

years ago, the people said, Queen Rap'hotath locked the Princess Felahlis away in the Silver Minaret of her palace, to keep her from the eyes and arms of men. They said that she was more beautiful than any other maiden of the azure desert, sweeter than a rare flower, and finer than both suns in the sky. But it is whispered that Rap'hotath was jealous of her daughter's great beauty, and feared it would one day draw to her a man of power and influence who would wed her and take the city from the queen's hands. Thus, Rap'hotath, not willing to kill her child, shut her up within the topmost chamber of the minaret, there to languish until her mother's death would release her.

As to the princess's father, some say that he was a lowly serf or guardsman to whom the queen's fancy turned upon a whim, and whom she had quietly put to death when she was finished with him, as she could not wed him due to his inferior birth. But most believe that he was a king from afar, for Rap'hotath was not born a queen.

*... an unthinkable decision was made ...*

"I will steal the princess from her prison," said Vadganomiar. "I would see her if her beauty is as great as is believed. Then I shall seek to steal her heart, and I will usurp the rule of this city from her mother's tyrant hands."

*... and an impossible adventure begun ...*

I told him that one cutthroat claimed he had found a secret entrance to the minaret at one end of the palace dungeons, and that this door which opened onto a stairway that could lead only to that topmost chamber was neither guarded nor locked, for who would wish to venture into those pits of despair where wail eternally the cries of the condemned? I told him, too, of another who declared that he had gained access to the inner court garden wherein the minaret stands, by way of climbing to the window of the westernmost tower of the outer gardens, from which descending a flight of steps brought him to a door which entered upon the inner gardens.