GEORG EBERS

SERAPIS. COMPLETE

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

The busy turmoil of the town had been hushed for some hours; the moon and stars were keeping silent watch over Alexandria, and many of the inhabitants were already in the land of dreams. It was deliciously fresh—a truly gracious night; but, though peace reigned in the streets and alleys, even now there was in this pause for rest a lack of the soothing calm which refreshes and renews the spirit of man. For some few weeks there had been an oppressive and fevered tension in the repose of night. Every house and shop was closed as securely as though it were done, not only to secure slumber against intrusion, but to protect life and property from the spoiler; and instead of tones of jollity and mirth the sleeping city echoed the heavy steps and ringing arms of soldiers. Now and again, when the Roman word of command or the excited cry of some sleepless monk broke the silence, shops and doors were cautiously opened and an anxious face peered out, while belated wanderers shrunk into gateways or under the black shadow of a wall as the watch came past. A mysterious burden weighed on the Heart of the busy city and clicked its pulses, as a nightmare oppresses the dreamer.

On this night of the year of our Lord 391, in a narrow street leading from the commercial harbor known as Kibotus, an old man was slinking along close to the houses. His clothes were plain but decent, and he walked with his head bent forward looking anxiously on all sides; when the patrol came by he shrank into the shadow; though he was no thief he had his reasons for keeping out of the way of the soldiery, for the inhabitants, whether natives or strangers, were forbidden to appear in the streets after the harbor was closed for the night.

He stopped in front of a large house, whose long, windowless wall extended from one side street to the next, and pausing before the great gate, he read an inscription on which the light fell from a lamp above: “The House of the Holy Martyr. His widow here offers shelter to all who need it. He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.”

“At how much per cent I wonder?” mattered the old man and a satirical smile curled his beardless lips. A heavy thud with the knocker rang through the silent street, and after a few short questions from within and equally curt replies from without, a small door was opened in the great gate. The stranger was on the point of crossing the vestibule when a human creature crept up to him on all fours, and clutched his ankle with a strong hand, exclaiming in a hoarse voice: “As soon as the door is shut—an entrance fee; for the poor, you know.”

The old man flung a copper piece to the gatekeeper who tried it, and then, holding on to the rope by which he was tied to a post like a watch-dog, he whined out “Not a drop to wet a Christian’s lips?”

“It has not rained for some time,” retorted the stranger, who proceeded to open a second door which led into a vast court-yard open to the blue vault of heaven. A few torches stuck against the pillars and a small fire on the pavement added thin smoky, flickering light to the clear glory of the stars, and the whole quadrangle was full of a heavy, reeking atmosphere, compounded of smoke and the steam of hot food.

Even in the street the wanderer had heard the dull buzz and roar which now met his ear as a loud medley of noises and voices, rising from hundreds of men who were encamped in the wide space before him—in groups or singly, sleeping and snoring, or quarrelling, eating, talking and singing as they squatted on the ground which was strewn with straw.

The inn was full, and more than half of the humble guests were monks who, during the last two days, had flowed into the city from every Cenoby, Laura and hermitage in the desert, and from most of the monasteries in the surrounding district—the ‘Nitriote Nome’. Some of them had laid

their heads close together for confidential whispering, others squabbled loudly, and a large group in the northern angle of the court had raised a psalm which mingled strangely with the “three,” “four,” “seven,” of the men who were playing ‘mora’, and the cry of the cook inviting purchasers to his stall spread with meat, bread, and onions.

At the end of the court furthest from the gateway there was a covered way, on to which a row of doors opened leading to the rooms devoted to families of women and children, each apartment being divided into two by a curtain across the middle. The stranger made his way into one of these rooms, where he was warmly welcomed by a young man, who was occupied in cutting a Kopais reed into a mouth-piece for a double flute, and by a tall matronly woman.

The new-comer’s name was Karnis and he was the head of a family of wandering singers who had arrived in Alexandria only the day before from Rome. His surroundings were poor and mean, for their ship had been attacked off the African coast by a band of pirates, and though they had saved their lives they had lost everything they possessed. The young owner of the vessel, to whom he owed his safety, had procured him admission to this Xenodochium,—[a refuge or inn]—kept by his mother the Widow Mary; Karnis had, however, found it far from comfortable, and had gone forth at noon to seek other quarters.

“All in vain!” said he, as he wiped the heat drops from his forehead. “I have hunted Medius half the city through and found him at last at the house of Posidonius the Magian, whose assistant he is. There was singing behind a curtain—wretched rubbish; but there were some old airs too with an accompaniment on the flutes, in the style of Olympus, and really not so bad.

“Then spirits appeared. By Sirius a queer business altogether! Medius is in the midst of it all. I arranged the chorus and sang with them a little. All I got for it was a little dirty silver—there! But as for a lodging—free quarters!—there are none to be found here for anything above an owl; and then there is the edict—that cursed edict!”

During this speech the younger man had exchanged meaning glances with his mother. He now interrupted Karnis, saying in a tone of encouragement:

“Never mind, father; we have something good in view.”

“You have?” said the old man with an incredulous shrug, while his wife served him with a small roast chicken, on a stool which did duty for a table.

“Yes father, we!” the lad went on, laying aside his knife. “You know we vowed an offering to Dionysus for our escape, since he himself once fell into the hands of pirates, so we went at once to his temple. Mother knew the way; and as we—she, I mean, and Dada and myself…”

“Heh! what is this?” interrupted Karnis, now for the first time noticing the dish before him. “A fowl—when we are so miserably poor? A whole fowl, and cooked with oil?” He spoke angrily, but his wife, laying her hand on his shoulder, said soothingly:

“We shall soon earn it again. Never a sesterce was won by fretting. Enjoy to-day’s gifts and the gods will provide for to-morrow.”

“Indeed?” asked Karnis in an altered key. “To be sure when a roast fowl flies into one’s mouth instead of a pigeon.... But you are right as usual, Herse, as usual, only—here am I battening like a senator while you—I lay a wager you have drunk nothing but milk all day and eaten nothing but bread and radishes. I thought so? Then the chicken must pretend to be a pheasant and you, wife, will eat this leg. The girls are gone to bed? Why here is some wine too! Fill up your cup, boy. A libation to the God! Glory to Dionysus!” The two men poured the libation on the floor and drank; then the father thrust his knife into the breast of the bird and began his meal with a will, while Orpheus, the son, went on with his story:

“Well, the temple of Dionysus was not to be found, for Bishop Theophilus has had it destroyed; so to what divinity could we offer our wreath and cake? Here in Egypt there is none but the great Mother Isis. Her sanctuary is on the shore of Lake Mareotis and mother found it at once. There she fell into conversation with a priestess who, as soon as she learnt that my mother belonged to a

family of musicians—though Dame Herse was cautious in announcing this fact—and hoped to find employment in Alexandria, led her away to a young lady who was closely veiled. This lady," Orpheus went on—he not only played the flute but took the higher parts for a man's voice and could also strike the lyre—"desired us to go to her later at her own house, where she would speak with us. She drove off in a fine carriage and we, of course followed her orders; Agne was with us too. A splendid house! I never saw anything handsomer in Rome or Antioch. We were kindly received, and with the lady there were another very old lady and a tall grave man, a priest I should fancy or a philosopher, or something of that kind."

"Not some Christian trap?" asked Karnis suspiciously. "You do not know this place, and since the edict…"

"Never fear, father! There were images of the gods in the halls and corridors, and in the room where we were received by Gorgo, the beautiful daughter of Porphyrius, there was an altar before an image of Isis, quite freshly anointed.—This Porphyrius is a very rich merchant; we learnt that afterwards, and many other things. The philosopher asked us at once whether we were aware that Theodosius had lately promulgated a new edict forbidding young maidens to appear in public as singers or flute-players."

"And did Agne hear that?" said the old man in a low voice as he pointed to the curtain.

"No, she and Dada were in the garden on to which the room opened, and mother explained at once that though Agne was a Christian she was a very good girl, and that so long as she remained in our service she was bound to sing with us whenever she was required. The philosopher exclaimed at once: 'The very thing!' and they whispered together, and called the girls and desired them to show what they could do."

"And how did they perform?" asked the old man, who was growing excited.

"Dada warbled like a lark, and Agne—well you know how it always is. Her voice sounded lovely but it was just as usual. You can guess how much there is in her and how deep her feeling is but she never quite brings it out. What has she to complain of with us? And yet whatever she sings has that mournful, painful ring which even you can do nothing to alter. However, she pleased them better than Dada did, for I noticed that Gorgo and the gentleman glanced at each other and at her, and whispered a word now and then which certainly referred to Ague. When they had sung two songs the young lady came towards us and praised both the girls, and asked whether we would undertake to learn something quite new. I told her that my father was a great musician who could master the most difficult things at the first hearing."

"The most difficult! Hm… that depends," said the old man. "Did she show it you?"

"No; it is something in the style of Linus and she sang it to us."

"The daughter of the rich Porphyrius sang for your entertainment? Yours?" said Karnis laughing. "By Sirius! The world is turning upside down. Now that girls are forbidden to perform to the gentlefolks, art is being cultivated by the upper classes; it cannot be killed outright. For the future the listeners will be paid to keep quiet and the singers pay for the right of torturing their ears—our ears, our luckless ears will be victimized."

Orpheus smiled and shook his head; then, again dropping his knife, he went on eagerly:

"But if you could only hear her! You would give your last copper piece to hear her again."

"Indeed!" muttered his father. "Well, there are very good teachers here. Something by Linus did you say she sang?"

"Something of that kind; a lament for the dead of very great power: 'Return, oh! return my beloved, came back—come home!' that was the burthen of it. And there was a passage which said: 'Oh that each tear had a voice and could join with me in calling thee!' And how she sang it, father! I do not think I ever in my life heard anything like it. Ask mother. Even Dada's eyes were full of tears."

"Yes, it was beautiful," the mother agreed. "I could not help wishing that you were there."

Karnis rose and paced the little room, waving his arms and muttering:

"Ah! so that is how it is! A friend of the Muses. We saved the large lute—that is well. My chlamys has an ugly hole in it—if the girls were not asleep… but the first thing to-morrow Ague.... Tell me, is she handsome, tall?"

Herse had been watching her excitable husband with much satisfaction and now answered his question: "Not a Hera—not a Muse—decidedly not. Hardly above the middle height, slightly made, but not small, black eyes, long lashes, dark straight eyebrows. I could hardly, like Orpheus, call her beautiful…"

"Oh yes, mother.—Beautiful is a great word, and one my father has taught me to use but rarely; but she—if she is not beautiful who is?—when she raised her large dark eyes and threw back her head to bring out her lament; tone after tone seemed to come from the bottom of her heart and rise to the furthest height of heaven. Ah, if Agne could learn to sing like that! 'Throw your whole soul into your singing.'—You have told her that again and again. Now, Gorgo can and does. And she stood there as steady and as highly strung as a bow, every note came out with the ring of an arrow and went straight to the heart, as clear and pure as possible."

"Be silent!" cried the old man covering his ears with his hands. "I shall not close an eye till daylight, and then… Orpheus, take that silver—take it all, I have no more—go early to market and buy flowers—laurel branches, ivy, violets and roses. But no lotuses though the market here is full of them; they are showy, boastful things with no scent, I cannot bear them. We will go crowned to the Temple of the Muses."

"Buy away, buy all you want!" said Herse laughing, as she showed her husband some bright gold pieces. "We got that to-day, and if all is well...." Here she paused, pointed to the curtain, and went on again in a lower tone: "It all depends of course, on Agne's playing us no trick."

"How so? Why? She is a good girl and I will…"

"No, no," said Herse holding him back. "She does not know yet what the business is. The lady wants her…"

"Well?"

"To sing in the Temple of Isis."

Karnis colored. He was suddenly called from a lovely dream back to the squalid reality. "In the Temple of Isis," he said gloomily. "Agne? In the face of all the people? And she knows nothing about it?"

"Nothing, father."

"No? Well then, if that is the case… Agne, the Christian, in the Temple of Isis—here, here, where Bishop Theophilus is destroying all our sanctuaries and the monks outdo their master. Ah, children, children, how pretty and round and bright a soap-bubble is, and how soon it bursts. Do you know at all what it is that you are planning? If the black flies smell it out and it becomes known, by the great Apollo! we should have fared better at the hands of the pirates. And yet, and yet.—Do you know at all how the girl…?"

"She wept at the lady's singing," interrupted Herse eagerly, "and, silent as she generally is, on her way home she said: 'To sing like that! She is a happy girl!'"

Karnis looked up with renewed confidence.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "that is my Agne. Yes, yes, she truly loves her divine art. She can sing, she will sing! We will venture it, if you, I, all of us die for it!

"Herse, Orpheus, what have we to lose? Our gods, too, shall have their martyrs. It is a poor life that has no excitement. Our art—why, all I have ever had has been devoted to it. I make no boast of having sacrificed everything, and if gold and lands were again to be mine I would become a beggar once more for the sake of art: We have always held the divine Muse sacred, but who can keep up a brave heart when he sees her persecuted! She may only be worshipped in darkness in these days, and the Queen of Gods and men shuns the light like a moth, a bat, an owl. If we must die let it be with and for Her! Once more let pure and perfect song rejoice this old heart, and if afterwards… My children,

we have no place in this dim, colorless world. While the Arts lived there was Spring on the earth. Now they are condemned to death and it is Winter. The leaves fall from all the trees, and we piping birds need groves to sing in. How often already has Death laid his hand on our shoulder, every breath we draw is a boon of mercy—the extra length given in by the weaver, the hour of grace granted by the hangman to his victim! Our lives are no longer our own, a borrowed purse with damaged copper coins. The hard-hearted creditor has already bent his knuckles, and when he knocks the time is up. Once more let us have one hour of pure and perfect enjoyment, and then we will pay up capital and interest when we must."

"It cannot and will not be yet," said Herse resolutely, but she wiped her eyes with her hand. "If Agne sings even, so long as she does it without coercion and of her own free-will no Bishop can punish us."

"He cannot, he dare not!" cried the old man. "There are still laws and judges."

"And Gorgo's family is influential as well as rich. Porphyrius has power to protect us, and you do not yet know what a fancy he has taken to us. Ask mother."

"It is like a story," Herse put in. "Before we left, the old lady—she must be eighty or more—took me aside and asked me where we were lodging. I told her at the Widow Mary's and when she heard it she struck her crutch on the floor. 'Do you like the place?' she asked. I told her not at all, and said we could not possibly stop here."

"Quite right!" cried Karnis. "The monks in the court-yard will kill us as dead as rats if they hear us learning heathen hymns."

"That is what I told her; but the old lady did not allow me to finish; she drew me close to her and whispered, 'only do as my granddaughter wishes and you shall be safely housed and take this for the present'—and she put her hand into the purse at her girdle, gave the gold into my hand, and added loud enough for the others to hear: 'Fifty gold pieces out of my own pocket if Gorgo tells me that she is satisfied with your performance.'"

"Fifty gold pieces!" cried Karnis clasping his hands. "That brightens up the dull grey of existence. Fifty, then, are certain. If we sing six times that makes a talent—[estimated in 1880 at $1100]—and that will buy back our old vineyard at Leontium. I will repair the old Odeum—they have made a cowhouse of it—and when we sing there the monks may come and listen! You laugh? But you are simpletons—I should like to see who will forbid my singing on my own land and in my own country. A talent of gold!

"It is quite enough to pay on account, and I will not agree to any bargain that will not give me the field-slaves and cattle. Castles in the air, do you say? But just listen to me: We are sure you see of a hundred gold pieces at least…" He had raised his voice in his eagerness and while he spoke the curtains had been softly opened, and the dull glimmer of the lamp which stood in front of Orpheus fell on a head which was charming in spite of its disorder. A quantity of loose fair hair curled in papers stuck up all over the round head and fell over the forehead, the eyes were tired and still half shut, but the little mouth was wide awake and laughing with the frank amusement of light-hearted youth.

Karnis, without noticing the listener, had gone on with his visionary hopes of regaining his estates by his next earnings, but at this point the young girl, holding the curtain in her right hand, stretched out her plump left arm and begged in a humble whine:

"Good father Karnis, give me a little of your wealth; five poor little drachmae!"

The old man started; but he instantly recovered himself and answered good-naturedly enough:

"Go back to bed, you little hussy. You ought to be asleep instead of listening there!"

"Asleep?" said the girl. "While you are shouting like an orator against the wind! Five drachmae, father. I stick to that. A new ribband for me will cost one, and the same for Agne, two. Two I will spend on wine for us all, and that makes the five."

"That makes four—you are a great arithmetician to be sure!"

"Four?" said Dada, as much amazed as though the moon had fallen. "If only I had a counting-frame. No, father, five I tell you—it is five."

"No, child, four; and you shall have four," replied her father. "Plutus is at the door and to-morrow morning you shall both have garlands."

"Yes, of violets, ivy and roses," added Dame Herse. "Is Agne asleep?"

"As sound as the dead. She always sleeps soundly unless she lies wide awake all the night through. But we were both so tired—and I am still. It is a comfort to yawn. Do you see how I am sitting?"

"On the clothes-chest?" said Herse.

"Yes, and the curtain is not a strong back to the seat. Fortunately if I fall asleep I shall drop forwards, not backwards."

"But there is a bed for each of you," said the mother, and giving the girl a gentle push she followed her into the sleeping-alcove. In a few minutes she came out again.

"That is just like Dada!" she exclaimed. "Little Papias had rolled off the chest on which he was sleeping, so the good girl had put him into her bed and was sitting on the chest herself, tired as she was."

"She would do anything for that boy," said Karnis. "But it is past midnight. Come, Orpheus, let us make the bed!"

Three long hen-coops which stood piled against the wall were laid on the ground and covered with mats; on these the tired men stretched their limbs, but they could not sleep.

The little lamp was extinguished, and for an hour all was still in the dark room. Then, suddenly, there was a loud commotion; some elastic object flew against the wall with a loud flap, and Karnis, starting up, called out: "Get out—monster!"

"What is it?" cried Herse who had also been startled, and the old man replied angrily:

"Some daemon, some dog of a daemon is attacking me and giving me no peace. Wait, you villain—there, perhaps that will settle you," and he flung his second sandal. Then, without heeding the rustling fall of some object that he had hit by accident, he gasped out:

"The impudent fiend will not let me be. It knows that we need Agne's voice, and it keeps whispering, first in one ear and then in the other, that I should threaten to sell her little brother if she refuses; but I—I—strike a light, Orpheus!—She is a good girl and rather than do such a thing…"

"The daemon has been close to me too," said the son as he blew on the spark he had struck.

"And to me too," added Herse nervously. "It is only natural. There are no images of the gods in this Christian hovel. Away, hateful serpent! We are honest folks and will not agree to any vile baseness. Here is my amulet, Karnis; if the daemon comes again you must turn it round—you know how."

CHAPTER II

Early next morning the singers set out for the house of Porphyrius. The party was not complete, however, for Dada had been forced to remain at home. The shoes that the old man had flung to scare away the daemon had caught in the girl's dress which she had just washed, and had dragged it down on to the earth; she had found it in the morning full of holes burnt by the ashes into the damp material. Dada had no other presentable garment, so, in spite of her indignant refusal and many tears, she had to remain indoors with Papias. Agne's anxious offers to stay in her place with the little boy and to lend Dada her dress, both Karnis and his wife had positively refused; and Dada had lent her aid—at first silently though willingly and then with her usual merriment—in twining garlands for the others and in dressing Agne's smooth black plaits with a wreath of ivy and violets.

The men were already washed, anointed and crowned with poplar and laurel when a steward arrived from Porphyrius to bid them follow him to his master's house. But a small sacrifice was necessary, for the messenger desired them to lay aside their wreaths, which would excite ill-feeling among the monks, and certainly be snatched off by the Christian mob. Karnis when he started was greatly disappointed, and as much depressed as he had been triumphant and hopeful a short time before.

The monks, who had gathered outside the Xenodochium, glanced with scowling suspicion at the party, who could not recover the good spirits with which they had begun the day till they were fairly out of the narrow, gloomy alleys, reeking with tar and salt fish, that adjoined the harbor, and where they had to push their way through a dense throng. The steward led the van with Herse, talking freely in reply to her enquiries.

His master, he said, was one of the great merchants of the city, whose wife had died twenty years since in giving birth to Gorgo. His two sons were at present absent on their travels. The old lady who had been so liberal in her treatment of the singers was Damia, the mother of Porphyrius. She had a fine fortune of her own, and notwithstanding her great age was still respected as the soul of business in the household, and as a woman deeply versed in the mysterious sciences. Mary, the pious Christian, who had founded the "House of the Holy Martyr," was the widow of Apelles, the brother of Porphyrius, but she had ceased all intercourse with her husband's family. This was but natural, as she was at the head of the Christian women of Alexandria, while the household of Porphyrius—though the master himself had been baptized—was as thoroughly heathen as any in Alexandria.

Karnis heard nothing of all this, for he came last of the party. Orpheus and Agne followed next to Herse and the steward, and after them came two slaves, carrying the lutes and pipes. Agne walked with downcast eyes, as if she desired to avoid seeing all that surrounded her, though when Orpheus addressed her she shyly glanced up at him and answered briefly and timidly. They presently came out of an obscure alley by the canal connecting Kibotus with Lake Mareotis where the Nile-boats lay at anchor. Karnis drew a deeper breath, for here the air was clear and balmy; a light northerly breeze brought the refreshing fragrance of the sea, and the slender palm-trees that bordered the canal threw long shadows mingling with the massive shade of the sycamores. The road was astir with busy groups, birds sang in the trees, and the old musician drank in the exciting and aromatic atmosphere of the Egyptian Spring with keen enjoyment.

As they reached the middle of the steep bridge across the canal he involuntarily stood still, riveted by the view of the southwest. In his excitement he threw up his arms, his eyes glistened with moisture and with the enthusiasm of youth, and, as was always the case when his emotions were stirred by some glorious work of God or man, an image rose to his mind, all unbidden—the image of his eldest son, now dead, but in life his closest and most sympathetic comrade. He felt as though his hand could grasp the shoulder of that son, too early snatched away, whose gifts had far transcended

those of the surviving Orpheus—as though he too could gaze with him on the grand scene that lay before him.

On a platform of rocks and mighty masonry rose a structure of wonderful magnificence and beauty, so brilliantly illuminated by the morning sun that its noble proportions and gorgeous colors showed in dazzling splendor and relief. Over the gilt dome bent the cloudless blue of the African sky, and the polished hemisphere shone, as radiant as the sun whose beams it reflected. Sloping planes for vehicles, and flights of steps for pedestrians led up to the gates. The lower part of this wonderful edifice—the great Temple of Serapis—was built to stand forever, and the pillars of the vestibule supported a roof more fitted to the majesty of the gods than to the insignificance of mortals; priests and worshippers moved here like children among the trunks of some gigantic forest. Round the cornice, in hundreds of niches, and on every projection, all the gods of Olympus and all the heroes and sages of Greece seemed to have met in conclave, and stood gazing down on the world in gleaming brass or tinted marble. Every portion of the building blazed with gold and vivid coloring; the painter's hand had added life to the marble groups in high relief that filled the pediments and the smaller figures in the long row of metopes. All the population of a town might have found refuge in the vast edifice and its effect on the mind was like that of a harmonious symphony of adoration sung by a chorus of giants.

"All hail! Great Serapis! I greet thee in joyful humility, thankful that Thou hast granted to my old eyes to see Thy glorious and eternal temple once again!" murmured Karnis in devout contemplation. Then, appealing to his wife and son, he pointed in silence to the building. Presently, however, as he watched Orpheus gazing in speechless delight at its magnificent proportions he could not forbear.

"This," he began with fervid enthusiasm, "is the stronghold of Serapis the King of the Gods! A work for all time. Its youth has lasted five hundred years, its future will extend to all eternity.—Aye, so it is; and so long as it endures in all its glory the old gods cannot be deposed!"

"No one will ever dare to touch a stone of it," said the steward. "Every child in Alexandria knows that the world will crumble into dust and ashes if a finger is laid on that Temple, and the man who ventures to touch the sacred image…"

"The god can protect himself!" interrupted the singer. "But you—you Christian hypocrites who pretend to hate life and love death—if you really long so vehemently for the end of all things, you have only to fall upon this glorious structure.—Do that, do that—only do that!"

The old man shook his fist at the invisible foe and Herse echoed his words:

"Aye, aye, only do that!" Then she added more calmly: "Well, if everything comes to an end at once the enemies of the gods will die with us; and there can be nothing terrible in perishing at the same time with everything that is beautiful or dear to us."

"Nevertheless," said the steward, "the Bishop has put out his hand to touch the sanctuary. But our noble Olympius would not suffer the sacrilegious host to approach, and they had to retire with broken heads. Serapis will not be mocked; he will stand though all else perish. 'Eternity,' the priest tells us, 'is to him but as an instant, and while millions of generations bloom and fade, he is still and forever the same!'"

"Hail, all hail to the great god!" cried Orpheus with hands outstretched towards the temple.

"Yea, hail! for everlasting glory shall be his!" repeated his father. "Great is Serapis, and his house and his image shall last…"

"Till the next full moon!" said a passer-by in a tone of sinister mockery, shaking his fist in the face, as it were, of the god. Orpheus turned quickly to punish the prophet of evil; but he had disappeared in the crowd and the tide of men had borne him onwards. "Till the next full moon!" murmured Agne, who had shuddered at her companion's rapturous ejaculations, and she glanced uneasily at Orpheus; but by the time Herse addressed her a minute or two later she had controlled the expression of her features, and the matron's heart was gladdened by her bright smile. Nay, many

a young Alexandrian, passing the group on foot or in a carriage, looked at her a second time, for that smile lent a mysterious charm to her pale, calm face. Nor had it faded away when they had crossed the bridge and were nearing the shores of the lake, for an idea once conceived lingered long in Agne's mind; and as she walked on in the bright glory of the morning's sun her mind's eye was fixed on a nocturnal scene—on the full moon, high in the sky—on the overthrow of the great idol and a glittering army among the marble ruins of the Serapeum. Apostles and martyrs soared around, the Saviour sat enthroned in glory and triumph, while angels, cradled on the clouds that were his footstool, were singing beatific hymns which sounded clearly in her ear above the many-voiced tumult of the quays. The vision did not vanish till she was desired to get into the boat.

Herse was a native of Alexandria and Karnis had passed some of the best years of his life there; but to Orpheus and Agne all was new, and even the girl, when once she had escaped from the crowd and noise which oppressed her, took an interest in the scene and asked a question now and then. The younger man had not eyes enough to see all that claimed his attention and admiration.

There were the great sluice-gates at the entrance to the canal that joined the lake to the sea—there, in a separate dock, lay the splendid imperial Nile-boats which served to keep up communication between the garrison of Alexandria and the military stations on the river—there, again, were the gaudy barges intended for the use of the 'comes', the prefect and other high officials—and there merchant-vessels of every size lay at anchor in countless number. Long trains of many-colored sails swept over the rippling lake like flights of birds across a cornfield, and every inch of the shore was covered with stores or buildings. Far away to the south long trellices of vine covered the slopes, broken by the silvery glaucous tones of the olive-groves, and by clumps of towering palms whose crowns mingled to form a lofty canopy. White walls, gaudily-painted temples and private villas gleamed among the green, and the slanting rays of the low sun, shining on the drops that fell from the never-resting wheels and buckets that irrigated the land, turned them into showers of diamonds. These water-works, of the most ingenious construction, many of them invented and contrived by scientific engineers, were the weapons with which man had conquered the desert that originally surrounded this lake, forcing it into green fertility and productiveness of grain and fruit. Nay, the desert had, for many centuries, here ceased to exist. Dionysus the generous, and the kindly garden-gods had blest the toil of men, and yet, now, in many a plot—in all which belonged to Christian owners—their altars lay scattered and overthrown.

During the last thirty years much indeed was changed, and nothing to the satisfaction of old Karnis; Herse, too, shook her head, and when the rowers had pulled them about half-way across, she pointed to a broad vacant spot on the bank where a new building was just rising above the soil, and said sadly to her husband:

"Would you know that place again? Where is our dear old temple gone? The temple of Dionysus." Karnis started up so hastily that he almost upset the boat, and their conductor was obliged to insist on his keeping quiet; he obeyed but badly, however, for his arms were never still as he broke out:

"And do you suppose that because we are in Egypt I can keep my living body as still as one of your dead mummies? Let others keep still if they can! I say it is shameful, disgraceful; a dove's gall might rise at it! That splendid building, the pride of the city and the delight of men's eyes, destroyed—swept away like dust from the road! Do you see? Do you see, I say? Broken columns, marble capitals, here, there and everywhere at the bottom of the lake—here a head and there a torso! Great and noble masters formed those statues by the aid of the gods, and they—they, small and ignoble as they are, have destroyed them by the aid of evil daemons. They have annihilated and drowned works that were worthy to live forever! And why? Shall I tell you? Because they shun the Beautiful as an owl shuns light. Aye, they do! There is nothing they hate or dread so much as beauty; wherever they find it, they deface and destroy it, even if it is the work of the Divinity. I accuse them before the Immortals—for where is the grove even, not the work of man but the special work of Heaven itself? Where is

our grove, with its cool grottos, its primaeval trees, its shady nooks, and all the peace and enjoyment of which it was as full as a ripe grape is full of sweet juice?"

"It was cut down and rooted up," replied the steward. "The emperor gave the sanctuary over to Bishop Theophilus and he set to work at once to destroy it. The temple was pulled down, the sacred vessels went into the melting-pot, and the images were mutilated and insulted before they were thrown into the lime-kiln. The place they are building now is to be a Christian church. Oh! to think of the airy, beautiful colonnades that once stood there, and then of the dingy barn that is to take their place!"

"Why do the gods endure it? Has Zeus lost his thunderbolts?" cried Orpheus clenching his hands, and paying no heed to Agne who sat pale and sternly silent during this conversation.

"Nay, he only sleeps, to wake with awful power," said the old man. "See those blocks of marble and ruins under the waves. Swift work is destruction! And men lost their wits and looked on at the crime, flinging the delight of the gods into the water and the kiln. They were wise, very wise; fishes and flames are dumb and cannot cry to heaven. One barbarian, in one hour can destroy what it has taken the sublimest souls years, centuries, to create. They glory in destruction and ruin and they can no more build up again such a temple as stood there than they can restore trees that have taken six hundred years to grow. There—out there, Herse, in the hollow where those black fellows are stirring mortar—they have given them shirts too, because they are ashamed of the beauty of men's bodies—that is where the grotto was where we found your poor father."

"The grotto?" repeated his wife, looking at the spot through her tears, and thinking of the day when, as a girl, she had hurried to the feast of Dionysus and sought her father in the temple. He had been famous as a gem-cutter. In obedience to the time-honored tradition in Alexandria, after intoxicating himself with new wine in honor of the god, he had rushed out into the street to join the procession. The next morning he had not returned; the afternoon passed and evening came and still he did not appear, so his daughter had gone in search of him. Karnis was at that time a young student and, as her father's lodger, had rented the best room in the house. He had met her going on her errand and had been very ready to help her in the search; before long they had found the old man in the ivy-grown grotto in the grove of Dionysus—motionless and cold, as if struck by lightning. The bystanders believed that the god had snatched him away in his intoxicated legion.

In this hour of sorrow Karnis had proved himself her friend, and a few months after Herse had become his wife and gone with him to Tauromenium in Sicily.

All this rose before her mind, and even Karnis sat gazing dumbly at the waves; for every spot where some decisive change has occurred in our lives has power to revive the past when we see it again after a long absence. Thus they all sat in silence till Orpheus, touching his father, pointed out the temple of Isis where he had met the fair Gorgo on the previous day. The old man turned to look at the sanctuary which, as yet, remained intact.

"A barbarous structure!" he said bitterly. "The art of the Egyptians has long been numbered with the dead and the tiger hungers only for the living!"

"Nay, it is not such a bad piece of work," replied the steward, "but it is out of their reach; for the ground on which it stands belongs to my old mistress, and the law protects private property.—You must at your leisure inspect the ship-yard here; it is perhaps the most extensive in the world. The timber that is piled there—cedar of Lebanon, oak from Pontus and heavy iron-wood from Ethiopia—is worth hundreds of talents."

"And does all that belong to your master?"

"No; the owner is the grandson of a freedman, formerly in his family. Now they are very rich and highly respected, and Master Clemens sits in the Senate. There he is—that man in a white robe."

"A Christian, I should imagine," observed the singer.

"Very true;" replied the steward. "But what is good remains good, and he is a worthy and excellent man notwithstanding. He keeps a tight hand over the ship-yard here and over the others too by the harbor of Eunostus. Only Clemens can never let other people have their own opinions; in that

he is just like the rest of them. Every slave he buys must become a Christian and his sons are the same; even Constantine, though he is an officer in the imperial army and as smart and clever a soldier as lives.—As far as we are concerned we leave every man to his own beliefs. Porphyrius makes no secret of his views and all the vessels we use in the corn-trade are built by Christians.—But here we are."

The boat stopped at a broad flight of marble steps which led from the lake into the garden of Porphyrius' house. Karnis as he walked through the grounds felt himself at greater ease, for here the old gods were at home; their statues gleamed among the dark clumps of evergreens, and were mirrored in the clear tanks, while delicious perfumes were wafted from the garlanded shrines and freshly anointed altars, to greet the newcomers.

CHAPTER III

The family of musicians were kindly received, but they were not immediately called upon to perform, for as soon as Damia heard that the pretty fair-haired child who had pleased her so much the day before had been obliged to remain at home, she had one of her granddaughter's dresses brought out, and requested Herse to go back to fetch her. Some slaves were to accompany Herse and transfer all her little property on board a Nile-boat belonging to Porphyrius, which was lying at anchor just off the ship-yard. In this large barge there were several cabins which had often accommodated guests, and which would now serve very well as a residence for Karnis and his party. Indeed, it was particularly well suited for a family of musicians, for they could practise there undisturbed, and Gorgo could at any time pay them a visit.

Herse went back to the Xenodochium with a lighter heart; her son also returned to the city to replace a number of necessaries that had been lost on board ship, and Karnis, rejoicing to be out of the monk-haunted asylum had remained in the men's room in the house of his new patron, enjoying the good things which abounded there. He felt as though he was here once more at home after years of exile. Here dwelt the spirit of his fathers; here he found men who enjoyed life after his own fashion, who could share his enthusiasms and his hatreds. He drank noble liquor out of an elegantly carved onyx cup, all that he heard soothed his ears, and all that he said met with entire sympathy. The future prospects of his family, till now so uncertain, were hardly inferior to those which his vivid imagination had painted the night before. And even if Fortune should again desert him, the hours of present enjoyment should be written down to the profit side of life, and remain a permanent gain at any rate in memory.

The venerable Damia, her son Porphyrius, and the fair Gorgo were in fact a trio such as are rarely met with. The master of the house, more cautious than the women, was inclined to think that his mother and daughter had been somewhat overhasty and imprudent in their advances and he had at first received Karnis with considerable reserve; but after a short interview he had convinced himself that the musician was a man of unusual culture and superior stamp. The old lady had, from the first, been predisposed in his favor, for she had read in the stars last night that the day was to bring her a fortunate meeting. Her wish was law, and Karnis could not help smiling when she addressed her son, whose hair had long been grey and who looked fully competent to manage his own household, as "my child," not hesitating to scold and reprove him. Her cathedra was a high arm-chair which she never quitted but to be carried to her observatory on the roof of the house, where she kept her astrological tablets and manuscripts. The only weakness about her was in her feet; but strong, and willing arms were always at her disposal to carry her about—to table, into her sleeping-room, and during the daytime out to sunny spots in the garden. She was never so happy as when Helios warmed her back with his rays, for her old blood needed it after the long night-watches that she still would keep in her observatory. Even during the hottest noon she would sit in the sun, with a large green umbrella to shade her keen eyes, and those who desired to speak with her might find shade as best they could. As she stood, much bent, but propped on her ivory crutches, eagerly following every word of a conversation, she looked as though she were prepared at any moment to spring into the middle of it and interrupt the speaker. She always said exactly what she meant without reserve or ruth; and throughout her long life, as the mistress of great wealth, she had always been allowed to have her own way. She asserted her rights even over her son, though he was the centre of a web whose threads reached to the furthest circumference of the known world. The peasants who tilled the earth by the Upper and Lower Nile, the shepherds who kept their flocks in the Arabian desert, in Syria, or on the Silphium meads of Cyrenaica, the wood-cutters of Lebanon and Pontus, the mountaineers of Hispania and Sardinia, the brokers, merchants, and skippers of every port on the Mediterranean,

were bound by these threads to the villa on the shore of Mareotis, and felt the tie when the master there—docile as a boy to his mother's will—tightened or released his hold.

His possessions, even in his youth, had been so vast that their increment could bring no added enjoyment to him or his family, and yet their increase had become his life's task. He strove for a higher sum to figure on the annual balance sheet, as eagerly as an athlete strives for a prize; and his mother not only inspected the account, but watched every important undertaking with keen interest. When her son and his colleagues doubted over some decision it was she who gave the casting vote; but though her advice in most cases proved sound and profitable, she herself ascribed this less to her own acumen and knowledge of the world than to the hints she obtained from the stars and from magical calculations. Her son did not follow her in these speculations, but he rarely disputed the conclusions that she drew from her astrological studies. While she was turning night into day he was glad to entertain a few learned friends, for all the hours of leisure that he could snatch from his pursuit of fortune, he devoted to philosophy, and the most distinguished thinkers of Alexandria were happy to be received at the hospitable table of so rich a patron. He was charmed to be called "Callias,"

[The noble Athenian family of Callias was famed for its wealth and splendor.]

and the heathen teachers at the schools of the Museum and Serapeum regarded him as a faithful ally. It was known that he had been baptized, but he never liked to hear the fact mentioned. He won all hearts by his perfect modesty, but even more perhaps by a certain air of suffering and melancholy which protected the wealthy merchant against the envy of detractors.

In the course of her conversation with Karnis the old lady enquired particularly as to the antecedent history of Agne, for if there had been a stain on her character, or if she were by birth a slave, Gorgo could not of course be seen with her in public, and in that case Karnis would have to teach the lament of Isis to some freeborn singer. Karnis in reply could only shrug his shoulders, and beg the ladies and Porphyrius to judge for themselves when he should have related the young girl's story.

Three years since, he said, he had been staying at Antioch at the time of a violent outbreak against the levying of certain taxes. There had been much bloodshed, and he and his family had got out of the city as quickly as they could. It was growing dusk when they turned into a wayside inn, where they found Agne and her little brother captives to a soldier. During the night the girl had crept up to the little boy's bed, and to comfort and lull him had begun to sing him a simple song. The singer's voice was so pure and pathetic that it had touched both him and his wife and they had at once purchased the girl and her brother for a small sum. He had simply paid what the soldier asked, not regarding the children in the light of slaves; nor had he had any description of them written out, though it was, no doubt, in his power to treat them as slaves and to sell them again, since the sale had taken place before witnesses who might still be found. He had afterwards learnt from the girl that her parents were Christians and had settled in Antioch only a few years previously; but she had no friends nor relatives there. Her father, being a tax-collector in the service of the Emperor, had moved about a great deal, but she remembered his having spoken of Augusta Treviroruin in Belgica prima, as his native place.—[Now Trier or Treves, on the Moselle.]

Agne had witnessed the attack on her father's house by the angry mob who had killed her parents, their two slaves, and her elder brother. Her father must certainly have been an official of some rank, and probably, as it would seem, a Roman citizen, in which case—as Porphyrius agreed—both the young girl and her little brother could legally claim their freedom. The insurgents who had dragged the two children out into the street had been driven off by the troops, and it was from them that Karnis had rescued them. "And I have never regretted it," added the old musician, "for Agne is a sweet, gentle soul. Of her voice I need say nothing, since you yourselves heard it yesterday."

"And were quite delighted with it!" cried Gorgo. "If flowers could sing it would be like that!"

"Well, well," said Karnis. "She has a lovely voice—but she wants wings. Something—what, I know not, keeps the violet rooted to the soil."

"Christian scruples," said the merchant, and Damia added:

"Let Eros touch her—that will loosen her tongue."

"Eros, always Eros!" repeated Gorgo shrugging her shoulders. "Nay, love means suffering—those who love drag a chain with them. To do the best of which he is capable man needs only to be free, true, and in health."

"That is a great deal, fair mistress," replied Karnis eagerly. "With these three gifts the best work is done. But as to Agne—what can be further from freedom than a girl bound to service? her body, to be sure is healthy, but her spirit suffers; she can get no peace for dread of the Christian's terrors: Sin, Repentance, and Hell...."

"Oh, we know how their life is ruined!" interrupted the old lady. "Was it Agne who introduced you to Mary's Asylum?"

"No, noble lady."

"But how then—that prudent saint generally selects her guests, and those that are not baptized…"

"She certainly sheltered heathens on this occasion."

"I am much surprised. Tell me how it happened."

"We were at Rome," began Karnis, "and my patron there persuaded Marcus, Mary's son, to take us on board his ship at Ostia. We dropped anchor at Cyrene, where the young master wanted to pick up his brother and bring him also to Alexandria."

"Then is Demetrius here?" asked Porphyrius.

"Yes, sir. He came on board at Cyrene. Hardly had we got fairly to sea again when we saw two pirate ships. Our trireme was at once turned round, but in our hurry to regain the harbor we stuck fast on a sand bank; the boats were at once put out to save the passengers and Cynegius, the consul…"

"Cynegius—on his way here!" exclaimed Porphyrius, much excited.

"He landed yesterday with us in the harbor of Eunostus. The secretaries and officers of his suite filled one boat and Marcus and his brother were getting into the other with their men. We, and others of the free passengers, should have been left behind if Dada…"

"That pretty little blonde?" asked Damia.

"The very same. Marcus had taken a great fancy to her prattle and her songs during the voyage—no nightingale can sing more clearly—and when she begged and prayed him he gave way at once, and said: he would take her in his boat. But the brave child declared that she would jump into the sea before she would leave without us."

"Well done!" cried the old lady, and Porphyrius added:

"That speaks well for her and for you."

"So after all Marcus found room for us in the boat—for all of us, and we got safely to land. A few days after we all came on in a troop-ship: Cynegius, the two brothers and the rest, all safe and sound; and, as we had lost everything we possessed, Marcus gave us a certificate which procured our admission into his mother's Xenodochium. And then the gods brought me and mine under the notice of your noble daughter."

"Then Cynegius is here, positively here?" asked Porphyrius once more. Karnis assured him that he was, and the merchant, turning to his mother, went on:

"And Olympius has not yet come home. It is always the same thing; he is as rash as a boy. If they should take him! The roads are swarming with monks. There is something astir. Bring out the chariot, Syrus, at once; and tell Atlas to be ready to accompany me. Cynegius here!—Ha, ha! I thank the gods!"

The last exclamation was addressed to a man who at this instant came into the room, muffled up to the eyes. He threw off the hood of his cloak and the wrapper that went round his throat, concealing his long white beard, and as he did so he exclaimed with a gasp for breath:

"Here I am once more!—Cynegius is here and matters look serious my friend."

"You have been to the Museum?"

"Without any obstruction. I found them all assembled. Brave lads. They are all for us and the gods. There are plenty of weapons. The Jews—[At that time about two-fifths of the whole population.]—are not stirring, Onias thinks he may vouch for that; and we must surely be a match for the monks and the imperial cohorts."

"If the gods only stand by us to-day and tomorrow," replied Porphyrius doubtfully.

"For ever, if only the country people do their duty!" cried the other. "But who is this stranger?"

"The chief of the singers who were here yesterday," replied Gorgo.

"Karnis, the son of Hiero of Tauromenium," said the musician, bowing to the stranger, whose stately figure and handsome, thoughtful head struck him with admiration.

"Karnis of Tauromenium!" exclaimed the newcomer with glad surprise. "By Hercules! a strange meeting. Your hand, your hand, old man. How many years is it since we last emptied a wine-jar together at the house of old Hippias? Seven lustres have turned our hair grey, but we still can stand upright. Well, Karnis son of Hiero—and who am I?"

"Olympius—the great Olympius!" cried Karnis, eagerly grasping the offered hand. "May all the gods bless this happy day!"

"All the gods?" repeated the philosopher. "Is that what you say? Then you have not crawled under the yoke of the cross?"

"The world can rejoice only under the auspices of the gods!" cried Karnis excitedly.

"And it shall rejoice still, we will save it from gloom!" added the other with a flash of vehemence.

"The times are fateful. We must fight; and no longer over trifles; we cannot now break each other's heads over a quibble, or believe that the whole world hangs on the question whether the instant of death is the last minute of this life or the first of the next. No—what now remains to be decided is whether the old gods shall be victorious, whether we shall continue to live free and happy under the rule of the Immortals, or whether we shall bow under the dismal doctrine of the carpenter's crucified son; we must fight for the highest hopes and aims of humanity."

"I know," interrupted Karnis, "you have already done battle valiantly for great Serapis. They wanted to lay hands on his sanctuary but you and your disciples put them to rout. The rest got off scot-free…"

"But they have taught me the value of my head," said Olympius laughing. "Evagrius prices it at three talents. Why, you might buy a house with the money and a modest man could live upon the interest. This worthy man keeps me concealed here. We must talk over a few things, Porphyrius; and you, Gorgo, do not forget the solemn festival of Isis. Now that Cynegius is here it must be made as splendid as possible, and he must tell the Emperor, who has sent him, what temper we Alexandrians are in. But where is the dark maiden I saw yesterday?"

"In the garden," replied Gorgo.

"She is to sing at the foot of the bier!" cried Olympius. "That must not be altered."

"If I can persuade her—she is a Christian," said Karnis doubtfully.

"She must," said the philosopher positively. "It will be a bad lookout indeed for the logic and rhetoric of Alexandria if an old professor and disputant cannot succeed in turning a young girl's resolutions upside down. Leave that to me. I shall find time for a chat with you by and bye, friend Karnis. How in the world does it happen that you, who so often have helped us with your father's coin, have come down to be the chief of a band of travelling musicians? You will have much to tell

me, my good friend; but even such important matters must give way to those that are more pressing. One word with you, Porphyrius."

Agne had been all this time awaiting Herse's return in the colonnade that ran along the garden-front of the house. She was glad to be alone, and it was very comfortable to rest on the soft cushions under the gilt-coffered ceiling of the arcade. At each end stood large shrubs covered with bunches of violet-blue flowers and the spreading branches cast a pleasant shade on the couch where she sat; the beautiful flowers, which were strange to her, were delightfully fragrant, and from time to time she helped herself to the refreshments which Gorgo herself had brought out to her. All she saw, heard, and felt, was soothing to her mind; never had she seen or tasted juicier peaches, richer bunches of grapes, fresher almonds or more tempting cakes; on the shrubs in the garden and on the grass-plots between the paths there was not a dead leaf, not a dry stem, not the tiniest weed. The buds were swelling on the tall trees, shrubs without end were covered with blossoms—white, blue, yellow, and red—while, among the smooth, shining leaves of the orange and lemon trees, gleamed the swelling fruit. On a round tank close at hand some black swans were noiselessly tracing evanescent circles and uttering their strange lament. The song of birds mingled with the plash of fountains, and even the marble statues, for all that they were dumb, seemed to be enjoying the sweet morning air and the stir and voice of nature.

Yes, she could be happy here; as she peeled a peach and slowly swallowed the soft fragrant mouthfuls, she laughed to remember the hard ship's-biscuit, of the two previous days' fare. And it was Gorgo's privilege to revel in these good things day after day, year after year. It was like living in Eden, in the perpetual spring of man's first blissful home on earth. There could be no suffering here; who could cry here, who could be sorrowful, who could die?… Here a new train of thought forced itself upon her. She was still so young, and yet she was as familiar with the idea of death as she was with life; for whenever she had happened to tell any minister of her creed that she was an orphan and a slave, and deeply sad and sorrowful, the joys of eternity in Paradise had always been described to her for her consolation, and it was in hopes of Heaven that her visionary nature found such a modicum of comfort as might suffice to keep the young artist-soul from despair. And now it struck her that it must be hard, very hard to die, in the midst of all this splendor. Living here must be a foretaste of the joys of Paradise—and in the next world, among the angels of Heaven, in the presence of the Saviour—would it not be a thousand times more beautiful even than this? She shuddered, for, sojourning here, she was no longer to be counted as one of the poor and humble sufferers to whom Christ had promised the Kingdom of Heaven—here she was one of the rich, who had nothing to hope for after death.

She pushed the peaches away with a feeling of oppression, and closed her eyes that she might no longer see all these perishable splendors and sinful works of the heathen, which pandered only to the senses. She longed to remain miserable and poor on earth, that she might rejoin her parents and dwell with them eternally.

To her it was not a belief but a certainty that her father and mother were dwelling in Heaven, and she had often felt moved to pray that she might die and be reunited to them; but she must not die yet, for her little brother still needed her care. The kind souls whom she served let him lack for nothing, it is true, that could conduce to his bodily welfare; still, she could not appear before her parents without the little one in her hand, and he would be lost eternally if his soul fell into the power of the enemies of her faith. Her heart ached when she reflected that Karnis, who was certainly not one of the reprobate and whom she affectionately revered as a master in the art she loved—that Herse, and the light-hearted Dada, and Orpheus even, must all be doomed to perish eternally; and to save Orpheus she would willingly have forfeited half the joys of Paradise. She saw that he was no less an idolater than his parents; and yet, day by day, she prayed that his soul might be saved, and she never ceased to hope for a miracle—that he too might see a vision, like Paul, and confess the Saviour. She was so happy when she was with him, and never happier than when it was her fortune to sing with

him, or to his admirable accompaniment on the lute. When she could succeed in forgetting herself completely, and in giving utterance by her lovely voice to all that was highest and best in her soul, he, whose ear was no less sensitive and appreciative than his father's, would frankly express his approval, and in these moments life was indeed fair and precious.

Music was the bond between her and Orpheus, and when her soul was stirred she could feel and express herself in music. Song was the language of her heart, and she had learnt by experience that it was a language which even the heathen could both use and understand. The Eternal Father himself must find joy in such a voice as Gorgo's. She was a heathen, and yet she had thrown into her song all that Agne herself could feel when she lifted up her heart in passionate prayer. The Christian—so she had often been taught—must have no part with the idolaters; but it was God himself who had cast her on the hands of Karnis, and the Church commanded that servants should obey their masters. Singing seemed to her to be a language in itself, bestowed by God on all living creatures, even on the birds, wherein to speak to Him; so she allowed herself to look forward with pleasure to an opportunity of mingling her own voice with that of the heathen lady.

CHAPTER IV

Not long after Porphyrius and the philosopher had retired to a private room Herse returned with Dada. Gorgo's blue spangled dress, which Damia had sent her, suited the girl to perfection; but she was quite out of breath, and her hair was in disorder. Herse, too, looked agitated, her face was red and she dragged little Papias, whose hand she held, rather roughly at her heels.

Dada was evidently abashed; less by reason of the splendor that surrounded her than because her foster-mother had strictly enjoined her to be very quiet and mannerly in the presence of their patrons. She felt shy and strange as she made her low courtesy to the old lady; but Damia seemed to be pleased with the timid grace of her demeanor, for she offered her her hand—an honor she usually conferred only on her intimates, bid her stoop, and gave her a kiss, saying kindly: "You are a good brave girl. Fidelity to your friends is pleasing in the sight of the gods, and finds its reward even among men."

Dada, obeying a happy impulse, threw herself on her knees before the old woman, kissed her hands, and then, sitting on her heels, nestled at her feet.

Gorgo, however, noticing Herse's agitation, asked what had happened to them. Some monks, Herse explained, had followed them on the road hither, had snatched Dada's lyre from the slave who was carrying it and pulled the wreath out of her hair. Damia was furious as she heard it, and trembled with rage as she railed at the wild hordes who disgraced and desecrated Alexandria, the sacred home of the Muses; then she began to speak once more of the young captain, Mary's son, to whom the troupe of singers owed their lives.

"Marcus," said she, "is said to be a paragon of chastity. He races in the hippodrome with all the gallants of the town and yet—if it is true it is a miracle—he shuns women as though he were a priest already. His mother is very anxious that he should become one; but he, by the grace of Aphrodite, is the son of my handsome Appelles, who, if he had gazed into those blue eyes all the way from Rome to Alexandria, would have surrendered at mercy; but then he would also have conquered them—as surely as I hope to live till autumn. You need not blush so, child. After all, Marcus is a man like other men. Keep your eyes open, Dame Herse!"

"Never fear!" cried Herse. "And I have need to keep them open I am sorry to say. The young captain, who on board ship was so bashful and retiring, as soon as he was on land altered his time. While we were away this morning he crept into his own mother's inn like a ferret, opened the door of our room with the keys of which he has the command—it is shameful!—and proposed to the girl to fly, to leave us—she is the daughter of a dear sister of mine—and go with him; who but he knows where!"

Damia struck the floor with her crutch and, interrupting the indignant matron with a spiteful laugh, exclaimed:

"Ha, ha! The saintly Mary's most saintly son! Such wonders do not happen every day! Here, Dada—here; take this ring, it has been worn by a woman who once was young and who has had many lovers. Close—come close, my sweet child."

Dada looked up at the old lady with puzzled eyes; Damia bent her head close to the girl's, and whispered, softly but vehemently in her ear:

"Only turn that milksop's head, make him so madly and desperately in love with you that he does not know which way to turn for delicious torment. You can do it I know, and if you do—well, I make no promises; but on the day when all Alexandria is talking of that woman's son as wandering out, night after night, to watch under the window of the fair Dada, the heathen singer—when he drives you out in the face of day and in his own chariot, down the Canopic Way and past his mother's door—then child, ask, claim whatever you will, and old Damia will not refuse it."

Then raising her head she added to the others:

"In the afternoon, my friends, you can take possession of your new quarters. Go with them, Dada. By-and-bye we will find you a pretty room in the tower. Come and see me very often, sweet one, and tell me all your prettiest tales. When I am not too busy I shall always be glad to see you, for you and I have a secret you know."

The girl stood up, looking uneasily at the old woman; Damia nodded knowingly, as much as to say that they quite understood each other and again offered her hand to Dada; but Dada could not kiss it; she turned and followed the others more gravely than usual.

Gorgo guessed what the old lady would be at with Dada; as soon as the party of singers had taken leave she went up to her grandmother and said reproachfully:

"That little fair thing will find no difficulty in making a fool of Marcus; for my part I hardly know him, but why should he pay for his mother's sins against you? How can he help…"

"He cannot help it," interrupted Damia with decisive abruptness. "He can do nothing to save his mother, any more than you can help being a child of twenty and bound to hold your tongue till your opinion is asked."

.....

The family of musicians had all met on board the barge which was lying at anchor in the lake, off the ship-yard. Orpheus had just been an eye-witness of the disturbance which prevailed throughout the city, and the wild howls and cries that were audible in the distance confirmed his report; but the waters of the lake were an unruffled mirror of blue, the slaves in the ship-yard were at work as usual, and the cooing turtle-doves flew from palm to palm.

No signs of troubled times were to be seen in the floating home of the wanderers. The steward had provided for everything. There were rooms and beds to spare in the vessel; the large deck-cabin was a comfortable sitting-room, and from the little galley at the prow came a savory smell of cooking and a cheerful clang of pots and pans.

"This is living!" exclaimed Karnis, stretching himself comfortably on a divan. "This abode seems made on purpose for our noble selves! Sit down, mother, make yourself at home. Here we are people of consequence, and if it were only to make things pleasant for the slaves we must behave as though we had never known people who take their meals squatted round an earthen bowl, and clawing out the broken meat. Enjoy the gifts of the present—who knows how long this golden hour may last! Ah, wife, it reminds us of former times! It would be very pleasant to be like this, side by side, and help ourselves from a table all our own to dainty dishes which we had not assisted in cooking. For you, old woman, have done everything with your own hands for so long, that you deserve to have some one to wait on you for once."

A little table was placed by each divan and covered with appetizing food; the steward mixed some fine wine of the country with fresh, clear water, Orpheus offered the libation, and Karnis spiced the meal with jests and tales of his youth, of which he had been reminded by his meeting with his old friend and comrade Olympius.

Dada interrupted him frequently, laughing more loudly and recklessly than usual; she was in a fever of excitement and Herse did not fail to remark it. The good woman was somewhat uneasy. The very fact that her husband always gave himself up heart and soul to the influences of the hour —though she was glad that he should enjoy this good fortune to the utmost—made her look beyond the present into the future. She had seen with her own eyes the tumult that was rife in Alexandria, and felt that they had arrived at an inauspicious moment. If it should come to a struggle between the Christians and the Heathen, Karnis, finding that his old friend Olympius was the head of his party, would infallibly seize the sword, and if, then, the victory remained with the Christians no mercy would be shown to those who had fought for the old gods. Gorgo's wish that Agne should sing in the temple of Isis was another source of anxiety; for if it came to that they might, only too probably, be accused of perverting a Christian to heathen worship, and be condemned to a severe penalty. All this had worn a very different aspect yesterday when she had thought of Alexandria as the gay home of

her youth; but now she saw what a change had taken place in these thirty years. The Church had risen on the ruins of the Temple, and monks had forced the sacrificing priests into the background.

Karnis and his troupe were musicians of no ordinary stamp; still the law concerning singing-girls might place him in peril, especially now that—to make matters worse—a young Christian was paying court to his pretty niece. What catastrophes might not be called down on his hapless head if so influential a woman as Marcus' mother Mary should come to know of her son's backsliding! Herse had long perceived how attractive that little simpleton was to all men—old and young—and when one of the lovers, of whom she had no lack, happened to take her fancy she was apt to forget herself and play a too audacious game; but as soon as she found she had gone too far and somewhat committed herself she would draw back and meet him, if she could not avoid him, with repellent and even unmannerly coldness. Again and again had Herse scolded and warned her, but Dada always answered her reproofs by saying that she could not make herself different from what she was, and Herse had never been able to remain stern and severe in the face of the foolish excuses that Dada put forward so convincingly.

To-day the good woman could not quite make up her mind whether it would be wiser to warn Dada against Marcus and desire her to repel any advances he might attempt to make, or to let bygones be bygones. She knew full well how a trifling incident gains importance when undue emphasis is laid on it; she therefore had merely asked the girl what secret she could have with old Damia and had accepted some evasive subterfuge in reply, while, at the same time, she guessed the truth and was quite determined not to remit her watchfulness. For a time, at any rate, she thought she would let matters go their own way, and never mention the young fellow's name; but her husband spoilt this plan, for with the eager jollity of a man very much at his ease after a good dinner he called upon Dada to tell their the whole history of the young Christian's invasion in the morning. Dada at first was reticent, but the old man's communicative humor proved infectious and she presently told her story:

"I was sitting alone with the poor little boy, like—well I do not know what like—you must find a comparison for yourselves. I was comforting myself with the reflection that the key was on the inside and the door locked, for I was getting frightened as the monks began to sing in the yard below, one part going off to the left, as it were, and the other part to the right. Did you ever see two drunken men walking arm in arm, and lurching first to one side and then to the other? You may laugh, but by the nine Muses it was just like that. Then Papias grew tired and cross and kept asking where Agne was, till at last he began to cry. When I asked him what he was crying for, he said he had forgotten, I really am patient—you must all allow that—I did not do anything to him, but, just to give him something to play with, I took out the key, for there was nothing else at hand that he could not break, and gave it to him and told him to play a tune on it. This delighted him, and he really did it quite prettily. Then I looked over my burnt dress and was horrified to see how large the holes were, and it struck me that I might turn it, because when you turn a thing the spots, you know, do not show."

"You have invented that this very minute," cried Orpheus laughing. "We know you. If you can only turn the laugh against yourself…"

"No, really," cried Dada, "the idea flew through my head like a bird through a room; but I remembered at once that a hole burnt through shows on both sides, so I threw the dress aside as past mending and sat down on the low stool to peep through the wicket by the door out at the yard; the singing had stopped and the silence frightened me almost as much. Papias had stopped his piping too, and was sitting in the corner where Orpheus sat to write his letter to Tauromenium."

"I know," said Orpheus, "the inkstand was there, that the steward of the inn had lent us the day before."

"Just so; and when mother came in, there he was, dipping his finger in the ink, and painting his white dress—you can study the pattern at your leisure.—But no not interrupt me.—Well, I was looking into the court-yard; it was quite empty; all the monks were gone. Suddenly a tall young man in a white dress with a beautiful sky-blue border appeared through the great gate. The gate-keeper

crawled after him very humbly as far as his rope would allow and even the steward spoke to him with both hands pressed to his breast as if he had a faithful heart on the right side as well as the one on the left. This young man—it was our kind friend Marcus, of course—crossed the court, taking a zigzag at first, as a snipe flies, and then came towards our door. The steward and the gate-keeper had both vanished.—Do you remember the young Goths whom their father took to bathe in the Tiber last winter, when it was so cold? And how they first stood on the brink and dipped their toes in, and then ran away and when they came back again just wetted their heads and chests? But they had to jump in at last when their father shouted some barbaric words to them—I can see them now. Well, Marcus was exactly like those boys; but at last he suddenly walked straight up to our door and knocked."

"He remembered your pretty face no doubt," laughed Karnis.

"May be. However, I did not stir. I kept as still as a mouse, sitting on my stool and watching him through the key-hole, till presently he called out: 'Is no one there?' Then I forgot and answered: 'They are all out!' Of course I had betrayed myself—but it is impossible to think of everything at once. Oh! yes—you may laugh. And he smiled too—he is a very handsome fellow—and desired me most pressingly to open the door as he had something of the greatest importance to say to me. I said he could talk very well through the gap at the top; that Pyramus and Thisbe had even kissed through a chink in a wall. But he would not see the joke; he got graver and more earnest, and insisted, saying that our fate, his and mine, hung on that hour, and that not a soul must overhear what he had to say. The top of the door was too high to whisper through, so there was nothing for it but to ask Papias for the key; however, he did not know where he had put it. I afterwards thought of asking him what he had done with his flute and he fetched it then at once.—In short, the key was nowhere to be found. I told Marcus this and he wrung his hands with vexation; but in a few minutes the inn-steward, who must have been hiding to listen behind a pillar, suddenly appeared as if he had dropped from the skies, took a key out of his girdle, threw the door wide open, and vanished as if the earth had swallowed him.

"There we stood, Marcus and I, face to face. He was quite agitated; I really believe the poor fellow was trembling, and I did not feel very confident; however, I asked him what it was that he wanted. Then he recovered himself a little: 'I wished,'—he began; so I went on: 'Thou wishedst,'—and it might have gone on to the end: 'he wished, we wished'–and so forth, like the children at school at Rome, when we were learning Greek; but, Papias came to the rescue, for he ran up to Marcus and asked him to toss him up high, as he used to do on board ship. Marcus did as he was asked, and then he suddenly broke out into such a torrent of words that I was quite terrified. First he said so many fine things that I quite expected a declaration of love, and was trying to make up my mind whether I would laugh him out of it or throw myself into his arms—for he really is a dear, good, handsome fellow—and if you would like to know the truth I should have been very willing to oblige him—to a certain extent. But he asked me nothing, and from talking of me—listen to this Father Karnis—and saying that the great Father in Heaven had granted me every good gift, he went on to speak of you as a wicked, perverse and reprobate old heathen."

"I will teach him!" exclaimed Karnis shaking his fist.

"Nay, but listen," Dada went on. "He praised you and mother for a great many things; but do you know what he says is wrong? He says you will imperil my psyche—my soul, my immortal soul. As if I had ever heard of any Psyche but the Psyche whom Eros loved!"

"That is quite another thing," said Karnis very seriously. "In many songs, you know, I have tried to make you uplift your soul to a higher flight. You have learnt to sing, and there is no better school for a woman's soul than music and singing. If that conceited simpleton—why, he is young enough to be my grandson—if he talks any such nonsense to you again you may tell him from me…"

"You will tell him nothing," cried Herse, "for we can have nothing whatever to do with the Christian. You are my own sister's child and I desire and order you—do you hear—to keep out of his way, if he ever tries to come near you again…"

"Who is likely to find us here?" said Dada. "Besides, he has no such ideas and motives as you suppose. It is what he calls my soul that he cares for and not myself; and he wanted to take me away, not to his own house, but to some man who would be the physician of my soul, he said. I am generally ready enough to laugh, but what he said was so impressive and solemn, and so wonderfully earnest and startling that I could not jest over it. At last I was more angry at his daring to speak to me in such a way than any of you ever thought I could be, and that drove him half mad. You came in, mother, just as the gentleman had fallen on his knees to implore me to leave you."

"And I gave him my mind on the subject," retorted Herse with grim satisfaction. "I let him know what I thought of him. He may talk about the soul—what he is after is the girl. I know these Christians and I know what the upshot will be. He will take advantage of the edict to gain his ends, and then you will be separated from us and shut up in a reformatory or a refuge or a cloister or whatever they call their dismal prisons, and will learn more about your soul than you will care to know. It will be all over then with singing, and laughter, and amusement. Now you know the truth, and if you are wise you will keep out of his way till we leave Alexandria; and that will be as soon as possible, if you listen to reason, Karnis."

She spoke with such earnest conviction that Dada remained silent with downcast eyes, and Karnis sat up to think the matter over.

However, there was no time now for further reflection; the steward came in and desired that he, with his son and Agne should go at once to Gorgo to practise the lament of Isis.

This command did not include Herse and Dada, who remained on the barge. Herse having plenty to occupy her in the lower rooms, Dada went on deck and watched the others on their way to the house; then she sat looking at the shipwrights at their work and tossed fruit and sweetmeats, the remains of their dessert, for the children to catch who were playing on the shore. Meanwhile she thought over Marcus' startling speech, Damia's injunctions and Herse's warnings.

At first it seemed to her that Herse might be right, but by degrees she fell back into her old conviction that the young Christian could mean no harm by her; and she felt as sure that he would find her out wherever she might hide herself, as that it was her pretty and much-admired little person that he sought to win, and not her soul—for what could such an airy nothing as a soul profit a lover? How rapturously he had described her charms, how candidly he had owned that her image was always before him even in his dreams, that he could not and would not give her up—nay, that he was ready to lay down his life to save her soul. Only a man in love could speak like this and a man so desperately in love can achieve whatever he will. On her way from the Xenodochium to the house of Porphyrius she had passed him in his chariot, and had admired the splendid horses which he turned and guided with perfect skill and grace. He was scarcely three years older than herself; he was eighteen—but in spite of his youth and simplicity he was not unmanly; and there was something in him—something that compelled her to be constantly thinking of him and asking herself what that something was. Old Damia's instructions troubled her; they took much of the charm from her dream of being loved by Marcus, clasped in his arms, and driven through the city in his chariot.

It was impossible—yes, quite impossible, she was sure—that they should have parted forever; as she sat, thinking still of him and glancing from time to time at the toiling carpenters, a boat pulled up at the landing close to the barge out of which jumped an officer of the imperial guard. Such a handsome man! with such a noble, powerful, sunburnt face, a lightly waving black beard, and hair that fell from under his gold helmet! The short-sword at his side showed him to be a tribune or prefect of cavalry, and what gallant deeds must not this brilliant and glittering young warrior have performed to have risen to such high rank while still so young! He stood on the shore, looking all round, his eyes met hers and she felt herself color; he seemed surprised to see her there and greeted her respectfully with a military salute; then he went on towards the unfinished hulk of a large ship whose bare curved ribs one or two foremen were busily measuring with tape and rule.

An elderly man of dignified aspect was standing close by, who, as Dada had already discovered, was the head of the ship-yard, and the warrior hastened towards him. She heard him say: “Father,” and in the next instant she saw the old man open his arms and the officer rush to embrace him.

Dada never took her eyes off the couple who walked on, arm in arm and talking eagerly, till they disappeared into a large house on the further side of the dockyard.

“What a handsome man!” Dada repeated to herself, but while she waited to see him return she gazed across the lake by which Marcus might find his way to her. And as she lingered, idly dreaming, she involuntarily compared the two men. There were fine soldiers in plenty in Rome, and the ship-builder’s son was in no particular superior to a hundred others; but such a man as Marcus she had never before seen—there could hardly be such another in the world. The young guard was one fine tree among a grove of fine trees; but Marcus had something peculiar to himself, that distinguished him from the crowd, and which made him exceptionally attractive and lovable. His image at length so completely filled her mind that she forgot the handsome officer, and the shipmaster and every one else.

CHAPTER V

Karnis and his two companions were a long time away. Dada had almost forgotten her wish to see the young soldier once more, and after playing with little Papias for some time, as she might have played with a dog, she began to feel dull and to think the quiet of the boat intolerable. The sun was sinking when the absentees returned, but she at once reminded Karnis that he had promised to take her for a walk and show her Alexandria. Herse, however, forbid her going on such an expedition till the following day. Dada, who was more irritable and fractious than usual, burst into tears, flung the distaff that her foster-mother put into her hand over the side of the ship, and declared between her sobs that she was not a slave, that she would run away and find happiness wherever it offered. In short she was so insubordinate that Herse lost patience and scolded her severely. The girl sprang up, flung on a handkerchief and in a moment would have crossed the plank to the shore; Karnis, however, held her back.

"Why, child," he said, "do you not see how tired I am?" The appeal had its effect; Dada recovered her reason and tried to look up brightly, but her eyes were still tearful and heavy and she could only creep away into a corner and cry in silence. The old man's heart was very soft towards the girl; he would have been glad only to speak a few kind words to her and smoothe down her hair; however, he made an effort, and whispering a few words to his wife said he was ready, if Dada wished it, to take her as far as the Canopic way and the Bruchium.

Dada laughed with delight, wiped away her tears, flung her arms round the musician's neck and kissed his brown cheeks, exclaiming:

"You are the best of them all! Make haste, and Agne shall come too; she must see something of the city."

But Agne preferred to remain on board, so Karnis and Dada set out together. Orpheus followed them closely for, though the troops had succeeded in quelling the uproar, the city was still in a state of ferment. Closely veiled, and without any kind of adornment—on this Herse had positively insisted—the girl, clinging to the old man's arm, made her way through the streets, asking questions about everything she saw; and her spirits rose, and she was so full of droll suggestions that Karnis soon forgot his fatigue and gave himself up to the enjoyment of showing her the old scenes that he knew and the new beauties and improvements.

In the Canopic way Dada was fairly beside herself with delight. Houses like palaces stood arrayed on each side. Close to the buildings ran a covered arcade, and down the centre of the roadway there was a broad footpath shaded by sycamores. This fine avenue swarmed with pedestrians, while on each side chariots, drawn by magnificent horses, hurried past, and riders galloped up and down; at every step there was something new and interesting to be seen.

Rome, even, could not boast of a handsomer street, and Dada expressed her delight with frank eagerness; but Karnis did not echo her praises; he was indignant at finding that the Christians had removed a fine statue of the venerable Nile-god surrounded by the playful forms of his infant children, which had formerly graced the fountain in the middle of the avenue, and had also overthrown or mutilated the statues of Hermes that had stood by the roadside. Orpheus sympathized in his wrath which reached its climax when, on looking for two statues, of Demeter and of Pallas Athene, of which Karnis had spoken to his son as decorating the gateway of one of the finest houses in the city, they beheld instead, mounted on the plinths, two coarsely-wrought images of the Lamb with its Cross.

"Like two rats that have been caught under a stone!" cried the old man. "And what is most shameful is that I would wager that they have destroyed the statues which were the pride of the town and thrown them on a rubbish heap. In my day this house belonged to a rich man named Philippus. But stop—was not he the father of our hospitable protector…"

"The steward spoke of Porphyrius as the son of Philippus," Orpheus said.

"And Philippus was a corn merchant, too," added Karnis. "Demeter was figurative of a blessing on the harvest, for it was from that the house derived its wealth, and Pallas Athene was patroness of the learning that was encouraged by its owners. When I was a student here every wealthy man belonged to some school of philosophy. The money-bag did not count for everything. Heathen or Jew, whether engaged in business or enjoying the revenues of an inherited fortune, a man was expected to be able to talk of something besides the price of merchandise and the coming and sailing of vessels."

During this conversation Dada had withdrawn her hand from the old man's arm to raise her veil, for two men had gone up to the gate between the images that had roused Karnis to wrath, and one of them, who at this instant knocked at the door, was Mary's son.

"Father, see, there he is!" cried Dada, as the door was opened, speaking louder than was at all necessary to enable her companion to hear her; the musician at once recognized Marcus, and turning to his son he said:

"Now we may be quite sure! Porphyrius and this young Christian's father were brothers. Philippus must have left his house to his eldest son who is the one that is dead, and it now belongs no doubt to Mary, his widow. I must admit, child, that you choose your adorers from respectable families!"

"I should think so," said the girl laughing. "And that is why he is so proud. My fine gentleman has not even a glance to cast at us. Bang! the door is shut. Come along, uncle!"

The young man in question entered the hall of his father's house with his companion and paused there to say in a tone of pressing entreaty: "Only come and speak with my mother; you really must not leave like this."

"How else?" said the other roughly. "You stick to your way, I will go mine. You can find a better steward for the estate—I go to-morrow. May the earth open and swallow me up if I stay one hour longer than is absolutely necessary in this demented place. And after all Mary is your mother and not mine."

"But she was your father's wife," retorted Marcus.

"Certainly, or you would not be my brother. But she—I have amply repaid any kindness she ever did me by ten years of service. We do not understand each other and we never shall."

"Yes, yes, you will indeed. I have been in church and prayed—nay, do not laugh—I prayed to the Lord that he would make it all work right and He—well, you have been baptized and made one of His flock."

"To my misfortune! You drive me frantic with your meek and mild ways," cried the other passionately. "My own feet are strong enough for me to stand on and my hand, though it is horny, can carry out what my brain thinks right."

"No, no, Demetrius, no. You see, you believe in the old gods…"

"Certainly," said the other with increasing irritation. "You are merely talking to the winds, and my time is precious. I must pack up my small possessions, and for your sake I will say a few words of farewell when I take the account-books to your mother. I have land enough belonging to myself alone, at Arsinoe; I know my own business and am tired of letting a woman meddle and mar it. Good-bye for the present, youngster. Tell your mother I am coming; I shall be with her in just an hour."

"Demetrius!" cried the lad trying once more to detain his brother; but Demetrius freed himself with a powerful wrench and hurried across the court-yard—gay with flowers and with a fountain in the middle—into which the apartments of the family opened, his own among the number.

Marcus looked after him sadly; they differed too widely in thought and feeling ever to understand each other completely, and when they stood side by side no one would have imagined that they were the sons of one father, for even in appearance they were strongly dissimilar. Marcus was slight and delicate, Demetrius, on the contrary, broad-shouldered and large-boned.

After this parting from his half-brother Marcus betook himself to the women's rooms where Mary, after superintending the spinning and other work of the slave-girls, in the rooms at the back,

was wont to sit during the evening. He found his mother in eager conversation with a Christian priest of advanced age, an imposing personage of gentle and dignified aspect. The widow, though past forty, might still pass for a handsome woman: it was from her that her son had inherited his tall, thin figure with narrow shoulders and a slight stoop, his finely-cut features, white skin and soft, flowing, raven-black hair. Their resemblance was rendered all the more striking by the fact that each wore a simple, narrow circlet of gold-round the head; nay it would have seemed some unusual trick of Nature's but that their eyes were quite unlike. Hers were black, and their gaze was shrewd and sharp and sometimes sternly hard; while the dreamy lustre of her son's, which were blue, lent his face an almost feminine softness.

She must have been discussing some grave questions with the old man, for, as the young man entered the room, she colored slightly and her long, taper fingers impatiently tapped the back of the couch on which she was lounging.

Marcus kissed first the priest's hand and then his mother's, and, after enquiring with filial anxiety after her health, informed her that Demetrius would presently be coming to take leave of her.

"How condescending?" she said coldly. "You know reverend Father what it is that I require of him and that he refuses. His peasants—always his peasants! Now can you tell me why they, who must feel the influence and power of their masters so much more directly than the lower class in towns, they, whose weal or woe so obviously depends on the will of the Most High, are so obstinately set against the Gospel of Salvation?"

"They cling to what they are used to," replied the old man. "The seed they sow bore fruit under the old gods; and as they cannot see nor handle our Heavenly Father as they can their idols, and at the same time have nothing better to hope for than a tenth or a twentieth of the grain…"

"Yes, mine and thine—the miserable profit of this world!" sighed the widow. "Oh! Demetrius can defend the idolatry of his favorites warmly enough, never fear. If you can spare the time, good Father, stay and help me to convince him."

"I have already stayed too long," replied the priest, "for the Bishop has commanded my presence. I should like to speak to you, my dear Marcus; to-morrow morning, early, will you come to me? The Lord be with you, beloved!"

He rose, and as he gave Mary his hand she detained him a moment signing to her son to leave them, and said in a low tone:

"Marcus must not suspect that I know of the error into which he has been led; speak roundly to his conscience, and as to the girl, I will take her in hand. Will it not be possible for Theophilus to grant me an interview?"

"Hardly, at present," replied the priest. "As you know, Cynegius is here and the fate of the Bishop and of our cause hangs on the next few days. Give up your ambitious desires I beseech you, daughter, for even if Theophilus were to admit you I firmly believe, nay—do not be angry—I can but hope that he would never give way on this point."

"No?" said the widow looking down in some embarrassment; but when her visitor was gone she lifted her head with a flash of wilful defiance.

She then made Marcus, who had on the previous day given her a full account of his voyage from Rome, tell her all that had passed between himself and Demetrius; she asked him how he liked his horse, whether he hoped to win the approaching races, and generally what he had been doing and was going to do. But it did not escape her notice that Marcus was more reticent than usual and that he tried to bring the conversation round to his voyage and to the guests in the Xenodochium; however, she always stopped him, for she knew what he was aiming at and would not listen to anything on that subject.

It was not till long after the slaves had lighted the three-branched silver lamps that Demetrius appeared. His stepmother received him kindly and began to talk on indifferent subjects; but he replied with ill-disguised impatience, for he had not come to chatter and gossip. She fully understood this;

but it pleased her to check and provoke him and she did it in a way which vividly reminded him of his early days, of the desolation and unhappiness that had blighted his young life when this woman had taken the place of his own tender gentle mother, and come between him and his father. Day after day, in that bygone time, she had received him just as she had this evening: with words that sounded kindly, but with a cold, unloving heart. He knew that she had always seen his boyish errors and petty faults in the worst light, attributing them to bad propensities and innate wickedness, that she had injured him in his father's eyes by painting a distorted image of his disposition and doings —and all these sins he could not forgive her. At the time of his father's assassination Demetrius was already grown to man's estate, and as the eldest son it would have been his right and duty to take part with his uncle Porphyrius in the management of the business; but he could not endure the idea of living in the same place with his stepmother, so, having a pronounced taste for a country life, he left the widow in possession of the house in the Canopic street, persuaded his uncle to pay over his father's share in the business in hard cash and then had quitted Alexandria to take entire charge of the family estates in Cyrenaica. In the course of a few years he had become an admirable farmer; the landowners throughout the province were glad to take his advice or follow his example, and the accounts which he now laid on the table by the side of Mary's couch—three goodly rolls—proved by the irrefragable evidence of figures that he had actually doubled their revenues from the estates of which he had been the manager. He had earned his right to claim his independence, to persist in his own determinations and to go his own way; he was animated by the pride of an independent nature that recklessly breaks away from a detested tie when it has means at command either to rest without anxiety or to devote its energies to new enterprise.

When Demetrius had allowed his stepmother time enough for subjects in which he took no interest, he laid his hand on the account-books and abruptly observed that it was now time to talk seriously. He had already explained to Marcus that he could no longer undertake to meet her requirements; and as, with him, to decide was to act, he wished at once to come to a decision as to whether he should continue to manage the family estates in the way he thought proper, or should retire and devote himself to the care of his own land. If Mary accepted the latter alternative he would at once cancel their deed of agreement, but even then he was very willing to stay on for a time in Cyrenaica, and put the new steward, when she had appointed one, in the way of performing his onerous duties. After that he would have nothing more to do with the family estates. This was his last word; and whichever way she decided, they might part without any final breach, which he was anxious to avoid if only for the sake of Marcus.

Demetrius spoke gravely and calmly; still, the bitterness that filled his soul imparted a flavor to his speech that did not escape the widow, and she replied with some emphasis that she should be very sorry to think that any motives personal to herself had led to his decision; she owed much, very much, to his exertions and had great pleasure in expressing her obligations. He was aware, of course, that the property he had been managing had been purchased originally partly with her fortune and partly out of her husband's pocket, and that half of it was therefore hers and half of it the property of Marcus and himself; but that by her husband's will the control and management were hers absolutely. She had endeavored to carry out the intentions of her deceased husband by entrusting the stewardship of the estate to Demetrius while he was still quite young; under his care the income had increased, and she had no doubt that in the future he might achieve even greater results; at the same time, the misunderstandings that the whole business had given rise to were not to be endured, and must positively be put an end to, even if their income were to diminish by half.

"I," she exclaimed, "am a Christian, with my whole heart and soul. I have dedicated my body and life to the service of my Saviour. What shall all the treasures of the world profit me if I lose my soul; and that, which is my immortal part, must inevitably perish if I allow my pockets to be filled by the toil of heathen peasants and slaves. I therefore must insist—and on this point I will not yield a jot

—that our slaves in Cyrenaica, a flock of more than three thousand erring sheep, shall either submit to be baptized or be removed to make way for Christians."

"That is to say…" began Demetrius hastily.

"I have not yet done," she interrupted. "So far as the peasants are concerned who rent and farm our land they all, without exception—as you said yesterday—are stiff-necked idolaters. We must give them time to think it over, but the annual agreement will not be renewed with any who will not pledge themselves to give up the old sacrifices and to worship the Redeemer. If they submit they will be safe—in this world and the next; if they refuse they must go, and the land must be let to Christians in their stead."

"Just as I change this seat for another!" said Demetrius with a laugh, and lifting up a heavy bronze chair he flung it down again on the hard mosaic pavement so that the floor shook.

Maria started violently.

"My body may tremble," she said in great excitement, "but my soul is firm when its everlasting bliss is at stake. I insist—and my representative, whether he be you or another, must carry my orders into effect without an hour's delay—I insist that every heathen shrine, every image of the field and garden-gods, every altar and sacred stone which the heathens use for their idolatrous practices shall be pulled down, overthrown, mutilated and destroyed. That is what I require and insist on."

"And that is what I will never consent to," cried Demetrius in a voice like low thunder. "I cannot and will not. These things have been held precious and sacred to men for thousands of years and I cannot, will not, blow them off the face of the earth, as you blow a feather off your cloak. You may go and do it yourself; you may be able to achieve it."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary drawing herself up with a glance of indignant protest.

"Yes—if any one can do it you can!" repeated Demetrius imperturbably. "I went to-day to seek the images of our forefathers—the venerable images that were clear to our infancy, the portraits of our fathers' fathers and mothers, the founders of the honor of our race. And where are they? They have gone with the protectors of our home, the pride and ornament of this house—of the street, of the city—the Hermes and Pallas Athene that you—you flung into the lime-kiln. Old Phabis told me with tears in his eyes. Alas poor house that is robbed of its past, of its glory, and of its patron deities!"

"I have placed it under a better safeguard," replied Maria in a tremulous voice, and she looked it Marcus with an appeal for sympathy. "Now, for the last time, I ask you: Will you accede to my demands or will you not?"

"I will not," said Demetrius resolutely.

"Then I must find a new agent to manage the estates."

"You will soon find one; but your land—which is our land too—will become a desert. Poor land! If you destroy its shrines and sanctuaries you will destroy its soul; for they are the soul of the land. The first inhabitants gathered round the sanctuary, and on that sanctuary and the gods that dwell there the peasant founds his hopes of increase on what he sows and plants, and of prosperity for his wife and children and cattle and all that he has. In destroying his shrines you ruin his hopes, and with them all the joy of life. I know the peasant; he believes that his labors must be vain if you deprive him of the gods that make it thrive. He sows in hope, in the swelling of the grain he sees the hand of the gods who claim his joyful thanksgiving after the harvest is gathered in. You are depriving him of all that encourages and uplifts and rejoices his soul when you ruin his shrines and altars!"

"But I give him other and better ones," replied Mary.

"Take care then that they are such as he can appreciate," said Demetrius gravely. "Persuade him to love, to believe, to hope in the creed you force upon him; but do not rob him of what he trusts in before he is prepared to accept the substitute you offer him.—Now, let me go; we are neither of us in the temper to make the best arrangements for the future. One thing, at any rate, is certain: I have nothing more to do with the estate."

CHAPTER VI

After leaving his stepmother Demetrius made good use of his time and dictated a number of letters to his secretary, a slave he had brought with him to Alexandria, for the use of the pen was to him unendurable labor. The letters were on business, relating to his departure from Cyrenaica and his purpose of managing his own estates for the future, and when they lay before him, finished, rolled up and sealed, he felt that he had come to a mile-stone on his road, a landmark in his life. He paced the room in silence, trying to picture to himself the fate of the slaves and peasants who, for so many years, had been his faithful servants and fellow-laborers, whose confidence he had entirely won, and many of whom he truly loved. But he could not conceive of their life, their toil or their festivals, bereft of images, offerings, garlands, and hymns of rejoicing. To him they were as children, forbidden to laugh and play, and he could not help once more recurring to his boyhood and the day of his going to school, when, instead of running and shouting in his father's sunny garden, he had been made to sit still and silent in a dull class-room. And now had the whole world reached such a boundary line in existence beyond which there was to be no more freedom and careless joy—where a ceaseless struggle for higher things must begin and never end?

If the Gospel were indeed true, and if all it promised could ever find fulfilment, it might perhaps be prudent to admit the sinfulness of man and to give up the joys and glories of this world to win the eternal treasure that it described. Many a good and wise man whom he had known—nay the Emperor, the great and learned Theodosius himself—was devoted heart and soul to the Christian faith, and Demetrius knew from his own experience that his mother's creed, in which he had been initiated as a boy and from which his father, after holding him at the font had perverted him at an early age, offered great consolations and enduring help to those whose existence was one of care, poverty, and suffering. But his laborers and servants? They were healthy and contented. What power on earth could induce them—a race that clung devotedly to custom—to desert the faith of their fathers, and the time-honored traditions to which they owed all the comforts and pleasures of life, or to seek in a strange creed the aid which they already believed that they possessed.

He did not repent of his determination; but he nevertheless said to himself that, when once he was gone, Mary would proceed only too soon on the work of extermination and destruction; and every temple on the estate, every statue, every whispering grotto, every shrine and stone anointed by pious hands, doomed now to perish, rose before his fancy.

Demetrius was accustomed to rise at cock-crow and go to bed at an early hour, and he was on the point of retiring even before the usual time, when Marcus came to his room and begged him to give him yet an hour.

"You are angry with my mother," said the younger man with a look of melancholy entreaty, "but you know there is nothing that she would not sacrifice for the faith. And you can smile so bitterly! But only put yourself in my place. Loving my mother as I do, it is acutely painful to me to see another person—to see you whom I love, too, for you are my friend and brother—to see you, I say, turn your back on her so completely. My heart is heavy enough to-day I can tell you."

"Poor boy!" said the countryman. "Yes, I am truly your friend, and am anxious to remain so; you are not to blame in this business—and for that matter, I am anything but cheerful. You have chosen to say: Down with the shrines! Perish all those who do not think as we do! Still, look at the thing as you will, in some cases certainly violence must ensue—nay, if no blood is shed it will be a wonder! You sum up the matter in one common term: The heathen peasants on the estate. My view of it is totally different; I know these farmers and their wives and children, each one by name and by sight. There is not one but is ready to bid me good day and shake my hand or kiss my dress. Many a one has come to me in tears and left me happy.—By the great Zeus! no one ever accused me of

being soft-hearted, but I could wish this day that I were harder; and my blood turns to gall as I ask —What is all this for—to what possible end?"

"For the sake and honor of the faith, Demetrius; for the eternal salvation of our people."

"Indeed!" retorted Demetrius with a drawl, "I know better. If that and that alone were intended you would build churches and chapels and send us worthy priests—Eusebius and the like—and would try to win men's hearts to your Lord by the love you are always talking so much about. That was my advice to your mother, only this morning. I believe the end might be attained by those means, among us as elsewhere; ultimately it will, no doubt, be gained—but not to-day nor to-morrow. A peasant, when he had become accustomed to the church and grasped a trust in the new God, would of his own accord give up the old gods and their sanctuaries; I could count you off a dozen such instances. That I could have looked on at calmly, for I want only men's arms and legs and do not ask for their souls; but to burn down the old house before you have collected wood and stone to build a new one I call wicked.—It is cruelty and madness, and when so shrewd a woman as your mother is bent on carrying through such a measure, come what may, there is something more behind it."

"You think she wants to get rid of you—you, Demetrius!" interrupted Marcus eagerly. "But you are mistaken, you are altogether wrong. What you have done for the estate…"

"Oh! as for that!" cried the other, "what has my work to do with all this? Ere the year is out everything that can remind us of the heathen gods is to be swept away from the hamlets and fields of the pious Mary. That is what is intended! Then they will hurry off to the Bishop with the great news and to crown one marvel with another, the reversion will be secured of a martyr's nimbus. And this is what all this zeal is for—this and nothing else!"

"You are speaking of my mother, remember!" cried Marcus, looking at his brother with a touching appeal in his eyes. Demetrius shook his shaggy head and spoke more temperately as he went on:

"Yes, child, I had forgotten that—and I may be mistaken of course, for I am no more than human. Here one thing follows so close on another, and in this house I feel so battered and storm-tossed, that I hardly know myself. But old Phabis tells me that steps are being seriously taken to procure the title of Martyr for our father Apelles."

"My mother is quite convinced that he died for the faith, and she loved him devotedly…"

"Then it is so!" cried Demetrius, grinding his teeth and thumping his fist down on the table. "The lies sown by one single man have produced a deadly weed that is smothering this miserable house! You—to be sure, what can you know of our father? I knew him; I have been present when he and his friends, the philosophers, have laughed to scorn things which not only you Christians but even pious heathen regard as sacred. Lucretius was his evangelist, and the Cosmogony of that utter atheist lay by his pillow and was his companion wherever he went."

"He admired the heathen poets, but he was a Christian all the same," replied Marcus.

"Neither more nor less than Porphyrius, our uncle, or myself," retorted his brother. "Since the day when our grandfather Philippus was baptized, wealth and happiness have deserted this house. He gave up the old gods solely that he might not lose the right of supplying the city and the Emperor with corn, and became a Christian and made his sons Christians. But he had us educated by his heathen friends, and though we passed for Christians we were not so in fact. When it was absolutely necessary he showed himself in church with us; but our daily life, our pleasures, our pastimes were heathen, and when life began for us in earnest we offered a bleeding sacrifice to the gods. It was impossible to retract honestly, since a renegade Christian returning to the worship of the old gods is incapacitated by law from making a will. You know this; and when you ask me why I am content to live alone, without either wife or child—and I love children, even those of other people—a solitary man dragging out my days and nights joylessly enough—I tell you: I am openly and honestly a worshipper of our old gods, and I will not go to church because I scorn a lie. What should I do with children who, in consequence of my retractation, must forfeit all I might leave them? It was this question of inheritance

only that induced my father to have us baptized and to make a pretense of Christianity. He set out for Petra with his Lucretius in his satchel—I packed it with my own hands into his money-bag—to put in a claim to supply grain to the 'Rock city.' He was slain on his way home; most likely by his servant Anubis, who certainly knew what money he had with him, and who vanished and left no trace. Because—about the same time—a band of Saracens had fallen on some Christian anchorites and travellers, in the district between Petra and Aila, your mother chose to assume a right to call our father a martyr! But she knew his opinions full well, I tell you, and shed many a tear over them, too.—Now she has expended vast sums on church-building, she has opened the Xenodochium and pours her money by lavish handfuls clown the insatiable throats of monks and priests. To what end? To have her husband recognized as a martyr. Hitherto her toil and money have been wasted. In my estimation the Bishop is a perfectly detestable tyrant, and if I know him at all he will take all she will give and never grant her wish. Now she is preparing her great move, and hopes to startle him into compliance by a new marvel. She thinks that, like a juggler who turns a white egg black, she can turn a heathen district into a Christian one by a twist of her finger. Well—so far as I am concerned I will have nothing to do with the trick."

During this harangue Marcus had alternately gazed at the floor and fixed his large eyes in anguish on his brother's face. For some minutes he found nothing to reply, and he was evidently going through a bitter mental struggle. Demetrius spoke no more, but arranged the sheets of papyrus that strewed the table. At length Marcus, after a deep sigh, broke out in a tone of fervent conviction and with a blissful smile that lighted up his whole face:

"Poor mother! And others misunderstand her just as you do; I myself was in danger of doubting her. But I think that now I understand her perfectly. She loved my father so completely that she hopes now to win for his immortal soul the grace which he, in the flesh, neglected to strive after. He was baptized, so she longs to win, by her prayers and oblations, the mercy of the Lord who is so ready to forgive. She herself firmly believes in the martyrdom of her beloved dead, and if only the Church will rank him among those who have died for Her, he will be saved, and she will find him standing in the pure radiance of the realms above, with open arms, overflowing with fervent love and gratitude, to welcome the faithful helpmate who will have purged his soul. Yes, now I quite understand; and from this day forth I will aid and second her; the hardest task shall not be too hard, the best shall not be too good, if only we may open the gates of Heaven to my poor father's imperilled soul."

As he spoke his eye glistened with ecstatic light; his brother, too, was touched, and to hide his emotion, he exclaimed, more recklessly and sharply than was his wont:

"That will come all right, never fear, lad!" But he hastily wiped his eyes with his hand, slapped Marcus on the shoulder, and added gaily: "It is better to choke than to swallow down the thing you think right, and it never hurt a man yet to make a clean breast of his feelings, even if we do not quite agree we understand each other the better for it. I have my way of thinking, you have yours; thus we each know what the other means; but after the tragedy comes the satyr play, and we may as well finish this agitating evening with an hour's friendly chat."

So saying Demetrius stretched himself on a divan and invited Marcus to do the same, and in a few minutes their conversation had turned, as usual, to the subject of horses. Marcus was full of praises of the stallions his brother had bred for him, and which he had ridden that very day round the Myssa—[The Myssa was the Meta, or turning-post]—in the Hippodrome, and his brother added with no small complacency:

"They were all bred from the same sire and from the choicest mares. I broke them in myself, and I only wish.... But why did you not come to the stables this morning?"

"I could not," replied Marcus coloring slightly. Then we will go to-morrow to Nicopolis and I will show you how to get Megaera past the Taraxippios."—[The terror of the horses.]

"To-morrow?" said Marcus somewhat embarrassed. "In the morning I must go to see Eusebius and then...."

"Well, then?"

"Then I must—I mean I should like...."

"What?"

"Well, to be sure I might, all the same.—But no, it is not to be done—I have...."

"What, what?" cried Demetrius with increasing impatience: "My time is limited and if you start the horses without knowing my way of managing them they will certainly not do their best. As soon as the market begins to fill we will set out. We shall need a few hours for the Hippodrome, then we will dine with Damon, and before dark...."

"No, no," replied Marcus, "to-morrow, certainly, I positively cannot...."

"People who have nothing to do always lack time," replied the other. "Is to-morrow one of your festivals?"

"No, not that=-and Good Heavens! If only I could...."

"Could, could!" cried Demetrius angrily and standing close in front of his brother with his arms folded. "Say out honestly: 'I will not go,' or else, 'my affairs are my own secret and I mean to keep it.'—But give me no more of your silly equivocations."

His vehemence increased the younger man's embarrassment, and as he stood trying to find an explanation which might come somewhat near the truth and yet not betray him, Demetrius, who had stood watching him closely, suddenly exclaimed:

"By Aphrodite, the daughter of the foam! it is a love affair—an assignation.—Woman, woman, always woman!"

"An assignation!" cried Marcus shaking his head. "No indeed, no one expects me; and yet—I had rather you should misunderstand me than think that I had lied. Yes—I am going to seek a woman; and if I do not find her to-morrow, if in the course of tomorrow I do not succeed in my heart's desire, she is lost—not only to me, though I cannot give up the heavenly love for the sake of the earthly and fleshly—but to my Lord and Saviour. It is the life—the everlasting life or death of one of God's loveliest creatures that hangs on to-morrow's work."

Demetrius was greatly astonished, and it was with an angry gesture of impatience that he replied:

"Again you have overstepped the boundary within which we can possibly understand each other. In my opinion you are hardly old enough to undertake the salvation of the imperilled souls of pretty women. Take care what you are about, youngster! It is safe enough to go into the water with those who can swim, but those who sink are apt to draw you down with them. You are a good-looking young fellow, you have money and fine horses, and there are women enough who are only too ready to spread their nets abroad…"

"What are you thinking of?" cried Marcus passionately. "It is I who am the fisher—a fisher of souls, and so every true believer ought to be. She—she is innocence and simplicity itself, in spite of her roguish sauciness. But she has fallen into the hands of a reprobate heathen, and here, where vice prowls about the city like a roaring lion, she will be lost—lost, if I do not rescue her. Twice have I seen her in my dreams; once close to the cavern of a raging dragon, and again on the edge of a precipitous cliff, and each time an angel called out to me and bid me save her from the jaws of the monster, and from falling into the abyss. Since then I seem to see her constantly; at meals, when I am in company, when I am driving,—and I always hear the warning voice of the angel. And now I feel it a sacred duty to save her—a creature on whom the Almighty has lavished every gift he ever bestowed on the daughters of Eve—to lead her into the path of Salvation."

Demetrius had listened to his brother's enthusiastic speech with growing anxiety, but he merely shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I almost envy you your acquaintance with this favorite of the gods; but you might, it seems to me, postpone the work of salvation. You were away from Alexandria for half a year, and if she could hold out so long as that…"

"Do not speak so; you ought not to speak so!" cried Marcus, pressing his hand on his heart as though in physical pain. "But I have no time to lose, for I must at once find out where the old singer has taken her. I am not so inexperienced as you seem to think. He has brought her here to trade in her beauty, and enrich himself. Why, you, too, saw her on board ship; I, as you know, had arranged for them to be taken in at my mother's Xenodochium."

"Whom?" asked Demetrius folding his hands.

"The singers whom I brought with me from Ostia. And now they have disappeared from thence, and Dada…"

"Dada!" cried Demetrius, bursting into a loud laugh without heeding Marcus who stepped up to him, crimson with rage. "Dada! that little fair puss! You see her day and night and an angel calls upon you to save that child's merry soul? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, boy! Why, what shall I wager now? I will stake this roll of gold that I could make her come with me to-morrow—with me, a hard-featured countryman, freckled all over like a plover's egg, where my clothes do not protect my skin, and with hair on end like the top of a broom—yes, that she will follow me to Arsinoe or wherever I choose to bid her. Let the hussy go, you simple innocent. Such a Soul as hers is of small account even in a less exclusive Heaven than yours is."

"Take back those words!" cried Marcus, beside himself and clenching his fist. "But that is just like you! Your impure eyes and heart defile purity itself, and see spots even in the sun. Nothing is too bad for a 'singing girl,' I know. But that is just the marrow of the matter; it is from that very curse that I mean to save her. If you can accuse her of anything, speak; if not, and if you do not want to appear a base slanderer in my eyes, take back the words you have just spoken!"

"Oh! I take them back of course," said Demetrius indifferently. "I know nothing of your beauty beyond what she has herself said to me and you and Cynegius and his Secretaries—with her pretty, saucy eyes. But the language of the eye, they say, is not always to be depended on; so take it as unsaid. And, if I understood you rightly, you do not even know where the singers are hiding? If you have no objection, I will help you to seek them out."

"That is as you please," answered Marcus hotly. "All your mockery will not prevent my doing my duty."

"Very right, very right," said his brother. "Perhaps this damsel is unlike all the other singing-girls with whom I used so often to spend a jolly evening in my younger days. Once, at Barca, I saw a white raven—but perhaps after all it was only a dove. Your opinion, in this case, is at any rate better founded than mine, for I never thought twice about the girl and you did.—But it is late; till to-morrow, Marcus."

The brothers parted for the night, but when Demetrius found himself alone he walked up and down the room, shaking his head doubtfully. Presently, when his body-slave came in to pack for him, he called out crossly:

"Let that alone—I shall stay in Alexandria a few days longer."

Marcus could not go to bed; his brother's scorn had shaken his soul to the foundations. An inward voice told him that his more experienced senior might be right, but at the same time he hated and contemned himself for listening to its warnings at all. The curse that rested on Dada was that of her position; she herself was pure—as pure as a lily, as pure as the heart of a child, as pure as the blue of her eyes and the ring of her voice. He would obey the angel's behest! He could and he must save her!

In the greatest excitement he went out of the house, through the great gate, into the Canopic way, and walked on. As he was about to turn down a side street to go to the lake he found the road stopped by soldiers, for this street led past the prefect's house where Cynegius, the Emperor's emissary, was staying; he had come, it was said, to close the Temples, and the excited populace had gathered outside the building, during the afternoon, to signify their indignant disapprobation. At sundown an armed

force had been called out and had dispersed the crowd; but it was by another road that the young Christian at length made his way to the shore.

CHAPTER VII

While Marcus was restlessly wandering on the shore of Mareotis, dreaming of Dada's image and arranging speeches of persuasive eloquence by which to touch her heart and appeal to her soul, silence had fallen on the floating home of the singers. A light white mist, like a filmy veil—a tissue of clouds and moonbeams—hung over the lake. Work was long since over in the ship-yard, and the huge skeletons of the unfinished ships threw weird and ghostly shadows on the silvered strand-forms like black visions of crayfish, centipedes, or enormous spiders.

From the town there came not a sound; it lay in the silence of intoxicated sleep. The Roman troops had cleared the streets, the lights were dead in every house, and in all the alleys and squares; only the moon shone over the roofs of Alexandria, while the blazing beacon of the light-house on the north-eastern point of the island of Pharos shone like a sun through the darkness.

In a large cabin in the stern of the vessel lay the two girls, on soft woollen couches and covered with rugs. Agne was gazing wide-eyed into the darkness; Dada had long been asleep, but she breathed painfully and her rosy lips were puckered now and then as if she were in some distress. She was dreaming of the infuriated mob who had snatched the garland from her hair—she saw Marcus suddenly interfere to protect her and rescue her from her persecutors—then she thought she had fallen off the gangway that led from the land to the barge, and was in the water while old Damia stood on the shore and laughed at her without trying to help her. Night generally brought the child sound sleep or pleasant dreams, but now one hideous face after another haunted her.

And yet the evening had brought her a great pleasure. Not long after their return from their walk the steward had come down to the boat and brought her a very beautiful dress, with greetings from his old mistress; he had at the same time brought an Egyptian slave-woman, well skilled in all the arts of the toilet, who was to wait upon her so long as she remained in Alexandria. Dada had never owned such a lovely dress! The under-robe was of soft sea-green bombyx silk, with a broad border, delicately embroidered, of a garland of roses and buds. The peplos was of the same color and decorated to match; costly clasps of mosaic, representing full-blown roses and set in oval gold settings, fastened it on the shoulders. In a separate case were a gold girdle, a bracelet, also of gold, in the shape of a snake, a gold crescent with a rose, like those on the shoulder-clasps, in its centre, and a metal mirror of spotless lustre.

The slave, a middle-aged woman with a dark cunning face, had helped her to put on this new garment; she had also insisted on dressing her hair, and all the time had never ceased praising the charms that nature had bestowed on her young mistress, with the zeal of a lover.

Agne had looked on smiling, good-naturedly handing the slave the pins and ribbands she had needed, and sincerely rejoicing in her companion's beauty and delight.

At last Dada had made her appearance in the deckroom and was greeted by many an Ah! and Oh! of admiration from the men of the party, including Medius, the singer whom Karnis had met in the street. Even Herse, who had received her quite disagreeably on her return from the city, could not suppress a smile of kindly approval, though she shook her finger at her saying:

"The old lady has set her heart on turning your head completely I see. All that is very pretty, but all the good it will do will be to rouse spiteful tongues. Remember, Dada, that you are my sister's child; I promise you I shall not forget it, and I shall keep my eye upon you."

Orpheus made haste to light every lamp and taper, of which there were plenty, for the barge was handsomely furnished, and when Dada was plainly visible in the brilliant illumination Karnis exclaimed:

"You look like a senator's daughter! Long live the Fair!"

She ran up to him and kissed him; but when Orpheus walked all round her, examining the fineness of the tissue and the artistic finish of the clasps, and even turned the snake above her round elbow, she sharply bid him let her be.

Medius, a man of the age of Karnis who had formerly been his intimate companion, never took his eyes off the girl, and whispered to the old musician that Dada would easily carry off the palm for beauty in Alexandria, and that with such a jewel in his keeping he might recover wealth and position and by quite honest means. At his suggestion she then assumed a variety of attitudes; she stood as Hebe, offering nectar to the gods—as Nausicae, listening to the tale of Odysseus—and as Sappho, singing to her lyre. The girl was delighted at all this, and when Medius, who kept close to her, tried to persuade her to perform in a similar manner in the magical representations at the house of Posidonius, before a select company of spectators, she clapped her hands exclaiming:

"You took me all round the city, father, and as your reward I should like to earn back your pretty vineyards, I should stand like this, you know, and like this—to be stared at. I only hope I might not be seized with a sudden impulse to make a face at the audience. But if they did not come too close I really might…"

"You could do no better than to play the parts that Posidonius might give you," interrupted Medius. "His audiences like to see good daemons, the kindly protecting spirits, and so forth. You would have to appear among clouds behind a transparent veil, and the people would hail you with acclamations or even raise their hands in adoration."

All this seemed to Dada perfectly delightful, and she was on the point of giving her hand to Medius in token of agreement, when her eye caught the anxious gaze of the young Christian girl who stood before her with a deep flush on her face. Agne seemed to be blushing for her. The color rushed to her own cheeks, and shortly saying: "No—after all, I think not," she turned her back on the old man and threw herself on the cushions close to where the wine-jug was standing. Medius now began to besiege Karnis and Herse with arguments, but they refused all his offers as they intended quitting Alexandria in a few days, so he had no alternative but to submit. Still, he did not altogether throw up the game, and to win Dada's consent, at any rate, he made her laugh with a variety of comical pranks and showed her some ingenious conjuring tricks, and ere long their floating home echoed with merriment, with the clinking of wine-cups and with songs, in which even Agne was obliged to take part. Medius did not leave till near midnight and Herse then sent them all to bed.

As soon as the slave had undressed her young mistress and left the girls alone, Dada threw herself into the arms of Agne who was on the point of getting into bed, and kissed her vehemently, exclaiming: "You are much—so much better than I! How is that you always know what is right?"

Then she lay down; but before she fell asleep she once more spoke to Agne: "Marcus will find us out, I am certain," she said, "and I should really like to know what he has to say to me."

In a few minutes sleep had sealed her eyes, but the Christian girl lay awake; her thoughts would not rest, and Sleep, who the night before had taken her to his heart, to-night would not come near her pillow; so much to agitate and disturb her soul had taken place during the day.

She had often before now been a silent spectator of the wild rejoicings of the musician's family, and she had always thought of these light-hearted creatures as spendthrifts who waste all their substance in a few days to linger afterwards through years of privation and repentance. Troubled, as she could not fail to be, as to the eternal salvation of these lost souls, though happy in her own faith, she had constantly turned for peace to her Saviour and always found it; but to-night it was not so, for a new and unexpected temptation had sprung up for her in the house of Porphyrius.

She had heard Gorgo sing again, and joined her own voice with hers. Dirges, yearning hymns, passionate outpourings in praise of the mighty and beautiful divinity had filled her ear and stirred her soul with an ecstatic thrill, although she knew that they, were the composition of heathen poets and had first been sung to the harmony of lutes by reprobate idolaters. And yet, and yet they had touched her heart, and moved her soul to rapture, and filled her eyes with tears.

She could not but confess to herself that she could have given no purer, sweeter, or loftier expression to her own woes, thankfulness, aspirations, and hopes of ever lasting life and glory, than this gifted creature had given to the utterance of her idolatry. Surprise, unrest, nay, some little jealousy had been mingled with her delight at Gorgo's singing. How was it that this heathen could feel and utter emotions which she had always conceived of as the special privilege of the Christian, and, for her own part, had never felt so fervently as in the hours when she had drawn closest to her Lord? Were not her own sentiments the true and right ones; had her intercourse with these heathens tainted her?

This doubt disturbed her greatly; it must be based on something more than mere self-torture, for she had not once thought of asking to whom the two-part hymn, with its tender appeal, was addressed, when Karnis had first gone through it with her alone; nor even subsequently, when she had sung it with Gorgo—timidly at first, more boldly the second time, and finally without a mistake, but carried completely away by the beauty and passion of the emotions it expressed.

She knew now, for Karnis himself had told her. It was the Lament of Isis for her—lost husband and brother—oh that horrible heathen confusion!—The departed Osiris. The wailing widow, who called on him to return with "the silent speech of tears," was that queen of the idolater's devils whose shameful worship her father had often spoke of with horror. Still, this dirge was so true and noble, so penetrated with fervent, agonized grief, that it had gone to her heart. The sorrowing Mother of God, Mary herself, might thus have besought the resurrection of her Son; just thus must the "God-like maid"—as she was called in the Arian confession of her father—have uttered her grief, her prayers, and her longings.

But it was all a heathen delusion, all the trickery and jugglery of the Devil, though she had failed to see through it, and had given herself up to it, heart and soul. Nay, worse! for after she had learnt that Gorgo was to represent Isis and she herself Nephthys, the sister of the divine pair, she had opposed the suggestion but feebly, even though she knew that they were to sing the hymn together in the Temple of Isis; and when Gorgo had clasped her in her arms with sisterly kindness, begging her not to spoil her plans but to oblige her in this, she had not repulsed the tempter with firm decision, but merely asked for time to think it over.

How indeed could she have found the heart to refuse the noble girl, whose beauty and voice had so struck and fascinated her, when she flung her arms round her neck, looked into her eyes and earnestly besought her:

"Do it for my sake, to please me. I do not ask you to do anything wicked. Pure song is acceptable to every god. Think of your lament, if you like, as being for your own god who suffered on the cross. But I like singing with you so much; say yes. Do not refuse, for my sake!"

She had thrown her arms so gladly, so much too gladly round the heathen lady—for she had a loving heart and no one else had ever made it a return in kind—and clinging closely to her she had said:

"As you will; I will do whatever you like."

Then Orpheus, too, had urged her to oblige Gorgo, and himself, and all of them; and it had seemed almost impossible to refuse the first request that the modest youth—to whom she would willingly have granted anything and everything—had ever made. Still, she had held back; and in her anxious bewilderment, not daring to think or act, she had tried every form of excuse and postponement. She would probably have been awkward enough about this, but Gorgo was content to press her no further, and when, after leaving the house, she had summoned up courage to refuse to enter the Temple of Isis, Karnis had only said: "Be thankful that this gifted lady, the favorite of the Muses, should think you worthy to sing with her. We will see about the rest by-and-bye."

Now, in the watches of the sleepless night, she saw clearly the abyss above which she was standing. She, like Judas, was on the point of betraying her Saviour; not indeed for money, but in obedience to the transient sound of an earthly voice, for the pleasure of exercising her art, to indulge a hastily-formed liking; nay, perhaps because it satisfied her childish vanity to find herself put on

an equality with a lady of rank and wealth, and matched with a singer who had roused Karnis and Orpheus to such ardent admiration.

She was an enigma to herself; while passages out of the Bible crowded on her memory to reproach her conscience.

There lay Dada's embroidered dress. Worn for the first time this day, in a month it would be unpresentably shabby and then, ere long, flung aside as past wearing. Like this—just like this—was every earthly pleasure, every joy of this brief existence. Alas, she certainly was not happy here in Karnis' sense of the word; but in the other world there were joys eternal, and she had only to deny herself the petty enjoyments of this life to secure unfailing and everlasting happiness in the next. There she would find an endless flow of all her soul could desire, there perhaps she might be allowed to cool the lips of Gorgo, as Lazarus cooled those of the rich man.

She was quite clear now what her answer would be to-morrow, and, firmly resolved not to allow herself to think of singing in the Temple of Isis, she at last fell asleep just as the light began to dawn in the east. She did not wake till late, and it was with downcast eyes and set lips that she went with Karnis and Orpheus to the house of Porphyrius.

CHAPTER VIII

When the steward went to summons the musicians to his master's house he had again had no bidding for Dada, and she was very indignant at being left behind. "That old cornsack's daughter," she said, "was full of her airs, and would have nothing to say to them excepting to make use of them for her own purposes!" If she had not been afraid of being thought intrusive she would have acted on old Damia's invitation to visit her frequently, and have made her appearance, in defiance of Gorgo, dropping like a shooting-star into the midst of their practising. It never occurred to her to fancy that the young lady had any personal dislike to her, for, though she might be ignored and forgotten, who had ever had any but a kind word for her. At the same time she assumed the right of feeling that "she could not bear" the haughty Gorgo, and as the party set out she exclaimed to Agne, "Well, you need not kill her for me, but at any rate, I send her no greeting; it is a shame that I should be left to mope alone with Herse. Do not be surprised if you find me turned to a stark, brown mummy —for we are in Egypt, you know, the land of mummies. I bequeath my old dress to you, my dear, for I know you would never put on the new one. If you bewail me as you ought I will visit you in a dream, and put a sugarplum in your mouth—a cake of ambrosia such as the gods eat. You are not even leaving me Papias to tease!"

For in fact Agne's little brother, dressed in a clean garment, was to be taken to Gorgo who had expressed a wish to see him.

When they had all left the ship Dada soon betrayed how superficial her indignation had been; for, presently spying through the window of the cabin the young cavalry officer's grey-bearded father, she sprang up the narrow steps—barefoot as she was accustomed to be when at home—and threw herself on a cushion to lean over the gunwale of the upper deck, which was shaded by a canvas awning, to watch the ship-yard and the shore-path. Before she had begun to weary of this occupation the waiting-slave, who had been up to the house to put various matters in order, came back to the vessel, and squatting down at her feet was ready to give her all the information she chose to require. Dada's first questions naturally related to Gorgo. The young mistress, said the slave, had already dismissed many suitors, the sons of the greatest families of Alexandria, and if her suspicions—those of Sachepris, the slave—were well founded, all for the sake of the old shipbuilder's son, whom she had known from childhood and who was now an officer in the Imperial guard. However, as she opined, this attachment could hardly lead to marriage, since Constantine was a zealous Christian and his family were immeasurably beneath that of Porphyrius in rank; and though he had distinguished himself greatly and risen to the grade of Prefect, Damia, who on all occasions had the casting-vote, had quite other views for her granddaughter.

All this excited Dada's sympathies to the highest pitch, but she listened with even greater attention when her gossip began to speak of Marcus, his mother, and his brother. In this the Egyptian slave was the tool of old Damia. She had counted on being questioned about the young Christian, and as soon as Dada mentioned his name she shuffled on her knees close up to the girl, laid her hand gently on her arm and looking up into her eyes with a meaning flash, she whispered in broken Greek—and hastily, for Herse was bustling about the deck: "Such a pretty mistress, such a young mistress as you, and kept here like a slave! If the young mistress only chose she could easily—quite easily—have as good a lover as our Gorgo, and better; so pretty and so young! And I know some one who would dress the pretty mistress in red gold and pale pearls and bright jewels, if sweet Dada only said the word."

"And why should sweet Dada not say the word?" echoed the girl gaily. "Who is it that has so many nice things and all for me? You—I shall never remember your name if I live to be as old as Damia...."

"Sachepris, Sachepris is my name," said the woman, "but call me anything else you like. The lover I mean is the son of the rich Christian, Mary. A handsome man, my lord Marcus; and he has

horses, such fine horses, and more gold pieces than the pebbles on the shore there. Sachepris knows that he has sent out slaves to look for the pretty mistress. Send him a token—write to my lord Marcus."

"Write?" laughed Dada. "Girls learn other things in my country; but if I could—shall I tell you something? I would not write him a line. Those who want me may seek me!"

"He is seeking, he is trying to find the pretty mistress," declared the woman; "he is full of you, quite full of you, and if I dared...."

"Well?"

"I would go and say to my lord Marcus, quite in a secret...."

"Well, what? Speak out, woman."

"First I would tell him where the pretty mistress is hidden; and then say that he might hope once—this evening perhaps—he is not far off, he is quite near this… over there; do you see that little white house? It is a tavern and the host is a freedman attached to the lady Damia, and for money he would shut his shop up for a day, for a night, for many days.—Well, and then I would say—shall I tell you all? My lord Marcus is there, waiting for his pretty mistress, and has brought her dresses that would make the rose-garment look a rag. You would have gold too, as much gold as heart can wish. I can take you there, and he will meet you with open arms."

"What, this evening?" cried Dada, and the blue veins swelled on her white forehead. "You hateful, brown serpent! Did Gorgo teach you such things as this? It is horrible, disgraceful, sickening!"

So base a proposal was the last thing she would ever have expected from Marcus—of all men in the world, Marcus, whom she had imagined so good and pure! She could not believe it; and as her glance met the cunning glitter of the Egyptian's eyes her own sparkled keenly, and she exclaimed with a vehemence and decision which her attendant had never suspected in her:

"It is deceit and falsehood from beginning to end! Go, woman, I will hear no more of it. Why should Marcus have come to you since yesterday if he does not know where I am? You are silent—you will not say?… Oh! I understand it all. He—I know he would never have ventured it. But it is your 'noble lady Damia'—that old woman, who has told you what to say. You are her echo, and as for Marcus.... Confess, confess at once, you witch...."

"Sachepris is only a poor slave," said the woman raising her hands in entreaty. "Sachepris can only obey, and if the pretty mistress were to tell my lady Damia…"

"It was she then who sent for me to go to the little tavern?"

The woman nodded. "And Marcus?"

"If the pretty mistress had consented…"

"Well?"

"Then—but Great Isis! if you tell of me!"

"I will not tell; go on."

"I should have gone to my lord Marcus and invited him, from you…"

"It is shameful!" interrupted Dada, and a shudder ran through her slight frame. "How cruel, how horrible it is! You—you will stay here till the others come home and then you will go home to the old woman. I thank the gods, I have two hands and need no maid to wait upon me! But look there—what is the meaning of that? That pretty litter has stopped and there is an old man signing to you."

"It is the widow Mary's house steward," whined the woman, while Dada turned pale, wondering what a messenger from Marcus' mother could want here.

Herse, who had kept a watchful eye on the landing-plank, on Dada's account, had also seen the approach of the widow's messenger and suspected a love-message from Marcus; but she was utterly astounded when the old man politely but imperiously desired her—Herse to get into the litter which would convey her to his mistress's house. Was this a trap? Did he merely want to tempt her from the vessel so as to clear the way for his young master? No—for he handed her a tablet on which there was a written message, and she, an Alexandrian, had been well educated and could read:

"Mary, the widow of Apelles, to the wife of Karnis, the singer." And then followed the same urgent request as she had already received by word of mouth. To reassure herself entirely she called the slave-woman aside, and asked her whether Phabis was indeed a trust worthy servant of the widow's. Evidently there was no treason to be apprehended and she must obey the invitation, though it disturbed her greatly; but she was a cautious woman, with not only her heart but her brains and tongue in the right place, and she at once made up her mind what must be done under the circumstances. While she gave a few decorative touches to her person she handed the tablet to the waiting-woman, whom she had taken into her own room, and desired her to carry it at once to her husband, and tell him whither she had gone, and to beg him to return without delay to take care of Dada. But what if her husband and son could not come away? The girl would be left quite alone, and then… The picture rose before her anxious mind of Marcus appearing on the scene and tempting Dada on shore—of her niece stealing away by herself even, if the young Christian failed to discover her present residence—loitering alone along the Canopic way or the Bruclumn, where, at noon, all that was most disreputable in Alexandria was to be seen at this time of year—she saw, shuddered, considered—and suddenly thought of an expedient which seemed to promise an issue from the difficulty. It was nothing new and a favorite trick among the Egyptians; she had seen is turned to account by a lame tailor at whose house her father had lodged, when he had to go out to his customers and leave his young negress wife alone at home. Dada was lying barefoot on the deck: Herse would hide her shoes.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.