

## CHAPTER VII

### THE QUELLING OF THE STORM

THEY set me on board a great ship, on the prow of which were images of certain gods of the Phœnicians, called by the Greeks *Pataeci*, not unlike to that which the Egyptians worshipped by the name of Bes, before which images burned fire. There was a royal cabin in that ship which was given to me, and with it splendid robes and furnishings of gold for my table.

At dawn we cast off from the quay of the white-walled city while thousands of the worshippers of Isis who learned that I was being taken from them, stood upon the quay and wailed, crying that the *Mouth-of-Isis* was sent away to slavery and that where her "Mouth" went, there the goddess would follow, leaving vengeance to fall upon their heads. For that the head-priestess of Isis should be given into the hands of barbarians and their foreign gods was such a crime as had not been known in Egypt.

Therefore they wailed, prophesying evil, and I stood upon the stern alone in my white robes, veiled, and hearkened to them, for none dared to come near to me. Yes, I hearkened and blessed them with my hands, whereat they knelt and wailed the more.

When at last we had passed down the Nile and were out upon the great sea, sailing swiftly for Sidon over quiet waters, I, Ayesha, having taken counsel of the goddess and of my woman's craft, sent for King Tenes, who was also on board the



ship, and received him in his own cabin that had been given up to me.

For my heart was black with rage against him, and against Nectanebes, Pharaoh of Egypt, who had betrayed me, and in my heart I swore that I would destroy them both. Yes, there I, the captive, sat and received the captor king in his own cabin, purposing his doom, though how this was to be accomplished as yet I did not know.

"O King," I said, "I, your slave who, when not a slave, was high-priestess of Isis in Egypt and her seeress, into whose breast the goddess poured her wisdom and her secrets, as indeed still she does, would speak with you, and since I could not come to you among so many men, have prayed your Majesty to come to me. What would you do with me, King Tenes, since it has pleased you to force Pharaoh to give me into your keeping? Is it an oracle that you desire concerning your fate or that of your country in the war? If so, I will——"

"Nay, Priestess," he broke in hurriedly, "of your oracles I and others have had enough. They are bitter bread for daily food. Keep them, I pray you, to nurture your own soul."

"What would you of me then, King Tenes, that you have been at such pains to steal me away from Egypt, even threatening Pharaoh to break your solemn pact with him if he did not give me into your hands, me, the snared bird, who by chance was left out of his oath to the high-priest and Isis's officer, the Greek."

"Lady Ayesha," blurted out Tenes, "that I have learned to be by birth, daughter of Yarab, once ruler of Ozal, upon whom, with the Egyptians, I made war in the past and brought to his death, because of *you*, Lady, tell me, you who are wise, what would



any man of you who had beheld your beauty as I saw it some nights gone?"

"Man, being man, that is, a ravening beast fashioned like a god in shape but not in soul, would make me his prey, Tenes. Such at least was the desire of the first Nectanebes whom you aided with the ships of Sidon to destroy my father, and of many since his time."

"Good. Well, I who am a man and something more, being not a god indeed, but a great king, would make you my prey, as you say, for to tell truth, having once looked on you I seek no other woman in the whole world."

Now I threw back my veil and studied him with my eyes.

"So you would take me for your queen, Tenes? Indeed I guessed as much. But what would your other queen, for doubtless you have one, say to this, O King?"

"My queen!" he said in an astonished voice, "my queen?"

"Surely, Tenes, you would scarcely dare to prefer less than queenship to such a one as I?"

"May be not. Well, let us say that I would make you my queen, since in Sidon it is not difficult to be rid of others of whom one may be weary; that is, it is not difficult to a king who also is high-priest of Baal and of Ashtoreth. Yes, yes, I am sure that I would make you my queen. I will offer it to you in writing if you desire."

"Aye, I do desire it, King, and that there may be no faults or traps in it, I myself will draw up the writing for you to sign. Only I doubt much whether I shall accept the offer if it is made."

"Why not, Lady? Is it a small thing to be Queen of Sidon?"



"For Ayesha, daughter of Yarab, high-priestess and prophetess of Isis, the wisest and most beautiful woman in the world, one who has never turned to look on man, it is a very small thing indeed, King Tenes. It is so small a thing that I will not deign to accept that proffered crown of yours, unless——"

"Unless what, Lady?"

"Unless it is made larger, King, so large and wide that she who wears it holds rule over all the earth."

"By Baal, Ashtoreth, and Moloch, all three of them, what mean you, Woman?"

"What I say, Man. I mean that when you are monarch, not of Sidon only, but of Egypt, Cyprus, Persia, and all the East, then perchance I will marry you, unless my fancy changes, as it may do, but certainly not before."

"Surely you are mad," he gasped. "How can I gather all these diadems upon a single brow? It is impossible."

"Aye, for you it is impossible, King Tenes, but for me it is possible. I can gather them and set them on your brow and on my own, I who have within me all the wisdom of the earth and much of the strength of Heaven. Understand that if I desire it and you follow my counsel, I can crown you emperor of the world, no less, but the question is, do I desire it and will you follow my counsel?"

"Lady, I swear that you are mad, unless in truth you are a goddess as they say in Egypt."

"Perchance I am somewhat of a goddess, and being so, marvel whether for any reward that can be given I shall debase myself by taking such a one as you to husband, King Tenes. Now, first, look on me well and answer whether you do indeed desire me and are ready to win me through toil and danger,



or whether you will let me be. For know, Tenes, that though I seem to be your captive, you cannot snare me or do me violence. Lay but a finger on me against my will, and it shall be your death, since I have those to aid me whom you cannot see. Now look—and answer.”

He looked, devouring me with his greedy eyes, then said,

“Of a truth I desire you more than anything on the earth, and since I may not do so otherwise, for I perceive that you are too strong for me, will take you at your own price. Yea, even if I must wait for years, still I will take you. Now tell me, most beautiful and most wise, what I must do, and swear to me that when I am king of all things you will wed me.”

“Aye, Tenes, I swear that when you are king of all things I will wed you,” I answered gently, laughing in my heart as I remembered that the first and last of all things, the greatest of all things, is—Death. “Hearken. You shall bring me to Sidon, not as a captive but as a strange goddess who has come to aid you and your people, and with honour shall you receive me in Sidon, causing your priests and priestesses to offer me worship and incense.”

“And if so, what then?”

“Then, when I have studied your people and your preparations for war, we will take counsel together and I will show you how you may prevail. Tell me, Tenes, do you love Pharaoh Nectanebes?”

“Nay, Lady, I hate him who asks too much and gives too little, as I hated his father before him. Still we sleep in the same bed and prop up the same wall, and if one of us ceases to support the wall, the Persians will push it down on both.”

“I understand. Yet even so it comes into my



mind that perchance you would have been safer had you been pushing at the wall with the Persian Ochus and not holding it up with the Egyptian Nectanebes."

He glanced at me with his shifting eyes and answered,

"I have had that thought, as you know well, but having rebelled against Ochus, defeated his satraps, and slain thousands of his soldiers, or rather those of his father, if I climb the wall I might find spears waiting for me on the farther side. Lady, it is too late."

"Yes, King Tenes, perhaps it is too late; I will consider of the matter in your interest and my own. But first send me papyrus and writing tools that I may set down our pact. When you have approved and signed it, then I will consider of this and other matters and not before. For the while, farewell.

He rose and went unwillingly enough and when I was alone in the cabin I laughed in my heart. This fish had been easy to hook, but he was a large fish and strong, and I must beware lest he pull me into the deep sea where both might drown together. Moreover, the man was hateful to me, more so even than that ox-eyed, heavy-jowled Pharaoh, and his presence seemed to poison the air I breathed. Yet if I entered into this pact with him doubtless I must breathe it often, which vexed me who shrank from men and their desires, and above all from this man. Yet he had done me wrong and insult; he had helped the Egyptians to make war upon my people and he had taken me as a slave, me, Ayesha, thinking to make of me his woman, and cost what it might, I would pay him back as I would pay back Nectanebes who sold me.

The papyrus was brought to me by a slave and on



it I wrote such a contract as I think was never signed by a king before. It was brief and ran thus:—

“Ayesha, daughter of Yarab, high-priestess of Isis, prophetess of Isis, known in Heaven and among her servants as *Isis-come-to-Earth*, and *Child of Wisdom*, to Tenes, King of Sidon.

“When you, Tenes, are king not only of Sidon but of Egypt, Cyprus, Persia, and the East, as I can make you, if you obey me in all things, then I, Ayesha, vow myself to you as your sole wife and queen. But if, ere this dignity is mine and yours, you dare even to touch my robe, then in the name of Isis and speaking with the voice of Isis, I, Ayesha, vow to you shame and death in the world and after it all the torments of hell and the jaws of the Devourer that await the judgment of Thoth on perjured souls beyond the Sun.

“Accepted and sealed by Ayesha, daughter of Yarab and by Tenes, King of Sidon.”

Having copied this writing, I sent it to Tenes by the slave that he might study it. Awhile later he asked audience of me, and entering, said in a thick voice that only a madman would set his seal to such words.

I looked at him and answered that it was nothing to me whether he sealed or did not seal them; indeed that considering all, I should be better pleased if he let the bargain be.

He stared at me and rage took hold of him who was inflamed with wine.

“Who are you,” he said, “that dare to talk thus to Tenes the King? You are but a woman clad in the robes of a priestess who pretend to powers you have not. Why should I not take you and have done?”

Now I mocked him, answering,



"Because I think you love to sit upon a throne better than to lie in a grave, Tenes, even in a king's coffin. Still, as you desire to know more particularly, I will put your question to the goddess, who is not far from me even on this ship, and to-morrow when the sun is up I will pass on her words to you—that is, if you live to look upon to-morrow's sun, King Tenes," I added, staring him in the eyes.

These words seemed to sober him, for he turned pale and left the cabin, making a sign to avert the evil eye, but as I noted, taking the writing with him. Yet me he left perplexed and afraid, for my heart was not so bold as my mouth!

Now that night, whether by chance or by the will of Heaven, a great tempest sprang up suddenly. The captain of the trireme, a Greek or a half-Greek of Naukratis, Philo by name, whom now upon this ship I met for the first time, came himself to warn me, and to make sure that all was fast in my cabin. He was a quick-brained man, very active in his body and pleasant-faced, with a brown, pointed beard, who had seen some five and thirty years upon the earth. I had made inquiries concerning him from a certain slave who attended me, and was told that although he pretended to timidity, this Philo was in truth a great warrior and one of the best handlers of a bow upon the mouths of Nile, since that which he aimed at he always hit, even if it were a fowl in flight. Moreover, he was a very good seaman and, it was said, faithful to those he served and a worshipper of the gods.

"If so," I answered to that old slave, "how comes it that this Philo, instead of a humble captain, is not the first general or admiral among the Greeks, as a man of such quality should be?"



"Because, divine Lady, of certain faults," answered the slave, "such faults as have made of me what I am instead of the Count of a Nome upon the Nile as I should have been. This Philo has always thought more of the welfare of others than of his own, which is a very evil weakness; also he has loved women too much, which is a worse."

"Vile sins indeed," I said, "more particularly the second. The wise always think of themselves first, and the holy never love more than one woman, and her not too much, which perhaps is why the wise and the holy are so hateful and so dull. Bring this Philo to me; he is one whom I should wish to know."

In the end Philo came, though whether because my message had reached him, or because of the advancing storm, I am not certain. At least he came, and as he bowed before me, made a certain secret sign whereby I knew that he was a worshipper of Isis and one of high degree, though not of the highest, since when I tried him with that sign he could not answer. Still his rank in our great company was enough, and thenceforward we spoke to each other under the seal of the goddess, or as our phrase went in those days "within the shadow of her wings," as brother and sister might, or rather as mother and son.

That is, we did this after I had proved him further and brought to his mind the fate of those who betray the goddess and her ministers upon earth.

This Philo told me in few words, that although the trireme was Egyptian and named *Hapi* after the god of Nile, for this voyage she was under charter to Tenes and for the most part manned with Sidonians, also with low fellows from Cyprus and the coast-ports. These like the Phœnician guards of



Tenes, of whom there were fifty on the vessel, worshipped other gods than those of Egypt, that is, such of them as worshipped any gods at all.

Many of these men, Philò said warningly, murmured because a priestess of Isis was on board their ship, which they thought would anger the Phœnician gods of whom the images had been set upon the prow, as might lawfully be done when a vessel was hired by Tyre or Sidon.

I answered laughing that as he and I knew, Isis could hold her own against Baal, Astarte, and all their company. Then, changing my mien, I asked him suddenly what he meant.

"Only this, Holy one," he answered: "That if by chance the ship came into danger—and I like not the signs of the sky and the moaning of the black north wind with rocks not two leagues away upon our lee, then I say if this ship came into danger, as might chance this very night, for here gales grow suddenly—well, Holy one, you might be in danger also. In such cases, Holy one, sometimes the Phœnicians demand a sacrifice to the *Cabiri*, the great gods of the sea whom we do not worship."

"Is it so?" I answered coldly. "Then tell them that those who demand sacrifices often furnish the victims. Have no fear, my brother-in-the-goddess. But if trouble comes, call to me to help you."

Then I stretched out to him the *sistrum* that was part of my ornaments of office in which I had been brought aboard that ship, and he kissed it with his lips and went about his business.

Scarce had he gone when the black north wind began to blow. It blew fearfully, rising hour by hour and even minute by minute, till the gale was terrible. The rowers could no longer row, for the great seas broke their oars, of which the handles



struck them, hurling them backward from the benches, and the sail they tried to hoist upon the mast was torn away and went flapping down the wind like a wounded gull. Thus continually the *Hapi* was driven in toward the coast of Syria where, still some miles away, the moonlight when it broke out between the clouds showed the white surf of breakers foaming on the iron rocks of Carmel.

Toward midnight the tall mast snapped in two like a rotten stick and went overboard, carrying with it certain men and crushing others. Then terror took hold of all the company upon this ship, so that they began to cry aloud who believed that black death was on them.

Now one shouted,  
"We are bewitched! At this season there should be no such gale, it is against nature."

Another answered,  
"Little wonder that we are bewitched who carry with us a sorceress of Egypt, one who hates our gods, wherefore they are angry."

This they said because they had heard the tale of the water turned to blood, also of the oracles I was wont to utter in the temple at Memphis. For in that city dwelt many Phœnicians who were great talkers and lovers of strange tales, though now, Holly tells me all their race is silent for ever and the only tales they hear are those of Gehenna.

Then arose another shout from many throats,  
"Sacrifice the witch to the gods of the Sea. Throw her into the sea that they may take her and we may live to look upon to-morrow's sun!"

Next there was a rush toward the afterpart of the trireme where I was in the cabin. In the waist of the ship appeared the captain, Philo, as I saw watching from between the curtains, and with him a



number of the crew who were Egyptians and faithful to him, perhaps six in all, not more. In his hands Philo held a bow, and a drawn short-sword was thrust through his belt.

He shouted to the mob of madmen to stand back, but they would not, and led by one of the guards of Tenes, crept forward. Philo knelt, resting his back against a water-cask, waiting till the ship steadied herself a little on the crest of a wave. Then he drew the bow and shot. Very well and straight did he shoot, for the arrow pierced that leader of the guard of Tenes from breast to back, so that he fell down dead. Seeing this, the others grew afraid and stayed where they were, clinging to the bulwarks of the ship or whatever they could grasp with their hands.

Tenes appeared among them. They shouted to him and he shouted back to them, but what they said I could not hear because of the howling of the wind.

Philo crept into the cabin and his face was very heavy.

"Holy one," he said, "make ready to join Isis in the heavens. Fearing for his own life, that dog of a Sidonian king has consented to your sacrifice and I am come to die with you."

"The goddess thanks you, O great-hearted man, and I, her servant, thank you also," I said, smiling at him. "Yet have no fear, since my spirit tells me that neither I nor you shall die this night. Help me now and let us go forth and talk with these hissing snakes of Sidon."

"But what will you say to them, Holy one?"

"The goddess will teach me what to say," I answered, who in truth did not know what I should say. All I knew was that some spirit moved me to go forth and to talk with them.



So we went, I leaning upon Philo as it was hard to stand upon my feet, and came to the stump of the broken mast in the midst of the hollow ship, all the mob of the crew drawing back before me. Here with one arm, I clung to the mast, and beckoned to them with the other in which I held the *sistrum* of our worship. They drew near, Tenes among them, his face covered by a cloak.

"Hearken!" I cried. "I learn that you would offer me, the Prophetess of Isis, as a sacrifice to your gods. Fools! Is not Isis greater than your gods? O Queen of Heaven! send a sign to show that thou art greater than these foreign gods!"

So I spoke and stared upward at the moon, for the wind had torn away my veil, and waited.

A great billow came and struck the forepart of the ship, burying it deep in green water. As she rose I saw two dark forms fly from her high-tossed prow and a voice cried,

"The guardian images have gone and the sacred fire is quenched!"

"Aye," I answered, "they are gone where you shall go, every one of you, if you dare to touch me. Know that I do not fear for my own life which cannot be taken from me, but for your lives I fear, and for Sidon, which presently shall lack a king—if you dare to touch me. Be silent now and though you deserve it not, I will pray Isis to save you."

Then gaping on me standing there like one inspired, as indeed I think I was, they were struck to silence and through the roaring gale and flying foam I prayed to Heaven to preserve that ship and those she bore from the grinding rocks on which the surf beat not a mile away.

A marvel happened, whether because the tempest had grown weary of its raging, or because That



which hears the prayers of men had accepted my prayer for its own purposes, to this hour I know not. At least the marvel happened, for although the sea still beat and rushed, wave following wave, like white-maned, countless charging steeds, of a sudden the gale died down and there was calm between sky and sea.

"It has pleased the great goddess to hearken to me and to save your lives, yes, even the lives of you who would have murdered her priestess," I said in a quiet voice. "Now get you to your oars and row as never you rowed before, if you would hold the ship off yonder rocks."

They gasped. They stared with open mouths! One said,

"*Thou* art the goddess; *thou* art the very goddess! Pardon us, pardon us, thy slaves, O Queen of Heaven!"

Then they rushed to their oars and with toil and danger drew the *Hapi* past the promontory of Carmel where the water boiled upon the rocks, and out into the deep sea beyond.

"What did I say to you, Philo?" I said, as he led me back to the cabin.

He made no answer, only lifting the hem of my garment, he pressed it to his brow.