

Aphrodite

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by Pierre Louys

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and of respectful friendship

APHRODITE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The erudite Prodicus of Ceos, who flourished toward the end of the first century before our era, is the author of the celebrated apologue which St. Basil recommended to Christian meditation: "Herakles between virtue and voluptuousness." We know that Herakles decided for the first, and was thus

enabled to accomplish a certain number of great crimes against the Hinds, the Amazons, the Golden Apples and the Giants. If Prodicos had limited himself to that, he would have written only a fable of readily comprehended symbolism, but he was a clever philosopher and his repertory of tales, "The Hours," which was divided into three parts, presented the moral truths under their three different aspects which correspond to the three ages of life. For little children he was pleased to propose as an example the austere choice of Herakles; to youths he doubtless related the voluptuous choice of Paris; and I imagine that, to ripe men, he said nearly this:

"Odysseus was wandering in the chase one day, at the foot of the mountains of Delphi, when he met on his path two virgins who held each other by the hand. The one had hair of violets, transparent eyes, and grave lips; she said to him: 'I am Arete.' The other had softly tinted eyelids, delicate hands and tender breasts; she said to him: 'I am Tryphe.' And they said together: 'Choose between us.' But the subtle Odysseus responded wisely: 'How could I choose—you are inseparable. The eyes which have seen you pass—one without the other—have glimpsed but a sterile shadow. Just as sincere virtue does not deprive itself of the eternal joys which voluptuousness brings to it, so luxury would go ill without a certain grandeur of soul. I will follow you both. Show me the way.' As he finished, the two visions melted together and Odysseus knew that he had spoken with the great goddess Aphrodite."

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The feminine personage who occupies the principal place in the romance whose pages you are about to turn, is an antique courtesan; but be reassured: she will not convert herself.

She will be loved neither by a monk, a prophet, nor a god. In present-day literature, this is an originality.

Rather she will be a courtesan, with all the frankness, the ardor and the pride of every human being who has a vocation and who holds in society a freely chosen place; she will aspire to raise herself to the highest point; she will not even imagine a need for excuse or mystery in her life. And this requires explanation.

Up to this day, the modern writers who have addressed themselves to a public free from the prejudices of young girls and school boys have employed a

laborious stratagem whose hypocrisy displeases me: "I have depicted voluptuousness as it is," they say, "in order to exalt virtue." But I, at the beginning of a romance whose intrigue develops at Alexandria, refuse absolutely to commit this anachronism.

Love, with all its consequences, was, for the ancient Greeks, the sentiment most virtuous and most fecund in grandeurs. They did not attach to it those ideas of shamelessness and immodesty which Israelite tradition, along with the Christian doctrine, has handed down to us. Herodotos (1.10) says to us, quite naturally: —"Among some barbarous races it is considered disgraceful to appear naked." When the Greeks or the Latins wished to insult a man who frequented "daughters of love," they called him <<moixos>> or Moechus, which merely signifies "adulterer." On the other hand, a man and a woman who, being free from other bonds, united themselves, even though this were in public and whatever their youth might be, were considered as injuring no one and were left at liberty.

One sees that the life of the ancients could not be judged after the moral ideas which come to us at the present time from Geneva.

As for me, I have written this book with the simplicity an Athenian would have brought to a relation of the same adventures. And I hope that it will be read in the same spirit.

Judging the ancient Greeks by the ideas actually received, not one exact translation of their greatest writers could be left in the hands of a young student. If M. Mounet-Sully should play his role of ###140###dipos without cuts, the police would suspend the representation. If M. Leconte de Lisle had not prudently expurgated Theocritos, his version would have been suppressed the same day it was put on sale.

One considers Aristophanes exceptional? Yet we possess important fragments of fourteen hundred and forty comedies, due to one hundred and thirty-two other Greek poets, some of whom, such as Alexis, Philetos, Strattis, Eubolos and Cratinos, have left us admirable verse, and no one has yet dared translate this shameless and sublime collection.

One quotes always, for the purpose of defending Greek customs, the teachings of some philosophers who condemned the sexual pleasures. There is confusion

here. Those scattered moralists reproved all excesses of the senses indiscriminately, without the existence, for them, of a difference between the debauch of the bed and that of the table.

He who, today, at a restaurant in Paris, orders with impunity a six-louis dinner for himself alone, would have been judged by them as guilty and no less so than another who would give a too intimate assignation in the middle of the street, being for that condemned by the existing laws to a year of prison. Moreover, these austere philosophers were generally regarded by antique society as abnormal and dangerous madmen; they were mocked on the stage, treated with blows in the streets, seized by tyrants to serve as court buffoons and exiled by free citizens who judged them unworthy of submitting to capital punishment.

It is then by a conscious and voluntary deceit that modern educators from the Renaissance to the present time have represented the antique moral system as the inspiration of their narrow virtues. If this moral system were great—if it merited indeed to be taken for a model and to be obeyed—it is precisely because no system has better known how to distinguish the just from the unjust according to a criterion of beauty: to proclaim the right of every man to seek individual happiness within the limits set by the rights of others and to declare that there is nothing under the sun more sacred than physical love—nothing more beautiful than the human body.

Such was the morality of the people who built the Acropolis; and if I add that it has remained that of all great minds, I will but state the value of a commonplace, so well is it proven that the superior intelligences of artists, writers, warriors or statesmen have never held its majestic tolerance to be illicit. Aristotle began life by dissipating his patrimony in the company of debauched women; Sappho gave her name to a special vice; Caesar was the *moechus calvas*:—nor can we imagine Racine avoiding girls of the theater and Napoleon practicing abstinence. The romances of Mirabeau, the Greek verses of Chemier, the correspondence of Diderot and the minor works of Montesquieu equal in boldness even the writings of Catullus. And, of all French authors the most austere, the most pious, the most laborious—Buffon—does one wish to know by what maxim he guides his counsel of sentimental intrigues? “Love! Why dost thou form the happy state of all beings and the misfortune of man?—It is because, in this passion, only the physical is good, and because the moral side is worthless.”

*

Whence comes this? And how does it happen that across the upsetting of antique ideas the great Greek sensuality remains like a ray of light upon the noblest foreheads?

It is because sensuality is a condition, mysterious but necessary and creative, of intellectual development. Those who have not felt to their limit the strongest demands of the flesh, whether as a blessing or as a curse, are incapable of understanding fully the demands of the spirit. Just as the beauty of the soul illumines the features, so only the virility of the body nourishes the brain. The worst insult that Delacroix could address to men—that which he threw indiscriminately at the railers of Rubens and at the detractors of Ingres—was this terrible word: “Eunuchs!”

Better yet, it seems that the genius of races, like that of individuals, is, before all, sensual. All the cities which have reigned over the world—Babylon, Alexandria, Athens, Rome, Venice, Paris—have been, by a general law, all the more licentious as they were more powerful, as though their dissoluteness were necessary, to their splendor. The cities where the legislator has attempted to implant artificially narrow and unproductive virtue have been, from the first day, condemned to absolute death. It was thus with Lacedaemonia which, in the midst of the most prodigious flight to which the human soul has ever risen—between Corinth and Alexandria, between Syracuse and Miletus—has left us neither a poet, a painter, a philosopher, an historian nor a scientist; barely the popular renown of a sort of Bobillot who, with his three hundred men, met death in a mountain pass without even gaining a victory. For this reason, after two thousand years measuring the emptiness of this Spartan virtue, we can, according to the exhortation of Renan: “Curse the soil where this mistress of sombre errors existed and insult her because she is no more.”

*

Shall we ever see a return of the days of Ephesos and Cyrene? Alas! the modern world succumbs under an invasion of ugliness; the civilizations move toward the North and enter into the fog, the cold, the mud. What darkness! People clothed in black circulate through infected streets. Of what are they thinking?—we know not; but our twenty-five years shudder at being thus exiled among old men.

As for those who ever regret that they knew not this earth-intoxicated youth which we call antique life, let them be permitted to live again, through a fecund

illusion, in the time when human nudity—the most perfect form, since we believe in the image of God, which we can know or even conceive—could reveal itself through the features of a sacred courtesan before the twenty thousand pilgrims upon the strands of Eleusis; where the most sensual love—the divine love whence we are born—was without stain, without shame and without sin; may they be permitted to forget eighteen barbarous, hypocritical and ugly centuries; to move from the marsh to the spring; to return piously to original beauty; amidst the sound of enchanted flutes to rebuild the Great Temple; and to consecrate enthusiastically to the sanctuaries of the true faith their hearts ever enthralled by the immortal Aphrodite.

Pierre Louys.

BOOK ONE

APHRODITE

Chapter One

CHRYISIS

LYING upon her bosom, her elbows forward, her feet apart and her cheek resting in her hand, she pierced little symmetrical holes in the pillow of green linen with a long golden pin.

Since she had awakened, two hours after mid-day, and quite tired from having slept too much, she had remained alone upon the disordered bed, one side covered by a vast flood of hair.

This mass of hair was deep and dazzling, soft as a fur, longer than a wing, supple, numberless, full of life and warmth. It half-covered her back, spread itself under her body and glittered to her very knees in thick and rounded ringlets. The young woman was rolled up in this precious fleece whose golden brown, almost metallic, reflections had caused the women of Alexandria to name her Chrysis.

It was not the smooth hair of the Syrians of the court, nor the tinted hair of the Asiatics, nor the brown and black hair of the daughters of Egypt. It was that of an Aryan race, of the Galilaeans from beyond the desert.

Chrysis. She loved that name. The young men who came to see her called her Chryse like Aphrodite in the verses which they left, with garlands of roses, at her door in the mornings. She did not believe in Aphrodite but she was pleased that they should compare her to the goddess, and she went sometimes to the temple to give her, as to a friend, boxes of perfume and blue veils.

She was born on the banks of the lake of Gennesaret in a country of shadow and of sun, over-run with rose-laurels. Her mother went in the evenings to wait upon the road to Jerusalem for travelers and merchants, in the midst of the pastoral silence. She was a woman much respected in Galilee. The priests did not avoid her door for she was charitable and pious; the lambs of the sacrifice were always paid for by her, the benediction of the Eternal extended over her house. But when she became enceinte, her condition was a matter of gossip—for she lived alone. A man who was celebrated for the gift of prophecy said that she would bear a daughter who would one day wear at her throat “the wealth and the faith

of a nation.” She did not quite understand how that could be but she named the child Sarah—this is to say Princess, in Hebrew. And this silenced the scandals.

Of this Chrysis had never known, the diviner having told her mother how dangerous it is to reveal to people prophecies of which they are the objects. She knew nothing of her future; wherefore she often thought of it. She recalled but little of her childhood and did not like to speak of it. The only very clear sentiment which had remained with her was of the fright and the vexation which were caused every day by the anxious surveillance of her mother who, the hour being come to go forth upon the road, shut her up in their room for interminable hours. She recalled also the round window through which she saw the waters of the lake, the mist-blue fields, the transparent sky, the light air of the Galilaean country. The house was surrounded by pink flax and tamarisks. Thorny caper bushes raised their green heads at hazard over the fine mist of the blue-grass. Little girls bathed in a limpid brook where red shells could be found under tufts of laurel blossoms. And there were flowers on the water, flowers in all the meadow and great lilies on the mountains.

She was twelve years old when she escaped to follow a troop of young riders who were going to Tyre as merchants of ivory and whom she had chanced to meet beside a well. They had adorned their long-tailed horses with many-colored tufts. She recalled well how they carried her away, pale with joy, on their mounts, and how they had halted later for the night—a night so bright that not a star could be seen.

Neither had she forgotten their entry into Tyre, she at the head, on the panniers of a pack horse, holding to the mane by her fists, flaunting her bare calves to the townswomen, proud now to be a woman herself. The same evening they departed for Egypt. She followed the sellers of ivory to the market of Alexandria.

There they left her two months later, in a little white house with a terrace and little columns, with her bronze mirror, soft rugs, new cushions and a handsome Hindu slave-girl, skilled in dressing the hair.

As she dwelt in the extreme Eastern Quarter which the young Greeks of Bruchion scorned to visit, she met for a long time only travelers and merchants, as did her mother. She did not see again her passing callers; she could please herself with them and then leave them quickly, before loving them. However,

she had inspired lasting passions. Masters of caravans had been known to sell their merchandise at a beggarly price, bankrupting themselves in order to remain near her a few days. With these men's gifts she had bought jewels, bed-cushions, rare perfumes, flowered robes and four slaves.

She had come to understand many foreign tongues and knew tales of all countries. Assyrians had told her the love-story of Douzi and Ishtar, Phoenician tales of Ashtaroth and Adonis. Greek girls of the isles had told her the legend of Iphis, and she knew also the love-story of Atalanta. Finally her Hindu slave-girl, patiently during seven years, had taught her to the last detail the complex art of the priestesses of Palibothra.

For love is an art, like music. It gives emotion of the same order, as delicate, as vibrant, perhaps even more intense; and Chrysis, who knew its every rhythm and subtlety, felt herself, and rightly, a greater artist than Plango herself, who was a musician in the temple.

Seven years she lived thus, without dreaming of a life more happy or more diversified than hers. But a little before her twentieth year, when from a young girl she became a woman, ambition suddenly awoke in her with maturity.

And one morning as she came out of a deep sleep, two hours past mid-day, quite tired from having slept too much, she turned over on her breast across the bed, her feet apart, rested her cheek in her hand and with a long golden pin pierced with little symmetrical holes her pillow of green linen.

She reflected profoundly.

There were at first four little points which made a square and a point in the middle. Then four other points to make a larger square. Then she tried to make a circle—but that was a little difficult.

Then she pierced points at random and began to call, "Djala! Djala!"

Djala was her Hindu slave whose name was Djalantachtchandrapchapala, which means: "Changeful-as-the-image-of-the-moon-upon-the-water." Chrysis was too lazy to say the entire name.

The slave entered and stood near the door without quite shutting it.

“Djala, who came yesterday?”

“Dost thou not know?”

“No. I paid no attention to him. I was weary. I was drowsy the whole time, and I remember nothing. Was he pleasing? When did he leave? Early? What was it he brought me? Is it valuable? No—don’t tell me. I don’t care. What did he say? Has no one come since his departure? Will he return? Give me my bracelets.”

The slave brought a casket but Chrysis did not even glance at it and, raising her arms as high as she could, “Ah! Djala,” she said, “Ah! Djala!... I would like to have extraordinary adventures.”

“Everything is extraordinary,” said Djala, “or nothing. The days are like each other.”

“Not at all. Formerly it was not so. In every country in the world the gods have come down upon earth and have loved mortal women. Ah! in what manner must they be awaited, in what forests must they be sought, they who are a little more than men? What prayers must be said that they come, they who would teach one something or make me forget everything? And if the gods will descend no more, if they are dead or if they are too old, Djala, will I also die without having seen a man who will bring tragic events into my life?”

She turned over on her back and interlaced her fingers.

“If someone should adore me, it seems to me that I would find much pleasure in making him suffer until he died of it. Those who come to me are not worthy of being wept for—and then, it . is my fault too—it is I who call them, why should they love me?”

“What bracelet today?”

“I will wear them all. But leave me. I need no one.”

“Thou wilt not go out?”

“Yes, I will go out alone—I will dress myself alone. I will not come back. Go!—Go!”

She let one foot drop on the rug and stretched herself erect. Djala had gone out softly.

She walked very slowly through the room, her hands clasped behind her neck, absorbed in the delight of applying her bare feet, moist with perspiration, to the cool pavement. Then she entered her bath. To regard herself through the water gave her great pleasure. She saw herself like a great shell of pearl open upon a rock. Her skin became harmonious and perfect; the lines of her body lengthened in a blue light; her whole figure was more supple; she recognized her hands no longer. The lightness of her body was such that she raised herself upon two fingers, let herself float for an instant and fall back softly upon the marble amidst a light stirring which lapped under her chin. The water flowed into her ears like a kiss.

The hour of the bath was that where Chrysis commenced to adore herself. The loveliness of her body became the object of tender contemplation and admiration. With her hair and her hands she made a thousand charming plays; now and then she laughed softly, like a child.

The day drew to a close. She rose up in the basin, came out of the water and walked toward the door. The marks of her feet glistened upon the stones. Swaying and as though exhausted, she opened the door wide and paused, her arm stretched out on the latch, then entered. Standing, still wet, near her bed, she commanded the slave, "Dry me."

The Malabar woman took a large sponge in her hand and passed it into the soft golden hair of Chrysis, which streamed backward laden with water; she dried it, scattered it, shook it gently, and then, plunging the sponge into a jar of oil, passed it gently over her mistress's body before rubbing her with a rough cloth, which made the pliant skin glow.

Chrysis buried herself shudderingly in the coolness of a marble seat and murmured, "Dress my hair."

In the level rays of the evening, the hair, still damp and heavy, shone like a shower luminous in the sun. The slave took it in handfuls and twisted it; she made it turn upon itself like a great serpent of metal which the pins of gold pierced like arrows. She rolled it about with a green band, thrice crossed, in order to enhance the gloss by contrast with the silk. Chrysis held at arm's length

her polished copper mirror. Idly she watched the dark hands of the slave move in the heavy hair, round the clusters, gather in the straying locks and sculpture the headdress like a vase of moulded clay. When this was done Chrysis said in a low voice, "Tint me."

A little box of rosewood, brought from the isle of Dioscoris, contained tints of all colors. With a brush of camel's hair the slave took a little black paste which she placed on the long finely curved lashes in order that the eyes should appear more blue. Two decided strokes of a crayon lengthened them, softened them; a bluish powder leadened the lids; two spots of bright vermilion accentuated the corners of the tears. Then, to fix the tints, the face must be covered with ointment. With a soft feather dipped in white pigment, Djala drew white streaks along the arms and on the neck; with a little brush full of carmine she ensanguined the mouth; her fingers spread over the cheeks a light cloud of red powder. Then with a pad of tinted leather she colored the elbows faintly and revived the luster of the ten nails. The toilette was finished.

Then Chrysis began to smile, and said to the Hindu, "Sing to me."

She sat with arched back in her marble armchair. Her pins were like golden rays behind her face. Her hands, resting upon her breast, spaced between the shoulders the red necklace of her painted nails, and her small white feet were reunited upon the stone.

Djala crouched near the wall and recalled love songs of old India:

"Chrysis..."

She sang in monotone:

"Chrysis, thy hair is like a bee-swarm, at rest upon a tree. The warm south wind blows through it with the dew of love and the moist perfume of the night flowers."

The young girl, with her slower and softer voice, took up the song:

"My hair is like an infinite river in the plain where the flaming evening flows away."

And they sang, one after the other:

“Thine eyes are like blue water-lilies, stemless and still on the pools.”

“Mine eyes in the shadow of my lashes are like deep lakes under dark branches.”

“Thy lips are two delicate dowers where the blood of the deer has fallen.”

“My lips are the burning edges of a wound.”

“Thy tongue is the bloody dagger which has made the wound of thy mouth.”

“My tongue is encrusted with precious stones. It is red from mirroring my lips.”

“Thine arms are rounded like two bars of ivory and thine armpits are two mouths.”

“My arms reach out like two lily stems whereon my fingers cling like five petals.”

“Thy limbs are the trunks of two white elephants which carry thy feet like two rosy flowers.”

“My feet are two water-lily petals upon a pool; my limbs are two swollen water-lily buds.”

“Thy bosom is a shield of silver.”

“It is the moon—and the moon’s gleam on the water.”

A deep silence fell. The slave raised her hands and bowed forward. Chrysis went on:

“I am a crimson blossom, full of sweet scents and honey.... I am like the sea-hydra, soft, living dower of the night.... I am a well, in an ever-warm shelter.”

The prostrate one murmured very low:

“Thou art awesome as the face of Medusa.”

Chrysis placed her foot upon the slave’s neck and said, trembling, “Djala...”

Little by little the night had come, but the moon was so luminous that the room

was filled with blue radiance.

Chrysis, naked, gazed at the still gleaming of her skin, and on her body where the deep shadows fell upon it.

She rose abruptly. "Djala, of what are we thinking? It is night and I have not yet gone out. Only sleeping sailors will be on the Heptastadion. Tell me, Djala, am I beautiful?

"Tell me, Djala, am I more beautiful this night than ever? I am the most beautiful woman in Alexandria; dost thou know it? Will he not follow me like a dog, he who will presently pass into the oblique regard of mine eyes? Will I not make of him what pleases me—a slave if it is my caprice; and can I not expect from the first who comes the most abject obedience? Dress me, Djala."

Around her arms two silver serpents twined, upon her feet were fixed sandals attached to her brown ankles by crossed leather thongs. She herself buckled around her waist a young girl's girdle. In her ears she placed great circular hoops, on her fingers rings and seals, on her neck three necklaces of golden images, chiseled at Paphos by the hierodules.

She studied herself for some time, wearing only her jewels; then drawing from a coffer where she had folded it a vast garment of sheer yellow linen, she wrapped it around her, draping herself from head to foot. Its diagonal folds furrowed that little of her figure which could be seen through the light tissue; one of her elbows thrust out under the close tunic, and the other arm, which she had left bare, carried a long train so that it would not drag in the dust.

She took in her hand her fan of plumes and went out nonchalantly.

Standing on the steps of the threshold, her hand resting against the white wall, Djala alone watched her mistress depart.

She walked slowly along the houses in the deserted street where the moonlight fell. A little dancing shadow frisked behind her steps.

Chapter Two

ON THE JETTY

ON the jetty of Alexandria, a girl stood singing. Beside her, seated on the white parapet, were two flute-players.

“Deep to the woods the satyrs drove

The oreads;

And helpless to the mountains fled

The water nymphs.

Hot forms, wet-eyed, with flying hair,

Were seized and bent

Grasswards, their bodies half-divine

Quivering, spent.

Eros finds always on the lips of women,

Painful and sweet desire.”

The flute-players repeated: “Eros! Eros!...” and sighed into their doubled reeds.

“Cybele, seeking Attys, sped

Across the plains.

Eros had pierced her heart with love

Which he disdained,

For Eros ever matches scorn

Against desire.

She drew the icy gentle breath

Of welcome death.

Eros finds always on the lips of women,

Painful and sweet desire.”

“Eros! Eros!... ” Shrill cries leaped from the flutes.

“Syrinx ran weeping to the shore—

And then beyond...

Cheating the Goat-Foot’s lusty will.

Her trembling shade

Whispered in reeds beside the stream.

So breaking these,

Pan bound the dead soul in the pipes

and crying flute.

Eros finds always on the lips of women,

Painful and sweet desire.”

While the flutes continued the slow refrain of the last stanza, the singer held out her hand to the passers-by who stood in a circle around her and received four oboli which she slid into her footgear.

Little by little, the crowd dispersed, curious to watch the passing of its numberless self. The noise of steps and of voices covered even the sound of the sea. Sailors drew, with bent shoulders, merchandise upon the quay. Girls who sold fruit passed by, their full baskets in their arms. Beggars besought with a trembling hand. Asses laden with full leathern bottles trotted before the sticks of

their drivers. But it was the hour of sunset, and an idle throng, more numerous than the active crowd, covered the jetty. Here and there groups formed, between which women wandered. One heard well known silhouettes called by name. The young looked at the philosophers who contemplated the women.

These were of every order and of every condition: from the most celebrated, dressed in light silks and shod with gilded leather, to the most miserable who walked barefoot. The poor ones were not less beautiful than the others but less fortunate only, and the attention of the sages dwelt by preference on those whose grace was not altered by the artifice of girdles and the encumberment of jewels. As it was the eve of the festival of Aphrodite, these women had full license to choose the garment which became them best and some of the youngest had even risked wearing none at all. But they shocked no one, for they would not have thus exposed themselves to the sun if any one of them had been marked by the least defect which could lead to mockery.

“Tryphera! Tryphera!”

And a young woman of joyous aspect elbowed some passers-by to rejoin a friend she had seen among the crowd.

“Tryphera! Art thou invited?”

“Where, Seso?”

“To Bacchis’s.”

“Not yet. She gives a dinner?”

“A dinner? A banquet, my dear. She is freeing her handsomest slave, Aphrodisia, on the second day of the festival.”

“At last! She has perceived that they come to her no longer except for her slave.”

“I think she has seen nothing. It is a fancy of old Cheres, the ship captain of the quay. He wanted to buy the girl for ten minae; Bacchis refused. Twenty minae; she still refused.”

“She is mad.”

“What wouldst thou have her do? It was her ambition to have a freed slave. Besides, she was right to bargain. Cheres will give thirty-five minae and for that price the girl will be free.”

“Thirty-five minae? Three thousand, five hundred drachmae? Three thousand, five hundred drachmae for a negress?”

“She is the daughter of a white.”

“Yes, but her mother is black.”

“Bacchis declared she would not give her for less and old Cheres is so much in love that he has consented.”

“Is he invited, he at least?”

“No! Aphrodisia will dance at the banquet as the last course after the fruit and it is only the next day they must deliver her to Cheres, but I am afraid she will be fatigued...”

“Don’t pity her! With him she will have time to recover. I know him, Seso. I have watched him sleep.”

They laughed together at Cheres. Then they complimented each other.

“Thou hast a pretty dress,” said Seso. “Didst thou have it embroidered at home?”

Tryphera’s robe was of a thin glaucous stuff entirely worked with large iris flowers. A carbuncle mounted in gold gathered it in folds on the left shoulder; the robe fell like a scarf as far as the metal girdle; a narrow slit which opened and closed at each step alone revealed the whiteness of the skin.

“Seso!” said another voice. “Seso and Tryphera, come, if you don’t know what to do. I am going to the Ceramic Wall to look for my name written there.”

“Mousarion! Whence comest thou, little one?”

“From the Pharos. There is no one down there.”

“What meanest thou? One needs but to throw in a line, it is so full.”

“No turbots for me. So I am going to the wall. Come.”

On the way, Seso recounted again the banquet project at the house of Bacchis.

“Ah! At Bacchis’s!” cried Mousarion. “Thou rememberest the last dinner, Tryphera: all the things they said about Chrysis?”

“Thou must not repeat it. Seso is her friend.”

Mousarion bit her lip, but already Seso was uneasy.

“What? What did they say?”

“Oh!... Slanders.”

“People can talk,” declared Seso. “She is worth more than all three of us. On the day she will be willing to leave her quarter and show herself at Bruchion, I know some of our lovers who will return to us no more.”

“Oh! Oh!”

“Certainly. I would commit follies for that woman. There is no one more beautiful here, believe me.”

The three young girls had arrived before the Ceramic Wall. From one end to the other of the immense white rampart inscriptions written in black succeeded each other. When a lover desired to present himself to a young woman it was sufficient for him to write their two names with the gift which he proposed; if the man and the gift were approved, the woman remained standing under the writing until the author returned.

“Look, Seso,” said Tryphera, laughing. “What nasty joker has written that?”

And they read, in big letters:

BACCHIS

THERSITES

TWO OBOLI

“To mock women so should not be permitted. As for me, were I the one named I would already have made an inquiry.” But farther on Seso paused before a more serious inscription.

SESO OF KNIDOS

TIMON SON OF LYSIAS

ONE MINA

She paled slightly.

“I remain,” she said.

And she backed against the wall under the envious looks of the passing women.

Some steps farther, Mousarion found a demand which was acceptable if not so generous. Tryphera returned alone to the jetty.

As the hour was advanced the crowd was less compact. However, the three musicians continued to sing and to play the flute.

Becoming aware of an unknown whose stoutness and garments were a little ridiculous, Tryphera tapped him on the shoulder.

“Well! little father! I wager thou art an Alexandrian, eh!”

“True, my daughter,” replied the good man, “and thou hast guessed it. Thou seest me quite surprised at the town and the people.”

“Thou art from Bubastis?”

“No. From Cabira. I came here to sell grain and I will return tomorrow richer by fifty-two minae. Thanks be rendered to the gods, the year has been good.”

Tryphera suddenly became full of interest in this merchant.

“My child,” he continued timidly, “thou canst give me a great pleasure. I would not like to return tomorrow to Cabira without being able to tell my wife and my three daughters that I have seen some celebrated men. Thou must know some celebrated men?”

“Some few,” she said, laughing.

“Good. Name them to me as they pass by. I am sure that I have met in the street, within the last two days, the most illustrious philosophers and the most influential functionaries. It is my despair not to know them.”

“Thou shalt be satisfied. Here is Naucrates.”

“Who is this Naucrates?”

“He is a philosopher.”

“And what does he preach?”

“That one must be silent.”

“By Zeus, there is a doctrine which does not demand a great genius and this philosopher does not please me at all.”

“Here is Phrasilas.”

“Who is this Phrasilas?”

“He is a dunce.”

“Then why dost thou not let him pass?”

“Because others consider him eminent.”

“And what does he say?”

“He says everything with a smile, which permits him to let his mistakes be understood as voluntary and his banalities as exquisites. He has all the advantage. The world has allowed itself to be deceived.”

“This is too much for me and I do not quite understand thee. Besides, the face of this Phrasilas is marked with hypocrisy.”

“Here is Philodemos.”

“The strategian?”

“No. A Latin poet who writes in Greek.”

“Little one, he is an enemy. I wish I had not seen him.”

Here the whole crowd made a movement; a murmur of voices pronounced the same name:

“Demetrios . . Demetrios...”

Tryphera mounted upon a stone and in her turn she said to the merchant,
“Demetrios... there is Demetrios, thou who wanted to see some celebrated men.”

“Demetrios? The lover of the queen? Is it possible?”

“Yes, thou hast had luck. He never goes out. Since I have been at Alexandria, this is the first time I have seen him on the jetty.”

“Where is he?”

“There he is, leaning over to see the shipping.”

“There are two leaning over.

“He is the one in blue.”

“I do not see him well. He turns his back to us.”

“Dost thou know he is the sculptor to whom the queen gave herself as model for the Aphrodite of the temple.”

“They say he is the royal lover. They say he is the master of Egypt.”

“And he is handsome as Apollo.”

“Ah! there he is turning around. I am glad I came. I will say that I have seen him. I have heard many things about him. It appears that no woman has ever resisted him. He has had many adventures, has he not? How does it happen that the queen has not been informed of them?”

“The queen knows of them as well as we do. She loves him too much to speak to

him about them. She is afraid lest he return to Rhodes, to his master, Pherecrates. He is as powerful as she and it is she who desired him.”

“He does not appear happy. Why does he look so sad? It seems to me I would be happy if I were he. I would like very much to be he, were it but for one evening....”

The sun had set. The woman looked at this man who was the dream of them all. He, without appearing to be conscious of the stir which he inspired, remained leaning on the parapet, listening to the flute-players.

The little musicians made one more round: then they gently threw their light flutes over their backs; the singer passed her arms around their necks and all three returned toward the town.

As darkness had come, the other women re-entered, in little groups, the immensity of Alexandria and the troop of men followed them; but as they went all looked back toward Demetrios. The last one who passed softly threw him her yellow flower and laughed. Silence fell upon the quays.

Chapter Three

DEMETRIOS

ON the plaza abandoned by the musicians Demetrios remained alone, resting on his elbows. He heard the sea murmur, the vessels creak slowly, the wind pass beneath the stars. The whole town was lighted by a little dazzling cloud which had lingered over the moon and the light in the sky was softened.

The young man looked about him; the tunics of the flute-players had left two imprints in the dust. He recalled their faces; they were two Ephesians. The eldest had seemed pretty to him, but the youngest was without charm; and, as ugliness made him suffer, he avoided thinking of her.

At his feet shone an object of ivory. He picked it up; it was a writing tablet whence hung a silver stylus. Its wax was almost used up but the letters must have been traced over several times so that, the last time, they were cut into the ivory.

He saw but three words written there:

MYRTIS LOVES RHODOCLEIA

And he asked himself to which of the two women this belonged and whether the other were the loved woman or, indeed, some unknown, abandoned at Ephesos. Then he thought a moment of rejoining the musicians to give back what was, perhaps, the souvenir of some dead beloved; but he could not have found them again without trouble and as he was already ceasing to be interested in them he turned around idly and threw the little object into the sea.

It fell rapidly, gliding like a white bird, and he heard the splash the distant black water made. This little noise made him feel the vast silence of the port.

Leaning with his back against the cold parapet, he tried to drive away every thought and began to look about him.

He had a horror of life. He left his dwelling only at the hour when life ceased and returned when the first dawn drew the fishermen and the kitchen gardeners

toward the town. The pleasure of seeing in the world only the shadow of the town and his own figure became such a delight to him that, for several months, he no longer remembered having seen the sun at mid-day.

He was wearied. The queen was fastidious.

He could hardly understand, this night, the joy and the pride which had filled him when, three years before, the queen, seduced perhaps more by the rumor of his beauty than by the reports of his genius, had ordered him invited to the palace and announced at the Gate of Evening by the blowing of silver trumpets.

This entrance enlightened his memory sometimes with one of those souvenirs which, by reason of too much sweetness, become more and more acute in the soul to the point of becoming intolerable. The queen had received him alone in her private apartments which were composed of three little rooms enviably soft and soundless. She was lying on her left side and as though buried in a cavern of greenish silks which bathed the black locks of her headdress in purple reflections. Her young body was robed in a fantastically embroidered costume.

Demetrios, kneeling respectfully, had taken in his hand the little bare foot of the queen Berenice, as a precious and sweet object, to be kissed.

Then she had risen.

Simply, like a handsome slave who serves as a model, she had undone her corselet, her little bands—taken even the circlets from her arms, even the rings from her toes, and she had stood, hands open before her shoulders which lifted her head beneath the coral ornaments that swayed in long strings by her cheeks.

She was the daughter of a Ptolemy and of a Syrian princess descended from all the gods through Astarte, whom the Greeks called Aphrodite. Demetrios knew this and that she was proud of her Olympian lineage. Therefore he was not troubled when the sovereign, without moving, said to him: “I am Astarte. Take marble and thy chisel and reveal me to the people of Egypt. I wish my image to be adored.”

Demetrios gazed at her, and guessing beyond all doubt what simple and fresh emotion moved this young girl, he said, “I am the first to adore it.”

The queen was not angry at this precipitancy, but demanded, drawing back,

“Dost think thyself Adonis, to touch the goddess?”

He replied, “Yes.”

She gazed at him, smiled a little, and concluded, “Thou art right.”

It was for this reason that he became insupportable and that his best friends were lost to him; but the hearts of all women doted upon him.

When he passed into a hall of the palace the slaves stopped, the women of the court became silent, the strangers listened to him also, for the sound of his voice was ravishing. If he retired to the queen they came even there to importune him under pretexts always new. If he wandered through the streets, the folds of his tunic became filled with little papyri on which the passers-by had written their names with anguished words but which he, tired of such matters, crumpled without reading. When they had put his work in place in the temple of Aphrodite the enclosure was filled at every hour of the night by the crowds of adoring women who came to read his name in the stone and to offer to their living god all the doves and all the roses.

Soon his house was encumbered with gifts which he at first accepted indifferently but which later he invariably refused when he understood. Even his slaves besought him. He had them whipped and sold. Then his male slaves, bribed by presents, opened the door to unknown women. The little objects of his toilette and of his table disappeared one after another. More than one woman in the town had a sandal or a girdle of his, a cup from which he had drunk, even the kernels of fruit he had eaten. If he dropped a flower while walking he found it no more behind him. They would have gathered up even the dust crushed by his feet.

Beyond the fact that this persecution became dangerous and threatened to kill all his sensitiveness he had arrived at the epoch of youth where the man who thinks believes it necessary to make two parts of his life and to mingle no longer the affairs of the spirit with the necessities of the senses. The statue of Aphrodite-Astarte was for him the sublime pretext for this moral conversion. All that the queen had of beauty, all that could be invented of ideals around the supple lines of her body, Demetrios had evoked from the marble and from that day he imagined no other woman on earth would ever again attain the level of his dreams. His statue became the object of his desire; henceforth he adored nothing

save it alone, and madly separated from the flesh the supreme Idea of the goddess, all the more immaterial if he had attached it to life.

When he again saw the queen herself, he found her despoiled of all which had constituted her charm. She was at once too different from the Other One and too similar, as though an intruder had taken the semblance of the admired woman. Her arms were slighter, her hips narrower, than those of the True One. In the end he tired of her.

His adorers knew it and though he continued his daily visits it was known that he had ceased to love Berenice. And around him the ardor redoubled. He did not notice it. In fact, the change which he needed was of another nature.

It is rare that, between two mistresses, a man should not have an interval of life where vulgar debauch tempts and satisfies him. Demetrios abandoned himself to it. When the necessity of going to the palace displeased him more than usual, he went at night to the garden of the sacred courtesans which surrounded the temple on all sides. The women who were there did not know him at all. They had no more cries or tears, and there at least he was not troubled by the amorous whining with which the queen enervated him. The conversation that he held with these beautiful calm persons was idle and without research. The visitors of the day, the weather of the morrow, the sweetness of the grass and of the night, were its charming subjects. They did not beseech him to expose his theories on sculpture and did not give their opinions of the Achilles of Skopas. If they happened to thank the visitor, to find him well made and to tell him so, he had the right not to believe in their disinterestedness.

Leaving them, he would mount the steps of the temple and fall into ecstasy before the statue.

Between the slender columns topped with Ionian volutes, the goddess, on a pedestal of rosy stone laden with pendent treasures, appeared as though living. She was nude, softly tinted in feminine tones; she held in one hand her symbolic mirror, and with the other adorned her beauty with a seven-fold necklace of pearls. One pearl, larger than the others, silvery and elongated, shone upon her bosom like a crescent moon between two snowy clouds.

Demetrios contemplated her tenderly and longed to believe, like the people, that those were the true sacred pearls born of the water drops which had rolled in the

shell of the Anadyomene.

“O divine Sister,” he said, “O flowering, O transfigured one! thou art no longer the little Asiatic whom I made thine unworthy model. Thou art her immortal Idea, the terrestrial Soul of the Astarte who was the progenitor of her race. Thou didst shine in her ardent eyes, thou didst burn in her somber lips, thou didst faint in her soft hands, thou didst pant in her swelling bosom, in former times, before thy birth; and that which would please the daughter of a fisherman would delight thee also, thee, goddess, thee—mother of gods and men—the joy and the sorrow of the world! But I have seen, evoked, seized thee, O marvelous Cytheraea! I have revealed thee to the earth. It is not thine image, it is thyself to whom I have given thy mirror and whom I have covered with pearls as on the day when thou wert born of the bleeding sky and the foamy smile of the waters, and Aurora, dripping with dew, with a cortege of blue tritons, acclaimed thee to the shores of Cypros.”

He had adored her thus when he entered upon the jetty at the hour when the crowd was dispersing and heard the sorrowful song of the flute-players. But this evening he had refused to visit the women of the temple. because a couple, half seen under the branches, had filled him with disgust and revolted his very soul.

Little by little, the gentle influence of the night worked upon him. He turned his face toward the wind which had passed over the sea and seemed to draw toward Egypt the scent of the roses of Amathus.

Lovely feminine forms sketched themselves in his thought. He had been requested to make, for the garden of the goddess, a group of the three Charities enlaced; but his youth revolted at copying conventions and he dreamed of uniting on the same block of marble three gracious movements of woman: two of the Charities would be clothed, one holding a fan and half closing her eyelids at the breath of the swaying plumes; the other dancing among the folds of her robe. The third, behind her sisters, would be nude and her raised arms would twist upon the nape of her neck the mass of her rolled hair.

He engendered in his spirit still other projects—as to attach to the rocks of the Pharos an Andromeda of black marble before the rough monster of the sea; to enclose the hill of Bruchion between the four horses of the rising sun, each one a mettlesome Pegasus—and with what intoxication did he not exult at the idea which was coming to birth in him of a Zagreus terrified before the approach of

the Titans. Ah! how he was seized by all beauty! How he tore himself from love! How he “separated from the flesh the supreme Idea of the goddess!” How free he felt, at last!

Now he turned his head toward the quays and saw, shining in the distance, the yellow veil of a sauntering woman.

Chapter Four

THE PASSER-BY

SHE came slowly with her head on one side, over the deserted jetty where the moonlight fell. A little flickering shadow frisked before her steps.

Demetrios watched her advance.

Diagonal folds furrowed the little that could be seen of her body through the light tissue; one of her elbows thrust out under the close tunic and the other arm, which she had left bare, carried the long train so it would not drag in the dust.

He recognized by her jewels that she was a courtesan; to spare himself a salute from her he crossed over quickly.

He did not wish to look at her. Wilfully he occupied his thought with the great sketch of Zagreus. And yet his eyes returned toward her who passed.

Then he saw that she did not stop at all, that she did not concern herself with him, that she did not even pretend to look at the sea nor to raise her veil before her face nor to be absorbed in her reflections; but that she was simply walking alone and sought nothing there but the coolness of the wind, solitude, freedom, the light quiver of the silence.

Without stirring, Demetrios did not turn his gaze from her and lost himself in a singular astonishment.

She continued walking like a yellow shade in the distance, indifferent and preceded by the little black shadow.

He heard at each step the gentle sound of her foot-wear in the dust of the way.

She walked to the isle of the Pharos and mounted among the rocks.

Suddenly, and as though long ago he had loved this unknown, Demetrios ran after her, then stopped, retraced his steps, trembled, grew angry at himself, attempted to leave the jetty; but he had never employed his will except to serve

his own pleasure and when it was time to make it act for the welfare of his character and the ordering of his life he felt himself filled with impotence and nailed to the spot where he stood.

As he could no longer avoid thinking of her he tried to find an excuse for the preoccupation which distracted him so violently. He imagined his admiration for her gracious passing was purely an esthetic sentiment. And he said to himself that she would be an ideal model for the Charity with the fan which he proposed to sketch on the morrow. Then suddenly all his thoughts were upset and a crowd of anxious questions flowed into his spirit around this woman in yellow.

What was she doing on the island at this hour of the night? Why, for whom, had she come out so late? Why had she not accosted him? She had seen him, certainly she had seen him as he crossed the jetty. Why, without a word of greeting, had she continued on her way? The rumor ran that certain women sometimes chose the cool hours before the dawn to bathe in the sea. But no one bathed at the Pharos. The sea was too deep there. Besides, how unlikely that a woman would thus have covered herself with jewels to go only to the bath.... Then, what drew her so far from Rhacotis? A rendezvous, perhaps? With some young man—to be courted, on the great wave-polished rocks?

Demetrios wished to assure himself. But already the young woman was returning, with the same soft and tranquil step, lighted full in the face by the slow lunar brightness and sweeping the dust of the parapet with the tip of her fan.

Chapter Five

THE MIRROR, THE COMB AND THE NECKLACE

SHE had a special beauty. Her hair seemed two masses of gold but it was too abundant and weighted her forehead with two deep shadow-laden waves which swallowed up the ears and wound seven-fold upon the nape of the neck. The nose was delicate with slender nostrils which sometimes palpitated above the rounded, mobile corners of the full and tinted mouth. The pliant line of the body undulated with each step, animated by the balancing of the beautiful hips under the rounded, swaying waist.

When she was no more than ten steps from the young man she turned her gaze toward him. Demetrios trembled. They were extraordinary eyes, blue, but deep and brilliant at the same time, moist, weary, in tears and in fire, almost closed under the weight of the lashes and the lids. They looked, these eyes, as the sirens sing. He who passed into their light was inevitably taken. She knew it well and used them skilfully; but she counted more on indifference affected toward the man whom so much unfeigned love had not been able to touch sincerely.

The navigators who have sailed over the purple seas beyond the Ganges tell that they have seen, under the waters, rocks which are of lodestone. When vessels pass near them, the nails and the ironwork tear themselves away toward the submarine cliff and unite with it forever. And that which was a rapid ship, a dwelling, a living being, becomes no more than a flotilla of planks dispersed by the wind, driven by the tides. Thus Demetrios himself was lost before two great magnetic eyes and all his strength fled from him.

She lowered her eyelids and passed near him.

He could have cried out with impatience. His fists clenched; he was afraid that he could not recover a calm attitude, for he must speak to her. However, he accosted her with the customary words.

“I salute thee,” he said.

“I salute thee also,” replied the passing one.

Demetrios continued, "Whither goest thou, so little hurried?"

"I return."

"All alone?"

"All alone."

And she made a movement to resume her promenade.

Then Demetrios thought that perhaps he was deceived in judging her a courtesan. For some time past the wives of the magistrates and of the functionaries had dressed and tinted themselves like the daughters of pleasure. This one might be a person very honorably known and it was without irony that he finished his questions thus: "To thy husband?"

Resting her hands on the parapet behind her, she began to laugh.

Demetrios bit his lip and hazarded, almost timidly, "Seek him not. Thou hast begun too late. There is no longer any one here."

"Who told thee I was seeking? I am walking alone and seek nothing."

"Whence camest thou, then? For thou hast not put on all these jewels for thyself—and here is a silken veil..."

"Wouldst thou have me go out naked or dressed in wool like a-slave? I dress myself only for my pleasure; I love to know that I am beautiful and, while walking, I look at my fingers to see all my rings."

"Thou shouldst have a mirror in thine hand and look at nothing but thine eyes. They were not born at Alexandria, those eyes. Thou art a Jewess, I hear it in thy voice which is softer than ours."

"No, I am not a Jewess. I am a Galilaean."

"How dost thou call thyself—Miriam or Noemi?"

"My Syrian name... thou shalt not know it. It is a royal name which no one bears here. My friends call me Chrysis, which is a compliment thou mightest

have paid me.”

He put his hand on her arm.

“Oh! no, no,” she said mockingly, “it is much too late for those pleasantries. Let me return quickly. It is almost three hours since I arose; I am dying of fatigue.”

Leaning over she took her foot in her hand.

“See how my little thongs hurt me. They were pulled much too tight. If I do not loosen them in an instant I will have a mark on my foot and that will be pretty indeed when someone embraces me! Let me go quickly. Ah! what a nuisance! If I had known, I would not have stopped. My yellow veil is all crumpled at the waist—look!”

Demetrios passed his hand over his forehead; then with the disengaged tone of a man who condescends to make his choice, he murmured, “Show me the way.”

“I will certainly not!” cried Chrysis with an astonished air.

“Thou dost not even ask if it is my pleasure. ‘Show me the way!’.

How he says that! Dost thou take me for a girl of the porneion? Dost thou know if I am free? Hast thou followed me in the streets? Hast thou noticed the doors where I am welcome? Hast thou counted the men who believe themselves loved of Chrysis? ‘Show me the way!’ I will not show it to thee, so please thee! Remain here or go, but elsewhere than with me!”

“Thou dost not know who I am....”

“Thou? Come, come! Thou art Demetrios of Sais; thou hast made the statue of my goddess; thou art the lover of my queen and the master of my city. But for me thou art but a handsome slave because thou hast seen me and because thou lovest me.”

She drew nearer and pursued with a coaxing voice, “Yes—thou lovest me. Oh! do not speak—I know what thou wilt tell me; thou lovest no one, thou art loved. Thou art the Well-Beloved, the Cherished, the Idol. Thou hast refused Glykera who had refused Antiochos. Demonassa who had sworn to die virgin would have entrapped thee if thy two Lybian slaves had not thrust her from the door.

Callistion the well-named, despairing of approaching thee, bought the house which is opposite thine and in the morning shows herself in the opening of the window. Thou thinkest I do not know all that? But everything is told, among women. The night of thine arrival at Alexandria they spoke to me of thee; and since then not a single day has passed on which thy name has not been pronounced before me. I know even the things thou hast forgotten. Poor little Phyllis hanged herself day before yesterday at the bar of thy door, did she not? Well—it is a fashion which spreads. Lydia has done like Phyllis; I saw leer this evening as I passed; she was quite blue but tears on her cheeks were not yet dry. Thou dost not know who Lydia is?... A child of fifteen years whom her mother had sold last month to a ship captain of Samos who passed the night at Alexandria before going up the river to Thebes. She came to me. I gave her advice; she knew absolutely nothing, not even how to play at dice. I often took her in my bed, because she had no place to sleep. And she loved thee! If thou couldst have heard her call thy name!... She wished to write to thee. Dost thou understand? I told her it was not worth the trouble...”

Demetrios watched her without hearing.

“Yes, it is all the same to thee, is it not?” continued Chrysis. “Thou didst not love her. It is I whom thou lovest. Thou hast not even heard what I have just told thee. I am sure thou couldst not repeat a word of it. Thou art well occupied wondering how my eyelids are made, how good my mouth must be, how soft my hair. Ah! how many others know that! All, all have desired my beauty: men, young men, old men, children, women, young girls. Last year I danced before twenty thousand persons and I know thou wert not one of them. Dost thou believe that I hide myself? Ah! why that! All women have seen me at the bath.

All men have seen me. Thou alone thou shalt never again see me. I refuse thee—I refuse thee! Of what I am, of what I feel, of my beauty, of my love, thou shalt know nothing, ever—ever! Thou art an abominable man, a coxcomb, cruel, insensitive and cowardly! I do not know why one of us has not had hate enough to kill you both, one with the other, thou the first and thy queen next.”

Demetrios calmly seized her by the arms without a word of reply.

She had a moment of anguish; but suddenly straightened her back and said in a low voice, “Ah! I do not fear that, Demetrios! Let me rise, thou art hurting my arms.”

They were silent for a few moments; then Demetrios continued, "This must stop, Chrysis. Thou knowest well I will not injure thee. But let me follow thee. So proud as thou art, it is a glory which will cost thee dear—to refuse Demetrios."

Chrysis remained silent.

He continued more gently, "What dost thou fear?"

"Thou art accustomed to the love of others. Dost thou know what one should give to a woman who does not love?" He grew impatient.

"I will give thee the gold of the world. I have it here in Egypt."

"I have it in my hair. I am tired of gold. I do not want gold. I wish for but three things. Wilt thou give them to me?"

Demetrios felt that she was going to demand the impossible. He looked at her anxiously. But she began to smile and said in a slow voice, "I wish for a silver mirror to reflect my eyes in my eyes."

"Thou shalt have it. What more wishest thou? Say quickly."

"I wish a comb of carved ivory to plunge into my hair like a net into the sunlit water."

"Then?"

"Thou wilt give me my comb?"

"Surely. Finish."

"I wish a pearl necklace to spread over my breast when I shall dance for thee the nuptial dances of my country."

He raised his eyebrows.

"That is all?"

"Thou wilt give me my necklace?"

"The one which shall please thee."

Her voice became very tender. "The one which shall please me? Ah! that is exactly what I wished to ask thee. Wilt thou let me choose my presents?"

"Of course."

"Thou swearest it?"

"I swear it."

"What oath dost thou make?"

"Name it."

"By the Aphrodite which thou hast sculptured."

"I swear by the Aphrodite. But why this precaution?"

"Well... I was not quite sure. Now I am."

She raised her head. "I have chosen my gifts."

Demetrios became restless once more and asked, "So soon?"

"Yes... Dost thou think that I would accept any silver mirror bought from a merchant of Smyrna or from some unknown courtesan? I wish that of my friend Bacchis who cheated me last week and who derided me evilly at a little party which she had with Tryphera, Mousarion and some other young fools who brought the whole thing to me. It is a mirror of which she is very fond because it once belonged to Rhodopis—she who was a slave with Aesop and was brought back by the brother of Sappho. Thou knowest that she is a very celebrated courtesan. Her mirror is magnificent. They say that Sappho has gazed in it and because of that Bacchis keeps it jealously. She has nothing more precious in the world; but I know where thou wilt find it. She told me one night when she was drunk. It is under the third stone of the altar. It is there she puts it every evening when she goes out at sunset. Go tomorrow to her house at that hour and fear nothing; her slaves go out with her."

"It is madness!" cries Demetrios. "Dost thou wish me to steal?"

"Dost thou not love me? I thought that thou didst love me. And then, hast thou

not sworn? I thought that thou hadst sworn. If I am mistaken, let us speak no more of it.”

He understood that she would ruin him but let himself be drawn away without a struggle, almost voluntarily. “I will do what thou sayest,” he replied.

“Oh! I know very well thou wilt do it. But thou didst hesitate at first. I can understand that. It is not an ordinary gift; I would not demand it from a philosopher. I demand it from thee. I know well thou wilt give it to me.”

She played an instant with the peacock plumes of her round fan, then, suddenly:

“Ah!... Neither do I wish a comb of common ivory bought from a vender of the town. Thou didst tell me I might choose, didst thou not? Very well, I wish I wish the comb of carved ivory which is in the hair of the High Priest’s wife. It is much more precious still than the mirror of Rhodopis. It comes from a queen of Egypt who lived a long, long time ago and whose name is so difficult I cannot pronounce it. So the ivory is very old and yellow as though it were gilded. They have graven upon it a young girl who passes through a marsh of lotos taller than she, where she walks upon the tips of her toes to avoid getting wet

[paragraph continues]... It is truly a beautiful comb... I will be content when thou givest it to me... I have also a little grudge against the one who possesses it. Last month I offered a blue veil to the Aphrodite; I saw it the next day upon the head of this woman. It was a little hasty and I was angry at her. Her comb will repay me for my veil.”

“And how will I get it?” demanded Demetrios.

“Ah; that will be a little more difficult. She is an Egyptian, thou knowest, and she dresses her two hundred plaits but once a year like the other women of her race. But I wish my comb tomorrow and thou wilt kill her to get it. Thou hast sworn an oath.”

She made a little grimace at Demetrios, who was looking at the ground. Then she finished thus, very quickly, “I have chosen my necklace also. I wish the seven row necklace of pearls which is about the neck of the Aphrodite.”

Demetrios started. “Ah! this time, it is too much! Thou shalt not laugh at me to the end! Nothing, dost thou hear—nothing! neither the mirror nor the comb nor

the necklace shalt thou have...”

But she closed his mouth with her hand and resumed her coaxing tone: “Do not say that. Thou knowest well thou wilt give me this also. I am very certain of it. I shall have the three gifts. Thou wilt come to me tomorrow evening and the day after tomorrow if thou wishest and every evening. At thine hour I will be there, in the costume thou preferrest, tinted as thy taste pleases, my hair dressed to thy fancy, ready for thy caprices. If thou wishest but tenderness, I will cherish thee as a child. If thou wishest silence I will be silent... When thou wouldst have me sing—Ah! thou wilt see, Well-Beloved! I know the songs of all countries.

[paragraph continues] I know those which are soft as the murmur of springs, others which are terrible as approaching thunder. I know some so naive and so fresh that a young girl could sing them to her mother; and I know those they would not sing at Lampsakos; I know some that Elephantis would have blushed to hear and that I would not dare to sing. Nights when thou wishest me to dance I will dance until morning. I will dance quite clothed, with my tunic dragging, or under a veil, or with a corselet. I shall dance with flowers upon my head and in my floating hair, tinted like a divine image. I know how to balance the hands, round the arms—thou shalt see! I dance on the tips of my toes, moving lightly across the rugs. I know all the dances of Aphrodite, those that they dance before Urania and those that they dance in honor of Astarte. I know even those which they dare not dance. I will dance for thee all the loves. Thou shalt see! The queen is richer than I but in all the palace there is not a chamber so enchanting as mine. I will not tell thee what thou wilt find there. There are things so lovely that I could not give thee an idea of them and others which are so rare that I have no words with which to tell of them. And then, dost thou know what surpasses all the rest? Chrysis—whom thou lovest and whom thou dost not yet know. Yes, thou hast seen my face, but thou dost not know how fair I am. Ah! Ah!... Ah! Ah! Thou wilt have many surprises. Ah! how thou wilt adore me, how thou wilt tremble in my arms, how thou wilt swoon for love of me. And how good my mouth will be! Ah! my kisses!”

Demetrios threw upon her a despairing look. She continued, tenderly: “What—thou wilt not give me a poor old silver mirror when thou wilt have all my hair like a golden forest in thy hands?”

Demetrios wished to touch it...

She drew back and said, "Tomorrow."

"Thou shalt have it," he murmured.

"And thou wilt not take for me a little ivory comb which pleases me when thou wilt have my two arms like two branches of ivory around thy neck?"

He attempted to caress them... She drew them back and repeated, "Tomorrow."

"I will bring it to thee," he said, very low.

"Ah! I knew it well!" cried the courtesan. "And thou wilt give me also the necklace of pearls which is about the neck of the Aphrodite and for which I will give thee more kisses in thy mouth than there are pearls in the sea!"

Demetrios, supplicating, advanced his head... Her vivid gaze overwhelmed his as she lent her luxurious lips...

When he opened his eyes she was already far away. A little shadow, more dim, darted behind her floating veil.

He walked vaguely toward the town, his head bent under an inexpressible shame.

Chapter Six

THE VIRGINS

THE faint dawn rose over the sea. All things were tinted with lilac. The flame-streaming brazier lighted on the tower of the Pharos was extinguished with the moon. Fugitive yellow glows appeared in the violet waves like faces of sirens under hair of mauve seaweed. It was suddenly light.

The jetty was deserted. The city was dead. It was the somber light before the first dawn, which lightens the slumber of the world and brings the enervating dreams of the morning. Nothing existed but the silence.

Like sleeping birds, the long ships ranged near the quays allowed their parallel oars to hang in the water. The perspective of the streets lay in pure architectural lines uninterrupted by a wagon, a horse or a slave. Alexandria was but a vast solitude, the vision of an antique city abandoned for centuries.

Now a sound of light footsteps pattered upon the soil and two young girls appeared, one dressed in yellow, the other in blue. They both wore the girdles of virgins which passed around the hips and tied very low upon their young bodies. It was the singer of the night past and one of the flute-players.

The musician was younger and prettier than . her friend. Pale as the blue of her robe, her eyes smiled faintly, half drowned under the eyelids. The two slender flutes hung at her back from the flowered knot at her shoulder. A double garland of iris about her rounded limbs undulated under the light stuff of her garment and was attached at the ankles to two silver anklets. She said:

“Myrtocleia, be not saddened because thou hast lost our tablets. Wilt thou ever forget that the love of Rhodis is thine; or canst thou think, naughty one, that thou wouldst have-ever read alone the line written by my hand? Am I one of those bad companions who graves upon her finger nail the name of her adored friend and goes to another when the nail has grown to the end? Hast thou need of a souvenir of me when thou hast me entire and living? Hardly am I at the age when girls marry, yet I was not half so old, on the day I saw thee for the first time. Thou wilt recall it. It was at the bath. Our mothers held us under our arms and we toddled toward each other. We played a long time upon the marble before

dressing again. Since that day we never separated and, five years after, we loved each other.”

Myrtocleia replied: “There was another first day, Rhodis, thou knowest. It was that day when thou didst write the three words upon my tablet, mingling our names. That was the first. We will never find it again. But never mind. Every day is new for me and when thou awakenest toward the evening it seems as though I had never seen thee before. I believe thou art not a girl: thou art a little nymph of Arcadia who has left her forest because Phoebos has dried her fountain. Thy body is supple as an olive branch, thy skin is soft as water in summer, iris winds about thee and thou bearest the lotus flower as Astarte the open fig. In what wood peopled by immortals did thy mother sleep before thy most happy birth? And what rash aegipan or what god of what divine

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river came to her in the grass? When we shall have quitted this frightful African sun thou wilt lead me to thy spring far behind Psophis and Pheneos in the vast shade-filled forest where one sees upon the soft earth the double trail of satyrs mingled with the light steps of the nymphs. There thou wilt seek a polished rock and thou wilt grave in the stone what thou didst write upon the wax: the three words which are our joy. Listen, listen, Rhodis! By the girdle of Aphrodite on which are brodered all the desires, all desires are strangers to me since thou art more than my dream! By the horn of Amalthea whence issue all the good things of the world, the world is indifferent to me since thou art the only good I have found in it! When I look upon thee and when I see myself, I know not why thou lovest me in return. Thy hair is blond as a sheaf of wheat; mine is black as that of a goat. Thy skin is white as shepherd’s cheese; mine is tanned as the sand of the beaches. Thy tender bosom blossoms as an orange tree in autumn; I am thin and sterile as a pine among the rocks. If my face is embellished, it is because of having loved thee. O Rhodis, thou knowest, where I am like the lips of Pan eating a sprig of myrtle, thou art rosy and pretty as the mouth of a little child. I know not why thou lovest me, but if thou shouldst cease to love me one day and, like thy sister Theano who plays the flute next thee, remain where we are employed, then I would never even think of sleeping and thou, returning, wouldst find me strangled with my girdle.”

The long eyes of Rhodis filled with tears and smiles, so cruel and so mad was the idea. She placed her foot upon a stone. “The flowers between my knees

annoy me. Undo them, adored Myrto. I have finished dancing for this night.”

The singer shrugged. “Oh! it is true. I had forgotten them already, those men and girls. They made you both dance, thou in this robe of Cos and thy sister with thee. If I had not defended thee they would have treated thee as they did thy sister before us... Ah! what an abomination! How cruel is man!”

She knelt by Rhodis, and detached the two garlands, then the three single flowers. When she arose the child put her arm around her neck and kissed her.

“Myrto, thou art not jealous of all those debauched people? What does it matter to thee that they should have seen me? Theano suffices them, I have left her to them. They shall not have me, dear Myrto. Be not jealous of them.”

“Jealous!”... I am jealous of all that approaches thee. That thy robes may not have thee alone, I put them on when thou hast worn them. That the flowers in thy hair do not remain in love with thee, I deliver them to the poor courtesans who soil them in orgies. I am afraid of everything thou touchest and I hate everything thou lookest upon. I would wish to be all my life between the walls of a prison where there were but thee and me, and hide thee so well in my arms that not an eye would suspect thee there. I would like to be the fruit thou eatest, the perfume which pleases thee, the slumber which enters beneath thine eyelids. I am jealous of the happiness which I give thee: nevertheless I would give thee as much as I have from thee. Behold my jealousies!”

Rhodis cried sincerely, “Rather would I go, like Nausithoe, to sacrifice to the god whom they adore at Thasos. But not this morning, my dear. I have danced a long time, I am very tired. I would like to go home, to sleep.”

She smiled and continued, “Theano must be told that our bed is no longer hers. After tonight, I could never again associate with her. Myrto, truly it is horrible. Is it possible that love is thus? Is that what they call love?”

“It is that.”

“They are wrong, Myrto. They do not know.”

The wind mingled their hair.

Chapter Seven

CHRYISIS'S HAIR

“HA!” cried Rhodis. “Look! Someone.”

The singer looked. A woman, far from them, was walking rapidly down the quay.

“I recognize her,” continued the child. “It is Chrysis. She is wearing her yellow robe.”

“What, is she already dressed?”

“I don’t understand it. Usually she does not go out before noon, and the sun has scarcely risen. Something has happened to her. Good fortune, doubtless; she has such good luck.”

They went to meet her, and said, “Greeting, Chrysis.”

“Greeting. How long have you been here?”

“I don’t know. It was already light when we came.”

“Was anyone on the jetty?”

“No one.”

“Not a man? Are you sure?”

“Oh! quite sure. Why dost thou ask that?”

Chrysis made no reply. Rhodis continued, “Didst thou wish to see someone?”

“Yes... perhaps... I think it is better that I should not see him. Yes, it is better. I was wrong to return; but I could not help it.”

“What is happening, Chrysis; wilt thou tell us?”

“Oh! no.”

“Not even us? not even us, thy friends?”

“Thou wilt know it later, with the whole town.”

“That is kind of thee.”

“A little earlier, if you insist upon it; but it is impossible, this morning. Extraordinary things are happening, my children. I am dying to tell you; but I must hold my tongue. Were you going home? Come to my house. I am all alone.”

“O Chryse, Chrysidion, we are too tired; we were going home to sleep.”

“Well! you shall sleep! This is the eve of the Festival of Aphrodite. It is a time for repose. If you wish the goddess to protect you and make you happy this coming year you must arrive at the temple with eyelids dark as violets and cheeks white as lilies. We will attend to that; come with me.”

She placed her arms about their waists and bore them hurriedly away.

Rhodis, however, was still preoccupied. “And when we shall be in thy house,” she continued, “thou wilt not then tell us what is coming to thee, what thou awaitest?”

“I will tell you many things, all that you please; hut that I will not tell. Do not insist, Rhode. Thou wilt know it tomorrow. Wait until tomorrow.”

“Thou art to be very happy? Or very powerful?”

“Very powerful.”

Rhodis opened her eyes wide and cried:

“Thou shalt visit the queen!”

“No,” said Chrysis, laughing; “but I shall be as powerful as she. Hast thou need of me? Desirest thou anything?”

“Oh! Yes!”

And the child became thoughtful again.

“Well, what is it?” inquired Chrysis.

“It is an impossible thing. Why should I ask it?”

Myrtocleia spoke for her: “At Ephesos in our country, when two girls like Rhodis and me love each other, the priests bless them. They both go to the temple of Athena to consecrate their double girdle; then to the sanctuary of Iphinoe to offer a lock of their mingled hair and finally under the Peristyle of Dionysos a ceremony is performed. In the evening, they go to their new dwelling, seated upon a flower-decked car, surrounded by torches and flute-players. And thenceforward they have all rights. They are respected. That is Rhodis’s dream. But here it is not the custom....”

“The law shall be changed,” said Chrysis; “and you shall be blessed together; I will make it my business.”

“Oh! truly?” cried the little one, flushing with joy.

“Yes; and I do not ask which of you will be the happier. I know Myrto, and that thou art lucky, Rhodis, to have such a friend. No matter what is said, they are rare.”

They had arrived at the door, where Djala, seated on the threshold, was weaving a towel of flax. The slave arose to let them pass, and entered after them.

In an instant the two flute-players had slipped out of their simple garments. Each washed the other carefully in a green marble bowl which emptied into the basin. Then they sank upon the bed.

Chrysis looked at them without seeing. The slightest words of

[paragraph continues] Demetrios repeated themselves endlessly, word for word, in her memory. She did not feel that Djala, in silence, untied and unrolled her long saffron veil, unbuckled the girdle, opened the necklaces, drew off the rings, the seals, the circlets, the silver serpents, drew out the golden pins; but the tickling of her falling hair awoke her vaguely.

She demanded her mirror.

Did she fear that she was not beautiful enough to retain this new lover—for he must be held—after the mad enterprises she had demanded of him? Or did she wish, through the examination of each of her beauties, to calm any unrest and justify her confidence?

She presented her mirror to all parts of her body, studying them one after another. She considered the whiteness of her skin, estimated its softness by long caresses, its warmth by embraces. She tested the firmness of her body, the tightness of her flesh. She measured her hair and considered its brilliance. She tried the strength of her gaze, the expression of her mouth, the sweetness of her breath, and from the edge of her armpit to the bend of the elbow she slowly drew a kiss along her arm.

An extraordinary emotion, made of surprise and pride, of certainty and impatience, seized her at the contact of her own lips. She turned as though she sought someone, but discovering on her bed the two Ephesians whom she had forgotten, she lay down between them, and her long golden hair enveloped the three young heads.

BOOK TWO

Chapter One

THE GARDENS OF THE GODDESS

THE temple of Aphrodite-Astarte was erected outside the gates of the city in an immense park full of flowers and shadowy places where the water of the Nile, brought through seven aqueducts, nourished at all seasons a prodigious verdure.

This flowering forest at the edge of the sea, these deep brooks, these lakes, these somber fields, had been created in the desert more than two centuries before by the first of the Ptolemies. Since then, the sycamores planted by his orders had become gigantic; under the influence of the fecund waters the lawns had grown into meadows, the pools had enlarged into lakes; from a park Nature had evolved a vast region.

The gardens were more than a valley, more than a region or country; they were a complete world enclosed by boundaries of stone and ruled by a goddess, the soul and center of this universe. All around rose a circular terrace, eighty stadia long and thirty-two feet high. This was not a wall, it was a colossal city made of fourteen hundred houses. An equal number of priestess-courtesans inhabited this sacred city and represented in this unique place severity different nationalities.

The plan of these sacred houses was uniform and as follows: the door, of red copper—the metal dedicated to the goddess— bore a knocker and striking-plate shaped symbolically; and beneath was engraved the name of the occupant with the initials of the usual phrase:

U. X. E.

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On each side of the door opened two rooms in the form of shops; that is to say: without a wall on the side of the gardens. That on the right, called “the exposed room” was the place where the bedecked priestess reposed upon a high seat at

the hour when the men arrived. That on the left was at the disposition of visitors who wished to pass the night in the open air without, however, sleeping on the grass.

Through the opened door a corridor gave access to a vast, marble-paved court, the center of which was occupied by an oval pool. A peristyle shaded this great spot from light and protected by a zone of coolness the entrance to the seven rooms of the house. At the back rose the altar which was of rose-granite.

Each woman had brought from her own land a little idol of the goddess, and, placed upon the domestic altar, she adored it in her own tongue without ever understanding the others. Lakmi, Ashtaroth, Venus, Ishtar, Freia, Mylitta, Kypris; such were the religious names of their deified Pleasure. Some venerated her under a symbolic form; a red boulder, a conical stone, a great spiny shell. Most of them set up on a pedestal of soft wood a coarse statuette with thin arms, heavy breasts and excessive hips. They laid at its feet a branch of myrtle, strewed the altar with rose leaves, and burned a grain of incense for each prayer that was granted. It was the confidant of all their sorrows, witness of all their labors, supposed source of all their pleasure. At their death it was put into their fragile little coffins as a guardian of their entombment.

The handsomest of these girls came from the kingdoms of Asia. Every year, vessels which brought to Alexandria the presents of tributaries or of allies, disembarked, with the bales and the leathern bottles, an hundred virgins chosen by the priests for the service of the sacred garden. These were Mysians and Jewesses, Phrygians and Cretans, girls from Ecbatana and from Babylon, from the shores of the Gulf of Pearls and from the sacred banks of the Ganges. Some were white of skin, with medallion-like faces and firm bosoms; others, brown as the earth under the rain, wore golden circles in their nostrils and shook dark masses of short hair upon their shoulders.

Some came from farther yet, little beings, slender and slow, whose language no one knew and who resembled yellow monkeys. Their eyes lengthened toward the temples; their straight black hair was fantastically dressed. These girls remained all their lives timid as lost animals. They knew the pretenses of love but refused to kiss. Between visitors they might be seen playing together, and, seated upon their little feet, amusing themselves childishly.

In a separate meadow the blond and rosy daughters of the North lived in a troop,

lying upon the grass. There were Sarmatians with triple plaits, with robust limbs and square shoulders, who made themselves crowns with branches of trees and wrestled to divert themselves; Scythians, flat-nosed, full-breasted, hairy; gigantic Teutons who terrified the Egyptians by their hair—pale as that of old men—and with flesh softer than that of children;

[paragraph continues] Gauls with hair red as that of cattle, who laughed without cause; modest young Celts with sea-green eyes.

Elsewhere, the brown-skinned Iberians met during the day. They had masses of heavy hair that they dressed cleverly. Their firm skins and strong physiques were much fancied by the Alexandrians. They were chosen for dancers as often as for mistresses.

Under the wide shadow of the palms dwelt the daughters of Africa: the Numidians veiled in white, the Carthaginians draped with black gauzes, the Negresses enveloped in multicolored costumes.

There were fourteen hundred.

When a woman entered there she never went forth again until the first day of her old age. She gave to the temple the half of her gains and the rest sufficed for her repasts and her perfumes.

They were not slaves, and each one actually possessed one of the houses of the terrace; but all were not equally popular, and the luckiest ones often found means to buy neighboring houses which their inhabitants sold in order to save themselves from starvation. These latter then transported their statuettes into the park and sought an altar made of flat stone, in a corner which they left no more. The poor merchants knew this and preferred to visit those who dwelt thus exposed to the wind upon the moss near their sanctuaries; but sometimes even these men did not present themselves, and then these poor girls united their miseries in couples—devoted friendships which became lasting love, households where all was shared, to the last woolen rag, and where alternating complaisances consoled for long chastities.

Those who had no woman-friends offered themselves as voluntary slaves to their more fortunate comrades. It was forbidden that these should have in their service more than twelve of the poor girls; but twenty-two courtesans were known who had attained the maximum and had chosen a variegated household from among

all races.

If by chance a woman had a son, he was brought up in the temple close to the contemplation of the perfect form and to the service of his divinity. If she were delivered of a daughter, the child was born for the goddess. The first day of her life, her symbolic marriage with the son of Dionysos was celebrated. Later she entered the Didascalion, the great monument-school where the young priestesses learned, in seven classes, the mysteries of the temple. The pupil chose at will the day of her initiation because an order of the goddess must not be thwarted; this day she was given one of the little houses on the Terrace, and some of these young pupils were counted among the most indefatigable and the most often visited.

The interior of the Didascalion, the seven class-rooms, the little theater and the peristyle of the court were ornamented with ninety-two frescoes which summed up the teachings of love. They were the work of a man's entire life—Cleochares of Alexandria, disciple and natural son of Apelles, had finished them, dying. Recently Berenice the queen, who was much interested in the celebrated school and had sent her young sisters there, had ordered from Demetrios a series of marble groups to complete the decoration; but until now only one had been placed, in the children's class.

At the end of each year, in the presence of all the assembled courtesans, a great competition took place which excited an extraordinary emulation in this crowd of women, for the twelve prizes awarded gave the right to the most supreme glory of which they could dream: the entry into the Cotytteion.

This last monument was enveloped in so many mysteries that a detailed description of it cannot now be given. We know only that it was included in the garden and that it had the form of a triangle whose base was a temple of the goddess Cotytto, in whose name fearful, unknown ceremonies were performed. The other two sides of the monument were composed of eighteen houses. Thirty-six courtesans dwelt there, so sought by rich suitors that they would by no means accept less than two minae; they were the Baptes of Alexandria. Once a month, at the full moon, they gathered in the close of the temple, maddened by exciting beverages and girt in ritual costumes. The eldest of the thirty-six had to take a mortal dose of the terrible philtre. The certainty of her speedy death made her attempt without fear all the dangerous excesses before which the living recoil. Her body, everywhere foaming, became the center and the model of the whirling

orgy; in the midst of long yells, cries, tears and dances the other women embraced her, towed her with their hair and joined madly in the uninterrupted spasm of this furious agony. Three years these women lived thus, and at the end of the thirty-sixth month such was the intoxication of their end.

Other less venerated sanctuaries had been raised by the women in honor of the other names of the many-formed Aphrodite. There was even an altar consecrated to the Uranian, who received the chaste vows of sentimental courtesans; another to the Epistrophia who brought forgetfulness of unhappy loves; another to the Chryseia, who attracted rich lovers; another to the Genetyllis, who protected young girls; another to the Coliade, who approved strong passions, for all that touched love was piety for the goddess. But the special altars had efficacy and virtue only in regard to small desires. They were served from day to day, their favors were quotidian and their commerce familiar. The successful suppliants placed simple flowers upon them; those who were not gratified soiled them. They were neither consecrated nor kept up by the priests and in consequence their profanation was not punishable.

Quite otherwise was the discipline of the temple.

The Temple, the High Temple or the High Goddess, the holiest place in all Egypt, the inviolable Astarteion, was a colossal edifice three hundred and thirty-six feet in length, elevated upon seventeen steps at the height of the gardens. Its golden doors were guarded by twelve hermaphroditic hierodules, symbols of love and the twelve hours of the night.

The entrance was not turned toward the East but in the direction of Paphos, that is to say, toward the north-east; the rays of the sun never penetrated directly into the sanctuary of the great nocturnal Immortal. Eighty-six columns sustained the architrave; they were tinted with crimson to half their height, and the upper parts disengaged themselves from these red vestments with an ineffable whiteness like the torsos of standing women.

Between the epistyle and the corona, the long girdling ornamental zoophoros unrolled its love myths of the fabulous beasts. Centaurs were there with stallions, goats with thin satyrs, naiads, stags, Bacchantes, tigers, lionesses, gryphons. The great multitude of beings hurtled thus onward, passionate, divine, creative, awake to the first stirring of life. The crowd of obscure couples ranged somewhat by chance about a few immortal scenes: Europa with the Olympian

bull, Leda with the swan. Farther along, Glaucos expired in the arms of the siren; the god Pan embraced a hamadryad with flying hair; the Sphinx approached the horse Pegasus —and, at the end of the frieze, the sculptor himself was figured before the goddess Aphrodite, modeling, from her own person, in soft wax the contours of a perfect cteis, as though all his ideal of beauty, joy and virtue had long since taken refuge in that precious and fragile jewel.

Chapter Two

MELITTA

“PURIFY thyself, Stranger.”

“I shall enter pure,” said Demetrios.

Dipping the end of her hair in water, the young guardian of the gate touched first his eyelids, then his lips and fingers, that his glance, the kiss of his mouth and the caress of his hands should be sanctified.

And he advanced into the wood of Aphrodite.

Through the branches which had become black, he perceived at the western horizon a sun of dark crimson which no longer dazzled the eyes. It was the sun of the same day upon which the meeting with Chrysis had thrown his life out of its groove.

The feminine soul is of a simplicity incredible to man. Where there is but a straight line they obstinately seek the complexity of a web; they find space and lose themselves in it. It was thus that the soul of Chrysis, transparent as that of a little child, appeared to Demetrios more mysterious than a problem of metaphysics. After leaving this woman upon the jetty, he returned home as though in a dream, incapable of replying to all the questions which tormented him. What did she wish with the three gifts? It would be impossible for her to carry or sell a stolen famous mirror, the comb of a murdered woman, the goddess's necklace of pearl. In keeping them at home she would expose herself each day to a fatal discovery. Then why demand them? To destroy them? He knew too well that women do not enjoy things in secret and that happy events do not begin to please them until the day they become known. And then, by what divination, by what prodigious clairvoyance, had she judged him capable of accomplishing for her three actions so extraordinary? Assuredly, if he wished, Chrysis, carried from her house, delivered over to his mercy, could be made his mistress, his wife or his slave, according to his choice. He was even free simply to destroy her. Former revolutions had accustomed the citizens to frequent violent deaths and no one would have given a second thought to a vanished courtesan. Chrysis must know this, yet she had dared...

The more he thought of her, the more pleased he was that she had so prettily varied the debate of the proposition. How many women, desirable as she, would have presented themselves awkwardly! This one, what had she demanded? Neither love, nor gold, nor jewels, but three incredible crimes! She interested him keenly. He had offered her all the treasures of Egypt; he felt now that, had she accepted them, she would not have received two oboli and that he would have been weary of her even before having known her. Three crimes were surely an unusual fee; but she was worthy of receiving it since she was the woman to demand it, and he promised himself to continue the adventure.

To give himself no time to withdraw from his firm resolution, he went the same day to Bacchis's, found her house empty, took the silver mirror and went to the gardens.

Must he go directly to Chrysis's second victim? He did not think so. The Priestess Touni, who possessed the famous ivory comb, was so charming and so delicate that he feared his heart would be touched if he appeared before her without a preliminary precaution. He retraced his steps and walked along the Great Terrace.

The temple women sat in their exposed chambers like flowers at an exhibition. Their attitudes and their costumes had no less diversity than their ages, types and races. The most beautiful, following the tradition of Phryne, left uncovered only the oval of their face, enveloping themselves from head to foot in great garments of fine linen. Others had adopted the fashion of robes under which their beauties were mysteriously distinguished as one sees green mosses like spots of shadow at the bottom of limpid waters.

Those who had youth for a charm dressed and posed to display their young beauty. But the more mature likewise had beauties, and posed in their own manner to exhibit their desirable femininity.

Demetrios passed slowly before them and did not weary of admiring.

He had never been able to see without intense emotion the beauty of a woman. He understood neither disgust before departed youth nor insensibility before very young girls. Any woman, this evening, could have charmed him. Provided she was silent and unassertive, he gave her dispensation as to beauty. The more his thoughts dwelt upon perfect forms the more his first emotional response

weakened. The emotion given him by the expression of living beauty was an exclusively cerebral sensuality which quite destroyed aphrodisia. He remembered with anguish the most admirable woman he had ever held in his arms.

“Friend,” said a voice, “dost thou not know me?”

He turned, made a negative sign, and continued his way, for he never twice visited the same girl. It was the only principle he followed in his visits to the gardens. Demetrios did not expose himself to the disillusion of any second visit.

“Clonarion!”

“Gnathene!”

“Plango!”

“Mnais!”

“Crobyle!”

“Ioesa!”

They cried out their names as he passed and some added the affirmation of their ardent nature. Demetrios followed the way; he was disposed, according to his habit, to select at hazard in the troop, when a young girl all dressed in blue leaned her head upon her shoulders and said to him, softly, without rising, “Is there no way?”

The unexpectedness of this formula made him smile. He stopped. “Open the door,” he said. “I choose thee.”

The girl joyously sprang to her feet and struck two blows on a gong. An old female slave came to open.

“Gorgo,” she said, “I have someone; quick, Cretan wine, and cakes!”

And she turned to Demetrios. “Thou hast no thirst for strong drink?”

“No,” said the young man, laughing, “hast thou any?”

“I must have it; they ask for it oftener than thou thinkest. Come this way; take care of the steps, one of them is broken. Enter my chamber; I will come back.”

The room was quite plain, like that of all novice priestesses. A great bed, some rugs and some seats furnished it insufficiently; but, through a large open bay, could be seen the gardens, the sea, the double roadstead of Alexandria. Demetrios stood looking at the distant city.

Setting suns beyond the harbors—peerless glories of maritime cities—calm of the heavens, purple of the waters—upon what soul clamorous with joy or sorrow do you not cast silence? What steps do not halt, what enjoyments do not suspend, what voices do not fail before you?... Demetrios gazed; a surge of torrential flame seemed to issue from the sun half plunged into the sea, and to flow directly to the curved shore of the wood of Aphrodite. From one horizon to the other, the sumptuous scale of crimson swept over the Mediterranean in zones of tints without transitions from golden red to cold violet. Between this quivering splendor and the greened mirror of Lake Mareotis, the white mass of the town was quite clothed with red-violet reflections. The different orientation of its twenty thousand flat houses accented it marvelously with twenty thousand spots of color—a perpetual metamorphosis according to the decreasing phrases of the western radiance. It was quick and incendiary; then, suddenly, the sun was swallowed up and the first inflow of the night laved the whole earth with a tremor, a veiled breeze, uniform and transparent.

“Here are figs, here are cakes, a comb of honey, wine—a woman. The figs must be enjoyed while it is still day!”

The girl had returned, laughing. She made the young man sit down, seated herself at his knees, and, raising her hands behind her head, secured a falling rose in her chestnut hair.

Demetrios uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise. “But thou art not a woman!” he cried.

“I am not a woman! By the two goddesses, what am I then? A Thracian, a porter or an old philosopher?”

“How old art thou?”

“I was born in the gardens. My mother is a Milesian. She is Pythias, whom they

call 'The Goat.' She is beautiful."

"Wert thou at the Didascalion?"

"I am still there, in the sixth class. I shall finish next year; it will not be too soon."

"Art thou weary of it?"

"Ah! if thou knewest how exacting the mistresses are! They make us do the same lesson twenty-five times over! And then, one is tired; I do not like that. Come, take a fig; not that one, it is not ripe. I will teach thee a new way to eat them: look."

"I know it. It is longer but it is no better. I think thou art a good pupil."

"Oh! what I know I have learned all alone. The mistresses wish to make us think they know more than we. They are handier at it, possibly, but they have invented nothing."

"Thou hast many visitors?"

"All too old; it is inevitable. Young men are so stupid! They love only women forty years old. At times I have seen some pass who are as handsome as Eros, and if thou couldst see what they choose—hippopotami! It is enough to make one turn pale. I hope I will not live to the age of those women. I would be too ashamed to be seen. Thou seest I am so glad, so glad to be still quite young. Let me give thee a kiss. I love thee."

Here their conversation took a turn less balanced, if not more silent, and Demetrios soon perceived that his misgivings were unnecessary as to the little person already so mature in wisdom. She seemed to take into account that she was very youthful to be a young man's hostess, and put every energy into entertaining him with a prodigious virtuosity which he could neither foresee nor permit, nor direct, and which never allowed him repose. In the end he embraced her. The half hour had been one long play. She rose and dipped her finger in the cup of honey and dabbed her lips with it; then, with a thousand efforts not to giggle, she leaned over Demetrios, kissing him. Her long ringlets danced at each side of their cheeks. The young man smiled and leaned on his elbow. "What is thy name?" he asked.

“Melitta. Didst thou not see my name on the door?”

“I did not look.”

“Thou canst see it in my room. They have all written upon my walls. I shall soon be obliged to have them repainted.”

Demetrios raised his head; the four panels of the room were covered with inscriptions.

“Why, how curious,” he said. “May I read them?”

“Oh! if thou wishest. I have no secrets.”

He read. The name of Melitta was repeated several times with the names of men and with inexpert drawings. Tender and comic phrases were grotesquely intermingled. Visitors detailed the charms of the little novice, or even made fun of her comrades. All of which was hardly interesting except as a written proof of a general abjection. But towards the end of the panel on the right, Demetrios received a shock.

“Who is this? Who is this? Tell me!”

“Who? What?” said the child. “What is the matter with thee?”

“Here. That name. Who wrote that?”

And his finger stopped under this double line:

MELITTA .L. KhRYSIDA

KhRYSIS .L. MELITTAN

“Ah!” she replied, “I did. I wrote that.”

“But who is this Chrysis.”

“She is my best friend.”

“I suppose so. That is not what I asked thee. Which Chrysis? There are many.”

“Mine is the most beautiful. Chrysis of Galilee.”

“Thou knowest her? Thou knowest her! Tell me, then! Whence comes she? Where does she live? Tell me everything!”

He sat down on the bed and took the young girl on his knees.

“Then thou lovest her?” she asked.

“It matters little to thee. Tell me what thou knowest. I am anxious to hear everything.”

“Oh! I know nothing at all; only that she has come twice to me; and thou canst imagine I have not asked information about her family. I was too happy to have her and I lost no time in such conversation.”

“How is she made?”

“She is made like a pretty girl; what dost thou wish me to say? Must I name for thee every hair of her head, adding that it is beautiful? And then, she is a woman, a true woman.... When I think of her, I am immediately lonely.”

And she put her arm around Demetrios’ neck.

“Thou knowest nothing,” he asked further, “nothing about her?”

“I know... I know that she comes from Galilee, that she is almost twenty, and that she lives in the Jewish quarter, at the end of the city near the gardens. But that is all.”

“And about her life, about her tastes, thou canst tell me nothing? She has friends among women, since she visits thee. But has she no friends among men?”

“Certainly. The first time she came here, a man was with her, and I swear to thee she was not bored. When a woman enjoys herself, I can see it in her eyes. Nevertheless, she came again, quite alone.... And she has promised me to come to see me soon again.”

“Thou dost not know whether she has another friend in the gardens? No one?”

“Yes, a woman from her country, Chimairis, a poor woman.”

“Where does she live? I must see her.”

“She has slept in the wood for a year. She sold her house. But I know where her den is. I can lead thee there, if thou wishest it. Put on my sandals for me, wilt thou?”

With a rapid hand Demetrios tied the cords of plaited leather over Melitta’s slender ankles. Then he held for her a short robe which she took simply over her arm, and they went out hastily.

They walked for a long time—the park was immense. At long intervals apart, girls under trees called to them, then lay down again, eyes in their hands. Melitta knew some of them, who kissed her without stopping her. While passing before a worn altar, she plucked three large flowers and placed them upon the stone.

The night was not yet dark. There is, in the intense light of summer days, something durable which lingers vaguely in the slow twilight. The pale, moist stars, hardly lighter than the depths of the sky, twinkled with a soft palpitation, and the shadows of the branches were undefined.

“Ah!” cried Melitta, “Mamma. There is mamma!”

A woman alone, robed in a triple muslin rayed with blue, was advancing with a tranquil step. As soon as she perceived the child, she ran to her, lifted her from the ground, took her in her arms and kissed her vigorously on the cheeks.

“My little girl! My little love, where art thou going?”

“I am leading someone who wishes to see Chimairis. And thou? Art thou taking a walk?”

“Corinna is delivered. I went to her; I dined at her bedside.”

“And what has she made? A boy?”

“Twin girls, my dear, pink as wax dolls. Thou mayest go there tonight. She will show them to thee.”

“Oh! how nice! Two little priestesses. What are their names?”

“Both Pannychis, because they were born on the eve of the festival of Aphrodite. It is a divine presage. They will be pretty.”

She replaced the child upon her feet, and addressed herself to Demetrios:

“How dost thou like my daughter? Have I the right to be proud of her?”

“You should be contented with each other,” he said, calmly.

“Kiss mamma,” said Melitta.

Silently, he placed a kiss upon her brow. Pythias returned it upon his mouth and they separated.

Demetrios and the girl took a few steps more under the trees, while the courtesan went away, turning her head to watch them. At length they arrived and Melitta said:

“Here she is.”

Chimairis was crouching on her left heel, on a little strip of lawn between two trees and a bush. She had a sort of red rag which was her garment and upon which she lay at the time the men passed by. Demetrios contemplated her with growing interest. She had the feverish look of those thin brown women whose wild bodies seem consumed by an ever beating ardor. Her strong lips, her extraordinary stare, her large, livid eyelids, composed a double expression of greed and of exhausted longing. The curves of her body indicated strong desire and her hair, matted in inextricable disorder, wild, furred and shameless, revealed her poverty, for she had sold everything, even her cosmetics, even her combs and pins.

Near her, a large pet goat stood on his hard hoofs, fastened to a tree by a golden chain which had formerly shone four-fold at the throat of his mistress.

“Chimairis,” said Melitta, “arise. Here is someone who wishes to speak to thee.”

The Jewess looked but did not stir. Demetrios advanced. “Thou knowest Chrysis?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Thou seest her often?”

“Yes.

“Canst thou tell me of her?”

“No.”

“What—no? What, thou canst not?”

“No.”

Melitta was astonished. “Speak to him,” she said. “Have confidence. He loves her! he wishes her well.”

“I see clearly that he loves her,” replied Chimairis. “If he loves her he wishes her ill. If he loves her I will not speak.” Demetrios trembled with anger, but was silent.

“Give me thy hand,” said the Jewess to him. “I shall see there if I am wrong.”

She took the young man’s left hand and turned it toward the moonlight. Melitta leaned forward to see, for although she could not read the mysterious lines, their fatality attracted her.

“What dost thou see?” said Demetrios.

“I see... Can I tell thee what I see? Wilt thou be pleased with me? Wilt thou even believe me?... I see first, all happiness; but it is in the past. I also see all love, but that is lost in blood.”

“Mine.

“The blood of a woman. Then the blood of another woman. Last of all, thine own; but a little later.”

Demetrios shrugged and, when he turned, perceived Melitta running at top speed among the trees.

“She is afraid,” continued Chimairis. “However, it is no concern of hers nor of mine. Let things take their course, since they cannot be stopped. From before thy birth, thy destiny was fixed. Go. I will speak no more.”

And she let his hand fall.

Chapter Three

LOVE AND DEATH

“THE blood of a woman. Then the blood of another woman. Last of all, thine own, but a little later.”

As he walked, Demetrios repeated these words and, in spite of all, a belief in them oppressed him. He had never placed confidence in oracles drawn from the bodies of victims or the movements of planets. Such affinities seemed too problematic. But the complex lines of the hand have, in themselves, the aspect of an exclusively individual horoscope which he regarded uneasily. And so the prediction of the Chiromant haunted his spirit.

In his turn, he considered the palm of his left hand where his life was summed up in secret and ineffaceable signs.

He saw first, at the summit, a sort of regular crescent whose points were turned toward the base of the fingers. Below, a quadruple line, knotted and pink, was hollowed, marked in two places by bright red points. Another more slender line descended, at first parallel, then turned abruptly toward the wrist. Finally, a third, short and pure, outlined the base of the thumb, which was entirely covered with lightly traced lines. He saw all that; but not knowing how to read the hidden symbol, he drew his hand over his eyes and changed the subject of his meditation.

Chrysis, Chrysis, Chrysis. The name pulsed in him like a fever.

[paragraph continues] To satisfy her, conquer her, enclose her in his arms—fly with her, into Syria, into Greece, to Rome, no matter where, if only it were a place where he should have no mistresses and she no lovers: that was what must be done, and immediately, immediately!

Of the three gifts which she had demanded, one was already secured. Two others remained: the comb and the necklace.

“The comb first,” he thought.

And he hastened his steps.

Every evening, after sunset, the wife of the High Priest sat upon a marble bench, placed with its back to the forest, whence one could view the whole sea. Demetrios knew this well, for this woman, like so many others, had been in love with him, and she had once told him that on the day he wished for her he could find her there.

Accordingly he went thither.

She was indeed there: but she did not see him approach; she sat with closed eyes, her body reposing against the back of the bench, her arms relaxed.

She was an Egyptian. Her name was Touni. She wore a light tunic of vivid purple without buckles or girdle, and without other embroidery than two black stars at the bosom. The thin stuff, ironed into folds, broke its fall upon the delicate roundings of her knees, and little sandals of blue leather gloved her slender, rounded feet. Her skin was quite brown, her lips very full, her shoulders small, her fragile and pliant figure seemed fatigued by the weight of her swelling bosom. She slept open-mouthed, dreaming gently.

Demetrios noiselessly sat down on the bench at her side.

He slowly drew nearer and nearer, coolly observing the delicate young shoulder, smooth and dark, which melted gently into the breast along the shaded muscles of the armpit.

Below it, the tunic of purple muslin lay long and loose. Gently, Demetrios caressed the soft garment and the warm skin quivered through the covering.

But Touni did not awaken.

Her dream changed gradually but did not dissolve. Her breath came more rapidly through her partly opened lips and she murmured a long, unintelligible phrase as her fevered head fell back.

With the same gentleness, Demetrios withdrew his hand and opened it to the sweep of the breeze.

Beyond the obscure blue slopes, the eternal sea shuddered beneath the immense

scintillation of the night. Like another breast of another priestess, it undulated beneath the stars, uplifted by the antique dreams which still cause it to thrill beneath our tardy eyes and of which the last beings will seek the mystery ere it is effaced at the end of the ages. The moon inclined her great goblet of blood over the waters. Far away, in the purest atmosphere which had ever united heaven and earth, a slight red trail, shot with dark veins, trembled upon the brightness of the sea beneath the rising moon like the quiver of a nocturnal breast beneath a caress that remains after the touch has passed.

Touni still slumbered, her head inclined, her body shadowed in its tinted muslin.

The redness of the moon, yet on the horizon, came to her over the water. Its shining, fateful glimmer bathed her in a flame which seemed immobile; but slowly the reflection raised over the Egyptian; one by one, her small black curls appeared, and finally, from the shadow, the Comb, the royal Comb desired by Chrysis, appeared suddenly, its diadem of ivory struck by the crimson brilliance.

Then the sculptor took Touni's soft face between his hands and turned it toward his own. Her eyes opened, widened. "Demetrios!... Demetrios!... Thou!"

And she clasped him in her arms.

"Oh," she murmured, in a voice which sang with happiness, "Oh, thou hast come, thou art here... Is it thou, Demetrios, in whose hands I awaken? Is it thou, son of my goddess, god of my life?"

Demetrios started back. With one movement she was beside him.

"No," she cried. "What dost thou fear? For thee I am not she who is surrounded by the omnipotence of the High Priest and from whom the people draw away. Forget my name, Demetrios. Women in love have no name. I am no longer she thou knewest. I am only a woman who loves thee—even to the tips of her fingers."

Demetrios did not open his lips.

"Listen once more," she resumed. "I know who possesses thee; I do not aspire to become, in any way, the rival of my queen. No, Demetrios, regard me as a little slave whom one abandons and soon forgets. Regard me as the lowest and poorest woman who waits at the roadside for the charity of love. In fact, who am

I but one of them? And what have the Immortals given me, more than the most servile of all my slaves? Thou, at least, thou hast the beauty which is dispensed like an emanation from the gods.”

Demetrios, exceedingly grave, pierced her with his gaze: “And what, thinkest thou, unfortunate one, what powers emanate from the gods except...”

“Love...”

“Or death.”

She started up.

“What meanest thou?... Death?... Yes, death... But it is so far from me... in sixty years I may think of it. But why speak to me of death, Demetrios?”

He said simply, “Death this night.”

Terror-struck, she laughed shrilly. “Tonight... No, no... Who said that? Why should I die?... Answer me... Speak... What horrible jesting....”

“Thou art condemned.”

“By whom?”

“By thy destiny.”

“How knowest thou?”

“I know because I am woven, Touni, with thy destiny. Thy destiny wills that thou shalt die, by my hand, upon this bench.” He seized her wrist.

“Demetrios,” she stammered, terrified, “I will not cry out. I will not call for aid. Let me speak...” And she wiped her perspiring forehead. “If death... comes to me from thee... death... will be sweet to me... I accept it, I desire it, but listen...”

Staggering from stone to stone, she dragged him into the darkness of the wood.

“Since thou holdest within thy hands all that we receive from the gods... the thrill which gives us life and that which snatches it away, open thy two hands

upon mine eyes, Demetrios... that of love... and that of death... do this and I will die without regret.”

There was no reply in the look he turned toward her, but she imagined there the “yes” which he had not uttered.

Transfigured for a second time, she lifted a new face where newborn desire, strong in despair, drove terror away.

She spoke no more, but already, between her lips which were never to close again, each breath sang softly as though she were deep in love even before receiving the embrace.

Nevertheless, she had gained that supreme victory.

Her young, delicate form quivered in a happiness too great to be less than eternal, and her distracted companion neglected to plan her death as he bestowed on her the last embrace of love.

“Ah...” she cried suddenly. “Let me die now, Demetrios; why dost thou delay?”

Leaning over her, he looked once more at Touni, whose great eyes were raised in ecstasy to his. Then, drawing out one of the long, golden pins which glittered behind her ears, he drove it home under her left breast.

Chapter Four

MOONLIGHT

HOWEVER, this woman would have given him her comb and even her hair as well, for love. If he did not ask it of her, it was because of his scruples; Chrysis had very precisely demanded a crime—not any ancient jewel, thrust into the hair of a young woman. That is why he believed it his duty to consent to some shedding of blood.

Still, he might have considered that the oaths one makes to women during the crises of love may be forgotten in the interval without great injury to the moral value of the lover who has sworn them; and that, if ever this involuntary forgetfulness needed to cover itself with an excuse, it would surely be in a case where the life of another assuredly innocent woman lay in the balance. But Demetrios did not pause to reason in this way. The adventure which he pursued was really too curious for him to trifle with its violent incidents. He feared lest he regret, later, having effaced from the intrigue some scene which, though short, was necessary to the beauty of the whole. Often but one virtuous qualm is necessary to reduce a tragedy to the commonplace of normal existence. The death of Cassandra, he mused, was not an indispensable fact in the development of “Agamemnon,” but if it had not taken place, all the “Orestes” would have been spoiled.

That is why, having cut away Touni’s hair, he folded the engraved ivory comb in his garments and, without reflecting further, undertook the third of the labors commanded by Chrysis: the rape of the necklace of Aphrodite.

He was not obliged to consider entering the temple by the Great Gate. The twelve hermaphrodites who guarded the entry would doubtless have let Demetrios pass, in spite of the prohibition which halted all the profane in the absence of the priest; but there was no reason why he should prove his futile guilt so naively, since a secret entrance led to the sanctuary.

Demetrios turned into a part of the deserted woods where lay the Necropolis of the High Priests of the goddess. He counted the first tombs, turned the door of the seventh, and closed it behind him.

With great difficulty, for the stone was heavy, he raised the funeral slab under which a marble stairway led downward, and descended, step by step.

He knew that one could make sixty paces in a straight line, and that afterward it was necessary to follow the wall by touch in order not to collide with the subterranean stairway of the temple.

The full coolness of the earth-depths calmed him, little by little. In a few moments he arrived at the end.

He ascended, he opened.

The night was light outside and black inside the divine enclosure. When, with care he had gently closed the too sonorous door, he felt himself full of tremors and as though surrounded by the cold of the stones. He dared not raise his eyes. The black silence terrified him; the obscurity peopled itself with unknown

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beings. He laid his hand on his forehead like a man who does not wish to awake for fear of finding himself living. At last he looked.

In the full moonlight, the goddess, upon a pedestal of rosy stone, laden with pendent treasures, appeared as though living. She was nude, softly tinted in feminine tones; she held in one hand her symbolic mirror, and with the other adorned her beauty with a seven-fold necklace of pearls. One pearl, larger than the others, silvery and elongated, shone upon her bosom like a crescent moon between snowy clouds. And they were the true holy pearls born of the water drops which rolled in the shell of the Anadyomene.

Demetrios lost himself in ineffable adoration. He believed in truth that Aphrodite herself was there. He recognized his work no longer, so profound was the abyss between what he had been and what he had become. He held forth his arms and murmured the mysterious words by which the goddess is supplicated in the Phrygian ceremonies.

Supernatural, luminous, impalpable, naked and pure, the softly palpitating vision hovered upon the stone. He fixed his eyes upon her although he feared lest the caress of his look make the delicate hallucination evaporate into the air. He advanced very gently, touched with his finger the rosy toe, as though to assure

himself of the existence of the statue, and, incapable of stopping, so much she drew him to her, he ascended until he stood beside her and, placing his hands upon the white shoulders, gazed contemplatively into her eyes.

He trembled, he swooned, he laughed with joy. His hands wandered over the arms, the cold, hard waist, descended, caressed.

[paragraph continues] With all his strength he strained himself to this Immortality. He looked at himself in the mirror, he lifted the necklace of pearls, took it off, swung it, gleaming, in the moonlight, and replaced it timidly. He kissed the curving hand, the round neck, the undulous bosom, the partly opened marble mouth. Then he drew back to the edge of the pedestal and, beholding the divine arms, gazed tenderly at the adorable bowed head.

The hair, dressed in the oriental manner, lightly veiled the forehead. The half-closed eyes elongated, smiling. The lips were parted as though swooning from a kiss.

Silently he disposed the seven rows of round pearls upon the dazzling breast and descended to the floor to see the idol from a distance.

Then it seemed to him that he awoke. He recalled what he had come to do, what he had wished, nearly accomplished; a monstrous thing. He blushed to the temples. The remembrance of Chrysis passed like a gross apparition before his memory. He enumerated everything dubious in the courtesan's beauty: the thick lips, the puffed hair, the languid gait. He had forgotten her hands, but he imagined them large to add an odious detail to the image he repulsed. His state of mind became like that of a man at dawn who could not explain to himself how he could have permitted himself to be tempted the evening before. He found neither an excuse, nor even a serious reason. Evidently he had been, for a day, victim of a sort of passing madness, a physical unrest, a malady. He felt himself cured, but still dizzy with intoxication.

To complete the return to himself, he leaned back against the wall of the temple and remained a long time standing before the statue. The light of the moon continued to descend through the square opening in the roof; Aphrodite shone resplendent; and, as her eyes were in the shadow, he sought their gaze...

So the night passed. Then the day came and the statue took in turn the glowing rosiness of the dawn and the golden reflection of the sun.

Demetrios had ceased to think. The ivory comb and the silver mirror which he bore in his tunic had passed from his memory. He abandoned himself gently to serene contemplation.

Outside, a tempest of bird cries clamored, piped and sang in the garden. The voices of women talked and laughed at the foot of the walls. The agitation of morning surged up from the awakened earth. Demetrios was filled only with delicious emotions.

The sun was already high and the shadow of the roof had moved when he heard a confused sound of light feet ascending the outer steps.

It was doubtless a sacrifice which they were about to offer the goddess, a procession of young women coming to fulfill vows or pronounce them before the statue for the first day of the Aphrodisian Festivals.

Demetrios wished to avoid them.

The sacred pedestal opened in the rear in a fashion known only to the priests and the sculptor. There the Hierophant stood to dictate to a young girl whose voice was clear and high, the miraculous utterances which issued from the statue on the third day of the festival. Through it, the gardens could be reached. Demetrios entered and paused before the bronze-edged opening which pierced the thick stone.

The two golden doors opened heavily. Then the procession entered.

Chapter Five

THE INVITATION

TOWARD the middle of the night, Chrysis was awakened by three knocks at the door. She had slept the whole day between the two Ephesians; they might have been taken for three sisters together. Rhodis was cuddled against the Galilaean; Myrtocleia slept face down, her eyes upon her arm and her back uncovered.

Chrysis disengaged herself carefully, took three steps upon the bed, descended, and partly opened her door.

A sound of voices came from the entrance.

“Who is it, Djala? who is it?” she asked.

“It is Naucrates who wishes to speak with thee. I am telling him that thou art not free.”

“Oh, how stupid! Certainly I am free. Enter, Naucrates, I am in my room.”

And she returned to the bed.

Naucrates stood for ‘some time on the threshold as though he feared being indiscreet. The two musicians opened sleep-laden eyes but could not tear themselves from their dreams.

“Seat thyself,” said Chrysis. “I have no coquetries to make between us. I know thou hast not come for me. What wishest thou of me?”

Naucrates was a well-known philosopher who for more than twenty years had been the lover of Bacchis and had never deceived her, more through indolence than by fidelity. His gray hair was trimmed short, his beard pointed after the manner of Demosthenes and his moustache cut even with his lips. He wore a large white garment of seamless wool.

“I have come with an invitation for thee,” he said. “Bacchis gives, tomorrow, a dinner to be followed by a festival. We will be seven, if thou comest. Do not fail

us.”

“A festival? What is the occasion?”

“She will free her handsomest slave, Aphrodisia. There will be dancers and auletrides. I believe thy two friends are engaged, and for that reason they should not be here. The others are rehearsing even now at Bacchis’s.”

“Oh! that is true,” cried Rhodis, “we had forgotten it. Arise, Myrto, we are very late.”

But Chrysis protested. “No! Not yet! How wicked thou art to take my women-friends away from me! If I had suspected that, I would not have received thee. Oh! see, they are already prepared!”

“Our robes are not complicated,” said the child. “And we are of beautiful enough to spend a long time dressing.”

“Will I see you at the temple, at least?”

“Yes, tomorrow morning; we will bring doves. I am taking a drachma from thy purse, Chryse; we have nothing with which to buy them. Until tomorrow.”

They ran out. Naucrates looked for some time at the door closed after them; then he folded his arms and, turning toward

[paragraph continues] Chrysis, said in a low voice, “Good. Thou conductest thyself well.”

“How?”

“Dost thou think this can endure for long? If it continues thus, we will be forced to go to Bathyllos...”

“Ah! no!” cried Chrysis, “I will never admit that! I know very well people make that comparison. But it is foolish and I am astonished that thou, who professest to think, should not understand how absurd it is.”

“And what difference dost thou find?”

“There is no question of difference. There is no relation between the one and the other; that is clear.”

“I do not say thou art wrong. I wish to know thy reasons.”

“Oh! they can be given briefly; listen carefully. Woman is, in point of love, a finished instrument. From head to foot, she is made uniquely, marvelously, for love. She alone knows how to love. She alone knows how to be loved. Consequently, love between women is perfect; between man and woman it is not as pure; between men it is mere friendship. That is all,” said Chrysis.

“Thou art hard on Plato, my girl.”

“The great men are not, any more than gods, great in all circumstances. Pallas understands nothing of commerce, Sophocles knew not how to paint, Plato knew not how to love. Philosophers, poets, orators—those who appeal to his name—are no better, and however admirable they may be in their own art, in love they are simpletons. Believe me, Naucrates, I feel I am right.”

The philosopher made a gesture. “Thou art a little irreverent,” he said, “but I by no means feel thou art wrong. My indignation was not real. There is something charming in the friendship of two young women, provided they are both quite willing to remain wholly feminine, to retain their long hair, wear womanly clothing, and refrain from artificial imitation of men, as though, illogically, they envied the gross sex which they despise so prettily. Yes, their alliance is remarkable because their bodies are not mated and their emotion is by so much the more refined. They do not embrace as do men with women; they feel more delicately the supreme emotion. Their joy is not violent. They know nothing of brutal actions and because of this they are superior to Bathyllos. Human love is distinguished from the stupid heat of animals only by two divine functions: the caress and the kiss. Now these are the only things known to the women of whom we are speaking. They have even brought them to perfection.”

“One can do no better,” said Chrysis, puzzled. “But then why dost thou reproach me?”

“I reproach thee for being an hundred thousand. Already a large number of women do not enjoy themselves except in the company of other women. Soon you will receive us no more, even as a last resort. I am scolding thee from jealousy.”

Here Naucrates found that the conversation had lasted long enough and he arose, simply. "I can tell Bacchis she may count on thee?" he asked.

"I will come," replied Chrysis.

The philosopher kissed her and went out slowly.

Then she clasped her hands and spoke aloud, although she was alone.

"Bacchis... Bacchis... He comes from her and does not know?... Is the mirror still there, then?... Demetrios has forgotten me... If he has hesitated the first day, I am lost; he will do nothing... But it is possible that all is done! Bacchis has other mirrors which she uses oftener. Perhaps she does not know yet... Gods! Gods! No way of hearing, and perhaps... Ah! Djala! Djala!"

The slave entered.

"Give me my dice," said Chrysis. "I wish to cast."

And she threw four little dice into the air.

"Oh!... Oh!... Djala, look; the cast of Aphrodite!"

Thus was called a rather rare throw by which the cubes all presented a different face. There were exactly thirty-five chances to one against this arrangement. It was the best cast of the game.

Djala observed coldly, "What didst thou ask?"

"That is true," said Chrysis, disappointed, "I forgot to make a wish. I thought, indeed, of something, but I said nothing. Does that count the same?"

"I think not; thou must begin again."

A second time Chrysis threw the dice. "The cast of Midas, now. What dost thou think of it?"

"It is hard to say. Good and bad. It is a throw which is explained by the following one. Begin again with a single die."

A third time Chrysis interrogated the play; but as soon as the die had fallen she

stammered: "The... the point of Kios!"

And she burst into sobs.

Djala said nothing, herself uneasy. Chrysis wept upon the couch, her hair spread out around her head. At length she turned with a movement of anger. "Why didst thou make me begin again? I am sure the first throw counted."

"If thou didst make a wish, yes. If thou didst not, no. Thou alone knowest," said Djala.

"Beside, the dice prove nothing. It is a Greek game. I do not believe in it. I will try something else."

She dried her tears and crossed the room. She took a box of white chips on a tablet, counted out twenty-two, then, with the point of a pearl clasp, she graved upon them, one after the other, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They were the arcana of the Kabala which she had learned in Galilee. "Here is something I trust. Here is something which never deceives," she said. "Raise the fold of thy robe; that will be my bag."

She threw the twenty-two counters into the slave's tunic, repeating mentally, "Shall I wear the necklace of Aphrodite? Shall I wear the necklace of Aphrodite? Shall I wear the necklace of Aphrodite?"

And she drew out the tenth arcanum which clearly betokened: "Yes."

Chapter Six

THE ROSE OF CHRYSIS

IT was a procession white and blue, yellow and rose and green.

Thirty courtesans advanced carrying baskets of flowers, snow-white doves with red feet, veils of the most fragile azure, and precious ornaments.

An old white-bearded priest, enveloped even around the head in a stiff unbleached material, walked before the young cortege and guided the file of bowed devotees toward the stone altar.

They sang, and their song was slow as the sea, sighing like the wind of mid-day, fitful as the breath of an amorous mouth. The first two bore harps which, sustained in the hollow of their left hands, curved forward like sickles of slender wood.

One of them advanced and said: "Tryphera, O beloved Kypris, offers thee this blue veil, woven by herself, that thou mayest continue thy favor toward her."

Another: "Mousarion lays at thy feet, O Goddess of the Fair Crown, these wreaths of gilliflower and this bouquet of bowing narcissi. She has worn them and has invoked thy name in the intoxication of their perfume. O Victorious receive these spoils of love."

Still another: "As an offering to thee, Golden Cytheraea, Timo consecrates this spiral bracelet. Mayest thou entwine vengeance around the throat of her thou knowest, as this silver serpent twined about her naked arm."

Myrtocleia and Rhodis came forward, holding each other by the hand. "Here are two doves from Smyrna with wings white as caresses, with feet red as kisses. O Double Goddess of Amatheia, accept them from our joined hands if it be true that the gentle Adonis alone sufficeth thee not and that an embrace still gentler delays, at times, thy slumber."

A very young courtesan followed. "Aphrodite, Peribasia, receive me with this, my tunic. I am Pannychis of Pharos; since last night I have dedicated myself to

thee.”

Another: “Dorotheaea conjures thee, O charitable Epistrophia, to take from her spirit the desire cast there by Eros or at length to inflame for her the eyes of him who refuseth himself. She offers thee this branch of myrtle because it is the tree which thou preferrest.”

Another: “Upon thine altar, O Paphia, Callistion lays sixty drachmae of silver, the remainder of four minae which she received from Cleomenes. Give her a lover more generous still, if the offering seem good to thee.”

There remained before the idol only a blushing child who had placed herself last. She held in her hand only a little wreath of crocus and the priest scorned her for an offering so slight.

She said: “I am not rich enough to give thee silver pieces, O Brilliant Olympian. Moreover, what could I give thee which thou dost not already possess? Here are yellow and green flowers, woven in a wreath for thy feet. And now...”

She threw open her tunic in a gesture of surrender to the deity. “... behold me wholly thine, Beloved Goddess. I wish to enter thy gardens to die a priestess of the temple. I swear to desire only you, I swear to love only you, and I renounce the world and sink myself in thee.”

The priest then covered her with perfumes and enveloped her with the veil woven by Tryphera. They left the nave together, through a door leading to the gardens.

The procession seemed finished and the other courtesans were about to withdraw when a last woman, late coming, appeared on the threshold.

This one had nothing in her hand and it seemed that she also had come to offer only her beauty. Her hair seemed like two floods of gold, two deep, shadow-laden waves which swallowed up the ears and wound seven-fold upon the nape of her neck. The nose was delicate, with thin nostrils which sometimes pulsed above the full and tinted mouth with rounded mobile corners. The pliant line of the body undulated with each step, animated by the swaying of the hips, and the rounded waist curved.

Her eyes were extraordinary, blue, but deep and brilliant at the same time,

changing as moonstones, half closed under the drowsy lids. They looked, those eyes, as the sirens sing...

The priest turned toward her, awaiting her speech.

She said, "Chrysis, O Chryseia, supplicates thee. Receive the slight gifts she lays at thy feet. Listen, hear, love and relieve her who lives after thine example and for the glory of thy name."

She stretched forth hands golden with rings and bowed, her legs together.

The vague song recommenced. The murmur of the harps mounted toward the statue with the rapid smoke of the incense which the priest burned in a simmering basin.

She straightened slowly and presented a bronze mirror which had been fastened at her girdle. "To thee," she said, "Astarte of the Night who minglest hands and lips and whose symbol is like the print of does' feet upon the pale earth of Syria, Chrysis consecrates her mirror. It has seen features and faces molded and transmuted by thy works, O thou eager-handed mighty one who movest lips to seek flesh."

The priest placed the mirror at the feet of the statue. Chrysis drew from her golden hair a long comb of red copper, the planetary metal of the goddess.

"To thee," she said, "Anadyomene, who wert born of the bleeding dawn and the foamy smile of the waters: to thee, Bare Beauty streaming with pearls, who didst knot thy dampened hair with ribbons of green seaweed, Chrysis consecrates her comb. It has dressed the hair which thou hast disheveled, O thou who controlllest and moldest the beloved body."

She gave her comb to the old man and bent her head to the right to remove her necklace of emeralds.

"To thee," she said, "O beloved who cooled the blush of the shamefaced maidens, who counsellest laughter: to thee, in whose name we offer our love, Chrysis consecrates her necklace. It was given in fee by a man whose name she knows not, and each emerald is a kiss where thou hast lived an instant."

She bowed a last time, profoundly, put the necklace into the hands of the priest,

and took a step to go.

The priest detained her. "What dost thou ask of the goddess for these precious offerings?"

She smiled, shaking her head, and said, "I ask nothing." Then she passed along the procession, stole a rose from a basket and put it to her mouth as she went out.

One by one, all the women followed. The door closed again upon the empty temple.

Demetrios remained alone, hidden in the bronze pedestal. He had not lost a gesture or a word of all this scene and when all was finished he remained a long time motionless, tormented afresh by irresolved passion.

He had believed himself well cured of his recent folly and had thought that nothing, henceforth, could throw him a second time into the ardent shadow of this unknown woman.

But he had reckoned without her.

Women! O women! If you wish to be loved, show yourselves, return, be at hand! The emotion he had felt upon the entrance of the courtesan was so complete and so violent that it could no longer be fought against by an effort of will.

Demetrios was bound like a barbarian slave to a triumphal chariot. To escape was an illusion. Without knowing it, and naturally, she had laid her hand upon him.

He had seen her coming at a great distance, for she wore the same yellow robe as on her walk along the jetty. She moved with slow and supple steps, softly undulating her hips. She had come direct to him as though she had divined him behind the stone.

From the first instant he knew that he would fall again at her feet. When she drew the mirror of polished bronze from her girdle, she looked into it for some time before giving it to the priest, and the brilliance of her eyes became stupefying. When, to take out her copper comb, she placed her hand upon her hair, raising a bended arm, according to the gesture of the Charities, all the beautiful line of her body was suggested under the garment, and the sun on the arm glinted on a vague and gleaming dew of perspiration. At last, when to lift

and undo her necklace of heavy emeralds, she disarranged the folded silk which veiled her bosom, Demetrios felt himself seized with a frenzy of affectionate hunger. But Chrysis began to speak.

She spoke, and each of her words tore him with anguish. She seemed to take pleasure in insisting and expanding on the universal delight in the vessel of beauty that she was, white as the statue itself and full of gold which streamed forth in her hair. She announced her door open for the idleness of passers-by, the contemplation of her beauty abandoned to the unworthy, and her readiness to make merry with unappreciative children. She gloried in her life and the markings it brought to her features—her lips, her hair, her deep divinity.

The excessive ease which surrounded her approach inclined Demetrios toward her, determined as he was to use it for himself alone to close the door behind him. So true is it that a woman is most maddeningly attractive when one has occasion to be jealous of her.

Therefore, having given to the goddess her green necklace in exchange for the one she herself hoped for, Chrysis returned toward the town—carrying a human will upon her lips like the little stolen rose whose stem she nibbled.

Demetrios waited until he was left alone in the precinct; then he issued from his retreat.

He looked uneasily at the statue, expecting a struggle in himself. But, as he was incapable of renewing a very violent emotion after so brief an interval, he became again astonishingly calm and without premature remorse.

Carelessly, he ascended softly to the statue, lifted from the bowed neck the necklace of the true pearls of the Anadyomene, and slipped it into his garments.

Chapter Seven

THE ENCHANTED LYRE

HE walked rapidly in the hope of finding Chrysis still upon the road which led to the town, fearing, if he delayed longer, lest he again lose his courage and desire.

The road, white with heat, was so bright that Demetrios closed his eyes as in the noonday sun. He went thus without looking before him and nearly collided with four black slaves who walked at the head of a new procession, when a little, singing voice said, softly:

“Well-Beloved! how glad I am!”

He raised his head; it was Queen Berenice reclining on her elbow in her litter.

She ordered:

“Stop, bearers!” and held out her arms to her lover. Demetrios was much annoyed; but he could not refuse and he ascended with a sulky air.

Then Queen Berenice, mad with joy, drew herself on her hands to the depths of the litter, and rolled among the cushions like a playful kitten.

For this litter was a room and twenty-five slaves carried it. Twelve women could lie in it at ease, scattered upon the dull blue rug among the cushions and stuffs; and its height was such that one could not touch the roof, even with the tip of a fan. It was more long than wide, closed in front and on the two sides by three very yellow curtains which flared with light. The back was of cedar wood, draped with a long veil of orange silk. Above this brilliant wall, the great golden hawk of Egypt spread out its stiffened wings: lower, sculptured in ivory and silver, the antique symbol of Astarte opened over a lighted lamp which contended with the day in imperceptible reflections. Below, Queen Berenice reclined between two Persian slaves who waved about her two fans of peacock feathers.

With her eyes, she invited the young sculptor to her side, and repeated, “Well-Beloved, I am glad.”

She laid his hand on her cheek. "I was seeking thee, Well-Beloved. Where wert thou? I have not seen thee since day before yesterday. If I had not met thee, I would presently be dead of sorrow. All alone in this great litter, I was so bored. Passing over the bridge of the Hermes, I threw all my jewels into the water. to make circles. Thou seest, I have no more rings or necklaces. I look like a little poor girl at thy feet."

She turned toward him and kissed him. The two fan-bearers crouched a little farther away and when Queen Berenice began to speak very low, put their fingers to their ears to make a pretense of not hearing.

Demetrios did not reply, scarcely listened, remained abstracted. He saw, of the young queen, only the scarlet smile of her mouth and the black cushion of her hair which she always dressed loosely as a rest for her languid head.

She said, "Well-Beloved, I have wept in the night. My arms moved to caress thee, but my hand found nowhere thy hand which I kiss today. I waited for thee in the morning, but since the full moon thou hast not come. I sent slaves into all parts of the town and killed them myself when they returned without thee. Where wert thou? Wert thou at the temple? Thou wert not in the gardens with those foreign women? No, I see that by thine eyes. Then what wert thou doing, so far from me? Thou wert before the statue? Yes, am sure of it, thou wert there. Thou lovest it more than me, now. It is quite like me, it has my eyes, my lips; so it is that which thou seekest. I am a poor abandoned creature. Thou art tired of me; I perceive it well. Thou thinkest of thy marbles and thine ugly statues as though I were not more beautiful than them all and, at the very least, living and loving and kind, ready for what thou wilt accept, resigned to what thou refusest. But thou wishest nothing of me. Thou hast not desired to be a king, thou hast not wished to be a god and adored in a temple of thine own. Thou art scarcely willing to love me, any more.

She drew up her feet under her and leaned on her hand. "I would do anything to see thee at the palace, Well-Beloved. If thou seekest me no longer, tell me who attracts thee; she shall be my friend. The... the women of my court... are beautiful. I have twelve who, since their birth, have been kept in my gynaeceum and do not even know that risen exist.... Thou shalt see them all if thou wilt come to see me after them.... And I have others with me who have been found more attractive than the sacred priestesses. Say a word; I have also a thousand foreign slaves; those whom thou wishest shall be delivered. I will dress them like

myself in yellow silk and gold and silver.

“But no, thou art the handsomest and coldest of men. Thou lovest no one, thou allowest thyself to be loved, thou pityest, in charity, those in whom thine eyes kindle love. Thou permittest me to adore thee, but as a horse allows itself to be curried, looking elsewhere. Thou art full of condescension. Ah, gods! Ah, gods! I shall finish by doing without thee, young coxcomb whom all the town adores and whom no one can make weep. I have not only women at the palace, I have vigorous Ethiopians who have chests of bronze and arms knotted with muscles. In their company I will quickly forget thy dainty nature and thy pretty beard. I will rest from being in love. But the day when I shall be certain that thine absent eyes will disturb me no more and that I can replace thy lips, I shall send thee from the heights of the bridge of Hermes to join my necklaces and rings like a jewel worn too long! Ah! it is well to be a queen!”

She straightened up and seemed to wait. But Demetrios still remained impassive and no more moved than if he had not heard her. She continued angrily, “Thou hast not understood?”

He leaned nonchalantly on his elbow and said, in a very natural voice, “The idea of a tale has come to me.”

“Once upon a time, long before Thrace had been conquered by thy father’s ancestors, it was inhabited by wild animals and a few terrified men.

“The animals were very beautiful; there were lions ruddy as the sun, tigers striped like the evening and bears black as night.

“Then men were small and flat-nosed, covered with old shabby skins, armed with clumsy lances and ungraceful bows. They dwelt in holes in the mountains closed with monstrous blocks which they rolled with difficulty. Their lives were passed in hunting. There was blood in the forests.

“The country was so dismal that the gods had deserted it. When, in the whiteness of the morning, Artemis left Olympus, her way was never that which would have led toward the north. The wars which took place there never interested Ares. The absence of flutes and citheri turned Apollo aside. The triple Hecate shone there alone, like a Medusa face over a petrified land.

“Now a man came to dwell there, who was of a happier race and went not clad in

skins like the mountain savages.

“He wore a long white robe which dragged a little behind him. He loved to wander at night in the moonlight, through the soft clearings of the woods, holding in his hand a little tortoise-shell fiddle which were planted two aurochs’ horns between which three silver cords were stretched.

“When his fingers touched the cords, a delicious music passed from them, much softer than the sound of springs or the phrases of the wind in the trees or the movements of wheat. The first time he played, three sleeping tigers awoke, so prodigiously charmed that they did him no harm, but approached as near as they could and withdrew when he ceased. The next day there were yet more of them, and wolves, and hyenas, and serpents erect upon their tails.

“So that, after a very short time, the animals came themselves to beg him to play for them. It often happened that a single bear came to him and went away contented with three marvelous chords. In return for his complaisances, the wild beasts gave him food and protected him from the men.

“But he tired of this fastidious life. He became so sure of his genius and of the pleasure he gave the beasts that he no longer tried to play well. The animals were always satisfied provided it were he. Soon he refused to give them even this satisfaction, and indifferently, ceased to play. All the forest mourned; nevertheless, the bits of meat and the savory fruits were not wanting before the threshold of the musician. They continued to nourish him and loved him even more. The heart of animals is made so.

“Now one day as, leaning against his open door, he watched the sun descend behind the motionless trees, a lioness passed nearby. He made a movement to re-enter as though he feared embarrassing solicitations. But the lioness paid no attention to him and passed, simply.

“Then he asked her, astonished: ‘Why dost thou not ask me to play?’ She replied that she did not care about it. He said to her: ‘Thou dost not know me?’ She replied: ‘Thou art Orpheus.’ He continued: ‘And thou dost not wish to hear me?’ She repeated: ‘I do not wish to.’—‘Oh!’ he cried. ‘Oh! how I am to be pitied! It is just for thee I would have liked to play. Thou art much more beautiful than the others and thou shouldst understand so much better. If thou wilt listen to me only an hour, I will give thee all thou canst dream of!’ She replied: ‘I demand that

thou steal the fresh meats that belong to the men of the plain. I demand that thou murder the first man whom thou meetest. I demand that thou take the victims they have offered to thy gods and that thou lay all at my feet!’ He thanked her for demanding no more, and did as she exacted.

“For an hour he played before her; but afterwards he broke his lyre and lived as though he were dead.”

The queen sighed: “I can never understand allegories. Explain it to me, Well-Beloved. What does it mean?”

He arose. “I have not told it for thee to understand. I have told thee a story to calm thee a little. Now it is late. Farewell, Berenice.”

She began to weep. “I was sure of it! I was sure of it!”

He laid her like a child upon her yielding bed of soft stuffs, smilingly placed a kiss upon her unhappy eyes, and descended calmly from the great moving litter.

BOOK THREE

Chapter One

THE ARRIVAL

BACCHIS had been a courtesan for more than twenty-five years. That is to say, she was approaching her fourth decade and the character of her beauty had changed several times.

Her mother who, for a long time, had been the director of her house and the counsellor of her life, had given her principles of conduct and economy which had enabled her gradually to acquire a considerable fortune, upon which she could draw without reckoning at the age where magnificence of entertainment must compensate for lessening splendor of the person.

Thus, in place of buying adult slaves at a high price in the market—an expense which so many others considered necessary and which was ruinous—she had contented herself for ten years with a single negress, and had prepared for the future, free of cost, a numerous household which would later become an asset.

Seven very beautiful mulattresses were born of her slave, and also three boys whom she had disposed of, because male servants make jealous lovers. She had named the seven girls after the seven planets, and had chosen for them different occupations corresponding as nearly as possible to the names they bore. Heliopé was the slave of the day, Selemis the slave of the night, Arete guarded the door, Aphrodisia attended to the bed, Hermione made the purchases and Cronomagira presided in the kitchen. Finally, Diomedé, the stewardess, attended to the accounts and responsibilities.

Aphrodisia was the favorite slave, the prettiest, the best loved. She often joined her mistress in entertaining visitors. Therefore she was excused from all servile work in order to keep her arms delicate and her hands soft. By an exceptional favor her hair was not covered, so that she was often taken for a free woman; and this very evening she was to be freed, at the enormous price of thirty-five minae.

The seven slaves of Bacchis, all well grown and admirably disciplined, were such a source of pride for her that she never went out without having them in her train, at the risk of leaving her house empty. It was through this imprudence that Demetrios entered the house so easily; but she was still ignorant of her misfortune when she gave the festival to which Chrysis was invited.

This evening, Chrysis was the first to arrive.

She was dressed in a green robe, embroidered with enormous rose branches which flowered upon her bosom.

Arete opened the door for her before she had time to knock and, following the Greek custom, conducted her into a little room, took off her red shoes and gently washed her bare feet; then she perfumed her wherever it was necessary, for the guests were spared every trouble, even that of making their toilette before going in to dinner. Then she presented her a comb and pins to order her headdress, as well as unguent and dry tints for her lips and cheeks.

When Chrysis was finally ready, she asked the slave, "Who are the shades?"

Thus were called all the guests save one alone who was the invited. This one, in whose honor the repast was given, brought with him whom he pleased, and the "shades" had no care other than to bring their couch-cushion and to be well behaved.

To Chrysis's question, Arete replied:

"Naucrates has asked Philodemos with his mistress Faustina whom he brought from Italy. He has also asked Phrasilas and Timon, and thy friend Seso of Knidos."

At that very moment Seso entered. "Chrysis!"

"My dear!"

The two women embraced and overflowed with exclamations at the happy chance which brought them together again.

"I feared I would be late," said Seso. "Poor Archytas delayed me...."

“What, still he?”

“It is always the same thing. Whenever I go to dine in the town he imagines that everybody is going to paw me. Then he must be consoled beforehand, and that takes time! Ah! my dear! If he only knew me better! I scarcely wish to deceive him. He is jealous enough, as it is!”

“And his child? Has anybody seen it yet, that thou knowest?”

“I should hope not! The third month—the little wretch! But it does not annoy me yet. When it does—it will leave quickly.”

“I know how you feel,” said Chrysis. “Do not let it disfigure you. Children age women. Yesterday I saw Philemation, our little friend of former times who has been living for three years at

[paragraph continues] Bubastis with a grain-merchant’s family. Dost thou know what she said to me, the first thing? ‘Ah! If thou couldst see what it has done to me!’ And she had tears in her eyes. I told her that she was still pretty, but she repeated: ‘If thou couldst see! If thou couldst remember!’ weeping like another Byblis. Then I saw she almost wanted me to agree with her, and I asked her to show me what she meant. My dear—her skin—like leather! And thou knowest how beautiful it was. One could not bear to look at the knuckles, they were so red. Do not ruin thine, Seso. Keep young and white as you are. A woman’s complexion is more precious than her jewels.”

While speaking thus, the two women finished their toilettes. Then they entered, together, the banquet hall where Bacchis stood waiting, her waist clasped by apodesmes and her neck laden with golden necklaces which graduated up to her chin.

“Ah! pretty dears, what a good idea of Naucrates’ it was to invite you both this evening.”

“We congratulate ourselves that it occurs here,” replied Chrysis, without appearing to understand the allusion. And, in order to say something spiteful at once, she added: “How is Doryclos?”

That was a very rich young lover who had just left Bacchis to marry a Sicilian.

“... I have sent him away,” said Bacchis, brazenly.

“You don’t say!”

“Yes. They say he is going to marry out of spite. But I expect him the morrow of his wedding. He is mad about me.”

While asking, “Where is Doryclos?” Chrysis had thought: “Where is thy mirror?” but Bacchis’s eyes did not look at her directly and she could read nothing in them except vague and meaningless trouble. However, Chrysis had time to clear up this question and, in spite of her impatience, she could resign herself to await a more favorable occasion.

She was about to continue the conversation when she was prevented by the arrival of Philodemos, Faustina and Naucrates, who constrained Bacchis to fresh politenesses. They fell into ecstasies over the poet’s embroidered garment and over the diaphanous robe of his Roman mistress. This young girl, little conversant with Alexandrian customs, had thought to Hellenize herself thus, not knowing that such a costume was incorrect at a feast where hired dancers, similarly half clothed, were to appear. Bacchis gave no sign of noticing this error, and she found amiable phrases to compliment Faustina upon her heavy, brilliant, blue-black hair drowned in striking perfumes. This she wore held up with a golden pin over the nape of her neck, to avoid spots of perfume upon her light silken garment.

They were about to take places at the table when the seventh guest entered; it was Timon, a young man whose absence of principle was a natural gift, but who had found, in the teachings of the philosophers of his time, some superior reasons approving his character.

“I have brought someone,” he said, laughing.

“Who is it?” demanded Bacchis.

“A certain Demo, who is from Mendes.”

“Demo! you don’t mean it, my friend! She is a girl of the cheapest sort!”

“Oh, very well. I will not insist on it,” said the young man.

“I just made her acquaintance at the corner of the Canopic way.

She asked me to give her a dinner and I brought her to thee. If thou wilt not...”

“This Timon is incredible,” declared Bacchis.

She called a slave. “Heliopé, go tell thy sister that she will find a woman at the door and that she is to drive her away with a beating. Go.”

She turned, looking for someone.

“Phrasilas has not come?”

Chapter Two

THE DINNER

AT these words an insignificant little man, with a gray forehead, gray eyes and a small gray beard, advanced with little steps and said, smiling:

“I was here.”

Phrasilas was an esteemed writer on various subjects, yet one could not say exactly whether he was a philosopher, a grammarian, an historian or a mythologist, so much did he touch upon the gravest studies with a timid ardor and a fickle curiosity. He dared not write a treatise, he could not construct a drama. His style had something hypocritical, meticulous and vain. For thinkers he was a poet; for poets a sage; for society a great man.

“Well, let us go to the table,” said Bacchis. And she laid herself upon the couch which presided over the feast. At her right lay Philodemos with Faustina and Phrasilas. At the left of Naucrates, Seso, then Chrysis and young Timon. Each of the guests reclined diagonally, resting the elbow on a silken cushion, their heads wreathed with flowers. A slave brought the crowns of red roses and blue lotus. Then the repast commenced.

Timon felt that his prank had thrown a slight coolness over the women. Therefore, not speaking to them at first, but addressing himself to Philodemos, he said gravely, “They say that thou art a very devoted friend of Cicero. What dost thou think of him, Philodemos? Is he an enlightened philosopher or merely a compiler without discernment or taste? For I have heard both opinions sustained.”

“Precisely because I am his friend, I cannot answer thee,” said Philodemos. “I have known him too well; therefore I know him ill. Question Phrasilas who, having read him but little, will judge him correctly.”

“Well, what does Phrasilas think of him?”

“He is an admirable writer,” said the little man.

“How dost thou mean that?”

“In the sense that all writers, Timon, are admirable in something, like all countries and all souls. Yet, to me, the spectacle of the sea is no more preferable than the dulllest plain. And so I could not class a treatise of Cicero, an ode of Pindar and a letter of Chrysis in the order of my sympathies even if I knew the style of our excellent friend at thy side. When I close a book I am satisfied if I carry away the memory of one line which has made me think. Until now, all those I have opened contained this line. But not one has given me a second. Perhaps we each have but a single thing to say in our life, and those who attempt to speak at greater length are too ambitious. How much more I regret the irreparable silence of the millions of souls who have not spoken.”

“I do not agree with thee,” said Naucrates, without raising his eyes. “The universe was created that three truths might be said and it is our misfortune that their certainty should have been proved five centuries before this evening. Heraclitos has comprehended the world; Parmenides has unmasked the soul; Pythagoras has measured God; nothing is left us but to be silent. I find the chick-pea very impudent.”

Seso tapped the table with the handle of her fan. “Timon,” she said, “my friend.”

“What is it?”

“Why dost thou ask questions which have no interest either for me, who know no Latin, or for thee who wishest to forget it? Art thou trying to dazzle Faustina with thy cosmopolitan erudition? My poor friend, thou wilt not deceive me with words. I disrobed thy great soul yesterday evening under my coverlets and I know, Timon, the chick-pea about which it is concerned.”

“Dost thou think so?” said the young man, simply.

But Phrasilas commenced a second little speech in an ironic and softened voice: “Seso, when we have the pleasure of hearing thee judge Timon, whether it be to applaud him as he merits or to blame him—which we cannot do—remember that he is an invisible being with a singular soul. It does not exist by itself, or at least we cannot know that it does, but it reflects those which mirror in it and changes in aspect with its changes in place. Last night, it was quite like thee: I am not surprised that it pleased thee. Just now it has taken the image of Philodemos: that is why thou didst just say that it belied itself. But it does not intend to be

contradictory since it affirms nothing. Thou seest, my dear, thou must refrain from thoughtless judgments.”

Timon cast an irritated look in the direction of Phrasilas, but he reserved his reply.

“However that may be,” continued Seso, “here we are, four courtesans, and we intend to direct the conversation in order nor to resemble pink children who only open their mouths to drink milk. Faustina, as thou art the newcomer, commence.”

“Very good,” said Naucrates, “choose for us, Faustina. Of what shall we speak?”

The young Roman turned her head, raised her eyes, blushed and, with an undulation of her whole body, sighed: “Of love.”

“A very pretty subject,” said Seso, suppressing a laugh.

But no one took up the word.

The table was covered with wreaths, greens, cups and ewers. Slaves brought woven baskets filled with bread light as snow. Fat eels sprinkled with seasonings, wax-colored alphests and sacred callichthys were brought in upon platters of painted earthenware.

Thus too were served a pompilos, a purple fish believed to be born of the same foam as Aphrodite, boops and bed-radones, a gray mullet flanked with cuttle-fish, and multicolored scorpoeni. In order that they might be eaten burning hot, slices of fat tunny-fish and soft warm poulps with tender arms were presented in their little casseroles. And at the last, the belly of a white torpedo.

Such was the first course, from which the guests selected the good morsels in little fragments and left the rest for the slaves.

“Love,” began Phrasilas, “is a word which has no meaning or which means everything at once, for it designates in turn two sentiments: Voluptuousness and passion. I do not know in what sense Faustina means it.”

“I wish,” interrupted Chrysis, “voluptuousness for my part and passion for my lover’s. Thou must speak of both or thou wilt but half interest me.”

“Love,” murmured Philodemos, “is neither passion nor voluptuousness. Love is quite another thing...”

“Oh! for pity’s sake,” cried Timon, “let us have, this evening, as an exception, a banquet without philosophies. We know, Phrasilas, that thou canst sustain the superiority of multiple pleasure over exclusive passion with a sweet eloquence and a honeyed persuasion. We know too that, after having spoken a full hour over so difficult a matter, thou wouldst be ready, during the following hour, to sustain the reasons of thine opponent with the same sweet eloquence and the same honeyed persuasion. I...”

“Permit...” said Phrasilas.

“I do not deny,” continued Timon, “the charm of this little game or even the wit thou employest in it. But I question its difficulty and, more than that, its interest. The ‘Banquet’ which thou didst publish some time ago in the course of a less serious tale and also the reflections borrowed by thee from a mythical personage who resembles thine ideal, seemed new and rare under the reign of Ptolemy Auletes; but we have lived for three years under the young queen Berenice, and I fail to understand by what complete change the smiling and harmonious method of thought has suddenly aged an hundred years under thy pen like the fashion of closed sleeves and yellow tinted hair. Excellent master, I deplore it, for though thy tales may need a little fire, though thine experience of the feminine heart is only superficial, on the other hand thou art at least gifted with the comic spirit and I love thee for having made me smile.”

“Timon!” cried Bacchis, indignantly. But Phrasilas stopped her with a gesture.

“Let it pass, my dear. Unlike most men, I retain, of the judgment whose subject I am, only that part of the praises which pleases me. Timon has given me his; others will praise me on other points. I could not live in the midst of a unanimous approbation, and the variety of sentiments which I call forth is, to me, a charming garden where I wish to breathe the roses without touching spurge.”

Chrysis moved her lips in a way that indicated clearly how little she made of this man who was so clever at terminating discussions. She turned toward Timon who was her neighbor on the couch and laid her hand upon his neck.

“What is the object of life?” she asked.

It was the question she asked when she did not know what to say to a philosopher; but this time she put such a tenderness into her voice that Timon almost fancied he heard a declaration of love.

However, he replied with certain calmness, "Each life has its own, my Chrysis. There is no universal object to the existence of beings. As for me, I am the son of a banker among whose patrons are all the great courtesans of Egypt, and, my father having amassed a considerable fortune by ingenious means, I restore it nobly to the victims of his good deeds by such means as the gods permit. I consider myself capable of fulfilling but a single duty in life. Such is the one I have chosen since it reconciles the demand of the rarest virtue with contrary satisfaction which another ideal would not support so well."

There were a few moments of silence; then Seso took up the word. "Timon, thou art very annoying to interrupt, at the beginning, the only serious conversation whose subject is interesting to us. At least let Naucrates speak, since thou hast such a bad character."

"What shall I say of love?" replied the invited. "It is the name given to sorrow to console those who suffer. There are but two ways of being unhappy: to desire what one has not or to possess what one desires. Love commences by the first and finishes by the second, in the most lamentable state—that is to say: as soon as it succeeds. May the gods save us from loving!"

"But to possess unexpectedly," said Philodemos, smiling, "is not that real happiness?"

"What a rarity!"

"Not at all—if one looks for it. Hear this, Naucrates: not to desire, but to take advantage of the occasion which presents itself; not to love, but to cherish from afar some very select persons for whom one feels a liking which the disposition of chance and circumstance might warm into desire; never to adorn a woman with the qualities one would wish in her, nor with the beauties of which she makes a mystery, but to presuppose the insipid in order to be astonished at the exquisite—is not that the best advice a sage could give to lovers? Only those have lived happily who have sometimes known how to arrange in their luxurious existence the inappreciable purity of some unforeseen enjoyment."

The second course was coming to an end. Pheasants had been served, sand-

grouse, a magnificent red and blue porphura and a swan with all its feathers which had been cooked for forty-eight hours in order not to scorch its wings. Upon upcurved platters lay water-plants, pelicans and a white peacock which seemed to brood eighteen roasted and larded white balls—in short, food enough to nourish a hundred persons with the fragments which were left, when the choice morsels had been set aside. But all this was nothing beside the last dish.

This masterpiece (for nothing such had been seen at Alexandria for a long time) was a young pig, half of which had been roasted and the other half stewed in bouillon. It was impossible to distinguish where it had been killed or how they had filled its belly with all it contained. It was stuffed with round quails, the breasts of fowls, larks, succulent sauces, and minced meat, the presence of which, in the intact animal, seemed inexplicable.

There was a general cry of admiration and Faustina resolved to ask for the recipe. Phrasilas smilingly uttered metaphorical sentences; Philodemos improvised a distich where the word <<xoiros>> was taken by turns in its two meanings, which made the already drunken Seso laugh until she cried; but as Bacchis had given the order to pour out seven rare wines in seven cups for each banqueter, the conversation degenerated.

Timon turned toward Bacchis. “Why,” he demanded, “wert thou so unkind to that poor girl I wished to bring? She was, at least, a colleague. In thy place, I would respect a poor courtesan more than a rich matron.”

“Thou art mad,” said Bacchis, without discussing it.

“Yes, I have often remarked that those who occasionally hazard astounding truths are considered eccentric. Paradoxes find everybody in agreement.”

“Come, my friend, ask thy neighbors. Who is the well-born man who would take a girl without jewels for his mistress?” “I have done it,” Philodemos said, simply.

The women sniffed at him.

“Last year,” he continued, “toward the end of spring, since the exile of Cicero gave me cause to fear for my own safety, I took a little journey. I withdrew to the foot of the Alps, to a charming place named Orobia, on the shores of little Lake Clisios. It was a simple village where there were less than three hundred women,

and one of them had become a priestess of Aphrodite to protect the others. Her house was known by a bouquet of flowers hung over the door, but she herself could not be distinguished from her sisters or her cousins. She did not know there were such things as paints, perfumes and cosmetics, intriguing veils and curling irons. She did not know how to care for her beauty. She depilated herself with sticky resin as one uproots weeds in a white marble court. It makes one shudder to think that she went without shoes, so that one could never kiss her bare feet as one does Faustina's, which are softer than hands. Yet in her company I found so many charms that I forgot Rome and happy Tyre and Alexandria for a whole month."

Naucrates approved with a sign of his head, and said, after having drunk, "The great moment of love is the instant when the true self is revealed. Women should know this and spare us disappointing surprises. But it seems, on the contrary, that they make every effort to disillusion us. Is there anything more painful than flowing hair on which one sees the traces of hot irons? anything more disagreeable than painted cheeks whose color clings to a kiss? anything more piteous than a penciled eye whose darkness smears? In the last analysis, I might understand how women could sometimes use these illusory devices; every woman loves to surround herself with a circle of admiring men, and if they meet no more intimately they need not reveal their true appearance. But it is inconceivable that any woman should seek to attract admiration by means which will destroy it as soon as it brings the admirer to her. Can any woman wish to be less attractive in private than in public?"

"Thou knowest nothing about it, Naucrates," said Chrysis, with a smile. "I know one cannot hold one lover out of twenty; yet one does not attract one man out of five hundred, and before pleasing him alone, he must be pleased in public. No one would see us pass if we neither rouged nor penciled. The little peasant of whom Philodemos spoke attracted him without difficulty because she was alone in her village; there are fifteen thousand beautiful women here; it is quite another competition."

"Dost thou not know that pure beauty has no need of adornment and is sufficient unto itself?"

"Yes. Very well, make a pure beauty compete, as thou sayest, with Gnathene who is ugly and old. Put the first in a torn tunic in the last rows of the theater and the second in her robe of stars in a place reserved by her slaves and note their

admirers when they leave; a handful would pay court to the pure beauty and two hundred to Gnathene.”

“Men are stupid,” concluded Seso.

“No—simply lazy. They give themselves no trouble in choosing their mistresses. The most loved are the most deceitful.”

“What if,” insinuated Phrasilas, “what if, on the one side, I would willingly praise...” And he maintained, with great charm, two theses utterly without interest.

One by one, twelve dancing girls appeared, the first two playing the flute and the last the tambourine, the others clapping crotals.

They adjusted their fillets, rubbed their little sandals with white resin, waited with outstretched arms for the music to commence... One note... two notes... a Lydian scale... and upon a light rhythm the twelve young girls sprang forward.

The dance was soft, slow and without apparent order, though all its figures had been fixed in advance. They maneuvered in a small space, they mingled like waves. Soon they grouped themselves into couples and without interrupting their steps, untied their girdles and let their rose-colored outer tunics fall. The odor of the dancer’s perfume diffused around the men, dominating the scents of the flowers and the steam of the broken meats. They threw themselves backward with sudden movements, arms over eyes, then straightened and touched hands in passing. Timon’s cheek was caressed by a fugitive warm palm.

“What is our friend thinking?” said Phrasilas in his thin voice.

“I am perfectly happy,” replied Timon, “I have never understood so clearly as this evening the supreme mission of woman.”

“And what is it?”

“To be loved—with or without art.”

“That is one opinion.”

“Phrasilas, once more, we know that nothing can be proved; furthermore, we

know that nothing exists and that even that is not certain. Remember that, and, to satisfy thy venerable mania, permit me to have a thesis at the same time debatable and vanquished, as they all are, but interesting for me who affirms it and for the majority of men who deny it. In the realm of thought, originality is more of a chimerical ideal than a certainty. Thou must know that.”

“Give me some more wine,” said Seso to the slave. “It is stronger than the other.”

“I maintain,” continued Timon, “that the married woman, in devoting herself to a man who deceives her; in refusing herself to every other; in bringing to the light children who deform her before their birth and monopolize her after it—I maintain that, in living thus, the woman called honest loses her life and that upon her marriage day the young girl makes a fool’s bargain.”

“She believes herself obeying a duty,” said Naucrates, without conviction.

“A duty? and toward whom? Is she not free to regulate a question which concerns herself alone? She is a woman and as such she is generally impervious to all pleasures of the intellect; and not content with remaining a stranger to this half of human joys, she marries and thus denies herself the other! Can any young girl say to herself, at the age when she is all ardor, ‘I will have my husband and know ten friends besides, perhaps twelve,’ and think that she will die without having regretted anything? As for me, when I quit life, the memory of three thousand will not satisfy me.”

“Thou art ambitious,” commented Chrysis.

“But with what incense, with what golden verse,” cried the gentle Philodemos, “should we not praise forever these beneficent companions! For your enlightened souls, love is not a sacrifice; it is an equal favor which two lovers exchange. We find among you the dreams of our lives. You are gentle to the graceless, consoling to the afflicted, hospitable to all, and beautiful, so beautiful! That is why I tell you, Chrysis, Bacchis, Seso, Faustina, that it is a just law of the gods which grants to you all the eternal admiration of men and the eternal envy of all women.”

The dancers had finished their steps.

A young acrobat had just entered who began juggling with daggers and walked

upon her hands among the upright blades.

As the attention of the guests was entirely attracted to the child's dangerous play, Timon looked at Chrysis and, little by little, without being seen, approached closer to her.

"No," said Chrysis, in a low voice. "No, my friend." But he slipped his arm around her.

"Stop," she begged. "They will see us. Bacchis will be angry."

A glance convinced the young man that no one was watching them. He emboldened himself to a further caress. Then, as a decisive argument against the scruples of modesty, he put his purse into the hand which lay, by chance, open.

Meanwhile, the young acrobat continued her subtle and perilous tricks. She walked on her hands, her skirt falling back, her feet hanging before her head, between sharp swords and long-pointed blades. Her uncomfortable position and perhaps also the fear of wounds, flooded her cheeks with dark, warm blood which heightened still more the brightness of her wide open eyes. Her waist bent and straightened. Her legs parted like the arms of a dancing-girl. Quick breathing pulsed in her bosom.

"Enough," said Chrysis, curtly: "thou art annoying me! Let me go. Let me go!"

And at the moment when the two Ephesians arose to play, according to the tradition, "The Fable of Hermaphrodite," she let herself slip from the couch and fled.

Chapter Three

RHACOTIS

THE door scarcely closed, Chrysis laid her hand over her racing and burning heart as one presses a painful spot to lessen the throbbing. Then she leaned her shoulder against a column and wrung her fingers in an agony of exasperation, moaning softly.

Would she, then, never know?

In proportion with the passing hours, the augmented improbability of her success blazed out before her. To demand the mirror abruptly would be a daring way to learn the truth. But, in case it had been taken, she would draw all suspicions on herself and would be lost. On the other hand, she could no longer remain there without speaking; impatience had driven her from the hall.

Timon's loutish behavior had exasperated her dumb rage into a trembling frenzy which forced her to press her body against the coolness of the great, smooth column.

She feared a nervous attack.

She called the slave Arete. "Keep my jewels for me; I am going out."

And she descended the seven steps.

Not a breath of air fanned the heavy drops of perspiration on her forehead. This disappointment increased her discomfort and made her stagger.

She walked on, following the street.

Bacchis's house was situated at the extremity of Bruchion, at the border of Rhacotis, the native town, the enormous slum peopled by sailors and Egyptians. The fishermen, who slept upon their anchored vessels during the overwhelming heat of the day, came there to pass their nights until dawn and to give up, to the girls and the wine-sellers, as payment for a double intoxication, the price of the fish of the day before.

Chrysis plunged into the alleys of this Alexandrian Suburra, full of voices, of movement and of barbarous music. She looked furtively through open doors, into halls eerie and reeking with the smoke of lamps, where shadowy forms, never single, seemed unreal. At the cross-ways, upon low trestles ranged before the houses, many-colored mattresses groaned in the shadow, loaded with human weight. Chrysis walked along uneasily. A lone woman begged. An old man fumbled at her. A gaping peasant sought to kiss her. She fled, in a sort of blushing fear.

This foreign town in the Greek city was, for Chrysis, full of darkness and dangers. She was unfamiliar with its strange labyrinths, the complexity of its streets, the secrets of certain houses. When she ventured into it, now and then, she always followed the same direct way toward a little red door, and there she forgot her lovers.

But this evening, without even having turned her head, she sensed herself followed by a double footfall.

She hastened her steps. The double tread hastened also. She began to run; she was pursued; then, frightened, she turned up an alley, then another which doubled back, then a long way which led in an unknown direction.

Her throat dry, her temples throbbing, sustained by Bacchis's wine, she fled, turning from right to left, pale, without knowing her way.

At length a wall barred her course: she was in a blind passage. Hastily she tried to turn back, but two sailors with brown hands barred the narrow way.

"Whither goest thou, little golden arrow?" asked one of them, laughing.

"Let me pass.

"Eh? Art thou lost, young girl? Thou dost not know Rhacotis, eh? We are going to show thee the town..."

And they both grasped her by the girdle. She cried out, struggled, struck out with her fist, but the second sailor seized both her hands in his left hand and said only: "Be quiet. Thou knowest they love not the Greeks here; no one will come to help thee."

“I am not a Greek!”

“Thou liest, thou hast white skin and a straight nose. Be still, if thou fearest a beating.”

Chrysis looked at the speaker. “I will follow thee,” she said. “Thou wilt follow us both. Walk with us; thou wilt be amused.”

Whither would they lead her? She had no idea; but the second sailor pleased her with his roughness, his brute-like head. She considered him with the imperturbable gaze of a young dog before meat. She swayed her body toward him, to touch him while walking.

With rapid steps, they traversed strange quarters, without life, without lights. Chrysis could not understand how they found their way in this nocturnal maze from which she could not have escaped alone, so fantastically complicated were its alleys. The closed doors, the empty windows, the motionless shadows terrified her. Above her, between the conjoining houses, she saw a ribbon of pale sky flooded with moonlight.

At length they re-entered life. At a turn of the street, suddenly, eight, ten, eleven lights appeared, illuminated doorways where young Nabatoeah women squatted between two red lamps which lighted their gold-hooded heads from below.

They heard the swell of a distant murmur, then an increasing tumult of wagons, of tossed bales, steps of donkeys and human voices. It was the market-place of Rhacotis where during Alexandria’s sleep all the provisions heaped up for the nourishment of nine hundred thousand mouths in one day were brought together.

They skirted the houses of the square, among the green heaps, vegetables, lotus roots, shining beans, panniers of olives. Chrysis took a handful of mulberries from a violet heap and ate them without stopping. Finally they arrived before a low door and the sailors descended with her for whom had been stolen the true pearls of the Anadyomene.

It was an immense hall. Five hundred men of the people, waiting for dawn, were drinking cups of yellow beer, eating figs, lentils, cakes of sesame and olyra bread. In the midst of them swarmed the rabble of yelping women, a whole field of black hair and many-colored flowers in an atmosphere of fire. They were poor girls without a shelter who belonged to everybody. They came there barefooted,

scantily covered by red or blue rags over the body, to beg for the scraps. Most of them carried upon the left arm a child enveloped in rags. There were also dancing women, six Egyptians on a platform with an orchestra of three musicians, of whom the first two tapped skin-covered tambourines with wands, while a third shook a great clanking sistrum of bronze.

“Oh; bon-bons of myxare!” cried Chrysis, joyfully.

And she bought the worth of two coppers from a little girl vendor.

But suddenly she grew faint, so insupportable was the odor of this foul retreat, and the sailors bore her away in their arms.

In the outer air she recovered a little. “Where are we going?” she begged. “I can walk no longer. I shall fall in the street.”

Chapter Four

BACCHANALIA WITH BACCHIS

WHEN she arrived once more before Bacchis's doorway, she was filled with the delicious sense of relaxation and cooling. The clouds were gone from her brow. Her mouth had softened. She mounted the steps and crossed the threshold.

Since Chrysis had left the hall, the festivities had developed like a flame.

Other friends had come in whom the twelve dancers had welcomed wildly. Crushed wreaths strewed the ground with flowers. In a corner, a leathern bottle of Syracusan wine poured out a golden river which flowed under the table.

Philodemos, beside Faustina, was singing the verses he had written about her, as he played with the material of her robe, "O, feet," he sang, "O rosy knees and handsome limbs! O perfect form! O you who madden me—warm hands, sweet voice! Roman thou art, and brown, and do not sing the verse of Sappho; but did not Perseus himself love the Indian Andromeda?"

Meanwhile, Seso, prone on the table in the midst of the scattered fruit, and completely beclouded by the vapors of the Egyptian wine, cooled her flesh in a sherbet of snow and repeated with comic solicitude: "Drink, little one. Thou art thirsty. Drink, my little one. Drink. Drink. Drink."

Aphrodisia, still a slave, triumphantly celebrated her last night of servitude in the tradition of all Alexandrian orgies. In obedience to this, she had accepted three suitors early in the festivities. But her obligations were not confined to that; until the end of the night, following the custom regarding women slaves who were to be made free, she had to prove by unflagging vivacity that her new dignity was in no wise a usurpation.

Standing alone behind a column, Naucrates and Phrasilas debated courteously upon the respective worth of Arcesilas and Carneade.

At the other end of the hall, Myrtocleia was protecting Rhodis against an overpressing banqueter. As soon as they saw Chrysis enter, the two Ephesians ran to her.

“Let us go, my Chryse. Theano remains; but we are going.”

“I will stay also,” said the courtesan. And she stretched out on her back upon a great bed covered with roses.

A noise of voices and falling coins drew her attention; it was Theano who, to mimic her sister, had taken the fancy, amidst laughter and cries, to parody the Fable of Danae. The saucy impiety of the child amused all the feasters, for it was long past the time when a thunderbolt would have exterminated mockers of the Immortal. But the play was broken up, as might be expected.

To console her, a new diversion had to be invented. Two dancing-girls slid an enormous silver-gilt crater, filled to the brim with wine, into the middle of the hall, and someone, seizing Theano by the feet, made her drink, head down, shaken by a burst of laughter which she could no longer control.

This idea met with such success that everyone gathered around, and when the flute-player was put upon her feet and they saw her

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little face inflamed by the congestion and streaming with wine drops, so general a mirth swept over everyone there that Bacchis said to Selemis:

“A mirror; a mirror! let her see herself so!”

The slave brought a bronze mirror.

“No! not that one. The mirror of Rhodopis. She is worth it.”

With a bound, Chrysis sprang up.

A rush of blood mounted to her cheeks, then receded and she remained quite pale, her heart bounding against her ribs, her eyes fixed upon the door through which the slave had gone out.

This instant would decide her whole life. Her last hope was about to vanish or be realized.

Around her the festival continued. A crown of iris, thrown at random, struck her

upon the mouth, leaving upon her lips the sharp taste of pollen. A man poured over her head a little vial of perfume which ran off too quickly, wetting her shoulder. The spatters from a brimming cup into which a pomegranate was thrown spotted her silken tunic and penetrated to her skin.

The absent slave did not return.

Chrysis held her stony pallor, motionless as a sculptured goddess. The rhythmic and monotonous plaint of a love-sick girl not far away measured the passing time. It seemed to her that this woman had groaned thus since the day before. She would have liked to wrench something, break her fingers, cry out.

At last Selemis returned, empty-handed.

“The mirror?” demanded Bacchis.

“It is... it is not there... It is... it is... stolen,” stammered the servant.

Bacchis uttered a cry so piercing that all became still and a horrible silence suddenly suspended the tumult.

From every part of the immense hall, men and women gathered around; there was but a little open space where Bacchis stood in a frenzy, before her the slave who had fallen upon her knees.

“Thou sayest... thou sayest!” she yelled.

And as Selemis made no reply, she caught her violently by the throat.

“It is thou who hast stolen it, is it not? It is thou! Answer! I will have thee whipped into speech, miserable little wench!”

Then a terrible thing happened. The child, in a frenzy of fear, the fear of suffering, the fear of death, the most present fear she had ever known, cried precipitately, “It is Aphrodisia! It is not I! It is not I!”

“Thy sister!”

“Yes, yes!” cried the mulattresses. “It is Aphrodisia who has taken it!”

And they dragged before Bacchis their sister, who had just swooned.

Chapter Five

THE CRUCIFIXION

ALL together they repeated: "Aphrodisia has taken it! Wretch! Wretch! Filthy thief!" Their hatred for the favored sister was supplemented by their personal fears. Arete kicked her repeatedly about the body.

"Where is it?" continued Bacchis. "Where hast thou put it?"

"She has given it to her lover."

"Who is he?"

"An Ophic sailor."

"Where is his ship?"

"It sailed this evening for Rome. Thou wilt never see thy mirror again. She must be crucified, the thief, the bloody beast!"

"Ah! Gods! Gods!" wept Bacchis. Then her grief changed into a furious anger.

Aphrodisia had recovered consciousness, but paralyzed with fright and understanding nothing of what was happening, she remained mute and tearless.

Bacchis grasped her by the hair, dragged her over the soiled floor, over the flowers and pools of wine, and cried:

"To the cross! To the cross! Bring the nails! Bring the hammer!"

"Oh!" said Seso to her neighbor, "I have never seen that. Let us follow them."

All followed, hurrying. And Chrysis also followed—she who alone knew the criminal and alone was the cause of all.

Bacchis went directly into the slaves' room, a square hall furnished with three mattresses where they slept, two by two, after the nights were over. At the back of the room, as an ever present menace, rose a cross in the form of a T, which,

until now, had never been used.

Amid the confused murmur of the young women and the men, four slaves lifted the martyr to the level of the cross-beam.

Still not a sound had issued from her mouth, but when she felt the cold of the rough wood against her naked back, her long eyes opened wide and she was seized with a spasmodic groaning which lasted until the end.

They placed her astride a wooden peg fixed to the middle of the upright which served to support the body and prevent the hands from tearing.

Then they spread out her arms.

Chrysis watched and was silent. What could she say? She could not vindicate the slave except by accusing Demetrios who, she reflected, was above all pursuit and would revenge himself cruelly. Beside, a slave was an item of wealth, and Chrysis's old rancor rejoiced to see her enemy thus about to destroy, with her own hands, the value of three thousand drachmae as completely as though she had thrown the pieces of money into the Eunostos. And then, was it worth while to bother with the life of a servile being?

Heliope held out to Bacchis the first nail with the hammer, and the martyrdom commenced.

Drunkenness, spite, anger, all the passions at once, even that instinct of cruelty which lurks in a woman's heart, shook the soul of Bacchis as she struck; and she uttered a cry almost as piercing as that of Aphrodisia as the nail tore into the open palm.

She nailed the other hand. She nailed the feet, one upon the other. Then, excited by the springs of blood escaping from the three wounds, she cried: "It is not enough! Wait! Thief! Sow! Sailor's trollop!"

One after another, she drew out the long pins from her hair and thrust them violently into the girl's soft flesh. When she had no more weapons in her hands, she buffeted the poor wretch and spat upon her skin. For some time she considered her completed work of vengeance; then she returned to the greater hall with all the guests.

Phrasilas and Timon, alone, did not follow her.

After an instant of meditation, Phrasilas coughed a little, placed his right hand in his left, raised his head, lifted his eyebrows and approached the crucified girl who was shaken uninterruptedly by a horrible tremor.

“Although I am,” he said to her, “in many circumstances opposed to dogmatic theories, I cannot ignore the fact that thou shouldst profit, in the conjuncture which has overtaken thee, by being familiarized in a more serious manner with the Stoic maxims. Zeno, who, it seems, did not have a spirit altogether exempt from error, has left us a few sophisms without much general bearing yet from which thou canst draw benefit for the special purpose of calming thy last moments. ‘Pain,’ he said, ‘is a word empty of meaning, since our will surpassed the imperfections of our perishable body.’ It is true that Zeno died at the age of ninety-eight without having had, the biographers say, any illness however slight; yet one cannot argue against him because of this for, from the fact that he knew how to preserve an unchanging health, we cannot logically conclude that he would have failed in character if he had become ill. Beside, it would be an abuse to constrain philosophers to practice personally the rules of life they propose and to cultivate unceasingly the virtues which they judge superior. In short, and in order not to develop beyond measure a discourse which would run the risk of lasting longer than thyself: force thyself to lift thy soul, so far as thou art able, my dear, above thy physical sufferings. However sadly, however cruelly thou mayest feel them, I beg thee be sure that I take a veritable part in them. They approach their end; be patient—forget. Behold the hour when thou canst choose, from among the diverse doctrines which attribute immortality to us, the one which will best soothe thy regret at disappearing. If they speak truly, thou wilt then have illuminated even the terrors of the transition. If they lie, what will it matter to thee? Thou wilt not even know that thou wert deceived.” Having spoken thus, Phrasilas readjusted the fold of his garment upon the shoulder and stole away with a troubled step.

Timon remained alone in the room with the dying girl upon the cross. The memory of hours spent with this unfortunate creature haunted his memory, mingled with the atrocious idea of the imminent decay into which the beautiful figure would shortly crumble. He pressed his hand upon his eyes to shut out the sight of the torture, but, unceasingly, he heard the trembling of her body upon the cross. At length he looked. Great meshes of bloody rivulets

Click to enlarge

interlaced upon her skin, from the pins in her arms to the contracted toes. Her head turned incessantly. Her hair hung along her left side, drenched with blood, perfume and tears.

“Aphrodisia! Dost thou hear me? Dost thou know me? It is I, Timon; Timon.”

A glance, already nearly blind, touched him for an instant. But the head turned always. The body trembled without pause. Softly, as though he feared that the sound of his steps might give her pain, the young man advanced to the foot of the cross. He stretched out his arms, took the feeble, turning head gently between his two brotherly hands, piously put aside along the cheeks the tear-matted hair, and placed upon the warm lips an infinitely tender kiss.

Aphrodisia closed her eyes. Did she recognize him who had come to enchant her horrible end by this movement of loving pity? An inexpressible smile lengthened her blue eyelids and with a sigh she gave up her spirit.

Chapter Six

ENTHUSIASM

SO the thing was done. Chrysis had the proof.

If Demetrios had resolved to commit the first crime, the two others must have followed without delay. A man of his rank would consider murder and even sacrilege to be less dishonoring than theft.

He had obeyed; therefore he was captive. This free, impassive, cold man, he too submitted to slavery, and his mistress, his dominator, was she, Chrysis, Sarah of the land of Gennesaret.

Ah! to think of it, repeat it, cry it aloud, to be alone! Chrysis precipitated herself from the clamor-filled house and ran quickly, straight before her, met full in the face by the morning breeze, cooled at last.

She followed to the Agora the street which led to the sea and at whose end the spars of eight hundred vessels huddled like gigantic reeds. Then she turned to the right, before the immense avenue of the Drome where the dwelling of Demetrios stood. A tremor of pride enveloped her and she passed before the windows of her future lover; but she was too clever to seek him before he sought her. She traversed the long road to the Canopic Gate and threw herself upon the ground between two aloes.

He had done it. He had done all for her, doubtless more than any lover had ever done for any woman. She could not weary of repeating it and affirming her triumph. Demetrios, the Well-Beloved, the impossible and hopeless dream of so many feminine hearts, had exposed himself, for her, to every peril, every shame, every voluntary remorse. He had even denied the ideal of his thoughts, he had despoiled his work of the miraculous necklace, and this day, already dawning, would see the lover of the goddess at the feet of his new idol.

“Take me! take me!” she cried. She adored him now. She called him, she desired him. The three crimes, in her spirit, transformed themselves into heroic actions, for which, in return, she would never have enough tenderness, enough passion, to give. With what an incomparable flame, then, would burn this unique love of

two beings equally young, equally fair, equally loved by each other and united forever after surmounting so many obstacles?

Together they would depart, they would leave the queen's city, they would set sail for mysterious lands, for Amathus, for Epidaurus or even for the unknown Rome which was the second city of the world after immense Alexandria, and which was undertaking the conquest of the earth. What would they not do, wherever they might be! What joy would be foreign to them, what human felicity would not envy theirs and pale before their enchanted passage!

Chrysis arose, dazzled. She stretched out her arms, raised her shoulders, breathed deeply. A sensation of languor and of increasing joy swelled in her heart. She resumed her homeward journey.

Opening the door of her room, she was surprised to see that nothing, since the day before, had changed beneath her roof. The little objects of her toilette, the table, the shelves, appeared to her insufficient to surround her new life. She broke some which reminded her too directly of old, useless lovers and for which she conceived a sudden hatred. If she spared others, it was not that she cared more for them but because she feared to denude her room in case Demetrios had formed the project of passing the night there.

She undressed slowly. The vestige of the orgy fell from her tunic, crumbs of cake, hairs, rose leaves.

With her hand, she freed her waist from the girdle and plunged her fingers into her hair to loosen its mass. But before lying down on the bed, the desire seized her to repose an instant upon the rugs of the terrace where the coolness of the air was so delicious.

She ascended.

The sun, risen only a few instants before, reposed upon the horizon like a huge, swollen orange.

A great palm tree with a curved trunk dropped its mass of dewy green leaves over the parapet. Chrysis crushed them to her tingling skin and shivered, her arms folded before her.

Her eyes wandered over the town, which whitened little by little. The violet

mists of the dawn arose from the silent streets and faded in the lucid air.

Suddenly an idea sprang forth in her mind, increased, dominated, made her delirious: Demetrios, he who had already done so much, why should he not kill the queen, he who could be king? And then...

And then, this enduring ocean of houses, of palaces, temples, porticoes, colonnades, which floated before her eyes from the Western Necropolis to the Gardens of the Goddess: Bruchion, the Hellenic town, dazzling and regular; Rhacotis, the Egyptian town, before which the light-flooded Paneion arose like an acropolitan mountain; the Great Temple of Serapis with a facade horned by two long rosy obelisks; the Great Temple of Aphrodite, surrounded by the murmurs of three hundred thousand palm trees and of numberless waters; the Temple of Persephone and the Temple of Arsinoe, the two sanctuaries of Poseidon, the three towers of Isis Pharis, the seven columns of Isis Lochias, and the Theater and the Hippodrome and the Stadion where Psittacos had run against Nicosthene, and the tomb of Stratonice and the tomb of the god Alexander—Alexandria! Alexandria—the sea, the men, the colossal marble Pharos whose mirrors saved men from the sea! Alexandria—the city of Berenice and of the eleven Ptolemaic kings, Physcos, Philometor, Epiphanios, Philadelphos! Alexandria—fulfillment of all dreams, the crown of all glories conquered during three thousand years in Memphis, Thebes, Athens, Corinth, by the chisel, by the reed, by the compass and by the sword!

Farther yet, the Delta, riven by the seven tongues of the Nile, Sais, Bubastis, Heliopolis; then, rising toward the south, the ribbon of fertile earth, the Heptanome where twelve hundred temples to all the gods lay in a vista along the banks of the river; and, farther, the Thebaid, Diospolis, the Elephantine Isle, the impassable cataracts, the Isle of Argo... Meroe... the Unknown; and even, could one believe the traditions of the Egyptians, the land of fabulous lakes whence escapes the antique Nile, lakes so vast that one loses the horizon while traversing their purple floods and so high in the mountains that the stars, distant no more, reflect in them like golden fruits—all that, all, would be the kingdom, the domain, the property of Chrysis the courtesan!

She raised her arms, suffocating, as though she thought herself able to touch the sky. And as she moved thus she saw, slowly passing at her left, a huge bird with black wings, flying toward the high seas.

Chapter Seven

CLEOPATRA

QUEEN BERENICE had a young sister named Cleopatra. Many other princesses of Egypt were called by this name, but this one was later the great Cleopatra who slew her empire and killed herself upon its corpse.

She was then twelve years old and no one could say what her beauty would be. Her long, thin build was disconcerting in a family where all the women were plump. She ripened like a badly grafted crossed fruit of foreign, obscure origin. Some of her features were violent as those of the Macedonians; others seemed to come to her from the depths of gentle, brown Nubia, for her mother had been a woman of inferior race and her origin was still doubtful. One was astonished to see lips almost thick under the curved, thin nose. Her young bosom alone marked her as a daughter of the Nile.

The little princess dwelt in a spacious chamber open upon the expanse of the sea and connected with that of the queen by a pillared vestibule.

There she passed the hours of the night upon a bed of blue-tinted silk where the skin of her finely toned young limbs took a still more somber hue.

Now in the night during which—far from her thoughts—the events just described took place, Cleopatra arose long before the dawn., She had slept but little and ill, uneasy from the extreme heat of the air.

Without waking her guardian women, she placed her feet gently upon the ground, slipped on her golden anklets, girdled her little brown body with a strand of enormous pearls, dressed, and issued from the room.

In the monumental vestibule, the guards, also, slept, except one who stood sentinel at the queen's door. This one fell upon his knees and whispered, full of terror, as though he had never found himself caught in such a conflict of duties and perils, "Princess Cleopatra, thy pardon... I cannot let thee pass."

The girl drew herself up, frowned violently, struck the soldier's temple with her fist, and exclaimed softly but ferociously, "Thou, if thou touchest me, I will cry

out and I will have thee quartered.”

Then she silently entered the queen’s chamber.

Berenice slept, her head upon her arm, her hand hanging down. A lamp, suspended above the great crimson bed, mingled its feeble light with that of the moon which reflected the whiteness of the walls. The yielding outline of the young woman, vague and luminous, was bathed in a slight shadow between the two lights. Slender and straight, Cleopatra seated herself upon the edge of the bed. She took her sister’s face between her little hands and awakened her with gesture and voice, saying, “Where is thy lover?”

With a start, Berenice opened her beautiful eyes. “Cleopatra... What art thou doing here?... What dost thou wish?”

The little girl repeated insistently, “Where is thy lover?”

“He is not...”

“Certainly not, thou knowest.”

Click to enlarge

“It is true. He is never here... Oh, Cleopatra, how cruel thou art to awaken me and tell me so!”

“And why is he never here?”

Berenice sighed mournfully. “I see him when he wishes... in the daytime... an instant.”

“Didst thou not see him yesterday?”

“Yes... I met him on the road... I was in my litter. He entered it.”

“Not as far as the Palace?”

“No... not quite; but almost at the door I still saw him...”

“And thou saidst to him...”

“Oh, I was furious... I said the most evil things... Yes, my dear.”

“Really?” said the young girl ironically.

“Too evil, doubtless, for he did not reply... At the moment when I was quite red with anger, he told me a long fable and as I did not quite understand it I did not know how to answer in my turn... He slipped out of the litter although I thought I could keep him.”

“Why didst thou not have him ordered back?”

“For fear of displeasing him.”

Cleopatra, swelling with indignation, caught her sister by the shoulders and spoke, looking into her eyes: “What! Thou art queen; thou art the goddess of a people; thou possessest a half of the world; all that is not Rome’s is thine; thou reignest over the Nile and over all the sea; thou reignest even over the heaven since thou speakest to the gods from nearer than any other—and thou canst not reign over the man thou lovest?”

“Reign...” said Berenice, drooping her head, “that is easy to say, but, seest thou, one does not reign over a lover as over a slave.”

“And why not?”

“Because... but thou canst not understand... To love is to prefer the happiness of another to that which one formerly wished for one’s self... If Demetrios is pleased, I will be also, even in tears and far from him... I can no longer desire a joy which may not at the same time be his, and I am happy with all that I give him.”

“Thou dost not know how to love,” said the child.

Berenice smiled sadly at her, then stretched sleepily and breathed deeply.

“Ah! presumptuous little maiden!” she sighed. “When thou wilt have swooned for the first time in a loving embrace, then thou wilt understand why one is never the queen of the man in whose arms one has been.”

“One is when one wishes.”

“But one can no longer wish.”

“I can! Why canst not thou, who art older than I?”

Berenice smiled again. “And where, little girl, wilt thou exercise thy power? Among thy dolls?”

“With him,” said Cleopatra.

Then without waiting for the astonishment of her sister to find words for expression, she continued with increasing exultation: “Yes, I have a lover! Yes! I have a lover! Why should I not have a lover like everyone, like thee, like my mother and my aunts, like the lowest of the Egyptians! Why should I not have a lover, since thou givest me no husband? I am a little girl no longer!...

[paragraph continues] I know! I know! Be silent; I know better than thyself... I am ashamed to have thee for a sovereign, thou who art someone’s slave!”

Little Cleopatra, erect, made herself as tall as possible and put her hands to her head like an Asiatic queen placing a tiara.

Her elder sister, who had listened to her, seated upon the bed, her feet drawn up, sank upon her knees to her and put her hands upon her delicate shoulders. “Thou hast a lover?”

She spoke timidly now, almost with respect. The little girl responded dryly, “If thou dost not believe me, look.”

Berenice sighed. “And when dost thou see him?”

“Three times a day.”

“Where?”

“Dost thou wish me to say?”

“Yes.”

Cleopatra questioned in her turn: “How is it that thou dost not know?”

“I know nothing, not even what happens in the Palace. Demetrios is the only

subject with whom I allow myself to be interested. I have not watched thee; it is my fault, my child.”

“Watch me if thou wilt. The day when I can no longer have my will, I will kill myself. Then it will be all the same to me.”

Shaking her head, Berenice replied, “Thou art free... Besides, it is too late for thee to be confined... But... tell me, dear... Thou hast a lover... and thou holdest him?”

“I have my way of holding him.”

“Who taught thee?”

“Oh! I alone. One knows that instinctively or one never knows it. At six years, I already knew how I would later hold my lover.”

“And wilt thou not tell me?”

“Follow me.”

Berenice rose slowly, put on a tunic and a mantle, aired her hair, damp from warm sleeping, and the two left the room together.

First the young girl traversed the vestibule and went straight to the bed she had lately left. There, from under the mattress of fresh, dry byssos, she took a new, engraved key. Then, turning: “Follow me—it is far,” she said.

She ascended a staircase in the middle of the vestibule, followed a long colonnade, opened doors, walked over rings, flagstones, pale marble and twenty mosaics of twenty empty and silent halls. She descended a stone stair, crossed dark thresholds, passed echoing doors. Now and again two enormous guards stood upon mats, lance in hand. After a long time, she crossed a court by the full moon and the shadow of a palm tree caressed her hip. Berenice still followed, enveloped in her blue mantle.

At length they arrived at a thick door banded with iron like a warrior’s torso. Cleopatra slipped the key into the lock, turned twice, pushed the door; a man, gigantic in the shadow, rose to his full height at the back of this prison.

Berenice looked, was shocked, and drooping her head, said very gently, “It is thou, my child, who knowest not how to love... at least, not yet... I was right in telling thee so.”

“Love for love, I like mine better,” said the little girl. “This love, at least, gives only joy.”

Then erect upon the threshold of the chamber and without taking a step forward, she said to the man standing in the shadow: “Come—kiss my feet, son of a dog.”

And when he had done so, she kissed his lips.

BOOK FOUR

Chapter One

THE DREAM OF DEMETRIOS

NOW, having returned home with the mirror, the comb and the necklace, Demetrios was visited by a dream, during his sleep; and this was the dream:

He is going toward the jetty, among the crowd, through a strange night without a moon, without stars, without clouds, which shines of itself.

Without his knowing why, nor what draws him, he is in haste to arrive, to be there as soon as he can; but he walks with effort and the air opposes an inexplicable resistance to his legs, as deep water might hinder each step.

He trembles, he thinks that he will never arrive, that he will never know toward whom he walks thus, panting and uneasy, through the luminous obscurity.

At times the crowd disappears entirely, whether it be that it really vanishes or that he ceases to feel its presence. Then it elbows him afresh, more importunately, and all go, go, go, with a rapid and sonorous step, forward, quicker than he...

Then the human mass closes in; Demetrios pales; a man pushes him with his shoulder; a woman's brooch tears his tunic; a young girl, pressed by the multitude, is so closely crowded against him that he senses the warmth of her skin, and she pushes away his face with frightened hands.

Suddenly he is alone, the first, upon the jetty. And as he turns to look back, he perceives in the distance a white swarm which is the whole crowd, suddenly drawn back to the Agora.

And he understands that it will advance no farther.

The jetty extends before him with all the fascination of an unfinished road which has undertaken the traverse of the sea.

He wishes to go to the Pharos, and he walks on. His legs have suddenly become light. The wind which breathes over sandy wastes drags him precipitately toward the undulating solitude into which the jetty reaches. But as he advances, the Pharos recedes before him; the jetty stretches out interminably. Soon, the high marble tower with its flaming crimson pile touches the livid horizon, palpitates, lowers, diminishes, and sets like another moon.

Demetrios still walks on.

Days and nights seem to have passed since he left in the distance the great quay of Alexandria, and he dares not turn his head for fear of seeing nothing more than the way already passed: a white line to the infinite and the sea.

Nevertheless, he turns.

Behind him lies an island covered with great trees from which enormous flowers droop.

Has he journeyed blindly, or did it rise at that very instant, becoming mysteriously visible? He does not think of asking; he accepts the impossible as a natural occurrence...

A woman is on the island. She stands before the door of the only house, her eyes half closed and her face bending over the flower of a huge iris which grows to the height of her lips. She has deep hair the color of dull gold and of a length which one might suppose marvelous by the mass of the swollen knot which lies upon her drooping neck. A black tunic covers this woman and a still blacker robe is draped over the tunic, and the iris whose scent she inhales, closing her eyes, is also tinted like the night.

On this apparel of mourning, Demetrios sees only the hair, like a golden vase upon an ebony column. He recognizes Chrysis.

The memory of the mirror and of the comb and of the necklace returns to him vaguely, but he does not believe in it, and in this singular dream only the reality seems to him a dream...

"Come," she says. "Enter behind me."

He follows her. Slowly she ascends a staircase covered with white skins. Her

arm rests over the balustrade, her bare heels float under her skirt.

The house has but one story. Chrysis halts upon the last step. "There are four rooms," she says. "When thou hast seen them, thou wilt never again come forth. Wilt thou follow me? Darest thou?"

But he would follow her anywhere. She opens the first door and closes it behind him.

The room is narrow and long. It is lighted by a single window which frames the whole sea. To the right and to the left, two little tables bear a dozen rolled volumes.

"Here are the books thou lovest," says Chrysis. "There are no others."

Demetrios opens them: they are the "neus" of Chaeremon, the "Return" of Alexis, the "Mirror of Lais" of Aristippos, the "Witch," the "Cyclops" and the "Bucolics" of Theocritus, the

[paragraph continues] "dipos at Colonos," the "Odes" of Sappho and some other works. In the midst of this ideal library, a young girl reclines, silent, upon some cushions.

"Now," murmurs Chrysis, drawing from a long golden case a manuscript of a single leaf, "here is the page of antique verse which thou never readest alone without weeping."

The young man reads at random:

<<Oi men ar' ethreneon, epi de stenaxonto gynaikes.

Teisin d' Andromaxe leykulenos Erxe gooio,

Ektoros androfonoio kare meta xersin exoysa

Aner, ap' aiunos neos uler, kadde me xeren

Aeipeis en megaroisi: pais d' eti nepois aytus,

On tekomen su t' egu te dysammoroi....>>

He stops, casting at Chrysis a tender, surprised look. "Thou?" he says to her, "thou showest me this?"

"Ah! thou hast not seen all. Follow me. Follow me, quickly!" They open another door.

The second room is square. It is lighted by a single window which frames all nature. In the center, a wooden stand bears a mass of red clay and in the corner, on a curved chair, a young girl rests in silence.

"Here thou wilt model Andromeda, Zagreus, and the Horses of the Sun. As thou wilt create them for thyself alone, thou wilt destroy them before thy death."

"It is the House of Happiness," says Demetrios, under his breath.

And he rests his forehead in his hand.

But Chrysis opens another door.

The third chamber is vast and round. It is lighted by a single window which frames the whole blue sky. Its walls are bronze grilles, reticulated in regular lozenges, through which steals the music of flutes and citheri, played in a melancholy mode by invisible musicians. And against the farthest wall, upon a throne of green marble, a young girl sits in silence.

"Come! Come!" repeats Chrysis. They open another door. The fourth chamber is low, somber, hermetically closed and of triangular form. Heavy draperies and furs bedeck it so softly, from floor to ceiling, that nudity does not astonish. When the door is closed, it is impossible to tell where it is. There is no window. It is a tiny world, out of the world. Here and there, hanging locks of black fir let tears of perfume slip into the air. And this chamber is lighted by seven myrrhine panes which color diversely the incomprehensible light of seven subterranean lamps.

"Thou seest," the young woman explains, in a calm and affectionate voice, "there are three different beds in the three corners of our room..."

Demetrios makes no reply. And he asks himself: "Is this indeed the end? Is this truly the limit of human existence? Have I, then, traversed the three other rooms but to stop in this one? And could I, could I leave it if I sleep within it a whole

night in the attitude which is the outstretched posture of the tomb?”

But Chrysis speaks...

“Well-Beloved, thou hast commanded me, I have come. Look at me well...”

She raises her arms together, rests her hands upon her hair and, elbows advanced, smiles. “Well-Beloved, I am thine... Oh, not so soon. I promised thee to sing. I will sing first.”

And he thinks no more but of her as he lies down at her feet. She wears little black sandals. Four threads of bluish pearls pass between the slender toes whose every nail has been painted with a carmine crescent.

Her head inclined upon her shoulder, she strikes the palm of her left hand with the finger tips of her right, slightly undulating her hips:

“I sleep, but my heart waketh:

It is the voice of my beloved. that knocketh,

Saying, Open to me, my dove, my undefiled;

For my head is filled with dew,

And my locks with the drops of the night.

I opened to my beloved,

But my beloved had withdrawn himself,

And was gone.

My soul failed when he spake:

I sought him, but I could not find him;

I called him, but he gave me no answer.

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,

If ye find my beloved,

That ye tell him that I am sick of love. [*1]

“Ah! It is the Song of Songs, Demetrios! It is the nuptial canticle of the girls of my country.

“The voice of my beloved!

Behold, he cometh,

Leaping upon the mountains,

Skiping upon the hills.

My beloved is like a roe or a young hart:

Behold! He standeth behind our wall;

He looketh forth at the windows,

Showing himself through the lattice.

My beloved spake, and said unto me,

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

For lo, the winter is past—

The rain is over and gone,

The flowers appear on the earth;

The time of the singing of the birds is come,

And the voice of the ring-dove is heard in our land.

The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,

And the vines, with the tender grape, give a good smell.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock,

In the secret places—

Let me see thy countenance,

Let me hear thy voice,

For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

Take us the foxes, the little foxes,

That spoil the vines:

For our vines have tender grapes.

My beloved is mine, and I am his:

He feedeth among the lilies.

Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,

Turn, my beloved,

And be thou like a roe or a young hart

Upon the mountains.” [*2]

She throws her veil from her and stands in a narrow garment which clasps her closely from knees to hips.

“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,

So is my beloved among the sons.

I sat down under his shadow with great delight,

And his fruit was sweet to my taste.

He brought me to the banqueting house,
And his banner over me was love.
—Thou hast ravished my heart, my spouse;
Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes,
With one chain of thy neck.
How much better is thy love than wine,
And the smell of thine ointments than all spices.
Thy lips drop as the honeycomb, O my spouse;
Honey and milk are under thy tongue,
And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.
A garden enclosed is my spouse,
A spring shut up,
A fountain sealed.
Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates,
With pleasant fruits—Camphire, with spikenard,
And saffron; calamus and cinnamon,
With trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes:
A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters,
And streams from Lebanon.” [*3]
She throws back her head, closing her eyes.
“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;

Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.

Let my beloved come into his garden,

And eat his pleasant fruits.” [*4]

She curves her arms and offers her mouth.

“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field,

Let us lodge in the villages.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it:

If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

Thou that dwellest in the gardens,

The companions hearken to thy voice:

Cause me to hear it.

Make haste, my beloved,

And be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart,

Upon the mountains of spices.” [*5]

Without moving her feet, without bending her closed knees, she slowly turns her torso upon her motionless hips. Her face above her garments seems like a great rosy flower in a vase of drapery.

She dances gravely, with her shoulders and her head and her beautiful arms entwined. She seems to suffer in her encasements. Respiration swells her bosom. Her mouth cannot close. Her eyelids cannot open. An increasing fire reddens her cheeks.

Sometimes her ten fingers are interlaced before her face. Sometimes she raises

her arms, stretching deliciously. A long fugitive furrow separates her raised shoulders. Finally, panting, covering her face with her hair in a single quick gesture, as one rolls the wedding veil, she stands silent in the center of the floor in all the mystery of her grace.

Demetrios and Chrysis...

So harmonious, so immediately perfect, is their first embrace, that they hold it, motionless, to taste to the full its many-faceted delight. Chrysis is crushed in the arms which embrace her so strongly. Their lips cling in the glowing sweetness of a demanding affection that will not be recklessly satisfied. Intoxicated with each other, their very souls ache.

Nothing is observed so intimately as the face of a loved woman. Seen at the excessive approach of the kiss Chrysis's eyes seem enormous. When she closes them, two parallel folds appear upon each lid and a uniformly pallid tint extends from the brilliant eyebrows to the beginning of the cheeks. When she opens them, a green ring, fine as a silken thread, lightens with a corona of color the unfathomable black pupil which enlarges beyond measure under the long, curved lashes. The little rosy corner whence the tears flow has sudden palpitations.

This kiss will never finish. It seems as though it were not honey and milk as is said in the Scripture, but something living, quick, enchanted—more caressing than the hand, more expressive than the eyes, a moving flower which Chrysis animates with all tenderness and all fancy.... Caresses prolong and envelop. The tips of her fingers clasp him in a network of ceaseless convulsive shudders. She is happy, but desire terrifies her as though it were a suffering. She puts him aside with her outstretched arms, her lips begging. Demetrios holds her by force.

No spectacle of nature—neither the flames of the western sun, nor the tempest among the palms, nor thunderbolts, nor mirage, nor the great risings of the waters—seems worthy of astonishment to those who have seen a woman transfigured in their arms. Chrysis's eyes, lighted by gratitude, gaze dizzily from the corners of the lids. Her cheeks are resplendent. Every muscular line is admirable.

Demetrios contemplates, with a sort of religious fear, this power of the goddess in the feminine nature, this transport of a whole being, this superhuman ecstasy whose direct cause he is, which he exalts or represses freely and which, for the

thousandth time, confounds him. Under his eyes, all the forces of life put forth effort and magnify themselves to create. Already she seems to take on a maternal majesty.

Footnotes

^186:1 Song of Solomon, 5: 2, 6, 8.

^187:2 Ibid., 2: 8-17.

^188:3 Ibid., 2: 3-4; 3: 9-15.

^188:4 Ibid., 3: 16.

^189:5 Ibid., 7: 10-11; 8: 7, 13-14.

Chapter Two

TERROR

OVER the sea and the gardens of the Goddess, the moon erected her mountains of light. Melitta, the young girl, so delicate and slender, whom Demetrios had taken for an instant and who had offered to lead him to Chimairis the Chiromant, remained alone with the savage, crouching sibyl.

“Do not follow that man,” Chimairis said to her.

“Oh! But I have not even asked him if I shall see him again... Let me run after him and I will return...”

“No, thou wilt not see him again. And that is better, girl. Those who see him once know sorrow. Those who see him twice play with death.”

“Why dost thou say that? I, who have just seen him, have played only with pleasure in his arms.”

“Thou hast had pleasure with him because thou knowest not what love is, my child. Forget him as a comrade and congratulate thyself that thou art not twelve years old.”

“Then people are very unhappy when they are grown up?” asked the child. “All the women here speak constantly of their troubles and I, who hardly ever weep, see them weep so much.”

Chimairis buried her hands in her hair and groaned. The goat shook his golden collar, turning his head toward her, but she did not even look at him.

Melitta continued purposely, “However, I know one happy woman. It is my great friend, it is Chrysis... I am sure she does not weep...”

“She will weep,” said Chimairis.

“Oh! prophetess of ill fortune! Take back what thou hast said, old mad-woman, or I will detest thee!”

But before the gesture of the little girl the black goat rose erect with forelegs drawn in and horns advanced.

Melitta fled, caring not whither.

Twenty paces farther on she burst out laughing at sight of a ridiculous couple among the bushes. And that sufficed to change the course of her thoughts.

She took the longest way to return to her house; then she decided not to return at all. The moonlight was magnificent, the night was warm, the gardens full of voices, laughter and song. Satisfied by what Demetrios had given her, she had a sudden desire to trail around the paths and bushes like a homeless priestess, in the depths of the wood, among the poor passers-by. Thus she was halted three or four times, under trees, beside stelae, and at benches; she amused herself with this new game whose setting sufficed to change the method of playing it, until a soldier standing in the middle of the path caught and raised her in his robust arms, like the god of the garden meeting a dryad. She exclaimed over this in triumphant delight.

Again free and continuing her way along a colonnade of palm trees, she met a lad named Mikyllos who seemed to be lost in the forest. She offered to serve him as guide, but she misled him to keep him all for herself. Mikyllos was not long in ignorance of Melitta's designs. Soon, comrades rather than lovers, they ran side by side into a more and more silent isolation and suddenly discovered the sea.

The place they had reached was far from the regions where the courtesans ordinarily fulfilled their religious profession. Why they chose other meeting places than this—the most admirable of all—they could not have said. The wood where the crowd meets is quickly stamped, once for all, with its central vista and its network of paths and squares and star-shaped clearings. On the outskirts, whatever may be the charm and beauty of the spots, an eternal void and the forest growth dominate in peace.

Mikyllos and Melitta arrived thus, hand in hand, at the edge of the public forest, a short hedge of aloes which defined a needless bound between the gardens of Aphrodite and those of her High Priest.

Encouraged by the silence and solitude of this flowering desert, both easily crossed the irregular wall of thick, twisted plants. At their feet the Mediterranean lapped softly upon the strand with little waves light as the welling of a river. The

two children plunged waist deep and laughingly pursued each other to attempt, in the water, difficult acrobatics which they quickly interrupted like games only half learned. Then, glistening and streaming, shaking their thin legs in the moonlight, they leaped upon the shadowy shore.

Footprints upon the sand drew them onward. They followed.

The night shone with an extraordinary brilliancy. They walked, ran, struggled with each other's hands, their sharp shadows silhouetting their figures behind them. How far would they go thus? They saw only themselves in the blue immensity of the horizon.

But suddenly Melitta cried: "Ah... Look!..." "What is it?"

"A woman."

"A priestess... Oh! the shameless! She has gone to sleep in this spot."

Melitta shook her head. "No... Oh! no; I do not dare go near, Mikyllos... She is no ordinary priestess..." "I would have thought so."

"No, Mikyllos; no, no; she is not one of us... It is Touni, the wife of the High Priest... And look at her well... She is not asleep... Oh! I do not dare go near, her eyes are open... Let us go... I am afraid... I am afraid..."

Mikyllos took three steps on tiptoe. "Thou art right. She is not asleep, Melitta, she is dead, the poor woman."

"Dead?"

"A pin in her heart."

He reached forth his hand to draw it out, but Melitta was seized with fright. "No. No! Do not touch her... She is a sacred person... Stay near her. Guard her, protect her... I am going for help... I am going to tell the others."

And she ran at top speed into the heavy shadows of the black trees.

Mikyllos wandered about for some time, alone and trembling before the young corpse. He touched the transpierced breast with his fingers. Then, terrified by

death or fearing above all to be taken for an accomplice in the murder, he departed suddenly, resolved to tell no one.

The cold body of Touni remained as before, abandoned in the moonlight.

Long after, the forest around her filled with a murmur, frightful because it was almost imperceptible.

From all sides, between the tree-trunks, between the bushes, a thousand women, huddled together like frightened sheep, advanced slowly, their immense mass quivering with a single shudder.

With a movement regular as that of sea-waves upon the strand, the first rank constantly gave way to another and it seemed as though no one wished to be first to discover and see the dead woman.

A great cry, uttered at once by a thousand throats far into the distance, saluted the poor body perceived at the foot of a tree.

A thousand arms were raised in the air, another thousand, and tear-choked voices were heard: "Goddess! not on us! Goddess! not on us! Goddess! if thou vengest thyself, spare our lives!"

A desperate voice rallied: "To the Temple!"

And all repeated: "To the Temple! To the Temple!"

Then a new stir swept through the multitude. Without daring another look at the dead woman who lay stretched upon her back, her arms thrown out, her eyes turned backward, the crowd of women, the white and the black, those from the East and those from the West, the sumptuous robes and the vague nudities, disappearing among the trees, gained the clearings, the paths, the roads, filled the open places, mounted the vast rosy stair which blushed in the rising dawn, and, with their frail, closed fists, beat upon the high bronze doors, wailing like children: "Open to us! Open to us!"

Chapter Three

THE MULTITUDE

IN the morning on which the bacchanalia at Bacchis's came to an end, there was an event at Alexandria: rain fell. Immediately, contrary to what usually occurs in countries less African, everyone was out of doors to welcome the downpour.

The phenomenon was neither torrential nor tempest-like. Large warm drops, from the height of a violent cloud, traversed the air. The women felt them moistening their breasts and their hastily knotted hair. Men gazed at the sky with interest. Little children burst into laughter, dragging their bare feet in the surface mud.

Then the cloud vanished amidst the light; the sky stood implacably pure, and a little after noon the mud had again become dust under the sun's rays.

But this momentary shower had sufficed. The town was cheered by it. The men remained together upon the flagstones of the Agora and the women clustered in groups, mingling their bright voices.

Only the courtesans were there, for, the third day of the Aphrodisian Festivals being reserved for the exclusive devotions of the married women, these latter had just assembled in a procession upon the road to the Astarteion, and upon the square there were only flowered robes and eyes black with fard.

As Myrtocleia passed, a young girl named Philotis, who was talking with several others, pulled her by the knot of her sleeve.

"Ah, little one! thou didst play at Bacchis's yesterday? What happened there? What did they do? Has Bacchis put on a new necklace of discs to hide the valleys of her neck? Does she wear breastplates of wood or of brass? Did she forget to dye the little white hairs on her temples, before putting on her wig? Come, speak, little stupid!"

"Dost thou think that I looked? I came after the dinner, I played my scene, I received my pay and then left at once."

“Oh! I know thou dost not corrupt thyself!”

“To spot my robe and receive blows? No, Philotis. Only rich women can afford to take part in orgies. Little flute-players gain only tears.”

“If thou wouldst not spot thy robe, leave it in the ante-chamber. When thou receivest buffets, make them pay thee. That is elementary. Then thou hast nothing to tell us? Not an adventure, not a jest, not a scandal? We are yawning like ibises. If thou knowest nothing, invent something.”

“My friend Theano stayed later than I. When I awoke just now, she had not returned. Perhaps the festival still continues.”

“It is ended,” said another woman. “Theano is down there, by the Ceramic Wall.”

The courtesans ran thither, but at some distance they stopped with smiles of pity.

Theano, dizzy in the most ingenuous drunkenness, was pulling obstinately at an almost dismantled rose whose thorns clung to her hair. Her yellow tunic was soiled, as though the whole orgy had passed over her. The bronze brooch which should have held the convergent folds of her garment upon her left shoulder, hung lower than her girdle, disarranging all her clothing.

As soon as she perceived Myrtocleia, she went off suddenly into the burst of singular laughter, known to everyone in Alexandria, which had given her the nickname of “The Hen.” It was the interminable cackling of a laying hen, a cascade of gayety which descended as her breath failed, recommenced on a sharp cry, and repeated its cadence, rhythmically, like the joy of a triumphant fowl.

“An egg! An egg!” jeered Philotis.

But Myrtocleia made a gesture. “Come, Theano. Thou must go to bed. Thou art not well. Come with me.”

“Ah! ha!... Ah! ha!...” laughed the child.

And she beat her breast with her little hand, crying in a changed voice, “Ah! ha!... The mirror...”

“Come!” repeated Myrto, impatiently.

“The mirror... It is stolen, stolen, stolen! Ah! ha! I will never laugh so much again if I live longer than Cronos. Stolen, stolen; the silver mirror!”

The singer tried to draw her away, but Philotis had understood. “Oh!” she cried to the others, raising her arms in the air.

“Come quickly! here is news! Bacchis’s mirror is stolen!”

And all exclaimed: “Papaie! Bacchis’s mirror!”

In an instant, thirty women crowded around the flute-player. “What are they saying?”

“What?”

“Bacchis’s mirror has been stolen. Theano has just said so.”

“But when?”

“Who took it?”

The child shrugged her shoulders. “How should I know?”

“Thou didst pass the night down there. Thou shouldst know. It is not possible. Who has entered her house? Surely they told thee. Try to remember, Theano.”

“How should I know?... There were more than twenty in the hall... They had hired me as a flute-player, but they kept me from playing because they did not like music. They asked me to mimic the dance-figure of Danae and they threw pieces of gold, and Bacchis took them all from me... And what more? They were crazy. They made me drink, head down, in a crater much too full where they had poured seven cups because there were seven wines on the table. My face was all wet. Even my hair was soaking and my roses.”

“Yes,” interrupted Myrto, “thou art a very naughty girl. But the mirror? Who took it?”

“Exactly! When they put me back on my feet, the blood had run to my head and

the wine to my ears. Ha! ha! They all began to laugh... Bacchis sent for the mirror... Ha! ha! It wasn't there. Someone had taken it."

"Who? I am asking thee, who?"

"It wasn't I, that is all I know. They could not search me, I was quite naked. I could not hide a mirror, like a drachma, under my eyelid. It wasn't I, that is all I know. She crucified a slave, perhaps for that... When I saw they were not looking at me any more, I picked up the Danae pieces. See, Myrto, I have five of them. Thou shalt buy robes for us three."

The report of the robbery had spread, little by little, over the whole square. The courtesans did not conceal their envious satisfaction. A noisy curiosity animated the shifting groups.

"It is a woman," said Philotis. "It is a woman who turned the trick."

"Yes, the mirror was well hidden. A robber could have carried off everything in the house and turned everything upside down without finding the stone."

"Bacchis has enemies, her former women-friends above all. They know all her secrets. One of them could have drawn her off somewhere and entered her house at the hour when the sun is hot and the streets almost deserted."

"Oh! perhaps she has had the mirror sold to pay her debts."

"Could it have been one of her visitors? They say she is careless, now, of whom she receives."

"No, it is a woman. I am sure of it."

"By the two goddesses! It is well done."

Suddenly a still more tempestuous crowd pushed toward a point of the Agora, followed by an increasing murmur which attracted all passers.

"What is it? What is it?"

And a shrill voice, dominating the tumult, cried over the anxious heads:

“Someone has slain the wife of the High Priest!”

A violent emotion seized all the crowd. No one believed it. No one could imagine that, in the midst of the Aphrodisian Festivals, such a murder had come to draw the wrath of the gods upon the town. But in all directions the same words passed from mouth to mouth:

“The wife of the High Priest has been slain! The temple festival is suspended!”

The news arrived rapidly. The body had been found, lying upon a bench of rose-marble, in a solitary place at the summit of the gardens. A long golden pin pierced the left breast; the wound had not bled but the assassin had cut off all the young woman’s hair and carried away the antique comb of the queen Nitocris.

After the first cries of anguish, a profound stupor spread. The multitude increased each moment. The entire town was there, a sea of bare heads and women’s headgear, an immense troop which debouched simultaneously from streets full of blue shadow into the dazzling light of the Agora of Alexandria. No such gathering had been seen since the day when Ptolemy Auletes was overthrown by the partisans of Berenice. And yet, political revolutions appeared less terrible than this crime of sacrilege upon which the welfare of the city might depend. The men thronged around the witnesses. New details were demanded. New conjectures were offered. Women imparted to late arrivals the theft of the celebrated mirror. The best informed affirmed that the two simultaneous crimes had been committed by the same hand. But whose hand? Girls who, the day before, had presented their offerings for the following year, feared lest the goddess withhold her consideration and sobbed, crouching, their heads in their robes.

An ancient superstition would have it that two such events would be followed by a more serious third. The crowd awaited this. After the mirror and the comb, what had the mysterious thief taken? A stifling atmosphere, inflamed by the south wind and full of dusty sand, weighed upon the motionless crowd.

Imperceptibly, as though this human mass were a single being, it was seized by a shudder which increased by degrees to panic, and all eyes became fixed on the same point of the horizon.

This was the distant extremity of the great rectilinear avenue which traversed Alexandria from the Canopic Gate, and led from the Temple to the Agora. There,

at the highest point of the gentle slope, where the way opened upon the sky, a second terrified multitude had just appeared and descended, running toward the first.

“The courtesans! The sacred courtesans!”

No one stirred. No one dared go to meet them for fear of learning of a new disaster. They arrived like a living inundation, preceded by the dull round of their course upon the ground. They raised their arms, they elbowed each other. They seemed to flee an army. They could be recognized, now. Their robes could be distinguished, their girdles, their hair. Rays of light struck the golden jewels. They were quite near. They opened their mouths... The silence was absolute.

“The of the goddess has been stolen, the true pearls of the Anadyomene!”

A clamor of despair greeted the fatal words. The crowd recoiled at first like a wave, then surged forward, beating against the walls, filling the road, engulfing the terrified women, into the long avenue of the Drome toward the undone Holy Immortal.

Chapter Four

THE RESPONSE

AND the Agora stood empty like a beach after the tide. Not entirely empty; a man and a woman remained, those who alone knew the secret of the great public emotion and who, one through the other, had caused it: Chrysis and Demetrios.

The young man was seated on a block of marble near the gate. The young woman was standing at the other extremity of the square. They could not recognize each other, but they divined one another mutually. Chrysis ran through the glare of the sun, drunken with pride, and, at last, with desire.

“Thou hast done it!” she cried. “Thou hast done it!”

“Yes,” said the young man, simply. “Thou art obeyed.”

She threw herself upon his knees and clasped him in a delicious embrace.

“I love thee! I love thee! I have never felt what I feel now. Gods! Now I know what it is to be in love! Thou seest it, my beloved, I give thee more than I promised thee day before yesterday. I who never desired anyone—I did not dream I would change so quickly. I would have loved thee; but now I give thee all that I have of good, all that I have of innocence, sincere and impassioned, all my soul, which is virgin, Demetrios, believe it!

[paragraph continues] Come with me, let us leave this town for a time, let us go to a hidden place, where there will be but thee and me. There we will have days such as the world has never known. Never has a lover done what thou hast done for me. Never has a woman loved as I love; it is not possible! It is not possible! I can hardly speak, my throat is so choked. Thou seest, I weep. I know also, now, why one weeps: it is from too much happiness... But thou dost not reply! thou sayest nothing! Kiss me...”

Demetrios stretched out his right leg, to lower his knee which was becoming a little tired. Then he made the young woman rise, arose himself, shook his garment to aerate the folds, and said softly, with a rather enigmatic little smile, “No... Farewell!”

And he walked away with a tranquil step.

Chrysis, dumbfounded, stood with open mouth and dangling hands. "What?... What... what sayest thou?"

"I say farewell," he articulated without raising his voice. "But... But then it was thou who..."

"Yes. I had promised thee."

"Then... I do not understand."

"My dear, that thou understandest or not is of no importance to me. I leave this little mystery to thy meditations. If what thou hast told me is true, they threaten to be prolonged. Here is something that comes handy to occupy them. Farewell."

"Demetrios! What do I hear?... Whence has this tone come to thee? Is it indeed thou who speakest? Explain to me! I conjure thee! What has happened between us? I could dash my head against the walls..."

"Must I repeat, a hundred times, the same thing to thee? Yes,

I have taken the mirror; yes, I have killed the priestess Touni to have the antique comb; yes, I have taken from the neck of the goddess the great seven-fold necklace of pearls. I was to deliver the three gifts to thee in exchange for a single sacrifice on thy part. That would be to value it highly, would it not? Now I have ceased to attribute this considerable value to it and I ask nothing more of thee. Act the same in thy turn and let us part. I wonder that thou dost not yet understand in the least a situation of such striking simplicity."

"Then keep thy presents! Am I thinking of them? It is thou whom I wish, thou alone..."

"Yes, I know it. But once more, I no longer wish on my side; and as the consent of both lovers is required for an assignation, our union is in danger of not being realized if I persist in my views. I am trying to make thee understand, with all the verbal clearness of which I am capable. I see that it is insufficient; but as it is not in my power to make it more perfect, I beg thee to accept with a good grace the fact as it is without penetrating any obscurity it has for thee, since thou dost not admit its possibility. I earnestly desire to close this interview which can have

no result and which may perhaps lead me into being disagreeable.”

“They have spoken to thee of me!”

“No.”

“Oh! I divine it! They have spoken to thee of me; do not say no! They have told thee evil of me! I have terrible enemies, Demetrios! Thou must not listen to them. I swear to thee by the gods, those women lie!”

“I do not know them.”

“Believe me! Believe me, Well-Beloved! What interest would

[paragraph continues] I have in deceiving thee since I expect nothing of thee but thyself? Thou art the first to whom I have spoken thus...”

Demetrios looked her in the eyes. “It is too late,” he said. “I have had thee.”

“Thou ravest... When was that? Where? How?”

“I speak the truth. I have had thee in spite of thyself. What I expected of thy favors, thou hast given me, unknown to thyself. Thou didst lead me in dreams, last night, to the country whither thou wouldst go, and thou wert fair... Ah! how fair thou wert, Chrysis! I have returned from that country. No human will can force me to see it again. One never finds happiness twice in the same way. I am not mad to the point of spoiling a happy memory. I owe thee this, wouldst thou say? But as I have loved only thy shadow, thou wilt dispense me, my dear, from thanking thy reality.”

Chrysis put her hands to her temples. “It is abominable! It is abominable! And he dares say it! He is content with it!”

“Thou becomest quickly precise. I told thee I had dreamed; art thou sure I was sleeping? I told thee I had been happy; does happiness, for thee, consist exclusively in this coarse physical emotion which thou provokest so well, thou hast told me, and which thou hast no power to diversify, since it is perceptibly the same with all women who give themselves? No, it is thyself whom thou belittlest in taking on this unseemly behavior. I think thou knowest not all the joys which are born of thy steps. The reason that mistresses differ, is that each

has personal ways of preparing and concluding an occasion which, after all, is as monotonous as it is necessary and which, considered by itself, would not be worth all the trouble we take to find a perfect mistress.

In this preparation and in this conclusion, among all women, thou excellent. At least, I have had pleasure in imagining so, and perhaps thou wilt grant me that, after having dreamed the Aphrodite of the Temple, my imagination has not had great trouble in representing the woman thou art. Once more, I will not tell thee if it were a nocturnal dream or a waking fancy. Let it suffice thee to know that, dreamed or conceived, thine image has appeared to me in an extraordinary setting. Illusion; but, above all, I will prevent thee, Chrysis, from undeceiving rue."

"And I, in all that, what dost thou make of me, me who loveth thee still in spite of the horrors I hear from thy mouth? Was I conscious of thine odious dream? Have I shared in this happiness of which thou speakest and which thou hast stolen from me, stolen!... That confounds thought. I shall go mad."

Here Demetrios dropped his tone of raillery and said, in a slightly trembling voice, "Wert thou troubled about me when thou didst profit by my sudden passion to exact, in an instant of madness, three acts which might have shattered my existence and which will leave in me forever the memory of a triple shame?"

"If I have done that, it was to attach thee. I would never have had thee if I had given myself to thee."

"Good. Thou hast been satisfied. Thou hast held me, not for long, but thou hast held me nevertheless, in the slavery thou didst wish. Suffer me to free myself this day!"

"I am the only slave, Demetrios."

"Yes, thou or I, merely the one of us two who loves the other. Slavery! Slavery! That is the true name of passion. You all have but a single dream, but a single idea in the brain: to make your weakness break the strength of man and your futility govern his intelligence! What you wish, as soon as you begin to grow, is not to love or be loved, but to bind a man to your ankles, to debase him, to bow his head and put your sandals upon it. Then you can, according to your ambition, tear from us sword, chisel or compass, break all which surpasses you, emasculate all which frightens you, take Herakles by the nose and make him

spin flax! But when you cannot bow either his forehead or his character, you adore the hand which strikes you, the knee which bears you down, even the mouth which insults you! The man who has refused to kiss your bare feet caps your desires. He who has not wept when you left his house can drag you to it by the hair: our love is reborn of our tears. For a single thing consoles you for not imposing slavery, love-smitten women! It is to submit to it."

"Ah! beat me if thou wilt! But love me afterward!" And she embraced him so suddenly that he had no time to turn aside his lips. He disengaged himself from her two arms at once.

"I detest thee. Farewell," he said.

But Chrysis clung to his mantle. "Do not lie. Thou adorest me. Thy soul is all full of me; but thou art ashamed at having yielded. Listen, Well-Beloved! If only that is wanting to console thy pride, I am ready to give, to have thee, more yet than I demanded of thee. Let me make some sacrifice for thee; after our union I will not complain of life."

Demetrios gazed at her curiously; and like her, three nights before upon the jetty, he said, "What oath makest thou?"

"By the Aphrodite, also."

"Thou dost not believe in the Aphrodite. Swear by Iahveh Sabaoth."

The Galilaean paled. "One does not swear by Iahveh."

"Thou refusest?"

"It is a terrible oath."

"It is the one I will have."

She hesitated some time, then said in a low voice, "I make the oath by Iahveh. What demandest thou of me, Demetrios?" The young man was silent.

"Speak, Well-Beloved," said Chrysis. "Tell me quickly. I am afraid."

"Oh! it is very little."

“But what?”

“I do not wish to tell thee to give me, in thy turn, three gifts, were they as simple as the first were rare. That would be against custom. But I can ask thee to receive gifts, can I not?”

“Surely,” said Chrysis, joyfully.

“This mirror, this comb, this necklace, which thou hast made me take for thee—thou didst not hope to use them, didst thou? A stolen mirror, the comb of a victim, and the necklace of the goddess; those were not jewels which one could display.”

“What an idea!”

“No. Indeed I did not think so. Then it was in pure cruelty that thou didst impel me to ravish them at the price of the three crimes by which the entire town is overwhelmed today. Well, thou wilt wear them.

“Thou wilt go into the little closed garden where the statue of Stygian Hermes stands. This place is always deserted and thou wilt not risk being disturbed there. Thou wilt remove the left heel of the god. The stone is broken, thou wilt see. There, in the interior of the pedestal, thou wilt find the mirror of Bacchis and thou wilt take it in thy hand; thou wilt find the great comb of

[paragraph continues] Nitocris and thou wilt plunge it into thy hair; thou wilt find the seven-fold pearl necklace of the goddess Aphrodite and thou wilt put it about thy neck. Thus bedecked, fair Chrysis, thou wilt go through the town. The crowd will deliver thee to the queen’s soldiers; but thou wilt have what thou didst wish and I will come to see thee in thy prison before sunrise.”

Chapter Five

THE GARDEN OF HERMANUBIS

CHRYISIS'S first movement was to shrug. She would not be so naive as to keep her oath!

The second was to go and see.

A growing curiosity impelled her toward the mysterious place where Demetrios had hidden the three criminal spoils. She wished to take them, touch them with her hand, make them shine in the sun, possess them an instant. It seemed to her that victory would not be quite complete until she had grasped the objects of her ambitions.

As for Demetrios, she would find a way to recapture him by some ulterior maneuver. How could it be that he had detached himself from her forever? The passion which she supposed in him was not of those which flicker out without return in the heart of man. The women who have been much loved form an elective household in the memory and a meeting with a former mistress, even hated, even forgotten, awakens an insurmountable inquiet whence a new love may spring. Chrysis knew this. However ardent she herself might be, however anxious to conquer this first man she had ever loved, she was not mad enough to buy him at the price of her life when she saw so many other ways of seducing him more simply.

And yet... what a sublime end he had proposed for her!

Under the eyes of an innumerable crowd, to bear the antique mirror in which Sappho had gazed, the comb which had gathered up the royal hair of Nitocris, the necklace of sea pearls which had rolled in the shell of the goddess Anadyomene... Then from the evening until morning to have Demetrios with her, to know at last how the deepest love can make a woman feel... and, toward the middle of the day, to die without effort... What an incomparable destiny!

She closed her eyes...

But no; she would not let herself be tempted.

She ascended the street which led in a straight line across Rhacotis to the Great Serapeion. This road, pierced by the Greeks, seemed somehow incongruous in this quarter of angular alleys. The two populations mingled grotesquely there, in a promiscuity still a little tinged with hate. Among the Egyptians dressed in blue skirts, the unbleached tunics of the Hellenes made splashes of white. Chrysis ascended rapidly, without listening to the conversations where the people entertained each other with the crimes committed for her.

Before the steps of the monument, she turned to the right, entered a dark street, then another where the terraces of the houses nearly touched, traversed a small star-shaped place where, near a spot of sunlight, two very brown little girls were playing in a fountain, and finally she stopped.

The garden of Hermes-Anubis was a little necropolis, abandoned long since, a sort of forgotten territory where relatives no longer came bringing libations to the dead, and which passers-by turned aside to avoid. In the midst of the crumbling tombs, Chrysis advanced in the greatest silence, frightened by each stone which crackled beneath her feet. The wind, always laden with fine sand, shook the hair upon her temples and swelled out her veil of scarlet silk toward the white leaves of the sycamores.

She discovered the statue between three funereal monuments which hid it from all sides and enclosed it in a triangle. The place was well chosen to bury a mortal secret.

Chrysis slipped as best she could into the narrow, stony passage. Seeing the statue, she paled slightly.

The jackal-headed god was standing, the right leg advanced, the headdress falling and pierced with two holes whence issued the arms. The head was bent from the height of the rigid body, following the movement of the hands which made the gesture of the embalmer. The left foot was detached.

With a slow and fearful look, Chrysis assured herself that she was quite alone. A sound behind her made her shudder; but it was only a little green lizard which disappeared into a fissure of the marble.

Then, at last, she dared lay hand upon the broken foot of the statue. She raised it obliquely and not without some trouble, for it drew with it a part of the hollowed socle which lay upon the pedestal. And underneath the stone she beheld,

suddenly, the gleam of the enormous pearls.

She drew out the whole necklace. How heavy it was! she would not have thought that pearls almost without settings would lie with such a weight in the hand. The globes were all marvelously round and of an almost lunar orieny. The seven strands succeeded each other, increasing like ripples upon star-lit water.

She laid it about her neck.

With one hand she arranged it, closing her eyes the better to feel the cold of the pearls on her skin. She spaced the seven rows regularly below her throat and let the last fall into the recess of her bosom.

Next she took the ivory comb, considered it for some time, caressed the little white figure which was sculptured in the thin crown, and plunged the jewel into her hair several times before fixing it as she wished.

Then she drew the silver mirror from the socle, looked into it and saw there her triumph, her eyes illuminated with pride, her shoulders adorned with the spoils of the gods...

And, enveloping herself even to the hair in her great scarlet cyclas, she went out from the necropolis without putting off the terrible jewels.

Chapter Six

THE WALLS OF CRIMSON

WHEN, from the mouths of the hierodules, the mob had learned for the second time the certainty of the sacrilege, it flowed out slowly across the gardens. The temple courtesans thronged by hundreds along the paths of black olives. Some strewed ashes upon their heads. Others bowed their foreheads into the dust or tore their hair or clutched their breasts, in token of calamity. Many sobbed, their eyes hidden in their arms.

The crowd descended silently into the town, through the Drome and out upon the quays. A universal mourning filled the streets with consternation. The terrified shop-keepers had precipitately withdrawn their many-colored wares, and wooden shutters fastened by bars succeeded each other like a monotonous palisade along the ground floors of the blind houses.

The life of the port was arrested. The sailors sat motionless upon the stone parapets, their cheeks resting in their hands. The vessels ready to depart had lifted their long oars and furled their pointed sails along the masts which swayed in the wind. Those who wished to enter the roadstead waited for signals in the offing and some of their passengers who had relatives in the queen's palace, fearing a bloody revolution, sacrificed to the gods of the underworld.

At the corner of the island of the Pharos and of the jetty, Rhodis, in the multitude, recognized Chrysis near leer.

"Ah! Chryse! Protect me, I am afraid. Myrto is here, but the crowd is so great... I am afraid they will separate us. Take our hands."

"Thou knowest," said Myrtocleia, "thou knowest what has happened? Do they know the guilty one? Is he being tortured? Since Herostratos, no one has seen anything like this. The Olympians abandon us. What will become of us?"

Chrysis did not reply.

"We gave doves," said the little flute-player. "Will the goddess remember that? The goddess is surely angry. And thou, and thou, my poor Chryse? Thou who

wert to be, today, either very happy or very powerful...”

“All is done,” said the courtesan.

“What sayest thou!”

Chrysis took two steps backward and raised her right hand to her mouth.

“Look well, my Rhodis; look, Myrtocleia. What you will see, today, human eyes have never seen since the day the goddess descended upon Ida. And until the end of the world, it will never be seen again upon the earth.”

The two friends recoiled in astonishment, believing her mad. But Chrysis, lost in her dream, walked to the monstrous Pharos, the flaming mountain of marble in eight hexagonal tiers. She pushed the bronze door and, profiting by the public inattention, she closed it from the inside by lowering the clanging bars.

Some moments passed.

The crowd muttered continuously. The living surge added its rumble to the regular beat of the waters.

Suddenly a cry arose, repeated by a hundred thousand throats.

“Aphrodite!!

—Aphrodite!!!”

A thunder of cries burst out. The joy, the enthusiasm of a whole people sang in an indescribable tumult of gladness at the foot of the walls of the Pharos.

The throng which covered the jetty swarmed violently into the island, swept over the rocks, mounted upon the houses, on the signal masts, on the fortified towers. The island was full, more than full, and the crowd arrived, still more compact, like the sweep of a flooded river, throwing back to the sea long human ranks from the height of the abrupt cliff.

The end of this inundation of men could not be seen. From the Palace of the Ptolemies to the wall of the Canal, the banks of the Royal Gate, from the Great Gate and from the Eunostos, vomited a serried mass fed indefinitely by the

tributary streets. Above this ocean, stirred by immense eddies, foaming with arms and faces, the yellow-veiled litter of the queen Berenice tossed like a bark in peril. And from moment to moment, augmented by new mouths, the noise became formidable.

Neither Helen on the Skaian Gates, nor Phryne in the waters of Eleusis, nor Thais inspiring the burning of Persepolis have known what triumph is.

Chrysis had appeared through the door of the occident, upon the first terrace of the red monument.

She was nude like the goddess; she held in each hand a corner of her scarlet veil which the wind tossed out against the evening sky, and with her right hand the mirror reflecting the evening sun.

Slowly, with bowed head, moving with infinite grace and majesty, she ascended the exterior slope which girdled like a spiral the tall scarlet tower. Her veil flickered like a flame. The flaring twilight reddened the pearl necklace like a rubescent river. She mounted, and in this glory her dazzling skin bloomed forth in all the magnificence of flesh, blood, fire, bluish carmine, velvety red, vivid rose, as, turning with the great crimson walls, she ascended toward the heavens.

BOOK FIVE

Chapter One

THE SUPREME NIGHT

THOU art loved of the gods,” said the old gaoler. “If I, a poor slave, had done the hundredth part of thy crimes, I would have seen myself tied on a wooden horse, hung by the feet, torn by blows, flayed by pincers. They would have poured vinegar in my nostrils, they would have laden me with bricks until I stifled, and, if I were dead of pain, my body would already feed the jackals of the burned plains. But for thee who hast stolen everything, killed everything, profaned everything, they reserve the gentle hemlock and they lend thee a good room in the meantime. Zeus blast me if I know why! Thou must know someone at the palace.”

“Give me some figs,” said Chrysis. “My mouth is dry.”

The old slave brought her, in a green basket, a dozen figs at the point of perfect ripeness.

Chrysis remained alone.

She sat down and rose again, she made a circuit of her room, she struck the walls with the palm of her hand without thinking of what she was doing. She unrolled her hair to refresh it, then knotted it up almost immediately.

They had made her put on a long vestment of white wool. The stuff was warm. Chrysis was quite bathed in perspiration.

[paragraph continues] She stretched her arms, yawned and leaned her elbows on the ledge of the high window.

Outside, the dazzling moon shone in a sky of limpid purity, a sky so pale and so light that not a star was to be seen.

It was in such a night that, seven years before, Chrysis had left the land of Gennesaret.

She remembered... They were merchants of ivory. They had decked out their long-tailed horses with many-colored tufts. They had met her at the edge of a round well...

And before that, the bluish lake, the transparent sky, the light air of the country of Galilee...

The house was surrounded by pink flax and tamarisks. Thorny caper bushes pricked the fingers about to seize the moths... One could imagine one saw the color of the wind in the undulations of the delicate grasses...

The little girls bathed in a limpid brook where one found red shells under the bushes of flowering laurel, and there were flowers on the water, flowers in all the meadow and great lilies on the mountains. And the line of the mountains was that of a young breast...

Chrysis closed her eyes with a faint smile which was suddenly extinguished. The idea of death had just seized her. And she felt that, until the end, she could never cease her thoughts.

“Ah!” she said to herself, “what have I done! Why did I meet that man? Why did he listen to me? Why did I let myself be caught, in my turn? Why must it be that, even now, I regret nothing?—Not to love or not to live: that is the choice God offered me. And what have I done to be punished?”

And there returned to her memory fragments of sacred verses she had heard quoted in her childhood. For seven years she had not thought of them. But they returned, one after another, with an implacable precision to apply themselves to her life and to predict her torment.

She murmured: “It is written:

“I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth,

The love of thine espousals,

When thou wentest after me in the wilderness,

In a land that was not sown.

For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bonds.

And thou saidst, I will not transgress;

When upon every high hill and under every green tree,

Thou wanderest, playing the harlot. [*1]

“It is written:

“And she shall follow after her lovers,

And she shall seek them.

For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil,

And multiplied her silver and gold.

Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof,

And my wine in the season thereof,

And will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. [*2]

“It is written:

“How canst thou say, I am not polluted?

See thy way in the valley,

Know what thou hast done.

Thou art a swift dromedary, traversing her ways;

A wild ass, used to the wilderness.

In her month they shall find her. [*3]

“It is written:

“She had played the harlot in the land of Egypt,

For she doted upon their paramours,

Whose flesh is as the flesh of asses,

And whose issue is like the issue of horses.

Thus thou calledst to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth,

In bruising thy teats by the Egyptians for the paps of thy youth. [*4]

“Oh!” she cried. “It is I! It is I! And it is written again:

“Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers;

Yet return again unto me, saith the Lord. [*5]

“But my chastisement is written also:

“Behold I will raise up thy lovers against thee,

And they shall deal furiously with thee:

They shall take away thy nose and thine ears;

And thy remnant shall fall by the sword. [*6]

“And again:

“And Huzzab shall be led away captive,

She shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her

As with the voice of doves,

Tabering upon their breasts. [*7]

“But one knows what the scripture says,” she added, to console herself. “Is it not written elsewhere:

“I will not punish thy daughters. [*8]

“And elsewhere does not the scripture counsel:

“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity which he hath given thee under the sun; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”
[*9]

She shuddered and repeated in a low voice:

“For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

“Truly, the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.
[*10]

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was.” [*11]

With a new tremor she repeated more slowly:

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was.”

And as she clutched her head in her hands, to repress her thought, she felt suddenly, without having foreseen it, the mortuary form of her skull through the living skin: the hollow temples, the enormous orbits, the shortened nose under the cartilage and the projecting jaws.

Horror! Then it was that she was to become! With a terrifying lucidity she had the vision of her corpse and she drew her hands over her body to go to the depths of this idea which, although so simple, had but just come to her—that she bore her skeleton in her, that it was not a result of death, a metamorphosis, a culmination, but a thing which one carries about always, an inseparable specter of the human form—and that the scaffolding of life is already the symbol of the tomb.

A furious desire to live, to see all again, to recommence everything, seized her suddenly. It was a revolt in the face of death; the impossibility of admitting that she would not see the evening of this day now being born; the impossibility of understanding how this beauty, this body, this active thought, this luxurious life of her flesh were, in full ardor, to cease their being and fall into decay.

The door opened quietly.

Demetrios entered.

Footnotes

^225:1 Jeremiah, 2: 2, 20.

^225:2 Hosea, 2: 7, 8, 9.

^226:3 Jeremiah, 2: 23, 24.

^226:4 Ezekiel, 23: 22, 25.

^226:5 Ezekiel, 23: 20, 21.

^226:6 Nahum, 3: 7.

^226:7 Jeremiah, 3: 1.

^227:8 Hosea, 4: 14.

^227:9 Ecclesiastes, 9: 7-10.

^227:10 Ecclesiastes, 11: 7.

^227:11 Ecclesiastes, 11: 9; 12 5-7.

Chapter Two

THE DUST RETURNS TO THE EARTH

“DEMETRIOS!” she cried.

And she sprang forward...

But after having carefully closed the wooden latch, the young man had not moved, and he maintained in his look so profound a tranquillity that Chrysis was suddenly frozen.

She had hoped for a transport, a movement of his arms, his lips, something, an outstretched hand...

Demetrios did not move.

He waited an instant in silence, with a perfect correctness, as though he wished to establish clearly his disengagement.

Then, seeing that nothing was demanded of him, he made four steps to the window and leaned back in the opening, watching the day appear.

Chrysis had seated herself on the low bed, her look fixed and almost stupid.

Then Demetrios spoke to himself.

“It is better,” he said, “that it should be thus. Such plays in the moment of death would, after all, be dismal enough. I wonder only that she would not have had a presentiment from the beginning and that she should have welcomed me with this enthusiasm. For me, it is a finished adventure. I regret a little that it should have ended thus, for after all, Chrysis has done no other wrong than to express very frankly an ambition which, without doubt, might have been that of most women; and had it not been necessary to throw a victim to the public indignation, I would have contented myself in having this too ardent girl banished, in order to deliver myself of her and yet leave her the joys of life. But there has been a scandal and nothing else can avail. Such are the effects of passion. Voluptuousness without thought—or the contrary, the idea without

enjoyment—have no such sad result. One may have many mistresses but must keep himself, with the help of the gods, from forgetting that all lips are alike.”

Having thus summed up one of his moral theories by an audacious aphorism, he resumed, easily, the normal current of his ideas.

He recalled vaguely an invitation to dine which he had accepted for the evening before, then forgotten in the whirlwind of events, and he promised to send an apology.

He reflected whether he should offer his tailor-slave for sale—an old man who remained attached to the cutting traditions of the preceding reign and was but imperfectly successful with the cup-shaped folds of the new tunics.

His mind was so free that he even drew, upon the wall, with the point of his modeling tool, a hasty study for his group of “Zagreus and the Titans,” a variant which modified the movement of the right arm of the principal personage.

Hardly was it finished when someone knocked gently upon the door. Demetrios opened it without haste. The old executioner entered, followed by two helmeted hoplites.

“I bring the little cup,” he said with an obsequious smile, to the address of the royal lover.

Demetrios kept silence.

Chrysis raised her head frantically.

“Come, my girl,” continued the gaoler. “The moment has come. The hemlock is all crushed. There is truly nothing to do but take it. Do not be afraid. One does not suffer at all.”

Chrysis looked at Demetrios, who did not turn aside his eyes.

Holding ever upon him her large black eyes surrounded by green light, she held out her right hand, took the cup and slowly carried it to her mouth.

She touched it with her lips. The bitterness of the poison and also the pains of the poisoning had been tempered by a honeyed narcotic.

She drank half of the cup, then, with a gesture she might have seen at the theater, in the Thyestes of Agathan, or which really issued from a spontaneous sentiment, she offered the rest to Demetrios... But with raised hand, the young man declined this indiscreet proposition.

Then the Galilaean swallowed the remainder of the brew, down to the green dregs which remained at the bottom. And there came to her lips a heart-rending smile which contained, indeed, a little scorn.

“What must I do?” she asked the gaoler.

“Walk around the room, my girl, until thy legs feel heavy. Then thou wilt lie down upon thy back and the poison will act by itself.”

Chrysis walked to the window, leaned her hand upon the wall, her temple on her hand, and cast toward the violet dawn the final look of lost youth.

The east was drowned in a lake of color. A long, livid band, like a strip of water, enveloped the horizon in an olive girdle. Above, many tints were born, one from the other, liquid pools of iridescent sky, sea-green or lilac, which melted imperceptibly into the leaden azure of the heavens. Then these degrees of shade lifted slowly, a golden line appeared, ascended, enlarged: a slender thread of crimson lighted this morose dawn and, in a deluge of blood, the sun was born.

“It is written:

“—The light is sweet...”

She remained thus, standing as long as her legs could sustain her. The hoplites were obliged to carry her to the bed when she made a sign that she staggered.

There the old man disposed the white folds of her robe along her outstretched limbs. Then he touched her feet and asked her: “Dost thou feel?”

She replied:

“No.”

He touched her knees and asked her:

“Dost thou feel?”

She made a negative sign and, suddenly, with a movement of her mouth and of her shoulders (for even her hands were dead), seized again by a supreme ardor and perhaps by regret for this sterile hour, she lifted herself toward Demetrios... But before he could have replied, she fell back lifeless, her eyes darkened forever.

Then the executioner drew the upper folds of her garment over her face; and one of the attendant soldiers, supposing that a more tender past has once united this young man and woman, cut off, with the end of his sword, the extreme ringlet of her hair upon the stones.

Demetrios touched it with his hand and, in truth, it was Chrysis herself, the surviving gold of her beauty, itself the pretext of her name...

He took the warm lock between thumb and fingers, separated it slowly, little by little, and under the sole of his shoe he ground it into the dust.

Chapter Three

CHRYISIS IMMORTAL

WHEN Demetrios found himself alone in his workshop encumbered with red marbles, with stands and scaffoldings, he desired to set himself at work.

The chisel in his left hand and the mallet in his right, he took up, listlessly, an interrupted sketch. It was the neck and shoulders of a gigantic horse designed for the temple of Poseidon. Beneath the cropped mane, the skin of the neck, wrinkled by a movement of the head, incurved geometrically like an undulous hollow of the sea.

Three days before, the detail of this regular development of muscles concentrated in Demetrios's spirit all the interest of daily life; but on the morning of Chrysis's death the aspect of things seemed changed. Less calm than he wished to be, Demetrios could not fix his occupied thought. A sort of veil he could not lift interposed between him and the marble. He threw aside his mallet and began to walk up and down past the dusty pedestals.

Suddenly he crossed the court, called a slave and said to him:

"Prepare the basin and the aromatics. Thou wilt perfume me after having bathed me, thou wilt give me my white vestments and thou wilt light the round perfume-burners."

When he finished his toilette, he summoned two other slaves.

"Go," he said, "to the queen's prison; deliver this lump of clay to the gaoler and have him carry it into the room where the courtesan Chrysis lies dead. If the body is not already thrown into the pit, you will say that they shall abstain from executing anything until I have given the order. Run quickly. Go."

He put a modeling tool into the fold of his girdle and opened the principal door upon the deserted avenue of the Drome...

Upon the threshold, he stopped suddenly, stupefied by the immense light of the African noon.

The street should have been white and the houses white also, but the flame of the meridian sun flooded the dazzling surfaces with such a fury of reflections that the walls of lime and the paving stones threw back, simultaneously, prodigious incandescences of shadow blue, of red and of green, of raw ochre and of hyacinth. Full quivering colors seemed to displace each other in the air and to cover only through transparence the waving of the uneven facades of the houses. The lilies themselves were deformed behind this brilliance; the right wall of the street rounded into space, floated like a veil, and in certain places became invisible. A dog lying near a curb was actually crimson.

Enthusiastic with admiration, Demetrios saw in this spectacle the symbol of his new existence. Long enough he had lived in solitary night, in silence and in peace. Long enough he had taken for light the moonbeams and for ideal the nonchalant line of a too delicate movement. His work was not virile. Over the skin of his statues there was an icy tremor.

During the tragic adventure which had just overthrown his intelligence, he had felt, for the first time, the full breath of life filling his breast. If he feared a second test, if, issuing victorious from the struggle, he had sworn to himself, before all things, to expose himself no more to a departure from his fine attitude taken before others, at least he had just comprehended that only that is worth the trouble of being imagined which attains, by means of marble, color or phrase, one of the profundities of human emotion —and that formal beauty is but a vague matter, susceptible of being always transfigured through the expression of sorrow or of joy.

As he finished thus the course of his thoughts he arrived before the door of the criminal prison.

His two slaves awaited him there.

“We have brought the lump of red clay,” they said. “The body is on the bed. They have not touched it. The gaoler salutes thee and recommends himself to thee.”

The young man entered in silence, followed the long corridor, ascended a few steps, entered the chamber of the dead, and carefully closed himself in.

The cadaver was extended, the head low and covered with a veil, the hands stretched out, the feet together. The fingers were laden with rings, two silver

anklets encircled the pale ankles and the nails of each toe were still red with powder.

Demetrios put his hand to the veil to lift it; but hardly had he seized it when a dozen flies escaped quickly from the opening.

He shuddered to his very feet... However, he drew aside the tissue of white wool and folded it around the hair.

Chrysis's face had become illuminated, little by little, with the eternal expression which death lends to the eyelids and to the hair of the dead. Some azure veinlets in the bluish whiteness of the cheeks gave to the motionless head an appearance of cold marble.

[Click to enlarge](#)

The diaphanous nostrils opened above the fine lips. The fragility of the ears was almost immaterial. Never, in any light, not even that of his dreams, had Demetrios seen such more than human beauty and such dazzling radiance of skin.

And then he recalled the words spoken by Chrysis during their first meeting: "Thou hast seen only my face. Thou knowest not how beautiful I am!" An intense emotion suddenly choked him. He wished to know. He could do so.

Of his three days of passion, he wishes to keep a souvenir which will last longer than himself—to bare this admirable body, to pose it like a model in the violent attitude he saw in his dream, and to create, from the dead body, the statue of Immortal Life.

He detaches the buckle and the knot. He opens the drapery. The body lies heavy. He raises it. The head falls back. The arms hang down. He draws off the whole robe and throws it into the middle of the room. The body falls back heavily.

With his hands under the cool arms, Demetrios slides the corpse to the head of the couch. He turns the head upon the left cheek, gathers and spreads the hair splendidly under the recumbent back. Then he raises the right arm, bends the forearm above the forehead, clenches the still flexible fingers upon the stuff of a cushion; and completes the pose of the recumbent Aphrodite.

Next he disposes the limbs, one extended stiffly aside and the other with raised knee. He rectifies some details, bends the waist to the left, stretches out the right foot and takes away the bracelets, the necklaces and the rings, in order not to trouble, by a single dissonance, the pure and complete harmony.

The model has taken the pose.

Demetrios throws upon the table the lump of damp clay which he has had brought there. He presses it, he kneads it, he draws it out according to the human form; a sort of barbarous monster is born of his ardent fingers; he looks.

The motionless corpse holds its impassioned position. But a slender thread of blood issues from the right nostril, flows over the lip and falls, drop by drop, under the half opened mouth.

Demetrios continues. The sketch becomes animated, precise, life-like. The left arm curves over the body as it had done in his dream. The muscles seem to tense themselves violently. The toes curl back.... When the night ascended from the earth and darkened the low chamber, Demetrios had finished the statue.

He made four slaves carry the sketch into his workshop. That very evening by lamplight, he had a block of Parian marble rough hewn, and, a year after that day, he was still working upon the marble.

Chapter Four

PITY

“GAOLER, open to us! Gaoler, open to us!” Rhodis and Myrtocleia were knocking at the closed door.

The door partly opened. “What do you want?”

“To see our friend,” said Myrto. “To see Chrysis, poor Chrysis who died this morning.”

It is not permitted; go away!”

“Oh! let us, let us come in. No one will know it. We will not tell of it. She was our friend. Let us see her again. We will come out soon. We will make no noise.”

“And if I am caught, my little girls? If I am punished because of you? It is not you who will pay the penalty.”

“Thou wilt not be caught. Thou art alone here. There are no other condemned. Thou has sent away the soldiers. We know all that. Let us in.”

“Well! Do not stay long. Here is the key. It is the third door. Tell me when you go. It is late, and I want to go to bed.”

The good old man handed them the key of beaten iron which hung at his girdle and the two little virgins ran at once, on their silent sandals, through the dark corridors.

Then the gaoler re-entered his office and discontinued his useless surveillance. The punishment of imprisonment was not applied in Greek Egypt and the little white house which the gentle old man had the mission to keep served only to lodge those condemned to death. In the intervals between executions it remained almost abandoned.

At the moment the great key entered the lock, Rhodis arrested her friend’s hand.

“I do not know if I dare see her,” she said. “I loved her well, Myrto... I am afraid... Enter first, wilt thou?”

Myrtocleia pushed the door; but as soon as she had cast her eyes into the room she cried:

“Do not come in, Rhodis! Wait for me here.”

“Oh! what is it? Thou art afraid also... What is on the couch? Is she not dead?”

“Yes. Wait for me... I will tell thee... Stay in the corridor and do not look.”

The body had remained in the frantic attitude which Demetrios had composed to make from it the Statue of Immortal Life. But the transports of extreme joy border upon the convulsions of extreme anguish, and Myrtocleia asked herself what atrocious sufferings, what martyrdom, what rending agonies, had thus writhed the body.

On tiptoe she approached the bed.

The thread of blood continued to flow from the diaphanous nostril. The skin of the body was perfectly white; not a rosy reflection vivified the ephemeral declining statue, but some emerald-colored spots which softly tinted the relaxed body signified that millions of new lives were springing from the hardly cold flesh and demanding their turn.

Myrtocleia took the dead arm and lowered it along the hip.

[paragraph continues] She tried also to stretch out the left leg, but the knee was almost stiff and she was not able to extend it completely.

“Rhodis,” she said in a troubled voice. “Come. Thou canst enter now.”

The trembling child entered the room, her features contracted, her eyes opened.

As soon as they felt themselves together, they burst into long sobs, in each other’s arms.

“Poor Chrysis! Poor Chrysis!” repeated the child.

They kissed each other on the cheek with a desperate tenderness, and the taste of the tears spread upon their lips all the bitterness of their numbed little souls.

They wept, they wept, they gazed at each other sorrowfully and sometimes they spoke both together, in hoarse, rending voices where the words finished with sobs.

“We loved her so much! She was not a friend to us, she was like a very young mother, a little mother between us two...” Rhodis repeated: “Like a little mother...”

And Myrto, drawing near the dead, said in a low voice: “Kiss her.”

They both leaned over and placed their hands upon the bed, and with fresh sobs touched the icy forehead with their lips.

And Myrto took the head between her hands, which plunged into the hair, and she spoke to it thus: “Chrysis, my Chrysis, thou wert the fairest and most adored of women, thou so like the goddess that the people took thee for her. Where art thou now, what have they done with thee? Thou didst live to give good joy. There has never been fruit more sweet than thy kisses, nor light more clear than thine eyes. Thy skin was a glorious robe which thou shouldst never have veiled; delight floated about thee like a perpetual fragrance; when thou didst loose thine hair all glory escaped with it and when thou didst close thy heart men prayed the gods to give them death.”

Crouched on the floor, Rhodis sobbed.

“Chrysis, my Chrysis,” continued Myrtocleia, “yesterday thou wert still living and young, hoping for long days, and now, behold, thou art dead and nothing in the world can make thee say a word to us. Thou hast closed thine eyes; we were not by thee. Thou hast suffered and thou hast not known that we wept for thee behind the walls. With thy dying look thou hast sought someone and thine eyes have not met our eyes heavy with mourning and with pity.”

The flute-player still wept. The singer took her by the hand.

“Chrysis, my Chrysis, Rhodis and Myrtocleia are very sad. And sorrow more than love unites two clasped hands. They who have once wept together will never part. We will bear thy dear body to earth, Chrysidion, and we will both cut

our hair over thy tomb.”

She enveloped the beautiful body in a coverlet of the bed; then said to Rhodis, “Help me.”

They lifted her gently; but the burden was heavy for the little musicians and they laid it for the first time upon the ground.

“Let us do off our sandals,” said Myrto. “Let us walk barefoot in the corridors. The gaoler must have fallen asleep... If we do not waken him we can pass, but if he sees us he will stop us . . As for tomorrow, that does not matter; when he sees the bed empty he will say to the queen’s soldiers that he has thrown the body into the pit as the law requires. Fear nothing, Rhode... Put thy sandals in thy girdle, as I do. And come. Take the body under the knees. Let the feet pass behind. Walk without sound, slowly, slowly...”

Chapter Five

PIETY

AFTER the turning of the second street, they put down the body a second time to do on their sandals. Rhodis's feet, too delicate to walk bare, were raw and bleeding.

The night was very brilliant. All the town was silent. The iron-colored shadows were outlined sharply in the middle of the street according to the profile of the houses.

The little virgins took up their burden.

"Where are we going?" asked the child. "Where shall we lay her in the earth?"

"In the cemetery of Hermanubis. It is always deserted. She will be in peace there."

"Poor Chrysis! Would I have thought that on the day of her end I would carry her body, without torches and without a funeral car, secretly, like a stolen thing?"

Then both began to speak volubly as though they were afraid of the silence, side by side with the corpse. The last day of Chrysis's life overwhelmed them with astonishment. Whence had she the mirror, the comb and the necklace? She herself could not have taken the pearls of the goddess; the temple was so well guarded that a courtesan could not have entered there. Then someone had acted for her? But who? She was not known to have a lover among the stolistes charged with the care of the divine statue. And then, if someone had acted in her place, why had she not denounced him? And, of all things, why these three crimes? To what had they served her, except to deliver her to punishment? A woman does not commit such follies without object, unless she be in love. Was Chrysis, then, in love? And with whom?

"We shall never know," concluded the flute-player. "She has taken her secret with her and even if she has an accomplice it is not he who will tell us of it."

Here Rhodis, who had already staggered for some moments, sighed, "I can do no

more, Myrto; I can carry her no longer. I should fall on my knees. I am broken with weariness and sorrow.”

Myrtocleia put her arm about her neck.

“Try again, my dear. We must carry her. It is for her life in the underworld. If she has no sepulcher and no obolos in her hand, she will wander forever on the brink of the river of hell and when, in our turn, Rhodis, we descend to the dead, she will reproach us for our impiety and we will not know how to answer her.”

But the child, in her weakness, burst into tears in her embrace.

“Quick, quick,” continued Myrtocleia. “Here comes someone from the end of the street. Place thyself with me before the body. Hide it behind our tunics. If they see it, all will be lost...”

She interrupted herself.

“It is Timon, I recognize him. Timon with four women... Ah! Gods! what will happen! He who laughs at everything will make fun of us... But no; stay here, Rhodis, I am going to speak to him.”

And, seized by a sudden idea, she ran into the street before the little group.

“Timon,” she said, and her voice was full of pleading. “Timon, stop. I beg thee to hear me. I have grave words in my mouth. I must speak them to thee alone.”

“My poor little girl,” said the young man, “how thou art moved! Hast thou lost thy shoulder knot, or has thy doll broken her nose in-falling? That would be a quite irreparable event.”

The young girl threw him a sorrowful look; but already the four women, Philotis, Seso of Knidos, Callistion and Tryphera, fidgeted about her.

“Come, little idiot!” said Tryphera, “if thou hast drained thy nurse dry, we cannot help thee. It is almost day, thou shouldst be in bed; since when do children wander in the moonlight?”

“Her nurse!” said Philotis. “It is Timon she wants.”

“Spank her. She deserves a spanking!”

And Callistion, an arm around Myrto’s waist, lifted her from the ground, raising her little blue tunic.

But Seso interposed.

“You are mad,” she cried. “Myrto does not run after men. If she calls Timon, she has other reasons. Leave her in peace and let them get it over with!”

“Well,” said Timon, “what wilt thou of me? Come over here. Speak in my ear. Is it really serious?”

“Chrysis’s body is there, in the street,” said the still trembling young girl. “We are carrying it to the cemetery, my little friend and I, but it is heavy and we ask if thou art willing to aid us . . It will not take long... Immediately after, thou canst rejoin thy women...”

Timon looked at her sincerely.

“Poor girls! And I laughed! You are better than we... Certainly I will help you. Go rejoin thy friend and wait for me—I will come.”

Turning toward the four women: “Go to my house,” he said, “by the Street of the Potters. I will be there in a little while. Do not follow me.”

Rhdis was still seated by the head of the corpse. When she saw Timon coming, she besought: “Do not tell this! We have stolen her to save her shade. Keep our secret, we will love thee well, Timon.”

“Be reassured,” said the young man.

He took the body under the shoulders and Myrto took it under the knees. They walked in silence and Rhdis followed, with short and tottering steps.

Timon did not speak. For the second time in two days, human wrath had taken from him one of his friends; and he asked himself what extravagance thus swept spirits aside from the enchanted road which leads to unclouded happiness.

“Ataraxia!” he thought, “indifference, repose, O voluptuous serenity! Who

among men will appreciate you? Man agitates himself, struggles, hopes, when but one thing is precious: to know how to draw from the passing moments all the joys they can give and to leave one's bed as seldom as possible."

They arrived at the gate of the ruined necropolis.

"Where shall we put her?" asked Myrto.

"Near the god."

"Where is the statue? I have never entered here. I was afraid of the tombs and of the steles. I do not know the Hermanubis."

"It must be in the center of the little garden. Let us seek it. I came here once when I was a child, while pursuing a lost gazelle. Let us start through the avenue of the white sycamores. We cannot fail to discover it."

They came to it, in fact.

The violet tints of the first dawn mingled with the moonlight on the marbles. Vague and distant harmony floated among the cypress branches. The rhythmic rustle of the palms, so like to drops of falling rain, shed an illusion of coolness.

Timon opened with effort a pink stone buried in the earth. The sepulcher was hollowed out beneath the hands of the funerary god who made the gesture of the embalmer. It must have contained a cadaver, formerly, but nothing more was found in the cavity save a heap of brownish dust.

The young man descended waist-deep and held out his arms: "Give her to me," he said to Myrto. "I will lay her well within and we will close the tomb..."

But Rhodis threw herself upon the body.

"No! do not bury her so quickly! I want to see her again! A last time! A last time! Chrysis! my poor Chrysis! Ah! horror... What has she become!..."

Myrtocleia had put aside the covering rolled about the dead and the face had appeared, so rapidly altered that the two young girls recoiled. The cheeks had taken on a square shape, the eyelids and the lips were swollen like six white cushions. Already nothing remained of the more than human beauty. They closed

the thick shroud. But slipped her hand under the stuff to place the obolos destined for Charon in Chrysis's fingers.

Then both, shaken by interminable sobs, placed the relaxed, inert body in Timon's arms.

And when Chrysis was placed in the depths of the sandy tomb, Timon reopened the winding sheet. He secured the silver obolos in the relaxed fingers, he supported the head with a flat stone; over the body, from the forehead to the knees, he spread the long mass of shadowy golden hair.

Then he came forth from the pit, and the musicians, kneeling before the gaping opening, cut off each other's young hair, bound it in a single sheaf and buried it with the dead.

TOIONDE PERAS ESKhE TO SYNTAGMA

TUN PERI KhRYSIDA KAI DEMETRION

THE END