

## CHAPTER XII. THE SLAYING OF IDERNES

Whilst I was still talking to my mother I received an urgent summons to the palace. I went and in a little ante-chamber met Amada alone, who, I could see, was waiting there for me. She was arrayed in her secular dress and wore the insignia of royalty, looking exceedingly beautiful. Moreover, her whole aspect had changed, for now she was no longer a priestess sworn to mysteries, but just a lovely and a loving woman.

"It is done, Shabaka," she whispered, "and thou art mine and I am thine."

Then I opened my arms and she sank upon my breast and for the first time I kissed her on the lips, kissed her many times and oh! my heart almost burst with joy. But all too fleeting was that sweet moment of love's first fruits, whereon I had sown the seed so many years ago, for while we yet clung together, whispering sweet things into each other's ears, I heard a voice calling me and was forced to go away before I had even time to ask when we might be wed.

Within the Council was gathered. The news before it was that the Satrap Idernes lay camped upon the Nile with some ten thousand men, not far from the great pyramids, that is, within striking distance of Memphis. Moreover his messengers announced that he purposed to visit the Prince Peroa that day with a small guard only, to inquire into this matter of the Signet, for which visit he demanded a safe-conduct sworn in the

name of the Great King and in those of the gods of Egypt and the East. Failing this he would at once attack Memphis notwithstanding any commands that might be given him under the Signet, which, until he beheld it with his own eyes, he believed to be a forgery.

The question was--what answer should be sent to him? The debate that followed proved long and earnest. Some were in favour of attacking Idernes at once although his camp was reported to be strongly entrenched and flanked on one side by the Nile and on the other by the rising ground whereon stood the great sphinx and the pyramids. Others, among whom I was numbered, thought otherwise, for I hold that some evil god led me to give counsel that day which, if it were good for Egypt was most ill for my own fortunes. Perchance this god was Isis, angry at the loss of her votary.

I pointed out that by receiving Idernes Peroa would gain time which would enable a body of three thousand men, if not more, who were advancing down the Nile, to join us before they were perhaps cut off from the city, and thus give us a force as large as his, or larger. Also I showed that having summoned Idernes under the Signet, we should put ourselves in the wrong if we refused to receive him and instead attacked him at once.

A third party was in favour of allowing him to enter Memphis with his guard and then making him prisoner or killing him. As to this I pointed out again that not only would it involve the breaking of a solemn oath,

which might bring the curse of the gods upon our cause and proclaim us traitors to the world, but it would also be foolish since Idernes was not the only general of the Easterns and if we cut off him and his escort, it would avail us little for then the rest of the Easterns would fight in a just cause.

So in the end it was agreed that the safe-conduct should be sent and that Peroa should receive Idernes that very day at a great feast given in his honour. Accordingly it was sent in the ancient form, the oaths being taken before the messengers that neither he nor those with him who must not number more than twenty men, would be harmed in Memphis and that he would be guarded on the road back until he reached the outposts of his own camp.

This done, I was despatched up the Nile bank in a chariot accompanied only by Bes, to hurry on the march of those troops of which I have spoken, so that they might reach Memphis by sundown. Before I went, however, I had some words alone with Peroa. He told me that my immediate marriage with the lady Amada would be announced at the feast that night. Thereon I prayed him to deliver to Amada the rope of priceless rose-hued pearls which was in his keeping, as my betrothal gift, with the prayer that she would wear them at the feast for my sake. There was no time for more.

The journey up Nile proved long for the road was bad being covered with drifted sand in some places and deep in mud from the inundation waters

in others. At length I found the troops just starting forward after their rest, and rejoiced to see that there were more of them than I had thought. I told the case to their captains, who promised to make a forced march and to be in Memphis two hours before midnight.

As we drove back Bes said to me suddenly,

"Do you know why you could not find me this morning?"

I answered that I did not.

"Because a good slave should always run a pace ahead of his master, to clear the road and tell him of its pitfalls. I was being married. The Cup of the holy Tanofir is now by law and right Queen of the Ethiopians. So when you meet her again you must treat her with great respect, as I do already."

"Indeed, Bes," I said laughing, "and how did you manage that business? You must have wooed her well during these days which have been so full for both of us."

"I did not woo her over much, Master; indeed, the time was lacking. I wooed the holy Tanofir, which was more important."

"The holy Tanofir, Bes?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Master. You see this beautiful Cup of his is after all--his beautiful Cup. Her mind is the shadow of his mind and from her he pours out his wisdom. So I told him all the case. At first he was angry, for, notwithstanding the words he spoke to you and me, when it came to a point the holy Tanofir, being after all much like other men, did not wish to lose his Cup. Indeed had he been a few score of years younger I am not sure but that he would have forgotten some of his holiness because of her. Still he came to see matters in the true light at last--for your sake, Master, not for mine, since his wisdom told him it was needful that I should become King of the Ethiopians again, to do which I must be married. At any rate he worked upon the mind of that Cup of his--having first settled that she should procure a younger sister of her own to fill her place--in such fashion that when at length I spoke to her on the matter, she did not say no."

"No doubt because she was fond of you for yourself, Bes. A woman would not marry even to please the holy Tanofir."

"Oh! Master," he replied in a new voice, a very sad voice, "I would that I could think so. But look at me, a misshapen dwarf, accursed from birth. Could a fair lady like this Karema wed such a one for his own sake?"

"Well, Bes, there might be other reasons besides the holy Tanofir," I said hurriedly.

"Master, there were no other reasons, unless the Cup, when it is awake, remembers what it has held in trance, which I do not believe. I wooed her as I was, not telling her that I am also King of the Ethiopians, or any more than I seem to be. Moreover the holy Tanofir told her nothing, for he swore as much to me and he does not lie."

"And what did she say to you, Bes?" I asked, for I was curious.

"She lied fast enough, Master. She said--well, what she said when first we met her, that there was more in me than the eye saw and that she who had lived so much with spirits looked to the spirit rather than to the flesh, and that dwarf or no she loved me and desired nothing better than to marry me and be my true and faithful wife and helpmeet. She lied so well that once or twice almost I believed her. At any rate I took her at her word, not altogether for myself, believe me, Master, but because without doubt what the holy Tanofir has shown us will come to pass, and it is necessary to you that I should be married."

"You married her to help me, Bes?"

"That is so, Master--after all, but a little thing, seeing that she is beautiful, well born and very pleasant, and I am fond of her. Also I do her no wrong for she has bought more than she bargained for, and if she has any that are not dwarfs, her children may be kings. I do not think," he added reflectively, "that even the faithful Ethiopians could accept a second dwarf as their king. One is very well for a change, but not two

or three. The stomach of a tall people would turn against them."

I took Bes's hand and pressed it, understanding the depth of his love and sacrifice. Also some spirit--doubtless it came from the holy Tanofir--moved me to say,

"Be comforted, Bes, for I am sure of this. Your children will be strong and straight and tall, more so than any of their forefathers that went before them."

This indeed proved to be the case, for their father's deformity was but an accident, not born in his blood.

"Those are good-omened words, Master, for which I thank you, though the holy Tanofir said the like when he wed us with the sacred words this morning and gave us his blessing, endowing my wife with certain gifts of secret wisdom which he said would be of use to her and me."

"Where is she now, Bes?"

"With the holy Tanofir, Master, until I fetch her, training her younger sister to be a diviner's worthy Cup. Only perhaps I shall never send, seeing that I think there will be fighting soon."

"Yes, Bes, but being newly married you will do well to leave it to others."

"No, no, Master. Battle is better than wives. Moreover, could you think that I would leave you to stand alone in the fray? Why if I did and harm came to you I should die of shame or hang myself and then Karema would never be a queen. So both her trades would be gone, since after marriage she cannot be a Cup, and her heart would break. But here are the gates of Memphis, so we will forget love and think of war."

An hour later I and my mother, the lady Tiu, stood in the banqueting hall of the palace with many others, and learned that the Satrap Idernes and his escort had reached Memphis and would be present at the feast. A while later trumpets blew and a glittering procession entered the hall. At the head of it was Peroa who led Idernes by the hand. This Eastern was a big, strong man with tired and anxious eyes, such as I had noted were common among the servants of the Great King who from day to day never knew whether they would fill a Satrapy or a grave. He was clad in gorgeous silks and wore a cap upon his head in which shone a jewel, but beneath his robes I caught the glint of mail.

As he came into the hall and noted the number and quality of the guests and the stir and the expectant look upon their faces, he started as though he were afraid, but recovering himself, murmured some courteous words to his host and advanced towards the seat of honour which was pointed out to him upon the Prince's right. After these two followed the



wife of Peroa with her son and daughters. Then, walking alone in token of her high rank, appeared Amada, the Royal Lady of Egypt, wonderfully arrayed. Now, however, she wore no emblems of royalty, either because it was not thought wise that these should be shown in the presence of the Satrap, or because she was about to be given in marriage to one who was not royal. Indeed, as I noted with joy, her only ornament was the rope of rose-hued pearls which were arranged in a double row upon her breast.

She searched me out with her eyes, smiled, touching the pearls with her finger, and passed on to her place next to the daughters of Peroa, at one end of the head table which was shaped like a horse's hoof.

After her came the nobles who had accompanied Idernes, grave Eastern men. One of these, a tall captain with eyes like a hawk, seemed familiar to me. Nor was I mistaken, for Bes, who stood behind me and whose business it would be to wait on me at the feast, whispered in my ear,

"Note that man. He was present when you were brought before the Great King from the boat and saw and heard all that passed."

"Then I wish he were absent now," I whispered back, for at the words a sudden fear shot through me, of what I could not say.

By degrees all were seated in their appointed places. Mine was by that of my mother at a long table that stood as it were across the ends of the high table but at a little distance from them, so that I was almost

opposite to Peroa and Idernes and could see Amada, although she was too far away for me to be able to speak to her.

The feast began and at first was somewhat heavy and silent, since, save for the talk of courtesy, none spoke much. At length wine, whereof I noted that Idernes drank a good deal, as did his escort, but Peroa and the Egyptians little, loosened men's tongues and they grew merrier. For it was the custom of the people of the Great King to discuss both private and public business when full of strong drink, but of the Egyptians when they were quite sober. This was well known to Peroa and many of us, especially to myself who had been among them, which was one of the reasons why Idernes had been asked to meet us at a feast, where we might have the advantage of him in debate.

Presently the Satrap noted the splendid cup from which he drank and asked some question concerning it of the hawk-eyed noble of whom I have spoken. When it had been answered he said in a voice loud enough for me to overhear,

"Tell me, O Prince Peroa, was this cup ever that of the Great King which it so much resembles?"

"So I understand, O Idernes," answered Peroa. "That is, until it became mine by gift from the lord Shabaka, who received it from the Great King."

An expression of horror appeared upon the face of the Satrap and upon those of his nobles.

"Surely," he answered, "this Shabaka must hold the King's favours lightly if he passes them on thus to the first-comer. At the least, let not the vessel which has been hallowed by the lips of the King of kings be dishonoured by the humblest of his servants. I pray you, O Prince, that I may be given another cup."

So a new goblet was brought to him, Peroa trying to pass the matter off as a jest by appealing to me to tell the story of the cup. Then I said while all listened,

"O Prince, the most high Satrap is mistaken. The King of kings did not give me the cup, I bought it from him in exchange for a certain famous bow, and therefore held it not wrong to pass it on to you, my lord."

Idernes made no answer and seemed to forget the matter.

A while later, however, his eye fell upon Amada and the rose-hued pearls she wore, and again he asked a question of the hawk-eyed captain, then said,

"Think me not discourteous, O Prince, if I seem to look upon yonder lovely lady which in our country, where women do not appear in public, we should think it an insult to do. But on her fair breast I see certain

pearls like to some that are known throughout the world, which for many years have been worn by those who sit upon the throne of the East. I would ask if they are the same, or others?"

"I do not know, O Idernes," answered Peroa; "I only know that the lord Shabaka brought them from the East. Inquire of him, if it be your pleasure."

"Shabaka again----" began Idernes, but I cut him short, saying,

"Yes, O Satrap, Shabaka again. I won those pearls in a bet from the Great King, and with them a certain weight of gold. This I think you knew before, since your messenger of a while ago was whipped for trying to steal them, which under the rods he said he did by command, O Satrap."

To this bold speech Idernes made no answer. Only his captains frowned and many of the Egyptians murmured approval.

After this the feast went on without further incident for a while, the Easterns always drinking more wine, till at length the tables were cleared and all of the meaner sort departed from the hall, save the butlers and the personal servants such as Bes, who stood behind the seats of their masters. There came a silence such as precedes the bursting of a storm, and in the midst of it Idernes spoke, somewhat thickly.

"I did not come here, O Peroa," he said, "from the seat of government at Sais to eat your meats and drink your wine. I came to speak of high matters with you."

"It is so, O Satrap," answered Peroa. "And now what may be your will? Would you retire to discuss them with me and my Councillors?"

"Where is the need, O Peroa, seeing that I have naught to say which may not be heard by all?"

"As it pleases you. Speak on, O Satrap."

"I have been summoned here, Prince Peroa, by a writing under what seems to be the Signet of signets--the ancient White Seal that for generations unknown has been worn by the forefathers of the King of kings. Where is this Signet?"

"Here," said the Prince, opening his robe. "Look on it, Satrap, and let your lords look, but let none of you dare to touch it."

Idernes looked long and earnestly, and so did some of his people, especially the lord with the hawk eyes. Then they stared at each other bewildered and whispered together.

"It seems to be the very Seal--the White Seal itself!" exclaimed Idernes

at length. "Tell me now, Peroa. How came this sacred thing that dwells in the East hither into Egypt?"

"The lord Shabaka brought it to me with certain letters from the Great King, O Satrap."

"Shabaka for the third time, by the holy Fire!" cried Idernes. "He brought the cup; he brought the famous pearls; he brought the gold, and he brought the Signet of signets. What is there then that he did not bring? Perchance he has the person of the King of kings himself in his keeping!"

"Not that, O Satrap, only the commands of the King of kings which are prepared ready to deliver to you under the White Seal that you acknowledge."

"And what may they be, Egyptian?"

"This, O Satrap: That you and all the army which you have brought with you retire to Sais and thence out of Egypt as quickly as you may, or pay for disobedience with your lives."

Now Idernes and his captains gasped.

"Why this is rebellion!" he said.

"No, O Satrap, only the command of the Great King given under the White Seal," and drawing a roll from his breast, Peroa laid it on his brow and cast it down before Idernes, adding,

"Obey the writing and the Signet, or by virtue of my commission, as soon as you are returned to your army and your safe-conduct is expired, I fall upon you and destroy you."

Idernes looked about him like a wolf in a trap, then asked,

"Do you mean to murder me here?"

"Not so," answered Peroa, "for you have our safe-conduct and Egyptians are honourable men. But you are dismissed your office and ordered to leave Egypt."

Idernes thought a little while, then said,

"If I leave Egypt, there is at least one whom I am commanded to take with me under orders and writings that you will not dispute, a maiden named Amada whom the Great King would number among his women. I am told it is she who sits yonder--a jewel indeed, fair as the pearls upon her breast which thus will return into the King's keeping. Let her be handed over, for she rides with me at once."

Now in the midst of an intense silence Peroa answered,

"Amada, the Royal Lady of Egypt, cannot be sent to dwell in the House of Women of the Great King without the consent of the lord Shabaka, whose she is."

"Shabaka for the fourth time!" said Idernes, glaring at me. "Then let Shabaka come too. Or his head in a basket will suffice, since that will save trouble afterwards, also some pain to Shabaka. Why, now I remember. It was this very Shabaka whom the Great King condemned to death by the boat for a crime against his Majesty, and who bought his life by promising to deliver to him the fairest and most learned woman in the world--the lady Amada of Egypt. And thus does the knave keep his oath!"

Now I leapt to my feet, as did most of those present. Only Amada kept her seat and looked at me.

"You lie!" I cried, "and were it not for your safe-conduct I would kill you for the lie."

"I lie, do I?" sneered Idernes. "Speak then, you who were present, and tell this noble company whether I lie," and he pointed to the hawk-eyed lord.

"He does not lie," said the Captain. "I was in the Court of the Great King and heard yonder Shabaka purchase pardon by promising to hand over his cousin, the lady Amada, to the King. The pearls were entrusted to



him as a gift to her and I see she wears them. The gold also of which mention has been made was to provide for her journey in state to the East, or so I heard. The cup was his guerdon, also a sum for his own purse."

"It is false," I shouted. "The name of Amada slipped my lips by chance--no more."

"So it slipped your lips by chance, did it?" sneered Idernes. "Now, if you are wise, you will suffer the lady Amada to slip your hand, and not by chance. But let us have done with this cunning knave. Prince, will you hand over yonder fair woman, or will you not?"

"Satrap, I will not," answered Peroa. "The demand is an insult put forward to force us to rebellion, since there is no man in Egypt who will not be ready to die in defence of the Royal Lady of Egypt."

This statement was received with a shout of applause by every Egyptian in the hall. Idernes waited until it had died away, then said,

"Prince Peroa and Egyptians, you have conveyed to me certain commands sealed with the Signet of signets, which I think was stolen by yonder Shabaka. Now hearken; until this matter is made clear I will obey those commands thus far. I will return with my army to Sais and there wait until I have received the orders of the Great King, after report made to him. If so much as an arrow is shot at us on our march, it will be open

rebellion, as the price of which Egypt shall be crushed as she was never crushed before, and every one of you here present shall lose his head, save only the lady Amada who is the property of the Great King. Now I thank you for your hospitality and demand that you escort me and those with me back to my camp, since it seems that here we are in the midst of enemies."

"Before you go, Idernes," I shouted, "know that you and your lying captain shall pay with your lives for your slander on me."

"Many will pay with their lives for this night's work, O thief of pearls and seals," answered the Satrap, and turning, left the hall with his company.

Now I searched for Amada, but she also had gone with the ladies of Peroa's household who feared lest the feast should end in blows and bloodshed, also lest she should be snatched away. Indeed of all the women in the hall, only my mother remained.

"Search out the lady Amada," I said to her, "and tell her the truth."

"Yes, my son," she answered thoughtfully; "but what is the truth? I understood it was Bes who first gave the name of the lady Amada to the Great King. Now we learn from your own lips that it was you. Wise would you have been, my son, if you had bitten out your tongue before you said it, since this is a matter that any woman may well misunderstand."

"Her name was surprised out of me, Mother. It was Bes who spoke to the King of the beauty of a certain lady of Egypt."

"And I think, my son, it was Bes who told Peroa and his guests that he and not you had given the King her name, which you do not seem to have denied. Well, doubtless both of you are to blame for foolishness, no more, since well I know that you would have died ten times over rather than buy your life at the price of the honour of the Lady of Egypt. This I will say to her as soon as I may, praying that it may not be too late, and afterwards you shall tell me everything, which you would have done well to do at first, if Bes, as I think, had not been over cunning after the fashion of black people, and counselled you otherwise. See, Peroa calls you and I must go, for there are greater matters afoot than that of who let slip the name of the lady Amada to the King of kings."

So she went and there followed a swift council of war, the question being whether we were to strike at the Satrap's army or to allow it to retreat to Sais. In my turn I was asked for my judgment of the issue, and answered,

"Strike and at once, since we cannot hope to storm Sais, which is far away. Moreover such strength as we have is now gathered and if it is idle and perhaps unpaid, will disperse again. But if we can destroy Idernes and his army, it will be long before the King of kings, who is sending all his multitudes against the Greeks, can gather another, and

during this time Egypt may again become a nation and able to protect herself under Peroa her own Pharaoh."

In the end I, and those who thought like me, prevailed, so that before the dawn I was sailing down the Nile with the fleet, having two thousand men under my command. Also I took with me the six hunters whom I had won from the Great King, since I knew them to be faithful, and thought that their knowledge of the Easterns and their ways might be of service. Our orders were to hold a certain neck of land between the river and the hills where the army of Idernes must pass, until Peroa and all his strength could attack him from behind.

Four hours later, the wind being very favourable to us, we reached that place and there took up our station and having made all as ready as we could, rested.

In the early afternoon Bes awakened me from the heavy sleep into which I had fallen, and pointed to the south. I looked and through the desert haze saw the chariots of Idernes advancing in ordered ranks, and after them the masses of his footmen.

Now we had no chariots, only archers, and two regiments armed with long spears and swords. Also the sailors on the boats had their slings and throwing javelins. Lastly the ground was in our favour since it sloped upwards and the space between the river and the hills was narrow, somewhat boggy too after the inundation of the Nile, which meant that

the chariots must advance in a column and could not gather sufficient speed to sweep over us.

Idernes and his captains noted all this also, and halted. Then they sent a herald forward to ask who we were and to command us in the name of the Great King to make way for the army of the Great King.

I answered that we were Egyptians, ordered by Peroa to hold the road against the Satrap who had done affront to Egypt by demanding that its Royal Lady should be given over to him to be sent to the East as a woman-slave, and that if the Satrap wished to clear a road, he could come and do so. Or if it pleased him he could go back towards Memphis, or stay where he was, since we did not wish to strike the first blow. I added this,

"I who speak on behalf of the Prince Peroa, am the lord Shabaka, that same man whom but last night the Satrap and a certain captain of his named a liar. Now the Easterns are brave men and we of Egypt have always heard that among them none is braver than Idernes who gained his advancement through courage and skill in war. Let him therefore come out together with the lord who named me a liar, armed with swords only, and I, who being a liar must also be a coward, together with my servant, a black dwarf, will meet them man to man in the sight of both the armies, and fight them to the death. Or if it pleases Idernes better, let him not come and I will seek him and kill him in the battle, or by him be killed."

The herald, having taken stock of me and of Bes at whom he laughed, returned with the message.

"Will he come, think you, Master?" asked Bes.

"Mayhap," I answered, "since it is a shame for an Eastern to refuse a challenge from any man whom he calls barbarian, and if he did so it might cost him his life afterwards at the hands of the Great King. Also if he should fall there are others to take his command, but none who can wipe away the stain upon his honour."

"Yes," said Bes; "also they will think me a dwarf of no account, which makes the task of killing you easy. Well, they shall see."

Now when I sent this challenge I had more in my mind than a desire to avenge myself upon Idernes and his captain for the public shame they had put upon me. I wished to delay the attack of their host upon our little band and give time for the army of Peroa to come up behind. Moreover, if I felt it did not greatly matter, except as an omen, seeing that I had good officers under me who knew all my plans.

We saw the herald reach the Satrap's army and after a while return towards us again, which made us think my challenge had been refused, especially as with him was an officer who, I took it, was sent to spy out our strength. But this was not so, for the man said,

"The Satrap Idernes has sworn by the Great King to kill the thief of the Signet and send his head to the Great King, and fears that if he waits to meet him in battle, he may slip away. Therefore he is minded to accept your challenge, O Shabaka, and put an end to you, and indeed under the laws of the East he may not refuse. But a noble of the Great King may not fight against a black slave save with a whip, so how can that noble accept the challenge of the dwarf Bes?"

"Quite well," answered Bes, "seeing that I am no slave but a free citizen of Egypt. Moreover, in my own country of Ethiopia I am of royal blood. Lastly, tell the man this, that if he does not come and afterwards falls into my hands or into those of the lord Shabaka, he who talks of whips shall be scourged with them till his life creeps out from between his bare bones."

Thus spoke Bes, rolling his great eyes and looking so terrible that the herald and the officer fell back a step or two. Then I told them that if my offer did not please them, I myself would fight, first Idernes and then the noble. So they returned.

The end of it was that we saw Idernes and his captain advancing, followed by a guard of ten men. Then after I had explained all things to my officers, I also advanced with Bes, followed by a guard of ten picked men. We met between the armies on a little sandy plain at the foot of the rise and there followed talk between the captains of our guards as

to arms and so forth, but we four said nothing to each other, since the time for words was past. Only Bes and I sat down upon the sand and spoke a little together of Amada and Karema and of how they would receive the news of our victory or deaths.

"It does not much matter, Master," said Bes at last, "seeing that if we die we shall never know, and if we live we shall learn for ourselves."

At length all was arranged and we stood up to face each other, the four of us being armed in the same way. For as did Idernes and the hawk-eyed lord, Bes and I wore shirts of mail and helms, those that we had brought with us from the East. For weapons we had short and heavy swords, small shields and knives at our girdles.

"Look your last upon the sun, Thieves," mocked Idernes, "for when you see it again, it shall be with blind eyes from the points of spears fastened to the gateway pillars of the Great King's palace."

"Liars you have lived and liars you shall die," shouted Bes, but I said nothing.

Now the agreement was that when the word had been given Idernes and I, and the noble and Bes, should fight together, but if they killed one of us, or we killed one of them, the two who survived might fall together on the remaining man. Remembering this, as he told me afterwards, at the signal Bes leapt forward like a flash with working face and foam upon



his lips, and before ever I could come to Idernes, how I know not, had received the blow of the Eastern lord upon his shield and without striking back, had gripped him in his long arms and wrapped him round with his bowed legs. In an instant they were on the ground, Bes uppermost, and I heard the sound of blow upon blow struck with knife or sword, I knew not which, upon the Eastern's mail, followed by a shout of victory from the Egyptians which told me that Bes had slain him.

Now Idernes and I were smiting at each other. He was a taller and a bigger man than myself, but older and one who had lived too well. Therefore I thought it wise to keep him at a distance and tire him, which I did by retreating and catching his sword-cuts on my shield, only smiting back now and again.

"He runs! He runs!" shouted the Easterns. "O Idernes, beware the dwarf!"

"Stand away, Bes," I called; "this is my game," and he obeyed, as often he had done when we were hunting together.

Now a shrewd blow from Idernes cut through my helm and staggered me, and another before I could recover myself, shore the shield from my hand, whereat the Easterns shouted more loudly than before. Then fear of defeat entered into me and made me mad, for this Satrap was a great fighter. With a shout of "Egypt!" I went at him like a wounded lion and soon it was his turn to stagger back. But alas! I struck too hard, for my sword snapped upon his mail.

"The knife!" screamed Bes; "the knife!"

I hurled the sword hilt in the Satrap's face and drew the dagger from my belt. Then I ran in beneath his guard and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed. He gripped me and we went down side by side, rolling over each other. The gods know how it ended, for things were growing dim to me when some thrust of mine found a rent in his mail made when the sword broke and he became weak. His spirit weakened also, for he gasped,

"Spare my life, Egyptian, and my treasure is yours. I swear it by the Fire."

"Not for all the treasure in the world, Slanderer," I panted back and drove the dagger home to the hilt thrice, until he died. Then I staggered to my feet, and when the armies saw that it was I who rose while Idernes lay still a roar of triumph went up from the Egyptians, answered by a roar of rage from the Easterns.

With a cry of "Well done, Master!" Bes leapt upon the dead man and hewed his head from him, as already he had served the hawk-eyed noble. Then gripping one head in each hand he held them up for the Easterns to see.

"Men of the Great King," I said, "bear us witness that we have fought fairly, man to man, when we need not have done so."

The ten of the Satrap's guard stood silent, but my own shouted,

"Back, Shabaka! The Easterns charge!"

I looked and saw them coming like waves of steel, then supported by my men and preceded by Bes who danced in front shaking the severed heads, I ran back to my own ranks where one gave me wine to drink and threw water over my hurts which were but slight. Scarcely was it done when the battle closed in and soon in it I forgot the deaths of Idernes and the Eastern liar.