil vultures around me.

The moment the contest was decided a yell of disappointment and rage rent the air, and the Arena was invaded from all sides by dark spirits, eager to take part in the approaching battle.

With a gesture of haughty contempt the defeated Angel signed to me to take my place under the banner of my new commander, who was already summoning around him his own army of followers. They were easily distinguished from the followers of the Dark Angel of the Red Star, for each spirit bore a spark of green light like the Star worn by their King, while those who followed the Angel of the Blood Red Star carried little sparks of crimson light.

As the Angels parted with looks of hatred and defiance, I saw two magnificent winged horses appear for them to ride, the size of the wings symbolising the all-soaring ambition of their riders.

When the two leaders had mounted these singular steeds a troop of horses, also winged but with much smaller wings, were led out, and upon them were mounted the different generals of both sides. Only one horse had no rider, and to my surprise it was led up to me, and I was directed by my new Master to mount upon its back.

"Thou hast an ambition to be a leader as great as are any of us," said he. "Take then this winged steed and see that thou fight for me in a fashion worthy of the gift."

I bowed to him in reply, and as I vaulted onto the horse's back the pleasure of finding myself once more in possession of one of those noble animals almost made me for the moment forget the horrors of my position and surroundings.

At a signal from the leader, the army of Dark Spirits to which I was now attached drew off from the city which they had entered as invited guests, and took up a position upon the vast black plains beyond. As we rode out under the ponderous dark gateways I saw that the citizen spirits were engaged in all the preparations for withstanding a siege at our hands. If mere hatred could have killed, the glances of furious malignity which they cast upon us, and which our side gave back to them, would have brought the contest to a speedy issue. The spirit in which men on Earth enter upon such a conflict is amity itself compared to that which is aroused in those dark spheres, where the passions

that lead to warfare and bloodshed rage with the fury of madness, and kindle around them the fierce flames of an almost universal conflagration which spreads on all sides with the rapidity of a forest fire, and stays not its destroying march till conquerors and conquered alike are consumed in its fiery clutches, and the vast confines of that mighty sphere are strewn from end to end with the dry ashes of the lives these fires of passion have consumed, and those who survive the conflict reign over an almost depopulated territory, till the constant influx of evil Spirits from the Earthly life peoples their Kingdoms once more.

The constant ebb and flow of life into and out of these dark spheres which is thus caused serves to release many of the unhappy beings, and suffers them to pass into a state where their repentance may bear its fruits, and where, taught by their own sufferings, they may learn pity towards those of others, and mercy for those who are in their power.

I should but sicken and disgust all who may read this story were I to attempt to give any picture of the horrors of the fight which I now witnessed. Let men imagine to themselves what all the horrors of war on Earth really mean, and then add ten-fold to their atrocity and their frightful cruelty, and still their visions will fall far short of the awful realities of the sights I beheld. Passions that were totally unbridled; hatred that was as deep as Hell itself; a savage bestial brutality that was even below that of the brute creation; a thirst for each other's blood which was appalling; a destructive force of magnetic wrath that shattered all around with a violence greater than that of the most powerful explosive known on Earth in these latter days; a heat of anger that literally kindled into flame the very atmosphere, and a strength of determination to conquer that bore down all before it. These marked the struggle, and were almost equally balanced between the two evil Angels, and kept the tide of battle swaying first in favor of one and then of the other.

Not as men fight on Earth, with spears and javelins, with swords and daggers, did these combatants and their soldiers fight. I found that the weapons they wore were merely ornaments, and counterparts worn because they had been used on Earth. As soon as the battle began in earnest the weapons were flung aside, and they assailed each other with tooth and claw, as do the lower animals, so great was their hunger to come into personal touch with their enemy, and rend them as a tiger rends his prey.

As for me, such warfare utterly revolted me. I was borne forward in the first charge upon our enemies, and then, as the rival armies of dark spirits grappled with each other, uttering wild cries of ferocious hate that made the very canopy of Hell resound with the blasphemous imprecations, as the tongues of magnetic flame, like spears of fire, darted around the struggling mass of combatants, and scorched and burnt like red hot knives, I was swept from my winged steed like a force like a perfect tornado of savage hate. I saw the Dark Angel standing up in his stirrups, and hurling upon me the lightning of his wrath, the thunder bolts of his destroying power, and then the great mass of spirits closed around me and trampled over my body, fighting and wrestling with each other and stamping on my prostrate form, till oblivion fell upon my senses and I knew no more.

Thus for the second time did Death the Great Deliverer unlock for me the portals of a new life.

CHAPTER XIV

MY WHITE ANGEL

When I awakened to consciousness again I was lying in the middle of a barren plain, and in the far horizon there was a faint light like the first streak of dawn in the night sky. Around me the ground presented the appearance of the crater of a volcano, whose fires have died out but whose cinders are yet warm with the fire that once kindled them into life. No living being was near me. I was absolutely alone, and as I arose, and shading my eyes with my hand looked towards the dawning light, I became conscious that some strange change had passed over myself.

My form was bent like that of an old man; I could not straighten myself up, and my hands, as I examined them, were shrunk and wrinkled as by extreme old age. I passed my hands over my head, and lo! I was as bald as an infant. My luxuriant black beard was gone; also my features felt sharp, and my cheeks like hollow caves.

Startled and uneasy, I turned to look for some stream in which to behold myself, and saw near my feet a deep dark pool, whose black waters reflected like a mirror my face and form.

Alas! Yes, it was even as I feared. All trace of youth had left me; my wasted, almost fleshless, form was that of an old man; my hollow eyes were dim and sunken, my hands feeble and shaking as though palsied, and my body bent and my steps slow and faltering.

In my surprise and horror I cried aloud to know the meaning of this change, and like a distant echo a woman's soft voice replied to me:

"Oh, my Son! My Son! thou didst live in thy short life of Earth and in the Dark sphere through an amount of passion and experience which comes to most men only with age. Thou didst consume thy youth with fierce desires, and thy manhood with thy hunger for revenge, and the flames of thy passions have burnt up the youth of thy Soul and withered up the beauty of thy Spirit form, so that there is naught left but the dry husk of an old man's form. Yet, Oh, My Son, my beloved Son! If upon the scorched plain which the fierce fires of Earth have devastated there springs up anew a fresher tenderer foliage, a finer, purer vegetation, shall not the wilderness of thy Soul blossom into fresh life, and the dry ashes of thy dead past be hid by the fair flowers whose seeds thou mayest yet sow even in the sad earth of this, the Sphere of Remorse and Repentance? Thy tears of sorrow shall water this dry soil. Thy hands shall labor in its fields until yonder streak of palest dawn shall change to glorious day, and the bare land around shall blossom with the sweet roses of tenderness and love.

"I cannot come to thee, my son, but thou shalt climb the rugged path which leads to me, and in a fair land of golden Hope thou and I shall enjoy the tender joys of the love thou hast never known. Fare thee well, yet think not that I leave thee save only for a time. Fare thee well."

The sweet voice died away, and as it faded I called and called to my White Angel to show me but one glimpse of her dear form. Then upon the dark background of the sky I saw a faint flickering reflection, so pale, so shadowy it was like a figure traced in mist, yet I knew it to be my sweet Mother's lovely form, and as with joy I saluted it it faded gradually away, and I stood upon the dark plain once more alone.

Wearily and sadly did I wander on and on through that barren land. No fair flowers gladdened my eyes; no green tree afforded me the sense of shelter; no fresh stream of living water sparkled forth to slake my thirst, no sweet fruits to stay my hunger. All was desolate, blossomless, fruitless, and lonely.

At last I reached the foot of a low range of hills, and as, after many a stumble and many a slip I dragged my feeble limbs by rugged rock-strewn pathways to the top of them, I saw far below me on the further side a still grey sea, whose quiet waves lapped gently on the sandy shores with a faint murmur that was soothing to my weary heart. The grey streak of dawn was still before me on the horizon of that strange sea, and clouds of pale grey mist like wandering shadows chased each other slowly across the darkened sky.

As I sat resting upon the hilltop faint pictures began to appear between me and the grey floating clouds, even as in the far-off days of my boyhood the fair visions of my youth had done when I had lain upon some grassy hill and watched the evening sky.

Dim at first, the pictures grew gradually clearer, and I recognized that they showed to me the drama of my life.

I saw not alone the events of my Earth existence, but the subtle influences of the Spirit world that were at work to mould each thought and shape each action. I saw my Father and my Mother as they met at first: he surrounded by all the influences of the ambitious Conqueror, the Angel of the Blood Red Star and his cohort of fierce followers who had hovered around the battlefields of Earth, and shared in the excitement of each contest.

Then I saw my Mother, as one enveloped in a veil of silver gossamer, the pure spirits of the Silver Star surrounding her like a cloud of white Angels, with outspread protecting wings. I saw her drawn within the influence of my Father's surroundings, and shadowed by the dark wings of the destroying Angel, while with bowed heads and drooping pinions the White Angels seemed to hover sadly near her.

I saw Queen Artemisia, and I read in her heart all the passionate sense of injustice, of slighted love, of wounded pride, that raged like a tempest, and I beheld the Dark Angel as he bent and whispered in her ear.

I saw my Father, beset by his love and his anxiety, building the fatal secret passage, and cementing its secrecy with the blood of the poor slave he had caused to be murdered. I saw

the exultant face of the Dark Spirit as he welcomed this miserable victim of the King's suspicious fears to his dominion, to use him as a tool to help on the drama with which he was amusing himself. I saw it progress step by step as the ill-concealed devotion to my Mother fanned the flame of Artemisia's wrath to a yet fiercer glow.

I saw my Mother's death and my own birth, and noted that while her pure Soul was borne away by the White Angels to their sphere, the shadow of the Dark Angel's wings rested upon the child that was half her's and half El Jazid's son.

I saw that as I grew to manhood the restless desires, the selfishly ambitious hopes, the instinct to rule over my fellows and force them to give me the lion's share of everything, sprang up like giant weeds and twined around the delicate shoots of pure and holy thoughts which the Angels of the snow white Silver Star had sown ere I was born, side by side with the seeds of evil sown by the Dark Angels. I saw the pure Spirits striving through the medium of the good Priest Abubatha to turn my thoughts from earthly joys, and I saw that as men play a game of chess with the light and dark pieces to represent the forces they control, so did the light and dark Angels strive for possession of my Soul, each limited in every act and every move they made by the unalterable laws of the Spirit World, in accordance with which all the Universe is upheld.

I saw the inducements of the one set of Spirits presented to my mind, and then the counter-attractions of the other, and noted how the inherited tendencies of my nature inclined the balance to the one side or the other; and because I was the son of El Jazid the Warrior, rather than the son of Cynthia the dreamy enthusiast, I saw the scale of my desires weigh down towards the Dark Angel and the gifts he held in his hand.

Every little incident of my life was reproduced, and when I came to the scene wherein I had stood beneath the date trees in the Desert at the parting of the ways, I saw that the fair Spirit of my Mother had stood at the end of the shining path, and pointed out to me the Palace of Parsagherd, and the Father who mourned ever for me as one dead and lost to him; but before I could see that tender Mother's Spirit the Dark Angel had drawn his mantle between mine eyes and the fair vision, and had turned my thoughts to him and to the dark mysteries he offered to unveil.

I beheld that the scales of Good and Evil weighed down and down on the side of darkness, till I sank down into a dark gulf. And for a time I could see no more.

But methought that the White Angels bowed their heads and veiled their faces as though they wept for the Soul that had sunk down, and I bowed mine own head and wept bitter tears of shame as I thought on the deep degradation of the life I had led with Jelal-ûd-dîn, and the gross desires of my animal Soul to which I had yielded when I had followed the darkened pathway by his side.

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How long I mourned over my sins I know not, but when at last I uncovered my head and looked up I saw that the pictures of my life were visible once more.

I now observed the figure of Mansur hovering around Jelal-ûd-dîn and myself, inspiring our thoughts and controlling our actions, and at times taking possession of Jelal-ûd-dîn's body and using it as though it was the mortal envelope of his own Spirit. Thus he seemed to enjoy again and again all the sensual pleasures of the Earth life, and this I knew to be his meaning when he had told me in the Dark Sphere that for the gratification of his base desires he had dragged down the Soul of Jelal-ûd-dîn to his own level.

Me I saw that he could not thus control. My body he could not enter, even when he had withdrawn the Spirit from it, but as again and again I yielded to the temptations to degrade myself, I saw with a shudder that the barrier that kept him back from my body grew thinner and thinner. Terrible as I had thought the stamp of evil which the countenance of Mansur wore when I beheld him in the Spirit World, it appeared even more terrible to my thoughts now when I perceived that it had been his influence which was dragging Jelal-ûd-dîn and myself down and down to the dark Kingdoms.

I thought of the strange contradictions of the man's character and the curious things he had told me, and I wondered whether they had been true or false.

As if in answer to my thoughts, a voice within me replied that in all which he had told me he had spoken the truth, for while the animal Soul of the man had grown so strong with over-indulgence that it acted as an almost hopeless clog upon all the

efforts of the higher Soul to rise into the pure atmosphere of truth, yet the innate love for truth which dominated him in all those things which pertained to this animal Soul enabled him to recognise a scientific truth when it was presented to his mind, and to sift from it all those husks of error which it had gathered in the Earth and lower spheres. Thus on the pathways of knowledge he was truly an efficient guide, while on those of morality his controlling influence led only to destruction.

I then asked where was Mansur? What was the fate of his Soul?

A dark shadow, black as a cloud of night, appeared on the grey background of the sky, and showed the bent form of a man whose head was bowed unto the earth, while his clasped hands were held aloft in supplication unto Heaven.

Page by page, picture by picture did my life's story unroll itself before mine eyes, showing me how mine own actions had influenced the lives around me, and been influenced in turn by them, and how that ceaseless contest between the light and dark Angels caused first the one side of man's nature and then the other to be influenced and developed, and how the indulgence of man's passions caused the scales of good or evil to rise or fall.

The passionate Artemisia, dominated entirely by her desire for revenge, flitted across the pictures like a restless accursed Fury, her absorption in the one idea stunting all the other faculties of her mind till its balance was destroyed, and that inharmony of thought was produced which men term insanity. I saw with a keen pang of remorse how my hatred had fed hers, and heaped fresh fuel upon the furnace of her angry passions, till the death of her son at my hands had snapped the last link between her and the power of sober reasoning, and she had in veritable truth not been responsible for her actions when she had shut Zuleika into the secret passage and sat dabbling her hands in my life's blood.

I realized through what an awful agony of suffering Artemisia had passed ere she reached that last stage, and I saw how dark and evil had been my own thirst for revenge upon the unhappy mother. When the picture appeared in which I had gathered around the unfortunate Selim the tormenting demons of the dark spheres, I saw a ray of light as from a star dart down to me, and the form of my own Mother appear as though she stood afar off and with clasped hands and eyes full of tears plead to me to think of her, and of what motherhood meant to woman, and bidding

me, by the sacredness of my own mother's sufferings, to spare this poor mother whose son was in my power one further pang of suffering at my hands.

The full, deep meaning of the picture was clear to my senses now, and I saw not alone one woman pleading unto man for mercy unto woman, one mother speaking in the sacred name of motherhood, but the Spirit of the murdered Cynthia pleading for mercy upon her murderer, and atoning for the unconscious wrong which she had done her when she had seemed to rob Artemisia of a heart that never could have been wholly hers. I saw the little seed of compassion and forgiveness sown by my mother's gentle hands, and beheld its first green tender blade shoot into life as I turned away and abandoned my long nursed desire for vengeance.

The pictures then showed me myself wandering in the dark kingdom of the Evil Angel, that I might learn for myself to what extreme ends the unchecked indulgence in passions such as mine lead men, and what would be the state of society where each one exacted the full measure of his revenge for wrongs suffered at the hands of his neighbor.

They showed me Mansur struggling between his awakening desire for Good and his enjoyment of things that were evil; drawn to myself by his pleasure in finding a mind that could understand and appreciate the intellectual hunger of his Soul, yet unable to resist the temptation to draw me down into the same gulf in which he was. They showed him to me as he watched the stars in the Spiritual Heavens and noted how the path of my Soul's star tended ever in an upward direction till it hung above that of the dark King of Evil himself.

And to the cunning mind of Mansur came the thought that were he to aid me I might perchance help to draw him also up with me out of the power of the Dark Angel, of whose service he had grown weary. Then had come the moment of my danger, and the sudden impulse in Mansur to give me that strange wand, whose virtues were valueless to all in the darkest sphere, since their low state made it impossible for any of the dark dwellers there to retain their hold upon it. I was not so low as those around me, and Mansur believed that it would be possible for me to handle it, and had given it to me while the good impulse was yet strong upon him. His own subsequent fate, terrible as it seemed, was nevertheless the opening of a door through which his Soul had found the release it craved, and already his foot was on

the lowest step of that long and difficult ladder by which he would yet mount to the higher life of the Soul, though even as he himself had said, the distance he would have to climb, and the multitudes he must raise step by step with himself, might well daunt the courage of the stoutest heart.

CHAPTER XV

ARTEMISIA VISITED AGAIN; FORGIVEN; WE VISIT SELIM; I VISIT ZULEIKA AND BAMBA

From Mansur my thoughts travelled to my father, and then my pictures showed him to me in the grey robes of a penitent. His kingly dress was gone; his haughty pride humbled, and he seemed slowly and sadly striving to undo the mistakes of his earthly life. Near him I saw the figure of the poor slave whom he had ordered to be killed. El Jazid appeared to be stooping over this figure as though to raise him up, and in so doing the vision faded from my sight.

Again did the picture of Artemisia rise before my sight, and as I gazed upon it in sorrow and remorse a voice spoke to me, saying:

“Arise and go unto this woman, thy once enemy. Her heart like thine hath softened, and she will hear thee now. Behold, thou didst rob her of her son; restore him to her sight. Thou canst do this, for thou canst draw him to thee on the Earth Plane, and there thou and Artemisia and her son shall meet yet once again.”

I looked upon the vision of the Queen, and I saw that she sat yet by the stormy sea of passion; but its waves rolled unheeded to her feet, the wild wind was hushed, and the dark clouds hung motionless overhead, unnoticed by her, for her head was bowed upon her breast, her face was hidden by her clasped hands, and she was softly, sadly weeping.

As I thought, with a new born feeling of compassion, of her misery, the image of myself was again projected upon the mirror-like atmosphere around her, and my voice seemed to reach her

ears, for she started up and gazed with trembling, half affrighted looks upon my reflection.

"Oh, Queen Artemisia!" said I slowly, "great hath been the sin between us both. I, as well as thou, have done evil, and I am come to ask thy forgiveness for my share; and inasmuch as my hand did rob thee of thy son I seek now to restore him unto thee. Behold, if thou wilt meet me upon the great Earth Plane I will draw thy son unto thee, that thou and he may meet once more."

Even as I spoke I felt myself rise from the hill-top whereon I stood and float towards the distant globe of the Earth, which hovered like a Star far away on the horizon.

As I alighted upon it I knew that I was in the Palace of Par-sagherd, and saw that I had entered the haunted rooms.

My half-brother Selim was seated upon the same queer-looking attempt at a throne which I had seen before, and in no respect was his own appearance changed from the strange mixture of age and childishness. I read in his thoughts that he regarded his hurried visit to me in the Astral Plane, when I had so nearly consigned him to the tender mercies of its horrible inhabitants, as a disagreeable dream, a nightmare vision, nothing more; and that he felt pleased to know that he was still surrounded by scenes with which he was familiar. To his eyes the Palace presented much the same appearance as in his earth life; the change and decay I saw were not visible to him.

Artemisia had arrived before me, and now stood before her son, a dark figure with outstretched hands and pleading eyes. The wildness had gone from her expression though the face was still scarred and wrinkled with the force of the passions that had raged in her heart. Round her figure I saw a faint shimmer of steel grey light, that enveloped her as with a veil, and changed the intense blackness of despair that had enwrapped her before, into the faint semblance of a garment of hope.

She stood beside her son, so close in fact that I thought he must have felt the wild beating of her heart, and yet I saw that she was quite invisible to him. He could no more see the spirit Mother who stood beside him than could a mortal have seen himself. He was in his Astral body, that first garment of the Spirit which is almost mortal in its materiality, and she was a Spirit from the lower sphere, and, as such, two degrees further removed from materiality than her son. For whether a Spirit

ascends or descends as he leaves the encircling belt of the Earth Plane, he leaves behind him more and more of the Earth's materiality, and becomes less and less easily visible to the eyes of mortals or of Earth-bound Spirits. To become visible it is necessary that he should clothe himself in the degree of materiality belonging to each sphere which intervenes between him and the Earth.

As I saw the look of disappointment and hopelessness that passed over Artemisia's face when she discovered that her son could not see her, could not even feel that she was near him, I understood all at once what my part was to be, and how I could restore her to her son if only for a short time.

The magnetic aura which had enabled the Dark Angel to show himself to Jelal-ûd-dîn during my Earth life was not alone a property of the Earthly body. It belonged to the spiritual organism; it was a characteristic of myself. Only the grossest part of that magnetic essence had been cast off with the Earth body, and though I could no longer have served as the medium through whom a Spirit could manifest his presence to a mortal, my aura enabled spirits of a degree above or below myself to become visible to those who were in an Earth-bound condition such as Selim's. Moreover, in the atmosphere of the Earth Plane the antagonism between my magnetic sphere and that of Artemisia was not so acutely felt as in the more etherealized spheres to which we really belonged, and therefore Artemisia was no longer shut away from me by so impassable a barrier. I could approach her, and as I did so, and the magnetic aura of my Spirit enveloped her as a cloud, she became suddenly visible to her son, appearing before him much as an apparition appears to mortals who have imagined there was no one present but themselves. And like a mortal under similar circumstances Selim was at first startled, almost alarmed, then joy at the sight of the beloved Mother overcame all other feelings, and as Artemisia, overcome with a mixture of shame and pleasure, sank at her son's feet, he too knelt down and clasped her in his arms, while I bowed my head and turned away my eyes, that I might not intrude upon the sacredness of their meeting.

When Artemisia had returned to the sphere in which she dwelt I resolved to go and see whether Zuleika was still sleeping where I had left her. When I approached the secret passage I

perceived that she was no longer either asleep or alone. The Spirit of the faithful Bamba was sitting where Zuleika had lain, and in the arms of this poor, faithful slave lay Zuleika, as she had lain cradled in them when a helpless infant. Bamba knew all the petty weaknesses, the selfish frivolity, the heartless vanity of Zuleika's nature. She saw with the clear eyes of the Spirit all the bitter change that had passed over the once lovely face and form, and she knew it to be but the outward stamp of the degradation of the Soul. Yet Zuleika was ever to her the child whom she had nursed, the laughing girl whom she had tended and loved, and the fair woman whom she had served, and for whose life she had laid down her own in the burning desert. Bamba's love had never changed; her faith in Zuleika had never swerved, and she was even dearer to her now in the hour of her misery and degradation than when the one had been almost a Queen and the other a poor slave.

I read all the nobility of Bamba's thoughts and recognized the purity of her Soul, and involuntarily I bowed to the poor slave as I would not have bowed before one of Earth's proudest Queens. And as I looked up lo! a golden star shone over Bamba's head, and a thin circlet like a crown of gold hovered for one moment in the air.

As for Zuleika, she was weeping like a child in Bamba's arms. But I approached not to her, nor sought to make my presence known, for I saw that she wept, not over the ruin and the sin she had helped to sow around her, but only over the loss of that beauty she had so highly prized. Not yet would I speak to her, for not yet was she able to understand how dead was my love for her, and yet how keen my pity.

CHAPTER XVI

DAWN AT LAST ; I AM VISITED BY A SPIRIT OF THE
GOLDEN STAR; MY GUIDE TEACHES ME THE
FOLLY OF AGGRANDIZEMENT; FALSE KINGS
AND TRUE KINGS; FALSE RELIGIONS
AND TRUE RELIGIONS

When I returned to the mountain top which I had left I saw that the first rays of the rising sun were beginning to light up the dark Earth around me, and to touch with a golden glory the tips of the wavelets on the grey sea, while on the spot where I had sat a long ray of golden light rested, like a messenger of Hope from the Angels of the Golden Star.

As I reached the hill once more I saw that a majestic Spirit in a long robe of grey spangled with little golden stars awaited me, and as he rose from his seat to greet me I noticed that to his drapery there were attached a pair of golden and grey wings of the most ethereal, transparent beauty, while on his forehead there gleamed a Golden Star. The countenance was majestic and beautiful in the extreme, and the figure tall and commanding. The type of feature was that of an Eastern; the complexion a pale olive, the eyes dark and soft in their velvety darkness, expressing at once power and tenderness. In his hand he held out to me what looked like the very wand which Mansur had given me in the Dark Angel's Kingdom, and which had vanished mysteriously.

"Behold," said he with a grave smile, "I am that Spirit of whom Mansur spoke unto thee when he gave thee this wand. Wonder not that it disappeared when it had served its purpose, for it existed not save in thine own magnetic aura. I projected to thee this, its spiritual counterpart, and the materiality of thine own Spirit clothed it for a time with a form visible to thine eyes and to those of Mansur alone. To the dwellers of that sphere it was invisible because it had not a degree of density akin to their condition, and it vanished from thee when the agitation of

thy mind snapped the slender thread of magnetic communication between us. Yet at the time it served as a focus upon which I could concentrate my will in support of thine.

"Thou hast desired to gain the knowledge of spiritual things: Behold! I will give unto thee such knowledge. I will teach thee the laws by which these spheres exist, and show thee what are the means of passing between each. That the Spirits who have arisen in the past to answer thy desire for knowledge should have come from the dark rather than from the light spheres, is due to the fact that thine aspirations after knowledge were inspired by selfish motives, rather than from a wish to use the wisdom gained for the service of thy fellow men. Moreover, thou hast desired to be a King, as men on Earth regard the Kingly state, and lo! in yonder Dark Sphere thou hast beheld what the most perfect development of that selfish thirst for aggrandisement doth mean. In the Dark Angel thou hast beheld one who was in Earth life the greatest Emperor the East hath known, in those ancient days when a despot was indeed an irresponsible power within his own domains. Thou hast beheld in him the ultimate development of those baser qualities that make a King great, and a conqueror invincible. No man can desire to aggrandise himself at the expense of his weaker brethren who is not selfish. None can wish to grasp for himself an abnormal share of wealth, while those around him go in rags that he may be clothed in purple and fine linen, who is not greedy. To desire that others shall bow the knee before thee and pay thee homage, as though thou wert the Divine Being personified, shows that pride and vanity alike rule in thine heart. To hunger for the territory of other nations that thou mayest swell the extent of thine own; to engage in war and bloodshed that thou mayest conquer those who are weaker than thyself, and chain them as slaves to thy chariot wheels, is surely to trample upon the just rights of those more feeble than thyself, but who are nevertheless entitled to enjoy such good things as the Lord of all hath given to them as well as unto thee. And yet, is it not by ignoring the rights of those who have not strength to defend themselves against him that the Earthly conqueror prevails? Is it not by wresting from his fellow men that which he is not powerful enough to keep that the successful warrior swells the number of his own possessions? Doth not ruin and devastation, death and suffering, follow in the track of the mighty Conqueror of nations? Is it not true that the greater

the conquests are the more wide spread is the misery that follows? Doth not the march of the triumphant army leave in its wake scenes of death and horror more terrible than those of a destroying pestilence? Think of thine own Earth life, of the hard wrung tribute ground out of the forced labors of the helpless nations the Persians had enslaved. Of the bitter sense of bondage that burns in the breasts of the conquered race, until the smouldering fire breaks forth in what the conquerors term 'revolt' against their usurped power. Think of the stern repression, the cruel measures by which such a revolt is met. Think of the feelings that are born in the breasts of conqueror and conquered alike, and then ask if it is any wonder that Hell should be peopled with the great enslavers of their fellow men, or that those who, like the Dark Angel thou hast seen, have devoted all their abilities on Earth to the amassing of treasures, the acquisition of territory, the grasping of power, the subjugation of all others' wills to their will, the humbling of all pride but their own, should be Kings, not alone on Earth, but in those dark spheres where the selfish and brutal qualities of man reign supreme. Ask thyself who have been the greatest Kings on Earth in the past, and who are likely to be the great Emperors of the future, and what are the qualities that most distinguish them above their fellows? Is not the answer ever the same? Can any one be truly a great conqueror who hath not left behind him all pity for the sufferings of his fellow man; all sense of his brother's equal right to the earth that God hath given, not to one man, but to all? Call the love of conquest by what fine name you please, it is still the greedy desire to possess what belongs unto another. If thou dost not seek to take another country for thine own personal use, but for thy country, it is still an act of pillage, for the grandeur of thine own country hath no more reason to be increased at the expense of thy neighbor than has thy larder to be enriched from his hen-roost. Yet in the one case men would call thee a great conqueror, and in the other a petty thief.

"There have been Kings, true Kings, on Earth, but they came not in the pomp of Royalty; their deeds were not those of the mighty slayers of their brother man; they came to teach, and to uplift the down-trodden and the weary; they used their strength to support those weaker than themselves, not to crush them; they used their superior gifts, their power to soar above their fellows, as a strong climber might use his strength to mount upon

a rock when he beheld the floods sweeping towards him, not in order to save himself, but that from his vantage place he might reach down and draw up the struggling multitude below him into that place of safety which he alone had been strong enough to reach.

"Such Kings have come upon the stage of Planetary life from time to time, and men have called them Messiahs of the Earth, and upon their teachings have founded systems of Religion. Pure in themselves, and bearing in the early days of their foundation the stamp of their great founder's pure doctrines, these systems of Religion have one after the other become encrusted with the meretricious glitter of those Earthly baubles of sovereignty with which the succeeding generations of the Priesthood sought to heighten their own power and glorify the virtues of their original Founder. And as surely as these ambitious priests, half-blinded by their Earthly natures, sought to add to their influence by these means, so surely did the hour of their deterioration from the pure teachings of the Spirit World begin. Each paltry bauble with which they decorated themselves, each piece of gold that they laid up as treasure, each mark of Earthly pomp and pride which they exacted from the populace as homage to their order, became as a mill-stone to drag them and their teachings from Heaven to Earth, yea, and even to below the Earth. Men sought the service of the Temples for the power it gave, not as a means of Holy Life. The treasures that had been amassed for the glory of God were squandered to gratify the lusts of man. The lives of self-denial and holy meditation that were to raise their votaries above the sordid thoughts of Earth, gave place to shameless scenes of debauchery and fierce struggles for the possession of temporal power, till the Temples became a by-word and a reproach, and their Priests a mere set of commonplace men, no longer endowed with a single spiritual gift, a single abnormal power of discerning spiritual things.

"Every shadow of Earthly pomp which a religion borrows from the insignia of Earthly Kings is but another link to connect it with Earth, not Heaven, and so soon as the pure Heaven-sent truths of Immortality come to be loaded with multitudinous doctrines and dogmas that have had their source only in the narrow minds of Earthly Priests, and the simple form of worshipping the Great Father comes to be surrounded with elaborate ceremonies and observances, and its priests decked out in all the gaudy frip-

pery of jewels and tinsel in imitation of the selfish grandeur of Earthly Monarchs, so soon may that system of Religion be likened unto those hideous idols which half-civilized nations make in the fancied image of their Gods and load with paint and jewels till all semblance to the thing that they were meant to symbolize is lost.

"Then, indeed, may the decrepitude of that system of Religion be said to have begun. Exactly how long it will last in this state is a matter of uncertainty, but its doom is none the less sealed. It is tottering to its fall, and may be likened to a bedizened corpse from which the Soul hath fled, but which those around seek still to galvanize into a ghastly semblance of its former life.

"So hath it been with the Religions of the past, and so will it be with those of the future. They shall have the pure dawn of their birth, the glorious glitter of their noonday, and the decrepitude of their failing night; and on the ashes of the old Faith that no longer satisfies the Spiritual aspirations of the human Soul, there shall arise a new and purer Faith, a truer broader Religion, giving unto mankind a wider view of the Great Mysteries of Spiritual Existence.

"Thus shall all the Faiths of the Earth arise and wane, till Earth itself is old, and the World and its inhabitants pass from the material stage of being to exist eternally in the Spirit Spheres.

"Wouldst thou desire to visit Earth and see for thyself a Temple and observe how it doth appear as seen from this side of life, and what value there is in the guidance of its Priests who have arrogated unto themselves the position of Spiritual Kings? Wouldst thou behold how they appear to us?"

As I gladly assented to this proposal the Angel seemed to me to put his hand on mine, although I felt no touch, and immediately, with the swiftness of thought, I found that we were hovering over a Temple.

CHAPTER XVII

WE VISIT A TEMPLE; WHY IT HAD DETERIORATED
AND BECOME UNCLEAN

After a few minutes of rapid flight we stopped, and began to descend to the material globe, till we hovered over a far larger Temple than the one which I have called the Temple of Amurath. I shall not say to what religion this last Temple belonged, nor in what country it was situated, for I do not desire that it should be supposed that the state of matters which existed there was specially typical of any Religion or any country; for I hold that Truth and Error, Good and Evil, are to be found everywhere and in all Religions and amongst all peoples, and no matter how pure the original doctrines of any form of Faith may be, it is impossible to prevent the ambitions and the lusts, the greed and the cruelty, that are inherent in the undeveloped Human Soul from perverting the original purity of the teachings and turning them to the basest purposes, and overlaying them with the grossest errors.

In the Temple above which we now hovered I saw that there was an immense mass of treasure hoarded up, and the wealth it represented must have been enormous. It was stored in great natural caverns which penetrated far into the rocky hillside upon which the Temple was built, and honey-combed the foundations below it. I saw that this treasure had been gradually amassed during many centuries, and gathered from every quarter of the globe. No use was being made of it, and it was simply stored up in these mighty caverns as the valuable possession of the Temple, a monument to the greed of its Priests.

Far above these vaults, in the Temple itself, there were costly vessels of gold and silver, splendid gems and wonderful carvings on ivory, and precious stones. The plunder of the Temple above, without any of the wealth concealed beneath in its vaults, would have made the ransom of a King. The building was of magnificent proportions, and of very beautiful workmanship. Every pillar was elaborately carved, and every foot of the roof inlaid with beautiful polished wood and precious stones, while the varie-

gated marble of the pavement was a marvel of beauty in design and colour. There were flowers laid as tributary offerings by the ignorant worshippers of these coarse symbols of their Gods. Sweet scented woods and fragrant roots were burning continually on the altars, and the smoke which hung like a misty veil about the altars and the worshippers gave an air of religious mystery to the scene.

Thus would the Temple itself have appeared to mortal sight. But to the eyes of a Spirit it was very different. The beauty of the building was marred by unsightly rents and fissures in the spiritual counterpart of the walls. The marble pavement was stained and blackened by the foul deeds that had been done by those who made the Temple their dwelling place. The gold was cankered, and the lustre of the jewels was dimmed by the violence of the means through which they had been wrested from their owners and seized for the enrichment of the Temple. The walls seemed hung with filmy draperies, whereon were depicted the shameless lives of many of those who called themselves the Prophets and teachers, the Priests and mediums, who stood as mediators between the simple populace and the Gods they sought to Worship.

The groves of sacred trees, designed to protect the Sensitives from the approach of the wandering hill tribes that dwelt around, might serve that purpose, but they no longer served any other, for in them there lurked a host of unclean creatures, the creations of the evil lives of those who had made Temple and Sensitives alike their prey. Around the Temple itself there hung a cloud of spiritual darkness that resembled the thunder clouds of night when the heavy atmosphere threatens at any moment to break forth into a violent storm. The thought emanations from the Temple of Amurath had resembled muddy water, those from this Temple were like a sea of mud and slime, and I did not desire to penetrate it, even had it been possible for me to do so.

Here and there I saw a faint gleam of light, like a feeble candle striving to shine through a screen of smoked glass, and I knew that where these lights shone there was still to be found some mortal whose spiritual condition had not been contaminated by the foulness of his surroundings, and whose Soul struggled still to keep alight the lamp of purity and truth.

A mutilated and perverted semblance of the old religious faith was practiced here. The Oracles were still invoked, and the

Gods besought to communicate with men. But the results that were obtained bore as much resemblance to the inspirations of the Higher Spirits as did the hideous images in the Temple to the Gods they were thought to represent; man-made and earth-suggested images, even as the inspirations were those of the horrible denizens of the Earth and Astral Planes.

The absurd ordinances, the horrible sacrifices, the revolting practices, the grotesque beliefs, the fantastic theories, that had crept into the teaching of this religion were all excrescences fastened one by one upon the simple purity of the teachings of its founder, and were suggested by the imperfect visions of those Sensitives who could only behold the Astral Plane or the Earth-bound Spirits around them. And as the horrible beings which appeared under the conditions of spiritual communication existing in this Temple were mistaken for the Gods and Devils of the Spirit World, so the distorted glimpses and the twisted teachings which arose from the same cause were mistaken for the revelations of the Almighty. Things which were intended for mere symbols of certain teachings were mistaken for the personifications of the Deities, and endowed with a sacred character never intended to be ascribed to them. The wild utterances of Sensitives obsessed by one or other of the unhappy Spirits that haunted the Temple were received as answers from the Gods, and Divine commands to be acted upon with unquestioning faith, till the confusion and error, the horrible teachings and cruel practices of which that Temple became the centre were so great that only the total destruction, the leveling with the dust of such a focus of iniquity, could free the poor, simple, ignorant people who worshipped at so false a shrine from the further prolongation of such a state of moral and intellectual darkness.

Those who gaze regretfully upon the ruins of some of these mighty monuments of the Past, and wonder why so fair a thing was given over to destruction and decay, can scarce realize the stupendous forces that were at work in the Spiritual World ere the final downfall of the fallacious system which it embodied was accomplished, and the Earth freed from the contamination of the poison it had disseminated on every side. Let not any man yield too readily the glamour with which time enshrouds the memory of the past. Let it not be imagined that the early ages of the World were the ages of unmixed innocence, simplicity and purity. For the less the intellect of man is developed the less can he perceive the

grossness of the errors and the spiritual darkness that surround him. In those early ages which some people admire, the abuses and the tyrannies were unchecked by the restraining influence which education exercises over the unbridled passions of mankind, and the mistakes and fallacies of the various theories were undetected because man's knowledge of the true nature of himself and his surroundings was limited by the conditions under which he lived. It is true that the errors of the present day are numerous and great enough, but they are as pigeons' eggs beside the rocs' eggs of the Past.

I first noticed that the Sensitives in this Temple were with one exception all of very tender years. The age of the oldest did not exceed twenty summers, while the majority were from fourteen to fifteen. In the Temple of Amurath, on the contrary, some of the seers attained to a fairly advanced period of life ere the change called Death overtook their mortal frames. For although the development of the highest forms of mediumship does tend to shorten the mortal life, by rendering the hold of the Sensitive upon materiality less secure, the lower forms (or degrees) of this power may be developed and exercised with very little danger or difficulty, beyond the inconveniences which arise from the extreme sensitiveness to all unsuitable or antagonistic influences which is the result of unveiling these abnormal powers. This, however, only applies to mediums of any class and every degree of power while these gifts are exercised amidst pure surroundings. For the mediums of the lower degrees are exposed to very great danger indeed if they have developed or use their gifts amidst impure surroundings, as the description I am about to give of this Temple will show. As mediums of the highest class are very rare, and still fewer who possess these gifts are ready to resign all share in the pleasures and excitements of Earth life in order to develop and exercise their gifts, the number of persons who would be withdrawn from active life,—were all those who are both willing and able to develop these high degrees of mediumship to do so,—would still be very inconsiderable, and would make very little difference to the progress of the busy life of the world of mortal men. But that all those who do develop the highest degrees of power must entirely withdraw from active life is a doctrine which I most emphatically maintain. And for this reason: that the development of such powers can only be accomplished by rendering the mortal envelope so entirely penetrable by the Spirit

within that it ceases to be any longer an adequate protection against the miasmatic exhalations from the life of that Astral Plane which, as I have shown, completely enwraps the Earth with a mantle of semi-material beings, whose influence over mortals is in exact proportion to the closeness with which they can come *en rapport* with them, and to the thickness or thinness of the protecting envelope of the mortal body.

If, then, the Spiritual powers be so highly developed as to put the Sensitive into harmony with the conditions of the higher spheres, it follows that the exceeding thinness of the material veil which interposes between the Spirit and all forms of Astral life must expose it to dangers from which a more thickly shielded Spirit is protected. What these dangers are will best be shown in this narrative, and it was because these dangers were in part recognized by the older religions which practiced divination and kindred methods of Spirit communion, that the idea of secluding the mediums and protecting them from all contact with the outside world arose. Not as a means of mortifying the flesh, but as a protection to the over sensitive Spirit, was this system of seclusion first enjoined and the groves of sacred trees planted, in order that they might become an impassable barrier against the near approach of mortals who brought in their train many strange Astral Beings who were attached to them by reason of the congeniality of their temperament. A magnet will attract and retain hold of an object just as long as its attractive force is the most powerful within that circle of attraction; but if a stronger magnet be brought close to the first the objects adhering to it will be drawn away and attach themselves to the stronger one.

Now, as a developed medium hath a stronger power of attraction for all things that pertain to Astral life than an undeveloped medium, it follows that any Astrals that are following the undeveloped medium will be attracted at once to the developed one the moment they are brought into close enough proximity to feel this superior attraction. Furthermore, as the development of a medium means the drawing away of a portion of that material element which imprisoned the magnetic aura, it follows that the aura of a developed medium will radiate its attractive force over a greater area than it would have done in an undeveloped condition, and thus it becomes necessary to interpose a wider and ever wider space between a medium and all doubtful surroundings the higher and higher you push the degree of his develop-

ment. If this is not done then the dangers which arise from the neglect of such a precaution must be in exact ratio to the increased sensibility of the uncovered Spirit. For though to a mortal eye no change in the mortal envelope has taken place, yet it is a fact that in a very highly developed Sensitive the Spirit so thoroughly penetrates to the outer verge of every atom of its material body that it is really covered by the scantiest amount of materiality compatible with a continuance of its mortal existence.

To draw the Spirit so completely *through*, as one may express it, the mortal envelope is a work of extreme delicacy and difficulty, and the process is one few mortals have the patience to submit to. Once it has been done it becomes IMPOSSIBLE to restore the medium to his former condition of insensibility, except for a brief space of time; even as it is impossible for a Spirit who has so completely penetrated through his mortal envelope as to cast it off altogether and sever all ties to it, to again clothe himself in a replica of his Earthly body for any long period, and the more advanced a Spirit becomes the more difficult it is for him to resume an Earthly vestment.

In watching the mediums of this Temple I noticed that around each of them there were clustered not only various repulsive forms of Astral life, but many Spirits of a low type, whose evil visages and coarse sensual expressions told plainly what their Earthly habits of life had been. I saw that the Astral beings seemed to float in the auras of these degraded Spirits, and feed upon the foul magnetism that surrounded them, while the gross Spirits themselves fastened like vampires upon the unlucky Sensitive, and sucked their vitality away till they became languid and weak, and finally faded away and died without any specific ailment being discernible.

The vampire Spirits were actuated solely by a fierce anxiety to renew the Astral envelope which kept their spirits in an Earth-bound condition, hovering about the Earth Plane, even as Jelal-ûd-dîn had kept renewing his mortal envelope in order that he might continue his Earth life. They did this because they felt that were they once to lose their hold of this means of remaining on the Earth Plane they must sink into a lower and darker sphere of unknown tribulation. By feeding on the vitality of the unfortunate Sensitive and on all upon whom they could fasten, these low Spirits were able to prolong their Earth-bound state of existence to an indefinite period, even as Jelal-ûd-dîn had pro-

longed his Earth life by absorbing the life of first one and then another mortal.

As I studied these Astral Spirits and these low Earth-bound vampires in whose auras they lived, I understood one mystery that had long perplexed me, and comprehended the cause of that strange lassitude which had crept over me more and more strongly the longer I lived with Jelal-ûd-dîn. For I observed that while the Sorcerer kept absorbing from me and from others our vitality, he in his turn was being drained of life by such vampire Spirits as were now before me, and who, owing to his own grossness of life, could more easily come into contact with him than with me, though as time passed on I also became their prey.

I saw that the poor mediums in this ill-omened Temple of corruption and infamy were literally defenceless against the attacks of these horrible ghouls, because the safeguards which purity might have erected around them were entirely absent, while the protection which the mortal envelope in a great measure affords was also withdrawn by the process of development to which they had been subjected. The poor mediums faded out of life in a very few years, and the ignorant, half-taught priests calmly concluded that mediumship inevitably acted injuriously upon the mortal frame, and that after all, since the Gods had taken their servants to a better world it was not only foolish but wrong to regret their death.

"See," said the Angel unto me, "see how that intercourse between mortals and immortals which should be the greatest solace and the greatest means of knowledge unto man has become not a blessing but a curse; not a means of life, but of death and premature decay. In seeking to enjoy all the pleasures, all the excitements, all the power and wealth of the material world, and at the same time to hold on to that intercourse with the Spirit World upon which they depend for their influence over man's superstitious fears, these priests have created around them a state of confusion that resembles some Pandemonium rather than a Temple of the pure and good. They have taken away the protection that nature gave the mediums and have nothing to substitute in its place, and then they ascribe to the will of the Gods a state of affairs created solely by the blind ignorance and the avaricious vanity of man. Thou hast seen how confusion arose in the Temple of Amurath by reason of the neglect and disregard of the simple laws of Spirit intercourse enjoined by

the prophets; see now how worse than confusion hath arisen from the same cause."

The Angel pointed to one chamber of the Temple and I saw that there were a large number of priests assembled around an unconscious medium who lay entranced upon the floor. A heavy vapor from the burning of scented powders filled the room, while the low, monotonous chanting of the priests served yet further to lull the Sensitive to slumber.

A far denser cloud than any produced by the incense however hung over the room to my spiritual sight, and as the aura of the medium spread its magnetic attraction yet further and further around I saw all sorts of strange Astral shapes gathering and gathering to it, like flies around a honeycomb. There were also Earth-bound Spirits of mortals that clustered most closely round the circle, and showed themselves from time to time amidst the strangely vanishing and re-appearing phantoms of the Astral Plane.

To have sought for anything like a coherent response to any question under such conditions would have been idle in the last degree, and the priests did not seem to seek for it, but contented themselves by putting their own interpretations on all the phenomena that appeared. Confusion reigned supreme. Here a Spirit of the Earth Plane would seize upon as much materiality as he could and show himself, speaking or gesticulating, or even playing some mischievous prank if he felt inclined, till a stronger Spirit came and wrested his hastily made form of materiality from him, as he might have dragged off his cloak. Some clashed the great brass cymbals together in a furious manner; others beat gongs, or twanged discordantly upon a harp; others carried various objects from different parts of the Temple and heaped them upon the floor. Some danced, and made wild, savage cries of joy or rage. Then the priests said the Gods were angry, or that they were pleased. Some launched forth into the most fearful denunciation of certain persons still in the flesh, and commanded that they should be offered up as sacrifices to appease the Gods. Others gave the most horrible accounts of their occupations, and declared such were the practices these Gods desired man to imitate. Others howled and prayed, while in and out there flitted continually those multitudinous hosts of Astral Beings whose curious bodies became visible while they floated in the magnetic cloud around the medium, even as insects

may be seen on a dark night flitting in the light of a lamp. Now and again the very emanations cast off by the bodies and minds of the circle of priests would even take shape, and show themselves for a brief moment in this densely material atmosphere of vital magnetism.

And this wild, incoherent jumble of everything earthly and unearthly was called "seeking inspiration from the Gods."

At last the power thrown off by the medium became exhausted. The strange throng of Spirits became invisible, and the medium, more dead than alive, was left to recover as best he could, while the priests dispersed to engage in some fresh pursuit.

"Is not such a gathering as that worse than a mockery?" said the Angel in a low, stern voice. "Can men dare to think that they can come into the presence of the Supreme by methods such as these? The minds of these priests are full, each of his own petty ambitions, his own greedy cares. They come fresh from the interests and excitements of their earthly lives, intent upon all that can minister to their own creature comforts, engrossed by the thoughts of their petty triumphs over one another, or over some rival priesthood, and they regard such a meeting as this rather as a change of excitement or a means of obtaining the sanction of the Gods for some meditated scheme, than as the solemn and sacred means of communion between the strugglers of the mortal life and those whose trials and probations, whose sacrifices and noble aspirations, have raised them into the glorious realms of Immortality. As ye sow, so shall ye reap, and if thou dost sow the seeds of hypocrisy and frivolity, of deceit and immorality, in thy daily life of Earth, verily the harvest of Spiritual results which thou shalt reap shall be the blossoming into life of all thine own evil, deceitful thoughts. Men may take these mediums and place them where all temptations may be shut away from them, but if ye surround them with the evil or the frivolous or the dishonest amongst mortal men, there will be no method by which ye can prevent untrue or foolish responses being given through the medium's powers. Like attracts like in the Spirit World as on Earth, and if those around a medium be impure or deceitful the magnetic aura of the Sensitive will only serve as a vehicle for the impure or deceitful of the Spirit World to show themselves and give their responses. The purity of the medium may for a time prevent the free use of his power by such Spirits, but the oftener he is subjected to the influence of the impure magnetism of deceit-

ful or evil mortals the more contaminated will even the purity of his aura become, and the more easily will the low and evil in Spirit life be able to make use of his powers, till at last they will even fasten upon him as ye see these vampire Spirits have done here, and if the life of the medium be prolonged for a sufficient time they will gradually cause him to experience all their own evil desires, and at last so control his body that he becomes a mere tool in their hands, an instrument for the gratification of their passions.

"The power of communion with the Spirits of the mighty Dead is a great and wondrous privilege, a boon granted by a loving Father to his suffering and struggling children in the flesh. But if this privilege be abused, if it be regarded as a pastime, a curious species of phenomena, a sort of jugglery by whose aid the ignorant and superstitious are to be over-awed, and those who can exercise this power enriched, then it becomes a danger, not a benefit, a curse, not a blessing, and it were better to close again the door of communication between the two worlds rather than suffer it to become a pitfall to the ignorant and unwary.

"The early deaths of these poor Sensitives is in truth a mercy for them, for since escape from this Temple is impossible in any other way, and though while their power remains, a certain superstitious feeling preserves them from actual moral or physical injury at the hands of these priests, yet were they once to lose this power,—as they inevitably must do under a prolongation of such conditions,—their fate would be one of such degradation physically and spiritually that any death however horrible would be a mercy in comparison.

"But see, in yonder chamber there is a young maid who is menaced by a fate worse than any death, for since she hath not yet been formally dedicated unto the Gods she hath not even that shadowy mantle of sanctity to protect her. Her beauty hath awakened the voluptuous admiration of one of these priests, and he hath persuaded her family to place her within these walls, under the pretext that the Gods have specially desired her service. The circumstance that she hath unquestionably certain spiritual gifts hath given color to this idea, and this evening she hath been brought into this Temple."

He pointed to a small chamber in a different part of the Temple from that which I had been studying, and I saw a young and very lovely maid, scarce fifteen years of age, lying slumber-

ing on a pile of very soft cushions. She had evidently wept herself to sleep, for the tears trembled still upon the long, dark lashes which veiled the lustrous dark eyes. Her long, dark hair hung about her slender, childish form like a veil of night. Her delicate features were beautiful in the extreme, and her skin white as snow and tinged on either cheek with a color as faint as the most delicate tint of a blush rose, while her slightly parted lips were red as the beautiful sea coral.

As I gazed upon her as one spell-bound I had a vague feeling that she was strangely familiar to my eyes, and then I remembered the vague half-seen visions of my boyhood, when I had dreamed of what the realization of my ideal of love was like, and I knew that this girl, this lovely, innocent child, was the embodiment of those dreams, her face the one which had haunted all my dreams of love, till the actual vision of Zuleika had put the child-like one to flight and supplanted it with the more material allurements of her attraction; an attraction which had never sufficed to satisfy the vague longing of my heart for my unseen Ideal. Zuleika had awakened the love of my passions; this child stirred to its depths the emotion of my Soul. I forgot all things as I gazed upon her. I forgot that I was a Spirit and she a mortal, and that between us there rose the barrier of her earthly state. I forgot also mine own aged form in the young ardour of my heart. I forgot even her peril. I was lost to all thoughts but the one thought of her innocent loveliness, her helpless youth.

The voice of the Angel recalled me to the realities of the moment.

"Yea," said he, "she is indeed thy twin Soul, born into life in the Heavenly Spheres in the same moment as thine own, and travelling thence to find again her reunion with thee. The twin Souls are as two halves of a golden circlet, each broken and incomplete without the other, yet united they form the perfect whole, the magic circle of love, whose existence hath no longer either beginning or ending. The golden ring that men place upon the finger of their brides is the symbol of this perfect reunion.

"It shall be thy task to guard this maid, and ward off from her the dangers of the Earthly life. But see that thou forget not to hold thine own passions well in check. See that thou art not betrayed into any loss of thine own self-control, or thine own calmness of judgment; else will thy power to aid her vanish, and thy weapons of defence become as broken reeds."

At this moment I saw the door of the room open softly, and the evil face of one of the priests appeared. He looked cautiously around, then stealthily glided in, shading with his hand a small lamp that he carried, and crept noiselessly and slowly forward lest he should awake his victim before he had reached her, and her cries should arouse others in the Temple.

At this sight a perfect tempest of rage filled my Soul, and without a moment's thought I plunged down towards the Temple as a diver plunges into the sea, but the moment my Spirit body touched the semi-material cloud that hung around the building my passage was arrested, and instead of penetrating into it I floated on its surface, its density being as great compared to the lightness of my Spirit body as water is to a piece of cork, and I was as unable to sink down through it as the cork is to sink under water. Half frantic in my anxiety I called upon the Angel for help, and as I did so I saw that he was rapidly gathering from the atmosphere of this cloud I found so impenetrable long threads of parti-colored vapor, for they were as immaterial as streams of gas, and as fine as the strands of a spider's web.

As I turned to look at him he suddenly threw over me the mass of vapory material he had been weaving, and as it fell around me like a robe I found that I was clad in a complete body of the Astral Plane; a body so heavy in comparison with my own Spirit that it felt like a suit of heavy armour, while my grey robes changed to the color of black. No longer did the cloud of Astral vapor resist my passage. I sank down like a stone sinking through water, and ere the vile priest could touch my beloved I stood between them.

In the anger of the moment the instinct of my earthly life came back to me, and involuntarily I felt in my girdle for my dagger that I might stab the treacherous hound where he stood. But weapon I had none save my hands, and I tried to grip him and fling him to the ground. And even as I had found when in my Spirit body I had sought to attack Selim, the earthly body of the priest acted like a case of slippery armour of which my Spirit hands could gain no grip, and the man crept steadily on. Trembling with rage and apprehension I looked around to see if there were no means at hand to aid me, nothing whereby I could arrest his progress. And at that moment a fearful temptation assailed me, for I saw that, following the priest like a flock of evil birds, there came a troop of those horrible semi-human

Astrals who had killed Selim at my bidding, and for one brief instant I was tempted to bid them aid me by killing this vile man. Only for one brief instant, I thank God. The next I remembered the warning of the Angel to keep control of my own passions, and with a cry to him for aid I stepped back and stood between the furtively gliding priest and the still sleeping girl.

As I did so a sudden light streamed down into the room and lit up the corner where I stood, and in that moment I knew that I had become visible to the startled priest, for he dropped the lamp with a crash upon the floor and sank involuntarily upon his knees in the extremity of his surprise and alarm.

"Get thee gone, thou shameless coward, thou vile unholy priest," cried I, in a voice that trembled with rage in spite of all my efforts to steady it. "Get thee gone, and pollute not the sacredness of this chamber of holy innocence with thy presence. Hast thou no fear of those Gods whom thou dost profess to worship, since thou wouldst lay thy sacrilegious hands on one whom thou didst say was to be dedicated to their service? Art thou not afraid that thou wilt call down the lightning of the offended Deity upon thine evil head?" and I advanced menacingly towards the now abjectly cowering priest. But ere I had taken two steps towards him he sprang up and rushed in wild terror from the room. Had I possessed the material bodies of half a dozen mortal men I could not so effectually have routed him, or set up so strong a barrier against his return as my sudden appearance in the Spirit had done.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SECOND DANGER TO IANTHE; I AM TEMPTED
AND AGAIN FALL

As the priest vanished the light also died out, and I turned to speak to the child, who had sprung up in the first moment of her alarm, but who, with a self-control rare in one of her sex and age, had forborne to cry out. I had once more become invisible, but I could still make my voice audible, and I answered her that she had nothing to fear, as I was there to protect her.

"Who art thou?" said she softly. "Art thou an Angel, or one of the Patriarchs whom God hath sent because I prayed to him last night?"

Her words gave me a strange pang, for they reminded me that though my heart was young yet my own acts had given me the body of an old man, while she was but a child. And I answered sadly:

"I am no Angel, neither am I a Patriarch. I was not old when I left the life of Earth. I am only a poor Spirit who loves thee, and would guard thee from all harm."

"And if thou art a Spirit why doth thy voice sound so sad?" replied she tenderly. "Are not all the good Spirits happy in Heaven?"

"Yea, but I am not in Heaven," said I, "I am not fit for Heaven yet, oh fair child. To be near thee and to help thee is as Paradise to me, for I long for some one to love me, and methinks thou wilt do that surely, my sweet maid."

"I will love thee if that will make thee less sad," said she simply. "I have left all I love behind me, and I too am sad. Ah! why was I brought here?" she wailed suddenly in a burst of childish grief. "Why did the Gods wish for me? I was so happy with those I loved, why should the Gods, who have all the world to worship them, seek to make me also come to serve them? I prayed to them in our little valley every day, but I feel as though I could not pray to them in this place; its air stifles me, and these grim walls only make me weep."

Then I drew very near to her, and kneeling down beside her put my arms around the gentle child as tenderly as her mother might have done, and I drew the pretty head unto my bosom, and pressed my kisses softly upon her cheeks and trembling lips, and stroked with my hand the long, flowing hair, till I soothed her grief. I whispered to her that she should not stay there long. I would help her to go away, for the Gods sought not to imprison any one between four gloomy walls; that it was only men, ignorant men, who did that, and that God would send his good Angels to guard her and help her.

And so at last she fell asleep with one arm around my neck, and her fair head resting on my shoulder.

My strange Astral body still clothed me, but its material form had faded away again, while the room, as I have said, was in darkness once more.

I think I must have passed an hour or so of earth time while I thus held my beloved in my arms, when again the door opened softly, and this time a woman entered. Such a woman! Such an unhappy, degraded specimen of her sex! With haggard, sunken eyes, wild hair, and half-clothed figure. She was still young in years, but old in shame and misery. In this poor creature I recognized another victim of the evil men within this Temple of evil. I saw that she had once been as fair and innocent as the child beside me, and had been dragged down step by step to her present level of degradation. I saw that, strange as it may appear, she cherished a wild, mad love for the man to whom before all others she owed her ruin, and that with the instinct of jealousy she had divined his passion for the fair girl in my arms and had watched him enter and leave the chamber, though she little guessed why he had fled so hastily, and thought that it was because he had heard some noise in the Temple.

In a half-crazed fashion the unfortunate woman had conceived a violent hatred for the innocent girl who had last attracted the notice of the man to whom she still clung, and she had resolved to poison the object of her dislike. As she approached I observed that she carried in her hand a small phial, one drop of which was certain death to those who inhaled its odour. She also carried a rose, and as she drew near to the girl she put down her little lamp and dropped two drops from the phial into the heart of the rose, and then drew near the sleeper.

For the second time that night a terrible temptation assailed

me. This time it was my love that made me weak, for as I looked at that poor degraded woman and thought that the gentle child in my arms might be menaced by a similar fate, while I might be powerless to save her, the thought came to me of how sweet it would be were she to die now, so young, so pure, so unsullied by the contamination of the earthly life, and thus place the barrier of Death between her and all danger, while Death would also withdraw that barrier of mortality that interposed so cruelly between my Soul and hers. How sweet to let her earthly body die, and then take her fair Spirit to dwell with me in the Spirit Land forever.

Some voice of warning whispered to me that to do so would be no less a murder than if my own hands administered the poison, but I put the thought aside, and argued with myself that I had nothing to do with it; I had only to stand aside for one moment and the deed was done, and my beloved would waken no more on Earth, but in my arms she would wake in the Spirit World. Was she not my twin Soul? Had I not found her at last, and who then could part us?

And like an avenging Spirit Death answered me. For as I argued with myself the woman had drawn near enough to drop her poisoned flower upon my darling's breast, and in one instant before I had well realized what had been done, a faint tremor passed over the slender frame, then another and another more violent, and then the sleeping earthly form I held lay still, asleep for ever.

CHAPTER XIX

MY PUNISHMENT

At first a wild joy possessed me. I kissed and kissed again the still warm body that lay in my arms; and then a chill fear crept over me, for the Spirit within stirred not at my touch; it lay still, as if Soul and body alike were dead.

I looked around me for some one to aid me, or explain why the Soul released not itself from that form of clay, and came to nestle in my breast, and I saw floating down from the far Heavens

a group of White Angels. They seemed to come from a far off Silver Star which I could dimly see, and they floated down and down to where I knelt beside my love. They were twelve in number and their silver wings shone with a brightness that well nigh blinded mine eyes. They had brought with them a car, shaped like a wild white swan and lined, I thought, with softest down. They spoke not to me, but motioned to me to stand aside. I pressed one last kiss upon the unconscious lips of my dead love, and then, like one who moves in a strange dream, I drew back, and let them form a circle round my darling. I saw them making passes over the silent form with their white hands as they hovered around the bier, and then at last I saw the Spirit rise through the body as though it had been a covering of vapor, and the White Angels bow their heads as though in prayer, while their extended arms received the new born Spirit. Then they laid it in the couch of snowy down and gathered with outspread wings around it.

I tried to go near to look at my beloved, to touch her, to follow her, for the vague fear of some great catastrophe was clutching at my heart and turning its warm blood to ice with the anguish of a growing despair. And the Angels waved me back, and one who seemed like a man with a shining helmet of silver turned to me and said:

"Thou canst not follow her now for she belongs to the Spheres of the Silver Star, and within those Spheres only those Souls which are pure and unsullied by all the evils of Earth can enter. Thou canst not touch her now, for thy hands are soiled with the things of Earth, and thy garments are dyed with the crimson stain of its passions."

His voice fell upon mine ear with the clear, cold ring of a silver bell, unrelieved by a single touch of pity or compassion. His calm, pure, lofty expression changed not as he pronounced my doom, for mighty in their perfect purity as are these Angels of the Silver Star, their Souls beat not in response to human woe, for they have never gauged the depth of human suffering.

And as the Angels spread their glittering silver wings and floated away with my beloved I sank upon the dull earth in utter despair, for now I knew what I had done in the madness of my passion, now I realised the full, deep measure of Death's bitterness, and that in this hour I had both found and lost my love, my Twin-Soul.

CHAPTER XX

MY GUIDE SHOWS ME MY ERROR; THE
DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

I was aroused at last from my despair by the voice of the Angel of the Golden Star calling unto me, and as I rejoined him he said somewhat sadly:

"Thou hast failed in the task set before thee, yet I marvel not, for well do I know how strong are the more selfish emotions of our Souls, and that only after long and patient efforts can we learn to hold our love and our hate alike in subjection. Grieve not too hopelessly for Ianthe, thy lost love, for though thou canst not follow her, thy love will draw her to thee again hereafter, and thou canst weave a ladder of good deeds and earnest efforts to purify thy Soul, by which thou shalt climb up to meet her in the realms of the glorious Golden Star. It is true that hadst thou but resisted this temptation thou wouldst have reaped joy where now thou hast gleaned sorrow, for thou couldst have drawn her away from yonder Temple of iniquity, and thou mightest have known many happy hours as the guide of her earthly steps, till she had gathered the knowledge which the Earth life was intended to give her, and then might she indeed have joined thee in the Spirit Lands. As it is, she will have to gain her experience by other means, and thou wilt have to labor upon this Earth Plane for many years ere thou shalt wipe away the stain upon thy Soul which thine acquiescence in her murder hath put upon it. Nay, start not; the motive that inspired thee was different from that of the actual doer of that deed, but thou wert none the less a partaker in it, for thy hand might have stayed hers, and thou mightest have saved that wretched woman from staining her Soul with yet another sin hadst thou made one effort to do so. I reproach thee not. Rather do I grieve for thee, because thine own conscience will be thy severest judge, and thine own empty heart thy hardest punishment."

I bowed my head at the Angel's words, for in very truth my punishment seemed greater than I could bear.

Again the Angel aroused me from my bitter thoughts by saying:

"Look yonder. See the means of deliverance that were drawing near unto thy beloved, and observe how the warriors of the air have enlisted a great host of Earthly warriors to help them pull down the Temple."

As he spoke he pointed to the crest of the hills whereon the Temple stood, and I saw the mighty army of a rival nation come pouring like a living flood down upon the Temple and its defenders, attacking them on all sides, and overwhelming them with their superior numbers.

I saw the two armies of the Light and Dark Spirits contending in the air and urging on those on Earth to the conflict, the Dark Spirits seeking desperately to inspire the failing courage of the defenders of the Temple, while the Light Spirits forced on their assailants in such a determined fashion that one point of vantage after another was gained, till the very inner doors of the sanctuary were reached. Here the priests, rendered desperate by the death that threatened them from every side, made a most courageous resistance, contending for every foot of the sacred ground.

Then I saw the woman who had killed my beloved rushing like an incarnate fury from place to place with a burning torch in her hand and setting fire to one thing after another till the thick smoke rose in clouds, and the fierce flames drove victors and vanquished alike to seek what safety they could find in flight, the glittering treasures of the Temple that had attracted the cupidity of the assailants having to be abandoned to the all engulfing flames.

As the fire was at its height, I looked down again to see if the earthly body of my lost love yet lay upon its bier, and as I did so I shuddered in horror, for the mad woman who had set the Temple on fire was standing beside it amidst the fierce flames and the suffocating smoke, screaming out in wild joy as first the bier and then the still form upon it were caught by the curling wreaths of flame. Then the roof fell in with a crash, and the body of the murderess and her victim were alike consumed in one funeral pyre.

CHAPTER XXI

ASTRAL SHELLS OF EARTHLY BODIES; THEIR NATURE AND FUNCTIONS IN LIFE AND THEIR APPEARANCE AFTER DEATH; THE THREE FLUIDS OR AURAS OF PHYSICAL LIFE; THE PERFECT AND PSYCHIC NATURES; THE DIFFERENCE OF MEDIUMISTIC QUALITIES EXPLAINED; VAMPIRE ASTRALS; HOW TO DISTINGUISH ASTRAL BODIES FROM SPIRIT BODIES; THE THREE BODIES, MATERIAL, ASTRAL, SPIRITUAL, FOUND IN EVERY PLANE, SOLID, FLUIDIC, LUMINOUS

"Shudder not," said the Angel, "it were better so, for the purifying fire will quickest release the Souls of the poor child and the sin-stained woman from all earthly chains, and in the dark realms of the lower spheres thou must seek out this woman's Spirit and help it to find repentance and purification. In so doing thou shalt atone for thine own share in her sin. Thou canst do nothing now because her Soul must find rest for a time ere it wakes in the dark regions whither it has gone. Do thou then come with me now, and I shall show thee why it is best that the mortal envelope be consumed with fire rather than laid in the tomb to decay."

The Angel touched me and together we floated away from the scene of horror till we reached a large burying place on a hillside. The graves were hollowed out of the rocks, and the bodies were in many cases carefully embalmed and wrapped in mummy clothes, that they might resist decay as long as possible.

"See," said the Angel, "a class of Astral life thou hast not studied yet."

He pointed as he spoke to the crumbling mortal bodies, and I saw that over each there hung a horrible and more or less decayed replica of the living form, a wax-like copy of the body's appearance at the moment of death. In the case of those who had

been dead for long years the Astral shells were far gone in decay, but with those only a few years dead the forms were very complete.

"Thou wilt observe," said the Angel, "that the Astral shell of one just dead is slightly larger and slightly coarser in appearance than the mortal body was in life. It wears the impress of death in its expression because that was the last change the living Soul imprinted on it at departure, but in life the Astral shell, like the mortal envelope, reflected the thoughts of the Soul it covered. It is larger than the mortal envelope because it was the outer covering of it. It was, in fact, that cover which interposed between the material body and the atmosphere of the Astral Plane, and it was the means by which the Soul drew from the Astral Plane those subtle elements of life upon which the Spirit body subsisted while imprisoned in the material husk. Observe that the Astral shell is like a spongy covering to all the organs of the body; it permeates through every part, enclosing within its slightly larger bulk every atom of materiality with an atom of this Astral substance. Its nature is like that of a sponge, for it draws to itself and absorbs the vital magnetism in the atmosphere as a sponge sucks up water. Thou dost know how by attraction a piece of cloth will suck up all the fluid contained in a jar of water, though only one corner of the cloth be dipped in it. It is then by such an unconscious mechanical action that the Astral shell sucks up the life magnetism of any living body with which it may come in contact, as well as what is contained in the life waves that circulate through the Universe. During its attachment to the mortal body to which it belongs it keeps up the equilibrium between the Astral and material life principles by this means, and it remains attached to the dead body as long as there is any of the material magnetism left in it, and while so attached it serves to keep it from that rapid decay which would ensue were all connection between them to cease."

"Dost thou mean that this Astral shell supplies the dead body with a degree of vitality?" I asked.

"Yes. But in so infinitesimal a degree that it is not perceptible to mortal senses. The function of the Astral shell in life was to thus supply the mortal body, and so long as it remains attached to it it continues to mechanically perform this function, and so long as it thus supplies a measure of life to the mortal body so long will that body act as a clog tied to the Spirit, and

preventing it from separating from the Earth Plane, for the attachment between body and Spirit must be severed entirely before the Soul can rise into the second sphere. Fire, which is an element at once material and Astral in its nature acts upon the atoms of the Astral shell as well as upon the material atoms, and disintegrates at one operation the two envelopes, thus freeing the Soul from both. Now you will observe that as the capillary attraction which the Astral shell exercises on all the vital fluid within the range of its attractive powers is a purely involuntary action on its part, it requires no intellectual life in the Astral shell in order to cause it to thus draw life out of living things, and you will see how after the death of a person his Astral shell, if left still integrate, can suck up the life of mortals and become a source of danger to them, so that a constant course of visits to a cemetery where an immense number of such Astral bodies in a fresh state are congregated, results in a gradual loss of vitality, so constant and so great that the mortal fades away and dies, literally because the Astral life fluid has been sucked out of his body faster than he could, with his own Astral body, absorb it again in sufficient quantity to sustain that equilibrium between the ASTRAL and MATERIAL vital fluids upon which, as we have said, the vitality of the mortal form is sustained.

"Now there is yet another circumstance that I would have thee notice. It is this, that the Astral shell, while it sucks up and attracts vitality to itself, is also subject to the force of attraction exercised over it by a form of magnetism which is at once stronger and more subtile than the quality of magnetism on which it subsists. This finer form of magnetism we call the 'Astral magnetism' of the SOUL, and it is only found where the Soul is present, since it is an attribute of the SOUL itself, and departs with it at its severance from any of the many bodies that successively clothe the Soul. In some mortals this magnetism is so covered over with the thick layers of materiality that very little indeed escapes during mortal life; the material envelope being a non-conductor serves as a solid case to keep it in. Such mortals will, therefore, not attract these Astral shells left by their departed fellow mortals, and may therefore visit burying places of the dead without any harm, and they are of all others the persons best fitted to perform the necessary offices for the dead, or to act as attendants in sickness, for they will neither absorb infection nor attract to themselves the Astral bodies of those whom they attend.

"There are, however, others so thinly veiled in materiality that their Spirits permeate through all the fibres of their mortal bodies, and their Astral magnetism radiates from them in a circle extending often to a considerable distance, and drawing to them all forms of Astral life and Astral parasites so that life is gradually absorbed from them, and they pass into Spirit life to lie in a state of unconsciousness for years. Mortals cannot discern why they have declined, drooped and died, and say that the Gods have taken them because they loved them, whereas they have simply fallen victims to the prevailing ignorance of mankind on the subtle subject of Astral influences.

"Thou hast been accustomed to think of fire as the most natural means for promoting the disintegration of the body because thou didst belong to a faith which looked not for a resurrection of that actual body of mortality with which thou didst part at death, but it is nations such as this nation whose mortal envelopes we are now surveying, who, teaching that the mortal body would rise again, sought to facilitate its resurrection by retaining it in as perfect a state of preservation as they could. They clung to the envelope that they could see because they were unable to comprehend truly the idea of the Soul's existence in a conscious state apart from matter, and they had not grasped the fact that matter may pass through conditions which sublimate it as well as the Soul, till it becomes a fit covering for the immortal Soul, although no longer visible to the coarse degree of mortal sight. The only body they can conceive of as rising again is the mortal one, and hence their desire to prevent the disintegration of its particles.

"Thou wilt now observe that on closely regarding the freshest of these Astral shells before us thou canst perceive an infinite number of minute suckers projecting from the whole surface of the Astral body. These suckers are like the antennae of the fly, but much more minute even than they are, and by the magnifying powers of Spiritual sight we can see that the surface of the Astral body resembles that of a fine sponge, the minute suckers being like the tiny points of the spongy surface. When an Astral body attaches itself to a living mortal it is by means of these suckers that it holds on, while it draws the vitality of its victim away like some parasitic plant that has fastened on a tree. To remove one of these Astrals it is necessary to apply a strong dose of ether saturated with vitriolic acid. This substance when in

a vaporised condition acts most powerfully upon all forms of Astral life, and causes the Astral shell to shrivel up as though vitriolic acid had been thrown upon a mortal body. But as *the mortal* has *also* his Astral envelope covering his mortal body, and as it is upon *that* the Astral parasite has fastened, it requires great care to use this means of freeing the mortal without also injuring him. Moreover, when thou hast destroyed the adhesive power of the Astral parasite's own suckers thou mayest find that thou hast also injured those of thy charge, since the chemical has acted upon both. It is therefore safer to remove the parasite by other and slower means, although by so doing thou wouldst have to allow it to go on absorbing for a longer time the vitality of the mortal. To draw it away suddenly would be like tearing away leeches that had fastened on the skin, and would be both painful and dangerous. Thou must therefore withdraw the parasite gradually, detaching one portion of its suckers after another by an application of the chemicals sufficient to partially paralyse them without destroying them. At the worst the mortal will only suffer a temporary loss of his own powers, and thou canst gradually give him back the vitality he has lost.

"If, however, a great many Astrals cluster upon one unfortunate mortal, it becomes most difficult, if not well nigh impossible, to keep him free from them, since the means of affecting them might injure him also. This will show thee why certain people with very magnetic auras must be guarded from all chance of such accidents, and why they would never thrive in cities, where on all hands are encountered the Astral shells that hang around the dwellings in which they have lived. For it is a curious circumstance that the magnetism thrown off in Earth life hangs about the house and belongings of a mortal, and attracts his Spirit to it after death. And as it attracts his Spirit so also it attracts that Astral envelope which is in no sense to be confounded with the Spirit. As the body decays the Astral decays also, but if it have absorbed an extra amount of vitality *after the death of the body* by feeding on the life of mortals, the Astral will become endowed with so much independent vitality of its own that it will simply drift away from the decayed body and enjoy for a time an almost independent existence. A Soulless, unintelligent existence, it is true, yet nevertheless an existence, for it will go on absorbing life so long as it can find any one to fasten upon, and as the dwelling place of its mortal owner's Earth life possesses

a certain magnetic attraction for it, it will drift back there as a rule in the first instance, and hang about the mortals who are in it—a senseless, purposeless wraith of its former inhabitant, whose appearance to the eyes of a clairvoyant will suggest a horrible idea of what the ghost of a mortal may be like.

“Would it not therefore be well to prevent any chance of this happening by destroying at first the dead body and the undesirable Astral appendage.

“If a mortal would know how to distinguish between the true Spiritual appearance of his dead friend and that of his mere Astral shell, let him observe that whereas the SPIRIT is ever intelligent looking, and slightly smaller in features and form than he was in life (for the simple reason that the mortal body was like a second and slightly larger covering of the Spirit, while the Astral body was the third envelope and the larger covering of the Earthly body), the Astral is like the SWOLLEN image of the dead friend, with the ghastly, death-like look of death, and the dull, expressionless inanimation of a Soulless, senseless, waxen image, capable of nothing but floating like a noisome weed upon the current of life around it.

“Such is the Astral body after Death has robbed it of a Soul. In life its powers are very different. Like the Spirit it can be detached from the mortal body, and can be projected to great distances from it. But while it will reflect like an image of soft wax every expression of its mortal owner’s thoughts, it is incapable of any independent thoughts of its own, or any action not dictated to it by the mind that has projected it. This duplicate of a man’s personality would be visible to a clairvoyant of a very low degree of power, since it is almost material in its nature, and can be seen where the true Spirit would be invisible. Hence the numerous instances in which such apparitions have shown themselves, sometimes at the actual moment of the death of the body, but most commonly just before dissolution has taken place, and while the Spirit has still a conscious thought projected to the friend to whom his apparition appears.

“When death has actually taken place the Astral may appear, but it will be with the stamp of death upon its waxen features. The reason that the Astral body most often appears at the time of death or in serious illness of the body, is because under such circumstances the ties between the Soul and its envelopes are greatly weakened, and any strong attraction can draw the Astral

body away. It is therefore in cases of illness that the Astral is occasionally found following a highly magnetic person in the flesh and leaving for the moment its own proper Earthly envelope. Where this takes place it greatly diminishes the chances of the sick person's recovery, and it is better that highly magnetic people who possess Astral rather than physical magnetism, should neither officiate as attendants upon the sick nor go to visit them, as however kindly the impulse prompting them to do so may be, it does not prevent them from exercising this magnetic attraction over the ASTRAL body of their sick friend. If they add a constant anxious thought of the friend to the magnetic attraction they will be almost certain to draw the Spirit as well as the Astral of that friend to them, in which case his chance of recovery will be very precarious, for though in cases of serious illness the withdrawal of the Spirit alone often allows a more complete rest to the body (as in sleep where the Soul is often absent from the mortal body with no injurious consequences) the withdrawal of both the Astral envelope and the Soul itself at the same moment makes the merely earthly envelope in great danger of becoming so drained of the vital fluid (by means of evaporation) before their return, that it is practically dead, and becomes incapable of serving again as a covering to the Spirit. The ties between it and the Spirit are so weakened that while it serves as a leaden clog to the Soul that would leave it behind, its rigidity has become so great that the Soul cannot again enter it. If the Spirit only be withdrawn from the earthly body the Astral will go on absorbing life with which to recruit it as it lies in deepest trance, but it is indeed precarious for both Soul and Astral to quit the body of the flesh at once. Therefore let the sick be ever attended by friends, but by such friends as are not too highly magnetic, or rather whose magnetism is not of the Astral degree, then they will give out vitality which the sick can absorb, but will not at the same time attract the Astral body to themselves.

"Some will scoff at these ideas and say they are chimerical; but can these wise scoffers say in what the life of a mortal consists, or of what nature that Soul is composed of which they speak so glibly as explaining all the wonders of Immortality? Can they say what life is, and whence it comes, and whither it goes at the death of a mortal body?

"The projections of the Astral body without the knowledge

of the Spirit may be termed 'Involuntary' projections, but thou knowest that a mortal may also acquire the power of sending his Astral body to any place or person he may desire to visit while his Spirit is present in the mortal body, and in a perfectly conscious state, in quite another place. It is, however, only when the body is in a state of trance and the Spirit quiescent that the Astral can remain absent for any length of time, otherwise the waste of vital power that takes place when all the functions of the body are in active operation will cause the body to die, as we have shown, for lack of that vital fluid with which the Astral body is destined to feed it.

"There is a prevalent idea to the effect that the Astral body belongs only to the Earth Plane of life; but this is an error, because Astral matter is a distinct element in itself; it is found in every sphere in a more and more sublimated quality as it recedes from the earthly centre, where alone it is found in any degree of density. It is the intermediate substance between matter and pure Spirit, and in the Spirit spheres the Spiritual Astral performs the same function of nourishing the Spirit body of those spheres as the earthly Astral performs for the earthly body, and Astral Spirit bodies are cast off along with the Spiritual envelope when the Soul departs for a higher sphere, just as earthly Astral and earth body are cast off together when the Soul leaves the Earth.

"The true Soul is therefore always clad in a triple garment, consisting of first the Spiritual Envelope that enwraps the Soul itself and which is always of that higher degree of spirituality which belongs to the sphere immediately above the one in which the Soul is enjoying its conscious existence. Secondly, there is the Envelope belonging to the sphere of the Soul's present conscious life: i.e., either of the Earth when on Earth or of some of the spheres above or below, according to the Soul's condition of progression. And thirdly, there is the Astral Envelope of each sphere, which serves, as we have said, to nourish the invisible Spirit body, and to link it with the second and visible one.

"In casting off its dual envelope, therefore, the Soul never alters any essential constituents of its individuality, it only passes into a more sublimated form of them, retaining the most Spiritual portions of its former state in each succeeding one, and passing always into higher and ever higher forms of sublimated matter.

"From certain classes of vampires the protecting Spirits

can guard man in a certain degree, but from such as Jel-alûd-dîn it is well nigh impossible to do so once he has established a complete rapport with his victim.

"Men see the things of the Spirit World so imperfectly as a rule that it is not to be wondered at that they have confounded the three classes of Astral Vampires. There be some mortals who even in life are unconscious vampires in a modified sense, because from the strong absorbent powers of their Astral bodies and their own natural tendency to retain rather than give out again a corresponding amount of their own magnetic vitality, they draw from those with whom they mingle an undue proportion of their life, and with very sensitive delicate persons they draw so much away, that while they flourish exceedingly themselves, the poor person whose vitality they have thus sucked out fades and often dies, without either the victim or the unintentional unconscious mortal vampire being aware of the cause. More especially is this often the case where the vampire mortal is old, and in need of a constant supply of vital fluid, while the victim is young and full of fresh vitality. This idea may seem a horrible one to many people, yet the fact exists, and the remedy in such cases is very simple. Let the too easily drained mortal separate from the other, and let some other mortal who possesses a superabundance of vitality (as many people do) supply the unconscious vampire with the life essence he or she may require.

"But to return to the question of the best means of disposing of the corpses of mortality. Doth it not seem to thee desirable for all reasons to hasten as much as possible the disintegration of their particles, rather than leave them to the slow process of a loathsome decay, whether thou dost make of them poor mummified relics of the Departed, or suffer them to corrupt the soil in which they are buried?"

As the Angel ceased to speak I looked at the lonely graveyard lying so still and silent under the dark night sky, with its rocky tombs and its mouldering corpses, its floating Astral wraiths and the wandering Earth-bound Spirits who hovered around their earthly bodies, unable to sever the links between themselves and those poor mortal forms for whose indulgence they had neglected to cultivate the higher powers of the Souls, so that the starved and stunted Spirits could scarce conceive of any life apart from those poor decaying forms. To the selfish and worldly the links of materiality are as giant links, and for

them it would be a mercy to sever by the purifying action of fire, all such material chains. As I thought of the utter uselessness of these embalmed bodies to their dead owners, as I saw how their preservation was a source of danger to dead and living alike, I turned to the Angel of the Golden Star, and said:

"Yea, thou art right. Better a thousand times the fiery sepulchre that my beloved hath found within yonder blazing Temple than that Dead and Living alike should be exposed to the horrors of such a state of things as thou hast shown me."

CHAPTER XXII

THE GREEK PHILOSOPHER; THE LITTLE SHRINE;
ABUBATHA AGAIN; WHY HIS PROGRESSION AS A
SPIRIT HAD BEEN SLOW; HOW A SENSITIVE
SHOULD BE TRAINED. THE FAULTS OF
PRIESTS AND MAGICIANS; HOW
MEDIUM POWERS ARE USEFUL
IN SPIRIT WORLD.

Once more we resumed our rapid flight, and it was with strangely mingled feelings of interest and regret that I recognised one familiar country after another as we passed. Very soon we alighted amongst a range of hills overlooking a city of the Greek Empire. Here we found a house of modest yet picturesque appearance, surrounded by fine trees and a small shrubbery, in which were placed many graceful statues surrounded by beds of fragrant flowers.

The dweller in this house was a man well on in middle age, whose calm noble cast of feature at once attracted me. He was seated at a table with every variety of scientific apparatus then known about him, and scattered on the shelves of the room I noticed many rare and precious books. I saw at once that he was a deep student of all nature, and I observed that many advanced spirits were around him, inspiring his thoughts and directing his studies, though he was himself unconscious of their presence.

The Spiritual atmosphere around this man was calm and clear, and in it were mirrored the great thoughts of the mighty dead who gathered around him.

"That," said the Angel, "is one of Earth's greatest philosophers, and it matters not whether he believes the thoughts he notes down are his own or whether they are an inspiration from the Gods, for they are true thoughts, and embody great truths and noble teachings, and though man may not recognise them now they will live as vital elements of Truth for all time."

Again we floated away, and this time we stayed our flight above a small mountain Temple, which I at once recognised as the one where I had met Abubatha, and conceived the idea of becoming a prophet. It was in truth no more than a little shrine. The word Temple was almost too important to use in describing it, yet in this humble little building I recognised a far more valuable aid to man's understanding of Immortality than in any of the splendid Temples I had seen. For here the lamp of Truth burned with a pure and steady flame, and the light that supplied it came in almost unbroken rays from the Higher Spheres.

The Priests were five in number, each gifted with some Spiritual endowment. In the case of four of them these gifts were of the lower degrees of power, and though of infinite value to their possessors in their daily lives, not of the same Spiritual importance as those of the fifth member of this little community, who was a medium of the higher class, and who in consequence led a very quiet secluded life, never going beyond the confines of the little Temple or the sacred grove which surrounded it. As I have already said, this little Shrine stood on the summit of a mountain, where it could catch the first and last rays of the rising and setting sun, and from which an extensive view of the country round could be obtained.

Behind the Temple there was a small building where the four Priests and the Sensitive lived, and around it there was a garden tended by all the Brothers in turn. Here they could sit and watch the clouds and sky, the hills, and fields, and trees, and the approaching figures of the occasional pilgrims who came to pay their homage at the little Shrine.

One of the Brothers, as I have said, never left the precincts of the Temple, but the others went forth two at a time to travel through the surrounding country, preaching the doctrines of their Order, helping the suffering, and performing such minor miracles

of healing and divination as their particular gifts enabled them to do. Those who sought for direct advice from the Higher Powers had to go to the Temple to seek for it, and then the response would be obtained through the Sensitive who lived secluded there, and whom no one but his Priestly Brethren ever saw.

The simple if somewhat narrow lives led by these Priests was at least free from all temptations of ambition and avarice, for their fame travelled not beyond the range of hills and valleys that shut them in on all sides, and the simple herdsmen to whose spiritual wants they ministered were too poor to offer any but the humblest gifts in return.

Thus only those who were animated by an unselfish love of their fellow men were ever tempted to come to this solitary little Shrine, and its absence of wealth and grandeur was its strongest safeguard against such elements of Spiritual deterioration as I had seen rising around the handsome Temple of Amurath.

While I was watching the little Temple I saw a Spirit approaching me, whose exceeding brightness caused me to think at first that he must be from a very high sphere. Then, as he drew aside the mantle which half hid his face I saw with a sense of joy that it was my beloved friend Abubathā, whom I had long desired in vain to see. He responded to my salutation with great affection, and in reply to my question of why I had never been able to see him except the one time when I had seen him in that dream on the night of my earthly death, he replied:

"At first Ahrinziman I lay in slumber, for my Spirit was not truly fit for its great change when Death overtook my mortal frame. I erred in that I took not more care of my earthly body. I fasted so often that I weakened its powers, and instead of helping to purify my soul thereby I only caused Soul and Body to part before I had fully gleaned the full measure of my Earth experience, and before my Spirit body was strong enough to sustain existence alone. Hence I was for long weak, and lay in a semi-slumber, unable to communicate with anyone upon Earth. When I recovered strength thou wert in the Temple of Amurath, and around thee there were so many strong Spirits of this Earth Plane that I could never approach near enough to show myself to thee. After that thine own course of life created a still greater barrier between us, and till that last hour of thine Earthly existence I was never able to draw near enough to warn thee of the dangers that beset thy path. And since thou quitted the mortal

body I have not been able to follow thy career, and would gladly hear through what experiences the indulgence of thy passions hath led thee."

I therefore related to him all that had befallen me, to the moment when my own mad selfishness had deprived me of my beautiful Twin-Soul, whom I knew now under the Greek name of Ianthe, and whose beauty was of a Grecian rather than an Eastern type. When I related how I had lost her my feelings so overcame me that I was unable to continue, and once more my good friend strove to comfort me even as when a boy I had poured my childish griefs into his sympathetic ears. When at last we parted I left Abubatha with a heart much soothed by his almost womanly tenderness of sympathy, and the thought that I should enjoy many happy hours in converse with him lightened the desolation of my existence.

From Abubatha I wandered back to the Mountain of Meditation, from whose summit I had reviewed the events of my life, and where I had first seen the Angel of the Golden Star.

I had not seated myself upon the Mountain side for long when I saw the Angel approaching, and as I rose to greet him he said "Ahrinziman, thou dost mourn ever over thy lost Ianthe, but believe me, that vain grief serves not to cure the wound, and thou must rouse thyself and look round upon the multitudes whose griefs are no less bitter, and in seeking to comfort others thou wilt find the surest balm for thine own sorrow. On Earth thou mayest see many unequal unions; there the pure may be mated with the impure, the good with the evil; but in the Spirit World it is not so, and until there be a certain measure of equality in the conditions of Twin-Souls they cannot unite. Thou mayest have certain qualities or experiences not possessed by thy counterpart, and she may have certain others not possessed by thee, and yet ye may truly be united, but it can only be so when the varying qualities have reached a stage of harmoniousness in which union is possible. While any elements conflict ye cannot become as one. Therefore it is that the Spirit World is full of waiting Souls, the higher spheres as well as the lower. For every Soul hath its mate, and sooner or later must unite with it. The dwellers of Earth are apt to imagine that theirs is the only real life, and that all the rest of the Soul's existence is passed in a condition of shadow-like immateriality. Yet what error can be greater than thus to confound the Soul with the coarse envelope of its material

life, and fancy that in casting off that it hath put aside all that gave it distinction and individuality? And if the cold senseless body of clay be not the man himself, doth it not follow that the soul must have taken with it all that made his identity? The loves and hates, the passions and desires, belonged not to the body but to the Soul, and at the severance between them those attributes belong still to the Soul; the senseless decaying body feels none of them. And if a man's love is an attribute of his Soul shall it not expand with his Soul in the Spirit World, and develop with each stage of its development, till it finds its most perfect expression in the Spirit Spheres? Thou mayest take a simple wild flower of the Earth and from it develop a most beautiful specimen of that plant, in whose perfection it is scarcely possible to recognize the humble root from whence it is sprung, yet thou hast changed none of its component parts, thou hast neither added to it nor taken any away: thou hast only developed that which was most beautiful and worthy of development, and subordinated those parts whose attributes were less worthy. Thou hast but applied thy knowledge to the study of that plant's possibilities, and from a poor weed scarce worth the trouble of plucking thou hast cultivated a glorious thing of beauty, worthy of a place in Paradise.

"So with the Soul. Man on Earth is as the wayside weed, yet may he develop into an Angel of Heaven without leaving one iota of his individuality behind, and the sweet companionship of his Twin-Soul is no less essential to the perfection of his happiness in Heaven than it was on Earth.

"But come! I will show thee those whose lot is even harder than thine."

CHAPTER XXIII

I HELP ZULEIKA AND ARTEMISIA; HOW WE PROGRESS BY HELPING OTHERS

Following out my newly-awakened interest in Artemisia and her son I found myself in a little while beside Selim, wondering much what would be the ultimate fate of one so crippled in his intellectual faculties as the poor half-witted Prince.

As I approached the place where he amused himself by holding his imaginary court, I saw Zuleika standing with her clasped hands pressed upon her forehead, as much to still the tumult of her thoughts as to shade her eyes, watching the infantile amusements of Selim, who was pretending to receive an embassy of some rival power, and going through all the pantomime appropriate to the occasion.

At my approach she started and turned round, saying "Is this thee, Ahrinziman? Art thou come here to add thy reproaches to my miserable state?"

"Nay, Zuleika. The time for reproach between us is past. In these regions all are alike too unhappy to add bitterness to another's lot by vain reproaches."

"Art thou come then to seek to awaken again the old ties between us?" said she suspiciously. "I owe thee no duty now. Death hath severed all ties between thee and me, and even were it not so I cared not for thee. Even in the days of thy pride and power I would have given more for one smile from yonder miserable pigmy of a man," pointing to Selim as she spoke, "than for all the love and gifts thou lavished upon me. Yea, even now I know of nothing that I can desire so deeply as to be suffered to remain here, where at last I can be near him. Oh Me!" she wailed in a sudden burst of grief that surprised me, "Oh Me! Is there no hope, no help, for him and me? Must we forever live on thus? He, the poor childish creature who smiles so happily at his conceits, and I, this miserable degraded object who fears to show myself to him now, lest he should shrink in horror from me."

"Zuleika," said I gravely and sadly, for her grief touched me, "Zuleika, between thee and me the past is dead; the grave has truly closed over all we were to each other in that past, but nevertheless I also suffer for my share in the passions of those days, and I too would fain undo the evils that have been wrought. If thou wilt go up to Selim thou wilt find that he turns to thee as to none else, disfigured and fallen as thou art. His love for thee is instinctive, as the love of a child for its Mother, but no less deep and tender, and thou canst do for him what none other can; for between thy Soul and his there are the magnetic links that ever unite the twin halves of the perfect Soul, and through thy mind he will dimly sense the things he cannot perceive at all with his own stunted faculties. I will show thee how to awake his dor-

mant powers, and so atone for my sin in hurrying him from the Earthly stage of life which was destined to develop the first germs of his senses through the medium of his material powers."

Zuleika's face brightened with the first look of unselfish pleasure I had ever seen, as she said:

"If thou wilt help us, Ahrinziman, I would have hope. Well do I know how great are thy powers."

"Nay, it is not on my powers that I shall now rely, Zuleika, I shall be but the medium for others, even as thou wilt be the medium for me, who always unseen will yet be working through thee."

A deep sigh caused me to look round, and I saw Artemisia standing beside us.

"Alas" said she, "I also must be ever unseen by mine own child. Yet I too can help to shield him with my love. Ahrinziman, my once enemy, my enemy no more since thou wilt help my child, I pray thee to forgive me."

She bowed her haughty head, and clasping the hand I held out to her in token of amity, bent down and kissed my fingers, while her hot tears like a soothing rain relieved the sorrowful burden of her heart.

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Those on Earth who have had the charge of a poor imbecile child will understand with what feelings we three watched for every sign of the returning intellect. How long and weary and fruitless seemed often our labors, yet how cheered from time to time were we by some sudden gleam of light, some sparkle of intelligence, as little by little the stupefying weight of the animal faculties gave place to the permeating influence of the more Spiritual powers, and first one mental shoot and then another burst through the dull soil of the Prince's mind.

In our absorption in watching we forgot ourselves; so intent were we upon his progress that we thought not of our own. Yet at times, as I watched Zuleika and the Queen, I could not but perceive how the haughty beauty of Artemisia, softened and chastened by her sorrow, came back to the regal features, smoothing away the hard lines of passion and leaving only the Spiritual beauty and warmth of her deep love. Zuleika's girlish grace and delicacy of feature came back again with all their old youthful charm, and with far more than their old loveliness; for her beauty

now was the truly Spiritual beauty of the unselfish soul that has learned to forget self in the love for others.

Of these changes, however, both the Queen and Zuleika were still ignorant. Zuleika had almost ceased to think of her own looks, save with an occasional pang of regret lest her want of beauty should be noticed by Selim. And Artemisia, in the half jealous feelings she still experienced at having to share with Zuleika the love of her son, forbore to comment upon the change which she perceived stealing over Zuleika.

At last the time came when I felt that my share in the work was over. Selim had attained to the growth of power akin to that of a bright youth just entering manhood, and I felt that he must progress henceforth by his own efforts, no longer by mine, and thus I told Zuleika and his Mother and bade them adieu for a season. As I turned to go Zuleika followed me, and touching me timidly on the arm said:

"Ahrinziman, my brother in adversity, cannot ye take me with you? If your task is ended so also must be mine, and I confess I would fain leave now, rather than wait till the awakened perceptions of Selim tell him how fair are the good and pure women of that Earth Plane upon which you say he is now to dwell, and how haggard and ugly to look upon am I. He clings to me now as to a dear sister. Alas! What if some time he should should turn from me in disgust at reading what I have been."

Her voice faltered, and she turned away her head to hide her tears. As for me, as I looked upon her I could not but smile and sigh: sigh to think of the sweetness of the Spiritual love that I could perceive was awakened in her heart, and which made the admiration and the love of her Twin-Soul a thing so dear to her that rather than brave the bitterness of indifference or dislike (or that tender toleration of mere gratitude which to those who love is as the gift of a stone where one is hungry and seeks for bread) she would leave the beloved object of all her cares and go forth to wander with me. I sighed because her words brought back to me all that I in my blindness had lost in losing my Ianthe, and I smiled to see how fair she was and how unconscious of it. And I said:

"Fare thee well, Zuleika. Thy path and mine diverge. For thee, whose sins were those of frivolity and youth, and who hast striven so earnestly to overcome them; for thee, and for Selim, there is a new life opening in the brighter spheres of the Earth Plane, where ye shall both gather that knowledge of life of which

Death deprived you. For me, my path lies amidst those fields of wide and dangerous knowledge that I have elected to explore, and wherein thou couldst not follow me. If thou dost desire to leave here for a season do so, but first let me advise thee to go to Selim himself and see what he will say to thy looks. Or stay, go yonder and look into that crystal stream that flows near our feet: gaze into its depths and methinks its waters will mirror back to thee the answer thou wilt get from Selim."

CHAPTER XXIV

LONG YEARS OF LABOR; I MEET MY MOTHER;
HOW THE SPHERES ARE INTERBLENDED, YET
DISCREET; THE GATES AND PORTALS

For many years I labored in the dark spheres and on the Earth Plane, helping and comforting those who were less fortunate than myself. At times I enjoyed a season of rest with my good friend Abubatha, and his patient faith and happy temperament did much to lighten the burden of my own cares, and to soothe my ever-present remorse for the loss of my sweet Ianthe.

Through all the weary waiting years I never caught one glimpse of her again. No echo even of her thoughts could come to me. For the gates of the snow-white spheres had shut upon her, and to me they were ever impenetrable. Vain were all my longings; fruitless all my regrets. The wall that my own act had created shut her away from me. Now and again at long intervals I had seen the vision of a Silver Star, and afar from it the Golden Star, but although they were a little nearer to each other as time passed on I saw no signs of the rays from the one crossing the rays from the other, and thus I knew that our union was still afar off.

As I wandered on the Earth Plane and worked in the dark spheres I would sometimes meet those whose life threads had been intertwined with my own, and I knew that they also were working out their penance, and gleaning the harvest of the seeds which they had sown.

Mansur I often saw, and from his wisdom I gained much valuable help; and as in time Jel-al-ûd-dîn joined us in our work I came to meet them very often. For both these Spirits the path was far more rugged than for myself, and their work was so enormous that there was no possibility for them to ascend for many centuries from the dark spheres. But even for them Hope's Star shone clear, and as their good deeds began to balance a little their evil ones their surroundings became less sombre. And yet the remorse those two suffered must have been terrible, for at every corner fresh consequences of their evil acts would rise up and confront them, and only the great courage and determination of the men could have enabled them to struggle on through the stupendous mass of evil which they had built up around them.

I cannot pause to describe any of the strange and varied scenes I saw during this part of my labors, for their records would fill volumes. But the experience I gathered from them was of priceless value to my Soul.

At last, after long, long years of labor, it came to pass that I wandered into a grey valley of shadows and lay down to rest, for Soul and body alike were weary, and I longed for a season of repose.

The valley was indeed a strange one, for everything looked like only the shadow of something else. The grey trees that waved their branches gently over head, the hills that rose on either side, the rocks that strewed the pathway through the glen, even the misty clouds above my head, were all like the shadowy reflections of another land, and in their very mistiness there was a suggestion of the things one sees in sleep. I lay down upon the ground and almost immediately sank into a most sweet slumber.

How long I lay asleep I do not know, but when I awoke the scene around me had changed, and I was in a new land, a glorious land of golden sunshine and fair flowers. My grey pilgrim's robe too was gone, and youth had returned to my face and form, for the Valley of Shadows was the Gate of Death, and in my sleep I had passed into a new sphere.

As I looked around me with delight I saw my Mother, the White Angel of my childhood, coming towards me, and the next moment Mother and Son, so long parted, were clasping each other in a fond embrace.

At first I could not speak, my heart was too full for words. Then I asked where I was.

"Thou art in the third sphere, Oh my son! Thou hast passed into it from the second sphere below the Earth where thou didst work. Thou mightest have enjoyed the pleasures of the beautiful second sphere above long since hadst thou desired it, but I was not there to greet thee, and we thought it best to leave thee at thy labors till thou couldst come here to me."

Again with much emotion I embraced her, and then I asked whether now I should be able to see my lost Ianthe. My Mother shook her head sadly.

"Not even yet, Oh my poor son! canst thou see thy Beloved. The Silver Star opens not its gates ever to one who hath known the passions of life. But thy Ianthe shall be drawn down in time to thee, and will meet thee in the lands of the Golden Star, where as yet thou hast not reached. Here thou canst dwell with me, dear Son, until the happy time comes which will unite thee with thine Ianthe. I have myself dwelt in the spheres of that Silver Star and I can tell thee of them. My love for thee and for thy Father drew me around you both, and as I followed the lives of those I loved I shared the thoughts and emotions of the Souls so strongly linked with mine; and I gathered the experiences of life, developing my passions and living in my own hopes and fears for thee, until I was no longer a fit dweller in the spheres of the Star of calm unruffled Peace."

"And where, Oh my Mother, are the spheres of the Silver Star? Do they lie far from Earth?"

"Nay, my Son. The spheres of the three Stars of Passion, of Innocence, and of Knowledge, that have for their symbols the Crimson, the Silver, and the Golden Stars, stretch from the Earth Plane upwards through all the spheres of the planet Earth itself. They are divided from each other by the invisible walls of the attraction or repulsion which the qualities of each exert upon the one opposed to it, so that they who belong unto the Silver Star can neither see nor come in contact with those who dwell in the rays of the Crimson Star, for they act upon each other with the strongest repelling force, while the qualities of the Golden Star are formed of a blending of the higher faculties of both, and thus the Golden Star hovers ever between them, and in its neutral spheres those who are drawn from the Silver and the Crimson Stars can blend. In the second sphere thou canst see three gates. One is in the second sphere below. It looks, they tell me, like a Gate of Fire, whose flaming portals admit those whose

passions bring them into affinity with the Red Star, into the realms of Darkness which men call Hell. Thou hast passed that Gate, my Son, and thou knowest into what lands it leads, and how from that Gate thou mayest descend into ever lower and lower depths of sin and passion.

"In the second sphere above the Earth there is the Silver Gate, wherein all the innocent and pure, all those who die in unsullied childhood or unsullied youth, do pass. Its lands are lovely to the eyes. Its realms are those of endless peace. Neither passion nor sorrow ever enter there. Therefore as the memory of my husband and my child awoke, my sorrow at parting from them shut me out from the lands within the Silver Gates, and I dwelt outside for many years, till my own efforts to lighten the sorrows of others raised me to this sphere."

"And do all children pass into that land of the Silver Star?"

"Not all, my Son. There be some children born of parents so evil, so degraded, that they inherit evil propensities, and learn even as children to follow the dictates of childish passion. Such children remain near the Earth outside the Silver Gates, tended by Spirit guardians. Still, many children enter the lands of the Silver Star, for most children are innocent of evil, in that they do not comprehend the nature of it.

"And now the third Gate that I would tell thee of is also in this second sphere above the Earth. It is larger and more beautiful than that of the Silver Star, and is of purest Gold. They who pass it are always men and women of full experience and ripe wisdom, and it opens only to those whose labors have taught them the control of their passions, and also given them the purity that comes of experience, not that which comes from irresponsible innocence. Thou hast not passed that Gate as yet, but thou shalt do so soon, for it hath its counterpart in every sphere (even as have each of the others), and it admits the Soul to the special lands which pertain unto the realms of the Golden Star in each sphere."

"And will Ianthe join me then?" I asked wistfully.

"Alas! No, Ahrinziman. Not even then can she come at once to thee. She left the Earth life so young and innocent, and the Earth ties were so feeble, that only after long years yet to come will she have gathered an experience which will make her a fit mate for thee. Hadst thou but known, it would have been so easy for thee to awaken her emotions while she was on Earth

and under thy care, whereas now in that peaceful life of the Silver Star her love may be asleep for long, long years. Yet despair not, my Son, in the memory of that one hour in which thou didst hold her in thine arms there is a link between you, and as thou dost rise thyself, thy thoughts, freed from Earth, will rise more easily to her."

My Mother's speech saddened me, for my hopes had sprung into sudden life when I found myself in so fair a land. Still, I had learned now how short is Time in comparison with Eternity, and I felt that with my Mother's love to soothe and comfort me I could still struggle to await in patience the coming of my vanished love. I felt this more especially as I considered how many waiting Souls there were, whose lives, even amidst the fair surroundings of the higher spheres, were still like my own, incomplete.

"Ahrinziman," said my Mother tenderly, "thou hast wandered far, my Son: thy path hath been long and weary, but the days of happiness are come for thee at last. In this fair land thou shalt dwell with me and with thy Father, for he too shall shortly join us here. And as in the dark spheres thou hast seen all the woes that evil produces, so here thou shalt see what joys spring from the seeds of good. Thou hast seen the dark Genii of the evil passions of man's Soul; now thou shalt behold the good Genii of unselfishness and purity and love, whose ethereal forms float in the air of these bright lands, and who have their dwelling places in the cloud palaces of golden hopes realised and happy dreams fulfilled. For as man's evil propensities assume form and shape in the Spirit World of ethereal life, so do his good desires: and as the one is strong to haunt him with thoughts of evil, so are the others powerful to inspire him with aspirations for that which is pure and good. Thus the actions and thoughts of a man's life react, not alone upon himself and those with whom he comes in contact, but upon a countless multitude whom he hath never seen, but who feel the influence of the Good or Evil Genii which he hath created."

My Mother now took me by the hand and led me to a beautiful archway of flowers, and together we passed into the fair gardens of that Land of Light.

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION; THE GATHERING OF MY FRIENDS;
MARRIAGE AT LAST OF TWIN-SOULS

More than two thousand three hundred years have passed since I left the mortal body, and the history of the time in which I lived hath become an ancient and half-forgotten story to the present generation of mankind. The city and Palace of Parsagherd lie in ruins, with but a crumbling heap of grass-grown stones to mark where they once stood.

The wandering Arabs pitch their tents where once Kings held their court, and the jackal makes his lair amidst the broken fragments of the fatal secret passage.

The Temple of Amurath hath also fallen into decay, and the Faith of my forefathers hath become an almost extinct belief, kept alive only by a scattered remnant of the ancient Persians, who worshipped the light of Purity and Truth under the emblem of the sacred Fire.

And as I stand upon a mountain top in that bright Spirit Sphere where I have dwelt with my beloved parents for so long, and look down to Earth to view again the scenes of my Earthly pilgrimage, and mark the changes Time hath wrought, the visions of my past rise one by one before me, showing me again the drama of my life's story. But now there is neither sadness nor reproach in the pictures: they but show the weaving of the threads in the web of my destiny.

As the last picture fades out in a haze of golden glory I see all the friends whom I knew or loved in the days of my Earth's history gathering around me, or sending to me from afar the reflex of their thoughts of me.

I see first Mansur and Jel-al-ûd-dîn, still working on the Earth plane and in the Dark Spheres, but working now as those who have conquered the evils of their past, and who are sowing the seeds of good that they may spring up and cover over the ruins they once helped to make, and veil them with flowers like a mantle of atonement.

I see next my fair Mother, clad in purest white, with a faint

bordering of pink to mark where once the crimson stained her fair white robes. She wears a Golden Star upon her brow, and she looks up at my Father with the half shy happy look of a young bride, as she leans upon his arm. He wears no kingly robes now. No crown rests upon his head. His mantle is of green and gold, but fashioned like a student's, not a King's. For the burdens of state sat heavy on his Soul and he hath been glad to cast them aside, to find in a life of study and the companionship of his sweet wife that happiness which long years of labor in the dark spheres have won for him.

With my parents I see another figure: that of the faithful friend, the gallant soldier, the noble patriot, Ben Al Zulid. And following them I see the dusky figure of that poor slave whom my Father's orders had caused to be slain, to guard the secret of the passage, but whom in Spirit life El Jazid had raised up and helped, till the wrong of the past had been forgiven, if not forgotten.

Following these I see Bamba, the ever faithful, and Zuleika and Selim. No longer doth Selim appear as the grotesque child with the face of an old man. He hath grown up into the true understanding and power of a man's estate, while Zuleika is no longer the selfish frivolous girl, but a thoughtful gentle woman, whose own sufferings have taught her sympathy with those of others. They make a very bright looking handsome group, as they stand with smiling faces looking over to me.

Artemisia stands beside her son, a Queenly figure in robes of crimson and gold, with a long white veil falling from the golden Crown she wears upon her head. For Artemisia is one of nature's Queens, and her commanding nature makes of her a strong protectress to those of her own sex whose weaker natures make them glad to lean upon her calm strength. She hath learnt the secret of true sovereignty, as opposed to mere selfish state, and there is no Spirit more noble, more constant in her unswerving devotion to others, than the once proud revengful Queen.

As the vision of Artemisia and the others fades away I see the radiant form of my beloved friend Abubatha. The shining brightness of his snowy robes no words can ever paint. The noble beauty of his face no language can express, as the dear friend and companion of my boyhood and Spirit life draws near to me.

Beside him I see the Angel of the Golden Star, no longer clad in grey and gold but with robes of dazzling white and wings

of glittering gold, while the Golden Star upon his forehead shimmers like the light from the Star of Truth. For the cycle of this Angel's pilgrimage is at last complete, and he reigns now in the realms of the glorious Golden Star.

He turns to me with a smile, as he says "Look up, Ahrinziman, and see the crowning vision of joy that awaits thee."

As he speaks I hear a strain of wondrous music, and I see a brilliant cloud of Silver light appear, and as it floats down and down to me I see that it is a vast throng of the Angels of the Silver Star, accompanied by many youths and maidens in robes of white and silver, carry flowers which they scatter around them as they float down to where I stand. In their midst I see a great mass of white blossoms, like a cloud of flowers, whereon there rests the lovely figure of my long lost Ianthe. No longer a child, but a gentle maid, with the sweet child's face and the long floating hair I saw of old. She is dressed in white, and her robes are spangled with silver Stars, while on her dark hair there is a crown of white flowers, and over her head there is thrown a veil of silver gauze.

As she floats down I see again the vision of the Silver and the Golden Stars, but now they are near together. And as I look at them I see that the rays from the Golden Star are touching the Silver one and turning its whiteness into Gold, and I know that the hour of my true romance hath dawned for me at last.

As my Ianthe and her train of white Spirits from the Silver Star reach the place where I stand I know why it is that all the nearest and dearest friends of my past have gathered around me, and why even those whose Spiritual conditions prevent them from entering my sphere have yet projected their thoughts to me in this the happiest moment of my existence, that as we have shared life's sorrows we may also share its joys, and it is with a heart full of deep gratitude for all their friendship that I turn to greet my lovely Bride.

As I clasped her to my heart I whispered to her, "Dost thou remember still thy Patriarch?"

She laughed and blushed, and raised her eyes shyly to my face. Then for answer she put her soft arms around my neck, and laid her fair head upon my breast, even as she had done on that far-away night when I had found and lost my Love.

ENVOI

Many centuries separate me from my earthly life, yet I have not lost one iota of my interest in the lives of those who are toiling through their earthly pilgrimages. The faith of my forefathers has well nigh passed away, and the Star of another Faith hath risen upon the earth and spread its teachings East and West, North and South.

Yet is not truth the same under whatever religious garb we find it?—is not God the same God, the same loving Father of all mankind, whether we call Him by the name of the Jewish Jehovah or that given to him by any other nation of his children? Are they not all alike his children, or can we believe that while he loads with privileges one favored race he will turn as a hard step-father from the prayers offered to Him by another, because their mode of worshipping Him is different? And if all Religions have their roots in the one fountain of all truth, may it not be possible that the restless discontent and scepticism of these later days of the nineteenth century of the Christian era, this searching amidst the teaching of the East, with its mystic doctrines and its secrets that may be revealed only to the elect few while the starving many have their eager hunger for Light left still unsatisfied, this turning to occult studies in the hope that some new path may be found; may not all this be due to the efforts of the Higher Powers to make man recognise his Universal Brotherhood as an actual verity, not as a mere ethical form of speech, and to make each nation recognise the truth and beauty that are enshrined in the teachings of the others. As each acknowledges the virtues of the other, as each nation and class recognise the slenderness of the barrier that separates them, and the sacredness of the bonds that should unite, they are taking a step towards the Millennium of perfect happiness of which every people of the Universe have dreamed.

And may it not also be that the Spirits of the Higher Spheres in seeking to level the barriers between nations and classes and religions, are also striving to draw away those barriers that interpose between Earth and the Spirit World?—and that, as

in these days the march of education, the diffusion of knowledge, the means of freer inter-communication between nation and nation, and the consequent spread of freedom of thought and liberty of action, have freed mankind from many of the dangers which surrounded the intercourse of the incarnate souls of earth with the disincarnate souls of the Spirit World; those doors of communication between the two worlds which have been so long closed are about to be thrown open again, that man's means of gaining knowledge upon earth may be augmented by the clearer knowledge of the Spirit Spheres?

And since in the past those Spiritual doors were closed by reason of the many errors that crept in, and the evil uses to which the unscrupulous turned the knowledge which they gained, may it not be that a part of the atoning work of those who abused or perverted their spiritual advantages in the past, consists now in returning to the earth and helping, with the clearer knowledge they have gained, and the purer, holier desires they have cultivated, to shed anew upon the world the glorious knowledge of the higher spheres of *Spiritual* life?

THE END

NOTES

Note A.

This story came to me under peculiar circumstances. It is printed as told by Ahrinziman himself, but the names of the characters are purely fictitious and have no claim to historical accuracy. The accounts given by historians of the Persian history of that period are meagre and often conflicting, although there is a general agreement as to the leading events, and as it may interest some readers to know who the actors in this true tale are, I give the real names:

El Jazid was Artaxerxes Longimanus of Persia, said by the Jewish historians to be the Ahasuerus mentioned in the Story of Esther and Vashti. He is said to have been a singularly handsome, graceful man, tall and of commanding presence.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, in giving the story of Esther and Vashti expresses the opinion that the action of the King in proposing to exhibit his beautiful wife to his boon companions after a banquet was intended as an insult to her and that she was justified in refusing to appear. In the opinion of Josephus there were indications of a private quarrel and that the King took this public method of finding an excuse for deposing Vashti from her position of dignity and honor. If Artemisia was Vashti then it is quite possible that the "Damaspia" who has gone down in history as the queen of Artaxerxes was some other wife than Vashti. Other historians ignore the story of Vashti and Esther.

Artemisia was Vashti, the haughty, beautiful Queen of Ash.

Selim was Xerxes, the only legitimate son of Artaxerxes, who had reigned only forty days when he was assassinated (it was said by Sogdianus).

Ahrinziman was Sogdianus, the illegitimate son of Artaxerxes. Various accounts are given of his character and the manner of his death, but all agree that he in his turn was assassinated by order of "Ochus," whom I call "Ahmed," a third and illegitimate son of Artaxerxes. Ochus then ascended the throne and reigned for a number of years.

Ben Al Zulid was Megabyzus, the noted general of Artaxerxes. The other characters of the story are not mentioned in history.

Note B.

In all discussions as to the merits or demerits of trance mediumship, one cannot but feel that there is amongst many people a total misconception of the true meaning of the word trance, that term being applied to any and every variety of hypnotic condition and to all forms of suspension of the individual consciousness.

Strictly speaking, a trance should mean a condition of enchantment or delight; entrancing meaning to delight and uplift the spirit into a superior condition of sensation in which the Soul, raised above the limitations of the lower or animal plane of existence, wanders in *conscious* pleasure amidst the highest thought regions to which that Soul can gain access. In the words of John of Patmos, one may describe a true trance condition. John of Patmos visited a sphere with which he was mentally and magnetically in harmony, and what he saw was what such a Soul would enjoy were it released entirely from the earth body, not merely lifted up from his earthly environments for a brief period.

In the perfect trance condition the Soul retains a full and perfect consciousness of its own individuality, and is to all intents and purposes as much awake as when acting through the agency of its earthly body, while it possesses the *added* mental power which would be its attribute were it finally freed from the envelopment of that earthly envelope which, while it protects the Soul in Earth life, also dulls and deadens its finer perceptions and limits its power of mental vision and its ability to receive the thought waves transmitted from other minds.

The true "Master of Magic" is he who, having learnt all which can enable him to control mind incased in matter, can go one step higher and, freeing himself from the limitations imposed by matter, roam at will into spheres too distant for the Soul to reach while clogged by its grosser envelope.

Furthermore, to take the Soul out of the body into the free upper regions of pure spirit life is to give it the same spiritual refreshment which climbing to the top of a high mountain or sailing upon the wide ocean gives to the tired and jaded mortal to whom change of air often means a renewal of life.

Thought is a universal essence unbounded by any limitations of time or space, but it is also in its nature like "Light," and capable of having its rays refracted and its illuminating

powers obscured by the mass of material thought atoms which fill the atmosphere of planetary life even as the material dust particles affect the transmission of a ray of light.

The constant giving off and absorbing again of every shade and variety of mental and physical atoms is a part of the unceasing pulsation of the life with which an inhabited planet teems, and we maintain that while there be some minds so powerful in their mental grasp of the thoughts transmitted to them and so clear and strong in their power of mental vision, that they can overcome many of the limitations produced by their earthly environments, yet even these lofty and powerful intellects would be enabled to wing their flight into still wider thought regions were they able to rise from their earthly body and, leaving *it* as the unconscious, unresponsive (because uninhabited) tabernacle of the Soul, travel into those farther mental spheres with which the degree of their mental development put them in harmony.

A perfect trance, then, should be the conscious flight of the Soul into a superior condition from which it ought to return strengthened and refreshed and capable of wider thoughts and nobler and freer actions and a stronger and more perfect possession of its own individuality. The true Seers of all ages who have left behind them knowledge which is as valuable now as when first given to the world, were Mystics who had mastered the true nature of the trance condition and to apply the word "trance" to all those exhibitions of semi-conscious mental aberrations of persons whose sensitiveness lays them open to the mesmeric control of either incarnate or excarnate minds, is to propagate an error which ought long ago to have been exploded. With the spread of mediumistic development all and every variety and degree of subconscious conditions have come to be classed as "trances," yet they bear no more resemblance to the true trance of the developed Mystic of the older occult "Faiths" than does the sleep which is produced by the use of powerful narcotic drugs resemble that of healthy tired nature.

The hypnotically-induced trance is as pernicious to the Soul as would be the habitual use of narcotics to the body. Whether the hypnotiser (or, more correctly, the magnetiser) be in the flesh or out of it, the results are the same; an habitual use of magnetism to induce sleep or "trance" is an evil and one which it would require a whole volume to properly illustrate.

The wisest of spirit intelligences on both sides of life do not,

then, use the magnetic forces to produce either trance or sleep, except as they would use a powerful medicine whose aid it was sometimes necessary to invoke but whose *habitual* use was an evil even more deadly than that which it was designed to cure.

The teachers of the Eastern schools study to enable their pupils to acquire the power of *conscious* spiritual communion while in the body, and the development of an equally conscious power of leaving the *body* while the *conscious spirit* is gaining rest and knowledge in a higher condition of existence. That the majority of mediums have not yet acquired this perfect control is due to the fact that very few are ever able or willing to go through the process needful to gain this perfect mastery of their bodies. The majority do not even grasp the idea that there is any need for more development than they have already attained.

In the limits of a note it is impossible to follow out this subject further, but since it is becoming an accepted fact that such things as "hypnotic" trances and hypnotic control exist, it would be well for thoughtful persons to give the subject an intelligent and careful consideration, regarding as a dangerous, as well as a useful and often beneficent attribute, this magnetic power which lies latent in so many people.

CONCERNING OBSESSIONS

In giving the Story of Ahrinziman to the public, those who dictated it have been asked to add a note as to their views of the recent discussions on Obsessions and other Evils which are so prominent a feature of the Occult movement in the present day.

First, as to the evil effects experienced by some persons who have sat in circles for development or for the manifestations of psychic power. The whole theory of magnetic control rests upon a condition of mutual receptivity being established between the members of a circle, but few reflect that the blending of magnetisms with those who form the *spirit* side of that circle is no less a part of the process, and that without the aid of the

magnetism of the spirits present nothing belonging to the spirit side of life would be obtained. Now, in forming a circle which sits in a large city, how are you going to insure absolute freedom from the intrusions of the low or evil earth-bound spirits who crowd the streets of a large city? The magnetic aura created by the circle hangs in a cloud around them and draws spirits to it even as a magnet draws iron and steel, and everything bright or rusty,—useful tools or dangerous weapons,— will be attracted by the powerful magnet.

The popular idea that the “good intelligences” who guard the meeting will prove strong enough to insure protection, has not always proved correct; for which reason we are not in favour of circles for physical phenomena being held in large cities.

Supposing, however, that they are held; then it should be remembered that the intruding spirits will give off their magnetism to blend with that of the good spirits, and thus magnetic threads will be formed between them and those members of the circle who are sensitive to magnetic influences, for not until a complete fusion of magnetisms takes place is there a distillation of that vitalised ether upon which genuine manifestations depend. If you once admit that the aura of a good and pure person can be poisoned by their absorbing the tainted mixture from a mixed circle of all sorts of mortals and spirits, you will also admit that the good persons can carry home with them a sufficient portion of that poisoned magnetism to form the nucleus of a magnetic state congenial to the low and depraved spirits, and into which any of them can enter a second time without the aid of the circle. The oftener the low spirit visits a good and pure mortal the more completely will that mortal’s aura become poisoned by the magnetism of the low spirit and the easier will it be for other low spirits to follow the first intruder, and the more difficult will be the task of breaking off the rapport which has been established or limiting these low spirits’ power of controlling the mortal.

In all physical phenomena one essential element required to form the complete magnetic chain from mortal conditions to the higher spirit states, is the magnetism of spirits upon the Earth Plane,—that being the condition of magnetic life which forms the final link with man. Therefore the presence and aid of earth-bound spirits is always needful to such manifestations, and even if these earth-bound spirits are not evil, but anxious to do good, their *continual* control of a very highly sensitive medium

must do harm because, owing to the nature and structure of that Astral body of the earth plane (in which an earth-bound spirit is imprisoned), the spirit cannot help absorbing from the mortal his *finer* life essence. A draught of that vitalised ether which is distilled at a seance for physical phenomena—most particularly for materialisation— is like a drink of champagne to a mortal or an elixir to a sick man, and it is little wonder that earth-bound spirits crowd to seances or that those who only know how much better *they* feel from attending a seance should be loud in praise of the good a seance is doing them and oblivious to, or ignorant of, the fact that the life essence they absorb must have been drawn from *some living* person in the flesh, since only persons in the flesh can give off earthly magnetism to blend with that higher magnetism which also is what the poor earth-bound spirit lacks and cannot obtain unaided. An earth-bound spirit is like one who belongs to neither earth nor heaven nor Gehenna. He has lost his hold on the earth life and not yet attained to the spirit world. He lives in his Astral body and, having nothing of his own, must borrow from those both above and below him on the ladder of development. We cannot here explain all that the study of the earth-bound Astral body would lead to, but we should much desire to see the nature and structure of that body, and its relation to both the true spirit body and the earthly envelope, made the subject of scientific study by the student of Occultism, for it is through this knowledge that the causes and cure of obsessions will be found.

We admit that physical phenomena, like every other form of phenomena, has its place and its use in demonstrating the nature of the latent powers conferred on man, but we object to the indiscriminate use of it, with disastrous and often fatal results. It would be wiser to recognise and admit the evil and the danger and set to work to find the remedy, than deny what is proved by thousands of instances of obsession and ruin amongst ignorant or thoughtlessly confiding mediums.

Magnetic treatment is one of the remedies for obstinate cases of obsession, but it ought to be very cautiously applied because under certain conditions magnetism will only increase the evil. The majority of magnetisers do not possess sufficient knowledge of the different forms of obsession nor of the different effects of the magnetism of the astral and physical planes. The whole subject is in need of an altogether wider study.

Mediumship is a *necessity*. Without it there would be no means of knowledge, no instruments through which to study the Occult plane, but mediumship, in exact proportion to the *magnetic* powers it confers, becomes a greater and ever greater source of danger the further its development is carried, unless the control of those powers can be held with a firm hand and *understood* in *all* their aspects. At the present moment mortals have not got sufficient knowledge to make the universal practise of mediumship safe, and it would be wiser to limit its development to those who intend to make it the business of their lives and who possess logical powers of brain, strength of will, and purity of purpose, as well as gifts of a high order.

The majority of slightly endowed dabblers in mediumship whom one meets on all sides are simply wasting time and creating a danger to themselves and others. Knowledge is the best safeguard, and knowledge will be best obtained from those who can study *all* the conditions of spirit life, not from those whose experiences have only been of a nature to put them in harmonious touch with certain of the bright spheres of good and happy spirits.

What we would like to see would be the conditions under which there could be a development of mediumship such as would reproduce some of the more subtle forms of phenomena known to the old Magicians, many of whom were very highly endowed men with a far greater knowledge than is shown by the fragmentary records they have left. But to reproduce these experiments would require the development of just those mediums whose gifts lie on the blended Astral and physical planes, and who are, as we said, the mediums whose powers are the most dangerous to develop in the mixed conditions in which public mediums at present have to live. A very special course of development for such mediums is also required, and very few would have the self-sacrifice to submit to the long and tedious process or give up all that they would have to resign. In the old days, a Magician, when he found such a medium as a young child, bought that child for a slave and did with it what he chose, and through such a medium the Magician made a study of the Astral body and the Astral plane of earth life, and those who wish to obtain the knowledge of that plane will have to find such mediums in order to learn by *actual demonstration* the facts the old Magicians discovered.

But no experimenter ought to attempt to develop or use that

or any other form of magnetic mediumship, *until* the experimenter understands the nature and dangers of the force he is studying. To allow all sorts of ignorant people to experiment with their own and others' magnetic forces is like throwing open to the public a chemical laboratory full of jars and vials containing the most powerful and deadly poisons. A study of the subject is a necessity of the age; but in making all freely welcome to enter upon that course of study the most clear and decided warnings ought to be given as to the dangerous nature of the elements which will have to be dealt with during that course of study. In all ages this has been true, and although a fair number of persons year by year safely carry on a little routine of simple experiments, they owe their safety to the fact that such gifts as they employ do not put them in touch with the sphere from which the *true* dangers arise, and even though they themselves escape harm there are numerous cases where persons who have joined in these experiments have suffered seriously afterwards, from the simple reason that the mediumship of the sufferers proved to be on a *different* plane, and once the development was *begun* by good but often half-instructed spirits, it has passed beyond their control, and the sensitive has been taken possession of by another class of spirits and developed onto the dangerous plane. As regards the two forms of magnetism which are classed as Astral and Physical, we say that the fundamental difference between them is due to the different planetary conditions under which the Astral people and the Physical people, or spirits of the Adamite race, were created. We speak of Physical spirits when we mean those spirits who obtained their original *individual* consciousness with their incarnation upon the planet earth at the period of its perfect physical (or present) stage of evolution. This race is called by old writers the Race of Adam, or first perfected type of man in the physical form on earth. As distinguished from the Adamite Race, old writers speak of the Astral people and of a mixed race whom they called the "Dwellers on the Threshold," and while the Western nations have lost trace of these ancient traditions, the Eastern schools of Occultism and Theology have retained a belief in them as a part of their teachings. With the lapse of time much confusion and many errors have crept into the teachings given regarding these two races, but the main features will be found alike in all countries both East and West, where any traditions survive, and although

the arrogance of Adamite man has made him believe that to *him* alone was the gift of Immortality given, the oldest records go to show that the Astral race was no less immortal and numbered amongst its people good as well as evil Intelligences of the highest order.

These spirits who have never known incarnation in the conditions of the Adamite race cannot be seen by man, but they can and do act upon him through the intervention and mediumship of that intermediate race who have blended with both the Astral and Adamite races and whose origin and kinship with man cannot be explained here, but which have been fully given in another story which will follow this one.

It is from the mediums upon earth who can hold converse with this dual race of Dwellers on the Threshold, that all knowledge of the true Astral people has been derived in ancient times, and it is of course partly due to the necessary imperfections in all mediums that certain errors have crept into accounts of them, for, as we have elsewhere shown, the minds of the *earthly* Inquirers who questioned the mediums, often dominated them to the *exclusion* of the spirit controls, hence the ideas of Adamite man got mixed with the revelations given him. If a study of the Astral Plane were opened up now by careful and thoughtful students, much could be learned, but not until the systematic development and safeguarding of the Astral-physical mediums was established, could it be attempted. These mediums were the subjects in olden times of the witchcraft manifestations, either innocently or with a knowledge and evil use of their power, and a study of the apparently absurd or wildly imaginative details given at many of the witch trials would indicate one direction in which to seek for the causes of obsessions. Mediums belonging to the class of mixed Astral and physical mediumship ought never under any circumstances to be tempted to sit for development in mixed circles or allow themselves to be treated magnetically even for curative purposes, because all magnetism will tend to the uncovering and development of the powers of their Astral body and put them at once in touch with the Astral plane of the Earth sphere—that sphere from which come the worst evils which can afflict humanity once the barrier between it and man is taken away. Since no one knows to what class their mediumship may belong, is it not wiser to avoid developing it unless there be good reason to believe

that in doing so valuable knowledge and useful power will be gained?

When we reflect upon the enormous degree of power which a finely developed, highly endowed, Astral-physical medium possesses, and that such power once developed can be used for good or for evil, according to the minds under whose control the power is held; we cannot wonder that such gifts filled people with fear in olden times, or that when so many evil practitioners of the Black Arts obtained and developed these mediums, a reign of terror prevailed which caused afflicted humanity to call in the aid of the laws and sweep all such persons and their knowledge from the earth, and that every religion has prohibited the use or development of such powers amongst the laity. It has been thought that the accounts of witchcraft in all lands are more or less exaggerated and highly colored, but we assert that within the lifetime of the younger members of the present generation there will be again a reproduction of all the worst features of those past epochs of evil power—a still more widespread reign of fear and danger will arise, because the number of persons who are developing and using magnetic powers is greater than in the past, and all these persons will become the tools of those who desire either good or evil results; they will be the instruments through which the occult forces will act in the time of conflict. The various churches and schools of philosophy will all take their share in the approaching conflict, just as they did in past times. And, as in the past, so in the future, the victory will be with those who possess the largest number of followers and the most knowledge with which to fight the side opposed to them.

The Spiritualists represent one of the efforts made by those in the spirit life to prepare for the coming struggle. The Societies of Eastern Mystics represent another. The churches represent a third. The Free-thought schools are an attempt by materialistic spirits to free men's minds and give to each his sovereign power over his own brain and his own power of action. The age is an age of Freedom and of Reason; let every one, then, welcome all schools of thought which can aid in giving to man that knowledge of the obscure and dark places in nature's kingdom, which will prove his best antidote against the approaching evil.