

Sensa

by Mabel Collins & Maud Hoffman

ACT II

Scene i - Hypnotized

The Interior of the Temple, as in Act One. Agmahd is standing by the Curtains of the Sanctuary. Priests chant Hymn to Ra at the Setting of the Sun.

Enter Kamen-baka from L.

Kamen-baka They are bringing him! Is he to pass into the Sanctuary at once, without preparation?

Agmahd At once. There must be no delay.

Kamen-baka Is it wise? Is it safe?

Agmahd We must take the risk!

Kamen-baka But he may die! The experiment may kill him, and he would be lost to us!

Agmahd No. He is young and ignorant. "The Ten" will lead him on and sustain him.

[Enter a Neophyte hurriedly. To Neophyte.]

Is he ready?

Neophyte [Agitated and fearful] My lord, we have done all that you directed. He has slept, and we watched him as he slept. He has eaten: -- when he woke, we brought him food. We bathed him in the perfumed bath and we put upon him the Seer's robe.

Agmahd Then wherefore this delay?

Neophyte My lord, he is terrified. A sudden fear has fallen upon him.

Kamen-baka Fear? What has alarmed him?

Neophyte Not I, my lord. We have none of us spoken to him of what he is to do.

Kamen-baka But if he is afraid, can you not quiet him?

[Enter 2nd Neophyte.]

2nd Neophyte All is well, my lord. He is now coming. They are almost here.

The intoning of Priests draws nearer and about a dozen Priests in white, enter slowly in double file and place themselves above the Sanctuary. They are followed by four young Neophytes carrying vases of incense, who go to their places above the Sanctuary. Then a

group of five of "The Ten," dressed in their violet-red robes, then Sensa, alone, in a pure white linen robe. He is followed by the other five of "The Ten."

Following are four more Incense Bearers who place themselves below the Sanctuary. Following are other Priests and Novices who fill the stage, L.

Kamen-baka [To Sensa] This is the chair of the Seer. Sit here.

Sensa hesitates. Looks round with an expression of uncertainty. Then takes his place, silent and alarmed.

Sensa Sit here? And what am I to do?

Agmahd [Sternly] Watch.

Agmahd and Kamen-baka move slowly down and draw aside the curtains, for the first time revealing the Opening to the Sanctuary, a square black hole leading into a dark corridor. They return to their places. Sensa has followed their movements fearfully.

And tell us what you see.

Sensa [Trembling voice] What should I see?

Agmahd Fear not. Watch.

Sensa turns his fearful eyes to the Sanctuary. All eyes are fixed on the Sanctuary, except Agmahd's. He watches Sensa. Sensa gazes with clasped hands deep into the dark opening. Gradually his hands relax on to the arms of the chair. He sinks back, chin on breast, eyes straight ahead. The light on the stage has become dimmer. There is absolute stillness. Presently Sensa lifts his head slowly as if seeing something within the corridor. He raises his whole body and leans forward gazing intently, breathing heavily. Suddenly he starts up with a strangled cry. There is a general suppressed cry of satisfaction from the Priests. Agmahd speaks calmly.

Agmahd What is it that you see?

[Sensa shudders.]

Tell us.

Sensa [Pointing] Do you not see the light? The light from the little doorway? There -- there, at the end of the corridor?

Other Priests [Murmuring and moving] No! No! There is no light. We cannot see a light. We cannot see . . .

Sensa Surely you see that the door has opened a little way, and a veiled figure stands there?

[He looks round on them.]

A Murmur from the Priests No! No! We do not see. We cannot see.

Sensa Oh, send it away! Send it away. It frightens me!

Agmahd [Triumphantly] Our Queen is welcome.

Sensa No! No! Send it away. I shall die of fear! Send it away!

Agmahd Our Queen is welcome, and we do her all reverence.

[Raising his arms with an Egyptian gesture of reverence. All the Priests do the same.]

Will our Queen help her subjects? Will she remove the curse of blindness which has fallen upon the Lord Hesepti, and destroy his enemy? Will she show herself to the people? The fortune of the temple is at stake. Unless our Queen helps us, the Temple must fall.

[Sensa has sat huddled with his hands over his eyes. He now moves and looks even more alarmed.]

Sensa A voice! A voice! Oh, I hear a dreadful voice! A voice like ice! She is speaking.
[General Stir.]

Agmahd [Strong and controlled] She speaks? Repeat her words. We cannot hear them. What does she say?

Sensa What! Can you not hear her? Can you not hear her speak?
[Looks fearfully at them.]

Priests [Murmuring low] No, we cannot hear. We cannot see. All is dark and silent.

Sensa You cannot hear her? You cannot see her? It is only I -- I -- who hear her and see her?

[In a trembling voice of great fear.]

No! No! I cannot! I cannot! No! No! I will not go in alone with you!

Agmahd What does she say? You must obey her command.

Sensa She says that you shall have all you ask.

[Murmurs of delight.]

But that I must go in there alone with her. I cannot. I cannot.

[Yet he rises with outstretched hand and moves toward the Sanctuary as if drawn by an invisible hand, resisting all the way.]

Yet I must. She draws me with her hand. It burns. It holds. It draws me.

He enters the Sanctuary. The Priests follow his every movement and press forward. There is an intense pause of waiting and anticipation. Suddenly, a terrific cry is heard, and Sensa flings himself forth from the Sanctuary, dashing wildly to escape, and falls in the midst of the priests. "The Ten" gather round him.

Oh, horror of horrors! What have I seen! Shall I ever forget that awful face!

One of the Ten Ah, be not afraid. That face is but a mask, and through it you will see things most beautiful and desirable.

Sensa But that voice! That cold and cruel voice!

Another of the Ten [Insinuatingly] That voice can be most soft and sweet. You have but to yield to its commands.

Sensa But her hand. Her hand that burnt me -- it was like fire.

Another of the Ten In that hand are all the passion and all the fire of life and joy.
[*"The Ten" press closer with soothing words and gestures. Sensa has removed his hands from his face and looks at them with wonder.*]

Sensa Can that be so?

The Ten Yes, yes! Oh, yes!

Sensa That face of horror can ne'er be sweet -- that voice can ne'er be kind -- that hand be tender!

The Ten It can! It is! So sweet, so tender!

Sensa [Bewildered] Can it be so?

Agmahd It is so. Enter there.

[*Gesture towards the Sanctuary. Sensa turns. "The Ten" surround him, softly chanting.*]

The Ten Yes. Enter there! Enter there! Life is there. Joy is there. Love and wealth and power are here.

[*They are at the door.*]

Are here! Are here! She will give them to you. Come! Come! Have no fear. Life is here.
[*Sensa, being cajoled and soothed, disappears into the Sanctuary. Agmahd and Kamenbaka draw the Curtains across.*]

Agmahd [Turning] He is ours! On him I will raise the fortunes of the Temple!

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene ii - The Slave

The same Scene. The walls are hung with garlands of roses in great profusion. Incense vases stand against the five pillars. The couch stands, L. A pile of costly and beautiful fabrics is thrown on it. On the floor and on small stools are quantities of valuable articles -- jewelry, flasks of perfume, etc.

Sensa sits on his chair in the center of the stage, opposite the Sanctuary. He wears a white robe. He looks much older, and very weary and heavy. His head is sunk on his breast, and his arms hang over the arms of the chair. Agmahd stands Center, in a dress of cloth of gold, dominating the whole scene, triumphant, superb. "The Ten" stand by the pillars. The Four Priests still stand, two on either side of the steps. Neophytes light the incense in the vases. Priests and Neophytes move amongst the beautiful things,

delightedly. Some twang softly on musical instruments. Kamen-baka's robe is rich and splendid, but not quite so gorgeous as Agmahd's.

Agmahd Does he sleep?

Kamen-baka He seems to sleep. He is exhausted. He suffers.

Agmahd He will recover. As I led him to this,
[*Wide gesture.*]

so I can lead him again. I have triumphed, and I shall go from one conquest to another.
[*Contemptuously.*]

Do you not remember how he feared to look upon the face of our Goddess? He has not been easy to break to my will. The common pleasures of ordinary men do not entice him. With those pleasures which reflect the life of the spirit -- with music, poetry, and great accomplishments, I led him. He played with the golden ball of success, and always won. To and fro he tossed it -- and the ball was always his. All is well. I have conquered.

Kamen-baka But the people clamor still to see the Goddess. They desire speech with her. "The Ten" are restive and rebellious. They complain that you drive them too far -- and our Seer seems near the end of his strength. There is no limit to your ambition.

Agmahd Nor to your desire. Even so. It is but right. The whole Temple is uplifted and made splendid. Hesepti is a royal giver -- he has sent us of his best.
[*To Priests.*]

Sing the song of triumph. Raise your voices in acclamation.

Certain Priests who seem frenzied with delight, cry out in unison, on a high note, an Egyptian word of triumph.

Agmahd goes into the Sanctuary.

Kamen-baka joins the Priests, L. center.

Sensastirs. Also "The Ten" begin to move. They are beautiful, but sullen and depressed.

Sensa What is that cry, as of triumph?

[*He raises himself, looks about.*]

Who can rejoice over such poor matter as this? Gold -- jewels? Is this all that the years have brought me?

Pause. The Stage is very silent, and for an instant, the playing of the fountain is faintly heard. The Priestesses by Door, Center, strike one chord on their harps. Sensa lifts his head painfully. "The Ten" and Kamen-baka are alert. Agmahd comes out of the Sanctuary.

Oh, I dimly recall a garden where flowers grew and lifted their sweet faces to the sun. But that was long ago, when I was young and full of hope. The Lotus was in bloom that day. I heeded it not, and now I cannot reach it. But oh! there is a cry in my soul for a Far-away Peace; for a voice that is known to my heart alone -- and for a glimpse, but one glimpse -- of that Divine Lady. Why do I linger here in this spot, evermore?

[Sensa rises and turns, and is confronted by Agmahd and Kamen-baka, one on either side of him. He falls back in his chair.]

Oh, I shall stifle in this close place, all sickly with incense and perfume.

Kamen-baka [Suavely] You have been too much within doors. They shall not kill you with the ceremonies of the Temple, even though you are the only one who can receive the messages and obtain the spells.

[Enter Neophyte.]

Neophyte [Excitedly] My lord! The Lord Hesep-ti is entering!

Enter Hesep-ti, powerful, strong, full of lusty life, seeing, and gorgeously attired with jewels and panther-skin, and wearing a great, flashing jewel on his brow. He comes straight down, stands in front of Agmahd.

Hesep-ti [Vigorously] Life! Health! Strength!

Agmahd Peace.

[Hesep-ti takes the jewel from his brow and hands it to Agmahd.]

Hesep-ti This, my lord, is for you to place in your crown. You have more than fulfilled your pledge. Bring in that coffer -- bring in that casket. Are the bullocks driven into the yard of the Temple?

[Assent from Attendants.]

It is well. There is plenty, there is glory for you all. I have given from my thankful heart.
[Sensa falls back in his chair, with a gasp.]

Young Priests He is fainting, my lord -- he is fainting!

["The Ten" rush towards Sensa with restoratives.]

The Ten Give him this! This. Give him this.

Sensa [Turning away] These things do not feed me.

Agmahd [Waves "The Ten" aside] He cares nothing for these.

Hesep-ti Is this a tortured slave? What has he done?

Agmahd He is our Seer. Through him we have worked the miracle which has restored your sight and destroyed your enemy.

Hesep-ti Then I pay him all homage.

[Makes an obeisance, and goes out.]

Sensa [Half raises a drawn, white face] Oh, Oh, I am dying.

The Ten No! No! You must not die!

They gather round him. One fans him, another soothes his hand. Another plays softly on a musical instrument. Another advances with a flask, kneels at his feet and pours out a fragrant liquid. A strong, pungent perfume fills the air. Sensa recoils in disgust.

Sensa [*Turning restlessly*] Peace -- Peace! I am too tired!

[*"The Ten" linger. He pushes them away.*]

Leave me. Can you not see that I have a feeling like death? Surely it is Death, and I shall be released from this bondage.

The Ten [*In surprise*] Bondage?

Sensa Yes. Am I not a tool, a slave? To you -- and you and you -- all! I cannot move. I cannot breathe. Night after night, I am in the Sanctuary, while you run hither and thither in the world. You enjoy the air, the sunshine, the people, the sweets of the earth -- and what do you bring to me, who sit here alone, keeping alive the fire in the Sanctuary? Only empty husks of empty things! Oh, if I did not know that behind that closed door, is my divine garden! If it were not that in sleep, I wander free where you cannot follow! If it were not that in profound, sweet sleep I touch the Infinite Source of all Refreshment, -- I could not return to this prison where I am a stranger -- alone and unloved!

Agmahd [*Scornfully*] Love? What has love to do with raising the fortune of the Temple?

Kamen-baka Love! [*Scornfully*] Though all men love me, I love no man.

Agmahd To raise the fortunes of the Temple and to lift it above all others, I have renounced my humanity.

Sensa It is nothing to me that it should be raised above all other Temples.

Agmahd If it is not above all others, it will be crushed by others.

The Ten [*All murmur*] Yes! Yes! We cannot endure that!

Agmahd We are one within the walls of this Temple. All our fortunes are at stake. You must obey. We will compel you to obey for the sake of our Temple, to make it the greatest in all Egypt.

Sensa I cannot. Oh, I cannot. I am too tired.

Kamen-baka We are destroying our priceless possession. We are stupefying him. He must have rest -- nay, more. He must have pleasure.

Agmahd Then you, who are versed in the mystery and magic of number and music and rhythm, bid him enter into pleasure.

Kamen-baka I will send him into the realms of joy, and the Ritual of "The Ten" shall be danced for him.

The Ten [*joyously*] Yes! Yes! We will dance for him! Come, dance!

They begin the Ritual Dance of "The Ten," accompanied by rhythmic music or intoning, from the Priests -- up Center. They circle round and round Sensa in a rhythmic dance. A moment of darkness falls upon the Stage. When it is again light, the Scene is witnessed through gauze. Sensa can be seen waking, and with a cry of joy he perceives a beautiful woman standing beside him. Her dress is of rosy red and pink shades. She has

red roses round her head, and a great rope of roses round her shoulders, crossing her heart. "The Ten" continue a slow dance, over against the Curtains of the Sanctuary, now singly, now in unison. The dance is composed of strange Egyptian postures, and the effect against the curtains is that of a frieze. Their movements are slow and unobtrusive, but they continue through the scene.

Sensa Is it you?

Dream Woman Yes, it is I. Your love of the Ages, your Queen of joy.
[*She sways from him, down L.*]

Sensa [*Slowly rising*] My love of the Ages, my Queen of joy, my very Self. How I have longed for you. Now I can reach you, now I can touch you, now I can lose myself in you. Where have you been so long?

Dream Woman Revelling in the consciousness of joy, whilst you have been down in the place of fear. Come, dance with me. Am I not your joy self? Your pleasure self? Your very self? Come, be with me, be of me. Be mine!

[*He has approached as though drawn by an invisible thread. She clasps him to her.*]

Sensa [*After a protracted pause, draws back, looking down at his clothes*] Oh, but this Priest's dress! How I hate it!

Dream Woman Be no longer a Priest. Be mine.
[*She takes a glittering robe from the couch and casts it round him.*]

Sensa Now I am utterly yours, until I am recalled.

Lifting a part of the rope of roses from her own throat, she throws it about him, uniting them. Gently, with seeming carelessness, she leads him to and fro as she wills upon the stage. At last she is seated in his chair, and he is kneeling beside her.

Sensa [*Adoringly*] How beautiful you are -- how beautiful! How I have longed for beauty!

Dream Woman And you -- how tired you are. Rest here. I will give you back your youth.
[*She draws him to her.*]

Sensa Oh, for eons of pleasure. Ages and eons of pleasure!

Dream Woman They are yours! Come to me. I will give them to you.
[*She draws him into her arms. He sinks wearily into her lap.*]

Sensa You have come to your beauty and I have not known you. How my years have been wasted.

Dream Woman These shall be the years of your triumph. Do not leave me again. Stay with me, and my passion will make you strong, to fulfil your destiny.

Sensa [*Lies in her arms in a trance of delight*] These walls no longer hold me. Ah, what broad, what open spaces! We are surrounded by innumerable shapes of exquisite beauty -

- Is it not so, dear love?

[She laughs gleefully.]

They are dancing. I see their gleaming feet, their flying hair. Their tresses fall across my face. I feel the soft petals, I smell their fragrance. Their hands touch me, they clasp and draw me. I, too, am dancing -- dancing, dancing -- through the years.

[They laugh with delight. He buries his head in the roses at her breast.]

Dream Woman Listen to the music! Do you hear it?

Sensa *[Raises his head]* That is no music of earth! it is not played on instruments. It is the music of the Spheres. We are amongst the stars, and it is the stars that dance round us! Is it for an hour? -- or is it for an age?

Dream Woman Think not of Time, dear one. These are the years of our life. Hark!

Sensa *[Listening rapturously]* Surely I hear all the birds of all the worlds, singing at once! What cries of joy! *[Rises]* O, what a glorious life is mine!

The Stage is again darkened for an instant. When it is light, the gauze has been lifted, and Sensa is seated in his chair as before -- the Dream Woman has vanished. Sensa has lost the worn, weary look, and is now alert, strong, upright.

The curtains are drawn back, revealing the low, dark doorway of the Sanctuary. A loud clamor of the voices of the People is heard without.

People We want the Goddess! Oh, Priests, let us enter! Let us behold the great Goddess!

Sensa Go to the people. Tell them I shall this night work a wonder. They shall not only see the Goddess: they shall speak with her.

[Exeunt Neophytes.]

[Agmahd and Kamen-baka draw back the curtains from in front of the Sanctuary, with an air of triumph. Sensa enters the Sanctuary.]

A Priest Open the doors! Admit the people!

[Exeunt two Neophytes.]

Another Priest Lower the lights! The great Goddess is about to show herself.

[Exeunt two more Neophytes, and an instant later, the lights are lowered and the Stage is darkened.]

Priests *[Chant]* Great Queen! Glorious Queen! We welcome you!

This continues, until suddenly, a ray of light streams down from above and impinges on a mirror which is placed at a point to reflect the light on to the center of the Stage, where it dimly reveals the veiled figure of the Dark Goddess. The People and the Priests take up an attitude of worship.

People The Goddess!

Priests The Goddess!
[*The Chanting ceases.*]

Goddess [*Stretching out her arms over the People*] My people, I see your hungry hearts. I recognize my servants. You are a worthy army. I trust you to obey, not from duty, but from Desire.

People Yes, yes, Lady!

Goddess [*Pointing to various people, touching some near her*] You desire gold. [*Hands are outstretched*] Oh, that is easy. [*Pours gold into their hands*] It is yours. Take it. [*To a woman and youth*] You desire pleasure. Have it. [*Gives a rope of roses to each. Then to a man, a rather rough type*] You desire love. [*Takes the hand of a woman*] Here is another hungry heart. Feed each other. [*Man draws the woman to him. Then to a Nobleman*] I see your secret desire. It cannot be uttered. I will give it to you. It shall be your secret and mine. It shall never be known. [*To a Peasant Woman*] The jewels make your eyes sparkle? Here. [*Throws a jewelled collar round her throat. To an Old Man*] And you long for youth? Poor dotard. Only believe you have it, and it is yours. [*He straightens him-self up. The People are getting excited, thronging forward. A woman grasps the robe of the Goddess and clings to it.*]

Peasant Woman Lady, I am childless. I long for a man child!
[*Big, rough peasants, pushing forward, grasp her robe from the other side.*]

1st Peasant Lady, I have never had a piece of gold in all my life!

2nd Peasant I have never seen a piece of gold!

Peasants Gold! Gold! Give us gold!

They all pull at her. The robe begins to tear. As the Goddess reaches for the gold and turns with her hands full, she staggers. The Crowd presses upon her, and she suddenly disappears. There is an uproar of baffled desire. The People are in a frenzy and tear at everything they can lay their hands on, and at each other. They run hither and thither.

People Where is she? Where is she? Here! No! Here! Here!

They now begin to rush out of the Temple, followed by all the Priests and Priestesses, except "The Ten." Some dash at the door of the Garden, Center, and tear it open. A great stream of light pours in, frightening them, and they rush shrieking away through the Exits. Sensa staggers from the Sanctuary and falls forward on the platform. The light streams on him.

The Lady of the Lotus appears at the Gate.

Lotus Lady [*With wrath*] Oh, Sensa, Beloved of the Gods was it for this that you were born?

[*Pause, Sensa stirs.*]

Was it for this that your eyes were opened, and your senses made clear to perceive?

[*Sensa half rises.*]

You know it was not. Have you fallen so low that you will be a slave for ever?

[Sensa rises.]

Go, then. I will cleanse my Sanctuary. It shall no longer be the dwelling-place of selfish desire. It shall be silent, and none shall know that any gods exist. Go, and leave me to my silence.

[She turns.]

Sensa turns and goes slowly with dragging footsteps towards Exit. He hesitates. A wild burst of song from the People can be heard.

Sensa That song! That song of degradation! It is Her song! The song of the Goddess! The song that is sung under all skies and in all ages. Ah, my Mighty Ones in passion -- Kings in lust, Monarchs in desire. We have lighted a fire that will bum through the ages! Are you satisfied at last? And I -- I -- what of me? *[Assumes an attitude of tense, introspective despair]* I die of hunger -- I am stupefied, and poor, and starved. I am beset on every side. Desire, Ambition, Greed, Passion crowd in on me, darken my life, and compel me to this slavery. I am alone -- alone, in the midst of this crowd.

[Turns to the Lady of the Lotus, speaks with great passion.]

What can I do? Queen of Wisdom -- Light of my soul, do not forsake me! Help me!

Lotus Lady [Turns] Sensa! You have called me!

Sensa Oh, Queen of Wisdom, save me!

[He falls on his knees.]

Lotus Lady [Comes down, touches his head] Sensa, you have called me.

Sensa [Distractedly] Lady, tell me -- what am I to do?

Lotus Lady Seek me. Daily, hourly, in holy meditation. Seek me in this garden, deep in the garden of your Soul. Look not out for help, but ever within the inner-most Sanctuary of your own Being -- within the Lotus bloom of your own Heart -- for there am I!

CURTAIN