

GLAUCIA

THE GREEK SLAVE

CHAPTER I

THE BROTHER AND SISTER

MORNING sunshine was just gilding the top of the Capitoline Hill, bringing into view the parent temple of the Imperial City—the shrine of Jupiter Tonans—but as yet the shadow still lay on the palaces and temples below, and only the first faint bustle of life was heard stirring this heart of the world—this mistress of nations—Rome.

The slight noise that came, borne on the morning breeze, did not arise from temple or palace, but away from these, down among the busy haunts of men, where moved a motley crowd of men, women, and children—Britons, Greeks, and Egyptians, for the most part—whose groans and curses, in different languages, mingled with the crack of the whip and the oaths of their Roman

MOTLEY: *greatly varied*

masters; for they were a party of slaves on their way to the market. There was to be a large auction today, and so before the rising sun had run its course, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, might be parted forever.

In the midst of this group walked a boy and girl, clasping each other by the hand, while the tears occasionally fell from their eyes, and they shuddered at the oaths they did understand, although much of what was said was utterly incomprehensible to them. They had been placed near the middle of the crowd, that the driver's lash might not fall upon them, as its marks would be likely to lessen their value, for they were no ordinary slaves. The girl looked delicate, but gave promise of being beautiful; and the boy's lithe, supple, graceful figure spoke of refinement, such as few of the others could boast. They each wore long white linen tunics, which bespoke their nationality, even if the girl's rich golden hair had not told the tale; and there was little fear that anyone would mistake the noble Greek outline of the boy as he stooped to whisper some word of encouragement to his little sister.

"Hush, my Glaucia," he whispered; "I am almost a man, and I will work for our freedom; thine first and then my own."

But the prospect of parting with her brother was too near for her to take any comfort from this promise yet.

“If they had only taken us to the slave-market at Athens, Laon, some friend might have bought us together,” she sobbed.

“It may be that someone will buy us both now,” said the lad; but it was easy to see that the word “buy” almost choked him as he uttered it, and his eyes glowed and flashed defiantly at the thought of his slavery. To Glaucia, however, separation from her brother was all she could think of at present. She knew nothing of slavery, for she had only been taken from a luxurious home a short time before; but Laon was her only friend in the wide world now, and she clung to him with passionate affection.

The slave-market was reached at last, and the poor creatures were ranged in groups, according to their value, and seated under the porticoes ready for the inspection of purchasers; but the two young Greeks were seated by themselves, and Glaucia was directed to smooth her tumbled hair, and Laon to look less angry and defiant.

“But I feel angry and defiant,” said the boy; “thy laws are unjust to allow the Roman creditor of my father to sell us for his debt.”

The man, who was arranging the different groups, merely shrugged his shoulders. “It were well for thee not to question our laws,” he said, “but make thyself as happy as thou canst.”

“Happy!” repeated Laon; “can a *slave* ever be happy?” and he dashed away the tears that, in

spite of all his efforts, would come welling up to his eyes.

It was now Glaucia's turn to try and comfort her brother, and as the sunlight came stealing into the marketplace, and a gentle breeze from the Tiber lifted her golden hair, she said, "See, Laon, our goddess Athene hath not forgotten us here in Rome, and it may be she will still let us be together."

But Laon shook his head sadly, and replied, "Athene is angry with us, Glaucia, and is punishing us for what happened years and years ago, soon after thou wert born."

"What was it?" asked Glaucia. "What could have made our goddess angry with us? Was not our father one of the noblest Epicureans in Athens?"

"He was accounted one of the richest," said Laon.

"Then he must have been a favorite with the gods," said Glaucia.

"Then, dost thou not see, little sister, that as only the rich are the favorites of the gods we cannot be, for we are poor," said Laon.

"But—but thou saidst something had happened, Laon—something that hath made our Athene angry with us. Tell me, what is it?" she added coaxingly.

But Laon shook his head. "Nay, I know not what it is myself," he said; "but our old nurse told me before we left Athens that our mother was not

dead, as we had always supposed, but had offended Athene."

"*Our* mother," repeated Glaucia, "was she kind to us as our brother Apecides' mother was to him? O, Laon, where is she? for we should not be sold to pay our father's debts if we could only find her."

But Laon only shook his head. "I know nothing but what our nurse told me, but I mean to find out all about it when I am a man."

Glaucia looked at her brother, and then at the tall Roman soldier who came lounging through the market at this moment, as if measuring them mentally.

"It will be a long time before thou art a man," she said.

"I am a man now," said Laon seriously. "I am only sixteen, and was a boy a month since, but I shall never be a boy again, Glaucia. Thinking of thee and my mother, and how she offended all the gods of Athens, has changed me, and I want to do a man's work in the world—to free thee and find my mother, if she lives."

"O, Laon, if we were only free we would go back to Athens and begin our search. Hast thou any clue?" she suddenly asked.

Laon reddened and put his hand to his breast, and then, after some hesitation, drew forth two small rolls of parchment.

"I have these," he said, "one for thee and one for

me; our nurse Lepida gave them to me, and they were left in her charge by our mother.”

“O, Laon, let me see,” said Glaucia, as he slowly unrolled one of the slips. They looked at the writing together, but neither being able to read they could make nothing of it. “I wish I could understand it,” continued Glaucia. “I will learn to read, if I can.”

In a moment the parchment was snatched from her hand, and Laon’s face worked convulsively as he said,

“Glaucia, thou shalt not—must not! No Greek maiden of virtue ever learns that which would at once defame her. Didst thou never hear why my father would not let me learn anything—why he grew to hate learning so much?”

Glaucia opened her eyes in wondering amazement. Laon was always so gentle with her, but now he spoke so passionately that his frame trembled, and he looked as though he were about to destroy her precious manuscript.

“What is it—what is the matter?” she asked.

“Glaucia, our mother wrote this,” said Laon slowly and impressively.

But Glaucia did not seem to be greatly surprised, and merely said, “I wish I had learned to use the stylus.”

“Athene preserve thee from such a fate!” said Laon devoutly. “Glaucia, if I fulfill my mother’s wish and give thee one of these, mind, thou must

keep it a secret that *our* mother ever used the stylus—ever wrote these words, whatever they may be.”

“But thou, Laon, will learn to read, wilt thou not?” asked Glaucia; “thou wilt want to know what our mother says to us here.”

Laon colored and hesitated for a minute or two, but at length he said,

“Learning is good for a man, but for a woman it is a shame and disgrace.”

“And was it through this that our mother offended Pallas Athene?” asked Glaucia.

“Through that and something else,” replied Laon moodily; “what the other cause was Lepida would not tell me; but—but—but, Glaucia, forget thou ever had a mother,” he added quickly.

The girl shook her head.

“I cannot, Laon,” she said; “that thou hast told me I can never forget, and when I am a woman I will take this parchment in my hand and go through the world in search of my mother.”

“I would that I had forgotten to tell thee this, or that Lepida had not charged me so strictly to do so before we were parted,” said the boy.

This allusion to their coming separation brought the tears to Glaucia’s eyes again, but their owner coming up at this moment she was told to dry them quickly, as it might prevent his making so good a bargain. He had brought a customer with him, a young Roman patrician, who

wanted a Greek dancing-girl to supply the place of one who had died. Laon's eyes flashed fire as he heard this.

"My sister has never learned to dance, most noble Roman," he said boldly.

The gay young Roman looked at Laon, but merely murmured, "Impudence!" as he passed on. His master, however, grew furious with passion.

"Is this the proper behavior for a slave?" he demanded. "Have I not lost enough by thy shameless spendthrift father? Ten thousand sesterces would not pay me for all the trouble I have been at, and now thou wilt cheat me by making thyself of as little value as possible."

"My sister cannot dance," said Laon, "and she shall not be sold for a dancing-girl."

"Ha! sayest thou so, thou miserable Greek slave!" exclaimed the man, striking Laon as he spoke. "I say she shall be a dancing-girl, for I will have her taught that she may—"

But here he was interrupted by receiving a blow from Laon that almost stunned him for a moment. He quickly recovered himself, however, and dragging the boy forward knocked him down, and kicked him as he might have kicked a dog, while Glauca screamed and begged him to spare her brother, receiving several blows herself as she tried to screen him.

Her screams soon brought a crowd of people together, for the market was fast filling now; but

GAY: *light-hearted*

SPENDTHRIFT: *wasteful and extravagant*

SESTERCES: *Roman coins made of brass*

no one interfered when they heard the cause of the uproar.

“A couple of young Greeks have turned upon their master,” was the explanation passed from lip to lip, and by the young men it was laughed at as a good joke. To poor Laon, however, it was no laughing matter; for when his master’s anger had sufficiently cooled to allow him to leave off kicking he was quite unable to rise, or even to crawl back to his place beside Glaucia, and lay groaning with pain until another slave was ordered to pick him up and carry him to a shed close at hand.

His master cursed himself for his folly in getting into a rage with the boy, for he was quite unsalable now, and might be for some time; while Glaucia had spoiled her good looks for the present, owing to her grief on her brother’s account.

She wanted to go with him when he was taken away, and begged very hard to be allowed to do so, for at first her master seemed inclined to relent toward her. The fact was, he was debating the cost of having Glaucia taught dancing; for as a dancing-girl she would be of far more value than a waiting-maid, which was all that she was fit for now; and if he decided to do this, she might make herself useful in trying to cure her brother’s wounds.

At length, however, he decided to try the chances of this day’s sale, and if he could get a good price for her at once he would take it and rid himself of any further trouble in the matter.

So Glaucia was told to go back to her place, and not shed another tear unless she wished to be beaten worse than her brother had been.

“These cursed Epicureans, I will never lend them another sesterce,” muttered her master; “they believe in nothing but present enjoyment; and as they think their soul dies with their body, so they seem to think the whole world is coming to an end with them, and if things can only be made smooth for them here, it matters not what happens to others afterward.”

Had Laon or his sister uttered this complaint no one could have felt surprised, for their father’s misdeeds were being visited most heavily upon them; but Laon could think of nothing now but his poor bruised, bleeding body, and Glaucia was too full of grief and anxiety on her brother’s account to think of anything else. Her mind was so full of this all-absorbing thought that she did not notice the little crowd that gradually gathered round her, until an elderly freedman asked a second time what she was crying about.

Glaucia lifted her head then. “O, my brother! my Laon!” she sobbed; “they have killed him, kicked him to death.” But her master coming back at this moment most of the crowd moved away, but the freedman still remained.

“Thou art a slave for sale,” he said; and, turning to her master, asked her price.

“A thousand sesterces,” said the slave-dealer shortly.

“A high price for a waiting-maid,” remarked the Roman.

“Too high for thee I doubt not, for, by the helmet of Cæsar, thou lookest as though thou didst not possess the half of that sum,” said the man in a sneering tone.

The eyes of the Roman flashed angrily. “I came not here to be insulted, but to ask the price of the slave-girl.”

“And I have told thee already—a thousand sesterces.”

“And I say it is too high; no one will give so much for a waiting-maid.”

“Then I will make a dancing-girl of her; she will fetch as much again then,” coolly remarked her owner.

“That is true enough, but thou wouldst have to keep her awhile, so that it would not be all profit. Wouldst thou not be willing to get the trouble off thy hands at once for eight hundred sesterces?”

The man shook his head. “The debt she is to be sold for is a heavy one, and I will not take less than the thousand,” he said. The man looked at Glauca again, and asked her several questions. “She is the only Greek girl in the market this morning,” he remarked.

“Yes, that she is, and there is not likely to be another for some days.”

“And my mistress leaves Rome tomorrow, and will have a Greek waiting-maid before she goes,” said the freedman, fingering the coins he carried in his pouch; “make out thy bill. I will take the girl, though I must say it is a high price to charge for her.”

Half an hour afterward Glaucia left the slave-market, weeping bitterly for her brother, and wondering whether they would ever meet again.