



"Daisy" Pumpelly Smyth

I

ON THE GREAT DAY, the piping of a shepherd woke me at dawn. I sprang up alarmed, for the shrill notes came from just below my casement and Novatus still lay beside me. Praise God, he was a sound sleeper!

Ah, I know who this is, I thought. How dare John seek me out here...and at such an hour! Is he playing a trick to anger Novatus with me? Or has he no sense at all?

I cast an anxious glance at my lover's face, so comely in its swarthy that for a moment I lingered. That dear head on the pillow...the clustered hair curved to his temples, fitting their breadth in dark angles; the upturned crescent of the brow; that mouth...a quivering wound...the long oval cheeks flushed with sleep....

Again a high note fluted from the garden.

This piping must stop, I thought. And I slipped from the couch, snatched up a robe to cover my body and tip-toed stealthily to the casement.

"John! Novatus is here. Do you wish to bring trouble upon me? I would not anger or hurt Novatus if you could give me the whole world."

The shepherd lifted his eyes to me, liquid eyes, burning madly in their large orbits, and now there was a great flame in them...which vexed me!

"I can give you better than the world, Mary. I have a better gift for you this day."

I leaned through the casement. I stretched forth my hand.

"Give it to me quickly then."

"But it might take long for you to believe me."

This was too laggardly and I frowned as I leaned lower.

"If it is something to be told, tell it quickly."

"In a word then...Messiah has come! I have seen Him, Mary. I want you, too, to see that beauty."

Now John, these past six years,  
by one means or another, had sought to disturb my happy life, for he deemed it  
sinful. Wherefore I laughed, to tease him.

"Is He as beautiful as my  
beloved?"

John's smile glistened.

"Come and see!"

Over his shoulder as he turned to  
go he whispered his last message: "On the mount above the city. At sundown. You  
can trace him by the multitude  
that follows."

"Come and see." "Come and see."

All day the words rang in my heart...a bell, waking the Hebrew woman in me, the  
child  
of my mother, calling up memories....

A little dome shaped house on the  
shore of Magdala. A woman, death written upon her, a young maid at her knee,  
and a shepherd lad of the Essenes, the beautiful John of Capernaum. The woman,  
my beloved mother, reading to us from a scroll. Again I could hear John say:  
"Truly,  
from all these signs and dates, Messiah is due." And then my mother: "Remember,  
John, He will come, not as a warrior, not, as the people think, to deliver  
Judea from Rome, but as Enoch's Messiah, the Lord of the Spirits, the  
Messenger, descended from a high realm to 'free the whole earth from fetters of  
darkness.' Yet...remember, too, the warning of Enoch, that 'Men will believe  
the  
Lord to be one with themselves and will see not the splendour wherewith God  
hath clothed Him'...till too late."

Novatus himself could not have  
kept me from the mount that night. Not that I yet believed John's words,  
but...if  
he spoke the truth...no woman of Israel could let Messiah's day pass her by.

I had never deceived Novatus,  
wherefore I told him frankly of the shepherd's message at dawn. This I had  
feared to do and it took a load from me when he laughed.

"A pastoral?" he mocked, with  
lifted brows and a flicker of fun on his lips. He could look so droll, my dear  
one! Then, as I urged him to go to the mount with me, emboldened to do this by  
his good mood: "Go yourself, my Mary. Sit with your prophet under your tree!  
His wisdom," he deigned to say, "I shall hear later from you. I prefer it from  
your sweet mouth."

Had I but left it at that! I know

not what madness it was in me that day that robbed me of all my arts. To my beloved Gentile, general of the Roman legions in Judea, half-brother to Rome's philosopher, Seneca, I quoted our Scriptures to prove our Messiah. In the end, wearied, he broke forth:

"Oh, abandon such follies, Mary...prophets and prophecies, visions, miraculous persons. Why must the world always have its gods...crutches to lean upon! Strange how we pass unthinking, from one trivial phase to another, never coming out into anything clear."

At sundown I climbed the hill behind Tiberias, below me the roofs of houses, black steps to the sea; above, on its pine-clad crest...a rabble! Drawing nearer, I saw their rough beards, their coarse mantles. They were busily chattering...like magpies. I thought: "He is not yet here. And...is this John's multitude? This the following of the Messiah...of the Lord of Spirits?"

Then through the rabble strode John, and I saw he was searching the road, and also...because of the fire in his eyes and his gravity...that it was not for me he searched. But as I climbed among the rocks, my yellow tunic so bright in the sun that none could fail to see me, his look singled me out and he came to me. Silent, he took my hand and led me through the midst of those ill-smelling ones, who now turned hundreds of curious eyes upon me, to where, upon a stone, two women sat. And as I approached these women whose faces, framed in the length of dark veils, glowed with an unearthly light, I crossed the boundary of a new world.

John turned first to the taller of the two, the one with the strong and high-boned face, but with a mien so gentle it seemed to give forth fragrance.

"O holy mother," thus he addressed her, so that I knew her at once for the mother of Him I had come to see, "this is my friend from childhood, Mary of Magdala. And this" ? now John spoke to me, but looked toward the other, younger woman, who was small, her features chiseled so fine that light seemed to filter through them, her lips moulded in a secret smile ? "this is yet another Mary who has come hither from Bethany to be near the Lord."

They rose. Each took me in their arms and kissed me, and it was as if I had been kissed by angels. And when again they seated themselves, I, Mary of Magdala, known as a sinner, sank to the ground in my fine linen to sit upon clay and stubble at their feet.

And there I asked of the mother  
what name she had given her Son and she told me His name was Jesus.

He came not by the road, but, all  
unexpected, through the olive grove. Nor could I have seen his approach from  
where I sat, with my  
back to the grove and my eyes lifted to His mother's face.

Now this mother rose.

"See! The Lord," she said.

I turned. Coming forth from the  
olive grove, thrusting aside a branch that He might have free passageway,  
strode one so mighty that my heart cried out, King of Men! Lion of the tribe of  
Judah! I spoke in my heart, for  
no word could I have uttered.

And yet...was this "the Lord of  
Spirits,"...this strong man, this man of vigorous body, of hawk-like face?

True,

His head stood erect from His spine with a majesty greater than that of any  
king. True, in that hawk's face the brow was moulded to ineffable compassion,  
and above the hollows in His heart-shaped cheeks splendour flashed from his  
eyes. But He was flesh and bone and blood, clad in rough homespun, and His  
sandals were soiled from the dust of the road. Heated by the climb up the steep  
mount, He thrust back his head-cloth from His sweating forehead and, under its  
akal, twisted up His hair at the neck.

And as I thought on these things, He stepped forward with the restless tread of  
a lion. and His glance fell on me...and pierced me like a sword. Then I knew  
that

from such eyes nothing in the heart could be hid. Shamed, I looked away, but  
His steadfast gaze drew my eyes back to His. And my heart took fright at their  
holiness and the unearthly love that shone in them.

Ah! Who could this be but the  
Lord of Spirits? Who else could press upon the mortal heart such a weight of  
love as its frailty could not bear? Of a nature too high for the little heart  
of desire?

Once more I turned away,  
rejecting this love. Regally, He passed.

He moved to a clearing where  
stood a tall pine tree, beneath which He seated Himself. And there for a little  
He sat in silence, upright and still, while the hushed people gathered around  
Him. And when all were assembled He turned His face toward them and I saw it  
lit with an enchanted smile.

"Are you happy?"

And as He began to speak I heard

a voice swinging like to music, with a sound even as the wind of unknown source. He was full of grace and winning, for the while He taught He gestured not as the rabbis, with pointed finger, but with hands outspread, palms upward, in sweet persuasion.

Of peace Jesus spoke, the peace of the Kingdom of God, which He told us was the true peace. But He said this peace could be established even in the kingdoms of our earthly world. For as bronze when brightly burnished reflects the radiant sun, so the heart of man if it be untarnished can flash to earth in one moment the Kingdom of God and all the glory thereof. And as I harkened to His words, wings in me spread for flight.

Now He rose to his feet and paced that circle of people, holding speech with them one by one. And I saw with what meekness each waited his turn, with hands crossed on the breast and bowed head, or with eyes full of tears lifted to his Lord's face.

To some He spoke jestingly. To a haggard woman who stood with a young maid beside her, He said: "Are you pleased with your daughter, O Leah? Pleased now? When next you have to complain of her, come and complain to me and I will do the chastising!" And He bent on the maid a tender, mirthful look.

Like to a boisterous wind He was in His laughter, and witty phrases fell from His lips. And again I said within myself: Can this be the Lord of Spirits? He is man. Such a man as I never beheld, but man.

Now He drew nigh to His mother and Mary of Bethany and me. And His mother and Mary fell on their knees in His path. But I...I stood struck to stone. Wherefore He passed me by with but a merciful smile. And my heart grieved for that He had passed and I yearned for a word from Him.

He turned to go down the hill, twelve men following Him. And I saw from the back His swaying gait, the strong tramping of His feet, the restless might of His body and the grace of His garments wrapping it as He strode. And I thought: Lion in the cage of flesh! Lower and lower He sank on the rocky levels, till a turn in the path far below snatched Him from my sight. And I was aware of a great loss and that the hill was stark without Him.

## II

BACK TO THE VILLA I hastened, eager to tell Novatus, should he still be there, that in this man Jesus was a greatness worth his seeing. But having repented my folly of the morning when my zeal had wearied my dear Roman, I would leave it to him now to speak first.

I found him reclining in the portico waiting to sup with me and we went together to the triclinium ? a pleasant place, cool and pillared and built of white marble. Black panels were frescoed on its walls and in each a Bacchante soared with a cup. Novatus himself had designed this dining-hall, wherefore it had beauty...which he loved.

Now, as we sat at the table, I waited from one course to another for my lover to ask me concerning Jesus. Then, since he asked not, I thought: It is because the slaves are here. Later he will surely question me, if for no reason save that he is curious...or, mayhap, a little jealous.

But out in the portico again he did but fondle me. Twining my hair through his fingers: "Your hair is spun amber, rollicking in curls. Your face..." he uptilted it... "a luscious fruit. Your eyes? They are Sybil's eyes. Can you read me the future, Mary? Nay, you need not, for I know it! Your lips....your lips...pomegranate wine...." And he played upon me as if I were a harp and he a deft musician.

Now when morning was come I found myself greatly torn in spirit. The mount overshadowing my villa seemed to have taken on life and to be brooding, conscious, above me, a centre for the diffusion of unearthly fragrance which reached me as a gentle breeze and drew...drew me. My heart burned to return to its summit, but for Novatus' sake I dare not. Last night when I had hastened him, eager to tell him of Jesus, he had disdained to hear, and in his silence I had caught a warning. For the first time I felt the bondage of his love and I chafed against it, for to seek Jesus again had become my utmost need.

This man Jesus...He was too much man to be Lord of Spirits...still...a chain had been forged betwixt His greatness and my nothingness, and through that chain ran a power that pulled me back to Him. Moreover, I knew not yet...and this I must know...if Jesus were indeed Messiah, or some false prophet to be forgot...put out from this heart that was now so troubled by him. Could I but see Him once more! Could I but ease this heart tonight...!

In the cool of the day Novatus was ever with me; wherefore to slip from the house in secret would be well-nigh impossible, even, had such been my wont. I saw but one course: to be frank with my dear lover and tell him I wished to go to the mount again and beg that he go with me.

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impossible, even, had such been my wont. I saw but one course, to be frank with my dear lover and tell him I wished to go to the mount again and beg that he go with me.

And so, as we rested in the colonnade after our mid-day meal, I led up to this artfully.

Concerning greatness, I asked:

How was it that some were born to it, their natures so compounded of it that they shed a glamour about them and their very destiny seemed charmed, while others for all their striving could attain not to this heaven-born thing?

He looked on me in his world-weary way.

"Greatness is all outside of life and not in it, Mary."

"Ah, that cannot be, dear one. In all that befalls even if it be not good, I see a thread of beauty."

"No," he laughed, "life is a round of jests. Mary, we creatures are but thin soil, and something is ever occurring to prove this to us. Rock covered with thin soil."

"Novatus, I have thought that even as in the womb the babe forms eyes and ears and all that it needs for use when it comes forth, so we have hidden within us another sight and hearing and new virtues, the use of which we know not in this world."

"But I am speaking of this world."

"Can we not get above this world even while we are in it?"

"Mortals are not gods! Nay" ? and he sighed ? "we are shallow vessels...of clay. Nothing enters in very deep and nothing very wonderful happens. Even tragedy is but the result of something being ill-timed."

"But yesterday, my Novatus, when I saw Jesus I did see greatness. To me He was like to a mountain catching the sun's first rays. I would have you see this too, beloved. For my own part I long to make sure if He be verily Messiah. Will you not take me to Him tonight?"

"Nay, Mary, tonight I must be busy. But you...you go. You need me not," he laughed. "A prophet can do no harm."

Thus once more I came to Jesus on the rocky summit, in the midst of His multitude. Again He was seated beneath the pine tree. Again I saw that mighty head, those eyes like to jewels in

deep-hollowed  
settings, that smile ? a heady cup. Again I heard the chime of His voice:  
"Grace  
and welcome unto you. Are you happy?"

So wedged were the people  
together that I could find neither John nor those two women who had seemed like  
angels. I was swallowed up in the crowd and it stank around me and some men  
spat. I felt a little sick. Then tall men pushed to the front of me and Jesus  
Himself was shut from my view.

Now He began to speak. He told us  
the meek were blessed, for they should inherit the earth; the merciful were  
blessed for they should obtain mercy; the pure in heart were blessed...they  
should see God...and those whom men reviled for that they believed on Him,  
those  
were greatly blessed and their reward was in Heaven.

And walled up in that roughness  
and those stale odors, and wretched and faint with sickness, I said in my  
heart:

What is all this? Meek creatures  
never inherit anything! The merciful obtain not mercy. To my slaves I am too  
merciful so that they flout me. Novatus, when young, had great merciful  
thoughts towards the common people in Rome and for this he well-nigh lost his  
life. And who can see God? Has not a prophet said that were we to look on Him  
we would die? Moreover, the slandered, the persecuted...it is foolishness to  
call  
these blessed. Are they then never to have peace on earth and naught but a  
reward in heaven? What indeed has this Jesus to offer but trouble...to such as  
would follow Him? This teaching is a gloomy thing. His face must have cast a  
spell on me last night, for now that I cannot see it, I like not his words.

But words still harsher fell on  
my ears.

"Every man that looks on a woman  
to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart..."

"If your right eye offends you,  
pluck it out and cast it from you."

I would hear no more! This Jesus  
was much too stern in His judgment for me. Pluck out my eye,  
indeed...or...pluck  
out my love for Novatus from my heart! Was this then adultery between him and  
me? Nay, I knew it was not. And my Novatus was kind in judgment. I remembered  
words of his of a gentle charity for which I had loved him the better as he  
spoke them: "All these poor creatures who come our way, come with their excuses  
hanging round their necks."

I edged through the crowd and  
climbed down the hill alone. Yet, as I slid from rock to rock, my heart was  
heavy and sore and I felt bereft, as one who has lost a great treasure.

### III

TO THE MOUNT I went no more. And  
soon Novatus and I were on our way to Jerusalem, where oft his duties held him  
for the space of months, and where, on the Mount of Olives, I had a villa  
– given me by my beloved.

A sweet villa this, I called it  
my "House of the Sportive Loves," for the friezes along its walls on golden  
panels were of rows of playful cupids, tipping scales in a merchant's booth  
full of sealed packets, up to mischief with bows and darts, or marching with  
gifts ? a  
looped garland of flowers, urns of clustered fruits.

The villa was old, built in the  
days when Rome first occupied Judea. On a stone at its entrance was inscribed  
"Salve"

[Lit., Hail] ? relic of a more hospitable owner, for Mary of Magdala had  
but one guest. The floor of the atrium, tiled in black and yellow, was worn  
from the passing of many feet, and at its center a pool gleamed, bordered by  
myrtle.

My chamber was paneled in scarlet and painted with landscapes and birds, and  
masks tragic and comic, and its hangings were of Tyrian hue. It looked on an  
unkempt garden where cupids in marble stood out against cypresses and cedars,  
and a fountain like to a small silver tree blew in the midst. I loved my villa  
well.

And here now Novatus and I  
revelled in unclouded happiness...though times there were when Jesus strode  
into  
my thoughts, whereupon I quickly let down a curtain to shut Him out.

And then one night I dreamed.

In my dream I stood on the mount  
above Tiberias with an invisible one who whispered to me: "He is coming." Then  
I saw Jesus midst the olive trees. And now His garments were white and  
glistening and His face like unto a lamp. And the invisible one said: "This is  
a Beauty to die for."

Awaking, I marvelled at the  
dream, and again my heart was sore troubled by Jesus, and again I felt that  
chain and the power flowing through it.

Once more I dreamed. In this  
second dream I was a captive in fetters, walking behind Novatus' chariot, my  
feet bleeding on cobble-stones. Then this picture vanished and I saw another.

Here, deep in a bottomless chasm, I was climbing the rough stones of its wall toward crags open to the sky, affrighted and weeping...when wings swooped down upon me and flew with me into a golden void. And I saw, standing upon the air, a great Being in shiny robes, having the face of Jesus. And while He looked steadfastly on me, with a love that glowed and swelled upon me even as light swells forth between bright clouds, He drew from the folds of His robe a white veil and laid it upon my head and wound it about my cheeks and throat, and His fingers stung me where they touched. And when I awoke from this dream, my head and throat still tingled.

Now I felt a madness to see Jesus. Yet to Novatus I dared not speak of this. A knowledge in my heart forbade me. And times there were when fear smote me. For should this man in Galilee who could draw my soul across miles to Him, who, while still in Galilee, had looked on me out of the sky...should He be verily Messiah, what choice had I but to follow Him? And should my beloved not follow with me...I dared look no further.

Now I dreamed these dreams, one upon another, on the eve of starting with our household for Tiberias. It was then late spring.

The camels were loaded and at dawn one day our caravan set forth, my dear lover and I in one litter, borne by the slaves.

A fair land is Palestine, all but shadowless in the morning light. The colours of its bosom are all pale...pale henna, pale grey, pale brown, pale green and the soft yellow of maize...the thick pebbling on its hillsides, white.

We jogged through Judea, peaceful beneath its vineyards, guarded by round watch-towers. We came to the hill country, where strange mountains rise, striped round the summits with ridges of chalky white ? having the look of coiled serpents ? and, where farther mountains, low-lying, tawny, like unto great crouched beasts, mark the boundary of Samaria. We went on past Shiloh and by nightfall reached old Shechem, wedged between two hoary mountains, the Mount of Blessing, the Mount of Cursing. There we rested at the caravansary, and, in the morning, set forth again.

The henna-coloured tents of the hills of Gilboa soared into view, then the round summit of Tabor, like to a rising purple moon above a low spiking of crags; and by starlight we looked from a height on the ruffled sea of Galilee.

Now I was in Tiberias, but where to find Jesus I knew not. None had told me where He dwelt. John's home was in Capernaum, but of him I could not ask, since I would go not in secret to him.

There was naught to do but wait till by some happy chance news reached me.

Then one day as I stood at a booth  
in the bazaar I saw Mary of Bethany in the distance treading her delicate way  
among the pedlars, who shouted up and down the vaulted street, their baskets of  
wares on their heads. Touching my wrist with her fingers and looking on me with  
eyes full of light, she said: "This meeting is blessed." And at that touch and  
look my heart was strangely stirred.

"Does Jesus still speak on the  
mount?" I asked of her.

"Yes, He is here again, Mary."

Now when I went to my villa and  
joined Novatus in the peristyle I took my courage in my hands and spoke out  
boldly to him.

"My love," I said, "Jesus is here  
and I am going at sundown to the mount. Would you not...."

But he shook his head.

"The Proconsul expects me at  
sundown. I will return and wait here for you." Then he added with banter in his  
tone, but a stiff smile on his lips, "I thought your prophet displeased you  
that last time."

"I wish to assure myself,  
Novatus, for truly this is no light thing," I said. "You have heard many times  
of our Promised One. Think on this promise, I beg of you. For should you come  
to believe in its truth and find that Jesus fulfilled it, that great hope of  
your youth would also be fulfilled. More than fulfilled. Your hope was to see  
the true glory of Rome restored, the virtues of the great republic. Messiah is  
to restore a world!"

"Mary, this is but a built-up  
dream. As for my own early dream" ? he spoke sadly ? "I have long since  
come to see that man is a hopeless product of...we know not what, save nature,  
and the existence of the gods but a concoction of his own mind."

IV

SO AGAIN I CLIMBED alone to that  
summit. Now I chose another way, that I might avoid the multitude, and thus  
came out upon the hill-top with my face toward the people. Wherefore it was a  
simple thing to find the mother of Jesus and Mary of Bethany. As on that first  
day they were seated on a rock apart from the others, and again I sank to the  
ground at their feet.

Jesus had begun to speak. Today  
He sat not beneath the tree, but with that straight majesty, hands clasped at  
His back, He moved to and fro before the people, His speech flowing forth as a

life-giving shower.

Love, He said, was the greatest law in this vast universe of God. It beat betwixt the realities of all things. It beat betwixt the stars. (He took up a pebble and held it out on His palm.) It beat betwixt the particles in this very stone and made of the stone a solid. In the inner world of spirit it was like to a waving sea and the cares of all men's hearts as drops of the sea. In the inner world it was the bond joining creator with creature. But, alas, the stranger...the little self...had usurped the hearts of most men and sealed them against this inflow of love. Whereas God, the Friend, had chosen the heart to be His own home. Earth and heaven were as His garden, but the heart of man His dwelling-place. Should His love reign in any heart, imperishable power would radiate therefrom. This was eternal life. And when such life quickened all men and the love of God linked hearts...even as it linked the stars throughout the firmament, the atoms in this little stone...then verily would God's kingdom appear in the mortal world. And the King Himself would be manifest in the midst like a resplendent sun.

And He ended thus, while my heart became drunken as from a goblet of strong wine: "A moth loves the light, though it burn his wings. Though he singes his wings he throws himself into the flame. He loves not the light for that it confers benefit upon him. He loves it for itself alone. Wherefore he hovers around the light, though he sacrifice his wings."

Now the while Jesus spoke I had observed a youth nearby, standing apart in a clearing, his eyes, gentle as a doe's, fixed upon that holy face. Oft had I seen this youth in Tiberias, and I knew him to be a prince of Israel. A strange figure he made against the dingy rabble. The fillet binding his head cloth was of gold, his tunic of a rich striped stuff and he wore gold bracelets on his upper arms. And no sooner had Jesus ceased than this youth came quickly toward Him and, standing with modest mien before Him, said: "Good Master, what shall I do to have this eternal life?"

Now Jesus had stretched forth His hands and seized the hand of the youth in a firm grip which He relaxed not the while He answered, and I saw that His eyes were full of great compassion as He looked down on the prince.

He said: "If you would enter into the life, keep the commandments."

"Which?" asked the youth.

"Thou shalt not kill," said Jesus, and His voice rang as in a chant. "Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother. And thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self."

"But," said the youth, raising earnest eyes to Jesus, "all these things I do observe. What lack I yet?"

"Ah-h!" smiled Jesus, "if you would be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me."

Will he do it...oh, will he do it?

My dream came back to me, "This is a Beauty to die for." And I leaned forward in my eagerness and watched the young face closely. Which would he choose: ? to

keep his poor baubles...nay, (for the choice meant more than this) to keep friends and kin? Or would he dare cast all aside for this eternal love and life that now stood in human form before him? Which...which would he choose? It seemed

I scarce could bear this silence.

The eyes of the prince fell before the steadfast look of Jesus, who smiled the while He waited. Then shame overspread the youthful face, as of one who knows not what to say. And sadly he turned about and went.

Now when he was gone, Jesus came first to those of us who stood near ? twelve men and we three women ? and in His eyes was so great a sorrow that it seemed I saw God sorrowing.

"It is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven," He said. "Verily it is easier" ...and He smiled again, albeit faintly, "for a camel to pass through the Eye of the Needle."

"But who then can be saved?" asked one of the twelve men.

And another: "Did he not say he observed the commandments?"

Jesus looked upon these and gently answered: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Now a third man spoke up.

"We have left all and followed you. What shall we have?"

And this speech affronted me, for I thought: Who gives, gives and asks nothing.

But Jesus took up the words with mercy and a promise whereat I marvelled, having seen and heard such men:

"In the day of the Re-birth, when

the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that has left for my sake homes or brethren or sisters or father or mother or land shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit eternal life."

I whispered in His mother's ear: "Might I speak with Him in secret?"

Ah, He could have my life!

Tonight I would fling it at His feet. One thing alone would I ask...that my lover

might wake to the knowledge of God and belief in Him, the Messiah.

Messiah...had

I said the word? Well, now I knew...knew beyond doubt. Yet how had I passed to this certainty, that Jesus was Messiah?

I would pray then tonight at

Messiah's feet that Novatus too might throw his life to the winds to serve the Promised One with me. Had not Jesus said that very day that with God all things are possible? And this was not wrong to ask. Nay, it was but the way of love that prayed not for self alone. Moreover, what a great servant would Jesus gain in Novatus...he who was called "the golden-tongued" and who wielded such power in

Rome. And my Novatus was not as this other prince, for when he gave...he gave all. Free and fearless

was Novatus, and by nature, as well as birth, noble.

The mother and I found Jesus

resting in the house of a believer. In a white-walled chamber lit by a flickering taper He lay on a mat, His head pillowed on His arm. His eyes were closed and that high-boned face, framed by the black bands of His locks, was still as death. The mother led me softly in and we sat on the floor for a long time, while Jesus stirred not. But the air in the room was astir! It was as though incense burned there and an invisible life pulsed all about me. And I knew

not whether Jesus slept...or prayed. And as I sat, my eyes fixed on His pure profile, I became aware that this dancing life was entering into me and that it was opening my heart. I felt my heart open like to a rose in sunlight. Then I felt a sunbeam stab it. My hand went to my heart and I sighed and closed my eyes. When I looked again...lo! Jesus had risen and was standing above me, gazing

down. And now my opened heart burned as He gazed. He smiled and held out His hands to me.

"Welcome! Welcome!" He said. And

His tones were so tender that my tears sprang.

I crept to His feet and knelt

before Him, for now I knew that I was at the mercy-seat. And shameless of my tears, shameless of aught that was in me, I threw back my head and gazed up at

His beauty. Wherefore my veil fell to my shoulders, leaving all my hair uncovered. Then Jesus, smiling, stooped and said: "I will cover your head myself, my daughter."

And with fingers that thrilled me where they touched, he wound my veil about my cheeks, my throat.

"O Rabboni," I cried, "this...this is not the first time...."

"Nay," He smiled, "verily this is not the first time...nor yet the last."

Now so awed was I before His mystery that I bowed my face on His feet. And again from above I heard the tender tones: "What would you ask of me, Mary? Speak to me."

A new desire burned within me, burst into flame in my heart...and I knew I should find no rest till I had died for Him.

"In another dream, O Lord, I saw your face and a voice said: 'This is a Beauty to die for.' "

Fire flashed from His eyes.

"That was a true vision and you shall see it again."

"Then I may die for you?"

I looked up to behold Him ? His hands raised in blessing above my head, His face uplifted in prayer, His eyes closed, His lips apart. Then He held my head against His heart...and I, Mary Magdala, heard the heart of Jesus beat.

"For this," He said at last, and I knew He meant the offer of my life, "you are accepted in the Kingdom. Go now. I will send for you."

V

IT WAS LATE to be alone in the streets, dark and deserted at this hour. I sped through a labyrinth of narrow ways, flanked crookedly by black houses, and, timorous though I was, a song sang itself in my heart as I ran ? "I will send for you. I will send for you."

Ah, when would He send for me? Must I wait to be summoned ere I taste again the new wine of His presence? Was not the mount free to all? Might I not follow with the multitude ? unsummoned? I asked not to be seen or heeded by Jesus...only to see, to heed, only to breathe the air He breathed. Mayhap...when

Novatus heard what I have to tell tonight, he too would go....

Novatus! I spoke the name aloud.

I stood still in the street. Till this moment I had forgotten him! And...that prayer: that my dear beloved wake to the light of this new day and share the love of its Sun with me...my heart had been full of it when I sought Jesus. So much had hung on the granting of it...great issues...our very happiness...how

could I have forgot that prayer? Why...Jesus Himself had minded me of it! Had He

not said: "What would you ask of me, Mary?" He had given me leave then to ask what I would, and I could think of naught else, with His glory shining down upon me, but that I would die for such divinity. As I uttered those words:

"Then

I may die for you?" ? my mind, my will spoke them not. Nay, they upwelled from depths unknown within me, called forth by that Mystery smiling on me through the lips and eyes of Jesus. And He had accepted my life, even unto death for His sake. Had I then taken a step...never to be re-traced...away from my

beloved? Alone in this dark alley, free of the magic of Jesus' presence, my heart still burned to die for Him. But could love like to this part me from Novatus? No, ah no! Jesus was kind!

Before me at last stood our

villa, its marble in the midst of palm trees pale blue in the night. And, as I approached the gate, I saw Novatus emerging from it.

"Mary! I have been hunting the whole mount for you. Gods, but it is good to have you back, unharmed."

His arm around me, we entered the atrium. In the light of the lamps he turned me about and with a keen look searched my face. And I saw that deep in his eyes were points of torment.

"Ah, Mary, the fear I had lost you made this clear to me," he said: "I would rather lose the whole world."

"Lose me, O beloved," I cried, smitten to the heart by his words and by that look. "Am I then separate from you to be lost? Nay, we are so interthreaded, you and I, fibre with fibre, that there is no such thing as you and I, but to me...only you."

We turned our steps toward the triclinium. Now surely, I thought, he will ask the reason of my delay and thus start me on my wondrous tale. But again he deigned not to question me; nay, when we were seated at our late supper, both reclining on the one couch, rather he increased his ardor, spent his full charm in witty cajoleries, smiling upon me...and when Novatus smiled it put me in mind of a great song. Yet though he jested, still in his eyes flickered those points of torment. And as ever I admired my lover for that he could mask his heart so well.

"There are three things that  
cannot be hid" ? his tender gaze plumbed mine ? "a man on a camel, a  
woman great with child, and...love!"

And when I cupped his face in my  
hands and kissed him: "Oh, Mary, you are love itself. To kiss your lips is to  
worship in a temple."

And though I knew well he  
worshipped in no temple, I also knew he spoke as a poet and his words were  
sweet to me.

From Novatus came in waves the  
strength and seduction of warm earth. With his winged black brows, those eyes  
of blue fire, that mouth like a crimson wound, the fine lips prone to quiver  
when a rush of feeling shook his firm control, he was, as none I ever knew,  
disturbing.

We went and reclined in the  
atrium, its columns rising high above us; on the frescoed walls, Trojan battles  
and Odyssean victories. And the spell of my lover and the spell of Rome stole  
like a sleeping-draught into my veins. That face above me...so hungry...in its  
dusky cap of circlet-bound curls, weighed down upon me, a focus like to a  
burning-glass of all human love and passion, blotting out (alas, how could it  
be?) ? the holy majesty of Jesus.

"See what I have brought you,  
Mary," and Novatus pressed into my hand an alabaster tear-jar from which exuded  
a fragrance as of flowers at dawn. "Nard for you, beloved," he whispered, "nard  
for your sweet body tonight."

On the morrow Novatus sought me,  
bringing news. A matter of great urgency, he said, had recalled him to  
Jerusalem. Would I make haste to pack? We were to journey on camels as speed  
was imperative. Wherefore, when sundown came, I found myself far from that  
hallowed mount in Galilee. The sun set for me that day behind the bleak  
Samaritan hills.

We broke our journey at Shechem  
to rest for the night in its old caravansary; and as I lay in a great vaulted  
chamber, pressed to my lover's heart, in the dark I heard him whisper;

"My whole life centers in you, O my  
Mary. Without you, I exist not."

Alone with him I loved above all  
earthly things, but bereft of that unearthly One who had opened to me the gates  
of another Kingdom...what was this new loneliness?

I no longer dared speak Jesus'  
name, for once when I did, Novatus had muttered an oath beneath his breath.  
Wherefore, for the first time, I had a life separate from my beloved, a sweet

secret world wherein I would hide to worship my Lord. And Novatus sensed this and feared and hated it.

Oh the pity of that blind fear!

Now I but loved him the more, with a quickened passion, tenacious as it had never been, and a deeper, more poignant tenderness. For now I understood those words

of Jesus, "I will send for you." From Galilee to Jerusalem would He send? I knew not how soon. And when such a call should come, what could I do but obey it, though it tear me forever from my beloved?

Here, verily, was a cause of fear, had Novatus but known it. But this too I must keep hid from him, a guilty secret, gnawing at my heart, clutching it now and again with a grip so fierce that I thought at such times I was dying.

Could I but prove to my poor Novatus that my love for the holy Jesus had naught to do with human love, but was in a realm apart, like to the worship of God, the burning of incense in a temple! This foolish, impious jealousy was no more than an evil dream. Could I but wake my beloved...while there was yet time!

Opportunity slipped with the passing days. At last I dared wait no longer to speak out the truth though against the barriers of that stubborn will, I know not how I should reach him.

One night as we sat in the porch, looking out on a dusky wall of cedars and cypress trees, while my fountain tinkled in the starlight, Novatus being in a tender mood and sitting with an arm around me, I ventured upon my theme.

"Dear one," I whispered, "no word you have ever said to me is forgot. By your words my mind has grown. And once...we talked of tragedy. This, you said, was but the result of something being ill-timed.

But what of the scars of tragedy on the heart?"

He stiffened, for he knew me as I knew him.

"They are never very deep. Take the emotions. Though the relation be the closest, the loved one is certain to be replaced by another if all things go not well."

So...he would threaten me!

"Should aught go wrong between us, Novatus, there would be none other for me. And naught could go wrong if you would but hear me. Jesus..." (at the name his lips curled; he withdrew his arm from my shoulder) "...Jesus to me is Messiah,

whom one loves not with body but with the soul."

"You cannot, Mary, divide  
yourself up in this way! Mind and body are one whole. You deceive yourself, my  
child."

"Oh, listen, Novatus! Open your  
mind. Try, try to think with the Jew. One thing wherefore I have loved you is  
your gift of sympathy. Why withhold it...now...from me? Think of the faith I  
imbibed even with my mother's  
milk. Consider this: I have been schooled all my life in one great Expectation,  
the coming of the Messiah, and all my life this Expected One has been as a  
living Person to me and I have loved Him...as I loved God. Long ere I saw Him  
living  
in Jesus I loved Him. I look upon Jesus not as man, Novatus. To me He is Lord  
of men, the holy Messenger of God, sent down upon earth with great power to  
free this cruel, benighted age from its fetters of darkness."

He had heard me thus far with  
cold impatience; now he broke:

"Fetters of darkness! The Hebrew  
mind has a morbid twist, Mary. And I wonder that your Greek blood from your  
father, philosopher that he was, rises not up against this. We live, dear  
child,  
far removed from a dark age. Ours is the age of enlightenment, an age of clear  
thinking, science, art. The arts of the Muses, the sciences of construction,  
such as the past never knew, whether it be the construction of temple or  
circus, aqueduct or government. All this...and this, I maintain is light...the  
civilization of Rome is  
spreading throughout the world. Rome may be power-mad but she builds in  
untrodden places. You are vague, my Mary. Define 'darkness.' "

"I think conquest is darkness, O  
Novatus. I think war is darkness."

"But through conquest, I repeat,  
Rome is spreading enlightenment throughout the world. And war is essential to  
the strong nation. Without war the nation becomes, like the Greeks, effete."

"I cannot argue on such things  
beloved. But I will tell you another form of darkness. It has come to me that  
even love may weld fetters of darkness."

I know not why I spoke such words  
unless from the carelessness of despair. They struck fire from my poor Novatus.

"What is this fanatic strain in  
your race through which it falls easy prey to rebels whom you call prophets?  
And  
you of all others, Mary! What would you do midst a dirty mob, trailing a

vagabond? What would you do without roof or bed, crawling into some cave by night to sleep on clay...this delicate raiment" ? he pinched up a fold of my tunic ? "shredding into rags? Nay, think you I would brook this while I lived? There are ways, my Mary, to guard you from yourself. Rome has small use for rebels."

I met his eyes unafraid, and at this the anger went out of him. Pleading stole into his voice.

"Mary, mistake not for lust that which is love. Love to me is that awe wherewith one regards the sacredness of another's person. And it is this I feel for you. Mary...till I met your loveliness I had never known anything but lust. But when I saw you, a flame in you burned through my hard fibre and ? if you would know the truth ? woke in me something I cannot name; you might name it spirit. That day I found you...darling...so young, scarce more than a child...alone in the door of an empty house, weeping for your dead mother..."

"Ah, yes, that day when you came down the path to water your horse in the sea."

"That day, my child. I knew that never till then had there been any reality in my life. Yes, what you call spirit, I call reality. And reality to me is what I can touch...feel."

His face yearned upon me. In pity and passion woven together in too strong a mesh, I yielded to his formidable love.

Now I knew the full cruelty of my fate; that my heart was caught in a strait betwixt two giant loves which were as enemies one to the other. My passion for this dear Roman I could not uproot. My love for Jesus was a quenchless flame. In the nearness of Novatus the human love overwhelmed the divine. The face of my so earthly lover blurred the memory of the immortal face. The touch of the human hand, the human lips, I would crave. And times there were when the echoes of that promise, "I will send for you," would drive me, defiant, to the broad breast of Novatus to seek protection there, in the bosom of this blinded creature, against a too jealous God.

Shamed was I in my soul. For one who would throw away life, was I not holding fast to mine?

VI

RECLINING ONE DAY in my peristyle alone (for Novatus was gone on an errand to Tiberias), I was meditating on a dream, my heart swallowed up in fear as I re-lived it, lest it be a prophecy.

In my dream I stood wrapped in a  
blue cloak beneath the great arch of the Fish Gate in Manasseh's Wall, looking  
out from its mouldy shade into the glitter of noon. With jewelled hand I  
clasped  
my veil. I faced Jerusalem. The rows of white houses enclosing the  
market-place,  
glaring in the sun, dazzled my eyes. Of a sudden Novatus appeared in a doorway;  
then crossed the square quickly toward me. He wore a red tunic banded with  
purple and the golden circlet on his head ringed it with fire. His hands were  
out-stretched; his face eager. I waited, my heart full in my throat.

The dream changed. Now my lover  
had entered the gate, but, alas...and I knew not what this meant...he was  
striding  
past me, seeing me not, robed for a journey in toga and white mantle, his  
profile  
set and cold as marble. Fear laying low my pride, I cast an anguished glance  
behind me, to see him in a green meadow, hand in hand with a woman. Her face I  
could not see, for she too was wrapped in a cloak...a crimson cloak, the colour  
of wine...or...blood. It seemed to me I died in my dream! I all but died now as  
a I  
brooded on it.

Then it was that Mary of Bethany  
came. At the sound of steps I turned. My little Greek slave stood at the door,  
and in the portico, Mary. Her presence brought with it a breath from another  
world.  
Her chastity seemed to rebuke me.

She came and sat at the foot of  
my reclining chair, silent while she fixed me with a long gaze. Tears of  
compassion shone in her eyes which, like to her mouth, had ever a secret look,  
as of one who knows and veils a mystery.

"Mary," she breathed at last, "the  
Master has sent for you."

My hand at my breast, I  
stammered:

"But Novatus is away."

"This is your opportunity."

I liked not the words, though it  
was she that spoke them.

"To run away would be cowardice,"  
I said.

"It is your only chance to  
escape."

"How poor a creature then you  
think me!"

"I know your too tender, yielding  
heart."

I turned from her. I rolled in  
anguish. I bit my pillow.

"O God," I whispered, "to be  
stronger, that what I must do I might do nobly."

"The Master knows all things,"  
she said, and now she moved closer and knelt beside me and laid a soft hand on  
my hand. "Today this word came from Galilee for you. And the moment of  
obedience is the moment when the Lord speaks."

I rose and unclasped my jewels,  
princely gifts from Novatus, and they dropped, a flashing heap, at my feet. I  
stooped then and gathered them and took them to my little scarlet chamber and  
laid them away in their casket. But even as I shut them from me, my eyes fell  
on my jar of nard. I snatched it to me heart. A breath of ineffable fragrance  
escaped its broken seal. With swooning senses I drank of its spice,  
remembering...remembering....

Essence of our rapture bottled in a tear-shaped jar.... No, I could not, would  
not leave this! If I must be exiled from earth...dear earth!...I would take  
into heaven's  
aridity with me this memory-evoking nard. But I hid it from those secret eyes  
of Mary.

We started on our journey ? oh,  
immeasurable journey, from him who was the whole substance of mortal love to  
me, unto the Lord-God-with-us.

Mary and I had joined a caravan  
whose destination, like ours, was Capernaum, where our Lord was sojourning. We  
had made the start from Mary's house in Bethany, a little white house, built of  
carved tiles, with a pomegranate tree at its door. Mary's sister, Martha ?  
that  
dark, different sister ? had met me with a grim face, and her brother,  
Lazarus alas, with sly advances.

By now it was midsummer. The  
countryside was parched and thirsty, the trees along the road powdered with  
dust. In the shade of a tree here and there a leper crouched, crying out  
raucously as he saw us, holding out a ghostly hand for alms, or a blind beggar  
sat  
patient, flies swarming on his closed eyelids.

We left Judea behind, entered the  
Samaritan country, sighted the pointed peaks of Gilboa and the rising-moon of

Tabor; and at last, from a grassy mount, looked down on the sea of Galilee.

On the way, as we rested at an inn,  
I made bold to confide in Mary, longing to bear my soul.

"Oh, Mary," thus I began, "I had  
such pride in the choice of my heart. To have loved such a man.... To have so  
loved such a man.... Now I must deny  
this love. And what will he do?"

But she broke in upon my words,  
and I knew from a sudden sternness in her that she was far from love and grief  
as is a star from earth.

"What is human love compared with  
the divine? Man's love is no more than a mirage, or as waves that roll in upon  
the shore, wave after wave, and break, and are lost."

"You have never loved!" I cried.

She raised her eyes heavenward.

"None but God," she whispered.

"How have you escaped...if you have  
a heart?"

The sharp words sprang from my  
lips ere I could think to withhold them, for all that was in me rebelled at  
that heavenward look, that lofty answer; and I felt sad and sore because the  
angel  
had no power to comfort me.

Softly she spoke.

"All my life, I believe, I have  
been waiting for the Lord Jesus and His sacred love. Mary, the heart is never  
content until it bestows itself on the highest. From my youth up I have guessed  
this. Marriage meant naught to me. Then when I saw our Lord I knew why."

"But had you married with love,"

I said, "you would know that such love too is sacred, since it is veritable  
oneness. Oneness of spirit, oneness of flesh...."

"Flesh?" she darted me a cold  
glance.

Yes, flesh! Wherein spirit dwells  
on earth...the flesh of two beings that are as one soul...."

"Mary" ? she bent low to  
me ? "can you not drive out this stranger from your heart and truly admit  
your Lord?"

I turned away despairing.

"How can I make you to see that  
if there be any stranger I myself am interwoven with him. And now that we are  
rent asunder can you look for less than agony? Could you cut the hand from the  
arm  
without pain...and maiming? Could you cleave the heart in twain and still  
live?"

We came to Tiberias. Here I  
lowered my veil, torn between terror lest I encounter Novatus and a mad desire  
to turn back now, ere it be forever too late, and fly to him who was blood of  
my blood, soul of my soul.

We passed brown Magdala, then  
into level land, through the golden grain fields of Gennesaret. At last we  
entered Capernaum. And there we traced our Lord to the house of Simon the  
Pharisee, where He sat at the mid-day meal and awaited the many who came to  
hear  
Him speak.

Following the multitude we  
reached a great white mansion and, crossing its court, were borne with the  
crowd up a stair leading to the second story and into a dim hall. Light  
streamed through an archway ? light and the strains of a chanting voice!

"Cause us to drink of the crystal  
river of Thine, O Divine One!

"Cause us to walk in the garden  
of Thy nearness, O Beloved!

"Cause us to attain the summit of  
Paradise. Shepherd of the World!

"Make us steadfast in Thy love, O  
Inspirer!"

God of my fathers...that voice! How  
it struck into my heart...pierced, wounded it. As I drank even deeper of its  
swinging  
cadences, in which a wrenched agony, as of the suffering of God, rose blended  
with strains of triumph, earth with its poor delights, its puny sorrows, faded  
away.

"Cause us to approach the throne  
of Thy might, O Cleaver of Dawn!

Make us steadfast in Thy love, O  
Inspirer!"

I could endure no more! Blind to  
the throng gathered in the outer hall, blind to all but One who sat at Simon's  
table, I ran through the arch to that One and cast myself down at His feet and

wept...and  
dared rain kisses on those holy feet.

What could I do now to pledge  
myself forever to Him? Of what worth was my word? But one treasure remained to  
me. I drew it from its hiding-place in my breast. Should I empty my nard,  
should I shatter my jar at His feet, would He know this to be my mortal heart,  
broken into fragments for His sake, and all its love spilled for Him? I drained  
out the perfume to the last drop and dashed the jar upon the stones before Him.  
And then I looked up...and His eyes were a fathomless mystery. So that none  
could  
hear He bent low and whispered, "I  
know." Once more I cast myself down, and His feet...so wet with my tears and my  
nard...I wiped with the locks of my hair.

From afar...so it seemed to me...I  
heard murmurings.

"She is weeping for her sins" ...in  
a woman's thin notes.

"Who is she?"

"The courtesan, Mary ? famous  
in Jerusalem. Once a poor maid from this neighbourhood ? Magdala."

"Oh...she."

And after this the whisper of a  
man.

"Why was this waste of ointment  
made? For it might have been sold for more than three-hundred pence and given  
to the poor."

I know not what it was that made  
me to raise my head at those words and fix my eyes on that man. His whisper had  
come from the seat next Jesus. Who was this that sat so near...and counted  
pence?

I saw a face drugged with earth.

The whispers buzzed on ? now  
whispers of men.

"It is polluted ointment.  
Ointment used for shameful purposes."

"With this ointment she anoints  
her body for her lovers...and she dares pour it on the Master's feet!"

Then the voice of Jesus Himself  
lifted with authority, while upon my head I felt a hand, light as a rose-leaf,  
firm as mail ? and the centre of its palm burned me with its life.

"Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? You have the poor with you always and whenever you will you can do them good. But me you have not always. Verily, verily I tell you, that wheresoever throughout the world this gospel shall be taught, this that she has done shall be mentioned also as a memorial to her."

Silence, heavy with shame, hushed that chamber; I more shamed than all to be the object of so great a bounty. None but Jesus could break such silence. He called out now, as if to rouse one who slept.

"Simon! Simon! I have somewhat to say unto you."

His hands still comforted my head and from His palm flowed life so strong that His palm was as fountain and my body a vase to be filled from it. Wherefore, lost to all save this mystery, I heard naught He said to Simon till I became aware He spoke of me.

"You gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but this woman since she came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. You brought no oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with her precious ointment. Wherefore all her sins are forgiven. For she loves much...."

I burst into sobs so wild that I could hear no more.

And now I must be alone. To a corner of Simon's garden I went and sat upon a stone bench, screened from the house by tall bushes.

All my sins forgiven for this sin of loving...of a reckless spending of my heart and counting not the cost? Did the virtues of the Kingdom then centre in but one ? unbridled love for God and all that He had made?

At a sound in the bushes I looked up and saw a man plucking a rose. He turned. Why...this was he that had sat next Jesus! Now he came toward me holding out the rose, his great body sinuous in its gliding. At close hand I could observe his features. His nose hooked downward. His mouth was a ruby crescent in his beard, his brows like a scimitar curved across his forehead. The full ellipses of his amber-coloured eyes gloated upon me. He smiled...as a serpent bares its fangs.

"Will you have a red rose from

me?"

"But it was you that questioned  
my humble gift to Jesus."

"Your face was hid when I made  
that speech! Beautiful Mary, I am Judas Iscariot, chief of the Lord's  
disciples." He flung the words at me, his head tossed back, his red lips  
curling.

"Chief of the Lord's disciples?  
And you offer lust where your Lord gives love."

Judas' eyes flinched, his face  
fell, and a look of strange despair engulfed his pride, as of one inured to  
defeat, so that for a little space I pitied him...till he lifted those eyes,  
narrowed  
with guile.

"I offer my heart, O cruel one."  
Seduction lurked in his voice. "The rose, the hundred-petaled rose, Mary, is a  
symbol of the heart and of the oneness of hearts."

"The nard was the symbol of my  
heart offered to the Lord," I said. "With Him alone I wish oneness."

"Do you think you can have it  
this way, when you scorn a fellow-creature?"

The thrust was sharp...and, alas,  
true. Judas dealt it as if in soft reproach, his voice wistful. But my eyes,  
piercing his mask, saw behind the secretive flesh a sinister self ? like to  
a column of black basalt, immovable and cold ? and I gave him thrust for  
thrust, though mine the worst by far.

"You, Judas, are a hypocrite. In  
the Master's very presence you gossiped of my paramours. I will not trouble to  
deny such slander. Yet you seek for yourself, from me, that same illicit love  
for which you dared judge me."

"It is you that judge me, Mary."  
I marvelled at the man's patience. So deaf was he to my bold affronts that now  
a dark laughter danced in his eyes. "And the Master has said, daring to jest  
with holy words, " 'judge not that you be not judged.' You will have a fall,"  
he chuckled in his throat. "Mark what I say, Mary of Magdala, you will have a  
fall!"

Then, leaving his rose to die in  
the dust of the path, he turned on his heel and went back into Simon's  
house...to  
companion Jesus.

And I stood and grieved for that

I should hate him, when I had hoped at such a moment, fresh from the Lord's forgiveness,  
to love all that God had made.

## VII

AT SUNDOWN, again athirst for  
solitude, I stole from our chamber at the inn, where Mary lay in a light sleep,  
and set forth for the synagogue. Now the synagogue stands on that street which  
ends  
in the highway, and when I had mounted the few steps to its court and turned to  
watch the beauty of the sunset ? the sky being an inverted golden bowl and  
the sea a mirror to it ? I saw in the distance a horseman galloping. His  
face was hid in the shadow of his mantle, but that form...that form...broad in  
the shoulders,  
lean, erect on his horse, well I knew!

Oh, to escape such a meeting! Yet  
could I flee from it...from Novatus?  
Nay, whatsoever the pain of it, this I would not do. I stood still, in full  
view upraised on those steps, the long avenue of the colonnade behind  
me ? still as a statue ? waiting.

Swiftly he drew nearer. Now I saw  
the beetling brows below the white mantle, the oval drop of the chin, the thin  
red mouth. And now I saw his eyes and the anger smouldering in them. He  
dismounted  
and strode to my side.

"Mary" ? his voice shook ? "why  
such a blow in the dark? You stabbed me, Mary, while I slept."

No answer had I, nor voice  
wherewith to answer. I cast down my eyes, mute in my shame.

"What folly, this flight...and to  
my very neighborhood. You have gone mad! The scene you made today in the house  
of that Jew...ah, you wonder that I know of it? A guest present from Tiberias  
quickly brought the news. Did it not shame you then to be held up a  
gazingstock, exposed to a room full of hypocrites as a repentant harlot, your  
'sins'  
the apt subject of a parable? Nay, this has shamed both you and me. Come back  
to me, Mary...to your own home...to my love that changes not, though you lose  
your senses...turn  
coward...knife me in the back." I shrank from the hunger in his look. "Or" ?  
seeing  
me shrink, his eyes blazed ? "or, by all the gods, Rome shall make short  
work of this man Jesus, shall despatch Him before another sundown."

Now I found my voice. Terrified,  
driven to the wall, lost to all thought of myself or my shame, now I found my

voice.

"Novatus, should you dare destroy this Holy One of God, and do so because of me, I swear to you I will kill myself."

He bowed his head and stood lingering...for I knew not what. And my heart broke over him and I longed to take him to my breast. But he had made the worst of threats and the life of the Lord Himself was now imperiled by him. And I knew not what he might do. Resources had he to carry out this threat, and also to defeat mine. Wherefore I spoke once more, and my words were false as they were cruel.

"Whatsoever you may attempt, you will find of no avail. Your hold upon me is loosed, O Novatus. And...you are too proud to seek revenge."

"Mary, why do you weep?"

On the temple steps Jesus found me in tears.

"Oh my Lord, I have driven my lover away...broken him...with a lie. And...this worthless life of mine...would I had never offered it to you! For now...it menaces your life. My Lord, Novatus would kill you."

A touch on my head, a burning current streaming from a light hand, and I lifted my face to His above me, and to the compassion in His eyes.

"Why do you weep?" He said once more, and now he was smiling. "When you have verily given up, your lover shall come after you."

VIII

THREE DAYS HAD PASSED. On the way to sup with our Lord in Peter's house, John and I strolled the highway. It was the twilight hour. Through alleys betwixt the black houses that edge the beach, women were coming up from the sea bearing jars on their shawled heads.

To John I could speak, as I could not to Mary ? the Mary that had never loved ? as I dared not yet to the holy mother, of the sorrow and dread in my heart.

"Dear John," I said, "you have been patient these three days and have taught me much. I see now that to fear Novatus was a great folly, since the Divine One cannot be slain by human hands. And my heart is truly comforted by my Lord's sweet promise, which I could never

doubt, that some day my lover will come back. But...oh, in the meantime, I tremble for him! I know not to what I have goaded him. Yet I can guess. He will turn to some other woman, John. For without a woman's love Novatus cannot endure his disillusioned life."

"Is that all?" said John.

The scornful question was softened by his voice, which was melodious as a viol.

"But I once dreamed of another woman...a woman in a crimson mantle. And crimson is the colour of blood. This bodes ill to him."

"Mary, I swear you do doubt!

Yield him up to the woman...should there be one! Why be troubled since the end is

sure? The Lord has been merciful in giving you such assurance. He is all compassion

to His children. He feels with us, aches with our sorrows. Still...has He not called

us out from our private grief, our private happiness, to serve Him in His giant task? If we would share this task, how strong we must be! Messengers of God come not as physicians to babes, healing one of a fever, another of a heartache.

When the house itself is rotting they come to raise a the new structure amid the ruin. To dare to serve so great a Builder should be enough for such humble ones as we."

By now we were close to the home of Peter, which stood on the narrow strip to our right between the highway and the sea...a simple dwelling of black brick, criss-crossed with lines of mortar.

His disciples alone were to sup with Jesus that night, the twelve men who were ever with Him and a few women; the holy mother, the wife of Peter, the mother of John, and Mary of Bethany. And to this meeting of near ones He had in His loving kindness bid me.

We entered a whited chamber lit by candles. Here our Lord sat upon a bench, kingly in full white robes that billowed from His wide-spread knees, casting a mighty shadow on the wall. His disciples, seated on the floor, formed a half circle at His feet.

As we crossed the threshold, John's mother looked up from that circle and I saw a small frown gather her forehead. Yet she was a soft and lovely creature, with child-like cheeks and a round cleft chin and, under two little arches for brows, great blue eyes that ever worshipped Jesus.

Vashti, the wife of Peter, came forward to greet me. Vashti had a fierce beauty. Her face was short and put me in mind of a young eagle, and dusky tresses framed it, flying out from her white veil. Her brows were like spread wings rising from low on the bridge of her nose. Her mouth when she smiled could be merry, though today, alas, I saw a tight-lipped smile. This woman bestowed her trust with caution and not yet was it given to Mary of Magdala.

Peter followed his wife to bid me welcome ? a man of heavy build, but with the quick of his soul bared on his broad face. He grasped my hands and tears filled his eyes. For Peter wept and laughed readily. Love had he wherewith to weep; wisdom wherewith to laugh.

Behind Peter, Judas Iscariot slunk my way with a grin. Plainly, Judas had forgiven me!

"Mary, you like me not, but I am a good-fellow; try me! I will make you laugh, I will make you dance!" He whipped out a flute from the breastfold of his robe and tilted it to his lips. "You will dance to my piping!"

I swept past him, mute and indignant, for there was a Presence in that chamber, and to that Presence I straightaway went and took my place at His feet. The master smiled down on me and I thought: now I know that God in heaven smiles.

We gathered round the table, spread with a white cloth and strewn with jasmine and rose petals, The Master placed Peter (who wept and begged for a humbler seat) at the head of the table. He himself took the center, Vashti at His right hand. His mother sat at His left and we other Marys across from Him. And when He had chanted, blessing the food, He turned His face to me and said:

"You have journeyed far to be with me. Some souls come here and are resuscitated. They come dead, they return alive. They come sick, they return healed. They come in sorrow and return joyous.

They come in want and return having partaken of a share. They come athirst, they return satisfied! Praise be to God, you are of these souls and you must rejoice exceedingly therefore."

Now the mother of John turned about to me that little frown gone from her face, and caught my hand and folded it in hers. And the Master, seeing this, glowed upon her.

"Wife of Zebedee," He said, "you

have a tender heart." Then He looked on Mary of Bethany. "You have a kind heart. And what sort of a heart have you, O Mary of Magdala?" His smile was full upon me. "What sort of a heart have you?"

"Oh, what sort of a heart have I?  
You know Rabboni!"

"You have a boiling heart,  
Magdalene" ? Laughing He rolled His lively hands one round the other. "You have a heart in tumult! Now, were these three hearts made one...the kind, the tender, the tumultuous...what a great heart that would be!"

Thus the meal went on, we happy  
and gay in the presence of this Holy One, who could be gayer than any. And then came a solemn change. The Master fell silent, His eyes uprolled, that luminous gaze  
as it were turned within Himself. It was even as though He had gone away, leaving only the shell of His body with us. Now,  
I thought, I can drink my fill of His beauty! But He moved, caught me staring, and smiled.

"Speak, Mary, speak," He said, "Your eyes are all speech."

"Your presence," I stammered, "makes  
of this meal a king's banquet."

"This is because of your great  
love. Once a poet said, 'Wounds dealt by Thee are my healing. Poison from Thy hand is honey.' "

"Wound me and give me poison that  
my human heart may die!"

"I will. When afflictions and  
bitter conditions taste sweet to man, this is a sign that he has found favour  
in the sight of God."

Now Peter murmured:

"The Master is feeding His sheep."

Jesus bowed His head and lowered His  
eyes and His hands lay open in His lap like cups.

"I myself am the food," He said.

In the silence I could all but  
hear my tears fall. Then the Master raised His head with an ineffable smile.

"Eat, Mary."

Fool that I was and blind to  
think He meant the food on my platter! To obey I ate of that food, though now

it was like to rough, coarse grains and I scarce could swallow the changed substance.

Or...was it my body that was changed and caught up into the Kingdom? Yes, the change was in this body, so light was it now, so filled with sparkling life, as if fashioned of air.

"I myself am the food," the Lord had said.

So, it was heavenly food of which He had bidden me partake. And verily I had partaken, for what could this be...this life effervescing within me...if it be not His life?

On the dark and deserted highway Mary and I walked alone to our inn, the blue night enveloping us. To our left the sea ran a liquid silver; to the right stood rows of black houses. The Synagogue lay ahead, its columns pallid in the moonlight, casting long black shadows. Its deep, colonnaded porch stood at the corner of the highway and the steep little street that led to our inn. Weary as we were, we dreaded this climb and, when we reached the Synagogue, we sat down on its steps to rest. Behind us stretched the long recess of the colonnade, its pavement ? flanked by those many columns ? striped with black shadows; the street at the side striped with black shadows. A white moon soared over the sea, while her double danced on its ripples, and Mary said:

"I never saw the moon so dazzling."

"But," I made answer, "when I think of the lustre on Jesus' face tonight, this whole scene looks opaque to me, even as a painting on a wall."

She pressed my hand and we both fell silent. In the stillness of the night, as I watched the rippling, flashing sea, I was again aware of that life like to wine within me and my heart opened to a fragrance blown from white gardens.

A scream pierced and rent the stillness. Mary had screamed! And at that instant the folds of a cloak flung over me from behind, muffled me in thick darkness. Hands wrapped it around me, muscular arms lifted me, and I knew that a man bore me down the steps and a little further on level ground, and set me down in a chair. Then to the tramp of feet I moved forward. At my side hoofs clattered on the stones. But soon all sound ceased as

we came to a halt. Again hands fumbled about my body, loosing the cloak, freeing my face of it, and I saw (and this surprised me not) that I sat in my own litter ? Felix, Novatus' most trusted slave, on his horse beside me.

"I ask pardon, my lady, for such rough treatment," he said, bending an anxious look upon me. "I could not have done this, you know, but by the express command of my Master."

A great light seemed to break upon me, and the while we jogged along the highway, through the little city of Bethesda, through silvered wheat fields, past the black slabs of Magdala's huts, Tiberias looming darkly ahead, a huddle of black and silver cubes descending the mountain, my thoughts were as a song of triumph.

How swift the fulfilment of the Lord's promise; that when I had verily given up my lover should come after me! How easy...this giving up! I had done no more than breathe a prayer, "Wound me and give me poison that my human heart may die." And my Lord, without death, had immortalized my heart and without death changed me. Poison and wounds had I asked, and instead He had fed me with His own life, refining my very flesh thereby. And here I was now on the road to Tiberias...on the way back to my beloved...a new Mary, ready to meet him, ready at last to win him to the Lord! But yesterday Jesus had said, as I knelt at His feet, "You must become so free and joyous; Mary, that you will be able to light in a cold heart a great fire." Now indeed was I free and joyous!

True, Novatus himself had come not after me. Lawless as Barabbas, chief of bandits, he had stolen me by the hands of slaves. But...could he steal me from the Lord save by the will of the Lord?

Late in the night we entered Tiberias and, passing through its crooked streets, soon reached the terrace where stood our villa, its white walls shining below the high feathers of the palms.

Within, the villa was silent and dark. I walked the length of the atrium, blue in a haze of moonlight, and, approaching the colonnade, saw a light like a yellow star glowing in my cubiculum.

Lois, my little Greek slave, crossed the peristyle to meet me. She welcomed me with happy tears and led me back to my chamber where she had wine and cakes set out. There she tenderly served me, removing my rumpled tunic, preparing my bath, and when I had come forth fresh from it, kneading me with perfumed oils ? with the oils of heady spices. Then, covering me with a brodered sheet of silk, she bade me good-night...and left the lamp burning.

Impatient, now I awaited my dear

one, scarce able to wait, being at last so free to love him, to atone for my baseness toward him, scarce able to wait to 'light in this heart a great fire.'

A step. The curtains at the doorway parted and Novatus stood in the arch, in his eyes a look humbled and shamed.

"Forgive me, Mary. I did a brutal thing, but you left me no other way. I knew you had lied to me. I know in my very fibre your love for me. The only thing in the world of which I am sure is this...this...and my love for you."

His voice quivered. I saw his lips quiver. I held out welcoming arms.

"Yes...you can love...Novatus...."

With a cry he was on his knees beside my couch. And the rhythm of our oneness pulsed in that chamber ? a great silent song.

## IX

TWO WEARY MONTHS had passed. By now the summer was far advanced. Long since, in my villa on the Mount of Olives ? that house of the little foolish loves ? I had lost my joy, my freedom.

On a night of stifling heat Novatus and I were reclining in the atrium, by the air-refreshing pool. From the walls those cupids mocked us with their levity, their darts and balances and gay garlands. Talk had flickered and died. I sat brooding.

Why...why had all gone wrong? No means had I left untried to win my beloved to my Lord. He had grown but the more implacable in his jealousy, the more ravenous for the whole of me. Mind and soul I must yield as well as body, my every thought I must yield, ere I satisfy his devouring greed. What could I do to break this net of falsity in which I now found myself caught? Even my prayers had been in vain.

Novatus left his reclining chair, seated himself on mine and bent a flushed face to me. Into his half-closed eyes there came a crafty look and to his thin lips the hunger of a wolf. I shuddered away from him.

"Come not near me tonight!" I cried, "tonight, I tell you frankly, my mind is full of a better thing ? that vision I saw in Galilee in the heart of a true man ? in the hearts of a few audacious fishermen...."

"Mary!"

"You thought I had forgot? Never can I forget. Can I stay with you, Novatus, and you mine so closed to truth? I once thought you just. Were you verily so, you would seek out Jesus and see for yourself."

"Mary...I...I have done this."

"You have done it!" I sat up, amazed, and my anger dropped from me. "Oh, when?"

"That time I was in Tiberias...without you, before I found you in Capernaum."

"You will tell me what happened?"  
Not easy was it to curb my eagerness.

"He mocked me," Novatus muttered, black fury on his face. "He laughed at me."

"He laughed at you? Oh impossible. Tell me all He said. Tell me what you said. Why is it you have kept this hid?"

"I could not grieve you, Mary. But, since it is out, you may have the story. I went to Him privately...to the house of one of your fishermen, where he was quartered. I too shall be frank. I went for your sake, that I might...'see for myself' the true nature of His influence over you. But I approached Him with courtesy. In His first question was contempt. A subtle contempt. 'What was the news of Rome?' I answered Him ? truthfully ? that Rome at the moment was occupied with the Olympic games."

"And there was no contempt in that, Novatus?"

"I but stated the truth. He then said it was a pity men should be occupied with games. Still courteous, I explained that these games had a serious object. The bodies of our potential soldiers must be developed to the fullest strength to drive heavy swords through coats of mail and to support the weight of the armour. He replied with flippancy that man was too greatly concerned with this perfecting of the body, for no matter to what extent he developed his sinews he could never become as strong as the ox, as bold as the lion or as big as the elephant. And this barbarian had the effrontery thus to trifle with me!"

So dismayed was I that I could not laugh, even at Novatus' comic anger. Too great a riddle was this for me to guess! Why was it the tender Jesus ? He who would not crush a bruised reed ? had treated Novatus thus?

Sick to heart, I went to my

chamber alone, and my lover sought me not that night. Strange that the dawn should have been so safeguarded!

A pebble flung against my casement woke me. I went to the casement and looked down on John.

"One word," I whispered. "Where may I meet you?"

John raised to my hand a small clay tablet.

"At Mary's house in Bethany."  
And, swift as a deer, he was gone.

Traced on the tablet in flowing script I beheld...an epistle from my Lord. And life tiding back and flooding me and a great joy lifting me up, I sank to my couch to read it.

"O tender lamb! How long will you wander bewildered while the Shepherd seeks you? Without hesitation turn to the flock, that led once again by the shepherd over hill and wady, in the light of the Sun of Truth, you may renew your spirit. Could you but know the love that awaits you, you would delay no longer your return to the fold."

"Bewildered"..."wandering"...the tablet dropped to my knees. Merciful Father, those words were addressed to a stray sheep!

So...I had failed. Failed my Lord.  
Failed Novatus. Had I then lost Novatus? Forfeited my Lord's promise? And...my hope...my great purpose to win to the Lord this dear beloved who was more than half of me, who was the very tree of my identity from which I grew as a branch.... If a hope so high be lost, if it be verily true that I must be cut from the tree, then let me die...quickly...O my God!  
I sank into a black abyss.

Ah, last night, last night...could I but relive it with the wisdom born of this agony. Or...have another night! Enough to abandon my beloved! Why leave him hopeless, bitter, believing I went in hate, shuddering from his touch, where...I so burned for that touch now, when...I so loved him? Nay, I would take this night. Such was my right and his. Yet...why wait for night?

I sprang from my couch to seek him, then paused to put my tablet in a chest. But even as I stooped to cover it

my glance fell on that flowing script, and I saw words verily hidden from me before....

"Without hesitation, turn to the flock." Why...here was a command wrapped in such tender phrasing that it had been

hid from me till now. Another night was not mine to take. "The moment of obedience" ? I

heard again Mary's voice ? "is the moment when the Lord speaks."

I had no choice but to go. In the Shepherd...in His forgiveness...lay my only hope.

I stood for I know not how long, there in that familiar chamber, in whose narrow length the wall, painted so bright in red, seemed to happily shelter me, from whose casement I could see the cedars, the white cupids on pedestals in the grass, the showering fountain. My gaze travelled round the little room, lingering on each dear object ? my couch set upon gilded lion's feet, its cover the hide of a lion, the tripod at its foot capped by a winged Mercury, the chairs and the stools of old ivory cushioned with Tyrian purple, the dressing-table of citrus wood strewn with precious trifles...each one the gift of my lover, quick with his touch. At last I said aloud:

"Lot's wife looked back. I dare not."

I gathered up the few things needful and, in trembling haste lest my resolution weaken, made ready to go. One robe alone I took with me, a tunic of rich pomegranate stuff, brodered with threads of gold, for Novatus himself had chosen this for me and had ever been happy when I wore it. And in its soft fold I laid my tablet.

What could I say to my dear one when I should bid him farewell? How explain this sudden fight save as my threat of last night explained it? That the Lord had again summoned me ? this he must never know. I prayed God for strength...for words. Then I went to his door, parted the curtains and peered within.

He lay so still that I knew he slept. I stole to his couch and knelt. Pale morning light shone through the casement and glinted across his face, illuminating it for me...and I saw that moving thing which had ever roused my tenderness, its innocence in sleep.

Long I knelt with eyes fixed, to imprint on my heart forever this face I might see no more...each loved feature of

Novatus...my lover. And then he woke, looked at me there on my knees, and stretched forth his arms to me. Alas that, fearful of my heart, I drew back from those dear arms!

He raised himself on his elbows  
and a great pain dawned in his eyes.

"Mary...what is it?"

"Novatus...my dear...I must go."

"Go? What is all this?"

"Novatus...if I stay...we will kill  
our love."

"Kill...our love?"

"Oh my beloved, do you not know?  
Inwardly are we not parted now? In this outward union we do but wound each other. And too many wounds mean...death."

"Nay, Mary, not in reality  
parted."

"Ah yes, a shadow lies between us...naught  
but a shadow, could you but see...in time..."

He cut me off in sudden rage.

"Shadow? That is a good word,  
Mary. The shadow of your own fancies...from the accursed..."

"No! No! You must not say it!"

"May the gods grant that I see  
the day when He is strung on the cross...with other thieves!"

Horrified by his blasphemy I fled  
and he made not a move to hold me. Now I stood high on the mount. On its rocky crest above me, the house of the pure Mary rose like a pillar of snow against the blue sky. In the midst of vineyards below, my villa shone in the sun...as if no shadow had fallen.... Irresolute I stood.

So...I had ceased not to blunder  
till I had turned this dearly loved one into a vengeful foe to my Lord. Oh never had I been bold enough, free enough with Novatus! I had trod too softly, fearful of his jealousy, fearful...ever fearful...of my own heart, lest it be tempted to yield its all to him and thus be faithless to Jesus...and in the end I had struck him a mortal blow.

Could I but go back now ? for no more than an hour ? to my poor beloved, alone...so bereft...in that villa, and bare my whole heart at last, with all that was in it of anguished love for him, might he not for very pity forget his wrath? Pain like to this must move him to listen. Verily, such pain proved my love! And when he had heard me and knew...knew that naught in earth or heaven could uproot this passion and that to leave him was death to me, might he not lay down a little pride and go with me to Jesus? To one so generous this should be an easy thing to do...a simple way out of our sorrow. not yet was it too late!

I turned to run down the hill.

But ere I had run ten paces I saw a commotion within my garden walls. Slaves appeared at the porch carrying a litter. Novatus came down the steps of the house and seated himself in the litter. The slaves bore him forth to the highway.

Then I saw them swing about and set off briskly for the Golden Gate.

On what errand was Novatus bound at this early hour, and in such haste? Trembling now for the life of my Lord, I sped to that house on the summit.

Rounding a bend in the road, I saw John.

"John! John!" I cried. "Thank God you are here. When I left Novatus...he threatened. See, his litter...near the Golden Gate. Where is the Master, John?"

"In Bethany."

"So near! And Novatus mayhap on the way to Pilate."

"What power has he, or Pilate, over the Lord, when His hour is not yet come?" John's eyes flashed. "This I have heard Him say, Mary: ? 'My hour is not yet come.' Look! Even now Novatus turns back."

The litter had stopped and faced about to my villa. What could have changed Novatus' purpose ? there, at the very wall of the city? Had he remembered my words, "You are too proud to seek revenge"?

Or was this but a last contemptuous gesture to dismiss me from his mind?

"John, why has the Master called me from Novatus? Is it that I have failed?"

"I think not, Mary."

"Was it not then His will that sent me back by means of that capture?"

"I think Novatus but captured you  
and the Master had naught to do with it."

"John, I beseech you help me to  
understand. In my soul I was never faithless to the Master. You know He  
promised me that when I had entirely given up, my lover would come after me.  
That  
night, at Peter's table, verily, verily, I gave up. John, even my flesh was  
changed. I believed from my soul the Master had wrought a miracle on me that I  
might quickly fulfil this great thing ? the winning to Him of my gifted, my  
powerful Novatus."

"Oh, think clearly, Mary. How  
could a Gentile, a Roman, quickly see  
with the vision of the Jew? The Jews themselves, despite their prophets, their  
age-long belief in the coming of a Messiah, are not yet ready to welcome God's  
Messiah. The great and powerful ignore Him. As for these crowds that dog His  
footsteps and give Him no peace, do you think them fit for such a gospel as  
His?" John's strange eyes  
sought the distance. "Did they know the cost of following Him they would flee  
away."

"But...Novatus? Think you, John,  
there is any hope for him now?"

"Where is your faith? You are  
blown upon by every wind. Men break their promises. Not so the Master."

"Then...I have failed not...yet?"

"What could you do against a jealous  
lover? Learn, Mary, from this" ? stooping he plucked a bud ? "that God  
has a destined time for all flowering. Learn to bide God's time. Force not  
closed doors."

We walked up the road that winds  
beneath a rocky cliff.

"You are taking me to the Master,  
John? He is with Mary and Martha?"

"Yes, but a few steps away now.  
The Master has planned a long journey," John spoke gently. "He would have you  
with Him on this journey. Wherefore He has come Himself for you."

By now we were near to the house of  
Mary. She stood in the arch of the door, behind the pomegranate tree, with the  
mother of Jesus. And seeing us, both came out upon the path and, tenderly  
smiling,  
embraced me, and the mother said:

"The Master is waiting for you,

Mary." Then she led me to his own chamber.

He stood gazing through a grated window, sadly, toward Jerusalem, and I saw the kingly sweep of His profile. The chamber was redolent of His musk. As we entered He turned and approached us. Now His grandeur burned full upon me and, shame consumed in the fire of His love, I ran forward and threw myself at His feet. Unsmiling, He raised me up, and I felt the solemnity of His love. And while I stood awed before Him, He drew a step closer and plunged His gaze into mine.

"I look into your eyes, O Mary,"

He said, "and I see your heart. Your pure heart is a magnet for the divine bestowals."

And now He began to pace the floor, hands clasped at His back, His eyes uplifted, their glory withdrawn from us and turned in upon Himself, as though He would read God's secrets from a tablet within His own being.

To and fro He paced between the window and that spot where I stood with his mother, and the while He strode the power of His tread shook me. Whensoever He wheeled about at the window and drew swiftly nigh unto me, flashing on me His lofty glance, a whirling current of life rolled from before His advancing feet. And caught in the onrush, my body grew ever more buoyant and free, its substance lighter and lighter, till it seemed to become light as air. At last I thought: I shall rise like a leaf in the wind and soon shall be blown away if this walk of the Lord cease not!

He stopped and once more stood close to me.

"I may tell you this," He said, "all your hopes and desires are destined to be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." In the Kingdom of God, I thought, and not before? "Even as twins in the womb," the Lord went on, "embrace and know not why, so it is with two that love in this world. For man traverses as in a dream the life of the physical world but dimly aware of its meaning, knowing little of the immortal powers wrapped within his own being. But when he enters the world of the Kingdom he will become acquainted with all mysteries, and even as he loves here, so there in that heaven of light, that heaven of divine bounties, that heaven of the will of God, shall he love a thousandfold."

Ah then, I said within myself, in very truth I have lost Novatus and must wait till the life to come ere we meet. And my heart bled from this wound dealt so suddenly by the hand of the Lord and tears streamed down my cheeks the while I stood silent before Him, gazing upward at His great might from the depths of my sorrow.

He brushed my wet lashes with his fingertips.

"Weep not," He said, in tones so piercing-tender that my tears broke forth afresh. "Weep not, Mary. You must be happy because of this thing I have told you."

"Mary weeps from love," said the kind mother, laying her hand on mine.

"I am cast into flames, my lord...the Flames of your love, your presence...and in these I am melting away."

But His pitying eyes saw deeper.

Slowly He shook His head, and the one word He spoke in answer came as a sigh:

"Nay."

And now was my mind thrown into confusion, for I knew not why this thing He had told me should make me happy when it snatched from me for the whole of my earthly life my love and hope. And I could scarce believe that "Nay". For, with the yielding of my hope to the irresistible will of the Lord, it had seemed to me I adored Him but the more for the very cruelty of His will, and that some of my tears had truly sprung from the pangs of a fierce new love wakened in my heart for Him.

Then...behold a wondrous thing! For while I still gazed through misted eyes on His glory, veils dropped from these eyes. I stood no longer in a walled chamber, in the Lord's bodily presence. NOW He loomed vast and blinding-bright, a form as it were built up of sunlight, vistas of a softer light opening behind Him....

He Himself brought me back from the vision. He led me to a plaque of polished bronze on the whited wall and with a gesture strong in majesty, placed a hand on my head and laid my face to His. So, standing before that mirror by the side of Jesus, I saw a young face moulded from clay...pale clay, red-lipped, tear-stained...cheek to cheek with a stern and immaculate Beauty, with eyes like to lamps in a watch-tower; I saw a young soul shielded by the Lord of souls from all loves less than the love of the Most High; I saw the Divine Shepherd enfolding His stray sheep.

Once only He spoke ere He dismissed me.

"I am your Father. I am your King. I...I am your Beloved."

The mother led me back to that larger chamber wherein we had left John and Mary. Here we now found Martha and a few of the twelve who always walked in the train of the Master. All were seated on benches against the wall, awaiting the arrival of their Lord, the men darkly mantled, their rough heads strong against the white wall.

Peter smiled on me, jovial and kind. The publican Matthew crossed over and took my hand in his. In spirit Mathew and I were kin. Philip and Thaddeus also came and spoke with me. James crossed not, but smiled from His bench. James was of shorter stature than John and his nose more hooked, and his eyes had less of depth than those strange eyes of his brother, though his too were large and bright.

All these men had serene brows.

But now a long shadow fell across the floor and I saw in the doorway...Judas, dark against the morning light. Curious, I stared at him. What had he to do with this circle? Could it be that God's Messenger traveled twinned with shadow, even as the sun? And was this man, Judas, such a thing?

He came and placed in my hand a lock of black hair.

"The Master's hair," he said. "When he trimmed it this morning, Mary, I saved this for you. I knew you would be here today."

My heart softened.

"Oh, Judas," I cried, "you have given me what the whole world could not give."

And now we heard a step...that step at whose strange commotion hearts suffocated with joy, rushing tears burned and blurred the eyes. And all rose, hands crossed on the breast...awaiting our Beloved's smile.

X

A YEAR PASSED; a year of far journeyings on foot, we ? the twelve men and six women ? following ever that "Cloud by day and Pillar of Fire by night."

Across Galilee we tramped, across the misty Plain of Esdraelon, flat and wide within a high border of mountains, like unto a striped cloth, with its long patches of sesame, maize and wheat and purple-rich earth. Up the elephant's back of Carmel, "Vineyard of God" ? a gray-green heap beneath the white dust of its roads.

On Carmel the prophets of old have left their footprints and holy presences hang above it. Once as we sat

with

the Master on the terrace of a house built on its summit, of a sudden He lifted His face to the sky, His eyes flashed a glad recognition into empty air, then up went His hand in a high salute. So we saw the great Immortal greeting invisible immortals.

On to Phoenicia we tramped, along

the white crescent of the beach to that ancient city Ptolemais, a crown of pearls on the distant tip of the crescent; on and on, to Tyre and Sidon. And withersoever

we went the people were enthralled by our Beloved, though there were many that knew not why. They that were Jews clamorously hailed Him, but, alas, as no more than a leader who would deliver them from Rome. Howbeit, He patiently trudged on, scattering the seeds of God's message on rich and stony soil alike.

Tramping in the footsteps of my

Lord, gladly had I accepted homelessness, for His footsteps were home enough for me. But one thing there was I could not yet accept ? that which seemed God's blindfold bound upon my eyes to hide from me my poor Novatus' fate. It had been a year since I had heard his name.

On our way to Phoenicia we

tarried awhile in a village at the base of Carmel, on that side where the mountain fronts the sea, and here at sundown one day the holy mother and I went walking with our Lord.

He led us along the highroad to

an ancient olive grove, where he

stood still and pointed out its trees, which were bent, gray and gnarled like to

old men, and told us Elijah himself had been wont to rest beneath them.

"Let us also rest here," He said.

So we sat on the grass under

those hoary trees, while shepherds passed by on the road, singing, leading their flocks to the fold; while swift dusk fell and the jackals set up their howls

on the mountain, and night came, studded with bright stars. I lifted my face to the stars.

"All the lamps of the night are

lit, O Lord," I said, "but the holy mother and I sit in the light of the Sun."

"This is but the beginning, Mary.

You shall be with me in all the worlds of God. And none can know here in this elemental world what it is to be with me in the eternal worlds."

"Ah," I murmured, "having such a

promise, how could I ask for a smaller happiness?"

The Master tilted His head and  
the magic of His smile gleamed in the starlight.

"You will take your heart from this other and give it up wholly to God?"

"Oh, I will try."

"First you say you will and then  
you say you will try!"

I bowed my head, shamed.

"What can I do with my heart?"

And now Jesus laughed with a  
great delight.

"I am pleased with your answer,  
Mary, for you have spoken to me one word of pure truth."

We strolled homeward in the  
night, the holy mother and I dropping a pace behind Him. Often He turned to  
speak to us, with some pleasantry; again, with winged words that lifted our  
spirits  
skyward. And such sweetness streamed from Him the while that I said within  
myself:

"Should He deign me not a  
syllable or a glance, to see this sweetness shining before me I would follow  
upon my knees, crawling behind Him in the dust, forever"

XI

TO CAPERNAUM we returned to rest,  
though rest there was none for the Master, save when He fled us and sailed  
alone to the shore of the Gadarenes and hid Himself in the hills. For by now  
the news of His wondrous works had spread far abroad and ever greater  
multitudes  
followed Him. And so compassed about by people was He that I knew not how He  
bore it, till one day He told us the secret of this patience.

The young Salome had come to Him  
with a little grief, then begged His forgiveness lest she weary Him, and in  
tones ineffable He answered her:

"Were I to spend day and night on  
your troubles I should never tire...I love you all so well."

And again He said:

"I work by the power of the Holy  
Spirit. I work not by physical laws. If I did, I should get nothing done!"

Here He taught by the seaside,  
standing on the pebbled beach. But soon such a crowd came jostling down on Him

that He must perforce find a boat, push out a little from the shore and sit on the sea while He spoke. And a beauteous sight was this. For at sundown He taught, in the cool of the day, and with fire above in the sky and below in the water, He was like unto a form of light.

Now in Capernaum are many Greeks.

Greeks people the cities on both sides of the sea. And these flocked to Jesus, loving His gaiety. Romans too came unto Him. Among the centurions He had friends.

And oft did He sit at the center of these Gentiles, the master-wit among them. For to such He spoke not of the Kingdom, they believing not. Yet He made them happy and, drawn by His love, they would let Him not alone.

In the synagogue too Jesus was welcomed. On many a Sabbath we followed Him across that colonnaded pavement to listen with rejoicing hearts as He spoke from the pulpit His words of life and spirit. Also at the house of Simon was He kept busy, for there the rich and great from among the Pharisees, importuned by the eager Simon, would oftimes gather to hear His discourse. Howbeit Jesus took these lightly.

Even He made sport of one, a strutting scribe whom Simon had tricked to His Presence. Ever shall I see this puffed up man as he stood before the Lord of men, his raised eyebrows seeming to pull him up on tip-toe, the while he delivered a speech such as he deemed suitable. In too great haste to be gone to await our Lord's answer, he bowed himself out, and the Master turned laughing to Simon:

"This is a dish you have cooked for me!"

"I trust," the anxious Simon answered, "that it is well prepared. Other dishes I have to set before you, also men of wealth and learning."

"Let us hope they are light," smiled the Master, "and will rest easily on my digestion. Some of these dishes are so heavy!" And then He sighed.

"Great is the power of the intellect, but it is of no avail till it has become the servant of love."

While we tarried in Capernaum I made my abode with John's mother (now widowed) in her fine stone house on the beach. At first the Lord dwelt with Peter and Vashti, then in our household. And each place in turn, as He filled it with His abundant life, was thronged to the doors night and day with people .

Busy were the women serving, for many came daily to sit at meat with our Lord. Vashti, John's mother, and I, with the help of the men, prepared the food. Much time we lost over the ovens, away

from the beloved Presence. But the poor mother of James and Joses ? another Mary ? that red-haired woman with the jocund face and fiercely worshipping heart, stood from morn till night in the kitchen, washing with Salome's aid the mounting piles of pots and platters.

While the Master dwelt with John and his mother sometimes I served as His door-keeper. I would meet the people at the door and lead them to that upper chamber wherein He spoke with them privately.

Hence, I saw many wondrous scenes, and others I scarce could bear!

There was the day when two great ladies of the court came, taking Him for a soothsayer. One wished to know if she should remarry, the other if it would advantage her to acquire a certain property.

And then did I witness the sternness of the Lord! All the while those bedizened women trifled in that chamber He paced up and down like to a captive lion. And when at last they minced away, none too satisfied with His answers ? though these had been more patient than His mien ? He turned unto me with great majesty and said:

"The people of the world are sleeping. You must be awake. The people of the world are heedless...have you not seen how heedless? You must be aware. The people of the world are steeped in darkness.

You must be immersed in a sea of light."

Vashti followed these women. She had by the hand her son David, then but a babe of two years. (He remembers now having played beneath the Lord's mantle when once, as he sat with a toy on the floor, that mantle swept round and hid him.) The Master's sternness fled. Smiles overspread His face. He held out His arms to the babe. Then, glancing on Judas at His side, from the bag this disciple ever carried He drew forth a coin of gold and bent with it to the little one.

"David, I give you gold," He said.

Behold, the infant scowled!

"No, no!" he cried, and went running.

"O Rabboni, Forgive him," ? Vashti hung her head.

But the Master laughed on a joyous  
note.

"Gold will never buy that child!"

Beneath the rays of His power  
whatsoever was hidden in the heart appeared above ground, even as seeds in the  
earth sprout beneath the sun. He poured forth His love...and lo! evil sprang  
out into  
the open. In the soul that was drawn unto Him, all that was good leapt to the  
call of that love, while all that was mean crept away, shamed before such  
greatness.

At another time I sat in the  
sacred Presence with six others. One was a publican, Reuben by name, known to  
be a sly man and a rascal. But our Lord, once passing his booth, had entered  
into speech with him, and from that very hour Reuben was ever to be seen in the  
multitude that followed us. At last, on a day when all were gathered about our  
Lord, He beckoned to John and said: "Go, John, on my behalf unto Reuben and  
tell him I have great love for him for that he is truly honorable." Whereat  
Judas  
spoke up: "Why say you this of a man whose mind is so set upon money that he  
extorts and cheats?" Then answered our Beloved, "There is naught I can give  
this  
man but hope."

Thus it was that Reuben,  
emboldened by such mercy, came seeking the Master in John's household.

The second stranger in our midst  
that day was a Pharisee, a man of miserly heart, who, seated beside the  
publican, drew his cloak tightly about his knees that it be not contaminated by  
Reuben's cloak.

Now the five other sinners at the  
feet of the all-forgiving Lord were the faithful disciples, John and Peter, the  
mother of John, Vashti, and this woman of no repute, Mary of Magdala.

He of the miserly heart had come  
last to the Master's presence. Till he entered Jesus had kept silence. Sitting  
above us on a bench, He had been gazing on a rose He held and lifting it to His  
face to smell it. But as the Pharisee joined us He smiled and bade him be  
seated on the mat next Reuben.

Then He began to speak:

"I hope a great love may be  
established among you and that day by day love will increase. I have gathered  
you all together here that you may be gathered in the same way in the Kingdom  
of God, and that you may verily love one another. If you love one another as  
you

should, it is even as though you had loved me as you should. I go away from this world, but love stays always."

Mary, the mother of John, raised worshipful eyes to the Master.

"Would I could be like that rose," she said, "and give forth such a fragrance."

Gentle as a breeze, wistful as a sigh fell the Master's voice:

"One could be much more beautiful than this rose. For the rose perishes. Its fragrance is but for a time. There is no winter for the soul of man."

One day we went by sea with the Master to Tiberias. And as we followed Him up from the shore into the market-place I saw two Romans crossing the square. My heart leapt to my throat. One was Lucius Vitellius, the Proconsul...but...that other...that vigorous body, that head held high in its mantle, the beetling brows, the pinched, ironic nostrils, the fine-drawn mouth....

That he had seen me I had no means of proving. Well aware he must have been, there in that little market-place, of the tumult about the Lord Jesus. Yet he cast not a glance our way, but keeping his face steadfastly averted, turned up a side street with the Proconsul. And all day I could think of naught else, but went about sunk in pain. An old dream came back to torture me. Again I could see Novatus in the Fish Gate, wrapped, even as now, in white toga and mantle, passing me by...to join a woman.

But at a later hour Jesus Himself sought to comfort me, albeit with a stern comfort.

We sat encamped in a grove, eating our mid-day meal from baskets, He in the midst, upraised on a rock. His regal head, in the green light of the grove and lifted against its foliage, had the look of an alabaster statue. From my seat on the ground I saw Him in profile. Then of a sudden He turned, His eyes fell on my tear-stained face and He beamed on me with that smile wherewith He would oftentimes watch our little behaviours ? a smile spiced with wit and wisdom, sweet with tenderness, deep with a mingled joy and sorrow beyond our knowing. I flung back my head, brushed off the tears from my cheeks and flashed Him an answering smile. And at this He broke into laughter:

"Ah, the sun is out again! The sun is shining! I am well pleased. But" ? ineffable tones gentled His voice ?  
"if the cloud weep not, how shall the meadow laugh? The hurricane, the cyclone and

the blast are but harbingers of spring."

Then He spoke of the tempests  
that sometimes rage over Galilee's lake.

"Strong ships are not conquered  
by the sea! They ride the waves like galloping steeds."

"Winds from every point, from the  
north, south, east and west have beaten against my Ark" ? smiling, He swung  
both hands to depict a boat in a storm ? "yet my Ark still floats. A single  
wave has submerged many a great ship...yet, my Ark still floats!"

And now He sat straight and  
triumphant.

"Though the waves should rise to  
the zenith of heaven, I shall preserve an invariable heart. For I know my  
goal...it  
is even as sighted land before me...and my eyes are fixed upon this and swerve  
not  
from it."

Once more His glance fell on me  
and he called:

"Come, Mary, sit beside me."

I rose and went over to Him and  
sank on the grass at His feet and laid my hand on His knee, and He covered it  
with  
His hand. And then, looking down on me with a great compassion, He said:

"Verily acceptance is the true  
path. When man surrenders His will unto God he is always happy. Your heart must  
become so tranquil, Mary, so invariable that neither trial nor woe will affect  
its peace. You must be wholly submissive. Then you shall have no will of your  
own and shall ask for naught but the Will of God. Whatsoever may happen, even  
in this nether world, is by the Will of God. And when man forgets his own will,  
his will is the Will of God, and all  
that he does is the Will of God.

"I can hide nothing from you,  
Lord," I murmured.

His hand rose high in the gesture  
of a king.

"Nothing!"

And then He smiled.

"Be happy, Mary! Unhappiness and  
the love of the Father cannot exist in the same heart, for the love of the

Father is happiness."

"This is my wish for you" ? His great eyes gazed beyond me ? that you become the essence of purity; that you become as a glowing lamp, diffusing the light of the love of God to all men; that you become as a star and shine forever from the horizon of universal glory upon centuries and cycles."

Nevertheless, when at sundown I followed Him up the mount, the multitude also following, I went as before...sunk in pain. And when all were dispersed and we came down the hill in the twilight and the highway stretched before us, a wave of grief wholly submerged my small ship. For, stirring the dust of the highway into clouds, I had seen horses and a gilded chariot, and Novatus erect in the chariot holding the reins. And as I stopped by the side of the road...my heart choking me...expecting ? knew not what ? again he passed me by with averted face.

But there came a day when we who served in the household being alone with our Lord, sad thoughts were forgot in the abounding joy of His nearness.

Free of guests at the mid-day meal, all sat at table with our Beloved, and the ever-toiling Mary, mother of James and Joseph ? she who spent other days in the kitchen ? was bidden by Him to the seat at His right hand. Then He made merry with her, for He greatly loved her laughing spirit.

That day so full was her heart for that she was sitting next the Lord, she scarce could touch her food. Smiling He heaped her plate.

"I perceive you are an angel, Mary. Angels eat not! Or, mayhap, you are going home to a luscious meal, and saving your appetite for that!"

Mary looked down, abashed.

"You are kind to me," she said.

"God knows the degree of it!" He answered with a deep sigh.

"I am not an angel, then," I laughed, "for I eat every morsel you set before me."

He held out to me on a platter three dried dates, black as though burnt to a crisp.

"Here, Mary, are Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego." And I knew not if He were jesting or in earnest, for the jests of the Master hid meanings ? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been cast into a fiery furnace ? yet had come forth alive. When He spoke again it

was with gravity.

"You are wise, Mary Magdalena, in that you eat all I give you, bitter or sweet."

Then He turned to the mother of James and Josés.

"Mary's heart is pure like unto the snow on Hermon. I am her witness that she is pure. She spoke one word of truth to me which I shall never forget."

"Will you not tell us?"

"Nay, I cannot tell you, for this was between Mary and me."

"Secret?" asked the other Mary.

"Oh, verily secret!"

"My Lord, I said, "if ever I told you an untruth, it was that I deceived myself."

"There are degrees of truth," He answered me, "but that one word of yours which has so pleased me was perfect truth."

And I knew the word He praised was this: What can I do with my heart?

"Rabboni," I cried, "You are the heart of God. You alone can drive out the stranger from these poor hearts. Oh, do this for mine!"

He turned and His gaze burned upon me and in it was a majesty of sorrow. Then He touched my eyes with His finger-tips, as though drying tears yet unshed.

On another day Vashti came, bringing Simon, her son of four years, and David, the babe. The house, as ever, was full of people, among them two other small boys brought by their mothers to be blest. And at early eventide all were assembled in the Master's chamber. This chamber is large and high and faces the sea and its walls are whited.

Our Lord sat majestic in the midst. The sun's rays, slanting through the windows, glistened upon Him. His robes, spread out in white folds on the floor, were like the great base of a statue. So upright He sat, so solemn, clothed with such might that I thought:

Thus

Moses must have looked when he thundered forth the Law.

Then, while the children played at His feet, He opened His lips to speak, and at this His austerity fell from

Him like a dropped cloak and with the sorcery of His unearthly joy He taught us of happiness.

"Happiness is life. The happiness of the spirit is everlasting life. This is a light which is not followed by darkness. This is an honour which is not followed by shame. This is a life which is not followed by death. This great blessing is obtained by man through naught but the guidance of God."

"This happiness is the source wherefrom man is born and spheres are framed and the Kingdom of God appears like unto the sun at mid-day. This happiness is the love of God. This happiness is the eternal might, the rays of which shine forth unto the temples of unity. Were it not for this happiness the worlds would not have been created."

When the Master had ended and now sat silent, gazing toward the sea, we women went into the kitchen, to return with wine and cake for the guests and milk for the children.

Now our Lord turned to the children and drew them up to His knees and gathered them to His breast. And He caressed and played with them, while they, enfolded in his arms, raised wondering faces to His smiles. Then He set them upon the floor and, calling to Vashti to bring their bowls of milk and one for Himself also, He got upon the floor with them. And there, in the midst of these little ones, He said:

"I am hungry too. We will take our milk together."

Tenderness played on His immortal face. He sipped from His own bowl and fed each child with a spoon.

In that chamber stood an old man, hands crossed on his breast like lifted birds' wings, his eyes cast down, and upon his cheeks, below the withered eyelids, trickled unheeded tears.

Now when night was come and the people were leaving, one of the mothers passed by, her little son at her side, and I heard the lisp of the babe:

"Is the Lord that blessed me, mother, that same Lord who holds the moon and the stars in His hand and makes the sunshine?"

Ah, those days in Capernaum...small wonder that I dwell so long on their perfect joy. They came to a sudden end.

One night as we sat at meat with our Lord, none being present but the twelve, those of our household and the holy mother (lately arrived from Nazareth), He, turning to us with a solemn

look,  
bade us make ready at once to go with Him to Jerusalem for the Passover.

"We will go up in secret to the  
Passover," He said.

And my heart gave a great leap.  
At last, I thought, I shall have news of Novatus. Perchance, even I may meet  
him! Then shall I know of a certainty if he has ceased to love me.

## XII

NOW WE WERE on our way to  
Jerusalem, walking in the footsteps of the Lord, a sun-clothed eagle treading  
earth, who strode on before us, His garments swinging, the sleeves of His cloak  
like great pinions; while Judas with His money-bag followed...in His shadow.

We went by way of Jericho, which  
leads to that desert of salt shoring the Dead Sea. Unto this we drew nigh, down  
a white aisle of pillars and pyramids. Bleached bones these strange forms seem  
to be, standing about the sea called Dead, whose laughing waters hide the dead  
sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Then slowly, through murderous heat, licked by  
breezes of fire, we mounted the lava wilderness that crags the sea and white  
desert.

In the midst of this peaked and petrified  
wilderness stands a small inn, into which we women crowded for the night, the  
men sleeping out in the court, for the inn was already over-full. Now the holy  
mother was with us and the mother of James and Joses, John's mother and the  
young Salome.

With the dawn we set out again  
upon our journey, and at last from a flowered plateau sighted Jerusalem. Its  
spired temple on Mount Moriah,  
uplifted above the great square of wall and with all of Jerusalem's domes  
behind it, appeared to my eyes like a high-crowned bride, leading the  
procession of the city forth.

All Bethany met these spent  
travellers . All Bethany gathered at the house of Mary, wherein we rested. And  
when the Lord made His entrance into Jerusalem, all Bethany companioned Him, a  
surging, rejoicing band, strewing branches broken from the palm trees on the  
path  
before Him, and He rode forward, mounted on a white ass.

From the day whereon we entered  
Jerusalem, lo! our Beloved changed. A force at white heat had His body in its  
grip, an inner commotion that all but burst His body and made it like to a  
mettlesome  
charger.

Now, in the faces of Pharisee and

Sadducee, in the very Temple itself, He hurled anew audacities ? claims heretofore never whispered save to a few believing hearts; divine and perilous teachings for the age-to-be; anathema on this brutish age; anathema on the Pharisees and money-changers in the Temple...while we listened in mingled wonder and terror, for among the multitude herded about Him, hanging upon His words, we saw baleful priests and heard their mutterings.

One night, returning from Bethany to Jerusalem, He gathered together Mary's household to depict a scene we had witnessed not, when that very morning certain Rabbis had pursued Him to the Temple cloisters.

Buoyantly He depicted this, laughing the while He turned into foolishness the accusations of the Pharisees. And yet...that laughter! What was this new sound in it that struck into my heart such dread?

"When I had ended my discourse," smiled the Master, "a Rabbi answered me thus:

" 'As you well know we expect plain signs in the day of the advent of Messiah, and unless these signs be fulfilled, to believe He is come is manifestly impossible.

" 'It is written He shall appear from an unknown place. You are from Nazareth. We know you and your people.

" 'According to the clear text of the Scriptures, Messiah is to wield a sceptre, a sword, and to sit upon the throne of David. But you! You have not so much as a staff or a net.

" 'Messiah is to fulfil the Law of Moses, but you have broken it.

" 'In the day of Messiah the Jews are to conquer the earth, till all mankind becomes subject unto them. In the cycle of Messiah justice is to reign. Even among the beasts shall this prevail, so that wolf and lamb shall quaff water from the same fountain, eagle and quail dwell in the same nest, lion and deer pasture in the same meadow, cat and mouse be at peace in the same house! But behold the oppression and wrong rampant in your time. The Jews are captive to the Romans. Rome has uprooted our foundations, pillaging and slaying us. What manner of justice is this?'

"But I made answer: 'These texts have an inner meaning. Sovereignty I do possess, but it is of the eternal kind, resembling not earth's empires. And I conquer not by the sword. My conquests

are

through love. I have a sword but it is not of steel. My sword is my tongue, which divided truth from falsehood.' "

"Ah, what said the Rabbi to that?"

I cried.

"He said naught to that," laughed

the Master, "but later I heard Him addressing a multitude. 'The Nazarene is a liar. He is the false Messiah. Believe Him not. Beware lest ye listen. He will mislead

you; will lure you from the religion of your fathers, will create turmoil among you.'

"And as I set forth for Bethany,"

said Jesus after a silent moment (and now the while He spoke, we were all aware of a mystery and of a gathering darkness, and a fear clutched at our hearts...yet

we believed it not), "as I set forth for Bethany the whispers of certain Sadducees, consulting together in Jerusalem, reached me...from afar. 'Let us hold

a conclave and conceive a plan. This man is a deceiver. We must do something! What?' " ? gaily the Master mimicked their confusion ? " 'Let us expel Him from the Land. Let us imprison Him. Let us oppress Him. Ah-h! Let us refer the matter to Rome. Thus shall we be quit of Him.' "

Jesus rose to His feet. He went

to the window and gazed into the night. On His lips was a strange exultant smile. His eyes gleamed like unto Jewels.

### XIII

THERE CAME A DAY fateful for me...and for two others.

We, the eighteen were seated with our Beloved in one of the thin-columned cloisters of the Temple. People on their way to the shrines, glimpsing the Lord from across the spacious pavement, turned and came toward us, and soon a crowd compassed us about.

The master had but just begun to speak, when of a sudden the noise of scuffling feet and an ugly swarm of phylacteried men, like unto a flight of ravens, rushed upon Him. Two dragged between them a woman.

Why...I knew the face of this woman. This was Phyllis, one of the loveliest of Jerusalem's courtesans. What had these Rabbis to do with her that they should force her to the Lord?

And now one stepped from the midst, a man with a mouth flat and cruel, and tall eyebrows, and I heard him say unto Jesus:

"Rabboni, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Moses commanded such to be stoned. What say you to this?"

The man was mad! Phyllis taken in adultery? She was no common harlot. Then all became clear to me. These priests had seized her in a helpless moment, to be used as bait for "the friend of sinners" that He be tempted to deny the law. And none would have dared to lay hands on her but that she had lost the favour of Pilate. Had not my Lord been present I would have fought them all for her.

The Lord seemed to hear not the crafty question. A white peace enwrapped Him and made Him to shine. He stirred Himself and bent low to the pavement to write thereon...to write with His finger on the temple's stones. Was He writing a new Law there ? upon that foundation ? a merciful new law? Who could doubt, as He crouched there, the Lion of Heaven, that He and He alone was Lawmaker now?

So still was He, save for that moving finger, that His very stillness (or was it His voiceless will?) commanded silence. I stole a swift glance at Phyllis. Poor woman, she stood cowering, white as the slim columns about her. My pity cried out to her. Yet I knew these evil priests had but brought her to her eternal refuge.

And now the Master raised Himself and His eyes flashed a terrible fire as God's answer to man's hypocrisy rang from His lips.

"He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

And again He stooped and lost Himself in His secret writing. And one by one the priests slunk out...an old man first.

Now none but Phyllis was left. She stood gazing upon the Lord, where He still bent low above that traceless script. Her lips were parted, as though in wonder. She laid a hand on her breast. The curls of her head were dishevelled, her tunic torn, but her plaintive disarray made her the lovelier.

And now Jesus lifted again that mighty head and in His eyes, as He fixed them on this woman, was the burning revelation of the love of God.

"Where are your accusers? Has no

man condemned you?"

"No man, Lord," she whispered.

"Neither do I condemn you." Oh  
the music of the voice of Him who was more than man, who bore God's messages!

"Neither  
do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more."

As the Master strode from the  
Temple courts, descending the white cascade of steps, Judas crept to my side.

Judas had never abandoned hope to  
win me, even though he knew...as who did not?...that my heart was torn between  
two deathless

loves, and of late this hope had waxed in effrontery. Now he whispered:

"Go after the woman, Mary. Jesus  
bids you go after her."

"The Master said naught to me..." I  
began, doubtful.

"Go, or you will be too late. He  
wishes her brought back to Him."

"Go yourself, Judas."

"Stubborn one! I will come with you.  
Hurry now. See, she is swift."

We followed the affrighted woman  
through the Golden Gate and up the Bethany road. At last to a path so  
familiar...so  
familiar...running through a vineyard to a Roman villa. Ah, what was this? The  
woman was on her way to my villa! My gate opened and took her in.

"Judas," I gasped, "my house!"

"I heard it had been sold." His  
voice was shallow and hard as metal.

Sick to the heart that Novatus  
had sold my villa and Phyllis was here in my stead, I all but ran to the  
entrance ? too shaken to heed, or care, that Judas followed me not. Once  
more I stood at my door, "Salve" inscribed on the stones of its  
vestibule...Salve!

A slave admitted me into the  
atrium and bade me be seated by the pool till she asked of her mistress if she  
would receive "one who came from Jesus."

By the pool again...the worn  
pavement beneath me feet, the columns standing about the myrtle-bordered basin,

reflected in the clear water, the cupids at play on the walls...the old enclosure, wrapping me about with the old spell. I sat in my own reclining chair, Novatus' chair ? vacant ? beside me. Naught was changed. We might have been here but yesterday.

Twice had the Lord summoned me from this spot, through His messengers, Mary of Bethany, John. The Lord had been stern concerning this house of the little loves. Now I found myself led back...to a house empty for me, with Novatus gone from it. Worse than empty, aliens being here. I found myself led back...sent back by the Lord, using me now for a messenger, to summon another woman away from love. Oh strange....

The slave, re-appearing, bade me follow her. As in a dream I followed. We crossed the court to the rear wing in which were the cubicula. Beyond the looped curtains at the central exit, between the columns of the portico, I could see my blowing fountain, silver against the dark trees. And a sharp cry sprang from my heart for Novatus, my beloved, and for a vanished delight. Till now I had sat; I had walked with the spectre of my beloved. Now I demanded of God that I see him once more in the body.

The slave led the way unto my own bed-chamber, my scarlet chamber opening on the evergreens of the garden.

The woman lay on my couch...while the masks, tragic and comic, stared from the red panels above her, and as I stood in the arch, she looked up with beautiful eyes hardened against me.

"You come from that great man who saved me from those hypocrites? Devils! They lied, falsely accused me. They had not that proof they claimed. But...who is He, that could shame them? Jesus of Nazareth, I know. But in reality, who is He?"

I moved to her side and, sinking to a stool, gazed at her long and sadly, for all that was struggling within her I knew. Even in my own breast at this moment such a struggle was set up.

"You wish to know?" I said at last. "For to know is to lose what peace you have, to barter it for a peace you know not...yet."

"I guess what you would tell me. You believe Him to be Messiah. But I tell you, I will not believe! He said, 'Go, and sin no more.' I will not have a Messiah who calls love 'sin'. Indeed, we need Him not who know the perfect love of earth."

At the head of the couch, thrown upon a chair, lay a man's cloak. This she seized and devoured it with kisses.

"Love is not sin," she cried, "love is not sin! Love never divides the soul from God. Nay, hate alone does this."

Wordless I gazed, my grief deepening. How poor a messenger was I! What had I to say to this sister...I...with passion asurge in my own heart, desire for my own beloved aflame in me again?

A step. A heavy step. The curtains were drawn aside. And Novatus himself stood before me ? Novatus in the flesh, even as-I had prayed to see him ? glancing from Phyllis to me, from me to Phyllis with dazed and unbelieving eyes.

There were prayers then that God answered with a jest!

I drew my veil closer and moved to the door that led to my garden. Novatus took a step toward me and I glimpsed an outstretched hand. In the taut silence I could all but hear his misery crying for me through his mute lips. Yet I gave no sign. For, as I turned forever from him I had loved so long, though my knees were shaking and my body weak, my heart was cold within me.

"Love is not sin," Phyllis had said. "Only hate divides the soul from God." And my own soul had made obeisance to the great truth of her words, and, victim myself of a love too strong for the net of man's puny laws, I had had no answer for her. Then I must not, must not hate ? nor so much as scorn. But...how could it be...my Novatus, from whom I had branched as from a deep root, as an artery from the heart, joined now with this other woman in "the perfect love" ? become one flesh with a stranger?

I dragged myself through the garden, where those foolish marble cupids stood frozen beneath the dark boughs of the trees. I glanced neither to right nor left, though my fountain as I passed its basin sprayed my hand with a last caress. And when I had closed the gate behind me and found myself out in the vineyard ? alone ? for a little space I stood a lifeless thing, even as the wife of Lot...when she looked back.

XIV

MERCIFUL grief came...and melted me. Remembrance of my Lord stabbed through me, quickened my numbness to life, released a flood of tears and all my love for the Highest.

In that white house on the summit ? the home of Mary and Martha ? He with His loved ones dwelt for a time. I would haste to Him who alone shamed not the heart.

Enough my own shame...wakened to

full awareness. Toiling up the steep ascent I lashed myself with my shame.  
Long, long had the Eternal Lover wooed my heart for God's love, and I...ingrate  
that

I was!...for that my stiff-necked will was set upon a fellow-creature, had  
withheld from this True Lover the heart I had vowed to Him ? nor known that  
I withheld it! Here I was now, on the way back to the Lord...the love I would  
yield not snatched from me by a ribald jest of fate ? creeping back, beaten  
and broken.

Yet the filching of that love had  
left my heart empty at last of "the stranger," and as I climbed the weary road  
so great a love for the True One burned in this emptiness that, humbled and  
guilty  
though I might be, I must perforce seek His presence. Could so small a thing as  
shame deter me from the Forgiver? Now I knew the climax of all pain ? the  
pain of the spirit's passion, a passion forever hopeless of attainment, even by  
winged spirit, its object being too pure, too high.

At the house in Bethany I found  
none but the women, Mary and Martha, the mother of John and the holy mother.  
Word had come from the Lord in Jerusalem that He would not be here till night,  
for He and the twelve were to keep the Feast of the Passover in the house of  
the mother of John Mark.

Ah, how could I wait? So parched  
was I now for His nearness, so eager my heart to tell Him that it was verily  
His at last to do with as He willed.

The sun sank in threatening  
clouds and dusk fell to night, billowed with clouds. Midnight passed and the  
first dark hours of the morning...and still the Master came not. Helpless to  
conceal  
our fears, we women crowded at a window, our eyes strained toward Jerusalem.

At last I could bear the suspense  
to longer. Driven by panic now, I made bold to seek my Lord. But that none  
might know my purpose, I slipped unseen from the chamber wherein we had  
gathered  
to watch the road and on tip-toe stole to the house door, then, myself out upon  
the road, hugged the cliff lest those watchers discover me.

Out upon the road...out in the  
night...alone...what was this I felt in the night that weighed so heavily on  
me,  
this pall that stifled me? The black air was stiff with a living

Had my Lord been slain in  
Jerusalem? Ah no, that could not be. We Jews well knew that no true prophet  
could be slain by human hands.  
But what had they done to him,

then, tonight? Where could I find Him? Where?

I came to the gate of the Garden  
of Gethsemane. It stood ajar. Could He be here ? safe ? in Gethsemane?  
For often He stopped to rest here. But would He linger at such an hour?  
Still...I  
would search this first, the gate being open.

I groped my way to the grove of  
olive trees. Grey as ghosts they were in the night, their branches writhing to  
heaven. Rumbling sounds reached my ears and, affrighted, I paused, thinking  
animals  
might be here. Then under trees I saw forms huddled, and I knew these sounds  
were the snores of sleeping men.

I drew nearer. Ah yes, there was  
Peter, there James, and a little beyond them, John in quiet sleep. My Lord must  
not be far now. And then I saw a lone figure, prostrate on a rock.

I stood, my hands clasped on my  
breast, sighing for joy. I had found Him and all was well!

And now His voice quivered, into  
a chant ? so low that I heard not the words ? then rose in a great wail.  
And my heart stopped...for what was this He prayed?

"Abba! Father! Remove this cup  
from me. Howbeit, not my will but Thine be done."

"This cup"? "This cup"? What cup?

Terror seized upon and shook me.  
Thought blotted out, I knew but two things. I must stay. I must hide. I sank to  
the ground behind a flowering bush, where I still could see (myself unseen)  
that  
prostrate form on the rock...the arms outstretched...a white cross.

How was it I had rejoiced,  
believing that all was well? Why had these eyes perceived not, till fear tore  
the veils from them, the awful abandon of those outstretched arms...of that  
rolling head with face buried? The rock, gray and flat, upon which He lay  
became  
to me a stark island, lapped by waves of a sinister sea...and He on that  
island,  
encircled by the impassable sea, sweated blood ? alone.

Who then could gain access to Him...who  
cross the boundary of this loneliness? God sorrowed here where men slept. God  
here communed with God. A pitiful woman, wide-eyed, sleepless ? watching ?  
even  
though her too bold heart yearned to soothe where none could soothe...might not  
profane by mortal touch the majesty of such sorrow, nor raise so much as a

whisper to break the dread silence of such communion.

But oh...that cup...that cup...what  
could it be, too bitter for the Lord to drink?

He rose to His knees and slowly  
lifted His face. His head fell back till His eyes strained toward the zenith of  
the clouded heavens. And again His voice soared in a chant. And though abysmal  
agony  
wrenched its tones to a strange beat, I heard ? in the few words that  
reached me ? love singing high above agony. For ? the cup forgotten ? He  
prayed for us, for His poor disciples, who would have walked in His footprints,  
but, slothful, had walked lagging; for those that slept under the trees...so  
near.

"Father," He prayed, "I have  
manifested Thy Name unto them Thou gavest me out of the world. Thine they were  
and Thou gavest them to me...I pray for them."

The deep tones sank to a murmur;  
then rang forth strong.

"Neither pray I for those alone,  
but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. That they all  
be one, as Thou, Father, art one in me and I in Thee...that the love wherewith  
Thou  
hast loved me may be in them and I in them."

And when He had ceased to pray,  
He knelt for a long time motionless...a statue on that rock.

At last He staggered to His feet,  
and I saw Him turn from the rock and move to the tree under which lay Peter,  
nigh to my rose-bush. His robe was ghostly in the night. His arms hung down in  
the  
loose white sleeves. His head drooped...and never before had I seen that head  
bowed low. Enshrouded by His loneliness, He walked with faltering step. To me,  
He was like a great white eagle ? wounded. He stooped and stood above Peter  
and called this disciple's name. And Peter stirred and half-rose; then sank to  
the ground and straightaway slept again. And I heard the Lord groan:

"Oh Peter, could you not watch  
with me one hour?"

And now...behold His coming, with  
that slow step, toward the rose-bush. Fright overtook me; shame consumed me,  
for here I was an unbidden guest...and a secret watcher.

Still...He came on. Beside the bush  
He paused; then turned His face to where I sat cowering.

"Mary! You!" He cried. In that

cry was a note that rent the heart, a darkened joy ? as a cry from one too heavy-laden who finds solace in a little thing.

One step...and He stood over me,  
and I cast down my eyes before His broken beauty, pale in its nimbus of sorrow.

"You, Mary, are awake."

I opened my eyes, I upturned  
them, and, because He stood so near, I could dimly see that He smiled on me,  
and that it was a wild smile gleaming through anguish.

"Forgive...Lord...forgive. Accept my  
heart...now...I implore."

From His height He spoke.

"My daughter...the heart should  
seek the Beloved of the World, for verily He is faithful. Henceforth  
forever...forever...be  
the lover of the Sun, aflame with the fire of the love of God. This...this is  
eternal."

And I fell on my face before Him.

My Lord still stood in the grass  
of Gethsemane. Ah, I know, for my face now rested on His feet, imprisoning them  
there, though I dared not...tonight...kiss their sacredness, nor had I the  
tears wherewith  
to bathe them. He still stood upon earth, but his  
words floated down as from a receding cloud.

The darkness had begun to lift  
and now a jagged rip of crimson wounded the east.

"See, the dawn," He breathed. "Go  
now, my daughter...Mary. I am with you always ? in every world."

I looked up. He stood pointing to  
the dawn. And as I gazed...oh not at the heavens, but at Him...Him...mutely  
pleading,  
for had He not said, "Go"?...He flung back His head and His eyes blazed down  
with  
such almighty love that in that look...again I saw God.

"Forever?"

"Forever...oh Beloved!"

I knew that I must go ? must  
leave Him to the awful secret of His "cup." I crept back from Him, facing His  
glory till I could see no more, for the distance and the tears that came at  
last.

Ah, where should I go? Could I  
but cling to the wall of Gethsemane, to wait His coming forth, that I might  
follow...follow...to

I knew not what. But alas, He had dismissed me. And as I lingered hesitant,  
there by the wall, I saw emerging from the Golden Gate a multitude with swords  
and staves, a multitude of priests and elders and captains of the Temple, and  
leading

them ? Judas! My senses reeled. In a lightening flash I beheld the form of  
the cup. I turned to run back to Gethsemane ? back to my Lord ? to  
drink that cup of blood with Him. But now my body reeled. I swooned.

A hand bathing my brow, then  
holding a draught to my lips...and cruel life returned. Ah, I knew that hand  
and  
the signet it bore!

"You are better...dear? Thank the  
gods I have found you! Having watched you...yesterday...from...from your villa,  
climbing toward Bethany, I came this way, seeking you. Mary...beloved...you are  
in  
danger. The Nazarene...I grieve to tell you this...has been seized by Caiaphas.  
His  
followers too, are suspect."

"I am glad, Novatus, to be  
endangered. Have no fear for me."

"Mary, see...my litter...here on the  
road. Will you not come with me?"

"I want but to share His fate.  
Let me go."

"I cannot let you go, my dear, my  
own! Mary...for what you have seen matters not. Your love only is love to me."

"What I have seen matters not?  
Ah, indeed it matters not! Have they passed...from Gethsemane?"

"They have passed, Mary."

"They have taken my Lord to...."

"Caiaphas. Then Herod.  
Afterwards, Pilate." The words were reluctant and spoken with great pity. "You  
cannot reach Him...where He is now."

"Still, I shall go...wherever He is...."

"Come in my litter, Mary. "

"No...no. You detain me. Farewell."

And as I went, looking not back

(for I knew that Novatus followed to see that I came to no hurt), Palestine's sudden sunrise, a great fan of fire, leapt above the mountains of Moab.

XV

I SOUGHT my Lord in the  
Praetorium.

In the square before the  
Praetorium already the mob was gathering. The great Roman house, upraised upon many steps, the tall pillars of its porch, loomed above me, forbidding. The guards  
at its doors threatened me from afar. As I passed through the mob, swift, resolute, fixed upon my goal, the Beloved, I heard hateful muttering.

My heart-broken look, I think,  
was my password at the doors. Unchallenged, I entered the vast hall. Within was commotion. Dark-brooding Jews, messengers from the high priests and Herod, were crossing and re-crossing the pavement, besieging Pilate's chambers.

As I drew near, a plan in my  
mind, a door opened and John came forth. Pale as death was he, his lips set, his eyes staring. He saw me not, till I spoke.

"You have talked with Pilate?"

"No, I could get no farther than  
his antechamber."

"John...I know Pilate...a little."

"Try then to see him, Mary. Let  
us do all we can. Though...after this morning...in the garden...Mary, He gave Himself  
up, not to the hirelings of Caiaphas, but as to God. Even those ruffians fell back before His high fortitude, ashamed to arrest Him. But He would have it so. He advanced to them. He accepted Judas' filthy kiss as if it were a lover's."

"Where is He now?"

"Mary...His feet are in the stocks."

"Oh great God! Oh, could I but go  
and throw myself at His feet ? His feet in the stocks ? and beseech Him to deliver Himself. For, John, He can. Pray that Pilate may see me. Pilate could refuse Caiaphas.

Alas that I too was driven from  
Pilate's door.

Desperate, I sought a guard. For  
a fever to act now burned in me...to move...move...nor rest till I had turned my last  
stone.

"Take me," I pleaded with the guard, "to the wife of Pilate."

The noble lady Claudia received me. I found her pacing the hall, her face distraught.

"O Claudia...you love Jesus?"

"Mary, why do I love Him? I have seen Him not, save in the distance. But all last night He troubled my dreams. In my dreams He appeared...more than man! This execution...it must not go on." She wrung her hands. "This must not be on Pilate's soul. Yet I cannot move him."

"You cannot move him? Oh try once more, once more."

"He is like unto rock. I cannot penetrate. This is some political thing. No woman ? nor I ? could reach him now."

"You are the one hope, Claudia. Beg at least this of Pilate ? that Mary of Magdala be admitted to Jesus."

"For your sake I will try, even though it anger him."

I waited alone, forced to a tortured interval wherein I was helpless to do aught but wait. When at last she returned, her face bespoke her failure.

"Mary, at the door of Pilate's antechamber I met your friend Novatus hasting from it. His look was furious. Can it be that he has opposed this execution? What could you do with Novatus, Mary? The hope is slight, since it seems plain that he and Pilate have quarreled. Still, Novatus might find some means. What could you do?"

I faced her challenge, horrified.

"God knows. Even this, I will try."

And now I sought...Novatus. Claudia, the woman, having failed with her lord, perchance Mary of Magdala...the woman....

God forgive me if this were sin. Yet what mattered my small sinning, even should I forfeit heaven for it, if the life of the Lord be spared thereby, to finish that work wherefore He had come? His "cup"...had it not been this...that so soon His ministering to man must end...the

message of God silenced on His lips? Oh not pain, not death, His cup.

But where...where to find Novatus?

Of a surety not in that house where dwelt in my place, slept in my bed, that other woman! Nay, not now. In his house in the city, perchance...I recrossed the halls of the Praetorium. From a corner I heard the strong sobbing of a man. I could not pass a broken heart. There knelt Peter, his great body heaving, his face hid in tear-wet hands. I touched his shoulder.

"Peter."

He uncovered his face...and I pray that never again may I look on such despair.

"Mary, touch me not. I am accursed...with Judas. No such traitor as he. No such coward as I. A pretty pair we, to be travelling, arm and arm, through eternity. Mary, you know I love my Lord.

I was no coward in the garden. With my sword I struck off the ear of the high-priest's servant himself. My Lord healed that wound...ah God!" Again sobs rent him. "Because I could not leave Him, Mary, I crept after Him...though at long

distance...into the very court of the palace of Caiaphas! Then how could it be that fear got me...fear of what a maidservant could do? When the wench accused me

saying: 'You also were with the Nazarene, you are one of them', 'I know not the man' I lied, and spat and swore...to carry it off. In all the worlds to come, Mary, I can lift not my face to my Lord's. And He warned me. He warned me even last night that I would do this very thing. And I said, 'I will never deny you, Lord. If I must die with you, I will not deny you.' "

"Poor Peter," I answered, "grieve not. The Master's love is so great...so great, I think even this is as naught to Him. He warned you? Then He knew you would do it. He has always known all that is in you, and He loved you more than any...save John . Grieve not. I must go." And

I stooped and kissed the tears on his cheeks. "One word more. Whatever I do, you will judge me not, I know."

"I judge?"

Now I hastened to a stair leading to a back street whereby I might escape the crowds. When, as I approached the arch from which this stair turns, a clutch on my arm held me fast. Who was this impeding my flight to my so ignoble sacrifice? An iron hand wheeled me round and I stood confronted by...Judas, his face thrust close to mine ? oh

sickening  
close!

But was this Judas' face? For  
this was a stone mask of evil. Darkness suffused his eyeballs and from his body  
exuded a strange stench, as it were the stench of the dead. He stared at me  
gloating,  
daring to smile.

I wrenched myself from his  
murderous hand. Yet even then pity filled my heart for this creature, once  
human, made of flesh and blood as I; having eyes and lips and a head and a  
heart...all feeling members...and heart longings and some good deeds. Once he  
had  
brought me a lock of the Master's hair.

"Judas," I said with a great  
sadness, "your devil has eaten up your humanity. Judas, I hate you not."

"I will say you hate me not! I am  
left your one strong man. Novatus has taken another woman into your own bed.  
Jesus you behold a traitor to His trusting race, a hypocrite and coward; in  
actual  
fact subservient to Rome, yet slyly cozening us with dreams of a free  
hereafter, of a kingdom in the world to come," he sneered, baring his pointed  
teeth; "now brought low indeed...sold to Caiaphas by Judas for thirty pieces of  
silver!  
Soon will you see Judas mustering, as Jesus feared to muster, all Judea against  
Rome. And more than Judea. The malcontent throughout Rome's dominions will  
Judas unite under his banner. You will yet see Judas king of an empire. And if  
Judas be not Messiah Himself, from whose loins should Messiah spring but from  
mine and yours...."

I crimsoned his cheek with a  
stinging blow.

"Go, poor creature!" I cried, "Can  
you not see that you are but a burst bubble, and all you can ever hope for from  
men is contempt?"

He fell back. Sinking to a bench  
he raised his eyes to me. And those uprolled eyes, that stricken face, like  
unto a dumb beast on whom a quagmire has seized to slowly suck him down, I  
shall cease not to see while I live.

Turning my back upon him while he  
still sat motionless, I tottered down the steps to the door. Weary unto death,  
I dragged myself along Jerusalem's streets, down stepped streets, buttressed  
streets,  
vaulted streets, past latticed and balconied happy houses, now decked for the  
Passover, till I reached the abode of Novatus.

Felix, that slave who had ever  
been my friend, opened the gate to me. When he saw me his eyes filled with pity  
and grave concern, and I knew he dreaded to speak. Yet tidings like unto his  
must be told at once.

"My master," he said, "has been  
forced to speed to Rome, by the Governor himself. He went raging, my lady, for  
that he must leave your neighbourhood. He put you in my care and you know I  
will  
do my best. When you came, I was on the point of starting forth to trace you. I  
would have sought you earlier, but that some trouble with the slaves..."

"He cannot be overtaken, Felix?"

"I am sure he cannot, my lady. He  
left in a chariot drawn by his race horses, commanded to catch the galley which  
sails today from Joppa . Sent on some trumped-up errand to get him out of  
Jerusalem  
at this moment...when he would have interfered to save your Master. So I  
gathered  
from what I knew of his purpose, and from his last words spoken to me. 'Those  
who forced my going,' he said, 'would do well to look to my return.' He has  
already been gone upwards of an hour."

So...Novatus would have saved my  
Lord ? of his own will would have saved my Lord ? and now he was  
gone...gone....

After pressing on me a little  
bread and wine Felix provided me a litter to convey me back to the Praetorium,  
whither my heart panted to return, and himself came on foot to guard me.

But for his escort never could we  
have reached the Praetorium, for by now the square before it was filled with a  
churning mob and, as we clove away midst struggling bodies, I heard a cry go up  
from a thousand throats:

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Sick with horror I parted the  
curtains and looked out. All around me was a sea of faces that were not as the  
faces of men, but of wolves and hyenas and jackals. And creeping, coiling among  
these wild beasts, I saw men with the Law bound on their heads. I saw these  
pause to whisper, now here, now there, and knew they were whispering poison  
into the mob's mindlessness.

Ravens wolves in sheep's  
clothing...how could it be that such were triumphing, that darkness could  
defeat  
light? Ah see! In the sky, uprolling clouds...and daylight blanching.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

I dropped the curtains to shut out the sight of those crying mouths. But the cries...the cries...I could not shut out, even with hands pressed against my ears. Oh, passing strange that at such a moment hope should have flashed into my heart.

"Felix, " I called through the curtains, "are we near to the Praetorium?"

"Here now, my lady."

We came to a halt and I stepped from the litter. But alas for my poor hope, these doors were now shut, set with a double guard. I turned to Felix.

"Take me to the sentinels. Make them let me in."

"How can I, lady?"

"I have had a thought, Felix...nay, more than a thought. Pilate can refuse to execute. The Jews cannot do it. The law forbids. And something in my heart has told me that Pilate's will is wavering. Oh take me to the guards."

"I am but a slave and my master has been sent away."

"Felix! Felix! Why waste time? It is certain that Pilate has talked with Jesus. And something in my heart tells me...take me to those sentinels!"

But, confronting the sentinels, I importuned faces of stone. The threshold was impassable. Crazed, I beat upon the central door. Then a guard seized me by the arm and, despite Felix's fiery defense, dragged me down the steps and thrust me into the mob. I found myself face to face with John. In his misery he was stern with me.

"All this is useless ? worse than useless! Come with me now. I am seeking the holy mother, my mother, and Mary."

We found them at last ? God knows how ? three mute women wedged in that sweaty pressure of bodies, cries for the blood of our Beloved in their very ears.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Give us our king. Give us the king of the Jews!"

First I saw the face of John's mother. This...dear God...was pitiable enough. But it was when those others turned, the holy mother and Mary of Bethany, that my knees weakened and the beating of

my heart failed. For in the eyes of the mother, widened with an awful sorrow, I saw mirrored the death of our Lord, while in Mary's eyes danced the gleam of the mad.

The central door of the palace opened. The churning of the crowd ceased and silence fell. A man strode through, wearing a toga bordered with purple. The sleekness of his face was broken into sagging flesh. His eyes stared, startled, uncertain. And I knew my heart had told me the truth and Pilate's will was indeed wavering. He came to the head of the steps.

"I find no fault in Jesus the Nazarene," he began. He cleared his throat. "You have a custom that I should release a prisoner at the time of the Passover. will you therefore that I release...the King of the Jews?"

A shout went up.

"Not this Jesus! Jesus Barabbas. Give us Jesus Barabbas!"

Now was my opportunity. Now would I cast myself at Pilate's feet and from the depths of my agony sway him to my Lord, who, in some way I know not, had already half-persuaded him to courage.

With the strength of the desperate I pushed my way through the mob and had all but reached the steps when two steel hands pinned me. A priest, his phylacteries dropped between his cruel brows, with a nose like the beak of a bird of prey, held me fast, dug the talons of one hand into my wrist, clapped the other to my mouth. More birds of prey closed me in. And ere I could move, Pilate turned on his heel and was gone. The great door clanged behind him.

Now the priests let me go.

Towered about by those striking bodies, I struggled back to John and the women. Felix had been lost long since.

"My child, all is vain," said the mother, speaking at last, His hour is come."

"Yes," said John, "His hour is come. I told you." John's face was ashen; its youth dead.

"His hour is come! His hour is come!" babbled Mary of Bethany.

We waited...I know not how long. It may have been a little time.

Then again the door opened. And now two stood in the porch between the pillars ? Pilate and with Him...Oh God!...the Master. The Master, haggard, death-pale. On His brow was a crown of

thorns.

From His shoulders hung a soldier's cloak...a scarlet cloak, soiled and tattered.

His submissive hand held a reed.

Wickedly mocked..."King of the Jews!" Yet to that crown of thorns, to those red rags, He lent a terrible majesty. And in the calm of His eyes, gazing down so steadfastly on the fury of these "chosen ones" ...in the very act of rejecting their Messiah, I saw naught but the pity of God.

"Behold the Man, " cried Pilate.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!,"  
roared the multitude.

Strong from the strength at his side, Pilate spoke roughly:

"Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

And then from within that multitude crafty voices: "You know we cannot crucify Him. You know well our law that forbids the taking of life.

But we have a law and by that law He ought to die for He has made Himself the Son of God."

"He has made Himself king, and he who makes himself king speaks against Caesar. If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend."

Threatening voices ? not of the common people, these. And Pilate flinched and turned, and my Lord tuned with him...and I saw that the back of my Lord's red cloak was darkly stained...as with blood.

"John," I groaned, "they have scourged Him."

John bent his head.

The door closed. Then once again it opened. And this time Pilate came forth alone, except that a servant followed, bearing an ewer, a basin and a napkin. As before, Pilate stood at the head of the steps, and his servant with him. He dipped his hands in the basin and washed and wrung and dried them. In silence he washed his thin, white hands. Then he turned to the throng in the square. Till now his eyes had been downcast. Now I could see into them. God in heaven...they were more at peace!  
He spoke.

"I am innocent of the blood of  
this just man. See ye to it."

Sunk in abysmal despair for which  
there are no words in any tongue, for no sorrow like to this, no loss like to  
this, has ever before overwhelmed the human heart, I waited...we five  
waited...while  
a lurid pallor, sickened the daylight.

To the right of the Praetorium  
stands a low wing of the building, having grated windows set into its stones  
and a door level to the pavement. At last the mother turned and with firm step  
walked  
to this door. And we turned and went after her. I knew...I knew then. He would  
come forth by this door.

The door clanked and swung open from  
within...and through it protruded the great beam of a cross.

With the beam, His thorn-crowned  
head emerged, and now His brow was dewed with blood from the thorns. Then His  
body staggered forth. And then His gaze fell on us, His loved ones, and He  
stopped  
and stood still before us . Oh fearful to see Him bowed beneath those heavy  
beams, that martyred head weighed down, His eyes upraised, His eyes upraised to  
us! Roughly the soldiers seized Him and swung Him round, and, ever submissive  
He stumbled on.

From the door emerged another  
cross, and behind it still another. Mean figures ? culprits ? bent  
beneath these crosses, following after the Lord...none but these now following  
in  
His footsteps. And thus we saw our beloved,  
crossing the court of that prison, staggering toward a multitude poised to  
leap.

Ah and how it leapt, this herd of  
hyenas, wolves and jackals! The soldiers themselves could not restrain them.  
Fleeing on ahead of John and the others, mad to be near my Lord while I  
could...while  
I could...even though that herd trample me to death, I could see at close hand  
the gambols of these animals, could see them spring to buffet the blood-flecked  
face, to spit on that holy face...to mingle their spittle with the Lord's  
blood...agile  
as monkeys, capering before Him; supple-jointed, bowing backward the while they  
mouthed their mockery.

"Hail, King of the Jews!"

But some women dared to weep.

The soldiers at last cleared the way, and, close to my Lord, I walked with Him to Golgotha. Ah, could I but have borne His cross!

## XVI

THE WALK was short. The hill called Golgotha lies but a little beyond the Fish Gate. In shape it is like unto a skull, white as a skull, being stony, and round it spread gardens. On that spring day, flower-studded gardens, lilies and red anemones jewelling the grass, which would have been a fair sight, but in the lurid darkness of that day the very flowers had turned pale.

Golgotha rolls up, not high, but oh steep, steep! Oh, cruel to see our Beloved struggling beneath His long cross up that rocky hill.

Was it the agony on our faces that clove a path for us through the soldiers' midst? For now, with our Lord, with His guards, we stood alone on the summit...John, the holy mother, three Marys...while singly, under their crosses, the thieves appeared above its chalky ridge.

The executioners took the cross from the shoulders of our dear Lord and dropped it clattering to the stones. A soldier advanced and loosed the scarlet cloak so that it fell in a heap on the cross at the Lord's feet. And He stood robed only in the long white tunic His mother had woven for Him, compassed about by soldiers. Then the executioners turned to those others waiting, doubled beneath their crosses, and stripped them and laid them out upon the beams.

I hid my face in my hands. And there was a dreadful silence on that hill...and to me, with my fingers pressed upon my eyes, darkness. Shrieks split the silence, followed by hammering and more shrieks. Then the sound of scuffling feet, of stones being hauled and heaped...and two awful separate shrieks. And I knew that the crosses of the two culprits had been lifted with their wounded burdens, and sunken and steadied in the ground.

Now...now...it must be the turn of my Lord. Now I must look. For, if I would drain His cup with Him, could I do less than look? How else could I serve Him...now...save by faithful, following eyes that suffered with Him? I prayed God for strength and turned to Him.

The soldiers had stripped Him of His one garment, His body stood out majestic against a darkened sky, naked but for that crown of thorns, and in His uplifted eyes shone the glory of the

Godhead.

So it was that I saw...at last...the  
Lord of Spirits "in the full glory wherewith God had clothed Him."

They stretched out His body on  
the cross, flat on the ground. Now worse was to come ? the hammer...the  
nails....

Ah, those hands! Those palms,  
centres of a healing life; those fingers that had wiped away my tears!

I saw one of the executioners  
pass to another, who knelt on the ground behind that prostrate Might, a hammer  
and three long nails, one longest of all. Two nails, a long and a short, the  
kneeling  
man placed on the ground beside him; then with unmoved face, he fitted the one  
he still held into my Lord's relaxed palm, and with a single blow drove it into  
that palm, deep into the wood. I clapped my hand to mouth to shut in a scream,  
for this...this...was more than I could bear. But no sound came from my  
Beloved's  
lips. His eyes now were closed.

"Ah, it may be He feels it not...that  
now He is out of the body. God grant that He feel it not!" I prayed.

Clumsily the executioner rose  
from his knees and came over to the left side. And now, because of the breadth  
of this man's body, I saw not the second nail driven in. Only I heard the thud  
of  
the hammer.

Still no sound came from that  
cross. And when the executioner moved to impale the feet...those feet...those  
feet,  
which I had kissed and anointed and dried with my hair...again I saw the divine  
face,  
and I saw the same patience wreathing His lips, the same serenity on His brow,  
though now His face was white and sharp, even as the stones of Golgotha.

At this moment a soldier stepped  
forward, on his mouth a grin, in his hands the superscription of the  
accusation. And he stooped and nailed it on the upper cross-beam. Black letters  
stared from the parchment: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

And now one of the executioners,  
not he that had hammered in the nails, but the other who had held and passed  
them, came bearing a cruet and a cup. I knew what was in that cruet ? the  
mixture of myrrh and wine whereby feeling is dulled. And I went forward to meet  
this man, for I would assuage, myself, my Beloved's suffering. If indeed He  
suffered.

The man glanced on me with pitying eyes and in silence placed the cruet and cup into my outstretched hands. And with body gone weak, I approached my Lord on His cross. His head drooped now, His skin was stretched taunt over the high bones of His face. There was the look of a slain lamb in that leonine head.

"My Lord," I breathed, "my beloved Lord...."

His eyes opened. And again upturned to me, I beheld the love of the Godhead triumphant on that peak of hell.

But mingled with that bright glory in His eyes I saw an awful bodily anguish, and with heart stabbed through till it seemed to break into fiery halves of pain I held out the myrrh and wine...in a cup.

Feebly He moved His head in refusal. Ah, why should He not drink this? Why hold so fast unto torture? Now I saw His lips tremble open and, bending close, heard one word:

"Forever?"

"Forever..." I sobbed.

Then the soldiers came to take Him from me...to set up His cross. And as they lifted high His naked majesty, the accusing scroll unfurled above, from the garden I heard a thousand voices, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And shouts of laughter rang to that hill.

Till then, curtained close with my Lord on Golgotha, I had know not the garden was filled with staring faces.

The cross jarred into the earth, but still no cry, not even a moan, escaped the drawn lips of my beloved Lord. I went, and with me the holy mother and John and his mother and Mary of Bethany, now a child to be led, all walking as though in sleep, and together we sank to the foot of that central cross. And then climbing the hill came Mary, mother of James and Joses, and Salome, veils across their mouths to stifle their sobs. And they, too, sinking to the ground, we all raised our eyes to the face of our dying Lord. And He gazed on us, nor removed that gaze, but looked steadfastly down on us. His lips were half open, giving up His anguish, or, as if He would speak but for that anguish, His weary eyes shrouded in a mystery of pain. How could we read that face, so great in death? But we could feel the yearning of His love upon us.

With the settling of the cross of our Beloved a few of the chief priests and elders had mounted the hill and now stood clustered together, too near...too near that cross, whispering among themselves, their faces satisfied.

To the right of us, close to  
where one of the culprits writhed in pain, sat a group of soldiers at a game of  
dice, their helmets bent low as the little dice rattled under the thief's  
bloody feet.

Beyond stood four other soldiers,  
wrangling over our Lord's seamless garment, for this, divided, could be of no  
worth, but whole, it would be soft to lounge in! Dear robe, whose hem my lips  
so  
oft had kissed, which had tingled as though alive to my lips, shot through by  
the life of Him who wore it...at last the four threw dice for it. And when a  
youth by a lucky draw won it, he laughed and said, "The Fates choose well, for  
this will fit me!"

And now the priests sidled nearer  
to this central cross, so near that the bells on their skirts jingled in our  
ears. On their golden mitres was inscribed, "Holy to Jehova," and these mitres  
they  
wagged at Him who hung above us, clothed only in His own blood, the while they  
fell to mocking Him!

"If you are the Son of God, come  
down from the cross."

"You that are able to destroy the  
temple and build it again in three  
days, get yourself down from the cross."

"Ho, dealer in miracles, you that  
save others, how is it you cannot save yourself?"

"He trusts in God! Well then, let  
God deliver Him if He will have Him. Did not this blasphemer say, 'I am the Son  
of God?' "

"Come down from the cross, come  
down from the cross and we will believe on you."

And pressing closer to gnash  
their teeth on Him, they all but trampled us who wept.

At this, the soldiers nearby  
looked up from their game of dice and got to their feet and stood among the  
priests, and the youth with the seamless robe hung over his arm came also, and  
others with him. And these Romans, for sport, joined their mockery to the  
priests',  
taunting "the King of the Jews".

Our Lord closed His eyes. His  
parted lips moved. Words fainted upon them. I strained my ears and heard:

"Father, forgive them, for they

know not what they do."

Yet scarce had these syllables  
died when from the cross on the left of our dear Beloved ? from the beams  
of which a thief looked down like unto an evil bird on the mitred and helmeted  
heads ? the last gibe fell:

"Are you not Messiah? If you are  
He, save yourself and us."

And then it was that the Lord of  
all mankind found one defender.

From the cross to the right a  
voice was raised, a dying voice and feeble, yet I doubt not its echo shall ring  
down the ages.

I looked up to see a suffering  
head craned forward to the farthest cross.

"Do you not even fear God, you  
who are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive but the  
due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing amiss."

And now this blessed thief turned  
to the Lord's cross, and as he gazed at that face drooping below the placard ?  
livid  
and shrunk even as his own, lips blackened even as his own ? wonder filled his  
eyes with a great humility.

"Lord," he prayed, "remember me  
when you come into your Kingdom."

Life tided back to our Lord. Once  
more in His eyes I beheld the burning revelation of the love of God.

"Verily, this day," He said and  
His voice rang strong, "shall you be with me in paradise."

My bosom swelled. My tears  
gushed. I thought: His first guest...a thief.

Had He waited...waited, prolonging  
His own torments, for the coming of this late guest? For now it was clear He  
was hastening away. Now His glance roved from one to another of these upturned  
faces  
at His feet, plumbing their sorrow with His, so that His sorrow sank into our  
depths; seeking to assuage our hearts with a last flicker of the fire of His  
unearthly love. And we knew ? we who gazed through tears that blurred Him ?  
that  
His dimming eyes were bidding us farewell.

His eyes swooned back to John,

whose arms encircled the holy mother. Words struggled through those black lips:

"Behold your mother."

Then looking last upon her that  
had borne Him:

"Behold your son."

And then He said:

"It is finished."

His head moved, His chin fell to  
His breast, the long half-moons of His eyes beneath His fallen eyelids glazed.  
And we knew that He ? our life ? was dead.

Now a soldier came forward. The  
King of the Jews was dead. The death of the thieves must be hastened, for  
tomorrow was a festal day in Jerusalem and the hill should be cleared of these  
corpses before nightfall. Wherefore with smashing blows, which shook howls from  
the thieves, he broke their legs and disposed of them. Then he stepped to the  
cross of our dear Beloved and, raising his spear, plunged it into that body  
which, God be thanked, could no longer feel men's weapons, neither scourge, nor  
nails, nor cross, nor spear, nor...tongue.

One of the executioners, lifting  
a ladder against the cross, climbed it and drew forth the nails from the  
clotted palms, then scrambling to the ground, jerked the long one from the  
feet. We had risen to make way for him. John stood supporting the tottering  
mother,  
she who was now his own. But I...I cared not what he nor the others, not even  
the  
holy mother did. Too cold was I now to feel, even to mourn, at this bleak  
moment.  
Apart from all I stood, turned to stone.

And it was then there came to me  
that centurion by whose orders my Lord had been mangled and done to death. His  
eyes burned solemnly and as he reached my side, he spoke to me below his  
breath.

"Truly, this was a righteous  
man."

"A god," I answered him dully.

We took our beloved down from the cross. Now He was  
clammy and waxen.

That merciful executioner who had  
passed unto me the cup and the cruet permitted John to support the feet and  
himself held our Lord by the arm-pits; and the beautiful head of our Lord, with

eyes forever closed, rested at peace on the executioner's shoulder. Then the two, John and this kindly man, laid down the body on the stones.

With the fading of our Lord's last breath the chief priests and elders had jingled down the hill; the multitude trampling the garden had begun to scatter. And now two came to Golgotha, Joseph of Aramathea and Nicodemus. Men of small courage, these. Disciples in secret of Jesus, they were also members of the Sanhedrin, which had met that very day to try for blasphemy the Son of God. These two had been present at the trial and had dared keep silence, defending not their Master. Now they joined us beneath His empty cross, where we still stood in our mute misery, huddled round the waxen form reclining mid the boulders of Golgotha.

Grief was in the faces of these Sanhedrists, but uppermost a sneaking shame. Each wore a smitten look. Yet had they come with their offerings. Joseph had his tomb to offer, one he had lately hewn for himself in a cliff in that garden below ? his garden, a corner of the broad acres he owned beyond Jerusalem's wall. Nicodemus would bring us out of his wealth one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes wherewith to serve the dead body of his Lord.

We left them on the hill with that loved body (for Joseph asked not our aid in that which must be done) to bury all that was left of Him who had come from above to exalt men and was now receiving His fellow-crucified before His throne in Paradise.

In those days when the Son of God walked earth and we, poor clods, companioned Him, if He withdrew from us but for an hour the sun of our spirits set. Now the sun had set forever. He was dead. Earth was dead. Alone we were left on its bare bones.

Life we had known. Now all was lifeless. Livid below that black sky, the fields spread to shadowy mountains. Livid, the domes of Jerusalem rose above the long ribbing of its wall. Livid, a company of wraiths, the satiated mob moved, soundless, toward the city gates. A band of shades ourselves, John and we six women, numbly our feet found the path dropping steep from Golgotha, numbly followed the chalk-white road...back to Jerusalem.

As we went, the poor crazed Mary groaned fearful words!

"The veil of His holy temple is rent, and with it the veil that covers all things...rent. And now I see...I see...into the darkness of all things. Those monsters that slew the life of God, that

march with us to Jerusalem...can none of you see what I see? Rotting corpses marching with us. Corpses come out from the tombs to do this deed. The corpses of those who ever since the world began have risen from the tombs to suck the life of the prophet. The eternal dead."

Now, before us on the road we saw, spectral in the dark, a tree, and dangling from it a man. And John turned aside with the mother into a field and seized my elbow to drag me with them ? but too late.

"What is that hanging on the tree, John?"

"You know."

"I know, Iscariot. That tree bears bitter fruit."

"Rotten fruit," said John, with hard-pressed lips.

## XVII

IN THE first dark hours of the third day I stole forth again from the house in Bethany, now to seek my Lord at His tomb. To press my cheek on the stone sealing the door of that tomb ? I could hope for no more than this. I asked no more.

I came to the gate of Joseph's garden. Beneath the dark sky, behind the blank pillars of the cypress trees, the sepulchre loomed ashen white, and where the stone had been...gaped a hole!

What was this? I ran. Yes, the stone was rolled away. Now I could enter, kneel close to my Beloved.

I plunged into the cave. Its chill smote me. Its darkness closed about me. I was in a narrow passage. I stretched forth my hands, feeling of the dank stones of the walls, groping my way to that inner vault wherein I knew they had laid my Lord.

But at last in the vault itself I could take not a step forward. For here I stood lost in pitch-black space with no walls to guide me, even as one gone suddenly blind. And what was this emptiness here? A musty breath, raw-cold ? a void ? this and naught else I sensed. Then my eyes cleared a little and, far in a corner, I saw a flat blur of white. An icy hand gripped my heart. I dragged my feet to that corner, fear slowing every step; then, shivering, stooped...and touched my Lord's grave clothes.

Where then was my Lord...where...where was He? Turning, I fled, I scarce knew how, back to the mouth of the cave.

The air was fresh with the dawn,  
the sky graying. I had but one thought ? to find my Lord. But, alone I  
could do naught. John must be told; he would help me. At the moment he lodged  
in the city with Peter, in the square just behind the Fish Gate. I sped to  
Jerusalem.

The window of their room opened  
on the square. I peered through its grating. The two men lay on their mats,  
still asleep, but I saw John stir.

"John!" I called, "John!" ? then  
when he woke ? "They have stolen our Lord from the sepulchre. Come...oh come!"

He sprang up and we went  
together, running. But John outran me and was at the tomb when I was no farther  
than the first trees of the garden. I saw him stoop and enter the tomb, then  
come forth and stand still in the grove, with bowed head. As I neared him, he  
raised  
troubled eyes.

"Mary...these grave-clothes...discarded!  
This can mean but one thing ? enemies have stolen Him."

"We must find Him...wrest Him from  
them."

"But in such a case, how could we  
even find Him?"

"John...love can find Him."

And now we saw Peter in the  
distance, running to the garden. When at last he caught up with us, breathless,  
staring amazed at the open tomb, and we told him our Lord had vanished from it,  
he wept and rent his garments.

"Will they not leave us even His  
body? What new sacrilege would they heap on it?"

"Find him, O Peter. Go...you and John...find Him."

"Who could find Him?" sobbed  
Peter, "The devils of Caiaphas have Him. They would defile His body."

"The guards were set here," said  
John, still in deep thought. "But it might be all were in the pay of Caiaphas."  
Then his eyes flashed; he spoke as if to himself. "Howbeit...what matters the  
body?"

I cried: "It is His body, John...His blessed and beloved  
body. Oh go...go...both of you...go!"

"I like not to leave you here,  
Mary."

"Here is where I wish to be."

And now they were gone and I was glad, for at last I was free to weep as I would. For this long time a crested wave of tears had been poised above me. The wave must break...and now! And such weeping should be done alone.

I bowed my head on the threshold of the tomb.

None could weep long as I wept. The fury of my sobbing spent itself, though my tears still flowed. I rose.

In the garden, his back to me, his face to the sun, where it showed a bright arc above a hill, stood one whom I took to be the gardener. Could it be he that had stolen the body of my Lord?

Not turning, but still with his face to the sun, he spoke.

"Why do you weep? Whom do you seek?"

How knew he that I stood there, that I wept? Why were this man's tones so melting-tender? But I thought not then on such things. Grief had me in too fierce a clutch that I should note the mystery of the gardener. So that I answered him brokenly:

"sir, if you have borne my Lord hence, tell me where you have laid him, that I might take Him away."

And now he wheeled upon me...this gardener. O merciful God! O kind God! Had I too died? Where was I? For here was my Lord...my Lord Himself...alive....

"Mary."

"Rabboni!"

Once again I was at His feet . The sun leapt above the mountains of Moab. My Lord smiled down into my lifted face.

Now I threw myself forward, frantic to kiss His feet, but He put out a hand to ward me away.

"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father."

I heeded only "Touch me not" and fell back grieving. Yet...I could touch His beauty, with a look! I drank my fill of the adored face. How it glistened now! And His eyes beamed down like stars

while

He smiled upon me.

Once more He spoke.

"Go, Mary, to my disciples. Say unto them: 'I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.' "

"Ascend, my Lord...ascend?" I murmured, "Will you then go away ? again? Oh leave us not again!"

Tears brimmed so full on my lashes I could see naught for them, and when I had dashed them away, my Lord was no longer there. How could He have fled so quickly? Alone...alone I knelt between the tomb and Golgotha.

I staggered to my feet. I must seek John now, though where to seek him I knew not. I turned my steps toward Jerusalem.

Then, on the further side of Golgotha, I saw him on his way back. As he neared me, I ran to meet him.

"John, I have found our Lord," I cried.

Gravely he spoke.

"Tell me how."

"I found Him living...not dead. John, how is it He lives, more vigorous even than before, more radiant than before, when the cross wounded Him so? There are no wounds on Him now."

"You have not yet told me how you found Him. What happened, Mary?"

"After you and Peter left me I went to the tomb and knelt there and mourned. And when I stood up, I saw a man in the garden, His back to me . How was it that I knew not that back! He asked, speaking with His face still hid, whom I sought and why I wept. Then, when I told Him, He turned about and, oh, John...I saw my Lord. I all but died of joy...after so much sorrow. John...His smile is the same."

"Yes, I know."

"You know? You too have seen Him? Then He passed your way?"

"No, Mary ? that is, I saw Him not. But I heard His voice, His same voice. When we had left you, as we neared the Fish Gate, He spoke to me."

"Spoke to you, and you saw Him  
not? I know not what you mean, O John."

"Mary, what you have seen is not  
that body whose blood still spatters Golgotha, but one the cross could not  
kill.

It was His heavenly body you saw."

"Ah, John...and it is the same...in  
every way like to His own...and substantial. Will I see it again? Will you see  
it?"

"Surely. From now on...always."

"John! I am alive again! But tell  
me, what happened with you? Did Peter too hear?"

"No, and I bade him go on ahead.  
Then I sat on that stone yonder, and our Lord spoke for a long time."

"Oh, what said He?"

"Some things you may know. He  
said His earth-life had been His little life, but that His greater life, in  
which we His loved ones share, had had no beginning and was endless, even as  
the night-depths. He said men questioned not by night the wealth and strength  
of  
the sun, nor by day the wealth and strength of the stars, for all these orbs  
had been visible in full glory to the eye, and the disappearance of the sun by  
night or the stars by day was but a manifestation of the will of the  
All-Powerful Godhead. He asked if we, His disciples, questioned His wealth and  
strength. Was it, He asked, that we had perceived not His full glory? His  
disappearance also was but a manifestation of  
the Will of the All-Powerful Godhead."

"John" ? I covered my face  
with my hands, "He said this...that we share His greater life with Him? We, who  
have felt so desolate, so helpless ? who thought that all was ended? This  
means a great thing, John."

"It means" ? John spoke with  
bowed head ? "that He has accepted even us to take up that work cut short  
by the cross."

"John, we must go at once to  
Peter and to all the others. Yes, to those nine who seem lost to us I must go,  
for our Lord has entrusted me with a message to them. Know you where to find  
them, John?"

"I can find them. They are  
scattered...hiding!"

"How they must suffer, poor souls...bereft

of faith...bereft of everything. Let us find them quickly...tell them what we know."

"They will not listen, Mary...not now."

We found them and they listened not. Such things could not be, they said. Even poor Peter shook his head. But the women of Galilee believed, and also Mary, the mother of John Mark. And when I went to Mary of Bethany, where she lay in her chamber, melancholy-mad, and broke our glad-tidings to her, the darkness lifted from her mind as an evil dream lifts with the morning. As to the holy mother, she ever walked with God.

And now to each of these steadfast ones came our Lord in dream or vision. And to Peter mercifully He came and wiped away his tears.

There followed a day of great gladness, when all we, who had seen the Risen Glory, were bidden to the house of the mother of John Mark ? a large house with a porch on Mount Zion ? that we might pray in that chamber wherein our Lord had supped for the last time.

And behold the while we prayed, the air of the chamber stirred and throbbed and our Lord's very presence burned upon us, not manifest now to the eye and therefore most awful.

I whispered to John, who sat at my side:

"He is here."

John's face changed. Light trembled across it, moulding the features to a yet nobler beauty. He upraised his eyes and glory spilled from them.

"The Lord is speaking. Take down His words."

He put into my hand his stylus, while Mary, the mother of Mark, went quickly and fetched me tablets.

"O my dear ones," John heard, "I enfold you in my arms."

Our Lord spoke long with us that day, while His life filled the room from wall to wall and from roof to floor and we were immersed in a sea of love.

God's Messengers, He told us, all come attended by the power of the Great Ether, and this Power men cannot slay, nor confine below ground. From this Great Ether now would He pour out His love

and

guidance upon us His chosen ones, till we should be lifted up into such understanding of the divine mysteries as had never before been accorded to man while he lived in the body. Thus, filled with the might of the Holy Spirit, each one of us, single-handed, could enter and challenge a nation. And though that nation should shed our blood, our very blood would conquer it for God. Our weapons must be but two, Faith and His Love; our only battle-cry, His Name. So we would build a new Temple, a mighty Tower, its stones many nations made one in Him. And when in turn this Temple should crumble, the faith within it grown weak, then lo! the Lord of Hosts would come again.

Now, as never before, the thought of the faithless nine gave my heart no peace. Once more I went seeking them, and traced them at last to a squalid upper chamber, wherein all had come together in their fear and misery.

"Believe me that Jesus lives," I pleaded. "It is indeed true that no human hand can slay the Prophet of God. For the Prophet of God is a great spirit, as ye have seen, not a thing of clay like a jar in a potter's hand, to be broken and cast away. Did death end Moses, Elijah? Nay, it is said Elijah never died. Wherefore, then should our Lord have died? His risen spirit dwells in our very midst. Oh, believe that I have seen Him!"

And my words at last took effect in their hearts and they did believe. Then two of them, Andrew and Cleopas, saw for themselves, meeting the Lord on the way to Emmaus. And again He appeared unto all the men as they sat at meat in their upper chamber, being also in the upper chamber of their own souls, where doors open into the light.

Now at eventide on a day when John and I walked Olivet alone, our Lord came and spoke with us there. John heard the voices; I saw a majestic outline, a mist on shadows. And He bade me, Mary, spread a feast on Olivet and call to it all His disciples, for now, He said, great decisions lay before us.

On the morrow, therefore, at sundown, I spread my feast, beneath a sycamore tree. And the eleven came and six women. And as we ate, we talked of other days, when here on this very spot our Beloved had sat in our midst, or when we followed Him across Judea, or along the shore of Galilee, or to Carmel and Phoenicia, or dwelt with Him in Capernaum. And each had some happy thing to recall ? of a saying not understood till now, or of some sweet event through which we had passed as in a dream, unaware of its import.

"I remember," said James, "one day, walking behind Him on Mount Carmel, fitting my sandals into His footprints, I trod upon an adder."

"And I," said John, "a day when,  
crossing Gennesaret with the Lord, walking alone with Him through the wheat, of  
a sudden He stopped and uplifted His face and pointed skyward. And I, also  
looking  
up, saw a hawk in pursuit of a little bird. And lo! While we stood and watched,  
that little bird fluttered down and flew to the breast of the Lord, and  
sheltered itself in His robe."

"I," said Peter, "recall a dark  
night in Capernaum when, as we started down a stair, I would have lighted His  
way with a lamp, but He laughed and picked me up as a man might swing a babe,  
and bore my heaviness down that stair and set my feet on firm ground."

"I remember," said Mary, "when He  
laid on my head a white veil."

And living again in those days,  
so that we breathed the very scent of them, again we seemed to be flocked at  
the knee of our Shepherd.

The sky turned opal, then dark.  
The stars hung above us, bright drops ready to fall. A great hush descended  
upon us.

And now behold One coming like to  
the moon in glory. Through the trees He came, advancing with His swaying gait,  
till He stood intolerably near. All saw Him and all fell prostrate at His feet.  
And then the divine voice spoke. We heard it as a rushing wind, resounding from  
every side:

"All power has been given unto me  
in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, my disciples, and make disciples of all  
the nations, teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo!  
I am with you always, even to the consummation of the world."

His shining form was gone, but He...He had left us not. While He spoke a  
swift elixir had distilled itself into our veins. And now in our breasts a new  
Heart beat, a light and fearless heart.

And we knew that our many hearts had been made one in His.

For long we sat in silence under  
the sycamore tree, in the blackness beneath its canopy. Then words burned my  
lips and I knew that I must speak them.

"My brothers, my sisters, see  
what our Lord has done for us! First, He chose us out of all the world, then He  
trained and taught us. Now, so great is His love, He has even come back from  
across the grave to us. To prove that He is always with us, to prove that there  
is no death ? and therefore, naught to fear ? He has shown unto us His  
immortal body. He reveals to us now such things as we could not have borne  
before...till something in us too had died with Him. In our grief He has united

us and brought us the greatest of all His gifts ? His eternal Presence and His guidance. The greatest of all His gifts? Nay, there is one still greater ? and this He has bestowed tonight, when He poured His own heart into ours ? that we may know He lives within us, to love within us. So, having resuscitated us, having reformed each one to be as a Shepherd's pipe at the lips of the Shepherd, having deigned to enter into us till we are now as one soul, He lays upon us a new command: To go forth and make disciples of the nations. By these words our Lord has announced to us, O beloved brothers, beloved sisters, that the time is come when we too may offer a proof ? that of our faithfulness, our loyalty; nay in very reality serve Him who has done all this for us."

From the circle of the shadow-forms under the tree, Matthew spoke first.

"Once I heard Him say, 'Freely have you received. Freely must you give. Were you to give life itself in the path of the kingdom, the Kingdom is so great that even thus you will have received it freely'. To make disciples of the nations clearly means that we should scatter. What shall we plan to do? For, as Mary has said, the time is upon us when we may prove our faithfulness, our loyalty."

Then fell the calm voice of John.

"It is plain that the first step is to free ourselves of all attachments. Fettered, how could we be loyal?"

"That is true," said one and another out of the night. And Peter broke forth:

"Free, verily, must we be if we would herald the Kingdom in the wilderness, free of every tie!"

James spoke:

"More than ties should be renounce. From the self must we be free."

"That is true." "True."

Then Philip:

"We must wholly sacrifice ourselves. To be at ease and also teach, these two will not coincide. From now we must forgo ease. We must accept every hardship. We must go forth, vagabond preachers.

Once more John lifted up His

voice, that voice dulcet sweet and deep.

"This has another aspect. For the sake of the Lord we shall be beaten, we shall be cast into prison, we shall be exiled. Even, the oppressors may kill us. Let us read this lesson now. Let us know that we shall be beaten, bound with chains, spat upon, banished...killed. Let us accept all this. Verily, I will."

"We will." "Verily, we will,"  
echoed one and all.

Then, each having found his cross  
and shouldered it, in silence we went down the hill, to face the menace of the future and the glory of the Kingdom.

## XVIII

WE DESCENDED Olivet. We went up into Galilee. There the men sold their nets and boats and bade farewell to their families. Then in perfect unity of heart they departed unto Jerusalem. In the city of Solomon's Temple where the Holy Word that had spoken in Moses, distorted by a blind priesthood, was now as sounding brass and tinkling symbols; where this same Word, speaking again through the lips of Jesus, had been silenced on the cross, they would make their first stand for His deathless Truth.

In Jerusalem a great new power lifted up the twelve. Preaching boldly in the streets, even in the cloisters of the Temple, they proclaimed the Kingdom with tongues of fire. This power streamed through their very hands. They touched a cripple; he leapt to his feet and walked. The sick they healed with a touch. Multitudes followed after them. Multitudes entered this living Faith. Then the priests rose up, even as Herod had risen to slay the babes of Bethlehem. The wrath of the Synagogues broke like unto a raging sea against a rock, and henceforth, the Lord's disciples endured great tribulation.

I, in the meantime, tarried in Galilee, where I dwelt in the house of the mother of John, the home also of the holy mother ? that house alive with the memories of a vanished Paradise, with echoes of divine footsteps. And thus twelve years went by ? weary years to me, for I chafed at the peace of our lives in Capernaum while in perilous Judea our brethren laboured and suffered and some died.

Moreover (to tell the truth), though the house still throbbed with the life of Him that had blessed it, what was this compared with the throb of His vigorous body aflame with His soul's effulgence! What was this compared with the wonder of those other days when we, the seventeen bereft ones, praying together, listening for a voice, would be caught up in spirit to our risen Lord, who, in His hidden ethereal world, consumed our hearts with divine fire! Not even John was left to us now. He had joined the apostles in Jerusalem. And

moments

there were in these heavy days when my thoughts would grope like the hands of the blind toward yet another who had vanished, whose parting words had been, "Those who forced my going would do well to look to my return"...yet...who returned not.

Once only had news of Novatus reached me, Paul the unwitting bearer. This intrepid convert who, in advance of us all, had gone forth to spread the faith in new regions, had returned from Achaia with a strange tale of the Governor of that province, one Junius Gallio.

Gallio was by birth, Paul told us, of the gens Annaea, brother to Seneca (my heart lost a beat at this) ? Marcus Annaeas Novatus. He had taken an adopted name with a fortune bequeathed him by an old friend. With him Paul had had a curious encounter ? he knew not, he said, what to make of it. When the Jews of Corinth had seized him and brought him before the judgment seat of Gallio, charged with the teaching of unlawful worship, this Roman had released

Paul, rebuked the Jews, and suffered their leader, Sosthenes, to be beaten in his very presence. At the foot of the judgment seat the man was lashed at the express command of Gallio, he looking on meantime with a weary contempt. And so prompt had been his decision that he, Paul, had had not a chance to speak in his own defence, the which he had opened his lips to do!

What was it had led Novatus to protect a Christian (albeit with such disdain) if not some thought of me? Yet he came not back...he came not back...and, lost in this new name, a stranger indeed was he now.

Thus I crept through the years. For even by the sea of Galilee, in this blessed city of Capernaum, the chosen home of our Lord while He lived in the body, unto which He returned from each journey to rest in the dwellings of His loved ones; where multitudes pressing about Him had witnessed His wondrous works with awe...even here His dazzling image had faded from the minds of men. He had given up life itself in cruel agony, that men might know eternal life...yet...He had been slain by human hands, and for this, belief in Him was dead! Some still held Him in their hearts, Reuben, the outcast, being of the faithful. Alas, that so few flames were left ? low-burning midst dying embers and gray ashes ? on these shores where His glory had kindled great fires.

The holy mother, a spirit clothed

in flesh, her eyes like mirrors of a brighter world, her lips sealed over its secrets, tirelessly ministered unto the sad and lonely with the soft touch of her love. All their little perplexities, their griefs, she took to the bosom of her tenderness. But she spoke scarce at all of the Lord's teachings, for to none would she offer an undesired cup, nor lay the burden of a great truth on any soul too weak for it. So by deeds she taught, her labours being in the field of human woe; Mary, the mother of John, cheerfully aiding her. And with such humble service her soul was content.

It was I ? I alone ? who  
chaffed at the emptiness of the days. And oft would I think in my heart: Is this, then, the cross I bore down Olivet ? to sit with folded hands while others sacrifice life to seed the earth with the knowledge of the Kingdom?

And then, in the spring of the  
year just past, which is to say the thirteenth year since our Lord was crucified, all things changed.

One night as we sat in that  
chamber facing the sea where, on the eve of the bloodiest of Passovers, our Lord had taught us of happiness ? we three women alone, Mary and I at the knees of the holy mother ? the door swung open and we saw John,  
travel-stained,  
pale in the candle-light, distraught.

Oft before had he come with cruel  
news. We had heard of Christians flogged and put into bonds, of women dragged to the prison-house...the stabbing of James the Less and the stoning of our glorious Stephen. We had seen John anxious and sorrowful. But never till now had we seen in his face...fear. What then had befallen our brethren worse than such sufferings?

He greeted us each with a kiss,  
then sank heavily into a chair.

Fear sharp in our own hearts, yet  
questioning him not, his mother and I set food and wine before him and an ewer and basin that he might refresh himself. But he pushed all these aside and began  
his tale. His tones were calm, his words ? at the first ? too careful.

"I have made this long journey,"  
he said, "to consult with you three on a grave issue which, if we find not the way to meet it, will bring down much trouble on us all.

"But a short time since, while  
Peter and I stood on a street corner preaching, a multitude of men compassed us about, and when we had done, begged that we baptize them. I liked not the faces of these men, but to Peter all are the sheep of the Lord and, whether or no they  
be hungry, he must feed them. Later, they confessed to...the worst of crimes!

They had been, they told us," ? John's voice broke ? "of that pack of beasts that howled for the blood of our Lord, and afterwards mocked Him...on the cross. Duped by their priests, used as tools, they swore. They appeared half mad with remorse.

"Now Peter has just uncovered a plot they have hatched. To avenge the wrongs at the hands of the priests, and also, they say, the death of their Messiah, they have planned to slay all who deceived them. And not alone these, but the rulers...elders. And should such a massacre take place (though Peter is striving with all his might to prevent it), should men believed to be Christians start a bloody conflict with the Jews...." He buried his face in his hands and groaned, then looked up with tortured eyes. "If the Jews retaliate and in turn massacre us...when have we ever feared death? But...this blot on our Faith...."

"Oh, let us go to our Lord," I cried. "Let us seek His guidance, for naught else can deliver us from this."

"He has promised to be with us always," murmured the mother of John, weeping.

Then spoke the holy mother.

"Be not so troubled, John. Have we not heard the Lord say that if for a single moment the heart become distrustful, at that moment the bounty of God would be cut off from it? Has He not also said that all power in heaven and earth is His? Would He deliver His cause into the hands of shame? Verily, it is clear, John. Our part is but to have faith, to seek, as Mary has said, His guidance, and then to act boldly upon it."

And now...how dare I write of that which befell me as we prayed, when the voice that answered laid a command on me...such a command as no mortal could obey unless divinely aided?

John heard the voice. We others felt in the air that mighty throbbing. The magnitude of an unseen Presence burned from above upon us, wrapped us about with its tingling life, pricked through our skin and invaded our hearts, and with a new unnamable sense, long ago opened in each of us, we touched the very Being of our Lord.

Now John began to speak, his face a center of light straining upward to catch the soundless words. And while he gave utterance to them I bowed my head low, amazed, weighed down by their

import. For with his eyes on me, John said:

"This is for you, Mary. You must depart at once for Rome. The apostles must send you thither with a message from Peter to Caesar. Having gained access to Caesar, you are to give this message by word of mouth. You are to offer a plea in behalf of these endangered priests, beseeching for them the Imperial protection. Thus will the mercy taught from the cross by the King of kings be revealed before the earth's loftiest throne.

"Meantime," said John, "(and this is for all) there is naught to fear. Those others ? verily crazed by remorse ? who seek vengeance on the priests will be held in check by a hand stronger than Peter's, mightier than Caesar's. Why should your hearts be troubled by so small a test? Know ye not that all are but vassals of the Lord, standing by His command, serving His ultimate purpose? In this journey to Rome lies a consummate wisdom and in it momentous results are hid. Others will follow Mary's steps; for now, verily, has the hour struck when ye, the heralds of the Kingdom, must scatter to the nations."

And then in my heart I heard secret words.

"You first, my daughter, my beloved daughter, shall uplift the banner of my love in Rome."

## XIX

BIDDING farewell to Galilee, I set sail within the week from Joppa, alone...yet not alone. For now, while our galley rolled in the waves of an endless sea, my Lord was ever with me. I felt Him within, through and around me, as an ocean surges in a drop. And night after night I saw Him in dreams, always in His human form...even as flesh and bone and blood, clad in rough homespun, lifting me up with His buoyancy and the resonant swing of His voice and intoxicating my heart. Once He appeared robed in white ? effulgent, exultant, lavishing on me, with smiles and eager gestures, the bounty of a new promise. Feasting my eyes on His glory, I thought: Am I still then a child that He should offer me a gift? Why should He think I lack aught while I drink this strong wine of His nearness? And I listened not to His promise. Wherefore, when I awoke I knew not what it had been.

At last we anchored at Ostia and by nightfall I entered Rome.

I had with me a letter from Paul to a Jew named Malachi, a porter in the Hebrew quarter. This man gave me a kindly welcome and, his insula being full, lodged me in an attic room. And here at the window that night I sank to

my knees and cried out to the heavens. For now as never before was I aware of my littleness. No longer was Rome a dream, a phantom city in the distance, dwarfed by my faith in this mission of the Lord's. Now it lay before my very eyes, solid and vast and dark beneath the stars, its building marching in masses up the hills for as far as the eye could see, five hills crowned with great columned piles. And I must somehow ? I knew not how ? seek out the ruler of all this...nay, of half the world besides...and impart unto him, Caesar, the mercy of the King of kings.

But when I fell asleep on my pallet, again my Lord came in a dream to me, and now I remembered His words ? even as I awoke I heard their echoing ? and verily, they shamed me!

"Your only hindrances are fear and doubt." Then: "Must I speak to you...to you of fear and doubt?"

There was one in Rome who could, if he would, gain me an audience with Caesar ? the senator, Lucius Vitellius, once Proconsul in Syria. But I put no trust in this man. For a fanatical Christian he would have little use. Still, other than he, I knew not a soul in the city save the kindly porter, Malachi! Of these many thousand doors but one was open to me. Nor could I be sure if this were open. Howbeit, I had no choice. There was naught to do but knock at this door. If it should close in my face, God would provide me another.

Hence, on the morning of my first day in Rome, having enquired of Malachi and learned that Vitellius dwelt on the Palatine Hill, made ready to see him without delay.

I had but a single tunic beside the one I wore ? a tunic of rich pomegranate stuff brodered with threads of gold. In those days, so long ago that they seemed as days of another life, when I fled from my poor Novatus to rejoin the Shepherd's fold, I had secretly carried it with me. I took it away and had ever kept it, for remembrance's sake, this being the robe in which I appeared most pleasing in my lover's sight. No need had I of such raiment in the humble fold of the Shepherd and I had worn it not till this day. But now, in hope to please Vitellius and win him, if might be, to my plan, I bedecked myself in its crimson folds. Then I covered my head with a blue veil and bound it with a golden tasseh. I scarce knew myself when I held up my mirror! And a trace of an earlier Mary, lingering within me still, exulted for that thus arrayed I need have no fear to meet Vitellius...nor the Emperor himself!

And so, in the gold-banded robe

and with gold-ringed head I descended the many stairs from my attic and stepped forth into an alley, where the gutters ran with filth, and naked and dirty children

romped in noisy play. I walked till I reached a wider street and there found a litter with idle bearers. This I hired forthwith, that I might in fitting mode approach Vitellius. And soon we came to the Tiber, which we crossed by one of a row of bridges spanning that muddy stream.

I had seen naught of Rome last night save the wretched alleys I had traversed to reach the Hebrew quarter, and that view of its mass from my casement. Now I peered eagerly into the narrow streets

swarming with boisterous crowds. To the right and left I looked up high walls ? pink,

bluish white, some a dingy brown ? broken by balconies and windows, with boxes dripping vines and flowers. In the lower story of these tall houses booths lined the pavement, their counters jutting across it, garlands looped along their cornices, plaques to the side, on which were painted the genii of each

shop, a god or a yellow serpent. At cross-roads I saw little niches set into the walls for the gods of street-crossings, where passers-by laid their humble offerings.

My bearers swung round a corner and I caught my breath, unprepared for this sudden vision of splendour. For now we were in the via Nova, and, down a long vista of marble flagging, I beheld...the Forum.

On each side of me rose great buildings of white, green, blue and orange-hued marble. Through their colonnades moved a close-packed throng, in which nobles in the bordered toga and women with high-coifed hair, sleek as silk in tight-fitting tunic and draped palla, elbowed their way past beggars, shaggy blonds from the north wearing beasts' skins, blacks naked but for the loin-cloth, red-skirted soldiers with flashing helmets.

Jogging in my litter toward the Forum I saw its wide square aglitter in the sun with white, gold and strong colour ? white temples, their columns surmounted by red, green and gilded pediments; heroic statues gaudily painted; basilicas niched with statues; even on roofs the statues perched, some winged, about to fly! Cascading fountains, like unto crystal willow trees, showered into great basins. Here and there the needle of a single column lifted to the sky a golden god. Two hills rose behind all this, temples climbing their terraces. On one stood the Capitol. On the other the Palatine itself reared its mighty bulk, in pillared porches, bronze domes and pinnacles.

The Palatine itself. I looked up awed at its grandeur. This then was my goal. Into this forbidding majesty I must force my way to its heart, the throne-room. But how?

My bearers mounted the hill and, running along in the shadow of the palace, at last reached the quarter of the senators and the knights. And ere I was ready in my mind to meet Vitellius, I was at the gate of his house. A slave opened to me. His master, he said, was at the senate. Would I wait? He was expected soon. I heaved a sigh of relief for this respite and waited.

The slave led me into a little oval room, through the door of which I could look into the atrium, could see a frescoed panel framed by two columns, a statue in the aisle, a glimpse of the lily-bordered pool. And the calm of this white stateliness invaded my whole being and filled me with peace, and I thought: An atrium. A pool. A Bacchante on the wall...soaring with a cup....

Now I heard a step. Vitellius had come, and as yet I had planned not what to say to him! And I sent up a prayer for help.

Then I saw one crossing my vista...a man in a scarlet tunic banded with purple. The light from above streamed on his gray hair and silvered it to shining white. And my heart leapt to my throat...as I had felt it would never do again.

He turned and came toward this oval room. And now I could see his dear face...and the changes there. How he has suffered, I thought. I rose, my heart pounding. He stood in the doorway.

"Mary."

That whisper was like to a cry, such pain was in it. A great pang stabbed me...and then...my old love awoke from its sleep of years.

And yet could this be the old love? For as I gazed once more on my Novatus, I knew that even should he hate me, or...care too little to hate, should

I pass utterly from his mind, a forgotten play thing, valueless to him, I should ever rejoice in this living stream of love now gushing forth so free from an inexhaustible spring within me, asking not even to give. All I asked was to love...like this.

Ah, his face! How its suffering  
smote me now he stood so close, pale beneath the whitened hair (only the  
eyebrows dark, and those starved eyes), the once firm modelling broken into a  
hurt looseness; all its forms deeper, thinner, as if the fingers of some great  
sculptor had pressed into every hollow, flickered over every plane, and in  
places pinched away the clay.

Could it be he was blind to my  
tumult, my passion of tenderness? Not that it mattered...now...but why should  
he stiffen,  
close himself against me as in a coat of mail? I had made no answer for that I  
could not.

He spoke again, as he would to a  
stranger, his voice constrained.

"You...here? What can have brought  
you to Rome, O Mary?"

Now I must find words. I forced a  
light tone, but it trembled like to a stretched lyre-string.

"You shall hear! But first tell  
me of yourself...Novatus. I believed you to be in Corinth."

"I was recalled and came but  
yesterday."

Yesterday? I thought. Yesterday I  
came.

"I have answered your question.  
Will you not answer mine?" Still he held himself in that tight control. "Tell  
me, what brings you here?"

I will tell him, I thought, and in straight words, for then he will  
laugh and be simple with me.

"I am come on an errand to Caesar."

At this verily he unbent! His  
brows went up. The old satire darted into his eyes. The old humour played  
across his upper lip, as he mocked me in his way of long ago.

"And what may this matter of  
state be?"

Now my words flowed free and  
happily.

"I know not enough, Novatus, to  
meddle in matters of state! I am come" ? I turned grave ? "from the  
Christians to bear a request to Caesar, and today I ventured to seek Vitellius,  
hoping he would take me to the Palatine."

"Vitellius? Nay, Vitellius will not take you, Mary. Come, sit and tell me the nature of the Christians' appeal to Caesar."

He led me to a bench, and frankly I told him the whole story, touching on the great oppression we had suffered from the Jewish priests, yet making it clear that we must protect our foes, as well as safeguard our Faith. And he sat beside me, silent and grim, his eyes bent upon the floor, so that I could read them not, but I saw a muscle twitch in his cheek and knew that my words in some way stirred him. Howbeit, when at last he turned and looked full on me, the fire in his eyes amazed me.

"Fool that I was," he burst forth, "to have left you so long exposed to danger in that accursed place! That my letter went unanswered...."

"You wrote? No letter reached me...."

"And the bearer assured me he had delivered it into safe hands! I poured forth so much in that letter. Then, waiting...waiting for some message...I remembered bitterly your last words to me...that my love for you mattered not. Still...I should have come myself to you! Forgive me, Mary."

"Nay," I said, "it is I that should ask your forgiveness for all I have made you to suffer."

He flashed me a glance...quick...sharp, as if he could not believe. Then a great glow overspread his face and colour tided into it.

"Mary...you love me still?"

"Love never dies," I whispered.

He turned and seized me. I could not escape his arms, his kisses, nor stem the flood of his words.

"What you have been to me! And now...this meeting...proof that we cannot part. Life without you has not been...life. That happiness I thought lost...Never again will I let you go, my Mary! As in the old days..."

"Ah, no!" Swifter than thought the words came.

He loosed me and put me off from him, his eyes searching mine...and now they burned softly.

He knows, I thought, reads what I cannot say.

At last he spoke.

"Mary, there are no barriers."

How great is the wealth of God!

We fling our lives at His feet, but can these enrich Him? He gives them back to us with a smile! He says: "Yield me your heart." And when the heart is verily yielded, all it has loved with the love that knows no swerving, is restored forever. And if even He say, through the lips of a sacrificed messenger, "Take up your cross and follow Me." He leads us...it may be through blood...into His deathless Kingdom, where we find our treasures immortal.

Long ago the Beloved of the World sought me where I sat on Temple steps, weeping tears of hopeless grief for that I had driven my lover away with a lie, and that lover had threatened the sacred life. And He, my Lord, had dried my tears with a touch and a word. The touch of His finger tips; the word...a

prophecy: "When you have verily given up, your lover shall come after you."

Who but the Lord of the future could have foreseen so strange a seeking...finding, or a consummation fraught with such great portent? For now, joined outwardly in betrothal, within we two were

aware of the fusion of our inmost being, fathoms below the stress of mortal life, in that region where run the deep waters of the eternal oneness. And ere on that day of days we bade each other a brief farewell, Novatus made me this promise:

"I will take you myself to Caesar, Mary...my wife."

XX

WITHIN TWO DAYS Novatus took me to Claudius Caesar.

We walked beneath a sweeping arch, on the top of which four white horses pranced to the sky, behind them, driving a marble chariot, Apollo and Diana. Thence, down the via Sacra, a long corridor of fluted columns that led to a mountain of white steps flanked by giant cypresses.

We climbed the steps and entered a colonnaded hall, very long and lofty. Its walls were a dusty red, like to the bloom on a pomegranate, frescoed with figures of heroic size in cool, bluish colours, and with trellises of fruit and vines, and partitioned at the far end by a massive purple curtain. Knights and senators thronged the colonnade, seeking audience with Caesar, but the guards led us quickly past them, down the long vista of the hall and into another extension of it, also closed in the distance

by purple hangings . We passed through, and again looked down a vista of red frescoed walls and columns to another purple curtain, dropping to the pavement in austere folds.

Such an approach prepared me for an august presence. But when the guards looped the third set of curtains and at last we stood in the throne room, I saw ? still in the distance ? a simple man, who, though his curule chair was raised on a gilded dais and his head wreathed with its crown of oak leaves, seemed scarce to know that he was Caesar, or that his chair was a throne. Less haughty was he than any of his courtiers waiting without.

As we drew nigh to the dais I saw that his face wore a baffled look and twitched now and then in little spasms, that his kind eyes blinked, his mouth quirked at the corners, and above his long nose his eyebrows peaked, as if ever asking a question. When his eyes rested on me, they grew very kind.

I had warned my beloved to speak not of our betrothal, for I wished to approach the Emperor in all simplicity, as a humble follower of the Lord Christ. Wherefore, when I was presented, it was but as Mary of Magdala, who had come to bear a petition to the Imperial Presence from the Christians of Jerusalem. And then, to gain me a little time, Novatus talked on other matters with Claudius, while I stood intent on this man raised on his throne, thinking: Here then is the great ruler of Rome...and here am I! God help me to do His will...God help me!

But as I watched his twitching face pity filled my heart for this Caesar. For by now I had heard his whole story. I knew that all Rome had taken him for a fool, mocked or neglected him, and even his own mother, shamed by her son's deformities, despised him. I knew that the few he dared to love had been torn from him and foully murdered, and he owed his own hapless life to naught save its inconsequence. His very Empire he owed but to the whim of the soldiers who, on that horrible day of the murder of Caligula, when all in the palace were fleeing, had dragged poor Claudius out by the feet from under a bed and, first having made a butt of him, for a jest set him on the throne. And when the time was come for me to speak, I was aware that Love itself spoke through me, albeit my words were simple.

I began:

"O Augustus! Surely you know of Him we Christians follow, the Lord Jesus Christ?"

He bent upon me his mild look.

"I have heard but a rumour of Him. Of the Christian sect I know a little more. Was not this Jesus a young

thaumaturgist who, in the reign of my uncle Tiberias, gathered about Himself a following and stirred up some trouble in Judea? I have forgot how the matter ended."

"The Christians believe, O Augustus, He was more than a thaumaturgist."

"More? How more?"

In few words I spoke of Israel's hope ? that a holy One would come by the will of God to earth to set up an empire not of this world, wherein all peoples would be united in an age-long reign of peace and justice. "Even as Seneca has foreseen" I said.

"Seneca, yes," smiled Claudius. "Also this minds me of Plato and his ideal republic. I have ever thought it would take a god ? or a succession of gods ? to bring to pass such a dream in this our world. Know you that here in Rome there is talk of the coming of a god-man?"

"

"In Rome? You in Rome have this prophecy too? We Christians believe it to be fulfilled in one whose life was no dream, but a reality beyond all dreams."

"Where then is this one now? I take it He is that same you say is more than a thaumaturgist."

"Alas, He has been crucified."

"Crucified?" Plain it was that in Caesar's mind were two questions. He asked first:

"Can a god-man die?"

"Nay, O Caesar...a god-man cannot die!"

"How was it that He was crucified? And by whom, O noble lady? What had Rome to do with this?"

I replied that Pontius Pilate had been the means, but our Jewish priests the cause; they fearing the power of Jesus, whose precepts must of necessity strip them of their privileges.

"Once in the Temple," I said, "I saw Him seize a whip and drive the money-changers from it's cloisters."

"Ah, He was a man of action."

"But this was His only act of violence. It was His sweet persuasion our priests and elders feared, and that He taught the people...love. For love, O Caesar, is an overturning power in an age

of greed. Yet He was no rebel. Myself I have heard Him say, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

"He sounds like a sensible man," said Caesar, nodding his head. "Go on with your story, O Mary Magdalena. I would hear why Pilate yielded to such vermin."

And then he did a gracious thing.  
He bade me sit.

"I know not why I have kept you standing so long, except that you had me in a spell. And you too Gallio, sit. I will come down to you." And he raised himself from his throne, hobbled down the steps of the dais and seated himself in a great chair by the wall, and we sat beside him. "Now your story. What of Pilate?"

"He understood not the Jews, O Caesar, and our whole land was seething against him. I know not what threat the priests held over him, only that he feared to thwart them. But it was against his will he yielded. And no blame can be laid upon Rome."

"You are just, O Mary."

"I am but the pupil of a  
god-man."

"How is it," now Claudius turned to Novatus, "you did not yourself avert this? Were you not in Judea at the time, known to this lady?"

And my dear one answered:

"Pilate, who knew I was bent on averting it, by a subtle trick which I could not circumvent, rid himself of me, despatched me to Rome on some fictitious errand the very day of the execution. There was no time. The whole dastardly thing, the arrest of Jesus and His death, was precipitated within ten hours. I have thought it part of some bargain with the Tetrarch whereby Pilate saved his skin in Judea. For, as the lady Mary has hinted, the Jews detested him. He had outraged them and their religion by forcing upon them certain policies deifying Tiberias, and they wanted but little excuse to bring him low in the eyes of that very sovereign he would flatter."

"Ah, well," said Caesar, "Pilate is already running down hill. Too weak, too thick-headed is he to last long politically. Tell me, O Mary," he blinked at me, "is it your belief that the punishment of a man is but the offspring of his own acts?"

"Indeed I believe this, Caesar.  
An act, is it not like a seed with a whole tree in it?"

"And vengeance," mused Caesar, "is this not an interference which but confuses the issue?"

"strange you should speak of vengeance, O Augustus."

"Why strange? Revenge is in most men's thoughts."

"But it has to do with my petition."

"You seek vengeance? On the priests...?"

"Oh, no...no. I am come to ask your protection for them."

Claudius fixed his gaze upon me and his face was all but beautiful in its benignity.

"Present your petition, Mary Magdalena."

"It is not in written form. With your permission, I will tell it"

And I spoke fully of the plot hatched in Jerusalem to avenge the wrongs of the priests' dupes and the death of their Messiah.

"Unphilosophical, O Mary, but an impulse scarce surprising."

"Ah, yes, but we are Christians, Caesar, and these men have taken our name. And now we must safeguard our Faith, which teaches not such things. We would also save these Jews from crime and shield the lives of the priests."

"Shield the lives of the priests?"

"Surely, Augustus. Our Lord taught mercy. Even on the cross He taught it, praying with His last breath for those that had hung Him there and for all who mocked Him as He died. This was His prayer on the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

Steadfastly gazing on the Emperor while I spoke, I saw tears start to his eyes.

"Wherefore," I went on, "we Christians implore you to issue an imperial edict to the Proconsul at Jerusalem (who has come to favour the Christians and has no liking for the Jews) that the priests have guards set over them by the Government. So will this plot to slay

them, checked for the moment by our chief apostle, be brought to naught. Furthermore we hope, and our hope is in Caesar's clemency, not even the plotters need suffer death."

"Such is the message, O Augustus, which has been entrusted to me."

In-so-far as I can recall them, these are the words that passed that day between the Emperor and me. His last words are graven on my heart.

Leaning out from his chair, his bewildered face working, those tears that had sprung at the mention of the mocked Lord Jesus now coursing down the ridges in his cheeks, he stammered:

"In all my life I have never heard the like of this. Those priests who forced Pilate to execute Him ye worship, who are even now harassing you, who...should I save them...will cease not to hound you.... Well, if you wish it, have it! Noble lady, your request is granted.

I will at once send despatches to Jerusalem. But I am tempted", now he smiled, "to command that you remain in Rome under the Imperial protection. Moreover" ? again those peaked brows, those peering eyes put me in mind of an endless quest ? "I would hear more of your God of mercy, O Mary of Magdala."

Novatus and I left the Palatine in silence. At last he spoke:

"Mary, you have touched the heart of Claudius."

"Claudius," I said, "may be Emperor, but he is a sad and lonely man."

"In Rome's high places, Mary, are many sad and lonely hearts. Our murderous Emperors have seen to this. There is scarce a patrician family that has not been decimated by the whims of the divine Caesars. I know these people. We will bring them a new hope."

"We...oh, Novatus!"

"Your Master once wounded my pride and it bled to death. I am grateful, Mary, my beloved, to have any memory of Him ? even one for which I blush."

XXI

NOW WEDDED for the space of half

a year, Novatus and I on an autumn evening strolled the white paths of our garden. Across a wide lawn of formal planting, of marble benches and herms, our villa stood, its old yellow brick gold in the afterglow.

The senator, Lucius Vitellius, had but just left us in the garden, where for long he had sat in a great stone chair, his paunch uplifting his toga, chatting on the news of Rome, and there had been that in his talk which had made me to shrink in horror from him, the thought of which still tormented me. For he had told us with relish of an abominable crime committed against ten slaves by Cassius Longinus, who, suspecting these of mutiny, had huddled them off in chains to the arena, and there, on that very day, forced some of them to combat with the gladiators and some with the wild beasts.

I screamed. Vitellius cast me a glance and laughed, and his belly shook.

"What would you have us to do?" he said. "These dogs outnumber us by the thousand. Should they come to realize their power and rise in rebellion against us ? and among them are intelligent ones, men of rank in their own little nations ? what would be left of our Rome? Anicetus ended the mutiny in his household by throwing a few, alive, to the fishes. There are, to be sure, the slave prisons...."

"Dens of torture and infamy!" flashed Novatus.

"But, I was about to say, a punishment too habitual to cow them. This, praise the gods, has been done today."

I turned in loathing from his sleek face, glossed over with the bland content of the well-fed, with its frosty eyes, its gross nostrils, its full, curling lips, the ball of a chin half-buried in shaven jowls and a roll of fat below it; and it seemed to me my heart collapsed as I felt within it the dying agonies of those helpless slaves, dragged to the beasts in the arena, trembling before great yawning, shaggy jaws.

And Novatus ? solicitous eyes on me ? turned the talk to other things.

Now walking beside him, still shaken, I said:

"Novatus, fear rules this city."

"With good cause," he sighed.

"The nobles fear not alone their slaves, but men...yes, and women, too, of their own rank, for the moment above them in power. They are caught betwixt two mill-stones," I said. "As for the

powerful,  
they fear one another. Even at the royal banquet...that sea of faces, Novatus,  
beneath the circlets, the garlands...how they struck a chill into my heart!  
Fear  
was behind their very grimaces. Some put me in mind of spoiled fruit and  
sickened me. Others were like unto masks. And the Empress...Messalina! When I  
looked  
on her in all her beauty, perfect and cold as a statue, but one thing alive in  
her face, her darting eyes, and poor Claudius tipsy beside her, his wreath  
awry, I myself felt fear."

"Messalina is a murderess," said  
Novatus, his jaw set grimly. "She has murdered many."

"It is true that through her  
intriguing Julia died?"

"She has destroyed two Julias,  
the niece of Tiberias and his grandchild."

"It is of her ? the younger ? I  
hear Pomponia speak. Novatus, I love Pomponia. She is valiant like unto a youth  
and in her is a stern strength. How she mourns her cousin, Julia. Ever she is  
haunted  
by her image, so white in death. White she was in life, Pomponia says, rare and  
pure."

"Julia was indeed pure compared  
with Rome's wicked women" ? the face of my beloved darkened ? "who  
concern themselves with naught but new forms of sensory pleasures...strange and  
terrible  
pleasures."

"Pomponia had turned unto me for  
comfort." I said. "This morning I sat long with her, speaking of eternal life  
and the deathless bonds of love. Even she let me take her into my arms while I  
tried to soothe her grief. I told her not of the Lord, but this I shall do in  
time, I know."

"Little by little," Novatus  
answered me, "by means of such tender friendship, we shall win many to the  
Dispeller of Sorrows."

I pressed his hand, my heart  
full, and we paced a few steps in silence. Then I spoke a thought which had  
been much in my mind of late.

"Seneca," I said, "is wise and  
noble. Oft when he visits us here he says wondrous things, worthy of an  
apostle. He too believes in one God and in justice and mercy toward our  
fellow-men and a reign of peace in the future. It is as though he had caught a

ray from the risen sun of Jesus. His words have more beauty than Paul's and more lucidity. Yet, despite all these gifts ? knowledge and wisdom and art, and rank with them ? he has influenced not the life of Rome."

"His words are but words...empty shells, Mary. Seneca has not the courage to live his philosophy. Hence, it has little effect, save to charm the mind."

"Ah, yes, I once heard the Master say: 'Great is the power of the intellect, but it is of no avail till it has become the servant of love.' "

"And love," Novatus mused, "is the one force strong enough to generate the true courage. Mary, I have seen in battle what men call courage. Greed, fear and bloodlust lie at the bottom of this...in the motives of such as make war and the passions of many that serve it. I have seen the courage of helpless patricians at a word from a mad Emperor opening veins and dying in cynical calm. But sublime courage I never witnessed till I saw you, my beloved, standing so confident before Caesar...straight as a lance, with your kindled eyes and your incredible plea!

"Dear child," he looked down on me with a brave and tender compassion, "you have escaped those hounds in Judea loosed again on the Christians, alas, through your intervention, but in this degenerate city, governed by brutes that claim divinity, you will run a greater risk...even with me at your side. Treachery stalks Claudius. No Roman Emperor dies in his bed and this just Emperor's days are numbered. Who will reign in his stead, what lies before us...none can foresee. You, Mary, know not fear, and I shall uphold you in all you may do, and shall labour with you, and with John and Peter when they come. But to uplift the banner of the love of Christ in Rome will require the sublime courage."

"To my mind but belief, Novatus. And when John and Peter come...when they come," I cried, "we four shall be as a strong foundation, and then will the truth resound in Rome as those two herald it in the streets!"

"They will run into death," said Novatus, his face strangely lit.

"But out of the nothingness of death" ? and a great joy swelled within me ? "God shall breed life."

"Again we strolled for a little in silence. I, for one, deep in thought. At last I said:

"Beloved, you have raised me to a

high estate, and together we mingle with the great in Rome and choose for our friends the afflicted among them...for our own sweet reasons. We have so won Caesar

himself that he wishes to meet our chief apostle. And for all this I praise God...and

you! Yet my thoughts turn back to the plight of the slaves and because of my pity upon them I would also reach out to these with mine own hands. I long to tell them with my own lips that they are free in God's Kingdom."

"God's Kingdom," said Novatus

softly, and I saw, as I lifted my eyes to him, humility resting on him like a dove. "Is it not the true Republic, the fusion of the great and lowly in an Order which will protect its every member? Even I see" ? his eyes grew wide ?

"the

fusion of great and little peoples in a world-embracing State. And they who serve the one King...Him who was son of a carpenter...will know not if they be great

or lowly. Assuredly we will gather in the slaves."

And my heart gave thanks for the

mighty vision my Lord had vouchsafed to Novatus ? such as none had seen till now ? and I cried:

"Oh my dear one, my beloved, I

burn to begin the work of this Kingdom. Must we wait for the coming of John and Peter? May not we two begin? For we have but a single heart between us and that heart open to the Lord."

"Not two are we then, but a host, Mary."

"How and where shall we begin?"

"Come," said my beloved, "come to the house and I will show you."

"Will you not tell me now?"

"Nay," he smiled, "for the answer is in the house."

And he turned with me into a path that led to the portico.

Felix opened the door to us, a little bent now and white-haired.

"We need light, Felix," Novatus spoke gently, "in the lararium."

We passed through to the atrium,

fragrant with odours of sandalwood and of aromatic oils, dripping from lamps. A stately hall. The lamps glowed dimly in its great spaciousness reflecting on

the sheen of old wood paneling and the polished mosaic floor, lighting up here and there some treasure from the past...a yellowed statue of Eros, a cylice, a black-figured amphora, limned by the hand of Clitias with horses and warriors.

Novatus lifted a lamp from its stand and led the way down a corridor.

"Now," he said, "I will answer your question as to how and where we may begin. One chamber there is which you have seen not yet, my Mary. Since the day I brought you here I have kept it locked against you. You will soon know why."

We reached the door and Novatus flung it wide.

"Our temple, wherein we shall worship, at the first, with our own free household."

I looked within and my heart leapt. Then I sobbed.

"Why, Mary!" smiled Novatus, slipping his arm through mine, "your eyes are two rivers of tears."

"I am thinking, my dear beloved, of the foolish tears of other days, and...that He once said to me, 'If the cloud weep not, how shall the meadow laugh?' "

There, in that old lararium, above a now empty altar, the lares all being gone, on a frescoed panel...lived my Lord. Yet not as in His earthly life. For this was the Ancient of Days, the Word, which through Jesus' lips had said:

"Before Abraham was, I AM."

A veiled head in profile, as it were descending through the ether, on the lips a wise and tender smile, and below this head a cross formed of two rays of light, descending from the divine One.

"Gaius, the Greek, did the painting, but I directed!" Novatus spoke lightly, to calm me. "What think you of that, my Mary?"

"How...you remember...."

"Ah, yes!" Then, as he pressed me closer: "The Messenger on His way to earth to free all its slaves from the 'fetters of darkness.' "

THE END

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