

"Put on thy golden girdle with the mighty emerald clasp
And thy lotus broided robe. Braid thy hair all cunningly,
And wear the winged head-dress with the turquoise jewelled asp,—
Then come and coax him from his gloom.—Thou only can'st,"
said he.

"Wise counsellor!" she smiled; "Nay, but too wise for thy short
years,
I will unto the King;—and such great issues are at stake
This time I dare not fail. I must go queenly—without tears
Or humble supplications,—but as one no woe can break."

"Stay thou with thy old nurse, Beloved,—she sitteth in the hall,—
And she will tell thee wondrous tales, to win from thee a smile,
Then take thy supper by her side, and when deep night doth fall,
Go to the tower, whence I'll come, but in a little while."

Arrayed in her most lovely robes she took her stately way
By courtiers unattended, through the palace vast and still.
Her beauty was a thing to hold all bitterness at bay,
To move the hearts of men, and bend their spirits to her will!

She passed beneath the rose red lights that hung from roof and door,
And by unseeing gods, where curled an incense, blue and sweet;
As one who walks in sleep she crossed the cool mosaic floor,
That echoed to the music of her silver-sandalled feet.

She reached the council chamber and there entered silently;—
But though the bowing wise men had been reeds the wind could
sway
Would have noted them as little. She only seemed to see
One face, inscrutable and dark, toward which she took her way.

The King sat still as Fate. "Most High," she said, "I come for truth
Of this new threat of vengeance. There is horror in the air;—
The Ethiopian runner hath brought word to me in sooth
Blood is sprinkled on the door-posts of Hebrews everywhere."

"There are rumors—so he sayeth—of an Angel who will slay
The first-born sons of Egypt—should these bondsmen not depart.
Thy people weep in anguish—I myself must hear thee say—
The Hebrew leader threatens no such danger to my heart,—"

"He is my heart—my inner heart;—O straight he is and strong!
To me he meaneth Egypt—Egypt meaneth but my son—
So I would take him swiftly toward the land where I belong
To return to thee in safety when these troubles all are done."

"The streets are filled with mourners;—every day more tears are
shed;
The embalmers have grown weary,—they will not work for gold,—
And everywhere the eye doth see processions of the dead
Till they seem but mocking phantoms, we watch unmoved and
cold."

"Thou wilt not let the Hebrews go—I read it in thine eyes;—
There are no gods in Egypt—there is nothing but thy Will—
That sets itself against some force that yet in strength will rise
But to silence all thine answers and bid thy voice be still."

Then Pharaoh leaned toward her: "O most beautiful!" he said,
"There is not a man who liveth dare say so to my face;
And truly were there such an one t'were better he were dead,
For dead men suffer nothing.—Yet I pray thee of thy grace"

"Have patience now to hear me. 'Tis as the Ethiope heard.
They threatened all the first-born;—but the tower is brass
and stone,
There my son shall stay to-night, guarded well, I give thee word.—
Where armies could not enter—can one angel pass alone?"

"Think'st thou that I am one to be affrighted by the dark?
A weakling to be played upon,—a coward or a fool?
Nay!—I defy the Israelites!—Their weapons miss their mark,
They have roused my utmost anger: it taketh long to cool."

"But thou!" he said; "but thou! Methinks had they but threatened
thee
I should perchance have known the very quality of fear;—
Thou thing of perfect loveliness! Content mine eyes will be
Though in the land of Egypt is no blossom for a year."

"But thou art queen, and thou art free;—free now to go or stay,
I would not bind thee to my side—not by one golden hair.—
Leave thou this land of peril e'er the breaking of the day
Or give thy life to my dark life,—and bear what it doth bear."

Then blanched her face to whiteness of the lillies on her gown,
And low she bowed as lillies bow in drift of wind and rain;
"My Lord," she said, "I have no will except to lay it down
At thy desire. As I have done, so will I do again."

"Thou art my King, my son is thine. It is not mine to say
That I will bear him hence.—Yet gropes my soul unto a light;
The quarrel is t'wixt Heaven and thee alone,—so I will stay
With him I love within the tower throughout this fateful night."

"And if the Angel cometh through the walls of stone and brass,—
And if he toucheth Egypt's son, to seal his gentle breath,
Then will we know that God is God, He who hath right to pass
Our little doors, for He Himself is Lord of Life and Death."



O when the desert blossomed like a mystic silver rose,
And the moon shone on the palace, deep guarded to the gate,
And softly touched the lowly homes fast barred against their foes,
And lit the faces hewn of stone, that seemed to watch and wait,—

There came a cry—a rending cry—upon the quivering air,
The sudden wild lamenting of a nation in its pain,
For the first-born sons of Egypt, the young, the strong, the fair,—
Had fallen into dreamless sleep,—and would not wake again.

And within the palace tower the little prince slept well,
His head upon his mother's heart, that knew no more alarms;
For at the midnight hour—O most sweet and strange to tell,—
She too slept deeply as the child close folded in her arms.

Hard through the city rode the King, unarmed, unhelmeted,
Toward the land he loaned his bondsmen, the country kept in peace;
He swayed upon his saddle, and he looked as looked the dead—
The people stared and wondered though their weeping did not
cease.

On did he ride to Goshen, and he called "Arise! Arise!
Thou leader of the Israelites, 'tis I who bid you go!
Take thou these people hence, before the sun hath lit the skies;—
Get thee beyond the border of this land of death and woe!"

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Across the plains of Egypt through the shadows of the night
Came the sound as of an army moving onward steadily,
And their leader read his way by the stars eternal light
While all the legions followed on their journey to the sea.

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The moon that shineth overhead once saw these mysteries,—
And then the world was young, that hath these many years been
old;

If Egypt drank her bitter cup down even to the lees
Who careth now? 'Tis but an ancient tale that hath been told.

*Yet still we hear the footsteps—as he goeth to and fro—
Of Asrael, the Angel, that the Lord God sent below,
To Egypt—long ago.*

