

The Stone of Cybele

from Golden Twigs

by
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Golden Twigs are Aleister Crowley's largely unpublished short stories based upon Frazer's Golden Bough. This wonderful tale is the first of the series which will appear in future issues. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.--H.B.

I

CROWNED WITH IVY upon a turreted fillet of gold that bound her wine-dark hair, the girl Cotys fixed her violet eyes upon the restless sea, that heaved with slow and oily prescience of storm. On the horizon all was deep orange; above, the clouds were uniform in blue-black darkness, pregnant with water and with thunder.

Cotys was tall and straight and slender, a young arrow from a rainbow; for there was in her something utterly remote from the life of the world. Her robe was of fine silk, sap-green with purple reflections; and on it, in dull gold, were brodered lions. The colour melted imperceptibly into her skin; for that too was like the ivy itself, flushing into amethyst, and paling into amber. In her eyes the light of the whole night of heaven burned in majesty; there were pride, and subtle joy, and the anguish of an infinite longing, wrought to a single gem of inscrutable Will. But in that Will one read no hope, not even desire.

The autumnal day suited her nature; she loved to dream deciduous things.

She stood upon the edge of the tall cliff, her slim fingers loving the wind that poured between them. But her thoughts were far beyond the horizon; they saw a field hospital on the veldt, and a man dying. She had come out from the great lonely house of Polpenning, that crowned the black headland, to realize her loss. The words of her father's last letter were sobbing in her brain. On the oak table of the refectory she had left the large official envelope, with the formal notification of Colonel Flack's death, the letters of sympathy from the General and other of his fellow officers, her father's letter, and a key.

“The surgeon tells me I have few hours to live,” he had written.

“Dennes has everything in order; you will have about œ3000 a year; œ10000 cash to Claude, for Marcia's sake; the rest in trust for Regulus. You are 24; I have made you sole executrix. I know you worthy of all trust. You have been everything to me since your mother died.

“I also give you charge of more than money. The key enclosed unlocks a safe hidden beneath the big table in my library in the Paris house.

There is the heirloom of the world. You know we are of the Flacci; Horace himself was of our kin. One of us, C. Valerius, at the sack of Rome by Genseric, took the sacred stone of Cybele from the temple of Victory on the Mons Palatinus. Never till now has our race failed of an adult male heir. The stone goes to Regulus when he is 21. And now farewell; I am glad I died fighting.”

The General's letter added to her pride; at the critical moment of the day, Colonel Flack had led his hussars in a mad charge against intrenched positions. It had succeeded, broken the enemy's centre and their commander's nerve at the same moment; it had won the field. The Victoria Cross had been pinned to that gallant breast before it breathed its last.

The storm broke heavily; Cotys was recalled to herself by heavy drops on her bare head; she turned and walked to the house. Here she changed her dress for black; as she came down into the hall she found her betrothed, the Hon. and Rev. Joseph Randolph Fortescue, a stalwart clergyman of thirty years of age. He took her in his arms in silence; her dress told him that she knew already what he had come to break to her. He honoured her for her steel strength, the Roman spirit yet alive and vigorous. She did not even show him the General's letter; she handed him her father's only. When he gave it back, she simply said, “I must go to Eton and see Regulus, to London and transact what is necessary with Dennes, then to Paris to take charge there. I shall be back in a month or six weeks.” The clergyman began to talk of their wedding; the idea had been to wait for Colonel Flack's return, which had been expected, with the happy turn of the campaign, in another six months' time. Fortescue reminded the girl that she was young and an orphan; a husband seemed obviously expedient. She asked him to defer the discussion until her return from Paris. Presently the vicar took his leave; he kissed her several times farewell, for she was going to start very early in the morning, and Fortescue, who lived ten miles away, had an early celebration. As he went, he wondered in himself a little. She is marvellous, he thought, the beauty of Spring itself, the dignity and distinction and reserve of the ideal chatelaine of a great house; but--is she capable of passion? She had

accepted him at once, yielded spontaneously to his first masterful caress; and yet--and yet--it seemed but a duty perfectly fulfilled. He thought of Tennyson's line--"Icily perfect, faultily faultless, splendidly null"--and then he smiled; she was one of those women--the best kind, that awaken only on marriage. They flower late, then once for all, a crimson bloom of glory, herald of the fairest fruit of what he called "God's orchard."

II

CLAUDE DE CRILLON was making tea for Cotys in his studio, which stood on the very brink of Montmartre. From the window one saw clear over Paris, from N^otre Dame to the Trocad^oro. Marcia, Colonel Flack's sister, had married for love into a noble French family of only moderate means. The result had been unfortunate; love soon cooled, even before the birth of Claude, and a quarrel had only been averted by the death of the husband. It was said that at a somewhat wild party he had backed himself to swim the Seine on the first horse he could pick up in a fiacre. Anyhow, he had been drowned. Marcia died when Claude, now 28, was ten years old. The boy had been brought up by Colonel Flack, sent to Winchester and Oxford, but they had never got on well together. Claude was not really deformed, but he gave that impression; his head was large, his face abominably ugly in a savage surly fashion, his body squat, and his limbs too long and strong to harmonize with them. At school and college he had done only the minimum work necessary to pass examinations; he toiled incessantly at sculpture, and when his muscles wearied he read the classics. He could read and speak Latin and Greek more easily than English, and refused to take classics for his examination on the ground that the University was totally ignorant of the subject. He played no games; he would not row; and he avoided the other men. His only friend at Magdalen was a blind boy, named Hughes, son of a Cabinet minister, whose first pleasure was the flute. De Crillon called him Marsyas, and bade him play while he sculpted. On the lad's side his joy was great to run his fingers over Claude's modellings; he made a master critic.

Cotys had not been encouraged to see much of Claude; she remembered him only from one Commemoration Week, when she had certainly succumbed to his extraordinary power and fascination. He knew exactly what all the other people did not know; and his ignorance of what they did know was almost equally enchanting.

So it was with very pleasant anticipations that she went to see him on an errand that could not fail to please--the announcement of a very unexpected legacy of æ10000 to eke out the two or three hundreds a year that his parents had left him.

Claude was sitting on a divan covered with grey fur, his legs crossed under him; Cotys sat opposite in an enormous arm chair of grey velvet. Everything in the studio was grey; the floor, the walls, the hangings, the very plaster casts had been toned down to harmony.

Only at the end of the room was a great gate of bronze, Claude's own work, a dark trellis covered with green vines that bore bunches of grapes in purple patina. Cotys, knowing his taste for classics, recounted her investigations in her father's library.

The stone of Cybele, she said, was jet black, rather like a sugar-loaf in shape, set in a plain stand of gold with the words AVE MATER DEORUM deeply chased. "Cotys," said Claude, "I want you to give me your most serious attention. You are now the representative of the eldest branch of the Flacci--I should have the stone if Regulus dies or fails of heirs, which he won't, so never mind that--but on you at this moment hangs the responsibility of the family honour. I know that that is more to you than anything on earth." Cotys nodded gravely. "Now," continued Claude, more seriously still, "I believe the chance is come for you to do something which has not been thought of for fifteen centuries--to achieve the end for which our race has been preserved in honour for so long," The girl was surprised, but deeply impressed; Claude's eyes sank into hers, and conquered them.

"I will tell you something about that stone," said he "which you know, but which you do not know you know. Come over here!"

He led her to a bust of grey marble, put her hand upon the head. She stared, uncomprehending. "Nothing happens?" "Nothing." "Well, this is what happened yesterday. You told me that you took the stone in your hands, and carried it to the light to read the inscription."

"Yes." "Well, you never told me that you put down the stone because it became hot." She flushed violently. "I'd absolutely forgotten; but it's true. How--oh how did you know?" "I know more than that. For an instant you went giddy; perhaps you even heard or saw something." "I had a stupid fancy." "Its a long shot; but perhaps you saw a valley dark with trees, and women with torches, and heard the noises of cymbals and of drums." He began to recite Swinburne's verses:

``We too have tracked by star-proof trees
The tempest of the Thyiades
Scare the loud night on hills that hid
The blood-feasts of the Bassarid,
Heard their song's iron cadences
Fright the wolf hungering from the kid,
Outroar the lion-throated seas,
Outchide the north-wind if it chid,
And hush the torrent-tongued ravines
With thunders of their tambourines.
But the fierce flute whose notes acclaim
Dim goddesses of fiery fame,
Cymbal and clamorous kettledrum,
Timbrels and tabrets, all are dumb
That turned the high chill air to flame;
The singing tongues of fire are numb
That called on Cotys by her name
Edonian, till they felt her come
And maddened, and her mystic face
Lightened along the streams of Thrace."

“You're a thought-reader, Claude!” she laughed. “I do remember something like that, now you tell me, like a dream that comes back suddenly sometimes in the afternoon. But it's all absolutely vague; you know, your saying it may have made me think I remember it. That happens sometimes.” “I'm glad you're sceptical; now I can demand to offer proof.” “It's strange; you don't know how keen I am; you've thoroughly aroused my curiosity.” “Then come here tomorrow afternoon at 5, as soon as my model's gone. I'll have Hughes here; you met him at Oxford that year; the blind boy, you know; he plays the flute better than ever. And bring the stone. I needn't tell you to be careful; come in a car all the way.” “So I will. And now: vale--do I pronounce it right?” and she laughed her way into the street.

III

ON HER RETURN to the house Cotys found a letter from Fortescue. It was long, and curiously devotional; it made her rather ashamed; she had been neglecting the offices of religion in her preoccupation with the details of business--the care of great estates thus suddenly thrust on her. She tried to make up for lost time, but her thoughts kept wandering to the stone of Cybele. Presently she had an overmastering impulse to take out the stone and handle it, to find out whether it were truth or imagination or coincidence, the heat, the giddiness, the half-seen vision. Her feet carried her to the library door, but her hand refused to open it. The inhibition was absolute. She stayed there several minutes, incapable of action; then, impatient and disgusted at her own vacillation, went determinedly to her bedroom, took her hat, and, summoning her maid, went out into the Champs-Élysées. Half-an-hour's brisk walk quieted her nerves; she went home, and slept like a child.

The next day she was at the studio with the stone. She had not removed it from the casket in which it reposed. Claude and Hughes were waiting for her. They were clad in the costumes of pagan priests of Rome; she had half expected something of the sort. “Cotys, you know Marsyas,” was all her cousin said. “I am going to be brusque; this is family business. Please sit on this stool.” He indicated one with three legs. In front of it was a square tray, full of earth. “I want you to do one rather strange thing,” he said; “please take off your shoes and stockings, and put your bare feet on this soil. It comes from Rome, from the very spot where the Temple of Victory once stood.” She made a little moue, decided that there was no harm in it with her cousin and a blind man, complied. “Put your right hand on this tree!” he went on. It was a very young pine, the trunk swathed in wool, and decked with wreaths of violets; on the stem, about half-way

up, the figure of a youth, one of Claude's own sculptures in wood, was bound by silken cords. "What is your Christian name?" asked the sculptor. "Cotys," answered the girl; then hesitatingly added, "well, I'm afraid that isn't a Christian name; it's pagan!" "Then you have no Christian name?" "I suppose not." "Very good; here is the stone. Take your hand from the tree; hold the stone in both hands, and kiss it." "I don't know why I'm doing this; it's silly and unnatural, and yet it's all familiar." "Familiar is the mot juste," said Hughes, who had till then been silent; "it is in the family, in the blood of the Flacci!" Cotys raised the stone to her lips. "Splendid," cried Claude after a moment, "she has kissed it eleven times. Already she remembers!" "The stone is hot," said Cotys, "but it will not burn me. I am fire of fire." Claude instantly placed a wreath of ivy on her head. She did not seem to notice it. "My lions are slow," she muttered; "they have slept too long." Suddenly she changed her tone, became abrupt, imperious, angry. "You are no priests of mine!" she cried; "have I no priest on earth? Open my sanctuary!" Claude shook his head. "I am the high priest of Dionysus," was his answer. "I am the high priest of Apollo," said Hughes. Cotys rose, with a fierce and determined look upon her face. "I am the priestess of Cybele," she said; "and I will open her shrine and reinstate the sacred stone!" She went down upon her knees, and placed the stone upon the earth. Then with sudden and utterly virginal ardour, she stripped off her dress, keeping only the long scarf of silk, purple and sap-green with its embroidery of dull gold, that she had worn over her shoulders. This she wrapped about her body, dipped, took up the stone--"Phallophore!" she cried with a spasm that shook her whole body. Something seemed to have been let loose in her at the word. Claude took up the pine-shaft, began to move toward the bronze gates. Marsyas began to play upon his flute, a low melody, with strange hesitations and dashes, quickening as it moved. To this danced Cotys, always decorous, always self-contained. Claude did not move in a straight line. He traced a complex pattern on the floor. It was a quarter of an hour before he reached the gates. Cotys was quivering in every limb. "Open the gates!" she gasped. Then Claude lifted his voice; in resounding Greek he cried aloud, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the Queen of Glory shall come in."

Hughes now pulled back the gates; Cotys entered, and flung herself before the altar which she found there, placing the sacred stone of Cybele in its centre. She began to intone strange words in a strange tongue. Her speech was thick and hissing, charged with lightnings, like the flashes of the head of a poisonous snake. She rose; she began to dance, no more in stately reverence, but wildly and indecently. The flute of Marsyas gave the measure; her cousin struck bronze cymbals, and beat upon a kettledrum. Suddenly she fell upon her back, her arms stretched out, even as one lies dead. The breath choked in her throat, then seemed to stop. The music ceased. Claude and his friend went to the altar; all was silence, all rapt intensity.

Cotys came to herself. She had forgotten everything. When she saw where she was lying, she thought it was a dream.

The room was small; the altar was a cube supported by four lions rampant. It was enshrined within a canopy of bronze. Behind it, ruddily gilded, was a great square with a circle inscribed in it; within the circle, the 'man of Vitruvius', that figure which is called the measure of heaven and earth. Bending over this, and holding it, were two gigantic goddess-figures wrought into attitudes the simplicity of whose obscenity was so chaste that Cotys failed to understand; she only felt the horror. The full tide of the reaction had set in; she knew that she had been insane, that some far taint in her blood had mastered her. She looked at the two men with shrinking horror. Claude looked steadily at her. "Priestess of Cybele," said he, "what follows?"

Cotys revolted violently. She sprang to her feet, unsteadily enough. She appealed to her religion; she made the sign of the cross. It only traced the figure of the 'man of Vitruvius!' "Our Father which art in heaven," she began, despairing. Again she saw the 'man of Vitruvius'; and, in her hysterical state, thought that he took the phrase to himself, and smiled at her. She saw that every modern thought was only a copy of some ancient thought, and she knew herself vowed in her blood to the old gods. "I am lost," she said quite quietly, "I am Cybele's. Bring me the knife; bring me the wine." Claude took a gilded silver bowl wide and flat from the outstretched hand of one of the bronze goddesses; from the other a dagger. "We do not know," said he, "--and I ask pardon of the gods, and pray enlightenment--we do not know what was the wine of Cybele; this wine must serve." It was a clear white liquid that he poured into the bowl, and it trembled and simmered internally as if it were alive. In its limpidity the nymphs and satyrs that he had chased upon it seemed to renew their pictured orgies of drunkenness and lust. Cotys took the dagger, and the wrists of the two men. She cut her own arm and then theirs,

holding their hands so that the three rivulets of blood were confluent to one. Then she took the ivy from her brows, and dipped it thrice. She took a leaf and put it in each mouth; then placed her hands on the two heads, and the three bowed themselves above the surface of the liquor. She caught her breath, choking; the fumes were suffocating. She set her teeth upon the ivy, and persisted; presently the great change began. She grew rosy and brilliant; the whole temple seemed alive with unearthly beauty; she began to sob in her excitement; stronger and deeper grew her breath as she inhaled the ether. Soon all three were lying prone, their faces pressed close to the surface of the liquor of Cybele, sucking the vapour by great draughts into their lungs with open mouth, their fingers clenched, their veins boiling with the madness of that supreme intoxication.

The world was blotted out for her; she knew Nothingness, a vast blind space, spangled with a few points of brilliant light. She drew the vapour fiercely through her throat; the rare stars blazed, blasted the blackness out of being. Raving with the splendour and ecstasy of it, she saw suddenly that she must go mad, that it was not for mortals to endure such brilliance. She cried out on Cybele ``Let that be which must be!" Instantly a new passion smote her: what new rite was owed to the infernal, the inexorable goddess? What hideous parody of the most sacred and mysterious doctrine of the Christian faith was enacted in that temple of abominations?

Quem si puellarum insereres choro

Mire sagaceis falleret hospites:

Discrimen obscurum, solutis

Crinibus, ambiguoque vultu.

IV

IT IS AN EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCE that the human brain is not impatient of contradiction. It is capable of carrying on two mutually exclusive trains of thought, and acting on each, without the slightest suspicion that anything is wrong with its unity. Each one of us, save the rarest--and it must be confessed, the most impractical--minds, admits of compromise somewhere, automatically, and when warning is given, the Will as often as not refuses to discuss the subject. Hence we have contradictions in terms flourishing gaily without any suspicion of their inherent oxymoron, as for example Christian Socialism. People claim to believe in destiny, and yet take pains to

decide between divers courses of action; others say that faith moves mountains, but never think of trying to remove so much as a grain of dust in the eye by so evidently economical and painless a method. Again, we make vital changes in our lives, and it takes us years to realize the bearings of them; and as that great philosopher, Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion*, has said "Do any of us understand what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?"

Cotys, priestess of Cybele, never thought of interfering with the plans of Miss Flack of Polpenning; and Miss Flack did not realize that her initiation into paganism meant more to her than taking up golf might have done. It was because the violation had been so deep that it showed no wave upon the surface. But the Hon. and Rev. Joseph Randolph Fortescue saw in her third letter that something had happened; a fortnight later he became seriously alarmed. He sent a telegram asking if anything was the matter. Cotys replied kindly and simply, or so she meant it; but the vicar's suspicions were only the more violently aroused. The double personality created in Cotys by her initiation was beginning to show signs of interfiltration. Fortescue was a man of action; he left his cure to his subordinate, and came over to Paris. Without warning he called at the house in the rue de Ponthieu. Cotys was at home; she was just dressing to go to the studio, as she did daily. The stone of Cybele, the fascination of the ether, the delirium of the savage rites, the personality of Claude, forceful and hideous, and that of Marsyas, pathetic and perverse, drew her exultant to their vortex.

Yet when her betrothed was announced, she forgot everything. She was the maiden of two months ago as she ran into the drawing-room. "Oh Randolph, how perfectly top-hole of you to come over. I've been dying to see you!" Fortescue had risen and gone towards her; as she came near he suddenly drew back. "My dear girl, whatever have you been doing?" "I? Nothing. What's wrong?" "Why, you've smothered yourself in musk!" "I certainly have not. How can you say such a thing?" She was perfectly sincere. "My mistake; forgive me!" answered Randolph, as he took her in his arms. She let herself go in his embrace; she began to kiss him eagerly. "There, sit down," she said a moment later, "and tell me all the news!" The vicar began to retail the doings of the village; Cotys stopped him. "Randolph! what's the matter with your face?" "Why, nothing! it's imagination, like that horrible smell of musk!" he laughed. But he went over to the mirror; she followed, her face ashen with horror. For the clear strong lines of the virile countenance were gone; the healthy pallor gone; instead, the whole skin was loose and red and bloated; horrible pimples with angry heads sprouted from it like fungi; the lips were full and puffed; they began to crack and blacken before their very

eyes. "My God!" cried he. Her mind worked quickly. "The best doctor in Paris lives two doors down," she gasped; "this is his hour; come, run!" She took his arm; in three minutes they were in the waiting-room.

The doctor came from his study. "Hullo!" said he, "what's this?" But at that moment the man choked and died, even as the swelling burst the skin; the flesh had putrefied completely. Another half-minute, and the bones themselves yielded to the quintessence of corruption that had devoured them. The doctor had taken Cotys by the arm, and hurried her from the room.

She could not even think; in the fresh air she began to act, but automatically. She signalled a taxicab, and bade the man drive to the studio on the Butte Montmartre.

Claude was there with a model. "Send her away!" she cried, stamping with impatience while the girl dressed and went, in answer to his nod. The door closed; Cotys flung herself on the grey fur of the divan, took Claude's head in her hands, and poured out her story. Claude listened, his satanic smile thrilling his every limb. "You didn't know about the musk," he said when she had done. "That is the sign of a priestess of Cybele. When you become that, your body begins to secrete that subtle essence of desire. And as for Fortescue, the ivy of Cybele is poison ivy! The priestess of Cybele is inviolate; if a baptised Christian touch her with--that kind of touch--he dies as you have seen. That is, unless he has renounced his baptism." Here he took Cotys in his arms. Sternly he said to her, every word staccato and tingling with most general hate, "And I want you to do it. I want you to find these men and rot their bones, my branch of poison ivy. I want you to be Cotys of the Flacci, and avenge the old gods on the new." She began to breathe heavily with the mad excitement of murder-lust; her fearful power made her insane with pride. She went to the great gates, and cried "Open, it is I, Cotys of the Flacci, priestess of Cybele!" Claude opened the doors; they sank down before the altar, their nostrils greedily drinking up the ether of the gilded bowls.

IT WAS THE SECOND SUMMER of the revival of the worship of Cybele. No longer was the scene of the revels sacred to those Four Eyes under which the initiation of Cotys had been made. Artist friends of Claude, their models and their mistresses, men and women of the fast society of Paris and London, had joined the company. Cotys had used her house to entertain, as a focus for gathering men and women into the shrine. Already branches were spreading all over the world. A Russian Grand Duke had desecrated the chapel of his palace at Moscow to dedicate it to Dionysus. Germany had taken up the old worship enthusiastically; Walpurgis Night had come again. Certain professors had been of great assistance here; they had shown how all the quaint old customs of Christianity were of Pagan origin, and by simply making the people conscious of what they had always been doing, had turned their hearts without an effort. In London various pagan rites had been instituted under the thin veil of dramatic performances. All this was done stealthily enough; Claude and Cotys hid their true purpose from all who could not be trusted absolutely. But at headquarters deep and deadly work was going on. Hughes had brought in a Cardinal from South Italy, and Cotys, whose brilliant physical and mental appearance increased by an hundredfold by the extraordinary stimulus of her enthusiasm, had not only fascinated him to slavery, but shown him how the one hope for the Church lay in the gradual return to her true character. The Cardinal had returned to Italy; he had talked over three of his colleagues, and the General of the Jesuits was wavering. There were hopes of a Pagan Pope before the century was over.

Into this fierce current of life came Regulus on his summer holidays from Eton. The boy was tall and strong, already soldierly in bearing at 15 years. Cotys brought him to the studio on his second day in Paris. His cousin's eyes devoured him with delight, a strange light kindling in their depths. ``Cotys," said he, ``do you recognize why the stone slept for all those years? It was because Cybele had no priest to guard it. None of the Flacci were capable of the holy office. Only when you came the old fires flamed again. But this boy shall be the Priest of Cybele, and so shall we establish the worship in the family. For he is the first born male of the main line; him must we consecrate." Neither of his hearers fully understood the implication; but pride and enthusiasm lit their faces. The boy had been prepared by his sister for something wonderful, and his gay adventurous spirit leaped to meet it. There and then they put him through the preliminary ceremony of the renunciation of his baptism, necessary because his second name was Paul, making him walk through the flames of ether, consecrated by a leaf from the ivy crown of

Cotys. Then, as was their custom with a neophyte, the priestess made him join in libations of ether, and put him to the appalling test of apostasy. The ceremony had been successful; Regulus was pagan.

Nine days later the rite of his initiation was to take place; a new rite, devised by Claude in arduous nights. Fifteen men and women of the inner circle had been invited to attend; for this rite could not be openly proclaimed. Its existence must be guarded with every precaution that the infernal ingenuity of the celebrants could devise.

First, in solemn silence, the priestess of Cybele came forth from the shrine. She was heavily veiled from head to foot, and a lion-skin hung from her slim shoulders. Taking a drum and a cymbal from two attendants, she gave him to eat from the one and to drink from the other. Then she took his head between her hands, and cried: "I consecrate thee to the service of the Mother of the Gods." At that she dropped her veils and raised her brother from his knees. Her part was over; Claude had not told her what was to follow, except in vague terms, that the boy was to be initiated into the sacred dance, and led before the altar. Now the music began; everyone had drum or flute or horn or cymbal, and, one calling to another in this mad music, they surrounded the novice and began to dance. At first he stood bewildered; then the madness found his feet, and he began to leap and cry like a wild thing. Presently Hughes, who had slipped out of the throng when the dance began--his blindness forbade him to join in that part of the ceremonies--opened the shrine. With wolfish glee the intoxicated company rushed into the sacred place, crying aloud like wild beasts. On the altar lay a heap of small sharp knives. The infuriated worshippers scrambled for these, gashing themselves and each other in their frenzy. The boy saw red. He too picked up a knife. Claude motioned back the other worshippers; Regulus was left alone before the altar, facing Cotys, who was reaching her knotted hands to heaven in a strained and passionate ecstasy, as though she would drag down the goddess herself from heaven. Claude began a fierce incantation in Greek; his strong voice rolled above the rage of the barbaric music. Every now and then leapt the chorus: *Soi d'egq leukas epi bqmon aigos*. "I will bring thee the offspring of a white goat before the altar." As the words became familiar by the constant repetition, men and women caught them up. Regulus, his face flashing, his limbs aching and sweating with the dance, whose fatigue he did not feel in his excitement, howled out the chorus, heedless of time, gashing his breast and arms now and again with the red-running knife. His eyes were fixed in awe and wonder on the stone of Cybele, drawn to it as a bird to a snake, seeming to communicate occultly with it, soul to soul. Suddenly his eyes illumined; they grew wilder and wider and more desperately fixed; his mouth opened in the square of tragedy, and

a long hoarse scream inarticulate burst from his throat. He became still, rigid; on tiptoe he gazed at the stone of Cybele, his arms raised, seeing some appalling sight, the scream one harsh and acrid monotone. With a gesture Claude hushed the cymbals. Even Cotys heard; she dropped her arms, and gazed upon the altar and her brother, bewildered. She became aware of the imminence of some climax. The boy's mouth closed, his head drooped; it was as if some fearful struggle ended in submission. He said in a very slow even voice, deliberately and religiously: *Soi d'egq leukas epi bqmon aigos*. Instantly his enthusiasm returned; the drums and cymbals clashed and boomed; the horns blared out, the flutes shrieked passionately; with one shout of triumph the boy leapt high into the air; when he touched earth again he had consummated the ineffable sacrifice that made him priest, and flung the ghastly trophies upon the sacred stone. The deafening music of the dance redoubled in delirium. Cotys saw herself for a moment, the Cornish heiress, the delicately-bred English lady; and here she stood; the Roman blood in her had brought her to this pass. She stood, a Pagan Priestess, witness of the most tragic and abominable rite of all antiquity. And the victim was her own brother, that lay there bleeding on the ground, his white face turned to heaven, with his eyes rolled up so that nothing showed but bloodshot whites.

She staggered and fell; her arms automatically grasped the altar; her forehead sank upon the sacred stone, wet with her brother's blood. When she came to herself the dance was over. The reaction had set in. Everyone was preternaturally quiet and self-possessed, pallid as death, the very breath subconsciously suppressed. Claude was bidding them farewell. "Dr. Howard and I will look after the Priest of Cybele," he said. "In a month he shall first minister in public to the Mother of the Gods." Cotys rose to her full height. "O priest of Dionysus, hearken! and come hither!" Claude, who was bending over Regulus, helping the doctor to place the bandages, came to her. She put an arm about his neck. "I take this man to be my husband," she said quietly and firmly, "and I here offer to the goddess our first-born son to be priest of Cybele, that the rite be established in the Flacci, the guardians of the sacred stone, from generation unto generation, until the Fates weary of spinning on the Loom of Time, and drop the silk from nerveless hands into the abyss that lies beyond the stars. *Konx Om Pax*." With these words, that for uncounted centuries had closed the greater mysteries, she ceased.

A few weeks later she was married to Claude at the Madeleine by the apostate Cardinal, who by subtle modifications of gesture and of emphasis and intonation, imperceptible save to the initiated, had restored the ceremony to a thin veil of the old rite at which girls sang:

'Tws dh to melavron

`Umhnaon

a errete tektontes andres

`Umhnaon

gambros erxetai ijos 'Areni

`Umhnaon

andros megalq polu meizqn

`Umhnaon

Thus was restored the secret worship of the ancient goddess, re-established in the world; and thus was restored the glory of the house of Flaccus.

Their firstborn was a boy; they called him Atys.