

ward—and the line of hills drew near. Then he began to stir himself, and she with him. He shouted to them to charge, and she echoed him, leaving his side at last to take command of a wing and sting the tired-out men-at-arms into new enthusiasm. In a minute they were a roaring tide that swept forward to the foot of the hills and surged upward without a check. In a little while they were hurling boulders down on an enemy that seemed inclined to parley.

Then, like a shadow of the incense cloud above, the mist closed up in the crystal again, and in a moment more King and Yasmini were looking into each other's eyes again above it. "I have seen that before," she said, shaking her head. "I am weary of their battles. They won; that is enough! I must know how they failed, so that we make no such mistakes!"

Her face was flushed, and her eyes glowed with the fire that is not lit by ordinary passion. She was being eaten by ambition—burned by her own fire—by ambition not totally selfish, for she yearned to shepherd King as she seemed to think this woman of the vision had not shepherded the man in armour.

"Look again!" she said. "Look again! And oh, ye old gods, show—show me wherein she failed!"

They stared again, and once more the crystal clouded. Out of the cloud came a city in the middle of a plain, and the city was besieged. It was not a very great city, but from the outside it looked rich, for domes and roofs and towers showed above the wall, all well built and well preserved. He and she, sitting their horses out of arrow range from the main gate seemed confident of taking it and eager to get it over with.

They no longer had only six or seven hundred men, but men by the

thousand. Their veterans in Roman armour were in command of others now, and they had a human pack-train with them, heavily burdened captives who sulked in chains under a guard.

The mist cleared further, and the gate gave in under the blows of an improvised battering-ram, covered by showers of arrows from short range. Then, like a river breaking down a dam, the thousands stormed in, howling. Smoke rose. There were screams of women. A great tower near the gate, that was half wood, half stone, crackled and curled up in yellow and crimson flame. He and she rode in together as modern men and women ride through a gate to the covert side at a fox-hunt. They chatted and laughed together, and their horses pranced, responding to the humour of their riders.

KING would have liked to tear his eyes from the scenes that followed in the tree-lined streets, but the crystal ball held him as if in a trance—that and Yasmini's hands that clasped his own like hot torture chamber clamps. Animals fighting to the death are not so vile, nor so inhuman as men can be in the hour of what they call victory. Even the little children of that city paid the penalty for having closed the gate.

Time was no measure to the crystal ball. In minutes it showed the devil's work of hours. The city went up in smoke and flame, and from the far side through a great breach in the wall the conquerors went out, with their plunder and such prisoners as had been saved to drag and carry it.

Now there were wagons and camels and horses. Now there were tents and furniture. Now each man of the fighting force had as much as he himself could carry, as well as what was loaded on the prisoners. Only he and

she seemed to care nothing for the loot and rode as if each was all the other needed. Still he wore nothing but his armour, and she no more than her dancing dress and sandals. But now she had eight prisoners to hold a panoply above her horse and keep the sun from her.

Yasmini shook her head impatiently. The crystal clouded over, and King's eyes were free.

"I am tired of it," she said. "I have seen that so many times. I know they won. I know they found their way to Khinjan. I know they began to build an empire here. I have seen all that a hundred times. What I must know is what mistake they made. What did they do wrong? How did they come to fail? Look again! Let us look again!"

She never once let King's hands go, but pressed them tighter and tighter until the circulation nearly stopped and they grew numb. Her own strength seemed endless—to grow rather than to wane in proportion as her yearning to look into the past grew. Her attitude would have been more understandable if she had believed herself and King to be reincarnations of those forgotten conquerors; but she was too original for that. She had said the old gods wished, and the man and the woman were; the old gods wished the same wish again, and she and King were. Why, then, if the old gods were contriving it all, should she seek to steady the ark for them? But down at bottom there is no logic connected with gods many. She clutched King's fingers as if to hold him there, and to make him see and understand the distant past, were the only way to save him from mistakes.

"Look!" she insisted. "Look again!" And he obeyed her. By this time obedience was much the easiest course. Between times his eyes were so weary he could hardly hold them open, and it was only when he gazed into the crystal that he could rest them and feel easy. He knew well that she was winning control over him in some sort, and he fought against it grimly. Soon he became weirdly conscious of being two men—one, whom he had grasped and overcome, a physical man who did not matter much, and another, mental man who was free from her, who could understand her, whom she could not reach or touch.

"Look!" she insisted. "Look!" And the crystal clouded over.

HE strode out of the mist, frowning with his chin hung low and fists clenched tight at his sides. Four of his own men came out of the mist to him and greeted him respectfully, yet not without a touch of irony.

They spoke to him and pointed westward. One laid a hand on his shoulder, but he shook it off and the man reeled back as if he had been struck. Another man reeled back as if he had been struck. Another man took up the argument, but he shook his head. They all spoke together, gesticulating and growing angry; but he stood calm among them, as a rock stands in a storm. He folded his arms across his breast after a while and listened, saying nothing.

Then as if to end the argument for good and all, he drew his sword and held it out toward them, hilt first, telling them to kill him and have done with it. They refused. He laughed at them, but they still refused; so he put his sword back in the sheath.

One of the men stepped into the mist and disappeared. Presently he came again, with two others, helping a wounded man along between them. Whoever the wounded man might be he was treated with respect. Prouder than Lucifer, he who had struck another man's hand from out his shoulder knelt to give this wounded man a

knee and seemed pained when the man refused him.

The wounded man pointed to the westward too and argued in short clipped-off sentences. He had a day or two to live—certainly not longer, for the blood flowed slowly from a wound that would not stanch; yet he argued as a man who has lost no interest in life, but rather sees its problems truly now that his own are near an end.

He demanded something almost truculently. He took his helmet off and passed it down to him. With fingers that were growing feeble the wounded man held it and traced out the letters S. P. Q. R. on the front.

"Go home!" he said, passing it back to him. "Fight your way back home!" What he said was as distinct as if a voice in the cave had spoken it.

Then, vision within a vision—dream within a dream—there was a view of the Via Appia, with gaunt grim galleys set along it in a row and on them a regiment's commander crucified along with the remnant of his men.

"So Rome treats traitors!" said a voice, that might have been either man's.

BUT instantly there was a vision, of ten thousand wolves baying down a Himalayan gorge in winter-time, the sleet frozen stiff on their fur and their tongues hanging. Eye and fang flashed altogether and made one gleam.

"Choose!" said a voice.

So he chose. He nodded. The men saluted him, and the wounded man was helped away to die. And then she came, angry as a flash of lightning, to spring at him and cling to him and call him names—begging, demanding, ordering, crying—abusing him and praising him in turn. He shook his head. She sobbed, but he shook his head again and pointed westward. Then she took him by the hand and led him away, not looking at his face again.

The crystal ball grew clouded. Yasmini's breath came and went as if she were running in a race, and her pressure on King's fingers was actually painful. The mist dissolved, and King forgot the pressure—forgot everything. The man in armour lay dead on his back in the cave on the wooden bed, and she bent over him, dagger in hand.

"Ah!" said Yasmini, her teeth chattering. "But what else could she do?" The mist closed in again and the crystal grew opaque. "The future!" she begged. "It is the future I must know! Ye old gods, tell me! Show me!"

The mist turned red. The crystal ball became as it were a ball of fire revolving within itself. The fire turned to blood, and the blood to fire again. The very cavern that they knelt in seemed to sway. Yasmini screamed and moaned. She loosed King's hands to cover her own eyes.

And as she did that King sank, like a sack half-empty and toppled over sideways on the floor asleep.

He neither dreamed nor was conscious of anything, but slept like a dead man, having fought against her mesmerism harder than he knew.

Statesmen, generals, outlaws, all make their big mistakes and manage to recover. Very nearly always it is an apparently little mistake.

Yasmini made her little mistake that minute in believing King was utterly mesmerized at last and utterly in her power. Whereas in truth he was only weary. It may be that she gave him orders in his sleep, after the accepted manner of mesmerists; but if she did, they never reached him!

(To be continued.)



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