

UARDA

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father had usurped the throne from his cousin and could claim only on one side, his mother's, to have the blood of Ra. Ani, the Regent, was of fuller royal blood than Rameses and Ani was conspiring for the diadem.

To Ameni it mattered little who sat upon the throne—so that he could use him. Firmly convinced that the common people were worthy to be fed only on mysteries and not to be trusted with the truth, that dangerous innovations had been made and were being made in the ancient and established order of things, Ameni clung with tenacity to every jot and tittle of the old order, which he felt was passing away into chaos, and devoted all the cunning of his great intellect to hold back the floods which he felt were threatening to inundate the minds of men with new and dangerous ideas. He was already conspiring with the Regent against the absent Rameses and determined to make the purification of Bent Anat a public matter, and to proclaim to the people that the daughter of Pharaoh had no more rights in matters of faith than the meanest of the people—it would be good politics—he thought.

A few days later Bent Anat came with her train to visit the house for Seti, where her brother was a pupil. Was it her brother she came to see, or did she wish again to hear the voice of that fair young poet-priest, Pentaur? As the princess alighted from her chariot before the temple, where a crowd apprised of her coming, had collected, "Hail to the daughter of Rameses! hail to the child of the Sun!" burst from a thousand throats. But on the threshold of the door appeared Ameni in full pontifical robes, his crozier extended as if to forbid her entrance. "The advent of the daughter of Rameses," he cried, "is an honor to this house if she comes in her purity. But to the unclean, be they slaves or princes, the portals of this sanctuary are closed. In the name of the immortals from whom thou art descended I ask thee, Bent Anat, art thou purified?"

A deep flush overspread the cheeks of the maiden and there was a rushing noise in her ears. Her royal blood surged wildly at the insult. Then she returned the gaze of the high priest haughtily and defiantly. "My father will communicate my answer to thee," she said and turned to go proudly.

But at her first step her eyes encountered those of Pentaur. Ameni saw the glance—his spies had informed him of the friendship between Pentaur and the princess. "Bent Anat," cried Ameni, "hear this, misguided child. To thee much will be forgiven. But to a servant of the Divinity—and he turned a threatening glance upon Pentaur—a priest who in the war of free will against law becomes a deserter, who forgets his duty and his oath—even though God has blessed him with rich gifts—he is damned. We drive him from among us. We curse him."

A deep sympathy, a nameless anguish, seized the soul of the princess. Pentaur haughtily stepped forward to support her and to defy Ameni. But before he could reach her side she sank upon her knees before Ameni and said: "I have sinned and have defiled myself, as thou hast said. Pentaur said it by the hut of the paraschites. Restore me to cleanliness, Ameni."

Like a flame that is crushed out by the hand, so the fire in the high priest's eyes was extinguished. Graciously, almost lovingly, he looked down upon the princess and blessed her. In his heart of hearts Ameni loved Pentaur and admired the royal daughter of the Sun. But policy must be maintained; the old reactionary felt that he must not let his private feelings interfere with what he considered not only his duty, but the safety of mankind. Therefore, Ameni said that the guilt of Bent Anat was not even yet expiated, that she would presently learn by what rites and prayers and exercises she might again attain to perfect purity. And so the princess returned once more to the royal palace across the river and Pentaur retired to his room to think of her whose pride had been overcome by the fear that her haughtiness would involve him in difficulties and dangers.

Meantime Paaker was pursuing his suit with the wife of Mena. In his visits to the necropolis with the fair Nefert and her friend, the royal Bent Anat, he had run across an old woman, a reputed witch, who lived in a cave and made a living by selling charms and philters and by the more horrible trade of so deforming children, the son of a king, loved the granddaughter of a paraschite!

While matters were in this state—the lovers loving and the mighty ones conspiring—there came couriers with letters from the royal army warring in far Asia. Among them was a letter from Nefert's brother, who was with the army. When their mother read the letter she was filled with a desperate design. The Lady Katuti had, for the sake of her spendthrift son, made deep inroads into the fortune of the absent Mena, her son-in-law, and had impoverished herself. In the love of Paaker for Nefert and in the use of Paaker's wealth which this might bring about she saw her only

hope. For her son had committed one of the greatest crimes known to the ancient Egyptian—he had pawned his father's mummy to satisfy a gambling debt.

And the young spendthrift, after a recent battle when there had been a division of spoils, had passed by heaps of plunder and claimed for his share only a female captive, the daughter of a Grecian prince. Paaker, for his love for Nefert, must be made to give her money to wipe out the family disgrace of the pawning of the mummy. Mena must be destroyed and Rameses dethroned. Was she herself not the counselor of the regent, who acted almost entirely by her advice? The present order of things wiped out, a new order instituted, and she as the guide and power of the throne upon which Ami desired to sit, she would have wealth enough at her command.

Katuti had in her house a dwarf, Nemu, the son of the old witch Hekt, who had sold the love philter to Paaker. Through him she learned of what had taken place, through him she stirred up the ambitions of the conspirators and the discontent of the dreg that they grew to be dwarfs who could be sold at a great profit to furnish amusement in the houses of the great. When he had spoken savagely to the old woman she had replied, "Aye, you with the six toes on your right foot, you who enjoy the fortune of the noble Assa—do you threaten? Paaker stood astonished and disturbed before the old woman—how did she know of the malformation of his right foot? Perhaps that he was Assa's grandson might be known to her, but she told him other things which he had thought hidden, and lastly that he loved Nefert.

"And I will give you a philter," she said. "Put it in the wine or the water which she drinks and she will love you. Mena is away at the wars. You long greatly, would you dare greatly? Here, take this vial. It is death for you and me if we are detected in this device. But throw me a silver ring and try the philter. Ha! ha! Assa's grandson—" and she vanished into her cave.

Paaker administered the philter to Nefert and, such is the power of believing what we wish to believe, he imagined that she treated him more kindly. And now the father of Uarda, a rough soldier, returned from the wars and told to the leech Nebsecht the story of her mother. She had been a captive whom he had purchased from among the spoils after a great battle years ago, when he followed the fortunes of Rameses in a war against the Greeks. Uarda was their child and was like her mother.

In that visit of the Princess Bent Anat to the hut of the paraschites the foundation of another love story had been laid. Rameri, the younger brother of the princess, had seen Uarda and after that he loved her—people. "It was only vinegar and turnip juice—that love philter," said Iekt scornfully to her son when she told him the secret, "but these fools need not know—at least not now." When Katuti broached the subject of asking aid of Paaker to Nefert; when she told her of the taking of his share of spoils the Greek princess; when she intimated that if Mena were dead and Nefert the wife of Paaker things would go better, Nefert flew for counsel to her bosom friend, Bent Anat. The result was that the princess "commanded" Nefert to reside with her away from the designs and machinations of her mother and of the other conspirators.

While things were in this state all Thebes was startled by an alleged miracle. In the temple of Amon a sacred ram had died, and on the western shore in the necropolis the prophet Rui had died. When they came to embalm Rui they found in his breast the heart of a ram. It was evident that the gods had given a signal evidence of the sacredness of the temples and the prophets on the western shore—the heart of the ram Amon had been transferred to the body of the prophet Rui.

But the heart was not the heart of the Amon ram. It was the heart of a ram secretly slaughtered by the grandfather of Uarda, who, at the command and entreaty of the leech Nebsecht, placed it in Rui's body when the paraschites removed the human heart. This as a reward, as he had promised, for the cure of Uarda. Nebsecht, in order to increase his knowledge, had desired a human heart for dissection, and this was the only way he could get it; for among the Egyptians the heart was thought the seat of the soul, and to destroy it was to destroy the soul. Ameni saw in the supposed transaction of the heart of the sacred ram an opportunity to exalt his priestly office, and so ordered a most gorgeous and sumptuous burial for Rui.

As the procession passed the hut of the paraschites the old man, crazed to think upon what he had done, rushed out and tried to seize the heart, which was borne in an alabaster vase. The man was a raving maniac. A great tumult arose, and the populace attacked the old man and his family and set fire to his hut. Pentaur, seizing a pole, laid about him with such fury in trying to protect the crazy man and his family that he killed four men and wounded several others. In the midst of the tumult appeared a stately woman, who commanded: "Forbear, I am Bent Anat, the daughter of Pharaoh." At the same time came to the aid of the post-priest a youth,

who was none other than Rameri. Bent Anat and her brother had come in disguise to see the funeral of Rui, though the Princess had been forbidden to approach the necropolis. With Bent Anat was another seeming youth. It was Nefert dressed as a boy. Some of the soldiers of the regent had been killed in the fray, and Ami demanded of Ameni that Pentaur be delivered up to the civil authorities for punishment. "Not so," replied Ameni. "Pentaur is a priest, and it belongs to me alone to punish him. He shall be punished."

Now, in the heart of the regent struggled two passions—his ambition and a love for Bent Anat. He was old, to be sure, and Bent Anat was young. But if the princess would marry him he would forget his ambitions and his treason against her father. That she loved the poet he well knew and as she would not consider his suit he resolved upon the destruction of Pentaur and went on with his plots against Rameses. Pentaur was condemned to the quarries at Chennu. There was a temple there and Ami knew that soon the culprit would be relieved from his quarry labors by order of Ameni, who really loved the young man, and become again a priest in full service in the Chennu Temple.

Through the dwarf Nemu the regent learned that old Hekt held some secret of importance regarding Paaker and Pentaur. He visited her in disguise and upon promise to give her license to practice her witchcraft unharmed she revealed to him the following story: Many years ago—when she had been young—she had loved and been loved by the Prince Assa. He had deserted her—she had been a dancing girl. In revenge she had stolen Assa's grandson and substituted in his place the son of a gardener. Paaker was the son of the gardener and Pentaur the grandson of Assa. Now more than ever was Ami resolved upon the destruction of Pentaur—for if this secret should ever come out the gulf between Bent Anat and Pentaur would not be so great.

Rameri, visiting in disguise the home of Uarda, heard of that undercurrent which had been stirred up by the ambitions of Ameni and Ami against his father. He resolved to go to Asia and warn the king of what was transpiring during his absence. He told Bent Anat of what he knew and of his resolve. Then he had a farewell interview with the granddaughter of the paraschites and they confessed their mutual love. The girl did not know that he was Prince Rameri—she thought him some noble and felt, even believing this, that his rank was so far above hers that their union could never be.

About her neck, held by a cord, Uarda wore an amulet upon which was engraven characters not of the Egyptian sort. This amulet had hung about the neck of Uarda's mother when the soldier Kaschta bought her. "Ah," cried Rameri, "you are, you must be, of royal blood. I know not what the writings mean, but I know that some day they will tell of your high birth. And, Uarda, I will tell you no more lies. I am not a noble only but I am the son of the Pharaoh. Do not cover your face with your hands, Uarda, for if I had not seen your mother's jewel, and if I were only a prince, by Horus himself, the son of Isis, I must have loved you. They design to send Pentaur not to Chennu but beyond it to the fatal mines of the mountains. They design to unthroned my father. Pentaur must be saved and so must my father's throne. We shall meet again, but now farewell. These conspirators, I hear, have called me the moulting hawk—they shall soon feel the talons of the royal eagle." Rameri gave Uarda his hand. She pressed it passionately to her lips. Uarda looked after her royal lover pale and speechless.

As she gazed she saw another man approaching. It was her father, the soldier. He came to tell her that he was under orders to form one of an escort taking prisoners to the north. "To Chennu?" she asked. "The orders were to the north only—to the mines." Uarda then told the soldier of what she had heard of the plot of the regent against Pentaur and asked if it could be frustrated. "I have but one life," answered the soldier, "but I would willingly give it to save his. I will devise a way."

Meantime Rameri, upon returning to the palace, had found his sister and Nefert in an unusual state of excitement. The faithful chamberlain of the princess had learned that the regent had, by some means, kept back all the letters sent from Egypt to the army, including those of the royal family. Rameri announced his intention of at once proceeding to Syria to the camp of his father, and told his sister all he had learned of the conspiracy against the king and of the treachery intended against Pentaur. A messenger from Ameni came to inform Bent Anat that in order to purify herself she must make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Emerald-Hathor, whose temple was near the emerald mines of Mount Sinai. The princess sent an answer that she had no objection to making the pilgrimage. Then she turned to Rameri—the boy seemed suddenly to have ripened into the man—and she acquiesced in all his arrangements.

They agreed that they should set out after sunset with a few faithful attendants on swift horses as far as Keft, a city on the left bank of the Nile to the north; thence ride across the desert to the Red Sea, where they could get a Phoenician ship and sail to the port of Alla. Then, by forced marches, they could cross the peninsula of Sinai and reach the Egyptian camp to make the king acquainted with all that was going on in Egypt. And Pentaur must be rescued—that was Bent Anat's part to devise.

She at once sent a trusty messenger to the Governor of Chennu, commanding him in the name of the king to detain every ship that might attempt to pass there and to prevent any prisoners who might be on board from being smuggled beyond the place for which their legal commitment called. All prisoners sent by order of Ameni were to be held at Chennu until the will of the High Priest could be further learned. Bent Anat openly announced her departure and ordered Nefert, who longed to be again under the protection of her husband, to accompany her on her pilgrimage. Then came to her Uarda and besought the privilege of making one of the train of the princess. To this Bent Anat agreed.

Paaker, in a frenzy, set off at once for the army, determined that he would take the life of Mena and, if he could, betray the cause of Rameses. So, as the result of all these complications and plots, behold Pentaur, a prisoner it is true, but safe, at Chennu. Paaker with the king in Syria and Bent Anat, Rameri and Nefert at the shrine of the Emerald-Hathor, from where they intended to communicate with the king.

One night, aided by the father of Uarda, Pentaur escaped and fled into the desert. He made for the region where he knew the king was fighting. On the way he and Bent Anat met. It was an interview under strange and unexpected circumstances, and they vowed to each other their mutual love. They journeyed on together until they came to Hebron, where Pentaur, Rameri and the soldier left the princess and her train and pushed on to the camp of the king.

When Pentaur and his companions arrived at the camp the king was about to fight a great battle. He sent runners to bid his daughter and her followers await the issue at Megiddo. Meantime Ameni had learned of the trick which Ami had attempted to play upon him with regard to Pentaur. "Gagabu," said the hierarch, "it was but a broken reed upon which we leaned in our plans. I had hoped to use Ami—not intended that he should make use of me. He is a weak vessel, but the plots of the weak are often more dangerous than the enmity of the strong. He has broken faith with me—he has shown that he has no awe of the priestly office. Aye, he has tried to trick me—me, Ameni. Well, well, I loved Pentaur, and perhaps was wrong in seeking to bind the poet to my will too strongly. Gagabu, Rameses is our Pharaoh. I see it all. Ami is too weak to succeed if he goes by his own guidance, and when the king returns in triumph will be the first to welcome him and seek to save his own life at the expense of ours. Gagabu, we are no longer of the party of the regent—you understand."

Rameses fought a great battle before the walls of Kedesh and returned triumphant to Egypt. In that great battle many things happened. Paaker, whose duty it was to act as chief of the scouts and report to the king the conditions of the land upon which the conflict was to be fought, deliberately deceived him. He reported as safe a pass which he knew was not safe, and in which he, by an alliance with the enemy secretly made, caught the Pharaoh in ambush. In the thickest of the desperate fight he was seen leading on a band of Hittites against the forces of Egypt. He cut the king off from his army at one time, and Mena, seeing Paaker and realizing his treachery, forgot his duty. He leaped from the royal chariot and sprang upon the treacherous Pioneer, driving him and wounding him with his ax, while the horses of the king carried the chariot into the thickest ranks of the enemy.

But suddenly there sprang upon the chariot a tall and valiant Egyptian. It was Pentaur, poet-priest no longer, but armed as a warrior and full of the fury of the fight. He covered the king with his shield and guided the chariot at the same time. There was a sound of shouting and to the rescue of the imperiled ones came rushing a brigade of Egyptians led by Rameri, the king's son. The Pharaoh, Pentaur and Mena were saved. The ranks of the enemy began to waver—reinforcements came up—the day was saved to Egypt, and Rameses II, after establishing order in the lands he had subjugated, returned as a victor to his own land.

When the news of the victory and of the immense spoil which had been taken reached Thebes no one was so eager to devise means for suitably welcoming the returning conqueror as Ami, the regent. Paaker had disappeared after the fight. Ami neither knew nor cared where he was, so that he kept out of the way and did not turn state's evidence. It was at Pelusium, that city which, situated

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