

"PRINCESS OF THE NILE"

• Sunset afterglow had turned the river Nile to molten copper when the two erect, superbly proportioned young men riding richly caparisoned Arabian horses, reined in their mounts and gazed at the Egyptian city of Memphis.

After their long siege on the bloody battlefield of Mansura, where they had been part of massed armies which had once more, in this year of 1249, defeated the Christian Crusaders who sought to wrest the Holy Land from Moslem rule, it was a welcome sight.

Prince Haidi, the strikingly handsome youngest son of the all-powerful Caliph of Bagdad, exclaimed, "The magic of the setting sun almost fires ancient Memphis to its former glory!"

Captain Hussein, his close friend and companion, answered, "From a Mameluke captain I heard that its glory is not entirely gone. At the coffee house called Tambourine, Taura the Dancer can be seen—a maiden far lovelier than a thousand moons." At Haidi's amused look, he continued, persuasively, "Tomorrow we must cross the Nile and ride for days over desert sands before we can reach Bagdad. At the Tambourine, we might gather wondrous memories to ease the dullness of our journey."

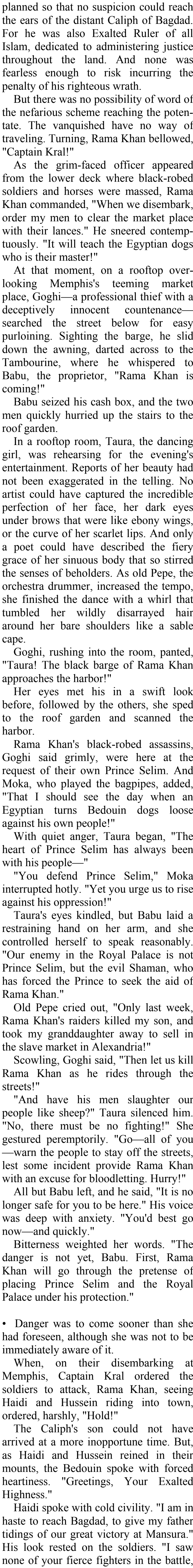
Haidi's amused look became a light-hearted grin. "Tonight we must find lodging somewhere, so why not at the Tambourine!"

A huge, black-sailed barge was approaching Memphis from the parched city of Halwyn, across the Nile. Stronghold of Rama Khan, it was a city which, by some freak of river currents, was set in land as barren as the Memphis land was fertile.

Under a deck awning, Rama Khan, the Bedouin plunderer whose diabolic mercilessness knew no bounds, watched the approaching shore line with cruel eyes in which always burned the consuming fires of ambition. And more so now than ever.

Shortly—if all went well, and he had his own methods of dealing with those who interfered with all going well for him—the fair city of Memphis would be his. The Royal Palace, too, would be his, following the death of the ruler, Prince Selim. Then his ultimate reward would be the exquisite Princess Shalimar.

*People knew her as
Taura the Dancer
and hailed her as
far lovelier than a
thousand moons . . .*



Every treacherous detail had been planned so that no suspicion could reach the ears of the distant Caliph of Bagdad. For he was also Exalted Ruler of all Islam, dedicated to administering justice throughout the land. And none was fearless enough to risk incurring the penalty of his righteous wrath.

But there was no possibility of word of the nefarious scheme reaching the potentate. The vanquished have no way of traveling. Turning, Rama Khan bellowed, "Captain Kral!"

As the grim-faced officer appeared from the lower deck where black-robed soldiers and horses were massed, Rama Khan commanded, "When we disembark, order my men to clear the market place with their lances." He sneered contemptuously. "It will teach the Egyptian dogs who is their master!"

At that moment, on a rooftop overlooking Memphis's teeming market place, Goghi—a professional thief with a deceptively innocent countenance—searched the street below for easy pilloining. Sighting the barge, he slid down the awning, darted across to the Tambourine, where he whispered to Babu, the proprietor, "Rama Khan is coming!"

Babu seized his cash box, and the two men quickly hurried up the stairs to the roof garden.

In a rooftop room, Taura, the dancing girl, was rehearsing for the evening's entertainment. Reports of her beauty had not been exaggerated in the telling. No artist could have captured the incredible perfection of her face, her dark eyes under brows that were like ebony wings, or the curve of her scarlet lips. And only a poet could have described the fiery grace of her sinuous body that so stirred the senses of beholders. As old Pepe, the orchestra drummer, increased the tempo, she finished the dance with a whirl that tumbled her wildly disarrayed hair around her bare shoulders like a sable cape.

Goghi, rushing into the room, panted, "Taura! The black barge of Rama Khan approaches the harbor!"

Her eyes met his in a swift look before, followed by the others, she sped to the roof garden and scanned the harbor.

Rama Khan's black-robed assassins, Goghi said grimly, were here at the request of their own Prince Selim. And Moka, who played the bagpipes, added, "That I should see the day when an Egyptian turns Bedouin dogs loose against his own people!"

With quiet anger, Taura began, "The heart of Prince Selim has always been with his people—"

"You defend Prince Selim," Moka interrupted hotly. "Yet you urge us to rise against his oppression!"

Taura's eyes kindled, but Babu laid a restraining hand on her arm, and she controlled herself to speak reasonably. "Our enemy in the Royal Palace is not Prince Selim, but the evil Shaman, who has forced the Prince to seek the aid of Rama Khan."

Old Pepe cried out, "Only last week, Rama Khan's raiders killed my son, and took my granddaughter away to sell in the slave market in Alexandria!"

Scowling, Goghi said, "Then let us kill Rama Khan as he rides through the streets!"

"And have his men slaughter our people like sheep?" Taura silenced him. "No, there must be no fighting!" She gestured peremptorily. "Go—all of you—warn the people to stay off the streets, lest some incident provide Rama Khan with an excuse for bloodletting. Hurry!"

All but Babu left, and he said, "It is no longer safe for you to be here." His voice was deep with anxiety. "You'd best go now—and quickly."

Bitterness weighted her words. "The danger is not yet, Babu. First, Rama Khan will go through the pretense of placing Prince Selim and the Royal Palace under his protection."

• Danger was to come sooner than she had foreseen, although she was not to be immediately aware of it.

When, on their disembarking at Memphis, Captain Kral ordered the soldiers to attack, Rama Khan, seeing Haidi and Hussein riding into town, ordered, harshly, "Hold!"

The Caliph's son could not have arrived at a more inopportune time. But, as Haidi and Hussein reined in their mounts, the Bedouin spoke with forced heartiness. "Greetings, Your Exalted Highness."

Haidi spoke with cold civility. "I am in haste to reach Bagdad, to give my father tidings of our great victory at Mansura." His look rested on the soldiers. "I saw none of your fierce fighters in the battle, yet I find some here in Egypt."

"Only at the request of Prince Selim, who has sought my help to quell the unrest in his city," Rama Khan answered smoothly.

Haidi said, with authority, "I must learn from Prince Selim the nature of the unrest in his realm, for it will be a matter of grave concern to my father. Tomorrow, at the first crack of dawn, I shall cross the river, and continue my journey."

"My black-sailed barge shall be at your disposal." Rama Khan's features revealed no hint of his relief. "With your Royal permission," he said, "I shall escort you to the Palace." He motioned to Captain Kral.

"Men of the Khan," Kral bellowed. "Forward!"

As arrogantly as though he was already the conqueror, Rama Khan rode at the head of his soldiers. And so hostile were the faces of the throngs darkening the rooftops, that Hussein said, wryly, "The Khan's men seem as welcome as a band of lepers."

On the roof of the Tambourine, old Pepe suddenly screamed, "Bedouin dog! Stealer of women!"

Taura and Goghi were watching the procession from the roof of the Tambourine, when Pepe screamed, "Bedouin dog! Stealer of women!"

The brick he threw at Rama Khan struck only a glancing blow. But the scimitar thrown back embedded itself in Pepe's throat. As his lifeless body fell to the street, the throngs on the rooftops, roaring their fury, began hurling bricks down on the procession.

One of the bricks struck Hussein on the forehead, felling him, and Rama Khan ordered his soldiers to clear the rooftops. Haidi, kneeling beside the prostrate Hussein, glanced upward, only half aware of the angry girl standing with the others. Then, assuring himself first that his friend was only stunned, he whipped out his scimitar and strode into the coffee shop. Goghi, a stout cudgel in hand, was guarding the stairs, and Haidi, slashing at him, sent the cudgel spinning.

Taura, seeing the encounter, cried, "That's Goghi—he's in danger!"

Babu said, swiftly, "Never mind Goghi. We must escape while we can!"

As Haidi mounted the stairs, Taura, with jeweled dagger in hand, darted behind an archway curtain. As he was about to pass her, she brought the dagger down with a force that sent blood spurting from his shoulder. With one slash of his scimitar, he severed the curtain.

Staring furiously at his attacker, he ordered, "Sheathe your claws, wench. I slay no maiden, even though she be a hellcat."

Her flashing eyes met his defiantly as she retorted, "Strange words from a paid assassin of the Khan!"

"I am no man of the Khan, but a stranger in your city! My companion was struck down by a missile hurled from this rooftop—and by yourself, like as not!"

Black-robed soldiers were stamping through the lower building, and she gasped, in panic, "Let me go, I beg of you, or the Khan's men will seize me and sell me into slavery!"

Irresistibly moved by her wild beauty, he loosed her, and she fled.

In the street below, Hussein struggled to his feet and groped his way to his horse. He grasped the pommel for support and leaned his head against the saddle.

Looking at Rama Khan, Captain Kral said, slyly, "A pity he was not killed, for then you could slaughter these Egyptian dogs with the Caliph's blessing."

Rama Khan pointed to a dropped weapon. "Fetch me yon Egyptian javelin."

Kral obeyed. Then, with murderous aim, Rama Khan flung it at Hussein's back.

Taura, seeing it from a small window, cried out, aghast, to Babu, "He has slain the stranger's friend!"

When Haidi reached the street, he hurried to kneel beside his friend's body, uttering his name in a grief-stricken voice. Rama Khan pointed out, with mock sympathy, "An Egyptian javelin, flung from a rooftop. Your Exalted Highness must now realize that Prince Selim had good cause to ask my assistance."

• At a hidden dock beneath the Tambourine, standing beside Taura, Babu said, hopelessly, "I fear all is lost. We are too weak to drive the Khan's assassins from the city."

Then their safety must be *bargained for*, she answered. As she spoke, she slipped out of her costume, until she wore only a sarong. Then she removed her gold anklets, pushed up her dark hair, and wound a wide strip of hide around it. "There is something the evil Khan de-

sires more than Memphis," she said.

Babu's tone held horror. "Not—the Princess Shalimar? No! No! Your Highness! To give yourself to the evil Khan—no! *No!*"

She replied, quietly, " 'Tis better that one be sacrificed than all."

Sliding off the dock, she swam with effortless skill along the sea wall, keeping close to its shadow to avoid detection. Where it skirted the Palace grounds, a submerged gigantic head of the god Ptah was a secret passageway into the Palace, and Taura dived straight into its open mouth.

She emerged in the pool of a secret chamber, and climbed out of the water. Mirva, Shalimar's personal handmaiden, was anxiously waiting, and her expression was one of intense relief as she said, "Your Highness, I feared for your safety."

The Princess Shalimar, who had masqueraded as Taura, the dancing girl, spoke gravely. "Old Pepe threw a brick at Rama Khan, and, instantly, fighting flared up. Many of my people were slain."

Wrapping a robe around the girl's wet figure, Mirva asked, "And my husband?"

"Fear not," Shalimar said gently. "Your Babu is unharmed."

• In elaborately beautiful quarters upstairs, the Princess Shalimar's hair was being brushed by handmaidens, when the clatter of Rama Khan's cavalcade sent everyone to the window. Behind Rama Khan was Prince Haidi, leading a horse bearing Captain Hussein's body.

"The stranger rides with them!" Shalimar cried.

Said a handmaiden, eagerly, "He is tall, his raiment costly, yet I cannot tell if he is handsome."

Shalimar said, "He is very handsome."

"You have met him, Your Highness?" another handmaiden asked.

"We spoke briefly."

"Think you he would help us against the evil Khan?"

"To come to the Palace, he must be of noble birth," the first handmaiden breathed. "With vast domain and an army."

Shalimar answered, "Go quickly. Learn the name and rank of the stranger." Turning to Mirva, she said, "If he be powerful, I shall seek his aid." At the girl's apprehensive suggestion that he might recognize her as Taura, the dancing girl, she said, "I doubt that he will suspect the Princess Shalimar of wielding the dagger that struck his shoulder."

The handmaiden returned excitedly to report that the stranger was Prince Haidi, youngest son of the mighty Caliph of Bagdad. "He has but to lift his hand, Your Highness, and the Caliph's army will sweep across the sands and deliver us!"

Shalimar smiled, with hope in her eyes.

But the smile turned to narrow-eyed dislike when the yellow-robed Shaman presented himself to her. By rank, he was a priest and healer, summoned long ago to attend the illness of Prince Selim, her father. But he was in Rama Khan's service, and his dark, hypnotic eyes, in a cadaverous face, had kept the Prince's will under his evil dominance.

Officially, Shalimar had not left the Palace, since, on his arrival, he had forbidden her to. It had been then that Taura the Dancer had appeared at the Tambourine to keep in touch with the dangers of her loved people in the only way she could.

"The visitor for whom you so elaborately prepare," the Shaman told her now, with deceptive softness, "departs at daybreak. Until then, you are forbidden to leave your quarters."

Ostensibly, the order came from her father. But the Prince gave no orders these days.

The Shaman left her and went to report to Prince Selim. "Rama Khan has come, Your Highness," he told the Prince.

Prince Selim had fine features, but they bore the look of a dominated man. "What brings that Bedouin cutthroat here?"

The Shaman's compelling eyes bored into his. "You wrote him—begging him to bring his soldiers to put down the unrest."

Selim's voice became trance-like. "I—I remember. My people have turned against me."

Haidi was waiting tensely with Rama Khan in an audience chamber when Selim came out, leaning on the Shaman. "Your Exalted Highness," Prince Selim said, "it grieves me your arrival is fraught with sadness."

"With an unwarranted slaying of Captain Hussein, of the Caliph's army, and my beloved comrade," Haidi retorted harshly.

Rama Khan said swiftly that Hussein's death would be avenged by the slaying of a hundred Egyptian rebels, and Haidi's look hardened. "Only *one* hand cast the javelin. Only *one* life shall be forfeit. *Until I have the thrower, I will not stir foot from Memphis.*"

Rama Khan's own look hardened then, though he spoke smoothly. Many of the rebels had been put in prison, he said, and he had sent for one of them. "Perhaps he can be *induced* to name the assassin. If so, your journey will not be delayed."

Manacled, Goghi was led in, babbling that he had seen nothing. At Rama Khan's threat to have him tortured on the rack, Haidi ordered, "Hold!" He had seen the fellow on the roof with the bazaar girl. "I fancy this rogue for a slave. Send him to my quarters. Through him, I hope to find the slayer of my comrade."



Manacled, Goghi was led in, babbling that he had seen nothing. Haidi demanded the rogue as a slave.

The Princess Shalimar, attended by her handmaidens, entered the room. Gleaming with jewels, her hair smooth as burnished ebony, she bore little resemblance to the bazaar girl. The Shaman's orders, she said clearly, would have given her no chance to offer sympathy to Prince Haidi. She exclaimed concernedly at his wounded shoulder. Told that it had been done by a wench at the bazaar, she insisted on cleansing it.

But, in her quarters, where he told her disconcertingly that the bazaar wench's beauty reminded him of her own, she was given no chance to ask his aid. For the Shaman appeared almost instantly. Bowing low to Haidi, he said, "Prince Selim insists I make sure your wound is properly cleansed before escorting you to your apartment, Your Exalted Highness."

Outwitted, Shalimar dared not protest.

Alone, finally, with Goghi, Haidi demanded of him the name of the bazaar wench.

Reluctantly, Goghi told him, "She is Taura the Dancer. Hers is the spirit that gives my people courage."

Haidi ordered, curtly, "You shall take me to her—tonight."

Unable to disobey him, Goghi bowed low.

• Late that evening, at the Tambourine, the dancing Taura's hair was a flying cloud around her bare shoulders. At sight of Rama Khan sitting at a table with Kral, and attended by black-robed soldiers, she shook it like a concealing veil across her face.

As Haidi entered with Goghi, Rama Khan told Kral, with grim significance, "He'll carry no tales to Bagdad."

When, at his order, Taura joined Haidi, his eyes paid her beauty no tribute, for he was thinking of Hussein. "I seek the cowardly jackal who slew my comrade."

She nodded gravely. "From a secret window in these walls, I witnessed the slaying."

He gripped her wrist. "Name me the assassin, and you shall receive one thousand pieces of gold!"

"I seek not gold," she quietly told him, "but your father's soldiers to drive Rama Khan and his vultures from our city."

Haidi said, contemptuously, "I care not what befalls your treacherous Egyptian jackals! Name me the slayer of my comrade, wench!"

Bitter anger at the man she had so liked, and so counted on, made her voice harsh. "The weapon that slew your comrade was Egyptian. But the hand that hurled it was the hand of Rama Khan."

Haidi rose with such force that the table was overturned. He strode across the room and, towering over Rama Khan, accused, "The hand that hurled the javelin was your own!"

At Kral's signal, black-robed soldiers closed in on Haidi. He defended himself fearlessly, but they forced him outside to the river's edge. There, Rama Khan hurled his scimitar at his captain's head with such vicious force that Haidi toppled into the water. Rama Khan and his men looked over the parapet to see him sink beneath the surface.

No one was watching Taura. But, followed by Goghi, she dived in after the presumably drowning man. As she rose to the surface with Haidi, who was regaining consciousness, Rama Khan roared, "He's still alive! Find boats! Slay them!"

By the time boats were launched, however, Goghi, and the girl whom he did not suspect was the Princess Shalimar, had towed Haidi along the river wall. When they reached Ptah's submerged head, she promised, "In a moment we will be safe; beneath the surface a viaduct leads to an underground chamber in the Palace."

"And be tortured on the rack for our pains!" Goghi panted. But, because searching boats were now dangerously close, he helped her tow Haidi through the entrance of the god's mouth.

In the secret chamber, when she ordered Mirva to bring bandages for Prince Haidi, the handmaiden answered, "Yes, Your Highness."

Goghi's eyes bulged. "*You—the Princess?*"

Shalimar was examining Haidi's head. "The wound is long—but not deep."

"And my skull thick," Haidi murmured. "Else I would have known such loveliness could not have been twice bestowed."

"Your words are fair," she reproached. "Yet, in the Tambourine—"

"They were harsh." His voice was shamed. "And my heart untouched by the sufferings of your people. In return, you risked your life to save my own, which henceforth will be yours to command."

Shalimar exclaimed at the wound in his shoulder and insisted upon cleansing it.

His eyes met hers in a look vowing loyal devotion.

Mirva, returning, addressed her anxiously. "Your Highness, Prince Selim demands your presence in the Great Hall."

But when, swiftly robed and coiffed, she entered the Great Hall, it was Rama Khan with the Shaman awaiting her. The matter was urgent, Rama Khan said directly. "Angered at the slaying of his comrade, Prince Haidi journeys at dawn to Bagdad, and soon will return with the Caliph's army to wreak vengeance on your people." He paused. "However, under certain conditions, I could be prevailed upon to see he does not live to carry tales to Bagdad."

"And your price for such gallant service?" Shalimar asked haughtily.

"Your hand in marriage. I have the power to *take* what I desire, yet—"

She told him clearly, disdainfully, "I doubt if you would find much joy of a *dead* Princess." Then, her expression deliberately contemptuous, she left the room.

Rama Khan's eyes were still narrowed with rage at her threat of suicide rather than marry him, when Kral reported they had found no trace of Haidi or the dancing girl. The Bedouin shouted, "Search every nook and corner of the city! Post guards over river craft!"

Returning to Haidi and Goghi, Shalimar recounted gravely what had happened. When Haidi promised to bring his father's army to march against Rama Khan, she said, "His men will be watching both banks of the river." She added, decisively, "Remaining here, you can accomplish nothing but your own destruction."

With Goghi's help, under cover of darkness, he could escape. They were to swim to mid-river, then float past the city with the current. On the opposite shore, Goghi would steal a small boat; with it, they could reach Alexandria. From there, they could take a ship to Haifa and thence overland across Palestine to Bagdad.

She refused Haidi's anxious plea that she come with them. "I must remain to do what I can to protect my people. I have been reared in luxury through taxation of my people. Now in their hour of need, I shall not desert them."

His face set, Haidi flung off his blanket and dived into the pool, followed by Goghi.

As they climbed out of the river on the opposite bank, Goghi scornfully told Haidi how little he cared to protect a man who unprotestingly deserted the Princess.

There was nothing he could do for her, trapped in the palace, Haidi said sharply. And his fervent anxiety for her was so in his look that Goghi's hostility vanished, though he had little hope that two against so many could help her.

"A small group of fearless men, striking when least expected, in time could whittle down the soldiers of the Khan," Haidi insisted. "Are there none such in Memphis?"

Goghi's eyes lighted with excitement.

"Among my contemporaries in the Den of Thieves are many who would fight if they knew that the Princess Shalimar was their beloved Taura!"

"The Den of Thieves," Haidi mused. "Tis an intriguing name."

"And well-hidden in the long-lost cavern of Isis, which lies deep beneath the city."

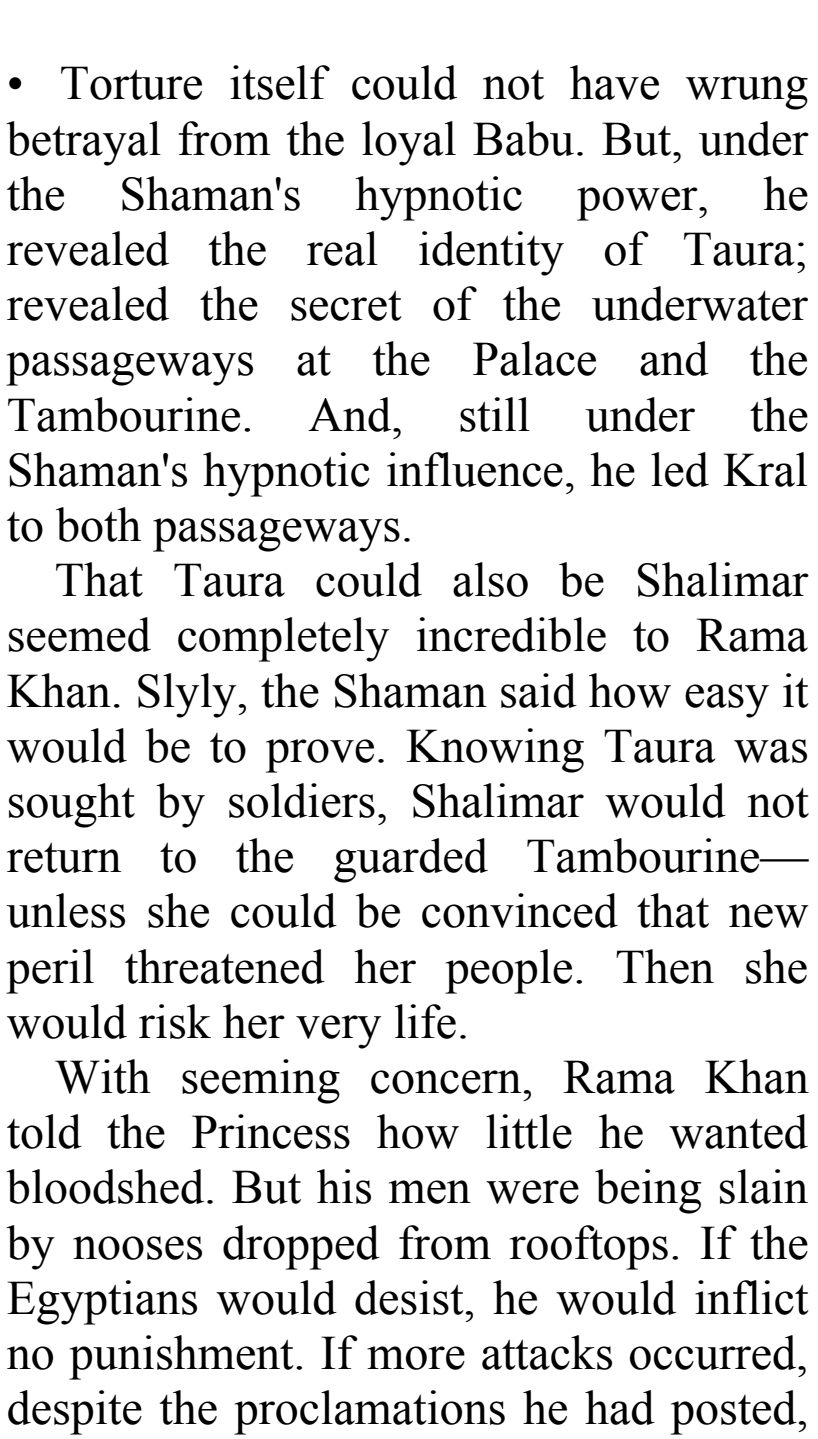
"Then take me to these noble rascals!"

The Den of Thieves was reached by a concealed passageway in the market place. As they approached it, a dwarf emerged from an opening in the wall. "Master," Goghi said to Haidi, "this is Little Tut, the smallest thief in Memphis."

The dwarf squinted at Haidi, and said, "A thief with a master—'tis a rare oddity."

Goghi smiled. "And a rare master who is also a Prince of Bagdad," he said, swaggeringly.

In the rock-vaulted cavern, Haidi told the gathered thieves that their Princess Shalimar was Taura the Dancer. "She insists on remaining, to try to protect her people. Therefore, our task is the removal of her enemies—under cover of darkness, wiping out small groups at a time."



In the cavern, Haidi told the thieves that their Princess was Taura the Dancer.

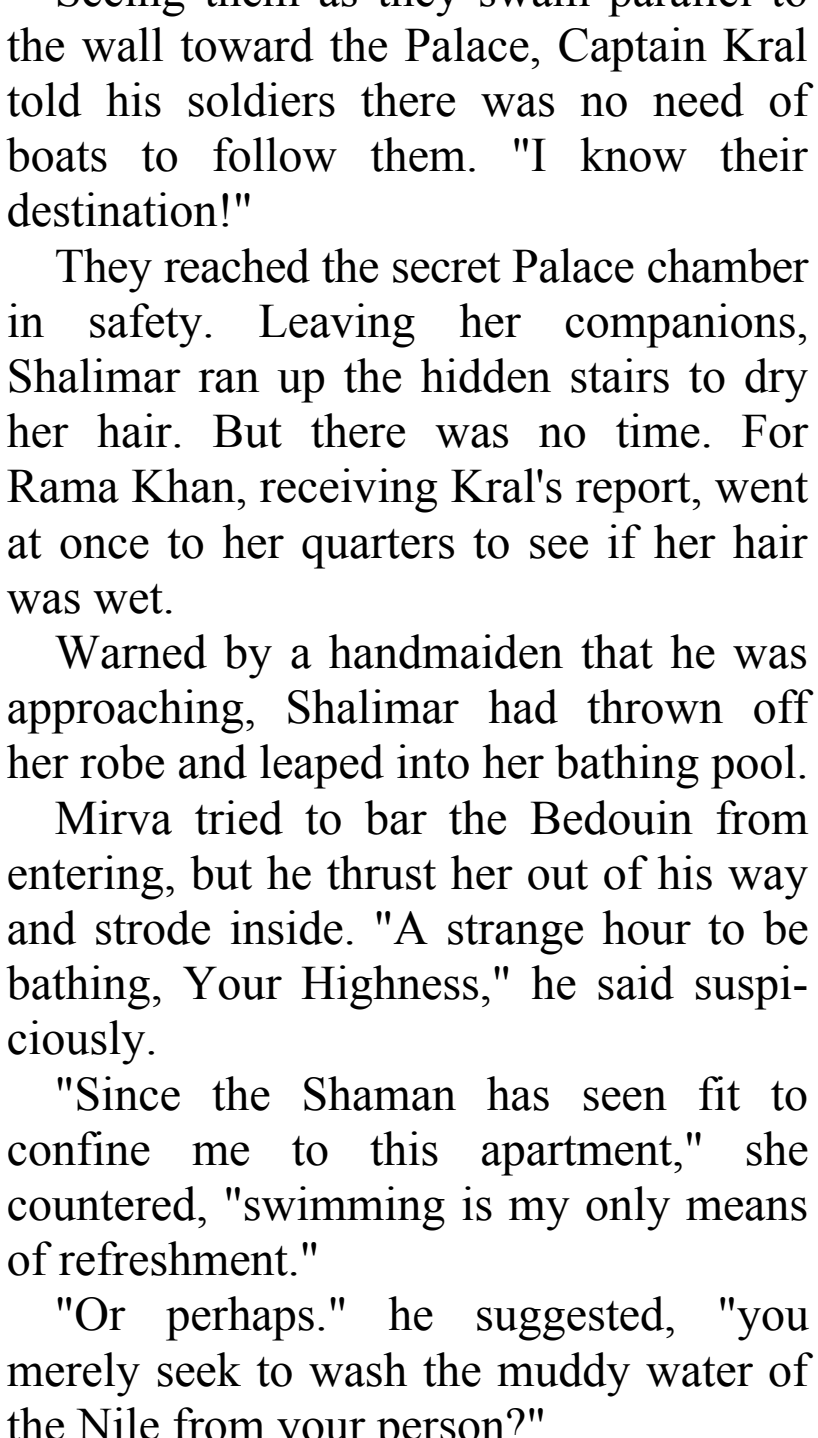
As one man, they agreed to attack Rama Khan's soldiers from dark rooftops and alleys, with silken nooses and dagger thrusts.

Meanwhile, at that very moment, Babu was being led to the Palace.

• Torture itself could not have wrung betrayal from the loyal Babu. But, under the Shaman's hypnotic power, he revealed the real identity of Taura; revealed the secret of the underwater passageways at the Palace and the Tambourine. And, still under the Shaman's hypnotic influence, he led Kral to both passageways.

That Taura could also be Shalimar seemed completely incredible to Rama Khan. Slyly, the Shaman said how easy it would be to prove. Knowing Taura was sought by soldiers, Shalimar would not return to the guarded Tambourine—unless she could be convinced that new peril threatened her people. Then she would risk her very life.

With seeming concern, Rama Khan told the Princess how little he wanted bloodshed. But his men were being slain by nooses dropped from rooftops. If the Egyptians would desist, he would inflict no punishment. If more attacks occurred, despite the proclamations he had posted, he would stop at nothing to avenge them. . . .



Rama Khan told Shalimar how little he wanted bloodshed. His men, he said, were being slain.

Knowing there were hotheads at the Tambourine who would ignore those proclamations, Shalimar knew she must risk going there to warn them.

As she emerged from the water, waiting soldiers emeshed her in a fish net, bound her wrists cruelly, then led her through the market place.

On the Tambourine's dark rooftop, Haidi said her name in agony. Covering his face to avoid recognition, he leaped to the street, followed by Goghi and a band of thieves, who formed a flying wedge that separated the soldiers. Then, freeing her from the net, they dashed through the door of the Tambourine, slammed it shut and barred it with heavy furniture.

Shalimar gasped as Haidi uncovered his face. "I had thought you safely on your way to Alexandria."

"I leave Memphis only when you go with me, my Princess!" He ordered his men: "Escape to the roof, comrades, while the door still holds!"

But there was no safety there. Only escape by the river offered a chance. They raced out the rear door to the patio. About four feet below its edge flowed the river. Shalimar dived into the water, and the men followed.

Seeing them as they swam parallel to the wall toward the Palace, Captain Kral told his soldiers there was no need of boats to follow them. "I know their destination!"

They reached the secret Palace chamber in safety. Leaving her companions, Shalimar ran up the hidden stairs to dry her hair. But there was no time. For Rama Khan, receiving Kral's report, went at once to her quarters to see if her hair was wet.

Warned by a handmaiden that he was approaching, Shalimar had thrown off her robe and leaped into her bathing pool.

Mirva tried to bar the Bedouin from entering, but he thrust her out of his way and strode inside. "A strange hour to be bathing, Your Highness," he said suspiciously.

"Since the Shaman has seen fit to confine me to this apartment," she countered, "swimming is my only means of refreshment."

"Or perhaps," he suggested, "you merely seek to wash the muddy water of the Nile from your person?"

"You speak in riddles, Bedouin Lord." She glared at him. "If you will have the grace to retire while I don suitable raiment, we will then resume this strange conversation."

Robed and reclining against cushions on a couch, with Mirva standing behind her and the other handmaidens sitting on cushions at her feet, Shalimar received Rama Khan, who entered with the Shaman and Kral.

"And now, Bedouin Lord," Shalimar said, imperiously, "you will explain your strange words and unwarranted intrusion."

His eyes were cruel with knowledge. "I see that many bracelets cover marks left by the rope on your wrists, Your Highness—or do you prefer I call you Taura?"

She asked, haughtily, "And if I were also Taura the Dancer, what then, Bedouin Lord?"

The dancing of Taura only added flame to his desires, he assured her. But the slaying of seven of his soldiers this night cried out for vengeance. "Tomorrow at high noon, seven of your people will be executed for each of my soldiers slain."

With no outward sign of her inner fears, she suggested that he had better consider saving his own people. For Prince Haidi had escaped last night. At his sharp oath, she taunted, "Whither will you flee with your people to escape the wrath of the Caliph?"

"When Prince Haidi returns with the Caliph's army," he rasped, "he will find Memphis a city of the dead!"

With every tortured nerve, she knew he would fulfill his terrifying threat. And she knew what she must do to prevent it; she who had so recently learned what love might be. She would bargain with him, she declared. "Spare my people and leave this city now, taking your soldiers with you—and I will share your wanderings. I will not take my life, and will in all ways perform the duties of a wife. This I solemnly swear in the sacred name of Mother Isis."

Triumph filled his voice. "'Tis a rare bargain! I shall order my soldiers to evacuate the city at once. Prepare yourself, my Princess, for I shall return at dawn to escort you across the river, where, in ancient Bedouin ritual, you will become the bride of Rama Khan." He salaamed and departed.

When Mirva went down the secret stairway to tell Haidi that the Princess wished his presence immediately, her face was so tear-stained that he dashed up ahead of her. Confronting Shalimar, he said, with deep anxiety, "Tell me what new evil has taken place."

Swiftly, as though to be rid of the words that were such agony to speak, she told him what she must do, and why she must do it. At his hoarse cry, she reminded him simply that *he* would sacrifice himself, even as she was doing, for *his* people. Then she drew his face down to hers. "There is so little time. Just hold me in your arms; all else let us forget."

"There is so little time," Shalimar said to Haidi. "Just hold me in your arms."

False dawn was touching the sky when she said, tenderly, "The memory of these enchanted hours I shall treasure in my heart for so long as I shall live."

In a voice that gave no hint of what he planned, he said, "May Allah protect us all this day."

After he had left, she prayed to the Egyptian goddess Isis. "Grant me the courage to walk in the darkness that lies ahead."

• Sitting beside Rama Khan on the barge deck, Shalimar's features revealed only regal composure. Three dhows were bearing down on the barge. As they neared, Rama Khan scanned the leading dhow, and his voice rose exultantly: "Tis none other than Prince Haidi!" He turned a look of triumph on Shalimar's bloodless face. "Shortly," he said, "I shall no longer have cause to quit Memphis!" Then he bellowed to the oarsmen: "Prepare to repel boarders!"

Haidi, looking up, whispered to Goghi, "May Allah grant our comrade fails us not."

For Little Tut was hidden in the cover of the main mast. As Haidi and his companions came alongside, the dwarf hacked at the cable which supported the mast. With a crashing roar, it toppled, knocking troopers overboard and felling others, and enveloping the rest. With his loyal comrades, Haidi and his staunch companions leaped over the debris.

Rama Khan and Kral converged on him with drawn weapons. Ironically, it was Rama Khan's scimitar, flailing so murderously at Haidi, that accidentally felled Kral instead. The next moment, in hand-to-hand combat with Rama Khan, Haidi brought his scimitar crashing down on the Bedouin's skull. Collapsing, he fell backward and into the river.

No one had seen the Shaman drag Shalimar to an upper deck. Now, holding his dagger at her throat, he shouted, "Throw down your weapons, Prince Haidi—or the Princess dies!"

Once more, brave Little Tut proved his courage. Sliding down a cable, he buried his knife in the evil Shaman's back. The remaining crew members, having lost their leaders, threw down their weapons in surrender.

"Now, comrades," Haidi ordered, exultantly, "put the prisoners to the oars, and point our bow to Memphis!"

"Mother Isis must have heard my prayers," Shalimar breathed. "For truly a miracle you have wrought, my Prince."

"Think you then that Mother Isis would aid me in a second miracle this day, that tomorrow, when I leave for Bagdad, I may carry with me a Princess?"

Shalimar answered, tenderly, "Mother Isis, in her great compassion, might grant a wish so dear to my heart."

• That the goddess Isis had heard her prayers, Shalimar was doubly sure on the day that she and Haidi paused before the great statue of Isis. Looking down at the eternal fire, dimly burning in the receptacle at the foot of the statue, she said, "If the sacred fire should glow brightly, then our love will last through all eternity."

Shalimar said, "If the sacred fire should glow brightly, our love will last through eternity."

Gradually, the flames intensified until the fire became brighter and brighter. Omen of new-found freedom. Freedom for Shalimar's once-oppressed people. Freedom for a lifetime to be shared with her beloved.

THE END

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**Taura (Princess Shalimar) .DEBRA PAGET
Prince Haidi.....JEFFREY HUNTER
Rama Khan.....MICHAEL RENNIE
Goghi.....DONA DRASSE
Mirva.....WALLY CASSELL
Shaman.....EDGAR BARRIER
Captain Kral.....MICHAEL ANSARA
Basra.....JACK ELAM
Babu.....LESTER SHARPE
Hakar.....LEE VAN CLEEPE
Little Tut.....BILLY CURTIS
Captain Hussein.....ROBERT ROARK**