

"Alas," said Al Ammin sadly, "the King still thinks me guilty. He spared my life, but does not even yet know that I was left over long at the gate."

"That matters little," the King responded. "I know it, and have restored thee not only to life but to favor. I wish to consult thee to-night. I have heard that this wicked king, whom his people would not have to reign over them, had familiar spirits and demons who obeyed him, that they brought him the gems and gold with which this garden is adorned, and even that they builded many of the palaces and temples, and carved out many of the great pillars which stand in it."

"I have heard the women tell such stories to the children," Al Ammin replied.

The King's brow darkened and an angry flush overspread his face, but he repressed his anger and continued: "I have heard that there was a secret band which met even in this hall wherein we now sit, that spirits and demons sat with them, and that thou, Al Ammin, wert one of the band."

"Before to-night, O King," said the other, "I never stood in the Garden of Irem."

"I have also heard," the King went on, as if he had expected that denial, "that these meetings were also held in a great cave in the mountain, and that the demons and spirits were there."

"There were meetings," said Al Ammin, "and I was there, but there were neither demons nor spirits."

"I have heard, too," continued the King, "that there was a word which the demons obeyed, and that this word was given to those who belonged to the band."

"It is said," Al Ammin replied, "that the King knew a word handed down by Prophet Hud, and handed down to him even from the Prophet Seth, which the powers of the air obeyed."

"Hadst thou not the word?" Modac asked.

"Nay, not that word," replied Al Ammin.

"What word hadst thou?" the King asked eagerly.

"O King, I dare not tell," was the only response Al Ammin returned.

Again the angry blood flushed the King's face; again the dark veins in his forehead swelled almost to bursting; again his eyes gleamed with a wild and dangerous light; but he suppressed his passion and suddenly changed the subject, asking abruptly of Al Ammin if he knew the meaning of the various symbols with which the room was decorated. Al Ammin explained the celestial phenomena briefly, the uses of the square, the level, the plumb, the compasses and other working tools at greater length, the King seeming to pay little attention during that recital. When, however, Al Ammin began to explain the mysteries of a future state of existence, with its rewards to virtue and punishment of crime, the King grew uneasy, he glanced fitfully around the room, his fingers twitched nervously, and at last, with a bound, he sprang upon Al Ammin, crying, "The word, slave! Give me the word, or I slay thee."

"My life," said the other, "is in the King's hand, but I cannot tell the word."

"Then thou shalt die," said Modac in a rage, and stepping back a pace he drew a weapon as if to execute his threat; but in that moment every light in the hall was extinguished except one which glared an angry red through a great eye over the dais, and struggled with the