

## CHAPTER XIX

### PEARL-MAIDEN

Many days had gone by, but still the fighting was not ended, for the Jews continued to hold the Upper City. As it chanced, however, in one of the assaults upon it that officer who had rescued Miriam was badly hurt by a spear-thrust in the leg, so that he could be of no more service in this war. Therefore, because he was a man whom Titus trusted, he was ordered to sail with others of the sick for Rome, taking in his charge much of the treasure that had been captured, and for this purpose travelled down to Tyre, whence his vessel was to put to sea. In obedience to the command of Cæsar he had carried the captive Miriam to the camp of his legion upon the Mount of Olives, and there placed her in a tent, where an old slave-woman tended her. For a while it was not certain whether she should live or die, for her sufferings and all that she had seen brought her so near to death that it was hard to keep her from passing its half-opened gates. Still, with good food and care, the strength came back to her body. But in mind Miriam remained sick, since during all these weeks she wandered in her talk, so that no word of reason passed her lips.

Now, many would have wearied of her and thrust her out to take her chance with hundreds of other poor creatures who roamed about the land until they perished or were enslaved of Arabs. But this Roman did not act thus; in truth, as he had promised it should be, had she been his

daughter, Miriam would not have been better tended. Whenever his duties gave him time he would sit with her, trying to beguile her madness, and after he himself was wounded, from morning to night they were together, till at length the poor girl grew to love him in a crazy fashion, and would throw her arms about his neck and call him "uncle," as in the old days she had named the Essenes. Moreover, she learned to know the soldiers of that legion, who became fond of her and would bring her offerings of fruit and winter flowers, or of aught else that they thought would please her. So when the captain received his orders to proceed to Tyre with the treasure and take ship there, he and his guard took Miriam with them, and journeying easily, reached the city on the eighth day.

As it chanced their ship was not ready, so they camped on the outskirts of Paleotyrus, and by a strange accident in that very garden which had been the property of Benoni. This place they reached after sunset one evening and set up their tents, that of Miriam and the old slave-woman being placed on the seashore next to the tent of her protector. This night she slept well, and being awakened at the dawn by the murmur of the sea among the rocks, went to the door of the tent and looked out. All the camp was sleeping, for here they had no enemy to fear, and a great calm lay upon the sea and land. Presently the mist lifted and the rays of the rising sun poured across the blue ocean and its gray, bordering coast.

With that returning light, as it happened, the light returned also into

Miriam's darkened mind. She became aware that this scene was familiar; she recognised the outlines of the proud and ancient island town. More, she remembered that garden; yes, there assuredly was the palm-tree beneath which she had often sat, and there the rock, under whose shadow grew white lilies, where she had rested with Nehushta when the Roman captain brought her the letter and the gifts from Marcus. Instinctively Miriam put her hand to her neck. About it still hung the collar of pearls, and on the pearls the ring which the slave-woman had found in her hair and tied there for safety. She took off the ring and placed it back upon her finger. Then she walked to the rock, sat down and tried to think. But for this, as yet her mind was not strong enough, for there rose up in it vision after vision of blood and fire, which crushed and overwhelmed her. All that went before the siege was clear, the rest one red confusion.

While she sat thus the Roman captain hobbled from his pavilion, resting on a crutch, for his leg was still lame and shrivelled. First he went to Miriam's tent to inquire after her of the old woman, as was his custom at the daybreak, then, learning that she had gone out of it, looked round for her. Presently he perceived her sitting in the shade of the rock gazing at the sea, and followed to join her.

"Good morning to you, daughter," he said. "How have you slept after your long journey?" and paused, expecting to be answered with some babbling, gentle nonsense such as flowed from Miriam's lips in her illness. But instead of this she rose and stood before him looking confused. Then she

replied:

"Sir, I thank you, I have slept well; but tell me, is not yonder town Tyre, and is not this the garden of my grandfather, Benoni, where I used to wander? Nay, how can it be? So long has passed since I walked in this garden, and so many things have happened--terrible, terrible things which I cannot remember," and she hid her eyes in her hand and moaned.

"Don't try to remember them," he said cheerfully. "There is so much in life that it is better to forget. Yes, this is Tyre, sure enough. You could not recognise it last night because it was too dark, and this garden, I am told, did belong to Benoni. Who it belongs to now I do not know. To you, I suppose, and through you to Cæsar."

Now while he spoke thus somewhat at random, for he was watching her all the while, Miriam kept her eyes fixed upon his face, as though she searched there for something which she could but half recall. Suddenly an inspiration entered into them and she said:

"Now I have it! You are the Roman captain, Gallus, who brought me the letter from----" and she paused, thrusting her hand into the bosom of her robe, then went on with something like a sob: "Oh! it is gone. How did it go? Let me think."

"Don't think," said Gallus; "there are so many things in the world which it is better not to think about. Yes, as it happens, I am that man,

and some years ago I did bring you the letter from Marcus, called The Fortunate. Also, as it chanced, I never forgot your sweet face and knew it again at a time when it was well that you should find a friend. No, we won't talk about it now. Look, the old slave calls you. It is time that you should break your fast, and I also must eat and have my wound dressed. Afterwards we will talk."

All that morning Miriam saw nothing more of Gallus. Indeed, he did not mean that she should, since he was sure that her new-found sense ought not to be overstrained at first, lest it should break down again, never to recover. So she went out and sat alone by the garden beach, for the soldiers had orders to respect her privacy, and gazed at the sea.

As she sat thus in quiet, event by event the terrible past came back to her. She remembered it all now--their flight from Tyre; the march into Jerusalem; the sojourn in the dark with the Essenes; the Old Tower and what befell there; the escape of Marcus; her trial before the Sanhedrim; the execution of her sentence upon the gateway; and then that fearful night when the flames of the burning Temple scorched to her very brain, and the sights and sounds of slaughter withered her heart. After this she could recall but one more thing--the vision of the majestic figure of Benoni standing against a background of black smoke upon the lofty cloister-roof and defying the Romans before he plunged headlong in the flames beneath. Of her rescue on the roof of the Gate Nicanor, of her being carried before Titus Cæsar in the arms of Gallus, and of his judgment concerning her she recollected nothing. Nor, indeed, did she

ever attain to a clear memory of those events, while the time between them and the recovery of her reason by the seashore in the garden at Tyre always remained a blank. That troubled fragment of her life was sunk in a black sea of oblivion.

At length the old woman came to summon Miriam to her midday meal, and led her, not to her own tent, but to that which was pitched to serve as an eating-place for the captain, Gallus. As she went she saw knots of soldiers gathered across her path as though to intercept her, and turned to fly, for the sight of them brought back the terrors of the siege.

"Have no fear of them," said the old woman, smiling. "Ill would it go here with him who dared to lift a finger against their Pearl-Maiden."

"Pearl-Maiden! Why?" asked Miriam.

"That is what they call you, because of the necklace that was upon your breast when you were captured, which you wear still. As for why--well, I suppose because they love you, the poor sick thing they nursed. They have heard that you are better and gather to give you joy of it; that is all."

Sure enough, the words were true, for, as Miriam approached, these rough legionaries cheered and clapped their hands, while one of them an evil-looking fellow with a broken nose, who was said to have committed great cruelties during the siege, came forward bowing and presented her

with a handful of wild-flowers, which he must have collected with some trouble, since, at this season of the year they were not common. She took them, and being still weak, burst into tears.

"Why should you treat me thus," she asked, "who am, as I understand, but a poor captive?"

"Nay, nay," answered a sergeant, with an uncouth oath. "It is we who are your captives, Pearl-Maiden, and we are glad, because your mind has come to you, though, seeing how sweet you were without it, we do not know that it can better you very much."

"Oh! friends, friends," began Miriam, then once more broke down.

Meanwhile, hearing the disturbance Gallus had come from his tent and was hobbling towards them, when suddenly he caught sight of the tears upon Miriam's face and broke out into such language as could only be used by a Roman officer of experience.

"What have you been doing to her, you cowardly hounds?" he shouted. "By Cæsar and the Standards, if one of you has even said a word that she should not hear, he shall be flogged until the bones break through his skin," and his very beard bristling with wrath, Gallus uttered a series of the most fearful maledictions upon the head of that supposed offender, his female ancestry, and his descendants.

"Your pardon, captain," said the sergeant, "but you are uttering many words that no maiden should hear."

"Do you dare to argue with me, you foul-tongued camp scavenger?" shouted Gallus. "Here, guard, lash him to that tree! Fear not, daughter; the insult shall be avenged; we shall teach his dirty tongue to sing another tune," and again he cursed him, naming him by new names.

"Oh! sir, sir," broke in Miriam, "what are you about to do? This man offered me no insult, none of them offered me anything except kind words and flowers."

"Then how is it that you weep?" asked Gallus suspiciously.

"I wept, being still weak, because they who are conquerors were so kind to one who is a slave and an outcast."

"Oh!" said Gallus. "Well, guard, you need not tie him up this time, but after all I take back nothing that I have said, seeing that in this way or in that they did make you weep. What business had they to insult you with their kindness? Men, henceforth you will be so good as to remember that this maiden is the property of Titus Cæsar, and after Cæsar, of myself, in whose charge he placed her. If you have any offerings to make to her, and I do not dissuade you from that practice, they must be made through me. Meanwhile, there is a cask of wine, that good old stuff from the Lebanon which I had bought for the voyage. If you should wish to



drink the health of our--our captive, it is at your service."

Then taking Miriam by the hand he led her into the eating-tent, still grumbling at the soldiers, who for their part laughed and sent for the wine. They knew their captain's temper, who had served with them through many a fight, and knew also that this crazed Pearl-Maiden whom he saved had twined herself into his heart, as was her fortune with most men of those among whom from time to time fate drove her to seek shelter.

In the tent Miriam found two places set, one for herself and one for the captain Gallus.

"Don't talk to me," he said, "but sit down and eat, for little enough you have swallowed all the time you were sick, and we sail to-morrow evening at the latest, after which, unless you differ from most women, little enough will you swallow on these winter seas until it pleases whatever god we worship to bring us to the coasts of Italy. Now here are oysters brought by runner from Sidon, and I command that you eat six of them before you say a word."

So Miriam ate the oysters obediently, and after the oysters, fish, and after the fish the breast of a woodcock. But from the autumn lamb, roasted whole, which followed, she was forced to turn.

"Send it out to the soldiers," she suggested, and it was sent as her gift.

"Now, my captive," said Gallus, drawing his stool near to her, "I want you to tell me what you can remember of your story. Ah! you don't know that for many days past we have dined together and that it had been your fashion to sit with your arm round my old neck and call me your uncle. Nay, child, you need not blush, for I am more than old enough to be your father, let alone your uncle, and nothing but a father shall I ever be to you."

"Why are you so good to me?" asked Miriam.

"Why? Oh! for several reasons. First, you were the friend of a comrade of mine who often talked of you, but who now is dead. Secondly, you were a sick and helpless thing whom I chanced to rescue in the great slaughter, and who ever since has been my companion; and thirdly--yes, I will say it, though I do not love to talk of that matter, I had a daughter, who died, and who, had she lived, would have been of about your age. Your eyes remind me of hers--there, is that not enough?"

"But now for the story. Stay. I will tell you what I know of it. Marcus, he whom they called The Fortunate, but whose fortune has deserted him, was in love with you--like the rest of us. Often he talked to me of you in Rome, where we were friends after a fashion, though he was set far above me, and by me sent to you that letter which I delivered here in this garden, and the trinket that you wear about your neck, and if I remember right, with it a ring--yes, it is upon your finger. Well, I

took note of you at the time and went my way to the war, and when I chanced to find you lately upon the top of the Gate Nicanor, although you were more like a half-burnt cinder than a fair maiden, I knew you again and carried you off to Cæsar, who named you his slave and bade me take charge of you and deliver you to him in Rome. Now I want to know how you came to be upon that gateway."

So Miriam began and told him all her tale, while he listened patiently. When she had done he rose and, limping round the little table, bent over and kissed her solemnly upon the brow.

"By all the gods of the Romans, Greeks, Christians, Jews, and barbarian nations, you are a noble-hearted woman," he said, "and that kiss is my tribute to you. Little wonder that puppy, Marcus, is called The Fortunate, since, even when he deserved to die who suffered himself to be taken alive, you appeared to save him--to save him, by Venus, at the cost of your own sweet self. Well, most noble traitress, what now?"

"I ask that question of you, Gallus. What now? Marcus, whom you should call no ill name, and who was overwhelmed through no fault of his own, fighting like a hero, has vanished----"

"Across the Styx, I fear me. Indeed that would be best for him, since no Roman must be taken prisoner and live."

"Nay, I think not, or at the least I hope he lives. My servant,

Nehushta, would nurse him for my sake, and for my sake the Essenes, among whom I dwelt, would guard him, even to the loss of their own lives. Unless his wound killed him I believe that Marcus is alive to-day."

"And if that is so you wish to communicate with him?"

"What else, Gallus? Say, what fate will befall me when I reach Rome?"

"You will be kept safe till Titus comes. Then, according to his command, you must walk in his Triumph, and after that, unless he changes his mind, which is not likely, since he prides himself upon never having reversed a decree, however hastily it was made, or even added to or taken from a judgment, you must, alas! be set up in the Forum and sold as a slave to the highest bidder."

"Sold as a slave to the highest bidder!" repeated Miriam faintly. "That is a poor fate for a woman, is it not? Had it been that daughter of yours who died, for instance, you would have thought it a poor fate for her, would you not?"

"Do not speak of it, do not speak of it," muttered Gallus into his beard. "Well, in this, as in other things, let us hope that fortune will favour you."

"I should like Marcus to learn that I am to march in the Triumph, and

afterwards to be set up in the Forum and sold as a slave to the highest bidder," said Miriam.

"I should like Marcus to learn--but, in the name of the gods--how is he to learn, if he still lives? Look you, we sail to-morrow night. What do you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to send a messenger to Marcus bearing a token from me to him."

"A messenger! What messenger? Who can find him? I can despatch a soldier, but your Marcus is with the Essenes, who for their own sakes will keep him fast enough as a hostage, if they have cured him. Also the Essenes live, according to your story, in some hyæna-burrow, opening out of an underground quarry in Jerusalem, that is, if they have not been discovered and killed long ago. How, then, will any soldier find their hiding-place?"

"I do not think that such a man would find it," answered Miriam, "but I have friends in this city, and if I could come at them I might discover one who would meet with better fortune. You know that I am a Christian who was brought up among the Essenes, both of them persecuted people that have their secrets. If I find a Christian or an Essene he would take my message and--unless he was killed--deliver it."

Now Gallus thought for a while, then he said, "If I were to go out in

Tyre asking for Christians or Essenes, none would appear. As well might a stork go out and call upon a frog. But that old slave-woman, who has tended on me and you, she is cunning in her way, and if I promised to set her at liberty should she succeed, well, perhaps she might succeed. Stay, I will summon her," and he left the tent.

Some minutes later he returned, bringing the slave with him.

"I have explained the matter to this woman, Miriam," he said, "and I think that she understands, and can prove to any who are willing to visit you, that they will have a free pass in to and out of the camp, and need fear no harm. Tell her, then, where she is to go and whom she must seek."

So Miriam told the woman, saying, "Tell any Essene whom you can find that she who is called their Queen, bids his presence, and if he asks more, give him this word--'The sun rises.' Tell any Christian whom you can find that Miriam, their sister, seeks his aid, and if he asks more, give him this word--'The dawn comes.' Do you understand?"

"I understand," answered the woman.

"Then go," said Gallus, "and be back by nightfall, remembering that if you fail, in place of liberty you travel to Rome, whence you will return no more."

"My lord, I go," answered the woman, beating her forehead with her hand and bowing herself from their presence.

By nightfall she was back again with the tidings that no Christians seemed to be left in Tyre; all had fled to Pella, or elsewhere. Of the Essenes, however, she had found one, a minor brother of the name of Samuel, who, on hearing that Miriam was the captive, and receiving the watchword, said that he would visit the camp after dark, although he greatly feared that this might be some snare set to catch him.

After dark he came accordingly, and was led by the old woman, who waited outside to meet him, to the tent where Miriam sat with Gallus. This Samuel proved to be a brother of the lowest order of the Essenes, whom, although he knew of her, Miriam had never seen. He had been absent from the village by the Jordan at the time of the flight of the sect, having come to Tyre by leave of the Court to bid farewell to his mother, who was on her deathbed. Hearing that the brethren had fled, and his mother being still alive, he had remained in Tyre instead of seeking to rejoin them at Jerusalem, thus escaping the terrors of the siege. That was all his story. Now, having buried his mother, he desired to rejoin the brotherhood, if any of them were left alive.

After Gallus had left the tent, since it was not lawful that she should speak of their secrets in the presence of any man who was not of the order, Miriam, having first satisfied herself that he was in truth

a brother, told this Samuel all she knew of the hiding-place of the Essenes beyond the ancient quarry, and asked him if he was willing to try to seek it out. He said yes, for he desired to find them; also he was bound to give her what help he could, since should the brethren discover that he had refused it, he would be expelled from their order. Then, having pledged him to be faithful to her trust, not by oath, which the Essenes held unlawful, but in accordance with their secret custom which was known to her, she took from her hand the ring that Marcus had sent her, bidding him find out the Essenes, and, if their Roman prisoner was yet alive, and among them, to deliver it to him with a message telling him of her fate and whither she had gone. If he was dead, or not to be found anywhere, then he was to deliver the ring to the Libyan woman named Nehushta, with the same message. If he could not find her either, then to her uncle Ithiel, or, failing him, to whoever was president of the Essenes, with the same message, praying any or all of them to succour her in her troubles, should that be possible. At the least they were to let her have tidings at the house of Gallus, the captain, in Rome, where he proposed to place her in charge of his wife until the time came for her to be handed over to Titus and to walk in the Triumph. Moreover, in case the brother should forget, she wrote a letter that he might deliver to any of those for whom she gave the message. In this letter Miriam set out briefly all that had befallen her since that night of parting in the Old Tower, and by the help of Gallus, whom she now recalled to the tent, the particulars of her rescue and of the judgment of Cæsar upon her person, ending it with these words:



"If it be the will of God and your will, O you who may read this letter, haste, haste to help me, that I may escape the shame more sore than death which awaits me yonder in Rome."

This letter she signed, "Miriam, of the house of Benoni," but she did not write upon it the names of those to whom it was addressed, fearing lest it should fall into other hands and bring trouble upon them.

Then Gallus asked the man Samuel what money he needed for his journey and as a reward for his service. He answered that it was against his rule to take any money, who was bound to help those under the protection of the order without reward or fee, whereat Gallus stared and said that there were stranger folk in this land than in any others that he knew, and they were many.

So Samuel, having bowed before Miriam and pressed her hand in a certain fashion in token of brotherhood and fidelity, was led out of the camp again, nor did she ever see him more. Yet, as it proved, he was a faithful messenger, and she did well to trust him.

Next day, at the prayer of Miriam, Gallus also wrote a letter, which gave him much trouble, to a friend of his, who was a brother officer with the army at Jerusalem, enclosing one to be handed to Marcus if, perchance, he should have rejoined the Standards.

"Now daughter," he said, "we have done all that can be done, and must

leave the rest to fate."

"Yes," she answered with a sigh, "we must leave the rest to fate, as you Romans call God."

In the evening they set sail for Italy, and with them much of the captured treasure, many sick and wounded men and a guard of soldiers. As it chanced, having taken the sea after the autumn gales and before those of mid-winter began, they had a swift and prosperous voyage, enduring no hardships save once from want of water. Within thirty days they came to Rhegium, whence they marched overland to Rome, being received everywhere very gladly by people who were eager for tidings of the war.