

Theocritus. IDYLL XV. THE WOMEN AT THE ADONIS FESTIVAL

The scene of this mime is Alexandria, and the chief characters are two fellow-countrywomen of the author. Gorgo, paying a morning call, finds Praxinoa, with her two-year-old child, superintending the spinning of her maids, and asks her to come with her to the Festival of Adonis at the palace of Ptolemy II. Praxinoa makes some demur, but at last washes and dresses and sallies forth with her visitor and their two maids. After sundry encounters in the crowded streets, they enter the palace, and soon after, the prima donna begins the Drie – which is really a wedding-song containing a forecast of a dirge – with an address to the bride Aphrodite and a reference to the deification of the queen of Ptolemy I. The song describes the scene – the offerings displayed about the marriage-bed, the two canopies of greenery above it, the bedstead with its representation of the Rape of Ganymede, the coverlets which enwrap the effigies of Adonis and Aphrodite, the image of the holy bridegroom himself – and ends with an anticipation of the choral dirge to be sung on the morrow at the funeral of Adonis.

PRAXINOA

[72] The crowd's simply enormous; they're pushing like a drove of pigs.

FIRST STRANGER

[73] Don't be alarmed, madam; we're all right.

PRAXINOA

[73] *You* deserve to be all right to the end of your days, my dear sir, for the care you've been taking of us (*to Gorgo*) What a kind considerate man! Poor Eunoa's getting squeezed. (*to Eunoa*) Push, you coward, can't you? (*they pass in*) That's all right. All inside, as the bridegroom said when he shut the door.

GORGIO (*referring, as they move forward towards the dais, to the draperies which hang between the pillars*)

[78] Praxinoa, do come here. Before you do anything else I insist upon your looking at the embroideries. How delicate they are! and in such good taste! They're really hardly human, are they?

PRAXINOA

[80] Huswife Athena! the weavers that made that material and the embroiderers who did that close detailed work are simply marvels. How realistically the things all stand and move about in it! they're living! It *is* wonderful what people can do. And then the Holy Boy; how perfectly beautiful he looks lying on his silver couch, with the down of manhood just showing on his cheeks, – (*religioso*) the thrice-beloved Adonis, beloved even down below!

SECOND STRANGER

[87] Oh dear, oh dear, ladies! do stop that eternal cooing. (*to the bystanders*) They'll weary me to death with their ah-ah-ah-ing.

PRAXINOA

[89] My word! where *does* that person come from? What business is it of yours if we do coo? Buy your slaves before you order them about, pray. You're giving your orders to Syracusans. If you *must* know, we're Corinthians by extraction, like Bellerophon himself. What *we* talk's Peloponnesian. I suppose Dorians may speak

Doric, mayn't they? Persephone! let's have no more masters than the one we've got. I shall do just as I like. Pray don't waste your breath.⁹

GORGON

[96] Be quiet, Praxinoa. She's just going to be the song, that Argive person's daughter, you know, the "accomplished vocalist"¹⁰ that was chosen to sing the dirge *last* year.¹¹ You may be sure *she'll* give us something good. Look, she's making her bow.

THE DIRGE

[100] Lover of Golgi and Idaly and Eryx' steepy hold,
O Lady Aphrodite with the face that beams like gold,
Twelve months are sped and soft-footéd Heav'n's pretty laggards, see,
Bring o'er the never-tarrying stream Adonis back to thee.
The Seasons, the Seasons, full slow they go and come,
But some sweet thing for all they bring, and so they are welcome home.
O Cypris, Dion's daughter, of thee annealed,¹² 'tis said,
Our Queen that was born of woman is e'en immortal made;
And now, sweet Lady of many names, of many shrines Ladye,
They guerdon's giv'n; for the Queen's daughtér, as Helen fair to see,
Thy lad doth dight with all delight upon this holyday;
For there's not a fruit the orchard bears but is here for his hand to take,
And cresses trim all kept for him in many a silver tray,
And Syrian balm in vials of gold; and O, there's every cake
That ever woman kneaded of bolted meal so fair
With blossoms blent of every scent or oil or honey rare –
Here's all outlaid in semblance made of every bird and beast.

[119] Two testers green they have plight ye, with dainty dill well dressed,
Whereon, like puny nightingales that flit from bough to bough
Trying their waxing wings to spread, the Love-babes hovering go.
How fair the ebony and the gold, the ivory white how fair,
And eagles twain to Zeus on high bringing his cup-bearer!
Aye, and he coverlets spread for ye are softer spread than sleep –
Forsooth Miletus¹³ town may say, or the master of Samian sheep,¹³
"The bridal bed of Adonis spread of my own making is;
Cypris hath this for her wrapping, Adonis that for his."

[129] Of eighteen years or nineteen is turned the rose-limbed groom;
His pretty lip is smooth to sip, for it bears but flaxen bloom.
And now she's in her husband's arms, and so we'll say good-night;
But to-morrow we'll come wi' the dew, the dew, and take hands and bear him away
Where plashing wave the shore doth lave, and there with locks undight
And blosoms bare all shining fair will raise this shrilling lay; –
"O sweet Adonis, none but thee of the children of Gods and men
'Twixt overworld and underworld doth pass and pass agen;
That cannot Agamemnon, nor the Lord o' the Woeful Spleen,¹⁴
Nor the first of the twice-ten children¹⁵ that came of the Trojan queen,
Nor Patroclus brave, nor Pyrrhus bold that home from the war did win,
Nor none o' the kith o' the old Lapith nor of them of Deucalion's kin –
E'en Pelops line lacks fate so fine, and Pelasgian Argos' pride.

[143] Adonis sweet, Adonis dear, be gracious for another year;
Thou'rt welcome to thine own alwáy, and welcome we'll both cry to-day and next
Adonis-tide."

GORGO

O Praxinoa! what clever things we women are! I do envy her knowing all that, and still more having such a lovely voice. But I must be getting back. It's Diocleidas' dinner-time,¹⁶ and that man's all pepper¹⁷; I wouldn't advise anyone to come near him even, when he's kept waiting for his food. Goodbye, Adonis darling; and I only trust you may find us all thriving when you come next year.