

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE TALE OF PHILO

ONCE more it was a night of full moon. As we had done for many days we were sailing before that steady wind along the coast of Libya, having this upon our right hand, and upon our left, at a distance, a line of rocky reef upon which breakers fell continually.

It was a very splendid moon that turned the sea to silver and lit up the palm-grown shore almost as brightly as does the sun. I sat upon the deck near to my cabin and by me stood Philo watching that shore intently.

"For what do you seek, Philo? Are you in fear of sunken rocks?"

"Nay, Child of Isis, yet it is true that I seek a certain rock which by my reckoning should now be in sight. Ah!"

Then suddenly he ran forward and shouted an order. Men leapt up and sprang to the ropes while the rowers began to get out the sweeps. As they did this the *Hapi* came round so that her bow pointed to the shore and the great sail sank to the deck. Then the long oars bit into the water and drove us shoreward.

Philo returned.

"Look, Lady," he said. "Now that the moon has risen higher you can see well," and he pointed to a headland in front of us.

Following his outstretched hand with my eyes I



perceived a great rock many cubits in height and carved on the crest of it a head far larger than that of the huge Sphinx of Egypt. Or perchance it was not carved; perchance Nature had fashioned it thus. At least there it stood and will stand, a terrible and hideous thing, having the likeness of an Ethiopian's head gazing eternally across the sea.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Lady, it is the Guardian of the Gate of the land whither we go. Legend tells that it is shaped to the likeness of the first king of that land who lived thousands upon thousands of years before the pyramids were built; also that his bones lie in it, or at least, that it is haunted by his spirit. For this reason none dare to touch and much less to climb yonder monstrous rock."

Then he left me to see to the matters of the ship, because, as he said in going, the entrance to the place was strait and dangerous. But I sat on alone upon the deck watching this strange new sight.

Within an hour, rowing carefully, we entered the mouth of a river, having the rock shaped like to a negro's head upon our right. Then it was that I saw something which put me in mind of Philo's tale about an ancient king. For there, unless I dreamed, upon the very point of the skull of the effigy, of a sudden I perceived a tall form clad in armour which shone silvery bright in the moon's rays. It leaned upon a great spear, and when we were opposite to it, straightened itself and bent forward as though to stare at our ship beneath. Next, thrice it lifted the spear in salutation; thrice it bowed, as I thought in obeisance to me, and having done so, threw its arms wide and was gone.

Afterward I asked Philo if he also had seen this thing.



"Nay," he answered in a doubtful voice as though the matter were one of which he did not wish to talk, adding,

"It is not the custom of mariners to study that head in the moonlight, because the story goes that if they do and chance to see some such ghost as that you tell of, it casts a spear toward them, who then are doomed to die within the year. Yet at you, Child of Isis, he cast no spear, only bowed and gave the salute of kings, or so you tell me. Therefore doubtless neither you nor any of us, your companions, are marked for death."

I smiled and said that I whose soul was in touch with Heaven feared not the wraith of any ancient king, nor did we speak more of this matter. Yet in the after ages it came into my mind that there was truth in the story and that this long-dead king appeared thus to give greeting to her who was destined to rule his land through many generations; also that perchance he was not dead at all, but, having drunk of a certain Cup of Life of which I was to learn, lived eternally there upon the rock.

I laid me down and slept, and when I woke in the bright morning it was to find that we had passed from that river into a canal dug by man which, though deep, was too narrow for the sweeps to work. Therefore the *Hapi* must be pushed along with poles and towed by ropes dragged at by the mariners from a path that ran upon the bank.

For three days we travelled thus making but slow progress, since the toil of dragging so large a ship was great, and at night we tied up to the bank, as boats do upon the Nile. All this while we saw no habitation though certain ruins we did see. Indeed that country was very desolate and full of great swamps that were tenanted by wild beasts, the haunt



of owls and bitterns, where lions roared and serpents crept, great serpents such as I had never seen.

At length at noon on the fourth day we came to a lake where the canal ended, which lake once had been a harbour, for we saw stone quays where still were tied some boats that seemed to be little used. Here Philo said that we must disembark and travel on by land. So we left the *Hapi*, sadly enough for my part, because those were happy, quiet days that I had spent on board of her, veritable oases in the storm-swept desert of my life.

Scarcely had we set foot upon the land when appeared, I knew not whence, a company of men, handsome, hook-nosed, sombre men, such as I had seen among the crew upon the *Hapi*. These men, though so fierce in appearance, were not barbarians, for they wore linen garments that gave to them the aspect of priests. Moreover, their leaders could speak Arabic in its most ancient form, which, having studied it, as it chanced, I knew. With this army, who bore bows and spears, came a multitude of folk of a baser sort that carried litters, or burdens, also a guard of great fellows that Philo told me were my especial escort. Now my patience failed so that I turned upon Philo saying,

"Hitherto, Friend, I have trusted myself to you, because it seemed decreed that I should do so. Now tell me, I pray you, what means this journey over countless leagues of sea into a land untrod, and whither go I in the fellowship of these barbarians? Because you brought me a certain writing in an acceptable hour, I gave myself into your keeping, nor did I even ask any revelation from the goddess or seek to solve the mystery by spells. Yet, now I ask and, as the Prophetess of Isis, demand the truth of you, her humbler servant."



"Lady divine," answered Philo, bowing himself before me, "what I have withheld is by command, the command of a very great one, of none less than Noot the aged and holy. You go to an old land that is yet new to find Noot, your master and mine."

"In the flesh or in the spirit?" I asked.

"In the flesh, Prophetess, if still he lives, as these men say, and see, I accompany you, I whom in the past you have found faithful. If I fail you, let my life pay forfeit, and for the rest, ask it of the holy Noot."

"It is enough," I said. "Lead on."

We entered the litters; we laded the bearers with the treasures of Isis and with my own peculiar wealth, and having placed the ship *Hapi* under guard, marched into the unknown like to some great caravan of merchants. For days we marched, following a broad road that was broken down in places, over plains and through vast swamps, and at night sleeping in caves or covered by tents which we brought with us.

This was a strange journey that I made surrounded by that host of hook-nosed, silent, ghost-like men, who, as I noted, loved the night better than they did the day. Almost might I have thought that they had been sent from Hades to conduct us to those gates from which for mortals there is no return. My fellowship of the priests and priestesses grew afraid and clustered round me at night, praying to be led back to familiar lands and faces.

I answered them that what I dared they must dare also, and that the goddess was as near to us here as she had been in Egypt, nor could death be closer to us than it was in Egypt. Yea, I bade them have faith, since without faith we could not be at



peace one hour who, lacking it, must be overwhelmed with terrors, even within the walls of citadels.

They hearkened, bowing their heads and saying that whatever else they might doubt, they trusted themselves to me.

So we went on, passing through a country where more of these half-savage men that I learned were called *Amahagger* dwelt in villages surrounded by their cattle, or by colonies in caves. At last there arose before us a mighty mountain whose towering cliffs had the appearance of a wall so vast that the eye could not compass it. By a gorge we penetrated that mountain and found within it an enormous, fertile plain, and on the plain a city larger than Memphis or than Thebes, but a city half in ruins.

Passing over a great bridge spanning a wide moat once filled with water that now here and there was dry, we entered the walls of that city and by a street broader than any I had ever seen, bordered by many noble, broken houses, though some of these seemed still to be inhabited, came to a glorious temple like to those of Egypt, only greater, and with taller columns. Across its grass-grown courts, that were set one within another, we were carried to some inner sanctuary. Here we descended from the litters and were led to sculptured chambers that seemed to have been made ready to receive us, where we cleansed ourselves of the dust of travel and ate. Then came Philo, who conducted me to a little lamp-lit hall, for now the night had fallen, where was a chair of state such as high-priests used, in which at his bidding I sat myself.

I think that being weary with travel, I must have slept in that chair, since I dreamed or seemed to



dream that I received worship such as is given to a queen, or even to a goddess. Heralds hailed me, voices sang to me, even spirits appeared in troops to talk to me, the spirits of those who thousands of years before had departed from the earth. They told me strange stories of the past and of the future; tales of a fallen people, of a worship and a glory that had gone by and been swallowed in the gulfs of Time. Then gathering in a multitude they seemed to hail me, crying,

"Welcome, appointed Queen! Build thou up that which has fallen. Discover thou that which is lost. Thine is the strength, thine the opportunity, yet beware of the temptations, beware of the flesh, lest the flesh should overcome the spirit and by its fall add ruin unto ruin, the ruin of the soul to the ruin of the body."

I awoke from my vision and saw Philo standing before me.

"Hearken, Philo," I said. "Of these mysteries I can bear no more. The time has come when you must speak, or face my wrath. Why have I been brought hither to this strange and distant land where it seems that I must dwell in a place of ruins?"

"Because the holy Noot so commanded, O Child of Wisdom," he answered. "Was it not set down in the writing I gave you at the Isle of Reeds upon the Nile?"

"Where then is the holy Noot?" I asked. "Here I see him not. Is he dead?"

"I do not think that he is dead, Lady. Yet to the world he is dead. He has become a hermit, one who dwells in a cave in a perilous place not very far from this city. To-morrow I will bring you to him, if that be your will. So only can you



see him who now for years has never left that cave, or so I think, save to fetch the food which is prepared for him."

"A strange tale, Philo, though that Noot should become a hermit does not amaze me, since such was ever his desire. Now tell me how he came hither, and you with him?"

"Lady, you will remember that in the bygone years when Nectanebes, he who was Pharaoh, fled up Nile, the holy Noot embarked upon my ship, the *Hapi*, to sail to the northern cities, that there he might treat with the Persians for the ransom of those temples of Egypt that remained unravished."

"I remember, Philo. What chanced to you upon that journey?"

"This, Lady: that we were very nearly slain, every one of us, for whom the Persians had set a trap, thinking to snare Noot and his company and torture him till he revealed where the treasures of the temples of Isis were hid away. Nevertheless, because I am a good sailor and because that warrior priest, Kallikrates, was brave, we escaped into the canal which is called the *Road of Rameses* and so at last out to sea, for to return up Nile was impossible. Then Noot commanded that I should sail on southerly upon a course he seemed to know well enough; or perchance the goddess taught it to him; I cannot say. At least I obeyed, so that in the end we reached that harbour which is guarded by a rock carved to the likeness of an Ethiopian's head, and thence travelled to this place, still guided by the wisdom of Noot who knew the road."

"And Kallikrates? What became of Kallikrates—who it seems was with you?" I asked in an indifferent voice, though my heart burned to hear his answer.



"Lady, so far as it is known to me this is the story of Kallikrates and the Princess Amenartas."

"The Princess Amenartas! By all the gods, what is your meaning, Philo? She went up Nile with Nectanebes her father, he who was Pharaoh."

"Nay, Lady, she went down Nile with Kallikrates, or perhaps with Noot, or perhaps with herself alone. I do not know with whom she hid since I never saw her, nor learned that she was aboard my ship until we were two days' journey out to sea and the coasts of Egypt were far behind us."

"Is it so?" I said coldly, though I was filled with bitter anger. "And what did the holy Noot when he found that this woman was aboard his vessel?"

"Lady, he did nothing except look on her somewhat doubtfully."

"And what did the priest Kallikrates? Did he strive to be rid of her?"

"Nay, Lady, and indeed that would have been impossible, unless he had thrown her overboard. He did nothing except talk with her—that is, so far as I saw."

"Well, then, Philo, where is she now, and where is Kallikrates? I do not see him in this place."

"Lady, I cannot tell you, but I think it probable that they are dead and in the fellowship of Osiris. When we had been some weeks at sea we were driven by storm to an island off the coast under the lee of which we took shelter, a very fertile and beautiful island, peopled by a kindly folk. After we had sailed again from that island it was discovered that the priest Kallikrates and the Royal Princess Amenartas were missing from the ship, nor because of the strong wind that blew us forward was it possible for us to return to seek for them. I made inquiry of the matter and the sailors



told me that they had been fishing together and that a shark which took their bait pulled them both into the sea ; in which case doubtless they were drowned."

"And did you believe that story, Philo?"

"Nay, Lady. I understood at once that it was one which the sailors had been bribed to tell. Myself I think that they went to the island in one of the boats of the people who dwell there; perhaps because they could no longer bear the cold eyes of Noot fixed upon them, or perhaps to gather fruit, for which those who have been long upon water often conceive a great desire. But," he added simply, "I do not know why they should have done this seeing that the island-dwellers brought us plenty of fruits in their boats."

"Doubtless they preferred to pluck them fresh with their own hands, Philo."

"Perhaps, Lady, or perhaps they wished to stay awhile upon that island. At least I noted that the Princess took her garments and her jewels with her, which she could scarcely have done if the shark had dragged her into the sea."

"Are you so sure, Philo, that she did not leave some of those jewels behind—in *your* keeping, Philo? It is very strange to me that the Princess Amenartas could have come aboard your ship and have left your ship, and you know nothing."

Now Philo looked up innocently and said,

"Surely it is lawful for a captain to receive faring money from his passengers, and that I admit I did. But I do not understand why the Child of Wisdom is so wrath because a Greek and a great lady were by chance left together upon an island where, for aught I know, one or other of them may have had friends."

"Am I not the guardian of the honour of the



goddess?" I answered. "And do you not know that under our law Kallikrates was sworn to her alone?"

"If so, Prophetess, doubtless that captain, or that priest, remembers his oaths and deals with this princess as though she were his sister or his mother. At the least the goddess can guard her own honour, so why should you fret your soul concerning it, Prophetess? Lastly, it is probable that by now both of them are dead and have made all things clear to Isis in the heavenly halls."

Thus he prattled on, adding lie to lie as only a Greek can do. I listened until I could bear no more. Then I said but one word. It was "Be-gone!"

He went humbly, yet as I thought, smiling.

Oh! now I saw it all. Noot had made a plot to remove Kallikrates far from me, so that I might never look upon him again. Philo knew of this plot, and through him Amenartas knew it also. Unknown to Noot she bribed Philo to hide her upon his ship till they were far from land, though whether the plan was known to Kallikrates I could not say, nor did it greatly matter. Then the rest followed. Amenartas appeared upon the ship and cast her net about Kallikrates who had sworn to have done with her, and the end can be guessed. Noot was wrath with them, so wrath that when the chance came they fled away, purposing to stay upon that island until they could find a ship to take them back to Egypt or elsewhere. Thus, I was sure, ran the story, and, as it proved afterward, I was right.

Well, they were gone and as I hoped, dead, since only death could cover up such sin, and for my part I was glad that I had done with Kallikrates and his



light-of-love. And yet there, seated on the couch of state, I wept—because of the outrage done to Isis whom I served. Or was it for myself that I wept? I cannot say, I only know that my tears were bitter. Also I was very lonely in this strange and desolate place. Why had I been brought here, I wondered. Because Noot had commanded it, sending for me from afar, and what he commanded, that I must obey. Where, then, was Noot, who, Philo swore, still lived? Why had he not appeared to greet me? I covered my eyes with my hands and threw out my soul to Noot, saying,

“Come to me, O Noot. Come to me, my beloved Master.”

Lol a voice, a well-remembered voice answered, “Daughter, I am here.”

I let fall my hand. I gazed with my tear-stained eyes, and behold! before me, white-robed, gold-filleted, snowy-bearded, grown very ancient and ethereal, stood the prophet and high-priest, my Master. For a moment I thought that it was his spirit which I saw. Then he moved, and I heard his white robes rustle, and knew that there stood Noot himself whom I had travelled so many thousand leagues to find.

I rose; I ran to him; I seized his thin hand and kissed it, while he, murmuring, “My Daughter, at last, at last!” leaned forward and with his lips touched me on the brow.

“Far away your summons reached me in an hour of peril,” I said. “Behold! I obeyed, I came. In faith I came, asking no questions, and I am here in safety, for I think the goddess herself was with me on that journey. Tell me all, O Noot. What is this place? How were you brought to it and why have you called me to you?”



"Hearken, Daughter," he said, seating himself beside me on the throne-like couch. "This city is named Kôr. Once she was queen of the world, as after her, Babylon, Thebes, Tyre, and Athens are, or have been queens. From Kôr thousands of years ago in the black, lost ages Egypt was peopled, as were other lands. In those dim days by another title her citizens worshipped Isis, Queen of Heaven, only they named her *Truth* whom in Egypt you know as Maat. Then apostasy arose and many of this great people, abandoning the pure and gentle worship of Isis wrapped in the veil of Truth, under the name of Rezu, a fierce sun-dæmon, set up another god to whom they made human sacrifices, as the Sidonians did to Moloch. Yea, they sacrificed men, women, and children by thousands, and even learned to eat their flesh, first as a sacred rite, and afterward to satisfy their appetites. Heaven saw and grew wrath; Heaven smote the people with a mighty pestilence, so that they perished and perished till few were left. Thus Kôr fell by the sword of God as, for like cause, fell Sidon."

"Of all this afterward," I answered impatiently. "Tell me first, how came you here? Long years ago you sailed down Nile to treat with the Persians for the ransom of the temples of Egypt, a mission in which it seems you failed, my Father."

"Aye, Ayesha, I failed. It was but a trap, since those false-hearted Fire-worshippers thought to take me captive and hold my life in gage against all the treasures of Isis. By the cunning and seamanship of Philo and the courage of a priest named Kallikrates, whom you may still remember after all these years," here he glanced at me sharply, "I escaped when a gang of them disguised as envoys strove to snare me. But the road up Nile being



barred, we were forced to fly south, and down Pharaoh's Great Ditch, till at length, after many wanderings and adventures, we came to this land, as it was fated that I should do. You will remember, Daughter, that I told you I believed that we were parting for a long while, although I believed also that we should meet again in the flesh."

"I remember well," I answered, "also that I swore to come to you at the appointed hour."

"I came to this land," went on Noot, "but Kallikrates, the Greek captain who was a priest of Isis, never reached it. He was lost on the way."

"With another, my Father. But now I have heard that story from Philo."

"With another who caused him to break his vows. Be sure, Daughter, that I knew nothing of her plot or that she was hidden aboard the ship, though perchance Philo knew. The goddess hid it from me, doubtless for her own purposes."

"Are this pair dead, or do they still live, my Father?"

"I cannot say; that also is hidden from me. Better for them if they are dead, since soon or late for such sacrilege vengeance will fall upon the head of one, if not of both of them. Peace be to them. May they be forgiven! At least as I think they loved each other much and, since love is very strong, all who have ever loved where they ought not should have pity on them," and again his questioning eyes played upon my face.