

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