

The Greek Princess

In the days when Seti II, the grandson of Rameses the Great, was Pharaoh of Egypt, there came a great ship driven by a storm from the north, which sought shelter in the Canopic mouth of the Nile.

Near the place where the ship anchored stood the temple of the ram-headed god Hershef, who watched over strangers. If any man took sanctuary in the shrine of Hershef, he was safe from all his enemies; and if a slave knelt before the statue and vowed to serve the god, he became free from his master.

The ship which had come to Canopus was reported at once to Thonis, the Warden of that mouth of the Nile, and he learned that it belonged to a prince of the people whom the Egyptians called the People of the Sea, or the Aquaiusha that is the Achaeans, those who dwelt in Greece and the islands of the Aegean and in Ionia, whom we now call the Mycenaeans.

Thonis discovered this from a group of the sailors on the ship who, when they learned of what chanced to those who sought sanctuary in the Temple of Hershef, deserted in a body and asked to be allowed to serve the god. When Thonis asked them why they wished to leave their master, since it seemed strange to him that men of the Aquaiusha, should wish to enter the service of an Egyptian god rather than return to their homes, they replied that they feared the vengeance of their own gods if they remained on the ship.

"...their master had carried off the wife of one of the kings of Greece"

For it seemed that the Prince their master had carried off the wife of one of the kings of Greece, together with much of his treasure - and this after the Greek king had received him as a guest and friend, and entertained him kindly in his palace.

Thonis was as much shocked as the sailors by this behavior - for in Egypt as in Greece to behave thus to one's host was thought to bring a sure vengeance from the gods. And he seized the Prince's ship with all on it and guarded it closely until he learned the will of Pharaoh. But the Greek Princess he caused to be escorted with all honor to the Temple of Hathor, the goddess of love and beauty.

When Seti heard of all this, he commanded Thonis to bring the ship, with all who had sailed in her, up the Nile to Memphis.

All was done as he commanded, and when they arrived the Princess was placed for safety in the Temple of Hathor at Memphis. But the Prince was led at once before Seti where he sat in his great hall of audience.

'O Pharaoh, life, health, strength be to you!' cried Thonis, kissing the ground before Seti's feet according to custom. 'I bring before you this stranger, a prince of the Aquaiusha, that you may learn from his own mouth who he is and why he has come to your shores.'

Then Seti spoke kindly to the stranger Prince, saying, 'Welcome to the land of Egypt, if you come in peace and as one who serves the gods. My Warden of the Nile, Thonis, tells me that in your own land you are the son of a king. Tell me of that land of that king - for it is my delight to hear strange stories and tales of other lands.'

The handsome young Prince in his bronze armor that shone like gold bowed before Pharaoh and said, 'My lord, I come in peace - driven here against my will by the god of the sea whom we call Poseidon. I am the son of Priam, the great King of Troy, and I have been on a visit to Greece where I have won to be my wife the most beautiful woman in the world - Helen, Princess of Sparta, and daughter of its King, Tyndareus.'

Seti the Pharaoh looked thoughtfully at the proud young Prince, and said, 'Tell me, Prince of Troy, how did you come to win this Princess of Sparta? Do the kings of the Aquaiusha send

their daughters across the sea to be wedded to the princes of other lands? For my learned scribe Ana, here, tells me that the city of Troy is far across the water from the land and islands of the Aquaiusha, and that there is war and rivalry between the two lands.'

'Then your scribe Ana is in error,' answered the Prince loftily. 'There was some fighting in my grandfather's day, but since then we have dwelt at peace. I came as one of the many princes of the Aquaiusha who were suitors for the hand of fair Helen - and King Tyndareus of Sparta gave her to me.'

At this the sailors who had sought sanctuary in the Temple of Hershef murmured, and Seti the Pharaoh said to them, 'Thonis reports that you who are now servants of Hershef tell another tale concerning these matters. Speak without fear, for you are now my subjects, and I will protect you.'

'King of Egypt,' answered the leader, 'we few sailors come from the islands and are of the Greek people, whom you call Aquaiusha, not men of Troy, whom we hold to be barbarians. We serve the gods of Greece and we fear them also and know that they punish wrongdoing.'

'This man, Prince Paris of Troy, who was our master, came as he says as a friend to Sparta. But he does not speak the truth of what happened there. All the people of our lands have heard of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, the daughter of King Tyndareus of Sparta and Ledz his Queen - though it is said that in truth Zeus, King of the Gods, whom you call Amon-Re, was her father.'

Seti nodded when he heard this and murmured, 'Even as Amon-Re was the father of Hatshepsut, the Great Queen of Egypt. Yes, the gods can indeed be the fathers of the spirits that dwell in the bodies of kings and queens.'

'The princes of Greece and of the islands all sought the hand of Helen in marriage,' went on the sailor, 'not only for her beauty but also because whoever married her would become the

King of Sparta. But Paris of Troy was not among their number. No, King Tyndareus gave his daughter to Menelaus, the younger son of the King of Mycenae, and made all the rest of her suitors swear to abide by his choice and to stand by Menelaus should anyone strive to steal his wife. That was several years ago. Since then Tyndareus has made Menelaus King of Sparta and he has reigned there with Helen as his Queen. The Prince of Troy came as a guest and an ambassador, and was welcomed as such. He dwelt at Sparta for many days, until Menelaus was forced to leave the city for a while on some affair of state. When he was gone, Paris carried off Helen by force, together with much treasure, and sailed away - only to be caught in a storm sent by the angry gods and driven hither.'

'That is false!' shouted Prince Paris angrily. 'Helen came of her own free will. She begged me to take her, for she hated her husband, Menelaus! And the treasure we took with us was her own.'

'Prince of Troy,' said Seti the Pharaoh 'You have already told me two tales which do not agree. First you say that you won this princess from her father when all the princes of the Aquaiusha came as her suitors, and then you admit that you took her from the husband whom her father had chosen for her and made King of Sparta... Vizier, lead this prince of Troy with all honor to the Royal Guest-House - and see that he and his followers are well guarded and ready to appear before me again when I command their presence.'

'Pharaoh has spoken - life, health, strength be to him!' cried Para-em-heb the Vizier, prostrating himself before Seti. Then at a sign from him the guards closed in and led the Prince of Troy and his followers away.

'And now,' said Seti the Pharaoh, 'we will visit this princess of the Aquaiusha where she dwells in the Temple of Hathor.'

Seti and his companions, the scribe Ana and Roi the High Priest of Amon-Re, made their way to the Temple of Hathor where the lovely Princess Helen had been lodged in the care of the priestesses of the goddess.

"Seti felt that he was indeed in the presence of the loveliest woman in the world"

When he beheld her, Seti felt that he was indeed in the presence of the loveliest woman in the world, perhaps even a goddess upon earth.

The tale of the Princess was far different from that of the Prince. According to her, she had dwelt in great happiness with her husband Menelaus and her two children, and felt no love at all for Paris the Trojan. Indeed, from what she told him, Seti understood that Paris had carried her off by magic, taking upon himself the shape of Menelaus to lure her way from the palace, down the long valley to the sea and away in the ship which had so soon been caught by the storm.

Such shape-shifting was familiar among the magicians of Egypt, though it seemed from Helen's words that only the gods practiced it in Greece, and that magic was hardly known in her country.

'Therefore, great Pharaoh,' begged Helen, 'protect me in honor here until my lord and love Menelaus comes to seek and claim me from you and do not let this evil prince carry me as a shameful captive to Troy.'

Helen wept, and the great red jewel she wore, the Star Stone which the goddess of love had given her, seemed to weep tears of blood as it trembled on her bosom in the dazzling sunlight that fell between the columns.

Seti was much moved by her tale and he swore an oath to her, saying, 'By Amon-Re, Father of Gods and Men, I swear that here in the Temple of Hathor you shall dwell with all honor until Menelaus comes for you. And I will send away this evil Prince of Troy without his treasure or his captive - and if he strives to steal you again he shall meet his death, and any of his nation who come to Egypt seeking you stand in danger of death also.'

All things were done as Pharaoh Seti commanded. The Prince of Troy raged and threatened in vain. The treasure he had stolen was taken from him and set in Pharaoh's treasury until Menelaus should come to claim it; and Paris was told that he must depart forthwith in his ship down the Nile before sunrise on the next day.

'I will depart indeed!' he shouted when Pharaoh's messenger brought him the royal command. 'But it will be up the river to rescue my wife from those who would keep her from me!'

Yet before the sun rose the Trojan ship was speeding down the river below Heliopolis, and ere the next sun rose it was out on the Great Green Sea, heading northwards towards Troy on the outskirts of the world.

All this came about very strangely, or so any of the Aquaiusha would have thought: but to the people of Egypt it was not at all out of the ordinary.

On the night before the Prince of Troy set sail, Pharaoh Seti's daughter Tausert knelt in prayer in the Temple of Hathor, for she was High Priestess of that goddess. As she knelt it seemed to her that the temple shook and a great light shone behind her. Turning she beheld the shape of Thoth himself, the great god of wisdom and messenger of Amon-Re.

'Fear not,' said Thoth as Tausert fell on her face before him. 'I come hither to work the will of the most high god Amon-Re, father of us all - and by his command you, who shall one day be Queen of Egypt, must learn of all that is performed this night so that you may bear witness of it in the days to come, when that king of the Aquaiusha who is the true husband of Helen shall come to lead her home.

'Know then that it is the will of Amon-Re that the Aquaiusha, amongst whom he is worshipped by the name of Zeus, shall fight a great war for Helen which shall last for ten years and end only when the city of Troy lies in ruins. For the beauty of Helen shall it be fought - for an empty beauty, since here Helen remains until Menelaus comes. But this night I, whom the Aquaiusha

name Hermes the Thrice Great, must draw forth the Ka, the double of Helen, the ghostly likeness of her that shall deceive all eyes and seem to Paris and to all at Troy to be none other than the real woman. For the Ka of Helen and not for Helen herself shall the great war of Troy be fought and the will of the Father of Gods and Men shall be accomplished.'

Then Thoth passed out of the shrine towards the cell where Helen dwelt. And presently the light shone in the shrine once more and Tausert saw him pass through it followed by the Ka of Helen - so like Helen herself that none could tell the difference. Thoth leading the way, they passed through the closed door of the temple and so onwards through the night until they reached where the ship lay at the quay-side below Memphis. And there Thoth, taking on the form of Hermes by which Paris would know him, delivered the Ka of Helen into his hands. And, rejoicing greatly, Paris cast off the mooring ropes and set sail northwards for Troy.

Yet Helen dwelt still in the Temple of Hathor at Memphis. And as the years passed most of the Egyptians forgot how she had come there, and many worshipped her as Hathor come to earth in human form, and most spoke of her as the Strange Hathor.

In time Seti died. His spirit went to dwell in the Hall of Osiris and his body was laid to rest in a great tomb below the Valley of Kings in Western Thebes. There was then a time of trouble in Egypt when various of his sons struggled for the throne. But at length Set-nakhte wore the Double Crown and held the scourge and the crook - and his half-sister Tausert sat by his side as Queen of Egypt.

Set-nakhte did not reign for long, and when he too was gathered to Osiris, his son the third Rameses became Pharaoh of Egypt.

All this while Helen had dwelt in the Temple of Hathor at Memphis and, though it was nearly twenty years since Paris had brought her to Egypt, she seemed scarcely to have aged at all but was still more lovely than any other woman in the world.

Now both Seti and Set-nakhte had faithfully observed the oath made to her. But young Rameses was of a different metal, and as soon as he became Pharaoh he declared that he would marry Helen and make her his Queen.

'She may be only a Princess of the Aquaiusha,' he declared. 'She may long ago have been the wife of one of the kings of that people - but she is still the loveliest of women, and she shall be mine!'

In vain Queen Tausert tried to persuade him against so wicked a deed. 'I care nothing for what my father and my grandfather may have sworn,' he cried. 'I have sworn no oath, except one, to marry Helen!'

'But,' urged Tausert, 'suppose her husband King Menelaus is still alive?' This troubled Rameses a little, and he waited before marrying Helen until his chief magicians had looked into the matter for him.

While they were doing so, there came a shipwrecked sailor up the river to Memphis and knelt at the shrine of Hathor to pray for help. Tausert was still the High Priestess of Hathor, and now that her son was Pharaoh, she had returned to dwell in the Temple. So when she saw the sailor kneeling in the shrine, she went to ask him whence he came and why he had come to the Temple of Hathor instead of that of Hershef, where strangers usually sought sanctuary.

'I come in obedience to a dream,' answered the man. 'Hermes, whom you call Thoth, visited me as I slept and bade me seek the Strange Hathor in her temple at Memphis and tell all my tale without hiding anything.'

'Speak on,' answered Tausert, 'and fear nothing. The Strange Hathor sits hidden in the shrine and hears all that you tell me.'

'Then know,' said the sailor, 'that I am Menelaus, King of Sparta. Troy fell several years ago, and since then I and my ships have been blown hither and thither about the seas. At length I came in my ship to the mouth of the River of Egypt, and with me was my wife the beautiful Helen, whom Paris stole and to rescue whom the war was fought. My other ships anchored behind the Island of Pharos, but I sailed into the mouth of the Nile, and there my ship was struck by a sudden storm of wind and wrecked on a little island.

'We all escaped safely to the shore and sought shelter in some caves nearby. Helen and I were alone in one cave - and when I awoke in the morning she had vanished. All day we searched for her, but there was no trace. She could not have left the island, for the river ran deep and fierce all round it, and we could only think that she had strayed too near the water's edge and been carried away by a crocodile.

'I was in despair. To have fought for ten years at Troy to win back Helen; to have wandered on the sea for seven years trying to bring her home to Sparta - and then to lose her like this seemed unbearable. I was tempted to fall upon my own sword and seek her in the fields of asphodel where Hades reigns, whom you call Osiris.

'Then, as I lay mourning for my loss, Hermes appeared to me. "Do not despair, Menelaus," he said. "All that has chanced is by the will of Zeus. Helen is not lost to you - she was never found. In the morning a ship of the Egyptians will carry you to Memphis. There seek Helen in the Temple of the Strange Hathor. Enter the temple and tell all your tale to the priestess there - and you will find the true Helen."

'All this I have done. A ship came to the island the next day and carried us up the river to Memphis - and here I kneel as Hermes bade me.'

'King of Sparta,' said Tausert solemnly, 'the will of Amon-Re, whom you call Zeus, is accomplished. Seventeen years ago, in the days when the good god my father Seti Merneptah was Pharaoh, Paris the Prince of Troy was driven with his ship into the Nile, and Thoth the all-

wise, whom you call Hermes, decreed that Helen should remain here in safety and honor until you came for her, and here she still dwells.'

'But Priestess,' gasped Menelaus, 'Helen went with Paris to Troy! We sacked Troy and I carried Helen away on my ship. She was with me until two days ago when she vanished from the island. How can she have been here ever since Paris stole her from my palace in Sparta?'

'By the will of Amon-Re the Ka of Helen was drawn forth by Thoth and sent with Paris,' answered Tausert. 'For a double, a mere spirit form, did you of the Aquaiusha fight and Troy fall. Here is Helen!'

As she spoke Tausert drew back the curtains of the shrine and Helen stepped forth with outstretched arms - beautiful Helen, unsoiled by years of siege and wandering, or by the unwished love of Paris.

Like a man in a dream Menelaus took Helen in his arms and held her as if to feel whether she were shadow or woman.

'Helen!' he murmured. 'Did you dwell here all these years while Paris carried a mere thing of air to Troy? Have we fought and died for a mere eidolon, a magic likeness, not a real woman? Truly the magic of the Egyptians is greater even than we have ever thought - and in Greece they are spoken of as the wisest of all men!'

Then Helen said: 'My lord and my love, we are not safe yet. Although I have dwelt here all these years honored and unharmed, a great danger has come upon me suddenly. The new Pharaoh, Rameses, the son of this lady, my protectress Tausert, wishes to make me his wife - and today he comes for his answer: whether I will be his willingly or by force.'

'This royal lady, Queen Tausert - does she favor the match?' asked Menelaus.

So little,' replied Tausert, 'that I will do all in my power to help you both to escape from Egypt - provided no harm comes to Rameses my son.' Then the three of them spoke together and devised a daring scheme.

At noon that day came Rameses the Pharaoh to the Temple of Hathor to claim fair Helen as his bride. He found her clad in mourning garments with her hair hanging loose, while Menelaus, still ragged and unshaven as befitted a shipwrecked sailor, stood respectfully at a little distance and Queen Tausert strove to comfort Helen.

'What has chanced here?' asked Rameses.

'That for which you prayed, my son,' answered Tausert. 'This man is a messenger whom you should welcome. He was a sailor who came from Troy in the ship of Menelaus of Sparta, that prince of the Aquaiusha who was husband to Helen. The ship in which he sailed was wrecked on the island of Pharos, and Menelaus is dead.'

'Is this true, stranger?' asked Rameses.

'O Pharaoh - life, health, strength be to you!' answered Menelaus, kneeling before him in the Egyptian manner. 'With my own eyes I saw him dashed on the rocks, and the waves carry his broken body out to sea.'

'Then, Helen, nothing stands between us!' cried Rameses.

'Only the memory of him who was my husband,' answered Helen.

'Your grief cannot be great after all these years.'

'Yet he was my husband, and a great king among my people the Greeks, and I would mourn him and pay due funeral rites to his memory so that his spirit may be at rest and dwell in the land where Hades rules. Wherefore I beg you to let me honor him as a king should be honored though his body is lost in the deep sea.'

'That I grant willingly,' said Rameses. 'You have but to command, and all shall be done as you wish. I know nothing of the funeral customs of the Aquaiusha, so you must instruct me.'

'I must have a ship,' said Helen, 'well furnished With food and wine for the' funeral feast, and a great bull to sacrifice to the spirit of my husband. And I must have treasures also - those which Paris stole long ago from my husband's palace when he carried me away. This sailor here and his companions in shipwreck should accompany me, for they know all that should be done, and it will take many men to perform the sacrifice. I must accompany them to speak the words and pour the last offering to my husband's spirit - and all this must be done on the sea in which his body lies, for then only can his spirit find rest in the realm of Hades - and only then can I be your bride.'

In his eagerness to win Helen, Rameses agreed to all that she asked. A ship was loaded with the treasures that Seti had taken from Paris; the Greek sailors, Menelaus among them, brought the great sacrificial bull on board and took charge of it; Helen, clad in her mourning robes, stood in the prow of the ship, the sunlight flashing on the red Star Stone that she wore - and the ship sailed swiftly down the Nile and out on to the sea near Canopus.

But next day there came a messenger, stained with brine and the dust of travel, and knelt before Rameses, crying, 'O Pharaoh - life, health strength be to you! - that sailor of the Aquaiusha who came with the news of the death of Menelaus was none other than Menelaus himself! When the ship was well out on the Great Green Sea beyond Canopus, the Aquaiusha sacrificed the bull indeed - but to the sea-god to give them a safe passage back to Greece. Then they seized us of Egypt who were on the ship and cast us into the sea, bidding us swim back to Memphis and tell you, O Pharaoh, that the will of Amon-Re and of Thoth was

accomplished and Helen, safe both from Paris the Trojan and from you, was on her way back to Sparta with her lawful husband, Menelaus.'

Now in his anger and disappointment Rameses wished to kill Tausert his mother, for he realized that she had known about Menelaus and had helped to rob him of Helen. But that night ibis-headed Thoth appeared to him and said, 'Pharaoh Rameses, all these strange happenings have been by the will of Amon-Re the god and father of all Pharaohs. By his will Helen was brought to Egypt; at his command I drew forth her Ka and sent it with Paris, to deceive him and all the Aquaiusha and the Peoples of the Sea; and he brought it about that Helen should be restored to her husband and sent to her home with him and with the treasures that Paris stole.'

Then Pharaoh Rameses bowed his head to the will of Amon-Re and heaped greater honors yet upon his mother-queen Tausert, High Priestess of Hathor.