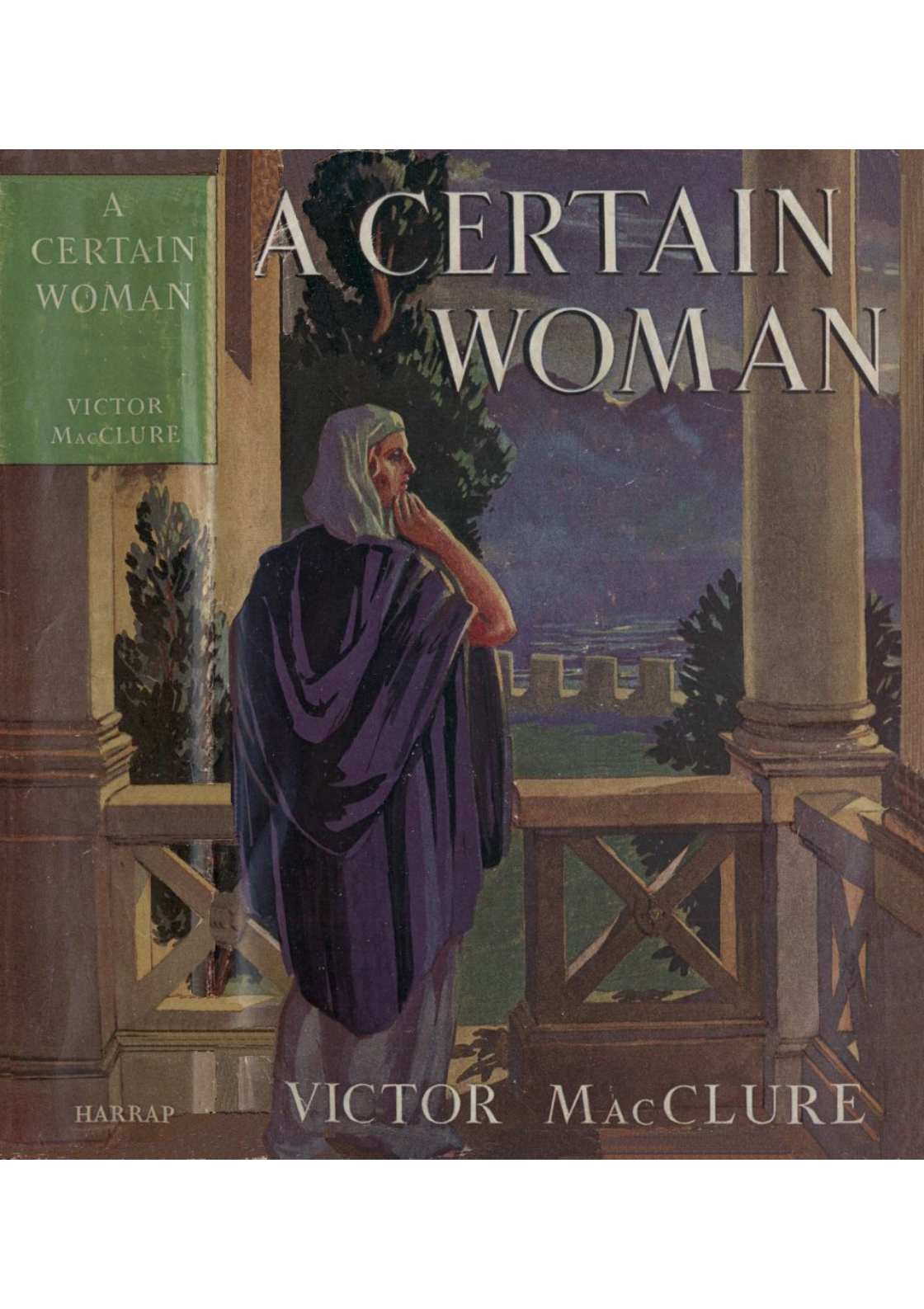


A
CERTAIN
WOMAN

VICTOR
MACCLURE

A CERTAIN WOMAN

The illustration depicts a woman in profile, facing right, standing on a balcony. She is wearing a light-colored headscarf and a voluminous, dark purple or blue robe. Her right hand is raised to her chin in a contemplative gesture. The balcony has a wooden railing with a lattice pattern. In the background, there are classical columns and a view of a landscape with a body of water and distant hills under a twilight sky. The overall style is that of a classic book cover illustration.

HARRAP

VICTOR MACCLURE

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To
MY WIFE
JUNE

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Preface

It is impossible to write a story dealing with Mary called Magdalen, and inevitably therefore with the mission and death of Jesus of Nazareth, without running counter to the myriad beliefs of Christians.

From the authors of the Gospels themselves, through Paul, the Christian Fathers, Reimarus, Renan, Farrar, Goguel, Middleton Murry, Joseph Klausner, hundreds of writers have tried to explain Jesus and his mission, and every one of them in the light or darkness of his personal beliefs, preconceptions, prejudices. In this regard nothing truer has been said than by Albert Schweitzer (quoted by Sherwood Eddy): “Each epoch has found its reflection in Jesus; each individual created him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man’s true self as the writing (or reading) of a life of Jesus.”

I need hardly be concerned, then, to apologize for the personal idea of Jesus which necessarily appears in the story that follows. My first hope is that nothing I have written will suggest that to me the yoke-maker of Nazareth was not, and is not, the Christ; my second, though paramount, that nothing I have written will weaken the faith of any believer.

There is, however, one respect of this ‘personal idea’ of Jesus which I ask the critical reader to keep strictly in mind. It is that, apart from my own beliefs, as a story-writer I am limited, but for plausibility, to the possible of the event and period with which I have elected to deal. I am limited, besides, by the story-construction I have elected to use, to presenting my ‘Jesus-idea’ almost solely as in the view and thought of Mary called Magdalen. It cannot justly be expected, therefore, that the ‘Jesus-idea’ herein attributed by myself to her will embody conceptions and beliefs which are the growth of some centuries of thinking.

For the rest, I have chosen to accept the tradition held by the Catholic Church about Mary Magdalen. That is to say, I have identified her, not only with the woman who laved the feet of Jesus with repentant and loving tears in the house of Simon the Pharisee, but with Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. I do so deliberately, knowing—I think—all the critical

objections. I do believe arguments of fair weight could be set against these objections, but here is no place for them. It is enough for me, speaking as far as I may as an artist, that except on the tradition with all it implies no attempt at a novel about Mary Magdalen would be worth the making.

V. MacC.

CHELSEA, 1950

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
<i>Book One</i>	
I. THE HOUSE OF ABIUD	<u>9</u>
II. AN INVITATION	<u>24</u>
III. CONSEQUENCES	<u>41</u>
IV. THE YOKE-MAKER	<u>58</u>
V. REVOLT	<u>80</u>
<i>Book Two</i>	
VI. THE WANTON OF MAGDALA	<u>101</u>
VII. REVELRY	<u>117</u>
VIII. VOICE IN THE NIGHT	<u>134</u>
IX. THE UNANSWERABLE	<u>150</u>
X. THE ROMAN	<u>170</u>
XI. CONTRITION	<u>188</u>
<i>Book Three</i>	
XII. RENUNCIATION	<u>205</u>
XIII. BETHANY	<u>229</u>
XIV. PERIL IMPENDING	<u>246</u>
XV. THE ANOINTING	<u>266</u>
XVI. NEWS FROM GETHSEMANE	<u>284</u>
XVII. AN END A BEGINNING	<u>300</u>

Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ ἣτις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἀμαρτωλός, καὶ ἐπιγνοῦσα ὅτι κατάκειται ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ Φαρισαίου, κομίσασα ἀλάβαστρον μύρῳ καὶ στᾶσα ὀπίσω παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ κλαίουσα, τοῖς δάκρυσιν ἤρξατο βρέχειν τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῖς θριξίν τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς ἐξέμασσεν, καὶ κατεφίλει τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ἤλειφεν τῷ μύρῳ.

ΚΑΤΑ ΛΟΥΚΑΝ

vii, 37-38

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

The House of Abiud

IT was spring-time in Judea.

The blessed work of the Pourer with his early rains was still in being, helped by the latter rains of March and April. In that scanty-soiled pastoral country, the uplands over Bethany, the field still rippled with wild grains and grasses. It still was starred by many a flower.

Sheep and goats cropped gratefully on this thin soil's ephemeral succulence. The kids and lambs, such as were still unweaned, nuzzled for the milk of their dams, their tails quick wagging. Or, satisfied awhile, they skipped clumsy-legged to darken themselves momentarily against the fleecy blue of the sky.

Seated on a rock, a shepherd boy raised his reed to thread with tenuous piping the mingled bleatings far and near. But, suddenly seeing some distant glitter deep below him where the hills tumbled east, he abruptly gave up piping to mouth a cry. The cry brought another herd, a man, over the nearest crest southward. For a moment or two, silhouetted as though cut in bronze, the pair stood motionless to peer from hand-shaded eyes into the deep distance. A dark frown contorted the brows of the elder. He spat distaste.

II

Far down the limestone hillside, away to the left of those shepherds, but yet a considerable height above the ravine-like depths wherein the younger had caught the glitter, stood Bethany. And here, in a terraced garden which had for parapet a good length of the township's wall, a comely boy was showing an indulgent sister how well he could use the sling. But, boyishly, as if seeking a foil for his own cleverness, he sought to persuade his sister to try.

"Do, Mary—do!" he pleaded. She made a comic face at him.

"Not I," she said. "I don't like touching the clay."

“Oh, Mary! And it was you that said I should make clay-balls. I’m sure I could sling stones much farther.”

“Yes, and perhaps hurt some one badly. You wouldn’t like to do that, would you, darling?”

The boy’s face clouded for a moment. Then it cleared and he turned to his sister with an impish grin.

“There’d be about as big a row if I landed somebody with a clay ball,” he chuckled. “But look, Mary!”

He pointed down the garden to the parapet that was part of the town wall.

“All the balls I’ve slung have gone into the brook,” he reasoned. “I can’t put one over the wall without going into the brook. Clean over the road, I mean. How could I hit anybody in the road?”

In some measure Lazarus argued truly. The rough causeway that came downhill from the town-gate, presently to take a bend beyond the garden into the Jericho road, stood well below the top of the garden’s containing wall. So that anything thrown from the terrace on which brother and sister stood would have had to be projected in a highish arc to land on the roadway. The brook that ran through the garden had egress from it by a deep-cut channel in the lowest of the terraces and through a low arch on the causeway side. No more than an overflow from the communal well in Bethany’s middle, and at the moment becoming scanty, in season it was copious enough. Witness of this was the fact that its course beyond the causeway, and presently for some distance athwart the road coming up from low-lying Jericho, was marked by a wide, thick growth of oleander—now a mass of pink blossom—of willow, canebrake, and—for surprise—the fig-bearing sycomore. It was into this nearer stream-side growth that Lazarus ben Abiud had been slinging the balls of clay.

Mary laughed. As Lazarus, from pointing at the garden’s parapet wall, turned to her with his query, she caught a glimpse of the grace that would be completed in him with adolescence. Once and again, these days, it came through the half-clumsy, heavy-legged, kid-like or coltish caprice of his young body’s movement. He turned now in his short belted shirt of blue linen, and in the sun-dappled shadow of the garden trees had all the alertly poised beauty of a young fawn.

And Mary laughed because her heart turned over with love of him.

“A stone,” she said, “might hit the wall-top and bounce over on some one. And clay would only stick or splatter.”

“The clay sticks to the sling. I can’t send the balls far—not far at all, you see—because they don’t want to leave the pouch. But a nice clean pebble —” Lazarus said persuasively. “Anyhow, I haven’t hit the wall once, even with your old clay-balls.”

“But you’ve cast one or two of my old clay-balls, as you call them, pretty far away from the brook on both sides.”

“Yes, I know. Very bad aim,” Lazarus nodded. “But I think that was because the clay stuck to the leather. You try it, Mary, and see.”

Mary shook her head.

“Ugh, no!” she said with a pretended shudder. “I’d hate touching the clay.”

“You don’t need to touch it, Mary. I can put a ball in for you,” said Lazarus, all eagerness. “Look! Here’s a good one—not too big, not too small, just nice. Oh, do throw it, Mary!”

“I’d rather see you do it, darling. After all, you haven’t put one into the big sycamore yet. That might be the very ball to do it,” Mary urged. “It looked drier than the others. It shouldn’t stick to the sling.”

Lazarus examined the ball, now in the cup of the sling.

“Perhaps it won’t,” he agreed. “Well, I’ll try. The big sycamore. Here goes!”

He poised himself and gave the sling a tentative swing.

“Are you watching, Mary?”

“I’m watching. Oh, splendid!” she went on to applaud. “That’s a real beauty!”

“It isn’t going to reach the sycamore, though.”

“Wait! Oh, no, not quite there. But that doesn’t matter. It was beautifully straight. And it’s the straightness that counts.”

“I don’t think even King David could’ve put a clay ball into that tree from here,” said Lazarus. “At least—not while he was still only nearly ten. Do you think he could have, Mary?”

“Perhaps not. Very likely not,” Mary replied consolingly. “At any rate, he was much older than you when he slew Goliath.”

“Yes, and he used nice clean pebbles, too, when he did it.”

“You can try with as many pebbles as you like, Lazarus, when you go with Abijah and the flocks into the hills. Abijah is very good with the sling.”

“Yes, far and true,” Lazarus agreed. He turned to look at the uplands. As he came about again he caught sight of a glitter in the blue depths far beyond the spread of bloom and foliage about the course of the brook.

“Oh, look, Mary!” he cried. “There’s something a-glitter away down on the Jericho road! It must be soldiers—the sun glancing off their spears and shields! They are coming up to Jerusalem!”

Dropping the sling at Mary’s feet, he skipped to the edge of the terrace and jumped down to the other which ran at a slight downward slope to the roadway wall. Mary, stooping to pick up the sling, followed more slowly to the terrace edge. Here she was more directly in the sunlight, and she brought from her shoulders the kerchief which had fallen off her rich auburn hair to bring it over her head again. Using its fold for greater shade, she gazed into the deep valley eastward.

“I see no glitter there, Lazarus,” she said. “Were you dreaming?”

“No, no. I saw it. I saw it. Wait. It will come again,” replied Lazarus, now by the parapet wall. “Perhaps they’ve turned into a bit of the road that’s hidden.”

“Perhaps. It is a very winding road with many high rocks——”

She broke off in sudden fear, for Lazarus in his eagerness had climbed the wall to stand on its coping. The fear, Mary knew, was idle. With all that half-clumsy coltishness of movement, Lazarus was as sure-footed as a kid and as easy on a height. But, woman-like, she did not feel happy to see him on the wall, and to make matters worse for her the boy was dancing on it from foot to foot, craning for extra height.

Mary strove to keep anxiety out of her voice.

“You won’t see anything now, Lazarus,” she called smoothly. “If any soldiers are moving there they’ve turned by now into the long defile.”

“No, no! The glitter was farther over to the left than that. It will show again soon, I’m sure.”

“What if it does? It will only be a glitter. Of course,” Mary went on, pretending annoyance, “if you don’t want me to watch you use your sling, I can go back to my reading. And perhaps you’d better go indoors and let Zachary hear your lessons.”

Her pretence was useless. Lazarus simply looked round to wrinkle his small nose at her.

“At least, darling,” Mary pleaded, “come down off the wall. It makes me giddy to look at you.”

“You come and watch beside me, Mary. Then,” said Lazarus, as one making a great concession, “you can hold me if you think I’ll fall off. Do come down, Mary!”

Gathering her skirts more closely about her, Mary bent to put a hand on the wall edging the terrace, and vaulted lightly to the lower ground. It was a movement that commonly would have been awkward, but she contrived to make it graceful. Then, nimble-footed, she ran down the slight slope to her brother and put her arm, as if thankfully, about his hips.

“If you do that,” said Lazarus, “you will *make* me fall.”

But, in his turn, he put his arm about her neck gently, but first pulled her wimple forward lest his clayed hand should touch her skin.

III

In that day (Tiberius being Emperor) Bethany sat in a little shelved vale of fertility somewhat rare in the Judean highlands. Above the parapets of its flat roofs rose the dome and spear of trees. There was, again, that singular growth of sycomores and other trees by the brook-side, the sycomores bearing the rough, fig-like fruit which the poor gladly ate. Outside the town-walls, but particularly to the east where the oleanders grew, lay terraced patches where barley stood in season, with millet, beans, pulse, and lentils. Farther about were the wall-enclosed vineyards, each with its stone watch-tower. But though thus environed with comparative fertility, the wealth (such as it was) of Bethany was not agricultural, but pastoral. The older-fashioned of the Bethany folk still called those rich who owned the largest flocks on the hillsides. And they had small opinion of—however much they might envy—the traders and officials from Jerusalem who had villas on the slopes round the town. The commerce in Bethany was small and local. The bigger, or at least the more constant, sales took place in Jerusalem itself, for

the city was only a mile and a half away. True, at the times of the great festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles the town swarmed with visitors. But in general the seasonal crowdings of Bethany were by Jerusalem's mere overflow.

Some grumblers thought the little town woefully ill-sited. But they were mere traders, the rootless skimmers of quick profits found in all towns. The true Bethanites, the folk whose fathers and their fathers' fathers had dwelt there, with flocks in the field and crops and vines in the terraced plots around, found no fault with the town or its situation. The Galileans—those chattering weathercocks!—might brag of their country's fertility and say it was easier "to raise a legion of olives in Galilee than to rear a child in Judea." Plain living tended to make for plain thinking, and the Judeans with their barley-cake diet could face weather conditions that would snuff out the average lowlander like pinched pith in an oil lamp. And where in all Palestine and Syria was there an aerie with a finer outlook than Bethany?

If the Bethanites in their staunch local patriotism wished to show how comfortably gracious life could be in their town, far from turning to the exotic villas built in its environs, they pointed to the house and garden of Abiud ben Shirach.

IV

It had been foresight, no doubt, on the part of Abiud's great-grandfather Joses to acquire that plot of land where the overflow of the town-well, freshet fed, left its subterranean channel and came to the surface. But though the descendants of Joses, prospering, had each made addition to the house and steadings by him begun, it had been left to Abiud, son of Shirach the scholar, to make full use of the stream in season for the garden's advantage. With no little of his father's learning, Abiud had been at once notably practical of mind and a man of some taste. Abiud it was that, while still a mere youth, had planned the canalizing of the stream and the walling of the gardens into terraces from which the water, distributed by the new irrigation, would not drain too soon and uselessly.

The garden of Abiud, seen in its maturity and several years after his death, was meant to give pleasure as well as material profit. For while there grew in it an abundance of fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, the presence of many others, useful neither for fruit nor as timber, but meant only for ornament or to give shade, manifested an æsthetic aim.

This combination of graced comfort with utility was to be seen also in the buildings the gardens adjoined. The quite spacious rooms, facing the garden through rough-pillared loggia and pergola, were backed by those offices and curtilages pertaining by custom to a farm: kitchen, dairy, granaries, barn, byre, stables, courtyard. The courtyard, floored in greater part merely with trodden earth baked by the sun, had entrance by a strong gateway in a high wall from a street straggling down from behind Bethany's town-gate and market-place.

The whole congeries, built generally of rough-hewn local stone overwashed with a pinkish ochre colourfully mellowed, had at once that homogeneous but happily accidental air which so often makes a picture of old farm-dwellings the world around. It manifestly belonged to industrious and prospering people; but, like the garden, it had graces which showed those people, for their day and place, to be something better than merely well-to-do. This was the home, in fine, of the three orphaned children of Abiud ben Shirach ben Ilai ben Joses: the boy, Lazarus; his seven-year-old sister, Mary; and the eldest of the trio, Martha, aged twenty-six.

V

“Look, Mary!” said Lazarus, “there's the glitter now! I said, didn't I, they hadn't reached the long defile?”

“Well, give them a moment or two and they'll be hidden by it. What then, my lamb?”

“Oh! no use watching then. We shan't see them again, hardly, until they're coming up the brook-side. Not,” Lazarus reckoned, “for another two hours.”

“If, that is,” said Mary, half musing, “they are coming up to Jerusalem.”

Lazarus turned from watching the intermittent far glitter to cast a glance at her of surprise. His admired sister, the glance said, was not troubling to use her head. And that was very unlike her. Aloud, while yet watching, he argued that the troops could only be Jerusalem bound. Between Jericho and the City no road branched off that the Roman soldiery, unless bent for war, were likely to use. No Judean patriots were astir to call the Romans off the made roads. Since morning no soldiers had passed *down* the road. And the glitter, since first seen, had moved southward.

“But you know all that as well as I do, Mary,” Lazarus broke off with a little laugh at himself. A touch of colour rose in his face. “So why do you let me say it?”

Mary’s answering laugh forbade him discouragement. Her grasp about him tightened. And, smiling, she looked up in his face.

“Because, my darling,” she said, “I like to hear you thinking. That is what our father, Abiud, bade me encourage you most to do—to think for yourself.”

“Did our father, Abiud, like the Romans?”

“At least he thought it idle to dislike them while doing nothing useful to be rid of them.”

“Do you like them, Mary?”

“Ah!” His sister smiled. “In some ways I’m very like my small brother. I’m apt to like things that aren’t good for me!”

Lazarus wrinkled his nose at her, but kept to his point. “Then you do like them,” he concluded. “Zachary hates them.”

“Yes, I know.”

“And so does Martha.”

“I know that too.”

“Why don’t you hate them?”

“Because, like our father, Abiud, I think it idle merely to hate.”

“Well,” Lazarus said slowly, “I don’t think I want to hate anybody—even the Romans. It must be a very uncomfortable feeling.”

“It is,” said Mary.

“I think Zachary likes it, though. It makes him spit without meaning to,” Lazarus giggled. “But there’s such a lot of things Zachary hates—and says I should hate too.”

“Zachary is only versed enough in the Law to teach a small boy,” said Mary. “I mean by that, he is not necessarily wise in all he says. Aren’t you taught in the synagogue-school to be gentle even when most badly wronged, to despise the evil done rather than the doer of it?”

“Yes,” nodded Lazarus.

“That was the way of our father, Abiud,” said Mary. “And who was ever so gentle yet just, or so wise and kind as he?”

“Tell me, tell me,” the boy begged eagerly. “Tell me again of our father!”

He slid through Mary’s encircling arm down into a sitting position on the wall, and patted the stone beside him in invitation. His sister at once complied.

VI

It was an oft-told tale Mary had to tell as far as her brother was concerned. But even without her immediate reasons for wishing to give the conversation another turn, Mary still would have welcomed the chance to talk to Lazarus of their father. One of the difficulties, however, into which the conversation had driven her made Lazarus’s invitation all the more opportune. It was that of warning her brother against his appointed tutor, Zachary, without undermining the latter’s authority. Mary did not like Zachary. She saw him as an annoying pedant, and believed him to be a sneak. She detested seeing him about the house, but saw no way of being rid of him. Under her dead father’s will, and by the choice of her elder sister, Martha, Zachary had been appointed by the town greybeards to give Lazarus that home tuition which, in happier circumstances, the motherless boy would have had at the knee of Abiud himself. But, Mary knew with certainty, Zachary was about the last man to whom her loving and lovable father would have given charge of his son.

Something of a scribe, in that he could write a little, and something of a rabbi, in that up to a point he was allowed to teach, Zachary yet was neither. That he was a weaver by trade was not against him, for even the most highly regarded of the rabbis took pride in knowing some craft or other. It simply was that Zachary had never shown such knowledge or ability as would have justified his ordination at the hands of the ‘grammared’ order. But—and here was perhaps half the reason for Mary’s dislike of the man—he gave himself all the airs, and seemed to look for all the respect, belonging to the real *Chakham*. At least about the house of Abiud ben Shirach. Or in the presence of humbler folk than himself. At the town-gate when the elders sat, or anywhere about the town that ordained scribes might be encountered, Zachary’s manner was ingratiating, even cringing. The remainder of Mary’s reason for disliking him was perhaps held in the fact that sister Martha thought so much of him. Martha treated him as if he had indeed been a

rabbi, and found the only relaxation from the household duties she so harassedly drove at from dawn till dusk in listening to his hair-splitting expositions of the niceties of the Law. Or, if that fact of itself might have held no reason for annoyance, there was the addition that Martha expected both Mary and Lazarus to share her admiration of the pretentious little man—this although Mary could both read and write much better than he, was skilled in the Greek he ignorantly affected to despise, had a talking acquaintance with the Latin he pretended to abominate, and was his master (had he condescended to listen to a woman) in all of the ‘three directions’ in which the scribes heaped bent their study.

That Mary was so accomplished, and therefore even amazingly an exception among the women of her race in that land and age, was due to the exceptional liberal-mindedness of an exceptional father. Sufficiently the Jew to be disappointed at not having a son as first-fruit of his marriage, it fell with the humorous philosophy of Abiud’s outlook to treat the little daughter who surprisingly was borne to him nine years later as if she had been the boy he again had hoped for. Charmed to begin with by her prettiness and engaging ways, he was more charmed still to perceive in her an intelligence outstandingly bright and questing. At first amusedly and lazily, then with increasing interest, he set himself to fostering it. He had inherited from his own father, Shirach, no small measure of Jewish scholarship, and had reached out—much in the manner that was even then brilliantly flowering in the writings of the Alexandrian Philo—to find parallels with his own purer beliefs in the pagan philosophies of Greece. Since, however, he was careful how and where he expressed his expanding ideas, and was willingly faithful in all essential religious observances, he ran no danger of facing the Council. The result of his philosophical inquiries was simply an increase in his natural tolerance. And none, save the coldest-minded of the Pharisees, could find a large tolerance amiss in a man so kindly, materially charitable, and fond of a joke.

VII

This, in smudged outline, is the adored father whom Mary for perhaps the hundredth time sat down to picture for her little brother. Lazarus had small actual memory of his father, for Abiud had died before his son was two years old. Of his mother, Lazarus had no memory at all, having lost her within a few weeks of her giving him light. It was as though this Anna, never in the years believing her husband’s cheerful acceptance of

disappointment to be valid, had drained herself of all vitality in one last effort to give him the son she thought he surely yearned for. This, at least, Abiud came to believe from what passed between his wife and himself in her last days. With her death something of his own vitality went out of him. Less than two years later, having quietly and unobtrusively put all his affairs in order, he quietly rendered back his spirit, as he believed, to the God who gave it.

For the reason that the child was slow of finding speech, and that in the last months Abiud was a mere shadow of himself, Lazarus's memory of his father was even less clear than might have been normal. He carried the impression only of some one whose nearness had made him feel warm and safe and happier—with details of personality, such as strong, kind hands, eyes that seemed to glow with affection, a deep, rich voice. If Mary had been inclined to think such details—true in themselves—simply conjurations in the boy's mind from what she herself had told him, the doubt was dispelled by Lazarus's own careful discrimination between what he did and did not remember of his father. "You told me" might bulk in his picture of the hero; the warm roots of his worship stood in "I remember."

Though the memory of itself would have led Mary to implant in Lazarus this hero-worship of their father, her more conscious purpose in doing so was intellectual. Abiud's reason for providing that Lazarus should have a home tutor lay, first and obviously, in the child's slowness in learning to speak. It might advantage the boy to have something more than the teaching which, from the age of six, he would receive in the synagogue-school. It was, besides, the bounden duty of the Jewish father himself to instruct a son in the *Torah*. The joy Abiud would have found in this duty was, he foresaw, to be denied him. Moreover, Lazarus would be without that very earliest religious instruction which the Jewish child normally found at the mother's knee. For Martha, already showing over-anxiety about household affairs, was unlikely to have the quiet patience required. And if Mary had, as well as the leisure, all the interest and affection needed for stirring imagination in the earliest stages, Abiud's own teaching had left her with a mind too ranging and adventurous for the exactitudes desirable later on. A male teacher was wanted for instilling that formal knowledge of the Law on which all Jewish education was based.

All this Mary readily acknowledged. The very spirit of rebellion which, since the death of Abiud, she found to be growing within her pointed the wisdom of Abiud's direction. Where the unwisdom lay was not with her dead father, but with Martha and the elders in their choice of Zachary as

teacher. For the Law that to Abiud had been a welcomed reminder of the Everlasting Mercy and a means of keeping communion with his God, was for Zachary (as for Martha in little less degree) a mere roster of countless 'must's' and 'mustn't's' with—in Mary's view—as much of the spiritual about it as a huckster's tally-board. Between Abiud's upright but uncaptious, confident, sane, and happy life within the Law, and the tortuous, petty, suspicious and niggling, half-miserable way of living that it appeared to mean to Zachary there was hardly the remotest relation. Yet, unhappily, there were many in Bethany and Jerusalem—indeed, throughout Judea—who, accepting this same Dædalian web of interpretation, existed fearfully rather than lived under a myriad stifling restrictions.

It was to counter the effect on the mind of Lazarus of such teaching—here doubly dangerous through Zachary's ignorant pedantry—that Mary held up to him the example of their father. While she thought it right that her little brother should be surely grounded in Leviticus, that he should understand the confession and profession of faith in the *Shema*, she did not want his mind confused by hair-splitting arguments. She did not wish him to be taught any of that subtlety or cunning which minced the Law as much for evading as obeying it. She wanted Lazarus simply to know God as all nobleness and truth, all-wise, just, merciful and good, and supremely to be loved.

Fortunately, the natural gentleness and simplicity of Lazarus were proof against the harm Zachary's pseudo-rabbinical pratings might have done him. The youngster was perfectly docile regarding such tasks as it was the home-teacher's proper duty to set him. He learned his prayers and the passages for recitation, if not easily, at least thoroughly in the end. But if Zachary ventured away from what was written, or what was traditional orally, of the romantic or poetical in what are now the Scriptures Lazarus simply lost interest. As far as the narrative parts of the Bible were concerned, the boy would let Mary embroider a story as she liked, and would listen entranced. But if Zachary attempted it, Lazarus was apt to interrupt with something he had heard from Mary. Which, of course, was very annoying for one as self-satisfied as Zachary.

Much of this, however, lay in the past. With Lazarus already some four years at the synagogue-school, Zachary for all practical purposes had become, so to say, mere holder of the book for the boy in the learning he had from the synagogue-officer and the visiting rabbis. But, supported by Martha, the little man still clung to the household. Loving its comfort, his nose ever a-sniff for the good things perfected in Martha's kitchen, he clung

to it in the pretence of being its spiritual adviser and the still necessary mentor of its youngest member. It was in pompous attempt at bolstering the pretence, particularly in its latter regard, that Zachary found himself at greatest odds with Mary. Complaining to her once that Lazarus had been impertinent, impolite, he unwisely ventured to exaggerate the respect due to him.

“It is everywhere known what a grievous offence it is for a pupil to contradict a rabbi—or teacher. Some have said it is worthy of death.”

“It would depend, surely,” said Mary, “on how much of a rabbi the teacher was—even on how much of a teacher. Just what, by the way, are you now able to teach Lazarus that he hasn’t learned better in school?”

“I—I—I——” spluttered the little man, red-faced.

“Very well. Leave that. About what did Lazarus contradict you?”

This put Zachary on safer ground. He drew himself up.

“I said that, in Sabbath-law, if a woman rolled grain in her hands to take away the husks, she would be guilty of sifting with a sieve. And Lazarus said, ‘She’d be sifting, yes—but where is the sieve?’ ”

“Well, that sounds reasonable. Where is the sieve?”

“The Law holds——” Zachary began pompously, when Mary cut in.

“The Law holds,” she said, “that working on the Sabbath is sin. It may please the rabbis to explain that the making of bread is work, and that sifting grain is part of that work. They may say truly that a woman sifting with her fingers is just as guilty as if she used an actual sieve. But if they say—as you seem to think—that she’s guilty of using an actual, wood-and-fibre sieve, then they’re talking nonsense.”

“Nonsense!” Zachary was appalled.

“Nonsense,” Mary reaffirmed. “And I don’t see, as yet, where Lazarus has contradicted you, let alone been impolite. He simply asked an intelligent question. I’d say, and most people who know him would say, that Lazarus is quite incapable of being impertinent or impolite—even to a fool. How was he impolite to you?”

“I was telling him,” said Zachary grandly, “of the great honour due to the Talmid and sage in this world, and of the reverence that will be given him in heaven. I spoke of the great ones: Abtalion and Shemajah, Hillel and Shammai. I was showing that the teacher was to be believed, even if he were

to declare anything on his right hand to be on his left. And Lazarus, not showing the respectful attention due—Lazarus said——”

“Lazarus said?”

“He said—oh, to think of it!—he said, ‘Zachary, what makes your nose so red?’!”

VIII

“Abiud was wise,” said Mary. “He did not like the Romans—what true son of Israel would?—but, as I said before, he thought it useless for Israel to keep hating them, while doing nothing all together to be rid of them.”

Lazarus hugged his knees and cocked his head at her.

“Why don’t we band together—from Dan to Beersheba?” he asked. “We’ve always been good fighters.”

“Ah, I don’t know,” said his sister. “Division is Israel’s bane. To argue is so much the habit with us that it seems impossible we could forget other differences, and say as one, ‘Israel shall be free.’ I’m afraid, brother, that even if we could it would be too late.”

“Too late!” cried Lazarus. “It wasn’t too late for Judas the Maccabee!”

“That was a different thing. The armies of Antiochus were little better organized than the Maccabeans. The Romans are modern soldiers. Fighting is their trade. They are trained to fight as one man in battle. They are all armed alike with the best of weapons, and in the legions are many men who have fought in many wars. It would take months, even years, to create an army of soldiers trained well enough to meet such men on equal terms.”

“What if it did? We could——”

“Wait!” said Mary. “Suppose we could agree among ourselves to gather everything needed for training an army—money, food, weapons—how could we make a muster of the men without the Romans knowing of it? And how long would it be before the legions were pouring from Syria and Cæsarea and Sebaste into Judea and Galilee, and into even the hills, wherever our men might be?”

“Before they were ready?”

“That’s what I mean,” said Mary. Then, seeing distress and disappointment in his face, she put a caressing hand on her brother’s knee.

“Yes, I know it hurts, darling. But I don’t want you to share a lot of idle dreams. You know what happened to Ezekias the Galilean—how he and his men were hunted and slain?”

“Yes—by the Idumean Herod. Was that why the Romans made him king over Israel?”

“In part, maybe. That was ten years after Galilee tried to rise,” said Mary. “No, Lazarus. Do not hope for any rising against the Romans. We Jews are too divided among ourselves—too many of our leaders are content with the foreign rule. Rebellion would only mean great suffering for the helpless poor—famine, homes destroyed, death, or sale into slavery. Judea and Galilee have seen too much of these.”

She rose from the wall, and held out her hand to him.

“But this is heavy talk for you, Lazarus,” she said. And she dangled the sling. “Shall we get back to your game?”

“Presently. I like talking to you, Mary. You don’t talk to me as if I was still a baby, but I understand you better than anybody.”

He rested his chin on his hugged knees, protruded his underlip, and considered awhile.

“Yes, Mary. I can see it,” he said. “Israel must wait until the Holy One—blessed be He!—sends us our King from heaven.”

Mary made no answer. She knew there was as much division of opinion among her people regarding the nature, qualifications, and purposes of the Messiah as on most other matters. Her own doubts sometimes frightened her. She would not risk planting the smallest doubt in the mind of Lazarus.

Lazarus, fortunately, did not seem to need a response. He thoughtfully rubbed his chin on his knee.

“It’s a pity all the same,” he said, “that we can’t have some good soldiers. I mean, *real* soldiers—soldiers all the time. And, of course, they’d need to have good captains and generals—like that one, Lucian.”

“Not much hope of that,” said Mary. “Are you coming up the garden?”

Lazarus straightened out his legs and swung off the wall.

“Don’t you think Lucian must be a great soldier?” he argued. “Of course, he’s a Roman, but—don’t you think he looks grand when he wears his gold armour and his sword and things? Don’t you like him, Mary?”

“As well as I like any Roman,” said Mary somewhat shortly. Then: “Well, are you going to use that ammunition you’ve made—before it all falls to dust?”

CHAPTER II

An Invitation

THE hooves clattered to a standstill and, with a bellow to the auxiliary acting as his groom, the Roman sprang agilely from his horse's back to astride the wall. He transferred the helmet slung by its chinstrap in the crook of his arm into his two hands, and gazed angrily at the splatter of clay on its highly burnished surface. Then he looked up the garden.

"Somebody's going to get his neck screw——" he was asserting, when he became aware that the figure on the higher inner wall was that of a woman. His mouth rounded with his eyes, and the threat died in a boyish, "Oh!"

He was young—had seen something just less than twenty years, Mary thought. The litheness of his spring to astride the wall had told her as much already, but it was confirmed by the shine of his close-cropped, ruddy-brown hair, the smoothness of the sun-tanned skin of his face, by the silky down on his chin. She began to feel as imperturbed as she meant to look.

"Queer game for a woman—slinging mud balls!" he grumbled, with a glance at the sling which dangled from Mary's fingers, picked up by her involuntarily on the scared flight of Lazarus. He swung off the wall and came up the slope towards her, holding out the helmet. "Just look at that—look at the mess you've made of my helmet!"

"I'm sorry," said Mary. "Give it to me and I'll clean it."

As she knelt to pick up a cloth lying by the balls of clay, and to receive the helmet, the wimple she had cast across her shoulder to veil her face fell away. The Roman gazed up at her.

"Divine Augustus!" he breathed.

"Give me the helmet," said Mary.

Staring at her, he handed it over. Fascinated, he watched her wipe the clay-splatter off with the corner of the cloth, then crumple the latter to restore the burnish. He began to smile.

"If it had been a stone, and I'd been riding bareheaded, it would have brained me," he said.

“But it wasn’t a stone, and you weren’t bareheaded,” said Mary. “And if you hadn’t been riding it wouldn’t have hit you at all.”

“Tell me—I am new to Judea—do all the women practise to be light-troops?”

“If you mean do they practise with the *funda*—no.”

“Well, do they all talk Latin like you?”

“I’d say next to none of them. I mean, of course, honest native women,” said Mary coolly. “They—if they need a language outside Aramaic—prefer Greek.”

“Are there many, then,” said he in Greek that limped, “as good-looking as you are?”

“I think,” replied Mary, “you had better stick to Latin.” She dropped the duster, threw her veil across her face, and held out the helmet.

“Must you do that?” he asked, looking at the veil.

“Here is your helmet,” she said. “I don’t think it is any the worse.”

He took it, and she got to her feet. “Vale!” she said, and turned to go up the garden, when a word from him stopped her.

“Lady!”

Mary came about. The Roman was standing with his helmet in the crook of his left arm, erect and soldier-like, with a new air of respect. He took a glance about the garden, then up at her again.

“Surely I cannot be mistaken,” he said. “Surely there cannot be in Bethany two such fair gardens so charmingly peopled? Surely I must be talking to the lady Mary, daughter of Abiud ben Shirach?”

“Yes, I am she.”

“I am Felix Scaliger, *eques*, lately second-in-command of a cavalry wing on the Parthian expedition, but now attached for political training to the staff of the Procurator, Valerius Gratus. My immediate chief is Marcus Lucianus, commander of the Jerusalem cohorts, and from him I bring you a message—only,” the young man came out of his pomp to smile, “I had been apt to miss delivering it—Lucian, unlike a good soldier, having given me a wrong direction to your house.”

Mary, inwardly amused by the boyish pomp of the preamble, felt more kindly towards him. She repressed an inclination to look behind her. In that

earlier turn towards the house, she had caught a glimpse (she felt certain) of Zachary lurking in the shadow. In any case, the Latin being beyond him, the little sneak would make nothing of the colloquy. It tickled Mary to think how *that* would irritate him.

“Well,” she said straight-faced, “the message?”

“It is that Lucian will be coming up this way from Jericho later in the day. He went down there at daybreak to meet the Governor of Syria, Lucius Pomponius Flaccus, who is coming from Galilee to visit Valerius in Jerusalem. Though why the old fool should choose *that* way of coming south,” Felix murmured in a half-aside, “I’m bothered to know! I’m on my way to meet Lucian now,” he added to Mary.

“Then you won’t have to go quite as far as you may be expecting,” said Mary. “My little brother saw the glitter of spears beyond the long defile some minutes ago.”

“Jove!” exclaimed the young soldier. “They’ve got off in a hurry!”

He glanced at the dropped sling and the remnant of the heap of clay balls, and grinned. “Your little brother!” he said comprehendingly. Then: “Do I take any word to Lucian?”

“Only that you delivered his message to the right person, and that she understands it.”

“Very well.”

He glanced at his helmet, put it on his head and adjusted the chinstrap, and, with his feet together, raised a hand in salute.

“Lady!” he said.

Mary raised one hand slightly and dropped it at her side. His hand also fell, and he turned and ran down the slope with a faint rattling, for he was in half-armor. In what looked like one movement he was over the wall and apparently astride his horse, because the clatter of hooves was immediate.

For a moment Mary watched the two horsemen go cantering—it seemed recklessly headlong—down the rocky road. Then she turned and went towards the house to look for Lazarus.

II

“Have you seen Lazarus?” asked Mary in the kitchen.

She was given no answer. Martha settled the closing slab of the oven quite unnecessarily, and stooped to fuss just as unnecessarily with the pot that stood, partly buried, in the heaped oven-embers on the hearth. In the shadows of a corner Zachary moved from foot to foot dumbly.

“I said—have you seen Lazarus?” Mary repeated.

“I have more to do than run after Lazarus,” said Martha. “And I haven’t the time—even if I was that much lost to decency and godliness,” she added —“to run after Gentiles either.”

The red-head temper in Mary began to stir. So that was it, she thought. Zachary *had* been spying. Unlikely that he had left the garden until Mary herself had moved towards the house. How he must have scuttered to get back to the kitchen to give Martha a full report before Mary appeared!—or had he been dodging back and forth from some point of vantage? Amusement blunted for a moment the edge of Mary’s anger as she thought of it. It wasn’t the first time she had imagined Zachary as one of those fussily busy beetle-things whose aimless activities seemed to them so important.

“Lazarus hit the young Roman with a clay ball on the helmet,” she conceded in explanation. “He ran away frightened, and I’d like to find him. Didn’t he come through the kitchen?”

“Well, we don’t know what goes on when some people go into Jerusalem to see those Akibas—godless Sadducees with their foreign, Gentile ways!—or who they meet there,” Martha said sideways. And she bustled over to a trough in which, under a clean cloth, lay the *challah*—that portion of the dough from her baking set aside for the Temple. With one finger between her teeth and another laid on her cheek she contemplated the dough under the half-lifted cloth. “I wonder, Zachary,” she paraded earnestness, “if we weighed the *challah* justly? I had one *hin* and six *logs* of wheaten flour, but there doesn’t seem to be even three *logs* of flour in this dough——”

Zachary teetered out of his corner.

“But we weighed it, Martha—we weighed it in the dough!” he said excitedly. “It has to be weighed in the dough—one-sixteenth it has to be. I’m sure we weighed it to the weight of an egg!”

Mary went over towards them.

“What does it matter if it’s over or under by the weight of an egg?” she said. “The priests get enough.”

“Nice, heathen talk!” exclaimed Martha. Then, as Mary came nearer the trough, “Keep back! Don’t you come here straight from contamination from a Gentile! This bread is sacred!”

“Stuff and nonsense!” said Mary. “I’m not contaminated by any Gentile.”

“You were holding his helmet,” accused Zachary.

“What of it? The bread that’ll make won’t be for the Sanctuary. It will be eaten at best by some lazy priest—some ‘godless Sadducee’ at that—but more likely will be sold as dough—to anybody.”

“Lazy priest!” gasped Zachary.

“This is what comes of talking to Romans!” bleated Martha.

“Romans! They do little worse in the country than a pack of lazy priests who grab the fatlings and the first-born of our herds, take tithe of our wheat, and then want their share of the dough made from what’s left—tithe anything coming out of the soil that can be kept in store: seeds, leaves, and stalks! The Romans!” said Mary, now flaring. “Well for Judea and for Israel if their children had something of the energy of the Romans! *They* anyhow make up their minds what they want and go after it together without stopping to argue every step. As for you——”

She turned so fiercely on Zachary that he went inches into the air. “You with your Pharisee pretences—if you must carry tales, clean your eyes and ears beforehand so that at least you can get your story right!”

Mary turned away from the trough to go out by the other door of the kitchen into the farm courtyard, but happened to take another look at her antagonists. The expression on both faces of pop-eyed horror, open-mouthed astonishment and aggrievement combined made her laugh. And, knowing that her sister’s solicitude about the *challah* was nonsense, meant only to put her in the wrong, she leaned over and gave the dough a defiant smack—it was under the cloth, anyhow. It had seemed impossible that Martha’s face could carry anything more in expression, but the consternation that was added made Mary laugh still more.

With a hand cramming her veil hard over her mouth she ran out into the open.

“Was the Roman soldier angry?” asked Lazarus.

“Well, he was to begin with, but he soon cooled down,” said Mary. “After all, he did get his helmet splattered by a clay ball.”

“Very angry?”

“Perhaps not really—just annoyed about having his nice clean helmet dirtied. I think he’d had it specially burnished to go and meet some very high-up Roman—Governor of Syria; I forget what name he said—who’s coming to Jerusalem from Jericho this morning.”

“Oh! Then it *was* spears I saw glittering,” said Lazarus. “Mary, I’m sorry I ran away.”

“Well, don’t feel too bad about it, my lamb—though running away from trouble is hardly ever the best way of getting out of it. I searched for you all through the garden and steadings. What made you come to the synagogue?”

“Looking for Isaac—so’s he could come and help you with the Roman. But he wasn’t here.”

That, thought Mary, was not so bad. She had feared Lazarus had simply run away to hide. But, next to herself, the most trusted friend Lazarus had in the town was his school-teacher, Isaac Barjonas, the *Chazzan* (superintendent) of the synagogue. To the boy, Isaac represented authority.

“Very well,” Mary said contentedly. “Let’s go back home.”

They walked back through the town—no great distance, for within the walls Bethany was small—Lazarus eagerly asking about the Roman, what he had said, what he was like. Mary elaborated more on the second than the first line of question: the Roman, though young, seemed to be an experienced soldier—good-looking, yes, in his foreign way—nimble rather than muscular, though he probably would become more compact later on—and he wore, besides the embossed helmet of some light sort of bronze, unplumed, a close-fitting jerkin of green leather with embossings of bronze and two straps from the collar supporting twisted rings, slightly open, but stopped with ornamental knobs. The jerkin had a sort of short petticoat made with leather straps studded with bronze bosses, and the short sword he carried was sheathed in the same green leather ornamented with the same bronze. His legs were bare, except for open-work *calcei*, also of green leather, coming up to the swell of the calf. Over the jerkin he wore a light cloak dyed, it seemed, with something more red than the purple of murex.

“Goodness!” said Lazarus. “You must have taken a good look at him, Mary!”

Mary felt colour come into her face.

“Oh!” she said easily. “Women take that sort of thing in at a glance, my dear; besides, I thought my small brother would probably want to know.”

“Maybe I’ll see him when they all come past the foot of the garden,” said Lazarus. “Will Lucian be there?”

“Very likely. I suppose the military commander in Jerusalem would have to be very polite to the Governor of Syria.”

They went through the smaller gate from the street into the garden direct. But through the archway leading from the garden to the courtyard they could see that the latter was oddly deserted and quiet. And from the lower end of the garden there came the hum of voices.

“They’re coming—they’re coming!” Lazarus danced excitedly. “Hurry, Mary, or they’ll be past!”

“I don’t think so,” said Mary. “You run on ahead. I’ll join you in a moment.”

The need to go in search of Lazarus had left her no time for the complete change of attire she had contemplated. Through the trees of the garden she could see the glitter of arms near enough in the Jericho road to warn her that the cavalcade would be passing in a few minutes. There was time only to run indoors and change her cloak for something less worn and more colourful than the one she was wearing, to put a better wrap about her head, and to pour water over her hands. She got into the garden in time to overtake Martha and Zachary as they moved to join a cluster of the women-servants who stood, modestly, but not very well-placed for seeing the show, along the last terrace before the outer wall. Plainly, they envied the men-servants the male privilege which permitted the better view from above the roadway. No doubt, but for Martha’s strictness, they would have been down there with their kerchiefs about their faces—though slackly enough held to be dropped, as by accident, if they saw one or other in the show itself who might deserve a return view. As it was, they took their cue from their mistress.

Martha, it was manifest, meant to establish the correct tone for the proceedings as far as her own domain was concerned. Muffled to the eyes—though, Mary noticed, in a fresh head-wrap—and clad in sombre black—but, Mary observed, her best cloak—she stalked in dignified fashion down the garden. Her pace was slow. Obviously she meant to show her people that

she had no real interest in this Gentile flummery, but was appearing simply to indulge them in their childish curiosity, to ease them, as it were, of any doubts they might have as to propriety. It was apparent, however, that Zachary was finding the slowness of her approach to the spectacle irksome both to his legs and to his patience. The assumed indifference of his outlook was wrecked by the anxious popping of his eyes towards the approaching cavalcade, and the tendency, now and again, to break into a stumbling little run that put him ahead of his principal. When this happened he looked back at her, momentarily, with the piteous appeal of an eager small dog out with a dawdling old lady, before falling back into step with her.

Mary shot past them without haste as they reached the women on the terrace. The leading portion of the century forming the Governor's escort was already coming round the bend below the garden wall, and it did not need the excited hail and beckoning from Lazarus to make her vault from the terrace to go down and join him. Her forwardness, as Martha saw it, scandalized the elder sister.

"Mary!" she protested. "Come back here at once!"

Mary ignored the injunction. She always resented Martha's assumption of authority over her, even when it was asserted in private. But its display before any third party, let alone the whole household staff, was certain to raise her temper. It did so now. It brought her into a sudden mood of recklessness, gave her the angry urge to substantiate her freedom by doing things calculated to outrage the too-strait-laced susceptibilities of Martha and her satellite. As a beginning, she slipped her wrap back from her head and face, and took her seat beside Lazarus on the wall. She was gratified to hear what can only be described as squeaking behind her from Martha.

But more was to come. The first fifty of the hundred men forming the escort was now passing under the garden wall. They were not Romans, but Syrian auxiliaries, though led by a Roman centurion. After them, with nothing of their disciplined order, came a huddle of people variously mounted, members of the Jewish priestly order, officials and young Roman dandies attached to the Governor's court. In the middle of this crowd, separating it rather than forming its kernel, was the *basterna* of the Governor. This was a highly decorated litter of leather and wood, with a flat roof supported by ornamental corner columns, slung on long shafts between two mules, tandem fashion. From inside the cornice supported by the columns curtains depended of rich silken fabric, dyed in a purple just blue enough to avoid the rather pinkish imperial hue, and embroidered in gold. Save for the narrower spaces front and back, these curtains were drawn

open. This was apparently to allow the Governor to converse with such of his company as he might incline to summon to his side.

With his head and shoulders raised on cushions, Pomponius lay at length in the litter. He wore the short-sleeved *tunica* of white linen, and over it an open mantle of light reddish woollen material cut in the manner of the *lacerna*. For warmth—or more likely, since a little Nubian boy crouched behind the head-cushions waving a light-woven fan, as a protection from the flies—another mantle covered his legs.

To one side of the litter rode Felix Scaliger, and on the other an older and more heavily built officer, dressed in much the same pattern of light armour as the younger, but of maroon leather ornamented with silver. His helmet was of bronze enamelled in maroon and with silver mountings, and his cloak was of turquoise blue. Even in that colourful centre of the column he was a distinctive figure, though more for the easy vigour of his carriage and the good seat he had on his horse than for the distinction of his dress.

As the litter came round the bend of the road this officer turned his attention from the dignitary in the litter to the two figures standing apart from the others along the wall of Abiud's garden—Mary and Lazarus. His regard met Mary's, and he raised a hand in salute. Mary answered with a little shake of fingers taken away from the breast of her cloak. Across the top of the litter Felix also claimed recognition with a smile and a raised hand, and had it in a smile and a nod. The other meanwhile, having stooped to make an excuse to the Governor, reined his horse aside out of the cavalcade and drew up alongside the wall.

"Hail to you, Mary, daughter of Abiud!" he said quietly, and glanced at Lazarus. "Give you greeting, young man!" said he to the boy, with a smile.

"Peace be upon you, sir," Lazarus replied readily in the like Greek, but coloured up. He drew closer to Mary whose arm was about him.

"That's no good wish for a soldier," laughed the man. "Campaigns for promotion, we say."

"Welcome Lucian!" Mary broke in. "Thank you for your message. My brother Lazarus would have been sorry had he missed seeing the show."

"Is that all the message meant to you?" Lucian asked.

"What more could it mean?"

"I thought you would have heard. The Governor rests until the afternoon in the house here of Joseph ben Bœthus. I had hoped, as you are the friend

of his daughter Zebina, to see you there.”

“I had not heard. And Zebina is with her sister at her uncle’s house in Jericho—probably,” added Mary, smiling, “in anticipation of just this Roman invasion.”

“Confound it!” said Lucian. “It will be dull—Pomponius and the Jewish greybeards talking politics——”

“Which, of course, does not interest you?”

“It depends on the occasion. I had not thought Joseph ben Boethus so strait-laced.”

“Nor is he,” said Mary. “Perhaps, with the other greybeards, he is only making the most of an occasion. Probably there is something the elders think likelier to reach the ear of Cæsar through this Pomponius than through Valerius.”

Lucian’s regard of her narrowed.

“What makes you think that?” he asked.

Mary laughed.

“Whose suggestion was it that the Governor should rest to-day in the house of Joseph?” she inquired.

“I don’t know. I heard of it only this morning in Jericho,” said Lucian. “But Pomponius lay the night, not in the palace, but in the house of Tzarifa ben Akiba.”

“Ben Akiba!” smiled Mary. “Well, there you are!”

“How acute you are!” commented Lucian, with an admiring look. “You should have been a Roman!”

“Heaven forbid!” said Mary. “Roman brilliance, on top of my poor Jewish wits, would be formidable indeed.”

Lucian’s head went back, and his deep-chested guffaw raised echoes in the trees of the garden. Mary was well aware of the disapproval her conversation with the Roman was meeting with behind her. Martha had already ordered the women-servants back to the house and steadings, and now her voice was raised to call the men back to their duties.

“Lazarus!”

“You had better go, my lamb,” said Mary, and released her hold of the boy. Lazarus, reluctantly, got down off the wall. The procession was already passing out of sight through the town-gate, but he had not exhausted his interest either in the martial garb or in the robust personality of the Roman commander. The summons from Martha, however, with the quiet injunction from Mary to obey it, could not be ignored. Lazarus took a last lingering look at Lucian.

“I bid you farewell, sir,” he shyly ventured, half raising his hand.

The Roman good-naturedly gave him the full salute.

“Farewell, Lazarus!” Lucian returned.

“Lazarus!” Martha called again on a rising note, and Lazarus turned and bolted.

“Your sister, isn’t it?” Lucian asked.

“Martha—yes,” said Mary. Then, the imp of mischief reasserting itself in her, she added, “If you think to find the house of Joseph too dull—and it wouldn’t be discourteous to the Governor—why not bring a friend or two for refreshment here? This garden, after all, gives the sweetest shade in Bethany.”

“I need no urging,” said Lucian. “I can easily find excuses to make to Pomponius. That is,” he added, “if you seriously mean it?”

“I seriously mean it,” said Mary.

IV

She was surprised, later, to discover just how serious of latent intention her impulsive invitation had been. The lamentations of Martha, and the pious dismay exhibited by Zachary, on hearing she had asked an unspecified number of the Romans to a light repast in the garden, seemed suddenly to give Mary the true and brimming measure of her urge to rebel. It was all at once revealed to her how irksomely narrow life in her father’s house had become since his death—how full the time had grown for breaking through the petty restrictions that, with all her resentment, she had allowed Martha and Zachary in concert to impose on herself and the household generally.

Her invitation to Lucian now took on a significance, a presage of consequence, of which she had been unaware in giving it. The realization of

what it could lead to, while it frightened her, simply stiffened her in resolve to see the matter through. Her anger cooled. A new sense of power fell upon her. The knowledge, long enough held already, that in strength of character and mental ability she far outstripped both Martha and Martha's adviser, armed her against them now as never before.

To the wailings of Martha about the disgrace in the eyes of the neighbours of entertaining Gentiles, and the country's oppressors at that, Mary quietly offered a reminder that their father had often done the like. Abiud, she pointed out, had held it politic as well as merely polite to extend an occasional hospitality to the Romans. They were, after all, masters of the country. They had even been invited by the elders of the people to take over its direct rule, when the greedy, vicious, and bloody oppression of Archelaus had brought Israel to the depths of misery.

"But the defilement!" moaned Martha.

"Everything they touch will have to be broken or burnt!" declared Zachary. "We shall all be rendered unclean!"

"Some of us," said Mary pointedly, "will be none the worse of a good wash. Besides, it is time we gave over this Pharisaic pretence. Our father Abiud wasn't even *chaber*—though no Pharisee could accuse him of not giving scrupulously both heave-offering and the poor's tithe, and few acted as if his field-products or his beasts were not credited."

Zachary, as Mary indeed hoped, played into her hands.

"Abiud—it is well-known—" he whined, "was sinfully lax."

"Only a blinded worm like yourself would say so," Mary replied indignantly. And she turned to her sister. "You knew our father longer than I did, Martha. But if you let this pass, I won't."

Martha bristled, and bent a withering gaze on her toady, who shrunk visibly.

"It ill becomes you, Zacharias bar-Achab," she said sternly, "to slander one—though fallen asleep—whose bread you eat. Well known! Lax! Sinfully! I wonder at you! If ever man walked——"

"I only meant—this contact with the heathen—" stammered Zachary. "And then, his early death—cut off . . ."

This was worse and worse. Martha rose from the chair into which earlier she had sunk so despairingly.

“That is enough,” she said majestically. “The feet of Abiud ben Shirach, servant of the Lord, walked where he was called. As gently as a hair drawn from milk, so went his spirit from him. As for this contact with the heathen _____”

“Well as for that,” Mary broke in, “the heathen are just about on the threshold. Do you want them to find you unprepared?”

Martha threw up her hands.

“The Lord preserve us!” she cried. “And us without a thing in the house to eat or drink! Oh, Mary, how could you?”

“There’s no need to start throwing away your wits,” said Mary. “There are plenty of pickled olives in the house, and several kinds of preserved fruits. Besides, there are all those loaves fresh from the oven. With a jar of the wine of Saron——”

“But the waste! If we serve anything to them in earthenware the cups and dishes will have to be smashed and thrown away.”

“Then don’t serve anything in earthenware,” suggested Mary calmly. “Serve everything in dishes that can be scoured. And there are glasses for the wine—washing will rid them of pollution.”

“What if they break the bread without blessing it?” asked Zachary in a hollow voice. “What if they mix the wine and water without blessing after?”

“What matter since they are heathen?” said Mary impatiently. “*You* will not be eating and drinking with them. If you feel that blessing is needed for what mere heathen consume bless everything yourself before it reaches them.”

What of denunciation and horror would have been expelled from the gap widening on indrawn breath in Zachary’s agonized countenance cannot now be told with accuracy, however closely one might guess. For just as the awful expulsion began it was choked back by the noise of a loud knocking on the door from the garden into the street.

“Mercy on us!” wailed Martha. “They’re here!”

While she stood petrified with her hands over her mouth, and Zachary—gagging inarticulately—went round helplessly in aimless circles, Mary quietly began issuing orders to the servants hanging curiously about the doors of the kitchen. The men were to take couches and chairs and cushions and carpets out into the garden and dispose them, as they often had done for more orthodox gatherings, comfortably under the shadier trees. When,

however, preparatory to getting the womenfolk busy, she asked Martha for the keys of larder and stores, Martha came out of her stupor.

“I’ll attend to the food,” she said. “Hadn’t you better go and receive them?”

“No need, I think, just yet,” said Mary. “Listen!”

Feet were coming at a shuffling run up to the door into the courtyard. And then there appeared in the opening, breathless, the familiar figure of one Jehudah, a Bethanite. A crony of Zachary’s, as much the busybody and as fond of Martha’s kitchen, he combined the trade of leather-worker with that of scout for the marriage-broker. Self-appointed scout, that was. The *Chazzan* of the synagogue and such local rabbis as concerned themselves about the marriageable young (marriage being almost a religious obligation) could well have dispensed with Jehudah’s fussy zeal. But, if in a remarried widow or two—and in some second husbands of widows—gratitude towards Jehudah had rather faded, there remained a few who still could thank him. And quite a number of men and women, eager either for initiation or re-entry into the blissful state with both profit and pleasure, looked to him hopefully for suggestions that authority was likely to approve.

Mary detested the man almost as heartily as she did his friend Zachary. However unofficially or officiously, he represented for her the disapproval by authority of her avoidance of marriage so far beyond the age when marriage was thought seemly for Judean women. She felt that Jehudah regarded her—and that in his haunting of the house Jehudah looked at her—as a fig so over-ripe as to be in peril of rotting, a fig moreover of some profit from which he was being cheated.

With heaving chest and beaded brow Jehudah came to a standstill on the kitchen threshold.

“Peace,” he gasped, “be upon this house!”

“Blessed is he that cometh,” Martha said automatically, and in the same breath, “What’s your news, Jehudah?”

“The Romans! The Governor of Syria is resting in the house of Joseph the Sadducee on his way to Jerusalem, and the market-place is filled with soldiers!”

“Is that all? Is that any reason for knocking the street-gate half off its hinges and scaring us all nearly out of our wits?” demanded Martha. “Are there no new bridles to make, no worn harness to patch, that you’ve time to run about wasting what breath is left you in gasping stale news?”

“Stale news!” echoed Jehudah, deflated, and he goggled beseechingly at his crony. Zachary, however, gave him only that contemptuous look and shrug which the well-informed reserve for pedlars of the obvious. But this, of course, for effect in the bypassing. Zachary was too laden with matter for Jehudah’s scandalized surprise to be silent for long. He had, in fact, begun to take breath for revelation when Martha forestalled him.

“Stale news! Isn’t it enough to have Mary bringing trouble——” she began, but switched to the more detailed anxieties of the moment at the sight of her dawdling women-servants: “You, Hagar, wash the blue platter, and put a clean cloth over it for the bread!—if we wash the cloth afterwards, Zachary, we need only wash the platter outside and in? You, Mehitabel, get out the best glasses and give them a good rinse and polish!”

“But the key of the chest, mistress!”

“I’ll open it myself. I can’t do everything at once, you ninny. I suppose, Mary, we’d better give them those good olives from Gush Halab—and do you think they’d like my quince cheese? I wish my honeyed apricots had come out better.”

So Martha, bustling about the kitchen, but finding time to berate Jehudah all over again for the fright he had given her.

“Stale news! As if the whole house hadn’t been out, gawping, to watch the Roman clowns—I’ll swear some of them had their faces painted!—go past the garden foot! As if we weren’t going to have a pack of them, on Mary’s invite, sprawling and swilling in the garden——!”

Mary stole away quietly. Martha might rant and flit about from cupboard to chest and from bread-bin to larder like a woman distracted, but in the end she would produce better fare than the Governor himself was likely to have in Joseph ben Bœthus’s grand hillside villa. Whatever her faults, Martha was a notable provider, with a knack of applying that delicate and individual touch which gave distinction even to the commonest dishes. And mere house-pride would make her turn out her best even for Romans.

Mary intercepted Lazarus as he made for the kitchen and took him with her into the garden. Knowing the accusations of godlessness that would be flung at her for her invitation to Lucian, she had sent the boy off beforehand to bathe and change into his best garments. It was always her care—as, to do the elder sister simple justice, it was Martha’s, when she remembered—to avoid quarrels and arguments of any serious import in Lazarus’s presence. And with the immediate likelihood that Zachary, if not Martha, would be

regaling Jehudah with views on the barefaced immodesty of her behaviour, she thought Lazarus had better be kept away.

The thought of the tale Jehudah presently would be carrying so excitedly round Bethany made Mary wince, which (she told herself as she supervised the men carrying out her instructions in the garden) was foolish. This that she had brought about was something that could not be hidden. Leaving Jehudah aside, there would be plenty of Bethanites about to mark the entry of Lucian and his companions into the garden. And that in itself would be enough to do major violence to the susceptibilities of the many sensitively orthodox in the town. There was no blinking the fact. What could be excused, or ignored, on the part of a man of their father's calibre and worth would not easily be forgiven two celibate women, especially one as suspect of odd behaviour (for instance, in this reluctance to marry) as Mary herself.

Mary shrugged away her apprehensions. Here was no matter that of itself would put her 'in danger of the Council.'

Leaving Lazarus in the garden, she went back to the kitchen.

Martha, for all her dislike of the guests, had prepared for them in her most lavish fashion. Dishes of fillets of salted fish in oil, radishes, lettuces, almonds, marinated olives, and a variety of preserved fruits besides her notable 'cheese' of quince stood on the table. A stout jar, wicker-guarded, of the Saron wine stood ready with its seal still unbroken. The water to mix with it, for the sake of greatest coolness, would not be drawn from the well until the last moment. Then the drawing pitcher would come up as if frosted.

But though obviously this collation wanted nothing for variety, quantity, or quality, Martha still fussed about it. This solicitude, however, plainly was a mere thing of habit. The real origin of her disquiet was in the return of her fears. From the uneasy glances of Zachary and Jehudah, and the no less furtive manner towards her of some of the servants, Mary knew that censure of her conduct had been rife in her absence. But she smothered the anger that rose in her, the wish to give those two ravens the sharpest edge of her tongue for their interference. Ignoring them, she spoke in unfeigned praise of Martha's provision.

"I've done my best in the time. I wish it was in a better cause," said Martha with trembling lips. "What I'll do if trouble comes of it—oh, Mary, how could you do such a thing?"

That, thought Mary, was Martha—as it also was Zachary—all over. Reason never reached her. It might, for a moment or two, seem to persuade

or even convince her. But in the next moment one found oneself back to where one had started with her.

Mary sighed.

“I am not sorry for doing it—only sorry that it worries you,” she said, gently enough. “But that, I think, comes from listening too much to the croaking of carrion crows.”

She shot a look of contempt at the pair, and saw them exchange a glance of shocked incredulity. That made her laugh.

“Come Martha—cheer up!” she went on. “It will soon be over and forgotten. Go and tidy up, and I’ll look after the rest.”

“I don’t need to——”

Martha broke off with a screech as knocking—brisk, strong, something peremptory and quite unmistakable—sounded on the main gate to the street.

“May we be forgiven!” she babbled. “They’re here!”

She threw her kerchief about her face and was about to bolt, but stopped.

“At least—at least,” she pleaded, “cover your hair!”

“Yes, I’ll do that,” Mary said meekly, and smiled as with deft fingers she brought the folded edge of her head-wrap in clean line from her forehead and over her ears to pin it at the nape of her neck. For she knew that this austere framing of her face better emphasized its beauty’s perfection, by sheer testing of it, than anything could.

Mistress of herself, all considerations destructive of her poise serenely dismissed, she went out to meet her guests.

CHAPTER III

Consequences

WITHIN an hour or two of her guests' departure, or perhaps within minutes of it, it became evident to Mary that her forebodings of trouble were to be thoroughly realized.

She had regarded it as inevitable, of course, that the gate should no sooner be shut upon the Roman backs than it would open for the first of a succession, on one pretence or another, of visitors from among the friends of Martha in the neighbourhood. Oddly enough, though she was aware of some display by her sister in the matter of restoring Levitical cleanness to such articles of household ware as were too valuable for destruction, and had her attention drawn to a basketful of broken crocks and remainder food carried to the town dump, Mary knew that Martha's family loyalty would not suffer any of her cronies to magnify the grounds of offence. At the same time, what Martha might or might not permit to be expressed in her presence would make little difference to the tales the visitors would eagerly spread once they were out of the house. This was a work on which, for certain, Zachary and Jehudah were already excitedly engaged.

It was all very well for Mary to keep aloof from these women visitors, and to shrug contempt for the embroideries both they and the two male busybodies were sure to add to the facts. A later indication of the trouble she had stirred up for herself could not so easily be shrugged off.

This took shape in a call, towards evening, by two of the rulers of the synagogue. And it was plain that one of the pair, a self-righteous individual named Nahum ben Kattina, considered that this business of entertaining a party of Romans, far from being made the subject of an inobtrusive visit by two elders, should have been investigated by all the *Parnasim* of the synagogue in session, with Mary before them as chief offender. Fortunately for Mary, perhaps, the second of the visiting elders was a gentle old man, Samuel ben Shila, who had known and loved her father. Of the two, he carried the greater authority. From the real affection he had for all the members of Abiud's family, and indeed out of his own kindly nature, his one idea was to have the whole affair laid to rest and forgotten as quickly and as

quietly as possible. Mary, however, seemed from the first determined to make smooth approaches to the inquiry somewhat difficult.

The inquiry had barely begun in the house's best chamber when Zachary and Jehudah, back from their tour of the town, came sidling into the room.

"Yes, yes!" said Nahum delightedly, rubbing his hands briskly together. "Come in, Zachary—come in, Jehudah! You will be wanted."

"Not by me," Mary said firmly. "Bring me before the whole Council if you please, I will not have these half-men here. If these are to be my judges you'll get no word out of me!"

"Now, now, now!" murmured old Samuel placatingly, stroking his long big white beard.

"Judges, no—but they are witnesses against you," said Nahum.

"Why 'against'? Do you bar all possibility that in some direction they might be 'for' me?" demanded Mary.

"By thy life, Nahum, and by the life of thy head," chuckled the old man, "her question is apt. In justice thou'rt but her scholar, man."

"They are witnesses," Nahum said stubbornly.

"Question them in private if you choose, then. There is nothing they can tell truly of me that I will deny—nothing they can tell that my sister Martha does not know. Beyond that, they can only have opinions. And, in so far as they are allowed to express them, they will be my judges. That I will not have," Mary declared. "So let them begone to chatter, like the mindless crows they are, what and where they list."

"It is not for you, wanton——" Nahum was beginning, when Samuel broke in hastily.

"Now, now, now!—you go far beyond your warrant, Nahum!" he warned. And, pushing past the other elder, he shepherded Zachary and Jehudah out of the room, closing the door upon them firmly.

"Let us go about matters," he said on returning, "quietly and in order. Above all, let us keep from anger. Daughter Mary, the question is this of your having given hospitality to a number of Romans this afternoon."

"The question, Rab' Samuel, seems now to go farther than that," said Mary. "Apparently I am accused of having lain with one or more of the Romans."

“Mary!” wailed Martha. She had long since surrendered completely to tears.

“No, no, no!” old Samuel protested. What—his fluttering hands asked of high heaven—was one to make of such a distractingly direct young woman. “None has made any such accusation.”

“I have been called ‘wanton,’ ” Mary persisted. “Why that, if my chastity is not in question?”

“And it could come to that,” muttered Nahum.

“Now, now!” pleaded Samuel.

“This is simply trifling time!” Nahum said angrily. “I said ‘wanton,’ and I mean ‘wanton.’ None but a shameless woman would consort as you do, not only here in Bethany, in the house of ben Boëthus, but in Jerusalem, in the house of the Akibas, with Romans and Greeks and heathen dogs of all kinds. None but a wanton would invite a horde of dissolute Romans into the house and garden of her respected dead father, there—in outrage of all decency and reverence of the Law—to break unblessed bread with them, and to hold them in lewd conversation. You may consider yourself fortunate that you are not dragged before the rulers of the congregation this very night, and whipped forthwith. I say——”

“You say a good deal, Nahum ben Kattina,” Mary interrupted coolly, “from the sound of it all earlier concocted and rehearsed. It is, of course, the speech you think of making to the session.”

This was so obviously true that, while ben Kattina started as if stung, old Samuel smothered a chuckle in his beard.

“I’ll trouble to take you up point by point,” Mary went on, “not to flatter you that you’ve been using what, deludedly, you call your mind——”

Waaagh!—old Samuel went inside himself. This was good hearing, but dangerous. Nahum, like many another in love with the sound of his own voice, believed that to talk was to think. But the knack of stringing bombilyous phrases together gave him some power in the session, and made him a rather dangerous enemy. It also made him very easy to antagonize.

Samuel made a small gesture of warning. Mary caught it, but went on as if unheeding:

“But to show Rab’ Samuel here just with what prejudice and what readiness to accept false witness he associates himself.

“If it is shameless and wanton in me to consort with Romans and other heathen dogs in the house of Joseph ben Bœthus, so must it be in the daughters of Joseph, Zebina, and Damaris. I have noticed no anxiety on your part, or on the part of the rulers, to drag them before the session and whip them forthwith. Nor is it noticeable that the womenfolk of the Akibas—of whom there are plenty—stand in danger of the Council.”

“It is well-known that the Bœthuseans and the Akibas both are sinfully lax,” Nahum said through his teeth.

“Joseph ben Bœthus and Silas ben Akiba are both members of the Great Sanhedrin—rulers, not of a small local synagogue, but in religious matters of the whole people.”

“Fine rulers!” muttered Nahum. “Bœthuseans and Sadducees!”

Mary smiled wickedly.

“And what of the High Priest himself,” she provoked, “Eliezar ben Anan?”

“Ha! How much did he give the Procurator for the office?”

“It is safe to ask the question here—where none will bring it to the ears of either Eliezar or Valerius,” Mary said sweetly. “You are very brave, Nahum, yapping at the skirts of a woman with only her own wits to defend her. Let us hear you yap at some one of consequence.”

Nahum, glaring, filled his chest.

“No, no!” said Mary. “I’ll hear no more from you. If you had come here prepared to talk reasonably I’d have submitted—even if it had meant appearing before the session. But you come with the matter judged beforehand, on baseless assumptions. The Romans were necessarily ‘dissolute.’ None of the household broke bread with them, in any case, but you assume it was ‘unblessed.’ Since the conversation was all in Latin or Greek, none that overheard it could say what it was about, but you assume it must have been ‘lewd.’”

“I will not be judged by any *Am ha-Aretz* like you.”

The insult to a man like Nahum, non-Pharisee though he was, was a deadly one. The blood came into his face until it seemed black.

“Daughter!” cried old Samuel.

“Jade!—I will have you whipped!” Nahum choked.

“Nor now,” Mary continued, “will I submit to examination by the session. Threaten as you please, but let me tell you that my chief guest this afternoon was Marcus Lucianus Ælius, commander of the Jerusalem cohorts and second only to Valerius himself. You may consider how he will act if I am arraigned for giving him hospitality.”

She turned to the old man.

“Rab’ Samuel,” she said gently. “I know you came here in kindness—only to find light on the matter. But in this company you are like the cock in the parable of Rabbi Samlai that went looking for light with a bat. You might say like the cock to the bat, ‘I am looking for light, but of what use is the light to you?’ ”

She went over to the old man and took his hand. Like a boy, she kissed it and carried it to her head and to her heart.

“You are as my father,” she said, “and you know that I will not lie to you. If you will walk with me in the garden awhile I shall answer truly all you may care to ask me.”

“Bless you, daughter,” replied the old man. “So be it!”

“It may be cold.”

She picked up a rug from a couch, and put it carefully about his shoulders. Then, without another look either at the still livid Nahum or the tearful and quite bemused Martha, she led him with a hand under his arm into the garden.

II

“So you see, Rab’ Samuel, I acted on impulse. And I am alone to blame—if blame there is. Once it was done, Martha could not help herself. She could hardly turn the Romans away from our doors.”

“No, no, of course not,” said the old man. “But there is blame, make no mistake about that, my child. And if it chances that the Romans hold one of their idolatrous festivals this week the contamination may be one that no simple washing may remove.”

“Then Joseph ben Bœthus and all those Sadducees who brought Pomponius from Jericho up to Jerusalem are equally contaminated.”

“Do not consider yourself in like case with them, Mary. Political need—some matter concerning the well-being of the people—may have led the rabbis to declare the contact lawful.”

“It might be that I acted expediently too, relieving some of the pressure on Joseph’s household.”

“Ah! That could be argued,” smiled old Samuel. “But you and I know it would be a quibble. That idea was not in your mind when you invited the Romans.”

She squeezed his arm.

“Rab’ Samuel,” she said, “no wonder I love you!”

“I am thankful that you do. It enables me to open my heart to you about yourself,” Samuel returned, and he patted her hand. “The afternoon’s affair may be smoothed over, though you haven’t made it easier. I wish you had not called Nahum ‘*Am ha-Aretz.*’”

“But that’s just what he is—an ignorant boor. His knowledge of the Law is as shallow as his thinking.”

The old man sighed.

“Perhaps that’s why he’s dangerous to thwart,” said he. “Deep thinking holds but few listeners. Nahum finds many.

“Nevertheless,” he went on, “I think we can smooth matters. What I’m concerned about, Mary, is that your impulse to mischief came from impatience with the Law.”

“Not with the Law. With niggling and ignorant interpretations of it—fiddlings about with it for mere fiddling’s sake.”

“Zachary?”

“And, led by him, Martha.”

“Your father Abiud was one of the wisest men I’ve known,” said Samuel, “but I’ve often doubted his wisdom in making you, a girl, such a scholar.”

“He could no more help opening his mind to me than he could help loving me,” replied Mary. “But I believe, if he had not taught me to read and write, I should have learned for myself.”

“I believe that, too,” said the old man. He turned his head from her, perhaps to hide the look of trouble in his eyes.

“And, Rab’ Samuel, why shouldn’t a woman be a scholar?”

“Because it sets her apart among our people. Her scholarship is wasted—unless she has men-children. My daughter, why don’t you marry?”

“Because the only man who appeals to me has a wife already.”

“My child!”

“And he was born nearly sixty years before me. He has a lovely large white beard, and his name is Samuel.”

The old man laughed delightedly.

“Now by my beard—the Holy One, blessed be He, forgive me for swearing—that was neat! A trap—and I walked into it!” he gasped. “Ah, Mary, Mary! Were I in my ardent youth again, and was there no Tabitha with my forelock twisted in her fingers from the age of twelve, you would not escape the marriage canopy with me. But are there no young men with eyes in Bethany?”

“Plenty—with eyes like sheep.”

“Ilai, the son of Isaac ben Seth—what of him?”

“An onion’s tegument between him and complete mindlessness.”

“What, then, of Jacob, son of Jacob ben Lubin—a well-grown and comely young man, and pious?”

“Would recognize every individual *drachm* in my dowry within a week, and know nothing about *me* in fifty years.”

The old man grasped that hand which she had on top of his, and held it until he had turned to look her straight in the face.

“Mary,” he said earnestly, “this Roman commander—this Mark Lucian—what is he to you?”

“Rab’ Samuel,” she said with as much gravity as he, “I do not know.”

She tucked the rug more warmly about his shoulders and put her hands back over and under his arm.

“Let us walk farther down the garden and away from the house,” she suggested. How like the old dear, she thought without resentment, to put his finger on the hub of the whole situation—on the one thing that, with all her fencing, had been topmost in her mind since the afternoon.

They walked to the terrace from which Lazarus had been slinging his clay pellets in the morning, and Mary found a bench near by that was big enough to seat both of them in comfort. The rag she had used to clean Felix's helmet had been left in a fork of a tree, and with it she wiped the seat of the bench.

"It is too early yet for the dew, Rab' Samuel," she said, "but are you sure it won't be too cold for you?"

He held out a testing hand.

"No, the air is mild, and this rug is warm," he said. "But if the dew were falling and the air biting, I would remain. For, my daughter, I greatly fear you are in peril."

That, she thought—searching for absolute honesty—could be true. But she could not give the answer aloud, and remained silent.

"Is this Lucian the sort of man that, were he of our people, you think you could marry?"

"My father, I do not know. He is strong, virile, pleasant to look upon. He is much simpler and more direct of speech than our men are whom he equals in learning. Yes, in many ways he is the sort of man I would marry. But I find him, somehow, strangely repellent."

"He is alien and a Gentile."

"No, the repulsion hasn't to do with that. It is some quality in him—I think of veiled harshness.

"I met him first," Mary went on, "in the house of Theophilus Akiba. I had gone there with Zebina Bœthus. His Greek was good. He spoke of Greek writings—some I remember my father speaking of, some I had read in part myself. Next time I met him in the Akibas' house, he brought me a book curiously made—not in a scroll as we know books, but in sheets of parchment folded and sewn together. Since then I have met him several times—in Jerusalem, and here in the house of Joseph Bœthus."

"It is not good for a true daughter of Israel to frequent the houses of the Sadducees."

"She should frequent, I suppose," said Mary with a smile, "the houses only of true sons of Israel? But, Rab' Samuel, how many men of diverse views think themselves that—exclusively?"

“Indeed, indeed,” the old man said hastily, “there is much division among our people——”

“Sadducees and Pharisees. Scribes who are one or the other—or neither. Rabbis who are Pharisees, but argue about the Law with Sadducees. Rabbis who are not Pharisees, but will not even look at a Sadducee. Men who have made no Pharisaic vows, but pretend to be Pharisees. The ‘true daughter of Israel’ doesn’t know where she is. She cannot even be sure that she *is* a true daughter of Israel.”

“She can be sure of it by loving the Law and following it. She will not be helped by reading the writings of the heathen. I could wish, I do wish,” said the old man, “that you would not concern yourself with these. If it were known to the rabbis you would be in danger of the ‘ban.’ ”

“There are rabbis—and rabbis,” said Mary. “Many of them, and these among the best-regarded, could not see me excommunicate on that account without peril of the deepest hypocrisy. Rab’ Samuel, if I quoted to you: ‘Sent to us from above so that we may have a nearer vision of the godhead, the high and holy soul dwells in us, but still remains bound with its heavenly springing’; or, again: ‘Everything comes from the will of Heaven save that which is done by the wicked’; to which of the Fathers would you attribute the sayings?”

“By my life, and by the life of my head,” said Samuel, “I cannot tell. Yet they have the truthful ring.”

“The first is from the Greek Plato, but retold by him who said the second—Posidonius the Stoic. And both,” added Mary while the old man sought breath for surprise, “quoted in my presence by the Rabbi Phiabi.”

Old Samuel smote his knee.

“Is it not possible, my father,” Mary went on, “since in the end, as we are told, He will gather the good of all nations under His rule, that the Holy One—blessed be He!—has allowed some enlightenment to fall upon elected ones among the heathen?”

“Indeed I have sometimes thought it possible.”

“I cannot believe, as some of our teachers seem to do, that the peoples outside the Covenant will be given the sudden choice of accepting the Law or being destroyed. For if Israel, with all the teaching of the Prophets and the Fathers since Moses, still fall short of understanding, how shall the heathen—untutored as they are—find it all in a moment? Yet, unless that

understanding be granted to covenanted and uncovenanted alike, the greater number of the people of His creation must be destroyed.”

“Edom and the oppressors of Israel—other Gentiles will be brought under the yoke of the Law.”

“By coercion?” asked Mary. “A victory even more barren than that gained by a grant of understanding, unsought and not laboured for! I conceive that the Almighty could have as little joy in it as in the contemplation of His world depeopled by His avenging wrath.”

“My child—my beloved daughter,” said the old man earnestly, “I beseech you to have care of whom you dispute with in such a fashion. There are some who would hold it blasphemy.”

“That I know,” replied Mary. “But I blaspheme only the opinions of those who would create a God after their own loveless and unlovable image. Where do I err if I conceive that the Holy One—blessed be He!—seeing the greater need of the heathen, out of His infinite mercy may have implanted in some pure and thoughtful mind among them some seed of enlightenment—yes, even more revealing than has been granted Israel—that may work as blessed leaven for their ultimate entire salvation.”

“But this is contrary to all teaching!” exclaimed Samuel. “Salvation is for the children of Abraham—they alone are purified by the acceptance of the Law on Mount Sinai!”

“Who or what can set limits to the Power and the Mercy? Certainly not men nor their earthbound thoughts. By a word, by the lifting of a finger, could not the Holy One—blessed be He!—on the instant make all living men as the children of Abraham? But would it not, conceivably, be more like the wise mercy we attribute to Him to implant that seed of enlightenment which, by gradual flowering and spreading, would bring the heathen to His feet in a knowledge and love of Him the more enduring, and the more profound, from being self-won?”

“Now by my life,” said the old man warmly, “if that be blasphemy, it is a blasphemy that echoes in my own heart! Tell me, Mary, is there any sign of that enlightenment in these books you read?”

“Yes, I believe so. There are many sayings in them that show the writers strive to know the nature and the will of the Godhead.”

“But this reading—these good sayings—are you certain in your own heart that they do not tempt you to stray from the faith of your fathers?”

“No, Rab’ Samuel. All that I have read of heathen philosophies has only strengthened me in that faith.”

“Blessed be the Rock of our salvation!” breathed the old man. “But, Mary, I fear for you. In you there lives again the searching, penetrative spirit that was your grandfather Shirach. Like him, you have gifts that even Hillel himself might have envied. But with all his inborn ability and his learning, Shirach ben Ilai never knew happiness. If that was the case with him, a man, how will it be for you, a woman, lovely to look upon, but with the mind of a man? You are restless, are you not?”

“I think,” said Mary, “that I am eating my heart out.”

“Poor child—poor child! The life of the everyday woman of our people—to marry, have children, keep an orderly and pious household, submit yourself to your husband—that could not content you?”

“There are things I must see for myself,” said Mary in a desperate way through her teeth. “I need food for my mind!”

In the distance a trumpet sounded. The old man came to his feet.

“Yes,” he said, “the sun is setting. We shall talk of this again, my child. Meantime, do nothing in haste. If you are troubled or tempted come to me. Will you promise that?”

“I promise that.”

“Good! Now, rise, my daughter!”

Mary rose. And seeing him in his simple, unaffected way cover his head with the rug she had put about him, she fell behind him as he turned to the west, and covered her own.

“O Lord our God!” prayed Samuel, “make us to lie down in peace, and raise us up again to life, O our King. Spread over us the tabernacle of Thy peace; strengthen us before Thee in Thy good counsel, and deliver us for Thy Name’s sake. Be Thou for protection around us; keep from us the enemy, the pestilence, the sword, famine, and affliction. Keep the Evil One from before and behind us, and hide us in the shadow of Thy wings, for Thou art a God who helps and delivers us; and Thou, O God, art a gracious and merciful King. Keep Thou our going out and our coming in, for life and for peace, henceforth and for ever.

“O Lord our God, Shield of the motherless and fatherless, look Thou upon this Thy daughter Mary, whom Thou hast endowed with such beauty and with so many precious gifts of the mind; neither let her beauty be for her

a cause of temptation nor those gifts a source of pride. O Thou, the Searcher of hearts, of Thy great mercy make plain to her the cause of the disquiet within her, keep her from the haste of anger, and bring her to Thy peace; Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, that keepest from temptation and from pride; Blessed be Thou that stillest disquiet of the heart; Blessed be Thou that bringest peace.”

III

So it was that what had been topmost in her mind since the afternoon never was reached by Mary in her talk with the old elder. Never, that is, in its most disturbing regard. She had meant to tell Samuel ben Shila the whole truth about herself and Lucian. It had been for that, almost completely, that she had led him into the garden. She had welcomed the old man's direct question regarding herself and the Roman commander, but, even while meaning to unburden her mind and heart of the whole truth, had let herself slip into the religious discussion which took her farther and farther away from the opening she wanted.

It was not that in what of self-revelation and belief she had exposed to the old man there was anything insincere or said for effect. She had said no word to him, save in the beginning, that in relation to what lay uppermost in her thoughts was deliberate fencing. Indeed she had not succeeded in saying a thousandth part of what teemed in her of doubt and hope and despair regarding her relationship with the God of her fathers, shadowed as that relationship was by the restrictive limitations and sanctions imposed by the rabbis. It had been a relief to her, this chance for expressing herself to the gentle old man who was so much her friend. For the truth was that neither in Bethany nor in Jerusalem was there another person to whom with either safety or a hope of being understood could she have said so much.

The women of her acquaintance, generally, had small interest in the speculative. The middle class—to the upper fringe of which, by the comparative wealth of her family, Mary belonged—were either wrapt in the affairs of the house and family they had or else in the marriage chances by which they looked to acquire them. The devout among them were largely concerned with being careful in the myriad observances of ‘do’ or ‘do not’ relating to the Sabbath and Levitical cleanness. And much the same may be said of the Jerusalemite women, the rich and otiose, to whom by reason of her beauty and culture and the remembered distinction of her father and grandfather, Mary had access. Mary had a deep interest in stuffs and

ornaments for the decoration of body and living quarters, but she was unable to make that interest a continual or main preoccupation.

As for the men she met, it has already been suggested in what poor regard she held the younger men of her own class. She had even less liking for the Jerusalemite young men whom she met. The serious-minded among them were engrossed, to the exclusion of almost every other interest, with the not very savoury politics relating to the priesthood and such civil offices as Roman rule allowed the Jews. The others were idle and dissolute, given to frequenting the Jerusalem stews, but shallowly informed in the quite considerable culture which was open to them, and covertly lascivious in their talk. Aping the Romans, and much addicted to the pagan amusements of the theatre and the circus, they had all the vices and none of the virtues of the conquering race. But if, as Mary found, to be overheard talking of the Platonic ‘Ideas’ or the ‘logoi spermatikoi’ of the Stoics was to have the pencilled eyebrows of these dandies superciliously raised at her, the difference between them and the older men in this regard was only one of manner. The older men, whether of the high-priestly families or the rich landed or merchant classes, or of the more religiously inclined middle classes, simply could not receive the idea of a woman wanting to use her mind. Even the most lax of the Sadduceans, however amused momentarily they might be by a beautiful woman showing superficial acquaintance with heathen philosophers, would have been shocked to learn that she really read them. The rabbis and their followers, of course, would have been more than shocked—they would have toyed with thoughts of ‘stoning.’ As for the notion that a woman might dispute about the written or traditional Law at all—let alone with an intelligence comparable with their own—they would have viewed it much as a later sage (as positive in a hidebound way as any of them) viewed the idea of a woman’s preaching—“like a dog’s walking on its hinder legs.”

For that insuppressible urge which, from the age of ten, had set Mary bath Abiud to mastering the Greek ‘People’s Bible’ and the other books left by her father, there was in her environment no outlet. There was nobody she knew to whom she could open her mind on equal terms. It was even dangerous for her to open her mind freely.

It may be imagined, then, with what pleasure and relief Mary found herself in the company of Mark Lucian. She knew it was her beauty that, on their first encounter in the Akiba mansion, had attracted the Roman commander to her side. But she had experienced a deeper glow than any mere flattery could have given her when, being called away by some of the

older men, Lucian had summoned—to hold his place by her in his absence—what he called ‘the only intelligence in the room’ worthy of her. This was a middle-aged Greek called Cleon who, though practising as a physician, was Lucian’s tutor in rhetoric and the sciences useful to a soldier, such as geometry and surveying.

“Hold her, Cleon, until I can be rid of the greybeards,” Lucian had said. And though he smiled, his gaze into her eyes was intent. “Tell me,” he asked the Greek, without taking his eyes off Mary, “who taught the young Aspasia?”

“Nay, I know not,” Cleon had replied, “—unless it was her father, Axiochus.”

“Axiochus-Cleon,” said Lucian, “this could be your daughter!”

And with that abruptness of his—so unlike the cultivated smoothness of the Jerusalemites—which Mary found attractive, he left them. It seemed to Mary, so decidedly and actively he moved, that although he was in a modified toga she could hear the clink of armour.

“Who,” she asked the Greek physician, “was Aspasia?”

With the answer to her question there began for Mary an enlarging of her education such as she had dreamt of, but of which all her aching hopes had seemed to be vain. It was not merely that he was full of stories such as that of Pericles and Aspasia. The broad and liberal sweep of Cleon’s mind, its catholicity, was in startling contrast to the narrow and rutted thinking of the rabbis. It amazed her, for a beginning, to hear the Greek express an obviously unfeigned admiration, even a deep reverence, for the One God of Judaic belief. It appeared to Mary that there was no ethical or philosophical idea, whatever its source, to which this Cleon would not offer an open mind. But he had as little tolerance for the Jewish notion of ‘Chosen’ and ‘heathen’ (or Gentiles) as he had for the Aristotelean doctrine of ‘barbarians’ and ‘Greeks.’

“Your rabbis,” he said, “cannot reserve God for the Jewish people. All the world is His sanctuary, and Heaven is for every one who seeks it through Him.”

It was Cleon, Mary thought, who selected the book for her that Lucian brought to the house in Bethany of Joseph Boëthus. This was a treatise by Posidonius, pupil of Panætius the Stoic, on the nature of the gods. Though its monotheism fell short of that of her own people in spirituality, Mary found in it much that was in harmony with her own native ideas. The loan of

this book led to the loan of others. As these were mostly inexpensive, slave-produced copies from Rome, more of them were in Latin than in Greek, the language that Mary greatly preferred. It was not until the *Carmen Sæculare* of Horace came into her hands that she found any liking for the Italian tongue. Thence to the *Æneid*, and from there back to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were almost inevitable steps. But though through poetry both Greek and Latin took on a music hitherto unnoticed by her, her need for them remained, so to say, utilitarian. The deeds of men could not hold her interest. She could not believe in those of the ‘gods.’ She wanted to know the thoughts of men on life and its meaning, and she preferred them in prose. The fact that it was in metre kept her, for a long time beyond this Bethany period of her story, from getting to any depth in even the splendid Epicurean *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius Carus.

IV

The life led by Mary from her meeting with Lucian and his Greek mentor became oddly furtive. But this was in respect only of keeping to herself the excursions she was making into ‘profane’ (or Gentile) literature beyond what was available to her in her father’s small library. For, although the more severe of the decrees enforced by the Shammai school of rabbis against Gentiles, their language, and their literature, were not to be passed for another half century, unauthorized persons like Mary, even at this time, read heathen authors at considerable peril.

Mary had too much self-respect to meet Lucian clandestinely. She met him, if sometimes by prearrangement, only in those high-priestly or Sadducean houses that were open to them both, and this overtly and when other women of reputation were present. The younger of the Bœthus daughters, Zebina, sympathized with Mary’s passion for reading if she did not share it. She was in and out of Jerusalem almost daily, and it was nothing to her to have her servant carry books back and forward as Mary borrowed or returned them. If Mary chose to spend hours in Zebina’s chamber poring over dry-as-dust scrolls, or if on the other hand Mary preferred to take away a volume in a wrap for smuggling into her own home, Zebina did not mind. Zebina had long decided there was that about Mary which entitled her to go her own ways. And that, said Zebina to herself, wasn’t just because she was so lovely to look at.

It was a regret to Mary that Cleon was so little about Jerusalem. The Greek was attached to the Procurator, and so spent most of the year in

Cæsarea. It was only at Passover, or more rarely during one of the other great festivals, that Valerius had residence in Herod's palace over by the Temple. Lucian seemed to be in Jerusalem and Cæsarea according to whether the bulk of his troops were in the one city or the other. But even when he was absent, the arrival of books at the Akiba mansion in Jerusalem was regular and constant.

Mary had an idea that this traffic of books in their *capsæ* or *scrinia* between the two cities was largely due to Cleon, though the Greek never took credit for it. Though she valued the talks she had with Lucian on the matter she read, it appeared to her ultimately that the Roman studied for what the learning could be worth to him. He valued ideas, that is, only in so far as they were 'furnishing' for his mind—equipment for mental encounter with other men. It was much the same attitude as he had to the athletics by which, for his profession, he kept himself bodily fit. Lucian's, Mary thought, was a keener intellect than that of the Greek. The Roman could epitomize the argument and conclusions of a piece of writing, and brilliantly, in a quarter of the time needed by Cleon. But he had none of the glow and fervour, the communicable warmth of appreciation, that informed all Cleon's criticism. Which is to say that, unlike the Greek, he did not love learning for learning's mere sake.

This was the consideration on which Mary, as she told old Samuel ben Shila, found Lucian somewhat repellent, which made her suspect him, as she said, of a "veiled harshness." She knew him to be ambitious, and she believed that the contacts he kept up with the leading Jewish families, his readiness to enter with the men of them into political discussion, were dictated by his ambition. But while she did not blame him for wishing to succeed, the idea that he was of calculating mentality made her suspicious of his motives in helping her towards the extra-Judaic learning for which she craved. Mary was perfectly aware of her physical attractiveness; and she wondered indeed if Lucian would have given so much time and trouble to finding her books to read, and to acting as her mentor in them, had she been plain.

In the months of their acquaintance, however, Lucian had done nothing and said nothing that she found embarrassing. If in passing ways he let her know that he found her attractive, in general he treated her with a blunt sort of respect and consideration—as though conceding to her as a woman the margin of gentleness that he would have denied a mannerly boy. He was scrupulous in avoiding any contact with her at all likely to damage her reputation with her own people, never suggesting a meeting save in some

house to which he had either an invitation or the entrée, and which he knew was open to her. Having once expressed a wish to see her home and that watered garden he had heard about, and having learned that, if not impossible, a visit there by him might come athwart the Gentile embargo, he never recurred to the idea again. And in the same way, having once questioned her closely regarding the consequences for a Jewish woman in having an affair with, or marrying, a Gentile he did not open the subject with her again.

Beyond asking her occasionally about Lazarus—whom he had seen with Mary once in Jerusalem while parading his troops, and again with her in the Boëthus villa in Bethany—he showed no interest in her affairs apart from her reading. He seemed quite content to help her in that regard without any thought of any closer relationship—until that day when, with his friends, he was invited by Mary to avail himself of shade and refreshment in Abiud's garden.

It was this that lay in Mary's mind when old Samuel had gone with his companion elder, Nahum. It lay on her mind regretfully, as the one thing above all she had wanted to confess to the old man. And none the less regretfully for what Samuel had spoken of as he returned with her to the house.

“The Jewish woman who gives herself to a Gentile, Mary, gives herself to a living death. She cannot marry him—unless he becomes a proselyte beforehand, acknowledging the God of Israel, and submitting to circumcision. Wanting that, their union is unlawful. No heathen rite can justify it, no later conversion of the man can remove the stain of adultery. She is outcast from her own people, and can never return to them. To return is death. Living, it were better for her to be a leper.”

“Rab' Samuel—Rab' Samuel—don't go into the house yet! I haven't told you what I brought you into the garden to tell you. The Roman—Lucian—he is leaving Judea and is going to Galilee—in time, to Rome. He wants me to go with him. I don't want to go. But I'm weary of the life I must live in Bethany. And I am tempted . . .”

CHAPTER IV

The Yoke-maker

THE words were never spoken. Had Rab' Samuel been disposed to linger with her in the garden for another minute or two Mary would have brought herself to confessing the temptation in which she stood. But the old man, no doubt anxious to take Nahum ben Kattina off the premises and see the potential scandal averted, in the end had been fussily inclined to bustle. And Mary's consideration for him forbade keeping him out any longer in the sharpening evening airs of the Judean upland. Unhappily, her intention of seeking Rab' Samuel at a more pliant hour on a later day was defeated, for within thirty-six hours of her talk with him the old man was dead.

Although the sensible majority of the Bethany elders saw nothing ominous in the seizure which, suddenly rendering Rab' Samuel powerless and mute, carried him off twelve hours later, there were one or two who followed the embittered Nahum in calling it God's judgment on him for his lenient dealing with Mary. It could not be said, considering his ripe age, that Samuel had been cut off, but having regard to his previous apparent heartiness it could be hinted that death had swallowed him up. There were, besides, plenty of the ignorant and superstitious eager with stuffed nose and open mouth to listen to, and to repeat with exaggeration, Nahum's dark whispers of uncanny happenings that evening in Abiud's garden.

To the unfeigned grief, then, which shook Mary on the mortal illness of her gentle old friend was added the misery of finding herself accused of being responsible. And while she knew the accusation as it was shaped to be cruelly and ignorantly unjust, she could not quite allay her own inward doubts. She could perhaps dismiss the fear of having kept Rab' Samuel out of doors to the point that he had chilled, but she wondered if the whole affair of her Gentile garden-party, the need to defend her in the synagogue and to oppose the harsh measures urged by Nahum ben Kattina, had not upset Rab' Samuel more than his placid gentleness to her had shown. It was certain that Nahum would make vehement objection to Samuel's proposal to let the matter drop, and a good deal might have occurred to disturb the old man after he and the younger had left the house of Abiud. The seizure had stricken Samuel the following evening only a few minutes before he was

due, with Nahum, to report to the rulers in session. What, Mary thought miserably, if agitation on her account had brought on the stroke? She became, on that, almost thankful that she had not reached confession to him regarding Lucian's proposals.

There was no way open to Mary for discovering whether or not her fear of being to blame had any real foundation. By the time the news reached her of Samuel's death, making her hasten with sympathy and a purposed gift for the widow and family, the darker hintings of Nahum's spiteful imagination had wrought evil for her with the bereaved household. Here was other matter for her concern. While it hardly diminished her sorrow, it served in its results to make her forget her doubts and fears, replacing them with a burning resentment and a deeper contempt for the people among whom she had to live.

The widow, old Tabitha, refused to see her. She was practically refused entry into the house of mourning. And while Samuel's son Saruch, a middle-aged man as gentle as his father but without the latter's strength of character, stammered his excuses, Mary became aware that something more than the garden-party had made her an object not merely of suspicion, but of active and fearful dislike, among no few of the many of her neighbours gathered to bewail the dead elder. The murmurings were meant to reach her. They went that she had first cozened, then killed, the old man—by witchcraft.

Close upon the numbing shock that was the first effect of the accusation, there came to Mary a clear realization of the immediate peril in which she stood. That the accusation was baseless, stupid, doltish, was of no moment—of as little account as the fact that even among those murmuring it the bulk so far had scarcely begun to believe it. So far. It wanted from her only the slightest hint of fear, a single look or gesture that could be interpreted as a sign in any way of guilt, and the scarce-born belief would find life. They would be at her, these frightened Judeans, like squawking hens on a crippled bird in a fowl-run.

Over the heads of those who stared at her near the doorway she saw the face of her enemy, Nahum. He was glaring at her balefully. He ached, she knew, to say the words that would set the mob-instinct ablaze. And the knowledge gave her strength. Against all his will she forced him into restraint. He would not, her unwavering regard insisted, give the word that harmed her—for his own sake. If he, an elder, did he would answer for the wrong to the Sanhedrin itself, with members of his own Council the first to testify against him.

The warning carried, for she saw him pluck his underlip in doubt. And she turned to the son of Samuel.

“Saruch,” she said quietly, yet that all round could hear, “your father was as my father’s elder brother, and as a father to me. I loved him greatly. Of my portion from my father there is the small field called Shirach’s close by the rock in which Abiud sleeps. On the other face of that same rock, screened by an acacia and opening from Shirach’s field, there is a cave prepared as a tomb. This, with the part of the field enclosed by the nearest terrace wall, I offer to you in Abiud’s name and memory, and out of my own love, as a resting-place for your father, Samuel ben Shila. So tell your mother, Tabitha. These”—she looked at Nahum and the others, not sparing them her contempt—“shall be for witness of the gift.”

This, the main purpose of her visit, completed, she turned and walked unhurriedly away.

II

If the meeting of the rulers about her entertainment of the Romans was ever held more than informally after the entombment of Samuel its findings were not intimated to Mary. Possibly the mentally better-balanced majority, some of whom almost certainly had talked with old Samuel in passing before his seizure, saw the sense of following his counsel to let the matter blow over quietly. There was, at all events, no official admonition for Mary, nor even any covert warning not to offend in the same way again. The two elders who came with the scribe to witness the act of gift whereby Mary conveyed the cave and land for Samuel’s sepulchre to his family for ever brought, indeed, the warmest thanks of the synagogue session. It was fitting, truly, that one so pure in heart and so manifestly a walker in the Way should repose in such decorous and peaceful environment. But for Mary’s thought, Samuel having been relatively poor, the good old man must have had burial in a lair hardly distinguishable among many others in the common field of the dead. Honouring the worthy Samuel, she honoured—it was felt—all the session, and surely the Holy One—blessed be His name!—would hold her dutiful and generous act in remembrance.

It was noticeable, however, that Nahum ben Kattina (usually so thrusting in the affairs of the session) was not of the two that brought Mary this blessing. And while no few of her neighbours—Bethany, like most towns, having its share of kindly and decent-minded folk—were ready to think well

of her and to give friendly enough countenance, still more there were who inclined to believe all the ill of her Nahum continued to mutter.

If Mary had been readier to accept the kindly advances of the better-hearted of her women neighbours, it is likely that suspicion of her among the more easily swayed to evil-thinking would soon have died down. But, her own private resentments apart, she cared no more for mere hob-nobbing and gossip now than she had at any time. After several contacts with Martha's friends visiting the house, she grew wearied, as a conversational gambit, of praise for her gift to Samuel's family. That was over and done with, the act already recorded in the Temple books. Besides, she resented a veiled suggestion by some of those gossips that her gift, in fact long-determined upon, was merely a device, suddenly thought of, for averting the censure or the punishment that otherwise would have come upon her. At best, she saw in the praise of her generosity only a lead to rather prurient probings into the state of her mind. She could not altogether escape those probings when people came to her home. But she could avoid approach to them in the street. She had always been rather aloof in public, a trifle on her dignity, except with a very few chosen friends. It did not occur to her now that she was at any need to change her demeanour in order to build up popular favour. If anything, her habitual air of aloofness, of being a creature apart, was intensified.

Mary, daughter of Abiud, was more than a well-known figure in Bethany. If her real acquaintances were few, every one knew her by sight. Her ancestry, her reputed wealth, her beauty, her clothes, some hint of her unwomanlike learning and of her queer reluctance to marry—all these had been topics for town gossip. No special condemnation of Bethany need be assumed when it is said that it had its share of the meanly envious. A small township where anyone's business was apt to be every one's business, it was, however, prepared ground for a quick nourishing of the evil report of Mary that was sown by Nahum ben Kattina.

It happened several times, in days soon after the death of Rab' Samuel, that Mary, walking in less frequented of the town's narrow alleys, heard herself obscenely reviled. And on one or two occasions actual filth was thrown at her. The fact that the abuse always was in male tones, and came, like the ordure, from some dark corner of courtyard or common entry, led her to believe that men were acting on urgings and for a consideration from Nahum himself. She was certain, once or twice, that she had seen the tall figure of her enemy slink round some far corner in her path just before she was assailed. Then the women of those back streets began to take a hand,

some of them normally self-respecting and of decent sort. They were bolder than the lurking males and, where earlier they had simply stopped talking at Mary's approach, to stare at her over shoulders in furtive suspicion, they began to face her in open hostility, though waiting until she had passed before shouting their abuse.

It was only in these side alleys to begin with that she met with open insult and molestation. Setting his hirelings to affront her in the more frequented streets, such as that leading through the town from the Jericho to the Jerusalem gate, was more than Nahum dared. The incitement would have been too apparent. But as the days went by the mutterings and the spiteful looks as she passed increased even in the more open parts of the town. Nahum's jackals, of course, were not in the alleys of their habitation during all hours of the day, and there were plenty of a mind to imitate them.

In the end Mary was driven to reducing excursion from her own home to the absolute minimum necessity allowed. Her own resolute spirit rebelled at doing so, and it was less for her own comfort's sake than for the sake of Lazarus that she renounced her freedom.

It seemed to her that the only person alive whose faith in her remained complete, and whose love stood unshaken, was her brother. After the first definite attacks on her, fortunately made when she was alone, she had avoided occasion for being with Lazarus in the streets. But she soon became aware that the boy was troubled for her, and she guessed that some of his schoolmates had been twitting him on account of herself. It was easy, of course, to have the guess confirmed out of Lazarus's own mouth, the youngster being eager in his hurt bewilderment to unburden his heart to her. And it seemed to her then that the wisest thing to do was to tell frankly how she had offended, and explain as best she could how ill report of her had grown and spread out of it.

For all the sweetness of his nature, Lazarus blazed with indignation.

"But they're bad, Mary—the people who say these things of you!" he stammered. "They're bad and cruel!"

"One or two may be," said Mary. "I think the most of them are simply unthinking—stupid."

"Oh, they must be *stupid*! Nobody who knows you could"—he failed of expression, and brooded. Then he announced, "I'm not going to let Ezra or any of the others say things. If they do, I'll—I'll throw them on the ground and beat them!"

“And so prove yourself as stupid as they are? No, my dear, you mustn’t do that. You needn’t listen to them. You can come away——”

“And leave them to insult my sister?”

“Nobody can insult your sister or you,” Mary said grandly. “Anyone base and stupid enough to try it isn’t worth noticing. And anybody worth noticing won’t try it.”

“I think,” faltered Lazarus, “that’s too hard for me, Mary. ‘Anybody base and stupid enough?’”

“Look at it this way, then. If people said bad things about Ezra’s sister would *you* want to make him ashamed of her?”

Lazarus clenched his fists at his side and stuck out his chin.

“*Now* I would!” said he.

Mary felt like laughing and crying at the same moment. This fierceness in her normally so mild-tempered young brother hardly surprised her. She had always felt that the lamb in him was yoked with a lion-cub, and that, given cause, he would assert himself strongly. But the sight of her baby (as she had perhaps over-long regarded him) becoming all at once the man of the family was somehow funny while inflicting its pang. And then the unquestioning loyalty to and faith in herself tugged at a heart that had begun overmuch in recent days to know loneliness.

She smothered her desire to hug him to her, and patiently explained her saying. Maliciousness, like mud-slinging, soiled the perpetrator more certainly than it did the victim. It involved an intentional contact with muck of which the victim was free. Self-respecting and intelligent folk, even for revenge, put mean and dirtying impulses behind them. And only self-respecting and intelligent people were worth bothering about.

“Never squabble, Lazarus,” Mary generalized. “I don’t believe you would, anyhow. But next time you see a squabble going on, just stand away from it and notice how silly and stupid and degrading it looks.”

“A *man* has got to fight sometimes,” said Lazarus.

“That’s different. I’m talking of squabbling,” said Mary. “Words on the tongue of a fool need never anger you, and to answer one is a waste of breath. You may have to fight some day. I hope it will only be for your own protection or to save some one weaker than yourself from cruelty. Then you must fight with all your might, strongly, mercilessly—and silently. Abijah, when you go with him into the hills to learn the tending of your flocks, will

teach you how to wrestle and use the staff. Abijah is cunning as well as strong—the only one, when your father and he were youths, who ever succeeded in putting Abiud on the ground.”

As was usual when his father was talked of, Lazarus was beguiled. Nothing could so commend any course of conduct to the boy as an assurance that it was one Abiud would have followed. He was ready, then, on Mary's persuasion, to regard Ezra and the other offenders merely as stupid fellows, the best answer for whose silly talk was a contemptuous shrug and avoidance of their company. They would very soon forget the amusement if no response gave it point.

Meantime, Mary resolved within herself, she would give the dying-down process every chance by keeping strictly to the house and garden. Although she did not say so to Lazarus, she believed that liking for his pleasant company, all the stronger because he could live so much in his own thoughts, would soon bring the better-conditioned of his fellows to dropping the sort of talk likely to alienate him.

III

Two things at the beginning helped to make tolerable for Mary the seclusion she had put upon herself. One was the companionship of Lazarus, who seemed more than usual to set aside his small affairs in order to be with her. The other was the supply of books that came, by the hands of servants of the Bœthus family, at intervals from Mark Lucian. They were apparently coming again all the way from Cæsarea. A few days after the garden-party which had made so much trouble the Judean Procurator had conducted his guest, Pomponius Flaccus, to the Syrian border. With Valerius had gone Lucian and Felix Scaliger and, of course, the Greek physician-teacher Cleon.

A week or two after Mary's seclusion began the supply, however, failed. She sent one of the hired men to the Bœthus villa, returning the last book she had read, and he came back with the news that the ladies of the house were gone down to Jericho, and that the steward had nothing to send on to Mary. In the course of another day or two Mary, idle, was brought to an extremity of restlessness.

Since the evening of Rab' Samuel's visit, she and Martha had been more than ever at odds. Martha was one of those people, by no means uncommon even to-day, who are capable of sustaining a host of notions, each contradictory of the other, at one and the same time. She had, of course, too

much of an almost mechanical family loyalty to allow any blatant defamation of Mary in her presence. A not ungentle affection, indeed, forbade her believe her sister anything worse than foolishly, exasperatingly wilful. She could and did believe, however, that Mary's entertainment of the Romans had been a perilous transgression of the Law, and she did fear that Samuel's death might be a consequence of his leniency towards Mary's ill-doing. In this, of course, she was coached by Zachary. It was not odd, then, that though Martha had loved and admired the old elder almost as much as Mary did, considering him one of the best men who had ever lived and believing him quite incapable of doing anything to invoke the wrath of Jehovah, she saw no inconsistency in saying his end was a warning to all. Martha, again, though feeling that Mary had done well in giving the land and cave for Samuel's sepulchre, yet was irritated at her for doing so. Remembering that Mary had long before expressed her intention of making the gift when the time came, Martha yet felt that Mary's way of doing so was unseemly. In Martha's view there should have been a prolonged and solemn family conference beforehand, with Zachary in attendance. Something was irritatingly lacking in that all conjurable ifs and ands, pros and cons, and side-issues had not been weighed and weighed again.

Martha believed she had always feared Mary's impatience with the advice of her elders (as represented by Martha and Zachary) would one day get her into trouble. And while she sorrowed inside herself, could even weep to herself for Mary in disgrace, there was relish for her at once in exasperation with Mary for calling the trouble down and in the satisfaction of being able to say, "I told you so!"

It all came, Martha reiterated, from this queer liking of Mary's for unwomanly pursuits, this aping of the rabbi and the scribe, this half-secret poring over heathen and therefore ungodly books, this mannish fiddling with reed pens and ink and paper. True it was, of course, that their father Abiud had encouraged the child to read and make pothooks at his knee, but surely there was a limit? Surely it was never meant to encourage idleness? Idleness—said Martha, pouncing on her own word—that was it! Sloth and indolence! Was there no wool to card and spin, no flax, no seam to stitch; were there no napkins to hem in the house?

Mary would have been grateful, often enough, for some domestic task that she would be allowed to complete without interference. Or, that tiring of, she would be permitted to leave awhile for taking up later. But she knew from experience she could not be for long at any task before Martha was round, advising, criticizing, admonishing her not to neglect some part of the

process she was not in the least likely to forget. Or, if she put the work aside for a little—there being no haste about it—removing it to put in the hands of a serving-woman, most probably usefully occupied already. If Mary joined the handmaidens at their tasks, Martha would inevitably appear to suggest that work was better done without so much laughing and chatter. There was, Mary acknowledged, no real malice behind Martha's interfering. Martha could not help it. It was just her way. But it was, nevertheless, wearisomely discouraging.

There was nothing, then, that Mary could find to do about the house or farm at all likely to allay her growing restlessness. Martha was simply incapable of relinquishing to her any responsibility that would interest her. Mary was quite aware that her intelligence was livelier than her sister's, and she saw many matters about the farm she was certain could be better managed. She saw, for example, that a stronger control was needed over the steward, Kemuel, and better direction given him in trading with the farm-produce. Mary, on evidences found away from the farm, knew Kemuel to be, if not dishonest, lazy. And for a really lazy man he seemed too adroit in handling Martha. It was through a transaction of Kemuel's that Mary came into such oddly disturbing contact with the Galilean carpenter.

IV

"I'm sure," grumbled Martha in passing, "that the carpenter Kemuel's brought in is making the new yoke for Wayward and Willing far too light. Kemuel thinks so too."

"Why don't you stop him, then?" asked Mary. "Or Kemuel?"

"I don't like to. Nor does Kemuel. He's so—so sure of himself."

Mary let the girdle she was listlessly embroidering drop on her lap, the better to stare. This, coming so oddly across her thoughts of Martha's interfering and fussy ways, was almost startling in surprise. She had just taken notice that Martha, though grumbling mechanically, really was not as fretful as cause for complaint usually made her, when the latter sprung still another surprise on her.

"Maybe you could talk to him," Martha suggested, "you that think yourself so clever with words."

Mary put her needlework into her basket and rose from the garden-bench. The odd affair might be worth investigating. It sounded as if Kemuel

was up to something.

“Who is this man?” she asked. “What’s happened to our usual carpenter, Lubim?”

“Lubim’s crippled. A beam in an old house fell on his shoulder. This is a man Kemuel hired through Lubim,” said Martha. “An itinerant.”

“Where is he?”

Martha recovered some of her normal tartness.

“Where would he be, ninny, but in the courtyard?”

Mary walked through the garden and under the arch into the court of the farm proper. There she found Lazarus and the ox-driver, Jonas, watching the carpenter, who was testing the new yoke for fit on the necks of the handsome pair of matched fawn oxen. As she entered the yard Lazarus heard the rustle of her skirts, looked about, and, seeing it was she, came eagerly to meet her. His eyes, his whole face and being, were agog with interest.

“Come and see—oh, Mary, come and see the new yoke he’s making for poor Wayward and old Willing!” he cried, grasping her hand.

“I’m coming,” Mary protested. “There’s no need to make me run, is there?”

As she approached, the carpenter lifted the yoke off the beasts’ necks, and waved a hand above the flies that crowded the off-side animal’s soft muzzle. From a near-by ledge he picked up a double-handled tool such as Mary had never seen before—a sort of spokeshave, it was—and, with the yoke up-ended on the ground and rested on his shoulder, waited good-manneredly for Mary to speak.

“Peace be on you, friend!” said Mary.

“And on your spirit, lady!”

Very white teeth showed in a smile through the silky, never-shorn beard and moustache. These, in their bleaching, betrayed with the deep tanning of the carpenter’s skin the work of a much hotter sun even than that of Palestine. His eyes were remarkable. In the moment that she could let her own gaze rest on his Mary thought them, in their irises, of so pale an amber as to be colourless. It was not until later that she saw the effect was by contrast with the ruddy tan of his skin, and that in reality they were as full of a rich golden glow as were her own or those of Lazarus. In that first look they seemed to have such penetrative power as to give the sensation of

actual impact. And it was this, with the disturbing feeling that the quiet words returning her greeting revealed instant knowledge of her spirit's unrest, that made her drop her gaze to the sinewy hands resting on the yoke. As she did so, the hands took up the spokeshave tool, turned the yoke with its twin hollowings outward, and began to take thin shavings off that surface of the uppermost hollow which would have contact with the bullock's shoulder. Now and again the fingers would testingly caress the shaven surface. The man, thought Mary, was obviously a skilled and careful worker—but still, only a carpenter.

Only a carpenter. About the poorest paid among tradesmen. What nonsense, then, to be disturbed by his pale-eyed gaze, to attribute significance to his answering greeting, unusual though the words might be. Mary took courage to look at the carpenter again.

He was leaning for support against the stable wall, the toes of his unsaddled feet being engaged in gripping the yoke's lower end. He had cast aside his cloak and tunic, and had girded the skirts of his shirt up between his bare legs into his girdle. His legs were as browned as his face, as if he had lived naked in the wilderness, and they were as beautifully muscled as the browned arms issuing from the knotted-back sleeves. His hair, finely-kempt, was long enough to have fallen on his shoulders, had it not been gathered back for working into a corded knot on the nape of his neck. It had the same silky quality as his beard and moustache, but its bright golden-brown showed none of the sun-bleaching noticeable in those. His face could not be said to be more than comely in its features, but there was distinction and nobility in the sum of them. And it struck Mary that, though his concentration was all on this simple task of yoke-making, she had never seen a man in whom the answerability of all faculties to his intention was so complete.

As she watched, the carpenter put the tool back on the ledge and carried the yoke back for another fitting on the necks of the oxen.

“Look, Mary—look!” Lazarus whispered urgently, squeezing her fingers. “That's what I mean!”

The carpenter was testing with his fingers the hollowing of the yoke alternately with a bared and corny patch of skin that knobbed on the off-side animal's left shoulder. He rested the yoke on fingers laid over the rubbed patch, then slowly drew them away as the neck took the yoke's weight. Then, as he lifted the yoke off again, he turned to the ox-driver with a smile and a nod.

“A little patience, friend Jonas,” he said, “and this Wayward will show you how sadly he is misnamed. He need not now be afraid, as I know he has never been truly unwilling, to throw all his weight into the yoke.”

“What was the matter with him?” Mary moved forward to ask.

“Why, lady, a gather of a sinew-end here on the shoulder. No allowance was made for it in the old yoke, and the full burden of that side fell on the gather. Pain would run through the whole shoulder back into the shoulder-blade, and down the leg, so that the whole flank pained and was wearied.”

Mary’s interest quickened to hear him use the Greek *omos* and its derivative *omoplate* in reference to the shoulder.

“And you have allowed for it?”

“Yes, lady. Wayward can now press his whole fore-shoulder into the yoke without hurt. But with this yoke he must always be kept on the shaft’s off-side.”

“My sister and our steward fear you have made the yoke too light.”

It was then that she realized how rich in actual colour were the carpenter’s eyes. They widened and glowed with humour as he chuckled.

“But you, I think, are not afraid of what is new,” he ventured. “And you can give ear to reason.”

“Let us see,” said Mary.

The carpenter put a demonstrative foot on the old yoke. It had broken where the loop for the shaft was pegged through.

“The Judean yoke always tends to be over-heavy,” he said.

“Our soils are stony, and our ways rough,” she reminded him.

“True, lady. But still no reason for putting weight not needed on oxen from whom those soils and roads demand so much heavier toil. This broken yoke—it is even bulkier than is usual in the Judean pattern. Can you see why?”

“No,” said Mary.

He picked up his adze which was leaning against the wall, and drove its blade into the broken yoke. He pushed the handle forward effortlessly, and a thick ragged chunk of brittle wood came away.

“Sapwood,” said the carpenter. “A third of the yoke’s bulk was fibreless, without strength—a useless weight, though not heavy, on the necks of your oxen. A poor quartering of terebinth, full of knots and shakes, and unseasoned at that. Look now, lady!”

With the adze he struck a sizeable chip out of the old yoke’s sounder face. Then he bade her compare the resulting surface with that which his adzing had given the new yoke. The latter, he showed her and the interested Lazarus, was of true oak, heartwood all through, and properly seasoned. It offered to the glancing blows of the adze a much better chance than the terebinth did of compacting its fibres into an almost polished, weather-resisting surface. Bulk for bulk it was, of course, heavier than the terebinth, but its greater strength allowed its use in smaller dimensions.

“I have seen divers yokes in many countries,” said the carpenter, “and I say to you that the most practical yoke is that, sufficiently strong, which is easiest on the ox. How can the animal exert his full strength if he is chafed and galled?”

“Your thought for the animal’s comfort, then,” said Mary, evocatively, “is simply practical?”

He laid aside the adze and picked up the new yoke, to rest his hands in its upper hollow as earlier, before answering her.

“Lady,” he said quietly, “my thought does hold that, but it goes farther. I remember that though the Father of us all—blessed be His holy Name!—thought it good to withhold the power of reason from the beasts, they are still His creatures. Were we given these humble helpers, think you, to answer their dumb protests against the clumsily made and thoughtlessly cruel yoke, against the task beyond their patient strength, only with the more thoughtless and cruel goad?”

“Most surely not,” said Mary, contrite.

“Most surely not,” agreed the carpenter. “Yet these dumb creatures of the Father—the ox, the ass, the horse, the camel, the beasts of burden alone—if they could cry aloud for pain how hideous with constant lamentation were our waking hours, even in this land of the Covenants! A goodly noise, forsooth, and gracious to the hearing of Him who made all living things!”

Imagination carried Mary to shuddering point. She felt like covering her ears.

“Surely it is heard,” she cried, “that dreadful dumb lamentation?”

The carpenter up-ended the yoke the other way about, picked up the spokeshave tool, and made a tentative stroke with it in the near-side hollow before answering.

“It is surely heard, lady,” he said quietly. “Do *we* not hear it—you and I who have learned only in part to listen? And shall not the Father, by Whom and for Whom in us we seek to listen, shall He not clearly hear the crying of His creatures? And shall He not hold to account the sons of men who cause it?”

He fell to shaping the yoke’s near-side hollow with the same concentration as Mary had noted earlier, and for the life of her she could not bring herself to break into it. Martha was hemming at the kitchen-door on the other side of the courtyard, and Mary went across to join her.

“Well, you’ve been long enough,” said Martha, and demanded, “Did you tell him?”

“I did. But he knows more than you or Kemuel ever knew, or can know,” said Mary, “—and not only about yokes!”

V

The strange carpenter was about the farm for several days. The disputed yoke when completed proved so obviously efficient, and brought about such a transformation in the ox Wayward that even Martha came to talk of ‘magic.’ The carpenter’s prophecy that Wayward would show himself sadly miscalled was fulfilled the first time the new yoke was fitted on his neck and shoulders. The off-side ox when forced to move by his yoke-mate, Willing, set off as usual favouring the harness on his near side. But presently the shape of the hollow in the yoke of itself slid him fully into occupying it. Lazarus, who was watching the trial, told Mary that the great beast seemed to grunt satisfaction as he settled his magnificent power into the smooth-fitting yoke and breast-hoop, and began to show his yoke-mate what pulling really was.

“I always *thought* Wayward was stronger than Willing,” said Lazarus. “And not really lazy, either. Jonas always thought so too. And now, of course, he thinks the world of Yeshu——”

“Of whom?”

“Of Yeshu—Yeshu the carpenter, you know—Yeshu bar-Nasha.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Mary.

It struck her that the name was strange, as though it had been assumed. And the notion momentarily disappointed her. It seemed to confirm a thought that the carpenter was one of those wandering, self-appointed ‘holy men,’ mostly poorly educated and often half-crazed, with whom Palestine was infested. Many of them used names assumed or adapted from apocalyptic writings, such as the Book of Daniel. It might be, of course, that Lazarus had picked up the name wrongly. Although the carpenter had none of those locutions, uncouth in the Judean ear, which marred the speech of north-country people, there were cadences in his voice which suggested he was from Galilee. And possibly the patronymic was a Galilean variant of some name well enough known in Judea.

Mary dismissed the speculation from her mind, at least in so far as it suggested this Yeshu was simply one of those semi-idle and half-crazed ‘Rabs’ who wandered about the country preaching. Wanderer he might be. There were hints in his talk, and at secondhand from Lazarus, that he had wandered far indeed—beyond the Two Rivers and the Indus itself. But half-crazed and semi-idle he manifestly was not. His consideration for the beasts of burden, if uncommon, was not exceptional. Her own father, Abiud, had shown it himself and strictly required it of his servants. But what was exceptional was the profound pity and understanding begetting the consideration, the loving regard for the animals as God’s creatures, a pity and understanding and love informed at the same time by sanity and sparkling common sense. No lazy ‘Rab,’ this, deceiving himself with devoutness as an escape to idleness from the common round of toil and self-support. Nor again the sort of man that would lend himself with Kemuel to dishonest bargaining. That idea had quickly vanished.

Although the carpenter, as already said, was about the farm for several days (the chance being taken to employ his outstanding skill on farm implements and buildings wanting repair), Mary avoided occasion for further talk with him. In this she went against inclinations neither vague nor inwardly unacknowledged. She wanted to talk with him again. She wanted to know in particular what he had meant in ranging her alongside himself as one who had “learned only in part to listen,” and again what he meant in saying, “the Father, by Whom and for Whom *in us* we seek to listen.” It seemed to Mary that a heartwarming conception of man’s kinship with the Godhead was here suggested, if somewhat reconditely. It was not at all destroyed for her in a seeming disconnexion between the two sayings. It was

a conception which no Rabbi or Gentile philosopher in her experience had anywhere approached. She longed to have the carpenter expound it.

Mary's studied avoidance of the Galilean was not easier to keep to in that it made her, with Zachary, an exception from the rest of the household. Save for Lazarus, for whom he apparently conceived a great liking, the carpenter did not encourage company when he was working. But during rest-spells, or at meal-times, he was usually ready to talk, and most of the people about the house tried to get near him. Even Martha could find time for a word with Yeshu, and Zachary's nose, in the common phrase, was rather out of joint. It amused Mary, somewhat wryly, to find herself in like case with the detested pedant, with reason for avoiding the carpenter little different from his. Zachary, who had begun by parading his knowledge of the Law to the stranger, and had been straitly answered, was afraid of having his rabbinical shallowness further exposed. Mary feared that some uncontrollable impulse would make her talk of her spirit's unrest. She had an uncanny feeling that the Galilean had already fathomed it. And she was certain that he would quickly convict her too of shallowness if she held back any of the causes from which her unrest was sprung. She shrank from full exposure of the causes, and was as much dismayed as astonished to discover how concerned she was not to be found shallow-minded by this stranger, this itinerant carpenter.

VI

After an unexpected visit from Felix Scaliger, both the longing to speak with the Galilean and the shrinking reluctance to indulge it were intensified for Mary. Felix came riding one afternoon to the end of the garden overlooking the Jericho road. Mary, from her favourite seat under the trees of the first terrace, heard his horse and his groom's draw up in the roadway, and she rose apprehensively. Then she saw him obviously standing on his horse's back to look over the wall. As he caught sight of her, she went forward to stop him from coming farther, but he was astride the wall and into the garden before she had gone three paces towards him.

Mary wanted to get rid of him; but the harm his visit was likely to do was already done, and she was surprisingly glad to see the young Roman. She quickly told him—it was certainly true, if not quite in the sense she meant to convey—that his half-clandestine visit to her would cause trouble in that it made her break a Jewish law. She hated being inhospitable, but he would have to be gone quickly, having given her his news. They walked

back to the roadside wall, Felix all dismay and inclined to stammer at causing her distress by his clumsy subterfuge.

His news was that he was on military business in Jerusalem for a day or two. He had left Lucian and Cleon, both well, at Strato's Tower, and both had asked him to convey their respectful good wishes to her. Lucian bade him tell her that he, Mark Lucian, would now definitely be moving in a week's time from Cæsarea into Galilee to take up the military mission, already mentioned to her, at the court of the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas.

"Does that mean a move for you also?" asked Mary.

"Very likely. Promotion and a move somewhere—but not to the Tetrarchy."

"Did Cleon—or Lucian—send any books?"

"No books. There is a letter from Lucian. Here it is."

Felix brought from his scrip—he was not in armour—a small roll of thin parchment, and handed it to her. They were at the wall overlooking the road.

"Thank you, Felix," said Mary. "And now, farewell!"

"Farewell, Mary," the soldier replied, and hesitated: "I may not come to see you again?"

"Not often, Felix. Once before your return to Cæsarea, and then openly by the street gate to the garden."

"If I have a message for you?"

"Send it by a public porter, in writing, and not by a legionary."

Felix raised his hand in salute, and dropped over the wall to his horse's back. Next moment he and the groom were clattering up the hill towards the town-gate. Mary watched them go, and saw that Felix had the sense to skirt the town by the bridle-path that went about the walls, to join the main road where it emerged on the west from the Jerusalem Gate.

Lucian's letter brought no news beyond that given her by Felix, but it urged her to consider the proposal made to her that day in the garden. Would she not leave her narrow life in bleak Judea and take up a more spacious, fuller one with him in smiling Galilee? And in time they would go on together to Rome, where a magistracy would be certain for him. His love for her possessed him entirely, and it would endure.

In this way the temptation that beset her was revived. It was made more urgent still by the reminder of the narrowness of her life which came with her reception indoors as a result of Felix's call. Martha, informed by Zachary, herself had seen the young Roman leave Mary and drop over the wall.

Mary, in the end, silenced Martha's tirade with a chill sarcasm that she had never used to her sister before, and that reduced Martha to tears. But by then Martha had said things which killed any respect or kindness Mary had left for her. Whatever the outcome, Mary knew for certain that she could be housed with Martha and her toady Zachary no longer. Wherever she might go, she could not and would not live any longer in Judea.

VII

It was for Lazarus's sake that Mary broke through her reluctance and went to speak with the Galilean.

On the day before the visit of Felix, Lazarus had come to her bubbling over gleefully with a great secret. He had been fascinated by a description given him by his friend Yeshu of men in some far country who walked on stilts. And Yeshu had promised to make him a small pair before taking the road again. They would be safe and easy to manage, but Lazarus when using them would stand a head taller probably than any man in Judea.

The plot was that Yeshu would make the stilts secretly in Lubim's workshop and carry them to one of the outfields where he was doing some repairs. There, after morning school, Lazarus would join him, and Yeshu would show him how to walk on the stilts. Then would come the great surprise for everybody. Being proficient, Lazarus would carry the stilts to the house. Hiding in a corner behind the barn, he would contrive to get as many of the household as possible into the courtyard. Then, behold, there he would be walking about the yard certainly a cubit taller even than Jonas!

Up to a point Lazarus's gleeful plot was a success. Mary, having been warned to be ready for the show, was there in time to see it and to applaud. The wonderment and applause indeed were genuine, loud, and almost general, the exception being the raven croak of Zachary crying, "Iniquity, iniquity!"

Unfortunately, and probably as a result of the scene with Mary overnight, Martha was in one of her most captious moods of righteousness.

She had begun to feel that since the coming of the Galilean an enfeebling warmth, a slackening in seemingly rigidity, had crept into the observances of the Law about the farm. So that Zachary's denunciation of the stilts as a sinful artifice for improving on the work of the Almighty had her full support. It was obviously true that if the Lord wanted a boy to have legs nearly three cubits long He would *give* the boys legs that long. For anyone to lengthen his legs artificially was, manifestly, a sin.

“‘Upon thy belly,’” quoted Martha darkly, “‘shalt thou go all the days of thy life.’”

Zachary plucked his beard uneasily, looking left and right.

“That,” he murmured, “was said to the serpent.”

“Eh?” said Martha crossly.

“The serpent—in Eden.”

“Oh!” said Martha, and produced another of her dialectical masterpieces: “Well, it comes to the same thing, anyway. They're abominations unto the Lord, these things. They must be broken up for firewood.”

A stifled wail arose from Lazarus. It was more than Mary could bear. But, knowing the futility of intervening on the ethical side, she kept her temper and played for time with a practical suggestion.

“Isn't that rather a waste? They're so beautifully made. Perhaps,” she said slyly, but giving Lazarus a reassuring squeeze the while, “they could be sold for use by some Gentile child, or made into a hand-cart?”

The appeal to thrift succeeded.

“Well, there'd be no harm in that,” said Martha. “But they're to be put away. Lazarus is not to walk in them again, especially,” she added piously, “on the Sabbath!”

She shoed her people back to their duties, and stalked majestically into her kitchen, followed by Zachary.

Mary led Lazarus through the archway into the garden. There he could keep back his grief no longer, and she gathered him into her arms.

“Be easy, take comfort, my darling!” she soothed him. “You shall have your stilts again; your friend Yeshu would never have made them for you if using them were a sin. Let's leave it to him. I'll speak to him when he comes in the evening to get his wages.”

Mary watched from the garden's end and saw the carpenter come up from the fields to the town-gate. She put herself in his way when he came in from the street, to find that he had already heard from one of the farm-hands about the stilts. The implied censure on his own lack of judgment merely amused him.

“Now let no child walk on a wall or climb a tree!” he said ironically. “Let all men break and burn their mattocks and spades, their hoes and flails, and let them till their fields with their proper hands alone! Let them ride no ass, yoke no oxen, make or use no plough! For, according to the sage Zachary, here is a new commandment: Thou shalt neither lengthen nor aid thy limbs by any artifice!”

He laughed shortly, and became stern.

“Zachary—that mindless splitter of imagined hairs! And the *domina*, too! To wring the heart of a happy boy with such folly—*there* is the real iniquity! Be assured. I shall speak to those two, and speak roundly. I will not shake Bethany's dust from my feet until Lazarus is given back his toys to enjoy in fit season.”

He put down his goat-hair sack of tools (he was ready for the road), and walked over to the kitchen-door. Mary returned to the garden.

Half an hour later, brooding, she saw the skirts of a man standing near her, and looked up into the contemplative scrutiny of the Galilean.

“I have come to bid you farewell, Mary.”

“I am glad, Yeshu, you did not go without doing that.”

“About Lazarus's stilts. I cannot claim to have made Zachary and your sister see reason,” he smiled, “but I have left them somehow persuaded that the toys are not evil. They will be given back to Lazarus in the morning.”

“Thank you, Yeshu.”

He regarded her quietly for a moment or two. Then he said:

“Mary—isn't there something you would tell me before I go?”

“No, Yeshu,” replied Mary, but looked on the ground. “The Holy One—blessed be His Name!—prosper you in all your ways and give you peace.”

He gave her no conventional answer, but spoke so that voice and saying seeped into her consciousness without startling her:

“I know you stand on what, for a Jewish woman, is the brink of an abyss.”

“How can you know that?”

“Let it be enough that I do know. You do not deny it. In mere fear of telling it you have avoided me.”

“Yes.”

“I must not help you. You must listen for yourself.”

“Listen?”

“Each one of us, Mary, is two. One is of the earth, with ears only for the sounds of earth, desire only for earthly satisfactions. It has life as a flower has life, and, though like a flower it may pass life on through its seed, like a flower it must perish. It is the living, but mortal, essence of the flesh.

“The other,” he went on, after a pause, “is of the Presence, not indeed of the Creator’s substance, but by Him given some quality of that Substance, able to absorb and reflect His radiance—above all, able to hear His voice. It is the spirit, and, being akin to the Divine Substance, it is eternal. As a man dwells within a house, yet is separate from it, so is the spirit tabernacled in the flesh, yet, though seemingly blent with it, apart. The flesh is ours, the spirit is ours, both given by the Father and therefore sanctified, and we are free to use them as we will. Here then, Mary, is the human calling: not despising the flesh, which is the gift of the Father, to glorify Him by using it for His purposes, at the same time employing His gift of the spirit in listening for His voice. For the one cannot be achieved without the other. Only when the self of the flesh is led by the self of the spirit are our double selves made one. This oneness attained, sin is impossible. For we are at one with the Father.”

“I desire greatly to reach that oneness, Yeshu. Teach me how!”

“Mary,” said the carpenter, almost sadly, “my time for teaching is not yet come. I humbly thank the Father that the way to that oneness is opened for me, but I have still much to learn. Yet this I will say to you. As I know of the disquiet that lies upon your spirit, I also know that pride and impatience alone stand between you and inward peace. Cleanse your heart of pride, of anger, of vain longings. Let your spirit stand alone in that cleansed tabernacle and be still—and listen. And, since one may become prisoner of a thought, do not pray with your mind. Let your spirit, contrite and humble, say only this: Our Father. And the Father, hearkening, will tell you what He desires to hear.”

He laid a hand gently on her shoulder. When presently she looked up, still feeling it, the carpenter had gone.

CHAPTER V

Revolt

FELIX SCALIGER went back to Cæsarea. And now it seemed to Mary that escape from the oppressive restriction of her life in Bethany was cut off, if not once and for all, at least for years to come. She had made her decision. But that which had inhibited acceptance of the means of flight offered by Lucian stood, also, against open departure to take up life as she might by herself elsewhere. This, of course, was her love for and her sense of duty towards Lazarus.

The episode with Mark Lucian was at an end. He had gone at last to Tiberias, and there would be no more of those periodic visits to Jerusalem which military duty in the province under direct Roman control had involved. With the idea that he might come again to Judea, either on leave or with the Tetrarch of Galilee on some visit of state, Mary refused in her mind to play. She decided that she did not wish to see Lucian again. It would simply mean a revival of the temptation, with the inhibitive factor as strong as ever.

Something of this Mary had tried to put to Felix on his farewell visit. Defying Martha, and daring the censure of Nahum ben Kattina and the like, she had invited the young Roman to come openly to the house. And though she walked and talked with Felix in the garden, of set purpose under the eyes of anyone in the household who chose to watch, he contrived to plead his senior's cause with no little eloquence.

“But what will you do, Mary?” he asked, when it became plain that his mission had failed. “You admit yourself that your life in Bethany is too narrowed to be borne. I am not learned like Lucian and Cleon—look how you laugh when I try to speak Greek—and reading is not in my line. But I know from them how clever you are. I can see it for myself. And I understand what they mean when they say you are wasting your life here—I mean, beyond the fact that you're so very lovely as a woman. That, of course, is the way I look at it—I mean, as rather a simple sort, not clever, but just a man. To me you're the loveliest woman I've ever seen, and if Lucian—well, any man would be proud of you if you were his. He could take you anywhere. You'd be a sensation in Rome.

“It’s such a waste for you to live here—in Bethany. You say yourself you can’t do the things you want to do. You can’t get the writings you’d like to study, and even if you could get them you’d have to read them secretly, more or less. I won’t claim that I understand you wanting to be a physician—that’s beyond me—but I don’t see why you shouldn’t study medicine—yes, and practise it—anyhow among women and children, if you want to.

“But, Mary, do you know,” Felix went on with a shrewdness Mary was inwardly amused to acknowledge, “I believe you think you want to be a physician only because you’re desperate for something to do. It’s reading about this old boy—what’s his name? Hippocrates—that has given you the idea. I’ll admit he must have been a wonder if, as you say, the Greeks classed him with Hercules. But you don’t really want to play midwife to a lot of stuffy Jewish women or go about dosing their brats with theriacs.”

“You’re wrong at least about the brats, as you call them,” Mary made the half-admission.

“Aspasia’s more your style,” Felix insisted. “But even at that you wouldn’t want to be in the portico or the academy all the time. What you need is gaiety, a good laugh now and then, merry company in a bacchanal—*dulce est desipere in loco*, as Lucian keeps saying.”

“Which is not quite what was meant by Horatius Flaccus,” laughed Mary.

“There you are!” Felix said triumphantly. “I didn’t know Lucian had stolen the line. Why, you’re more than half a Roman already! And that’s what I mean. With Lucian you’d have freedom. Although a first-class soldier, he’s an intellectual, able to appreciate your wits as well as your beauty. You and he together would be a success. You’d be among people with whom you could make the best of yourself. There would be no danger for Lucian in marrying you.”

“Thank you!” said Mary. “I’m glad of that!”

“No, no! Don’t take me up wrongly! I’m thinking of *you*. I’m thinking that if marrying you meant a check or a set-back in Lucian’s career, it would mean also some insecurity for you. Roman law on marriage is a bit complicated. I don’t know much about it. You wouldn’t I suppose, wish to be married by our religious rites?”

“For me, a Jewess, it would be impossible! It would mean forsaking the God of my fathers!”

Mary's revulsion was genuine. But Felix—if, indeed, he noticed it at all—seemed to make little of it. And she realized that his admiration for her, respectful enough and deep though it manifestly was, still could not diminish his conviction that the suggested alliance with Roman Lucian did her, mere *peregrina*, no negligible honour. The realization, bitter in its first impact, began to amuse her. It provoked her to impishness. She looked at Felix, now knitting his brows in an effort of concentration notably boyish, and she checked a giggle.

“Lucian wouldn't, I suppose, wish to be married by Jewish rites?” she queried. Then she added hurriedly. “But, of course not, that's impossible!”

“Yes, yes, of course, impossible!”

“No rabbi would, or could, perform them.”

“Eh?”

“Unless, that is, Lucian accepted the Jewish faith. We Jews, you see, are not allowed under the Law to marry with barbarians.”

“Barbarians! You can't call us Romans 'barbarians'!”

“Why not? The Greeks did, having been like us a people for æons before Romulus populated the Palatine with riff-raff.”

“Divine Augustus! I never heard such——”

“Well, if you don't like being regarded as barbarians—*gentiles*. Unlike you Romans, who seem to be allowed to marry anybody, we Jews cannot marry with Gentiles. If we do we are no longer Jews.”

Felix suddenly grinned.

“Well, from your own account,” he said, “that would seem to be no great punishment. It isn't any good, Mary,” he went on. “You won't fool me into growing hot any more, so don't try it. All I've been trying to say is that Lucian will want to deal honourably with you—I mean by that, make you his wife as securely as Roman law permits. He'd be a fool if he didn't tie you to him securely. You're so lovely that no man can look at you without wishing you were his.”

For a moment then Mary had felt something less than mistress of herself. Regarding Felix as a mere boy, his obvious attraction towards herself, gratifying though it was, had amused rather than stirred her. Warned by it, she had yet thought it callow—something to be pitied. Here, however, she suddenly became aware that she had been condescending overmuch, perhaps

too patronizingly, to something too rare and too sincere to be so slightly treated. It dawned on Mary all at once that Felix was not so much the mere boy as she had thought him. If he was a year or two short of the absolute physical perfection that, setting accident or disease aside, most certainly would be his, he was already an experienced soldier. He had been, Mary knew, through at least two arduous campaigns. Unlike herself, he had seen far horizons on sea and land, overtaking them day after day only to find fresh ones. It was only in the book-learning in which Mary herself took pride that he lacked experience. It was unlikely he would ever overtake Lucian or herself in that regard. He had not the required interest in it.

Mary was herself too young, and at the same time still too taken up with the pursuit of learning, to formulate the truth that one may be too full of knowledge to have any room for wisdom. But she divined instinctively that Felix, if he had not the mentality for scholarship, would never justly be regarded as a fool. He would always have a sufficiency of wisdom for his needs. Already he had the air of command, even of distinction, and she had seen enough of him in other company to know that, for his age and apart from his being of the conquering race, he had a way of winning respect. He had the quality that the Romans called ‘virtue.’

When Felix, pleading Lucian’s cause, told Mary that no man could look at her without wishing her his, she had become at once aware of the depth of Felix’s own longing. She could not help feeling stirred by it. And even as she told herself that it revealed a situation she could not in fairness allow to develop, she knew that the like yearning heard in the voice of Lucian himself would have broken down her resistance. As it was . . .

“It is impossible, Felix,” she had said with finality.

“Mary—I—I must see you again.”

“Better not, I think,” she replied, tempering the kindness she felt, for the pleading had been for Felix himself.

He had come on the eve of the Sabbath, and their talk in the garden had brought them near to the sunset. Making the impending infraction of the Law her excuse, Mary had hurried him into the farewells. And, bewildered though he was as usual by her Jewish foibles, the young Roman had gone with a dignity which Mary for the first time in their acquaintance found some difficulty in equalling.

She had been perilously near to tears when she shut the street-gate on Felix. To dry them came anger at the almost immediate closing-in upon her

of the restricted life to which the putting away of temptation seemed to doom her. According to Martha, egged on by Zachary, Mary's 'wantoning' with the Roman had defiled the Sabbath.

II

Such an easy confutation of her tormentors' niggling strictures as on that Sabbath eve Mary had found to hand was not available to her in respect of her transgressions on the following Sabbath proper. Then, to prove either that the Sabbath had not come or that both Martha and Zachary were as much in sin as herself, she had only to point to the still-burning kitchen fire and to the unwashed Zachary—a rat still away from his own hovel.

There was, to begin with, the repetition of her weeks-old refusal to attend the synagogue. This, in a woman, was not necessarily sinful, but in Mary's case it was unseemly.

In the episode of the beggar Mary did break the Sabbath according to the rules laid down by the rabbis. In the late afternoon Lazarus came to her with word that a poor man lay in the street against the courtyard-wall apparently near death with hunger or exhaustion.

"He has no legs, Mary," Lazarus said, almost voiceless with pity. "I gave him my two pennies, but he could hardly take them."

Mary hurriedly pushed under a rug the portion of the works of Alexandrian Philo that she had been reading, and got to her feet. Her first impulse was to call Martha, who was resting, but thinking of the almost inevitable fuss that would ensue she determined to act on her own findings.

"Stay inside, Lazarus," she commanded the boy, who was about to follow her. It was in her mind that the beggar might be leprous, but too exhausted to have been able to warn Lazarus from him. She ran out of her room, through the garden, and out into the street by the garden-gate.

The man was lying, as Lazarus had said, against the confining wall of the farm courtyard. His face was fish-belly white where a rusty beard did not cover it, and the skin was tinily beaded with moisture. Two rough crutches lying by him, and a seat of hide laced to the loin-cloth wrapping the lower part of the legless torso, showed how the man would ordinarily get about. Bethany, with all its faults, held many charitable people—too charitable, Mary knew, to refuse shelter on the Sabbath to such a poor creature had he entreated it—and she guessed that he had been overcome by sudden

weakness while making his painful way to some definite objective. He was not, she thought, of Bethany. And it occurred to her in a way that made her shrug, as she swiftly knelt by him, that if he had come into the town that day he had broken the Sabbath-law rather flagrantly. He carried no mark of the leper on the thin body much exposed by a very ragged shirt. It would have made no difference in Mary's ministrations if he had.

"Water, my poor man?" she suggested, clear-voiced.

The head sunk on the breast lolled towards her slightly, the eyelids lifted heavily and fell again, and she thought his lips moved. She rose to her feet again and hastened back into the house. In the kitchen she put bread and meat on a platter, and filled a cup with strong wine. Taking the platter and the wine and a second cup, and snatching up a clean cloth, she hastened to where a semi-porous pitcher of water hung cooling in draughty shade. She soaked the cloth, and filled the second cup. Lazarus, watching her anxiously, but giving her swift actions sensible clearance, now brought himself into her notice.

"Is Kemuel about the steading, or Jonas?" Mary asked.

Lazarus shook his head. "They're both visiting their families," he said. "Abijah, though, is asleep in the straw-barn."

"Wake him, darling. Bid him make a bed of fresh straw in a sheltered corner."

"For the poor man outside?"

"Yes, of course. And tell him when he has done that to come to me."

"Yes, Mary."

Lazarus ran off to do her bidding, and almost as quickly Mary returned with her burden to the sick man in the street.

Putting platter and cups aside handily, she knelt and with her arm about his shoulders wiped the dusty moisture from his eyes and face. His eyes opened, and an unintelligible croak came through the matted beard. Mary put the cloth clear of the street dust on the crosspiece of one of the crutches, then picked up the cup of water and held it to his lips. The water dribbled down his beard on to his half-naked chest, so Mary picked up the cloth again and wiped away the hairs from over the mouth, and then cleaned the gummy lips. When she brought the cup up to them again, he drank greedily. She allowed him, however, to drink much less than half the cupful. He protested as she took the cup away.

“More water, lady, I thirst!”

“Presently,” Mary replied, changing the water-cup for that holding the wine. This she held to his lips. He accepted the wine to begin with as if it had been water, then as its taste and strength asserted itself, he opened his eyes in surprise.

“Wine, lady, princely wine!” he gasped. Then, as she took the cup away: “Nay, nay, a little more, lady! I had scarce begun to savour it!”

“It will not be denied you,” Mary smiled. “But you must drink it more slowly, a little at a time. How long is it since you ate?”

“Save for a morsel yestereve, I have not broken bread for two days—that was in Jericho.”

Mary winced at the picture this conjured. Jericho lay perhaps under twenty Roman miles away in bird-flight, but the road thence was stony and tortuous and mostly steep—an uphill climb all the way, taxing enough to a whole man in perfect health, but beyond description painful for this sorely-maimed creature. She hurriedly raised the wine-cup to his lips again. But now he was able to lift his hands to his own help, and presently began—on Mary’s advice, as the better way to break his long fast—eating pieces of bread sopped in the wine. He was on his way to Jerusalem, but, having spent one night out in the open and met none that would give him help that day on the practically deserted road, he had turned into Bethany to look for food and shelter. But he had forgotten, apparently, that it was the Sabbath. Except for one man asleep in the shadow of the town-gate, who had wakened enough to give him grumbling directions, he had seen nobody in the town within hailing distance.

“I was nearly spent, lady,” he explained. “As I rested against the wall here a sudden darkness came over me, and my spirit left me. As if from far off, one offered me water. Then, long after, coming through a gracious coolness, I woke to find you—may the Holy One—blessed be His Name!—reward you—with the cup at my lips.”

“But you have come far from Bethany’s middle,” said Mary. “Were you, then, seeking some one you knew?”

“None that I knew, lady, but the house of a family of whose goodness to the poor I had been told even in distant Sepphoris—the orphaned children of Abiud.”

“I am Mary, daughter of Abiud.”

“The Name be praised!”

“Who spoke of us in Sepphoris?”

“A good carpenter that lifted me into the shade one day when I had broken a crutch. He shared his bread with me and made me a new crutch. Yeshu bar-Nasha is his name—may it be blessed!”

“May it be blessed!” echoed Mary, and wondered to find herself doing so.

She wondered to find herself so affected by the reminder of the Galilean. It was not strange to her that Yeshu should have spoken of the charitable house of Abiud even in comparatively distant Sepphoris, or that she should have heard of it. What made her wonder was the realization that, even as she asked the question “Who in Sepphoris?” she had known the answer. It made her wonder that in her mind’s eye she could picture Yeshu so clearly, and in her mind’s ear so distinctly catch the tones of his voice, saying, “I know you stand on what, for a Jewish woman, is the brink of an abyss.”

Both the recollection and the wonder at it, however, were banished by the happenings of the next few minutes. Abijah, the shepherd, came out of the courtyard into the street, followed by Lazarus. At almost the same moment, though Mary did not see him immediately, Zachary appeared from an entry some distance along the roadway on the opposite side, only to stop dead in his tracks with hands upraised in horror.

“We’ll have to help him in, Abijah,” said Mary. “He is still too spent to manage by himself.”

“You can leave that to me, Mary mistress,” replied the shepherd. “He’s an easy one-man lift—there’s nothing of him.”

With no more ado, nor any more effort, than if he had been handling one of his own lambs, the powerful hill-man stooped and picked the beggar up into his arms. The beggar protested feebly, casting an eye back at platter and cups.

“Never mind those, brother,” Abijah chuckled. “They’ll come after, and you’ll eat and drink more comfortably where I’m taking you.” And he strode off through the gate with his burden.

By this time Zachary, coming with quite un-Sabbatical haste, was more than half-way down the street. Mary saw him, and the habitual annoyance at his ubiquity arose in her. She did not feel like satisfying his curiosity in any

way, and without thinking much of what she was doing she picked up her cloth, the cups, and the platter, and bade Lazarus bring along the crutches.

In the straw-barn she found the beggar propped up comfortably in the rough bed prepared for him by Abijah, with a stool handily placed to serve as a table for the half-begun meal. The shepherd was returning at sundown to his flocks, now watched by his boy in a fairly near-by fold, but by then, he said, Asa, the maimed man, would be most likely asleep, and Kemuel and Jonas would be back in the steading. There was nothing more that Mary was called on to do. So, leaving the interested Lazarus to gather Asa's news of Yeshu, she went back into the house.

She was in trouble the moment she entered it.

III

“What petty sort of God is this,” she found herself asking bitterly, “that you expect me to worship?”

It was farther than she had ever meant to go, but anger drove her on.

“If I take food and drink to a helpless man I break the Sabbath.”

“You carried it over the threshold,” Zachary reiterated the accusation; “that is as if you carried it from one tenement to another.”

“But if I had found a rabbi to stretch a cord out from the gate and along to enclose where the poor man lay, it would have been no offence?”

“If the cord had been stretched yesterday,” Zachary acknowledged. “But the cord could not have been stretched to-day without breaking the Law.”

“But the man was so spent—he might have been dying!” exclaimed Mary.

“It makes no difference.”

“The All-pitying sets the stretching of a rope against the succour of one of His creatures? I don't believe it!”

“Mary!” protested Martha. “Zachary has told you!”

“If all the rabbis from Dan to Beersheba—and Zachary isn't one of them—told me so, I still wouldn't believe it! The poor man lay outside exhausted,” cried Mary. “Tell me, what *should* I have done? What would you have done, either of you?”

“The pity is that he couldn’t have come through the gate himself—perhaps if you had waited—then it would have been all right. I would gladly—everybody knows that I . . .” Martha meandered. “As it is, you sinned. You caused Abijah to sin. And what’s worse, you made your own little brother sin!”

“It is not on *my* head!” breathed Zachary. “True, I am his teacher, but I cannot carry Lazarus’s sin on my head!”

“Nobody asked you to,” snapped Mary. “And Lazarus has committed no sin.”

“He carried the man’s crutches. Let me tell you that even your father, Abiud——”

“And let me tell you, you hair-splitting fool, that my father, Abiud, would have done just as I have done. He knew that the Lord of Mercy did not give him such a heart of pity to stifle its working for fear of breaking some stupid encrustation of the Law. I will not worship such a God as you depict for me. One angered by an act of mercy done outside a rope put up merely to cheat Him, and fool enough to excuse it if done inside. I will have nothing to do with a God so petty-minded.”

Her two hearers stared at her in horror, but she swept on.

“I will worship no God that I cannot love. You, Zachary, would have spoken of my father, Abiud, slightly. I say to you and to Martha that the only God I will look up to is one as gentle and kind and forgiving as Abiud was, my own all-understanding father.”

If Martha’s eyes filled sentimentally at the mention of Abiud, she yet was as profoundly shocked by Mary’s tirade as was Zachary. She began to tell Mary that she, Mary, had rendered herself liable to judgment by the Council, and—supported by mutterings from Zachary—to say that the likely chastisement was just what Mary needed to bring her to her senses. But she spoke, save for Zachary, to an empty room.

IV

The wash and change which Mary felt she needed after her contact with the beggar, Asa, did little to cool her down or to soothe the unquiet of her spirit. She went out into the garden, but simply to pace about. She could not rest.

It was close to sunset. The Sabbath was nearly over. She told herself that she hated the Sabbath, wishing she could be in some country where it was disregarded, forgotten. She had intended, earlier, to look for Lazarus and hear from him what the maimed man in the straw-barn had to tell about Yeshu. But now, almost inviting rather than fighting the regret flooding in on her that she had not grasped the chance of going away with Felix, she did not want to think of the Galilean. She did not want in her mind to hear his voice saying that she stood on the brink of an abyss. That association with the heathen Lucian, however legalized under the Roman code, would be an abyss for her, a Jewish woman, she was much too clear-minded to deny. None of her reading of pagan authors had shaken her belief that God *was*. In spite of her detestation of the thorn-bush of qualifications, inhibitions, and pettifoggings which the rabbis and scribes had made of the Law, she believed that He had shown Himself more clearly to Israel at its best than to any other people. She would never, she knew, be able to forget Him. And she would be able to shut out the thought of Him, she saw, only at the cost of an inward coarsening, an increasing atrophy of those indefinable inward qualities by which perception was made clear and fine and the bowels made to yearn towards what was tender, innocent, lovely. If hardened shallowness, the negation of depths, could be an abyss, here was abyss indeed. Of a certainty it would hold its own misery—the misery of emptiness.

No. She did not want to think of Yeshu. He, more than any writings she had ever read, more than any rabbi or scribe she had ever listened to—more even than her father, Abiud—had brought her close to such a conception of the Godhead as she had seemed to grope for all her conscious life.

Here, Mary persuaded herself, she touched the kernel of her woes. The unrest she struggled with sprang from little else than the day-to-day balking of her search for God. All her surreptitious reading, frowned on as it would have been by the rabbis, was directed ultimately to this one purpose—a deeper understanding of the nature of the Godhead and its relations with mankind. This purpose was hindered and stifled by the fixed and inexpansive beliefs of the people round her. There was nowhere that she was allowed expression of the ideas which teemed her mind. She was denied any chance of developing and testing them in discussion.

That she longed for a life of greater activity was true. But what precluded that greater activity, that interest in affairs, that contact with a wide variety of thinking people, was vested in precisely the same thing that smothered overt employ of her thoughts. It was the denial by the men of her

race, again from their contracted interpretation of the Law, of any personality—save in a limited sense—in a woman.

Mary had seen too many good instances to deny that the Jewish woman could be beautifully beloved and cherished by a husband. Even that a woman could be the guiding intelligence in a happy and prosperous marriage, she had seen too many proofs not to admit. But the women in such cases seemed content to have being within the restrictive limits in interests and activities which custom, founded on wholly male interpretation of the Law, imposed on them. Of any world outside their own households or their own neighbourhoods they seemed to have no knowledge, nor to want any. They exercised their minds on no problems outside those spheres. And where they pondered upon God—if at all—they manifested it only by a meek submission to the dictates of the Law, at best in liberal obedience of its biddings to be charitable, at worst in apprehensive fussiness about legal immaculacy and Sabbath-keeping little less finicking than Martha's.

Mary was far from despising her woman neighbours. Knowing the innate goodness of many of them, she could even envy them their placid acceptance of life as it was. But she saw that among them she could not, except by discard of all she had grown to value most highly, find any abiding place. Even the kindest and most intelligent of her woman neighbours, if they had refrained from open hostility towards her, already tended to avoid her, to look at her askance. Discard whatever she might of hopes and longings, she would never, never find response or understanding in Bethany.

Yet it was to this barren and thwarted existence that Yeshu in the last brief encounter had seemed to recommend her submission. To what other end was she to cleanse her heart of pride, anger, and vain longings? Were she to succeed in letting her spirit stand alone and still in the cleansed tabernacle of self, of what avail to know the Father of her questing? In Bethany and in her home, for avoidance of carping criticism, she would still have to pretend conformity with the myriad petty rules only by observance of which, according to Zachary and Martha and the like, could the Holy One be appeased. She would still be in rebellion. If escape from Bethany in heathen company meant falling into an abyss, to remain there living a lie and at the sacrifice of everything she considered valid was to sink into a morass. Between abyss and morass there was little to choose—save for the thought of Lazarus.

The knocking on the garden-gate from the street seemed to be an illusion. Even the exclamatory stir inside the house that followed it failed to make Mary aware of its reality. It had to be repeated, and she had to see Abijah striding towards the gate, before she awoke to the fact that Felix had returned. Then she ran. With Abijah's perilously open dislike for all things Roman, Felix was certain to have a surly reception not to be covered or accounted for by the difficulty Felix would find in understanding the shepherd's hillside Aramaic.

Mary's speed brought her to the gate as Abijah raised the locking-bar.

"Leave this to me, Abijah," she commanded. "I know who it is."

"As you will, mistress," the shepherd replied, but naturally took it upon himself to save her the exertion of handling the gate's considerable weight. At the sight of Felix standing outside, Abijah growled in his beard. Fortunately the Roman was clad in civilian *tunica* with *pænula* over it, and wore a Greek hat of flat cone shape. It was a costume such as a fashionable—which is to say, a paganish—young Jerusalemite would have worn. This in itself was enough to make Abijah mutter.

"That will do, Abijah!" Mary warned. And with no more of greeting or welcome than the word "Enter!" she quickly led the Roman along the garden face of the house to the terrace where she had first spoken to him.

"What brings you here, Felix?" she demanded. "Quickly! for our Jewish Sabbath is not yet past, and it will be said that I break the Law in receiving you."

"I come with the same plea as when I saw you last."

"I made it clear enough then that the answer was 'No!'"

"Nevertheless, Lucian gives you the chance, through me, to change your mind. A litter, with bearers and escort, awaits you on the Jericho road."

"Oh!"

"You cannot see it, nor can any in Bethany. It is hidden with its attendants in the brake rimming the brook."

"It need not wait for me. I cannot use it."

"Nevertheless," the Roman repeated firmly, "it will remain there until an hour after sunset. And I shall be within call on the road beyond the garden

wall.”

“It is useless, Felix,” said Mary. The inward battle she had fought since being chidden for her act of mercy to the legless Asa was quickened a hundred-fold. Sore at heart as she was, the temptation racked her. With it, and oddly seeming to give it force, came what she took to be another illusion—an illusion of perfume stealing into her senses, something exotic, sweet enough to cloy but for a redeeming sharpness, clean, astringent. There rose within her an anguish that almost forced the cry: Why have you come *now*—ah!—why at this stricken moment?

Aloud, she said constrainedly, “Our farewells were said a week ago, Felix. You must go, now!”

“A moment more will suffice, Mary—then my way, if you will permit it, is into the road over the wall,” he replied in the same crisp, unmoved speech that he had used all through. “I have to give you something—call it, for remembrance—that I should have brought last week.”

Under his cloak he appeared to undo cords attaching something to his girdle, then brought out, lying in the palms of his hands, a small bottle or vase most delicately shaped from some material like, but too warm in tone to be, alabaster. The perfume which Mary had thought illusory rose from it, now unmistakably.

“Oh, Felix!” breathed she, all woman at once. “From Lucian?”

He placed the vase in her outstretched hands, and seemed to hesitate for a moment before replying: “Yes, from Lucian.”

“But it must be priceless—priceless. The vase itself is like a jewel, so skilfully and beautifully wrought, and such a rare perfume surely never was met even in Damascus. It comes from the East?”

“That, I think, must be so. I—it was redeemed from spoils taken in Parthia.”

Mary scarcely heard. Her fingers, sensuously caressing the surfaces of the vase, informed her of its worth as surely as the sight of her eyes. It felt as lovely as it looked. The attar or essence it held, its clean astringency asserting distillations too uncloying to be of the rose alone, must have been of unique power, for beneath the woven cap of silken cords the stopper, of like material to the vase itself, was sealed into the neck with a resinous wax.

“It is too valuable,” said Mary, not troubling to conceal her desire, “I cannot accept it.”

“I think you must,” Felix replied gruffly. “It will be smashed else on the nearest rock or stone.”

“Lucian would hardly thank you for that.”

“Lucian—” said Felix. “Lucian would thank me less to let him see it again, unless you came with it. It is for you, Mary. It could not be for any other woman.”

He took her outstretched hands in his, and closed her fingers quickly over the vase. As quickly then, he released her and stepped back a pace. His hands went up in the now familiar salute.

“Farewell, Felix!” said Mary. “I——”

“If it is farewell,” he interrupted her abruptly, “it is, as you say, already said. A doubled farewell carries no good fortune. The litter remains in the brook-side cover—and I on the road near by—until an hour after sunset.”

A couple of long strides took him past her. Almost before she could turn, he had jumped down from the terrace, had crossed the down-going stretch to the roadway wall, and was over that, with never a pause, that Mary could see, to look back.

VI

For a long time Mary stood where Felix had so abruptly left her. With the vase in her cupped hands, lifting it at times for fuller appreciation of its fragrance, she gazed over that point of the wall he had dropped behind. Her expectation was to catch another sight of Felix as he went down the Jericho road. But apparently he had turned uphill towards the town-gate. Either that or simply settled under cover of the wall—Mary did not for a moment doubt his intention of waiting for her until an hour after sunset. There was, at any rate, neither sight nor sound of him.

Mary sighed as she turned towards the house. She sighed for the chance of getting away from Bethany renounced for the second time, and because of the too probable renewal of censure that the unexpected visit of Felix would evoke inside. It was very unlikely that her talk with the Roman had passed over unwatched. She had been conscious towards the end, and while she had stood looking out over the Jericho road, of some stirring about the house, and she thought there had been some coming and going by the garden-gate. She decided it would be better to face the trouble at once, and get it over. At

least, she thought, it would be for the last time with her dealings with the Romans as the cause.

Mary made straight for the farm kitchen.

Her reception there was exactly as she had foreseen it, with the difference that the forces against her had the addition of Jehudah, the self-appointed marriage-broker. At Mary's entrance, he with Zachary pointedly turned his back on her. And Martha, seated by the fireless hearth, merely looked up and as pointedly looked down again.

"I am sorry, Martha," said Mary. "I didn't know Felix Scaliger was coming. If I had known I'd have stopped him. As it is, I have sent him away. He won't be coming back—ever."

"That is what you said last Sabbath."

"We won't go into that again, please. You know very well it wasn't the Sabbath last time."

"It's the Sabbath this time. As for sending the Roman away for good, it is too late. The harm's done. The whole town knows he was here."

"Already?" Mary turned her gaze on the two men, now watching the colloquy. They looked away.

"It isn't as if you hadn't done evil enough already," said Martha. "I don't mean just to-day—breaking the Covenant by carrying food outside the house and letting that Roman come in. It's everything. I think you must be possessed, Mary. Ever since you took up with these Bœthus women——"

"You made enough fuss of them yourself any time they came to the house."

Mary intended to throw Martha out of stride, and succeeded.

"Well, they're Jews, anyway. And their position—the position of their family," stumbled the older woman. "Not that I hold with their ways. Why, they're little better than heathen."

"But the best in the house was hardly good enough for them."

"That has nothing to do with what I'm saying. It's you I'm talking about. Ever since you invited those Romans you've done nothing but bring disgrace on the house. Anybody'd have thought the things said about you and old Rab' Samuel——"

"What things, Martha?" Mary urged, dangerously quiet.

“You know well enough what things.”

“Yes, I know well enough what things, Martha. What I want to hear is you, my sister, repeating them.”

“Oh, oh! It’s all too dreadful! The next thing will be that you *will* be brought before the Council. Nahum ben Kattina is just looking for the chance.”

“I don’t doubt it,” said Mary. “Ben Kattina’s piety is a mere cloak for cruelty of the most vicious kind. But where will he get the chance?”

“This breaking of the Sabbath with the Roman will give him the chance. He knows about it already.”

“Now, I wonder,” mused Mary, looking innocently at the two men, “I wonder who told him?”

“He didn’t need telling. He could see for himself. The whole town could see for itself,” whimpered her sister. “I don’t know—I simply don’t know—what’s to become of you, Mary. There isn’t a better-dowered girl in Bethany than you, maybe not in all Judea. But Jehudah here——”

“Oh, yes,” murmured Mary, “Jehudah here——?”

“He says there isn’t a young man in Bethany who would marry you.”

“I’ll waste no grief over that,” said Mary. “The last thing I’d ever want would be to have any Bethanite for husband. In passing, we had better be quite clear about that. You, Martha, have encouraged Jehudah here to peddle me and my portion among what you and he and Zachary think the likeliest families in Bethany—the ben Seths and the ben Lubins and the like. That has got to stop. To begin with, I will not have Jehudah or Zachary interfering with my affairs at all.”

“I have done, I have done!” exclaimed Jehudah. “When I think of the goodly young men who might have——”

“When you think of the goodly presents you might have had in secret!”

Jehudah, scowling, began to mutter that there were plenty of comely enough young women in Bethany, well enough dowered, who would not despise his services. They respected their elders, kept the Law, and would rather be dead than let any Gentile—let alone a Roman—pass even the shadow of a finger across the hem of their skirts. Jehudah, inwardly bemoaning the loss of a transaction so full of prospective profit, was irked into boldness, and would have developed his theme. But he happened to

glance at Zachary for commendation, and became aware that his crony was sniffing. Put out, he looked at Martha. She also was sniffing. He peered about him, raised his head, and fell to sniffing on his own account.

“Now let my beard be shorn, but I would swear——!”

“Then it is no dream!” breathed Zachary. “There *is* a heavenly odour!”

“I can scarce believe it. It is as if all Sharon’s roses,” Martha had begun to say, but broke off to follow the pop-eyed gaze of the two men. They were staring at the perfume vase which Mary had brought from under her cloak.

“This is the source of the perfume,” said Mary. “You may look on it, Martha, as a token that the Romans will not come again. Felix Scaliger came to leave it with me as a parting gift from Mark Lucian.”

Zachary and Jehudah came forward to peer, and Martha rose to follow their example. The would-be rabbi and the self-appointed marriage-broker, needy men both, exclaimed their awe.

“A princely gift, a thing beyond price!”

“Worth a king’s ransom, past all reckoning costly!”

For a moment or two Martha stared at the vase. Her lips moved, but no voice came. Then she looked from the vase at Mary. Colour flooded her sallow face, and her mouth opened into a gape as of pain, held while, as suddenly as it had come, the red faded to a leaden grey. A hostile stranger looked from her eyes into Mary’s.

“Costly, maybe,” she said on a breath’s end, “but not beyond all reckoning.” Then with calculated deliberation: “The price of your wantonness?”

All anger died in Mary. She knew that Martha did not really believe the ultimate implication of the question, but the sudden revelation of jealous envy which prompted it shocked her profoundly. It left her abominably desolate. She stared at Martha for as long as it took the elder woman to look away shamefaced. Then, gathering her skirts together, she quietly left the kitchen.

VII

The way to her own apartment lay through that other where Lazarus was most likely to be found towards sunset. She hoped that the boy had slipped

out for a moment. Abijah was nearly due to return to his flocks. Lazarus would hardly let the shepherd go without a farewell. Between the boy and man there was a strong bond of affection. Mary snatched at the comfort which lay in the fact.

She was torn between desire to take Lazarus in her arms and fear that the contact would break down her resolution.

As she hesitated at the entry to the middle chamber, Lazarus put down the scroll he was reading, rose, and came towards her. Mary went to meet him. She dropped to her knees on a hair-stuffed carpet that lay between them, so that her eyes were on a level with his. As her free hand went over his shoulder Lazarus tried to copy what had been Mary's own gesture of consolation to him in moments of distress. His gentle yet clumsy try at stroking her face almost robbed her of self-control. She fought back a gulp that must have led to the wildest weeping, and hugged him to her.

"I don't care, Mary, what Martha and Zachary say about you," he said at his sturdiest. "I shall always love you best."

"And I shall always love you, my darling. Always believe that—whatever happens."

"Nothing will happen to you, Mary. I won't let anything bad happen to you."

"I didn't mean that, Lazarus. I meant, if it ever appears that I've forgotten—forgotten my love for you—don't believe it."

"I won't."

"That is well, then," said Mary.

She fought against releasing what must have been a spate of words—reiterations of her love for him, injunctions about taking care of himself, advice on those he could trust and to whom he was to turn at need for counsel and help. But she could say nothing that would not betray her present betrayal of his confidence in her—her impending treachery.

As it was, they clung to each other in silence till Lazarus became aware of the perfume from the vase she carried.

"What a lovely smell, Mary! What is it?"

"Oh, just a perfume vase—never mind it, darling!" she said hastily, and got to her feet after a last hug.

She sped without a backward glance, and came to her own room. She wrapped the perfume vase in a small shawl together with her jewels and some money, and put the smaller bundle in a larger one made up from the best of her clothes. With this in hand she stole out into the garden.

Her need to see Lazarus again overcame her. She put the bundle down and, keeping in the shadows, she went back to where she could look through the open window into the middle chamber. The sun was setting, and Lazarus already in his shawl was being very dutiful and very grown-up reciting the prayer, *Shemoneh Esreh*:

. . . Cause us to turn, O our Father, to Thy Law, and draw us near, O our King, to Thy service, and restore us in perfect repentance to Thy presence.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who delightest in repentance.

Forgive us, Our Father, for we have sinned; pardon us, O King, for we have transgressed; ready Thou art to pardon and forgive.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord most gracious, who dost abundantly pardon. . . .

Mary's hands were at her mouth, or she must have cried aloud. Her heart, over-teemed, seemed to be about to burst in her breast. In despair for the resolve which on the moment became impossible of fulfilment, she turned away from sight of the window and Lazarus beyond it. Her knees felt like giving way under her, and she went at a staggering run farther up the garden to come abreast of the kitchen. Seconds passed before the purport of the gabble coming from it reached her comprehension, before she realized that the trio she had left was made a quartet by the addition of her arch-enemy, Nahum ben Kattina.

"But they would whip her," Martha was feebly protesting.

"It would be what she deserves!" came from Zachary, and Jehudah growled an agreement.

"She has behaved badly, I know," Martha wailed. "But if bringing her before the Council means she would be whipped——!"

"Bring her before the Council I most certainly will," declared Nahum. "And what matter if we ordain that she is to be whipped? A wanton, she is certainly lost."

With renewed anger, strength came back to Mary. Looking neither to left nor to right, she hastened down the garden, and paused only to pick up her bundle. A few moments brought her to the roadway wall.

"Felix! Felix!"

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER VI

The Wanton of Magdala

A PRESS of exclamatory humanity surged and eddied in a narrow gut of road among rocks near the Lake of Galilee, on the way from Capernaum to Magdala. It was a rough and stony road, too rough indeed for a large proportion of the humans making up the crowd. There were few that did not show signs of being poorly off, and a considerable number who had the appearance of being bodily afflicted. Obvious beggars some of them, one or two actually blind, one or two shaking with the palsy, but still more of them halt or lame. Some of the afflicted were being helped along by anxious friends. Others staggered and reeled, buffeted about by the unheeding sturdy, to make what progress they could alone.

At one point on the roadside the crowd eddied aside to listen to a man who stood on a flat boulder. His tale was repetitive:

“I was blind, I tell you. I was blind from a boy, but he made me see! Yes, I was blind, and he made me see.”

Questions were shot at him: “Will he cure the shakes?”. . . “Can he heal the lame?”. . . “Look at my ulcers, friend!—would he heal them?”

“Aye!” returned the man on the boulder. “The first use I had of my blessed sight was to see a cripple drop his crutch at the healer’s bidding!”

Again on this there was a peeling away of the fringes of the listening, questioning group by mere force of the press along the road. “On to Capernaum! On to Capernaum!”

“Is the healer at Capernaum?”

“Aye, so they say.”

“Press on, then—press on to Capernaum!”

The struggling crowd, thrust willy-nilly through the roadway gut, surged about a highly ornamental litter borne by four slaves. The litter was of Roman pattern, the *lectica*. In the crowd it rocked like a ship in a turbulent sea, or was momentarily stayed as the bearers found their balance again. It was clear that the bearers were at a loss what to do for their burden’s safety. They were gradually being forced off the roadway towards a gap in the

bordering rocks where the edge fell away precipitously. It looked, in fact, as if another moment or two would see the litter toppling into the steep, when there was an intervention.

A fair-skinned youngster of perhaps eighteen, lithely built and wearing only a belted shirt or *chiton* and a Greek hat, dodged nimbly along the crowd's edge to put himself in front of the leading pair of slaves. A fellow of apparent sense and resource, he quickly had the bearers under the single command they needed. By cajolery, his own quick eye for a gap, and a sensible use of the litter's bulk, he led in a direction that quartered the human stream and brought the *lectica* to a rock-ledge by the roadside where it could be rested.

At the half-bump with which the litter was rested, its curtains parted and a woman looked out. She was heavily veiled against the dust, but her voice did not want for an edge.

"Giles, your clumsiness suggests you want a taste of the rod. What do you mean by throwing me about like a bundle of soiled linen?"

"Mistress, it was the crowd. Pray look at them. They pressed so hard on us that we could scarce keep on our feet."

"A rod for such a rabble might save your own back from stripes. Or need you have got into such a mob at all? Either I will be better served or there shall be groanings in the stable-yard. How long am I to be kept in this dust and sour smell?"

"Peace, lady, peace!" interrupted the youth who, apparently unnoticed, had saved her from much greater discomfort than she complained about. "Your bearers are not to blame for staggering in such a stream in so narrow a neck of road. And the rabble, as you call it, is already thinning. You'll have a clear road in a moment or two."

He was a smiling and friendly youngster, but he seemed to have little liking for the woman in the litter. At any rate, he spoke without looking at her. She, for her part, appeared not to find him interesting.

"What are they doing here, all these people?" she demanded.

"Why, they are the sick and the poor from nearly all the lakeside towns. They look for healing and teaching from one of great power—Jesus."

"Another of these ragged prophets!" the woman sneered. "They are a pestilence!"

From behind her veil she looked up and down the road. There was still a crowd, but it had thinned.

“Giles! Jason! Take the litter up again and go on. I want to be home before sunset,” she commanded. “And go smoothly, or your backs will suffer for it—all four of you!”

In spite of the veil she managed to express intense disgust with her surroundings before closing the litter curtains. The four bearers took up their burden again and set out against the crowd.

Plucking his underlip thoughtfully, the youngster in the belted shirt and Greek hat spent a moment or two watching the litter’s progress. He was about to turn and go with the crowd, when a man on horseback drew rein alongside him.

“You have wits, young fellow,” he commended. “I saw you in action. It was well done.”

The boy smiled pleasantly, but said nothing. The horseman was looking after the litter. Although in civil garb, little different from the youngster’s but for a cloak and greater richness of texture, he was obviously a Roman soldier and an officer at that. He was powerfully framed in a lean way, deeply burned of the sun, and had a campaigner’s beard of weather-bleached golden-brown.

“But who was the lady?” he turned to ask. “Some one of consequence, surely.”

“That I cannot tell, except that before I went to help her bearers one beside me said she was of Magdala.”

“Of Magdala?” murmured the Roman.

“He also said she was wanton,” added the boy.

“Of Magdala—and wanton!” the Roman repeated, and smiled wryly. Then he looked down at the lad. “I am for Bethsaida Julias—from Tiberias,” he said. “And I am in haste. I cannot ride through such a crowd on this horse, for he is not completely schooled and may damage some one. Is there any bypath that you could show me?”

“Let me have your bridle,” said the youngster.

The villa outside the southern fringes of Magdala at which the woman of the litter arrived that afternoon in some ways resembled the house of Abiud in Bethany. It was largely a matter of shape. There was the same protection of loggia and pergola into a garden, but these and the house they adjoined were built in the Roman fashion. The columns of classic design, and the walls interior and exterior, were smoothly finished in gypsum over bricks of a sort. The garden was more formalized, and no stream ran through it. But the Galilean soil and climate permitted the growth of turf of a kind, and the house's main front overlooked the Sea of Galilee.

Mary of Magdala's dissatisfaction with the bearers of her *lectica* was renewed with their approach to the villa. They were clumsy in negotiating the narrow roadway leading to the house, and awkward in settling the litter on the pedestal arranged at a convenient height for alighting. The knowledge that she herself was greatly to blame for her bearers' awkwardness did not lessen her irritation. Restlessness had made her venture earlier in the day on what had proved a fruitless journey. The acquaintance she had hoped to see at an estate on the far side of Galilean Bethsaida had herself gone visiting. Mary, knowing the people her acquaintance was calling upon, had set out to follow, but had changed her mind, and had ordered Giles and the others to carry her back to Magdala. And although she had been mindful of their need to rest and refresh themselves, she had yet been impatient at the need to wait while they did so in the rather shabby inn which was nearest available.

Her bearers had been weary enough by the time they encountered the crowd on the road from Magdala. But her impatience had denied them the normal spells of rest and changes of shoulder during the remainder of the journey, and they were really spent when they settled the litter for her alighting at the villa.

The sight of their streaming faces and their sweat-soaked tunics should, she well knew, have moved her to compassion. But driven by annoyance at her own folly, she berated them shrewishly, repeating her threats of the rod if ever they showed such clumsiness again.

Her major-domo, Perian, stood on the villa's threshold awaiting the end of her tirade. Mary, however, put his official formality of greeting aside with an impatient gesture, and disappeared quickly into the house. Perian moved a step or two into the open, the better to wink at sturdy Giles.

"Tantrums!" his lips shaped noiselessly, and his thumb jerked at shoulder height in the direction of the villa's back premises.

Giles and the other three bearers grinned. Perian hinted at something rather tastier and stronger than lentil-porridge and *posca*—the watered sour wine—which was their normal fare. It would be worth a little fatigue and an unmerited scolding. They wiped their brows on shirt-sleeves or even shirt-hem, and picked up the litter, while Perian went back into the house.

The major-domo had little expectation of finding the ill-temper of his mistress abated. He had a shrewd idea of what, in general, was its cause. With a supper-party on a fairly grand scale in prospect the jaunt to Bethsaida, so suddenly decided upon, had been a piece of folly. That something had happened on the jaunt to emphasize its foolishness, something inauspicious, Perian could guess. It would come from paying a visit without the precaution of sending a runner with a message beforehand. But the initial folly, in one as exacting as the *domina*, was to leave the preparations for feasting over a dozen guests in the hands of her servants until almost the last hour. And nothing put such an edge on the mistress's temper, never completely equable, as finding herself foolishly at fault.

Perian sighed as he followed his mistress to the villa's triclinium, where the supper was set. He knew very well what he would find.

Nothing of the preparations that he and his underlings had made, even at her definite order, seemed to please Mary. The arrangement of the reclining couches, middle and two sides, had been made too far into the room. No space had been left for the musicians and entertainers.

"That can quickly be altered, mistress," Perian soothed, and would have issued orders to the assembled staff.

"No, no! Leave it—leave it as it is!" Mary said impatiently, and went off on another track: "But whose idea was it to drape my best Persian coverlet over the middle couch?"

"Anna quite believed that you——"

"Take it away! Has nobody any sense? Old Calvinus is always spilling wine or worse. It would be ruined. Anna! Put it away carefully, and bring that worn piece of Damascus weave."

"The brown and green, ma'am?"

"What else, you ninny? Shift the red cover from the left to the middle, and put the Damascus stuff in its place. But, just look at those cushions!"

The servants ran about anxiously for several minutes, moving pillows and lamps and platters and ornaments from this place to that, and as often as

not replacing them just where they had been, before the mistress of the house allowed them pause.

“Nobody could say it looks well,” she announced, “but it will have to do, I suppose.”

And she turned to Perian.

“And now, Perian, you can tell me what’s been making you fidget from foot to foot for the last twenty minutes.”

“It’s the merchant Matthias.”

“Matthias?”

“Yes, ma’am. He would like to speak to you. He has been here since quite half-an-hour before you got back.”

“Well, he’ll have to wait. I’ve had a very vexatious journey, and I’m covered with dust,” Mary said angrily. “I won’t talk to anybody.”

“But ma’am——”

“You needn’t say it. I know I promised to see him earlier than this, but I simply must bathe and change first. If he wants to talk with me he must wait. Chloe! Where’s Chloe?”

Her personal maid hastened forward.

“Here, ma’am.”

“My bath, girl!”

“It is waiting for you, ma’am. It was ready the minute you came in—indeed it was, ma’am.”

“And now, I suppose, it’ll be hardly worth getting into. Well! Come along, child! What are we waiting for?”

The servants watched until she had disappeared with her handmaid through the neighbouring peristylum, then with exchanged glances sighed their relief. The tempest had passed for the time being, though there was no saying when it might spring up again. The major-domo sympathized enough to sigh with them, but immediately remembered his office and dignity.

“Come, come! Bustle, now, bustle! There is much still to do!” he reminded them. And he in turn disappeared through the columned apartment next-door.

III

The merchant Matthias had been put to wait in the storeroom of the villa. He did not feel, however, that any hurt was done to his dignity in being made to wait there rather than in an apartment of actual reception. In fact, given a choice, he would have elected to pass the time in the storeroom above any other part of the house.

A little round man, shrewd, patient, and good-humoured, he sat on a bale of carpet-stuffs—and sniffed. The mingled odours of woven goods were familiar in his nostrils. It were an understatement to say that he liked them; they were as the breath of his life. For Matthias, if by necessity a trader in other commodities, delighted in the products of the loom beyond anything else he had to handle. To run a fine fabric through his fingers gave him the greatest joy he knew. He was far from despising the coarser weaves of camel or goat, such as were used by the makers of tents. But to feel the textures of fine wool and silk, to peer at warp and woof, to judge the quality of the spin and gauge the number of threads to the thumb's-width, gave him an inner glow that nothing else could.

As he sat on the carpet-bale he was, so to say, a full man. He had made the round of the storeroom in thorough fashion twice, and to this point and that had made more than one extra visit. And though there was a number of bales in well-sewn covers to which he would have liked to apply an opening knife, goods enough were exposed to fill him with an artist's satisfaction. True, indeed, there were no less than three fair coffers he would dearly have liked to look into. But that, he acknowledged, arose from a scarce-worthy curiosity.

He had seen enough. It was true, as was said, that this Mary of Magdala was a rich woman. Simon, the Pharisee—Matthias's own rather envied rival in trade—had reason other than the woman's ill-repute for his often-expressed hatred of her. There were other women named for unchastity about the Herodian court of Tiberias, and Simon wasted no breath on them. No. Clearly the thing that aroused the Pharisee's wrath about this Mary was her unwomanly—and it had to be admitted, plainly successful—ventures in trading. It was common talk in the lakeside markets that the Magdalene had more than once got in front of Simon in a deal. Simon, of course, in some respects traded at a disadvantage compared with his woman rival. As a Pharisee he could not be seen openly in those quarters where money, if not quite so plentiful as appearances suggested, at least was spent most extravagantly—in and around the court of the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas. No

strict Jew lived in Tiberias, which was built on an ancient burial-ground and was therefore unclean. So that to the religious inhibitions preventing the *chaber* Simon having direct contact with the heathenish people attached to or frequenting the practically pagan court there was added the embargo on his entering the capital of Galilee at all. Which, chuckled tubby Matthias, no doubt was particularly irking to one as keen after the shekels as Simon bar Joatham.

Matthias himself, though without any pretences at Pharisaiism, was never really at ease in Gentile company or in contact with Jews who had lapsed into heathen ways. He therefore did his conscience some violence in seeking the presence of this woman of evil-repute in her own house. But she had been at times a customer of his, and he had once acted as her agent in a purchase. It was with the memory that in this last transaction he had made a good and honest bargain for her that he now came to her, frankly, for help. That she herself drove a hard bargain he well knew, but he did not believe she was quite so avaricious as some people held. In any case, one good turn deserved another.

The communings of Matthias were here interrupted by the sound of the storeroom door being slid into its wall recess and the entry of Perian. Matthias politely rose to his feet off the carpet-bale.

“I’m afraid,” said the major-domo, “if you want to see the *domina* that you’ll still have to wait some time.”

Matthias shrugged. Perian, having turned to push the door a little towards closing—as though he would have liked to shut it completely, but didn’t quite dare—came into the room, nearer to the merchant.

“She’s in one of her moods,” he confided, with a look behind him. “So if—as I guess—you’re here to ask some favour of her——?”

“You believe I’ll be out of luck?”

“I’m afraid so. On the other hand, her wicked mood may pass. That’s how it is with her. One minute she’s a very fury, and none can do right. Next minute the tongue that was making you wince is making you laugh, and it seems none can do wrong.”

“Think you, friend, you give me news?” Matthias asked easily. “All gall, all honey—what is that but a woman?”

“Here it is never all gall, never all honey—sweet citrus essence in the gall, tart citrus essence in the honey. Make no mistake, my friend,” said Perian, “you will not advance your causes with my mistress by treating her

simply as a fickle woman. She is never to be soothed by a pretence that she is right when she is wrong. Hers is a strange dæmon—if, indeed, she is possessed by an only one. Even when it drives her worst, she seems to know she is driven, and is even then repenting.”

“In spite of the wicked moods you tell of,” said Matthias, not disguising his wonderment, “you appear to hold your strange *domina* in no little respect.”

“I do in fact. And with reason,” Perian replied, suddenly abrupt. “But I meant only to advise you not to flatter her as a means of securing her favour. And this in recompense for your long wait.”

“I shall not forget your kindness,” said Matthias. “As for having to wait . . .”

He shrugged and showed his palms.

“That is nothing in these troublous times. The difficulties of doing business multiply daily. Unrest everywhere. It is as if the spirit of Judas the Gaulonite still moved in the land.”

“Judas the——?” queried the major-domo.

“Judas the Gaulonite. He effected a rising of the people against the census and the tribute it was meant to extend. That was in my childhood. I remember——”

“I crave your pardon. Surely you see that I am not of this country, but of Thrace? I do not understand the matters you speak of.”

“You must have noticed the unrest, nevertheless. Taxation is the cause. It strips us to the bone.”

“I have heard my mistress complain of it.”

Matthias was out for a gossip. He needed an audience. He felt it a pity that the major-domo was a Gentile, and an outlandish one at that. But still . . .

“Every day,” he said, “it becomes harder to find the little to put away for one’s old age. One hears it said that the country prospers, but just look around. There are tokens—wonders. Do they foretell a change? Have you not heard, for instance, of this man of Nazareth—Jesus is his name—who teaches new doctrines to the confusion of the *chakham*, the rabbi, and the scribe?”

“He who heals the sick, casts out dæmons?”

“That’s the man—Jesus.”

“I had not noted his name,” said Perian. “And truly, friend, I cannot linger to hear of the doctrines he teaches. If they confuse the pious and the learned of your faith consider how they would confuse me, a simple Greek. And I have much to do. Farewell!”

Perian went to the door, cast a glance outside it, and looked back.

“I wonder now what it would be like,” he said, “if your healer of Nazareth came and cast out a few devils in this establishment?”

IV

“Well,” Mary of Magdala asked coldly, “what do you want?”

Bringing up his two hands to meet his forehead, Matthias bowed deeply, and let the hands fall slowly to his sides as he came erect again. In the time that the salutation occupied, his mind had recorded a good deal. This was the first time he had seen the Magdalene unveiled. Being what he was, he noted first the costly textures of her garments: the light-catching blue silk with the embroidered hem which, held by two jewelled pins to her hair, covered her head and fell in columnal flutings to spread on her shoulders; the deep-sleeved cloak of close-woven lambswool in a deeper yet answering blue which, clasped across her breast by a wide golden chain set with varicoloured gems, carried the vertical lines of the wimple in broadened folds almost to her feet; the under *tunica* of still finer woollen weave in the blue-green of the sea’s sunnier vales, girdled high by a long-ended broad belt of raised embroidery, and draping into folds about her feet; the gold-threaded sandals in blue enamelled leather. These trader Matthias noted first. But his coming erect no more than confirmed his impressions of the woman herself.

A full two hand’s-breadths taller than he, she carried herself with an upright grace he was momentarily puzzled to find remarkable, for in Galilee it was the young woman who did not hold herself erect that was out of the ordinary. He then told himself that it came from the too uplifted chin above an over-long throat, but changed his mind and said to himself, no, it was because of an insolent directness of the look from oddly tawny eyes. Or was it, again, the mouth—too proud to be labelled sulky? It could be that the burnished copper hair which glinted of gold under the wimple . . .

“I asked you,” he heard the cold repelling voice remind him, “what you wanted?”

“Lady,” said Matthias, and despised himself for giving her the title. He wouldn’t give it her again. An honest merchant had no call to be obsequious to any woman, however rich and however imperious, that decent people called harlot. “I come to beg a favour. I ask it in return for the good bargain I made for you in the matter of those hangings from Antiochia of the Oxus.”

“A directed bargain. You knew nothing of the hangings, nor would have thought them marketable had you known of them. The knowledge and the risk were mine. You acted merely as my doer, and were requited.”

“I made the journey to Tyre.”

“You were making the journey in any case, but a charge against me on account of it was added to your recompense.”

“Yet it was a good bargain that I made for you with Sardican. How easily might I have exaggerated the price I gave him!”

“And how easily could I have discovered the exaggeration! Timnah, who usually acts for me in Tyre, lay sick in Damascus. But within a fortnight of your deal with Sardican he was back in Tyre. And two days over the fortnight after your return to the city, I learned for certain that you had dealt with me honestly.”

Mary laughed at the look Matthias gave her, and Matthias did not like the sound of it. He raised his shoulders over deprecating palms.

“It was still a close bargain,” he murmured.

“Granted. But that was recognized in your feeling. It offers no ground, that I can see, for seeking or granting favours on my side or yours. Keep that in mind, will you?” said Mary. “And now tell me directly what you want.”

Matthias had every reason to feel shocked, bemused. He was being treated with, and being forced into, a blunt directness of dealing which violated all the polite pretences and subtleties that were thought right in social or business contact. The woman, as her servant had suggested, was possessed—mad. But he had an uncomfortable feeling that he, to say nothing of fellow-merchants, would find a like want of wits nicely profitable. Well, if subtlety of approach was cast aside, so be it.

“I ask you to use your influence in Herod’s court for me,” he said, “for the sale of some goods.”

“What sort of goods?” asked Mary. He hesitated, and she laughed and went on: “Very well, I’ll guess—fabrics for hangings? Ornamented woven stuffs?”

“Yes.”

“My good man, you can’t have considered what you’re asking. Think. Would you go with a like request, for example, to Simon, your rich competitor?”

“Simon detests—he has no influence in Herod’s court.”

“Supposing he had influence there—didn’t detest the sight and smell of it?”

“Simon is a hard man—grasping.”

“And I am a woman? But you give me the clue I sought,” said Mary. “Simon would ask you what his influence was worth to you. He would point out that he had plenty of fabrics himself that he would like to sell. Wouldn’t he?”

“Very likely, but——”

“Well, so have I a store of woven goods that I want to sell. It happens also that I’m likelier to make a sale to the court than either yourself or Simon, because I know the tastes of both Antipas and Herodias. Can you tell me, then, why I should help you, or even pass the chance of a sale to you?”

“Because I saw the chance of a sale first.”

“That’s as may be. Why should I help you in it?”

“I am a poor man, but—but—in a small way—I—I could, if the profit were good——”

“You would make it worth my while?”

“Yes.”

“Very well. I can be plain with you,” said Mary. “I knew that Herodias was tired of the hangings in her own private apartments. She always is getting tired of hangings or coverlets or draperies. But for reasons of my own I don’t want to sell her anything. So I won’t interfere with any sale you want to make. Introducing you to the court is another matter. If I do that I shall require to be paid—either in goods or money. And I shall require payment to be made before I make the introduction.”

Matthias’s gasp only made her smile. She moved towards the door.

“I need material for reclothing some of my servants. Bring me, then, a score yards of Egyptian cloth, and the like of medium-weight Damascene camelhair-weave, and I’ll see that you and your goods are received into the palace.”

“But lady, if I don’t sell?” cried Matthias.

“You will. It’s that pink stuff with the acanthus pattern you brought from Sardican, isn’t it?”

Matthias could only gape soundlessly.

“I see it is. Herodias will love it. And out of the profit you can easily afford the stuffs I want.”

She stepped into the doorway, and clapped her hands for a servant. Then she turned for a last word to Matthias.

“Oh, by the way,” she said carelessly, “if you do sell any goods to the Tetrarch or his lady don’t leave the palace without your money!”

Matthias stood staring at the doorway’s empty oblong of light until it was darkened by the servant that was to conduct him out of the house.

“She’s still laughing, isn’t she?”

“Who’s still laughing?” asked the lad.

“Your mistress.”

“You’re dreaming. I saw her a moment ago. She told me to see you out. She wasn’t laughing then. Nobody’s laughing. With the house in the bustle it’s in, getting ready for this supper-party, nobody’s got anything to laugh about.”

But Matthias still heard her laughing. He was certain she was possessed of a devil.

V

By what many of her acquaintances regarded as typical caprice in Mary, the kitchen of her villa was planned on a scale large enough, they said, for a royal palace. But this was exaggeration springing from envy, whether of malice or of amused admiration. The kitchen’s oddity lay in its spaciousness. It was big enough to have given freedom of movement to several times the number of cooks and servants needed for tending its two open hearths and

its single, though capacious oven. It had been converted, in fact, from a sizeable viridarium, or greenhouse-garden, roofed on three sides round a columned centre-plot, and open to a courtyard on the third. Where the centre-plot had been a deepened cistern had been built, with containing walls raised to above waist-height. Into this cistern the rains in their season were led, not merely from the kitchen's own in-falling triple roof, but through a system of gullies from all the roofs of the villa, save those only that surrounded the one other peristyled apartment of the house. This had, of course, its own central fountain.

The kitchen's cistern had an impervious cover of glazed earthenware tiles of large size, supported on beams, except at one corner where a lipped opening with a flap allowed for the drawing of water by bucket or pitcher. The cistern cover served as a table at need.

The notable matter about this relatively enormous kitchen^[1] was that where other villa-owners, giving a banquet, for the more important dishes had to resort to the town bakehouse, Mary could hire professional cooks to work under direct supervision, with the added advantage of being able to serve hot dishes straight from oven or hearth.

[1] This kitchen would be perhaps four to six times the size of that usual in a Roman villa of like proportions to Mary's. The apartment identified as the kitchen in the House of Pansa, in Pompeii, for instance, is about 15 feet by 15 feet. Incidentally, the House of Pansa is supposed to have been abutted by a bakery with an oven big enough to supply daily bread for several hundred customers.

The time for the arrival of her supper-guests was approaching, and Mary in the course of a final round of inspection with Perian was in the kitchen. The wicker-and-net covers which kept the flies from a range of cold dishes on the cistern-top were lifted anxiously by the chief of the hired cooks.

"Yes," nodded Mary. "Yes, you have done your work well. See to it, Perian, that when the ovens are cleared he has a good cup of fair wine—he and his helpers."

She turned to the now widely beaming *pistor*.

"What think you of the wine of Asochis?" she asked. "It is not to every one's liking."

"It is to mine, *domina*. I have tasted it but rarely—thrice at most—but surely the grape grows nowhere better than on the south-facing slopes of Asochis?"

“Ah!” smiled Mary. “A judge of wine as well as of wheat! The Asochis be it, Perian, for our friend. Gischala for the others.”

The delighted baker-cook and his grinning mates bowed deeply as, followed by her equally pleased major-domo, she sailed out of the kitchen. Her handmaid, Chloe, was waiting for her at the end of the service passage.

“Yes, Chloe?”

“I was to remind you, mistress—the gifts.”

“Ah, the gifts! There is nothing else, Perian?”

“No, *hera*, no,” Perian said hastily. “You have seen all.”

“My poor Perian!” sympathized Mary. “Then, let us look at these gifts!”

Of the gifts, sent beforehand by her supper-guests, such as were perishable had already been removed to larder or kitchen, while the fruits went for display on the dessert-table in the triclinium. What remained had been set out in a small reception-room. Mary examined a jar of wine.

“From Bassus for a wager—m’m—yes, Bassus! He and his imported Falernian!” She examined the seal. “The man’s a fool! Just look at this, Perian!”

Perian looked at the blackened label.

“‘M. Marcellus Cos.,’” he read.

“I didn’t mean the label. Maybe that’s genuine enough, though it would make the wine over eighty years old. I meant the seal,” said Mary. “Isn’t it obvious that new gypsum has been put over old and smeared with dust?”

“I’d say, yes—it has.”

“That Bassus! Unseal the jar, Perian, and see to it that Bassus gets nothing to drink during the evening but his own vinegar.”

“But, mistress, if it should happen to be good wine?”

“Why, then, the jest recoils on me,” said Mary.

She went on with her appraisal. This jewel was valueless, mere glass, and badly designed at that. The plaque in bronze was the work of a modeller with no thumbs. The amphora, though copying a good shape, was of miserably poor clay and as miserably glazed. A scarf, a shawl, an ornamented fillet for the hair, a necklet, a comb, two bracelets, all were

examined and condemned as of poor quality or for being chosen without taste.

“No single thing of the lot selected with any thought of the recipient,” Mary commented sourly. “Why do I trouble myself and my household, Perian, to feast people so tasteless and unthinking? Look at this book!”

She had picked up a copy of Virgil’s *Georgics* on leaves of parchment bound together in the new manner.

“Joannes Rubinius—until the death of his father known as Jonas ben Reuben—he sends me this, not for love of me, but simply to bolster his Roman pretences. A cheap publisher’s copy, one of perhaps fifty made at the same time by slaves writing to dictation. But so little has Joannes of the Roman tongue that he fails to see what a travesty hurried writing and bad spelling here makes of Virgil’s purity and elegance! The pretentious fool—but, ah, the greater fool I to tolerate, and even to invite, such silly company!”

Her vehemence made the two servants apprehensive, but, just as she seemed about to storm out of the room, her glance went to a small purse of embroidered cloth with a plain ivory ring. Perian himself had put it aside on the couch where the gifts were ranged as a thing of small consequence. Mary picked it up, and examined the scrawled inscription on the glazed linen label lightly threaded to it.

“I thought so!” she exclaimed. “It is from Joanna, the wife of Chuza! Why was this put aside? It should have had centre place with all that rubbish set away from it! Chloe, gather all those scarves and trinkets and stuff, and put them in the coffer of odds-and-ends. I can never wear them, but I suppose I must keep them awhile. Perian, bid Anna find places in the triclinium for this amphora and the plaque—where they may be seen but hardly noticed. And have every lamp lit straightway throughout the house.”

Hugging the little purse to her breast, Mary went out of the room, followed by arm-laden Chloe.

Perian picked up the book thrown carelessly back on the couch, and turned over its leaves. He had only a limited speaking acquaintance with the Roman tongue, and could read it hardly at all. But, where earlier he had thought this book, bound as it was in the new and handier way, would have been the most sure of the gifts to give his mistress pleasure, he now understood her contempt of it. The skins were of poor quality, the writing uneven and clumsy. Perian had only to place it mentally among the volumes

and scrolls of Augustan papyrus and virgin parchment, so fairly written, that were Mary's most treasured possessions to see how offensive it was. Much the same could be said of the bronze plaque and the amphora. Against any one of the few similar things of Mary's own choice which she allowed to stand about the villa, they would look cheap and nasty.

At the same time, what was there about a little cloth purse not very well fashioned and rather haltingly ornamented to snatch his unpredictable mistress out of haggarding bitterness and bring her so suddenly into a delight that made a girl of her? The thing was practically valueless. It had none of the quality or finish that . . .

And suddenly Perian smote his brow. He understood.

Smiling, he went to fetch the taper he needed for lighting up the house.

CHAPTER VII

Revelry

IN the house of Simon of Magdala, in a galleried upper chamber overhanging the Galilean lake, there was a gathering of some consequence. Besides some elders of Magdala itself and other towns near by, there were visitors from Jerusalem—two Pharisees and a scribe of distinction. Of the Pharisees, one was a member of the great Sanhedrin.

Prayers in some measure had anticipated actual sunset, and supper in its more substantial respects had already been disposed of. The guests, in fact, were simply toying with the lighter titbits of dessert. There was a lull in discussion until the last of the servants would have left the room. This was an elderly man who, in the irritating manner of the privileged, still fussed around in the hope that, being pretty much in his master's confidence, or else being so familiar an object as to pass unnoticed, he might gather what the conference was about.

“Have done, Caleb, have done!” Simon said impatiently. “Get you gone, and slide the door to!”

“Yes, yes, master—you needn't mind me. I was only tidying—tidying.”

Simon's look, however, put an end to his quavering. With the air of a faithful dog too unkindly rebuked, he trotted to the door. Simon strode after him, and himself slid the zigzagged panels of the door into straightness along its slots, dropped the catch, and for good measure pulled the inner curtain over it.

“Now,” he said, “we may talk freely!”

The Sanhedrin member stroked his beard.

“You do not believe, then, that Herod Antipas will move against the Nazarene?”

“No,” said Simon.

“In spite of his imprisonment of John, son of Zacharias?”

“In spite of that.”

“Yet this Jesus is potentially a likelier fomenter of trouble than John ever was. John remained by Jordanside, calling the people to him for the baptism of repentance——”

“While the Nazarene seeks the people in all parts,” broke in a Jerusalemite, “disputing with ourselves and the rabbis even in Jerusalem itself.”

“Why, then, do you come to Galilee?” sneered Simon. “What the Nazarene does in Jerusalem is no concern of Herod’s. Are you in Jerusalem so short of resource that you cannot trick a false prophet into the hands of the Romans?”

There were shocked murmurs about the room.

“Come, come, friend Simon!” said the Sanhedrin member. “It is not yet established that this Jesus foments rebellion against Rome. We of Jerusalem are here to learn merely in how much his teaching subverts the Law.”

“If, as the Nazarene holds, the Kingdom of Heaven is actually come, how will Rome survive? It may be that I am too blunt-minded,” said Simon, “but I see no real difference between wishing him in the hands of Herod Antipas and wishing him dealt with by Pontius Pilate, except that he is liker to have short shrift from the Roman.”

“If, that is, the Nazarene were an active Zealot and were in Judea,” the man of the Sanhedrin pointed out. “I’m sure—I’m sure,” he went on in the pleading voice of sweet reason, “we none of us have any thought but to preserve peace among our people. It is not a good thing that false expectations should be aroused in them. It only leads to unrest. If the time were ripe for the redemption of Israel, surely the Holy One—blessed be He!—would give a sign to those in authority, those whose one toil is to know the Law and to keep it.”

“Surely! Beyond doubt!” murmurs approved him.

“Is it likely, then, that the sign will be given through an unknown labourer from an obscure Galilean village—a mere—ah——?”

“A mere carpenter,” supplied Simon. “A maker of yokes.”

“We do not despise any honest man, I hope, for the way he earns his bread. I simply say it is quite unlikely that such a one, lacking the understanding that derives from close study of the Law under its ablest interpreters, can be the chosen instrument for any new revelation. It is said, and I believe with truth, that prophecy ended with Malachi. The Law is

perfected, and not the return of Elijah himself will alter it. This Jesus may be, for all I know, a very worthy sort of man, though misled. But from the very obscurity of his so-called teachings he is dangerous, for the ignorant read into them promises and wonders which lead only to uneasiness and discontent. The yoke of Rome lies heavy on Israel as things are. And any trouble would result only in further impositions, further exactions. It is for this reason—for the sake of peace for Israel, that is—and for this reason alone, that we hope Herod will—ah—will make the move—ah—the move that is needed.”

“Herod won’t,” Simon declared bluntly. “If you go by his imprisonment of John the baptizer you’ll be cheated, I tell you.”

“Why?” asked a Jerusalemite. “On your own showing the Nazarene is a greater menace to Herod’s peace than John was.”

“That was none of my showing,” said Simon. “Eliud ben Achim it was who tried to show that——”

“On the point that the Nazarene is more active,” Eliud put in.

“I don’t think the Nazarene is the greater menace to Herod. I say he is the greater menace to the Law,” Simon went on. “Herod seized John for denouncing his marriage to Herodias—a personal reason. I do not say that Herod would not like the Nazarene out of the way. But the Nazarene is a healer of sorts, and the ignorant admire him. Herod—that Idumean jackal—is at once too superstitious and too cunning to act directly. He will not risk the anger of Heaven should the Nazarene be a true prophet, nor will he risk the anger of the people by removing Him whom they call teacher, healer. He therefore will not act at all, but will leave us, the Jews who keep the Law, to play the catspaw.”

Simon crossed the room to the gallery in a stride or two. There he turned to face his guests.

“It is plain, nevertheless,” he said harshly, “that the Nazarene must be dealt with. The Kingdom is come, forsooth! Is it not said that if Israel would but keep two Sabbaths perfectly the Kingdom would be established. Yet this prophet, so-called—this maker of yokes—this *Am ha-Aretz*—this Jesus—makes naught of our Holy Sabbath.

“Let him but come to Magdala, and some way will be found for stopping his mouth.”

Two younger of the elders were standing in the wide opening to the lakeward gallery. Simon went past them, glaring, and stood brooding. In the

dusk's blue distance, where the curve of the shore melted into it, was a blaze of light.

“And there,” nodded Simon, “—there is another abomination—that harlot!”

“She has much company again,” remarked one of the men beside him.

“It is always much company with her—a hardened sinner, whose life is all riot and waste.”

“If rumour in the markets be true it cannot be all waste. It is said that she is rich. The Greeks, anyhow, are ever anxious to give her credit.”

“She is the cause of waste in others; what harlot isn't?” said Simon. “But we cannot touch her—convict and stone her as she deserves. She is protected by that Idumean dog's-get, Herod.”

“For favours received?”

“I do not doubt it.”

“Now, I wonder, Simon,” smiled the other beside him, “if all your fury against this Mary is from simple righteousness. Wasn't there some word of her besting you in a deal in fine linen?”

There was some chuckling in the room behind him, and Simon turned quickly to find some of his fellow-townsmen rocking.

“It is true,” he said, “that she robbed me of my just profits by unfair means—yes, and that more than once. Women in trade!”

“Women have long been driving hard bargains,” said one of the younger men, “in fruit, in eggs, in foodstuffs. Why not in cloth?”

“New notions! I don't hold with them. But—let Heaven be my judge,” swore Simon, “—it is for no reason but her harlotry that I would have the woman convicted and stoned!”

The Magdala elders agreed that Mary was an offence to the godly. But how could she be brought to book if Herod protected her?

“She can be given a lesson,” said Simon. “There is one, Anna, a dependent of hers, whose ways are suspect. And this Anna might be trapped. . . .”

He turned and stared balefully along the lake shore.

“Let the wanton look to her house,” he said in his beard. “She—among her heathen images!”

II

Besides one of her ‘heathen images,’ a lovely marble of the Grecian *Nike*, in the atrium of the villa Mary was giving surprised welcome to a tall, bearded Roman.

“But Felix—Felix Scaliger,” she repeated. “It must be eight years——”

“It is quite that, Mary,” Felix replied. “I had not intended visiting you from a dusty journey. But, without knowing it was yours, I saw your litter nearly pushed over a cliff by a crowd on the Capernaum road. And I came to see that you had taken no harm.”

“None at all. I was angry with my bearers for their clumsiness—and almost made sick by that noisome rabble. But I have got over both.”

“Your bearers were hardly to blame. You had a narrow escape—did you know?”

“I didn’t know. How was that?”

“A solid press of the rabble where the road narrowed bore against your leading bearer. But for that young Judean, as nimble of wit as he was of limb, you would have gone over the cliff. He gave your men the help and lead they needed.”

“A young Judean!” echoed Mary. “There was a youth who forbade me scold my bearers. I did not lift my veil to look at him. I thought him impertinent. I confess I had no idea that I owed him anything. Did you reward him, Felix?”

Felix laughed.

“Not knowing then that the litter was yours, Mary,” he said, “I had no reason for doing that. But I tried to fee him for showing me a side-road to Capernaum, and he’d have none of it. A strange youngster. Looked half asleep half the time. But he ran beside my cantering horse like a deer, all the same.”

“You will stay to supper, Felix?”

He hesitated.

“I have been to Bethsaida Julias on affairs from Tiberias, where I am on an official visit, and to which I should rightly return at once. Besides, I am covered with dust.”

“Then you want a bath, clean garments, and something to eat. Meantime, my servants can clean your own clothing. Say you will stay, Felix!”

“You have guests?”

“It does not matter—except that I’d rather have you to myself. Come! I am a poor hostess to keep you standing on the threshold.”

Mary led the way farther into the house. She had no need to summon Perian. Having received Felix in the first instance, the major-domo was standing by in case he was needed. Perian passed on Mary’s orders to the servant who would attend to Felix personally, and was about to lead the Roman to a cubicula, when Mary stopped them.

“You have been a long time away from Palestine,” said Mary to Felix. “Where?”

“Among other places—Rome.”

There was an awkward silence for a moment or two, then Mary waved the two servants away. “I’ll call you.”

The servants disappeared, and Mary faced Felix straightly.

“Well?”

“Yes,” said Felix, slowly. “I saw Lucian.”

“Well?”

“You had better know, Mary. Lucian will never come back to Galilee—or, at least, to you. Always ambitious, he has married a Roman lady through the influence of whose family he looks for advancement.”

Mary nodded, and held out her hand to Felix. “Come with me,” she said.

He took her hand, and she led him through a narrow passage, or *fauces*, to an inner room, where stood the coffer in which she kept her treasures. With some manipulation that Felix could not see, she freed the lid, and threw it back. Then, stooping, she brought out the perfume vase Felix had brought her that night of her flight from Bethany.

“Do you remember this, Felix?”

“I remember,” said the Roman. For the man he was, he was oddly stirred. “So you have kept it, Mary—all these years.”

“All these years, the seal still unbroken,” Mary nodded. “No need to break the seal. To leave it awhile among any garments I meant to wear was, and is, enough to give me all the perfume I ever want. All these years I have kept it—five of them since Lucian’s desertion of me. Though I knew from the first I had no real hope of his return—if I’d had any real hope, Felix, would my life have been what it has been?—yet I secretly hoped. Throwing away all remnants of modesty, Felix—every remaining shred of the teaching and beliefs I had from Abiud, my father—hardening my heart against pity and all loving-kindness, so that even my good Cleon was dismayed—I yet secretly hoped. And, secretly hoping, I still kept this against the outwardly unhoped-for return.

“But now,” she exclaimed wildly, lifting the vase as if to dash it on the mosaicked floor; “I will consign it, broken, to lend its fragrance to the kitchen midden!”

Felix would have moved towards her, but was checked by a swift change in her mood. Suddenly she hugged the vase to her bosom.

“But no!” she said, low-voiced. “No! I shall keep it until I can take to myself a rich and magnificent enough lover! Won’t that be the right revenge, Felix?” she said, sobbingly, on a rising note. “Won’t that be the ironic revenge?”

Convulsed, but dry-eyed, she swayed and stumbled into Felix’s ready arms.

“Quietly, Mary, quietly! Do not give way in that wild fashion! You will do yourself hurt if you sob like that. You mustn’t weep.”

“Would that I could weep, Felix. I sob, not for grief, but for anger. I could not weep even when Cleon died. Shame I know—shame for what I was and have become. Rage, also. They rack me with pain. And but for pain I could believe my breast turned to stone.”

“I am to blame——”

“Because you took me to Lucian?”

“Yes. I persuaded you——”

“No. Nothing you said, or could have said, persuaded me. Hatred of my narrowed life in Bethany persuaded me. Belief in my own powers—belief

that in the world outside Judea they would be given freedom to range and expand—these persuaded me.”

“I promised you that you could trust in Lucian,” said Felix, doggedly. “I was young. He was my mentor. No bookman myself, I admired the learning he added to his ability as a soldier. I believed he loved learning as you did. I believed no man could hold your respect, or keep you happy, unless he shared your love of learning—yes, and matched you in it. In this regard I knew I couldn’t satisfy you. I had no love of learning. I wanted no more of it than was needed for making me a good soldier. Even now I want no more than that—enough, at any rate, to talk what I take to be sense when there’s need to talk. So, judging Lucian’s need of you to be no less than my own, I spoke for him.”

“Felix!”

“Allow me one moment more, Mary. I say I judged Lucian’s need of you by my own. It did not seem possible to me that any man would so undervalue your beauty, your dignity, your wit, your grace—everything, in fact, that combines to make you the rarity you are—as to fail in making you his for ever. I don’t know what happened to separate you and Lucian—to make him, as you say, desert you. I only know if I’d had his good fortune nothing would have parted us, even for a time, except a campaign or some duty on which I could not take you with me. I only know that nothing would prevent me coming back to you except death itself.”

She had long before slid from the embrace of her own seeking, and they had been standing with their hands locked oddly on each other’s wrists, with the vase between them. But on the change of tense in his last sentence, she slipped his grasp and stood away from him, to look at him half frowning. Felix dropped his hands to his sides.

“Mary,” he said quietly. “Forget Lucian. Forget, too, the fool I was to let my love for you speak for him. I loved you then. I loved you from the first moment I saw you—you remember how I climbed the wall in Bethany to tax you with hitting me with a clay ball from the sling? I have loved you ever since.”

She held out a hand to fend off his approach, and she laughed wryly.

“No, no, no, Felix! You must be stupid to tell me this—at such a time! For you—for me—oh, it simply will not do!”

She clapped her hands, and turned away from him until the servant allotted to him appeared.

“Go with Stephen and have your bath, Felix,” she said quietly. “I shall see you at supper.”

For a moment or two after the men had gone she stood looking absently at the perfume vase held in her two hands. A dry sob escaped from her, and once again she raised the vase as if to dash it on the floor. Then, with a sudden transition to calm, she walked in a quite matter-of-fact way to the coffer and put the vase back. Lowering the lid, she fastened it by a bolting arrangement hidden in an embossed ornament, and operated by a removable pin. The pin she slipped into a pocket inside her girdle.

Coming erect again, she went over to a mirror of polished copper, and spent a moment or two arranging her head-veil, and whisking the dust from her contact with Felix from her mantle and *tunica*. Then she went to meet her guests.

III

Of the guests assembled in the villa's triclinium there was presently—with Mary as a possible other exception—only one capable of taking an onlooker's view of the proceedings. Felix Scaliger, not averse to occasional relaxation through good food and wine, was careful in choosing the occasion for lapsing from a normally abstemious habit. Over-indulgence did not go well with the athleticism he felt at need to preserve for the active part of the profession he loved, and its immediate or next-morning *sequelæ* were no help when engaged—as he was on this visit to Galilee—in military diplomacy. He had been sent by the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, to persuade Herod into a reorganization and redistribution of his police troops.

The room, Felix thought, was almost as garish as the company. He guessed that Mary had done what she could with wall colours and other decorative elements to subdue an original Eastern barbarism, but had been defeated by architectural detail. In idea and proportion the chamber was Roman, but its ornamentation lacked restraint. The pilasters which broke the containing walls into panels, and the columns standing out from them to form an ambulatory and support the beams of the coffered ceiling, were not only gross in shape, but were too heavily ornate for ease of the eyes. This over-assertion in plinth, base, cap, and fluting had answer in the ceiling mouldings, in the dado, frieze, and cornice of the walls themselves. The clerestory piercings in the frieze that lit the chamber during the day were filled with clumsily designed trellises of bronze.

The room, Felix decided, was not worthy of the furnishings Mary had put into it—the hangings of jewelled coloration that here and there hid the elaborated panels, the glowing wine-and-honey larch of the tables and *lecti*, the chastened richness of the numerous candelabra with suspended lamps that lit the feast. But it did suit the company.

He thought them a mixed lot, both men and women, and he identified most of them as hangers-on to the Herodian court: a Greek or two, Græco-Romanized Jews, Syrians, declassed Romans.

The food had been served in the Roman fashion, and there had been in the beginning an imitation of the Roman formality in taking wine. But the formality had been dispensed with as the banquet went on, as had the other of mixing the wine with cooled water. Most of the guests had reached the stage of demanding wine according to his or her individual want, and few were troubling about diluting it. The festivity was running towards riot.

Although in the years since Bethany Felix had attained ease in the lingua franca, Greek-based, of the Asian and Syrian provinces, most of the chatter and badinage that was tossed about went past him. He could gather that the joke of the evening was against the rather withered elegant half-way down the *summus* couches on his left—something about Falernian that this Bassus had himself provided and was being made to drink. Felix, having read a work on the Germanic war by one Bassus Aufidius and heard of an orator of the same family called Julius, wanted to know if the old fop was a connexion. But, perceiving that his questions were making the ageing youngster uncomfortable, he began to wish he had never ventured on the politely intended inquiry, the more so because Mary beside him showed a cruel intention of exploiting it for the man's further discomfort.

The resulting exposure of this Bassus's pretences told Felix nothing that he had not already guessed—that the man probably was descended from some freed slave of the Bassi. It was not unusual for a manumitted slave to adopt the patronymic of the family he had served, nor uncommon for such a one to become rich enough through trade or usury to leave his descendants well-off. For this pretended Roman expatriate, whose faulty Latin betrayed only the slightest experience of Italy, Felix felt little pity. But he was shocked at Mary. Her unheeding cruelty towards her guest suggested a deterioration in her character that dismayed him. For her own sake he wanted to intervene.

It happened, however, that there was an intervention of another kind. The elderly Roman on Mary's right hand, Calvinus, was already far gone in

wine. He picked up the name of Bassus, and some jingle suggested itself to his tipsy mind.

“Bassus?” he remarked. “Bassus is no Bacchus. Wha’s’e know of wine? Dir’e ever forward wine in’e smoke of a flue?” Then in an un stumbling sonorous voice he began to quote Horace:

“Hic dies anno redeunte festus
Corticem adstrictum pice demovebit
Amphoræ, fumum bibere institutæ
Consule Tullo.”

“Well done, Calvinus!” the guests cheered. “More! More!”

“And how abou’ crea—clearing it—hey?” He struggled to his feet.

“Massica si cœlo supponas vina sereno,
Nocturna, si quid crassi est, tenuabitur aura,
Et decedet odor nervis inimicus; at illa,
Integrum perdunt lino vitiata saporem.”

Swaying, he received the cheers and laughter with a dignified air of having earned them. He aimed a cunning finger at the side of his nose, and missed it.

“Or with an egg!” he announced. Pulling himself too erect in an effort to add weight to the announcement, he over-balanced and went sprawling back on the couch beside Mary. Fortunately, his wine-cup was empty, or the lesser ill she had foreseen for her Persian coverlet would have visited its substitute. Mary lithely dodged contact with the sprawler, and signalled a servant to prop him up.

“Declamation being so elegantly begun by Calvinus,” she said clearly through the noise, “what about something from Rubinius, our student of Virgil?”

The suggestion was received with acclaim, not unmixed with jeering. The paganized young Jew so named protested with assumed languor that he had no verses in memory. Besides, he said, he didn’t want to be classed with any actor.

“Oh, come, Joannes!” said Mary. “Nobody would ever class you as an actor, but you yourself boast that you’re seldom out of the theatre. By now you must be an expert on delivery. As for not remembering any verses, there is that fine copy of Virgil’s *Georgics*—I did thank you suitably for it?”

“Why, yes, Mary—of course.”

“You could hold it in your hand—just to refresh your memory—while you speak some of your favourite stanzas. Perian!”

“Ma’am?”

“Just fetch that new copy of Virgil. You know where it is.”

Discomfort crept over Felix once again. In spite of her honeyed accents, Mary was playing some trick on the young fellow. It was not that he, Felix, could get up any liking for the fellow. The name seemed all wrong. It sounded like an Eastern mispronunciation of ‘Rubienus.’ And then there was a trifle too much curl in the cropped hair, probably tintured anyhow, and the toga didn’t seem right—too short, too bordered, too fancy altogether. Fellow looked a bit of a creature. . . .

And here again Felix was sorrier for Mary than for her victim. True, the fellow seemed to have no notion what a mess he was making of things, mouthing the lines like the worst of bad professionals, loud and soft without any relation to the sense, boggling the scansion, and pronouncing hardly a word right. But Mary must have known how bad it would be. She therefore must have called for the exhibition in mere malice. It did not matter that this Rubinius was quite pleased with himself, accepting all the applause as genuine. It scarcely mattered, save for what it showed, that Mary transgressed the laws of hospitality. Save for what the transgression showed; a cruelty in Mary of Magdala of which Mary of Bethany would have been incapable. A cruelty that, seen in another, would have made Bethany’s Mary wince for shame.

As the evening wore on the discomfort of Felix grew more and more acute. If Mary, like all her guests except himself, had abandoned herself to the effects of wine, he would have been less perturbed. But although she drank a great deal more than Felix, she remained mistress of her intelligence. Felix had soldiered for close on a dozen years and in many countries. He had seen and shared in not a few nights of riot and debauch, and he did not consider himself squeamish. But, even allowing for his own sobriety, he felt he had never been so sick and weary of a spectacle of debauchery as of this that the guests of Mary presented. Yet Mary herself, apparently as sober as he, seemed not merely to view it without disgust, but to be set on urging it forward—as though she found amusement in exposing the pretensions and weaknesses of each of her guests in turn. It did not seem to occur to her—or, if it did, she did not appear to care—that in laying bare the worst in her companions she made even more plain the evil traits

developed in herself. The pride which in Mary of Bethany had lain in courage and a passionate personal integrity, and which therefore had struck Felix Scaliger as admirable, seemed now to have become mere touchiness regarding her own superiority. It defended her beauty, her power of attraction, her wit and intelligence, her position and possessions, against being surpassed by those of anyone, man or woman, in her company. And this although she plainly regarded her companions as worthless. Despising them, exposing them on any opportunity as the self-seeking decadents they were, she yet appeared to find some value in the powers she could exercise on them.

Felix cursed himself no less than his erstwhile friend, Mark Lucian, for the part he had taken in causing proud Mary of Bethany to become the pitiable Mary of Magdala. It was with a profound relief that he accepted Mary's invitation to take a turn in the garden.

IV

"You do not like my friends?" Mary suggested.

"They are not your friends, Mary," said Felix. "One does not despise one's friends."

"If one holds them foolish?"

"Other virtues—I mean, some virtue in them outweighing their folly must prevent despal. But don't chaffer words with me, Mary. You know very well these people are not worthy of you."

"I must frequent their company—or have none at all," said Mary. "As for their being worthy of me, I could wonder what I value in myself that would make me worthy of them."

Felix exclaimed impatiently.

"No, no!" Mary said quickly. "I am not talking idly. Nor am I searching for flattery. If you think, Felix, that I did not realize you were watching me in the supper-room, you are mistaken. But I could take no care to show myself to you any different from what I am—or my company any different from what it usually is. You thought, did you not, that a hostess should behave better?"

"Yes."

“Even to guests of that quality?”

“To guests of any quality.”

Mary laughed.

“Your downrightness, Felix,” she said, “is refreshing. There is nothing I can say to you that you cannot answer to my shame.”

“I did not speak to shame you, Mary.”

“Your solid virtue does that. I could take no care to behave differently because I would not have you believe me what I am not. If you think of me as the Mary you knew in Bethany you will take hurt. I am what I have become. I live among people whom I despise, and I don’t know why I despise them. They are no worse than I am. If they have no virtue, neither have I.”

“Mary!”

“That hurts because you insist on thinking of me as I was. But you have seen to-night, Felix, nothing you couldn’t have seen on occasion for the last year or two, nothing that you will not see on occasion a year hence. This is my life. I live among people who tolerate me and whom I tolerate. I am less idle than they are, but only because I need exercise for my wits.”

“In what way?”

“In a way that Cleon pointed out to me. He showed me how the trends in markets might be anticipated, how commerce flowed in the trade-routes, and how by foresight founded on knowledge money could be ventured for profit.”

“Cleon did that?”

“For amusement, as an exercise of his intelligence. He simply wished to prove the value of accurate observation. He had no interest in making money. But I had. And by adopting Cleon’s ideas I have prospered.”

“This was after—after——?”

“After Lucian left me? Yes. Cleon, I think, foresaw Lucian’s intention of making the separation final. Lucian could accept me as a woman, but was annoyed by me as an individual. He did not wish me to think for myself. And as I insisted on thinking for myself, even in matters of what he called policy, he often grew angry with me. My Jewish obstinacy, my outspokenness to his friends, augured ill for his advancement while I was with him. So he left me. Cleon remained.”

They had wandered away from the house to where the wall of the villa garden dropped into rough ground undulating, dune-like, to the lake shore. In the blue of the starry night a pair of nightingales, perched in trees apart, vied each other in bubbling ripples of song. Some distance along the shore lights were moving. For a moment or two they listened and watched with but idle interest.

“This woman Lucian has married,” Mary said abruptly, “what is she called?”

“Corinna. She is of the Claudian family.”

“Beautiful?”

“M’m—dignified, patrician—yes. Beautiful—well, no.”

“A cold woman,” Mary decided. “Lucian has chosen one to dissatisfy him—thoroughly.”

There was a long silence between them; then Felix essayed to speak:

“Mary!”

It was as if she had not heard him.

“Cleon remained,” she repeated almost absently. “There always had been a great kindness between Cleon and myself. I could find—and too often did find; it was the root of our mutual unease—a limitation in Lucian’s thinking. But there was no boundary to Cleon’s thought, nothing that he could not approach with an open mind. Interested, alive with curiosity, ever questing, he yet was unique in discretion. He foresaw the difficulties I would face in uniting with Lucian. I would not accept the rites of Roman marriage, and Lucian could not submit to Jewish requirements. Because of the principle that the woman in a Roman marriage passes simply from the tuition of her father or family into that of her husband, Cleon advised me against pretence of any of the three Roman forms that might confer this *potestas* on Lucian—*confarreatio*, *coemptio*, *usus*——”

“Divine Augustus!” breathed Felix.

“What’s the matter?”

“Amazement. Hearing you talk like another Cicero.”

“I only echo Cleon. He saw the real danger for me. My rejection of Roman rites didn’t matter. As a Jewess I had no standing. But a legal contract could be made that left me with free disposition of my own property. Outwardly my union with Lucian was *matrimonium justum*. In

fact, it was merely concubinage. In Roman eyes it wasn't adulterous or shameful. In the eyes of my own people it made me a harlot."

"Any shame attaches to the belief that says so!"

"Nevertheless Jewish law is kinder to the foreign woman than the Roman is. A Gentile woman, accepting the Law, can become the legal wife of a Jew. But even had I been ready to marry Lucian through Juno Pronuba, with sacrifices and the rest of it, none of the forms would have given me real status. Because as a foreigner, *peregrina*, I had and have no right to Roman marriage at all."

"I am no lawyer. At any rate, you are a much better one than I am," said Felix. "But there must be a way——"

"Cleon saw none. And his only care was that no legal formality or contract would put what belonged to me into Lucian's power. Can you, Felix, doubt what would have happened to my possessions if Lucian had charge of them?"

"Lucian never had enough for his needs. He was always in debt," Felix said with some hesitation. "But——"

"I know now that, but for Cleon, Lucian would have stripped me of all I had," said Mary. "And the fact that he had made me penniless would not have stopped him from leaving me alone in Cæsarea."

Felix remained silent.

"You don't believe that?"

"He was my friend. I took you from Bethany to him. Shrinking from the consequences, I—I—well, I shrink from believing it," said Felix unhappily. "But I cannot escape from it. I must believe it."

He considered for a moment or two.

"When he left Cæsarea for Rome," he then asked, "you understood it was only for a visit? You thought he would return?"

"Lucian said he would be away less than six months."

"What happened?"

"I felt that the separation was final, but still hoped he would return. Cleon saw my restlessness. A ship put in that was going to Alexandria, and he suggested a visit to Egypt. We went there. We had converse with the Jewish philosopher, Philo, read in the libraries, and visited the cities of the

Nile. One day, after a visit to the market in Alexandria, Cleon spoke, as I have told you, about how commerce was carried on. By then four months or more were spent. I was anxious to return to Cæsarea. I had a store of money by me, and I made a venture in many bales of what I saw was an exceptionally fine weave of Egyptian cloth, and other pieces of patterned fabric. Cleon and I took ship with these and came to Tyre. I sold more than half of the Egyptian cloth and several of the other pieces to merchants there. Then I hurried with what was left to Damascus, and sold it with even better profit than I had in Tyre, making enough altogether to pay for our trip to Egypt.”

“Now, by Hercules!”

“We came back to Cæsarea,” Mary continued. “Valerius, with whom Lucian had sailed for Puteoli, had returned. Lucian hadn’t. Cleon saw Valerius, and learned that Lucian had been given a command in the armies of the Rhine. There was no direct message either by mouth or pen for myself or Cleon. There has been no message during the five years since.” She broke off. “Those lights along the shore seem to be increasing.”

“Yes,” Felix agreed. “What do they mean?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t noticed it as a local practice, but don’t fishermen sometimes use torches to attract fish?”

“It may be that,” Felix agreed, and went on: “And in the five years since?”

“Cleon and I travelled, stopping awhile in cities that attracted us. Damascus, Tarsus, Antioch of Syria, Antioch of Pisidia, Ephesus, Pergamos, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Rhodes. Cleon exchanged thoughts with philosophers and poets, and I sat at his feet. And I traded. But Cleon grew weary of the journeys, and his health was failing. I brought him back to Galilee, which he loved. This house was for sale, and I bought it. Six months after we came here, Cleon met death in his sleep. That was two years ago. Dear Cleon!

“There is only one trade, Felix, which a solitary woman like myself—neither virgin, wife, nor widow—is allowed to follow in comparative peace in this country, or in any from the Pillars of Hercules to the Caucasus,” Mary said after a sigh. “My neighbours suppose that I follow it, and I let them suppose so. I am counted rich, and they suppose my riches ill-gotten. There is some irritation because I use my ill-gotten riches in commerce of another kind. But from an acquaintance with Herod Antipas which goes back to the

time of Lucian it is supposed that I am under his protection. This supposition I even foster. It saves me from molestation on the score of the others.”

“Mary!”

“Let us go in and join the rabble,” she said harshly. “It seems I have told a long story to no purpose.”

CHAPTER VIII

Voice in the Night

THE neglected guests greeted the return of Mary and Felix with shouting. Mary put their bawdy hints aside with less asperity than would have been normal with her, and called for a change of wine, a fresh service of fruits and sweetmeats. As a further diversion, once the interest in the new wine and its adjuncts began to fade, she had the singers and musicians summoned. The troupe was new to most of her guests. It came, via Damascus, from the far end of Philip's Tetrarchy beyond Trachonitis. The instruments were more primitive than those known in Syria or Palestine, and the music whether sung or played was of limited gamut. For appreciation its wild cadences needed clearer intelligence than the bulk of Mary's guests at the moment, or perhaps normally, were able to lend. Apart from the effects of the grape, their wits were better keyed for finding amusement in the snores with which Calvinus, the old Roman, unconsciously kept time to the music's rhythm.

The Mary whom Felix watched deal with the situation could have been, he thought, an entirely different woman from the Mary he had been pitying less than an hour before. A gesture from her to the leader of the troupe led presently to a succession of loudly plangent chords, followed by a break into a more assertive rhythm. A semi-naked girl with a lithe and lustrous brown body shot from behind drapery held up by two Nubians, and began a mad whirl in the middle of the floor beyond that occupied by the guests. In the attention given to the dancer, few of the guests heeded the deft removal of Calvinus by the strong bearers of Mary's litter. The smoothly effected transition from rowdiness to quiet attention in her riotous company, with the unobtruded removal of the rather pitiable target of their derision, could not have been done with politer skill. With no more than a lifting of the brows and a couple of hardly perceptible gestures, Mary had created a situation she could control with dignity. The scene, indeed, had not been rescued from an atmosphere of debauchery. The guests were too far gone in wine for that. But Mary in an instant had become the well-poised hostess, in quiet command of a company that did not quite know how to behave. Felix, though inclined to chuckle inwardly, yet marvelled.

The brown-skinned dancer, from her introductory spin, moved into a slow passage in which, with undulating arms and a varied number of steps from one side to the other, she presented a series of graceful poses briefly held. Save for a mitred headdress of open-work gilt material, a heavy gold bangle on each wrist, and a pleated skirt of diaphanous material gathered up to the hip at each side, she was naked. The nipples of her high and rounded little breasts were gilded. And at each pose, with prone hands downheld, her sloelike eyes, heavy with kohl, seemed to adore them. The choreography was simple. The dancer moved alternately on the two lines of a flat angle, turning the one pose from side to side at the apex, and moving out to hold it again at the end of each of the angle's arms. But though the pace of the repetitive music did not alter, a gradual increase in the number of steps between each pose, and in these a more exaggerated protrusion of the veiled loins each time, gave the effect of crescendo and invited excitation.

This solo dance ended in a whirl even faster than that with which it had begun. The dancer scarcely paused to acknowledge the acclamation of her audience, but gracefully beckoned with alternate arms to left and right. From one side and the other, two women joined her. Of much heavier build than the solo dancer, they were as scantily clad, except that veils, brought across under the eyes and fixed to close-fitting caps of gold network, fell over their breasts and shoulders. The trio dance that ensued had no apparent sequence of ordered movement. The three simply moved about and postured as they willed, but without getting in each other's way. They stepped with wing-like motions of their arms either up or down to pause for a brief body movement as in *danse de ventre*, in the case of the heavier women either with the hands cupping their breasts after a downward undulation of their arms, or held behind their head at the end of an upward move. Command of their pectoral muscles enabled the two heavier women to twitch their breasts distinctly without flexion in their upheld arms.

Mary's guests had fallen silent, both men and women watching the performance with more or less obvious avidity. The three dancers were joined by another two, but, although the music quickened and grew louder, the sense of a swelling murmur outside the house that had begun to be felt from close to the start of the trio dance now asserted itself strongly. The attention of the audience wandered from the dancers. They looked at each other inquiringly.

"A storm coming up?" one ventured.

"How can that be? There's no wind. The flames of the lamps do not flicker, and the smoke from them goes up almost straight to the ceiling."

“Yes, that’s true.”

But still the exterior murmur swelled, as if, indeed, the waters of the near-by Sea of Galilee were rising turbulently. Perian brought himself into his mistress’s notice and lifted his brows inquiringly. A nod from Mary gave him leave to investigate.

The dance went on, but haltingly. Both musicians and dancers were conscious at once of the wandering attention of their audience and of the cause of it. The chief musician, leader of the troupe, cast an appealing glance at Mary, who almost immediately clapped her hands. The music stopped, and the dancers ran to put on their wraps. The outside mutter and sougling for a moment had uninterrupted sway. And then all Mary’s guests seemed to speak at once. It was a storm . . . it couldn’t be. . . .

“But this is nonsense,” said Felix. “Whatever it is, it is outside the house. Why not go outside the house to discover?”

Mary put out a hand to stop him from rising.

“Perian has gone to find out.”

“I’d sooner see for myself,” said the soldier. “I know the noise. I have often heard it come from an enemy camp. It is the sound of many voices.”

“At night?”

“And from the sea—many voices?”

Then Perian returned. “It is a gathering of many people on the shore, *hera*; they carry torches.”

“The people have risen against Herod!” cried a guest.

“Unlikely,” said Felix. He had suddenly towered above the rather scared guests. “Or else they have leaders of no quality.”

He strode across the triclinium to its entry and disappeared. Mary hurried after him. More doubtfully, and in ones and twos, the guests followed.

II

To the left, or north, of the villa, the shore was thronged. There must have been some hundreds of people. From the height of the garden wall it was possible to see that the central clustering of torches was about a figure

apparently standing in the stern of a boat, for it rose beyond the water's edge. The murmur that had drawn Felix and Mary from the villa had died down to a mere sighing. Above this a single voice could be heard. To begin with, and while the guests still came with their chattered surmises to join Felix and Mary, it was possible to make out only an occasional word of what the man in the stern of the boat was saying. But as the guests fell to silence his voice, apparently effortless, but vibrant, persuasive, and with a golden ring, gradually became more distinct.

“Woe to you when all men speak well of you! For isn't that just what their fathers did to the false prophets? But I say to you that hear me, Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, bless those that curse you, and pray for those that abuse you. . . .”

“Huh!” sneered the dandy who called himself Rubinius. “Nothing to see, nothing to hear—only this new prophet, the Nazarene, filling the ears of the unwashed!”

He giggled at his own wit. Mary turned on him impatiently.

“Quiet!” she said. “Give us peace!”

“A queer rebellion!” chuckled Felix. “And what nonsense! How can one love one's enemies?”

“Oh, please be quiet, Felix,” Mary begged. “This is a teaching new in Israel.”

“For,” rang the voice from the boat's stern, “if you love only those that love you, is it anything to your credit? Why, men of sin do no less. And if you do good only to those who do good to you, or help only those who help you, what merit can you claim for that? I say to you again, men of sin do no less.”

“Huh!” exclaimed Rubinius. “There's wisdom for you!”

“You witless fool, be quiet!” Mary said fiercely. “Be quiet, or go—go back to your wine, go and play dice—do anything your silly mind fancies—but either go or shut up!”

Rubinius, however, was not alone in his impatience.

“I for one am beginning to shiver,” said a woman. “I can't hear half what the man's saying, and I'm sure I don't understand what I do hear. Let's go in, Mary!”

“Oh, yes, Mary, do let’s go indoors again. This is no fun,” another woman pleaded.

“I give you my view, for what it’s worth,” said the elegant Bassus in his artificially languid manner. “The hours of daylight should be long enough for this farthingsworth of prophet. Must he come here and disturb the night?”

Mary could stand their chatter no longer. She broke away from the group and ran to a gate in the garden wall that gave into a roadway leading to the shore. She was well away before Felix, turning on the exclamations of the other guests, realized she had gone. Some time elapsed before he could get from the others what appeared a sensible indication of the direction she had fled in, and set out to follow her. Not knowing the garden, he wasted still more time in blundering about before finding the gate and the roadway. He ran towards the shore shouting her name.

“Mary never had any manners,” one of the women declared.

“Oh, well, what can you expect? Everybody knows she’s possessed.”

“I wouldn’t mind being possessed if I had her money.”

“I wouldn’t mind being possessed if I had her choice of Roman—that Felix man simply stuns me,” hiccuped the girl Bassus had brought to the banquet.

“I had thought, my dear Thyrsa,” drawled he, “you preferred subtlety.”

“I’m a bit tired of subtlety,” replied the girl. “Thews and a strong back for a change.”

“I’m shivering. What we’re standing here for I don’t know,” broke in the woman first to object to being in the open. “A fine way to end a banquet, I must say! I’m sick and tired of Mary’s caprices. Let’s go inside.”

“Good idea!” said Rubinius. “Didn’t some one suggest dice?”

“Not for me,” said Bassus, as they moved towards the house. “In my view, for what it’s worth, the party’s over. I did hope to have a word with the dancing-girl with the gilded *mammillæ*, but that can wait. I suggest we treat darling Mary as she treats us—without ceremony—and depart in a body forgetting thanks or farewells. To my habitation is but a step.”

Some, thinking of Mary’s good wine and food, and remembering the pretences and the chillingly elegant sparsities of Bassus in both respects, did not consider his idea at all funny. But it happened that the more assertive

minority that usually gives a lead on occasions of the sort thought a change of scene attractive, and within a very few minutes Mary's villa was empty of guests, save for the old toper, Calvinus, snoring on a couch that no chance incontinence on his part would greatly harm.

III

Mary sped, between scramble and run, along the rugged and tortuous pathway to the shore. Memories sweet and bitter alternated and spun in her recollection. Through shouts of her own name behind her—she knew it was Felix, but paid no heed—she caught snatches of the message coming from the water's edge:

“Love your enemies, then, and lend to them without expecting any return. Great will be your reward. For you will be in truth sons of the Most High—He who is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil. Be merciful as your Father in Heaven is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Pardon, and you will yourselves be pardoned . . .

“My call is not to those who hold themselves to be righteous, but to sinners. I call them to be born again in the endless love of God, their Father. . . .”

Behind her the repeated cry: “Mary, Mary!” In her mind remembrance of the embracing warmth of her own strong and gentle father, Abiud, the just, the kind, so ready in forgiveness. The voice from the shore again, closer, pitched in a deeper key: “I know you stand . . . on the brink of an abyss.”

Of course, of course (she told herself), it could not be otherwise. But how had she failed to see it? Yeshu bar-Nasha—Jesus of Nazareth. The man speaking from the stern of the boat was the penny-a-dozen prophet she had jeered at, but he was also Yeshu, the Galilean yoke-maker.

Calling herself fool and worse, Mary scrambled over the rough, dune-like land that separated her from the crowd, pausing now and again, breathless, to listen to Jesus. Her feet were bruising. Small stones and sand filled her sandals. And suddenly people were all around her.

Jesus had finished his discourse, it seemed. The people about Mary were murmuring. Then suddenly rose the cry: “The prophet is going! The prophet is going!”

“Is there to be no more healing of the sick?”

“He is putting out by boat from the shore!”

“No, no! I must have him touch me! Bid him stay!”

“Hurry, you strong ones, and bid the prophet stay!”

The crowd surged about Mary, buffeting her this way and that. She was engulfed. A staff or crutch end was screwed agonizingly into her foot. Close by she heard a croaking voice: “Way for me, friends, way for me, a leper and unclean these many years!” Distorted bodies crushed past her. A shapeless face peered into hers.

“Felix, help!” she cried, her voice drowned by the voices of the crowd.

An arm came about her, and her voice rose again.

“Have no fear, lady,” said the owner of the supporting arm. “I will help you. Just let me be your guide.”

The help given her was deft, decided. Presently she was out of the crowd and alone with her guide. She had noted, thankfully, that he was clean of body and habit, and now she could determine that he was young, little more than a youth.

“My thanks to you,” she breathed.

“Keep them awhile,” was the reply, somewhat abrupt. “Isn’t that your house—where the lights are?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll take you there. Lean on me still—the going is rough.”

One arm was about her, and the other hand upheld her left elbow. She was supported smoothly through the hummocks of the duneland in a way that made Mary wonder. Her guide seemed to have the eyes of a cat. Her feet were put on the comparatively easier going of a path, and the arm about her shifted to replace the other supporting her forearm. They came, she and her guide, to the garden-gate.

“My thanks once again,” said Mary. “I shall be all right now.”

The young fellow laughed quietly.

“Let me finish a welcome task,” he suggested. “You are more shaken than you know. I’ll put you into your servants’ hands.”

Protest seemed futile. Mary allowed herself to be led up to the loggia where light streamed from an outer room. Something about the young fellow struck Mary as familiar—the belted shirt, the Greek hat which held his features in shadow.

“Don’t I owe you a double debt?” she suggested. “Aren’t you the young Judean who prevented my litter from being overturned on the Capernaum road?”

“Yes. But I didn’t know the litter was yours.”

There was a hinted significance in the reply that made Mary jump to a disappointing conclusion—the insistence on seeing her right up to the house had been made, apparently, in the hope of reward.

“I must give you something for your trouble,” she suggested.

The head in the shadowing Greek hat moved slowly from side to side.

“I don’t need—I don’t want—any reward.”

“But,” murmured Mary. “I feel you are here—you brought me right up to the house—for some purpose?”

“I came to see you. I know who you are.”

“You know who I am?” Mary repeated, half bewildered. She was astonished to find herself in fear of a kind, fear of she did not know what. “Many people know who I am,” she said hardily, “but what especially am I to you, young man?”

“I think,” he replied quietly, “no, I know—you are my sister Mary.”

“Laza——”

The name stuck in her throat. With a quick stride towards him, she grasped him by the shoulders and turned him full into the light. In the fierceness of her grasp, the hat fell back on his head. She stared into his face, and incredulity was swept away in recognition.

“Lazarus! Lazarus!”

From under the dark eyebrows, slightly knitted, the oddly golden eyes, so well remembered, regarded her questioningly. His shapely lips parted a little in a tentative smile.

The thought of what had happened in the intervening years swept over Mary. She could not be sure why Lazarus had sought her out—was it in reproach? Her hands dropped from his shoulders, and she backed away. But

Lazarus followed her, his hands outstretched. She took them, but found her own enfolding. And in much the same way as she would have drawn to her the child she had last seen in Bethany she was herself drawn into a strong but gentle embrace that banished all her fears and doubts.

IV

They had passed through the arcading which separated the lamp-lit summer-room from the loggia, and were seated together on a draped couch. Mary, concerned because she thought Lazarus too lightly clad for the night airs, would have had a cloak brought for him, but had to be content with making him wrap one of the couch draperies about his waist and legs. Lazarus indulged her concerns, but laughed at them. He was warm enough, wanted no food.

Reluctance to let her brother encounter her wine-flushed and careless-mouthed guests—so many of them sheerly pagan—had made her take him no farther into the house than the summer-room. Eager for news of Lazarus himself, of Bethany, and of his purposes in Galilee, she soon forgot that she had guests at all. Quick in change of mood though she was herself, she found Lazarus quicker, though much less prone to extremes in any. He appeared to have lost none of the affectionate disposition which had made him so lovable as a child. He could still lapse into the self-contained gravity which had made him no less endearing. But he seemed readier to laugh.

“Martha?” he said in answer to her inquiry. “She’s just the same as ever, pondering the simplest thing with the same finger in the side of her mouth—you know, with the rest spread over her cheek. The flocks increase and the fields yield prosperously (thanks be to the Holy One—blessed be His Name!), but she still goes about with knitted brows.

“And Zachary? Just the same, too, except for being more of water-jar shape about his middle. I think, perhaps, he gets into tighter knots than ever about the niceties of the Law. But he still loves the kitchen.

“He and Martha together—I love them. They make me laugh.”

He chuckled affectionately at the thought, but at once became serious when Mary asked what brought him to Galilee.

“I follow Jesus of Nazareth. He is that same Yeshu, you know, who fashioned the yoke for Wayward and Willing, and who made the stilts for me.

“Mary, there has never been a teacher in Israel like him. Did you hear him as he spoke to the crowd from the stern of James’s boat?”

“Something of what he said.”

“It is so simple. It comes right out of him, with none of the ifs and ands and the made-up arguments—like making a bird’s nest of a skein of twine just for the sake of unravelling it—that you hear in the schools. He says straight out, ‘You’ll hear it said, but *I* say to you.’ And then you get what you see at once is the truth. He preaches forgiveness.”

“Forgiveness?”

“That the Holy One is indeed our Father, loving His children—us, you see?—ready to forgive our wrongdoings. It’s so lovely, Mary. It’s finding out that God, though He must punish, doesn’t want to. He isn’t the fussy tyrant Zachary seems to think Him, somebody to be bargained with by not doing this, that, and the other. That’s what Yeshu tells the doctors and the scribes and Pharisees. You can’t, he says, no matter how obedient you are to the Law, become so good as to have the Kingdom of Heaven given you as a right. Nobody’s so righteous, he says, as not to need God’s pardon. But nobody’s so bad as to have no hope of His mercy and love and forgiveness.

“I’m afraid I explain it badly, Mary,” he broke off.

“I think you explain it very well, Lazarus,” she said. “Tell me, why has Yeshu to teach in secret—at night?”

“He doesn’t. So many people waited for him to finish supper, and followed him afterwards—he was coming back here to James’s boat—that he just couldn’t disappoint them. But I don’t know that this torchlight meeting is such a good thing. Herod always connects meetings with rebellion. And there are rumours that the scribes and such, who hate Yeshu—he can make them look such fools when they argue with him—are banding with Herod’s people to have him taken and put in prison. You know what happened to John the Baptist?”

“I do. But, Lazarus,” said Mary apprehensively. “Doesn’t that mean danger for you?”

“Me? Nobody notices me!” he laughed. And he got to his feet.

“You aren’t going, are you?”

“Yes. I said I’d meet Yeshu and Simon and the others in Capernaum. They’ve gone there in the boat.”

“You can’t go to Capernaum at this time of night!”

“That’s all right. Their lodging is in a house on the shore, outside the town-walls.”

“But it’s miles away!”

“I can run it easily inside the hour. But you’re not going to lose me so easily, Mary, now that I’ve found you. I’ll be back soon after dawn.”

“Tell me, Lazarus, are you a disciple of Yeshu—I mean, a constant follower?”

“I’m not a disciple. I’m too young and not wise enough for that. But I follow him as much as he’ll let me. He sends me back to Bethany now and then—when they need help on the farm. I can’t help following him. He is the finest man I’ve ever met. I’m sure God speaks through him.”

He picked up his hat and walked a step or two towards the loggia, but stopped before reaching the arcading, as if to think. Then he turned to her.

“I’ll tell you something, Mary. Yeshu speaks of God the Father as you used to speak to me of Abiud, our own father. As you told me of a father that, loving us dearly, we could love, so Yeshu speaks of God—beyond understanding perfect in might, majesty, and power, yet loving and greatly to be loved. That makes me follow him.”

Lazarus broke from grave seriousness with a smile, and raised his hand in a modified version of the Roman salute.

“Peace be upon you, my sister!” he said.

“And upon you, my brother!” Mary said almost mechanically.

She moved to see him go, but when she reached the loggia he had vanished into the night, and only the creak of the garden-gate told of the swiftness of his going.

V

Felix was angry. He felt that he had been slighted and fooled. To begin with, soldier though he was, he had made a rough passage through the dunes, and then had spent anxious minutes searching for Mary among a rough crowd of people, too many of whom would have cut her throat for a hundredth part of the value merely of the gold clasping her mantle. To go on with, turning back to the villa, he had seen her in distant silhouette against

the light that filled the loggia being fervently embraced by a man. He felt sure of it.

His wanderings about the near-shore land had brought him in such relation to the villa that it was more convenient to enter the grounds by the main gate. When he got up to the house itself he could see nobody in the loggia, and he had gone in by the main door. The porter, informing him that all the other guests had departed, seemed reluctant to let Felix re-enter. Perian had then appeared, but on Felix questioning him declared he did not know where his mistress was. It struck Felix that, considering Mary had been on the shore in the dark and among a crowd of possible cut-throats, the major-domo was singularly unconcerned.

“But she is in the house,” said Felix. “I saw her return.”

“Yes, sir. I know. But I don’t know where she is.”

“Couldn’t you find her?”

“I know my mistress is not in any of the public rooms,” Perian replied smoothly. “And at the moment I would not care to look for her in her private apartments.”

“I see!” Felix raged.

“May I offer you a cup of wine, sir?”

“Thank you, no.”

“If you care to retire, sir?”

“I want nothing. I shall wait here awhile,” said Felix.

His impatience had brought him right into the house, Perian following, and they had reached the peristylum. Felix threw himself on to a couch.

The major-domo bowed and departed. Felix stared after him, hot-eyed, and called him ‘pimp’ and ‘pander.’ The house was nothing but a brothel—all those lechers, strumpets, bawds, jades, and classless apes at the supper-table!—and Mary its fit mistress.

With what arrogant coolness or impatience she had put aside his attempts to tell her of the love he had kept for her close on eight years. She had thought the attempts stupid, inopportune, puerile. But within an hour or two, heated no doubt by wine, she could throw herself into a frowsty rabble and come out of it with some youth whom, whether known to her or not, she must scurry with to the cubicula. And he, Felix, had been fool enough to let himself be impressed by——

“Felix!”

He came out of his resentful absorption to find Mary close by him. He leapt to his feet, and stood glowering at her.

“You are angry with me, Felix?” she said meekly enough.

“Angry with you?” he replied, with a laugh like a dog’s bark. “Who in my place wouldn’t be?”

“I’m sorry. I ought to have been more thoughtful. But a wonderful thing happened. I’m afraid I lost my wits in the crowd. Some lame man hurt my foot with his crutch or staff, and I was thrown about. Then a youth—the same boy who saved my litter from being overturned on the Capernaum road—he came to my rescue. He almost carried me out of the crowd, and brought me right up to the house. I was disappointed. I thought he had done it for reward. But—oh, Felix!—it was my brother, Lazarus!”

“Your brother?—Lazarus?”

“Yes. You remember my little brother in Bethany? Eight years have made him almost a man.”

“If indeed it was Lazarus who saved your litter from a spill, and who ran beside my horse to put me on the byroad to Capernaum, he is very much a man,” said Felix. “His wind must be superb, and he has the build of the young athlete whom Praxiteles, the Greek sculptor, had for model. Our own Philiscus said——”

In his relief he wanted to chatter, but an amused look and a really happy laugh from Mary made him pause.

“What’s the matter? Am I being funny?”

“No, Felix, only in being so much yourself. You see Lazarus as the potential soldier, the athlete, the swift and enduring runner. I am glad to see so much left in him of the enchanting baby whose first steps were into my outheld arms, so much of the sweet nature, the innate honesty, the innocence of the darling small brother who turned always to me when things went wrong . . .”

Mary placed a hand over her eyes and stood swaying. Felix put himself nearer to her lest she collapsed as, hours earlier, she had—when much less moved. But he allowed anticipation to go no further.

“It was—it was as though we had parted only yesterday,” she said, after a little, in a thin quavering voice. And pagan Felix, who called himself

Stoic, in his love for her, saw not merely how much self-control was in the statement's simplicity, but the years of loneliness and longing, locust-eaten, of which it said the greatest woe was appeased.

"I am glad, Mary," he said carefully, "for both of you."

"Thank you, Felix."

Another moment or two passed before she took her hand away from her eyes. They were wet, and so much of the Mary he had known in Bethany looked out of them as to make him marvel at the change. If love of a brother could work in her so deeply, thought Felix, fighting against jealousy, what a miracle in loving there would be for the man who could win her faith and trust to cherish maritally.

"I am disturbed, Felix," he heard her say, and woke from a dream to listen. "Lazarus is a follower of Jesus."

"The prophet who spoke from the boat?"

"Yes. Jesus of Nazareth."

"How strange—I mean, that your brother should follow such a one."

"Not at all strange, Felix. You would need to have our Jewish faith—the Jewish faith," she corrected herself, "—to understand. I met Jesus years ago in Bethany. He then was known by a Galilean variant of his name, and I did not connect him until an hour ago with the 'Yeshu' who came to our farm to make a new yoke for our oxen and carry out repairs."

"A carpenter?"

"Only a carpenter, Felix, but I think the most memorable personality I have ever met. His power of perception was almost frightening, except that he breathed kindness—not the sentimental kindness of the weakly pitying, but the kindness of a strong man alive to the real needs of others. His honesty was such as to put one's own imagined honesty to shame. I can explain no more. The truth shone in him."

"A strange eulogy for a carpenter," said Felix. "I despair of ever understanding Jewish thought. But what should disturb you about your brother following this Jesus, unless it is that the man, though honest, preaches sedition?"

"That is unlikely," replied Mary, and immediately wondered why she thought so. In what she had heard on the shore there had been nothing approaching sedition. But Jesus was a Jew, and as such almost inevitably

would tend in his teaching to foretell the re-establishment of the Throne of David, with the downfall and subjection of Israel's oppressors, through the Messiah's coming. He would scarcely be listened to unless he did. In the view of Herod Antipas, and of the Romans, such teaching would certainly be seditious.

"To be quite frank," she went on, "I don't know. From what I heard, and from what Lazarus tells me, Jesus preaches simple religion and appears to have the healing touch. But he has power, and attracts great crowds. This in itself is enough to make Herod uneasy, suspicious. He imprisoned and executed another prophet, one John, not many months ago—I'd say for no other reason, although John did condemn his marriage to Herodias.

"The matter is, Felix, that apparently Jesus's teaching offends the hidebound leaders of the Jews—the rabbis, the scribes, the Pharisees. And it is rumoured that these leaders are conspiring with Herod's officials to have Jesus arrested and put away. If this is true there might be danger for Lazarus. I want to be forewarned. Could you find out by casual inquiry in Tiberias if anything is intended against Jesus, and let me know soon?"

"Certainly," said Felix. "But I hope I don't need to ride to Tiberias at this time of night?"

"Of course not. Indeed, I think Perian has already prepared a bed for you."

Mary clapped her hands, and Perian made an almost immediate appearance.

"Perian, the *præfectus* is staying. Have you made arrangements?"

"Yes, *domina*. Stephen has everything prepared."

Perian turned with a click of his fingers, and the younger servant made as quick an appearance as he had himself.

Felix hesitated. He looked round, saw Mary, the major-domo, and the lad Stephen all looking at him expectantly, and he grinned. Apparently he was being sent to bed willy-nilly.

"Good night, Mary!" he said.

"Good night, Felix! If you must leave early in the morning come back soon. My house is yours."

Felix raised his hand in salute and followed Stephen. Mary inquired of her major-domo if every one who was not at need to stop overnight had left

the house, and if food and accommodation had been provided for the rest—the dancers and so forth. Perian assured her that everything of the sort was in order.

“Then let all the servants take advantage of the earlier departure of the guests, and go to bed,” said Mary. “Tell the porter to see to the seaward gate as well as the main one. When you lock the house, leave the garden entrance from the summer-room open. I shall want one hand-lamp in the summer-room. Tell the watchmen that the summer-room is open, but that I shall still be astir. Then go to bed yourself, Perian. Good night!”

VI

Mary stood alone and unmoving at the seaward end of the loggia. The glow of light in the clerestory openings of the house and of grilled lower windows went out room by room, until only the glimmer of the one lamp in the summer-room remained. The rasp and squeak of folding and sliding doors being shut, the thump of bolts and bars came to an end, fading in the distance with the voices of the servants. The murmur between the house’s two exterior watchmen as they made their point also ended, to be succeeded by the fall of their feet on the paving and the tap of their spear-shafts. These, too, died away.

In the silence, broken only by the far splash of the lazy-stirring waters of the lake, Mary stood still. The faint light reaching her by reflexion on the summer-room wall from the solitary lamp touched the folds of her veil and mantle so gently that she was only a shadow against shadow. Till the quiet was broken by a sob. Then the pale glimmer of white arms rising settled and held shape with clasped hands crushed against her lips.

CHAPTER IX

The Unanswerable

LIGHT filled the sky beyond the tall hills of Gaulonitis. The sun, barely risen above the tortured wastes of Batanæa, gave gilded shape to their peaks, so chastening the illusion of a flat sheet painted blue, fretted at hazard on top, and dropping sheer through banks of grey mist into the water on the far side of the Galilean Sea.

From behind these carven peaks the sky arched from palest lemon through chrysoprase and emerald into a blue which deepened into darkest sapphire, red-tinged, in the zenith. Downy feathers of cloud echoing the zenith's purple floated horizontally at wide intervals where the sky was palest. Nearer, like smoke from the peaks, some ochreous clouds plumed up into the chrysoprase where the further layers thickened and fell closer, gradually surrendering purple to fleckings of pale gold and spreading wide in tenuating fans, reaching out through gold into lemon into creamy white where cerulean deepened into cobalt.

Out of the mists that veiled their distance the lake waters came dimpling into more assured definition and colour as they approached the hither shore. Sparkling with the myriad colours in the sky, they more and more took up the lifted sapphire to find at last a hem of emerald, marbled with ochre and white, where they broke on gilded sand. The rough duneland, closer by, tumbling in shades of umber, cool or warm, was shadowed in blue and tufted with brown-green and purple.

Against all this stood the embrasured wall of the garden, a shadow given hard outline by the light reflected along its top edges, this light strong enough to cast a shadow in blurred serration into the lucid green of the garden sward. The light, again, edged the dark foliage of the trees which speared the brilliant sky and denied by contrast the seeming nearness of the gilded peaks. Closer yet, the light glancing on the smooth creamy surface of the loggia columns placed them in perfect relation with the trees and the distances beyond. And, as if to add the last touch of perfection, by reflexion from the bathed walls of the villa it lit the shadow edges of the columns, emphasizing their roundness.

Mary stood beside the last of the loggia columns. Only the heavier cloak which muffled her unmoving figure told of her having stirred since her house had fallen into quiet. The lamp in the summer-room still burned.

Birds twittered in the trees of the garden. One of them flew out of the nearest cypress and lighted on the plinth-top of the column beside her. It stood flicking its tail up and down and hopped twice to look at her inquiringly, then flew past her to the house eaves. And Mary did not stir.

It was the sound, presently, of a horse stamping impatiently on the far side of the house that made her move. One of the hands that held the cowling folds of her cloak about her head dropped to her side as she turned to listen. The trampling of the horse's hooves on paving dulled as it was walked on the earth of a path, then came the creaking of the main gate being opened and shut, followed by the regular beat as the animal was cantered away.

Mary turned fully then to listen, and the folds of her cloak fell away from her face. Pale but lovely under the crown of ruddy hair glinting in the clear morning light, it told of a vigil that had left her sad and troubled.

The beat of the hooves died away, and she turned back to her still contemplation of the north-stretching shore and sea.

II

The dawn light fell through the narrow arches of the balcony of that upper room in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It lit the up-turned face and the figure of Simon who, with phylactery on forehead and arm, and with shawl over his head, stood praying towards Jerusalem:

“. . . Great salvation bring over Israel Thy people for ever, for Thou art King, Lord of all salvation. Praised be Thou, Lord, for Thou blessest Thy people Israel with salvation.”

So he ended his supplication, abruptly removing the shawl and phylacteries to place them on a stool near by. He gazed along the shore to the other side of Magdala, and the brooding, vengeful look which had come into his face as it turned in the same direction overnight came back. A sound behind him made him turn, and he strode into the inner chamber.

The *Chazzan* of the chief synagogue awaited him. Simon greeted the congregational officer eagerly, hungrily:

“Well, Amos, well?”

“She is taken, Simon bar Joatham, the woman Anna is taken.”

“Yes, yes! Hurry, man, hurry!”

“She returned from the woman Mary’s villa in the dusk, but—her husband being absent—she did not go to her own house, but to that of Sosas, the Syrian weaver. At second cockcrow we surprised them together—I and Joses and Ephraim. The man we could not take, of course, but the woman _____”

“Yes, yes! Well done, Amos, well done! Go now and summon the Council. Bid them meet at the fourth hour. And let the woman be brought before us then.”

“Upon my head be it!”

The *Chazzan* bowed and departed.

Rubbing his hands together vigorously, Simon turned back into the balcony and gazed to where Mary’s villa gleamed white gilt above the shore.

“Now, wanton!” he said in his beard. “You shall have something to fear!”

III

The sun, overtopping the eastern wall of the sea, awoke Mary from her long contemplation. She shivered, but as with one hand she gathered her cloak closer about her neck with the other she cast it clear off her head.

For a moment she looked about her, absently, then on a sudden decision went quickly into the house. She passed through one apartment and another and went into the supper-room. Her foot kicked against a wine-goblet which had fallen on the floor only half emptied to leave a puddle of liquor.

She looked about the room with its crumpled pillows and covers, the remains of fruit and bread and sweetmeats littering tables and floor, and an expression of disgust drove the weariness out of her face.

In a sudden fury, she picked up the baton of a great gong that was suspended on a frame by one of the walls, and beat it violently.

“Perian! Perian!” she shouted, and raised the clangour again.

The major-domo came hurrying, struggling with his cloak and trying to wipe sleep from his eyes at the same time, and his untied sandals going flap-flap on the tessellated floor.

“*Domina?*”

“Rouse the servants! Set them at once to cleansing this kite’s roost of foulness! Is my house a hovel, a tavern of the stews? I will not have such a dreggy disorder left to putrify and taint my airs.”

“But, mistress,” Perian ventured timidly, as she paused for words and breath, “you yourself sent the servants to bed last night. True, your guests departed—the supper ended—much earlier than usual. But your kindness has always permitted the cleaning-up after a big supper to be left till next day.”

“I want this room—I want the whole house—cleaned now! Now!”

The clangour of the gong had aroused all her servants, and most of them came crowding to the open entry of the triclinium. In varying stages of emerging from sleep, they were also in varying states of fear, for the gong was sounded only in acute emergency, fire, or the suspicion of thieves. Two of the outdoor servants, indeed—Giles and another bearer—arrived with open-necked jars of water. Their gabbling hushed when they saw the rage their mistress was in. It happened that Giles came to a stop beside Mary. She snatched the water-jar from him, and spouted its contents across the triclinium floor.

“Now, now!” she repeated. “You will start cleaning this boozing-den this moment.”

She looked at Perian and around the faces of her staff. The rage died in her. Their varied expressions of apprehension, bewilderment, unbelief—not unmixed with astonishment—were too much for her. She began to laugh.

“My poor Perian, my good people!” she said. “I am at fault. The blame for this clutter and disorder is mine. A slothful mistress makes slothful servants. Go, all of you, about your duties since you are astir.”

The servants not immediately attached to her started to move away.

“Let them break their fast, Perian,” she said quietly. “But do get this room cleansed and put in order as quickly as possible. The sight and smell of it is hateful. I want the whole house thoroughly cleaned and aired before noon.”

“At your will, *domina*,” said Perian.

As Mary turned from him, her own maid Chloe knelt at her feet.

“What is it, Chloe?”

“Will you be pleased to have your bath prepared at once, ma’am?” the girl asked timidly. “And may I bring you some food?”

“You are a good child, Chloe,” said Mary. She passed her hand gently down the girl’s cheek in a half-caress. “I am not angry with you. Get my bath ready in an hour’s time, and let me have some bread and fruit on the terrace.”

She was about to take her way to her own cubicula, when a thought came to her.

“The præfectus Scaliger,” she asked Perian, “was it he who rode off from the house at sunrise?”

“Yes, *domina*. Stephen attended him.”

“Very well. The musicians and dancers were to have thirty denarii—give them forty, Perian. Provide them with food for a day’s journey.”

“At your will, *domina*.”

“Cornelius Calvinus is the only guest remaining?”

“Yes, *domina*.”

“Bid Stephen attend him when he wakes. See to it, Perian, that the old man is respectfully entertained, and let him have the litter or a mule, as he chooses, to carry him to Tiberias. Call me in time to give him farewell. Otherwise, Perian, I will see nobody to-day except those of the household, the commander Scaliger if he returns—and my brother, Lazarus.”

IV

A cloak in a bundle was thrown over the wall into the garden. It was followed by a Greek hat. Presently, after a faint scuffle of sandalled feet finding footholds, an arm was thrust into one of the wall’s embrasures and a head appeared. It was thatched with hair that curled from bronze at the roots into locks which were bleached gold at the ends. The face under this also had a golden tinge, a bloom upon healthy smoothness as if a peach had been powdered with a fine matt dust of the metal. The first arm was followed by a second, there was an effortless heave, and a youth in a belted *chiton* of blue linen sat at ease in the embrasure.

Lazarus had arrived.

He looked about him, somewhat naïvely contemplating the extent of house and grounds, and taking in the evidences of comparative luxury conveyed at once by the order in which they were kept and by a variety of extraneous detail. With his oddly dark eyebrows upraised, he gave his head one shake, saying to himself quite obviously: "Think of that now!"

Then he rose to his feet, picked up his bundled cloak and his hat, and crossed the turf to the terraced loggia. Thence he was about to enter the house by way of the open summer-room, when his eye fell on the breakfast table set out for Mary. He went over to the table, cast cloak and hat on the bench beside which the table was set, picked up his hat, put it on, and gravely blessed the bread and the fruit. Taking off his hat again, he picked up a loaf and broke it in his fingers. He had begun to munch with the contentment of good appetite, when he noticed the flask of oil. He picked it up, removed the stopper, and smelled. He smiled approval, and was about to sprinkle the oil on his bread, but checked himself. He set the flask on the table again, donned his hat, stood, and blessed the oil. Having looked to see that he had not omitted thanks for anything on the table he was likely to want, he removed his hat and sat down once again, to fall on the food with that serious attention which all healthy and uninhibited people devote to natural functions.

Chloe, having been into the house for a knife and some wine, came back through the summer-room humming happily under her breath. She stepped out into the loggia and saw a young man concentratedly devouring her mistress's breakfast. With a yelp, she dropped the knife, juggled with and saved the wine-flask, and bolted back into the house. Lazarus, hearing the clatter of the knife on the paving, turned at his leisure to see what was happening. All he saw was the end of a skirt whisking into the summer-room entry. It struck him as something which, did it call for explanation, would explain itself no doubt in time. He went on eating.

At the exciting news from a scarcely coherent Chloe that a thief was eating her breakfast, Mary snatched up a cloak and went hurrying out to the terrace. It occurred to her before she had quite passed through the summer-room who Chloe's thief most likely was, and thought to check her own progress as well as the maid's in order to observe the intruder without attracting his attention.

For a moment or two, then, Mary was able to watch Lazarus. It made her smile to see with what an innocent look of absorption he picked up an apple,

smelt it, and split it in two with his fingers. But her heart turned over within her. So much the man he was to look at, in the strength of his brown hands, but still, she thought, with so much about him of the little brother who, in the bygone, would have brought the apple to her and have stood with his small body against her knees to watch operations. Tenderness welled up in her, and her spirit went out to him.

Lazarus looked up. And the still-apprehensive Chloe was astonished to see her ‘thief’ grin widely, rise wiping his mouth on her mistress’s clean napkin, and come forward to greet her mistress with a kiss on both cheeks. The kisses, too, were returned.

“This is my brother, Lazarus, Chloe. Bring the wine, some water, and another knife, plate, and napkin.”

Chloe hastened. She wanted to get back quickly, have a thoroughly good look at this suddenly appearing young man, and get among her fellow-servants with the news. Brother and sister the young man and her mistress most assuredly were. The likeness was unmistakable. But for his queer dark brows and her strangely alive-looking red hair, they were as alike as two peas from the same pod.

“Is there anything the matter with my face, Mary?” Lazarus asked, when Chloe had returned and gone away again.

“Nothing that I can see, except that it’s an uncommonly nice one,” said Mary. “Why?”

“That girl of yours—Chloe—though she pretended not to, kept looking at me so. I say, Mary, this bread of yours is marvellously good. It must be made from wheat of the Hauran?”

“Yes, it is from Hauran wheat. Hauran wheat grinds so well.”

“I know. Best berry in the country—full, sweet, and hardens perfectly. I wish we could grow wheat like it in Judea.”

“Farmer Lazarus!” smiled Mary. “But, my dear, you must expect to be stared at by my servants, appearing as you do out of nowhere.”

“I came from Capernaum.”

“They don’t know that. Chloe suddenly finds you eating the breakfast she had set out for me. How did you get in, by the way?”

“Over the wall. I came straight up from the shore—had a wash in the lake. That garden-gate was barred—naturally—so I came over the wall.

What oil is this? It's as good as the bread."

"You should know the oil. It is Gush Halab."

"A selected pressing, then. Ah, what a country, Galilee! 'Easier to raise a legion of olives in Galilee than to bring up a child in Judea.' You must be very rich, Mary."

"Not rich. Call it well-to-do. But, Lazarus, if you are going to make the garden wall your way of entry——"

"I won't if you don't like it, Mary. It just struck me as easier than getting some one to come and open the main gate."

"I don't mind it. You must do just as you like, my dear. But I'll have to show you to all my servants, so that they'll know you. I don't want one of the watchmen perhaps using his spear on you as you come over the wall, or Giles—who considers himself a wrestler—throwing you back over it."

Lazarus grinned.

"Giles! Who's Giles?"

"One of my men—my litter-bearer."

"Oh, yes. I remember him. Very sturdy, but very stiff. No balance. I think, since I can keep on my feet with Abijah, I could keep on my feet with your Giles. We'll have to see," mused Lazarus. "But, Mary—this being so well-to-do—is it true what they say of you in the lakeside towns?"

A chill fell over Mary, and she felt sick. The moment she had dreaded had come. She faced it straightly.

"That I am—am wanton?"

"That!" Lazarus said contemptuously. "They'd say that about any woman who lived alone. For all that my master, Jesus, teaches that one must not answer insult with blows, I think I'd kill anyone who said that meaningly of you, Mary, knowing you to be my sister."

The ice melted from about Mary's heart. A grateful warmth flowed through her. She could have wept, thrown herself into her brother's arms.

"No, no!" Lazarus went on. "I know now—little as I was, I knew it at the time—that it was their saying so that drove you from home in Bethany. But the only person who believed it, really, was Nahum ben Kattina. And he—may he find forgiveness!—has made answer for his harshness and his cruelty."

“Nahum is dead?”

“Three years ago he was smitten by a great agony in his bowels. Within five days—the last two raving in a fever—he lay cold.”

“He was my bitter enemy,” said Mary, “he made me hate him, but now I only feel sorrow for him.”

“That is well. It isn’t good to hate. You yourself taught me that years ago, Mary, and to return good for evil is the root, almost, of all that Jesus teaches. But, as I say, Nahum was the only one who thought ill of you, Mary. Martha didn’t really, nor did Zachary. They both wept when they found you had gone.”

“Did you?”

“Of course.”

“You felt I had betrayed you?”

“No, no! I can remember. After I had wept I went away by myself and tried to reason the matter out. I made Martha let me go for a time with Abijah into the hills. And I came to see that you couldn’t live beside Martha and Zachary, who couldn’t think as you thought, but were always finding fault with you.

“Perhaps,” Lazarus went on, after a pause, “I’m telling you what I came to think years later, after I became bar Mizvah, as if I worked it all out in the hills with Abijah. That wouldn’t be true. It all came gradually, I suppose. I missed you dreadfully—ached to see you. But I believe even at my smallest I did think you had a right to do as you thought best, and if you had to stop away you just had to stop away.

“Martha kept on weeping for a long time after you’d gone—I mean, when she found time to miss you—and she was very hard on Zachary. Jehudah she simply wouldn’t have about the place. But she made a terrible fuss when she heard you had drawn the money of your portion from the Temple treasury. She was sure you would simply fritter it away, and she nearly jumped down my throat when I said you wouldn’t. But I don’t think she would have denied it you, even if she could.

“But,” asked Lazarus, coming back to his original question, “is it true what they say of you—that you’re a successful merchant?”

“It was to begin trading that I drew my portion from the Treasury—and, yes, I have prospered,” Mary admitted. “Have you finished eating?”

“Yes,” said Lazarus. He rose, put on his hat, and returned thanks for the food they had eaten. “What now?”

“Come with me,” replied Mary.

She led him through the house to the storeroom, stopping on the way to get from Perian the pin which operated the bolts, or *pessuli*, of its sliding-door. The major-domo, like most of the servants, had already heard from Chloe about Lazarus, but, having seen for himself how frank and unspoiled Lazarus appeared, he hoped that the youngster would, as Mary suggested, be about the villa a good deal. It was time, Perian thought, that his mistress had some one near her for whom she had a real affection. The softening influence of this new-found brother was already manifest. Perian had caught a glimpse of Lazarus overnight in the summer-room, had known of his presence there when Felix was questioning him, and—though interpreting the relationship between his mistress and her visitor with Thracian cynicism—had felt instinctively that the new association brought relief for her from some tension too long endured. Perian accompanied brother and sister to the storeroom, and relieved Mary of the trouble of working the awkward bolts of the door with the key-like *balanos*. He left them together in the storeroom.

Lazarus exclaimed his wonder, not so much at the richness of the goods Mary displayed to him, as at their variety. He had not known, he said, that weaving could be done in such a range of materials, in so many different countries, or in so many differing intricacies of design. But . . .

“But what, Lazarus?”

“All this,” said he, with a wave of his hand about the storeroom, “does mean wealth. But lying here it is useless wealth. And supposing you sold it all, Mary, I should think the profit would not meet the expenses of this house over many years.”

“Yes,” Mary nodded, “you *are* grown-up, my brother. You are right. Sales out of this storeroom would never keep my house going. Not because the profits are not large, but because the sales are only occasional. Here I keep only the rarer things that come into my hands. The greater part of my money is in ventures with trustworthy merchants in Tyre, in Damascus, in Ptolemais, in Antioch, in Corinth, in Alexandria. I even have money in cargoes that sail into the outer sea and to the lands of the north where people, fairer than you or I, paint their bodies.”

Lazarus started to laugh.

“It’s so funny! Martha worrying herself almost into tears thinking you’d fritter away your portion—and you sending cargoes to painted heathen!” he choked. “If she heard that she’d start putting the dough on the fire and the stewpot in the oven!”

His picture of Martha at work with preoccupation made Mary giggle.

“But isn’t it risky?” Lazarus asked, suddenly serious again. “And how can it be for gain?”

“Venturing to the northern land, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“It is full of hazard, yes. Many a ship has never been heard of again. But one successful venture will cover the loss of two or even more. The metals that come from the north lands are much in demand in Italy, in Greece, and here.”

“Gold—silver?”

“These in small quantities. I meant metals like lead and tin. But we will talk of commerce another time, Lazarus,” said Mary. “I want to speak with you about the Nazarene.”

“Pray don’t speak of Yeshu as ‘the Nazarene,’ Mary,” begged Lazarus. “He is called that despitefully by those who think of him as a mere carpenter, an *Am ha-Aretz*.”

“Mere carpenter he may be, though you and I know he is an uncommonly good one,” said Mary. “*Am ha-Aretz* he assuredly is not. Only the wilfully blind and deaf would say so. I did not call Him ‘the Nazarene’ despitefully, but I won’t use the word again. Let us go back to the terrace, Lazarus.”

V

The effect of her talk with Lazarus had been to make Mary uneasy than ever regarding his association with Jesus.

She had done what she could, without being too pressing, to persuade Lazarus to spend the day with her; she was anxious to keep him by her until she heard from Felix what Herod’s attitude was towards Jesus. But Lazarus had promised one or other of Jesus’s regular followers that he would rejoin the company when it landed that morning at Magdala by boat from

Capernaum. And as he sat with Mary on the terrace he had seen a boat come down the lake from the north, and had at once identified it as belonging to James, or at least to the Zebedee family. In his direct way he had taken the shortest route to the town shore. That, in its first stage, had been over the wall.

Mary immediately regretted having let him go. But she had balked at either playing the older, wiser sister, or at exploiting his unaltered affection, as a means of diverting Lazarus from his intention. Her own experience of family trammels forbade attempt at hobbling him. It was close on impertinence, she felt, even to doubt his assurances that he stood in no danger. Lazarus was over seventeen—no younger than she herself had been when she fled from home. He had the right to believe he could look after himself.

None the less, Mary felt distinctly uneasy as she watched Lazarus go bounding through the dunes and along the shore to the fish-quays. It was not that she thought the teachings of Jesus would harm him. On the contrary, the happy piety which lay so naturally on her brother seemed to have found strength and spirituality from those teachings. It was a spirituality which could not have burgeoned from anything absorbed from Zachary or in Bethany's schools. Mary had simply what amounted to a premonition that hostile action was intended against Jesus. She feared Lazarus might be involved in it.

That Jesus was of the type of agitator whom authority had real reason for wanting to suppress Mary did not believe. But he did preach the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, apparently attracting great crowds to hear him, and that was enough to arouse hostility in the touchy and suspicious Tetrarch, Herod Antipas. It was apparent, also, that Jesus had attracted the attention of the priestly class—the Sadducees and Boethuseans—who supplied the majority in the Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem. And if their power in civil matters, under the Roman Procurator, had force in Judea only, they still could exert considerable influence in the tetrarchy. They did not want, any more than did Herod, any prophets preaching the Kingdom in too easily excitable Galilee. They were quite comfortably off under the Roman regime, and wanted nothing to happen that would disturb their ease. If, therefore, as was likely, Herod sought their advice, it would almost inevitably be for nipping potential trouble in the bud.

It was evident, moreover, that Jesus had aroused antagonism among the Pharisees—at least the more hidebound of them—not merely by condemning them for hypocrisy in mere outward show of keeping the Law,

but by activities on the part of his disciples and himself which seemed to hold the Law in small regard. Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, but frequented the company of the lax and the positively sinful people whose conduct, in the Pharisaic view, was a hindrance to the Kingdom's advent. Challenging, too, the sanctity of the Sabbath, and generally slighting the traditions of the elders, Jesus had little farther to go before making the Pharisees solidly hostile to him.

From superstition Herod might hesitate to act against a Man of God. But once let him become aware that the political and religious leaders in Judea and his own domain were against Jesus, and Herod would strike quickly enough. And there was no saying who or how many of Jesus's followers would be implicated.

It was with some apprehension and impatience, therefore, that Mary awaited the return of Felix Scaliger from Tiberias.

VI

The creaking of the main gate being opened made Mary put aside her embroidery and rise to her feet. Her hope was that Felix, unable to return himself, had sent a messenger. But the sound of a woman's voice in agitation speaking to the porter at once dispelled the expectation. She gathered that she was being sought for in haste, and, though she had determined not to receive any of her local acquaintances that day, she went to see who the visitor was.

That something untoward had happened became apparent as soon as Mary came to the landward end of the loggia. The visitor, a sempstress named Jemima, who worked for Mary's sewing-woman, Anna, in the town, was being helped by Perian up the path to the house.

"Bring Jemima here, Perian!" Mary called, and impelled Chloe, who had followed her, to go and give the major-domo a hand.

She herself sped back through the loggia and prepared a seat on the bench where she had been sitting, and waited until her servants brought the woman along. The dust on Jemima's skirts, the sweat streaming down her pallid face, the state approaching collapse, all told the same story to Mary. The woman had probably run all the way from the far side of Magdala, only to break down with exhaustion on reaching her goal.

“Water, Perian, and a cup of strong wine,” said Mary, as she helped Chloe to get the woman settled on the bench. “You, Chloe, fetch a basin of water and a clean napkin!”

Jemima essayed to speak.

“Wait a moment, Jemima, don’t try to talk,” Mary commanded. “You’ll tell what you have to tell in good time, and better and quicker when you are yourself again. Patience!”

The injunction cost Mary some effort. The news Jemima brought might too readily confirm the fear which had been troubling her all morning. But common sense and compassion both counselled patience. It was at once stupid and unkind to attempt extracting a message from such an exhausted creature. The collapse Jemima was on the brink of might become absolute through effort.

Perian and Chloe were quickly back with the drinking and washing water and the wine. Mary herself looked after Jemima, bathing her face and wrists, and giving her to drink of the wine following cleansing sips of water.

“Now, Jemima,” Mary allowed, when colour had chased the greyness out of the sempstress’s face, “what’s the matter?”

“It’s Anna, my lady—they’ve taken Anna!”

“Who have taken Anna?”

“The synagogue-officer, Amos, and others. They’ve taken her before the Council.”

“Why? What for?”

“They found her in the house of Sosas, the weaver from Tripolis, at dawn, and they mean to stone her as adulteress.”

“Anna! What of her husband, Jacob?”

“He, I think, has joined with her accusers.”

A hope Mary had conceived in asking the last question died with the answer. If Anna’s husband had joined the prosecution there was small hope for her. It would not matter that, as Mary knew, this Jacob’s own conduct in no small part had led to Anna’s defection—that he was idle, dissolute, and spendthrift of his wife’s earnings. Anna would have no advocate to plead the extenuating circumstance. Nothing could be pleaded in favour of a woman found in the bed of a man not her husband.

“The fool!” said Mary under her breath. She had a fairly clear idea of what had happened. Jacob had the habit, when he could find money enough, of spending the night in the town stews, returning home only when the day was warmed. Anna very likely had put money in his way—‘lost’ it where Jacob would find it—and had pretended that she herself would be away for the night. It would be an easy pretence, for Anna regularly helped in getting things ready for entertaining a company to supper in Mary’s villa, as often as not stopping the night there. And it would evoke no comment in the villa if Anna, as she apparently had done, slipped back into Magdala once her share in the preparations was completed.

“The fool!” said Mary to herself. She was horrified, not so much by Anna’s wrongdoing, as by the dire peril in which Anna stood through being caught in it. With the exception of Joanna, wife of one of Herod’s stewards, Mary liked Anna more than anyone else she knew in Galilee. She liked Anna’s independence. A clever needlewoman with a notable feeling for line, Anna could have been permanently employed at the Herodian court—or, indeed, with Mary—but preferred to work from her own place in Magdala. She had several sempstresses working for her in their own homes, of whom Jemima was one. And in spite of a wastrel husband she was an honest and well-doing woman, in Mary’s view worth a hundred of Mary’s Galilean acquaintances. Mary’s “fool,” then, held no real contempt for Anna, nor anything of blame. It sprang from distress, fear, and a suddenly realized affection and sense of worth.

To increase Mary’s growing fear there came to her a sharp misgiving that Anna somehow had been deliberately trapped. Jacob was not the man to care what his wife did as long as she provided him with money. On his own initiative he would never have lost a chance to indulge his nocturnal hankerings in order to spy on her. Nor, the trap being sprung, was it likely—however much facile indignation he might experience—that he would so far jeopardize his one source of funds as to accuse her to the Council. The thing reeked of conspiracy.

To make matters still worse, the peril for Anna was immediate. Jemima’s story was secondhand, largely. She had not seen the actual taking of Anna, and knew only from others that Anna was held in the council chamber. But she had seen and talked with the crowd gathered there, and had heard enough to send her flying to Mary for help. It was useless trying to believe that Jemima’s story was imaginative, or thinking that Anna was not being examined by her judges even as the story was told. The thing had to be accepted as fact, and the agonizing aspect of the situation that there was no

time available for preventing the sentence on Anna being carried out. The only person who could remit the Council's sentence, whatever it might be, was Herod, and Herod was at Tiberias, a good ten Roman miles away. The section of Magdala concerned lay about two miles farther from Tiberias than the villa, so that between procuring Herod's pardon (so to call it) and carrying it to the synagogue, twenty-two miles had to be covered. By the time that had been done, the sentence would have been carried out.

It might be stoning to death. Mary had never heard of such a stoning of a woman in Galilee, but the Law specifically demanded its execution on a Jewish woman convicted of adultery. In Judea any capital sentence required the confirmation of the Roman authority, but stonings had been done there by mere rule of the mob. And this was the danger for Anna. The fact that she had been spied upon, trapped, and haled before the Council spoke of conspiracy. Anna, as a Jewess, was subject to the Council's correction. It could be that sentence of death on her by the Council actually required confirmation by Herod, but Herod was not the man to make trouble about the slaying of a woman on religious grounds, especially if it could be engineered to look as if the mob had enforced it.

Mary was about to follow the only course open to her, the time-absorbing course of sending Jonas at speed with a letter to Herodias—she could not appeal to Herod direct—when there came the welcome sound of a horse trotting towards the villa from the direction of Tiberias. She ran to confirm her hope. The rider was, as she had thought, Felix Scaliger. She hastened to meet him at the gate.

The Roman, having dismounted, listened to Mary's story and appeal without comment until she had done. Then he gathered the reins in his fingers.

"It is the only thing to do, Mary," he said crisply. "It would be a waste of time appealing to Herod—probably useless. By now, both he and Herodias are on their way by galley to Bethsaida Julias. But remember I may be unable to do anything in Magdala. In Judea I have authority. In Galilee, none. But I will do what I can—for your sake."

He swung himself astride his horse, lifted his hand in salute, and galloped off.

A yelling crowd spewed from a narrow street as Felix rode into the northernmost section of Magdala. It ran, looking backward to where a white-faced, dishevelled, and distraught woman was being hauled and pushed by three men towards the town-gate. The jeering crowd swirling and thrusting against the few Herodian police surrounding this group of four was of the poorer sort. They were not, by any means, all Jews.

At some distance behind the swarm round the prisoner there stalked and strutted—according to their build—a number of people, men, better clad and cleaner than the generality. They were of the elders of the community.

From the shadow of the gate a woman, also better clad than the generality, thrust through the crowd towards the prisoner. She carried a wine-cup. Felix, with a feeling of chill in his shoulders, understood from this that the prisoner had indeed been condemned to death. Charitable Jewish women were allowed to offer wine containing a grain of frankincense to the condemned as an expedient for deadening their senses. He resolved to interfere, demand a stay of the execution until it had the sanction of the Tetrarch, and looked round for the right person in authority to address. Then he saw Lazarus standing quietly by the roadside watching the proceedings. He walked his horse over to him.

“You are, I think, Lazarus ben Abiud, brother of Mary?”

Lazarus looked up with a friendly smile.

“And you, I think,” he replied, “are Felix Scaliger, *praefectus equestris*.”

Thinking himself perhaps mocked, Felix scanned the up-turned face sternly. But a wider grin and a warmer twinkle in the amber eyes only invited appreciation of fun—the echo of Felix’s own phrasing, the added formality, were simply that.

Felix threw a nod after the noisy crowd.

“That,” he suggested, “doesn’t upset you at all?”

Lazarus let his eyes follow the direction of the nod, then brought them back to look up again at Felix, seriously.

“But it does. Such a thing muddies the face of Israel and of Rome alike,” he said quietly.

Felix swallowed a momentary resentment at the inclusion of Rome. It leapt, he saw, over argument to a basic truth.

“The woman,” he said, “is in some sort your sister’s adherent. Mary is in great distress for her—sent me in haste to stop them from killing her, if I could. That drugged cup—they mean to stone her?”

“Yes—if they are allowed.”

“I have no authority in Galilee, Lazarus. I will interfere if needs must, but if Herod resents the interference I shall be in trouble, not only with him—which scarcely matters—but with my superiors, Pontius Pilate, or even Vitellius, Governor of Syria, which does matter. Still, if there’s no other way for it . . .”

He clapped his heels to his horse, which began to move. Lazarus quickly put himself at the horse’s bridle.

“Yes, let us follow,” he said over his shoulder. “I am grieved that the woman is put to shame, but they will not be allowed to stone her.”

“Who’s to stop them?” demanded Felix. “That mob—those bearded ones!”

“Jesus will stop them,” said Lazarus.

“Jesus. You mean the prophet fellow from Nazareth? What authority has he?”

“The best authority—from the Lord Himself. Don’t be troubled, Felix,” said Lazarus, as the Roman reined-in in astonishment. “The *gerousia* of Magdala—those bearded ones, as you call them—have convicted Anna, but they have not yet passed sentence. Oh, they would stone her, yes. But they mean to bring her before Jesus of Nazareth. Anna means nothing to them. They simply hope to trap Jesus into confirming the sentence of stoning according to our Law.”

“If it’s the law, how can he get out of confirming it?”

“Let us see. Jesus is not far off. Urge your horse on, or we may be late. I can run.”

“Yes,” said Felix, smiling in spite of his doubts, “I have learnt that!”

Some way off the crowd was milling to a stop by the roadside. Felix put his horse into a quick amble, and he and Lazarus were soon on the edge of the crowd. It parted a little, fearfully, as Felix came up, and stood away from the horse. Lazarus left Felix then, edging sideways into and through the crowd, getting gradually to the front.

From the height of his horse's back, Felix could see little more than the head and shoulders of the group in the crowd's midst. The elders were in a bunch behind the men who held Anna, and they faced—across a small open space—a man of beautifully serene countenance, silky-bearded, and with beautifully kempt longish brown hair. That, thought Felix, must be this Jesus of Nazareth, and—divine Augustus!—that's neither fool nor trickster.

A silence had fallen on the crowd. Its only movement was a craning of necks. A voice, apparently of one of the elders, made itself heard:

“This woman was taken in the act of adultery. The Law given by Moses commands that she be stoned. But what, Jesus, say you?”

After a quiet glance at the speaker, it appeared to Felix that Jesus either stooped or knelt to the ground. There was the same deep silence, the crowd craning to see what was happening low down in its centre.

“The Law commands that we stone her,” the voice repeated. “But what, Jesus, say you?”

The silence held.

VIII

Mary, bewildered, looked at the group which had come out of Magdala. Two of her men-servants had followed Felix there, and had returned with him, bringing Anna. All of them, even Felix, seemed to be in a daze.

“But,” Mary demanded impatiently, “Jesus—what did he do?—what did he say?”

“He knelt,” said Felix slowly, “and wrote in the roadside dust.”

“Wrote in the dust?”

“That's it. He wrote with his finger in the dust.”

“Wrote what in the dust?”

“I don't know. Lazarus, who was close, said it wasn't Latin, nor Greek, nor your Jewish characters.”

“And he did not speak? How, then——”

“No, he didn't speak,” Felix replied in the same slow, puzzled way, “not until they questioned him again. Then he stood, Mary. He stood and showed

those Jewish elders a face—I can't describe it—prideless, but masterful. He said to them: 'Let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone!'

Mary caught her breath.

"O my father!" she whispered. "O wit divine! O wisdom unanswerable!"

Aloud she asked: "And what did he then?"

Apparently trying to snatch himself back to his normal stolidity, Felix ruffled his close locks and smoothed his beard.

"Why," he replied, still slightly dazed, "he just stooped again to write in the dust. And the high Jews, shamefaced, stole away one by one. The crowd melted. Your brother and I went with them, to await Anna in the distance. She and the prophet were left alone."

Mary turned to Anna, wordless.

"I thought my heart would break," said Anna. "I was still in terror, for I didn't know what he was writing in the dust. I thought my heart would break. He stood up when every one else had gone. His look was stern, but kind, and his voice was gentle. I'd rather have had him look and speak angrily. It was his goodness that broke my heart——"

"O Anna, woman—woman!" Mary interrupted. "What did he say? What did he say?"

"He said, 'Where, woman, are your accusers? Did none of them condemn you?' I just stammered, 'No, sir, none.' 'Then,' he said, 'neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and sin no more.'"

CHAPTER X

The Roman

“WHY do you concern yourself with this sort of thing?” Felix asked half-angrily. “Perian tells me you have been away since early morning, by yourself, and on foot.”

“How long have you been waiting, Felix?” Mary inquired.

“That doesn’t matter—not very long, as it happens—and my mission to Herod is nearly over. I’m thinking of you, Mary. You’re tired out.”

“I’m very weary, true enough.”

“Where have you been?”

“Into the hills between Chorazin and Galilean Bethsaida.”

“Hercules!” said Felix. “That’s all of ten leagues, there and back—and on foot! You must be possessed!”

“I’ve often acknowledged it,” Mary replied with a smile. “But in this matter I am completely myself.”

“Look, Mary, if you want Lazarus brought to you, or if you want to warn the Nazarene, let me see to it. There are ways—anyhow, I can get it done in half the time and with a moiety of the fatigue it costs you to walk all that distance.”

They were in the atrium of the villa—its parlour, so to speak. Mary had just come in to find Felix awaiting her, and they were still standing after having exchanged greetings. Mary took a seat on a couch, and invited Felix to occupy its other end. As they sat, she caught sight of Chloe hovering in the *tablinum* beyond.

“Presently, Chloe!” she said. “I’ll call you when I want you, child.”

Mary turned then to Felix.

“I haven’t been either to look for Lazarus—though I saw him—or to warn Jesus. I went to listen to Jesus.”

“You must be fond,” said the Roman. “I’ll admit there’s something about the man. He struck me as being neither the crazed creature nor the imposter

some would make him out—I can't forget how he handled those elders in the Anna affair. That was staggering. At the same time, there's no denying that he is causing unrest in the lakeside parts of Galilee."

"What evidence have you of that, Felix?"

"Nothing direct. And it doesn't matter, *vita mea*," Felix replied lightly, "whether I'm believing my own eyes or not. The point is that Herod's officers regard your Jesus as a source of unrest. I tried, as you bade me, to get something out of Herod himself, but he's a slippery type. Wanted to shift the question to me—what did Rome think of these prophets? But I'll tell you the conclusion I've come to, after talking to some of Herod's ministers and police officers:

"Herod won't touch Jesus as long as the people, the Jews particularly, make much of him. That might provoke more trouble than leaving him be. But it seems that Jesus is giving offence to your scribes and Pharisees. If *they* turn against him Herod will act."

Felix outlined a situation which Mary herself had already figured out. She went straight to the one point in his outline that seemed salient.

"The police officers you talk of, are they hostile to Jesus?"

"They think he's a menace to the peace."

"Put it this way, then—they want to arrest Jesus, and only stay for Herod's warrant?"

"Yes."

Mary considered. This was something new.

There was little political significance in the teaching of Jesus. From what Mary had heard of it that day, from what she had heard of it on the shore some nights previously, and from all she had learnt of it through Lazarus, it seemed to her to be directly against revolt. Jesus, it was true, proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. True, also, that to all but a very few Jews the Kingdom had a political and material meaning. It meant to them the satisfaction of all Israel's hatreds and ambitions through a world-wide upheaval in which thrones and empires would topple, and which would inaugurate an unlimited period of unlimited prosperity, with Israel dominant. This upheaval, leaving Israel with universal rule, would be brought about by the Deliverer, the Son of Heaven, the Messiah.

But the Kingdom preached by Jesus was neither political nor material. It was material only in that it filled the mouths of the hungry. Nothing that

man, of himself, was able to do would bring the Kingdom into being. Nothing that man, of himself, could do would make him worthy of it. Nothing in the teaching of Jesus implied that the realization of the Kingdom would hand any of the divine power over to Israel, as of right, for political revenge, political dominance, or anything else. It implied merely that Israel was in a favoured position only because of the Covenant, because beyond all peoples on earth she had been blessed with divine revelation. She no more had a necessary or inalienable entitlement to the Kingdom than had the individual. She could, like the individual, only search her heart, utterly acknowledge her transgressions, repent of them, and throw herself on the Mercy of God. The Kingdom, in fine, was not of this earth. It was simply the universal fulfilment of the Will of God, and only the Will of God could effect it. So much for the political and material aspect of Jesus's teaching. Its greatness lay in its proclamation of the divine pardon, not as a reward for this or that or the other, but as a gift to all who sought it in real contrition and in truth.

"Herod's officers simply cannot have heard Jesus for themselves," said Mary. "They must have listened to false reports of his sayings."

"What's to be expected of spies?" shrugged Felix.

"On false report they would imprison such a force for good as Israel never before has seen?"

"Policemen!" said Felix. "They don't like crowds."

II

Mary had to set aside her consideration of the dangers hanging over Jesus, and so, perhaps, over Lazarus. Perian had been bringing himself under her notice now and then for some time. When, finally, she called him, Chloe came at his heels.

"Yes, Perian?"

"It's the merchant Matthias, *domina*. He has brought some cloth for you, and wishes to see you."

"Where is he, Perian?—oh, I see! He came by the postern?"

"Yes, *domina*. He is with the cloth in the peristylum. Shall I open the storeroom?"

“Only to put the cloth in it, Perian. Bring Matthias here.”

“At your will, *domina*,” said Perian, and took his departure.

“What is it, Chloe?” Mary said then.

“Shall I bring water for your feet, ma’am?” asked the girl. “And your clothes—they must be full of dust.”

“Let be, let be. My feet and my clothes are well enough for a little. You shall attend to me presently,” Mary said absently.

The girl almost stared at her. This was a new mildness in her mistress, and an odd carelessness about her appearance in one normally impatient of the faintest maculation. But her wonderment escaped Mary, who had withdrawn into herself.

Mary was brought out of her abstraction by the return of Perian with the merchant, who salaamed.

“Well, Matthias?” demanded Mary, after formal salutation had been exchanged.

“I have brought the cloth you required—forty cubits of a fine medium-weight camelhair-weave of Damascus, and another forty of Egyptian cloth, the best quality.”

“Your word as an honest trader that they are the finest of their kind? Remember, I am expert.”

“By my life—by the life of my head——”

“No, Matthias, do not swear to their quality,” Mary smiled. “Just tell me what they cost you.”

Put out, the tubby little man fiddled with his beard. This terrible woman, who would allow a man no honest hedging!

“Let me see, let me see,” he murmured. “The Egyptian weave I have had in store for some time——”

“Four denarii the reed?” suggested Mary.

“Tha—that would be about it—I think——”

“And the camelhair of recent purchase?”

“Eight denarii the reed.”

“Matthias, Matthias!” Mary said reproachfully. “Nearly three denarii the double cubit? Come, now—come!”

“I swear it. Indeed, I’m not sure that it wasn’t nearer three denarii the double cubit that I paid.”

“It must be superfine weave. I don’t know that I’ve ever seen a medium-weight camelhair I’d pay nine denarii a reed for,” murmured Mary, as if communing with herself. Then she looked up, frowning. “On your reckoning, then,” she said harshly, “you have brought me goods to the value of forty-four denarii?”

“Yes—uh—lady.”

“And you consider *that* adequate return for the favour you wish me to do you?”

“Yes, lady—I mean, it was what you demanded.”

“Tell me again, what was it you wanted me to do?”

“You were to use your influence in Herod’s court for me, for the sale of some hangings.”

“Oh, yes, I remember. That stuff you had of Sardican—pink, with an acanthus pattern? If you cannot make a profit of three hundred denarii at least on that sale, you are a poorer trader than I think you are. It ought to be five hundred denarii—or six,” said Mary.

She thought for a long moment or two. Matthias, wondering what the mounting estimate of his likely profits portended, watched her apprehensively.

“Six hundred denarii profit!” Mary breathed. “And you offer me goods worth a doubtful forty-four. That’s seven-and-a-half per centum—less than a tenth share! I don’t think I can do it!”

“But it is what you asked. Forty cubits of——”

“I couldn’t have been thinking what I was doing. I tell you, Matthias,” said Mary. “I won’t do it at the price.”

“No?”

“No. I have a reputation to keep up. They say I drive a hard bargain. What will be said if I do something for less than a tenth share?”

Matthias was about ready to rend his garments. He stretched out his hands in appeal.

“But you said——”

“I know very well what I said. But I won’t do it at the price,” Mary said stubbornly. Then, after a pause: “I’d rather do it for nothing.”

“For nothing?”

“Nothing!” Mary almost snarled. She fumbled in the inside of her girdle, and brought out the pin that unlocked the coffer of her valuables. “Chloe!”

Her maid came running. “Mistress?” Mary held out the key-pin.

“Bring me my ring of carved onyx.”

Chloe took the key and ran.

“Perian!”

“*Domina?*”

“Bring me forty-four denarii.”

“At your will, *domina*,” answered Perian, and he in turn hurried out.

Mary pointed to a winged, high stool on the opposite side of the atrium. It faced her own couch-end directly.

“Be seated, Matthias!”

“Thank you, lady—I——”

His half-formed objection was waved aside imperiously. He went obediently to the stool, climbed on to it, and sat with his feet dangling, intoed. Mary, with her thumb under her chin, the fingers of her hand resting on her cheek, and the supporting elbow on the voluted couch-end, sat regarding him like a sibyl. Under the gaze which seemed, while absorbing him thoroughly, to penetrate to something far behind him, Matthias clasped and unclasped his hands in his lap, swung his feet, and stared about him. He looked at the ceiling, at the cornice of the walls, and pretended great interest in a candelabrum of bronze. He would have found a real interest in the marble Nike which, apart from the candelabra, was the room’s one decoration, but to let his bulge-eyed gaze rest on a graven image would have been a sin. So he transferred the bulge-eyed gaze to Mary, found her still regarding him sibyl-like, and looked at Felix. The Roman was looking at him in a grave way little less supportable than Mary’s, so Matthias took a passing glance at the *Nike*, coughed, and stared at the ceiling, his sloe eyes apparently about to pop altogether out of his round brown face. He coughed once again, became conscious that, aching to sit cross-legged, he had turned his toes completely inward and was swinging them besides, and started to reach with one foot for the floor. What other antic his unease would have

brought him into it were hard to surmise; but, to his immense relief, both Perian and Chloe returned. He gratefully got to his feet.

“Ah, Chloe, the ring!” said Mary, without moving from her oracular posture. “Give it to friend Matthias.

“Take the ring to the palace at Tiberias,” she instructed him. “Do not enter by the main portico, but go to the door at the top of a stairway on the north side. Ask for Demeter; you will find him reliable. Give him the ring and five denarii, and ask him to take the ring to the steward, Chuza. Chuza will then know that you are come from me. The rest, Matthias, should be easy to a man of your resource.”

“Lady, I—I——” stammered the little man.

“Give Matthias forty-four denarii,” Mary ordered Perian. “There are forty-four denarii in the purse?”

“Yes, *domina*,” replied Perian, and handed the little double sack to the merchant.

“I cannot take the money, lady. It was agreed—the cloth——”

“Forty-four denarii was the price you yourself put on the cloth. And you shall have that—not a mite more nor less.”

“I did not mean that, lady—I——”

“Count the money, Matthias, count the money,” Mary said peremptorily. “My servant, Perian, is to be trusted. But he may have miscounted. And I will not have it said, later, that I kept back a single *quadrans*. Count the money!”

Matthias poured the silver into his palm with fingers that trembled, but yet contrived not to drop a coin, and to count the money back into the bag.

“Forty-four denarii,” he announced. “But I cannot take it.”

“And I,” said Mary, “cannot take it back.”

For a moment or two the little round merchant stood looking, dazedly, at the purse. Then he straightened himself, lifted his head, and turned to Mary squarely.

“Lady,” he said firmly. “It has pleased you to make fun of me, but I do not believe you wish to put me to shame. The cloths I brought you, on your asking, are good cloths. Maybe I could get forty-four denarii for them,

selling them piece by piece. But you know, and I know, that they could be bought in those quantities for much less than forty-four denarii.”

He hesitated a moment.

“Yes, Matthias,” said Mary. “Say on.”

“There are flaws in two pieces of the camelhair,” Matthias admitted humbly. “But I expected you to examine the lengths, and I was ready to argue with you. Let that be, now. I shall send two pieces to replace the flawed ones.

“You are only pretending, lady,” he went on, after a pause, “when you say you would rather introduce me to Herod’s court for nothing than for a mere forty-four denarii. It is part of the fun you make of me. But forty-four denarii is more than I can afford to lose if I do not sell the pink hanging. It would keep me and my family for several weeks. And so, lady—and you, sir—it is not funny to me to have the money I was ready to risk given back as if it were nothing. It shames me because—because—well, because I want to take it!”

He looked so rueful as the confession burst from him that both Mary and Felix started to laugh. At that Matthias eyed them with such a mingling of doubt, surprise, and wistfulness in all his chubby features as to make them laugh still more. And finally Matthias, from smiling tentatively, himself began to chuckle.

“Think no shame to accept the price of your cloth, Matthias,” said Mary. “I was in an evil mood when I bade you bring it. It was a good bargain you made for me with Sardican.”

“You requited me for that,” said Matthias quickly.

“Ha! The shrewd merchant!” Mary pretended a sneer. “I gave you commission on the purchase of those fabrics from the Oxus, not on their sale.”

“Their sale is no concern of mine, lady.”

“It was nevertheless so profitable to me that you may accept the price of your cloths without diffidence,” said Mary. “Take it, Matthias. Chuza will look for at least twenty-five denarii.”

Matthias winced, and showed a good amount of the whites of his eyes, as if astounded that men should be so grasping. But he tucked the money-sack into the folds of his girdle, and held out the onyx ring.

“What if the steward Chuza tries to keep your ring?” he asked doubtfully. “It must be very precious.”

“If he does not return it to you, Matthias, he will to me,” Mary said firmly. “I wish you success in your venture. Farewell!”

“Peace be upon you, lady! May the Holy One—blessed be His Name!—reward your kindness!”

With a salaam that included Felix, the little merchant suffered himself to be conducted out by Perian.

Felix chuckled.

“That comedy rather turned about on itself, Mary?”

“Didn’t it? It was so funny that I quite failed to see its cruelty,” said Mary.

“Its cruelty?”

“I thought to play on a weakness. That was cruel.”

“But you meant to do the little man a kindness right from the start.”

“A bitter kindness, surely, that asks return in ridicule of the recipient,” Mary suggested. “My plan of kindness could have sent Matthias away hating me.”

“Would you have minded?”

“No.”

“Yet you are glad that, as it happens, Matthias went away blessing you?”

“Yes. Is that hard for you to understand, Felix?”

“Too hard. I don’t understand at all,” Felix confessed.

Mary called the hovering Chloe and told her to prepare a bath and lay out clean clothing. Then she returned her attention to Felix.

“My bitter plan of kindness could have succeeded only if Matthias had been, as I thought him, merely a ridiculous little huckster led by love of gain. Why be troubled by the hate of such a creature? Against that one can at least harden one’s heart,” said Mary. “But gain meant less to Matthias than his self-respect. And his self-respect had force enough—in spite of the confession of flaws in the cloth, and of longing to keep the forty-four denarii—to turn the tables on me, show me the cruelty I was indulging in, and how small my imagined magnanimity was compared with his. Rescuing himself

from ridicule, he rescued me from meanness, and so could go away blessing me. And yes, I'm glad he could."

She turned away from Felix as she finished speaking, and he, rediscovering the exquisite line of her profile, ached within himself because of its beauty and a remoteness in its expression that, it seemed to him, made the ache itself a trespass. He had a feeling that she gave him her confidence in a way that she gave it to nobody else, not even her brother Lazarus. It made him wonder that, although the actual occasions of their meeting could almost be numbered on the fingers of two hands, she could make their friendship seem to have been constant all their lives. In the few days of their re-encounter here in Galilee, and from its first moment, she had made him feel that the seven or more years of separation had never been, as if some unperceived bond of the Bethany days had found growth and stability in the interim. True it was that he, Felix, had never forgotten Mary in the years between. He had loved her in Bethany, and he had come back to her with his love more possessing him than ever. But what he marvelled at was that, where in Bethany she had given him the mere liking for a stranger she had been bidden to trust, here in Galilee years later she gave him the trust of that rare friendship which assumes without question that the causes of either one are the causes of the other. The bane of it was that the kindness of the friend only added to the ache of the lover for the woman, who remained remote.

But the Mary who evoked these thoughts in Felix was a very different woman from her he had pitied on the evening of his arrival, and Felix said as much aloud:

"You are a changed woman, Mary, in the last few days."

"Am I, Felix? In what way?"

"You were not wont to care, I think, whether people blessed you or not."

"That is true. Of more recent years—too many perhaps—I did not care."

"What has changed you, Mary?"

"I cannot tell—if I am changed," Mary said quietly. "Reminder of a quest I had forgotten. Memories. Your coming to Galilee, Felix. The coming of Lazarus. Perhaps simply because I'm tired of being bitter. For a woman who fights for herself in this country bitterness is inescapable. And she can become—very lonely."

Her hand lay quiescent on a cushion beside her, and Felix took it in his own.

“Let me take care of you, Mary,” he urged. “There is no need for you to fight for yourself, or to feel bitter, or to be lonely. Since I first saw you in Bethany there has never been another woman for me—there never will be another. I love you, Mary. I always will.”

Mary did not try to take away her hand, but she looked down at his clasped over it, as if fascinated by its sinewy brownness against her own fair skin. Her eyes were troubled when she raised them to look into his.

“You move me very much, Felix,” she said quietly. “Just before you asked me what had changed me I was thinking of you. But for Lazarus, you are the only man in the world for whom I have any affection. Except for one other, of all the men I know you are the only one for whom I have any respect. There is great virtue in you, Felix. When you offer me your love I am tempted as an experienced woman ordinarily is tempted by the virile. But I cannot find in myself the love for you that I believe you look for in me. Would you take me, Felix, as you might some chance woman of whom you knew nothing, and who knew nothing of you except that she found your manhood attractive?”

“Yes.”

“There have been women of that kind in your life?”

“One or two, Mary. There are tensions in a soldier’s life. I have known the common hunger.”

“I understand that. I do not condemn you, Felix. But you have just said there has never been any other woman for you but me, and that there never will be any other. How do you reconcile that with putting me among those women with whom you have satisfied your ‘common hunger’?”

“I do not put you among those women, Mary. Nor would it be any common hunger that would be satisfied for me in you. It is a hunger that I have known for eight years,” said Felix. “Why shouldn’t I take you, given the chance?”

Mary withdrew her hand from under his, and looked at the reddened patches his fingers had left.

“We would not chop words, Felix, if what you look for from me had been in me to give you,” she said.

“Mary!”

She rose to her feet and smiled down at him.

“You are a master of the inopportune, my dear,” she said. “I feel haggard with weariness and choked with dust—and you talk to me of love!”

“How hard you can be, Mary!”

“Yes, my dear. I know. But I am not running away. I simply must bathe and change my clothes. Do you return to Tiberias?”

“There is no need. Herod lies to-night at Bethsaida Julias, meeting his brother Philip.”

“Shouldn’t you be there?”

“Perhaps. I could like Philip. He has quality. But I’ve had more than enough of Antipas, and I’m glad to think my dealings with him are over; only it will mean, when they are ended, that I must return to Cæsarea,” Felix said with a sudden touch of gloom. “But, no,” he added. “I have no real need to go to Bethsaida Julias.”

“Then stay at least to supper, Felix. Perian and Stephen between them will find you anything you need,” said Mary. “My house is yours.”

III

“No, Felix,” said Mary, “Cleon was never my lover.”

They were sitting in the summer-room, where they had supped. It had been a light meal—a dish of vegetables, fish fresh from the lake, fruit, bread, and wine—and the servants had removed all trace of it, save for a beaker of wine.

Across the lake, and framed in triptych by the columned arches separating the room from the loggia, the last of the sun gave glowing colour, against a sky of silky green, to the upper half of the mountain-wall which towered from the mirroring water. Henna, saffron, and golden ochre, this upper half fell about into blue shadow which streamed and streaked into the flat blue of the lower half. The blue of the lower half, only faintly modelled, had, but for a long metallic streak tailing off horizontally in a boat’s wake, precise replica in the water. The merlons of the garden wall fretted the reflected blue and segmented its near-shore edging of brighter colours caught from sky and sunlit heights.

“He could have been, I think,” said Mary, “for in spite of his age and weight there was nothing about Cleon that was not dear to me. But it never

occurred to me that he might wish to be my lover. He gave no sign of wishing it. Better for me, perhaps, if Cleon had been my lover. It might have saved me from the intemperances my resentment against Lucian drove me into. We were often taken for father and daughter, and more than once in our travels my actions were a reproach to him in that relationship—as though he were whoremonger of his own flesh and blood. But I never heard a word of reproof from him. At times I would tax him with over-complacency, usually to invite his reproach for something I'd done that I regretted, that had left me feeling soiled. His answer scarcely varied: that he could give me advice, but could not teach me experience, and that my own reproach should be more effective than his.

“The death of Cleon left me desolate. In the last two years of his life his example had had its effect on me. I had become more reconciled to living. Cleon was a Stoic in that he believed in the soul's immortality, almost a Jew in his conception of a unique godhead, but an Epicurean of the older sort in his belief that happiness lay in the cultivation of the mind, the practice of virtue, and the search for beauty. In every way he was temperate. He could—this son of a slave—have made himself a rich and powerful man, but he cared neither for money nor power. When he died I found that he had left twelve hundred minas in my name with safe merchants in various cities between here and Ephesus.”

“Divine Augustus!” ejaculated Felix. “That's about half a million sesterces!”

“It was more by the time I had reckonings from the merchants concerned,” Mary smiled. “He had never collected the interest on any of it, and there was interest on the accumulated interest. Cleon spent on himself only about five sesterces a day.

“Cleon foresaw his death, I believe, long before it happened, and that it would leave me solitary. He knew that the only security for a solitary woman lay in her having money and knowing how to use it. So he taught me how trade was carried on. What he failed to teach me was his own virtue—not to love money for money's sake. I have been making money, Felix, for five years. The more I got the more I wanted.”

“You are, then, a rich woman, Mary?”

“This house is mine, Felix, and all that's in it. I have fourteen servants, only six of whom are slaves. I have enough to keep it and them, and I am not in debt to anyone. Judge for yourself.”

“It is not great wealth,” said Felix, “but it is rich enough. It is more than I shall inherit.”

“Can you live on your pay?”

“I can now. I couldn’t in the days of my tutelage—about the time I met you in Bethany. But for good fortune in the matter of spoils in the extra-Parthia campaign I’d have been heavily in debt,” said Felix. “Since then I have learned to live carefully. I don’t need a lot.”

“What does the future hold for you, Felix? Must you be a soldier all your life?”

“I hope to be a soldier all my life. But we don’t want to talk about me. I want to hear about you, Mary. What happened after Cleon died?”

“I was very desolate, as I say.”

“His death made you become bitter?”

“Not Cleon’s death. In his last days he spoke to me in ways that prevented my feeling bitter at the loss of him. No, no. Sad, yes—deprived, lonely. It was something consequent on Cleon’s death, but from the outside, that embittered me. Persecution, hostility, interference. Until Cleon finally became too frail, we were a good deal about Herod’s court, here and in Sepphoris. Herod was glad to renew the acquaintance with Cleon which had begun while Lucian was reorganizing Herod’s forces. There was much in Cleon that Herod found attractive—among other things, Cleon’s knowledge of architecture. Herod, like all the sons of his father, is, as you know, an avid builder.

“I never did like Herod Antipas,” Mary went on. “From the first I thought him shallow and untrustworthy. Even while I was protected by Lucian, whom Herod would have hesitated to offend, Herod’s flatteries made me uncomfortable. I had to take good care not to be alone with him. His princess at that time, the daughter of Aretas, King of Arabia, was scarcely ever seen in public.

“It was different when I returned with Cleon. Herod would not have minded giving offence to Cleon, but, fortunately for me, he had every fear of offending his new wife, Herodias. But by every secret method he could devise he pestered me. It was worse after Cleon died. Herod pursued me even into this house, coming here one night clandestinely. He had armed men, I know, posted round the villa, and I risked massacre of myself and my household by repulsing him—as I would most likely would have risked massacre had I been amenable, for he would have stopped at nothing to keep

any hint of his visit from reaching Herodias. But by one pretence and another—apparently hiding his identity from my servants by treating him with no more respect than was due to an ordinary visitor, and calling him ‘Phasaël,’ representing myself to be under the particular protection of Vitellius, whom I have met, and to be acquainted with Pontius Pilate, whom I haven’t, but whom Herod fears as much as he hates—while allaying his fears in one direction, I so fomented them in another that, I think, he became anxious to get out of my house.”

“The misbegotten son of a dog!” said Felix.

“I made an enemy,” said Mary. “Luckily, Herodias liked me, and I could use her as a shield against her husband’s molestation. In the end I got rid of Herod by lending him money through Herodias. No doubt he would like to have me strangled, but he won’t come near me for fear I ask him to pay up. The irony of the situation is that I am supposed, as a discard of Herod’s, to be under his protection, and that has saved me from molestation of another kind.

“I’ll say nothing of the pestering I suffered from the creatures attached to Herod who thought me easy prey. But it didn’t improve my temper. With Cleon gone, I needed something to occupy me. I sought chances to buy and sell. Magdala—as a soldier you will see at once—is well situated for trade. Roads branch from it in all directions—to Damascus, to Tyre and Sidon, to Samaria and Cæsarea, to the cities of the Decapolis. But my activities did not please the merchants of the neighbouring towns. The men of my own race called me a lost woman, a harlot, but resented my unwomanliness in pitting my wits against theirs. But Greek, Syrian, Phœnician, Jew—they all tried to best me in ways they would not have used against a man. Fortunately, I had advantages of which they knew nothing. Cleon, though dead, was behind me—his knowledge, his copious observation. In my travels with him I had met merchants ready to forget I was a woman, men of substance and integrity who found their markets wherever men traded. Scarcely a caravan passed through Magdala but brought me some intelligence—from Egypt, Asia, Macedonia, Parthia.”

“There is something to be said, then,” smiled Felix, “for our Roman peace!”

“Something to be said, yes. But more if you would organize your Roman post for something other than official use,” said Mary. “Quick intelligences are the life of commerce, and commerce——”

She broke off with a laugh.

“Poor Felix!” she said. “Having wearied you with boastings about my exploits in trade, I was like to make you yawn with a lecture on commerce!”

“But you don’t weary me,” said Felix. “I want the complete picture of you. You haven’t yet told me the ultimate cause of the bitterness you spoke of—that I saw for myself in the way you dealt with your supper-guests the other evening.”

“Persecution and intolerance were the cause. In this ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ I was an outcast—neither wife nor widow, neither Jew nor Gentile. That I would scarcely have minded, but I was not left alone. The men who called me harlot and caused filth to be thrown at me——”

“No!” Felix protested.

“Yes. Too cowardly to do it themselves, they paid to have it done from dark alleys and housetops. But these very men—I speak of men of my own race—would readily have couched with me in secret. Left to themselves, the Gentiles would have tolerated me. What is a harlot, Jew or Gentile, to a worshipper of Baal? I could deal with Syrian or Greek who thought my favour was for sale—I had only to laugh at them and multiply their offers far beyond the reach of their purses. In the end the Gentiles knew I was not for sale. But, of course, there were the unthinking of the rougher sort of all Galilee’s mixed races ready enough to echo any foulness. Of course I grew bitter. Not entirely because there was no pity anywhere for me—I wanted none, I only wanted to be left alone—but because I looked around and saw the fruits of pitilessness everywhere.

“I am talking of what happened in the streets of Magdala, less often in Capernaum. Here, in my own house, because of the supposed protection of Herod, I was ultimately left unmolested.

“In the beginning,” Mary continued, “I interfered very little with the trading of the merchants hereabout. I dealt in costly and exotic goods they had small experience in handling, goods sent me by my own correspondents far afield. But it was conceived by some that the sales I made destroyed prospective sales for them, and they attacked me, not on the ground that I was trading unfairly, though of course they said that, but for my harlotry. So I attacked them. I began to trade in the goods they traded in, with my better intelligences anticipating both their purchasing and their sales.”

“Good!” said Felix. “That was to make war!”

“Legitimate war for a man to make, yes—but for a woman? Bested in a deal, a trader may hate his successful rival, but does he call him catamite

and seek to have him stoned? Of course I grew bitter, pitiless. My hand was against those of all about me, and their hands against mine. I was alone. Where could I turn for support and understanding? To the shallow-pated, self-seeking lechers, sots, and Paphians—such as you saw here the other evening—that haunt the court of Herod? Let but one of them fall into misfortune, lose the countenance of Herod or Herodias, and the others would not merely desert him or her—they would rend the unlucky one. As they would myself if I did not feed them on occasion, amusing them with caprice and cynicism they haven't the wit to see are contempt.”

Mary's story, not wanting for force from being told unemotionally, seemed to end there, and Felix could find nothing to say. Admiration for the courage and resource in Mary which it proved, fury at the persecution she had suffered, and an aching pity for the isolation and unhappiness it brought her to—they all jangled with self-loathing for his own part in it. It had not been for this that he had pleaded with the girl whose serenity and loveliness and innocence and pride made his heart turn over in the Bethany garden, not for this that he had caught her in his arms as she dropped from the wall that night eight years bygone. He had pictured her, released from the narrowed life she detested, taking an honoured place among people of consideration, at first in the provinces, and ultimately in Rome, free to pursue the scholarship she loved, courted by poets and philosophers for her wit and learning, no less than for her beauty. What a callow young fool he had been in attributing to Lucian the devotion, the feeling that here was something to be treasured more than life itself, which were his own. What criminal fatuity in him, out of boyish admiration for imagined qualities in an older man, to play the procurer!

“The fool I was, Mary!” he muttered. “Ye Gods, my skin crawls with shame when I think of it!”

“When you think of what, Felix?”

“When I think how, loving you as I did, I helped Lucian to wreck your life.”

“Lucian did not wreck my life, Felix. There is nothing that has happened to me that I did not in some measure foresee. If I had not foreseen, if I had not been afraid, that the world had no place for a woman who wanted to go her own way while keeping her virtue, I would not have given myself to Lucian. There were pretences on the part of Lucian for which I cannot forgive him, promises he made that he did not intend to keep. Lucian did not really love me, Felix—not as you love me.”

“What?” shouted Felix.

“Don’t yell!” she begged him between urgency and amusement. “It is only what you’d have me believe.”

“You may well believe it.”

“But you see, Felix, I made it difficult for a man as ambitious and yet as formal as Lucian. If I no longer outwardly kept the Law of my people, I was still Jewish enough to avoid the ceremonials of Roman beliefs. Lucian, with no beliefs himself, thought I simply meant to be awkward. It could do him no good to have a wife who would not keep to form, who daily emphasized the fact that she was a mere *peregrina*.”

“The more fool he!” said Felix. “Didn’t he know that many women of rank in Rome have accepted the Jewish faith?”

“Secretly?”

“Well, not secretly, but quietly enough for none to bother about it.”

There was silence between them, then Mary asked quietly:

“Felix?”

“Yes, Mary?”

“That vase of perfume—it wasn’t really Lucian’s gift to me?”

Felix hesitated.

“No, Mary,” he said at last. “Lucian merely agreed I should give it to you.”

The light had gone. The arcade giving into the night was only shadow on dimly discernible shades of darkness.

“It was your own gift, Felix, part of the spoil that kept you out of debt,” Mary said with a shake in her voice. “I might have guessed it long ago, instead of now—suddenly remembering your look, a moment of silence, when I showed you the vase on the evening of your coming here——”

She broke off, and asked after a little:

“If I had not guessed, would you ever have told me?”

Again Felix hesitated.

“I might,” he confessed. “Lucian—I don’t owe him any friendship now.”

“Ah, you have virtue, Felix,” murmured Mary. “Your vase—it is the most precious gift I’ve ever had.”

Their hands met in the dark. He pulled her tentatively towards him. She did not resist, and he stretched along the couch, slipped one arm under her knees and the other about her, and lifted her bodily into his embrace.

Mary sighed, and let her head fall into the nook of his shoulder.

She would not let herself think of where she might drift. She did not know—she could not care. She only knew that she was tired, tired of feeling bitter, tired of fighting alone. She only knew that there was comfort for her here, male warmth——

Then, out of the night beyond, there came the thudding of hooves, a loud knocking at the main gate, and a voice:

“In the Emperor’s name—the affairs of Rome!”

CHAPTER XI

Contrition

In the three days that passed between the sudden departure of Felix and the receipt of a message from him Mary fell increasingly into restlessness and doubt.

She was frank with herself. She knew she had surrendered herself to Felix that night too certainly for any coy retreating. But for the unexpected arrival of the messenger from Tiberias, she would, in fairness, have had to give herself to him completely. True it was that an overwhelming sense of loneliness and being weary had made her welcome his embrace, but in the fleeting contact she became aware how great a passion the quiet patience and forbearance of Felix had masked. But she had to be honest with herself. She had to admit that since his arrival in her house in Galilee she had simply eluded acknowledging the obvious strength or depth of Felix's desire of her. And to have let the dark overtake them in such proximity together, to have gone into his arms at all, was to give a promise that only cruel and selfish caprice would deny.

At the same time, with a vagueness unlike her, Mary was glad of the respite on the morning following Felix's departure. The message had come from the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, at the instance of Vitellius, the Governor of Syria. It had gone to Tiberias, arriving at nightfall, and being of some urgency had been brought by the messenger to Mary's villa. It had bidden Felix consult with the three Palestinian tetrarchs together—Herod, Philip, and Lysanias—on some disposition of their forces. The fact that Herod and Philip were already meeting in Bethsaida Julius sat so well with his orders that Felix would have been lax to neglect the opportunity it afforded. Philip might be gone from the border city by the time he got there in the morning.

It was plain to Mary from the hurried conversation she had with him before he left her that Felix regarded their interrupted embrace as a betrothal. He believed he saw a way by which their marriage could be made valid and binding under Roman law. Mary could be adopted legally by an uncle of his by marriage, his mother's brother, and in this way—with probably some payment of a fee—she would attain what amounted to

Roman citizenship. Quite a number of Jews living in the Roman colonies were Roman citizens. There would be nothing to hinder her keeping her Jewish faith. It was just as plain from the possessive embrace Felix had given her before hurrying off that he took her agreement with his scheme for granted.

But, Mary asked herself in the days that followed, was marriage with Felix the solution she sought for all her problems? If protected by it she still might refrain from rites she thought idolatrous, and at the same time could keep the Law in matters she deemed essential, would she attain the spiritual contentment she had so long been denied?

Felix's letter came from Bethsaida Julias, but had been written on the eve of a journey to Cæsarea Philippi. "It is all going to take too long," Felix complained.

To begin with, Herod was scared to leave his own territory and go into Philip's, and then he wanted a bigger escort of his own troops than Philip liked coming into his domain. To settle that difficulty I had to bring up half a wing of my own fellows from Sebaste to escort them both. The next trouble, I suppose, will be getting Lysanias out of *his* terrain into Philip's—with an escort big enough for his dignity, but that Philip won't regard as an invasion. That, thank the gods, will be for Vitellius himself to fix. It is all such a cumbrous business. Philip, as I think I told you, has some quality, but even he doesn't move without a gang of women and even more useless men. Herod must have with him as many, male and female, as would populate a good-sized town. With your admirable intelligence, my Mary most dear, you will see at once how this makes for slowness, a snail's crawl. The saying is sere and bald, but still true, that a company travels only as quickly as its slowest member. All this affair needs is for four men to get on their horses, with mounted escort if they must, and canter to an appointed place of meeting. They could settle the whole thing in a couple of days. Can you wonder that Rome wins battles? One thing I promise you for when we are married, and it is also an interdiction: On no persuasion will I take you with me on any campaign, or even on any military business, where, in my judgment, you were better left behind.

This does not mean that I shall not consult you on many matters when we are man and wife. Oddly enough, actual fighting takes up very little of a soldier's time. A good general, to my mind, is the one who gets what he wants without fighting. . . .

Mary read the letter in her favourite seat in the loggia. It was a very long letter to come from the hand of such a man as Felix, and although it was in a slightly cursive version of the normal uncial script apparently personal to Felix—incidentally, in its neatness and dexterity throwing no unclear light on his character—it must have taken him a considerable time to write. Mary could imagine him penning it far into the night. It was unlikely, she thought, that she would ever get as long a letter from Felix again.

There was in it not one single reference to Lucian. But Mary saw clearly that the letter's whole intention was to scatter once and for all any fears that

her experience with Lucian could evoke. In sheer assumption of mutual happiness through mutual help in each other's causes it had a subtlety which conscious cleverness could never have achieved. Once and for all, it seemed, Felix set down the conditions in which he and Mary would live together. He did not understand her views on religious matters, but he would not only respect them, he would see that they were respected by others. In time, perhaps, if she would be patient with him, he might come to accept them himself, but here, definitely, only in so far as they were compatible with his duty. In the same way he would respect her desires for scholarship. And if here, admittedly, he could only follow humbly in her tread he would do all he could to foster those desires. To this end he would cultivate the company and friendship of men of learning. This, in fact, would be Mary's concern. . . .

If Mary had written to Felix telling him of her doubts and fears she could scarcely have had a fuller or more reassuring reply. The heartening thing about it was that its every single line assumed complete understanding on Mary's part, that its every line said Felix needed her.

"I have the will, I know, and the patience, I think," wrote Felix,

to become a good general. But though I miss no chance for study or for work, I doubt my ability to become a great one. With you beside me, this becomes possible. Except that I can promise to love you well, to become great is all I can offer you. But the honours I win will equally be your honours. The great general, his great lady. That is the picture.

I know, Mary, that loneliness and the thought that you had been bitter long enough brought you into my arms that night. I guess, besides, that a doubt if you could love me made you hesitate to link your fortunes with mine. And I beg you to let the doubt trouble you no longer. You are not as hard as you think you are. There is such gentleness in you that, when you realize how well I love you, you will not fail to respond. Give yourself to me without fear. You shall be most preciously cherished. And so, farewell.

And yet the doubt remained.

What was it, Mary asked herself, that she wanted? And she told herself again: spiritual contentment. For four days she had been arguing with herself in circles, trying to evade the conclusion she had come to in the beginning: that marriage with Felix held out no greater hope of spiritual contentment than had her so-called marriage with Lucian. What did Felix's letter, honest and thoughtful of her as it was, do towards erasing that conclusion?

Mary's answer to herself was, Nothing.

It offered temptingly the love of a physically attractive, unselfish, and most likely virile man—something suggesting contentments indeed, though not directly spiritual ones. It held out the chance of fame and honours,

contenting things in their way, but again not necessarily or directly spiritual. In any other regard the letter promised her little more, and perhaps a little less, than had been available in her association with Cleon.

In that association there had been no hindrance to Mary's reading, thinking, and talking as she liked, or to her going where she liked. Cleon had been an Academy and a Stoa in one. Without capitulation of his own broad-based ideas, he had been ever ready to examine any new proposition or to illumine an old one. But the truth was that, until resentment and hurt from Lucian's treatment of her lost their sting, she had sought for everything but spiritual contentment, that in the more placid last years with Cleon she had thought of spiritual contentment but fleetingly, and that since Cleon's death she had been too occupied in sybaritism as a relief from money-making and tricking her persecutors to think of religion at all.

And with that, Mary confessed to herself, evasion of the real issue might as well stop. Religion.

Without ignoring a very definite longing for more amusement and liveliness, it had been a desire for freedom in religious thought which had made her want to get away from Bethany. By herself she could not escape from the barriers set up by the code of her people. In order to escape she had entered into a union which the code forbade, which the code condemned as a deadly sin. It was idle to argue that in this the code was inhumanly harsh. It was right. And in acknowledging it to be right, she was at once at the spring of the turmoil that possessed her. She saw with eyes undimmed the appalling quandary into which she had thrown herself.

To escape from the restrictions which hampered her quest for God she had snatched an expedient that bound her worse than ever. Her union with Lucian might in Roman eyes have been legitimate (his subsequent one-sided divorce and his marriage with Corinna denied it), but her own ineluctable Jewishness called it adulterous. And this was the factor which had made her quest superficial, unreal, and without core, not merely during her intimacy with Lucian, but in the years thereafter. The element that in her Bethany days had given heart, purpose, and warmth to her quest, that had removed all feeling of guilt from her search for inspired utterance in pagan thought, was lost. This was the sense of communion with the Everlasting, the Father. For just as it had been blasphemy to have implored blessing or countenance away from the adulterous bed to which she would return, so it had been as blasphemous to seek it in the stony-heartedness and injured pride of the years that followed.

She could not be sure that she repented of her fornication with Lucian or of the even more promiscuous contacts she had lapsed into during the earlier days of her travelling with Cleon. She was not sure that she repented of any of the excesses she had been guilty of then or in the two years since Cleon's death. She regretted these things because they had left her feeling soiled, because the memory of them diminished her self-respect. She regretted them because they had taken the vital essence out of the much that she had learned in the years since Bethany, because they turned her knowledge into so much dusty refuse. Sin? If a sense of degradation and of lost integrity was the result of sin, they were sin. If destruction of her sense of communion with the Father-God of her longings, and her attempts to forget him—if these were the result of sin, then she had sinned indeed. But if bitterly regretting the loss and hating the shame which made her try to forget were repentance, then she bitterly repented of her sins.

But of what avail was repentance, asked Mary, if there was no pardon? There was, at any rate, no pardon to be had from her own people. According to the Law she had sinned beyond forgiveness. She was outcast.

She did not want to be outcast. But, on the other hand, she did not want to return to the narrowed, niggling life she had rebelled against. She might, she did repent the manner of her rebellion, and the transgressions it had led her into, but not for a moment did she repent of the rebellion itself.

"I won't—I won't go back to that!" Mary said through her teeth. "Even if they could or would take me back, I wouldn't go. It would be the same all over again—no freedom to think or speak or do. If I have to believe without question in the figmentation of the rabbis I cannot believe at all. If in the misery of my own folly I have forgotten God, the God of my soul's need would not have forgotten me! My own people will neither accept me nor let me live in peace. I will go where I will be accepted and respected and can live in peace. With Felix, who loves me . . ."

Felix, who loves you—her doubts intruded—Felix, who loves you, but who swears by a deified emperor, who sacrifices at haphazard to a dozen different gods, and who is under the orders of Pontius Pilate, the oppressor. If your intimacy with Lucian was adulterous . . . ?

"You stand, Mary, on the brink of an abyss!"

Mary's hand flew to her heart, and she looked about her wildly. It was as if Yeshu had spoken to her from the nearest column of the loggia. She got to her feet quickly and, without thinking where she was going, hurried through the loggia to the landward end of the pergola beyond.

And as she raised her eyes to the hills above Magdala she saw a crowd of people congregate about a smaller group that stood on a little eminence. She ran back the way she had come and through the summer-room into the house.

“Chloe! Chloe! My old dark cloak with the hood—quickly, child!—quickly!”

II

It was late afternoon when Mary got back from the hills. Perian met her at the house-door, and walked with her through the vestibule.

“A messenger arrived only a few moments before you, *domina*. He says he is bidden give the message to you personally,” said Perian. “He comes from Simon bar Joatham, the merchant.”

“From Simon bar Joatham!” wondered Mary. She let the hood of her cloak fall off her head as she went through to the atrium. The messenger, obviously one of Simon’s hired men, stood waiting for her. “Well?”

The man made an obeisance.

“My master, Simon bar Joatham,” he said, “begs that you will give him your company at his house this evening after sunset.”

“I am not of your master’s acquaintance,” said Mary, “and I therefore cannot understand why he should seek my company. Did he give a reason?”

“No, lady.”

“Can you guess at any reason?”

“No, lady. I only know that preparation is made for a number of people. My master did bid me tell you it was an occasion of importance.”

Mary thought for a moment or two. Simon had given her no cause to love him. He had been one of her worst persecutors, and she had taken more than one chance to punish him for it where she thought he would feel it most—his purse. There could be no friendly motive in the invitation, then. It smelt of a trap of some kind.

“You may tell your master that for courtesy the occasion treads too closely on the heels of the invitation,” said Mary. “But tell him also that although Mary bath Abiud is at nobody’s last-minute bidding, it may happen

that her curiosity will get the better of her dislike for incivility, in which case she will accept his invitation by appearing at his house.”

“Lady?” The messenger looked at her in sheer bewilderment.

“Ah!” Mary said. “You haven’t a very good memory, of course.”

She cast an inquiring glance at Perian, and he smiled understandingly.

“Take him and give him a cup of wine and a denarius, Perian,” said Mary. “Let him return into Magdala with my answer pat.”

“Yes, *hera*.” Perian crooked a summoning finger at Simon’s servant, who meekly followed him through the house.

Chloe made her appearance and looked reproachfully at the dusty hems of Mary’s cloak and *tunicæ*. There was, her look suggested, a little too much of this going about alone and on foot.

Mary smiled.

“Yes, I know, Chloe. But just some water for my feet at the moment. I’ll take off these dusty garments and rest awhile before I really bathe and change. Go bring the water to my room, child.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The little handmaid bobbed and ran happily to the other end of the house, Mary following more leisurely. Chloe sang as she prepared the basin, and filled the pitcher.

“You sound happy, pet,” said a kitchen-maid. “What’s agog?”

“Nothing, Lois. It’s just the mistress—she’s never angry now. She is sweet to me.”

“M’m! Let’s hope it keeps. Still, it’s true. She’s a different woman since the tall Roman appeared.”

“I don’t think it’s the Roman,” said Chloe. “I think it’s her brother. They’re very fond of each other, you see?”

“I see all right,” returned Lois. “Maybe that’s the juice in your pomegranate, too, baby.”

Chloe giggled and coloured up a little, but sedately picked up the filled pitcher and the basin, and went to find a towel.

Mary had already undressed to her shift by the time the girl arrived with the water, and she put on a light cloak before sitting down on her day-bed to

let Chloe undo her sandals and bathe her feet. As the girl bent earnestly to pour water with the one hand and lave off the dust with the other, Mary watched her with an interest she had not felt for a long time. The child, she thought, was still charmingly pretty with her neat head of ebony hair falling into curls of warm brown. Neatly made all through, deft in her movements, there was pleasure in watching the play of the rounded arms and the dimpled little hands. Looking at the smooth, faintly olive yet glowing skin of neck and shoulder, Mary's glance passed to a gap between shift and bosom, and she glimpsed the tender swelling of the girl's little breasts. The child, Mary told herself, is growing up. She is nearly a woman. How could I have missed for so long what a gentle little thing she is, so pleasant, so ready to please?

"Chloe!" Mary said very quietly.

"Yes, my mistress?" Chloe replied, barely glancing up from her towelling of a foot. But, as Mary did not continue, she stopped and looked up obediently.

Mary put off the question she had been going to ask, and on an impulse asked another one entirely.

"Do you love me, Chloe?"

"Ma'am!" The girl sat back on her heels and stared, making three O's of eyes and mouth in the bigger O of her round face.

"It doesn't matter, Chloe," Mary said, with a queer wrench at her heart. "How would you like to be free?"

"Oh, but I do, ma'am—I do love you—and—" Chloe was protesting, and apparently without the slightest pretence, when the significance of Mary's second question dawned on her. She faltered, "Did—did you say 'free,' ma'am?"

"Yes, Chloe, would you not like to be free, like Perian?"

As if she did not grasp the meaning of the question even then, Chloe took the foot that was still wet and gave it an absented wipe or two with the towel. When she looked up again her lips were trembling and tears were welling in her eyes.

"Come, child," Mary urged. "Here is no matter for tears!"

"I—I don't want to be sent away! Please, please, my lady, don't send me away! I do love you—I do, I do, I do!"

“There, there! You mustn’t be such a baby. Finish drying my foot, wipe your eyes, and listen to what I’m saying, Chloe,” said Mary, and waited until her foot was dried and sandalled like the other.

“I am not going to send you away. I was just asking if you would like to be free. That would mean, of course, that you would be able to leave my service if you wanted to, able to do just as you choose. Soon you will want to be married, to have a home of your own and children. If I set you free nobody will be able to take your children from you and sell them to strangers, as you were taken from your mother and sold. Do you understand that, Chloe?”

“Yes, my lady—but I don’t want to leave you.”

“I don’t want to lose you, Chloe. You may stay with me for as long as you choose.”

But it was useless to go on trying to explain. Chloe had put her head on her mistress’s knees and was crying—if the shaking of her shoulders was any sign—copiously into the towel she held. Mary caressed the smooth round neck, letting her fingers play with one finely moulded ear. Her own heart was full. Remembering how often she had made Chloe tremble or fall into tears with her too-ready angers—angers over things in which the child had no part at all—and the stinging sarcasms, sensed rather than understood by Chloe, for some clumsiness which her own rage had caused; remembering, too, how little regret or real feeling had been in the capricious pleasantnesses she had used to lift the girl out of woe into smiling; remembering altogether the little she had ever done to earn Chloe’s loyalty or affection, Mary thought it a miracle that the child so manifestly loved her.

She soothed Chloe as best she could, resisting the desire to take her in her arms as she might a little sister. The resistance came, she hoped, through no remnant of pride, no thought of making too much of a servant. It came from a feeling that she had no right to act on easy impulse. This new yearning to love and be loved by her own kind, finding its first subject in the pretty little creature who had served her so pleasantly and so well, might spring merely from the ache of loneliness. Better to let her new kindness (to call it that) appear just another variant of the old changeableness.

So she bade Chloe dry her eyes and be happy, and lifted her to her feet. She would not send her away. They would talk about Chloe’s manumission by and by, but meantime Chloe was not to talk about the possibility of her being freed to anyone but Perian. That was a good idea—Chloe should talk to Perian about it, and learn from him what it meant.

“Now take your things away, Chloe,” Mary said. “Come and call me when the shadow of the courtyard dial is pointing at the topmost leaf of the apricot tree, looking at both from beside the cistern opening. And be happy, Chloe. I love you too much ever to want to part with you.”

Mary stretched herself on the day-bed, and Chloe spread a light cover over her. Chloe completed the usual business of tucking her mistress in, but was not ready to go until she had kissed the hand lying outside the cover and hugged it to her heart. Then she picked up her pitcher, basin, and towel, and ran from the room.

Yes, Mary thought, Chloe deserved to be set free. The impulse was perhaps a good one, perhaps as good an impulse as that which had made her buy the tearful little slave-child in the market of Ephesus. What ill-fortune had reft the child of about twelve from her mother, Mary had never quite understood. Cleon, angry in a way she had seldom seen him, had conducted the transaction for her with the dealer. And he would only say that the mother had been sold separately a week earlier, and that the child had been fortunate in not being taken with her. From Chloe herself Mary could glean little information. There had been father and mother and child on the Isle of Samos, living happily enough; but the father apparently had died—in debt, Mary guessed—and men had come and taken mother and child, and had carried them by boat across the sea. Then had come days of walking, great weariness, and the bewildering confusion of a big city. Loss of the mother, soon, for the little girl, and day after day of fear and miserable loneliness.

The purchase was made in the serener last years of companionship with Cleon. And it had been a delight for Mary to find her perception justified by the emergence, from a husk of verminous rags, dirt, and neglect, of a naturally sweet-skinned, sweetly-built, and pretty little girl. She herself had stripped, bathed, and reclad the child. But how easy it had been thereafter to let the clever little creature slip into taking over the duties, copied eagerly from a succession of locally hired tirewomen, of handmaiden. Easy, too, in one’s bitter self-absorption, to let the intended daughter-companion gradually become merely the useful slave-girl. Perhaps the impulse in the market of Ephesus had been a good one. Perhaps it had saved Chloe, as the anger of Cleon about the mother had hinted, from a life of degradation and misery. But it had remained—an impulse.

“Oh, shallow, shallow!” Mary said into her pillow. “Shallow, inconstant, and fickle!”

In the hills that afternoon she had stood, heavily veiled and apart, listening to Jesus of Nazareth speaking again on the love one owed one's fellow-men. If you love not your neighbour, but think you love God (Jesus declared), you fool yourself. You love yourself too much if you cannot love even your enemies, and self-love is a wall of brass between yourself and the Father. Cast out self, be never-failing in kindness, for the kindness of a moment is seldom enough. It may spring from self-pity. Give love out of strength and not out of weakness. When you lift up the fallen do not merely set them on their feet with some soothing words; stay by them until they can walk. . . .

No more than she had kept her inward promises for Chloe, had she kept her promises for herself. For all her learning, and for all her cleverness, her life had been a pretence. There was nobody she had ever known that she had not failed. Lazarus, Martha, her dead father, Cleon, Chloe, Felix—even Lucian. She had failed her God. Mary dug her head harder into the pillow, and wept.

III

Mary had put aside her half-intention of going to the house of Simon, and was dressing quietly for an evening in her own home. There was a likelihood of Lazarus's coming. She had seen him on the hills and had reproached him for keeping away from her so long. He was dreamy and absent in manner, much as he sometimes had been as a child—a kind of listlessness, curious in one so active and healthy, out of which one had to draw him each time one wanted his attention. It was something Mary had hoped he would grow out of, and it troubled her a little to find him still subject to it. Felix, she remembered, had noticed something of it on the Capernaum-Magdala road. But in spite of his dreamy listlessness Lazarus had been pleased to see Mary, and had said that if Jesus was not going farther into the hills he would come to the villa in the evening.

Mary hoped Lazarus would stay with her overnight. She had been stupid to think for a moment of going to Simon's. There was something ulterior in the invitation. A strict Pharisee, Simon would scarcely be seen in public with any woman, even his wife did he have one. Much less would he be seen at table with a woman. Why, then, the invitation to a woman to whom he gave the reputation that he gave her? She had sent the equivocal reply on impulse, thinking she might accept what amounted to a challenge, and out of

curiosity. But, she hoped, she had done with impulse of the sort, with belligerency, and with curiosity of the kind.

She had just finished dressing to stop at home, when word was brought to her that Lazarus had arrived.

He seemed subdued rather than dreamy, and when he had exchanged the kisses of greeting with Mary he came straight to the cause of his repression.

“Jesus says I should go to Bethany, Mary.”

“Perhaps you should. But why does Jesus say so? Have you lost favour with him?”

“Oh, no. You don’t lose favour with Jesus just like that. I think he feels that there’s a difficult time coming for him and the others, and he doesn’t want me to be in it. Of course I’ll go to Bethany. I suppose I’m really a bit young to be one of his closest companions.”

“Yes, I should go to Bethany if I were you, Lazarus. Martha will be glad to see you, and Abijah and Jonas and the rest of them. After all, you are the master there.”

Lazarus grinned, coming clean out of repression.

“Tell Martha that,” he suggested. And a new line of thought came to him: “Jesus wanted to speak with you, Mary.”

“This afternoon? But I was closely veiled.”

“That doesn’t disguise you, my sister. Besides, he saw me talking to you. Of course, by the time the crowd thinned from about him you had gone. He may come to see you.”

There was in one way nothing that Mary wanted more; in another, nothing she wanted less. If she had longed to speak with, but yet had avoided, the ‘Yeshu’ of Bethany days who had said his ‘time for teaching’ was ‘not yet come,’ the opposing emotions were infinitely greater with regard to Jesus of Nazareth. The power and the authority in him, the sense that God dwelt in and spoke through him, had become so absolute in the intervening years that, while she yearned for the dissipation of all her doubts and perplexities, the absolution which she felt sure the boundless love that welled up in Jesus would find for her, Mary dreaded submitting her years-long debasement to his searching penetration. Then it came to her that, were her father, Abiud, alive, she would go to him, if with no less abjection of shame, with no less certainty of forgiveness. And the Father Who spoke through Jesus of Nazareth, of Whose pardon Jesus gave absolute assurance

to the contrite, how could He fall short of the mercy that an earthly father would show?

Mary found herself murmuring the saying of Isaiah she had heard Jesus repeat that afternoon on the hills: “‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.’” And she came out of her contemplation to hear Lazarus saying:

“I don’t like it, Mary. He has gone to the house of Simon the Pharisee, in Magdala. I left him there.”

“The house of Simon! Lazarus, it’s some sort of trap!”

“That doesn’t worry me. How can anybody trap Jesus? It’s the way they treated him—as if he were nobody. Of course there’s a big crowd there, but they might have given him the water to wash his feet in the ordinary way. He’s been in the dust of the hills nearly all day.”

Mary bit on her immediate impulse, and thought. Then she decided to follow it.

“I’m going there, Lazarus—now!”

“But Simon’s a Pharisee, Mary. He won’t let a woman into his house.”

“He has invited me.”

Lazarus looked at her in a puzzled way; then his amber eyes began to glow.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “there’s some plot. But go, Mary. You’ll be safe. Whatever the trap, Jesus will spring it. I’ll come with you.”

“Please, Lazarus, no. If you love me let me go alone.”

Lazarus hesitated. He thought of the press of people about Simon’s house, and of Mary’s fright that night on the shore. But he looked at his sister again. She had some reason—

“Very well, Mary. Since you put it that way, I’ll stay here. Could I bathe and sleep awhile, then have some food?”

“Yes, Lazarus. Come with me.”

They went through the house together, and Mary handed Lazarus over to the care of Perian. Then she went to her own room. Chloe was putting away the dark hooded cloak and veil which Mary had worn in the afternoon. It had been cleaned of dust. She put on the cloak, and was about to leave the room, when a thought came to her. She went back and unlocked her

treasure-chest, and took from it the vase of perfume-oil given her by Felix. And to Chloe's amazement, for she could not associate the precious attar with the worn cloak, Mary found a small knife and scraped away the resinous seal which held in the stopper. But even then the stopper would not come away.

"If needs be, I'll break it!" Mary said aloud.

"Break your precious vase, mistress?"

"Aye, Chloe. I shall never find a better use for it!"

And, wrapping the vase in the folds of her cloak, she hurried out of the house and into the night.

IV

She had pushed through the crowd about the house and had been admitted by the same servant who had brought her the message from Simon. Led by him, she had mounted the stairs to the upper room with the arcading overhanging the lake.

The room was crowded. There were no women, not even a woman servant. The supper-guests reclined on the couches arranged triclinium fashion round the tables on which supper, now over, had been served. All round this arrangement for the favoured—who were, Mary saw, a collection of the learned in the Law, rabbis, scribes, at least one Pharisee other than Simon himself, and two Sadducees of the priesthood from Jerusalem—there was a huddle of humbler men from the towns round about. The room was stifling, at once from the heat of bodies and from that created by the numerous lamps hanging from many-branched candelabra. A faint wind from the lake scarcely relieved it.

As the servant held back the curtain over the door, and made way for her through the nearer onlookers, the discussion going on round the triclinium came to a stop. No word of greeting came to her from Simon, the first person her eyes fell upon. He simply looked at her, hostilely, and stroked his beard. Her low-held glance went round the couches, first along the *summus* branch where the honoured guests were ranged, and then—not seeing Jesus where she thought to find him—along the *imus* fork. Jesus reclined in the lowest portion of this least honoured wing. Her eyes met his. Here there was no hostility, such as she had seen come out of the other eyes. There was recognition and a friendliness that needed no accompanying smile. His hair,

as usual, was beautifully kempt, but the lower hems of both his long tunic and his cloak, and his sandalled feet, were thick with dust.

The eyes of Jesus, clearer and more startlingly amber than her own or those of Lazarus, bade her have no fear. But they did something else. As if Jesus had actually spoken, they told her plainly that she had been brought there as a test of himself. She understood. Tears sprang into her eyes, blindingly, and she crossed the space separating her from Jesus, and knelt at his feet. As she bent over them, tears splashed on to his instep. She bent still lower and kissed the foot. She undid his sandals, looked for a towel, and realized she had forgotten to bring one. But still there was something she could use, something that would express her humility and repentance. Without looking up, her tears falling the while on Jesus's feet, she pushed back the hood of her cloak, and undid the pins that held her hair. It fell about her face, a thick fountain of copper shot with gold, so long as to sweep the ground. She did not hear the gasp that went up from the men all round the room.

Clumsily at first, then with growing confidence, she wiped tears and dust from the feet with handfuls of her hair bunched in her hands. She could not, she saw, really clean Jesus's feet, but she was doing what she had come to do. She was giving him the honour that the hard and rather stupid man at the top table had failed of in common hospitality.

And as certainly as if it had been said, she knew that Simon, having told the men about him that she was a notorious harlot, was asking why this Jesus, this searcher of hearts, did not know what sort of woman was at his feet—was asking why the feet did not spurn her away as something unclean.

She had removed most of the dust from Jesus's feet, and now she picked up the perfume vase from the floor beside her. Thinking, for quickness, to break it, she hit the stopper against the floor-tiling. The stopper fell out with a tinkle. She held the vase up swiftly, but enough of the thin oil had gushed out to fill the whole room with its sweet, uncloying perfume. She trickled it on to Jesus's feet and spread it with her fingers, her hair still hiding her face. Then Jesus spoke:

“Simon, I have something to say to you.”

Simon cleared his throat, and replied with mock graciousness, “Let me hear it—huh—Rabbi.”

“A moneylender had two men in debt to him. One owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. Finding that neither truly had the money to

repay him, he freely forgave them both. Now, tell me, which of the forgiven debtors would love him for it most?"

"Why—huh—Rabbi, surely the one he had forgiven most."

"A sensible answer," said Jesus. He rose on the couch, stretched out his hand, and gently raised Mary's tearful face.

"Look you, Simon, on this woman. When I entered your house you had no water brought to cleanse my feet. But she has cleansed them with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss of friendship and welcome. But she has scarce stopped kissing my feet since she knelt at them. You did not anoint my head with the oil of courtesy, but she has anointed my feet with a most precious attar.

"So I say to you: Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; to whom little is forgiven but little loves."

As she stoppered what remained in the vase, and hugged it to her breast, Jesus put a hand under her arm to lift her up.

"Rise, Mary!" he said clearly. "Your sins are forgiven you."

As Mary got to her feet, a murmuring arose all round the room, but particularly from the learned and the pious on the couches: "But this is blasphemy! How can he pretend to forgive sin?"

The hand still under Mary's arm supported and guided her, for her tears were blinding her and her limbs felt weak. Through the cloud of her own hair she looked at Jesus, saw him dimly, and heard him say in the rich, unforced voice she had noted long ago in Bethany—it quelled the murmuring:

"Your faith has saved you, Mary. Go in peace!"

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER XII

Renunciation

“THESE are the terms, Matthias,” said Mary, “and it is useless on your part to try to alter them. Are you suggesting that I have put a higher price on the goods than I paid for them?”

The merchant raised his shoulders and showed his palms.

“I don’t know what that means,” Mary told him. “If you cannot give me a plain ‘no’ to my question I shall make arrangements elsewhere.”

“No, no!” Matthias said hastily. “I haven’t any doubt that the list is true to a mite. You must forgive me, lady.”

“Mary,” she reminded him.

“You must forgive me, Mary,” the little man amended. “It is a habit. It doesn’t seem possible that I am to have all these rich goods to sell without giving you more than a receipt for them. I am bewildered. It is like one of the stories told by those heathen tellers of tales.”

“Matthias, Matthias! Am I to believe that you, a respectable and honest Jewish merchant, with a wife and family too, spend your time listening to those spinners of godless fables?”

“No, no! But once—well, or maybe twice—in passing through the Nabatean end of the market, one has paused to hear,” Matthias stammered. Really, he thought, though this Mary was a greatly changed woman, she was as quick as ever to make a man look foolish on a chance word—and as acute as ever in a matter of business. But might the Holy One—blessed be the Name!—forgive him for being so greedy with one so generous. She was handing over rich woven goods, worth many talents, for him to sell for her, with no more bond than his simple word and a witnessing of the list of them. And he, like a back-street huckster, must treat her as if she offered him mouldy figs. O fie! O shame! O——!

“No more than that?” Mary was smiling. “I rejoice to hear it. I would not like to think my agent in Eastern Galilee gave countenance to such impious liars. Have you spoken again with Simon bar Joatham regarding the villa?”

“Yes. He does want to buy it, but——”

“Go on, Matthias.”

“He says he will not deal direct with you, nor——”

“Tell me his exact words, Matthias.”

“Nor will he, he says, set foot in the house until you and—and your abominations are out of it.”

“He must want it to sell again,” Mary surmised. “His own house in the city is handsome, more convenient than this for his affairs.”

“He wants it to sell again, yes. I imagine he already has a buyer,” said Matthias, and added enviously: “I wish I had!”

“I wish you had, Matthias. But I need not be over-careful with Simon where his greed is concerned. You will tell him that he either deals direct with me and in this house or not at all. Unless he wants the chance to go past him, he will come to me before the coming Sabbath with the necessary bond prepared, his witnesses, and with the money in silver or gold.”

“Twenty Greek talents?”

“Twenty-two Greek talents,” said Mary. “Not a mite less.”

“Wouldn’t it be wiser, lady—I mean, Mary—to say, perhaps, twenty-five talents? It’s always safer to have a margin—for bargaining——”

“I won’t haggle with Simon bar Joatham,” Mary said with a touch of her former arrogance. “You know as well as he does that the house will easily sell for twenty-five. But I want to be quit of it, Matthias. And that reminds me. Make arrangements at once for clearing the storeroom. Reckon the number of asses or carts you’ll need, and have it cleared before the Sabbath.”

“I am a poor man, Mary. I have not yet found dry storage that can be safely guarded.”

“I think you mean that you haven’t found a place you think cheap enough. But, Matthias, you will not sell these rare pieces of mine unless you have room to show them, and that in a quarter where moneyed people will care to come. If you think to go to the people I have listed for you, carrying one piece at a time, you will defeat your aim. You will look like a pedlar. Unless you know exactly what they want, you must attract them to you. And you will find, doing that, that where one piece doesn’t attract them another possibly will. And you will find, too, that the sale of one makes for the sale of another.

“You must be rid of timidity. If you are short of ready money I will help you. Find a house with a store anywhere in the combined settlements of Magdala, or even in Capernaum. If it must be purchased I shall find the money for it, and you will either give me a bond for the money or pay me rent for the house.”

“Mary, I——”

“Pooh!” said Mary in effect, cutting into a probable profusion of thanks. “I know what I’m doing, Matthias. You are honest and shrewd, and I am sure every one likes you. Be courageous and careful, and you will wake up one morning to find that you owe nothing either to me or anyone else.”

“If the Holy One—blessed be His Name!—gives me life you shall have every penny,” said Matthias with dignity. “But may He forget me if I ever forget your kindness!”

“That is well said. Now, bustle, man! Go find yourself a house with good storeroom. When you do I’ll come and look at it.”

Matthias went on his way a trifle dizzied by his good fortune, and Mary turned again to her domestic and business affairs.

Months had passed since she had anointed the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon. From that night she had determined to quit her house on the lake shore by Magdala and Galilee itself, and to return to Bethany. But it could not be done suddenly, without a lot of preparation. The merchants with whom she had money ventured had to be told that she was retiring from active trading, and in some cases they were as far away as Greece and Egypt. Some of the wealthier merchants of the Grecian provinces of what is now known as Asia Minor, of Damascus, and the Phœnician ports had organized a fair system of communication, and this to a certain extent was at her disposal. But even so communication was slow. It was necessary for her to find an agent to act for her in Galilee, and she had fixed tentatively on Matthias. She felt sure the little man was trustworthy, but she was not so sure that his shrewdness and his knowledge sufficed for dealing with the rarer fabrics and other goods in which she had specialized. While waiting for the winding up of her ventures with the farther-off merchants, she had therefore watched the handling by Matthias of an increasing number of transactions she put in his way. And she had seen that he brought to the business a love of fine textures which equalled her own, and that it was only lack of opportunity and experience that made his knowledge of them inferior. She found the little man an eager pupil, quick to learn, and with a natural taste which experience was likely to develop. The timidity Mary

reproached him with sprang from the same source as his adoption of common tricks of the market—lack of capital. He had to buy in small quantities such goods as he could be sure of selling quickly, at profits which could be lightly skimmed for the upkeep of his wife and family. But that, given the chance, he could take courage was proved, Mary thought, by his venture in the hangings he had bought in Tyre in the hope of disposing of them in the Herodian court. Mary had enough confidence in Matthias ultimately to suggest to some of her connexions that they should make him her successor.

Now, however, her affairs far afield were near to being settled. She had reached a stage where it seemed possible she would be able to leave for Bethany inside a fortnight. Lazarus was there. On the suggestion of Jesus he had gone there in time for the harvest, but had returned to Galilee for a little, then gone south again with Jesus for the Feast of Tabernacles. And Jesus was back north without Lazarus.

In her brother's absence Mary had no exact information about Jesus's wanderings. She was contributing to the support of his following, and what news she had came from Judas of Kerioth, the purse-bearer, who appeared now and then, almost secretly, to collect funds. From him she heard of a journey into Syria towards Tyre and Sidon, and of some important happening at Cæsarea Philippi about which Judas hinted too obscurely for Mary's understanding. From Judas, again, she had heard of opposition by the Sanhedrin during Jesus's sojourn in Jerusalem, and indeed of an attempt to arrest him. It was clear that there was a growing antagonism to Jesus in high places, and it had a look of being concerted. Mary's own journeyings and the preoccupation of her own affairs generally had prevented her from meeting Jesus again, although he had been near Magdala more than once.

There remained to trouble her the question of how she stood with Felix. It was going to be difficult. Since that first long letter from Bethsaida Julias, four short notes had reached her. Apparently the negotiations with the three tetrarchs had been brought to a successful conclusion, but he had found it impossible to get back to Galilee. His duties kept him shuttling back and forth between Judean Cæsarea and Jerusalem. But it was manifest in all his notes, short as they were, that Felix considered Mary betrothed to him, and that he believed her to be getting ready—somewhat slowly—to join him in Cæsarea.

It was even more difficult to explain to Felix than she had imagined.

“But, Mary,” he protested in bewilderment, “if that dispatch had not reached me from Pilate that night you would have bedded with me?”

“Yes, Felix. But it would have meant just that more to regret.”

“To regret? I meant—I mean to deal honourably with you, Mary. I told you how I planned to make our marriage legal. And it would be legal. I asked a law counsellor at Vitellius’s court, and he said it could be done—adoption, citizenship, everything.”

“I have told you, Felix, that the legality under Roman law is the least of it. When I thought of coming to you, I had forgotten the God of my people. But now I remember. I cannot have peace at heart unless I do. The God of Israel forbids a Jewess to mate with a non-Jew, a Gentile. I cannot marry you, Felix.”

“You cannot blow hot, blow cold, like this!” Felix said furiously. “One minute falling into my arms, the next foisting me off with talk of Jews and Gentiles! To hades with Jews and Gentiles! I’m a man, you’re a woman.”

“It can’t be argued like that, my dear.”

“‘My dear’!”

“You are very dear to me, Felix. Nothing can alter that. But let us sit like friends together and see if we cannot come to an understanding,” said Mary.

She pointed to the couch beside which Perian had set cups and a flask of wine. They were in the atrium of the villa, where they had met. But Mary’s reluctance to put more than friendship into her response to Felix’s embrace, and his chagrin at what he thought was her coldness, had kept them standing.

Felix took the seat indicated, frowning boyishly. Mary took the couch’s other end. She poured some wine for both Felix and herself, and set herself to her hard task.

“First, Felix, let me make it clear that I have no intention of slighting you. Let me make it clear that I do not think myself too good for you. Let me make it clear that anything I say is an attempt to bring an understanding between myself and you.”

“Go on, Mary! Say what you have to say. I am not the fool you think me.”

“Your saying so, Felix, justifies my caution. I think you are an angry man, no more, but I also think your anger is unjust. I have never blown hot or cold with you. Until the night when I let you lift me into your arms, I did all I could to stop you telling me of your love for me. I have never said I loved you. I have never promised to marry you. On the night when you had suddenly to go off on duty you spoke hastily about how a legal Roman marriage could be arranged for you and me, and you went off assuming that I agreed.”

“I assumed you agreed because you had fallen—no, had let me take you into my arms. Don’t say my plan for our marriage came after that. You knew before it that I wanted you for wife.”

“Yes, I knew that, Felix. But I came into your arms without consideration of whether I was to be your wife or not. In your letter from Bethsaida Julias you said you knew it was loneliness and being tired of my own bitterness that had brought me into your arms. And that is true. I did not want you as a lover, I needed only the comfort you could give me as a friend.”

“Jove! Think you I am ice? That was to ask too much of a man.”

“I know it. And if you had not been called away you would not have been denied the satisfaction you sought.”

“Hercules! And if I had taken you?”

“As I say, there would have been just that more to regret.”

“Not for me.”

“Then, for me. You had no sooner left the house than I knew I was glad of the respite. For three days I fought against the conviction that to marry you would be wrong. On the fourth day your letter came. It held out greater temptation, but the oftener I read it the more my conviction grew: I could not marry you, Felix. There has been everything to strengthen that conviction since.”

“Where would marrying me be wrong?”

“I am a Jewess.”

“And I am a Roman—a knight at that. If I don’t mind marrying a Jewess why should a Jewess mind marrying me?”

“This Jewess does not love you enough to forsake the God of her fathers.”

“You don’t *need* to forsake the god of your fathers. I told you that particularly.”

“I cannot marry you without forsaking Him. It is the Law.”

A lift of his eyebrows on a sharp intake of breath expressed Felix’s impatience.

“I thought it was to be free from all such nonsense that you left Bethany?” he said.

“To be free from some nonsense, certainly. But that the Lord God liveth is the eternal truth. I cannot escape from it. In uniting myself with Mark Lucian I tried to put it behind me, but I could not. My deep-rooted belief in it made a happy union with Lucian impossible for me, because he did not believe in it. My belief and his non-belief made our union adulterous.

“We might go on arguing about this for weeks, Felix,” Mary concluded, “but it would not alter my conviction. Believing as I do, I cannot unite with you, an unbeliever, except as an adulteress. And nothing you can devise of adoption, Roman citizenship, or legal contract can make any difference. Live a hundred years together, Felix, and before the God I worship, and in my own eyes, I should not be your wife or even your concubine. I should be your harlot.”

“Because I am not of the Jewish faith?”

“Because of that.”

For a long moment or two Felix considered the matter in silence.

“There is little I would not do, Mary, to make you my wife,” he said at last. “But I cannot promise to accept the Jewish faith. I promised in my letter to you from Bethsaida Julias that I would see if in time I could accept it, but only in so far as it was compatible with my duty. Farther than that I cannot go. To promise more would be a pretence—a lie.”

“You could not accept the Jewish faith and remain a Roman soldier, Felix.”

There was another moment or two of silence while Felix thought.

“Because my duty as a Roman soldier might demand action against the Jews?” he suggested.

It was too simple a statement to cover all the difficulties involved, but Mary nodded and said, “Yes.”

Felix looked round the stripped atrium and into the equally bare peristylum beyond.

“You are a very different woman from the Mary I met on my first coming here,” he said. “The alteration began that very night. I think when we sat at supper you meant to show how hard and bitter the defection of Lucian had made you.”

“That is true. But I began to discover then that the bitterness was of my own making.”

“The discovery began with hearing the prophet Jesus?”

“Yes.”

“You are a very different woman. You are more like the Mary I knew in Bethany, yet very different from her.”

“I am nearly ten years older, Felix.”

“It is not that. You are more beautiful now than you were then. Some uncertainty has gone out of you. You are quieter of spirit, and you seem to be happier. That is what I cannot understand. Being happier, why are you dressed in those colourless clothes? Why have you got rid of the beautiful things kept about you? Why are you dismissing your servants and leaving this house?”

“I want to be rid of everything, Felix, that turns my thoughts on myself. I must put away self. I must serve instead of being served.”

Felix looked to where the marble *Nike* had stood.

“And beauty?” he asked. “Do you propose to live without that—you?”

Mary turned her gaze in the same direction, and she smiled.

“Beauty?” she said. “I have found beauty of another kind, Felix.”

III

It was, nevertheless, a great wrench to Mary to part with Felix, more especially since, beneath the stoicism in which he ultimately accepted her decision, she could see the hurt and bewilderment. It was unlikely, humanly speaking, that she would ever meet the same love and devotion again. Unlikely either, in spite of the wide difference in belief and outlook, that

there would be another man in her life with whom she would find the same unquestioning friendship and trust.

When they had given each other regretful farewell, she stood in the garden to watch Felix go. And long after he had passed from sight, and the sound of his horse's hooves had died away, she watched the road.

The sun sank behind the hills to the south-west, and the brief dusk of Galilee was at hand. Mary, with a shiver, was about to turn into the house, when she became aware that some one was lurking close to the main gate. The porter was nowhere at hand, and she went quickly down to the gate to look for herself. As she pulled it open, a man came along by the garden wall from the direction of the lake, and slipped quickly past her.

"Judas!" said Mary, and looked into the roadway for a second visitor.

"Shut the gate!" he bade her. "What are you waiting for?"

"Isn't there some one with you?"

"Who would be with me?"

"Why not Lazarus?"

"He is in Bethany. I am come alone this time."

"Were you waiting outside the gate for long? You seemed, as I opened it, to come straight along under the wall from the shore."

"I did come straight from the shore. You opened the gate just as I reached it."

"And you saw nobody?"

"Except yourself, nobody," said the man from Kerieth. He was positive enough to take the bar of the gate out of Mary's hands and to drop it into its slot. Mary led the way up to the house, but remained certain that there was still some one lurking beyond the garden wall.

The idea remained in her consciousness while she saw to it that Judas was fed in comfort, and while she talked with him. He had left Jesus, he said, on the other side of the lake, in Philip's territory, and had come with one or two of the brethren by boat to a cove on the near side of Magdala.

Judas was the only Judean in the twelve that were the immediate disciples of Jesus. It was perhaps for this reason that he was generally known as 'Iscariot,' or 'Ish Kerieth,' from the town of his origin instead of

from his family. In him the not unusual Judean contempt for things Galilean was exaggerated.

Mary was used to these Judean prejudices of Judas, and was ready to allow for them. She was aware that in a narrowed sense Jesus's mission in Galilee might be called a failure. While Jesus could at any time gather great multitudes of the labouring people, and had indeed brought them in large number to the Fount of Mercy, he had made the 'learned' and the well-to-do in general hotly antagonistic to him by his attacks on their externalism in worship. And if this had led to mere avoidance of him by the greater number of his antagonists it had driven a fierier minority into alliance with the Herodians. This alliance sought cause and occasion for arresting him and putting him in prison. So that Jesus had been forced, except at times when his absences had allowed opposition to die down, to carry out his teaching in Galilee by incursions from the neutral territory of Gaulanitis or the Decapolis. But it could be said that an equal antagonism to Jesus on the part of the rulers and leaders of the people had developed in Judea, or rather in Jerusalem. It was the more dangerous antagonism, for in Judea the power in civil and religious matters lay in the hands of the Sanhedrin, effectively dominated by the Sadducees and the priests.

When, therefore, she heard Judas cry woe on Galilee for its apathy and antagonism towards the message preached by his Master, Mary thought he might equally have cried woe on Judea. And at first she felt something akin to amusement at what seemed the repetition of a prejudice preventing Judas from seeing the whole situation. But her faint amusement vanished when she discovered a new element in the almoner's inveighings. This came when Judas was about to take his departure again. Mary had brought him a bag of money and he was hiding it securely in the folds of his waistcloth.

"Let these unbelievers of Galilee look to themselves!" Judas reiterated. "These besotted rulers of the synagogues! That Idumean bye-blow, Herod, and his minions! Bitterly will they rue their unbelief, their persecutions! The day is coming—it is close at hand!"

"The day, Judas?"

"The appointed hour. It must come. Let but the Master go up again to Jerusalem——"

"Surely the danger for him is greater there than here? You yourself told me the chief priests and the scribes were set to stone him."

Judas shrugged impatiently.

“What can they do against him? Isn’t all power within his grasp? We are wasting time in Galilee,” he said. “Jerusalem—that’s the place.”

Mary would have detained him then, but he would not be stayed. His brethren would be waiting for him in the cove by Magdala, anxious to set out for Bethsaida Julias. Judas was too much the busy man of affairs to waste time in gossip on high matters with a woman. He might drop a hint suggestive of special knowledge and special perception on his own part to such a ‘subscriber’ as Mary, but his general attitude was that the woman’s rôle was to be concerned with sustentation, and not to be forward in counsel. So that he put Mary’s questions aside with unconcealed impatience, and hurried off into the night.

The hintings of Judas left Mary puzzled and disturbed, but she was given no time just then to turn them over in her mind. She had told Perian, as he went to see Judas out of the main gate, to have a look about for anyone lurking outside. Perian came back to say that Simon bar Joatham was there with two men.

With her major-domo Mary went out to the vestibule and found Simon waiting there in the shadow with a fold of his cloak drawn over his head. Beyond him, in the open, two stalwart young elders stood by, and Mary guessed that they were armed with swords under their cloaks. The reason for this was apparent in the loaded ass, looked after by a fourth man carrying a spear, that dragged an impatient hoof on the pathway still farther beyond in the open.

“Peace be unto you, Simon!” Mary said courteously, and extended the greeting to the others, “And unto you, friends!”

The two younger men salaamed with a murmured reply, but Simon merely inclined his head a little.

“Have you been waiting long at the gate?” Mary asked Simon.

“Nay. We had not reached it when it was opened to let some one out.”

“Enter, then,” said Mary. She still was possessed by the idea that there had been some one prowling outside the garden wall when Judas arrived, and she had a feeling that some one still was there. But she gathered that Simon had brought the purchase-money for the house, and she did not want to give him cause for uneasiness by talking of a suspicion which, after all, was not very well founded.

It was aside, therefore—while Simon and his company were engaged in carrying in the leathern bags of money from the ass’s back—that she told

Perian to gather the watchmen and as many of the men-servants as remained, and to make a thorough search in and out of the house grounds.

She got Simon and his company settled in a corner of the peristylum that was warmed by a great brazier and lit by several candelabra. The money-bags lay together on a wide, low table, together with several rolls of parchment and an ink-horn brought by Simon.

Mary seated herself in a tall stool with arms that in a manner enthroned her above and aloof from the three men. They were seated on a low couch by the table on which the money lay.

“I forbear to tempt you, Simon, with any of the hospitalities that I usually offer my visitors,” said Mary. “I know how unwillingly you are here, regarding me and my house as abominations. It is no affair of mine how you salve your conscience in buying something you regard as an abomination, even to sell again.”

“The Law allows——”

“I am not talking of the Law, nor even of your conscience. I said it was no affair of mine how you salve it. I take it that you do not want the house for your own use?”

“And that,” said Simon, grimly bland, “is possibly no affair of yours either.”

“You are mistaken. If I knew that you wanted the house for your own use, human-kindness might lead me to be less intractable about the price. If, on the other hand, you want it merely to make money out of it, I fix a price which I think allows you a huckster’s profit and nothing more. You might be in need of the house. You are, I think, in no need of money.”

Simon looked at her sourly. His two companions smiled.

“We need waste no time in words,” said Simon. “Name your price.”

“It is already named, through Matthias. Twenty-two Greek talents.”

“I offer you eighteen.”

“A waste of time,” said Mary. “Do you, to begin with, know what you are offering for? Have you seen the house?”

“I saw it built.”

“I don’t doubt you know what it cost to build, what I paid for it, and the alterations I had done to it. You have seen the builder, Sarid?”

“That is true. Eighteen Greek talents I offer.”

“Then you know it is in good repair. Twenty-two talents I require.”

“I’ll waste no more time. In each of these four bags there are five talents,” said Simon. “See!”

He undid the thong of one of the bags, and spilled the contents on to the table.

“Twenty talents. I will go no farther.”

Mary smiled.

“An old trick, Simon. Do not trouble yourself to open any more of the bags. Indeed, if there are only twenty talents there, you have made a journey for nothing. You may carry the money back home again.”

“Thirty minæ—nine hundred shekels—I will add——”

“You were told by Matthias that unless you came here with twenty-two talents you might save yourself the trouble of coming at all,” said Mary. “I am not to be moved, Simon. The house is worth twenty-five talents, at least, so I am making you a gift of three talents. And I will chaffer no further. Either put down twenty-two talents or begone.”

With a suppressed groan, Simon fished a long purse out of the folds of his waistband, and threw it on the table.

“Four hundred and thirty Roman staters in gold,” he said. “Count the money.”

“That is still over a mina short of twenty-two talents,” said Mary. “But let it pass. I need not count the money.”

“You need your own witnesses.”

“I know you to be a hard man, Simon bar Joatham—yes, and even a cruel one,” said Mary. “But I have not heard it said, nor do I believe, that you do not keep your word once pledged. And if your witnesses are good enough for you, they are good enough for me. Have you the deed that would make the house yours?”

“Yes,” said Simon. “Here it is.”

“For twenty-two Greek talents?”

Simon grinned as if with difficulty.

“The sum and the day are yet to be written in,” he said. “But that offers little trouble since I wrote the deed myself.”

He took the reed and horn, and added the necessary details to the parchment, then handed it over to Mary. She signed it, and the two witnesses added their names.

“Now, Simon,” said Mary. “Write me a bond for twenty talents Greek as from to-morrow the Fifth of Tishri.”

“A bond for twenty talents! What folly is this?”

“I am lending you the twenty talents—unless, of course, you would rather not be my banker.”

“But, mistress, it is a great sum. I—I had to borrow specie from many friends in Magdala and Capernaum in order to make it up. Why, if you meant to take my bond for the price of the house, make me bring the gold here at this time of night?”

“The time of night is your own choice, Simon. It gives a clue to why I made you bring the money here. If you had come to me openly and said you were ready to buy the house, your bond—had you bought the house—would have been enough. But you said you would neither deal directly with me, nor set your foot in the house until I and my abominations were out of it. Therefore I said in my turn that you would either buy the house my way or not at all. This was to deal lightly with you, Simon, for I believe I know the buyer you have found for the house.”

“You know the buyer?”

“Artemas of Sepphoris, isn’t it?” Mary smiled. “I see it is. Very well, Simon. When you think of me as a harlot, remember this also: whereas I never sold my love for gain, I made you sell your pride and your convictions for three talents that I might have pouched myself.”

“That, mistress,” acknowledged Simon, “is to use the scourge.”

“Bloodlessly, I hope, and without enmity. Do you write me the bond, Simon?”

“Nay, mistress,” said Simon. He picked up the deed of sale and peered at it. “You are a better scribe than I am. Let us consider its terms and you shall write it yourself.”

There was little difficulty about drawing up the bond. The one point at issue was the amount of interest it was to carry. Mary insisted on waiving

the enormous percentage then usual, and Simon, obviously opposing his habitual eagerness for gain with an uncertain wish to be generous, protested against what he called her folly in refusing more than five per centum. But in the end Mary had her way. The bond was executed and witnessed for registration at the chief synagogue of Magdala, and the three men got ready to take their leave.

The money spilled out on the table had been restored to its sack, and with the others was stacked for loading on the ass. The long purse of Roman gold staters lay apart, and the three men stared at it. Mary lifted it in both hands, and thrust it into those of Simon.

“This two talents, Simon,” she said, “I give to you for disbursement to the poor through the synagogues of Magdala. It is not to be put out on loan and only the profits distributed. I want it to be used directly for the help of the needy, the sick, the widowed, and the orphaned.”

While his two companions exclaimed their wonderment at some length, Simon had time to get over two conflicting impressions: first, that Mary had repented of her hard bargain with him and was restoring the full profit he had hoped for, and second, that it was exasperatingly with his money she was being so insanely munificent. He got over these ideas, but he remained bewildered.

“Now, by the life of my head,” he gabbled, “it is princely! Why, so distributed it could keep forty poor families for a whole year!”

Abstractedly, he weighed the purse in a hand, then fell as if moodily to returning it into the folds of his waistcloth. As if moodily, again, he signed to his companions to begin carrying out the heavier bags. He scarcely noticed when Mary, seeing Perian lurking in the kitchenward end of the peristylum, had two of her litter-bearers brought to help in carrying out the sacks. He did not see that Mary bade Perian, apparently with some information to give her, keep it until later. Simon, nursing the considerable weight of the sash-enfolded purse in his two hands, scarcely came out of his deep abstraction to address her:

“Uh—Mary—it shall be as you command. I myself—I shall see that a fair and wide division of your bounty is made throughout the combined city. And the elders in the city will call you blessed. The needy and afflicted will call you blessed.”

He looked more gaunt than ever as he raised his head, and a trick of the room’s lighting gave lambency to the deep-set gaze he turned on her.

“And I, Simon bar Joatham, your sometime enemy,” he began, and swallowed. “Tell me,” he seemed to beg, “this—this—it is due to the teaching of the Nazarene, Jesus?”

“Yes, Simon.”

He looked down at his hands hooked under the purse in his sash.

“I am too old for easy changes of mind,” he said. “Yet, you—you whom I judged to be wholly evil—I find myself thinking to bless! But how can I bless you without blessing the Nazarene who wrought the change in you?”

As she gave no answer, he looked at her again, fiercely.

“You were evil, were you not?” he demanded.

“You would say so.”

“In some ways—I ask not how—you departed from the Law?”

“I am not under your judgment, Simon. But I will answer again: You would say so.”

“And you consider you have found pardon?”

“That is my belief.”

“Whence this belief?” demanded Simon, suddenly ablaze. “Or think you this Nazarene has the power to pardon?”

“He makes no such claim. He simply has such faith in the limitless love and understanding of the Father that he can see none turned away who truly seeks it.”

“Foh! Publicans, eaters of blood, Sabbath-breakers, harlots—pardon for these!”

“Who more greatly need it? Surely not you and your brethren of the *Chaberim*, certain as you are of your own righteousness? You have made your bargain with the One. You keep the Law. You pay the Temple-tribute. You are exact in tithing. You observe the Sabbath. You fast. Grimly you do these things. And in them you are justified. You are therefore in need neither of pardon nor of blessing. What does it matter to you whether the Lord is merciful or not? By fearfully keeping the Law you pay for your salvation.”

Blood congested about Simon’s eyes.

“That,” he said thickly, “is a travesty. It is to make a huckster’s pact of the Covenant—a huckster’s stall of the Throne!”

“It is indeed,” said Mary, “but it is no travesty. It is a conception of what the Father requires of His children which separates all but a moiety of Israel’s thousands from His love for ever.”

“Let them but keep the Law!”

“Easy for you to say so, Simon. Easy for you to do. Easy for you and your kind to wear phylacteries and the fringed-garments, easy to find the leisure for study of the Torah, for saying your many prayers, for fasting in repose. But how difficult for the poor, the burdened with labour! How shall a man who must work from sunrise to sunset for one poor denarius find water for washing ere he breaks his bread, when he must give a mite to the carrier for a cupful to quench his thirst?”

“Let him spare a drop from the cup for the Lord’s sake!” exclaimed Simon. Beading of moisture on brow and cheekbones declared his inward turmoil. “The Law asks for no more!”

“It matters nothing that the hands remain unclean?”

“The ordinance is satisfied.”

“In whose judgment?” asked Mary quietly. And as he did not answer she went on without irony, “Go your ways, Simon, go your ways! Live in the thorn-bush that your like and the scribes have made of the Law. For us, the outcast of you *Chaberim*, the hope is better. For did not the Lord once say through His servant: ‘I desire love and not sacrifice.’? Without your certainty of righteousness, without attempt to bargain with the Unbuyable, we outcasts, following the Nazarene, will try so to become the loving children of a loving Father that evil will be impossible. Even so may His Kingdom come.”

“It is not so simple, it cannot be so simple!” muttered Simon. “One cannot, like the Nazarene, claim by loving the Lord to set all ordinance and tradition aside.”

He made a move as if to go, but stopped to glower at her.

“Woman,” he said, “there is a devil in you. Never until now have I had a moment of doubt.”

He looked away, realized that the money had been carried out, and saw that his companions, watching, were waiting for him in the atrium.

“I cannot be for the Nazarene,” he went on, “but you may warn him that if he is in danger here in Galilee there is greater danger for him in Jerusalem

or Judea. For the faces of the priests and Sadducees, the scribes, and of my own people are set against him.”

Once again he appeared to struggle with himself, as if fighting against an impulse.

“I find it hard to admit a mistake,” he said, “but may the Lord prosper you—in well-doing!”

He bent slightly, touching his forehead with his palm, and, coming very erect again, strode quickly past her and out of her sight.

IV

“We found the man, *domina*,” said Perian, “but he doesn’t look like a thief. He said he was looking for you—named you as the daughter of Abiud the son of Shirach—a little rabbi sort of man who says he comes from Bethany.”

“A little rabbi sort of man—from Bethany!” exclaimed Mary. “Where is he?”

“In the kitchen, *domina*.”

Mary went off towards the kitchen at such a pace that Perian had almost to trot after her. The captured lurker was, as she had immediately guessed, the erstwhile thorn in her flesh, Zachary.

The little man sat humped on a low stool beside the still-warm embers in one of the hearths. Two of Mary’s men-servants were keeping guard over him. The remainder of the staff looked on. At the sight of Mary, Zachary half fell from the stool, and staggered on gradually collapsing legs to throw himself on his knees at her feet.

“Mary mistress, Mary!” he wailed.

Mary stooped and caught his hands as they grabbed at her skirts, and tried to raise him.

“My poor Zachary! What have they done to you? Help me, Perian, Stephen, Giles!”

The men came about her and between them lifted Zachary back to the stool. Mary snatched a hassock from the hearth-side and knelt at his feet.

“Why! He’s completely spent. Water!”

“He’s been given water, mistress.”

“Wine, then! Perian, bring a cup of spiced wine!” Mary ordered, and she turned to Zachary. “You are come from Bethany: what’s your news, Zachary?”

“It is Lazarus—he is sick. And Martha bade me search for Jesus of Nazareth.”

“When did you leave Bethany? And how came you?”

“I left it on the day following the Feast of Trumpets. Walking, I came by Jericho and the west of Jordan.”

“Is it for Lazarus that Martha bids you seek for Jesus?”

“Yes. None of the skilled, either man or woman, can do aught for him. It is no violent demon that ails him. At times he passes into sleep that is like death itself. Awake, he seems to dream, and is not to be moved nor made to eat.”

Zachary stirred anxiously, as if he wanted to be up and doing.

“Rest you awhile, Zachary,” Mary soothed him. “Leave all now to me.”

“You will find Jesus? And know where he is?”

“We’ll talk of that by and by. I say, leave all to me.”

Any further questions, she decided, would have to wait for the morning. Zachary had come the hundred Roman miles from Bethany in three days. It spoke of his love and anxiety for Lazarus that he had faced the journey alone, but also of the stubbornness of his Judaism that instead of taking the easier way through the heart of detested Samaria he had chosen the longer, more toilsome and lonelier route by Jericho and the Jordan. But why had he not been given horse or ass to ride on—a companion? Why had Martha let a man of his build and sedentary habit face the journey at all?

She put the questions aside, and gave her orders:

“Stephen, prepare a bath for Zachary; and you, Perian, find clean linen for him. Anna, fan the embers and heat some broth; prepare what you can of a light meal. Zachary is footsore and exhausted and needs sleep. Something, then, that will not keep him wakeful, Anna. The rest of you, get to bed——”

She broke off as Perian came with a cup of spiced wine.

“Good, Perian! Oh, and find clean linen for Zachary.”

She took the wine-cup and put it into Zachary's hands.

"Drink a little, Zachary."

The little man looked about him pitifully, helplessly, and for a moment Mary was puzzled. Then she guessed what was the matter. She plucked the kerchief from her hair and spread it over his uncovered head, and took the cup out of his hands. Zachary struggled to his feet and blessed the wine, then sat down with an apologetic little smile that thanked her for her understanding. She gave him the cup and he fell to sipping it.

Mary got to her feet.

"Now, my good people," she said, "finish your duties and get to bed. We must all be up betimes to-morrow and be ready to go. Our parting comes earlier than I expected. I shall be closing the house, and leaving only the watchmen in charge. At the earliest hour possible, with those who are going with me, I shall be leaving for Bethany."

V

There was, however, no starting out for Bethany in the early morning of the following day.

It was not merely that Zachary was too full of aches and pains to be moved; he was querulous about the command he was under to seek out Jesus of Nazareth. In this second regard Mary was torn between desire to bring her beloved brother into the healing hands of Jesus and her fears for the latter did he venture so near to Jerusalem as Bethany. She resolved, finally, to leave decision to Jesus himself. She went to see Perian, who was leaving her service, and asked him to undertake the task of bearing the news of Lazarus's illness to Jesus.

"Will you do this for me, Perian? I warn you it may mean more than a day's search, and I am loth to keep you from going about your own affairs any longer. But there is none of my people, faithful as I believe they would be, whom I could trust to be so discreet."

"*Domina*, you know I never wished to leave your service."

"But, my good Perian, I have told you that my home in Bethany is simple, with no place for a house-steward."

“Yes, my lady,” the Thracian said steadily. “But when you made me a free man you bound me to you with something stronger than collar or fetters.”

“My good friend!”

“I am your man for all time, *domina*. And it is a little thing you ask of me. Just tell me what I am to do.”

“Very well. Go into the town and to the haven. I will give you money. Hire a boat with enough men for the oars to take you quickly across to Gergesa if the wind is not favourable. Inquire about Gergesa for Jesus. Follow him only if he has gone north, but no farther than Bethsaida Julias or Capernaum. If he happens to have gone south, do not attempt to follow him—unless, of course, you have sure word that he can be easily reached.”

“And the message, *domina*?”

“Simply that Lazarus ben Abiud lies very sick in his home at Bethany, and that his sister, Martha, is in great anxiety.”

“At your will, *domina*.”

“Come with me, Perian.”

She went with him through the house to where she kept her coffer, and gave him the money for his venture into Gaulanitis. But to this now she added an intended present of a year’s wages. In order to cut short his thanks and assurances of his devotion, she asked him what his plans for the future were, and was pleased to learn he had found employment with Matthias. Perian apparently had been often in converse with the merchant during the past months, and had convinced him of his knowledge of fabrics, picked up from Mary herself. She commended Perian’s plan, but to herself determined that if Matthias, with whom she would have to be often in touch, reported favourably she would provide funds for procuring a real interest in the business for her ex-major-domo. It was, she thought, the least she could do for such a patient and faithful servant, too often tried by an impatient and unpredictable mistress.

Before letting Perian go, she sought his advice about how to deal with the other servants. She already had prepared for freeing her slaves, of whom she owned six. These were Stephen, her four litter-bearers, and Chloe. Chloe she meant to keep by her. She had already begun to repair her neglect in educating the girl, and she meant to provide her with a dowry. But she was not sure that, having used the five men as escort for herself, Chloe, and Anna to Bethany, it would be wise simply to turn them loose to follow their

own devices in Judea. All the chances were that they would make for Jerusalem and, in their excitement over being freed, lose themselves and such money as she meant to give them in the city stew. Here Perian could help her. He suggested that Mary gave either himself or Matthias the greater portion of the intended largess, and that, having been escorted by the five men to Bethany, she should then present them with the papers of manumission and send them back to Matthias with only enough for the journey. Perian, meantime, would try to find places for them as freedmen.

The suggestion commended itself to Mary. It took a weight off her mind. In her resolve to live humbly, and in the new perception that only in the love of her kind could she approach the love of God, the idea of possessing property in human flesh had become unfeignedly abhorrent to her. But with this there went a new perception of her responsibilities.

It was bad enough having to turn some half-a-dozen hired servants back into a labour-market rife with unemployment and its concomitant distress, though she did so with generous provision for their upkeep for months to come. It was still worse, she saw, to throw into the same market a number of newly freed slaves, unused to providing for themselves and unskilled in any of the crafts, or even in the humblest sort of work, in which free labour had market at all.

Her talk with Perian, however, went a long way to allaying Mary's fears. It did more. Perian's readiness to be of service to her indicated a loyalty which, she felt, she had done little to win. Even the freeing of Perian, soon after his purchase by herself and Cleon between three and four years earlier, had been largely on Cleon's suggestion. It had been Cleon, indeed, who had first noticed Perian's capabilities and felt that the Thracian was too good a man to be in bondage. And only the mere act of manumission had been Mary's. At any time since the death of Cleon it would have been reasonable enough on Perian's part to have left her service. Her capricious treatment of him, to say nothing of his right to seek advancement, would have justified it. But Perian's manifest devotion to her was just another lesson in how far she had gone astray in her cynical appraisal of the human heart's capacity for kindness. And it made her feel very humble indeed.

It chanced that as Perian was about to set out on his errand, Matthias came to the villa to finish his task of clearing the storeroom. The merchant fell in with the idea for dealing with the five men-slaves, but suggested that he should hold not only the moneys they were to have, but the papers which declared them free. This, Matthias thought, would be an additional inducement for them to make a quick return from Bethany and into the care

of Perian and himself. If Mary would accompany him back to Magdala, they could register the acts of manumission at the synagogue and with the Herodian authority in the city. This suggestion sat handily with a need of Mary's. She wanted to regularize her transactions with Simon also by registration at the synagogue, and the time occupied in doing this would give Zachary a better chance of recovery for the journey south.

Mary accompanied Perian to the gate and parted with him there, assuring him that the severance was not final, but that they would be meeting again. Then she returned to the house and put Stephen, the youngest but most intelligent of her men-servants, in charge of the final preparations for the departure.

The morning was still scarcely warmed when she set out with Matthias for the farther end of the joint townships called Magdala. She took the opportunity of sounding him on the idea of ultimately having Perian as partner, and discovered that the merchant had already thought of it himself. Perian was ready to invest his savings. He had a good knowledge of Mary's erstwhile customers. Matthias wanted some one he could trust to keep reckonings and to look after the store while he went about the markets. And since Mary left decision to him, once he had tried Perian thoroughly (Mary thus laying any suspicion that she was placing a spy in his establishment), Matthias quickly passed into enthusiasm for the idea.

The merchant had found a house and storeroom combined, and Mary had provided the money for the purchase. But the papers in connexion with the transaction still had to be signed, witnessed, and registered. As soon, then, as Matthias had locked up the last shipment of goods from the villa he collected a couple of solid cronies for witness, and set out with them and Mary for the chief synagogue. At the same time a messenger was sent to summon Simon and his witnesses to the synagogue also.

Mary told Matthias frankly of her sale of the villa overnight to Simon, and of the depositing of the purchase price with his wealthier rival. If he was perhaps a trifle chagrined at being passed over, he was sensible enough to see that his standing was not strong enough for the responsibility of a loan of twenty Attic talents. And his faint dejection vanished when, on the arrival of Simon and company, he was introduced to the great ones by Mary as her agent, and was called upon to act as her witness to the deed. He heard with amazement of Mary's benefaction to the poor of the combined towns, and—the several pieces of business being completed—he became very fussily important about finding a suitable donkey to carry Mary back to the villa. The news of Mary's gift had in some measure got round Magdala. A small

crowd had gathered about the synagogue when Mary left it, and the fact that Simon went some part of the way with her emphasized the general impression that she was to be held in high esteem.

So it was that in the streets where once she had been the recipient of side-mouthed curses and surreptitiously thrown filth, Mary rode through a rain of blessings, with an escort of cheering children. The demonstration was not at all to her liking. She sat on the pillion-pad with her head bowed and her veil drawn over her face. Matthias, on the other hand, gloried in it. He strutted, beaming, on the donkey's off-side, with a proprietary hand on its stubbly mane. It was, in his idea, a great occasion. But he would have liked Mary to be a little more responsive to it. For a woman who could give away two talents (that was, a hundred and twenty minæ—thirty-six hundred shekels—twelve thousand, four hundred denarii) for the benefit of the poor, she was even somewhat shabbily dressed. The material of her black garments was, of course, of the very finest quality—superfine weave, in fact. But he would have preferred to see her in that raiment of sea-blues and greens which she had worn that day—that lucky day!—when he had gone to beg her interest for him in the court of Herod. Rich, beautiful . . .

“Matthias!” Mary's voice broke into his thoughts. He awoke to the fact that they were outside the city-gate. “If you have your purse with you give these children a few pennies and bid them go back home.”

“I will, Mary, yes.”

He took his domestic purse—as distinct from his trading one—out of his girdle and extracted a few coppers. While Mary rode on, he tossed them one by one to the children. Of course they shrieked and fought over those that fell in the dust, and by the time he had rendered justice and persuaded them to turn back, Mary was well distant. He began to trot after her. He was out of breath when he overtook her. Mary had the donkey-driver bring her mount to a halt.

“Come no farther, Matthias,” she bade him. “You have affairs to attend to, and I am within sight of the house. Thank you for your help. The Lord prosper you in all your ways and give you blessing!”

He would have protested, but thought better of it.

“And may His peace rest upon you, Mary!”

Mary was already moving away when he came erect out of his profound salaam. Matthias stood in the middle of the road, looking after her. He knew, somehow, that she would not look back, but he still gazed. Moisture welled

up in his plum, blue-brown eyes. He flicked it away with a forefinger, sniffed a little, and turned back into the city.

CHAPTER XIII

Bethany

MARY, with her party, arrived in Bethany two days before Kippurim to find Lazarus recovered. Still dreamy, he was scarcely aware that he had been ill, and he did not like to be questioned about his strange sickness. As far as Mary could see, the only effect it had had upon him—apart from his dreaminess, which seemed to be passing off—was to make him lean. His face had lost its youthful roundness, and the emphasis on the bone structure stressed his likeness to Mary.

In the morning after her arrival Mary told her men-servants what she had arranged for them. She fed them, and set them on their way back to Galilee. This, at least, as regarded her four litter-bearers. Stephen she commissioned to return more speedily by way of Jericho, the west of Jordan, and that part of the Decapolis by which, she thought, Jesus would be making his way to Bethany. Stephen was to look for Jesus and tell Him of Lazarus's recovery. Lazarus himself wanted to bear the news. He considered that Martha had been unduly fussy in sending for Jesus. But his own feeling of lassitude, together with the persuasions of Mary and Martha combined, brought him round to leaving the task to Stephen. There was, besides, the October ploughing, and presently the sowing of barley, to superintend. The time of the year was one when Lazarus could not reasonably be absent from the farm.

The reconciliation of Mary and Martha came more nearly to being perfected than Mary had hoped. If Martha wept and made perhaps a parade of forgiveness, that was just her way. Behind the dramatization there was, Mary could feel, a real warmth and sincerity, something much less shallow than, in an older day, she would have been ready to suspect. Martha was genuinely conscience-stricken, and her plea to be forgiven in her turn was not simply formal.

To some extent Martha was a changed woman. She could not put away her habit of worrying over a self-imposed burden of responsibilities, any more than she could bring herself to relegating any. But, to Mary's profound relief, Martha had become more concerned to keep the spirit of the Law than to fuss about its fulfilment to the letter. That this was due to the influence

and teaching of the one-time yoke-maker, Yeshu, was very apparent. Martha was for ever quoting him. She took pride in the fact that on his several visits to Jerusalem since his acceptance of baptism by John and the beginning of his ministry he had made 'her house' his headquarters. And where she and Zachary once had taken delight in following the most intricate rabbinical elaborations of the Law they now vied in exactly remembering what, and in which minutely pursued circumstances, Jesus said this or that. Zachary, indeed, tried to combine this newer exercise with the older one—in which, of course, he had advantages. But he could not hold Martha's interest for long on the vantage-ground. He had to be satisfied with his exacter knowledge of the sources when Jesus quoted from the prophets or the psalmists. But both Martha and Zachary aired superiority over Mary in that their meetings with Jesus had been more frequent, and went farther back in his public ministry, than hers.

Mary accepted their on-goings with amused resignation. She had occupation for the time being in tidying up the loose ends of her business affairs. This involved a succession of visits to Jerusalem to see the merchant-banker into whose hands she was directing various moneys from her distant ventures, and who was himself in communication with her former connexions. She was doing what she could, also, to help Anna in building up in Judea a dressmaking business to replace that lost in Galilee. To this end she had put Anna into contact with her old-time woman acquaintances of the Sadducean families in Bethany and Jerusalem. Then there was the educating of Chloe, not merely a matter of pothooks, but from the very simplest elements bringing the girl into an interest in life's meaning in relation to the Creator. It was not very easy, this. Chloe was clever enough, but Mary had a feeling that girl was more concerned to please her than interested in ideas.

During the last weeks in Galilee Mary had begun to keep a written record of such sayings of Jesus as she had heard for herself, and of the saliences in such of them as came to her secondhand. She took the record up again in Bethany, and carefully noted all that was gleanable from the kitchen chatter between Martha and Zachary. It was not difficult to do this secretly, because the pair went over the same ground often enough, and Mary had merely to take away as much as she could remember for the time being, write it down, and return to the kitchen with a casual question that would start the ball rolling again. In this the rather laughable bickering of Martha and Zachary over exacting wording was a help. They both had good memories. From between them it was easy enough to take the probable of

some noteworthy saying in the clear and distinguished, and very individual, idiom of Jesus himself.

With regard to the actual wording of Jesus's teaching, Lazarus was no great help, though beyond doubt he was clearer on the meaning of it than either Martha or Zachary. But he had been following Jesus intermittently from about the time of the imprisonment of John the Baptist, and had therefore a good knowledge of events in the ministry. As far as this went, Mary made it also the subject of careful record. Though in the stress of anxious times that were to follow years later much of this record was lost, it is probable that some part of it was put into the hands of the 'Beloved Physician' who followed Paul. Almost certainly, at any rate, a much older Mary was to talk to this Luke and to tell him her own story.

Although, however, these early days of her reception back into the house of her father quickly slipped into placidity, Mary still was anxious about the probable return of Jesus to Judea and Jerusalem. She could not forget the warning given her by Simon the Pharisee. A message reached her from Matthias reporting a successful sale of some of the stuffs she had put into his hands, and to it was added a note from Perian that he had met Jesus between Gergesa and Bethsaida Julias and had given him the word of Lazarus's illness. But for a long time there was no news of whether or not Stephen had successfully delivered the counter-word. The month of Tishri, with its Feast of Tabernacles and its Feast of Palms, was about to slide into the sowing month of Marchesvan. And it could only be that Stephen had fulfilled his errand.

Then, with the suddenness of a thunderbolt out of an unmenacing sky, there came word that Jesus actually had been in Jerusalem, disputing with the elders, and that they had sought to stone him. He had later restored the sight of a blind man, somehow giving further offence to the rulers. The bringer of this news was Iscariot, very important and allusive about it all. But his story of the activity in Jerusalem, much as Mary would have liked to hear it in detail, took a minor place against the message which gave actual purpose to his visit: Jesus was on his way to Bethany and begged the hospitality of Martha for himself and some of his disciples.

II

The lost sheep is an exception who remains a wonder in the home of his returning for even as long as nine days. The jokes, the wit, the stories that in

the first flush of family excitement were received with such ready laughter and so much bated breath too soon begin to fall flat. Affection, perhaps, does not actually fade, but it is apt to be clouded by speculation on what the prodigal intends to make of himself—now. He says, does he, that he is ‘looking about’? Well, for what? It is hoped that he will find something to occupy him fairly soon. At the moment his idleness is a wee thing irritating. One is apt to find him, so to speak, just a trifle too much under foot.

It was all very well, then, for Mary (she having received her inheritance) to contribute to the household budget for the upkeep of herself, her girl Chloe, and the woman Anna. It was all very well for her to be in and out of Jerusalem on business Martha, exasperatingly, knew nothing about. Not that Martha was one for poking her nose into things that didn’t concern her. Least said, quoth Martha—as loquacious a woman as ever breathed—soonest mended. Since Mary could afford to set free five grown men who were her property—not that Martha held with slavery—it was as likely she was as rich as Lazarus had reported. And maybe, being rich, it was necessary for her to be concerned with all those mysterious papers and parchments in Greek and what not. Martha thought it only right that Mary should spend several hours a day in teaching Chloe godliness—a pretty little thing, Chloe; bright, too—quite a pleasure to have her about the kitchen watching how things were done. Maybe it was right, also, for Mary to bring yards and yards of fine cloth into the house for Anna to work on, and for Mary and Chloe to help with the sewing. But there was no need for the three of them to make a body feel out of it, and if sewing was to be the thing wasn’t there plenty of napery in the house that needed mending? There was, anyhow, still a bit too much just sitting idle, gossiping, twiddling thumbs.

You would think, from the little interest anybody took (said Martha), that the house and the farm managed themselves. But what with about a dozen people, men and women, to be watched every minute—they’d be doing everything the wrong way, else, if not just plain dawdling and idling—and everybody running to *her* to ask what was to be done about this and what was to be done about that, as if they were afraid to think for themselves, house and farm would soon be in a fine pickle but for her. Lazarus was a good boy, but he was much too easy-going. He left the servants too much to themselves—said he was no Egyptian overseer to stand over them with a whip—and laughed when anything went wrong. It came to this, that a body needed to be able to be in three or four places at once, have a dozen pairs of hands, to get through all there was to do. It was too much for one woman. Somebody (said Martha, who could hardly give an order by proxy without

following her messenger up to see it properly delivered) might think some time of doing something to help. Somebody ought to take an interest.

The arrival of Judas with the news that Jesus was on his way to the house sent Martha into a flurry. There was plenty of food in the house, and besides the four or five women-servants actually under the roof there were the wives of the farm-hands only too ready to help in the house when called upon. If there had not been, as there was, the greater part of a mutton-carcase available, Jesus and those with him would have been quite content to sup on as simple a dish as a lentil-porridge, serving themselves. But Martha, lamenting there was no time to get a sheep for roasting whole and that it wasn't the time of the year for the best young vegetables, gave herself the labour of preparing a small roast and a large stew, sundry messes of preserved or parched vegetables and legumes, dishes of fruit fresh and kept in honey, besides a service of wine—in sum, a feast. This presupposed, naturally, greater formality of arrangement as well as more elaboration in serving and in carrying water for the washing of hands.

Mary would have taken, and indeed tried to take, on herself such of the work of preparation as would leave Martha with only supplies to look after. But it was useless. Martha could not stop in larder and kitchen. She could not believe anything was being done unless every one was scurrying round as in an ant-heap. Without meaning to in the least, she kept popping out of the kitchen to give directions quite at variance with those given by Mary. And Mary retired.

Jesus arrived some time before sunset, and therefore an hour or more before Martha was prepared to serve supper. With him came the two sons of Jonas, Andrew and Simon, the latter already called Cephas. Also the two other fishermen, James and John, sons of Zebedee, but from their readiness to bellow with indignation humorously nicknamed by Jesus 'sons of thunder.' Matthew, Philip, Bartholomew and the other James, the son of Alpheus—these with Judas, already arrived, made up a party of ten. The absentees of the twelve—Thomas, Thaddeus, and Simon the zealot of Gaulanitis—were away on varying duties. The party came from the south, coming by sheep-tracks off the Bethlehem-Jerusalem road, and bypassing Bethany to the east. Lazarus had caused an arched opening to be slapped out of the garden wall overlooking the Jericho road. Narrow steps led up to it from the roadway, and it was filled by a stout wooden gate that sat into a deep rebate in the stonework, also slotted for heavy bars, and opened on to a stone plat on the garden side. From this plat another flight of steps went up to the highest garden-level. The new entrance had been made largely for the

convenience of Jesus. It obviated the need to approach the house of Abiud through the streets of Bethany, and gave him the chance on occasion to reach a haven of peace and comfort without having to deal with the crowds who so readily gathered when his presence anywhere was reported.

It was really the first time that Mary had seen Jesus since he had spoken to her in the garden eight years before. She had too quickly been blinded by her tears to have seen him clearly in the house of Simon, and on the occasions when she had gone to listen to him in the open she had been too far from him. Mary waited until the courtesies of foot-washing and so on had been gone through and the company had settled in the great room next the kitchen before she joined it. Jesus was seated and had begun with the others on a passing drink-and-bite of watered wine and barley-cake when Mary entered, but with his kind instinct for doing the right thing regardless of convention he rose, as probably no other Jew of his time would have done for a woman, and went to meet Mary. He took her by the hand and introduced her as the sister of Martha and Lazarus to his disciples in turn, with a jocular description for her of each of them. Then he led her back to where he had been sitting, offered her a low footstool by his knee, and when she was seated took up his discourse where he had left it.

Mary had every chance to look at him as he talked. She had felt since seeing him in Galilee that the usefully muscled, if not exactly robust, yoke-maker of eight years earlier had become fine-drawn almost to the point of being wasted. She thought that since seeing him in Galilee he had become more finely-drawn than ever. That this apparent wasting was due to physical privation was unlikely. Jesus was not ascetic in the matter of food; it was, indeed, one of the charges against him by antagonistic Pharisees that he fasted hardly at all. Nor was his almost gauntness due to the enormous amount of walking he did in the course of his ministry. It seemed to Mary that the wasting was due to an inward fire, an intensity of conviction and of purpose, too strong for the flesh to bear. With this consuming purpose, she thought, there went some immense burden of secret grief, which yet, oddly, perfected rather than flawed, or augmented rather than reduced, a serenity at once profound, warm, and vital. His eyes lay deeper in his head than formerly, but, if in repose they seemed to look from some great sublimation of sorrow to prospects beyond any earthly horizon, they attended the moment as it needed—interestedly, warmly, mirthfully, angrily—but always serenely and with the normally irised clearness of good health. The skin lay close over the bone of cheek and brow and jaw, as it did over that of the work-broadened hands, but it was neither hectic nor tenuous. It was thick and smooth and warm. Warmth, Mary thought, was an outstanding

characteristic of this Jesus. It was so outstanding, so individual, as to be a mark of his greatness. That he could be forbidding, she had heard. She felt that he could be formidable. But, where he welcomed, there emanated from some deep core of loving-kindness in him such warmth as to make his greeting an embrace.

As she sat silent, listening to his discourse, Mary became more and more conscious that the loneliness from which no human can escape was, by every circumstance of his being, in Jesus so accentuated as to be unique. Jesus lived his teaching. He did not postulate an ideal towards which he invited others to join him in striving. He was, in himself, that ideal. He said simply that, in order to fit themselves for the Kingdom of Heaven which was imminent, men had to come into complete communion with God. But prophets had said the like before. Where Jesus differed from them, Mary saw, was that he knew God, not as a servant knows his master, but as a loving son knows a loving Father. It was this filial intimacy with God that made him unique. It was this that made him, humanly speaking, lonely. His invitation to be brothers with him in loving and being loved by the Father had fallen generally on deaf ears, or at best on ears whose membranes vibrated in incomprehension; the terminal wisdom which he lived in word and deed was too profoundly simple for the men who heard and saw. To grasp it fully required an act of faith—a rebirth to Sonship of the Father. At his teaching's end, through rejection, incomprehension, apathy, misunderstanding, he remained alone and unique among his kind: the Son of God. Carrying the sorrows of defeat, deep grief for the folly and stony-heartedness that spurned salvation, it was a lonely situation.

III

It was also, Mary perceived, a very dangerous one.

Jesus moved and had his being in his own certainty of what was good. He held that to walk with God was to be delivered from evil. If, walking with God, a man contravened the Law, it was not he who was wrong, but the Law. This was a conception which was bound to antagonize the leaders of the people, the Pharisees, the scribes, the rabbis, and—since the conception implied the futility of ritual sacrifice—the Sadducees. Because these leaders lived by and for the Law. It was the criterion of culture and of piety. It was the one gauge of eminence, worth, kudos. It was also, through Israel's obedience to its dictates regarding tribute, first-fruits, tithes, sacrifices, the source of Sadducean and priestly wealth.

It could not be easy, Mary saw, for Pharisee and Sadducee to accept doctrines so destructive of their worldly fame and interest as were those of Jesus. It must appear to them that if the untutored like this Galilean yoke-maker could claim direct revelation of the Divine Will, and the right to act and speak accordingly, the Law and its traditions were made naught. The devoted labour of the fathers in Israel through generations became valueless. The hind at the plough, the burden-bearer, the hewer of wood and drawer of water, the bonded debtor, the boughten slave—any of these, the lowest of the low, the publican, the harlot—professing to love the Lord, stood equal with the most pious and the most learned in the land. Eminence vanished. Privilege ended. Anarchy prevailed. Chaos was come again.

Here was no mere cleavage of ideas, a chasm to be bridged. Between the opposing conceptions there could be no junction, no fusion. The semblance between them, in that both postulated a way of life with God for guide, was illusory. If Jesus's way was truth, that of the Pharisees was false. If truth lay with the Pharisees, Jesus was either deluded or an impostor. Acceptance of the one conception was quite incompatible with acceptance of the other.

The question, then, that pressed itself on Mary's consciousness was this: How was Jesus likely to fare with the organized religious bodies against whose convictions and interests his doctrines warred?

The answer, she apprehended, could only be: ill.

From what she gathered, sitting at his feet, Mary understood that Jesus was asked either to justify his claim to be directly guided by God, his Father, or else to retract it. But, Mary saw, to unbelief there was no justification that Jesus needed or might adduce. He was the living manifestation of the truth he spoke, and therefore its only justification—not to be comprehended except through faith. He could not argue with the doctors and scribes, for to him their premises were false. He could refute them only with self-evident truths. They asked for a sign. He could give them none that they wanted, for in himself he was sign enough. To demonstrate the thaumaturgy their unfaith demanded would be to 'tempt the Lord God.' Nor could Jesus retract without the cardinal and ultimate sin of denying the Spirit. Neither could he be silent.

It was a situation that organized religion, the men of computed prayer and spiritual stasis, could not dare tolerate. Since sneering and ridicule did not avail to scotch the subversion, nor reason serve to expose its alleged speciousness, the great ones pacing aloof on the tessellated pavement would act as their kind always did in such an emergency: Gravely, solemnly, and

without the slightest consciousness of self-deception, they would find a formula for ‘doing justice’ on the would-be innovator. Having the power, how could they forbear to use it?

This estimate of the danger for Jesus in the environs of Jerusalem threaded Mary’s appreciation of his discourse to herself and the disciples. She could not, though she tried, free her mind of apprehension. A word here and there in the questions put to Jesus by his followers would revive it. It seemed to Mary that failure on the part of these men, devoted as they manifestly were, to grasp the spiritual essence of their Master’s teaching, their too materialistic concept of the Reign which he proclaimed, was forcing Jesus into paths he had not meant to tread. It could be, of course, that the disciples were lagging behind a development in the teaching which had been inherent in it from the first. It disturbed Mary to hear the disciples call Jesus ‘Lord.’ Issues seemed to be arising which her mind was reluctant to identify or explore, but which she felt impended ominously.

Mary, however, had to put her doubts and fears away in suspension. The sun went down, and the evening prayer was said. Lazarus busied himself with lighting the lamps, and Martha and her woman began to move in and out of the room with the preparations for supper proper. In this there was nothing that Mary really could do. But Martha clearly thought Mary’s idleness called for rebuke. She appealed to Jesus:

“Rabboni Yeshu, do you think it fair for Mary to sit there, leaving all the work of getting supper to me? Come, now, you tell her to get up and lend me a hand!”

Jesus smiled: his memory may have flashed back eight years.

“Ah, Martha, Martha!” he said. “You gather so many little things to bother about that you can think of nothing else. But Mary”—he let his hand rest on her shoulder for a moment—“Mary seeks a better nurture, and she is not to be taken away from it.”

IV

A few thunder-showers with the new moon of Marchesvan laid the dust enough to let some ploughing be done, but the actual rains of the period held off until half-way through the month. Gradually the Judean skies greyed over, torn clouds from their ragged edges dragging rods of water over the hills and fields. The unpaved roads and paths became quagmires or torrents.

Not immediately did the overflow of Bethany's mid-town well, passing through Abiud's garden, show the effects. Then, after days when the only sound from the garden was the drip of rain and mist moisture from the trees, the little stream began to chatter. The gush from level to level thickened and threw longer, more urgent arcs noisily. The water rushing through the gridded arch low in the garden wall spilled out of the cross-road channel, and found a second way down the rocky road to Jericho.

The next new moon, that of Kislev, brought a lighter but more incessant downpour. Careless stewardship of fields belonging to an absentee landlord and standing higher than those of Lazarus, allowing a heavy stream to form and flow into the latter, threatened to wash away not only the new-sown seed but the precious soil conserved in the terracing. There was a call to all hands about the farm. Mary, putting herself at Lazarus's orders with other women from the house, found pleasure in seeing that her brother unassertively took the lead in the operations, not by virtue of his being son of the house, but because he saw better than anyone there what to do. Kemuel, the steward, was more concerned to divert the stream from the terraces in his charge than to think of where he was diverting it, and, but for Lazarus, would simply have passed the danger to fields belonging to other people at lower levels. Lazarus, on the other hand, calmly surveyed the whole position and had the work begun on a plan that passed the flood away harmlessly for his neighbours as well as himself.

While the rains lasted, however, the unwatched land higher up offered a constant threat to the well-kept terraces below, and the giving of any embanking wall in the terracing could be disastrous in a very few hours. So that the inclement weather, far from keeping Lazarus and the farm-hands in the shelter of house or steadings, forced them to be out on fairly continual patrol.

Mary became increasingly concerned about Lazarus's health. It seemed to her that he grew thinner every day, and she was afraid that, between watching the rain-soaked fields and visiting the folds to consult with Abijah about the flocks, he was seriously overtaxing his strength. But beyond seconding Martha's efforts to combat the effects of fatigue with hot food and drinks, and to get him into dry garments out of wet ones as quickly as possible, there was not much she could do. Lazarus, for all the sweetness of his nature, could be stubborn, and he did not like to be reminded of his illness or to be treated as an invalid. Mary would have invoked the help of Jesus in making Lazarus take greater care of himself, but Jesus had gone back to Jerusalem and was very occupied in teaching in the Temple porches.

There was word of his curing a man of dumbness, and later of a woman whose body had been fixed in a bowed position for eighteen years being made straight. Both of these cures had led to great disputation with the religious rulers, particularly that of the bent woman, for this had been done on the Sabbath day and in a synagogue. And Jesus had denounced Pharisees and jurists in round terms for their hypocrisy.

The weather cleared towards the middle of the month and held until *Chanuccah*, the Feast of Dedication. Immediately after the Feast Judas came to Bethany and reported that Jesus was on the way to the Jordan crossing beyond Jericho with the intention of remaining awhile in Perea. For the third time he had so aroused the enmity of the rulers in Jerusalem as to be at need to evade them.

The visit of Judas had a disturbing effect on Mary. The man from Kerioth had probably the clearest mind among the 'Twelve,' and was obviously the best educated. Since Lazarus had brought him, as purse-bearer for Jesus's followers, to Mary in Galilee, Judas had been hinting with increasing openness about great things to be expected in some wonderful fruition of Jesus's mission. There had been, Mary remembered, some revelation at the time when threat from Pharisees and Herodians combined had made Jesus retire from Galilee into the Tetrarchy of Philip. It had been made, according to Judas, near Cæsarea Philippi, and it was on it that he built his hinted expectations of wonders to come. And, in spite of the manifest danger to Jesus in Jerusalem from the enmity of priests and scribes, Judas had ever been impatient for Jesus to return there.

It was a very moody Judas who came to Bethany that day after *Chanuccah*. He obviously resented the need to get out of Jerusalem, and thought that Jesus should have shamed and astonished his enemies with some demonstration of 'power.'

One thing added to another brought Mary to a conclusion that made her very uncomfortable in mind. Judas's hints of 'The Day,' 'The Appointed Hour,' and of 'All Power' being given into Jesus's hands, together with the fact that the disciples no longer addressed Jesus as 'Master,' but as 'Lord,' suggested some Messianic conception had arisen in regard to Jesus's mission.

This was a conception in connexion with Jesus from which Mary instinctively and intellectually recoiled. The idea that Jesus should be regarded as the Messiah made her cold with fear. It distilled all the doubts and forebodings which had haunted her regarding him since her rediscovery

of him in Galilee, and left a quintessence of terror. Witness that Jesus was God's servant, invested with power through the Spirit, was the soul's peace that his word and touch had given to Mary herself. It was not, therefore, from any conception of Jesus as Messiah that Mary's heart and mind recoiled, but from a conception of him as the Messiah of popular fancy. This Jesus could not possibly be. His whole ethic, his perception of the soul's need, was against it. And this was the point of terror. He could not be Messiah at all in Judea or Galilee unless he was the Messiah of general imagination and expectation. Failure in Jerusalem, in particular, to produce some convincingly spectacular 'sign' would mean death.

Yet, it seemed to Mary, it was towards some claim to the Messiahship that every circumstance was driving Jesus; from the uniqueness of his complete communion with the Father, the misunderstanding and rejection of his message with its consequent isolation of him as the Only Son, his destiny could only be Messianic. But with the antagonism to him of Sadducee, Pharisee, scribe, and rabbi, so fixed of idea as to be beyond enlightenment in mass, the consummation had the terrifying inevitability of Greek tragedy.

V

It was in the fear rooted in these considerations that, on the sudden collapse of Lazarus eight weeks later, Mary fought against sending for Jesus. The two months of Tebeth and Shebat had passed in rain and snow and bitter cold. There had been trouble with the lambing ewes in the hillside folds, and Lazarus was not to be kept from sharing the chilly vigils of Abijah and the other communal shepherds. And one morning he came back to the house shivering, lay down with a growing fever, and before sunset passed into a stupor.

Martha, unlike Mary, had seen the onset and course of Lazarus's previous illness, and the swiftness of the new attack frightened her. She would have sent for Jesus straightway, but Mary forbade it. It was well into the morning of next day, when Lazarus's breathing had become barely perceptible, and she heard one or other of the 'wise women' summoned by Martha mutter incantations and suggest remedies of quite irrational and even foul composition, that Mary sent Jonas off on horseback to the Jordan Valley to look for Jesus.

Lazarus did not recover consciousness. Gradually all warmth left his body until it lay clammy cold, the golden glow departed from his skin

leaving it a yellowed grey. Martha's 'wise women' declared that Lazarus was dead, and a priest brought in by Lazarus's friend from childhood, Isaac, the *Chazzan* of Bethany's synagogue, said the same. Mary insisted on keeping vigil on the body for another twenty-four hours. It was then Friday. Jonas returned in the morning and reported that he had found Jesus, who, though believing that Lazarus's illness was not mortal, promised to come to Bethany. Jonas got back in time only to help the other men of the farm to prepare the rock-tomb for Lazarus beside that in which his father, Abiud, slept. According to the Law, Lazarus was entombed before the eve of the Sabbath.

Two days after the Sabbath Mary was sitting with Chloe in her own room. The house was full of people doing neighbourly office in condoling with the bereaved sisters, and Mary had slipped away from their repetitive and too mechanic lamentations. They were kindly folks who had liked her sweet-natured brother a great deal. And that they sincerely realized the deprivation which Martha and she were suffering Mary did not doubt. But there was a competition among them to say the seemly thing and to exhibit the right sensibilities which seemed to mock Mary's own deep grief. She believed that Chloe, who, after an immediate paroxysm of weeping, crept about the house silently with bowed head and a bitten lower lip, came nearest to herself and Martha in realization of what was lost with Lazarus. The happy friendship between her little companion and her brother, Mary had lately come to see, had promised a marriage of pleasant omen.

Martha, not less stricken than Mary, would have thought something was amiss if her kitchen and the rooms of reception had not been crowded for days after the funeral with mourning neighbours. It would have looked to her like a want of proper feeling and respect for poor Lazarus if she had not fed as many visitors as possible, and had avoided the comforting speeches of any single one of them. Yet, in her grief, she was not so much the creature of convention and use as to be shocked by Mary's frequent escapes from the persistent company. The death of Lazarus, indeed, brought Mary and Martha together in kindness in a way that at least one of them had scarcely thought possible.

It was with some surprise that Mary looked up from her sewing to find it was Martha who called her, low-voiced, to the window. Part of the surprise was the realization that Martha wore her outdoor hood and veil, and had come to the window from the roadway end of the garden.

“Yes, Martha?”

“No, no—come to the window, Mary!” Martha begged, straining to pitch her voice nowhere but into the room. Mary passed her sewing to Chloe and got up to cross to the window.

“Jesus has come, Mary,” whispered Martha. “I thought I saw him and some of the Twelve coming up the road from Jericho—from the granary, that was—so I told Anna to look after the people, put on my hood, and slipped down the road to make sure. And it was Jesus. He wants to see you, Mary.”

“Where is he?”

“Down the brook, at the wall beside the big sycamore.”

“I’ll go to him. It is wise, Martha, not to let it be known he is here; the news can so quickly get into Jerusalem.”

“I was thinking of that, Mary.”

“Are you coming with me to him?”

“I want to, yes.”

“Then stop where you are. I’ll try to join you without attracting attention,” said Mary, and turned into the room. “Come, Chloe!”

But getting out of the house and through the garden without attracting attention was not so easy. To get out of the house, Mary had to pass through the crowded sitting-room and kitchen, and there were people already in the garden looking to see what Martha was doing. By the time Mary and Martha had reached the gate into the Jericho road there was hardly a person left in the house. The word had passed that Mary and Martha were going to the sepulchre to mourn their dead brother, and custom demanded that friends should join them in it.

Jesus, apparently deciding that his visit could not be kept quiet, had come up the road to meet Mary, and was almost at the foot of the roadway steps when she ran down them. There was such compassion in his look that all her grief welled up again, and she threw herself, weeping, to her knees at his feet.

“*Kyrie*,” she sobbed, “had you been here my brother would not have died!”

She heard Jesus groan, and she looked up. He was staring ahead of him, his hands white-knuckled with tenseness, and his face suddenly beaded with moisture. And suddenly the tenseness went. He looked down at Mary.

“Where have you laid him?” he asked.

Mary looked round in the direction of the place of sepulchre, hesitated because kneeling she could not indicate the place, and felt his hand come under her arm to raise her. She stood up.

“Come and see,” she said.

The neighbours, men and women, spilled out of the garden, and the fussier of them hastened ahead to show the way, overtaking each other and falling back in the manner of crowds. The rock-tombs were to the east and downhill from the town, among the last of the terraced fields. They were reached by an ass-track turning off the road that ran up to Bethany’s Jericho Gate. Down this track the people poured, overflowing it. In the crowd’s middle Jesus walked with Mary, and Chloe came behind with Martha and Zachary, while the disciples who had come with Jesus up from the Jordan Valley followed in a cluster.

They came to the place of Lazarus’s entombment, a cliffy spur of rock facing south-east with acacias growing at its base. From the cliff’s base a level plat of ground ran out to an upholding wall which rose from a wider and bigger terraced field below. The crowd disposed itself about the perimeters of these two plats, chattering, and watched Jesus, Mary, and Martha come to a stop on the higher level opposite the stone-filled opening to Lazarus’s tomb. And suddenly the chattering stopped, for Jesus had dropped his head into his hands in grief.

It was the renewed murmuring of the crowd that made Mary, whose own grief had taken her once again to her knees, look up. Jesus wept. He wept, she believed, because sweet-natured Lazarus, loving him greatly, had believed in him completely, without doubt or question, but with that childlike faith which Jesus himself said was the only certain key to the Kingdom of Heaven.

As Mary looked up at him, Jesus dropped his hands from his face, and said in the round, great, clear voice he had so easily at command:

“Take away the stone!”

There was a hush, then a murmur of protest: Of what avail to open the tomb? What sense was there in moving the sealing-stone?

“*Adonai*,” said Martha meekly. “Our brother is four days dead. By now his poor body will be decaying——”

“Martha,” replied Jesus. “Did I not tell you that you only needed faith to see the glory of God?” And, raising his voice to its greatness again, he repeated peremptorily, “I say, remove the stone!”

Jonas, from the farm, and some other men went to the mouth of the rock-sepulchre. Some of the wooden levers they had used to place the stone slab over the cave-mouth still lay about. Using them, they fell to taking the slab away. The other people close to the tomb, doubtfully, apprehensively, began to back away from it. In the silence, broken only by the panting of the men moving the great slab, the creak of the wooden levers, and the grating of stone on stone, the gaze of the crowd turned to Jesus.

Looking up to the sky, he had fallen again into the tension he had shown on meeting Mary, the veins swelling on his temples, and sudden moisture beading his cheekbones and brows. And once more the tension broke.

“Father,” he said quietly, “I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me!”

He levelled his clear amber gaze at the tomb-mouth, and in the rich unforced tone that yet might have carried to Jerusalem he commanded:

“Lazarus, come forth!”

In a long silence there was a sound like the echoing of a sigh, and presently another like the brushing aside of leaves. Then, as all heads were craned towards the sepulchre-mouth, in the darkness beyond whiteness stirred. A long pennant of linen was cast up and floated to the ground.

It was Martha, the bothering and the easily perturbed, who was first to move out of frozen immobility. With a cry, she began to run towards the cave-mouth. Mary, essaying to rise, found herself without the strength. She could only bury her tear-streaked face thankfully in her hands.

CHAPTER XIV

Peril Impending

THAT just man, Simon the Pharisee of Magdala, came out of Jerusalem by way of Bethphage to Bethany, bringing the first return on Mary's loan. It was in gold to the value of nine hundred shekels silver, but he came alone and on foot with only his staff for protection.

"You put yourself to too much trouble," said Mary, as he dropped the long leather tube of coins from his girdle on the low table between them. "Surely I told you that the merchant Ben Yoezear could receive for me?"

"Yes, I know. But I wanted to speak with you."

"I wish you'd let me have water brought for your feet."

"I thank you, no. It is no walk from Jerusalem—about fifteen Greek furlongs?—and I shall be returning immediately."

"Then, pray be seated. Let me dilute some wine for you; the water from our well is always refreshingly cold, and the rabbis pronounce it clean."

Simon confessed to being thirsty. Mary poured wine for him, and set the water-jar handily. He blessed both, drank greedily, and took the seat Mary indicated for him. She waited for him to speak.

"It was your brother, Lazarus ben Abiud, was it not, whom the Nazarene is supposed to have raised from the dead?"

"Let us not talk of supposition, Simon," said Mary. "My brother lay shrouded in his tomb for four days, having lain cold and rigid for a day beforehand. Jesus of Nazareth came, had the tomb opened, and called on Lazarus to come forth. And Lazarus rose and came out of the tomb."

"Some trick!" said Simon. "A conspiracy to deceive!"

"Between whom? Jesus and my brother? My sister and I? My girl, Chloe? The woman who kept vigil with me and helped me prepare him for sepulchre? Isaac, the *Chazzan* of the synagogue? Semachiah, the priest who pronounced him dead? The three-score people more who saw the stone removed and my brother come from the grave in his cereclothes?"

Conspiracy means secrecy. A secret shared among so many would not long be kept.”

“Nay, it needs that only your brother and the Nazarene should share it.”

“You do not know my brother, but there is no man—save one—so free from guile in all Israel. The other is Jesus himself. In your heart you know he would not stoop to fraud. You have been listening,” said Mary, “to the creatures of the high priests.”

Simon remained silent.

“Think what you will of the wonder, Simon,” said Mary. “But do I need to share your disbelief to hear what you walked from Jerusalem to say?”

“My disbelief is shared by the Great Sanhedrin.”

“I do not doubt it. Bethany and this house have been pestered by its spies and bullies. None of us has escaped question.”

“Except the two principals—your brother and the Nazarene. They did not stay to be questioned.”

“They did not stay to be dragged and cudgelled into Jerusalem by the police of Caiaphas and Annas. And I know of no law that either bade them stay for questioning or gives any the right to question them,” said Mary. “I still wait to hear, Simon, what you came to say.”

“I came out of kindness to give you warning. But I am put off by pert speeches and frowardness.”

“I am grateful for the kindness. But if I am to be called pert and froward because I will not accept assumptions that pervert the truth—why, then, I will dispense with the warning.”

“The Nazarene has not taught you meekness, woman.”

Mary sighed.

“Say on, Simon. I cannot pretend to meekness, but I can keep silence.”

“The Holy One be praised!” said Simon un-Pharisaically. “I was bidden to testify to the Great Sanhedrin against the Nazarene.”

(Why always ‘against,’ Mary asked herself.)

“Having said what I knew about his disregard for the Law, his neglect of the Sabbath, his forgiving of sins, and his eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and—and the like—I told the worthy rulers and elders of how a

wanton had been turned from evil by the teaching of the Nazarene, and of how she had given a great sum of money for the use of the poor. But none, asked one of the priests—an Akiba, I think—for the upkeep of the Temple? To that I could only answer that I knew not. Whereupon there was outcry. It was said that the Nazarene's influence on this wanton, whose repentance neglected the sin-offering, was typical. There was much, as I understand, that had been examined upon before, but in the end it was agreed that the Nazarene must die lest the Law, and all authority established by it, be set at naught. But what concerns you most, Mary, is the saying that Lazarus also should die."

In some measure Mary had foreseen the threat, but to hear it put into words was a shock. She kept control of herself to ask calmly:

"On what grounds?"

"As an accomplice of the Nazarene in deception or sorcery."

"Say, rather, as an inconvenient living witness to the glory of God made manifest in Jesus," said Mary.

Simon mouthed inarticulate disbelief, contempt.

"I wonder at you, Simon bar Joatham, you who pride yourself on doing justly, giving countenance to such bowelless obliquity," said Mary. "Jesus and my brother are condemned to death without formal accusation, without being heard. That is the work, Simon, not of judges, but of mere hangmen. Countenancing it, you carry the same breastplate."

"Nay, nay, but I do not countenance it!" Simon said hastily. "I am not concerned for the Nazarene. To me he is a false prophet, a disturber of the peace, a subverter of our Holy Law——"

"None of which gives warrant, even were it true, for condemning him to death. He has neither pronounced the Name nor led the people to worship false gods."

Simon stared, open-mouthed. This was the unanswerable ruling on the Law as it related to the Nazarene which he had heard pronounced to the Sanhedrin, no later than the day before, by probably the greatest jurist in the country. It made the arguments of Caiaphas, the high priest, and of his supporters on the expediency of destroying Jesus sound almost viciously unscrupulous. It made Simon, because of the change seen in Mary, already doubtful regarding his almost instinctive hostility to the Nazarene, still more doubtful. He had detested Mary earlier and even more than he had detested the carpenter of Nazareth. But since he had witnessed her relinquishment of

luxury, her charity, and had been given the use of such a great amount of her money, his detestation of her had died, and his antagonism had become mechanical. In much the same way he had become increasingly uncertain regarding the validity of his hatred of the Nazarene. And where once he had felt justified in going to any length in order to silence him, with the heat of his detestation dying, it had wanted only the pronouncement of the just and most learned Gamaliel to convict Simon, in his own mind, of a rather ungodly eagerness to play—as this Mary-woman now called it—the hangman.

It staggered Simon profoundly to hear Mary produce, so easily, the rule of the Law by which only yesterday he had been surprised from the lips of Gamaliel. There was, he said in his beard, never any telling what the jade would be up to next! But it wouldn't do to let her see she had scored.

“It is not for a woman,” he said loftily, “to argue on such matters. The maturest flowering of Israel's experience and learning may well be left to decide—uh—between justice—uh—and expediency.”

He noted an impatient lifting of Mary's eyebrows, and blundered on quickly:

“I must confess, myself, to some uneasiness. Hence my coming here to warn you. I am not, as I say, concerned for the Nazarene. At least, for the sake of the Law, and because he is impertinent against Heaven, he must either be silent or go to prison—uh—with stripes. Your brother is in a different case. He may have been led astray by the Nazarene.”

II

Simon's warning was confirmed almost at once by common report of the determination of the Sanhedrin majority, Caiaphas-Annas-led, to ensure the death of Jesus, and by an actual proclamation bidding anyone who knew where the Nazarene was to report to the chief of the Temple police. That Lazarus stood in the same danger as Jesus was not so strongly confirmed. But, though Mary came to believe that Simon had magnified what had been merely a tempting but impracticable suggestion, she was glad Lazarus had been able to follow Jesus to a retreat on the Ephraim border of Samaria.

Two days after his emergence from the tomb sufficed to put Lazarus on his feet again. With the return of Lazarus to the house, Jesus took charge. He ordered that for the next twenty-four hours Lazarus was to be left alone,

except for the need to take food to him. This, he said, was to be Martha's business. Beginning with a little nourishing broth, she was gradually to give substance to the dishes cooked for her brother, and she herself was to do the waiting on him. For the rest, the house was to be cleared of all but its normal inhabitants. The doors were to be closed against all visitors until Lazarus felt fit to move.

Jesus himself left Bethany in the early morning after the raising of Lazarus, taking with him all of his accompanying disciples save Judas. He warned Martha and Mary that their house would be besieged, first by the merely curious, and later by inquisitors acting for the Sanhedrin. But they were neither to allow anyone to question Lazarus nor to force confidences from him themselves. And they were not to let sisterly fears for Lazarus's health delay his leaving with Judas once Lazarus himself felt ready to go.

Their brother, said Jesus, had been within the gates of death. Jesus could not tell, Lazarus could not tell, nor could anyone mortal tell how far the breath of life had gone when Lazarus was laid in his tomb. Here was a mystery known only to the Father in Heaven. In time to come, as then and there, the raising of Lazarus would be made a marvel or an occasion for sneering unbelief. The question would be asked: Was Lazarus dead or merely asleep? But dead or asleep, the triumph of faith remained manifest, the glory of the Father remained manifest—else Lazarus were never raised from the tomb at all. Unbelief would ask what recollection of beyond-the-grave Lazarus brought back, and because he had none would say he had not passed from life. Because he had none, unbelief would sneer of sorcery, illusion, trickery. But the secrets of beyond-the-grave were for the dead and not for the living. In the mercy of Heaven the man that lived was allowed to carry but one truth of the life beyond death, and this he learned only by faith. It was that God would not allow the souls of the faithful to perish.

Therefore, Jesus concluded, let Martha and Mary beware of helping the priests and the rulers in any way to use Lazarus for the bolstering of their scepticism. There was nothing Lazarus could tell that couldn't be better told by Martha and Mary themselves or by Zachary; but the unbelievers would want to pester him. And the thing that Lazarus needed most was peace. To be constantly reminded that for five days, four of them actually entombed, he had lain cold and stark could only do him harm. The sooner he was away from Bethany the better for him.

Jesus had barely left the house when his prediction of besiegement was made good. All through the day the street on the townward side of the house was crowded by the inquisitive, and the gates were thumped by such as

thought their own importance or acquaintance with the family entitled them to be received into the house and told of the marvel in complete detail, if not indeed to an interview with Lazarus. Mary wrote a bold notice on papyrus to the effect that Lazarus was doing well but had been ordered undisturbed rest, and she caused it to be nailed on the outside of the larger of the street gates, but there were still some who considered this hint to keep away could not possibly apply to them. It was found necessary to post Jonas and other of the farm-hands in turn on the gate's outer side to stop it from being kicked and shaken noisily by the offended.

There was a regular flow of people up and down the roadway beyond the garden's other end. They gaped awhile at the garden wall, moved off to descend the hill and gape at the empty sepulchre, turned round into the town to gape at the gates from steading and garden, and then—having become as it were expert—acted as ciceroni for newcoming gapers. There were, of course, those of the younger generation who attempted to bestride the roadside wall by giving each other a leg-up, and Zachary found consolation for the embargo on gossiping with visitors in rapping the knuckles of these enterprising ones with a stout staff.

This first day's incursion, however, trying though it was to deal with, consisted merely of the idly curious, and these largely from the immediate neighbourhood. Fortunately Lazarus was so much restored in energy by the evening that his decision to set out after Jesus in the grey of the following morning could hardly be gainsaid, for the incursion of the second day was of quite another order.

Soon after Lazarus slipped with Judas out of the gateway on the Jericho road, to skirt Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives by hill-paths to the east which would bring them to the Samaria road at Nob, the local people had begun to gather about the house again. Presently these were joined by idlers from Jerusalem itself. The noise created by the Jerusalemites was so great, and their attempts to enter the garden and steadings so shameless, that Mary wrote two notices for nailing to the gates back and front:

Molested by the impertinent curiosity of idlers, Lazarus ben Abiud, whom Jesus of Nazareth brought alive out of the sepulchre after four days, is gone into the wilderness to recover his strength in quiet.

What effect the notices might have had it were hard to say. With the arrival at the house of the emissaries of the inner Sanhedrin about two hours after Lazarus and Judas had gone, the crowds found a new interest and began to thicken. Although Mary felt inclined to deny the Sanhedrin's authority to invade the house, or even to enforce an inquiry, she did not

think it politic to refuse entry to its inquisitors. They numbered four, apart from the six cudgel-men escorting, and consisted of three Sadducees and a scribe. All three Sadducees were priests—one of them a relative of Caiaphas and close in the High Priest's counsels—but not, apparently, belonging to the course of priests at that time on Temple duty. Mary, however, summoned by Abijah, who held the half-open smaller gate with his wolf-spear, was neither allowing invasion by the Sanhedrin's full force nor letting garden and steading be overrun by the crowd which that force was ready to have treading on its heels. She was not having the Temple cudgel-men—notorious bullies and thieves—inside the gates at all. They might put their backs to the closed gates and thump the heads of the curious in the streets as much as they liked. Only the four principals would be given entry, and this on the understanding that it was not ceded as a right.

“The reluctance of your welcome, Mary bath Abiud,” said the priest who was related to Caiaphas, “would suggest you had something to conceal.”

“No,” returned Mary. “Nothing to conceal, Nason bar Yochenan. Only something to safeguard. Because our brother has been delivered from the grave we need not, my sister and I, give Jerusalem's stews the run of our garden, house, and granaries. And he is surely over-sanguine who expects ‘*Salve!*’ when invading in force.”

She did not wish to antagonize either her visitors or the men who sent them, but as she resented the arrogance of their attempted entry she presently began to resent their open hostility to any suggestion that Lazarus had been in actual need of rescue from the tomb.

“How do you account for it?” demanded the scribe member of the quartet.

“I am at no need to account for it to you,” said Mary. “You have been given the story by five people without variation as regards facts. All you have attempted to do so far is to alter the facts to suit your own preconceived ideas. You will therefore expect me to account for what happened, not from the facts as I know them, but from the facts as you would like them altered. That I refuse to do.”

She looked at Martha and Zachary and the others, collected with herself for questioning in the big reception-room next the kitchen. She held Martha's eye.

“You have told all you have to tell, Martha?”

“Everything, Mary.”

“And you, Zachary?”

Zachary took a deep breath as if prepared to talk at length, but he let it all escape from him and took a smaller one to say, meekly: “Yes, Mary.”

The others were Chloe and an elderly woman, wife of one of the farmhands. Mary smiled at them and turned to the inquisitors.

“You may as well take your leave, I think,” she suggested. “You see there are no more facts to be collected here.”

“That is not for you to decide,” the priest Nason said angrily. And the solitary scribe hastened to support him:

“I don’t agree,” he said, “that there are no more facts to be collected here. I say too many of our questions remain unanswered.”

“As being merely hypothetical,” said Mary.

“Besides,” the scribe hurried on, “there are other witnesses still to be seen.”

“What witnesses?” asked Mary.

“Why, several score of people who, by your own account, were by the sepulchre when the Nazarene is supposed to have brought your brother from it.”

“If you must still ‘suppose’ what has been plainly vouched for by half-a-dozen unshakable witnesses, questioning another seventy will not bring you to the truth. That is by the way,” said Mary. “My sister has charge of this house for our brother. Will you tell her on whose authority you propose to use it for the interrogation of several score people?”

“By the authority of the Sanhedrin!” blazed Nason. “This house is the scene of an imposture. There must be confrontation!”

“Nonsense! The Sanhedrin has no such authority,” said Mary. “You may make elsewhere what fatuous pretence you like of functioning as a court, but you won’t do it here. Your questions, where they relate to facts, have become mere repetition, and it is only with facts that you have any semblance of authority for being concerned. None of us here need account to you for the facts. None of us is bound to tell you what opinion we form of them, what inferences we may draw from them.

“If you must persist in the absurdity of listening to some seventy people describe the same event, the town synagogue should be available. Incidentally, the *Chazzan*, Isaac, should be able to bring you Semachiah the

priest. It was Semachiah that Isaac summoned to confirm his decision that our brother was dead. And Isaac certainly should present to you the reputedly wise women who watched Lazarus die, and those other mortuary-ones who prepared his body for the grave. But since from all these you can truthfully obtain only confirmation of what you have gathered here it is improbable that you will be pleased.”

III

That she ran some personal risk in dealing so high-handedly with the Sanhedrin's inquisitors Mary was well aware. The priest Nason and the scribe Rephael were not the sort to accept a snubbing in their brief hour of authority without resentment. And, although it appeared that Mary had been allowed to settle undisturbed on a backwater of the stream of Bethany's life, it did not mean that orthodox Jewry had forgiven her offences against the Law. It had been enough, apparently, to satisfy her immediate neighbours that she was accepted back into the house of Abiud, for here was close association with the prophet of Nazareth. But the orthodox of Bethany, like the orthodox of neighbouring Jerusalem or of Magdala, were far from acknowledging the validity of that forgiveness of which Jesus gave assurance to those who turned to him. To them nothing could absolve a Jewish woman from the guilt of sex-relation with a Gentile. She was for ever outcast. It only needed then that either the Sadducee Nason or the scribe Rephael should find a hint of Mary's association with Mark Lucian, and in their resentment they might, one or other or both of them, create no small trouble for her.

Mary, however, could not bring herself to accept meekly the prejudiced investigation of the Sanhedrin's creatures. She was driven by an indignation near akin to the rebellion which had sent her out of Bethany eight years earlier. The bias shown by the interrogating quartet, their fixed determination to find nothing good but everything evil in Jesus's rescue of Lazarus from the tomb was typical, she saw, of the tyranny which power and privilege exercised in almost every phase of life in Jewish Palestine.

The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection or a future life. They therefore could not accept the plain facts of the case in the raising of Lazarus. It appeared to them only that a large number of people, in large majority hitherto of unquestioned probity, had all at once conspired together to support a staggering lie, and this for the set purpose of furthering a belief the Sadducees found repugnant. But the dreadful thing about it all to Mary

was the assumption by the investigators that no recognition of individual rights was required of them, that they might bully and coerce and shout down as they chose, the assumption in fine that the country and its people existed for the Sanhedrin, and not the Sanhedrin for country and people. It suddenly became plain to Mary why there was such poverty and distress in Judea, why so many thousands of its people lived always on the edge of famine. The tall and unblemished long-beards who paraded the Gabbatha in their costly raiments could not be uneasy over anything save a threat to their own comfort. They could not be uneasy, because it did not occur to them to see, that great numbers of the people whom it was their implicit duty to care for lived toilsomely in want and suffering. These Sadduceans, these men of empty pomp and shallow circumstance, neglected the disagreeable yet manifest obligation to convince the Roman authority that the farmed-out system of tax-gathering led to extortion, injustice, and misery for the many, if to sordid affluence for the few. But to them, of course, that obligation was as inconvenient and as uncalled-for as the no-less-urgent one of considering whether tithing and Temple-tribute, first-fruits and sacrificial offerings—to say nothing of money-changing and the trade in birds and beasts for the altar—had not become a mere exploitation of the productive for the benefit of an otiose and ornamental exiguity.

It seemed to Mary that, generally, the Sadducean aristocracy who lived for and by the Temple worship regarded the mercantile, yeomen, and proletary myriads as merely a necessary evil—necessary as a distant, awed, and automatically approving audience for the Temple ritual, and as a productive formicary meant to support their betters. The basic insolence of this conception was missed, not only by those who held it, but by the generality of those it victimized. Its victims could be enraged and exasperated by its manifestations in the underlings who carried out the orders of the Sanhedrin—in effect, the executive junta of the Sadducees—and they might, had they the temerity, inveigh against ‘jacks in office.’ But they rarely perceived that the insolence they met in the underlings, with its inevitable concomitants of coercion, violence, and sheer disregard of human right, was so strong a constituent as to be almost the active principle of the growth through which it ran. Sadducism was a tyranny within a tyranny. And like all tyrannies it was sceptical, intolerant. Within its power it would suffer no idea to root that even hinted any alteration of its standing. And since its power, being derived from the superior tyranny, was not absolute, there was no trick or chicanery it would not try to justify for use in suppressing the threatening idea. If they could not prosecute the idea’s propagator *ad hoc* they would liquidate him *ad alia*. And in like manner,

most probably, would they deal with those who too obviously gave the offender succour.

IV

Simon of Magdala's visit to Bethany took place four days after the departure of Lazarus and the incursion by the Sanhedrin's inquisitors. These carried on with their perquisitions about the town through the day following, a Friday. The Saturday-Sabbath intervened. Whether its spies had meantime submitted reports or not, the Sanhedrin's determination to compass the death of Jesus, and possibly of Lazarus, was heard by Simon at a meeting on the Sunday, and he came with news of it to Mary on the day following.

Simon had no sooner left Bethany on the Monday than there arrived in the town the Sanhedrin's proclamation asking for betrayal of the place where Jesus and his followers were in retreat. Immediately afterwards there was another visit by the inquisitors to take up this point of inquiry, previously neglected, oddly enough, at any rate in the likeliest place for the answer to be known.

Fortunately, although Martha and Mary knew the general direction in which Jesus and the disciples had headed, neither of them had any idea of the actual destination. It almost seemed that Jesus, foreseeing the Sanhedrin perquisitions, had warned Judas not to name the place of meeting to anyone, and had himself been purposely vague to the sisters. It followed, therefore, that they could be only vague in reply to this extra questioning by the Sanhedrin's scouts, in so far as they replied at all. And since nobody in the house or the town was any better informed it happened that the spies went away with the impression that Jesus and his company were strategically placed for evading anything but concerted pursuit from the three separate sub-provinces about Jordan.

That the mutterings against herself for her recalcitrance did not result in action by the rulers in near-by Jerusalem was due, Mary came to think, to Akiba and Boëthus memories of her association with Lucian. It might also be, she considered, that word of her friendship with Felix Scaliger had been passed from Galilee to Jerusalem. Next to Pontius Pilate, Felix was probably the most prominent Roman in Judea. The last thing the Sadduceans wanted to do was offend their Roman masters.

The days began to lengthen, and life in the house of Abiud fell back into the normally humdrum. One day was like the next—rising, looking to see if

the winter weather was breaking, more frequent exclamation for the patches of blue in the sky, quiet hours devoted to Chloe's lessons, to reading, to helping Anna with her sewing—the quietness broken by Martha's incursions or her distant scoldings in the kitchen, by the protestations of the great courtyard-gate being opened, the squeaking of the wheels of the bullock-cart, the flop-plop of the broad hooves of Hyssop and Juniper, successors of Wayward and Willing, the lighter plapping of the feet of the milch-kine and their lowing, the still lighter fall of the asses' feet, somehow suggesting neatness, daintiness—these identifiable sounds serving for hour-glass, audibly marking the passage of time; for variation, the kitchen smells, such as the fragrance of new-baked bread, to tell the day of the week; but even this, out of the humdrum, pedestrian, at need to be questioned in balance against other circumstances: Martha bread-baking—Monday or Friday?

At wide intervals apart, to raise heads from scroll or seam or to arrest cooking-spoon in mid-air, the fall of running feet in the street outside to be followed by knocking on the gate. A runner, this, from the merchant-banker Ben Yoezear, in Jerusalem, with a letter for Mary brought with his own by ship to Joppa, by caravan through Esdraelon, or by that relay-post with which a scattered handful of traders were imitating the Imperial express system even between points outside Roman dominion. Less spectacularly, the bearer of a message from busy Matthias, by the Lake of Galilee, to pick up a letter from Mary already partly written and only awaiting such an opportunity to be added to and sealed for dispatch.

So out of the month of Shebat into Adar and past the last new moon of the year. Two travellers from the north passing through Bethany at a week's interval could give no news of any activity on the part of Jesus. Judas, arriving alone two days after the second of these passers-by, was scarcely more informative. Jesus, he said, was not teaching in public. He was taking things quietly, instructing only the twelve in matters appertaining to the Kingdom. Lazarus was well—better, Judas thought, than he had been for long before Jesus raised him from the tomb. Mary and Martha would be seeing him, perhaps, in a day or two. It depended on what Judas discovered when, presently, he got to Jerusalem.

V

The sacred year, beginning with the new moon on the first Sabbath of Nisan, was in its second day when the note arrived from Lazarus. It begged Martha to double her Monday's baking, and to put aside and ready such

provender as might be carried into the wilds in donkey-panniers. Several people more than Jesus and himself and the twelve would have to be fed for a day or two. Jonas was to be told to hire two asses with panniers to make up a train of four with Kimmosh (nettle) and Charul (spiny acanthus), the two donkeys belonging to the farm. Lazarus would be in Bethany before the day was warned on the Monday.

Martha brought the note to Mary and, having given it her to read, stood with a finger in her mouth and the other four spread on her cheek, frowning as if perplexedly.

“What think you of that?” she demanded, when Mary looked up from the letter’s end. “Isn’t it vexatious?”

“It means a lot of work, certainly,” Mary said sympathetically, “but it seems straightforward enough.”

“Straightforward enough! I’ll give Lazarus—bless him!—a good talking-to, that I will. Suddenly giving me all this to do; more flour will be needed than we can grind at home, I’ll have to get wheat round to Jubal’s mill, and there isn’t enough leaven in the house for a double Monday baking. How do I know how many people he wants to feed? How do I know what to pack in the panniers when I don’t know how far it’s to be carried and how long it’ll need to keep? How do I——”

“Now, now, Martha!” said Mary, snatching relief from induced breathlessness. “Don’t pretend to me that you’re bothered. Nobody’s better than yourself at dealing with such sudden emergencies. Besides, Lazarus said weeks ago that supplies might be needed. And you were quite ready, I remember, to send out a sumpter train twice weekly if wanted.”

“Oh, well, if I knew what was needed—beforehand, I mean—how far it had to travel, how many were to be fed.”

“Yes, that’s only reasonable. And it is very heedless of Lazarus not to give you fuller details. Did you ask the messenger where the note was given him?”

“I never thought. He was in such a hurry to get into Jerusalem that he wouldn’t stop even to break bread.”

“That would almost mean that he came up from Jericho.”

“Why?”

“If he had come up to Jerusalem from Samaria by Bethel he would have completed his business there before coming here. That’s the likelihood,

anyhow,” said Mary. “And the likelihood from that is that Lazarus is with Jesus somewhere in the Jordan valley. Does that help in any way?”

“Fish,” Martha said decidedly.

“Fish?”

“If they’re anywhere near Jericho they’ll be glad of some fish. I could do with some fresh for frying, and some salted. But how can I get into Jerusalem with wheat to be ground and leaven to get and all that bread to bake?”

“Can’t you give the fishmonger an order?”

“Saruch? Oh, he’ll buy anything, that man; and sometimes it’s late in the afternoon before he gets here. You simply can’t trust him.”

“In that case,” said Mary, “Anna and I will get into Jerusalem to-morrow in time for the arrival of the fish from the coast. That’ll be all right, Martha,” she added hastily as she saw the doubting finger go into her sister’s mouth. “If I don’t know good fish from bad except by the smell, Anna does.”

“I suppose that’ll have to do,” Martha grumbled. “I just don’t know where to begin—I wonder if some of that salted meat I’ve been smoke-drying . . . ?”

VI

Lazarus had not long arrived with Judas when Mary and Anna got back from Jerusalem with the fish next morning. He greeted Mary with manifest affection, but turned directly to give attention to the business that brought him to Bethany. It was with something deeper-seated than amusement that Mary saw him quietly take his own way in the face of rather querulous opposition by Judas. Judas appeared to regard Lazarus’s idea of the provender-train as uncalled-for. There could be nothing carried by it in the way of a real necessity which could not be bought for money on the road. Waiting for so much food to be prepared and packed was a dangerous waste of time. By the time they got started they could be in Jericho, perhaps across Jordan. Besides, a train of four asses would attract attention—perhaps of thieves—and it was more than two men could handle or defend. And he, Judas, was no donkey-driver.

“I am,” Lazarus said calmly. “And we shall be taking two others with us to bring the animals back. As for food, if you will tell me where even bread

is to be bought either side of Jordan for twenty miles north and south of its meeting with the Jabbock stream I'll agree with you, Judas, that my panniers are not needed."

Lazarus went on to demonstrate that the hasty departure suggested by Judas would bring Lazarus and himself at sunset half-way between two possible resting-places, out in the wilds with a long walk in the morning to potable water, and with either an extra walk beyond the appointed meeting-place or a wait of some hours for the arrival of Jesus and his company.

"There's the choice, Judas," said Lazarus with a disarming twinkle. "Three hours in comfort here, or three hours perhaps in the rain by Jordanside, and with no food to welcome the very likely famished company who'll be looking for it in inhospitable Peræa."

He turned to Martha: "If I can have the knife and board and a big basin of water outside, Martha, I'll clean the fish for you. Andrew bar Jonas showed me how to do it quickly."

This, thought Mary, was a different Lazarus. Although there were moments when his thoughts seemed far away, he had lost that look of almost lethargic dreaminess. The hollows in his face and neck, and the gauntness of his body, had filled out, and the warm golden colour had returned to his skin. He moved with the same lithe grace as formerly, but with more decision. If he still refrained from mere chatter the decision which characterized his movements also characterized his speech.

Mary was helping to make leaf-packets of the various articles going into the panniers, and she found opportunity to call Lazarus presently out to the stabling for consultation on packing.

"How is Jesus, Lazarus; how does he do?" Mary asked. And Lazarus looked concerned.

"Well in body, I think," he answered, "but weary of spirit. These days he seems loth to teach the people who come about. He spends all his time in instructing the Twelve apart——"

Lazarus broke off to examine a pack-knot on one of the animals, then turned again to Mary.

"Do you know, Mary," he said earnestly, "I believe none of the Twelve understands Jesus—not even Simon Peter."

"Do *you* understand him, Lazarus?"

“No,” said Lazarus with a faint smile. “But then, you know, I’m not very bright; else, I suppose, loving me as he does, he would have made me one of the Twelve.”

“It still doesn’t vex you that you aren’t deeper in his counsels?”

“Vex me? No. Jesus knows my worth better than I do.”

He laughed and turned again to look at the fastenings and so forth on the pack-donkeys. He looked into a feed-bag, and frowned.

“Micah!” he called to one of the farm-hands in charge of the animals.

“Yes, master!” the man answered, and came over. Lazarus held out the feed-bag.

“Who bade you provide for the beasts so scantily?”

“The mistress. She said half a measure would be enough to go on with.”

“She could not have been thinking,” said Lazarus. “The beasts have far to go and quickly, Micah. Shift them all over to the other side of the courtyard. There will be mild sunshine over there presently, and they will enjoy it. But watch for the panniers, Micah, if they want to lie down. And put another half-measure in their feed-bags.”

“Yes, master,” said the man, and went to undo the head-rope of the leading animal.

Lazarus lifted a humorous eyebrow at Mary, and would have walked towards the house, but Mary stopped him.

“I want to hear more about the Master, Lazarus. I am anxious about him.”

“And I, too,” said Lazarus. “He is so lonely. He keeps himself so much apart. I watch him, and I see him so troubled of heart that my own aches for him.”

Lazarus turned from her with his far-away look for a moment, and then brought his candid gaze back to Mary.

“Tell me, Mary,” he said, “you know that Jesus is in truth the Son of God?”

“Yes,” said Mary. “I know that.”

Once more Lazarus turned from her, and there was a long silence before he showed her his look of deep trouble.

“Then why has he—who called me from the grave—why has he set his face towards death?”

Mary wanted simply to run away. Lazarus’s troubled question sat so much with her own inmost fears that it was like a sting. But she held her ground, and with difficulty got out a question in her turn:

“How do you know that, my brother? Is it from Jesus himself?”

“No. It is from what I’ve heard from some of the Twelve. They say he has spoken twice already of his death—they don’t understand. But I—I can read it in his face. I *know*. Mary, why does he look for death? Isn’t it enough that he brought me from the grave?”

“I simply don’t know, Lazarus. We may be mistaken. He has something to prove. Look how the multitudes that followed him have melted away. Like the Pharisees, they look for signs and wonders that he could but will not give them. His message falls on deaf ears. Even you and I, with all the proof we have of his kinship with the Father, with all our will to believe, how much do we understand?”

“Mary!” came the voice of Martha from the kitchen entrance. She wondered at Mary keeping Lazarus gossiping when there was so much to do, so much ready for packing. And, besides, Judas was growing impatient.

“Judas,” said Lazarus, “is always impatient. Nothing ever happens quickly enough for him.”

The three of them went into the house.

VII

The sumpter train with Micah and the owner of the two extra donkeys had already set out from the farm courtyard through the town. To avoid notice Lazarus and Judas would join it by the gate into the Jericho road when it came down from the town-gate. Mary had taken Judas into her own apartment to give him money from her treasure-chest.

“You have ever been generous, Mary of Magdala.”

“Mary of Bethany.”

“Mary of Bethany,” Judas amended with unruffled smoothness. “Ever generous. And your reward is certain when our Master, the Lord Jesus, claims his Kingdom.”

“His Kingdom, Judas?” Mary asked quietly. “How do you picture that Kingdom?”

“Surely it is manifest? Israel freed. The power of Rome made naught. The Anointed One——”

“Messiah!”

“I have spoken too soon?” murmured Judas. “I wonder. Is it not written: ‘Then shall be seen the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory; and he will send his angels and bring the elect from the quarters of the four winds.’ ”

“Do you believe, then, Judas, that this money I give you will be returned to me in equal gold?”

“Equal?” replied Judas in a kind of ecstasy. “I say to you that for every piece you shall have six, even ten. I, who shall be Master of the King’s treasury, declare it!”

Mary, though shocked, yet felt only pity for the man. She said slowly:

“But Jesus Himself has said, Judas, that his Kingdom is not of this world.”

“Of this world, no. Of a world so changed as to be quite new.”

Mary could find nothing more to say. She was in a species of daze, and her heart felt as heavy as lead. That one so close to Jesus as was the man from Kerioth should attach the wistful, ordinary, and material Messianic fantasy to the mission of his Master filled her with a sickish apprehension. If the others of the Twelve shared Judas’s conception it was small wonder that Jesus, as Lazarus told, seemed troubled of heart, lonely, apart. How far it all drifted from the simple teaching of the Divine Love which, accepted, must remove the self-interest that was the beginning and end of mankind’s surrender to the powers of evil! How bitter for Jesus to know that his own followers, the men nearest him, no less than his sworn enemies, conditioned his validity on his tempting God! And into what disastrous conflict with evil, all the more deadly for being vested in respectability and governance, must the expectations of follower and foe alike contrive to drive him.

To hide her perturbation Mary fell to rearranging the contents of her treasure-coffer. Inquisitive—for he was ever hinting to know what moneys Mary had at command, and that he should have charge of them—Judas edged closer. He sniffed and asked whence arose the delicious fragrance.

Mary found the perfume vase given her by Felix. About half of its original contents remained, carefully resealed. She showed it to Judas.

“It must be very costly,” he said, not without awe. “Why do you keep it? Sold, it would fetch many denarii.”

To Mary, it was as if a chilling shadow had fallen over her. She snatched the vase up to her breast before hurriedly putting it back in the coffer.

“No, no, no!” she protested. And then, slowly, as though not of her own volition: “I may have a use for it.”

VIII

She sat in the garden enjoying the last of the mild sunshine that Lazarus had predicted. She did not hear Martha call her from the house, nor yet when the call was repeated in the garden close by. Martha, indeed, was speaking directly to her before Mary came out of her sombre reverie.

“Well, I must say, Mary, it’s too bad. Here I am with a hundred things to do and not a soul stirs to help me. Anna and Chloe gone into Jerusalem—and you—don’t you know you’ve been sitting there for hours—since almost just after Lazarus and Judas set out?”

“I know it, Martha,” said Mary. “By now they are well past the balsam groves of Jericho. In a little over an hour they will be in the khan Lazarus spoke of. What is it you want me to do?”

She knew that the direct question would put Martha at a loss. It did.

“Well,” Martha fumbled, “you—you might help me to arrange things for Passover.”

“Passover,” smiled Mary, “is still ten days away.”

“But—well——”

“You arranged yesterday with Jubal for plenty of flour. The lamb is chosen. What is there to do? If you begin cleaning the house, you will only have it to do again nearer the time.”

“I don’t like you—it’s too early in the year for sitting outside like this.”

Mary got to her feet, laughing, and she caught Martha by a shoulder and kissed her.

“Dear Martha!”

“Nonsense! I don’t hold with such light ways,” said Martha, softened none the less. “And Passover will be on us sooner than you think. The Lord Jesus will be in Bethany before four days are over.”

“Who told you that?” Mary demanded, alarmed.

“Judas did,” said Martha. Then, noticing that Mary stood rigid: “Why, what’s the matter?”

“His face is set towards Jerusalem.”

“Yes, of course—for Passover. Oh, if you’re thinking of the priests and scribes plotting against him,” said Martha, “Judas is certain they won’t dare touch Jesus. Nor Lazarus either——”

But it looked to her as if Mary was not listening. Mary’s face was set and cold, and in her eyes there was something Martha had never before seen there.

It was fear.

CHAPTER XV

The Anointing

ON the seventh day of Aprilish Nisan, a Friday, Mary walked with Chloe from Jerusalem. She and her companion had been to see Anna settled in a house there, taken for the better handling of the renascent dressmaking business. The road to Bethany was unusually peopled for the early afternoon of the day before the Sabbath.

For the time of year it was not unusual, perhaps, for numbers to be making towards the city. Passover-week would begin after sunset on the Sabbath, and most of the wayfarers to Jerusalem could be identified as pilgrims of the occasion, early for divers reasons. Some, it could be, wished to complete as soon as possible a needed purification in the Temple in order to have full participation from the start of the festival. Others, again, were looking forward to an extra Sabbath in the city with opportunity of listening to celebrated rabbis in the Temple porches. Jews of the Dispersion would seek the synagogues where exposition was made in the tongues familiar to them in the countries of their exile. Whatever their reasons, they were early to make the most of Passover.

The unusual feature, however, was the number hastening in the direction of Bethany or Jordanside. These were not the laden from the city markets, wishing to be home before sunset brought them into the Sabbath. There were normally occasional groups of such, and these Mary and Chloe overtook and passed without exertion. The others, going eastward singly, in pairs, and in groups, were unburdened. They had the manner of people hurrying towards an expected event of interest, and they overtook and passed Mary and Chloe at much greater speed than the latter overtook the laden home-goers. But of the eastward-heading there still was a residue who progressed with unhurried stateliness. Personages these were, whose careful beards, rich headgear, stoles, tasseled- and fringed-garments, phylacteries, sober deportment, and general loftiness of mien proclaimed them to be variously scribes, Pharisees, rabbis, and even Sadduceans.

It was not until she was half-way to Bethany that the reason for this unusual exodus eastward dawned on Mary. She surmised that the word must

have reached Jerusalem that Jesus of Nazareth had come up to Bethany, and probably that he intended sojourning there over the Sabbath.

Mary quickened her pace and arrived in Bethany to find the house in surprising quiet, but to have her surmise confirmed by Martha. Her sister said that Jesus had reached Bethany an hour or more before noon, some four or five score people following him, apart from the Twelve and Lazarus. Some of these additional followers were of that seventy whom he had instructed and sent out six months earlier, but many, both men and women, had come from the lakeside and farther in Galilee to join him, others adding themselves to his company from both sides of Jordan during his course through the Peræa and Jericho.

“The most of them have gone on to Jerusalem—and a good thing, too,” said Martha with her air of being put-upon by all manner of thoughtless people. “It looks like being a crowded Passover, droves of people—hordes—coming up from Jericho—this early, too!—and likely enough Bethany’ll be eaten out of house and home long before the *Haroseth* is mixed.”

“Jesus?”

“Gone with Simon Peter and some of the others to stop awhile with Simon ben Tabbai. But he’ll be here to-night alone—only he and Lazarus. A good thing, too,” said Martha. “They ought to let him have some time to himself sometime.”

“Where’s Lazarus?”

“With Kemuel looking at the barley—at least, he went to look at the barley first, and then was going up into the hills to see Abijah and the flocks. I expect he’s there now. He’ll be back before sunset.”

It was not, then, until after sunset that Mary saw Jesus. From the roadway end of the garden she could see that a considerable concourse had gathered about the villa of Simon ben Tabbai, a well-to-do merchant of Jerusalem, who was still commonly called the ‘Leper’ from his once having been Levitically segregated on account of a skin affection, long ago cured. His villa stood outside the walls of Bethany on the south-facing slope of the plateaued valley in which the town had site. The configuration of the ground outside the wall which contained Simon’s artificially made-up garden formed a natural amphitheatre. It was about this that the ordinary folk from Jerusalem had spread themselves, probably in the hope of seeing Jesus perform wonders, but, as it happened, to hear him confute the doctors and rulers who had come from the city in carpingly disputatious mood.

Jesus, Mary thought when at last he arrived with Lazarus, looked a very tired man. And at first glance she would have said, physically rather than mentally. But on a second consideration she saw it was easy to contrast the weary movements of an over-fatigued body with the ready smile of friendliness and the swift wit of question and answer which were the response to his welcome. The wasted figure drooped, but the regard of the amber eyes was alive and the warm voice in no way perfunctory. Yet, when the notable courtesy that grew from his absolute unselfishness was not engaged, the weariness of mind which Lazarus had detected became manifest. It was manifest enough to stound the heart of Mary as his bodily weariness could not. Mary concluded that, turned in upon itself, aware of its divinely given perceptions and powers, the consciousness of Jesus knew itself lonely, for save in its own compass it found no complete human response. Therefore, with the loneliness, sorrow.

Ah, yes—Mary said to herself—to ensure rest for weary bones and muscles and tendons were easy enough did Jesus himself submit. There was soothing oil for aching joint and sinew, sleep-inducing herb and broth and a soft bed in guarded quiet. But with what could one minister to a heart and mind so uniquely, so incomparably burdened?

II

After the immunity afforded by the Sabbath had passed, Jesus did not again make use of the shelter and rest offered by the house of Abiud—this, Mary felt sure, because of the threat to Lazarus. As soon as the sun set on a day of undisturbed quiet, largely spent in meditation in the garden, Jesus called the household together and blessed its members. Then, with Lazarus, he slipped out quietly by the gate to the Jericho road, and went by the bridle-path about the town to the house of Simon ben Tabbai. And although during the next four days he came nightly out of Jerusalem to Bethany it was under Simon's roof that he slept. The nightly evacuation of Jerusalem was for safety. To have remained in the city after sundown would have been an invitation to Caiaphas to send his cudgel-men—a move the High Priest would be loth to make in the daytime. And, in the event of a posse being sent to Bethany by night, no occasion was given for a merely opportune seizure of Lazarus if he was not under the same roof as Jesus.

Nevertheless, in spite of this apparent awareness and its consequent precaution, it appeared to Mary that Jesus was deliberately doing all he could to bring the issue between himself and the rulers to a crisis or climax.

There was his entry into Jerusalem on the morning after that peaceful Sabbath. It was made on the back of an ass's colt which had never been ridden before. Amid the shouts of 'Hosanna!' from crowds pouring out of the city in the wake of his own followers, and along a roadway strewn with garments and the cut-down branches of trees, Jesus rode into Jerusalem as King-Messiah.

This was not the entry of the Messiah of popular conception—the warrior-hero who would free Israel by conquest of her oppressors by the might of the sword. It was entry of the Messiah of Jesus's own conceiving—the champion of the meek and the humble, of the weary and the afflicted, the antagonist of evil who saw that the use of any of evil's weapons against itself was immediate defeat. But by the much that it diverged from the common concept the more it became a challenge.

Supporting, as it did, the parallel of a Kingdom of Heaven to which the only passport was acceptance of the Everlasting Love and Mercy, it withered the Pharisaic idea of religious exclusiveness no less than the Sadducean of religious hierarchy. It turned to futility the tortuous ratiocinations of the rabbis and exposed the bleakness of scriblish pedantry. It put aside the useless Zealot dreams of an unmerited act of God giving aid to armed brabble of disunity.

Through the fear for Jesus which haunted Mary there gradually emerged the recognition, none the less frightening, that the course he pursued was for him the only way. She had deceived herself in thinking that a gradual process in which rejection and misunderstanding of the earlier simple message, opposition and a combination of circumstance, had forced Jesus into accepting Messiahship. It could be that the full realization of his own destiny and mission, a complete grasp of all they implied, had hesitated to burgeon in his human comprehension. For Jesus was human. Unless he was man, subject to all man's doubts and temptations, Mary thought, his purpose was vitiated. God made manifest in a creature subject to no human frailties was purposeless—God made manifest in God. But in God made manifest in man—there was the exemplar of rich hope. Unquestionably Jesus had received intimations of his destiny long before seeking baptism from John the son of Zecharias. It had hardly been idly that in the days of his apparent itinerancy as yoke-maker-carpenter he had called himself 'bar-Nasha'—the Son of Man. Nor had it been idly, as a matter of form or as an example, that he had sought the baptism of repentance and the remission of sin at the hands of John. What early doubts, fears, hesitations, uncertainties regarding the appointed course were cast aside as unworthy that day in Jordan's

stream? And if, thought Mary, it was gradually out of conflict that his sublime Sonship of the Father had been perfected, so much greater, humanly speaking, the triumph, so much greater the encouragement for those whom Jesus taught to follow him.

The course which Jesus chose that week of Passover, provocative and challenging as it was to religious officialdom, fraught as it was with peril, Mary came to see as inevitable. Claiming the authority and showing the power that he did, Jesus was bound to carry his teaching and his warranty to Jerusalem, the operative centre of the orthodoxies he challenged. He was bound to proclaim himself there. Not to have done so, to have lapsed into the only alternative—that of becoming the wandering ‘Rab,’ preaching in the wilderness, slinking over this frontier and that as local authority here and there bestirred itself against an annoyance—would have been apostasy unredeemable, a betrayal of the Kingdom to the powers of darkness.

Mary perceived the inevitability, but all that she was of loving woman cringed in quivering agony from the thought of what must ensue. Three times, she knew from Lazarus, Jesus had foretold his imminent betrayal and death in Jerusalem. Like the men closest to him, she was bewildered by the prediction, but her bewilderment was not allayed by any of the vague though extravagant Messianic expectations which seemed to temper theirs. The essential teaching of Jesus, Mary considered, precluded the invocation of any heavenly power to save him from the rage of his enemies. God, according to Jesus, was not to be tempted in any extremity. Unless, then, the mass of ordinary people gathered in Jerusalem from scattered Israel accepted Jesus as their Messiah, and this in such overwhelming number as to intimidate the rulers, the dreadful issue was inevitable. But, if twelve men specially chosen and specially taught, with all their devotion to their Master, after many months of close association still were so very far from grasping the mysteries of the Kingdom he preached, how in a few brief hours would that mass of people who had never seen or heard him before surpass them in comprehension? It could only be as Jesus himself foresaw: his gospel of Redeeming Love rejected, he would be betrayed into the hands of the religious rulers and condemned by them with every pretence of impartiality and justice that self-deceptive pomp or greedy sophistry, fabricating the expedient, could compass. Finally, he would be delivered to shameful death at the hands of the Gentiles. Mary’s bewilderment swung in sickish agony between the inevitable outcome and the complete guiltlessness of him on whom the appalling injustice would be done.

The days passed with their mantle of fear. Mary missed the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, but her restlessness took her next day to the house she had rented for Anna. There word was brought to her of the outburst by Jesus against the sordid trafficking in the Temple courts.

Within herself, at the thought of how the deed would exacerbate the enmity of the Sadduceans, she cried, No, no, no! Then, with a sudden uplift of the heart, she snatched at the possibility that it might betoken a less submissive attitude in Jesus towards his antagonists. Next moment she was thinking that for once, by resisting evil actively and almost with violence, Jesus had failed to keep his own precept. Immediately thereupon she realized that with his outstanding common sense and practicality he was no more to be bound by the letter of his own teaching than by the letter of the Law. He simply saw that protest in mere words against the defilement of his Father's house would be futile.

It was a commonplace to the Jerusalemite—it had been a thing only vaguely disturbing to Mary herself—that in the Court of the Gentiles there were tables and stalls where people haggled stridently over money and the price of doves, that burdened porters making short cuts back and forth between the cloisters north and south passed behind even the Holy of Holies and through the place of worship for thousands. But in the eyes of pious pilgrims up from the country, or from the lands of the Dispersion, these things could look only what they were—the grossest sacrilege. For all but a few of these a one visit to the Temple was the event of their lives, long looked forward to and saved up for. It was something from which they hoped to carry a contentingly precious memory to the end of their days. It had been, therefore, in some measure to express the shocked disillusionment of these humble people that Jesus deliberately invited the zeal of his Father's house to eat him up. Deliberately. But primarily, as deliberately, to expose more memorably than speech ever could the huge and squalid materiality of the Temple, he let the extraordinary force pent within him have play enough at once to subdue and frighten the market-keepers and to show the profiteers behind them they were weighed and found wanting.

The days pressed on each other with such urgency that it seemed to Mary one had scarce dawned before it was falling into dusk. Yet, as dusk bore the menace of a restless, unrefreshing night, and as dawn held the threat of an inauspicious day, so each hour, as it was fearfully overtaken without realization of its terrors, appeared wastefully to exhaust her lease of time.

Jesus himself, serene and unhurrying, yet seemed concerned not to leave any single minute unused. While daylight lasted he was about the Temple

cloisters, never without a crowd about him, holding his hearers breathless with the parables, superlatively told, that he used to illustrate his teachings. Scarcely one of these parables but stripped with allusive irony the hypocrisies and fatty hebetudes of those seeking to still his voice. Time and time again his audiences were invaded by groups from the different sects of his opposers—scribes, Pharisees of the harsher Shammai persuasions, Sadduceans, Herodians. They came armed with carefully concocted questions meant to trap him, by his answers, into either alienating the sympathies of his listeners and followers or else talking sedition or blasphemy. Had not the ulterior intent of the questionings been so malevolent Mary would have joyed in the deft wit and intellectual penetration of the replies. But while she could get neither as near nor as often as she wished to listen to Jesus in the Temple—it was difficult for a woman—she saw enough of the hostile invasions to be persuaded, here again, of an attempt to force a crisis quickly. The interrogations had the appearance of being organized, of being made with intentionally increasing frequency. If actual interrogation was made by a different group each time, there was, Mary could detect, a repeated mingling with the general crowd by another group of men which was always the same. These men had the furtive air of unclever spies.

The repeated provocative questioning, the concerted listening—it all had the look of conspiracy. It convinced Mary that the intrigue against Jesus, begun a year or more earlier in Galilee, was at last coalescing in a final drive to its objective. And she believed that Jesus, aware of the fact, while holding off the climax until his own moment, was making the most of his time before it was reached. He left Temple and city each day only with the last of the daylight, but while a sufficient crowd still hung around him to make attempted seizure by the Temple porters under their ‘Segens’ too unpopular to risk. A walk across the Valley of Jehosophat brought him by rising road to the Mount of Olives for a talk with his disciples before separating for the night. This had become an evening custom for Jesus since his entry into Jerusalem. On Olivet he would sit awhile explaining with great patience—so Lazarus told Mary—implications of his sayings during the day that his people had failed to grasp. A hill-path forked a little to the south of the mount, one tine bearing west towards Bethphage and the other easterly to Bethany. A good number of Jesus’s followers and disciples had sleeping quarters in Bethphage, the rest in Bethany, where Jesus still lodged at night with Simon ben Tabbai. The normally used road from Jerusalem to Jericho passed by Bethphage before reaching Bethany a quarter of a mile eastward,

but because of its windings it was nothing shorter as a way to Bethany than the hill-path by Olivet.

On the thirteenth of Nisan, the fourth day of Passover-week, Mary came by Bethphage on her way to Bethany. It was late afternoon. She had just left the last of Bethphage's houses behind her when she heard a shout. She turned and saw Lazarus come bounding into the roadway by the path from Olivet, and she waited for him to join her.

"I knew it was you, Mary. I saw you from Olivet crossing the valley, and I came to give you company home," Lazarus explained, and asked: "Why are you alone?"

"Chloe is remaining in Jerusalem, helping Anna."

"Oh? You didn't think of joining Judas, then?"

"Iscaiot? I don't know what you mean, brother. Why should I join Judas?"

"He must have left the city about the same time as you did," said Lazarus. "He's somewhere on the road ahead of us."

"You must have eyes, my dear, like the cliff-dwelling vulture," said Mary. "I suppose you saw him, too, from Olivet?"

"No, here, from the rise behind Bethphage. From his pace I'd have said he had overtaken and passed you."

"I hardly think so. Oh, no. I'm sure I'd have seen him."

"Odd," mused Lazarus. "Of course, he may have had something to attend to in Bethphage, and have left Jerusalem much earlier than you. Only—I thought we left him there behind us when we went over to Olivet."

Mary was puzzled.

"What's the matter, Lazarus? What makes you worry about the activities of Judas?"

"His manner in the last few days. He has become very glum, taciturn, inclined to go off by himself."

"Judas, I think, has always carried a sullen fire within him," Mary said slowly. "In many ways he is the outstanding one of the chosen Twelve."

With an exclamation Lazarus came to a halt, and Mary, checked, turned to find him staring at her and, in an odd way, beaming.

“You don’t agree?” she suggested.

“I do, I do. But,” said Lazarus, “how like you, Mary, to see that!”

He recovered the distance between them, took her arm for a moment to make her continue the walk. “Tell me, tell me!” he urged.

“Judas just misses the qualities that would make him a leader of men. He is ambitious, but his dreams of himself in power occupy too much of his mind. They stop him from awakening and exercising the gifts needed for making his ambitions materialize. He feels that he has those gifts, and resents it that his fellows are blind to them. Not realizing that cleverness unactivated too commonly makes a man the mere tool of practicality, he is hurt by the preference given to men whom he regards as stupid.”

“Dear old Simon Peter!” said Lazarus.

“I was generalizing. You bring me back to the case,” smiled Mary. “When I said just now Judas was possibly the most outstanding of the Twelve you agreed with me. Why?”

“Lots of reasons. For one thing, I’ve never heard him ask silly questions of Jesus. Most of the others do, even the sons of Alphaï, barring Matthew. For another thing, Judas has more learning than any of them, though Matthew, again, runs him close. You want to be a lot alone with him, as I’ve so often been, to find out how much he knows. He doesn’t talk much in company. He’s a bit impatient, of course, always in a hurry to be doing something.”

“That rather contradicts my notion of him as dreamer,” said Mary.

“Oh, no it doesn’t. For all his being in a hurry, he isn’t really the man of action. He knows a lot, but he isn’t wise. I mean,” Lazarus searched, “he’s in a hurry without thinking what he’s in a hurry about. Oh, he’s a dreamer sure enough. It’s being so much in the middle of his own dreams—I mean, dreams about himself—that makes him impatient. He can’t stop to consider what the other fellow might be after.”

“Well, let us get along,” suggested Mary, for Lazarus was inclined to stop the better to express himself. “Martha has this supper at Simon ben Tabbai’s partly on her hands. She may want help.”

“She’s sure to want help. But,” Lazarus smiled, “will she take it?”

They looked at each other in understanding and walked on for a minute or two in silence. Then Lazarus asked his sister earnestly:

“What, do you think, is going to happen, Mary?”

“I don’t know, brother. It is too hard for me to understand. That the man we have grown to love so much, whom we believe to be the Christ, is to suffer and die is too dreadful to think of. But Jesus himself foretells it. You yourself heard him, coming up from Jericho.”

“Plainly. But why, Mary—why?”

“I don’t know why, Lazarus. I can see only that it is inevitable. Annas—that grasping old man—Caiaphas, the fatted priests, the scribes, the rabbis, and the Pharisees that hold to the bitter teachings of the Rabbi Shammai—can you imagine them accepting our Jesus as the Christ? Now? If they had been going to believe in him they would have believed from the first. No, no, Lazarus. It has come to the test. Jesus cannot deny one jot of his teaching, one letter of his belief. He is the Son of God. And since they will not accept him they must, for the sake of all their obdurate worldliness holds dear, destroy him.”

“O my Father!” Lazarus breathed. “You don’t think a deed of power _____”

“To make belief easy for the stiff-backed, the contumacious? To win the approval of the perverse? A barren gain, that. You know he has always refused to give such a sign.”

“He brought me from the grave——”

“By faith. For love’s sake. Not to exalt himself or to show his power.”

“Yes, Mary, I’m sure that must be true,” said Lazarus. “Never, never for himself. Never, never for show. If they’d only listen, only look, only think _____”

He broke off suddenly, and pointed ahead.

“There *is* Judas!” he exclaimed.

As he spoke, the figure which had come into view at a turn of the road, and which was seated on a rock by the wayside moodily gazing at the dust, looked up and back, rose quickly, and started hurrying towards Bethany.

“Now why should he do that?” asked Mary.

“I don’t know. But it shows you what I meant about Judas. He has been like that since before we all came back to Bethany. He didn’t like Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the ass’s colt, and the people calling him ‘King-Messiah.’ Judas wanted—he expected—to see Jesus clad in shining armour

ride into the city on a great war-horse. The others are like that, too—looking to see some miraculous happening, Rome subdued in the raising of a hand, and themselves as Princes of Heaven—counsellors at least—sitting on either hand of Jesus the King, judging the nations.

“But it seems to me, Mary,” Lazarus went on, bringing her again to a halt and looking at her with a growing blaze in his golden eyes, “it seems to me that the miraculous thing is here already. This little people beloved of the Lord—blessed, blessed be His Holy Name!—this cradle of prophets and seers so often made the mouth of the Everlasting and even raised to look upon His Glory, covenanted Israel, erring, wilful, blind, deaf, bowed, and suffering from its own follies, at last there blooms for it the flower of all its holy wisdom and genius—the Anointed of the Lord in its very midst.”

“Lazarus—darling!”

“Wait, Mary! You know I don’t speak easily, but here I can find my tongue. I don’t know about judging the nations, though I think in the Lord’s good time that must come. But I believe that the judgment of Israel itself is even now begun. It lies in whether it rejects or receives Jesus as its Lord.”

“In that, Lazarus, as in the rest you’ve said, I’m sure you’re right,” said Mary. She was deeply stirred. “We are helpless lookers-on at a great mystery. Jesus must know that there will be neither mercy nor justice for him at the hands of Caiaphas and his creatures. He must know that by fair means or foul they will have him put to death, and that cruelly. You see that, don’t you?”

“Yes, I see that. And I see, too, that he only evades them for the moment. He means at the last to invite the worst they can do to him. He has said that he will rise again, and I try to stay myself with that. But my bowels melt within me, Mary, when I think of what he must suffer. Not, like me, to drift unknowingly out of living and to be called from dreamless sleep by the voice best loved. But—oh, no, Mary—I can’t say it!”

“If he suffers what we dread to happen, dear Lazarus, it will be because he knows it is the will of the Father. It were foolish to say, let us agonize no more about it. But let us try at least not to let *him* see us agonize about it. We shall be with him to-night at Simon’s. Do let us try to show him only our love for him, our belief, our faith, our trust.”

“Yes, Mary,” said Lazarus. “Now let us go home.”

II

Save for three of the men farm-servants standing by as watchmen, the house of Abiud was left to Mary. With all her women who were to help her in serving supper, and carrying dishes of food, Martha had gone an hour before to the house of Simon ben Tabbai. Lazarus had followed a little later.

As if for some rite demanding complete purification, Mary had bathed and changed into clean clothing to her skin. She dressed as scrupulously as ever she had done in her Magdala days, save for the kohl with which she then might have touched her eyelids and the red oxide she might have used then to tint her cheeks. It did not occur to her, as she looked in her mirror of polished metal, to arrange her head-veil and the set of her cloak on her shoulders, that she was beautiful. The face she saw reflected was merely that of Mary, a woman she knew, not at all worthy for the errand she had taken upon herself, but making herself outwardly as seemly for it as care would allow. But her humility of mind, the selflessness in which she went about her scrupulous tiring, together with the devotion in her purpose, gave her a serenity that had been absent from the thinned features for many a day. And she was, indeed, very beautiful.

With a little fold of metal which she had devised for the purpose, she snuffed out the light of all but one of the lamps by which she had dressed. Then she went over to a low table to pick up a towel, a washed comb, and the delicately wrought vase that held what was left of the precious attar given her years before by Felix Scaliger. She had already scraped away the sealing and loosened the stopper. She wrapped comb and vase in the towel, and holding the bundle to her breast she walked through the house to the kitchen. Two of the men on watch were sitting by the hearth.

“Micah!” she said to the younger one quietly. He sprang to his feet.

“Mistress Mary?”

“I am going to Simon ben Tabbai’s by the postern-gate. Will you come with me and rebar it when I have gone?”

“Yes, Mistress Mary. But hadn’t I better get a closed lamp and take you up to the house? There are a lot of people out from Jerusalem because of the Lord Jesus, and some of them may be bad characters.”

“No need for a lamp, Micah, The moon has risen. It is only a step or two, and I shall be safe enough. But thank you for the thought.”

The lad protested once again as he opened the gate for her.

“Look, Micah! Light shines from the house, and the path is clear. Don’t fear for me. I feel that nothing can harm me to-night.”

“Then go in peace, Mistress Mary!”

“The Lord bless you, Micah!”

There were fewer people about the house than their figures against its lighted apertures had from a distance suggested. In general they had come out of Bethany town. Remembering, perhaps, the generous charity that Mary had dispensed since her return to her home, the poor people outside the gates parted readily to let her pass, and the less indigent about the house itself made way for her more reluctantly only because they were intent to see what was going on inside.

The reception-room used for supper in Simon’s villa, unlike that in most houses of the locality not built to the Roman plan, instead of being an upper room was on the ground-level. It was a spacious chamber, so great in area that the floor above it had to be supported on great beams held up by many stout columns. Thus, with its middle oblong of pillars and surrounding ambulatory, it had the look of a Roman peristylum, save that what would have been the impluvium had no cistern and was ceilinged over. Light and air were provided by a range of arched openings with high sills in the long exterior wall. They gave an outlook to the south-east. In inclement weather heavy curtains of leather folded over each other on the inner side, and against robbery in the night outer shutters woven like heavy wattle were dropped into sockets and secured by hooks to interior metal rings. Neither of these devices was in use at the time of Mary’s arrival.

Mary made her way through the vestibule and past the opening to the supper-room into the servery and kitchen beyond. Martha, arranging dishes of sweetmeats on a long table, simply lifted her eyebrows in laborious surprise at her idle sister’s appearance, and went on with her work. Simon’s wife, Bilhah, held by stoutness and a crippled foot to a cushioned stool near the roasting-hearth, lifted her crutched stick, however, and summoned Mary to her with a smile. Mary went across and found a smaller stool.

“The Lord bless you, Bilhah!” Mary said, before seating herself at the older woman’s knee.

“And you in His Name, my dear. How beautiful you look!”

“Do I, Bilhah? I’m glad,” said Mary. “How is your foot? Did you ask the Lord Jesus about it?”

“I did. And he laughed at me. He said I was too fat.”

“Did he, now?”

“Yes, he did. Then he went down on his knees and took off my sandal. He asked me what did I think *would* happen, me making the foot of a small girl carry a mountain of a woman. He said it so funnily, he made me laugh.”

At the recollection Bilhah shook largely and wiped an eye.

“Yes, and then?”

“Oh, then he sent for some myrrh-balsam. While he was waiting he was holding my toes in one hand and passing the fingers of the other over my foot and ankle—oh, so soothingly——”

Mary found a mental picture of cunningly tender fingers exploring round a gathered tendon-end on the twitching shoulder of a patient ox, and caressing the adzed surface of a yoke.

“Looking at me, smiling,” she heard Bilhah go on, “until I dreamed I was falling into his eyes. When I looked down to see what he was doing to my foot he was rubbing the balsam into it. Then he wound a strip of linen round it and my ankle.”

“Yes?”

“He told me I was to pray every morning for three weeks that I wouldn’t put my weight on the foot, because the Lord—who liked people not to leave all the bother to Him—would scarcely cure my foot if I did.”

“If I were you,” said Mary, “I’d keep that foot up on a couch.”

“That’s what Jesus said. And so I do, so I do. I’m only sitting like this because I must watch supper being served, though nobody could ever do it nicer than Martha,” Bilhah replied. And she called across the kitchen, “It’s going nicely, isn’t it, Martha?”

“Very nicely, Bilhah. The fruits and sweets are in, and the meat dishes are out. Simon, I think, was just going to ask Jesus to bless the cup.”

“The servants can have their supper, then,” said the stout hostess. “After that, Martha, we’ll send everything that’s left out to the poor people at the gate, especially the leavened bread, every bit of it. I must have every crumb of leaven out of this house by noon to-morrow.”

“Our house is clean. Not a crumb left,” Martha said proudly, but turned to Mary with the familiar expression of worry: “I wish you’d talk to Lazarus, Mary. I couldn’t get him to look.”

“But you say yourself there isn’t a crumb left.”

“There isn’t. Zachary and I went over the whole house *and* the places in the steading where the men might eat.”

“Then I’m certain there isn’t a crumb anywhere, not enough to please the smallest mouse. So why worry?”

“Lazarus ought to look,” Martha said obstinately.

“Martha’s right, Mary. Lazarus ought to look,” Bilhah pronounced judicially. “He’s head of the house. Of course, it’s us women that really clean the house, but the man should search. Simon will.”

“Oh, very well, Martha,” said Mary without a sigh. “I’ll speak to Lazarus.”

She rose from the stool at Bilhah’s knee, and, clutching the bundle under her cloak, went swiftly through to the supper-room. If the other two women exchanged a glance with uplifted eyebrows, it was merely in passing. You never could tell whether Mary would go off at once to do what she said she’d do or just dawdle about until, as Martha put it, it came up her back.

The supper was set very much in the fashion of the Roman triclinium within the quadrangle of pillars. There were very few about the room of those importunate individuals—relatives to a remote degree and acquaintances who reckoned themselves privileged friends—who always got wind of such occasions. The extraordinarily kindly unwritten rules of hospitality observed among the Jews of the time, and more especially about Passover, while they stopped short of according such visitors positions in the formal seating, granted them what almost amounted to a right to find places or seats outside it. And to be passed savoury sops and morsels of meat or a mouthful of wine was considered neither humiliating to the receiver nor necessarily condescending in the giver.

A few of such informally present guests were seated variously at the table foot, and others were leaning on the pillars. The regular company was composed of Jesus and the Twelve, Lazarus, and two worthies of the neighbourhood, with, of course, the host, Simon. The U of the seating arrangement had its open end to the outer wall fenestrated in arches, and Mary at the room’s entrance looked over its left wing. Jesus was seated, like most of the others, with his feet tucked under him, in the place of honour at Simon’s right. Lazarus, for some reason—it looked as if to act as cup-bearer—had vacated his place on Jesus’s right and was standing behind his Master. As Mary moved from the entrance to the opening between two pillars he

looked across in surprise. Then he leaned forward and put a hand on Jesus's shoulder, and obviously whispered the word, "Mary!" And Jesus, half-absently putting his own hand up to touch Lazarus's affectionately, looked across at Mary. She felt the warmth that came into his eyes suffuse her.

Mary went round the pillared corner and stood behind Jesus. Simon looked up and said, "You are welcome, my daughter!"

"Peace be with you, Simon, and on your house!" said Mary. She took the vase out of the towel and showed it to him, taking out the stopper as she did so. He did not for a moment grasp her purpose, but the fragrance of the oil reached him and his face lit up with understanding, and he nodded. Lazarus, too, saw what she meant to do. He took the towel out of her hands, slipped back the cloak-hood which Jesus had apparently put over his head for blessing the wine, and placed the towel under the tress-ends of Jesus's hair and about his shoulders.

There was a hush in the room as Mary poured the oil on Jesus's head, and combed it into his hair. Then as the exquisite fragrance began to fill the room murmurs of wonderment arose. Simon, snuffing deeply, found tongue for his appreciation:

"Beautiful, beautiful! Many rare essences have passed through my hands in the way of trade, but never have I met with one so like to steal away my senses. From how many flowers, from what king's garden beyond Indus, and by what magician among perfumers was that loveliness extracted! Worthily done, my daughter—let me see the vase that held it."

Mary put the vase into his hands.

"O rarity! A lovely, lovely thing! But it must have cost you a pretty penny, Mary bath Abiud!"

There rose a babel of voices: "So rare a thing must have been worth a prince's ransom!" . . . "A basketful of shekels!" . . . "A basketful of staters . . . !"

Then through the babel there asserted itself the cold voice of Judas of Kerioth:

"It is a waste. I have seen this perfume vial in the hands of Mary bath Abiud before. I said then, and I say now, it could have been sold for as much as three hundred denarii."

"Talk of what you know, Judas," said Simon. "At three hundred denarii it would have been thrown away!"

“So much greater the waste,” returned Judas. “It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.”

“Ho, ho, ho!” came the deep voice of Simon Peter, its rough Galilean in rude contrast with the scrupulous diction of the bursar. “Thus speaks full-belly! Those rich meats we’ve eaten—saving your presence, host Simon—why weren’t they refused by us and given to the poor?”

Jesus gently put aside the towel with which Lazarus was wiping some errant gout of oil from his forehead, and turned to the company.

“How thoughtless you are!” he said to his disciples quietly. “Are you minded to put shame upon Mary, whose bread you have so often eaten? This, I say to you, is a lovely thing she has done to me. The poor you will always have by you, but myself you will not have by you always. This oil that Mary has kept—she has kept it to anoint me for burial.”

His hearers were gripped with a stillness like that of the dead. It seemed to Mary, behind him, that Jesus bent his gaze upon Judas, for Judas, from staring down at his clenched hands, was constrained to break from immobility into raising his head and looking into Jesus’s eyes. Mary was heartsore at hearing Jesus quietly give definition to the scarcely realized idea which had brought her there with her vase of oil. The anointing had been meant vaguely as a test, a test of her own fear, and more certainly as a symbol of his kingship. But, heartsore though she was, wrung by the thought that her deed somehow helped to make certain the dreaded thing impending, she yet could feel a pang of most exquisite pity for Judas, such wretchedness looked out of his eyes.

“And this I say to you,” Jesus went on, “wheresoever throughout the world the gospel is preached the memory of Mary here will be kept by the story told of her deed of love to-night.”

CHAPTER XVI

News from Gethsemane

LIGHT lingered in the upper city, that part of Jerusalem anciently named Zion, while the streets under the towers of the inner wall and beyond gathered the dusk. Already the fifth day of Passover-week was merging into the sixth.

In the house she had rented in the upper city for Anna, Mary sat at a projecting window which looked out over the roofs of Zion towards Hebron. It was by an effort of will that she remained where she was, still as if carved in coloured stone, for anxiety made her restless. From a room at the back of the house she could hear the low-kept voices of Chloe and Anna, and she was tempted either to call them to her or to go and join them. But she knew that if she did either it would not banish her disquiet. She would only pass it on to these two who loved her, increasing the unhappiness for herself that they already felt.

The nub of her anxiety was that she knew from Lazarus that Jesus was in the city. She had come early in the day that was passing to visit Anna and to go to the Temple. Indeed, she had gone to the Temple, only to find that Jesus had not appeared there during the morning. And it was not until late in the afternoon that Lazarus had come to her with word that Jesus, having sent two of his disciples before him to make the preparations, intended to break bread—the *Mazzoith*—with the full Twelve that night in Jerusalem. This to Mary seemed to invite, did the Annas-Caiaphas faction get wind of it, visitation by Temple cudgel-men under a Segen.

Thoughts evoked by the sunset and by Passover made a medley in her mind. She looked in at a window from the Bethany garden and saw ten-year-old Lazarus saying his prayer, heard his boy's voice: "Make us to lie down in peace, and raise us up again into life, O our King. Spread over us the tabernacle of Thy peace. . . ." And with this, as in fancy she saw the Twelve gathered together with Jesus, there mingled the Passover psalm: "Give thanks unto the Lord for he is good; his mercy endureth for ever. . . . I called upon the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me. . . . The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can men do unto me?"

And one stood beside her in the Bethany garden, a yoke-maker of Galilee, teaching her that prayer was neither an attitude nor a petition, but a spiritual condition inviting suffusion: “Do not pray with your mind. Let your spirit, contrite and humble, say only this: Our Father. And the Father, hearkening, will tell you what He desires to hear. . . .”

These and other phrases of old worship swirled and eddied in her mind. There lay on her lap a scroll of the Septuagint; she found it hard to tolerate its clumsy Greek, but copies of the books in Hebrew were hard to come by. It served as a reminder of sonorous passages heard in the old tongue in the rich deep voice of her father, Abiud. And she had been trying to read from Isaiah. She had come on a passage which would have made her, but for a remnant superstition which exaggerated reverence for ink and sheepskin, cast the scroll from her in an access of terror:

“. . . As many were astounded at Thee . . . so mistreated in aspect was He from the shape of men as not to look like a man. . . .”

Time and again she fought the horror down, cleared her mind of the jumbled swirl of phrases, and dragged herself out of the pit of despair to bid, as Yeshu had taught her, “her spirit stand alone and be still in its cleansed tabernacle.” But she could not reach the balming quiescence of absolute selflessness. Her whole being flooded back in anguished cry: “Not what I dread, O Merciful Father—not that!—not that!”

The stillness that she came to at the last was of simple exhaustion. The pictures and phrases that had swirled in her mind blurred, became a ribbon that she oddly seemed to pass, buckling it once and again, through her fingers. She noted idly a more purposeful footfall on the paving of the street below, different from the shuffle of the ordinary passer-by. A metallic whisper went with it, and she said to herself, “Great salvation bring over Israel, Thy people, for ever . . . *caligae* . . . the metal-shod boots of a soldier . . . his armour. . . .”

The footfalls stopped. She heard the murmur of voices, still idly, but awaked to the moment when the ringing footfalls and the accompanying metallic crisping told that the soldier was mounting the outside stone stairs to the house.

Then she knew. She hastened to the back-room, lit a resined sliver of wood at a lamp burning in a wall recess, and ran back to touch the wicks of the pendant cruses of a candelabrum. She had barely done so, the flames had not begun to feed from the cupped oil, and she was turning from quenching

the portfire in the ashes of a brazier when, in the room's semi-dark, Felix stood in the doorway.

That he had calculated effect, Mary doubted. It would not be like Felix. But she knew he had put on his best light armour, and the effect was magnificent.

He had shaved off the campaign beard, and Mary thought that he looked much more like the youth who had climbed over the wall in Bethany than he had appeared to her in Galilee. But the thought was fleeting. This was a man, mature, splendid in his strength, sure of himself, virile, dynamic, potentially formidable. And it came to her with a pang that though Israel was not wanting in well-grown men it could show very few capable of the hard self-discipline that made Felix Scaliger, like no small number of his kind, almost frighteningly answerable to his calling.

Mary let the lighted wicks of the lamps begin to draw their fuel before she moved from the brazier. Then, dusting a grain of resin off the portfire from her fingers, she stepped nearer her visitor.

“Felix!” she said quietly, without pretence of surprise.

He came farther into the room without a word, looked about him, and went to lay his helmet down on a work-table of Anna's. Then he came across the room to Mary, took her hand and, with a glance at what light there might be from the window and another at the pendant lamps, he turned her towards the latter. With her hand firmly but gently held between both his, he scanned her face.

“You are greatly changed, Mary,” he said. Then, half-angrily: “If I had seen you in the street, I don't believe I'd have recognized you. If this is what the doctrines of the Nazarene prophet can do to a beautiful woman the worst that can happen to the Nazarene will be too good for him!”

“The ‘worst that can happen’ to him? What do you mean, Felix?” Mary asked. Her anxiety, momentarily forgotten, came flooding back on her, redoubled. “If I am haggard, unlovely, the teaching of Jesus is not to blame, but the cruel and selfish men who are leagued against him. Tell me what you mean, Felix—you have heard something?”

“Officially, I know nothing. But rumours have reached me, and I have made inquiry. You know that the High Priest and the men supporting him in the Jewish council which acts in religious and non-military affairs—what do you call it?”

“The Sanhedrin!”

“The Sanhedrin, yes—you know the men I speak of are bitter enemies of the Nazarene?”

“I know it too well.”

“Take my word for it, they will stop at nothing to take your prophet and bring him to condemnation. In fear of public outcry, they will do all they can to hurry matters in secret. Remember, Mary, that the supposed misdemeanours of the Nazarene are a purely Jewish affair. But though no sedition is involved—I am certain of that; it is my business to know—Pilate’s hand may be forced by these Jewish leaders. The High Priest has lodged a request at the orderly-room of the Prætorium for three quaternions of auxiliaries to support Temple officers in effecting an arrest to-night.”

Mary caught her breath.

“That,” said Felix, “may mean your prophet. I do not know definitely, but I go by the rumours leaking from the High Priest’s quarters.”

“But if your soldiers are to be used,” Mary suggested with no real hope, “the arrest may be political.”

“The troops will be there to handle any disorder, that’s all. The High Priest’s request isn’t unusual. As for political—well, I’d know about that. It would be my affair.

“I haven’t much time, Mary,” Felix went on. “I have sought you out—never mind how—to say this: The cause you have been following is dead—or it will be dead with the condemnation of its leader. Why not now come with me to Rome? The uncle of whom I spoke to you in Magdala is dead. I am his heir. I shan’t be rich, but I shan’t have to live on my pay and an erratic allowance from my family. I return to Rome in a matter of days. I can say with just a nod to Fortuna that my future is much more secure. It is full of the promise of success. All that I offered you in Galilee still stands, and now much less at the mercy of chance. My uncle, who would have adopted you, is dead, true enough. But the Roman status that would make our marriage regular can still be secured for you. I know it. Come with me to Rome, Mary.”

She turned away from him, not in any revulsion, but because she was deeply stirred, unsure of herself. Felix misinterpreted the movement.

“No, no, Mary—wait! Don’t say no just yet!” he begged. “In the last few months I have tried to forget you. But it is impossible. I know beyond question that if I cannot have you for wife I can have no woman.”

In spite of her distress for him, and for herself, Mary found a smile.

“You may alter your mind about that, Felix.”

“Possibly. But I don’t think so. Since we parted in Galilee I have found that even the thought of lying with another woman is an adultery. I love you, Mary. What is more, I love you well—greatly. Give me your hand again!”

This she could not deny him. Again he took her hand in both of his.

“Months ago, I believe, but for this strange attachment to the Nazarene, you would have decided for myself and Rome, on love and happiness,” said Felix. “Why not now? I am certain that the Nazarene’s course is ended. What is there for you now, Mary? I love you. As I look at you, thin and worn as you have become, you are more beautiful than ever. You teach me of a loveliness that I had never perceived. It goes down to the bone. And if you were mere bone, I still would hunger for you——”

“I cannot let you go on, Felix,” Mary interrupted resolutely. “It hurts you, and it hurts me. It is true that once I might have come to you as you wish, but it would have been for unhappiness to us both. It would be for unhappiness only more certainly now. Because what I have become has been awaiting me, I can see, every moment of my consciousness. I cannot explain it to you, Felix, because to understand it you would need to be of my people and to have experienced what I have experienced. But it means again just what parted us in Galilee. My beliefs are my life. And I cannot, could not, live them with you in pagan Rome.”

“That is your last word, then, Mary?”

He dropped her hand and stood away from her. He did so, she saw, only by a great effort, for he seemed to shake, and beads of sweat glistened on his temples. And not out of pity, which would have been an affront, but because she knew that a love like his too rarely was given by man to woman, and because, indeed, she realized then that she loved Felix dearly, she was stricken with sorrow.

“Yes, Felix—I beg you not to be angry with me—but I can say nothing other.”

“I could curse the Nazarene—I could curse this god of yours that comes between us. But to what end? Loving you, I will not be angry. But you may believe I had never thought I could know such desolation.”

He turned about and went to pick up his helmet. He put it in the crook of his left arm and strode to the doorway. There he turned again, raised his

hand in the full Roman salute, and dropped it with a clash on his sword.

Next moment he was gone. She heard the crisping of his armour and the ring of his feet as he descended the stairway, the pause as he donned his helmet, and the ring and crisp beginning again in the street, only to die away.

II

The moon which had silvered the roofs and walls of Zion, terracing down beyond the window, was setting among clouds. It was well past midnight. Mary sat at the window from which she had scarcely moved since the going of Felix. In the room behind her Anna and Chloe had sought sleep together on a broad couch. The girl stirred uneasily, murmuring now and again in her slumber, as though the distresses communicated to her from Mary still disturbed her. For the gentle little Chloe was never held for long by any woes of her own, but was extremely sensitive of any distresses in those she loved, among whom—save maybe for Lazarus—Mary stood first.

A single lamp on the candelabrum lit the room feebly. A length of material from Anna's store was draped on a horse to keep the light from falling into the eyes of the sleepers, and Mary from where she sat could not see if Chloe's stirrings had brought her out of the cover in which she was wrapped. And Mary was about to rise and cross to the couch to assure herself, when her attention was drawn to a sound in the street below. It was the sound of running feet. She listened for a moment or two where she sat, then, as it became apparent that the runner had turned off the street and was swiftly mounting the stairs outside, she sprang from her seat.

Lazarus came through the doorway. Save for a loin-cloth, he was naked.

“Lazarus! What——?”

He put a hand on his heaving chest as if to still it, and took a deliberate deep breath through his nostrils to gasp:

“Mary! Jesus has been seized by the Temple guards—Judas has betrayed him!”

There were exclamations from Anna and Chloe, who, barely awake, were sitting up with their garments clutched to them.

“This isn't a dream, Lazarus?”

“No, no. I was there. In the Gethsemane garden. Judas went there with some of the Segens, and a gang of the Temple guards. There was also a number of those Syrian legionaries. I followed them. Judas went up to Jesus and kissed him. This was to show the head Segen—as if the man wouldn’t know—which was our Master. The cudgel-men laid hold of Jesus, and there was a scuffle. Simon Peter used a sword and sliced one of the Temple bullies on the side of his head. Jesus rebuked Peter and touched the wound so that it stopped bleeding. Then they took Jesus away. One of the Segens saw me, and took hold of me. But I had got up in a hurry to follow Judas, and had just wrapped a sheet about me. So I slipped out of the sheet and left the Segen holding that.”

“Judas!” said Anna. “Him with his cold voice and burning eyes—I always felt he was a bad man!”

“Unhappy Judas!” Mary replied. “He isn’t to be explained, Anna, by simply calling him a bad man. There is something here beyond us.

“Anna,” she broke off, “We must find a *chiton* and a cloak for Lazarus, somehow.”

“I have a tunic or two made as samples, and a cloak.”

“Meantime,” said Mary, “one of these covers to wrap him in.” Chloe seemed to have one in her hands without picking it up, so quick was she in putting it about Lazarus.

“You are heated, brother, and may take harm from chill. That’s it, Chloe,” Mary commended. “Now, Lazarus. Rest yourself and tell us about it from the beginning.”

She was much less calm than she outwardly appeared. But she had so long dreaded the arrest of Jesus that with the event itself a tension seemed to snap. It was beyond her power to render Jesus any help in a worldly sense, however earnestly she might pray. There was so much that seemed to indicate that Jesus himself had forced the situation, or at least courted its arising, that even her innermost protest appeared presumptuous.

She was on the mere fringes of a mystery far beyond her comprehension.

“The supper was meant just for the Twelve,” said Lazarus when he was seated with the three women about him. “That, anyhow, was what I thought, and though neither Jesus nor any of the others objected to my being there, I only acted as sewer with young John Mark, and kept myself pretty well out of sight. Something happened early on. Judas left the house. He must have gone straight either to Caiaphas or to Annas.

“Jesus spoke again of his death. He broke a cake of bread and blessed it and gave it to his disciples, and he said it stood for his body broken for us. Then he called me to fill the cup with wine. He blessed it, and made the eleven take of it. And he said it was his blood shed for us in the new covenant that remitted sins. He would never eat Passover again, he said, nor drink of wine any more until he did so with us in the Kingdom of the Father.

“Moving in and out of the room, I lost the thread of what Jesus was saying. I began to fall asleep on my feet. You see, knowing there was some idea of being overnight in Jerusalem, I had got up before dawn to see Abijah and the flocks and to talk with Kemuel about the barley. So I was tired. Young John Mark was yawning too, and Jesus told us to go and get some sleep. John Mark offered to share his bed with me. I took off my clothes and just wrapped a sheet about me. I could hear Jesus talking off and on for some time, and I’m sure they sang the *Pesach* hymn. Then they must all have gone—I suppose to Gethsemane—because, of course, there wasn’t anything like room for them all in the house.

“Some time later I woke up with a start. Judas was standing in the doorway of John Mark’s room looking at me. There was a murmur of many voices in the street below. Judas vanished without a word. I thought he had gone into the supper-room. I got up with the sheet about me and went through to see what he was doing. But he wasn’t there. I looked out of the window and saw him moving away with a crowd of Temple porters and about a dozen soldiers. They had lamps and pine-knots. I couldn’t take time to find my clothes—John Mark had moved them somewhere. All I could do was slip on my sandals and follow Judas as I was.

“I couldn’t believe Judas meant to do what he appeared to be doing. With all his impatience, I had so often seen him turn—when Jesus said or did something lovely—and look at the Master as if ready to fall at his feet. But there he was with the Segens, a gang of the cudgel-men, and a dozen Syrian auxiliaries. I wanted to run on ahead, get past them unseen, get to Olivet in front of them and warn Jesus. But the lie of the streets wouldn’t let me. I tried getting past by one side-street, but found myself in a warren of courtyards and little entries with stairs running up and down and all roads. I had to go back. It was no use trying to slip past them. The sheet I had round me showed up too much, and it would have been no better if I had shed it. Anyhow, by the time I caught sight of them again they were passing through the gate.

“Then,” Lazarus said miserably, “I made another mistake. I thought Jesus most likely had gone up the Mount to the place where I left him

yesterday, the place I came from to join you on the Bethany road, Mary. So when Judas and his company had got a little down the hill I took off the sheet and folded it, put it over my shoulder, girded myself, and really ran.

“I made a fairly wide loop to the south and got back to the regular path in front of them—if they’d been going up the Mount. But they weren’t. A turn in the path gave me a chance to look back, and it struck me that they were spread out—their lights, you see?—and anyhow bearing far too much to the north to be coming up behind me. Then I saw what was happening. They were searching the garden of Gethsemane. I could have wept. Maybe I couldn’t have slipped by them and into the garden first, but I could have tried. Maybe, maybe, maybe—if, if, if!” Lazarus reproached himself bitterly. “If I had only kept awake—if I had listened to what Jesus was saying—if I had followed Judas when he first went out——”

“A moment, Lazarus,” said Mary. “Think! When you turned on the path to Olivet and looked back, you could see the lights carried by the men with Judas quite distinctly?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Anyone in the valley could have seen them come downhill from the Jericho Gate?”

“Why, yes.”

“And so, anyone in Gethsemane?”

“Not so easily, because of the trees, but still—oh, Mary!”

“Yes, my dear, there it is,” Mary said sadly. “If you had contrived to warn Jesus, I don’t believe he would have acted on the warning.”

Lazarus pondered the matter for a moment or two.

“No,” he said finally. “Thinking it all over, I don’t believe he would.”

“To me it all has the appearance of having been appointed—foreseen,” said Mary. “It has all happened as Jesus meant it to happen, even to his betrayal by Judas, that pitifully wretched man. But tell us, Lazarus, what happened after you evaded the Temple guard?”

“I watched from a distance, from behind trees and walls, and followed alongside when they returned with Jesus to the city. They took him to the house of Annas. And I ran back here to tell you of it.”

“What of those who were with Jesus—the Twelve?”

Lazarus hung his head.

“Scattered. Like myself,” he muttered, “they ran away. Only Peter followed Jesus to the house of Annas. I saw him in the street in front of me, between myself and the crowd.”

Somewhere outside there was the noise of voices.

Mary crossed the room and looked from the window. Up the hill, at the end of the street where it branched from a more important thoroughfare, she saw the straggle-tail of a crowd go across, followed by a small body of troops marching in order. The figures gradually lost definition in light and shadow from the flicker of cressets already disappeared round the angle. Then Mary saw, in the last gleams of the torchlight, the outline of a man, big and bearded, with one hand on his breast and the other supporting himself by the walls, stumble bewilderedly after the procession.

Mary remained at the window for a minute or two after the stumbling figure had gone and darkness again possessed the streets.

In the room behind her were two people whose love of Jesus rested in, or sprang from, reasons embracing personal gratitude perhaps stronger than her own. The forgiveness Jesus had assured her of, cleansing her of the seven dæmons which held her in thrall, had restored her soul. But he had stepped between Anna and a cruel death, and he had called Lazarus from the grave itself. It was, then, more than likely that the dismay and grief felt by both were not less poignant or hard to bear than her own. It was manifestly true she had foreseen the tragedy now moving to its climax long before Lazarus, Anna, and the immediate following of Jesus, and the latter, in spite of Jesus’s own warnings, had foreseen it hardly at all. But here was no reason why she, Mary—as she had been doing—should assume that the dreadful thing impending affected her more than anyone, Jesus himself excepted. Lazarus, his gentle heart never petrified by any selfishnesses, and for all his intuitive grasp of ultimate meanings, would be in an agony of distress and bewilderment and sorrow far surpassing her own. And Anna, more phlegmatic if less comprehending, would yet be stricken.

Shall I *ever* learn humility? Mary asked herself.

She turned back into the room.

“I cannot think that the Sanhedrin will meet until after daybreak,” she suggested. “What we can do until then, or even then, except pray, I don’t know. That noise, Lazarus, came from the posse—I think taking Jesus away from the house of Annas.”

“Not just coming away, having left him there? You saw him?”

“No. But I’m sure I saw Simon Peter following after. I make the guess,” said Mary, “that they are taking Jesus either to the house of Caiaphas or to the Hall of the Assessors.”

“I’ll follow!” Lazarus exclaimed. “Anna, if I may borrow this cover? I’ll return it when I’ve got my own clothes from John Mark’s room.”

“But you’re tired, Lazarus,” Mary protested. “You should rest awhile.”

“I couldn’t! I must see what’s happening.”

“Then you must have something better to wear than that, Lazarus,” said Anna. “I can find you a tunic and a cloak. They won’t be as fine as I meant to give you.”

“I only need a tunic.”

“No, Lazarus. If you must go out, you must. But it will mean standing about, and you must keep warm. And, Lazarus,” said Mary, “you will remember, won’t you, that it will only add to our Master’s suffering if you let yourself fall into the hands of his enemies?”

Lazarus looked at her long and haggardly.

“I’ve been pretty careful of my own skin, haven’t I?” he said at last, with a bitterness unusual indeed. Chloe wailed suddenly, and Mary put an arm about her.

“You will continue to take care, I hope,” said Mary, “because it is your Master’s will. He did not call you from the grave just to have you throw your life away.”

“No. That, I think, is true. I’ll take care.”

Lazarus walked over and gently laid his cheek against Chloe’s for a moment. Then, taking the garments that Anna had found for him, he carried them into the inner room.

Presently he returned properly clad, and threw the cover back on the couch.

“Thank you, Anna!” he said.

He walked over to the house-door and with a hand on the jamb looked back with a faint and rather wan semblance of his old smile: “Don’t be afraid for me—anybody. I’ll take care. And I’ll come back and report to you, Mary.”

They heard the swift fall of his feet die away as he ran down the stairs, its reassertion and fade as he sped up the street.

“It will be hours before we hear anything,” Mary said to her companions. “You might as well lie down again.”

“Won’t you try to rest, Mary?” Anna asked gently. Mary shook her head.

And in a little she was back at her vigil by the window in the quiet house, her thoughts and the night sky for company.

III

When Anna awoke and looked across the room from the couch, the sky in the double oblong of window was grey behind the dark of the framing. The lamp that was screened from her bed threw but the feeblest glimmer. It did not serve to define the figure of Mary, and it was merely by the darkness of part of the latter’s draped head against the lightening grey that Anna could tell Mary was still sitting in the window recess.

Anna was moved by a great compassion. If she had not always loved Mary it had been because the Mary of Magdala days, far from inviting affection, had seemed hardly to look even for gratitude. Although Anna had then had many proofs of Mary’s careless generosity, she would never have called her kind. It was strange to realize that buried in the aloof, capricious, and self-centred woman of those days there had lain the present Mary—strange that in her whose cool amber gaze was so often disconcerting, in the woman who knew prices to a mite and was not to be cheated of a farthing, but who put high value on skilled work and artistic probity—strange that in the often forbidding creature then there had been hidden the gentle and considerate, though still quietly dominating, Mary whom the healing touch of Jesus had bidden arise from the cast shell of self.

“That’s a great woman,” Anna told herself. “Great even then, but greater now. The Lord knows my heart is sore for Jesus, but I don’t know enough about it all to feel as Mary does. Dear, loving soul that sees and understands so much—how she must be suffering!”

Anna rose from her bed and gently tucked the covers about the sleeping Chloe. Silently, for the figure in the window did not stir, she slipped into her sandals and went through into the inner room to lave herself with cold water and to rinse her mouth with an astringent infusion of herbs. She dressed

again and as silently went through to the other room, crossing to the window to lay her hand gently on Mary's shoulder.

Apart from raising her own hand to caress that of Anna, Mary did not move. And Anna stooped to kiss Mary on the cheek.

“Peace be upon you, Mary!”

“The Lord give you peace, dear Anna!”

“Won't you rest now, Mary?” Anna urged. “You must be bone-weary, sitting there all these long hours. Look!” she went on, unconsciously using the phrase of long tradition, “it is day at Hebron! The hour of sacrifice is come.”

Even as she spoke, there came a long blast of a horn from the Temple down hill to the east.

“The hour of the greatest of all sacrifices, I fear,” said Mary, “is yet to come!”

She rose to her feet, so unsteadily that Anna threw a supporting arm about her. For a moment or two they stood looking across the still, grey walls and roofs of Zion to where, tiny in the south, Hebron gleamed in the pale sunlight thrown from afar across the wastes of old Moab, the dark deep of the Salt Sea, and the tumbled asperities of Judea's wilderness.

“How still it is, Anna—as if this pulsing world held its breath and the heavenly host, drawing the stars back into the firmament, had fled the sight of the cruel evil men contemplate. But surely the Father of us all has not veiled His eyes?”

“Come and take some rest, Mary!”

“All night, Anna, I have tried to pray as Jesus taught me, stripping my spirit of self, asking only to know the Father's will. But no light has been given me; understanding is as far from me as ever. Is it because of rebellion in my heart—because I asked how He could countenance such cruelty?”

“Do not torture yourself with such thoughts, Mary dear. Take some rest,” urged Anna. “You are chilled and weary. Let me undress you to your shift so that you can slip in beside Chloe. Look how she lies, warm and snug as a doveling in its nest. How gladly would she give you of her warmth.”

“You tempt me indeed, Anna—but to be thoughtless,” Mary smiled. “But I can't steal poor Chloe's young warmth to take the chill out of my old bones. No,” she went on, “I cannot rest, Anna. I shall wash and have some

hot broth. Then you must leave the housework to me while you get along with your own.”

Anna was looking at her with raised eyebrows.

“Bless me, I had forgotten you were Galilean!” said Mary. “You do not, as in Judea, work up to noon on the eve of Passover?”

Anna shook her head.

“No cutting or sewing for me to-day, Mary. But we may tidy up the house together,” she conceded.

It was some time later that Mary, looking through the bundle she had brought from Bethany on the previous day, came upon the empty flask from which she had poured the last of the precious oil on the head of Jesus. She did not know upon what compulsion she had folded it in with her spare *tunica* and headgear. It had become, truly enough, the most prized of her possessions, but for that reason it had been safer maybe to leave it in her treasure-chest in Bethany. And her spare garments were perfumed enough.

Its strangely sweet but astringent fragrance still lingered about it. Filling her nostrils, it wafted her back to that moment in the house of Simon ben Tabbai, and she felt again the inward pang to hear: “She has kept it to anoint me for burial.”

Mary carefully wrapped the vase up again, and put away her bundle. She turned to find Anna watching her curiously.

“That vase will carry its perfume for many a year yet, Mary.”

“Yes, Anna. Do you go to market to-day?”

“I must. We shall need some more cakes of bread.”

“I would come with you, only Lazarus might return while I was absent. Will you, Anna, buy for me aloes and such other herbs and spices as are used for the entombment of the dead?”

Anna’s hands went to her mouth, and she looked at Mary as if both puzzled and in fear.

“For the entombment of the dead, Mary?”

“Why, yes,” said Mary emotionlessly. “You know we’ll be unable to buy them else until two days after this?”

IV

And then all her carefully fostered resolution broke down.

As the day warmed, several of the women who had followed Jesus out of Galilee came to Mary with their fears and anxieties. Among them was that other Mary, the wife of Alpheus (or Klôpas), the mother of three of the disciples. Salome, too, the eager and ambitious little wife of Zebedee, mother of the ‘sons of thunder.’ Another was the one woman whom Mary in Magdala had cared to call friend, Joanna, whose husband, Chuza, was a steward of the treasury of Herod Antipas.

Between the fears of the women for their scattered men-folk and their anxieties concerning Jesus there was a good deal of weeping and wailing, which Mary, in her own weariness and distress, found it exhausting to control. She could offer them no hopes or consolations they were at all likely to sustain themselves with, and she was incapable of feeding them with pious platitudes. The immediate truth, as she saw it, was too stark for their absorption. She shrank from reminding them, in their grief, of Jesus’s own predictions regarding his sufferings and death. In the end she contrived to make them all go out and watch events, keeping with her Joanna only.

It was as well that she did get rid of the weeping wives and mothers, for they had hardly gone when Anna returned with an apronful of herbs and spices, the significance of which could not have been hidden. Mary herself lost the courage she had summoned to meet the need of buying them. She broke down in bidding Anna bestow her burden in some close place out of sight, and sought what comfort she might in the ready arms of Joanna.

So Lazarus, bleak with fatigue and misery, arrived to find her. He reported that the Sanhedrin, reduced to an illegal number under Caiaphas’s presidency, had condemned Jesus to death on the grounds of blasphemy.

“They have bound him and taken him before Pontius Pilate,” Lazarus said huskily. “If Pilate confirms the sentence, it means—oh, Mary!”

His knees buckled under him, and Chloe shrieked as he fell crumpling to the floor. She was the first of the four women to reach him.

Mary gently put Chloe aside, and with the other two women carried Lazarus to the couch. She called up all she had ever read, or she had learned from Cleon, of medicine to examine her brother.

“It is not the sickness that—that he had before,” she said at last. “He has simply worn himself out. Let him lie as he is, Anna, and keep him warm.

Wrap a stone from the hearth in linen and put it at his feet. When he stirs let him sip a little of the older wine.”

She kissed Lazarus, and rose to her feet.

“I leave him in your care, Anna, and yours, Chloe, Joanna,” she said. “When he wakes beg him for love of me—of all of us—not to attempt any more to-day. I have something to try—a last resort.”

She hastened through to the inner room, and undid her little clothes bundle. She took from it the empty perfume vase, hid it under her cloak, and went right through to the house entrance in the other room.

“You are going out?” said Joanna. “Hadn’t Anna or I better come with you?”

“No, stay with Lazarus. What I’m going to do I must do alone. I am going to the Prætorium.”

CHAPTER XVII

An End a Beginning

MARY came by a main gate in the towered inner wall of the city to an entry from the Temple's western cloisters into the Court of the Gentiles. She swiftly passed through the crowds eddying there, making her way behind the Sanctuary to the gates under the colonnade of the north wall. Here she found difficulty, not because the crowds at this point were exceptional, but because an abnormal number of those individuals who have a preference for conferring in doorways had gathered to talk about what was happening in the open space beyond the Temple enclosure.

She balked at pushing past the knot tightly wedged in the first gate, and went on to find herself in no better case at the second. Here she had to take her courage in her hands and push past. The gate-stoppers wheeled narrowly to glare at her in the resentful manner of their kind, but, since she was determined, did grudgingly let her go through.

The open space in which Mary now found herself was practically the forecourt of the Antonia fortress, the Prætorium. It had something less than a third of the area of the total Temple enclosure, which was about a quarter of an English mile square. The Antonia main building, with its towers, stood in the north-west corner, and on the easterly flank of this was a raised platform. This, from the ornamental *tesseræ* with which it was floored, was called the Pavement (the *Gabbatha*, or *Lithostratos*, of St John), but the name by common usage extended to the whole forecourt.

The *Gabbatha* proper was semicircular in shape, colonnaded along its arc. In front of the colonnade, and following its shape, was a row of stone benches, parted in the middle by a more important marble seat with good space about it. The central and separate seat was occupied by the Procurator on such occasions as he sat with the Sanhedrin. They occupied the less ornamental, less elevated benches. The actual Judgment Hall of the Prætorium was in that projection of the fortress which flanked the Pavement on the west. It seldom, if ever, was entered by the members of the Sanhedrin, at least openly, for association with a Gentile under a roof entailed uncleanness, and this, even with purification, usually meant for

priest or orthodox Jew alike no participation in any sacrificial ceremonies or religious festivals for, normally, about a fortnight.

When Mary came into the forecourt she found it not nearly so crowded as she had expected. There was a considerable concentration of people about the steps which led up to the Pavement at the corner next the entrance to the Hall of Judgment, but for the rest they were gathered in thin knots from one end of the forecourt to the other. There was a noticeable absence from the crowd of the more responsible sort of citizen, though on the *Gabbatha* proper somewhere about thirty of the Sanhedrin sat and stood about in groups.

Mary threaded her way through the people knotted about the forecourt to a door at which guards were posted in the eastern wing of the Prætorium.

“Soldier,” she said to the first of the sentries. “I beg you to tell me—where might I find the commander, Felix Scaliger?”

The man stared at her foolishly, then woke up: “What’s that? Who?”

“The præfectus Scaliger—I wish to see him.”

The sentry was opening and shutting his mouth at her, dumbly, when the other, older man, on the far side of the door spoke out of the side of his lips:

“No use talking to him, lady—can’t tell a bee from a bull’s foot. It’s a waste o’ time tryin’ this door. Nobody inside can tell his *cubitus* from his *funda*—well, anyhow—quickest chance o’ findin’ the young commander is to go round the buildin’—orderly-room on the right goin’ down to the Damascus Gate.”

“Thank you, soldier!”

“Lady, you’re welcomer than a jugful o’ *posca*!”

At another time Mary might have smiled at being favourably compared with a jug of water and sour wine, but the quip came over her shoulders. She was already hastening towards the stone screen at the west end of the forecourt. Out of the corner of her eye she saw that some of the women who had been with her earlier were in an anxious huddle on the fringe of the crowd near the Judgment Hall. She saw, indeed, that Salome had marked her go by, and was drawing the attention of the other women to her passing. But she hastened on, the swifter to escape interruption.

Beyond the pillared screen she went down some steps into a crowded market. It was as thronged and as busy as she had ever seen it, as if the need to get buying and selling done before Passover custom stopped trading at

noon overbore the importance of what was happening in the Judgment Hall. She bumped her way through the lanes of stalls and, turning north, gradually came into the relative freedom of the street leading down to the Damascus Gate.

The barracks and other buildings attached to the Prætorium extended some distance down the slope, and there were several doors with soldiers around them. But she made her choice of an arched opening leading into a courtyard, just inside of which there was what appeared to be an office. Two sentries, again, were posted outside. She repeated her request to the nearest of them. He transferred his spear to his shield-hand the better to jerk his right thumb over shield and shoulder at the office entrance.

“Inquiries inside,” he said.

The grizzled centurion at the table looked up with a frown which lifted into a surprised stare.

“Well, what is it?”

“I wish to see the commander Felix Scaliger.”

“If you’d take that veil out of your mouth, woman, I could hear what you’re saying. *Who* is it you want to see?”

Mary threw her veil back over both shoulders.

“I wish to see the commander, Felix Scaliger,” she repeated distinctly.

The centurion still stared at her, searchingly, for a moment, then came to his feet.

“Your pardon, lady,” he said. “But I don’t know that seeing the commander this morning’s going to be so easy; he’s likely to be with the Procurator. And I don’t know that—is it something important?”

“Perhaps, centurion, we could let the commander judge of that for himself,” said Mary. “You could, I suppose, have a token conveyed to him?”

“A token?”

“This,” said Mary, and she brought the vase from under her cloak. The centurion stared at it, then held out his hand for it. He examined it incredulously.

“Jove!” he muttered. He looked up at Mary. “Now I know, lady, that you *do* know the commander.”

He turned to a youngster, an accensus, who stood at a desk bracketed from the office back wall.

“Here, Gerardus, take this straight to Commander Scaliger’s room. Ask his *apparitor* where he is. If the *apparitor* doesn’t know drag him out and make him find the commander. Don’t come back until you’ve seen this vase into Commander Scaliger’s hands. Wait—as you were!”

He turned again to Mary. “That’s what you want, lady? It’s enough—no need to send your name?”

“No need.”

“Good!” said the centurion, then to the lad: “Now run—and don’t drop that vase or I’ll flay you!”

The lad bolted, and the centurion stooped to draw a rough stool from under his table. He set it invitingly near Mary.

“Do be seated, lady. I’m sorry there’s nothing better to offer you, but we don’t often have ladies calling—at least,” he smiled, “not this side of the Prætorium.

“Eh, now, you’ll be wondering about that vase, belike?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Eight years or more it must be—that campaign into the mountains beyond the Two Rivers—Mes’pot’, you know—Parthia?”

“I know,” said Mary, “from reading.”

“Untidy business, the Parthians forever harrying our wings. Young Felix was only the makings of a soldier then—cavalry—aide to the wing-commander—but he came out of it with credit. And I myself, though an old enough soldier, hadn’t got my company yet. But you don’t want to hear about that. I found yon vase in a tent where some women had been—women belonging to some Persian prince, I should think. They take their women with them, the Persians.

“I had to turn the vase in, of course, and young Felix redeemed it. I could have wished, then, that I’d kept it and sold it on the side, because he paid a good penny or two for it into the kitty. But that might have meant trouble for me.”

He smelled his hands.

“Odd how the vase keeps the scent after so many years,” he remarked, and added, “that is, unless you kept it sealed until recently. And even then _____”

“I kept it sealed for seven years,” Mary answered the unasked question.

“You’ve known Commander Scaliger that long?”

He went on, the garrulous veteran, talking as much to himself as to Mary, about how well “young Felix had come on,” how gratifying it was to see the junior officers one had known fulfilling one’s prophecies about them—Felix being a mere pace off being promoted general—with digressions about his own campaigning experiences and the queer peoples he had fought against; they did say, if Mary would excuse him, that those Parthians—fought as bowmen, bareback, on swift little horses, did Mary know?—actually bred from their own mothers and sisters.

“Ah, yes,” he said. “That young Felix has turned out to be a first-class officer, and the troops know it—like him for it. Yes. He’s going far, that young man——”

He broke off, and looked alertly past Mary at the sound of quickly approaching feet in the courtyard. He stood up and saluted as Felix entered.

Mary also rose to face Felix, who took hold of her arm with one hand while balancing her perfume vase with the other. He looked from her to the vase, and from that to her again with a faint smile that struggled with a grim sort of perplexity.

“All right, Felix?” asked the centurion.

“Thank you, Miles,” replied Felix, scarcely removing his questioning gaze from the face of Mary. “Better than all right.”

He dropped his hold on Mary’s arm and put the vase into her hands, then took her by the other arm to lead her to the door.

“Come with me, Mary.”

Mary could only half turn to look at the centurion between her shoulder and Felix’s.

“Thank you, Centurion Miles!”

She barely saw the answering salute and smile before Felix hurried her out.

II

Felix turned from the window to which he had walked from her in anger. "If not to withdraw your refusal of me," he said coldly, "why have you come, Mary?"

"To ask you, Felix, as an honest man and a lover of the truth as you see it, to save one who is innocent of all guilt from a cruel and ignominious death."

"You mean, of course, the Nazarene?"

"Yes, Felix."

"You must know that what authority I have in Palestine is only military. It is, in any case, subject to that of the Procurator, Pontius Pilatus. The *jus gladii* is in his hands. Are you asking me to appeal to him?"

"Yes, Felix."

"On what grounds? The court of your own people, the Sanhedrin, has investigated the case of the Nazarene, and has reported to Pilate that he is deserving of death. This according to the laws of your own people. True, Pilate must—or ought—to judge the case on its own merits. But since he is not familiar with your laws—what Roman can be?—he is almost bound to accept the word of the native court, your own law-givers."

"Pilate ought to know, if he doesn't, that the meeting of the Sanhedrin which condemned Jesus was not properly constituted. Less than half its members were present. The rule requires that in capital cases it must be in plenary session, and a two-thirds majority alone can confirm sentence of death. Besides that," said Mary, "a trial cannot legally be held on the eve of Passover or any other festival."

She was finding it desperately difficult to keep her head. In the distance she could hear a louder crowd-murmur than was to be accounted for by any normal market or Temple activity. She feared that Jesus was already before Pilate, and already was being condemned.

"These are matters," she said steadily, "which ought to be told to Pilate. He is being foxed into countenancing an illegality."

"It is hard to fox a fox," said Felix. "You ask too much of me, Mary. You ask me to plead on behalf of the man whose influence has robbed me of you. I am not *persona grata* with Pontius Pilate since the news came of my

advancement. But if you will promise to come with me to Rome—to be my wife—I will intercede with Pilate for the Nazarene.”

“I cannot promise it. My religion, my beliefs forbid.”

“Religion! Beliefs! What are these? I am asking you to live, woman—to live!”

“My belief is my life. O Felix! I had such pride in your integrity; how can you let this thing happen?”

“Integrity! Talk to a famished man of integrity, and be laughed at! I had the thought when I left you last night to gather my baggage together and leave for Cæsarea with the dawn. I forced myself to say farewell to the hope of eight long years. Why I am here still—ah, it doesn’t matter. My hope was dead. Now you come, not to resurrect the hope, but to remind me of my eight years of bootless longing—ye gods, more like a puling schoolboy than a man!—to remind me of the pain of strangling my hope! More than that, to gain access to me, you send me as token the perfume flask that wakens all I ever felt for you! And to what end? To make this monstrous plea that I save for you the miserable cause of my deprivation!”

“Yes, Felix,” Mary said quietly. “I see it is impossible for you. Will you summon a servant to conduct me back to the gate-house?”

“Wait, Mary! Tell me this: How greatly do you love this Jesus?”

“Not after the flesh, Felix, as women love men or as you love me, but yet more dearly than my life.”

He pondered that, and suggested: “As one might love one’s father?”

“Oh, more dearly than that. I dearly loved my father, Abiud. I love his memory. But uncountable times more dearly do I love him you call the Nazarene.”

“If I saved him, would you marry him?”

For a moment Mary had no breath. Then she said, slowly:

“No, Felix. That’s impossible, not because I am so unworthy, but because marriage is not for the Lord Jesus.”

“The ‘Lord Jesus’?” he echoed, wondering. “He is not a man?”

“As much man as yourself, Felix. But—but God walks in him.”

“Your ‘One God’?”

“Yes, Felix.”

The Roman put both hands up to rub his face vigorously, squeezing the butts of his palms into his eyes. He dropped his hands slowly, and shook his head.

“I don’t understand this,” he muttered to the floor. “It’s beyond me.”

He peered at Mary, as if just recovering vision and sense.

“Listen! You say you love this—this man-god better than life. That means, doesn’t it, you would willingly die for him?”

“Willingly, if I might.”

“You say your beliefs are your life. They alone stand between you and marriage with me. That means—they alone stop me from saving Jesus. But you will not give up the life you have in your beliefs to save him. Why not?”

“Because,” said Mary, “those beliefs derive from *him*—from the beliefs, the truths, for which he is persecuted. If I depart from the faith he has taught me, can’t you see, Felix, that I become a traitor—worse, I join with those who would bring him to a cruel and ignominious death?”

He stared at her as if incredulously, and half turned away.

“I doubt if you understand just how cruel and ignominious,” he said through his teeth. And he muttered, “*Crudelissimum teterimumque supplicium!*”^[2]

^[2] The description is Cicero’s: “The cruellest and most disgusting of tortures.”

Himself now like a tortured man, panting, he glared at Mary from under lowered brows. And suddenly he strode to her, and gripped her wrist so fiercely as to draw from her a little moan. He slackened the grip, but did not release her.

“Even now it may be too late,” he said. “Come with me!”

III

She found herself, after traversing a warren of corridors, crossing courtyards, and going up and down a succession of stairways, in an arcaded stone chamber overlooking the Pavement at its eastern end. This was occupied by a number of men, soldiers and clerks, who leaned on the

balustrade, laughing. At the sound of Felix's workmanlike sandals they looked up and sprang to attention. Felix said nothing, but stood glaring at them until they slunk guiltily away.

The forecourt fronting the *Gabbatha* now seethed with people. Among them Mary saw so many men whom she identified as Boethusian cudgelmen and their Segens that she knew at once they had been specially mustered. They stood thickest against the parapet-wall of the platform. It was only along the steps at both ends of the platform that troops were lined to hold the crowd in check.

On the *Gabbatha* itself Pilate was seated in his procurator's throne, his bodyguard and lictors about him. Some distance off, and on the far side from Mary, Jesus stood away from the half-levelled spears of two soldiers. His hands were bound in front of him. The priests' bullies apparently had disordered his usually well-kempt hair and rent his *tunica*, enforcing the rule that accused should appear before the Sanhedrin in mourning. Bruises on his face told how he had been maltreated. He was, plainly, very weary and spent, but his serenity was absolute and his dignity unpretendingly firm.

Near him, and between him and Pilate, stood Caiaphas the High Priest, a tall and well-built man, stately, suave of manner, with the bland, clever look of the successful politician. He had an air of breeding in distinct contrast with the plebian cast of Pilate. The Procurator looked as brutal as his reputation held him, and his craftiness was as manifest in his face as his tetchy suspicion.

With Caiaphas were four or five men, priests or Sadducees. And it was obvious that, while this group kept an ostentatious distance from the Procurator, they had not the like fear of incurring uncleanness from the Jew they were urging Pilate to slay. That division had risen between Sadduceans and Pharisees was indicated by the fact that each sect was strictly gathered on the one side of the Governor's throne and on the other. And while the Sadduceans were all on their feet behind and about Caiaphas, the few Pharisees sat aloof and uneasy in their seats. Even now, between both sects, there was present much less than half of the full Sanhedrin of seventy. It did not matter whether the absent members appeared now or not. The case was in the hands of the Gentile authority. The illegal act had been committed. And, further to emphasize its irregularity, it had most apparently had its beginning before the lawful hour—the sixth of Roman timing, and the first of the Jewish. The day, even now, was hardly warmed.

In the depth of her distraction Mary was yet appalled by the transparent false pretence of formality, the blandly disguised cynicism regarding human rights, with which the Sadduceans were urging forward the murder plot.

Mary could not hear what Caiaphas was saying to Pilate, but, though the Procurator's head was turned away from her, she heard what he replied to the High Priest:

“That is all very special pleading, Sir Priest. But I have examined this man, I tell you, closely, and I find no fault in him at all.”

Caiaphas cast a glance towards the platform's edge, and there was an immediate yell of protest, thin at first, but taken up by the general crowd.

“There is a chance, a good chance, Mary,” Felix said in her ear. “Pilate is in doubt. A word or two from me would sway him. Give me the promise I want from you, and I'll go down and speak to him.”

“I cannot—O Father in Heaven—I cannot!”

A smaller and older man had stepped to the side of Caiaphas and was saying something about Jesus having stirred up the people from farther Galilee to Jerusalem itself. Mary could not hear him distinctly. Felix was talking to her:

“It is you who are condemning this Jesus whom you say you love.”

“Oh, no, Felix—no!”

“You are. Pilate, I can see, is suspicious of the Jews. He knows that somehow he is being foxed. A word would sway him. I have that word. Let me but give him a hint that the process is illegal, and he would fear what I might report of him in Rome. It is sure that I can save Jesus. And I will—for your promise.”

“O cruel, cruel Felix!”

“O cruel you! Cruel to me—cruel beyond thinking of to Jesus. Have you any conception at all of what you're condemning him to? You talk of a cruel and ignominious death. These are only words. Have you ever seen a crucifixion?” Mary could only fall back into a corner of the arcading, her hands over her face.

Below, there was indistinct gabble on the *Gabbatha*, shouting from the crowd—gabble, silence, shouts—gabble, silence, shouts. She became dimly aware, through the conflict that raged in her, that Pilate, according to a custom at Passover which released one prisoner, was offering to free Jesus.

But even as with belated comprehension hope sprang up in her heart, it was slain by the shouts below of: “Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!” Then as she said to herself that Pilate could never grant the release of Barabbas, an insurrectionary who had slain at least one man, a tax-gatherer, shrieks arose: “Crucify the Nazarene blasphemer! Crucify him!”

It seemed to her presently that she must have swooned on her feet, for it was through a great stillness, and as if from a distance, she heard Felix:

“Listen, Mary! There is still time.”

She brought her hands away from her tear-stricken face to look at him in a daze.

“What is it, Felix? Why have these wolves fallen silent?”

“Pilate has gone in.”

“And Jesus?”

“He has been given over to be scourged.”

“Oh, no—how can they—to Jesus?”

“Quickly, Mary, your promise! I can save him from that; I will save him from death.”

“I cannot—I must not.”

“To save his life—to save his life!”

“It would be to kill what is dearer than life to him.”

“O woman! The man’s back and breast are stripped for the metal-loaded thongs, and you talk still in riddles. What’s dearer to any man than life?”

She held on to consciousness, and said, “The truth he is ready to die for. In fear of death would you, a Roman, desert your ensigns?”

“I’d have to be crazed.”

The murmuring of the crowd, which had been rising again, suddenly hushed. Pilate had come out from the doorway behind his throne and had raised his hand. He said, “Again I have questioned this Jesus, and I have found nothing in him deserving of death.”

A snarling yell went up from the crowd. Mary clung to Felix, and he did not deny her the comfort of his arm.

“Remember that, ye Jews, when I bring your King out to you again. I have found no harm in the man,” said Pilate. There was another yell, and

with a shrug he turned and went back inside.

“I am steeped in shame,” Felix said. “My love is turned to shame. What is there now for you and me, Mary? As long as you live you must remember that you sent this man to his death on the cross. As long as I live I must remember that I did not save him.”

“Then you relent?”

“I cannot relent. Shame though it is, I must cling to the narrow chance. Why don’t you relent?” Felix said wearily. “Why can’t you give your life to me for his—and live?”

“I have told you, Felix. My life is not mine to give. It is given to Him. Living, I should be dead. I should die to all Jesus means and suffers for. My soul would die.”

“Now, by Hercules!”

The oath was checked by the reappearance of Pilate. He came striding out of the colonnade, passed by the side of his throne, swinging in well away from where Caiaphas and the Sadducees were gathered. He looked at them, and at the crowd below. Then he threw his hand in a wide gesture to the colonnade.

“Behold the Man!”

Jesus, supported by his two guards, tottered out of the colonnade and passed the throne. He came erect, moved his arms, and the guards fell away from him.

A yell went up again from the Segen-led portions of the crowd: “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

“Oh!” Mary moaned. “His poor face is bloody!”

“I blame myself,” Felix said hoarsely. “They have crowned him with thorns. That robe is to mock him. But what do barbarian auxiliaries know better. I blame myself. But, Mary, I blame you.”

“No.”

“Look with what still dignity he bears himself!”

“I cannot look.”

“I have seen men face death bravely, but I have seen none face such a death with courage like that. He is not strongly made,” muttered Felix. “I could break him with my two hands. But I would I were such a man!”

“Tell me, you,” he said to Mary brutally. “They say he brought your brother Lazarus from the grave, back from death. Is it true?”

“It is true.”

“Then why does he not use his power, this man-god? Why doesn’t he save himself?”

“Felix, I do not know.”

“Could he?”

“If he so willed it, yes.”

“Then why doesn’t he so will it? To die the death of a felon!”

And it happened that Mary, realizing the question was one she had too long been forgetting to consider, looked down directly at Jesus. Almost as if he had felt her anguish, he turned his head a little and looked up.

In the warmth she believed she saw come into his eyes with recognition of her she was given a glimpse of the answer.

IV

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. . . . Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.

She was aghast to find where distress had led her. There had been more than one moment when she had been on the edge of saying to Felix: “Yes, yes, I give you my promise: save him, and I will come with you to Rome.” She had said to herself: “What do my beliefs matter if Jesus dies? What will be their value to me if he is gone? And, after all, what is the belief that prevents me from marrying Felix but the exaggeration of the Law against which I rebelled long ago—which, indeed, the teaching of Jesus has abrogated. Why should I not love the Lord my God with all my heart and with all my mind, even if married to a Gentile?” And again: “What I should care what happens to me if Jesus dies?” Then: “What have I to look forward to? As women love men I love Felix. I have carried fear in my heart ever since I saw that the entrenched interests of Judaism could not accept Jesus. I am weary of anxiety and fear. I want to escape from it.”

But all that, she now saw, was that dilution of duty to the Father, that diverging from the mundanely inconvenient way of faith, precisely for exposing which Jesus was to suffer and die.

Losing faith, she had been presumptuous. It was hard to understand why Jesus, the guiltless, the loving, should have to suffer and die in so dreadful a way. It raised a doubt as to the Mercy of the Everlasting, questioned if there existed such a Being as the Loving Father, since a deed so cruel, so unjust, so horrifying appeared to be countenanced. How could this dreadful thing be the Will of the Father?

But to doubt its being the Will of the Father was to doubt Jesus himself. Through his unique understanding of the Will of the Father he had proved himself the Son. Since, therefore, he had made no effort to escape the toils spun by his enemies, but had even invited the worst they could do to him, it was plain that he was accepting his lot of suffering and death as the Father's Will. And since, again, she believed that Jesus was the Son of God, the Anointed of the Lord, the Messiah, it was presumption in her to think of saving his life through Felix Scaliger. She aligned herself with those unbelievers who needed a sign. Jesus could accept one thing only, apart from Heavenly intervention, to save him from the cross. It was that his persecutors should repent and believe in him.

V

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin. . . .

“What is the matter, Mary? What has happened to you?”

Felix turned her to him, unresisting, to look into her rapt face.

“The suffering Servant of the Lord,” she murmured.

“What are you saying? It is not too late to save him even now.”

Below them a Nubian boy came to Pilate with a basin of water. Pilate laved his hands, shook them, and held them up wet before the crowd.

“Look, ye Jews!” he cried in the hush. “I wash my hands of this, for I find no guilt in the Man. Your laws condemn him, not mine!” And he turned to Caiaphas: “How say you, Caiaphas, High Priest of the Jews? His blood is on your head.”

“His blood be on us and on our children, O Pilate!”

“On us and our children!” the crowd echoed. “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate held still for a moment, then: “So be it!” he said. He turned to a centurion, and pointed at Jesus. “Take him away! And release to them Barabbas!”

A scream went up from the crowd. But it was not all bloodthirstiness. Beneath it there was groaning, a wailing.

Pilate stared down at the forecourt doubtfully, rubbing his chin. Then without a look at Jesus, Caiaphas, or the Sadduceans, went right across the Pavement and into the Judgment Hall. The guards closed in on Jesus, turned him about. They led him up to the colonnade where a double file of auxiliaries, opening out and turning on the centurion’s command, also closed in on him.

They marched him into the building by the dark doorway behind Pilate’s throne.

With difficulty Mary found voice enough to ask, timidly:

“What will they do now, Felix?”

Because he found no less difficulty in speaking, Felix answered bluntly:

“They will take him out by that courtyard where I came for you—see, the people know it, and are already swarming through the market!

“He will be made to carry the *patibulum*—the transom of his own cross—down by the Damascus Gate to the execution mound. And there they will nail his outstretched hands to it, lashing them with cords lest his weight tear the nails through the flesh when they hoist him up. Oh, he will have company,” Felix said bitterly, “two miscreants already condemned to die in the same way!”

He gently removed Mary’s hands from her face, and held them to his breast.

“There is still time, Mary,” he said earnestly, persuasively. “I will make Pilate recant. The centurion commanding these Syrian auxiliaries is an old comrade—a decent soldier who hates such work. He will obey me. If need be I will risk my whole future—death, it might be—by countermanding Pilate’s fiat and appealing to Vitellius, or even to Cæsar. I need you so much, Mary. Give me your word.”

“I cannot give it, Felix. Now less than ever,” she said quietly. Then almost desperately: “If I could only make you understand! If Jesus did not believe, did not *know* it to be the Will of the Father that he should suffer and die there would be no need for you or anyone to rescue him. He would rescue himself. His Father in Heaven would rescue him.”

“That sounds to me like mere raving. What do you mean?”

“Ever since he began to teach, these cruel men, blinded by self-interest, have asked him for a sign.”

“A sign?”

“Some wonder that would prove to their besotted minds that he was Heaven-sent. And never, never, with all his power, has Jesus worked a wonder save for pity’s sake. He has lived his teaching—proof enough for those who had ears to hear and eyes to see. And shall he now tempt God, even in his human extremity, by making magic for their sake?”

She pointed down to the *Gabbatha* where Caiaphas and others still stood in talk over a paper held out to them, from a distance, by an *apparitor*.

“You talk like one possessed,” said Felix.

“I *am* possessed—possessed with new understanding,” Mary replied with conviction. “At last I know my Lord and King. Master of life and death, he chooses death rather than yield to the masked powers of evil. Felix, truly, this is the Son of God.”

“Yet he goes to his death?”

“O blind that you are—can’t you see? Here is such a victory as Rome, with all her conquests, never knew.”

“Victory?” Felix repeated, quite bewildered. “What victory?”

“Victory over death. He has vanquished death in choosing it.”

Felix made a gesture of despair.

“It is too hard for me, Mary. I just do not understand it.”

He half turned away from her, but came back.

“Do you mean that now, if I said I would deliver Jesus, asking nothing of you, that you would not wish me to?”

“You could not deliver him, Felix, if he did not will it.”

“Then, your coming to me—all this struggle between us, all your self-torture—should never have been? It has been to no purpose?”

“You must forgive me, Felix. Even now I only dimly understand what is happening. I came to you distraught.”

“I am too bereft not to feel bitter,” Felix answered gently. “But I do perceive, Mary, that you are held and led by a power that neither yourself nor my love for you can break. I shall say to you now only that you are the woman of my life, that you have done nothing you need beg me to forgive. This is Fate. I accept it. What shall I do for you now?”

She held out her hand to him.

“Lead me, if you can, to some quiet postern whence I may follow him.”

VI

He led her, by devious ways she had not known existed, to an outpost on the north wall of the city from which steps went this way and that down to the inside of the Damascus Gate. The one sentry there saluted and left them to themselves in a stone recess. From it they could look over the wall to Golgotha.

On the mound two crosses showed darkly against the purpled hills beyond that seemed to hold up the livid and sullen sky. About the base of the mound a murmuring crowd swarmed ant-like, with a thinning stream even more ant-like trickling into its dark mass. On the mound's top a few figures, crouching, worked busily, brazen gleams seeming to pass from one to the other. Vivid, the red cloak of the centurion stood out against the sombre background.

As they watched, those two, from the wall, the crowd approaching and about the mound stilled and became silent. Between the two crosses already upright a third rose jerkily, and jolted to erectness. A moment later the thud of its settling into its rocky socket came across the intervening space, to be followed by the noise of wedges hammered.

“Is it——” Mary spoke through the fingers of her two hands.

“Aye, Mary!” Felix sighed. “It is done. Your Jews have done to death a righteous and brave man. This is the end.”

“No, Felix. It is not the end. And my people have no more done him to death than did the Greeks Socrates, or the Romans Caius Julius Cæsar.”

“Your people rejected him.”

“The mass of them were given no chance to accept him. Others rejected him in ignorance, led astray by fantastic promises. No, Felix. The guilt lies at the door of evil in power, self-interest, masking as integrity—a handful of wicked men. A dreadful thing, Felix, for they deem themselves honest.”

“No doubt,” said Felix. “Men in power everywhere do dreadful things only to keep power, just as men out of power do dreadful things to gain it, both counting themselves virtuous.”

Silence fell between them awhile. Then Felix, seeing her look towards Golgotha with a new access of pain, said gently:

“Be comforted, Mary. It cannot last long for him.”

She turned to him quickly, as if he had attempted comfort too coolly.

“Report, then, lies,” she said, sharp with distress. “They say men linger for many hours.”

“Strong men may. But Jesus was greatly spent. Courage alone held him up. That frame will not long endure. The end for him will come quickly.”

He looked about him.

“The day is full of omen,” he said. “There is no cloud to veil the face of the sun, yet it is veiled. One may look at it with the unshielded eye. And listen—all sound has stopped!”

It was true. The sighing murmur of the crowd was hushed, and from behind them in the city nothing disturbed the silence.

They stood a little apart, listening almost anxiously, as if for the last beats of a dying heart.

And suddenly, close at hand, the blowing of trumpet made them both start. Mary threw out a hand in apprehension and Felix caught it. He took it to his breast in both his, while she stood at arm’s length looking at him in fear.

“It is the tenth hour. They are mustering the new guard,” he explained. And while still searching her face with his gaze he went on more to himself: “Yes. He was righteous and gentle. I remember him that day in Magdala—the truth looked out of him. He could be all you think him. This day of omen

—the hush and murmur, the darkness of the sun. Is the world dying, Mary,” he asked, “because he is dying?”

“I feel that it is the world as we knew it, Felix, that is dying. But he told his disciples he would rise from death. And a new world will rise with him—a world redeemed.”

Mary would have moved away, but Felix still held her. Then, at the sound of approaching feet, he let her go. His *apparitor* came to the opening of the wall-bay, and saluted.

“Your escort is mustered, Commander. The baggage-train is ready to move.”

“Thank you, Ennius! I am coming.”

The *apparitor* saluted and went away. Felix returned the salute perfunctorily, and in a continuing motion of the dropping hand placed it under her forearm. They went some length of the wall platform, and down the steps to the inside of the Damascus Gate. There they faced each other.

“This is farewell, Mary. I shall pray that we do not meet again, as long, at least, as you are of the same mind.”

“Then it is for ever, Felix.”

“Stubborn!” he smiled. Then, serious-faced: “And now, my poor woman, whither will you go? What will you do?”

“I must follow him, Felix. There will be a woman’s work to do.”

Felix looked at her awhile, as if he saw a Mary he had never known. His hand rose to the salute, but fell before it was accomplished. He turned and went up the hill, taking with him the metallic small clatter with which she had always associated him. For a moment or two she watched his going.

Then, with a lift of her head, she turned and passed through the Gate into the empty road down to Golgotha.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *A Certain Woman (Mary called Magdalen)* by Victor Thom
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