

still technically a stranger, and would have to leave the city for the festival. He was much more annoyed than on the previous occasion; for he had "settled down" with Dodeh, and become fat and lazy; besides, he was all on fire to see the ceremony of which he had only witnessed the aftermath. He expressed his feelings in the plainest words to Dodeh. It was the nearest approach to ill-temper he had ever shown.

She laughed in her most fascinating way. "Dear baby," she said, "what a fuss about nothing! All you need do is to leave the city openly and lie off shore a few miles out to sea; I will get a little boat and come for you at night. You shall come back here; I will disguise you, and we will see the ceremony together—except the last day, when women are not allowed to participate. But I will tell you exactly what to do, and you shall see everything." Cleon was enchanted at her ready compliance, and her quick solution; when the time came he left Tyre in great state, taking a most affecting public farewell of his wife, to throw as much dust as possible in the eyes of the world. That night Dodeh did as she had said; they got back to the villa without being observed, and though it was all dark without, within were lights and flowers and a splendid banquet ready. Never had Dodeh been so hilarious as she was that night; the slightest incidents seemed to amuse her, and in consequence she was equally amusing. They really behaved like two silly children; one would have said they had been parted for a year instead of a bare fraction of a day.

II.

For the next three days the happy couple remained quietly at home, save for an hour or so in the morning, when Dodeh went to the market and the temple in order not to arouse comment in the city. On the fourth day the festival was to begin.

That morning Dodeh came home with quantities of live quails, which Cleon had not seen before the festival. The explanation was that Asteria, the mother of Melcarth, was a quail, and these birds might therefore not be eaten until the birth of Melcarth, which was to be celebrated that night. Shortly after sunset Dodeh dressed Cleon in the disguise of a slave and made him carry the quails; and they went forth together to a part of the city where they were not known. At every place where four streets met a bale-fire blazed. Around these fires the people were assembled, in great solemnity, every one with bright clothes, and most of them carrying one or more live quails, each according to his rank and wealth. Priests walked up and down the street in twos and threes, chanting:

Rejoice! Rejoice!

O men of Tyre, rejoice!

O women of Tyre, clap hands!

Asteria your goddess is ill at ease.

She is bowed upon the arms of her handmaidens.

Cry aloud that Asteria may be delivered from her pain!

Let a man child be born unto Asteria, even the great god Melcarth, Lord of Tyre.

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Presently the song changed. It became surpassing slow and sad. One priest began:

"Now is the hour of the tribulation of Asteria."

Another answered:

"Whence came Asteria?"

"From the fire of the sun."

"What shall avail her to purge her of her tribulation?"

"The fire of the sun."

Then rose the voices of the priests in chorus:

"Arise, ye people, let strength and beauty be born of Asteria, mother of Melcarth, Lord of Tyre!"

At that all the people shouted together, and began to leap joyously across the flames, dropping the live quails into them as they sprang. Cleon, following his wife's direction, imitated them. As the quails began to roast, they were recovered from the fire, and every one plucked and ate one then and there. When every one had had his fill, the dance began; but Cleon and Dodeh soon slipped away to the quieter pleasures of the flute.

On the following day, it was evident that Melcarth had indeed been born; for there he stood in the great square that was in the center of the city, in effigy, twenty feet high, upon a sea-horse. Around him was a regular scaffolding of logs, with sheaves of straw; in preparation, as Dodeh explained to her husband, for the final bonfire. But this day was to be devoted to the drama of the life of the great God. Dodeh had procured a priest's dress for Cleon, as through her association with the temple she could easily do. They found a secluded station in that part of the temple which was allotted to the priests and priestesses—and this was the only day in the year when women were permitted to enter the holy place. This enabled them to see perfectly without attracting any special attention.

At high noon the herald entered the temple and bade all men mark the coming of the king. A minute later the rest of the procession arrived. Cleon could see it through the open door of the sacred building. First came a solid phalanx of guards, in white tunics and buskins, with shields, corslets, and helmets of carved and polished brass. They carried spears which had been gilded in honor of the occasion. Next came a company of horsemen, their trappings covered with fans of peacock's feathers. After them came many priests; then the company of the actors of the sacred drama, in the various disguises necessary; then other priests. Next came six gigantic men of swarthy stature, bearing a gilded pole carved with representations of the deeds of Melcarth, and tipped with the image of a pine-cone.

Last came the king, in a chariot of chased ivory and gold. The car was swathed with a great curtain of true Tyrian purple, against which the king showed marvellously, for he wore silks of the richest blue over his golden armor, and in his helmet with its crenellated circlet were seven white ostrich feathers. In his hand he carried the sacred rod of office, for he was high priest as well as king. About him the high ministers of state bore each the symbol of his office.

At the temple the king descended, and did sacrifice at the great altar where burned the perpetual fire. Only the priests and the actors entered with him.

The king gave the signal, and the sacred play began. With every detail the great legend of Melcarth was commemorated; his conquest of the lion and of the dragon, of the Rivers of Destruction and of the Untameable Sea-horse. They represented his cleansing of the land by rain, his fertilizing of the desert by rivers; they showed how he had won the golden fruit from the gardens of the Sunset, and how he had dragged back his friend Mazib from the very heart of hell.

This was the climax of the mystery, for no sooner had the rescued man embraced his savior than the king himself, leaving his throne, stepped forward as