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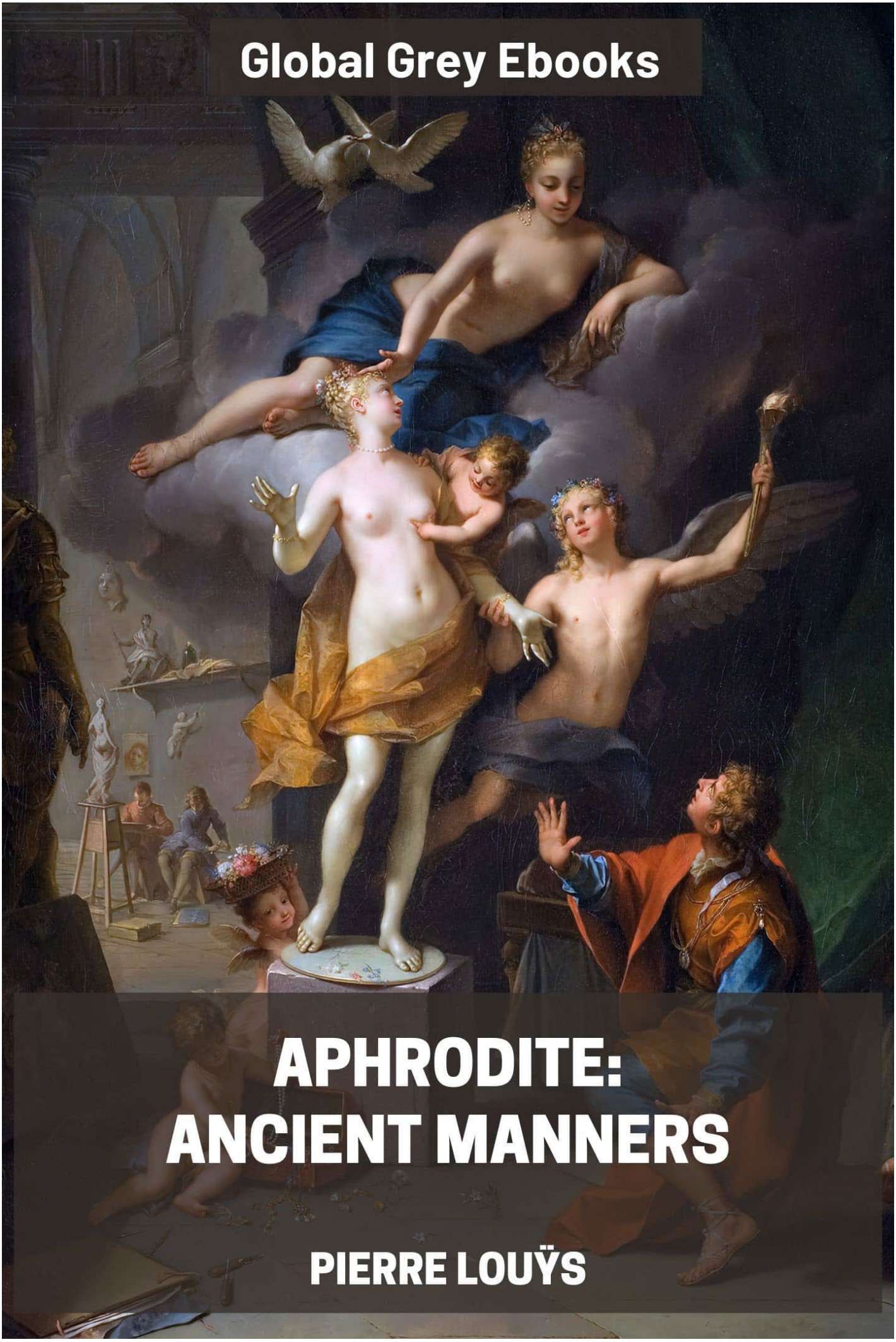

# APHRODITE: ANCIENT MANNERS

PIERRE LOUŸS

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# Preface

The very ruins of the Greek
world instruct us how our
modern life might be made
supportable.

RICHARD WAGNER

The learned Prodicos of Ceos, who flourished towards the end of the fifth century before our era, is the author of the celebrated apologue that Saint Basil recommended to the meditations of the Christians: *Heracles between Virtue and Pleasure*. We know that Heracles chose the former and was therefore permitted to commit a certain number of crimes against the Arcadian Stag, the Amazons, the Golden Apples, and the Giants.

Had Prodicos gone no further than this, he would simply have written a fable marked by a certain cheap Symbolism; but he was a good philosopher, and his collection of tales, *The Hours*, in three parts, presented the moral truths under the various aspects that befit them, according to the three ages of life. To little children he complacently held up the example of the austere choice of Heracles; to young men, doubtless, he related the voluptuous choice of Paris, and I imagine that to full-grown men he addressed himself somewhat as follows:

"One day Odysseus was roaming about the foot of the mountains of Delphi, hunting, when he fell in with two maidens holding one another by the hand. One of them had glossy, black hair, clear eyes, and a grave look. She said to him: 'I am Arete.' The other had drooping eyelids, delicate hands, and tender breasts. She said: 'I am 'Tryphe.' And both exclaimed: 'Choose between us.' But the subtile Odysseus answered sagely. 'How should I choose? You are inseparable. The eyes that have seen you pass by separately have witnessed but a barren shadow. Just as sincere virtue does not repel the eternal joys that pleasure offers it, in like manner self-indulgence would be in evil plight without a certain nobility of spirit. I will follow both of you. Show me the way.' No sooner had he finished speaking than the two visions were merged in one another, and Odysseus knew that he had been talking with the great golden Aphrodite."

The principal character of the novel which the reader is about to have under his eyes is a woman, a courtesan of antiquity; but let him take heart of grace: she will not be converted in the end.

She will be loved neither by a saint, nor by a prophet, nor by a god. In the literature of to-day this is a novelty.

A courtesan, she will be a courtesan with the frankness, the ardour, and also the conscious pride of every human being who has a vocation and has freely chosen the place he occupies in society; she will aspire to rise to the highest point; the idea that her life demands excuse or mystery will not even cross her mind. This point requires elucidation.

Hitherto, the modern writers who have appealed to a public less prejudiced than that of young girls and upper-form boys have resorted to a laborious stratagem the hypocrisy of which is displeasing to me. "I have painted pleasure as it really is," they say, "in order to exalt virtue." In commencing a novel which has Alexandria for its scene, I refuse absolutely to perpetuate this anachronism.

Love, with all that it implies, was, for the Greeks, the most virtuous of sentiments and the most prolific in greatness. They never attached to it the ideas of lewdness and immodesty which the Jewish tradition has handed down to us with the Christian doctrine. Herodotos (I. 10) tells us in the most natural manner possible, "Amongst certain barbarous peoples it is considered disgraceful to appear in public naked." When the Greeks or the Latins wished to insult a man who frequented women of pleasure, they called him μοῖχος or *mœchus*, which simply means adulterer. A man and a woman who, without being bound by any tie, formed a union with one another, whether it were in public or not, and whatever their youth might be, were regarded as injuring no one and were left in peace.

It is obvious that the life of the ancients cannot be judged according to the ideas of morality which we owe to Geneva.

For my part, I have written this book with the same simplicity as an Athenian narrating the same adventures. I hope that it will be read in the same spirit.

In order to continue to judge of the ancient Greeks according to ideas at present in vogue, it is necessary that *not a single* exact translation of their great writers should fall in the hands of a fifth-form schoolboy. If M. Mounet—Sully were to play his part of Œdipus without making any omissions, the police would suspend the performance. Had not M. Leconte de Lisle expurgated Theocritos, from prudent motives, his book would have been seized the very day it was put on sale. Aristophanes is regarded as exceptional! But we possess important fragments of fourteen hundred and forty comedies, due to one hundred and thirty-two Greek poets, some of whom, such as Alexis, Philetairos, Strattis, Euboulos, Cratinos, have left us admirable lines, and nobody has yet dared to translate this immodest and charming collection.

With the object of defending Greek morals, it is the custom to quote the teaching of certain philosophers who reproved sexual pleasures. But there exists a confusion in this matter. These rare moralists blamed the excesses of all the senses without distinction, without setting up any difference between the debauch of the bed and that of the table. A man who orders a solitary dinner which costs him six louis, at a modern Paris restaurant, would have been judged by them to be as guilty, and no less guilty, than a man who should make a rendez-vous of too intimate a nature in the public street and should be condemned therefore to a year's imprisonment by the existing laws. Moreover, these austere philosophers were generally regarded by ancient society as dangerous madmen; they were scoffed at in every theatre; they received thrashings in the street; the tyrants chose them for their court jesters, and the citizens of free States sent them into exile, when they did not deem them worthy of capital punishment.

It is, then, by a conscious and voluntary fraud, that modern educators, from the Renaissance to the present day, have represented the ancient code of morality as the inspiring source of their narrow virtues. If this code was great, if it deserves to be chosen for a model and to be obeyed, it is precisely because none other has more successfully distinguished the just from the unjust according to a criterion of beauty; proclaimed the right of all men to find their individual happiness within the bounds to which it is limited by the corresponding right of others, and declared that there is nothing under heaven more sacred than physical love, nothing more beautiful than the human body.

Such were the ethics of the nation that built the Acropolis; and if I add that they are still those of all great minds, I shall merely attest the value of a common-place. It is abundantly proved that the higher intelligences of artists, writers, warriors, or statesmen have never regarded the majestic toleration of ancient morals as illegitimate. Aristotle began life by wasting his patrimony in the society of riotous women; Sappho has given her name to a special vice;

Cæsar was the *mœchus calvus*; nor can we imagine Racine shunning the stage-women nor Napoleon practicing abstinence. Mirabeau's novels, Chénier's Greek verses, Diderot's correspondence, and Montesquieu's minor works are as daring as the writings of Catullus himself. And the most austere, saintly, and laborious of all French authors, Button, would you know his maxim of advice in the case of sentimental intrigues? "Love! why art thou the happiness of all beings and man's misfortune? Because only the *physical part* of this passion is good, and the rest is worth nothing."

Whence is this? And how comes it that in spite of the ruin of the ancient system of thought, the grand sensuality of the Greeks has remained like a ray of light upon the foreheads of the highest?

It is because sensuality is the mysterious but necessary and creative condition of intellectual development. Those who have not felt the exigencies of the flesh to the uttermost, whether for love or hatred, are incapable of understanding the full range of the exigencies of the mind. Just as the beauty of the soul illumines the whole face, in like manner virility of the body is an indispensable condition of a fruitful brain. The worst insult that Delacroix could address to men, the insult that he hurled without distinction against the decriers of Rubens and the detractors of Ingres, was the terrible word: eunuchs.

But furthermore, it would seem that the genius of peoples, like that of individuals, is above all sensual. All the cities that have reigned over the world, Babylon, Alexandria, Athens, Rome, Venice, Paris, have by a general law been as licentious as they were powerful, as if their dissoluteness was necessary to their splendour. The cities where the legislator has attempted to implant a narrow, unproductive, and artificial virtue have seen themselves condemned to utter death from the very first day. It was so with Lacedæmon, which, in the centre of the most prodigious intellectual development that the human spirit has ever witnessed, between Corinth and Alexandria, between Syracuse and Miletus, has bequeathed us neither a poet, nor a painter, nor a philosopher, nor an historian, nor a savant, barely the popular renown of a sort of Bobillot who got killed in a mountain defile with three hundred men without even succeeding in gaining the victory. And it is for this reason that after two thousand years we are able to gauge the nothingness of Spartan virtue, and declare, following Renan's exhortation, that we "curse the soil that bred this mistress of sombre errors, and insult it because it exists no longer."

Shall we see the return of the days of Ephesus and Cyrene? Alas! the modern world is succumbing to an invasion of ugliness. Civilization is marching to the north, is entering into mist, cold, mud. What night! A people clothed in black fills the mean streets. What is it thinking of? We know not, but our twenty-five years shiver at being banished to a land of old men.

But let those who will ever regret not to have known that rapturous youth of the earth which we call ancient life, be allowed to live again, by a fecund illusion, in the days when human nudity, the most perfect form that we can know and even conceive of, since we believe it to be in God's image, could unveil itself under the features of a sacred courtesan, before the twenty thousand pilgrims who covered the strands of Eleusis; when the most sensual love, the divine love of which we are born, was without sin: let them be allowed to forget eighteen barbarous, hypocritical, and hideous centuries.

Leave the quagmire for the pure spring, piously return to original beauty, rebuild the great temple to the sound of enchanted flutes, and consecrate with enthusiasm their hearts, ever charmed by the immortal Aphrodite, to the sanctuaries of the true faith.

Pierre Louÿs.

# Book I

# I. Chrysis

She lay upon her bosom, with her elbows in front of her, her legs wide apart and her cheek resting on her hand, pricking, with a long golden pin, small symmetrical holes in a pillow of green linen.

Languid with too much sleep, she had remained alone upon the disordered bed ever since she had awakened, two hours after mid-day.

The great waves of her hair, her only garment, covered one of her sides.

This hair was resplendently opaque, soft as fur, longer than a bird's wing, supple, uncountable, full of life and warmth. It covered half her back, flowed under her naked belly, glittered under her knees in thick, curling clusters. The young woman was enwrapped in this precious fleece. It glinted with a russet sheen, almost metallic, and had procured her the name of Chrysis, given her by the courtesans of Alexandria.

It was not the sleek hair of the court-woman from Syria, or the dyed hair of the Asiatics, or the black and brown hair of the daughters of Egypt. It was the hair of an Aryan race, the Galilæans across the sands.

Chrysis. She loved the name. The young men who came to see her called her Chryse like Aphrodite, in the verses they laid at her door, with rose-garlands, in the morning. She did not believe in Aphrodite, but she liked to be compared to the goddess, and she went to the temple sometimes, in order to give her, as to a friend, boxes of perfumes and blue veils.

She was born upon the borders of Lake Gennesaret, in a country of sun and shade, overgrown by laurel roses. Her mother used to go out in the evening upon the Jerusalem road, and wait for the travelers and merchants. She gave herself to them in the grass, in the midst of the silence of the fields. This woman was greatly loved in Galilee. The priests did not turn aside from her door, for she was charitable and pious. She always paid for the sacrificial lambs, and the blessing of the Eternal abode upon her house. Now when she became with child, her pregnancy being a scandal (for she had no husband), a man celebrated for his gift of prophecy told her that she would give birth to a maiden who should one day carry "the riches and faith of a people" around her neck. She did not well understand how that might be, but she named the child Sarah, that is to say princess in Hebrew. And that closed the mouth of slander.

Chrysis had always remained in ignorance of this incident, the seer having told her mother how dangerous it is to reveal to people the prophecies of which they are the object. She knew nothing of her future. That is why she often thought about it. She remembered her childhood but little, and did not like to speak about it. The only vivid sensation she had retained was the fear and disgust caused her by the anxious surveillance of her mother, who, on the approach of her time for going forth upon the road, shut her up alone in her chamber for interminable hours. She also remembered the round window through which she saw the waters of the lake, the blue-tinted fields, the transparent sky, the blithe air of Galilee. The house was covered with tamarisks and rose-coloured flax. Thorny caper-bushes reared their green heads in wild confusion, over-topping the fine mist of the grasses. The little girls bathed in a limpid brook, where they found red shells under the tufts of flowering laurels; and there were flowers upon the water and flowers over all the mead and great lilies upon the mountains.

She was twelve years old when she escaped from home to follow a troop of young horsemen who were on their way to Tyre to sell ivory. She fell in with them before a cistern. They were adorning their long-tailed horses with multi-coloured tufts. She well remembered how she

was carried off, pale with joy upon their horses, and how they stopped a second time during the night, a night so clear that the stars were invisible.

Neither had she forgotten how they entered Tyre: she in front, seated upon the panniers of a pack-horse, holding on to its mane with her fists, and proudly dangling her naked calves, to show the women of the town that she had pure blood coursing in her well-shaped legs. They left for Egypt that same evening. She followed the ivory-sellers as far as the market of Alexandria.

And it was there, in a little white house with a terrace and tapering columns, that they left her two months afterwards, with her bronze mirror, carpets, new cushions, and a beautiful Hindoo slave who was learned in the dressing of courtesans' hair. Others came on the evening of their departure, and others on the morrow.

As she lived at the extreme east of the town, a quarter disdained by the young Greeks of Brouchion, she was long before she made the acquaintance of aught but travellers and merchants, like her mother. Yet she inspired interminable passions. Caravan-masters were known to sell their merchandise dirt cheap in order to stay with her, and ruin themselves in a few nights. With these men's fortune she bought jewels, bed-cushions, rare perfumes, flowered robes, and four slaves.

She gained a knowledge of many foreign languages, and knew the tales of all countries. Assyrians told her the loves of Douzi and Ishtar; Phœnicians those of Ashtaroth and Adonis. Greek harlots from the isles told her the legend of Iphis, and taught her strange caresses which surprised her at first, but afterwards enchanted her so much that she could not do without them for a whole day. She also knew the loves of Atalanta, and how, like her, flute-girls, while yet virgins, may tire out the strongest men. Finally, her Hindoo slave had taught her patiently, during seven years, the minutest details of the complex and voluptuous art of the courtesans of Palibothra.

For love is an art, like music. It gives emotions of the same order, equally delicate, equally thrilling, sometimes perhaps more intense; and Chrysis, who knew all its rhythms and all its subtilities, regarded herself, with good reason, as a greater artist than Plango herself. Yet Plango was a musician of the temple.

Seven years she lived thus, without dreaming of a life happier or more varied. But shortly before her twentieth year, when she emerged from girlhood to womanhood and saw the first charming line of nascent maturity take form under her breasts, she suddenly conceived other ambitions.

And one morning, waking up two hours after mid-day, languid with too much sleep, she turned over upon her breast, threw out her legs, leaned her cheek upon her hand, and with a long golden pin, pricked little symmetrical holes upon her pillow of green linen.

Her reflexions were profound.

First it was four little pricks which made a square, with a prick in the centre. Then four other pricks to make a bigger square. Then she tried to make a circle. But it was a little difficult. Then, she pricked away aimlessly and began to call:

"Djala! Djala!"

Djala was her Hindoo slave, and was called Djalantachtchandratchapala, which means: "Mobile as the image of the moon upon the water." Chrysis was too lazy to say the whole name.

The slave entered and stood near the door, without entirely closing it.

“Who came yesterday, Djala?”

“You do not know?”

“No, I did not look. He was handsome? I think I slept all the time; I was tired. I remember nothing at all about it. At what time did he go away? This morning early?”

“At sunrise, he said—”

“What did he leave me? Is it much? No, don’t tell me. It’s all the same to me. What did he say? Has no one been since? Will he come back again? Give me my bracelets.”

The slave brought a casket, but Chrysis did not look at it, and, raising her arm as high as she could:

“Ah! Djala,” she said, “ah! Djala! I long for extraordinary adventures.”

“Everything is extraordinary,” said Djala, “or nought. The days resemble one another.”

“No, no. Formerly it was not like that. In all the countries of the world gods came down to earth and loved mortal women. Ah! on what beds await them, in what forest search for them that are a little more than men? What prayers shall I put up for the coming of them that will teach me something new or oblivion of all things? And if the gods will no longer come down, if they are dead or too old, Djala, shall I too die without seeing a man capable of putting tragic events into my life?”

She turned over upon her back and interlocked her fingers.

“If somebody adored me, I think it would give me such joy to make him suffer till he died. Those who come here are not worthy to weep. And then, it is my fault as well: it is I who summon them; how should they love me?”

“What bracelet to-day?”

“I shall put them all on. But leave me. I need no one. Go to the steps before the door, and if anyone comes, say that I am with my lover, a black slave whom I pay. Go.”

“You are not going out?”

“Yes, I shall go out alone. I shall dress myself alone. I shall not return. Off with you! Off with you!”

She let one leg drop upon the carpet and stretched herself into a standing posture. Djala had gone away noiselessly.

She walked very slowly about the room, with her hands crossed behind her neck, entirely absorbed in the luxury of cooling the sweat of her naked feet by stepping about on the tiles. Then she entered her bath.

It was a delight to her to look at herself through the water. She saw herself like a great pearl-shell lying open on a rock. Her skin became smooth and perfect; the lines of her legs tapered away into blue light; her whole form was more supple; her hands were transfigured. The lightness of her body was such that she raised herself on two fingers and allowed herself to float for a little and fall gently back on the marble, causing the water to ripple softly against her chin. The water entered her ears with the provocation of a kiss.

It was when taking her bath that Chrysis began to adore herself. Every part of her body became separately the object of tender admiration and the motive of a caress. She played a thousand charming pranks with her hair and her breasts. Sometimes, even, she accorded a

more direct satisfaction to her perpetual desires, and no place of repose seemed to her more propitious for the minute slowness of this delicate solace.

The day was waning. She sat up in the piscina, stepped out of the water, and walked to the door. Her foot-marks shone upon the stones. Tottering, and as if exhausted, she opened the door wide and stopped, holding the latch at arm's length; then entered, and, standing upright near her bed, and dripping with water, said to the slave:

"Dry me."

The Malabar woman took a large sponge and passed it over Chrysis's golden hair, which, being heavily charged with water, dripped streams down her back. She dried it, smoothed it out, waved it gently to and fro, and, dipping the sponge into a jar of oil, she caressed her mistress with it even to the neck. She then rubbed her down with a rough towel which brought the colour to her supple skin.

Chrysis sank quivering into the coolness of a marble chair and murmured:

"Dress my hair."

In the level rays of evening her hair, still heavy and humid, shone like rain illuminated by the sun: The slave took it in handfuls and entwined it. She rolled it into a spiral and picked it out with slim golden pins, like a great metal serpent bristling with arrows. She wound the whole around a triple fillet of green in order that its reflections might be heightened by the silk.

Chrysis held a mirror of polished copper at arm's length. She watched the slave's darting hands with a distracted eye, as she passed them through the heavy hair, rounded off the clusters, captured the stray locks, and built up her head-dress like a spiral rhytium of clay. When all was finished, Djala knelt down on her knees before her mistress and shaved her rounded flesh to the skin, in order that she might have the nudity of a statue in her lovers' eyes.

Chrysis became graver and said in a low voice:

"Paint me."

A little pink box from the island of Dioscoris contained cosmetics of all colours. With a camel-hair brush, the slave took a little of a certain black paste which she laid upon the long curves of the beautiful eye-lashes, in order to heighten the blueness of the eyes. Two firm lines put on with a pencil imparted increased length and softness to them; a bluish powder tinted the eye-lids the colour of lead; two touches of bright vermilion accentuated the tear-corners. In order to fix the cosmetics, it was necessary to anoint the face and breast with fresh cerate. With a soft feather dipped in ceruse, Djala painted trails of white along the arms and on the neck; with a little brush swollen with carmine she reddened the mouth and touched up the nipples of the breasts; with her fingers she spread a fine layer of red powder over the cheeks, marked three deep lines between the waist and the belly, and in the rounded haunches two dimples that sometimes moved; then with a plug of leather dipped in cosmetics she gave a indefinable tint to the elbows and polished up the ten nails. The toilette was finished.

The Chrysis began to smile, and said to the Hindoo woman:

"Sing to me."

She sat erect in her marble chair. Her pins gleamed with a golden glint behind her head. Her painted finger-nails, pressed to her neck from shoulder to shoulder, broke the red line of her necklace, and her white feet rested close together upon the stone.

Huddled against the wall, Djala bethought her of the love-songs of India.

“Chrysis . . .”

She sang in a monotonous chant.

“Chrysis, thy hair is like a swarm of bees hanging on a tree. The hot wind of the south penetrates it with the dew of love-battles and the wet perfume of night-flowers.”

The young woman alternated, in a softer, lower voice:

“My hair is like an endless river in the plain when the flame-lit evening fades.”

And they sang, one after the other:

“Thine eyes are like blue water-lilies without stalks, motionless upon the pools.”

“Mine eyes rest in the shadow of my lashes like deep lakes under dark branches.”

“Thy lips are two delicate flowers stained with the blood of a roe.”

“My lips are the edges of a burning wound.”

“Thy tongue is the bloody dagger that has made the wound of thy mouth.”

“My tongue is inlaid with precious stones. It is red with the sheen of my lips.”

“Thine arms are tapering as two ivory tusks, and thy armpits are two mouths.”

“Mine arms are tapering as two lily-stalks and my fingers hang therefrom like five petals.”

“Thy thighs are two white elephants’ trunks. They bear thy feet like two red flowers.”

“My feet are two nenuphar-leaves upon the water: My thighs are two bursting nenuphar buds.”

“Thy breasts are two silver bucklers with cusps steeped in blood.”

“My breasts are the moon and the reflection of the moon and the water.”

“Thy navel is a deep pit in a desert of red sand, and thy belly a young kid lying on its mother’s breast.”

“My navel is a round pearl on an inverted cup, and the curve of my belly is the clear crescent of Phœbe in the forests.”

There was a silence. The slave raised her hands and bowed to the ground.

The courtesan proceeded:

“It is like a purple flower, full of perfumes and honey.”

“It is like a sea-serpent, soft and living, open at night.”

“It is the humid grotto, the ever-warm lodging, the Refuge where man reposes from his march to death.”

The prostrate one murmured very low: “It is appalling. It is the face of Medusa.”

Chrysis planted her foot upon the slave’s neck and said with trembling:

“Djala.”

The night had come on little by little, but the moon was so luminous that the room was filled with blue light.

Chrysis looked at the motionless reflections of her naked body where the shadows fell very black.

She rose brusquely:

“Djala, what are we thinking of? It is night, and I have not yet gone out. There will be nothing left upon the heptastadion but sleeping sailors. Tell me, Djala, I am beautiful?

“Tell me, Djala, I am more beautiful than ever to-night? I am the most beautiful of the Alexandrian women, and you know it? Will not he who shall presently pass within the sidelong glance of my eyes follow me like a dog? Shall I not perform my pleasure upon him, and make a slave of him according to my whim, and can I not expect the most abject obedience from the first man whom I shall meet? Dress me, Djala.”

Djala twined two silver serpents about her arms. On her feet she fixed sandals and attached them to her brown legs with crossed leather straps. Over her warm belly Chrysis herself buckled a maiden’s girdle, which sloped down from the upper part of the loins along the hollow line of the groins; in her ears she hung great circular rings, on her neck three golden phallus-bracelets enchased at Paphos by the hierodules. She contemplated herself for some time, standing naked in her jewels; then, drawing from the coffer in which she had folded it, a vast transparent stuff of yellow linen, she twisted it about her and draped herself in it to the ground. Diagonal folds intersected the little that one saw of her body through the light tissue; one of her elbows stood out under the light tunic, and the other arm, which she had left bare, carried the long train high out of reach of the dust.

She took her feather fan in her hand, and carelessly sauntered forth.

Standing upon the steps of the threshold, with her hand leaning on the white wall, Djala watched the courtesan’s retreating form.

She walked slowly past the houses, in the deserted street bathed in moonlight. A little flickering shadow danced behind her.

# II. The Quay At Alexandria

On the quay at Alexandria a singing-girl was standing singing. By her side were two flute-girls, seated on the white parapet.

I

The satyrs pursue in the woods
The light-footed oreads.
They chase the nymphs upon the mountains,
They fill their eyes with affright,
They seize their hair in the wind,
They grasp their breasts in the chase,
And throw their warm bodies backwards
Upon the green dew-covered moss,
And the beautiful bodies, their beautiful bodies half divine,
Writhe with the agony . . .
O women! Eros makes your lips cry aloud
With dolorous, sweet Desire.

The flute-players repeated

“Eros
Eros!”

and wailed in their twin reeds.

II

Cybele pursues across the plain
Attys, beautiful as Apollo.
Eros has smitten her to the heart, and for him,
O Totoi! but not him for her,
Instead of love, cruel god, wicked Eros,
Thou counsellest but hatred . . .
Across the meads, the vast distant plains,
Cybele chases Attys;
And because she adores the scorned,
She infuses into his veins
The great cold breath, the breath of death.
O dolorous, sweet Desire!

“Eros!
Eros!”

Shrill wailings poured from the flutes.

III

The Goat-foot pursues to the river
Syrinx, the daughter of the fountain;
Pale Eros, that loves the taste of tears,
Kissed her as she ran, cheek to cheek;
And the frail shadow of the drowned maiden

Shivers, reeds, upon the waters.
But Eros kings it over the world and the gods.
He kings it over death itself.
On the watery tomb he gathered for us
All the reeds, and with them made the flute,
'Tis a dead soul that weeps here, women,
Dolorous, sweet Desire.

Whilst the flute prolonged the slow chant of the last line, the singer held out her hand to the passers-by standing around her in a circle, and collected four obols, which she slipped into her shoe.

The crowd gradually melted away, innumerable, curious of itself and watching its own movements. The noise of footsteps and voices drowned even the sound of the sea. Sailors hauled their boats upon the quay with bowed shoulders. Fruit-sellers passed to and fro with teeming baskets upon their arms. Beggars begged for alms with trembling hand. Asses, laden with leathern bottles, trotted in front of the goads of their drivers. But it was the hour of sunset; and the crowd of idlers, more numerous than the crowd bent on affairs, covered the quay. Groups formed in places, and women wandered amongst them. The names of well-known characters passed from mouth to mouth. The young men looked at the philosophers, and the philosophers looked at the courtesans.

The latter were of every kind and condition, from the most celebrated, dressed in fine silks and wearing shoes of gilded leather, to the most miserable, who walked barefooted. The poor ones were no less beautiful than the others, but less fortunate only, and the attention of the sages was fixed by preference upon those whose natural grace was not disfigured by the artifice of girdles and weighty jewels. As it was the day before the Aphrodisiæ, these women had every license to choose the dress which suited them the best, and some of the youngest had even ventured to wear nothing at all. But their nudity shocked nobody, for they would not thus have exposed all the details of their bodies to the sun if they had possessed the slightest defect which might have rendered them the laughing-stock of the married women.

"Tryphera! Tryphera!"

And a young courtesan of joyful mien elbowed her way through the crowd to join a friend of whom she had just caught sight.

"Tryphera! are you invited?"

"Where, Seso?"

"To Bacchis's."

"Not yet. She is giving a dinner?"

"A dinner? A banquet, my dear. She is to liberate her most beautiful slave, Aphrodisia, on the second day of the feast."

"At last! She has perceived at last that people came to see her only for the sake of her slave."

"I think she has seen nothing. It is a whim of old Cheres, the ship-owner on the quay. He wanted to buy the girl for ten minæ. Bacchis refused. Twenty minæ; she refused again."

"She must be crazy."

"Why, pray? It was her ambition to have a freed-woman. Besides, she was quite right to bargain. Cheres will give thirty-five minæ, and at that price the girl becomes a freed-woman."

“Thirty-five minæ? Three thousand five hundred drachmæ? Three thousand five hundred drachmæ for a negress?”

“She is a white man’s daughter.”

“But her mother is black.”

“Bacchis declared that she would not part with her for less, and old Cheres is so amorous that he consented.”

“I hope he is invited at any rate.”

“No! Aphrodisia is to be served up at the banquet as the last dish, after the fruit. Everybody will taste of it at pleasure, and it is only on the morrow that she is to be handed over to Cheres; but I am much afraid she will be tired . . .”

“Don’t pity her. With him she will have time to recover. I know him, Seso. I have watched him sleep.”

They laughed together at Cheres. Then they complimented one another. “You have a pretty robe,” said Seso. “Did you have it trimmed at home?”

Tryphera’s robe was of fine sea-green stuff entirely trimmed with flowering iris. A carbuncle set in gold gathered it up into a spindle-shaped pleat over the left shoulder; the robe fell slantingly between the two breasts, leaving the entire right side of her body naked down to the metal girdle; a narrow slit, that opened and closed at every step, alone revealed the whiteness of the leg.

“Seso!” said another voice. “Seso and Tryphera, come with me if you don’t know what to do. I am going to the Ceramic Wall to see whether my name is written up.”

“Mousarion! Where have you come from, my dear?”

“From Pharos. There is nobody there.”

“What do you mean? There is nothing to do but fish, it is so full.”

“No turbots for me. I am off to the wall. Come.”

On the way, Seso told them about the projected banquet at Bacchis’s over again.

“Ah! at Bacchis’s!” cried Mousarion. “You remember the last dinner, Tryphera, and all the stories about Chrysis?”

“You must not repeat them. Seso is her friend.”

Mousarion bit her lips; but Seso had already taken the alarm.

“What did they say about her?”

“Oh! various ill-natured things.”

“Let people talk,” declared Seso. “We three together are not worth Chrysis. The day she decides to leave her quarter and shew herself at Brouchion, I know of some of our lovers whom we shall never see again.”

“Oh! Oh!”

“Certainly. I would commit any folly for that woman. Be sure that there is none here more beautiful than she.”

The three girls had now arrived in front of the Ceramic Wall. Inscriptions written in black succeeded one another along the whole length of its immense white surface. When a lover

desired to present himself to a courtesan, he had merely to write up their two names, with the price he offered; if the man and the money were approved of, the woman remained standing under the notice until the lover re-appeared.

“Look, Seso,” said Tryphera, laughing.

“Who is the practical joker who has written that?”

And they read in huge letters:

BACCHIS
THERSIES
2 OBOLS

“It ought not to be allowed to make fun of the women like that. If I were the rhymarch, I should already have held an enquiry.”

But further on, Seso stopped before an inscription more to the point:

SESO OF CNIDOS
TIMON THE SON OF LYSIAS
1 MINA

She turned slightly pale.

“I stay,” she said.

And she leaned her back against the wall under the envious glances of the women that passed by.

A few steps further on Mousarion found an acceptable offer, if not as generous an one. Tryphera returned to the quay alone.

As the hour was advanced, the crowd had become less compact. But the three musicians were still singing and playing the flute.

Catching sight of a stranger whose clothes and rotundity were slightly ridiculous, Tryphera tapped him on the shoulder.

“I say! Papa! I wager that you are not an Alexandrian, eh?”

“No indeed, my girl,” answered the honest fellow. “And you have guessed rightly. I am quite astounded at the town and the people.”

“You are from Boubastis?”

“No. From Cabasa. I came here to sell grain, and I am going back again to-morrow, richer by fifty-two minæ. Thanks be to the gods! it has been a good year.”

Tryphera suddenly began to take an great interest in this merchant.

“My child,” he resumed timidly, “you can give me a great joy. I don’t want to return to Cabasa to-morrow without being able to tell my wife and three daughters that I have seen some celebrated men, You probably know some celebrated men?”

“Some few,” she said, laughing.

“Good. Name them to me when they pass. I am sure that during the last two days I have met the most influential functionaries. I am in despair at not knowing them by sight.”

“You shall have your wish. This is Naucrates.”

“Who is Naucrates?”

“A philosopher.”

“And what does he teach?”

“Silence.”

“By Zeus, that is a doctrine that does not require much genius, and this philosopher does not please me at all.”

“That is Phrasilas.”

“Who is Phrasilas?”

“A fool.”

“Then why do you mention him?”

“Because others consider him to be eminent.”

“And what does he say?”

“He says everything with a smile, and that enables him to pass off his errors as international and common-places as subtile. He has all the advantage. People have allowed themselves to be duped.”

“All this is beyond me, and I don’t quite understand. Besides, the face of this Phrasilas is marked by hypocrisy.”

“This is Philodemos.”

“The strategist?”

“No. A Latin poet who writes in Greek.”

“My dear, he is an enemy. I am sorry to have seen him.”

At this point a flutter of excitement ran through the crowd and a murmur of voices pronounced the same name:

“Demetrios . . . Demetrios . . .”

Tryphera mounted upon a street post, and she too said to the merchant:

“Demetrios . . . That is Demetrios. You were anxious to see celebrated men.”

“Demetrios? the Queen’s lover? Is it possible?”

“Yes, you are in luck. He never leaves his house. This is the first time I have seen him on the quay since I have been at Alexandria.”

“Where is he?”

“That’s he, bending over to look at the harbour.”

“There are two men leaning over.”

“It is the one in blue.”

“I cannot see him very well. His back is turned to me.”

“Know you not? he is the sculptor to whom the queen offered herself for a model when he carved the Aphrodite in the temple.”

“They say he is the royal lover. They say he is the master of Egypt.”

“And he is as beautiful as Apollo.”

“Ah! he has turned round. I am very glad that I came. I shall say that I have seen him. I have heard so much about him. It seems that no woman has ever resisted him. He has had many love adventures, has he not? How is it that the queen has not heard of them?”

“The queen knows of them as well as we do. She loves him too much to speak of them. She is afraid of his returning to Rhodes, to his master, Pherecrates. He is as powerful as she is, and it is she who desired him.”

“He does not look happy. Why does he look so sad? I think I should be happy if I were in his place. I should like to be he, were it only for an evening.”

The sun had set. The women gazed at this man, their common dream. He, without appearing to be conscious of the stir he created, remained leaning over the parapet, listening to the flute-girls.

The little musicians made another collection; then, they softly threw their light flutes over their backs. The singing-girl placed her arms round their necks and all three returned to the town.

At night-fall, the other women went back into immense Alexandria in little groups, and the herd of men followed them; but all turned round as they walked, and looked at Demetrios.

The last girl who passed softly cast her yellow flowers at him, and laughed.

Night fell upon the quays.

# III. Demetrios

Demetrios remained alone, leaning on his elbow, at the spot vacated by the flute-girls. He listened to the murmur of the sea, to the slow creaking of the ships, to the wind passing beneath the stars.

The town was illumined by a dazzling little cloud which lingered upon the moon, and the sky was bathed in soft light.

The young man looked around him. The flute-girls' tunics had left two marks in the dust. He remembered their faces: they were two Ephesians. He had thought the elder one pretty; but the younger was without charm, and, as ugliness was a torture to him, he avoided thinking about her.

An ivory object gleamed at his feet. He picked it up: it was a writing-tablet, with a silver style attached to it. The wax was almost worn away and it had been necessary to go over the words several times in order to make them legible. They were even scratched into the ivory.

There were only these words:

Myrtis Loves Rhodocleia

and he did not know to which of the two women this belonged, and whether the other was the loved one, or whether it was some unknown girl left behind in Ephesos. Then he thought for a moment of overtaking the two musicians in order to restore them what was perhaps the souvenir of a cherished dead friend; but he could not have found them without difficulty, and as he was already beginning to lose interest in them, he turned round languidly and threw the little object into the sea.

It fell rapidly, with a gliding motion like a white bird, and he heard the splash it made away out in the black water. This little noise enhanced the immense silence of the harbour. Leaning against the cold parapet, he tried to drive away all thought, and began to look at the things around him.

He had a horror of life. He only left his house when the life of the day was dying down, and he returned home when the dawn began to draw the fishermen and market-gardeners to the town. The pleasure of seeing nought in the world but the ghost of the town and his own stature had become a voluptuous passion with him, and he did not remember having seen the mid-day sun for months.

He was wearied. The queen was tedious.

He could hardly understand, that night, the joy and pride that had possessed him three years before, when the queen, bewitched perhaps by the stories of his beauty and genius, had sent for him to the palace, and had heralded him to the Evening Gate with the sound of the silver salpinx.

His arrival at the palace sometimes lighted up his memory with one of those souvenirs which, through excess of sweetness, become gradually embittered in the soul and then intolerable . . . The queen had received him alone, in her private apartments, consisting of three rooms of incomparable luxury, where every sound was muffled by cushions. She lay upon her left side, embedded, at it were, in a litter of greenish silks which, by reflection, bathed the black locks of her hair in purple. Her youthful body was arrayed in a daring open-worked costume which she had had made before her eyes by a Phrygian courtesan, and which exposed the twenty-

two places where caresses are irresistible. One had no need to take off that costume during a whole night, even though one exhausted one's amorous imagination beyond the most extravagant dreams.

Demetrios fell respectfully on his knees, and took Queen Berenice's naked little foot in his hand, in order to kiss it, as one kisses an object delicate and rare.

Then she rose.

Simply, like a beautiful slave posing, she undid her corselet, her bandelettes, her open drawers, took off the very bracelets from her arms, the rings from her ankles, and stood up erect, with her hands open before her shoulders, her head slightly thrown back, and her coral coif trembling upon her cheeks.

She was the daughter of a Ptolemy and a Syrian princess descended from all the gods, through Astarte, whom the Greeks call Aphrodite. Demetrios knew this, and that she was proud of her Olympian lineage. Accordingly he was not disconcerted when the queen said to him without moving: "I am Astarte. Take a block of marble and your chisel and reveal me to the men of Egypt. I desire them to worship my image."

Demetrios looked at her, and divined, unerringly, the artless, novel sensuality with which this young girl's body was animated. He said, "I am the first to worship it," and he took her in his arms. The queen was not angry at this brusquerie, but stepped back a pace and asked, "You think yourself Adonis, that you dare to lay hands on the goddess?" He answered, "Yes." She looked at him, smiled a little, and concluded.

"You are right."

Thus was why he became insupportable, and his best friends left him; but he ravished the hearts of all women.

When he entered one of the apartments of the palace, the women of the court ceased talking, and the other women listened to him too, for the sound of his voice was an ecstasy. If he took refuge with the queen, their persecution followed him even there, under pretexts ever new. Did he wander through the streets, the folds of his tunic became filled with little papyri on which the women wrote their names with words of anguish. But he crumpled them up without reading them. He was tired of all that. When his handiwork was set up in the temple of Aphrodite, the sacred enclosure was invaded at every hour of the night by the crowd of his feminine adorers, who came to read his name chiselled in the stone and offer a wealth of doves and roses to their living god.

His house was soon encumbered with gifts, which he accepted at first out of negligence, but ended by refusing all, when he understood what was desired of him, and that he was being treated like a prostitute. His very slave-women offered themselves. He had them whipped, and sold them to the little porneion at Rhacotis. Then his men-slaves, seduced by presents, opened his door to unknown women whom he found at his bed-side when he came home, and whose attitude left no doubt as to their passionate intentions. The trinkets of his toilet-table disappeared one after the other; more than one of the women of the town had a sandal or a belt of his, a cup from which he had drunk, even the stones of the fruit he had eaten. If he dropped a flower as he walked, he did not find it again. The women would have picked up the very dust upon which his shoes had trampled.

In addition to the fact that this persecution was becoming dangerous and threatened to kill all his sensibility, he had reached the stage of manhood at which a thinking man perceives the urgency of dividing his life into two parts, and of ceasing to confound the things of the intellect with the exigencies of the senses. The statue of Aphrodite was for him the sublime

pretext of this moral conversion. The highest realization of the queen's beauty, all the idealism it was possible to read into the supple lines of her body, Demetrios had evoked it all from the marble, and from that day onward he imagined that no other woman on earth would ever attain to the level of his dream. His statue became the object of his passion. He adored it only, and madly divorced from the flesh the supreme idea of the goddess, all the more immaterial because he had attached it to life.

When he again saw the queen herself, she seemed to him destitute of everything which had constituted her charm. She served for a certain time to hoodwink his aimless desires, but she was at once too different from the Other, and too like her. When she sank down in exhaustion after his embraces, and incontinently went to sleep, he looked at her as if she were an intruder who had adopted the semblance of the beloved one and usurped her place in his bed. The arms of the Other were more slender, her breast more finely cut, her hips narrower than those of the Real one. The latter did not possess the three furrows of the groins, thin as lines, that he had graved upon the marble. He finally wearied of her.

His feminine adorers were aware of it, and though he continued his daily visits it was known that he ceased to be amorous of Berenice. And the enthusiasm on his account doubled. He paid no attention to it. In point of fact, he had need of a change of quite other importance.

It often happens that in the interval between two mistresses a man is tempted and satisfied by vulgar dissipation. Demetrios succumbed to it. When the necessity of going to the palace was more distasteful to him than usual, he went off at night to the garden of the sacred courtesans. This garden surrounded the temple on every side.

The women who frequented it did not know him. Moreover, they were so wearied by the superfluity of their loves that they had neither exclamations nor tears, and the satisfaction he was in search of was not dashed, in that quarter at least, by those frenzied cat-cries with which the queen exasperated him.

His conversation with these fair, self-possessed ladies was idle and unaffected. The day's visitors, the probable weather on the morrow, the softness of the grass, the mildness of the night—these were the charming topics. They did not beg him to express his theories in statuary, and they did not give their opinion upon the Achilleus of Scopas. If it befell that they dismissed the lover who had chosen them, and that they thought him handsome and told him so, he was quite at liberty not to believe in their disinterestedness.

When freed from the embrace of their religious arms, he mounted the temple steps and fell to an ecstatic contemplation of the statue.

Between the slim columns crowned with Ionian volutes, the goddess stood instinct with life upon a pedestal of rose-coloured stone laden with rich votive offerings. She was naked and fully sexed, tinted vaguely and like a woman. In one hand she held her mirror, the handle of which was a priapus, and with the other she adorned her beauty with a pearl necklace of seven strings. A pearl larger than the others, long and silvery, gleamed between her two breasts, like the moon's crescent between two round clouds.

Demetrios contemplated her tenderly, and would fain have believed, like the common people, that they were real sacred pearls, born of the drops of water which had rolled in the shell of Anadyomene.

"O divine sister!" he would say. "O flowered one! O transfigured one! You are no longer the little Asiatic woman whom I made your unworthy model. You are her immortal Idea, the terrestrial soul of Astarte, the mother of her race. You shone in her blazing eyes, you burned in her sombre lips, you swooned in her soft hands, you gaped in her great breasts, you

strained in entwining legs, long ago, before your birth; and the food which the daughter of a sinner hungers for is your tyrant also, you, a goddess, the mother of gods and men, the joy and anguish of the world. But I have seen you, evolved you, caught you, O marvelous Cytherea! It is not to your image, it is to yourself that I have given your mirror, and yourself that I have covered with pearls, as on the day when you were born of the fiery heaven and the laughing foam of the sea, like the dew-steeped dawn, and escorted with acclamations by blue tritons to the shores of Cyprus."

He had been adoring her after this fashion when he entered the quay, at the hour when the crowd was melting away, and he heard the anguish and tears of the flute-girls' chant.

But he had spurned the courtesans of the temple that evening, because a glimpse of a couple beneath the branches had stirred him with disgust and revolted him to the soul.

The kindly influence of the night penetrated him little by little. He turned his face of the wind, the wind that had passed over the sea and seemed to carry to Egypt the lingering scent of the sweet-smelling roses of Amathus.

Beautiful feminine forms took shape in his brain. He had been asked for a group of the three Charites, enclasping one another, for the garden of the goddess, but it was distasteful to his youthful genius to copy conventions, and he dreamed of bringing together on the same block of marble the three graceful motions of woman. Two of the Charites were to be dressed, one holding a fan and half closing her eyelids to the gently-swaying feathers; the other dancing in the folds of her robe. The third should be standing naked behind her sisters, and, with her uplifted arms, would be twisting the thick mass of her hair upon her neck.

His mind conceived still other projects, as, for example, to erect, upon the rocks of Pharos, an Andromeda of black marble confronting the tumultuous monster of the sea, or to enclose the agora of Brouchion between the four horses of the rising sun, like wrathful Pegasi; and what was not his exultant rapture at the idea, which began to germinate within him, of a Zagreus terror-stricken by the approaching Titans? Ah! how beauty had once more taken him for its own! how he was escaping from the clutches of love! how he was separating from the flesh the supreme idea of the goddess! In a word, how free he felt!

Now, he turned his head towards the quays, and, in the distance, saw the yellow shimmer of a woman's veil.

# IV. The Passer-By

She carried slowly along the deserted quay, which was bathed in moonlight. Her head leaned over one shoulder. A little shadow danced and flickered before her footsteps.

Demetrios watched her as she drew near.

Diagonal folds intersected the little one saw of her body through the thin tissue; one of her elbows stood out in relief under the tight tunic, and the other arm, which she had left bare, carried the long train, holding it high out of the dust.

He recognised by her jewels that she was a courtesan. In order to avoid her salutation he crossed the road rapidly.

He did not want to look at her. He obstinately centered his thoughts upon the rough plan of his Zagreus. Nevertheless his eyes turned in the direction of the passer-by.

Then he saw that she did not stop, that she paid no attention to him, that she did not even affect to look at the sea, or to raise the front of her veil, or to absorb herself in her reflections; but that she was merely taking a walk by herself and was in search of nothing but the freshness of the breeze, solitude, abandonment, the subtle thrill of silence.

Demetrios did not take his eyes off her, and fell into a singular astonishment.

She continued to walk like a yellow shadow in the distance, nonchalant, and preceded by the little black shadow.

He heard at each step the slight creak of her shoe in the dust.

She walked on as far as the island of Pharos and went up into the rocks.

Suddenly, and as if he had loved this unknown woman for a long time, Demetrios ran after her, then stopped, retraced his steps, trembled, got angry with himself, tried to leave the quay; but he had never utilised his will except in the service of his pleasure, and when it was time to set it in motion for the salvation of his character and the ordering of his life, he felt completely powerless and nailed to the spot on which he stood.

As he could not throw off the thought of this woman, he tried to find excuses in his own eyes for the preoccupation which was so violently distracting him. He imagined that his admiration for the graceful apparition was due to a purely æsthetic sentiment, and he said to himself that she would make a perfect model for the Charis with the fan which he intended to design on the morrow.

Then, suddenly, all his thoughts became confused, and a crowd of anxious questions surged up into his mind about this woman in yellow.

What was she doing in the island at this hour of the night? Why, for whom had she left home so late? Why had she not addressed him? She had seen him, certainly she had seen him while he was crossing the quay. Why had she gone her way without a word of salutation? It was rumoured that certain women sometimes chose the fresh hours before the dawn to bathe in the sea. But there was no bathing at Pharos. The sea was too deep. Besides, how unlikely that a woman would be covered with all those jewels for no other object than to go bathing! Then what took her so far from Rhacotis? A rendezvous perhaps? Some young rake, avid of variety, who had chosen for a temporary bed the great rocks polished by the waves?

Demetrios wished to be certain. But the young woman was already returning, with the same calm and indolent step. The sluggish radiance of the moon shone full upon her face as she advanced, brushing the dust of the parapet with the end of her fan.

# V. The Mirror, The Comb, And The Necklace

She had a special beauty of her own. Her hair seemed two masses of gold, but it was too abundant, and it padded her low forehead with two heavy waves charged with amber, which swallowed up the ears and twisted themselves into a seven-fold coil upon the nape of the neck. The nose was delicate, with expressive nostrils which palpitated sometimes, surmounting a thick and painted mouth, with rounded mobile corners. The supple line of the body undulated at every stop, receiving animation from the harmonious motion of her unfettered breasts, or from the swing of the beautiful hips that supported her lissom waist.

When she was within ten paces of the young man, she turned her eyes upon him. Demetrios was seized with trembling. They were extraordinary eyes; blue, but deep and brilliant at the same time, humid, weary, bathed in tears and flashing fire, almost closed under the weight of the eyelids and eyelashes. The glance of these eyes was like the siren's song. Whosoever crossed their path was inevitably a captive. She knew it well, and cunningly she used their virtue; but she counted still more upon affected indifference as a weapon of attack against the man whom so much sincere love had been incapable of touching deeply.

The navigators who have sailed over the purple seas, beyond the Ganges, relate that they have seen, beneath the water, rocks of magnetic stone. When ships pass near them, the nails and iron fittings are wrenched down to the submarine cliff and remain fixed to it for ever. And what was once a swift craft, a habitation, a living being, becomes nought but a flotsam of planks, scattered by the winds, tossed by the waves. Thus did Demetrios, in the presence of the spell of two great eyes, lose his very self, and all his strength ebbed away.

She lowered her eyes and passed by close to him. He could have shouted with impatience. He clenched his fists. He was afraid of not being able to recover a calm attitude, for speak to her he must. Nevertheless he approached her with the formula of convention.

"I salute you," said he.

"I salute you also," answered the woman.

Demetrios continued:

"Where are you going to in so leisurely a fashion?"

"I am going home."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

And she made a movement as if to resume her walk.

Then Demetrios thought that perhaps he had made a mistake in taking her for a courtesan. For some time past, the wives of the magistrates and functionaries had taken to dressing and painting themselves like the women of pleasure. She was probably a woman of honourable reputation, and it was not without irony that he finished his question thus:

"To your husband?"

She put her two hands to her sides and began to laugh.

"I haven't one this evening."

Demetrios bit his lip and suggested, almost timidly:

“Don’t look for one. You have set to work too late. There is no one about now.”

“Who told you that I was looking for one? I am taking a walk by myself, and am looking for nothing.”

“Where have you come from then? You certainly have not put on all those jewels for your own pleasure, and that silken veil. . .”

“Would you have me go out naked, or dressed in wool like a slave-woman? I dress for my own benefit. I like to know that I am beautiful, and I look at my fingers as I walk in order to recognise all my rings. . . . .”

“You ought to have a mirror in your hand and look at nothing but your eyes. Those eyes did not see the light at Alexandria. You are a Jewess. I recognise it by your voice, which is softer than ours.”

“No, I am not a Jewess. I am a Galilæn.”

“What is your name, Miriam or Noëmi?”

“My Syriac name you shall not know. It is a royal name which is not home here. My friends call me Chrysis, and it is a compliment that you might have paid me.”

He put his hand on her arm.

“Oh! no, no,” she said mockingly. “It is much too late for this kind of trifling. Let me go home quickly. I have been up for nearly three hours. I am dying of hunger.”

Bending down, she took her foot in her hand:

“See how my little thongs hurt me. They are too tightly strapped. If I do not loose them in a moment, I shall have a mark on my foot, and that will be a pretty object to kiss. Leave me quickly. Ah! what an ado! If I had known, I would not have stopped. My yellow veil is all crumpled at the waist, look.”

Demetrios passed his hand over his forehead; then, with the careless air of a man who condescends to make his choice, he murmured:

“Show me the way.”

“I shall do nothing of the kind,” said Chrysis with a stupefied air. “You do not even ask me whether it is my pleasure.

“Show me the way! Listen to him! Do you take me for a porneion-girl, who puts herself on her back for three obols without looking to see who is possessing her? Do you even know whether I am free? Do you know what appointments I may have? Have you followed me in the street? Have you noted the doors that open for me? Have you counted the men who think they are loved by Chrysis? Show me the way! I shall not show it you, if you please. Stay here or go away, but you shall not go home with me!”

“You do not know who I am.”

“You? Of course I do! You are Demetrios of Saïs; you made the statue of my goddess; you are the lover of my queen and the lord of my town. But for me you are nothing but a handsome slave, because you have seen me and you love me.”

She came a little nearer to him, and went on in a caressing voice:

“Yes, you love me. Oh! don’t interrupt me. I know what you are going to say: you love no one, you are loved. You are the Well-beloved, the Darling, the Idol. You refused Glycera, who had refused Antiochus. Demonassa the Lesbian, who had sworn to die a virgin, entered

your bed during your sleep, and would have taken you by force if your two Lybian slaves had not put her naked into the street. Callistion, the well-named, despairing of approaching you, has bought the house opposite yours, and shows herself at the open window in the morning, as scantily dressed as Artemis in the bath. You think that I do not know all that? But we courtesans hear of everything. I heard of you the night of your arrival at Alexandria; and since then not a single day has passed without your name being mentioned. I even know things you have forgotten. I even know things that you do not yet know yourself. Poor little Phyllis hanged herself the day before yesterday on your door-post, did she not? well, the fashion is catching. Lyde has done like Phyllis: I saw her this evening as I passed, she was quite blue, but the tears were not yet dry upon her cheeks. You don't know who Lyde is? a child, a little fifteen-year-old courtesan whom her mother sold last month to a Samian shipwright who was passing the night at Alexandria before going up the river to Thebes. She came to see me. I gave her some advice; she knew absolutely nothing, not even how to play at dice. I often took her in my bed, because, when she had no lover, she did not know where to sleep. And she loved you! If you had seen her hug me to her and call me by your name. She wanted to write to you. Do you understand? I told her it was not worth while . . ."

Demetrios gazed at her without understanding.

"Yes, all that is a pure matter of indifference to you, is it not?" continued Chrysis. "You did not love her. It is I that you love. You have not even listened to what I have just told you. I am sure you could not repeat a single word. You are absorbed in wondering how my eyelids are made up, speculating on the sweetness of my mouth, on the softness of my hair. Ah! how many others know all this! All who have desired me have had their pleasure upon me: men, young men, old men, children, women, young girls. I have refused nobody, do you understand? For seven years, Demetrios, I have only slept alone three nights. Count how many lovers that makes. Two thousand five hundred and more. I do not include those that came in the daytime. Last year I danced naked before twenty thousand persons, and I know that you were not one of them. Do you think that I hide myself? Ah! for what, pray? All the women have seen me in the bath. All the men have seen me in bed. You alone, you shall never see me. I refuse you. I refuse you. You shall never know anything of what I am, of what I feel, of my beauty, of my love! You are an abominable man, fatuous, cruel, insensible, cowardly! I don't know why one of us has not had enough hatred to kill you both in one another's arms, first you, and afterwards the queen."

Demetrios quietly took her by the two arms, and, without answering a word, bent her backwards with violence.

She had a moment's anguish; but suddenly she stiffened her knees, stiffened her elbows, backed a little, and said in a low voice:

"Ah! I am not afraid of that, Demetrios! you shall never take me by force, were I as feeble as an amorous virgin and you as strong as a son of Atlas. You desire not only the satisfaction of your own senses, but chiefly of mine. Moreover, you want to see me from head to foot, because you believe that I am beautiful, and I am beautiful indeed. Now the moon gives less light than my twelve waxen torches. It is almost dark here. And then it is not customary to undress upon the quay. I could not dress myself again without the help of my slave. Let me free, you hurt my arms."

They were silent for a few minutes; then Demetrios answered:

"We must have done with this, Chrysis. You know well that I shall not force you. But let me follow you. However proud you are, you would pay dearly for the glory of refusing Demetrios."

Chrysis still kept silence. He continued more gently:

“What are you afraid of?”

“You are accustomed to the love of others. Do you know what ought to be given to a courtesan who does not love?”

He became impatient.

“I do not ask you to love me. I am tired of being loved. I do not want to be loved. I ask you to abandon yourself. For that, I will give you all the gold in the world. I have it in Egypt.”

“I have it in my hair. I am tired of gold. I don’t want gold. I want but three things. Will you give them to me?”

Demetrios felt that she was going to ask for the impossible. He looked at her anxiously. But she began to smile, and said in slow tones:

“I want a silver mirror to gaze at my eyes within my eyes.”

“You shall have it. What else do you want? Quickly.”

“I want a carved ivory comb to plunge into my hair like a net into water that sparkles in the sun.”

“And then?”

“You will give me my comb?”

“Yes, yes. Go on.”

“I want a pearl necklace to hang on my breast, when I dance you the nuptial dances of my country in my chamber.”

He raised his eyebrows;

“Is that all?”

“You will give me my necklace?”

“Any you please.”

Her voice became very tender.

“Any I please? Ah! that is exactly what I wanted to ask you. Will you let me choose my presents?”

“Of course.”

“You swear?”

“I swear.”

“What oath will you swear?”

“Dictate it to me.”

“By the Aphrodite you carved.”

“I swear by the Aphrodite. But why these precautions?”

“Ah! . . . I was uneasy; but now I am reassured”.

She raised her head.

“I have chosen my presents.”

Demetrios suddenly became anxious and asked:

“Already?”

“Yes. Do you think I shall accept any sort of silver mirror, bought of a merchant of Smyrna, or some stray courtesan. I want the mirror of my friend Bacchis, who stole a lover from me last week and jeered at me spitefully in a little orgie she had with Tryphera, Mousarion, and some young fools who repeated everything to me. It is a mirror she prizes greatly because it belonged to Ithodopis, who was fellow-slave with æsop and was redeemed by Sappho’s brother. You know that she is a very celebrated courtesan. Her mirror is magnificent. It is said that Sappho used it, and it is for this reason that Bacchis lays store on it. She has nothing more precious in the world; but I know where you will find it. She told me one night, when she was intoxicated. It is under the third stone of the altar. She puts it there every evening when she leaves her house at sunset. Go to-morrow to her house at that hour and fear nothing: she takes her slaves with her.”

“This is pure madness,” cried Demetrios. “Do you expect me to steal?”

“Do you not love me? I thought that you loved me. And then, have you not sworn? I thought you had sworn. If I am mistaken, let us say no more about it.”

He understood that she was ruining him, but he yielded without a struggle, almost willingly.

“I will do what you say,” he answered.

“Oh! I know well that you will. But you hesitate at first. I understand that. It is not an ordinary present. I would not ask it of a philosopher. I ask you for it. I know well that you will give it me.”

She toyed a moment with the peacock feathers of her round fan, and suddenly:

“Ah! . . . Neither do I wish for a common ivory comb bought at a tradesman’s in the town. You told me I might choose, did you not? Well, I want . . . I want the carved ivory comb in the hair of the wife of the high priest. It is much more valuable than the mirror of Rhodopis. It came from a queen of Egypt who lived a long time ago, and whose name is so difficult that I cannot pronounce it. Consequently the ivory is very old, and as yellow as if it were gilded. It has a carved figure of a young girl walking in a lotus-marsh. The lotus is higher than she is, and she is stepping on tiptoe in order not to get wet. . . . . It is really a beautiful comb. I am glad you are going to give it to me. I have also some little grievances against its present possessor. I had offered a blue veil to Aphrodite last month; I saw it on this woman’s head next day. It was a little hasty, and I bore her a grudge for it. Her comb will avenge me for my veil.”

“And how am I to get it?” asked Demetrios.

“Ah! that will be a little more difficult. She is an Egyptian, you know, and she makes up her two hundred plaits only once a year, like the other women of her race. But I want my comb to-morrow, and you must kill her to get it. You have sworn an oath.”

She pouted at Demetrios, who was looking on the ground. Then she concluded very quickly:

“I have chosen my necklace also. I want the seven-stringed pearl necklace on the neck of Aphrodite.”

Demetrios started violently.

“Ah! this time, it is too much! You shall not have the laugh of me to the end! Nothing, do you understand? neither the mirror, nor the comb, nor the collar.”

But she closed his mouth with her hand and resumed her caressing tone:

“Don’t say that. You know well that you will give me this too. I am sure of it. I shall have the three gifts. You will come to see me to-morrow evening, and the day after to-morrow if you like, and every evening. I shall be at home at any hour, in the costume you prefer, painted according to your taste, with my hair dressed after your pleasure, ready for your most extravagant caprices. If you desire but tender love, I will cherish you like a child. If you thirst after rare sensations, I will not refuse you the most agonising. If you wish for silence, I will hold my peace, when you want me to sing, ah! you will see, Well-Beloved! I know songs of all countries. I know some that are soft as the murmur of springs, others that are terrible as the coming of thunder. I know some so simple and fresh that a young girl might sing them to her mother; and I know some that could not be sung at Lampsacos. I know some that Elephantis would have blushed to hear, and that I dare not sing above a whisper. The nights you want me to dance, I will dance till morning. I will dance fully dressed, with my trailing tunic, or in a transparent veil, or in open drawers and a corselet with two openings to allow the breasts to peep through. But have I promised you to dance naked? I will dance naked if you prefer. Naked and with flowers on my head, or naked with my hair loose, painted like a divine image. I can balance my hands, circle my arms, vibrate my breast, heave my belly, contort my croup, you will see! I dance on the tips of my toes or lying down in the carpets. I know all the dances of Aphrodite, that are danced before Ourania, and those that are danced before Astarte. I even know some they dare not dance. I will dance you all the loves. When this is finished we shall be only at the beginning. You will see! The queen is richer than I am, but there is not in all the palace a chamber as amorous as mine. I don’t tell you what you will find there. There are things too beautiful for me to be able to give you an idea of them, and others so strange that I do not know the words to describe them. And then, do you know what you will see, something which transcends all the rest? You will see Chrysis whom you love, and whom you do not yet know. Yes, you have only seen my face, you do not know how beautiful I am. Ah! Ah! . . . Ah! Ah! You will have surprises. Ah! how you will play with my nipples, how you will bend my little waist as it lies upon your arm, how you will tremble in the grasp of my knees, how you will faint away on my moving body! And how excellent my mouth! Ah! my kisses!”

Demetrios looked at her with a frenzied eye.

She continued tenderly:

“What! You will not give me a poor old silver mirror when you may have all my hair like a golden forest in your hands?”

Demetrios tried to touch it . . . She recoiled and said:

“To-morrow!”

“You shall have it,” he murmured.

“And you will not take for me a little ivory comb which pleases me, when you can have my two arms like two branches of ivory around your neck?”

He tried to stroke them. She drew them behind her back and repeated: “To-morrow!”

“I will bring it,” he said very low. “Ah! I knew it!” cried the courtesan; “and you will also give me the seven-stringed necklace of pearls on the neck of Aphrodite, and for that I will sell you all my body, which is like a half-opened shell of mother-of-pearl, and more kisses in your mouth than there are pearls in the sea!”

Demetrios held out his head, supplicatingly.

She shot him a brilliant glance and gave him her sensual lips . . .

When he opened his eyes she was already afar off. A little pale shadow danced before her floating veil.

He returned vaguely towards the town, with his forehead bent under the weight of an inexpressible shame.

# VI. The Virgins

The dim dawn rose on the sea. All things were tinted with lilac. The furnace blazing on the summit of the tower of Pharos died down with the moon. Fugitive yellow gleams appeared in the violet waves like sirens' faces under the hair of purple sea-weed. Daylight came all at once.

The quay was deserted. The town was dead. It was the grey light before the first day blush that illumines the world's sleep and brings the feverish dreams of morning.

Nothing existed, except silence.

The long boats anchored in line near the quays, with their rows of parallel oars hanging in the water, looked like sleeping birds. The perspective of the architectural line of the streets was unbroken by vehicle, horse, or slave. Alexandria was but a solitude, the unreal phantom of some antique city abandoned for centuries.

But the sound of light footsteps fell tremulously upon the ground, and two young girls appeared, one dressed in yellow, the other in blue.

They both wore maidens' girdles, which circled round the hips and buckled low down upon the body below the navel. They were the musicians of the night, the singing-girl and one of the flute-girls.

The flute-girl was younger and prettier than her friend. Her eyes smiled faintly, pale as the blue of her robe, half hidden under her eyelids. Her two slender flutes hung dangling from her flowered shoulder-knot along her back. A double iris-garland, fastened to the ankles by two silver anklets, undulated beneath the gauzy robe and encircled the rounded legs.

She said:

"Myrtocleia, do not be sad because you have lost our tablets. Would you ever have forgotten that you possess the love of Rhodis, and can you think, naughty girl, you would ever have read in solitude the line written by my hand? Am I one of those faithless friends who engrave their bed-sister's name upon their nail and unite themselves to another girl as soon as the nail has grown to the limit? Do you need a souvenir of me when you have my living body? I am barely of nubile age, and yet I was not half so old on the day I saw you for the first time. You remember it well. It was at the bath. Our mothers took us in their arms and held us towards one another. We played for a long time on the marble before putting on our clothes again. We have never left one another since that day, and, five years afterward, we loved each other."

Myrtocleia answered:

"There is another first day, Rhodis, and you know it. It is the day you linked our two names together in writing upon the tablets. That was the first day! It will never come back again. But never mind. Each day is new for me, and when you awake towards evening, it is as if I saw you for the first time, You are not a girl at all: you are a little Arcadian nymph that has left her forests because Phoibos has dried up her fountain. Your body is supple as an olive branch, your skin is soft as water in summer, the iris circles about your legs, and you wear the lotus-flower like Astarte the open fig. In what wood haunted by immortals did your mother betake her to sleep before your thrice-blessed birth? and what roaming ægipan, or what river-god united himself with her in the grass? When we have left this terrible African soil, you shall take me to your fountain, far beyond Psophis and Phenens, to vast shady forests where, upon the soft earth, one may see the double footprints of satyrs and light-treading nymphs.

There you shall search out a smooth rock, and you shall engrave upon the stone the words you wrote upon the wax: the words that are our joy. Listen, listen, Rhodis! By the girdle of Aphrodite upon which all desires are embroidered, all desires are unknown to me; for you are more than my dream! By the horn of Amaltheia whence flow all the good things of the world, the world is a matter of indifference to me; for you are the only good I have found in it! When I look at you and when I see myself, I know not why you love me in return. Your hair is as fair as ears of corn; mine is black as a ram's fleece. Your skin is as white as shepherd's cheese; mine is brown as the sand upon the beach. Your tender breast is as flowered as the orange tree in autumn; mine is meagre and barren as the rock pine. If my face has gained in beauty, it is because I have loved you. O Rhodis! well you know that my singular virginity is like the lips of Pan eating a sprig of myrtle; yours is the colour of roses, and dainty as the mouth of a little child. I do not know why you love me; but if you ceased to love me for a day; if, like your sister Theano who plays the flute by your side, you ever stayed to sleep in the houses that employ us, then I should never even think of sleeping alone in our bed, and when you came in you would find me strangled with my girdle."

The very idea was so wild and cruel that Rhodis's long eyes filled with smiles and tears. She placed her foot upon a street-post:

"My flowers between my legs hamper me. Undo them, adored Myrto. I have finished dancing for to-night."

The singing-girl started.

"Oh! it is true. I had already forgotten them, those men and women. They made both of you dance, you in this Cossian robe, transparent as water, and your sister naked with you. If I had not protected you, they would have possessed you like a prostitute, as they did your sister before our eyes in the same room. Oh, what an abomination! Did you hear her cries and wailings? How dolorous is the love of man!"

She knelt down beside Rhodis and unclasped the two garlands, and then the three higher up, imprinting a kiss on the place of each. When she rose to her feet, the child took her by the neck and swooned under her mouth.

"Myrto, you are not jealous of all those debauchees? What does it matter that they should have seen me? Theano suffices them, and I have relinquished her to them. They shall not have me, darling Myrto. Do not be jealous of them."

"Jealous! I am jealous of everything that approaches you. In order that your robes may not have you alone, I put them on when you have worn them. In order that the flowers in your hair may not remain amorous of you, I give them to mean courtesans who will defile them in their orgies. I have given you nothing, in order that nothing may possess you. I am afraid of everything you touch, and I hate everything you look at. I should like to pass my whole life between the four walls of a prison alone with myself and you, and unite myself with you so profoundly, hide you so well between my arms, that no eye would suspect your presence. I would I were the fruit that you eat, the perfume that delights you, the sleep that glides beneath your eyelids, the love that strains your limbs. I am jealous of the happiness I give you, and I would I could give you the very happiness I derive from you. That is what I am jealous of; but I do not fear your mistresses of a night when they help me to satisfy your girlish desires. As for lovers, I know well that you will never be theirs; I know well that you cannot love man, intermittent and brutal man."

Rhodis exclaimed with conviction:

“I would rather go, like Nausithoe, and sacrifice my virginity to the god Priapos adored at Thasos. But not this morning, darling. I have danced a long time, and I am very tired. I wish I were at home, sleeping on your arm.”

She smiled, and continued:

“We must tell Theano that our bed is no longer hers. We will make her up another one beside the door. After what I have seen this night I cannot embrace her again. Myrto, it is really horrible. Is it possible to love like that? Is that what they call love?”

“Yes, it is that.”

“They deceive themselves, Myrto. They do not know.”

Myrtocleia took her in her arms, and both kept silence together.

The wind mingled their hair.

# VII. Chrysis’s Hair

“Look,” said Rhodis, “look! I see some one.”

The singing-girl looked. A woman, in the distance, was walking rapidly along the quay.

“I recognise her.” resumed the child.

“It is Chrysis. She is wearing her yellow robe.”

“What! is she dressed already?”

“I can’t understand it. Usually she does not go out before mid-day, and the sun is hardly up. Something must have happened to her: something fortunate no doubt: she is so lucky.”

They advanced to meet her, and said:

“Hail, Chrysis.”

“Hail. How long have you been here?”

“I don’t know. It was daylight when we arrived.”

“There was nobody on the quay?”

“Nobody.”

“Not a man! are you sure?”

“Oh, quite sure. Why do you ask?”

Chrysis did not answer. Rhodis went on:

“You wanted to see somebody?”

“Yes . . . perhaps . . . I think perhaps it is as well I have not seen him. Yes, it is as well. I was wrong to come back; I could not restrain myself.”

“But what is the matter? Do tell us, Chrysis.”

“Oh, no.”

“Not even us? Not even us, your little friends?”

“You shall know later on, together with the whole town.”

“It is very amiable of you.”

“You shall know a little before, if you really want to; but this morning it is impossible. Extraordinary things are happening, my dears. I am dying to tell you, but I must hold my tongue. You were going home? Come and sleep with me, I am quite alone.”

“Oh, Chrysis, Chrysidion, we are so tired! We are going home certainly, but to have a good sleep.”

“Well, you can sleep afterwards. To-day is the eve of the Aphrodisiæ. Is it a day for rest? If you want the goddess to protect you and to make you happy next year you must enter her temple with eyelids dark as violets and cheeks white as lilies. We will see to that; come with me.”

She put her arms round their waists, and closing her caressing hands upon their little half naked breasts, bore them hurriedly off.

Rhodis, however, remained preoccupied.

“And when we are in your bed,” she said, “will you not tell us what is happening; what you expect?”

“I will tell you many things, everything you please; but about that subject I shall say nothing.”

“Even when we are in your arms, naked, with the lamp extinguished?”

“Do not insist, Rhodis: you shall know to-morrow. Wait till to-morrow.”

“You are going to be very happy? or very powerful?”

“Very powerful.”

Rhodis opened her eyes wide and exclaimed:

“You are going to sleep with the queen!”

“No,” said Chrysis laughing; “but I am going to be as powerful as she is. Do you desire anything?”

“Oh, yes.”

And the little girl became thoughtful.

“Well, what is it?” asked Chrysis.

“It is something impossible. Why should I ask?”

Myrtocleia spoke for her:

“At Ephesos, in our country, when two virgins of nubile age like Rhodis and me love one another, the law allows them to be united in marriage. They both go to the temple of Athena and sacrifice their double girdle; thence to the sanctuary of Iphinoë, where they offer a lock of their hair, interwined; and finally to the peristyle of Dionysios, where the more male of the two receives a little knife of sharp-edged gold, and a white linen cloth to stanch the blood. In the evening, the “fiancee” is conducted to her new home in a flowered chariot between her husband and the paranymph, escorted by torch-bearers and flute-girls. And thenceforth they have the rights of married people; they may adopt little girls and associate them in their intimate life. They are respected. They have a family. That is the dream of Rhodis. But it is not the custom here.”

“We will change the law,” said Chrysis.

“But leave it to me, you shall marry one another.”

“Oh, is it true?” cried the little girl, flushing with joy.

“Yes; and I don’t ask which of you is to be the husband. I know that Myrto possesses everything necessary to create that illusion. You are fortunate, Rhodis, to have such a friend. They are rare, whatever people say.”

They reached the door, where Djala was sitting on the steps weaving a towel of flax. The slave-woman rose to allow them to pass, and then followed them.

The two flute-girls took off their simple clothing in an instant. They performed minute ablutions upon each other in a green marble bowl communicating with the bath. Then they rolled upon the bed.

Chrysis looked at them without seeing them. The words spoken by Demetrios, even the most trivial, ran in her memory unceasingly. She was not conscious of the presence of Djala, who

silently untied and unwound her long saffron veil, unbuckled the girdle, took off the rings, the seals, the armlets, the silver serpents, the golden pins; but the gentle titillation of her hair falling over her shoulders woke her vaguely.

She asked for her mirror.

Was she beginning to feel afraid that she was not beautiful enough to keep this new lover—for keep him she must—after the mad exploits she had demanded of him? Or was it that, by a detailed examination of each one of her physical beauties, she wanted to calm her alarms and justify her confidence?

She brought the mirror close to every part of her body, touching each in succession. She appraised the whiteness of her skin, estimated its softness by long caresses, its warmth by embraces. She tested the fullness of her breasts, the firmness of her belly, the tension of her flesh. She measured her hair and considered its glossiness. She tried the strength of her regard, the expression of her mouth, the fire of her breath; and she bestowed a long, slow kiss along her naked arm from the region of the armpit down to the bend of the elbow.

An extraordinary emotion, compounded of astonishment and pride, of certainty and impatience, took possession of her at this contact with her own lips. She turned round as if she were looking for somebody; but catching sight of the two forgotten Ephesian girls upon her bed, she leaped into their midst, separated them, hugged them with a sort of amorous fury, and her long golden hair enveloped the three young heads.

# Book II

# I. The Gardens Of The Goddess

The temple of Aphrodite-Astarte stood outside the gates of the town, in an immense park, full of flowers and shade. The Nile water, conveyed by seven aqueducts, induced an extraordinary verdure all the year round.

This flowering forest on the sea's verge, these deep streams, these lakes, these darkling meadows, had been created in the desert more than two centuries previously by the first of the Ptolemies. Since then, the sycamores planted by his orders had grown to gigantic size; under the influence of the fertilising waters, the lawns had grown into meads, the basins had widened into ponds, nature had turned a park into a champaign.

The gardens were more than a valley, more than a country; they were a complete world enclosed by bounds of stone and governed by a goddess, the soul and centre of this universe. All around it stood a circular terrace, eighty stades long and thirty-two feet high. This was not a wall, it was a colossal "cité," composed of fourteen hundred houses. A corresponding number of prostitutes inhabited this sacred town, and in this unique spot were represented seventy different nationalities.

The plan of the sacred houses was uniform and as follows: the door, of red copper (a metal consecrated to the goddess), bore a phallos-shaped knocker which fell upon a receiving-plate in relief, the image of the cteis; and beneath was graved the courtesan's name, with the initials of the usual formula:

Ω.Ξ.Ε.
ΚΟΧΛΙΣ
Π.Π.Π

Two rooms contrived like shops opened out on either side of the door, that is to say, there was no wall on the side facing the gardens. The one on the right, the "chambre exposée," was the place where the courtesan sat bedecked with her adornments upon a lofty cathedra at the hour when the men arrived. The one on the left was at the disposal of suitors who wished to pass the night in the open air, without, however, sleeping on the grass.

When the door was opened, a corridor gave access to a vast court-yard paved with marble, the centre of which was occupied by an oval basin. A peristyle cast a circle of shadow round this patch of light, and interposed a zone of coolness between it and the entries to the seven chambers of the house. At the further end rose the altar of red granite.

Each woman had brought a little idol of the goddess from her native country, and each adored it in her own tongue, as it stood upon the altar, without understanding the other women. Lachmi, Ashtaroth, Venus, Ischtar, Freia, Mylitta, Cypris, such were the religious names of their deified VOLUPTAS. Some venerated her under a symbolic form: a red pebble, a conical stone, a great knotted shell. Most of them had a little statuette on a pedestal of green wood, usually a rudely-carved figure with thin arms, heavy breasts, and excessive hips. The hand pointed to the delta-shaped locks of the belly. They laid a myrtle-branch at its feet, scattered the altar with rose leaves, and burned a little grain of incense for every prayer granted. It was the confidant of all their troubles, the witness of all their undertakings, the supposed cause of all their pleasures. At their death, it was placed in their fragile little coffin, to watch over their sepulture.

The most beautiful of these women came from the kingdoms of Asia. Every year, the vessels which carried the presents of the tributaries or allies to Alexandria landed, together with the

bales and leathern bottles, a cargo of a hundred virgins chosen by the priests for the service of the sacred garden. They were Mysians and Jewesses, Phrygians and Cretans, daughters of Ecbatana and Babylon, maidens from the Bay of Pearls and from the sacred banks of the Ganges. Some were white-skinned with medallion-like faces and inflexible bosoms; others, brown as the earth under rain, wore silver rings in their noses. Their hair fell short and dark upon their shoulders.

Some came from a still greater distance: dainty, deliberate little beings, whose language nobody understood, and who resembled yellow monkeys.

Their long eyes pointed towards their temples; they dressed their straight black hair in the quaintest fashion. These girls remained all their lives as timid as strayed animals. They knew the movements of love, but refused the kiss upon the mouth. Between two passing unions they were to be seen sitting on their little feet, and playing with one another, and amusing themselves like infants.

In a solitary meadow, the pink and pale daughters of the North lived together, lying upon the grass. They were Sarmatians with triple tresses, robust legs, square shoulders, who made garlands for themselves with the branches of trees, and wrestled for a pastime. There were big-breasted, flat-nosed, hairy Scythians, who paired in the attitude of beasts; gigantic Teutons who terrified the Egyptians with their hair pale as that of old men and their flesh softer than that of children; Gauls, sandy-hued like cows, and who laughed without a motive; young Celts with sea-green eyes, who never went out naked.

Elsewhere, the brown-breasted Iberians assembled together during the day. They had heavy hair that they dressed with extreme care, and nervous bellies which they did not depilate. Their firm skins and powerful croups were held in great esteem by the Alexandrians. They were chosen for dancing-girls as often as for mistresses. Under the large shadow of the palm-trees lived the daughters of Africa: Numidians veiled in white, Carthaginians apparelled in black gauze, Negresses enveloped in many-coloured costumes.

They were fourteen hundred.

When once a woman had entered the garden, she never left it till the first day of her old age. She gave the half of her gains to the temple, and the remainder went to defray the cost of her meals and perfumes.

They were not slaves, and each was the real owner of one of the houses of the Terrace; but all were not equally beloved, and the most fortunate often found the opportunity of buying the neighbouring houses, which their owners were willing to sell in order to escape the ravages of hunger. These girls carried off their obscene statuettes to the park and searched out a flat stone to serve as an altar, in a corner which henceforth they did not leave. The poorer tradesmen were aware of this. and preferred to address themselves to the women who slept thus in the open air upon the moss near their sanctuaries; but occasionally even these suitors were not forthcoming, and then the poor creatures took to themselves a partner in distress. These passionate friendships developed almost into conjugal love. The couple shared everything down to the last scrap of wool. They consoled one another for their long periods of chastity by alternate complaisances.

Those who had no girl friends offered themselves of their own accord as slaves to their more prosperous colleagues.

The latter were forbidden to have more than a dozen of these poor creatures in their service; but twenty-two courtesans were quoted as having attained the maximum. These had chosen a motley staff of domestics from all the nationalities.

If, in the course of their stray amours, they conceived a son, he was brought up in the temple-enclosure in the contemplation of the perfect form and in the service of its divinity. If they were brought to bed of a daughter, the child was consecrated to the goddess.

On the first day of its life, they celebrated its symbolic marriage with the son of Dionysos, and the Hierophant deflowered it herself with a little golden knife; for virginity is displeasing to Aphrodite. Later on, the little girl entered the Didascalion, a great monumental school situated behind the temple, and where the theory and practice of all the erotic arts were taught in seven stages: the use of the eyes, the embrace, the motions of the body, the secrets of the bite, of the kiss, and of glottism.

The pupil chose the day of her first experiment at her own good pleasure, because desire is ordained by the goddess, whose will must be obeyed. On that day, she was allotted one of the houses of the Terrace, and some of these children, who were not even nubile, counted amongst the most zealous and the most esteemed.

The interior of the Didascalion, the seven class-rooms, the little theatre, and the peristyle of the court, were decorated with ninety-two frescoes designed to sum up the whole of amatory teaching. It was the life-work of one man. Cleochares of Alexandria, the natural son and disciple of Apelles, had terminated them on the eve of his death. Recently, Queen Berenice, who was greatly interested in the celebrated school and sent her young sisters to it, had ordered a series of marble groups from Demetrios in order to complete the decoration; but as yet only one of them had been erected, in the children’s class-room.

At the end of each year, in the presence of the entire body of courtesans, a great competition took place, which excited an extraordinary emulation amongst this crowd of women, for the twelve prizes which were offered conferred the right to the most exalted glory it was possible to dream of: the right to enter the Cotytteion.

This last monument was shrouded in so much mystery, that it is impossible for us to give a detailed description of it. We know merely that it was comprised in the peribola and that it had the form of a triangle of which the base was a temple of the goddess Cotytto, in whose name fearful unknown debauches took place. The other two sides of the monument were composed of eighteen houses; they were inhabited by thirty-six courtesans, so sought after by rich lovers that they did not give themselves for less than two minæ: they were the Baptes of Alexandria. Once a month, at full moon, they assembled in the temple enclosure, maddened by aphrodisiacs, and girt with the canonical phallos. The oldest of the thirty-six was required to take a mortal dose of the terrible erotogenous philter. The certainty of a speedy death impelled her to attempt without hesitation all the dangerous feats of sensual passion before which the living recoil. Her body, covered with foam, became the centre and model of the whirling orgie; in the midst of prolonged shriekings, cries, tears, and dances, the other naked women embraced her with frenzy, bathed their hair in her sweat, fastened on her burning flesh, and drew fresh ardors from the uninterrupted spasm of this furious agony. Three years these women lived thus, and such was the wild madness of their end at the close of the thirty-sixth month.

Other less venerated sanctuaries had been erected by the women, in honour of the other names of the multiform Aphrodite. There was an altar sacred to the Ouranian Aphrodite, which received the chaste vows of sentimental courtesans: another to the Apostrophian Aphrodite, who granted forgetfulness of unrequited loves; another to the Chrysean Aphrodite, who attracted rich lovers; another to Genetyllis, the patron goddess of women in child-birth; another to Aphrodite of Colias, who presided over gross passions, for everything which related to love fell within the pious cult of the goddess. But these special altars possessed no

efficacy or virtue except in the case of unimportant desires. Their service was haphazard, their favours were a matter of daily occurrence, and their votaries were on terms of familiarity with them. Suppliants whose prayers had been granted made simple offerings of flowers; those who were not content defiled them with their excrements. They were neither consecrated nor kept up by the priests, and their profanation incurred no punishment.

Far different was the discipline of the temple.

The temple, the Great Temple of the Great Goddess, the most sacred spot in all Egypt, the inviolable Astarteïon, was a colossal edifice one hundred and thirty six feet in length, standing on the summit of the gardens and approached on all sides by seventeen steps. The golden gates were guarded by twelve hermaphrodite hierodules, symbolising the two objects of love and the twelve hours of the night.

The entrance did not face towards the east, but in the direction of Paphos, that is to say, towards the north-east. The sun’s rays never penetrated directly into the sanctuary of the Great Goddess of the Night. Eighty-six columns upheld the architrave: they were tinted purple as far as their mid-height, and all the upper part stood out from these gaudy trappings with an unspeakable whiteness, like the busts of standing women.

Between the epistyle and the coronis, the long belt-shaped Zophora unfolded its bestial sculptures, erotic and fabulous. There were centauresses mounted by stallions, goats tumbled by meagre satyrs, virgins served by monstrous bulls, naïads covered by stags, bacchantes loved by tigers, lionesses seized by griffins. All this great wallowing multitude of beings was exalted by the irresistible divine passion. The male strained, the female opened, and the fusion of the creative forces produced the first thrill of life. The crowd of obscure couples sometimes, by chance, left a clear space round some immortal scene: Europa on hands and knees bearing the weight of the glorious Olympian beast; Leda guiding the hardy swan between her beautiful arched thighs. Farther on, the insatiable Siren exhausting expiring Glaucos; the god Pan standing upright and possessing an hamadryad with flying hair; the Sphinx raising her croup to the level of the horse Pegasos. At the end of the frieze, the sculptor had carved a figure of himself facing the goddess Aphrodite. He stood there modelling the contours of a perfect cteis in soft wax, with the goddess herself as his model, as if his whole ideal of beauty, joy, and virtue had long since taken refuge in this precious fragile flower.

# II. Melitta

“Purify thyself, stranger.”

“I shall enter pure,” said Demetrios.

Dipping the end of her hair in water, the young gate-keeper moistened first his eyelids, then his lips and fingers, in order that his glance might be sanctified, as also the kiss of his mouth and the caress of his hands.

And then he pressed forward into the wood of Aphrodite.

Through the dark branches, he perceived a setting sun of sombre purple, powerless to dazzle the eyes. It was the evening of the day on which his life had been convulsed by the meeting with Chrysis.

The feminine soul is of a simplicity incredible to men. Where there is nothing but a straight line, they obstinately search for the complexity of a web; they find emptiness and go astray in it. Thus it was that the soul of Chrysis, limpid as a little child’s, appeared to Demetrios more mysterious than a problem in metaphysics. After leaving this woman upon the quay, he went back to his house like a man in a dream, incapable of answering all the questions which tormented him. What did she want with these three gifts? It was impossible for her either to wear or to sell a celebrated mirror, acquired by theft, the comb of an assassinated woman, the pearl necklace of the goddess. If she kept them at home, she would expose herself every day to the possibility of a fatal discovery. Then why ask for them? To destroy them? He knew only too well that women are incapable of enjoying things in secret and that good fortune brings them happiness only as soon as it is noised abroad. And then, what divination, what profound clairvoyance had led her to judge him capable of accomplishing three such extraordinary actions for her sake?

Assuredly, if he had liked, he might have carried off Chrysis from her home, held her at his mercy, and made her his mistress, his wife, or his slave, at choice. He had even the right to do away with her, simply. Former revolutions had accustomed the citizens to violent deaths, and no one would have troubled about the disappearance of a courtesan. Chrysis must know this, and yet she had dared . . .

The more he thought about her, the more grateful he was to her for having varied the usual routine of bargaining in so charming a manner. How many women of equal worth with Chrysis had offered themselves clumsily! But what did this one ask for? Neither love, nor gold, nor jewels, but three unheard-of crimes! She interested him keenly. He had offered her all the treasures of Egypt: he felt distinctly, now, that if she had accepted them she would not have received two obols, and that he would have tired of her even before knowing her. Three crimes were certainly an unusual salary; but she was worthy to receive it since she was a woman capable of exacting it, and he promised himself to go on with the adventure.

In order not to give himself the time to repent of his firm resolve, he went the very same day to the house of Bacchis, found the house empty, took the silver mirror and went off to the gardens.

Was it necessary to make a direct call on Chrysis’s second victim? Demetrios thought not. The priestess Touni, who owned the famous ivory comb, was so charming and so weak that he was afraid of repenting if he went straight to her house without any preliminary precautions. He retraced his steps and went along the Grand Terrace.

The courtesans were on show in their “chambres exposées” like flowers in a shop window.

Their attitudes and their costumes had no less diversity than their ages, types, and races. The most beautiful, according to the tradition of Phryne, leaving exposed nothing but the oval of their faces, sat enveloped from head to foot in their great garment of fine wool. Others had adopted the fashion of transparent robes, under which one distinguished their beauties mysteriously, just as, through limpid water, one discerns the green mosses lying in splashes of shade upon the bottom. Those whose sole charm consisted in their youthfulness sat naked to the waist, stiffening out their busts in order to display to the best advantage the firmness of their breasts. But the most mature, knowing that the features of the feminine visage age more quickly than the skin of the body, sat quite naked, holding their breasts in their hands, and stretching their clumsy thighs apart, as if they wished to prove that they were still women.

Demetrios passed slowly before them, with unflagging admiration. He had never yet succeeded in contemplating a woman’s nudity without intense emotion. He understood neither disgust before the corpse of a young woman nor insensibility to the body of a little girl. That evening any woman could have charmed him. Provided she remained silent and did not display more ardour than the minimum required by the etiquette of the bed, he was quite ready to forgive her for her lack of beauty. And what is more, he even preferred that she should have a coarse body, for the more his intelligence considered faultless forms, the less room was there for his sensual desires. The agitation which he felt upon contact with living beauty was due to a sensualism exclusively cerebral, which annihilated mere sexual excitation. He remembered with anguish having remained all night as impotent as an old man, by the side of the most admirable woman he had ever held in his arms. And since that night he had learnt to choose mistresses of less purity.

“Friend,” said a voice, “you don’t recognise me?”

He turned round with a negative sign, and went on his way, for he never undressed the same woman twice. It was the principle that guided his visits to the gardens. A woman one has not yet possessed retains something of the virgin; but what good result, what surprise can one expect from a second rendez-vous? It is almost marriage. Demetrios did not expose himself to the illusions of the second night. Queen Berenice sufficed for his rare conjugal impulses, and with that exception he was careful to choose a new accomplice for every evening’s indispensable adultery.

“Clonarion!

Gnatene!

Plango!

Mnaïs!

Crobyle!

Ioessa.”

They cried their names as he passed, and some added protestations of their ardent natures or proposed an abnormal vice. Demetrios followed the road. He was preparing to choose at a venture, according to his habit, when a little girl entirely dressed in blue leaned her head upon her shoulder and said to him softly, without rising:

“Is it quite out of the question?”

The novelty of this mode of address made him smile. He stopped.

“Open the door,” he said. “I choose you.”

The little girl gleefully jumped to her feet and gave two raps with the phallus-shaped knocker. The door was opened by an old slave woman.

“Gorgo,” said the little girl, “I have got somebody; quickly, get some cakes and Cretan wine, and make the bed.”

She turned round to Demetrios.

“You don’t want any satyrion?”

“No,” said the young man laughing. “You have some?”

“I have to keep it,” said the child. “I am asked for it oftener than you think. Come this way; be careful of the steps, one of them is worn. Go into my room. I shall be back in a moment.”

The room was quite simple, like those of the novices. A great bed, a couch, a few seats and carpets composed all the scanty furniture; but through a large open bay there was a view over the gardens, the sea, the double harbour of Alexandria. Demetrios remained standing and looked at the distant city.

Suns setting behind harbours! Incomparable glories of maritime cities, calm skies, purple waters! Upon what soul vociferous with joy or sorrow would you not cast a shroud of silence? What feet have not halted, what passions have not withered, what voices have not died away before you? . . . Demetrios looked; a swell of torrential flame seemed to issue from the sun, half dipping into the sea, and to flow straight to the left bend of the wood of Aphrodite. From horizon to horizon, the Mediterranean was flooded by the sumptuous purple spectrum which lay in sharply-defined bands of colour, golden red and dull violet side by side. Between this ever-shifting splendour and the peaty mirror of Lake Mareotis, stood the white mass of the town, bathed in red and violet reflexions. Its twenty thousand flat houses spreading in different directions picked it out marvellously with twenty thousand dashes of colour that underwent a perpetual metamorphosis according to the various phases of the setting luminary. The flaming sun shot forth rapid shafts, then was swallowed up, almost suddenly, in the sea, and with the first reflux of the night, there floated over the whole earth a thrill, a muffled breeze, uniform and transparent.

“Here are figs, cakes, a piece of honeycomb, wine, a woman. Eat the figs while it is daylight and the woman when it is dark.”

It was the little girl, laughing as she entered. She bade the young man sit down, mounted astride on his knees, and stretching her two arms behind her head, made fast a rose which was on the point of slipping down from her auburn hair.

In spite of himself Demetrios could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. She was completely naked, and when divested of her ample robe, her little body was seen to be so young, so infantine in the breast, so narrow at the hips, so visibly immature, that Demetrios felt a sense of pity, like a horseman on the point of throwing his man’s weight upon an over-delicate mare.

“But you are not a woman!” he exclaimed.

“I am not a woman! By the two goddesses, what am I, then? A Thracian, a porter, or an old philosopher?”

“How old are you?”

“Ten and a half. Eleven. One may say eleven. I was born in the gardens. My mother is a Milesian. She is called Pythias, but she goes by the name of ‘The Goat.’ Shall I send for her, if you think me too little? Her house is not far from mine.”

“You have been to the Didascalion?”

“I am still there in the sixth class. I shall have finished next year; and not too soon either.”

“Aren’t you happy?”

“Ah! if only you knew how difficult the mistresses are to please! They make you recommence the same lesson twenty times! Things perfectly useless that men never ask for. And then one is tired out, all for nothing. I don’t like that at all. Come, take a fig; not that one, it is not ripe. I will show you a new way to eat. Look!”

“I know it. It is longer and no better than the other way. I see that you are a good pupil.”

“Oh! I have learnt everything I know by myself. The mistresses would have us believe that they are cleverer than we are. They have more style, that may be, but they have invented nothing.”

“You have many lovers?”

“They are all too old: it is inevitable. Young men are so foolish! They only like women forty years old. Now and again I see young men pretty as Eros pass by, and if you were to see what they choose! Hippopotami! It is enough to make one turn pale. I hope sincerely that I shall never reach these women’s age: I should be too ashamed to undress. I am so glad to be still quite young. The breasts always develop too soon. I think that the first month I see my blood flow I shall feel ready to die. Let me give you a kiss. I like you very much.”

Here the conversation took a less serious if not a more silent turn, and Demetrios rapidly perceived that his scruples were beside the mark in the case of so expert a young lady. She seemed to realise that she was somewhat meagre pasturage for a young man’s appetite, and she battled her lover by a prodigious activity of furtive finger-touches, which he could neither foresee nor elude, nor direct, and which never left him the leisure for a loving embrace. She multiplied her agile, firm little body around him, offered herself, refused herself, slipped and turned and struggled. Finally they grasped one another. But this half hour was merely a long game.

She jumped out of bed the first, dipped her finger in the honey-bowl and moistened her lips; then, making a thousand efforts not to laugh, she bent over Demetrios and rubbed her mouth against his. Her round curls danced on either side of their cheeks. The young man smiled and leaned upon his elbow.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Melitta. Did you not see my name upon the door?”

“I did not look.”

“You can see it in my room. They have written it all over the walls. I shall soon be forced to have them repainted.”

Demetrios raised his head: the four panels of the chamber were covered with inscriptions.

“That is very curious, indeed.” said he. “May one read?”

“Oh, if you like. I have no secrets.”

He read. Melitta’s name was there several times repeated, coupled with various men’s names and barbaric drawings. Tender, obscene, or comic sentences jostled oddly with one another. Lovers boasted of their vigour, or detailed the charms of the little courtesan, or poked fun at her girl-friends. All this was interesting merely as a written proof of a general degradation. But, looking towards the bottom of the right-hand panel, Demetrios gave a start.

“What is that? What is that? Speak!”

“Who? What? Where?” said the child. “What is the matter with you?”

“Here. That name. Who wrote that?”

And his finger stopped under this double line.

ΜΕΛΙΤΤΑ .Λ. ΧΡΥΣΙΔΑ
ΧΡΥΣΙΣ .Λ. ΜΕΛΙΤΤΑΝ

“Ah!” she answered, “that’s me. I wrote that.”

“Who is she, Chrysis?”

“My great friend.”

“I dare say. That is not what I ask you. Which Chrysis? There are many.”

“Mine, the most beautiful. Chrysis of Galilee.”

“You know her! you know her! But speak, speak! Where does she come from? where does she live? who is her lover? tell me everything!”

He sat down upon the couch and took the little girl upon his knees.

“You are in love, then?” she said.

“That matters little to you. Tell me what you know; I am in a hurry to hear everything.”

“Oh! I know nothing at all. It is quite short. She has been to see me twice, and you may imagine that I have not asked her for details about her family. I was too happy to have her, and I did not lose time in conversation.”

“How is she made?”

“Like a pretty girl, what do you expect me to say? Do you want me to name all the parts of her body, adding that everything is beautiful? And then, she is a woman, a real woman . . . Every time I think about her I desire somebody.”

And she put her arm round the neck of Demetrios.

“Don’t you know anything about her?” he began again.

“I know—I know that she comes from Galilee, that she is nearly twenty years old, and that she lives in the Jews’ quarter, in the east end, near the gardens. But that is all.”

“And about her life, her tastes? can you tell me nothing? She is fond of women, since she came to see you. But is she altogether Lesbian?”

“Certainly not. The first night she passed here, she brought a lover, and I swear to you there was no make-believe about her. When a woman is sincere, I can see it by her eyes. That did not prevent her from returning once quite alone. And she has promised me a third night.”

“You don’t know whether she has any other *amie* in the gardens? Nobody?”

“Yes, one of her countrywomen, Chimairis. She is very poor.”

“Where does she live? I must see her.”

“She has slept in the wood for upwards of a year. She has sold her house. But I know where her den is. I can take you to it if you wish. Put on my sandals, will you?”

Demetrios rapidly buckled the plaited leather straps round Melitta’s slender ankles. Then he handed her her short robe, which she merely threw over her arm, and they departed in haste.

They walked far. The park was immense. From time to time, a girl under a tree proffered her name and opened her robe, then lay down again and leaned her face upon her hand. Melitta knew some of them: they embraced her without stopping her. Passing before a rustic altar, she gathered three great flowers and placed them upon the stone.

It was not yet dusk. The intense light of summer days has something permanent about it which lingers vaguely in the slow twilight.

The faint, humid stars, hardly brighter than the body of the sky, twinkled and throbbed gently, and the shadows of the branches remained indecisive.

“Mamma! There’s mamma,” cried Melitta suddenly.

A woman, dressed in a garment of triple muslin striped with blue, was seen advancing with a tranquil step, alone. As soon as she caught sight of the child she ran up to her, raised her off the ground, lifted her up in her arms, and kissed her energetically on the cheek.

“My little girl! my little love! how are you?”

“I am guiding somebody who wants to see Chimairis. And you? Are you out for a walk?”

“Corinna is *accouchée*. I have been to see her. I have dined by her bedside.”

“And what has she given birth to? A boy?”

“Two twin girls, my dear, as pink as wax dolls. You can go and see them tonight; she will show them to you.”

“Oh! how lovely! Two little courtesans. What are their names?”

“They are both called Pannychis, because they were born on the day before the Aphrodisiæ. It is a divine presage. They will be pretty.”

She replaced the child upon her feet, and turning to Demetrios:

“What do you think of my daughter? Have I the right to be proud of her?”

“You have the right to be satisfied with one another,” he answered gravely.

“Kiss mamma,” said Melitta.

He silently imprinted a kiss between her breasts. Pythias returned it to him upon the mouth, and they separated.

Demetrios and the child advanced a few more paces beneath the trees, whilst the courtesan receded into the distance, turning her head as she walked. At last they reached their goal, and Melitta said:

“It is here.”

Chimairis was sitting crouching upon her left heel, on a little grass-plot between two trees and a bust. A sort of red rag, her last remaining day garment, lay spread out beneath her. At night, she slept upon it naked, at the hour the men passed. Demetrios contemplated her with growing interest. She had the feverish aspect of certain emaciated dark women whose tawny bodies seem consumed by an ever-throbbing ardour. Her powerful lips, the excessive brilliancy of her glance, her livid eyelids combined to produce a double expression of sensual lustfulness and physical exhaustion. The curve of her hollow belly and her nervous thighs formed a natural cavity, designed as if to receive; and as she had sold everything, even her combs and pins, even her depilatory tweezers, her hair was tangled together in inextricable disorder. A black pubescence invested her nudity with a certain savage and shaggy effrontery.

A great he-goat stood stiffly on its four legs beside her. It was tethered to a tree by a gold chain which had formerly glittered in a quadruple coil upon its mistress's breast.

"Chimairis," said Melitta, "get up. Here is somebody who wishes to speak to you."

The Jewess looked, but did not move.

Demetrios advanced.

"Do you know Chrysis?" he said.

"Yes."

"Do you see her often?"

"Yes."

"Will you talk to me about her?"

"No."

"What? No? What? you cannot?"

"No."

Melitta was stupefied.

"Speak to him," she said. "Have confidence. He loves her, he wishes her well."

"I see clearly that he loves her." answered Chimairis. "If he loves her, he wishes her ill. If he loves her, I shall not speak."

Demetrios tingled with rage, but said nothing.

"Give me your hand," said the Jewess. "It will tell me whether I am mistaken."

She took the young man's left hand and turned it towards the moonlight. Melitta leaned forward to see, although she could not read the mysterious lines, but their fatality attracted her.

"What do you see?" said Demetrios.

"I see . . . Can I tell what I see? will you be obliged to me? First I see happiness, but it is all in the past. I also see love, but it is drowned in blood . . ."

"In my blood?"

"In a woman's blood. And then the blood of another woman. And then yours, a little later on."

Demetrios shrugged his shoulders, and when he turned, he perceived Melitta fleeing down the alley at full speed.

"It has given her a fright," said Chimairis.

"But there is no question of Melitta or of me. Let things take their course, since nothing can be prevented. Your destiny was certain even before your birth. Go. I shall say no more." And she dropped his hand.

# III. Love And Death

“A woman’s blood. Afterwards another woman’s blood. Afterwards yours, but a little later on.”

Demetrios repeated these words to himself as he walked, and in spite of himself, his belief in them weighed upon him. He had never had any faith in oracles drawn from the bodies of victims or the movements of planets. These affinities seemed too problematical. But the complex lines of the hand have, in themselves, an exclusively personal horoscopic aspect which he considered with uneasiness. The fortune-teller’s prediction haunted his mind.

In his turn, he examined the palm of his left hand, on which his life was summed up in secret and indelible signs.

In the first place he saw, at the summit, a sort of regular crescent, the ends of which pointed towards the base of the fingers. Below this, a deep quadruple line, knotted and roseale, marked in two places by very red spots. Another line, but thinner, ran parallel to this at first, and then swerved brusquely round towards the wrist. Finally, a third line, short and clear, turned round the base of the thumb, which was entirely covered with thread-like markings. He saw all that; but, not being able to read the hidden symbol, he passed his hand over his eyes and changed the subject of his meditations.

Chrysis! Chrysis! Chrysis! This name throbbed within him like a fever. Satisfy her, vanquish her, clasp her in his arms, fly with her elsewhere, to Syria, to Greece, to Rome, no matter where, provided it was a place where he had no mistress and she no lovers: that was the thing, and immediately, immediately.

Of the three presents she had asked for, one was already in his possession. Remained the other two: the comb and the necklace.

“The comb first,” he said to himself.

Every evening at sunset, the high priest’s wife went forth and sat upon a marble seat, with her back turned to the forest and her face set to the great expanse of sea in front of her. Demetrios knew this well, for this woman, like so many others, had been in love with him, and she had told him that the day he chose to possess her it was there he would find her.

It was to that spot, then, that he directed his steps. And there indeed she was; but she did not see him coming. She was sitting with her eyes shut, with her body thrown back upon the seat, and her arms hanging negligently by her sides.

She was an Egyptian. Her name was Touni. She wore a light tunic of bright purple, without clasp or girdle, and without other adornments than two black stars to mark the points of her breasts. The thin tissue, ironed into pleats, terminated at the curve of the delicate knees, and little shoes of blue leather, fitting like gloves, covered her dainty round feet. Her skin was very swarthy, her lips very thick, her shoulders very small, and her fragile, supple waist seemed to bend under the weight of her full throat. She was asleep with her mouth open, dreaming peacefully.

Demetrios, noiselessly, sat down on the bench, by her side.

He slowly drew nearer and nearer, leaning over her, appreciating the delicate lines of her smooth, dark-skinned shoulders, slender at the summit, muscular near the armpit and joined to the bust by the shading of the bush beneath.

Lower down, the long, loose slit of the purple muslin tunic was open as far as the hips. Through the gaping drapery, Demetrios slowly passed his hand, and his united finger-tips touched the curves of her left breast, damp with perspiration. Its nipple rose erect in the palm of his hand. Notwithstanding, Touni slept on.

Her dream gradually changed, but did not fade. Her breath came quicker through her half open lips and she murmured a long, unintelligible sentence, as her fevered head fell back once more.

With the same stealthy tenderness, Demetrios withdrew his hot hand, to let it be refreshed by the light breeze.

From the vague outline of the blue garden slopes as far as the immense scintillation of the night, shuddered the eternal sea. Like unto another bosom of some fresh priestess, its undulations were swelling heavenwards, uplifted by the dreams of antiquity that still cause it to thrill in the sight of our belated glances. When the end of all things is nigh, the last living beings will try before they disappear to fathom the mysteries of the moving ocean.

The moon inclined her great goblet of blood over the waters. Far away, in the purest atmosphere that had ever united heaven and earth, a slight red trail, where black veins meandered, trembled on the surface of the waves beneath the rising orb of night, as when the agitation of a caress on a rounded breast, in the dead of night, remains long after the hand that caused it has been lifted.

Touni still slumbered, her head leaning backwards, her body well-nigh naked, enshrouded in tinted muslin folds.

The purple glare of the moon, as yet on the horizon, came over the sea towards the sleeping woman. The fatal, vivid rays lit her up with a flame that seemed immobile. Little by little, their brilliancy mounted, encircling the Egyptian girl. Her black curls appeared one by one, and finally the Comb flashed out of the darkness: the royal Comb that Chrysis coveted. The ivory diadem was now bathed in the glory of the crimson moonbeams.

It was then that the sculptor took Touni's sweet face in both his hands, turning her features towards his own. Her eyes opened and became dilated.

"Demetrios! Demetrios! Is it you? Oh! You have come at last! You are here!" she murmured, clasping him in her arms, as her voice rang with the accents of happiness. "Is it really you, Demetrios, whose hands awake me? Is it you, son of my goddess; God of my body and my life?"

Demetrios made as if to retreat. With one bound, she was close to him again.

"What do you fear?" she said. "For you I am not the woman before whom all tremble, because she is surrounded by the might of the High Priest. Forget my name, Demetrios. In their lovers' arms, women have no name. I am no longer what you think. I am nothing but a woman who loves and whose yearning for you fills her frame as far as the points of her breasts."

Demetrios did not open his lips.

"Listen to me a little while longer," she went on. "I know who enthrals you. I will not even be your mistress, nor make the least attempt to rival the queen. No, Demetrios. Do with me as you will. Take me like some little slave-wench that a man possesses for a few minutes, leaving her afterwards with a remembrance that becomes oblivion. Take me like the lowest poverty-stricken harlot who, crouching by the roadside, awaits the charity of some furtive and brutal attack of lust. After all, what am I to place myself above those women? Have the

Immortals given me anything more than that with which they have endowed the most servile of all my slaves? You, at least, are Beauty incarnate, with its out spreading emanations of the Gods."

Demetrios, more steadfastly serious than before, pierced her with his glance.

"Wretched creature, what do you suppose emanates from the Gods, if it be not. — "

"Love!"

"Or Death!"

"What mean you?" she exclaimed, starting to her feet. "Death! Yes, Death indeed! But it is so far off for me! In sixty years' time, I'll think of my end. Why speak to me of Death, Demetrios?"

"Death this very night!" he said quietly.

She laughed outright, in sheer fright.

"Tonight? No, no! Who says so? Why should I die? Answer me! Speak! What means this vile mockery?"

"You are condemned."

"By whom?"

"By your destiny."

"How know you that?"

"Because my destiny is interwoven with yours, Touni."

"Is it my fate to die now?"

"It is your lot to die by my hand, on that bench."

He seized her wrist.

"Demetrios!" she stammered, affrighted. "I'll not shriek! I'll not call for aid! Only let me speak first!" She wiped the sweat from her brow. "If death—should come from you—death will be sweet—for me. I accept it; I desire it, but hearken!"

Staggering from stone to stone, she led him away in the dark night of the woods.

"Since in your hands are all the gifts of the Gods," she continued, "the first thrill of life and the final throb of agony, let both your palms, bestowing all they hold, be opened to my eyes, Demetrios. Give me the hand of Love as well as that of Death. If you do this, I die without regret."

There was no reply in the vague look he gave her, but she thought she read the "Yes" he had not uttered.

Transfigured a second time, she lifted towards him a new face, where desire, born again, drove, with the strength of desperation, all terror away.

She spoke no more, but already between her lips that were never to close again, each breath she drew sang a soft song, as if she was beginning to feel the deepest voluptuousness of love before even being gripped in the conjunction she craved.

Nevertheless, she gained this supreme victory.

With one movement, she tore off her light tunic and rolled it up into a ball of muslin that she threw behind her, smiling with scarce a vestige of sadness. Her young and slender body was

outstretched in such great and lively felicity that it was impossible for it not to be eternal, and as her preoccupied lover, who perhaps was merely anxiously hesitating, terminated the work of Love without beginning that of Death, she suddenly exclaimed:

“Ah! Kill me! Kill me, I say, Demetrios! Why do you tarry?”

He rose up a little, resting on his hands; looked once more at Touni, whose great eyes peered ecstatically in his face, from beneath him, and drawing out one of the long, golden hairpins that glittered behind her ears, he drove it deliberately home under her left breast.

# IV. Moonlight

Nevertheless, this woman would have given him her comb and her hair also, for love's sake.

If he did not ask for it, it was because he had scruples. Chrysis had very categorically demanded a crime, and not such or such old jewel stuck in a young woman's hair. That is why he considered it his duty to consent to bloodshed.

He might have reflected, too, that the vows one makes to women during the first heat of passion may be forgotten in the interval without any great detriment to the moral worth of the lover who has sworn them, and that if ever this involuntary forgetfulness deserved to be excused it was certainly in a case where the life of another woman, assuredly innocent, was also in the scales. But Demetrios did not trouble himself with this method of reasoning. The adventure upon which he was engaged seemed to him too curious to allow of his juggling away its violent incidents. He was afraid that, later on, he might regret having cut out of the plot a scene which, though short, was indispensable for the beauty of the *ensemble*. A feeble truckling to virtue is often all that is required to reduce a tragedy to the common-places of everyday existence. The death of Cassandra, he mused, is not absolutely necessary for the development of Agamemnon; but if it had not taken place, the whole Orestes Trilogy would have been spoilt.

And so, after cutting the storied comb out of Touni's hair, he stowed it away in his garments, and, without further reflection thereon, undertook the third of the labours ordained by Chrysis: the seizing of Aphrodite's necklace.

It was useless to dream of entering the temple by the main door. The twelve hermaphrodites who guarded the entrance would certainly have allowed Demetrios to pass, in spite of the order directing the exclusion of every profane person in the absence of the priests; but he had no need to prove his future guilt in this ingenuous manner, since a secret entrance led to the sanctuary.

Demetrios betook himself to a part of the wood which sheltered the Necropolis of the high priests of the goddess. He counted the first tombs, opened the door of the seventh, and closed it again behind him.

With great difficulty, for the stone was heavy, he raised the burial-slab under which a marble staircase plunged down into the earth, and he descended step by step.

He knew that sixty paces were to be made in a straight line, and that afterwards it would be necessary to feel one's way along the wall in order not to knock against the subterranean staircase of the temple.

The exceeding freshness of the deep earth calmed him little by little.

In a few minutes he arrived at the limit.

He mounted the stairs, and pushed open the trap-door.

The night was clear without, and pitch dark within the divine enclosure. When he had softly and carefully closed the resounding door, a chill fell upon him, and he felt as though hemmed in by the coldness of the stones. He dared not raise his eyes. This black silence terrified him: the darkness became alive with the unknown. He put his hand to his forehead like a man who does not want to awake for fear of finding himself among the living. At last he looked.

He saw, in a glory of moonbeams, the dazzling figure of the goddess. She stood upon a pedestal of pink stone laden with pendent treasures. She was naked and fully sexed, vaguely tinted with the natural colours of woman. With one hand, she held a mirror with a priapus handle, and with the other she adorned her beauty with a seven-stringed pearl necklace. One pearl larger than the others, long and silvery, shone between her two nipples like a nocturnal crescent between two rounded clouds. And they were the real sacred pearls born of the water-drops which had rolled into the shell of Anadyomene.

Demetrios lost himself in ineffable adoration. He believed in very truth that Aphrodite herself was there. He did not recognise his handiwork, for the abyss between what he had been and what he had become was profound. He stretched out his arms and murmured the mysterious words of prayer which are used in the Phrygian ceremonies.

Supernatural, luminous, impalpable, naked, and pure, the vision floated upon the stone, palpitated gently. He fixed his eyes upon it, dreading lest the caress of his glance should cause this frail hallucination to dissolve into thin air. He advanced very softly, touched the pink heel with his finger, as if to make sure of the statue's existence, and, incapable of resisting the powerful attraction it exercised upon him, mounted to its side, laid his hands upon the white shoulders, and gazed into its eyes.

He trembled, he grew faint, he began to laugh with joy. His hands wandered over the naked arms, pressed the hard, cold bust, descended along the legs, caressed the globe of the belly. He hugged this immortality to his breast with all his might. He looked at himself in the mirror, he lifted up the pearl necklace, he took it off, he made it glitter in the moonlight, and put it back again, fearfully. He kissed the bended hand, the round neck, the wave-like throat, the parted marble lips. Then he stepped back to the edge of the pedestal, and, taking the divine arms in his hands, tenderly gazed at the adorable head.

The hair was dressed in the Oriental style, and veiled the forehead slightly. The half-closed eyes prolonged themselves in a smile. The lips were parted, as in the swoon of a kiss. He silently arranged the seven rows of pearls upon the glittering breast, and descended to the ground to contemplate the idol at a distance.

Then he became conscious of an awakening. He remembered what he had come to do, what he had wished to accomplish, what he had barely escaped accomplishing: a monstrous deed. He flushed to the temples.

The recollection of Chrysis passed before his memory like a vision of grossness. He enumerated all the flaws in her beauty: the thick lips, the heavy knees, the loose gait. He had forgotten what her hands were like; but he imagined them large, to add an odious detail to the image he abhorred. His mental state became similar to that of a man surprised at dawn by his mistress in the bed of an ignoble prostitute, and unable to explain to himself how he had allowed himself to be tempted the night before. He could find neither an excuse nor a serious reason. Evidently, throughout one day, he had been the victim of a sort of temporary madness, a physical perturbation, a disease. He felt that he was cured, though still drunk with giddiness.

In order to complete his recovery, he planted himself against the temple wall and remained standing for a long time before the statue. The light of the moon continued to descend through the square opening in the roof; Aphrodite was resplendent; and, as the eyes were veiled in shade, he sought to meet their glance.

The whole night passed thus. Then daylight came and the statue took on in succession the rosy lividness of the dawn and the gilded reflection of the sun.

Demetrios had ceased to think. The ivory comb and the silver mirror which he carried in his tunic had slipped from his memory. He abandoned himself voluptuously to serene contemplation.

Outside, a tempest of bird-songs twittered, whistled, sang in the garden. Women's voices were heard, talking and laughing at the foot of the walls. The bustle of the early morning arose from the awakened earth. Demetrios experienced nothing but feelings of bliss.

The sun was already high, and the shadow of the roof had already shifted when he heard a confused sound of light feet upon the outer flight of steps.

It was doubtless a sacrifice to be offered to the goddess, a procession of young women coming to carry out or utter vows before the statue, for the first day of the Aphrodisiæ.

Demetrios resolved to fly.

The sacred pedestal opened at the back, in a way known only to the priests and the sculptor. It was there that the hierophant stood to dictate to a young girl whose voice was clear and high the miraculous discourses which issued from the statue on the third day of the fête. Thence one might reach the gardens. Demetrios entered, and stopped before the bronze-plated openings which pierced the massive stone.

The two golden doors swung heavily open. Then the procession entered.

# V. The Invitation

Towards the middle of the night, Chrysis was awakened by three knocks at the door.

She had slept all day between the two Ephesians, and, but for the disorder of their bed, they might have been taken for three sisters together. The Galilæan's thigh, bathed in perspiration, rested heavily upon Rhodis nestling up against her hostess. Myrtocleia was asleep upon her breast, with her face in her arm and her back uncovered.

A sound of voices was heard in the entrance.

Chrysis disengaged herself with great care, stepping over her companions, and getting down from the couch, held the door ajar.

"Who is it, Djala? Who is it?" she asked.

"It is Naukrates who wants to see you. I have told him you are not at liberty."

"What nonsense! Certainly I am at liberty! Enter, Naukrates, I am in my room."

And she went back to bed.

Naukrates remained for some time on the threshold, as if fearing to commit an indiscretion. The two music-girls opened their sleep-laden eyes and made efforts to tear themselves away from their dreams.

"Sit down," said Chrysis. "There is no need for coquetry between us. I know that you do not come for me. What do you want of me?"

Naukrates was a philosopher of repute, who had been Bacchis's lover for more than twenty years, and did not deceive her, more from indolence than fidelity. His grey hair was cut short, his beard pointed à la Demosthenes, and his moustache cropped so as not to hide his lips. He wore a large white garment made of simple wool with a plain stripe.

"I am the bearer of an invitation," he said. "Bacchis is giving a dinner to-morrow, to be followed by a fête. We shall be seven, with you. Don't fail to come."

"A fête? A propos of what?"

"She is to liberate her most beautiful slave, Aphrodisia. There will be dancing-girls and flute-girls. I think that your two friends are engaged to be there, and, as a matter of fact, they ought not to be here now. The rehearsal is going on at Bacchis's at this very moment."

"Oh! it is true," cried Rhodis, "we had forgotten about it. Get up, Myrto, we are very late."

But Chrysis protested.

"No, not yet! how disagreeable of you to steal away my women. If I had suspected that, I would not have let you in. Why, they are actually ready!"

"Our robes are not complicated," said the child. "And we are not beautiful enough to spend much time in dressing."

"I shall see you at the temple, of course?"

"Yes, to-morrow morning, we are going to offer doves. I am taking a drachma out of your purse, Chrysis, otherwise we should have nothing to buy them with. Good-bye till to-morrow."

They ran out. Naucrates considered for a short time the door that had just closed upon them; then he folded his arms and, turning round to Chrysis, said in a low voice:

“Good. Your behaviour is charming.”

“What do you mean?”

“One woman is not enough for you. You must have two, now. You even pick them up in the street. It is a noble example you are setting. But kindly tell me what is to become of us men? You have all got little *amies*, and after quitting their insatiable arms, you have just as much passion to offer as they are willing to leave you. Do you think this can go on indefinitely? If things continue like this, we shall be forced to apply to Bathyllos . . .”

“Ah! no!” cried Chrysis. “You will never get me to admit that! I know well that people make the comparison, but it is entirely absurd; and I am astonished that you, who pretend to be a thinker, do not understand how ridiculous it is.”

“And what difference do you see?”

“It is not a question of difference. There is no connection between the one and the other: that’s clear!”

“I do not say you are wrong. I want to know your reasons.”

“Oh! I can tell them you in two words: listen carefully. From the point of view of love, woman is a perfect instrument. From head to foot she is constructed, solely, marvellously, for love. *She alone knows how to love. She alone knows how to be loved.* Consequently, if a couple of lovers is composed of two women, it is perfect; if there is only one woman, it is only half as good; if there is no woman at all, it is purely idiotic. That is all I have to say.”

“You are hard on Plato, my girl.”

“Great men are not, any more than the gods, great under all circumstances. Pallas understands nothing about painting; Plato did not know how to love. Philosophers, poets, or rhetoricians, all who follow him, are as worthless as their master, and however admirable they may be in their art, in love they are devoid of knowledge. Believe me, Naukrates, I feel that I am right.”

The philosopher made a gesture.

“You are somewhat wanting in reverence,” he said; “but I do not by any means think you are wrong. My indignation was not real. There is something charming in the union of two young women, on condition that they both consent to remain feminine, keep their hair long, uncover their breasts, and refrain from arming themselves with adventitious instruments, as if they were illogically envious of the gross sex for which they profess such a pretty contempt. Yes, their liaison is remarkable because their caresses are entirely superficial, and the quality of their sensual satisfaction is all the more refined. They do not clasp one another in a violent embrace, they touch one another lightly in order to taste of the supreme joy. Their wedding-night is not defiled with blood. They are virgins, Chrysis. They are ignorant of the brutal action; this constitutes their superiority over Bathyllos, who maintains that he offers the equivalent, forgetting that you also, even in this sorry respect, could enter into competition with him. Human love is to be distinguished from the rut of animals only by two divine functions: the caress and the kiss. Now these are the only two functions known to the women in question. They have even brought them to perfection.”

“Excellent,” said Chrysis in astonishment. “But then what have you to reproach me with?”

“My grievance is that there are a hundred thousand of you. Already a great number of women only derive perfect pleasure from their own sex. Soon you will refuse to receive us altogether, even as a makeshift. It is from jealousy that I blame you.”

At this point Naukrates considered that the conversation had lasted long enough, and he rose to his feet, simply.

“I can tell Bacchis that she may count on you?” he said.

“I will go,” answered Chrysis.

The philosopher kissed her knees and slowly went out.

Then she joined her hands together and spoke aloud though she was alone.

“Bacchis . . . Bacchis . . . he comes from her house and he does not know! The mirror is still there, then! . . . Demetrios has forgotten me . . . If he has hesitated the first day, I am lost, he will do nothing. But is it possible that all is finished? Bacchis has other mirrors which she uses more often. Doubtless she does not know yet. Gods! Gods! no means of having news, and perhaps . . . Ah! Djala! Djala!”

The slave-woman entered.

“Give me my knuckle-bones,” said Chrysis. “I want to tell my own fortune.”

She tossed the four little bones into the air.

“Oh . . . Oh . . . Djala, look! the Aphrodite throw!”

This was the name given to a very rare throw whereby all the knuckle-bones presented a different face. The odds against this combination were exactly thirty-five to one. It was the best throw in the game.

Djala remarked coldly:

“What did you ask for?”

“It is true,” said Chrysis, disappointed. “I forgot to wish. I certainly had something in my mind, but I said nothing. Does that count all the same?”

“I think not; you must begin again.”

Chrysis cast the bones again.

“The Midas throw, this time. What do you think of that?”

“One cannot tell. Good or bad. It is a throw which is interpreted by the next one. Now start with a single bone.”

Chrysis consulted the game a third time; but as soon as the bone fell, she stammered:

“The . . . the Chian ace!”

And she burst into sobs.

Djala too was uneasy, and said nothing. Chrysis wept upon the bed, with her hair lying in confusion about her head. At last she turned round angrily.

“Why did you make me begin again? I am sure the first throw counted.”

“If you wished, yes. If not, no. You alone know,” said Djala.

“Besides, the bones prove nothing. It is a Greek game. I don’t believe in it. I shall try something else.”

She dried her tears and crossed the room. She took a box of white counters from a shelf, counted out twenty-two, then with the point of a pearl clasp, engraved in succession the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They were the arcana of the Cabbala she had learnt in Galilee.

“I have confidence in this. This does not deceive”, she said. “Lift up the skirt of your robe; I will use it as a bag.”

She cast the twenty-two counters into the slave’s tunic, repeating mentally:

“Shall I wear Aphrodite’s necklace? Shall I wear Aphrodite’s necklace? Shall I wear Aphrodite’s necklace?”

And she drew the tenth arcanam, and this signified plainly:

“Yes.”

# VI. Chrysis’s Rose

It was a procession, white and blue and yellow and pink and green.

Thirty courtesans advanced, bearing baskets of flowers, snow-white doves with red feet, veils of the most fragile azure, and precious ornaments.

An old white-bearded priest, swathed to the head in stiff unbleached cloth, preceded the youthful band and guided the line of bending worshippers to the altar of stone.

They sang, and their song languished like the sea, sighed like a southern breeze, panted like an amorous mouth. The first two carried harps which they rested upon the hollow of their left hand and which curved forward like sickles of slender wood.

One of them advanced and said:

“Tryphera, O beloved Cypris, offers thee this blue veil which she has woven herself, that thou mayest continue to deal gently with her.”

Another:

“Mousarion places at thy feet, O goddess of the beautiful coronal, these wreaths of wall-flowers and this bouquet of drooping daffodils. She has borne them in the orgie and has invoked thy name in the wild ecstasy of their perfumes, O! victorious one! have respect to these spoils of love.”

Yet another:

“As an offering to thee, golden Cytherea, Timo consecrates this spiral bracelet. Mayest thou entwine vengeance round the throat of her thou wottest of, even as this silver serpent entwined itself around her naked arms.”

Myrtocleia and Rhodis advanced, holding one another by the hand.

“Here are two doves of Smyrna, with wings white as caresses, with feet red as kisses.

“O! double goddess of Amathontis, accept them of our joined hands, if it be true that the tender Adonis is not alone sufficient for thee and that sometimes thy sleep is retarded by a yet sweeter embrace.”

A very young courtesan followed:

“Aphrodite Peribasia, receive my virginity with this blood-stained tunic. I am Pannychis of Pharos: I have dedicated myself to thee since last night.”

Another:

“Dorothea conjures thee, O charitable Epistrophia to remove far from her spirit the desire that Eros has implanted in it, or else to inflame for her the eyes of him that says her nay. She offers thee this branch of myrtle, because it is the tree thou lovest best.”

Another:

“On thine altar, O Paphia, Callistion places sixty silver drachmæ, the balance of four minæ she received from Cleomenos. Give her a lover still more generous if thou thinkest it a goodly offering.”

There remained before the altar only a blushing little child who had occupied the last place in the procession. She held nothing in her hand but a little crocus wreath, and the priest scorned her for the poverty of her offering.

She said:

“I am not rich enough to give you silver coins, O glittering Olympian goddess. Besides, what could I give thee that thou lackest? Here are flowers, yellow and green, pleated into a wreath for thy feet. And now . . .”

She unbuckled the clasps of her tunic; the tissue slipped down to the ground and she stood revealed quite naked.

. . . “I dedicate myself to thee body and soul, beloved goddess. I desire to enter thy gardens and die a courtesan of the temple. I swear to desire naught but love, I swear to love but to love, I renounce the world and I shut myself up in thee.”

Then the priest covered her with perfumes and enveloped her nudity in the veil woven by Tryphera. They left the nave together by the door opening into the gardens.

The procession seemed at an end, and the other courtesans were about to retrace their steps when another woman, a belated arrival, was seen upon the threshold. She had nothing in her hand, and it seemed as if she also had naught but her beauty to offer. Her hair appeared as two streams of gold, two deep waves full of shade, which engulfed the ears and were twisted in seven rolls over the back of the neck. The nose was delicate, with expressive nostrils which palpitated at times over a thick painted mouth, the corners rounded and throbbing. The flexible line of the body undulated at every step, animated by the rolling of the hips or the oscillation of the breasts, under which bent the supple waist.

Her eyes were extraordinary: blue but dark and bright at the same time, changing and glinting like moonstones, half closed under drooping lashes. Those eyes looked, as sirens sing . . .

The priest turned towards her, waiting for her to speak.

She said:

“Chrysis, O Chryseia, supplicates thee. Accept the poor gifts she lays at thy feet. Hear, love, and solace her that lives after thine example and for the cult of thy name, and grant her her prayers.”

She held out her hands gilded with rings, and bent low with her legs close together.

The vague canticle began again. The murmur of the harps rose up towards the statue with the swirling fumes of crackling incense from the priest’s censer.

She drew herself up slowly to her full height and offered a bronze mirror which hung from her girdle.

“To thee, Astarte of the Night, that joinest hand to hand and lip to lip, and whose symbol is like to the footprint of the deer upon the pale soil of Syria, Chrysis consecrates her mirror. It has seen the haggard darkness of the eyelids and the glitter of the eyes after love, the hair glued to the temples by the sweat of thy battles, O! warrior-queen of ruthless hand, thou that joinest body to body and mouth to mouth.”

The priest laid the mirror at the feet of the statue. Chrysis drew from her golden hair a long comb of red copper, the planetary metal of the goddess.

“To thee,” she said, “Anadyomene, born of the rosy dawn and the sea-foam’s smile; to thee. O nudity shimmering with tremulous pearls, that didst bind thy dripping hair with ribbons of

green seaweed, Chrysis consecrates her comb. It has plunged into her hair tossed by thy convulsions, O furiously-panting mistress of Adonis, that furrowest the camber of the loins and racks the stiffening knee!"

She gave the comb to the old man and inclined her head to the right in order to take off her emerald necklace.

"To thee", she said, "O! Hetaira, that drivest away the blushes of shamefaced maidens and promptest the lewd laugh, for whom we sell the love that streams from our entrails, Chrysis consecrates her necklace. It was given to her for her fee by a man whose name she knows not, and each emerald is a kiss on which thou hast lived an instant."

She made a last and more prolonged reverence, put the collar into the priest's hand and took a step as if to depart.

The priest stayed her:

"What do you ask of the goddess for these precious offerings?"

She shook her head, smiled, and said:

"I ask nothing."

Then she passed along the procession, stole a rose from a basket, and put it in her mouth as she went out.

One by one all the women followed. The door closed upon the empty temple.

Demetrios remained alone, concealed in the bronze pedestal.

He had not lost a gesture or a word of all this scene, and when everything was over, he remained motionless for a long time, harassed by new torments, passionate, irresolute.

He had thought himself quite cured of his madness of the night before, and had believed that henceforth nothing could throw him a second time into the ardent shadow of this strange woman.

But he had counted without her.

Women! O women! if you wish to be loved, show yourselves, return, present yourselves! The emotion he had felt on her entrance was so entire and overwhelming that it was out of the question to dream of struggling against it by a violent effort of the will. Demetrios was bound like a barbarian slave to a triumphal car. The idea of escape was an illusion. Without knowing it, and quite naturally, she had made him her captive.

He had seen her coming in the distance, for she wore the same yellow robe she had had on the quay. She walked with low, supple steps and with languid undulations of the hips. She had come straight to him, as if she had divined him behind the stone.

He realised from the first instant that he was ready once more to fall at her feet. When she drew the mirror of polished bronze from her girdle, she looked at herself in it for the last time before giving it to the priest, and the brilliancy of her eyes became stupefying. When, in order to take her copper comb, she laid her hand upon her hair and raised her bended arm, in conformity with the gesture of the Graces, the beautiful line of her body revealed itself under the tissue, and the sun illumined a tiny dew of brilliant sweat under her armpit. Finally, when, in order to lift up and unbuckle her necklace of heavy emeralds, she parted the pleated silk that veiled her double bosom down to the sweet shade-hidden place that admits of nothing more than a bouquet being slipped into it, Demetrios was seized with such a frenzied desire to put his lips upon it and tear off the whole dress that . . . But Chrysis began to speak.

She spoke, and every one of her words was torture to him. She seemed wantonly to insist and enlarge upon the prostitution of the vase of beauty that she was, white as the statue itself, and full of overflowing gold streaming down in a shower of hair. She told how her door was open to the lounging passer-by, how her body was delivered over to the contemplation of the unworthy, how the task of firing her cheeks with the flush of passion was committed to clumsy children. She spoke of the venal fatigue of her eyes, of her lips hired by the night, of her hair entrusted to brutal hands, of her divinity crucified.

Even the exceeding facility of her access was a charm in Demetrios's eyes, though he was resolved to use it solely for his own benefit and to close the door behind him. For it is profoundly true that a woman only reaches the utmost limit of her seductiveness when she gives occasion for jealousy.

And so, having given the goddess her green necklace in exchange for the one she hoped for. Chrysis returned to the town carrying a human will in her mouth, like the little stolen rose whose stalk she was nibbling.

Demetrios waited until he was left alone in the temple; then he issued forth from his retreat.

He looked at the statue apprehensively, expecting an infernal inward struggle. But, being incapable of renewing a violent emotion at so short an interval of time, he once more became astonishingly calm, without premature remorse.

Negligently, tranquilly, he climbed close up to the statue, took the necklace of true pearls from off Anadyomene's neck, and slipped it into his raiment.

# VII. The Tale Of The Enchanted Lyre

He walked very rapidly, hoping to overtake Chrysis in the road which led to the town. He was afraid that if he delayed any further he might once again lose his courage and his power of will.

The white, hot road was so luminous that Demetrios closed his eyes as if the midday sun was shining. He was walking in this way without looking in front of him, when he narrowly escaped colliding with four black slaves who were marching at the head of a fresh procession. Suddenly a musical little voice said softly:

“Well-beloved, how glad I am!”

He raised his head: it was Queen Berenice leaning on her elbow in her litter.

She gave the order:

“Stop, porters!”

And held out her arms to her lover.

Demetrios was greatly put out, but he could not refuse, and he got in sulkily.

Then Queen Berenice, beside herself with joy, crawled on her hands and knees to the far end, and rolled in the cushions like a playful kitten.

For this litter was a chamber carried by four and twenty slaves. It afforded ample room for twelve women to recline in it at random, upon a thick blue carpet strewn with stuffs and cushions; and its height was so great that one could not touch the roof, even with the tip of one’s fan. Its length was greater than its width, and it was closed in front and on the three sides by very fine yellow curtains which scintillated with light. The back was of cedar-wood, draped in a long veil of orange-coloured silk. At the top of this splendid wall, the great golden hawk of Egypt hung grimly with its two wings extended to their full extent. Lower down, carved in ivory and silver, the antique symbol of Astarte gaped above a lighted lamp whose rays strove with the daylight in elusive reflections. Underneath, lay Queen Berenice, fanned on either side by two Persian slave women, waving two tufts of peacock’s feathers.

She beckoned the young sculptor to her side with her eyes, and repeated:

“Well-beloved, I am happy!” She stroked his cheek.

“I was looking for you, Well-beloved. Where were you? I have not seen you since the day before yesterday. If I had not met you I should soon have died of grief. I was so unhappy all alone in this great litter. I have thrown all my jewels over the bridge of Hermes, to make circles in the water. You see I have neither rings nor necklace. I look like a little pauper at your feet.”

She turned round to him and kissed him on the mouth.

The two fan-bearers sat down upon their haunches a little further off, and when Queen Berenice began to speak in a low tone, they put their fingers close to their ears in order to make a semblance of not hearing. But Demetrios did not answer, barely listened, remained like one bewildered. He saw of the young queen nothing but the red smile of her mouth and the black cushion of her hair which she always wore loosely bound in order to be able to rest her weary head upon it.

She said:

“Well-beloved, I have wept during the night. My bed was cold. When I awoke, I stretched my naked arms to my two sides and I did not find you, and my hand nowhere met the hand I embrace to-day. I waited for you in the morning, and you had not been since the full moon. I sent slaves into all the quarters of the town and I had them executed when they came back without you. Where were you? were you at the temple? you were not in the garden with those strange women? No, I see by your eyes that you have not loved. Then what were you doing far away from me? You were before the statue? Yes, I am sure you were there. You love it more than me now. It is exactly like me, it has my eyes, my mouth, my breasts, but it is the statue that you treasure. I am a poor deserted woman. I weary you, and I see it well. You think of your marble and your ugly statues as if I were not more beautiful than all of them, and, in addition, alive, amorous, and tender, ready to grant you whatever you are willing to accept, resigned whenever you refuse. But you want nothing. You have refused to be a king, you have refused to be a god and be adored in a temple of your own. You almost refuse to love me now.”

She gathered her feet under her and leaned upon her hand.

“I would do anything to see you at the palace, Well-beloved. If you do not want me any longer, tell me who it is that attracts you, she shall be my friend. The . . . the women of my court . . . are beautiful. I have a dozen also who have been kept in ignorance of the very existence of men. They shall all be your mistresses if you will come to see me after them. . . And I have others with me who have had more lovers than the sacred courtesans and are expert in love. Choose which you will, I have also a thousand foreign slave-women; you shall have any of them you please. I will dress them like myself, in yellow silk and silver.

“But no, you are the most beautiful and the coldest of men. You love no one, you suffer yourself to be loved, you lend yourself, out of charity, to those who are captured by your eyes. You permit me to have my pleasure of you, but as an animal allows itself to be milked, looking somewhere else all the time. Ah! Gods! Ah! Gods! I shall end by being able to do without you, young coxcomb that the whole town adores, and from whom no woman can draw tears. I have other than women at the palace; I have sturdy Ethiopians with chests of bronze and arms bulging out with muscles. In their embrace, I shall soon forget your womanish legs and your pretty beard. The spectacle of their passion will doubtless be a new one for me, and I shall give my amorousness a rest. But the day I am certain that your eyes have ceased to trouble me by their absence, and that I can replace your mouth, then I shall despatch you from the top of the bridge of Hermes to join my necklace and my rings like a jewel I have worn too long. Ah! what it is to be a queen!”

She sat up and seemed as if waiting. But Demetrios remained impassive, and did not move a muscle, as if he had not heard her. She resumed angrily:

“You have not understood?”

He leaned carelessly upon his elbow and said quietly and unmovedly:

“I have thought of a tale.

“Long ago, long before the conquest of Thrace by your father’s ancestors, it was inhabited by wild beasts and a few timorous men.

“The animals were very beautiful: there were lions tawny as the sun, tigers striped like the evening, and bears black as night.

“The men were little and flat-nosed, covered with old, worn skins, armed with rude lances and bows without beauty. They shut themselves up in mountain holes, behind huge stones

which they moved with difficulty. They passed their lives at the chase. There was blood in the forests.

“The country was so forlorn that the gods had deserted it. When Artemis left Olympus in the whiteness of the morning, she never took the path which would have led her to the North. The wars which were waged there did not disturb Ares. The absence of pipes and flutes repelled Apollo. The triple Hecate alone shone in solitude, like the face of a Medusa upon a petrified land.

“Now, there came to live in that country a man of more favoured race, one who did not dress in skin like the mountain savages.

“He wore a long white robe which trailed behind him a little. He loved to wander at night in the calm forest-glades by the light of the moon, holding in his hand a little tortoise-shell in which were fixed two auroch-horns. Between these horns were stretched three silver strings.

“When his fingers touched the strings, delicious music passed over them, much sweeter than the sound of fountains, or the murmur of the wind in the trees, or the swaying of the barley. The first time he played, three sleepy tigers awoke, so prodigiously charmed that they did him no harm, but approached as near as they could and retired when he ceased. On the morrow there were many more, and wolves also, and hyenas, and snakes poised upright on their tails.

“After a very short time the animals came of their own accord, and begged him to play to them. A bear would often come quite alone to him and go away enchanted on hearing three marvellous chords. In return for his favours, the wild beasts provided him with food and protected him against the men.

“But he tired of this tedious life. He became so certain of his genius, and of the pleasure he afforded to the beasts, that he ceased to care to play well. The animals were always satisfied, so long as it was he who played. Soon he refused even to give them this satisfaction, and stopped playing altogether, from indifference. The whole forest mourned, but for all that the musician’s threshold did not lack savoury meats and fruits. They continued to nourish him, and loved him all the more. The hearts of beasts are so constructed.

“Now one day, he was leaning against his open door, looking at the sunset behind the motionless trees, when a lioness happened to pass by. He took a step inside as if he feared tiresome solicitations. The lioness did not trouble about him, and simply passed by.

“Then he asked her in astonishment; ‘Why do you not beg me to play?’ She answered that she cared nothing about it. He said to her: ‘Do you not know me?’ She answered: ‘You are Orpheus.’ He answered: ‘And you don’t want to hear Me?’ She repeated, ‘No.’ ‘Oh!’ he cried, ‘oh! how I am to be pitied! It is just for you that I should have liked to play. You are much more beautiful than the others, and you must understand so much better. If you will listen to me one little hour, I will give you everything you can dream of.’ She answered: ‘Steal the fresh meats that belong to the men of the plain. Assassinate the first person you meet. Take the victims they have offered to your gods, and lay all at my feet.’ He thanked her for the moderation of her demands, and did what she required.

“For one hour he played before her: but afterwards he broke his lyre and lived as if he were dead.”

The queen sighed:

“I never understand allegories. Explain it to me, Well-beloved. What does it mean?”

He rose.

“I do not tell you this in order that you may understand. I have told you a tale to calm you a little. It is late. Good-bye, Berenice.”

She began to weep.

“I was sure of it! I was sure of it!”

He laid her like a child upon her soft bed of luxurious stuffs, imprinted a smiling kiss upon her unhappy eyes, and tranquilly descended from the great litter without stopping it.

# Book III

# I. The Arrival

Bacchis had been a courtesan for more than twenty-five years. That is equivalent to saying that she was nearly forty, and that her beauty had changed its character several times.

Her mother, who had long been the directress of the house and her general adviser, had given her principles of conduct and economy which had enabled her gradually to acquire a great fortune, which she was in a position to spend freely, at an age when the magnificence of the bed supplies the place of physical splendour.

Thus it was that instead of buying adult slaves at the market at a high rate, an expense which so many others considered necessary, and which ruined the young courtesans, she had been content for ten years with a single negress, and had provided for the future by making her beget a child every year, in order to create for herself, for nothing, a numerous staff of domestics who should be a source of riches later on.

As she had chosen the father with care, seven very beautiful mulatto girls had been born of her slave, and also three boys whom she had killed, because male slaves give useless suspicions to jealous lovers. She had named the seven daughters after the seven planets, and had chosen them diverse functions, in harmony, as far as possible, with the names they bore. Heliope was the slave for the day-time, Selene for the night, Aretias guarded the door, Aphrodisia tended the bed, Hermione did the buying, and Cronomagira, the cooking. Finally, Diomeda, the housekeeper, kept the books and superintended the staff.

Aphrodisia was the favourite slave, the prettiest and best-loved. She often shared her mistress's bed at the request of lovers who took a fancy to her. Consequently, she was dispensed from all servile work in order that her arms might be kept delicate and her hands soft. By an exceptional favour, her hair was not covered, so that she was often taken for a free woman, and that very night she was to be freed in reality at the enormous price of thirty-five minæ.

Bacchis's seven slaves, all tall and admirably trained, were such a source of pride to her that she never went out without having them in her train, at the risk of leaving her house empty. Thanks to this imprudence, Demetrios had been able to enter her house without difficulty; but when she gave the festival to which Chrysis was invited she was still in ignorance of the calamity.

That evening Chrysis was the first arrival.

She was dressed in a green robe worked with enormous rose-branches which flowered over her breasts.

Aretias opened the door for her without her having to knock, and, according to the Greek custom, took her aside into a little room, untied her red shoes, and gently washed her naked feet. Then, raising the robe, or parting it, according to the place, she perfumed wherever there was necessity for it: for the guests were spared every kind of trouble, even that of making their toilette before going in to dinner. Then she offered a comb and pins to restore the lines of her head-dress, together with cosmetics, both dry and moist, for her lips and cheeks.

At last, when Chrysis was ready:

"Where are the *shades?"* she said to the slave.

This was the term applied to all the diners, except to one alone, the guest par excellence. The guest in honour of whom the dinner was given brought whomsoever he pleased with him, and the "shades" had nothing to do but to bring their bed-cushions and prove themselves people of breeding.

Aretias answered:

"Naukrates has invited Philodemos with his mistress, Faustina, whom he has brought back from Italy. He has also invited Phrasilas and Timon, and your friend Seso of Cuidos."

Seso entered at this precise moment.

"Chrysis!"

"My darling!"

The two women embraced, and enlarged with many an exclamation upon the happy chance which had brought them together.

"I was afraid of being late," said Seso. "That poor Archytas has kept me. . ."

"What, Archytas again?"

"It is always the same thing. Whenever I go out to dine, he imagines that my body is to be at everybody's disposal in turn. Then he insists on having his revenge beforehand, and that takes such a time! Ah! my dear, if he knew me better! I am far from wanting to deceive my lovers. I have quite enough of them as it is."

"And the baby that is coming? It does not show yet, however."

"I hope not indeed. It is the third month. It is growing, the little wretch. But it does not bother me yet. In six weeks I shall begin to dance. I hope that will prove very unpleasant to it, and that it will disappear quickly."

"You are right," said Chrysis. "Don't let your shape get disfigured. I saw Philemation yesterday, our former little friend, who lived three years at Boubaste with a grain merchant. Do you know the first thing she said to me? 'Ah! if you saw my breasts!' and she had tears in her eyes. I told her she was still pretty, but she repeated: 'If you saw my breasts! ah! ah! if you saw my breasts!' weeping like a Byblis. Then I saw that she was almost anxious to show them, and I asked to see them. My dear, two empty bags! And you know what beauties she had. They were so white that the points were invisible. Don't spoil yours, my Seso. Leave them fresh and firm as they are. A courtesan's two breasts are worth more than her necklace."

During this conversation, the two women were making their toilette. Finally they entered the banqueting-room together, where Bacchis was standing waiting, with her waist encircled by breast-bands and her neck loaded with rows of gold necklaces reaching up to the chin.

"Ah, my pretty dears, what a good idea on the part of Naukrates to invite you both together this evening!"

"We congratulate ourselves on its being to your house that we are invited," answered Chrysis without appearing to understand the innuendo. And, in order to say something venomous immediately, she added:

"How is Doryclos?"

Doryclos was a young and extremely rich lover who had just deserted Bacchis to marry a Sicilian woman.

"I . . . I have turned him away," said Bacchis, brazenly.

“Is it possible?”

“Yes; they say he is going to marry out of spite. But I expect him the day after his marriage. He is madly in love with me.”

While asking: “How is Doryclos?” Chrysis had thought: “Where is your mirror?” But Bacchis did not look one in the face, and the only expression to be read in her eyes was a vague embarrassment devoid of meaning. Besides, there was time for Chrysis to elucidate this question, and, in spite of her impatience, she knew how to wait with resignation for a more favourable opportunity.

She was about to continue the conversation, when she was prevented by the arrival of Philodemos, Faustina, and Naukrates, which involved Bacchis in fresh interchanges of politeness. They fell into ecstasies over the poet’s embroidered garment and the diaphanous robe of his mistress. This young girl, being unfamiliar with Alexandrian usage, had thought to Hellenize herself in this manner, not knowing that a dress of the kind was inadmissible at a festival where hired dancing-women, similarly unclothed, were to appear.

Bacchis affected not to notice this error, and in a few amiable phrases complimented Faustina on her heavy blue hair swimming in brilliant perfumes. She wore her hair raised high above the neck in order to avoid staining her light silken stuffs with myrrh.

They were about to sit down to table when the seventh guest arrived; it was Timon, a young man whose want of principle was a natural gift, but who had discovered in the teaching of the philosophers of his time some superior reasons for self-satisfaction.

“I have brought someone with me,” he said laughing.

“Whom?” asked Bacchis.

“A certain Demo, a girl from Mendes.”

“Demo! What can you be thinking of, my dear fellow? She is a street girl. She can be had for a fig.”

“Good, good. We won’t insist on it.” said the young man. “I have just made her acquaintance at the corner of the Canopic way. She asked me to give her a dinner, and I brought her to you. If you don’t want her. . .”

“Timon is really extraordinary,” declared Bacchis.

She called a slave:

“Heliope, go and tell your sister that she will find a woman at the door and that she is to drive her away with a stick. Off you go!”

She turned and looked round:

“Has not Phrasilas come yet?”

# II. The Dinner

At these words, a sickly little man, with a grey forehead, grey eyes, and a small, grey beard, advanced with little steps and said smiling:

“I was there.”

Phrasilas was a polygraph of repute of whom it would have been difficult to say exactly whether he was a philosopher, a grammarian, a historian, or a mythologist. He undertook the most weighty studies with timid ardour and ephemeral curiosity. Write a treatise he dare not. Construct a drama he could not. His style had something hypocritical, finniking, and vain. For thinkers he was a poet; for poets he was a sage: for society he was a great man.

“Come! to table!” said Bacchis. And she lay down with her lover upon the bed which stood at the head of the banqueting board. On her right, reclined Philodemos and Faustina with Phrasilas. On Naukrates’s left, Seso, then Chrysis and young Timon. Each one of the guests reclined in a diagonal position, leaning upon silken cushions and wearing wreaths of flowers upon their heads. A slave-girl brought the garlands of red roses and blue lotus-flowers, then the banquet began.

Timon felt that his freak had chilled the women. He therefore did not speak to them at first, but, addressing Philodemos, said gravely:

“They say you are the devoted friend of Cicero. What do you think of him, Philodemos? Is he an enlightened philosopher or a mere compiler, without discernment and without taste? for I have heard both opinions put forward.”

“It is precisely because I am his friend that I cannot answer your question,” said Philodemos. “I know him too well; consequently I know him ill. Ask Phrasilas, who, having read him but little, will judge him without error.”

“Well, what does Phrasilas think about it?”

“He is an admirable writer,” said the little man.

“In what sense?”

“In the sense that all writers, Timon, are admirable in something, like all landscapes and all souls. I cannot prefer the spectacle of the sea itself to the most monotonous plain. And so I am unable to classify in the order of my sympathies a treatise by Cicero, an ode of Pindar, and a letter written by Chrysis, even if I knew the style of our excellent little friend. When I put down a book, I am content if I carry away in my memory a single line which has given me food for thought. Hitherto, all the books I have opened have contained that line: but no book has ever given me a second. Perhaps each of us has only one thing to say in his life, and those who have attempted to speak at greater length have done so because they were inflated by ambition. How much more do I regret the irreparable silence of the millions of souls who have said nothing.”

“I am not of your opinion,” said Naukrates, without lifting his eyes. “The universe was created for the expression of three verities, and to our misfortune, their certitude was proved five centuries before this evening. Heraclitos has solved the riddle of the world; Parmenides has unmasked the soul; Pythagoras has measured God; we have nothing left us but to hold our tongues. I consider the chickpea very rash.”

Seso lightly tapped the table with the handle of her fan.

“Timon, my friend,” she said.

“What is it?”

“Why do you propound questions without any interest either for me who am ignorant of Latin, or for yourself who want to forget it? Do you fancy you can dazzle Faustina with your foreign erudition? My poor fellow, I am not the woman to be duped by your words. I undressed your great soul last night under my bed-clothes, and I know the chickpea it concerns itself with.”

“Do you think so?” said the young man, simply.

But Phrasilas began a second little couplet, with a suave, ironical intonation.

“Seso, when you think fit to give us the pleasure of judging Timon, whether to applaud him, as he deserves, or to blame him, unjustly in my opinion, remember that he is an invisible being and that the nature of his soul is hidden from us. It has no existence in itself, or at least we cannot know it; but it reflects the souls of those that mirror themselves in it, and changes its aspect when it changes its place. Last night it resembled you exactly; I am not astonished you were pleased with it. Just now it took the image of Philodemos; that is why you have just said it belied itself. Now it certainly does not belie itself, because it does not affirm itself. You see my dear, that we ought to beware of rash judgments.”

Timon shot a glance of irritation at Phrasilas, but he reserved his reply.

“However that may be,” answered Seso, “there are four of us courtesans here, and we intend to direct the conversation, in order that we may not resemble pink children who only open their mouths to drink milk. Faustina, you arrived the last, please begin.”

“Very good,” said Naukrates. “Choose for us, Faustina. What shall we talk about?”

The young Italian woman turned her head, raised her eyes, blushed, and with an undulation of her whole body, sighed:

“Love.”

“A very pretty subject,” said Seso, trying not to laugh.

But no one took it up.

The table was covered with wreaths, flowers, tankards, and jugs. Slaves brought wicker baskets, containing bread as light as snow. On terra-cotta plates were to be seen fat eels sprinkled with seasoning, wax-coloured alphests, and sacred beauty-fish.

There was also a pompilus, a purple fish which was supposed to have sprung from the same foam as Aphrodite, bebradons, a grey mullet served up with calmars, multi-coloured scorpenas. Some were brought in their little sauce-pans, in order that they might be eaten foaming hot; fat tunnyfish, hot devil-fish with tender tentacles, slices of lamprey; finally the belly of a white electric eel, round as that of a beautiful woman.

Such was the first course. The guests chose little tit-bits from each fish, and left the rest to the slaves.

“Love,” began Phrasilas, “is a word which has no meaning, or rather too much, for it designates in turn two irreconcilable feelings: sensual gratification and passion. I do not know in what sense Faustina takes it.”

“For my part,” interrupted Chrysis, “I like to have the sensual gratification, and to leave passion to my lovers. We must speak both of one and the other, or my interest will only be partial.”

“Love,” murmured Philodemos, “is neither passion nor sensual gratification. Love is something quite different.”

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake,” exclaimed Timon, “let us have a banquet for once without philosophies. We are aware, Phrasilas, that you can uphold with graceful eloquence and honeyed persuasiveness the superiority of multiple pleasure over exclusive passion. We are aware also that after having spoken for a full hour on such a thorny question, you would be ready, during the next hour, with the same graceful eloquence and the same honeyed persuasiveness, to defend the arguments of your adversary. I do not. . . . .”

“Allow me . . .” said Phrasilas.

“I do not deny,” continued Timon, “the charm of this little sport, or even the wit you bring to bear on it. I have my doubts as to its difficulty, and consequently as to its interest.
The *Banquet* you published some time ago and incorporated in a story of lighter tone, and also the reflexions you placed recently in the mouth of a mythical personage who resembles your ideal, seemed new and rare in the reign of Ptolemy Auletes. But for three years we have been living under the young Queen Berenice, and I know not by what transformation the method of thought you had adopted, that of an illustrious exegetical critic, harmonious and smiling, has suddenly grown a century older under your pen, like the fashion of tight sleeves and yellow hair. Excellent master, I deplore it, for if your stories lack fire, if your experience of the female heart is not worth serious consideration, on the other hand you are gifted with the comic spirit, and I am grateful to you for having made me smile.”

“Timon!” cried Bacchis in indignation.

Phrasilas motioned to her to be silent.

“Let him alone, my dear. Unlike most men, I retain only the eulogistic portion of the judgments people pass upon me. Timon has given me his; others will praise me on other points. It would be impossible to live in the midst of unanimous approbation, and I regard the very variety of the sentiments I provoke as a charming flower-bed in which I desire to breathe the scent of the roses without tearing up the spurge.”

Chrysis moved her lips in a way which showed clearly how slight was the value she set on this man and his cleverness at terminating disputes. She turned towards Timon, who shared her bed with her, and put her hand on his neck. “What is the aim of life?” she asked him.

It was the question she usually asked when she was at a loss what to say to a philosopher; but this time she introduced a tender note into her voice, and Timon fancied he detected a declaration of love.

Nevertheless he answered with a certain calm:

“Each one has his own object in life, my Chrysis. There is no object universal and common to all beings. For my part, I am the son of a banker whose clientèle is composed of all the great courtesans of Egypt, and, my father having amassed an enormous fortune by ingenious methods, I restore it honourably to the victims of his favours by sleeping with them as often as the strength the Gods have given me allows me to do so. I have decided that my energy is only susceptible of performing one duty in life. I have chosen this duty because it combines the exigencies of the rarest virtue with contrary satisfactions that another ideal would support less easily.”

During this speech he had slipped his right leg behind those of Chrysis, who was lying on her side, and he tried to part the closed knees of the courtesan as if to give a precise object to existence for that evening. But Chrysis did not humour him.

There was a silence for several minutes; then Seso began to speak.

“Timon, it is very annoying of you to interrupt at the very beginning the only serious conversation of which the subject is capable of interesting us. At any rate, let Naukretes speak, since you are so spiteful.”

“What shall I say about love?” answered the Guest par excellence. “It is the name given to sorrow to console those who suffer. There are only two ways of being unhappy: either we desire what we have not, or we possess what we desired. Love begins with the first, and comes to an end with the second, in the most lamentable state, that is to say, as soon as it succeeds. May the gods preserve us from love!”

“But to possess unexpectedly,” said Philodemos, smiling; “is not that true felicity?”

“What a rarity!”

“Not at all, if one is careful. Listen to me, Naukrates: not to desire, but to act in such a way that the opportunity offers itself; not to love, but to cherish from a distance certain well-chosen women for whom one feels one might have a taste in the long run, if chance and circumstances combined to throw them into one’s arms; never to adorn a woman with qualities one wants her to have, or with beauties of which she makes a mystery, but always to take the insipid for granted in order to be astonished by the exquisite. Is not this the best advice a sage can give to lovers? They only have lived happily who, in the course of their dear existences, have been wise enough occasionally to reserve for themselves the priceless purity of unforeseen joys.”

The second course was drawing to a close. There had been pheasants, attagas, a magnificent blue and red porphyris, and a swan with all its feathers, the cooking of which had been spread over forty-eight hours so as not to burn its wings. Upon curved plates one saw phlexids, pelicans, a white peacock which seemed to be sitting on a dozen and a half of roast and stuffed spermologues; in a word, enough food to feed a hundred persons on the fragments left behind after the choice pieces had been set aside. But all this was nothing compared with the last dish.

This chef-d’œuvre (such a work of art had not been seen for many a long day at Alexandria) was a young pig, of which one half had been roasted and the other boiled. It was impossible to distinguish the wound which had provoked its death, or by what means its belly had been stuffed with everything it contained. It was stuffed with round quails, chicken breasts, field-larks, succulent sauces, and slices of vulva and mince-meat. The presence of all these things in an animal apparently intact seemed inexplicable.

The guests uttered an unanimous cry of admiration, and Faustina asked for the recipe. Phrasilas smilingly delivered himself of sententious metaphorical maxims; Philodemos improvised a distich in which the word χοῖρος was taken alternately in both senses. This made Seso, already drunk, laugh till the tears flowed, but Bacchis having given the order to pour seven rare wines into seven cups for the use of each guest, the conversation strayed.

Timon turned to Bacchis:

“Why,” he asked, “should you have been so hard on the poor girl I wanted to bring with me? She was a colleague, nevertheless. If I were in your place, I should respect a poor courtesan more highly than a rich matron.”

“You are mad,” said Bacchis, without discussing the question.

“Yes, I have often noticed that those who, once in a way, venture to utter striking truths, are taken for lunatics. Paradoxes find everybody agreed.”

“Nonsense, my friend; ask your neighbours, where is the man of birth who would choose a girl without jewels as his mistress.”

“I have done it,” said Philodemos with simplicity.

And the women despised him.

“Last year,” he went on, “at the end of spring, Cicero’s exile gave me good reason to fear for my own safety, and I took a little journey. I retired lo the foot of the Alps, to a charming place named Orobia, on the borders of the little lake Clisius. It was a simple village with barely three hundred women, and one of them had become a courtesan in order to protect the virtue of the others. Her house was to be recognised by a bouquet of flowers hanging over the door, but she herself was indistinguishable from her sisters or cousins. She was ignorant of the very existence of paint, perfumes, cosmetics, transparent veils and curling-tongs. She did not know how to preserve her beauty, and depilitated herself with pitchy resin just as one pulls up weeds from a courtyard of white marble. One shudders at the thought that she walked without boots, so that it was impossible to kiss her naked feet as one kisses Faustina’s, softer than one’s hand. And yet I discovered so many charms in her that beside her brown body I forgot Rome for a whole month and blessed Tyre and Alexandria.”

Naukrates nodded approval, took a draught of wine, and said:

“The great event in love is the instant when nudity is revealed. Courtesans should know this and spare us surprises. Now, it would seem on the contrary that they devote all their efforts to disillusioning us. Is there anything more painful than a mass of hair bearing traces of the curling irons? Is there anything more disagreeable than painted cheeks that leave the marks of the cosmetics on the mouth that kisses them! Is there anything more pitiable than a pencilled eye with the charcoal half rubbed off? Strictly speaking, I can understand chaste women using these illusory devices: every woman likes to surround herself with a circle of male adorers, and the chaste ones amongst them do not run the risk of familiarities which would unmask the secrets of their physique. But that courtesans whose end and resource is the bed, should venture to show themselves less beautiful in it than in the street is really inconceivable.”

“You know nothing about it, Naukrates,” said Chrysis with a smile. “I know that one does not keep one lover out of twenty; but one does not seduce one man out of five hundred, and before pleasing in the bed one must please in the street. No one would notice us if we did not rouge our faces and darken our eyes. The little peasant-girl Philodemos speaks of, attracted him without difficulty because she was alone in her village. There are fifteen thousand courtesans here. The competition is quite another thing.”

“Don’t you know that pure beauty has no need of adornment, and suffices for itself?”

“Yes. Well, institute a competition between a pure beauty, as you say, and Gnathène, who is old and plain. Dress the former in a tunic covered with holes and set her in the last row at the theatre, and put the latter in her star-embroidered robe in the places reserved by her slaves, and note their prices at the end of the performance: the pure beauty will get eight obols and Gnathène two minæ.”

“Men are stupid,” Seso concluded.

“No, simply lazy. They do not take the trouble to choose their mistresses. The best-loved women are the most mendacious.”

“But if,” suggested Phrasilas, “but if, on the one hand, I should willingly applaud . . .”

And he delivered himself, with great charm, of two set discourses entirely devoid of interest.

One by one, twelve dancing girls appeared, the two first playing the flute and the last the timbrel, the others manipulating castanets. They arranged their bandelets, rubbed their little sandals with white resin, and waited with extended arms for the music to begin . . . A note . . . two notes . . . a Lydian scale, and the twelve young girls shot forward to the accompaniment of a light rhythm.

Their dance was voluptuous, languorous, and without apparent order, although all the figures had been settled beforehand. They confined their evolutions to a small space: they intermingled like waves. Soon they formed in couples, and without interrupting the step, unfastened their girdles and let their pink tunics glide to the ground. An odour of naked women spread about the men, dominating the perfume of the flowers and the steam of the gaping viands. They threw themselves backwards with brusque movements, with their bellies tightly drawn, and their arms over their eyes. Then they straightened themselves up again and hollowed their loins, and touched one another, as they passed, with the points of their dancing breasts. Timon's hand received the fugitive caress of a hot thigh.

"What does our friend think about it?" said Phrasilas with his piping voice.

"I feel perfectly happy," answered Timon. "I have never before so clearly understood the supreme mission of women."

"And what is it?"

"Prostitution, either with or without art."

"That is only an opinion."

"Phrasilas, once again, we know that nothing can be proved: worse still, we know that nothing exists, and that even that is not certain. This being conceded and in order to satisfy your celebrated mania, permit me to hold a theory at once contestable and antiquated, as all of them are, but interesting to me, who affirm it, and to the majority of men, who deny it. In the ease of thought, originality is an ideal still more chimerical than certitude. You are aware of that."

"Give me some Lesbian wine," said Seso to the slave. "It is stronger than the other."

"I maintain," Timon went on, "that the married woman, by devoting herself to a man who deceives her, by refusing herself to all others (or by committing adultery very rarely, which comes to the same thing), by giving birth to children who deform her before they see the light and monopolise her when they are born,—I maintain that by living thus a woman destroys her life without merit, and that on her wedding-day a young girl concludes a dupe's bargain."

"She acts in fancied obedience to a duty," said Naukrates without conviction.

"A duty? and to whom? Is she not free to settle a question which concerns nobody but herself? She is a woman, and in virtue of her sex is generally insensible to the pleasures of the intellect; and not content with remaining a stranger to one half of human joys, she excludes herself, by her marriage, from the other aspect of pleasure. Thus a young girl can say to herself, at the age when she is all passion: 'I shall know my husband, and in addition, ten lovers, perhaps twelve', and believe that she will die without having regretted anything? Three thousand women will not be enough for me on the day I take my leave of life."

"You are ambitious," said Chrysis.

"But with what incense, with what golden poesy," exclaimed the gentle Philodemos, "should we not praise to eternity the beneficent courtesans! Thanks to them, we escape all the complicated precautions, the jealousies, the stratagems, the throbbings of the heart that

accompany adultery. It is they who spare us hours of waiting in the rain, rickety ladders, secret doors, interrupted meetings, and intercepted letters and misunderstood signals. O! dear creatures, how I love you! With you there are no sieges to be undertaken: for a few little coins you give us what another would hardly be capable of granting us as a condescension, after three weeks of coldness. For your enlightened souls, love is not a sacrifice, it is an equal favour exchanged by two lovers, and so the sums we confide to you do not serve to compensate you for your priceless caresses, but to pay at its proper price for the multiple and charming luxury with which, by a supreme complaisance, you pacify nightly our ravenous passions. As you are innumerable, we always find amongst you both the dream of our lives and our fancy for the evening, all women at a day's notice, hair of every shade, eyes of every colour, lips of every savour. There is no love under heaven so pure that you cannot feign it, nor so revolting that you dare not propose it. You are tender to the disreputable, consolatory to the afflicted, hospitable to all, and beautiful! That is why I tell you, Chrysis, Bacchis, Seso, Faustina, that it is a just law of the gods which decrees that courtesans shall be the eternal desire of lovers and the eternal envy of virtuous spouses."

The dancing-girls had ceased dancing.

A young girl-acrobat had just entered, who juggled with daggers and walked on her hands between the upright blades.

As the attention of the guest was entirely absorbed by the lassie's dangerous sport, Timon looked at Chrysis, and gradually, without being seen, manoevered so that he lay behind her at full length and touched her with his feet and mouth.

"No," said Chrysis in a low voice, "no, my friend."

But he had slipped his arm around her through the large slit in her robe and was carefully caressing the reclining courtesan's delicate, burning skin.

"Wait," she implored. "We shall be seen. Bacchis will be angry."

A glance convinced the young man that he was not being watched. He ventured upon a caress after which women rarely resist when once they have allowed things to go so far. Then, in order to quench by a decisive argument the last scruples of expiring modesty, he put his purse in her hand, which happened by chance to be open.

Chrysis resisted no longer.

Meanwhile the young acrobat continued her subtle and dangerous tricks. She walked upon her hands, with her skirt reversed, with her feet dangling in front of her head, between sharp swords and long keen blades. The effort occasioned by this critical posture, and perhaps also the fear of wounds, flooded her cheeks with dark warm blood, which heightened still further the glitter of her wide-open eyes. Her waist bent and straightened itself again. Her legs parted like the arms of a dancing girl.

A violent respiration agitated her naked breast.

"Enough," said Chrysis briefly: "you have only excited me a little. Let us have no more of it. Leave me. Leave me."

And at the moment when the two Ephesians rose, according to the tradition, to play *The Fable of Hermaphroditus*, she let herself slip down from the bed and went out feverishly.

# III. Rhacotis

Hardly had the door closed upon her than Chrysis pressed the inflamed centre of her desire with her hand as one presses a sore spot to relieve shooting pains. Then she leaned up against a column and twisted her fingers, groaning with anguish.

She would never know anything, then!

As the hours passed, the improbability of her success increased, became flagrant. Brusquely to ask for the mirror was a very risky method of discovering the truth. In case it should have been taken, she would attract the suspicions of all to herself, and would be lost. On the other hand, she had left the banqueting hall out of sheer impatience.

Timon's clumsinesses had merely served to exasperate her dumb rage. A trembling fit due to over-excitement compelled her to apply her whole body to the freshness of the smooth, monstrous column. She felt an attack coming on and was afraid.

She called the slave Aretias:

"Keep my jewels for me: I am going out."

And she descended the seven stone steps.

The night was hot. Not a breath of wind to fan the heavy beads of sweat upon her forehead. The disappointment increased her discomfort and made her reel.

She walked along down the street.

Bacchis's house was situated at the extremity of Brouchion, on the limits of the native town, an enormous slum inhabited by sailors and Egyptian women. The fishermen, who slept upon their vessels anchored during the crippling heat of the day, came to pass their nights there till the break of dawn, and in return for a double intoxication left the harlots and the wine-sellers the price of the evening's catch.

Chrysis entered the narrow streets of this Alexandrian Suburra, full of sound, movement and barbarous music. She cast furtive glances through open doors into rooms reeking with lamp smoke, where naked couples lay enlaced together. At the cross-roads, on low trestles erected in front of the houses, multi-coloured mattresses creaked and tumbled in the shadow, under a double human load. Chrysis walked along with embarrassment. A woman without a lover solicited her. An old man caressed her breasts. A mother offered her her daughter. A gaping peasant kissed the back of her neck. She fled, in a sort of hot terror.

This foreign town within the Greek town was, for Chrysis, full of night and dangers. She was ill acquainted with the strange labyrinth, the intricacy of the streets, the secrets of certain houses. When, at rare intervals, she ventured to set foot in it, she always followed the same direct road towards a little red door; and there she forgot her usual lovers in the indefatigable arms of a young ass-driver with strong muscles, whom she had the joy of paying in her turn.

But this evening, she felt even without turning her head that she was being followed by a double footstep.

She increased her pace. The double footstep did likewise. She began to run; the footsteps behind her ran also; then beside herself with terror, she took another alley, and then another in the opposite direction, and then a long street which stretched away in an unknown direction.

With dry throat and swollen temples, but sustained by Bacchis's wine, she pursued her flight, turned from right to left, pale, panic-stricken.

Finally, a wall blocked farther progress: she was in a blind alley. She tried hastily to double, but two sailors with brown hands barred the narrow passage.

"Where are you going to, my little wisp of gold?" said one of them laughing.

"Let me pass."

"Eh? you are lost, young lady, you don't know Rhacotis well, eh? We are going to show you the town."

And they both took her by the waist. She shouted, and struggled, struck out with her fist, but the second sailor seized both her hands in his left hand and simply said:

"A little calm, please. You know that the Greeks are not loved here: nobody will come to your assistance."

"I am not Greek!

"You lie, you have a white skin and a straight nose. Unless you want the stick, submit quietly."

Chrysis looked at the speaker, and suddenly fell on his neck.

"I love you, I will follow you," she said. "You will follow both of us. My friend shall have his share. Walk with us: it will not be dull."

Where were they taking her to? She had not the least idea, but this second sailor's very rudeness, his brutish head pleased her. She considered him with the imperturbable glance that young bitches have in the presence of meat. She bent her body towards him, to touch him as she walked.

With rapid steps they traversed strange quarters, without life, without lights. Chrysis could not understand how they threaded their way through this nocturnal maze out of which she never could have got alone on account of the curious intricacy of the streets. The closed doors, the deserted windows, the motionless shadows terrified her. Above her head, between the houses, that almost met, ran a pale ribbon of sky, flooded with moonlight.

Finally, they entered life once more. At a turning of the street, suddenly, eight, ten, eleven lights appeared, illuminated doorways occupied by Nabatæan women squatting between two red lamps which cast a gleam from below upon their heads hooded with gold.

In the distance, they heard first a swelling murmur, and then a confused roar of chariots, tumbling bales, asses' footsteps, and human voices. It was the square of Rhacotis where, during the Alexandrian summer, all the provisions for nine hundred thousand mouths a day were collected and stacked up.

They passed the houses of the square, between green piles, vegetables, lotus roots, smooth beans, baskets of olives. Chrysis took a handful of mulberries out of a violet heap, and ate them without stopping. Finally, they arrived before a low door and the sailors entered with her for whom had been stolen the True Pearls of Anadyomene.

There was an immense hall there. Five hundred men of the people sat waiting for the day, drinking cups of yellow beer, eating figs, lentils, sesame cakes, olyra bread. In their midst, swarmed a herd of yelping women, a whole field of black hair and multicoloured flowers in an atmosphere of fire. They were poor homeless girls who were the property of all. They came there to beg for scraps, bare-footed, bare-breasted, with a scanty red or blue rag tied

round their bellies, carrying, for the most part, a tattered infant on their left arm. There were also dancing-girls, six Egyptians on a dais, with an orchestra of three musicians, the first two of whom smote ox-hide timbrels with drum-sticks, whilst the third wielded a great sistrum of sonorous brass.

“Oh! myxaira sweets!” said Chrysis gleefully.

And she bought two sous’ worth of the little girl who hawked them.

But suddenly she swooned, overcome by the insupportable stink of this den, and the sailors carried her out in their arms.

The fresh air brought her round a little.

“Where are we going to?” she implored. “Let us be quick: I can walk no more. You see that I don’t resist, I am nice to you. But let us find a bed as soon as possible, otherwise I shall drop down in the street.”

# IV. The Orgie At Bacchis's

When she once more found herself at Bacchis's door, she was penetrated by the delicious sensation produced by the respite from desire and the silence of the flesh. Her forehead no longer ached. Her mouth no longer twitched. She felt nothing but an intermittent pain which seized her from time to time in the small of the back. She mounted the steps and crossed the threshold.

As soon as Chrysis had left the room the orgie had developed like a flame.

Other friends entered, to whom the twelve dancing girls fell an easy prey. Forty tattered wreaths strewed the ground with flowers. A leathern bottle of Syracusan wine had burst in a corner, and its golden flood flowed under and around the table.

Philodemos was by the side of Faustina.

He had torn her robe and was singing her the verses he had made in her honour.

"O feet," he said, "O sweet thighs, deep reins, round croup, cloven fig, hips, shoulders, breasts, mobile neck; O all ye things that charm me, warm hands, expert movements, active tongue! You are a Roman, you are a Roman, you are too dark and you do not sing the poems of Sappho; but Perseus was the lover of the Indian Andromeda."[1]

Meanwhile, Seso lay flat upon her belly on the table in a pile of crushed fruit. She was completely overpowered by the fumes of Egyptian wine, and as she lay dipping the nipple of her right breast in a pond of snow-cooled wine, she kept repeating with a comical pathos:

"Drink, my little darling. You are thirsty. Drink, my little darling. Drink. Drink. Drink."

Aphrodisia, still a slave, triumphed in the midst of a circle of men, and was celebrating her last night of servitude by an extravagant debauch. In obedience to the tradition of all Alexandrian orgies, she had begun by giving herself to three lovers at once; but her task did not end there, and according to the law of slaves who became courtesans, she was expected to prove by an incessant zeal, lasting all night, that she had not usurped her new dignity.

Standing alone behind a curtain, Naukrates and Phrasilas discussed courteously the respective value of Arcesilas and Carneades.

At the end of the hall, Myrtocleia protected Rhodis against the over-zealous enterprises of one of the guests.

As soon as the two Ephesians saw Chrysis enter, they rose to meet her.

"Come away, my Chryse. Theano stays: but we are going.

"I stay too," said the courtesan. And she lay down on her back upon a great bed covered with roses.

A din of voices and the clattering of money falling on the floor attracted her attention. It was Theano who, in order to parody her sister, had bethought her to caricature the "Fable of Danaë," simulating a mad ecstasy of voluptuous delight every time a golden coin penetrated her. The child's daring impiety amused all the guests, for they were no longer in the days when the thunderbolt would have exterminated those who scoffed at the Immortal One. But

[1] Philodème AP. V. 132.

the sport degenerated, as might have been foreseen. A clumsy fellow hurt the poor little thing, and she fell to weeping noisily.

It was necessary to invent a new amusement to console her. Two dancing-girls pushed into the centre of the room an immense silver-gilt bowl filled to the top with wine. Then somebody seized Theano by the feet, and made her drink with her head downwards. This convulsed her with a fit of laughter which she was unable to master.

This idea was such a success that everybody crowded around, and when the flute-girl was set on her feet again, the sight of her little face purple with congestion and dripping with wine, produced such a general hilarity that Bacchis said to Selene:

“A mirror! a mirror! let her see herself!”

The slave brought a bronze mirror. “No, not that one. The mirror of Rhodopis. She merits it.”

Chrysis sprang up with a bound. The blood spurted to her cheeks, then retired again, and she remained perfectly pale, with the beatings of her heart battering her breast, and her eyes fixed on the door through which the slave had disappeared.

That instant was to decide her whole life. Her last hope was either to vanish or be realised. The fête continued all around her.

An iris wreath, thrown from somewhere or other, fell upon her lips. A man broke a little phial of perfume over her hair. It ran down too quickly and wetted her shoulders. The splashes of wine from a full tankard into which somebody had thrown a pomegranate spotted her silk tunic and penetrated to the skin. She bore all the traces of the orgie magnificently.

The slave who had gone out did not return.

Chrysis remained stone-pale, motionless as a sculptured goddess. The rhythmic and monotonous wail of a woman in travail of love not far away marked the passage of time for her. It seemed to her that this woman had been moaning thus since the night before. She could have twisted something, broken her fingers, shouted.

At last Selene came back, empty-handed.

“The mirror?” asked Bacchis.

“It . . . It has gone . . . it . . . has been . . . stolen,” stammered the servant.

Bacchis uttered a cry so piercing that all ceased speaking, and a frightful silence brusquely interrupted the tumult.

Men and women crowded round her from all parts of the vast chamber, leaving a little space in the centre which was occupied by the distracted Bacchis and the kneeling slave.

“What! What!” she shrieked.

And as Selene did not answer, she seized her violently by the neck:

“You have stolen it yourself! You have stolen it yourself! Answer, answer! I will loosen your tongue with the whip, miserable little bitch!”

Then a terrible thing happened. Beside herself with fear, the fear of suffering, the fear of death, the most instant terror she had ever known, the child exclaimed hurriedly:

“It is Aphrodisia! It is not I! it is not I!”

“Your sister!”

“Yes, yes,” said the mulatto woman; “it is Aphrodisia who has taken it.”

And they dragged their sister, who had just fallen into a fainting fit, before Bacchis.

# V. The Crucified One

They all repeated together:

“It is Aphrodisia who has taken it! Bitch! Bitch! Filthy thief!”

Their hatred of the favourite sister was reinforced by their fear for themselves.

Aretias gave her a kick in the breast.

“Where is it?” asked Bacchis. “Where have you put it?”

“She has given it to her lover.”

“Who is he?”

“An Opian sailor.”

“Where is his ship?”

“It sailed this evening for Rome. You will never see your mirror again. Let us crucify the bitch, the bloody animal!”

“Ah! Gods! Gods!” sobbed Bacchis.

Then suddenly her sorrow changed into a frenzy of rage.

Aphrodisia had come to herself again; but, paralysed by terror, and unable to understand what was happening, she remained speechless and tearless.

Bacchis seized her by the hair, dragged her over the soiled floor, through the flowers and pools of wine, and cried:

“The cross! the cross! bring the nails! bring the hammer!”

“Oh!” said Seso to her neighbour; “I have never seen that. Let us follow them.”

All pressed forward to follow. And Chrysis, who alone knew the guilty one, and was alone the cause of everything, Chrysis followed too.

Bacchis went straight into the slaves’ chamber, a square apartment furnished with three mattresses on which they slept in couples when the nights were over. At the lower end, like an ever-present menace, stood a T-shaped cross which had never yet been used.

In the midst of the confused murmur of the young men and women, four slaves hoisted the martyr to the level of the branches of the cross.

Not a sound had yet left her lips; but when she felt the touch of the cold rough beam on her naked back, her long eyes dilated, and she was seized with a convulsive fit of groaning which lasted till the end.

They put her astride on a wooden peg driven into the centre of the upright. This served to support the body and obviate the tearing of the hands.

Then they opened out her arms.

Chrysis looked on and held her peace. What could she say? She could only have exonerated the slave by incriminating Demetrios, who was beyond reach of all attack, and who would have taken a cruel revenge. Besides, a slave was a source of riches, and it was a satisfaction to the long-standing grudge that Chrysis bore her enemy to think that she was destroying in this way with her own hands the value of three thousand drachmæ as completely as if she had

thrown the money into the Eunostis. And then, was the life of a minion worth troubling about?

Heliope handed Bacchis the first nail and the hammer, and the torture began. Intoxication, rancour, anger, all the passions together, even the instinct of cruelty which lurks in a woman's heart, animated the soul of Bacchis at the moment she struck, and she uttered a shriek almost as piercing as that of Aphrodisia when the nail bent in the open palm.

She nailed up the second hand. She nailed the feet one upon the other. Then, excited by the sight of the blood spurting from the three wounds, she cried:

"It is not enough! Thief! Sow! Sailors' strumpet!"

She took the long pins out of her hair, and dug them violently into the flesh of her breasts, the belly, and the thighs. When she had no more weapons left in her hands, she smacked the poor wretch and spat upon her.

She contemplated this work of vengeance for some time; then she returned into the banqueting-hall with all the guests.

Phrasilas and Timon alone did not follow her.

After a moment's silent meditation, Phrasilas coughed slightly, put his right hand into his left, raised his head, lifted his eyebrows, and drew near the crucified one, whose body shook with a continuous, horrible trembling.

"Although I am," he said to her, "in divers circumstances, opposed to absolute theories so-called, yet I cannot blind myself to the fact that, in the conjuncture which has overtaken you, you would gain by being familiarised in more solid fashion with the maxims of the Stoics. Zeno, who does not seem to have had a spirit completely exempt from error, has left us several sophistries of no great general import, but, at the same time, you might derive profit from them to the particular end of calming your last moments.

"Pain", he said, "is a word void of meaning, since our will transcends the imperfections of our perishable body. It is true that Zeno died at the age of ninety-eight, without ever having had, according to his biographers, any illness, however slight; but this circumstance cannot be used as an argument against him, for from the mere fact that he succeeded in maintaining an unimpaired good health, we cannot logically conclude that he would have been lacking in force of character had he fallen ill. Besides, it would be an abuse to compel the philosophers to practise in their persons the rules of conduct they profess, and to cultivate without respite the virtues they deem superior. In a word, not to prolong inordinately a discourse which might last longer than yourself, endeavour to lift up your soul, my dear, as far as possible, above your physical sufferings. However melancholy, however cruel they may appear to you, I beg you to believe that I have a real part in them. They are drawing to a close: be patient, forget. Between the various doctrines which attribute immortality to us, this is the moment for choosing the one most fitted to alleviate your regrets at having to disappear. If these doctrines are true, you will have lightened the bitter agony of the passage. If they lie, what does it matter? You will never know that you were mistaken."

Having spoken thus, Phrasilas re-adjusted the folds of his garment over his shoulder and vanished with an unsteady gait.

Timon remained alone in the room with the woman hanging in the throes of death upon the cross.

The memory of a night passed on the poor wretch's breast haunted his brain, and confounded itself with the atrocious vision of the imminent rottenness into which this splendid body that had burned in his arms was about to fall.

He pressed his hand over his eyes in order not to see her torture, but he *heard* the unceasing trembling of the body upon the cross.

Finally, he looked. Great threads of blood formed a network on the skin from the pins in the breast down to the curled-up heels. The head turned perpetually. All the hair, matted with blood, sweat, and perfume, hung over the left side.

"Aphrodisia! do you hear me! do you recognise me? It is I, Timon; Timon."

Her glance, almost blind, rested on him for a second. But the head turned incessantly. The body trembled continually.

Softly, as if he feared the sound of his foot-steps would hurt her, the young man advanced to the foot of the cross. He stretched out his arms, he carefully took her strengthless and ever-turning head between his two fraternal hands, piously smoothed away her tear-drenched hair from her cheeks, and imprinted on the hot lips a kiss of infinite tenderness.

Aphrodisia closed her eyes. Did she recognise him who had charmed her horrible end by this impulse of affectionate pity? An inexpressible smile distended her blue eyelids, and with a sigh she gave up the ghost.

# VI. Enthusiasm

So, the deed was accomplished. Chrysis had the proof.

If Demetrios had brought himself to commit the first crime, the two others had probably followed without delay. A man of his rank would consider murder, and even sacrilege, as less dishonourable than theft.

He had obeyed, consequently he was a captive. This man, free, impassive, and cold as he was, had submitted to the yoke of slavery like the others, and his mistress, his tamer, it was she, Chrysis, Sarah of Gennesaret.

Ah! to think of it, to repeat it, to say it out aloud, alone!

Chrysis rushed out of the noisy house and ran quickly, straight before her, with the fresh breeze of morning bathing her face.

She went as far as the Agora along the road which led to the sea, at the end of which the masts of eight hundred ships stood huddled together like gigantic stalks of corn. Then she turned to the right, before the immense avenue of the Dromos where the house of Demetrios was. A thrill of pride came over her when she passed in front of the windows of her future lover; but she did not commit the indiscretion of attempting to see him the first. She followed the long road as far as the Canopic Gate, and cast herself upon the ground between two aloes.

He had done it. He had done everything for her, certainly more than any lover had ever done for any woman. She repeated it unceasingly and reiterated her triumph again and again. Demetrios, the Well-Beloved, the impossible and hopeless dream of so many feminine hearts, had run every sort of peril for her, every kind of shame, of willing remorse. He had even abjured the ideal of his thought, he had despoiled his handiwork of the miraculous necklace, and that day which was just dawning would see the lover of the goddess at the feet of his new idol.

“Take me! take me!” she cried. She adored him now. She called out for him. She longed for him. The three crimes became metamorphosed in her mind into three heroic actions, in return for which she would never be able to give enough affection, enough passion. With what an incomparable flame would their love burn—this unique love of two beings equally young, equally beautiful, equally loved by one another and united for ever after the conquest of so many obstacles.

They would go away together, they would set sail for mysterious countries, for Amaronthis, for Epidauros, or even for that unknown Rome which was the second town in the world after immense Alexandria, and which had undertaken the subjugation of the earth. What would they not do, wherever they might be? What joy would be a stranger to them, what human felicity would not envy them theirs, and pale before their enchanted passage?

Chrysis rose from the ground, dazzled, She extended her arms, set back her shoulders, threw out her bust. A sensation of languor and mounting joy stiffened her firm breasts. She set out for home . . .

On opening the door of her chamber, she started with surprise to see that nothing had changed under her roof since the night before. The little objects on her toilet-table, on the stands, on the shelves, appeared to her an inadequate setting for her new life.

She broke some that reminded her too directly of bygone useless lovers, for whom she now conceived a sudden hatred. If she spared others, it was not that she valued them more, but she was afraid of dismantling her chamber in case Demetrios had formed the design of passing the night there.

She undressed slowly. Vestiges of the orgie fell from her tunic, crumbs of cake, hairs, rose-leaves.

When her waist was relieved of the pressure of her girdle, she smoothed the skin and plunged her fingers into her hair to lighten its weight.

But before going to bed a longing came over her to rest an instant on the rugs of the terrace, where the coolness of the air was so delicious.

She mounted.

The sun had barely risen. It lay on the horizon line like a vast swollen orange.

A great gnarled palm-tree stood with its thicket of green leaves hanging over the balustrade. Chrysis ensconced her tingling nudity in its shade, and shivered, with her breasts in her hands.

Her eyes wandered over the gradually whitening town. The violet vapours of the dawn rose from the silent streets and disappeared in the pellucid air.

Suddenly, an idea burst upon her mind, grew upon her, took possession of her. Demetrios, who had already done so much, why should he not kill the Queen, Demetrios who might be the king?

And then?

And then, that monumental ocean of houses, palaces, temples, porticoes, colonnades, that swam before her eyes from the Necropolis of the west to the gardens of the Goddess: Brouchion, the Egyptian town, in front of which the gleaming Paneion reared itself aloft like a mountain acropolis; the Great Temple of Serapis, from the facade of which arose, horn-like, two long pink obelisks; the Great Temple of Aphrodite engirded by the rustling of three hundred thousand palm-trees and countless waves; the Temple of Persephone and the Temple of Arsinoë, the two sanctuaries of Poseidon, the three towers of Isis Lochias, and the theatre, and the Hippodrome, and the Stadium where Pittacos had run in competition with Nicosthenes, and the tomb of Stratonice, and the tomb of the god Alexander—Alexandria! Alexandria! the sea, the men, the colossal marble Pharos whose mirror saved men from the sea! Alexandria! the city of the eleven Ptolemies, Physcon, Philometor, Epiphanes, Philadelphos; Alexandria, the climax of all dreams, the diadem of all the glories conquered during three thousand years in Memphis, Thebes, Athens, Corinth, by the chisel, the pen, the compass, and the sword! Still farther away, the Delta, cloven by the seven tongues of Nile, Saïs, Boubastis, Heliopolis; then, travelling towards the South, that ribbon of fertile land, the Heptanomos with the long array of its twelve hundred riverside temples dedicated to all the gods, and further still, Thebaïs. Diospolis, the Isle of Elephants, the impassable cataracts, the Isle of Argo . . . Meroë . . . the unknown; and even, if it was permitted to believe the traditions of the Egyptians, the country of the fabulous lakes, whence escapes the antique Nile, lakes so vast that one loses sight of the horizon when crossing their purple flood, and perched so high upon the mountains that the stars are reflected in them like golden apples.—all this, all, should be the kingdom, the domain, the possession of Chrysis, the courtesan.

She almost choked, and threw her arms on high as if she thought to touch the heavens.

And simultaneously, she watched on her left the slow flight towards the open sea of a great bird with black wings.

# VII. Cleopatra

Queen Berenice had a young sister called Cleopatra. Many other Egyptian princesses had borne the same name, but this girl became in later years the great Cleopatra who destroyed her kingdom, and killed herself, as one might say, on the corpse of her dead empire.

About this time, she was twelve years of age, and no one could tell what her beauty would be. Her body, tall and thin, seemed out of place in a family where all the females were plump. She was ripening like some badly-grafted, bastard fruit of foreign, obscure origin. Some of her lineaments were hard and bold, as seen in Macedonia; other traits appeared as if inherited from the depths of Nubia, where womankind is tender and swarthy, for her mother had been a female of inferior race whose pedigree was doubtful. It was surprising to see Cleopatra's lips, almost thick, under an aquiline nose of rather delicate shape. Her young breasts, very round, small, and widely separated, were crowned with a swelling aureola, thereby showing she was a daughter of the Nile.

The little Princess lived in a spacious room, opening on to the vast sea and joined to the Queen's apartment by a vestibule under a colonnade.

Cleopatra passed the hours of the night on a bed of bluish silk, where the skin of her young limbs, already of a dark hue, took on still deeper tints.

It came to pass that in the night when—far from her and her thoughts—the events already chronicled in these pages look place, Cleopatra rose long before dawn. She had slept but little and badly, being anxious about her troubles of puberty which she had just experienced, and disturbed by the extreme heat of the atmosphere.

Without waking the woman who watched over her slumbers, she softly put her feet to the ground, slipped her golden bangles round her ankles, girded her little brown belly with a row of enormous pearls, and thus accoutred, left her chamber.

In the monumental corridor, armed guards were also sound asleep, except one who stood sentinel at the door of the Queen's room.

He fell on his knees and whispered in dire terror, as if he had never before found himself thus struggling in such a conflict of duty and danger:

"Princess Cleopatra, I crave thy pardon! I cannot let thee pass!"

The lass drew herself up to her full height, knitted her brows violently, and dealt a dull blow on the soldier's forehead with her clenched fist.

"As for thee," she said in smothered accents, but with ferocious meaning, "I'll raise a cry of rape, and have thee quartered!"

Then, in silence, she entered the Queens chamber.

Berenice was asleep, her head pillowed on her arm, her hand hanging down.

Over the great crimson couch, a hanging lamp mingled its feeble glare with that of the moon, reflected by the whiteness of the walls. The vague, luminous outlines of the slumbering woman's supple nudity were thus enwrapped in misty shadow, between these two contrasting lights.

Slender Cleopatra sat straight up on the edge of the bed. She took her sister's face in her two little hands, waking Berenice up by touch and speech.

“Why is your lover not with you?” asked Cleopatra.

Berenice, startled, opened her lovely eyes.

“Cleopatra! What are you doing here? What do you want of me?”

“Why is your lover not with you?” repeated the girl, insisting.

“Is he not with me?”

“Certainly not! You know that well enough!”

“True! He’s never here. Oh, Cleopatra, how cruel of you to wake me, to tell me so!”

“But why is he always away?”

“I see him when he chooses,” sighed Berenice, in grief. “During the day— for a minute or two.”

“Did you not see him yesterday?”

“Yes. I met him by the roadside. I was in my litter. He got in with me.”

“As far as the Palace?”

“No—not quite. He was still in sight nearly as far as the gates.”

“What did you tell him?”

“Oh, I was furious! I said most wicked things. Yes, darling, I did!”

“Indeed?” rejoined the young girl, ironically.

“Perhaps too wicked, for he never answered me. Just when I felt myself scarlet with rage, he recited a long fable for my benefit. As I did not quite understand it, I did not know how to reply. He slipped out of the litter, just as I thought of keeping him by my side.

“Why not have called him back?”

“I feared to displease him.”

Cleopatra, swelling with indignation, took her sister by the shoulders, and looking her full in the face, spoke thus to her:

“How now! You are the Queen, the people’s goddess! Half the world belongs to you; all that Rome does not rule is yours; you reign over the Nile and the entire ocean. You even reign over the heavens, since you are nearer to the ear of the Gods than anyone, and yet you cannot reign over the man you love!”

“Reign . . . reign!” said Berenice, hanging her head. “That’s easy to say, but, look you, one does not reign over a lover as if dominating a slave.”

“And why not, pray?”

“Because . . . But you cannot understand! To love, is to prefer the happiness of another to that which we formerly selfishly desired before meeting the loved one. Should Demetrios be content, so likewise would I be, even weeping and far from his side. I wish for no delight that is not his, and all I bestow on him gives me great joy.”

“You know not how to love,” said the young lass.

Berenice smiled sadly, then she stretched her two arms stiffly on either side of her couch, as she jutted out her breasts and arched her loins.

“Ah, little presumptuous virgin!” she sighed. “When for the first time you’ll swoon in loving conjunction, then only will you understand why one is never the queen of a man who causes you thus to lose your senses.”

“A woman can always be a queen should she so will it.”

“But she has no longer any power of will.”

“I have! Why should you not be the same? You are my elder!”

Berenice smiled again.

“My little girl, upon whom do you exercise your strength of will? On which one of your dolls?”

“On my lover!” said Cleopatra.

Without allowing her sister time to find words to express her stupefaction, the damsel went on talking with growing vivacity.

“I have got a lover! Yes, I’ve a lover! Why should I not have a sweetheart like everybody else, the same as you and my mother, and my aunt, and the lowest woman in Egypt? A lover? Of a surety! And why not, prithee, seeing that for six months past, I am a woman, and you have not yet found me a husband? Aye, Berenice, I have a lover. I’m no longer a little girl. I know now! I know! Be silent—say nothing, for I know more than you. I, too, have clasped my arms till they were fit to snap, over the naked back of a man who thought he was my master. I, too, have crooked my toes in the empty air, feeling as if life was leaving me, and I’ve died a hundred times over in the same way as you have swooned, but immediately afterwards, Berenice, I was on my feet, upstanding, erect! Say naught to me, for I am ashamed to claim you as my Sovereign—you, who are someone’s slave!”

Little Cleopatra drew herself up to her full height, endeavouring to appear as tall as possible. She took her head in her hands, like an Asiatic queen trying on a tiara.

Seated on the bed, her feet tucked under her, the elder sister listened, and then knelt, so she could come near to the young lass and place her hands on Cleopatra’s sloping, slender shoulders.

“So you’ve a lover?” Berenice now spoke timidly, almost respectfully.

“If you don’t believe me, you can look,” replied the girl, curtly.

“When do you see him?” sighed Berenice.

“Three times a day.”

“Where?”

“Do you want me to tell you?”

“Yes.”

“How comes it that you do not know this?” interrogated Cleopatra in her turn.

“I know nothing, not even what goes on at the Palace. Demetrios is the only subject of conversation I care about. I have not watched over you as I should have done, my child. All this is my fault.”

“Watch me if you like. When I can no longer have my own way, I’ll kill myself. Therefore, little care I, whatever happens!”

“You are free,” replied Berenice, shaking her head. “At any rate, it is too late to restrain you. But, answer me, darling. You have a lover and—you manage to keep him to yourself?”

“I have my way of holding him.”

“Who taught you?”

“I taught myself all alone. Such knowledge comes instinctively or never. When I was but six years old, I knew how I meant to hold my sweetheart later on in life.”

“Will you not tell me?”

“Follow me.”

Berenice rose slowly, put on a tunic and a mantle, shook out her heavy tresses, adhering together by the sweat of the bed, and both the sisters left the room.

First went the youngest, straight along the vestibule, back to her bed. Under the mattress of fresh, dry byssos, she took a newly-cut key.

“Follow me. It’s rather far,” she said, turning to her sister.

In the middle of the passage was a staircase which she ascended. Then she glided along a never-ending colonnade, opened several doors, walking on carpets, white marble slabs and the mosaic floors of a score of empty, silent apartments.

She descended a stone stairway, and stepped over the dark thresholds of clanging doors. Now and again, the two women came upon soldiers, resting on mats in couples, their spears close to their hands. Some long time afterwards, Cleopatra crossed a courtyard lit up by the rays of the full moon, and the shadow of a palm-tree caressed her hips. Berenice, wrapped in her blue mantle, still followed her.

At last, they reached a massive door, clamped with iron like a warrior’s breastplate. In the lock, Cleopatra slipped her key, turning it twice. Then, pushing open the portal, a man—a very giant in the darkness—rose to his full height out of the depths of his dungeon.

Berenice stirred with emotion, looked in, and with drooping head, said very softly:

“Tis you, my child, who know not how to love. At least—not yet. I was quite right when I told you that.”

“Love for love, I prefer mine,” said the girl. “He gives me naught but joy, at any rate.”

So saying, erect on the prison threshold, and without making a step forward, she said to the man who stood in the shadow:

“Come hither, and kiss my foot, son of a cur!”

When he had done so, she pressed her mouth to his lips.

# Book IV

# I. Demetrios Dreams A Dream

Now, with the mirror, the necklace, and the collar, Demetrios having returned home, a dream visited him in his slumber, and this was his dream:

He is going towards the quay, mingled with the crowd, on a strange moonless night, cloudless, but shedding a peculiar brilliance of its own.

Without knowing why, or what it is that draws him, he is in a hurry to arrive, to be *there* as soon as he can, but he walks with effort, and the air opposes an inexplicable resistance to his legs, as deep water hampers footsteps.

He trembles, he thinks he will never reach the goal, that he will never know towards whom, in this bright obscurity, he is walking thus, panting and troubled.

At times, the crowd disappears entirely, whether it be that it really fades away, or that he ceases to be conscious of its presence. Then it jostles more importunately than ever, and all press, on, on, on, with a quick and sonorous step, more quickly than he . . .

Then the human mass closes in upon him; Demetrios pales; a man pushes him with his shoulder; a woman's buckle tears his tunic; a young girl is wedged against him, so tightly that he feels the pressure of her nipples against his chest, and she pushes his face away with two terrified hands.

Suddenly he is alone, the first, upon the quay. And as he turns to look behind him, he perceives in the distance the white swarm of the crowd which has all at once receded to the Agora.

And he realises that it will advance no further.

The quay lies white and straight like the first stage of an unfinished road which has undertaken to cross the sea.

He wants to go to Pharos, and he walks. His legs have suddenly become light. The wind blowing in the sandy deserts drives him headlong towards the watery solitudes into which the quay plunges venturesomely. But in proportion as he advances, Pharos retreats before him; the quay is immeasurably prolonged. Soon the high marble tower on which blazes a purple wood-pile touches the livid horizon, flickers, dies down, wanes, and sets like another moon.

Demetrios walks ever onwards.

Days and nights seem to have passed since he left the great quay of Alexandria far behind him, and he dare not turn his head, for fear of seeing nothing but the road he has travelled along: a white line stretching to infinity—and the sea.

And still he turns round.

An island is behind him, covered with great trees whence droop enormous blossoms.

Has he crossed it like a blind man, or does it spring into sight at the same instant and become mysteriously visible? He does not think of conjecturing: he accepts the impossible as a natural event . . .

A woman is in the isle. She is standing before the door of its one house, with her eyes half closed and her face bending over a monstrous iris-flower that reaches to the level of her lips. She has heavy hair, the colour of dull gold, and of a length one may surmise to be marvellous, judging by the mass of the great coil that lies on her drooping neck. A black tunic

envelopes this woman, and a robe blacker still is draped upon the tunic, and the iris whose perfume she breathes with downcast eyelids is of the same hue as night.

In all this mourning garb, Demetrios sees but the hair, like a golden vase on an ebony column. He recognises Chrysis.

The recollection of the mirror and of the necklace and of the comb recurs to him vaguely; but he does not believe in it, and in this singular vision reality alone seems to him a dream . . .

“Come,” says Chrysis. “Follow me.”

He follows her. She slowly mounts a staircase strewn with white skins. Her arm rests upon the rail. Her naked heels float in and out from under her robe.

The house has but one storey. Chrysis halts at the topmost step.

“There are four chambers,” she says.

“When you have seen them, you will never leave them. Will you follow me? Have you confidence?”

But he will follow her everywhere. She opens the first door and closes it behind him.

This room is long and narrow. It is lighted by a single window, through which is seen enframed the great expanse of sea. On the right and left are two small tables and on them a dozen book-rolls.

“Here are the books you love,” says Chrysis. “There are no others.”

Demetrios opens them: they are *The Oineus* of Chæremon, *The Return* of Alexis, *The Mirror of Lais* of Aristippos, *The Enchantress*, *The Cyclops*, the *Bucolics* of Theocritos, *Œdipus at Colonos*, the *Odes* of Sappho, and several other little works. Upon a pile of cushions, in the midst of this ideal library, there is a naked girl who utters no word.

“Now,” murmurs Chrysis, drawing from a long golden coder a manuscript consisting of a single leaf, “here is the page of antique poesy that you never read alone without weeping.”

The young man reads at a venture:

[Greek: Hoi men ar’ ethrêneon, epi de stenachonto gynaikes.
Têsin d’Andromachê leukôlenos êrche gooio,
Hektoros androphonoio karê meta chersin echousa;
Aner, ap’ aiônos neos ôleo, kadde me chêrên
Leipeis en megaroisi; pais d’eti nêpios autôs,
Hon tekomen sy t’egô te dysammoroi. . .]

He stops, casting upon Chrysis a look of surprise and tenderness.

“You?” he says. “You show me this?”

“Ah! you have not seen everything. Follow me. Follow me quickly.”

They open another door.

The second chamber is square. It is lighted by a single window, through which is seen enframed all nature. In the midst, stands a wooden trestle bearing a lump of red clay, and in a corner, a naked girl lies upon a curved chair, and utters no word.

“Here you will model Andromeda and Zagreus and the Horses of the Sun. As you will create them for yourself alone, you will break them in pieces before your death.”

“It is the House of Felicity,” says Demetrios in a low voice.

And he lets his forehead sink into his hands.

But Chrysis opens another door.

The third chamber is vast and round. It is lighted by a single window, through which is seen enframed the great expanse of blue sky. Its walls consist of gratings of bronze bars so disposed as to form lozenge-shaped interstices. Through them glides a music of flutes and pipes played to a doleful measure by invisible musicians. And against the far wall, upon a throne of green marble, sits a naked girl who utters no word.

“Come! Come!” repeats Chrysis.

They open another door.

The fourth chamber is low, sombre, hermetically closed, and triangular. Thick carpets and rugs array it so luxuriously from floor to roof that nudity is not astonished in it. Lovers can easily imagine that they have cast off their garments upon the walls in all directions. When the door is closed again, it is impossible to guess where it was. There is no window. It is a narrow world, outside the world. A few wisps of black hair hanging to the cushions shed tear-drops of perfumes. And this chamber is lighted by seven little myrrhine panes which colour diversely the incomprehensible light of seven subterranean lamps.

“See,” explains the woman in an affectionate and tranquil tone, “there are three different beds in the three corners of *our* chamber.”

Demetrios does not answer. And he asks within himself:

“Is it really a last term? Is it truly a goal of human existence? Have I then passed through the other three chambers only to stop in this one? And shall I, shall I ever be able to leave it if I lie in it a whole night in the attitude of love which is the prostration of the tomb.”

But Chrysis speaks.

“Well-Beloved, you asked for me; I am come, look at me well . . .”

She raises her two arms together, lays her hands upon her hair, and, with her elbows projecting in front of her, smiles.

“Well-Beloved, I am yours . . . Oh! not immediately . . . I promised you to sing, I will sing first . . .”

And he thinks of her no more, and lays him down at her feet. She has little black sandals. Four threads of blue pearls pass between the dainty toes, on the nails of which has been painted a carmine lunar crescent.

With her head reposing on her shoulder, she taps on the palm of her left hand with her right, and undulates her hips almost imperceptibly.

“By night, on my bed,
I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him, but I found him not. . . . .
I charge ye, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
If ye find my beloved,
Tell him
That I am sick of love.”

“Ah! it is the Song of Songs, Demetrios. It is the nuptial canticle of the women of my country.”

“I sleep, but my heart waketh:
It is the voice of my beloved . . .
That knocketh at my door,
The voice of my beloved!
He cometh,
Leaping upon the mountains
Like a roe
Or a young hart.”

“My beloved speaks, and says unto me:
Open unto me, my sister, my fair one:
My head is filled with dew,
And my locks with the drops of the night.
Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away.
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone,
The flowers appear on the earth.
The time of the singing of birds is come,
The voice of the turtle-dove is heard in the land.
Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away.”

She casts her veil away, and stands up arrayed in some tight-fitting stuff wound closely round the legs and hips.

“I have put off my coat;
How shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet:
How shall I defile them?
My well-beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door,
And my bowels were moved for him.
I rose up to open to my beloved,
And my hands dropped with myrrh,
And my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh,
Upon the handles of the lock.
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!

She throws her head back and half closes her eyelids.

“Stay me, comfort me,
For I am sick of love.
Let his left hand be under my head
And his right hand embrace me.
Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, with
one of thine eyes,
With one chain of thy neck.
How fair is thy love!
How fair are thy caresses!
How much better than wine!
The smell of thee pleaseth me more than all spices.
Thy lips drop as the honeycomb:
Honey and milk are under thy tongue.

The smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon."

"A garden enclosed is my sister,
A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

"Awake, O north wind!
Blow, thou south!
Blow upon my garden,
That the spices thereof may flow out."

She rounds her arms, and holds out her mouth.

"Let my beloved come into his garden
And eat of his pleasant fruits.
Yes, I come into my garden,
O! my sister, my spouse,
I gather my myrrh with my spice,
I eat my honeycomb with my honey.
I drink my wine with my milk.
SET ME AS A SEAL UPON THINE HEART
AS A SEAL UPON THINE ARM
FOR LOVE IS STRONG AS DEATH."[2]

Without moving her feet, without bending her tightly-pressed knees, she slowly turns her body upon her motionless hips. Her face and her two breasts, above her tightly-swathed legs, seem three great pink flowers in a flower-holder made of stuffs.

She dances gravely, with her shoulders and her head and the intermingling of her beautiful arms. She seems to suffer in her sheath and to reveal ever and ever more the whiteness of her half imprisoned body. Her breathing inflates her breast. Her mouth cannot close. Her eyelids cannot open. A heightening flame flushes her cheeks.

Now her ten interlocked fingers join before her face. Now she raises her arms. She strains voluptuously. A long fugitive groove separates her shoulders as they rise and fall. Finally, with a single movement of her body, enveloping her panting visage in her hair as with a bridal veil, she tremblingly unfastens the sculptured clasp which retained her garment about her loins, and allows all the mystery of her grace to slip down upon the ground.

Demetrios and Chrysis . . .

Their first embracement before love is immediately so perfect, so harmonious, that they keep it immobile, in order fully to know its multiple voluptuousness. One of her breasts stands out erect and round, from under the strong encircling arm of Demetrios. One of her burning thighs is rivetted between his two legs, and the other lies with all its heavy weight thrown upon them. They remain thus, motionless, clasped together but not penetrated, in the rising exaltation of an inflexible desire which they are loth to satisfy. At first, they catch at one another with their mouths alone. They intoxicate each other with the contact of their aching and ungated virginities.

We look at nothing so minutely as the face of the woman we love. Seen at the excessively close range of the kiss, Chrysis's eyes seem enormous. When she closes them, two parallel creases remain on each eyelid, and a leaden-hued patch extends from the brilliant eyebrows to the verge of the cheeks. When she opens them, a green ring, fine as a silken thread,

[2] Song of Songs.

illumines with a coloured coronal the fathomless black eyeball immeasurably distended under the long curved lashes. The little pellet of red flesh whence the tears flow has sudden palpitations.

Their kiss is endless. Chrysis would seem to have under her tongue, not milk and honey, as in Holy Writ, but living, mobile, enchanted water. And this multiform tongue itself, now incurved like an arch, now rolled up like a spiral, now shrinking into its hiding-place, now darting forth like a flame, more caressing than the hand, more expressive than the eyes, circling, flower-like, into a pistil, or thinning away into a petal, this ribbon of flesh that hardens when it quivers and softens when it licks, Chrysis animates it with all the resources of her endearing and passionate fantasy . . . Then she showers on him a series of prolonged caresses that twist and turn. Her nervous finger-tips suffice to grasp him tightly, and to produce convulsive tremblings along his sides. She is happy only when palpitating with desire or enervated by exhaustion: the transition terrifies her like a torture. As soon as her lover summons her, she thrusts him away with rigid arms: she presses her knees close together, she supplicates him dumbly with her lips. Demetrios constrains her by force.

...No spectacle of nature, neither the blazing glory of the setting sun, nor the tempest in the palm-trees, nor the mirage, nor the mighty upheavals of the waters, seem worthy of astonishment to those who have witnessed the transfiguration of a woman in their arms. Chrysis becomes extraordinary. Arching her body upwards, and sinking back again in turns, with her bent elbow resting on the cushions, she seizes the corner of a pillow, clutches at it like a dying woman, and gasps for breath, with her head thrown back. Her eyes, brilliant with gratitude, fix the madness of their glance at the corner of the eyelids. Her cheeks are resplendent. The curve of her swaying hair is disconcerting. Two admirable, muscular lines, descending from the ear and the shoulder, meet under the right breast and bear it like a fruit.

Demetrios contemplates this divine madness in the feminine body with a sort of religious awe—this transport of a whole being, this superhuman convulsion of which he is the direct cause, which he exalts or represses at will, and which confounds him for the thousandth time.

Under his very eyes all the mighty forces of life strain in the effort to create. The breasts have already assumed, up to their very tips, maternal majesty. And these wails, these lamentable wails that prematurely weep over the labour of childbirth! . . .

# II. The Panic

Far above the sea and the Gardens of the Goddess, the moon poured down torrents of light.

Melitta—that little damsel, so delicate and slender, possessed by Demetrios for a fleeting moment, and who had offered to take him to Chimairis, learned in chiromancy—had remained behind alone with the fortune-teller, crouching, and still fierce.

“Do not follow that man,” Chimairis had said.

“Oh yes, I will! I’ve not even asked him if I am ever to see him again. Let me run after him to kiss him, and I’ll come back—”

“No, you’ll not see him ever more. And so much the better, my girl. Women who meet him once, learn to knew pain. Women who meet him twice, trifle with death.”

“Why say it? I’ve just met him, and I’ve only trifled with pleasure in his arms.”

“You owe your pleasure to him because you do not know what voluptuousness means, my tiniest of tiny girls. Forget him as you would a playmate and congratulate yourself on being only twelve years old.”

“So one is very unhappy when grown up?” asked the child. “All the women here chatter unceasingly of their troubles, and I, who never hardly cry, see so many weeping!”

Chimairis dug her two hands into her hair and uttered a groan. Her goat shook its gold collar and turned its head in her direction, but she did not bestow a glance on the animal.

“Nevertheless, I know one happy woman,” continued Melitta, significantly. “She’s my great friend, Chrysis. I’m certain she never sheds a tear.”

“She will,” said Chimairis.

“Oh, prophetess of evil! Take back what you’ve said, distraught old woman, or I shall hate you!”

Seeing the young girl’s threatening gestures, the black goat reared up erect, its front legs bent under; its horns thrust forward.

Melitta fled without looking where she went.

Twenty paces farther on, she burst out laughing, as she caught sight of a ridiculous couple hidden between two bushes. That sufficed to change the current of her young thoughts.

She took the longest road before returning to her hut, and then decided not to go home at all. It was a magnificent, warm, moonlight night. The gardens were full of many voices and songs. Satisfied with what she had earned through the visit of Demetrios, she was seized with a sudden fancy to play the part of a vagrant girl of roads and ditches, in the depths of the wood, with pauper passers-by. In this way, she was enjoyed twice or three against a tree, a stone pillar, or on a bench, and found amusement as if the game was new, because the scene kept changing. A soldier, standing in the middle of a pathway, lifted her bodily up in his robust arms and identified himself with the God of the Gardens who joins himself to the wenches who tend the rose-trees without needing to let the hussies feet touch the ground. At this, Melitta uttered a cry of triumph.

Escaping again, she continued her flight through an avenue of palms, where she met a lad, named Mikyllos, seemingly lost in the forest. She offered to be his guide, but led him astray

designedly, so as to keep him with her for her own purposes. Mikyllos was not long in fathoming Melitta's intentions, as well as her tiny talents and capabilities. Soon becoming companions, rather than lovers, they ran along side by side in solitude that grew more and more silent. Suddenly, they came in front of the sea.

The spot where they found themselves was far distant from the parts where the courtesans generally celebrated the rites of their religious profession. Why they chose other trysting-places in preference to this—the most admirable of all—they could not have told you. The part of the wood where the crowd gathered soon became a notorious central alley, surrounded by a network of bypaths and starry glades. On the outskirts, despite the charm or the beauty of the sites, there reigned eternal solitude where luxuriant vegetation flourished peacefully.

Thus strolling, hand in hand, Mikyllos and Melitta reached the limit of the public park, a low hedge of aloes, forming a useless dividing line between the gardens of Aphrodite and those of her High Priest.

Encouraged by the hushed solitude of this flowery wilderness, the young couple easily climbed over the irregular wall formed by the quaint twisted plants. The Mediterranean, at their feet, slowly swept the shore, with wavelets like the fringes of a river. The two children waded in breast-high and chased each other, laughing meanwhile, as they tried to effect difficult conjunctions in the water. They soon put an end to these sports, which failed like games insufficiently rehearsed. After that, luminous and dripping wet, wriggling their frog-like legs in the moonlight, they sprang upon the dark edge of the sea.

Traces of footprints on the sand urged the boy and girl onwards. They walked, ran, and struggled, pulling each other by the hand; their black, well-defined shadows sketching bold outlines of their two figures. How far were they to go in this wise? They saw no other living things on the immense azure horizon.

"Ah! Look!" exclaimed Melitta, all of a sudden.

"What's the matter?"

"There's a woman!"

"A courtesan! Oh, the shameless thing! She has fallen asleep in the open."

"No, no!" rejoined Melitta, shaking her head. "I dare not go near her, Mikyllos. She's no courtesan."

"I should have thought she was.

"No, I say, Mikyllos, she's not one of us. It's Touni, wife of the High Priest. Look well at her. She is not asleep. Oh, I'm afraid to approach her. Her eyes are wide open! Let us go away! I'm afraid—oh, so afraid!"

Mikyllos made three steps forward on tip-toe.

"You're right, Melitta. She is not sleeping, poor woman! She is dead."

"Dead?"

"There is a pin in her heart."

He stretched out his hand to draw it from her breast, but Melitta was terrified.

"No, no! Touch her not! She is sacred! Remain by her side, watch over her, protect her. I'll call for help. I'll tell the others."

She fled with all the strength of her legs into the deep shadow of the black trees.

Alone and trembling, Mikyllos wandered round the corpse of the young woman. He touched the pierced breast with his finger. Then, either scared by death, or more likely fearing to be taken for an accomplice of the murder, he suddenly took to his heels, resolved to apprise no one.

The icy nakedness of Touni remained as before, abandoned in the bright light of the moon.

A long time afterwards, the woods near where she lay became filled with murmurs which were frightful because almost imperceptible.

On all sides, between tree-trunks and bushes, a thousand courtesans, huddled together like frightened sheep, advanced slowly, their masses quivering with a unanimous shudder.

By a movement as regular as that of the sea striking the sandy foreshore, the front rank of this army made way for those following behind. It seemed as if nobody wanted to be the first to find the dead woman.

A great cry, taken up by a thousand mouths and dying away at a distance, arose to salute the poor corpse when it was perceived stretched out at the foot of a tree.

A thousand naked arms were first uplifted and then as many others.

“Goddess! Not on us!” now sobbed many voices. “Goddess, not on us! If thou wreakest vengeance, Goddess, spare our lives!”

“To the Temple!” was the rallying-cry arising from one despairing throat.

“To the Temple! To the Temple!” repeated all the other women.

At this juncture, a new eddy convulsed the surging multitude. Without daring to cast another look at the dead woman, stretched out on her back on the ground, her eyes upturned and her arms thrown back, all the courtesans in one great mob, black women and white, those of the East and the West, some in sumptuous robes and others in vague nudity, scampered through the trees, rushing across glades, paths, and roads; swarming into the vast open spaces in front of the houses, until they mounted the gigantic pink marble staircase that gleamed deeply red in the light of coming day. With their weak clenched fists, they battered the lofty bronze doors, squalling childishly:

“Open the gates for us! Open! Let us in!”

# III. The Crowd

The morning the orgie at Bacchis's came to an end an event took place at Alexandria: rain fell.

Immediately, contrarily to what usually happens in countries less African, everybody went out to welcome the shower.

The phenomenon was neither torrent-like nor stormy. Large warm drops fell from a violet cloud and traversed the air. The men looked at the sky with interest. The little children roared with laughter, and went about splashing their tiny naked feet in the surface-mud.

Then the cloud faded away in the light, the sky remained implacably pure, and a short time after midday the mud had once more turned into dust under the sun.

But this momentary shower had sufficed. It filled the town with gaiety. The men congregated on the pavement of the Agora, and the women thronged together in groups, intermingling their shrill voices.

Only the courtesans were there, for the third day of the Aphrodisæ being reserved for the exclusive devotions of the married women, the latter had just started for the Astarteïon in a great procession, and there was nothing in the square but flowered robes and eyes blackened with paint.

As Myrtocleia passed by, a young girl called Philotis, who was talking with many others, pulled her by the sleeve knot.

"Ho, my little lass! you played at Bacchis's yesterday? What happened? What took place there? Did Bacchis put on a new necklace to hide the cavities in her neck? Has she got wooden breasts or copper ones? Did she forget to dye the little white hairs on her temples before putting on her wig? Come, speak, fried fish!"

"Do you suppose I looked at her? I arrived after the banquet, I played my piece, I received my payment, and I ran off."

"Oh, I know you don't dissipate!"

"To stain my robe and receive blows? No, Philotis. Only rich women can afford to indulge in orgies. Little flute-girls get nothing but tears."

"When one doesn't want to stain one's robe, one leaves it in the ante-chamber. When one receives blows, one insists on being paid double. It is quite elementary. So you have nothing to tell us? not an adventure, not a joke, not a scandal? We are yawning like storks. Invent something if you know nothing."

"My friend Theano stayed after me. When I awoke a few minutes ago, she had not yet come. The fête is perhaps still going on."

"It is finished," said another woman. "Theano is down there, by the ceramic wall."

The courtesans started off at a run, but presently stopped with a smile of pity.

Theano, in a naive fit of drunkenness, was obstinately pulling at a rose stripped of its leaves, the thorns of which were caught in her hair. Her yellow tunic was soiled with red and white stains as if she had borne the brunt of the whole orgie. The bronze clasp, which kept up up the converging folds of the stuff upon her left shoulder, dangled below the waist, and

revealed the mobile globe of a young breast already too mature, and which was stained with two spots of purple.

As soon as she saw Myrtocleia, she brusquely went off into a peal of singular laughter. Everybody knew it at Alexandria, and it had procured her the nickname of the "Fowl." It was an interminable cluck-cluck, a torrent of gaiety which commenced in a very low key and took her breath away, then shot up again into a shrill cry, and so forth, rhythmically, like the joy of a triumphant hen.

"An egg! an egg!" said Philotis.

But Myrtocleia made a gesture:

"Come, Theano, come to bed. You are not well. Come with me."

"Ah! . . . ha! . . . Ah! . . . ha!" laughed the child. And she took her breast in her little hand, crying in a hoarse voice:

"Ah! . . . Ha! . . . the mirror . . ."

"Come along!" repeated Myrto, losing patience.

"The mirror . . . it is stolen, stolen! Ah! haaa! I shall never laugh so much again if I live to be as old as Chronos. Stolen, stolen, the silver mirror!"

The singing-girl tried to drag her away, but Philotis had understood.

"Hi!" she cried to the others, waving her two arms. "Come here quickly! There is news! Bacchis's mirror has been stolen!"

And all exclaimed:

"Papaië! Bacchis's mirror!"

In an instant, thirty women crowded round the flute-girl:

"What is happening?"

"What?"

"Bacchis has had her mirror stolen: Theano has just said so."

"But when?"

"Who has taken it?"

The child shrugged her shoulders:

"How do I know?"

"You passed the night there. You must know. It is not possible. Who entered her house? You have certainly been told. Try to collect yourself, Theano."

"What do I know about it? There were more than twenty of them in the banqueting room.

"They had hired me to play the flute, but they prevented me from playing because they do not like music. They asked me to mimic the figure of Danaë and they threw gold coins at me, and Bacchis took them all away from me . . . It was a band of madmen. They made me drink head downwards out of a bowl overflowing with wine. They had poured seven tankards in it because there were seven wines upon the table. My face was all dripping. Even my hair was soaked, and my roses."

"Yes," interrupted Myrto, "you are an awful fright. But the mirror? Who took it?"

“Exactly! when they put me on my feet again, my head was suffused with blood, and I was covered with wine up to the ears. Ha! Ha! they all began to laugh . . . Bacchis sent for the mirror . . . Ha! ha! it had disappeared. Somebody had taken it.”

“Who? That is what we want to know.”

“It was not I, that is all I know. It was no use searching me: I was quite naked. I cannot hide a mirror under my eyelid, like a drachma. It was not I, that is all I know. She crucified a slave, perhaps on account of that. When I saw that they were not looking at me, I picked up the Danaë coins. See, Myrto, I have five: you shall buy robes for the three of us.”

The news of the theft spread gradually over the whole square. The courtesans did not hide their envious satisfaction. A noisy curiosity animated the moving groups.

“It is a woman,” said Philotis; “it is a woman who is responsible for this piece of work.”

“Yes, the mirror was well hidden. A thief could have carried off everything in the room and upset everything without finding the stone.”

“Bacchis had enemies, especially her former friends. They knew all her secrets. One of them has probably enticed her away somewhere, and then entered her house at the hour when the sun is hot and the streets are almost deserted.”

“Oh! she has perhaps sold the mirror to pay her debts.”

“Supposing it were one of her lovers? They say she takes porters now!”

“No, it is a woman, I am sure of it.”

“By the two goddesses! it serves her right.”

Suddenly, a still more excited mob rushed towards a point of the Agora, followed by a rising rumour which drew all the passers-by after it.

“What is the matter? what is the matter?”

And a shrill voice dominating the tumult shouted over all their heads:

“The High-Priest’s wife has been killed!”

Violent consternation took possession of the crowd. It was incredible. People refuse to believe that so atrocious a murder could have been committed at the very height of the Aphrodisisæ, bringing down the wrath of the gods upon the town. But the same sentence passed from mouth to mouth in all directions:

“The wife of the High-Priest has been killed! The festival at the Temple is put off.”

News arrived rapidly. The body had been found, lying on a pink marble seat, in a lonely place, at the summit of the gardens.

A long golden pin penetrated her left breast; the wound had not bled; but the assassin had cut off all the young woman’s hair, and had carried away the antique comb of Queen Nitaoucrit.

After the first exclamations of anguish, a profound stupor gained the uppermost. The whole multitude grew every minute. The whole town was there: it was a sea of bare heads and women’s hats, an immense herd pouring simultaneously from the streets bathed in blue shade into the dazzling brilliance of the Alexandrian Agora. Such a throng had never been seen since the day when Ptolemy Auleter had been driven from the throne by the partisans of Berenice. And even political revolutions seemed less terrible than this piece of sacrilege, on which the safety of the whole city might depend.

The men pushed their way close to the witnesses. They clamoured for further details. They put forth conjectures. Women informed the new arrivals of the theft of the celebrated mirror. The wiseacres swore that these two simultaneous crimes had been committed by the same hand.

But who could it be? Courtesans, who had made their offerings the night before for the ensuing year, were fearful lest the goddess should pay no attention to them, and sat sobbing, with their heads buried in their robes.

An ancient superstition had it that two such events would be followed by a third and still graver one. The crowd awaited the third. After the mirror and the comb, what had the mysterious robber taken? A stifling atmosphere, inflamed by the south wind and filled with sand dust, weighed upon the motionless crowd.

Gradually, as if this human mass were a single being, it was seized with a shivering which grew little by little until it became a panic, and all eyes were turned towards the same point on the horizon.

It was at the distant extremity of the long straight avenue which traversed Alexandria from the Canopic gate and led from the Temple to the Agora. There, on the top of the gentle incline, where the road opened upon the sky, a second terror-stricken multitude had just made its appearance and was running down the hill to join the first one.

“The courtesans, the sacred courtesans!”

Nobody stirred. Nobody dared to go and meet them, for fear of hearing of a new disaster. They arrived like a living flood, preceded by the dull noise of their footsteps on the ground. They waved their arms, they jostled one another, they seemed to be in flight before an army. They were to be recognised now. One could distinguish their robes, their girdles, their hair. Rays of light gleamed on their golden jewels. They were quite near. They opened their mouths. There was a silence.

“The necklace of the Goddess has been stolen, the True Pearls of Anadyomene are gone!”

A clamour of despair arose at the fatal utterance. The crowd retreated at first like a wave, then poured headlong forward, beating the walls, filling the road, thrusting back the frightened women, in the long avenue of the Dromos, towards the desecrated immortal saint.

# IV. The Response

And the Agora was left empty, like a beach after the tide.

Empty, but not completely: a man and a woman stayed behind, the only two mortals who knew the secret of the great public emotion, the two beings who were the cause of it: Chrysis and Demetrios.

The young man was seated on a block of marble near the port. The young woman stood at the opposite end of the square. They could not recognise one another; but they divined one another mutually: Chrysis, drunk with pride and finally with desire, ran in the full glare of the sun.

“You have done it!” she cried; “you have done it, then!”

“Yes,” said the young man simply. “You are obeyed.”

She quickly sat herself on his knees and embraced him deliriously:

“I love you! I love you! I have never before felt what I feel now! Gods! At last I know what it is to be in love! You see, my beloved, I give you more than I promised you the day before yesterday. I, who have never denied anyone, I could not dream that should change so quickly. I had only sold you my body upon the bed, now I give you all my excellence, all my purity, my sincerity, my passion, my virgin soul, Demetrios. Come with me; let us leave this town for a time; let us go into a hidden place, where there are only you and I. We will spend days such as the world has never seen. Never did a lover do what you have done for me. Never did a woman love as I love: it is not possible! it is not possible! I can hardly speak. I am choking. You see, I weep. I know now what it is to weep: it is through excess of happiness. But you do not answer! You say nothing? Kiss me!”

Demetrios stretched out his right leg to ease his knee, which was a little cramped. Then he raised the young woman, stood up, shook the creases out of his garments, and said softly with an enigmatic smile:

“No . . . Adieu . . .”

And he tranquilly turned away.

Chrysis stood rooted to the ground with stupefaction, her mouth open and her head dangling.

“What? What . . . what . . . what do you say?”

“I say adieu,” he said, without raising his voice.

“But . . . but it cannot be you who . . .”

“Yes. I had promised.”

“Then . . . I fail to understand . . .”

“My dear, whether you understand or not is a matter of indifference to me. I leave this little mystery to your meditations. If what you have told me is true, they are likely to be prolonged. This affair occurs most conveniently to give them occupation. Adieu.”

“Demetrios! What do I hear? . . . what is the meaning of this tone? Is it really you who speak? Explain! I conjure you! What has happened between us? It is enough to make one dash one’s head against the wall.”

“Am I to repeat the same thing a hundred times? Yes, I have taken the mirror; yes, I have killed the priestess Touni in order to get the peerless comb; yes, I have stolen the great seven-stringed necklace of the goddess. I was to hand you over the presents in exchange for a single sacrifice on your part. It was putting it at a high value, was it not? Now, I have ceased to estimate it at this extraordinary value, and I have nothing more to ask of you. Act in the same way, and let us part. I wonder you do not understand a situation the simplicity of which is so evident.”

“Keep your presents! Do you suppose I care about them? It is yourself that I want, you, you alone.”

“Yes, I know. But once again, I am not willing, and, as the consent of both the parties is necessary for a rendez-vous, I am very much afraid it will not take place, if I persist in my present views. This is what I am trying to impress upon you with all the clearness of diction of which I am capable. I see it is inadequate; but as I cannot improve it, I beg you to kindly accept the accomplished fact with a good grace, without prying into what you consider obscure about it, since you do not admit that it is within the limits of probability. I am most anxious to bring this discussion to an end. It can lead to no result, and might perhaps force me to be impolite.”

“People have been tittle-tattling about me?”

“No!”

“Oh yes, I guess as much! People have been talking about me, don’t deny it. They have said things about me behind my back! I have terrible enemies, Demetrios! You must not listen to them: I swear to you by the gods, they lie!”

“I do not know them.”

“Believe me! Believe me, Well-beloved! What interest could I have in deceiving you, since I desire nothing from you except yourself? You are the first person I have ever spoken to like this . . .”

Demetrios looked her in the eyes.

“It is too late,” he said. “I have possessed you.”

“You are raving . . . When? Where? How?”

“I speak the truth. I have possessed you in spite of yourself. What I hoped from your complaisance you have given me without your knowledge. You took me to the country you want to go to, in a dream, last night, and you were beautiful . . . ah! you were beautiful, Chrysis! I have returned from that country. No human will shall force me to see it again. The same event never brings happiness twice. I am not so mad as to ruin a happy souvenir. I am indebted for this to you, you will say; but as I have only loved your shadow, you will dispense me, dear creature, from thanking your reality.”

Chrysis pressed her hands to her temples.

“It is abominable, abominable! And he dares to say this! And he makes a boast of it!”

“You jump to definite conclusions very quickly. I have told you that I have had a dream: are you sure that I was asleep? I have told you that I was happy: does happiness, according to you, consist in the gross physical thrill which you say you are so expert in producing, but which you cannot diversify, since it is much the same with all women who give themselves! No, it is yourself that you belittle by taking this most unbecoming point of view. I think you do not quite realise all the felicities which spring from under your footsteps. What

differentiates mistresses from one another is that they have each a fashion, personal to themselves, of preparing and terminating an incident which, as a matter of fact, is as monstrous as it is necessary, and the quest of which, supposing we had only it in view, would not be worth all the trouble we take to find a perfect mistress. In this preparation and in this termination you excel beyond all women. At least, it has been a pleasure to me to think so, and perhaps you will grant me that after having produced the Aphrodite of the Temple my imagination has had no great difficulty in divining the manner of woman you are. Once again, I will not tell you whether it is a question of a night dream or a waking error. It is enough for you to know that, whether dreamed or conceived, your image has appeared to me in an extraordinary frame. Illusion; but, in all things I shall prevent you, Chrysis, from disillusioning me."

"And me, what do you mean to do with me, who loves you still in spite of all the horrors that proceed from your mouth? Have I had the consciousness of your odious dream? Have I had my share in this happiness of which you speak, and which you have stolen, stolen from me! Has one ever heard of a lover so amazingly selfish as to take his pleasure of the woman who loves him without allowing her to share it! . . . This confounds all thought. It will drive me mad."

At this point, Demetrios dropped his tone of mockery, and said, in a voice that trembled slightly:

"Did you trouble yourself about me when you took advantage of my sudden passion to extort from me, in a moment of folly, three actions which might have destroyed my existence, and which will always leave behind them the remembrance of a triple shame?"

"If I asked this, it was to attach you to me. I should not have got you if I had given myself."

"Good. You have been satisfied. You have held me, not for long, but you have held me, nevertheless, in the serfdom you desired. Today, you must allow me to free myself!"

"I am the only slave, Demetrios."

"Yes, you or I, but one of us two if he loves the other. Slavery! Slavery! that is the real name of passion. You have all of you only one dream, one idea in your heads; to break men's strength with your feebleness and govern his intelligence with your futility. As soon as your breasts take form, you desire neither to love nor to be loved, but to bind a man to your ankles, to lower him, to bow his head and put your sandals upon it. Then, in conformity with your ambition, you can dash the sword, the chisel, or the compass out of our hands, break everything which transcends you, emasculate everything which frightens you, tweak Hercules by the nose and set him a-spinning wool. But when you have been able neither to bow his head nor weaken his character, you adore the fist that beats you, the knee that strikes you to the ground, the very mouth that insults you. The man who has refused to kiss your naked feet satisfies your dearest wish if he violates you. The man who has not wept when you left his house, can drag you there by the hair: your love will spring up again from your tears, for there is but one thing that consoles you when you are unable to impose slavery, amorous women! and that is to submit to it."

"Ah, beat me, if you like! but love me afterwards!"

And she hugged him so brusquely that he had not time to turn away his lips. He freed himself from both her arms.

"I detest you! Adieu," he said.

But Chrysis clung to his mantle.

“Do not lie. You adore me. Your soul is full of me: but you are ashamed at having yielded. Listen, listen, Well-beloved! If that is all that is needed to console your pride, I am ready to give you, in order to have you, still more than I asked of you. Whatever sacrifice I make you, I will not complain of life after our union.”

Demetrios looked at her curiously, and, like her, the night before upon the quay, he said to her:

“What oath do you swear me?”

“By Aphrodite also.”

“You do not believe in Aphrodite. Swear by Jehovah Sabaoth.”

The Galilæan woman paled.

“We do not swear by Jehovah.”

“You refuse?”

“It is a terrible oath.”

“I must have it.”

She hesitated, then said in a low voice: “I swear by Jehovah. What do you want of me, Demetrios?”

The young man kept silence.

“Speak quickly, I am afraid.”

“Oh! very little.”

“But what is it?”

“I will not ask you to give me three presents, were they as simple as the first three were rare. It would be contrary to the usages. But I can ask you to accept some, can I not?”

“Assuredly,” said Chrysis joyously.

“This mirror, this necklace, this comb, which you made me steal for you, you did not expect to use them, I suppose? A stolen mirror, the comb of a victim, and the goddess’s necklace are not jewels one can make a display of.”

“What an idea!”

“No, I thought so. It is therefore out of pure cruelty that you incited me to ravish them at the price of the three crimes with which the whole town resounds to-day. Well, you are going to wear them.”

“What?”

“You must go into the little enclosed garden where the statue of the Stygian Hermes is. This place is always deserted, and you will run no risk of being disturbed. You will take off the god’s left heel. The stone is broken, you will see. Then, in the interior of the pedestal, you will find Bacchis’s mirror, and you will place it in your hand; you will find the great comb of Nitaoucrit, and will place it in your hair; you will find the seven pearl necklaces of the goddess Aphrodite, and you will put them on your neck. Thus adorned, beautiful Chrysis, you will go about the town. The crowd will deliver you to the Queen’s soldiers, but you will have what you desired, and I will go and see you in your prison before sunrise.”

# V. The Garden Of Hermanubis

Chrysis's first impulse was to shrug her shoulders. She would not be so ingenuous as to keep her word.

The second was to go and see.

A rising curiosity impelled her toward the mysterious place where Demetrios had hidden the three criminal trophies. She wanted to take them, to touch them with her hands, to make them gleam in the sunlight, to possess them for an instant. It seemed to her that her victory would not be quite complete so long as she should not have seized the booty of her ambitions.

As for Demetrios: she would find the means of recapturing him ultimately. How was it possible to believe that he had emancipated himself from her for ever? The passion she attributed to him was not one of those that die out in a man's heart irrevocably. The women one has once greatly loved form a family of election in a man's heart and the meeting with a former mistress, even though hated or forgotten, excites an unexpected disorder of the soul whence the new love may burst forth. Chrysis was not ignorant of this. However ardent she might be herself, however anxious to conquer the first man she had ever loved, she was not mad enough to buy him at the cost of her life when she saw so many other methods of seducing him more simply.

And yet . . . what a blessed end he had proposed to her!

Under the eyes of an innumerable crowd, bear the antique mirror into which Sappho had gazed, the comb which had held in place the royal hair of Nitaoucrit, the necklace of marine pearls that had rolled in the shell of the goddess Anadyomene . . . Then, from the evening till the morning drink madly of all the sensations with which the wildest love can inspire a woman . . . and towards the middle of the day, die without effort . . . what an incomparable destiny!

She closed her eyes . . .

But no: she would not allow herself to be tempted.

She crossed Rhacotis and mounted the street which led in a straight line to the Great Serapeion. This road, constructed by the Greeks, seemed incongruous in this quarter of angular alleys. The two populations mingled oddly, in a promiscuity from which hatred was not absent. Amongst the blue-shirted Egyptians, the unbleached tunics of the Hellenes made splashes of white. Chrysis mounted rapidly, without listening to the conversations in which the people discoursed of the crimes committed for her sake.

Before the steps of the monument, she turned to the right, took an obscure street, then another, the houses of which almost touched, crossed a little star-shaped square where two swarthy little girls were playing in a sunny fountain, and finally she stopped.

The garden of Hermes Anubis was a little necropolis long ago abandoned, a sort of no man's land to which parents no longer brought the libations to the dead, and that the passers-by avoided. In the midst of the crumbling tombs, Chrysis advanced in the greatest silence, quaking with fear at every stone that clattered under her feet. The wind, always charged with fine sand, blew her hair over her temples and sent her veil of scarlet silk floating towards the white leaves of the sycamores.

She discovered the statue between three monuments that hid it on all sides and enclosed it in a triangle. The spot was well chosen for the concealment of a mortal secret.

Chrysis forced her way as best she could through the narrow, stony passage; on seeing the statue she paled slightly.

The jackal-headed god was in a standing attitude, with his right leg advanced, and with his hair falling on his shoulders. This hair was pierced by two holes for the arms.

The head on the top of the rigid body was bent downwards and contemplated the movement of the hands as they performed the characteristic gesture of the embalmer. The left foot was loose.

Looking round slowly and fearfully, Chrysis made sure that she was quite alone. A little noise behind her made her start; but it was only a green lizard slipping away into a marble fissure.

Then she ventured at last to lay hold of the broken foot of the statue. She lifted it obliquely, and not without difficulty, for it was attached to a loose fragment of the hollow pedestal. And under the stone she suddenly saw the gleam of the enormous pearls.

She withdrew the necklace altogether. How heavy it was! She would never have imagined that unmounted pearls could weigh with such a weight upon the hand. The pearl globes were all marvellously round and of an almost lunar water. The seven strings succeeded one another in ever-widening circles, like circular clouds on a star-studded lake.

She put it round her neck.

She arranged it in tiers with one hand, closing her eyes in order the better to feel the coldness of the pearls on her skin. She disposed the seven tiers regularly along her naked breast, and thrust the last one into the warm channel between her breasts.

Then she took the ivory comb, considered it for a time, caressed the white figurine carved in the dainty coronal, and plunged the jewel into her hair several times before fixing it exactly as she wished.

Then she drew the silver mirror from the pedestal, looked at herself in it, saw her triumph in it, her eyes gleaming with pride, her shoulders adorned with the spoils of the gods . . .

And enveloping herself to the hair in her great purple cyclas, she left the necropolis, taking with her the terrible jewels.

# VI. The Walls Of Purple

Then, out of the mouth of the hierodules, the people had learnt the certainty of the sacrilege for the second time, they gradually melted away through the gardens.

The courtesans of the temple crowded by hundreds along the paths of black olive trees. Some scattered ashes on their heads. Others beat their foreheads on the ground, or pulled out their hair, or tore their breasts, as a sign of calamity. Many sobbed, with their heads in their hands.

The crowd descended into the town in silence, along the Dromos and along the quay. Universal mourning spread consternation throughout the streets. The shopkeepers had hastily taken in their multicoloured stands, from fear, and wooden shutters kept in place by iron bars succeeded one another like a monotonous palisade on the ground-floor of windowless houses.

The life of the harbour had come to a stand-still. The sailors sat motionless on the street-posts, with their cheeks in their hands. The ships ready to leave had taken in their long oars and clewed up their pointed sails along the masts rocking in the wind. Those who wished to enter the harbour waited for the signals out in the open, and some of their passengers, who had relatives at the queen's palace, believing a bloody revolution was in progress, sacrificed to the infernal gods.

At the corner of the island of Pharos and the quay, Rhodis recognised Chrysis standing near her in the crowd.

"Ah! Chrysis! take me under your care! I am afraid! Myrto is here! but the crowd is so great . . . I am afraid that we shall be separated. Take us by the hand."

"You know," said Myrtocleia, "you know what is happening? Do they know the culprit? Is he being tortured? Nothing like it has ever been seen since Hierostratos. The Olympians are deserting us. What is going to become of us?"

Chrysis did not answer.

"We had given doves," said the little flute-player; "will the goddess remember? The goddess must be very angry. And you, my poor Chryse! you who were to be very happy to-day or very powerful . . ."

"All is accomplished," said the courtesan.

"What do you mean?"

Chrysis took two steps backwards and lifted her right hand to her mouth.

"Look well, Rhodis; look, Myrtocleia. Human eyes have never beheld what you are to behold to-day, since the day, when the goddess descended upon Ida. And such a sight will never be seen again upon the earth."

The two friends, believing her to be mad, recoiled in stupefaction. But Chrysis, lost in her dream, walked to the monstrous Pharos, a mountain of gleaming marble in eight hexagonal tiers. Taking advantage of the public inattention, she pushed open the bronze door and closed it on the inside by letting drop the sonorous bars.

A few minutes elapsed.

The crowd surged perpetually. The living tide added its clamour to the regular upheavals of the waters.

Suddenly a cry arose upon the air, repeated by a hundred thousand voices.

“Aphrodite!”

“Aphrodite!!”

A thunder of cries burst forth. The joy, the enthusiasm of a whole people sang in an indescribable tumult of ecstasy at the walls of Pharos.

The rout that covered the quay surged violently forward into the island, took possession of the rocks, mounted on the houses, on the signal masts, on the fortified towers. The isle was full, more than full, and the crowd arrived ever more compact, like the onrush of a swollen river hurling long rows of human beings into the sea from the top of the precipitous cliff.

This flood of men was interminable. From the palace of the Ptolemies to the wall of the Canal, the banks of the Royal Port, of the Great Port, and of Euroste were alive with a dense mass of human beings that received continual reinforcements from the side streets. Above this ocean, agitated by immense eddies, a foaming mass of arms and faces, floated like a barque in peril the yellow sails of Queen Berenice’s litter. The tumult gathered force every moment and became formidable.

Neither Helen on the Scain Gates, nor Phryne in the waves of Eleusis, nor Thaïs setting fire to Persepolis have known what triumph means.

Chrysis had appeared by the western Gate, on the first terrace of the red monument.

She was naked like the goddess, she held in her two hands the ends of her scarlet veil which floated with the wind upon the evening sky, and in her right hand the mirror, in which was reflected the setting sun.

Slowly, with bended head, moving with infinite grace and majesty, she mounted the outer staircase which wound around the high vermilion tower like a spiral. Her veil flickered like a flame. The rosy sunset reddened the pearl necklace like a river of rubies.

She mounted, and in this glory, her gleaming skin took on all the magnificence of flesh, blood, fire, blue carmine, velvety red, bright pink, and revolving upwards with the great purple walls, she went on her way towards the sky.

# Book V

# I. The Supreme Night

“You are loved of the gods,” said the old gaoler. “If I, a poor slave, had committed the hundredth part of your crimes, I should have been bound upon the rack, hung up by the feet, lashed with thongs, burnt with pincers. They would have poured vinegar into my nostrils, overwhelmed and crushed me with bricks, and if I had died under the agony, my body would already be food for the jackals of the burning plains. But you who have stolen, assassinated, profaned, you may expect nothing more than the gentle hemlock, and in the meanwhile you enjoy a good room. May Zeus blast me with his thunderbolt if I can tell why! You probably know somebody at the palace.”

“Give me figs,” said Chrysis; “my mouth is dry.”

The old slave brought her a dozen ripe figs in a green basket.

Chrysis was left alone.

She sat down and got up again, she walked round the room, she struck the walls with the palms of her hands without thinking of anything whatever. She let down her hair to cool it, and then put it up again almost immediately.

They had dressed her in a long garment of white wool. The stuff was hot. Chrysis was bathed in perspiration. She stretched her arms, yawned, and leaned herself against the lofty window.

Outside, the silvery moon shone in a sky of liquid purity, a sky so pale and clear that not a star was visible.

It was on just such a night that, seven years before, Chrysis had left the land of Gennesaret.

She remembered . . . They were five. They were sellers of ivory. Their long-tailed horses were adorned with parti-coloured tufts. They had met the child at the edge of a round cistern . . .

And before that, the blue lake, the transparent sky, the light air of the land of Galilee. . . . .

The house was environed with pink flax-plants and tamarisks. Thorny caper-bushes pricked one’s fingers when one went a-catching butterflies . . . One could almost see the wind in the undulations of the pine grasses . . .

The little girls bathed in a limpid brook where one found red shells under the flowering laurels: and there were flowers upon the water, and flowers all over the mead, and great lilacs upon the mountains, and the line of the mountain was that of a young breast . . .

Chrysis closed her eyes with a faint smile which suddenly died away. The idea of death had just occurred to her. And she felt that, until the last, she would be incapable of ceasing to think.

“Ah!” she said to herself, “what have I done? Why did I meet that man? Why did he listen to me? Why did I let myself be caught in the trap? How is it that, even now, I regret nothing?

“Not to love or to die: that is the choice God has given me. What have I done to deserve punishment?”

And fragments of sacred verses occurred to her that she had heard quoted in her childhood. She had not thought of them for seven years. But they returned, one after the other, with an implacable precision, to apply to her life and predict her penalty.

She murmured:

“It is written:

I remember thy love when thou wast young.
For of old thou hast broken thy yoke.
And burst thy bonds;
And thou hast said: I will no longer serve.
But upon every high hill,
And under every green tree,
Thou hast wandered, playing the harlot.[3]

“It is written:

I will follow after my lovers,
Who give me my bread and my wine,
And my wool and my flax,
And my oil and my wine.[4]

“It is written:

How canst thou say: I am not polluted?
See thy way in the valley,
Know what thou hast done,
O thou dromedary traversing her ways,
O thou wild ass,
Panting and ever lustful,
Who could prevent thee from satisfying thy desire?[5]

“It is written:

*She has played the harlot in the land of Egypt.*
She has doted upon paramours
Whose flesh is as the flesh of asses,
And whose issue is like the issue of horses.
Thus thou callest to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth,
In bruising thy teats by the Egyptians
For the paps of thy youth.”[6]

“Oh!” she cried. “It is I! It is I!”

“And it is written again:

Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers,
And thou wouldst return again to me! saith the Lord.[7]

“But my chastisement also is written:

Behold: I raise up thy lovers against thee:
They shall judge thee according to their judgments.

[3] *Jeremiah* II, 2, 20.
[4] *Hosea* II, 5.
[5] *Jeremiah* II, 23, 24.
[6] *Ezekiel* XXIII, 20, 21.
[7] *Jeremiah* III, 1.

They shall take away thy nose and thine ears,
And thy remnant shall fall by the sword.[8]

“And again:

She is undone: she is stripped naked, she is led away captive
Her servants wail like doves
And taber upon their breasts.[9]

“But does one know what the Scripture says?” she added to console herself. “Is it not written elsewhere:

I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom.[10]

“And elsewhere does not Scripture give this advice:

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy and drink thy wine with a merry heart: for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.[11]

She shivered, and repeated in a low voice:

For there is no work, nor device nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, *whither thou goest!* Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to see the sun.[12]

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes, or ever thou goest to thy long home and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, or the dust return to the earth as it was.[13]

Shivering once more, she repeated slowly:

Or the dust return to the earth as it was.

And as she took her head in her hands in order to stifle her thoughts, she suddenly felt, without having foreseen it, the mortuary form of her cranium through the living skin: the empty temples, the enormous orbits, the flat nose under the cartilage, and the protruding jaws.

Horror! this it was, then, that she was about to become! With frightful lucidity, she had the vision of her corpse, and she passed her hands over her whole body in order to probe to the bottom an idea which, though simple, had never yet occurred to her—that she bore *her skeleton within her*, that it was not a result of death, a metamorphosis, a culmination, but a thing one carries about, a spectre inseparable from the human form, and that the framework of life is already the symbol of the tomb.

A furious desire to live, to see everything again, to begin everything again, to do everything again, suddenly came over her. It was a revolt in the presence of death: the impossibility of admitting that she would never see the evening of the dawning day: the impossibility of

[8] *Ezekiel* XXIII, 22, 25.
[9] *Nahum* II, 7.
[10] *Hosea* IV, 14.
[11] *Ecclesiastes* IX, 7, 10.
[12] *Ecclesiastes* XI, 7.
[13] *Ecclesiastes* XII, 1, 5-7.

understanding how this beauty, this body, this active thought, this opulent life of the flesh could cease to be, in its zenith, and go to rottenness.

The door opened quietly.

Demetrios entered.

# II. Dust Returns To Earth

“Demetrios!” she cried.

And she rushed forward.

But after carefully dropping the wooden bolt, the young man remained motionless, and his glance betrayed such profound tranquility that Chrysis was suddenly stricken with a cold chill.

She had hoped for an impulse of generosity, a movement of the arms, the lips, anything, an outstretched hand . . .

Demetrios did not move.

He waited in silence for an instant, in an extremely correct attitude, as if he wished clearly to disavow all responsibility in the case.

Then, seeing that nothing was asked of him, he strode towards the window and planted himself in the embrasure to contemplate the dawn of day.

Chrysis sat upon the low bed, with a fixed look in her dulled eyes.

Then Demetrios began to commune with himself.

“It is better thus,” he said to himself. “Such trivial amusements on the very eve of death would, as a matter of fact, be most lugubrious. I wonder, however, that she should not have had a presentiment of it from the very beginning, and I marvel that she should have received me so enthusiastically. As for me, it is an adventure terminated. I regret somewhat this denouement, for all things considered, the only crime of which Chrysis is guilty is to have expressed very frankly an ambition which might have been shared by most women, without doubt, and if it were not necessary to cast a victim to the public indignation, I should be satisfied with the banishment of this too-ardent young woman, in order to get rid of her and at the same time leave her the joys of life. But there has been a scandal, and none can stop the course of events. Such are the effects of passion. Thoughtless sensuality, or its contrary, the idea without the reality, do not involve these fatal consequences. We ought to have many mistresses, but to beware, with the help of the gods, of forgetting that all mouths resemble one another.”

Having thus, in an audacious aphorism, summed up one of his moral theories, he lightly resumed the normal course of his ideas.

He remembered vaguely an invitation to dine that he had accepted for the night before and then forgotten in the whirl of events, and he resolved to send an apology.

He considered whether he should put his slave-tailor up for sale, an old man who had remained attached to the fashionable cut of the former regime, and who succeeded very imperfectly with the new puckered tunics.

His mind was even so free from all preoccupation that he stumped out upon the wall a rough study of his group of *Zagreus and the Titans*, a variant which modified the position of the principal character’s right arm.

Hardly had he finished, when a gentle knock was heard at the door.

Demetrios opened without haste. The old executioner entered, followed by two helmeted hoplites.

“I bring the little cup,” he said, smiling obsequiously at the royal lover.

Demetrios kept silence.

Chrysis, half beside herself, raised her head. “Come, my girl,” continued the gaoler, “the hour has come. The hemlock is crushed. There is really nothing left but to take it. Do not be afraid. There is no pain.”

Chrysis looked at Demetrios, who did not turn away his eyes.

Still continuing to regard him with her great black eyes that were rimmed with green light, Chrysis stretched out her hand, took the cup, and slowly raised it to her mouth.

She dipped her lips in it. The bitterness of the poison and also the pangs of the poisoning had been tempered with honey and narcotics.

She drank half the contents of the cup, then, whether it was that she had seen this gesture at the Theatre, in the *Thyestes* of Agathon, or whether it was really the outcome of a spontaneous sentiment, she handed the poison to Demetrios. But the young man waved away this indiscreet suggestion.

Then the Galilæan drank the rest of the beverage even to the green slime at the bottom. An agonising smile overspread her cheeks, a smile in which there was certainly a little contempt.

“What must I do?” she said to the gaoler.

“Walk about the room, my girl, until you feel a heaviness in the legs. Then lie down on your back, and the poison will do the rest.”

Chrysis walked to the window, leaned her head against the wall, with her temples in her hand, and cast a last look of vanished youth upon the violet dawn.

The orient was bathed in a sea of colour. A long band, livid as a water leaf, enveloped the horizon with an olive-coloured girdle. Higher up, several tints sprang out of one another, liquid sheets of blue-green sky, irisated, or lilac-coloured, melting insensibly into the leaden azure of the upper heavens. Then, these tiers of colour rose slowly, a line of gold appeared, mounted, expanded: a thin thread of purple illumined this melancholic dawn, and, in a flood of blood, the sun was born.

It is written:

"The light is sweet . . .”

She remained thus, standing, so long as her legs could sustain her. When she showed signs of reeling, the hoplites carried her to the bed.

There, the old man disposed the white folds of the robe along the rigid limbs. Then he touched her feet and asked her:

“Do you feel anything?”

She answered:

“No.”

He touched her knees and asked her:

“Do you feel anything?”

She made a sign to him that she felt nothing, and suddenly, with a movement of her mouth and shoulders (for her very hands were dead), seized with a supreme frenzy of passion, and

perhaps with regret, at this sterile hour, she raised herself towards Demetrios, but before he could answer she fell back lifeless, with the light for ever gone from out of her eyes.

Then the executioner covered her face with the upper folds of her garment: and one of the assistant soldiers, supposing that a more tender past had once united this young man and woman, severed with his sword the uttermost lock of her hair, and it fell down upon the paving-stones.

Demetrios took it in his hand, and in truth it was Chrysis in her entirety, the gold that survived her beauty, the very pretext of her name . . .

He took the warm lock between his thumb and his fingers, severed the strands slowly, dropped them to the earth, and ground them into the dust under the sole of his shoe.

# III. Chrysis Immortal

When Demetrios found himself alone in his red studio, littered with marble statuary, rough models, trestles, and scaffoldings, he endeavoured to apply himself once more to his work.

With his chisel in his left hand and his mallet in his right, he resumed, but without ardour, an interrupted rough study. It was the breast and shoulders of a gigantic horse intended for the temple of Poseidon. Under the close-cropped mane, the skin of the neck, puckered by a movement of the head, curved in geometrically like an undulating marine basin.

Three days before, the details of this regular muscular arrangement had entirely absorbed all Demetrios's interest; but on the morning of the death of Chrysis, the aspect of things seemed changed. Less calm than he could have wished, Demetrios could not succeed in fixing his preoccupied thoughts. A sort of veil which he could not lift interposed itself between him and the marble. He throw down his mallet and began to pace about amongst the dusty pedestals.

Suddenly he crossed the court, called a slave, and said to her:

"Prepare the piscina and the aromatics. Bathe me and perfume me, give me my white garments, and light the round perfume-pans."

When he had finished his toilette, he summoned two other slaves.

"Go," said he, "to the Queen's prison; hand the gaoler this lump of potter's earth, and tell him to place it in the death-chamber of Chrysis the courtesan. If the body has not already been thrown into the dungeon, charge him to take no action until he receives my orders. Go quickly."

He put a roughing-chisel into the fold of his girdle and opened the principal door which gave upon the deserted avenue of the Dromos.

Suddenly he halted on the threshold, stupefied by the immense midday light of Africa.

The street was certainly white and the houses white too, but the flame of the perpendicular sunbeams bathed the gleaming surfaces with such a fury of reflections that the limestone walls and the pavements danced with prodigious incandescence in dark blue, red, green, raw ochre, and hyacinth. Great palpitating pillars of colour seemed to hang in the air and to be superimposed in transparent masses over the shimmering, flaming facades. The very lines of the houses lost their shape behind this dazzling magnificence; the right wall of the street rounded off dimly into space, floated like a piece of drapery, and in certain places became invisible. A dog lying near a street-post was literally bathed in crimson.

Lost in admiration, Demetrios saw a symbol of his new existence in this spectacle. He had lived long enough in solitary night, in silence, and in peace. Long enough had he taken moon-beams for light, and, for his ideal, the languid line of a too delicate pose, His work was not virile. There was an icy shiver on the skin of his statues.

During the tragic adventure which had just convulsed his intelligence, he had, for the first time, felt the great living breath of life inflate his breast. If he feared a second ordeal; if, victorious in the struggle, he swore above all things not to run the risk of flinching from the beautiful attitude he had adopted in the face of the world, at any rate he had just realised that that only is worthy of being imagined which penetrates by means of marble, colour or speech to one of the profundities of human emotion—and that formal beauty is merely so much uncertain matter, ever capable of being transfigured by the expression of sorrow or joy.

Just as he was finishing this line of thought, he arrived before the door of the criminal prison.

His two slaves were waiting for him.

“We have brought the lump of red clay,” they said. “The body is on the bed. It has not been touched. The gaoler salutes you and hopes you will not forget him.”

The young man entered in silence, followed the long corridor, mounted some steps, and penetrated into the death-chamber. He carefully closed the door after him.

The body lay upon the bed, with the head covered with a veil, the fingers extended, and the feet close together. The fingers were laden with rings: two silver bangles encircled the pale ankles, and the nails of each toe were still red with powder.

Demetrios laid his hand on the veil in order to raise it; but he had no sooner touched it than a dozen flies rapidly escaped from the opening.

He shivered from head to foot. Nevertheless he removed the tissue of white wool and wound it round the hair.

Chrysis’ face had little by little become illumined with the expression of eternity that death dispenses to the eyelids and hair of corpses. In the bluish whiteness of the cheeks, the azure veinlets gave the immobile head the appearance of cold marble. The diaphanous nostrils were distended above the fine lips. The fragile ears had something immaterial about them. Never, in any light, even in his dreams, had Demetrios seen such superhuman beauty and such a brilliancy of fading skin.

And then he remembered the words uttered by Chrysis during their first interview: “You only know my face. You do not know how beautiful I am!” An intense emotion suddenly stifles him. He wishes to know. He has the power.

Of his three days of passion he wishes to keep a souvenir which shall last longer than himself.—to lay bare the admirable body, to pose it as a model in the violent attitude in which he saw it in his dreams, and to create, from the corpse, the statue of Immortal Life.

He unclasps the buckle and unties the knot. He throws back the draperies. The body is heavy. He raises it. The head falls backwards. The breasts tremble. The arms drop pendent. He withdraws the robe entirely and casts it into the middle of the chamber. Heavily, the body falls back again.

Placing his two hands under the icy armpits, Demetrios pulls the dead woman to the upper end of the bed. He turns the head over on to the left cheek, collects and arranges the hair splendidly under the back. Then he raises the right arm, bends the forearm over the forehead, closes the still soft fingers over the stuff of a cushion: two admirable muscular lines, descending from the ear and elbow, meet under the right breast and bear it like a fruit.

Afterwards, he arranges the legs, one stretched out stiffly on one side, the other with the knee raised and the heel almost touching the croup. He rectifies a few details, turns over the waist a little to the left, straightens out the right foot and takes off the bracelets, the necklaces and the rings, in order not to mar by a single dissonance the pure and complete harmony of feminine nudity.

The Model has taken the pose.

Demetrios casts the dark lump of clay upon the table. He presses it, kneads it, lengthens it out into human form: a sort of barbarous monster takes shape under his burning fingers: he looks.

The motionless corpse preserves its attitude of passion. But a thin thread of blood trickles from the right nostril, flows upon the lip, and falls, drop by drop, under the half-opened mouth.

Demetrios continues. The rough figure takes life and precision. A prodigious left arm circles over the body as if it were clasping someone in a tight embrace. The muscles of the thigh stand out violently. The heels are bent upwards.

When night mounted from the earth and darkened the low chamber, Demetrios had finished the statue.

He had it carried to his studio by four slaves. That very evening, by lamplight, he had a block of Parian marble rough-hewed, and a year after that day he was still working at the marble.

# IV. Pity

“Gaoler, open! Gaoler, open!”

Rhodis and Myrtocleia knocked at the closed door.

The door opened half way.

“What do you want?”

“To see our friend,” said Myrto. “To see Chrysis, poor Chrysis, who died this morning.”

“It is not allowed; go away!”

“Oh, let us enter. No one will know. We will tell no one. She was our friend, let us see her once more. We will go out again. We will go out again quickly. We will make no noise.”

“And supposing I am caught, my little girls? Supposing I am punished on your account? You will not pay the fine?”

“You will not be caught. You are alone here. There are no other inmates of the prison. You have sent away the soldiers. We know this. Let us enter.”

“Well, well! Do not stay too long. Here is the key. It is the third door. Tell me when you go away. It is late and I want to go to bed.”

The kindly old man handed them a key of beaten iron which hung from his girdle, and the two little virgins ran immediately, on their noiseless sandals, along the obscure corridors.

Then the gaoler re-entered his lodge, and did not insist any further upon a useless surveillance. The penalty of imprisonment was not applied in Greek Egypt, and the little white house that was placed under the care of the gentle old man served merely for the reception of culprits condemned to death. In the interval between executions it remained almost deserted.

The moment the great key entered the lock, Rhodis arrested her friend’s hand:

“I do not know whether I dare see her,” she said. “I loved her well, Myrto . . . I am afraid . . . Go in first, will you?”

Myrtocleia pushed open the door; but as soon as she had cast a glance into the chamber she cried:

“Do not enter, Rhodis! Wait for me here.”

“Oh! What is there? You are afraid too . . . What is there on the bed? Is she not dead?”

“Yes, wait for me . . . I will tell you . . . Stay in the corridor and do not look.”

The body was still in the ecstatic attitude in which Demetrius had arranged it for his Statue of Immortal Life. But the transports of extreme joy confine upon the convulsions of extreme pain, and Myrtocleia asked herself what atrocious sufferings, what agonies had produced such an upheaval in the corpse.

She approached the bed on tiptoe.

The thread of blood continued to flow from the diaphanous nostril. The skin of the body was perfectly white; the pale tips of the breasts receded like delicate navels; not a single rose-coloured reflection gave life to the ephemeral recumbent statue; but some emerald-coloured

spots that tinted the smooth belly signified that millions of new lives were germinating in the scarcely-cold flesh, and were demanding “the right of succession!”

Myrtocleia took the dead arm and laid it flat along the hip. She tried also to pull out the left leg; but the knee was almost rigid, and she did not succeed in pulling it out completely.

“Rhodis,” she said, in a troubled voice, “come; you can enter now.”

The trembling child penetrated into the chamber. Her features contracted, her eyes opened wide.

As soon as they felt that there were two of them, they fell into one another’s arms and burst into long-drawn sobs.

“Poor Chrysis! Poor Chrysis!” repeated the child.

They kissed one another on the cheek with a desperate affection from which all sensuality had disappeared and the taste of the tears upon their lips filled their forlorn little souls with bitterness.

They wept, and wailed, they looked at one another other with anguish, and sometimes they spoke both together in a hoarse voice of agony, and their words ended in sobs.

“How we loved her! She was not a friend for us. She was a little mother for both of us . . .”

Rhodis repeated:

“Like a little mother . . .”

And Myrto, dragging her to the side of the dead woman, said in a low voice:

“Kiss her.”

They both bent down, and placed their hands upon the bed, as, with fresh sobs, they touched the icy forehead with their lips.

And Myrto took the head between her two hands, buried them in the hair, and spoke to her thus:

“Chrysis, my Chrysis, you who were the most beautiful and the most adored of women, who were so like the goddess that the people took you for her, where are you now, what have they done with you? You lived to impart beneficent joy. No fruit was ever sweeter than your mouth, no light brighter than your eyes; your skin was a glorious robe that you would not veil; voluptuousness floated upon it like a perpetual odour; and when you unclasped your hair, all desires flowed from it; and when you clasped your naked arms, one implored the gods for permission to die.”

Rhodis sat huddled up on the ground, sobbing.

“Chrysis, my Chrysis.” pursued Myrtocleia, “but yesterday you were living, and young, and hoping for length of days, and now you are dead, and no power on earth can induce you to speak a word to us. You have closed your eyes, and we were not there. You have suffered and you did not know that we wept for you behind the walls. Your dying eyes looked for someone and did not meet our eyes stricken with sorrow and pity.”

The flute-girl wept continually. The singing girl took her by the hand.

“Chrysis, my Chrysis, you once told us that one day, thanks to you, we should marry. Our union is one of tears, and sad is the betrothal of Rhodis and Myrtocleia. But sorrow, rather than love, welds together two enclasped hands. Those who have once wept together will

never desert one another. We are going to lay your dear body under the ground, Chrysidion, and we will both of us cut off our hair upon your tomb."

She enveloped the beautiful body and then she said to Rhodis:

"Help me."

They lifted her up gently; but the burden was a heavy one for the little musicians, and they laid it down upon the ground.

"Let us take off our sandals," said Myrto. "Let us walk bare-footed in the corridors. The gaoler is surely asleep. If we do not wake him we shall pass, but if he sees us he will prevent us . . . To-morrow matters not: when he sees the empty bed, he will say to the Queen's soldiers that he has thrown the body into a ditch, according to the law. Let us fear nothing, Rhodis! . . . Put your sandals in your girdle, like me. And come! Take the body under the knees. Let the feet hang behind. Walk without noise, slowly, slowly . . ."

# V. Piety

After the turning of the second street, they laid the body down a second time in order in put on their sandals. Rhodis's feet, too delicate to walk naked, were torn and bleeding.

The night was full of brilliancy. The town was full of silence. The iron-coloured shadows lay in square blocks in the middle of the streets, according to the profile of the houses.

The little virgins resumed their load.

"Where are we going to?" asked the child. "Where are we going to bury it?"

"In the cemetery of Hermanubis. It is always deserted, it will be in peace there."

"Poor Chrysis! Could I ever have thought that on her last day, I should bear her body without torches and without funeral car, secretly, like a thing stolen."

Then both began to talk volubly as if they were afraid of the silence, cheek by jowl with the corpse. The last day of Chrysis's life filled them with astonishment. Where had she got the mirror, the necklace and the comb? She could not have taken the pearls of the goddess herself. The temple was too well guarded for a courtesan to be able to enter it. Then somebody must have acted for her? But who? She was not known to possess any lover amongst the Stolists to whom the guard of the divine statue was entrusted. And then, if someone had acted for her, why had she not denounced him? And, in any case, why these three crimes? Of what had they availed her, except to deliver her over to punishment? A woman does not commit such follies without an object, unless she be in love? Was Chrysis in love? and who could it be?

"We shall never know", concluded the flute-player. "She has taken her secret with her, and even if she had an accomplice he would be the last to enlighten us."

At this point, Rhodis, who had been resting for several instants, sighed:

"I cannot carry her any longer, Myrto. I shall fall down on my knees, I am broken with fatigue and grief."

Myrtocleia took her by the neck:

"Try again, my darling. We *must* carry her. Her nether life is at stake. If she has no sepulture and no obol in her hand, she will roam eternally on the banks of the river of hell, and when we in our turn, Rhodis, go down to the dead, she will reproach us with our impiety, and we shall not know what to answer her."

But the child, overcome with weakness, burst into tears.

"Quickly, quickly!" exclaimed Myrtocleia.

"Somebody is coming along the end of the street. Place yourself in front of the body with me. Let us hide it behind our tunics . . . If it is seen, all is lost . . ."

She stooped short.

"It is Timon. I recognise him. Timon with four women. Ah, gods! what is going to happen? He laughs at everything and will mock us . . . But no, stay here, Rhodis; I will speak to him."

And, inspired by a sudden thought, she ran down the street to meet the little group.

“Timon,” she said, and her voice was full of supplication; “Timon, stop. I have grave words to utter to you alone.”

“My poor little thing,” said the young man, “how excited you are! Have you lost your shoulder-knot or have you dropped your doll and broken its nose? This would be an irreparable disaster.”

The girl threw him a look of anguish; but the four women, Philotis, Seso of Cnidos, Callistion, and Tryphera, were already clamouring round her with impatience.

“Get away, little idiot!” said Tryphera, “if you have dried up your nurse’s teats, we cannot help it, we have no milk. It is almost daylight, you ought to be in bed; what business have children to roam about in the moonlight?”

“Her nurse?” said Philotis. “She wants to steal away Timon.”

“The whip! She deserves the whip!” said Callistion, who put one arm round Myrto’s waist, lifting her off the ground and raising her little blue tunic, But Seso interposed:

“You are mad,” she cried. “Myrto has never known a man. If she calls Timon, it is not to sleep with him. Let her alone, and let us have done with it!”

“Come,” said Timon, “what do you want with me? Come here. Whisper in my ear. Is it really serious?”

“The body of Chrysis is there, in the street,” said the young girl tremblingly. “We are carrying into the cemetary, my little friend and I, but it is heavy, and we ask you if you will help us. It will not take long. Immediately afterwards you can rejoin your women . . .”

Timon’s look reassured her.

“Poor girls! To think that I laughed! You are better than we are . . . Certainly I will help you. Go and join your friend and wait for me, I am coming.”

Turning to the four women . . .

“Go to my house,” he said, “by the street of the Potters. I shall be there in a short time. Do not follow me.”

Rhodis was still sitting in front of the corpse. When she saw Timon coming, she implored him:

“Do not tell! We have stolen it to save her shade. Keep our secret, we will love you, Timon.”

“Have no fears,” said the young man.

He took the body under the shoulders and Myrto took it under the knees, and they walked on in silence, with Rhodis tottering along behind.

Timon said not a word. For the second time in two days, human passion had carried off one of the transitory guests of his bed, and he marvelled at the unreason that drove people out of the enchanted road that leads to perfect happiness.

“Impassivity,” he thought, “indifference, quietude, voluptuous serenity! who amongst men will appreciate you? We fight, we struggle, we hope, when one thing only is worth having: namely, to extract from the fleeting moment all the joys it is capable of affording, and to leave one’s bed as little as possible.”

They reached the gate of the ruined necropolis.

“Where shall we put it?” said Myrto.

“Near the god.”

“Where is the statue? I have never been in here before. I was afraid of the tombs and the inscriptions. I do not know the Hermanubis. It is probably in the centre of the little garden. Let us look for it. I once came here before when I was a child, in quest of a lost gazelle. Let us follow the alley of white sycamores. We cannot fail to discern it.”

Nor did they fail to find it.

Dawn mingled its delicate violets with the moonbeams on the monuments. A vague and distant harmony floated in the cypress branches. The regular rustling of the palms, so similar to tiny drops of falling rain, cast an illusion of freshness.

Timon opened with difficulty a pink stone imbedded in the earth. The sepulture was excavated beneath the hands of the funerary god, whose attitude was that of the embalmer. It must have contained a body, formerly; but at present nothing was to be found but a handful of brownish dust.

The young man jumped into the grave, as far as his waist, and held out his arms:

“Give it to me,” he said to Myrto. “I am going to lay it at the far end, and we will close up the tomb again.”

But Rhodis threw herself on the body.

“No, do not bury her so quickly! I want to see her again! One last time! One last time! Chrysis! My poor Chrysis! Ah! the horror of it . . . How she has changed! . . .”

Myrtocleia had just disarranged the blanket which covered the dead woman, and the sight of the sudden change the face had undergone made the two girls recoil. The cheeks had become square, the eyelids and lips were puffed out like half-a-dozen white pads. Nothing was left of all that superhuman beauty. They drew the thick winding-sheet over her again: but Myrto slipped her hand under the stuff and placed an obol for Charon in her fingers.

Then, shaken by interminable sobs, they passed the limp inert body to Timon.

And when Chrysis was laid in the bottom of the sandy tomb, Timon opened the winding-sheet again. He fixed the silver obol tightly in the nerveless hand; he propped up the head with a flat stone; he spread the long deep-gold hair over her body from the forehead to the knees.

Then he left the tomb, and the musicians, kneeling before the yawning opening, cut off their young hair, bound it together in one sheaf, and buried it with the dead.

ΤΟΙΝΔΕ ΠΕΡΑΣ ΕΣΧΕ ΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ
ΤΩΝ ΠΕΡΙ ΧΡΥΣΙΔΑ ΚΑΙ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΝ

THE END

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