

Grecian temple. She seemed devout—to have forgotten that she ever killed a man, or made a threat or plotted for a kingdom.

"Be still," she said, raising a finger. "The old gods talk to us in here. It is not for us to answer them in words, but in deeds. Let us listen and do!"

There were two cushions—great billowy modern ones, covered in gold brocade—on the floor in the midst of the cave. Between them was a stand of ivory, some two feet high, whose top was a disk, cut from the largest tusk that ever could have been. On the disk resting in a little hollow in the ivory, was a pure, perfect crystal sphere of a foot diameter. He could see his reflection in it, and Yasmini's, too, the moment he entered the cave, and whichever way they moved both images remained undistorted. He suspected that the lighting and the crystal reflectors had not been arranged at random.

IN each corner of the four-square cave was a brazier of bronze, and from each rose incense smoke, straight upward. The four streams of smoke met at the ceiling and converged into a cloud that hung almost motionless.

Yasmini stepped very reverently to a cushion by the crystal in the middle, and signed to King to imitate her. They stood facing. She seemed to pray, for her eyes were hidden under the long lashes. Then she knelt, and King did the same, his knees sinking deep into another cushion. So they knelt eye to eye above the crystal for many minutes without either saying a word. It was Yasmini who spoke first.

"The old gods have showed me the past many and many a time in this," she said. "It is their way of speaking to me. Now, to-day, I have prayed to them to show me the future. Look! Look, Athelstan! Do as I do—so!"

There seemed nothing to be gained by disobeying her. To obey her might be to win new insight into the ramifications of her plans. Men who have experience of the East are the last to deny that there is method in Eastern magic; they glimpse the knowledge that belonged to Pharaoh's men, although unlike Moses they are not always able to confound it. The East forgets nothing. The West ignores. But there are men from the West who are willing to look and to listen and to try to understand; like King, they go high in the Service. There are others who look on at the magic with an understanding eye and are caught by it. Their end is not good to contemplate. The East is fettered in her own mesmeric spell and must suffer until she wakes.

Yasmini held the upright column of the ivory stand with both hands, close under the disk at the top. He copied her, placing his hands below hers. Hers slipped down and covered his, soft and warm; and so they stayed.

"Look!" she said. "Look!"

Her own eyes were grown big and round, and she gazed at the crystal ball as she had looked into King's eyes that night, with the very hunger of her soul. Her lips were parted. Watching her, King grew expectant, too. His eyes followed hers, to stare into the middle of the crystal, no longer feeling sleepy, and in less than a minute he could not have withdrawn them had he tried.

The crystal clouded over. Yasmini's breath came steadily, with a little hissing sound between her teeth, and the crystal, or else the whole world, seemed to sway in time to it. Then the man in Roman armor strode out of a mist, and all was steady again and easy to understand. When the man in armor opened his lips to speak, one knew what he had said.

When he frowned, one knew why he frowned. When he smiled, one knew that she was coming.

And she did come, dancing out of the mist behind him, to fling soft arms round his neck and whisper praises in his ear. He stood like a king who has come into his own, with an arm round her and his chin held high. She kissed him on his proud chin, and laughed into his face.

There were troubles—difficulties, all in the mist behind, but he stood and despised them then while she caressed him!

Just as spoken words had no part in the vision, yet the whole was understood, so time did not enter into it. There was no connecting link between each scene; each dissolved into the other, and all were one.

She faded into mist, in a swirl of graceful drapery, and he frowned again. A long line of men-at-arms stood before him, grim as he and as discontented. They leaned on spears, at ease, and that seemed to annoy him most of all. A spokesman stood out from the ranks and addressed him, with gesticulations and a head so far thrown back that his helmet-plume stood out like a secretary's pen behind him. He was not a Roman, although there was something Roman about his attitude and armour. None of the men-at-arms was a Roman.

They demanded to be led home, wherever home was. (It was as plain as if their spokesman had shouted it into King's ear aloud.) And he refused them bluntly, proudly.

Two men brought him a native woman, each holding an arm and thrusting her forward between them. She was not at all unlike a native woman of to-day, either in dress or sullenness; she had the beak and the keen eyes and the cruel lips of the "Hills." They showed her to him, and it was quite clear that they compared her to their own women, left behind; the comparison was plainly to her disadvantage.

He wasted no argument on them, but his scorn made the two men fade away, and the woman with them. Yet he had no scorn for his lined-up fighting men, and so could act none. He ordered the spokesman back to the ranks, and the man obeyed. He gave another order, and the long lines stood at attention, spears straight up and down, and their round shields like great medallions on a wall. He ordered them away, but they stood still.

THEN he did a truly Roman thing.

He got his harness off—unbuckled and took off the great bronze corselet, in which he lay dead in another cave. He threw it down—tore open the white shirt underneath—and held his arms out. He bade them come and kill him. He bade them drive their spears into his unprotected breast.

There was not a movement down the line of men. They stood as a cliff looks at the tide. He dared them. He called them cowards—women—weaklings afraid of blood. But they stood still. He strode up and down the line, seeking a man with heart enough to plunge a spear into him, and no man moved.

Then he stood still before them all again and wept, because they loved him and he loved them. And then she came, not dancing this time, but barefooted and walking like a poem of the early days of Greece. She picked up his corselet and buckled it on him, making him hold up his arms and kneel while she slipped it over his head. And the grim men-at-arms hove their long spears up into the air and roared her an ovation, bringing down their right feet with a thunder all together.

"Ave!"

But the mist closed up and then the

crystal was clear again. It was Yasmini's voice that spoke. King looked up into her eyes, and they made him shudder, for he had never seen eyes like them. Her hands still clasped his own, burning hot. She was more terrible than Khinjan.

"I never saw that before," she said. "It is because you are here! We shall see it all now! We shall know it all! We shall know whether it was she who killed him, or whether his own men took him at his word. We shall know! Look again! Look again!"

HIS eyes seemed unable to obey his own will any longer. They obeyed her voice. He gazed into the crystal, and it clouded over. But although he obeyed her, the crystal obeyed him and answered at least in part the questions his imagination asked. He was not conscious of asking anything, but being a soldier his curiosity followed a more or less definite line.

Yasmini's breath began to come and go again with the little hissing sound. Her hot hands pressed his own. The mist suddenly dissolved. There was a road—a long white road, across a plain, and the men-at-arms fought their way along it. They were facing east.

Archers opposed them—archers on foot, and cavalry—Parthians. The Parthians were wild, but the drill of the men-at-arms was a thing to marvel at. When the flights of arrows came they knelt behind their shields. When the horsemen charged they closed in solid phalanx, and the inner ranks hurled javelins at ten-yard range. When the fury of the onslaught died they formed in column and went forward, gaining furlongs at a time while their enemy watched them and wondered.

It was plain that the enemy expected them to retreat sooner or later,

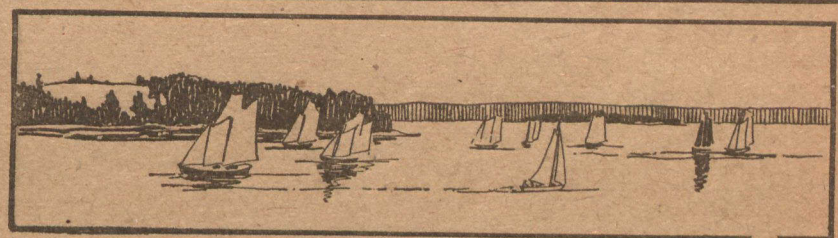
for the archers and cavalry were at great pains to get behind them, so that before long the road ahead was less well defended than that behind. It did not seem to occur to the enemy that they were pressing toward the distant line of hills and did not seek to return at all.

They had no baggage to impede them. It was absurd to suppose they would not try to fight a way back soon. They must be a Roman raiding party, out to teach Parthians a lesson. Yet they pressed ever forward, and the hills grew ever nearer; while he sat a great brown charger calmly in their midst and gave them not too many orders, but here and there a word of praise, and once or twice a trumpet shout of encouragement. He seemed to own the knack of being wherever the fight was fiercest. His mere presence seemed better than a hundred men when the phalanx bent before charging cavalry.

She rode a little white horse, beside him always and utterly scornful of the risk. She wore no armour—carried no shield. Her bare feet showed through the sandal straps, and the outlines of her lissom body were quite visible through the muslin stuff she wore. She might have just come from the dancing. She had a flower in her hand, and a wreath of flowers in her hair. She shouted more encouragement than he. She shouted too much. Once he laid a strong brown hand across her mouth, and she held it there and kissed it.

They lost men—five or six or ten or twenty at each onslaught. Perhaps they had been a thousand strong in the beginning. Their own men—the regimental surgeons probably—cut the throats of the badly wounded, to save them from the enemy's attentions; and by this time they were not more than seven or eight hundred strong.

But they went forward—ever for-



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