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JOSHUA

By Georg Ebers

Volume 4.

CHAPTER XX.

The storm which had risen as night closed in swept over the isthmus. The waves in its lakes dashed high, and the Red Sea, which thrust a bay shaped like the horn of a snail into it from the south, was lashed to the wildest fury.

Farther northward, where Pharaoh's army, protected by the Migdol of the South, the strongest fort of the Etham line, had encamped a short time before, the sand lashed by the storm whirled through the air and, in the quarter occupied by the king and his great officials, hammers were constantly busy driving the tent-pins deeper into the earth; for the brocades, cloths, and linen materials which formed the portable houses of Pharaoh and his court, struck by the gale, threatened to break from the poles by which they were supported.

Black clouds hung in the north, but the moon and stars were often visible, and flashes of distant lightning frequently brightened the horizon. Even now the moisture of heaven seemed to avoid this rainless region and in all directions fires were burning, which the soldiers surrounded in double rows, like a living shield, to keep the storm from scattering the fuel.

The sentries had a hard duty; for the atmosphere was sultry, in spite of the north wind, which still blew violently, driving fresh clouds of sand into their faces.

Only two sentinels were pacing watchfully to and fro at the most northern gate of the camp, but they were enough; for, on account of the storm, no one had appeared for a long time to demand entrance or egress. At last, three hours after sunset, a slender figure, scarcely beyond boyhood, approached the guards with a firm step and, showing a messenger's pass, asked the way to Prince Siptah's tent.

He seemed to have had a toilsome journey; for his thick black locks were tangled and his feet were covered with dust and dried clay. Yet he excited no suspicion; for his bearing was that of a self-reliant freeman, his messenger's pass was perfectly correct, and the letter he produced was really directed to Prince Siptah; a scribe of the corn storehouses, who was sitting at the nearest fire with other officials and subordinate officers, examined it.

As the youth's appearance pleased most of those present, and he came from Tanis and perhaps brought news, a seat at the fire and a share in the meal were offered; but he was in haste.

Declining the invitation with thanks, he answered the questions curtly and hurriedly and begged the resting soldiers for a guide. One was placed at his disposal without delay. But he was soon to learn that it would not be an easy matter to reach a member of the royal family; for the tents of Pharaoh, his relatives, and dignitaries stood in a special spot in the heart of the camp, hedged in by the shields of the heavily-armed troops.

When he entered he was challenged again and again, and his messenger's pass and the prince's letter were frequently inspected. The guide, too, was sent back, and his place was filled by an aristocratic lord, called I the 'eye and ear of the king,' who busied himself with the seal of the letter. But the messenger resolutely demanded it, and as soon as it was again in his hand, and two tents standing side by side rocking in the tempest had been pointed out to him, one as Prince Siptah's, the other as the shelter of Masana, the daughter of Hornecht, for whom he asked, he turned to the chamberlain who came out of the former one, showed him the letter, and asked to be taken to the prince; but the former offered to deliver the letter to his master—whose steward he was—and Ephraim—for he was the messenger—agreed, if he would obtain him immediate admission to the young widow.

The steward seemed to lay much stress upon getting possession of the letter and, after scanning Ephraim from top to toe, he asked if Kasana knew him, and when the other assented, adding that he brought her a verbal message, the Egyptian said smiling:

"Well then; but we must protect our carpets from such feet, and you seem weary and in need of refreshment. Follow me."

With these words he took him to a small tent, before which an old slave and one scarcely beyond childhood were sitting by the fire, finishing their late meal with a bunch of garlic.

They started up as they saw their master; but he ordered the old man to wash the messenger's feet, and bade the younger ask the prince's cook in his name for meat, bread, and wine. Then he led Ephraim to his tent, which was lighted by a lantern, and asked how he, who from his appearance was neither a slave nor a person of mean degree, had come into such a pitiable plight. The messenger replied that on his way he had bandaged the wounds of a severely injured man with the upper part of his apron, and the chamberlain instantly went to his baggage and gave him a piece of finely plaited linen.

Ephraim's reply, which was really very near the truth, had cost him so little thought and sounded so sincere, that it won credence, and the steward's kindness seemed to him so worthy of gratitude that he made no objection when the courtier, without injuring the seal, pressed the roll of papyrus with a skilful hand, separating the layers and peering into the openings to decipher the contents. While thus engaged, the corpulent courtier's round eyes sparkled brightly and it seemed to the youth as if the countenance of the man, whose comfortable plumpness and smooth rotundity at first appeared like a mirror of the utmost kindness of heart, now had the semblance of a cat's.

As soon as the steward had completed his task, he begged the youth to refresh himself in all comfort, and did not return until Ephraim had bathed, wrapped a fresh linen upper-garment around his hips, perfumed and anointed his hair, and, glancing into the mirror, was in the act of slipping a broad gold circlet upon his arm.

He had hesitated some time ere doing this; for he was aware that he would encounter great perils; but this circlet was his one costly possession and, during his captivity, it had been very difficult for him to hide it under his apron. It might be of much service to him but, if he put it on, it would attract attention and increase the danger of being recognized.

Yet the reflection he beheld in the mirror, vanity, and the desire to appear well in Kasana's eyes, conquered caution and prudent consideration, and the broad costly ornament soon glittered on his arm.

The steward stood in astonishment before the handsome, aristocratic youth, so haughty in his bearing, who had taken the place of the unassuming messenger. The question whether he was a relative of Kasana sprang to his lips, and receiving an answer in the negative, he asked to what family he belonged.

Ephraim bent his eyes on the ground for some time in embarrassment, and then requested the Egyptian to spare him an answer until he had talked with Hornecht's daughter.

The other, shaking his head, looked at him again, but pressed him no farther; for what he had read in the letter was a secret which might bring death to whoever was privy to it, and the aristocratic young messenger was doubtless the son of a dignitary who belonged to the circle of the fellow-conspirators of Prince Siptah, his master.

A chill ran through the courtier's strong, corpulent body, and he gazed with mingled sympathy and dread at the blooming human flower associated thus early in plans fraught with danger.

His master had hitherto only hinted at the secret, and it would still be possible for him to keep his own fate separate from his. Should he do so, an old age free from care lay before him; but, if he joined the prince and his plan succeeded, how high he might rise! Terribly momentous was the choice confronting him, the father of many children, and beads of perspiration stood on his brow as, incapable of any coherent thought, he led Ephraim to Kasana's tent, and then hastened to his master.

Silence reigned within the light structure, which was composed of poles and gay heavy stuffs, tenanted by the beautiful widow.

With a throbbing heart Ephraim approached the entrance, and when he at last summoned courage and drew aside the curtain fastened firmly to the earth, which the wind puffed out like a sail, he beheld a dark room, from which a similar one opened on the right and left. The one on the left was as dark as the central one; but a flickering light stole through numerous chinks of the one on the right. The tent was one of those with a flat roof, divided into three apartments, which he had often seen, and the woman who irresistibly attracted him was doubtless in the lighted one.

To avoid exposing himself to fresh suspicion, he must conquer his timid delay, and he had already stooped and loosed the loop which fastened the curtain to the hook in the floor, when the door of the lighted room opened and a woman's figure entered the dark central chamber.

Was it she?

Should he venture to speak to her? Yes, it must be done.

Panting for breath and clenching his hands, he summoned up his courage as if he were about to steal unbidden into the most sacred sanctuary of a temple. Then he pushed the curtain aside, and the woman whom he had just noticed greeted him with a low cry.

But he speedily regained his composure, for a ray of light had fallen on her face, revealing that the person who stood before him was not Kasana, but her nurse, who had accompanied her to the prisoners and then to the camp. She, too, recognized him and stared at him as though he had risen from the grave.

They were old acquaintances; for when he was first brought to the archer's house she had prepared his bath and moistened his wound with balsam, and during his second stay beneath the same roof, she had joined her mistress in nursing him. They had chatted away many an hour together, and he knew that she was kindly disposed toward him; for when midway between waking and sleeping, in his burning fever, her hand had stroked him with maternal tenderness, and afterwards she had never wearied of questioning him about his people and at last had acknowledged that she was descended from the Syrians, who were allied to the Hebrews. Nay, even his language was not wholly strange to her; for she had been a woman of twenty when dragged to Egypt with other prisoners of Rameses the Great. Ephraim, she was fond of saying, reminded her of her own son when he was still younger.

The youth had no ill to fear from her, so grasping her hand, he whispered that he had escaped from his guards and come to ask counsel from her mistress and herself.

The word "escaped" was sufficient to satisfy the old woman; for her idea of ghosts was that they put others to flight, but did not fly themselves. Relieved, she stroked the youth's curls and, ere his whispered explanation was ended, turned her back upon him and hurried into the lighted room to tell her mistress whom she had found outside.

A few minutes after Ephraim was standing before the woman who had become the guiding star of his

life. With glowing cheeks he gazed into the beautiful face, still flushed by weeping, and though it gave his heart a pang when, before vouchsafing him a greeting, she enquired whether Hosea had accompanied him, he forgot the foolish pain when he saw her gaze warmly at him. Yet when the nurse asked whether she did not think he looked well and vigorous, and withal more manly in appearance, it seemed as though he had really grown taller, and his heart beat faster and faster.

Kasana desired to learn the minutest details of his uncle's experiences; but after he had done her bidding and finally yielded to the wish to speak of his own fate, she interrupted him to consult the nurse concerning the means of saving him from unbidden looks and fresh dangers—and the right expedient was soon found.

First, with Ephraim's help, the old woman closed the main entrance of the tent as firmly as possible, and then pointed to the dark room into which he must speedily and softly retire as soon as she beckoned to him.

Meanwhile Kasana had poured some wine into a goblet, and when he came back with the nurse she made him sit down on the giraffe skin at her feet and asked how he had succeeded in evading the guards, and what he expected from the future. She would tell him in advance that her father had remained in Tanis, so he need not fear recognition and betrayal.

Her pleasure in this meeting was evident to both eyes and ears; nay, when Ephraim commenced his story by saying that Prince Siptah's command to remove the prisoners' chains, for which they were indebted solely to her, had rendered his escape possible, she clapped her hands like a child. Then her face clouded and, with a deep sigh, she added that ere his arrival her heart had almost broken with grief and tears; but Hosea should learn what a woman would sacrifice for the most ardent desire of her heart.

She repaid with grateful words Ephraim's assurance that, before his flight, he had offered to release his uncle from his bonds and, when she learned that Joshua had refused to accept his nephew's aid, lest it might endanger the success of the plan he had cleverly devised for him, she cried out to her nurse, with tearful eyes, that Hosea alone would have been capable of such a deed.

To the remainder of the fugitive's tale she listened intently, often interrupting him with sympathizing questions.

The torturing days and nights of the past, which had reached such a happy termination, seemed now like a blissful dream, a bewildering fairy-tale, and the goblet she constantly replenished was not needed to lend fire to his narrative.

Never before had he been so eloquent as while describing how, in the ravine, he had stepped on some loose stones and rolled head foremost down into the chasm with them. On reaching the bottom he had believed that all was lost; for soon after extricating himself from the rubbish that had buried him, in order to hurry to the pool, he had heard the whistle of the guards.

Yet he had been a good runner from his childhood, had learned in his native pastures to guide himself by the light of the stars, so without glancing to the right or to the left, he had hastened southward as fast as his feet would carry him. Often in the darkness he had fallen over stones or tripped in the hollows of the desert sand, but only to rise again quickly and dash onward, onward toward the south, where he knew he should find her, Kasana, her for whose sake he recklessly flung to the winds what wiser-heads had counselled, her for whom he was ready to sacrifice liberty and life.

Whence he derived the courage to confess this, he knew not, and neither the blow from her fan, nor the warning exclamation of the nurse: "Just look at the boy!" sobered him. Nay, his sparkling eyes sought hers still mote frequently as he continued his story.

One of the hounds which attacked him he had flung against a rock, and the other he pelted with stones till it fled howling into a thicket. He had seen no other pursuers, either that night, or during the whole of the next day. At last he again reached a travelled road and found country people who told him which way Pharaoh's army had marched. At noon, overwhelmed by fatigue, he had fallen asleep under the shade of a sycamore, and when he awoke the sun was near its setting. He was very hungry, so he took a few turnips from a neighboring field. But their owner suddenly sprang from a ditch near by, and he barely escaped his pursuit.

He had wandered along during a part of the night, and then rested beside a well on the roadside, for he knew that wild beasts shun such frequented places.

After sunrise he continued his march, following the road taken by the army. Everywhere he found traces of it, and when, shortly before noon, exhausted and faint from hunger, he reached a village in

the cornlands watered by the Seti-canal, he debated whether to sell his gold armband, obtain more strengthening food, and receive some silver and copper in change. But he was afraid of being taken for a thief and again imprisoned, for his apron had been tattered by the thorns, and his sandals had long since dropped from his feet. He had believed that even the hardest hearts could not fail to pity his misery so, hard as it was for him, he had knocked at a peasant's door and begged. But the man gave him nothing save the jeering counsel that a strong young fellow like him ought to use his arms and leave begging to the old and weak. A second peasant had even threatened to beat him; but as he walked on with drooping head, a young woman whom he had noticed in front of the barbarian's house followed him, thrust some bread and dates into his hand, and whispered hastily that heavy taxes had been levied on the village when Pharaoh marched through, or she would have given him something better.

This unexpected donation, which he had eaten at the next well, had not tasted exactly like a festal banquet, but he did not tell Kasana that it had been embittered by the doubt whether to fulfil Joshua's commission and return to his people or yield to the longing that drew him to her.

He moved forward irresolutely, but fate seemed to have undertaken to point out his way; for after walking a short half hour, the latter portion of the time through barren land, he had found by the wayside a youth of about his own age who, moaning with pain, held his foot clasped between both hands. Pity led him to go to him and, to his astonishment, he recognized the runner and messenger of Kasana's father, with whom he had often talked.

"Apu, our nimble Nubian runner?" cried the young widow, and Ephraim assented and then added that the messenger had been despatched to convey a letter to Prince Siptah as quickly as possible, and the swift-footed lad, who was wont to outstrip his master's noble steeds, had shot over the road like an arrow and would have reached his destination in two hours more, had he not stepped on the sharp edge of a bottle that had been shattered by a wagon-wheel—and made a deep and terrible wound.

"And you helped him?" asked Kasana.

"How could I do otherwise?" replied Ephraim. "He had already lost a great deal of blood and was pale as death. So I carried him to the nearest ditch, washed the gaping wound, and anointed it with his balsam."

"I put the little box in his pouch myself a year ago," said the nurse who was easily moved, wiping her eyes. Ephraim confirmed the statement, for Apu had gratefully told him of it. Then he went on.

"I tore my upper garment into strips and bandaged the wound as well as I could. Meanwhile he constantly urged haste, held out the pass and letter his master had given him and, knowing nothing of the misfortune which had befallen me, charged me to deliver the roll to the prince in his place. Oh, how willingly I undertook the task and, soon after the second hour had passed, I reached the camp. The letter is in the prince's hands, and here am I—and I can see that you are glad! But no one was ever so happy as I to sit here at your feet, and look up to you, so grateful as I am that you have listened to me so kindly, and if they load me with chains again I will bear it calmly, if you will but care for me. Ah, my misfortune has been so great! I have neither father nor mother, no one who loves me. You, you alone are dear, and you will not repulse me, will you?"

He had fairly shouted the last words, as if beside himself, and carried away by the might of passion and rendered incapable by the terrible experiences of the past few hours of controlling the emotions that assailed him, the youth, still scarcely beyond childhood, who saw himself torn away from and bereft of all that had usually sustained and supported him, sobbed aloud, and like a frightened birdling seeking protection under its mother's wings, hid his head, amid floods of tears, in Kasana's lap.

Warm compassion seized upon the tender-hearted young widow, and her own eyes grew dim. She laid her hands kindly upon his head, and feeling the tremor that shook the frame of the weeping lad, she raised his head with both hands, kissed his brow and cheeks, looked smilingly into his eyes with tears in her own, and exclaimed:

"You poor, foolish fellow! Why should I not care for you, why should I repel you? Your uncle is the most beloved of men to me, and you are like his son. For your sakes I have already accepted what I should otherwise have thrust far, far from me! But now I must go on, and must not care what others may think or say of me, if only I can accomplish the one thing for which I am risking person, life, all that I once prized! Wait, you poor, impulsive fellow!"—and here she again kissed him on the cheeks—"I shall succeed in smoothing the path for you also. That is enough now!"

This command sounded graver, and was intended to curb the increasing impetuosity of the ardent youth. But she suddenly started up, exclaiming with anxious haste: "Go, go, at once!"

The footsteps of men approaching the tent, and a warning word from the nurse had brought this stern order to the young widow's lips, and Ephraim's quick ear made him understand her anxiety and urged him to join the old nurse in the dark room. There he perceived that a few moments' delay would have betrayed him; for the curtain of the tent was drawn aside and a man passed through the central space straight to the lighted apartment, where Kasana—the youth heard it distinctly—welcomed the new guest only too cordially, as though his late arrival surprised her.

Meanwhile the nurse had seized her own cloak, flung it over the fugitive's bare shoulders, and whispered:

"Be near the tent just before sunrise, but do not enter it until I call you, if you value your life. You have neither mother nor father, and my child Kasana ah, what a dear, loving heart she has!—she is the best of all good women; but whether she is fit to be the guide of an inexperienced young blusterer, whose heart is blazing like dry straw with love for her, is another question. I considered many things, while listening to your story, and on account of my liking for you I will tell you this. You have an uncle who—my child is right there—is the best of men, and I know mankind. Whatever he advised, do; for it will surely benefit you. Obey him! If his bidding leads you far away from here and Kasana, so much the better for you. We are walking in dangerous paths, and had it not been done for Hosea's sake, I would have tried to hold her back with all my might. But for him—I am an old woman; but I would go through fire myself for that man. I am more grieved than I can tell, both for the pure, sweet child and for yourself, whom my own son was once so much like, so I repeat: Obey your uncle, boy! Do that, or you will go to ruin, and that would be a pity!"

With these words, without waiting for an answer, she drew the curtain of the tent aside, and waited until Ephraim had slipped through. Then, wiping her eyes, she entered, as if by chance, the lighted chamber; but Kasana and her late guest had matters to discuss that brooked no witnesses, and her "dear child" only permitted her to light her little lamp at the three-armed candelabra, and then sent her to rest.

She promptly obeyed and, in the dark room, where her couch stood beside that of her mistress, she sank down, hid her face in her hands, and wept.

She felt as though the world was upside down. She no longer understood her darling Kasana; for she was sacrificing purity and honor for the sake of a man whom—she knew it—her soul abhorred.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ephraim cowered in the shadow of the tent, from which he had slipped, and pressed his ear close to the wall. He had cautiously ripped a small opening in a seam of the cloth, so he could see and hear what was passing in the lighted room of the woman he loved. The storm kept every one within the tents whom duty did not summon into the open air, and Ephraim had less reason to fear discovery on account of the deep shadow that rested on the spot where he lay. The nurse's cloak covered him and, though shiver after shiver shook his young limbs, it was due to the bitter anguish that pierced his soul.

The man on whose breast he saw Kasana lay her head was a prince, a person of high rank and great power, and the capricious beauty did not always repel the bold man, when his lips sought those for whose kiss Ephraim so ardently longed.

She owed him nothing, it is true, yet her heart belonged to his uncle, whom she had preferred to all others. She had declared herself ready to endure the most terrible things for his liberation; and now his own eyes told him that she was false and faithless, that she granted to another what belonged to one alone. She had bestowed caresses on him, too, but these were only the crumbs that fell from Hosea's table, a robbery—he confessed it with a blush—he had perpetrated on his uncle, yet he felt offended, insulted, deceived, and consumed to his inmost soul with fierce jealousy on behalf of his uncle, whom he honored, nay, loved, though he had opposed his wishes.

And Hosea? Why, he too, like himself, this princely suitor, and all other men, must love her, spite of his strange conduct at the well by the roadside—it was impossible for him to do otherwise—and now, safe from the poor prisoner's resentment, she was basely, treacherously enjoying another's tender caresses.

Siptah, he had heard at their last meeting, was his uncle's foe, and it was to him that she betrayed

the man she loved!

The chink in the tent was ready to show him everything that occurred within, but he often closed his eyes that he might not behold it. Often, it is true, the hateful scene held him in thrall by a mysterious spell and he would fain have torn the walls of the tent asunder, struck the detested Egyptian to the ground, and shouted into the faithless woman's face the name of Hosea, coupled with the harshest reproaches.

The fervent passion which had taken possession of him was suddenly transformed to hate and scorn. He had believed himself to be the happiest of mortals, and he had suddenly become the most miserable; no one, he believed, had ever experienced such a fall from the loftiest heights to the lowest depths.

The nurse had been right. Naught save misery and despair could come to him from so faithless a woman.

Once he started up to fly, but he again heard the bewitching tones of her musical laugh, and mysterious powers detained him, forcing him to listen.

At first the seething blood had throbbled so violently in his ears that he felt unable to follow the dialogue in the lighted tent. But, by degrees, he grasped the purport of whole sentences, and now he understood all that they said, not a word of their further conversation escaped him, and it was absorbing enough, though it revealed a gulf from which he shrank shuddering.

Kasana refused the bold suitor many favors for which he pleaded, but this only impelled him to beseech her more fervently to give herself to him, and the prize he offered in return was the highest gift of earth, the place by his side as queen on the throne of Egypt, to which he aspired. He said this distinctly, but what followed was harder to understand; for the passionate suitor was in great haste and often interrupted his hasty sentences to assure Kasana, to whose hands in this hour he was committing his life and liberty, of his changeless love, or to soothe her when the boldness of his advances awakened fear and aversion. But he soon began to speak of the letter whose bearer Ephraim had been and, after reading it aloud and explaining it, the youth realized with a slight shudder that he had become an accomplice in the most criminal of all plots, and for a moment the longing stole over him to betray the traitors and deliver them into the hand of the mighty sovereign whose destruction they were plotting. But he repelled the thought and merely sunned himself in the pleasurable consciousness—the first during this cruel hour-of holding Kasana and her royal lover in his hand as one holds a beetle by a string. This had a favorable effect on him and restored the confidence and courage he had lost. The baser the things he continued to hear, the more clearly he learned to appreciate the value of the goodness and truth which he had lost. His uncle's words, too, came back to his memory.

"Give no man, from the loftiest to the lowliest, a right to regard you save with respect, and you can hold your head as high as the proudest warrior who ever wore purple robe and golden armor."

On the couch in Kasana's house, while shaking with fever, he had constantly repeated this sentence; but in the misery of captivity, and on his flight it had again vanished from his memory. In the courtier's tent when, after he had bathed and perfumed himself, the old slave held a mirror before him, he had given it a passing thought; but now it mastered his whole soul. And strange to say, the worthless traitor within wore a purple coat and golden mail, and looked like a military hero, but he could not hold his head erect, for the work he sought to accomplish could only succeed in the scresy that shuns the light, and was like the labor of the hideous mole which undermines the ground in the darkness.

His tool was the repulsive cloven-footed trio, falsehood, fraud, and faithlessness, and she whom he had chosen for his help-mate was the woman—it shamed him to his inmost soul—for whom he had been in the act of sacrificing all that was honorable, precious, and dear to him.

The worst infamies which he had been taught to shun were the rounds of the ladder on which this evil man intended to mount.

The roll the youth had brought to the camp contained two letters. The first was from the conspirators in Tanis, the second from Siptah's mother.

The former desired his speedy return and told him that the Syrian Aarsu, the commander of the foreign mercenaries, who guarded the palace, as well as the women's house, was ready to do him homage. If the high-priest of Amon, who was at once chief-judge, viceroy and keeper of the seal, proclaimed him king, he was sovereign and could enter the palace which stood open to him and ascend the throne without resistance. If Pharaoh returned, the body-guards would take him prisoner and remove him as Siptah, who liked no halfway measures, had secretly directed, while the chief-priest insisted upon keeping him in mild imprisonment.

Nothing was to be feared save the premature return from Thebes of Seti, the second son of Menephtah; for the former, after his older brother's death, had become heir to the throne, and carrier doves had brought news yesterday that he was now on his way. Therefore Siptah and the powerful priest who was to proclaim him king were urged to the utmost haste.

The necessary measures had been adopted in case of possible resistance from the army; for as soon as the Hebrews had been destroyed, the larger portion of the troops, without any suspicion of the impending dethronement of their commander-in-chief, would be sent to their former stations. The body-guards were devoted to Siptah, and the others who entered the capital, should worst come to worst, could be easily overpowered by Aarsu and his mercenaries.

"There is nothing farther for me to do," said the prince, "stretching himself comfortably, like a man who has successfully accomplished a toilsome task," except to rush back to Tanis in a few hours with Bai, have myself crowned and proclaimed king in the temple of Amon, and finally received in the palace as Pharaoh. The rest will take care of itself. Seti, whom they call the heir to the throne, is just such another weakling as his father, and must submit to a fixed fact, or if necessary, be forced to do so. The captain of the body-guards will see that Menephtah does not again enter the palace in the city of Rameses.

The second letter which was addressed to the Pharaoh, had been written by the mother of the prince in order to recall her son and the chief-priest Bai to the capital as quickly as possible, without exposing the former to the reproach of cowardice for having quitted the army so shortly before the battle. Though she had never been better, she protested with hypocritical complaints and entreaties, that the hours of her life were numbered, and besought the king to send her son and the chief-priest Bai to her without delay, that she might be permitted to bless her only child before her death.

She was conscious of many a sin, and no one, save the high-priest, possessed the power of winning the favor of the gods for her, a dying woman. Without his intercession she would perish in despair.

This letter, too, the base robber of a crown read aloud, called it a clever bit of feminine strategy, and rubbed his hands gleefully.

Treason, murder, hypocrisy, fraud, shameful abuse of the most sacred feelings, nay all that was evil must serve Siptah to steal the throne, and though Kasana had wrung her hands and shed tears when she heard that he meant to remove Pharaoh from his path, she grew calmer after the prince had represented that her own father had approved of his arrangements for the deliverance of Egypt from the hand of the king, her destroyer.

The letter from the prince's mother to Pharaoh, the mother who urged her own son to the most atrocious crimes, was the last thing Ephraim heard; for it roused in the young Hebrew, who was wont to consider nothing purer and more sacred than the bonds which united parents and children, such fierce indignation, that he raised his fist threateningly and, springing up, opened his lips in muttered invective.

He did not hear that Kasana made the prince swear that, if he attained the sovereign power, he would grant her first request. It should cost him neither money nor lands, and only give her the right to exercise mercy where her heart demanded it; for things were in store which must challenge the wrath of the gods and he must leave her to soothe it.

Ephraim could not endure to see or hear more of these abominable things.

For the first time he felt how great a danger he ran of being dragged into this marsh and becoming a lost, evil man; but never, he thought, would he have been so corrupt, so worthless, as this prince. His uncle's words again returned to his mind, and he now raised his head proudly and arched his chest as if to assure himself of his own unbroken vigor, saying meanwhile, with a long breath, that he was of too much worth to ruin himself for the sake of a wicked woman, even though, like Kasana, she was the fairest and most bewitching under the sun.

Away, away from the neighborhood of this net, which threatened to entangle him in murder and every deed of infamy.

Resolved to seek his people, he turned toward the gate of the camp, but after a few hasty steps paused, and a glance at the sky showed him that it was the second hour past midnight. Every surrounding object was buried in silence save that from the neighboring Dens of the royal steeds, came the sound of the rattle of a chain, or of the stamp of a stallion's hoof.

If he risked escaping from the camp now, he could not fail to be seen and stopped. Prudence commanded him to curb his impatience and, as he glanced around, his eyes rested on the

chamberlain's tent from which the old slave had just emerged to look for his master, who was still waiting in the prince's tent for his lord's return.

The old man had treated Ephraim kindly, and now asked him with good-natured urgency to come in and rest; for the youth needed sleep.

And Ephraim accepted the well-meant invitation. He felt for the first time how weary his feet were, and he had scarcely stretched himself upon the mat which the old slave—it was his own—spread on the floor of the tent for him, ere the feeling came over him that his limbs were relaxing; and yet he had expected to find here time and rest for calm deliberation.

He began, too, to think of the future and his uncle's commission.

That he must join his people without delay was decided. If they escaped Pharaoh's army, the others could do what they pleased, his duty was to summon his shepherds, servants, and the youths of his own age, and with them hurry to the mines to break Joshua's chains and bring him back to his old father and the people who needed him. He already saw himself with a sling in his girdle and a battle-axe in his hand, rushing on in advance of the others, when sleep overpowered him and bound the sorely wearied youth so firmly and sweetly that even dreams remained aloof from his couch and when morning came the old slave was obliged to shake him to rouse him.

The camp was already pervaded with bustling life. Tents were struck, asses and ox-carts laden, steeds curried and newly-shod, chariots washed, weapons and harnesses cleaned, breakfast was distributed and eaten.

At intervals the blare of trumpets was heard in one direction, loudly shouted commands in another, and from the eastern portion of the camp echoed the chanting of the priests, who devoutly greeted the new-born sun-god.

A gilded chariot, followed by a similar one, drove up to the costly purple tent beside Kasana's, which active servants were beginning to take down.

Prince Siptah and the chief-priest Bai had received Pharaoh's permission to set off for Tanis, to fulfil the wish of a "dying woman."

Soon after Ephraim took leave of the old slave and bade him give Kasana's nurse the cloak and tell her that the messenger had followed her advice and his uncle's.

Then he set off on his walk.

He escaped unchallenged from the Egyptian camp and, as he entered the wilderness, he heard the shout with which he called his shepherds in the pastures. The cry, resounding far over the plain, startled a sparrow-hawk which was gazing into the distance from a rock and, as the bird soared upward, the youth fancied that if he stretched out his arms, wings must unfold strong enough to bear him also through the air. Never had he felt so light and active, so strong and free, nay had the priest at this hour asked him the question whether he would accept the office of a captain of thousands in the Egyptian army, he would undoubtedly have answered, as he did before the ruined house of Nun, that his sole desire was to remain a shepherd and rule his flocks and servants.

He was an orphan, but he had a nation, and where his people were was his home.

Like a wanderer, who, after a long journey, sees his home in the distance, he quickened his pace.

He had reached Tanis on the night of the new moon and the round silver shield which was paling in the morning light was the same which had then risen before his eyes. Yet it seemed as though years lay between his farewell of Miriam and the present hour, and the experiences of a life had been compressed into these few days.

He had left his tribe a boy; he returned a man; yet, thanks to this one terrible night, he had remained unchanged, he could look those whom he loved and revered fearlessly in the face.

Nay, more!

He would show the man whom he most esteemed that he, too, Ephraim, could hold his head high. He would repay Joshua for what he had done, when he remained in chains and captivity that he, his nephew, might go forth as free as a bird.

After hurrying onward an hour, he reached a ruined watch-tower, climbed to its summit, and saw, at a short distance beyond the mount of Baal-zephon, which had long towered majestically on the horizon,

the glittering northern point of the Red Sea.

The storm, it is true, had subsided, but he perceived by the surging of its emerald surface that the sea was by no means calm, and single black clouds in the sky, elsewhere perfectly clear, seemed to indicate an approaching tempest.

He gazed around him asking himself what the leader of the people probably intended, if—as the prince had told Kasana—they had encamped between Pihahiroth—whose huts and tents rose before him on the narrow gulf the northwestern arm of the Red Sea thrust into the land—and the mount of Baal-zephon.

Had Siptah lied in this too?

No. This time the malicious traitor had departed from his usual custom; for between the sea and the village, where the wind was blowing slender columns of smoke asunder, his falcon-eye discovered many light spots resembling a distant flock of sheep, and among and beside them a singular movement to and fro upon the sands.

It was the camp of his people.

How short seemed the distance that separated him from them!

Yet the nearer it was, the greater became his anxiety lest the great multitude, with the women and children, herds and tents, could not escape the vast army which must overtake them in a few hours.

His heart shrank as he gazed around him; for neither to the east, where a deeper estuary was surging, nor southward, where the Red Sea tossed its angry waves, nor even toward the north, whence Pharaoh's army was marching, was escape possible. To the west lay the wilderness of Aean, and if the wanderers escaped in that direction, and were pressed farther, they would again enter Egyptian soil and the exodus would be utterly defeated.

So there was nothing left save to risk a battle, and at the thought a chill ran through the youth's veins; for he knew how badly armed, untrained, savage, unmanageable, and cowardly were the men of his race, and had witnessed the march of the powerful, well-equipped Egyptian army, with its numerous foot-soldiers and superb war-chariots.

To him now, as to his uncle a short time before, his people seemed doomed to certain destruction, unless succored by the God of his fathers. In former years, and just before his departure, Miriam, with sparkling eyes and enthusiastic words, had praised the power and majesty of this omnipotent Lord, who preferred his people above all other nations; but the lofty words of the prophetess had filled his childish heart with a slight fear of the unapproachable greatness and terrible wrath of this God.

It had been easier for him to uplift his soul to the sun-god, when his teacher, a kind and merry-hearted Egyptian priest, led him to the temple of Pithom. In later years he had felt no necessity of appealing to any god; for he lacked nothing, and while other boys obeyed their parents' commands, the shepherds, who well knew that the flocks they tended belonged to him, called him their young master, and first in jest, then in earnest, paid him all the honor due a ruler, which prematurely increased his self-importance and made him an obstinate fellow.

He whom stalwart, strong men obeyed, was sufficient unto himself, and felt that others needed him and, as nothing was more difficult for him than to ask a favor, great or small, from any one, he rebelled against praying to a God so far off and high above him.

But now, when his heart was oppressed by the terrible destiny that threatened his people, he was overwhelmed by the feeling that only the Greatest and Mightiest could deliver them from this terrible, unspeakable peril, as if no one could withstand this powerful army, save He whose might could destroy heaven and earth.

What were they that the Most High, whom Miriam and Hosea described as so pre-eminently great, should care for them? Yet his people numbered many thousands, and God had not disdained to make them His, and promise great things for them in the future. Now they were on the verge of destruction, and he, Ephraim, who came from the camp of the enemy, was perhaps the sole person who saw the full extent of the danger.

Suddenly he was filled with the conviction that it was incumbent upon him, above all others, to tell the God of his fathers,—who perhaps in caring for earth and heaven, sun and stars, had forgotten the fate of His people—of the terrible danger impending, and beseech Him to save them. He was still standing on the top of the ruined tower, and raised his arms and face toward heaven.

In the north he saw the black clouds which he had noticed in the blue sky swiftly massing and rolling hither and thither. The wind, which had subsided after sunrise, was increasing in strength and power, and rapidly becoming a storm. It swept across the isthmus in gusts, which followed one another more and more swiftly, driving before them dense clouds of yellow sand.

He must lift up his voice loudly, that the God to whom he prayed might hear him in His lofty heaven, so, with all the strength of his young lungs, he shouted into the storm:

"Adonai, Adonai! Thou, whom they call Jehovah, mighty God of my fathers, hear me, Ephraim, a young inexperienced lad, of whom, in his insignificance, Thou hast probably never thought. I ask nothing for myself. But the people, whom Thou dost call Thine, are in sore peril. They have left durable houses and good pastures because Thou didst promise them a better and more beautiful land, and they trusted in Thee and Thy promises. But now the army of Pharaoh is approaching, so great a host that our people will never be able to resist it. Thou must believe this, Eli, my Lord. I have seen it and been in its midst. So surely as I stand here, I know that it is too mighty for Thy people. Pharaoh's power will crush them as the hoofs of the cattle trample the grain on the threshing-floor. And my people, who are also Thine, are encamped in a spot where Pharaoh's warriors can cut them down from all directions, so that there is no way for them to fly, not one. I saw it distinctly from this very spot. Hear me now, Adonai. But canst Thou hear my words, oh Lord, in such a tempest? Surely Thou canst; for they call Thee omnipotent and, if Thou dost hear me and dost understand the meaning of my words, Thou wilt see with Thy mighty eyes, if such is Thy will, that I speak the truth. Then Thou wilt surely remember the vow Thou didst make to the people through Thy servant Moses.

"Among the Egyptians, I have witnessed treachery and murder and shameful wiles; their deeds have filled me, who am myself but a sinful, inexperienced youth, with horror and indignation. How couldst Thou, from whom all good is said to proceed, and whom Miriam calls truth itself, act like those abominable men and break faith with those who trusted in Thee? I know, Thou great and mighty One, that this is far from Thee, nay, perhaps it is a sin even to cherish such a thought. Hear me, Adonai! Look northward at the troops of the Egyptians, who will surely soon leave their camp and march forward, and southward to the peril of Thy people, for whom escape is no longer possible, and Thou wilt rescue them by Thy omnipotence and great wisdom; for Thou hast promised them a new country, and if they are destroyed, how can they reach it?"

With these words he finished his prayer, which, though boyish and incoherent, gushed from the inmost depths of his heart. Then he sprang with long leaps from the ruined tower to the barren plain at his feet, and ran southward as fleetly as if he were escaping from captivity a second time. He felt how the wind rushing from the north-east urged him forward, and told himself that it would also hasten the march of Pharaoh's soldiers. Perhaps the leaders of his people did not yet know how vast was the military power that threatened them, and undervalued the danger in which their position placed them. But he saw it, and could give them every information. Haste was necessary, and he felt as though he had gained wings in this race with the storm.

The village of Pihahiroth was soon gained, and while dashing by it without pausing, he noticed that its huts and tents were deserted by men and cattle. Perhaps its inhabitants had fled with their property to a place of safety before the advancing Egyptian troops or the hosts of his own people.

The farther he went, the more cloudy became the sky,—which here so rarely failed to show a sunny vault of blue at noonday,—the more fiercely howled the tempest. His thick locks fluttered wildly around his burning head, he panted for breath, yet flew on, on, while his sandals seemed to him to scarcely touch the ground.

The nearer he came to the sea, the louder grew the howling and whistling of the storm, the more furious the roar of the waves dashing against the rocks of Baal-zephon. Now—a short hour after he had left the tower—he reached the first tents of the camp, and the familiar cry: "Unclean!" as well as the mourning-robos of those whose scaly, disfigured faces looked forth from the ruins of the tents which the storm had overthrown, informed him that he had reached the lepers, whom Moses had commanded to remain outside the camp.

Yet so great was his haste that, instead of making a circuit around their quarter, he dashed straight through it at his utmost speed. Nor did he pause even when a lofty palm, uprooted by the tempest, fell to the ground so close beside him that the fan-shaped leaves in its crown brushed his face.

At last he gained the tents and pinfolds of his people, not a few of which had also been overthrown, and asked the first acquaintances he met for Nun, the father of his dead mother and of Joshua.

He had gone down to the shore with Moses and other elders of the people. Ephraim followed him there, and the damp, salt sea-air refreshed him and cooled his brow.

Yet he could not instantly get speech with him, so he collected his thoughts, and recovered his breath, while watching the men whom he sought talking eagerly with some gaily-clad Phoenician sailors. A youth like Ephraim might not venture to interrupt the grey-haired heads of the people in the discussion, which evidently referred to the sea; for the Hebrews constantly pointed to the end of the bay, and the Phoenicians sometimes thither, sometimes to the mountain and the sky, sometimes to the north, the center of the still increasing tempest.

A projecting wall sheltered the old men from the hurricane, yet they found it difficult to stand erect, even while supported by their staves and clinging to the stones of the masonry.

At last the conversation ended and while the youth saw the gigantic figure of Moses go with slow, yet firm steps among the leaders of the Hebrews down to the shore of the sea, Nun, supported by one of his shepherds, was working his way with difficulty, but as rapidly as possible toward the camp. He wore a mourning-robe, and while the others looked joyous and hopeful when they parted, his handsome face, framed by its snow-white beard and hair, had the expression of one whose mind and body were burdened by grief.

Not until Ephraim called him did he raise his drooping leonine head, and when he saw him he started back in surprise and terror, and clung more firmly to the strong arm of the shepherd who supported him.

Tidings of the cruel fate of his son and grandson had reached him through the freed slaves he had left in Tanis; and the old man had torn his garments, strewed ashes on his head, donned mourning robes, and grieved bitterly for his beloved, noble, only son and promising grandson.

Now Ephraim was standing before him; and after Nun had laid his hand on his shoulders, and kissed him again and again, he asked if his son was still alive and remembered him and his people.

As soon as the youth had joyfully assured him that such was the case, Nun threw his arms around the boy's shoulders, that henceforth his own blood, instead of a stranger, should protect him from the violence of the storm.

He had grave and urgent duties to fulfil, from which nothing might withhold him. Yet as the fiery youth shouted into his ear, through the roar of the hurricane, on their way through the camp, that he would summon his shepherds and the companions of his own age to release Hosea, who now called himself Joshua, old Nun's impetuous spirit awoke and, clasping Ephraim closer to his heart, he cried out that though an old man he was not yet too aged to swing an axe and go with Ephraim's youthful band to liberate his son. His eyes sparkled through his tears, and waving his free arm aloft, he cried:

"The God of my fathers, on whom I learned to rely, watches over His faithful people. Do you see the sand, sea-weed, and shells yonder at the end of the estuary? An hour ago the place was covered with water, and roaring waves were dashing their white spray upward. That is the way, boy, which promises escape; if the wind holds, the water—so the experienced Phoenicians assure us—will recede still farther toward the sea. Their god of the north wind, they say, is favorable to us, and their boys are already lighting a fire to him on the summit of Baal-zephon yonder, but we know that it is Another, Who is opening to us a path to the desert. We were in evil case, my boy!"

"Yes, grandfather!" cried the youth. "You were trapped like lions in the snare, and the Egyptian host—it passed me from the first man to the last—is mighty and unconquerable. I hurried as fast as my feet could carry me to tell you how many heavily-armed troops, bowmen, steeds, and chariots...."

"We know, we know," the old man interrupted, "but here we are."

He pointed to an overturned tent which his servants were trying to prop, and beside which an aged Hebrew, his father Elishama, wrapped in cloth, sat in the chair in which he was carried by bearers.

Nun hastily shouted a few words and led Ephraim toward him. But while the youth was embracing his great-grandfather, who hugged and caressed him, Nun, with youthful vivacity, was issuing orders to the shepherds and servants:

"Let the tent fall, men! The storm has begun the work for you! Wrap the covering round the poles, load the carts and beasts of burden. Move briskly, You, Gaddi, Shamma, and Jacob, join the others! The hour for departure has come! Everybody must hasten to harness the animals, put them in the wagons, and prepare all things as fast as possible. The Almighty shows us the way, and every one must hasten, in His name and by the command of Moses. Keep strictly to the old order. We head the procession, then come the other tribes, lastly the strangers and leprous men and women. Rejoice, oh, ye people; for our God is working a great miracle and making the sea dry land for us, His chosen people. Let everyone thank Him while working, and pray from the depths of the heart that He will continue to protect us. Let

all who do not desire to be slain by the sword and crushed by the weight of Pharaoh's chariots put forth their best strength and forget rest! That will await us as soon as we have escaped the present peril. Down with the tent-cover yonder; I'll roll it up myself. Lay hold, boy! Look across at the children of Manasseh, they are already packing and loading. That's right, Ephraim, you know how to use your hands!

"What more have we to do! My head, my forgetful old head! So much has come upon me at once! You have nimble feet, Raphu;—I undertook to warn the strangers to prepare for a speedy departure. Run quickly and hurry them, that they may not linger too far behind the people. Time is precious! Lord, Lord, my God, extend Thy protecting hand over Thy people, and roll the waves still farther back with the tempest, Thy mighty breath! Let every one pray silently while working, the Omnipresent One, Who sees the heart, will hear it. That load is too heavy for you, Ephraim, you are lifting beyond your strength. No. The youth has mastered it. Follow his example, men, and ye of Succoth, rejoice in your master's strength."

The last words were addressed to Ephraim's shepherds, men and maid servants, most of whom shouted a greeting to him in the midst of their work, kissed his arm or hand, and rejoiced at his return. They were engaged in packing and wrapping their goods, and in gathering, harnessing, and loading the animals, which could only be kept together by blows and shouts.

The people from Succoth wished to vie with their young master, those from Tanis with their lord's grandson, and the other owners of flocks and lesser men of the tribe of Ephraim, whose tents surrounded that of their chief Nun, did the same, in order not to be surpassed by others; yet several hours elapsed ere all the tents, household utensils, and provisions for man and beast were again in their places on the animals and in the carts, and the aged, feeble and sick had been laid on litters or in wagons.

Sometimes the gale bore from the distance to the spot where the Ephraimites were busily working the sound of Moses' deep voice or the higher tones of Aaron. But neither they nor the men of the tribe of Judah heeded the monition; for the latter were ruled by Hur and Naashon, and beside the former stood his newly-wedded wife Miriam. It was different with the other tribes and the strangers, to the obstinacy and cowardice of whose chiefs was due the present critical position of the people.

CHAPTER XXII.

To break through the center of the Etham line of fortifications and march toward the north-east along the nearest road leading to Palestine had proved impossible; but Moses' second plan of leading the people around the Migdol of the South had also been baffled; for spies had reported that the garrison of the latter had been greatly strengthened. Then the multitude had pressed around the man of God, declaring that they would rather return home with their families and appeal to Pharaoh's mercy than to let themselves, their wives, and their families be slaughtered.

Several days had been spent in detaining them; but when other messengers brought tidings that Pharaoh was approaching with a powerful army the time seemed to have come when the wanderers, in the utmost peril, might be forced to break through the forts, and Moses exerted the full might of his commanding personality, Aaron the whole power of his seductive eloquence, while old Nun and Hur essayed to kindle the others with their own bold spirit.

But the terrible news had robbed the majority of the last vestige of self reliance and trust in God, and they had already resolved to assure Pharaoh of their repentance when the messengers whom, without their leader's knowledge, they had sent forth, returned, announcing that the approaching army had been commanded to spare no Hebrew, and to show by the sharp edge of the sword, even to those who sued for mercy, how Pharaoh punished the men by whose shameful sorcery misery and woe had come upon so many Egyptians.

Then, too late, they became aware that to return would ensure more speedy destruction than to boldly press forward. But when the men capable of bearing arms followed Hur and Nun to the Migdol of the South, they turned to fly at the defiant blare of the Egyptian war trumpets. When they came back to the camp with weary limbs, depressed and disheartened, new and exaggerated reports of Pharaoh's military force had reached the people, and now terror and despair had taken possession of the bolder men. Every admonition was vain, every threat derided, and the rebellious people had forced their

leaders to go with them till, after a short march, they reached the Red Sea, whose deep green waves had forced them to pause in their southward flight.

So they had encamped between Pihahiroth and Baal-zephon, and here the leaders again succeeded in turning the attention of the despairing people to the God of their fathers.

In the presence of sure destruction, from which no human power could save them, they had again learned to raise their eyes to Heaven; but Moses' soul had once more been thrilled with anxiety and compassion for the poor, sorely afflicted bands who had followed his summons. During the night preceding, he had climbed one of the lower peaks of Baal-zephon and, amid the raging of the tempest and the roar of the hissing surges, sought the Lord his God, and felt his presence near him. He, too, had not wearied of pleading the need of his people and adjuring him to save them.

At the same hour Miriam, the wife of Hur, had gone to the sea-shore where, under a solitary palmtree, she addressed the same petition to her God, whose trusted servant she still felt herself. Here she besought Him to remember the women and children who, trusting in Him, had wandered forth into distant lands. She had also knelt to pray for the friend of her youth, languishing in terrible captivity; but had only cried in low, timid accents: "Oh, Lord, do not forget the hapless Hosea, whom at Thy bidding I called Joshua, though he showed himself less obedient to Thy will than Moses, my brother, and Hur, my husband. Remember also the youthful Ephraim, the grandson of Nun, Thy faithful servant."

Then she returned to the tent of the chief, her husband, while many a lowly man and poor anxious woman, before their rude tents or on their thin, tear-drenched mats, uplifted their terrified souls to the God of their fathers and besought His care for those who were dearest to their hearts.

So, in this night of utmost need, the camp had become a temple in which high and low, the heads of families and the housewives, masters and slaves, nay, even the afflicted lepers sought and found their God.

At last the morning came on which Ephraim had shouted his childish prayer amid the roaring of the storm, and the waters of the sea had begun to recede.

When the Hebrews beheld with their own eyes the miracle that the Most High was working for His chosen people, even the discouraged and despairing became believing and hopeful.

Not only the Ephraimites, but the other tribes, the foreigners, and lepers felt the influence of the newly-awakened joyous confidence, which urged each individual to put forth all his powers to prepare for the journey and, for the first time, the multitude gathered and formed into ranks without strife, bickering, deeds of violence, curses, and tears.

After sunset Moses, holding his staff uplifted, and Aaron, singing and praying, entered at the head of the procession the end of the bay.

The storm, which continued to rage with the same violence, had swept the water out of it and blew the flame and smoke of the torches carried by the tribes toward the south-west.

The chief leaders, on whom all eyes rested with trusting eagerness, were followed by old Nun and the Ephraimites. The bottom of the sea on which they trod was firm, moist sand, on which even the herds could walk as if it were a smooth road, sloping gently toward the sea.

Ephraim, in whom the elders now saw the future chief, had been entrusted, at his grandfather's suggestion, with the duty of seeing that the procession did not stop and, for this purpose, had been given a leader's staff; for the fishermen whose huts stood at the foot of Baal-zephon, like the Phoenicians, believed that when the moon reached her zenith the sea would return to its old bed, and therefore all delay was to be avoided.

The youth enjoyed the storm, and when his locks fluttered and he battled victoriously against the gale in rushing hither and thither, as his office required, it seemed to him a foretaste of the venture he had in view.

So the procession moved on through the darkness which had speedily followed the dusk of evening. The acrid odor of the sea-weed and fishes which had been left stranded pleased the boy,—who felt that he had matured into manhood,—better than the sweet fragrance of spikenard in Kasana's tent. Once the memory of it flashed through his brain, but with that exception there was not a moment during these hours which gave him time to think of her.

He had his hands full of work; sometimes a heap of sea-weed flung on the path by a wave must be

removed; sometimes a ram, the leader of a flock, refused to step on the wet sand and must be dragged forward by the horns, or cattle and beasts of burden must be driven through a pool of water from which they shrank.

Often, too, he was obliged to brace his shoulder against a heavily-laden cart, whose wheels had sunk too deeply into the soft sand; and when, even during this strange, momentous march, two bands of shepherds began to dispute about precedence close to the Egyptian shore, he quickly settled the dispute by making them draw lots to decide which party should go first.

Two little girls who, crying bitterly, refused to wade through a pool of water, while their mother was busy with the infant in her arms, he carried with prompt decision through the shallow puddle, and the cart with a broken wheel he had moved aside by the light of the torches and commanded some stalwart bondmen, who were carrying only small bundles, to load themselves with the sacks and bales, nay, even the fragments of the vehicle. He uttered a word of cheer to weeping women and children and, when the light of a torch fell upon the face of a companion of his own age, whose aid he hoped to obtain for the release of Joshua, he briefly told him that there was a bold adventure in prospect which he meant to dare in concert with him.

The torch-bearers who usually headed the procession this time were obliged to close its ranks, for the storm raging from the northeast would have blown the smoke into the people's faces. They stood on the Egyptian shore, and already the whole train had passed them except the lepers who, following the strangers, were the last of the whole multitude.

These "strangers" were a motley crew, comprising Asiatics of Semitic blood, who had escaped from the bondage or severe punishments which the Egyptian law imposed, traders who expected to find among the wanderers purchasers of their wares, or Shasu shepherds, whose return was prohibited by the officials on the frontier. Ephraim had much trouble with them, for they refused to leave the firm land until the lepers had been forced to keep farther away from them; yet the youth, with the aid of the elders of the tribe of Benjamin, who preceded them, brought them also to obedience by threatening them with the prediction of the Phoenicians and the fishermen that the moon, when it had passed its zenith, would draw the sea back to its old bed.

Finally he persuaded the leader of the lepers, who had once been an Egyptian priest, to keep at least half the distance demanded.

Meanwhile the tempest had continued to blow with increased violence, and its howling and whistling, blended with the roar of the dashing waves and the menacing thunder of the surf, drowned the elders' shouts of command, the terrified shrieks of the children, the lowing and bleating of the trembling herds, and the whining of the dogs. Ephraim's voice could be heard only by those nearest and, moreover, many of the torches were extinguished, while others were kept burning with the utmost difficulty. Seeking to recover his wind and get a little rest, he walked slowly for a time over the damp sand behind the last lepers, when he heard some one call his name and, turning, he saw one of his former playmates, who was returning from a reconnoitring expedition and who, with the sweat pouring from his brow and panting breath, shouted into the ear of the youth, in whose hand he saw the staff of a leader, that Pharaoh's chariots were approaching at the head of his army. He had left them at Pihahiroth and, if they did not stop there to give the other troops time to join them, they might overtake the fugitives at any moment. With these words he darted past the lepers to join the leaders; but Ephraim stopped in the middle of the road, pressing his hand upon his brow, while a new burden of care weighed heavily upon his soul.

He knew that the approaching army would crush the men, women, and children whose touching fear and helplessness he had just beheld, as a man's foot tramples on an ant-bill, and again every instinct of his being urged him to pray, while from his oppressed heart the imploring cry rose through the darkness:

"Eli, Eli, great God most high! Thou knowest—for I have told Thee, and Thine all-seeing eye must perceive it, spite of the darkness of this night—the strait of Thy people, whom Thou hast promised to lead into a new country. Remember Thy vow, Jehovah! Be merciful unto us, Thou great and mighty one! Our foe is approaching with resistless power! Stay him! Save us! Protect the poor women and children! Save us, be merciful to us!"

During this prayer he had raised his eyes heavenward and saw on the summit of Baal-zephon the red blaze of a fire. It had been lighted by the Phoenicians to make the Baal of the north-wind favorable to the men of kindred race and hostile to the hated Egyptians. This was a kindly deed; but he put his trust in another God and, as his eye glanced over the vault of heaven and noted the grey and black storm-clouds scurrying, gathering, parting, and then rushing in new directions, he perceived between two dispersing masses of clouds the silvery light of the full moon, which had now attained her zenith.

Fresh anxiety assailed him; for he remembered the prediction of men skilled in the changes of winds and waves. If the sea should now return to its ancient bed, his people would be lost; for there was no escape, even toward the north, where deep pools of water were standing amid the mire and cliffs. Should the waves flow back within the next hour, the seed of Abraham would be effaced from the earth, as writing inscribed on wax disappears from the tablet under the pressure of a warm hand.

Yet was not this people thus marked for destruction, the nation which the Lord had chosen for His own? Could He deliver it into the hand of those who were also His own foes?

No, no, a thousand times no!

And the moon, which was to cause this destruction, had but a short time before been the ally of his flight and favored him. Only let him keep up his hope and faith and not lose confidence.

Nothing, nothing was lost as yet.

Come what might, the whole nation need not perish, and his own tribe, which marched at the head of the procession, certainly would not; for many must have reached the opposite shore, nay, perhaps more than he supposed; for the bay was not wide, and even the lepers, the last of the train, had already advanced some distance across the wet sand.

Ephraim now remained alone behind them all to listen to the approach of the hostile chariots. He laid his ear to the ground on the shore of the bay, and he could trust to the sharpness of his hearing; how often, in this attitude, he had caught the distant tramp of stray cattle or, while hunting, the approach of a herd of antelopes or gazelles.

As the last, he was in the greatest danger; but what cared he for that?

How gladly he would have sacrificed his young life to save the others.

Since he had held in his hand the leader's staff, it seemed to him as if he had assumed the duty of watching over his people, so he listened and listened till he could hear a slight trembling of the ground and finally a low rumble. That was the foe, that must be Pharaoh's chariots, and how swiftly the proud steeds whirled them forward.

Springing up as if a lash had struck him, he dashed on to urge the others to hasten.

How oppressively sultry the air had grown, spite of the raging storm which extinguished so many torches! The moon was concealed by clouds, but the flickering fire on the summit of the lofty height of Baal-zephon blazed brighter and brighter. The sparks that rose from the midst of the flames glittered as they swept westward; for the wind now came more from the east.

Scarcely had he noticed this, when he hurried back to the boys bearing pans of pitch who closed the procession, to command them in the utmost haste to fill the copper vessels afresh and see that the smoke rose in dense, heavy clouds; for, he said to himself, the storm will drive the smoke into the faces of the stallions who draw the chariots and frighten or stop them.

No means seemed to him too insignificant, every moment that could be gained was precious; and as soon as he had convinced himself that the smoke-clouds were pouring densely from the vessels and making it difficult to breathe the air of the path over which the people had passed, he hurried forward, shouting to the elders whom he overtook that Pharaoh's chariots were close at hand and the march must be hastened. At once pedestrians, bearers, drivers, and shepherds exerted all their strength to advance faster; and though the wind, which blew more and more from the east, impeded their progress, all struggled stoutly against it, and dread of their approaching pursuers doubled their strength.

The youth seemed to the heads of the tribes, who nodded approval wherever he appeared, like a shepherd dog guarding and urging the flock; and when he had slipped through the moving bands and battled his way forward against the storm, the east wind bore to his ears as if in reward a strange shout; for the nearer he came to its source, the louder it rang, and the more surely he perceived that it was a cry of joy and exultation, the first that had burst from a Hebrew's breast for many a long day.

It refreshed Ephraim like a cool drink after long thirsting, and he could not refrain from shouting aloud and crying joyously to the others: "Saved, saved!" Two tribes had already reached the eastern shore of the bay and were raising the glad shouts which, with the fires blazing in huge pans on the shore, kindled the courage of the approaching fugitives and braced their failing strength. Ephraim saw by their light the majestic figure of Moses on a hill by the sea, extending his staff over the waters, and the spectacle impressed him, like all the other fugitives, from the highest to the lowest, more deeply

than ought else and strongly increased the courage of his heart. This man was indeed the trusted servant of the Most High, and so long as he held his staff uplifted, the waves seemed spell-bound, and through him God forbade their return.

He, Ephraim, need no longer appeal to the Omnipotent One—that was the appointed task of this great and exalted personage; but he must continue to fulfil his little duty of watching the progress of individuals.

Back against the stream of fugitives to the lepers and torch-bearers he hastened, shouting to each division, "Saved! Saved! They have gained the goal. Moses' staff is staying the waves. Many have already reached the shore. Thank the Lord! Forward, that you, too, may join in the rejoicing! Fix your eyes on the two red beacons! The rescued ones lighted them! The servant of the Lord is standing between them with uplifted staff."

Then, kneeling on the wet sand, he again pressed his ear to the ground, and now heard distinctly, close at hand, the rattle of wheels and the swift beat of horses' hoofs.

But while still listening, the noise gradually ceased, and he heard nothing save the howling of the furious storm and the threatening dash of the surging waves, or a single cry borne by the east wind.

The chariots had reached the dry portion of the bay and lingered some time ere they continued their way along this dangerous path; but suddenly the Egyptian war-cry rang out, and the rattle of wheels was again heard. They advanced more slowly than before but faster than the people could walk.

For the Egyptians also the road remained dry; but if his people only kept a short distance in advance he need feel no anxiety; during the night the rescued tribes could disperse among the mountains and hide in places where no chariots nor horses could follow. Moses knew this region where he had lived so long as a fugitive; it was only necessary to inform him of the close vicinity of the foe. So he trusted one of his play-fellows of the tribe of Benjamin with the message, and the latter had not far to go to reach the shore. He himself remained behind to watch the approaching army; for already, without stooping or listening, spite of the storm raging around him, he heard the rattle of wheels and the neighing of the horses. But the lepers, whose ears also caught the sound, wailed and lamented, feeling themselves in imagination flung to the ground, crushed by the chariots, or crowded into a watery grave, for the pathway had grown narrower and the sea seemed to be trying in earnest to regain the land it had lost.

The men and cattle could no longer advance in ranks as wide as before, and while the files of the hurrying bodies narrowed they lengthened, and precious time was lost. Those on the right were already wading through the rising water in haste and terror; for already the commands of the Egyptian leaders were heard in the distance.

But the enemy was evidently delayed, and Ephraim easily perceived the cause of their diminished speed; for the road constantly grew softer and the narrow wheels of the chariots cut deeply into it and perhaps sank to the axles.

Protected by the darkness, he glided forward toward the pursuers, as far as he could, and heard here a curse, yonder a fierce command to ply the lash more vigorously; at last he distinctly heard one leader exclaim to the man next him:

"Accursed folly! If they had only let us start before noon, and not waited until the omen had been consulted and Anna had been installed with all due solemnity in Bai's place, it would have been easy work, and we should have caught them like a flock of quail! The chief-priest was wont to bear himself stoutly in the field, and now he gives up the command because a dying woman touches his heart."

"Siptah's mother!" said another soothingly. "Yet, after all, twenty princesses ought not to have turned him from his duty to us. Had he remained, there would have been no need of scourging our steeds to death, and that at an hour when every sensible leader lets his men gather round the camp-fires to eat their suppers and play draughts. Look to the horses, Heter! We are fast in the sand again!"

A loud out-cry rose behind the first chariot, and Ephraim heard another voice shout:

"Forward, if it costs the horses their lives!"

"If return were possible," said the commander of the chariot-soldiers, a relative of the king, "I would go back now. But as matters are, one would tumble over the other. So forward, whatever it may cost. We are close on their heels. Halt! Halt! That accursed stinging smoke! Wait, you dogs! As soon as the pathway widens, we'll run you down with scant ceremony, and may the gods deprive me of a day of life for each one I spare! Another torch out! One can't see one's hand before one's face! At a time like this a beggar's crutch would be better than a leader's staff"

"And an executioner's noose round the neck rather than a gold chain!" said another with a fierce oath.

"If the moon would only appear again! Because the astrologers predicted that it would shine in full splendor from evening till morning, I myself advised the late departure, turning night into day. If it were only lighter! . . ."

But this sentence remained unfinished, for a gust of wind, bursting like a wild beast from the southeastern ravine of Mount Baal-zephon, rushed upon the fugitives, and a high wave drenched Ephraim from head to foot.

Gasping for breath, he flung back his hair and wiped his eyes; but loud cries of terror rang from the lips of the Egyptians behind him; for the same wave that struck the youth had hurled the foremost chariots into the sea.

Ephraim began to fear for his people and, while running forward to join them again, a brilliant flash of lightning illumined the bay, Mount Baal-zephon, and every surrounding object. The thunder was somewhat long in following, but the storm soon came nearer, and at last the lightning no longer flashed through the darkness in zigzag lines, but in shapeless sheets of flame, and ere they faded the deafening crash of the thunder pealed forth, reverberating in wild uproar amid the hard, rocky precipices of the rugged mountain, and dying away in deep, muttering echoes along the end of the bay and the shore.

Whenever the clouds, menacing destruction, discharged their lightnings, sea and land, human beings and animals, far and near, were illumined by the brilliant glare, while the waters and the sky above were tinged with a sulphurous yellow hue through which the vivid lightning shone and flamed as through a wall of yellow glass.

Ephraim now thought he perceived that the blackest thunder-clouds came from the south and not from the north, but the glare of the lightning showed behind him a span of frightened horses rushing into the sea, one chariot shattered against another, and farther on several jammed firmly together to the destruction of their occupants, while they barred the progress of others.

Yet the foe still advanced, and the space which separated pursued and pursuers did not increase. But the confusion among the latter had become so great that the warriors' cries of terror and their leaders' shouts of encouragement and menace were distinctly heard whenever the fierce crashing of the thunder died away.

Yet, black as were the clouds on the southern horizon, fiercely as the tempest raged, the gloomy sky still withheld its floods and the fugitives were wet, not with the water from the clouds but by the waves of the sea, whose surges constantly dashed higher and more and more frequently washed the dry bed of the bay.

Narrower and narrower grew the pathway, and with it the end of the procession.

Meanwhile the flames blazing in the pitch pans continued to show the terrified fugitives the goal of escape and remind them of Moses and the staff God had given him. Every step brought them nearer to it. Now a loud shout of joy announced that the tribe of Benjamin had also reached the shore; but they had at last been obliged to wade, and were drenched by the foaming surf. It had cost unspeakable effort to save the oxen from the surging waves, get the loaded carts forward, and keep the cattle together; but now man and beast stood safe on shore. Only the strangers and the lepers were still to be rescued. The latter possessed no herds of their own, but the former had many and both sheep and cattle were so terrified by the storm that they struggled against passing through the water, now a foot deep over the road. Ephraim hurried to the shore, called on the shepherds to follow him and, under his direction, they helped drive the herds forward.

The attempt was successful and, amid the thunder and lightning, greeted with loud cheers, the last man and the last head of cattle reached the land.

The lepers were obliged to wade through water rising to their knees and at last to their waists and, ere they had gained the shore, the sluices of heaven opened and the rain poured in torrents. Yet they, too, arrived at the goal and though many a mother who had carried her child a long time in her arms or on her shoulder, fell upon her knees exhausted on the land, and many a hapless sufferer who, aided by a stronger companion in misery, had dragged the carts through the yielding sand or wading in the water carried a litter, felt his disfigured head burn with fever, they, too, escaped destruction.

They were to wait beyond the palm-trees, whose green foliage appeared on the hilly ground at the edge of some springs near the shore; the others were to be led farther into the country to begin, at a given signal, the journey toward the southeast into the mountains, through whose inhospitable stony

fastnesses a regular army and the war-chariots could advance only with the utmost difficulty.

Hur had assembled his shepherds and they stood armed with lances, slings, and short swords, ready to attack the enemy who ventured to step on shore. Horses and men were to be cut down and a high wall was to be made of the fragments of the chariots to bar the way of the pursuing Egyptians.

The pans of burning pitch on the shore were shielded and fed so industriously that neither the pouring rain nor the wind extinguished them. They were to light the shepherds who had undertaken to attack the chariot-soldiers, and were commanded by old Nun, Hur, and Ephraim.

But they waited in vain for the pursuers, and when the youth, first of all, perceived by the light of the torches that the way by which the rescued fugitives had come was now a wide sea, and the smoke was blown toward the north instead of toward the southwest—it was at the time of the first morning watch—his heart, surcharged with joy and gratitude, sent forth the jubilant shout: "Look at the pans. The wind has shifted! It is driving the sea northward. Pharaoh's army has been swallowed by the waves!"

The group of rescued Hebrews remained silent for a short time; but suddenly Nun's loud voice exclaimed:

"He has seen aright, children! What are we mortals! Lord, Lord! Stern and terrible art Thou in judgment upon Thy foes!"

Here loud cries interrupted him; for at the springs where Moses leaned exhausted against a palm-tree, and Aaron was resting with many others, the people had also perceived what Ephraim had noticed—and from lip to lip ran the glad, terrible, incredible, yet true tidings, which each passing moment more surely confirmed.

Many an eye was raised toward the sky, across which the black clouds were rushing farther and farther northward.

The rain was ceasing; instead of the lightning and thunder only a few pale flashes were seen over the isthmus and the distant sea at the north, while in the south the sky was brightening.

At last the setting moon emerged from the grey clouds, and her peaceful light silvered the heights of Baal-zephon and the shore of the bay, whose bottom was once more covered with tossing waves.

The raging, howling storm had passed into the low sighing of the morning breeze, and the sea, which had dashed against the rocks like a roaring wild-beast, now lay quivering with broken strength at the stone base of the mountain.

For a short time the sea still spread a dark pall over the many Egyptian corpses, but the paling moon, ere her setting, splendidly embellished the briny resting-place of a king and his nobles; for her rays illumined and bordered their coverlet, the sea, with a rich array of sparkling diamonds in a silver setting.

While the east was brightening and the sky had clothed itself in the glowing hues of dawn, the camp had been pitched; but little time remained for a hasty meal for, shortly after sunrise, the gong had summoned the people and, as soon as they gathered near the springs, Miriam swung her timbrel, shaking the bells and striking the calf-skin till it resounded again. As she moved lightly forward, the women and maidens followed her in the rhythmic step of the dance; but she sang:

"I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

"The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.

"The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name. "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

"The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.

"Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

"And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble.

"And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

"The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

"Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

"Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them.

"Thou, in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation."

Men and women joined in the song, when she repeated the words:

"I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

This song and this hour of rejoicing were never forgotten by the Hebrews, and each heart was filled with the glory of God and the glad and grateful anticipation of better, happier days.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The hymn of praise had died away, but though the storm had long since raged itself into calmness, the morning sky, which had been beautiful in the rosy flush of dawn, was again veiled by grey mists, and a strong wind still blew from the southwest, lashing the sea and shaking and swaying the tops of the palm-trees beside the springs.

The rescued people had paid due honor to the Most High, even the most indifferent and rebellious had joined in Miriam's song of praise; yet, when the ranks of the dancers approached the sea, many left the procession to hurry to the shore, which presented many attractions.

Hundreds had now gathered on the strand, where the waves, like generous robbers, washed ashore the booty they had seized during the night.

Even the women did not allow the wind to keep them back; for the two strongest impulses of the human heart, avarice and the longing for vengeance, drew them to the beach.

Some new object of desire appeared every moment; here lay the corpse of a warrior, yonder his shattered chariot. If the latter had belonged to a man of rank, its gold or silver ornaments were torn off, while the short sword or battle-axe was drawn from the girdle of the lifeless owner, and men and women of low degree, male and female slaves belonging to the Hebrews and foreigners, robbed the corpses of the clasps and circlets of the precious metal, or twisted the rings from the swollen fingers of the drowned.

The ravens which had followed the wandering tribes and vanished during the storm, again appeared and, croaking, struggled against the wind to maintain their places above the prey whose scent had attracted them.

But the dregs of the fugitive hordes were still more greedy than they, and wherever the sea washed a costly ornament ashore, there were fierce outcries and angry quarrelling. The leaders kept aloof; the people, they thought, had a right to this booty, and whenever one of them undertook to control their rude greed, he received no obedience.

The pass to which the Egyptians had brought them within the last few hours had been so terrible, that even the better natures among the Hebrews did not think of curbing the thirst for vengeance. Even grey-bearded men of dignified bearing, and wives and mothers whose looks augured gentle hearts thrust back the few hapless foes who had succeeded in reaching the land on the ruins of the war-chariots or baggage-wagons. With shepherds' crooks and travelling staves, knives and axes, stones and insults they forced their hands from the floating wood, and the few who nevertheless reached the land were flung by the furious mob into the sea which had taken pity on them in vain.

Their wrath was so great, and vengeance so sacred a duty, that no one thought of the respect, the

pity, the consideration, which are misfortune's due, and not a word was uttered to appeal to generosity or compassion or even to remind the people of the profit which might be derived from holding the rescued soldiers as prisoners of war.

"Death to our mortal foes! Destruction to them! Down with them! Feed the fishes with them! You drove us into the sea with our children, now try the salt waves yourselves!"

Such were the shouts that rose everywhere, and which no one opposed, not even Miriam and Ephraim, who had also gone down to the shore to witness the scene it presented.

The maiden had become the wife of Hur, but her new condition had made little change in her nature and conduct. The fate of her people and the intercourse with God, whose prophetess she felt herself to be, were still her highest aims. Now that all for which she had hoped and prayed was fulfilled; now that at the first great triumph of her efforts she had expressed the feelings of the faithful in her song, she felt as if she were the leader of the grateful multitude at whose head she had marched singing and as if she had attained the goal of her life.

Ephraim had reminded her of Hosea and, while talking with him about the prisoner, she moved on as proudly as a queen, answering the greetings of the throng with majestic dignity. Her eyes sparkled with joy, and her features wore an expression of compassion only at brief intervals, when the youth spoke of the greatest sufferings which he had borne with his uncle. She doubtless still remembered the man she had loved, but he was no longer necessary to the lofty goal of her aspirations.

Ephraim had just spoken of the beautiful Egyptian, who had loved Hosea and at whose intercession the prisoner's chains had been removed, when loud outcries were heard at a part of the strand where many of the people had gathered. Shouts of joy mingled with yells of fury; and awakened the conjecture that the sea had washed some specially valuable prize ashore.

Curiosity drew both to the spot, and as Miriam's stately bearing made the throng move respectfully aside, they soon saw the mournful contents of a large travelling-chariot, which had lost its wheels. The linen canopy which had protected it was torn away, and on the floor lay two elderly Egyptian women; a third, who was much younger, leaned against the back of the vehicle thus strangely transformed into a boat. Her companions lay dead in the water which had covered its floor, and several Hebrew women were in the act of tearing the costly gold ornaments from the neck and arms of one of the corpses. Some chance had preserved this young woman's life, and she was now giving her rich jewels to the Israelites. Her pale lips and slender, half-frozen hands trembled as she did so, and in low, musical tones she promised the robbers to yield them all she possessed and pay a large ransom, if they would spare her. She was so young, and she had shown kindness to a Hebrew surely they might listen to her.

It was a touching entreaty, but so often interrupted by threats and curses that only a few could hear it. Just as Ephraim and Miriam reached the shore she shrieked aloud—a rude hand had torn the gold serpent from her ear.

The cry pierced the youth's heart like a dagger-thrust and his cheeks paled, for he recognized Kasana. The bodies beside her were those of her nurse and the wife of the chief priest Bai.

Scarcely able to control himself, Ephraim thrust aside the men who separated him from the object of the moment's assault, sprang on the sand-hill at whose foot the chariot had rested, and shouted with glowing cheeks in wild excitement:

"Back! Woe to any one who touches her!"

But a Hebrew woman, the wife of a brickmaker whose child had died in terrible convulsions during the passage through the sea, had already snatched the dagger from her girdle, and with the jeering cry "This for my little Ruth, you jade!" dealt her a blow in the back. Then she raised the tiny blood-stained weapon for a second stroke; but ere she could give her enemy another thrust, Ephraim flung himself between her and her victim and wrenched the dagger from her grasp. Then planting himself before the wounded girl, he swung the blade aloft exclaiming in loud, threatening tones:

"Whoever touches her, you robbers and murderers, shall mingle his blood with this woman's." Then he flung himself beside Kasana's bleeding form, and finding that she had lost consciousness, raised her in his arms and carried her to Miriam.

The astonished plunderers speechlessly made way for a few minutes, but ere he reached the prophetess shouts of: "Vengeance! Vengeance!" were heard in all directions. "We found the woman: the booty belongs to us alone!—How dares the insolent Ephraimite call us robbers and murderers? —Wherever Egyptian blood can be spilled, it must flow!—At him!—Snatch the girl from him!"

The youth paid no heed to these outbursts of wrath until he had laid Kasana's head in the lap of Miriam, who had seated herself on the nearest sand-hill, and as the angry throng, the women in front of the men, pressed upon him, he again waved his dagger, crying: "Back—I command you. Let all of the blood of Ephraim and Judah rally around me and Miriam, the wife of their chief! That's right, brothers, and woe betide any hand that touches her. Do you shriek for vengeance? Has it not been yours through yonder monster who murdered the poor defenceless one? Do you want your victim's jewels? Well, well; they belong to you, and I will give you mine to boot, if you will leave the wife of Hur to care for this dying girl!"

With these words he bent over Kasana, took off the clasps and rings she still wore, and gave them to the greedy hands outstretched to seize them. Lastly he stripped the broad gold circlet from his arm, and holding it aloft exclaimed:

"Here is the promised payment. If you will depart quietly and leave this woman to Miriam, I will give you the gold, and you can divide it among you. If you thirst for more blood, come on; but I will keep the armlet."

These words did not fail to produce their effect. The furious women looked at the heavy broad gold armlet, then at the handsome youth, and the men of Judah and Ephraim who had gathered around him, and finally glanced enquiringly into one another's faces. At last the wife of a foreign trader cried:

"Let him give us the gold, and we'll leave the handsome young chief his bleeding sweetheart."

To this decision the others agreed, and though the brickmaker's infuriated wife, who thought as the avenger of her child she had done an act pleasing in the sight of God, and was upbraided for it as a murderess, reviled the youth with frantic gestures, she was dragged away by the crowd to the shore where they hoped to find more booty.

During this threatening transaction, Miriam had fearlessly examined Kasana's wound and bound it up with skilful hands. The dagger which Prince Siptah had jestingly given the beautiful lady of his love, that she might not go to war defenceless, had inflicted a deep wound under the shoulder, and the blood had flowed so abundantly that the feeble spark of life threatened to die out at any moment.

But she still lived, and in this condition was borne to the tent of Nun, which was the nearest within reach.

The old chief had just been supplying weapons to the shepherds and youths whom Ephraim had summoned to go to the relief of the imprisoned Hosea, and had promised to join them, when the mournful procession approached.

As Kasana loved the handsome old man, the latter had for many years kept a place in his heart for Captain Homecht's pretty daughter.

She had never met him without gladdening him by a greeting which he always returned with kind words, such as: "The Lord bless you, child!" or: "It is a delightful hour when an old man meets so fair a creature." Many years before—she had then worn the curls of childhood—he had even sent her a lamb, whose snowy fleece was specially silky, after having bartered the corn from her father's lands for cattle of his most famous breed—and what his son had told him of Kasana had been well fitted to increase his regard for her.

He beheld in the archer's daughter the most charming young girl in Tanis and, had she been the child of Hebrew parents, he would have rejoiced to wed her to his son.

To find his darling in such a state caused the old man grief so profound that bright tears ran down upon his snowy beard and his voice trembled as, while greeting her, he saw the blood-stained bandage on her shoulder.

After she had been laid on his couch, and Nun had placed his own chest of medicines at the disposal of the skilful prophetess, Miriam asked the men to leave her alone with the suffering Egyptian, and when she again called them into the tent she had revived the strength of the severely-wounded girl with cordials, and bandaged the hurt more carefully than had been possible before.

Kasana, cleansed from the blood-stains and with her hair neatly arranged, lay beneath the fresh linen coverings like a sleeping child just on the verge of maidenhood.

She was still breathing, but the color had not returned to cheeks or lips, and she did not open her eyes until she had drunk the cordial Miriam mixed for her a second time.

The old man and his grandson stood at the foot of her couch, and each would fain have asked the

other why he could not restrain his tears whenever he looked at this stranger's face.

The certainty that Kasana was wicked and faithless, which had so unexpectedly forced itself upon Ephraim, had suddenly turned his heart from her and startled him back into the right path which he had abandoned. Yet what he had heard in her tent had remained a profound secret, and as he told his grandfather and Miriam that she had compassionately interceded for the prisoners, and both had desired to hear more of her, he had felt like a father who had witnessed the crime of a beloved son, and no word of the abominable things he had heard had escaped his lips.

Now he rejoiced that he had kept silence; for whatever he might have seen and heard, this fair creature certainly was capable of no base deed.

To the old man she had never ceased to be the lovely child whom he had known, the apple of his eye and the joy of his heart. So he gazed with tender anxiety at the features convulsed by pain and, when she at last opened her eyes, smiled at her with paternal affection. Her glance showed that she instantly recognized both him and Ephraim, but weakness baffled her attempt to nod to them. Yet her expressive face revealed surprise and joy, and when Miriam had given her the cordial a third time and bathed her brow with a powerful essence, her large eyes wandered from face to face and, noticing the troubled looks of the men, she managed to whisper:

"The wound aches—and death—must I die?" One looked enquiringly at another, and the men would gladly have concealed the terrible truth; but she went on:

"Oh, let me know. Ah, I pray you, tell me the truth!"

Miriam, who was kneeling beside her, found courage to answer:

"Yes, you poor young creature, the wound is deep, but whatever my skill can accomplish shall be done to preserve your life as long as possible."

The words sounded kind and full of compassion, yet the deep voice of the prophetess seemed to hurt Kasana; for her lips quivered painfully while Miriam was speaking, and when she ceased, her eyes closed and one large tear after another ran down her cheeks. Deep, anxious silence reigned around her until she again raised her lashes and, fixing her eyes wearily on Miriam, asked softly, as if perplexed by some strange spectacle:

"You are a woman, and yet practise the art of the leech."

"My God has commanded me to care for the suffering ones of our people," replied the other.

The dying girl's eyes began to glitter with a restless light, and she gasped in louder tones, nay with a firmness that surprised the others:

"You are Miriam, the woman who sent for Hosea." And when the other answered promptly and proudly: "It is as you say!" Kasana continued:

"And you possess striking, imperious beauty, and much influence. He obeyed your summons, and you—you consented to wed another?"

Again the prophetess answered, this time with gloomy earnestness: "It is as you say."

The dying girl closed her eyes once more, and a strange proud smile hovered around her lips. But it soon vanished and a great and painful restlessness seized upon her. The fingers of her little hands, her lips, nay, even her eyelids moved perpetually, and her smooth, narrow forehead contracted as if some great thought occupied her mind.

At last the ideas that troubled her found utterance and, as if roused from her repose, she exclaimed in terrified accents:

"You are Ephraim, who seemed like his son, and the old man is Nun, his dear father. There you stand and will live on.... But I—I Oh, it is so hard to leave the light.... Anubis will lead me before the judgment seat of Osiris. My heart will be weighed, and then...."

Here she shuddered and opened and closed her trembling hands; but she soon regained her composure and began to speak again. Miriam, however, sternly forbade this, because it would hasten her death.

Then the sufferer, summoning all her strength, exclaimed hastily, as loudly as her voice would permit, after measuring the prophetess' tall figure with a long glance: "You wish to prevent me from doing my duty— you?"

There had been a slight touch of mockery in the question; but Kasana doubtless felt that it was necessary to spare her strength; for she continued far more quietly, as though talking to herself:

"I cannot die so, I cannot! How it happened; why I sacrificed all, all.... I must atone for it; I will not complain, if he only learns how it came to pass. Oh, Nun, dear old Nun, who gave me the lamb when I was a little thing—I loved it so dearly—and you, Ephraim, my dear boy, I will tell you everything."

Here a painful fit of coughing interrupted her; but as soon as she recovered her breath, she turned to Miriam, and called in a tone which so plainly expressed bitter dislike, that it would have surprised any one who knew her kindly nature:

"But you, yonder,—you tall woman with the deep voice who are a physician, you lured him from Tanis, from his soldiers and from me. He, he obeyed your summons. And you . . . you became another's wife; probably after his arrival yes! For when Ephraim summoned him, he called you a maiden . . . I don't know whether this caused him, Hosea, pain But there is one thing I do know, and that is that I want to confess something and must do so, ere it is too late.... And no one must hear it save those who love him, and I—do you hear—I love him, love him better than aught else on earth! But you? You have a husband, and a God whose commands you eagerly obey—you say so yourself. What can Hosea be to you? So I beseech you to leave us. I have met few who repelled me, but you—your voice, your eyes—they pierce me to the heart—and if you were near I could not speak as I must.... and oh, talking hurts me so! But before you go—you are a leech—let me know this one thing—I have many messages to leave for him ere I die.... Will it kill me to talk?"

Again the prophetess found no other words in answer except the brief:

"It is as you say," and this time they sounded harsh and ominous.

While wavering between the duty which, as a physician, she owed the sufferer and the impulse not to refuse the request of a dying woman, she read in old Nun's eyes an entreaty to obey Kasana's wish, and with drooping head left the tent. But the bitter words of the hapless girl pursued her and spoiled the day which had begun so gloriously and also many a later hour; nay, to her life's end she could not understand why, in the presence of this poor, dying woman, she had been overpowered by the feeling that she was her inferior and must take a secondary place.

As soon as Kasana was left alone with Nun and Ephraim, and the latter had flung himself on his knees beside her couch, while the old man kissed her brow, and bowed his white head to listen to her low words, she began:

"I feel better now. That tall woman.... those gloomy brows that meet in the middle.... those nightblack eyes.... they glow with so fierce a fire, yet are so cold.... That woman.... did Hosea love her, father? Tell me; I am not asking from idle curiosity!"

"He honored her," replied the old man in a troubled tone, "as did our whole nation; for she has a lofty spirit, and our God suffers her to hear His voice; but you, my darling, have been dear to him from childhood, I know."

A slight tremor shook the dying girl. She closed her eyes for a short time and a sunny smile hovered around her lips.

She lay in this attitude so long that Nun feared death had claimed her and, holding the medicine in his hand, listened to hear her breathing.

Kasana did not seem to notice it; but when she finally opened her eyes, she held out her hand for the cordial, drank it, and then began again:

"It seemed just as if I had seen him, Hosea. He wore the panoply of war just as he did the first time he took me into his arms. I was a little thing and felt afraid of him, he looked so grave, and my nurse had told me that he had slain a great many of our foes. Yet I was glad when he came and grieved when he went away. So the years passed, and love grew with my growth. My young heart was so full of him, so full.... Even when they forced me to wed another, and after I had become a widow."

The last words had been scarcely audible, and she rested some time ere she continued:

"Hosea knows all this, except how anxious I was when he was in the field, and how I longed for him ere he returned. At last, at last he came home, and how I rejoiced! But he, Hosea....? That woman—Ephraim told me so—that tall, arrogant woman summoned him to Pithom. But he returned, and then.... Oh, Nun, your son.... that was the hardest thing....! He refused my hand, which my father offered.... And how that hurt me....! I can say no more....! Give me the drink!"

Her cheeks had flushed crimson during these painful confessions, and when the experienced old man perceived how rapidly the excitement under which she was laboring hastened the approach of death, he begged her to keep silence; but she insisted upon profiting by the time still allowed her, and though the sharp pain with which a short cough tortured her forced her to press her hand upon her breast, she continued:

"Then hate came; but it did not last long—and never did I love him more ardently than when I drove after the poor convict—you remember, my boy. Then began the horrible, wicked, evil time.... of which I must tell him that he may not despise me, if he hears about it. I never had a mother, and there was no one to warn me.... Where shall I begin? Prince Siptah —you know him, father—that wicked man will soon rule over my country. My father is in a conspiracy with him.... merciful gods, I can say no more!"

Terror and despair convulsed her features as she uttered these words; but Ephraim interrupted her and, with tearful eyes and faltering voice, confessed that he knew all. Then he repeated what he had heard while listening outside of her tent, and her glance confirmed the tale.

When he finally spoke of the wife of the viceroy and chief-priest Bai, whose body had been borne to the shore with her, Kasana interrupted him with the low exclamation:

"She planned it all. Her husband was to be the greatest man in the country and rule even Pharaoh; for Siptah is not the son of a king."

"And," the old man interrupted, to quiet her and help her tell what she desired to say, "as Bai raised, he can overthrow him. He will become, even more certainly than the dethroned monarch, the tool of the man who made him king. But I know Aarsu the Syrian, and if I see aright, the time will come when he will himself strive, in distracted Egypt, rent by internal disturbances, for the power which, through his mercenaries, he aided others to grasp. But child, what induced you to follow the army and this shameful profligate?"

The dying girl's eyes sparkled, for the question brought her directly to what she desired to tell, and she answered as loudly and quickly as her weakness permitted:

"I did it for your son's sake, for love of him, to liberate Hosea. The evening before I had steadily and firmly refused the wife of Bai. But when I saw your son at the well and he, Hosea.... Oh, at last he was so affectionate and kissed me so kindly.... and then—then.... My poor heart! I saw him, the best of men, perishing amid contumely and disease.

"And when he passed with chains one thought darted through my mind....."

"You determined, you dear, foolish, misguided child," cried the old man, "to win the heart of the future king in order, through him, to release my son, your friend?"

The dying girl again smiled assent and softly exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, I did it for that, for that alone. And the prince was so abhorrent to me. And the shame, the disgrace—oh, how terrible it was!"

"And you incurred it for my son's sake," the old man interrupted, raising her hand, wet with his tears, to his lips; but she fixed her eyes on Ephraim, sobbing softly:

"I thought of him too. He is so young, and it is so horrible in the mines."

She shuddered again as she spoke; but the youth covered her burning hand with kisses, while she gazed affectionately at him and the old man, adding in faltering accents:

"Oh, all is well now, and if the gods grant him freedom...."

Here Ephraim interrupted her to exclaim in fiery tones:

"We are going to the mines this very day. I and my comrades, and my grandfather with us, will put his guards to flight."

"And he shall hear from my lips," Nun added, "how faithfully Kasana loved him, and that his life will be too short to thank her for such a sacrifice."

His voice failed him—but every trace of suffering had vanished from the countenance of the dying girl, and for a long time she gazed heavenward silently with a happy look. By degrees, however, her smooth brow contracted in an anxious frown, and she gasped in low tones:

"Well, all is well.... only one thing.... my body.... unembalmed.... without the sacred amulets. . . ."

But the old man answered:

"As soon as you have closed your eyes, I will give it, carefully wrapped, to the Phoenician captain now tarrying here, that he may deliver it to your father."

Kasana tried to turn her head toward him to thank him with a loving glance, but she suddenly pressed both hands on her breast, crimson blood welled from her lips, her cheeks varied from livid white to fiery scarlet and, after a brief, painful convulsion, she sank back. Death laid his hand on the loving heart, and her features gained the expression of a child whose mother has forgiven its fault and clasped it to her heart ere it fell asleep.

The old man, weeping, closed the dead girl's eyes. Ephraim, deeply moved, kissed the closed lids, and after a short silence Nun said:

"I do not like to enquire about our fate beyond the grave, which Moses himself does not know; but whoever has lived so that his or her memory is tenderly cherished in the souls of loved ones, has, I think, done the utmost possible to secure a future existence. We will remember this dead girl in our most sacred hours. Let us do for her corpse what we promised, and then set forth to show the man for whom Kasana sacrificed what she most valued that we do not love him less than this Egyptian woman."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

I do not like to enquire about our fate beyond the grave
Then hate came; but it did not last long

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOSHUA — VOLUME 4 ***

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