



**ELECTA . . .**  
**mysterious lady**  
**of Rome**

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## Electa...

**I**T was very early in the morning, so that the sun had not yet reached the doorways of the street. The windows, too, were blind with sleep, for in this quiet dark street in Ephesus no one was yet stirring.

But a sound now broke the stillness. It was the muffled tramp of many feet and they drew nearer and magnified the sound, echoing harshly between the narrow walls. Soon a company of Roman soldiers marched into the narrow way. They came to a halt before an arched doorway. One of them approached the door and beat a thunderous tattoo upon it with the haft of his pike.

The door opened suddenly, and the figure of a quiet, clean-shaven man, dressed simply in a robe of the Christian fashion, stood therein and looked upon the soldier. In the shadows behind him the face of a woman appeared. There were pain and resignation in the faces of the man and the woman, but no surprise. At the command of the Captain of the soldiers, the man and the woman fell in quietly without a backward glance at their home, and were marched away in the center of the company of soldiers.

If there were any eyes to see the

going of the man and woman, they were concealed behind the shuttered windows of the houses thereabout. The sound of the marching feet died away, the morning stillness settled again upon the street, and still no one came forth to note the open doorway of the invaded house.

But now a wail cut the morning stillness sharply as a child called for his mother. Almost at once into the open doorway came the figure of a small boy of perhaps six, clad in the garments of Rome, his hair cut short in Roman fashion. He rubbed his eyes as though but newly awakened from his sleep, and again called sharply for his mother. There was no answer, and still upon the narrow street the silence hung oppressively. The child now descended the two brief steps from the doorway to the stone pavement, and his bare feet made no sound. He moved slowly northward on the narrow street, a small disconsolate figure of unutterable loneliness. Presently, his feet slowed and stopped at another doorway. Here he sank to the steps, and putting his head upon his thin arms, sobbed desolately.

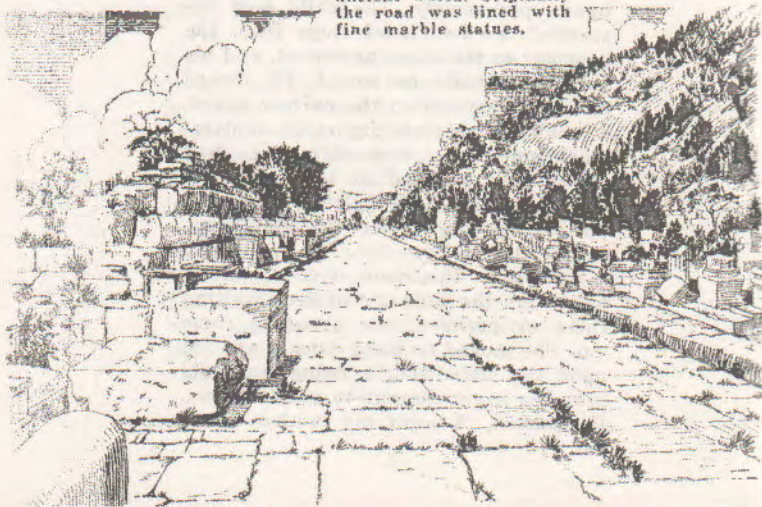
And now the door opened quietly as though the woman had been waiting there or perhaps was about to come out. She moved forward quickly and sat upon the steps and, drawing the child into her arms, sought to comfort him. He sobbed, "I want my mother. She's



gone—my mother's gone", and here his voice rose again in a piteous wail. And the deep blue radiance of the woman's eyes was bright with unshed tears, and she said in her quiet voice, "Come into my house and see what I have for you." But the child only shook his head and said: "My mother's gone, I want my mother—please?" The last word was a small broken entreaty as the child raised his eyes to the woman's face for the first time since she had opened her door.

The face into which the child looked was mature and wise and good. The eyes were a deep, brilliant blue, now

Below: The beautiful marble paved highway from Ephesus to the temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Originally the road was lined with fine marble statues.



touched with inexpressible tenderness, so that the child almost imperceptibly relaxed and gulped back his tears. The woman now arose abruptly and entered into the house again, leaving the door open behind her. She returned with a footed silver goblet which she offered to the boy, now standing at the doorstep. He drank a little of the water and she wiped his smudged, tear-stained face with a corner of her mantle. And now she said to him: "Let us return the water vessel to the house, shall we?" And so she put her hand upon his shoulder, and he put his small hand upon a fold of her mantle and looked upward into her face trustingly. They entered into the doorway, he holding the shining goblet tightly against his breast so that he did not see the crest of an Emperor thereon.

\* \* \* \* \*

Claudia Procula, young wife of Pontius Pilate, woke suddenly from a troubled sleep, and sat upright upon her couch of gold and ivory.

"Veronica!" she called sharply, and her maidservant appeared in the doorway as if by magic. "What is the hour?" she asked, and then added abruptly: "I want to see my husband at once."

Veronica, the maidservant, crossed her hands in front of her and bowed her head briefly: "The Governor, thy husband, was called but an hour hence



to preside in judgment upon the Jew, Jesus." And now she added: "Will my lady have her bath?"

But already Claudia Procula had sprung from her couch, and she said: "You must take a message to the Governor for me. Here, I'll write it." And she moved quickly toward the niche in the marble wall of her sleeping room and catching up a pen of split bamboo, dipped it into the ink but newly made of soot and gum and began to scratch noisily upon a piece of parchment. A small pottery jar held sand, and this she scattered upon the parchment so that the ink must dry quickly. Now, she turned to Veronica and saw that she was spreading the silken covers of the couch.

"Leave the couch," she commanded sharply. "Don thy mantle quickly and bear this to the Governor in the greatest haste."

And now Claudia Procula dressed herself in haste without the aid of her maid-servant. Her long, black hair she bound round her head in a queenly coronet, and tucked her feet into slim, golden sandals so that presently she was fully gowned, and there was naught else to add to her costume.

Knowing that Veronica could not return through the crowded streets for more than half an hour, she paced the floor of the palace room restlessly, and the flower-blue of her eyes was clouded with fear and self reproach.

"Oh God", she prayed, "whatever God Thou art, grant that I be not too late to save this gentle godly man Who is sent of Thee."

Claudia Procula, royal granddaughter of Caesar Augustus, did not doubt but that her message to Governor Pontius Pilate, her husband, would be instantly obeyed. After all, was not she of royal blood?

This palace of Herod the Great in which Claudia Procula waited and paced the marble floor, shone with walls of silver and gold, and many precious marbles were there, but the vaulted ceiling echoed to her lonely footsteps. These were the royal quarters, and no servants came thence unless bidden, except Veronica, the maidservant of Claudia Procula, the Governor's wife. Pilate's wife hated the dismal palace and the business which brought them there to Jerusalem for ten days out of each year to hold courts of judgment, but Claudia Procula did not complain too much since it was not her right to thus accompany her husband. She knew well that were she not Claudia Procula, granddaughter of Augustus Caesar, she would not be permitted to travel thus with her husband, the Governor. The wives of other governors stayed at home.

She had seen Him once, the man Jesus, moving along the highway that led outward from the City walls, and there were many that followed Him,

men and women also. She had noted how clean were His garments, the lustre of His beard and hair that proclaimed beyond the shadow of a doubt that here was a prophet Who felt it no honor to wear soiled and ragged garments. Perhaps He felt it added no holiness to wear a lifetime of soil in His hair and beard. Truly this was a strange prophet, the like of which Claudia Procula had never seen before.

So when Veronica, her maidservant, began to tell of this strange prophet and His doings here in Jerusalem and everywhere throughout the land, she listened. Thus it was she had much to say to Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judaea, last night. Such conversations between Roman ladies and their husbands were rare, and Pontius Pilate's free discussions with his wife of the problems of the trial of the man, Jesus, was a tribute to her beauty and royal birth, but more than both of these an acknowledgment of her unusual wit and mind for the political nuances of the period.

So it was she had dreamed the night long of the man Jesus. Upon this one and that of the people in her dream had He laid hands and healed of their diseases, and by His word He had commanded the dead to arise from the tomb, and behold, a man came forth from his tomb, and was quick again. In her dream He had turned His great dark eyes upon her, not in sadness or

reproach, but simply in quiet acknowledgement of her presence.

And in her dream, He had spoken, and these were His words: "Claudia Procula," He had said, "thou art greater far than thou yet dream, for lo, when the Emperor and his line shall have been forgotten and thy name is heard no more upon the lips of man, yea two thousand years hence shall ye be remembered and thy good live after thee."

Here His voice faded, and she who slept upon the royal couch awakened suddenly and knew that the hour was late.

Presently now there was shouting in the street beyond the broad palace gardens, and Claudia Procula ran out upon the garden roof, from whence she could see the way that led from the Judgment Hall, but the morning sun slanted into her eyes, and she could see only the bustle of movement and crowds of people and faint shouts from below reached her ears. She trembled and was sick at heart. "Too late," she said aloud, "I was too late." Why, oh why had Pontius Pilate left the palace without waking her? Had he known too well that the Sanhedrin would condemn the man, Jesus, and force the Roman Governor himself to do likewise?

Now there were footsteps upon the corridor, and Veronica entered, breathless in her haste.

"Oh, my lady," she said, "I gave him the message." Here she paused and Claudia Procula said quickly:

"And what has come about?"



And here the maid, Veronica, lifted her mantle to her face and burst into tears. Claudia Procula said not a word but handed Veronica a clean, white linen kerchief of her own, and snatched the rough mantle from around Veronica's shoulders, wrapped herself therein and sped down the broad marble corridor and into the streets of Jerusalem.

Clad in the rough mantle of her own maidservant, Claudia Procula looked not like the wife of the Governor and was not noticed among the crowd. She moved forward quickly now here and now there so that she was soon in the center of the milling mob. Presently she came up beside the band of soldiers and saw that within their midst was the man Jesus. His hands were bound behind Him with a strand of rope and upon His head a crown of thorns pierced His brow, so that the bright scarlet of His blood marred the whiteness of His flesh. Behind Him a man, clad in the crude garments of a country shepherd, bore the cross.

The crowd screamed: "Crucify him!" But here and there, dotted among the mob, were those who wept and wailed greatly, and many women lamented loudly.

Once He turned in simple dignity, and said:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children, for behold the days are

coming in which they shall say: 'Blessed are the barren . . .'" And now there came between Claudia Procula and the man Jesus, one who shouldered her roughly and, glancing at her tear-stained face, said scornfully:

"Women love overmuch to weep."

When she had turned back to the man Jesus, His words were lost to her for He had stopped speaking, and the women now had ceased their wailing.

Now it was the third hour of the day in the full sunlight of the Spring morning that Jesus, the Man, was led upward to the hill, called Golgotha, which translated means "The Place of the Skull." Here already were erected two crosses with space between them, and hung thereon upon the crosses were two thieves. Now was Jesus laid upon the third cross, and Roman soldiers did pound home the nails right heartily that pierced His hands and feet. And the women wailed again as the cross was raised. Claudia Procula stood close at hand, her face hidden in the folds of her borrowed mantle, aghast at the brutal spectacle.

How could such things be? Never before in her brief life had she questioned the rightness of her husband's decisions, or those of Rome. She looked with wonder upon the crude sign written upon the Cross above the sagging head written in letters both Greek and Latin, and also of Hebrew "This is the King of the Jews."



The King of the Jews! What was it, she wondered, Veronica had told her of Him? Of what was He King? Around the Lady Claudia Procula, the rude rabble shouted and ever and anon a voice was raised in hysterical denunciation. The Lady Claudia viewed them with wonder. The shouting mob and the stolid soldiers performing their grisly duties of crucifixion, made a nightmare scene that etched itself on her brain and in her heart, and she turned to leave but could find no way out of the tightly packed mob that thronged the three crosses. Thus it was she stood until the sky grew dark and the Man, hanging upon the Cross, cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And there was upon the land in the hour of midday a darkness unto night. The earth roared and trembled, and the graves of the dead were broken open. And the temple of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, shook and trembled also, so that the mighty Veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

He drank a little of the water and she wiped his smudged, tear-stained face with a corner of her mantle.





so that the priests of the Temple feared mightily and fell upon their knees and prayed aloud.

In the darkness, the crowd that thronged the crosses melted away in fear and returned unto their homes, and the Lady Claudia Procula stumbled fearfully along the darkened path and came at last to the Palace where she entered and threw herself in anguish upon her couch. Here it was that her husband, Pontius Pilate, found her weeping bitterly. She started at his touch and drew away from him, she who but yesterday had loved him much.

"You did not receive my message—you did not understand?" she asked.

He shook his head impatiently as though to say: "Why all this fuss over one man?"

"The message arrived," he said stolidly, "there was naught else I might do. The Jews themselves commanded that I release Barabbas, the thief, instead of this man. It is their right to say."

And Claudia Procula looked at him amazed.

"But you commanded," she said. "You commanded . . . and none other has the power to pronounce the death sentence."

Pontius Pilate considered her tearful face, and said a little impatiently:

"Think you I want the Jews sending wily ambassadors to Rome with tales about my governorship?" Here he turned

from her and moved toward the brazier of charcoal and stood warming his hands.

The Lady Claudia Procula looked at him, a tall, dark man with a wide, intelligent brow, and knew suddenly that this great man who was Governor of Judea and a power in the land, was in reality only a fearful mortal, jealous of his position and afraid to lose his place in the world. She shook her head, ever so slightly, and said, looking at him:

"I am so sorry for you."

Her husband only shrugged, as though the understanding of women, and his wife above all, was beyond his comprehension.

"This palace wearies me," he said at length. "I shall be glad to return to Cesarea Philippi."

To this remark, the Lady Claudia Procula returned no answer.

And now it came about after the return of the Governor and his wife to the palace in Cesarea Philippi that a strange thing occurred, and the Lady Claudia Procula began to wear, within the palace and without, a heavy mantle bound about her head, and even when she lay upon her couch to dine was the mantle bound securely about her brow.

Pontius Pilate, preoccupied with matters of State, did not notice for a time, but there came a day when it seemed strange to him that the Lady Claudia Procula should wear within her own

palace a mantle bound about her head, such as the Jews in mourning wore.

"What is this?" he demanded. "Why are you bound up like an old woman?"

For answer she slipped the mantle from her head, and lo, the shining raven tresses of the Lady Claudia Procula were now silvery as the hoar frost that hung upon the trees of Rome in mid-winter. True, they gleamed in life and beauty, but none the less were they silvered.

Pontius Pilate looked in astonishment and said:

"I like it not. You must dye it again."

"I will not," said the Lady Claudia Procula, and her words were definite and firm.

"But how came it this way?" queried Pilate.

"It began upon the day of the Crucifixion of the man Jesus. I stood at the foot of the Cross, and I saw Him there, and I saw the world go dark. Nor have I seen it ever become light again," she added somberly.

"You stood at the foot of the Cross?" said Pilate wonderingly. "Surely, my Lady Procula's beauty is too well known in Jerusalem that she might thus stand and I not hear about it soon."

"I wore the coarse, homespun mantle of my maidservant and none knew me."

Said Pontius Pilate firmly to his wife:

wife: "I like it not. You must dye it dark again. Send for one of the Egyptians . . ."

And here the Lady Claudia arose and looked down upon him, as he lay upon his couch at dinner, and she said:

"My lord, how masterful are you . . . in small things!"

Whereupon she turned and walked away and left him there. And he was still for an instant, flushing darkly in shameful anger at her thrust. True, he had not been decisive in handling the matter of the so-called King of the Jews. But how was he to know that the Lady Claudia Procula would make of it such a tremendous issue? What was there about this man Jesus to stir his lady in this fashion?

In the days that followed Pontius Pilate grew morose and sullen and was even brutal toward those of his slaves on whom he had looked with favor heretofore. The Lady Claudia Procula, too, found him oftener than not an unpleasant companion.

Now it came about that Ankahmen, an Egyptian slave whom thus far Pontius Pilate had looked upon with favor, became the butt of his ill-temper. So it was that when Pontius Pilate moved quickly upon his dinner couch one day, upsetting a tray of wine from the hands of Ankahmen, so that it cascaded down upon his toga, he furiously ordered the slave put to death at once, and his decree was carried out.



But there were other Egyptian slaves in the household, and they love Pontius Pilate not. Not more than twenty-four hours after the execution of the slave was it that Pontius Pilate himself fell back upon his couch and was dead of poison. Claudia Procula, newly widowed of the Governor of Judea, took ship and left that place, having first set all the Egyptian and other slaves free and having provided them with money for their journey to their homes, freely forgiving them.

It was the intention of the Lady Claudia to take ship direct for Rome. She had hoped to find a barque sailing along the coast of Libya and thence straight through the Pass of Sicily to Rome but the only ship available was a trade ship, bound for Rhodes and thence to Ephesus, and upon this ship the Lady Claudia sailed. And Veronica, her maidservant, now a freewoman, accompanied her upon this journey.

Now, when they touched at the Port of Ephesus, the maidservant did go ashore to purchase the needs of the Lady Claudia, and thus it was that she returned with the story that the Emperor Tiberius awaited the arrival of the Lady Claudia, since word had already reached him of the freeing of the Egyptian slaves. Rumor had it that the Lady Claudia was to receive such punishment as the Emperor might deem fit for her act in disposing of the State's property, namely the house-

hold slaves.

Thus it was that again the Lady Claudia wore the rough mantle of her servant and went ashore and stayed and found shelter with the Christians of Ephesus. And she sold her jewels there and bought a small house in the Street of the Christians, and here the followers of Christ were often wont to meet. The Lady Claudia was now known as Veronica, so that her true name was forgotten, although sometimes in the Spring memory would come to haunt my Lady, and then she spoke of the three crosses set upon the hill.

"Yes," she would say simply, "I was there . . . I saw it."

\* \* \* \* \*

And now the door closed upon the woman and child, and she leaned against the door for a moment as though to shut out all evil that might enter there. At last she turned and smiled down upon the child and gestured to the small couches set along the wall:

"See," she said, "I have many children just like you."

The child looked up at her trustingly, and said:

"Where are they now?"

She smiled down at him and said:

"They went early to the market, but they'll be back soon, and then you shall all play together."

"How many children have you?" asked the small son of Rome.

"There are twelve now," said the woman, and her smile touched the radiant blue of her eyes.

And now a muffled, ominous sound reached her ears, and her hand flew to her heart which began to pound suddenly like a frightened bird. It was the tramp of the Roman soldiers, returning again to the Street of the Christians, as they had done so many times. No Christian who lived upon the street knew when the soldier band might stop at his door and lead him away for imprisonment or slow torturous death. Her hand dropped quietly to her side lest she alarm the child, and she turned to him and said:

"Come, little one, now we shall play again." And she led him to the inner stairway that led to the roof and bid him go upward.

"Quickly now," she said, "climb the stair and get you on the roof behind the front wall and be ye still as a tiny mouse."

The child gazed at her wonderingly and said:

"Why?"

"It is but a game, Child," she said gently. "The children when they come, will look after you," and here she put her hand upon his shoulder and urged him upward.

And so he sped up the stairs, and she closed the door gently to the garden roof lest she frighten him with her haste. She turned again to face

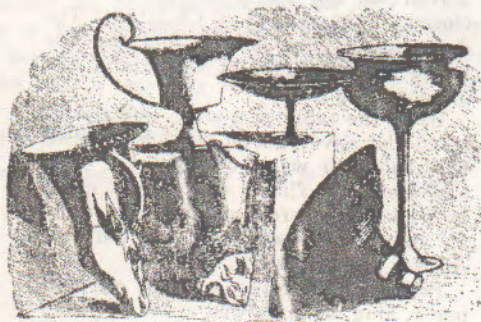
the doorway and waited.

The tread of the soldier's nail-studded sandals upon the pavement sounded louder and yet louder, and presently . . . yes, they were stopping. The thunder of the knocking upon her door echoed in the quiet house, and she sped to open it lest the child above her cry out.

The soldiers looked at her, and one of them said: "We would enter."

The woman was surprised. She opened the door and they entered the house and stood looking therein. And now one of them brought forth from his bosom a crude, wooden cross, made of two sticks bound together with a thong from some legionnaire's boot, and he handed it to her and said:

"Thy good works are known hereabouts, and Nero would spare thee. Do but take this cross and trample it under foot and thou shalt go free."





She looked at him for a moment and then her eyes fell to the crude cross he held in his hands. The soldier urged it into her hands, and she took it gently, but her eyes saw it not. They were fixed far into the past so many years ago that she counted them not. The crosses stood again upon the hill in the morning sunlight at Jerusalem, and Jesus, the Christ, hung upon the central cross. Again in memory darkness fell upon the land, and the majesty of that lonely figure touched her heart afresh with anguish so that she cried aloud: "No!"

She lifted the rough cross tenderly with her two gentle, aging hands, and brought it swiftly to her heart, and held it there. She lifted her eyes to the tall Roman soldier who had handed it to her, and she said simply:

"You know not what you ask."

And so the ranks of the soldiers closed again around a Christian. The door opened and closed and another house on the Street of Christians was quiet and empty.

Upon the table in a shadowed corner stood the silver goblet, still half filled with the clear water of which the child had tasted. A finger of sunlight crept in from the narrow window and drew an answering shaft from the polished surface of the cup.

For a moment the crest of an Emperor, long dead, glowed again in proud loneliness.

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