

The God of Ibreez

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I.

El-gebel, surnamed the Terrible, rode northwards on his sacred stallion. The way was steep; before him towered the mighty range of the Mountains of the Bull, their snows stained red by sunset. The King laughed and turned in his saddle. He looked over the forests of pine (whose spears seemed to him, in his poetic mood, like those of his own cavalry) to where in the dying light the flames of that city which is now called Tarsus began to shine lurid through the dust of that sultry air of the great plain. It was the climax of his life; never in all history had any army passed through those tremendous gorges, jagged wounds torn by the swords of warring gods his ancestors, where the way wound among prodigious precipices of red rocks and gray, often so narrow that two men could not ride abreast, often so steep and rugged that even the sure step of mountain-bred horses sometimes faltered.

He felt himself at last worthy even of those great gods; his heart beat high to feel that they could look on him with pride. Like the great golden eagle, he had swooped on Tarsus that never dreamed of danger from the north. In one fierce battle he had overwhelmed the unready levies of the city; the timid and effeminate burgesses had hastened to surrender the gates, but the grim warrior had put all to fire and sword. His men were laden with spoils great and goodly, gold and silver and copper, tapestries and silks, a thousand things precious beyond all price, since he had never even dreamed beauty such as theirs. He had not only

conquered an enemy; he had discovered a new world. More than that, he had the jewel of all, the wonder of his eyes, a thing the thought of which made his heart ache within him, so marvelous was it beyond all the imaginations of his soul. And even as his thought turned thither, the sacred stallion ceased to climb. He had come to the crest of the first range; before him lay a stretch of meadow land, spacious and gracious. He called to his equerry to give the order to pitch camp.

The equipment of the raiding hill men was of the simplest order. For all shelter the men stripped blankets of goats' hair, which during the day they used as saddles, from their chargers, and fastened them to spears fixed in the ground. For meat they had dried goats' flesh and flat cakes of unleavened meal. Each man was thus entirely independent of nature for three weeks, or, with economy, a month, providing only that he could find water at intervals of three or four days. For the goat was still the saviour of the tribe, his skin not only furnishing an excellent receptacle for water, but conferring upon it the blessing of a flavor all its own.

The King's own equipment was hardly more elaborate. His tent was larger than those of his men, and made of camels' hair, dyed red and blue in stripes. Instead of goats' flesh he had dried venison, and his cakes were specially baked for him daily; also they had much more salt in them than any common soldier could afford.

El-gebel had not earned the title of The Terrible without deserving it. His accession to power had not been devoid of incident as that of most modern monarchs. His line combined the sacerdotal with the kingly function; the person in office was expected not only to govern — in fact, government was looked upon as a sort of necessary evil — but to insure the daily rising of the sun and the periodical supply of rain. He was expected to keep the goats from disease and even from wandering; and the apple and walnut and mulberry

harvests, as well as those of maize and rice, were as dependent on his energy and activity as the success of a state ball today is upon the urbanity of the monarch. Consequently when the king fell ill or became old, his self-forgetful care for the welfare of his people would induce him to call attention to the fact of his incapacity, and to suggest that he should be slain so that his spirit might pass into the vigorous body of his heir. Sometimes, the failing body would infect even the mind, so that the King did not appreciate the urgency of the matter. In such a case kind friends would remind him. Now El-gebel, who was the eldest surviving son of his royal father, the first born having been piously sacrificed according to custom, discovered that a younger brother was supplanting him in his father's affections. This, to El-gebel, was a sure sign of the King's infirmity. He put the point before several powerful chiefs in whose wisdom he had the utmost confidence, although (by a curious coincidence) they were themselves in disgrace at court, and the upshot was that they decided that the safety of the community demanded the immediate succession of El-gebel.

It would be undeniably serious if one fine morning the sun failed to rise!

So they paid a visit to the decrepit ruler, who, though taken by surprise, killed three of the patriots before succumbing to a spear-thrust in the back from the hand of El-gebel himself.

Once upon the throne, El-gebel showed himself worthy of the trust reposed in him. Aware that stability of rule is above all to be desired in any community, is, in fact, the prime condition of its prosperity, and not forgetful of the fact that the brethren of a King are often envious of him, he overmastered his family affection in the interests of the state, and inviting his brothers to a banquet in celebration of his accession, he poisoned them.

As to the chiefs who had aided him in the painful but necessary task of supplanting his sire, he reasoned rightly that they were turbulent persons with no respect for established authority; he had himself seen them in the very act of regicide. Of this crime, which, the King being also a priest, was not only murder but sacrilege, he accordingly convicted them; and they suffered the penalty of decapitation. This course of action commended itself to all the best and most conservative elements in the state; such uprightness, combined with such self-sacrificing devotion to duty, commanded both respect and obedience.

Now it was decreed by Fate that a certain enterprising merchant of Tarsus, seeking a new market, should determine to journey across the Mountains of the Bull with four asses laden with choice wares.

The King, like Columbus when he saw the jetsam thrown by the Gulf Stream on the shores of Europe, divined the existence of boundless wealth beyond his frontier, and, cutting off the ears of the explorer as evidence that he was no effeminate and luxurious potentate with no thought beyond his own pleasure, but a serious ruler who desired only the prosperity of his people, inquired minutely as to the distance of his city, its population, its army, its defenses, its wealth, as became an earnest seeker after knowledge, and on receiving what appeared to him highly satisfactory replies, instructed him to act as guide through the mountains. Arrived in sight of the city, he sacrificed the merchant to his gods — for, unless the favor of heaven be assured, what undertaking can prosper? — and, thus fortified with the divine blessing, made his dispositions for attack as above recounted, with the same signal success as had accompanied every action of his life. A happy harmony of prudence and daring marked his character; this, coupled with an inflexible will enlightened by acute intelligence, raised him immeasurably above the common herd, even of warrior kings.

II.

We now see El-gebel, in the words of that world-poet who has made the country of Warwickshire not only the center but the crown, of England:

“A warrior weary of slaughter
Striding to the striped lair
Of deftly-woven camels’ hair
Where the trembling captive woman
Waits his pleasure-hour inhuman.”

For the wonder-jewel of all his spoils was the virgin priestess of one of the smaller temples of Tarsus.

She was the tiniest and most perfect creature imaginable, supple and slender, suave and secret.

She looked less like a woman than like a painted doll. Her hair was thick and long, of that intense black that has the blue sheen of steel in its depths; her face, of exquisite delicacy, wore that constant and ambiguous smile that we see in the pictures of Leonardo da Vinci. But her skin was smoother and whiter than the whitest ivory, her mouth dyed with vermilion, her jet mysterious eyes made more lustrous with belladonna; her lashes thick and black with antimony. She was dressed in a single piece of the finest scarlet tissue, wound round and round so closely and so cunningly that it perfectly revealed and perfectly concealed her nubile loveliness. The king had himself discovered her during the sack of the city, sitting placid in her accustomed place in the shrine which she served. He had instantly realized the value of his find, for she was as different from the women of his tribe as a prize Pekinese from a mongrel sheep dog; he held back the soldiers, gave her into the special charge of a trusted officer, and ordered that she was to be treated delicately, and allowed to make her own arrangements — as well as is possible in a blazing town — for the journey. His inevitable instinct told him

that here was a piece of fragility, that must be handled with care, or it would break.

A tent had been erected for her next to the king's. When he had rested from his journey, slept for an hour, and partaken of a mighty meal, he strode across the ten yards of moonlit glade that separated his tent from hers. His lips curled cruelly at the thought of the sport that he would have with her. He pictured every thing. She would be cowering and weeping in a corner of the tent; he could catch her by the hair and hold her up and mock her. Luckily, the dialect of Tarsus, barbaric as it doubtless was, was near enough to his own speech to make conversation easy. Then with the other hand he would put his sword to her throat. After that he would laugh, throw down the sword and tear that web that clothed her, neck to ankle. The prologue was clear; the play itself was inarticulate, a bestial gloating that confused his mind altogether, swamping his humanity.

But the master dramatist, who had devised so many complex plots and carried them through point by point without a hitch, had erred for the first time.

The tent was not as he had expected it, empty and dark, with the girl trembling in one corner. It was lit brilliantly by twelve silver lamps; each a long low box with seven wicks arranged in a row, fed by pure olive oil instead of the goats' fat to which he was accustomed. Between the lamps were bowls filled with wild flowers from the starry meadow. Instead of the bare grass he had expected, he found himself treading on thick rugs, four deep, on which a cloth of scarlet embroidered with golden dragons had been laid. She was sitting at the far end of the tent on a great pile of brilliantly colored silken cushions, and in front of her was a table of carved silver with golden vines twined about it, the grapes being great amethysts. She was not weeping; she was softly radiant.

The vision paused him for a second, and it was she who spoke. Her little hands went to her forehead, and

fell to her lap as she bowed low. Then, in a voice dulcet as dewfall, measured as music, and as caressing as the breeze, she said: "It is the crown of my life that I am honored by the visit of the greatest conqueror that lives, and my great shame that I am unable to receive him worthily. On a journey one has not time nor means; but majesty is noble, and will pardon the poor welcome, since the will is there." She motioned the king courteously to the seat above her. "I pray your majesty to take his ease," she continued, "may it be his pleasure to deign to partake of the humble food which I have endeavored to prepare for him!" Then the king understood that it was her purpose to poison him. "I have eaten," he said abruptly. She divined his thought. "Your majesty wrongs me," she said. "To prove it, I pray you choose of the food, that I may eat." "She does not want to poison herself," thought the king, "or she would not have done it before I came. I will humor her." He accordingly took his seat by her side, and gave her food. He had never seen anything like it in his life. There were tiny white cakes, thin as his sword-blade, glistening with golden crystals; there were little cylinders, apparently of some strange kind of meat; there were fruits such as he had never seen before; there were eggs in a jelly of pale amber; and quails covered with some warm substance like ivory or cream.

Before Krasota, for that was the girl's name, had eaten many mouthfuls, El-gebel discovered that fact which would make Catullus say, centuries later, "I pray the gods, Fabullus, to make me one total nose." He forgot that he had eaten two and a half pounds of dried goats' flesh an hour earlier; and he fell to with ardour. The girl took a chased amphora, and poured from it not water, but a liquid sparkling and purple whose scent made even the food seem commonplace. She filled two bowls with this, and offered them to the king to choose. "It is the custom of Tarsus," she said, "to drink together, praying the gods for each other's health and happiness." With that she drank. The king put down his bowl with a

sour face. "I do not like this water," he said. "It is bad water." She laughed in his face, drained her bowl, replenished it, drank again. "Your majesty will think otherwise in a little while," she smiled, "would he but deign to try again." He sipped cautiously; presently he changed his mind indeed, and drank his fill. By this time he was in a roaring good humor, and he began to wax amorous; a coarse caress testified to the fact. Krasota did not resent it; she smiled as she shook her head. Then, in a very low slow voice, she explained her position. "If I am to be the queen of the greatest conqueror in the world," she began — and that was another quite new idea to him! — "there is much to be learnt. You see, your majesty does not know what to eat, or how to eat it. You eat like a goat. Then you pay an evening call upon a lady with an old quilt of goats' hair cloth, shaggy and dirty, for all attire. You dress like a goat. You haven't shaved for a month. You look like a goat. Then your skin is rough and hard. You feel like a goat. Then you come here having touched goats' flesh with your fingers and not having washed. You smell like a goat. I am sure, too, from what you did just then that you make love like a goat. I shall soon change all this. I always wanted a great king to play with." This last new view of life set El-gebel agape indeed. His brain was dizzy with the strangeness of it all; and, supremely, he was overcome; no man can endure the suspicion that he is personally offensive; the repetition of the word 'goat' was more than he could stand. The obvious remedy, a stroke of his sword, would not cure his memory of that. He could not look at Krasota; El-gebel the Terrible was doing what in a lesser man might have been called blushing; he got up, and went out of the tent. Krasota suavely assuring him that the record of his visit would be engraved on gold by her family for countless generations, and praying openly to the gods that he might enjoy the blessings of untroubled repose, the dreams of love and victory.

III.

The following night the king left Krasota to her own devices, merely sending her word to prepare his food for him; not until the third night of the journey through the mountains did he return to her tent. In these two days he had taken all possible pains to remove the reproach of goatishness. He had halted the army beside a ravine, and ordered the display of the spoils, and an inventory to be made by the bard of the tribe, so that the great victory might be sung worthily.

He had picked out a magnificent hooded mantle of blue silk, a broad band of gold, studded with rough jewels, evidently intended for the head, and a large oval mirror of polished silver with an ivory handle. With these he returned to his tent, and proceeded to experiment. He saw after a few trials that it was hopeless to frame his hairy countenance in such a setting; so he exercised his usual determination and thoroughness, and had not only his chin but his whole head shaved clean. Then he went to bathe in the ravine, and removed the main evidence of the four months that had elapsed since he had taken off his goats' hair tunic. Not yet satisfied, he had sent officers to search for perfume, which, under the instruction of Krasota, they found easily; it was with the contents of a great flask of 'atr of roses that he rubbed himself till his skin shone again. Now when he put on the blue robe, and drew the hood over his head, and fixed it with the band of gold, he was not so displeased with the comment of the mirror. So he sent word to Krasota that he would dine in her tent that night.

With characteristic tact, she made no remark whatever about the change in his appearance; she began the conversation by congratulating him on his brilliance as a cavalry tactician. She had watched the battle, it appeared, from the roof of her temple. From that she led him on to a discussion of his own country,

and his plans for its advancement. These consisted solely in trying to find some other folk to rob. "Majesty," she said, "your country lacks four things; without these you are of no more account than a flock of goats." (How El-gebel began to hate that word goat!) "First, you must plant wheat instead of this dreadful maize, which is only fit for goats to eat; next, you need oil instead of rancid goats' fat, so you must plant olives. Then without wine of the vine, man is no better than a goat; and lastly, you ought to breed bulls. They are the strongest animals on earth; you can find no beast for plowing like the ox; the cow gives a sweet delicate milk very different from the stinking milk of goats; and the flesh is excellent to eat, as your majesty knows; I am sure you never want to eat goats' flesh any more." It was at this time that El-gebel meditated ordering the wholesale destruction of the unfortunate animal which seemed to occupy so large a place in the thoughts, and so small an one in the affections, of his fair captive. However, in this matter of affections —

He was a little less clumsy than on the former occasion; but Krasota, patting his great hand gently, as one who consoles a troubled child, continued to talk politics. "Bulls," said she, "are more important to you than you suppose. I have heard from officers appointed by your favor to guard me that the vitality of the nation is incarnated in the king; if you should happen to fall ill or to grow old, like your august father, it would be a very serious thing for you. Now we will have a temple, and you will make me priestess, and there shall be a perfectly black bull with a white star upon his forehead as the god in whom the life of the nation is concealed. We will assure his continued vigor by killing him every year on the day of Spring, and his life shall pass into that of his successor in the usual way. This will make for the stability of your rule." El-gebel was not slow to grasp the great advantages of the plan proposed, and agreed at once to her suggestion that a party of officers

with a guard should be sent back to the plain the next morning to collect cattle and vine-dressers and all the other people and things necessary for the various reforms proposed. The king was more delighted than ever with his prisoner, and renewed his advances. This time she heaved a sigh. "I wish it were possible, O king," she murmured, "to forget duty in rapture unspeakable such as it is the evident intention of your majesty to bestow upon his devoted slave; but there is much work to do. The officers of the commission must be carefully picked, and there is not a moment to lose. Suppose that your majesty should have contracted the fever of the plains!"

El-gebel saw the force of this argument, and spent his night in drawing up dispositions for the morrow instead of in sloth and dalliance.

The following evening, before sunset, they came to the last crest of the mountains. El-gebel reined in his horse, and waited for Krasota's litter. "Look," said he, "there is my city!" It was little better than a collection of huts, built partly of stones plastered with mud, partly of rude brick, partly of wood. "We shall not reach it tonight," continued the king; "when we reach the bottom of the ravine it will be pitch dark, and the torrents are dangerous." He kicked his horse, and began the descent. The climb was even more difficult than it looked; it was very late when they reached an open space at the mouth of the ravine and the order to pitch camp was given.

The morning dawned; Krasota found herself looking up into the mountain. Giant precipices, red as blood, towered on each side of her! and from the western cliff a river burst, in one magnificent jet, a crystal arch of water that matched the sky for azure. Plunging to the gulf, it joined the multitudinous springs that bubbled everywhere from the bed of the ravine, and almost at her feet their torrents raged afoam, a roar of many waters. The grassy plateau on which she stood was

smooth and green, shadowed by ancient walnut-trees. As she gazed upon the beauty of the scene, the king joined her. "We start for the city in an hour," said he. "City!" she retorted, "it is not fit for a goat to live in! I will stay here in the tent, until you bring the sacred bull. Then architects shall bring their builders, and the builders their quarrymen, and here I will have my temple." The king knew that to argue the matter would ensure a further reference to goats; he acquiesced. "Very good!" he answered, "then I will stay here tomorrow with a few of my men. I am anxious to make progress in the matter you know of." "You will go to the city," she replied firmly, "unless you are the greatest fool in Asia. Ten to one somebody has started a rebellion, and if the army should arrive without you, you would find another king there when you did come. Besides — I may as well be frank — you had much better forget all that foolishness. You have plenty of that in the city. I am sacred. I am going to make you a really great king; and if we mix pleasure and business, business will suffer. Also, you stir up all sorts of jealousy if you bring back a strange woman; one of your wives will probably find a way to poison you. No: you must tell every one that I am a virgin priestess of immense power, and that I am on your side. Come; you have sense — wonderful sense, for a man — show it by not destroying your ambition for an hour's pointless pleasure! Besides, you would not find such delight as you suppose," she added, seeing him flush with anger, evidently ready to take immediate measures to constrain her inclination. "I am highly imaginative, and I am sure that I should be able to do nothing but bleat." El-gebel swallowed his wrath; he was intensely irritated at the way he was put off; but he could not deny that she was clever at the art of putting off. He felt no more inclination to caress her than if she had been one of the goats she was always discussing. He recognized her wisdom as a higher type than his own savage cunning; he gave her up. She knew

the gesture. "O king!" said she, "men have surnamed you The Terrible; in five years they will change it to The Great and Terrible. I am more than half in love with you, as a mother with her child; and I will bring you to glory of which you do not dream — I swear it by the sacred Bull!" Then she put a friendly hand on his. "Do you know how I recognize a great man? He is always like a baby. He cries for the moon; he is single-hearted and simple; he has that true inner wisdom which life teaches small men to forget; and he builds on trust because he knows that if he allows himself to be suspicious he will have no time for any thing else. Now, see, they are holding your stallion for you; go, and prosper!" "I shall come to see you every week," replied the king; "on business."

She followed him with her eyes until he was lost to sight in the dust of the plain. Then she sat down under the oldest of the walnuts, and began to plan the details of her temple.

IV.

Eight years later the word of Krasota had been abundantly fulfilled. Under her magic guidance the very face of Nature had been changed. Cybistra was now a handsome capital, with marble palaces and temples; the rough and arid plain between it and the ravine of Ibreez was become a land of corn and vine; green lanes happy with hazel and hawthorn, poplar and willow, led from field to field. Nightingales had found out this paradise, and lent their lusty aid to joy. Ibreez itself was now a comely village, sprung up about the Temple of the Bull.

The swiftness and completeness of El-gebel's victory had smoothed the path of reform. The spoils of Tarsus were all so obviously desirable that it seemed worth while to take any trouble to have them on the spot. It was better to sit under one's own vine and fig-tree than to travel five days to sit under somebody else's! One

chief, indeed, imbued with what we may call the stern old Covenanting spirit, had seen the cloven hoof of degeneracy in the effeminate substitution of other things for goats, which to him were the be-all and end-all of life, and the hallmark of Virtue. He took aside another chief whom he knew to be disaffected toward El-gebel from having heard him utter frequent complaints almost amounting to threats, and said something about the evil influence of foreign women on the morals of kings. His confidant was of course the head of El-gebel's secret police, and the old chief slept with his forefathers. Others took notice.

The people imported by the king from the plains to plant and dress the vines, to quarry and to build, to plow the ground and sow the corn, to irrigate the deserts and to level the roads, to breed the cattle and to weave the silk and the wool, were a great source of strength to the nation. In the lovely mountain air they forgot the effeminacy which had made them so easy a prey to the mountaineers. They were of the same stock and language as their conquerors, and they mingled happily, smooth against rough, to a medium that promised a great race.

King El-gebel, surnamed The Great and Terrible, stood on the brink of the ravine with Krasota and the young but already famous sculptor Ebal. Some distance below them rose the Temple of the Bull, a group of domes rising out of each other like soap bubbles on the surface of water. The temple was built of the red rock of the district, but the domes were barred with blue porcelain tiles to symbolize the sacred river. Within the great courtyard was the ancient meadow with its walnuts, almost as when Krasota had first seen it save for that polished wall that girt it, red rock with diamonds of white marble inlay, and that under the oldest walnut was a mighty basin of marble and syenite, filled with the limpid water of three springs, and overflowing to a rivulet flower-prankt that tumbled to the torrents. There

shook his mighty limbs and disported himself the great black bull with the white star upon his forehead, then leapt from the basin and plunged headlong round the meadow, bellowing with all the furious joy of animal life. But the king had not come to Ibreez to see the Sacred Bull; it was the day of the completion of the masterpiece of Ebal.

Upon the laboriously polished face of a crimson rock that rose sheer out of the water of a branch of the main stream were two colossal figures. The mystery of the Uniting of the Strength of the Bull and the Wisdom of the Man was symbolized by the divine image, fourteen feet in height, a bearded man wearing a high pointed cap from which branched several pairs of bulls' horns. This figure was clad in a short tunic, belted, with bare legs and arms to emphasize his power. Around the wrists were bracelets; upon the feet, high boots with toes turned up like sabots. In his right hand he bore a vine-branch heavy-laden, for it was he that had brought the vine; in his left a branch of bearded wheat, so tall that the stalks touched the ground.

Before him stood with both hands raised in adoration the image of El-gebel himself. He was dressed in the official costume which Krasota had devised for him, a domed cap encircled by flat bands adorned with a rose of jewels. From neck to ankle fell a long robe heavily fringed, and over it a mantle clasped on the breast with precious stones. These vestments were carved exquisitely with delicate patterns to represent embroidery. On his neck hung a chain, and on his wrist a bracelet. Ebal had caught the noble and determined expression of the great king; while he adored the god, it was as an equal; no servility or fear could dwell in that face with its hawk-nose and its fierce calm eye. El-gebel had grown his beard since the raid upon Tarsus had succeeded, and that upon Krasota failed; for she told him that a beard added dignity to a great king, and that all semblance to — to anything unpleasant — might be

avoided by the use of a device brought down from heaven by a god some years previously, an implement known in Tarsus as a comb.

The king congratulated Ebal on the wonder he had wrought upon the rock; then, turning to Krasota, he said: "You too have well made good your word. It is but eight years since I conquered Tarsus." "O King," she answered, "live for ever! But you did not conquer Tarsus; Tarsus conquered you. Civilization has overflowed at last the virgin barrier of the Mountains of the Bull. See yonder!" she cried, with outstretched finger and raised voice, "beyond your city that you have raised to splendor from a heap of mud huts, that you have embowered in oak and poplar, willow and mulberry, that you have filled with the song of nightingale and thrush, jeweled with crested hoopoe and rainbow lovely woodpecker, while your servants, the agile swifts, clamour shrill praise of you in every sky, beyond this paradise of ours, look westward! There see the desolation of the desert, see the salt marshes, fetid and poisonous, see the dreary expanse of the vast Lycaonian plain, sweeping treeless and barren, solitary as death itself, nay, see beyond it — what are those jagged and abrupt cliffs of fire-scarred mountains, under the purple velvet of their clouds, pregnant with storm? There lies the road to Europe, that continent vast almost as our own, smothered in hideous forests, where roam more hideous savages than they. There lies our path of conquest; we are the outpost of Asia, of civilization and of learning, of liberty in thought, and of mastery in action; we are the tip of the spear that the great God that is above all the gods extends towards the setting sun. I have spoken. O King, live for ever!"

The king El-gebel, surnamed The Great and Terrible, put his hands upon his eyes; for he was weeping. Silently he passed away from that stern prophetess, who dwelt in the body of a painted doll wrapped round in scarlet tissue.

She and the young sculptor followed the king at a great distance. He did not halt at the village; he did not seem to see the stallion that two grooms held in waiting; he pressed on through the long lanes, and shut himself up into his palace.

V.

Ebal remained with Krasota; they dined together in the open beneath the walnuts.

They sat in silence. Presently the rising moon touched the summit of the western precipice with her light; next, through a gap, a thin ray fell upon the river as it spouted from the rock, kindling it to a luminous and unearthly blue.

Krasota murmured under her breath: "Half a woman made with half a god." Ebal still waited. "I am going to talk to you," she said at last, "because you will understand. You are an artist, and you have not made love to me." "I am an artist, and that was my way of making love to you," he retorted with sly vigor, ready for jest or earnest. "Surely," she smiled, pleased with the boy's quickness, "and you have won me. Therefore I can talk to you as if we were twins at the breast of the Great Mother Goddess. You know why I have never given myself to any man, why I shall never give myself to you?" "I know," he said; "I guessed it the first day I came here. But that is why I want you so much." "Then you will understand, adorable my brother! Listen! There are two kinds of people, mainly, in this world. There is the herd-mind, the goat-folk, as I should say to El-gebel if I wished to tease him, who live the easy middle life, birth, life, and death through generations stagnant as the marshes beyond Cybistra. No hope, no light, on any path of theirs! Then there are people like you and me, the eagle-people. Look at what I have done! I have made a paradise of this desert; I have raised

this people from a life lower than the beasts to freedom, prosperity, and happiness; I have brought even Art herself beyond the Mountains of the Bull; I have turned the cunning savage who murdered his father and his brothers as I would shake the fruit from this branch that hangs above us into the god-like man you saw today, who wept because he knew he could not live to spread light and freedom over the gloomy forests of Europe; and the very same thing in me that makes me want to do that, that has taken my life in its grip, and forced me to study sayings of the wise men of every country, to explore nature, to slay myself (in a word) on the altar of humanity, that same thing is the impulse that makes me — what I am — for which you love me, and for which any one of these herd-men would take up stones and stone me! This beats my wits out on its anvil. Do you know, I find myself saying: Why did you not yield to El-gebel, rule him and his people as a courtesan would have done, lived idle and luxurious? Was it because of your aspiration to the salvation of humanity, or because of your mad lust of degradation unfathomable and unique? I gained both ends. Half a woman made with half a god!"

Ebal rejoined at once: "Whole woman in that at least! You see that the two aims have one source; then if one be divine, so must the other be! Hear also this word of a great philosopher whom I worshipped in Egypt, when I went to study art: 'That which is above is like that which is below, and that which is below is like that which is above, for the performance of the miracles of the One Substance.' Now that which you detest and desire is really in its nature identical with the other; its root is in discontent with the pettiness of things. So far as we are gods, we are children; and children cry for the moon." She smiled to recognize her own doctrine thrown back at her in the very spot where she had uttered it eight years before. He went

on, not noticing. "To your savage it seems monstrous that human sacrifice should be abolished; we madmen want that one strange, blasphemous, impossible thing! So go thy way rejoicing!" She shook her head. "I might," she said, "but my fate is even now upon me. I have desired the impossible so much that having done all that my life can do, I begin to lust for the uncharted and illimitable realms of death. 'I would I had been the first that took her death out from between wet hoofs and reddened teeth, splashed horns, fierce fetlocks of the brother bull!' Ai! Ai!"

"I know," replied Ebal; "I hate my rocks not because they resist my hand, for that is battle, which I love, but because of their multitude, the infinitude of shapeless things that I must leave so. Just so the king felt this day also. But I want to dash myself to pieces from a precipice, to take my death from the enemy I have loved and fought so hard. And in my loves I seek the adulteress, the murderess, anyone, to put it in a phrase, who feels so strongly that she has broken something to attain her ends; the artist, not the nanny-goat." "Then come to me when I lie dead; for I am artist, I am adulteress, I murderess; and in my death perhaps I may be glad to turn back once and smile on life."

They found her in the morning upon the edge of the great marble basin, torn and trampled, her young blood purpling the magical blue of the pool. By her side lay Ebal, his breast thrust through with his own sculptor's knife, his mouth still closed upon the heart of Krasota, and his pale locks clotted with the scarlet blossom of her life that flamed in the sun as never any other red of earth, caking and darkening here and there to nightshade purple. Afar, the great Bull tossed skyward his great head, its white star crimsoned; and, careless, began to feed upon the rich tall grass.

But the attendant priests suppressed this part of the event, and distorted and mutilated the rest; were they

