

GEORG EBERS

UARDA : A ROMANCE OF
ANCIENT EGYPT.

VOLUME 04

Georg Ebers

**Uarda : a Romance of
Ancient Egypt. Volume 04**

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CHAPTER XV

The afternoon shadows were already growing long, when a splendid chariot drew up to the gates of the terrace-temple. Paaker, the chief pioneer, stood up in it, driving his handsome and fiery Syrian horses. Behind him stood an Ethiopian slave, and his big dog followed the swift team with his tongue out.

As he approached the temple he heard himself called, and checked the pace of his horses. A tiny man hurried up to him, and, as soon as he had recognized in him the dwarf Nemu, he cried angrily:

"Is it for you, you rascal, that I stop my drive? What do you want?"

"To crave," said the little man, bowing humbly, "that, when thy business in the city of the dead is finished, thou wilt carry me back to Thebes."

"You are Mena's dwarf?" asked the pioneer.

"By no means," replied Nemu. "I belong to his neglected wife, the lady Nefert. I can only cover the road very slowly with my little legs, while the hoofs of your horses devour the way—as a crocodile does his prey."

"Get up!" said Paaker. "Did you come here on foot?"

"No, my lord," replied Nemu, "on an ass; but a demon entered into the beast, and has struck it with sickness. I had to leave it on the road. The beasts of Anubis will have a better supper than we to-night."

"Things are not done handsomely then at your mistress's house?" asked Paaker.

"We still have bread," replied Nemu, "and the Nile is full of water. Much meat is not necessary for women and dwarfs, but our last cattle take a form which is too hard for human teeth."

The pioneer did not understand the joke, and looked enquiringly at the dwarf.

"The form of money," said the little man, "and that cannot be chewed; soon that will be gone too, and then the point will be to find a recipe for making nutritious cakes out of earth, water, and palm-leaves. It makes very little difference to me, a dwarf does not need much—but the poor tender lady!"

Paaker touched his horses with such a violent stroke of his whip that they reared high, and it took all his strength to control their spirit.

"The horses' jaws will be broken," muttered the slave behind. "What a shame with such fine beasts!"

"Have you to pay for them?" growled Paaker. Then he turned again to the dwarf, and asked:

"Why does Mena let the ladies want?"

"He no longer cares for his wife," replied the dwarf, casting his eyes down sadly. "At the last division of the spoil he passed by the gold and silver; and took a foreign woman into his tent. Evil demons have blinded him, for where is there a woman fairer than Nefert?"

"You love your mistress."

"As my very eyes!"

During this conversation they had arrived at the terrace-temple. Paaker threw the reins to the slave, ordered him to wait with Nemu, and turned to the gate-keeper to explain to him, with the help of a handful of gold, his desire of being conducted to Pentaur, the chief of the temple.

The gate-keeper, swinging a censer before him with a hasty action, admitted him into the sanctuary. You will find him on the third terrace," he said, "but he is no longer our superior."

"They said so in the temple of Seti, whence I have just come," replied Paaker.

The porter shrugged his shoulders with a sneer, and said: "The palm-tree that is quickly set up falls down more quickly still." Then he desired a servant to conduct the stranger to Pentaur.

The poet recognized the Mohar at once, asked his will, and learned that he was come to have a wonderful vision interpreted by him.

Paaker explained before relating his dream, that he did not ask this service for nothing; and when the priest's countenance darkened he added:

"I will send a fine beast for sacrifice to the Goddess if the interpretation is favorable."

"And in the opposite case?" asked Pentaur, who, in the House of Seti, never would have anything whatever to do with the payments of the worshippers or the offerings of the devout.

"I will offer a sheep," replied Paaker, who did not perceive the subtle irony that lurked in Pentaur's words, and who was accustomed to pay for the gifts of the Divinity in proportion to their value to himself.

Pentaur thought of the verdict which Gagabu, only two evenings since, had passed on the Mohar, and it occurred to him that he would test how far the man's superstition would lead him. So he asked, while he suppressed a smile:

"And if I can foretell nothing bad, but also nothing actually good?"—

"An antelope, and four geese," answered Paaker promptly.

"But if I were altogether disinclined to put myself at your service?" asked Pentaur. "If I thought it unworthy of a priest to let the Gods be paid in proportion to their favors towards a particular person, like corrupt officials; if I now showed you—you—and I have known you from a school-boy, that there are things that cannot be bought with inherited wealth?"

The pioneer drew back astonished and angry, but Pentaur continued calmly—

"I stand here as the minister of the Divinity; and nevertheless, I see by your countenance, that you were on the point of lowering yourself by showing to me your violent and extortionate spirit.

"The Immortals send us dreams, not to give us a foretaste of joy or caution us against danger, but to remind us so to prepare our souls that we may submit quietly to suffer evil, and with heartfelt gratitude accept the good; and so gain from each profit for the inner life. I will not interpret your dream! Come without gifts, but with a humble heart, and with longing for inward purification, and I will pray to the Gods that they may enlighten me, and give you such interpretation of even evil dreams that they may be fruitful in blessing.

"Leave me, and quit the temple!"

Paaker ground his teeth with rage; but he controlled himself, and only said as he slowly withdrew:

"If your office had not already been taken from you, the insolence with which you have dismissed me might have cost you your place. We shall meet again, and then you shall learn that inherited wealth in the right hand is worth more than you will like."

"Another enemy!" thought the poet, when he found himself alone and stood erect in the glad consciousness of having done right.

During Paaker's interview with the poet, the dwarf Nemu had chatted to the porter, and had learned from him all that had previously occurred.

Paaker mounted his chariot pale with rage, and whipped on his horses before the dwarf had clambered up the step; but the slave seized the little man, and set him carefully on his feet behind his master.

"The villain, the scoundrel! he shall repent it—Pentaur is he called! the hound!" muttered the pioneer to himself.

The dwarf lost none of his words, and when he caught the name of Pentaur he called to the pioneer, and said—

"They have appointed a scoundrel to be the superior of this temple; his name is Pentaur. He was expelled from the temple of Seti for his immorality, and now he has stirred up the younger scholars to rebellion, and invited unclean women into the temple. My lips hardly dare repeat it, but the gate-keeper swore it was true—that the chief haruspex from the House of Seti found him in conference with Bent-Anat, the king's daughter, and at once deprived him of his office."

"With Bent-Anat?" replied the pioneer, and muttered, before the dwarf could find time to answer, "Indeed, with Bent-Anat!" and he recalled the day before yesterday, when the princess had remained so long with the priest in the hovel of the paraschites, while he had talked to Nefert and visited the old witch.

"I should not care to be in the priest's skin," observed Nemu, "for though Rameses is far away, the Regent Ani is near enough. He is a gentleman who seldom pounces, but even the dove won't allow itself to be attacked in its own nest."

Paaker looked enquiringly at Nemu.

"I know," said the dwarf "Ani has asked Rameses' consent to marry his daughter."

"He has already asked it," continued the dwarf as Paaker smiled incredulously, "and the king is not disinclined to give it. He likes making marriages—as thou must know pretty well."

"I?" said Paaker, surprised.

"He forced Katuti to give her daughter as wife to the charioteer. That I know from herself. She can prove it to thee."

Paaker shook his head in denial, but the dwarf continued eagerly, "Yes, yes! Katuti would have had thee for her son-in-law, and it was the king, not she, who broke off the betrothal. Thou must at the same time have been inscribed in the black books of the high gate, for Rameses used many hard names for thee. One of us is like a mouse behind the curtain, which knows a good deal."

Paaker suddenly brought his horses to a stand-still, threw the reins to the slave, sprang from the chariot, called the dwarf to his side, and said:

"We will walk from here to the river, and you shall tell me all you know; but if an untrue word passes your lips I will have you eaten by my dogs."

"I know thou canst keep thy word," gasped the little man. "But go a little slower if thou wilt, for I am quite out of breath. Let Katuti herself tell thee how it all came about. Rameses compelled her to give her daughter to the charioteer. I do not know what he said of thee, but it was not complimentary. My poor mistress! she let herself be caught by the dandy, the ladies' man—and now she may weep and wail. When I pass the great gates of thy house with Katuti, she often sighs and complains bitterly. And with good reason, for it soon will be all over with our noble estate, and we must seek an asylum far away among the Amu in the low lands; for the nobles will soon avoid us as outcasts. Thou mayst be glad that thou hast not linked thy fate to ours; but I have a faithful heart, and will share my mistress's trouble."

"You speak riddles," said Paaker, "what have they to fear?"

The dwarf now related how Nefert's brother had gambled away the mummy of his father, how enormous was the sum he had lost, and that degradation must overtake Katuti, and her daughter with her.

"Who can save them," he whimpered. "Her shameless husband squanders his inheritance and his prize-money. Katuti is poor, and the little words "Give me! scare away friends as the cry of a hawk scares the chickens. My poor mistress!"

"It is a large sum," muttered Paaker to himself. "It is enormous!" sighed the dwarf, "and where is it to be found in these hard times? It would have been different with us, if—ah if—. And it would be a form of madness which I do not believe in, that Nefert should still care for her braggart husband. She thinks as much of thee as of him."

Paaker looked at the dwarf half incredulous and half threatening.

"Ay—of thee," repeated Nemu. "Since our excursion to the Necropolis the day before yesterday it was—she speaks only of thee, praising thy ability, and thy strong manly spirit. It is as if some charm obliged her to think of thee."

The pioneer began to walk so fast that his small companion once more had to ask him to moderate his steps.

They gained the shore in silence, where Paaker's boat was waiting, which also conveyed his chariot. He lay down in the little cabin, called the dwarf to him, and said:

"I am Katuti's nearest relative; we are now reconciled; why does she not turn to me in her difficulty?"

"Because she is proud, and thy blood flows in her veins. Sooner would she die with her child—she said so—than ask thee, against whom she sinned, for an "alms."

"She did think of me then?"

"At once; nor did she doubt thy generosity. She esteems thee highly—I repeat it; and if an arrow from a Cheta's bow or a visitation of the Gods attained Mena, she would joyfully place her child in thine arms, and Nefert believe me has not forgotten her playfellow. The day before yesterday, when she came home from the Necropolis, and before the letter had come from the camp, she was full of thee—

["To be full (meh) of any one" is used in the Egyptian language for "to be in love with any one."]

nay called to thee in her dreams; I know it from Kandake, her black maid." The pioneer looked down and said:

"How extraordinary! and the same night I had a vision in which your mistress appeared to me; the insolent priest in the temple of Hathor should have interpreted it to me."

"And he refused? the fool! but other folks understand dreams, and I am not the worst of them—Ask thy servant. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred my interpretations come true. How was the vision?"

"I stood by the Nile," said Paaker, casting down his eyes and drawing lines with his whip through the wool of the cabin rug. "The water was still, and I saw Nefert standing on the farther bank, and beckoning to me. I called to her, and she stepped on the water, which bore her up as if it were this carpet. She went over the water dry-foot as if it were the stony wilderness. A wonderful sight! She came nearer to me, and nearer, and already I had tried to take her hand, when she ducked under like a swan. I went into the water to seize her, and when she came up again I clasped her in my arms; but then the strangest thing happened— she flowed away, she dissolved like the snow on the Syrian hills, when you take it in your hand, and yet it was not the same, for her hair turned to water-lilies, and her eyes to blue fishes that swam away merrily, and her lips to twigs of coral that sank at once, and from her body grew a crocodile, with a head like Mena, that laughed and gnashed its teeth at me. Then I was seized with blind fury; I threw myself upon him with a drawn sword, he fastened his teeth in my flesh, I pierced his throat with my weapon; the Nile was dark with our streaming blood, and so we fought and fought—it lasted an eternity—till I awoke."

Paaker drew a deep breath as he ceased speaking; as if his wild dream tormented him again.

The dwarf had listened with eager attention, but several minutes passed before he spoke.

"A strange dream," he said, "but the interpretation as to the future is not hard to find. Nefert is striving to reach thee, she longs to be thine, but if thou dost fancy that she is already in thy grasp she will elude thee; thy hopes will melt like ice, slip away like sand, if thou dost not know how to put the crocodile out of the way."

At this moment the boat struck the landing-place. The pioneer started up, and cried, "We have reached the end!"

"We have reached the end," echoed the little man with meaning. "There is only a narrow bridge to step over."

When they both stood on the shore, the dwarf said,

"I have to thank thee for thy hospitality, and when I can serve thee command me."

"Come here," cried the pioneer, and drew Nemu away with him under the shade of a sycamore veiled in the half light of the departing sun.

"What do you mean by a bridge which we must step over? I do not understand the flowers of speech, and desire plain language."

The dwarf reflected for a moment; and then asked, "Shall I say nakedly and openly what I mean, and will you not be angry?"

"Speak!"

"Mena is the crocodile. Put him out of the world, and you will have passed the bridge; then Nefert will be thine—if thou wilt listen to me."

"What shall I do?"

"Put the charioteer out of the world."

Paaker's gesture seemed to convey that that was a thing that had long been decided on, and he turned his face, for a good omen, so that the rising moon should be on his right hand.

The dwarf went on.

"Secure Nefert, so that she may not vanish like her image in the dream, before you reach the goal; that is to say, ransom the honor of your future mother and wife, for how could you take an outcast into your house?"

Paaker looked thoughtfully at the ground.

"May I inform my mistress that thou wilt save her?" asked Nemu. "I may?—Then all will be well, for he who will devote a fortune to love will not hesitate to devote a reed lance with a brass point to it to his love and his hatred together."

CHAPTER XVI

The sun had set, and darkness covered the City of the Dead, but the moon shone above the valley of the kings' tombs, and the projecting masses of the rocky walls of the chasm threw sharply-defined shadows. A weird silence lay upon the desert, where yet far more life was stirring than in the noonday hour, for now bats darted like black silken threads through the night air, owls hovered aloft on wide-spread wings, small troops of jackals slipped by, one following the other up the mountain slopes. From time to time their hideous yell, or the whining laugh of the hyena, broke the stillness of the night.

Nor was human life yet at rest in the valley of tombs. A faint light glimmered in the cave of the sorceress Hekt, and in front of the paraschites' but a fire was burning, which the grandmother of the sick Uarda now and then fed with pieces of dry manure. Two men were seated in front of the hut, and gazed in silence on the thin flame, whose impure light was almost quenched by the clearer glow of the moon; whilst the third, Uarda's father, disembowelled a large ram, whose head he had already cut off.

"How the jackals howl!" said the old paraschites, drawing as he spoke the torn brown cotton cloth, which he had put on as a protection against the night air and the dew, closer round his bare shoulders.

"They scent the fresh meat," answered the physician, Nebsecht. "Throw them the entrails, when you have done; the legs and back you can roast. Be careful how you cut out the heart—the heart, soldier. There it is! What a great beast."

Nebsecht took the ram's heart in his hand, and gazed at it with the deepest attention, whilst the old paraschites watched him anxiously. At length:

"I promised," he said, "to do for you what you wish, if you restore the little one to health; but you ask for what is impossible."

"Impossible?" said the physician, "why, impossible? You open the corpses, you go in and out of the house of the embalmer. Get possession of one of the canopi,

[Vases of clay, limestone, or alabaster, which were used for the preservation of the intestines of the embalmed Egyptians, and represented the four genii of death, Amset, Hapi, Tuamutef, and Khebsennuf. Instead of the cover, the head of the genius to which it was dedicated, was placed on each kanopus. Amset (tinder the protection of Isis) has a human head, Hapi (protected by Nephthys) an ape's head, Tuamutef (protected by Neith) a jackal's head, and Khebsennuf (protected by Selk) a sparrow-hawk's head. In one of the Christian Coptic Manuscripts, the four archangels are invoked in the place of these genii.]

lay this heart in it, and take out in its stead the heart of a human being. No one—no one will notice it. Nor need you do it to-morrow, or the day after tomorrow even. Your son can buy a ram to kill every day with my money till the right moment comes. Your granddaughter will soon grow strong on a good meat-diet. Take courage!"

"I am not afraid of the danger," said the old man, "but how can I venture to steal from a dead man his life in the other world? And then—in shame and misery have I lived, and for many a year—no man has numbered them for me—have I obeyed the commandments, that I may be found righteous in that world to come, and in the fields of Aalu, and in the Sun-bark find compensation for all that I have suffered here. You are good and friendly. Why, for the sake of a whim, should you sacrifice the future bliss of a man, who in all his long life has never known happiness, and who has never done you any harm?"

"What I want with the heart," replied the physician, "you cannot understand, but in procuring it for me, you will be furthering a great and useful purpose. I have no whims, for I am no idler. And as to

what concerns your salvation, have no anxiety. I am a priest, and take your deed and its consequences upon myself; upon myself, do you understand? I tell you, as a priest, that what I demand of you is right, and if the judge of the dead shall enquire, 'Why didst thou take the heart of a human being out of the Kanopus?' then reply—reply to him thus, 'Because Nebsecht, the priest, commanded me, and promised himself to answer for the deed.'"

The old man gazed thoughtfully on the ground, and the physician continued still more urgently: "If you fulfil my wish, then—then I swear to you that, when you die, I will take care that your mummy is provided with all the amulets, and I myself will write you a book of the Entrance into Day, and have it wound within your mummy-cloth, as is done with the great.

[The Books of the Dead are often found amongst the cloths, (by the leg or under the arm), or else in the coffin trader, or near, the mummy.]

That will give you power over all demons, and you will be admitted to the hall of the twofold justice, which punishes and rewards, and your award will be bliss."

"But the theft of a heart will make the weight of my sins heavy, when my own heart is weighed," sighed the old man.

Nebsecht considered for a moment, and then said: "I will give you a written paper, in which I will certify that it was I who commanded the theft. You will sew it up in a little bag, carry it on your breast, and have it laid with you in the grave. Then when Techuti, the agent of the soul, receives your justification before Osiris and the judges of the dead, give him the writing. He will read it aloud, and you will be accounted just."

[The vignettes of Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead represent the Last Judgment of the Egyptians. Under a canopy Osiris sits enthroned as Chief Judge, 42 assessors assist him. In the hall stand the scales; the dog headed ape, the animal sacred to Toth, guides the balance. In one scale lies the heart of the dead man, in the other the image of the goddess of Truth, who introduces the soul into the hall of justice Toth writes the record. The soul affirms that it has not committed 42 deadly sins, and if it obtains credit, it is named "maa cheru," i.e. "the truth-speaker," and is therewith declared blessed. It now receives its heart back, and grows into a new and divine life.]

"I am not learned in writing," muttered the paraschites with a slight mistrust that made itself felt in his voice.

"But I swear to you by the nine great Gods, that I will write nothing on the paper but what I have promised you. I will confess that I, the priest Nebsecht, commanded you to take the heart, and that your guilt is mine."

"Let me have the writing then," murmured the old man.

The physician wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and gave the paraschites his hand. "Tomorrow you shall have it," he said, "and I will not leave your granddaughter till she is well again."

The soldier engaged in cutting up the ram, had heard nothing of this conversation. Now he ran a wooden spit through the legs, and held them over the fire to roast them. The jackals howled louder as the smell of the melting fat filled the air, and the old man, as he looked on, forgot the terrible task he had undertaken. For a year past, no meat had been tasted in his house.

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