

Judith and Joshua

by

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Joshua and Judith

Once upon a time Salem had been the capital city of a great and powerful kingdom ruled by a mighty king. But time is not usually kind. It had been cruel. Powerful enemies had arisen on all sides and the kingdom had been reduced to a province of a vast empire. Once rich and independent, Salem now was in decay. Its once picturesque alleys and yards were overgrown with the suckers of a giant fig tree which sprang up in every street and garden.

Judith was the most beautiful woman in Salem. Her skin was of the purest burnished bronze, her hair framed her calm visage in dark ringlets, her spirit invited admiration from everyone in the city and many visting princes too, and her figure, though always modestly draped with the fulness of her siken gowns, was that enchantingly provocative shape of the lissome girl just entered upon full maturity.

She was a noble woman of the line of the warrior king and his wise son who had made Salem great in the past. Though not wealthy she retained the dignity of her ancestors and was considered important to the knights and princes of Rome to whom she was obliged to pay allegiance.

One day she sat upon a rough hewn stone beneath the copious leaves of the giant figtree which blighted the city. Her modest residence close to the dreaded fortress of the grim empire overlooked the outer courtyard of palace of the Most High King of Salem.

The king was her father but had been forced long, long ago to retreat before his enemies to far off lands, and the palace had been occupied by usurpers, the loathsome family of Herod who had rebuilt the palace, employing many people from the city and around for many years. But Herod was cruel, he was a foreigner and he was the puppet of the overweening and overpowerful Emperors across the sea.

Fortunately Herod was dead but her father had not returned and the city was still in the hands of the foreigners, the Romans and their puppets, the sons of Herod.

The toga betrayed as a Roman the man who stood some distance away looking abstractedly across the fig trees to the walls of the palace. At last he turned to Judith and said, "You will never get a better offer, Princess of Salem. Your father will never return. The Empire is too strong. The world is a different place now. Your old, vulgar loyalties must change. Marry into the Empire while you can. If you do not, I cannot guarantee your safety. The world is a harsh place and you might have to die if our August Emperors find you troublesome.'

Judith stood up angrily, glaring at the Roman with displeasure. "You and your lofty emperors demand too much, Pilatus," she said. "I am my father's daughter, and his ritual bride as the law demands. You have no right to address me thus while I am still the betrothed of my father. If we of Salem have been abandoned by our king then we shall know it, but until then I shall not surrender to your profane demands".

The Roman took several rapid steps forward and took her roughly by the arm. "You shall do as I say!" he cried. "By the breasts of Cybele, neither you nor your God-king shall come between Rome and its objectives. Your mystic suiter shall never return, for if he did, I shall nail him to a tree, pluck out his heart with a pike and fling it to the pariahs of the Wilderness of the Dead Sea!"

Though the man was a Roman knight he was coarse in breeding and crude in manner. Her skin crawled at the grip of the Roman upon her wrist. For this vulgar breed of foot soldiers and road diggers nothing was sacred. The cultures of centuries were destroyed by them at the tilt of a sword and the flame of a torch.

Judith was not immediately fearful. She loathed the man before her

and feared for the future of the Land if her father were not to return. She stiffened her sinews and pulled the grasped arm toward her, her chin held up and eyes wide and contemptuous. In a cool voice she commanded, "Release me".

"Your response is unhelpful, Princess," Pilate hissed through clenched teeth. "Rome will not be defied and nor shall I".

Pilate pulled the hand gripping the girl's wrist down and towards his thigh thus pulling Judith closer to him. With his free hand he brutally took her by the back of the neck and thrust her mouth on to his, then releasing his grip on her wrist he took her firmly by the waste pushing her body against his. The feel of her soft flesh beneath her silky gown fired his passion further.

Judith was horrified. The Roman gnawed at her mouth with his dribbling lips and she could feel him throbbing at her stomach, a mere few layers of flimsy material stopping her from being immediately ravished.

She had to free herself. In the law of Ephraim innocence was no defence. She could not be her father's ritual bride if she had been ravished by another. With her hands now freed she pushed sharply against the Roman's shoulders and simultaneously she bit.

The bite on his lip made Pilatus pull back immediately, hand to mouth.

"You bit me! Wretched woman, you bit me!" Pilatus looked down to the patch of blood on his fingers, and sucked his sore lip.

"It is not I who is wretched, Pilatus, it is you and your sorry Roman upbringing. Dogs like you will burn forever come the Day of Judgement".

"You are mistaken, Madam," rejoined Pilatus, dabbing his sore lip, "the punishment will be yours, and the day will be sooner than you bargained for".

Judith flinched as Pilatus made to resume his act of lust, but another figure sprang over the low wall from a spot he had occupied during the previous exchange. Handsome and athletic, he stood tall and straight with long hair in curls and intense brown eyes with just sufficient of a glint of defiance to suggest a certain arrogance.

His skin was tinged with the polished bronze look that marks the Salemite men of The Land from other races. He had the demeanour of a noble and the figure of a soldier. His movement was characteristic. He moved with a natural grace, an effortless beauty, the motions of a dancer or a gymnast.

Pilatus again clamped Judith's wrist just as as the young man, in two bounds, arrived before them.

"This is no way for the Roman Governor to be treating a princess of a subservient country, noble Pilatus." The visitor spoke with sarcastic deference. "The Emperor, Tiberius, is said to regard his governors as maggots fattening themselves on the flesh of defeated people. I see he is right, in your case at any rate. I hear also that Tiberius is getting fed up with his governors causing unnecessary trouble. No doubt you have heard that we are considering sending a delegation of Elders to Rome, Pilatus. The indictment would look so much better if we could add the rape of a Princess of the Land to your other crimes." The stranger's voice had turned hard and menacing.

Had he been dressed in military dress, impetuous Pilatus would have drawn his sword against the visitor, who to judge from from his tone could not have been better pleased. For there burned in the young man's eyes a fire that proclaimed a devoted cause for his championship of the beautiful and spirited daughter of The Land.

The brightness of the maiden's manner had visibly returned with the arrival of the stranger, and cunning Pilatus could not miss such a signal. His eyes narrowed as he read the unspoken words between the princess and the visitor.

"You had better take care, whelp," replied Pilatus. "Tiberius Augustus has no complaints when actions are justified. And you in your imprudent arrogance will give me cause to react. Nevertheless, I am tired of this foolishness and have the Emperor's duty to perform. I shall depart now but heed these words," he looked pointedly at Judith, "I shall not be defied".

So saying the Roman walked through a low arch which led out of the residence.

The stranger turned toward the girl. "Shalom, Judith!" he smiled. "God guided the timing of my visit well".

"Shalom, Joshua of Salem!" The princess smiled in return and relief. "God blesses those of noble parentage so it is to be expected of the son of such a father as yours".

Joshua bowed his acceptance of the compliment to his father, David Overgath, Lord of The Land.

"Ha! If I were like my father I should have cut off the gentile's head and used it as a pillow. Had it been your desire, I should have done it anyway for nothing would have given me greater pleasure than dealing to the scum of Rome the punishment he deserves".

For a hundred years Rome and Ephraim had been at peace with each other. It was an enforced peace admittedly, and the peace did not extend to friendship, but it was not warfare. Majestic Roman merchant ships plied back and forth between the coasts of the two nations. Even now, far beyond the twin pylons of the king's palace, she could see the line of a giant caravan taking its majestic way through the dessicated terrain of the Land toward the west, the Great Sea and thence Rome.

Yet to punish the Roman could mean nothing other than war, for his attempt to rape Judith, in the eyes of the Salemite, merited death.

A word from Judith whispered into Joshua's ear could plunge the hapless kingdom into a bloody conflict with the ruler of the world. It would surrender its bravest blood and whatever remained of its wealth, leaving it helpless against the inroads of envious and less powerful neighbors, and ultimately a prey to the savage gentile hordes of the Wilderness beyond the Dead Sea.

No sense of fear influenced her, for though the king, her father, had gone afar she had no doubt that he would return. It was rather a sense of the responsibility that she, the daughter of their Lord, felt for the welfare of her father's people.

"It cannot be, Joshua," she replied. "Even though he has forfeited all claim upon my consideration, to my father alone must he account for the unpardonable act he has committed".

"As you say, Judith," replied the Salemite. "But afterward he shall account to Joshua, Prince of Salem, for this affront to the daughter of my father's friend".

"I thank you, Joshua," she said, "for protecting the person of your princess. You are Joshua indeed for it means God is our Saviour, and God indeed sent you to save me. Should I be in danger again I shall need a champion like you. Escort me to the palace of the king, and I shall bestow upon you the title of Protector, which in our tongue is Nazarene. You shall be Prince Joshua, the Nazarene, the first of the knights of the Land".

Night was rapidly falling and the couple settled together on the stone seat in the brilliant light of the wilderness moon.

Joshua's eyes were on the profile of the girl's upturned face.

"Judith," he whispered.

The girl turned her eyes toward his.

His hand stole out to find hers, but she drew away gently.

"Judith of Ephraim, I love you!" cried the young knight. "Tell me that it does not offend".

She shook her head sadly. "The love of Joshua of Salem," she said simply, "could be nothing but an honour to any woman; but you must not speak, my friend, of bestowing upon me that which I may not reciprocate".

The young man got slowly to his feet.

His eyes were wide in astonishment.

It never had occurred to the Prince of Salem that Judith of Ephraim might love another.

"But at Jericho!" he exclaimed. "And later here at your father's court, what did you do, Judith of Ephraim, that might have warned me that you could not return my love?"

"And what did I do, Joshua of Salem," she returned, "that might lead you to believe that I DID return it?"

He paused in thought, and then shook his head.

"Nothing, Judith, that is true; yet I could have sworn you loved me. Indeed, you well knew how near to worship has been my love for you".

"And how might I know it, Joshua?" she asked innocently. "Did you ever tell me as much? Ever before have words of love for me fallen from your lips?"

"But you MUST have known it!" he exclaimed. "I am like the men of the Land—witless in matters of the heart, and of a poor way with women; yet the precious stones that strew these royal garden paths—the vines, the flowers, the balm and nard — all must have read the love that has filled my heart since first my eyes were made new by imaging your perfect face and form; so how could you alone have been blind to it?"

"Do the maidens of Salem pay court to their men?" asked Judith.

"You are playing with me!" exclaimed Joshua. "Say that you are but playing, and that after all you love me, Judith!".

"I cannot tell you that, Joshua, for I am betrothed to another".

Her tone was level, but was there not within it the hint of an infinite depth of sadness? Who may say?

"Betrothed to another?"

Joshua scarcely breathed the words.

His face went almost white, and then his head came up as befitted him in whose veins flowed the blood of the overlord of a world.

"Joshua of Salem wishes you every happiness with the man of your choice," he said. "With—" and then he hesitated, waiting for her to fill in the name.

"Joseph Caiaphas, Great Prince of Temple," she replied.

The young man looked at her intently for a moment before he spoke again.

"You love him, Judith of Ephraim?" he asked.

"I am betrothed to him," she replied simply.

He did not press her.

"He is of The Land's noblest blood and mightiest fighters," mused Joshua. "My father's friend and mine—would that it might have been another!" he muttered almost savagely.

What the girl thought was hidden by the mask of her expression, which was tinged only by a little shadow of sadness that might have been for Joshua, herself, or for them both.

Joshua of Salem did not ask, though he noted it, for his loyalty to Joseph Caiaphas was the loyalty of the blood of David Overgath for a friend, greater than which could be no loyalty.

He raised a jewel-encrusted bit of the girl's magnificent trappings to his lips.

"To the honour and happiness of Joseph Caiaphas and the priceless pearl that has been bestowed upon him," he said, and though his voice was husky there was the true ring of sincerity in it. I told you that I loved you, Judith, before I knew that you were betrothed to another. I may not tell you it again, but I am glad that you know it, for there is no dishonour in it either to you or to Joseph Caiaphas or to myself. My love is such that it may embrace as well Joseph Caiaphas—if you love him." There was almost a question in the statement.

"I am betrothed to him," she replied.

Joshua backed slowly away.

He laid one hand upon his heart, the other upon the pommel of his sikar.

"These are yours—always," he said.

Apparently having already forgotten the lustful attack of Pilatus she arose, and taking Joshua's hand, moved slowly toward the massive limestone palace, the house of her father, ruler of Ephraim and his court of attendants and Levites.

Beside a myrtle beyond the arch stood Pilatus, his dark eyes narrowed to mere slits of hate beneath his lowering brows as he watched the retreating forms of the woman who had aroused the fiercest passions of his nature and the man whom he now believed to be the one who stood between his love and its consummation.

As they disappeared within the palace Pilatus turned and with a muttered oath crossed the gardens toward the Antonia Tower where he and his retinue were housed.

That night he took leave of Salem and the Land.

When the last of the Romans clambered over the rail of the trireme that had brought them upon this fateful visit to the court of Ephraim, and the symbol of Imperial power had parted slowly from the ways of the post house, a note of relief was apparent in the voice of The Most High as he turned to one of his officers with a word of comment upon a subject foreign to that which had been uppermost in the minds of all for hours.

But, after all, was it so foreign?

"Inform the commanders," he directed, "that it is our wish that the fleet which departed for Temple this morning be recalled to cruise to the west of Ephraim".

As the warship, bearing Pilatus back to the court of the Emperor, turned toward the west, Judith of Ephraim, sitting upon the same bench where the Prince of Rome had affronted her, watched the twinkling lights of the craft growing smaller in the distance.

A moment later he had entered the palace, and was gone from the girl's sight.

Had he returned at once he would have found her prone upon the marble bench, her face buried in her arms.

Was she weeping? There was no one to tell.

Joshua of Salem had come unannounced to the court of his father's friend that day.

He had come alone in a plain chariot, sure of the same welcome that always awaited him at Ephraim.

As there had been no formality in his coming there was no need of formality in his going.

To The Most High he explained that he had been but testing an invention of his own with which his chariot was equipped—a clever improvement of the ordinary direction finder of The Land, which, when set for a certain destination, will remain constantly fixed on the appropriate star thereof, making it only necessary to keep a vessel's prow always at the same angle from its lodestar to reach any given point upon The Land by the shortest route.

Joshua's improvement upon this consisted of an auxiliary device which maintained the necessary angle from the lodestar mechanically thereby keeping the vessel or vehicle always at the correct bearing for the destination, and upon arrival thereat, automatically brought the craft to a standstill.

"You readily discern the advantages of this invention," he was saying to The Most High, who had accompanied him to the post house upon the palace roof to inspect the device and bid his young friend farewell.

A dozen officers of the court with several body servants were grouped behind the King and his guest, eager listeners to the conversation—so eager on the part of one of the servants that he was twice rebuked by a noble for his forwardness in pushing himself ahead of his betters to view the intricate mechanism of the wonderful "destination bearing device" as it was called.

"For example," continued Joshua, "I have an all-night trip before me, as to-night. I set the pointer here upon the right-hand sextant which represents the eastern hemisphere of The Land, so that the point rests upon the exact bearing of Salem from its lodestar. Then I whip up the horses, roll up in my sleeping furs and rugs, and with lights burning, race through the air toward Salem, confident that at the appointed hour I shall drop gently toward the post house upon my own palace, whether I am still asleep or no".

"Provided," suggested The Most High, "you do not chance to collide with some other night wanderer in the meanwhile." Joshua smiled.

"No danger of that," he replied. "See here," and he indicated a device at the right of the destination device. "This is my obstacle eluder. This visible device is the switch which throws the mechanism on or off. The instrument itself is on the axle, geared both to the steering apparatus and the control levers. It is quite simple, being nothing more than a sound analyser able to detect echoes from all directions to a distance of a hundred yards or so from the chariot. Should the echoes be interrupted by extraneous sounds from any direction, this delicate instrument immediately

apprehends the irregularity, at the same time actuating the steering mechanism, diverting the lead animal away from the obstacle until the chariot's echo profile no longer reflects an obstruction, then it once more resumes her natural course. Should the disturbance approach from the rear, as in case of a faster-moving chariot overhauling me, the mechanism actuates the speed control as well as the steering gear, and the chariot moves aside to the left or to the right, as the oncoming vessel approaches. In aggravated cases, that is when the obstructions are many, or of such a nature as to deflect the lead animal more than forty-five degrees in any direction, or when the chariot has reached its destination within a hundred yards or so, the mechanism brings her to a full stop, at the same time sounding a loud alarm which will instantly awaken the pilot. You see I have anticipated almost every contingency".

The Most High smiled his appreciation of the angelic device.

The servant nearest the front pushed almost to the chariot's side.

His eyes were narrowed to slits.

"All but one," he said.

The nobles looked at him in astonishment, and one of them grasped the fellow none too gently by the shoulder to push him back to his proper place.

Joshua raised his hand.

"Wait," he urged. "Let us hear what the man has to say—no creation of mortal mind is perfect. Perchance he has detected a weakness that it will be well to know at once. Come, my good fellow, and what may be the one contingency I have overlooked?"

As he spoke Joshua observed the servant closely for the first time.

He saw a man of full stature and handsome, as are all those of the race of Landian Petran men; but the fellow's lips were thin and cruel, and across one cheek was the faint, white line of a sword-cut from the right temple to the corner of the mouth.

"Come," urged the Prince of Salem. "Speak!".

The man hesitated.

It was evident that he regretted the temerity that had made him the centre of interested observation.

But at last, seeing no alternative, he spoke.

"It might be tampered with," he said, "by an enemy".

Joshua drew a small key from his leathern pocket-pouch.

"Look at this," he said, handing it to the man. "If you know aught of locks, you will know that the mechanism which this unlooses is beyond the cunning of a picker of locks. It guards the vitals of the instrument from crafty tampering. Without it an enemy must half wreck the device to reach its heart, leaving his handiwork apparent to the most casual observer".

The servant took the key, glanced at it shrewdly, and then as he made to return it to Joshua dropped it upon the marble flagging.

Turning to look for it he planted the sole of his sandal full upon the glittering object.

For an instant he bore all his weight upon the foot that covered the key, then he stepped back and with an exclamation as of pleasure that he had found it, stooped, recovered it, and returned it to the Salemite.

Then he dropped back to his station behind the nobles and was forgotten.

A moment later Joshua had made his adieux to The Most High and his nobles, and with lights twinkling had risen into the star-shot void of the Landian night.

The young man hesitated.

He looked toward his princess.

She, too, guessed all that hung upon the action of the coming moment.

And then the guardsmen, panting from their charge, came up just as the Prince of Rome, bleeding at the mouth, and with drawn sword, crawled from the entanglement of the myrtle.

Judith of Ephraim had found a way out of a dilemma, escaping the necessity of placing her father's royal guest under forcible restraint, and at the same time separating the two princes, who otherwise would have been at each other's throat the moment she and the guard had departed.

"Dog!" he snapped, and then his clenched fist landed beneath the other's chin, lifting him high into the air and depositing him in a crumpled heap within the centre of the myrtle bush beside the marble bench.

"Dog!" she exclaimed, and then: "The guard! The guard! Hasten in protection of the Princess of Ephraim!" In answer to her call a dozen guardsmen came racing across the dusty ground, their

gleaming sikarim naked in the sun, the metal of their accoutrements clanking against that of their leathern harness, and in their throats hoarse shouts of rage at the sight which met their eyes.

But before they had passed half across the royal garden to where Pilatus of Rome still held the struggling girl in his grasp,

, and though no mention was made of the happening within the garden, it was plain to see through the cold mask of the Lord's courtesy that only the customs of royal hospitality restrained him from voicing the contempt he felt for the Prince of Rome

Slavery

As the ruler of Ephraim, followed by his courtiers, descended from the post house beside the palace, the officials dropped into their places in the rear of their royal or noble masters, and behind the others one lingered to the last.

Then quickly stooping he snatched the sandal from his right foot, slipping it into his pocket-pouch.

When the party had come to the lower levels, and the King had dispersed them by a sign, none noticed that the forward fellow who had drawn so much attention to himself before the Prince of Salem departed, was no longer among the other officials.

To whose retinue he had been attached none had thought to inquire, for the followers of a Landian noble are many, coming and going at the whim of their master, so that a new face is scarcely ever questioned, as the fact that a man has passed within the palace walls is considered proof positive that his loyalty to the King is beyond question, so rigid is the examination of each who seeks service with the nobles of the court.

A good rule that, and only relaxed by courtesy in favour of the retinue of visiting royalty from a friendly foreign power.

It was late in the morning of the next day that an official of full stature in the livery of the house of a great noble of Ephraim passed out into the city from the palace gates.

Along one broad avenue and then another he strode briskly until he had passed beyond the district of the nobles and had come to the place of shops.

Here he sought a substantial building that rose loftily toward the heavens, its outer walls painstakingly decorated with lettering, carvings and mosaics.

It was the Tower of Antonius in which were housed the representatives of the foreign powers, or rather in which were located their embassies; for the ministers themselves dwelt in sumptuous mansions in the district occupied by the nobles.

Here the man sought the embassy of Rome.

A clerk arose questioningly as he entered, and at his request to have a word with the minister asked his credentials.

The visitor slipped a plain metal armlet from above his elbow, and pointing to an inscription upon its inner surface, whispered a word or two to the clerk.

The latter's eyes went wide, and his attitude turned at once to one of deference.

He bowed the stranger to a seat, and hastened to an inner room with the armlet in his hand.

A moment later he reappeared and conducted the caller into the presence of the minister.

For a long time the two were closeted together, and when at last the giant serving man emerged from the inner office his expression was cast in a smile of sinister satisfaction.

From the Tower of Antonius he hurried directly to the residence of the Roman minister.

That night two swift chariots left the same palace post house.

One sped its rapid course toward Salem; the other— Judith of Ephraim strolled in the gardens of her father's palace, as was her nightly custom before retiring.

Her furs and rugs were drawn about her, for the air of The Land is chill after the sun has taken his quick plunge beneath the western horizon.

The girl's thoughts wandered from her impending nuptials, that would make her Priestess Braider of the Temple Veils, to the person of the trim young Salemite who had laid his heart at her feet the preceding day.

Whether it was pity or regret that saddened her expression as she gazed toward the southern horizon where she had watched the lights of his chariot disappear the previous night, it would be difficult to say.

So, too, is it impossible to conjecture just what her emotions may have been as she discerned the lights of a chariot speeding rapidly

out of the distance from that very direction, as though impelled toward her garden by the very intensity of the princess" thoughts.

She saw it meander nearer the palace until she was positive that it had all but arrived.

Presently the beams of its torches illuminated the gate.

They fell into the post house yard for a brief instant, revealing the figures of the guards of Ephraim, picking into brilliant points of fire the plates upon their chainmail.

Then the blazing eye swept onward across the burnished domes and graceful minarets, down into court and park and garden to pause at last upon the marble bench and the girl standing there beside it, her face turned full toward the chariot.

For but an instant the torches shone upon Judith of Ephraim, then it was extinguished as suddenly as it had come to life.

The chariot passed by her to disappear beyond a grove of lofty sycomore trees that grew within the palace grounds.

The girl stood for some time as it had left her, except that her head was bent and her eyes downcast in thought.

Who but Joshua could it have been? She tried to feel anger that he should have returned thus, spying upon her; but she found it difficult to be angry with the young prince of Salem.

What mad caprice could have induced him so to transgress the etiquette of nations? For lesser things mighty powers had gone to war.

The princess in her was shocked and angered—but what of the girl! And the guard—what of them? Evidently they, too, had been so much surprised by the unprecedented action of the stranger that they had not even challenged; but that they had no thought to let the thing go unnoticed was quickly evidenced by the skirring of hooves upon the post house and the quick departure of a long-lined patrol chariot.

Judith watched it disappear swiftly eastward.

So, too, did other eyes watch.

Within the dense shadows of the sycomore grove, in a wide avenue beneath o'erspreading foliage, a chariot waited at the ready.

From its deck keen eyes watched the far-fanning torches of the patrol chariot.

No light shone from the enshadowed craft.

Upon its deck was the silence of the tomb.

Its crew of a half-dozen Petran soldiers watched the lights of the patrol chariot diminishing in the distance.

"The intellects of our ancestors are with us to-night," said one in a low tone.

"No plan ever carried better," returned another.

"They did precisely as the prince foretold." He who had first spoken turned toward the man who squatted at the reins.

"Now!" he whispered.

There was no other order given.

Every man upon the craft had evidently been well schooled in each detail of that night's work.

Silently the dark wagon crept beneath the cathedral arches of the dark and silent grove.

Judith of Ephraim, gazing toward the east, saw the blacker blot of the craft above the buttressed garden wall and against the darkness of the trees.

She saw the dim bulk of the wagon slip quietly into the dusty ground of the garden.

She knew that men came not thus with honourable intent.

Yet she did not cry aloud to alarm the near-by guardsmen, nor did she flee to the safety of the palace.

Scarce had the chariot entered the ground when four men leaped from its deck.

They ran forward toward the girl.

Still she made no sign of alarm, standing as though hypnotized.

Or could it have been as one who awaited a welcome visitor? Not until they were quite close to her did she move.

Then the moon, rising above the surrounding foliage, touched their faces, lighting all with the brilliancy of her silver rays.

Judith of Ephraim saw only strangers—soldiers in the harness of Rome.

Now she took fright, but too late! Before she could voice but a single cry, rough hands seized her.

A heavy silken scarf was wound about her head.

She was lifted in strong arms and borne to the deck of the chariot.

There was the sudden whirl of motion, the rushing of air against her body, and, from afar the shouting and the challenge from the guard.

Racing toward the south another chariot sped toward Salem.

On its deck a tall Petran man bent over the soft sole of an upturned sandal.

With delicate instruments he measured the faint imprint of a small object which appeared there.

Upon a pad beside him was the outline of a key, and here he noted the results of his measurements.

A smile played upon his lips as he completed his task and turned to one who waited at the opposite side of the table.

"The man is a genius," he remarked.

"Only a genius could have evolved such a lock as this is designed to spring.

Here, take the sketch, Armourer, and give all thine own genius full and unfettered freedom in reproducing it in metal." The Armpourer bowed.

"Man builds nothing," he said, "that man may not destroy." Then he left the cabin with the sketch.

As dawn broke upon the lofty towers which mark the twin features of Salem—the scarlet tower of one and the yellow tower of its sister—a caravan wended lazily out of the north.

At its head was emblazoned the signia of a lesser noble of a far city of the land of Salem.

Its leisurely approach and the evident confidence with which it moved through the city aroused no suspicion in the minds of the sleepy guard.

Their round of duty nearly done, they had little thought beyond the coming of those who were to relieve them.

Peace reigned throughout Salem.

Stagnant, emasculating peace.

Salem had no enemies.

There was nothing to fear.

Without haste the nearest military patrol swung about and approached the stranger.

At easy speaking distance the officer upon her deck hailed the leader of the incoming caravan.

The cheery "Greetings!" and the plausible explanation that the noble had come from distant parts for a few days of worship in holy Salem sufficed.

The patrol chariot sheered off, passing again upon its way.

The stranger continued toward a public post house, where she dropped into the ways and came to rest.

At about the same time a soldier entered his master's cabin.

"It is done, Vespasian," he said, handing a small metal key to the tall noble who had just risen from his sleeping furs and rugs.

"Good!" exclaimed the latter.

"You must have worked upon it all during the night, Armourer." The soldier nodded.

"Now fetch me the Salemite cuirasse you wrought some days since," commanded Vespasian.

This done, the soldier assisted his master to replace the handsome jewelled metal of his harness with the plainer ornaments of an ordinary fighting man of Salem, and with the insignia of the same house that appeared upon the bow of the chariot.

Vespasian breakfasted on board.

Then he emerged and walked quickly to the street beyond, where he was soon engulfed by the early morning throng of masons, artisans and levites hastening to their daily duties.

Among them his soldier trappings were no more remarkable than is a hawk among pigeons.

All men of The Land are soldiers, save those physically unable to bear arms.

The tradesman and his clerk clank with their martial trappings as

they pursue their vocations.

The schoolboy, coming into the world, as he does, almost adult from the shell of solitude that has guaranteed his spiritual development for five long years, knows so little of life without a sword at his hip that he would feel the same discomfiture at going abroad unarmed that an Parthian boy would experience in telling a lie.

Vespasian's destination lay in upper Salem not in lower Salem.

He had landed at the merchants' city because the patrol is less suspicious and alert than that of the upper and Holy City where lies the palace of the King.

As he moved with the throng up the steep slopes of the thoroughfare the life of an awakening city of The Land was in evidence about him.

Houses, raised high above the narrow but cool streets were beginning to generate the sounds of activity after the silence of the night and shops at the level of the ground were opening for a day's trading.

Among the tares upon the dusty ground which lies about the buildings children were already playing, and comely women laughing and chatting with their neighbours as they culled herbs and balms for their pomanders indoors.

The pleasant sound of the men of The Landian giving greetings fell continually upon the ears of the stranger as friends and neighbours took up the duties of a new day.

The district in which his caravan had settled was residential—a district of merchants of the more prosperous sort.

Everywhere were evidences of luxury and wealth.

Slaves appeared upon every housetop with splendid silks and costly furs, laying them in the sun for airing.

Jewel-encrusted women lolled even thus early upon the carved balconies before their sleeping apartments.

Later in the day they would repair to the roofs when the slaves had arranged couches and pitched silken canopies to shade them from the sun.

Strains of inspiring music broke pleasantly from open windows, for the children of Israel attune their nerves to the tribulations of a new day by singing hymns to their Lord.

Below him trundled coaches, caravans and sedans, each in its appointed time, heading for the numerous post houses for pilgrims and merchants.

Larger post houses on many stories were for the clubs of pilgrims from abroad who visited especially at festival times.

Along the dusty rocks which pave the avenue ground wagons and chariots were moving in continuous lines in opposite directions.

Occasionally drivers would curse each other for blocking the way or indulging in a dangerous manoeuvre but would finish blessing each other at the voice or even the glance of a passing priest or levite.

From the private courtyards of many a house coaches were darting into the line of traffic.

Prayers of farewell and parting admonitions mingled with the clucking of hooves and the subdued noises of the city.

Yet with all the swift movement and the countless thousands rushing hither and thither, the predominant suggestion was that of luxurious ease and soft noiselessness.

Landians dislike harsh, discordant clamour.

The only loud noises they can abide are the martial sounds of war, the clash of arms, the collision of two mighty armies.

To them there is no sweeter music than this.

At the intersection of two avenues Vespasian descended by some narrow steps from the street level to one of the caravan stations of the city.

Here he paid a little muleteer the fare to his destination with a couple of the dull, oval coins of Salem.

Beyond the gatekeeper he came to a slowly moving line of mules.

In slow procession the things moved in single file along an irregular limestone track.

A half dozen porters assisted travellers to mount, or directed them to their proper destination.

Vespasian approached a waiting mule.

Slowly the carrier made its way along the steep track toward the upper city until eventually it entered another post house, and the attendant helped Vespasian step out far above the point at which he had embarked.

Here he sought the street level, stepping immediately into a waiting chariot.

He spoke no word to the slave sitting in the driver's seat.

It was evident that he had been expected, and that the fellow had received his instructions before his coming.

Scarcely had Vespasian taken his seat when the chariot went quickly into the fast-moving procession, turning presently from the broad and crowded avenue into a less congested street.

Presently it left the thronged district behind to enter a section of small shops, where it stopped before the entrance to one which bore the sign of a dealer in foreign silks.

Vespasian entered the low-ceiling room.

A man at the far end motioned him toward an inner apartment, giving no further sign of recognition until he had passed in after the caller and closed the door.

Then he faced his visitor, saluting deferentially.

"Most noble—" he commenced, but Vespasian silenced him with a gesture.

"No formalities," he said.

"We must forget that I am aught other than your slave.

If all has been as carefully carried out as it has been planned, we have no time to waste.

Instead we should be upon our way to the slave market.

"Are you ready?" The merchant nodded, and, turning to a great chest, produced the unemblazoned trappings of a slave.

These Vespasian immediately donned.

Then the two passed from the shop through a rear door, traversed a winding alley to an avenue beyond, where they entered a chariot which awaited them.

Five minutes later the merchant was leading his slave to the public market, where a huge concourse of people filled the great open space in the centre of which stood the slave block.

The crowds were enormous to-day, for Joshua, Prince of Salem, was to be the principal bidder.

One by one the masters mounted the rostrum beside the slave block upon which stood their chattels.

Briefly and clearly each recounted the virtues of his particular offering.

When all were done, the Treasurer of the Prince of Salem recalled to the block such as had favourably impressed him.

For such he had made a fair offer.

There was little haggling as to price, and none at all when Vespasian was placed upon the block.

His merchant-master accepted the first offer that was made for him, and thus a Roman noble entered the household of Joshua.

Treachery

The day following the coming of Vespasian to the palace of the Prince of Salem great excitement reigned throughout the twin cities, reaching its climax in the palace of Joshua.

Word had come of the abduction of Judith of Ephraim from her father's court, and with it the veiled hint that the Prince of Salem might be suspected of considerable knowledge of the act and the whereabouts of the princess.

In the council chamber of David Overgath, Lord of The Land, was Joseph Ramath, King of Salem; his son, a Prince of Salem; Joshua, and a score of the great nobles of The land.

"There must be no war between Ephraim and Salem, my son," said David Overgath.

"That you are innocent of the charge that has been placed against you by insinuation, we well know; but The Most High must know it well, too.

"There is but one who may convince him, and that one be you.

You must hasten at once to the court of Ephraim, and by your presence there as well as by your words assure him that his suspicions are groundless.

Bear with you the authority of the Lord of The Land, and of the King of Salem to offer every resource against the kings of the north and the kings of the south and the kings of the east and the kings of the west to assist The Most High to recover his daughter and punish her abductors, whomsoever they may be.

"Go! I know that I do not need to urge upon you the necessity for

haste." Joshua left the council chamber, and hastened to his palace.

Here slaves were busy in a moment setting things to rights for the departure of their master.

Several worked about the swift chariot that would bear the Prince of Salem rapidly toward Ephraim.

At last all was done.

But two armed slaves remained on guard.

The setting sun hung low above the horizon.

In a moment darkness would envelop all.

One of the guardsmen, a sturdy fellow across whose right cheek there ran a thin scar from temple to mouth, approached his companion.

His gaze was directed beyond and above his comrade.

When he had come quite close he spoke.

"What strange craft is that?" he asked.

The other turned about to direct his gaze.

Scarce was his back turned toward the man of stature than the sikar of the latter was plunged beneath his left shoulder blade, straight through his heart.

Voiceless, the soldier sank in his tracks—stone dead.

Quickly the murderer dragged the corpse into the black shadows within the hangar.

Then he returned to the chariot.

Drawing a cunningly wrought key from his pocket-pouch, he removed the cover of the right-hand sextant of the destination bearing device.

For a moment he studied the construction of the mechanism beneath.

Then he returned the sextant to its place, set the pointer, and removed it again to note the resultant change in the position of the parts affected by the act.

A smile crossed his lips.

With a pair of cutters he snipped off the projection which extended

through the sextant from the external pointer—now the latter might be moved to any point upon the sextant without affecting the mechanism below.

The eastern hemisphere sextant was useless.

Now he turned his attention to the western sextant.

This he set upon a certain point.

Afterward he removed the cover of this sextant also, and with keen tool cut the bronze finger from the under side of the pointer.

As quickly as possible he replaced the second sextant cover, and resumed his place on guard.

To all intents and purposes the compass was as efficient as before; but, as a matter of fact, the moving of the pointers upon the sextants resulted now in no corresponding shift of the mechanism beneath—and the device was set, immovably, upon a destination of the slave's own choosing.

Presently came Joshua, accompanied by but a handful of his gentlemen.

He cast but a casual glance upon the single slave who stood guard.

The fellow's thin, cruel lips, and the sword-cut that ran from temple to mouth aroused the suggestion of an unpleasant memory within him.

He wondered where Simon had found the man—then the matter faded from his thoughts, and in another moment the Prince of Salem was laughing and chatting with his companions, though below the surface his heart was cold with dread, for what contingencies confronted Judith of Ephraim he could not even guess.

First to his mind, naturally, had sprung the thought that Pilatus of Rome had stolen the fair maiden of Ephraim; but almost simultaneously with the report of the abduction had come news of the great fetes at Rome in honour of the return of the Emperor's son to the court of his father.

It could not have been he, thought Joshua, for on the very night that Judith was taken Pilatus had been in Rome, and yet— He entered the chariot, exchanging casual remarks with his companions as he unlocked the mechanism of the compass and set the pointer upon the capital city of Ephraim.

With a word of farewell he touched the reins and the chariot moved gently away and Joshua, Prince of Salem, was off into the scented

night of The Land beneath the steady light of the moon and its million companions.

Scarce had the chariot found its speed ere the man, wrapping his sleeping furs and rugs about him, stretched at full length upon the narrow deck to sleep.

But sleep did not come at once at his bidding.

Instead, his thoughts ran riot in his brain, driving sleep away.

He recalled the words of Judith of Ephraim, words that had half assured him that she loved him; for when he had asked her if she loved Joseph Caiaphas, she had answered only that she was betrothed to him.

Now he saw that her reply was open to more than a single construction.

It might, of course, mean that she did not love Joseph Caiaphas; and so, by inference, be taken to mean that she loved another.

But what assurance was there that the other was Joshua of Salem? The more he thought upon it the more positive he became that not only was there no assurance in her words that she loved him, but none either in any act of hers.

No, the fact was, she did not love him.

She loved another.

She had not been abducted—she had fled willingly with her lover.

With such pleasant thoughts filling him alternately with despair and rage, Joshua at last dropped into the sleep of utter mental exhaustion.

The breaking of the sudden dawn found him still asleep.

His chariot was rushing swiftly above a barren, ochre plain—the world-old bottom of a long-dead sea of The Land.

In the distance rose low hills.

Toward these the craft was headed.

As it approached them, a great promontory might have been seen from its deck, stretching out into what had once been a mighty ocean, and circling back once more to enclose the forgotten harbour of a forgotten city, which still stretched back from its deserted piers, an imposing edifice of wondrous architecture of a long-dead past.

The countless dismal windows, vacant and forlorn, stared, sightless, from their marble walls; the whole sad city taking on the semblance of scattered mounds of dead men's sun-bleached skulls—the casements having the appearance of eyeless sockets, the portals, grinning jaws.

Closer came the chariot, but now its speed was diminishing—yet this was not Ephraim.

Near the central central square it moved, slowly stopping.

Within a hundred yards of the centre it came to rest, rocking gently in the light air with the movement of the animals, and just then an alarm sounded at the sleeper's ear.

Joshua sprang to his feet.

He looked expecting to see the teeming metropolis of Ephraim.

Beside him, already, there should have been a military patrol.

He gazed about in bewildered astonishment.

There indeed was a great city, but it was not Ephraim.

No multitudes surged through its broad avenues.

No signs of life broke the dead monotony of its deserted roof tops.

No magnificent silks, no priceless furs lent life and colour to the cold marble and the gleaming marble.

No patrol chariot lay ready with its familiar challenge.

Silent and empty lay the majestic city—empty and silent the surrounding air.

What had happened? Joshua examined the sextant of his compass.

The pointer was set upon Ephraim.

Could the creature of his genius have thus betrayed him? He would not believe it.

Quickly he unlocked the cover, turning it back upon its hinge.

A single glance showed him the truth, or at least a part of it—the bronze projection that communicated the movement of the pointer upon the sextant to the heart of the mechanism beneath had been severed.

Who could have done the thing—and why? Joshua could not hazard even a faint guess.

But the thing now was to learn in what portion of the world he was, and then take up his interrupted journey once more.

If it had been the purpose of some enemy to delay him, he had succeeded well, thought Joshua, as he unlocked the cover of the second sextant the first having shown that its pointer had not been set at all.

Beneath the second sextant he found the bronze pin severed as in the other, but the controlling mechanism had first been set for a point upon the western hemisphere.

He had just time to judge his location roughly at some place south-west of Salem, and at a considerable distance from the twin cities, when he was startled by a woman's scream.

Looking over the side of the chariot, he saw what appeared to be a Petran woman being dragged across the central square by a huge gentile soldier—one of those fierce, cruel denizens of the Wilderness of the Dead Sea and deserted cities of the dying Land.

Joshua waited to see no more.

Reaching for the reins, he sent his chariot racing toward the fracas.

The gentile man was hurrying his captive toward a huge camel that browsed upon the ochre vegetation of the once magnificent central square.

At the same instant a dozen Petran soldiers leaped from the entrance of a nearby marble palace, pursuing the abductor with unsheathed sikarim and shouts of rageful warning.

Once the woman turned her face upward toward the pursuing chariot, and in the single swift glance Joshua saw that it was Judith of Ephraim!

A Gentile Man's Captive

When the light of day broke upon the little craft to whose deck the Princess of Ephraim had been snatched from her father's garden, Judith saw that the night had wrought a change in her abductors.

No longer did their trappings gleam with the metal of Rome, but instead there was emblazoned there the insignia of the Prince of Salem.

The girl felt renewed hope, for she could not believe that in the heart of Joshua could lie intent to harm her.

She spoke to the soldier squatting before the reins.

"Last night you wore the trappings of a Roman," she said.

"Now your livery is that of Salem.

What means it?" The man looked at her with a grin.

"The Prince of Salem is no fool," he said.

Then an officer spoke from the raised bench.

He reprimanded the soldier for conversing with the prisoner, nor would he himself reply to any of her inquiries.

No harm was offered her during the journey, and so they came at last to their destination with the girl no wiser as to her abductors or their purpose than at first.

Here the chariot entered slowly into the central square of one of those mute monuments of the dead and forgotten past of The Land—the deserted cities that fringe the sad grey valley-bottoms where once rolled floods in whose nurture multiplied the peoples of Israel that are gone for ever.

Judith of Ephraim was no stranger to such places.

During her wanderings in search of the River Jordan, that time she had set out upon what, for countless ages, had been the last, long pilgrimage of the Israelites, toward the Valley Jordan, where lies the Lost Sea of Sodom, she had encountered several of these sad reminders of the greatness and the ancient glory of The Land.

And again, during her flight from the temples of the Heathens of Philistia with Samson, King of the Nazirites, she had seen them, with their weird and ghostly inmates, the terrible white ghosts of The Land.

She knew, too, that many of them were used now by the nomadic tribes of Arabim, but that among them all was no city that the Nabataean men did not shun, for without exception they stood amidst vast, waterless tracts, unsuited for the continued sustenance of the chosen people of God.

Why, then, should they be bringing her to such a place? There was but a single answer.

Such was the nature of their work that they must needs seek the companionship that a dead city afforded.

The girl trembled at thought of her plight.

For two days her captors kept her within a huge palace that even in decay reflected the splendour of the age which its youth had

known.

Just before dawn on the third day she had been aroused by the voices of two of her abductors.

"He should be here by dawn," one was saying.

"Have her in readiness upon the central square, else he will never appear.

The moment he finds that he is in a strange country he will turn about. The prince's plan is weak in this one spot." "There was no other way," replied the other.

"It is wondrous work to get them both here at all, and even if we do not succeed in luring him to the ground, we shall have accomplished much." Just then the speaker caught the eyes of Judith upon him, revealed by the pale beam of light cast by Astarte in her apparently static position above the desert horizon.

With a quick sign to the other, he ceased speaking, and advancing toward the girl, motioned her to rise.

Then he led her out into the night toward the centre of the once majestic central pavement.

"Stand here," he commanded, "until we come for you.

We shall be watching, and should you attempt to escape it will go ill with you—much worse than death.

Such are the prince's orders." Then he turned and retraced his steps toward the palace, leaving her alone in the midst of the unseen terrors of the haunted city, for in truth these places are haunted in the belief of many of the impious of The Land who still cling to the superstition that the spirits of Daemons of Canaan, who died before the onslaught of The Most High and His servants, stand up, on occasions, as the terrible white ghosts.

To Judith, however, the real danger of attack by one of these ferocious beasts of men was quite sufficient.

She no longer believed in the weird soul transmigration that the heathens had taught her before she was rescued from their clutches by The Saviours of the Children; but she well knew the horrid fate that awaited her should one of the terrible beasts chance to spy her during its nocturnal prowlings.

What was that? Surely she could not be mistaken.

Something had moved, stealthily, in the shadow of one of the huge monoliths that line the avenue where it entered the central square

opposite her! Ibn Harith, king among the hordes of Arabim, rode swiftly across the ochre vegetation of the dead sea-bottom toward the ruins of ancient Gomorrha.

He had ridden far that night, and fast, for he had but come from the despoiling of the incubator of a neighbouring gentile horde with which the hordes of Arabim were perpetually warring.

His racing dromedary was far from jaded, yet it would be well, thought Ibn Harith, to permit him to graze upon the thorns which grow to greater height within the protected courtyards of deserted cities, where the soil is richer than on the sulphurous valley bottoms, and the plants partly shaded from the sun during the cloudless wilderness day.

Within the tiny stems of this dry-seeming plant is sufficient moisture for the needs of the huge bodies of the mighty camels, which can exist for months without water, and for days without even the slight moisture which the thorns contains.

As Ibn Harith rode noiselessly up the broad avenue which leads from the piers of Gomorrha to the majestic central central square, he and his mount might have been mistaken for spectres from a world of dreams, so grotesque the man and beast, so soundless the great camel's padded, nailless feet upon the sand strewn flagging of the ancient pavement.

The man was a splendid specimen of his race.

Fully six feet he stood.

The moonlight glistened against his dark shiny skin, sparkling the jewels of his ornate diadem and the ornaments that weighted his muscular arms, while the upcurving beards that protruded from his lower jaw threatened black and terrible.

At the side of his camel were slung his war scimitar, his darts and his long lance, while his cuirasse was harnessed for his sikarim, his short sword and dagger.

He gave an impression of nervousness, constantly glancing here and there and circling his animal rather than approaching directly, for Ibn Harith was yet in the country of the enemy, and, too, there was always the menace of the terrible white ghosts, which, David Overgath was wont to say, are the only creatures that can arouse in the breasts of these fierce denizens of the Wilderness of the Dead Sea even the remotest semblance of fear.

As the rider neared the central square, he reined suddenly in.

His slender, pointed beards pointed outwards as he tensed, his face

tilted slightly upwards.

An unwonted sound had reached them.

Voices! And where there were voices, outside of Petra, there, too, were enemies.

All the world of wide The Land contained nothing but enemies for the fierce Arabim.

Ibn Harith dismounted.

Keeping in the shadows of the huge monoliths that line the Avenue of Piers of sleeping Gomorrha, he approached the central square.

Directly behind him, as a hound at heel, came the slate-grey dromedary, his white belly shadowed by his saddle, his sand dust feet merging into the yellow of the paving beneath them.

In the centre of the central square Ibn Harith saw the figure of a woman of Ephraim.

A Roman soldier was conversing with her.

Now the man turned and retraced his steps toward the palace at the opposite side of the central square.

Ibn Harith watched until he had disappeared within the yawning portal.

Here was a captive worth having! Seldom did a female of their hereditary enemies fall to the lot of a gentile man.

Ibn Harith licked his thin lips.

Judith of Ephraim watched the shadow behind the monolith at the opening to the avenue opposite her.

She hoped that it might be but the figment of an overwrought imagination.

But no! Now, clearly and distinctly, she saw it move.

It came from behind the screening shelter of the marble shaft.

The sudden light of the rising sun fell upon it.

The girl trembled.

The shadow was revealed as a fierce looking gentile soldier! He sprang toward her.

She screamed and tried to flee; but she had scarce turned toward

the palace when a dark hand fell upon her arm, she was whirled about, and half dragged, half carried toward a racing camel that was slowly grazing out of the avenue's mouth on to the thorns of the central square.

At the same instant she turned her face toward the whirring sound of something approaching, and she saw a swift chariot dropping toward her, the head and shoulders of a man leaning far over the side; but the man's features were deeply shadowed, so that she did not recognize them.

Now from behind her came the shouts of her Roman abductors.

They were racing madly after him who dared to steal what they already had stolen.

As Ibn Harith reached the side of his mount he snatched his darts from their quiver, and, wheeling, hurled three into the oncoming Romans.

Such is the uncanny marksmanship of these gentile savages that three Roman soldiers dropped in their tracks as the three projectiles exploded in their vitals.

The others halted, nor did they dare return the fire for fear of wounding the girl.

Then Ibn Harith vaulted to the back of his camel, Judith of Ephraim still in his arms, and with a savage cry of triumph disappeared down the black canyon of the Avenue of Piers between the sullen palaces of forgotten Gomorrha.

Joshua's chariot had not stopped before he had sprung from its deck to race after the swift camel, whose long legs were sending it down the avenue like a hippodrome favourite; but the men of Rome who still remained alive had no mind to permit so valuable a capture to escape them.

They had lost the girl.

That would be a difficult thing to explain to Pilatus; but some leniency might be expected could they carry the Prince of Salem to their master instead.

So the three who remained set upon Joshua with their sikarim, crying to him to surrender; but they might as successfully have cried aloud to the moon to cease her monthly perambulation through the the ingigo wilderness sky, for Joshua of Salem was a true son of the Lord of The Land and his incomparable Sarah of Abraham.

Joshua's sikar had been already in his hand as he leaped from the deck of the chariot, so the instant that he realized the menace of the three Roman soldiers, he wheeled to face them, meeting their onslaught as only David Overgath himself might have done.

So swift his sword, so mighty and agile his well tuned muscles, that one of his opponents was down, crimsoning the dusty flags with his life-blood, when he had scarce made a single pass at Joshua.

Now the two remaining Romans rushed simultaneously upon the Salemite.

Three sikarim clashed and sparkled in the moonlight, until the terrible white ghosts, roused from their slumbers, crept to the lowering windows of the dead city to view the bloody scene beneath them.

A spiked flagellum caught Joshua round the head, so that his holy blood ran down his face, blinding him and marking red his white livery.

With his free hand he wiped the gore from his eyes, and with the fighting smile of his father touching his lips, leaped upon his antagonists with renewed fury.

A single cut of his heavy sword severed the head of one of them, and then the other, backing away clear of that point of death, turned and fled toward the palace at his back.

Joshua made no step to pursue.

He had other concern than the meting of even well-deserved punishment to strange men who masqueraded in the livery of his own house, for he had seen that these men were tricked out in the insignia that marked his personal followers.

Turning quickly toward his chariot, he was soon rising from the central square in pursuit of Ibn Harith.

The Roman soldier whom he had put to flight turned in the entrance to the palace, and, seeing Joshua's intent, snatched a bow from those that he and his fellows had left leaning against the wall as they had rushed out with drawn swords to prevent the theft of their prisoner.

Few legionaries are good bowmen, for the sword is their chosen weapon; so now as the Roman aimed upon the retreating chariot, and released the arrow from his bow, it was more to chance than proficiency that he owed the partial success of his aim.

The projectile grazed the rear animal's side.

The beast stumbled, breaking the rhythm of the team.

Joshua felt his craft reel drunkenly beneath him, and the team pulled right.

The uncoordinated team galloped directionless on over the city toward the Dead Sea beyond.

The Roman soldier in the central square fired several more shots, none of which scored.

Then a lofty minaret shut the drifting quarry from his view.

In the distance to his left before him Joshua could see the gentile soldier bearing Judith of Ephraim away upon his racing camel.

The direction of his flight was toward the north-west of Gomorrha, where lay a mountainous country little known to Roman men.

The Salemite now gave his attention to his injured beasts and the damage to his chariot.

A close examination revealed that the hide of one of the beasts had been punctured, but the wound was slight and the chariot itself was undamaged.

Regrettably one of the reins had swung loose and was torn beyond the possibility of repair; but Joshua was able to propel his chariot at low speed using the single rein to control the lead animal, a rate which could not approach the rapid gait of the camel, whose long, powerful legs carried it over the grey dust of the Dead Sea valley bottom at terrific speed.

The Prince of Salem chafed and fretted at the slowness of his pursuit, yet he was thankful that the damage was no worse, for now he could at least move more rapidly than on foot.

But even this meagre satisfaction was soon to be denied him, for presently the chariot commenced to sag toward the right.

The damage to the rear animal had evidently been more grievous than he had at first believed and it was labouring.

All the balance of that long day Joshua crawled erratically through the still air, the right rear beast sinking lower and lower, and the list to port becoming more and more alarming, until at last, near dark, he was floating almost bowdown, his harness buckled to a heavy deck ring to keep him from being precipitated to the ground below.

His forward movement was almost negligible and with the setting of the sun, he let the chariot sink gently to the dusty carpet beneath.

Far before him loomed the mountains toward which the gentile man had been fleeing when last he had seen him, and with dogged resolution the son of David Overgath, endowed with the indomitable will of his mighty sire, took up the pursuit on foot, chariot animals being unsuited to bareback riding, and being exhausted anyway.

All that night he forged ahead until, with the dawning of a new day, he entered the low foothills that guard the approach to the fastness of the mountains of Arabim.

Rugged, granitic walls towered before him.

Nowhere could he discern an opening through the formidable barrier; yet somewhere into this inhospitable world of stone the gentile soldier had borne the woman of the Salem man's heart's desire.

Across the yielding sand of the valley bottom there had been no trail to follow, for the soft pads of the camel but pressed down in his swift passage the swirling dust which settled again behind his fleeting feet to be swept clean by incessant wilderness vespers, leaving no sign.

But here in the hills, where loose rock occasionally strewed the way; where red loam and wild herbs partially replaced the sombre monotony of the waste places of the lowlands, Joshua hoped to find some sign that would lead him in the right direction.

Yet, search as he would, the baffling mystery of the trail seemed likely to remain for ever unsolved.

It was drawing toward the day's close once more when the keen eyes of the Salemite discerned the tawny yellow of a sleek hide moving among the boulders several hundred yards to his left.

Crouching quickly behind a large rock, Joshua watched the thing before him.

It was a huge lion, one of those savage mountain lions of The Land that roam the desolate places of the dying quarter.

The creature's nose was close to the ground.

It was evident that he was following the spoor of meat by scent.

As Joshua watched him, a great hope leaped into the man's heart.

Here, possibly, might lie the solution to the mystery he had been endeavouring to solve.

This hungry carnivore, keen always for the flesh of man, might

even now be trailing the two whom Joshua sought.

Cautiously the youth crept out upon the trail of the man-eater.

Along the foot of the perpendicular cliff the creature moved, sniffing at the invisible spoor, and now and then emitting the low moan of the hunting lion.

Joshua had followed the creature for but a few minutes when it disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as though dissolved into thin air.

The man leaped to his feet.

Not again was he to be cheated as the other had cheated him.

He sprang forward at a reckless pace to the spot at which he last had seen the huge, skulking brute.

Before him loomed the sheer cliff, its face unbroken by any aperture into which the mighty beast might have insinuated its huge carcass.

Beside him was a small, flat boulder, not larger than the deck of a bowman's chariot, nor standing to a greater height than twice his own stature.

Perhaps the lion was in hiding behind this? The brute might have discovered the man upon his trail, and even now be lying in wait for his easy prey.

Cautiously, with drawn sikar, Joshua crept around the corner of the rock.

There was no lion there, but something which surprised him infinitely more than would the presence of twenty lions.

Before him yawned the mouth of a dark cave leading downward into the ground.

Through this the lion must have disappeared.

Was it his lair? Within its dark and forbidding interior might there not lurk not one but many of the fearsome creatures? Joshua did not know, nor, with the thought that had been spurring him onward upon the trail of the creature uppermost in his mind, did he much care; for into this gloomy cavern he was sure the lion had trailed the gentile man and his captive, and into it he, too, would follow, content to give his life in the service of the woman he loved.

Not an instant did he hesitate, nor yet did he advance rashly; but with ready sword and cautious steps, for the way was dark, he stole

on.

As he advanced, the obscurity became impenetrable blackness.

The Fair Race

Downward along a smooth, broad floor led the strange tunnel, for such Joshua was now convinced was the nature of the shaft he at first had thought but a cave.

Before him he could hear the occasional low moans of the lion, and presently from behind came a similar uncanny note.

Another lion had entered the passageway on HIS trail! His position was anything but pleasant.

His eyes could not penetrate the darkness even to the distinguishing of his hand before his face, while the lions, he knew, could see quite well, though absence of light seemed utter.

No other sounds came to his ears than the dismal, bloodthirsty moanings of the beast ahead and the beast behind.

The tunnel had led straight, from where he had entered it beneath the side of the rock furthest from the unscaleable cliffs, toward the mighty barrier that had baffled him so long.

Now it was running almost level, and presently he noted a gradual ascent.

The beast behind him was gaining upon him, crowding him perilously close upon the heels of the beast in front.

Presently he should have to do battle with one, or both.

More firmly he gripped his weapon.

Now he could hear the breathing of the lion at his heels.

Not for much longer could he delay the encounter.

Long since he had become assured that the tunnel led beneath the cliffs to the opposite side of the barrier, and he had hoped that he might reach the moonlit open before being compelled to grapple with either of the monsters.

The sun had been setting as he entered the tunnel, and the way had been sufficiently long to assure him that darkness now reigned upon the world without.

He glanced behind him.

Blazing out of the darkness, seemingly not ten paces behind, glared two flaming points of fire.

As the savage eyes met his, the beast emitted a frightful roar and then he charged.

To face that savage mountain of onrushing ferocity, to stand unshaken before the hideous fangs that he knew were bared in slaving blood-thirstiness, though he could not see them, required nerves of bronze; but of such were the nerves of Joshua of Salem.

He had the brute's eyes to guide his point, and, as true as the sword hand of his mighty sire, his guided the keen point to one of those blazing orbs, even as he leaped lightly to one side.

With a hideous scream of pain and rage, the wounded lion hurtled, clawing, past him.

Then it turned to charge once more; but this time Joshua saw but a single gleaming point of fiery hate directed upon him.

Again the needle point met its flashing target.

Again the horrid cry of the stricken beast reverberated through the rocky tunnel, shocking in its torture-laden shrillness, deafening in its terrific volume.

But now, as it turned to charge again, the man had no guide whereby to direct his point.

He heard the scraping of the padded feet upon the rocky floor.

He knew the thing was charging down upon him once again, but he could see nothing.

Yet, if he could not see his antagonist, neither could his antagonist now see him.

Leaping, as he thought, to the exact centre of the tunnel, he held his sword point ready on a line with the beast's chest.

It was all that he could do, hoping that chance might send the point into the savage heart as he went down beneath the great body.

So quickly was the thing over that Joshua could scarce believe his senses as the mighty body rushed madly past him.

Either he had not placed himself in the centre of the tunnel, or else the blinded lion had erred in its calculations.

However, the huge body missed him by a foot, and the creature continued on down the tunnel as though in pursuit of the prey that

had eluded him.

Joshua, too, followed the same direction, nor was it long before his heart was gladdened by the sight of the moonlit exit from the long, dark passage.

Before him lay a deep hollow, entirely surrounded by gigantic cliffs.

The surface of the valley was dotted with enormous trees, a strange sight so far from a waterway.

The ground itself was clothed in short grass, picked out with innumerable patches of pretty flowering herbs.

Beneath the silvery effulgence of the moon the scene was one of indescribable loveliness, tinged with the weirdness of strange enchantment.

For only an instant, however, did his gaze rest upon the natural beauties outspread before him.

Almost immediately they were riveted upon the figure of a huge lion standing across the carcass of a newly killed camel.

The huge beast, his tawny mane bristling around his bloodied head, kept his eyes fixed upon another lion that charged erratically hither and thither, with shrill screams of pain, and horrid roars of hate and rage.

Joshua quickly guessed that the second brute was the one he had blinded during the fight in the tunnel, but it was the dead camel that centred his interest more than either of the savage carnivores.

The bridle was still upon the head of the Arabim's mount, and Joshua could not doubt but that this was the very animal upon which the gentile soldier had borne away Judith of Ephraim.

But where were the rider and his prisoner? The Prince of Salem shuddered as he thought upon the probability of the fate that had overtaken them.

Human flesh is the food most craved by the fierce lion of Judah, whose huge carcass and giant thews require enormous quantities of meat to sustain them.

Two human bodies would have but whetted the creature's appetite, and that he had killed and eaten the gentile man and the Ephraim girl seemed only too likely to Joshua.

He had left the carcass of the mighty camel to be devoured after having consumed the more tooth-some portion of his banquet.

Now the sightless lion, in its savage, aimless charging and counter-charging, had passed beyond the kill of its fellow, and there the light breeze that was blowing wafted the scent of new blood to its nostrils.

No longer were its movements erratic.

With outstretched tail and foaming jaws it charged straight as an arrow, for the body of the camel and the mighty creature of destruction that stood with forepaws upon the slate-grey side, waiting to defend its meat.

When the charging lion was twenty paces from the dead camel the killer gave vent to its hideous challenge, and with a mighty spring leaped forward to meet it.

The battle that ensued awed even the Salemite.

The mad rending, the hideous and deafening roaring, the implacable savagery of the blood-stained beasts held him in the paralysis of fascination, and when it was over and the two creatures, their heads and shoulders torn to ribbons, lay with their dead jaws still buried in each other's bodies, Joshua tore himself from the spell only by an effort of the will.

Hurrying to the side of the dead camel, he searched for traces of the girl he feared had shared the camel's fate, but nowhere could he discover anything to confirm his fears.

With slightly lightened heart he started out to explore the valley, but scarce a dozen steps had he taken when the glistening of a jewelled bauble lying on the grass caught his eye.

As he picked it up his first glance showed him that it was a woman's hair ornament, and emblazoned upon it was the insignia of the royal house of Ephraim.

But, sinister discovery, blood, still wet, splotched the magnificent jewels of the setting.

Joshua half choked as the dire possibilities which the thing suggested presented themselves to his imagination.

Yet he could not, would not believe it.

It was impossible that that radiant creature could have met so hideous an end.

It was incredible that the glorious Judith should ever cease to be.

Upon his already jewel-encrusted harness, to the strap that crossed his majestic chest beneath which beat his loyal heart, Joshua,

Prince of Salem, fastened the gleaming thing that Judith of Ephraim had worn, and wearing, had made holy to the Salemite.

Then he proceeded upon his way into the heart of the unknown valley.

For the most part the giant trees shut off his view to any but the most limited distances.

Occasionally he caught glimpses of the towering hills that bounded the valley upon every side, and though they stood out clear beneath the light of the two moons, he knew that they were far off, and that the extent of the valley was immense.

For half the night he continued his search, until presently he was brought to a sudden halt by the distant sound of squealing camels.

Guided by the noise of these habitually bad-tempered beasts, he stole forward through the trees until at last he came upon a level, treeless plain, in the centre of which a city of Arabim reared its black woollen marquees and vividly coloured pendants.

About the walled city the Salemite saw a huge encampment of the gentile soldiers of the Wilderness of the Dead Sea, and as he let his eyes rove carefully over the city he realized that here was no deserted metropolis of a dead past.

But what city could it be? His studies had taught him that in this little-explored portion of The Land the fierce tribe of Arabim men ruled supreme, and that as yet no Salemite or Ephraimite had succeeded in piercing to the heart of their domain to return again to the world of civilization.

The men of Arabim had perfected huge catapults with which their uncanny marksmanship had permitted them to repulse the few determined efforts that neighbouring nations of Arabim had made to explore their country by means of battle fleets of chariots.

That he was within the boundary of Arabim, Joshua was sure, but that there existed there such a wondrous city he never had dreamed, nor had the chronicles of the past even hinted at such a possibility, for the Arabim were known to live, as did the other gentile men of The Land, within the deserted cities that dotted the dying quarter, nor ever had any desert horde built so much as a single edifice, other than the low stone shrines where they offer abominations to gods of fertility.

The encircling camp of gentile soldiers lay about five hundred yards from the city's walls.

Between it and the city was no semblance of breastwork or other

protection against bow or catapult fire; yet distinctly now in the light of the rising sun Joshua could see many figures moving along the top of the wall, and upon the watchtowers beyond.

That they were beings like himself he was sure, though they were at too great distance from him for him to be positive that they were Petran men.

Almost immediately after sunrise the gentile soldiers commenced firing upon the little figures upon the wall.

To Joshua's surprise the fire was not returned, but presently the last of the city's inhabitants had sought shelter from the weird marksmanship of the gentile men, and no further sign of life was visible beyond the wall.

Then Joshua, keeping within the shelter of the trees that fringed the plain, began circling the rear of the besiegers' line, hoping against hope that somewhere he would obtain sight of Judith of Ephraim, for even now he could not believe that she was dead.

That he was not discovered was a miracle, for mounted soldiers were constantly riding back and forth from the camp into the forest; but the long day wore on and still he continued his seemingly fruitless quest, until, near sunset, he came opposite a mighty gate in the city's western wall.

Here seemed to be the principal force of the attacking horde.

Here a great platform had been erected whereon Joshua could see squatting a gentile soldier, surrounded by others of his kind.

This, then, must be the notorious Harith the Fourth, King of Arabim, the fierce old ogre of the south-west, as only for a King are platforms raised in temporary camps or upon the march by the gentile hordes of The Land.

As the Salemite watched he saw another gentile soldier push his way forward toward the rostrum.

Beside him he dragged a captive, and as the surrounding soldiers parted to let the two pass, Joshua caught a fleeting glimpse of the prisoner.

His heart leaped in rejoicing.

Judith of Ephraim still lived! It was with difficulty that Joshua restrained the impulse to rush forward to the side of the Ephraimian princess; but in the end his better judgment prevailed, for in the face of such odds he knew that he should have been but throwing away, uselessly, any future opportunity he might have to

succour her.

He saw her dragged to the foot of the rostrum.

He saw Harith the Fourth address her.

He could not hear the creature's words, nor Judith's reply; but it must have angered the gentile monster, for Joshua saw him leap toward the prisoner, striking her a cruel blow across the face with his metal-banded arm.

Then the son of David Overgath, King of Kings, Lord of The Land, went mad.

The old, blood-red haze through which his sire had glared at countless foes, floated before his eyes.

His Nazirite muscles, responding quickly to his will, sent him in leaping and bounding toward the gentile monster that had struck the woman he loved.

The Arabim were not looking in the direction of the forest.

All eyes had been upon the figures of the girl and their King, and loud was the hideous laughter that rang out in appreciation of the wit of the gentile king's reply to his prisoner's appeal for liberty.

Joshua had covered about half the distance between the forest and the gentile soldiers, when a new factor succeeded in still further directing the attention of the latter from him.

Upon a high tower within the beleaguered city a man appeared.

From his upturned mouth there issued a series of frightful shrieks; uncanny shrieks that swept, shrill and terrifying, across the city's walls, over the heads of the besiegers, and out across the forest to the uttermost confines of the valley.

Once, twice, thrice the fearsome sound smote upon the ears of the listening gentile men and then far, far off across the broad woods came sharp and clear from the distance an answering shriek.

It was but the first.

From every point rose similar savage cries, until the world seemed to tremble to their reverberations.

The gentile soldiers looked nervously this way and that.

They knew not fear, as civilised men may know it; but in the face of the unusual their wonted self-assurance deserted them.

And then the majestic gate in the city wall opposite the platform of Harith the Fourth swung suddenly wide.

From it issued as strange a sight as Joshua ever had witnessed, though at the moment he had time to cast but a single fleeting glance at the tall bowmen emerging through the portal behind their long, oval shields; to note their flowing auburn hair; and to realize that the growling things at their side were fierce lions of The Land.

Then he was in the midst of the astonished Arabim.

With drawn sikar he was among them, and to Judith of Ephraim, whose startled eyes were the first to fall upon him, it seemed that she was looking upon David Overgath himself, so strangely similar to the fighting of the father was that of the son.

Even to the famous fighting smile of the shepherd was the resemblance true.

And the sword arm! Ah, the subtleness of it, and the speed! All about was turmoil and confusion.

Gentile soldiers were leaping to the backs of their restive, squealing camels.

Dogs were growling out their savage gutturals, whining to be at the throats of the oncoming foemen.

Ibn Harith and another by the side of the rostrum had been the first to note the coming of Joshua, and it was with them he battled for possession of the Ephraim girl, while the others hastened to meet the host advancing from the beleaguered city.

Joshua sought both to defend Judith of Ephraim and reach the side of the hideous Harith the Fourth that he might avenge the blow the creature had struck the girl.

He succeeded in reaching the rostrum, over the dead bodies of two soldiers who had turned to join Ibn Harith and his companion in repulsing this adventurous Salemite man, just as Harith the Fourth was about to leap from it to the back of his camel.

The attention of the gentile soldiers turned principally upon the bowmen advancing upon them from the city, and upon the savage lions that paced beside them— cruel beasts of war, infinitely more terrible than their own savage dogs.

As Joshua leaped to the rostrum he drew Judith up beside him, and then he turned upon the departing King with an angry challenge and a sword thrust.

As the Salemite's point pricked his gentile hide, Harith the Fourth

turned upon his adversary with a snarl, but at the same instant two of his chieftains called to him to hasten, for the charge of the fair-skinned inhabitants of the city was developing into a more serious matter than the Arabim had anticipated.

Instead of remaining to battle with the Petran man, Harith the Fourth promised him his attention after he had disposed of the presumptuous citizens of the walled city, and, leaping astride his camel, galloped off to meet the rapidly advancing bowmen.

The other soldiers quickly followed their King, leaving Judith and Joshua alone upon the platform.

Between them and the city raged a terrific battle.

The fair-skinned soldiers, armed only with their long bows and a kind of short-handled war-axe, were almost helpless beneath the savage mounted gentile men at close quarters; but at a distance their sharp arrows did fully as much execution as the projectiles of the gentile men.

But if the soldiers themselves were outclassed, not so their savage companions, the fierce lions.

Scarce had the two lines come together when hundreds of these appalling creatures had leaped among the Arabim, dragging soldiers from their camels—dragging down the huge camels themselves, and bringing consternation to all before them.

The numbers of the citizenry, too, was to their advantage, for it seemed that scarce a soldier fell but his place was taken by a score more, in such a constant stream did they pour from the city's majestic gate.

And so it came, what with the ferocity of the lions and the numbers of the bowmen, that at last the Arabim fell back, until presently the platform upon which stood Joshua and Judith lay directly in the centre of the fight.

That neither was struck by a dart or an arrow seemed a miracle to both; but at last the tide had rolled completely past them, so that they were alone between the fighters and the city, except for the dying and the dead, and a score or so of growling lions, less well trained than their fellows, who prowled among the corpses seeking meat.

To Joshua the strangest part of the battle had been the terrific toll taken by the bowmen with their relatively puny weapons.

Nowhere that he could see was there a single wounded gentile man, but the corpses of their dead lay thick upon the field of battle.

Death seemed to follow instantly the slightest pinprick of a bowman's arrow, nor apparently did one ever miss its goal.

There could be but one explanation: the missiles were poison-tipped.

Presently the sounds of conflict died in the distant forest.

Quiet reigned, broken only by the growling of the devouring lions.

Joshua turned toward Judith of Ephraim.

As yet neither had spoken.

"Where are we, Judith?" he asked.

The girl looked at him questioningly.

His very presence had seemed to proclaim a guilty knowledge of her abduction.

How else might he have known the destination of the chariot that brought her! "Who should know better than the Prince of Salem?" she asked in return.

"Did he not come hither of his own free will?" "From Gomorrha I came voluntarily upon the trail of the gentile man who had stolen you, Judith," he replied; "but from the time I left Salem until I awoke above Gomorrha I thought myself bound for Ephraim.

"It had been intimated that I had guilty knowledge of your abduction," he explained simply, "and I was hastening to the King, your father, to convince him of the falsity of the charge, and to give my service to your recovery.

Before I left Salem some one tampered with my sextant, so that it bore me to Gomorrha instead of to Ephraim.

That is all.

You believe me?" "But the soldiers who stole me from the garden!" she exclaimed.

"After we arrived at Gomorrha they wore the livery of the Prince of Salem.

When they took me they were trapped in Roman harness.

There seemed but a single explanation.

Whoever dared the outrage wished to put the onus upon another, should he be detected in the act; but once safely away from

Ephraim he felt safe in having his minions return to their own livery." "You believe that I did this thing, Judith?" he asked.

"O, Joshua," she replied sadly, "I did not wish to believe it; but when everything pointed to you—even then I would not believe it".

"I did not do it, Judith," he said.

"But let me be entirely honest with you. As much as I love your father, as much as I respect Joseph Caiaphas, to whom you are betrothed, as well as I know the frightful consequences that must have followed such an act of mine, hurling into war, as it would, three of the greatest nations of The Land—yet, notwithstanding all this, I should not have hesitated to take you thus, Judith of Ephraim, had you even hinted that it would not have displeased YOU.

"But you did nothing of the kind, and so I am here, not in my own service, but in yours, and in the service of the man to whom you are promised, to save you for him, if it lies within the power of man to do so," he concluded, almost bitterly.

Judith of Ephraim looked into his face for several moments.

Her breast was rising and falling as though to some resistless emotion.

She half took a step toward him.

Her lips parted as though to speak—swiftly and impetuously.

And then she conquered whatever had moved her.

"The future acts of the Prince of Salem," she said coldly, "must constitute the proof of his past honesty of purpose." Joshua was hurt by the girl's tone, as much as by the doubt as to his integrity which her words implied.

He had half hoped that she might hint that his love would be acceptable—certainly there was due him at least a little gratitude for his recent acts in her behalf; but the best he received was cold scepticism.

The Prince of Salem shrugged his broad shoulders.

The girl noted it, and the little smile that touched his lips, so that it became her turn to be hurt.

Of course she had not meant to hurt him.

He might have known that after what he had said she could not do anything to encourage him! But he need not have made his

indifference quite so palpable.

The men of Salem were noted for their gallantry—not for boorishness.

Possibly it was the Earth blood that flowed in his veins.

How could she know that the shrug was but Joshua's way of attempting, by physical effort, to cast blighting sorrow from his heart, or that the smile upon his lips was the fighting smile of his father with which the son gave outward evidence of the determination he had reached to submerge his own great love in his efforts to save Judith of Ephraim for another, because he believed that she loved this other! He reverted to his original question.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"I do not know." "Nor I," replied the girl.

"Those who stole me from Ephraim spoke among themselves of Gomorrha, so that I thought it possible that the ancient city to which they took me was that famous ruin; but where we may be now I have no idea." "When the bowmen return we shall doubtless learn all that there is to know," said Joshua.

"Let us hope that they prove friendly.

What race may they be? Only in the most ancient of our legends and in the mural paintings of the deserted cities of the Wilderness of the Dead Sea are depicted such a race of auburn-haired, fair-skinned people.

Can it be that we have stumbled upon a surviving city of the past which all The Land believes buried beneath the ages?" Judith was looking toward the forest into which the gentile men and the pursuing bowmen had disappeared.

From a great distance came the hideous cries of lions, and an occasional shot.

"It is strange that they do not return," said the girl.

"One would expect to see the wounded limping or being carried back to the city," replied Joshua, with a puzzled frown.

"But how about the wounded nearer the city? Have they carried them within?" Both turned their eyes toward the field between them and the walled city, where the fighting had been most furious.

There were the lions, still growling about their hideous feast.

Joshua looked at Judith in astonishment.

Then he pointed toward the field.

"Where are they?" he whispered.

"WHAT HAS BECOME OF THEIR DEAD AND WOUNDED?"

The King of Peraea

The girl looked on with incredulity.

"They lay in piles," she murmured.

"There were thousands of them but a minute ago." "And now," continued Joshua, "there remain but the lions and the carcasses of the gentile men." "They must have sent forth and carried the dead bowmen away while we were talking," said the girl.

"It is impossible!" replied Joshua.

"Thousands of dead lay there upon the field but a moment since.

It would have required many hours to have removed them.

The thing is uncanny." "I had hoped," said Judith, "that we might find an asylum with these fair-skinned people.

Notwithstanding their valour upon the field of battle, they did not strike me as a ferocious or warlike people.

I had been about to suggest that we seek entrance to the city, but now I scarce know if I care to venture among people whose dead vanish into thin air." "Let us chance it," replied Joshua.

"We can be no worse off within their walls than without.

Here we may fall prey to the lions or the no less fierce Arabim.

There, at least, we shall find beings moulded after our own images.

"All that causes me to hesitate," he added, "is the danger of taking you past so many lions.

A single sword would scarce prevail were even a couple of them to charge simultaneously." "Do not fear on that score," replied the girl, smiling.

"The lions will not harm us." As she spoke she descended from the platform, and with Joshua at her side stepped fearlessly out upon the bloody field in the direction of the walled city of mystery.

They had advanced but a short distance when a lion, looking up from its gory feast, descried them.

With an angry roar the beast walked quickly in their direction, and at the sound of its voice a score of others followed its example.

Joshua drew his sikar.

The girl stole a quick glance at his face.

She saw the smile upon his lips, and it was as wine to sick nerves; for even upon warlike The Land where all men are brave, woman reacts quickly to quiet indifference to danger—to dare-deviltry that is without bombast.

"You may return your sword," she said.

"I told you that the lions would not harm us.

Look!" and as she spoke she stepped quickly toward the nearest animal.

Joshua would have leaped after her to protect her, but with a gesture she motioned him back.

He heard her calling to the lions in a low, singsong voice that was half purr.

Instantly the mighty heads went up and all the wicked eyes were riveted upon the figure of the girl.

Then, stealthily, they commenced moving toward her.

She had stopped now and was standing waiting them.

One, closer to her than the others, hesitated.

She spoke to him imperiously, as a master might speak to a refractory hound.

The mighty carnivore let its head droop, and with tail between its legs came slinking to the girl's feet, and after it came the others until she was entirely surrounded by the savage maneaters.

Turning she led them to where Joshua stood.

They growled a little as they neared the man, but a few sharp words of command put them in their places.

"How do you do it?" exclaimed Joshua.

"Your father once asked me that same question in the galleries of the Golden Cliffs within the Taurus Mountains, beneath the temples

of the heathens.

I could not answer him, nor can I answer you.

I do not know whence comes my power over them, but ever since the day that Belshazzar threw me among them in the lion pit of the Heathens of Tammuz, and the great creatures fawned upon instead of devouring me, I ever have had the same strange power over them.

They come at my call and do my bidding, even as the faithful dog does the bidding of your mighty sire." With a word the girl dispersed the fierce pack.

Roaring, they returned to their interrupted feast, while Joshua and Judith passed among them toward the walled city.

As they advanced the man of Salem looked with wonder upon the dead bodies of those of the gentile men that had not been devoured or mauled by the lions.

He called the girl's attention to them.

No arrows protruded from their carcasses.

Nowhere upon any of them was the sign of mortal wound, nor even slightest scratch or abrasion.

Before the bowmen's dead had disappeared the corpses of the Arabim had bristled with the deadly arrows of their foes.

Where had the slender messengers of death departed? What unseen hand had plucked them from the bodies of the slain? Despite himself Joshua could scarce repress a shudder of apprehension as he glanced toward the silent city before them.

No longer was sign of life visible upon wall or roof top.

All was quiet—brooding, ominous quiet.

Yet he was sure that eyes watched them from somewhere behind that blank wall.

He glanced at Judith.

She was advancing with wide eyes fixed upon the city gate.

He looked in the direction of her gaze, but saw nothing.

His gaze upon her seemed to arouse her as from a lethargy.

She glanced up at him, a quick, brave smile touching her lips, and

then, as though the act was involuntary, she came close to his side and placed one of her hands in his.

He guessed that something within her that was beyond her conscious control was appealing to him for protection.

He threw an arm about her, and thus they crossed the field.

She did not draw away from him.

It is doubtful that she realized that his arm was there, so engrossed was she in the mystery of the strange city before them.

They stopped before the gate.

It was a mighty thing.

From its construction Joshua could but dimly speculate upon its unthinkable antiquity.

It was circular, closing a circular aperture, and the Salemite knew from his study of ancient architecture of The Land that it rolled to one side, like a huge wheel, into an aperture in the wall.

Even such world-old cities as ancient Gomorrha were as yet undreamed of when the races lived that built such gates as these.

As he stood speculating upon the identity of this forgotten city, a voice spoke to them from above.

Both looked up.

There, leaning over the edge of the high wall, was a man.

His hair was auburn, his skin fair.

His forehead was high, his eyes large and intelligent.

The language that he used was intelligible to the two below, yet there was a marked difference between it and their tongue of The Land.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"And what do you here before the gate of Peraea?"

"We are friends," replied Joshua.

"This be the princess, Judith of Ephraim, who was captured by the Arabim horde.

I am Joshua of Salem, Prince of the house of Joseph Ramath, King of Salem, and son of David Overgath, Lord of The Land, and of his

wife, Sarah of Abraham”.

“Ephraim?” repeated the man.

“Salem?” He shook his head.

“I never have heard of these places, nor did I know that there dwelt upon The Land a race of thy strange appearance.

Where may these cities lie, of which you speak? From our loftiest tower we have never seen another city than Peraea.” Joshua pointed toward the north-east.

“In that direction lie Salem and Ephraim,” he said.

“Salem is over eight thousand cubits from Peraea, while Ephraim lies nine thousand five hundred cubits north-east of Salem”.

Still the man shook his head.

“I know of nothing beyond the Peraean hills,” he said.

“Nothing may live there beside the hideous gentile hordes of Arabim.

They have conquered all The Land except this single valley and the city of Peraea.

Here we have defied them for countless ages, though periodically they renew their attempts to destroy us.

From whence you come I cannot guess unless you be descended from the slaves the Arabim captured in early times when they reduced the outer world to their vassalage; but we had heard that they destroyed all other races but their own”.

Joshua tried to explain that the Arabim ruled but a relatively tiny part of The Land, and even this only because their domain held nothing to attract the Hebrew race; but the Peraean could not seem to conceive of anything beyond the valley of Peraea other than a trackless waste peopled by the ferocious gentile hordes of Arabim.

After considerably parleying he consented to admit them to the city, and a moment later the wheel-like gate rolled back within its niche, and Judith and Joshua entered the city of Peraea.

All about them were evidences of fabulous wealth.

The facades of the buildings fronting upon the avenue within the wall were richly carven, and about the windows and doors were oftentimes set foot-wide borders of precious stones, intricate mosaics, or tablets of beaten gold bearing bas-reliefs depicting what may

have been bits of the history of this forgotten people.

He with whom they had conversed across the wall was in the avenue to receive them.

About him were a hundred or more men of the same race.

All were clothed in flowing robes of gold and white and all were beardless.

Their attitude was more of naive curiosity than antagonism.

They followed the new-comers with their eyes; but spoke no word to them.

Joshua could not but notice the fact that though the city had been but a short time before surrounded by a horde of bloodthirsty demons yet none of the citizens appeared to be armed, nor was there sign of soldiery about.

He wondered if all the fighting men had sallied forth in one supreme effort to rout the foe, leaving the city all unguarded.

He asked their host.

The man smiled.

"No creature other than a score or so of our sacred lions has left Peraea to-day," he replied.

"But the soldiers—the bowmen!" exclaimed Joshua.

"We saw thousands emerge from this very gate, overwhelming the hordes of Arabim and putting them to rout with their deadly arrows and their fierce lions." Still the man smiled his knowing smile.

"Look!" he cried, and pointed down a broad avenue before him.

Joshua and Judith followed the direction indicated, and there, marching bravely in the sunlight, they saw advancing toward them a huge army of bowmen.

"O!" exclaimed Judith.

"They have returned through another gate, or perchance these be the troops that remained to defend the city?" Again the fellow smiled his uncanny smile.

"There are no soldiers in Peraea," he said.

"Look!" Both Joshua and Judith had turned toward him while he spoke, and now as they turned back again toward the advancing

regiments their eyes went wide in astonishment, for the broad avenue before them was as deserted as the tomb.

"And those who marched out upon the hordes to-day?" whispered Joshua.

"They, too, were unreal?" The man nodded.

"But their arrows slew the gentile soldiers," insisted Judith.

"Let us go before Herod Antipas," replied the Peraean.

"He will tell you that which he deems it best you know.

I might tell you too much." "Who is Herod Antipas?" asked Joshua.

"King of Peraea," replied the guide, leading them up the broad avenue down which they had but a moment since seen the phantom army marching.

For half an hour they walked along lovely avenues between the most magnificent buildings that the two had ever seen.

Few people were in evidence.

Joshua could not but note the deserted appearance of the mighty city.

At last they came to the royal palace.

Joshua saw it from a distance, and guessing the nature of the magnificent edifice wondered that even here there should be so little sign of activity and life.

Not even a single guard was visible before the majestic entrance gate, nor in the gardens beyond, into which he could see, was there sign of the myriad life that pulses within the precincts of the royal estates of the Petran kings.

"Here," said their guide, "is the palace of Herod Antipas." As he spoke Joshua again let his gaze rest upon the wondrous palace.

With a startled exclamation he rubbed his eyes and looked again.

No! He could not be mistaken.

Before the massive gate stood a score of sentries.

Within, the avenue leading to the main building was lined on either side by ranks of bowmen.

The gardens were dotted with officers and soldiers moving quickly to and fro, as though bent upon the duties of the minute.

What manner of people were these who could conjure an army out of thin air? He glanced toward Judith.

She, too, evidently had witnessed the transformation.

With a little shudder she pressed more closely toward him.

"What do you make of it?" she whispered.

"It is most uncanny." "I cannot account for it," replied Joshua, "unless we have gone mad." Joshua turned quickly toward the Peraean.

The fellow was smiling broadly.

"I thought that you just said that there were no soldiers in Peraea," said the Salemite, with a gesture toward the guardsmen.

"What are these?" "Ask Herod Antipas," replied the other.

"We shall soon be before him." Nor was it long before they entered a lofty chamber at one end of which a man reclined upon a rich couch that stood upon a high dais.

As the trio approached, the man turned dreamy eyes sleepily upon them.

Twenty feet from the dais their conductor halted, and, whispering to Judith and Joshua to follow his example, threw himself headlong to the floor.

Then rising to hands and knees, he commenced crawling toward the foot of the throne, swinging his head to and fro and wiggling his body as you have seen a hound do when approaching its master.

Judith glanced quickly toward Joshua.

He was standing erect, with high-held head and arms folded across his broad chest.

A haughty smile curved his lips.

The man upon the dais was eyeing him intently, and Joshua of Salem was looking straight in the other's face.

"Who be these, Judas?" asked the man of him who crawled upon his belly along the floor.

"O Herod Antipas, most glorious King," replied Judas, "these be strangers who came with the hordes of Arabim to our gates, saying that they were prisoners of the gentile men."

They tell strange tales of cities far beyond Peraea”.

“Arise, Judas,” commanded Herod Antipas, “and ask these two why they show not to Herod Antipas the respect that is his due.” Judas arose and faced the strangers.

At sight of their erect positions his face went livid.

He leaped toward them.

“Creatures!” he screamed.

“Down! Down upon your bellies before the last of the kings of The Land!”.

The Phantom Bowmen

As Judas leaped toward him Joshua laid his hand upon the hilt of his sikar.

The Peraean halted.

The majestic apartment was empty save for the four at the dais, yet as Judas stepped back from the menace of the Salemite’s threatening attitude the latter found himself surrounded by a score of bowmen.

From whence had they sprung? Both Joshua and Judith looked their astonishment.

Now the former’s sword leaped from its scabbard, and at the same instant the bowmen drew back their slim shafts.

Herod Antipas had half raised himself upon one elbow.

For the first time he saw the full figure of Judith, who had been concealed behind the person of Joshua.

“Enough!” cried the King, raising a protesting hand, but at that very instant the sword of the Salemite cut viciously at its nearest antagonist.

As the keen edge reached its goal Joshua let the point fall to the floor, as with wide eyes he stepped backward in consternation, throwing the back of his left hand across his brow.

His bronze had cut but empty air—his antagonist had vanished—there were no bowmen in the room! “It is evident that these are strangers,” said Herod Antipas to Judas.

“Let us first determine that they knowingly affronted us before we take measures for punishment.” Then he turned to Joshua, but ever

his gaze wandered to the perfect lines of Judith's glorious figure, which the gown of the princess of The Land accentuated rather than concealed.

"Who are you," he asked, "who knows not the etiquette of the court of the last of kings?" "I am Joshua, Prince of Salem," replied the Salemite.

"And this is Judith, Princess of Ephraim.

In the courts of our fathers men do not prostrate themselves before royalty.

Not since the Brigands tore their immortal goddess limb from limb have men crawled upon their bellies to any throne upon The Land.

Now think you that the daughter of one mighty King and the son of another would so humiliate themselves?" Herod Antipas looked at Joshua for a long time.

At last he spoke.

"There is no other King upon The Land than Herod Antipas," he said.

"There is no other race than that of Peraea, unless the hordes of Arabim may be dignified by such an appellation.

Peraeans are white; your skins are brown.

There are no women left upon The Land.

Your companion is a woman." He half rose from the couch, leaning far forward and pointing an accusing finger at Joshua.

"You are a lie!" he shrieked.

"You are both lies, and you dare to come before Herod Antipas, last and mightiest of the kings of The Land, and assert your reality.

Some one shall pay well for this, Judas, and unless I mistake it is yourself who has dared thus flippantly to trifle with the good nature of your King.

"Remove the man.

Leave the woman.

We shall see if both be lies.

And later, Judas, you shall suffer for your temerity.

There be few of us left, but—Helios must be fed.

Go!" Joshua could see that Judas trembled as he prostrated himself once more before his ruler, and then, rising, turned toward the Prince of Salem.

"Come!" he said.

"And leave the Princess of Ephraim here alone?" cried Joshua.

Judas brushed closely past him, whispering: "Follow me—he cannot harm her, except to kill; and that he can do whether you remain or not.

We had best go now—trust me." Joshua did not understand, but something in the urgency of the other's tone assured him, and so he turned away, but not without a glance toward Judith in which he attempted to make her understand that it was in her own interest that he left her.

For answer she turned her back full upon him, but not without first throwing him such a look of contempt that brought the scarlet to his cheek.

Then he hesitated, but Judas seized him by the wrist.

"Come!" he whispered.

"Or he will have the bowmen upon you, and this time there will be no escape.

Did you not see how futile is your bronze against thin air!" Joshua turned unwillingly to follow.

As the two left the room he turned to his companion.

"If I may not kill thin air," he asked, "how, then, shall I fear that thin air may kill me?"

"You saw the Arabim fall before the bowmen?" asked Judas.

Joshua nodded.

"So would you fall before them, and without one single chance for self-defence or revenge." As they talked Judas led Joshua to a small room in one of the numerous towers of the palace.

Here were couches, and Judas bid the Salemite be seated.

For several minutes the Peraean eyed his prisoner, for such Joshua now realized himself to be.

"I am half convinced that you are real," he said at last.

Joshua laughed.

"Of course I am real," he said.

"What caused you to doubt it? Can you not see me, feel me?"

"So may I see and feel the bowmen," replied Judas, "and yet we all know that they, at least, are not real." Joshua showed by the expression of his face his puzzlement at each new reference to the mysterious bowmen—the vanishing soldiery of Peraea.

"What, then, may they be?" he asked.

"You really do not know?" asked Judas.

Joshua shook his head negatively.

"I can almost believe that you have told us the truth and that you are really from another part of The Land, or from another world.

But tell me, in your own country have you no bowmen to strike terror to the hearts of the gentile hordesmen as they slay in company with the fierce lions of war?" "We have soldiers," replied Joshua.

"We of the Hebrew race are all soldiers, but we have no bowmen to defend us, such as yours. We defend ourselves".

"You go out and get killed by your enemies!" cried Judas incredulously.

"Certainly," replied Joshua.

"How do the Peraeans?"

"You have seen," replied the other.

"We send out our deathless archers—deathless because they are lifeless, existing only in the imaginations of our enemies. It is really our giant minds that defend us, sending out legions of imaginary soldiers to materialize before the mind's eye of the foe. "They see them—they see their bows drawn back—they see their slender arrows speed with unerring precision toward their hearts. And they die—killed by the power of suggestion".

"But the archers that are slain?" exclaimed Joshua.

"You call them deathless, and yet I saw their dead bodies piled high upon the battlefield. How may that be?"

"It is but to lend reality to the scene," replied Judas.

"We picture many of our own defenders killed that the Arabim may not guess that there are really no flesh and blood creatures opposing them. Once that truth became implanted in their minds, it is the theory of many of us, no longer would they fall prey to the suggestion of the deadly arrows, for greater would be the suggestion of the truth, and the more powerful suggestion would prevail—it is law".

"And the lions?" questioned Joshua. "They, too, were but creatures of suggestion?"

"Some of them were real," replied Judas. "Those that accompanied the archers in pursuit of the Arabim were unreal. Like the archers, they never returned, but, having served their purpose, vanished with the bowmen when the rout of the enemy was assured. Those that remained about the field were real. Those we loosed as scavengers to devour the bodies of the dead of Arabim. This thing is demanded by the realists among us. I am a realist. Herod Antipas is an etherealist. The etherealists maintain that there is no such thing as matter—that all is mind. They say that none of us exists, except in the imagination of his fellows, other than as an intangible, invisible mentality. According to Herod Antipas, it is but necessary that we all unite in imagining that there are no dead Arabim beneath our walls, and there will be none, nor any need of scavenging lions".

"You, then, do not hold Herod Antipas's beliefs?" asked Joshua.

"In part only," replied the Peraean. "I believe, in fact I know, that there are some truly ethereal creatures. Herod Antipas is one, I am convinced. He has no existence except in the imaginations of his people. Of course, it is the contention of all us realists that all etherealists are but figments of the imagination. They contend that no food is necessary, nor do they eat; but any one of the most rudimentary intelligence must realize that food is a necessity to creatures having actual existence".

"Yes," agreed Joshua, "not having eaten to-day I can readily agree with you".

"Ah, pardon me," exclaimed Judas. "Pray be seated and satisfy your hunger," and with a wave of his hand he indicated a bountifully laden table that had not been there an instant before he spoke.

Of that Joshua was positive, for he had searched the room diligently with his eyes several times.

"It is well," continued Judas, "that you did not fall into the hands of an etherealist. Then, indeed, would you have gone hungry".

"But," exclaimed Joshua, "this is not real food—it was not here an

instant since, and real food does not materialize out of thin air”.

Judas looked hurt. “There is no real food or water in Peraea,” he said; “nor has there been for countless ages. Upon such as you now see before you have we existed since the dawn of history. Upon such, then, may you exist”.

“But I thought you were a realist,” exclaimed Joshua.

“Indeed,” cried Judas, “what more realistic than this bounteous feast? It is just here that we differ most from the etherealists. They claim that it is unnecessary to imagine food; but we have found that for the maintenance of life we must thrice daily sit down to hearty meals. “The food that one eats is supposed to undergo certain chemical changes during the process of digestion and assimilation, the result, of course, being the rebuilding of wasted tissue. Now we all know that mind is all, though we may differ in the interpretation of its various manifestations. Herod Antipas maintains that there is no such thing as substance, all being created from the substanceless matter of the brain. We realists, however, know better. We know that mind has the power to maintain substance even though it may not be able to create substance—the latter is still an open question. And so we know that in order to maintain our physical bodies we must cause all our organs properly to function. This we accomplish by materializing food-thoughts, and by partaking of the food thus created. We chew, we swallow, we digest. All our organs function precisely as if we had partaken of material food. And what is the result? What must be the result? The chemical changes take place through both direct and indirect suggestion, and we live and thrive”.

Joshua eyed the food before him.

It seemed real enough.

He lifted a morsel to his lips.

There was substance indeed.

And flavour as well.

Yes, even his palate was deceived.

Judas watched him, smiling, as he ate.

“Is it not entirely satisfying?” he asked.

“I must admit that it is,” replied Joshua. “But tell me, how does Herod Antipas live, and the other etherealists who maintain that food is unnecessary?”

Judas scratched his head.

"That is a question we often discuss," he replied. "It is the strongest evidence we have of the non-existence of the etherealists; but who may know other than Helios?"

"Who is Helios?" asked Joshua. "I heard your King speak of him".

Judas bent low toward the ear of the Salemite, looking fearfully about before he spoke.

"Helios is the essence," he whispered. "Even the etherealists admit that mind itself must have substance in order to transmit to imaginings the appearance of substance. For if there really was no such thing as substance it could not be suggested—what never has been cannot be imagined. Do you follow me?"

"I am groping," replied Joshua dryly.

"So the essence must be substance," continued Judas. "Helios is the essence of the All, as it were. He is maintained by substance. He eats. He eats the real. To be explicit, he eats the realists. That is Herod Antipas's work. He says that inasmuch as we maintain that we alone are real we should, to be consistent, admit that we alone are proper food for Helios. Sometimes, as to-day, we find other food for him. He is very fond of Arabim".

"And Helios is a man?" asked Joshua.

"He is All, I told you," replied Judas. "I know not how to explain him in words that you will understand. He is the beginning and the end. All life emanates from Helios, since the substance which feeds the brain with imaginings radiates from the body of Helios. Should Helios cease to eat, all life upon The Land would cease to be. He cannot die, but he might cease to eat, and, thus, to radiate".

"And he feeds upon the men and women of your belief?" cried Joshua.

"Women!" exclaimed Judas. "There are no women in Peraea. The last of the Peraean females perished ages since, upon that cruel and terrible journey across the muddy plains that fringed the half-dried seas, when the gentile hordes scourged us across the world to this our last hiding-place—our impregnable fortress of Peraea. Scarce twenty thousand men of all the countless millions of our race lived to reach Peraea. Among us were no women and no children. All these had perished by the way. As time went on, we, too, were dying and the race fast approaching extinction, when the Great Truth was revealed to us, that mind is all. Many more died before we perfected our powers, but at last we were able to defy death when we fully understood that death was merely a state of mind. Then came the creation of mind-people, or rather the materialization of imaginings. We first put these to practical use

when the Arabim discovered our retreat, and fortunate for us it was that it required ages of search upon their part before they found the single tiny entrance to the valley of Peraea. That day we threw our first bowmen against them. The intention was purely to frighten them away by the vast numbers of bowmen which we could muster upon our walls. All Peraea bristled with the bows and arrows of our ethereal host. But the Arabimians did not frighten. They are lower than the beasts—they know no fear. They rushed upon our walls, and standing upon the shoulders of others they built human approaches to the wall tops, and were on the very point of surging in upon us and overwhelming us. Not an arrow had been discharged by our bowmen—we did but cause them to run to and fro along the wall top, screaming taunts and threats at the enemy. Presently I thought to attempt the thing—THE GREAT THING. I centred all my mighty intellect upon the bowmen of my own creation—each of us produces and directs as many bowmen as his mentality and imagination is capable of. I caused them to fit arrows to their bows for the first time. I made them take aim at the hearts of the gentile men. I made the gentile men see all this, and then I made them see the arrows fly, and I made them think that the points pierced their hearts. It was all that was necessary. By hundreds they toppled from our walls, and when my fellows saw what I had done they were quick to follow my example, so that presently the hordes of Arabim had retreated beyond the range of our arrows. We might have killed them at any distance, but one rule of war we have maintained from the first—the rule of realism. We do nothing, or rather we cause our bowmen to do nothing within sight of the enemy that is beyond the understanding of the foe. Otherwise they might guess the truth, and that would be the end of us. But after the Arabim had retreated beyond bowshot, they turned upon us with their terrible projectiles, and by constant shooting at us made life miserable within our walls. So then I bethought the scheme to hurl our bowmen through the gates upon them. You have seen this day how well it works. For ages they have come down upon us at intervals, but always with the same results”.

“And all this is due to your intellect, Judas?” asked Joshua. “I should think that you would be high in the councils of your people”.

“I am,” replied Judas, proudly. “I am next to Herod Antipas”.

“But why, then, your cringing manner of approaching the throne?”

“Herod Antipas demands it. He is jealous of me. He only awaits the slightest excuse to feed me to Helios. He fears that I may some day usurp his power”.

Joshua suddenly sprang from the table. “Judas!” he exclaimed. “I am a beast! Here I have been eating my fill, while the Princess of Ephraim may perchance be still without food. Let us return and find

some means of furnishing her with nourishment”.

The Peraean shook his head. “Herod Antipas would not permit it,” he said. “He will, doubtless, make an etherealist of her”.

“But I must go to her,” insisted Joshua. “You say that there are no women in Peraea. Then she must be among men, and if this be so I intend to be near where I may defend her if the need arises”.

“Herod Antipas will have his way,” insisted Judas. “He sent you away and you may not return until he sends for you”.

“Then I shall go without waiting to be sent for”.

“Do not forget the bowmen,” cautioned Judas.

“I do not forget them,” replied Joshua, but he did not tell Judas that he remembered something else that the Peraean had let drop—something that was but a conjecture, possibly, and yet one well worth pinning a forlorn hope to, should necessity arise.

Joshua started to leave the room.

Judas stepped before him, barring his way.

“I have learned to like you, Salemite man,” he said; “but do not forget that Herod Antipas is still my King, and that Herod Antipas has commanded that you remain here”.

Joshua was about to reply, when there came faintly to the ears of both a woman’s cry for help.

With a sweep of his arm the Prince of Salem brushed the Peraean aside, and with drawn sword sprang into the corridor without.

The Hall of Doom

As Judith of Ephraim saw Joshua depart from the presence of Herod Antipas, leaving her alone with the man, a sudden qualm of terror seized her.

There was an air of mystery pervading the stately chamber.

Its furnishings and appointments bespoke wealth and culture, and carried the suggestion that the room was often the scene of royal functions which filled it to its capacity.

And yet nowhere about her, in antechamber or corridor, was there sign of any other being than herself and the recumbent figure of Herod Antipas, the King, who watched her through half-closed eyes from the magnificent trappings of his regal couch.

For a time after the departure of Judas and Joshua the man eyed her intently.

Then he spoke.

"Come nearer," he said, and, as she approached: "Whose creature are you? Who has dared materialize his imaginings of woman? It is contrary to the customs and the royal edicts of Peraea. Tell me, woman, from whose brain have you sprung? Judas's? No, do not deny it. I know that it could be no other than that envious realist. He seeks to tempt me. He would see me fall beneath the spell of your charms, and then he, your master, would direct my destiny and—my end. I see it all! I see it all!"

The blood of indignation and anger had been rising to Judith's face.

Her chin was up, a haughty curve upon her perfect lips.

"I know nothing," she cried, "of what you are prating! I am Judith, Princess of Ephraim.

I am no man's `creature.'" Never before to-day did I lay eyes upon him you call Judas, nor upon your ridiculous city, of which even the greatest nations of The Land have never dreamed.

"My charms are not for you, nor such as you.

They are not for sale or barter, even though the price were a real throne.

And as for using them to win your worse than futile power—" She ended her sentence with a shrug of her shapely shoulders, and a little scornful laugh.

When she had finished Herod Antipas was sitting upon the edge of his couch, his feet upon the floor.

He was leaning forward with eyes no longer half closed, but wide with a startled expression in them.

He did not seem to note the LESE MAJESTE of her words and manner.

There was evidently something more startling and compelling about her speech than that.

Slowly he came to his feet.

"By the fangs of Helios!" he muttered. "But you are REAL! A REAL woman! No dream! No vain and foolish figment of the mind!"

He took a step toward her, with hands outstretched.

"Come!" he whispered. "Come, woman! For countless ages have I dreamed that some day you would come. And now that you are here I can scarce believe the testimony of my eyes. Even now, knowing that you are real, I still half dread that you may be a lie".

Judith shrank back.

She thought the man mad.

Her hand stole to the jewelled hilt of her dagger.

The man saw the move, and stopped.

A cunning expression entered his eyes.

Then they became at once dreamy and penetrating as they fairly bored into the girl's brain.

Judith suddenly felt a change coming over her.

What the cause of it she did not guess; but somehow the man before her began to assume a new relationship within her heart.

No longer was he a strange and mysterious enemy, but an old and trusted friend.

Her hand slipped from the dagger's hilt.

Herod Antipas came closer.

He spoke gentle, friendly words, and she answered him in a voice that seemed hers and yet another's.

He was beside her now.

His hand was up her shoulder.

His eyes were down-bent toward hers.

She looked up into his face.

His gaze seemed to bore straight through her to some hidden spring of sentiment within her.

Her lips parted in sudden awe and wonder at the strange revealment of her inner self that was being laid bare before her consciousness.

She had known Herod Antipas for ever.

He was more than friend to her.

She moved a little closer to him.

In one swift flood of light she knew the truth.

She loved Herod Antipas, King of Peraea! She had always loved him.

The man, seeing the success of his strategy, could not restrain a faint smile of satisfaction.

Whether there was something in the expression of his face, or whether from Joshua of Salem in a far chamber of the palace came a more powerful suggestion, who may say? But something there was that suddenly dispelled the strange, hypnotic influence of the man.

As though a mask had been torn from her eyes, Judith suddenly saw Herod Antipas as she had formerly seen him, and, accustomed as she was to the strange manifestations of highly developed mentality which are common upon The Land, she quickly guessed enough of the truth to know that she was in grave danger.

Quickly she took a step backward, tearing herself from his grasp.

But the momentary contact had aroused within Herod Antipas all the long-buried passions of his loveless existence.

With a muffled cry he sprang upon her, throwing his arms about her and attempting to drag her lips to his.

"Woman!" he cried. "Lovely woman! Herod Antipas would make you queen of Peraea. Listen to me! Listen to the love of the last kings of The Land".

Judith struggled to free herself from his embrace.

"Stop, creature!" she cried. "Stop! I do not love you. Stop, or I shall scream for help!".

Herod Antipas laughed in her face. "'Scream for help'," he mimicked. "And who within the halls of Peraea is there who might come in answer to your call? Who would dare enter the presence of Herod Antipas, unsummoned?"

"There is one," she replied, "who would come, and, coming, dare to cut you down upon your own throne, if he thought that you had offered affront to Judith of Ephraim!".

"Who, Judas?" asked Herod Antipas.

"Not Judas, nor any other soft-skinned Peraean," she replied; "but a real man, a real soldier—Joshua of Salem!".

Again the man laughed at her.

"You forget the bowmen," he reminded her. "What could your Salemite soldier accomplish against my fearless legions?" Again he caught her roughly to him, dragging her towards his couch.

"If you will not be my queen," he said, "you shall be my slave".

"Neither!" cried the girl.

As she spoke the single word there was a quick move of her right hand; Herod Antipas, releasing her, staggered back, both hands pressed to his side.

At the same instant the room filled with bowmen, and then the King of Peraea sank senseless to the marble floor.

At the instant that he lost consciousness the bowmen were about to release their arrows into Judith's heart.

Involuntarily she gave a single cry for help, though she knew that not even Joshua of Salem could save her now.

Then she closed her eyes and waited for the end.

No slender shafts pierced her tender side.

She raised her lids to see what stayed the hand of her executioners.

The room was empty save for herself and the still form of the King of Peraea lying at her feet, a little pool of crimson staining the white marble of the floor beside him.

Herod Antipas was unconscious.

Judith was amazed.

Where were the bowmen? Why had they not loosed their shafts? What could it all mean? An instant before the room had been mysteriously filled with armed men, evidently called to protect their King; yet now, with the evidence of her deed plain before them, they had vanished as mysteriously as they had come, leaving her alone with the body of their ruler, into whose side she had slipped her long, keen blade.

The girl glanced apprehensively about, first for signs of the return of the bowmen, and then for some means of escape.

The wall behind the dais was pierced by two small doorways, hidden by heavy hangings.

Judith was running quickly towards one of these when she heard the clank of a soldier's metal at the end of the apartment behind

her.

Ah, if she had but an instant more of time she could have reached that screening arras and, perchance, have found some avenue of escape behind it; but now it was too late—she had been discovered! With a feeling that was akin to apathy she turned to meet her fate, and there, before her, running swiftly across the broad chamber to her side, was Joshua, his sikar gleaming in his hand.

For days she had doubted his intentions of the Salemite.

She had thought him a party to her abduction.

Since Fate had thrown them together she had scarce favoured him with more than the most perfunctory replies to his remarks, unless at such times as the weird and uncanny happenings at Peraea had surprised her out of her reserve.

She knew that Joshua of Salem would fight for her; but whether to save her for himself or another, she was in doubt.

He knew that she was betrothed to Joseph Caiaphas, Great Prince of Temple, but if he had been instrumental in her abduction, his motives could not be prompted by loyalty to his friend, or regard for her honour.

And yet, as she saw him coming across the marble floor of the audience chamber of Herod Antipas of Peraea, his fine eyes filled with apprehension for her safety, his splendid figure personifying all that is finest in the fighting men of The Land, she could not believe that any faintest trace of perfidy lurked beneath so glorious an exterior.

Never, she thought, in all her life had the sight of any man been so welcome to her.

It was with difficulty that she refrained from rushing forward to meet him.

She knew that he loved her; but she was betrothed to Joseph Caiaphas.

Not even might she trust herself to show too great gratitude to the Salemite, lest he misunderstand.

Joshua was by her side now.

His quick glance had taken in the scene within the room—the still figure of the King sprawled upon the floor—the girl hastening toward a shrouded exit.

"Did he harm you, Judith?" he asked.

She held up her crimsoned blade that he might see it.

"No," she said, "he did not harm me." A gentile smile lighted Joshua's face.

"Praised be our first ancestor!" he murmured.

"And now let us see if we may not make good our escape from this accursed city before the Peraeans discover that their King is no more." With the firm authority that sat so well upon him in whose veins flowed the blood of David Overgath and Sarah of Abraham of Salem, he grasped her hand and, turning back across the hall, strode toward the majestic doorway through which Judas had brought them into the presence of the King earlier in the day.

They had almost reached the threshold when a figure sprang into the apartment through another entrance.

It was Judas.

He, too, took in the scene within at a glance.

Joshua turned to face him, his sword ready in his hand, and his mighty body shielding the slender figure of the girl.

"Come, Judas of Peraea!" he cried.

"Let us face the issue at once, for only one of us may leave this chamber alive with Judith of Ephraim." Then, seeing that the man wore no sword, he exclaimed: "Bring on your bowmen, then, or come with us as my prisoner until we have safely passed the outer portals of thy ghostly city".

"You have killed Herod Antipas!" exclaimed Judas, ignoring the other's challenge. "You have killed Herod Antipas! I see his blood upon the floor—real blood—real death. Herod Antipas was, after all, as real as I. Yet he was an etherealist. He would not materialize his sustenance. Can it be that they are right? Well, we, too, are right. And all these ages we have been quarrelling—each saying that the other was wrong! However, he is dead now. Of that I am glad. Now shall Judas come into his own. Now shall Judas be King of Peraea!".

As he finished, Herod Antipas opened his eyes and then quickly sat up.

"Traitor! Assassin!" he screamed, and then: "Guard! Guard!".

Judas went sickly white.

He fell upon his belly, wriggling toward Herod Antipas.

"Oh, my King, my King!" he whimpered. "Judas had no hand in this. Judas, your faithful Judas, but just this instant entered the apartment to find you lying prone upon the floor and these two strangers about to leave. How it happened I know not. Believe me, most glorious King!"

"Cease, knave!" cried Herod Antipas. "I heard your words: 'However, he is dead now. Of that I am glad. Now shall Judas come into his own. Now shall Judas be King of Peraea.'" "At last, traitor, I have found you out. Your own words have condemned you as surely as the acts of these creatures of Ephraim have sealed their fates—unless—" He paused. "Unless the woman..."

But he got no further.

Joshua guessed what he would have said, and before the words could be uttered he had sprung forward and struck the man across the mouth with his open palm.

Herod Antipas frothed in rage and mortification.

"And should you again affront the Princess of Ephraim," warned the Salemite, "I shall forget that you wear no sword—not for ever may I control my itching sword hand." Herod Antipas shrank back toward the little doorways behind the dais.

He was trying to speak, but so hideously were the muscles of his face working that he could utter no word for several minutes.

At last he managed to articulate intelligibly.

"Die!" he shrieked. "Die!" and then he turned toward the exit at his back.

Judas leaped forward, screaming in terror. "Have pity, Herod Antipas! Have pity! Remember the long ages that I have served you faithfully. Remember all that I have done for Peraea. Do not condemn me now to the death hideous. Save me! Save me!"

But Herod Antipas only laughed a mocking laugh and continued to back toward the hangings that hid the little doorway.

Judas turned toward Joshua.

"Stop him!" he screamed. "Stop him! If you love life, let him not leave this room," and as he spoke he leaped in pursuit of his King.

Joshua followed Judas's example, but the "last of the kings of The Land" was too quick for them.

By the time they reached the arras behind which he had disappeared, they found a heavy stone door blocking their further

progress.

Judas sank to the floor in a spasm of terror.

"Come, man!" cried Joshua. "We are not dead yet. Let us hasten to the avenues and make an attempt to leave the city. We are still alive, and while we live we may yet endeavour to direct our own destinies. Of what avail, to sink spineless to the floor? Come, be a man!"

Judas shook his head.

"Did you not hear him call the guards?" he moaned. "Ah, if we could have but intercepted him! Then there might have been hope; but, alas, he was too quick for us".

"Well, well," exclaimed Joshua impatiently. "What if he did call the guards? There will be time enough to worry about that after they come—at present I see no indication that they have any idea of over-exerting themselves to obey their king's summons".

Judas shook his head mournfully.

"You do not understand," he said. "The guards have already come—and gone. They have done their work and we are lost. Look to the various exits".

Joshua and Judith turned their eyes in the direction of the several doorways which pierced the walls of the majestic chamber.

Each was tightly closed by huge stone doors.

"Well?" asked Joshua.

"We are to die the death," whispered Judas faintly.

Further than that he would not say.

He just sat upon the edge of the king's couch and waited.

Joshua moved to Judith's side, and, standing there with his sword unsheathed, he let his eyes roam ceaselessly about the majestic chamber, that no foe might spring upon them unseen.

For what seemed hours no sound broke the silence of their living tomb.

No sign gave their executioners of the time or manner of their death.

The suspense was terrible.

Even Joshua of Salem began to feel the terrible strain upon his nerves.

If he could but know how and whence the hand of death was to strike, he could meet it unafraid, but to suffer longer the hideous tension of this blighting ignorance of the plans of their assassins was telling upon him grievously.

Judith of Ephraim drew quite close to him.

She felt safer with the feel of his arm against hers, and with the contact of her the man took a new grip upon himself.

With his old-time smile he turned toward her.

"It would seem that they are trying to frighten us to death," he said, laughing; "and, shame be upon me that I should confess it, I think they were close to accomplishing their designs upon me".

She was about to make some reply when a fearful shriek broke from the lips of the Peraean.

"The end is coming!" he cried. "The end is coming! The floor! The floor! Oh, Helios, be merciful!" Judith and Joshua did not need to look at the floor to be aware of the strange movement that was taking place.

Slowly the marble flagging was sinking in all directions toward the centre.

At first the movement, being gradual, was scarce noticeable; but presently the angle of the floor became such that one might stand easily only by bending one knee considerably.

Judas was shrieking still, and clawing at the royal couch that had already commenced to slide toward the centre of the room, where both Judith and Joshua suddenly noted a small orifice which grew in diameter as the floor assumed more closely a funnel-like contour.

Now it became more and more difficult to cling to the dizzy inclination of the smooth and polished marble.

Joshua tried to support Judith, but himself commenced to slide and slip toward the ever-enlarging aperture.

Better to cling to the smooth stone he kicked off his sandals and with his bare feet braced himself against the sickening tilt, at the same time throwing his arms supportingly about the girl.

In her terror her own hands clasped about the man's neck.

Her cheek was close to his.

Death, unseen and of unknown form, seemed close upon them, and because unseen and unknowable infinitely more terrifying.

"Courage, my princess," he whispered.

She looked up into his face to see smiling lips above hers and eyes, reflecting no inner fear, drinking deeply of her own.

Then the floor sagged and tilted more swiftly.

There was a sudden slipping rush as they were precipitated toward the aperture.

Judas's screams rose weird and horrible in their ears, and then the three found themselves piled upon the royal couch of Herod Antipas, which had stuck within the aperture at the base of the marble funnel.

For a moment they breathed more freely, but presently they discovered that the aperture was continuing to enlarge.

The couch slipped downward.

Judas shrieked again.

There was a sickening sensation as they felt all let go beneath them, as they fell through darkness to an unknown death.

The Battle in the Plain

The distance from the bottom of the funnel to the floor of the chamber beneath it could not have been great, for all three of the victims of Herod Antipas's wrath alighted unscathed.

Joshua, still clasping Judith tightly to his breast, came to the ground catlike, upon his feet, breaking the shock for the girl.

Scarce had his feet touched the rough stone flagging of this new chamber than his sword flashed out ready for instant use.

But though the room was lighted, there was no sign of enemy about.

Joshua looked toward Judas.

The man was pasty white with fear.

"What is to be our fate?" asked the Salemite. "Tell me, man! Shake off your terror long enough to tell me, so I may be prepared to sell my life and that of the Princess of Ephraim as dearly as possible".

"Helios!" whispered Judas. "We are to be devoured by Helios!".

"Your deity?" asked Joshua.

The Peraean nodded his head.

Then he pointed toward a low doorway at one end of the chamber.

"From thence will he come upon us. Lay aside your puny sword, fool. It will enrage him the more and make our sufferings the worse".

Joshua smiled, gripping his sikar the more firmly.

Presently Judas gave a horrified moan, at the same time pointing toward the door.

"He has come," he whimpered.

Joshua and Judith looked in the direction the Peraean had indicated, expecting to see some strange and fearful creature in human form; but to their astonishment they saw the broad head and great-maned shoulders of a huge lion, the largest that either ever had seen.

Slowly and with dignity the mighty beast advanced into the room.

Judas had fallen to the floor, and was wriggling his body in the same servile manner that he had adopted toward Herod Antipas.

He spoke to the fierce beast as he would have spoken to a human being, pleading with it for mercy.

Joshua stepped between Judith and the lion, his sword ready to contest the beast's victory over them.

Judith turned toward Judas.

"Is this Helios, your god?" she asked.

Judas nodded affirmatively.

The girl smiled, and then, brushing past Joshua, she stepped swiftly toward the growling carnivore.

In low, firm tones she spoke to it as she had spoken to the lions of the Golden Cliffs and the scavengers before the walls of Peraea.

The beast ceased its growling.

With lowered head and catlike purr, it came slinking to the girl's feet.

Judith turned toward Joshua.

"It is but a lion," she said.

"We have nothing to fear from it." Joshua smiled. "I did not fear it," he replied, "for I, too, believed it to be only a lion, and I have my sikar".

Judas sat up and gazed at the spectacle before him—the slender girl weaving her fingers in the tawny mane of the huge creature that he had thought divine, while Helios rubbed his hideous snout against her side.

"So this is your god!" laughed Judith.

Judas looked bewildered.

He scarce knew whether he dare chance offending Helios or not, for so strong is the power of superstition that even though we know that we have been reverencing a sham, yet still we hesitate to admit the validity of our new-found convictions.

"Yes," he said, "this is Helios. For ages the enemies of Herod Antipas have been hurled to this pit to fill his maw, for Helios must be fed".

"Is there any way out of this chamber to the avenues of the city?" asked Joshua.

Judas shrugged.

"I do not know," he replied.

"Never have I been here before, nor ever have I cared to do so".

"Come," suggested Judith, "let us explore. There must be a way out".

Together the three approached the doorway through which Helios had entered the apartment that was to have witnessed their deaths.

Beyond was a low-roofed lair, with a small door at the far end.

This, to their delight, opened to the lifting of an ordinary latch, letting them into a circular arena, surrounded by tiers of seats.

"Here is where Helios is fed in public," explained Judas. "Had Herod Antipas dared it would have been here that our fates had been sealed; but he feared too much thy keen blade, Salemite man, and so he hurled us all downward to the pit. I did not know how closely connected were the two chambers. Now we may easily reach the avenues and the city gates. Only the bowmen may dispute the right of way, and, knowing their secret, I doubt that they have power to

harm us”.

Another door led to a flight of steps that rose from the arena level upward through the seats to an exit at the back of the hall.

Beyond this was a straight, broad corridor, running directly through the palace to the gardens at the side.

No one appeared to question them as they advanced, mighty Helios pacing by the girl’s side.

“Where are the people of the palace—the king’s retinue?” asked Joshua. “Even in the city streets as we came through I scarce saw sign of a human being, yet all about are evidences of a mighty population”.

Judas sighed.

“Poor Peraea,” he said. “It is indeed a city of ghosts. There are scarce a thousand of us left, who once were numbered in the millions. Our great city is peopled by the creatures of our own imaginings. For our own needs we do not take the trouble to materialize these peoples of our brain, yet they are apparent to us. Even now I see mighty throngs lining the avenue, hastening to and fro in the round of their duties. I see women and children laughing on the balconies—these we are forbidden to materialize; but yet I see them—they are here. But why not?” he mused.

“No longer need I fear Herod Antipas—he has done his worst, and failed. Why not indeed? “Stay, friends,” he continued. “Would you see Peraea in all her glory?”

Joshua and Judith nodded their assent, more out of courtesy than because they fully grasped the import of his mutterings.

Judas gazed at them penetratingly for an instant, then, with a wave of his hand, cried: “Look!” The sight that met them was awe-inspiring.

Where before there had been nothing but deserted pavements and dusty roads, yawning windows and tenantless doors, now swarmed a countless multitude of happy, laughing people.

“It is the past,” said Judas in a low voice. “They do not see us—they but live the old dead past of ancient Peraea—the dead and crumbled Peraea of antiquity, which stood upon the shore of Great Sea. See those fine, upstanding men swinging along the broad avenue? See the young girls and the women smile upon them? See the men greet them with love and respect? Those be seafarers coming up from their ships which lie at the piers at the city’s edge. Brave men, they—ah, but the glory of Peraea has faded! See their

weapons. They alone bore arms, for they crossed the five seas to strange places where dangers were. With their passing passed the martial spirit of the Peraeans, leaving, as the ages rolled by, a race of spineless cowards. We hated war, and so we trained not our youth in warlike ways. Thus followed our undoing, for when the seas dried and the gentile hordes encroached upon us we could do nothing but flee. But we remembered the seafaring bowmen of the days of our glory—it is the memory of these which we hurl upon our enemies”.

As Judas ceased speaking, the picture faded, and once more, the three took up their way toward the distant gates, along deserted avenues. Twice they sighted Peraeans of flesh and blood. At sight of them and the huge lion which they must have recognized as Helios, the citizens turned and fled.

They will carry word of our flight to Herod Antipas,” cried Judas, “and soon he will send his bowmen after us. Let us hope that our theory is correct, and that their shafts are powerless against minds cognizant of their unreality. Otherwise we are doomed. Explain, Salemite man, to the woman the truths that I have explained to you, that she may meet the arrows with a stronger counter-suggestion of immunity”.

Joshua did as Judas bid him; but they came to the majestic gates without sign of pursuit developing.

Here Judas set in motion the mechanism that rolled the huge, wheel-like gate aside, and a moment later the three, accompanied by the lion, stepped out into the plain before Peraea.

Scarce had they covered a hundred yards when the sound of many men shouting arose behind them.

As they turned they saw a company of bowmen debouching upon the plain from the gate through which they had just passed.

Upon the wall above the gate were a number of Peraeans, among whom Judas recognized Herod Antipas.

The King stood glaring at them, evidently concentrating all the forces of his trained mind upon them.

That he was making a supreme effort to render his imaginary creatures deadly was apparent.

Judas turned white, and commenced to tremble.

At the crucial moment he appeared to lose the courage of his conviction.

The huge lion turned back toward the advancing bowmen and growled.

Joshua placed himself between Judith and the enemy and, facing them, awaited the outcome of their charge.

Suddenly an inspiration came to Joshua.

"Hurl your own bowmen against Herod Antipas's!" he cried to Judas. "Let us see a materialized battle between two mentalities".

The suggestion seemed to hearten the Peraean, and in another moment the three stood behind solid ranks of bowmen who hurled taunts and menaces at the advancing company emerging from the walled city.

Judas was a new man the moment his battalions stood between him and Herod Antipas.

One could almost have sworn the man believed these creatures of his strange hypnotic power to be real flesh and blood.

With hoarse battle cries they charged the bowmen of Herod Antipas.

Barbed shafts flew thick and fast.

Men fell, and the ground was red with gore.

Joshua and Judith had difficulty in reconciling the reality of it all with their knowledge of the truth.

They saw cohort after cohort march from the gate in perfect step to reinforce the outnumbered company which Herod Antipas had first sent forth to arrest them.

They saw Judas's forces grow correspondingly until all about them rolled a sea of fighting, cursing soldiers, and the dead lay in heaps about the field.

Judas and Herod Antipas seemed to have forgotten all else beside the struggling bowmen that surged to and fro, filling the broad field between the forest and the city.

The wood loomed close behind Judith and Joshua.

The latter cast a glance toward Judas.

"Come!" he whispered to the girl. "Let them fight out their empty battle—neither, evidently, has power to harm the other. They are like two controversialists hurling words at one another. While they are engaged we may as well be devoting our energies to an

attempt to find the passage through the cliffs to the plain beyond”.

As he spoke, Judas, turning from the battle for an instant, caught his words.

He saw the girl move to accompany the Salemite.

A cunning look leaped to the Peraean’s eyes.

The thing that lay beyond that look had been deep in his heart since first he had laid eyes upon Judith of Ephraim.

He had not recognized it, however, until now that she seemed about to pass out of his existence.

He centred his mind upon the Salemite and the girl for an instant.

Joshua saw Judith of Ephraim step forward with outstretched hand.

He was surprised at this sudden softening toward him, and it was with a full heart that he let his fingers close upon hers, as together they turned away from forgotten Peraea, into the woods, and bent their steps toward the distant mountains.

As the Peraean had turned toward them, Judith had been surprised to hear Joshua suddenly voice a new plan.

“Remain here with Judas,” she had heard him say, “while I go to search for the passage through the cliffs”.

She had dropped back in surprise and disappointment, for she knew that there was no reason why she should not have accompanied him.

Certainly she should have been safer with him than left here alone with the Peraean.

And Judas watched the two and smiled his cunning smile.

When Joshua had disappeared within the wood, Judith seated herself apathetically upon the dusty ground to watch the seemingly interminable struggles of the bowmen.

The long afternoon dragged its weary way toward darkness, and still the imaginary legions charged and retreated.

The sun was about to set when Herod Antipas commenced to withdraw his troops slowly toward the city.

His plan for cessation of hostilities through the night evidently met with Judas’s entire approval, for he caused his forces to form themselves in orderly cohorts and march just within the edge of the

wood, where they were soon busily engaged in preparing their evening meal, and spreading down their sleeping furs and rugs for the night.

Judith could scarce repress a smile as she noted the scrupulous care with which Judas's imaginary men attended to each tiny detail of deportment as truly as if they had been real flesh and blood.

Sentries were posted between the camp and the city.

Officers clanked hither and thither issuing commands and seeing to it that they were properly carried out.

Judith turned toward Judas.

"Why is it," she asked, "that you observe such careful nicety in the regulation of your creatures when Herod Antipas knows quite as well as you that they are but figments of your brain? Why not permit them simply to dissolve into thin air until you again require their futile service?"

"You do not understand them," replied Judas. "While they exist they are real. I do but call them into being now, and in a way direct their general actions. But thereafter, until I dissolve them, they are as actual as you or I. Their officers command them, under my guidance. I am the general—that is all. And the psychological effect upon the enemy is far greater than were I to treat them merely as substanceless vagaries.

"Then, too," continued the Peraean, "there is always the hope, which with us is little short of belief, that some day these materializations will merge into the real—that they will remain, some of them, after we have dissolved their fellows, and that thus we shall have discovered a means for perpetuating our dying race. Some there are who claim already to have accomplished the thing. It is generally supposed that the etherealists have quite a few among their number who are permanent materializations. It is even said that such is Herod Antipas, but that cannot be, for he existed before we had discovered the full possibilities of suggestion. There are others among us who insist that none of us is real. That we could not have existed all these ages without material food and water had we ourselves been material. Although I am a realist, I rather incline toward this belief myself. It seems well and sensibly based upon the belief that our ancient forbears developed before their extinction such wondrous mentalities that some of the stronger minds among them lived after the death of their bodies—that we are but the deathless minds of individuals long dead. It would appear possible, and yet in so far as I am concerned I have all the attributes of corporeal existence. I eat, I sleep"—he paused, casting a meaning look upon the girl—"I love!"

Judith could not mistake the palpable meaning of his words and expression.

She turned away with a little shrug of disgust that was not lost upon the Peraean.

He came close to her and seized her arm.

"Why not Judas?" he cried. "Who more honourable than the second of the world's most ancient race? Your Salemite? He has gone. He has deserted you to your fate to save himself. Come, be Judas's!"

Judith of Ephraim rose to her full height, her lifted shoulder turned toward the man, her haughty chin upraised, a scornful twist to her lips.

"You lie!" she said quietly, "the Salemite knows less of disloyalty than he knows of fear, and of fear he is as ignorant as the unhatched young".

"Then where is he?" taunted the Peraean. "I tell you he has fled the valley. He has left you to your fate. But Judas will see that it is a pleasant one. To-morrow we shall return into Peraea at the head of my victorious army, and I shall be King and you shall be my consort. Come!" And he attempted to crush her to his breast.

The girl struggled to free herself, striking at the man with her metal armlets.

Yet still he drew her toward him, until both were suddenly startled by a hideous growl that rumbled from the dark wood close behind them.

Simon the Rock, the Bowman

As Joshua moved through the forest toward the distant cliffs with Judith's hand still tight pressed in his, he wondered a little at the girl's continued silence, yet the contact of her cool palm against his was so pleasant that he feared to break the spell of her new-found reliance in him by speaking.

Onward through the dim wood they passed until the shadows of the quick coming Landian night commenced to close down upon them.

Then it was that Joshua turned to speak to the girl at his side.

They must plan together for the future.

It was his idea to pass through the cliffs at once if they could locate the passage, and he was quite positive that they were now close to it; but he wanted her assent to the proposition.

As his eyes rested upon her, he was struck by her strangely ethereal appearance.

She seemed suddenly to have dissolved into the tenuous substance of a dream, and as he continued to gaze upon her, she faded slowly from his sight.

For an instant he was dumbfounded, and then the whole truth flashed suddenly upon him.

Judas had caused him to believe that Judith was accompanying him through the wood while, as a matter of fact, he had detained the girl for himself! Joshua was horrified.

He cursed himself for his stupidity, and yet he knew that the fiendish power which the Peraean had invoked to confuse him might have deceived any.

Scarce had he realized the truth than he had started to retrace his steps toward Peraea, but now he moved at a trot, the Holy Spirit that he had inherited from his father carrying him swiftly over the soft carpet of fallen leaves and rank grass.

The moon's brilliant light flooded the plain before the walled city of Peraea as Joshua broke from the wood opposite the majestic gate that had given the fugitives egress from the city earlier in the day.

At first he saw no indication that there was another than himself anywhere about.

The plain was deserted.

No myriad bowmen camped now beneath the overhanging verdure of the giant trees.

No gory heaps of tortured dead defaced the beauty of the scarlet sward.

All was silence. All was peace.

The Salemite, scarce pausing at the forest's verge, pushed on across the plain toward the city, when presently he descried a huddled form in the grass at his feet.

It was the body of a man, lying prone.

Joshua turned the figure over upon its back.

It was Judas, but torn and mangled almost beyond recognition.

The prince bent low to note if any spark of life remained, and as he did so the lids raised and dull, suffering eyes looked up into his.

"The Princess of Ephraim!" cried Joshua. "Where is she? Answer me, man, or I complete the work that another has so well begun".

"Helios," muttered Judas. "He sprang upon me and would have devoured me but for the girl. Then they went away together into the wood—the girl and the huge lion, her fingers twined in his tawny mane".

"Which way went they?" asked Joshua.

"There," replied Judas faintly, "toward the passage through the cliffs".

The Prince of Salem waited to hear no more, but springing to his feet, raced back again into the forest.

It was dawn when he reached the mouth of the dark tunnel that would lead him to the other world beyond this valley of ghostly memories and strange hypnotic influences and menaces.

Within the long, dark passages he met with no accident or obstacle, coming at last into the light of day beyond the mountains, and no great distance from the southern verge of the domains of the Arabim.

From the boundary of Arabim to the city of Gomorrha is a distance of some two hundred cubits, so that the Salemite had before him a substantial journey between him and Gomorrha.

He could at best but hazard a chance guess that toward Gomorrha Judith would take her flight.

There lay the nearest water, and there might be expected some day a rescuing party from her father; for Joshua knew The Most High well enough to know that he would leave no stone unturned until he had tracked down the truth as to his daughter's abduction, and learned all that there might be to learn of her whereabouts.

He realized that the trick which had laid suspicion upon him would greatly delay the discovery of the truth, but little did he guess to what vast proportions had the results of the villainy of Pilatus of Rome already grown.

Even as he emerged from the mouth of the passage to look across the foothills in the direction of Gomorrha, an Ephraim battle fleet was making its majestic way slowly toward Salem, while from Temple raced another mighty armada to join forces with its ally.

He did not know that in the face of the circumstantial evidence against him even his own people had commenced to entertain suspicions that he might have stolen the princess of Ephraim.

He did not know of the lengths to which the Romans had gone to disrupt the friendship and alliance which existed between the three mighty powers of the east—Salem, Ephraim and Temple.

How Roman emissaries had found employment in important posts in the foreign offices of the three mighty nations, and how, through these men, messages from one King to another were altered and garbled until the patience and pride of the three rulers and former friends could no longer endure the humiliations and insults contained in these falsified papers—not any of this he knew.

Nor did he know how even to the last David Overgath, Lord of The Land, had refused to permit the King of Salem to declare war against either Ephraim or Temple, because of his implicit belief in his son, and that eventually all would be satisfactorily explained.

And now two mighty fleets were moving upon Salem, while the Roman spies at the court of Joseph Ramath saw to it that those in the city remained in ignorance of their danger.

War had been declared by The Most High, but the messenger who had been dispatched with the proclamation had been a Roman who had seen to it that no word of warning reached the city of the approach of a hostile fleet.

For several days diplomatic relations had been severed between Salem and her two most powerful neighbors, and with the departure of the ministers had come a total cessation of communication between the disputants, as is usual upon The Land.

But of all this Joshua was ignorant.

All that interested him at present was the finding of Judith of Ephraim.

Her trail beside that of the huge lion had been well marked to the tunnel, and was once more visible leading southward into the foothills.

As he followed rapidly downward toward the Dead Sea bottom, where he knew he must lose the track in the resilient spiny vegetation, he was suddenly surprised to see a naked man approaching him from the north-east.

As the fellow drew closer, Joshua halted to await his coming.

He knew that the man was unarmed, and that he was apparently a Peraean, for his skin was white and his hair blond.

He approached the Salemite without sign of fear, and when quite close called out the cheery greeting of The Land.

"Who are you?" asked Joshua.

"I am Simon the Rock, commander of the bowmen," replied the other. "A strange thing has happened to me. For ages Herod Antipas has been bringing me into existence as he needed the services of the army of his mind. Of all the bowmen it has been Simon the Rock who has been oftenest materialized. For a long time Herod Antipas has been concentrating his mind upon my permanent materialization. It has been an obsession with him that some day this thing could be accomplished and the future of Peraea assured. He asserted that matter was nonexistent except in the imagination of man—that all was mental, and so he believed that by persisting in his suggestion he could eventually make of me a permanent suggestion in the minds of all creatures. Yesterday he succeeded, but at such a time! It must have come all unknown to him, as it came to me without my knowledge, as, with my horde of yelling bowmen, I pursued the fleeing Arabim back to their grey plains. As darkness settled and the time came for us to fade once more into thin air, I suddenly found myself alone upon the edge of the great plain which lies yonder at the foot of the low hills. My men were gone back to the nothingness from which they had sprung, but I remained—naked and unarmed. At first I could not understand, but at last came a realization of what had occurred. Herod Antipas's long suggestions had at last prevailed, and Simon the Rock had become a reality in the world of men; but my harness and my weapons had faded away with my fellows, leaving me naked and unarmed in a hostile country far from Peraea".

"You wish to return to Peraea?" asked Joshua.

"No!" replied Simon the Rock quickly. "I have no love for Herod Antipas. Being a creature of his mind, I know him too well. He is cruel and tyrannical—a master I have no desire to serve. Now that he has succeeded in accomplishing my permanent materialization, he will be unbearable, and he will go on until he has filled Peraea with his creatures. I wonder if he has succeeded as well with the maiden of Peraea".

"I thought there were no women there," said Joshua.

"In a hidden apartment in the palace of Herod Antipas," replied Simon the Rock, "the King has maintained the suggestion of a beautiful girl, hoping that some day she would become permanent. I have seen her there. She is wonderful! But for her sake I hope that Herod Antipas succeeds not so well with her as he has with me. Now, Salemite, I have told you of myself—what of you?"

Joshua liked the face and manner of the bowman.

There had been no sign of doubt or fear in his expression as he had

approached the heavily-armed Salemite, and he had spoken directly and to the point.

So the Prince of Salem told the bowman of Peraea who he was and what adventure had brought him to this far country.

"Good!" exclaimed the other, when he had done.

"Simon the Rock will accompany you. Together we shall find the Princess of Ephraim and with you Simon the Rock will return to the world of men—such a world as he knew in the long-gone past when the boats of wealthy Peraea fished the Great Sea, and the surf beating against the barrier of these parched and dreary lands yielded catches in their hundreds".

"What mean you?" asked Joshua. "Had you really a former actual existence?"

"Most assuredly," replied Simon the Rock.

"In my day I commanded the boats of Peraea—mightiest of all the boats that sailed the sea. "Wherever men lived upon The Land there was the name of Simon the Rock known and respected. Peaceful were the land races in those distant days—only the seafarers were soldiers; but now has the glory of the past faded, nor did I think until I met you that there remained upon The Land a single person of our own mould who lived and loved and fought as did the ancient fishers of my time. O, but it will seem good to see men once again—real men! Never had I much respect for the landsmen of my day. They remained in their walled cities wasting their time in play, depending for their protection entirely upon the fishers. And the poor creatures who remain, the Herod Antipas's and Judas's of Peraea, are even worse than their ancient forbears".

Joshua was a trifle sceptical as to the wisdom of permitting the stranger to attach himself to him.

There was always the chance that he was but the essence of some hypnotic treachery which Herod Antipas or Judas was attempting to exert upon the Salemite; and yet, so sincere had been the manner and the words of the bowman, so much the fighting man did he seem, but Joshua could not find it in his heart to doubt him.

The outcome of the matter was that he gave the naked commander leave to accompany him, and together they set out upon the trail of Judith and Helios.

Down to the lime grey Dead Sea bottom the trail led.

There it disappeared, as Joshua had known that it would; but where it entered the plain its direction had been toward Gomorrha and so

toward Gomorrha the two turned their faces.

It was a long and tedious journey, fraught with many dangers.

The bowman had not yet accustomed himself to relativity and could not travel at the pace set by Joshua, whose Nazirite muscles carried him with great rapidity over the irregular face of the wilderness.

Fifty cubits a day was a fair average for the bowman, but the son of David Overgath might easily have covered a hundred or more miles had he cared to abandon his new-found comrade.

All the way they were in constant danger of discovery by roving bands of Arabim, and especially was this true before they reached the boundary of Arabim.

Good fortune was with them, however, and although they sighted two detachments of the savage gentile men, they were not themselves seen.

And so they came, upon the morning of the third day, within sight of the sulphur marked domes of distant Gomorrha.

Throughout the journey Joshua had ever strained his eyes ahead in search of Judith and the huge lion; but not till now had he seen aught to give him hope.

This morning, far ahead, half-way between themselves and Gomorrha, the men saw two tiny figures moving toward the city.

For a moment they watched them intently.

Then Joshua, convinced, leaped forward at a rapid run, Simon the Rock following as swiftly as he could.

The Salemite shouted to attract the girl's attention, and presently he was rewarded by seeing her turn and stand looking toward him.

At her side the huge lion stood with up-pricked ears, watching the approaching man.

Not yet could Judith of Ephraim have recognized Joshua, though that it was he she must have been convinced, for she waited there for him without sign of fear.

Presently he saw her point toward the northwest, beyond him.

Without slackening his pace, he turned his eyes in the direction she indicated.

Racing silently over the thick vegetation, not half a mile behind, came a score of fierce gentile soldiers, charging him upon their

mighty camels.

To their right was Simon the Rock, naked and unarmed, yet running valiantly toward Joshua and shouting warning as though he, too, had but just discovered the silent, menacing company that moved so swiftly forward with couched spears and ready sikarim.

Joshua shouted to the Peraean, warning him back, for he knew that he could but uselessly sacrifice his life by placing himself, all unarmed, in the path of the cruel and relentless savages.

But Simon the Rock never hesitated.

With shouts of encouragement to his new friend, he hurried onward toward the Prince of Salem.

The Salemite man's heart leaped in response to this exhibition of courage and self-sacrifice.

He regretted now that he had not thought to give Simon the Rock one of his swords; but it was too late to attempt it, for should he wait for the Peraean to overtake him or return to meet him, the Arabim would reach Judith of Ephraim before he could do so.

Even as it was, it would be nip and tuck as to who came first to her side.

Again he turned his face in her direction, and now, from Gomorrha way, he saw a new force hastening toward them—two legions of well armed men—and even at the distance they still were from him he discerned the device of Rome upon their standards.

Now, indeed, seemed little hope for Judith of Ephraim.

With savage soldiers of the hordes of Arabim charging toward her from one direction, and no less implacable enemies, in the form of the creatures of Pilatus, Prince of Rome, bearing down upon her from another, while only a lion, a Salemite soldier, and an unarmed bowman were near to defend her, her plight was quite hopeless and her cause already lost ere ever it was contested.

As Judith saw Joshua approaching, she felt again that unaccountable sensation of entire relief from responsibility and fear that she had experienced upon a former occasion.

Nor could she account for it while her mind still tried to convince her heart that the Prince of Salem had been instrumental in her abduction from her father's court.

She only knew that she was glad when he was by her side, and that with him there all things seemed possible—even such impossible things as escape from her present predicament.

Now had he stopped, panting, before her.

A brave smile of encouragement lit his face.

"Courage, my princess," he whispered.

To the girl's memory flashed the occasion upon which he had used those same words—in the throne-room of Herod Antipas of Peraea as they had commenced to slip down the sinking marble floor toward an unknown fate.

Then she had not chidden him for the use of that familiar salutation, nor did she chide him now, though she was betrothed to another.

She wondered at herself—flushing at her own turpitude; for upon The Land it is a shameful thing for a woman to listen to those two words from another than her husband or her betrothed.

Joshua saw her flush of mortification, and in an instant regretted his words.

There was but a moment before the gentile soldiers would be upon them.

"Forgive me!" said the man in a low voice. "Let my great love be my excuse—that, and the belief that I have but a moment more of life," and with the words he turned to meet the foremost of the gentile soldiers.

The fellow was charging with couched spear, but Joshua leaped to one side, and as the great camel and its rider hurtled harmlessly past him he swung his sikar in a mighty cut that cleaved the gentile carcass in twain.

At the same moment Simon the Rock leaped with bare hands clawing at the leg of another of the riders; the balance of the horde raced in to close quarters, dismounting the better to wield their favourite sikarim; the Roman chariots touched the soft carpet of the dust-clad Dead Sea bottom, disgorging fifty fighting men from their decks; and into the swirling sea of cutting, slashing swords sprang Helios, the huge lion.

Gentile Men and White Ghosts

An Arabim scimitar smote a glancing blow across the forehead of Joshua.

He had a fleeting vision of soft arms about his neck, and warm lips close to his before he lost consciousness.

How long he lay there senseless he could not guess; but when he opened his eyes again he was alone, except for the bodies of the dead gentile men and Romans, and the carcass of a huge lion that lay half across his own.

Judith was gone, nor was the body of Simon the Rock among the dead.

Weak from loss of blood, Joshua made his way slowly toward Gomorrha, reaching its outskirts at dark.

He wanted water more than any other thing, and so he kept on up a broad avenue toward the majestic central central square, where he knew the precious fluid was to be found in a half-ruined building opposite the majestic palace of the ancient King, who once had ruled this mighty city.

Disheartened and discouraged by the strange sequence of events that seemed fore-ordained to thwart his every attempt to serve the Princess of Ephraim, he paid little or no attention to his surroundings, moving through the deserted city as though no terrible white ghosts lurked in the black shadows of the mystery-haunted edifices that flanked the broad avenues and the majestic central square.

But if Joshua was careless of his surroundings, not so other eyes that watched his entrance into the central square, and followed his slow footsteps toward the marble edifice that housed the tiny, half-choked spring whose water one might gain only by scratching a deep hole in the red sand that covered it.

And as the Salemite entered the small building a dozen grotesque figures emerged from the doorway of the palace to speed noiselessly across the central square toward him.

For half an hour Joshua remained in the building, digging for water and gaining the few much-needed drops which were the fruits of his labour.

Then he rose and slowly left the structure.

Scarce had he stepped beyond the threshold than twelve Arabim soldiers leaped upon him.

No time then to draw a sikar; but swift from his tunic flew his long, slim dagger, and as he went down beneath them more than a single gentile heart ceased beating at the bite of that keen point.

Then they overpowered him and took his weapons away; but only nine of the twelve soldiers who had crossed the central square returned with their prize.

They dragged their prisoner roughly to the palace pits, where in utter darkness they chained him with rusty links to the solid masonry of the wall.

"To-morrow Ibn Harith will speak to you," they said. "Now he sleeps. But great will be his pleasure when he learns who has wandered amongst us—and great will be the pleasure of Harith the Fourth when Ibn Harith drags before him the mad fool who dared prick the great King with his sword".

Then they left him to the silence and the darkness.

For what seemed hours Joshua squatted upon the stone floor of his prison, his back against the wall in which was sunk the heavy eye-bolt that secured the chain which held him.

Then, from out of the mysterious blackness before him, there came to his ears the sound of naked feet moving stealthily upon stone—approaching nearer and nearer to where he lay, unarmed and defenceless.

Minutes passed—minutes that seemed hours—during which time periods of sepulchral silence would be followed by a repetition of the uncanny scraping of naked feet slinking warily upon him.

At last he heard a sudden rush of unshod soles across the empty blackness, and at a little distance a scuffling sound, heavy breathing, and once what he thought the muttered imprecation of a man battling against great odds.

Then the clanging of a chain, and a noise as of the snapping back against stone of a broken link.

Again came silence.

But for a moment only.

Now he heard once more the soft feet approaching him.

He thought that he discerned wicked eyes gleaming fearfully at him through the darkness.

He knew that he could hear the heavy breathing of powerful lungs.

Then came the rush of many feet toward him, and the THINGS were upon him.

Hands terminating in manlike fingers clutched at his throat and arms and legs.

Hairy bodies strained and struggled against his own smooth hide as he battled in silence against these horrid foemen in the darkness of

the pits of ancient Gomorrha.

Joshua of Salem was helpless as a frail woman in the clutches of these unseen creatures of the pit's Stygian night.

Yet he battled on, striking futile blows against daemoniac beasts he could not see; feeling thick, squat throats beneath his fingers; the drool of saliva upon his cheek, and hot, foul breath in his nostrils.

Fangs, too, mighty fangs, he knew were close, and why they did not sink into his flesh he could not guess.

At last he became aware of the mighty surging of a number of his antagonists back and forth upon the great chain that held him, and presently came the same sound that he had heard at a little distance from him a short time before he had been attacked—his chain had parted and the broken end snapped back against the stone wall.

Now he was seized upon either side and dragged at a rapid pace through the dark corridors—toward what fate he could not even guess.

At first he had thought his foes might be of the tribe of Arabim, but their hairy bodies belied that belief.

Now he was at last quite sure of their identity, though why they had not killed and devoured him at once he could not imagine.

After half an hour or more of rapid racing through the underground passages, his captors suddenly emerged into the moonlight of a courtyard, far from the central square.

Immediately Joshua saw that he was in the power of a tribe of the terrible white ghosts of The Land.

All that had caused him doubt before as to the identity of his attackers was the hairiness of their breasts, for the white ghosts are entirely hairless except for a great shock bristling from their heads.

Now he saw the cause of that which had deceived him— across the chest of each of them were strips of hairy hide, usually of lion, in imitation of the harness of the gentile soldiers who so often camped at their deserted city.

Joshua had read of the existence of tribes of ghosts that seemed to be progressing slowly toward higher standards of intelligence.

Into the hands of such, he realized, he had fallen; but—what were their intentions toward him? As he glanced about the courtyard, he saw fully fifty of the hideous beasts, squatting on their haunches,

and at a little distance from him another human being, closely guarded.

As his eyes met those of his fellow-captive a smile lit the other's face, and: "Greetings, Salem man!" burst from his lips.

It was Simon the Rock, the bowman.

"Greetings!" cried Joshua, in response. "How came you here, and what befell the princess?"

"Salemite men like yourself descended upon us in mighty wagons that sped across the desert, even as an empty fishing boat of my day skimmed the sea," replied Simon the Rock. "They fought with the gentile men of Arabim. They slew Helios, god of Peraea. I thought they were your friends, and I was glad when finally those of them who survived the battle carried the girl of Ephraim to one of their craft and sped away with her to the mysteries of the far horizon. "Then the gentile men seized me, and carried me to a great, empty city, where they chained me to a wall in a black pit. Afterward came these and dragged me hither. And what of you, Salemite?"

Joshua related all that had befallen him, and as the two men talked the great ghosts squatted about them watching them intently.

"What are we to do now?" asked the bowman.

"Our case looks rather hopeless," replied Joshua ruefully.

"These creatures are born man-eaters.

Why they have not already devoured us I cannot imagine—there!" he whispered.

"See? The end is coming".

Simon the Rock looked in the direction Joshua indicated to see a huge ghost advancing with a mighty bludgeon.

"It is thus they like best to kill their prey," said Joshua.

"Must we die without a struggle?" asked Simon the Rock.

"Not I," replied Joshua, "though I know how futile our best defence must be against these mighty brutes! Oh, for a sikar!".

"Or a good bow," added Simon the Rock, "and a cohort of bowmen".

At the words Joshua half sprang to his feet, only to be dragged roughly down by his guard.

"Simon the Rock!" he cried. "Why cannot you do what Herod Antipas and Judas did? They had no bowmen other than those of their own creation. You must know the secret of their power. Call forth your own legion of angels, Simon the Rock!"

The Peraean looked at Joshua in wide-eyed astonishment as the full purport of the suggestion bore in upon his understanding.

"Why not?" he murmured.

The savage ghost bearing the mighty bludgeon was slinking toward Joshua.

The Salemite's fingers were working as he kept his eyes upon his executioner.

Simon the Rock bent his gaze penetratingly upon the ghosts.

The effort of his mind was evidenced in the sweat upon his contracted brows.

The creature that was to slay the Salemite man was almost within arm's reach of his prey when Joshua heard a hoarse shout from the opposite side of the courtyard.

In common with the squatting ghosts and the daemon with the club he turned in the direction of the sound, to see a company of sturdy bowmen rushing from the doorway of a near-by building.

With screams of rage the ghosts leaped to their feet to meet the charge.

A volley of arrows met them half-way, sending a dozen rolling lifeless to the ground.

Then the ghosts closed with their adversaries.

All their attention was occupied by the attackers—even the guard had deserted the prisoners to join in the battle.

"Come!" whispered Simon the Rock. "Now may we escape while their attention is diverted from us by my bowmen".

"And leave those brave fellows leaderless?" cried Joshua, whose loyal nature revolted at the merest suggestion of such a thing.

Simon the Rock laughed.

"You forget," he said, "that they are but thin air—figments of my brain. They will vanish, unscathed, when we have no further need for them. Praised be your first ancestor, Salemite, that you thought of this chance in time! It would never have occurred to me to

imagine that I might wield the same power that brought me into existence”.

“You are right,” said Joshua.

“Still, I hate to leave them, though there is nothing other to do,” and so the two turned from the courtyard, and making their way into one of the broad avenues, crept stealthily in the shadows of the building toward the once majestic central square upon which were the buildings occupied by the gentile soldiers when they visited the deserted city.

When they had come to the edge of the square Joshua halted.

“Wait here,” he whispered. “I go to fetch camels, since on foot we may never hope to escape the clutches of these gentile fiends”.

To reach the courtyard where the camels were kept it was necessary for Joshua to pass through one of the buildings which surrounded the square.

Which were occupied and which not he could not even guess, so he was compelled to take considerable chances to gain the enclosure in which he could hear the restless beasts squealing and quarrelling among themselves.

Chance carried him through a dark doorway into a large chamber in which lay a score or more gentile soldiers wrapped in their sleeping furs and rugs.

Scarce had Joshua passed through the short hallway that connected the door of the building and the majestic room beyond it than he became aware of the presence of something or some one in the hallway through which he had but just passed.

He heard a man yawn, and then, behind him, he saw the figure of a sentry rise from where the fellow had been dozing, and stretching himself resume his wakeful watchfulness.

Joshua realized that he must have passed within a foot of the soldier, doubtless rousing him from his slumber.

To retreat now would be impossible.

Yet to cross through that roomful of sleeping soldiers seemed almost equally beyond the pale of possibility.

Joshua shrugged his broad shoulders and chose the lesser evil.

Warily he entered the room.

At his right, against the wall, leaned several swords, bows and

spears—extra weapons which the soldiers had stacked here ready to their hands should there be a night alarm calling them suddenly from slumber.

Beside each sleeper lay his weapon—these were never far from their owners from childhood to death.

The sight of the swords made the young man's palm itch.

He stepped quickly to them, selecting two short swords— one for Simon the Rock, the other for himself; also some trappings for his naked comrade.

Then he started directly across the centre of the apartment among the sleeping Arabim.

Not a man of them moved until Joshua had completed more than half of the short, though dangerous, journey.

Then a youth directly in his path turned restlessly upon his sleeping furs and rugs.

The Salemite paused above him, one of the short swords in readiness should the soldier awaken.

For what seemed an eternity to the young prince the gentile man continued to move uneasily upon his couch, then, as though actuated by springs, he leaped to his feet and faced the Salemite.

Instantly Joshua struck, but not before a savage grunt escaped the other's lips.

In an instant the room was in turmoil.

Soldiers leaped to their feet, grasping their weapons as they rose, and shouting to one another for an explanation of the disturbance.

To Joshua all within the room was plainly visible in the dim light reflected from without, for the moon was at its zenith; but to the eyes of the newly-awakened gentile men objects as yet had not taken on familiar forms. They saw vaguely the figures of soldiers moving about their apartment.

Now one stumbled against the corpse of him whom Joshua had slain.

The fellow stooped and his hand came in contact with the cleft skull.

He saw about him the giant figures of other gentile men, and so he jumped to the only conclusion that was open to him.

"The Parthians!" he cried. "The Parthians are upon us! Rise, soldiers of Arabim, and drive home your swords within the hearts of the Arabim's ancient enemies!".

Instantly the gentile men began to fall upon one another with hacking swords.

Their savage lust of battle was aroused.

To fight, to kill, to die with cold bronze buried in their vitals! Ah, that to them was Nirvana.

Joshua was quick to guess their error and take advantage of it.

He knew that in the pleasure of killing they might fight on long after they had discovered their mistake, unless their attention was distracted by sight of the real cause of the altercation, and so he lost no time in continuing across the room to the doorway upon the opposite side, which opened into the inner court, where the savage camels were barking and fighting among themselves.

Once here he had no easy task before him.

To catch and mount one of these habitually irritable and intractable beasts was no child's play under the best of conditions; but now, when silence and time were such important considerations, it might well have seemed quite hopeless to a less resourceful and optimistic man than the son of the Lord.

From his father he had learned much concerning the traits of these mighty beasts, and from Aretas, also, when he had visited that mighty gentile King among his horde at Petra.

So now he centred upon the work in hand all that he had ever learned about them from others and from his own experience, for he, too, had ridden and handled them many times.

The temper of the camels of Arabim appeared even shorter than their vicious cousins of Ephraim and Salem, and for a time it seemed unlikely that he should escape a savage bite from a couple of old bulls that circled, grunting and displaying, about him; but at last he managed to get close enough to one of them to touch the beast.

With the feel of his hand upon the sleek hide the creature quieted, and in answer to the touch of the Salemite sank to its knees.

In a moment Joshua was upon its back, guiding it toward the great gate that leads from the courtyard through a large building at one end into an avenue beyond.

The other bull, still squealing and enraged, followed after his fellow.

There was no bridle upon either, for these strange creatures are controlled entirely by tugs on their fur and whispered commands—when they are controlled at all.

Even in the hands of the gentile men bridle reins would be hopelessly futile against the mad savagery and mastodonic strength of the camel, and so they are guided in that strange manner which the men of The Land have learned to use.

With difficulty Joshua urged the two beasts to the gate, where, leaning down, he raised the latch.

Then the camel that he was riding placed his mighty shoulder to the ancient cedarwood planking, pushed through, and a moment later the man and the two beasts were swinging silently down the avenue to the edge of the central square, where Simon the Rock hid under an upturned statue.

Here Joshua found considerable difficulty in subduing the second camel, and as Simon the Rock had never before ridden one of the beasts, it seemed a most hopeless job; but at last the bowman managed to scramble to the sleek back, and again the two beasts fled softly down the sand strewn avenues toward the open salt sea beyond the city.

All that night and the following day and the second night they rode toward the north.

No indication of pursuit developed, and at dawn of the second day Joshua saw in the distance the waving ribbon of great trees that marked one of the waterways of The Land.

Immediately they abandoned their camels and approached the cultivated district on foot.

Joshua also discarded his livery, or such of it as might serve to identify him as a Salemite, or of royal blood, for he did not know to what nation belonged this waterway, and upon The Land it is always well to assume every man and nation your enemy until you have learned the contrary.

It was mid-forenoon when the two at last entered one of the roads that cut through the cultivated districts at regular intervals, joining the arid wastes on either side with the majestic, white, central highway that follows through the centre from end to end of the far-reaching, threadlike farm lands.

The high wall surrounding the fields served as a protection against surprise by raiding gentile hordes, as well as keeping the savage lions and other carnivora from the domestic animals and the human beings upon the farms.

Joshua stopped before the first gate he came to, pounding for admission.

The young man who answered his summons greeted the two hospitably, though he looked with considerable wonder upon the white skin and fair hair of the bowman.

After he had listened for a moment to a partial narration of their escape from the Arabim, he invited them within, took them to his house and bade the servants there prepare food for them.

As they waited in the low-ceiled, pleasant livingroom of the farmhouse until the meal should be ready, Joshua drew his host into conversation that he might learn his nationality, and thus the nation under whose dominion lay the waterway where circumstance had placed him.

"I am Titus," said the young man, "son of Vespasian, of Rome, a noble in the retinue of Pilatus, Prince of Rome.

At present I am Marshal of the Road for this district." Joshua was very glad that he had not disclosed his identity, for though he had no idea of anything that had transpired since he had left Salem, or that Pilatus was at the bottom of all his misfortunes, he well knew that the Roman had no love for him, and that he could hope for no assistance within the dominions of Rome.

"And who are you?" asked Titus.

"By your appearance I take you for a fighting man, but I see no insignia upon your tunic.

Can it be that you are a knight?"

Now, these wandering soldiers of fortune are common upon The Land, where most men love to fight.

They sell their services wherever war exists, and in the occasional brief intervals when there is no organized warfare between the nations, they join one of the numerous expeditions that are constantly being dispatched against the gentile men in protection of the waterways that traverse the wilder portions of The Land.

When their service is over they discard the livery of the nation they have been serving until they find a new master.

In the intervals they wear no insignia, their war worn cuirasse and weapons being sufficient to attest their calling.

The suggestion was a happy one, and Joshua embraced the chance it afforded to account satisfactorily for himself.

There was, however, a single drawback.

In times of war such mercenaries as happened to be within the domain of a belligerent nation were compelled to don the insignia of that nation and fight with her soldiers.

As far as Joshua knew Rome was not at war with any other nation, but there was never any telling when one nation would be flying at the throat of a neighbour, even though the great and powerful alliance at the head of which was his father, David Overgath, had managed to maintain a long peace upon the greater portion of The Land.

A pleasant smile lighted Titus's face as Joshua admitted his vocation.

"It is well," exclaimed the young man, "that you chanced to come hither, for here you will find the means of obtaining service in short order.

My father, Vespasian, is even now with me, having come hither to recruit a force for the new war against Salem".

To Save Rome

Judith of Ephraim, battling for more than life against the lust of Judas, cast a quick glance over her shoulder toward the forest from which had rumbled the fierce growl.

Judas looked, too.

What they saw filled each with apprehension.

It was Helios, the lion-god, rushing wide-jawed upon them! Which had he chosen for his prey? Or was it to be both? They had not long to wait, for though the Peraean attempted to hold the girl between himself and the terrible fangs, the great beast found him at last.

Then, shrieking, he attempted to fly toward Peraea, after pushing Judith bodily into the face of the man-eater.

But his flight was of short duration.

In a moment Helios was upon him, rending his throat and chest with demoniacal fury.

The girl reached their side a moment later, but it was with difficulty that she tore the mad beast from its prey.

Still growling and casting hungry glances back upon Judas, the lion at last permitted itself to be led away into the wood.

With her giant protector by her side Judith set forth to find the passage through the cliffs, that she might attempt the seemingly impossible feat of reaching far-distant Ephraim across the more than thousand cubits of savage terrain.

She could not believe that Joshua had deliberately deserted her, and so she kept a constant watch for him; but as she bore too far to the north in her search for the tunnel she passed the Salemite as he was returning to Peraea in search of her.

Judith of Ephraim was having difficulty in determining the exact status of the Prince of Salem in her heart.

She could not admit even to herself that she loved him, and yet she had permitted him to apply to her that term of endearment and possession to which a maiden of The Land should turn deaf ears when voiced by other lips than those of her husband or fiancé—"my princess." Joseph Caiaphas, Great Prince of Temple, to whom she was affianced, commanded her respect and admiration.

Had it been that she had surrendered to her father's wishes because of pique that the handsome Salemite had not taken advantage of his visits to her father's court to push the suit for her hand that she had been quite sure he had contemplated since that distant day the two had sat together upon the carved seat within the magnificent Garden of the Kings that graced the inner courtyard of the palace of Sheba at Ophir? Did she love Joseph Caiaphas? Bravely she tried to believe that she did; but all the while her eyes wandered through the coming darkness for the figure of a clean-limbed fighting man—black-haired and grey-eyed.

Black was the hair of Joseph Caiaphas; but his eyes were brown.

It was almost dark when she found the entrance to the tunnel.

Safely she passed through to the hills beyond, and here, under the bright light of the moon, she halted to plan her future action.

Should she wait here in the hope that Joshua would return in search of her? Or should she continue her way north toward Ephraim? Where, first, would Joshua have gone after leaving the valley of Peraea? Her parched throat and dry tongue gave her the answer— toward Gomorrha and water.

Well, she, too, would go first to Gomorrha, where she might find more than the water she needed.

With Helios by her side she felt little fear, for he would protect her from all other savage beasts.

Even the terrible white ghosts would flee the mighty lion in terror.

She need fear only men, but she must take this and many other chances before she could hope to reach her father's court again.

When at last Joshua found her, only to be struck down by the sikar of a gentile man, Judith prayed that the same fate might overtake her.

The sight of the soldiers leaping from their chariots had, for a moment, filled her with renewed hope—hope that Joshua of Salem might be only stunned and that they would rescue him; but when she saw the Roman livery upon their tunics, and that they sought only to escape with her alone from the charging Arabim, she gave up.

Helios, too, was dead—dead across the body of the Salemite.

She was, indeed, alone now.

There was none to protect her.

The Roman soldiers dragged her to the deck of the nearest chariot.

All about them the gentile soldiers surged in an attempt to wrest her from the Romans.

At last those who had not died in the conflict gained the decks of the two craft.

Quickly the craft galloped toward the horizon.

Judith of Ephraim glanced about her.

A man stood near, smiling down into her face.

With a gasp of recognition she looked full into his eyes, and then with a little moan of terror and understanding she buried her face in her hands and sank to the polished sycamore-wood deck.

It was Pilatus, Prince of Rome, who bent above her.

Swift were the chariots of Pilatus of Rome, and great the need for reaching his father's court as quickly as possible, for the fleets of war of Salem and Ephraim and Temple were scattered far and wide above The Land.

Nor would it go well with Pilatus or Rome should any one of them discover Judith of Ephraim a prisoner upon his own vessel.

Great though the distance was, the chariots covered it without a stop.

Long before they had reached their destination Judith of Ephraim

had learned several things that cleared up the doubts that had assailed her mind for many days.

Scarce had they departed Gomorrha than she recognized one of the crew as a member of the crew of that other chariot that had borne her from her father's gardens to Gomorrha.

The presence of Pilatus upon the craft settled the whole question.

She had been stolen by emissaries of the Roman prince—Joshua of Salem had had nothing to do with it.

Nor did Pilatus deny the charge when she accused him.

He only smiled and pleaded his love for her.

"I would sooner mate with a white ghost!" she cried, when he would have urged his suit.

Pilatus glowered sullenly upon her.

"You shall marry me, Judith of Ephraim," he growled, "or, by your first ancestor, you shall have your preference—and marry a white ghost." The girl made no reply, nor could he draw her into conversation during the balance of the journey.

As a matter of fact Pilatus was a trifle awed by the proportions of the conflict which his abduction of the Ephraimian princess had induced, nor was he over comfortable with the weight of responsibility which the possession of such a prisoner entailed.

His one thought was to secure her for Rome, and there let the Universal Genius, the Emperor, assume the responsibility.

In the meantime he would be as careful as possible to do nothing to affront her, lest they all might be captured and he have to account for his treatment of the girl to one of the great kings whose interest centred in her.

And so at last they came to Rome, where Pilatus hid his prisoner in a secret room high in the east tower of his own palace.

He had sworn his men to silence in the matter of the identity of the girl, for until he had seen the Emperor, Neron, he dared not let any one know whom he had brought with him from the south.

But when he appeared in the majestic audience chamber before the cruel-lipped man who was his god, he found his courage oozing, and he dared not speak of the princess hid within his palace.

It occurred to him to test his father's sentiments upon the subject, and so he told a tale of capturing one who claimed to know the

whereabouts of Judith of Ephraim.

"And if you command it, Magnificence," he said, "I will go and capture her—fetching her here to Rome." Neron frowned and shook his head.

"You have done enough already to set Ephraim and Temple and Salem all three upon us at once should they learn your part in the theft of the Ephraim princess. That you succeeded in shifting the guilt upon the Prince of Salem was fortunate, and a masterly move of strategy; but were the girl to know the truth and ever return to her father's court, all Rome would have to pay the penalty, and to have her here a prisoner amongst us would be an admission of guilt from the consequences of which nothing could save us. It would cost me my throne, Pilatus, and that I have no mind to lose. If we had her here—" the elder man suddenly commenced to muse, repeating the phrase again and again.

"If we had her here, Pilatus," he exclaimed fiercely. "Ah, if we but had her here and none knew that she was here! Can you not guess, man? The guilt of Rome might be for ever buried with her bones," he concluded in a low, savage whisper.

Pilatus, Prince of Rome, shuddered.

Weak he was; yes, and wicked, too; but the suggestion that his Emperor's words implied turned him cold with horror.

Assassination runs riot in the Roman occupied cities; yet to murder a woman is a crime so unthinkable that even the most hardened of the paid assassins would shrink from you in horror should you suggest such a thing to him.

Neron was apparently oblivious to his governor's all-too-patent terror at his suggestion.

Presently he continued: "You say that you know where the girl lies hid, since she was stolen from your people at Gomorrha. Should she be found by any one of the three powers, her unsupported story would be sufficient to turn them all against us. There is but one way, Pilatus," cried the older man. "You must return at once to her hiding-place and fetch her hither in all secrecy. And, look you here! Return not to Rome without her, upon pain of death!"

Pilatus, Prince of Rome, well knew his ruler's temper.

He knew that in the tyrant's heart there pulsed no single throb of love for any creature.

He had tried to find a bride at the courts of several of his powerful neighbours, but they would have none of him and he took them by

force. Many sought self-destruction rather than surrender to the Emperor of Rome. And so Neron gave them their wishes. He ravaged them then destroyed them.

Slowly Pilatus withdrew from the presence of his Emperor.

With white face and shaking limbs he made his way to his own palace.

As he crossed the courtyard his glance chanced to wander to the majestic east tower looming high against the azure of the sky.

At sight of it beads of sweat broke out upon his brow.

Cybele! No other hand than his could be trusted to do the horrid thing.

With his own fingers he must crush the life from that perfect throat, or plunge the silent blade into the red, red heart.

Her heart! The heart that he had hoped would brim with love for him! But had it done so? He recalled the haughty contempt with which his protestations of love had been received.

He went cold and then hot to the memory of it.

His compunction cooled as the self-satisfaction of a near revenge crowded out the finer instincts that had for a moment asserted themselves—the good that he had inherited from the slave woman was once again submerged in the bad blood that had come down to him from his royal sire; as, in the end, it always was.

A cold smile supplanted the terror that had dilated his eyes.

He turned his steps toward the tower.

He would see her before he set out upon the journey that was to blind his father to the fact that the girl was already in Rome.

Quietly he passed in through the secret way, ascending a spiral runway to the apartment in which the Princess of Ephraim was immured.

As he entered the room he saw the girl leaning upon the sill of the east casement, gazing out across the roof tops of Rome toward distant Ephraim.

He hated Ephraim.

The thought of it filled him with rage.

Why not finish her now and have it done with? At the sound of his

step she turned quickly toward him.

Ah, how beautiful she was! His sudden determination faded beneath the glorious light of her wondrous beauty.

He would wait until he had returned from his little journey of deception—maybe there might be some other way then.

Some other hand to strike the blow—with that face, with those eyes before him, he could never do it.

Of that he was positive.

He had always gloried in the cruelty of his nature, but, Cybele! he was not that cruel.

No, another must be found—one whom he could trust.

He was still looking at her as she stood there before him meeting his gaze steadily and unafraid.

He felt the hot passion of his love mounting higher and higher.

Why not sue once more? If she would relent, all might yet be well.

Even if his father could not be persuaded, they could fly to Ephraim, laying all the blame of the knavery and intrigue that had thrown four mighty nations into war, upon the shoulders of Neron.

And who was there that would doubt the justice of the charge? "Judith," he said, "I come once again, for the last time, to lay my heart at your feet. Ephraim and Temple and Rome are battling with Salem because of you. Wed me, Judith, and all may yet be as it should be".

The girl shook her head.

"Wait!" he commanded, before she could speak. "Know the truth before you speak words that may seal, not only your own fate, but that of the thousands of soldiers who battle because of you. "Refuse to wed me willingly, and Rome would be laid waste should ever the truth be known to Ephraim and Temple and Salem. They would raze our cities, leaving not one stone upon another. They would scatter our peoples across the face of The Land from the frozen north to the frozen south, hunting them down and slaying them, until this great nation remained only as a hated memory in the minds of men. But while they are exterminating the Romans, countless thousands of their own soldiers must perish— and all because of the stubbornness of a single woman who would not wed the prince who loves her. Refuse, Judith of Ephraim, and there remains but a single alternative—no man must ever know your fate. Only a handful of loyal servitors besides my royal father and

myself know that you were stolen from the gardens of The Most High by Pilatus, Prince of Rome, or that to-day you be imprisoned in my palace. "Refuse, Judith of Ephraim, and you must die to save Rome— there is no other way. Neron, the King, has so decreed. I have spoken".

For a long moment the girl let her level gaze rest full upon the face of Pilatus of Rome.

Then she spoke, and though the words were few, the unimpassioned tone carried unfathomable depths of cold contempt.

"Better all that you have threatened," she said, "than you." Then she turned her back upon him and went to stand once more before the east window, gazing with sad eyes toward distant Ephraim.

Pilatus wheeled and left the room, returning after a short interval of time with food and drink.

"Here," he said, "is sustenance until I return again.

The next to enter this apartment will be your executioner.

Commend yourself to your ancestors, Judith of Ephraim, for within a few days you shall be with them." Then he was gone.

Half an hour later he was interviewing an officer high in the navy of Rome.

"Whither went Vespasian?" he asked.

"He is not at his palace." "South, to the great waterway that skirts Arabim," replied the other.

"His son, Titus, is Marshal of the Road there, and thither has Vespasian gone to enlist recruits among the workers on the farms." "Good," said Pilatus, and a half-hour more found him departing Rome in his swiftest chariot.

Brabbas the Bandit

The face of Joshua of Salem gave no token of the emotions that convulsed him inwardly as he heard from the lips of Titus that Salem was at war with Rome, and that fate had thrown him into the service of the enemy.

That he might utilize this opportunity to the good of Salem scarce sufficed to outweigh the chagrin he felt that he was not fighting in the open at the head of his own loyal troops.

To escape the Romans might prove an easy matter; and then again it might not.

Should they suspect his loyalty (and the loyalty of an impressed Bandit was always open to suspicion), he might not find an opportunity to elude their vigilance until after the termination of the war, which might occur within days, or, again, only after long and weary years of bloodshed.

He recalled that history recorded wars in which actual military operations had been carried on without cessation for a hundred years, and even now there were nations upon The Land with which Salem had made no peace since the reconsecration.

The outlook was not cheering.

He could not guess that within a few hours he would be blessing the fate that had thrown him into the service of Rome.

"Ah!" exclaimed Titus.

"Here is my father now.

Greetings! Vespasian.

Here is one you will be glad to meet— a doughty bandit—" He hesitated.

"Barabbas," interjected Joshua, seizing upon the first appellation that occurred to him.

As he spoke glanced quickly to the tall soldier who was entering the room.

Where before had he seen that lanky figure, that taciturn countenance, and the livid sword-cut from temple to mouth?

"Vespasian," repeated Joshua mentally. "Vespasian!" Where had he seen the man before? And then the noble spoke, and like a flash it all came back to Joshua—the forward servant upon the post house at Ephraim that time that he had been explaining the intricacies of his new compass to The Most High; the lone slave that had guarded his own hangar that night he had left upon his ill-fated journey for Ephraim—the journey that had brought him so mysteriously to far Gomorrha.

"Vespasian," he repeated aloud, "blessed be your ancestors for this meeting," nor did the Roman guess the wealth of meaning that lay beneath that hackneyed phrase with which The Landian acknowledges an introduction.

"And blessed be yours, Barabbas," replied Vespasian.

Now came the introduction of Simon the Rock to Vespasian, and as Joshua went through the little ceremony there came to him the

only explanation he might make to account for the white skin and blond hair of the bowman; for he feared that the truth might not be believed and thus suspicion be cast upon them both from the beginning.

"Simon the Rock," he explained, "is, as you can see, a heathen. We nickname him, Satan. He has wandered far from his bloodied Anatolian temples in search of adventure. I came upon him in the pits of Gomorrha; but though I have known him so short a time, I can vouch for his bravery and loyalty".

Since the destruction of the fabric of their false religion by David Overgath, the majority of the heathens had gladly accepted the new order of things, so that it was now no longer uncommon to see them mingling with the multitudes of Salemite men in any of the great festivals of the solar year, so Vespasian neither felt nor expressed any great astonishment.

All during the interview Joshua watched, catlike, for some indication that Vespasian recognized in the battered bandit the erstwhile magnificent Prince of Salem; but the sleepless nights, the long days of marching and fighting, the wounds and the dried blood had evidently sufficed to obliterate the last remnant of his likeness to his former self; and then Vespasian had seen him only twice in all his life.

Little wonder that he did not know him.

During the evening Vespasian announced that on the morrow they should depart north toward Syria, picking up recruits at various stations along the way.

In a great field behind the house chariots lay—fair-sized wagons that would accommodate many men, yet swift and well armed also.

Here Joshua slept, and Simon the Rock, too, with the other recruits, under guard of the regular Roman soldiers that manned the craft.

Toward midnight Vespasian returned to the commander's caravan from his son's house, repairing at once.

Joshua, with one of the Romans, was on watch.

It was with difficulty that the Salemite repressed a cold smile as the noble passed within a foot of him—within a foot of the long, slim, Salemitic blade that swung in his scabbard.

How easy it would have been! How easy to avenge the cowardly trick that had been played upon him—to avenge Salem and Ephraim and Judith! But his hand moved not toward the dagger's

hilt, for first Vespasian must serve a better purpose— he might know where Judith of Ephraim lay hidden now, if it had truly been Romans that had spirited her away during the fight before Gomorrha.

And then, too, there was the instigator of the entire foul plot.

HE must pay the penalty; and who better than Vespasian could lead the Prince of Salem to Pilatus of Rome? Faintly out of the night there came to Joshua's ears the clopping of a distant hoof.

He scanned the horizon.

Yes, there it was far in the north, dimly outlined against the dark void of space that stretched illimitably beyond it, the faint suggestion of a chariot passing, unlighted, through the night.

Joshua, knowing not whether the craft might be friend or foe of Rome, gave no sign that he had seen, but turned his eyes in another direction, leaving the matter to the Roman who stood watch with him.

Presently the fellow discovered the oncoming craft, and sounded the low alarm which brought the balance of the watch and an officer from their sleeping furs and rugs upon the deck near by.

The wagon lay without lights, and, still as she was upon the ground, must have been entirely invisible to the oncoming chariot, which all presently recognized as a small craft.

"It is the moon," whispered one of the Roman soldiers.

"I would know her in the blackness of the pits among ten thousand other craft".

"Right you are!" exclaimed Vespasian, who had come on deck.

And then he hailed: "Greetings, The moon!".

"Greetings!" came presently from afar after a brief silence.

Then: "Who speaks?"

"Vespasian of Rome".

"Good!" came the reply.

"Is it safe?"

"Yes. Wait, we will show our lights," and a moment later the smaller chariot pulled in close beside the Romans, and the lights of the latter were immediately extinguished once more.

Several figures could be seen slipping from the side of the visiting craft and advancing toward the Romans.

Ever suspicious, the Romans stood ready to receive the visitors as friends or foes as closer inspection might prove them.

Joshua stood quite near, ready to take sides with the new-comers should chance have it that they were Salemites playing a bold stroke of strategy upon this lone Roman ship.

He had led such sorties himself, and knew that such a contingency was quite possible.

But the face of the first man to cross the rail undeceived him with a shock that was not at all unpleasurable—it was the face of Pilatus, Prince of Rome.

Scarce noticing the others upon the decks of the chariots, Pilatus strode forward to accept Vespasian's greeting, then he summoned the noble below.

The soldiers and officers returned to their sleeping furs and rugs, and once more the deck was deserted except for the Roman soldier and Barabbas, the bandit, who stood guard.

The latter walked quietly to and fro.

The former leaned across the rail, wishing for the hour that would bring him relief.

He did not see his companion approach the lights of the caravan of Vespasian.

He did not see him stoop with ear close pressed to a tiny ventilator.

"May the white ghosts take us all," cried Pilatus ruefully, "if we are not in as ugly a snarl as you have ever seen! Neron thinks that we have her in hiding far away from Rome. He has bidden me bring her here." He paused.

No man should have heard from his lips the thing he was trying to tell.

It should have been for ever the secret of Neron and Pilatus, for upon it rested the safety of a throne.

With that knowledge any man could wrest from the King of Rome whatever he listed.

But Pilatus was afraid, and he wanted from this older man the suggestion of an alternative.

He went on.

"I am to kill her," he whispered, looking fearfully around. "Neron merely wishes to see the body that he may know his commands have been executed. I am now supposed to be gone to the spot where we have her hidden that I may fetch her in secrecy to Rome. None is to know that she has ever been in the keeping of a Roman. I do not need to tell you what would befall Rome should Ephraim and Salem and Temple ever learn the truth".

The jaws of the listener at the ventilator clicked together with a vicious snap.

Before he had but guessed at the identity of the subject of this conversation.

Now he knew.

And they were to kill her! His muscular fingers clenched until the nails bit into the palms.

"And you wish me to go with you while you fetch her to Rome," Vespasian was saying. "Where is she?"

Pilatus bent close and whispered into the other's ear.

The suggestion of a smile crossed the cruel features of Vespasian.

He realized the power that lay within his grasp.

He should be a king at least.

"And how may I help you, my Prince?" asked the older man suavely.

"I cannot kill her," said Pilatus.

"Cybele! I cannot do it! When she turns those eyes upon me my heart becomes water." Vespasian's eyes narrowed.

"And you wish—" He paused, the interrogation unfinished, yet complete.

Pilatus nodded.

"YOU do not love her," he said.

"But I love my life—though I am only a lesser noble," he concluded meaningly.

"You shall be a greater noble—a noble of the first rank!" exclaimed Pilatus.

"I would be a king," said Vespasian bluntly.

Pilatus hesitated.

"A king must die before there can be another king," he pleaded.

"Kings have died before," snapped Vespasian. "It would doubtless be not difficult for you to find a king you do not love, Pilatus—there are many who do not love you." Already Vespasian was commencing to presume upon his power over the young prince.

Pilatus was quick to note and appreciate the subtle change in his Captain.

A cunning scheme entered his weak and wicked brain.

"As you say, Vespasian!" he exclaimed.

"You shall be a king when the thing is done," and then, to himself: "Nor will it then be difficult for me to find a king I do not love".

"When shall we go to Syria?" asked the noble.

"At once," replied Pilatus.

"Let us get under way now— there is nothing to keep you here?"

"I had intended leaving on the morrow, picking up such recruits as the various Marshals of the Roads might have collected for me, as we returned to Syria".

"Let the recruits wait," said Pilatus. "Or, better still, come you to Syria with me, leaving the legionaries to follow and pick up the recruits".

"Yes," acquiesced Vespasian; "that is the better plan.

Come; I am ready," and he rose to accompany Pilatus to the latter's chariot.

The listener at the ventilator came to his feet slowly, like an old man.

His face was drawn and pinched and very white beneath the light copper of his skin.

She was to die! And he helpless to avert the tragedy.

He did not even know where she was imprisoned.

The two men were walking from the caravan to the fast chariot.

Barabbas, the bandit, crept closer, his sinuous fingers closing

tightly upon the hilt of his dagger.

Could he despatch them both before he was overpowered? He smiled.

He could slay an entire cohort of Israel's enemies in his present state of mind.

They were almost abreast of him now.

Pilatus was speaking.

"Bring a couple of your men along, Vespasian," he said.

"We are short-handed, so quickly did we depart." The mercenary's fingers dropped from the dagger's hilt.

His quick mind had grasped here a chance for succouring Judith of Ephraim.

He might be chosen as one to accompany the assassins, and once he had learned where the captive lay he could dispatch Pilatus and Vespasian as well as now.

To kill them before he knew where Judith was hid was simply to leave her to death at the hands of others; for sooner or later Neron would learn her whereabouts, and Neron, King of Rome, could not afford to let her live.

Barabbas put himself in the path of Vespasian that he might not be overlooked.

The noble aroused the men sleeping upon the deck, but always before him the strange Bandit whom he had recruited that same day found means for keeping himself to the fore.

Vespasian turned to his Captain, giving instruction for the bringing of the Legion to Damascus, and the gathering up of the recruits; then he signed to two soldiers who stood close behind the Captain.

"You two accompany us," he said, "and put yourselves at the disposal of her centurion." It was dark upon the deck of the chariot, so Vespasian had not a good look at the faces of the two he chose; but that was of no moment, for they were but common soldiers to assist with the ordinary duties upon a chariot, and to fight if need be.

One of the two was Simon the Rock, the bowman.

The other was not Joshua.

The Salemite was mad with disappointment.

He snatched his dagger from his harness; but already Pilatus had left the deck of the Augustus, and he knew that before he could overtake him, should he dispatch Vespasian, he would be killed by the Roman soldiers, who now were thick upon the deck.

With either one of the two alive Judith was in as great danger as though both lived—it must be both! As Vespasian descended to the ground Joshua boldly followed him, nor did any attempt to halt him, thinking, doubtless, that he was one of the party.

After him came Simon the Rock and the Roman soldier who had been detailed to duty.

Joshua walked close to the left side of the latter.

Now they came to the dense shadow under the side of the chariot.

It was very dark there, so that they had to grope for the step.

Simon the Rock preceded the Roman.

The latter reached upward for the grips, and as he did so bronze fingers closed upon his windpipe and a bronze blade pierced the very centre of his heart.

Barabbas, the bandit, was the last to clamber over the tail of the chariot, drawing up the step after him.

A moment later the chariot was moving rapidly, headed for the north.

At the rail Simon the Rock turned to speak to the soldier who had been detailed to accompany him.

His eyes went wide as they rested upon the face of the young man whom he had met beside the limestone cliffs that guard mysterious Peraea.

How had he come in place of the Roman? A quick sign, and Simon the Rock turned once more to find the centurion that he might report himself for duty.

Behind him followed the bandit.

Joshua blessed the chance that had caused Vespasian to choose the bowman of all others, for had it been another Roman there would have been questions to answer as to the whereabouts of the soldier who lay so quietly in the field beyond the residence of Titus, Politarch of the Southern Road; and Joshua had no answer to that question other than his sword point.

The journey to Damascus seemed interminable to the impatient

Joshua, though as a matter of fact it was quickly accomplished.

Some time before they reached their destination they met and spoke with another Roman war chariot.

From it they learned that a mighty battle was soon to be fought south-west of Damascus in Galilee.

The combined armies of Rome, and Temple had been intercepted in their advance toward Salem by the mighty Salemitic and Ephraim irregulars—the most formidable upon The Land, not alone in numbers and armament, but in the training and courage of its officers and soldiers, and the zealotry of feeling among them.

Not for many a day had there been the promise of such a battle.

Four kings were in direct command of their own fleets—Joseph Caiaphas of Temple, and Neron of Rome upon one side; while upon the other was Joseph Ramath, King of Salem and The Most High of Ephraim.

With the latter was David Overgath, Lord of The Land.

From the far north another force was moving south across the barrier cliffs—the new army of Michael, the Prince of Heaven, coming in response to the call from the Lord.

Upon the decks of the glorious chariots of war beardless shining faces looked over eagerly toward the south.

Magnificent were they in their splendid cloaks of Cherub and Seraph.

Courageous, formidable fighters from the scented cities of the kingdom of Heaven.

And from the distant south, from the sea of Reeds and the cliffs of gold, from the temples of the ancient heathens and the garden of Isis in the Delta, the thousands of the Wise of ephraim in the dispersal marched into the north at the call of the great man they all had learned to respect, and, respecting, love.

Leading this mighty band, second only to the Cananaeans of Salem, was Lazarus, The Messiah, his heart beating strong in anticipation of the coming moment when he should hurl his righteous crews and the weight of their consumming love upon the enemies of The Lord.

But would these allies reach the theatre of war in time to be of avail to Salem? Or, would Salem need them? Joshua, with the others in the chariot, heard the gossip and the rumours as they travelled north.

None knew of the two armies, the one from the south and the other from the north, that were coming to support the men of The Land, and all of Rome was convinced that nothing now could save the power of Salem from being wiped for ever from the earth of The Land.

Joshua, too, loyal son of Salem that he was, felt that even his beloved disciples might not be able to cope successfully with the combined forces of the mighty powers.

Now the chariot reached the post house beside the northern palace of Pilatus.

Hurriedly the prince and Vespasian disembarked.

Joshua touched Simon the Rock upon the arm.

"Come!" he whispered. "You are my only friend among a nation of enemies. Will you stand by me?"

"To the death," replied Simon the Rock.

The two approached the entrance.

A slave guarded it.

"Where are your passes?" he asked.

Joshua fumbled in his pocket pouch as though in search of them, at the same time entering the porch.

Simon the Rock followed him, closing the door.

The slave waited not patiently but with little interest.

Every second counted.

They must gain entry as soon as possible after Pilatus and Vespasian if they would know whither the two went.

Joshua turned suddenly upon the slave, hurling him to the opposite side of the porch.

"Bind and gag him, Simon the Rock!" he cried.

Then he grasped the handle of the inner door, as the bowman grappled with the slave.

Joshua could not assist his companion until he had made certain the coast within was clear.

The slave commenced to scream.

"Silence him!" cried Joshua.

A moment later a limp form crumpled to the floor of the porch.

"He is silenced," said Simon the Rock.

Opening the door, he noted that no one was about, grasped the still form of the slave and pushed it out upon the floor.

He sighted the receding figures of Pilatus and Vespasian, and he saw the two men disappear through one of the exits of the corridor beyond.

Joseph Caiaphas's Sacrifice

The morning of the second day of her incarceration in the east tower of the palace of Pilatus, Prince of Rome, found Judith of Ephraim waiting in dull apathy the coming of the assassin.

She had exhausted every possibility of escape, going over and over again the door and the windows, the floor and the walls.

The solid marble slabs she could not even scratch; the tough glass of the windows would have shattered to nothing less than a heavy sledge in the hands of a strong man.

The door and the lock were impregnable.

There was no escape.

And they had stripped her of her weapons so that she could not even anticipate the hour of her doom, thus robbing them of the satisfaction of witnessing her last moments.

When would they come? Would Pilatus do the deed with his own hands? She doubted that he had the courage for it.

At heart he was a coward—she had known it since first she had heard him brag as, a visitor at the court of her father, he had sought to impress her with his valour.

She could not help but compare him with another.

And with whom would an affianced bride compare an unsuccessful suitor? With her betrothed? And did Judith of Ephraim now measure Pilatus of Rome by the standards of Joseph Caiaphas, Great Prince of Temple? She was about to die; her thoughts were her own to do with as she pleased; yet furthest from them was Joseph Caiaphas.

Instead the figure of the tall and comely Salemite filled her mind, crowding therefrom all other images.

She dreamed of his noble face, the quiet dignity of his bearing, the smile that lit his eyes as he conversed with his friends, and the smile that touched his lips as he fought with his enemies— the fighting smile of his heavenly sire.

And Judith of Ephraim, true daughter of The Land, found her breath quickening and heart leaping to the memory of this other smile—the smile that she would never see again.

With a little half-sob the girl sank to the pile of furs and rugs that were tumbled in confusion beneath the east windows, burying her face in her arms.

In the corridor outside her prison-room two men had paused in heated argument.

"I tell you again, Pilatus," one was saying, "that I shall not do this thing unless you be present in the room." There was little of the respect due to authority in the tone of the speaker's voice.

The other, noting it, flushed.

"Do not impose too far upon my friendship for you, Vespasian," he snapped. "There is a limit to my patience".

"There is no question of imperial prerogative here," returned Vespasian. "You ask me to become an assassin in your stead, and against your king's strict injunctions. You are in no position, Pilatus, to dictate to me; but rather should you be glad to accede to my reasonable request that you be present, thus sharing the guilt with me. Why should I bear it all?"

The younger man scowled, but he advanced toward the locked door, and as it swung in upon its hinges, he entered the room beyond at the side of Vespasian.

Across the chamber the girl, hearing them enter, rose to her feet and faced them.

Under the soft copper of her skin she blanched just a trifle; but her eyes were brave and level, and the haughty tilt of her firm little chin was eloquent of loathing and contempt.

"You still prefer death?" asked Pilatus.

"To YOU, yes," replied the girl coldly.

The Prince of Rome turned to Vespasian and nodded.

The noble drew his short-sword and crossed the room toward Judith.

"Kneel!" he commanded.

"I prefer to die standing," she replied.

"As you will," said Vespasian, feeling the point of his blade with his left thumb.

"In the name of Neron, King of Rome!" he cried, and ran quickly toward her.

"In the name of Joshua, Prince of Salem!" came in low tones from the doorway.

Vespasian turned to see the Bandit he had recruited at his son's house leaping across the floor toward him.

The fellow brushed past Pilatus with an: "After him, you—dog!" Vespasian wheeled to meet the charging man.

"What means this treason?" he cried.

Pilatus, with bared sword, leaped to Vespasian's assistance.

The rebel's sword clashed against that of the noble, and in the first encounter Vespasian knew that he faced a master swordsman.

Before he half realized the stranger's purpose he found the man between himself and Judith of Ephraim, at bay facing the two swords of the Romans.

But he fought not like a man at bay.

Ever was he the aggressor, and though always he kept his flashing blade between the girl and her enemies, yet he managed to force them hither and thither about the room, calling to the girl to follow close behind him.

Until it was too late neither Vespasian nor Pilatus dreamed of that which lay in the mercenary's mind; but at last as the fellow stood with his back toward the door, both understood—they were penned in their own prison, and now the intruder could slay them at his will, for Judith of Ephraim was bolting the door at the man's direction, first taking the key from the opposite side, where Pilatus had left it when they had entered.

Pilatus, as was his way, finding that the enemy did not fall immediately before their swords, was leaving the brunt of the fighting to Vespasian, and now as his eyes appraised the Bandit carefully they presently went wider and wider, for slowly he had come to recognize the features of the Prince of Salem.

The Salemite was pressing close upon Vespasian.

The noble was bleeding from a dozen wounds.

Pilatus saw that he could not for long withstand the cunning craft of that terrible sword hand.

"Courage, Vespasian!" he whispered in the other's ear. "I have a plan. Hold him but a moment longer and all will be well," but the balance of the sentence, "with Pilatus, Prince of Rome," he did not voice aloud.

Vespasian, dreaming no treachery, nodded his head, and for a moment succeeded in holding Joshua at bay.

Then the Salemite and the girl saw the Roman prince run swiftly to the opposite side of the chamber, touch something in the wall that sent a mighty panel swinging inward, and disappear into the black vault beyond.

It was done so quickly that by no possibility could they have intercepted him.

Joshua, fearful lest Vespasian might similarly elude him, or Pilatus return immediately with reinforcements, sprang viciously in upon his antagonist, and a moment later the headless body of the Roman noble rolled upon the marble floor.

"Come!" cried Joshua. "There is no time to be lost.

Pilatus will be back in a moment with enough soldiers to overpower me." But Pilatus had no such plan in mind, for such a move would have meant the spreading of the fact among the palace gossips that the Ephraimian princess was a prisoner in the east tower.

Quickly would the word have come to his father, and no amount of falsifying could have explained away the facts that the king's investigation would have brought to light.

Instead Pilatus was racing madly through a long corridor to reach the door of the tower-room before Joshua and Judith left the apartment.

He had seen the girl remove the key and place it in her pocket-pouch, and he knew that a dagger point driven into the keyhole from the opposite side would imprison them in the secret chamber till eight dead worlds circled a cold, dead sun.

As fast as he could run Pilatus entered the main corridor that led to the tower chamber.

Would he reach the door in time? What if the Salemite should have already emerged and he should run upon him in the passageway? Pilatus felt a cold chill run up his spine.

He had no stomach to face that uncanny blade.

He was almost at the door.

Around the next turn of the corridor it stood.

No, they had not left the apartment.

Evidently Vespasian was still holding the Salemite! Pilatus could scarce repress a grin at the clever manner in which he had outwitted the noble and disposed of him at the same time.

And then he rounded the turn and came face to face with a fair-haired giant.

The fellow did not wait to ask the reason for his coming; instead he leaped upon him with a sikar, so that Pilatus had to parry a dozen vicious cuts before he could disengage himself and flee back down the runway.

A moment later Joshua and Judith entered the corridor from the secret chamber.

"Well, Simon the Rock?" asked the Salemite.

"It is fortunate that you left me here, Salemite man," said the bowman.

"I just now intercepted one who seemed over-anxious to reach this door—it was he whom they call Pilatus, Prince of Rome".

Joshua smiled.

"Where is he now?" he asked.

"He escaped my blade, and ran down this corridor," replied Simon the Rock.

"We must lose no time, then!" exclaimed Joshua.

"He will have the guard upon us yet!" Together the three hastened along the winding passages through which Joshua and Simon the Rock had tracked the Romans by the marks of the latter's sandals in the thin dust that overspread the floors of these seldom-used passage-ways.

They had come to the chambers at the entrance before they met with opposition.

Here they found a handful of guardsmen, and an officer, who, seeing that they were strangers, questioned their presence in the palace of Pilatus.

Once more Joshua and Simon the Rock had recourse to their blades, and before they had won their way to one of the doors the noise of the conflict must have aroused the entire palace, for they heard men shouting, and as they passed many turns on their quick passage to the post house they saw armed men running hither and thither in search of the cause of the commotion.

Beside the stage lay the chariot, with three soldiers on guard.

Again the Salemite and the Peraean fought shoulder to shoulder, but the battle was soon over, for the Prince of Salem alone would have been a match for any three that Rome could produce.

Scarce had the horses hauled on the harness ere a hundred or more fighting men leaped to view in the post house yard.

At their head was Pilatus of Rome, and as he saw the two he had thought so safely in his power slipping from his grasp, he danced with rage and chagrin, shaking his fists and hurling abuse and vile insults at them.

With her team pulling forward at a dizzy speed, the chariot shot off like a dart toward the horizon.

From a dozen points swift patrol chariots embarked after her, for the scene upon the post house beside the palace of the Prince of Rome had not gone unnoticed.

A dozen times arrows grazed the chariot's side, and as Joshua could not leave the reins, Judith of Ephraim herself hurled darts hhhhupon the enemy as she had been taught.

It was a noble race and a noble fight.

One against a score now, for other Roman craft had joined in the pursuit; but Pilatus, Prince of Rome, had built well when he built the chariot.

No one in the Imperial Army possessed a swifter chariot; no other craft so well armoured.

One by one the pursuers were distanced, and as the last of them fell out of range behind, Joshua dropped the chariot's speed to save the horses, as she tore through the thin air of the desert toward the south-east and Ephraim.

A stiff ten hour journey lay ahead for the swiftest of chariots, and between Rome and Ephraim might lie half the legions of the Syrian Legation, for in this direction was the reported seat of the great battle that even now might be in progress.

Could Joshua have known precisely where the great armies of the

contending nations lay, he would have hastened to them without delay, for in the return of Judith to her father lay the greatest hope of world peace.

Half the distance they covered without sighting a single soldier, and then Simon the Rock called Joshua's attention to a distant craft that rested upon the vegetation of the great Jordan valley, through which the chariot was speeding.

About the vessel many figures could be seen swarming. The Salemite saw that they were gentile soldiers, and that they were repeatedly charging down upon the crew of a stranded caravan.

The nationality of the latter he could not make out.

It was not necessary to change course to permit passing directly by the scene of battle, but Joshua veered his craft a few hundred feet that he might have a better and closer view.

If the caravan was of a friendly power, he could do no less than stop and direct his weapons upon her enemies, though with the precious freight he carried he scarcely felt justified in stopping, for he could offer but two swords in reinforcement—scarce enough to warrant jeopardizing the safety of the Princess of Ephraim.

As they came close by the stricken train, they could see that it would be but a question of minutes before the gentile horde would swarm across the defenders to glut the ferocity of their bloodlust upon them.

"It would be futile to stop," said Joshua to Judith. "The caravan may even be of Parthia—she shows no insignia. All that we may do is fire upon the hordesmen".

As he spoke he stepped to one of the bows and pointed its bolt toward the gentile soldiers at the caravan's side.

At the first shot from the chariot those upon the vessel below evidently discovered her for the first time.

Immediately a device fluttered from the defenders of the caravan.

Judith of Ephraim caught her breath quickly, glancing at Joshua.

The camel train was that of Joseph Caiaphas, Great Prince of Temple—the man to whom the Princess of Ephraim was betrothed! How easy for the Salemite to pass on, leaving his rival to the fate that could not for long be averted! No man could accuse him of cowardice or treachery, for Joseph Caiaphas was in arms against Salem, and, further, upon the chariot were not enough swords to delay even temporarily the outcome that already was a foregone

conclusion in the minds of the watchers.

What would Joshua, Prince of Salem, do? Scarce had the pennant broken to the faint breeze the bow of the chariot turned at a sharp angle toward the fray.

"Can you navigate her?" asked Joshua of Judith.

The girl nodded.

"I am going to try to take the survivors aboard," he continued. "It will need both Simon the Rock and myself to man the guns while the Sadducees take to the boarding tackle. Keep her bow depressed against the arrow fire. She can bear it better in her forward armour, and at the same time the propellers will be protected".

He hurried to the side as Judith took the control.

A moment later the boarding tackle dropped from the side of the chariot, and from a dozen points along either side stout, knotted leathern lines trailed downward.

At the same time a signal broke from her bow: "Prepare to board us".

A shout arose from the deck of the Sadducaian caravan.

Joshua, who by this time had returned from the side, smiled sadly.

He was about to snatch from the jaws of death the man who stood between himself and the woman he loved.

Take the port bow, Simon the Rock," he called to the bowman, and himself stepped to the bow upon the starboard side.

At any moment any of them might be pierced.

The men defending the Sadducaian caravan were battling with renewed hope.

In the rear stood Joseph Caiaphas, leaning back in prayer.

Just then a leading animal was hit. Judith hauled the reins in an effort to avert the imminent tragedy, but she succeeded only in lessening the shock of the chariot's impact as she struck a rock behind which the Sadducees were sheltering.

When the gentile men saw only two soldiers and a woman upon the deck of the chariot, a savage shout of triumph arose from their ranks, while an answering groan broke from the lips of the Levites.

The former now turned their attention upon the new arrival, for

they saw her defenders could soon be overcome.

As they charged a shout of warning came from Joseph Caiaphas.

"Who is it," he cried, "that offers his life in the service of the Lord's servant, Joseph Caiaphas? Never was wrought a nobler deed of self-sacrifice upon The Land!".

The gentile horde was scrambling over the side of the chariot as there broke from the bow the device of Joshua, Prince of Salem, in reply to the query of the Great Prince of Temple.

None upon the smaller chariot had opportunity to note the effect of this announcement upon the Levites, for their attention was claimed slowly now by that which was transpiring upon their own deck.

Simon the Rock stood behind the bow he had been operating, staring with wide eyes at the onrushing hideous gentile soldiers.

Joshua, seeing him thus, felt a pang of regret that, after all, this man that he had thought so valorous should prove, in the hour of need, as spineless as Judas or Herod Antipas.

"Simon the Rock—the man!" he shouted. "Grip yourself! Remember the days of the glory of the fishers of Peraea. Fight! Fight, man! Fight as never man fought before. All that remains to us is to die fighting".

Simon the Rock turned toward the Salemite, a gentile smile upon his lips.

"Why should we fight," he asked. "Against such fearful odds? There is another way—a better way. Look!".

He pointed toward the abandoned caravan.

The gentile men, a handful of them, had already reached the chariot's deck, as Joshua glanced in the direction the Peraean had indicated.

The sight that met his eyes set his heart to thumping in joy and relief Judith of Ephraim might yet be saved? For from below there poured a stream of giant bowmen, gentile and terrible.

Not the bowmen of Herod Antipas or Judas, but the bowmen of a commander of bowmen—savage fighting men, eager for the fray.

The gentile soldiers paused in momentary surprise and consternation, but only for a moment.

Then with horrid war-cries they leaped forward to meet these

strange, new foemen.

A volley of arrows stopped them in their tracks.

In a moment the only gentile soldiers upon the deck of the chariot were dead soldiers, and the bowmen of Simon the Rock were leaping over the vessel's sides to charge the hordesmen upon the ground.

Cohort after cohort tumbled from the bowels of the chariot to launch themselves upon the unfortunate gentile men.

Joseph Caiaphas and his Levites stood wide-eyed and speechless with amazement as they saw thousands of these strange, fierce soldiers emerge from the companion-way of the small craft that could not comfortably have accommodated more than six.

At last the gentile men could withstand the onslaught of overwhelming numbers no longer.

Slowly, at first, they fell back across the valley plain.

The bowmen pursued them.

Simon the Rock, standing upon the deck of the chariot, trembled with excitement.

At the top of his lungs he voiced the victorious cry of his forgotten day.

He roared encouragement and commands at his battling cohorts, and then, as they charged further and further from the chariot, he could no longer withstand the lure of battle.

Leaping over the ship's side to the ground, he joined the last of his bowmen as they raced off over the dead sea-bottom in pursuit of the fleeing gentile horde.

Beyond a low promontory of what once had been an island the gentile men were disappearing toward the west.

Close upon their heels raced the fleet bowmen of a bygone day, and forging steadily ahead among them Joshua and Judith could see the mighty figure of Simon the Rock, brandishing aloft the Arabim short-sword with which he was armed, as he urged his creatures after the retreating enemy.

As the last of them disappeared behind the promontory, Joshua turned toward Judith of Ephraim.

"They have taught me a lesson, these vanishing bowmen of Peraea," he said. "When they have served their purpose they

remain not to embarrass their masters by their presence. Joseph Caiaphas and his soldiers are here to protect you. My acts have constituted the proof of my honesty of purpose. Good-bye," and he knelt at her feet, raising the tassels of her dress to his lips.

The girl reached out a hand and laid it upon the long black hair of the head bent before her.

Softly she asked: "Where are you going, Joshua?"

"With Simon the Rock, the bowman," he replied.

"There will be fighting and forgetfulness." The girl put her hands before her eyes, as though to shut out some mighty temptation from her sight. "May my ancestors have mercy upon me," she cried, "if I say the thing I have no right to say; but I cannot see you cast your life away, Joshua, Prince of Salem! Stay, my chieftain. Stay—I love you!"

A cough behind them brought both about, and there they saw standing, not two paces from them Joseph Caiaphas, Great Prince of Temple.

For a long moment none spoke.

Then Joseph Caiaphas cleared his throat.

"I could not help hearing all that passed," he said. "I am no fool, to be blind to the love that lies between you. Nor am I blind to the lofty honour that has caused you, Joshua, to risk your life and hers to save mine, though you thought that that very act would rob you of the chance to keep her for your own. "Nor can I fail to appreciate the virtue that has kept your lips sealed against words of love for this Salemite, Judith, for I know that I have but just heard the first declaration of your passion for him. I do not condemn you. Rather should I have condemned you had you entered a loveless marriage with me. Take back your liberty, Judith of Ephraim," he cried, "and bestow it where your heart already lies enchained, and when the golden collars are clasped about your necks you will see that Joseph Caiaphas's is the first prayer to be raised in declaration of eternal friendship for the new Princess of Salem and her royal mate!"

A GLOSSARY OF NAMES AND TERMS

Arabim. A gentile horde.

Aretas. A gentile man, chieftain of the Nabataim.

Barabbas. Joshua's alias.

Belshazzar. A Holy Heathen of the Tenth Cycle.

David Overgath. Lord of The Land.

Ephraim. A former kingdom of The Land.

Gomorrha. An ancient dead city of The Land.

Great Sea. Mightiest of the five oceans.

Harith the Fourth. King of Arabim.

Heathens of Tammuz. A gentile religious cult.

Helios. The Peraean god; a huge lion.

Herod Antipas. King of Peraea.

Jordan. Valley of Heaven.

Joseph Caiaphas. Great Prince of Temple.

Joseph Ramath. Grandfather of Sarah of Abraham and King of Salem.

Joshua of Salem. Son of David Overgath and Sarah of Abraham.

Judith. Princess of Ephraim.

Judas. A Peraean.

Nabataea. Name of a gentile Landian horde from the city of Petra.

Neron. King of Rome.

Parthians. A gentile horde inimical to Arabim.

Peraea. The forgotten city.

Pilatus. Prince of Rome.

Rome. A conquering Empire in the limit of the west.

Salem. The city of the grandfather of Sarah of Abraham.

Simon. Joshua's Treasurer.

Sarah of Abraham. Princess of Salem.

Simon the Rock. Commander of Peraean bowmen.

Sodom. The Lost Sea of Jordan.

Styx. River of Death.

Sycomore. A Landian hardwood.

Taurus Mountains. Surrounding the Valley Jordan and the Lost Sea of Sodom.

Temple. A Landian kingdom in the eastern hemisphere.

Tenth Cycle. A sphere, or plane of eminence, among the Heathens of Tammuz.

The Most High. King of Ephraim.

Titus. Son of Vespasian the Roman noble.

Vespasian. A Roman noble.

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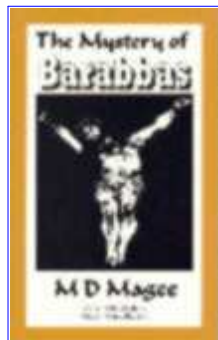
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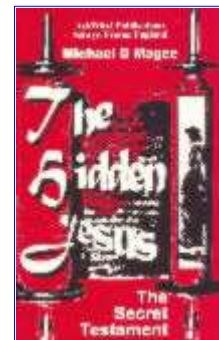
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