

PAPHNUTIUS

By Hrotsvitha

Argument

The conversion of Thais by the hermit Paphnutius. Obedient to a vision, he leaves the desert, and, disguised as a lover, seeks out Thais in Alexandria. She is moved to repent by his exhortations and, renouncing her evil life, consents to be enclosed in a narrow cell, where she does penance for three years. Paphnutius learns from a vision granted to Anthony's disciple Paul that her humility has won her a place among the blessed in Paradise. He brings her out of her cell and stays by her side until her soul has left her body.

Characters

- PAPHNUTIUS.
- THAIS.
- THE ABBESS.
- LOVERS OF THAIS.
- DISCIPLES OF PAPHNUTIUS.
- ANTONY.
- PAUL.

Paphnutius

Scene I

DISCIPLES. Why do you look so gloomy, father Paphnutius? Why do you not smile at us as usual?

PAPHNUTIUS. When the heart is sad the face clouds over. It is only natural.

DISCIPLES. But why are you sad?

PAPHNUTIUS. I grieve over an injury to my Creator.

DISCIPLES. What injury?

PAPHNUTIUS. The injury His own creatures made in His very image inflict on Him.

DISCIPLES. Oh, father, your words fill us with fear! How can such things be?

PAPHNUTIUS. It is true that the impassible Majesty cannot be hurt by injuries. Nevertheless, speaking in metaphor, and as if God were weak with our weakness, what greater injury can we conceive than this—that while the greater world is obedient, and subject to His rule, the lesser world resists His guidance?

DISCIPLES. What do you mean by the lesser world?

PAPHNUTIUS. Man.

DISCIPLES. Man?

PAPHNUTIUS. Yes.

DISCIPLES. What man?

PAPHNUTIUS. Every man.

DISCIPLES. How can this be?

PAPHNUTIUS. It has pleased our Creator.

DISCIPLES. We do not understand.

PAPHNUTIUS. It is not plain to many.

DISCIPLES. Explain, father.

PAPHNUTIUS. Be attentive, then.

DISCIPLES. We are eager to learn.

PAPHNUTIUS. You know that the greater world is composed of four elements which are contraries, yet by the will of the Creator these contraries are adjusted in harmonious arrangement. Now, man is composed of even more contrary parts.

DISCIPLES. What can be more contrary than the elements?

PAPHNUTIUS. The body and the soul. The soul is not mortal like the body, nor the body spiritual as is the soul.

DISCIPLES. That is true. But what did you mean, father, when you spoke

of “harmonious arrangement”?

PAPHNUTIUS. I meant that as low and high sounds harmoniously united produce a certain music, so discordant elements rightly adjusted make one world.

DISCIPLES. It seems strange that discords can become concords.

PAPHNUTIUS. Consider. No thing is composed of “likes”—neither can it be made up of elements which have no proportion among themselves, or which are entirely different in substance and nature.

DISCIPLES. What is music, master?

PAPHNUTIUS. One of the branches of the “quadrivium” of philosophy, my son. Arithmetic, geometry, music, and philosophy form the quadrivium.

DISCIPLES. I should like to know why they are given that name.

PAPHNUTIUS. Because just as paths branch out from the quadrivium, the place where four roads meet, so do these subjects lead like roads from one principle of philosophy.

DISCIPLES. We had best not question you about the other three, for our slow wits can scarcely follow what you have told us about the first.

PAPHNUTIUS. It is a difficult subject.

DISCIPLES. Still you might give us a general idea of the nature of music.

PAPHNUTIUS. It is hard to explain to hermits to whom it is an unknown science.

DISCIPLES. Is there more than one kind of music?

PAPHNUTIUS. There are three kinds, my son. The first is celestial, the second human, the third is produced by instruments.

DISCIPLES. In what does the celestial consist?

PAPHNUTIUS. In the seven planets and the celestial globe.

DISCIPLES. But how?

PAPHNUTIUS. Exactly as in instruments. You find the same number of

intervals of the same length, and the same concords as in strings.

DISCIPLES. We do not understand what intervals are.

PAPHNUTIUS. The dimensions which are reckoned between planets or between notes.

DISCIPLES. And what are their lengths?

PAPHNUTIUS. The same as tones.

DISCIPLES. We are none the wiser.

PAPHNUTIUS. A tone is composed of two sounds, and bears the ratio of nine to eight.

DISCIPLES. As soon as we get over one difficulty, you place a greater one in our path!

PAPHNUTIUS. That is inevitable in a discussion of this kind.

DISCIPLES. Yet tell us something about concord, so that at least we may know the meaning of the word.

PAPHNUTIUS. Concord, harmony, or symphonia may be defined as a fitting disposition of modulation. It is composed sometimes of three, sometimes of four, sometimes of five sounds.

DISCIPLES. As you have given us these three distinctions, we should like to learn the name of each.

PAPHNUTIUS. The first is called a fourth, as consisting of four sounds, and it has the proportion of four to three. The second is called a fifth. It consists of five sounds and bears the ratio of one and a half. The third is known as the diapason; it is double and is perfected in eight sounds.

DISCIPLES. And do the spheres and planets produce sounds, since they are compared to notes?

PAPHNUTIUS. Undoubtedly they do.

DISCIPLE. Why is the music not heard?

DISCIPLES. Yes, why is it not heard?

PAPHNUTIUS. Many reasons are given. Some think it is not heard because it is so continuous that men have grown accustomed to it. Others say it is because of the density of the air. Some assert that so enormous a sound could not pass into the mortal ear. Others that the music of the spheres is so pleasant and sweet that if it were heard all men would come together, and, forgetting themselves and all their pursuits, would follow the sounds from east to west.

DISCIPLES. It is well that it is not heard.

PAPHNUTIUS. As our Creator foreknew.

DISCIPLES. We have heard enough of this kind of music. What of “human” music?

PAPHNUTIUS. What do you want to know about that?

DISCIPLES. How is it manifested?

PAPHNUTIUS. Not only, as I have already told you, in the combination of body and soul, and in the utterance of the voice, now high, now low, but even in the pulsation of the veins, and in the proportion of our members. Take the finger-joints. In them, if we measure, we find the same proportions as we have already found in concord; for music is said to be a fitting disposition not only of sounds, but of things with no resemblance to sounds.

DISCIPLES. Had we known the difficulty that such a hard point presents to the ignorant, we would not have asked you about your “lesser world.” It is better to know nothing than to be bewildered.

PAPHNUTIUS. I do not agree. By trying to understand you have learned many things that you did not know before.

DISCIPLES. That is true.

DISCIPLE. True it may be, but I am weary of this disputation. We are all weary, because we cannot follow the reasoning of such a philosopher!

PAPHNUTIUS. Why do you laugh at me, children? I am no philosopher, but an ignorant man.

DISCIPLES. Where did you get all this learning with which you have puzzled our heads?

PAPHNUTIUS. It is but a little drop from the full deep wells of

learning—wells at which I, a chance passerby, have lapped, but never sat down to drain.

DISCIPLE. We are grateful for your patience with us; but I for one cannot forget the warning of the Apostle: “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.”

PAPHNUTIUS. Whether a fool or a wise man does wrong, he will be confounded.

DISCIPLES. True.

PAPHNUTIUS. Nor is God offended by Knowledge of the Knowable, only by undue pride on the part of the Knower.

DISCIPLES. That is well said.

PAPHNUTIUS. And I would ask you—unto whose praise can the knowledge of the arts be more worthily or more justly turned than to the praise of Him Who made things capable of being known, and gave us the capacity to know them?

DISCIPLES. Truly, to none.

PAPHNUTIUS. The more a man realizes the wonderful way in which God has set all things in number and measure and weight, the more ardent his love.

DISCIPLES. That is as it should be.

PAPHNUTIUS. But I am wrong to dwell on matters which give you so little pleasure.

DISCIPLES. Tell us the cause of your sadness. Relieve us of the burden of our curiosity.

PAPHNUTIUS. Perhaps you will not find the tale to your liking.

DISCIPLES. A man is often sadder for having his curiosity satisfied, yet he cannot overcome this tendency to be curious. It is part of our weakness.

PAPHNUTIUS. Brothers—there is a woman, a shameless woman, living in our neighbourhood.

DISCIPLES. A perilous thing for the people.

PAPHNUTIUS. Her beauty is wonderful: her impurity is—horrible.

DISCIPLES. What is her wretched name?

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais.

DISCIPLES. Thais! Thais, the harlot!

PAPHNUTIUS. Yes—she.

DISCIPLE. Everyone has heard of her and her wickedness.

PAPHNUTIUS. It is no wonder, for she is not satisfied to ruin herself with a small band of lovers. She seeks to allure all men through her marvellous beauty, and drag them down with her.

DISCIPLES. What a woeful thing!

PAPHNUTIUS. And it is not only fools and wastrels who squander their substance with her. Citizens of high standing and virtue lay precious things at her feet, and enrich her to their own undoing.

DISCIPLES. It is terrible to hear of such things.

PAPHNUTIUS. Flocks of lovers crowd to her doors.

DISCIPLES. And to their destruction!

PAPHNUTIUS. They are so crazed with desire that they quarrel and fight for admission to her house.

DISCIPLES. One vice brings another in its train.

PAPHNUTIUS. They come to blows. Heads are broken, faces bruised, noses smashed; at times they drive each other out with weapons, and the threshold of the vile place is dyed with blood!

DISCIPLES. Most horrible!

PAPHNUTIUS. This is the injury to the Creator for which I weep day and night. This is the cause of my sorrow.

DISCIPLES. We understand now. You have good reason to be distressed, and I doubt not that the citizens of the heavenly country share your grief.

PAPHNUTIUS. Oh, to rescue her from that wicked life! Why should I not try?

DISCIPLES. God forbid!

PAPHNUTIUS. Brother, our Lord Jesus went among sinners.

DISCIPLES. She would not receive a hermit.

PAPHNUTIUS. What if I were to go in the disguise of a lover?

DISCIPLE. If that thought is from God, God will give you strength to accomplish it.

PAPHNUTIUS. I will set out immediately. I shall need your best prayers. Pray that I may not be overcome by the wiles of the serpent. Pray that I may be able to show this soul the beauty of divine love.

DISCIPLE. May He Who laid low the Prince of Darkness give you the victory over the enemy of the human race.

Scene II

PAPHNUTIUS. I am bewildered in this town. I cannot find my way. Now I shut my eyes, and I am back in the desert. I can hear my children's voices praising God. Good children, I know you are praying for me! I fear to speak. I fear to ask my way. O God, come to my help! I see some young men in the marketplace. They are coming this way. I will go up to them and ask where she is to be found.

THE YOUNG MEN. That stranger seems to want to speak to us.

YOUNG MAN. Let us go and find out.

PAPHNUTIUS. Your pardon, gentlemen. Am I speaking to citizens of this town?

YOUNG MAN. You are. Can we do anything for you?

PAPHNUTIUS. My salutations!

YOUNG MAN. And ours, whether you are a native or a foreigner.

PAPHNUTIUS. I am a stranger.

YOUNG MAN. What brings you here? Have you come for pleasure, business,

or learning? This is a great city for learning. Which is it?

PAPHNUTIUS. I cannot say.

YOUNG MAN. Why?

PAPHNUTIUS. That is my secret.

YOUNG MAN. It would be wiser to tell us your secret. It will be difficult for you, a stranger, to do your business here without the advice of us citizens.

PAPHNUTIUS. But if I tell you, you may try to hinder me from carrying out my plans.

YOUNG MAN. You can trust us. We are men of honour!

PAPHNUTIUS. I believe it. I will trust in your loyalty and tell you my secret.

YOUNG MAN. We are not traitors. No harm shall come to you.

PAPHNUTIUS. I am told that there lives in this town a woman who loves all who love her. She is kind to all men; she'll not deny them anything.

YOUNG MAN. Stranger, you must tell us her name. There are many women of that kind in our city. Do you know her name?

PAPHNUTIUS. Yes, I know it.

YOUNG MAN. Who is she?

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais.

YOUNG MAN. Thais! She is the flame of this land! She sets all hearts on fire.

PAPHNUTIUS. They say she is beautiful. The most exquisite woman of her kind in the world!

YOUNG MAN. They have not deceived you.

PAPHNUTIUS. For her sake I have made a long and difficult journey. I have come here only to see her.

YOUNG MAN. Well, what should prevent you? You are young and handsome.

PAPHNUTIUS. Where does she live?

YOUNG MAN. Over there. Her house is quite near this place.

PAPHNUTIUS. That house?

YOUNG MAN. Yes, to the left of the statue.

PAPHNUTIUS. I will go there.

YOUNG MAN. If you like, we will come with you.

PAPHNUTIUS. I thank you for the courtesy, but I would rather go alone.

YOUNG MAN. We understand. Have you money in your purse, stranger? Thais loves a handsome face, but she loves a full purse more.

PAPHNUTIUS. Gentlemen, I am rich. I have a rare present to offer her.

YOUNG MAN. To our next meeting, then! Farewell. May Thais be kind!

PAPHNUTIUS. Farewell.

Scene III

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais! Thais!

THAIS. Who is there? I do not know that voice.

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais! Your lover speaks! Thais!

THAIS. Stranger, who are you?

PAPHNUTIUS. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come!

THAIS. Who are you?

PAPHNUTIUS. A man who loves you!

THAIS. And what do you want with me?

PAPHNUTIUS. I will show you.

THAIS. You would be my lover?

PAPHNUTIUS. I am your lover, Thais, flame of the world!

THAIS. Whoever loves me is well paid. He receives as much as he gives.

PAPHNUTIUS. Oh, Thais, Thais! If you knew what a long and troublesome journey I have come to speak to you—to see your face!

THAIS. Well? Have I refused to speak to you, or to show you my face?

PAPHNUTIUS. I cannot speak to you here. I must be with you alone. What I have to say is secret. The room must be secret too.

THAIS. How would you like a bedchamber, fragrant with perfumes, adorned as for a marriage? I have such a room. Look!

PAPHNUTIUS. Is there no room still more secret—a room that your lovers do not know? Some room where you and I might hide from all the world?

THAIS. Yes, there is a room like that in this house. No one even knows that it exists except myself, and God.

PAPHNUTIUS. God! What God?

THAIS. The true God.

PAPHNUTIUS. You believe that He exists?

THAIS. I am a Christian.

PAPHNUTIUS. And you believe that He knows what we do?

THAIS. I believe He knows everything.

PAPHNUTIUS. What do you think, then? That He is indifferent to the actions of the sinner, or that He reserves judgment?

THAIS. I suppose that the merits of each man are weighed in the balance, and that we shall be punished or rewarded according to our deeds.

PAPHNUTIUS. O Christ! How wondrous is Thy patience! How wondrous is Thy love! Even when those who believe in Thee sin deliberately, Thou dost delay their destruction!

THAIS. Why do you tremble? Why do you turn pale? Why do you weep?

PAPHNUTIUS. I shudder at your presumption. I weep for your damnation.

How, knowing what you know, can you destroy men in this manner and ruin so many souls, all precious and immortal?

THAIS. Your voice pierces my heart! Strange lover—you are cruel. Pity me!

PAPHNUTIUS. Let us pity rather those souls whom you have deprived of the sight of God—of the God Whom you confess! Oh, Thais, you have wilfully offended the divine Majesty. That condemns you.

THAIS. What do you mean? Why do you threaten me like this?

PAPHNUTIUS. Because the punishment of hell-fire awaits you if you remain in sin.

THAIS. Who are you, who rebuke me so sternly? Oh, you have shaken me to the depths of my terrified heart!

PAPHNUTIUS. I would that you could be shaken with fear to your very bowels! I would like to see your delicate body impregnated with terror in every vein, and every fibre, if that would keep you from yielding to the dangerous delights of the flesh.

THAIS. And what zest for pleasure do you think is left now in a heart suddenly awakened to a consciousness of guilt! Remorse has killed everything.

PAPHNUTIUS. I long to see the thorns of vice cut away, and the choked-up fountain of your tears flowing once more. Tears of repentance are precious in the sight of God.

THAIS. Oh, voice that promises mercy! Do you believe, can you hope that one so vile as I, soiled by thousands and thousands of impurities, can make reparation, can ever by any manner of penance obtain pardon?

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais, no sin is so great, no crime so black, that it cannot be expiated by tears and penitence, provided they are followed up by deeds.

THAIS. Show me, I beg you, my father, what I can do to be reconciled with Him I have offended.

PAPHNUTIUS. Despise the world. Leave your dissolute lovers.

THAIS. And afterwards? What then?

PAPHNUTIUS. You must retire to some solitary place, where you may learn to know yourself and realize the enormity of your sins.

THAIS. If you think this will save me, I will not delay a moment.

PAPHNUTIUS. I have no doubt it will.

THAIS. Yet give me a little time. I must collect the wealth that I have gained through the sins of my body—all the treasures I have kept too long.

PAPHNUTIUS. Do not give them a moment's thought. There will be no lack of people to find them and make use of them.

THAIS. I have another idea in my mind. I did not think of keeping this wealth or of giving it to my friends. Nor would I distribute it among the poor. The wages of sin are no material for good works.

PAPHNUTIUS. You are right. What then do you propose to do with your possessions?

THAIS. Give them to the flames! Burn them to ashes!

PAPHNUTIUS. For what reason?

THAIS. That they may no longer exist in the world. Each one was acquired at the cost of an injury to the goodness and beauty of the Creator. Let them burn.

PAPHNUTIUS. How you are changed! Grace is on your lips! Your eyes are calm, and impure passions no longer burn in them. Oh, miracle! Is this Thais who was once so greedy for gold? Is this Thais, who seeks so humbly the feet of God?

THAIS. God give me grace to change still more. My heart is changed, but this mortal substance—how shall it be changed?

PAPHNUTIUS. It is not difficult for the unchangeable substance to transform us.

THAIS. Now I am going to carry out my plan. Fire shall destroy everything I have.

PAPHNUTIUS. Go in peace. Then return to me here quickly. Do not delay! I trust your resolution, and yet—

THAIS. You need not be afraid.

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais, come back quickly! God be with you!

Scene IV

THAIS. Come, my lovers! Come, all my evil lovers! Hasten, my lovers!
Your Thais calls you!

LOVERS. That is the voice of Thais. She calls us. Let us make haste. Let us make haste, for by delay we may offend her.

THAIS. Come, lovers! Run! Hasten! What makes you so slow? Never has Thais been more impatient for your coming. Come nearer. I have something to tell you all.

LOVERS. Oh, Thais, what is the meaning of this pile of faggots? Why are you throwing all those beautiful and precious treasures on the pile?

THAIS. You cannot guess? You do not know why I have built this fire?

LOVERS. We are amazed. We wonder greatly what is the meaning of it and of your strange looks.

THAIS. You would like me to tell you, evil lovers?

LOVERS. We long to hear.

THAIS. Look, then!

LOVERS. Stop, Thais! What are you doing? Are you mad?

THAIS. I am not mad. For the first time I am sane, and I rejoice!

LOVERS. To waste these pounds of gold, and all the other treasure! Oh, Thais, you have lost your senses! These are beautiful things, precious things, and you burn them!

THAIS. All these things I have extorted from you as the price of shameful deeds. I burn them to destroy all hope in you that I shall ever again turn to your love. And now I leave you.

LOVERS. Wait, Thais. Oh wait a little, and tell us what has changed you!

THAIS. I will not stay. I will not tell you anything. To talk with you has become loathsome.

LOVERS. What have we done to deserve this scorn and contempt? Can you accuse us of being unfaithful? What wrong have we done? We have always sought to satisfy your desires. And now you show us this bitter hatred! Unjust woman, what have we done?

THAIS. Leave me, or let me leave you. Do not touch me. You can tear my garments, but you shall not touch me.

LOVERS. Cruel Thais, speak to us! Before you go, speak to us!

THAIS. I have sinned with you. But now is the end of sin, and all our wild pleasures are ended.

LOVERS. Thais, do not leave us! Thais, where are you going?

THAIS. Where none of you will ever see me again!

LOVERS. What monstrous thing is this? Thais, glory of our land, is changed! Thais, our delight, who loved riches and power and luxury—Thais, who gave herself up to pleasure day and night, has destroyed past remedy gold and gems that had no price! What monstrous thing is this? Thais, the very flower of love, insults her lovers and scorns their gifts. Thais, whose boast it was that whoever loved her should enjoy her love! What monstrous thing is this? Thais! Thais! this is a thing not to be believed.

Scene V

THAIS. Paphnutius, my father, I am ready now to obey you, command what you will.

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais, I have been uneasy during your absence. I feared you had been caught in the world's snare. I feared you would not return.

THAIS. You need not have been afraid. The world does not tempt me now. My possessions are ashes. I have publicly renounced my lovers.

PAPHNUTIUS. Oh, happy guilt that has brought such happy penitence! Since you have renounced your earthly lovers, you can now be joined to your Heavenly Lover.

THAIS. It is for you to show me the way. Be a lantern to me, for all is obscure night.

PAPHNUTIUS. Trust me, daughter. Follow me.

THAIS. I can follow you with my feet. Would that I could follow you with my deeds!

Scene VI

THAIS. Oh, I am weary!

PAPHNUTIUS. Courage! Here is the monastery where a famous community of holy virgins live. I am anxious for you to pass the time of penance here if you will consent.

THAIS. I do not resist. I wish to obey you. I trust you.

PAPHNUTIUS. I will go in, and persuade the Abbess who is the head of the community to receive you.

THAIS. And what shall I do meanwhile? Do not leave me alone.

PAPHNUTIUS. You shall come with me. But look! The Abbess has come out to meet us. I wonder who can have told her so promptly of our arrival.

THAIS. Rumour, Father Paphnutius. Rumour never delays.

Scene VII

PAPHNUTIUS. You come opportunely, illustrious Abbess. I was just seeking you.

ABBESS. You are most welcome, venerated Father Paphnutius. Blessed is your visit, beloved of the Most High.

PAPHNUTIUS. May the grace of Him Who is Father of all pour into your heart the beatitude of everlasting peace!

ABBESS. And what has brought your holiness to my humble dwelling?

PAPHNUTIUS. I need your help.

ABBESS. Speak but the word. You will find me eager to do all in my power to carry out your wishes.

PAPHNUTIUS. Oh, Abbess, I have brought you a little wild gazelle who has been snatched half dead from the jaws of wolves. Show it compassion, nurse it with all your tenderness, until it has shed its rough goatskin and put on the soft fleece of a lamb.

ABBESS. Explain yourself further.

PAPHNUTIUS. You see this woman. From her youth she has led the life of a harlot. She has given herself up to base pleasures—

ABBESS. What misery!

PAPHNUTIUS. She cannot offer the excuse that she was a Pagan to whom such pleasures bring no remorse of conscience. She wore the baptismal robes of a child of God when she gave herself to the flames of profane love. She was not tempted. She chose this evil life. She was ruined by her own will.

ABBESS. She is the more unfortunate.

PAPHNUTIUS. Yet such is the power of Christ, that at His word, of which my poor mouth was the instrument, she has fled from the surroundings which were her damnation. Obedient as a child, she has followed me. She has abandoned lust and ease and idle luxury. She is resolved to live chastely.

ABBESS. Glory to the Author of the marvellous change!

PAPHNUTIUS. Amen. But since the maladies of the soul, like those of the body, need physic for their cure, we must minister to this soul diseased by years of lust. It must be removed from the foul breath of the world. A narrow cell, solitude, silence—these must be her lot henceforth. She must learn to know herself and her sins.

ABBESS. You are right. Such a penance is necessary.

PAPHNUTIUS. Will you give orders for a little cell to be made ready as soon as possible?

ABBESS. Yes, my father. It shall be done as quickly as we can.

PAPHNUTIUS. There must be no entrance, no opening of any kind, except a small window through which she can receive the food that will be brought her on certain days at certain fixed hours. A pound of bread, and water according to her need.

ABBESS. Forgive me, dear father in God, but I fear she will not be able to endure such a rigorous life. The soul may be willing, but that fastidious mind, that delicate body used to luxury, how can we expect them to submit?

PAPHNUTIUS. Have no fear. We know that grave sin demands a grave remedy.

ABBESS. That is true, yet are we not told also to hasten slowly?

PAPHNUTIUS. Good mother, I am already weary of delay. What if her lovers should pursue her? What if she be drawn back into the abyss? I am impatient to see her enclosed.

ABBESS. Nothing stands in the way of your enclosing her now. The cell which you told us to prepare is ready.

PAPHNUTIUS. Then enter, Thais! This is just such a refuge as we spoke of on our journey. It is the very place for you. There is room and more than room here for you to weep over your sins.

THAIS. How small it is! How dark! How can a delicate woman live in such a place?

PAPHNUTIUS. You are not pleased with your new dwelling! You shudder at the thought of entering! Oh, Thais, have you not wandered long enough without restraint? Is it not right that you should now be confined in this narrow, solitary cell, where you will find true freedom?

THAIS. I have been so long accustomed to pleasure and distraction. My mind is still a slave to the senses.

PAPHNUTIUS. The more need to rein it, to discipline it, until it ceases to rebel.

THAIS. I do not rebel—but my weakness revolts against one thing here.

PAPHNUTIUS. Of what do you speak?

THAIS. I am ashamed to say.

PAPHNUTIUS. Speak, Thais! Be ashamed of nothing but your sins.

THAIS. Good father, what could be more repugnant than to have to attend to all the needs of the body in this one little room. ... It will soon be uninhabitable.

PAPHNUTIUS. Fear the cruel punishments of the soul, and cease to dread transitory evils.

THAIS. My weakness makes me shudder.

PAPHNUTIUS. The sweetness of your guilty pleasures was far more bitter and foul.

THAIS. I know it is just. What grieves me most is that I shall not have one clean sweet spot in which to call upon the sweet name of God.

PAPHNUTIUS. Have a care, Thais, or your confidence may become presumption. Should polluted lips utter so easily the name of the unpolluted Godhead?

THAIS. Oh, how can I hope for pardon! Who will pity me—who save me! What shall I do if I am forbidden to invoke Him against Whom only I have sinned! To whom should I pray if not to Him.

PAPHNUTIUS. You must indeed pray to Him, but with tears, not with words. Let not a tinkling voice, but the mighty roar of a contrite heart sound in the ear of God.

THAIS. I desire His pardon. Surely I may ask for it?

PAPHNUTIUS. Oh, Thais, the more perfectly you humble yourself, the more swiftly you will win it! Let your heart be all prayer, but let your lips say only this: “O God Who made me, pity me!”

THAIS. O God, Who made me, pity me! He alone can save me from defeat in this hard struggle!

PAPHNUTIUS. Fight manfully, and you will gain a glorious victory.

THAIS. It is your part to pray for me! Pray I may earn the victor’s palm.

PAPHNUTIUS. You need not remind me.

THAIS. Give me some hope!

PAPHNUTIUS. Courage! The palm will soon be in this humble hand. It is time for me to return to the desert. I owe a duty to my dear disciples. I know their hearts are torn by my absence. Yes. I must go. Venerable Abbess, I trust this captive to our charity and tenderness. I beg you to take the best care of her. Sustain her delicate body with necessities. Refresh her soul with the luxuries of divine knowledge.

ABBESS. Have no anxiety about her, for I will cherish her with a mother’s love and tenderness.

PAPHNUTIUS. I go then.

ABBESS. In peace.

Scene VIII

DISCIPLES. Who knocks there?

PAPHNUTIUS. It is I—your father.

DISCIPLES. It is the voice of our father Paphnutius!

PAPHNUTIUS. Unbolt the door.

DISCIPLE. Good father, welcome.

ALL. Welcome, father! Welcome!

PAPHNUTIUS. A blessing on you all!

DISCIPLE. You have given us great uneasiness by your long absence.

PAPHNUTIUS. It has been fruitful.

DISCIPLE. Your mission has succeeded? Come, tell us what has happened to Thais.

PAPHNUTIUS. All that I wished.

DISCIPLE. She has abandoned her evil life?

PAPHNUTIUS. Yes.

DISCIPLE. Where is she living now?

PAPHNUTIUS. She weeps over her sins in a little cell.

DISCIPLES. Praise be to the Supreme Trinity!

PAPHNUTIUS. A little narrow cell, no wider than a grave. Blessed be His Terrible Name now and for ever.

DISCIPLES. Amen.

Scene IX

PAPHNUTIUS. Three years of her penance are over, and I cannot tell whether her sorrow has found favour with God. For some reason He will not enlighten me. I know what I will do. I will go to my brother Antony and beg him to intercede for me. God will make the truth known to him.

Scene X

ANTONY. Who comes this way? By his dress it is some brother-dweller in the desert. My old eyes do not recognize you yet, friend. Come nearer.

PAPHNUTIUS. Brother Antony! Do you not know me?

ANTONY. This is joy indeed! What pleasures God sends us, when we resign ourselves to have none! I did not think to see my brother Paphnutius again in this world. Is it indeed you, brother?

PAPHNUTIUS. Yes, it is I.

ANTONY. You are welcome, very welcome. Your coming gives me great joy.

PAPHNUTIUS. I am no less rejoiced to see you.

ANTONY. But what is the cause? What has brought Paphnutius from his solitary retreat? He is not sick, I trust? He has not come to old Antony for healing?

PAPHNUTIUS. No, I am in good health.

ANTONY. That's well! I am glad of it.

PAPHNUTIUS. Brother Antony, it is three years since my peace was broken and disturbed by the persistent vision of a soul in peril. I heard a voice calling me night and day. But I stopped my ears—fearing my weakness. I thought “She calls me to ruin me.” “No, no,” the voice said. “I call you to save me.”

ANTONY. A woman's voice!

PAPHNUTIUS. Before my vision it was well known to us all that in the great town on the edge of the desert there was a harlot called Thais, through whom many were destroyed body and soul.

ANTONY. It was she who called you!

PAPHNUTIUS. Brother Antony, it was God who called me. My disciples

opposed me; nevertheless I went to the town to see Thais and wrestle with the demon.

ANTONY. A perilous enterprise.

PAPHNUTIUS. I went to her in the disguise of a lover, and began by flattering her with sweet words. Then I threw off the mask and brought terror to her soul with bitter reproaches and threats of God's punishment.

ANTONY. A prudent course. Hard words are necessary when natures have grown soft and can no longer distinguish between good and evil.

PAPHNUTIUS. I was disarmed by her docility. Truly, brother Antony, my heart melted like wax when she spurned her ill-gotten wealth and abandoned her lovers.

ANTONY. But you hid your tenderness?

PAPHNUTIUS. Yes, Brother Antony.

ANTONY. What followed?

PAPHNUTIUS. She chose to live in chastity. She consented to be enclosed in a narrow cell. She accepted her penance with sweetness and humility.

ANTONY. I am rejoiced by what you have told me! All the blood in my old veins exults and rejoices!

PAPHNUTIUS. That is because you are a saint.

ANTONY. Brother, you cannot mean that you are sad?

PAPHNUTIUS. I rejoice immeasurably in her conversion. Yet at times I am uneasy. I fear that the penance may have been too long and severe for a woman of such delicate frame.

ANTONY. That does you no wrong. Where true love is, loving compassion is not wanting.

PAPHNUTIUS. I came to beg yours for Thais. Of your charity give me your prayers. I beg you and your disciples to join with me in praying for a sign. Let us persevere in prayer until it is shown us from heaven that the penitent's tears have moved the divine mercy to indulgence.

ANTONY. Brother Paphnutius, I have never granted a request more gladly.

Come, we will gather together my disciples.

PAPHNUTIUS. I know that God will listen to his good servant Antony.

Scene XI

ANTONY. Thanks be to God! The gospel's promise is fulfilled in us!

PAPHNUTIUS. What promise, blessed Antony?

ANTONY. Those who unite in prayer can obtain whatever they desire.

PAPHNUTIUS. What miracle has happened? What is it?

ANTONY. My disciple Paul has had a vision.

PAPHNUTIUS. What vision? Oh, call him!

ANTONY. He is here. Paul, my son, tell our brother, Paphnutius, the wonders you have seen.

PAUL. Father, I saw in my vision a splendid bed. It was adorned with white hangings and coverings, and a crown was laid on it, and round it were four radiant virgins. They stood there as if they were guarding the crown. There was a great brightness round the bed, and a multitude of angels. I, seeing this wonderful and joyful sight, cried out, "This glory must be for my master and father Antony!"

ANTONY. Son, did you not know Antony was unworthy of such honour?

PAUL. But a divine voice answered me, saying, "This glory is prepared, not, as you think, for Antony, but for the harlot, Thais!"

PAPHNUTIUS. O sweet Christ! How shall I praise Thee for so lovingly sending comfort to my sad heart?

ANTONY. He is worthy to be praised.

PAPHNUTIUS. Then farewell, Brother Antony. I must go at once to my captive.

ANTONY. You must indeed. It is time her valiant penance ended. You should assure her that her pardon is complete; you should fill her with hope, and speak to her only of the beatitude in store for her.

PAPHNUTIUS. Your blessing.

Scene XII

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais, my little daughter! Thais! Open the window and let me see you.

THAIS. Who speaks?

PAPHNUTIUS. Paphnutius.

THAIS. Why should you visit a poor sinner? Why should I be given this great joy and happiness?

PAPHNUTIUS. These years that I have been absent from you in the body have been weary to me too. I have thought of you night and day. I have yearned for your salvation.

THAIS. I never doubted that.

PAPHNUTIUS. Tell me how things are with you. How have you lived here? What have you been doing?

THAIS. Nothing worth the telling! I have nothing to offer God.

PAPHNUTIUS. The offering He loves best is a humble spirit.

THAIS. All I have done is to gather up the many sins on my conscience into a mighty bundle and keep them always in mind. All day I have sat gazing towards the East, saying only this one prayer: "O God Who made me, pity me!" If my bodily senses have always been conscious of the offensiveness of this place, my heart's eyes have never been blind to the dreadfulness of hell.

PAPHNUTIUS. Your great penitence has won a great forgiveness. Yet God has not pardoned you for your valiant expiation so much as for the love with which you have given yourself to Christ.

THAIS. Can that be true? Would that it were!

PAPHNUTIUS. Give me your hand. Let me bring you out of your cell to prove you are forgiven.

THAIS. No, father, leave me here. This place with all its uncleanness is best for me.

PAPHNUTIUS. The time has come for you to cast away your fear, and hope

for life! God wishes your penance to end.

THAIS. Let the angels praise Him! He has not despised the love of a humble sinner.

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais, would you rejoice if now you were called upon to lay aside this body?

THAIS. Oh, father, my soul longs to escape from this earth.

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais, you have finished your course here. In fifteen days you will, by God's grace, pass straight to Paradise.

THAIS. To Paradise! I should be happy if I might be spared hell's torments and be mercifully cleansed in a gentle fire until my spirit is fit for the eternal happiness.

PAPHNUTIUS. Grace is the free gift of God and does not depend on our merits. If it did, it could not be called grace.

THAIS. For this let the choirs of heaven praise Him, and all the little twigs and fresh green leaves on earth, all animals, and the great waters. He is patient with us when we fall! He is generous in His gifts when we repent.

PAPHNUTIUS. He loves to be merciful. From all eternity He has preferred pardon to punishment.

Scene XIII

THAIS. Holy father, do not leave me. Be near to comfort me in this hour of my death.

PAPHNUTIUS. I will not leave you, Thais, until your soul has taken flight to the stars, and I have buried your body.

THAIS. I feel the end is near. Brother, do not leave me!

PAPHNUTIUS. Now is the time to pray.

THAIS. O God Who made me, pity me! Grant that the soul which Thou didst breathe into me may now happily return to Thee. O God Who made me, pity me!

PAPHNUTIUS. Thais! Thais! Oh, loving humble spirit, pass to thy glory! ... Angels lead her into Paradise! ... O uncreated Beauty, existing in Truth

without material form, grant that the divers parts of this human body now to be dissolved may return to their original elements! Grant that the soul, given from on high, may soar into light and joy, and that the body may be cherished peacefully in the soft lap of the earth until that day when, the ashes being brought together again, and the life-giving sap restored to the veins, this same Thais may rise again, a perfect human being as before, and take her place among the glorious white flock who shall be led into the joy of eternity! Grant this, O Thou Who alone art what Thou art—Who livest and reignest and art glorious in the Unity and perfect Trinity through infinite ages!