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THE MARTYRDOM OF ISSACHAR.

It was done, and from the mouths of the priests and priestesses rose a shrill cry of triumph, for had not their gods conquered? Had not this servant of the hated Lord of Israel been caught by the bait of the beauty of a priestess of Baal, denying and rejecting him? Was not evil once more triumphant, and must not they, his ministers, rejoice?

Again the shahid raised his wand and they were silent. "You have indeed done well and wisely," he said, addressing Aziel. "Now, take to wife the divine lady who has chosen you," and he pointed to Elissa, who lay fainting on the ground, "and be happy in her love, sitting in my seat, which heronforth is yours, as ruler of the priests of El and master of their mysteries, forgetting the follies of your former faith, and spitting on its altars. Hail to you, shahid, lord of the Baalites and chosen of El. Take him, you priestess, and with him the divine lady, his wife, bearing them in triumph to their high house."

"What of the Levite?" asked a voice. The shahid glanced at Issachar, who all this while had stood like one stricken to the heart, we stayed upon his face and a stare of horror in his eyes. "I saw," he said, "that I had forgotten you; but you also are on your trial, who dared against the law to hold secret meeting with the Lady Baalite. For this sin the punishment is death, nor would any woman name you husband to save you from it. Still, in this hour of joy we will be merciful; therefore do as your master did, raise incense on the altar, saying the appointed words, and go your way."

"Before I make my offering on yonder altar according to your command, I have some words to say, O priest of El, you are Issachar, quietly, but in a voice that chilled the blood of those who heard it. "First, I addressed myself to you, Aziel, and to you, woman," and he pointed to Elissa who lay fainting, and leasted treacherous upon her father. "My dream is fulfilled, Aziel, you have sinned, indeed, and must bear the appointed punishment of your sin, yet have a message of mercy spoken through my lips. Because you have sinned through love and pity, your offense is not unto death, yet shall you sorrow for it all your life. Upon the altar of holiness and bitterness of soul shall creep back to the feet of Him you have forsaken. Woman, your spirit is noble and your feet are set in the way of truth. I shall through you have this offense come, and therefore your love shall bear no fruit, nor shall the blessing of your beloved save you from doom. I have a daughter, set your eyes beyond it, for there is hope. Where is she who swore our lives away?" and he pointed to Elissa.

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ELISSA UNLOCKED THE GATE.

not speak, for you have been ill. Drink this and sleep. Aziel swallowed the draught, and was instantly overcome by slumber. When he awoke the sun was shining brightly through the window place, and its rays fell upon the shrewd, kindly face of Metem, who was seated on a stool watching him, his chin resting on his hand. "Tell me all that has befallen, friend," said Aziel, "since—" he and he shuddered. "Since you were married after a new fashion, and that blessed but most honorable fool, Issachar, went to his reward. Well, I will when you have eaten," answered Metem, as he gave him food. "First," he said presently, "you have lain here for three days, raving in a fever, nursed by myself and visited by your wife, the Lady Baalite, whenever she could escape from her religious duties. "Elissa! Has she been here?" "I have seen her here," said Aziel, "and what is more, she will be back soon. Secondly, Ithobal has been as good as his word, and invests the city with a vast army, cutting off all supplies and possibilities of escape. It is believed that he will try an assault within the next week, which many think will be successful. Thirdly, to avoid that risk it is rumored that the priests and



priestesses, at the instance of the council, are discussing the wisdom of giving over to him the person of the daughter of Sakon, on the plea that her sister as the Lady Baalite was brought about by bribery, and is therefore void, as she was not chosen by the unaided will of the goddess. "But," said Aziel, "she is my wife, according to their religious law. How, then, can she be given in marriage to another?" "Nay, prince, if she is not the Lady Baalite, your husbandship falls to the ground with the rest, for you are not the shahid, an office which perchance you can dispense with. But all this priestly juggling means little, the truth being that the city in its terror will throw her as a sop to Ithobal, hoping thereby to appease his rage. The Lady Elissa knows her danger—but here she comes to speak for herself. His umbrella, and that they stood at the chamber were drawn, and through them came Elissa, clad in her splendid robes of office, and wearing upon her brow the golden crescent of the moon. "How goes it with the prince, Metem?" she asked in her soft voice, glancing anxiously toward the couch, which was half hidden in the shadow of the wall. "Look for yourself, lady," answered the Phoenician, bowing before her. "Elissa, Elissa," cried Aziel, raising himself and opening his arms. She saw and heard, then with a low cry, and as swiftly as a swallow swooping to its nest, she ran to him and was wrapped in his embrace, and thus they stood, murmuring words of love between their kisses. "Is it your pleasure that I should leave you?" asked Metem, presently. "No! Then, prince, I will have you remember that you are still weak and should not give way to violent emotions."

"Listen, Aziel," said Elissa, untwining his arm about her neck. "There is no time for tenderness; moreover, you should show none to one who is still the high priestess of Baalite, although in truth she worships her no longer. Remember that you indeed to offer incense upon yonder altar that my life might be saved, but when I prayed you not, I spoke from the heart, and I cannot escape from death, neither can you escape remorse, and as I think that what of all desired, the desire for the dead. "Can we not still flee the city?" asked Aziel. "Metem will tell you that it is impossible; day and night I am watched and guarded; also Ithobal holds Zimbo so firmly in his net that no narrow could fly out of it and he not know. And there is worse to tell: Beloved, they purpose to give me up as a peace offering to Ithobal. Yes, even my father is in the plot, for he thinks it his duty to sacrifice his daughter to save the town. If, indeed, it will avail to save it. "But you are the Baalite and Ithobal's ally. In such a time the goddess herself would

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CHAPTER XV. ELISSA TAKES SANCTUARY.

Two or three days before a procession of priestesses might be seen advancing slowly toward the holy tomb along the narrow road of rock cut in the mountain face. Behind her, the procession, wearing a black veil over her braided robes, walked Elissa with downcast eyes and hair unbound in token of grief, while behind her came Metem, the Phoenician, who carried a funeral dirge and from time to time broke into a wail of simulated grief. Nor, indeed, was there any hollow as might be thought since from the mountain path he could see the outposts of the army of Ithobal upon the plain, and note with a shudder of foreboding the ranks of his countless thousands shimmering in the gorges of the opposing heights. It was not for the dead Baalite that they mourned that day, but for the fate that overshadowed them and their city of gold.

"May the curse of all the gods fall on her!" muttered one of the priestesses as she toiled for many days a procession of priestesses might be seen advancing slowly toward the holy tomb along the narrow road of rock cut in the mountain face. Behind her, the procession, wearing a black veil over her braided robes, walked Elissa with downcast eyes and hair unbound in token of grief, while behind her came Metem, the Phoenician, who carried a funeral dirge and from time to time broke into a wail of simulated grief. Nor, indeed, was there any hollow as might be thought since from the mountain path he could see the outposts of the army of Ithobal upon the plain, and note with a shudder of foreboding the ranks of his countless thousands shimmering in the gorges of the opposing heights. It was not for the dead Baalite that they mourned that day, but for the fate that overshadowed them and their city of gold. "Will he be satisfied with that," asked the woman, "and leave the city in peace?" "It seems so," answered Elissa, with a laugh, "though it is strange that a king should exchange ephib and glory for a round dagger, as my love loves his rival. Well, let us thank the gods that make man foolish and give us women wit to profit by their folly. If he wants her, let him bring her chain, for few will be the poorer by her loss." "You at least will be richer," said the other woman, "by the crown of Baalite. Well, I do not grudge it you, and for the daughter of Sakon, she shall be Ithobal's if I take her to him limb by limb."

"Nay, friend, that is not the bargain. Remember, she must be delivered to me without hurt or blemish, otherwise we shall so sacrifice in vain. Be silent, here is the cave." Having reached the platform in front of the tomb, the procession of mourners ranged themselves about it in a semi-circle, with their backs to the edge of the cliff that rose sheer for sixty feet or more from the plain beneath, across which, but at a little distance from its foot, ran the road followed by the caravan of merchants in their journeys to and from the coast. Then a hymn having been sung, invoking the blessings of the gods on the dead priestess, Elissa, as the Lady Baalite, unlocked the gates of bronze with a golden key that hung at her girdle, and the bearers of the bowls of offerings pushed them into the mouth of the tomb whose threshold they were not allowed to pass. Next, with bowed head and hands crossed upon her breast, Elissa entered the tomb, and locking the bronze gates behind her, took up two of the bowls and vanished with them into its gloomy depths. "Why did she lock the gate?" asked a priestess of Metem. "It is not customary." "Doubtless because it was her pleasure

ing through the market place, and that peering into the eyes of her wrath, as in a mirror, became a great flame, wrapping the temple walls, and by the light of his own tribes swell suddenly from 50,000 throats and the measured tramp of their innumerable feet, as the king broke, and he saw them advancing in three armies toward the three points chosen for attack, the largest of the armies, headed by Ithobal, the king, leading its march upon the wall gate of which he was in command. It was a wondrous and a fearful sight, that of these hordes of plumed savages, their spears flashing in the sun, and their fierce faces alight with hereditary hate and the lust of slaughter. Never had he seen such a spectacle, nor could he look upon it without dreading the issue of the war for if they were savages, these foes were brave as the lions of their own plains and sworn by the head of their king to drag down the sheltering walls of Zimbo with their naked hands or die to the last man. Turning his head with a sigh of doubt, Aziel found Metem standing at his side. "Have you seen her?" he asked eagerly. "No, prince. How could I see her if she is in a tomb like a fox in his burrow? But I have heard her." "What did she say? Quick, man, tell me." "But little, prince, for she was long watched and I scarce got a word here long. She sent you her greetings, and would have you know that her heart will be with you in the day of battle, and that she prays for you of heaven for your safety. Also, she said that she is well, though it is long since she has seen the grave among the bodies of the dead of Zimbo, whose spirits, as she says, haunt her dreams, reviving her because she deprecates their sepulchre and has renounced their god."

"Lestom, indeed," said Aziel, with a shudder. "But tell me, Metem, had she no other word?" "Three words are strong, and we shall beat them," answered Aziel. "Save, prince, for none were not all without strong hearts to guard them, and those of the womanish citizens of Zimbo who tell you that the Phoenician of Issachar the Levite, made yonder in the temple on the day of sacrifice, and in the hour of his death, have taken hold of the people, and by eating out their valor fulfill themselves. Men hint at them, the women whisper them in closets, and the very children cry them in the streets. More—one man last night pointed to the skies and shrieked that in them he saw that fiery word of doom of which the prophet spoke, hanging point toward us, and that the Phoenician of Issachar vowed they saw it, too. Another tells how he met the very spirit of Issachar stalk-

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my God, to visit the sin of it on my head and to leave your unharned. Aziel! Aziel! woman or spirit, while I have life and memory, I am yours, and you are mine; I shall have you, and if we may meet again in this or in any other world, clean and faithful I shall come to you again. Glad I had that have lived because in my life I have known you and you have sworn to love me. Glad shall I be to live again if again I may know you and hear that oath—if not, it will be a hell. You grow weak and I must be gone. Farewell, and living or dead, forget me not; swear that you will never forget me."

"I swear it," he answered faintly, "and God grant that I may die for you, not you for me." "I saw it," answered Aziel, "and whistled, and bending, she kissed him on the brow, for he was too weak to lift his lips to hers. Then she was gone."

"I have patience," answered Metem at her side; "you know the plan—tonight that proud girl's father shall sleep in the camp of Ithobal." "Will he be satisfied with that," asked the woman, "and leave the city in peace?" "It seems so," answered Elissa, with a laugh, "though it is strange that a king should exchange ephib and glory for a round dagger, as my love loves his rival. Well, let us thank the gods that make man foolish and give us women wit to profit by their folly. If he wants her, let him bring her chain, for few will be the poorer by her loss." "You at least will be richer," said the other woman, "by the crown of Baalite. Well, I do not grudge it you, and for the daughter of Sakon, she shall be Ithobal's if I take her to him limb by limb."

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