

THE TOUR
BY
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The Tour

Chapter I

The night that hung over the sea was windless and blissfully silver-pure after the glowing splendour of the day; and the great quadrireme glided evenly and softly, as though upon a lake, under a wide firmament of stars. The thin horizon was purely outlined around the oval sea; and on this wide world there was nothing but the stars and the ship.

But the ship resounded with music. There was the constantly repeated melodious phrase of the three hundred rowers, soft and monotone, in a melancholy minor, with ever the same refrain, after which the boatswain gave out the chant, after which the chorus of rowers again threw back their long, hushed phrase of melancholy, the soft, monotonous accompaniment of the wearying work, the musical encouragement to repeat the same movement of the arms and the same bending of the body over the loins.

This music rose in a mournful swell from the ship's lower deck and harmonizing with it was the soft stroke of the oars, which were like the legs of some graceful sea-animal; the ship herself, with her swanlike raised prow, suggested an elegant monster swimming through the lake-calm waters of that silvery night-world, a monster with a swan's neck and hundreds of slender, evenly-moving legs and winged with two rose-yellow sails, which rose and bellied gently at the ship's own motion, but did not swell, because the wind lay still.

While the great, winged navigium glided upon that harmony of slaves' song and oar-strokes, there came from the rear half-deck the blither song of the sailors idling after their work. It sounded cheerful with deep, bass male voices, without the rowers' melancholy; and there was one sailor who gave the time in a higher voice, for the seamen were at liberty to sing, but their singing must be artistically led, because melodious music meant a prosperous voyage and averted evil chances and did not let the shrill voices of the sirens ring from under the waters and because the pure sound of the human voice kept away the rocks drifting under the sea and compelled the sea-serpent to dive back into the deep.

And through these two choirs, through the melancholy singing of the rowers and the jubilant seamen's song, a delicate female voice let fall clear, love-yearning notes, always with a playful and wanton final phrase. It was—while as it were golden beads tinkled from twanged harp-strings: those very bright gold beads which tinkle from the strings of the little four-stringed Lesbian harp—a hymn to the goddess Aphrodite, whose name constantly rang back, plaintively and wantonly, in the singer's Greek, exotically soft against the harder Latin of the men's joy-song and the melodious melancholy phrase of the lower deck....

Publius Lucius Sabinus lay on the prow in a pavilion of Tyrian red-silk curtains and listened. The music sounding up from his ship in the silver-pure, windless night, through the blissful, wide-pure, star-strewn air, brought him a moment's respite from grief. He lay calmer now, sated with despair, with his soul of sorrow as it were bathed in the melodious music. He stared, as though without thinking, now almost free from grief, at the silver statue of Aphrodite, the patroness of his ship, in front of which an alabaster lamp burned, while a light spiral of nard curled around the goddess' feet from an incense-boat.

It was not possible to feel always, always, the same vehement grief. To-morrow, nay, in an hour, the sorrow would resume its violence; now, in this night of coolness and melody, there was just a brief rest, a moment of annihilation, almost a sense of wistful well-being. And, in this calmer mood, Lucius felt a need to speak a friendly word to his old friend and tutor, as he had not done since the voyage began.

He struck the gong beside his couch; and a little black slave appeared.

"Tarrar," said Lucius, "find Thrasyllus for me and tell him that I await him."

The little Libyan slave, looking like a monkey in his scanty, many-coloured coat, made a drolly serious movement of reverence, crept backwards and disappeared. It was not long before he lifted the hanging and Thrasyllus stepped into the presence of his young master, Publius Lucius Sabinus.

The pedagogue, or tutor, was an elderly freedman, tall, lean, serious, grey-haired and grey-bearded. His eyes were kindly; his mouth wore a fatherly smile.

Lucius, without rising, stretched out his hand to him:

"Thrasyllus," he said, "forgive me if I have been unkind."

This was all that he said. His voice sounded deep, manly and earnest. The old tutor had taken a seat on a footstool beside his master's couch. And, holding the other's hand for a moment in his own, he said:

"Lucius, I thank you for that word. But I have nothing to forgive, dear young master. You are the master, I am your slave, your slave still, even though you have given me my freedom. I am your servant, but one who has fatherly feelings for you. I feel a father's love towards you; and you have never forbidden it. It is well; and I am content. I serve you and I love you. But I thank you for that generous word. That is what you are: generous, just. You are far above all pride. You know how to admit when you are wrong. And I, on my side, if you think that you need it, gladly grant you my forgiveness, though the word is unsuited to my mouth. You were bitter and you were suffering: your sorrow drove you mad. Your nature is violent in all things: in your love, in your sorrow, in your hatred, in all your passions and angers...."

"I was not generous and not just, Thrasyllus, and I raised my hand against you. Forgive me."

The old tutor shrugged his shoulders:

"I forgive you, I forgive you. Your blood flows hotly and the red cloud sometimes blinds you. Certainly you must control and master yourself. But I, I am your slave, though I feel for you like a father; and that you raised your hand against me: what of it? It was a movement of anger. You are as mettlesome as a young colt. And sorrow drove you mad."

"It does so still. Sometimes, sometimes it is as though I felt a fury of frenzy here, inside me, in my breast! Then I must have her, have her back, have her here, beside me, in my arms, at my breast, at my lips! O ye gods, ye gods, ye gods!"

He drew a deep breath, moaned and sobbed.

"Be still, dear young master," said the tutor. "Try to forget and try to be resigned. She is gone. She is not to be found. We have searched everywhere. You have vainly squandered treasures to find her. Ilia is gone. It is three months now since she disappeared. She was probably kidnapped by pirates while bathing. She used often to bathe in the sea, among the rocks...."

"Is the villa at Baiae sold? I won't go back to it!... Since she is no longer there, since she has disappeared, disappeared! She has disappeared! She has disappeared without a trace! Just one sandal on the shore. It was a calm sea. She cannot have been drowned!... In my house she was queen! My Ilia: she was the queen of my house, though she was a slave! Everything for her and because of her! She was my slave, but she had slaves herself, male and female: she had the jewels of an empress, she had the raiment of a goddess! I worshipped her as I would Venus herself! And she has disappeared, she has disappeared without a trace, without a trace! Not a thing of hers has been found save a sandal, a sandal! Where can she be? Is she dead, is she alive? Did she run away, was she kidnapped, has she been murdered? Shall I never, never see her again? Here, here" — he rose suddenly — "here, in my boiling breast, I feel it welling up now, the fury of frenzy! I want her, I will have her! Ilia, Ilia, Ilia!"

And he uttered a despairing cry, a scream of anguish, and burst into sobs.

His cry, his scream was heard in the night, throughout the ship.

And suddenly, because of his grief, all the music fell silent: the melancholy chant of the rowers, the joy-song of the sailors and the hymn to the goddess, sung to the twanging Lesbian harp.

Only the oars continued to beat the waves. For the rest, silence, silence, silence ... over all the ship, under the starry dome....

Then the boatswain's voice made itself heard. The rowers' melodious phrase rose in a mournful swell, always the same. And the high voice of the sailor who led the singing set the time. The seamen took up the chant. And bright, golden beads from the four-stringed harp fell like clear drops through the night; and the Greek hymn of the songstress pined away with love and tenderness, to ring out suddenly, imploringly:

"Aphrodite!... Aphrodite!..."

Chapter II

Lucius lay on his cushions sobbing like a child. Beside him sat old Thrasyllus, with his hand on his master's heaving shoulder:

"Lucius, pray control yourself," he said. "Master yourself and yield piously to Fate. Ilia is gone, she is gone. She is probably gone for ever. She has disappeared. Pirates must have kidnapped her while she was bathing.... Do not think of her any more. Life is rich in promise. Fortune has favoured you not only with untold treasures, but also with genius and soul. You love beauty and study, every art and every science. You did well to follow my advice at last and not to go on languishing with grief in the villa at Baiæ. Yes, it is sold. We shall never go back there. The villa is sold to Cæsar. For almost nothing. Tiberius can look upon it as a gift! What does it matter? Forget the villa and ... forget Ilia.... We are now sailing towards Egypt, the birthplace of all wisdom, the cradle of humanity. You did well to follow my advice: you needed distraction, my dear young master; and this distraction will bring healing to your sick soul. To-morrow we shall reach Alexandria. The voyage is auspicious and will probably be completed without storms. Try to sleep now; and, once again, thank you for your kind word. You are generous. I had nothing to forgive, but I am grateful that you love me better than you would a simple slave. Good-night. Good-night, Lucius."

The tutor left the pavilion:

"Draw the curtains close, Tarrar," he said to the Libyan boy. "Noiselessly."

"Yes, Thrasyllus," said the child.

The tutor walked to the end of the long deck. The sailors' song was hushed, the hymn was hushed; only the rowers' melancholy phrase sounded very softly, muffled in undertone.

The old man stopped. On a pile of cushions lay Catullus, Lucius' penniless uncle, pot-bellied as Silenus and with a bald and shining pate; and on a low chair sat Cora, the Greek slave from Cos. Her harp stood like a rounded bow by her side; and she leant her head against it.

"Well, Thrasyllus," mumbled Catullus, sleepily, "how goes it with my nephew?"

"He has spoken a kind word to me," replied the tutor, joyfully.

"A kind word?" cried Catullus, raising himself, with his hands still behind the grey fringe of his cranium. "I shall become jealous! I have not had a kind word since that wench bolted...."

"Ssh! Be silent, worthy Catullus," said Thrasyllus. "He believes that she has been kidnapped. Leave him in that belief."

"And every one knows – the steersman told me so himself – that she ran away with Carus the Cypriote, the sailor! Every one knows it, all the sailors and rowers...."

"Ssh!" Thrasyllus repeated. "Never tell him! He worshipped the woman and she was not worth it! She reigned as queen in his house ... and she ran away with Carus the Cypriote! She left a master like Lucius for a scoundrel like Carus!"

"And Lucius still believes that Venus watches over him!"

"Why should the goddess not watch over him, my Lord Catullus? Ilia was not worthy of Lucius: the goddess was in very truth watching over Lucius when she aroused that mad passion in Ilia. Who knows what great and high happiness she has in store for him in the future?"

"I don't believe in the gods, Thrasyllus, not even in Bacchus," said Catullus. "You know I don't. Since the gods ordained that I should be born as poor as a rat and my nephew surrounded by every earthly treasure, since ... since I was a babe at the breast, I have not believed in the gods! And least of all in Venus ... though I could almost begin to believe in her when Cora sings to her as she has been doing."

The Greek slave raised her head from the harp on which she was leaning:

"Did I sing well?" she asked. "Thrasyllus, did I sing well?"

"Very well indeed, Cora," said Thrasyllus.

"Did he say anything about my song?"

"No," said Thrasyllus, "he did not."

"Has he never said anything about my singing?"

"No, Cora; he is suffering too much to take notice of it."

"Poor Cora!" said Catullus. "She has been singing hymns to Aphrodite for three months now, ever since Ilia went away and since you, Thrasyllus, bought Cora for her beautiful voice, to divert Lucius a little; and I believe that Lucius has not even observed that Cora can sing ... much less realized that she exists!"

"It doesn't matter," said the Greek slave, leaning her head against the harp again.

Catullus yawned and puffed out his stomach:

"I shall stay and sleep here in my cushions," he said. "I shall not go to my pavilion. I shall stay and sleep here, under the stars. To-morrow we shall be at Alexandria! Alexandria! The city with the most exquisite cooking, so they say! I am tired of Rome and Baiae; I am really tired of roast peacock and oysters. Nothing but Rome and roast peacock; nothing but Baiae and oysters: I shall end by turning into a peacock or an oyster! Change of diet is the secret of good health. I was losing my gaiety and had not a joke left in me to charm an occasional laugh out of Lucius. He did not even

listen to me, Cora, when I was witty ... and you expect him to listen to your song! He listens to nothing and nobody since Ilia is gone."

"Was she so very beautiful?" asked Cora.

"She was very beautiful," said Thrasyllus, with grave appreciation.

"She was beautiful," Catullus echoed, in airy praise, "but she was too heavy and too big. Her ankles were not slender. Her wrists were as thick as a man's."

"She was very beautiful," Thrasyllus repeated. "She was as beautiful as a goddess."

"That is just where I never agreed," cried Catullus, vehemently, "either with you or with my nephew. You both said that she was like a goddess...."

"She was like the Cnidian Venus of Praxiteles," Thrasyllus persisted.

"I could never see it!" Catullus persisted, in his turn. "I could never see it. There may have been something of Praxiteles' Venus in the lines of her body ... something, perhaps, though much coarser; but her face certainly lacked the charm, the smile of that divine statue. Now, though I do not believe in the gods, though I do not believe in Venus, I do believe in my own correct and sometimes sober opinion! I was not in love with Ilia as Thrasyllus and Lucius were! And really, between ourselves, I can understand her bolting, though she did reign as queen in the house. She was far too much admired for her divine ankles and wrists and for her big feet and hands! Did she not sometimes have to turn and turn for a hour, while Lucius lay looking at her, to turn on a revolving pedestal, which two slaves under the floor moved round and round and round, and did not Lucius grow angry if she stirred? 'I can't endure this, uncle!' she would often declare to me; and I can well understand it. To play at being a living statue strikes me as wearisome; and I also should say, 'Thank you for nothing,' if my nephew were to take it into his head, because nature has at least blessed me with a fairly perfect form, to make me turn and turn on a revolving pedestal as Cupid with his bow and arrow or as Ganymede with a drinking-cup in his hand! What do you say, dreamy Cora?"

"I don't know," said Cora. "No one will ask me to pose as the Cnidian Venus. I have nothing but my voice...."

"And I nothing but a terrible sleepy feeling!" yawned Catullus. "I shall stay and sleep here, under the stars...."

He stretched himself and heaved his body over; two slaves approached and covered him carefully with silken sheets and woollen blankets and pushed pillows under his head, his loins and his feet. He accepted their attentions like a child. And, when he had turned over, he at once fell asleep like a child, with not a wrinkle of care in his bald forehead, which shone like ivory in the soft light of the stars.

Cora had risen to her feet:

“Good-night, Thrasyllus,” she said.

“Good-night, Cora,” said the tutor, paternally.

The Greek slave, her harp tucked into her arm, moved away slowly. She lifted the hanging of a cabin which she shared above-deck with some other slaves. These were sleeping in six or seven narrow beds close together. A rose-coloured lantern shed a vague glimmer, here over a hip rounded in sleep, there over a face with shut eyes, framed in black tresses and white, raised arms.

The slave undressed in silence. Her muslin peplos woven with gold flowers fell from her. She stood naked. She looked at her wrists, which were slim, like a patrician's. She stooped and looked at her ankles. She arched the instep of her narrow, shapely foot. And she passed her slender fingers over her hips, which were like a virgin's, and over her waist, round which she could almost make her two hands meet. Then she took up a metal hand-mirror and looked at herself in the light of the rose-coloured lantern. She half-closed her big eyes, which were like gigantic sapphires in mother-o'-pearl shells, very soft, very bright, very big, with the streak of antimony stretching to the temples. Then she smiled.

But next she gave a very deep sigh. She lay down on her little narrow bed between two other beds. A slave had moved slightly in her sleep, muttering. Cora drew a sheet over herself; and her great eyes stared, without seeing, into the rose-coloured lantern.

In the windless night the ship glided over the sea, which was calm as a lake; and there was nothing but the beating of the oars and the lulling melodious phrase of the rowers....

Sometimes ... a sing-song order from the steersman, up in his look-out turret....

And then a creaking of heavy ropes over great pulleys....

Chapter III

Next morning, the soft, even light of a tea-rose dawn spread over a magic spectacle, beautiful as a marvellous dream, flimsy as a vision, compelling as an enchantment. The ship had glided past the monumental, marble, nine-storeyed Pharos into the Great Harbour; and Alexandria lay before the eyes of the delighted travellers, Lucius, Thrasyllus, Catullus, shining pink through diaphanous, mother-o'-pearl gleams and a slowly-lifting silvery mist, like a city of magic and fairy-tale. A long, long row of white palaces, with irregular gables, loomed through the mist and the gleam.

On the left, on the rocks of Lochias, the pillars of the former royal palace shone magical and fairylike in the silvery mist. Thrasyllus knew that, since Egypt had become a Roman province, the legate resided there, surrounded with royal honours. Under the palace the little square basin of the palace-harbour showed, gay with the purple sails of the legate's triremes; with the little island of Antirrhodos, behind which pillars and yet more pillars outlined more and more clearly the white theatre; with the bight of the Posidium, where stood the Temple of Poseidon and the great Emporium, the great market of the merchant shippers, while a pier ran into the harbour on which, dainty as a marble ornament, stood the villa of the Timoneum, built by Mark Antony. A riot of luxuriant green gardens, with the stately crowns of palm-trees and the dreamy-delicate crests of tamarisks, flung cool, dark nosegays between all those gleaming white buildings, which began to blink in the ever fiercer sunshine....

Thrasyllus pointed with his finger, along the harbour, the long row of palaces of the Cæsareum, the huge docks and yards teeming all motley with people and industry, to the Heptastadium, the promenade-jetty which stretched out to unite the city with the island of Pharos, whence the light-house took its name. On the one side of this pier, with rostra and statues on the marble balustrade and gates, lay the harbour of Eunostus and the naval docks of Cibotus.

The water on every side was crowded and swarming with vessels: biremes and triremes, battle-ships and merchant-ships; themasts rose like a forest of poplars and the sails glowed like the many-coloured wings of one bird against another; and, as soon as the quadrireme glided in, she was surrounded by a host of sloops, filled with traders, with yelling Arabs and Nubians. The Aphrodite heaved to; a pilot came on board; then she glided on again through the press of the sloops, the yelling of the traders and with swanlike elegance turned and lay to beside the great quay, at the place where she was expected, the place kept open for her.

The quay, between the obelisks, was alive with a maddening concourse of people: sailors and merchants, vendors of fruit and water and vegetables, chattering women, screaming children, Ethiopian beggars, Greek students, priests of Serapis and Isis,

Roman soldiers; and all pointed at the ship and streamed in unison to gaze at her in wide-eyed and open-mouthed admiration. For, though numbers of vessels entered the Great Harbour of Alexandria daily, it was not every day that the quay was visited by so impressive a quadrireme as this; and the beautiful ship aroused curiosity.

The three travellers stood on the prow, beside the silver figure of Aphrodite, and Catullus said, in an appreciative tone:

"It's not half bad. Just look at that row of palaces! It is as though Alexandria were one great palace, opening on its harbour! And what people, white, dark and black, all mixed! And what a noise they make, what a noise! We are much calmer in Italy!... Do look, Lucius, at all those ibises walking about on the quay, quiet and tame, pecking here and there, upon my word as though they were at home! Do you see the ibises, Thrasyllus? I thought that they just stood and dreamed on one leg, beside the Nile, like poetic birds ... and, the moment I arrive, I see great flocks of them actually walking on the quay of Alexandria's harbour! White ibises, black ibises, piebald ibises! What a crowd of ibises! What a crowd of them! And so dignified, much more dignified than the people! Ye gods, what a noisy crew the Alexandrians are!"

The gangway was slung from the ship to the quay; and the master was receiving the port-authorities, to whom he had to show his papers, when two men came hurrying across the gangway, which was hedged in by a guard of sailors to protect it against any intrusion of the gaping populace. One of them was an obvious Latin, the other a dark-skinned Sabæan.

"Well, Vettius!" said Lucius, welcoming the Latin, who was his steward. "I am glad to see you again and I hope that your voyage was as prosperous as ours!"

Vettius the steward bowed low before his young master, bowed ceremoniously before fat Uncle Catullus. He had travelled ahead of his master to seek suitable lodgings at Alexandria and he seemed very well pleased with what he had found, for he pointed joyfully to the dark-skinned Sabæan, who had kept behind and now bobbed down with many salaams and respectful assurances, uttered in a language that fluctuated between Latin, Greek, Phoenician and Arabic.

"This is Master Ghizla, a native of Saba, my lord," said Vettius, presenting him, "the owner of the largest guest-house in Alexandria; and he has at your disposal a row of three suites, standing in their own gardens, with spacious annexes, near the guest-house proper; and I am convinced that, when we have put in our own furniture, they will afford a fit residence for you and the honourable Catullus. Of course, when travelling, all conveniences are but temporary and not to be compared with your insula at Rome or your villa at Baiæ, now the property of our gracious Emperor Tiberius."

"It is well, it is well, Vettius," said Lucius. "We shall not be too hard to please. Are there baths attached to them?"

"There are most comfortable baths attached to them, my lord," declared Master Ghizla, bobbing down twice and thrice in salaams. "And there are taps with very cold water and taps with very hot water. They are suites which I let only to princely nobles like your lordship; and I have had the honour of lodging in them the Persian Prince Kardusi, whom you surely know, and Baabab, Satrap of Mesopotamia, whom you also surely know, my lords, as princely nobles."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Lucius, trying to jest. "Kardusi and Baabab, I know them well."

"We are even related to them and call them by their names," Uncle Catullus broke in, airily, with a bow and puffing out his stomach. "But there is something that I want to ask you, Master Ghizla, something that neither his lordship nor Master Vettius will care so much about: are there kitchens to the suites, kitchens where our trusty cook can prepare us this or that simple fare?"

"There are most comfortable kitchens to these princely suites, my lord," Master Ghizla assured him. "His Highness the Satrap Baabab often gave very sumptuous banquets and would invite his excellency the legate to his table every other day; and near the kitchens there is a well of water clear as crystal."

"I don't drink much water," said Uncle Catullus.

"We have old Mareotis wine in our cellars, my lord, wine thick as ink, dark-purple as molten princely sealing-wax and fragrant as the own lotus of our Lady Isis, blessed be her name! We have also the rose-coloured date-wine of Meroe and the fine topaz-yellow liqueur of Napata: we have all the Ethiopian liqueurs..."

"That's better than water," said Uncle Catullus, smacking his lips. "What say you, my dear Lucius?"

Lucius had made a great effort that morning to control his grief; together with his uncle and the tutor, he had stared with interest at the splendid panorama that unrolled itself before their eyes as they entered the Great Harbour; he had welcomed his steward Vettius with a kind word; he had interested himself in the apartments which he was to occupy. Now, however, tired and listless, he had sunk into a seat, beside the silver image of the goddess, and sat looking disconsolately in front of him. He was a tall, comely fellow, with an athletic frame developed by wrestling exercise; and his dark eyes, though now veiled with melancholy and longing, gleamed with a deep spark of intelligence. Immensely rich, the sole heir of various relatives who had died childless, he had joined for but a short time in the mad orgies of the young Romans of his own rank and had soon devoted himself to many branches of science, to astronomy in particular, philosophy, magic, the favourite passion of that period;

he amused himself with modelling and sculpture; as a collector, he loved everything that was beautiful: pictures and statues, old coins and old glass; and his Etruscan antiquities were famous all over Rome. Certainly, he had always desired to see Egypt, to travel through Egypt; and the sight of the marble palaces of Alexandria had already charmed him for a moment. But his grief and longing returned to him immediately after; red anger awoke in him once more and impotent fury that Ilia, his best-beloved slave, had vanished, one inauspicious morning, from his villa at Baiaë, without leaving a trace behind her.

"Come, Lucius," said Catullus, "we're going on shore now, my dear fellow. There are our litters waiting for us, prepared by Master Ghizla's care...."

"With excellent, powerful Libyan bearers, my lord, bearers whom I reserve exclusively for princely nobles like you...."

"And, if you care first to take a turn through the city, sir," Vettius proffered, "I will see to it that the furniture and baggage are conveyed from the ships to your apartments, so that you will find everything arranged in time for luncheon."

Although Lucius of course travelled with his own litters and his own bearers, Ghizla and Vettius had judged that two Alexandrian litters, with twelve Libyan bearers, would serve his purpose better at Alexandria, especially because here they were accustomed to move quicker, at a trot, than in Rome, where the pace was statelier and slower. Master Ghizla, therefore, who would not fail to charge the litters and bearers in his bill at double the price and more, had quickly and slyly set out his litters in front of the gangway, before Rufus, the under-steward, had even thought of preparing his master's own litter.

"Very well, Vettius," said Lucius, making an effort and rising. "I see two litters: those are for Uncle Catullus and me. And how is our good Thrasyllus to accompany us? For he knows the city already from the writings of Eratosthenes and Strabo; he can tell us much that is interesting on the way; and the tour would not afford us half the same pleasure without him."

"I have had a good donkey saddled for Master Thrasyllus," said Master Ghizla, with a salaam.

In fact, an ass, held by a boy on a leading-rein, stood waiting behind the litters, among the open-mouthed populace.

"And if," the Sabæan hinted, suavely, "if I might entrust the noble lords to the conduct of my younger brother Caleb, he will go in front of the noble lords and act as a guide with whom they will doubtless be no less satisfied than were the Prince of Persia and the Satrap of Mesopotamia...."

“Kardusi and Baabab,” Uncle Catullus completed, mischievously. “Two pleasant, simple fellows: I’m sorry they’re gone.”

But Ghizla pointed to Caleb, who now came up with a flourish of salaams and bowed. As against Ghizla, who was tall, lean and dignified, Caleb, the younger man, was vivacious and sparkling, with dark eyes, flashing teeth and a gay, smiling mouth. He wore wide striped trousers of many colours, a white burnous, a red turban and large rings in his ears; and he spoke better Latin than his brother, with now and then a few sentences of Greek.

Lucius accepted Caleb as his guide; and they went on shore; and Lucius and Uncle Catullus took their seats in their litters. Thrasyllus mounted his quiet donkey; but Caleb flung himself with a swagger on to a jet-black, gaily-caparisoned Sabæan mare, who neighed when she felt the red heels of Caleb’s sandals in her flanks. So the procession started: first three ebon-black outrunners, with whips which they cracked right and left to make room, to drive barking dogs away and to keep beggars at a distance; then Caleb, proudly sitting his horse like a young conqueror, always smiling and sparkling with black eyes and white teeth; then the two litters, with Thrasyllus at the side on his donkey; and round the three travellers a number of guards, armed with whips and sticks.

They pressed through the crowd along the quay, where everybody looked and pointed at the distinguished foreigners; they went at a quick trot, for the outrunners went at a trot, cracking their whips; Caleb, on his Sabæan mare, showed off his equestrian powers and pranced elegantly along upon his steed; the litter-bearers followed at a short, steady quick-trot; even Thrasyllus’ donkey, as sober as a philosopher, trotted blithely on; and behind trotted the guards, shaking their sticks and flourishing their long whips. They trotted along the middle of the broad street, over the great stone flags; and it seemed as though everything were trotting in a quick rhythm, including all the other litters, the carts and horsemen, who with their outrunners and outriders also strove to make their way through the bustle.

So the cavalcade trotted on; and the street-boys scattered and the ibises scattered with outstretched necks and wide-flapping wings.

“What crowds of ibises!” Catullus cried. “Thrasyllus, isn’t it comical to see so many ibises walking and fluttering through the streets of Alexandria?”

“My lord,” cried Thrasyllus, from the back of his dancing donkey, “the ibises are Alexandria’s scavengers.”

“I dare say, but they are unclean birds themselves for all that! And they are counted among the sacred animals!” cried Uncle Catullus. “Whoosh! Whoosh!”

And he drove them away, with a flourish of his arm from the litter, for the whips of the runners trotting behind circled, it is true, around the street-boys but ever spared

the sacred ibises, one of which would sometimes stray, fluttering wildly, among the bearers.

Meanwhile Caleb continued to give a graceful equestrian performance on his snorting mare beside Lucius' litter:

"My lord!" cried Caleb. "Do you see the Heptastadium? The great bridge leading to the Pharos? Do you see that tall-masted ships are able to sail under it? It is an interesting walk there of an evening, my lord: all the beauties of Alexandria go there; and a great nobleman like yourself need but make his choice and any hetaira in Alexandria will fall at his feet! This is the Moon Gate, my lord! And this is the High Street: behind it lies the Rhacotis quarter, which is very interesting at night, my lord, most interesting for any one like your lordship to roam through in disguise. But now we are going through the High Street; and here, you see, is the Square, where the High Street crosses the Museum Street and the Avenue of Pillars."

Lucius looked around him with enjoyment. They were still going at a trot, a trot of mare and runners and bearers and donkey, a noisy trotting between shouting and laughing voices and cracking whips, while in the streets and squares the hucksters also shouted and laughed and swore, while the street-boys cheered and screamed for an obolus and the ibises, flapping their wings, darted away, to alight again elsewhere and act as scavengers to Alexandria.

"It is very different from Rome in every way," thought Lucius. "It is the east."

Yes, it was the east. It was Egypt, it was Alexandria. Never in the Forum at Rome, lively and busy though it was, never in the basilicas had Lucius beheld this ever trotting, ever hurrying tumult. It was as though every one were pressed for time and hurrying feverishly. Processions of priests hurried; the Roman guards even, returning from the Palace after being relieved, marched with an accelerated step; and yet the numerous litters never struck against one another: they all glided at the trot of their bearers, to the right, to the left, beside one another; there was only a shouting, a din, a cursing, a cracking of whips loud enough to rouse the dead. Here was a quarrel, with violent gestures and shrill voices; there the noisy gaiety of squabbling vegetable-women and bawling vendors of water-melons; suddenly, in a rage, the women flung cabbages at the vendors' heads and the vendors sent melons trundling between the women's legs; the cabbages and melons rolled across the street and the crowd yelled with enjoyment, while distinguished but still trotting processions of notables in litters or on horseback made a way for themselves. The cabbages and melons rolled in front of the feet of Lucius' bearers; and Caleb, rising in his stirrups with flapping burnous and uplifted arms, hardly holding the reins in his fingers while the mare reared on her hind-legs, poured forth a torrent of curses over the women and the hucksters ... and then turned to Lucius with a pleased smile, as though all this tumult were the most ordinary morning affair in the streets of

Alexandria.... Yes, that was the Egyptian character: bustle, tumult, uproar, yelling and cursing for the least thing; quarrelling for the least thing; and then everything just ordinary again, as though nothing had happened. All this in a motley whirl of colours: Rome was monotonously white and colourless beside it, Lucius thought. Here the colours glared more fiercely: the citrons, oranges and melons lay yellow and gold over the markets; and there were exotic fruits too, scarlet and vermilion....

They came to the painters' quarter. Troughs of used colouring-matter ran in gutters along the streets: there were rivulets of indigo, there were little waterfalls of ochre. The bearers splashed through purple and trotted on with purple-black feet. A golden whirl of dust in the morning sun powdered over these motley colours as with handfuls of the finest glittering sand. Tall buildings shot up their pillars in that glitter, seemed to shimmer, to move in that shimmer of light.

Caleb now pointed to the Acropolis, standing fortress-like, four-square and heavy, protecting and dominating the city. Next came the Sun Gate. Outside the city-wall was a canal; along the canal ran an avenue of tall sycamores, bringing a sudden blissful calm and coolness and silver-green shadows. And now Caleb pointed to the famous lake, Lake Mareotis: it lay spread out like a sea, but was divided by isthmuses into smaller inland lakes; there were islands often bearing some temple to Aphrodite; and along the margins of the lake rose villa after villa, in royal pomp of marble-coloured villas, casting their reflections into the limpid water.

"That is where the rich hetairæ live," said Caleb, with a wink, "hetairæ for people like your lordship: a prince like you can take your choice."

Tall papyrus shot up on the lake's edge. There were papyrus-eyots: the stalks rustled at the least breeze; and on the eyots lived the basket-makers: there were families of basket-makers; the children weaving baskets and hampers looked up and cried out for an obolus. White lotus and pink water-lilies blossomed and small gilt barges passed across the lake, with coloured awnings to them. Ibises and cranes fluttered out of the reeds.

"You must come here again in the evening, my lord," Caleb advised, winking eagerly. "This is the place for one like your lordship to enjoy himself: at Rhacotis there are only the common women and the houses where the sailors go. But many princely nobles like to see everything at Alexandria."

The procession trotted back through the Gate of the Sun, which made a wide breach in the city-walls, a vaulted arch above Corinthian pillars; and Caleb said:

"We are now coming to the Avenue of Pillars and to the Museum."

Here again were the bustle, the tumult, the uproar, the shouting and cheering and cursing, the multitude, litters, horsemen, pedestrians. The Avenue of Pillars also was swarming, mainly with students, philosophers and loose women. The sun blazed

down in the middle of the street; there were golden patches of light and blue-purple islands of shadow. And there was always the golden glitter of dust, as of the finest sand whirling through the air. Here were the hair-dressers and barbers; here were the baths, here the tailors'-shops with their riot of colours and here the glittering jewellers'-shops and here, behind tables, stood the money-changers. There were stretches of green garden; and behind the gardens loomed the colonnades of the Museum. Close by were the Gymnasium and the Athletic School.

"Will your lordship visit the Museum?" asked Caleb, still parading his horsemanship on the Sabæan mare.

Thrasyllus thought that it would be interesting to visit the Museum; and the travellers alighted. There was a great rush to see them. Uncle Catullus threw oboli among the street-boys, who rolled over one another, fighting. Beggars approached, grey-bearded men like prophets and old women like sibyls; and Lucius flung a coin here and there.

The runners and guards drew themselves up around the two litters, the mare and the donkey; but Caleb walked in front of the travellers, mincing elegantly on the tips of his red riding-boots and holding the hem of his burnous in his swaying hand. It was as though he were always dancing, whether on horseback or on foot.

"The Museum," Caleb explained, "is, as your lordships know, the Academy of Alexandria, founded by the beautiful Cleopatra."

"That is not true," Thrasyllus whispered to his young master. "It was founded by Ptolemy the First."

"Here philosophers and scholars in every branch of science devote themselves to study; and they are surrounded by thousands of disciples from all countries. But both masters and pupils are as poor as rats and do not, all told, possess ... that!" said Caleb, with a flip of his finger and thumb.

"The Museum has produced great scholars," Thrasyllus expounded, more appreciatively, "such as Euclid, Erasistratus and Diophantus; then there were the poets Theocritus, Aratus, Callimachus; and among critics Aristarchus; and among philosophers more than I could name."

"And because they are so poor, all these learned gentry," said Caleb, with a laugh, pointing, as they entered the gardens of the Museum through a portico, to stately white-cloaked figures walking to and fro, "because they are so poor, they live on a fund provided by the State: they're no use for anything, these learned gentry; but they are certainly clever, my lords, they're all that: you won't find their equals for cleverness anywhere. And the books they collect! Their library is quite famous.... Look," continued Caleb, pointing, "it is just the time when they have their mid-day meal: it seems to be philosophical to do so earlier than princely nobles are used to

do. No doubt it will interest you, as strangers, to see so many very wise and poverty-stricken scholars and philosophers eating their black broth."

The colonnades of the Museum loomed aloft; there were statues to commemorate famous men of learning; and there was an immense rounded exedra, from which lectures were delivered at frequent intervals. The travellers entered the cenaculum, the refectory, which was wide, lofty and very long; the scholars and philosophers sat eating at long tables; Lucius was struck by the fact that they were sitting, instead of reclining.

"They don't know any better," Caleb explained. "They just sit down for a moment and gobble up their broth; they are not epicures, they are only just clever, you see. They have more in their heads, my lords, than in their pockets. But they have plenty in their heads beyond a doubt."

A philosopher moved towards the strangers. He was very old, frail and grey and looked like a long dry stalk, in his toga. He smiled and mumbled words which at first were incomprehensible. From the folds of his garment he stretched forth a clawlike hand. He was begging; and Lucius gave him some money.

"The highest philosophy is ... to be satisfied with little," he then said, plainly, in pure Greek.

And he bowed, ironically, and turned away with the movement of a long dry stalk, in his dirty cloak.

"The shameless rascal!" cried Uncle Catullus, indignantly.

But Lucius laughed and looked down the long table at which the men of learning ate. Sometimes a beggar would come up to them; and they gave him their bread and fruit. Sometimes, too, dogs snuffled around; and the men of learning flung them their offal, over which the dogs choked greedily. Two ibises also walked in ludicrous high-legged state through the cenaculum, pecking here and there, and kept the floor clean, though they themselves were not so cleanly.

The travellers returned to their litters; and, amid much shouting and cursing and swearing at street-boys and cracking of whips at beggars, the procession started, while Caleb, for no reason, insisted on making his mare rear and curvet across the street with elegant movements of her fore-feet.

But now, smiling with his black eyes and white teeth, he bent to one side, low enough almost to slip from his mount, and asked Lucius:

"Would your lordship now like to see the Soma?"

And through the public gardens of Bruchium, along the Paneum — an artificial little rocky mountain built up in the shape of a top or pineapple — the procession trotted

to the Soma, the burying-place of the Ptolemies, where it lay in the cool shade of sycamores and tamarisks. A long avenue of recumbent sphinxes, male – bearded – and female – high-breasted – led to the pyramid tombs. The travellers alighted and the old priests in charge appeared.

“These distinguished strangers wish to see the burial-places of the Ptolemies,” said Caleb. “They are princely nobles and no doubt will also be interested in the tomb of Alexander the Great.”

“Death is but a slumbering and a twilight transition to the halls of eternal sunshine,” replied the priest in charge. “Earthly greatness is the perishable step to the imperishable palace of Osiris, where our dead monarchs now sit enthroned around him, their heads circled with the pschent and their hands grasping the scarab sceptre. And great Isis has appeared to them as the splendour of truth, for she lifted her veil for their delight, so that they saw her. Life is but a dream, death is a bridge and eternity is life.”

Caleb walked mincingly in front, on the tips of his red riding-boots, and pointed out things, while the old priest went on reciting the eternal verities, as though to himself, The tombs of granite, porphyry and marble, inscribed with hieroglyphics, rose like temples, pyramid-shaped. The priest now went in front of the travellers and descended a few steps: inside, in the subterranean vault, invisible, the mummies rested in their painted sarcophagi; standing lamps burned on their tripods, perfumes rose in a cloud from vases and dishes; and daintily-coloured glass vessels, filled with oil, honey and fruit, stood on low bronze tables, while amphoræ of consecrated water awaited the hour of the resurrection, when the dead should rise and be baptized into the true new life, which was eternity. There was an overpowering scent of sickly-sweet aromatics; and in the mist of the perfumes the big, wide-open eyes of the painted images on the sarcophagus-lids stared, ghostly and superhuman, straight before them into the brightening future. They were images of bearded kings and ibis-crowned queens; sometimes they were images of children.

Through the mist of the aromatics the golden, winged suns gleamed in the embrace of the snakes coiled tail in mouth. Sacred Horus, son of Osiris and Isis, the radiant redeemer of mankind, who descended out of pity on a sinful world, bestrode Typhon, the grinning spirit of evil. There were images of the god Apis, of the god Râ, of Thoth and Anubis, with the heads of an ox, an ibis, a dog.

After this, the shade of the sycamores and tamarisks outside the tombs was silver-green and cool; and the pure air of the sunny morning seemed strange after the perfumed, sickly-sweet atmosphere of the sultry underground sepulchres. The priest in charge stopped before a gleaming marble pyramid. The narrow bronze door hung tapering upwards between pilasters carved with lotus-capitals.

"The tomb of Alexander of Macedon," said the custodian, solemnly.

They went inside. Again, burning lamps shed their fragrance. There was a heavy mist of nard. Behind a bronze railing on a basalt pedestal stood a sarcophagus of transparent crystal, polished and engraved. And within this thick crystal, in a green watery light, where the flame of the lamps was mirrored in the glass, a mummy lay visible. It was like the chrysalis of a gigantic moth. The face was stained brown with balsam and salve and stared with eyes of beryl. The hair and short beard were painted gold. Many-coloured bandages wrapped the body in a close sheath; and the legs also were closely fastened together in a case of gold filagree.

The mummy lay on a mattress of striped byssus, the head on a byssus pillow. The scarlet lips seemed to grin in the crisp golden beard and the beryl eyes were full of amazement at what they saw in eternity.

"These are the sacred remains of the great Alexander," said the priest in charge. "History teaches us that Ptolemy, son of Lagus, took the body of the hero and conqueror from Perdiccas, who was bringing it back from Babylon to Macedon, but was passing through Egypt in the hope of conquering our sacred country. Ptolemy marched against him; Perdiccas had hardly set foot in Egypt when he perished at the hands of his own soldiery on an island which had been surrounded by Ptolemy's troops. With Perdiccas were the royal family: Alexander's pregnant widow Roxana and her young children. They were allowed to embark for Macedon, but the body of Alexander the Great was carried to Alexandria and buried in state in a massive gold sarcophagus. This sarcophagus was stolen by Ptolemy Parisactus, a pretender to the Egyptian throne, who invaded the country from Syria with a host of troops. Alexander's body, however, was rescued from his hands and laid in this crystal coffin. Here it lies."

Lucius and his companions stared, greatly moved by the sight of this corpse nearly three centuries old, embalmed and bandaged, with its feet in a sheath of gold filagree and its beryl eyes staring with surprise. Was this chrysalis all that remained of the great Alexander, whom the oracle of Ammon had declared to be the son of Ammon-Râ son of the sun-god?

Only Caleb remained indifferent, with his mincing gait and an incredulous little laugh at the genuineness of Alexander's body, to which he had already conducted so many "princely nobles," including Kardusi of Persia and Baabab of Mesopotamia.

"Here lies Alexander the Great," continued the priest in charge. "The warrior, the conqueror, the king of kings, the son of the sacred sun-god, Ammon-Râ, descended upon earth. He lived to be thirty-three in this terrestrial life. But this life is a dream and death is the bridge to the life that is the eternal reality. The soul has departed from this house embalmed with precious ointments...."

And he added, in a different voice:

"Even to your excellencies the charge is only one gold stater a head...."

"I will pay for you, my lord!" smiled Caleb, with an elegant bow to Lucius.

And he paid the priest, who went on speaking, with the gold coins shining in his uplifted hand:

"Generosity is a great virtue. He who gives more than he is asked to give earns the favour of Thoth, who sews the good chances of fortune upon the earth."

Caleb grinned with flashing teeth to show that he understood and dropped another half-stater into the priest's palm.

The travellers stepped out of the sepulchre. The sunny morning outside seemed strange, with silver-green shadows between waving tamarisks and rustling sycamore-leaves.

Lucius was pale. And he said to Thrasyllus and Uncle Catullus:

"Death!... Death!... She is perhaps dead.... She is drowned, perhaps, in the sea ... and we shall never recover her exquisite body, to embalm it...."

"In any case she has disappeared, my dear nephew," said Uncle Catullus, trying to console him. "Let us think of her no more. By all the gods, try to forget her: she had thick ankles and large feet.... Lucius, do be sensible at last! Enjoy yourself during this interesting tour. We have had a morning more interesting than any that we ever had at Rome. We have seen an ideal system of scavenging, we have heard philosophical and religious truths and we have seen the mummy of Alexander! I've really received too many new impressions. My brains are soaked like an overfull sponge: they can contain no more this morning. That sated condition of the head makes my stomach feel empty, as empty as my pocket when your liberality has forgotten to line it for your old uncle. My dear Lucius, when travelling one must be sparing ... of one's powers. I suggest to our indefatigable guide that we should go home and see if, in our absence, our trusty cook has remembered that, though life is a dream, even the dead and therefore all the more the living have to be fed. The dead are sustained with oil, honey and fruit: I am curious to see what our cook's pious thoughts have prepared to-day for the living."

The procession trotted home through the gardens of Bruchium, the palace quarter, and along the Hippodrome to Master Ghizla's great diversorium, or guest-house. It stood near the Canopian gate in an oval garden, behind a hedge of tall cactuses; the door opened between two figures of Hermes. Here sat the janitor, or porter; and the travellers were struck by the fact that a winged head of Hermes, in marble, crowned the marble architrave of the door. Caducei, or Hermes'-wands, with winding snakes,

were carved on the pilasters of the door; for the diversorium was dedicated to Hermes and known in the quarter as the Hermes House.

The janitor rose and bowed, with his hands stretched to the ground. Master Ghizla also, standing beside a statue of Hermes in the middle of his garden, bowed in this fashion, bending low, with his hands stretched groundwards.

The procession trotted in, the travellers alighted, but Caleb sat his mare, bowed gracefully and, stooping forward, whispered in Lucius' ear:

"After you have rested, my lord, I will take you whither you please, I will procure you whatsoever you please ... for your lordship's pleasure and gratification. Whithersoever you please and whatsoever you please.... I wish you good luck at your repast."

With that he threw the mare on her haunches, stood up in the stirrups, waved his burnous, uttered a cry and rode away, in a cloud of graceful gestures.

The diversorium consisted of several low buildings. It harboured Arabian and Phœnician merchants, who looked out curiously, squatting on mats or lying at their meal, served by black slaves. But Master Ghizla led his "princely guests" to their own suites; and Vettius and Rufus received the travellers on the threshold. They had worked to good purpose, conveying furniture, boxes and packing-cases on camels and mules. A Babylonian carpet lay upon the floor; the travellers' own beds were ready; in the corners of Lucius' bedroom stood bronze and marble statues, for no important Roman with any pretension to taste travelled without carrying a few of his treasures with him; and perfumes burned before the statues. There were curtains hanging from rings; and garments lay ready, neatly folded and strewn with fragrant flowers, on long, low, sycamore-wood tables. There were metal mirrors on bronze pedestals; all the brushes, tweezers and unguent-sticks, in gold adorned with agates, lay spread on bronze tables; all the jars, pots and vases essential to the toilet stood filled with cosmetics, ointments and perfumes. All this furniture and upholstery, all these useful and artistic possessions had been brought over from the ship.

"My diversorium boasts every possible comfort, my lord, and all the latest conveniences," bragged Ghizla, "which visitors like your lordship demand in these days."

He lifted a curtain beside Lucius' couch: there was in fact a marble basin with taps, under a canopy.

"And here," said Master Ghizla, "is your triclinium."

The dining-room which Master Ghizla described by this high-sounding name was a pleasant, spacious, airy apartment, with sun-blinds between pillars; and, as Lucius entered, he was greeted with the music of harps. For all the wealthy young Roman's

“family” were drawn up there in two rows, awaiting his arrival: Vettius and Rufus and Tarrar, the little black slave; all his slaves, male and female, all the great household without which no distinguished Roman thought it possible to live, even—indeed especially—when travelling. And, amid the female slaves, stood the Greek slave from Cos, Cora, with two other harpists; and they drew long, descending cords from their strings, while Cora sang a short song of welcome to the gracious master. Incense burned on dishes; two S-shaped couches coiled round a long, low table covered with a yellow-and-white cloth and already laid with yellow-and-white crockery and gleaming gold plate. A little fountain of verberna-water played in the middle of a bowl filled with blue lotus.

Lucius assured Vettius and Rufus that he was really pleased; indeed it was as though he were at home. Then, because Uncle Catullus said that he was starving, he invited his uncle and parasite, who had so often diverted him with a merry jest, to lie down, lay down himself and motioned Thrasyllus, his friend and tutor, to a stool by his side, for, though Thrasyllus shared his pupil’s meals, as a freedman he remained the inferior and ate seated. Tarrar and three girl-slaves waited, while Cora and the two harpists struck a soft melody from their strings or danced a little ballet.

Uncle Catullus was glad to have neither oysters nor roast peacock set before him: Lucius’ cook had surpassed himself, in this first exotic repast, with a first course of peppered water-melon in sugared wine-sauce, with which was served an Egyptian spiced bread, named caces; next, young tunnies, surrounded by savoury eggs, stuffed olives and finely chopped coxcombs; next, a sucking-pig served on bread-fruit and cucumbers; lastly, a honey-tart, covered with a cream custard containing stoned dates and cinnamon. They had the celebrated Mareotis wine, thick as ink and purple as molten wax, poured by Master Ghizla himself out of a jar still warm from the sun; and there was the topaz-yellow Ethiopian liqueur of Napata, which he dripped drop by drop into goblets filled with snow and which spread an aroma as of roses steeped in silphium.

Uncle Catullus ate his fill and Lucius too did honour to the meal, however much his heart still suffered and craved, while Thrasyllus was moderate as always. Then a legitimate drowsiness overcame the three travellers and they withdrew behind their curtains, to rest.

Chapter IV

But Lucius did not sleep. Now that he was alone, he felt the agony of his suffering and affliction. He drew a sandal from a little casket, a woman's blue-leather sandal adorned with gold relief and small, for all that Uncle Catullus was pleased to say. It was the only trace that Ilia had left behind her. And he kissed the sandal and groaned and stretched himself out impotently and clenched his fists and lay like that, staring before him without moving.

He lay lost in thought. And suddenly he struck the gong and summoned Tarrar, who entered nimbly and respectfully:

"Find Caleb and bring him here to me."

The little slave returned in a short time and ushered in Caleb, who approached with graceful salaams. Tarrar left his master alone with the Sabæan.

"Caleb," said Lucius, "sit down and listen. I need your advice."

"Your faithful servant is listening, my lord," said Caleb, sitting down on a chair.

"Caleb," continued Lucius, "I have not come to Egypt merely to see the things of interest which this country supplies. I have another object. There are mysterious oracles in Egypt; there are prophets and sibyls, so I am told, living in the desert. I want to know something. I want to know where some one is, one who is dear to me and far away. I want to consult the oracles and the prophets and sibyls. You must conduct me, without saying a word to my uncle or my tutor, because they do not approve of the attempts which I wish to make to find this person whom I love. Be my guide, Caleb, and I will reward you."

"I will be your guide, my lord," replied Caleb, "and this very night I will conduct you...."

"Where?"

"To the sibyl of Rhacotis, an old sorceress who knows everything."

"We will go by ourselves, in secret."

"Very well, my lord; no one shall accompany us.... What do you think: would you not like a cool sherbet after your rest? And divert yourself with looking at the goods which the travelling merchants from distant foreign lands, who happen to-day to be staying in the diversorium, have to offer for sale? I will have the sherbet prepared and the merchants informed, my lord. And to-night I will lead you through Rhacotis: we will go by ourselves, my lord, and no one shall know anything of our nocturnal expedition."

Caleb went away; Tarrar drew the curtains aside. Beyond the bedchamber was a pillared portico; and the green shadow of the palm-garden outside fell within doors.

Uncle Catullus was still asleep, but Thrasyllus already sat reading his Egyptian guide-books at a table under a palm-tree. The wonderful, fantastic stories of Herodotus charmed the old tutor's mind, which was not disinclined to fantasy; but Thrasyllus also took pleasure in the more succinct descriptions of the learned Eratosthenes, Ptolemy Evergetes' librarian, who lived three centuries before and was a noted astronomer, philosopher and geographer. Thrasyllus loved to consult his splendid maps, which had never yet been bettered and which lay spread in heavy parchment on the table before him; and the tutor followed the cinnabar-traced Nile on these maps down to Ethiopia and the mysterious sources of the sacred stream.

Yes, Eratosthenes was the most respectable guide. When he went blind, in his eighty-second year, he starved himself. Thrasyllus honoured him as a martyr of science. But the tutor also consulted Artemidorus and Hypsicrates, for he wished to be well-informed about the country which he was about to visit, that mysterious country of age-old history and colossal art, while also he did not despise the quite modern writings of his contemporary, Strabo: what a contemporary told about a country over the whole of which he had travelled was perhaps most important of all, because of its practical utility and also because of the freshness of the new impressions.

So Thrasyllus sat under his palm-tree at a table strewn with unrolled papyri; more scrolls stood in a case by his side; and his fingers followed the cinnabar-traced Nile. Lucius in the portico smiled in kindly approval. But the travelling merchants, led by Caleb, arrived through the garden. They were Indians, Sabæans, Arabs, Phœnicians; and their slaves toiled under their heavy bales of merchandise, which were slung on pliant sticks over their shoulders. The merchants bent low in salaams before the wealthy Roman, bowed down to the earth, kissed the ground which his foot had trodden, all eager to sell their exotic wares at a profit above the ordinary to so distinguished a traveller. The Phœnicians made their slaves spread out Damascus tapestry, but Lucius looked at it with scorn and the Phœnicians at once rolled up their inferior tapestry. Then, however, they displayed embroidery from Nineveh and Tyre; and Lucius turned a little pale, because he thought of Ilia. It was all very beautiful in hue and very curious in pattern.

"Call Uncle Catullus here," he said to Tarrar, who was squatting beside him like a faithful little monkey.

Tarrar hastened to Catullus, who thereupon arrived, sleepily rubbing his eyes, in a wide silk indoor simar; his grey hair stood in a tangle around his bald skull.

"Uncle," said Lucius, aside, "look here, if you please. Those embroideries from Tyre and Nineveh: I want them. Bargain for them."

For Uncle Catullus knew how to bargain. He began by turning up his nose at the embroideries; and the merchants uttered loud cries of protest and lifted their hands and invoked all the gods. But Uncle Catullus scornfully shook his head and said:

“No, I won’t buy that trash. Show me other things.”

Then the Phœnicians showed gold vessels from Tartessus, but the Arabs offered perfumes and aromatics from Jeddah and Zebid. The Sabæans displayed wonderful amulets, which bring luck and blissful dreams: the Indians showed tame, trained snakes, as domestic pets: the snakes had a small sardonyx encrusted in their heads, where it had grown into their scaly skin, and they danced on the tips of their tails, to the piping of the Indians’ flutes. They were attractive little creatures and did not cost more than one stater apiece, with the ebony casket in which they were kept; and Lucius impatiently bought them at once, partly because Tarrar found them so attractive and grinned where he squatted and looked on while the snakes danced and twisted one among another.

But at last a Mongolian merchant arrived, with a pale-yellow face and narrow eyes, which looked as though they were closed, and his hair, around his shaven head, ended in a pigtail of purple silk, with a tassel to it. This merchant offered little black balls, to be smoked in peculiar pipes; he asked Lucius to accept a pipe and a couple of little black pills in a yellow-silk bag, without payment, and to smoke them when he had the opportunity. The intoxication which they produced was something very peculiar, said the merchant.

Meanwhile Uncle Catullus had duly succeeded in acquiring the embroideries from Tyre and Nineveh at a really laughable price and presented them to his nephew, who of course paid for them in his stead. But, when Lucius held them in his hands – they were narrow strips embroidered with Assyrian lions and strange unicorns – he grew sad and said:

“What use are they to me, after all? Time was when I should have given them to Ilia as a border for her stola. Tarrar, put the pretty embroideries away, with the Mongolian pills and all the other rubbish which I have bought without wanting to: the little gold vases and the Sabæan amulets.”

“And the dear little snakes, my lord?” asked Tarrar, with glittering eyes.

“You may keep them ... to play with,” said Lucius, carelessly.

Meanwhile Caleb had had the cups of sherbet handed round. Uncle Catullus thought it particularly good and considered that Lucius’ cook ought really to write down this Egyptian recipe; but Lucius gave his to Tarrar, who scooped up the sherbet greedily with his black fingers.

Chapter V

Night had fallen over the city, a dark, starless night. To escape attention, Lucius and Caleb mounted a small, inconspicuous litter at the back of the diversorium. Caleb sat at Lucius' feet with his legs dangling out of the litter, which was lifted by four powerful Libyans, in preparation for departing at a trot.

"Have you your dagger, my lord?" asked Caleb.

Yes, Lucius had a dagger in his girdle.

"And are you wearing your Sabæan amulets?"

Yes, Lucius had hung the amulets which he had bought round his neck, for Caleb was full of confidence in these talismans of his country: the amulets warded off all ill-luck; Caleb himself wore amulets everywhere, on his chest and round his waist and even on a narrow gold bangle round his ankle.

The bearers scurried through Bruchium and past the Gymnasium and the Museum, as though they had an enemy at their heels. They came to a square that lay higher than the Great Harbour; and Lucius looked out across the quays at the different harbours. Red and green and yellow lights and signals shone over a variegated, patched throng of ships and boats and swarming people. But the wonder to Lucius' eyes was the light-house of Pharos. The nine storeys of the tall marble monument, stacked one on top of the other like so many cubes, each cube smaller than the one below, ended in a sort of cupola, where a heap of burning coal gleamed from immense mirrors and reflectors, which turned and turned continually, sending bright, broad rays from the summit of the tower upon the harbours, which they lit up each time, before stretching into the dark night. Sometimes the wide sheaves of light struck the high marble bridge of the Heptastadium, which led to the light-house itself and which at this hour was crowded with women and idlers.

"My lord," whispered Caleb, "would you not like to get out ... and walk ... there? The loveliest women in Alexandria are strolling yonder ... and you can take your choice."

Lucius shook his head:

"I want to go to the sibyl," he said.

"Your lordship is sick," said Caleb. "Your lordship is sick with longing and useless pining. The lovely women of Alexandria would cure your lordship. They have often cured me, my lord, when I was sick with longing and pining."

"Longing and pining for what, Caleb?"

"For my country, for Saba, my lord, for Saba, the fairest and dearest country in the world, my lord, which I have had to leave ... for the sake of business, my lord, for the sake of business. For we do no business in Saba."

The four bearers trotted on. They were now trotting past the immemorial temple of Serapis, the Serapeum: sombre and grey it lay with its terraces below the Acropolis; and numbers of other shrines, also sombre, grey and mysterious, were ranged, with the needles of their obelisks, around the vast temple.

"These shrines are deserted, my lord," said Caleb, "and no longer find worshippers. Even the Serapeum is deserted ... for the temple of Serapis at Canopus. And the modern Alexandrians hold all this sacred quarter in but slight esteem since the quinquennial games were instituted at Nicopolis. All those who wish to do honour to Serapis repair to Nicopolis and Canopus. We will go there too, my lord, and you shall dream dreams full of import high up, on the roof of the temple.... Look, my lord, here we are, at Rhacotis...."

The trotting bearers had left the aristocratic quarters. They were now hurrying through a narrower, sombre street.

"We had better get out here, my lord, and walk," said Caleb. "We shall find our litter here when we return."

Lucius and Caleb alighted. The sombre street was hardly lit, but was nevertheless swarming with people, including drunken sailors and fighting beldames.

"It's very different here, my lord, from the Heptastadium and Lake Mareotis. Here the people, soldiers and sailors take their pleasure. Here a dagger is drawn as quick as thought. Here is nothing but kennels and taverns. But every traveller who wants to know Alexandria comes here.... Look, my lord, here it is," said Caleb, "here!"

They had gone through a network of little lanes and alleys and come to a square. At one corner an old, ragged philosopher stood arguing and expounding. Around him soldiers, sailors and wenches gathered, listening attentively to what he said of true wisdom. When he put out his hand for alms, two soldiers gave him some coppers, but the others laughed and pelted him with rotten vegetables. He fled and disappeared, pursued by yelping dogs that bit him in the skirt of his torn toga.

"Will you not see the Syrian boys dance, my lord?" asked Caleb. "They dance so beautifully."

"No, I want to go to the sibyl," Lucius answered, impatiently.

"We are close to her dwelling, my lord," Caleb declared.

They almost fought their way through the crowd. The men cursed them because they pushed and the women flung themselves round their necks. Caleb drew his

dagger and raised it threateningly. Other knives were drawn forthwith. There was a demoniacal yelling and din. But they succeeded in avoiding bloodshed.

"I want to go to the sibyl," Lucius repeated, panting and with his clenched fists pushing away two women who were hanging on to his arms.

Lucius and Caleb now hurried through a reek of wine past the open brothels and reeking taverns. Caleb stopped in front of a small, narrow door and knocked. It was opened by a little Greek girl, pretty and delicate as a Tanagra figurine, with very large black eyes.

"Is Herophila within?" asked Caleb. "A distinguished foreigner wishes to consult her."

"I will tell her," said the girl.

They entered a very narrow little chamber. A woman came from behind a curtain. She was shrouded in a white veil, like a phantom; she carried an earthenware lamp; and it was not possible to see if she was young or old.

"Do you wish to know the future?" she asked, in a hollow voice.

"No," said Lucius, "I want to know the past and the present. I want to know where a girl named Ilia is and how she vanished from my house. Here is the sandal which she left behind: the only trace of her. If she ... is dead, can you make her appear before me, so that I may ask her?"

"Yes," said the sibyl, "I can. For I am descended from the witch of En-dor."

"Who was she?" asked Lucius.

"The witch who made Samuel appear before Saul...."

"I never heard of them," said Lucius.

"And another of my forbears was my honoured namesake, Herophila of Erythræ."

"Who was she?" asked Lucius.

"She was the custodian of the shrine of Apollo Smintheus, the divine rat-killer. She prophesied to Hecuba the calamity which would cause the death of her son Paris, whom she was bearing in her womb."

"I never heard of her before," Lucius repeated. "Tell me if Ilia is dead."

The sibyl pressed the blue-leather sandal to her head; and her other hand pressed Lucius' forehead.

"She is not dead!" she cried, in a voice of rapture.

"She is not dead?"

"No, Ilia lives!"

"Where? Where is she?"

The sibyl, in a trance, muttered incomprehensible sounds:

"She appears ... she appears," she stammered, at length.

Suddenly, behind her, the curtains parted. There was nothing there but a smoking tripod. Thick fumes filled the apartment and rolled on high like a heavy curtain.

"She appears ... she appears," the sibyl went on stammering.

Lucius stared breathlessly.

Suddenly, in the fumes, a figure was vaguely outlined as of a dainty woman, flimsy and thin, a shade that moved to and fro.

"I see her!" cried Lucius. "Ilia, Ilia! Speak one word to me! Come back to me! I cannot live without you!"

The vision had vanished. The smoke clouded away. The curtains closed again.

"It is difficult," said the sibyl, faintly, "to hold the astral bodies of living persons for more than a single moment. I can summon the dead for you for a longer time. But Ilia is not dead."

"Then where is she?" cried Lucius.

The sibyl now pressed the sandal to her forehead and her other hand lay on Lucius' head:

"I see her," said the sibyl. "She is lying in a boat, swooning.... The sea is raging.... Now rough, bearded men are hurrying her away...."

"She is kidnapped!" cried Lucius. "By pirates?"

"Yes!" cried the sibyl and fell into a faint.

The pretty Greek girl appeared and said:

"The fee is half a ptolemy, in gold...."

Caleb paid.

Lucius looked down in despair upon the swooning sibyl.

"To-morrow night, my lord," said the Greek girl, in a sing-song voice, "Herophila will be able to tell you more ... where Ilia was taken by the pirates."

But Lucius clenched his fists; he foamed at the mouth with sudden anger and roared:

"She has merely read my own thoughts! No more! No more!"

He glared round him like a madman, drew his dagger and made as though to fling himself upon the sibyl's swooning body.

“My lord! My lord!” shouted Caleb, holding him back and gripping him in his strong arms.

The Greek girl, standing in front of the fainting woman, spread wide her arms and cried:

“Do not murder a holy woman, my lord! Do not murder a poor, holy woman!”

And, as she stood thus, Lucius saw that she was like the shade of Ilia ... and he burst into sobs.

Chapter VI

Those were sad days. Lucius would lie on his bed, sobbing like a child, then rise suddenly, in transports of rage, tear his clothes or take up a stool and hurl it at a marble statue, which fell down in dust and fragments. He showed Thrasyllus the door; and Uncle Catullus kept out of the way. Lucius had ended by banging Tarrar against a table; and the little slave had a deep wound in his forehead. Caleb, who was a good hand at doctoring, had himself bandaged Tarrar's head.

Anxiously, in the palm-garden, the travelling merchants whispered about the wealthy Roman, who was sick with sorrow, and Uncle Catullus whispered in their company. Thrasyllus consoled himself by visiting the libraries of the Museum and the Serapeum. Lucius refused to hear any music. He did not leave his bed. He did not eat. He did not sleep. He looked unshaven, lean-cheeked and hollow-eyed, as one who was desperately sick.

They were sad days. The first charm of Alexandria was past; and Lucius cursed his journey, his whole life and everybody. In his impotent pain he groaned, sobbed and raved. Master Ghizla ordained silence and quiet around his rooms. Not a sandal creaked, not a voice sounded.

Lucius listened to this stillness. It was after luncheon, which Uncle Catullus had taken alone with Thrasyllus. And in the burning sunny stillness of that glowing June Lucius suddenly heard a child sobbing.

He rose from his couch. The sobs came from the back-garden; and Lucius raised the curtain and looked out. There, listening for his master's gong, sat Tarrar, huddled, like a little monkey, in a gaudy coat. He wore a napkin round his head as a bandage. And he was weeping, with little sobs, as if he were in great sorrow.

"Tarrar!" cried Lucius.

The little slave started up:

"My lord!" he answered.

And he rose and approached with comical reverence and sobbed.

"Tarrar," said Lucius, "why are you weeping? Are you in pain?"

"No, my lord," said Tarrar. "I beg pardon, my lord, for weeping. I must not weep in your august presence. I humbly beg your pardon, my lord. But I am weeping because ... because ... because I am so unhappy."

"And why are you unhappy? Because I struck you? Because you are in pain? Because you fell and made a hole in your head?"

"No, my lord," said Tarrar, trying to control himself, "not because you struck me. I am your little slave, my lord, and you have the right to strike me. And also not

because I am in pain: there is only a little burning pain now, for Caleb bandaged my head this morning with cool ointment. The hole is not so very deep either; and, when it is healed, the scar will remind me that I belong to you, my lord, and that I am your little slave."

"But then why are you weeping, Tarrar, and why are you unhappy?"

"I am weeping, my lord," Tarrar began, "because...."

And then he could restrain himself no longer, comical, respectful little monkey that he was, and sobbed aloud.

Lucius laid his hand on the boy's curly head:

"Why are you weeping, child?"

"Because the snakes wouldn't dance any more!" sobbed Tarrar, in despair. "Because one of them is dead and the other gone, for it crept out of its skin and left its skin behind! Because, whatever pains I took to pipe the magic tune on the flute—in the garden behind the house, so as not to make a noise or disturb you—the snakes would not dance any more ... as they did when the merchant piped to them! And because now ... one of the snakes is dead, my lord, and the other crept away out of its skin!"

And Tarrar, overcome with misery, sobbed aloud and showed his master the snake and the ebony casket, from which a skin hung, with a square piece of glass gummed to the head.

Lucius gave a melancholy smile. Was he not himself miserable, like Tarrar, because he too had been robbed of his plaything? And he said:

"Come with me, Tarrar."

And he took the little slave by the hand and led him to his room.

He sat down, with Tarrar standing in front of him. Then he said:

"Tarrar, I am sorry for hurting you so badly. Forgive me, Tarrar."

But Tarrar shook his head:

"It is not for me to forgive you, my lord," he said, earnestly, with great, dim eyes. "You are the master."

"Tarrar," Lucius continued, "when we are back in Rome, you shall be free. I will set you free. And you shall no longer be a little slave. But you shall go to school, to the freedmen's college. And learn all sorts of things. And become very clever, like Thrasyllus. And I will give you money. And you will be able to do whatever you please."

Tarrar was a little taken aback:

"You are very kind, my lord," he said. "But, if I go to school, who will fold your clothes? And listen for your gong? You are not driving me away, my lord, because I was so unhappy? I would rather stay with you, my lord, I would rather remain your little slave ... and I will never again be so disrespectful as to weep.... I would rather remain your stupid little slave."

"You shall be free, Tarrar. But you will be allowed to serve me all the same."

"I don't want to be free, my lord. What use is freedom to me? I am your little slave. I should always be your little slave just as before."

"Then ask me something else, Tarrar, something that you would like very much."

Tarrar grinned with his white teeth through his tears:

"May I tell you, my lord?"

"Yes."

Tarrar hesitated. Then he said, shyly:

"Two other little dancing snakes, my lord."

Lucius laughed softly:

"Child!" he said. "I will give you two other little snakes! But I fear that those also will refuse to dance as only the Indian merchant can make them dance."

"I fear so too," said Tarrar, reflecting. "The snake that is still alive has crept back to the merchant, I expect, out of the skin which it left behind it. I also fear that the new snakes would refuse to dance.... Then I would rather have nothing, my lord. I don't want anything. If only I may serve you."

"Then get everything ready to shave me ... and tell the slaves to prepare the bath."

"Yes, my lord," said Tarrar, with alacrity.

Chapter VII

"Mother of Eros, hear thy slave!

"Child of the foam, great goddess of love,

Aphrodite, look down from above!

Thou, who dost madden the gods with desire,

Thou, who fulfillest men's hearts with thy fire,

All but the heart of my lord that I crave,

Hark to thy slave!

"Spill this hot blood that courses in vain for him,

Darken these eyes that are heavy with pain for him,

Smite the parched lips that he sees but to spurn them,

The hands stretched in love ... take them, break them and burn them!

"Then, in the place where lately he strode,

Mingle mine ash with the dust of the road;

Thus, though I win not a glance from his eye,

Thus, though as ever he pass me by

Careless, unseeing, at least my lord's heel

Cannot but touch me, at least I shall feel

The embrace of his foot; and his sandall'd sole

Shall kiss my dust and make me whole.

"Then let the heart that he has press'd,

The ashen lips by him caressed

Sink low in the lowly dust of the road

Lest another tread where late he trod.

"Mother of Eros, hear thy slave!

"Child of the foam, great goddess of love,

Aphrodite, look down from above!

Thou, who dost madden the gods with desire,

Thou, who fulfillest men's hearts with thy fire,
All but the heart of my lord that I crave,
Hark to thy slave!"

Cora's song rang through the falling night. Her clear voice, tinkling as though with little golden bells, at first soft and hushed, rose throbbing in passion and then broke like a crystal ray and melted in mournfulness and plaintive prayer.

The shadows lay heaped under the palm-trees. Outside the doors of their apartments, in the galleries of the diversorium, sat the travelling merchants, squatting or lying on mat or rug, listening. Uncle Catullus lay in a hammock and Thrasyllus sat beside him and looked up at the stars, which were beginning to show like silver daisies in wide, blue meadows.

"You have sung beautifully, Cora," said Uncle Catullus to the slave, who was sitting on the ground with the four-stringed harp before her.

"Thank you, my lord," said the slave.

"Why not call me uncle?" said Catullus, good-naturedly.

"I should not dare," said Cora, smiling.

"Ilia used to call me uncle."

"I am not Ilia, my lord."

Tarrar appeared in the pillared portico.

But his appearance was a surprise. For Tarrar, no longer bandaged, looked like a little savage: he wore his Libyan festive garment; a girdle of feathers hung round his waist; he was crowned with a head-dress of feathers. And he stood grinning.

"Great gods, Tarrar!" cried Uncle Catullus, with a start. "What have you done to yourself? You look like a little cannibal! You frighten me! What's happening?"

"We are going to Canopus, my lord, to-night!" cried Tarrar, jubilantly. "My Lord Lucius lets you know that we are all going to Canopus this very night! Here is his lordship himself!"

And Tarrar pointed triumphantly to Lucius, who appeared upon the threshold. Cora had risen and now curtsied low to the ground, with outstretched arms.

Lucius looked like a young Egyptian god. He wore an Egyptian robe of striped byssus, with a border of hieroglyphics worked in heavy embroidery and precious stones; his legs were encased in hose of gold tissue; about his head was an Egyptian coif, likethat of a sphinx, with broad, projecting, striped bands, which fell to his shoulders; he glittered with strange jewels and was wrapped from head to foot in

fine gold net like a transparent cloak, like an immaterial shroud. And he approached with a smile, brilliantly, superhumanly beautiful.

"Great sacred gods! Great sacred gods!" exclaimed Uncle Catullus.

He rose; Thrasyllus rose too; and the merchants gathered round and, in salaam upon salaam, showed their admiration for the dazzling stranger.

"Lucius, what possesses you? What is happening? Have you turned into Serapis himself?"

"No, uncle," smiled Lucius, "I am merely clad in ceremonial raiment because I want to go to Canopus and dream on the roof of the temple of Serapis. It is the great feast; and Caleb" – he pointed to Caleb stepping forward – "has persuaded me to go this night in state to Canopus. You are coming too, uncle; you also, Thrasyllus; we shall all go, all my freedmen and slaves. Caleb will see about a boat."

A violent and feverish excitement followed. Slaves, male and female, streamed from every side of the diversorium, rejoicing and clasping their hands in amazement.

"When any princely noble, such as his lordship," Caleb explained, "goes to Canopus, to the feast of Serapis thrice holy, he goes in the greatest state, with all his household to accompany him."

"So I am going too, as I belong to the household?" exclaimed Uncle Catullus. "Only ... am I to rig myself out like that? And where shall I find such a sumptuous raiment?"

"My lord," said Caleb, "you will find everything ready in your chamber. You too, Master Thrasyllus."

Uncle Catullus hurried away, clasping his fat stomach in his two hands. You never knew where you were with that Lucius! For days and days he had been mourning and sobbing and lamenting; he had remained invisible and had eaten nothing ... and there, there he appeared, decked out like a young god, and wanted to go to Canopus, to dream on the roof of the temple!

"And I had just been reckoning on a quiet evening, because I feel that I've overloaded my stomach!" moaned Uncle Catullus. "Egypt will be the death of me!"

Lights everywhere, links and torches; fever and gaiety everywhere, because one and all were going to Canopus that night. What a surprise! Their lord was no longer sick! It was the great feast! It was the feast of Serapis! The feast of dreams! The water-festival and the boat-festival! It was the summer festival of Canopus!

Vettius and Rufus, the two stewards, gave orders here, there and everywhere. One and all, they said, were to deck themselves in festive garb. Ione, the old female slave,

who had charge of the harpists and dancers, was given leave to buy from the merchants whatever she needed, veils and ornaments.

"We are going to Canopus, we are going to Canopus!" cried the women, in joyful chorus. "Quick, Ione, hand me the poppy-rouge! Here, a stick of antimony! I want a blue veil, Ione, and blue lotus-flowers for my hair! Quick, quick, Ione! The master is ready!"

"We are going to Canopus, we are going to Canopus!" Cora cried, joyfully, with the rest. "My lord was like a young god, he looked like Serapis himself! Ione, I must have a net of gold thread and a dreaming-veil of gold thread and pink water-lilies for my hair! I want a wreath of pink water-lilies!"

Lucius from afar beheld this stir, in the reflection of the lamps and torches in the night. Slaves were running to and fro; litters were prepared. He thought only of Ilia. He wanted to wrap himself in the dreaming-veil and to lie on the temple-roof and dream where Ilia was, where she had been carried ... by the pirates. And he stood like a priest, gazing solemnly before him.

Chapter VIII

During those evenings of the summer festival, Alexandria was lighted more brilliantly than Rome itself. The town glittered with hundreds of lights, lamps, lanterns, torches and links; it glittered in its harbours, where the blinding sheaves of light floated from the dome of the light-house; it glittered in its two main streets, which intersected each other; it glittered in the colonnades of the Museum and the Gymnasium, colonnades and stadia themselves restlessly teeming, up to where the multitude were making merry for the festival.

But above all it glittered over Lake Mareotis and the Canopus Canal. The splendid villas on the lake were bright with many-coloured lanterns and balls of fire; the temple of Aphrodite, on the eyot, was silhouetted in flaring lines; and over the golden waters of the lake itself the illuminated boats pressed and crowded, filled with song, filled with dance, full of colour, gladness and joy; streamers flapped and rugs trailed over the sides of the boats down to the water.

Through the lighted streets the bearers hurried and thronged with the litters towards Lake Mareotis. They hurried from the diversorium, with the harpists and the dancing-girls and a great procession of slaves in festive raiment. An army of freedmen followed on horses and mules; and the passers-by pointed to the imposing procession, evidently the household of a very wealthy Roman who was going to Canopus to dream.

The procession reached a landing-stage on the lake. Here a great barge lay moored, a thalamegus which Caleb had succeeded in hiring at the last moment for a vast sum of money. The thalamegus was painted blue and gilded, with blue-and-gilt oars, which stuck out like so many swan's-legs. Caleb had had her covered with tapestry and adorned with wreaths of flowers and festoons of leaves. The silver statue of Aphrodite stood on the prow, with incense burning before it. The troop of slaves, male and female, and freedmen, with Vettius and Rufus, hastened on board to await the master's coming.

A dense multitude pressed round to look on greedily. Now a Roman litter approached, recognizable by its square shape; yet another and the master alighted, with the aid of his slaves, male and female. He was accompanied by an old, corpulent kinsman and a grave tutor.

"He's going dreaming! He's going dreaming!" cried the populace. "See, he has his dreaming-veil on! He looks like Serapis himself!"

Beggars crowded round the travellers:

"Divine lord and exalted prince! Image of Horus, the son of Osiris! May Serapis send you good dreams! May Serapis load you with blessings! May he keep bad dreams locked far from you, in the shadowy underworld!"

The stewards distributed money among the beggars. Lucius had gone on board. The slave-girls scattered flowers before his feet as he walked.

The song of the rowers was heard from the body of the boat. The creaking ropes were cast off; the barge glided towards the middle of the lake. She gleamed with blue, green and yellow lights and left a trail of brightness in her wake; the water was bright around her. On the banks the villas and palaces of light stood in gardens of light.

Hundreds of other barges were gliding slowly in the same direction. Above the monotonous drone of the rowers' song rang ballads and hymns. The music of citharas was heard in descending chords; the harps rang out; the notes of double flutes quavered through the evening air with a magic intoxication of melody.

The waters of the lake stood high. It was the month when the kindly Nile stepped outside its banks with a moist foot and overflowed the Delta. The golden waters of the lake lapped higher than the marble steps of the villas down which the brilliant hetairæ descended, holding the lappets of their veils, to take their seats on the cushions of their barges.

Flowers fell on the water, in unison with the notes of hymn and song. All the craft, hundreds and hundreds, large and small, barges and coracles, square rafts and canoes, pressed gently forward towards the entrance of the Canopian Canal. On the banks were thousands of idlers and spectators, all the people of Alexandria.

The vessels glided to the harmony of the twanged strings into the broad canal. It was very full of water; the banks were flooded. Reeds tall as a man, biblos and cyamos, rose like pillars, blossoming during this month with thousands of waving plumes: the leaves of the biblos were long and bending over, as though each were languidly broken; those of the cyamos were round as scales and goblet-deep, stacked one above the other along the stems, like cups.¹ In the light on the barges, golden patches glowed among the stalks; and the reeds and rushes blossomed up as though out of molten gold.

Here lay the Canopian harbour, here the suburb of Eleusis; and the canal split into two branches. The narrower channel led to Schedia, on the Nile; the broader led past Nicopolis to Canopus.

Beyond stretched the sea, wide and blue. Only a narrow strip of land separated it from the canal; and it lay boundless under a thousand twinkling stars.

"Lucius," said Thrasyllus, sitting spell-bound at the feet of the young Roman, who sat on a raised throne and gazed in front of him like a priest, full of longing for his dream of that night, "Lucius, my Lord Catullus, look! We have passed Nicopolis, with its amphitheatre and stadium; and yonder lies Taposiris, with Cape Zephyrium; and on a height I can see the temple of Aphrodite Arsinoe."

"I see," said Lucius, turning his eyes towards the temple, which was lit with lines of fire and rose above the water like a mansion in Olympus.

"I see," echoed Uncle Catullus, seated by Lucius' side.

"I was reading," Thrasyllus explained, "that at the same place where that temple now stands there once stood the city of Thonis, named after the king who hospitably entreated Menelaus and Helen. Homer mentions it and speaks of the secret herbs and precious balsams which Helen received from Queen Polydamna, Thonis' spouse."

"You know everything, Thrasyllus," said Uncle Catullus, warmly, "and it is a joy to travel with you."

"Tell the slave from Cos to sing the Hymn to Aphrodite as we row past the goddess' temple," said Lucius.

Thrasyllus went to Cora and communicated the master's order. Forthwith a group of singers and dancers rose to their feet. Cora herself struck the resounding chords. And she sang:

"Mother of Eros, hear thy slave!
"Child of the foam, great goddess of love,
Aphrodite, look down from above!
Thou, who dost madden the gods with desire,
Thou, who fulfillest men's hearts with thy fire,
All but the heart of my lord that I crave,
Hark to thy slave!"

She stood as one inspired while she sang, with her fingers on the chords, facing the temple. Around her the girls danced to the song. The movements of their lithe bodies, light as the ripple of a silken scarf in the breeze, met and dissolved in picture after picture with each word of the song. The singer's voice swelled crystal-clear. From the bank of the canal, from the open houses, on the temple-steps the people listened to her song. In the tall reeds lay smaller boats, wherein a man and woman embraced in love. Their hands thrust aside the yielding stems; and their smiles glanced at Cora.

"All but the heart of my lord that I crave,
Hark to thy slave!"

the other singers now sang after her.

"She sings well," said Lucius.

Cora heard him. She blushed crimson between the great rose-coloured flowers at her temples. But she behaved as though she had heard nothing. And she sat down quietly among her companions, at the foot of the silver statue of Aphrodite.

The barge glided on slowly with the others. From all of them, in turns, came music. The water of the flooding canal was like a broad golden mirror. On the bank, between the stalks of the tall reeds, the open taverns and brothels rose, wreathed in flowers, as from an enchanted lake. The women in them beckoned and waved with long lotus-stems.

But the barges glided on, towards Canopus. They were all going to the temple of Serapis. Not until after the dreams would the brothels and taverns be visited. The orgy was to come after the dream.

¹These cyamos-leaves were actually used for kitchen-utensils by the people of Alexandria; and their sale provided a regular livelihood.

Chapter IX

In the strange bright summer night of light, lit by the sheen of the stars and the glow of the lamps, Canopus rose amid its slender obelisks and its spreading palm-trees. The barges lay moored to the long quay, one beside the other. One solemn train of pilgrims after another flowed down the street to the temple of Serapis. The town was alive with the whisper of music and aglow with illumination.

It was mid-night. From the temple of Serapis heavy gong-strokes sounded, like a divine, golden thunder rolling at regular intervals under the stars. The singing processions, bathed in torchlight, streamed towards the temple.

There was a wide avenue paved with large, square stones. This avenue, or dromos, led to the sanctuary, the temenos, along a double row of immense basalt sphinxes, half woman, half lioness; half man, half bull. They were drawn up like superhuman sentinels that had turned to stone; and their great human faces stared raptly into the night. In between the sphinxes, the coloured lamps and lanterns blossomed like lotus-flowers, glowing blue, red and yellow.

The processions streamed into the dromos at pilgrims' pace. Through the dromos they reached the first propylæum, then the second, the third, the fourth. These consisted of a gigantic series of heavy pylons, painted with hieroglyphics: a veritable forest of pylon-trunks rising in serried ranks of frowning columns and crowned with heavy architraves which seemed to support the starry realm of the summer night itself. Through these endless rows of pillars the dense multitude of pilgrims in search of their dreams marched to the music of hymns. It marched with its steady, slow, regular, religious tread. And monotonous as the rhythm of its march was the melody of its hymn, borne upon ever the same harp-chords.

Lucius' procession marched with the others. He walked gravely, with Catullus by his side; Thrasyllus followed; the slaves, male and female, followed. In front of him strode his musicians, singers and dancers. And Cora's voice rose only a little higher in the ever-repeated hymn to the god Serapis.

The temple itself produced a sense of infinity. An immense fore-court, or pronaos, soared on high with its pillars, a forest of pylons crowned by the roof, with its painted hieroglyphics. The pronaos gave admittance to the sanctuary, the holy of holies, an immeasurable empty space, without image, without altar, without anything. Nevertheless as it were a mysterious sanctity descended here, because of the height, the impressive, colossal dimensions. The "wings," or pteres, the two side-walls, sculptured with symbolic bas-reliefs, painted gold, azure and scarlet, approached each other with slanting lines in a mystic perspective, where a cloud of fragrance hovered like a conflagration. Behind this the holy of holies lost itself, the abode of the god, of Serapis; invisible the statue. A swarm of acolytes, zacori and

neocori, were officiating on ascending stairs, in worship before close-drawn hyacinth curtains.

The processions divided themselves along the wings, the side-walls, as directed by the temple-keepers' wands. It was as though a broad stream were dividing into two rivers. At the end of the wings, behind the holy of holies, flights of stairs widened in the open night, leading to terraces, the one ever higher than the other, so that they could not be overlooked. The golden gong-strokes solemnly rolled and thundered, echoing heavily and loudly.

Over the terraces, in a constant round, up and down, marched the chief priests, the hieropsalts, the hieroscopes, the hierogrammat, the pastophors, the sphagists and the stolist. The hieropsalts sang the hymns to the sacred harps; the hieroscopes prophesied from the entrails of victims; the hierogrammat guarded the secrets of the Hermetic wisdom; the pastophors carried the images of Anubis, with the dog's head, in silver boats; the sphagists were the sacrificial priests; the stolist served the sacred images, adorned them, tended them with ever clean and perfumed hands. But among the hierogrammat strode the prophets. They had beheld the godhead face to face; they knew the past and the future, they knew the meaning of the sacred dreams. They were very holy; and the oldest of them were most holy. Whenever they approached, the people sank to the ground and kissed the pavement, with hands uplifted.

The sacred hour approached, the hour when Serapis would send the sacred dreams from heaven, out of the sun itself, when all the procession would have streamed in, when the gates of the dromos would have slammed with their ponderous monolithic doors, when the last gong-stroke would clatter away in the sacred night.

From the terraces the town, the canal, and the lake lay visible as in one golden shimmer of lights. But on the terraces themselves suddenly an incredible stillness reigned. Not a voice, not a rustle sounded from out of that multitude of thousands. And on the granite pavement the pilgrims were stretched one beside the other.

In between the rows the temple-keepers moved, the neocori. And they bent incessantly over the pilgrims and covered them with the dreaming-nets and -veils, while zacori slung the censers. A heavy, intoxicating perfume of almost stifling aromatic vapour was wafted through the air.

Suddenly, through the silence, the harps of the hieropsalts struck the sacred chord.

There was a short hymn, one single phrase, which melted away.

On the vast terraces the multitude of the thousands of pilgrims lay motionless under nets and veils, their eyes closed. Not a sound came from the illuminated city. The sacred silence reigned wide and mystic, fraught with terror, over the sea, along the

starry sky, over the city and the temple. For Serapis, invisible, was rising from the underworld, to bring the dreams.

He rose in a cloud of dreams, out of the sacred, subterranean Hell, where he reigns even as Osiris reigns in high Heaven. He is Osiris himself; between him and Osiris there is no difference. He is two. While Osiris is the benevolent Almighty above, he is the benevolent Almighty below. He opposes Typhon, even as Osiris combated Typhon. Victory falls to him in the end, even as it did to Osiris.

Now he rises, in the cloud of dreams. For it is his feast, the feast of his kindly waters, which he pours in summer rains from the sacred vessels wherewith the dog's-head of Anubis, his watchman, servant and comrade, is crowned, the waters which he pours into the sacred stream, so that it may flood sacred Egypt. Now he rises in the cloud of dreams.

The earth splits and Serapis rises from the subterranean Hell. He is everything, even as Osiris is. He is feminine, Neith, the beginning, and masculine, Ammon, eternity. He is what the last will be. And he cannot be other than the benefactor. He makes the dreams hover like butterflies around the foreheads of those who believe in him. His healing power makes whole the sick. He pours the secret of that healing into the minds of the servants of sufferers who shall dream in their masters' stead. His dreams advise what must be done or left undone to achieve prosperity, fortune, consideration, happiness and love.

And he will make Lusius dream where to find a beloved woman who has disappeared....

In the silence the young Roman lies, covered with a gold network, like a precious mummy, straight out, his arms beside his body, his eyes shut. Near him lie all his followers.

The cloud of the perfumes is wafted over their eyes reverently closed under the veils.

The sacred silence continues, hour after hour, unbroken....

Chapter X

Had Lucius slept? Had he dreamed? Had the fragrant cloud drugged his senses? Had a strange mystic power spread over him? Had Serapis descended upon him? Had the dreams surrounded him?

It seemed to him that a golden thunder roused him from his heavy, motionless lethargy. The gong-strokes rolled through the temple and far away into the starry night. Harp-chords sounded, a hymn was intoned. He felt his veil wet with thick-rising dew....

Round and round the terraces, singing, moved the long procession of the priests. It was still night. Everywhere around Lucius the dreamers arose, drunk with sleep and dreaming. In the reflections of the lamps and torches their faces were ghostly, spiritualized as after a long prayer, after protracted adoration and ecstasy, wherein their thoughts, desires and souls had been refined.

On the topmost terrace, round which the whole city shimmered visibly with light – on the one side the nocturnal blue of the sea, on the other the silvery forking of the Nile's mouths through the Delta – the learned hierogrammats, the keepers of the sacred writings, sat each on his throne. In their hands they held unrolled the sacred scrolls, whose hieroglyphics gave answer to all things. Temple-slaves behind them lifted high the coloured lanterns. In front of them the multitudinous dreamers thronged.

Great was the thronging. The dreamers wanted to know the interpretation of their dreams. But those who had dreamed were so many that the priests did not answer save with a few words full of dark meaning.

Many, disappointed, went down the terraces. Orgy awaited them in the taverns and brothels along the canal....

Lucius had risen, in the midst of all his followers. He stood stiff, motionless, veiled in the gold net, like a god entranced.

"Lucius," Thrasyllus asked, "my dear child and master, tell me: have you dreamed?"

"Yes," replied Lucius, in a trance.

"I too," said Uncle Catullus. "It was a nightmare, most unpleasant! I had dined too heavily. My stomach was overloaded. And I am now shivering with this chilly dew. Egypt is most interesting, but Egypt will positively be the death of me!"

Caleb had approached:

"My gracious lord," said Caleb, "your Sabæan amulets have no doubt inspired you with a favourable dream. You must have your dream expounded. But not by the hierogrammats.... Look, the dreamers are crowding in front of them. There is no

reaching them. You must have your dream expounded by a most holy prophet, by Amphris, the centenarian.... Come with me, let me lead you to him...." He took Lucius by the hand. "It costs half a talent, no less," said Caleb. "Thirty minæ, my lord. But then Amphris will expound your dreams for you, Amphris, the holy Amphris. The hierogrammatæ charge ten or twenty drachmæ. But they can never tell it as the holy Amphris, the prophet does. This is where he sits enthroned, my lord."

They were standing in front of a small pyramid, on one of the upper terraces. Two sphinxes beside the narrow door lay like mysterious stone sentinels. Temple-keepers guarded the gate.

"The most holy Amphris?" Caleb asked.

"Forty minæ," said one of the priests.

"Why not a talent right away?" grumbled Caleb.

"Forty minæ," repeated the priest.

Caleb took the gold coins from the long purse at his girdle and slipped them into the priest's hand:

"Enter, my lord," he said, pointing to the open door.

Lucius entered. Seated on a throne was an old man who looked like a god of age and wisdom. Lucius himself was as beautiful as a young god. A strange light, as of soft moons, shone from blue globes. Lucius bowed to the ground, fell upon his knees and kissed the floor. He remained in this position.

"Did Serapis pass over you, my son?"

"Yes, holy father."

"What did he make you see, in your dreams?"

"The woman whom I love...."

The prophet had laid his long, thin, transparent hand on the dreamer's head:

"But who did not love you," he said, gently and quietly.

"How do you know, holy father?... I saw the pirates who kidnapped her...."

"But by whom she was not kidnapped...."

"How do you know, holy father?"

"And by whom she was not sold as a slave."

"Where is she then, O father?"

"What did Serapis make you see in the dream?"

Lucius sobbed:

"I do not know, father.... I saw her and ... those who kidnapped her."

"How many were they?"

"Many."

"Old and young?"

"No, they resembled one another like brothers, like doubles."

"Because they were not many."

"Not many?"

"No."

"How many were they, father?"

"They were ... one."

"Not more?"

"They were one," repeated the prophet. "My son, your soul is sick. It is sick with sorrow and love. Love is strong, but wisdom is stronger. Gather wisdom, my son. My child, I can see into your soul. I see it lying tortured and trembling."

"There is no comfort if I do not find her!"

"There is comfort. Isis seeking for Osiris recovered all the pieces of his body except that piece which fructified her. And yet she found comfort, in the end."

"Give me comfort, holy father."

"I am wisdom, child, and you are young. Serve wisdom, but honour love."

"Father, why did the pirates resemble one another?"

"Because they were one."

"One pirate?"

"One pirate."

"Where is Ilia, father?"

"My son, even my wisdom does not tell me that whereof you have not dreamed. You dreamed of many pirates, who resembled one another like doubles. There was one pirate, my child."

"Who was he?"

"Did Serapis conjure up his image before you?"

"I no longer see it."

"Then go in peace. And let love and wisdom comfort you."

Lucius went. On the threshold of the pyramid he met an hetaira. She glittered like an idol in her ceremonial garb, sewn with jewels, and looked at him with painted eyes.

"It's Tamyris, my lord," said Caleb. "She is going to consult Amphis. She has paid a talent! Has Amphis interpreted your dream? The door-keeper, who also is wise, has interpreted mine for me! And for only five drachmæ."

"One pirate! One pirate!" murmured Lucius.

And he clenched his fists, impotently....

The multitude streamed away along the terraces. The barges glided back on the canal, in the night.

And constantly, near the pleasure-houses and taverns, the vessels stopped and the dreamers alighted.

Here mead flowed and foaming golden beer and heavy Mareotis wines and the intoxicating liqueurs of Napata. Here the naked women, who beckoned with lotus-stalks, twisted in the dance.

"Back!" cried Lucius. "Back to Alexandria!"

The barge stopped at no pleasure-houses, at no taverns. The master sobbed, his head wrapped in his golden dreaming-veil. There was no music. Only the plaintive song of the rowers made itself heard from below.

Behind, in the east, the dawn paled in one long, rosy line, above the sea ... while the festal lamps flickered out and died....

Chapter XI

Serapis had opened the floodgates of the sky.

The first spring rains had already descended in heavy torrents; the water-gods had already poured the kindly streams from their urns into the swelling Nile; the river-surveyors, who had consulted the Nilometers¹ at every place, declared that the sacred stream was steadily rising and that the maximum gauge would be reached that summer.

The rains clattered down in white curtains of pouring waters.

The palm-garden of the diversorium was inundated. Master Ghizla made his slaves dig little canals to carry the water to cisterns.

There was much joy and gladness at all this water. The air was fresh; though mid-summer was approaching, an equable coolness tempered the atmosphere around Alexandria; no river-mist spread seeds of disease; and the great dampness brought relief even to this ground, which had dried up during the winter, and to the parched air.

The travellers remained indoors. After the night of dreams at Canopus, Lucius had come home in one of his impotent fits of fury, locking himself in his room in despair and refusing to see anybody whatever.

Uncle Catullus abandoned himself to long siestas; Thrasyllus studied books, maps and globes.

In the porch of the slaves' quarters sat Cora. As she was forbidden to sing or play, she sat crouched with her arms around her knees, gazing mournfully at the rains. Their lord's sickness spread melancholy among all his household.

Caleb squatted beside Cora. Like her he sat with his arms around his knees and he smiled with his flashing eyes and teeth and said:

"Cora, I love you very much."

Cora did not move; she merely answered, very gently:

"I am not free; I belong to the master."

"I should like to buy you, Cora; and then you would be free."

Cora did not answer; the rain poured down in an endless grey sheet; and in the palm-garden, under an umbrella, Master Ghizla drilled his dripping slaves.

"You would be free," Caleb repeated. "You would not be my slave, but my wife. I am rich: we are rich, Ghizla and I. We do a very good business. Our diversorium is the finest in Alexandria. We make a great deal of money, because all princely nobles alight at our establishment. Cora, you would be its mistress. You would have slaves,

male and female. I would pay your master whatever he asked; it would be deducted from his bill. For business is business, you know. But I could pay for you, if necessary, in ready money. And then, Cora, when we have grown very rich ... then we would go back to Saba, to my native land. It is the sweetest and most beautiful country in the world ... to live in, you know. But there's no business to be done there. You have to be rich there; then it's delightful. When we are rich, we will go back there. Cora, shall I tell you about Saba, about my country, even if it were only, Cora, to divert you, now that it's raining and you mustn't sing?"

"I am listening, Caleb."

"Saba, dear Cora, is the mightiest kingdom of Arabia; Saba is Arabia Felix, Cora. Saba is the sweet land where the balsam-trees grow and the precious spices are gathered: myrrh and frankincense and cinnamon. All the herbs and flowers, Cora, are scented in Saba; there is no herb and no flower that is not scented. Under the sky, which is transparent as empty blue space, the clouds of perfume waft up and rise to the feet of the gods, who always glance down smilingly upon my country, upon my happy country. The palm-tree is scented there and the calamus-reed is scented there; the scented papyrus blossoms there. Nowhere are the flowers so big and of so many kinds, or the trees so densely-leaved or so green. Nowhere are the nights so mild and the days so blissful. The nights are for feasting and the days for resting. We climb up long ladders into the tall trees and sleep in leafy nests, like birds. Mariaba is my town, the golden capital of my sweet land. Have you ever seen a fairy-city in your dreams, Cora? That is Mariaba. There are temples of chrysolite with domes of blue crystal, which imitate the firmament. The streets are strewn with golden sand. Mariaba is situated on a hill, like the palace of a god. The king, Cora, is a descendant of Balkis, our great queen, who brought Solomon the treasures of Ophir; the king lives at Mariaba in a palace walled with gold. The walls of his apartments are like blue mirrors and he treads on carpets that are woven of flowers and hourly renewed. He does not eat, but lives on perfumes. He is sacred, but he may not leave his palace; for an oracle has commanded his people to stone him the moment that he comes out. Everything in his palace and in the town is luxury and delight. There is no commerce, there is no business. The Sabæans surrender the trade in the precious products of their country to the men of Syria and Mesopotamia. They themselves, Cora, are rich and as gods.... When we are rich and you are my wife ... we shall be as gods in Mariaba and you shall see the king, behind a transparent hanging of gold glass, while he feeds on those perfumes. We shall live in a house of alabaster, which is transparent, but only to those inside. We shall have a barge of blue leather with red-silk tassels and little golden, tinkling bells.... When the evening wind is fresh, we shall warm our hands at glowing cinnamon. I shall anoint your body with fluid larimnum, which is the most costly of aromatics and is not exported, not even to Cæsar. We shall have no plate except of gold and an ivory couch inlaid with jasper,

or perhaps with sard. And you will go about on an elephant with silvered hoofs, many gold bands round his trunk and, at night, two little lanterns on his tusks, Cora. And we shall be happier than you can imagine or than I can tell.”²

“What you are describing, Caleb, is indeed like fairyland. But I have heard say that, because of all that fragrance in their country, the Sabæans one and all suffer from headache.”

“When we suffer from headache, Cora, we burn asphalt and the hairs of a goat’s beard. There is no remedy to compare with that for headache. Or else we wear the sacred amulets. Wear one, Cora: wear this amulet, which I have always worn.”

“No, Caleb.”

“Are you afraid that I shall bewitch you?”

“Yes. I fear the Sabæan amulets. It is perhaps because of one of them that the master dreamed the bad dream which has made him ill and sad.”

“Cora, I love you so much.... Will you permit me to buy you from your master?”

“If you bought me, O Caleb, I should be a faithful slave and sing and play the harp to you. But I should be unhappy, even if I were your wife and free ... because I should be so far from my master....”

“Whom you love.”

Cora hesitated. Then she said:

“Whom I love, Caleb ... but as the flower loves the sun, as the moth loves the star ... from afar and from the depths ... without hope.”

The rain poured down in an endless grey sheet. In the garden, Master Ghizla was swearing at the slaves and wading, with tucked-up tunic and lean, hairy legs, through the puddles.

Caleb rose. He said nothing and went away, his head sunk in melancholy. Then he came back and resumed:

“You would go hunting with me, Cora, and you would sit in front of me on a Sabæan stallion, which would be swift as the wind, and we should catch lion-whelps in nets and tame them with palm-wine and they would follow you about like big cats.”

Cora only smiled and said nothing.

“I know, Cora, why you will not be my wife. It is not because you love your master. For, even if your master loved you, you would be a slave. My wife would be a free woman and reign as queen in my house. But you will not be my wife because perhaps you know the Sabæan law which prescribes that a married woman is also

the wife of all her husband's brothers. But Ghizla, dear Cora, would not dare to touch even the hem of your garment."

"I did not know that law," said Cora.

"There was a king's daughter in our country, Cora. She was dazzlingly beautiful and was the wife of fifteen brothers, who were princes. All the fifteen of them glowed with love for her. When one of the brothers wished to tarry in her chamber, he set his stick outside the door, as a sign. Then the others passed their way.... When she wearied of their eagerness to love her, she devised a stratagem. She had sticks made for her, like the brothers'. When one of the princes left her, she placed one of these sticks outside her door. In this way she enjoyed peace.... But one day all the brothers happened to be in the square of the town at the same time. One of them went to visit her ... and found outside the door the stick of a brother ... whom he had just left in the town-square! Then he thought that his wife, the wife of the fifteen brothers, was unfaithful to them ... with a sixteenth, a stranger. And he sought his father and told him of his suspicions. But it appeared that the wife was innocent. And not only the father but the fifteen brothers and their spouse laughed at the stratagem and were happy.... But you, Cora, would never need to put a stick like mine outside your door. For I have only one brother, Ghizla, and he would not dare to touch so much as the hem of your garment."

Cora laughed and Caleb laughed and his eyes and teeth flashed and glittered.

"In that case, I'll think it over, Caleb!" laughed Cora. "In that case, I'll think it over!"

"Do think it over, Cora," laughed Caleb. "If you are willing, I'll buy you from your master. And we shall have a pleasure-boat of cedar-wood, but with sails like a bird's wings, so that we can either sail about on the sea or soar high into the clouds. And then on some nights we could visit the moon, where all the people are transparent, like shades.... This is not a fairy-tale, Cora; it's as I tell you. We have those magic ships in our seas, in our skies.... Think it over, Cora! Do think it over!"

And, while Cora was still laughing incredulously, Caleb girdled his tunic high and waded barefoot through the puddles of the palm-garden, looking round and laughing as he went. For Ghizla had called to him to see the canals which the slaves were digging to carry off the rain-water to the cisterns.

1Stone wells on the banks of the Nile, in which the water rose and fell as in the river itself; marked columns indicated the maximum, minimum and middle gauge. Inspectors informed the people beforehand how high the Nile would rise and when the stream would be likely to overflow its banks.

2Caleb's description of Saba owes very little to the author's invention. Nearly all these details upon Arabia Felix will be found set forth in Strabo's Geography.

Chapter XII

But Libyan bearers carried a litter into the garden.

The litter was close-curtained with blue canvas, against the rain.

And a veiled woman peeped through a slit in the curtains and beckoned to Caleb:

"Is he at home?" she asked.

Caleb recognized her, but he answered with an air of innocence and asked:

"Who, gracious lady?"

"He," repeated the woman. "The young Roman, Publius Lucius Sabinus."

"He is at home, gracious lady," said Caleb. "But he is unwell. He will not see any one."

"If he is at home, I want to see him," said the woman.

And she alighted on the stone steps of the portico. She was closely wrapped in her veils, but Caleb had recognized her. And she offered Caleb a gold coin, which Caleb did not refuse, because business was business and a well-invested stater brought him still a little nearer to his native land, for which he was longing.

"I do not know whether I can let you in," said Caleb, hesitatingly.

The woman produced a second piece of gold. It disappeared in Caleb's girdle as though by witchcraft.

"Where is he staying?" she asked.

"In the princes' building, of course," said Caleb, proudly. "Where his little black slave is squatting."

The veiled woman went up to Tarrar, squatting on a mat outside a door:

"I want to see him," said the woman. "I want to speak to him. Take me to him."

"The master is asleep," said Tarrar.

"Wake him."

"The master is sick," said Tarrar.

"Tell him that I can cure him."

"I dare not," said Tarrar. "He would be angry. It would be against his orders. He is accustomed to have us obey him."

"Announce me."

"No," said Tarrar.

"You're a little monkey," said the woman.

And she opened the door and lifted a curtain.

Tarrar and Caleb, dismayed, tried to stop her:

"She's inside!" said Caleb.

"The master will beat me!" said Tarrar, shivering. "That impudent wench!"

But Caleb, with his finger to his mouth, told him to be silent ... and listened at the door.

The veiled woman stood in Lucius' room. Lucius lay on a couch in mournful meditation. He opened his eyes wide with amazement.

"I am Tamyris," said the woman. "Lucius, I am Tamyris. I am famed for my beauty; and I have kept kings waiting on the threshold of my villa on Lake Mareotis merely out of caprice. I once kissed a negro slave while the King of Pontus was waiting; and, when my black lover held me in his arms, I called the king in ... and then showed him the door and drove him away."

"That's not true," said Lucius.

Tamyris opened her veils and laughed:

"No, it's not true," she said. "But what is true is this, that I have been burning with love for you since the day when I saw you, beautiful as a god, on the threshold of Amphis' pyramid. Lucius, I want to be your slave. I want to serve and love you. I will cure you and make you laugh. I shall make you forget all your sorrow. Lucius, I have served the sacred goddess Aphrodite since I was a child of six. She has taught me, through oracles and dreams, the utter secret of her science, the secret of her highest voluptuousness, which she herself did not know until she loved Adonis. Lucius, if you will love me, I shall be your slave and reveal the secret of Adonis to you."

"Go away," said Lucius.

"Lucius," said Tamyris, "I have never asked a man to love me. But my days, since I looked into the mournful depths of your eyes, have been like withered gardens and my nights like scorched sands. I suffer and I am ill. I have an everlasting thirst here, in my throat, despite draughts cooled with snow and fruit steeped in silphium. See, my hands shake as though I were in a fever. See, Lucius, how my hands shake. They want to fondle you, to fondle your limbs and...."

"Go away," said Lucius.

"Lucius, I long to be your slave. I, Tamyris, the famous hetaira, who possess treasures, as you do, and the largest beryl discovered in Ethiopia, I long to be your slave and I long to shake your pillows high and soft and to lave your feet in nard and to dry them with my kisses, kiss after kiss until they are dry."

Lucius struck a hard blow on the gong. Caleb and Tarrar appeared.

"Call the guards," Lucius commanded. "And drag this woman away if she does not go."

"I am going," said Tamyris. "But, when I am dead, O Lucius, burnt out with love, I shall haunt you and my ghost will twine around you, without your being able to prevent it, and I shall suck your soul from your lips ... until I have you inside me ... inside me."

"Gracious lady," said Caleb, obsequiously, "the rain has ceased and your litter waits."

"I am going," said Tamyris. "The Prince of Numidia expects me. He has come with twenty swimming elephants, over the sea and straight across the lake, to love me. I am giving an orgy to-night, just to amuse him. Lucius, if you call on me to-night, we will tie up the Prince of Numidia and tickle the soles of his feet till he dies of laughing. Will you come?"

"You lie," said Lucius. "There is no prince come to see you and there are no swimming elephants. You weary me. Go away, or I shall have you scourged from my presence with long whips."

"I am going," said Tamyris. "But, at a moment when you are not thinking of it, I shall bewitch you. Then you, without knowing it, will drink a philtre which I have prepared for you; and you will come to me and I shall embrace you. And in my embrace you shall know what otherwise would have always remained a secret to you. I am going."

That night Lucius went to Tamyris.

But he returned, the next morning, disillusionized and disappointed.

Chapter XIII

"My son," said old Thrasyllus, sitting beside his couch, "do you intend always to cherish your illness and longing, like a serpent that devours you, bone and flesh? The sibyl of Rhacotis merely guessed your own thoughts. The holy Amphis could explain nothing more than that many, who resemble one another, mean only one in the dream. After that, what could your credulity imagine that a crafty hetaira would make you guess in her embrace? The name of that one man? The name of the pirate? The place where he is hiding Ilia?... One pirate?... Who could have stolen her?"

"I don't know," said Lucius, wearily.

"My poor, sick boy," said the tutor, "no one knows and no one will ever know. She has disappeared. If she has not been kidnapped by pirates, she is drowned. Did you not visit the slave-markets in Rome on purpose to find her? Have you not done the same thing here, in Alexandria? She is not to be found. Forget her, my son. Try to get better. If no other woman can cure you, let some other power than love cure you. Amphis mentioned wisdom. There is wisdom. Seek it here, in the land of wisdom. This city, my son, is a sinful city, though it is fair to look upon. This city is as Tamiris herself: it is a wanton among cities. There is no more wisdom in this city, notwithstanding the Museum, notwithstanding the Serapeum, notwithstanding the dreams of Canopus, which die away in orgies. In this city I have met none save merchants, usurers and venal women. This magnificent city is a venal city. Even the philosophers here are avaricious and venal. Even the prophets demand a talent for their divinations. The power of money holds sway here and no longer wisdom. Let us go farther. There is wisdom left in Egypt. And in the wisdom which we shall find you will be cured. Listen, my son: there is the sacred word of the Kabbala, which Moses himself received from the godhead on Mount Sinai. That word has never been graven on tables of stone, but Moses whispered it to his sons and those sons to theirs. It is the key to happiness. He who utters it has the power to avoid suffering and to know all that can be known on earth. I have sought for it, in the Museum, in the Serapeum, here and at Canopus. While you lay sorrowing on your couch, my son, I have held converse with priests and with philosophers, with prophets. I am persuaded that I shall not find the word in Alexandria."

"But where will you find it, Thrasyllus?"

The tutor stared before him:

"Perhaps farther on," he said. "Perhaps at Memphis. Let us go to Memphis. If I do not find the word at Memphis, I shall look for it farther still. Let us sail up the Nile, to Thebes, to Ethiopia. Let us go to the pillars of Sesostris. Something tells me that we shall find it ... and that you will be cured, my son. But let us go."

Lucius approved and the departure was decided. Thereupon Master Ghizla and Caleb had a long talk on “business,” after which Caleb asked for an interview with Lucius, which was granted and at which Uncle Catullus and Thrasyllus were present.

“Noble lords,” Caleb began, “I should like to speak to you in your own interest. The question, noble lords, is this: I understand from the most learned Master Thrasyllus that there is a plan on foot to leave Alexandria and to travel over Memphis to Ethiopia, as far as the pillars of Sesostris. That will certainly be a fine journey; and all great lords take that road. But permit me, your servant, to give you a piece of advice, in your own interest, noble lords, in your own interest. My advice is this: hire from me and my brother Ghizla a comfortable and spacious Nile barge, a thalamegus, not only to ascend the Nile in, but also to live in, so far as possible, because—spoken without slander, noble lords, spoken without slander!—the diversoria which you will find at Hermopolis, at Leontopolis, ay, even at Memphis and Thebes are ... bad, are all bad, not to be compared with our far-famed Hermes House, O my honoured benefactors! No, they are unclean hovels, standing on the edges of marshes, without any modern conveniences; and, though you have your own cook, you would not even find any unpolluted wells there, not to speak of wine, and would never have a good meal again, O my Lord Catullus! Therefore, O my patrons, hire our Nile thalamegus, in which you can live with a small following, with a few slaves; leave the other slaves here, with the greater part of your splendid equipment; and allow me—if you have been satisfied, O my Lord Lucius, with my conduct at Alexandria and Canopus—to be your guide, at the head of your own escort, and to remove all difficulties from your path. I know the whole of Egypt! I have already conducted numbers of noble lords, ay, to the sources of the Nile, to those most mysterious sources! We will take tents with us and hire camels, when necessary, but take my advice ... and never alight at any other Egyptian diversoria, except our Hermes House, for they are all bad, bad, bad ... indescribably bad, O my noble lords!”

“Caleb,” said Lucius, “I was just about to propose to you what you are proposing to me, that you should be our guide to the pillars of Sesostris and hire me a barge to sail up the Nile.”

“O my lords!” cried Caleb, overjoyed and obviously relieved. “How glad I am of that! For now I am convinced that you will be comfortable and travel pleasantly and that you, O my Lord Catullus, will dine as you have been wont to do here ... especially as we shall not forget to take our own wines on board, the purple Mareotis wine, thick as ink, and the topaz-yellow liqueur of Napata.”

“But is the last really necessary, Caleb?” asked Uncle Catullus, mischievously. “After all, we are going to Ethiopia!”

"And on the way, my lord? Before we reach Ethiopia? And above all let me also explain that the Ethiopian liqueurs ... must first descend the Nile, to acquire the perfume and the rich flavour which they do not possess in Ethiopia itself."

"If only they don't lose that perfume, Caleb, when they ascend the Nile again!" said Uncle Catullus, jestingly.

"I shall see to that, my lord," said Caleb, who saw through Uncle Catullus quite as plainly as Uncle Catullus saw through Caleb. "I'll see to that. You just leave it to me."

"We are leaving everything to you, Caleb. Get the barge ready for to-morrow," said Lucius.

"Then we shall go up the Nile next day, my lord," said Caleb, happy and delighted.

And he retired with salaam upon salaam.

And Master Ghizla, in the palm-garden, pretending to be busy with the little canal, but in reality full of eagerness to know the result of Caleb's advice, whispered:

"I say!... Brother!..."

"Yes?"

"Well, Caleb, well?" asked Ghizla, anxiously and looking a little pale.

"They're hiring the thalamegus ... they're alighting at no other diversorium ... they're sleeping in our tents, they'll travel withour camels and...."

"Well, Caleb, and what else?" asked Ghizla, rubbing his hands.

"They're drinking our wines ... all the way to Napata!"

"Where you'll pretend to lay in a fresh stock of liqueurs?"

"You leave that to me, Brother Ghizla, you just leave it to me!"

"May the gods bless you, Brother Caleb; may Thoth, Hermes and Serapis bless you! Quick, let us look in the cellars if we have enough in store!"

There came a sudden shower, as though poured from an urn in the sky by an invisible water-god; and the two brothers, with their garments girdled up, rushed bare-legged through the puddles of their palm-garden to their wine-cellars, which lay warm as stone cupolas in the sun, or else were kept cool with double walls filled with snow.

Chapter XIV

In the still and silent night, the Delta lay flooded by the kindly waters of the sacred river. From the Canopic to the Sebennyitic mouth, from the Phatmetic along the Mendesian to the Pelusiac mouth, the Delta lay flooded: one still and silent sea in the night, a wide, silver sheet of water without a ripple, stretching farther than the eye could reach in the soft-falling sheen of the full moon. Between the river-mouths the canals lay in streaks of silver light, full of water to their edges. Past the blossoming reeds, past the blossoming lotuses and water-lilies, the great barge glided up the stream as in a vision.

There was not a sound amid the silence but the dripping from the oars.

The night was muffled, wide and immense. It was as though the moon, up above, had inundated the sky, even as the flood the sacred land below. It was as though the flood of moonshine were drenching the sacred sky also with a calm, unrippled sea, but a sea of light. The night was like a noiseless, silvery day; the night was like a shadow of the day. In that inundation of the light of heaven the stars paled, innumerable, like a silvery powder sprinkled by the moonshine. There lay the lake of Butos, wide and mystic and gleaming. Island emerged after island. Palms stood in clusters, stately, motionless and delicate. A shrine appeared and vanished as the dream-barge glided down a bend of the canal. Country-mansions stood peacefully linked together. There were taller dykes and patches of golden, shadowy wheat. Sheaves of corn looked like the images of gods, reverence-compelling, ranged in order beside one another, against the wall of a barn. A peculiar scent was wafted by, a fresh aroma as of always moist flowers.

The outline of a village came into view. And hamlet joined itself to hamlet, with shrines and mansions in between. Suddenly, farther up, in the sea of glory, in the sea of light, huge needles rose on high from the ground, with quivering lines, and became lost in the midst of light.

Thrasyllus standing by Cora on the fore-castle pointed:

“The obelisks of Sais.”

She turned, with a start, and was silent. The barge that afternoon had left Naucratis along the canals which seam the Saitic nome, or province. They were now nearing the capital, Sais, the capital of all Lower Egypt. They already saw the Anubis Avenue. And suddenly, at a bend, between very tall reeds blossoming with tassels and bowing before the barge, Thrasyllus pointed:

“The temple of Isis-Neith.”

There were sphinxes: they seemed to lift their basalt heads in prayer to the moon and the sky. Lamps and lights twinkled like stars. The thalamegus hove to; orders rang out; the sailors moored the vessel.

"The temple of Isis-Neith," Thrasyllus repeated to Lucius, who approached with Catullus and Caleb.

They were all arrayed in long, white-linen robes. Cora also was similarly clad, in a long, white, close fitting linen robe. She wore a wreath of wheat-ears and lotus-flowers at her temples. For it was the Night of the Glowing Lights, the Feast of the Burning Lamps.

"Nemu-Pha is waiting for me in the temple," said Thrasyllus. "I wrote to him and he has consented to receive me. He is the high-priest of Isis; and to-night he receives those who come to consult him. I thought, Lucius, of going alone. Nemu-Pha is one of the holiest prophets in Egypt. One word from him can perhaps enable me to guess much. But, if you accompany me, with only a single thought in your sick brain, you would break the mystic thread which might be woven between the high-priest's spirit and mine. Let me go alone. I have no other care than your happiness ... even though we are not agreed on the form which it should take.

"Go, Thrasyllus," said Lucius.

"I don't think that I shall go on shore," said Uncle Catullus. "The Night of the Glowing Lights and the Feast of the Burning Lamps leave me cold. It is colourless and cheerless; it will be a spectral orgy. I am too old and fat, Lucius, for spectral orgies. Go on shore alone and amuse yourself as you may."

Lucius assembled his slaves, male and female. They were all in long, white robes, the women wreathed with ears of wheat and lotus-flowers.

"You are all free to-night," said Lucius. "You have a night of liberty. Until sunrise you belong to yourselves. Go your ways and do whatever you please."

Rufus handed each a small sum of money. The slaves bowed low and disappeared, between the palms, in the direction of the moonlit, twinkling city.

Only a guard of sailors kept watch on the barge. Uncle Catullus retired to his cabin. Tarrar also did not wish to go on shore and remained to sleep at his master's threshold. The Feast of Isis made many shudder who were not accustomed from their youth to its shivery mysticism.

Thrasyllus had gone. Lucius also went on shore. He saw Cora hesitating under the palm-trees while the other women slaves had already gone gaily to enjoy their night of liberty:

"Why don't you join your companions, Cora?" asked Lucius.

"My lord," Cora replied, "if you permit me, I would rather stay here."

"You are free to-night."

"What should I do with liberty, my lord?"

"You can do what you please, go to the temple and see the veiled Isis ... and enjoy yourself as and with whom you choose."

She cast down her eyes and blushed.

"There is a general holiday to-night," continued Lucius, "for slaves male and female."

She folded her hands as though in prayer:

"My lord," she begged, "suffer me to remain here, near the barge. I am afraid of liberty and of the big city."

"Do as you please," said Lucius.

He went on alone. Loneliness sent a shiver through him because of this strange night which was like day. A white melancholy emanated from his soul. He felt aimless. He would have preferred to accompany Thrasyllus. He would not have minded going to bed. He had almost invited Cora to accompany him to Sais, but did not think it suited to his dignity.

He went alone, in his white raiment, in the bountiful moonlight. How strange the night was, all white and trembling. He approached the town. There was nothing but the monotonous rattling of the sistra carried by the long-robed pilgrims who walked in procession to the temple. All the houses along the road were lit with the lamps burning at the doors and windows, vessels full of oil with burning wicks. It was a strange pale-yellow twinkling in the moonshine. It was like a funeral ceremony. For it commemorated the night on which Isis had collected the scattered limbs of her brother and husband Osiris, murdered and quartered by Typhon and scattered all over Egypt.

The procession streamed to the temple. Along the road, the hierodules, the priestesses, danced to a monotonous chant, hand in hand, in a long row. They threw a laugh to the numberless strangers who had come to Sais, for that night. The strangers laughed back and picked out the priestesses; and they withdrew together, first to the temple, then farther away.

Three hierodules laughed to Lucius. They danced round him. He did not wish to seem uncivil; also he felt very forlorn. He just laughed back, wearily and kindly.

"Shall we come with you?" asked one of the hierodules.

"As you please," said Lucius. "Are you going to the temple?"

"If you wish."

They walked in front of him and beside him. They wore white, close-fitting robes, with lotus-flowers and ears of wheat in their hair. They were gentle and civil and obliging and young, like three young children.

The white multitude streamed along the streets. The obelisks of the dromos came into view. The temple rose gigantic and mysterious, with numbers of square buildings and terraces stacked one above the other. There were rows of gigantic pylons, which lost themselves in the moonlit night. The monotonous melody of the sistra rattled on every side; on every side the lamps twinkled. Lucius felt within him an immeasurable melancholy, because of life and because of death, because of people and because of himself.

The hierodules led the way. They were kind and courteous, glad at meeting this amiable stranger, to whom they would be obliging, as their duty prescribed that night.

They entered the pronaos and secos. In the immensity of the pillared spaces the countless sistra rattled eerily, producing a vibration which was no longer music: it was as though the pylons and pillars themselves were rattling, as though the very earth were rattling.

Suddenly Lucius felt a cold shiver pass through him. In the holy of holies rose the veiled Isis. It was an immense statue, five fathoms high and surrounded entirely with a silvery film, seamed with hieroglyphics. Above the image, on the architrave, was written:

**I AM WHO HAVE BEEN,
WHO AM
AND WHO SHALL BE;
AND NO ONE HAS LIFTED MY VEIL.**

Around the image shone thousands of burning vessels, of glowing lamps. There was a mist of light and a smoke of incense. And round about the image there was the incessant dance of the hierodules and the worship of the sacrificing priests, all the night through. And ever, like an obsession, there was the rattle of the sistra, as though the whole immense temple were rattling.

Lucius, led by the three women, offered his sacrifice at one of the numberless altars. The priest pronounced the sacred words and Lucius poured forth the libation and paid his gold coin.

He felt desperately unhappy.

"Sir," asked one of the women, "do you wish us all three to accompany you to one of the temple-chambers? Or would you have two of us go away?"

He laughed softly at their polite manners, like those of young and well-brought-up children. He gave a melancholy glance:

"I am unwell, I am very unwell," he said. "I think I will go home alone."

"Your eyes are full of pain, sir," said one of the hierodules.

And one of the others said:

"Cannot we comfort you and cure you?"

Lucius shook his head.

"Then let us lead you home," said the third.

They left the temple.

"I live on the river," said Lucius. "I came in a thalamegus."

They walked beside him, like shades. When they reached the barge, Lucius said:

"I am at home here. Let me thank you and pay you. May holy Isis protect you!"

"May holy Isis cure you, sir!" said the hierodules.

He gave them a gold coin apiece. They disappeared in the night, like shades. But under the palm-trees was another shade. It was Cora.

"I am not well," said Lucius. "I came back."

"Do you wish to go to bed, my lord?" asked Cora.

"No, I should not be able to sleep," replied Lucius. "This night is strange and unreal. I will lie here under the trees."

"I will leave you, my lord."

"No, stay," he said. "I am ill and I feel lonely. Stay."

"Suffer me to fetch you a cloak and a pillow, my lord."

"I thank you."

She disappeared into the barge and returned with the pillow and cloak. She covered him up and pushed the pillow under his head.

"The night is strange," he repeated, "and unreal. It is like a white day. There is no dew falling. I shall remain here till Thrasyllus comes. But do you stay. I feel ill and lonely."

"What can I do, my lord? I may not sing: only the sistrum may sound to-night."

"Dance to me; move in the moonlight. Can you dance without accompaniment?"

"Yes, my lord," said Cora.

He lay under the palms. Cora danced in the open moonlight, near the tall river-reeds. She twisted and turned like a white water-nymph that had risen from the stream. She stood still, in attitudes of rapture. She adored Isis, her hands uplifted to the moon. She was very lithe and slender, very white, with white flowers and ears of wheat around her temples.

He lay without moving, watching her. And he thought his only thought: where could Ilia be? For there had not been more than one pirate....

When, late in the night, Thrasyllus returned, he found Lucius asleep under the palms with Cora keeping vigil beside him.

"My lord is asleep," said Cora. And she asked, "Tell me, Thrasyllus: what did Nemu-Pha say?"

The old tutor looked gloomy. And he said:

"The wise ages have been drowned in the night of time. Egypt is Egypt no longer. Sais is Sais no longer. If wisdom still tarries here and is still to be found, I shall find it not by the sea, not in the Delta. This is the granary and the emporium of the world ... but nothing more. Great Isis hides behind her veil the worthlessness and venality of her priests, whose last remaining pride is to sell in great secrecy the word, 'Be a god unto yourself.'... That word does not satisfy me. But there is Memphis, there is Thebes. I still have hope, Cora ... that I shall find the divine word which will cure him."

The old man stepped on board the barge. The night waned; yonder, in Sais, the twinkling of the Burning Lamps died away.

In the east, the light broke through, as through a bursting sluice. Long, rosy islands seemed to drift in an ocean of molten gold. A long flight of cranes, black against the golden sky, swept down to meet the dawn. Cocks crowed; and on the waters of Lake Butos the first lotus-blooms opened their white chalices. As it were crimson flowed and lay, here and there, over the silent, silver streaks of the canals, in pools of purple red.

Chapter XV

The travellers had left Sais, after visiting the temple of Athene and the tomb of Psammetichus, son of Necho, founder of the twenty-sixth dynasty, one of the twelve kings of the Dodecarchy, who divided Egypt among themselves after the death of Sethos in B. C. 671. Psammetichus, in obedience to the oracles, defeated and expelled his eleven fellow-kings and reigned alone at Memphis and afterwards at Sais. Here was his tomb; it was sacred; there was an oracle attached to it; and Lucius had consulted that oracle.

After that, Lucius had consulted the manteum, or oracle, of Latona at Butos, on an island in the lake. He had next visited Xoïs, Hermopolis, Lycopolis, Mendes and all the Sebennyitic nome, which contained numberless oracles and shrines. At Mendes the god Pan was worshipped; and there was an oracle which spoke by means of the god's pipes. Here the goat was held sacred and received public worship at the hands of priestesses in Dionysiac frenzy. The travellers next visited Diospolis and Leontopolis, Busiris and Cunopolis and all the Busiritic nome.

All these towns, with numbers of villages in between, covered the islands of the flooded Delta, densely peopled and luxuriously cultivated. The great farmsteads and country-mansions stood linked along the canals, which were filled high to their banks with the flowing waters. The ears of corn swelled with ripeness along the shores; and the cattle gleamed and glanced, grazing in the rich meadows. The fat fields were fragrant, in these last days of the summer month of Epiphi, with a strange, moist scent as of nameless flowers ever drenched in dew. The sun was warm, but not burning, as though the moisture of so many waters tempered all the heat; the fierce rays did not burn, as though they were ever drinking the excessive damp. And from the marshes, which the Nile had turned into lakes, rose no mist, but the scent of the water-flowers: lotus, nymphaea and nenuphar.

The rains seemed to have ended. The maximum gauge in the Nilometers appeared to have been reached; only the morning dew was often heavy, like rain. But the days glided past in an immaculate glory of sunshine tempered by moisture, while the rich, fragrant country lay stretched under smooth skies, which changed cloudlessly from morning rose to midday blue and evening gold, in a gradual fusing of tints. There was hardly a breeze in the evening; the atmosphere retained an ideal perfection of heavenly, temperate warmth; this summer warmth was fresh and cool.

The thalamegus glided up the Nile. The river was as wide as a sea; everywhere, in the noonday sun, the pools of the waters glittered in among the farmsteads, mansions and shrines. On the horizon, the outlines of the towns, with the needles of the obelisks, shimmered in the damp haze. At every moment, dense palm-clusters or sycamores raised their regular canopies along the river, forming an avenue, or else

tamarisks luxuriated and their branches threw fine shadows, like blue stripes upon gold.

There lay the Athribitic nome and the Prosopitic nome, whose capital is Aphroditopolis. Lucius went on shore with a great retinue. The town, consecrated to Aphrodite, was peopled by none but hierodules, priests and priestesses of the goddess. Lucius consulted the oracle.

Next morning, after the orgy, he was lying under the triple awning of the barge which was gliding still higher up the river. Around him were screens of plaited, transparent reeds, interwoven with flowers. Thrasyllus sat by his side:

"Nemu-Pha told me," said Thrasyllus, "that both Plato and Pythagoras spent years and years on the steps of the temples of Isis before they were deemed worthy of learning one word of the Hermetic wisdom. Well, I never imagined that Nemu-Pha would unlock the Hermetic wisdom to me. But I did hope perhaps to learn a single word with which, continuing to meditate my own thoughts, I could have unlocked the secret, Lucius, of your happiness. But Nemu-Pha did not speak that word to me. And yet, my son, I had to pay him a high price to be admitted to his sanctuary. I am sorry for wasting your money."

Lucius smiled:

"Nevertheless, Thrasyllus, the oracles, even though they never satisfy the questioner wholly, say very strange and impressive things. Shall I make you a confession? I certainly hope that I shall one day know who robbed me of Ilia. And, when I know, I shall not rest until I have tortured him and made him die a thousand deaths."

"It was the pirates, Lucius," said Thrasyllus, evasively, "unless Ilia was drowned."

"It was one pirate, Thrasyllus," said Lucius. "All the oracles now never speak except of one pirate. And it is for me ... as though I saw him before me! The dog!"

The barge was gliding past Latopolis, on the right; on the left, standing farther back from the river, Heliopolis showed faintly. They were nearing Babylon, but the travellers were to go through to Memphis.

"Look!" said Thrasyllus, starting up in rapture. "The Pyramids!"

Lucius turned, with real interest. There on the horizon, like an enormous, mystic geometry, the triangles of the Pyramids, which announced Memphis, rose against the pink morning sky. They were like eternal lines drawn by the gods from earth to heaven.

"The Pyramids!" echoed Lucius, as though overcome by a mystic impression.

On the other side, Heliopolis was now more clearly outlined, standing high on a hill, with the temple of the bull Mnevis. Babylon, a suburb of Memphis, swarmed on the

river-bank and, with the battlements of its forts; was visible through a sycamore avenue. And suddenly, after a grove of palms, Memphis loomed into view.

“Memphis!” cried Thrasyllus.

And Uncle Catullus, appearing from his cabin, pointed and repeated:

“Memphis!”

The old Egyptian capital lay Cyclopean, like some extinct monster, with heavy lines of squat, bleaching sanctuaries and, on the river, a portico of giant pylons. Behind these age-old, massive buildings the Pyramids showed spectrally.

Thrasyllus pointed his long, crystal spy-glass towards the horizon:

“There!” he said, with a shiver. “The most sacred monument in Egypt! The great Sphinx, the immense Neith, the ever-silent wisdom! Next to the second pyramid: that looming figure of a gigantic, motionless animal!”

The barge hove to and was moored. Caleb proposed that they should go on shore.

Here, even on the quays, the riotous bustle of agriculture and commerce had ceased to reign. Under the palms there was not the metropolitan press and throng of Alexandria, the world’s market-place and emporium. Only a few fruit-sellers squatted beside their wares and uttered their cries, now that they saw strangers, offering sliced melons and coco-nut milk. Here and there an Egyptian cowered, dreaming, with long, split eyes. The quays were old, grey, wide and deserted. Even the foreigners’ barge roused but little curiosity. A few children at play assembled when the two litters were carried on shore.

Caleb found it difficult to hire two camels, for himself and Thrasyllus, but he succeeded. The cavalcade started; Caleb’s armed guards—for an escort was needed here, because of the robbers in the desert—surrounded the litters. And the strangers proceeded along the quays, under the palms, to the city. Caleb rode ahead, for he knew the city and the way.

The city was gloomy, huge and empty, but Lucius, ever sensitive to impressions, underwent the enchantment of that past. For Memphis was the eternal past. The town had once numbered six hundred thousand inhabitants. It now haply numbered a few thousands; the rare figures in the wide streets were dwarfed and lost. Sometimes a woman’s face peeped out from the half-opened, vermilion shutters of some great grey, dilapidated house.

Ye gods, what dimensions! What lines, what spaciousness of deserted squares, what heaven-high rows of pylons! The Serapeum yonder, at the endless end of an avenue of six hundred sphinxes, six rows of a hundred sphinxes, the ever-silent incarnations of wisdom, the lion-women who were the wisdom of Neith! What colossal statues,

hewn out of one block of stone and towering to the sky, with the pschent crowns of their diadems! And everywhere the deathly silence and under the feet of the Libyan bearers the dust of ages, which flew up on high in one dense cloud after another!

Caleb rode ahead, by the sphinxes in the avenue. They stood in rows, the wise lionesses with fixed women's faces, eternal guardians of the secret. Some of them were already sinking in the sandy ground, disappearing with their stretched fore-paws. Others shelved to one side, borne down by the pressure of the centuries. Here the Pharaohs themselves had passed in sacred processions! Here Moses had walked and Hermes Trismegistus; here Joseph had wandered, the interpreter of dreams; here, lastly, Cambyses, with his Persian hordes, had ridden sacrilegiously! This was Memphis, thrice-sacred Memphis, profaned long centuries ago and now dead and sinking in the devouring sands of the desert, which approached from the west, out yonder! The city would be swallowed up by the sands! That past would sink back into the lap of the earth!

Suddenly Lucius shuddered with the mystic awe of what has been. And his own life and grief seemed small to him.

They approached the sanctuary. It rose as a huge shadow. And from every door swarmed serving-priests of Serapis, minor priests and door-keepers ... because they saw the strangers. They ranged themselves in front of the entrance and stood waiting.

Caleb said:

"These are distinguished Latin lords, cousins of the divine Cæsar Tiberius, blessed be his name. They wish to see the sacred bull...."

"Apis ..." said the oldest priest.

"Who is Osiris, in the sacred shape of the bull ..." added other priests.

And others again, oracularly:

"And who drew the plough through the fields of sacred Egypt when he disguised himself with the other gods, under the forms of animals...."

"From the eyes of Jupiter Ammon, who wished to reign alone."

"The same," said Caleb, flinging himself from his camel.

The priests arranged themselves in processional order while the travellers alighted and Thrasyllus also slid from his camel. And they sang the Hymn of Apis, as they were wont to do when visitors came. For in the huge dead city of Memphis, inhabited by hardly a few thousands, who were dwarfed and lost in the spaces of the ancient, mystic capital of ancient, mystic Egypt, in truth the worship of Apis was still maintained only because all the travellers came to see the sacred bull. The fees which

the travellers paid to the priests formed the principal revenue of their brotherhood. The temple was falling in ruins; the enormous pylons seemed to totter, the gigantic architraves leaned forward; the giant statues were bruised by the rains and eaten away, as though the centuries themselves had mutilated them; the sphinxes were sinking into the sand. But still the worship of the bull Apis was maintained, because of the strangers and their fees.

A young priest who spoke a little Latin was allotted to the travellers and took his place by Lucius' side, respectfully:

"It is a pity," he said, smiling cheerfully, "that Serapis did not bring you to Memphis a month earlier. For then, my noble lord, you would have beheld the death of Apis and his return to life."

"What is this, then?" asked Lucius.

"The incarnation of the god in the sacred bull lasts a quarter of a century," the young, pleasant, smiling priest explained. "After being incarnated in the bull for five-and-twenty years, the god disappears out of the bull and the bull is marked down for death. The priests drown him solemnly in the Nile and embalm his sacred body and celebrate his obsequies with special ceremonies. What a pity, my lord, that you have come too late! After the obsequies they seek the young Apis, they seek him throughout sacred Egypt. As a rule they find him immediately, for the godhead immediately becomes reincarnated in a new-born bull; and, if it omit to do so, the calamity is so great that the country is plunged into mourning and the disaster foretells universal plagues. But Serapis Osiris loves his Egypt and but seldom delays the new incarnation. This time, after Apis' obsequies, we were able at once to celebrate his blessed advent."

"And where was Apis found?" asked Lucius.

"On the farm belonging to my father, who is a land-owner," replied the pleasant young priest, smiling mischievously. "I am a land-owner's son; and, when Apis was born in our stables, my father dedicated me to Osiris, that I might take care of the god. I came here with him; I have been here hardly a month; I came with him."

And he smiled, glad, young and happy; his fresh, young cheeks were still bronzed with the sun and his arms and hands were sturdy as those of a young peasant and shepherd.

The singing priests drew themselves up before a *secos*, a square plot of grass surrounded by columns.

"My lords," said the pleasant-looking priest, "this is the *secos* of the mother of Apis and we are going to show her to you."

"So she also comes from your father's farm?" asked Uncle Catullus.

"Most certainly, my lord," replied the priest, roguishly.

"That of course goes without saying," commented Uncle Catullus.

The young priest opened the gate of the secos. At the far end was the sacred stall, like the wide interior of a temple. The priest, vanished in the shadow.

And, when he reappeared, he was leading, merely by pressing his hand against her snow-white flank, a handsome, sleek cow.

He led her to the strangers. She shone, well-tended and well-fed. She had placid eyes of bluish gold, beautiful, large, soft and womanly, the eyes of Hera herself. Her horns were gilded and her hoofs were painted red.

The pleasant-looking priest led her to the strangers and was glad and happy because Apis' mother was so comely:

"Is she not handsome?" he asked proudly.

The strangers smiled and agreed that she was very handsome; and the priest, with respectful familiarity, stroked her snow-white flank and pointed out that she had one black foot. Then he kissed her, fondly and reverently, on her moist muzzle and led her back, with the pressure of his hand, to the temple that was her stall. She went, solemnly, as though aware of her high, sacred dignity, which existed only because of the strangers and their fee.

The priest, still smiling, returned; and the other priests sang their hymn.

And, by the priest's pleasant manner, Lucius seemed to observe that he ought to pay. He beckoned to Caleb; and there were mutual, smiling, roguish negotiations between Caleb and the priest. For Caleb always tried to pay the fees which he distributed on Lucius' behalf a little less liberally than he set them down on the long papyrus scroll of his bill; and he generally succeeded.

But the priest was not only roguish, but very crafty and polite; and the transaction, conducted in mysterious and jocular whispers, lasted a long time ... until Lucius said, impatiently, but still smiling:

"And may we now see Apis himself?"

So Caleb paid, grudgingly. But the priest remained pleasant and the other priests sang while conducting the strangers to Apis' own secos.

This sanctuary was even bigger and more impressive than that of the white bull-mother. There was a square in front of it, with obelisks; and the pleasant-looking priest entered between two sphinxes. But the pillars, the obelisks, the sphinxes seemed to totter, to slant, to burst with old age.

The priests sang the hymn; and suddenly, like a whirlwind, a young bull came trotting out of the stable over the grass-plot. It was Apis; and the priests lifted their hands in adoration as they sang.

But, if his mother was stately and aware of her dignity, Apis himself carried his divinity with the recklessness of his hot youth. He ran across the lawn, glad to have escaped from his stable; and the pleasant priest, laughing, ran after him. But he could not catch him by his gold collar; and, panting for breath, the little priest said, proudly:

“Isn’t he beautiful and playful? Isn’t he most delightful, our Apis?”

He was beautiful and playful and most delightful, the visitors granted. He was a splendid bull-calf. His coat gleamed black as jet; and he was painted in accordance with the sacred prescript without which there is no incarnation: a white moon, like a snowy little crown, shone like a sickle between his gilded horns; and two other little white crowns adorned him on either side above the forelegs. His eyes blazed as might carbuncles with a light kindled behind them; and he stared from under his curly forehead with an almost human glance. His neck already fell into powerful, heavy folds; his chest was broad; and he lashed his tail like a whip. His hoofs were vermilion. And he trotted round his grass-plot and pushed out the sods with his horns and scratched with his red hoofs. The pleasant-looking priest now went up to him, laughing, and took him, respectfully and yet firmly, by the gold collar and talked to him and laughed; and Apis shook himself; and the priest laughed; and now all the priests began to laugh and the strangers laughed and Caleb roared and Uncle Catullus held his sides. Even Lucius had to laugh and Thrasyllus too; they all laughed at Apis, because he was such a delightful, pretty, playful bull-calf, just like a merry boy, with his human eyes which looked at you naughtily and watchfully and archly ... until all of a sudden he tore himself loose from his little priest and ran, ran like a whirlwind, till the clods of earth flew all around.

“He is so pretty and playful!” said the little priest, glad and happy as a boy, when he came back panting, after locking up the little bull again in the sanctuary. “But he is wild, he is very wild: as a rule, we only show him through the windows of his secos; but, when such very distinguished strangers come to look at him, we let him out for a trot, now and again. Yes, then he may come for a trot, once in a way!... And he himself thinks it great fun, to come for a trot, now and then, in the presence of strangers.”

Then the pleasant-looking little priest went up to Caleb, who was still laughing aloud because Apis was such a very delightful little bull. And there was a long and protracted discussion, mysterious, jocular and yet weighty. For Caleb was taken aback; but then the little priest knew what it cost to make Apis trot about so prettily for such very distinguished strangers.

Chapter XVI

They took the repast provided by Caleb outside the town, in a farmstead beside a canal, under a cluster of palm-trees. There were no dainty dishes, there were no purple-coloured wines thick as ink; but there were omelettes and there was cestreus, the sea-fish that swims up the Nile in certain months: fried in cici-oil, this is a popular, homely dish, it is true, but nevertheless toothsome for hungry travellers picnicking in the grass. There was foaming beer and hydromel, or honey-water; and Uncle Catullus, spoilt though he was, thought the simple meal anything but unpalatable and considered that an idyll of this sort was good for the stomach, once in a way.

Lucius told Caleb to have his luncheon with them; and Caleb, after much deprecation and many salaams at the honour shown him, squatted down and crossed his legs and ate with relish and kept on laughing at the thought of dear little Apis trotting round his secos for the strangers who paid so generously. The travellers were to rest under the palm-trees and allow the midday heat to pass before going on to the pyramids. For Caleb had sent the litters back to the barge and had now hired four good camels at the farm, including two with comfortable saddles of bright tapestry, for his two noble clients.

The farmer and his wife, glad at the visit that brought them in money, spread awnings under which the travellers could enjoy their siesta and laid mats on the ground; and Uncle Catullus called for a fly-net, which he wound round his head. And, while he slept and Caleb also closed his eyes, Lucius, with Thrasyllus by his side, gazed at the wonderful, divinely geometrical lines in the distance, the lightly-traced triangles against the golden noonday sky.

"The base is square," said Thrasyllus, "and the summit is square, but looks pointed."

"To me they seem strange, mysterious embodiments of vastness," said Lucius.

"What are they actually?"

"We don't altogether know," replied Thrasyllus. "Some of the pyramids were sepulchres of kings and sacred animals. Those are the pyramids of Cheops, or Khufu, of Chephren and of Mencheres; and we shall see the kings' chambers inside them. They were built twenty, perhaps thirty centuries ago. Herodotus says that the pyramid of Cheops, which is the biggest, took thirty years to build with a hundred thousand slaves, who were changed every three months. The name is derived from *nûp*fire, because, like a flame, the pyramid ends in a point. Many were used as store-houses in the long years of famine; others were dykes against the sands of the desert, which blew towards Memphis and threatened to bury the city, in a succession of ages. Many pyramids have already been swallowed up in the sands."

"What are those ruined palaces over there?" asked Lucius, pointing to crumbled rows of pylons and pillars, surmounted by cracked architraves, impressive ruins which stood on a hill at the outskirts of the town and seemed to be tumbling into the Nile.

"The old palaces of the Pharaohs," said Thrasyllus. "They were ten in number. Joseph, the Jewish interpreter of dreams, was a powerful governor under one of them; Moses, who knew Hermes Trismegistus and learned the occult wisdom from him, all the wisdom that can be known, was saved, as a babe, by the daughter of a Pharaoh, where his sister had exposed him in a basket made of bulrushes at the place where the princess was wont to bathe: she was the daughter of Amenophis III., who saw his people smitten with ten plagues sent over Egypt by Jahve, the God of the Jews, because the Pharaoh would not suffer them to leave the country. This Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea and was the father of Sesostris.... I have written on these scrolls everything that is more or less interesting."

And Thrasyllus, glad to see that Lucius' attention was attracted, handed him the scrolls. Lucius began reading:

"This all happened here!" he said, startled and arrested. "This is all ... the past! The age-old past, which is gone, which was swallowed up by the sands ... thousands of years ago!... How small we are when we look into the past ... and when we gaze into the centuries, the centuries that have buried themselves so deeply!"

"My son," said the old tutor, "I am so thankful that your mind is once more capable of receiving these impressions. For the beauty of the past is a comfort for the future; and the sick soul is healed in that beauty when it understands that its own grief is but a grain of sand in a desert which blows in the wind and conceals all things."

Lucius made no further reply, absorbed in what he was reading about Joseph and Moses, about Jahve and Pharaoh Amenophis, who was the father of Sesostris....

Chapter XVII

The golden noonday sky paled; the blinding topaz of the heavens melted away into amber honey; and the sands of the desert stretched out wide, far and endless to the last glittering streak of the horizon, on which the sun had set. Behind the group formed by the travellers – four camels surrounded by drivers and guards, Arabs and Libyans – between the darkening palm-trees the gigantic city of Memphis sank into shadow like some vast extinct monster; and the crumbling palaces of the kings sloped down the hill, as it were tumbling into the Nile, and mirrored their ruins in the clear sapphire of the stream, where the pools lay pink and gold among the tall reeds and the lotuses closing on the face of the water. The last fallen pillars lay, round and immense, in the luxuriant grass, amid a riot of scarlet and crimson poppies. Mysteriously carved with hieroglyphics, they were as felled Titans of rose-red granite; and they pressed heavily on the ground wherein they were sinking. They were of a melancholy majesty, those huge overthrown pillars which had supported the golden roofs above the might of the Pharaohs.

Caleb rode his camel with a swagger, as though he were bestriding his Sabæan mare. He dug his heel into the camel's side; and the startled brute took great strides, snorting and grunting; Caleb roared with delight. The Libyans, big-limbed and powerful, went silently; the Arab drivers yelled and shouted.

Forty stadia from Memphis rose a broad, hilly dyke, on which the pyramids stood. And Caleb, who, as the guide, also knew a thing or two, cried:

"My lord, two of the pyramids yonder, the largest, belong to the seven wonders of the world! They are a stadium high; and the length of their sides is equal to their height. They are the two tombs of the Pharaohs; but the smaller pyramid, higher up on the hill and, as you see, built entirely of black stone, was the costliest of all."

He trotted on his startled camel around the others and cried:

"Master Thrasyllus won't deny it, learned though he is!"

Thrasyllus smiled; and Caleb, glad at being allowed to speak, continued:

"That black stone comes from Southern Ethiopia and is heavier than any other stone and incredibly hard! That is why the pyramid cost so much. But then it was erected by all the lovers of Queen Cleopatra; and it is she who is buried there!"

"Caleb," cried Master Thrasyllus, "what you have been telling about the black stone I accept; but Cleopatra, who died in Alexandria, was not buried at Memphis."

"Cleopatra, Cleopatra!" Caleb insisted, vigorously; but he now rushed away on his bewildered camel, because he wanted to warn the priest-custodian of the pyramids that there were great lords approaching.

"Caleb is wrong," said Thrasyllus, as the three camels stepped along sedately, among the gigantic Libyans and shouting Arabs, while Caleb tore fantastically over the sands. "The black pyramid yonder is really not the tomb of Cleopatra. The historians speak of Doricha, an hetaira mentioned by Sappho, the famous poetess, as the mistress of her brother Charaxus, who was a wine-merchant at Lésbos and travelled constantly to Naucratis. This costly black tomb is said to have been dedicated to Doricha, who died young, by her lovers...."

The cavalcade had drawn near; the camels, in obedience to the drivers' orders, knelt down; the travellers slipped to the ground. And Caleb at once came to meet them, smiling, at the head of six priest-custodians, whose business it was to keep up the interior of the pyramids and show the shrines to foreigners.

"Do many foreigners come here?" Uncle Catullus asked of the oldest priest.

"Not a week passes in this present month," said the old priest, "but foreigners come to admire the sacred pyramids. You are Latins, but we receive visits also from Greek lords and Persians and Indians. When the Nile has subsided to its lowest gauge, however, when the autumnal winds blow and the sand-storms begin, then no more foreigners come. For then death and destruction blow out of the desert, as the hurricanes of fate which one day will cover Memphis with a sandy shroud. See these few sphinxes, whose heads alone still project above these downs. Once they numbered hundreds; and an avenue stretched between their silence to the Pyramids. But the desert swallowed them up, the hurricanes spread them with dust, the sandy shroud covered up the wisdom of Neith. One day the shroud will cover up all Egypt and veil all her wisdom. What was known will be known no longer. That will be the punishment of the gods, inflicted upon unworthy man, who will be plunged into a night of ignorance and the bestiality of primitive desire. The centuries will turn about!"

The priests in attendance, with a simple pressure of the hand, had caused a heavy monolithic door to turn on its hinges in the largest of the pyramids. They lighted torches and went through the syrx, a winding tunnel painted with gigantic figures of gods and with hieroglyphics. It was strange, but there was a humming and murmur of voices, though the pyramid was uninhabited. It was as though a swarm of ghosts were whirling around like a gale of wind. The impression was given immediately; and, when the travellers exchanged glances, they saw in one another's eyes that they were all four thinking the same thing; and Caleb muttered saving incantations and repeatedly kissed his amulets.

The priests led the way, while the flames of the torches blew and blew in the mysterious draught, as though ghosts were hovering around. The travellers entered an enormous square room; huge statues were sculptured in the stone walls; and,

though the room was empty, there was a smell of spices, as if the smells of old had lingered eternally. Two bats fluttered to the ceiling and whirled round in a circle.

"This is the king's chamber of Cheops," said the old priest. "Once upon a time it contained a sarcophagus of azure granite, with the embalmed body of the great King Cheops, or Khufu; and it was surrounded by the sarcophagi of his brothers. He wore out his people with taxes and heavy labour, in order to found this mausoleum for himself. Where is he now? Where is his embalmed body? Where is his azure sarcophagus? Where are the sarcophagi of his brothers Chefren and Schafra? Where are they? Where are they? They are scattered and vanished as grains of sand, the mummies of the proud rulers, covered with scented wax and tightly swathed in narrow bandages; and scattered and vanished are their sarcophagi; and one day these pyramids themselves will be scattered and vanished, swallowed up in the lap of the earth! Everything vanishes, all is vanity: thy wisdom alone, O Neith, is needful to man!"

"Thy wisdom alone, O Neith, is needful to man!" echoed the priests.

"And we no longer possess it!"

"Alas, alas, we no longer possess it!" echoed the priests, mechanically, indifferently, while they led the way back through the tunnel; and their words blew away in the strange, mysterious draught, because of the invisible ghosts that hovered.

But, when they were outside, the priests kept their torches alight; and they led the travellers to the small, black pyramid. They pushed open the stone door; and the old priest went in first. There was a long tunnel, followed by a room with smooth, black, polished walls, in which the torches and the shadows of the travellers and priests themselves were reflected curiously.

"The pyramid of Cleopatra," whispered Caleb to Thrasyllus.

"The pyramid of Doricha," Thrasyllus corrected him, with a smile.

But the old priest shook his head gently and, in a low and fond voice, said:

"The pyramid of Rhodopis. She lived at Naucratis and was incomparably beautiful and chaste. One day, when she was bathing, an eagle flew through the open ceiling of the bathroom and plucked from her maid's hands the sandal which she was just about to lace on her mistress' foot."

Lucius suddenly turned very pale. But the priest continued:

"The eagle flew to Memphis, where the king was administering justice in one of the courts of the palace; and, flying above the king, the eagle dropped the sandal, so that it fell into the folds of the king's garment. The king was much surprised; and he examined the sandal, which was as small as a child's and yet was the sandal of a

woman. And he bade his servants search all Egypt to find the woman whom so small a sandal would fit. His servants then found Rhodopis at Naucratis and carried her to the king and he married her; and, when she died, after a few months' happiness, the disconsolate king dedicated to her the black pyramid ... which is the costliest of all the pyramids.... Rhodopis' scented mummy vanished; her sarcophagus vanished. But the sandal, which the king ever worshipped, was preserved by a miracle. Behold it."

And the priests, with their torches, lighted in the middle of the jet-black room a crystal shrine, standing on a black-porphry table. And in the crystal shrine lay a little sandal, like a child's and yet a woman's, a little red-leather sandal with gold ornaments, arabesques that glittered incredibly fresh.

"The sandal kept for tourists," murmured Uncle Catullus, with a sceptical smile. "We shall pay for it presently, Caleb, just as we did for the little Apis."

"But still it is very pretty, my lord," whispered Caleb, with a smile.

But Lucius was trembling in every limb. And he said to Thrasyllus:

"This is an omen. I had never heard of this legend. This sandal, in this shrine!... I would be alone with the priest!"

The request of so distinguished a noble could not be gainsaid. The others withdrew, after fixing two torches in sconces. Lucius remained alone with the old priest, by the shrine of Rhodopis' sandal. And then he produced Ilia's little sandal from his breast and said:

"Wise priest and holy father, you possess wisdom, you assuredly still know the past. I have confidence in you: you shall tell me where the girl Ilia is, whom I have lost; you shall tell me who stole her from me. See, this sandal is the only trace that she left behind her. Tell me the past and I will reward you richly."

The priest took the sandal and pressed it to his head, while his other hand trembled above the crystal shrine:

"May the spirit of Rhodopis enlighten me," said the old priest. "I see Ilia...."

"Dead?"

"No, alive."

"Alone?"

"No, with her kidnapper."

"Do you see her kidnapper?"

"Yes."

"Describe him to me!"

"Give me your hand, here, above Rhodopis' sandal."

Lucius stretched out his hand to the priest, above the sandal:

"Describe him to me!" he repeated.

And in his tortured mind he saw before him the image of one of his own sailors, of whom he had been thinking lately, who at that time used to prow1 about the villa at Baiaë: a Cypriote whom he had once caught talking to Ilia in the oleanders; she had never been able to explain what he was doing.

There was a pause. The priest's lean hand trembled violently in Lucius' firm grasp. And at last the priest said, with his eyes closed and his other hand still pressing Ilia's sandal to his forehead:

"I see him, plainly, plainly! Rhodopis' spirit is enlightening me! I see the kidnapper! I see Ilia's kidnapper!"

"Is he tall?"

"He is tall."

"Broad?"

"He has broad shoulders ... and a coarse face; he is of a coarse beauty which women sometimes like, which unworthy women prefer to noble beauty, because they prefer rude passion to love.... Rhodopis' chaste spirit is over me! I see the kidnapper."

"How is he clad? As a slave?"

"No."

"As a freedman?"

"No."

"As a freeman?"

"Yes."

"As a patrician? A knight?"

"No."

"As a soldier?"

"No."

"As a sailor?"

"No. Yes, he is clad as a sailor, I think, my lord. But I no longer see him," said the priest, opening his eyes. "And I shall never be able to tell you anything more."

He gave Lucius back the sandal. The other priests returned, took up the torches. Quivering with suppressed rage, Lucius walked out of the black pyramid. Uncle Catullus was already sitting on his camel.

Lucius also mounted his. The Cypriote's image now stood clearly before his eyes. But he said nothing; his lips were tightly shut, his forehead frowned; his grief seemed to be restrained and subdued in his heart by his outraged pride.

And, while Caleb paid the lordly fee, as he always did, Lucius slipped into the old priest's hand a purse heavy with gold.

Chapter XVIII

The short twilight had deepened to purple over the desert; night came gliding along the firmament; the stars began to peep. And Caleb, who suspected Lucius' emotion at each fresh divination, considered that new impressions would be the best medicine for him. After a short deliberation with Uncle Catullus and Thrasyllus, he said:

"My noble lord, before the night has quite fallen, I should like to take you to the great Neith ... for the sake both of the statue itself and of the Jewish prophet, a hermit, who dwells in a cave hard by."

Lucius nodded his approval. And in the falling night he sat erect on the saddle-pad of his camel and raised his head towards the stars. Had he guessed the truth? Had the truth gradually been revealed within him? Or had the sibyl, Amphris, the oracle and the priests whom he had consulted really shown him the way to that truth? He did not know, he had so many vague memories that it all grew confused in his seeking, solving brain.... But he certainly was the Cypriote, the sailor, Carus ... who, shortly before Ilia's disappearance, had himself disappeared from the crew of the quadrireme ... and whom he had once found with Ilia among the oleanders! A thing which she had never been able to explain! Carus! A sailor! Not a slave, it was true, but one of his meanest servants! A Cyprian sailor, to have robbed him of the woman who reigned as queen over his house, whom he dressed like a goddess, whom he covered with everything that was precious! And she must have been kidnapped – it could not be otherwise – with her own consent, her own, infatuated consent.

Had he guessed the truth? Had his groping brain at last divined the truth? Or had the priests and the oracles and Amphris and the sibyl indeed revealed the truth to him? He decided that they must have done so. His soul was inclined to accept the supernatural. And he knew, he knew, thanks to the wise knowledge of the priests and the oracles.

So she had been able to leave him, him, for his hired sailor! He raised his head towards the stars. His lips were tightly clenched, his forehead frowned. But never, he resolved, would his lips utter to any one, not even to Thrasyllus, the secret truth which the oracles had revealed to him. He would be silent and his pride would suppress his grief.

"Look, my lord," said Caleb, while Lucius still stared straight before him, up, towards the stars.

Lucius lowered his eyes. And suddenly he gave a start. The Sphinx loomed before him in the night. In the immense starry night, with the sands glittering all around like a silver sea, loomed the immense Neith, the omniscient wisdom. It was more gigantic than any sphinx that he had ever seen.

It had been shaped by Nature herself out of an immense monolith. Human hands had only reshaped it more plainly for human eyes ... into the Sphinx. It was not the veiled Isis of Sais; it was the unveiled, silent knowledge, which had known everything from the beginning of time. It raised its head towards the stars ... as he had done. It was resting: its lioness-body rested and sank into the sand; its fore-paws projected like walls. Its superhuman breasts seemed to heave in the night. Its fixed eyes stared upwards and its granite veil stood out upon its lioness-body. It was awesomely beautiful in the starry night.

The travellers had alighted. And Caleb had fetched the Jewish hermit from the cave in which he lived, opposite the Sphinx.

"I believe he's mad," said Caleb, timidly, a little alarmed by Lucius' frown. "But it doesn't matter if he is mad. He is the Jewish hermit; and all distinguished foreigners, such as your lordship, listen to him ... because he says strange things."

"He too!" muttered Lucius.

The Jewish hermit came up to them in the fallen night. He was of giant stature and incredibly old; his beard fell in waves down to his waist. His grey robe trailed over the sand. And he exclaimed, in a loud voice:

"I am Tsafnath-Paeneach, 'he who reveals mysteries!' I am of the tribe of Joseph himself, who took to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On! In me was the wisdom of Joseph, who interpreted dreams, and the wisdom of the priests of On! But all wisdom is dead in me, Jahve be praised, since I beheld Him!"

"Whom?" asked Lucius, dismayed by the prophet's booming voice.

"It was a night of twinkling stars!" cried the prophet. "It was thirty years ago! I lived in my cave, as I do now! And I knew everything and I looked Neith in the face and in the eyes.... Along the road, yonder, through the sands ... they came! They came, they came, they drew near.... On an ass that stumbled with fatigue sat a woman. A greybeard, staff in hand, led the stumbling beast. Then I saw that the woman held, pressed to her breast, in the folds of her mantle, a Child! And the woman was like Heva and like Isis; and the Child was like Habel and like Horus. When they came before the mighty Neith, the ass could stumble no farther through the sands of the desert. And the woman alighted and smiled upon the Child through her tears. But the greybeard led the woman to the mighty Neith and helped her to climb into its deep granite lap. There the woman rested against Neith's bosom and the Child rested against the woman's bosom. And then ... then I saw, I, Tsafnath-Paeneach, I who reveal mysteries, that the Child that was like Habel and Horus was radiant in the night, in the folds of the woman's mantle! The Child was radiant; a wreath of rays, a halo of light shone about the Child! The mother slept, the radiant Child slept, the greybeard slept ... and the mighty Neith watched over their sleep in the starry

night! Then, O Jahve, I knew that I had beheld Thy Son; and this happiness was my last wisdom. Since then I know nothing more, O Jahve, be praised! Since then I have discovered no mysteries! Since then the knowledge of Joseph has died away within me and that of the priests of On! For I have seen Jahve's Son, there, there, in the lap of Neith ... and since then I have seen nothing but that vision! And I shall die with the vision of the radiant Child before my eyes!"

The prophet's loud, booming voice had risen to a cry of joy; and Caleb repeated to Lucius, in a whisper:

"You see, my lord, he's mad."

But Thrasyllus, on the other side, whispered:

"He's not mad, Lucius.... He is a seer.... He has seen.... He has perhaps seen the new God of Whom all the sibyls speak...."

"Which new God?" asked Lucius.

"I don't know His name," said Thrasyllus.

But Uncle Catullus spoke:

"My dear nephew, that great monstrous fellow frightens me, here in the dark, in the desert, in front of this awful statue. Egypt gives me too many impressions. I feel like a sponge full of water, so soaked am I with impressions. Egypt will be the death of me, Lucius, you'll see it will! Meanwhile I propose to mount my camel."

And Uncle Catullus called his guards and drivers and bade them make his camel kneel down for him.

But Lucius went to the prophet and drew him aside:

"Do you know the past?" he asked, anxiously.

"The past?" echoed the Jewish seer, in an uncertain voice; and his eyes were as though blind.

"Do you see and can you tell me if that which I think has happened ... is undoubtedly true?"

"I no longer see either the past or the future," said the seer. "I see nothing but the present. And the present for me is nothing but ... the radiant Child yonder!"

"Who is He?" asked Lucius.

"I do not know, unless He be Jahve's Son!" cried the seer. "He was like Habel, he was like Horus. But I do not know, unless He be Jahve's Son!"

Thrasyllus approached:

“Lucius,” he said, “let us go. The night is falling and the guards have warned us against wild animals and robbers.”

“Let Caleb give the prophet a gold piece,” said Lucius.

Caleb produced a stater; but the prophet’s laugh of thunder sent him staggering back:

“Gold!” cried the prophet, laughing like thunder. “What do I want with dead gold! I have seen living gold; I have seen the Child That was radiant gold as the sun itself, radiant as the burning bush! What do I want with dead gold!”

“He’s mad! He’s mad!” cried Caleb. “He doesn’t want gold!”

And, terrified, Caleb slipped back the stater—but into another purse, in which he collected his savings—and rushed to his camel, which was already kneeling in the sand.

In the light of the stars that twinkled over the sea of sand the travellers rode back to Memphis.

Chapter XIX

It was very early one morning and Lucius was walking alone on the opposite bank of the river. In the tender dawn the vast grey lines of Memphis became visible in rose-red silhouette.

Lucius was wandering alone. Solitude had become dear to him, like rest after a severe illness, especially because he doubted his cure. He doubted; he doubted the certainty.

Did he know the truth? He was doubting now, after a sleepless night, and asking himself, did he know the truth? And, if he knew the truth, was he really cured, cured in his sick soul, cured of his suffering?

He did not know; he no longer knew anything. He wandered beside the Nile, alone, without knowing, without knowing. A dulness filled his brain, like a mist. Life was awaking on the farms with cheerful rural activity. The grain burst under the mill-stones; and the women on their knees rubbed with powerful palms the dough which the men beside them had already kneaded with the vigorous dance of their feet. Lucius stopped to look on; and they laughed; and he laughed back. The men danced and the women rubbed; and they laughed and were happy. A jealousy of their happiness rose hotly in the young Roman.

"Will you give me some milk?" he asked a girl who was milking a splendid, snow-white cow.

The girl handed the stranger the milk in the hollow leaf of a cyamus-plant. Lucius did not know whether to give her any money. He drank and handed back the reed goblet:

"Thank you," he said; and she laughed and went on milking.

He gave her no money and went on. How beautiful the world was and the morning! How rosy this first light over the silvering stream! How grey and colossal the past, yonder, of that dying, sinking city! How beautiful and impressive were every form and tint! How lovely was the world! Even the people down there, those labourers, those shepherdesses, those men and women baking, had a calm rustic, idyllic beauty in their simplicity and naturalness. How good the world was and how happy people could be, if the gods did not pour grief into their hearts!

Grief! Did he feel grief? Or had the mere thought that Ilia had proved unworthy of his great love already cured him of the disease that was grief? But was he cured and did he know?

He was approaching the hamlet of Troia. And he remembered reading in Thrasyllus' notes that Menelaus had come past here with his band of Trojan captives and generously permitted them to settle here. They had founded their colony. Behind

Troia stood a rocky mountain-range; and behold, there was the ancient quarry from which, years ago, the blocks of stone were hewn to build the pyramids, block upon block, without cement! And Lucius' feet rattled through the curious fossils which strewn the ground like pebbles with the shapes of long lentils and pea-pods and which were thought to be the petrified remnants of the meals served to the many thousand slaves who had worked at the pyramids.

Suddenly he saw a woman. She was resting, sitting against the rocks and gazing at the rosy sky. He recognized his slave, the one with the beautiful voice, the singer, Cora.

She started when she saw him and rose and bowed low, with outstretched hands:

"Forgive me, my lord," she stammered, "for straying so far from the barge."

He reassured her: he was a master who did not grudge his slaves a liberty. And he asked her, in a kind voice:

"Why did you stray so far?"

"I strayed without intending it, my lord. My thoughts carried me along!"

"What were you thinking of?"

"I was thinking of Cos, my dear birthplace, and whether I should ever see it again."

"It is the birthplace of Apelles the painter and of Epicharmus the poet-philosopher and inventor of comedy. It is a place of beauty and art, is it not, Cora?"

"It is like a most charming garden, my lord. It contains the temples of Æsculapius and Aphrodite. I was born there in the slave-school. I had a delightful childhood. There was a big garden in which I used to play.... Forgive me, my lord...."

"Go on."

"I was trained there and tended. I was bathed and carefully anointed and rubbed. This was done by the negresses. I learned to dance when I was very young. That is why I am lithe, my lord; and I hope that I dance well. But I also loved music; I sang. We had masters, who taught us to sing and play the harp, and mistresses, who taught us to dance. Dryope, who was in charge of the slave-school, was stern, but she was not unkind. My parents also were her slaves. My father was a runner and my mother was a dancer too. There were wagers when my father ran in a race; and he but seldom failed to win the prize for our mistress. She would have him flogged when he did not win the prize, but not hard, for she did not want to injure his precious body. Dryope was a good mistress to us, for my mother stopped dancing after she had once sprained her foot and Dryope nevertheless remained kind and gentle to her slave. But, when I was able to sing and dance, my lord, Dryope sold me for a big sum to a slave-dealer who was going to Rome with a number of slaves,

male and female. I embraced Dryope and my parents and went with the dealer. He also was not harsh to me, because I was a valuable slave, my lord; he was not harsh to his slaves; he was careful of them as of precious merchandise. Thrasyllus bought me for you, my lord, on the slave-market in Rome; and I was proud when he paid a big sum for me after hearing my trial song and seeing my trial dance. And now ... now I am happy, my lord, to belong to a master like yourself. But still my thoughts often wander to Cos, to the slaves' quarters, to my parents, to my fellow-slaves there and to Dryope. Forgive me, my lord."

"And would you like to go back to Cos, Cora?"

"My lord, our native land remains dear to us. But I belong to you; and where you are there I will be."

"And shall you be happy there too, Cora, so far from Cos?"

"I shall be happy where you are happy, my lord, and unhappy where you are unhappy."

Lucius looked at her. He did not take her words to be more than the politeness of a courteous slave, who came from a famous slave-school and for whom he had paid a high price, because of her delicate beauty and her accomplishments. But still the sound of Cora's voice was pleasant to his ear; and he said, graciously and with a gentle smile:

"You know how to speak the word that sounds well, even as you sing true and play true."

She made no further answer and bowed her head, feeling that he did not count her words as more than a well-sounding speech:

"Have I your permission, my lord, to go back to the barge?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "go."

She made a gesture of graceful reverence and moved away. He followed her at a distance. She walked along by the tall reeds of the river. She was very pretty and dainty, like the soft-tinted statuettes that came from Tanagra. Her flowered muslin peplos hung limply pleated around her shapely body in a succession of thin folds, which blew open and shut. Her bare arms were very slender. Her blue-black hair was fine and caught golden gleams. Now, while she stopped to pluck a flowering reed, she stood among the stems like a nymph.

And Lucius smiled because she was so very pretty, so tenderly winsome, because she sang and played the harp so very beautifully and because she said such civil words and had spoken so charmingly of her native island, Cos, where she was born in Dryope's slave-school.

Chapter XX

Uncle Catullus lay under the awning of the thalamegus and asked Cora to come and sit by him:

"Sing and play me some cheerful songs, Cora," he said. "Be kind to me even though I be not your master. For I feel bored here, on this Nile boat, at Memphis. I have been bored ever since Lucius went to the oracle of Ammon, through the barren desert. What an idea, what a mad idea! They have been gone five days now; they will probably arrive to-morrow.... I am bored, Cora, I am horribly bored. Egypt will be the death of me! First I am saturated with new impressions, like a sponge with water, and then Lucius abandons me to unlimited boredom. He's an egoist; he never thinks of his old uncle.... Cora, be amiable to me and sing and play me some cheerful songs, won't you?"

This was the burden of Uncle Catullus' complaint. As he said, Lucius had gone through the desert to the oracle of Ammon, with Caleb, Thrasyllus and Tarrar, with guards and drivers, and Uncle Catullus had remained behind on the barge, under the care of Rufus the under-steward, with all the other slaves, male and female.

A track led from Memphis through the desert to the oasis where the oracle of Ammon resided. It ran through the sands marked with granite posts, like small obelisks, nothing more. It was a chain of sign-posts rather than a road. The summer sun beat down implacably upon the scorching sands, which lay blown against the rocky range of mountains along the south of which the road was traced.

The caravan had now been travelling five days through the sands. Lucius, on an elephant, lay in a spacious, square litter, with blue and yellow curtains to keep out the light, and had expressed a wish that Thrasyllus should sit by his side. Caleb, swathed in white muslin, which left only his gleaming eyes and flashing teeth visible, sat upon a powerful dromedary, on leather cushions, under a great parasol fixed to his saddle-gear, and occasionally swaying gently to and fro. Elephant and dromedary were surrounded with long fly-nets, from which dangled many-coloured fringes. Tarrar, also swathed in linens of many colours, squatted like a little monkey on a camel and defied the sun of his native land, the glare of his Libyan desert. The guards and drivers rode mules; and ponies carried the travellers' luggage, their tents, their provisions and their still swollen water-bags.

For five days now they had been marching on their monotonous journey through the desert. At break of day the caravan started; at noon a halt was made under the tents; in the evening the procession moved on again, until darkness and fatigue urged the travellers to rest. It was an endless journey. It seemed as if the goal would never be reached. It was an unrelieved alternation of gold-glittering sands, under implacable, blazing skies, and fading sands, under endless skies of nocturnal blue. It was an

unrelieved alternation of rosy sunrises and orange sunsets. It was an unrelieved alternation of the peeping, the radiant awakening and the duller waning of the stars. Sometimes the south wind rose and blew for hours. Silently the caravan plodded through the rising whirls of sand. Sometimes the faint track of posts seemed to have disappeared; the obelisks stood aslant, sunk into the sands. A melancholy descended over man and beast.

The midday meal, taken under a tent, Lucius shared with Thrasyllus, Caleb, and Tarrar. It consisted always of broiled mutton, dates and an unvarying ration of water, with a dash of palm-wine in it. Strange to say, Lucius was almost cheerful and declared that Uncle Catullus had done well not to accompany them to the oasis of Ammon, as such meals would certainly have been a sore trial for him. And, strange again, Caleb, usually so merry and cheerful, became despondent and sad. At least, he exclaimed, now that Lucius began to jest:

"I wonder, my lord, that you can be gay in these god-forsaken Libyan sands! They weigh upon my chest, O my lord, as though I were already sinking under them, like the obelisks and sphinxes! O my noble lord, O my princely lord, what a desperate idea of your lordship's to wish to undertake this awful journey, to wish to go to the oracle of Ammon, which is quite ruined and deserted, whither perhaps for two centuries past no noble lord like your lordship has ever travelled! O my lord, O my lord, if only this horrible journey ends well! The drivers and guards are not yet complaining; there is still water in the bags for men and beasts; we have not yet experienced any other adventure beyond the appearance of one lion, who stood proudly on the point of a rock but fled when he saw my burnous flapping in the distance, while our hunters tried to shoot him with poisoned arrows. But my lord, if more lions appear, or if robbers suddenly come in sight, or if those terrible ghosts loom up: the sphinxes with the human heads and the giants with faces of animals, which, people say, fill the desert; or if we meet the giant snake, who has a forest growing on his back and who makes his nest underground and who, when hungry, bores his terrible body right through the earth's flat disk and swallows towns and villages, O my lord, then I doubt, alas, whether my flapping burnous and the bows and arrows of our hunters and guards will save us! O my lord, O my gracious, noble lord, shall I ever see Saba again, my dear country blessed by the gods!"

Thus ran Caleb's complaint; but Lucius said:

"Tarrar is seeing his country again, aren't you, Tarrar?"

"Yes, my lord," said the little slave, "but I come from the sea-coast, not from the desert, and I was not happy in my country and my parents gave me no food to eat and the country is not beautiful either, as Saba is, and I would much rather be with you, in Rome, for that is the loveliest country in the world, and in your house, which is the loveliest house in the world."

After the midday rest the journey was resumed and the sun sank slowly: the sky was like a glowing copper dome, which dulled and cooled; and the stars came out; and over the rocky crests that rose on ridges along the road appeared the flying figures of wild animals. Startling roars sounded in the night, to the great alarm of Caleb, who said that he did not mind lions or hyenas but that he was afraid of the giants and the colossal snake and the ghosts of the desert, which lured travellers to the magic cities which are nothing but hallucination, enchantment and destruction. And all the drivers and guards, sturdy Libyans and Arabs, were like him and said that they did not fear the tangible lions and would hunt them if need be, but that they did fear the intangible lions of the desert, all the haunting, shadowy visions of wrath with which Typhon lures the caravans into Hell.

Then great fires were kindled, to ward off the lions and the ghosts; and they glowed in the still glowing night; and the guards and drivers danced fantastic dances round the fires; and Caleb, to forget his alarm, joined in the dance.

But Thrasyllus told his master about Alexander the Great. When Alexander founded Alexandria, the oracle of Ammon was the most celebrated in Egypt; and Callisthenes and Plutarch relate how the great Macedonian started from Parætonium, on the coast, to make his way through the desert by way of the oasis. Violent south-winds attacked his retinue; but he did not give in, though sand-storms nearly swallowed him up, with his elephants and camels. Suddenly, however, kindly showers fell, at the bidding of the gods, and the winds abated and the sand-storms dropped. Two crows flew beside the great Alexander and guided him to the oasis.

At the first ray of dawn, after a refreshing sleep, the journey was resumed, the monotonous journey, the endless journey. It was the last day but one; and, when the halt was called, it appeared that the drivers and guards had cut open the water-bags and drunk their fill of the water. Caleb grew furious and instantly drew his dagger and wanted to fling himself on the Libyans and Arabs; but they also drew their daggers and everybody shouted and screamed and yelled. Then Lucius intervened and quieted them all and gave them money; and they fell on their knees and sobbed and begged his pardon for drinking up the water, but they had been so thirsty and they accused Caleb of being too sparing with the ration. And Caleb defended himself and said that in the desert one had to be sparing and not gulp down all the water at once, without thinking of the morrow, of the animals and of the noble lord, who now had not a drop of water left. But the noble lord caused a heavy basket full of lemons to be let down from his elephant and gave each of the guards and drivers one lemon and told them that they must now hold out, by sucking this lemon, until they reached the oasis. And they kissed his hands and abased themselves before him and caressed his legs and called him Osiris and Serapis and Ammon-Râ and their life's benefactor.

Men and animals were exhausted, but they allowed themselves hardly any rest that night and no one slept and all wanted to go on, ever on, in the last spurring of their energies.

Was it, after the sleepless night, because of that exhaustion and that last spurring, an atmospheric phenomenon, an hallucination, an illusion, a fata morgana? In the first rosy glimmers of the dawn, reflected from the east to the west, there rose in the west as it were a dream, a nebulous dream-vision of unsubstantial forms, the vague paradisial vision of barely-outlined, rose-tinted trees, slender, shadowy trunks and palm-crowns suffused in rosy light; and then the straight lines, no more than an azure shadow, of walls, of roofs, terraces, domes.

Was it a vision, was it a dream? No, it was real; and Caleb jubilantly pointed and shouted:

“Ammon-Râ! Ammon-Râ!”

“Ammon-Râ! Ammon-Râ!” repeated the guards and drivers, yelling wildly and cheering like madmen, for the oasis took colour, the trees became more clearly marked and the temple, large as a town, now stretched its walls impressively.

The horses sniffed the air and neighed, the elephants waved their trunks, the camels swung out their legs, the men thrust forward their throats and inhaled the fragrance of verdure and the coolness of running wells; and the inhabitants of the oasis, poor natives in the service of the priests of the temple, poured out of their huts to meet the caravan and knelt in the road, offering split coconuts, juicy oranges and scarlet fruits, of strange shapes and juicy pulp, and earthenware dishes full of water limpid as flowing crystal.

Chapter XXI

There was a dense wood of palm-trees through which the travellers made their way to the temple of Ammon-Râ, whose walls lay spread like a town.

"See, my lord," said Caleb, walking ahead and pointing, "these are male palm-trees; and those more slender ones are female; and they marry one another, my lord, and feel love for one another; they grow towards one another, see, my lord, like these two; and they wave to one another and the male fructifies the female; and it is only when they love each other that the fruits are luxuriant and their honey and wine pleasant to the taste."

"It is as Caleb says," Tarrar assented. "The palm-trees in my country marry one another and they are the most excellent in the whole world."

"They also marry in Saba," said Caleb, in pique. "We have sweeter honey and date-wine in Saba than you have here in Libya."

A heated discussion arose between Caleb and Tarrar upon the respective merits of the Sabæan and Libyan palm-trees. But the travellers were now entering the first gate of the temple.

There was a triple row of walls round the old sanctuary, but they were falling into ruins, the obelisks were sinking away, the sphinxes were covered with luxuriant, flowering creepers, tall grasses shot up between the flag-stones of the dromos and all the doors were open. There was a deep shade from the leafy tops of the turpentine-trees, which were fragrant with heavy perfumes in the sunshine. The fleshy aloes drove their sword-like leaves over the walls; and their long stalks blossomed with huge scarlet flowers which smoked as though with incense. But it was above all the daturas whose pendant alabaster goblets poured forth a giddiness, an intoxication of heavy scents, around which the great Atlas moths flew slowly hovering.

There were no door-keepers; and the travellers walked on, through the endless dromos. The monolithic colossi rose on either hand; but they also were shelving to one side, or sinking away. Lastly, from out of the vista of the pylons, which stood in endless row after row, a group of priests approached the travellers. It was the high-priest of Ammon-Râ, accompanied by eleven other priests; and they were all very old and grey. They all had grey locks and they all wore long, grey beards. They all wore long, fiery red robes; and, when they drew near in procession, they were like gods in their placid dignity.

They did not wish to betray their surprise to the travellers. The oracle of Ammon was no longer visited as it had been visited two centuries ago. It was no longer held in honour; the temple was fallen into decay; summers would pass without the advent of a single pilgrim. But Lucius had wanted to consult the oracle of Ammon just because its historic past gave it a poetic charm for him. And, when he saw the

high-priest approach, he stretched out his hands in reverence to the ground and knelt and bowed his head; and Thrasyllus, Caleb and Tarrar knelt and bowed behind him.

"What do you seek, my son?" asked the centenarian high-priest.

"The truth," replied Lucius.

"Then enter into the House of the Sun," the high-priest ordained.

And the travellers rose; and the priests gladly led the way. They led their visitors through the pronaos and naos to the secos, to the holy of holies. And, pointing in the golden shade of midday dusk, between pillars like tree-trunks, to the enormous statue of Ammon-Râ, old as time, the sun-god with the bull's head, the high-priest continued:

"The Sun reveals the truth to him who is worthy to hear it, even as ages ago he revealed the truth to Alexander of Macedon. Before his coming, the deity uttered himself only by moving his brows and wrinkling his bull forehead between his divine horns. But the deity addressed Alexander of Macedon with the sound of his lowing voice and told him, in words plainly audible to the king and all his following, that he was the son of the Sun, the son of Jupiter Ammon-Râ."

Lucius looked up at the statue. In the golden twilight of the temple, where the noontide daylight filtered in and broke between the pillars in a shimmer of dust, he saw the supreme god, who was no longer held in honour, wrapped in shadow, paintless wood and colourless basalt, blind and pock-pitted where his bull head and his human neck had been robbed of the jewelled eyes and the precious stones with which he had once been inlaid. And Lucius felt so deep a compassion within himself for the fading god, once all-honoured and now forgotten in his distant, sinking temple in the Libyan desert, that he bent his knees in pity and reverence.

The Jewish seer, who lived in the cave of Neith, had haply seen the new god, the Son of Jahve, crowned with light for days and days. Here, in the immensity of his ruined sanctuary, Lucius beheld the fading of the god who was forgotten, but whom, centuries ago, Alexander of Macedon had travelled through whirlwinds and sandstorms to seek.

When Lucius looked up, he was alone with the old high-priest:

"Father," he said, kneeling, "I would know the truth. I would know if what I believe to be the truth, revealed to me by oracle after oracle, is the truth to Jupiter Ammon-Râ."

"My son," said the priest, "the truth does not shine forth until after meditation, after contemplation and pious prayers, after days and nights of communing with the

deity. I will be your intermediary. And you shall know what you would know, if you have faith."

"Father," said Lucius, "I lay my forehead, heavy with care and suffering and doubt, in your holy hands."

And he bowed his head towards the priest's open palms.

He remained five days and nights together with the priest. In the temple, the golden shadows of the day changed into the blue shadows of the night and the glittering of the sun into the flickering of the lamps. There was prayer and fasting and the touch of soul to soul.

Chapter XXII

After five days and nights, Lucius knew. Pale, tired and enlightened, he sought out his followers, Thrasyllus, Caleb and Tarrar, who were staying in the great, cavernous rooms of the temple. And he was calm, peaceful and dignified. He bathed and ate and slept. And at night, in the silence of the temple-grounds, which wove itself into one mystic atmosphere with the golden gleam of the stars, he woke Tarrar and said:

“Take this sycamore box.”

It was a small casket of delicate workmanship, which had always accompanied him wherever he went.

Tarrar, heavy with sleep, took up the little box.

“Follow me,” said Lucius.

The little slave, in astonishment, followed his master. Lucius passed through the shadow-haunted temple-precincts, which stretched endlessly in every direction. He went through the parks, which were haunted with sphinxes and obelisks and thick with the sultry heat of datura-scent. He went through the whole oasis, under the grove of palm-trees and past the huts of the natives.

Tarrar followed him. The little slave felt, inquisitively, that the sycamore casket was not locked. He opened it for an instant; and by the flickering starlight Tarrar saw a small woman’s sandal, which he knew. The little slave wondered and wondered. But he continued to follow his master, faithfully; he would have followed him to the death.

They came to the desert. The master entered the desert; and Tarrar continued to wonder. The starry night now spread its dome over their heads; the silvery sands lay outstretched before him.

“Dig,” Lucius commanded, suddenly turning round.

Tarrar gave a start. He put down the casket in the sand and dug a hole with his hands.

“Deeper,” Lucius commanded. “Dig deeper.”

The little slave dug; quickly, like a little monkey, he dug the hole deep with his two hands.

“Put the casket in the hole,” Lucius commanded.

Tarrar did so and looked at his master.

“Cover the casket up with sand.”

Tarrar did as his master commanded. Then Lucius said:

“Now come back.”

And he went back to the oasis; but Tarrar, before following him, stamped down the sand under which the casket lay buried and overwhelmed it, amid violent gestures of delight, with native curses, curses not to be averted, in the Libyan tongue.

Chapter XXIII

The travellers had returned to Memphis and Caleb displayed the skin of a lion which had been shot in the desert and told the people in the thalamegus terrible tales of desert ghosts and dread visions. The barge was now gliding up the Nile in the night; the sky was softly blue, like dark byssus; the water was a pale blue, like rippling silk; and the waning moon hung above the palm-clusters and country-mansions on the river-bank like a great, overripe fruit which threatened to burst in the sky and whose juice was already trickling in thick orange drops that flowed far over the Nile.

And, while the rowers' monotonous chant resounded with the regular beat of the oars, Thrasyllus, sitting beside Lucius, gave way to melancholy and said:

"Egypt is Egypt no longer. Alexandria is a commercial town; Memphis is a decaying greatness; and the priests are venal and no longer know the Hermetic wisdom. I have sought for five days among the dusty papyri of the neglected library in the temple of Ammon; it is as though all that is worth knowing were hiding itself."

"The priests must be hiding the Hermetic wisdom on purpose," said Lucius.

"They used to do so in other days for Plato and Pythagoras, when their souls were lofty and incorruptible. Nowadays they show what they have and tell what they know for money. But what they have is not more than we in Rome possess in the temple of Isis; and what they know is not the key to happiness. And yet ... and yet I believe in a sacred word, handed down in the wisdom of the Kabbala by word of mouth, from father to son. But I have not yet received it from any priest, neither at Memphis nor in the oasis. And yet I have hopes. There is Thebes; and there are the secrets of Ethiopia ... down to the pillars of Sesostris."

Lucius smiled gently:

"The word," he said, "the secret of happiness ... Thrasyllus, is happiness not an illusion of the brain? Does happiness not lie in resigning one's self piously to one's fate and is the secret word not the proud 'Be a god unto yourself'?"

The old man started. And he whispered:

"You also? Have you also heard that word, as I heard it at Sais? I took no account of it, it did not satisfy me."

"It satisfied me in the oasis, because it is a proud, strong word and I have needed pride and strength ... since I have known, Thrasyllus."

"Known what, Lucius?"

"That Carus stole Ilia from me."

The old man started violently:

"You know?" he exclaimed. "You know? Who told you? Who betrayed the secret?"

"The voice itself within my own soul, which the oracles caused to speak to me. My own thoughts, tossing this way and that, which the oracles guided. From the sibyl of Rhacotis, who merely guessed my own thoughts, down to the old high-priest of Ammon-Râ, who spoke to me like a father ... and who said to me the word, 'Be a god unto yourself!'"

"As Nemu-Pha said to me, at Sais. I paid for it in gold."

"I paid for it in gold in the oasis. But what does that matter, Thrasyllus? The word gave me strength and pride."

"O my son, if you could be cured of your sorrow, of your grief!"

"They are no longer in me. I no longer have any grief, no longer any sorrow. I am a god unto myself."

"The gods suffer. Isis suffered because of Osiris. All the gods suffer."

"I suffer no longer. My grief has departed from me. The world and life are beautiful. See, the colours and the light are beautiful. The sky is softly blue, like dark byssus; the water ripples like blue silk; and the moon is like a great, overripe fruit which bursts in the sky and whose juice trickles over the Nile. To-morrow the day will bring another beauty. In these successive beauties, Thrasyllus, I will be a god unto myself."

"O my son, though I did not tell you the word myself, I am so happy that you yourself found the word!"

In the night there sounded the high, rising tones of a harp, followed by Cora's crystal-clear voice, which was accompanied by other harps and other voices.

"The word of pride, the word of strength, Thrasyllus," said Lucius, calmly; and the old tutor saw a tranquil smile on his young master's face as he added, "The word that almost makes me happy."

Chapter XXIV

After the abundant dews of the night came the delight of the cool-warm summer day. The clustering trees now pressed their way forward more richly and luxuriously along the banks of the Nile. Here, on the Libyan side, lay the town of Acanthus, with its temple of Osiris in a spreading wood of Theban acanthus-trees, of which the natives tap the fragrant gums. Next, on the Arabian bank, came Aphroditopolis, the second town of the name, with the temple of the White Cow; and then the travellers reached the Heracleotic nome, a big island in the Nile, from which a canal cuts through the Arsinoic nome, the most fertile in the whole country. Here and here alone the olive-tree flourished in dense, silvery woods; but here also there twisted and twined, in close festoons, the vine-branches, on which the grapes were beginning to swell; here the fruit-trees bent under their heavy load and the orchards stretched; here the sickles of the husbandmen waved through the abundant ears of corn. Here the fat soil yielded wealth and prosperity; here the innumerable sheep spread in a wave of wool over the hills, like a shadowy white sea. Here, between margins of sands, Lake Mœris stretched exquisite and crystal blue to the horizon, as it were a fresh-water inland sea. In earlier ages, the ocean must have extended to those margins and stolen the whole northern land of Lower Egypt, that gift of the Nile, as Herodotus had called it long ago. Here the double lotus-flowers were trained to blossom in the waters; and here the sacred scarabs were bred and worshipped upon the white flowers.

Lucius would wander alone of a morning, strolling along the banks of the lake. It was so strangely calm here and so divinely beautiful; and a heaven-sent consolation filled the air. These were the regions blest by the gods; and it pleased Lucius to linger here. The thalamegus lay moored under acanthus-trees; the flowering reeds shot up to a man's height around her. And every afternoon, at sunset, Lucius, sometimes accompanied by Thrasyllus, sometimes alone, walked to the labyrinth.

The road lay along the waterworks of the canal, where daily, under the supervision of the engineers, the quantity of water that flowed in and out of the lake through the canal was closely gauged. The tilled and inhabited lands around Lake Mœris, large as a sea, were never flooded. If the Nile increased, all that happened was that the blue crystal mirror of the lake rose. If the waters of the river fell, then those of the lake filled them up, by careful management of the sluices. The water was never other than a benevolent deity.

Along the waterworks ran the road to the labyrinth. In the sinking glory of the sun, in blood-red and orange splendours, Lucius saw it daily, the strange Titanic town of monoliths, the linked rows of palaces and courts, projecting their columns endlessly, endlessly, towards the sunlit horizon. Orange and blood-red gleams glowed over the flat stone tables of the roofs, which were not higher than a single pillared storey and

which spread out their immense terrace like a paved desert. There were twenty palaces, each surrounded by twenty-seven monolithic columns; and all this wondrous architecture of past centuries was without a beam of wood, was without cement or masonry, was simply stone laid upon stone with faultless precision and column hewn beside column, absolutely circular, each column a single stone. At the end of the palaces, which were a stadium long, rose the square pyramid, the tomb of the builder, King Amenemha.

The holy place was guarded by priests, who led Lucius through the halls and crypts. The twenty palaces represented the former twenty Egyptian nomes, or provinces; and the emissaries of each province used to gather with their priests and priestesses in their palace or court and offer up sacrifices and discuss great questions of policy or local welfare. But nowadays the palaces were deserted, the crypts were deserted, and the priests led Lucius along endless, deserted, winding corridors which meandered from palace to palace. The torches smeared the walls with blood-red light, smeared the smooth stone walls of the corridors and halls and floors and ceilings, stone after stone upon stone of wonderful dimensions all resting one upon another without cement. And to Lucius it was one of the marvels of the world, even more marvellous, because of its sublime human architecture, than the pyramids had been.

Travelling on camels with Uncle Catullus and a great retinue, Lucius went a hundred stadia farther, to Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis. The trees flourished more richly, more luxuriantly, like a richly-wooded park around the travellers, till they came to the sacred lake where the sacred crocodile, named Such, was held in veneration.

"Well," said Uncle Catullus, "here's another of these little pets which are kept for the edification of foreigners!"

And in fact the priests who came to meet the travellers in front of the dromos of the sacred lake, surrounded on every side with pillars, first amiably demanded a stater a head as entrance-fee, while Caleb, of course, had seen to a supply of rich provisions, as an offering to the deity. The slaves carried baskets with cakes, roast meats and jars of hydromel.

In the lake lay Such, the huge monster; but the priests had tamed the terrible deity: they were luring him from the middle of the lake, where his temple was, to the bank, because some Persian visitors happened to have arrived before Lucius and wished to present their offerings. On the edge of the lake the priests took Such fearlessly by his terrible jaws and made him swallow the cakes and meat and wine of the Persian grandees, who were greatly diverted and laughed aloud.

"They must be great noblemen," said Caleb, "and are going from the pillars of Sesostris to Alexandria, even as you, my noble lords, are going from Alexandria to

the pillars of Sesostris. My lord, if you permit me, I should much like to exchange a few words with the guide of the Persian lords."

Lucius gave his permission; and the crocodile, who had swallowed his Persian presents, swam back to the middle of the lake. But the priests now quickly lured him to the other side, where Lucius was waiting; and the ever greedy crocodile approached; and the priests again took him fearlessly by his terrible jaws and the monster now swallowed Lucius' gifts, the cakes, the roast meat, as though insatiable; and the priests, laughing, emptied a jar of hydromel into his maw.

Meanwhile, Caleb, after a few words with the guide, had sunk in salaams before the Persian lords.

"He's offering the Persians his diversorium," said Uncle Catullus, jestingly.

And in fact Caleb, in a few minutes, came back happy and swaggering to his own travellers and said, in a mysterious whisper:

"I have recommended their Persian lordships to be sure to stop at the Hermes House at Alexandria; and I slipped a gold ptolemy into their guide's hand. Yes, my lords, business is business; and, if we did no business at Alexandria, I could never hope to see my beloved Saba again. For there you must have done business, if you want to live in the country; there's no business to be done there, my lords."

By way of Heracleopolis, where divine honours were paid to the ichneumon, the spotted rat that devours the eggs of the adders and attacks the adders themselves, after first rolling itself in the mud, which dries round its body and forms an armour, the travellers reached Cynopolis, where the dog is worshipped as Anubis, and Oxyrynchus, where the fish of the name is venerated. And it now appeared that, in this region of Heptanomis, where, on the Arabian side of the Nile, the strange battlements of the blinding white Alabastrites Mountains blaze against the sky, all animals received divine honours, as though the priests had instituted these popular forms of worship in great numbers everywhere, so that they might the more carefully keep to themselves the secret Hermetic wisdom. Cats and falcons, sheep and wolves, baboons and zebus, eagles and lions, goats and spiders: all the animals were worshipped in one or other town or village; all the animals had their temples and priests; and Uncle Catullus said that he grew weary of having to admire so many sacred animals, especially as Apis, the little bull, and Such, the crocodile, were after all the only ones that were really interesting to see. But all these cattle, all these birds and fishes, all these creatures, from carnivora down to insects, were worshipped, tended, fed and shown in the temples to strangers, each time at a piece of gold a head. No, it was really too silly, especially when, after the first Crocodilopolis, on the left, the second Crocodilopolis appeared on the right, on the bank of the Nile, with another Such!

“Lucius,” said Uncle Catullus, “honestly, I’m not going to feed any more sacred crocodiles, nor any sacred goats or cats or beetles either. I’ve seen enough of all those pests, do you hear, nephew?”

And Lucius and Thrasyllus were inclined to agree with Uncle Catullus; and the barge sped past the wondrous purple of the Porphyrites Mountains, gold-ruddy crests in the orange evening sky, up to Ptolemais, the greatest town in the Thebais.

Ptolemais was a prosperous city, ruled like Alexandria by a municipal government founded on the Greek model; but after Ptolemais the travellers were especially charmed with Abydos. Here they saw the Memnonium, which was not so gigantic as the labyrinth, but which still was built of great single blocks of stone, according to that same marvellous system of lost ancient architecture. They also saw the underground well, which is reached by vaults and galleries, a subterranean miracle of monoliths, always fitted to one another and upon one another, without masonry. The temple of Apollo rose in a flowering acacia-wood, as in a sudden dream of swarming white, fragrant blossoms.

Lesser Diospolis and Tentyra followed. The Tentyrians worship Aphrodite and hunt the crocodile, which they destroy wherever they can; and Uncle Catullus said that they showed good taste in this civilized choice. After the half-Arabian Coptos and Apollonopolis, Thebes loomed into view, with its hundred gates, the gates which Homer sang, the gates through which two hundred warriors, with all their horses and chariots, could pass. And, as the travellers drew near, in the rosy dawn behind Thebes, the Smaragdis Hills appeared in green outline, transparent and far-away as a dream, through the misty light of the horizon.

Thebes was already called Greater Diospolis and worshipped Zeus-Jupiter.

“Heaven be praised!” said Uncle Catullus. “The Upper Egyptians are become sensible. Venus and Jupiter are once more held in honour! Every conceivable sort of crocodile, goat, dog, rat, falcon and beetle is done with. It was high time!”

Like Memphis, Thebes spread itself as an immense, ancient, but dying city. For eighty stadia along the Nile its ancient palaces and temples stood in an endless row, forsaken, ruined, cracking, slanting and sinking, with their pillars and walls, their mutilated colossi and sphinxes, their obelisks already fallen to the ground. Even in the sun, a grey melancholy spread over the great city, whose streets, indeed, were crowded with numbers of pedestrians, camels and litters, but without the feverish, metropolitan bustle which had reigned at Alexandria. The gloom of a fatally waning glory lay like a haze over all this architectural immensity, which Cambyses, with his Persian hordes, had in past ages destroyed beyond repair, as with gigantic hammer-strokes.

In the moonlit night the city, with its vast outlines, with its endless row of Titanic palaces, rose beside the Nile like a Titanic citadel, mysteriously chilling to the heart. In these abandoned temples the lost wisdom especially had been cultivated by the omniscient priests, the heirs of Moses and of Hermes Trismegistus. Here the utmost wisdom of philosophy and astronomy and astrology was known. Here the year and the day were calculated by the sun and no longer, as of yore, by the moon; here the year was divided into twelve months of thirty days, with five intercalary days; and here was calculated the time that must be added to the three hundred and sixty-five days in order to arrive at the exact length of the year. The kings who reigned here reigned, according to the hieroglyphs on the obelisks, over Scythia, Bactria, Ionia and India! They had ruled the world, in the deep-sunk centuries! In the measureless spaces of their immense palaces and temples, from which the Nile, flowing silver in the moonlight, could be seen through the rows of pylons gleaming as it had gleamed centuries ago, not an atom remained of the material or immaterial life of this long, long array of monarchs. Their names alone were still extant, written on cracking or mutilated obelisks, but their history lingered only in a few disputed legends. The unplumbed depth of the past made Lucius' sensitive mind turn giddy. Yet, as he wandered by Thrasyllus' side through the endless forsaken halls and rooms and courts, here dark with shadow, there lighted by the spectral moon, he was charmed by the sombre beauty and grandeur of that giddy depth.

Here, too, stood a monolithic memnonium. Next came, linked together, the forty royal tombs hewn in the rock. And, in front of this Titanic ruin, in which not a mummy remained, the travellers saw, in the moonlit night, the two seated colossi, themselves carved out of monoliths; but one, with the trunk broken off—by what power?—had fallen in the high grass, while the other still stared towards the east, in the hieratic attitude, the long hands upon the knees, the pschent crowning the vast, ecstatic head, with its huge, staring, sightless eyes, from which the enamel had disappeared and the jewelled pupils.

The travellers stood in silence before the statue in the moonlight; and even Uncle Catullus refrained from jesting. The atmosphere at this spot was woven of shimmering divinity. The moon was waning, the dawn was rising rose-red. And, as though with a human voice, a single note sounded from the statue. The note was intoned clearly and almost plaintively; it developed into the powerful sound of a man's high voice, swelled into something terribly human and almost divine and broke off short and hard. They all heard it in the uncertain light: Lucius, Thrasyllus, Catullus, Caleb, Cora, all the slaves, male and female, who had accompanied the travellers. Caleb turned very pale and time after time pressed his lips to his amulets.

And, motionless and now silent, the blind colossus stared towards the sun, which was rising out of a sea of rosy beams and gold-dust cloud.

That evening, in the temple of Zeus-Jupiter-Râ, the travellers saw the strange ceremony of the wedding of the Pallade, or Pallachide. She was the daughter of one of the greatest families of Diospolis and was chosen a month ago, for her birth and beauty, as the priestess of the god. She had served the god that month by giving her beauty to whomsoever she would. Now that the period of her service was past, she was marrying her bridegroom, a young man, like herself a member of one of the greatest and oldest Theban families. There was a ceremony of mourning and dirge because the service of so fair and famed a maiden was at an end; there was the presentation of gifts by all whom she had embraced that month; there was glad gaiety now because of her wedding. She was attired and anointed as a goddess and received great honour from the close-packed multitude; and after her wedding she kissed the priestess who succeeded her, likewise a virgin from one of the leading families of the town, and who was shown naked before the altar and was exquisitely beautiful as a child.

"Every country has its customs," said Uncle Catullus, with a shrug. "I don't envy the bridegroom; but no one seems to consider it odd; and the polite thing for us foreigners to do will be just to act as though we thought it all quite natural."

And with Lucius, Thrasyllus and Caleb he approached the bride, who was now sparkling with jewels beside her bridegroom; and their slaves threw roses and lilies and lotus-flowers before her feet; and she thanked him with a silent, winning dignity, standing amid the circle of her kinsmen in a queenly attitude.

But, after Thebes, to Uncle Catullus' despair, there reappeared on the banks of the Nile the towns at which crocodiles, fishes and falcons were worshipped.

"Lucius," said Uncle Catullus to his nephew, seriously, one morning, while the barge was approaching Apollonopolis Magna, "Lucius, my dear boy, I have a confession to make to you. I think I've had enough of it. I'm sick of falcons, fishes and crocodiles which are gods, not to mention dogs, wolves, beetles, bulls and other cattle. And, in addition to being sick of all these sacred animals, I'm sick of all those strange Egyptian foodstuffs, while, moreover, I suspect Caleb of fortifying with barley-spirit the wines with which he supplies us out of his store; and this applies not only to the thick-as-ink Mareotis wine, but also to the topaz-yellow liqueurs of Napata.... Lucius, my dear boy, I am old and I feel ill. My head is like a sponge saturated not with water but with impressions of strange ceremonies and immoral customs. Also my stomach is overloaded and my palate over-excited. I have a craving for a few succulent oysters and a young roast peacock. I understand that one can't get those here, on the Nile; but still I should like to learn what your plans really are ... I've heard something about hunting-expeditions and the pillars of Sesostri...."

"Yes, uncle," said Lucius, with a smile, "Caleb did suggest that we should leave the barge at Philæ, where we shall soon be arriving, and go through Ethiopia with carts,

camels, elephants and tents, go hunting on elephants and ostriches and travel over Napata and Meroe, through forest and wilderness, to Cape Dire and the pillars of Sesostris, where we shall find the quadrireme waiting for the homeward journey."

"Well, my dear boy, I think that this programme, together with my spongy brain and overloaded stomach, would be too much for me. If I were to accomplish it by your side, then Egypt would certainly be the death of me, a contingency which I am dreading as it is. I think, don't you, that I had better go down the Nile again in the barge, past all the sacred wolves and falcons and cats and beetles?"

But Caleb had approached:

"In that case, my noble Lord Catullus," he said, "I have a much better plan. In fact, I, your humble, obedient servant, agree with you that the journey through Ethiopia would perhaps be very tiring for you. That is why I would propose that the thalamegus take you from Apollonopolis Magna, by the canal, to Berenice, on the Bay of Acatantus, in the Arabian Gulf.¹ At Berenice you will meet the quadrireme, which has gone by Pelusium and the Nechao Canal² and is ascending the Arabian Gulf to fetch us at the pillars of Sesostris. In this way you will do the journey without inconvenience and yet with enjoyment, for the Berenice Canal passes along the Smaragdis Mountains and they are a dream, my lord; my lord, they're a dream!..."

Thus did Caleb advise him, reflecting that, if Uncle Catullus adopted this programme, instead of going back to Alexandria, the princely apartments at the Hermes House would remain unoccupied and could be let to the Persian grandees who had fed the sacred Such on Lake Mœris and who were travelling in the opposite direction to his own noble clients....

¹The Red Sea.

²The old canal through the Isthmus of Suez.

Chapter XXV

And so it happened. Uncle Catullus thought that Caleb's suggestion was really not bad; and so he remained on board the thalamegus with Rufus the under-steward and a number of male and female slaves and was to go from Apollonopolis Magna to Berenice, there to meet the quadrireme, while Lucius, Thrasyllus and Caleb took ship in a simple barge which brought them to Syene. Tarrar was with them; and Cora was with them.

"Cora," Lucius had asked, "do you dare undertake the journey through the forest and the wilderness?"

"My lord, I am your slave," Cora had answered, gladly; and she had gone with them.

"When we come back at night from hunting, Cora, you shall sing to us under the twinkling stars of Ethiopia...."

At Syene the travellers saw the last Roman soldiers: there were always three cohorts stationed at this spot, on the Egyptian frontier. At Elephantina was the Little Cataract, in the middle of the river, falling over rocky steps, across whose smooth surface the water first shot forward quickly, to come shooting next over a rocky rampart, roaring and clattering in a deep dive. And the travellers saw the watermen come up from Philæ in light boats and then shoot, with the powerful, brawling stream, over the steps and raise themselves over the rocky wall and slip, boat and all, with joyful cries, down the waterfall into the depths; and it looked such a safe sport that first Caleb, next Lucius, next even Cora, strapped into a little skiff, shot the rapids, raising themselves over the wall and slipping down the waterfall.

From Syene to Philæ the journey was done in carts. There was an end to any luxurious comfort; the road led for hundreds of stadia through a level plain with strange big rocks, like statues of Hermes in a Greek city, along the road. They were round and cylindrical, like polished black stones, three on top of one another, from large to small. The travellers were conveyed to the island in a raft of laths and wickerwork, on which the water lapped over their feet.

"Herodotus tells us," said Thrasyllus, "that the mysterious sources of the Nile ought to be here, near Syene and Elephantina, and that the canal which leads to them is an abyss and a bottomless sea! But Herodotus often tells us fairy-tales! For observe, the abyss, the bottomless sea, is covered all over with islands; and they are inhabited; and the sources of the Nile are certainly not here!"

At Tachampso the travellers again took a boat. But the Ethiopian forests were now to be traversed. Lucius mounted his elephant; the others mounted camels; more camels carried tents and luggage, of which there was now only a little; and Caleb had hired a strongly-armed escort of powerful Libyans and swift-footed Arabs. For, though the

Ethiopians themselves were not warlike and offered no danger to the travellers, there were the savage races, the Troglodytæ, the Blemmyes, the Nubians, the Megabari, and, above all, the Ochthyophagi and Macrobiani, who, if they were not overawed by the sight of a strong and numerous force, might surprise and plunder the travellers. The civilized world ended here. This was the very end of the world. True, on the Nile there was still Napata and the Ethiopian capital, Meroë; but beyond that was buried the secret of the world's end, the secret of the sources of the Nile, the secret of the horizons of the earth, the secret of the endless sea surrounding the world. Here, in these forests, began the temptation merely to go on and on, to go on in order to learn what the end would be, with what temptations and with what dread perils. Caleb told of travellers who had gone on and on and who had seen Typhon's awful giant head appear above the edge of the world, with gaping mouth; and he had swallowed them up. One guide had escaped and had told it to Caleb, who said that he was worthy of belief. There also, in the immeasurable ocean that washed the world's edge, lay the great serpent, which coiled itself in spirals and then covered the whole surface of the water, as far as the eye could reach, when it came up to bask in the scorching heat of the southern sun. Once, said Caleb, some daring travellers, who thought that the snake was a sort of dark desert, had walked over its scales, for miles on end, until the snake moved and they realized the terror and slipped into the sea in which you sink and sink and sink, for three centuries, before reaching the bottom of Typhon's Hell.

These were the terrible tales which Caleb knew how to tell, one after the other, while the sun set over the forest and the stars twinkled and the fires blazed high and the tents were pitched and a sheep roasted on the spit. And Caleb made himself so much afraid and the guards and drivers so very much afraid that, shivering with fear, they asked Cora to sing. Then Cora would play on her harp and sing to them; and at the sound of her voice the dread visions, the uncanny phantoms, the giants and pygmies vanished and sleep came over them all, except Thrasyllus, who remained awake, smiling and thoughtful, and looked up at the stars and reflected that, thanks to his studies, he knew the occult secret, that the world was not a disk, washed by the sea, but a sphere, which glowed with internal fire and moved round the sun, the centre of the universe....

It was as though a new health were making Lucius strong and cheerful. Yes, it seemed to Thrasyllus that Lucius was no longer thinking of Ilia and that he was cured of his carking grief. In the Ethiopian forests, which now almost surrounded them with an impenetrable wall of huge trees and dense foliage and tangled creepers, he abandoned himself enthusiastically to the delights of the great hunts which Caleb organized, with the aid of the mighty hunters whom he had hired for his noble client. These hunters included five Elephantophagi, with whom Lucius hunted the elephants which sometimes pass through the forests in herds. The

elephants were often shot by archers, three of whom served one heavy bow: two men, leg forward, held the bow; the third drew back the string; and the arrow, dipped in snake poison, struck the elephant, who fell stunned. If the elephant was not killed, he was surrounded with a network of ropes; and, when he recovered consciousness, he was tamed and made to lure other elephants. If the elephant, however, was not to be tamed and if, after recovering his senses, he relapsed into a dangerous rage, then he was driven, amid much shouting and yelling, against a tree, which had purposely been sawn through at the foot. Elephants are accustomed to rest against trees; but, as soon as the untamable elephant leant against this tree, it fell over him and prevented him from rising, so that he broke the bone of his leg and was killed. This often implied cruelty, but it also implied danger; and Lucius' newly aroused manhood found satisfaction in this robust, virile sport.

But there was also the hunting of the swift-footed ostriches, with hunters selected from the tribe of the Struthophagi; and this hunt provided the maddest enjoyment and excited Caleb and Tarrar in particular; and Thrasyllus and Cora also came to look on, for it was a most diverting spectacle, in which the hunters disguised themselves as ostriches, with little skirts of feathers and with one hand stuck into a stuffed ostrich-neck, with the stuffed head sticking out on top. There were first wild bird-dances; then the hunters darted forward and scattered corn and lured the real birds, which rushed after them and pecked at the grains, until they were caught in ravines from which they could find no issue and were shot with arrows. And with their precious feathers, bleached and curled, the Struthophagi made costly coverings, soft and white and downy, which Caleb bought for a song to send to Alexandria and Rome, where they were a great luxury, so that Caleb made a pretty penny by the transaction.

Sometimes there was danger in the forest. There was danger when the Struthophagi met the Sionians, a tribe of nomads with whom they were always at war; it was dangerous when the Acridophagi appeared, the verminous locust-eaters; but the travellers' strong escort, the huge Libyans and nimble Arabs, inspired respect and the wild nomads fled at the first bow-shot. And Caleb was afraid of nobody; he feared only the wood-nymphs, who, when they have caught you in their arms, which are pythons, laugh and laugh into your ears, until you go mad, and then dance round with you, until you drop dead. And, when he lay down at night to sleep under a black ostrich-feather covering, he also feared the scorpions, which have no fewer than four jaws and whose bite is not fatal but produces a slow, incurable canker.

They also caught lions, in nets, and hippopotami, in pits, and wild buffaloes, which they pursued with the huge hounds of the Cynamolgian hunters. They hunted from tall trees and they hunted from the reeds in the water. It was a rude and stimulating

life; and Caleb once said to Lucius, seriously, that he felt the courage to go on and to go on again ... to fight the great snake in the ocean that encompassed the earth....

It did not come to that, however. But the caravan was approaching Napata and the Ethiopian emerald-mines and topaz-rocks. The emerald-mines were like marvellous green, magic caves, in which thousands of slaves were working; the topaz-rocks were visited at night time: the stones, because of their yellow sheen, are almost invisible by day, but glitter in the dark night; then little metal tubes are planted over each stone that is found, so as to make it easier to recognize the stones in the daytime and to grub them out. In former ages, the Egyptian and Ethiopian kings maintained separate guards around these mines and rocks.

At Napata, where the travellers now arrived, they saw their first entirely native, barbarian town. There was not a word of Latin spoken here; Lucius and Thrasyllus could not have made themselves understood without Tarrar and Caleb; and even then the little Libyan slave and the Sabæan guide found it difficult to grapple with the language. The Ethiopians, who wore no clothing save the skin of some animal round their waist, surprised the travellers by the smallness of their stature. Everything about them was small: their houses built of palm-leaves and bamboo, their oxen and goats and sheep; and Thrasyllus was of opinion that the legend of the Pygmæi, or nations of dwarfs, had originated because of Ethiopia.

The natives ate hardly any meat, but mainly vegetables and fruits, or young shoots of trees, or they would suck reed-stalks and lotus-flowers. But they also took blood and milk and cheese; and there was no other food. No, Uncle Catullus would never have stood it here, thought Lucius, when the travellers went still farther south, to the capital of Ethiopia, Meroe, on the island of the same name. And here Lucius discovered that the famous date-wines and topaz-yellow liqueurs of Napata and Meroe were a sheer hoax, that there was no wine or liqueur whatever distilled in Ethiopia and that the delicious drinks with which Master Ghizla and Caleb had provided him and Uncle Catullus came from no farther than Lake Mareotis at Alexandria!

A fabulous vegetation, however, grew luxuriantly over the island. If the people and animals were small, the trees shot up with amazing vigour: the huge palm-trees, the ebony-trees, the ceratia and persea, under whose gigantic domes of thick foliage the green villages of little plaited wicker huts disappeared from view. In the marshes round Lake Psebo the travellers hunted, if not the great snake, at any rate the terrible boa, which even ventures to attack the elephant. And the natives showed them a fight between one of these boas and an elephant and a hippopotamus.

They visited the gold-mines, the copper-mines, the jewel-mines, the temples of Hercules and Pan and of a strange barbaric deity. The dead were buried in the Nile, or else they were kept in the houses under a mica slab of human form. In the middle

of the town stood the Golden Temple, where the king dwelt in sacred mystery. There were slabs of gold between bamboo columns. In former ages the priests elected the kings and deposed them at will; but a certain king had caused all the priests to be strangled and since then a law had been passed that, if the king were maimed or lost a limb, all the people of his court had to inflict the same injury on themselves, for which reason the king's person was guarded with great care and was divine and sacred; and the travellers did not see him.

Chapter XXVI

After the fierce hunting by day, the nights were twinkling mysteries of great shining, diamond stars; and Sirius shone like a white sun. The rustling silence, the audible stillness of the vast forests lapped the encampment of the caravan, where the fires died out but still glowed sufficiently to keep the wild animals at a distance and where the guards and drivers lay immersed in sound sleep. Lucius was happy in that mystery; and in the silvery sheen of the night the last memories of his grief seemed to lift like wisps of disappearing mist.

The travellers had approached the Land of Ophir; and the pillars of Sesostris would be reached next day. In this last twinkling night of forest-life, with the stars shining through the foliage like a diamond cupola above an emerald dome, Lucius had left his tent while all the others slept. Next to his tent were those of Thrasyllus, Caleb and Cora. And he saw Cora sitting outside her tent, which was the biggest, because she was a woman, and made of spotted lynx-hides, whose warmth resisted the plentiful dew. And she rose and stretched her hands to the ground, in salutation, and preserved that attitude, shyly.

"Are you not sleeping, Cora?" asked Lucius.

"No, my lord. I cannot sleep when the nights twinkle like this, when the stars send forth such rays that it is really as though they were moving to and fro. I feel that I must go on gazing at them until they fade away."

"Life here in the forest is too wild for you, too lonely...."

"Life in the forest is paradise, my lord. By day Thrasyllus tells me wonderful things about the mountains and the plants and the animals and the savage tribes; and so the hours pass till you return from hunting...."

"And you sing to us and dance in the light of the fire and charm the rude hunters and Caleb in particular...."

She smiled and made no reply.

Then she continued:

"And the nights are such strange mysteries of sounds and silence and of radiant stars; and it is as though Sirius grew bigger nightly."

"And you are never frightened?"

"I am not frightened, my lord."

"Not even at night?"

"Least of all at night, because ..."

"Because what?"

"Because then you have returned; and I feel safest where you are."

"From that height yonder, Cora, one can see the sea. I love the sea and I often miss the sea in the forest. I am glad that we are near the sea again. As I returned from hunting, I could just catch sight of a streak of sea from there. I should like to see the sea now, at night, with all those twinkling stars above it."

"Yes, my lord."

"Come with me ... that is, if you are not frightened."

"I am not frightened, my lord, where you are."

And her heart throbbed in her throat, but not with fear.

They went past the sleeping guards and left the circle of the watch-fires. She nearly stumbled over the creepers and stones; and he said:

"Give me your hand."

It was the first time that his hand had met hers. He had never touched her before. When she felt the warm strength of his hand around her own small hand, hers lay passive like a captive dove.

"Why are you trembling so?" he asked.

"I don't know, my lord," she stammered.

He smiled and did not speak again.

They climbed the rocky height and he helped her, with his fingers still grasping hers. He even put his arm round her slim waist, to support her, and he felt that she was still trembling, as in a fever.

"Look," he said, pointing, "there is the sea."

They both looked out. Around them stretched the forests, all shadow and denseness and gloom and loneliness and mystery. On one horizon, gleaming darkly in the night, lay the line of the sea, the Arabian Gulf, the Erythræan or Red Sea.

"The sea," she stammered. "Yes, the sea, I love it too. I always had it around me, at Cos. I also miss it in the forest, as you do, my lord."

"To-morrow we shall reach the sea again, Cora.... Cora, I want you, to-night, this last night ... to dance to me ... here, in the starlight."

"Yes, my lord," said the slave.

She danced. She softly hummed a tune between scarce-parted lips. The thin folds of her garment flew to either side; and with her veils she mimicked the movements of birds' wings. She hovered round and round on the upland, circling like a swallow.

He stepped towards her; and she ceased dancing.

"Cora," he said, "to-morrow we shall be at Dire, by the pillars of Sesostris. On the opposite side are Ebal and Usal and Saba, Caleb's country, to which he wants to return when he is rich."

"Yes, my lord."

"Cora, if you are really fond of Caleb, I will resign you to him."

She trembled and clasped her hands. She fell on her knees and gave one loud sob.

"What's the matter, Cora?"

"My lord, let me stay with you! Let me dance and sing for you, let me serve you, let me wash your feet; kick me, beat me, torture me! But do not send me away! Do not send me away! Keep me! Keep me with you!... I come from Dryope's slave-school, I have cost you a fortune, my lord! I am not beautiful, but my voice is good and, my lord, I am a clever dancer. But, if your lordship is tired of my voice and my dancing, I will wash your feet; and, when you are angry and want to beat a slave, you shall beat me and ill-treat me! But keep me, keep me, wherever you may be!"

She had thrown herself before him and was sobbing and kissing his feet.

And he said:

"Then, Cora, don't you love Caleb?"

"My lord," she said, "I love you—if I must say it!—and I have loved you from the first moment when Thrasyllus brought me to you. And, if it please you, my lord, I will die for you. But keep me and do not give me to Caleb!"

"And if it pleased me, Cora ... that you should not die for me but live for me? Not only to sing to me and dance to me, but also to throw your arms around my neck, to lay your breast upon my breast and your lips upon my lips?..."

She gave a cry as of incredible happiness. Smiling, he raised her very tenderly and folded her in his arms, close against him.

"Oh!" she cried, in ecstasy, when his lips sought hers. "Aphrodite! Aphrodite! She has heard my prayer!"

Her little hands ventured to reach out for his head and take it by the temples. Around them was the solitude of the Ethiopian night; from out of the forests the flowers filled the air with incense; a spice-laden aroma was wafted from the sea; and the radiant stars hung above them, like white suns, with the dazzling glory that was Sirius....

Chapter XXVII

Cape Dire! The sea was reached; and there rose the obelisks, the shafts, the pillars of Sesostris, whose sacred writings immortalized the remembrance of the passage of the Egyptian world-ruler who for nine years had linked conquest to conquest, even to Arabia, even to Bactriana, even to India. And Caleb approached Lucius with a smile and said:

"Most noble lord, I wished to keep it for you as a surprise and would not tell you before, but this little diversorium at Cape Dire, overlooking my beloved native land, belongs to us, to Ghizla and me, and is a small branch of our great Hermes House at Alexandria; and to-night you need no longer sleep in a tent, but will have a worthy apartment and sleep on a soft couch of skins. For, though you are still without your own furniture and your sumptuous utensils and treasures of art and though this little guest-house is not to be compared with our big diversorium, it is nevertheless comfortable and clean and it has bathrooms and kitchens and we built it here for the accommodation of any noble lords who travel from Alexandria to the pillars of Sesostris or from the pillars of Sesostris to Alexandria."

And Caleb, swaggering gaily and elegantly on the tips of his red boots, led the travellers into his guest-house; and Lucius, for the first time for weeks, bathed not in a rustling stream but in a bathroom, where his slaves rubbed and kneaded his body.

Caleb stood on the cape, with his hand above his eyes, and looked out in astonishment. He was surprised that the quadrireme, with Uncle Catullus on board, had not arrived from the Gulf of Acathantus, nay, was not even in sight. Could there have been an accident? He told his fears to no one but Thrasyllus; and the two stood looking long on the point of Cape Dire, gazing into the distance, each with his hand above his eyes.

But at last, when night began to fall, the great, graceful sea-monster appeared on the horizon, with her prow erect like a swan's neck and her hundreds of slender legs moving in unison; and the rose-yellow sails bellied in the breeze; and the silver statue of Aphrodite shot forth its silver spark of light; and the rowers' long, melancholy chant, the soft, monotonous accompaniment of tiring work, was borne long and wistfully over the sea, together with the cheerful song of the sailors. And the travellers, who now all stood on the cape waiting for the ship, saw the figures of Uncle Catullus, of the stewards Vettius and Rufus, of the master and the steersman.

And they waved again and again; and Cora, with her harp pressed to her bosom, sang the song of welcome to the ship; and her voice sounded jubilant and clear, full of happiness and full of gladness. The ropes were flung ashore, the ship lay moored....

But what was the anxiety that covered the faces of all on board, who were now preparing to walk across the gangway to the jetty? Why did Uncle Catullus lift his hands on high and shake his head, pinned round so comically in his travelling-veil? And what was it that Vettius and Rufus were saying to each other with much gesticulation and why did they now all land with such embarrassed faces?

"Well, Lucius," said Uncle Catullus, embracing him, "you're looking splendid, my dear fellow, splendid, brown and bronzed as a Nimrod; and your arms feel hard and your eyes are bright and your mouth is laughing happily and you look very different from what you were when we left Baiæ.... Ah, my dear, dear Lucius! Fortune is blind and fate is a riddle and we poor mortals are the playthings of the cruel gods; and we never know, in the midst of our delight and gladness, what is hanging over our heads ... especially when travelling, dear boy: my dear boy, especially when travelling!"

"But why especially when travelling, my dear uncle?" asked Lucius, laughing.

And he led his uncle into the diversorium; and his uncle was now weeping; and his slaves unpinned his travelling-veil for him and relieved him of his travelling-cloak; and Vettius and Rufus also looked so strange and so gloomy and solemn; and it was as though the air were filled with dread.

"But, Uncle Catullus," said Lucius, "what has happened?"

"My dear, dear boy," Uncle Catullus kept on tediously repeating, "I ... I really can not tell you."

And he wrung his hands and wept; and Thrasyllus turned pale and Cora turned pale and Rufus looked gloomy.

"No," repeated Uncle Catullus, "I really can not tell Lucius. You tell him, Vettius, you tell him."

"My Lord Catullus," said Vettius, at last, in despair, "how can I tell my Lord Lucius? If I do, he will fly into a passion and kill me; but, perhaps, if Rufus will tell him ..."

"I will not, I will not," said Rufus, warding off the suggestion with both hands. "By all the gods, Vettius, I will not tell him."

"Nor will I," said Uncle Catullus, moaning and weeping.

Lucius now knitted his brows and said:

"But I must know, Vettius. I order you to tell me what has happened – for something has happened – I order you to tell me and I swear not to kill you.... Has it to do with the quadrireme, a mutiny among the rowers?"

"Worse than that, my lord!" wailed Vettius.

"Has there been a theft of our baggage or jewels or plate?"

"Worse, my lord, much worse!"

"Has there been a fire at our insula in Rome? Is the villa burned down?"

"Worse, worse, my lord!" Vettius and Rufus now cried in chorus.

And they flung themselves at Lucius' feet and embraced his knees; and Uncle Catullus fell sobbing on Thrasyllus' breast.

"But what is it? By all the gods, speak up!" cried Lucius, in a fury. "What is it? Speak up, or I will have you whipped till you do!"

"We will tell you, my lord!" Vettius and Rufus now cried.

And Uncle Catullus cried:

"Yes, tell him, tell him; after all, he must be told."

"Are we alone, my lord?" whined Vettius. "Are there no slaves listening at the doors and is Caleb out of hearing?"

Cora opened the doors and peeped out:

"There is no one there," she said. "I will withdraw, my lord."

"No, stay," commanded Lucius.

She stayed.

"Speak up," Lucius commanded Vettius, lifting him up.

"My lord," said Vettius, again falling at Lucius' feet, "if I must tell you, let me do so on my knees. For I have not the strength left to tell you, my lord, if I stand face to face with your anger."

"Speak!" roared Lucius, in a voice of thunder.

"My lord," said Vettius, at last, clasping Lucius' knees in his hands and kissing them continually, "my lord, our gracious emperor, Augustus Tiberius, is wroth with you, we know not for what reason, and...."

"Well?" shouted Lucius.

"And he has confiscated all your possessions, O my lord, everything that you possess: all your insula in Rome, your villa, your estates and domains, your horses and chariots and cattle, your slaves and treasures of art, your library and your jewels ... and has attached all the sums which you had lodged with your bankers and money-changers in various towns! You are penniless, my lord, for you own nothing except what your ship contains; and, if I had not succeeded in keeping Tiberius' displeasure secret by means of a precipitate flight and by continuing to drift about in the Great Sea and the Arabian Gulf, your quadrireme also would have been seized at

Alexandria and you would now have been without your ship, without your rowers, without your slaves, without a single penny. By bribing the authorities at Pelusium with the money that remained in my hands, I managed secretly to pass through the Nechao Canal to Arsinoe; and at Berenice we met your Uncle Catullus and informed him of the terrible news. My lord, do not slay me and do not be wroth with me, for I have saved for you what I could!"

And Vettius writhed at Lucius' feet and sobbed; and they all sobbed: Uncle Catullus, Thrasyllus, Rufus and Cora....

And Caleb, who had been listening at the door, turned very pale.

For there was still a long, long, long papyrus scroll of a bill awaiting payment, for the big hunts in the Ethiopian forests!

Chapter XXVIII

Caleb was pale when he appeared before Lucius, who had sent for him.

"Caleb," said Lucius, "perhaps you already know ..."

"I know nothing, my lord," said Caleb.

"I am penniless, Caleb. The Emperor Tiberius has confiscated all my possessions; and even my title to the quadrireme is questionable."

"O my lord, O my lord!" Caleb began to lament. "O my poor, poor, noble lord! What a terrible fate to befall you! If only you had consented faithfully to wear the Sabæan amulets! O my poor, poor, noble lord! What will you do now? You, who always lived in the lap of luxury! And now! How now? Alas, my poor, poor, noble lord and alas, poor, poor Caleb! For who, my lord, my poor, poor noble lord, will now pay my bill?"

And, wailing and lamenting and shaking his head and weeping, Caleb unfurled the long, long, long papyrus scroll of his bill, which uncoiled itself from his quivering fingers right down to the floor, like a rustling snake.

"We'll look into your bill at once, Caleb," said Lucius, encouragingly. "Call the stewards and Thrasyllus to me."

They came and examined the bill and shook their heads and thought the expenses of the great Ethiopian hunt terribly high; but Caleb swore that, because of his growing affection for Lucius, he had charged less than he did to other noble lords:

"But there is a solution, my lord," said Caleb, drawing Lucius aside. And he continued, "My lord, if you will make over Cora to me ... I will write off all the expenses of the Ethiopian hunt."

"Caleb," said Lucius, earnestly, "I know that you are fond of Cora. But I also am very fond of her, Caleb, and I mean to keep her as my only treasure."

A loud sob came from a corner of the room. And Lucius, turning round, saw Tarrar sitting on the floor, looking profoundly dejected.

"And me, my lord?" sobbed Tarrar. "Won't you keep me as your little slave, my lord?"

Lucius smiled and laid his hand on Tarrar's woolly head:

"I am not forgetting you either, Tarrar," he said, "and I shall keep you too. But, for the rest, Caleb, I shall have to sell the ship and all my slaves and anything that remains to me. I have some money as well, however, and I will try to pay you in full. But Cora shall not appear on the bill."

"Alas, my lord, this is an evil day and the end of the world is certainly near at hand, notwithstanding that I can see the blue coast of my dear Saba! I, like yourself, am losing everything: the hope of getting Cora, who loves you even as you love her, and the hope of getting my poor money!"

"Come, Caleb, we must not repine. Let us just count the money that remains to us."

The stewards laid rows of gold coins on the table. And Caleb's bill, despite the length which his papyrus scroll covered on the floor, was paid and receipted, after some quibbling between the stewards, who took exception to certain items, and Caleb, who was quite amenable to reason. And, when the money had been transferred to the purse which wound like a fat snake round Caleb's waist, he became cheerful again and said:

"My lord, my noble lord, for you are still a noble lord, listen to me. I am profoundly miserable that I can't have Cora. Yes, my lord, really, I am profoundly miserable. But I am an honest fellow and at the same time I am a man of business. Listen, my lord, and let your stewards listen and your trusty Thrasyllus too. Listen, my lord. You wish to sell the quadrireme with all her contents. But where, my lord? It can't be done at Alexandria, for any property of yours would be seized at once. Here, at Cape Dire, oh, there are only uncivilized Macrobiani and no noble lords who could afford to buy the quadrireme! Listen, my lord, listen. Do you with all these your servants, free men and witnesses, sign a certificate, oh, my ever noble lord, a certificate ... dare I say it?"

"Speak out, Caleb!"

"A certificate that the quadrireme, with her rowers and all her contents, belongs to me; and I swear by the gods of Sabæa and of Egypt, by the eyes of Cora, whom I love, by the friendship which I, my lord, your guide and companion in the chase, venture to cherish for you, I swear, my lord, that I will myself endeavour to dispose of the quadrireme to a noble lord and pay you honestly, to the last penny, after deducting my expenses!"

Thus spoke Caleb; and he stood up in the exalted attitude in which he had taken his oath, with his eyes and hands raised to heaven, and waited.

Vettius and Rufus thought it rather risky, but Lucius said:

"Caleb's advice is excellent. It is the only thing to do. If I delay, Tiberius' minions will discover where I am and take the last remnant of my belongings from me. Caleb, I will do as you say. I will sign the document certifying that the ship is your property, together with the slaves, the rowers, the furniture, the jewels, the very valuable plate...."

But Caleb did not move. He continued to stand in the solemn, rapt attitude of his oath, with his eyes and hands raised to heaven. And he now said, slowly:

“I thank you, my lord, for your confidence. It will certainly not be abused. If I do not render you an equitable account in whatever place of exile you may be, may the awful jaws of Typhon, whose tongue is a serpent and whose teeth are blazing flames, swallow me and devour me!”

And Caleb himself trembled at his terrific oath and then fell on his knees before Lucius – a thing which he, a free Sabæan, had never yet done – and kissed the foot of the suddenly impoverished noble lord!

Chapter XXIX

Near the pillars of Sesostris, near the little diversorium, there lay moored, beside the quadrireme, a merchant trireme, which was sailing past Ophir to the Persian Gulf and which was to go up the Euphrates to Babylon. And Lucius asked to speak to the master and said:

"Master, can I have room in your ship for myself, my father, my young wife and my little black slave? I am a sculptor; and I am on my way to Babylon."

And he pointed to Thrasyllus, Cora and Tarrar, who approached, each carrying a small bundle of luggage.

"Certainly," said the master. "My one cabin is still unoccupied. It is small and perhaps inconvenient; but people like you, who are sculptors, are not accustomed to luxury, I dare say, and will be prepared to make shift."

Lucius answered that, if the cabin was suitable for his wife and his father, he and the little slave would do the best they could on the half-deck or in the hold; and he beckoned to his family to come on board and paid the passage-money.

For Caleb had advanced him a goodly sum on the value of the quadrireme, for the immediate needs of the voyage; and Caleb himself had set out, with a great following, for his dear Saba, first because he wanted to forget his love-sickness in the pleasures of Arabia Felix and then to make a start by selling many of Lucius' slaves and jewels, his ornaments and furniture at Mariaba, the capital, because it was safer to get this done as quickly as possible. The sale of the great ship herself would be difficult enough.

Uncle Catullus remained on board of her. He did not wish to be a burden on his poor nephew Lucius; he had contrived to hoard a modest capital with one gold piece after another that had accidentally slipped through Lucius' fingers; and he was to sail to Alexandria in the ship, after she had been sold, and there, in the city of the finest cooking, to spend his old age in a small apartment in the Hermes House. And so he had taken a tearful leave of Lucius, Thrasyllus and Cora and had said to her:

"Dear Cora, just as you were going to call me uncle, we part and perhaps for ever. Ah, Egypt is the death of me! Egypt will irrevocably be the death of me! For I can never go back to Rome, poor old exile that I am, because Tiberius — may he die a thousand deaths! — would rob me of my few pence even as he has robbed Lucius of his treasures...."

The merchant trireme glided away over a smooth sea; and the travellers on the deck waved farewell to Uncle Catullus, who stood on the prow and waved back. It was a leave-taking for good. And the master asked, inquisitively:

"Is that lord, who stands waving his hand to you, the owner of that splendid vessel?"

"Yes, master," Lucius lied, "and he's my uncle. And one day I shall be his heir."

"Then you will do well to hold him in honour, sir," said the master, growing very respectful. "Whew! That's a prospect not to be sneezed at! What a noble ship! What a magnificent quadrireme! But tell me, master," he continued, more and more inquisitively, "in that case why don't you stay with your uncle?"

"Because it's not a good thing, master, for poor relations to be always hanging round the rich. For then you only annoy them and they end by cutting you off with a shilling. And that is why, master," said Lucius, pressing Cora, by his side, to him "after seeing and admiring Egypt at my rich uncle's expense, I am now paying a visit to Babylon with my father, my wife and my little slave. From there we shall go through Assyria and Asia Minor to the island of Cos, where my wife was born and where I want to settle down as a sculptor."

The master thought this very natural; and, as the wind was now blowing a stiff breeze, with the first cold, autumnal gusts, Lucius, happy, gay and healthy, led Cora into her cabin, while Tarrar squatted outside, like a faithful, clever little monkey, and Thrasyllus, within, carefully rolled up the maps, books and itineraries which he had consulted during their tour.

Postscript.

Caleb of Mariaba (Saba), joint proprietor of the Great Diversorium, the Hermes House, at Alexandria, near the Canopian Gate, to the ever noble Lord Publius Lucius Sabinus, sculptor, at Cos.

"Written at Alexandria, at the second hour of the fourteenth day of the month of Pacothi, in the ninth year of the benevolent reign of our gracious Emperor Tiberius Augustus.

"MY EVER NOBLE LORD, GREETING!

"It is a pleasure to me, Caleb of Mariaba, to inform you by this letter, entrusted to Alexandros of Alexandria, master of the merchant trireme Berenice, that by chance and great good fortune I have succeeded in disposing of the valuable quadrireme, the pleasure-ship Aphrodite, once your property, noble lord, and in the presence of witnesses, free men, transferred to me at Cape Dire, by the Pillars of Sesostri¹ ... selling her at Arsinoe, previous to the passage through the Nechao Canal (which would probably have been liable to legal objections), at the very profitable price (as, considering all the circumstances, it appears to me, your most obedient, humble servant, friend, guide and companion in the chase) of (after deducting my commission and all my expenses) 900,000 (say, nine hundred thousand) sesterces, a

sum reckoned according to the Roman value, item that noble quadrireme Aphrodite and three hundred rowers (slaves), item all the necessary and most complete equipment, item costly furniture, carpets, plate and treasures of art, which would probably have produced large sums had it been possible to sell them separately, without danger of seizure in the name of our gracious Emperor Tiberius Augustus, but the separate sale of which would, in the circumstances aforesaid, have entailed innumerable drawbacks;

“Whereas I, Caleb of Mariaba, acting and appearing on my own behalf, as actual owner of the noble quadrireme Aphrodite, have been able to sell this magnificent pleasure-ship to the noble Lord Baabab, a Persian satrap, residing at Susa;

“Wishing, my noble Lord Lucius, companion of the chase and friend, to act to your ever noble advantage, I propose, in order to reduce to a minimum all risks of shipwreck and piracy and other fatal accidents (such as a jealous fate keeps ever hanging over the heads of us poor mortals), to remit to you at frequent intervals, by the intermediary of a master of merchant-vessels, one trusted by all and personally known to myself and sailing to and fro between Alexandria and the Archipelago, a small sum in gold coin or bar, with account and settlement, so that you, my noble lord, may at the earliest moment possess your whole capital in your own hands.

“And I also send you, in memory of your most beautiful ship, a few pieces of furniture and valuables (withheld and smuggled away), including two bronze bedsteads, a citron-wood table, a Babylonian carpet, some Ethiopian ostrich-feather coverings, the silver statue of Aphrodite, patroness of your ship, and a few minor trifles of taste and convenience.

“I take advantage of the opportunity, my noble lord, dear friend and stout companion of the chase, to tell you that at Mariaba, during a temporary stay in my beloved country, Sabæa, I bought myself a most beautiful slave, a Greek like Cora and excelling in many gifts, which slave, in order to bind her with greater certainty to my affection, I set free at Mariaba, leaving her, however, as my wife in my house in that city, where I hope one day, after achieving my fortune, to enjoy a life of bliss, fearing lest my brother Ghizla might allow his rights on her to prevail (according to the manners of our country) and hoping to visit her each time that my conduct of noble lords shall bring me to the pillars of Sesostris, from which my beloved country is easily reached.

“Wishing you, my noble lord and friend and companion of the chase, the blessing of the gods upon your house, upon your new work and your household, upon your wife and your servants, the wise Thrasyllus and the faithful Tarrar, together with an always possible change of fortune, I bow low before you, in all humility and friendship, with one hand on my heart and one hand on my lips.

“Your ever most obedient, humble servant and guide and friend and companion of the chase,

“CALEB of Mariaba (Saba), joint proprietor of the Great Diversorium, the Hermes House, at Alexandria, near the Canopian Gate.”

The End