

A Christian Goddess tale tantalizing the imagination of curious readers.

From Whence They Came Prostitution to Papacy

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## Chapter 4

### The Immaculate Conception

*“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.” Isaiah. 7:15*

The young Roman soldier entered the room like a true patrician. Helmet tucked under his left arm, saber and sword hanging from his belt, he looked ready for a battle of any kind. His confident gait and manner told Mary that he feared no confrontation, either in the arena or in the forum.

“Artemis, this is Mary.” The High Priest began his introductions. “She is eager to learn with a strong interest in astrology and astronomy. What’s more, you will find her to be a pupil with as many questions as you have answers, I believe.” He slapped Artemis on the back and grinned.

Mary’s cheeks flushed. “I am honored to meet you.” She made a slight bow of her head as much to hide her embarrassment as to be polite.

“It is I who am honored, miss.” Artemis had a smooth masculine voice, one that sounded like a Rabbi in prayer.

He bowed low toward Mary as he spoke, waiting for her next response.

Unsure of what to say, she blurted out her curiosity, "I have never met a man with the name Artemis. Why on earth?" More quickly than she had spoken them, Mary wanted to take back her words. She felt a warm blush all over her body. Such a question would surely have offended the young man.

"You are right as always, Rabbi. She is already asking confounding questions." Blue eyes sparkling, blonde hair bouncing as his head bobbed, Artemis laughed aloud.

"I meant no disrespect, sir." Mary moved to defend her social blunder. "I am only curious, not critical. It is, you must admit, an unusual name for a man of Rome. I've come to understand that names, here in the temple, have much deeper meaning than they do outside."

With a clap of his hands, the High Priest summoned another slave. Mary felt as if she had been saved by the sound.

"Take these two to a chamber comfortable for learning." His eyes seemed rather mischievous but the High Priest didn't smile this time. It was obvious that his direction to the slave was intended as an order for Mary and Artemis as well.

They were led away to a well-lit room where Mary found a comfortable couch. Sitting there in silence her innocence was just as apparent as her curiosity had been

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in the chamber of the High Priest. Standing with his back against a pillar, his arms crossed in front of him, Artemis seemed to be looking into Mary, trying to decide where to begin.

Perhaps concluding that Mary was childishly sincere, he opted to simply answer her first question. "Artemis is the name that my mother chose for me. I only use it during my visits to the temple. Chosen by my father, my legal Roman name is Pantera. I prefer not to use it here."

Mary's mouth was already open to question him further when the young man continued.

"My mother wanted to endow me with the qualities of the great Goddess. Artemis is both masculine and feminine. She is the great huntress, independent and strong. Being the patroness of childbirth, she is also the compassionate one, especially with women and children. She is said to have helped her mother to birth her twin brother, Apollo." Artemis moved to sit beside Mary who moved away slightly.

"You needn't fear me." He smiled with a gentle reassuring glance that gave her comfort. "I am, after all, named for a Virgin Goddess."

"It would seem that your mother has blessed you with this name. Why then do you have yet another?" Displaying confidence, Mary settled more comfortably into her seat. "I am not afraid sir."

“As I said,” he continued, “my father made the choice of my legal name. He was concerned that going through life named for a Greek Goddess would hurt my ego. He didn’t want his son growing up with a girl’s name, being made fun of, beaten on, always having to prove his manhood. In essence the two names are both wishes for me to have a balance between masculine and feminine energy. Pantera is also a Greek name. It can mean virgin, the whole one, or it can be a metaphoric name for the panther. Once again the name speaks of strength, courage and the ability to have compassion and understanding. Neither name is easy to live up to, but they keep me very aware of my moral obligations as well as my military ones.”

This time Mary was cautious to be certain that her new teacher was quite finished before she ventured yet another question. “May I ask, if you are satisfied and comfortable with both names, why it is that you have chosen to use Artemis here and Pantera out there?” She looked into his eyes for a sign that she was not giving the impression of impudence.

“I use the name mother gave me here in the temple as an honor to her and to the Goddess that is my namesake. My legal name is one that does, as my father expected, bring me more respect from my peers. I am simply being as balanced as I can be and at the same time looking out for my own skin, I suppose.”

Mary could see that his endowment had indeed given Artemis a special personality. “Somehow,” she thought to herself, “this man could be a best friend, like one of my

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sisters. Yet so intriguing, interesting, attractive and passionate a man that I could love him. Perhaps, even . . .” The thought raised goose bumps on her arms and brought heat to her face.

“We had better go to supper.” Artemis abruptly ended the interview with another bow.

Relieved to have an excuse to escape her own feelings, Mary left the room. However, her mind had not left with her. Instead her thoughts explored what had happened in that chamber. Twice she had felt strong sensual, even sexual, urges. She knew she should welcome these feelings as part of her womanhood, but what of her personal vow to remain a virgin?

There were other things to contemplate as well. She had been surprised by Artemis’s sudden departure. Surely he was not that hungry. Was he as attracted to her as she was to him? Or worse, was he repelled by her impudence and curiosity? Had he perceived her feelings? Was he psychic? Did he have as keen an intuition as the Goddess for whom he was named?

Mary feared her feelings had been revealed. The thought was paralyzing. Stopping dead in her tracks, she grabbed for her heart with both hands. “Goddess, if I am in love let him love me, too. If this is only lust let us both abhor it.” Mary never thought she would make such a plea, but make it she had. Now she would have to wait for the Goddess’s answer. The Virgin of the Temple ran for the rooftop.

Mary had been to the baths and eaten a meager breakfast. She was anxious to hear from her new teacher or perhaps receive a summons from the High Priest. She didn't have to wait long. A slave girl entered the women's chambers and delivered her message: Artemis was waiting for her in their meeting room. He was anxious to begin their studies.

At first Mary was relieved. Perhaps he really had been starving for his supper. New feelings then erupted. Maybe he had no interest in her other than as a pupil entrusted to him by the High Priest, but astrology and astronomy were not on her mind right now. Completely enthralled with this blonde-haired blue-eyed man of manners and decorum, Mary hadn't stopped thinking about him since she made her plea to the Goddess.

He was intelligent and attractive, but there was something more that she couldn't understand. She longed to be with him, to know him, to touch him. She questioned her yearning. Was it lust? Had she simply come of age, having the sexual leanings that most young women have? Or was this attraction more than infatuation? Could she truly love someone she had only just met?

Deciding that a meeting would answer her questions, she pinched her cheeks, brushed her hair and fastened her dress with a bronze and gold brooch. Looking in the polished brass mirror, she was more than satisfied with her appearance. Childishly fearing that she was becoming vain, she whispered a prayer to the Goddess asking for humility. Still, she had to look again into her dressing glass. "I can be attractive and know it without being vain."

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She covered her mouth; her private thoughts had actually been spoken. This time in silence, she affirmed her beauty. Hoping that Artemis would find her fetching as well, she hastened to meet him.

Once at the door, however, she had to pause in apprehension. What if some of her fears were truly founded? What if he didn't feel any attraction for her? Then again, what would she do if he did? Mary had always taken her vows of virginity seriously. Would this man take her heart and leave her less than whole? Could this be the way the Goddess would squeeze from her a vow to the priesthood? The answers, she knew, were within the chamber before her.

Heart pounding, she knocked lightly. Cracking the door open she called in, "Artemis, are you there? It's Mary, I've come to begin my studies as you asked."

A large hand reached through the doorway to take hers. Amazingly, it was as soft as it was strong. Not the hand of a Roman soldier, she thought. Artemis's firm but gentle grasp led her into the room.

He quietly closed the door behind her. "Thank you for coming so quickly."

No long bow followed his greeting, only a slight affirmative nod of his head. There was no helmet, sword or saber today. The young man was simply dressed in a Roman toga belted with a golden chain. To Mary, he looked like an angel come to deliver a message from God.

She secretly hoped it was a loving message, not one of reproach.

“I am eager to learn, just as the High Priest told you.” Not wanting to make any assumptions, she tried to make her reply matter-of-fact.

“What do you think you can learn from me, Mary?”

The question astonished her. The fluttering in her chest and sweating palms told her this was not a question about academic curriculum. Her heart told her that the answer to this question could mold her future. The silence was growing long. Artemis reached once more for Mary’s hand, gently holding it to his face.

“Astronomy? If you truly want to know the nature of the stars you only need to see your own reflection. In your eyes you will see the light of love. Astrology? If you want to know your destiny, see the love in my eyes.” Artemis was kneeling at her feet now, still holding her small hand against a smoothly shaven cheek and looking up so that she could indeed see his eyes.

He hadn’t given her a chance to answer his question. Instead he had said everything that Mary was thinking. She had been right; Artemis was extremely intuitive.

With a golden tongue, he spoke to her again. “Mary, you are indeed fair to look upon, but my feelings are as much for your soul as they are for your body. I long to know you, to love you and to make love with you. It is as if the gods have secretly made me drink a potion of love. I

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have a yearning for you that is insatiable by any other means. We are fated for this love affair, Mary, truly directed by the gods.”

Cradling his head in both her hands, Mary looked again into his eyes, her own filling with joyous tears. The Goddess had answered as she had hoped. Her first lover would also be her true love, a soul mate who would cherish her in body, mind and spirit.

“You have seen into my heart, Artemis, sensed my longing. I feared that my love would not be returned and I prayed to the Goddess for guidance and protection. Looking into your eyes, I know that I need no defense against you. What is to come will last forever. My heart is open to you and you alone. My body is yours to explore, my soul anxious for the fullness of knowing you.”

For a moment she could find no more words. Then she remembered the Song of Songs. “Oh, give me of the kisses of your mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine. Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance. Your name is like finest oil.” With a deep sigh she found her own tongue. “Love me, Artemis, as no one will again.”

Artemis could think of nothing more to say than to continue with Solomon’s verse. “Ah, you are fair, my darling, ah, you are fair. Your eyes are like doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes climbing up from the washing pool. Your lips are like a crimson thread. Your mouth is lovely. You have captured my heart, my own, my bride. You have captured my heart.”

With loving surrender, Mary gave a final response to Artemis's poetry. "*Let my beloved come to his garden and enjoy its luscious fruits.*" Relinquishing her vows, the virgin made her intentions clear. "You will be both my beloved and the instrument of my initiation, for I have never known a man."

"Hush then, as I enter your heart and call you to mine. Drink deep of love." Artemis invited her to their celebration of love.

Mary closed her eyes. Leaning back on the couch, she allowed Artemis to undress them both. Hearts and bodies melded as one. Passion came upon them like a sudden storm. The winds of change most certainly were blowing away childhood ideals, transforming the virgin's life.

Gone from Mary's mind were her apprehensions about sexual union and losing her wholeness. With each kiss, each tender stroke from her lover, the fullness of her soul reached new heights. When the moment came, Mary released fully the psychic energy of sexual union and pulled her beloved to her bosom. Heart to heart they bonded in a mutual destiny that one day would change the world.

The couple knew that their love would be eternal but this bittersweet affair could not last. Soon Artemis would have to return to his homeland. Mary, if she chose wedlock, would have to be wed to a Jew. Artemis was neither Hebrew nor Jew. If she chose instead the life of a

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priestess, her lover could only come to her with shekel in hand for the sake of the Goddess. In either event they would never be able to continue as they had.

Silent, sacred lovemaking marked the morning of the young soldier's departure. There was no need to affirm their love in any other way. Mary rose from the couch, dressed and kissed her beloved gently on the forehead as an unspoken farewell. Walking out the door that had been the entrance to these sweet weeks of bliss, tears burning her eyes, she held a secret that must soon be revealed.

Her moon time had come and gone without bleeding. Even in the naivety of youth, Mary knew that there could be new life in her womb. Still, she had kept her secret from Artemis, waiting for some surer signs of pregnancy.

Over the next weeks, those signs became very apparent. Mary could not keep down her food. Her breasts began to swell with the anticipation of a child. A once slender waist was growing thick.

Of course, none of this was going unnoticed by her sisters. Among themselves they gossiped about Mary's condition. Could she be the one? Could she possibly be having a sacred child? Perhaps even the prophesied Messiah? These thoughts and questions always arose when one of the virgins became pregnant; but Mary was not yet initiated to the priesthood. This meant that from the perspective of the High Priest, she would have to be wed to a prominent Jew who would care for her and the child. Of course the women could abort the pregnancy and save Mary from a political marriage arrangement.

Mary knew what they were thinking but could not imagine eliminating the life in her womb. This child was conceived in a love so deep that the baby's soul must be sacred, no matter how it had found life in this world. She spent long hours pondering her fate and that of her child.

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