

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

'Iram indeed is gone with all his rose,
And Jamshyd's seven-ringed Cup, where no one knows.'

ROSES and roses and roses: the garden was aglow, mysterious, foamy with them; I doubt you would have found the like in the Garden of Iram or in al-Jannat itself. Roses with pale petals over-curving like a wave or the lip of a shell, that within were all blush and peerless pinkness; roses amber-hearted or apricot-hearted; roses of infinite purity tossed in sprays whiter than the snows of Kaf; delicate yellow roses billowing over the latticed pergolas; crimson roses burning deep in the cypress gloom, redder than rubies, redder than wine, marvellously imperial and profound—not ostentatious nor flaunting their beauty, but compelled into a secret pride akin to compassion by the lofty intensity of their dreams, of their secret knowledge. . . .

These were the only faithful councillors and friends the Queen had.

She was in her garden amongst them, in a place of fretted marble, with overhead a foamy canopy of the yellow roses. You shall see her now, the rose of all roses in the rose garden; with beauty drawn out of the suns and fragrant nights of eighteen Persian springs—no more. Her eyes were dark and lustrous, but with something more than softness in them; in the poise of her beautiful head were strength and pride; but with the pride, humility, you would say; and the strength the strength of impersonality. . . .

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

It was a sore burden to be laid on her, this queenhood—in a kingdom left to her by her dead husband, to be held in trust for their unborn son. An over-civilized kingdom, wherein luxury was pursued and duty mainly neglected; a city of white palaces and mosques and lovely gardens, which put its trust in Turkish mercenaries, and thronged to hear too clever poets stab each other in mellifluous-spiteful *ruba'i* or *ghazal* over their wine; a city without patriotism, virtue or valour. She knew she had no defence, nor anyone to rely upon, but the hired Turks; and they—it would have been a strong king's work, or the greater part of it, to keep them in order. She had five hundred of them in her pay: five hundred too many for peace; hundreds of thousands too few for war—such war, especially, as threatened.

It was less than a year since she had travelled down from the mountain castle of her forefathers to be the bride of a young warlike king she had never seen: a marriage, however, that proved to be of those arranged in heaven. They became at once lovers and comrades, and foresaw splendid things they would do together: conquests they would make, not merely external; regeneration they would bring to their people. But within six months of their marriage he had died; leaving her to the protection of a crafty Minister she loved not and the Turkish guards—and to the tender mercies of terrible Mahmud of Ghazna.

Which tender mercies were now beginning to precipitate: and that was the worst part of her burden—perhaps.

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

With her five hundred Turks she was to oppose that World-shaker—that Turk of Turks and great Thunderbolt of God,—unless means could be found of placating him. It had come about in this way:

As Mahmud was among kings, so was Abu Ali ibn Sina ¹ among philosophers; and during the months of this queen's married life that brilliant ornament of time had deigned to shed the lustre of his presence on her husband's court. It was a light to be hidden under no bushel, a fame as wide as Mahmud's own; where Ibn Sina was, there was the intellectual capital of the world. And Mahmud could not endure it that his Ghazna should be second in any respect to any city on earth. He himself was the Daystar of the Age; let all counter-suns unite their radiance to his.

He wanted Ibn Sina himself; and what he wanted he asked for; and what he asked for he never failed to get. The four hundred poets of Ghazna, collected willy nilly from all the House of Islam; lured by barbaric pearls and gold, or fetched in as pampered captives from conquered kingdoms, had no magic to dull the tooth of envy that would be busy at their master's heart while Ibn Sina the Great remained at court or city other than his. Poets—*ta!*—their wit and quarrels were amusing; it swelled one's sense of splendour to feed them, array them, set them cock-fighting, flog them on occasion, or stuff their mouths with gold; it was a thing to boast of, like the conquest of

¹ Avicenna.

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

India, that one had twenty score of them fattening in one's palace;—and then, too, they were the minters of flattery, without whose service it should not pass current far or long. But every court in Iran had its living dozen or more of them; and one had lost one's Firdausi that outshone them all.

Ibn Sina, on the other hand, was unique. That he was a poet, and of the wittiest, was the least of his accomplishments. No science was hidden from him; not even the Secret Science. From China to Andalus none had a tithe of his fame; he was the greatest of all physicians; and supreme, since Aflatun and Aristo, in philosophy.—A sovereign, luxurious and extravagant man withal, out-princing princes in the manner of his life, and with disciples unnumbered for his subjects: the gayest, the most brilliant of men who could yet snatch time from his high living to pour out upon the world a torrent of books ten times as profound, ten times as scintillant, and ten times as many as any other ten thinkers could produce together. Why, one would give all conquered Hindustan for Ibn Sina, and think the exchange cheap: possession of the man would more allay one's ambition, more swell one's fame. Mahmud had sent ambassadors with rich gifts and a peremptory message: Ibn Sina was to start for Ghazna forthwith.

The king and queen sent for the philosopher, and let Mahmud's emissaries give their message direct. There was just one man in Islamiyeh in those days, probably—

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

at least in the Abbassid Caliphate—who would have dared flout Mahmud's commands; and that was Ibn Sina. In a lesser mind you might ascribe such light defiance to puffed-up vanity, and hold him a victim of his own eternal brilliance and success. But you have not understood Ibn Sina unless you have seen in him nature's prodigy, with no room in him for flattery or fear: one naturally to look on world-conquerors as the dust beneath his feet—and to tell them so. He quietly informed the ambassador that the court of his master was no place for men of mind: they could do no good work there. Even here in Iran there was much too much, for the dignity of civilization, of Turkish soldiery; was he to drown himself in the central ocean of Turkism, and become the slave of the son of the slave of a slave.¹ Let Sultan Mahmud bethink him of the insult he had offered Firdausi; and again of what al-Biruni suffered for prophesying truly twice; and let him give up hope of associating with his betters.

All of which the King al-Ka'us approved heartily; and added sharp words of his own to tease the Ghaznewid's hearing withal. Haughty young leopard of a prince, he had himself been straining, eastward, at the leashes of peace: Mahmud's ambitions grew intolerable to monarchs of will and spirit. . . . It was, of course, no less than to declare war; for which he, al-Ka'us, might have had as many Turks out of Turan as he desired: swift fearless bowmen and spearmen from the vast plains, nine-tenths of them with

¹ Mahmud—who was actually that.

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

a nourishable hatred against the son of Sabuktigin already. And he could have overawed and led them—to victory? One could not say; no one ever did win victory from Mahmud; and yet, while Mahmud lived, there was always the chance. At least to an honourable defeat.—The Sultan at that time was busy in India: outdoing the exploits of Iskander of old, and taking in ripe empires as one might swallow grapes; he could but pocket al-Ka'us's insult, and promise himself that the hour of these Persian princelings should come, and presently. And now it was certainly at hand. Al-Ka'us had died before Mahmud, returning, had arrived at Ghazna; and a month since the message had come: *Deliver up Ibn Sina and so much in tribute, or expect my armies to carry away the dust of your city.*

What could she do? Ibn Sina had left them before her husband's death, or that dire blow would not have fallen: the great doctor would surely have cured al-Ka'us; and as to the tribute demanded, there was not so much gold in Iran and Turan. Should she flee, and leave the kingdom to Mahmud? She thought of her dead lord, and of his unborn son, and dismissed the idea as unthinkable. Fight?—ah, but how? What could the captain of her Turks, Oghlu Beg—even supposing that he and his men would stand by her—do with his five hundred against the Ghaznevid's hundreds of thousands? And even if she had an army: Hussein al-Ajjami her vizir, she judged, would make his own terms with Mahmud; selling without compunction herself, her son, and her kingdom.

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

She had answered the Sultan's letter thus:

'The philosopher Abu Ali ibn Sina left our court long since; and is to be sought now at Merv or Ray or Samarcand—we know not where. Sultan Mahmud is a mighty champion of the Faith, a most puissant prince, and also a man of honour; it is certain that if he leads his armies hither, I also, a weak woman, shall endeavour to give him battle; let him consider, then, what kind of victory he might win. Were I victor, it would be a triumph for me until the Day of Judgment; if the victory be his, men will say, He has only conquered a woman. And the issues of war are in the hands of God: it cannot be known aforehand what the result will be. Make war, then, upon the strong, and in the victory his strength shall be added to yours; but give the hand of your august friendship to the weak: so shall men praise your magnanimity, and your fame shall endure. We expect your friendship, my lord Sultan; since most undeniably we are weak.

'But we will not give up this kingdom to you, since it is not ours to give, but the property of Hasan Ali ibn al-Ka'us, who is not yet born. Yet, knowing that the Sultan is wise and kindly, we have no anxiety in this matter, but repose on the couch of tranquillity and confidence.'

She had received no answer to this; but knew that Mahmud was on the march. Now, what she meditated was the raising of an army to oppose him. She clapped her hands for a slave, and sent for the vizir.

He had held office under the father of her husband,

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

had this Ajjami: planting his power by a thousand roots while the old king's faculties were failing. He had been a very politic minister: had he strayed anywhere from honourable service, none, even of his own household, knew of it for a certainty. Al-Ka'us would have dismissed him, but died before the occasion served; now the Queen found herself dependent on him. If she did not trust him greatly, whom else should she trust at all? He had been all humility with her; all, she suspected, a soft buffer between her will and its carrying into effect.—A handsome old man, perhaps sixty; refined, smooth, white-bearded and aquiline: it might have been a noble face, but for a keen quietude in the eyes that slightly veiled selfishness and cunning, and a sensuous fullness of the lower lip. His strength lay in intrigue, in persistence, in perfect suavity not to be ruffled; in the power of a will, too, that would hunt covertly for years, and never forgo its designs.

When the formalities of greeting were over she began to question him. Had the messengers ridden forth? What answers had come in? Was the manhood of the provinces assembling? What numbers had been mustered?—Ah, but here we must work with caution, said he; must consider well before irrevocable steps were taken, and irrevocable disaster invited. Mahmud and his host were drawing near, and opposition was hardly to be offered. The swiftness of his marches, the terror of his name, his long tradition of invincibility—all these things were to be taken into

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

account. The feeling throughout the country, among the nobles—which he, her slave, had so carefully tested—was that, since the king was dead——

Here she broke in upon his speech to remind him that the king, unborn, was present.

He bowed low; seemed a little distressed—tactfully, as one who reserves painful things. These matters were in the hands of God; who could build upon the uncertainties of fate? Then he fetched a compass, and spoke of her beauty; ah, with tact—with wonderful tact! He indicated, not failing to make his meaning clear—and terrible—what the result of that beauty would be, upon Mahmud. And who could doubt the truth of his words? The kingdom would be annexed; she herself would be taken to Ghazna, to the Sultan's harem; her son, when he was born, would be enslaved or slain,—at best would grow up the nonentity Mahmud might choose to make of him.—‘And your advice, O Ajjami?’ said she, knowing there were ill things to be spoken.—His advice was couched in the language of utmost reverent devotion. Many of the prominent and influential had broached the idea to him; might his words, that were to declare it, be pearls of humility, rubies of love! It was that a king should be provided; for lack of whom indifference and anxiety were rife, and would grow; a king about whom the people might gather, and with whom, perhaps, the son of Sabuktigin might deign to treat. Let her lift her slave to the throne then, that he might meet Mahmud as king: so the radiance of her own

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

beauty should remain hidden from the burning glances of the World Conqueror. . . .

She turned a little cold as she listened to him; mastered a disgust that sickened her; mastered her face and voice, and answered him. She was but two months a widow, she said; and her heart demanded longer time for mourning. Meanwhile she would consider this plan . . . that seemed wise . . . that might presently come to seem best. And she had great comfort of the thought that he, who served her and was faithful, had served and been faithful to al-Ka'us her dear lord also; and to al-Amin the father of al-Ka'us. Ah, what treasures were honour and loyalty! Not all the riches of the realm, nor sovereignty itself would weigh an ant's weight against them on the day when Munkir and Nakir should open his tomb; when his friends should ask what wealth he had left behind him; but the angels, what good deeds he had sent before. She could trust him, she knew, to leave nothing undone for the safety of his prince.—So he left her, assuring her of his devotion; and went forth to the furthering of his plans. She might trust him, she supposed, to sell her to Mahmud.

She walked forth among the roses her friends; perchance they would have comfort or counsel to whisper. . . . Allah! must she indeed pay this price that she loathed? Mahmud, or al-Ajjami! . . . She believed, knowing him somewhat, that the vizir would have cunning enough to save her for himself, should she consent to his terms: he won his battles perhaps even more inevitably than Mahmud.

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

But what would he do with her son? She shuddered. For herself, she would rather the Ghaznewid's harem . . . but again, there was her son. . . .—The white rose reached out its sprays to her; the apricot-hearted wafted her its sweetness; the crimson, as she passed, stirred by a delicate wind, brushed her cheek with its sovereign bloom, and came dewed with a tear from the touch. *We both are Queens in Iran!* it whispered.

No, she would not pay the price. There was Oghlu Beg, the captain of the guard; dependable so long as he was paid;—she would compound with him for the contents of her treasury, and ride out herself among his Turks to seek death on the field. Then she and her son would meet al-Ka'us together in Paradise; and she knew al-Ka'us would approve.—She sent for the Turk.

'Oghlu Beg,' she said, when the big limbed man was before her, 'your living depends on your reputation for faith and valour. You have received my lord's pay, and mine; and your pay shall be doubled if you serve me well now. Doubled?—ask of me the whole of my treasury, when you have defeated me Mahmud ibn Sabuktigin.'

'Madam,' said he, with the heavy speech of the slow-thoughted, 'it would be impossible without raising a great army. And I might do that, even now, had I the authority. But it would be a great task; the slave's son of Ghazna is renowned and feared. The men of Turan would not come to the banners of less than a king. And I also would serve for something better than money. . . . I love you; make

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

me king, and I will go forth with you and gather an army that may meet even Mahmud with hope. Otherwise I must clearly offer my sword to the Ghaznewid; there would be little profit in offering it elsewhere.'

Such things happened constantly. Turkish captains founded many a dynasty in Persia, and then patronized art and letters as vigorously—if not as intelligently—as they pushed their conquests. This slow, heavy, bow-legged warrior, for all his confessed readiness to sell himself and his men to her enemy, did not rouse in her the fear and disgust she felt at the advances of her own so polished countryman. His bluntness was better than the vizir's tact: it was his business to sell himself, and he would do it; but he had a code that would keep him from selling her.

'This is your one condition?' she asked.

'It is the one condition,' he answered. 'Not only on account of my love, but also in consideration of the possibilities. Not otherwise could I gather an army.'

'And you will not ride with me against Mahmud with the army you have—and receive my treasury in exchange?'

'Dead men enjoy not wealth,' said he. 'It is the one condition.'

There was no hope then, and she dismissed him. But an impulse came to her before he had passed from sight, and she called him back.

'Before you came here, O Oghlu Beg,' she said, 'al-Ajjami the vizir was with me. He too had a plan to

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

propose; and his plan was even as yours is. He too would be king, and my husband.'

'May his couch be made in hell!' growled the Turk.

'I will tell you,' said she. 'The King my husband was not as other men; and no man shall have of me what he had. I will not marry al-Ajjami, O Oghlu; and I will not marry you. Therefore go you to Mahmud with your men, and serve him while he pays you, as you have served my lord and me. But I will even beg a boon of you before you go.'

The Turk bent his head.

'Stay you here until the Ghaznewid is at the gates; go to him then. I desire your protection against al-Ajjami.'

He had no more command of metaphor than a dog. Where another would have said 'O Moon of Wonder' or 'O Tulip from the garden-plots of Paradise', he could get out nothing but 'I will stay. And I will guard thee from this son of Iblis.' Then, after a pause for thought: 'And I will not go to Mahmud. If it be thy will I will carry thee where Mahmud comes not: to Egypt, or Africa, or Spain. And none shall harm thee by the way: neither I nor another.'

But the Queen had no idea of seeking refuge anywhere.

That night two things happened. First: the messenger returned from Mahmud's camp and reported. The Sultan had laughed over the Queen's letter. Within a week he would be at the city gates. 'She expects our friendship' he said 'because she is undeniably weak. Tell her the

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

price of our friendship shall be'—here he had looked round for a suggestion—'What shall it be, you poets?' One of whom had named a sum altogether preposterous, and another had doubled it; and a third, more gifted with imagination, had cried, 'The Cup of Jamshyd!'—'Stuff his mouth with rubies!' cried the Allah-breathing lord; 'the Cup of Jamshyd it shall be. If the Queen shall send us that, she shall have our friendship until her death or ours; but if she send it not——' Not for nothing had Mahmud fed upon the ancient legends whereof Firdausi made the great epic for him: in which the Cup of Jamshyd shone remote and mystic, the Grail and supreme talisman of an elder age, before the Arab, before the Sassanid—before, and long before, Xerxes led his armies against Greece. His terms were a jest; there were no terms; he meant conquest, and most thoroughly to wipe out the insult he had received from al-Ka'us and Ibn Sina.

The other happening was this: Oghlu Beg supped, and died in great torment an hour later—just when he should have been carrying into action a plan he had been at pains to form. He was always a slow-thoughted man; now his slowness cost him his life. He did not die, however, before conveying his intent, and a command to avenge him, to his brother and chief lieutenant. Who then proceeded with five Turks of the guard and a headsman's carpet to the chambers of al-Ajjami; so that by morning the Queen had lost both her suitors. Before noon the guard, disciplined, lacking their Oghlu, rode away after some

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

minor looting to join the standards of Mahmud of Ghazna.

The Sultan had promised to arrive within a week: it was a point of honour with him, at least in such matters as this, to be very much better than his word. All that day men came riding in from the east with tidings of his approach; none of them remained in the city, but sought safety farther afield. And all day through the western gates the city was emptying itself. Disturbances were to be dreaded, now that there was none to enforce authority; but fear policed the place fairly until evening. Before the sun had set, one could see from the towers of the palace clouds of dust along the flat horizon eastward. In the morning Mahmud of Ghazna would be at the gates; by noon he would be in the city; by nightfall—— There was nothing to be done. He might have had the name of *Yilderim*, fittest title for your typical Turkish world-shaker at any time: his blows fell swift and terrible as the thunderbolt, and there was no escaping them.

The Queen walked among her roses in the twilight, very calm and proud; not yet had she given way to despair. She had done all she could, though it was nothing; she had no plan; she could not and would not dwell on the morrow. She still maintained a resigned queenly confidence: whatever fate might befall her body, her soul would keep the trust. When she met her lord in Paradise—and might that be to-morrow!—she would have no cause to be ashamed; and her son would have nothing to forgive her. Her son? He had not yet been born; yet he stood

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

in her mental vision as clear a figure as her husband. The dead and the unborn were her companions: there, living and on this earth, she stood for them: for the future and the past. She felt as if she were somehow in two worlds at once: one outward and illusionary, full of terrible fantasm and turmoil; one jinward and stable, where there was peace; and from this inner world she might look down serenely untroubled upon the chaotic happenings below or without. For there al-Ka'us walked with her; and the young hero that was to be, Hasan Ali ibn al-Ka'us; and the roses bloomed for the three of them: she and the roses were in both worlds. Out of the Persian earth they bloomed, these Persian roses, lovely with all ancient Persian deeds and dreams; and perhaps she too (like Omar Tentmaker):

Sometimes thought that never blew so red
The rose as where some buried Cæsar bled—

we will say, Khusru for Cæsar. These were white, perhaps, remembering the white hair of Zal; and perhaps young Isfendiyar, on his seven-staged journey and seven marvellous labours, won from fate the golden wisdom and tenderness that made these citron or apricot-hearted; and these so crimson, so peerless perfect—perhaps they distilled their glory from Rustum's sorrow over slain Sohrab his son; or perhaps the glow that shone from them was reflected from some still more ancient link between heaven and Persia—from Feridun's sword, or Zal's simurgh-feather,

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

from blacksmith Kavah's apron, or from Jamshyd's Seven-ringed Cup. . . . Ah, in the inner world what was a thing carved of jewels or crystal, or any talisman, how potent soever, better than, or different from, His secret spiritual beauty God puts forth where our eyes can see it, through every rose that blooms in the garden? . . . Hasan Ali ibn al-Ka'us, mayest thou, too, bring new beauty to the roses! . . .

A hoarse roaring from the city broke in upon the peace of the rose garden; panic-stricken women of the court came running to her; the dregs of the populace, they said, had risen to sack the palace; and where should they hide, or how escape, or who would protect them? 'I will protect you,' said the Queen; 'fear you nothing!' She made her way into the palace, donned tiara and robes of sovereignty, took sceptre in hand, and went to the gate where by that time the mob had gathered; then had that thrown open, and herself discovered in the entrance. Very queenlike, with a gesture she commanded silence, and was obeyed; then spoke to her people. Took them into her confidence; called them her children, and they felt that they were so; spoke of their late king as if he were present, and expected much of them; spoke of their king who was to be, whom she bore beneath her breast. . . . Thieves and men of trades still viler hung their heads; women you would have called she-devils were brought to wholesome weeping; when she dismissed them, they went in silence. What was with her that evening, to make her greater than

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

herself? Driven to the place where hope is not, she had attained that divine confidence which hope only promises and strives after. She had no need of hope, possessing the internal reality.

A great storm raged in the night; in the morning she found the palace deserted, but for two of her tiring-women whom she had brought with her from her mountain home. She bade them robe her in her richest robes and deck her with all the insignia of royalty; not as a suppliant would she meet world-quelling Mahmud. In the Hall of Audience, at the foot of the throne, she found a third who had not deserted her: al-'Awf the dwarf, playing with cup and ball, and chattering. None knew to fathom the mind of this 'Awf: sometimes it seemed that of a child just learning to talk; sometimes he was quite the idiot; sometimes out of his simplicity wisdom flashed, so that you would have said an angel spoke through him.

The Queen would not await Mahmud there, but in the garden: whither now the three that formed her court followed her. The wind that had blown in the night had made a wreck of everything; and it was a mournful desolation beneath grey skies that she found. The ground was bestrewn with petals; the beauty of the place was gone; there was no comfort for her now with the roses. White and yellow, apricot, and carmine, the long sprays were tossed and ravished; not a bud had broken into bloom since dawn; there was no blossom anywhere. She came to her dearest bush, that ruby-hearted glory in the shadow

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

of the cypresses; all its royalty had fallen in a beautiful rain of petals; one bud alone was left—but what a rose it would be when it bloomed! She picked it, and went up sadly to her divan in the pergola. This ominous ruin of the roses was too much; the realities that had sustained her the evening before were no longer within her vision.

Al-'Awf came hurrying to the foot of the throne; he had been peering about and chattering through the garden, full of some business of his own—or Allah's—such as no human mentality could understand. Now he appeared big with an idea: swaggering with immense importance. The Wonder of the World should take comfort, said he; behold, here was al-'Awf the Intrepid sent of heaven to protect her. Here was al-'Awf, about to ride forth and treat with his old-time gossip the son of Sabuktigin: to speak with that spawn of Sheitan on her behalf;—to command him, and roughly! Here he crowed like a cock; with what intent or meaning, who shall guess? No, no; not command; that would but put Mahmud out of spirits; in matters such as this more delicate means must be used; the Pearl of pearls must trust to the wisdom of heaven-sent al-'Awf. He would carry to Mahmud the toy Mahmud had demanded of her; let her send by him the Cup of Jamshyd; a small matter in itself, but likely to appease the rascal. . . . Here he knelt before her, and held out both hands to receive, it appeared, the rose-bud she held; and she, being in no mood for his inspiration or imbecility, gave it to him, and said, 'Yes; go!' If he should go to Mahmud, at least

THE SECRET MOUNTAIN

he would get a court appointment, and be well or fairly treated. He swaggered out; then, having quiet, she fell asleep.

She awoke to find the garden, brightly sunlit now, filled with resplendent guards; and before her a very kingly and warlike man all in golden armour and robes of cloth-of-gold and scarlet; fierce-visaged, but with his features softened into reverence and wonder now, so that one noted potentialities of kindness and generosity that at other times might be hidden.

'O Royal Moon of Iran,' said he, 'think not I come otherwise than to render homage. It is thou who art the conqueror; thou who of thy wealth hast given me the sacred gift. . . .'

So far her eyes had been all on Mahmud of Ghazna; now she turned where he pointed, and beheld al-'Awf, robed sumptuously, standing at the Sultan's left. His mouth had been stuffed three times over since he left the garden: once with sweets, once with pearls, and once with gold; and he had been installed—as being a present to Mahmud from the Queen—chief of the court dwarfs to the mightiest sovereign in Islam.

'Let the veil be withdrawn from it, O Jewel of Dwarf-hood, that the Queen may look once more on the glory of her gift, and say if Mahmud's friendship be worth such a price,' said the Sultan; whereupon al-'Awf drew away the gold-cloth covering from the thing he held in his hands.

THE ROSE AND THE CUP

And all the resplendent guards of Mahmud, the flower of the nobles of Ghazna, fell on their faces and made obeisance. And Sultan Mahmud bowed his head and covered his eyes to shield them from the excessive glory. . . . A ruby brighter than the setting sun; a vase from whose radiant splendour delight issued out and spread over the world, and exquisite odours of musk and attar and sandalwood, and music like the singing of Israfel, like the lutany in Gabriel's heaven. In seven rings of unutterable loveliness it shone there . . . and only the crimson rose, the flower of the flowers of Iran, knew by what magic she had put forth the Cup of Jamshyd for a bloom.