GEORG EBERS

THE EMPEROR. COMPLETE

Georg Ebers

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Ebers G.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

It is now fourteen years since I planned the story related in these volumes, the outcome of a series of lectures which I had occasion to deliver on the period of the Roman dominion in Egypt. But the pleasures of inventive composition were forced to give way to scientific labors, and when I was once more at leisure to try my wings with increase of power I felt more strongly urged to other flights. Thus it came to pass that I did I not take the time of Hadrian for the background of a tale till after I had dealt with the still later period of the early monastic move in "Homo Sum." Since finishing that romance my old wish to depict, in the form of a story, the most important epoch of the history of that venerable nation to which I have devoted nearly a quarter century of my life, has found its fulfilment. I have endeavored to give a picture of the splendor of the Pharaonic times in "Uarda," of the subjection of Egypt to the new Empire of the Persians in "An Egyptian Princess," of the Hellenic period under the Lagides in "The Sisters," of the Roman dominion and the early growth of Christianity in "The Emperor," and of the anchorite spirit—in the deserts and rocks of the Sinaitic Peninsula—in "Homo Sum." Thus the present work is the last of which the scene will be laid in Egypt. This series of romances will not only have introduced the reader to a knowledge of the history of manners and culture in Egypt, but will have facilitated his comprehension of certain dominant ideas which stirred the mind of the Ancients. How far I may have succeeded in rendering the color of the times I have described and in producing pictures that realize the truth, I myself cannot venture to judge; for since even present facts are differently reflected in different minds, this must be still more emphatically the case with things long since past and half-forgotten. Again and again, when historical investigation has refused to afford me the means of resuscitating some remotely ancient scene, I have been obliged to take counsel of imagination and remember the saying that 'the Poet must be a retrospective Seer,' and could allow my fancy to spread her wings, while I remained her lord and knew the limits up to which I might permit her to soar. I considered it my lawful privilege to paint much that was pure invention, but nothing that was not possible at the period I was representing. A due regard for such possibility has always set the bounds to fancy's flight; wherever existing authorities have allowed me to be exact and faithful I have always been so, and the most distinguished of my fellow-professors in Germany, England, France and Holland, have more than once borne witness to this. But, as I need hardly point out, poetical and historical truth are not the same thing; for historical truth must remain, as far as possible, unbiassed by the subjective feeling of the writer, while poetical truth can only find expression through the medium of the artist's fancy.

As in my last two romances, so in "The Emperor," I have added no notes: I do this in the pleasant conviction of having won the confidence of my readers by my historical and other labors. Nothing has encouraged me to fresh imaginative works so much as the fact that through these romances the branch of learning that I profess has enlisted many disciples whose names are now mentioned with respect among Egyptologists. Every one who is familiar with the history of Hadrian's time will easily discern by trifling traits from what author or from which inscription or monument the minor details have been derived, and I do not care to interrupt the course of the narrative and so spoil the pleasure of the larger class of readers. It would be a happiness to me to believe that this tale deserves to be called a real work of art, and, as such, its first function should be to charm and elevate the mind. Those who at the same time enrich their knowledge by its study ought not to detect the fact that they are learning.

Those who are learned in the history of Alexandria under the Romans may wonder that I should have made no mention of the Therapeutai on Lake Mareotis. I had originally meant to devote a

chapter to them, but Luca's recent investigations led me to decide on leaving it unwritten. I have given years of study to the early youth of Christianity, particularly in Egypt, and it affords me particular satisfaction to help others to realize how, in Hadrian's time, the pure teaching of the Saviour, as yet little sullied by the contributions of human minds, conquered—and could not fail to conquer—the hearts of men. Side by side with the triumphant Faith I have set that noble blossom of Greek life and culture—Art which in later ages, Christianity absorbed in order to dress herself in her beautiful forms. The statues and bust of Antinous which remain to us of that epoch, show that the drooping tree was still destined to put forth new leaves under Hadrian's rule.

The romantic traits which I have attributed to the character of my hero, who travelled throughout the world, climbing mountains to rejoice in the splendor of he rising sun, are authentic. One of the most difficult tasks I have ever set myself was to construct from the abundant but essentially contradictory accounts of Hadian a human figure in which I could myself at all believe; still, how gladly I set to work to do so! There was much to be considered in working out this narrative, but the story itself has flowed straight from the heart of the writer; I can only hope it may find its way to that of the reader.

LEIPZIG, November, 1880.
GEORG EBERS.

BOOK 1

CHAPTER I

The morning twilight had dawned into day, and the sun had risen on the first of December of the year of our Lord 129, but was still veiled by milk-white mists which rose from the sea, and it was cold.

Kasius, a mountain of moderate elevation, stands on a tongue of land that projects from the coast between the south of Palestine and Egypt. It is washed on the north by the sea which, on this day, is not gleaming, as is its wont, in translucent ultramarine; its more distant depths slowly surge in blue-black waves, while those nearer to shore are of quite a different hue, and meet their sisters that lie nearer to the horizon in a dull greenish-grey, as dusty plains join darker lava beds. The northeasterly wind, which had risen as the sun rose, now blew more keenly, wreaths of white foam rode on the crests of the waves, though these did not beat wildly and stormily on the mountain-foot, but rolled heavily to the shore in humped ridges, endlessly long, as if they were of molten lead. Still the clear bright spray splashed up when the gulls dipped their pinions in the water as they floated above it, hither and thither, restless and uttering shrill little cries, as though driven by terror.

Three men were walking slowly along the causeway which led from the top of the hill down into the valley, but it was only the eldest, who walked in front of the other two, who gave any heed to the sky, the sea, the gulls, and the barren plain that lay silent at his feet. He stopped, and as soon as he did so, the others followed his example. The landscape below him seemed to rivet his gaze, and it justified the disapproval with which he gently shook his head, which was somewhat sunk into his beard. A narrow strip of desert stretched westward before him as far as the eye could reach, dividing two levels of water. Along this natural dyke a caravan was passing, and the elastic feet of the camels fell noiselessly on the road they trod. The leader, wrapped in his white mantle, seemed asleep, and the camel-drivers to be dreaming; the dull-colored eagles by the road-side did not stir at their approach. To the right of the stretch of flat coast along which the road ran from Syria to Egypt, lay the gloomy sea, overhung by grey clouds; to the left lay the desert, a strange and mysterious feature in the landscape, of which the eye could not see the end, either to the east or to the west, and which looked here like a stretch of snow, there like standing water, and again like a thicket of rushes.

The eldest of our travellers gazed constantly towards heaven or into the distance; the second, a slave who carried rugs and cloaks on his broad shoulders, never took his eyes off his master; and the third, a young, free-man, looked wearily and dreamily down the road.

A broad path, leading to a stately temple, crossed that which led from the summit of the mountain to the coast, and the bearded pedestrian turned up it; but he followed it only for a few steps, then he turned his head with a dissatisfied air, muttered a few unintelligible words into his beard, turned round and hastily retraced his steps to the narrow way, down which he went towards the valley. His young companion followed him without raising his head or interrupting his reverie, as if he were his shadow, but the slave lifted his cropped fair head and a stolen smile crossed his lips as on the left hand side of the Kasius road he caught sight of a black kid, and close beside it an old woman who, at the approach of the three men covered her wrinkled face in alarm with her dark blue veil.

“That is the reason then!” said the slave to himself with a nod, and blowing a kiss into the air to a black-haired girl who crouched at the old woman’s feet. But she, for whom the greeting was intended, did not observe this mute courtship, for her eyes followed the travellers, and especially the young man, as if spellbound. As soon as the three were far enough off not to hear her, the girl asked with a shiver, as if some desert-spectre had passed by-and in a low voice “Grandmother, who was that?”

The old woman raised her veil, laid her hand on her grandchild’s mouth, and whispered:

"It was he."

"The Emperor?"

The old woman answered with a significant nod, but the girl squeezed herself up, against her grandmother, with vehement curiosity stretching out her dusky head to see better, and asked softly: "The young one?"

"Silly child! the one in front with a grey beard."

"He? Oh, I wish the young one was the Emperor!"

It was in fact Hadrian, the Roman Emperor, who walked on in silence before his escort, and it seemed as though his advent had given life to the desert, for as he approached the reed-swamp, the kites flew up in the air, and from behind a sand-hill on the edge of the broader road which Hadrian had avoided, came two men in priestly robes. They both belonged to the temple of Baal of Kariotis, a small structure of solid stone, which faced the sea, and which the Emperor had yesterday visited.

"Do you think he has lost his way?" said one to the other, in the Phoenician tongue.

"Hardly," was the answer. "Master said that he could always find a road again by which he had once gone, even in the dark."

"And yet he is gazing more at the clouds than at the road."

"Still, he promised us yesterday."

"He promised nothing for certain," interrupted the other.

"Indeed he did; at parting he called out—and I heard him distinctly: 'Perhaps I shall return and consult your oracle.'"

"Perhaps."

"I think he said 'probably.'"

"Who knows whether some sign he has seen up in the sky may not have turned him back; he is going to the camp by the sea."

"But the banquet is standing ready for him in our great hall."

"He will find what he needs down there. Come, it is a wretched morning, and I am being frozen."

"Wait a little longer-look there."

"What?"

"He does not even wear a hat to cover his grey hair."

"He has never yet been seen to travel with anything on his head."

"And his grey cloak is not very imperial looking."

"He always wears the purple at a banquet."

"Do you know who his walk and appearance remind me of?"

"Who?"

"Of our late high-priest, Abibaal; he used to walk in that ponderous, meditative way, and wear a beard like the Emperor's."

"Yes, yes—and had the same piercing grey eye."

"He too used often to gaze up at the sky. They have both the same broad forehead, too; but Abibaal's nose was more aquiline, and his hair curled less closely."

"And our governor's mouth was grave and dignified, while Hadrian's lips twitch and curl at all he says and hears, as if he were laughing at it all."

"Look, he is speaking now to his favorite—Antonius I think they call the pretty boy."

"Antinous, not Antonius. He picked him up in Bithynia, they say."

"He is a beautiful youth."

"Incomparably beautiful! What a figure and what a face! Still, I cannot wish that he were my son."

"The Emperor's favorite!"

"For that very reason. Why, he looks already as if he had tried every pleasure, and could never know any farther enjoyment."

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On a little level close to the sea-shore, and sheltered by crumbling cliffs from the east wind, stood a number of tents. Between them fires were burning, round which were gathered groups of Roman soldiers and imperial servants. Half-naked boys, the children of the fishermen and camel-drivers who dwelt in this wilderness, were running busily hither and thither, feeding the flames with dry stems of sea-grass and dead desert-shrubs; but though the blaze flew high, the smoke did not rise; but driven here and there by the squalls of wind, swirled about close to the ground in little clouds, like a flock of scattered sheep. It seemed as though it feared to rise in the grey, damp, uninviting atmosphere. The largest of the tents, in front of which Roman sentinels paced up and down, two and two, on guard, was wide open on the side towards the sea. The slaves who came out of the broad doorway with trays on their cropped heads-loaded with gold and silver vessels, plates, wine-jars, goblets, and the remains of a meal had to hold them tightly with both hands that they might not be blown over.

The inside of the tent was absolutely unadorned. The Emperor lay on a couch near the right wall, which was blown in and bulged by the wind; his bloodless lips were tightly set, his arms crossed over his breast, and his eyes half closed. But he was not asleep, for he often opened his mouth and smacked his lips, as if tasting the flavor of some viand. From time to time he raised his eyelids—long, finely wrinkled, and blue-veined—turning his eyes up to heaven or rolling them to one side and then downwards towards the middle of the tent. There, on the skin of a huge bear trimmed with blue cloth, lay Hadrian's favorite Antinous. His beautiful head rested on that of the beast, which had been slain by his sovereign, and its skull and skin skilfully preserved, his right leg, supported on his left knee, he flourished freely in the air, and his hands were caressing the Emperor's bloodhound, which had laid its sage-looking head on the boy's broad, bare breast, and now and then tried to lick his soft lips to show its affection. But this the youth would not allow; he playfully held the beast's muzzle close with his hands or wrapped its head in the end of his mantle, which had slipped back from his shoulders.

The dog seemed to enjoy the game, but once when Antinous had drawn the cloak more tightly round its head and it strove in vain to be free from the cloth that impeded its breathing, it set up a loud howl, and this doleful cry made the Emperor change his attitude and cast a glance of displeasure at the boy lying on the bear-skin, but only a glance, not a word of blame. And soon the expression, even of his eyes, changed, and he fixed them on the lads's figure with a gaze of loving contemplation, as though it were some noble work of art that he could never tire of admiring. And truly the Immortals had moulded this child of man to such a type; every muscle of that throat, that chest, those arms and legs was a marvel of softness and of power; no human countenance could be more regularly chiselled. Antinous observing that his master's attention had been attracted to his play with the dog, let the animal go and turned his large, but not very brilliant, eyes on the Emperor.

"What are you doing here?" asked Hadrian kindly.

"Nothing," said the boy.

"No one can do nothing. Even if we fancy we have succeeded in doing nothing we still continue to think that we are unoccupied, and to think is a good deal."

"But I cannot even think."

"Every one can think; besides you were not doing nothing, for you were playing."

"Yes, with the dog." With these words Antinous stretched out his legs on the ground, pushed away the dog, and raised his curly head on both hands.

"Are you tired?" asked the Emperor.

"Yes."

"We both kept watch for an equal portion of the night, and I, who am so much older, feel quite wide awake."

"It was only yesterday that you were saying that old soldiers were the best for night-watches."

The Emperor nodded, and then said:

"At your age while we are awake we live three times as fast as at mine, and so we need to sleep twice as long. You have every right to be tired. To be sure it was not till three hours after midnight that we climbed the mountain, and how often a supper party is not over before that."

"It was very cold and uncomfortable up there."

"Not till after the sun had risen."

"Ah! before that you did not notice it, for till then you were busy thinking of the stars."

"And you only of yourself—very true."

"I was thinking of your health too when that cold wind rose before Helios appeared."

"I was obliged to await his rising."

"And can you discern future events by the way and manner of the rising of the sun?"

Hadrian looked in surprise at the speaker, shook his head in negation, looked up at the top of the tent, and after a long pause said, in abrupt sentences, with frequent interruptions:

"Day is the present merely, and the future is evolved out of darkness; the corn grows from the clods of the field; the rain falls from the darkest clouds; a new generation is born of the mother's womb; the limbs recover their vigor in sleep. And what is begotten of the darkness of death—who can tell?"

When, after saying this, the Emperor had remained for some time silent, the youth asked him:

"But if the sunrise teaches you nothing concerning the future why should you so often break your night's rest and climb the mountain to see it?"

"Why? Why?" repeated Hadrian, slowly and meditatively, stroking his grizzled beard; then he went on as if speaking to himself:

"That is a question which reason fails to answer, before which my lips find no words; and, if I had them at my command, who among the rabble would understand me? Such questions can best be answered by means of parables. Those who take part in life are actors, and the world is their stage. He who wants to look tall on it wears the cothurnus, and is not a mountain the highest vantage ground that a man can find for the sole of his foot? Kasius there is but a hill, but I have stood on greater giants than he, and seen the clouds rise below me, like Jupiter on Olympus."

"But you need climb no mountains to feel yourself a god," cried Antinous; "the godlike is your title—you command and the world must obey. With a mountain beneath his feet a man is nearer to heaven no doubt than he is on the plain."

"Well?"

"I dare not say what came into my mind."

"Speak out."

"I knew a little girl who when I took her on my shoulder would stretch out her arms and exclaim, 'I am so tall!' She fancied that she was taller than I then, and yet was only little Panthea."

"But in her own conception of herself, it was she who was tall, and that decides the issue, for to each of us a thing is only that which it seems to us. It is true they call me godlike, but I feel every day, and a hundred times a day, the limitations of the power and nature of man, and I cannot get beyond them. On the top of a mountain I cease to feel them; there I feel as if I were great, for nothing is higher than my head, far or near. And when, as I stand there, the night vanishes before my eyes, when the splendor of the young sun brings the world into new life for me, by restoring to my consciousness all that just before had been engulfed in gloom, then a deeper breath swells my breast, and my lungs fill with the purer and lighter air of the heights. Up there, alone and in silence, no hint can reach me of the turmoil below, and I feel myself one with the great aspect of nature spread before me. The surges of the sea come and go, the tree-tops in the forest bow and rise, fog and mist roll away and part asunder hither and thither, and up there I feel myself so merged with the creation that surrounds me that often it even seems as though it were my own breath that gives it life. Like the storks and the

swallows, I yearn for the distant land, and where should the human eye be more likely to be permitted, at least in fancy, to discern the remote goal than from the summit of a mountain?

"The limitless distance which the spirit craves for seems there to assume a form tangible to the senses, and the eye detects its border line. My whole being feels not merely elevated, but expanded, and that vague longing which comes over me as soon as I mix once more in the turmoil of life, and when the cares of state demand my strength, vanishes. But you cannot understand it, boy. These are things which no other mortal can share with me."

"And it is only to me that you do not scorn to reveal them!" cried Antinous, who had turned round to face the Emperor, and who with wide eyes had not lost one word.

"You?" said Hadrian, and a smile, not absolutely free from mockery, parted his lips. "From you I should no more have a secret than from the Cupid by Praxiteles, in my study at Rome."

The blood mounted to the lad's cheeks and dyed them flaming crimson. The Emperor observed this and said kindly:

"You are more to me than the statue, for the marble cannot blush. In the time of the Athenians Beauty governed life, but in you I can see that the gods are pleased to give it a bodily existence, even in our own days, and to look at you reconciles me to the discords of existence. It does me good. But how should I expect to find that you understand me; your brow was never made to be furrowed by thought; or did you really understand one word of all I said?"

Antinous propped himself on his left arm, and lifting his right hand, he said emphatically:

"Yes."

"And which," asked Hadrian.

"I know what longing is."

"For what?"

"For many things."

"Tell me one."

"Some enjoyment that is not followed by depression. I do not know of one."

"That is a desire you share with all the youth of Rome, only they are apt to postpone the reaction. Well, and what next?"

"I cannot tell you."

"What prevents your speaking openly to me?"

"You, yourself did." "I?"

"Yes, you; for you forbid me to speak of my home, my mother, and my people."

The Emperor's brow darkened, and he answered sternly:

"I am your father and your whole soul should be given to me."

"It is all yours," answered the youth, falling back on to the bear-skin, and drawing the pallima closely over his shoulders, for a gust blew coldly in at the side of the tent, through which Phlegon, the Emperor's private secretary, now entered and approached his master. He was followed by a slave with several sealed rolls under his arms.

"Will it be agreeable to you, Caesar, to consider the despatches and letters that have just arrived?" asked the official, whose carefully-arranged hair had been tossed by the sea-breeze.

"Yes, and then we can make a note of what I was able to observe in the heavens last night. Have you the tablets ready?"

"I left them in the tent set up especially for the work, Caesar."

"The storm has become very violent."

"It seems to blow from the north and east both at once, and the sea is very rough. The Empress will have a bad voyage."

"When did she set out?"

"The anchor was weighed towards midnight. The vessel which is to fetch her to Alexandria is a fine ship, but rolls from side to side in a very unpleasant manner."

Hadrian laughed loudly and sharply at this, and said:

"That will turn her heart and her stomach upside down. I wish I were there to see—but no, by all the gods, no! for she will certainly forget to paint this morning; and who will construct that edifice of hair if all her ladies share her fate. We will stay here to-day, for if I meet her soon after she has reached Alexandria she will be undiluted gall and vinegar."

With these words Hadrian rose from his couch, and waving his hand to Antinous, went out of the tent with his secretary.

A third person standing at the back of the tent had heard the Emperor's conversation with his favorite; this was Mastor, a Sarmatian of the race of the Taryges. He was a slave, and no more worthy of heed than the dog which had followed Hadrian, or than the pillows on which the Emperor had been reclining. The man, who was handsome and well grown, stood for some time twisting the ends of his long red moustache, and stroking his round, closely-cropped head with his bands; then he drew the open chiton together over his broad breast, which seemed to gleam from the remarkable whiteness of the skin. He never took his eyes off Antinous, who had turned over, and covering his face with his hands had buried them in the bear's hairy mane.

Mastor had something he wanted to say to him, but he dared not address him for the young favorite's demeanor could not be reckoned on. Often he was ready to listen to him and talk with him as a friend, but often, too, he repulsed him more sharply than the haughtiest upstart would repel the meanest of his servants. At last the slave took courage and called the lad by his name, for it seemed less hard to submit to a scolding than to smother the utterance of a strong, warm feeling, unimportant as it might be, which was formed in words in his mind. Antinous raised his head a little on his hands and asked:

"What is it?"

"I only wanted to tell you," replied the Sarmatian, "that I know who the little girl was that you so often took upon your shoulders. It was your little sister, was it not, of whom you were speaking to me lately?"

The lad nodded assent, and then once more buried his head in his hands, and his shoulders heaved so violently that it would seem that he was weeping.—Mastor remained silent for a few minutes, then he went up to Antinous and said:

"You know I have a son and a little daughter at home, and I am always glad to hear about little girls. We are alone and if it will relieve your heart."

"Let me alone, I have told you a dozen times already about my mother and little Parthea," replied Antinous, trying to look composed.

"Then do so confidently for the thirteenth," said the slave. "In the camp and in the kitchen I can talk about my people as much as I like. But you—tell me, what do you call the little dog that Panthea made a scarlet cloak for?"

"We called it Kallista," cried Antinous wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. "My father would not allow it but we persuaded my mother. I was her favorite, and when I put my arms round her and looked at her imploringly she always said 'yes' to anything I asked her."

A bright light shone in the boy's weary eyes; he had remembered a whole wealth of joys which left no depression behind them.

CHAPTER II

One of the palaces built in Alexandria by the Ptolemaic kings stood on the peninsula called Lochias which stretched out into the blue sea like a finger pointing northwards; it formed the eastern boundary of the great harbor. Here there was never any lack of vessels but to-day they were particularly numerous, and the quay-road paved with smooth blocks of stone, which led from the palatial quarter of the town—the Bruchiom as it was called—which was bathed by the sea, to the spit of land was so crowded with curious citizens on foot and in vehicles, that all conveyances were obliged to stop in their progress before they had reached the private harbor reserved for the Emperor's vessels.

But there was something out of the common to be seen at the landing-place, for there lying under the shelter of the high mole were the splendid triremes, galleys, long boats and barges which had brought Hadrian's wife and the suite of the imperial couple to Alexandria. A very large vessel with a particularly high cabin on the after deck and having the head of a she-wolf on the lofty and boldly-carved prow excited the utmost attention. It was carved entirely in cedar wood, richly decorated with bronze and ivory, and named the Sabina. A young Alexandrian pointed to the name written in gold letters on the stern, nudging his companion and saying with a laugh:

"Sabina has a wolf's head then!"

"A peacock's would suit her better. Did you see her on her way to the Caesareum?" replied the other.

"Alas! I did," said the first speaker, but he said no more perceiving, close behind him, a Roman lictor who bore over his left shoulder his fasces, a bundle of elmrods skilfully tied together, and who, with a wand in his right-hand and the assistance of his comrades, was endeavoring to part the crowd and make room for the chariot of his master, Titianus, the imperial prefect, which came slowly in the rear. This high official had overheard the citizens' heedless words, and turning to the man who stood beside him, while with a light fling he threw the end of his toga into fresh folds, he said:

"An extraordinary people! I cannot feel annoyed with them, and yet I would rather walk from here to Canopus on the edge of a knife than on that of an Alexandrian's tongue."

"Did you hear what the stout man was saying about Verus?"

"The lictor wanted to take him up, but nothing is to be done with them by violence. If they had to pay only a sesterce for every venomous word, I tell you Pontius, the city would be impoverished and our treasury would soon be fuller than that of Gyges at Sardis."

"Let them keep their money," cried the other, the chief architect of the city, a man of about thirty years of age with highly-arched brows and eager piercing eyes; and grasping the roll he held in his hand with a strong grip, he continued:

"They know how to work, and sweat is bitter. While they are busy they help each other, in idleness they bite each other, like unbroken horses harnessed to the same pole. The wolf is a fine brute, but if you break out his teeth he becomes a mangy hound."

"You speak after my own heart," cried the prefect. "But here we are, eternal gods! I never imagined anything so bad as this. From a distance it always looked handsome enough!"

Titianus and the architect descended from the chariot, the former desired a lictor to call the steward of the palace, and then he and his companion inspected first the door which led into it. It looked fine enough with its double columns which supported a lofty pediment, but, all the same, it did not present a particularly pleasing aspect, for the stucco had, in several places, fallen from the walls, the capitals of the marble columns were lamentably injured and the tall doors, overlaid with metal, hung askew on their hinges. Pontius inspected every portion of the door-way with a keen eye and then, with the prefect, went into the first court of the palace, in which, in the time of the Ptolemies, the tents had stood for ambassadors, secretaries, and the officers in waiting on the king. There they met with an unexpected hindrance, for across the paved court-yard, where the grass grew in tufts,

and tall thistles were in bloom, a number of ropes were stretched aslant from the little house in which dwelt the gate-keeper; and on these ropes were hung newly-washed garments of every size and shape.

"A pretty residence for an Emperor," sighed Titianus, shrugging his shoulders, but stopping the lictor, who had raised his fasces to cut the ropes.

"It is not so bad as it looks," said the architect positively. "Gate-keeper! hi, gate-keeper! Where is the lazy fellow hiding himself?"

While he called out and the lictor hurried forward into the interior of the palace, Pontius went towards the gate-keeper's lodge, and having made his way in a stooping attitude through the damp clothes, there he stood still. Ever since he had come in at the gate annoyance and vexation had been stamped on his countenance, but now his large mouth spread into a smile, and he called to the prefect in an undertone:

"Titianus, just take the trouble to come here."

The elderly dignitary, whose tall figure exceeded that of the architect in height by a full head, did not find it quite so easy to pass under the ropes with his head bent down; but he did it with good humor, and while carefully avoiding pulling down the wet linen, he called out:

"I am beginning to feel some respect for children's shirts; one can at any rate get through them without breaking one's spine. Oh! this is delicious—quite delicious!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight which the architect had invited the prefect to come and enjoy, and which was certainly droll enough. The front of the gate-keeper's house was quite grown over with ivy which framed the door and window in its long runners. Amidst the greenery hung numbers of cages with starlings, blackbirds, and smaller singing-birds. The wide door of the little house stood open, giving a view into a tolerably spacious and gaily-painted room. In the background stood a clay model of an Apollo of admirable workmanship; above, and near this, the wall was hung with lutes and lyres of various size and form.

In the middle of the room, and near the open door, was a table, on which stood a large wicker cage containing several nests of young goldfinches, and with green food twined among the osiers. There were, too, a large wine-jar and an ivory goblet decorated with fine carving. Close to the drinking-vessels, on the stone top of the table, rested the arm of an elderly woman who had fallen asleep in the arm-chair in which she sat. Notwithstanding the faint grey moustache that marked her upper-lip and the pronounced ruddiness of her fore head and cheeks, she looked pleasant and kind. She must have been dreaming of something that pleased her, for the expression of her lips and of her eyes-one being half open and the other closely shut-gave her a look of contentment. In her lap slept a large grey cat, and by its side—as though discord never could enter this bright little abode which exhaled no savor of poverty, but, on the contrary, a peculiar and fragrant scent—lay a small shaggy dog, whose snowy whiteness of coat could only be due to the most constant care. Two other dogs, like this one, lay stretched on the floor at the old lady's feet, and seemed no less soundly asleep.

As the prefect came up, the architect pointed to this study of still-life, and said in a whisper:

"If we had a painter here it would make a lovely little picture."

"Incomparable," answered Titianus, "only the vivid scarlet on the dame's cheeks seems to me suspicious, considering the ample proportions of the wine-jar at her elbow."

"But did you ever see a calmer, kindlier, or more contented countenance?"

"Baucis must have slept like that when Philemon allowed himself leave of absence for once! or did that devoted spouse always remain at home?"

"Apparently he did. Now, peace is at an end." The approach of the two friends had waked one of the little dogs. He gave tongue, and his companion immediately jumped up and barked as if for a wager. The old woman's pet sprang out of her lap, but neither his mistress nor the cat let themselves be disturbed by the noise, and slept on.

"A watcher among a thousand!" said the architect, laughing.

"And this phalanx of dogs which guard the palace of a Caesar," added Titianus, "might be vanquished with a blow. Take heed, the worthy matron is about to wake."

The dame had in fact been disturbed by the barking. She sat up a little, lifted her hands, and then, half singing, half muttering a few words, she sank back again in her chair.

"This is delicious!" cried the prefect.

"Begone dull care" she sang in her sleep.

"How may this rare specimen of humanity look when she is awake?"

"I should be sorry to drive the old lady out of her nest!" said the architect unrolling his scroll.

"You shall touch nothing in the little house," cried the prefect eagerly. "I know Hadrian; he delights in such queer things and queer people, and I will wager he will make friends with the old woman in his own way. Here at last comes the steward of this palace."

The prefect was not mistaken; the hasty step he had heard was that of the official they awaited. At some little distance they could already hear the man, panting as he hurried up, and as he came, before Titianus could prevent him, he had snatched down the cords that were stretched across the court and flung all the washing on the ground. As soon as the curtain had thus dropped which had divided him from the Emperor's representative and his companion, he bowed to the former as low as the rotund dimensions of his person would allow; but his hasty arrival, the effort of strength he had made, and his astonishment at the appearance of the most powerful personage in the Nile Province in the building entrusted to his care, so utterly took away his breath—of which he at all times was but "scant"—that he was unable even to stammer out a suitable greeting. Titianus gave him a little time, and then, after expressing his regret at the sad plight of the washing, now strewn upon the ground, and mentioning to the steward the name and position of his friend Pontius, he briefly explained to him that the Emperor wished to take up his abode in the palace now in his charge; that he—Titianus—was cognizant of the bad condition in which it then was, and had come to take council with him and the architect as to what could be done in the course of a few days to make the dilapidated residence habitable for Hadrian, and to repair, at any rate, the more conspicuous damage. He then desired the steward to lead him through the rooms.

"Directly—at once," answered the Greek, who had attained his present ponderous dimensions through many years of rest: "I will hasten to fetch the keys." And as he went, puffing and panting, he re-arranged with his short, fat fingers the still abundant hair on the right side of his head. Pontius looked after him.

"Call him back, Titianus," said he. "We disturbed him in the midst of curling his hair; only one side was done when the lictor called him away, and I will wager my own head that he will have the other side frizzled before he comes back. I know your true Greek!"

"Well, let him," answered Titianus. "If you have taken his measure rightly he will not be able to give his attention without reserve to our questions till the other half of his hair is curled. I know, too, how to deal with a Hellene."

"Better than I, I perceive," said the architect in a tone of conviction. "A statesman is used to deal with men as we do with lifeless materials. Did you see the fat fellow turn pale when you said that it would be but a few days before the Emperor would make his entry here? Things must look well in the old house there. Every hour is precious, and we have lingered here too long."

The prefect nodded agreement and followed the architect into the inner court of the palace. How grand and well-proportioned was the plan of this immense building through which the steward Keraunus, who returned with his fine curls complete all round, now led the Romans. It stood on an artificial hill in the midst of the peninsula of Lochias, and from many a window and many a balcony there were lovely prospects of the streets and open squares, the houses, palaces and public buildings of the metropolis, and of the harbor, swarming with ships. The outlook from Lochias was rich, gay and varied to the south and west, but east and north from the platform of the palace of the Ptolemies, the gaze fell on the never-wearying prospect of the eternal sea, limited only by the vault of heaven. When

Hadrian had sent a special messenger from Mount Kasius to desire his prefect Titianus to have this particular building prepared for his reception, he knew full well what advantages its position offered; it was the part of his officials to restore order in the interior of the palace, which had remained uninhabited from the time of Cleopatra's downfall. He gave them for the purpose eight, or perhaps nine, days—little more than a week. And in what a condition did Titianus and Pontius find this now dilapidated and plundered scene of former magnificence—the sweat pouring from their foreheads with their exertions as they inspected and sketched, questioned and made notes of it all.

The pillars and steps in the interior were tolerably well preserved, but the rain had poured in through the open roofs of the banqueting and reception-lulls, the fine mosaic pavements had started here and there, and in other places a perfect little meadow had grown in the midst of a hall, or an arcade; for Octavianus Augustus, Tiberius, Vespasian, Titus and a whole series of prefects, had already carefully removed the finest of the mosaics from the famous palace of the Ptolemies, and carried them to Rome or to the provinces, to decorate their town houses or country villas. In the same way the best of the statues were gone, with which a few centuries previously the art-loving Lagides had decorated this residence—besides which they had another, still larger, on the Bruchiom.

In the midst of a vast marbled hall stood an elegantly-wrought fountain, connected with the fine aqueduct of the city. A draught of air rushed through this hall, and in stormy weather switched the water all over the floor, now robbed of its mosaics, and covered, wherever the foot could tread, with a thin, dark green, damp and slippery coating of mossy plants and slime. It was here that Keraunus leaned breathless against the wall, and, wiping his brow, panted rather than said: "At last, this is the end!"

The words sounded as if he meant his own end and not that of their excursion through the palace, and it seemed like a mockery of the man himself when Pontius unhesitatingly replied with decision:

"Good, then we can begin our re-examination here, at once."

Keraunus did not contradict him, but, as he remembered the number of stairs to be climbed over again, he looked as if sentence of death had been passed upon him.

"Is it necessary that I should remain with you during the rest of your labors, which must be principally directed to details?" asked the prefect of the architect.

"No," answered Pontius, "provided you will take the trouble to look at once at my plan, so as to inform yourself on the whole of what I propose, and to give me full powers to dispose of men and means in each case as it arises."

"That is granted," said Titianus. "I know that Pontius will not demand a man or a sesterce more or less than is needed for the purpose."

The architect bowed in silence and Titianus went on.

"But above all things, do you think you can accomplish your task in eight days and nine nights?"

"Possibly, at a pinch; and if I could only have four days more at my disposal, most probably."

"Then all that is needed is to delay Hadrian's arrival by four days and nights."

"Send some interesting people—say the astronomer Ptolemaeus, and Favorinus, the sophist, who await him here—to meet him at Pelusium. They will find some way of detaining him there."

"Not a bad idea! We will see. But who can reckon on the Empress's moods? At any rate, consider that you have only eight days to dispose of."

"Good."

"Where do you hope to be able to lodge Hadrian?"

"Well, a very small portion of the old building is, strictly speaking, fit to use."

"Of that, I regret to say, I have fully convinced myself," said the prefect emphatically, and turning to the steward, he went on in a tone less of stern reproof than of regret.

"It seems to me, Keraunus, that it would have been your duty to inform me earlier of the ruinous condition of the building."

"I have already lodged a complaint," replied the man, "but I was told in answer to my report that there were no means to apply to the purpose."

"I know nothing of these things," cried Titianus.

"When did you forward your petition to the prefect's office?"

"Under your predecessor, Haterius Nepos."

"Indeed," said the prefect with a drawl.

"So long ago. Then, in your place, I should have repeated my application every year, without any reference to the appointment of a new prefect. However, we have now no time for talking. During the Emperor's residence here, I shall very likely send one of my subordinates to assist you!"

Titianus turned his back on the steward, and asked the architect:

"Well, my good Pontius, what part of the palace have you your eye upon?"

"The inner halls and rooms are in the best repair."

"But they are the last that can be thought of," cried Titianus. "The Emperor is satisfied with everything in camp, but where fresh air and a distant prospect are to be had, he must have them."

"Then let us choose the western suite; hold the plan my worthy friend."

The steward slid as he was desired, the architect took his pencil and made a vigorous line in the air above the left side of the sketch, saying:

"This is the west front of the palace which you see from the harbor. From the south you first come into the lofty peristyle, which may be used as an antechamber; it is surrounded with rooms for the slaves and body-guard. The next smaller sitting-rooms by the side of the main corridor we may assign to the officers and scribes, in this spacious hypaethral hall—the one with the Muses—Hadrian may give audience and the guests may assemble there whom he may admit to eat at his table in this broad peristyle. The smaller and well-preserved rooms, along this long passage leading to the steward's house, will do for the pages, secretaries and other attendants on Caesar's person, and this long saloon, lined with fine porphyry and green marble, and adorned with the beautiful frieze in bronze will, I fancy, please Hadrian as a study and private sitting-room."

"Admirable!" cried Titianus, "I should like to show your plan to the Empress."

"In that case, instead of eight days I must have as many weeks," said Pontius coolly.

"That is true," answered the prefect laughing. "But tell me, Keraunus, how comes it that the doors are wanting to all the best rooms?"

"They were of fine thyra wood, and they were wanted in Rome."

"I must have seen one or another of them there," muttered the prefect.

"Your cabinet-workers will have a busy time, Pontius."

"Nay, the hanging-makers may be glad; wherever we can we will close the door-ways with heavy curtains."

"And what will you do with this damp abode of fogs, which, if I mistake not, must adjoin the dining-hall?"

"We will turn it into a garden filled with ornamental foliage."

"That is quite admissable—and the broken statues?"

"We will get rid of the worst."

"The Apollo and the nine Muses stand in the room you intend for an audience-hall—do they not?"

"Yes."

"They are in fairly good condition, I think."

"Urania is wanting entirely," said the steward, who was still holding the plan out in front of him.

"And what became of her?" asked Titianus, not without excitement.

"Your predecessor, the prefect Haterius Nepos, took a particular fancy to it and carried it with him to Rome."

"Why Urania of all others?" cried Titianus angrily. "She, above all, ought not to be missing from the hall of audience of Caesar the pontiff of heaven! What is to be done?"

"It will be difficult to find an Urania ready-made as tall as her sisters, and we have no time to search one out, a new one must be made."

"In eight days?"

"And eight nights."

"But my good friend, only to get the marble—"

"Who thinks of marble? Papias will make us one of straw, rags and gypsum—I know his magic hand—and in order that the others may not be too unlike their new-born sister they shall be whitewashed."

"Capital—but why choose Papias when we have Harmodius?"

"Harmodius takes art in earnest, and we should have the Emperor here before he had completed his sketches. Papias works with thirty assistants at anything that is ordered of him, so long as it brings him money. His last things certainly amaze me, particularly the Hygyeia for Dositheus the Jew, and the bust of Plutarch put up in the Caesareum; they are full of grace and power. But who can distinguish what is his work and what that of his scholars? Enough, he knows how things should be done; and if a good sum is to be got by it he will hew you out a whole sea-fight in marble in five days."

"Then give Papias the commission but the hapless mutilated pavements-what will you do with them?"

"Gypsum and paint must mend them," said Pontius, "and where that will not do, we must lay carpets on the floor in the Eastern fashion. Merciful night! how dark it is growing; give me the plan Keraunus and provide us with torches and lamps for to-day, and the next following ones must have twenty-four hours apiece, full measure. I must ask you for half a dozen trustworthy slaves Titianus; I shall want them for messengers. What are you standing there for man? Lights, I said. You have had half a lifetime to rest in, and when Caesar is gone you will have as many more years for the same laudable purpose—"

As he spoke the steward had silently gone off, but the architect did not spare him the end of the sentence; he shouted after him:

"Unless by that time you are smothered in your own fat. Is it Nile-mud or blood that runs in that huge mortal's veins?"

"I am sure I do not care," said the prefect, "so long as the glorious fire that flows in yours only holds out till the work is done. Do not allow yourself to be overworked at first, nor require the impossible of your strength, for Rome and the world still expect great things of you. I can now write in perfect security to the Emperor that all will be ready for him in Lochias, and as a farewell speech, I can only say, it is folly to be discouraged if only Pontius is at hand to support and assist me."

CHAPTER III

The prefect ordered the lictors, who were awaiting him with his chariot, to hasten to his house, and to conduct to Pontius several most worthy slaves, familiar with Alexandria—some of whom he named—and at the same time to send the architect a good couch with pillows and coverlets, and to despatch a good meal and fine wine to the old palace at Lochias. Then he mounted his chariot and drove through the Bruchiom along the shore to the great edifice known as the Caesareum. He got on but slowly, for the nearer he approached his destination the denser was the crowd of inquisitive citizens, who stood closely packed round the vast circumference of the building. Quite from a distance the prefect could see a bright light; it rose to heaven from the large pans of pitch which were placed on the towers on each side of the tall gate of the Caesareum which faced the sea. To the right and left of this gate stood a tall obelisk, and on each of these, men were lighting lamps which had been attached to the sides and placed on the top, on the previous day.

"In honor of Sabina," said the prefect to himself. "All that this Pontius does is thoroughly done, and there is no more complete sinecure than the supervision of his arrangements."

Fully persuaded of this he did not think it necessary to go up to the illuminated door-way which led into the temple erected by Octavian in honor of Julius Caesar; on the contrary, he directed the charioteer to stop at a door built in the Egyptian style, which faced the garden of the palace of the Ptolemies, and which led to the imperial residence that had been built by the Alexandrians for Tiberius, and had been greatly extended and beautified under the later Caesars. A sacred grove divided it from the temple of Caesar, with which it communicated by a covered colonnade. Before this door there were several chariots and horses, and a whole host of slaves, black and white, were in attendance with their masters' litters. Here lictors kept back the sight-seeking crowd, officers were lounging against the pillars, and the Roman guard were just assembling with a clatter of arms, to the sound of a trumpet within the door, to await their dismissal.

Everything gave way respectfully before the chariot of the prefect, and as Titianus walked through the illuminated arcades of the Caesareum, passing by the masterpieces of statuary placed there, and the rows of pictures—and reached the halls in which the library of the palace was kept, he could not help thinking of all the care and trouble which with the assistance of Pontius, he had for months devoted to rendering this palace which had not been used since Titus had set out for Judaea, fit quarters for Hadrian's reception. The Empress now lived in the rooms intended for her husband, and decorated with the choicest works of art, and Titianus reflected with regret that, after Sabina had once become aware of their presence there, it would be quite impossible to transfer them to Lochias. At the door of the splendid room which he had intended for Hadrian he was met by Sabina's chamberlain who undertook to conduct him at once into the presence of his mistress.

The roof of the hall in which the prefect found the Empress, in summer was open to the sky; but at this season was suitably covered in by a movable copper roof, partly to keep off the rain of the Alexandrian winter, and partly too because, even in the warmer season Sabina was wont to complain of cold; but beneath it a wide opening allowed the air free entrance and exit. As Titianus entered the room a comfortable warmth and subtle perfume met his senses; the warmth was produced by stoves of a peculiar form standing in the middle of the room; one of these represented Vulcan's forge. Brightly glowing charcoal lay in front of the bellows which were worked by an automaton, at short regular intervals, while the god and his assistants modelled in brass, stood round the genial fire with tongs and hammers. The other stove was a large silver bird's-nest, in which likewise charcoal was burning. Above the glowing fuel a phoenix, also in brass, and in the likeness of an eagle, seemed striving to soar heavenwards. Besides these a number of lamps lighted the saloon, which in truth looked too large for the number of people assembled in it, and which was lavishly furnished with gracefully-formed seats, couches, and tables, vases of flowers and statues.

The prefect and Pontius had intended a quite different room to serve for smaller assemblies, and had fitted it up suitably for the purpose, but the Empress had preferred the great hall to the smaller room. The venerable and nobly-born statesman was filled with vexation, nay, with an embarrassment that made him feel estranged, when he had to glance round the room to find the persons in it, collected, as they were, into small knots. He could hear nothing but hushed voices; here an unintelligible murmur and there a suppressed laugh, but from no one a frank speech or full utterance. For a moment he felt as if he had found admittance to the abode of whispering calumny, and yet he knew why here no one dared to speak out or above a murmur. Loud voices hurt the Empress, and a clear voice was a misery to her, and yet few men possessed so loud and penetrating a chest voice as her husband, who was not wont to lay restraint upon himself for any human being, not even for his wife.

Sabina sat on a large divan, more like a couch than a chair; her feet were buried in the shaggy fell of a buffalo, and her knees and ankles wrapped round with down-cushions covered with silk. Her head she held very upright, and it was difficult to imagine how her slender throat could support it, loaded as it was with strings of pearls and precious stones which were braided in the tall structure of her reddish-gold hair, that was arranged in long cylindrical curls pinned closely side by side. The Empress's thin face looked particularly small under the mass of natural and artificial adornment which towered above her brow. Beautiful she could never have been, even in her youth, but her features were regular, and the prefect confessed to himself as he looked at Sabina's face, marked as it was with minute wrinkles and touched up with red and white, that the sculptor who a few years previously had been commissioned to represent her as 'Venus Victrix' might very well have given the goddess a certain amount of resemblance to the imperial model. If only her eyes, which were absolutely bereft of lashes, had not been quite so small and keen—in spite of the dark lines painted round them—and if only the sinews in her throat had not stood out quite so conspicuously from the flesh which formerly had covered them!

With a deep bow Titianus took the Empress's right hand, covered with rings; but she withdrew it quickly from that of her husband's friend and relative, as if she feared that the carefully-cherished limb—useless as it was for any practical purpose, a mere toy among hands—might suffer some injury, and wrapped it and her arm in her upper-robe. But she returned the prefect's friendly greeting with all the warmth at her command. Though formerly at Rome she had been accustomed to see Titianus every day at her house, this was their first meeting in Alexandria; for the previous day, exhausted by the sufferings of her sea-voyage, she had been carried in a closed litter to the Caesareum, and this morning she had declined to receive his visit, as her whole time was given up to her physicians, bathing-women, and coiffeurs.

"How can you survive in this country?" she said in a low but harsh voice, which always made the hearer feel that it was that of a dull, fractious, childless woman. "At noon the sun burns you up, and in the evening it is so cold—so intolerably cold!' As she spoke she drew her robe closer round her, but Titianus, pointing to the stoves in the middle of the hall, said:

"I hoped we had succeeded in cutting the bowstrings of the Egyptian winter, and it is but a feeble weapon."

"Still young, still imaginative, still a poet!" said the Empress wearily. "I saw your wife a couple of hours since. Africa seems to suit her less well; I was shocked to see Julia, the handsome matron, so altered. She does not look well."

"Years are the foe of beauty."

"Frequently they are, but true beauty often resists their attacks."

"You are yourself the living proof of your assertion."

"That is as much as to say that I am growing old."

"Nay—only that you know the secret of remaining beautiful."

"You are a poet!" murmured the Empress with a twitch of her thin under-lip.

"Affairs of state do not favor the Muses."

"But I call any man a poet who sees things more beautiful than they are, or who gives them finer names than they deserve—a poet, a dreamer, a flatterer—for it comes to that."

"Ah! modesty can always find words to repel even well-merited admiration."

"Why this foolish bandying of words?" sighed Sabina, flinging herself back in her chair. "You have been to school under the hair-splitting logicians in the Museum here, and I have not. Over there sits Favorinus, the sophist; I dare say he is proving to Ptolemaeus that the stars are mere specks of blood in our eyes, which we choose to believe are in the sky. Florus, the historian, is taking note of this weighty discussion; Pancrates, the poet, is celebrating the great thoughts of the philosopher. As to what part the philologist there can find to take in this important event you know better than I. What is the man's name?"

"Apollonius."

"Hadrian has nick-named him 'the obscure.' The more difficult it is to understand the discourses of these gentlemen the more highly are they esteemed."

"One must dive to obtain what lies at the bottom of the water—all that floats on the surface is borne by the waves, a plaything for children. Apollonius is a very learned man."

"Then my husband ought to leave him among his disciples and his books. It was his wish that I should invite these people to my table. Florus and Pancrates I like—not the others."

"I can easily relieve you of the company of Favorinus and Ptolemaeus; send them to meet the Emperor."

"To what end?"

"To entertain him."

"He has his plaything with him," said Sabina, and her thin lips curled with an expression of bitter contempt.

"His artistic eye delights in the beauty of Antinous, which is celebrated, but which it has not yet been my privilege to see."

"And you are very anxious to see this marvel?"

"I cannot deny it."

"And yet you want to postpone your meeting with Caesar?" said Sabina, and a keen glance of inquiry and distrust twinkled in her little eyes.

"Why do you want to delay my husband's arrival?"

"Need I tell you," said Titianus eagerly, "how greatly I shall rejoice to see once more my sovereign, the companion of my youth, the greatest and wisest of men, after a separation of four years? What would I not give if he were here already! And yet I would rather that he should arrive in fourteen days than in eight."

"What reason can you have?"

"A mounted messenger brought me a letter to-day in which the Emperor tells me that he proposes to inhabit the old palace at Lochias, and not the Caesareum."

At these words Sabina's forehead clouded, her gaze, dark and blank, was fixed on her lap, and biting her under-lip, she muttered:

"Because I am here."

Titianus made as though he had not heard these words, and continued in an easy tone:

"There he has a wide outlook into the distance, which is what he has loved from his youth up. But the old building is much dilapidated, and though I have already begun to exert all the forces at my command, with the assistance of our admirable architect, Pontius, to restore a portion of it at any rate, and make it a habitable and not too uncomfortable residence, the time is too short to do anything thoroughly worthy—"

"I wish to see my husband here, and the sooner the better," interrupted the Empress with decision. Then she turned towards the row of pillars which stood by the right-hand wall of the hall, and which were at some distance from her couch, calling out "Verus." But her voice was so weak that

it did not reach the person addressed, so turning to the prefect, she said: “I beg of you to call Verus to me, the praetor Lucius Aurelius Verus.” Titianus immediately obeyed.

As he entered the hall he had already exchanged friendly greetings with the man to whom the Empress wished to speak. He now did not succeed in attracting his attention till he stood close at his elbow, for he formed the centre of a small group of men and women who were hanging on his words. What he was saying in a subdued voice must have been extraordinarily diverting, for it could be seen that his hearers were making the greatest efforts to keep their suppressed laughter from breaking out into a shout that would shake the very hall, a noise the Empress detested. When the prefect came up to Verus, a young girl, whose pretty head was crowned by a perfect thicket of little ringlets, was just laying her hand on his arm and saying:

“Nay-that is too much; if you go on like this, for the future whenever you speak I shall stop my ears with my hands, as sure as my name is Balbilla.”

“And as sure as you are descended from King Antiochus,” added Verus bowing.

“Always the same,” laughed the prefect, nodding to the audacious jester.

“Sabina wants to speak to you.”

“Directly, directly,” said Verus. “My story is a true one, and you all ought to be grateful to me for having released you from that tedious philologer who has now button-holed my witty friend Favorinus. I like your Alexandria, Titianus; still it is not a great capital like Rome. The people have not yet learned not to be astonished; they are perpetually in amazement. When I go out driving—”

“Your runners ought to fly before you with roses in their hair and wings on their shoulders like Cupids.”

“In honor of the Alexandrian ladies?”

“As if the Roman ladies in Rome, and the fair Greeks at Athens,” interrupted Balbilla.

“The praetor’s runners go faster than Parthian horses,” cried the Empress’s chamberlain. “He has named them after the winds.”

“As they deserve,” added Verus “Come, Titianus.” He laid his hand in a confidential manner on the arm of the prefect, to whom he was related; and as they went towards Sabina he whispered in his ear:

“I can keep her waiting as if I were the Emperor.”

Favorinus who had been engaged in talk with Ptolemaeus, the astronomer, Apollonius, and the philosopher and poet Pancrates in another part of the hall, looked after the two men and said:

“A handsome couple. One the personification of imperial and dignified Rome; the other with his Hermes-like figure.”

“The other”—interrupted the philologist with stern displeasure, “the other is the very incarnation of the haughtiness, the luxury pushed to insanity, and the infamous depravity of the metropolis. That dissipated ladies-man.”

“I will not defend his character,” said Favorinus in his pleasant voice, and with an elegance in his pronunciation of Greek which delighted even the grammarian. “His ways and doings are disgraceful; still you must allow that his manners are tinged with the charm of Hellenic beauty, that the Charites kissed him at his birth, and though, by the stern laws of virtue we must condemn him, he deserves to be crowned with praise and garlands from the point of view of the feeling for beauty.”

“Oh! for the artist who wants a model he is a choice morsel.”

“The Athenian judges acquitted Phryne because she was beautiful.”

“They did wrong.”

“Hardly in the eyes of the gods, whose fairest works must deserve our respect.”

“Still poison may be kept in the most beautiful vessels.”

“And yet body and soul always to a certain extent correspond.”

“And can you dare to call the handsome Verus the admirable Verus?”

"No, but the reckless Lucius Aurelius Verus is at the same time the gayest and pleasantest of all the Romans, free alike from spite or carefulness, he troubles himself with no doctrines of virtue, and as when a thing pleases him, he desires to possess it, he endeavors to give pleasure to every one else."

"He has wasted his pains so far as I am concerned."

"I do as he wishes."

The last words both of the philologer and the sophist were spoken somewhat louder than was usual in the presence of the Empress. Sabina, who had just told the praetor which residence her husband had decided on inhabiting, drew up her shoulders and pinched her lips as if in pain, while Verus turned a face of indignation—a face which was manly in spite of all the delicacy and regularity of the features—on the two speakers, and his fine bright eyes caught the hostile glance of Apollonius.

An intimation of aversion to his person was one of the things which to him were past endurance; he hastily passed his hand through his blue-black hair, which was only slightly grizzled at the temples and flowed uncurled, but in soft waving locks round his head, and said, not heeding Sabina's question as to his opinion of her husband's latest instructions:

"He is a repulsive fellow, that wrangling logician; he has an evil eye that threatens mischief to us all, and his trumpet voice cannot hurt you more than it does me. Must we endure him at table with us every day?"

"So Hadrian desires."

"Then I shall start for Rome," said Verus decidedly. "My wife wants to be back with her children, and as praetor, it is more fitting that I should stay by the Tiber than by the Nile."

The words were spoken as lightly as though they were nothing more than a proposition to go to supper, but they seemed to agitate the Empress deeply, for her head, which had seemed almost a fixture during her conversation with Titianus, now shook so violently that the pearls and jewels rattled in the erection of curls. There she sat for some seconds staring into her lap.

Verus stooped to pick up a gem that had fallen from her hair, and as he did so she said hastily:

"You are right. Apollonius is intolerable. Let us send him to meet my husband."

"Then I will remain," answered Verus, as pleased as a wilful boy who has got his own way.

"Fickle as the wind," murmured Sabina, threatening him with her finger. "Show me the stone—it is one of the largest and finest; you may keep it."

When an hour later, Verus quitted the hall with the prefect, Titianus said:

"You have done me a service cousin, without knowing it. Now can you contrive that Ptolemaeus and Favorinus shall go with Apollonius to meet the Emperor at Pelusium?"

"Nothing easier" was the answer.

And the same evening the prefect's steward conveyed to Pontius the information that he might count on having probably fourteen days for his work, instead of eight or nine only.

CHAPTER IV

In the Caesareum, where the Empress dwelt, the lights were extinguished one after another; but in the palace of Lochias they grew more numerous and brighter. In festal illuminations of the harbor pitch cressets on the roof, and long rows of lamps that accumulated architectonic features of the noble structure, were always kindled; but inside it, no blaze so brilliant had ever lighted it within the memory of man. The harbor watchmen at first gazed anxiously up at Lochias, for they feared that a fire must have broken out in the old palace; they were soon reassured however, by one of the prefect's lictors, who brought them a command to keep open the harbor gates that night, and every night till the Emperor should have arrived, to all who might wish to proceed from Lochias to the city, or from the city to the peninsula, under the orders of Pontius the architect. And till long past midnight not a quarter of an hour passed in which the people whom the architect had summoned to his aid were not knocking at the harbor gates, which, though not locked were all guarded. The little house belonging to the gate-keeper was also brightly lighted up; the birds and cats belonging to the old woman whom the prefect and his companions had found slumbering by her wine-jar, were now fast asleep, but the little dogs still flew loudly yelping into the yard each time a new-comer entered by the open gate.

"Come, Aglaia, what will folks think of you? Thalia, my beauty, behave like a good dog; come here, Euphrosyne, and don't be so silly!" cried the old lady in a voice which was both pleasant and peremptory, as she stood-wide awake now-behind her table, folding together the dried clothes. The little barking beasts who were thus endowed with the names of the three Graces did not trouble themselves much about her affectionate admonitions; to their sorrow, for it happened more than once to each of them, when they had got under the feet of some new-comer, to creep, whining and howling, into the house again to seek consolation from their mistress, who would pick up the sufferer and soothe it with kisses and coaxing.

The old lady was no longer alone, for in the background, on a long and narrow couch which stood in front of the statue of Apollo, lay a tall, lean man, wearing a red chiton. A little lamp hanging from the ceiling threw a dull light on him and on the lute he was playing. To the faint sound of the instrument, which was rather a large one, and which he had propped on the pillow by his side, he was singing, or rather murmuring a long ditty. Twice, thrice, four times he repeated it in the same way. Now and again he suddenly let his voice sound more loudly—and though his hair was quite grey his voice was not unpleasing—and sang a few phrases full of expression and with artistic delivery; and then, when the dogs barked too vehemently, he would spring up, and with his lute in his left-hand and a long pliable rattan in his right, he would rush into the court-yard, shout the names of the dogs, and raise his cane as if he would kill them; but he always took care not to hit them, only to beat on the pavement near them. When, returning from such an excursion, he stretched himself again on his couch, the old woman, pointing to the hanging-lamp which the impatient creature often knocked with his head, would call out, "Euphorion, mind the oil."

And he each time answered with the same threatening gesture and the same glare in his black eyes:

"The little brutes!"

The singer had been diligently practising his musical exercises for about an hour, when the dogs rushed into the court-yard, not barking this time, but yelping loudly with joy. The old woman laid aside the washing and listened, but the tall man said:

"As many birds come flying before the Emperor as gulls before a storm. If only they would leave us in peace—"

"Hark, that is Pollux; I know by the dogs," said the woman, hastening as fast as she could over the threshold and out to meet him. But the expected visitor was already at the door. He picked up the three four-footed Graces who leaped round him, one after the other by the skin of the neck, and

gave each a tap on its nose. Then, seeing the old woman, he took her head between his hands, and kissed her forehead, saying, “Good-evening, little Mother,” and shook hands with the singer, adding, “How are you, great, big Father?”

“You are as big as I am,” replied the man thus addressed, and he drew the younger man towards him, and laid one of his broad hands on his own grey head and the other on that of his first-born, with its wealth of brown hair.

“As if we were cast in the same mould,” cried the youth; and in fact he was very like his father —like, no doubt, as a noble hunter is like a worn-out hack—as marble is like limestone—as a cedar is like a fir-tree. Both were remarkably tall, had thick hair, dark eyes, and strongly aquiline noses, exactly of the same shape; but the cheerful brightness which irradiated the countenance of the youth had certainly not been inherited from the lute-player, but from the little woman who looked up into his face and patted his arm.

But whence did he derive the powerful, but indescribable something which gave nobility to his head, and of which it was impossible to say whether it lay in his eye, or in the lofty brow, arched so differently to that of either parent?

“I knew you would come,” cried his mother. “This afternoon I dreamed it, and I can prove that I expected you, for there, on the brazier, stands the stewed cabbage and sausage waiting for you.”

“I cannot stay now,” replied Pollux. “Really, I cannot, though your kind looks would persuade me, and the sausage winks at me out of the cabbage-pan. My master, Papias, is gone on ahead, and in the palace there we are to work wonders in less time than it generally takes to consider which end the work should be begun at.”

“Then I will carry the cabbage into the palace for you,” said Doris, standing on tip-toe to hold a sausage to the lips of her tall son. Pollux bit off a large mouthful and said, as he munched it:

“Excellent! I only wish that the thing I am to construct up there may turn out as good a statue as this savory cylinder—now fast disappearing—was a superior and admirable sausage.”

“Have another?” said Doris.

“No mother; and you must not bring the cabbage either. Up to midnight not a minute must be lost, and if I then leave off for a little while you must by that time be dreaming of all sorts of pleasant things.”

“I will carry you the cabbage then,” said his father, “for I shall not be in bed so early at any rate. The hymn to Sabina, composed by Mesomedes, is to be performed with the chorus, as soon as the Empress visits the theatre, and I am to lead the upper part of the old men, who grow young again at the sight of her. The rehearsal is fixed for to-morrow, and I know nothing about it yet. Old music, note for note, is ready and safe in my throat, but new things—new things!”

“It is according to circumstances,” said Pollux, laughing.

“If only they would perform your father’s Satyr-play, or his Theseus!” cried Doris.

“Only wait a little, I will recommend him to Caesar as soon as he is proud to call me his friend, as the Phidias of the age. Then, when he asks me ‘Who is the happy man who begot you?’ I will answer: It is Euphorion, the divine poet and singer; and my mother, too, is a worthy matron, the gate-keeper of your palace, Doris, the enchantress, who turns dingy clothes into snow-white linen.”

These last words the young artist sang in a fine and powerful voice to a mode invented by his father.

“If only you had been a singer!” exclaimed Euphorion.

“Then I should have enjoyed the prospect,” retorted Pollux, “of spending the evening of my life as your successor in this little abode.”

“And now for wretched pay, you plant the laurels with which Papias crowns himself!” answered the old man shrugging his shoulders.

“His hour is coming, too,” cried Doris, “his merit will be recognized; I saw him in my dreams, with a great garland on his curly head!”

"Patience, father-patience," said the young man, grasping his father's hand. "I am young and strong, and do all I can. Here, behind this forehead, good ideas are seething; what I have succeeded in carrying out by myself, has at any rate brought credit and fame to others, although it is all far from resembling the ideal of beauty that here—here—I seem to see far away and behind a cloud; still I feel that if, in a moment of kindness, Fortune will but shed a few fresh drops of dew on it all I shall, at any rate, turn out something better than the mere ill-paid right-hand of Papias, who, without me does not know what he ought to do, or how to do it."

"Only keep your eyes open and work hard," cried Doris.

"It is of no use without luck," muttered the singer, shrugging his shoulders.

The young artist bid his parents good-night, and was about to leave, but his mother detained him to show him the young goldfinches, hatched only the day before. Pollux obeyed her wish, not merely to please her, but because he liked to watch the gay little bird that sat warming and sheltering her nestlings. Close to the cage stood the huge wine-jar and his mother's cup, decorated by his own hand. His eye fell on these, and he pushed them aside in silence. Then, taking courage, he said, laughing: "The Emperor will often pass by here, mother; give up celebrating your Dionysiac festival. How would it do if you filled the jar with one-fourth wine and three-fourths water? It does not taste badly."

"Spoiling good gifts," replied his mother.

"One-fourth wine-to please me," Pollux entreated, taking his mother by the shoulders and kissing her forehead.

"To please you, you great boy!" said Doris, as her eyes filled with tears. "Why for you, if I must, I would drink nothing but wretched water. Euphorion you may finish what is left in the jar presently."

•••

Pontius had already begun his labors, at first with aid only of his assistants who had followed him on foot. Measuring, estimating, sending short notes and writing figures, names and suggestions on the plan, and on his folding wax-tablets, he was not idle for an instant, though frequently interrupted by the appointed superintendents of the workshops and manufactures in Lochias, whose co-operation he required. They only came at this late hour because they were called upon by the prefect's orders.

Papias, the sculptor, introduced himself among the latest, though Pontius had written to him with his own hand that he had to communicate to him a very remunerative and particularly pressing commission for the Emperor, which might, perhaps, be taken in hand that very night. The matter in question was a statue of Urania, which must be completed in eight days by the same method which Papias had introduced at the last festival of Adonis, and to the scale which he, Pontius, indicated, in the palace of Lochias itself. With regard to several works of restoration which had to be carried out with equal rapidity, and as to the price to be paid, they could agree at the same time and place.

The sculptor was a man of foresight and did not appear on the scene alone but with his best assistant, Pollux, the son of the worthy couple at the gate, and several slaves who dragged after him sundry trunks and carts loaded with tools, boards, clay, gypsum and other raw materials of his art. On the road to Lochias he had informed the young sculptor of the business in hand, and had told him in a condescending tone that he would be permitted to try his skill in reconstructing the Urania. At the gate he had permitted Pollux to greet his parents, and had gone alone into the palace to open his bargain with the architect without the presence of witnesses.

The young artist perfectly understood his master. He knew that he would be expected to carry out the statue of Urania, while his task-master, after making some trifling alterations in the completed work, would declare that it was his own. Pollux had for two years been obliged, more than once, to put up with similar treatment; and now, as usual, he submitted to this dishonest manoeuvre because, under his master there was plenty to do, and the delight of work was to him the greatest he could have.

Papias, to whom he had gone early as an apprentice and to whom he owed the knowledge he possessed, was no miser, still Pollux needed money, not for himself alone but because he had taken on himself the charge of a widowed sister and her children as if they were his own family. He was always glad to take some comfort into the narrow home of his parents, who were poor, and to maintain his younger brother Teuker—who had devoted himself to the same art—during the years of his apprenticeship. Again and again he had thought of telling his master that he should start on his own footing and earn laurels for himself, but what then would become of those who relied on his help, if he gave up his regular earnings and if he got no commissions when there were so many unknown beginners eager for them? Of what avail were all his ability and the most honest good-will if no opportunity offered for his executing his work in noble materials? With his own means he certainly was in no position to do so.

While he was talking to his parents Papias had opened his transactions with the architect. Pontius explained to the sculptor what was required and Papias listened attentively; he never interrupted the speaker, but only stroked his face from time to time, as if to make it smoother than it was already, though it was shaved with peculiar care and formed and colored like a warm mask; meanwhile draping the front of his rich blue toga, which he wore in the fashion of a Roman senator, into fresh folds.

But when Pontius showed him, at the end of the rooms destined for the Emperor, the last of the statues to be restored, and which needed a new grin, Papias said decisively:

“It cannot be done.”

“That is a rash verdict,” replied the architect. “Do you not know the proverb, which, being such a good one, is said to have been first uttered by more than one sage: ‘That it shows more ill-judgment to pronounce a thing impossible than to boast that we can achieve a task however much it may seem to transcend our powers.’”

Papias smiled and looked down at his gold-embroidered shoes as he said:

“It is more difficult to us sculptors to imagine ourselves waging Titanic warfare against the impossible, than it is to you who work with enormous masses. I do not yet see the means which would give me courage to begin the attack.”

“I will tell you,” replied Pontius quickly and decidedly. “On your side good-will, plenty of assistants and night-watchers; on ours, the Caesar’s approval and plenty of gold.”

After this the transaction came to a prompt and favorable issue, and the architect could but express his entire approbation, in most cases, of the sculptor’s judicious and well-considered suggestions.

“Now I must go home,” concluded Papias. “My assistants will proceed at once with the necessary preparations. The work must be carried on behind screens, so that no one may disturb us or hinder us with remarks.”

Half an hour later a scaffolding was already erected in the middle of the hall where the Urania was to stand.

It was concealed from; public gaze by thick linen stretched on tall wooden frames, and behind these screens Pollux was busied in framing a small model in wax, while his master had returned home to make arrangements for the labors of the following day.

It wanted only an hour of midnight, and still the supper sent to the palace for the architect by the prefect remained untouched. Pontius was hungry enough, but before attacking the meal that a slave had set out on a marble table—the roast meat which looked so inviting, the orange-red crayfish, the golden-brown pasty and the many-hued fruits—he conceived it his duty to inspect the rooms to be restored. It was needful to see whether the slaves who had been set, in the first place to clean out all the rooms, were being intelligently directed by the men set over them, whether they were doing their duty and had all that they required; they had got some hours to work, then they were to rest and to begin again at sunrise, reinforced by other laborers both slave and free.

More and better lighting was universally demanded, and when, in the hall of the Muses, the men who were cleaning the pavement and scraping the columns loudly clamored for torches and lamps, a young man's head peered over the screen which shut in the place reserved for the restoration of the Urania, and a lamentable voice cried out:

"My Muse, with her celestial sphere, is the guardian of star-gazers and is happiest in the dark —but not till she is finished. To form her we must have light and more light—and when it is lighter here the voice of the people down there, which does not sound very delightful up in this hollow space, will diminish somewhat also. Give light, then, O, men! Light for my goddess, and for your scrubbers and scourers."

Pontius looked up smiling at Pollux, who had uttered this appeal, and answered:

"Your cry of distress is fully justified, my friend. But do you really believe in the power of light to diminish noise?"

"At any rate," replied Pollux, "where it is absent, that is to say in the dark, every noise seems redoubled."

"That is true, but there are other reasons for that," answered the architect. "To-morrow in an interval of work we will discuss these matters. Now I will go to provide you with lamps and lights."

"Urania, the protectress of the fine arts, will be beholden to you," cried Pollux as the architect went away.

Pontius meanwhile sought his chief foreman to ask him whether he had delivered his orders to Keraunus, the palace-steward, to come to him, and to put the cressets and lamps commonly used for the external illuminations, at the service of his workmen.

"Three times," was the answer "have I been myself to the man, but each time he puffed himself out like a frog and answered me not a word, but only sent me into a little room with his daughter— whom you must see, for she is charming—and a miserable black slave, and there I found these few wretched lamps that are now burning."

"Did you order him to come to me?"

"Three hours ago, and again a second time, when you were talking with Papias."

The architect turned his back upon the foreman in angry haste, unrolled the plan of the palace, quickly found upon it the abode of the recalcitrant steward, seized a small red-clay lamp that was standing near him, and being quite accustomed to guide himself by a plan, went straight through the rooms, which were not a few, and by a long corridor from the hall of the Muses, to the lodging of the negligent official. An unclosed door led him into a dark ante-chamber followed by another room, and finally into a large, well-furnished apartment. All these door-ways, into what seemed to be at once the dining and sitting-room of the steward, were bereft of doors, and could only be closed by stuff curtains, just now drawn wide open. Pontius could therefore look in, unhindered and unperceived, at the table on which a three-branched bronze lamp was standing between a dish and some plates. The stout man was sitting with his rubicund moon-face towards the architect, who, indignant as he was, would have gone straight up to him with swift decision, if, before entering the second room, a low but pitiful sob had not fallen on his ear.

The sob proceeded from a slight young girl who came forward from a door beyond the sitting-room, and who now placed a platter with a loaf on the table by the steward.

"Come, do not cry, Selene," said the steward, breaking the bread slowly and with an evident desire to soothe his child.

"How can I help crying," said the girl. "But tomorrow morning let me buy a piece of meat for you; the physician forbade you to eat bread."

"Man must be filled," replied the fat man, "and meat is dear. I have nine mouths to fill, not counting the slaves. And where am I to get the money to fill us all with meat?"

"We need none, but for you it is necessary."

"It is of no use, child. The butcher will not trust us any more, the other creditors press us, and at the end of the month we shall have just ten drachmae left us."

The girl turned pale, and asked in anxiety:

"But, father, it was only to-day that you showed me the three gold pieces which you said had been given you as a present out of the money distributed on the arrival of the Empress."

The steward absently rolled a piece of bread-crumb between his fingers and said:

"I spent that on this fibula with an incised onyx—and as cheap as dirt, I can tell you. If Caesar comes he must see who and what I am; and if I die any one will give you twice as much for it as I paid. I tell you the Empress's money was well laid out on the thing." Selene made no answer, but she sighed deeply, and her eye glanced at a quantity of useless things which her father had acquired and brought home because they were cheap, while she and her seven sisters wanted the most necessary things.

"Father," the girl began again after a short silence, "I ought not to go on about it, but even if it vexes you, I must—the architect, who is settling all the work out there, has sent for you twice already."

"Be silent!" shouted the fat man, striking his hand on the table. "Who is this Pontius, and who am I!"

"You are of a noble Macedonian family, related perhaps even to the Ptolemies; you have your seat in the Council of the Citizens—but do, this time, be condescending and kind. The man has his hands full, he is tired out."

"Nor have I been able to sit still the whole day, and what is fitting, is fitting. I am Keraunus the son of Ptolemy, whose father came into Egypt with Alexander the Great, and helped to found this city, and every one knows it. Our possessions were diminished; but it is for that very reason that I insist on our illustrious blood being recognized. Pontius sends to command the presence of Keraunus! If it were not infuriating it would be laughable—for who is this man, who? I have told you his father was a freedman of the former prefect Claudius Balbillus, and by the favor of the Roman his father rose and grew rich. He is the descendant of slaves, and you expect that I shall be his obedient humble servant, whenever he chooses to call me?"

"But father, my dear father, it is not the son of Ptolemy, but the palace-steward that he desires shall go to hire."

"Mere chop-logic!—you have nothing to say, not a step do I take to go to him."

The girl clasped her hands over her face, and sobbed loudly and pitifully. Keraunus started up and cried out, beside himself.

"By great Serapis. I can bear this no longer. What are you whimpering about?"

The girl plucked up courage and going up to the indignant man she said, though more than once interrupted by tears.

"You must go father—indeed you must. I spoke to the foreman, and he told me coolly and decidedly that the architect was placed here in Caesar's name, and that if you do not obey him you will at once be superseded in your office. And if that were to happen, if that—O father, father, only think of blind Helios and poor Berenice! Arsinoe and I could earn our bread, but the little ones—the little ones."

With these words the girl fell on her knees lifting her hands in entreaty to her obstinate parent. The blood had mounted to the man's face and eyes, and pressing his hand to his purple forehead he sank back in his chair as if stricken with apoplexy. His daughter sprang up and offered him the cup full of wine and water which was standing on the table; but Keraunus pushed it aside with his hands, and panted out, while he struggled for breath:

"Supersede me—in my place—turn me out of this palace! Why there, in that ebony trunk, lies the rescript of Euergetes which confers the stewardship of this residence on my ancestor Philip, and as a hereditary dignity in his family. Now Philip's wife had the honor of being the king's mistress—or, as some say, his daughter. There lies the document, drawn up in red and black ink on yellow papyrus

and ratified with the seal and signature of Euergetes the Second. All the princes of the Lagides have confirmed it, all the Roman prefects have respected it, and now—now."

"But father" said the girl interrupting her father, and wringing her hands in despair, "you still hold the place and if you will only give in."

"Give in, give in," shrieked the corpulent steward shaking his fat hands above his blood-shot face. "I will give in—I will not bring you all to misery—for my children's sake I will allow myself to be ill-treated and down-trodden, I will go—I will go directly. Like the pelican I will feed my children with my heart's blood. But you ought to know what it costs me, to humiliate myself thus; it is intolerable to me, and my heart is breaking—for the architect, the architect has trampled upon me as if I were his servant; he wished—I heard him with these ears—he shrieked after me a villainous hope that I might be smothered in my own fat—and the physician has told me I may die of apoplexy! Leave me, leave me. I know those Romans are capable of anything. Well—here I am; fetch me my saffron-colored pallium, that I wear in the council, fetch me my gold fillet for my head. I will deck myself like a beast for sacrifice, and I will show him—"

Not a word of this harangue had escaped the ears of the architect who had been at first indignant and then moved to laughter, and withal it had touched his heart. A sluggish and torpid character was repugnant to his vigorous nature, and the deliberate and indifferent demeanor of the stout steward, on an occasion which had prompted him and all concerned to act as quickly and energetically as possible, had brought words to his lips which he now wished that he had never spoken. It is true that the steward's false pride had roused his indignation, and who can listen calmly to any comment on a stain on his birth? But the appeal of this miserable father's daughter had gone to his heart. He pitied the fatuous simpleton whom, with a turn of his hand, he could reduce to beggary, and who had evidently been far more deeply hurt by his words than Pontius had been by what he had overheard, and so he followed the kindly impulse of a noble nature to spare the unfortunate.

He rapped loudly with his knuckles on the inside of the door-post of the ante-room, coughed loudly, and then said, bowing deeply to the steward on the threshold of the sitting-room:

"Noble Keraunus—I have come, as beseems me, to pay you my respects. Excuse the lateness of the hour, but you can scarcely imagine how busy I have been since we parted."

Keraunus had at first started at the late visitor, then he stared at him in consternation. He now went towards him, stretched out both hands as if suddenly relieved of a nightmare, and a bright expression of such warm and sincere satisfaction overspread his countenance that Pontius wondered how he could have failed to observe what a well-cut face this fat original had.

"Take a seat at our humble table," said Keraunus. "Go Selene and call the slaves. Perhaps there is yet a pheasant in the house, a roast fowl or something of the kind—but the hour, it is true, is late."

"I am deeply obliged to you," replied the architect, smiling. "My supper is waiting for me in the hall of the Muses, and I must return to my work-people. I should be grateful to you if you would accompany me. We must consult together as to the lighting of the rooms, and such matters are best discussed over a succulent roast and a flask of wine."

"I am quite at your service," said Keraunus with a bow.

"I will go on ahead," said the architect, "but first will you have the goodness to give all that you have in the way of cressets, lights and lamps to the slaves, who, in a few minutes, shall await your orders at your door."

When Pontius had departed, Selene exclaimed with a deep sigh

"Oh! what a fright I have had! I will go now and find the lamps. How terribly it might have ended."

"It is well that he should have come," murmured Keraunus. "Considering his birth and origin, the architect is certainly a well-bred man."

CHAPTER V

Pontius had gone to the steward's room, with a frowning brow, but it was with a smile on his strongly-marked lips, and a brisk step that he returned to his work-people. The foreman came to meet him with looks of enquiry as he said. "The steward was a little offended and with reason; but now we are capital friends and he will do what he can in the matter of lighting."

In the hall of the Muses he paused outside the screen, behind which Pollux was working, and called out:

"Friend sculptor, listen to me, it is high time to have supper."

"It is, indeed," replied Pollux, "else it will be breakfast."

"Then lay aside your tools for a quarter of an hour and help me and the palace-steward to demolish the food that has been sent me."

"You will need no second assistant if Keraunus is there. Food melts before him like ice before the sun."

"Then come and save him from an overloaded stomach."

"Impossible, for I am just now dealing most unmercifully with a bowl full of cabbage and sausages. My mother had cooked that food of the gods and my father has brought it in to his first-born son."

"Cabbage and sausages!" repeated the architect, and its tone betrayed that his hungry stomach would fain have made closer acquaintance with the savory mess.

"Come in here," continued Pollux, "and be my guest. The cabbage has experienced the process which is impending over this palace—it has been warmed up."

"Warmed-up cabbage is better than freshly-cooked, but the fire over which we must try to make this palace enjoyable again, burns too hotly and must be too vigorously stirred. The best things have been all taken out, and cannot be replaced."

"Like the sausages, I have fished out of my cabbages," laughed the sculptor. "After all I cannot invite you to be my guest, for it would be a compliment to this dish if I were now to call it cabbage with sausages. I have worked it like a mine, and now that the vein of sausages is nearly exhausted, little remains but the native soil in which two or three miserable fragments remain as memorials of past wealth. But my mother shall cook you a mess of it before long, and she prepares it with incomparable skill."

"A good idea, but you are my guest."

"I am replete."

"Then come and spice our meal with your good company."

"Excuse me, sir; leave me rather here behind my screen. In the first place, I am in a happy vein, and on the right track; I feel that something good will come of this night's work."

"And tomorrow—"

"Hear me out."

"Well."

"You would be doing your other guest an ill-service by inviting me."

"Do you know the steward then?"

"From my earliest youth, I am the son of the gatekeeper of the palace."

"Oh, ho! then you came from that pretty little lodge with the ivy and the birds, and the jolly old lady."

"She is my mother—and the first time the butcher kills she will concoct for you and me a dish of sausages and cabbage without an equal."

"A very pleasing prospect."

"Here comes a hippopotamus—on closer inspection Keraunus, the steward."

"Are you his enemy?"

"I, no; but he is mine—yes," replied Pollux. "It is a foolish story. When we sup together don't ask me about it if you care to have a jolly companion And do not tell Keraunus that I am here, it will lead to no good."

"As you wish, and here are our lamps too."

"Enough to light the nether world," exclaimed Pollux, and waving his hand to the architect in farewell he vanished behind the screens to devote himself entirely to his model.

It was long past midnight, and the slaves who had set to work with much zeal had finished their labors in the hall of the Muses. They were now allowed to rest for some hours on straw that had been spread for them in another wing of the building. The architect himself wished to take advantage of this time to refresh himself by a short sleep, for the exertions of the morrow, but between this intention and its fulfilment an obstacle was interposed, the preposterous dimensions namely of his guest. He had invited the steward on purpose to give him his fill of meat, and Keraunus had shown himself amenable to encouragement in this respect. But after the last dish bad been removed the steward thought that good manners demanded that he should honor his entertainer by his illustrious presence, and at the same time the prefect's good wine loosened the tongue of the man, who was not usually communicative.

First he spoke of the manifold infirmities which tormented him and endangered his life, and when Pontius, to divert his talk into other channels, was so imprudent as to allude to the Council of Citizens, Keraunus gave full play to his eloquence, and, while he emptied cup after cup of wine, tried to lay down the reasons which had made him and his friends decide on staking everything in order to deprive the members of the extensive community of Jews in the city of their rights as citizens, and to expel them, if possible, from Alexandria. So warm was his zeal that he totally forgot the presence of the architect, and his humble origin, and declared to be indispensable, that even the descendants of freed-slaves should be disenfranchised.

Pontius saw in the steward's inflamed eyes and cheeks that it was the wine which spoke within him, and he made no answer; and determined that the rest he needed should not be thus abridged, he rose from table and briefly excusing himself he retired to the room in which the couch had been prepared for him. After he had undressed he desired his slave to see what Keraunus was about, and soon received the reassuring information that the steward was fast asleep and snoring.

"Only listen," said the slave, to confirm his report. "You can hear him grunting and snuffing as far as this. I pushed a cushion under his head, for otherwise, so full as he is, the stout gentleman might come to some harm."

Love is a plant which springs up for many who have never sown it, and grows into a spreading tree for many who have neither fostered nor tended it. How little had Keraunus ever done to win the heart of his daughter, how much on the contrary which could not fail to overshadow and trouble her young life. And yet Selene, whose youth—for she was but nineteen—needed repose and to whom the evening with the reprieve of sleep brought more pleasure than the morning with its load of cares and labor, sat by the three-branched lamp and watched, and tormented herself more and more as it grew later and later, at her father's long absence. About a week before the strong man had suddenly lost consciousness; only, it is true, for a few minutes, and the physician had told her that though he appeared to be in superabundant health, the attack indicated that he must follow his prescriptions strictly and avoid all kinds of excess. A single indiscretion, he had declared, might swiftly and suddenly cut the thread of his existence. After her father had gone out in obedience to the architect's invitation, Selene had brought out her youngest brothers' and sisters' garments, in order to mend them. Her sister Arsinoe, who was her junior by two years, and whose fingers were as nimble as her own, might indeed have helped her, but she had gone to bed early and was sleeping by the children who could not be left untended at night. Her female slave, who had been in her grandmother's service, ought to have

assisted her; but the old half-blind negress saw even worse by lamp-light than by daylight, and after a few stitches could do no more. Selene sent her to bed and sat down alone to her work.

For the first hour she sewed away without looking up, considering, meanwhile, how she could best contrive to support the family till the end of the month on the few drachmae she could dispose of. As it got later she grew wearier and wearier, but still she sat at the work, though her pretty head often sank upon her breast. She must await her father's return, for a potion prepared by the physician stood waiting for him, and she feared he would forget it if she did not remind him.

By the end of the second hour sleep overcame her, and she felt as if the chair she was sitting on was giving way under her, and as if it was sinking at first slowly and then quicker and quicker, into a deep abyss that opened beneath her. Looking up for help in her dream, she could see nothing but her father's face, which looked aside with indifference. As her dream went on she called him and called him again, but for a long time he did not seem to hear her. At last he looked down at her and when he perceived her he smiled, but instead of helping her he picked up stones and clods from the edge of the gulf and threw them on her hands with which she had clutched the brambles and roots that grew out of the rift of the rocks. She entreated him to cease, implored him, shrieked to him to spare her, but not a muscle moved in the face above her; it seemed set in a vacant smile, and even his heart was dead too, for he ruthlessly flung down now a pebble, now a clod, one after the other, till her hands were losing their last feeble hold and she was on the point of falling into the fatal gulf below. Her own cry of terror aroused her, but during the brief process of returning from her dream to actuality, she saw through swiftly parting mists—only for an instant, and yet quite plainly—the tall grass of a meadow, spangled with ox-eye daisies, white and gold, with violet-hued blue bells and scarlet poppies, among which she was lying—as in a soft green bed, while near the sward lay a sparkling blue lake and behind it rose beautiful swelling hills, with red cliffs, and green groves, and meadows bright in the clear sunshine. A clear sky, across which a soft breeze gently blew light silvery flakes of cloud, bent over the lovely but fleeting picture, which she could not compare with anything she had ever seen near her own home.

She had only slept for a short time, but when, once more thoroughly awake, she rubbed her eyes, she thought her dream must have lasted for hours.

One flame of the three-branched lamp had flickered into extinction and the wick of another was beginning to waste. She hastily put it out with a pair of tongs that hung by a chain, and then after pouring fresh oil into the lamp that was still burning she carried the light into her father's sleeping room.

He had not yet returned. She was seized with a mortal terror. Had the architect's wine bereft him of his senses? Had he on his way back to his rooms been seized with a fresh attack of giddiness? In spirit she saw the heavy man incapable of raising himself, dying perhaps where he had fallen.

No choice remained to her; she must go at once to the hall of the Muses and see what had happened to her father, pick him up, give him help or—if he still were feasting—endeavor to tempt him back by any excuse she could find. Everything was at stake; her father's life and with it maintenance and shelter for eight helpless creatures.

The December night was stormy, a keen and bitter wind blew through the ill-closed opening in the roof of the room as Selene, before she began her expedition, tied a handkerchief over her head and threw over her shoulders a white mantle which had been worn by her dead mother. In the long corridor which lay between her father's rooms and the front portion of the palace, she had to screen the flickering light of the little lamp with her left hand, carrying it in her right; the flame blown about by the draught and her own figure were mirrored here and there in the polished surface of the dark marble. The thick sandals she had tied on to her feet roused loud echoes in the empty rooms as they fell on the stone pavements, and terror possessed Selene's anxious soul. Her fingers trembled as they held the lamp and her heart beat audibly as, with bated breath, she went through the cupolaed hall

in which Ptolemy Euergetes 'the fat' was said, some years ago, to have murdered his own son, and in which even a deep breath roused an echo.

But even in this room she did not forget to look to the right and left for her father. She breathed a sigh of relief when she perceived a streak of light which shone through the gaping rift of a cracked side-door of the hall of the Muses and fell in a broken reflection on the floor and the wall of the last room through which she had to pass. She now entered the large hall which was dimly lighted by the lamps behind the sculptor's screen, and by several tapers, now burnt down low. These were standing on a table knocked together out of blocks of wood and planks at the extreme end of the hall, and behind this her father was sound asleep.

The deep notes brought out of the sleeper's broad chest, were echoed in a very uncanny way from the bare walls of the vast empty room, and she was frightened by them and still more by the long black shadows of the pillars, that lay, like barriers, across her path. She stood listening in the middle of the hall and soon recognized in the alarming tones a sound that was only too familiar. Without a moment's hesitation she started to run, and hastened to the sleeper, shook him, pushed him, called him, sprinkled his forehead with water, and appealed to him by the tenderest names with which her sister Arsinoe was wont to coax him. When, in spite of all this, he neither spoke nor stirred, she flung the full light of the lamp on his face. Then she thought she perceived that a bluish tinge had overspread his bloated features, and she broke into the deep, agonized, weeping which, a few hours previously had touched the architect's heart.

There was a sudden stir behind the screens which enclosed the sculptor and the work in progress. Pollux had been working for a long time with zeal and pleasure, but at last the steward's snoring had begun to disturb him. The body of the Muse had already taken a definite form and he could begin to work out the head with the earliest dawn of day. He now dropped his arms wearily, for as soon as he ceased to create with his whole heart and mind he felt tired, and saw plainly that without a model he could do nothing satisfactory with the drapery of his Urania. So he pulled his stool up to a great chest full of gypsum to get a little repose by leaning against it.

But sleep avoided the artist who was too much excited by his rapid night's work, and as soon as Selene opened the door he sat upright and peeped through an opening between the frames of his place of retirement. When he saw the tall draped figure in whose hand a lamp was trembling, when he watched her cross the spacious hall, and then suddenly stand still, he was not a little startled, but this did not hinder him from noting every step of the nocturnal spectre with far more curiosity than alarm. Then, when Selene looked round her, and the lamp illuminated her face, be recognized the steward's daughter, and immediately knew what she must be seeking.

Her vain attempts to rouse the sleeper, though somewhat pathetic, had in them at the same time something irresistibly ludicrous, and Pollux felt sorely tempted to laugh. But as soon as Selene began to weep so bitterly he hastily pushed apart two of the laths of the screen, went up and called her name, at first softly not to frighten her, and then more loudly. When she turned her head he begged her warmly not to be alarmed far he was no ghost, only a very humble and ordinary mortal, in fact-as she might see—nothing more, alas! than the son of Euphorian, the gate-keeper, good for nothing as yet, but treading the path to something better.

"You, Pollux?" asked the girl with surprise.

"The very man. But you—can I help you?"

"My poor father," sobbed Selene. "He does not stir, he is immovable—and his face—oh! merciful gods."

"A man who snores is not dead," said the sculptor. "But the doctor told him—"

"He is not even ill! Pontius only gave him stronger wine to drink than he is used to. Let him be; he is sleeping with the pillow under his neck, as comfortably as a child. When he began just now to trumpet a little too loud I whistled as loud as a plover, for that often silences a snorer; but I could more easily have made those stone Muses dance than have roused him."

"If only we could get him to bed."

"Well, if you have four horses at hand."

"You are as bad as you ever were!"

"A little less so, Selene, only you must become accustomed again to my way of speaking. This time I only mean that we two together are not strong enough to carry him away."

"But what can I do, then? The doctor said—"

"Never mind the doctor. The complaint your father is suffering from is one I know well. It will be gone to-morrow, perhaps by sundown, and the only pain it will leave behind, he will feel under his wig. Only leave him to sleep."

"But it is so cold here."

"Take my cloak and cover him with that."

"Then you will be frozen."

"I am used to it. How long has Keraunus had dealings with the doctor?"

Selene related the accident that had befallen her father and how justified were her fears. The sculptor listened to her in silence and then said in a quite altered tone:

"I am truly sorry to hear it. Let us put some cold water on his forehead, and until the slaves come back again I will change the wet cloth every quarter of an hour. Here is a jar and a handkerchief —good, they might have been left on purpose. Perhaps, too, it will wake him, and if not the people shall carry him to his own rooms."

"Disgraceful, disgraceful!" sighed the girl.

"Not at all; the high-priest of Serapis even is sometimes unwell. Only let me see to it."

"It will excite him afresh if he sees you. He is so angry with you—so very angry."

"Omnipotent Zeus, what harm have I done you, fat father! The gods forgive the sins of the wise, and a man will not forgive the fault committed by a stupid lad in a moment of imprudence."

"You mocked at him."

"I set a clay head that was like him on the shoulders of the fat Silenus near the gate, that had lost its own head. It was my first piece of independent work."

"But you did it to vex my father."

"Certainly not, Selene; I was delighted with the joke and nothing more."

"But you knew how touchy he is."

"And does a wild boy of fifteen ever reflect on the consequences of his audacity? If he had but given me a thrashing his annoyance would have discharged itself like thunder and lightning, and the air would have been clear again. But, as it was, he cut the face off the work with a knife, and deliberately trod the pieces under foot as they lay on the ground. He gave me one single blow—with his thumb—which I still feel, it is true, and then he treated me and my parents with such scorn, so coldly and hardly, with such bitter contempt—"

"He never is really violent, but wrath seems to eat him inwardly, and I have rarely seen him so angry as he was that time."

"But if he had only settled the account with me on the spot! but my father was by, and hot words fell like rain, and my mother added her share, and from that time there has been utter hostility between our little house and you up here. What hurt me most was that you and your sister were forbidden to come to see us and to play with me."

"That has spoilt many pleasant hours for me, too."

"It was nice when we used to dress up in my father's theatrical finery and cloaks."

"And when you made us dolls out of clay.".

"Or when we performed the Olympian games."

"I was always the teacher when we played at school with our little brothers and sisters."

"Arsinoe gave you most trouble."

"Oh! and what fun when we went fishing!"

"And when we brought home the fishes and mother gave us meal and raisins to cook them."

"Do you remember the festival of Adonis, and how I stopped the runaway horse of that Numidian officer?"

"The horse had knocked over Arsinoe, and when we got home mother gave you an almond-cake."

"And your ungrateful sister bit a great piece out of it and left me only a tiny morsel. Is Arsinoe as pretty as she promised to become? It is two years since I last saw her; at our place we never have time to leave work till it is dark. For eight months I had to work for the master at Ptolemais, and often saw the old folks but once in the month."

"We go out very little, too, and we are not allowed to go into your parents' house. My sister—"

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes, I think she is. Whenever she can get hold of a piece of ribbon she plaits it in her hair, and the men in the street turn round to look at her. She is sixteen now."

"Sixteen! What, little Arsinoe! Why, how long then is it since your mother died?"

"Four years and eight months."

"You remember the date very exactly; such a mother is not easily forgotten, indeed. She was a good woman and a kinder I never met. I know, too, that she tried to mollify your father's feeling, but she could not succeed, and then she need must die!"

"Yes," said Selene gloomily. "How could the gods decree it! They are often more cruel than the hardest hearted man."

"Your poor little brothers and sisters!"

The girl bowed her head sadly and Pollux stood for some time with his eyes fixed on the ground. Then he raised his head and exclaimed:

"I have something for you that will please you."

"Nothing ever pleases me now she is dead."

"Yes, yes indeed," replied the young sculptor eagerly. "I could not forget the good soul, and once in my idle moments I modelled her bust from memory. To-morrow I will bring it to you."

"Oh!" cried Selene, and her large heavy eyes brightened with a sunny gleam.

"Now, is not it true, you are pleased?"

"Yes indeed, very much. But when my father learns that it is you who have given me the portrait —"

"Is he capable of destroying it?"

"If he does not destroy it, he will not suffer it in the house as soon as he knows that you made it." Pollux took the handkerchief from the steward's head, moistened it afresh, and exclaimed as he rearranged it on the forehead of the sleeping man:

"I have an idea. All that matters is that my bust should serve to remind you often of your mother; the bust need not stand in your rooms. The busts of the women of the house of Ptolemy stand on the rotunda, which you can see from your balcony, and which you can pass whenever you please; some of them are badly mutilated and must be got rid of. I will undertake to restore the Berenice and put your mother's head on her shoulders. Then you have only to go out and look at her. Will that do?"

"Yes, Pollux; you are a good man."

"So I told you just now. I am beginning to improve. But time—time! if I am to undertake to repair Berenice I must begin by saving the minutes."

"Go back to your work now; I know how to apply a wet compress only too well."

With these words Selene threw back her mantle over her shoulders so as to leave her hands free for use, and stood with her slender figure, her pale face, and the fine broadly-flowing folds of rich stuff, like a statue in the eyes of the young sculptor.

"Stop—stay so—just so," cried Pollux to the astonished girl, so loudly and eagerly that she was startled.

"Your cloak hangs with a wonderfully-free flow from your shoulders—in the name of all the gods do not touch it. If only I might model from it I should in a few minutes gain a whole day for our Berenice. I will wet the handkerchief at intervals in the pauses." Without waiting for Selene's answer the sculptor hastened into his nook and returned first with one of the lamps he worked by in each hand, and some small tools in his mouth, and then fetched his wax model which he placed on the outer side of the table, behind which the steward was sleeping. The tapers were put out, the lamps pushed aside, and raised or lowered, and when at last a tolerably suitable light was procured Pollux threw himself on a stool, straddled his legs, craned his head forward as far as his neck would allow, looking, with his hooked nose, like a vulture that strives to descry his distant prey-cast his eyes down, raised them again to take in something fresh, and after a long gaze looked down again while his fingers and nails moved over the surface of the wax-figure, sinking into the plastic material, applying new pieces to apparently complete portions, removing others with a decided nip and rounding them off with bewildering rapidity to use them for a fresh purpose.

He seemed to be seized with cramp in his hands, but still under his knotted brow his eye shone earnest, resolute and calm, and yet full of profound and speechless inspiration. Selene had said not a word that permitted his using her as a model; but, as if his enthusiasm was infectious, she remained motionless, and when, as he worked, his gaze met hers she could detect the stern earnestness which at this moment possessed her eager companion.

Neither of them opened their lips for some time. At last he stood back from his work, stooping low to look first at Selene and then at his statuette with keen examination from head to foot; and then, drawing a deep breath, and rubbing the wax over with his finger, he said:

"There, that is how it must go! Now I will wet your father's handkerchief and then we can go on again. If you are tired you can rest."

She availed herself but little of this permission and presently he began work again. As he proceeded carefully to replace some folds of her drapery which had fallen out of place, she moved her foot as if to draw back, but he begged her earnestly to stand still and she obeyed his request.

Pollux now used his fingers and modelling tools more calmly; his gaze was less wistful and he began to talk again.

"You are very pale," he said. "To be sure the lamp-light and a sleepless night have something to do with it."

"I look just the same by daylight, but I am not ill."

"I thought Arsinoe would have been like your mother, but now I see many features of her face in yours again. The oval of their form is the same and, in both, the line of the nose runs almost straight to the forehead; you have her eyes and the same bend of the brow, but your mouth is smaller and more sharply cut, and she could hardly have made such a heavy knot of her hair. I fancy, too, that yours is lighter than hers."

"As a girl she must have had still more hair, and perhaps she may have been as fair as I was —I am brown now."

"Another thing you inherit from her is that your hair, without being curly, lies upon your head in such soft waves."

"It is easy to keep in order."

"Are not you taller than she was?"

"I fancy so, but as she was stouter she looked shorter. Will you soon have done?"

"You are getting tired of standing?"

"Not very."

"Then have a little more patience. Your face reminds me more and more of our early years; I should be glad to see Arsinoe once more. I feel at this moment as if time had moved backwards a good piece. Have you the same feeling?"

Selene shook her head.

"You are not happy?"

"No."

"I know full well that you have very heavy duties to perform for your age."

"Things go as they may."

"Nay, nay. I know you do not let things go haphazard. You take care of your brothers and sisters like a mother."

"Like a mother!" repeated Selene, and she smiled a bitter negative.

"Of course a mother's love is a thing by itself, but your father and the little ones have every reason to be satisfied with yours."

"The little ones are perhaps, and Helios who is blind, but Arsinoe does what she can."

"You certainly are not content, I can hear it in your voice, and you used formerly to be as merry and happy as your sister, though perhaps not so saucy."

"Formerly—"

"How sadly that sounds! And yet you are handsome, you are young, and life lies before you."

"But what a life!"

"Well, what?" asked the sculptor, and taking his hands from his work he looked ardently at the fair pale girl before him and cried out fervently:

"A life which might be full of happiness and satisfied affection."

The girl shook her head in negation and answered coldly:

"'Love is joy,' says the Christian woman who superintends us at work in the papyrus factory, and since my mother died I have had no love. I enjoyed all my share of happiness once for all in my childhood, now I am content if only we are spared the worst misfortunes. Otherwise I take what each day brings, because I can not do otherwise. My heart is empty, and if I ever feel anything keenly, it is dread. I have long since ceased to expect any thing good of the future."

"Girl!" exclaimed Pollux. "Why, what has been happening to you? I do not understand half of what you are saying. How came you in the papyrus factory?"

"Do not betray me," begged Selene. "If my father were to hear of it."

"He is asleep, and what you confide to me no one will ever hear of again."

"Why should I conceal it? I go every day with Arsinoe for two hours to the manufactory, and we work there to earn a little money."

"Behind your father's back?"

"Yes, he would rather that we should starve than allow it. Every day I feel the same loathing for the deceit; but we could not get on without it, for Arsinoe thinks of nothing but herself, plays draughts with my father, curls his hair, plays with the children as if they were dolls, but it is my part to take care of them."

"And you, you say, have no share of love. Happily no one believes you, and I least of all. Only lately my mother was telling me about you, and I thought you were a girl who might turn out just such a wife as a woman ought to be."

"And now?"

"Now, I know it for certain."

"You may be mistaken."

"No, no! your name is Selene, and you are as gentle as the kindly moonlight; names, even, have their significance."

"And my blind brother who has never even seen the light is called Helios!" answered the girl.

Pollux had spoken with much warmth, but Selene's last words startled him and checked the effervescence of his feelings. Finding he did not answer her bitter exclamation, she said, at first coolly, but with increasing warmth:

"You are beginning to believe me, and you are right, for what I do for the children is not done out of love, or out of kindness, or because I set their welfare above my own. I have inherited my

father's pride, and it would be odious to me if my brothers and sisters went about in rags, and people thought we were as poor and helpless as we really are. What is most horrible to me is sickness in the house, for that increases the anxiety I always feel and swallows up my last coin; the children must not perish for want of it. I do not want to make myself out worse than I am; it grieves me too to see them drooping. But nothing that I do brings me happiness—at most it moderates my fears. You ask what I am afraid of?—of everything, everything that can happen to me, for I have no reason to look forward to anything good. When there is a knock, it may be a creditor; when people look at Arsinoe in the street, I seem to see dishonor lurking round her; when my father acts against the advice of the physician I feel as if we were standing already roofless in the open street. What is there that I can do with a happy mind? I certainly am not idle, still I envy the woman who can sit with her hands in her lap and be waited on by slaves, and if a golden treasure fell into my possession, I would never stir a finger again, and would sleep every day till the sun was high and make slaves look after my father and the children. My life is sheer misery. If ever we see better days I shall be astonished, and before I have got over my astonishment it will all be over."

The sculptor felt a cold chill, and his heart which had opened wide to his old playfellow shrank again within him. Before he could find the right words of encouragement which he sought, they heard in the hall, where the workmen and slaves were sleeping, the blast of a trumpet intended to awake them. Selene started, drew her mantle more closely round her, begged Pollux to take care of her father, and to hide the wine-jar which was standing near him from the work-people and then, forgetting her lamp, she went hastily toward the door by which she had entered. Pollux hurried after her to light the way and while he accompanied her as far as the door of her rooms, by his warm and urgent words which appealed wonderfully to her heart, he extracted from her a promise to stand once more in her mantle as his model.

A quarter of an hour later the steward was safe in bed and still sleeping soundly, while Pollux, who had stretched himself on a mattress behind his screen, could not for a long time cease to think of the pale girl with her benumbed soul. At last sleep overcame him too, and a sweet dream showed him pretty little Arsinoe, who but for him must infallibly have been killed by the Numidian's restive horse, taking away her sister Selene's almond-cake and giving it to him. The pale girl submitted quietly to the robbery and only smiled coldly and silently to herself.

CHAPTER VI

Alexandria was in the greatest excitement

The Emperor's visit now immediately impending had tempted the busy hive of citizens away from the common round of life in which, day after day,—swarming, hurrying, pushing each other on, or running each other down—they raced for bread and for the means of filling their hours of leisure with pleasures and amusements. The unceasing wheel of industry to-day had pause in the factories, workshops, storehouses and courts of justice, for all sorts and conditions of men were inspired by the same desire to celebrate Hadrian's visit with unheard-of splendor. All that the citizens could command of inventive skill, of wealth, and of beauty was called forth to be displayed in the games and processions which were to fill up a number of days. The richest of the heathen citizens had undertaken the management of the pieces to be performed in the Theatre, of the mock fight on the lake, and of the sanguinary games in the Amphitheatre; and so great was the number of opulent persons that many more were prepared to pay for smaller projects, for which there was no opening. Nevertheless the arrangements for certain portions of the procession, in which even the less wealthy were to take a share, the erection of the building in the Hippodrome, the decorations in the streets, and the preparations for entertaining the Roman visitors absorbed sums so large that they seemed extravagant even to the prefect Titianus, who was accustomed to see his fellow-officials in Rome squander millions.

As the Emperor's viceroy it behoved him to give his assent to all that was planned to feast his sovereign's eye and ear. On the whole, he left the citizens of the great town free to act as they would; but he had, more than once, to exert a decided opposition to their overdoing the thing; for though the Emperor might be able to endure a vast amount of pleasure, what the Alexandrians originally proposed to provide for him to see and hear would have exhausted the most indefatigable human energy.

That which gave the greatest trouble, not merely to him, but also to the masters of the revels chosen by the municipality, were the never-dormant hostility between the heathen and the Jewish sections of the inhabitants, and the processions, since no division chose to come last, nor would any number be satisfied to be only the third or the fourth.

It was from a meeting, where his determined intervention had at last brought all these preliminaries to a decision beyond appeal, that Titianus proceeded to the Caesareum to pay the Empress the visit which she expected of him daily. He was glad to have come to some conclusion, at any rate provisionally, with regard to these matters, for six days had slipped away since the works had been begun in the palace of Lochias, and Hadrian's arrival was nearing rapidly.

He found Sabina, as usual, on her divan, but on this occasion the Empress was sitting upright on her cushions. She seemed quite to have got over the fatigues of the sea-voyage, and in token that she felt better she had applied more red to her cheeks and lips than three days ago, and because she was to receive a visit from the sculptors, Papias and Aristeas, she had had her hair arranged as it was worn in the statue of Venus Victrix, with whose attributes she had, five years previously—though not, it is true, without some resistance—been represented in marble. When a copy of this statue had been erected in Alexandria, an evil tongue had made a speech which was often repeated among the citizens.

"This Aphrodite is triumphant to be sure, for all who see her make haste to fly; she should be called Cypris the scatterer."

Titianus was still under the excitement of the embittered squabbles and unpleasing exhibitions of character at which he had just been present when he entered the presence of the Empress, whom

he found in a small room with no one but the chamberlain and a few ladies-in-waiting. To the prefect's respectful inquiries after her health, she shrugged her shoulders and replied:

"How should I be? If I said well it would not be true; if I said ill, I should be surrounded with pitiful faces, which are not pleasant to look at. After all we must endure life. Still, the innumerable doors in these rooms will be the death of me if I am compelled to remain here long."

Titianus glanced at the two doors of the room in which the Empress was sitting, and began to express his regrets at their bad condition, which had escaped his notice; but Sabina interrupted him, saying:

"You men never do observe what hurts us women. Our Verus is the only man who can feel and understand—who can divine it, as I might say. There are five and thirty doors in my rooms! I had them counted-five and thirty! If they were not old and made of valuable wood I should really believe they had been made as a practical joke on me."

"Some of them might be supplemented with curtains."

"Oh! never mind—a few miseries, more or less in any life do not matter. Are the Alexandrians ready at last with their preparations?"

"I am sure I hope so," said the prefect with a sigh. "They are bent on giving all that is their best; but in the endeavor to outvie each other every one is at war with his neighbor, and I still feel the effects of the odious wrangling which I have had to listen to for hours, and that I have been obliged to check again and again with threats of 'I shall be down upon you.'"

"Indeed," said the Empress with a pinched smile, as if she had heard some thing that pleased her.

"Tell me something about your meeting. I am bored to death, for Verus, Balbilla and the others have asked for leave of absence that they may go to inspect the work doing at Lochias; I am accustomed to find that people would rather be any where than with me. Can I wonder then that my presence is not enough to enable a friend of my husband's to forget a little annoyance—the impression left by some slight misunderstanding? But my fugitives are a long time away; there must be a great deal that is beautiful to be seen at Lochias."

The prefect suppressed his annoyance and did not express his anxiety lest the architect and his assistants should be disturbed, but began in the tone of the messenger in a tragedy:

"The first quarrel was fought over the order of the procession."

"Sit a little farther off," said Sabina pressing her jewelled right-hand on her ear, as if she were suffering a pain in it. The prefect colored slightly, but he obeyed the desire of Caesar's wife and went on with his story, pitching his voice in a somewhat lower key than before:

"Well, it was about the procession, that the first breach of the peace arose."

"I have heard that once already," replied the lady, yawning. "I like processions."

"But," said the prefect, a man in the beginning of the sixties—and he spoke with some irritation, "here as in Rome and every where else, where they are not controlled by the absolute will of a single individual, processions are the children of strife, and they bring forth strife, even when they are planned in honor of a festival of Peace."

"It seems to annoy you that they should be organized in honor of Hadrian?"

"You are in jest; it is precisely because I care particularly that they should be carried out with all possible splendor, that I am troubling myself about them in person, even as to details; and to my great satisfaction I have been able even to subdue the most obstinate; still it was scarcely my duty—"

"I fancied that you not only served the state but were my husband's friend."

"I am proud to call myself so."

"Aye—Hadrian has many, very many friends since he has worn the purple. Have you got over your ill temper Titianus? You must have become very touchy. Poor Julia has an irritable husband!"

"She is less to be pitied than you think," said Titianus with dignity, "for my official duties so entirely claim my time that she is not often likely to know what disturbs me. If I have forgotten to

dissimulate my vexation before you, I beg you to pardon me, and to attribute it to my zeal in securing a worthy reception for Hadrian."

"As if I had scolded you! But to return to your wife—as I understand she shares the fate I endure. We poor women have nothing to expect from our husbands, but the stale leavings that remain after business has absorbed the rest! But your story—go on with your story."

"The worst moments I had at all were given me by the bad feeling of the Jews towards the other citizens."

"I hate all these infamous sects—Jews, Christians or whatever they are called! Do they dare to grudge their money for the reception of Caesar?"

"On the contrary Alabarchos, their wealthy chief, has offered to defray all the cost of the Naumachia and his co-religionist Artemion."

"Well, take their money, take their money."

"The Greek citizens feel that they are rich enough to pay all the expenses, which will amount to many millions of sesterces, and they wish to exclude the Jews, if possible, from all the processions and games."

"They are perfectly right."

"But allow me to ask you whether it is just to prohibit half the population of Alexandria doing honor to their Emperor!"

"Oh! Hadrian will, with pleasure, dispense with the honor. Our conquering heroes have thought it redounded to their glory to be called Africanus, Germanicus and Dacianus, but Titus refused to be called Judaicus when he had destroyed Jerusalem."

"That was because he dreaded the remembrance of the rivers of blood which had to be shed in order to break the fearfully obstinate resistance of that nation. The besieged had to be conquered limb by limb, and finger by finger, before they would make up their minds to yield."

"Again you are speaking half poetically, or have these people elected you as their advocate?"

"I know them and make every effort to secure them justice, just as much as any other citizen of this country which I govern in the name of the Empire and of Caesar. They pay taxes as well as the rest of the Alexandrians; nay more, for there are many wealthy men among them who are honorably prominent in trade, in professions, learning and art, and I therefore mete to them the same measure as to the other inhabitants of this city. Their superstition offends me no more than that of the Egyptians."

"But it really is above all measure. At Aelia Capitolina which Hadrian had decorated with several buildings, they refused to sacrifice to the statues of Zeus and Hera. That is to say they scorn to do homage to me and my husband!"

"They are forbidden to worship any other divinity than their own God. Aelia rose up on the very soil where their ruined Jerusalem had stood, and the statues of which you speak stand in their holy places."

"What has that to do with us?"

"You know that even Caius—[Caligula]—could not reduce them by placing his statue in the Holy of Holies of their temple; and Petronius, the governor, had to confess that to subdue them meant to exterminate them."

"Then let them meet with the fate they deserve, let them be exterminated!" cried Sabina.

"Exterminated?" asked the prefect. "In Alexandria they constitute nearly half of the citizens, that is to say several hundred thousand of obedient subjects, exterminated!"

"So many?" asked the Empress in alarm. "But that is frightful. Omnipotent Jove! supposing that mass were to revolt against us! No one ever told me of this danger. In Cyrenaica, and at Salamis in Cyprus, they killed their fellow-citizens by thousands."

"They had been provoked to extremities and they were superior to their oppressors in force."

"And in their own land one revolt after another is organized."

"By reason of the sacrifices of which we were speaking."

"Tinnius Rufus is at present the legate in Palestine. He has a horribly shrill voice—but he looks like a man who will stand no trifling, and will know how to quell the venomous brood."

"Possibly" replied Titianus. "But I fear that he will never attain his end by mere severity; and if he should he will have depopulated his province."

"There are already too many men in the empire."

"But never enough good and useful citizens."

"Outrageous contemners of the gods and useless citizens!"

"Here in Alexandria, where many have accommodated themselves to Greek habits of life and thought, and where all have adopted the Greek tongue, they are undoubtedly good citizens, and wholly devoted to Caesar."

"Do they take part in the rejoicings?"

"Yes, as far as the Greek citizens will allow them."

"And the arrangement of the water-fight?"

"That will not be given over to them, but Artemion will be permitted to supply the wild beasts for the games in the Amphitheatre."

"And he was not avaricious about it?"

"So far from it that you will be astonished. The man must know the secret of Midas, of turning stones into gold."

"And are there many like him among your Jews?"

"A good number."

"Then I wish that they would attempt a revolt, for if this led to the destruction of the rich ones, their gold, at any rate, would remain."

"Meanwhile I will try and keep them alive, as being good rate-payers."

"And does Hadrian share your wish?"

"Without doubt."

"Your successor may perhaps bring him to another mind."

"He always acts according to his own judgment, and for the present I am in office," answered Titianus haughtily.

"And may the God of the Jews long preserve you in it!" retorted Sabina scornfully.

CHAPTER VII

Before Titianus could open his lips to reply, the principal door of the room was opened cautiously but widely, and the praetor Lucius Aurelius Verus, his wife Domitia Lucilla, the young Balbilla and, last of all, Annaeus Florus, the historian, entered. All four were in the best spirits, and immediately after the preliminary greetings, were eager to report what they had seen at Lochias; but Sabina waved silence with her hand, and breathed out:

"No, no; not at present. I feel quite exhausted. This long waiting, and then—my smelling-bottle, Verus. Leukippe, bring me a cup of water with some fruit-syrup—but not so sweet as usual."

The Greek slave-girl hastened to execute this command, and the Empress, as she waved an elegant bottle carved in onyx, under her nostrils, went on:

"It is a little eternity—is it not, Titianus, that we have been discussing state affairs? You all know how frank I am and that I cannot be silent when I meet with perverse opinions. While you have been away I have had much to hear and to say; it would have exhausted the strength of the strongest. I only wonder you don't find me more worn out, for what can be more excruciating for a woman, that to be obliged to enter the lists for manly decisiveness against a man who is defending a perfectly antagonistic view? Give me water, Leukippe."

While the Empress drank the syrup with tiny sips twitching her thin lips over it, Verus went up to the prefect and asked him in an under tone:

"You were a long while alone with Sabina, cousin?"

"Yes," replied Titianus, and he set his teeth as he spoke and clenched his fist so hard that the praetor could not misunderstand, and replied in a low voice:

"She is much to be pitied, and particularly just now she has hours—"

"What sort of hours?" asked Sabina taking the cup from her lips.

"These," replied Verus quickly, "in which I am not obliged to occupy myself in the senate or with the affairs of state. To whom do I owe them but to you?"

With these words he approached the mature beauty, and taking the goblet out of her hand with affectionate subservience, as a son might wait on his honored and suffering mother, he gave it to the Greek slave. The Empress bowed her thanks again and again to the praetor with much affability, and then said, with a slight infusion of cheerfulness in her tones:

"Well—and what is there to be seen at Lochias?"

"Wonderful things," answered Balbilla readily and clasping her little hands.

"A swarm of bees, a colony of ants, have taken possession of the palace. Hands black, white and brown—more than we could count, are busy there and of all the hundreds of workmen which are astir there, not one got in the way of another, for one little man orders and manages them all, just as the prescient wisdom of the gods guides the stars through the 'gracious and merciful night' so that they may never push or run against each other."

"I must put in a word on behalf of Pontius the architect," interposed Verus. "He is a man of at least average height."

"Let us admit it to satisfy your sense of justice," returned Balbilla. "Let us admit it—a man of average height, with a papyrus-roll in his right-hand and a stylus in the left, controls them. Now, does my way of stating it please you better?"

"It can never displease me," answered the praetor. "Let Balbilla go on with her story," commanded the Empress.

"What we saw was chaos," continued the girl, "still in the confusion we could divine the elements of an orderly creation in the future; nay, it was even visible to the eye."

"And not unfrequently stumbled over with the foot," laughed the praetor. "If it had been dark, and if the laborers had been worms, we must have trodden half of them to death—they swarmed so all over the pavement."

"What were they doing?"

"Every thing," answered Balbilla quickly. "Some were polishing damaged pieces, others were laying new bits of mosaic in the empty places from which it had formerly been removed, and skilled artists were painting colored figures on smooth surfaces of plaster. Every pillar and every statue was built round with a scaffolding reaching to the ceiling on which men were climbing and crowding each other just as the sailors climb into the enemy's ships in the Naumachia."

The girl's pretty cheeks had flushed with her eager reminiscence of what she had seen, and, as she spoke, moving her hands with expressive gestures, the tall structure of curls which crowned her small head shook from side to side.

"Your description begins to be quite poetical," said the Empress, interrupting her young companion. "Perhaps the Muse may even inspire you with verse."

"All the Pierides," said the praetor, "are represented at Lochias. We saw eight of them, but the ninth, that patroness of the arts, who protects the stargazer, the lofty Urania, has at present, in place of a head—allow me to leave it to you to guess divine Sabina?"

"Well—what?"

"A wisp of straw."

"Alas," sighed the Empress. "What do you say, Florus? Are there not among your learned and verse spinning associates certain men who resemble this Urania?"

"At any rate," replied Florus, "we are more prudent than the goddess, for we conceal the contents of our heads in the hard nut of the skull, and under a more or less abundant thatch of hair. Urania displays her straw openly."

"That almost sounds," said Balbilla laughing and pointing to her abundant locks, "as if I especially needed to conceal what is covered by my hair."

"Even the Lesbian swan was called the fair-haired," replied Florus.

"And you are our Sappho," said the praetor's wife, drawing the girl's arm to her bosom.

"Really! and will you not write in verse all that you have seen to-day?" asked the Empress.

Balbilla looked down on the ground a minute and then said brightly: "It might inspire me, everything strange that I meet with prompts me to write verse."

"But follow the counsel of Apollonius the philologer," advised Florus. "You are the Sappho of our day, and therefore you should write in the ancient Aeolian dialect and not Attic Greek." Verus laughed, and the Empress, who never was strongly moved to laughter, gave a short sharp giggle, but Balbilla said eagerly:

"Do you think that I could not acquire it and do so? To-morrow morning I will begin to practise myself in the old Aeolian forms."

"Let it alone," said Domitia Lucilla; "your simplest songs are always the prettiest."

"No one shall laugh at me!" declared Balbilla pertinaciously. "In a few weeks I will know how to use the Aeolian dialect, for I can do anything I am determined to do—anything, anything."

"What a stubborn little head we have under our curls!" exclaimed the Empress, raising a graciously threatening finger.

"And what powers of apprehension," added Florus.

"Her master in language and metre told me his best pupil was a woman of noble family and a poetess besides—Balbilla in short."

The girl colored at the words, and said with pleased excitement:

"Are you flattering me or did Hephaestion really say that?"

"Woe is me!" cried the praetor, "for Hephaestion was my master too, and I am one of the masculine scholars beaten by Balbilla. But it is no news to me, for the Alexandrian himself told me the same thing as Florus."

"You follow Ovid and she Sappho," said Florus; "you write in Latin and she in Greek. Do you still always carry Ovid's love-poems about with you?"

"Always," replied Verus, "as Alexander did his Homer."

"And out of respect for his master your husband endeavors, by the grace of Venus, to live like him," added Sabina, addressing herself to Domitia Lucilla.

The tall and handsome Roman lady only shrugged her shoulders slightly in answer to this not very kindly-meant speech; but Verus said, while he picked up Sabina's silken coverlet, and carefully spread it over her knees:

"My happiest fortune consists in this: that Venus Victrix favors me. But we are not yet at the end of our story; our Lesbian swan met at Lochias with another rare bird, an artist in statuary."

"How long have the sculptors been reckoned among birds?" asked Sabina. "At the utmost can they be compared to woodpeckers."

"When they work in wood," laughed Verus. "Our artist, however, is an assistant of Papias, and handles noble materials in the grand style. On this occasion, however, he is building a statue out of a very queer mixture of materials."

"Verus may very well call our new acquaintance a bird," interrupted Balbilla, "for as we approached the screen behind which he is working he was whistling a tune with his lips, so pure and cheery, and loud, that it rang through the empty hall above all the noise of the workmen. A nightingale does not pipe more sweetly. We stood still to listen till the merry fellow, who had no idea that we were by, was silent again; and then hearing the architect's voice, he called to him over the screen. 'Now we must clap Urania's head on; I saw it clearly in my mind and would have had it finished with a score of touches, but Papias said he had one in the workshop. I am curious to see what sort of a sugarplum face, turned out by the dozen, he will stick on my torso—which will please me, at any rate, for a couple of days. Find me a good model for the bust of the Sappho I am to restore. A thousand gadflies are buzzing in my brain—I am so tremendously excited! What I am planning now will come to something!'"

Balbilla, as she spoke the last words, tried to mimic a man's deep voice, and seeing the Empress smile she went on eagerly.

"It all came out so fresh, from a heart full to bursting of happy vigorous creative joy, that it quite fired me, and we all went up to the screen and begged the sculptor to let us see his work."

"And you found?" asked Sabina.

"He positively refused to let us into his retreat," replied the praetor; "but Balbilla coaxed the permission out of him, and the tall young fellow seems to have really learnt something. The fall of the drapery that covers the Muse's figure is perfectly thought out with reference to possibility—rich, broadly handled, and at the same time of surprising delicacy. Urania has drawn her mantle closely round her, as if to protect herself from the keen night-air while gazing at the stars. When he has finished his Muse, he is to repair some mutilated busts of women; he was fixing the head of a finished Berenice to-day, and I proposed to him to take Balbilla as the model for his Sappho."

"A good idea" said the Empress. "If the bust is successful I will take him with me to Rome."

"I will sit to him with pleasure," said the girl. "The bright young fellow took my fancy."

"And Balbilla his," added the praetor's wife; "he gazed at her as a marvel, and she promised him that, with your permission, she would place her face at his disposal for three hours to-morrow."

"He begins with the head," interposed Verus. "What a happy man is an artist such as he! He may turn about her head, or lay her peplum in folds without reproof or repulse, and to-day when we had to get past bogs of plaster, and lakes of wet paint, she scarcely picked up the hem of her dress, and never once allowed me—who would so willingly have supported her—to lift her over the worst places."

Balbilla reddened and said angrily:

"Really Verus, in good earnest, I will not allow you to speak to me in that way, so now you know it once for all; I have so little liking for what is not clean that I find it quite easy to avoid it without assistance."

"You are too severe," interrupted the Empress with a hideous smile. "Do not you think Domitia Lucilla, that she ought to allow your husband to be of service to her?"

"If the Empress thinks it right and fitting," replied the lady raising her shoulders, and with an expressive movement of her hands. Sabina quite took her meaning, and suppressing another yawn she said angrily:

"In these days we must be indulgent toward a husband who has chosen Ovid's amatory poems as his faithful companion. What is the matter Titianus?"

While Balbilla had been relating her meeting with the sculptor Pollux, a chamberlain had brought in to the prefect an important letter, admitting of no delay. The state official had withdrawn to the farther side of the room with it, had broken the strong seal and had just finished reading it, when the Empress asked her question.

Nothing of what went on around her escaped Sabina's little eyes, and she had observed that while the governor was considering the document addressed to him he had moved uneasily. It must contain something of importance.

"An urgent letter," replied Titianus, "calls me home. I must take my leave, and I hope ere long to be able to communicate to you something agreeable."

"What does that letter contain?"

"Important news from the provinces," said Titianus.

"May I inquire what?"

"I grieve to say that I must answer in the negative. The Emperor expressly desired that this matter should be kept secret. Its settlement demands the promptest haste, and I am therefore unfortunately obliged to quit you immediately."

Sabina returned the prefect's parting salutations with icy coldness and immediately desired to be conducted to her private rooms to dress herself for supper.

Balbilla escorted her, and Florus betook himself to the "Olympian table," the famous eating-house kept by Lycortas, of whom he had been told wonders by the epicures at Rome.

When Verus was alone with his wife he went up in a friendly manner and said:

"May I drive you home again?"

Domitia Lucilla had thrown herself on a couch, and covered her face with her hands, and she made no reply. "May I?" repeated the praetor. As his wife persisted in her silence, he went nearer to her, laid his hand on her slender fingers that concealed her face, and said:

"I believe you are angry with me!" She pushed away his hand, with a slight movement, and said: "Leave me."

"Yes, unfortunately I must leave you. Business takes me into the city and I will—"

"You will let the young Alexandrians, with whom you revelled through the night, introduce you to new fair ones—I know it."

"There are in fact women here of incredible charm," replied Verus quite coolly. "White, brown, copper-colored, black—and all delightful in their way. I could never be tired of admiring them."

"And your wife?" asked Lucilla, facing him, sternly. "My wife? yes, my fairest. Wife is a solemn title of honor and has nothing to do with the joys of life. How could I mention your name in the same hour with those of the poor children who help me to beguile an idle hour."

Domitia Lucilla was used to such phrases, and yet on this occasion they gave her a pang. But she concealed it, and crossing her arms she said resolutely and with dignity:

"Go your way—through life with your Ovid, and your gods of love, but do not attempt to crush innocence under the wheels of your chariot."

"Balbilla do you mean," asked the praetor with a loud laugh. "She knows how to take care of herself and has too much spirit to let herself get entangled in erotics. The little son of Venus has nothing to say to two people who are such good friends as she and I are."

"May I believe you?"

"My word for it, I ask nothing of her but a kind word," cried he, frankly offering his hand to his wife. Lucilla only touched it lightly with her fingers and said:

"Send me back to Rome. I have an unutterable longing to see my children, particularly the boys."

"It cannot be," said Verus. "Not at present; but in a few weeks, I hope."

"Why not sooner?"

"Do not ask me."

"A mother may surely wish to know why she is separated from her baby in the cradle."

"That cradle is at present in your mother's house, and she is taking care of our little ones. Have patience, a little longer for that which I am striving after, for you, and for me, and not last, for our son, is so great, so stupendously great and difficult that it might well outweigh years of longing."

Verus spoke the last words in a low tone, but with a dignity which characterized him only in decisive moments, but his wife, even before he had done speaking, clasped his right-hand in both of hers and said in a low frightened voice:

"You aim at the purple?" He nodded assent.

"That is what it means then!"

"What?"

"Sabina and you—"

"Not on that account only; she is hard and sharp to others, but to me she has shown nothing but kindness, ever since I was a boy."

"She hates me."

"Patience, Lucilla; patience! The day is coming when the daughter of Nigrinus, the wife of Caesar, and the former Empress—but I will not finish. I am, as you know, warmly attached to Sabina, and sincerely wish the Emperor a long life."

"And he will adopt."

"Hush!—he is thinking of it, and his wife wishes It."

"Is it likely to happen soon?"

"Who can tell at this moment what Caesar may decide on in the very next hour. But probably his decision may be made on the thirtieth of December."

"Your birthday."

"He asked what day it was, and he is certainly casting my horoscope, for the night when my mother bore me—"

"The stars then are to seal our fate?"

"Not they alone. Hadrian must also be inclined to read them in my favor."

"How can I be of use to you?"

"Show yourself what you really are in your intercourse with the Emperor"

"I thank you for those words—and I beg you do not provoke me any more. If it might yet be something more than a mere post of honor to be the wife of Verus, I would not ask for the new dignity of becoming wife to Caesar."

"I will not go into the town to-day; I will stay with you. Now are you happy?"

"Yes, yes," cried she, and she raised her arm to throw it round her husband's neck, but he held her aside and whispered:

"That will do. The idyllic is out of place in the race for the purple."

CHAPTER VIII

Titianus had ordered his charioteer to drive at once to Lochias. The road led past the prefect's palace, his residence on the Bruchiom, and he paused there; for the letter which lay hidden in the folds of his toga, contained news, which, within a few hours, might put him under the necessity of not returning home till the following morning. Without allowing himself to be detained by the officials, subalterns, or lictors, who were awaiting his return to make communications, or to receive his orders, he went straight through the ante-room and the large public rooms for men, to find his wife in the women's apartments which looked upon the garden. He met her at the door of her room, for she had heard his step approaching and came out to receive him.

"I was not mistaken," said the matron with sincere pleasure. "How pleasant that you have been released so early to-day. I did not expect you till supper was over."

"I have come only to go again," replied Titianus, entering his wife's room. "Have some bread brought to me and a cup of mixed wine; why—really! here stands all I want ready as if I had ordered it. You are right, I was with Sabina a shorter time than usual; but she exerted herself in that short time to utter as many sour words as if we had been talking for half a day. And in five minutes I must quit you again, till when?—the gods alone know when I shall return. It is hard even to speak the words, but all our trouble and care, and all poor Pontius' zeal and pains-taking labor are in vain."

As he spoke the prefect threw himself on a couch; his wife handed him the refreshment he had asked for, and said, as she passed her hand over his grey hair:

"Poor man! Has Hadrian then determined after all to inhabit the Caesareum?"

"No. Leave us, Syra—you shall see directly. Please read me Caesar's letter once more. Here it is." Julia unfolded the papyrus, which was of elegant quality, and began:

"Hadrian to his friend Titianus, the Governor of Egypt. The deepest secrecy—Hadrian greets Titianus, as he has so often done for years at the beginning of disagreeable business letters, and only with half his heart. But to-morrow he hopes to greet the dear friend of his youth, his prudent vicegerent, not merely with his whole soul, but with hand and tongue. And now to be more explicit, as follows: I come to-morrow morning, the fifteenth of December, towards evening, to Alexandria, with none but Antinous, the slave Mastor, and my private secretary, Phlegon. We land at Lochias, in the little harbor, and you will know my ship by a large silver star at the prow. If night should fall before I arrive there, three red lanterns at the end of the mast shall inform you of the friend that is approaching. I have sent home the learned and witty men whom you sent to meet me, in order to detain me, and gain time for the restoration of the old nest in which I had a fancy to roost with Minerva's birds—which have not, I hope, all been driven out of it—in order that Sabina and her following may not lack entertainment, nor the famous gentlemen themselves be unnecessarily disturbed in their labors. I need them not. If perchance it was not you who sent them, I ask your pardon. An error in this matter would certainly involve some humiliation, for it is easier to explain what has happened than to foresee what is to come. Or is the reverse the truth? I will indemnify the learned men for their useless journey by disputing this question with them and their associates in the Museum. The rapid movement to which the philologer was prompted on my account will prolong his existence; he bristles with learning at the tip of every hair, and he sits still more than is good for him.

"We shall arrive in modest disguise and will sleep at Lochias; you know that I have rested more than once on the bare earth, and, if need be, can sleep as well on a mat as on a couch. My pillow follows at my heels—my big dog, which you know; and some little room, where I can meditate undisturbed on my designs for next year, can no doubt be found.

"I entreat you to keep my secret strictly. To none—man nor woman—and I beseech you as urgently as friend or Caesar ever besought a favor—let the least suspicion of my arrival be known.

Nor must the smallest preparation betray whom it is you receive. I cannot command so dear a friend as Titianus, but I appeal to his heart to carry out my wishes.

"I rejoice to see you again; what delight I shall find in the whirl of confusion that I hope to find at Lochias. You shall take me to see the artists, who are, no doubt, swarming in the old castle, as the architect Claudius Venator from Rome, who is to assist Pontius with his advice. But this Pontius, who carried out such fine works for Herodes Atticus, the rich Sophist, met me at his house, and will certainly recognize me. Tell him, therefore, what I propose doing. He is a serious and trustworthy man, not a chatterbox or scatter-brained simpleton who loses his head. Thus you may take him into the secret, but not till my vessel is in sight. May all be well with you."

"Well, what do you say to that?" asked Titianus, taking the letter from his wife's hand. "Is it not more than vexatious—our work was going on so splendidly."

"But," said Julia thoughtfully and with a meaning smile. "Perhaps it might not have been finished in time. As matters now stand it need not be complete, and Hadrian will see the good intention all the same. I am glad about the letter, for it takes a great responsibility off your otherwise overloaded shoulders."

"You always see the right side," cried the prefect. "It is well that I came home, for I can await Caesar with a much lighter heart. Let me lock up the letter, and then farewell. This parting is for some hours from you, and from all peace for many days."

Titianus gave her his hand. She held it firmly and said:

"Before you go I must confess to you that I am very proud."

"You have every right to be."

"But you have not said a word to me about keeping silence."

"Because you have kept other tests—still, to be sure, you are a woman, and a very handsome one besides."

"An old grandmother, with grey hair!"

"And still more upright and more charming than a thousand of the most admired younger beauties."

"You are trying to convert my pride into vanity, in my old age."

"No, no! I was only looking at you with an examining eye, as our talk led me to do, and I remembered that Sabina had lamented that handsome Julia was not looking well. But where is there another woman of your age with such a carriage, such unwrinkled features, so clear a brow, such deep kind eyes, such beautifully-polished arms—"

"Be quiet," exclaimed his wife. "You make me blush."

"And may I not be proud that a grandmother, who is a Roman, as my wife is, can find it so easy to blush? You are quite different from other women."

"Because you are different from other men."

"You are a flatterer; since all our children have left us, it is as if we were newly married again."

"Ah! the apple of discord is removed."

"It is always over what he loves best that man is most prompt to be jealous. But now, once more, farewell."

Titianus kissed his wife's forehead and hurried towards the door; Julia called him back and said:

"One thing at any rate we can do for Caesar. I send food every day down to the architect at Lochias, and to-day there shall be three times the quantity."

"Good; do so."

"Farewell, then."

"And we shall meet again, when it shall please the gods and the Emperor."

•••

When the prefect reached the appointed spot, no vessel with a silver star was to be seen.

The sun went down and no ship with three red lanterns was visible.

The harbor-master, into whose house Titianus went, was told that he expected a great architect from Rome, who was to assist Pontius with his counsel in the works at Lochias, and he thought it quite intelligible that the governor should do a strange artist the honor of coming to meet him; for the whole city was well aware of the incredible haste and the lavish outlay of means that were being given to the restoration of the ancient palace of the Ptolemies as a residence for the Emperor.

While he was waiting, Titianus remembered the young sculptor Pollux, whose acquaintance he had made, and his mother in the pretty little gate-house. Well disposed towards them as he felt, he sent at once to old Doris, desiring her not to retire to rest early that evening, since he, the prefect, would be going late to Lochias.

"Tell her, too, as from yourself and not from me," Titianus instructed the messenger, "that I may very likely look in upon her. She may light up her little room and keep it in order."

No one at Lochias had the slightest suspicion of the honor which awaited the old palace.

After Verus had quitted it with his wife and Balbilla, and when he had again been at work for about an hour the sculptor Pollux came out of his nook, stretching himself, and called out to Pontius, who was standing on a scaffold:

"I must either rest or begin upon something new. One cures me of fatigue as much as the other. Do you find it so?"

"Yes, just as you do," replied the architect, as he continued to direct the work of the slave-masons, who were fixing a new Corinthian capital in the place of an old one which had been broken.

"Do not disturb yourself," Pollux cried up to him. "I only request you to tell my master Papias when he comes here with Gabinius, the dealer in antiquities, that he will find me at the rotunda that you inspected with me yesterday. I am going to put the head on to the Berenice; my apprentice must long since have completed his preparations; but the rascal came into the world with two left-hands, and as he squints with one eye everything that is straight looks crooked to him, and—according to the law of optics—the oblique looks straight. At any rate, he drove the peg which is to support the new head askew into the neck, and as no historian has recorded that Berenice ever had her neck on one side, like the old color-grinder there, I must see to its being straight myself. In about half an hour, as I calculate, the worthy Queen will no longer be one of the headless women."

"Where did you get the new head?" asked Pontius. "From the secret archives of my memory," replied Pollux. "Have you seen it?"

"Yes."

"And do you like it?"

"Very much."

"Then it is worthy to live," sang the sculptor, and, as he quitted the hall, he waved his left-hand to the architect, and with his right-hand stuck a pink, which he had picked in the morning, behind his ear.

At the rotunda his pupil had done his business better than his master could have expected, but Pollux was by no means satisfied with his own arrangements. His work, like several others standing on the same side of the platform, turned its back on the steward's balcony, and the only reason why he had parted with the portrait of Selene's mother, of which he was so fond, was that his playfellow might gaze at the face whenever she chose. He found, however, to his satisfaction, that the busts were held in their places on their tall pedestals only by their own weight, and he then resolved to alter the historical order of the portrait-heads by changing their places, and to let the famous Cleopatra turn her back upon the palace, so that his favorite bust might look towards it.

In order to carry out this purpose then and there, he called some slaves up to help him in the alteration. This gave rise, more than once, to a warning cry, and the loud talking and ordering on this spot, for so many years left solitary and silent, attracted an inquirer, who, soon after the apprentice had begun his work, had shown herself on the balcony, but who had soon retreated after casting a glance at the dirty lad, splashed from head to foot with plaster. This time, however, she remained to watch, following every movement of Pollux as he directed the slaves; though, all the time and whatever he was doing, he turned his back upon her.

At last the portrait-head had found its right position, shrouded still in a cloth to preserve it from the marks of workmen's hands. With a deep breath the artist turned full on the steward's house, and immediately a clear merry voice called out:

"What, tall Pollux! It really is tall Pollux; how glad I am!"

With these words the girl on the balcony loudly clapped her hands; and as the sculptor hailed her in return, and shouted:

"And you are little Arsinoe, eternal gods! What the little thing has come to!" She stood on tip-toe to seem taller, nodded at him pleasantly, and laughed out: "I have not done growing yet; but as for you, you look quite dignified with the beard on your chin, and your eagle's nose. Selene did not tell me till to-day that you were living down there with the others."

The artist's eyes were fixed on the girl, as if spellbound. There are poetic natures in which the imagination immediately transmutes every new thing that strikes the eyes or the intelligence, into a romance, or rapidly embodies it in verse; and Pollux, like many of his calling, could never set his eyes on a fine human form and face, without instantly associating them with his art.

"A Galatea—a Galatea without an equal!" thought he, as he stood with his eyes fixed on Arsinoe's face and figure. "Just as if she had this instant risen from the sea—that form is just as fresh, and joyous, and healthy; and her little curls wave back from her brow as if they were still floating on the water; and now as she stoops, how full and supple in every movement. It is like a daughter of Nereus following the line of the as the waves as they rise into crests and dip again into watery valleys. She is like Selene and her mother in the shape of her head and the Greek cut of her face, but the elder sister is like the statue of Prometheus before it had a soul, and Arsinoe is like the Master's work after the celestial fire coursed through her veins."

The artist had felt and thought all this out in a few seconds, but the girl found her speechless admirer's silence too long, and exclaimed impatiently:

"You have not yet offered me any proper greeting. What are you doing down there?"

"Look here," he replied, lifting the cloth from the portrait, which was a striking likeness.

Arsinoe leaned far over the parapet of the balcony, shaded her eyes with her hand and was silent for more than a minute. Then she suddenly cried out loudly and exclaiming:

"Mother—it is my mother!" She flew into the room behind her.

"Now she will call her father and destroy all poor Selene's comfort," thought Pollux, as he pushed the heavy marble bust on which his gypsum head was fixed, into its right place.

"Well, let him come. We are the masters here now, and Keraunus dare not touch the Emperor's property." He crossed his arms and stood gazing at the bust, muttering to himself:

"Patchwork—miserable patchwork. We are cobbling up a robe for the Emperor out of mere rags; we are upholsterers and not artists. If it were only for Hadrian, and not for Diotima and her children, not another finger would I stir in the place."

The path from the steward's residence led through some passages and up a few steps to the rotunda, on which the sculptor was standing, but in little more than a minute from Arsinoe's disappearance from the balcony she was by his side. With a heightened color she pushed the sculptor away from his work and put herself in the place where he had been standing, to be able to gaze at her leisure at the beloved features. Then she exclaimed again:

"It is mother—mother!" and the bright tears ran over her cheeks, without restraint from the presence of the artist, or the laborers and slaves whom she had flown past on her way, and who stared at her with as much alarm as if she were possessed.

Pollux did not disturb her. His heart was softened as he watched the tears running down the cheeks of this light-hearted child, and he could not help reflecting that goodness was indeed well rewarded when it could win such tender and enduring love as was cherished for the poor dead mother on the pedestal before him.

After looking for some time at the sculptor's work Arsinoe grew calmer, and turning to Pollux she asked:

"Did you make it?"

"Yes," he replied, looking down.

"And entirely from memory?"

"To be sure."

"Do you know what?"

"Well."

"This shows that the Sibyl at the festival of Adonis was right when she sang in the Jalemus that the gods did half the work of the artist."

"Arsinoe!" cried Pollux, for her words made him feel as if a hot spring were seething in his heart, and he gratefully seized her hand; but she drew it away, for her sister Selene had come out on the balcony and was calling her.

It was for his elder playfellow and not for Arsinoe that Pollux had set his work in this place, but, just now, her gaze fell like a disturbing chill on his excited mood.

"There stands your mother's portrait," he called up to the balcony in an explanatory tone, pointing to the bust.

"I see it," she replied coldly. "I will look at it presently more closely. Come up Arsinoe, father wants to speak to you."

Again Pollux stood alone.

As Selene withdrew into the room, she gently shook her pale head, and said to herself:

"'It was to be for me,' Pollux said; something for me, for once—and even this pleasure is spoilt."

CHAPTER IX

The palace-steward, to whom Selene had called up his younger daughter, had just returned from the meeting of the citizens; and his old black slave, who always accompanied him when he went out, took the saffron-colored pallium from his shoulders, and from his head the golden circlet, with which he loved to crown his curled hair when he quitted the house. Keraunus still looked heated, his eyes seemed more prominent than usual and large drops of sweat stood upon his brow, when his daughter entered the room where he was. He absently responded to Arsinoe's affectionate greeting with a few unmeaning words, and before making the important communication he had to disclose to his daughters, he walked up and down before them for some time, puffing out his fat cheeks and crossing his arms. Selene was alarmed, and Arsinoe had long been out of patience, when at last he began:

"Have you heard of the festivals which are to be held in Caesar's honor?"

Selene nodded and her sister exclaimed:

"Of course we have! Have you secured places for us on the seats kept for the town council?"

"Do not interrupt me," the steward crossly ordered his daughter. "There is no question of staring at them. All the citizens are required to allow their daughters to take part in the grand things that are to be carried out, and we all were asked how many girls we had."

"And how are we to take part in the show?" cried Arsinoe, joyfully clapping her hands.

"I wanted to withdraw before the summons was proclaimed, but Tryphon, the shipwright, who has a workshop down by the King's Harbor, held me back and called out to the assembly that his sons said that I had two pretty young daughters. Pray how did he know that?"

With these words the steward lifted his grey brows and his face grew red to the roots of his hair. Selene shrugged her shoulders, but Arsinoe said:

"Tryphon's shipyard lies just below and we often pass it; but we do not know him or his sons. Have you ever seen them Selene? At any rate it is polite of him to speak of us as pretty."

"Nobody need trouble themselves about your appearance unless they want to ask my permission to marry you," replied the steward with a growl.

"And what did you say to Tryphon?" asked Selene.

"I did as I was obliged. Your father is steward of a palace which at present belongs to Rome and the Emperor; hence I must receive Hadrian as a guest in this, the dwelling of my fathers, and therefore I, less than any other citizen—cannot withhold my share in the honors which the city council has decreed shall be paid to him."

"Then we really may," said Arsinoe, and she went up to her father to give him a coaxing pat. But Keraunus was not in the humor to accept caresses; he pushed her aside with an angry: "Leave me alone," and then went on:

"If Hadrian were to ask me 'Where are your daughters on the occasion of the festival?' and if I had to reply, 'They were not among the daughters of the noble citizens,' it would be an insult to Caesar, to whom in fact I feel very well disposed. All this I had to consider, and I gave your names and promised to send you to the great Theatre to the assembly of young girls. There you will be met by the noblest matrons and maidens of the city, and the first painters and sculptors will decide to what part of the performance your air and appearance are best fitted."

"But, father," cried Selene, "we cannot show ourselves in such an assembly in our common garments, and where are we to find the money to buy new ones?"

"We can quite well show ourselves by any other girls, in clean, white woollen dresses, prettily smartened with fresh ribbons," declared Arsinoe, interposing between her father and her sister.

"It is not that which troubles me," replied the steward; "it is the costumes, the costumes! It is only the daughters of the poorer citizens who will be paid by the council, and it would be a disgrace to be numbered among the poor—you understand me, children."

"I will not take part in the procession," said Selene resolutely, but Arsinoe interrupted her.

"It is inconvenient and horrible to be poor, but it certainly is no disgrace! The most powerful Romans of ancient times, regarded it as honorable to die poor. Our Macedonian descent remains to us even if the state should pay for our costumes."

"Silence," cried the steward. "This is not the first time that I have detected this low vein of feeling in you. Even the noble may submit to the misfortunes entailed by poverty, but the advantages it brings with it he can never enjoy unless he resigns himself to being so no longer."

It had cost the steward much trouble to give due expression to this idea, which he did not recollect to have heard from another, which seemed new to him, and which nevertheless fully represented what he felt; and he slowly sank, with all the signs of exhaustion, into a couch which formed a divan round a side recess in the spacious sitting-room.

In this room Cleopatra might have held with Antony those banquets of which the unequalled elegance and refinement had been enhanced by every grace of art and wit. On the very spot where Keraunus now reclined the dining-couch of the famous lovers had probably stood; for, though the whole hall had a carefully-laid pavement, in this recess there was a mosaic of stones of various colors of such beauty and delicacy of finish that Keraunus had always forbidden his children to step upon it. This, it is true, was less out of regard for the fine work of art than because his father had always prohibited his doing so, and his father again before him. The picture represented the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, and the divan only covered the outer border of the picture, which was decorated with graceful little Cupids.

Keraunus desired his daughter to fetch him a cup of wine, but she mixed the juice of the grape with a judicious measure of water. After he had half drunk the diluted contents of the goblet, with many faces of disgust, he said:

"Would you like to know what each of your dresses will cost if it is to be in no respect inferior to those of the others?"

"Well," said Arsinoe anxiously.

"About seven hundred drachmae;—[$115 in 1880]—Philinus, the tailor, who is working for the theatre, tells me it will be impossible to do anything well for less."

"And you are really thinking of such insane extravagance," cried Selene. "We have no money, and I should like to know the man who would lend us any more."

The steward's younger daughter looked doubtfully at the tips of her fingers and was silent, but her eyes swimming in tears betrayed what she felt. Keraunus was rejoiced at the silent consent which Arsinoe seemed to accord to his desire to let her take part in the display at whatever cost. He forgot that he had just reproached her for her low sentiments, and said:

"The little one always feels what is right. As for you, Selene, I beg you to reflect seriously that I am your father, and that I forbid you to use this admonishing tone to me; you have accustomed yourself to it with the children and to them you may continue to use it. Fourteen hundred drachmae certainly, at the first thought of it, seems a very large sum, but if the material and the trimming required are bought with judgment, after the festival we may very likely sell it back to the man with profit."

"With profit!" cried Selene bitterly, "not half is to be got for old things-not a quarter! And even if you turn me out of the house—I will not help to drag us into deeper wretchedness; I will take no part in the performances."

The steward did not redden this time, he was not even violent; on the contrary, he simply raised his head and compared his daughters as they stood—not without an infusion of satisfaction. He was accustomed to love his daughters in his own way, Selene as the useful one, and Arsinoe as the beauty; and as on this occasion all he cared for was to satisfy his vanity, and as this end could be attained through his younger daughter alone, he said:

"Stay with the children then, for all I care. We will excuse you on the score of weak health, and certainly, child, you do look extremely pale. I would far rather find the means for the little one only."

Two sweet dimples again began to show in Arsinoe's cheeks, but Selene's lips were as white as her bloodless cheeks as she exclaimed:

"But, father—father! neither the baker nor the butcher has had a coin paid him for the last two months, and you will squander seven hundred drachmae!"

"Squander!" cried Keraunus indignantly, but still in a tone of disgust rather than anger. "I have already forbidden you to speak to me in that way. The richest of our noble youths will take part in the games; Arsinoe is handsome and perhaps one of them may choose her for his wife. And do you call it squandering, when a father does his utmost to find a suitable husband for his daughter. After all, what do you know of what I may possess?"

"We have nothing, so I cannot know of it," cried the girl beside herself.

"Indeed!" drawled Keraunus with an embarrassed smile. "And is that nothing which lies in the cup board there, and stands on the cornice shelf? For your sakes I will part with these—the onyx fibula, the rings, the golden chaplet, and the girdle of course."

"They are of mere silver-gilt!" Selene interrupted, ruthlessly. "All my grandfather's real gold you parted with when my mother died."

"She had to be cremated and buried as was due to our rank," answered Keraunus; "but I will not think now of those melancholy days."

"Nay, do think of them, father."

"Silence! All that belongs to my own adornment of course I cannot do without, for I must be prepared to meet Caesar in a dress befitting my rank; but the little bronze Eros there must be worth something, Plutarch's ivory cup, which is beautifully carved, and above all, that picture; its former possessor was convinced that it had been painted by Apelles himself herein Alexandria. You shall know at once what these little things are worth, for, as the gods vouchsafed, on my way home I met, here in the palace, Gabinius of Nicaea, the dealer in such objects. He promised me that when he had done his business with the architect he would come to me to inspect my treasures, and to pay money down for anything that might suit him. If my Apelles pleases him, he will give ten talents for that alone, and if he buys it for only the half or even the tenth of that sum, I will make you enjoy yourself for once, Selene."

"We will see," said the pale girl, shrugging her shoulders, and her sister exclaimed:

"Show him the sword too, that you always declared belonged to Caesar, and if he gives you a good sum for it you will buy me a gold bracelet."

"And Selene shall have one, too. But I have the very slenderest hopes of the sword, for a connoisseur would hardly pronounce it genuine. But I have other things, many others. Hark! that is Gabinius, no doubt. Quick, Selene, throw the chiton round me again. My chaplet, Arsinoe. A well-to-do man always gets a higher price than a poor one. I have ordered the slave to await him in the ante-room; it is always done in the best houses."

The curiosity dealer was a small, lean man, who, by prudence and good luck, had raised himself to be one of the most esteemed of his class and a rich man. Having matured his knowledge by industry, and experience, he knew better than any man how to distinguish what was good from what was indifferent or bad, what was genuine from what was spurious. No one had a keener eye; but he was abrupt in his dealings with those from whom he had nothing to gain. In circumstances where there was profit in view, he could, to be sure, be polite even to subservience and show inexhaustible patience. He commanded himself so far as to listen with an air of conviction to the steward as he told him in a condescending tone that he was tired of his little possessions, that he could just as well keep them as part with them; he merely wanted to show them to him as a connoisseur and would only part with them if a good round sum were offered for what was in fact idle capital. One piece after another passed through the dealer's slender fingers, or was placed before him that he might

contemplate it; but the man spoke not, and only shook his head as he examined every fresh object. And when Keraunus told him whence this or that specimen of his treasures had been obtained, he only murmured—"Indeed" or "Really."

"Do you think so?" After the last piece of property had passed through his hands, the steward asked:

"Well, what do you think of them?"

The beginning of the sentence was spoken confidently, the end almost in fear, for the dealer only smiled and shook his head again before he said:

"There are some genuine little things among them, but nothing worth speaking of. I advise you to keep them, because you have an affection for them, while I could get very little by them."

Keraunus avoided looking towards Selene, whose large eyes, full of dread, had been fixed on the dealer's lips; but Arsinoe, who had followed his movements with no less attention, was less easily discouraged, and pointing to her father's Apelles, she said: "And that picture, is that worth nothing?"

"It grieves me that I cannot tell so fair a damsel that it is inestimably valuable," said the dealer, stroking his gray whiskers. "But we have here only a very feeble copy. The original is in the Villa belonging to Phinius on the Lake of Larius, and which he calls Cothurnus. I have no use whatever for this piece."

"And this carved cup?" asked Keraunus. "It came from among the possessions of Plutarch, as I can prove, and it is said to have been the gift of the Emperor Trajan."

"It is the prettiest thing in your collection," replied Gabinius; "but it is amply paid for with four hundred drachmae."

"And this cylinder from Cyprus, with the elegant incised work?" The steward was about to take up the polished crystal, but his hand was trembling with agitation and pushed instead of lifting it from the table. It rolled away on the floor and across the smooth mosaic picture as far as the couches. Keraunus was about to stoop to pick it up, but his daughters both held him back, and Selene cried out:

"Father, you must not; the physician strictly forbade it."

While the steward pushed the girls away grumbling, the dealer had gone down on his knees to pick up the cylinder, but it seemed to cost the slightly-built man much less effort to stoop than to get up again, for some minutes had elapsed before he once more stood on his feet, in front of Keraunus. His countenance had put on an expression of eager attention, and he once more took up the painting attributed to Apelles, sat down with it on the couch, and appeared wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the picture, which hid his face from the bystanders.

But his eye was not resting on the work before him, but on the marriage-scene at his feet, in which he detected each moment some fresh and unique beauty. As the dealer sat there for some minutes with the little picture on his knee, the steward's face brightened, Selene drew a deep breath, and Arsinoe went up to her father to cling to his arm and whisper in his ear:

"Do not let him have the Apelles cheap—remember my bracelet."

Gabinius now rose, glanced at the various objects lying on the table and said in a much shorter and more business-like tone than before:

"For all these things I can give you—wait a minute—twenty-seventy-four hundred—four hundred and fifty—I can give you six hundred and fifty drachmae, not a sesterce more!"

"You are joking," cried Keraunus.

"Not a sesterce more," answered the other coldly. "I do not want to make anything, but you as a business man will understand that I do not wish to buy with a certain prospect of loss. As regards the Apelles—"

"Well?"

"It may be of some value to me, but only under certain conditions. The case is quite different as regards buying pictures. Your two young damsels know of course that my line of business leads me to admire and value all that is beautiful, but still I must request you to leave me alone with your father for

a little while. I want to speak with him about this curious painting." Keraunus signed to his daughters, who immediately left the room. Before the door was closed upon them the dealer called after them:

"It is already growing dark, might I ask you to send me as bright a light as possible by one of your slaves."

"What about the picture?" asked Keraunus.

"Till the light is brought let us talk of something else," said Gabinius.

"Then take a seat on the couch," said Keraunus. "You will be doing me a pleasure and perhaps yourself as well."

As soon as the two men were seated on the divan, Gabinius began:

"Those little things which we have collected with particular liking, we do not readily part with —that I know by long experience. Many a man who has come into some property after he has sold all his little antiquities has offered me ten times the price I have paid him to get them back again, generally in vain, unfortunately. Now, what is true of others is true of you, and if you had not been in immediate need of money you would hardly have offered me these things."

"I must entreat you," began the steward, but the dealer interrupted him, saying:

"Even the richest are sometimes in want of ready money; no one knows that better than I, for I—I must confess—have large means at my command. Just at present it would be particularly easy for me to free you from all embarrassment."

"There stands my Apelles," exclaimed the steward. "It is yours if you make a bid that suits me."

"The light—here comes the light!" exclaimed Gabinius, taking from the slave's hand the three-branched lamp which Selene had hastily supplied with a fresh wick, and he placed it, while he murmured to Keraunus, "By your leave," down on the centre of the mosaic. The steward looked at the man on his left hand, with puzzled inquiry, but Gabinius heeded him not but went down on his knees again, felt the mosaic over with his hand, and devoured the picture of the marriage of Peleus with his eyes.

"Have you lost anything?" asked Keraunus.

"No-nothing whatever. There in the corner—now I am satisfied. Shall I place the lamp there, on the table? So—and now to return to business."

"I beg to do so, but I may as well begin by telling you that in my case it is a question not of drachmae but of Attic talents."—[The Attic talent was worth about L200, or $1000 dollars in the 1880 exchange rate.]

"That is a matter of course, and I will offer you five; that is to say a sum for which you could buy a handsome roomy house."

Once more the blood mounted to the steward's head; for a few minutes he could not utter a word, for his heart thumped violently; but presently be so far controlled himself as to be able to answer. This time at any rate, he was determined to seize Fortune by the forelock and not to be taken advantage of, so he said:

"Five talents will not do; bid higher."

"Then let us say six."

"If you say double that we are agreed."

"I cannot put it beyond ten talents; why, for that sum you might build a small palace."

"I stand out for twelve."

"Well, be it so, but not a sesterce more."

"I cannot bear to part with my splendid work of art," sighed Keraunus. "But I will take your offer, and give you my Apelles."

"It is not that picture I am dealing for," replied Gabinius. "It is of trifling value, and you may continue to enjoy the possession of it. It is another work of art in this room that I wish to have, and which has hitherto seemed to you scarcely worth notice. I have discovered it, and one of my rich customers has asked me to find him just such a thing."

"I do not know what it is."

"Does everything in this room belong to you?"

"Whom else should it belong to?"

"Then you may dispose of it as you please?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Very well, then—the twelve Attic talents which I offer you are to be paid for the picture that is under our feet."

"The mosaic! that? It belongs to the palace."

"It belongs to your residence, and that, I heard you say yourself, has been inhabited for more than a century by your forefathers. I know the law; it pronounces that everything which has remained in undisputed possession in one family, for a hundred years, becomes their property."

"This mosaic belongs to the palace."

"I assert the contrary. It is an integral portion of your family dwelling, and you may freely dispose of it."

"It belongs to the palace."

"No, and again no; you are the owner. Tomorrow morning early you shall receive twelve Attic talents in gold, and, with the help of my son, later in the day I will take up the picture, pack it, and when it grows dark, carry it away. Procure a carpet to cover the empty place for the present. As to the secrecy of the transaction—I must of course insist on it as strongly—and more so—than yourself."

"The mosaic belongs to the palace," cried the steward, this time in a louder voice, "Do you hear? it belongs to the palace, and whoever dares touch it, I will break his bones."

As he spoke Keraunus stood up, his huge chest panting, his cheeks and forehead dyed purple, and his fist, which he held in the dealer's face, was trembling. Gabinius drew back startled, and said:

"Then you will not have the twelve talents!"

"I will—I will!" gasped Keraunus, "I will show you how I beat those who take me for a rogue. Out of my sight, villain, and let me hear not another word about the picture, and the robbery in the dark, or I will send the prefect's lictors after you and have you thrown into irons, you rascally thief!"

Gabinius hurried to the door, but he there turned round once more to the groaning and gasping colossus, and cried out, as he stood on the threshold:

"Keep your rubbish! we shall have more to say to each other yet."

When Selene and Arsinoe returned to the sitting-room they found their father breathing hard and sitting on the couch, with his head drooping forward. Much alarmed, they went close up to him, but he exclaimed quite coherently:

"Water—a drink of water!—the thief!—the scoundrel!"

Though hardly pressed, it had not cost him a struggle or a pang to refuse what would have placed him and his children in a position of ease; and yet he would not have hesitated to borrow it, aye, or twice the sum, from rich or poor, though he knew full certainly that he would never be in a position to restore it. Nor was he even proud of what he had done; it seemed to him quite natural in a Macedonian noble. It was to him altogether out of the pale of possibility that he should entertain the dealer's proposition for an instant.

But where was he to get the money for Arsinoe's outfit? how could he keep the promise given at the meeting?

He lay meditating on the divan for an hour; then he took a wax tablet out of a chest and began to write a letter on it to the prefect. He intended to offer the precious mosaic picture which had been discovered in his abode, to Titianus for the Emperor, but he did not bring his composition to an end, for he became involved in high-flown phrases. At last he doubted whether it would do at all, flung the unfinished letter back into the chest, and disposed himself to sleep.

CHAPTER X

While anxiety and trouble were brooding over the steward's dwelling, while dismay and disappointment were clouding the souls of its inhabitants, the hall of the Muses was merry with feasting and laughter.

Julia, the prefect's wife, had supplied the architect at Lochias with a carefully-prepared meal, —sufficient to fill six hungry maws, and Pontius' slave—who had received it on its arrival and had unpacked it dish after dish, and set them out on the humblest possible table had then hastened to fetch his master to inspect all these marvels of the cook's art. The architect shook his head as he contemplated the superabundant blessing, and muttered to himself:

"Titianus must take me for a crocodile, or rather for two crocodiles," and he went to the sculptor's little tabernacle, where Papias the master was also, to invite the two men to share his supper.

Besides them he asked two painters, and the chief mosaic worker of the city, who all day long had been busied in restoring the old and faded pictures on the ceilings and pavements, and under the influence of good wine and cheerful chat they soon emptied the dishes and bowls and trenchers. A man who for several hours has been using his hands or his mind, or both together, waxes hungry, and all the artists whom Pontius had brought together at Lochias had now been working for several days almost to the verge of exhaustion. Each had done his best, in the first place, no doubt, to give satisfaction to Pontius, whom all esteemed, and to himself; but also in the hope of giving proof of his powers to the Emperor and of showing him how things could be done in Alexandria. When the dishes had been removed and the replete feasters had washed and dried their hands, they filled their cups out of a jar of mixed wine, of which the dimensions answered worthily to the meal they had eaten. One of the painters then proposed that they should hold a regular drinking-bout, and elect Papias, who was as well known as a good table orator as he was as an artist, to be the leader of the feast. However, the master declared that he could not accept the honor, for that it was due to the worthiest of their company; to the man namely, who, only a few days since, had entered this empty palace and like a second Deucalion had raised up illustrious artists, such as he then saw around him in great numbers, and skilled workmen by hundreds, not out of plastic stone but out of nothing. And then—while declaring that he understood the use of the hammer and chisel better than that of the tongue, and that he had never studied the art of making speeches—he expressed his wish that Pontius would lead the revel, in the most approved form.

But he was not allowed to get to the end of this evidence of his skill, for Euphorion the door-keeper of the palace, Euphorion the father of Pollux, ran hastily into the hall of the Muses with a letter in his hand which he gave to the architect.

"To be read without an instant's delay," he added, bowing with theatrical dignity to the assembled artists. "One of the prefect's lictors brought this letter, which, if my wishes be granted, brings nothing that is unwelcome. Hold your noise you little blackguards or I will be the death of you."

These words, which so far as the tone was concerned, formed a somewhat inharmonious termination to a speech intended for the ears of great artists, were addressed to his wife's four-footed Graces who had followed him against his wish, and were leaping round the table barking for the slender remains of the consumed food.

Pontius was fond of animals and had made friends with the old woman's pets, so, as he opened the prefect's letter, he said:

"I invite the three little guests to the remains of our feast. Give them anything that is fit for them, Euphorion, and whatever seems to you most suitable to your own stomach you may put into it."

While the architect first rapidly glanced through the letter and then read it carefully, the singer had collected a variety of good morsels for his wife's favorites on a plate, and finally carried the last remaining pasty, with the dish on which it reposed, to the vicinity of his own hooked nose.

"For men or for dogs?" he asked his son, as he pointed to it with a rigid finger.

"For the gods!" replied Pollux. "Take it to mother; she will like to eat ambrosia for once."

"A jolly evening to you!" cried the singer, bowing to the artists who were emptying their cups, and he quitted the hall with his pasty and his dogs. Before he had fairly left the hall with his long strides, Papias, whose speech had been interrupted, once more raised his wine-cup and began again:

"Our Deucalion, our more than Deucalion—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Pontius. "If I once more stop your discourse which began so promisingly; this letter contains important news and our revels must be over for the night. We must postpone our symposium and your drinking-speech."

"It was not a drinking-speech, for if ever there was a moderate man—" Papias began. But Pontius stopped him again, saying:

"Titianus writes me word that he proposes coming to Lochias this evening. He may arrive at any moment; and not alone, but with my fellow-artist, Claudius Venator from Rome, who is to assist me with his advice."

"I never even heard his name," said Papias, who was wont to trouble himself as little about the persons as about the works of other artists.

"I wonder at that," said Pontius, closing the double tablets which announced the Emperor's advent.

"Can he do anything?" asked Pollux.

"More than any one of us," replied Pontius. "He is a mighty man."

"That is splendid!" exclaimed Pollux. "I like to see great men. When one looks me in the eye I always feel as if some of his superabundance overflowed into me, and irresistibly I draw myself up and think how fine it would be if one day I might reach as high as that man's chin."

"Beware of morbid ambition," said Papias to his pupil in a warning voice. "It is not the man who stands on tiptoe, but he who does his duty diligently, that can attain anything great."

"He honestly does his," said the architect rising, and he laid his hand on the young sculptor's shoulder. "We all do; to-morrow by sunrise each must be at his post again. For my colleague's sake it will be well that you should all be there in good time."

The artists rose, expressing their thanks and regrets. "You will not escape the continuation of this evening's entertainment," cried one of the painters, and Papias, as he parted from Pontius, said:

"When we next meet I will show you what I understand by a drinking-speech. It will do perhaps for your Roman guest. I am curious to hear what he will say about our Urania. Pollux has done his share of the work very well, and I have already devoted an hour's work to it, which has improved it. The more humble our material, the better I shall be pleased if the work satisfies Caesar; he himself has tried his hand at sculpture."

"If only Hadrian could hear that!" cried one of the painters. "He likes to think himself a great artist—one of the foremost of our time. It is said that he caused the life of the great architect, Apollodorus—who carried out such noble works for Trajan—to be extinguished—and why? because formerly that illustrious man had treated the imperial bungler as a mere dabbler, and would not accept his plan for the temple of Venus at Rome."

"Mere talk!" answered Pontius to this accusation. "Apollodorus died in prison, but his incarceration had little enough to do with the Emperor's productions—excuse me, gentlemen, I must once more look through the sketches and plans."

The architect went away, but Pollux continued the conversation that had been begun by saying:

"Only I cannot understand how a man who practises so many arts at once as Hadrian does, and at the same time looks after the state and its government, who is a passionate huntsman and who dabbles in every kind of miscellaneous learning, contrives, when he wants to practise one particular form of art, to recall all his five senses into the nest from which he has let them fly, here, there, and everywhere. The inside of his head must be like that salad-bowl—which we have reduced to

emptiness—in which Papias discovered three sorts of fish, brown and white meat, oysters and five other substances."

"And who can deny," added Papias, "that if talent is the father, and meat the mother of all productiveness, practice must be the artist's teacher! Since Hadrian took to sculpture and painting it has become the universal fashion here to practise these arts, and among the wealthier youth who come to my workroom, many have very good abilities; but not one of them brings anything to any good issue, because so much of their time is taken up by the gymnasium, the bath, the quail-fights, the suppers, and I know not what besides, so that they do nothing by way of practice."

"True," said a painter. "Without the restraint and worry of apprenticeship no one can ever rise to happy and independent creativeness; and in the schools of rhetoric or in hunting or fighting no one can study drawing. It is not till a pupil has learned to sit steady and worry himself over his work for six hours on end that I begin to believe he will ever do any good work. Have you any of you seen the Emperor's work?"

"I have," answered a mosaic worker. "Many years ago Hadrian sent a picture to me that he had painted; I was to make a mosaic from it. It was a fruit piece. Melons, gourds, apples, and green leaves. The drawing was but so-so, and the color impossibly vivid, still the composition was pleasing from its solidity and richness. And after all, when one sees it, one cannot but feel that such superfluity is better than meagreness and feebleness. The larger fruits, especially under the exuberant sappy foliage, were so huge that they might have been grown in the garden of luxury itself, still the whole had a look of reality. I mitigated the colors somewhat in my transcript; you may still see a copy of the picture at my house, it hangs in the studio where my men draw. Nealkes, the rich hanging-maker, has had a tapestry woven from it which Pontius proposes to use as a hanging for a wall of the work-room, but I have made a fine frame on purpose for it."

"Say rather for its designer."

"Or yet rather," added the most loquacious of the painters, "for the visit he may possibly pay your workshops."

"I only wish the Emperor may come to ours too! I should like to sell him my picture of Alexander saluted by the priests in the temple of Jupiter Ammon."

"I hope that when you agree about the price you will remember we are partners," said his fellow-artist smugly.

"I will follow your example strictly," replied the other.

"Then you will certainly not be a loser," cried Papias, "for Eustorgius is fully aware of the worth of his works. And if Hadrian is to order works from every master whose art he dabbles in, he will require a fleet on purpose to carry his purchases to Rome."

"It is said," continued Eustorgius, laughing, "that he is a painter among poets, a sculptor among painters, an astronomer among musicians, and a sophist among artists—that is to say, that he pursues every art and science with some success as his secondary occupation."

As he spoke the last words Pontius returned to the table where the artists were standing round the winejar; he had heard the painter's last remark and interrupted him by saying:

"But my friend you forget that he is a monarch among monarchs—and not merely among those of today—in the fullest meaning of the word. Each of us separately can produce something better and more perfect in his own line; but how great is the man who by earnestness and skill can even apprehend everything that the mind has ever been able to conceive of, or the creative spirit of the artist to embody! I know him, and I know that he loves a really thorough master, and tries to encourage him with princely liberality. But his ears are everywhere, and he promptly becomes the implacable enemy of those who provoke his resentment. So bridle your restive Alexandrian tongues, and let me tell you that my colleague from Rome is in the closest intimacy with Hadrian. He is of the same age, resembles him greatly, and repeats to him everything that he hears said about him. So cease talking about Caesar and pass no severer judgments on dilettanti in the purple than on your wealthy pupils,

who paint and chisel for the mere love of it, and for whom you find it so easy to lisp out ‘charming,’ or ‘wonderfully pretty,’ or ‘remarkably nice.’ Take my warning in good part, you know I mean it well.”

He spoke the last words with a cordial, manly feeling, of which his voice was peculiarly capable, and which was always certain to secure him the confidence even of the recalcitrant.

The artists exchanged greetings and hand-shakings and left the hall; a slave carried away the wine-jar and wiped the table, on which Pontius proceeded to lay out his sketches and plans. But he was not alone, for Pollux was soon at his side, and with a comical expression of pathos and laying his finger on his nose, he said:

“I have come out of my cage to say something more to you.”

“Well?”

“The hour is approaching when I may hope to repay the beneficent deeds, which, at various times, you have done to my interior. My mother will to-morrow morning, set before you that dish of cabbage. It could not be done sooner, because the only perfect sausage-maker, the very king of his trade, prepares these savory cylinders only once a week. A few hours ago he completed the making of the sausages, and to-morrow morning my mother will warm up for our breakfasts the noble mess, which she is preparing for us this evening—for, as I have told you, it is in its warmed-up state that it is the ideal of its kind. What will follow by way of sweets we shall owe again to my mother’s art; but the cheering and invigorating element—I mean the wine that I drives dull care away, we owe to my sister.”

“I will come,” said Pontius, “if my guest leaves me an hour free, and I shall enjoy the excellent dish. But what does a gay bird like you know of dull care?”

“The words fit into the metre,” replied Pollux. “I inherit from my father—who, when he is not gate-keeping, sings and recites—a troublesome tendency whenever anything incites me to drift into rhythm.”

“But to-day you have been more silent than usual, and yet you seemed to me to be extraordinarily content. Not your face only, but your whole length—a good measure—from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head was like a brimming cask of satisfaction.”

“Well, there is much that is lovely in this world!” cried Pollux, stretching himself comfortably and lifting his arms with his hands clasped far above his head towards heaven.

“Has anything specially pleasant happened to you?”

“There is no need for that! Here I live in excellent company, the work progresses, and—well, why should I deny it? There was something specially to mark to-day; I met an old acquaintance again.”

“An old one?”

“I have already known her sixteen years; but when I first saw her she was in swaddling clothes.”

“Then this venerable damsel friend is more than sixteen, perhaps seventeen! Is Eros the friend of the happy, or does happiness only follow in his train?” As the architect thoughtfully said these words to himself, Pollux listened attentively to a noise outside, and said:

“Who can be passing out there at this hour? Do you not hear the bark of a big dog mingle with the snapping of the three Graces?”

“It is Titianus conducting the architect from Rome,” replied Pontius excitedly.

“I will go to meet him. But one thing more my friend, you too have an Alexandrian tongue. Beware of laughing at the Emperor’s artistic efforts in the presence of this Roman. I repeat it: the man who is now coming is superior to us all, and there is nothing more repellant to me than when a small man assumes a strutting air of importance because he fancies he has discovered in some great man a weak spot where his own little body happens to be sound. The artist I am expecting is a grand man, but the Emperor Hadrian is a grander. Now retire behind your screens, and tomorrow morning I will be your guest.”

CHAPTER XI

Pontius threw his pallium over the chiton he commonly wore at his work and went forward to meet the sovereign of the world, whose arrival had been announced to him in the prefect's letter. He was perfectly calm, and if his heart beat a little faster than usual, it was only because he was pleased once more to meet the wonderful man whose personality had made a deep impression on him before.

In the happy consciousness of having done all that lay in his power and of deserving no blame, he went through the ante-chambers and chief entrance of the palace into the fore-court, where a crowd of slaves were busied by torch-light in laying new marble slabs. Neither these workmen nor their overseers had paid any heed to the barking of the dogs and the loud talking which had for some little time been audible in the vicinity of the gate-keeper's lodge; for a special rate of payment had been promised to the laborers and their foremen if they should have finished a set piece of the new pavement by a certain hour, to the satisfaction of the architect. No one who heard the deep man's-voice ring through the court from the doorway guessed to whom it belonged.

The Emperor had been delayed by adverse winds and had not run into the harbor till a little before midnight.

Titianus, who was watching for him, he greeted as an old friend with heartfelt warmth, and with him and Antinous he stepped into the prefect's chariot, while Phlegon the secretary, Hermogenes his physician, and Mastor with the luggage, among which were their campbeds, were to follow in another vehicle. The harbor watchmen hastened to array themselves indignantly to oppose the chariot, as it rolled noisily along the street, and the huge dog that destroyed the peace of the night with its baying; but as soon as they recognized Titianus they respectfully made way. The gate-keeper and his wife, obedient to the prefect's warning, had remained up, and as soon as the singer heard the chariot approaching which bore the Emperor, he hastened to open the palace-gates. The broken-up pavement and the swarms of men engaged in repairing it, obliged Titianus and his companions to quit the chariot here and to pass close to the little gate-house. Hadrian, whose observation nothing ever escaped which came in his way and seemed worth noticing, stood still before Euphorion's door and looked into the comfortable little room, with its decoration of flowers and birds and the statue of Apollo; while dame Doris in her newest garments, stood on the threshold to watch for the prefect. And Titianus greeted her warmly, for he was wont whenever he came to Lochias to exchange a few merry or wise words with her. The little dogs had already crept into their basket, but as soon as they caught sight of a strange dog they rushed past their mistress into the open air, and dame Doris found herself obliged, while she returned the kindly greeting of her patron, to shout at Euphrosyne, Thalia and Aglaia more than once by their pretty names.

"Splendid, splendid!" cried Hadrian, pointing into the little house. "An idyl, a perfect idyl. Who would have expected to find such a smiling nook of peace in the most restless and busy town in the empire."

"I and Pontius were equally surprised at this little nest, and we therefore left it untouched," said the prefect.

"Intelligent people understand each other, and I owe you thanks for preserving this little home," answered the Emperor. "What an omen, what a favorable, in every way favorable augury, it offers me. The Graces receive me here into these old walls, Aglaia, Thalia and Euphrosyne!"

"Good luck to you, Master," old Doris called out to the prefect.

"We come late," said Hadrian.

"That does not matter," said the old woman. "Here at Lochias for the last week we have quite forgotten to distinguish day from night, and a blessing can never come too late."

"I have brought with me to-day an illustrious guest," said Titianus. "The great Roman architect Claudius Venator. He only disembarked a few minutes since."

"Then a draught of wine will do him good. We have in the house some good white Mareotic from my daughter's garden by the lake. If your friend will do us humble folks so much honor, I beg he will step into our room; it is clean, is it not sir? and the cup I will give him to drink it out of would not disgrace the Emperor himself. Who knows what you will find up in the midst of all the muddle yonder?"

"I will accept your invitation with pleasure," answered Hadrian. "I can see by your face that you have a pleasure in entertaining us, and any one might envy you your little house."

"When the climbing-rose and the honey-suckle are out it is much prettier," said Doris, as she filled the cup. "Here is some water for mixing."

The Emperor took the cup carved by Pollux, looked at it with admiration, and before putting it to his lips said:

"A masterpiece, dame; what would Caesar find to drink out of here where the gate-keeper uses such a treasure? Who executed this admirable work, pray?"

"My son carved it for me in his spare time."

"He is a highly-skilled sculptor," Titianus explained.

When the Emperor had half emptied the cup with much satisfaction he set it on the table, and said:

"A very noble drink! I thank you, mother."

"And I you, for styling me mother: there is no better title a woman can have who has brought up good children; and I have three who need never be ashamed to be seen."

"I wish you all luck with them, good little mother," replied the Emperor.

"We shall meet again, for I am going to spend some days at Lochias."

"Now, in all this bustle?" asked Doris.

"This great architect," said Titianus, in explanation, "is to advise and help our Pontius."

"He needs no help!" cried the old woman. "He is a man of the best stamp. His foresight and energy, my son says, are incomparable. I have seen him giving his orders myself, and I know a man when I see him!"

"And what particularly pleased you in him?" asked Hadrian, who was much amused with the shrewd old woman's freedom.

"He never for a moment loses his temper in all the hurry, never speaks a word too much or too little; he can be stern when it is necessary, but he is kind to his inferiors. What his merits are as an artist I am not capable of judging, but I am quite certain that he is a just and able man."

"I know him myself," replied Caesar, "and you describe him rightly; but he seemed to me sterner than he has shown himself to you."

"Being a man he must be able to be severe; but he is so only when it is necessary, and how kind he can be he shows himself every day. A man grows to the mould of his own mind when he is a great deal alone; and this I have noticed, that a man who is repellant and sharp to those beneath him is not in himself anything really great; for it shows that he considers it necessary to guard against the danger of being looked upon as of no more consequence than the poorer folks he deals with. Now, a man of real worth knows that it can be seen in his bearing, even when he treats one of us as an equal. Pontius does so, and Titianus, and you who are his friend, no less. It is a good thing that you should have come—but, as I said before, the architect up there can do very well without you."

"You do not seem to rate my capacity very highly, and I regret it, for you have lived with your eyes open and have learned to judge men keenly."

Doris looked shrewdly at the Emperor with her kindly glance, as if taking his mental measure, and then answered confidently:

"You—you are a great man too—it is quite possible that you might see things that would escape Pontius. There are a few choice souls whom the Muses particularly love and you are one of them."

"What leads you to suppose so?"

"I see it in your gaze—in your brow."

"You have the gift of divination, then?"

"No, I am not one of that sort; but I am the mother of two sons on whom also the Immortals have bestowed the special gift, which I cannot exactly describe. It was in them I first saw it, and wherever I have met with it since in other men and artists—they have been the elect of their circle. And you too—I could swear to it, that you are foremost of the men among whom you live."

"Do not swear lightly," laughed the Emperor. "We will meet and talk together again little mother, and when I depart I will ask you again whether you have not been deceived in me. Come now, Telemachus, the dame's birds seem to delight you very much."

These words were addressed to Antinous, who had been going from cage to cage contemplating the feathered pets, all sleeping snugly, with much curiosity and pleasure.

"Is that your son?" asked Doris.

"No, dame, he is only my pupil; but I feel as if he were my son."

"He is a beautiful lad!"

"Why, the old lady still looks after the young men!"

"We do not give that up till we are a hundred or till the Parcae cut the thread of life."

"What a confession!"

"Let me finish my speech.—We never cease to take pleasure in seeing a handsome young fellow, but so long as we are young we ask ourselves what he may have in store for us, and as we grow old we are perfectly satisfied to be able to show him kindness. Listen young master. You will always find me here if you want anything in which I can serve you. I am like a snail and very rarely leave my shell."

"Till our next meeting," cried Hadrian, and he and his companions went out into the court.

There the difficulty was to find a footing on the disjointed pavement. Titianus went on in front of the Emperor and Antinous, and so but few words of friendly pleasure could be exchanged by the monarch and his vicegerent on the occasion of their meeting again. Hadrian stepped cautiously forward, his face wearing meanwhile a satisfied smile. The verdict passed by the simple shrewd woman of the people had given him far greater pleasure than the turgid verse in which Mesomedes and his compeers were wont to sing his praises, or the flattering speeches with which he was loaded by the sophists and rhetoricians.

The old woman had taken him for no more than an artist; she could not know who he was, and yet she had recognized—or had Titianus been indiscreet? Did she know or suspect whom she was talking to? Hadrian's deeply suspicious nature was more and more roused; he began to fancy that the gate-keeper's wife had learnt her speech by heart, and that her welcome had been preconcerted; he suddenly paused and desired the prefect to wait for him, and Antinous to remain behind with the clog. He turned round, retraced his steps to the gatehouse and slipped close up to it in a very unprincely way. He stood still by the door of the little house which was still open, and listened to the conversation between Doris and her husband.

"A fine tall man," said Euphorion, "he is a little like the Emperor."

"Not a bit," replied Doris. "Only think of the full-length statue of Hadrian in the garden of the Paneum; it has a dissatisfied satirical expression, and the architect has a grave brow, it is true, but pure friendly kindness lights up his features. It is only the beard that reminds you of the one when you look at the other. Hadrian might be very glad if he were like the prefect's guest."

"Yes, he is handsomer—how shall I say it—more like the gods than that cold marble figure," Euphorion declared. "A grand noble, he is no doubt, but still an artist too; I wonder whether he could be induced by Pontius or Papias or Aristeas or one of the great painters to take the part of Calchas the soothsayer in our group at the festival? He would perform it in quite another way than that dry stick Philemon the ivory carver. Hand me my lute; I have already forgotten again the beginning of the last verse. Oh! my wretched memory! Thank you."

Euphorion loudly struck the strings and sang in a voice that was still tolerably sweet and very well trained:

"'Sabina hail! Oh Sabina!—Hail; victorious hail to the conquering goddess Sabina!' If only Pollux were here he would remind me of the right words. 'Hail; victorious hail, to the thousand-fold Sabina!'—That is nonsense. 'Hail, hail! divine hail to thee O all-conquering Sabina.' No it was not that either. If a crocodile would only swallow this Sabina I would give him that hot cake in yonder dish with pleasure, for his pudding. But stay—I have it. 'Hail, a thousand-fold hail to the conquering goddess Sabina!'"

Hadrian had heard all he wanted; while Euphorion went on repeating his line a score or more of times to impress it on his recalcitrant memory. Caesar turned his back on the gate-house, and while he and his companions picked their way not without difficulty through the workmen who squatted here and there and everywhere on the ground, he clapped Titianus more than once on his shoulder, and after he had been received and welcomed by Pontius, he exclaimed:

"I bless my decision to come here now! I have had a good evening, a quite delightful evening."

The Emperor had not felt so cheerful and free from care for years as on this occasion, and when in spite of the late hour he found the workmen still busy everywhere, and saw all that had already been restored in the old palace and what was being done for its renovation, the restless man could not resist expressing his satisfaction, and exclaimed to Antinous:

"Here we may see that even in our sordid times miracles may be wrought by good-will, industry, and skill. Explain to me my good Pontius how you were able to construct that enormous scaffold."

CHAPTER XII

More pleasant hours were to follow on the amusing arrival of the Emperor at his half-finished residence at Lochias that night. Pontius proposed to him to inspect several well-preserved rooms, which had in the first instance been reserved for the gentlemen of his suite; and one of these with an open outlook on the harbor, the town, and the island of Antirrhodus he suggested should be provisionally furnished for the Emperor's reception. Thanks to the architect's foresight, to Mastor's practised hand, and to the numbers of men employed in the palace who were accustomed to all kinds of service—provision was soon made for the night, for Hadrian and his companions. The comfortable couch which the prefect had sent to Lochias for Pontius was carried into the Emperor's sleeping-room, and the camp-beds for Antinous and the suite were soon set up in the other rooms. Tables, pillows, and various household vessels which had already been sent in from the manufactories of Alexandria, and which stood packed in bales and cases in the large central court of the palace were soon taken out, and so far as they were applicable for use were carried into the hastily-arranged rooms. Even before Hadrian, under the prefect's guidance, had reached the last room in which restorations were being carried out, Pontius was ready with his arrangements, and could assure the Emperor that to-night he would find a good bed and very tolerable quarters, and that by to-morrow he should have a really elegantly-furnished room.

"Charming, quite delightful," cried the Emperor, as he entered his room. "One might fancy you had some industrious demons at your command. Pour some water over my hands, Mastor, and then to supper! I am as hungry as a beggar's clog."

"I think we shall find all you need," replied Titianus, while Hadrian washed his hands and his bearded face.

"Have you eaten all that I sent down to Lochias to-day, my dear Pontius?"

"Alas! we have," sighed Pontius.

"But I gave orders that a supper for five should be sent."

"It sufficed for six hungry artists," answered the architect, "if only I could have guessed for whom the food was intended! And now what is to be done? There are wine and bread still in the hall of the Muses, meanwhile."

"That must satisfy us," said the Emperor, as he wiped his face. "In the Dacian war, in Numidia, and often when out hunting, I have been glad if only one or the other was to be obtained."

Antinous, who was very hungry and tired, made a melancholy face at these words of his master, and Hadrian perceiving it, added with a smile:

"But youth needs something more to live upon than bread and wine. You pointed out to me just now the residence of the palace-steward. Might we not find there a morsel of meat or cheese, or something of the kind?"

"Hardly," replied Pontius. "For the man stuffs his fat stomach and his eight children with bread and porridge. But an attempt will at any rate be worth making."

"Then send to him; but conduct us at once to the hall where the Muses have preserved some bread and wine for me and these good fellows, though they do not always provide them for their disciples."

Pontius at once conducted the Emperor into the hall. On the way thither, Hadrian asked:

"Is the steward so miserably paid that he is forced to content himself with such meagre fare?"

"He has a residence rent free, and two hundred drachmae a month."

"That is not so very little. What is the man's name, and of what kith and kin is he?"

"He is called Keraunus, and is of ancient Macedonian descent. His ancestors from time immemorial have held the office he now fills, and he even supposes himself to be related to the extinct royal dynasty through the mistress of some one of the Lagides. Keraunus sits in the town council and

never stirs out in the streets without his slave, who is one of the sort which the merchants in the slave market throw into the bargain with the buyer. He is as fat as a stuffed pig, dresses like a senator, loves antiquities and curiosities, for which he will let himself be cheated of his last coin, and bears his poverty with more of pride than of dignity; and still he is an honorable man, and can be made useful, if he is taken on the right side."

"Altogether a queer fellow. And you say he is fat, is he jolly?"

"As far from it as possible."

"Ah, people who are fat and cross are my aversion. What is this by way of an erection?"

"Behind that screen works Papias' best scholar. His name is Pollux, and he is the son of the couple who keep the gate-house. You will be pleased with him."

"Call him here," said the Emperor.

But before the architect could comply with his desire the sculptor's head had appeared above the screen. The young man had heard the approaching voices and steps; he greeted the prefect respectfully from his elevated position, and after satisfying his curiosity was about to spring down from the stool on which he had climbed when Pontius called to him that Claudius Venator, the architect from Rome, wished to make his acquaintance.

"That is very kind in him, and still more kind in you," Pollux answered from above, "since it is only from you that he can know that I exist beneath the moon, and use the hammer and chisel. Allow me to descend from my four-legged cothurnus, for at present you are forced to look up to me, and from all I have heard of your talents from Pontius, nothing can be more absolutely the reverse of what it ought to be."

"Nay, stop where you are," answered Hadrian. "We, as fellow-artists, may waive ceremony.—What are you doing in there?"

"I will push the screen back in a moment and show you our Urania. It is very good for an artist to hear the opinion of a man who thoroughly understands the thing."

"Presently, friend-presently; first let me enjoy a scrap of bread, for the severity of my hunger might very possibly influence my judgment."

As he was speaking the architect offered the Emperor a salver with bread, salt, and a cup of wine, which his own slave had carried to him. When Pollux observed this modest meal, he called out:

"That is prisoners' fare, Pontius; have we nothing better in the house than that?"

"Possibly you yourself assisted in demolishing the dainty dishes I had sent down for the architect," cried Titianus, pretending to threaten him.

"You are defacing a fair memory," sighed the sculptor, with mock melancholy. "But, by Hercules, I did my fair share of the work of destruction. If only now—but stay! I have an idea worthy of Aristotle himself! that breakfast, to which I invited you to-morrow morning, most noble Pontius, is all ready at my mother's, and can be warmed up in a few minutes. Do not be alarmed, worthy sir, but the dish in question is cabbage with sausages—a mess which, like the soul of an Egyptian, possesses at the instant of resurrection, nobler qualities than when it first sees the light."

"Excellent," cried Hadrian. "Cabbage and sausages!" He wiped his full lips with his hand, smiling with gratification, and he broke into a hearty laugh of amusement as he heard a loud "Ah!" of satisfaction from Antinous, who drew nearer to the canvas screen. "There is another whose mouth waters and whose imagination revels in a happy future," said the Emperor to the prefect, pointing to his favorite.

But he had misinterpreted the lad's exclamation, for it was the mere name of the dish—which his mother had often set on the table of his humble home in Bithynia—which reminded him of his native country and his childhood, and transplanted him in thought back into their midst. It was a swift leap at his heart, and not merely the pleasant watering of his gums, that had forced the "Ah" to his lips. Still, he was glad to see his native dish again, and would not have exchanged it against the richest banquet. Pollux had meanwhile come out of his nook, and said:

"In a quarter of an hour I shall set before you the breakfast which has been turned into a supper. Mitigate your worst hunger with some bread and salt, and then my mother's cabbage-stew will not only satisfy you, but will be enjoyed with calm appreciation."

"Greet dame Doris from me," Hadrian called after the sculptor; and when Pollux had quitted the hall he turned to Titianus and Pontius and said:

"What a splendid young fellow. I am curious to see what he can do as an artist."

"Then follow me," replied Pontius, leading the way.

"What do you say to this Urania? Papias made the head of the Muse, but the figure and the drapery Pollux formed with his own hand in a few days."

The imperial artist stood in front of the statue, with his arms crossed, and remained there for some time in silence. Then he nodded his bearded head approvingly, and said gravely:

"A well-considered work, and carried out with remarkable freedom; this mantle drawn over the bosom would not disgrace a Phidias. All is broad, characteristic and true. Did the young artist work from the model here at Lochias?"

"I have seen no model, and I believe that he evolved the whole figure out of his head," replied Pontius.

"Impossible, perfectly impossible," cried the Emperor, in the tone of a man who knows well what he is talking about. "Such lines, such forms not Praxiteles himself could have invented. He must have seen them, have formed them as he stood face to face with the living copy. We will ask him. What is to be made out of that newly-set-up mass of clay?"

"Possibly the bust of some princess of the house of the Lagides. To-morrow you shall see a head of Berenice by our young friend, which seems to me to be one of the best things ever done in Alexandria."

"And is the lad a proficient in magic?" asked Hadrian. "It seems to me simply impossible that he should have completed this statue and a woman's bust in these few days."

Pontius explained to the Emperor that Pollux had mounted the head on a bust already to hand, and as he answered his questions without reserve, he revealed to him what stupendous exertions of the arts had been called into requisition to give the dilapidated palace a suitable and, in its kind, even brilliant appearance. He frankly confessed that here he was working only for effect, and talked to Hadrian exactly as he would have discussed the same subject with any other fellow-artist.

While the Emperor and the architect were thus eagerly conversing, and the prefect was hearing from Phlegon, the secretary, all the experience of their journey, Pollux reappeared in the hall of the Muses accompanied by his father. The singer carried before him a steaming mess, fresh cakes of bread, and the pasty which a few hours previously he had carried home to his wife from the architect's table. Pollux held to his breast a tolerably large two-handled jar full of Mareotic wine, which he had hastily wreathed with branches of ivy.

A few minutes later the Emperor was reclining on a mattress that had been laid for him, and was making his way valiantly through the savory mess. He was in the happiest humor; he called Antinous and his secretary, heaped abundant portions with his own hand on their plates, which he bade them hold out to him, declaring as he did so that it was to prevent their fishing the best of the sausages out of the cabbage for themselves. He also spoke highly of the Mareotic wine. When they came to opening the pasty the expression of his face changed; he frowned and asked the prefect in a suspicious tone, severely and sternly:

"How came these people by such a pasty as this?"

"Where did you get it from?" asked the prefect of the singer.

"From the banquet which the architect gave to the artists here," answered Euphorion. "The bones were given to the Graces and this dish, which had not been touched, to me and my wife. She devoted it with pleasure to Pontius' guest."

Titianus laughed and exclaimed:

"This then accounts for the total disappearance of the handsome supper which we sent down to the architect. This pasty-allow me to look at it—this pasty was prepared by a recipe obtained from Verus. He invited us to breakfast yesterday and instructed my cook how to prepare it."

"No Platonist ever propagated his master's doctrines with greater zeal than Verus does the merits of this dish," said the Emperor, who had recovered his good humor as soon as he perceived that no artful preparation for his arrival was to be suspected in this matter. "What follies that spoilt child of fortune can commit! Does he still insist on cooking with his own hands?"

"No, not quite that," replied the prefect. "But he had a couch placed for him in the kitchen on which he stretched himself at full length and told my cook exactly how to prepare the pasty, of which you are—I should say, of which the Emperor is particularly fond. It consists of pheasant, ham, cow's udder and a baked crust."

"I am quite of Hadrian's opinion," laughed the Emperor; doing all justice to the excellent pie. "You entertain me splendidly my friend, and I am very much your debtor. What did you say your name is young man?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.