

## CHAPTER V

### HOW RAMES FOUGHT THE PRINCE OF KESH

Now for a whole moon there were great festivals in Thebes, and in all of these Neter-Tua, "Glorious in Ra, Hathor Strong in Beauty, Morning Star of Amen," must take her part as new-crowned Queen of Egypt. Feast followed feast, and at each of them one of the suitors of her hand was the guest of honour.

Then after it was done, Pharaoh her father and his councillors would wait upon her and ask if this man was pleasing to her. Being wise, Tua would give no direct answer, only of most of them she was rid in this way.

She demanded that the writing of the dream of her mother, Ahura, should be brought and read before her, and when it had been read she pointed out that Amen promised to her a royal lover, and that these chiefs and generals were not royal, therefore it was not of them that Amen spoke, nor did she dare to turn her eyes on one whom the god had forbidden to her.

Of others who declared that they were kings, but who, being unable to leave their countries, were represented by ambassadors, she said that not having seen them she could say nothing. When they appeared at the Court of Egypt, she would consider them.

So at length only one suitor was left, the man whom she knew well Pharaoh and his councillors desired that she should take as husband. This was Amathel, the Prince of Kesh, whose father, an aged king, ruled at Napata, a great city far to the south, situated in a land that was called an island because the river Nile embraced it in its two arms. It was said that after Egypt this country was the richest in the whole world, for there gold was so plentiful that men thought it of less value than copper and iron; also there were mines in which beautiful stones were found, and the soil grew corn in abundance.

Moreover, once in the far past, a race of Pharaohs sprung from this city of Napata, had sat on the throne of Egypt, until at length the people of Egypt, headed by the priests, had risen and overthrown them because they were foreigners and had introduced Nubian customs into the land. Therefore it was decreed by an unalterable law that none of their race should ever again wear the Double Crown. Of the descendants of these Pharaohs, Rames, Tua's playmate, was the last lawful child.

But although the Egyptians had cast them down, at heart they always grieved over the rich territory of Napata, which was lost to them, for when those Pharaohs fell Kesh declared itself independent and set up another dynasty to rule over it, of which dynasty Amathel Prince of Kesh was the heir.

Therefore they hoped that it might come back to them by marriage between

Amathel and the young Queen Neter-Tua. Ever since she was born the great lords and councillors of Egypt, yes, and Pharaoh himself, seeing that he had no son to whom he might marry her after the fashion of the country, had been working to this end. It was by secret treaty that the Prince Amathel was present at the crowning of the Queen, of whose hand he had been assured on the sole condition that he came to dwell with her at Thebes. It is true that there were other suitors, but these, as all of them knew well, were but pawns in a game played to amuse the people.

The king destined to take the great queen captive was Amathel and no other. Tua knew it, for had not Asti told her, and was it not because of her fear of this man and her love for Rames that she had dared to commit the sacrilege of attempting to summon Amen from the skies? Still, as yet, the Pharaoh had not spoken to her of Amathel, nor had she met him. It was said that he had been present at her crowning in disguise, for this proud prince gave out that were she ten times Queen of Egypt, he would not pledge himself to wed as his royal wife, one who was displeasing to him, and that therefore he must see her before he pressed his suit.

Now that he had seen her in her loveliness and glory, he announced that he was well satisfied, which was but half the truth, for, in fact, she had set all his southern blood on fire, and there was nothing that he desired more than to call her wife.

On the night which had been appointed for Amathel to meet his destined

bride, a feast had been prepared richer by far than any that went before. Tua, feigning ignorance, on entering the great unroofed hall lit with hundreds of torches down all its length, and seeing the multitudes at the tables, asked of the Pharaoh, her father, who was the guest that he would welcome with such magnificence which seemed worthy of a god rather than of a man.

"My daughter," answered the old monarch nervously, "it is none other than the Prince of Kesh, who in his own country they worship as divine, as we are worshipped here in Egypt, and who, in truth, is, or will be, one of the greatest of kings."

"Kesh!" she answered, "I thought that we claimed sovereignty over that land."

"Once it was ours, Daughter," said her father with a sigh, "or rather the kings of Kesh were also kings of Egypt, but their dynasty fell before my great-great-grandfather was called to the throne, and now but three of their blood are left, Mermes, Captain of the Guard of Amen; Asti, the Seer and Priestess, his wife, your foster-mother and waiting lady, and the young Count Rames, a soldier in our army, who was your playmate, and as you may remember saved you from the sacred crocodile."

"Yes, I remember," said Tua. "But then why is not Mermes King of Kesh?"

"Because the people of the city of Napata raised up another house to

rule over them, of whom Amathel is the heir."

"A usurping heir, surely, my father, if there be anything in blood."

"Say not that, Tua," replied Pharaoh sharply, "for then Mermes should be Pharaoh in our place also."

Tua made no reply, only as they took their seats in the golden chairs at the head of the hall, she asked carelessly:

"Is this Prince of Kesh also a suitor for my hand, O Pharaoh?"

"What else should he be, my daughter? Did you not know it? Be gracious to him now, since it is decreed that you shall take him as a husband.

Hush! answer not. He comes."

As he spoke a sound of wild music arose, and at the far end of the great hall appeared a band of players gorgeously attired, who blew horns made from small tusks of the elephant, clashed brazen cymbals and beat gilded drums. These advanced a little way up the hall and stood there playing, while after them marched a bodyguard of twenty gigantic Nubian soldiers who carried broad-bladed spears with shields of hippopotamus hide curiously worked, and were clothed in tunics and caps of leopard-skin.

Next appeared the Prince of Kesh himself, a short, stout, broad-shouldered young man, thick-featured, heavy-faced, and having

large, rolling eyes. He was clad in festal garments, and hung about with heavy chains of gold fastened with clasps of glittering stones, while from his crisp, black hair rose a tall plume of nodding ostrich feathers. Fan bearers walked beside him, and the train of his long cloak was borne by two black and hideous dwarfs, full-grown men but no taller than a child of eight.

With one swift glance, while he was yet far away, Tua studied the man from head to foot, and hated him as she had never hated anyone before. Then she looked over his head, as from her raised seat upon the dais she was able to do, and saw that behind him came a second guard of picked Egyptian soldiers, and that in command of them, simply clad in his scaled armour of bronze, and wearing upon his thigh the golden-handled sword that Pharaoh had given him, was none other than the young Count Rames, her playmate and foster-brother, the man whom her heart loved. At the sight of his tall and noble form and fine-cut face rising above the coarse, squat figure of the Ethiopian prince, Tua blushed rosy red, but Pharaoh noting it, only thought, as others did, that it was because now for the first time her eyes fell upon him who would be her husband.

Why, Tua wondered, was Rames chosen to attend upon the Prince Amathel? At once the answer rose in her mind. Doubtless it had been done to gratify the pride of Amathel, not by Pharaoh, who would know nothing of such matters, but by some bribed councillor, or steward of the household. Rames was of more ancient blood than Amathel, and by right should be the King of Kesh, as he should also be Pharaoh of Egypt;

therefore, to humble him he was set to wait upon Amathel.

Moreover, it was guessed that the young Queen looked kindly upon this Count Rames with whom she had been nursed, and who, like herself, was beautiful to behold. Therefore, to abase him in her eyes he had been commanded to appear walking in the train of Amathel and given charge over his sacred person at the feast.

In a moment Tua understood it all, and made a vow before her father Amen that soon or late those who had planned this outrage should pay its price, nor did she forget that promise in the after days.

Now the Prince had mounted the dais and was bowing low to Pharaoh and to her, and they must rise and bow in answer. Then Pharaoh welcomed him to Egypt in few, well-chosen words, giving him all his titles and speaking meaningly of the ancient ties which had linked their kingdoms, ties which, he prayed, might yet draw them close again.

He ceased and looked at Tua who, as Queen, had also a speech to deliver that had been given to her in writing. Although she remembered this well enough, for the roll lay beside her, never a word would she read, but turned round and bade one of her waiting-ladies bring her a fan.

So after a pause that seemed somewhat long Amathel delivered his answer that was learned by rote, for it replied to "gentle words from the lips of the divine Queen that made his heart to flower like the desert after

rain," not one of which had she spoken. Thereon Tua, looking over the top of her fan, saw Rames smile grimly, while unable to restrain themselves, some of the great personages at the feast broke out laughing, and bowed down their heads to hide their merriment.

With an angry scowl the Prince turned and commanded that the gifts should be brought. Now slaves advanced bearing cups of worked gold, elephants and other beasts fashioned in gold, and golden vases full of incense, which he presented to Pharaoh on behalf of his father, the King of Kesh and himself, saying boastfully that in his country such things were common, and that he would have brought more of them had it not been for their weight.

When Pharaoh had thanked him, answering gently that Egypt too was not poor, as he hoped that he would find upon the morrow, the Prince, on his own behalf alone, offered to the Queen other presents, among them pectorals and necklaces without price fashioned of amethysts and sapphires. Also, because she was known to be the first of musicians and the sweetest-voiced lady in the land--for these were the greatest of the gifts that Tua had from Amen--he gave to her a wonderfully worked harp of ivory with golden strings, the frame of the harp being fashioned to the shape of a woman, and two black female slaves laden with ornaments, who were said to be the best singers in the Southern Land.

Now Pharaoh whispered to Tua to put on one of the necklaces, but she would not, saying that the colour of the stones did not match her white



robe and the blue lotus flowers which she wore. Instead, she thanked Amathel coldly but courteously, and without looking at his gifts, told the royal Nurse, Asti, who stood behind her, to bear them away and to place them at a distance, as the perfumes that had been poured over them, oppressed her. Only, as though by an afterthought, she bade them leave the ivory harp.

Thus inauspiciously enough the feast began. At it Amathel drank much of the sweet wine of Asi or Cyprus, commanding Rames, who stood behind him, to fill his cup again and again, though whether he did this because he was nearest to him, or to lower him to the rank of a butler, Tua did not know. At least, having no choice, Rames obeyed, though cup-filling was no fitting task for a Count of Egypt and an officer of Pharaoh's guard.

When the waiting women, clad in net worked with spangles of gold, had borne away the meats, conjurers appeared who did wonderful feats, amongst other things causing a likeness of Queen Neter-Tua wearing her royal robes and having a star upon her brow, to arise out of a vase.

Then, as they had arranged, they strove to do the same for the Prince Amathel, but Asti who had more magic than all of them, watching behind Tua's chair, put out her strength and threw a spell upon them.

Behold! instead of the form of the Prince, which these conjurers summoned loudly and by name, there appeared out of the vase a monkey wearing a crown and feathers that yet resembled him somewhat, which

black and hideous ape stood there for a while seeming to gibber at them, then fell down and vanished away.

Now some of the audience laughed and some were silent, but Pharaoh, not knowing whether this were a plot or an evil omen from the gods, frowned and looked anxiously at his guest. As it chanced, however, the Prince, filled with wine, was so engaged in staring at the loveliness of Tua, that he took no note of the thing, while the Queen looked upwards and seemed to see nothing. As for the conjurers, they fled from the hall, fearing for their lives, and wondering what strong spirit had entered into the vase and spoiled the trick which they had prepared.

As they went singers and dancing women hurriedly took their place, till Tua, wearying of the stare of Amathel, waved her hand and said that she wished to hear those two Nubian slaves whose voices were said to be so wonderful. So they were brought forward with their harps, and having prostrated themselves, began to play and sing very sweetly, Nubian songs melancholy and wild, whereof few could understand the meaning. So well did they sing, indeed, that when they had done, Neter-Tua said:

"You have pleased me much, and in payment I give you a royal gift. I give you your freedom, and appoint that henceforth you shall sing before the Court, if you think fit to stay here, not as slaves but for hire."

Then the two women prostrated themselves again before her Majesty and blessed her, for they knew that they could earn wealth by their gift,

and the rich courtiers taking the Queen's cue, flung rings and ornaments to them, so that in a minute they got more gold than ever they had dreamed of, who were but kidnapped slaves. But Prince Amathel grew angry and said:

"Some might have been pleased to keep the priceless gift of the best singers in the world."

"Do you say that these sweet-voiced women are the best singers in the world, O Prince?" asked Tua, speaking to him for the first time. "Now if you will be pleased to listen, you provoke me to make trial of my own small skill that I may learn how far I fall short of 'the best singers in the world.'"

Then she lifted up the ivory harp with the strings of gold and swept her fingers over it, trying its notes and adjusting them with the agate screws, looking at Amathel all the while with a challenge in her lovely eyes.

"Nay, nay, my daughter," said Pharaoh, "it is scarcely fitting that a queen of Egypt should sing before all this noble company."

"Why not, my father?" she asked. "To-night we all do honour to the heir of his Majesty of Kesh. Pharaoh receives him, Pharaoh's daughter accepts his gifts, the highest in the land surround him," then she paused and added slowly, "one of blood more ancient than his own waits on him as

cup-bearer, one whose race built up the throne his father fills," and she pointed to Rames, who stood near by holding the vase of wine. "Why, then, should not Egypt's queen seek to please our royal guest as best she may--since she has no other gift to give him?"

Then in the dead silence which followed this bold speech, whereof none could mistake the meaning, Neter-Tua, Morning Star of Amen, rose from her seat. Pressing the ivory harp against her young breast, she bent over it, her head crowned with the crown of Upper Egypt whereon glistened the royal uræus, a snake about to strike, and swept the well-tuned strings.

Such magic was in her touch that instantly all else was forgotten, even the Pharaoh leaned back in his golden chair to listen. Softly she struck at first, then by slow degrees ever louder till the music of the harp rang through the pillared hall. Now, at length, she lifted up her heavenly voice and began to sing in a strain so wild and sweet that it seemed to pierce to the watching stars.

It was a sad and ancient love-tale that she sang, which told how a priestess of Hathor of high degree loved and was beloved by a simple scribe whom she might not wed. It told how the scribe, maddened by his passion, crept at night into the very sanctuary of the temple hoping to find her there, and for his sacrilege was slain by the angry goddess. It told how the beautiful priestess, coming alone to make prayer in the sanctuary for strength to resist her love, stumbled over the lover's

corpse and, knowing it, died of grief. It told how Hathor, goddess of love, melted by the piteous sight, breathed back life into their nostrils, and since they might not remain upon earth, wafted them to the Under-world, where they awoke and embraced and dwell on for ever and for aye, triumphant and rejoicing.

All had heard this old, old story, but none had ever heard it so divinely sung. As Tua's pure and lovely voice floated over them the listeners seemed to see that lover, daring all in his desire, creep into the solemn sanctuary of the temple. They saw Hathor appear in her wrath and smite him cold in death. They saw the beautiful priestess with her lamp, and heard her wail her life away upon her darling's corpse; saw, too, the dead borne by spirits over the borders of the world.

Then came that last burst of music thrilling and divine, and its rich, passionate notes seemed to open the heavens to their sight. There in the deep sky they perceived the awakening of the lovers and their embrace of perfect joy, and when a glory hid them, heard the victorious chant of the priestess of love sighing itself away, faint and ever fainter, till at length its last distant echoes died in the utter silence of the place of souls.

Tua ceased her music. Resting her still quivering harp upon the board, she sank back in her chair of state, outworn, trembling, while in her pale face the blue eyes shone like stars. There was stillness in the hall; the spell of that magical voice lay on the listeners; none

applauded, it seemed even that none dared to move, for men remembered that this wonderful young Queen was said to be daughter of Amen, Master of the world, and thought that it had been given to them to hearken, not to a royal maiden, but to a goddess of the skies.

Quiet they sat as though sleep had smitten them, only every man of their number stared at the sweet pale face and at those radiant eyes. Drunk with passion and with wine, Amathel, Prince of Kesh, leaned his heavy head upon his hand and stared like the rest. But those eyes did not stay on him. Had he been a stone they could not have noted him less; they passed over him seeking something beyond.

Slowly he turned to see what it might be at which the Morning Star of Amen gazed, and perceived that the young captain who waited on him, he who was said to be of a race more ancient and purer than his own, he whose house had reigned in the Southern Land when his ancestors were but traffickers in gold, was also gazing at this royal singer. Yes, he bent forward to gaze as though a spell drew him, a spell, or the eyes of the Queen, and there was that upon his face which even a drunken Nubian could not fail to understand.

In the hands of Rames was the tall, golden vase of wine, and as Amathel thrust back his chair its topmost ivory bar struck the foot of the vase and tilted it, so that the red wine poured in a torrent over the Prince's head and gorgeous robes, staining him from his crest of plumes to his feet as though with blood. Up sprang the Prince of Kesh roaring

with fury.

"Dog-descended slave!" he shouted. "Hog-headed brother of swine, is it thus that you wait upon my Royalty?" and with the cup in his hand he smote Rames on the face, then drew the sword at his side to kill him.

But Rames also wore a sword, that sword hafted with the golden crocodile which Pharaoh had given him long ago--that sword which Asti the foresighted had seen red with royal blood. With a wild, low cry he snatched it from its sheath, and to avoid the blow that Amathel struck at him before he could guard himself, sprang backwards from the dais to the open space in the hall that had been left clear for the dancers. After him leapt Amathel calling him "Coward," and next instant the pillars echoed, not with Tua's music but with the stern ringing of bronze upon bronze.

Now in their fear and amaze men looked up to Pharaoh, waiting his word, but Pharaoh, overcome by the horror of the scene, appeared to have swooned; at least, he lay back in his chair with his eyes shut like one asleep. Then they looked to the Queen, but Tua made no sign, only with parted lips and heaving breast watched, watched and waited for the end.

As for Rames he forgot everything save that he, a soldier and a noble of royal race, had been struck across the mouth by a black Nubian who called himself a prince. His blood boiled up in him, and through a red haze as it were, he saw Tua's glorious eyes beckoning him on to a

victory. He saw and sprang as springs the lion of the desert, sprang straight at the throat of Amathel. The blow went high, an ostrich plume floated to the ground--no more, and Amathel was a sturdy fighter and had the strength of madness. Moreover, his was the longer weapon; it fell upon the scales of armour of Rames and beat him back, it fell again on his shoulder and struck him to his knee. It fell a third time, and glancing from the mail wounded him in the thigh so that the blood flowed. Now a soldier of Pharaoh's guard shouted to encourage his captain, and the Nubians shouted back, crying to their prince to slit the hog's throat.

Then Rames seemed to awake. He leapt from his knees, he smote and the blow went home, though the iron which the Nubian wore beneath his robe stayed it. He smote again more fiercely, and now it was the blood of Amathel that flowed. Then bending almost to the ground before the answering stroke, he leapt and thrust with all the strength of young limbs trained to war. He thrust and behold! between the broad shoulders of Amathel pierced from breast to back, appeared the point of the Egyptian's sword. For a moment the prince stood still, then he fell backwards heavily and lay dead.

Now, with a shout of rage the giants of the Nubian guard rushed at Rames to avenge their master's death, so that he must fly backwards before their spears, backwards into the ranks of the Pharaoh's guard. In a flash the Nubians were on them also and, how none could tell, a fearful fray began, for these soldiers hated each other, as their fathers had



done before them, and there were none who could come between them, since at this feast no man bore weapons save the guards. Fierce was the battle, but the Nubians lacked a captain while Rames led veterans of Thebes picked for their valour.

The giants began to give. Here and there they fell till at length but three of them were left upon their feet, who threw down their arms and cried for mercy. Then it was for the first time that Rames understood what he had done. With bent head, his red sword in his hand, he climbed the dais and knelt before the throne of Pharaoh, saying:

"I have avenged my honour and the honour of Egypt. Slay me, O Pharaoh!"

But Pharaoh made no answer for his swoon still held him.

Then Rames turned to Tua and said:

"Pharaoh sleeps, but in your hand is the sceptre. Slay me, O Queen!"

Now Tua, who all this while had watched like one frozen into stone, seemed to thaw to life again. Her danger was past. She could never be forced to wed that coarse, black-souled Nubian, for Rames had killed him. Yonder he lay dead in all his finery with his hideous giants about him like fallen trees, and oh! in her rebellious human heart she blessed Rames for the deed.

But as she, who was trained in statecraft, knew well enough, if he had escaped the sword of Prince Amathel, it was but to fall into a peril from which there seemed to be no escape. This dead prince was the heir of a great king, of a king so great that for a century Egypt had dared to make no war upon his country, for it was far away, well-fortified and hard to come at across deserts and through savage tribes. Moreover, the man had been slain at a feast in Pharaoh's Court, and by an officer of Pharaoh's guard, which afterwards had killed his escort under the eyes of Egypt's monarchs, the hand of one of whom he sought in marriage. Such a deed must mean a bitter war for Egypt, and to those who struck the blow--death, as Rames himself knew well.

Tua looked at him kneeling before her, and her heart ached. Fiercely, despairingly she thought, throwing her soul afar to seek out wisdom and a way of escape for Rames. Presently in the blackness of her mind there arose a plan and, as ever was her fashion, she acted swiftly. Lifting her head she commanded that the doors should be locked and guarded so that none might go in or out, and that those physicians who were amongst the company should attend to the wounded, and to Pharaoh, who was ill. Then she called the High Council of the Kingdom, all of whom were gathered there about her, and spoke in a cold, calm voice, while the company flocked round to listen.

"Lords and people," she said, "the gods for their own purposes have suffered a fearful thing to come to pass. Egypt's guest and his guard have been slain before Egypt's kings, yes, at their feast and in their

very presence, and it will be said far and wide that this has been done by treachery. Yet you know well, as I do, that it was no treachery, but a mischance. The divine prince who is dead, as all of you saw, grew drunken after the fashion of his people, and in his drunkenness he struck a high-born man, a Count of Egypt and an officer of Pharaoh, who to do him greater honour was set to wait upon him, calling him by vile names, and drew his sword upon him to kill him. Am I right? Did you see and hear these things?"

"Aye," answered the Council and the audience.

"Then," went on Tua, "this officer, forgetting all save his outraged honour, dared to fight for his life even against the Prince of Kesh, and being the better man, slew him. Afterwards the servants of the Prince of Kesh attacked him and Pharaoh's guard, and were conquered and the most of them killed, since none here had arms wherewith to part them. Have I spoken truth?"

"Yea, O Queen," they answered again by their spokesman. "Rames and the royal guard have little blame in the matter," and from the rest of them rose a murmur of assent.

"Now," went on Tua with gathering confidence, for she felt that all saw with her eyes, "to add to our woes Pharaoh, my father, has been smitten by the gods. He sleeps; he cannot speak; I know not whether he will live or die, and therefore it would seem that I, the duly-crowned Queen of

Egypt, must act for him as was provided in such a case, since the matter is very urgent and may not be delayed. Is it your will," she added, addressing the Council, "that I should so act as the gods may show me how to do?"

"It is right and fitting," answered the Vizier, the King's companion, on behalf of all of them.

"Then, priests, lords and people," continued the Queen, "what course shall we take in this sore strait? Speaking with the voice of all of you and on your behalf, I can command that the Count Rames and all those other chosen men whom Pharaoh loves, who fought with him, shall be slain forthwith. This, indeed," she added slowly, "I should wish to do, since although Rames had suffered intolerable insult such as no high-born man can be asked to bear even from a prince, and he and all of them were but fighting to save their lives and to show the Nubians that we are not cowards here in Egypt, without doubt they have conquered and slain the heir of Kesh and his black giants who were our guests, and for this deed their lives are forfeit."

She paused watching, while although here and there a voice answered "Yes" or "They must die," from the rest arose a murmur of dissent. For in their hearts the company were on the side of Rames and Pharaoh's guards. Moreover, they were proud of the young captain's skill and courage, and glad that the Nubians, whom they hated with an ancient hate, had been defeated by the lesser men of Egypt, some of whom were

their friends or relatives.

Now, while they argued among themselves Tua rose from her chair and went to look at Pharaoh, whom the physicians were attending, chafing his hands and pouring water on his brow. Presently she returned with tears standing in her beautiful eyes, for she loved her father, and said in a heavy voice:

"Alas! Pharaoh is very ill. Set the evil has smitten him, and it is hard, my people, that he perchance may be taken from us and we must bear such woe, because of the ill behaviour of a royal foreigner, for I cannot forget that it was he who caused this tumult."

The audience agreed that it was very hard, and looked angrily at the surviving Nubians, but Tua, conquering herself, continued:

"We must bear the blows that the fates rain on us, nor suffer our private grief to dull the sword of justice. Now, as I have said, even though we love them as our brothers or our husbands, yet the Count Rames and his brave comrades should perish by a death of shame, such a death as little befits the flower of Pharaoh's guard."

Again she paused, then went on in the midst of an intense silence, for even the physicians ceased from their work to hearken to her decree, as supreme judge of Egypt.

"And yet, and yet, my people, even as I was about to pass sentence upon them, uttering the doom that may not be recalled, some guardian spirit of our land sent a thought into my heart, on which I think it right to take your judgment. If we destroy these men, as I desire to destroy them, will they not say in the Southern Country and in all the nations around, that first they had been told to murder the Prince of Kesh and his escort, and then were themselves executed to cover up our crime? Will it not be believed that there is blood upon the hands of Pharaoh and of Egypt, the blood of a royal guest who, it is well known, was welcomed here with love and joy, that he might--oh! forgive me, I am but a maiden, I cannot say it. Nay, pity me not and answer not till I have set out all the case as best I may, which I fear me is but ill. It is certain that this will be said--aye, and believed, and we of Egypt all called traitors, and that these men, who after all, however evil has been their deed, are brave and upright, will be written in all the books of all the lands as common murderers, and go down to Osiris with that ill name branded on their brows. Yes, and their shame will cling to the pure hands of Pharaoh and his councillors."

Now at this picture the people murmured, and some of the noble women there began to weep outright.

"But," proceeded Tua with her pleading voice, "how if we were to take another course? How if we commanded this Count Rames and his companions to journey, with an escort such as befits the Majesty of Pharaoh, to the far city of Napata, and there to lay before the great king of that land

by writings and the mouths of witnesses, all the sad story of the death of his only son? How if we sent letters to this Majesty of Kesh, saying, 'Thou hast heard our tale, thou knowest all our woe. Now judge. If thou art noble-hearted and it pleases thee to acquit these men, acquit them and we will praise thee. But if thou art wroth and stern and it pleases thee to condemn these men, condemn them, and send them back to us for punishment, that punishment which thou dost decree.' Is that plan good, my people? Can his Majesty of Kesh complain if he is made judge in his own cause? Can the kings and captains of other lands then declare that in Egypt we work murder on our guests? Tell me, who have so little wisdom, if this plan is good, as I dare to say to you, it seems to me."

Now with one voice the Council and all the guests, and especially the guards themselves who were on their trial, save Rames, who still knelt in silence before the Queen, cried out that it was very good. Yes; they clapped their hands and shouted, vowing to each other that this young Queen of theirs was the Spirit of Wisdom come to earth, and that her excellent person was filled with the soul of a god.

But she frowned at their praises and, holding up her sceptre, sternly commanded silence.

"Such is your decree, O my Council," she cried, "and the decree of all you here present, who are the noblest of my people, and I, as I am bound by my oath of crowning, proclaim and ratify it, I, Neter-Tua, who am named Star and Daughter of Amen, who am named Glorious in Ra, who am

named Hathor, Strong in Beauty, who am crowned Queen of the Upper and the Lower Land. I proclaim--write it down, O Scribes, and let it be registered this night that the decree may stand while the world endures--that two thousand of the choicest troops of Egypt shall sail up Nile, forthwith, for Kesh, and that in command of them, so that all may know his crime, shall go the young Count Rames, and with him those others who also did the deed of blood."

Now at this announcement, which sounded more like promotion than disgrace, some started and Rames looked up, quivering in all his limbs.

"I proclaim," went on Tua quickly, "that when they are come to Napata they shall kneel before its king and submit themselves to the judgment of his Majesty, and having been judged, shall return and report to us the judgment of his Majesty, that it may be carried out as his Majesty of Kesh shall appoint. Let the troops and the ships be made ready this very night, and meanwhile, save when he appears before us to take his orders as general, in token of our wrath, we banish the Count Rames from our Court and Presence, and place his companions under guard."

So spoke Tua, and the royal decree having been written down swiftly and read aloud, she sealed and signed with her sign-manual as Queen, that it might not be changed or altered, and commanded that copies of it should be sent to all the Governors of the Nomes of Egypt, and a duplicate prepared and despatched with this royal embassy, for so she named it, to be delivered to the King of Kesh with the letters of condolence, and the



presents of ceremony, and the body of Amathel, the Prince of Kesh, now divine in Osiris.

Then, at length, the doors were thrown open and the company dispersed, Rames and the guard being led away by the Council and placed in safe keeping. Also Pharaoh, still senseless but breathing quietly, was carried to his bed, and the dead were taken to the embalmers, whilst Tua, so weary that she could scarcely walk, departed to her chambers leaning on the shoulder of the royal Nurse, Asti, the mother of Rames.