

have taught you the Sacred Dance of the Vestals." From that time she resisted no more; she allowed delirium to take its course. Such crises gave her the most exquisite relief; the perfect physical fatigue was an enchantment. Gradually, too, she mastered the possession, and knew what she was doing. But as she gained this, she lost the effect; she failed to reach the summits of enthusiasm, and the fatigue, instead of being pleasure, was partial, a dull ache, in which she was too tired to dance, not tired enough to sleep. But one thing grew upon her, the fascination of the fire. The play of its heat upon her face tortured and delighted her. Sometimes she would loosen her robe and thrust her breast over the glowing oak, rejoicing as it scorched her. Sometimes she would play with the flame with her hands, passing them through and through it. She imagined them as fish leaping in the water. But nowhere was satisfaction to be found. She became moody and wretched, toying fatally instead of willfully with the fire, obtaining no pleasure, yet unable to stop. One day she took a brand from the flame, and began to dance the marriage dance with it; was she not the Bride of the Fire? Round and round the hut she leapt and whirled, thrashing herself savagely with the burning bough, until in ecstasy of pain and excitement she flung back the brand into the flame, and fell prone upon the ashes about the fire in a swoon of utter collapse.

When she awoke to life she found that she was badly burned. But the ancestors had communed with her in her trance; from that moment she was a changed creature. She reverted to her old quiet ways; she lost the self-consciousness that had disturbed her; and she occupied herself with patient toil. It was a curious task that she had set herself; she took long strands of her hair, and wove them, wove them, day and night, into a fine network, a glimmering veil scarcely visible for glamor, a pallor of ash like the harvest-moon, but strong with deft inlacement so that she might have bound inextricably a young bull in its elastic tether.

The autumn fell upon the hills; no untoward incident had marred the life of the tribe; at the mid-summer ceremony of the Flight of the King her father had conquered easily, running lightly from his palace to the hill-top where stood the twin oaks solitary and proud that marked the turning-point of the race, passed between them, and taken refuge on the hearth of Vesta, the flaming bough waving triumphantly in his hand before the first of the suitors for the kingdom had reached even the top of the little ridge that was the last landmark in the race. His start, which amounted to nigh a fourth of the course, was ample, save in serious debility or accident.

He who was first of all the disappointed crowd was a stranger from a very far country. He was like a young leopard, ruddy bronze, with gleaming eye and flashing teeth, long-armed, with black hair curled upon his brows. When he saw that the king was safe, instead of following and joining in the banquet which was always ready in the palace to refresh the contestants of the race, and to celebrate the renewed life and vigor of the King, he waved his sword, gave a great shout, and, swerving from the course, ran wildly through the village, and was lost to sight.

Julia asked her father who he was, and why he acted thus, not in accordance with the custom. "His name is Abrasax, and his surname Ithys, which means The Straight One, and he is of an island called Chi in the great sea which he says reaches to the bounds of the world. He is full of strange tales. I do not know why he has gone."

Perhaps Julia herself knew; for on the day before her eyes had fallen upon him as he passed, and seen in his gaze that it was she, more than the kingdom, that he desired. Perhaps he had gone because he would not come to her unless triumphant. And she flashed with scorn and anger that he should treat her as a woman. And that night she knew. For when all was still, an arrow with blunt point was shot into the King's House, and in its notch was fastened a thin piece of bark on which was written one word—"YET."

So summer passed and fell into autumn; Julia had finished her veil, twelve yards in length, a foot in breadth, and bound it round about her brows for a crown, a tapering cone of beauty towering from her forehead.

The days drew in; Julia fell into utter listlessness and lassitude. She could hardly force herself to tend the sacred fire. She sat hour by hour brooding over it; it had lost its power to kindle her; she let a brand fall on her wrist, and it only woke the flesh to pain, dull and stupid, a dark hall of melancholy and of the shadow of death. She became brutalized; only, like a dog, she sought her father constantly, taking refuge with him from her ill-ease; to feel his arms about her seemed protection from—she knew not what.

Yet in all the monotony of her misery there was a single point at which all concentrated; the memory of a leap and a shout, a bronze leopard body, fierce eyes, black curls, a long sword glittering to heaven, and an arrow shot into the holy house of Vesta. And so acute became that pang that in her heart was born a deadly hatred. He had insulted her by his proud glance; he meant all that was dangerous, all that was evil, in her life; she personified the malice of all damned ghosts and sorcerers, the menace of her people, in him.

This hate so grew upon her that it turned to sickness; blue lines came under her eyes; her skin was loose upon her; her limbs were heavy; she could not eat; she spent her days squatting before the fire, now and then lifting a great bough with weary arms to let it drop dully on the embers. She never cared to make it blaze up brightly; so long as a live spark lay in the ash, she was fulfilling all she need. Even in the bitter nights of winter, when the wind howled through the rude walls of the hut, and snow came through the opening in the roof to hiss upon the fire, she preferred to sit and shiver in her robe, rather than to heap the boughs. At last all this formulated itself in a single conscious will. Abrasax would return at midsummer, she was sure; well, let him come. She knew how he must pass from the palace to the hut appointed for his bestowal at night after the banquet; she would waylay him and kill him. So now she took a dagger and passed her days sharpening it on a stone, testing it on the boughs of oak; her whole soul black with bitter lust of murder.

And then came the day of the Rekindling of the Fire. She had regained her peace of mind, her confidence, her calm. With a firm voice she declared the omens; all were favorable. Only, as the days drew on to midsummer, gladness grew upon her even as the flowers upon their stems; only twelve days more—eleven days more—ten days more—before she would plunge that steel into the heart of the man whose image mocked and taunted and defiled her.