

RACHEL

The soft, deep gloom with which the Egyptian maid maiden had a habit of enlarding her apartment was grateful to Rachel, although it seldom failed to bring a reprimand from some member of her uncle's household who might come in. It was like throwing back a blessing of God, this flood of light, and anythingavoring even faintly of interference was intolerable in that strict man's house. Not seeking to draw his attention too closely upon herself, since she was not comfortable by nature and was yet dependent upon him for this pleasant home-life, which not even her simple fortune could have secured elsewhere, the girl instructed her servants to keep a watchful eye and flood the rooms with sunshine when an intrusion was threatened.

There was no fear of snob today, with preparation for the great feast of the Pasch going on. She could rest there in security until evening, and perhaps with at least out of the long conflict with thought, the solution of the wrenching problem of her life.

Silence, too, was on the room, yet the girl, lying upon the stibly ornamented couch, could not think, and neither could she sleep. Then the sun, which had been hidden all day, suddenly thrust back the clouds, and as its glory spread over the streets and roofs of Jerusalem, a faint found a space between the heavy curtains of the western window and lay like a long, slender sword upon the darkness, and Rachel watched it, until the clouds reinforced, again imprisoned the sun.

Then she rose and moving to the window, parted the curtains and looked down upon the varied scenes of the street.

"I must see that woman," she said, at length, to herself.

Within the home her uncle thought so carefully guarded, the happenings of the world came to one pair of ears for the Egyptian servant had a wide acquaintance in the city and she found her mistress a patient listener to the gossip of the day. Rachel knew herself to be not wholly disinterested, albeit a servant was her informant; for she sought ever an answer to one question, and she knew not from what source that answer might come. But none, not even the Egyptian who appeared to possess the power of divination, dreamed that all the soul of the young Jewish woman had resolved itself into that one question, why she could not be happy, why she could not turn herself to life with the presence of her cousins and "her friends," or why, at least, she could not gather some sweetness out of existence, if she must go for it to the bypath of sin? That captain of the Roman soldiers, Tene she had taken a fearful risk in continuing her friendship with him; and yet, when speech forsook him, when he, Caesar, a soldier, trembled under her hand, she knew herself to be untouched, in her innermost being, by this strange fact of living and loving. If her soul had but responded—would ostracism be cast off by her creed and her race have been too much to pay for that consciousness of existence? And Joel, whom her people desired she should wed, who loved her—could she but feel toward him as other women might have felt! Could she only have held to the traditions of the women of her race—widespread wifehood, prayed for motherhood!

She turned drearily from the window, with the old sickening horror of her ultimate fate creeping over her. She would marry Joel, bear him children, grow into a similitude of her aunt, as he would come to resemble her uncle. The days stretched out in endless procession before her, each with its ordinance; the Sabbath and the feast days; and never in any of them would she be loved for herself. The God of her fathers had failed her, not less than her nature had done.

Always as she thought this last thought, she shuddered, knowing she blasphemed.

She touched a silver bell, and the Egyptian girl appeared.

"I am restless, Myra, she complained.

"It is the light," said the maid, drawing the curtains together. She led her mistress to the couch and seated herself on the rug by its side.

"Nay, I think it was that story you told me of the woman, whom that man you call the Prophet saved, and His writing on the pavement."

"Never was anything more wonderful known in Jerusalem, my lady! He wrote, and in what He wrote each man saw his own sin. But He has done many more beyond the power of man. At Bethany is one Lazarus, whom He raised to life after being four days in the tomb."

"That is not so marvelous. Many of the prophets of Israel have brought back the dead to life; but to endorse an adulterous woman—may that is an unheard-of thing!"

Pains in the Back

Are symptoms of a weak, torpid or stagnant condition of the kidneys or liver, and are a warning to be heeded. They are commonly attended by loss of energy, lack of courage, and sometimes by gloomy foreboding and depression.

"I was taken ill with kidney trouble, and became so weak I could scarcely get around. I took medicine without benefit, and finally decided to try Hood's Sarsaparilla. After the first bottle I felt so much better that I continued its use, and six bottles made me a new woman. When my little girl was a baby, she could not keep anything on her stomach, and we gave her Hood's Sarsaparilla which cured her." Mrs. Thomas L. Walsburg, Ont.

Hood's Sarsaparilla

Cures kidney and liver troubles, relieves the back, and builds up the whole system.

"I would see that woman, Myra," said Rachel, unheeding the words.

"Do you mind telling me about it?" said Rachel, and the unconscious superiority was gone from her voice.

"I broke the Law," she said, and a chill crept over Rachel. Had she not broken a more sacred part of the Law in her own heart? And what had Myra repeated to her of the Prophet's denunciation of those who sin in their hearts?

"You who knew so well its consequences?"

"A woman does not think of the consequences when she loves," Rachel recalled her Roman lover, even when his kiss was warm on her lips, had she not thought, shudderingly, of what would result were it to become known?

"And then—when you met the consequences?" She would search this woman's innermost soul, if she could wring out of it the knowledge she was seeking.

"I was not sorry," she said, and a chill crept over Rachel. "Death was preferable to life without him."

"But were you not afraid?"

"God, I held, could not be crueler than the man I loved."

"He turned from you?"

"And accused me of being the cause of his downfall?"

"I saw his face?"

"The Prophet's?"

"And why are you here instead of among His followers?"

"He hath no need of me. His friends and relations minister to His wants; His disciples keep Him company. But I serve Him in others, and she spread her hands over the baskets, to be filled with food and wine."

"You attend to the poor?"

"The lepers," she explained. He has great compassion for them. He has cured many. I serve Him in them."

The Egyptian maid plucked at Rachel's sleeve.

"It grows late, my lady! If the master returns on the great feast, and should find you missing—"

"Swiftly they made their way home. Scarcely had Rachel removed her street attire, when the call to assemble for the celebration of the feast of the deliverance reached her. But her attention flagged, and more than once while the rite was being scrupulously performed, she caught the surprised and stern glance of her uncle fixed on her. She drew her thoughts to the ritual; tasted of the bitter herbs, drank the prescribed wine, and partook of the feast that followed, knowing all the while she had no real part in all.

Here was the empty heart; nor God nor man had ever filled it. God was to be her only liberal observance of the Law; man a lord to be served with her body, obeyed with her will. Love—could she but have felt it for God, as this woman felt it for the Prophet, she would have felt it for the Prophet she loved. Her Roman lover as had this woman for the man who had won her affections and had then cast her off to meet alone the dire penalty for their common sin—could she have even felt this, she would have held herself blessed to become his slave.

She looked over the room and shuddered, remembering that all her life she would have to go through this mockery of existence. She might find the Prophet. Perchance He would work a miracle on her, as he had upon the other woman, upon the condemning man. Far into the night she kept the Egyptian girl by her bed, to recount all things whatsoever she had heard concerning Him.

"And then," the voice was flowing softly; they sought again to ensnare Him, and one of the others inquired of Him which was the greatest commandment. And He told them that the first and greatest commandment was to love God, with all one's heart and mind and soul; and the second was like on to it; to love one's neighbor as one's self.

"Love—love! (Ab! if she only could! If she could only love God! If she could only love her uncle and his family; or her Roman lover, who loved her with the fierceness of a pagan; or Joel, who loved her after the calm steadfast manner of the Jew! If she could only love the lepers, as that other woman did! If she could only fill this empty heart of hers. Otherwise—"

"Myra, her words broke the steady recital of the servant. I will see the Prophet tomorrow! Now you may go!"

Before Rachel was awake the next morning, the maid crept into her room, and weeping called her.

"O my lady! Last night they apprehended the Prophet! He is now in the hands of Caesar's soldiers! Even now they are leading him to the court of Pilate!"

"Do not be disturbed, Myra!" counseled Rachel. "If he be a true Prophet, God will deliver Him. Daniel came unharmed from the den of lions, and the children were unharmed in the fiery furnace."

"But lay it in the morning, Myra returned, and exulting herself at the feet of her mistress cried, between sobs that shook her slim body.

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Why should she not marry the Roman, whose advancement was certain, and seek out yonder in the world such enjoyment as it had to offer. If God had denied her the universal blessings, which would have secured her happiness here, what was there left her, but to strive to win it out yonder by means of her special gifts? And yet to make herself a renegade—she, the last of her father's name!

Two more days passed, while the conflict raged within. She had heard from Myra that the Prophet had died upon His cross, and she found herself thinking with pity of the woman whose God was dead. She had heard of the darkened sky, the veil of the temple, the declaration of the centurion, and had set them down as fancies of overwrought minds. But the third night she could not sleep, and before day, she rose, dressed quietly and stole from the house. As she walked the quiet of the morning began to fall upon her spirit, and a sense of security and gladness came to her. This feeling finally drew her out of herself. She stopped and viewed her surroundings. Behind her lay the city, the great, the beautiful, city that David loved and Solomon adored, Jerusalem the Holy! Long, long, she looked upon it, lying under the pearl-gray light now showing in the east. From it would she tear herself?

Frightened, she hid herself in her veil and hurried on, heedless of the direction. When she again paused, she found herself under the trees of a garden, and saw that the sun had now risen. She paused and tried to review and analyze the experience through which she had just passed. Then, without a sound to warn her of approach, a figure stood before her, clad in garments of dazzling whiteness. The hands and feet radiated an amethystine light, which also burned like a crown around the head; and she remembered the thorn-crowned brow of the Prophet as He passed under her window. Then, she looked into the face, and cast herself down as the other woman had done, and uttered the unspeakable Name!

Lying there, she seemed to hear a voice telling her to lift up the empty chalice of her heart that it might be filled with love, love of God, love of man, in the love of Christ, who had come to gather unto Himself the souls of all the children of earth.

She never knew how long she lay there, face forward on the green sward. But the sound of running feet at length roused her. She rose and saw a little crowd of men and women going in great haste toward a distant part of the garden. She joined them. Presently they passed, silent, with bated breath. She pushed her way forward, and looked, with them, upon the open tomb.—Anna C. Minogue in Catholic Telegraph.

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H McEWEN Supt. P. E. I. Railway, Railway Offices, March 23, 1912.

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