

character to call for my decree. And take heed, all of you, how you give voice to the egotistic thoughts that are boiling in your brains."

One by one the courtiers filed from the hall, casting dark looks upon the last counselor, the thin and evil looking Ramek, the king had summoned to his throne. But Ramek, the wise, heeded not their looks as he plucked a flower in the garden and placed it in his bosom. For well he knew that he controlled the ear of the king, and when he wished to raise a storm the royal clouds would answer to his word. And in this case he had his ends to serve, for he loved the daughter of the king and feared that his rival, Prince Hamassar, had already won the hand of the Princess Bru.

Then throughout the city spread the news of the emperor's decree. Over mountains, plains and rivers traveled the words of the new law, and in distant villages the people groaned in fear that their king was growing old and harsh. The faces of the women wore sarcastic smiles, and playfully would they enjoin their husbands to keep their heads. But the men murmured, and in some place, the ever ready plotter saw a chance to raise revolt; for even in the most peaceful kingdom there is always present the man who loves to stir up the people against their lord.

So the days went by and all men were humble. No longer did the boaster free his tongue, nor the dandy tell of his triumphs in love. The lawyers and the doctors, the scoldsayers and the merchants went about in silence, and when they referred to themselves spoke in a deprecating way refreshing to hear.

Once more the face of the emperor took on its accustomed smile. He was pleased with his people, for they seemed to him sufficiently humble to satisfy his most exacting mood. The boaster no longer appealed to the throne, and the courtiers wore a subservient air which appealed to the heart of the autocrat.

Seeing the monarch in this pliant state Prince Hamassar, a handsome and wealthy youth whose diffidence had often been noticed by the king, felt encouraged to plead for the hand of the Princess Bru. It was no easy task which he thus essayed. The man who won the hand of the emperor's child would be king one day, and this fact had been a potent motive in the unsuccessful suit of Ramek, the wise.

Thus it was that there was great excitement in the land when the emperor, yielding to the blushing intercession of his child, graciously acknowledged the worthiness of Prince Hamassar and placed in his the hand of Princess Bru. The courtiers smiled and shouted in acclaim, but Ramek, frowning, stole from the hall in silence, and when he reached the street breathed a vow of vengeance to the gods. What if he were old and thin! Was he not wise? Who was this Hamassar that he should win a kingdom and a bride while better men must bow before him and wander alone beneath the stars? But hold, the end was not yet! Was there not a way to over-

come this bold presumption on the part of a prince formerly so modest? Surely Ramek, who had placed an emperor beneath his thumb, should not be defeated because for a moment the force of youth had proved too much for his gray hairs.

Communing thus with himself the Cassius like figure of the defeated suitor approached the palace. The day was hot, and as he removed his hat and let

the flower scented breeze play with his silvered locks his face became stern with a vengeful and determined purpose. Could Hamassar and the Princess Bru have seen that look their transports would have been much less pronounced.

CHAPTER II.



"I have the hand-handsomest nose in the world."

The palace of Prince Hamassar was gay with brilliant lights, and on the soft, warm air of night arose the joyous notes of a drinking song. The gardens which surrounded the great mansion seemed to feel the influence of the gayety, for the flowers welcomed the kisses of the night wind, and the trees and shrubs murmured as though humming the air that echoed from the banquet hall. The fountains splashed merrily, and when the moon came up seemed to laugh at their own silvery beauty.

Within the palace dark faced eunuchs hurried about dispensing the hospitality of their lord. For Prince Hamassar entertained that night 200 mighty men in honor of his betrothal to the emperor's child. The banquet room presented a glorious scene. About the table were gathered the statesmen, poets, merchants of the land, and the feast before them was worthy of their rank. Stern men of battle sat among the men of peace and men learned in the law conversed politely with their clients. Sharp eyed doctors were glad to see the viands and the wines disappear so fast, for well they knew that indigestion, sharp and painful, would give them work next day. So each guest was happy in his own peculiar way, and decorum gave place to mirth as the night waxed old.

At the head of the room sat handsome Prince Hamassar, his dark, fine face lighted with a smile. Why should he not be glad? Youth, wealth and fame were his, and the promise of a crown. The fairest maiden in the world had given him her troth. He was beloved by the people and possessed the friendship of the king. As he gazed about him that night and saw among his guests the great men of the land his pulse beat wildly and he drained a glass of snow cooled wine to quiet the fever of conceit which he knew was throbbing in his brain.

Near him sat the wise but wicked Ramek, decked in gorgeous robes and looking even thinner than before, placed as he was between two robust men. But Ramek, though not great in flesh, had a brilliant tongue, and his witty jests amused those who heard them so that a roar of laughter ever and anon arose from his corner of the board. Out of his small, burning eyes he watched the prince and often pledged his health in a brimming goblet of the headiest wine. Hamassar, unsuspecting of his rival's purpose, drank freely and laughed boisterously at the pungent words of Ramek, the wise.

When the fun was at its height and sedate and solemn counselors had forgotten their dignity and sang and drank as though they were boys on a lark Ramek arose and called in loud tones for silence. After a while the uproar ceased, the wine was untouched for a moment, the song died away in cheerful echoes through the palace, and all eyes were turned upon the cadaverous courtier who stood near the prince.

"My friends," said Ramek, holding a glass of wine in his hand, "it gives me great pleasure to propose a toast. It is seldom that so many circumstances of good omen surround a man as those which crowd upon him whose health it is fitting we should drink. To most men youth itself is a sufficient joy. What then should be the satisfaction of a man who is not only young but handsome, rich, and over whose head there hangs the promise of a crown? We who love our land, who give our lives to its advancement and look with jealous eyes upon all that affects its welfare, can truly say that the event which is celebrated by this gathering here to-night meets with our warm approval. I can well remember the day when our host was a little child. It is hard for me to realize that the fleeting years have changed him from a toddling boy into a firm, able man filled with a lofty purpose and crowned at the outset of his career with the laurels of success. But I must not detain you further, for I see that every glass is filled. My countrymen, I give you the health and happiness of Hamassar, prince and an emperor's hope."

(To be continued.)