

CHAPTER XIII

THE SHAME OF PHARAOH

WHEN Pharaoh and his daughter had gone, though I did not see them go, I bade farewell to Philo, thanking him much and, in reward for all he had done, calling down on him the blessing of the goddess which he received upon his bended knees. Moreover, when he had risen from them he swore himself to my service, saying that while he lived he would come even from the ends of the earth to do my will. Also he showed me how I might call him by certain secret ways.

So we bade farewell for a while, nor did I let him go empty-handed, since from those jewels that Tenes had heaped upon me, which almost by accident I had preserved in my flight, I took certain of great value and gave them to him as a gift from the goddess. Thus we parted though, as both of us were sure, not for the last time.

So soon as our coming was known the priests and priestesses of Isis flocked to the quay in solemn procession to receive Noot, their high-priest, and me their high-priestess, which they did with sacred ceremony and holy chants. By them we were escorted through the streets of Memphis to the temple of Isis accompanied by many of the crew of the *Hapi* that were of our brotherhood. Among them I missed one.

"Where is the priest Kallikrates?" I asked of Noot.

He smiled and answered,

"I think that he has been taken to the palace of Pharaoh to be nursed until he recovers from his wounds. Perchance for a while he is minded, or it is decreed that he should continue to play a warrior's part. Yet fear not, Daughter; those upon whose brow Isis has laid her hands, in life or death must return to her at last. They are hawks upon a string which, though it stretches, cannot be broken."

"Aye," I answered, "in life or death," and asked no more of this Kallikrates.

In the midst of the rejoicings of the city at our safe return, we came to the temple and made sacrifice. There it was that I set the jewels of Tenes, all save those that I had given to Philo, upon the alabaster statue of the goddess in her inmost shrine that only I and Noot might enter, and there too by signs and wonders she signified to me her acceptance of the offering. For here while we stood alone before the effigy of the goddess in that holy place, a trance fell upon Noot and in his trance he spoke to me with the voice of Isis and out of her infinite heart. This was the divine message that came to me through the lips of Noot:

"Daughter, I, thy mother, know of all that thou hast passed and of all that thou must pass. Though the barbarian come and the gods of Egypt are thrown down and ruin smites the land and thou seemest to be left alone, abide thou here till my word bids thee to depart. By myself and That of which under the name of Isis I am a minister, I swear that no harm shall befall thee or that place where thou art, or those of my servants who remain with thee. Therefore await my commands with patience, doing such things as I inspire thee to

do, that thou mayest bring the vengeance of the gods upon those dogs who desecrate their shrines."

Thus spoke Noot in his trance, not knowing what he had said until I told him afterward. He listened earnestly and bade me obey.

"Even if I be taken from you for a while, as it comes to me will happen—perchance I learned it in my swoon, Daughter—and you are left unfriended and alone, still I pray you to obey. If so, think not that I am dead, who do but return to my own place and land, but wait until my message comes. Then obey that also though I know not what it will be."

Thus he spoke solemnly and I bowed my head and hid his words within my heart——

The war began, Egypt's last war for life. Nectanebes the Pharaoh, inspired by his evil Dæmon, thrust aside his captains and declared himself General in Chief of his armies, he who had scarce the wit or the courage to command the guard of a harem. At first that Dæmon served him well, since at Barathra, as the gulfs are named which make the Sirbonian bog, the Persians were trapped and lost many thousands of their men who sank through the sand into the marshes and there were drowned or speared. But their numbers were uncountable and the rest came on. Pelusium was besieged and for a while held its own against the giant Nicostratus of Argos, a man as strong as Hercules who, like Hercules, clothed himself in a lion's skin and for a weapon bore a great club. The Grecian captain, Kleinios of Cos, he who had been present at the feast when I was given over to Tenes and whom in my vision at that feast I had seen dead, lying upon a heap of slain, attacked Nicostratus and after a mighty fight was defeated, Kleinios and

five thousand men of those who were with him being slain. Thus was my vision fulfilled.

Then his Dæmon departed from Nectanebes taking his heart with him, for of a sudden Pharaoh ceased to be a man and, becoming a coward, fled back to Memphis, leaving his fleet, his cities, and their garrisons to their fate.

Rumour ran fast; it told of the fall of city after city, some stormed, some bribed to surrender; it told that Ochus had sworn to burn Memphis and after it Thebes; also to seize Nectanebes and roast him living upon the altar in the great temple of Ptah here at Memphis, or otherwise to make him fight with the bull Apis after the beast had been driven mad by fiery darts. It told that the Egyptians, enraged at the desertion of their armies by Pharaoh, would themselves seize him and give him up to Ochus as a peace-offering. Crowds gathered and rushed through the streets of Memphis calling imprecations on his name, or clustered like bees round the altars of the gods, praying for help in their despair, yes, round the neglected altars of the gods of Egypt.

Then of a sudden came Amenartas, flying to the temple of Isis for sanctuary, since it was reported that Ochus had said that the shrines of Isis he would spare alone, because she was the Mother of all things and her throne was in the moon and her husband was Osiris-Ra who was the Father of fire which he worshipped; also because a certain priestess of the goddess had done him great service in the war, words that caused me to wonder.

So this royal princess came and put on the veil of a novice that it might protect her should Ochus take the city. But though this veil changed her face and form to the eyes of men, her heart it did not change.

A little later came Kallikrates from the war in the Delta where I learned he had done great things, fighting bravely. Indeed he told me himself that he had fought the giant Nicostratus in single combat and wounded him, though the matter was not pressed to an end, since others rushed up and separated them. He said that he was a very terrible man and that when that huge club of his wavered above him, for the first time in his life he felt afraid. Notwithstanding he ran in beneath the club and stabbed Nicostratus in the shoulder.

Thus it happened that all being lost in war and his service at an end, Kallikrates the captain once more became Kallikrates the priest and again put on the robes of Isis. Therefore in that temple, serving together before its altars were Amenartas, Princess of Egypt, and Kallikrates, priest of Isis.

Often I, Ayesha, seated in my chair of state as first of that holy company, save the aged Noot alone, watched them from beneath my veil while they anointed the statue of the goddess or joined in the sacred chants and hymns of praise. As I watched I noted this—that always they drew near together as though some strength compelled them; that always their glances thrown from the corners of their eyes, met and turned away and met again, and that always, if occasion served, the robe of the one brushed the robe of the other, or the hand of the one touched the hand of the other. These things I noted in silence, wondering what judgment the goddess would call down upon this beautiful pair who dared thus to violate her sanctuary with their earthly passion. Oh! much I wondered, though little did I guess what it would be and by whose hand it was destined to fall upon them.

Lastly came Nectanebes himself, his great eyes

full of terror and his fat frame wasted with woe and sleeplessness. He sought audience of me.

"O Prophetess," he said, "all is lost! Ochus Artaxerxes has his foot upon my neck. I fly, seeking shelter beneath the wings of Isis, seeking shelter from you, O Isis-come-to-earth. Help me, Daughter divine, for my Dæmon has deserted me, or if he comes at all it is but to jibber and to mock."

"Strange words from Pharaoh," I answered in a voice of scorn, "very strange words from Pharaoh who gave this same prophetess to be the woman of a vile, Baal-serving king; from Pharaoh who has deserted his army, his country, and his gods, and now seeks only to save his treasure and his life."

"Reproach me not," he moaned, "Fate has been too strong for me, as perchance one day it may be too strong for you also. At first all went well. In the bygone years I conquered the Persian; I built temples to the gods. Then of a sudden Fortune hid her face and now—and now!"

"Aye, O fallen Pharaoh," I answered, "and why did Fortune hide her face? I will tell it, to whom it has been revealed. It was because although you built temples to the gods, you were false to the gods. In secret, following the counsel of that Dæmon of yours, you made bloody sacrifice to devils, to Baal, to Ashtoreth, and to Aphrodite of the Greeks. Nay, do not start and deny, for I know all. Lastly, to crown your crimes, you gave me, the high-prophetess of Isis, to the base, red-handed Tenes, one who offered his own son to idols. What has chanced to Tenes who took me, and say, what shall chance to him who sold me, O Nectanebes no more a Pharaoh?"

Now I thought that surely he would kill me and cared not if he did. For my heart was sore—oh!

because of many things my heart was sore. But like a beaten cur he only cowered at my feet, praying me to pardon him, praying me to cease from beating him with my tongue, praying me to counsel him. I listened and pity took hold of me, who was ever tender-minded though a lover of justice and a hater of traitors.

"Hearken," I said at last. "If Ochus finds you here, O fallen Pharaoh, first he will make a mock of you and then he will torture you to death. I have heard what he will do. He will bring you to his judgment seat and lay you bound upon your back and grind his sandals upon your face. Then he will force you to sacrifice to the fire that he worships and one by one to spit upon the effigies of the gods of Egypt. Lastly, either he will cause the holy bull Apis to gore you to death, or he will bind you upon the altar in the temple of Ptah and there slowly with torments bring you to your end."

Now when Nectanebes heard these things, he wept and I thought that he would swoon away.

"Hearken," I said again, "I will show you a road whereby although defeated and disgraced you may yet win glory that shall be told of from age to age. Summon the people while there is yet time. Go to the temple of Ammon, King of the gods of Egypt. Stand before the shrine of Ammon and make confession of your sins in the ears of all. Then, there in the sight of all, slay yourself, praying Ammon and all the gods to accept your life as an offering and to spare Egypt and the people upon whose head you, the hated of the gods, have brought all these woes. So can you cause the Persian and the world to marvel and say that though accursed, still you were great, and so perchance you shall turn away the wrath of heaven from apostate Egypt."

A flash of pride shone in his eyes that had been empty of light and filled with tears. He lifted his head stiffly as though still it felt the weight of the great earrings of state, the golden uræus, and the double crown. For a moment he looked as once he had done at Sais reviewing his triumphant army after his first victory over the Persians and drinking in the incense of its shouts, yes, he looked as great Thotmes and the proud Rameses might have done in their day, a Pharaoh, the king of all the world he knew.

"It would be well to die thus," he murmured, "it would be very well, and then, perhaps, the gods I have betrayed would forgive me, the old, old gods to whom thirty dynasties of recorded kings have bowed the knee, and those who went before them for unnumbered generations. Yes, then perhaps that great company of Pharaohs would not turn their backs on me or spit at me when I join them at the table of Osiris. But, Prophetess"—here his face fell in again and his crab-like eyes projected and rolled, while his voice sank to a whisper, "Prophetess, *I dare not.*"

"Why, Nectanebes?"

"Because—oh! because years ago I struck a bargain with a certain Power of the Under-world, a daemon if you will, at least some spirit of evil that comes I know not whence and dwells I know not where, which became manifest to me. It promised me glory and success if I would sacrifice to it—nay, I will not tell what I sacrificed, but once I had a son, yes, like Tenes I had a son——"

Here I, Ayesha, shivered, then motioned to him to speak on.

"This was the bargain, that though to please the people I might build temples to the gods, by certain

means I must defile them in their shrines. Aye, and I did defile them, and when the priest dressed me, the Pharaoh, in the trappings of those gods according to custom, by thought and word and deed I blasphemed them. Yet one divinity remained outside the pact because my Dæmon warned me that she was too strong for him and must not be offended," and he paused.

"Was she perchance named Isis?" I asked.

"Aye, Prophetess, she was named Isis and therefore I never polluted her shrine and therefore to her alone in my heart I offered prayer. So all went well and I gathered great armies and vast wealth, I hired Greeks by thousands to fight for me, I made alliances with many kings and was sure that again I should defeat the Persians and be the master of the world. Then came the evil hour of that accursed feast at which you, the Mouth of Isis, were summoned to prophesy and, moved by some madness, you unveiled your beauty before Tenes, and I, forgetting whose minister you were, gave you to Tenes, thereby outraging Isis in your person."

"Did I not warn you, Nectanebes, and did not the holy Noot warn you?"

"Aye, you warned me, but in my need I took the risk, or I forgot. From that moment all went ill and ruin, like a giant before whom none may stand, has hunted me by night and day."

"Yes, Nectanebes, and Isis is the name of that giant."

"I made error upon error," he went on. "I trusted to Tenes and Tenes betrayed me. My Dæmon counselled me to thrust aside the Grecian generals and take command of the armies, and at first there was victory, then came defeat. It might

have been retrieved, but of a sudden my courage failed me. It fell like a temple of which the foundations have been washed out by hidden waters. It crashed down; in a moment its proud pylons, its tall columns, its massive, honourable walls blazoned with the records of glorious deeds, fell to a shapeless heap hidden in the dust of shame. I am undone. I am what you see, a loathsome worm, a wounded worm wriggling in the black slime of despair, I who was Pharaoh."

Again pity touched me, Ayesha, and I answered, "There still remains the road that I have pointed out. While we live, however black our record, repentance is always possible, since otherwise there would be no hope for man the sinner. Moreover, repentance, if it be true, brings amendment in its train, and this god-born pair struggling upward, hand in hand, over cruel rocks, through swamps and streams, through brakes and briars, blinded with tears and the gross darkness of despair, at length see the sweet shape of Forgiveness shining before them like a holy dawn such as never gleams upon this world. Hearken, therefore, to one who speaks not with her own voice, or out of the foolishness of her own weak flesh, but as she is commanded of a spirit that is within her. Go to the temple of Ammon and there in the presence of the people make confession of your sins and fall, a sacrifice, upon your sword. Self-murder is a sin, but occasions come when to live on is a greater sin, since it is better to die for others than to cherish breath that poisons them."

"To die! There you speak it, Prophetess. I say again that I dare not die. When I die I pass to the Dæmon. This was the pact: that for my life he should give me success and glory, and that

in return after death, I should surrender him my soul."

"Is it so?" I answered. "Well, the bargain is ancient, as old as the world, I think; one also that every human being in his degree seals or refuses to seal in this way or in that. Still my counsel holds. This Dæmon of yours has broken his oath, for where now are the success and glory, Nectanebes? Therefore he cannot claim the fulfilment of your own."

"Nay, Prophetess," he answered in a wailing voice, "he has *not* broken it. From the first he told me that I must work no harm to Isis the Mother, since the Queen of Heaven was more powerful than all the denizens of hell, and that if once it were spoken, her Word of Strength would pierce and shrivel him like a red-hot sword and cutting his web of spells, would bring his oaths to nothingness and me with them. And now the web is cut, and I the painted insect that it meshed, fall from it to where the hell-born spider sits in his hole. Prophetess, I have seen him with these eyes, I have seen his orbs of fire, I have seen his snout and fangs like to those of a crocodile, I have seen his great hairy arms and the searching talons stretched out to grip me, and I tell you that I dare not die to be cast into the jaws of the Devourer and burn eternally in his belly of flames. Show me how to save my life, so that I may continue to look upon the sun. Oh! because you are a tender woman and charitable, though I have sinned against you, show me how to save my life."

Now hearing this creature plead with me thus, this coward who at the last did not dare go face the indignant gods like a man, saying, as a great soul should, "I have deeply erred, O ye Gods; I repent,

pardon me of your nobility, or slay my soul and make an end," my pity left me and its place was filled with scorn and loathing.

"Those who would live when the Persian dogs are on their heels, must fly fast and far, Nectanebes; they must fly like the deer of the desert on whom the hunters close. The road up Nile is empty, Nectanebes; as yet there are no Persians there. As you would not die, take it and live."

"Aye," he said as the thought went home, "why not? I have still a vast treasure; for many years I have hoarded against misfortune, for who can put all his trust in any Dæmon? With it I can buy friends in the south; with it I may found another empire among the Ethiopians or those of Punt. Why should I not fly? Prophetess?"

"I know not," I answered, "save that Death is always fast and untiring and in the end wears down the swiftest runner."

This I said darkly for at that moment there came into my mind a vision that once I had seen of a certain servile slave, aforetime a Pharaoh, that same royal slave who grovelled before me; yea, a vision of him throttling in a rope while black men mocked him. Yet of that I said nothing, only added,

"If it should please you to go south, Nectanebes, would it please you also to take with you that royal and beautiful lady, Amenartas your daughter, aforetime Princess of Egypt?"

"Nay," he answered sharply, "since hour by hour she scourges me with her tongue because I am fallen. Let her abide here under the veil of Isis. Yet why do you ask this, Prophetess?"

"Because of Isis. Because, as I think, this lady of the royal blood makes play with a certain priest

who is sworn to Isis, and the goddess does not love that her vowed servitors should desert her for the sake of mortal woman."

"What priest?" he asked dully.

"A Greek who is named Kallikrates."

"I know him, Prophetess. A very beauteous man, like to their own Apollo; a brave one too who did good service yonder in the marshes, fighting the giant general whom he wounded. Also I remember that in the past he was a captain of my guard before he became a priest and that there was trouble concerning him, though what trouble I forget, save that Amenartas pleaded for him. Well, if he has offended you, there are still those who do my will. Send for him, and if it pleases you, he shall be killed. I give you his life. Yes, his blood shall flow at your feet. Indeed I will command it at once, since you tell me he has shamed the goddess or angered you, her priestess," and he opened his hands to clap them, summoning the messengers of death.

I saw, I thrust my arm between so that they struck not upon each other, but upon my soft flesh, making no sound.

"Nay," I said, "this warrior-priest is a good servant of the Queen Isis, one, moreover, who fought for me, her prophetess, upon the seas. He shall not die for so small a matter. Yet I pray you, Nectanebes, take with you the royal princess Amenartas, when you fly south with your treasure."

"Aye," he answered wearily, "as it is your desire I'll take her if she will come, though if so there will be small rest for me."

Then he went, bowing to me humbly, and this was my farewell to Nectanebes, the last Pharaoh of Egypt. I watched him go and wondered whether I had done well in forbidding him to kill Kallikrates.

It came into my mind that the death of this man would save me much trouble. Why should he not die as others did who had sinned against the goddess? An answer rose within me. It was that he had sinned, not only against the goddess, but also against me—and this by preferring another woman before me.

Was I then so feeble that I could not hold my own against another woman should I choose to do so? Nay. Yet my trouble was that I did not choose.

Now I saw the truth. My rebellious flesh desired that which my spirit rejected. My spirit was far from this man, yet my flesh would have him near. Aye, my flesh said: "Let him be slain rather than another should take him," while my spirit answered, "What has he to do with one whose soul is set upon things above? Let him go his way, and go you yours. Above all, be not stained with his blood."

So I let him go, not knowing that it was written in the books of Fate that I *must* be stained with his blood, steeped in it to the eyes. Aye, I saved him from the sword of Nectanebes and let him go, determining to think of him no more.

Yet as it chanced Fate played me an evil trick in this matter. On the morrow, or the next day, I sat in the gloom of the outer sanctuary praying to the goddess to ease me of my sore heart, for alas! strive as I would to hide it, that heart was sore. There came a white-robed priest, Kallikrates himself, but changed indeed from that glorious Grecian warrior who had beat back the boarders on the *Hapi*, or who had fought in single combat with the giant Nicostratus. For now the little golden curls were shaven from his head and he was pale with the thin diet of the fruits of the earth and pure water which alone might pass the lips of those who were

sworn to Isis, enough indeed for me who touched no other food, or such a one as the aged Noot, but not for a great-framed man bred to the trade of arms. Moreover, his face was troubled as though with some struggle of the soul.

He passed me unseen and going to the statue of the goddess, knelt down before it and prayed earnestly, perhaps for help and blessing. Rising at length, once more he passed me and I saw that his gray eyes were full of tears and longed to comfort him. Also I saw that still he carried on his hand that ring talisman which I had set there upon the ship *Hapi*, that it might perchance defend him from the evil influences which desire and compass the death of men.

He went out across the pillared court toward the cloister at its end. From this cloister appeared a woman, the dark and beauteous Amenartas herself. This was easy to see since, I know not why, she had put off the veil of Isis and was gloriously attired in the robes of a princess—scanty enough I thought them, for they left bare much of her loveliness—while on her dark and abundant hair shone a golden circlet from which rose the royal uræus, and on her arms and bosom sparkled jewels and necklaces.

They meet by plan, thought I to myself. But it was not so, for seeing her, Kallikrates started and turned to fly; also he covered his eyes with his hand as though to hide her beauty from him. She lifted her face like one who pleads, yes, and when he would not hearken, caught him by the hand and drew him into the shadow of the cloister.

There they remained a long while, for at this hour the place was deserted by all. At length they appeared again on the edge of the shadow and I saw that her arms were about him and that her head

rested on his breast. They separated. She vanished into the shadows and went her way, while he walked to and fro across the court, muttering to himself like a man who knows not what he does.

I came from my place and met him, saying,

"Surely you are troubled, Priest. Can it be that the goddess refuses your prayers? Or is it perchance that you weary of them and would still play the part of a warrior of warriors as you did on the galley *Hapi*, or but the other day yonder in the northern marshes? If so, it is too late, Priest, for Egypt is fallen and all is lost. That is, unless, like Mentor and many of your race, you would sell your sword to Ochus Artaxerxes."

"Aye, Prophetess," he answered, "Egypt is lost which, being a Greek, should not trouble me over much, and I too am lost, I, the driven of an evil fate."

"Speak on if it pleases you. Or be silent if it pleases you, O Priest. What the prophetess hears, she tells only to the Mother."

Then I turned and went back into the shadow of the shrine where I leaned against a pillar—I remember that on it was sculptured the scene of Thoth weighing hearts before Osiris. Here I waited, wondering whether he would follow me or go his ways.

For a while he stood hesitating, but at length he followed me.

"Prophetess," he said hoarsely, "I speak under the veil of Isis, knowing that such confessions cannot be revealed. Yet it is hard to speak, since the matter has to do with woman, aye, and with yourself, most holy Prophetess."

"In Isis I have no self," I answered.

"Prophetess, in bygone years, as I think you know,

I learned to love a royal maiden, one set far above me, and it seems that she loved me. That passion brought a brother's blood upon my hands, as you also know. I fled to the goddess, seeking peace and forgiveness. For in me I think there are two selves, the self of my body and the self of my soul."

"As in most that breathe beneath the sun," I answered, sighing.

"I was bred a soldier, one who came from a race of soldiers, men of high blood and good to look upon, as once I was, though in this garb few would guess it."

"I have seen you wearing war-harness and can guess," I answered, smiling a little.

"That soldier-self, Prophetess, was as are others of the breed. I drank and I revelled, I bowed the knee to Aphrodite, loving women and for an hour being loved. I fought, not without honour. Then seeking advancement, with my brother I entered the service of Pharaoh, and of that story doubtless you know the rest."

I bowed my head and he went on,

"I came to Philæ, I made confession, I took the first vows. At night and alone I was led to the sanctuary, there to see the vision of the goddess. I saw that vision glowing in the darkened shrine, and oh! it was glorious."

Here I started and watched him narrowly, wondering how much he knew or guessed.

"Something took hold of me, Prophetess, for now I beheld her whom all my soul adored, her with whom it would be united. It was as though a memory came to me from afar, a memory and a promise. That Power which took hold of me caused me to bend my head as though to kiss the vision and thereby pledge my soul to the divine. The vision

also bent its head and our lips met, and lo! hers were like to those of mortal woman, yet sweeter far."

"The Mother is mistress of all shapes, Priest. Yet think not that she forgets the pledge that thus it pleased her to accept. From that moment you were sworn to her, and doubtless in a day to come, in this form or in that, she will claim you—should you remain true to her, O Priest."

"The years passed," he went on, "and true I remained. Fate brought me here to Memphis and in this temple I saw you, holy Prophetess, and learned to worship you from afar, not with the body, but with the spirit; since to me you were and are what the vulgar call you, *Isis-come-to-Earth*, and the sight of you ever put me in mind, as it does to-day, of that divine vision whose lips met mine in the shrine at Philæ. Perchance you never knew it, but thus with my spirit I worshipped you."

Now I, Ayesha, remained silent, leaning against the pillar, for weakness took hold of me who felt as though I were about to fall. Yet—and let the vengeful gods write this to my honour—yet I made him no sign that I was she who had played the part of Isis in the sanctuary.

"It is well," I said presently, "and doubtless at the appointed hour the goddess will thank you. But what then is your trouble, Priest? To love a goddess with the spirit is no crime."

"Aye, Prophetess. But what if he who loves the goddess with his spirit and is sworn to her alone for ever in a vow of perpetual chastity, should love a woman with his flesh and thus betray both heaven and his own soul?"

"Then, Priest," I answered, speaking very low, "I fear that he is one whose hope of forgiveness is but small. Yet for those who repent and deny,

there is pardon. Only they must deny, they must deny while there is still time."

"Easy to say and hard to do," he answered, "at least for him who has to deal with one that will not be denied; with one who holds his heart in the hollow of her hand and crushes it; with one whose eyes are like star-beacons to which the wanderer must fly; with one whose breath is as roses and whose lips are as honey; with one who can drive the desires of man as a racer drives his chariot; with one to whom oaths also have been sworn, such oaths as the youth swears to the maid in the first madness of the flesh, decreed by those who made it. Goddesses are far away, but woman is near; moreover, among men there is a law which even a prophetess may understand, which says that oaths vowed with the lips may not be broken to benefit the vower's soul."

"These are ancient arguments," I answered; "from age to age they echo from the roofs of the temples of Aphrodite and of Ashtoreth, but Isis knows them not. The flesh is given to mankind that its wearers may learn to scorn and trample it; the spirit is given to mankind that its holders may learn to rise upon its wings. Woe to those who choose the flesh and reject the spirit. Repentance is still possible, and after it comes amendment and after amendment, forgiveness."

He brooded awhile, then said,

"Prophetess, I repent who above all things desire at the end—that end which again and again I have sought in battle wherever it has passed me by—to be united with the goddess, shaped like the divine one whom I saw in the shrine at Philæ. Yes, with her and with no other. But how can I amend who am a lion in a net, a net woven of woman's hair?"

Now I searched him with my eyes and learned that although so sore beset, this man spoke nothing but the truth. Then I answered,

“The wise bird flies the snare which it sees spread in its sight. To-morrow at the dawn Noot the Holy sails north to meet certain ambassadors of the Persians and if he can make terms, to ransom the temples of Isis from the rage of Ochus. Will you go with him, breathing no word of his purpose or of yours? If so, perchance thus at last you shall find that goddess whose lips met yours at Philæ, here—or elsewhere.”

He thought awhile, then muttered,

“It is hard, very hard, yet I will go; I who would satisfy my soul and not my flesh.”

As he spoke a tall priestess flitted past us, passing from shadow into shadow, but thinking that she was one of those whose duty it was to watch the inner shrine at this hour, I took no note of her. Nor did Kallikrates, lost in his own thoughts, so much as see her.

