

**TITUS:  
A COMRADE OF THE CROSS**

Florence Morse Kingsley

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-0-9984440-6-2

Production Management: Joshua Schwisow

Interior Layout Design: Rei Suzuki, Joshua Schwisow

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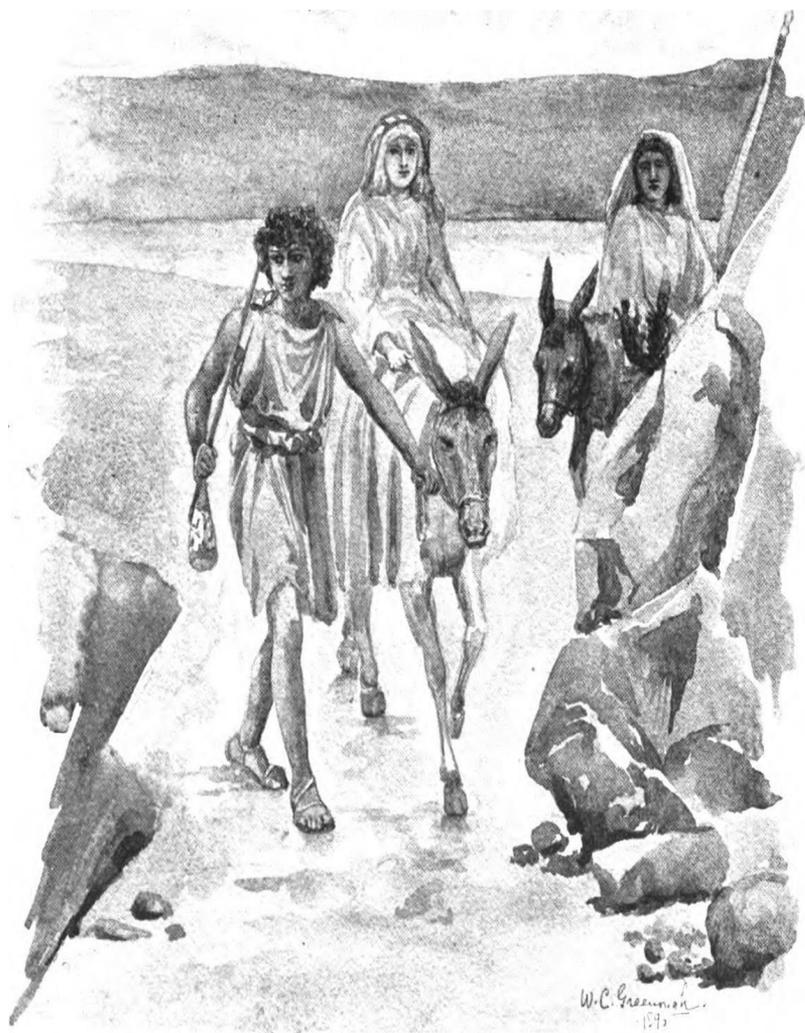
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1893



## CHAPTER 1



**A**bout seventeen years before this story begins there was mourning in one of the most beautiful of the homes of Jerusalem. In the court of the household the servants were gathered about the great central fountain, some weeping loudly, some talking and gesticulating.

“We shall never, never see him again,” said an elderly woman, wringing her hands.

“He was such a darling—so sweet!” sobbed another, “and so beautiful, with his lovely eyes, and his cheeks red as a pomegranate.”

“Oh, my David, my David!” wailed a fourth, sitting flat upon the ground, with her head upon the edge of the fountain, and her tears mingling with its waters—“who could have the heart to take thee from thy mother!”

“His, mother will die!” said the woman who had spoken first. “I have it from Reba, her waiting-woman, that she hath gone from one fainting fit into another since she was told the child had been stolen.”

“And Prisca gone too; dost think she stole the little one?”

"Nay, woman! Prisca loved the lad as her own life; she would never harm a hair of his head."

"I know that she loved him, but I fancy that she loved that beggarly Greek better. Dost think the Greek carried them both off?"

"How could he?" broke in another. "There was no way, had he been so minded."

"Thou knowest not everything," said an old woman, who had not spoken before. "I have it from master's own body servant, Malchus, that the master caught the Greek talking to Prisca in the gateway once, and bade him begone. The man answered something in an unknown tongue, but with a bold look withal; the master gave command to have him seized and scourged, which was done forthwith. And a heavy scourging it was too, for he was a Gentile. That was ten days since, and now Prisca and the little David have both disappeared."

Here all the women broke out afresh into loud wailing and lamenting.

In the meantime a far more painful scene was passing in the interior of the palace. The sunshine was filtering through the branches of the trees, making wavering spots of brightness on the velvet grass. Roses, lilies and oleanders glowed in rich masses around the basins of marble fountains. Birds singing sweetly flitted here and there. Yet everything seemed sad and forsaken, for the mistress of all this beauty and splendor lay, white and grief-exhausted, on her couch in a shaded chamber. Near her, his face buried in his hands, sat her husband.

"No, Anna," he groaned, "I can get no trace of him. I have sent the servants in every direction; Malchus hath searched the city since early dawn; I myself sought all night. Yet will I find him!" he continued fiercely, springing up and pacing the chamber hurriedly. "It were too horrible a thing to endure patiently. May the God of Abraham witness that I will be avenged of this wrong! And yet who can be my enemy? Who would dare to steal David, the only son of Caiaphas? 'Tis some plot to make me pay moneys for his redemption. Yet would I pay—to the whole of my fortune. Oh, my son, my

son!" And the unhappy father rent his garments, and lifting up his voice wept bitterly.

"Nay, my husband, do not despair," spoke the soft voice of Anna. "There is yet hope; he hath only been gone since yester-eve.

Yet as she spoke, the vision of her three-year-old darling rose before her, and she fancied him wailing for his mother; perhaps sick and lonely in some dark den of the city; perhaps dead. And her courage failed her, and she too wept bitterly, smothering her sobs, woman-like, lest she add to her husband's anguish.

And so the hours, heavy with sorrow, lengthened into days; and no tidings of the lost child. The days became weeks; still no word of hope. So passed away months; and the months, leaden-footed, became in their turn years. The wailing in the servants' quarters ceased; the symbols of mourning were laid aside; and nothing but the anguished look in the eyes of the mother told of the hidden sorrow—a sorrow more bitter than death.

No more children came to fill the house with play and laughter; and while the gentle Anna became sad indeed, and silent, Caiaphas, the master, grew by degrees gloomy, taciturn and of a temper not to be trifled with. Over the home once so gay and happy, lay a pall which could never be lifted.

Once at least time, Anna fancied that she caught a glimpse of the missing Prisca. The woman held by the hand a boy of about ten years, dark-eyed, dark-haired, and with the color of a ripe pomegranate in his lips and cheeks. But before she could call a servant, the two had disappeared in the crowd, and could never be found, though Jerusalem was searched from wall to wall; and outside the walls also, among the pilgrims encamped there.

"Perhaps after all it was not Prisca," said Anna sadly to Caiaphas, as they sat in the garden at twilight. "I did not see her face, by reason of her veil. But the boy! Oh, my husband, he was so beautiful! And bursting into tears, she hid her face on his arm.

"Nay, my brave wife, weep not. Am I not better to thee than many sons?" And so he strove to comfort her sore heart.

And again the empty years rolled on.



## CHAPTER 2



Day was closing; and night, doubly welcome in an almost tropical climate, was close at hand. Over the waters of the lake glowed a thousand tender colors, constantly shifting and melting the one into the other—gold, crimson, rose, and rare purples in the sky above, and again in the glassy water beneath, which reflected also the distant shores embowered in trees; while here and there the early lights in a white-walled villa, or distant village, twinkled starlike through the dark masses of foliage.

The surface of the water was alive with craft of various kinds; some, standing out at a distance from the land with white and parti-colored sails, seemed endeavoring to catch the light breeze, which as yet scarcely ruffled the surface of the water; others, propelled by the oar, skimmed lightly about nearer the land. One standing on the shore could catch melodious snatches of song floating over the water, and the calls of the fishermen as they prepared to set forth for their night's work. In truth it was a fair spot, this lake of Gennesaret.

And a fair city was Capernaum. Standing as it did near the head of this miniature sea, it carried on a busy trade with its neighbors. Ample warehouses, with wharves and clustered shipping, occupied the waterfront; while behind lay the town with its great synagogue, built of white and rose tinted marble, its public buildings, squares and streets, stretching up to the base of a high range of mountainous hills, which swept like an amphitheater about the lake.

On this particular evening a solitary fisherman was engaged in fastening his craft to the bank of a little creek, which emptied into the lake about half a mile from the city. The scene was a familiar one to him, and even the flashing glories of the sunset, now dying into a dim twilight, scarcely awakened more than an undefined sense of happiness. He was thinking chiefly of the fact that he was hungry. Stooping, he hastily shook the rude fastening to see that it was secure, then took from the bottom of the boat his net, and a number of fine fish, which he proceeded to string upon a twig plucked from a convenient tree.



As he walked quickly away, carrying his net over his shoulder, the fish swinging from his hand, he seemed rather more than a boy—a well-grown lad of perhaps nineteen years, well built, strong and muscular. A skin browned by exposure, black eyes under level black brows, jetty hair slightly curling, a nose curved like the beak of an eagle,

and well-cut lips, made up a countenance of unusual strength and beauty. He was clothed in a single sleeveless garment of coarse white linen reaching to the knee; this was bound about at the waist with a girdle of some scarlet stuff, and from the girdle depended a primitive kind of pouch or wallet.

Ten minutes of brisk walking brought the lad to the outer wall of the city, where he found the watchman about to close the gates

for the night. As he passed hurriedly through, one of the men hailed him:

“Ho, lad! Thou wert like to pass thy night outside the walls.”

“And that were no matter,” shouted the boy in return. “Many a night have I passed on the lake, as thou knowest; and mayhap I know another way to get in save through thy gate here.” And he darted laughing away, as one of the men made a motion as though to seize him.



“Dost know the lad?” said one of the men to his comrade, who had joined in the boy’s laugh with a low chuckle.

“Yes, I know him. His name is Titus—a bold fellow. He dwells near



to the fish market with his father Dumachus. They call themselves fishers—” Here the man stopped and shrugged his shoulders.

“What meanest thou?” said the other idly.

But the gate-keeper was fastening the huge locks—with much puffing and straining, and many a smothered groan—and did not hear him; at least he did not answer; and his companion presently forgot that he had asked the question.

Meanwhile the lad was threading his way through the narrow streets, quite dark now by reason of the lofty walls on either side. Occasionally he would come out into a paved square or open space,

where numerous small booths, lighted by flaming torches, proclaimed a market-place. At one of these booths he paused a moment and looked at its wares, which were displayed in flat baskets; there were cakes made with honey, dried figs and dates, small cheeses of goat's-milk, and various sweetmeats, together with nuts and fresh fruits of many kinds. After a moment's deliberation, he selected some delicate little cakes, which—wrapped in fresh green leaves by the obliging huckster—he bestowed in his wallet, paying for his purchase with a copper coin taken from a corner of the same receptacle. Then turning and making his way through the crowd which nearly filled the square, he plunged into a labyrinth of streets leading apparently into the meaner portion of the city, for the open spaces became smaller and less frequent, and the walls lower and more closely crowded together. Finally pausing before what dimly appeared as a doorway in the rough wall, he entered, and carefully closed the door behind him.

“Is that you, mother?” asked a feeble voice from the gloom within.

“No, Stephen boy; it is I. Where is the mother?”

“Nay, I know not,” answered the voice querulously. “She went to the fountain for water, a long time ago, it seemeth to me, and I am parched with thirst and so hungry! Canst thou bring me out into the court, Titus?”

“Aye, lad, that can I, and give thee to drink also.” And laying his fish and nets upon the ground, he crossed the court, now plainly revealed by the moonlight which flooded the heavens.

At one side of the little yard appeared a dark opening from which was looped back a leathern curtain. Stooping a little, Titus entered, and immediately came out again bearing in his arms a figure, which he tenderly deposited on a pile of nets.

“There, Stephen boy, see the moon, how bright it is; and here is water, albeit not so fresh and cool as the mother will fetch thee presently.” And Titus poured out, from a small skin bottle or gurglet, water into a cup, which he handed to the lad on the nets.

The latter seemed scarcely more than a child, so small and shrunken was his figure; and as he moved painfully to take the wa-

ter, it appeared that he was cruelly deformed and misshapen. But his face, as the bright moonlight fell upon it, was, despite its pallor and emaciation, beautiful, for the features were delicately shapen, while the light golden hair, fine and curling, made an aureole about the brow, from beneath which shone wonderful dark eyes.

“Truly the water hath a foul taste, but it hath wet my tongue and moistened my throat, and that is a blessing. I am glad that thou art come, Titus, for now I can go upon the roof. This day hath been a heavy one, and my back hath hurt me cruelly.”

While the sick boy was speaking in his weak, fretful voice, Titus had been busily engaged in building a small fire; and presently the fish hanging from a stick began to splutter in the heat, while an appetizing odor stole out upon the air.

“Cheer up, Stephen lad!” Titus was saying, as he made his preparations for the simple meal. “I have a fine treat for thee in my wallet here.”

Stephen’s eyes brightened, as he lay quietly watching the flickering flames. “Is it something that I can give to the baby?” he asked presently.

“It will suit the baby rarely,” said Titus, laughing. “I had him in mind when I picked out this particular dainty at the good Justin’s stall. But thou must not give it all to the baby; thou must thyself eat.”

“Yes, I will eat,” replied Stephen contentedly. “But, Titus, I love to see the little one when I give him a cake. He is sweeter than the sweetest of Justin’s dainties. Hark! I think I hear him now!” And raising himself on one elbow, the lad listened intently.

Titus likewise paused a moment in his culinary operations, and the sound of a baby’s gurgling laughter, and sweet broken talk, floated down from a neighboring housetop.

“Ah, the young rascal!” said Titus. “He waxeth a bold fellow.”

“Yes, truly,” said Stephen eagerly. “Last night he clambered over the parapet between our two roofs, and came running quite alone to me. He loves me,” he added in a tone expressive of deep conviction.

“He loves sweets, that is certain,” answered Titus, laughing. “But here is the mother at last,” he added, looking toward the doorway.

A tall figure, heavily draped, and bearing on her head a water-pot, at this moment entered the courtyard.

“Where hast thou been, mother?” demanded Stephen. “Thou didst leave me at sunset, and I had been dead of thirst by this time, but for my Titus, who gave me a sorry draught indeed—but better than none at all—from the gurglet.”

The woman let down the jar from off her head, and hastily poured a cup of water for the child, saying in a soothing tone as she did so:

“Nay, thou shouldst not chide thy mother, child; tis unseemly. But the time at the fountain did pass swiftly enough, by reason of the marvelous things which I heard. There was a great crowd there, and I had to wait my turn. The good Jocunda, our neighbor, had the tale from her husband; he heard it in the market-place. All Capernaum is ringing with the wonder of—”

“Let us have supper first,” interrupted Titus, “for the child is faint with hunger, and I am well-nigh starving. We will have that marvelous tale of thine later.”

So saying, he took the fish from the fire, while Prisca—for such was the woman’s name—hastened to bring the thin cakes of bread, which served the treble use of dishes, napkins and food. For tearing the tough, thin cake into large fragments, she gave to each a liberal portion, while Titus broke up and distributed the broiled fish in the same way. Laying the fish on the piece of bread, each of the humble party proceeded to break and eat alternately from the fish and the bread, finishing by wiping their fingers upon the bread, and tossing the fragments to the dog, which made short work of the clearing up. Titus ate heartily, with appetite sharpened by youth and long abstinence, finishing his meal with a draught of water from the jar which stood close at hand.

“Now, Stephen lad,” he exclaimed, “I feel like a new man. Would that thou couldst eat more than a bird; but thou shalt have the cakes now.”

“Nay, Titus, carry me up first. I will have my cakes on the roof.”

“Wait, lad, till I take up thy bed; thou’lt sleep better up there in the cool air.” Saying which, Titus disappeared again into the dark

interior of the house, emerging presently therefrom, bearing on his shoulder a small roll.

“I will fetch thee when I have spread down thy rug,” he said, as



*“Here he is!” - p. 16*

he rapidly ascended a rude ladder-like stairway, which led from the courtyard up the outside of the house to the roof. Down again he came quickly, whistling gayly, and lifting the helpless Stephen carefully from the pile of nets, on which he still lay, bore him steadily up the stairs onto the flat top of the roof. Here in the shelter of the rude parapet which surrounded the edge, he laid his burden down on the little pallet.

The boy drew a long breath as he gazed into the glorious sky now fully spread out above him. The moon was sailing high in the heavens, while here and there glowed dimly certain bright stars which even its full-orbed splendor could not quench. A light breeze from the lake blew gently over the city. Behind loomed up the dark masses of the hills.

“Ah, my Titus!” sighed the boy, “I could not live were it not for the nights. I loathe the days, down there behind that hateful curtain,

with nothing to do, and often no one to talk to. And when father is here—"The boy stopped and shuddered slightly. Then another thought struck him. Raising himself on one elbow, he called in a gentle voice, "Gogo, here's Stephen! Gogo!"

A little gurgle of delighted laughter, and a woman's voice from the adjoining roof said,—“Here he is!” lifting, as she spoke, over the low parapet which divided the two buildings, a small naked figure, which toddled unsteadily on its tiny dimpled feet, to the spot where Stephen was lying, watching his approach with delighted smiles.

“See, Titus, how well he walks! The darling! Come here to Stephen, Gogo; I have some cakes for thee.”

At this magic word, the baby broke into a staggering run, which would have ended disastrously had not Titus, who was watching the scene, caught him up and conveyed him with a single stride to the would-be haven. There he nested down beside Stephen with cooing, unintelligible words, which seemed to afford the lad the greatest satisfaction.

“The little beggar!” said Titus. “He is thinking of cakes.”

Opening his wallet he produced the dainties in question, somewhat damaged by the heat, it is true, but received with tokens of a lively joy by the two on the rug.

“Is thy mother with thee?” again spoke the woman from the adjoining roof.

“Not yet, good neighbor,” said Titus. “But she will come soon, when she hath put things to rights below.”

Even as he spoke the tall figure of Prisca was seen coming up the stairway.

“Good evening to thee, neighbor,” she said, spying the figure of the other woman. “Come over and I will tell thee the tale which I heard at the fountain.”

“Meanest thou of the wonder-working stranger who hath come to our city? I too have heard of him,” replied the other, stepping over the low boundary between the roofs.

Then the two, seating themselves with their backs against the parapet, prepared for a comfortable gossip.