

We were to enter the palace garbed as monks to Kutchoroolkas—the god of the great desert, he of the Ever-Changing Skin—and thence from the fane of the fork-tongued god would we steal over to that westernmost tower of the outer courtyard, the window of which was said to lay low enough that one might scale the wall and reach it without being sighted by the sentries who paced to and fro along the high walls which surrounded the inner gardens. Vadganomiar would make the ascent and hoist me up after him. From there, if all proceeded thus, we would venture to seek out the entrance to the prison cells, at the end of which we would discover if there did truly stand a door which gains one access to the Silver Minaret. We had plotted until the sky was dusking, and we made no more delay in exiting my dwelling and setting forth to attempt our designs.

*But would the rewards be success . . .*

Within the chamber was grandiose and luxurious, furnished with ornate stools and divans, finished in gold and silver. Rich rugs were spread upon the floor and magnificent draperies hung from the walls. A large, grand canopied bed with silken curtains sky blue lay at one end of the room, and near at hand stood a small mahogany table upon which rested copious bottles of perfumes and pigments to enhance beauty. An exquisite incense danced and floated upon the cool night breeze that blew in through an open, narrow windowlet across from the doorway, from which one could see the pale glimmering disk of the moon hanging amidst the star-clad sky.

"Princess Felahlis?" my companion called forth.

"Who is here?" asked a soft maiden's voice, dulcet and melodious, at once like the call of a lark as of the hush of a gentle brook.

*. . . or a waking nightmare?*

I beheld the scene with silent horror, transfixed by the ghastly sight such that I was stunned in body, unable to move, wrapt in horrid revelation. There are terrors which stalk the world, dimly understood