GEORG EBERS

THE BRIDE OF THE NILE. COMPLETE

Georg Ebers

The Bride of the Nile. Complete

Ebers G.

The Bride of the Nile. Complete / G. Ebers — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Georg Ebers
The Bride of the Nile – Complete

PREFACE

The “Bride of the Nile” needs no preface. For the professional student I may observe that I have relied on the authority of de Goeje in adhering to my own original opinion that the word Mukaukas is not to be regarded as a name but as a title, since the Arab writers to which I have made reference apply it to the responsible representatives of the Byzantine Emperor in antagonism to the Moslem power. I was unfortunately unable to make further use of Karabacek’s researches as to the Mukaukas.

I shall not be held justified in placing the ancient Horus Apollo (Horapollo) in the seventh century after Christ by any one who regards the author of the Hieroglyphica as identical with the Egyptian philosopher of the same name who, according to Suidas, lived under Theodosius, and to whom Stephanus of Byzantium refers, writing so early as at the end of the fifth century. But the lexicographer Suidas enumerates the works of Horapollo, the philologer and commentator on Greek poetry, without naming the Hieroglyphica, which is the only treatise alluded to by Stephanus. Besides, all the other ancient writers who mention Horapollo at all leave us quite free to suppose that there may have been two sages of the same name—as does C. Leemans, who is most intimately versed in the Hieroglyphica—and the second certainly cannot have lived earlier than the VIIth century, since an accurate knowledge of hieroglyphic writing must have been lost far more completely in his time than we can suppose possible in the IVth century. It must be remembered that we still possess well-executed hieroglyphic inscriptions dating from the time of Decius, 250 years after Christ. Thus the Egyptian commentator on Greek poetry could hardly have needed a translator, whereas the Hieroglyphica seems to have been first rendered into Greek by Philippus. The combination by which the author called in Egyptian Horus (the son of Isis) is supposed to have been born in Philae, where the cultus of the Egyptian heathen was longest practised, and where some familiarity with hieroglyphics must have been preserved to a late date, takes into due account the real state of affairs at the period I have selected for my story.

GEORG EBERS

October 1st, 1886.

BOOK 1

CHAPTER I

Half a lustrum had elapsed since Egypt had become subject to the youthful power of the Arabs, which had risen with such unexampled vigor and rapidity. It had fallen an easy prey, cheaply bought, into the hands of a small, well-captained troop of Moslem warriors; and the fair province, which so lately had been a jewel of the Byzantine Empire and the most faithful foster-mother to Christianity, now owned the sway of the Khalif Omar and saw the Crescent raised by the side of the Cross.

It was long since a hotter season had afflicted the land; and the Nile, whose rising had been watched for on the Night of Dropping—the 17th of June—with the usual festive preparations, had cheated the hopes of the Egyptians, and instead of rising had shrunk narrower and still narrower in its bed.—It was in this time of sore anxiety, on the 10th of July, A.D. 643, that a caravan from the North reached Memphis.

It was but a small one; but its appearance in the decayed and deserted city of the Pyramids—which had grown only lengthwise, like a huge reed-leaf, since its breadth was confined between the Nile and the Libyan Hills—attracted the gaze of the passers-by, though in former years a Memphite would scarcely have thought it worth while to turn his head to gaze at an interminable pile of wagons loaded with merchandise, an imposing train of vehicles drawn by oxen, the flashing maniples of the imperial cavalry, or an endless procession wending its way down the five miles of high street.

The merchant who, riding a dromedary of the choicest breed, conducted this caravan, was a lean Moslem of mature age, robed in soft silk. A vast turban covered his small head and cast a shadow over his delicate and venerable features.

The Egyptian guide who rode on a brisk little ass by his side, looked up frequently and with evident pleasure at the merchant's face—not in itself a handsome one with its hollow cheeks, meagre beard and large aquiline nose—for it was lighted up by a pair of bright eyes, full of attractive thoughtfulness and genuine kindness. But that this fragile-looking man, in whose benevolent countenance grief and infirmities had graven many a furrow, could not only command but compel submission was legible alike in his thin, firmly-closed lips and in the zeal with which his following of truculent and bearded fighting men, armed to the teeth, obeyed his slightest sign.

His Egyptian attendant, the head of the Hermeneutai—the guild of the Dragomans of that period—was a swarthy and surly native of Memphis; whenever he accidentally came too close to the fierce-looking riders of the dromedaries he shrunk his shoulders as if he expected a blow or a push, while he poured out question and answer to the Merchant Haschim, the owner of the caravan, without timidity and with the voluble garrulity of his tribe.

"You seem very much at home here in Memphis," he observed, when the old man had expressed his surprise at the decadence and melancholy change in the city.

"Thirty years ago," replied the merchant, "my business often brought me hither. How many houses are now empty and in ruins where formerly only heavy coin could secure admittance! Ruins on all sides!—Who has so cruelly mutilated that fine church? My fellow-believers left every Christian fane untouched—that I know from our chief Amru himself."

"It was the principal church of the Melchites, the Emperor's minions," cried the guide, as if that were ample explanation of the fact. The merchant, however, did not take it so.

"Well," he said, "and what is there so dreadful in their creed?"

"What?" said the Egyptian, and his eye flashed wrathfully. "What?—They dismember the divine person of the Saviour and attribute to it two distinct natures. And then!—All the Greeks settled here, and encouraged by the protection of the emperor, treated us, the owners of the land, like slaves,

till your nation came to put an end to their oppression. They drove us by force into their churches, and every true-born Egyptian was punished as a rebel and a leper. They mocked at us and persecuted us for our faith in the one divine nature of our Lord."

"And so," interrupted the merchant, "as soon as we drove out the Greeks you behaved more unmercifully to them and their sanctuaries than we—whom you scorn as infidels—did to you!"

"Mercy?—for them!" cried the Egyptian indignantly, as he cast an evil eye on the demolished edifice. "They have reaped what they sowed; and now every one in Egypt who does not believe in your One God—blessed be the Saviour!—confesses the one sole nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. You drove out the Melchite rabble, and then it was our part to demolish the temples of their wretched Saviour, who lost His divine Unity at the synod of Chalcedon—damnation wait upon it!"

"But still the Melchites are fellow-believers with you—they are Christians," said the merchant.

"Christians?" echoed the guide with a contemptuous shrug. "They may regard themselves as Christians; but I, with every one else great and small in this land, am of opinion that they have no right whatever to call themselves our fellow-believers and Christians. They all are and shall be for ever accursed with their hundreds—nay thousands of devilish heresies, by which they degrade our God and Redeemer to the level of that idol on the stone pillar. Half a cow and half a man! Why, what rational being, I ask you, could pray to such a mongrel thing? We Jacobites or Monophysites or whatever they choose to call us will not yield a jot or tittle of the divine nature of our Lord and Saviour; and if the old faith must die out, I will turn Moslem and be converted to your One Omnipotent God; for before I confess the heresies of the Melchites I will be hewn in pieces, and my wife and children with me. Who knows what may be coming to pass? And there are many advantages in going over to your side: for the power is in your hands, and long may you keep it! We have got to be ruled by strangers; and who would not rather pay small tribute to the wise and healthy Khalif at Medina than a heavy one to the sickly imperial brood of Melchites at Constantinople. The Mukaukas George, to be sure, is not a bad sort of man, and as he so soon gave up all idea of resisting you he was no doubt of my opinion. Regarding you as just and pious folks, as our next neighbors, and perhaps even of our own race and blood, he preferred you—my brother told me so—to those Byzantine heretics, flayers of men and thirsting for blood, but yet, the Mukaukas is as good a Christian as breathes."

The Arab had listened attentively and with a subtle smile to the Memphite, whose duties as guide now compelled him to break off. The Egyptian made the whole caravan turn down an alley that led into a street running parallel to the river, where a few fine houses still stood in the midst of their gardens. When men and beasts were making their way along a better pavement the merchant observed: "I knew the father of the man you were speaking of, very well. He was wealthy and virtuous; of his son too I hear nothing but good. But is he still allowed to bear the title of governor, or, what did you call him?—Mukaukas?"

"Certainly, Master," said the guide. "There is no older family than his in all Egypt, and if old Menas was rich the Mukaukas is richer, both by inheritance and by his wife's dower. Nor could we wish for a more sensible or a juster governor! He keeps his eye on his underlings too; still, business is not done now as briskly as formerly, for though he is not much older than I am—and I am not yet sixty—he is always ailing and has not been seen out of the house for months. Even when your chief wants to see him he comes over to this side of the river. It is a pity with such a man as he; and who was it that broke down his stalwart strength? Why, those Melchite dogs; you may ask all along the Nile, long as it is, who was at the bottom of any misfortune, and you will always get the same answer: Wherever the Melchite or the Greek sets foot the grass refuses to grow."

"But the Mukaukas, the emperor's representative… the Arab began. The Egyptian broke in however:

"He, you think, must be safe from them? They did not certainly injure his person; but they did worse, for when the Melchites rose up against our party—it was at Alexandria, and the late Greek

patriarch Cyrus had a finger in that pie—they killed his two sons, two fine, splendid men—killed them like dogs; and it crushed him completely."

"Poor man!" sighed the Arab. "And has he no child left?"

"Oh, yes. One son, and the widow of his eldest. She went into a convent after her husband's death, but she left her child, her little Mary—she must be ten years old now—to live with her grandparents."

"That is well," said the old man, "that will bring some sunshine into the house."

"No doubt, Master. And just lately they have had some cause for rejoicing. The only surviving son—Orion is his name—came home only the day before yesterday from Constantinople where he has been for a long time. There was a to-do! Half the city went crazy. Thousands went out to meet him, as though he were the Saviour; they erected triumphal arches, even folks of my creed—no one thought of hanging back. One and all wanted to see the son of the great Mukaukas, and the women of course were first and foremost!"

"You speak, however," said the Arab, "as though the returning hero were not worthy of so much honor."

"That is as folks think," replied the Egyptian shrugging his shoulders. "At any rate he is the only son of the greatest man in the land."

"But he does not promise to be like the old man?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the guide. "My brother, a priest, and the head of one of our great schools, was his tutor, and he never met such a clever head as Orion's, he tells me. He learnt everything without any trouble and at the same time worked as hard as a poor man's son. We may expect him to win fame and honor—so Marcus says—for his parents and for the city of Memphis: but for my part, I can see the shady side, and I tell you the women will turn his head and bring him to a bad end. He is handsome, taller even than the old man in his best days, and he knows how to make the most of himself when he meets a pretty face—and pretty faces are always to be met in his path…"

"And the young rascal takes what he finds!" said the Moslem laughing. "If that is all you are alarmed at I am glad for the youth. He is young and such things are allowable."

"Nay, Sir, even my brother—he lives now in Alexandria, and is blind and foolish enough still in all that concerns his former pupil—and even he thinks this is a dangerous rock ahead. If he does not change in this respect he will wander further and further from the law of the Lord, and imperil his soul, for dangers surround him on all sides like roaring lions. The noble gifts of a handsome and engaging person will lead him to his ruin; and though I do not desire it, I suspect...."

"You look on the dark side and judge hardly," replied the old man. "The young...."

"Even the young, or at least the Christian young, ought to control themselves, though I, if any one, am inclined to make the utmost allowance for the handsome lad—nay, and I may confess: when he smiles at me I feel at once as if I had met with some good-luck; and there are a thousand other men in Memphis who feel the same, and still more the women you may be sure—but many a one has shed bitter tears on his account for all that.—But, by all the saints!—Talk of the wolf and you see his tail! Look, there he is!—Halt! Stop a minute, you men; it is worth while, Sir, to tarry a moment."

"Is that his fine quadriga in front of the high garden gate yonder?"

"Those are the Pannonian horses he brought with him, as swift as lightning and as.... But look! Ah, now they have disappeared behind the hedge; but you, high up on your dromedary, must be able to see them. The little maid by his side is the widow Susannah's daughter. This garden and the beautiful mansion behind the trees belong to her."

"A very handsome property!" said the Arab.

"I should think so indeed!" replied the Memphite. "The garden goes down to the Nile, and then, what care is taken of it!"

"Was it not here that Philommon the corn-merchant lived formerly?" asked the old man, as though some memories were coming back to him.

"To be sure. He was Susannah's husband and must have been a man of fifty when he first wooed her. The little girl is their only child and the richest heiress in the whole province; but she is not altogether grown up though she is sixteen years old—an old man's child, you understand, but a pretty, merry creature, a laughing dove in human form, and so quick and lively. Her own people call her the little water-wagtail."

"Good!—Good and very appropriate," said the merchant well pleased. "She is small too, a child rather than a maiden; but the graceful, gladsome creature takes my fancy. And the governor's son—what is his name?"

"Orion, Sir," replied the guide.

"And by my beard," said the old man smiling. "You have not over-praised him, man! Such a youth as this Orion is not to be seen every day. What a tall fellow, and how becoming are those brown curls. Such as he are spoilt to begin with by their mothers, and then all the other women follow suit. And he has a frank, shrewd face with something behind it. If only he had left his purple coat and gold frippery in Constantinople! Such finery is out of place in this dismal ruinous city."

While he was yet speaking the Memphite urged his ass forward, but the Arab held him back, for his attention was riveted by what was taking place within the enclosure. He saw handsome Orion place a small white dog, a silky creature of great beauty that evidently belonged to him—in the little maiden's arms saw her kiss it and then put a blade of grass round its neck as if to measure its size. The old man watched them as, both laughing gaily, they looked into each other's eyes and presently bid each other farewell. The girl stood on tiptoe in front of some rare shrub to reach two exquisite purple flowers that blossomed at the top, hastily plucked them and offered them to him with a deep blush; she pushed away the hand he had put out to support her as she stretched up for the flowers with a saucy slap; and a bright glance of happiness lighted up her sweet face as the young man kissed the place her fingers had hit, and then pressed the flowers to his lips. The old man looked on with sympathetic pleasure, as though it roused the sweetest memories in his mind; and his kind eyes shone as Orion, no less mischievously happy than the young girl, whispered something in her ear; she drew the long stem of grass out of her waist-belt to administer immediate and condign punishment withal, struck it across his face, and then fled over grass-plot and flower-bed, as swift as a roe, without heeding his repeated shouts of "Katharina! bewitching, big damsel, Katharina!" till she reached the house.

It was a charming little interlude. Old Haschim was still pondering it in his memory with much satisfaction when he and his caravan had gone some distance further. He felt obliged to Orion for this pretty scene, and when he heard the young man's quadriga approaching at an easy trot behind him, he turned round to gaze. But the Arab's face had lost its contentment by the time the four Pannonians and the chariot, overlaid with silver ornamentation and forming, with its driver, a picture of rare beauty and in perfect taste, had slowly driven past, to fly on like the wind as soon as the road was clear, and to vanish presently in clouds of dust. There was something of melancholy in his voice as he desired his young camel-driver to pick up the flowers, which now lay in the dust of the road, and to bring them to him. He himself had observed the handsome youth as, with a glance and a gesture of annoyance with himself, he flung the innocent gift on the hot, sandy highway.

"Your brother is right," cried the old man to the Memphite. "Women are indeed the rock ahead in this young fellow's life—and he in theirs, I fear! Poor little girl!"

"The little water-wagtail do you mean? Oh! with her it may perhaps turn to real earnest. The two mothers have settled the matter already. They are both rolling in gold, and where doves nest doves resort.—Thank God, the sun is low down over the Pyramids! Let your people rest at the large inn yonder; the host is an honest man and lacks nothing, not even shade!"

"So far as the beasts and drivers are concerned," said the merchant, "they may stop here. But I, and the leader of the caravan, and some of my men will only take some refreshment, and then you must guide us to the governor; I have to speak with him. It is growing late…"

“That does not matter,” said the Egyptian. “The Mukaukas prefers to see strangers after sundown on such a scorching day. If you have any dealings with him I am the very man for you. You have only to make play with a gold piece and I can obtain you an audience at once through Sebek, the house-steward he is my cousin. While you are resting here I will ride on to the governor’s palace and bring you word as to how matters stand.”

CHAPTER II

The caravansary into which Haschim and his following now turned off stood on a plot of rising ground surrounded by palm-trees. Before the destruction of the heathen sanctuaries it had been a temple of Imhotep, the Egyptian Esculapius, the beneficient god of healing, who had had his places of special worship even in the city of the dead. It was half relined, half buried in desert sand when an enterprising inn-keeper had bought the elegant structure with the adjacent grove for a very moderate sum. Since then it had passed to various owners, a large wooden building for the accommodation of travellers had been added to the massive edifice, and among the palm-trees, which extended as far as the ill-repaired quay, stables were erected and plots of ground fenced in for beasts of all kinds. The whole place looked like a cattle-fair, and indeed it was a great resort of the butchers and horse-dealers of the town, who came there to purchase. The palm-grove, being one of the few remaining close to the city, also served the Memphites as a pleasure-ground where they could "sniff fresh air" and treat themselves in a pleasant shade. 'Tables and seats had been set out close to the river, and there were boats on hire in mine host's little creek; and those who took their pleasure in coming thither by water were glad to put in and refresh themselves under the palms of Nesptah.

Two rows of houses had formerly divided this rendezvous for the sober and the reckless from the highroad, but they had long since been pulled down and laid level with the ground by successive landlords. Even now some hundreds of laborers might be seen, in spite of the scorching heat, toiling under Arab overseers to demolish a vast ruin of the date of the Ptolemies and transporting the huge blocks of limestone and marble, and the numberless columns which once had supported the roof of the temple of Zeus, to the eastern shore of the Nile-loading them on to trucks drawn by oxen which hauled them down to the quay to cross the river in flat-bottomed boats.

Amru, the Khaliff's general and representative, was there building his new capital. For this the temples of the old gods were used as quarries, and they supplied not only finely-squared blocks of the most durable stone, but also myriads of Greek columns of every order, which had only to be ferried over and set up again on the other shore; for the Arabs disdained nothing in the way of materials, and made indiscriminate use of blocks and pillars in their own sanctuaries, whether they took them from heathen temples or Christian churches.

The walls of the temple of Imhotep had originally been completely covered with pictures of the gods, and hieroglyphic inscriptions; but the smoke of reeking hearths had long since blackened them, fanatical hands had never been wanting to deface them, and in many places they had been lime-washed and scrawled with Christian symbols or very unchristian mottoes, in Greek and the spoken dialect of the Egyptians. The Arab and his men took their meal in what had been the great hall of the temple—none of them drinking wine excepting the captain of the caravan, who was no Moslem but belonged to the Parsee sect of the Masdakites.

When the old merchant, sitting at a table by himself, had satisfied his hunger, he called this chief and desired him to load the bale containing the hanging on a litter between the two largest baggage camels, and to fasten it securely but so that it could easily be removed.

"It is done," replied the Persian, as he wiped his thick moustache—he was a magnificent man as tall and stalwart as an oak, with light flowing hair like a lion's mane.

"So much the better," said Haschim. "Then come out with me." And he led the way to the palmgrove.

The sun had sunk to rest behind the pyramids, the Necropolis, and the Libyan hills; the eastern sky, and the bare limestone rock of Babylon on the opposite shore were shining with hues of indescribable diversity and beauty. It seemed as though every variety of rose reared by the skilled gardeners of Arsinoe or Naukratis had yielded its hues, from golden buff to crimson and the deepest

wine-tinted violet, to shed their magic glow on the plains, the peaks and gorges of the hills, with the swiftness of thought.

The old man's heart beat high as he gazed at the scene; he drew a deep breath, and laying his slender hand on the Persian's mighty arm he said: "Your prophet, Masdak, taught that it was God's will that no one should think himself more or less chosen than another, and that there should be neither rich nor poor on earth, but that every possession should belong to all in common. Well, look around you here as I do. The man who has not seen this has seen nothing. There is no fairer scene here below and to whom does it belong? To poor simple Salech yonder, whom we allowed to tramp half naked at our camels' heels out of pity.—It is his as much as it is yours or mine or the Khaliff's. God has given us all an equal share in the glory of his works, as your prophet would have it. How much beauty is the common possession of our race! Let us be thankful for it, Rustem, for indeed it is no small matter.—But as to property, such as man may win or lose, that is quite a different matter. We all start on the same race-course, and what you Masdakites ask is that lead should be tied to the feet of the swift so that no one should outstrip another; but that would be.... Well, well! Let us feast our eyes now on the marvellous beauty before us. Look: What just now was the purple of this flower is now deep ruby red; what before was a violet gleam now is the richest amethyst. Do you see the golden fringe to those clouds? It is like a setting.—And all this is ours—is yours and mine—so long as we have eyes and heart to enjoy and be uplifted by it!"

The Masdakite laughed, a fresh, sonorous laugh, and said: "Yes, Master, for those who see as you see. The colors are bright no doubt over the sky and the hills, and we do not often see such a red as that at home in my country; but of what use is all that magic show? You see rubies and amethysts—but as for me! The gems in your hanging stand for something more than that shining show. I mean no harm, Master, but I would give all the sunsets that ever glowed on earth for your bales and never repent of the bargain!" He laughed more heartily than before and added: "But you, worthy Father, would think twice before you signed it.—As to what we Masdakites hope for, our time is not yet come."

"And suppose it were, and that the hanging were yours?"

"I should sell it and add the price to my savings, and go home and buy some land, and take a pretty wife, and breed camels and horses."

"And next day would come the poorer men who had laid nothing by, and had made no bargain over hangings and sunsets; and they would ask for a share of your land, and a camel and a foal each, and you would not be able ever to see a sunset again but must wander about the world, and your pretty wife with you to help you share everything with others.—Let us abide by the old order, my Rustem, and may the Most High preserve you your good heart, for you have but a foolish and crotchety head."

The big man bent over his master and gratefully kissed his arm; at this moment the guide rejoined them, but with a long face for he had promised more than he could perform. The Mukaukas George had set out—a quite unheard of event—for an excursion on the river in his barge, with his son and the ladies of the house just as he was hoping to secure an audience for the Arab. Orion's return—the steward had explained—had made the old man quite young again. Haschim must now wait till the morrow, and he, the guide, would counsel him to pass the night in the city at an inn kept by one Moschion, where he would be well cared for.

But the merchant preferred to remain where he was. He did not care about the delay, more particularly as he wished to consult an Egyptian physician with regard to an old standing complaint he suffered from, and there was no more skilful or learned leech in the whole land, the Egyptian guide assured him, than the famous Philip of Memphis. The situation here, outside the town, was very pleasant, and from the river's bank he might observe the comet which had been visible for some nights past—a portent of evil no doubt. The natives of the city had been paralysed with terror; that indeed was evident even here in Nesptah's caravansary, for usually as the evening grew cool, the tables and benches under the palms were crowded with guests; but who would care to think of enjoyment in those days of dread?

So he remounted his ass to fetch the physician, while old Haschim, leaning on the Masdakite's arm, betook himself to a bench by the river. There he sat gazing thoughtfully at the starry sky, and his companion dreamed of home and of buying a meadow, even without the price of the gorgeous hanging, of building a house, and of choosing a pretty little wife to manage it. Should she be fair or dark? He would rather she should be fair.

But his castle in the air was shattered at this point, for an object was approaching across the Nile which attracted his attention, and which he pointed out to his chief. The stream lay before them like a broad belt of black and silver brocade. The waxing moon was mirrored in the almost unruffled surface and where a ripple curled it the tiny crest glittered like white flame. Bats swooped to and fro in the gloom from the city of the dead to the river, and flitted above it like shadows blown about by the wind. A few lateen sails moved like pale, gigantic birds over the dark waters; but now from the north —and from the city—a larger mass came towards the palm-grove with bright, gleaming eyes of light.

"A fine boat,—the governor's no doubt," said the merchant, as it slowly came towards the grove from the middle of the stream. At the same time the clatter of hoofs became audible from the road behind the inn. Haschim turned round and was aware of torchbearers running ahead of a chariot.

"The sick man has come so far by water," said the Arab, "and now, he is to be driven home.—Strange! this is the second time to-day that I have met his much-talked-of son!"

The governor's pleasure-barge was nearing the palm-grove. It was a large and handsome boat, built of cedar-wood and richly gilt, with an image of John, the patron-saint of the family, for a figure-head. The nimbus round the head was a crown of lamps, and large lanterns shone both at the bows and stern of the vessel. The Mukaukas George was reclining under an awning, his wife Neforis by his side. Opposite to them sat their son and a tall young girl, at whose feet a child of ten sat on the ground, leaning her pretty head against her knees. An older Greek woman, the child's governess, had a place by the side of a very tall man, on an ottoman beyond the verge of the awning. This man was Philip the leech. The cheerful sound of the lute accompanied the barge, and the performer was the returned wanderer Orion, who touched the strings with skill and deep feeling.

It was altogether a pleasing scene—a fair picture of a wealthy and united family. But who was the damsel sitting by Orion's side? He was devoting his whole attention to her; as he struck the strings with deeper emphasis his eyes sought hers, and it seemed as though he were playing for her alone. Nor did she appear unworthy of such homage, for when the barge ran into the little haven and Haschim could distinguish her features he was startled by her noble and purely Greek beauty.

A few handsomely-dressed slaves, who must have come with the vehicle by the road, now went on board the boat to carry their invalid lord to his chariot; and it then became apparent that the seat in which he reclined was provided with arms by which it could be lifted and moved. A burly negro took this at the back, but just as another was stooping to lift it in front Orion pushed him away and took his place, raised the couch with his father on it, and carried him across the landing-stage between the deck and the shore, past Haschim to the chariot. The young man did the work of bearer with cheerful ease, and looked affectionately at his father while he shouted to the ladies—for only his mother and the physician accompanied the invalid after carefully wrapping him in shawls—to get out of the barge and wait for him. Then he went forward, lighted by the torches which were carried before them.

"Poor man!" thought the merchant as he looked after the Mukaukas. "But to a man who has such a son to carry him the saddest and hardest lot floats by like a cloud before the wind."

He was now ready to forgive Orion even the rejected flowers; and when the young girl stepped on shore, the child clinging fondly to her arm, he confessed to himself that Dame Susannah's little daughter would find it hard indeed to hold her own by the side of this tall and royal vision of beauty. What a form was this maiden's, and what princely bearing; and how sweet and engaging the voice in which she named some of the constellations to her little companion, and pointed out the comet which was just rising!

Haschim was sitting in shadow; he could see without being seen, and note all that took place on the bench, which was lighted by one of the barge's lanterns. The unexpected entertainment gave him pleasure, for everything that affected the governor's son roused his sympathy and interest. The idea of forming an opinion of this remarkable young man smiled on his fancy, and the sight of the beautiful girl who sat on the bench yonder warmed his old heart. The child must certainly be Mary, the governor's granddaughter.

Then the chariot started off, clattering away down the road, and in a few minutes Orion came back to the rest of the party.

Alas! Poor little heiress of Susannah's wealth! How different was his demeanor to this beautiful damsel from his treatment of that little thing! His eyes rested on her face in rapture, his speech failed him now and again as he addressed her, and what he said must be sometimes grave and captivating and sometimes witty, for not she alone but the little maid's governess listened to him eagerly, and when the fair one laughed it was in particularly sweet, clear tones. There was something so lofty in her mien that this frank expression of contentment was almost startling; like a breath of perfume from some gorgeous flower which seems created to rejoice the eye only. And she, to whom all that Orion had to say was addressed, listened to him not only with deep attention, but in a way which showed the merchant that she cared even more for the speaker than for what he was so eager in expressing. If this maiden wedded the governor's son, they would indeed be a pair! Taus, the innkeeper's wife, now came out, a buxom and vigorous Egyptian woman of middle age, carrying some of the puffs for which she was famous, and which she had just made with her own hands. She also served them with milk, grapes and other fruit, her eyes sparkling with delight and gratified ambition; for the son of the great Mukaukas, the pride of the city, who in former years had often been her visitor, and not only for the sake of her cakes, in water parties with his gay companions—mostly Greek officers who now were all dead and gone or exiles from the country—now did her the honor to come here so soon after his return. Her facile tongue knew no pause as she told him that she and her husband had gone forth with the rest to welcome him at the triumphal arch near Menes' Gate, and Emau with them, and the little one. Yes, Emau was married now, and had called her first child Orion. And when the young man asked Dame Taus whether Emau was as charming as ever and as like her mother as she used to be, she shook her finger at him and asked in her turn, as she pointed towards the young lady, whether the fickle bird at whose departure so many had sighed, was to be caged at last, and whether yon fair lady....

But Orion cut her short, saying that he was still his own master though he already felt the noose round his neck; and the fair lady blushed even more deeply than at the good woman's first question. He however soon got over his awkwardness and gaily declared that the worthy Taus' little daughter was one of the prettiest girls in Memphis, and had had quite as many admirers as her excellent mother's puff-pastry. Taus was to greet her kindly from him.

The landlady departed, much touched and flattered; Orion took up his lute, and while the ladies refreshed themselves he did the maiden's bidding and sang the song by Alcaeus which she asked for, in a rich though subdued voice to the lute, playing it like a master. The young girl's eyes were fixed on his lips, and again, he seemed to be making music for her alone. When it was time to start homewards, and the ladies returned to the barge, he went up to the inn to pay the reckoning. As he presently returned alone the Arab saw him pick up a handkerchief that the young lady had left on the table, and hastily press it to his lips as he went towards the barge.

The gorgeous red blossoms had fared worse in the morning. The young man's heart was given to that maiden on the water. She could not be his sister; what then was the connection between them?

The merchant soon gained this information, for the guide on his return could give it him. She was Paula, the daughter of Thomas, the famous Greek general who had defended the city of Damascus so long and so bravely against the armies of Islam. She was Mukaukas George's niece, but her fortune was small; she was a poor relation of the family, and after her father's disappearance—for his body

had never been found—she had been received into the governor's house out of pity and charity—she, a Melchite! The interpreter had little to say in her favor, by reason of her sect; and though he could find no flaw in her beauty, he insisted on it that she was proud and ungracious, and incapable of winning any man's love; only the child, little Mary—she, to be sure, was very fond of her. It was no secret that even her uncle's wife, worthy Neforis, did not care for her haughty niece and only suffered her to please the invalid. And what business had a Melchite at Memphis, under the roof of a good Jacobite? Every word the dragoman spoke breathed the scorn which a mean and narrow-minded man is always ready to heap on those who share the kindness of his own benefactors.

But this beautiful and lofty-looking daughter of a great man had conquered the merchant's old heart, and his opinion of her was quite unmoved by the Memphite's strictures. It was ere long confirmed indeed, for Philip, the leech whom the guide had been to find, and whose dignified personality inspired the Arab with confidence, was a daily visitor to the governor, and he spoke of Paula as one of the most perfect creatures that Heaven had ever formed in a happy hour. But the Almighty seemed to have forgotten to care for his own masterpiece; for years her life had been indeed a sad one.

The physician could promise the old man some mitigation of his sufferings, and they liked each other so well that they parted the best of friends, and not till a late hour.

CHAPTER III

The Mukaukas' barge, urged forward by powerful rowers, made its way smoothly down the river. On board there was whispering, and now and again singing. Little Mary had dropped asleep on Paula's shoulder; the Greek duenna gazed sometimes at the comet which filled her with terrors, sometimes at Orion, whose handsome face had bewitched her mature heart, and sometimes at the young girl whom she was ill-pleased to see thus preferred by this favorite of the gods. It was a deliciously warm, still night, and the moon, which makes the ocean swell and flow, stirs the tide of feeling to rise in the human breast.

Whatever Paula asked for Orion sang, as though nothing was unknown to him that had ever sounded on a Greek lute; and the longer they went on the clearer and richer his voice grew, the more melting and seductive its expression, and the more urgently it appealed to the young girl's heart. Paula gave herself up to the sweet enchantment, and when he laid down the lute and asked in low tones if his native land was not lovely on such a night as this, or which song she liked best, and whether she had any idea of what it had been to him to find her in his parents' house, she yielded to the charm and answered him in whispers like his own.

Under the dense foliage of the sleeping garden he pressed her hand to his lips, and she, tremulous, let him have his way.—Bitter, bitter years lay behind her. The physician had spoken only too truly. The hardest blows of fate had brought her—the proud daughter of a noble father—to a course of cruel humiliations. The life of a friendless though not penniless relation, taken into a wealthy house out of charity, had proved a thorny path to tread, but now-since the day before yesterday—all was changed. Orion had come. His home and the city had held high festival on his return, as at some gift of Fortune, in which she too had a goodly share. He had met her, not as the dependent relative, but as a beautiful and high-born woman. There was sunshine in his presence which warmed her very heart, and made her raise her head once more like a flower that is brought out under the open sky after long privation of light and air. His bright spirit and gladness of life refreshed her heart and brain; the respect he paid her revived her crushed self-confidence and filled her soul with fervent gratitude. Ah! and how delightful it was to feel that she might be grateful, devotedly grateful.—And then, then this evening had been hers, the sweetest, most blessed that she had known for years. He had reminded her of what she had almost forgotten: that she was still young, that she was still lovely, that she had a right to be happy, to enchant and be enchanted—perhaps even to love and to be loved.

Her hand was still conscious of his burning kiss as she entered the cool room where the Lady Neforis sat awaiting the return of the party, turning her spinning-wheel by the couch of her invalid husband who always went to rest at late hours. It was with an overflowing heart that Paula raised her uncle's hand to her lips—Orion's father, might she not say HER Orion's?—Then she kissed her aunt—his mother, and it was long since she had done so—as she and little Mary bid her good-night. Neforis accepted the kiss coolly but with some surprise, and looked up enquiringly at the girl and at her son. No doubt she thought many things, but deemed it prudent to give them no utterance for the present. She allowed the girl to retire as though nothing unusual had occurred, superintended the servants who came to carry her husband into his bedroom, gave him the white globule which was to secure him sleep, and with indefatigable patience turned and moved his pillows till his couch was to his mind. Not till then, nor till she was satisfied that a servant was keeping watch in the adjoining room, did she leave him; and then—for there was danger in delay—she went to seek her son.

This tall, large and rather too portly woman had been in her youth a slender and elegant girl; a graceful creature though her calm and expressionless features had never been strikingly beautiful. Age had altered them but little; her face was now that of a good-looking, plump, easy-going matron, which had lost its freshness through long and devoted attendance on the sick man. Her birth and position gave her confidence and self-reliance, but there was nothing gracious or captivating in her

individuality. The joys and woes of others were not hers; still she could be moved and stirred by them, even to self-denial, and was very capable of feeling quite a passionate interest for others; only, those others must be her own immediate belongings and no one else. Thus a more devoted and anxious wife, or a more loving mother would have been hard to find; but, if we compare her faculty for loving with a star, its rays were too short to reach further than to those nearest to her, and these regarded it as an exceptional state of grace to be included within the narrow circle of those beloved by her somewhat grudging soul.

She knocked at Orion's sitting-room, and he hailed her late visit with surprise and pleasure. She had come to speak of a matter of importance, and had done so promptly, for her son's and Paula's conduct just now urged her to lose no time. Something was going on between these two and her husband's niece was far outside the narrow limits of her loving kindness.

This, she began by saying, would not allow her to sleep. She had but one heart's desire and his father shared it: Orion must know full well what she meant; she had spoken to him about it only yesterday. His father had received him with warm affection, had paid his debts unhesitatingly and without a word of reproach, and now it was his part to turn over a new leaf: to break with his former reckless life and set up a home of his own. The bride, as he knew, was chosen for him. "Susannah was here just now," she said. "You scapegrace, she confessed that you had quite turned her Katharina's little head this morning."

"I am sorry for it," he interrupted in a tone of annoyance. "These ways with women have grown upon me as a habit; but I have done with them henceforth. They are unworthy of me now, and I feel, my dear Mother...."

"That life is beginning in earnest," Neforis threw in. "The wish which brings me to you now entirely accords with that. You know what it is, and I cannot imagine what you can have to say against it. In short, you must let me settle the matter to-morrow with Dame Susannah. You are sure of her daughter's affection, she is the richest heiress in the country, well brought up, and as I said before, she has quite lost her little heart to you."

"And she had better have kept it!" said Orion with a laugh.

Then his mother waxed wroth and exclaimed: "I must beg you to reserve your mirth for a more fitting season and for laughable things. I am very much in earnest when I say: The girl is a sweet, good little creature and will be a faithful and loving wife to you, under God. Or have you left your heart in Constantinople? Has the Senator Justinus' fair relation.—But nonsense! You can hardly suppose that that volatile Greek girl...."

Orion clasped her in his arms, and said tenderly, "No, dearest mother, no. Constantinople lies far, far behind me, in grey mist beyond the farthest Thule; and here, close here, under my father's roof, I have found something far more lovely and more perfect than has ever been beheld by the dwellers on the Bosphorus. That little girl is no match for a son of our stalwart and broad-shouldered race. Our future generations must still tower proudly above the common herd in every respect; I want no plaything for a wife, but a woman, such as you yourself were in youth—tall, dignified and handsome. My heart goes forth to no gold-crested wren but to a really royal maiden.—Of what use to waste words! Paula, the noble daughter of a glorious father, is my choice. It came upon me just now like a revelation; I ask your blessing on my union with her!"

So far had Neforis allowed her son to speak. He had frankly and boldly uttered what she had indeed feared to hear. And so long she had succeeded in keeping silence!—But now her patience gave way. Trembling with anger she abruptly broke in, exclaiming, as her face grew crimson:

"No more, no more! Heaven grant that this which I have been compelled to hear may be no more than a fleeting and foolish whim! Have you quite forgotten who and what we are? Have you forgotten that those were Melchites who slew your two dear brothers—our two noble sons? Of what account are we among the orthodox Greeks? While among the Egyptians and all who confess the saving doctrine of Eutyches, among the Monophysites we are the chief, and we will remain so, and

close our ears and hearts against all heretics and their superstitions. What! A grandson of Menas, the brother of two martyrs for our glorious faith, married to a Melchite! The mere idea is sacrilege, is blasphemy; I can give it no milder name! I and your father will die childless before we consent! And it is for the love of this woman, whose heart is so cold that I shiver only to think of it—for this waif and stray, who has nothing but her ragged pride and the mere scrapings of a lost fortune, which never could compare with ours—for this thankless creature, who can hardly bring herself to bid me, your mother, such a civil good-morning—by Heaven it is the truth—as I can say to a slave—for her that I, that your parents are to be bereft of their son, the only child that a gracious Providence has left to be their joy and comfort? No, no, never! Far be it from me! You, Orion, my heart's darling, you have been a wilful fellow all your life, but you cannot have such a perverse heart as to bring your old mother, who has kept you in her heart these four and twenty years, in sorrow to the grave and embitter your father's few remaining days—for his hours are numbered!—And all for the sake of this cold beauty, whom you have seen for a few hours these last two days. You cannot have the heart to do this, my heart's treasure, no, you cannot!—But if you should in some accursed hour, I tell you—and I have been a tender mother to you all your life-but as surely as God shall be my stay and your father's in our last hour, I will tear all love for you out of my heart like a poisonous weed—I will, though that heart should break!"

Orion put his arms round the excited woman, who lead freed herself from his embrace, laid his hand lightly on her lips and kissed her eyes, whispering in her ear:

"I have not the heart indeed, and could scarcely find it." Then, taking both her hands, he looked straight into her face.

"Brrr!" he exclaimed, "your daredevil son was never so much frightened in his life as by your threats. What dreadful words are these—and even worse were at the tip of your tongue! Mother—Mother Neforis! Your name means kindness, but you can be cruel, bitterly cruel!"

Still he drew her fondly to him, and kissed her hair and brow and cheeks with eager haste, in a vehemence of feeling which came over him like a revulsion after the shock he had gone through; and when they parted he had given her leave to negotiate for little Katharina's hand on his behalf, and she had promised in return that it should be not on the morrow but the day after at soonest. This delay seemed to him a sort of victory and when he found himself alone and reflected on what he had done in yielding to his mother, though his heart bled from the wounds of which he himself knew not the depth, he rejoiced that he had not bound Paula by any closer tie. His eyes had indeed told her much, but the word "Love" had not passed his lips—and yet that was what it came to.—But surely a cousin might be allowed to kiss the hand of a lovely relation. She was a desirable woman—ah, how desirable! —and must ever be: but to quarrel with his parents for the sake of a girl, were she Aphrodite herself, or one of the Muses or the Graces—that was impossible! There were thousands of pretty women in the world, but only one mother; and how often had his heart beat high and won another heart, taken all it had to give, and then easily and quickly recovered its balance.

This time however, it seemed more deeply hit than on former occasions; even the lovely Persian slave for whose sake he had committed the wildest follies while yet scarcely more than a school-boy —even the bewitching Heliodora at Constantinople for whom he still had a tender thought, had not agitated him so strongly. It was hard to give up this Paula; but there was no help for it. To-morrow he must do his best to establish their intercourse on a friendly and fraternal footing; for he could have no hope that she would be content to accept his love only, like the gentle Heliodora, who was quite her equal in birth. Life would have been fair, unutterably fair, with this splendid creature by his side! If only he could take her to the Capital he felt sure that all the world would stand still to turn round and gaze at her. And if she loved him—if she met him open-armed.... Oh, why had spiteful fate made her a Melchite? But then, alas, alas! There must surely be something wrong with her nature and temper; would she not otherwise have been able in two years to gain the love, instead of the

dislike, of his excellent and fond mother?—Well, after all, it was best so; but Paula's image haunted him nevertheless and spoilt his sleep, and his longing for her was not to be stilled.

Neforis, meanwhile, did not return at once to her husband but went to find Paula. This business must be settled on all sides and at once. If she could have believed that her victory would give the invalid unqualified pleasure she would have hastened to him with the good news, for she knew no higher joy than to procure him a moment's happiness; but the Mukaukas had agreed to her choice very reluctantly. Katharina seemed to him too small and childish for his noble son, whose mental superiority had been revealed to him unmistakably and undeniably, in many long discussions since his return, to the delight of his father's heart. "The water-wagtail," though he wished her every happiness, did not satisfy him for Orion. To him, the father, Paula would have been a well-beloved daughter-in-law, and he had often found pleasure in picturing her by Orion's side. But she was a Melchite; he knew too how ill-affected his wife was towards her, so he kept his wish locked in his own breast in order not to vex the faithful companion who lived, thought, and felt for him alone; and Dame Neforis knew or guessed all this, and said to herself that it would cost him his night's rest if he were to be told at once what a concession Orion had made.

With Paula it was different. The sooner she learnt that she had nothing to expect from their son, the better for her.

That very morning she and Orion had greeted each other like a couple of lovers and just now they had parted like a promised bride and bridegroom. She would not again be witness to such vexatious doings; so she went to the young girl's room and confided to her with much satisfaction the happy prospects her son had promised them,—only Paula must say nothing about it till the day after to-morrow.

The moment she entered the room Paula inferred from her beaming expression that she had something to say unpleasant to herself, so she preserved due composure. Her face wore a look of unmoved indifference while she submitted to the overflow of a too-happy mother's heart; and she wished the betrothed couple joy: but she did so with a smile that infuriated Neforis.

She was not on the whole spiteful; but face to face with this girl, her nature was transformed, and she rather liked the idea of showing her, once more in her life, that in her place humility would beseem her. All this she said to herself as she quitted Paula's room; but perhaps this woman, who had much that was good in her, might have felt some ruth, if in the course of the next few hours she could but have looked into the heart of the orphan entrusted to her protection. Only once did Paula sob aloud; then she indignantly dried her tears, and sat for a long time gazing at the floor, shaking her pretty head again and again as though something unheard-of and incredible had befallen her.

At last, with a bitter sigh, she went to bed; and while she vainly strove for sleep, and for strength to pray and be silently resigned, Time seemed to her a wild-beast chase, Fate a relentless hunter, and the quarry he was pursuing was herself.

CHAPTER IV

On the following evening Haschim, the merchant, came to the governor's house with a small part of his caravan. A stranger might have taken the mansion for the home of a wealthy country-gentleman rather than the official residence of a high official; for at this hour, after sunset, large herds of beasts and sheep were being driven into the vast court-yard behind the house, surrounded on three sides by out-buildings; half a hundred horses of choice breed came, tied in couples, from the watering-place; and in a well-sanded paddock enclosed by hurdles, slaves, brown and black, were bringing fodder to a large troop of camels.

The house itself was well-fitted by its unusually palatial size and antique splendor to be the residence of the emperor's viceroy, and the Mukaukas, to whom it all belonged, had in fact held the office for a long time. After the conquest of the country by the Arabs they had left him in possession, and at the present date he managed the affairs of his Egyptian fellow-countrymen, no more in the name of the emperor at Byzantium, but under the authority of the Khaliff at Medina and his great general, Amru. The Moslem conquerors had found him a ready and judicious mediator; while his fellow-Christians and country-men obeyed him as being the noblest and wealthiest of their race and the descendant of ancestors who had enjoyed high distinction even under the Pharaohs.

Only the governor's residence was Greek—or rather Alexandrian-in style; the court-yards and out-buildings on the contrary, looked as though they belonged to some Oriental magnate-to some Erpaha (or prince of a province) as the Mukaukas' forefathers had been called, a rank which commanded respect both at court and among the populace.

The dragoman had not told the merchant too much beforehand of the governor's possessions: he had vast estates, in both Upper and Lower Egypt, tilled by thousands of slaves under numerous overseers. Here in Memphis was the centre of administration of his property, and besides the offices for his private affairs were those he needed as a state official.

Well-kept quays, and the wide road running along the harbor side, divided his large domain from the river, and a street ran along the wall which enclosed it on the north. On this side was the great gate, always wide open by day, by which servants or persons on business-errands made their entrance; the other gate, a handsome portal with Corinthian columns opening from the Nile-quay, was that by which the waterparty had returned the evening before. This was kept closed, and only opened for the family, or for guests and distinguished visitors. There was a guardhouse at the north gate with a small detachment of Egyptian soldiers, who were entrusted with the protection of the Mukaukas' person.

As soon as the refreshing evening breeze came up from the river after the heat of the day there was a stir in the great court-yard. Men, women and girls came trooping out of the retainers' dwellings to breathe the cooler air. Waiting-maids and slaves dipped for water into enormous earthen vessels and carried it away in graceful jars; the free-men of the household rested in groups after the fatigues of the day, chatting, playing and singing. From the slaves' quarters in another court-yard came confused sounds of singing hymns, with the shrill tones of the double pipe and duller noise of the tabor—an invitation to dance; scolding and laughter; the jubilant shouts of a girl led out to dance, and the shrieks of a victim to the overseer's rod.

The servant's gateway, still hung with flowers and wreaths in honor of Orion's recent return, was wide open for the coming and going of the accountants and scribes, or of such citizens as came very willingly to pay an evening call on their friends in the governor's household; for there were always some officials near the Mukaukas' person who knew more than other folks of the latest events in Church and State.

Ere long a considerable number of men had assembled to sit under the deep wooden porch of the head-steward's dwelling, all taking eager part in the conversation, which they would have found very enjoyable even without the beer which their host offered them in honor of the great event of

his young lord's return; for what was ever dearer to Egyptians than a brisk exchange of talk, at the same time heaping ridicule or scorn on their unapproachable superiors in rank, and on all they deem enemies to their creed or their country.

Many a trenchant word and many a witty jest must have been uttered this evening, for hearty laughter and loud applause were incessant in the head steward's porch; the captain of the guard at the gate cast envious and impatient glances at the merry band, which he would gladly have joined; but he could not yet leave his post. The messengers' horses were standing saddled while their riders awaited their orders, there were supplicants and traders to be admitted or turned away, and there were still a number of persons lingering in the large vestibule of the governor's palace and craving to speak with him, for it was well known in Memphis that during the hot season the ailing Mukaukas granted audience only in the evening.

The Egyptians had not yet acquired full confidence in the Arab government, and every one tried to avoid being handed over to its representative; for none of its officials could be so wise or so just as their old Mukaukas. How the suffering man found strength and time to keep an eye on everything, it was hard to imagine; but the fact remained that he himself looked into every decision. At the same time no one could be sure of his affairs being settled out of hand unless he could get at the governor himself.

Business hours were now over; the anxiety caused both by the delay in the rising of the Nile and by the advent of the comet had filled the waiting-rooms with more petitioners than usual. Deputations from town and village magistrates had been admitted in parties; supplicants on private business had gone in one by one; and most of them had come forth content, or at any rate well advised. Only one man still lingered,—a countryman whose case had long been awaiting settlement—in the hope that a gift to the great man's doorkeeper, of a few drachmae out of his poverty might at length secure him the fruit of his long patience—when the chamberlain, bidding him return on the morrow, officiously flung open the high doors that led to the Mukaukas' apartments, to admit the Arab merchant, in consideration of Haschim's gold piece which had come to him through his cousin the dragoman. Haschim, however, had observed the countryman, and insisted on his being shown in first. This was done, and a few minutes later the peasant came out satisfied, and gratefully kissed the Arab's hand.

Then the chamberlain led the old merchant, and the men who followed him with a heavy bale, into a magnificent anteroom to wait; and his patience was put to a severe test before his name was called and he could show the governor his merchandise.

The Mukaukas, in fact, after signifying by a speechless nod that he would presently receive the merchant—who came well recommended—had retired to recreate himself, and was now engaged in a game of draughts, heedless of those whom he kept waiting. He reclined on a divan covered with a sleek lioness' skin, while his young antagonist sat opposite on a low stool, The doors of the room, facing the Nile, where he received petitioners were left half open to admit the fresher but still warm evening-air. The green velarium or awning, which during the day had screened off the sun's rays where the middle of the ceiling was open to the sky, was now rolled back, and the moon and stars looked down into the room. It was well adapted to its purpose as a refuge from the heat of the summer day, for the walls were lined with cool, colored earthenware tiles, the floor was a brightly-tinted mosaic of patterns on a ground of gold glass, and in the circular central ornament of this artistic pavement stood the real source of freshness: a basin, two man's length across, of brown porphyry flecked with white, from which a fountain leaped, filling the surrounding air with misty spray. A few stools, couches and small tables, all of cool-looking metal, formed the sole furniture of this lofty apartment which was brilliantly lighted by numerous lamps.

A light air blew in through the open roof and doors, made the lamps flicker, and played with Paula's brown hair as she sat absorbed, as it seemed, in the game. Orion, who stood behind her, had several times endeavored to attract her attention, but in vain. He now eagerly offered his services to fetch her a handkerchief to preserve her from a chill; this, however, she shortly and decidedly

declined, though the breeze came up damp from the river and she had more than once drawn her peplos more closely across her bosom.

The young man set his teeth at this fresh repulse. He did not know that his mother had told Paula what he had yesterday agreed to, and could not account for the girl's altered behavior. All day she had treated him with icy coldness, had scarcely answered his questions with a distant "Yes," or "No;" and to him, the spoilt favorite of women, this conduct had become more and more intolerable. Yes, his mother had judged her rightly: she allowed herself to be swayed in a most extraordinary manner by her moods; and now even he was to feel the insolence of her haughtiness, of which he had as yet seen nothing. This repellent coldness bordered on rudeness and he had no mind to submit to it for long. It was with deep vexation that he watched every turn of her hand, every movement of her body, and the varying expression of her face; and the more the image of this proud maiden sank into his heart the more lovely and perfect he thought her, and the greater grew his desire to see her smile once more, to see her again as sweetly womanly as she had been but yesterday. Now she was like nothing so much as a splendid marble statue, though he knew indeed that it had a soul—and what a glorious task it would be to free this fair being from herself, as it were, from the foolish tempers that enslaved her, to show her—by severity if need should be—what best beseems a woman, a maiden.

He became more and more exclusively absorbed in watching the young girl, as his mother—who was sitting with Dame Susannah on a couch at some little distance from the players—observed with growing annoyance, and she tried to divert his attention by questions and small errands, so as to give his evident excitement a fresh direction.

Who could have thought, yesterday morning, that her darling would so soon cause her fresh vexation and anxiety.

He had come home just such a man as she and his father could have wished: independent and experienced in the ways of the great world. In the Capital he had, no doubt, enjoyed all that seems pleasant in the eyes of a wealthy youth, but in spite of that he had remained fresh and open-hearted even to the smallest things; and this was what most rejoiced his father. In him there was no trace of the satiety, the blunted faculty for enjoyment, which fell like a blight on so many men of his age and rank. He could still play as merrily with little Mary, still take as much pleasure in a rare flower or a fine horse, as before his departure. At the same time he had gained keen insight into the political situation of the time, into the state of the empire and the court, into administration, and the innovations in church matters; it was a joy to his father to hear him discourse; and he assured his wife that he had learnt a great deal from the boy, that Orion was on the high road to be a great statesman and was already quite capable of taking his father's place.

When Neforis confessed how large a sum in debts Orion had left in Constantinople the old man put his hand in his purse with a sort of pride, delighted to find that his sole remaining heir knew how to spend the immense wealth which to him was now a burden rather than a pleasure—to make good use of it, as he himself had done in his day, and display a magnificence of which the lustre was reflected on him and on his name.

"With him, at any rate," said the old man, "one gets something for the money. His horses cost a great deal but he knows how to win with them; his entertainments swallow up a pretty sum, but they gain him respect wherever he goes. He brought me a letter from the Senator Justinus, and the worthy man tells me what a leading part he plays among the gilded youth of the Capital. All this is not to be had for nothing, and it will be cheap in the end. What need we care about a hundred talents more or less! And there is something magnanimous in the lad that has given him the spirit to feel that."

And it was not a hale old grey-beard who spoke thus, but a broken man, whose only joy it was to lavish on his son the riches which he had long been incapable of enjoying. The high-spirited and gifted youth, scarcely more than a boy in years, whom he had sent to the Capital with no small misgivings, must have led a far less lawless life than might have been expected; of this the ruddy tinge in his sunburnt cheeks was ample guarantee, the vigorous solidity of his muscles, and the thick

waves of his hair, which was artificially curled and fell in a fringe, as was then the fashion, over his high brow, giving him a certain resemblance to the portraits of Antinous, the handsomest youth in the time of the Emperor Hadrian. Even his mother owned that he looked like health itself, and no member of the Imperial family could be more richly, carefully and fashionably dressed than her darling. But even in the humblest garb he would have been a handsome—a splendid youth, and his mother's pride! When he left home there was still a smack of the provincial about him; but now every kind of awkwardness had vanished, and wherever he might go—even in the Capital, he was certain to be one of the first to attract observation and approval.

And what had he not known in his city experience? The events of half a century had followed each other with intoxicating rapidity in the course of the thirty months he had spent there. The greater the excitement, the greater the pleasure was the watchword of his time; and though he had rioted and revelled on the shores of the Bosphorus if ever man did, still the pleasures of feasting and of love, or of racing with his own victorious horses—all of which he had enjoyed there to the full—were as child's play compared with the nervous tension to which he had been strung by the appalling events he had witnessed on all sides. How petty was the excitement of an Alexandrian horse-race! Whether Timon or Ptolemy or he himself should win—what did it matter? It was a fine thing no doubt to carry off the crown in the circus at Byzantium, but there were other and soul-stirring crises there beyond those which were bound up with horses or chariots. There a throne was the prize, and might cost the blood and life of thousands!—What did a man bring home from the churches in the Nile valley? But if he crossed the threshold of St. Sophia's in Constantinople he often might have his blood curdled, or bring home—what matter?—bleeding wounds, or even be carried home—a corpse.

Three times had he seen the throne change masters. An emperor and an empress had been stripped of the purple and mutilated before his eyes.

Aye, then and there he had had real and intense excitement to thrill him to the marrow and quick. As for the rest! Well, yes, he had had more trivial pleasures too. He had not been received as other Egyptians were: half-educated philosophers—who called themselves Sages and assumed a mystic and pompously solemn demeanor, Astrologers, Rhetoricians, poverty-stricken but witty and venemous satirists, physicians making a display of the learning of their forefathers, fanatical theologians—always ready to avail themselves of other weapons than reason and dogma in their bitter contests over articles of faith, hermits and recluses—as foul in mind as they were dirty in their persons, corn-merchants and usurers with whom it was dangerous to conclude a bargain without witnesses. Orion was none of these. As the handsome, genial, and original-minded son of the rich and noble Governor, Mukaukas George, he was welcomed as a sort of ambassador; whatever the golden youth of the city allowed themselves was permitted to him. His purse was as well lined as theirs, his health and vigor far more enduring; and his horses had beaten theirs in three races, though he drove them himself and did not trust them to paid charioteers. The "rich Egyptian," the "New Antinous," "handsome Orion," as he was called, could never be spared from feast or entertainment. He was a welcome guest at the first houses in the city, and in the palace and the villa of the Senator Justinus, an old friend of his father, he was as much at home as a son of the house.

It was under his roof, and the auspices of his kindhearted wife Martina, that he made acquaintance with the fair Heliodora, the widow of a nephew of the Senator; and the whole city had been set talking of the tender intimacy Orion had formed with the beautiful young woman whose rigid virtue had hitherto been a subject of admiration no less than her fair hair and the big jewels with which she loved to set off her simple but costly dress. And many a fair Byzantine had striven for the young Egyptian's good graces before Heliodora had driven them all out of the field. Still, she had not yet succeeded in enslaving Orion deeply and permanently; and when, last evening, he had assured his mother that she was not mistress of his heart he spoke truly.

His conduct in the Capital had not certainly been exemplary, but he had never run wild, and had enjoyed the respect not only of his companions in pleasure, but of grave and venerable men whom

he had met in the house of Justinus, and who sang the praises of his intelligence and eagerness to learn. As a boy he had been a diligent scholar, and here he let no opportunity slip. Not least had he cultivated his musical talents in the Imperial city, and had acquired a rare mastery in singing and playing the lute.

He would gladly have remained some time longer at the Capital, but at last the place grew too hot to hold him-mainly on his father's account. The conviction that George had largely contributed to the disaffection of Egypt for the Byzantine Empire and had played into the hands of the irresistible and detested upstart Arabs, had found increasing acceptance in the highest circles, especially since Cyrus —the deposed and now deceased Patriarch of Alexandria—had retired to Constantinople. Orion's capture was in fact already decided on, when the Senator Justinus and some other friends had hinted a warning which he had acted on just in time.

His father's line of conduct had placed him in great peril; but he owed him no grudge for it —indeed, he most deeply approved of it. A thousand times had he witnessed the contempt heaped on the Egyptians by the Greeks, and the loathing and hatred of the Orthodox for the Monophysite creed of his fellow-countrymen.

He had with difficulty controlled his wrath as he had listened again and again to the abuse and scorn poured out on his country and people by gentle and simple, laymen and priests, even in his presence; regarding him no doubt as one of themselves—a Greek in whose eyes everything "Barbarian" was as odious and as contemptible as in their own.

But the blood of his race flowed in the veins of the "new Antinous" who could sing Greek songs so well and with so pure an accent; every insult to his people was stamped deep in his heart, every sneer at his faith revived his memory of the day when the Melchites had slain his two brothers. And these bloody deeds, these innumerable acts of oppression by which the Greek; had provoked and offended the schismatic Egyptian and hunted them to death, were now avenged by his father. It lifted up his heart and made him proud to think of it. He showed his secret soul to the old man who was as much surprised as delighted at what he found there; for he had feared that Orion might not be able wholly to escape the powerful influences of Greek beguilements;—nay, he had often felt anxious lest his own son might disapprove of his having surrendered to the Arab conquerors the province entrusted to his rule, and concluded a peace with them.

The Mukaukas now felt himself as one with Orion, and from time to time looked tenderly up at him from the draught-board. Neforis was doing her best to entertain the mother of her son's future bride, and divert her attention from his strange demeanor. She seemed indeed to be successful, for Dame Susannah agreed to everything she said; but she betrayed the fact that she was keeping a sharp watch by suddenly asking: "Does your husband's lofty niece not think us worthy of a single word?"

"Oh no!" said Neforis bitterly. "I only hope she may soon find some other people to whom she can behave more graciously. You may depend upon it I will put no obstacle in her way."

Then she brought the conversation round to Katharina, and the widow told her that her brother-in-law, Chrysippus, was now in Memphis with his two little daughters. They were to go away on the morrow, so the young girl had been obliged to devote herself to them: "And so the poor child is sitting there at this minute," she lamented, "and must keep those two little chatter-boxes quiet while she is longing to be here instead."

Orion quite understood these last words; he asked after the young girl, and then added gaily:

"She promised me a collar yesterday for my little white keepsake from Constantinople. Fie! Mary, you should not tease the poor little beast."

"No, let the dog go," added the widow, addressing the governor's little granddaughter, who was trying to make the recalcitrant dog kiss her doll. "But you know, Orion, this tiny creature is really too delicate for such a big man as you are! You should give him to some pretty young lady and then he would fulfil his destiny! And Katharina is embroidering him a collar; I ought not to tell her little secret, but it is to have gold stars on a blue ground."

"Because Orion is a star," cried the little girl. "So she is working nothing but Orions."

"But fortunately there is but one star of my name," observed he. "Pray tell her that Dame Susa."

The child clapped her hands. "He does not choose to have any other star near him!" she exclaimed.

The widow broke in: "Little simpleton! I know people who cannot even bear to have a likeness traced between themselves and any one else.—But this you must permit, Orion—you were quite right just now, Neforis; his mouth and brow might have been taken from his father's face."

The remark was quite accurate; and yet it would have been hard to imagine two men more unlike than the bright youth full of vitality, and the languid old man on the couch, to whom even the small exertion of moving the men was an effort. The Mukaukas might once have been like his son, but in some long past time. Thin grey locks now only covered one half of his bald head, and of his eyes, which, thirty years since, had sparkled perhaps as keenly as Orion's, there was usually nothing, or very little to be seen; for the heavy lids always drooped over them as though they had lost the power to open, and this gave his handsome but deathly-pale face a somewhat owl-like look. It was not morose, however; on the contrary the mingled lines of suffering and of benevolent kindliness resulted in an expression only of melancholy. The mouth and flabby cheeks were as motionless as though they were dead. Grief, anxiety and alarms seemed to have passed over them with a paralysing hand and had left their trace there. He looked like a man weary unto death, and still living only because fate had denied him the grace to die. Indeed, he had often been taken for dead by his family when he had dipped too freely into a certain little blood-stone box to take too many of the white opium-pills, one of which he placed between his colorless lips at long intervals, even during his game of draughts.

He lifted each piece slowly, like a sleeper with his eyes half shut; and yet his opponent could not hold her own against his wary tactics and was defeated by him now for the third time, though her uncle himself called her a good player. It was easy to read in her high, smooth brow and dark-blue eyes with their direct gaze, that she could think clearly and decisively, and also feel deeply. But she seemed wilful too, and contradictory—at any rate to-day; for when Orion pointed out some move to her she rarely took his advice, but with set lips, pushed the piece according to her own, rarely wiser, judgment. It was quite plain that she was refractory under the guidance of this—especially of this counsellor.

The bystanders could not fail to see the girl's repellent manner and Orion's eager attempts to propitiate her; and for this reason Neforis was glad when, just as her husband had finished the third game, and had pushed the men together on the board with the back of his hand, his chamberlain reminded him that the Arab was without, awaiting his pleasure with growing impatience. The Mukaukas answered only by a sign, drew his long caftan of the finest wool closer around him, and pointed to the doors and the open roof. The rest of the party had long felt the chill of the damp night air that blew through the room from the river, but knowing that the father suffered more from heat than from anything, they had all willingly endured the draught. Now, however, Orion called the slaves, and before the strangers were admitted the doors were closed and the roof covered.

Paula rose; the governor lay motionless and kept his eyes apparently closed; he must, however, have seen what was going forward through an imperceptible slit, for he turned first to Paula and then to the other women saying: "Is it not strange?—Most old folks, like children, seek the sun, and love to sit, as the others play, in its heat. While I—something that happened to me years ago—you know;—and it seemed to freeze my blood. Now it never gets warm, and I feel the contrast between the coolness in here and the heat outside most acutely, almost as a pain. The older we grow the more ready we are to abandon to the young the things we ourselves used most to enjoy. The only thing which we old folks do not willingly relinquish is personal comfort, and I thank you for enduring annoyances so patiently for the sake of securing mine.—It is a terrific summer! You, Paula, from the heights of Lebanon, know what ice is. How often have I wished that I could have a bed of snow. To feel myself

one with that fresh, still coldness would be all I wish for! The cold air which you dread does me good. But the warmth of youth rebels against everything that is cool."

This was the first long sentence the Mukaukas had uttered since the beginning of the game. Orion listened respectfully to the end, but then he said with a laugh: "But there are some young people who seem to take pleasure in being cool and icy—for what cause God alone knows!"

As he spoke he looked the girl at whom the words were aimed, full in the face; but she turned silently and proudly away, and an angry shade passed over her lovely features.

CHAPTER V

When the Arab was at last admitted to the governor's presence his attendants unfolded a hanging before him. The giant Masdakite did the chief share of the work; but as soon as the Mukaukas caught sight of the big man, with his bushy, mane-like hair, and a dagger and a battle-axe stuck through his belt, he cried out:

"Away, away with him! That man—those weapons—I will not look at the hanging till he is gone."

His hands were trembling, and the merchant at once desired his faithful Rustem, the most harmless of mortals, to quit the room. The governor, whose sensitive nerves had been liable to such attacks of panic ever since an exiled Greek had once attempted to murder him, now soon recovered his composure, and looked with great admiration at the hanging round which the family were standing. They all confessed they had never seen anything like it, and the vivacious Dame Susannah proposed to send for her daughter and her visitors; but it was already late, and her house was so far from the governor's that she gave that up. The father and son had already heard of this marvellous piece of work, which had formed part of the plunder taken by the Arab conquerors of the Persian Empire at the sack of the "White Tower"—the royal palace of Madam, the capital of the Sassanidze. They knew that it had been originally 300 ells long and 60 ells wide, and had heard with indignation that the Khaliff Omar, who always lived and dressed and ate like the chief of a caravan, and looked down with contempt on all such objects of luxury, had cut this inestimable treasure of art into pieces and divided it among the Companions of the Prophet.

Haschim explained to them that this particular fragment had been the share of the booty allotted to Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law. Haschim himself had seen the work before its dismemberment at Madain, where it hung on the wall of the magnificent throne-room, and subsequently, at Medina.

His audience eagerly requested him to describe the other portions; he, however, seemed somewhat uneasy, looking down at his bare feet which were standing on the mosaic pavement, damp from the fountain; for, after the manner of his nation, he had left his shoes in the outer room. The governor had noticed the old man's gestures as he repeatedly put his hand to his mouth, and while his wife, Orion, and the widow were besieging the merchant with questions, he whispered a few words to one of the slaves. The man vanished, and returned bringing in, by his master's orders, a long strip of carpet which he laid in front of the Arab's brown and strong but delicately-formed feet.

A wonderful change came over the merchant's whole being as this was done. He drew himself up with a dignity which none of those present had suspected in the man who had so humbly entered the room and so diligently praised his wares; an expression of satisfaction overspread his calm, mild features, a sweet smile parted his lips, and his kind eyes sparkled through tears like those of a child unexpectedly pleased. Then he bowed before the Mukaukas, touching his brow, lips and breast with the finger-tips of the right hand to express: "All my thoughts, words and feelings are devoted to you,"—while he said: "Thanks, Son of Menas. That was the act of Moslem."

"Of a Christian!" cried Orion hastily. But his father shook his head gently, and said, slowly and impressively: "Only of a man."

"Of a man," repeated the merchant, and then he added thoughtfully: "Of a man! Yes, that is the highest mark so long as we are what we ought to be The image of the one God. Who is more compassionate than He? And every mother's son who is likewise compassionate, is like him."

"Another Christian rule, thou strange Moslem!" said Orion interrupting him.

"And yet," said Haschim, with tranquil dignity, "it corresponds word for word with the teaching of the Best of men—our Prophet. I am one of those who knew him here on earth. His brother's smallest pain filled his soft heart with friendly sympathy; his law insists on charity, even towards the shrub by the wayside; he pronounces it mortal sin to injure it, and every Moslem must obey him.

Compassion for all is the command of the Prophet....” Here the Arab was suddenly and roughly interrupted; Paula, who, till now, had been leaning against a pilaster, contemplating the hanging and silently listening to the conversation, hastily stepped nearer to the old man, and with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes pointed at him wrathfully, while she exclaimed in a trembling voice-heedless alike of the astonished and indignant bystanders, and of the little dog which flew at the Arab, barking furiously:

“You—you, the followers of the false prophet—you, the companions of the bloodhound Khalid—you and Charity! I know you! I know what you did in Syria. With these eyes have I seen you, and your bloodthirsty women, and the foam on your raging lips. Here I stand to bear witness against you and I cast it in your teeth: You broke faith in Damascus, and the victims of your treachery—defenceless women and tender infants as well as men—you killed with the sword or strangled with your hands. You—you the Apostle of Compassion?—have you ever heard of Abyla? You, the friend of your Prophet—I ask you what did you, who so tenderly spare the tree by the wayside, do to the innocent folk of Abyla, whom you fell upon like wolves in a sheepfold? You—you and Compassionate!” The vehement girl, to whom no one had ever shown any pity, and on whose soul the word had fallen like a mockery, who for long hours had been suffering suppressed and torturing misery, felt it a relief to give free vent to the anguish of her soul; she ended with a hard laugh, and waved her hand round her head as though to disperse a swarm of gadflies.

What a woman!

Orion’s gaze was fixed on her in horror—but in enchantment. Yes, his mother had judged her rightly. No gentle, tender-hearted woman laughed like that; but she was grand, splendid, wonderful in her wrath. She reminded him of the picture of the goddess of vengeance, by Apelles, which he had seen in Constantinople. His mother shrugged her shoulders and cast a meaning glance at the widow, and even his father was startled at the sight. He knew what had roused her; still he felt that he could not permit this, and he recalled the excited girl to her senses by speaking her name, half-reproachfully and half-regretfully, at first quite gently but then louder and more severely.

She started like a sleep-walker suddenly awaked from her trance, passed her hand over her eyes, and said, as she bowed her head before the governor:

“Forgive me, Uncle, I am sorry for what has occurred—but it was too much for me. You know what my past has been, and when I am reminded—when I must listen to the praises even of the wretches to whom my father and brother....”

A loud sob interrupted her; little Mary was clinging to her and weeping. Orion could hardly keep himself from hastening to her and clasping her in his arms. Ah, how well her woman’s weakness became the noble girl! How strongly it drew him to her!

But Paula soon recovered from it; even while the governor was soothing her with kind words she mastered her violent agitation, and said gently, though her tears still quietly flowed: “Let me go to my room, I beg....”

“Good-night, then, child,” said the Mukaukas affectionately, and Paula turned towards the door with a silent greeting to the rest of the party; but the Moslem detained her and said:

“I know who you are, noble daughter of Thomas, and I have heard that your brother was the bridegroom who had come to Abyla to solemnize his marriage with the daughter of the prefect of Tripolis. Alas, alas! I myself was there with my merchandise at the fair, when a maddened horde of my fellow-believers fell upon the peaceful town. Poor child, poor child! Your father was the greatest and most redoubtable of our foes. Whether still on earth or in heaven he yet, no doubt honors our sword as we honor his. But your brother, whom we sent to his grave as a bridegroom—he cursed us with his dying breath. You have inherited his rancor; and when it surges up against me, a Moslem, I can do no more than bow my head and do penance for the guilt of those whose blood runs in my veins and whose faith I confess. I have nothing to plead—no, noble maiden, nothing that can excuse the deed of Abyla. There—there alone it was the fate of my grey hairs to be ashamed of my fellow-

Moslems—believe me, maiden, it was grievous to me. War, and the memory of many friends slain and of wealth lightly plundered had unchained men's passion; and where passion's pinions wave, whether in the struggle for mine and thine or for other possessions, ever since the days of Cain and Abel, it is always and everywhere the same."

Paula, who till now had stood motionless in front of the old man, shook her head and said bitterly:

"But all this will not give me back my father and brother. You yourself look like a kind-hearted man; but for the future—if you are as just as you are kind—find out to whom you are speaking before you talk of the compassion of the Moslems!"

She once more bowed good-night and left the room. Orion followed her; come what might he must see her. But he returned a few minutes after, breathing hard and with his teeth set. He had taken her hand, had tried to tell her all a loving heart could find to say; but how sharply, how icily had he been repulsed, with what an air of intolerable scorn had she turned her back upon him! And now that he was in their midst again he scarcely heard his father express his regrets that so painful a scene should have occurred under his roof, while the Arab said that he could quite understand why the daughter of Thomas should have been betrayed to anger: the massacre of Abyla was quite inexcusable.

"But then," the old man went on, "in what war do not such things take place? Even the Christian is not always master of himself: you yourself I know, lost two promising sons—and who were the murderers? Christians—your own fellow-believers…"

"The bitterest foes of my beliefs," said the governor slowly, and every syllable was a calm and dignified reproof to the Moslem for supposing that the creed of those who had killed his sons could be his. As he spoke he opened his eyes wide with the look of those hard, opaquely-glittering stones which his ancestors had been wont to set for eyes in their portrait statues. But he suddenly closed them again and said indifferently:

"At what price do you value your hanging? I have a fancy to buy it. Name your lowest terms: I cannot bear to bargain."

"I had thought of asking five hundred thousand drachmae," said the dealer. "Four hundred thousand drachmae, and it is yours."

The governor's wife clasped her hands at such a sum and made warning signals to her husband, shaking her head disapprovingly, when Orion, making a great effort to show that he too took an interest in this important transaction, said: "It may be worth three hundred thousand."

"Four hundred thousand," repeated the merchant coolly. "Your father wished to know the lowest price, and I am asking no more than is right. The rubies and garnets in these grapes, the pearls in the myrtle blossoms, the turquoises in the forget-me-nots, the diamonds hanging as dew on the grass, the emeralds which give brilliancy to the green leaves—this one especially, which is an immense stone—alone are worth more."

"Then why do you not cut them out of the tissue?" asked Neforis.

"Because I cannot bear to destroy this noble work," replied the Arab. "I will sell it as it is or not at all." At these words the Mukaukas nodded to his son, heedless of the disapprobation his wife persisted in expressing, asked for a tablet which lay near the chessboard, and on it wrote a few words.

"We are agreed," he said to the merchant. "The treasurer, Nilus, will hand you the payment to-morrow morning on presenting this order."

A fresh emotion now took possession of Orion, and crying: "Splendid! Splendid!" he rushed up to his father and excitedly kissed his hand. Then, turning to his mother, whose eyes were full of tears of vexation, he put his hand under her chin, kissed her brow, and exclaimed with triumphant satisfaction: "This is how we and the emperor do business! When the father is the most liberal of men the son is apt to look small. Meaning no harm, worthy merchant! As far as the hanging is concerned, it may be more precious than all the treasures of Croesus; but you have something yet to give us

into the bargain before you load your camels with our gold: Tell us what the whole work was like before it was divided."

The Moslem, who had placed the precious tablet in his girdle, at once obeyed this request.

"You know how enormous were its length and breadth," he began. "The hall it decorated could hold several thousand guests, besides space for a hundred body guards to stand on each side of the throne. As many weavers, embroiderers and jewellers as there are days in the year worked on it, they say, for the years of a man's life. The woven picture represented paradise as the Persians imagine it —full of green trees, flowers and fruits. Here you can still see a fragment of the sparkling fountain which, when seen from a distance, with its sprinkling of diamonds, sapphires and emeralds, looked like living water. Here the pearls represent the foam on a wave. These leaves, cut across here, belonged to a rose-bush which grew by the fountain of Eden before the evil of the first rain fell on the world.

"Originally all roses were white, but as the limbs of the first woman shone with more dazzling whiteness they blushed for shame, and since then there are crimson as well as white roses. So the Persians say."

"And this—our piece?" asked Orion.

"This," replied the merchant, with a pleasant glance at the young man, "was the very middle of the hanging. On the left you see the judgment at the bridge of Chinvat. The damned were not represented, but only the winged, Fravashi, Genii who, as the Persians believe, dwell one with each mortal as his guardian angel through life, united to him but separable. They were depicted in stormy pursuit of the damned—the miscreant followers of Angramainjus, the evil Spirit, of whom you must imagine a vast multitude fleeing before them. The souls in bliss, the pure and faithful servants of the Persian divinity Auramazda, enter with songs of triumph into the flower-decked pleasure-garden, while at their feet the spirits were shown of those who were neither altogether cursed nor altogether blessed, vanishing in humble silence into a dusky grove. The pure enjoyed the gifts of paradise in peace and contentment.—All this was explained to me by a priest of the Fire-worshippers. Here, you see, is a huge bunch of grapes which one of the happy ones is about to pluck; the hand is uninjured —the arm unfortunately is cut through; but here is a splendid fragment of the wreath of fruit and flowers which framed the whole. That emerald forming a bud—how much do you think it is worth?"

"A magnificent stone!" cried Orion. "Even Heliodora has nothing to equal it.—Well, father, what do you say is its value?"

"Great, very great," replied the Mukaukas. "And yet the whole unmutilated work would be too small an offering for Him to whom I propose to offer it."

"To the great general, Amru?" asked Orion.

"No child," said the governor decidedly. "To the great, indivisible and divine Person of Jesus Christ and his Church."

Orion looked down greatly disappointed; the idea of seeing this splendid gem hidden away in a reliquary in some dim cupboard did not please him: He could have found a much more gratifying use for it.

Neither his father nor his mother observed his dissatisfaction, for Neforis had rushed up to her husband's couch, and fallen on her knees by his side, covering his cold, slender hand with kisses, as joyful as though this determination had relieved her of a heavy burden of dread: "Our souls, our souls, George! For such a gift—only wait—you will be forgiven all, and recover your lost peace!"

The governor shrugged his shoulders and said nothing; the hanging was rolled up and locked into the tablinum by Orion; then the Mukaukas bid the chamberlain show the Arab and his followers to quarters for the night.

CHAPTER VI

Pangs of soul and doubtings of conscience had, in fact, prompted the governor to purchase the hanging and he therefore might have been glad if it had cost him still dearer. The greater the gift the better founded his hope of grace and favor from the recipient! And he had grounds for being uneasy and for asking himself whether he had acted rightly. Revenge was no Christian virtue, but to let the evil done to him by the Melchites go unpunished when the opportunity offered for crushing them was more than he could bring himself to. Nay, what father whose two bright young sons had been murdered, but would have done as he did? That fearful blow had struck him in a vital spot. Since that day he had felt himself slowly dying; and that sense of weakness, those desperate tremors, the discomforts and suffering which blighted every hour of his life, were also to be set down to the account of the Melchite tyrants.

His waning powers had indeed only been kept up by his original vigor and his burning thirst for revenge, and fate had allowed him to quench it in a way which, as time went on, seemed too absolute to his peace-loving nature. Though not indeed by his act, still with his complicity he saw the Byzantine Empire bereft of the rich province which Caesar had entrusted to his rule, saw the Greeks and everything that bore the name of Melchite driven out of Egypt with ignominy—though he would gladly have prevented it—in many places slain like dogs by the furious populace who hailed the Moslems as their deliverers.

Thus all the evil he had invoked on the murderers of his children and the oppressors and torturers of his people had come upon them; his revenge was complete. But, in the midst of his satisfaction at this strange fulfilment of the fervent wish of years, his conscience had lifted up its voice; new, and hitherto unknown terrors had come upon him. He lacked the strength of mind to be a hero or a reformer. Too great an event had been wrought through his agency, too fearful a doom visited on thousands of men! The Christian Faith—to him the highest consideration—had been too greatly imperilled by his act, for the thought that he had caused all this to be calmly endurable. The responsibility proved too heavy for his shoulders; and whenever he repeated to himself that it was not he who had invited the Arabs into the land, and that he must have been crushed in the attempt to repel them, he could hear voices all round him denouncing him as the man who had surrendered his native land to them, and he fancied himself environed by dangers—believing those who spoke to him of assassins sent forth by the Byzantines to kill him.—But even more appalling, was his dread of the wrath of Heaven against the man who had betrayed a Christian country to the Infidels. Even his consciousness of having been, all his life long, a right-minded, just man could not fortify him against this terror; there was but one thing which could raise his quelled spirit: the white pillules which had long been as indispensable to him as air and water. The kind-hearted old bishop of Memphis, Plotinus, and his clergy had forgiveness for all; the Patriarch Benjamin, on the contrary, had treated him as a reprobate sentenced to eternal damnation, though at the time of this prelate's exile in the desert he had hailed the Arabs as their deliverers from the tyranny of the Melchites, and though George had principally contributed to his recall and reinstatement, and had therefore counted on his support. And, although the Mukaukas could clearly see through the secondary motives which influenced the Patriarch, he nevertheless believed that Benjamin's office as Shepherd of souls gave him power to close the Gates of Heaven against any sheep in his flock.

The more firmly the Arabs took root in his land, the wiser their rule, and the more numerous the Egyptian converts from the Cross to the Crescent, the greater he deemed his guilt; and when, after the accomplishment of his work of vengeance—his double treason as the Greeks called it—instead of the wrath of God, everything fell to his lot which men call happiness and the favors of fortune, the superstitious man feared lest this was the wages of the Devil, into whose clutches his hasty compact with the Moslems had driven so many Christian souls.

He had unexpectedly fallen heir to two vast estates, and his excavators in the Necropolis had found more gold in the old heathen tombs than all the others put together. The Moslem Khaliff and his viceroy had left him in office and shown him friendship and respect; the bulaites—[Town councillors]—of the town had given him the cognomen of "the Just" by acclamation of the whole municipality; his lands had never yielded greater revenues; he received letters from his son's widow in her convent full of happiness over the new and higher aims in life that she had found; his grandchild, her daughter, was a creature whose bright and lovely blossoming was a joy even to strangers; his son's frequent epistles from Constantinople assured him that he was making progress in all respects; and he did not forget his parents; for he was never weary of reporting to them, of his own free impulse, every pleasure he enjoyed and every success he won.

Thus even in a foreign land he had lived with the father and mother who to him were all that was noblest and dearest.

And Paula! Though his wife could not feel warmly towards her the old man regarded her presence in the house as a happy dispensation to which he owed many a pleasant hour, not only over the draughts-board.

All these things might indeed be the wages of Satan; but if indeed it were so, he—George the Mukaukas—would show the Evil One that he was no servant of his, but devoted to the Saviour in whose mercy he trusted. With what fervent gratitude to the Almighty was his soul filled for the return of such a son! Every impulse of his being urged him to give expression to this feeling; his terrors and gratitude alike prompted him to spend so vast a sum in order to dedicate a matchless gift to the Church of Christ. He viewed himself as a prisoner of war whose ransom has just been paid, as he handed to the merchant the tablet with the order for the money; and when he was carried to bed, and his wife was not yet weary of thanking him for his pious intention, he felt happier and more light-hearted than he had done for many years. Generally he could hear Paula walking up and down her room which was over his; for she went late to rest, and in the silence of the night would indulge in sweet and painful memories. How many loved ones a cruel fate had snatched from her! Father, brother, her nearest relations and friends; all at once, by the hand of the Moslems to whom he had abandoned her native land almost without resistance.

"I do not hear Paula to-night," he remarked, glancing up as though he missed something. "The poor child has no doubt gone to bed early after what passed."

"Leave her alone!" said Neforis who did not like to be interrupted in her jubilant effusiveness, and she shrugged her shoulders angrily. "How she behaved herself again! We have heard a great deal too much about charity, and though I do not want to boast of my own I am very ready to exercise it—indeed, it is no more than my duty to show every kindness to a destitute relation of yours. But this girl! She tries me too far, and after all I am no more than human. I can have no pleasure in her presence; if she comes into the room I feel as though misfortune had crossed the threshold. Besides! —You never see such things; but Orion thinks of her a great deal more than is good. I only wish she had been safe out of the house!"

"Neforis!" her husband said in mild reproach; and he would have reproved her more sharply but that since he had become a slave to opium he had lost all power of asserting himself vigorously whether in small matters or great.

Ere long the Mukaukas had fallen into an uneasy sleep; but he opened his eyes more frequently than usual. He missed the light footfall overhead to which he had been accustomed for these two years past; but she who was wont to pace the floor above half the night through had not gone to rest as he supposed. After the events of the evening she had indeed retired to her room with tingling cheeks and burning eyes; but the slave-girls, who paid little attention to a guest who was no more than endured and looked on askance by their mistress, had neglected to open her window-shutters after sundown, as she had requested, and the room was oppressively sultry and airless. The wooden shutters felt hot to the touch, so did the linen sheets over the wool mattrasses. The water in her jug,

and even the handkerchief she took up were warm. To an Egyptian all this would have been a matter of course; but the native of Damascus had always passed the summer in her father's country house on the heights of Lebanon, in cool and lucent shade, and the all-pervading heat of the past day had been to her intolerable.

Outside it was pleasant now; so without much reflection she pushed open the shutter, wrapped a long, dark-hued kerchief about her head and stole down the steep steps and out through a little side door into the court-yard.

There she drew a deep breath and spread out her arms longingly, as though she would fain fly far, far from thence; but then she dropped them again and looked about her. It was not the want of fresh air alone that had brought her out; no, what she most craved for was to open her oppressed and rebellious heart to another; and here, in the servants' quarters, there were two souls, one of which knew, understood and loved her, while the other was as devoted to her as a faithful dog, and did errands for her which were to be kept hidden from the governor's house and its inhabitants.

The first was her nurse who had accompanied her to Egypt; the other was a freed slave, her father's head groom, who had escorted the women with his son, a lad, giving them shelter when, after the massacre of Abyla, they had ventured out of their hiding-place, and after lurking for some time in the valley of Lebanon, had found no better issue than to fly to Egypt and put themselves under the protection of the Mukaukas, whose sister had been Paula's father's first wife. She herself was the child of his second marriage with a Syrian of high rank, a relation of the Emperor Heraclius, who had died, quite young, shortly after Paula's birth.

Both these servants had been parted from her. Perpetua, the nurse, had been found useful by the governor's wife, who soon discovered that size was particularly skilled in weaving and who had made her superintendent of the slave-girls employed at the loom; the old woman had willingly undertaken the duties though she herself was free-born, for her first point in life was to remain near her beloved foster-child. Hiram too, the groom, and his son had found their place among the Mukaukas' household; in the first instance to take charge of the five horses from her father's stable which had brought the fugitives to Egypt, but afterwards—for the governor was not slow to discern his skill in such matters—as a leech for all sorts of beasts, and as an adviser is purchasing horses.

Paula wanted to speak with them both, and she knew exactly where to find them; but she could not get to them without exposing herself to much that was unpleasant, for the governor's free retainers and their friends, not to mention the guard of soldiers who, now that the gates were closed, were still sitting in parties to gossip; they would certainly not break up for some time yet, since the slaves were only now bringing out the soldiers' supper.

The clatter in the court-yard was unceasing, for every one who was free to come out was enjoying the coolness of the night. Among them there were no slaves; these had been sent to their quarters when the gates were shut; but even in their dwellings voices were still audible.

With a beating heart Paula tried to see and hear all that came within the ken of her keen eyes and ears. The growing moon lighted up half the enclosure, the rest, so far as the shadow fell, lay in darkness. But in the middle of a large semi-circle of free servants a fire was blazing, throwing a fitful light on their brown faces; and now and again, as fresh pine-cones were thrown in, it flared up and illuminated even the darker half of the space before her. This added to her trepidation; she had to cross the court-yard, as she hoped, unseen; for innocent and natural as her proceedings were, she knew that her uncle's wife would put a wrong construction on her nocturnal expedition.

At first Neforis had begged her husband to assist Paula in her search for her father, of whose death no one had any positive assurance. But his wife's urgency had not been needed: the Mukaukas, of his own free will, had for a whole year done everything in his power to learn the truth as to the lost man's end, from Christian or Moslem, till, many months since, Neforis had declared that any further exertions in the matter were mere folly, and her weak-willed husband had soon been brought to share her views and give up the search for the missing hero. He had secured for Paula, not without some

personal sacrifice, much of her father's property, had sold the landed estates to advantage, collected outstanding debts wherever it was still possible, and was anxious to lay before her a statement of what he had recovered for her. But she knew that her interests were safe in his hands and was satisfied to learn that, though she was not rich in the eyes of this Egyptian Croesus, she was possessed of a considerable fortune. When once and again she had asked for a portion of it to prosecute her search, the Mukaukas at once caused it to be paid to her; but the third time he refused, with the best intentions but quite firmly, to yield to her wishes. He said he was her Kyrios and natural guardian, and explained that it was his duty to hinder her from dissipating a fortune which she might some day find a boon or indeed indispensable, in pursuit of a phantom—for that was what this search had long since become.

[Kyrios: The woman's legal proxy, who represented her in courts of justice. His presence gave her equal rights with a man in the eyes of the Law.]

The money she had already spent he had replaced out of his own coffers.

This, she felt, was a noble action; still she urged him again and again to grant her wish, but always in vain. He laid his hand with firm determination on the wealth in his charge and would not allow her another solidus for the sole and dearest aim of her life.

She seemed to submit; but her purpose of spending her all to recover any trace of her lost parent never wavered in her determined soul. She had sold a string of pearls, and for the price, her faithful Hiram had been able first to make a long journey himself and then to send out a number of messengers into various lands. By this time one at least might very well have reached home with some news, and she must see the freed-man.

But how could she get to him undetected? For some minutes she stood watching and listening for a favorable moment for crossing the court-yard. Suddenly a blaze lighted up a face—it was Hiram's.

At this moment the merry semi-circle laughed loudly as with one voice; she hastily made up her mind—drew her kerchief closer over her face, ran quickly along the darker half of the quadrangle and, stooping low, hurried across the moonlight towards the slaves' quarters.

At the entrance she paused; her heart throbbed violently. Had she been observed? No.—There was not a cry, not a following footstep—every dog knew her; the soldiers who were commonly on guard here had quitted their posts and were sitting with their comrades round the fire.

The long building to the left was the weaving shop and her nurse Perpetua lived there, in the upper story. But even here she must be cautious, for the governor's wife often came out to give her orders to the workwomen, and to see and criticise the produce of the hundred looms which were always in motion, early and late. If she should be seen, one of the weavers might only too probably betray the fact of her nocturnal visit. They had not yet gone to rest, for loud laughter fell upon her ear from the large sheds, open on all sides, which stood over the dyers' vats. This class of the governor's people were also enjoying the cool night after the fierce heat of the day, and the girls too had lighted a fire.

Paula must pass them in full moonshine—but not just yet; and she crouched close to the straw thatch which stretched over the huge clay water-jars placed here for the slave-girls to get drink from. It cast a dark triangular shadow on the dusty ground that gleamed in the moonlight, and thus screened her from the gaze of the girls, while she could hear and see what was going on in the sheds.

The dreadful day of torture ending in a harsh discord was at end; and behind it she looked back on a few blissful hours full of the promise of new happiness;—beyond these lay a long period of humiliation, the sequel of a terrible disaster. How bright and sunny had her childhood been, how delightful her early youth! For long years of her life she had waked every morning to new joys, and gone to rest every evening with sincere and fervent thanksgivings, that had welled from her soul as freely and naturally as perfume from a rose. How often had she shaken her head in perplexed unbelief when she heard life spoken of as a vale of sorrows, and the lot of man bewailed as lamentable. Now

she knew better; and in many a lonely hour, in many a sleepless night, she had asked herself whether He could, indeed, be a kind and fatherly-loving God who could let a child be born and grow up, and fill its soul with every hope, and then bereave it of everything that was dear and desirable—even of hope.

But the hapless girl had been piously brought up; she could still believe and pray; and lately it had seemed as though Heaven would grant that for which her tender heart most longed: the love of a beloved and love-worthy man. And now—now?

There she stood with an inconsolable sense of bereavement—empty-hearted; and if she had been miserable before Orion's return, now she was far more so; for whereas she had then been lonely she was now defrauded—she, the daughter of Thomas, the relation and inmate of the wealthiest house in the country; and close to her, from the rough hewn, dirty dyers' sheds such clear and happy laughter rang out from a troop of wretched slave wenches, always liable to the blows of the overseer's rod, that she could not help listening and turning to look at the girls on whom such an overflow of high spirits and light-heartedness was bestowed.

A large party had collected under the wide palm-thatched roof of the dyeing shed-pretty and ugly, brown and fair, tall and short; some upright and some bent by toil at the loom from early youth, but all young; not one more than eighteen years old. Slaves were capital, bearing interest in the form of work and of children. Every slave girl was married to a slave as soon as she was old enough. Girls and married women alike were employed in the weaving shop, but the married ones slept in separate quarters with their husbands and children, while the maids passed the night in large sleeping-barracks adjoining the worksheds. They were now enjoying the evening respite and had gathered in two groups. One party were watching an Egyptian girl who was scribbling sketches on a tablet; the others were amusing themselves with a simple game. This consisted in each one in turn flinging her shoe over her head. If it flew beyond a chalk-line to which she turned her back she was destined soon to marry the man she loved; if it fell between her and the mark she must yet have patience, or would be united to a companion she did not care for.

The girl who was drawing, and round whom at least twenty others were crowded, was a designer of patterns for weaving; she had too the gift which had characterized her heathen ancestors, of representing faces in profile, with a few simple lines, in such a way that, though often comically distorted, they were easily recognizable. She was executing these works of art on a wax tablet with a copper stylus, and the others were to guess for whom they were meant.

One girl only sat by herself by the furthest post of the shed, and gazed silently into her lap.

Paula looked on and could understand everything that was going forward, though no coherent sentence was uttered and there was nothing to be heard but laughter—loud, hearty, irresistible mirth. When a girl threw the shoe far enough the youthful crowd laughed with all their might, each one shouting the name of some one who was to marry her successful companion; if the shoe fell within the line they laughed even louder than before, and called out the names of all the oldest and dirtiest slaves. A dusky Syrian had failed to hit the mark, but she boldly seized the chalk and drew a fresh line between herself and the shoe so that it lay beyond, at any rate; and their merriment reached a climax when a number of them rushed up to wipe out the new line, a saucy, crisp-haired Nubian tossed the shoe in the air and caught it again, while the rest could not cease for delight in such a good joke and cried every name they could think of as that of the lover for whom their companion had so boldly seized a spoke in Fortune's wheel.

Some spirit of mirth seemed to have taken up his quarters in the draughty shed; the group round the sketcher was not less noisy than the other. If a likeness was recognized they were all triumphant, if not they cried the names of this or that one for whom it might be intended. A storm of applause greeted a successful caricature of the severest of the overseers. All who saw it held their sides for laughing, and great was the uproar when one of the girls snatched away the tablet and the rest fell upon her to scuffle for it.

Paula had watched all this at first with distant amazement, shaking her head. How could they find so much pleasure in such folly, in such senseless amusements? When she was but a little child even she, of course, could laugh at nothing, and these grown-up girls, in their ignorance and the narrow limitations of their minds, were they not one and all children still? The walls of the governor's house enclosed their world, they never looked beyond the present moment—just like children; and so, like children, they could laugh.

"Fate," thought she, "at this moment indemnifies them for the misfortune of their birth and for a thousand days of misery, and presently they will go tired and happy to bed. I could envy these poor creatures! If it were permissible I would join them and be a child again."

The comic portrait of the overseer was by this time finished, and a short, stout wench burst into a fit of uproarious and unquenchable laughter before any of the rest. It came so naturally, too, from the very depths of her plump little body that Paula, who had certainly not come hither to be gay, suddenly caught the infection and had to laugh whether she would or no. Sorrow and anxiety were suddenly forgotten, thought and calculation were far from her; for some minutes she felt nothing but that she, too, was laughing heartily, irrepressibly, like the young healthful human creature that she was. Ah, how good it was thus to forget herself for once! She did not put this into words, but she felt it, and she laughed afresh when the girl who had been sitting apart joined the others, and exclaimed something which was unintelligible to Paula, but which gave a new impetus to their mirth.

The tall slight form of this maiden was now standing by the fire. Paula had never seen her before and yet she was by far the handsomest of them all; but she did not look happy and perhaps was in some pain, for she had a handkerchief over her head which was tied at the top over the thick fair hair as though she had the toothache. As she looked at her Paula recovered herself, and as soon as she began to think merriment was at an end. The slave-girls were not of this mind; but their laughter was less innocent and frank than it had been; for it had found an object which they would have done better to pass by.

The girl with the handkerchief over her head was a slave too, but she had only lately come into the weaving-sheds after being employed for a long time at needle work under two old women, widows of slaves. She had been brought as an infant from Persia to Alexandria with her mother, by the troops of Heraclius, after the conquest of Chosroes II.; and they had been bought together for the Mukaukas. When her little one was but thirteen the mother died under the yoke to which she was not born; the child was a sweet little girl with a skin as white as the swan and thick golden hair, which now shone with strange splendor in the firelight. Orion had remarked her before his journey, and fascinated by the beauty of the Persian girl, had wished to have her for his own. Servants and officials, in unscrupulous collusion, had managed to transport her to a country-house belonging to the Mukaukas on the other side of the Nile, and there Orion had been able to visit her undisturbed as often as fancy prompted him. The slave-girl, scarcely yet sixteen, ignorant and unprotected, had not dared nor desired to resist her master's handsome son, and when Orion had set out for Constantinople —heedless and weary already of the girl who had nothing to give him but her beauty—Dame Neforis found out her connection with her son and ordered the head overseer to take care that the unhappy girl should not "ply her seductive arts" any more. The man had carried out her instructions by condemning the fair Persian, according to an ancient custom, to have her ears cut off. After this cruel punishment the mutilated beauty sank into a state of melancholy madness, and although the exorcists of the Church and other thaumaturgists had vainly endeavored to expel the demon of madness, she remained as before: a gentle, good-humored creature, quiet and diligent at her work, under the women who had charge of her, and now in the common work-shop. It was only when she was idle that her craziness became evident, and of this the other girls took advantage for their own amusement.

They now led Mandane to the fire, and with farcical reverence requested her to be seated on her throne—an empty color cask, for she suffered under the strange permanent delusion that she was the wife of the Mukaukas George. They laughingly did her homage, craved some favor or made

enquiries as to her husband's health and the state of her affairs. Hitherto a decent instinct of reserve had kept these poor ignorant creatures from mentioning Orion's name in her presence, but now a woolly-headed negress, a lean, spiteful hussy, went up to her, and said with a horrible grimace:

"Oh, mistress, and where is your little son Orion?" The crazy girl did not seem startled by the question; she replied very gravely: "I have married him to the emperor's daughter at Constantinople."

"Hey day! A splendid match!" exclaimed the black girl. "Did you know that the young lord was here again? He has brought home his grand wife to you no doubt, and we shall see purple and crowns in these parts!"

These words brought a deep flush into the poor creature's face. She anxiously pressed her hands on the bandage that covered her ears and said: "Really Has he really come home?"

"Only quite lately," said another and more good-natured girl, to soothe her.

"Do not believe her!" cried the negress. "And if you want to know the latest news of him: Last night he was out boating on the Nile with the tall Syrian. My brother, the boatman, was among the rowers; and he went on finely with the lady I can tell you, finely...."

"My husband, the great Mukaukas?" asked Mandane, trying to collect her ideas.

"No. Your son Orion, who married the emperor's daughter," laughed the negress.

The crazy girl stood up, looked about with a restless glance, and then, as though she had not fully understood what had been said to her, repeated: "Orion? Handsome Orion?"

"Aye, your sweet son, Orion!" they all shouted, as loud as though she were deaf. Then the usually placable girl, holding her hand over her ear, with the other hit her tormentor such a smack on her thick lips that it resounded, while she shrieked out loud, in shrill tones:

"My son, did you say? My son Orion?—As if you did not know! Why, he was my lover; yes, he himself said he was, and that was why they came and bound me and cut my ears.—But you know it. But I do not love him—I could, I might wish, I...." She clenched her fists, and gnashed her white teeth, and went on with panting breath:

"Where is he?—You will not tell me? Wait a bit—only wait. Oh, I am sharp enough, I know you have him here.—Where is be? Orion, Orion, where are you?"

She sprang away, ran through the sheds and lifted the lids of all the color-vats, stooping low to look down into each as if she expected to find him there, while the others roared with laughter.

Most of her companions giggled at this witless behavior; but some, who felt it somewhat uncanny and whom the unhappy girl's bitter cry had struck painfully, drew apart and had already organized some new amusement, when a neat little woman appeared on the scene, clapping her plump hands and exclaiming:

"Enough of laughter—now, to bed, you swarm of bees. The night is over too soon in the morning, and the looms must be rattling again by sunrise. One this way and one that, just like mice when the cat appears. Will you make haste, you night-birds? Come, will you make haste?"

The girls had learnt to obey, and they hurried past the matron to their sleeping-quarters. Perpetua, a woman scarcely past fifty, whose face wore a pleasant expression of mingled shrewdness and kindness, stood pricking up her ears and listening; she heard from the water-shed a peculiar low, long-drawn Wheeuh!—a signal with which she was familiar as that by which the prefect Thomas had been wont to call together his scattered household from the garden of his villa on Mount Lebanon. It was now Paula who gave the whistle to attract her nurse's attention.

Perpetua shook her head anxiously. What could have brought her beloved child to see her at so late an hour? Something serious must have occurred, and with characteristic presence of mind she called out, to show that she had heard Paula's signal: "Now, make haste. Will you be quick? Wheeuh! girls—wheeuh! Hurry, hurry!"

She followed the last of the slave-girls into the sleeping-room, and when she had assured herself that they were all there but the crazy Persian she enquired where she was. They had all seen her a

few minutes ago in the shed; so she bid them good-night and left them, letting it be understood that she was about to seek the missing girl.

CHAPTER VII

Paula went into her nurse's room, and Perpetua, after a short and vain search for the crazy girl, abandoned her to her fate, not without some small scruples of conscience.

A beautifully-polished copper lamp hung from the ceiling and the little room exactly suited its mistress both were neat and clean, trim and spruce, simple and yet nice. Snowy transparent curtains enclosed the bed as a protection against the mosquitoes, a crucifix of delicate workmanship hung above the head of the couch, and the seats were covered with good cloth of various colors, fag-ends from the looms. Pretty straw mats lay on the floor, and pots of plants, filling the little room with fragrance, stood on the window-sill and in a corner of the room where a clay statuette of the Good Shepherd looked down on a praying-desk.

The door had scarcely closed behind them when Perpetua exclaimed: "But child, how you frightened me! At so late an hour!"

"I felt I must come," said Paula. "I could contain myself no longer."

"What, tears?" sighed the woman, and her own bright little eyes twinkled through moisture. "Poor soul, what has happened now?"

She went up to the young girl to stroke her hair, but Paula rushed into her arms, clung passionately round her neck, and burst into loud and bitter weeping. The little matron let her weep for a while; then she released herself, and wiped away her own tears and those of her tall darling, which had fallen on her smooth grey hair. She took Paula's chin in a firm hand and turned her face towards her own, saying tenderly but decidedly: "There, that is enough. You might cry and welcome, for it eases the heart, but that it is so late. Is it the old story: home-sickness, annoyances, and so forth, or is there anything new?"

"Alas, indeed!" replied the girl. She pressed her handkerchief in her hands as she went on with excited vehemence: "I am in the last extremity, I can bear it no longer, I cannot—I cannot! I am no longer a child, and when in the evening you dread the night and in the morning dread the day which must be so wretched, so utterly unendurable...."

"Then you listen to reason, my darling, and say to yourself that of two evils it is wise to choose the lesser. You must hear me say once more what I have so often represented to you before now: If we renounce our city of refuge here and venture out into the wide world again, what shall we find that will be an improvement?"

"Perhaps nothing but a hovel by a well under a couple of palm-trees; that would satisfy me, if I only had you and could be free—free from every one else!"

"What is this; what does this mean?" muttered the elder woman shaking her head. "You were quite content only the day before yesterday. Something must have...."

"Yes, must have happened and has," interrupted the girl almost beside herself. "My uncle's son.—You were there when he arrived—and I thought, even I firmly believed that he was worthy of such a reception.—I—I—pity me, for I… You do not know what influence that man exercises over hearts.—And I—I believed his eyes, his words, his songs and—yes, I must confess all—even his kisses on this hand! But it was all false, all—a lie, a cruel sport with a weak, simple heart, or even worse—more insulting still! In short, while he was doing all in his power to entrap me—even the slaves in the barge observed it—he was in the very act—I heard it from Dame Neforis, who is only too glad when she can hurt me—in the very act of suing for the hand of that little doll—you know her—little Katharina. She is his betrothed; and yet the shameless wretch dares to carry on his game with me; he has the face...."

Again Paula sobbed aloud; but the older woman did not know how to help in the matter and could only mutter to herself: "Bad, bad—what, this too!—Merciful Heaven!…" But she presently recovered herself and said firmly: "This is indeed a new and terrible misfortune; but we have known

worse—much, much worse! So hold up your head, and whatever liking you may have in your heart for the traitor, tear it out and trample on it. Your pride will help you; and if you have only just found out what my lord Orion is, you may thank God that things had gone no further between you!" Then she repeated to Paula all that she knew of Orion's misconduct to the frenzied Mandane, and as Paula gave strong utterance to her indignation, she went on:

"Yes, child, he is a man to break hearts and ruin happiness, and perhaps it was my duty to warn you against him; but as he is not a bad man in other things—he saved the brother of Hathor the designer—you know her—from drowning, at the risk of his own life—and as I hoped you might be on friendly terms with him at least, on his return home, I refrained.... And besides, old fool that I am, I fancied your proud heart wore a breastplate of mail, and after all it is only a foolish girl's heart like any other, and now in its twenty-first year has given its love to a man for the first time."

But Paula interrupted her: "I love the traitor no more! No, I hate him, hate him beyond words! And the rest of them! I loathe them all!"

"Alas! that it should be so!" sighed the nurse. "Your lot is no doubt a hard one. He—Orion—of course is out of the question; but I often ask myself whether you might not mend matters with the others. If you had not made it too hard for them, child, they must have loved you; they could not have helped it; but ever since you have been in the house you have only felt miserable and wished that they would let you go your own way, and they—well they have done so; and now you find it ill to bear the lot you chose for yourself. It is so indeed, child, you need not contradict me. This once we will put the matter plainly: Who can hope to win love that gives none, but turns away morosely from his fellow-creatures? If each of us could make his neighbors after his own pattern—then indeed! But life requires us to take them just as we find them, and you, sweetheart, have never let this sink into your mind!"

"Well, I am what I am!"

"No doubt, and among the good you are the best—but which of them all can guess that? Every one to some extent plays a part. And you! What wonder if they never see in you anything but that you are unhappy? God knows it is ten thousand times a pity that you should be! But who can take pleasure in always seeing a gloomy face?"

"I have never uttered a single word of complaint of my troubles to any one of them!" cried Paula, drawing herself up proudly.

"That is just the difficulty," replied Perpetua. "They took you in, and thought it gave them a claim on your person and also on your sorrows. Perhaps they longed to comfort you; for, believe me, child, there is a secret pleasure in doing so. Any one who is able to show us sympathy feels that it does him more good than it does us. I know life! Has it never occurred to you that you are perhaps depriving your relations in the great house of a pleasure, perhaps even doing them an injury by locking up your heart from them? Your grief is the best side of you, and of that you do indeed allow them to catch a glimpse; but where the pain is you carefully conceal. Every good man longs to heal a wound when he sees it, but your whole demeanor cries out: 'Stay where you are, and leave me in peace.'—If only you were good to your uncle!"

"But I am, and I have felt prompted a hundred times to confide in him—but then…"

"Well—then?"

"Only look at him, Betta; see how he lies as cold as marble, rigid and apathetic, half dead and half alive. At first the words often rose to my lips…"

"And now?"

"Now all the worst is so long past; I feel I have forfeited the right to complain to him of all that weighs me down."

"Hm," said Perpetua who had no answer ready. "But take heart, my child. Orion has at any rate learnt how far he may venture. You can hold your head high enough and look cool enough. Bear all that cannot be mended, and if an inward voice does not deceive me, he whom we seek…"

"That was what brought me here. Are none of our messengers returned yet?"

"Yes, the little Nabathaean is come," replied her nurse with some hesitation, "and he indeed—but for God's sake, child, form no vain hopes! Hiram came to me soon after sun-down…"

"Betta!" screamed the girl, clinging to her nurse's arm. "What has he heard, what news does he bring?"

"Nothing, nothing! How you rush at conclusions! What he found out is next to nothing. I had only a minute to speak to Hiram. To-morrow morning he is to bring the man to me. The only thing he told me…"

"By Christ's Wounds! What was it?"

"He said that the messenger had heard of an elderly recluse, who had formerly been a great warrior."

"My father, my father!" cried Paula. "Hiram is sitting by the fire with the others. Fetch him here at once—at once; I command you, Perpetua, do you hear? Oh best, dearest Betta! Come with me; we will go to him."

"Patience, sweetheart, a little patience!" urged the nurse. "Ah, poor dear soul, it will turn out to be nothing again; and if we again follow up a false clue it will only lead to fresh disappointment."

"Never mind: you are to come with me."

"To all the servants round the fire, and at this time of night? I should think so indeed!—But do you wait here, child. I know how it can be managed.

"I will wake Hiram's Joseph. He sleeps in the stable yonder—and then he will fetch his father. Ah! what impatience! What a stormy, passionate little heart it is! If I do not do your bidding, I shall have you awake all night, and wandering about to-morrow as if in a dream.—There, be quiet, be quiet, I am going."

As she spoke she wrapped her kerchief round her head and hurried out; Paula fell on her knees before the crucifix over the bed, and prayed fervently till her nurse returned, Soon after she heard a man's steps on the stairs and Hiram came in.

He was a powerful man of about fifty, with a pair of honest blue eyes in his plain face. Any one looking at his broad chest would conclude that when he spoke it would be in a deep bass voice; but Hiram had stammered from his infancy; and from constant companionship with horses he had accustomed himself to make a variety of strange, inarticulate noises in a high, shrill voice. Besides, he was always unwilling to speak. When he found himself face to face with the daughter of his master and benefactor, he knelt at her feet, looked up at her with faithful, dog-like eyes full of affection, and kissed first her dress, and then her hand which she held out to him. Paula kindly but decidedly cut short the expressions of delight at seeing her again which he painfully stammered out; and when he at length began to tell his story his words came far too slowly for her impatience.

He told her that the Nabathaean who had brought the rumor that had excited her hopes, was not unwilling to follow up the trace he had found, but he would not wait beyond noon the next day and had tried to bid for high terms.

"He shall have them—as much as he wants!" cried Paula. "But Hiram entreated her, more by looks and vague cries than by articulate words, not to hope for too much. Dusare the Nabathaean—Perpetua now took up the tale—had heard of a recluse, living at Raithu on the Red Sea, who had been a great warrior, by birth a Greek, and who for two years had been leading a life of penance in great seclusion among the pious brethren on the sacred Mount of Sinai. The messenger had not been able to learn what his name in the world had been, but among the hermits he was known as Paulus."

"Paulus!" interrupted the girl with panting breath. "A name that must remind him of my mother and of me, yes, of me! And he, the hero of Damascus, who was called Thomas in the world, believing that I was dead, has no doubt dedicated himself to the service of God and of Christ, and has taken the name of Paulus, as Saul, the other man of Damascus did after his con version,—exactly like him! Oh! Betta, Hiram, you will see: it is he, it must be! How can you doubt it?"

The Syrian shook his head doubtfully and gave vent to a long-drawn whistle, and Perpetua clasped her hands exclaiming distressfully: “Did I not say so? She takes the fire lighted by shepherds at night to warm their hands for the rising sun—the rattle of chariots for the thunders of the Almighty! —Why, how many thousands have called themselves Paulus! By all the Saints, child, I beseech you keep quiet, and do not try to weave a holiday-robe out of airy mist! Be prepared for the worst; then you are armed against failure and preserve your right to hope! Tell her, tell her, Hiram, what else the messenger said; it is nothing positive; everything is as uncertain as dust in the breeze.”

The freedman then explained that this Nabathaean was a trustworthy man, far better skilled in such errands than himself, for he understood both Syriac and Egyptian, Greek and Aramaic; and nevertheless he had failed to find out anything more about this hermit Paulus at Tor, where the monks of the monastery of the Transfiguration had a colony. Subsequently, however, on the sea voyage to Holzum, he had been informed by some monks that there was a second Sinai. The monastery there—but here Perpetua again was the speaker, for the hapless stammerer’s brow was beaded with sweat—the monastery at the foot of the peaked, heaven-kissing mountain, had been closed in consequence of the heresies of its inhabitants; but in the gorges of these great heights there were still many recluses, some in a small Coenobium, some in Lauras and separate caves, and among these perchance Paulus might be found. This clue seemed a good one and she and Hiram had already made up their minds to follow it up; but the warrior monk was very possibly a stranger, and they had thought it would be cruel to expose her to so keen a disappointment.

Here Paula interrupted her, crying in joyful excitement:

“And why should not something besides disappointment be my portion for once? How could you have the heart to deprive me of the hope on which my poor heart still feeds?—But I will not be robbed of it. Your Paulus of Sinai is my lost father. I feel it, I know it! If I had not sold my pearls, the Nabathaean.... But as it is. When can you start, my good Hiram?”

“Not before a fort—a fortnight at—at—at—soonest,” said the man. “I am in the governor’s service now, and the day after to-morrow is the great horse-fair at Niku. The young master wants some stallions bought and there are our foals to....”

“I will implore my uncle to-morrow, to spare you,” cried Paula. “I will go on my knees to him.”

“He will not let him go,” said the nurse. “Sebek the steward told him all about it from me before the hour of audience and tried to have Hiram released.”

“And he said…?”

“The lady Neforis said it was all a mere will-o’-the-wisp, and my lord agreed with her. Then your uncle forbade Sebek to betray the matter to you, and sent word to me that he would possibly send Hiram to Sinai when the horse-fair was over. So take patience, sweetheart. What are two weeks, or at most three—and then....”

“But I shall die before then!” cried Paula. “The Nabathaean, you say, is here and willing to go.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Then we will secure him,” said Paula resolutely. Perpetua, however, who must have discussed the matter fully with her fellow-countryman, shook her head mournfully and said: “He asks too much for us!”

She then explained that the man, being such a good linguist, had already been offered an engagement to conduct a caravan to Ctesiphon. This would be a year’s pay to him, and he was not inclined to break off his negotiations with the merchant Hanno and search the deserts of Arabia Petraea for less than two thousand drachmae.

“Two thousand drachmae!” echoed Paula, looking down in distress and confusion; but she presently looked up and exclaimed with angry determination: “How dare they keep from me that which is my own? If my uncle refuses what I have to ask, and will ask, then the inevitable must happen, though for his sake it will grieve me; I must put my affairs in the hands of the judges.”

"The judges?" Perpetua smiled. "But you cannot lay a complaint without your kyrios, and your uncle is yours. Besides: before they have settled the matter the messenger may have been to Ctesiphon and back, far as it is."

Again her nurse entreated her to have patience till the horse-fair should be over. Paula fixed her eyes on the ground. She seemed quite crushed; but Perpetua started violently and Hiram drew back a step when she suddenly broke out in a loud, joyful cry of "Father in Heaven, I have what we need!"

"How, child, what?" asked the nurse, pressing her hand to her heart. But Paula vouchsafed no information; she turned quickly to the Syrian:

"Is the outer court-yard clear yet? Are the people gone?" she asked.

The reply was in the affirmative. The freed servants had retired when Hiram left them. The officials would not break up for some time yet, but there was less difficulty in passing them.

"Very good," said the girl. "Then you, Hiram, lead the way and wait for me by the little side door. I will give you something in my room which will pay the Nabathaean's charges ten times over. Do not look so horrified, Betta. I will give him the large emerald out of my mother's necklace." The woman clasped her hands, and cried out in dismay and warning.

"Child, child! That splendid gem! an heirloom in the family—that stone which came to you from the saintly Emperor Theodosius—to sell that of all things! Nay-to throw it away; not to rescue your father either, but merely—yes child, for that is the truth, merely because you lack patience to wait two little weeks!"

"That is hard, that is unjust, Betta," Paula broke in reprovingly. "It will be a question of a month, and we all know how much depends on the messenger. Do you forget how highly Hiram spoke of this very man's intelligence? And besides—must I, the younger, remind you?—What is the life of man? An instant may decide his life or death; and my father is an old man, scarred from many wounds even before the siege. It may make just the difference between our meeting, or never meeting again."

"Yes, yes," said the old woman in subdued tones, "perhaps you are right, and if I…" But Paula stopped her mouth with a kiss, and then desired Hiram to carry the gem, the first thing in the morning, to Gamaliel the Jew, a wealthy and honest man, and not to sell it for less than twelve thousand drachmae. If the goldsmith could not pay so much for it at once, he might be satisfied to bring away the two thousand drachmae for the messenger, and fetch the remainder at another season.

The Syrian led the way, and when, after a long leave-taking, she quitted her nurse's pleasant little room, Hiram had done her bidding and was waiting for her at the little side door.

CHAPTER VIII

As Hiram had supposed, the better class of the household were still sitting with their friends, and they had been joined by the guide and by the Arab merchant's head man: Rustem the Masdakite, as well as his secretary and interpreter.

With the exception only of Gamaliel the Jewish goldsmith, and the Arab's followers, the whole of the party were Christians; and it had gone against the grain to admit the Moslems into their circle —the Jew had for years been a welcome member of the society. However, they had done so, and not without marked civility; for their lord had desired that the strangers should be made welcome, and they might expect to hear much that was new from wanderers from such a distance. In this, to be sure, they were disappointed, for the dragoman was taciturn and the Masdakite could speak no Egyptian, and Greek very ill. So, after various futile attempts to make the new-comers talk, they paid no further heed to them, and Orion's secretary became the chief speaker. He had already told them yesterday much that was fresh and interesting about the Imperial court; to-day he entered into fuller details of the brilliant life his young lord had led at Constantinople, whither he had accompanied him. He described the three races he had won in the Circus with his own horses; gave a lively picture of his forcing his way with only five followers through a raging mob of rioters, from the palace to the church of St. Sophia; and then enlarged on Orion's successes among the beauties of the Capital.

"The queen of them all," he went on in boastful accents, "was Heliodora—no flute-player nor anything of that kind; no indeed, but a rich, elegant, and virtuous patrician lady, the widow of Flavianus, nephew to Justinus the senator, and a relation of the Emperor. All Constantinople was at her feet, the great Gratian himself sought to win her, but of course, in vain. There is no palace to compare with hers in all Egypt, not even in Alexandria. The governor's residence here—for I think nothing of mere size—is a peasant's hut—a wretched barn by comparison! I will tell you another time what that casket of treasures is like. Its door was besieged day and night by slaves and freedmen bringing her offerings of flowers and fruit, rare gifts, and tender verses written on perfumed, rose-colored silk; but her favors were not to be purchased till she met Orion. Would you believe it: from the first time she saw him in Justinus' villa she fell desperately in love with him; it was all over with her; she was his as completely as the ring on my finger is mine!"

And in his vanity he showed his hearers a gold ring, with a gem of some value, which he owed to the liberality of his young master. "From that day forth," he eagerly went on, "the names of Orion and Heliodora were in every mouth, and how often have I seen men quite beside themselves over the beauty of this divine pair. In the Circus, in the theatre, or sailing about the Bosphorus—they were to be seen everywhere together; and through the hideous, bloody struggle for the throne they lived in a Paradise of their own. He often took her out in his chariot; or she took him in hers."

"Such a woman has horses too?" asked the head groom contemptuously.

"A woman!" cried the secretary. "A lady of rank!—She has none but bright chestnuts; large horses of Armenian breed, and small, swift beasts from the island of Sardinia, which fly on with the chariot, four abreast, like hunted foxes. Her horses are always decked with flowers and ribbons fluttering from the gold harness, and the grooms know how to drive them too!—Well, every one thought that our young lord and the handsome widow would marry; and it was a terrible blow to the hapless Heliodora when nothing came of it—she looks like a saint and is as soft as a kitten. I was by when they parted, and she shed such bitter tears it was pitiable to see. Still, she could not be angry with her idol, poor, gentle, tender kitten. She even gave him her lap-dog for a keepsake—that little silky thing you have seen here. And take my word for it, that was a true love-token, for her heart was as much set on that little beast as if it had been her favorite child. And he felt the parting too, felt it deeply; however, I am his confidential secretary, and it would never do for me to tell tales out of school. He clasped the little dog to his heart as he bid her farewell, and he promised her to send

some keepsake in return which should show her how precious her love had been—and it will be no trifle, that any one may swear who knows my master. You, Gamaliel, I daresay he has been to you about it by this time."

The man thus addressed—the same to whom Hiram was to offer Paula's emerald—was a rich Alexandrian of a happy turn of mind; as soon as the incursion of the Saracens had made Alexandria an unsafe residence, so that the majority of his fellow Israelites had fled from the great port, he had found his way to Memphis, where he could count on the protection of his patron, the Mukaukas George.

He shook his grizzled curls at this question, but he presently whispered in the secretary's ear. "We have the very thing he wants. You bring me the cow and you shall have a calf—and a calf with twelve legs too. Is it a bargain?"

"Twelve per cent on the profits? Done!" replied the secretary in the same tone, with a sly smile of intelligence.

When, by-and-bye, an accountant asked him why Orion had not brought home this fair dame, the bearer too of a noble name, to his parents as their daughter-in-law, he replied that, being a Greek, she was of course a Melchite. Those present asked no better reason; as soon as the question of creed was raised the conversation, as usual in these convivial evenings, became a squabble over dogmatic differences; in the course of it a legal official ventured to opine that if the case had been that of a less personage than a son of the Mukaukas—for whom it was, of course, out of the question—of a mere Jacobite citizen and his Melchite sweetheart, for instance, some compromise might have been effected. They need only have made up their minds each, respectively, to subscribe to the Monothelitic doctrine—though, he, for his part, could have nothing to say to anything of the kind; it was warmly upheld by the Imperial court, and by Cyrus, the deceased patriarch of Alexandria, and was based on the assumption that there were indeed two natures in Christ, but both under the control of one and the same will. By this dogma there were in the Saviour two persons no doubt; still it asserted His unity in a certain qualified sense, and this was the most important point.

Such an heretical proposition was of course loudly disapproved of by the assembled Jacobites; differences of opinion were more and more strongly asserted, and a calm interchange of views turned to a riotous quarrel which threatened to end in actual violence.

This discussion was already beginning when Paula succeeded in slipping unseen across the court-yard.

She silently beckoned to Hiram to follow her; he cautiously took off his shoes, pushed them under the steep servants' stairs, and in a few minutes was standing in the young girl's room. Paula at once opened a chest, and took out a costly and beautifully-wrought necklace set with pearls. This she handed to the Syrian, desiring him to wrench from its setting a large emerald which hung from the middle. The freedman's strong hand, with the aid of a knife, quickly and easily did the work; and he stood weighing the gem, as it lay freed from the gold hemisphere that had held it, larger than a walnut, shining and sparkling on his palm, while Paula repeated the instructions she had already given him in her nurse's room.

The faithful soul had no sooner left his beloved mistress than she proceeded to unplait her long thick hair, smiling the while with happy hope; but she had not yet begun to undress when she heard a knock. She started, flew to the door and hastily bolted it, while she enquired:

"Who is there?"—preparing herself for the worst. "Hiram," was the whispered reply. She opened the door, and he told her that meanwhile the side door had been locked, and that he knew no other way out from the great rambling house whither he rarely had occasion to come.

What was to be done? He could not wait till the door was opened again, for he must carry out her commission quite early in the morning, and if he were caught and locked up for only half the day the Nabathaean would take some other engagement.

With swift decision she twisted up her hair, threw a handkerchief over her head, and said: "Then come with me; the moon is still up; it would not be safe to carry a lamp. I will lead the way and

you must keep behind me If only the kitchen is empty, we can reach the Viridarium unseen. If the upper servants are still sitting in the court-yard the great door will be open, for several of them sleep in the house. At any rate you must go through the vestibule; you cannot miss your way out of the viridarium. But stay! Beki generally lies in front of the tablinum—the fierce dog from Herrionthis in Thebais; and he does not know you, for he never goes out of the house, but he will obey me.

"When I lift my hand, hang back a little. He is quite quiet with his masters, and does not hurt a stranger if they are by. Now, we must not utter another word.—If we are discovered, I will confess the truth; if you alone are seen, you can say—well, say you were waiting for Orion, to speak to him very early about the horse-fair at Niku."

"A horse was off—off—offered me for sale this very day."

"Good, very good; then you lingered in the vestibule to speak of that—to ask the master about it before he should go out. It must be daylight in a few hours.—Now, come."

Paula went down the stairs with a sure and rapid step. At the bottom Hiram again took off his shoes, holding them in his hand, so as to lose no time in following his mistress. They went on in silence through the darkness till they reached the kitchen. Here Paula turned and said to the Syrian:

"If there is any one here, I will say I came to fetch some water; if there is no one I will cough and you can follow. At any rate I will leave the door open, and then you will hear what happens. If I am obliged to return, do you hurry on before me back by the way we came. In that case I will return to my room where you must wait outside till the side door is opened again, and if you are found there leave the explanation to me.—Shrink back, quite into that corner."

She softly opened the door into the kitchen; the roof was open to the light of the declining moon and myriad stars. The room was quite empty: only a cat lay on a bench by the wide hearth, and a few bats flitted to and fro on noiseless wings; a few live coals still glowed among the ashes under the spits, like the eyes of lurking beasts of prey. Paula coughed gently, and immediately heard Hiram's step behind her; then, with a beating heart and agonizing fears, she proceeded on her way. First down a few steps, then through a dark passage, where the bats in their unswerving flight shot by close to her head. At last they had to cross the large, open dining-hall. This led into the viridarium, a spacious quadrangle, paved at the edges and planted in the middle, where a fountain played; round this square the Governor's residence was built. All was still and peaceful in this secluded space, vaulted over by the high heavens whose deep blue was thickly dotted with stars. The moon would soon be hidden behind the top of the cornice which crowned the roof of the building. The large-leaved plants in the middle of the quadrangle threw strange, ghostly shadows on the dewy grass-plot; the water in the fountain splashed more loudly than by day, but with a soothing, monotonous gurgle, broken now and then by a sudden short pause. The marble pillars gleamed as white as snow, and filmy mists, which were beginning to rise from the damp lawn, floated languidly hither and thither on the soft night breeze, like ghosts veiled in flowing crape. Moths flitted noiselessly round and over the clumps of bushes, and the whole quiet and restful enclosure was full of sweetness from the Lotos flowers in the marble basin, from the blossoms of the luxuriant shrubs and the succulent tropical herbs at their feet. At any other time it would have been a joy to pause and look round, only to breathe and let the silent magic of the night exert its spell; but Paula's soul was closed against these charms. The sequestered silence lent a threatening accent to the furious wrangling in the court-yard, which was audible even here in bursts of uproar; and it was with an anxious heart that she observed that everything was not in its usual order; for her sharp eyes could discern no one, nothing, at the entrance to the tablinum, which was usually guarded by an armed sentinel or by the watch-dog; and surely—yes, she was not mistaken—the bronze doors were open, and the moon shone on the bright metal of one half which stood ajar.

She stopped, and Hiram behind her did the same. They both listened with such tension that the veins in their foreheads swelled; but from the tablinum, which was hardly thirty paces from them, came only very faint and intermittent sounds, indistinct in character and drowned by the tumult without.

A few long and anxious minutes, and then the half-closed door was suddenly opened and a man came forth. Paula's heart stood still, but she did not for an instant lose her keenness of vision; she at once and positively recognized the man who came out of the tablinum as Orion and none other, and the big, long-haired dog too came out and past him, sniffed the air and then, with a loud bark, rushed on the two watchers. Trembling and with clenched teeth, but still mistress of herself, she let him come close to her, and then, calling him by his name: "Beki" in low, caressing tones, as soon as he recognized her, she laid her hand on his shaggy head to scratch his ears, as he loved it done.

Paula and her companion were standing behind a column in the deepest shadow. Thus Orion could not see her, and the dog's loud bark had prevented his hearing her coaxing call; so when Beki was quiet and stood still, Orion whistled to him. The obedient and watchful beast, ran back, wagging his tail; and his master, greeting him as "a stupid old cat-hunter," let him spring over his arm, hugged the creature and then pushed him off again in play. Then he closed the door and went into the apartments leading to the courtyard.

"But he must come back this way to go to his own rooms," said Paula to her companion with a sigh of relief. "We must wait. But now we must not lose a minute. Come over to the door of the tablinum. The dog will know me now and will not bark again." They hastened on, and when they had reached the door, which lay in shadow within a deep doorway, Paula asked her companion: "Did you see who the man was who came out?"

"My lord Orion," said Hiram. "He was co—co—coming home from the town when I preceded you across the yard."

"Indeed?" she said with apparent indifference, and as she leaned against the cold metal door-panels she looked back into the garden and thought she was now free to return. She would describe to the freedman the way he must now go—it was quite simple; but she had not had time to do so when, from a room dividing the viridarium from the vestibule she heard first a woman's shrill voice; then the deeper tones of a man; and hardly had they exchanged a few sentences, when every sound was lost in the furious barking of the hound, and immediately after a loud shriek of pain from a woman fell upon her ear, and the noise of a heavy object falling to the ground.

What had happened? It must be something portentous and terrible; of that there could be no doubt; and ere long Paula's fears were justified. Out from the room where the scene had taken place rushed Orion, and with him the dog, across the grass-plot which was usually respected and cherished as holy ground, towards the side of the house facing the river, which was where he and all the family had their rooms.

"Now!" cried Paula, quickly leading the way.

She flew in breathless haste through the first room and into the unguarded hall; but she had not reached the middle of it when she gave a scream, for before her in the moonlight, lay a body, motionless, at full length, on the hard, marble floor.

"Run, Hiram, fly!" she cried to her companion. "The door is ajar—open—I can see it is."

She fell on her knees by the side of the lifeless form, raised the head, and saw—the beautiful, deathlike face of the crazy Persian slave. She felt her hand wet with the blood that had soaked the hapless girl's thick, fair hair, and she shuddered; but she resisted her impulse of horror and loathing, and perceiving some dark stains on the torn peplos she pulled it aside and saw that the white bosom was bleeding from deep wounds made in the tender flesh by the cruel fangs of the hound.

Paula's heart thrilled with indignation, grief and pity. He—he whom she had only yesterday held to be the epitome of every manly perfection—Orion, was guilty of so foul a deed! He, of whose unflinching, dauntless courage she had heard so much, had fled like a coward, and had left the victim to her fate—twice a victim to him!

But something must be done besides lamenting and raging, and wondering how in one human soul there could be room for so much that was noble and fine with so much that was shameful and

cruel. She must save the girl, she must seek help, for Mandane's bosom still faintly rose and fell under Paula's tremulous fingers.

The freedman's brave heart would not allow him to fly to leave her with the injured girl; he flung his shoes on the floor, raised the senseless form, and propped it against one of the columns that stood round the hall. It was not till his mistress had repeated her orders that he hurried away. Paula watched him depart; as soon as she heard the heavy door of the atrium close upon him, heedless of her own suspicious-looking position, she shouted for help, so loudly that her cries rang through the nocturnal silence of the house, and in a few minutes, from this side and that, a slave, a maid, a clerk, a cook, a watchman, came hurrying in.

Foremost of all—so soon indeed that he must have been on his way when he heard her cry—came Orion. He wore a light night-dress, intended, so she said to herself, to give the wretch the appearance of having sprung out of bed. But was this indeed he? Was this man with a flushed face, staring eyes, disordered hair and hoarse voice, that favorite of fortune whose happy nature, easy demeanor, sunny gaze and enchanting song had bewitched her soul? His hand shook as he came close to her and the injured slave; and how forced and embarrassed was his enquiry as to what had happened; how scared he looked as he asked her what had brought her into this part of the house at such an hour.

She made no reply; but when his mother repeated the question soon after, in a sharp voice, she—she who had never in her life told a lie—said with hasty decision: "I could not sleep, and the bark of the dog and a cry for help brought me here."

"I call that having sharp ears!" retorted Neforis with an incredulous shrug. "For the future, at any rate, under similar circumstances you need not be so prompt. How long, pray, have young girls trusted themselves alone when murder is cried?"

"If you had but armed yourself, fair daughter of heroes!" added Orion; but he had no sooner spoken than he bitterly regretted it. What a glance Paula cast at him! It was more than she could bear to hear him address her in jest, almost in mockery: him of all men, and at this moment for the first time—and to be thus reminded of her father! She answered proudly and with cutting sharpness: "I leave weapons to fighting men and murderers!"

"To fighting men, and murderers!" repeated Orion, pretending not to understand the point of her words. He forced a smile; but then, feeling that he must make some defence, he added bitterly: "Really, that sounds like the utterance of a feeble-hearted damsel! But let me beg you to come closer and be calm. These pitiable gashes on the poor creature's shoulder—I care more about her than you do, take my word for it—were inflicted by a four-footed assassin, whose weapons were given by nature. Yes, that is what happened. Rough old Beki keeps watch at the door of the tablinum. What brought the poor child here I know not, but he caught scent of her and pulled her down."

"Or nothing of the kind!" interrupted Neforis, picking up a pair of man's shoes which lay on the ground by the sufferer.

Orion turned as pale as death and hastily took the shoes from his mother's hand; he would have liked to fling them up and away through the open roof. How came they here? Whose were they? Who had been here this night? Before going into the tablinum he had locked the outer door on that side, and had returned subsequently to open it again for the people in the court-yard. It was not till after he had done this that the crazy girl had rushed upon him; she must have been lurking somewhere about when he first went through the atrium but had not then found courage enough to place herself in his way. When she had thrown herself upon him, the dog had pulled her down before he could prevent it: he would certainly have sprung past her and have come to the rescue but that he must thus have betrayed his visit to the tablinum.

It had required all his presence of mind to hurry to his room, fling on his night garments, and rush back to the scene of disaster. When Paula had first called for help he was already on his way, and with what feelings! Never had he felt so bewildered, so confused, so deeply dissatisfied with

himself; for the first time in his life, as he stood face to face with Paula, he dared not look straight into the eyes of his fellow-man.

And now these shoes! The owner must have come there with the crazy girl, and if he had seen him in the tablinum and betrayed what he was doing there, how could he ever again appear in his parents' presence? He had looked upon it as a good joke, but now it had turned to bitter earnest. At any cost he must and would prevent his nocturnal doings from becoming known! Some new wrong-doing-nay, the worst was preferable to a stain on his honor.—Whose could the shoes be? He suddenly held them up on high, crying with a loud voice: "Do these shoes belong to any of you, you people? To the gate-keeper perhaps?"

When all were silent, and the porter denied the ownership, he stood thinking; then he added with a defiant glare, and in a husky voice: "Then some one who had broken into the house has been startled and dropped them. Our house-stamp is here on the leather: they were made in our work-shop, and they still smell of the stable-here, Sebek, you can convince yourself. Take them into your keeping, man; and tomorrow morning we will see who has left this suspicious offering in our vestibule.—You were the first to reach the spot, fair Paula. Did you see a man about?"

"Yes," she replied with a hostile and challenging stare.

"And which way did he go?"

"He fled across the viridarium like a coward, running across the poor, well-kept grass-plot to save time, and vanished upstairs in the dwelling-rooms."

Orion ground his teeth, and a mad hatred surged up in him of this mystery in woman's form in whose power, as it seemed, his ruin lay, and whose eyes mashed with revenge and the desire to undo him. What was she plotting against him? Was there a being on earth who would dare to accuse him, the spoilt favorite of great and small…? And her look had meant more than aversion, it had expressed contempt.... How dare she look so at him? Who in the wide world had a right to accuse him of anything that could justify such a feeling? Never, never had he met with enmity like this, least of all from a girl. He longed to annihilate the high-handed, cold-hearted, ungrateful creature who could humble him so outrageously after he had allowed her to see that his heart was hers, and who could make him quail—a man whose courage had been proved a hundred times. He had to exercise his utmost self-control not to forget that she was a woman.—What had happened? What demon had been playing tricks on him—What had so completely altered him within this half-hour that his whole being seemed subverted even to himself, and that any one dared to treat him so?

His mother at once observed the terrible change that came over her son's face when Paula declared that a man had fled towards the dwelling-rooms; but she accounted for it in her own way, and exclaimed in genuine alarm: "Towards the Nile-wing, the rooms where your father sleeps? Merciful Heaven! suppose they have planned an attack there! Run—fly, Sebek.

"Go across with some armed men! Search the whole house from top to bottom! Perhaps you will catch the rascal—he had trodden down the grass—you must find him—you must not let him escape."

The steward hurried off, but Paula begged the head gardener, who had come in with the rest, to compare the foot-prints of the fugitive, which must yet be visible on the damp grass, with the shoes; her heart beat wildly, and again she tried to catch the young man's eye. Orion, however, started forward and went into the viridarium, saying as he went: "That is my concern."

But he was ashamed of himself, and felt as if something tight was throttling him. In his own eyes he appeared like a thief caught in the act, a traitor, a contemptible rascal; and he began to perceive that he was indeed no longer what he had been before he had committed that fatal deed in the tablinum.

Paula breathed hard as she watched him go out. Had he sunk so low as to falsify the evidence, and to declare that the groom's broad sole fitted the tracks of his small and shapely feet? She hated him, and yet she could have found it in her heart to pray that this, at least, he might not do; and when he came back and said in some confusion that he could not be sure, that the shoes did not seem

exactly to fit the foot-marks, she drew a breath of relief and turned again to the wounded girl and the physician, who, had now made his appearance. Before Neforis followed her example she drew Orion aside and anxiously asked him what ailed him, he looked so pale and upset. He only said with some hesitation: “That poor girl’s fate…” and he pointed to the Persian slave.—“It troubles me.”

“You are so soft-hearted—you were as a boy!” said his mother soothingly. She had seen the moisture sparkling in his eyes; but his tears were not for the Persian, but for the mysterious something —he himself knew not what to call it—that he had forfeited in this last hour, and of which the loss gave him unspeakable pain.

But their dialogue was interrupted: the first misfortune of this luckless night had brought its attendant: the body of Rustem, the splendid and radiantly youthful Rustem, the faithful Persian leader of the caravan, was borne into the hall, senseless. He had made some satirical remark on the quarrel over creeds, and a furious Jacobite had fallen upon him with a log of wood, and dealt him a deep and perhaps mortal wound. The leech at once gave him his care, and several of the crowd of muttering and whispering men, who had made their way in out of curiosity or with a wish to be of use, now hurried hither and thither in obedience to the physician’s orders.

As soon as he saw the Masdakite’s wound he exclaimed angrily:

“A true Egyptian blow, dealt from behind!—What does this mob want here? Out with every man who does not belong to the place! The first things needed are litters. Will you, Dame Neforis, desire that two rooms may be got ready; one for that poor, gentle creature, and one for this fine fellow, though all will soon be over with him, short of a miracle.”

“To the north of the viridarium,” replied the lady, “there are two rooms at your service.”

“Not there!” cried the leech. “I must have rooms with plenty of fresh air, looking out upon the river.”

“There are none but the handsome rooms in the visitor’s quarters, where my husband’s niece has hers, Sick persons of the family have often lain there, but for such humble folk—you understand?”

“No—I am deaf,” replied the physician.

“Oh, I know that,” laughed Neforis. “But those rooms are really just refurnished for exalted guests.”

“It would be hard to find any more exalted than such as these, sick unto death,” replied Philippus. “They are nearer to God in Heaven than you are; to your advantage I believe. Here, you people! Carry these poor souls up to the guests’ rooms.”

CHAPTER IX

"It is impossible, impossible, impossible!" cried Orion, jumping up from his writing-table. He thought of what he had done as a misfortune, and not as a crime; he himself hardly knew how it had all come about. Yes, there must be demons, evil, spiteful demons—and it was they who had led him to so mad a deed.

Yesterday evening, after the buying of the hanging, he had yielded to his mother's request that he should escort the widow Susannah home. At her house he had met her husband's brother, a jovial old fellow named Chrysippus; and when the conversation turned on the tapestry, and the Mukaukas' purpose of dedicating this work of art with all the gems worked into it, to the Church, the old man had clasped his hands, fully sharing Orion's disapproval, and had exclaimed laughing "What, you the son, and is not even a part of the precious stones to fall to your share? Why Katharina? Just a little diamond, a tiny opal might well add to the earthly happiness of the young, though the old must lay up treasure in heaven.—Do not be a fool! The Church's maw is full enough, and really a mouthful is your due."

And then they drank a good deal of fine wine, till at last the older man had accompanied Orion home, to stretch his limbs in the cool night air. A litter was carried behind him for him to return in, and all the way he had continued to persuade the youth to induce his father not to fling the whole treasure into the jaws of the Church, but to spare him a few stones at least for a more pleasing use. They had laughed over it a good deal, and Orion in his heart had thought Chrysippus very right, and had remembered Heliodora, and her love of large, handsome gems, and the keepsake he owed her. But that neither his father nor his mother would remove a single stone, and that the whole hanging would be dedicated, was beyond a doubt; at the same time, some of this superfluous splendor was in fact his due as their son, and a prettier gift to Heliodora than the large emerald could not be imagined. Yes—and she should have it! How delighted she would be! He even thought of the chief idea for the verses to accompany the gift.

He had the key of the tablinum, in which the work was lying, about his person; and when, on his return, he found the servants still sitting round the fire, he shut the door of the out-buildings while a feeling came over him which he remembered having experienced last on occasions when he and his brothers had robbed a forbidden fruit-tree. He was on the point of giving up his mad project; and when, in the tablinum itself, a horrible inward tremor again came over him he had actually turned to retreat—but he remembered old Chrysippus and his prompts. To turn and fly now would be cowardice. Heliodora must have the large emerald, and with his verses; his father might give away all the rest as he pleased. When he was kneeling in front of the work with his knife in his hand, that sickening terror had come over him for the third time; if the large emerald had not come off into his hand at the first effort he would certainly have rolled the bale up again and have left the tablinum clean-handed. But the evil demon had been at his elbow, had thrust the gem into his hand, as it were, so that two cuts with the knife had sufficed to displace it from its setting. It rolled into his hand and he felt its noble weight; he cast aside all care, and had thought no more with anything but pleasure of this splendid trick, which he would relate to-morrow to old Chrysippus—of course under seal of secrecy.

But now, in the sober light of day, how different did this mad, rash deed appear; how heavily had he already been punished; what consequences might it not entail? His hatred of Paula grew every minute: she had certainly seen all that had happened and would not hesitate to betray him—that she had shown last night. War, as it were, was declared between them, and he vowed to himself, with fire in his eyes, that he would not shirk it! At the same time he could not deny that she had never looked handsomer than when she stood, with hair half undone, confronting him—threatening him. "It is to be love or hate between us." he muttered to himself. "No half-measures: and she has chosen hate! Good! Hitherto I have only had to fight against men; but this bold, hard, and scornful maiden,

who rejects every gentle feeling, is no despicable foe. She has me at bay. If she does her worst by me I will return it in kind!—And who is the owner of the shoes? I have taken all possible means to find him. Shameful, shameful! that I cannot hold up my head to look boldly at my own face in the glass. Heliodora is a sweet creature, an angel of kindness. She loved me truly; but this—this—Ah; even for her, this is too great a sacrifice!"

He pressed his hand to his brow and flung himself on a divan. He might well be weary, for he had not closed his eyes for more than thirty hours and had already done much business that morning. He had given orders to Sebek the house-steward and to the captain of the Egyptian guard to hunt out the owner of the sandals by the aid of the dogs, and to cast him into prison; next he had of his own accord—since his father generally did not fall asleep till the morning and had not yet left his room—tried to pacify the Arab merchant with regard to the mishap that had befallen his head man under the governor's roof; but with small success.

Finally the young man had indulged his desire to compose a few lines addressed to the fair Heliodora—for there was no form of physical or mental effort to which he was not trained. He had not lost the idea that had occurred to him yesterday before his theft in the tablinum, and to put it into verse was in his present mood an easy task. He wrote as follows:

"'Like liketh like' saith the saw; and like to like is but fitting.
Yet, in the hardest of gems thy soft nature rejoices?
Nay, but if noble and rare, if its beauty is priceless,
Then, Heliodora, the stone is like thee—akin to thy beauty.
Thus let this emerald please thee;—and know that the fire
That fills it with light burns more fierce in the heart of thy Friend."

He penned the lines rapidly; and as he did so he felt, he knew not why, an excited thrill, as though every word he threw off was a blow aimed at Paula. Last night he had intended to send the costly jewel to the handsome widow in a suitable setting; but now it would be madly imprudent to order such a thing. He must send it away at once; he had hastened to pack it up with the verses, with his own hand, and entrusted it to Chusar, a horsedealer's groom from Constantinople, who had brought his Pannonian steeds to Memphis. He had himself seen off this trustworthy messenger, who could speak no Egyptian and very little Greek, and when his horse was lost to sight in the dust of the road leading to Alexandria he had returned home in a calmer mood. Ships were constantly putting to sea from that port for Constantinople, and Chusar was enjoined to sail by the first that should be leaving. At least the odious deed should not have been committed in vain; and yet he would have given a year of his life if now he could but know that it had never been done.

"Impossible!" and "Curse it!" were the words he had most frequently repeated in the course of his retrospect during the past night and morning. How he had had to rush and hurry under the broiling sun! and the sense of being compelled to do so for mere concealment's sake seemed to him—who had never in his life before done anything that he could not justify in the eyes of honest men—so humiliating, that it brought the sweat to his burning brow. He—Orion—to dread discovery as a thief! It was inconceivable, and he was afraid, positively afraid for the first time since his boyhood. His fortunate star, which in the Capital had shone on him so brightly and benevolently, seemed to have proved faithless in this ruinous hole! What had that Persian girl taken into her crazy head that she must rush upon him like some furious beast of prey? He had been bound to her once, no doubt, by a transient passion—and what youth of his age was blind to the charms of a pretty slave-girl? She had been a lovely child, and it was a vexation, nay a grief to him, that she should have been so shamefully punished. If she should recover, and he could have prayed that she might, it would of course be his part to provide for her—of course. To be just, he could not but confess that she indeed had good reason to hate him: but Paula? He had shown her nothing but kindness and yet how unhesitatingly,

how openly she had displayed her enmity. He could see her now with the name “murderer” on her quivering lips; the word had stung him like a lance-thrust. What a hideous, degrading and unjust accusation lay in that exclamation! Should he submit to it unrevenged?

Was she as innocent as she was haughty and cold? What was she doing in the viridarium at midnight?—For she must have been there before that ill-starred dog flew at Mandane. An assignation with the owner of the shoes his mother had found was out of the question, for they belonged to some man about the stables. Love, thought he, for a wonder had nothing to do with it; but as he came in he had noticed a man crossing the court-yard who looked like Paula’s freedman, Hiram the trainer. Probably she had arranged a meeting with her stammering friend in order—in order?—Well, there was but one thing that seemed likely: She was plotting to fly from his parents’ house and needed this man’s assistance.

He had seen within a few hours of his return that his mother did not make life sweet to the girl, and yet his father had very possibly opposed her wish to seek another home. But why should she avoid and hate him? In that expedition on the river and on their way home he could have sworn that she loved him, and the remembrance of those hours brought her near to him again, and wiped out his schemes of vengeance against her, of punishment to be visited on her. Then he thought of little Katharina whom his mother intended him to marry, and at the thought he laughed softly to himself. In the Imperial gardens at Constantinople he had once seen a strange Indian bird, with a tiny body and head and an immensely long tail, shining like silver and mother of pearl. This was Katharina! She herself a mere nothing; but then her tail! vast estates and immense sums of money; and this—this was all his mother saw. But did he need more than he had? How rich his father must be to spend so large a sum on an offering to the Church as heedlessly as men give alms to a beggar.

Katharina—and Paula!

Yes, the little girl was a bright, brisk creature; but then Thomas’ daughter—what power there was in her eye, what majesty in her gait, how—how—how enchanting her—her voice could be—her voice....

He was asleep, worn out by heat and fatigue; and in a dream he saw Paula lying on a couch strewn with roses while all about her sounded wonderful heart-ensnaring music; and the couch was not solid but blue water, gently moving: he went towards her and suddenly a large black eagle swooped down on him, flapped his wings in his face and when, half-blinded, he put his hand to his eyes the bird pecked the roses as a hen picks millet and barley. Then he was angry, rushed at the eagle, and tried to clutch him with his hands; but his feet seemed rooted to the ground, and the more he struggled to move freely the more firmly he was dragged backwards. He fought like a madman against the hindering force, and suddenly it released him. He was still under this impression when he woke, streaming with perspiration, and opened his eyes. By his couch stood his mother who had laid her hand on his feet to rouse him.

She looked pale and anxious and begged him to come quickly to his father who was much disturbed, and wished to speak with him. Then she hurried away.

While he hastily arranged his hair and had his shoes clasped he felt vexed that, under the influence of that foolish dream, and still half asleep, he had let his mother go before ascertaining what the circumstances were that had given rise to his father’s anxiety. Had it anything to do with the incidents of the past night? No.—If he had been suspected his mother would have told him and warned him. It must refer to something else. Perhaps the old merchant’s stalwart headman had died of his wounds, and his father wished to send him—Orion—across the Nile to the Arab viceroy to obtain forgiveness for the murder of a Moslem, actually within the precincts of the governor’s house. This fatal blow might indeed entail serious consequences; however, the matter might very likely be quite other than this.

When he left his room the brooding heat that filled the house struck him as peculiarly oppressive, and a painful feeling, closely resembling shame, stole over him as he crossed the

viridarium, and glanced at the grass from which—thanks to Paula's ill-meant warning—he had carefully brushed away his foot-marks before daybreak. How cowardly, how base, it all was The best of all in life: honor, self-respect, the proud consciousness of being an honest man—all staked and all lost for nothing at all! He could have slapped his own face or cried aloud like a child that has broken its most treasured toy. But of what use was all this? What was done could not be undone; and now he must keep his wits about him so as to remain, in the eyes of others at least, what he had always been, low as he had fallen in his own.

It was scorchingly hot in the enclosed garden-plot, surrounded by buildings, and open to the sun; not a human creature was in sight; the house seemed dead. The gaudy flag-staffs and trellis-work, and the pillars of the verandah, which had all been newly painted in honor of his return and were still wreathed with garlands, exhaled a smell, to him quite sickening, of melting resin, drying varnish and faded flowers. Though there was no breath of air the atmosphere quivered, as it seemed from the fierce rays of the sun, which were reflected like arrows from everything around him. The butterflies and dragonflies appeared to Orion to move their wings more languidly as they hovered over the plants and flowers, the very fountain danced up more lazily and not so high as usual: everything about him was hot, sweltering, oppressive; and the man who had always been so independent and looked up to, who for years had been free to career through life uncontrolled, and guarded by every good Genius now felt trammelled, hemmed in and harassed.

In his father's cool fountain-room he could breathe more freely; but only for a moment. The blood faded from his cheeks, and he had to make a strong effort to greet his father calmly and in his usual manner; for in front of the divan where the governor commonly reclined, lay the Persian hanging, and close by stood his mother and the Arab merchant. Sebek, the steward awaited his master's orders, in the background in the attitude of humility which was torture to his old back, but in which he was never required to remain: Orion now signed to him to stand up:

The Arab's mild features wore a look of extreme gravity, and deep vexation could be read in his kindly eyes. As the young man entered he bowed slightly; they had already met that morning. The Mukaukas, who was lying deathly pale with colorless lips, scarcely opened his eyes at his son's greeting. It might have been thought that a bier was waiting in the next room and that the mourners had assembled here.

The piece of work was only half unrolled, but Orion at once saw the spot whence its crowning glory was now missing—the large emerald which, as he alone could know, was on its way to Constantinople. His theft had been discovered. How fearful, how fatal might the issue be!

"Courage, courage!" he said to himself. "Only preserve your presence of mind. What profit is life with loss of honor? Keep your eyes open; everything depends on that, Orion!"

He succeeded in hastily collecting his thoughts, and exclaimed in a voice which lacked little of its usual eager cheerfulness:

"How dismal you all look! It is indeed a terrible disaster that the dog should have handled the poor girl so roughly, and that our people should have behaved so outrageously; but, as I told you this morning, worthy Merchant, the guilty parties shall pay for it with their lives. My father, I am sure, will agree that you should deal with them according to your pleasure, and our leech Philippus, in spite of his youth, is a perfect Hippocrates I can assure you! He will patch up the fine fellow—your head-man I mean, and as to any question of compensation, my father—well, you know he is no haggler."

"I beg you not to add insult to the injury that I have suffered under your roof," interrupted Haschim. "No amount of money can buy off my wrath over the spilt blood of a friend—and Rustem was my friend—a free and valiant youth. As to the punishment of the guilty: on that I insist. Blood cries for blood. That is our creed; and though yours, to be sure, enjoins the contrary, so far as I know you act by the same rule as we. All honor to your physician; but it goes to my heart, and raises my gall to see such things take place in the house of the man to whom the Khaliff has confided the weal or

woe of Egyptian Christians. Your boasted tolerance has led to the death of an honest though humble man in a time of perfect peace—or at least maimed him for life. As to your honesty, it would seem…"

"Who dares impugn it?" cried Orion.

"I, young man," replied the merchant with the calm dignity of age. "I, who sold this piece of work last evening, and find it this morning robbed of its most precious ornament."

"The great emerald has been cut from the hanging during the night." Dame Neforis explained. "You yourself went with the man who carried it to the tablinum and saw it laid there."

"And in the very cloth in which your people had wrapped it," added Orion. "Our good old Sebek there was with me. Who fetched away the bale this morning; who brought it here and opened it?"

"Happily for us," said the Arab, "it was your lady mother herself, with that man—your steward if I mistake not—and your own slaves."

"Why was it not left where it was?" asked Orion, giving vent to the annoyance which at this moment he really felt.

"Because I had assured your father, and with good reason, that the beauty of this splendid work and of the gems that decorate it show to much greater advantage by daylight and in the sunshine than under the lamps and torches."

"And besides, your father wished to see his new purchase once more," Neforis broke in, "and to ask the merchant how the gems might be removed without injury to the work itself. So I went to the tablinum myself with Sebek."

"But I had the key!" cried Orion putting his hand into the breast of his robe.

"That I had forgotten," replied his mother. "But unfortunately we did not need it. The tablinum was open."

"I locked it yesterday; you saw me do it, Sebek…"

"So I told the mistress," replied the steward. "I perfectly recollect hearing the snap of the strong lock."

Orion shrugged his shoulders, and his mother went on:

"But the bronze doors must have been opened during the night with a false key, or by some other means; for part of the hanging had been pulled out of the wrapper, and when we looked closely we saw that the large emerald had been wrenched out of the setting."

"Shameful!" exclaimed Orion.

"Disgraceful!" added the governor, vehemently starting up. He had fallen a prey to fearful unrest and horror: he thought that his Lord and Saviour, to whom he had dedicated the precious jewel, regarded him as so sinful and worthless that He would not accept the gift at his hands. But perhaps it was only Satan striving to hinder him from approaching the Most High with so noble an offering. At any rate, human cunning had been at work, so he said with stern resolution:

"The matter shall be enquired into, and in the name of Jesus Christ, to whom the stone already belongs, I will never rest nor cease till the criminal is in my hands."

"And in the name of Allah and the Prophet," added the Arab, "I will aid thee, if I have to appeal for help to the great chief Amru, the Khaliff's representative in this country.—A word was spoken here just now that I cannot and will not forget. And the tone you have chosen to adopt, young man, seems to spring from the same fount: the old fox, you think, put a false gem of impossible size into the hanging, and has had it stolen that his fraud may not be detected when a jeweller examines the work by daylight. This is too much! I am an honest man, Sirs, and I am fain to add a rich one; and the man who tries to cast a stain on the character I have borne through a long life shall learn, to his ruing, that old Haschim has greater and more powerful friends to back him than you may care to meet!"

As he uttered this threat the merchant's eyes glistened through tears; it grieved him to be unjustly suspected and to be forced to express himself so hardly to the Mukaukas for whom he felt both reverence and pity. It was clear from the tone of his speech that he was in fact a determined and

a powerful personage, and Orion interrupted him with the eager enquiry: “Who has dared to think so basely of you?”

“Your own mother, I regret to say,” replied the Moslem sadly, with an oriental shrug of distress and annoyance—his shoulders up to his ears.

“Forget it, I beg of you,” said the governor. “God knows women have softer hearts than men, and yet they more readily incline to think evil of their fellow-creatures, and particularly of the enemies of their faith. On the other hand they are more sensitive to kindness. A woman’s hair is long and her wits short, says the saw.”

“You have plenty to say against us women!” retorted Neforis. “But scold away—scold if it is a comfort to you!” But she added, while she affectionately turned her husband’s pillows and gave him another of his white pillules: “I will submit to the worst to-day for I am in the wrong. I have already asked your pardon, worthy Haschim, and I do so again, with all my heart.”

As she spoke, she went up to the Arab and held out her hand; he took it, but lightly, however, and quickly released it, saying:

“I do not find it hard to forgive. But I find it impossible, here or anywhere, to let so much as a grain of dust rest on my bright good name. I shall follow up this affair, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.—And now, one question: Is the dog that guarded the tablinum a watchful, savage beast?”

“How savage he is he unfortunately proved on the person of the poor Persian slave; and his watchfulness is known to all the household,” cried Orion.

“But I would beg you, worthy merchant,” said Neforis, “and in the name of all present, to give us the help of your experience. I myself—wait a little wait: in spite of her long hair and her short wits a woman often has a happy idea. I, probably, was the first to come on the robber’s track. It is clear that he must belong to the household since the dog did not attack him. Paula, who was so wonderfully quick in coming to the rescue of the Persian, is of course not to be thought of…”

Here her husband interrupted her with an angry exclamation: “Leave the girl quite out of the question wife!”

“As if I supposed her to be the thief!” retorted Neforis indignantly, and she shrugged her shoulders as Orion, in mild reproach, also cried: “Mother! consider…” and the merchant asked:

“Do you mean the young girl from whom I had to take such hard words last night?—Well, then, I will stake my whole fortune on her innocence. That beautiful, passionate creature is incapable of any underhand dealings.”

“Passionate!” Neforis smiled. “Her heart is as cold and as hard as the lost emerald; we have proved that by experience.”

“Nevertheless,” said Orion, “she is incapable of baseness.”

“How zealous men can be for a pair of fine eyes!” interrupted his mother. “But I have not the most remote suspicion of her; I have something quite different in my mind. A pair of man’s shoes were found lying by the wounded girl. Did you do what my lord Orion ordered, Sebek?”

“At once, Mistress,” replied the steward, “and I have been expecting the captain of the watch for some time; for Psamtik....”

But here he was interrupted: the officer in question, who for more than twenty years had commanded the Mukaukas’ guard of honor, was shown into the room; after answering a few preliminary enquiries he began his report in a voice so loud that it hurt the governor, and his wife was obliged to request the soldier to speak more gently.

The bloodhounds and terriers had been let out after being allowed to smell at the shoes, and a couple of them had soon found their way to the side-door where Hiram had waited for Paula. There they paused, sniffing about on all sides, and had then jumped up a few steps.

“And those stairs lead to Paula’s room,” observed Neforis with a shrug.

"But they were on a false scent," the officer eagerly added. "The little toads might have thrown suspicion on an innocent person. The curs immediately after rushed into the stables, and ran up and down like Satan after a lost soul. The pack had soon pulled down the boy—the son of the freedman who came here from Damascus with the daughter of the great Thomas—and they went quite mad in his father's room: Heaven and earth! what a howling and barking and yelping. They poked their noses into every old rag, and now we knew where the hole in the wine-skin was.—I am sorry for the man. He stammered horribly, but as a trainer, and in all that has to do with horses, all honor to him! —The shoes are Hiram's as surely as my eyes are in my head; but we have not caught him yet. He is across the river, for a boat is missing and where it had been lying the dogs began again. Unless the unbelievers over there give him shelter we are certain to have him."

"Then we know who is the criminal!" cried Orion, with a sigh as deep as though some great burden were lifted from his soul. Then he went on in a commanding tone—and his voice rang so fiercely that the color which had mounted to his cheeks could hardly be due to satisfaction at this last good news....

"As it is not yet two hours after noon, send all your men out to search for him and deliver him up. My father will give you a warrant, and the Arabs on the other shore will assist you. Perhaps the thief may fall into our hands even sooner and with him the emerald, unless the rogue has succeeded in hiding it or selling it." Then his voice sank, and he added in a tone of regret. "It is a pity as concerns the man, we had not one in our stables who knew more about horses! Fresh proof of your maxim, mother: if you want to be well served you must buy rascals!"

"Strictly speaking," said Neforis meditatively, "Hiram is not one of our people. He was a freedman of Thomas' and came here with his daughter. Every one speaks highly of his skill in the stable; but for this robbery we might have kept him for the rest of his life still, if the girl had ever taken it into her head to leave us and to take him with her, we could not have detained him.—You may say what you will, and abuse me and mock me; I have none of what you call imagination; I see things simply as they are: but there must be some understanding between that girl and the thief."

"You are not to say another word of such monstrous nonsense!" exclaimed her husband; and he would have said more, but that at that moment the groom of the chambers announced that Gamaliel, the Jewish goldsmith, begged an audience. The man had come to give information with regard to the fate of the lost emerald.

At this statement Orion changed color, and he turned away from the merchant as the slave admitted the same Israelite who had been sitting over the fire with the head-servants. He at once plunged into his story, telling it in his peculiar light-hearted style. He was so rich that the loss he might suffer did not trouble him enough to spoil his good-humor, and so honest that it was a pleasure to him to restore the stolen property to its rightful owner. Early that morning, so he told them, Hiram the groom had been to him to offer him a wonderfully large and splendid emerald for sale. The freedman had assured him that the stone was part of the property left by the famous Thomas, his former master. It had decorated the head-stall of the horse which the hero of Damascus had last ridden, and it had come to him with the steed.

"I offered him what I thought fair," the Jew went on, "and paid him two thousand drachmae on account; the remainder he begged me to take charge of for the present. To this I agreed, but ere long a fly began to hum suspicion in my ear. Then the police rushed through the town with the bloodhounds. Good Heavens, what a barking! The creatures yelped as if they would bark my poor house down, like the trumpets round the walls of Jericho—you know. 'What is the matter now,' I asked of the dog-keepers, and behold! my suspicions about the emerald were justified; so here, my lord Governor, I have brought you the stone, and as every suckling in Memphis hears from its nurse—unless it is deaf —what a just man Mukaukas George is, you will no doubt make good to me what I advanced to that stammering scoundrel. And you will have the best of the bargain, noble Sir; for I make no demand for interest or even maintenance for the two hours during which it was mine."

"Give me the stone!" interrupted the Arab, who was annoyed by the Jew's jesting tone; he snatched the emerald from him, weighed it in his hand, put it close to his eyes, held it far off, tapped it with a small hammer that he took out of his breast-pocket, slipped it into its place in the work, examining it keenly, suspiciously, and at last with satisfaction. During all this, Orion had more than once turned pale, and the sweat broke out on his handsome, pale face. Had a miracle been wrought here? How could this gem, which was surely on its way to Alexandria, have found its way into the Jew's hands? Or could Chusar have opened the little packet and have sold the emerald to Hiram, and through him to the jeweller? He must get to the bottom of it, and while the Arab was examining the gem he went up to Gamaliel and asked him: "Are you positively certain—it is a matter of freedom or the dungeon—certain that you had this stone from Hiram the Syrian and from no one else? I mean, is the man so well-known to you that no mistake is possible?"

"God preserve us!" exclaimed the Jew drawing back a step from Orion, who was gazing at him with a sinister light in his eyes. "How can my lord doubt it? Your respected father has known me these thirty years, and do you suppose that I—I do not know the Syrian? Why, who in Memphis can stammer to compare with him? And has he not killed half my children with your wild young horses?—Half killed every one of my children I mean—half killed them, I say, with fright. They are all still alive and well, God preserve them, but none the better for your horsebreaker; for fresh air is good for children and my little Rebecca would stop indoors till he was at home again for fear of his terrifying pranks."

"Well, well!" Orion broke in. "And at what hour did he bring you the emerald for sale? Exactly. Now, recollect: when was it? You surely must remember."

"Adonai! How should I?" said the Jew. "But wait, Sir, perhaps I may be able to tell you. In this hot weather we are up before sunrise; then we said our prayers and had our morning broth; then...."

"Senseless chatter!" urged Orion. But Gamaliel went on without allowing himself to be checked. "Then little Ruth jumped into my lap to pull out the white hairs that will grow under my nose and, just as the child was doing it and I cried out: 'Oh, you hurt me!' the sun fell upon the earth bank on which I was sitting."

"And at what time does it reach the bank?" cried the young man.

"Exactly two hours after sunrise," replied the Jew, "at this time of year. Do me the honor of a visit tomorrow morning; you will not regret it, for I can show you some beautiful, exquisite things —and you can watch the shadow yourself."

"Two hours after sunrise," murmured Orion to himself, and then with fresh qualms he reflected that it was fully four hours later when he had given the packet to Chusar. It was impossible to doubt the Jew's statement. The man was rich, honest and content: he did not lie. The jewel Orion had sent away and that purchased from Hiram could not in any case be identical. But how could all this be explained? It was enough to turn his brain. And not to dare to speak when mere silence was falsehood—falsehood to his father and mother!—If only the hapless stammerer might escape! If he were caught; then—then merciful Heaven! But no; it was not to be thought of.—On, then, on; and if it came to the worst the honor of a hundred stablemen could not outweigh that of one Orion; horrible as it was, the man must be sacrificed. He would see that his life was spared and that he was soon set at liberty!

The Arab meanwhile had concluded his examination; still he was not perfectly satisfied. Orion longed to interpose; for if the merchant expressed no doubts and acknowledged the recovered gem to be the stolen one, much would be gained; so he turned to him again and said: "May I ask you to show me the emerald once more? It is quite impossible, do you think, that a second should be found to match it?"

"That is too much to assert," said the Arab gravely. "This stone resembles that on the hanging to a hair; and yet it has a little inequality which I do not remember noticing on it. It is true I had never seen it out of the setting, and this little boss may have been turned towards the stuff, and yet, and yet. —Tell me, goldsmith, did the thief give you the emerald bare—unset?"

"As bare as Adam and Eve before they ate the apple," said the Jew.

"That is a pity—a great pity!—And still I fancy that the stone in the work was a trifle longer. In such a case it is almost folly and perversity to doubt, and yet I feel—and yet I ask myself: Is this really the stone that formed that bud?"

"But Heaven bless us!" cried Orion, "the twin of such an unique gem would surely not drop from the skies and at the same moment into one and the same house. Let us be glad that the lost sheep has come back to us. Now, I will lock it into this iron casket, Father, and as soon as the robber is caught you send for me: do you understand, Psamtik?" He nodded to his parents, offered his hand to the Arab, and that in a way which could not fail to satisfy any one, so that even the old man was won over; and then he left the room.

The merchant's honor was saved; still his conscientious soul was disturbed by a doubt that he could not away with. He was about to take leave but the Mukaukas was so buried in pillows, and kept his eyes so closely shut, that no one could detect whether he were sleeping or waking; so the Arab, not wishing to disturb him, withdrew without speaking.

CHAPTER X

After the great excitement of the night Paula had thrown herself on her bed with throbbing pulses. Sleep would not come to her, and so at rather more than two hours after sunrise she went to the window to close the shutters. As she did so she looked out, and she saw Hiram leap into a boat and push the light bark from the shore. She dared neither signal nor call to him; but when the faithful soul had reached open water he looked back at her window, recognized her in her white morning dress and flourished the oar high in the air. This could only mean that he had fulfilled his commission and sold her jewel. Now he was going to the other side to engage the Nabathaean.

When she had closed the shutters and darkened the room she again lay down. Youth asserted its rights the weary girl fell into deep, dreamless slumbers.

When she woke, with the heat drops on her forehead, the sun was nearly at the meridian, only an hour till the Ariston would be served, the Greek breakfast, the first meal in the morning, which the family eat together as they also did the principal meal later in the clay. She had never yet failed to appear, and her absence would excite remark.

The governor's household, like that of every Egyptian of rank, was conducted more on the Greek than the Egyptian plan; and this was the case not merely as regarded the meals but in many other things, and especially the language spoken. From the Mukaukas himself down to the youngest member of the family, all spoke Greek among themselves, and Coptic, the old native dialect, only to the servants. Nay, many borrowed and foreign words had already crept into use in the Coptic.

The governor's granddaughter, pretty little Mary, had learnt to speak Greek fluently and correctly before she spoke Coptic, but when Paula had first arrived she could not as yet write the beautiful language of Greece with due accuracy. Paula loved children; she longed for some occupation, and she had therefore volunteered to instruct the little girl in the art. At first her hosts had seemed pleased that she should render this service, but ere long the relation between the Lady Neforis and her husband's niece had taken the unpleasant aspect which it was destined to retain. She had put a stop to the lessons, and the reason she had assigned for this insulting step was that Paula had dictated to her pupil long sentences out of her Orthodox Greek prayerbook. This, it was true, she had done; but without the smallest concealment; and the passages she had chosen had contained nothing but what must elevate the soul of every Christian, of whatever confession.

The child had wept bitterly over her grandmother's fiat, though Paula had always taken the lessons quite seriously, for Mary loved her older companion with all the enthusiasm of a half-grown girl—as a child of ten really is in Egypt; her passionate little heart worshipped the beautiful maiden who was in every respect so far above her, and Paula's arms had opened wide to embrace the child who brought sunshine into the gloomy, chill atmosphere she breathed in her uncle's house. But Neforis regarded the child's ardent love for her Melchite relation as exaggerated and morbid, imperilling perhaps her religious faith; and she fancied that under Paula's influence Mary had transferred her affections from her to the younger woman with added warmth. Nor was this idea wholly fanciful; the child's strong sense of justice could not bear to see her friend misunderstood and slighted, often simply and entirely misjudged and hardly blamed, so Mary felt it her duty, as far as in her lay, to make up for her grandmother's delinquencies in regard to the guest who in the child's eyes was perfection.

But Neforis was not the woman to put up with this demeanor in a child. Mary was her granddaughter, the only child of her lost son, and no one should come between them. So she forbid the little girl to go to Paula's room without an express message, and when a Greek teacher was engaged for her, her instructions were that she should keep her pupil as much as possible out of the Syrian damsel's way. All this only fanned the child's vehement affection; and tenderly as her grandmother would sometimes caress her—while Mary on her part never failed in dutiful obedience—neither of

them ever felt a true and steady warmth of heart towards the other; and for this Paula was no doubt to blame, though against her will and by her mere existence.

Often, indeed, and by a hundred covert hints Dame Neforis gave Paula to understand that she it was who had alienated her grandchild; there was nothing for it but to keep the child for whom she yearned, at a distance, and only rarely reveal to her the abundance of her love. At last her life was so full of grievance that she was hardly able to be innocent with the innocent—a child with the child; Mary was not slow to note this, and ascribed Paula's altered manner to the suffering caused by her grandmother's severity.

Mary's most frequent opportunities of speaking to her friend were just before meals; for at that time no one was watching her, and her grandmother had not forbidden her calling Paula to table. A visit to her room was the child's greatest delight—partly because it was forbidden—but no less because Paula, up in her own room, was quite different from what she seemed with the others, and because they could there look at each other and kiss without interference, and say what ever they pleased. There Mary could tell her as much as she dared of the events in their little circle, but the lively and sometimes hoydenish little girl was often withheld from confessing a misdemeanor, or even an inoffensive piece of childishness, by sheer admiration for one who to her appeared nobler, greater and loftier than other beings.

Just as Paula had finished putting up her hair, Mary, who would rush like a whirlwind even into her grandmother's presence, knocked humbly at the door. She did not fly into Paula's arms as she did into those of Susannah or her daughter Katharina, but only kissed her white arm with fervent devotion, and colored with happiness when Paula bent down to her, pressed her lips to her brow and hair, and wiped her wet, glowing cheeks. Then she took Mary's head fondly between her hands and said:

"What is wrong with you, madcap?"

In fact the sweet little face was crimson, and her eyes swelled as if she had been crying violently.

"It is so fearfully hot," said Mary. "Eudoxia"—her Greek governess—"says that Egypt in summer is a fiery furnace, a hell upon earth. She is quite ill with the heat, and lies like a fish on the sand; the only good thing about it is…"

"That she lets you run off and gives you no lessons?"

Mary nodded, but as no lecture followed the confession she put her head on one side and looked up into Paula's face with large roguish eyes.

"And yet you have been crying!—a great girl like you?"

"I—I crying?"

"Yes, crying. I can see it in your eyes. Now confess: what has happened?"

"You will not scold me?"

"Certainly not."

"Well then. At first it was fun, such fun you cannot think, and I do not mind the heat; but when the great hunt had gone by I wanted to go to my grand mother and I was not allowed. Do you know, something very particular had been going on in the fountain-room; and as they all came out again I crept behind Orion into the tablinum—there are such wonderful things there, and I wanted just to frighten him a little; we have often played games together before. At first he did not see me, and as he was bending over the hanging, from which the gem was stolen—I believe he was counting the stones in the faded old thing—I just jumped on to his shoulder, and he was so frightened—I can tell you, awfully frightened! And he turned upon me like a fighting-cock and—and he gave me a box on the ear; such a slap, it is burning now—and all sorts of colors danced before my eyes. He always used to be so nice and kind to me, and to you, too, and so I used to be fond of him—he is my uncle too—but a box on the ears, a slap such as the cook might give to the turnspit—I am too big for that; that I will certainly not put up with it! Since my last birthday all the slaves and upper servants, too, have had to treat me as a lady and to bow down to me! And now!—it was just here.—How dare he?" She began to cry again and sobbed out: "But that was not all. He locked me into the dark tablinum and left—

left me....” her tears flowed faster and faster, “left me sitting there! It was so horrible; and I might have been there now if I had not found a gold plate; I seized my great-grandfather—I mean the silver image of Menas, and hammered on it, and screamed Fire! Then Sebek heard me and fetched Orion, and he let me out, and made such a fuss over me and kissed me. But what is the good of that; my grandfather will be angry, for in my terror I beat his father’s nose quite flat on the plate.”

Paula had listened, now amused and now grave, to the little girl’s story; when she ceased, she once more wiped her eyes and said:

“Your uncle is a man, and you must not play with him as if he were a child like yourself. The reminder you got was rather a hard one, no doubt, but Orion tried to make up for it.—But the great hunt, what was that?”

At this question Mary’s eyes suddenly sparkled again. In an instant all her woes were forgotten, even her ancestor’s flattened nose, and with a merry, hearty laugh she exclaimed:

“Oh! you should have seen it! You would have been amused too. They wanted to catch the bad man who cut the emerald out of the hanging. He had left his shoes and they had held them under the dogs’ noses and then off they went! First they rushed here to the stairs; then to the stables, then to the lodgings of one of the horse-trainers, and I kept close behind, after the terriers and the other dogs. Then they stopped to consider and at last they all ran out at the gate towards the town. I ought not to have gone beyond the court-yard, but—do not be cross with me—it was such fun!—Out they went, along Hapi Street, across the square, and at last into the Goldsmith’s Street, and there the whole pack plunged into Gamaliel’s shop—the Jew who is always so merry. While he was talking to the others his wife gave me some apricot tartlets; we do not have such good ones at home.”

“And did they find the man?” asked Paula, who had changed color repeatedly during the child’s story.

“I do not know,” said Mary sadly. “They were not chasing any one in particular. The dogs kept their noses to the ground, and we ran after them.”

“And only to catch a man, who certainly had nothing whatever to do with the theft.—Reflect a little, Mary. The shoes gave the dogs the scent and they were set on to seize the man who had worn them, but whom no judge had examined. The shoes were found in the hall; perhaps he had dropped them by accident, or some one else may have carried them there. Now think of yourself in the place of an innocent man, a Christian like ourselves, hunted with a pack of dogs like a wild beast. Is it not frightful? No good heart should laugh at such a thing!”

Paula spoke with such impressive gravity and deep sorrow, and her whole manner betrayed such great and genuine distress that the child looked tip at her anxiously, with tearful eyes, threw herself against her, and hiding her face in Paula’s dress exclaimed: “I did not know that they were hunting a poor man, and if it makes you so sad, I wish I had not been there! But is it really and truly so bad? You are so often unhappy when we others laugh!” She gazed into Paula’s face with wide, wondering eyes through her tears, and Paula clasped her to her, kissed her fondly, and replied with melancholy sweetness:

“I would gladly be as gay as you, but I have gone through so much to sadden me. Laugh and be merry to your heart’s content; I am glad you should. But with regard to the poor hunted man, I fear he is my father’s freedman, the most faithful, honest soul! Did your exciting hunt drive any one out of the goldsmith’s shop?”

Mary shook her head; then she asked:

“Is it Hiram, the stammerer, the trainer, that they are hunting?”

“I fear it is.”

“Yes, yes,” said the child. “Stay—oh, dear! it will grieve you again, but I think—I think they said—the shoes belonged—but I did not attend. However, they were talking of a groom—a freedman—a stammerer....”

"Then they certainly are hunting down an innocent man," cried Paula with a deep sigh; and she sat down again in front of her toilet-table to finish dressing. Her hands still moved mechanically, but she was lost in thought; she answered the child vaguely, and let her rummage in her open trunk till Mary pulled out the necklace that had been bereft of its gem, and hung it round her neck. Just then there was a knock at the door and Katharina, the widow Susannah's little daughter, came into the room. The young girl, to whom the governor's wife wished to marry her tall son scarcely reached to Paula's shoulder, but she was plump and pleasant to look upon; as neat as if she had just been taken out of a box, with a fresh, merry lovable little face. When she laughed she showed a gleaming row of small teeth, set rather wide apart, but as white as snow; and her bright eyes beamed on the world as gladly as though they had nothing that was not pleasing to look for, innocent mischief to dream of. She too, tried to win Paula's favor; but with none of Mary's devoted and unvarying enthusiasm. Often, to be sure, she would devote herself to Paula with such stormy vehemence that the elder girl was forced to be repellent; then, on the other hand, if she fancied her self slighted, or treated more coolly than Mary, she would turn her back on Paula with sulky jealousy, temper and pouting. It always was in Paula's power to put an end to the "Water-wagtails tantrums"—which generally had their comic side—by a kind word or kiss; but without some such advances Katharina was quite capable of indulging her humors to the utmost.

On the present occasion she flew into Paula's arm, and when her friend begged, more quietly than usual that she would allow her first to finish dressing, she turned away without any display of touchiness and took the necklace from Mary's hand to put it on herself. It was of fine workmanship, set with pearls, and took her fancy greatly; only the empty medallion from which Hiram had removed the emerald with his knife spoiled the whole effect. Still, it was a princely jewel, and when she had also taken from the chest a large fan of ostrich feathers she showed off to her play-fellow, with droll, stiff dignity, how the empress and princesses at Court curtsied and bowed graciously to their inferiors. At this they both laughed a great deal. When Paula had finished her toilet and proceeded to take the necklace off Katharina, the empty setting, which Hiram's knife had bent, caught in the thin tissue of her dress. Mary disengaged it, and Paula tossed the jewel back into the trunk.

While she was locking the box she asked Katharina whether she had met Orion.

"Orion!" repeated the younger girl, in a tone which implied that she alone had the right to enquire about him. "Yes, we came upstairs together; he went to see the wounded man. Have you anything to say to him?"

She crimsoned as she spoke and looked suspiciously at Paula, who simply replied: "Perhaps," and then added, as she hung the ribbon with the key round her neck: "Now, you little girls, it is breakfast time; I am not going down to-day."

"Oh, dear!" cried Mary disappointed, "my grandfather is ailing and grandmother will stay with him; so if you do not come I shall have to sit alone with Eudoxia; for Katharina's chariot is waiting and she must go home at once. Oh! do come. Just to please me; you do not know how odious Eudoxia can be when it is so hot."

"Yes, do go down," urged Katharina. "What will you do up hereby yourself? And this evening mother and I will come again."

"Very well," said Paula. "But first I must go to see the invalids."

"May I go with you?" asked the Water wagtail, coaxingly stroking Paula's arm. But Mary clapped her hands, exclaiming:

"She only wants to go to Orion—she is so fond of him...."

Katharina put her hand over the child's mouth, but Paula, with quickened breath, explained that she had very serious matters to discuss with Orion; so Katharina, turning her back on her with a hasty gesture of defiance, sulkily went down stairs, while Mary slipped down the bannister rail. Not many days since, Katharina, who was but just sixteen, would gladly have followed her example.

Paula meanwhile knocked at the first of the sickrooms and entered it as softly as the door was opened by a nursing-sister from the convent of St. Katharine. Orion, whom she was seeking, had been there, but had just left.

In this first room lay the leader of the caravan; in that beyond was the crazy Persian. In a sitting-room adjoining the first room, which, being intended for guests of distinction, was furnished with royal magnificence, sat two men in earnest conversation: the Arab merchant and Philippus the physician, a young man of little more than thirty, tall and bony, in a dress of clean but very coarse stuff without any kind of adornment. He had a shrewd, pale face, out of which a pair of bright black eyes shone benevolently but with keen vivacity. His large cheek-bones were much too prominent; the lower part of his face was small, ugly and, as it were, compressed, while his high broad forehead crowned the whole and stamped it as that of a thinker, as a fine cupola may crown an insignificant and homely structure.

This man, devoid of charm, though his strongly-characterized individuality made it difficult to overlook him even in the midst of a distinguished circle, had been conversing eagerly with the Arab, who, in the course of their two-days' acquaintance, had inspired him with a regard which was fully reciprocated. At last Orion had been the theme of their discourse, and the physician, a restless toiler who could not like any man whose life was one of idle enjoyment, though he did full justice to his brilliant gifts and well-applied studies, had judged him far more hardly than the older man. To the leech all forms of human life were sacred, and in his eyes everything that could injure the body or soul of a man was worthy of destruction. He knew all that Orion had brought upon the hapless Mandane, and how lightly he had trifled with the hearts of other women; in his eyes this made him a mischievous and criminal member of society. He regarded life as an obligation to be discharged by work alone, of whatever kind, if only it were a benefit to society as a whole. And such youths as Orion not only did not recognize this, but used the whole and the parts also for base and selfish ends. The old Moslem, on the contrary, viewed life as a dream whose fairest portion, the time of youth, each one should enjoy with alert senses, and only take care that at the waking which must come with death he might hope to find admission into Paradise. How little could man do against the iron force of fate! That could not be forefended by hard work; there was nothing for it but to take up a right attitude, and to confront and meet it with dignity. The bark of Orion's existence lacked ballast; in fine weather it drifted wherever the breeze carried it, He himself had taken care to equip it well; and if only the chances of life should freight it heavily—very heavily, and fling it on the rocks, then Orion might show who and what he was; he, Haschim, firmly believed that his character would prove itself admirable. It was in the hour of shipwreck that a man showed his worth.

Here the physician interrupted him to prove that it was not Fate, as imagined by Moslems, but man himself who guided the bark of life—but at this moment Paula looked into the room, and he broke off. The merchant bowed profoundly, Philippus respectfully, but with more embarrassment than might have been expected from the general confidence of his manner. For some years he had been a daily visitor in the governor's house, and after carefully ignoring Paula on her first arrival, since Dame Neforis had taken to treating her so coolly he drew her out whenever he had the opportunity. Her conversations with him had now become dear and even necessary to her, though at first his dry, cutting tone had displeased her, and he had often driven her into a corner in a way that was hard to bear. They kept her mind alert in a circle which never busied itself with anything but the trivial details of family life in the decayed city, or with dogmatic polemics—for the Mukaukas seldom or never took part in the gossip of the women.

The leech never talked of daily events, but expressed his views as to other and graver subjects in life, or in books with which they were both familiar; and he had the art of eliciting replies from her which he met with wit and acumen. By degrees she had become accustomed to his bold mode of thought, sometimes, it is true, too recklessly expressed; and the gifted girl now preferred a discussion with him to any other form of conversation, recognizing that a childlike and supremely unselfish

soul animated this thoughtful reservoir of all knowledge. Almost everything she did displeased her uncle's wife, and so, of course, did her familiar intercourse with this man, whose appearance certainly had in it nothing to attract a young girl.—The physician to a family of rank was there to keep its members in good health, and it was unbecoming in one of them to converse with him on intimate terms as an equal. She reproached Paula—whose pride she was constantly blaming—for her unseemly condescension to Philippus; but what chiefly annoyed her was that Paula took up many a half-hour which otherwise Philippus would have devoted to her husband; and in him and his health her life and thoughts were centred.

The Arab at once recognized his foe of the previous evening; but they soon came to a friendly understanding—Paula confessing her folly in holding a single and kindly-disposed man answerable for the crimes of a whole nation. Haschim replied that a right-minded spirit always came to a just conclusion at last; and then the conversation turned on her father, and the physician explained to the Arab that she was resolved never to weary of seeking the missing man.

"Nay, it is the sole aim and end of my life," cried the girl.

"A great mistake, in my opinion," said the leech. But the merchant differed: there were things, he said, too precious to be given up for lost, even when the hope of finding them seemed as feeble and thin as a rotten reed.

"That is what I feel!" cried Paula. "And how can you think differently, Philip? Have I not heard from your own lips that you never give up all hope of a sick man till death has put an end to it? Well, and I cling to mine—more than ever now, and I feel that I am right. My last thought, my last coin shall be spent in the search for my father, even without my uncle and his wife, and in spite of their prohibition."

"But in such a task a young girl can hardly do without a man's succor," said the merchant. "I wander a great deal about the world, I speak with many foreigners from distant lands, and if you will do me the honor, pray regard me as your coadjutor, and allow me to help you in seeking for the lost hero."

"Thanks—I fervently thank you!" cried Paula, grasping the Moslem's hand with hearty pleasure. "Wherever you go bear my lost father in mind; I am but a poor, lonely girl, but if you find him…"

"Then you will know that even among the Moslems there are men…"

"Men who are ready to show compassion and to succor friendless women!" interrupted Paula.

"And with good success, by the blessing of the Almighty," replied the Arab. "As soon as I find a clue you shall hear from me; now, however, I must go across the Nile to see Amru the great general; I go in all confidence for I know that my poor, brave Rustem is in good hands, friend Philippus. My first enquiries shall be made in Fostat, rely upon that, my daughter."

"I do indeed," said Paula with pleased emotion. "When shall we meet again?"

"To-morrow, or the morning after at latest."

The young girl went up to him and whispered: "We have just heard of a clue; indeed, I hope my messenger is already on his way. Have you time to hear about it now?"

"I ought long since to have been on the other shore; so not to-day, but to-morrow I hope." The Arab shook hands with her and the physician, and hastily took his leave.

Paula stood still, thinking. Then it struck her that Hiram was now on the further side of the Nile, within the jurisdiction of the Arab ruler, and that the merchant could perhaps intercede for him, if she were to tell him all she knew. She felt the fullest confidence in the old man, whose kind and sympathetic face was still visible to her mind's eye, and without paying any further heed to the physician she went quickly towards the door of the sick-room. A crucifix hung close by, and the nun had fallen on her knees before it, praying for her infidel patient, and beseeching the Good Shepherd to have mercy on the sheep that was not of His fold. Paula did not venture to disturb the worshipper, who was kneeling just in the narrow passage; so some minutes elapsed before the leech, observing

her uneasiness, came out of the larger room, touched the nun on the shoulder, and said in a low voice of genuine kindness:

"One moment, good Sister. Your pious intercession will be heard—but this damsel is in haste." The nun rose at once and made way, sending a wrathful glance after Paula as she hurried down the stairs.

At the door of the court-yard she looked out and about for the Arab, but in vain. Then she enquired of a slave who told her that the merchant's horse had waited for him at the gate a long time, that he had just come galloping out, and by this time must have reached the bridge of boats which connected Memphis with the island of Rodah and, beyond the island, with the fort of Babylon and the new town of Fostat.

CHAPTER XI

Paula went up-stairs again, distressed and vexed with herself. Was it the heat that had enervated her and robbed her of the presence of mind she usually had at her command? She herself could not understand how it was that she had not at once taken advantage of the opportunity to plead to Haschim for her faithful retainer. The merchant might have interested himself for Hiram.

The slave at the gate had told her that he had not yet been taken; the time to intercede, then, had not yet come. But she was resolved to do so, to draw the wrath of her relations down on herself, and, if need should be, to relate all she had seen in the course of the night, to save her devoted servant. It was no less than her duty: still, before humiliating Orion so deeply she would warn him. The thought of charging him with so shameful a deed pained her like the need for inflicting an injury on herself. She hated him, but she would rather have broken the most precious work of art than have branded him—him whose image still reigned in her heart, supremely glorious and attractive.

Instead of following Mary to breakfast, or offering herself as usual to play draughts with her uncle, she went back to the sick-room. To meet Neforis or Orion at this moment would have been painful, indeed odious to her. It was long since she had felt so weary and oppressed. A conversation with the physician might perhaps prove refreshing; after the various agitations of the last few hours she longed for something, be it what it might, that should revive her spirits and give a fresh turn to her thoughts.

In the Masdakite's room the Sister coldly asked her what she wanted, and who had given her leave to assist in tending the sufferers. The leech, who at that moment was moistening the bandage on the wounded man's head, at this turned to the nun and informed her decidedly that he desired the young girl's assistance in attending on both his patients. Then he led the way sitting-room, saying in subdued into the adjoining tones:

"For the present all is well. Let us rest here a little while."

She sat down on a divan, and he on a seat opposite, and Philippus began:

"You were seeking handsome Orion just now, but you must...."

"What?" she asked gravely. "And I would have you to know that the son of the house is no more to me than his mother is. Your phrase 'Handsome Orion' seems to imply something that I do not again wish to hear. But I must speak to him, and soon, in reference to an important matter."

"To what, then, do I owe the pleasure of seeing you here again? To confess the truth I did not hope for your return."

"And why not?"

"Excuse me from answering. No one likes to hear unpleasant things. If one of my profession thinks any one is not well...."

"If that is meant for me," replied the girl, "all I can tell you is that the one thing on which I still can pride myself is my health. Say what you will—the very worst for aught I care. I want something to-day to rouse me from lethargy, even if it should make me angry."

"Very well then," replied the leech, "though I am plunging into deep waters!—As to health, as it is commonly understood, a fish might envy you; but the higher health—health of mind: that I fear you cannot boast of."

"This is a serious beginning," said Paula. "Your reproof would seem to imply that I have done you or some one else a wrong."

"If only you had!" exclaimed he. "No, you have not sinned against us in any way.—'I am as I am' is what you think of yourself; and what do you care for others?"

"That must depend on whom you mean by 'others!'"

"Nothing less than all and each of those with whom you live—here, in this house, in this town, in this world. To you they are mere air—or less; for the air is a tangible thing that can fill a ship's sails and drive it against the stream, whose varying nature can bring comfort or suffering to your body."

"My world is within!" said Paula, laying her hand on her heart.

"Very true. And all creation may find room there; for what cannot the human heart, as it is called, contain! The more we require it to take and keep, the more ready it is to hold it. It is unsafe to let the lock rust; for, if once it has grown stiff, when we want to open it no pulling and wrenching will avail. And besides—but I do not want to grieve you.—You have a habit of only looking backwards...."

"And what that is pleasurable lies before me? Your blame is harsh and at the same time unjust. —Indeed, and how can you tell which way I look?"

"Because I have watched you with the eye of a friend. In truth, Paula, you have forgotten how to look around and forward. The life which lies behind you and which you have lost is all your world. I once showed you on a fragmentary papyrus that belonged to my foster father, Horus Apollo, a heathen demon represented as going forwards, while his head was turned on his neck so that the face and eyes looked behind him."

"I remember it perfectly."

"Well, you have long been just like him. 'All things move,' says Heraclitus, so you are forced to float onwards with the great stream; or, to vary the image, you must walk forwards on the high-road of life towards the common goal; but your eye is fixed on what lies behind you, feasting on the prospect of a handsome and wealthy home, kindness and tenderness, noble and loving faces, and a happy, but alas! long-lost existence. All the same, on you must go.—What must the result be?"

"I must stumble, you think, and fall?"

The physician's reproof had hit Paula all the harder because she could not conceal from herself that there was much truth in it. She had come hither on purpose to find encouragement, and these accusations troubled even her sense of high health. Why should she submit to be taken to task like a school-girl by this man, himself still young? If this went on she would let him hear.... But he was speaking again, and his reply calmed her, and strengthened her conviction that he was a true and well-meaning friend.

"Not that perhaps," he said, "because—well, because nature has blessed you with perfect balance, and you go forward in full self-possession as becomes the daughter of a hero. We must not forget that it is of your soul that I am speaking; and that maintains its innate dignity of feeling among so much that is petty and mean."

"Then why need I fear to look back when it gives me so much comfort?" she eagerly enquired, as she gazed in his face with fresh spirit.

"Because it may easily lead you to tread on other people's feet! That hurts them; then they are annoyed, and they get accustomed to think grudgingly of you—you who are more lovable than they are."

"But quite unjustly; for I am not conscious of ever having intentionally grieved or hurt any one in my whole life."

"I know that; but you have done so unintentionally a thousand times."

"Then it would be better I should quit them altogether."

"No, and a thousand times no! The man who avoids his kind and lives in solitude fancies he is doing some great thing and raising himself above the level of the existence he despises. But look a little closer: it is self-interest and egoism which drive him into the cave and the cloister. In any case he neglects his highest duty towards humanity—or let us say merely towards the society he belongs to—in order to win what he believes to be his own salvation. Society is a great body, and every individual should regard himself as a member of it, bound to serve and succor it, and even, when necessary, to make sacrifices for it. The greatest are not too great. But those who crave isolation,—you yourself —nay, hear me out, for I may never again risk the danger of incurring your wrath—desire to be

a body apart. What Paula has known and possessed, she keeps locked in the treasure-house of her memory under bolt and key; What Paula is, she feels she still must be—and for whom? Again, for that same Paula. She has suffered great sorrow and on that her soul lives; but this is evil nourishment, unwholesome and bad for her."

She was about to rise; but he bent forward, with a zealous conviction that he must not allow himself to be interrupted, and lightly touched her arm as though to prevent her quitting her seat, while he went on unhesitatingly:

"You feed on your old sorrows! Well and good. Many a time have I seen that trial can elevate the soul. It can teach a brave heart to feel the woes of others more deeply; it can rouse a desire to assuage the griefs of others with beautiful self-devotion. Those who have known pain and affliction enjoy ease and pleasure with double satisfaction; sufferers learn to be grateful for even the smaller joys of life. But you?—I have long striven for courage to tell you so—you derive no benefit from suffering because you lock it up in your breast—as if a man were to enclose some precious seed in a silver trinket to carry about with him. It should be sown in the earth, to sprout and bear fruit! However, I do not blame you; I only wish to advise you as a true and devoted friend. Learn to feel yourself a member of the body to which your destiny has bound you for the present, whether you like it or not. Try to contribute to it all that your capacities allow you achieve. You will find that you can do something for it; the casket will open, and to your surprise and delight you will perceive that the seed dropped into the soil will germinate, that flowers will open and fruit will form of which you may make bread, or extract from it a balm for yourself or for others! Then you will leave the dead to bury the dead, as the Bible has it, and dedicate to the living those great powers and gracious gifts which an illustrious father and a noble mother—nay, and a long succession of distinguished ancestors, have bequeathed to a descendant worthy of them. Then you will recover that which you have lost: the joy in existence which we ought both to feel and to diffuse, because it brings with it an obligation which it which is only granted to us once to fulfil. Kind fate has fitted you above a hundred thousand others for being loved; and if you do not forget the gratitude you owe for that, hearts will be turned to you, though now they shun the tree which has beset itself intentionally with thorns, and which lets its branches droop like the weeping-willows by the Nile. Thus you will lead a new and beautiful life, receiving and giving joy. The isolated and charmless existence you drag through here, to the satisfaction of none and least of all to your own, you can transform to one of fruition and satisfaction—breathing and moving healthily and beneficently in the light of day. It lies in your power. When you came up here to give your care to these poor injured creatures, you took the first step in the new path I desire to show you, to true happiness. I did not expect you, and I am thankful that you have come; for I know that as you entered that door you may have started on the road to renewed happiness, if you have the will to walk in it.—Thank God! That is said and over!"

The leech rose and wiped his forehead, looking uneasily at Paula who had remained seated; her breath came fast, and she was more confused and undecided than he had ever seen her. She clasped her hand over her brow, and gazed, speechless, into her lap as though she wished to smother some pain.

The young physician beat his arms together, like a laborer in the winter when his hands are frozen, and exclaimed with distressful emotion: "Yes, I have spoken, and I cannot regret having done so; but what I foresaw has come to pass: The greatest happiness that ever sweetened my daily life is gone out of it! To love Plato is a noble rule, but greater than Plato is the truth; and yet, those who preach it must be prepared to find that truth scares away friends from the unpleasing vicinity of its ill-starred Apostles!"

At this Paula rose, and following the impulse of her generous heart, offered the leech her hand in all sincerity; he grasped it in both his, pressing it so tightly that it almost hurt her, and his eyes glistened with moisture as he exclaimed: "That is as I hoped; that is splendid, that is noble! Let me

but be your brother, high-souled maiden!—Now, come. That poor, crazy, lovely girl will heal of her death-wound under your hands if under any!"

"I will come!" she replied heartily; and there was something healthy and cheerful in her manner as they entered the sick-room; but her expression suddenly changed, and she asked pensively:

"And supposing we restore the unhappy girl—what good will she get by it?"

"She will breathe and see the sunshine," replied the leech; "she will be grateful to you, and finally she will contribute what she can to the whole body. She will be alive in short, she will live. For life—feel it, understand it as I do—life is the best thing we have." Paula gazed with astonishment in the man's unlovely but enthusiastic face. How radiantly joyful!

No one could have called it ugly at this moment, or have said that it lacked charm.

He believed what he had asserted with such fervent feeling, though it was in contradiction to a view he had held only yesterday and often defended: that life in itself was misery to all who could not grasp it of their own strength, and make something of it worth making. At this moment he really felt that it was the best gift.

Paula went forward, and his eyes followed her, as the gaze of the pious pilgrim is fixed on the holy image he has travelled to see, over seas and mountains, with bruised feet.

They went up to the sick girl's bed. The nun drew back, making her own reflections on the physician's altered mien, and his childlike, beaming contentment, as he explained to Paula what particular peril threatened the sufferer, and by what treatment he hoped to save her; how to make the bandages and give the medicines, and how necessary it was to accept the poor crazy girl's fancies and treat them as rational ideas so long as the fever lasted.

At last he was forced to go and attend to other patients. Paula remained sitting at the head of the bed and gazing at the face of the sufferer.

How fair it was! And Orion had snatched this rose in the bud, and trodden it under foot! She had, no doubt, felt for him what Paula herself felt. And now? Did she feel nothing but hatred of him, or could her heart, in spite of her indignation and scorn, not altogether cast off the spell that had once bound it?

What weakness was this! She was, she must, she would be his foe!

Her thoughts went back to the idle and futile life that she had led for so many years. The physician had hit the mark; and he had been too easy rather than severe. Yes, she would begin to make good use of her powers—but how, in what way, here and among these people? How transfigured poor Philippus had seemed when she had given him her hand; with what energy had he poured forth his words.

"And how false," she mused, "is the saying that the body is the mirror of the soul! If it were so, Philippus would have the face of Orion, and Orion that of Philippus." But could Orion's heart be wholly reprobate? Nay, that was impossible; her every impulse resisted the belief. She must either love him or hate him, there was no third alternative; but as yet the two passions were struggling within her in a way that was quite intolerable.

The physician had spoken of being a brother to her, and she could not help smiling at the idea. She could, she thought, live very happily and calmly with him, with her nurse Betta, and with the learned old friend who shared his home, and of whom he had often talked to her; she could join him in his studies, help him in his calling, and discuss many things well worth knowing. Such a life, she told herself, would be a thousand times preferable to this, with Neforis. In him she had certainly found a friend; and her glad recognition of the fact was the first step towards the fulfilment of his promise, since it showed that her heart was still ready to go forth to the kindness of another.

Amid these meditations, however, her anxiety for Hiram constantly recurred to her, and it was clear to her mind that, if she and Orion should come to extremities, she could no longer dwell under the governor's roof. Often she had longed for nothing so fervently as to be able to quit it; but to-day it filled her with dread, for parting from her uncle necessarily involved parting from his son. She hated

him; still, to lose sight of him altogether would be very hard to bear. To go with Philippus and live with him as his sister would never do; nay, it struck her as something inconceivable, strangely incongruous.

Meanwhile she listened to Mandane's breathing and treated her in obedience to the leech's orders, longing for his return; presently however, not he but the nun came to the bed-side, laid her hand on the girl's forehead, and without paying any heed to Paula, whispered kindly: "That is right child, sleep away; have a nice long sleep. So long as she can be kept quiet; if only she goes on like this!—Her head is cooler. Philippus will certainly say there is scarcely any fever. Thank God, the worst danger is over!"

"Oh, how glad I am!" cried Paula, and she spoke with such warmth and sincerity that the nun gave her a friendly nod and left the sick girl to her care, quite satisfied.

It was long since Paula had felt so happy. She fancied that her presence had had a good affect on the sufferer, that Mandane had already been brought by her nursing to the threshold of a new life. Paula, who but just now had regarded herself as a persecuted victim of Fate, now breathed more freely in the belief that she too might bring joy to some one. She looked into Mandane's more than pretty face with real joy and tenderness, laid the bandage which had slipped aside gently over her ears, and breathed a soft kiss on her long silken lashes.

She rapidly grew in favor with the shrewd nun; when the hour for prayer came round, the sister included in her petitions—Paula—the orphan under a stranger's roof, the Greek girl born, by the inscrutable decrees of God, outside the pale of her saving creed. At length Philippus returned; he was rejoiced at his new friend's brightened aspect, and declared that Mandane had, under her care, got past the first and worst danger, and might be expected to recover, slowly indeed, but completely.

After Paula had renewed the compress—and he intentionally left her to do it unaided, he said encouragingly:

"How quickly you have learnt your business.—Now, the patient is asleep again; the Sister will keep watch, and for the present we can be of no use to the girl; sleep is the best nourishment she can have. But with us—or at any rate with me, it is different. We have still two hours to wait for the next meal: my breakfast is standing untouched, and yours no doubt fared the same; so be my guest. They always send up enough to satisfy six bargemen."

Paula liked the proposal, for she had long been hungry. The nun was desired to hasten to fetch some more plates, of drinking-vessels there was no lack—and soon the new allies were seated face to face, each at a small table. He carved the duck and the roast quails, put the salad before her and some steaming artichokes, which the nun had brought up at the request of the cook whose only son the physician had saved; he invited her attention to the little pies, the fruits and cakes which were laid ready, and played the part of butler; and then, while they heartily enjoyed the meal, they carried on a lively conversation.

Paula for the first time asked Philippus to tell her something of his early youth; he began with an account of his present mode of life, as a partner in the home of the singular old priest of Isis, Horus Apollo, a diligent student; he described his strenuous activity by day and his quiet studies by night, and gave everything such an amusing aspect that often she could not help laughing. But presently he was sad, as he told her how at an early age he had lost his father and mother, and was left to depend solely on himself and on a very small fortune, having no relations; for his father had been a grammarian, invited to Alexandria from Athens, who had been forced to make a road for himself through life, which had lain before him like an overgrown jungle of papyrus and reeds. Every hour of his life was devoted to his work, for a rough, outspoken Goliath, such as he, never could find it easy to meet with helpful patrons. He had managed to live by teaching in the high schools of Alexandria, Athens, and Caesarea, and by preparing medicines from choice herbs—drinking water instead of wine, eating bread and fruit instead of quails and pies; and he had made a friend of many a good man, but never yet of a woman—it would be difficult with such a face as his!

"Then I am the first?" said Paula, who felt deep respect for the man who had made his way by his own energy to the eminent position which he had long held, not merely in Memphis, but among Egyptian physicians generally.

He nodded, and with such a blissful smile that she felt as though a sunbeam had shone into her very soul. He noticed this at once, raised his goblet, and drank to her, exclaiming with a flush on his cheek:

"The joy that comes to others early has come to me late; but then the woman I call my friend is matchless!"

"Well, it is to be hoped she may not prove to be so wicked as you just now described her.—If only our alliance is not fated to end soon and abruptly."

"Ah!" cried the physician, "every drop of blood in my veins...."

"You would be ready to shed it for me," Paula broke in, with a pathetic gesture, borrowed from a great tragedian she had seen at the theatre in Damascus. "But never fear: it will not be a matter of life and death—at worst they will but turn me out of the house and of Memphis."

"You?" cried Philippus startled, "but who would dare to do so?"

"They who still regard me as a stranger.—You described the case admirably. If they have their way, my dear new friend, our fate will be like that of the learned Dionysius of Cyrene."

"Of Cyrene?"

"Yes. It was my father who told me the story. When Dionysius sent his son to the High School at Athens, he sat down to write a treatise for him on all the things a student should do and avoid. He devoted himself to the task with the utmost diligence; but when, at the end of four years, he could write on the last leaf of the roll. 'Here this book hath a happy ending,' the young man whose studies it was intended to guide came home to Cyrene, a finished scholar."

"And we have struck up a friendship…?"

"And made a treaty of alliance, only to be parted ere long."

Philippus struck his fist vehemently on the little table in front of his couch and exclaimed: "That I will find means to prevent!—But now, tell me in confidence, what has last happened between you and the family down-stairs?"

"You will know quite soon enough."

"Whichever of them fancies that you can be turned out of doors without more ado and there will be an end between us, may find himself mistaken!" cried the physician with an angry sparkle in his eyes. "I have a right to put in a word in this house. It has not nearly come to that yet, and what is more, it never shall. You shall quit it certainly; but of your own free will, and holding your head high...."

As he spoke the door of the outer room was hastily opened and the next instant Orion was standing before them, looking with great surprise at the pair who had just finished their meal. He said coldly:

"I am disturbing you, I see."

"Not in the least," replied the leech; and the young man, perceiving what bad taste it would be and how much out of place to give expression to his jealous annoyance, said, with a smile: "If only it had been granted to a third person to join in this symposium!"

"We found each other all-sufficient company," answered Philippus.

"A man who could believe in all the doctrines of the Church as readily as in that statement would be assured of salvation," laughed Orion. "I am no spoilsport, respected friends; but I deeply regret that I must, on the present occasion, disturb your happiness. The matter in question...." And he felt he might now abandon the jesting tone which so little answered to his mood, "is a serious one. In the first instance it concerns your freedman, my fair foe."

"Has Hiram come back?" asked Paula, feeling herself turn pale.

"They have brought him in," replied Orion. "My father at once summoned the court of judges. Justice has a swift foot here with us; I am sorry for the man, but I cannot prevent its taking its course. I must beg of you to appear at the examination when you are called."

"The whole truth shall be told!" said Paula sternly and firmly.

"Of course," replied Orion. Then turning to the physician, he added: "I would request you, worthy Esculapius, to leave me and my cousin together for a few minutes. I want to give her a word of counsel which will certainly be to her advantage."

Philippus glanced enquiringly at the girl; she said with clear decision: "You and I can have no secrets. What I may hear, Philippus too may know."

Orion, with a shrug, turned to leave the room:

On the threshold he paused, exclaiming with some excitement and genuine distress:

"If you will not listen to me for your own sake, do so at least, whatever ill-feeling you may bear me, because I implore you not to refuse me this favor. It is a matter of life or death to one human being, of joy or misery to another. Do not refuse me.—I ask nothing unreasonable, Philippus. Do as I entreat you and leave us for a moment alone."

Again the physician's eyes consulted the young girl's; this time she said: "Go!" and he immediately quitted the room.

Orion closed the door.

"What have I done, Paula," he began with panting breath, "that since yesterday you have shunned me like a leper—that you are doing your utmost to bring me to ruin?"

"I mean to plead for the life of a trusty servant; nothing more," she said indifferently.

"At the risk of disgracing me!" he retorted bitterly.

"At that risk, no doubt, if you are indeed so base as to throw your own guilt on the shoulders of an honest man."

"Then you watched me last night?"

"The merest chance led me to see you come out of the tablinum...."

"I do not ask you now what took you there so late," he interrupted, "for it revolts me to think anything of you but the best, the highest.—But you? What have you experienced at my hands but friendship—nay, for concealment or dissimulation is here folly—but what a lover…?"

"A lover!" cried Paula indignantly. "A lover? Dare you utter the word, when you have offered your heart and hand to another—you...."

"Who told you so?" asked Orion gloomily.

"Your own mother."

"That is it; so that is it?" cried the young man, clasping his hands convulsively. "Now I begin to see, now I understand. But stay. For if it is indeed that which has roused you to hate me and persecute me, you must love me, Paula—you do love me, and then, noblest and sweetest...." He held out his hand; but she struck it aside, exclaiming in a tremulous voice:

"Be under no delusion. I am not one of the feeble lambs whom you have beguiled by the misuse of your gifts and advantages; and who then are eager to kiss your hands. I am the daughter of Thomas; and another woman's betrothed, who craves my embraces on the way to his wedding, will learn to his rueing that there are women who scorn his disgraceful suit and can avenge the insult intended them. Go—go to your judges! You, a false witness, may accuse Hiram, but I will proclaim you, you the son of this house, as the thief! We shall see which they believe."

"Me!" cried Orion, and his eyes flashed as wrathfully and vindictively as her own. "The son of the Mukaukas! Oh, that you were not a woman! I would force you to your knees and compel you to crave my pardon. How dare you point your finger at a man whose life has hitherto been as spotless as your own white raiment? Yes, I did go to the tablinum—I did tear the emerald from the hanging; but I did it in a fit of recklessness, and in the knowledge that what is my father's is mine. I threw away the gem to gratify a mere fancy, a transient whim. Cursed be the hour when I did it!—Not on

account of the deed itself, but of the consequences it may entail through your mad hatred. Jealousy, petty, unworthy jealousy is at the bottom of it! And of whom are you jealous?"

"Of no one; not even of your betrothed, Katharina," replied Paula with forced composure. "What are you to me that, to spare you humiliation, I should risk the life of the most honest soul living? I have said: The judges shall decide between you."

"No, they shall not!" stormed Orion. "At least, not as you intend! Beware, beware, I say, of driving me to extremities! I still see in you the woman I loved; I still offer you what lies within my power: to let everything end for the best for you...."

"For me! Then I, too, am to suffer for your guilt?"

"Did you hear the barking of hounds just now?"

"I heard dogs yelping."

"Very well.—Your freedman has been brought in, the pack got on his scent and have now been let into the house close to the tablinum. The dogs would not stir beyond the threshold and on the white marble step, towards the right-hand side, the print of a man's foot was found in the dust. It is a peculiar one, for instead of five toes there are but three. Your Hiram was fetched in, and he was found to have the same number of toes as the mark on the marble, neither more nor less. A horse trod on his foot, in your father's stable, and two of his toes had to be cut off: we got this out of the stammering wretch with some difficulty.—On the other side of the door-way there was a smaller print, but though the dogs paid no heed to that I examined it, and assured myself—how, I need not tell you—that it was you who had stood there. He, who has no business whatever in the house, must have made his way last night into the tablinum, our treasury. Now, put yourself in the judges' place. How can such facts be outweighed by the mere word of a girl who, as every one knows, is on anything rather than good terms with my mother, and who will leave no stone unturned to save her servant."

"Infamous!" cried Paula. "Hiram did not steal the gem, as you must know who stole it. The emerald he sold was my property; and were those stones really so much alike that even the seller…"

"Yes, indeed. He could not tell one from the other. Evil spirits have been at work all through, devilish, malignant demons. It would be enough to turn one's brain, if life were not so full of enigmas! You yourself are the greatest.—Did you give the Syrian your emerald to sell in order to fly from this house with the money?—You are silent? Then I am right. What can my father be to you—you do not love my mother—and the son!—Paula, Paula, you are perhaps doing him an injustice—you hate him, and it is a pleasure to you to injure him."

"I do not wish to hurt you or any one," replied the girl. "And you have guessed wrongly. Your father refused me the means of seeking mine."

"And you wanted to procure money to search for one who is long since dead!—Even my mother admits that you speak the truth; if she is right, and you really take no pleasure in doing me a mischief, listen to me, follow my advice, and grant my prayer! I do not ask any great matter."

"Speak on then."

"Do you know what a man's honor is to him? Need I tell you that I am a lost and despised man if I am found guilty of this act of the maddest folly by the judges of my own house? It may cost my father his life if he hears that the word 'guilty' is pronounced on me; and I—I—what would become of me I cannot foresee!—I—oh God, oh God, preserve me from frenzy!—But I must be calm; time presses.... How different it is for your servant; he seems ready even now to take the guilt on himself, for, whatever he is asked, he still keeps silence. Do you do the same; and if the judges insist on knowing what you had to do with the Syrian last night—for the dogs traced the scent to your staircase—hazard a conjecture that the faithful fellow stole the emerald in order to gratify your desire to search for your father, his beloved master. If you can make up your mind to so great a sacrifice —oh, that I should have to ask it of you!—I swear to you by all I hold sacred, by yourself and by my father's head, I will set Hiram free within three days, unbeaten and unhurt, and magnificently indemnified; and I will myself help him on the way whither he may desire to go, or you to send him,

in search of your father.—Be silent; remain neutral in the background; that is all I ask, and I will keep my word—that, at any rate, you do not doubt?" She had listened to him with bated breath; she pitied him deeply as he stood there, a suppliant in bitter anguish of soul, a criminal who still could not understand that he was one, and who relied on the confidence that, only yesterday, he still had had the right to exact from all the world. He appeared before her like a fine proud tree struck by lightning, whose riven trunk, trembling to its fall, must be crushed to the earth by the first storm, unless the gardener props it up. She longed to be able to forget all he had brought upon her and to grasp his hand in friendly consolation; but her deeply aggrieved pride helped her to preserve the cold and repellent manner she had so far succeeded in assuming.

With much hesitation and reserve she consented to be silent as long as he kept his promise. It was for his father's sake, rather than his own, that she would so far become his accomplice: at the same time everything else was at an end between them, and she should bless the hour which might see her severed from him and his for ever.

The end of her speech was in a strangely hard and repellent tone; she felt she must adopt it to disguise how deeply she was touched by his unhappiness and by the extinction of the sunshine in him which had once warmed her own heart too with bliss. To him it seemed that an icy rigor breathed in her words—bitter contempt and hostile revulsion. He had some difficulty in keeping himself from breaking out again in violent wrath. He was almost sorry that he had trusted her with his secret and begged her for mercy, instead of leaving things to run their course, and if it had come to the worst, dragging her to perdition with him. Sooner would he forfeit honor and peace than humble himself again before this pitiless and cold-hearted foe. At this moment he really hated her, and only wished it were possible to fight her, to break her pride, to see her vanquished and crying for quarter at his feet. It was with a great effort—with tingling cheeks and constrained utterance that he said:

"Severance from you is indeed best for us all.—Be ready: the judges will send for you soon."

"Very well," she replied. "I will be silent; you have only to provide for the Syrian's safety. You have given me your word."

"And so long as you keep yours I will keep mine. Or else…" the words would come from his quivering lips—"or else war to the knife!"

"War to the knife!" she echoed with flashing eyes. "But one thing more. I have proof that the emerald which Hiram sold belonged to me. By all the saints—proof!"

"So much the better for you," he said. "Woe to us both, if you force me to forget that you are a woman!"

And he left the room with a rapid step.

CHAPTER XII

Orion went down stairs scowling and clenching his fists. His heart ached to bursting.

What had he done, what had befallen him? That a woman should dare to treat him so!—a woman whom he had deigned to love—the loveliest and noblest of women; but at the same time the haughtiest, most vengeful, and most hateful.

He had once read this maxim: “When a man has committed a base action, if only one other knows of it he carries the death-warrant of his peace in the bosom of his garment.” He felt the full weight of this sentence; and the other—the one who knew—was Paula, the woman of all others whom he most wished should look up to him. But yesterday it had been a vision of heaven on earth to dream of holding her in his arms and calling her his; now he had but one wish: that he could humble and punish her. Oh, that his hands should be tied, that he should be dependent on her mercy like a condemned criminal! It was inconceivable—intolerable!

But she should be taught to know him. He had passed through life hitherto as white as a swan; if this luckless hour and this woman made him appear as a vulture, it was not his fault, it was hers. She should soon see which was the stronger of the two. He would punish her in every way in which a woman can be punished, even if the way to it led through crime and misery! He was not afraid that the leech bad won her affections, for he knew, with strange certainty that, in spite of the hostility she displayed, her heart was his and his alone. “The gold coin called love,” said he to himself, “has two faces: tender devotion and bitter aversion; just now she is showing me the latter. But, however different the image and superscription may be on the two sides, if you ring it, it always gives out the same tone; and I can hear it even in her most insulting words.”

When the family met at table he made Paula’s excuses; he himself ate only a few mouthfuls, for the judges had assembled some time since and were waiting for him.

The right of life and death had been placed in the hands of the ancestors of the Mukaukas, powerful princes of provinces; they had certainly wielded it even in the dynasty of Psammitichus, whose power had been put to a terrible end by Cambyses the Persian. And still the Uraeus snake—the asp whose bite caused almost instant death, reared its head as the time-honored emblem of this privilege, by the side of St. George the Dragon-slayer, over the palaces of the Mukaukas at Memphis, and at Lykopolis in Upper Egypt. And in both these places the head of the family retained the right of arbitrary judgment and capital punishment over the retainers of his house and the inhabitants of the district he governed, after Justinian first, and then the Emperor Heraclius, had confirmed them in their old prerogative. The chivalrous St. George was placed between the snakes so as to replace a heathen symbol by a Christian one. Formerly indeed the knight himself had had the head of a sparrow-hawk: that is to say of the god Horus, who had overthrown the evil-spirit, Seth-Typhon, to avenge his father; but about two centuries since the heathen crocodile-destroyer had been transformed into the Christian conqueror of the dragon.

After the Arab conquest the Moslems had left all ancient customs and rights undisturbed, including those of the Mukaukas.

The court which assembled to sit in judgment on all cases concerning the adherents of the house consisted of the higher officials of the governor’s establishment. The Mukaukas himself was president, and his grown-up son was his natural deputy. During Orion’s absence, Nilus, the head of the exchequer, a shrewd and judicious Egyptian, had generally represented his invalid master; but on the present occasion Orion was appointed to take his place, and to preside over the assembly.

The governor’s son hastened to his father’s bedroom to beg him to lend him his ring as a token of the authority transferred to him; the Mukaukas had willingly allowed him to take it off his finger, and had enjoined him to exercise relentless severity. Generally he inclined to leniency; but breaking into a house was punishable with death, and in this instance it was but right to show no mercy, out of

deference to the Arab merchant. But Orion, mindful of his covenant with Paula, begged his father to give him full discretion. The old Moslem was a just man, who would agree to a mitigated sentence under the circumstances; besides, the culprit was not in strict fact a member of the household, but in the service of a relation.

The Mukaukas applauded his son's moderation and judgment. If only he had been in rather better health he himself would have had the pleasure of being present at the sitting, to see him fulfil for the first time so important a function, worthy of his birth and position.

Orion kissed his father's hand with heart-felt but melancholy emotion, for this praise from the man he so truly loved was a keen pleasure; and yet he felt that it was of ill-omen that his duties as judge, of which he knew the sacred solemnity, should be thus—thus begun.

It was in a softened mood, sunk in thought as to how he could best save Hiram and leave Paula's name altogether out of the matter, that he went to the hall of justice; and there he found the nurse Perpetua in eager discussion with Nilus.

The old woman was quite beside herself. In the clatter of her loom she had heard nothing of what had been going on till a few minutes ago; now she was ready to swear to the luckless Hiram's innocence. The stone he had sold had belonged to his young mistress, and thank God there was no lack of evidence of the fact; the setting of the emerald was lying safe and sound in Paula's trunk. Happily she had had an opportunity of speaking to her; and that she, the daughter of Thomas, should be brought before the tribunal, like a citizen's daughter or slave-girl, was unheard of, shameful!

At this Orion roughly interfered; he desired the old gate-keeper to conduct Perpetua at once to the storeroom next to the tablinum, where the various stuffs prepared for the use of the household were laid by, and to keep her there under safe guard till further notice. The tone in which he gave the order was such that even the nurse did not remonstrate; and Nilus, for his part obeyed in silence when Orion bid him return to his place among the judges.

Nilus went back to the judgment-hall in uneasy consternation. Never before had he seen his young lord in this mood. As he heard the nurse's statement the veins had swelled in his smooth youthful forehead, his nostrils had quivered with convulsive agitation, his voice had lost all its sweetness, and his eyes had a sinister gleam.

Orion was now alone; he ground his teeth with rage. Paula had betrayed him in spite of her promise, and how mean was her woman's cunning! She could be silent before the judges—yes. Silent in all confidence now, to the very last; but the nurse, her mouthpiece, had already put Nilus, the keenest and most important member of the court, in possession of the evidence which spoke for her and against him. It was shocking, disgraceful! Base and deliberately malicious treachery. But the end was not yet: he still was free to act and to ward off the spiteful stroke by a counterthrust. How it should be dealt was clear from Perpetua's statement; but his conscience, his instincts and long habits of submission to what was right, good, and fitting held him back. Not only had he never himself done a base or a mean action; he loathed it in another, and the only thing he could do to render Paula's perfidy harmless was, as he could not deny, original and bold, but at the same time detestable and shameful.

Still, he could not and he would not succumb in this struggle. Time pressed. Long reflection was impossible; suddenly he felt carried away by a fierce and mad longing to fight it out—he felt as he had felt on a race-day in the hippodrome, when he had driven his own quadriga ahead of all the rest.

Onwards, then, onwards; and if the chariot were wrecked, if the horses were killed, if his wheels maimed his comrades overthrown in the arena-still, onwards, onwards!

A few hasty steps brought him to the lodge of the gate-keeper, a sturdy old man who had held his post for forty years. He had formerly been a locksmith and it still was part of his duty to undertake the repairs of the simple household utensils. Orion as a youth had been a beautiful and engaging boy and a great favorite with this worthy man; he had delighted in sitting in his little room and handing him the tools for his work. He himself had remarkable mechanical facility and had been the old man's

apt pupil; nay, he had made such progress as to be able to carve pretty little boxes, prayer-book cases, and such like, and provide them with locks, as gifts to his parents on their birth days—a festival always kept with peculiar solemnity in Egypt, and marked by giving and receiving presents. He understood the use of tools, and he now hastily selected such as he needed. On the window-ledge stood a bunch of flowers which he had ordered for Paula the day before, and which he had forgotten to fetch this terrible morning. With this in one hand, and the tools in the breast of his robe he hastened upstairs.

"Onwards, I must keep on!" he muttered, as he entered Paula's room, bolted the door inside and, kneeling before her chest, tossed the flowers aside. If he was discovered, he would say that he had gone into his cousin's chamber to give her the bouquet.

"Onwards; I must go on!" was still his thought, as he unscrewed the hinge on which the lid of the trunk moved. His hands trembled, his breath came fast, but he did his task quickly. This was the right way to work, for the lock was a peculiar one, and could not have been opened without spoiling it. He raised the lid, and the first thing his hand came upon in the chest was the necklace with the empty medallion—it was as though some kind Genius were aiding him. The medallion hung but slightly to the elegantly-wrought chain; to detach it and conceal it about his person was the work of a minute.

But now the most resolute. "On, on...." was of no further avail. This was theft: he had robbed her whom, if she only had chosen it, he was ready to load with everything wherewith fate had so superabundantly blessed him. No, this—this....

A singular idea suddenly flashed through his brain; a thought which brought a smile to his lips even at this moment of frightful tension. He acted upon it forth with: he drew out from within his under-garment a gem that hung round his neck by a gold chain. This jewel—a masterpiece by one of the famous Greek engravers of heathen antiquity—had been given him in Constantinople in exchange for a team of four horses to which his greatest friend there had taken a fancy. It was in fact of greater price than half a dozen fine horses. Half beside himself, and as if intoxicated, Orion followed the wild impulse to which he had yielded; indeed, he was glad to have so precious a jewel at hand to hang in the place of the worthless gold frame-work. It was done with a pinch; but screwing up the hinge again was a longer task, for his hands trembled violently—and as the moment drew near in which he meant to let Paula feel his power, the more quickly his heart beat, and the more difficult he found it to control his mind to calm deliberation.

After he had unbolted the door he stood like a thief spying the long corridor of the strangers' wing, and this increased his excitement to a frenzy of rage with the world, and fate, and most of all with her who had compelled him to stoop to such base conduct. But now the charioteer had the reins and goad in his hand. Onwards now, onwards!

He flew down stairs, three steps at a time, as he had been wont when a boy. In the anteroom he met Eudoxia, Mary's Greek governess, who had just brought her refractory pupil into the house, and he tossed her the nosegay he still held in his hands; then, without heeding the languishing glances the middle-aged damsel sent after him with her thanks, he hastened back to the gate-keeper's lodge where he hurriedly disburdened himself of the locksmith's tools.

A few minutes later he entered the judgment-hall. Nilus the treasurer showed him to the governor's raised seat, but an overpowering bashfulness kept him from taking this position of honor. It was with a burning brow, and looks so ominously dark that the assembly gazed at him with timid astonishment, that he opened the proceedings with a few broken sentences. He himself scarcely knew what he was saying, and heard his own voice as vaguely as though it were the distant roar of waves. However, he succeeded in clearly stating all that had happened: he showed the assembly the stone which had been stolen and recovered; he explained how the thief had been taken; he declared Paula's freedman to be guilty of the robbery, and called upon him to bring forward anything he could in his own defence. But the accused could only stammer out that he was not guilty. He was not able to defend himself, but his mistress could no doubt give evidence that would justify him.

Orion pushed the hair from his forehead, proudly raised his aching head, and addressed the judges:

"His mistress is a lady of rank allied to our house. Let us keep her out of this odious affair as is but seemly. Her nurse gave Nilus some information which may perhaps avail to save this unhappy man. We will neglect nothing to that end; but you, who are less familiar with the leading circumstances, must bear this in mind to guard yourselves against being misled: This lady is much attached to the accused; she clings to him and Perpetua as the only friends remaining to her from her native home. Moreover, there is nothing to surprise me or you in the fact that a noble woman, as she is, should assume the onus of another's crime, and place herself in a doubtful light to save a man who has hitherto been honest and faithful. The nurse is here; shall she be called, or have you, Nilus, heard from her everything that her mistress can say in favor of her freedman?"

"Perpetua told me, and told you, too, my lord, certain credible facts," replied the treasurer. "But I could not repeat them so exactly as she herself, and I am of opinion that the woman should be brought before the court."

"Then call her," said Orion, fixing his eyes on vacancy above the heads of the assembly, with a look of sullen dignity.

After a long and anxious pause the old woman was brought in. Confident in her righteous cause she came forward boldly; she blamed Hiram somewhat sharply for keeping silence so long, and then explained that Paula, to procure money for her search for her father, had made the freedman take a costly emerald out of its setting in her necklace, and that it was the sale of this gem that had involved her fellow-countryman in this unfortunate suspicion.

The nurse's deposition seemed to have biased the greater part of the council in favor of the accused; but Orion did not give them time to discuss their impressions among themselves. Hardly had Perpetua ceased speaking, when Orion took up the emerald, which was lying on the table before him, exclaiming excitedly, nay, angrily:

"And the stone which is recognized by the man who sold it—an expert in gems—as being that which was taken from the hanging, and unique of its kind, is supposed, by some miracle of nature, to have suddenly appeared in duplicate?—Malignant spirits still wander through the world, but would hardly dare to play their tricks in this Christian house. You all know what 'old women's tales' are; and the tale that old woman has told us is one of the most improbable of its class. 'Tell that to Apelles the Jew,' said Horace the Roman; but his fellow-Israelite, Gamaliel'—and he turned to the jeweller who was sitting with the other witnesses will certainly not believe it; still less I, who see through this tissue of falsehood. The daughter of the noble Thomas has condescended to weave it with the help of that woman—a skilled weaver, she—to spread it before us in order to mislead us, and so to save her faithful servant from imprisonment, from the mines, or from death. These are the facts.—Do I err, woman, or do you still adhere to your statement?"

The nurse, who had hoped to find in Orion her mistress' advocate, had listened to his speech with growing horror. Her eyes flashed as she looked at him, first with mockery and then with vehement disgust; but, though they filled with tears at this unlooked-for attack, she preserved her presence of mind, and declared she had spoken the truth, and nothing but the truth, as she always did. The setting of her mistress' emerald would prove her statement.

Orion shrugged his shoulders, desired the woman to fetch her mistress, whose presence was now indispensable, and called to the treasurer:

"Go with her, Nilus! And let a servant bring the trunk here that the owner may open it in the presence of us all and before any one else touches the contents. I should not be the right person to undertake it since no one in this Jacobite household—hardly even one of yourselves—has found favor in the eyes of the Melchite. She has unfortunately a special aversion for me, so I must depute to others every proceeding that could lead to a misunderstanding.—Conduct her hither, Nilus; of course with the respect due to a maiden of high rank."

While the envoy was gone Orion paced the room with swift, restless steps, Once only he paused and addressed the judges:

"But supposing the empty setting should be found, how do you account for the existence of two —two gems, each unique of its kind? It is distracting. Here is a soft-hearted girl daring to mislead a serious council of justice for the sake, for the sake of...." he stamped his foot with rage and continued his silent march.

"He is as yet but a beginner," thought the assembled officials as they watched his agitation. "Otherwise how could he allow such an absurd attempt to clear an accused thief to affect him so deeply, or disturb his temper?"

Paula's arrival presently put an end to Orion's pacing the room. He received her with a respectful bow and signed to her to be seated. Then he bid Nilus recapitulate the results of the proceedings up to the present stage, and what he and his colleagues supposed to be her motive for asserting that the stolen emerald was her property. He would as far as possible leave it to the others to question her, since she knew full well on what terms she was with himself. Even before he had come into the council-room she had offered her explanation of the robbery to Nilus, through her nurse Perpetua; but it would have seemed fairer and more friendly in his eyes—and here he raised his voice—if she had chosen to confide to him, Orion, her plan for helping the freedman. Then he might have been able to warn her. He could only regard this mode of action, independently of him, as a fresh proof of her dislike, and she must hold herself responsible for the consequences. Justice must now take its course with inexorable rigor.

The wrathful light in his eyes showed her what she had to expect from him, and that he was prepared to fight her to the end. She saw that he thought that she had broken the promise she had but just now given him; but she had not commissioned Perpetua to interfere in the matter; on the contrary, she had desired the woman to leave it to her to produce her evidence only in the last extremity. Orion must believe that she had done him a wrong; still, could that make him so far forget himself as to carry out his threats, and sacrifice an innocent man—to divert suspicion from himself, while he branded her as a false witness? Aye, even from that he would not shrink! His flaming glance, his abrupt demeanor, his laboring breath, proclaimed it plainly enough.—Then let the struggle begin! At this moment she would have died rather than have tried to mollify him by a word of excuse. The turmoil in his whole being vibrated through hers. She was ready to throw herself at his feet and implore him to control himself, to guard himself against further wrong-doing—but she maintained her proud dignity, and the eyes that met his were not less indignant and defiant than his own.

They stood face to face like two young eagles preparing to fight, with feathers on end, arching their pinions and stretching their necks. She, confident of victory in the righteousness of her cause, and far more anxious for him than for herself; he, almost blind to his own danger, but, like a gladiator confronting his antagonist in the arena, far more eager to conquer than to protect his own life and limb.

While Nilus explained to her what, in part, she already knew, and repeated their suspicion that she had been tempted to make a false declaration to save the life of her servant, whose devotion, no doubt, to his missing master had led him to commit the robbery; she kept her eye on Orion rather than on the speaker. At last Nilus referred to the trunk, which had been brought from Paula's room under her own eyes, informing her that the assembly were ready to hear and examine into anything she had to say in her own defence.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.