

## Chapter 6: Phryne and the Naked Truth

**H**ELEN of TROY ran quickly up the steps of Eve's house with Lucrezia Borgia and Delilah at her heels. In the front hall they found the First Lady of Hades awaiting them.

"Warm, isn't it?" Helen remarked, throwing aside her jeweled collar. "I hope we're not late."

"Only a moment or two," replied Eve. "The others are all in the reception room. Except Phryne. I do hope that she won't disappoint us. You remember she promised to speak."

"Yes. I'm looking forward to it. Do you know, my dear, this club was a positive inspiration on your part. I find it the one bright spot in an otherwise hellish existence. By the way, how is that little maid of yours getting

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

along? I've taken quite a fancy to her. She seems dreadfully out of place here in Hades."

"She is, my dear Helen. And dreadfully unhappy, too, separated from her lover. I think the Judgment Board slipped up a bit in her case. Still, I suppose they do the best they can, with the docket always so crowded. Even Saint Peter makes mistakes. The other day he actually held up a moving picture censor from Philadelphia, right at the Gates. The fellow, it seems, had made some unpleasant remarks about the length of the angels' robes. Considered them entirely too suggestive. I hear they *are* being worn rather short, this season. The affair made quite a stir. The man got in, of course, after Saint Peter had duly apologized. I shouldn't be surprised to hear that he has already put the cherubim and seraphim in petticoats."

"Imagine it!" Helen laughed. "But to come back to this girl. Can't Satan help her out?"

"He can but he won't. I've asked him. He says it's impossible to change the rules of Hades to suit individual cases."

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

“Why not get up a petition to the Throne?” Delilah suggested, “and ask to have her case reconsidered? I like Hell, myself. It suits my tropical temperament. But I can see that a great many people might not. This girl, for instance, strikes me as being just the sort of person who would be happy with a nice pair of wings——”

“Especially,” interrupted Lucrezia Borgia, smiling, “as her lover was an aviator. Perfect, I’d say.” She took a flask from her vanity case. “Will any of you girls join me in a drink?”

Eve and the others drew back in some haste.

“No thanks!” they replied, shuddering.

“Too bad, my dears,” Lucrezia went on, calmly sipping her *liqueur*, “how my past still clings to me. Yet I never made a practice of poisoning my friends—except in the most extreme circumstances. But about this petition. It seems to me that before we do anything definite in this girl’s case we ought first to find out how the young man feels about the matter. He may not want her to join him in Heaven.”

“In fact,” said Delilah, “he may not be so crazy about it there himself.”

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

"There is something in that, my dear," Eve laughed. "The man is an American, of course, and I've been given to understand that all Americans think Heaven is going to be very much like Paris. How disappointed a lot of them must feel. Possibly the fellow might prefer to join his sweetheart down here."

"Or," observed Helen, "he may have forgotten her altogether."

"Precisely," Lucrezia Borgia agreed. "That is why I think we should get in touch with the young man before we start any petitions. Possibly you girls may not know it, but my father is rather prominent in Celestial circles. Suppose I ask him to look up this American and find out how he feels."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Helen. "Eve dear, what's his name?"

"I haven't the least idea," Eve laughed. "Suppose we send for the girl and ask her."

Marie, however, having been duly summoned, was unable to give much information on the subject.

"His name," she whispered, "was—was Smith. Myself, I always called him Bobo. He

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

came, he told me, from the great city of Hoken and was very handsome."

"Good Heavens!" Eve cried—"is that all you know about him?"

"Alas, madame, how can I be sure? In Paris one met so many Americans. But I remember that across his chest there was tattooed a great eagle, and around his right leg——"

"Never mind the details," Eve said. "I doubt if they would be of much assistance to the Pope. And as a matter of fact I have just remembered that Satan looked up the girl's case and naturally knows the man's identification number. I'll see if I can't worm it out of him. Here comes Phryne now. Suppose we start."

The lady from Athens came in, looking very *chic* in an evening gown of fish net and pearls.

"Sorry, my dears," she exclaimed, "but I happened to run into Alexander the Great as I was coming out of Anne Boleyn's Waffle Shoppe and he insisted on taking me to the Gehenna Roof. I had a lot of trouble getting rid of him."

"Drunk, as usual, I suppose," Thais muttered. "Poor Alexander. He and I traveled together for years, but he never could seem to

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

go to bed sober. Still, I'll admit he was a great lover—while he lasted. The good, I suppose, always die young."

"He told me an amusing story," Phryne went on, "about a Chicago man who blew into Hell last week, in an alcoholic daze. When he had been shown over the place by one of the Travelers' Aid imps he turned to his guide.

"'Heaven hasn't got a thing on Chicago,' he said."

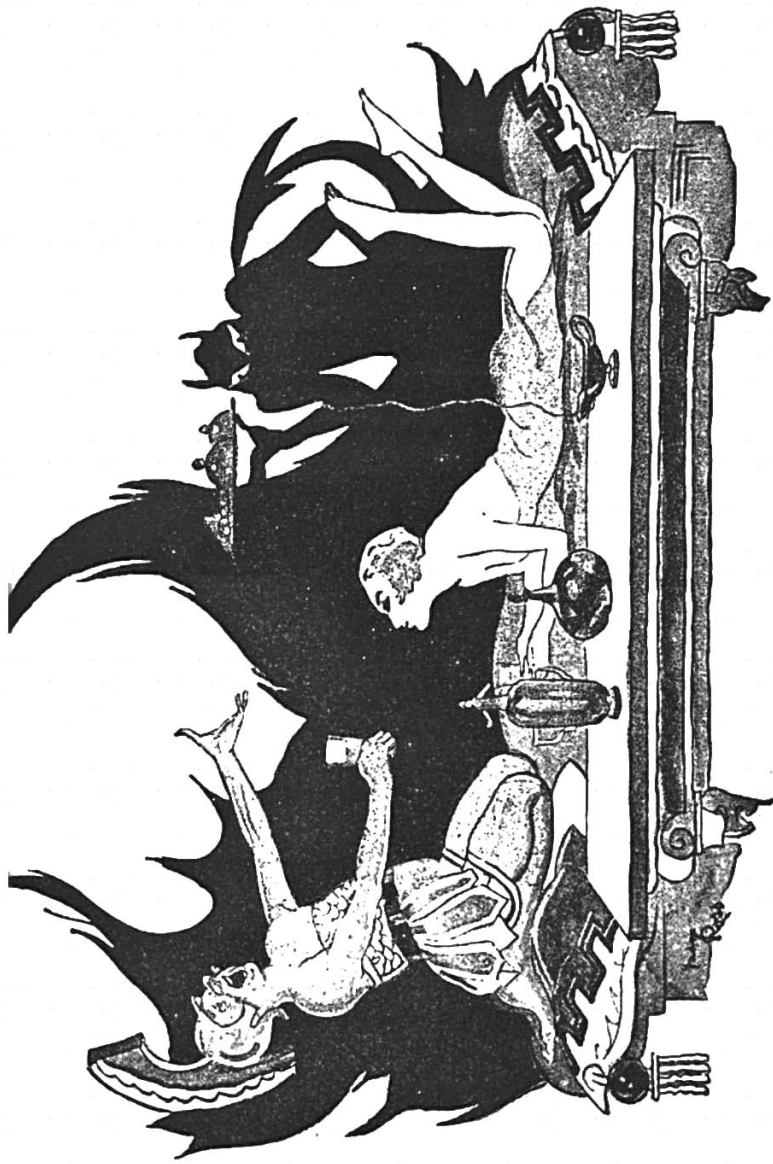
"The guide began to laugh.

"'You're a little mixed, Mister,' he explained. 'This isn't Heaven—it's Hell!'"

"That's old, my dear," Thais laughed. "Alexander used to tell it on a man from Nineveh. But his pet yarn was the one about the stone ax salesman from Gomorrah who came home rather unexpectedly one night and started to get into bed. It was dark, of course and his wife said,"

"'Why, Shalamanezer, you're terribly late.' And——"

"I know," Eve sniffed. "Her husband's name wasn't Shalamanezer at all. Adam used to tell that one on Noah. Phryne dear, we are all



*"Alexander the Great told me an amusing story about a Chicago man who blew in last week," said Phryne. "He thought Hell was Heaven."*

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

looking forward to the story of your famous trial——”

“I’m ready. Just wait until I shed my pearls. Eve, my love, you certainly do keep your shack hot.”

“Don’t blame me. That’s one of the drawbacks of living in the Figleaf Park section. So near the Pit. I suppose Satan is obliged to have his headquarters right over the boiler rooms, for business reasons, but I’m getting rather fed up with it, myself. Next year I think I shall rent a cottage in the suburbs. Here, darling—take the chair.”

“I hope, girls,” Phryne began, “that you won’t expect anything in the way of a speech from me. Unfortunately, I never had the advantages of a decent education, like some of you princesses and queens. I started life as a cloak model and worked my way up, and while I will admit that it is an interesting profession, and has its moments, it does not afford much opportunity for a study of the classics.

“I’d been working at it for a couple of years, when I met a breastplate buyer from Syracuse who told me I had the most perfect thirty-six



## *Ladies in Hades*

---

in Greece. When he heard I came from a little one-horse town called Thespiæ, he said the stars indicated that I should go into the show business. So he got me an engagement in the Hippodrome chorus.

“I made a tremendous hit from the start. Inside of a week most of the gilded youth of Athens, to say nothing of their solid gold fathers and grandfathers, came to the conclusion that their mission in life was to shelter me from the hard and cruel world.

“As a result, I had more boy friends than I knew what to do with. Actually had to hire a secretary to keep track of my social engagements and catalogue my jewels. You see, I never let them say it with flowers. Pearls have always given me much more of a kick than pansies.

“Except, of course, with Praxiteles. The sculptor, you know. He was my real love. The only man who ever quite satisfied me in every way. I adored him.

“Naturally, I didn't stay in the show business very long, especially after the Crown Prince of Persia, who was in town for the chariot races,

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

presented me with a gorgeous house near the Acropolis. My parties there were the talk of Athens. Everybody who was anybody came to them. Even old Plato used to drop in regularly two or three times a week to listen to my wise-cracks. He said it took his mind off the philosophy business."

"And quite right, too," Salome laughed. "All the philosophers I ever met were just antiquated eggs who sat around saying mean things about life because they had grown too old to live it."

"Exactly. There were a lot of them in Athens in my time. Even Plato said he had had virtue thrust upon him. Praxiteles was no philosopher, I'll tell the world. But hard as he worked he somehow couldn't seem to get into the big money. He did a statue of Aphrodite, using me as a model, that should have been worth its weight in gold—I know *I* was—and all he got for it was five hundred oboli. I hear the thing is on exhibition right now, at a gallery in Rome."

"It is, my dear," Lucrezia Borgia interrupted. "I've seen it often. Delicious, don't you think, that the charms of a woman in your profession

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

should continue to thrill the crowd two thousand years after the philosophers who condemned her have been forgotten?"

"It's flattering, I must say. Praxiteles always insisted that I was much more interesting to him than Aphrodite. He wasn't very religious. Goddesses, he said, bored him. They were apt to be cold—unresponsive. He preferred things that were more human.

"I worried about his lack of success a great deal, and was always trying to think up some way to help him. One day, while he was working on a pot-boiling wall fountain for a rich oil merchant from Crete, and complaining that the critics wouldn't recognize his genius, I had an idea.

"'Look here, Adorable,' I said, 'I want you and some of your literary friends to write a one-act sketch for me. A snappy little act about the birth of Aphrodite. I'll play the lead and show the lady coming up out of the ocean in all her god-given beauty.'

"'You are prepared, I hope,' said Praxiteles, 'to dress the part?'

"'You should know, if anyone does,' I told

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

him. 'We have got to do something to get your name in the newspapers.'

"The more Praxiteles thought about the idea the better he liked it. He would ask some of his theatrical friends, he said, to help him out.

"'We could stage the thing,' he said, 'on the beach down near the boat landing, where there will be plenty of room for the crowd.'

"So, to make a long story short, about a week later we did. The whole town turned out to see the performance and my boy friend's name, as the author of the piece, was on everybody's lips. He had arranged for free wine for the crowd and our opening was a knockout. The ambulance chariots were busy all afternoon carrying away prominent citizens who had been injured in the struggle for ringside seats."

"It's a wonder," observed Mrs. Potiphar, "that the authorities allowed you to get away with it. They wouldn't have, in my time."

"As a matter of fact," Phryne grinned, "they didn't. Which was exactly what I had counted on, to get Praxiteles some free advertising. We had the mayor and chief of police with us, of

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

course. They were regular fellows. But the League of Neglected Wives and all the rest of the antis had a fit. They said my act was barefaced, which wasn't the half of it, my dears. So they got the Board of Public Morals after us and had me arrested.

"That started a riot. Some of my boy friends took the horses out of the police chariot and pulled the thing to the station house themselves, with me, wearing a smart pair of gloves, posed gracefully on the gilded clamshell which had been one of the props in our act. Believe me, girls, my parade up Main Street made Lady Godiva's performance almost respectable. *She* didn't have bobbed hair.

"Praxiteles declared that my arrest was an outrage and wanted to hang a couple of the censors to a tree, but I persuaded him to give up the idea.

"'I believe in Art for Art's sake,' I told him. 'They can't jail a girl for that. Haven't I always been a model citizen?'

"The police court magistrate, however, had different ideas. He was a sour-faced old crab and after he had heard the charges against me

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

he looked over his tablets and dug up some ancient and moth-eaten blue law about insulting the gods by impersonating one of them in a public performance, without a license. It was a very serious matter, he pointed out, and the penalty was banishment to Africa for life—just what the reform crowd wanted. They had been trying to run me out of town for quite a while.

“When the magistrate ordered me locked up, Praxiteles decided that I must have legal advice, so he sent for his friend Julius C. Hyperides, the well-known police-court lawyer.

“‘There is nothing to this case at all,’ Julius said after he had given me the once-over. ‘As soon as I can send out for a bathrobe, and fix up your bail, you can run along home. But you will have to appear in court in the morning.’

“‘Couldn’t you put it off for a few days?’ I asked, ‘so I can have a chance to talk to my dressmaker. I haven’t a decent thing to wear.’

“‘That is all right,’ Julius said, ‘and I am fully prepared to believe your story. But do not worry about that for decent things to wear never get a girl anything in court. Just come

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

as you are. When I arise to appeal to the calm and rugged intelligence of a jury I always use the sex appeal, and I do not mind saying, my dear, that you have it to burn. It is one reason I am taking your case.'

"'Is that so?' I told him, with a pleasant smile. 'Well, don't forget it when you come to make out my bill.'

"But Julius only felt for his watch and looked legal.

"'Bills,' he remarked, 'are something else again. I never mix pleasure with business. And since you have mentioned the matter I may as well tell you right now that I expect a retainer of ten thousand oboli.'

"'Do you take trading stamps?' I asked.

"'Real money, payable in advance,' he snapped.

"'Why, Julius,' I said, smiling at him again. 'I should not have thought a handsome young man like you could be so mercenary.'

"Julius put on a heavy professional manner—and his glasses.

"'Be yourself, little one,' he grumbled. 'I never take cases on a contingency. And as for

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

that smile you have been handing me I will say it is some smile and I advise you to save it up for the judges in court tomorrow instead of wasting it on a hard-boiled egg like me.' ”

“I once had a lawyer,” remarked Salome, “who charged me two thousand Babylonian shekels in a breach of promise suit and never collected me a cent. Naturally, I refused to pay him. When he threatened to attach my jewelry I invited him to take me out to dine and got him so full of Cyprian wine he signed a receipt for his bill thinking it was the dinner check. A girl has to do something to protect herself against these legal sharks.”

“I don't believe you could have worked that on Julius,” Phryne laughed. “He refused to sign anything—said whenever he saw a dotted line it made him feel so dizzy he couldn't remember how to spell his name.

“‘One thing you want to remember when you get in court,’ he told me. ‘No matter how many foolish questions they ask you, keep cool. Don't show your temper. Anything else you got, understand, it's all right you should show it, but temper is out—see.’



## *Ladies in Hades*

---

“‘What sort of questions are they likely to ask me,’ I said. ‘I’ve never been in court.’”

“‘Well, for instance, suppose the prosecuting attorney says to you, “What is your full name and why—answer yes or no?” That is a question you are pretty sure to be asked. All you got to do is smile and say you refuse to answer on grounds it may tend to incriminate or degrade you. If he makes any more such cracks just come back at him with something nifty, like “So’s your old man.””

“‘Or they may say, “Were you in the Apollo Night Club on Saturday, June 16th, 362 B.C., at half-past four in the morning drunk or sober?” That question is a sort of memory test and they always ask it. Just laugh—don’t answer—while I object on the ground it is irrelevant and immaterial. Nobody is ever sober in a night club at half-past four in the morning—if they were, they wouldn’t be there. Anything else, like what time you went to bed and did your friends, if any, take breakfast with you, just say you don’t remember. That is always the safest answer to make to any kind of a question in court, and I notice, what with the kind of

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

liquor we are getting nowadays, all our best people are using it.'

" 'That will be quite all right with me,' I said. 'I always did have a poor memory—especially for bills.'

"When I said that Julius began to look rather uneasy, and grumbled there was one thing he hoped I wouldn't forget, and that was his retaining fee.

" 'If the reporters come around to see you tonight,' he went on, 'have some good-looking photographs ready and tell them you are a poor but honest girl who is doing the best she can, working as a cloak model in all its various branches to send your aged grandmother to college. Anything with a real heart throb in it like that always makes a hit with the public. I'll see you in the morning.'

"The next day, when I met Julius for final instructions he took me into his private office and locked the door.

" 'Have you got that retainer with you?' he asked.

" 'Here it is,' I said, handing him the money, 'and I hope it chokes you. What next?'

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

“Next I would like you to take off that dress.’

“Be your age, Julius,’ I said, picking up a paper weight. ‘I did not come here to do any disrobing act, and while you are a lawyer, and naturally have a cash register instead of a conscience, I think ten thousand oboli is enough for you to skin me out of, without trying to steal my clothes as well. What is the matter with this dress? My dressmaker sat up all night making it especially for the occasion.’

“Just the same,’ Julius said, ‘you have put your case in my hands and had better do what I tell you. Your dress may be all right for certain purposes but I have something else I want you to wear.’ Then he opened a package he had on his desk and took out a long blue cotton wrapper.

“Nothing doing, old dear,’ I laughed. ‘It would ruin my reputation as the best dressed woman in Athens to appear before my public in a thing like that. I’d be convicted on the first ballot, of obtaining money under false pretenses.’ But Julius insisted, and at last, just to satisfy him, I put the thing on.

“Nobody paid any attention to me, when I

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

took my seat in the court. The judges—there were nine of them, all married men, Julius told me—were doing their best to keep awake while the Prosecuting Attorney, Lysias, made his opening address, telling the court I was a public nuisance and a lot more pleasant things like that.

“‘This defendant,’ he concluded, giving me a dirty look, ‘is a disgrace to our fair city of Athens! Her offense against public decency was flagrant. I could summon a hundred witnesses, if necessary, to prove it. She hasn’t a leg to stand on.’

“‘He was right about that, so far as anybody could see. The wrapper Julius had insisted on my wearing came right down to my ankles. I was furious, but Julius only winked.

“‘The prosecution summoned three witnesses—the policeman who had arrested me and two snoopers from the Board of Public Morals. Julius didn’t ask them a single question, or put anybody on the stand in my defense. I had just begun to figure how I could get back my ten thousand oboli when he stood up.

“‘These charges, your honors,’ he shouted,

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

waving his arms in the air, 'are an insult to the intelligence of this court and I for one scorn to answer them! My client, in spite of the ungentlemanly remarks which the attorney for the prosecution has made about her, is a perfect lady, and just to let you all see how perfect a lady she is I am going to have her take the stand, so that the facts may speak for themselves! Madame,'—he waved to me—'please rise and face the court!'

"I got up, without knowing what it was all about. But when Julius snatched off my wrapper, I began to see what he was driving at, because I hadn't a stitch on, underneath.

"'Your honors,' he said, pointing his finger at me, 'here is our case! The defense rests!'

"I will say this for Julius—he certainly did know his judges. The old boys—there wasn't one under sixty—looked like kids in a candy shop. As for the crowd, it went wild. When Julius started to put my cloak on me again the head judge objected."

"'Do not be in a hurry, counselor,' he said. 'I feel that it is the duty of this court to examine the evidence you have presented more closely.

## *Phryne and the Naked Truth*

---

Meanwhile, let the courtroom be cleared!"

"I stood there while the bailiffs drove the crowd into the hall. The judges were consulting in whispers. Presently the head judge turned to Julius.

"'We have come to the conclusion, counselor,' he announced, 'that before we can arrive at a decision in this most interesting case it will be necessary for us to question your client privately, in chambers. Meanwhile, the court suggests that you go and get your lunch. Take plenty of time, for it is a hot day. If our examination supports the bare facts in the case as you have presented them to us, we shall bring in a verdict of acquittal. Come back some time this afternoon. Mr. Clerk, please lock the doors and inform every one that the court is in conference!'"

"Well?" asked Cleopatra, with a broad smile.  
"What happened then?"

"It is against the rules," grinned Phryne, "to tell what goes on in judicial chambers. All I need say is, I was acquitted."

Salome, who had been fidgeting in her chair, took off another veil.

## *Ladies in Hades*

---

"I don't know whether it is your story, my dear," she said to Phryne, "or the fact that Satan is working the grillroom overtime to-night on account of the holiday crowd, but this place is simply sizzling. Why couldn't we meet out of doors, some time?"

"An excellent idea," agreed Eve. "How about your house, my dear. I adore your garden. And you can tell us all about the time you danced before Herod, and how John the Baptist came to lose his head. Shall I put you down for the next meeting?"

"Delighted. I've promised to meet Julius Cæsar at Nero's to-night for a game of poker, so don't mind if I run along."

Cleopatra gazed after Salome with a smile.

"If I know my Roman emperors," she murmured, "between Julius and Nero that girl is going to get into trouble."

"That hard-boiled egg!" Delilah laughed. "Never! Why, she could play strip poker with a naked Senegambian and come home with a coonskin coat!"