

FICTION

Georg Ebers

A Thorny Path

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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A THORNY PATH

By Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER I.

The green screen slowly rose, covering the lower portion of the broad studio window where Heron, the gem-cutter, was at work. It was Melissa, the artist's daughter, who had pulled it up, with bended knees and outstretched arms, panting for breath.

"That is enough!" cried her father's impatient voice. He glanced up at the flood of light which the blinding sun of Alexandria was pouring into the room, as it did every autumn afternoon; but as soon as the shadow fell on his work-table the old man's busy fingers were at work again, and he heeded his daughter no more.

An hour later Melissa again, and without any bidding, pulled up the screen as before, but it was so much too heavy for her that the effort brought the blood into her calm, fair face, as the deep, rough "That is enough" was again heard from the work-table.

Then silence reigned once more. Only the artist's low whistling as he worked, or the patter and pipe of the birds in their cages by the window, broke the stillness of the spacious room, till the voice and step of a man were presently heard in the anteroom.

Heron laid by his graver and Melissa her gold embroidery, and the eyes of father and daughter met for the first time for some hours. The very birds seemed excited, and a starling, which had sat moping since the screen had shut the sun out, now cried out, "Olympias!" Melissa rose, and after a swift glance round the room she went to the door, come who might.

Ay, even if the brother she was expecting should bring a companion, or a patron of art who desired her father's work, the room need not fear a critical eye; and she was so well assured of the faultless neatness of her own person, that she only passed a hand over her brown hair, and with an involuntary movement pulled her simple white robe more tightly through her girdle.

Heron's studio was as clean and as simple as his daughter's attire, though it seemed larger than enough for the purpose it served, for only a very small part of it was occupied by the artist, who sat as if in exile behind the work-table on which his belongings were laid out: a set of small instruments in a case, a tray filled with shells and bits of onyx and other agates, a yellow ball of Cyrenian modeling-wax, pumice-stone, bottles, boxes, and bowls.

Melissa had no sooner crossed the threshold, than the sculptor drew up his broad shoulders and brawny person, and raised his hand to fling away the slender stylus he had been using; however, he thought better of it, and laid it carefully aside with the other tools. But this act of self-control must have cost the hot-headed, powerful man a great effort; for he shot a fierce look at the instrument which had had so narrow an escape, and gave it a push of vexation with the back of his hand.

Then he turned towards the door, his sunburnt face looking surly enough, in its frame of tangled gray hair and beard; and, as he waited for the visitor whom Melissa was greeting outside, he tossed back his big head, and threw out his broad, deep chest, as though preparing to wrestle.

Melissa presently returned, and the youth whose hand she still held was, as might be seen in every feature, none other than the sculptor's son. Both were dark-eyed, with noble and splendid heads, and in stature perfectly equal; but while the son's countenance beamed with hearty enjoyment, and seemed by its peculiar attractiveness to be made--and to be accustomed--to charm men and women alike, his father's face was expressive of disgust and misanthropy. It seemed, indeed, as though the newcomer had roused his ire, for Heron answered his son's cheerful greeting with no word but a reproachful "At last!" and paid no heed to the hand the youth held out to him.

Alexander was no doubt inured to such a reception; he did not disturb himself about the old man's ill-humor, but slapped him on the shoulder with rough geniality, went up to the work-table with easy composure, took up the vice which held the nearly finished gem, and, after holding it to the light and examining it carefully, exclaimed: "Well done, father! You have done nothing better than that for a long time."

"Poor stuff!" said his father. But his son laughed.

"If you will have it so. But I will give one of my eyes to see the man in Alexandria who can do the like!"

At this the old man broke out, and shaking his fist he cried: "Because the man who can find anything worth doing, takes good care not to waste his time here, making divine art a mere mockery by such trifling with toys! By Sirius! I should like to fling all those pebbles into the fire, the onyx and shells and jasper and what not, and smash all those wretched tools with these fists, which were certainly made for other work than this."

The youth laid an arm round his father's stalwart neck, and gayly interrupted his wrath. "Oh yes, Father Heron, Philip and I have felt often enough that they know how to hit hard."

"Not nearly often enough," growled the artist, and the young man went on:

"That I grant, though every blow from you was equal to a dozen from the hand of any other father in Alexandria. But that those mighty fists on human arms should have evoked the bewitching smile on the sweet lips of this Psyche, if it is

not a miracle of art, is--"

"The degradation of art," the old man put in; but Alexander hastily added:

"The victory of the exquisite over the coarse."

"A victory!" exclaimed Heron, with a scornful flourish of his hand. "I know, boy, why you are trying to garland the oppressive yoke with flowers of flattery. So long as your surly old father sits over the vice, he only whistles a song and spares you his complaints. And then, there is the money his work brings in!"

He laughed bitterly, and as Melissa looked anxiously up at him, her brother exclaimed:

"If I did not know you well, master, and if it would not be too great a pity, I would throw that lovely Psyche to the ostrich in Scopas's court-yard; for, by Herakles! he would swallow your gem more easily than we can swallow such cruel taunts. We do indeed bless the Muses that work brings you some surcease of gloomy thoughts. But for the rest--I hate to speak the word gold. We want it no more than you, who, when the coffer is full, bury it or hide it with the rest. Apollodorus forced a whole talent of the yellow curse upon me for painting his men's room. The sailor's cap, into which I tossed it with the rest, will burst when Seleukus pays me for the portrait of his daughter; and if a thief robs you, and me too, we need not fret over it. My brush and your stylus will earn us more in no time. And what are our needs? We do not bet on quail-fights; we do not run races; I always had a loathing for purchased love; we do not want to wear a heap of garments bought merely because they take our fancy--indeed, I am too hot as it is under this scorching sun. The house is your own. The rent paid by Glaukias, for the work-room and garden you inherited from your father, pays for half at least of what we and the birds and the slaves eat. As for Philip, he lives on air and philosophy; and, besides, he is fed out of the great breadbasket of the Museum."

At this point the starling interrupted the youth's vehement speech with the appropriate cry, "My strength! my strength!" The brother and sister looked at each other, and Alexander went on with genuine enthusiasm:

"But it is not in you to believe us capable of such meanness. Dedicate your next finished work to Isis or Serapis. Let your masterpiece grace the goddess's head-gear, or the god's robe. We shall be quite content, and perhaps the immortals may restore your joy in life as a reward."

The bird repeated its lamentable cry, "My strength!" and the youth proceeded with increased vehemence:

"It would really be better that you should throw your vice and your graver and your burnisher, and all that heap of dainty tools, into the sea, and carve an Atlas such as we have heard you talk about ever since we could first speak Greek. Come, set to work on a colossus! You have but to speak the word, and the finest clay shall be ready on your modeling-table by to-morrow, either here or in Glaukias's work-room, which is indeed your own. I know where the best is to be found, and can bring it to you in any quantity. Scopas will lend me his wagon. I can see it now, and you valiantly struggling with it till your mighty arms ache. You will not whistle and hum over that, but sing out with all your might, as you used when my mother was alive, when you and your apprentices joined Dionysus's drunken rout. Then your brow will grow smooth again; and if the model is a success, and you want to buy marble, or pay the founder, then out with your gold, out of the coffer and its hiding-place! Then you can make use of all your strength, and your dream of producing an Atlas such as the world has not seen--your beautiful dream--will become a reality!"

Heron had listened eagerly to his son's rhapsody, but he now cast a timid glance at the table where the wax and tools lay, pushed the rough hair from his brow, and broke in with a bitter laugh: "My dream, do you say--my dream? As if I did not know too well that I am no longer the man to create an Atlas! As if I did not feel, without your words, that my strength for it is a thing of the past!"

"Nay, father," exclaimed the painter. "Is it right to cast away the sword before the battle? And even if you did not succeed--"

"You would be all the better pleased," the sculptor put in. "What surer way could there be to teach the old simpleton, once for all, that the time when he could do great work is over and gone?"

"That is unjust, father; that is unworthy of you," the young man interrupted in great excitement; but his father went on, raising his voice; "Silence, boy! One thing at any rate is left to me, as you know--my keen eyes; and they did not fail me when you two looked at each other as the starling cried, 'My strength!' Ay, the bird is in the right when he bewails what was once so great and is now a mere laughing-stock. But you--you ought to reverence the man to whom you owe your existence and all you know; you allow yourself to shrug your shoulders over your own father's humbler art, since your first pictures were fairly successful.--How puffed up he is, since, by my devoted care, he has been a painter! How he looks down on the poor wretch who, by the pinch of necessity, has come down from being a sculptor of the highest promise to being a mere gem-cutter! In the depths of your soul--and I know it--you regard my laborious art as half a handicraft. Well, perhaps it deserves no better name; but that you--both of you--should make common cause with a bird, and mock the sacred fire which still burns in an old man, and moves him to serve true and noble art and to mold something great--an Atlas such as the world has never seen on a heroic scale; that--"

He covered his face with his hands and sobbed aloud. And the strong man's passionate grief cut his children to the heart, though, since their mother's death, their father's rage and discontent had many a time ere now broken down into

childish lamentation.

To-day no doubt the old man was in worse spirits than usual, for it was the day of the Nekysia--the feast of the dead kept every autumn; and he had that morning visited his wife's grave, accompanied by his daughter, and had anointed the tombstone and decked it with flowers. The young people tried to comfort him; and when at last he was more composed and had dried his tears, he said, in so melancholy and subdued a tone that the angry blusterer was scarcely recognizable: "There--leave me alone; it will soon be over. I will finish this gem to-morrow, and then I must do the Serapis I promised Theophilus, the high-priest. Nothing can come of the Atlas. Perhaps you meant it in all sincerity, Alexander; but since your mother left me, children, since then--my arms are no weaker than they were; but in here--what it was that shriveled, broke, leaked away--I can not find words for it. If you care for me--and I know you do--you must not be vexed with me if my gall rises now and then; there is too much bitterness in my soul. I can not reach the goal I strive after and was meant to win; I have lost what I loved best, and where am I to find comfort or compensation?"

His children tenderly assured him of their affection, and he allowed Melissa to kiss him, and stroked Alexander's hair.

Then he inquired for Philip, his eldest son and his favorite; and on learning that he, the only person who, as he believed, could understand him, would not come to see him this day above all others, he again broke out in wrath, abusing the degeneracy of the age and the ingratitude of the young.

"Is it a visit which detains him again?" he inquired, and when Alexander thought not, he exclaimed contemptuously: "Then it is some war of words at the Museum. And for such poor stuff as that a son can forget his duty to his father and mother!"

"But you, too, used to enjoy these conflicts of intellect," his daughter humbly remarked; but the old man broke in:

"Only because they help a miserable world to forget the torments of existence, and the hideous certainty of having been born only to die some horrible death. But what can you know of this?"

"By my mother's death-bed," replied the girl, "we, too, had a glimpse into the terrible mystery." And Alexander gravely added, "And since we last met, father, I may certainly account myself as one of the initiated."

"You have painted a dead body?" asked his father.

"Yes, father," replied the lad with a deep breath. "I warned you," said Heron, in a tone of superior experience.

And then, as Melissa rearranged the folds of his blue robe, he said he should go for a walk. He sighed as he spoke, and his children knew whither he would go. It was to the grave to which Melissa had accompanied him that morning; and he would visit it alone, to meditate undisturbed on the wife he had lost.

CHAPTER II.

The brother and sister were left together. Melissa sighed deeply; but her brother went up to her, laid his arm round her shoulder, and said: "Poor child! you have indeed a hard time of it. Eighteen years old, and as pretty as you are, to be kept locked up as if in prison! No one would envy you, even if your fellow-captive and keeper were younger and less gloomy than your father is! But we know what it all means. His grief eats into his soul, and it does him as much good to storm and scold, as it does us to laugh."

"If only the world could know how kind his heart really is!" said the girl.

"He is not the same to his friends as to us," said Alexander; but Melissa shook her head, and said sadly: "He broke out yesterday against Apion, the dealer, and it was dreadful. For the fiftieth time he had waited supper for you two in vain, and in the twilight, when he had done work, his grief overcame him, and to see him weep is quite heartbreaking! The Syrian dealer came in and found him all tearful, and being so bold as to jest about it in his flippant way--"

"The old man would give him his answer, I know!" cried her brother with a hearty laugh. "He will not again be in a hurry to stir up a wounded lion."

"That is the very word," said Melissa, and her large eyes sparkled. "At the fight in the Circus, I could not help thinking of my father, when the huge king of the desert lay with a broken spear in his loins, whining loudly, and burying his maned head between his great paws. The gods are pitiless!"

"Indeed they are," replied the youth, with deep conviction; but his sister looked up at him in surprise.

"Do you say so, Alexander? Yes, indeed--you looked just now as I never saw you before. Has misfortune overtaken you too?"

"Misfortune?" he repeated, and he gently stroked her hair. "No, not exactly; and you know my woes sit lightly enough on me. The immortals have indeed shown me very plainly that it is their will sometimes to spoil the feast of life with a right bitter draught. But, like the moon itself, all it shines on is doomed to change--happily! Many things here below seem strangely ordered. Like ears and eyes, hands and feet, many things are by nature double, and misfortunes, as they say, commonly come in couples yoked like oxen."

"Then you have had some twofold blow?" asked Melissa, clasping her hands over her anxiously throbbing bosom.

"I, child! No, indeed. Nothing has befallen your father's younger son; and if I were a philosopher, like Philip, I should be moved to wonder why a man can only be wet when the rain falls on him, and yet can be so wretched when disaster falls on another. But do not look at me with such terror in your great eyes. I swear to you that, as a man and an artist, I never felt better, and so I ought properly to be in my usual frame of mind. But the skeleton at life's festival has been shown to me. What sort of thing is that? It is an image--the image of a dead man which was carried round by the Egyptians, and is to this day by the Romans, to remind the feasters that they should fill every hour with enjoyment, since enjoyment is all too soon at an end. Such an image, child--"

"You are thinking of the dead girl--Seleukus's daughter--whose portrait you are painting?" asked Melissa.

Alexander nodded, sat down on the bench by his sister, and, taking up her needlework, exclaimed "Give us some light, child. I want to see your pretty face. I want to be sure that Diodorus did not perjure himself when, at the 'Crane,' the other day, he swore that it had not its match in Alexandria. Besides, I hate the darkness."

When Melissa returned with the lighted lamp, she found her brother, who was not wont to keep still, sitting in the place where she had left him. But he sprang up as she entered, and prevented her further greeting by exclaiming:

"Patience! patience! You shall be told all. Only I did not want to worry you on the day of the festival of the dead. And besides, to-morrow perhaps he will be in a better frame of mind, and next day--"

Melissa became urgent. "If Philip is ill--" she put in.

"Not exactly ill," said he. "He has no fever, no ague-fit, no aches and pains. He is not in bed, and has no bitter draughts to swallow. Yet is he not well, any more than I, though but just now, in the dining-hall at the Elephant, I ate like a starving wolf, and could at this moment jump over this table. Shall I prove it?"

"No, no," said his sister, in growing distress. "But, if you love me, tell me at once and plainly--"

"At once and plainly," sighed the painter. "That, in any case, will not be easy. But I will do my best. You knew Korinna?"

"Seleukus's daughter?"

"She herself--the maiden from whose corpse I am painting her portrait."

"No. But you wanted--"

"I wanted to be brief, but I care even more to be understood; and if you have never seen with your own eyes, if you do not yourself know what a miracle of beauty the gods wrought when they molded that maiden, you are indeed justified in regarding me as a fool and Philip as a madman--which, thank the gods, he certainly is not yet."

"Then he too has seen the dead maiden?"

"No, no. And yet--perhaps. That at present remains a mystery. I hardly know what happened even to myself. I succeeded in controlling myself in my father's presence; but now, when it all rises up before me, before my very eyes, so distinct, so real, so tangible, now--by Sirius! Melissa, if you interrupt me again--"

"Begin again. I will be silent," she cried. "I can easily picture your Korinna as a divinely beautiful creature."

Alexander raised his hands to heaven, exclaiming with passionate vehemence: "Oh, how would I praise and glorify the gods, who formed that marvel of their art, and my mouth should be full of their grace and mercy, if they had but allowed the world to sun itself in the charm of that glorious creature, and to worship their everlasting beauty in her who was their image! But they have wantonly destroyed their own masterpiece, have crushed the scarce-opened bud, have darkened the star ere it has risen! If a man had done it, Melissa, a man what would his doom have been! If he--"

Here the youth hid his face in his hands in passionate emotion; but, feeling his sister's arm round his shoulder, he recovered himself, and went on more calmly: "Well, you heard that she was dead. She was of just your age; she is dead at eighteen, and her father commissioned me to paint her in death.--Pour me out some water; then I will proceed as coldly as a man crying the description of a runaway slave." He drank a deep draught, and wandered restlessly up and down in front of his sister, while he told her all that had happened to him during the last few days.

The day before yesterday, at noon, he had left the inn where he had been carousing with friends, gay and careless, and had obeyed the call of Seleukus. Just before raising the knocker he had been singing cheerfully to himself. Never had he felt more fully content--the gayest of the gay. One of the first men in the town, and a connoisseur, had honored him with a fine commission, and the prospect of painting something dead had pleased him. His old master had often admired the exquisite delicacy of the flesh-tones of a recently deceased body. As his glance fell on the implements that his slave carried after him, he had drawn himself up with the proud feeling of having before him a noble task, to which he felt equal. Then the porter, a gray-bearded Gaul, had opened the door to him, and as he looked into his care-worn face and received from him a silent permission to step in, he had already become more serious.

He had heard marvels of the magnificence of the house that he now entered; and the lofty vestibule into which he was admitted, the mosaic floor that he trod; the marble statues and high reliefs round the upper part of the walls, were well worth careful observation; yet he, whose eyes usually carried away so vivid an impression of what he had once seen that he could draw it from memory, gave no attention to any particular thing among the various objects worthy of admiration. For already in the anteroom a peculiar sensation had come over him. The large halls, which were filled with odors of ambergris and incense, were as still as the grave. And it seemed to him that even the sun, which had been shining brilliantly a few minutes before in a cloudless sky, had disappeared behind clouds, for a strange twilight, unlike anything he had ever seen, surrounded him. Then he perceived that it came in through the black velarium with which they had closed the open roof of the room through which he was passing.

In the anteroom a young freedman had hurried silently past him--had vanished like a shadow through the dusky rooms. His duty must have been to announce the artist's arrival to the mother of the dead girl; for, before Alexander had found time to feast his gaze on the luxurious mass of flowering plants that surrounded the fountain in the middle of the impluvium, a tall matron, in flowing mourning garments, came towards him--Korinna's mother.

Without lifting the black veil which enveloped her from head to foot, she speechlessly signed him to follow her. Till this moment not even a whisper had met his ear from any human lips in this house of death and mourning; and the stillness was so oppressive to the light-hearted young painter, that, merely to hear the sound of his own voice, he explained to the lady who he was and wherefore he had come. But the only answer was a dumb assenting bow of the head.

He had not far to go with his stately guide; their walk ended in a spacious room. It had been made a perfect flower-garden with hundreds of magnificent plants; piles of garlands strewed the floor, and in the midst stood the couch on which lay the dead girl. In this hall, too, reigned the same gloomy twilight which had startled him in the vestibule.

The dim, shrouded form lying motionless on the couch before him, with a heavy wreath of lotus-flowers and white roses encircling it from head to foot, was the subject for his brush. He was to paint here, where he could scarcely distinguish one plant from another, or make out the form of the vases which stood round the bed of death. The white blossoms alone gleamed like pale lights in the gloom, and with a sister radiance something smooth and round which lay on the couch--the bare arm of the dead maiden.

His heart began to throb; the artist's love of his art had awaked within him; he had collected his wits, and explained to the matron that to paint in the darkness was impossible.

Again she bowed in reply, but at a signal two waiting women, who were squatting on the floor behind the couch, started up in the twilight, as if they had sprung from the earth, and approached their mistress.

A fresh shock chilled the painter's blood, for at the same moment the lady's voice was suddenly audible close to his ear, almost as deep as a man's but not unmelodious, ordering the girls to draw back the curtain as far as the painter should desire.

Now, he felt, the spell was broken; curiosity and eagerness took the place of reverence for death. He quietly gave his orders for the necessary arrangements, lent the women the help of his stronger arm, took out his painting implements, and then requested the matron to unveil the dead girl, that he might see from which side it would be best to take the portrait. But then again he was near losing his composure, for the lady raised her veil, and measured him with a glance as though he had asked something strange and audacious indeed.

Never had he met so piercing a glance from any woman's eyes; and yet they were red with weeping and full of tears. Bitter grief spoke in every line of her still youthful features, and their stern, majestic beauty was in keeping with the deep tones of her speech. Oh that he had been so happy as to see this woman in the bloom of youthful loveliness! She did not heed his admiring surprise; before acceding to his demand, her regal form trembled from head to foot, and she sighed as she lifted the shroud from her daughter's face. Then, with a groan, she dropped on her knees by the couch and laid her cheek against that of the dead maiden. At last she rose, and murmured to the painter that if he were successful in his task her gratitude would be beyond expression.

"What more she said," Alexander went on, "I could but half understand, for she wept all the time, and I could not collect my thoughts. It was not till afterward that I learned from her waiting-woman--a Christian--that she meant to tell me that the relations and wailing women were to come to-morrow morning. I could paint on till nightfall, but no longer. I had been chosen for the task because Seleukus had heard from my old teacher, Bion, that I should get a faithful likeness of the original more quickly than any one else. She may have said more, but I heard nothing; I only saw. For when the veil no longer hid that face from my gaze, I felt as though the gods had revealed a mystery to me which till now only the immortals had been permitted to know. Never was my soul so steeped in devotion, never had my heart beat in such solemn uplifting as at that moment. What I was gazing at and had to represent was a thing neither human nor divine; it was beauty itself--that beauty of which I have often dreamed in blissful rapture.

"And yet--do not misapprehend me--I never thought of bewailing the maiden, or grieving over her early death. She was but sleeping--I could fancy: I watched one I loved in her slumbers. My heart beat high! Ay, child, and the work I did was pure joy, such joy as only the gods on Olympus know at their golden board. Every feature, every line was of such perfection as only the artist's soul can conceive of, nay, even dream of. The ecstasy remained, but my unrest gave way to an indescribable and wordless bliss. I drew with the red chalk, and mixed the colors with the grinder, and all the while I could not feel the painful sense of painting a corpse. If she were slumbering, she had fallen asleep with bright images in her memory. I even fancied again and again that her lips moved her exquisitely chiseled mouth, and that a faint breath played with her abundant, waving, shining brown hair, as it does with yours.

"The Muse sped my hand and the portrait--Bion and the rest will praise it, I think, though it is no more like the unapproachable original than that lamp is like the evening star yonder."

"And shall we be allowed to see it?" asked Melissa, who had been listening breathlessly to her brother's narrative.

The words seemed to have snatched the artist from a dream. He had to pause and consider where he was and to whom he was speaking. He hastily pushed the curling hair off his damp brow, and said:

"I do not understand. What is it you ask?"

"I only asked whether we should be allowed to see the portrait," she answered timidly. "I was wrong to interrupt you. But how hot your head is! Drink again before you go on. Had you really finished by sundown?"

Alexander shook his head, drank, and then went on more calmly: "No, no! It is a pity you spoke. In fancy I was painting her still. There is the moon rising already. I must make haste. I have told you all this for Philip's sake, not for my own."

"I will not interrupt you again, I assure you," said Melissa. "Well, well," said her brother. "There is not much that is pleasant left to tell. Where was I?"

"Painting, so long as it was light--"

"To be sure--I remember. It began to grow dark. Then lamps were brought in, large ones, and as many as I wished for. Just before sunset Seleukus, Korinna's father, came in to look upon his daughter once more. He bore his grief with dignified composure; yet by his child's bier he found it hard to be calm. But you can imagine all that. He invited me to eat, and the food they brought might have tempted a full man to excess, but I could only swallow a few mouthfuls. Berenike--the mother--did not even moisten her lips, but Seleukus did duty for us both, and this I could see displeased his wife. During supper the merchant made many inquiries about me and my father; for he had heard Philip's praises from his brother Theophilus, the high-priest. I learned from him that Korinna had caught her sickness from a slave girl she had nursed, and had died of the fever in three days. But while I sat listening to him, as he talked and ate, I could not keep my eyes off his wife who reclined opposite to me silent and motionless, for the gods had created Korinna in her very image. The lady Berenike's eyes indeed sparkle with a lurid, I might almost say an alarming, fire, but they are shaped like Korinna's. I said so, and asked whether they were of the same color; I wanted to know for my portrait. On this Seleukus referred me to a picture painted by old Sosibius, who has lately gone to Rome to work in Caesar's new baths. He last year painted the wall of a room in the merchant's country house at Kanopus. In the center of the picture

stands Galatea, and I know it now to be a good and true likeness.

"The picture I finished that evening is to be placed at the head of the young girl's sarcophagus; but I am to keep it two days longer, to reproduce a second likeness more at my leisure, with the help of the Galatea, which is to remain in Seleukus's town house.

"Then he left me alone with his wife.

"What a delightful commission! I set to work with renewed pleasure, and more composure than at first. I had no need to hurry, for the first picture is to be hidden in the tomb, and I could give all my care to the second. Besides, Korinna's features were indelibly impressed on my eye.

"I generally can not paint at all by lamp-light; but this time I found no difficulty, and I soon recovered that blissful, solemn mood which I had felt in the presence of the dead. Only now and then it was clouded by a sigh, or a faint moan from Berenike: 'Gone, gone! There is no comfort--none, none!'

"And what could I answer? When did Death ever give back what he has snatched away?

"'I can not even picture her as she was,' she murmured sadly to herself--but this I might remedy by the help of my art, so I painted on with increasing zeal; and at last her lamentations ceased to trouble me, for she fell asleep, and her handsome head sank on her breast. The watchers, too, had dropped asleep, and only their deep breathing broke the stillness.

"Suddenly it flashed upon me that I was alone with Korinna, and the feeling grew stronger and stronger; I fancied her lovely lips had moved, that a smile gently parted them, inviting me to kiss them. As often as I looked at them--and they bewitched me--I saw and felt the same, and at last every impulse within me drove me toward her, and I could no longer resist: my lips pressed hers in a kiss!"

Melissa softly sighed, but the artist did not hear; he went on: "And in that kiss I became hers; she took the heart and soul of me. I can no longer escape from her; awake or asleep, her image is before my eyes, and my spirit is in her power."

Again he drank, emptying the cup at one deep gulp. Then he went on: "So be it! Who sees a god, they say, must die. And it is well, for he has known something more glorious than other men. Our brother Philip, too, lives with his heart in bonds to that one alone, unless a demon has cheated his senses. I am troubled about him, and you must help me."

He sprang up, pacing the room again with long strides, but his sister clung to his arm and besought him to shake off the bewitching vision. How earnest was her prayer, what eager tenderness rang in her every word, as she entreated him to tell her when and where her elder brother, too, had met the daughter of Seleukus!

The artist's soft heart was easily moved. Stroking the hair of the loving creature at his side--so helpful as a rule, but now bewildered--he tried to calm her by affecting a lighter mood than he really felt, assuring her that he should soon recover his usual good spirits. She knew full well, he said, that his living loves changed in frequent succession, and it would be strange indeed if a dead one could bind him any longer. And his adventure, so far as it concerned the house of Seleukus, ended with that kiss; for the lady Berenike had presently waked, and urged him to finish the portrait at his own house.

Next morning he had completed it with the help of the Galatea in the villa at Kanopus, and he had heard a great deal about the dead maiden. A young woman who was left in charge of the villa had supplied him with whatever he needed. Her pretty face was swollen with weeping, and it was in a voice choked with tears that she had told him that her husband, who was a centurion in Caesar's pretorian guard, would arrive to-morrow or next day at Alexandria, with his imperial master. She had not seen him for a long time, and had an infant to show him which he had not yet seen; and yet she could not be glad, for her young mistress's death had extinguished all her joy.

"The affection which breathed in every word of the centurion's wife," Alexander said, "helped me in my work. I could be satisfied with the result.

"The picture is so successful that I finished that for Seleukus in all confidence, and for the sarcophagus I will copy it as well or as ill as time will allow. It will hardly be seen in the half-dark tomb, and how few will ever go to see it! None but a Seleukus can afford to employ so costly a brush as your brother's is--thank the Muses! But the second portrait is quite another thing, for that may chance to be hung next a picture by Apelles; and it must restore to the parents so much of their lost child as it lies in my power to give them. So, on my way, I made up my mind to begin the copy at once by lamp-light, for it must be ready by to-morrow night at latest.

"I hurried to my work-room, and my slave placed the picture on an easel, while I welcomed my brother Philip who had come to see me, and who had lighted a lamp, and of course had brought a book. He was so absorbed in it that he did not observe that I had come in till I addressed him. Then I told him whence I came and what had happened, and he thought it all very strange and interesting.

"He was as usual rather hurried and hesitating, not quite clear, but understanding it all. Then he began telling me something about a philosopher who has just come to the front, a porter by trade, from whom he had heard sundry wonders, and it was not till Syrus brought me in a supper of oysters--for I could still eat nothing more solid--that he

asked to see the portrait.

"I pointed to the easel, and watched him; for the harder he is to please, the more I value his opinion. This time I felt confident of praise, or even of some admiration, if only for the beauty of the model.

"He threw off the veil from the picture with a hasty movement, but, instead of gazing at it calmly, as he is wont, and snapping out his sharp criticisms, he staggered backward, as though the noonday sun had dazzled his sight. Then, bending forward, he stared at the painting, panting as he might after racing for a wager. He stood in perfect silence, for I know not how long, as though it were Medusa he was gazing on, and when at last he clasped his hand to his brow, I called him by name. He made no reply, but an impatient 'Leave me alone!' and then he still gazed at the face as though to devour it with his eyes, and without a sound.

"I did not disturb him; for, thought I, he too is bewitched by the exquisite beauty of those virgin features. So we were both silent, till he asked, in a choked voice: 'And did you paint that? Is that, do you say, the daughter that Seleukus has just lost?'

"Of course I said 'Yes'; but then he turned on me in a rage, and reproached me bitterly for deceiving and cheating him, and jesting with things that to him were sacred, though I might think them a subject for sport.

"I assured him that my answer was as earnest as it was accurate, and that every word of my story was true.

"This only made him more furious. I, too, began to get angry, and as he, evidently deeply agitated, still persisted in saying that my picture could not have been painted from the dead Korinna, I swore to him solemnly, with the most sacred oath I could think of, that it was really so.

"On this he declared to me in words so tender and touching as I never before heard from his lips, that if I were deceiving him his peace of mind would be forever destroyed-nay, that he feared for his reason; and when I had repeatedly assured him, by the memory of our departed mother, that I had never dreamed of playing a trick upon him, he shook his head, grasped his brow, and turned to leave the room without another word."

"And you let him go?" cried Melissa, in anxious alarm.

"Certainly not," replied the painter. "On the contrary, I stood in his way, and asked him whether he had known Korinna, and what all this might mean. But he would make no reply, and tried to pass me and get away. It must have been a strange scene, for we two big men struggled as if we were at a wrestling-match. I got him down with one hand behind his knees, and so he had to remain; and when I had promised to let him go, he confessed that he had seen Korinna at the house of her uncle, the high-priest, without knowing who she was or even speaking a word to her. And he, who usually flees from every creature wearing a woman's robe, had never forgotten that maiden and her noble beauty; and, though he did not say so, it was obvious, from every word, that he was madly in love. Her eyes had followed him wherever he went, and this he deemed a great misfortune, for it had disturbed his power of thought. A month since he went across Lake Mareotis to Polybius to visit Andreas, and while, on his return, he was standing on the shore, he saw her again, with an old man in white robes. But the last time he saw her was on the morning of the very day when all this happened; and if he is to be believed, he not only saw her but touched her hand. That, again, was by the lake; she was just stepping out of the ferry-boat. The obolus she had ready to pay the oarsman dropped on the ground, and Philip picked it up and returned it to her. Then his fingers touched hers. He could feel it still, he declared, and yet she had then ceased to walk among the living.

"Then it was my turn to doubt his word; but he maintained that his story was true in every detail; he would hear nothing said about some one resembling her, or anything of the kind, and spoke of daimons showing him false visions, to cheat him and hinder him from working out his investigations of the real nature of things to a successful issue. But this is in direct antagonism to his views of daimons; and when at last he rushed out of the house, he looked like one possessed of evil spirits.

"I hurried after him, but he disappeared down a dark alley. Then I had enough to do to finish my copy, and yesterday I carried it home to Seleukus.

"Then I had time to look for Philip, but I could hear nothing of him, either in his own lodgings or at the Museum. To-day I have been hunting for him since early in the morning. I even forgot to lay any flowers on my mother's grave, as usual on the day of the Nekysia, because I was thinking only of him. But he no doubt is gone to the city of the dead; for, on my way hither, as I was ordering a garland in the flower-market, pretty little Doxion showed me two beauties which she had woven for him, and which he is presently to fetch. So he must now be in the Nekropolis; and I know for whom he intends the second; for the door-keeper at Seleukus's house told me that a man, who said he was my brother, had twice called, and had eagerly inquired whether my picture had yet been attached to Korinna's sarcophagus. The old man told him it had not, because, of course, the embalming could not be complete as yet. But the picture was to be displayed to-day, as being the feast of the dead, in the hall of the embalmers. That was the plan, I know. So, now, child, set your wise little woman's head to work, and devise something by which he may be brought to his senses, and released from these crazy imaginings."

"The first thing to be done," Melissa exclaimed, "is to follow him and talk to him.-Wait a moment; I must speak a

word to the slaves. My father's night-draught can be mixed in a minute. He might perhaps return home before us, and I must leave his couch--I will be with you in a minute."

CHAPTER III.

The brother and sister had walked some distance. The roads were full of people, and the nearer they came to the Nekropolis the denser was the throng.

As they skirted the town walls they took counsel together.

Being perfectly agreed that the girl who had touched Philip's hand could certainly be no daimon who had assumed Korinna's form, they were inclined to accept the view that a strong resemblance had deceived their brother. They finally decided that Alexander should try to discover the maiden who so strangely resembled the dead; and the artist was ready for the task, for he could only work when his heart was light, and had never felt such a weight on it before. The hope of meeting with a living creature who resembled that fair dead maiden, combined with his wish to rescue his brother from the disorder of mind which threatened him; and Melissa perceived with glad surprise how quickly this new object in life restored the youth's happy temper.

It was she who spoke most, and Alexander, whom nothing escaped that had any form of beauty, feasted his ear on the pearly ring of her voice.

"And her face is to match," thought he as they went on in the darkness; "and may the Charites who have endowed her with every charm, forgive my father for burying her as he does his gold."

It was not in his nature to keep anything that stirred him deeply to himself, when he was in the society of another, so he murmured to his sister: "It is just as well that the Macedonian youths of this city should not be able to see what a jewel our old man's house contains.--Look how brightly Selene shines on us, and how gloriously the stars burn! Nowhere do the heavens blaze more brilliantly than here. As soon as we come out of the shadow that the great walls cast on the road we shall be in broad light. There is the Serapeum rising out of the darkness. They are rehearsing the great illumination which is to dazzle the eyes of Caesar when he comes. But they must show too, that to-night, at least, the gods of the nether world and death are all awake. You can never have been in the Nekropolis at so late an hour before."

"How should I?" replied the girl. And he expressed the pleasure that it gave him to be able to show her for the first time the wonderful night scene of such a festival. And when he heard the deep-drawn "Ah!" with which she hailed the sight of the greatest temple of all, blazing in the midst of the darkness with tar-pans, torches, and lamps innumerable, he replied with as much pride and satisfaction as though she owed the display to him, "Ay, what do you think of that?"

Above the huge stone edifice which was thus lighted up, the dome of the Serapeum rose high into the air, its summit appearing to touch the sky. Never had the gigantic structure seemed so beautiful to the girl, who had only seen it by daylight; for under the illumination, arranged by a master-hand, every line stood out more clearly than in the sunlight; and in the presence of this wonderful sight Melissa's impressionable young soul forgot the trouble that had weighed on it, and her heart beat higher.

Her lonely life with her father had hitherto fully satisfied her, and she had, never yet dreamed of anything better in the future than a quiet and modest existence, caring for him and her brothers; but now she thankfully experienced the pleasure of seeing for once something really grand and fine, and rejoiced at having escaped for a while from the monotony of each day and hour.

Once, too, she had been with her brothers and Diodoros, Alexander's greatest friend, to see a wild-beast fight, followed by a combat of gladiators; but she had come home frightened and sorrowful, for what she had seen had horrified more than it had interested her. Some of the killed and tortured beings haunted her mind; and, besides, sitting in the lowest and best seats belonging to Diodoros's wealthy father, she had been stared at so boldly and defiantly whenever she raised her eyes, by a young gallant opposite, that she had felt vexed and insulted; nay, had wished above all things to get home as soon as possible. And yet she had loved Diodoros from her childhood, and she would have enjoyed sitting quietly by his side more than looking on at the show.

But on this occasion her curiosity was gratified, and the hope of being able to help one who was dear to her filled her with quiet gladness. It was a comfort to her, too, to find herself once more by her mother's grave with Alexander, who was her especial friend. She could never come here often enough, and the blessing which emanated from it--of that she was convinced--must surely fall on her brother also, and avert from him all that grieved his heart.

As they walked on between the Serapeum on one hand, towering high above all else, and the Stadium on the other, the throng was dense; on the bridge over the canal it was difficult to make any progress. Now, as the full moon rose, the sacrifices and games in honor of the gods of the under world were beginning, and now the workshops and factories had emptied themselves into the streets already astir for the festival of the dead, so every moment the road became more crowded.

Such a tumult was generally odious to her retiring nature; but to-night she felt herself merely one drop in the great, flowing river, of which every other drop felt the same impulse which was carrying her forward to her destination. The

desire to show the dead that they were not forgotten, that their favor was courted and hoped for, animated men and women, old and young alike.

There were few indeed who had not a wreath or a posy in their hands, or carried behind them by a slave. In front of the brother and sister was a large family of children. A black nurse carried the youngest on her shoulder, and an ass bore a basket in which were flowers for the tomb, with a wineflask and eatables. A memorial banquet was to be held at the grave of their ancestors; and the little one, whose golden head rose above the black, woolly poll of the negress, nodded gayly in response to Melissa's smiles. The children were enchanted at the prospect of a meal at such an unusual hour, and their parents rejoiced in them and in the solemn pleasure they anticipated.

Many a one in this night of remembrance only cared to recall the happy hours spent in the society of the beloved dead; others hoped to leave their grief and pain behind them, and find fresh courage and contentment in the City of the Dead; for tonight the gates of the nether world stood open, and now, if ever, the gods that reigned there would accept the offerings and hear the prayers of the devout.

Those lean Egyptians, who pushed past in silence and haranging their heads, were no doubt bent on carrying offerings to Osiris and Anubis--for the festival of the gods of death and resurrection coincided with the Nekysia--and on winning their favors by magical formulas and spells.

Everything was plainly visible, for the desert tract of the Nekropolis, where at this hour utter darkness and silence usually reigned, was brightly lighted up. Still, the blaze failed to banish entirely the thrill of fear which pervaded the spot at night; for the unwonted glare dazzled and bewildered the bats and night-birds, and they fluttered about over the heads of the intruders in dark, ghostly flight. Many a one believed them to be the unresting souls of condemned sinners, and looked up at them with awe.

Melissa drew her veil closer and clung more tightly to her brother, for a sound of singing and wild cries, which she had heard behind her for some time, was now coming closer. They were no longer treading the paved street, but the hard-beaten soil of the desert. The crush was over, for here the crowd could spread abroad; but the uproarious troop, which she did not even dare to look at, came rushing past quite close to them. They were Greeks, of all ages and of both sexes. The men flourished torches, and were shouting a song with unbridled vehemence; the women, wearing garlands, kept up with them. What they carried in the baskets on their heads could not be seen, nor did Alexander know; for so many religious brotherhoods and mystic societies existed here that it was impossible to guess to which this noisy troop might belong.

The pair had presently overtaken a little train of white-robed men moving forward at a solemn pace, whom the painter recognized as the philosophical and religious fraternity of the Neo-Pythagoreans, when a small knot of men and women in the greatest excitement came rushing past as if they were mad. The men wore the loose red caps of their Phrygian land; the women carried bowls full of fruits. Some beat small drums, others clanged cymbals, and each hauled his neighbor along with deafening cries, faster and faster, till the dust hid them from sight and a new din drowned the last, for the votaries of Dionysus were already close upon them, and vied with the Phrygians in uproariousness. But this wild troop remained behind; for one of the light-colored oxen, covered with decorations, which was being driven in the procession by a party of men and boys, to be presently sacrificed, had broken away, maddened by the lights and the shouting, and had to be caught and led again.

At last they reached the graveyard. But even now they could not make their way to the long row of houses where the embalmers dwelt, for an impenetrable mass of human beings stood pent up in front of them, and Melissa begged her brother to give her a moment's breathing space.

All she had seen and heard on the way had excited her greatly; but she had scarcely for a moment forgotten what it was that had brought her out so late, who it was that she sought, or that it would need her utmost endeavor to free him from the delusion that had fooled him. In this dense throng and deafening tumult it was scarcely possible to recover that collected calm which she had found in the morning at her mother's tomb. In that, doubt had had no part, and the delightful feeling of freedom which had shone on her soul, now shrank deep into the shade before a growing curiosity and the longing for her usual repose.

If her father were to find her here! When she saw a tall figure resembling his cross the torchlight, all clouded as it was by the dust, she drew her brother away behind the stall of a seller of drinks and other refreshments. The father, at any rate, must be spared the distress she felt about Philip, who was his favorite. Besides, she knew full well that, if he met her here, he would at once take her home.

The question now was where Philip might be found.

They were standing close to the booths where itinerant dealers sold food and liquors of every description, flowers and wreaths, amulets and papyrus-leaves, with strange charms written on them to secure health for the living and salvation for the souls of the dead. An astrologer, who foretold the course of a man's life from the position of the planets, had erected a high platform with large tables displayed to view, and the instrument wherewith he aimed at the stars as it were with a bow; and his Syrian slave, accompanying himself on a gayly-painted drum, proclaimed his master's powers. There were closed tents in which magical remedies were to be obtained, though their open sale was

forbidden by the authorities, from love-philters to the wondrous fluid which, if rightly applied, would turn lead, copper, or silver to gold. Here, old women invited the passer-by to try Thracian and other spells; there, magicians stalked to and fro in painted caps and flowing, gaudy robes, most of them calling themselves priests of some god of the abyss. Men of every race and tongue that dwelt in the north of Africa, or on the shores of the Mediterranean, were packed in a noisy throng.

The greatest press was behind the houses of the men who buried the dead. Here sacrifices were offered on the altars of Serapis, Isis, and Anubis; here the sacred sistrum of Isis might be kissed; here hundreds of priests performed solemn ceremonies, and half of those who came hither for the festival of the dead collected about them. The mysteries were also performed here, beginning before midnight; and a dramatic representation might be seen of the woes of Isis, and the resurrection of her husband Osiris. But neither here, nor at the stalls, nor among the graves, where many families were feasting by torchlight and pouring libations in the sand for the souls of the dead, did Alexander expect to find his brother. Nor would Philip be attending the mysterious solemnities of any of the fraternities. He had witnessed them often enough with his friend Diodoros, who never missed the procession to Eleusis, because, as he declared, the mysteries of Demeter alone could assure a man of the immortality of the soul. The wild ceremonies of the Syrians, who maimed themselves in their mad ecstasy, repelled him as being coarse and barbarous.

As she made her way through this medley of cults, this worship of gods so different that they were in some cases hostile, but more often merged into each other, Melissa wondered to which she ought to turn in her present need. Her mother had best loved to sacrifice to Serapis and Isis. But since, in her last sickness, Melissa had offered everything she possessed to these divinities of healing, and all in vain, and since she had heard things in the Serapeum itself which even now brought a blush to her cheek, she had turned away from the great god of the Alexandrians. Though he who had offended her by such base proposals was but a priest of the lower grade--and indeed, though she knew it not, was since dead--she feared meeting him again, and had avoided the sanctuary where he officiated.

She was a thorough Alexandrian, and had been accustomed from childhood to listen to the philosophical disputations of the men about her. So she perfectly understood her brother Philip, the skeptic, when he said that he by no means denied the existence of the immortals, but that, on the other hand, he could not believe in it; that thought brought him no conviction; that man, in short, could be sure of nothing, and so could know nothing whatever of the divinity. He had even denied, on logical grounds, the goodness and omnipotence of the gods, the wisdom and fitness of the ordering of the universe, and Melissa was proud of her brother's acumen; but what appeals to the brain only, and not to the heart, can not move a woman to anything great--least of all to a decisive change of life or feeling. So the girl had remained constant to her mother's faith in some mighty powers outside herself, which guided the life of Nature and of human beings. Only she did not feel that she had found the true god, either in Serapis or Isis, and so she had sought others. Thus she had formulated a worship of ancestors, which, as she had learned from the slave-woman of her friend Ino, was not unfamiliar to the Egyptians.

In Alexandria there were altars to every god, and worship in every form. Hers, however, was not among them, for the genius of her creed was the enfranchised soul of her mother, who had cast off the burden of this perishable body. Nothing had ever come from her that was not good and lovely; and she knew that if her mother were permitted, even in some other than human form, she would never cease to watch over her with tender care.

And those initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, as Diodoros had told her, desired the immortality of the soul, to the end that they might continue to participate in the life of those whom they had left behind. What was it that brought such multitudes at this time out to the Nekropolis, with their hands full of offerings, but the consciousness of their nearness to the dead, and of being cared for by them so long as they were not forgotten? And even if the glorified spirit of her mother were not permitted to hear her prayers, she need not therefore cease to turn to her; for it comforted her unspeakably to be with her in spirit, and to confide to her all that moved her soul. And so her mother's tomb had become her favorite place of rest. Here, if anywhere, she now hoped once more to find comfort, some happy suggestion, and perhaps some definite assistance.

She begged Alexander to take her thither, and he consented, though he was of opinion that Philip would be found in the mortuary chamber, in the presence of Korinna's portrait.

It was not easy to force their way through the thousands who had come out to the great show this night; however, most of the visitors were attracted by the mysteries far away from the Macedonian burial-ground, and there was little to disturb the silence near the fine marble monument which Alexander, to gratify his father, had erected with his first large earnings. It was hung with various garlands, and Melissa, before she prayed and anointed the stone, examined them with eye and hand.

Those which she and her father had placed there she recognized at once. That humble garland of reeds with two lotus-flowers was the gift of their old slave Argutis and his wife Dido. This beautiful wreath of choice flowers had come from the garden of a neighbor who had loved her mother well; and that splendid basketful of lovely roses, which had not been there this morning, had been placed here by Andreas, steward to the father of her young friend Diodoros, although he was of the Christian sect. And these were all. Philip had not been here then, though it was now past

midnight.

For the first time in his life he had let this day pass by without a thought for their dead. How bitterly this grieved Melissa, and even added to her anxiety for him!

It was with a heavy heart that she and Alexander anointed the tombstone; and while Melissa uplifted her hands in prayer, the painter stood in silence, his eyes fixed on the ground. But no sooner had she let them fall, than he exclaimed:

"He is here, I am sure, and in the house of the embalmers. That he ordered two wreaths is perfectly certain; and if he meant one for Korinna's picture, he surely intended the other for our mother. If he has offered both to the young girl--"

"No, no!" Melissa put in. "He will bring his gift. Let us wait here a little while, and do you, too, pray to the manes of our mother. Do it to please me."

But her brother interrupted her eagerly: "I think of her wherever I may be; for those we truly love always live for us. Not a day passes, nor if I come in sober, not a night, when I do not see her dear face, either waking or dreaming. Of all things sacred, the thought of her is the highest; and if she had been raised to divine honors like the dead Caesars who have brought so many curses on the world--"

"Hush--don't speak so loud!" said Melissa, seriously, for men were moving to and fro among the tombs, and Roman guards kept watch over the populace.

But the rash youth went on in the same tone:

"I would worship her gladly, though I have forgotten how to pray. For who can tell here--unless he follows the herd and worships Serapis--who can tell to which god of them all he shall turn when he happens to be at his wits' end? While my mother lived, I, like you, could gladly worship and sacrifice to the immortals; but Philip has spoiled me for all that. As to the divine Caesars, every one thinks as I do. My mother would sooner have entered a pesthouse than the banqueting-hall where they feast, on Olympus. Caracalla among the gods! Why, Father Zeus cast his son Hephaistos on earth from the height of Olympus, and only broke his leg; but our Caesar accomplished a more powerful throw, for he cast his brother through the earth into the nether world--an imperial thrust--and not merely lamed him but killed him."

"Well done!" said a deep voice, interrupting the young artist. "Is that you, Alexander? Hear what new titles to fame Heron's son can find for the imperial guest who is to arrive to-morrow."

"Pray hush!" Melissa besought him, looking up at the bearded man who had laid his arm on Alexander's shoulder. It was Glaukias the sculptor, her father's tenant; for his work-room stood on the plot of ground by the garden of Hermes, which the gem-cutter had inherited from his father-in-law.

The man's bold, manly features were flushed with wine and revelry; his twinkling eyes sparkled, and the ivy-leaves still clinging to his curly hair showed that he had been one in the Dionysiac revellers; but the Greek blood which ran in his veins preserved his grace even in drunkenness. He bowed gayly to the young girl, and exclaimed to his companions:

"The youngest pearl in Alexandria's crown of beauties!" while Bion, Alexander's now gray-haired master, clapped the youth on the arm, and added: "Yes, indeed, see what the little thing has grown! Do you remember, pretty one, how you once--how many years ago, I wonder?--spotted your little white garments all over with red dots! I can see you now, your tiny finger plunged into the pot of paint, and then carefully printing off the round pattern all over the white linen. Why, the little painter has become a Hebe, a Charis, or, better still, a sweetly dreaming Psyche."

"Ay, ay!" said Glaukias again. "My worthy landlord has a charming model. He has not far to seek for a head for his best gems. His son, a Helios, or the great Macedonian whose name he bears; his daughter--you are right, Bion--the maid beloved of Eros. Now, if you can make verses, my young friend of the Muses, give us an epigram in a line or two which we may bear in mind as a compliment to our imperial visitor."

"But not here--not in the burial-ground," Melissa urged once more.

Among Glaukias's companions was Argeios, a vain and handsome young poet, with scented locks betraying him from afar, who was fain to display the promptness of his poetical powers; and, even while the elder artist was speaking, he had run Alexander's satirical remarks into the mold of rhythm. Not to save his life could he have suppressed the hastily conceived distich, or have let slip such a justifiable claim to applause. So, without heeding Melissa's remonstrance, he flung his sky-blue mantle about him in fresh folds, and declaimed with comical emphasis:

*"Down to earth did the god cast his son: but with mightier hand
Through it, to Hades, Caesar flung his brother the dwarf."*

The versifier was rewarded by a shout of laughter, and, spurred by the approval of his friends, he declared he had hit on the mode to which to sing his lines, as he did in a fine, full voice.

But there was another poet, Mentor, also of the party, and as he could not be happy under his rival's triumph, he exclaimed: "The great dyer--for you know he uses blood instead of the Tyrian shell--has nothing of Father Zeus about him that I can see, but far more of the great Alexander, whose mausoleum he is to visit to-morrow. And if you would like

to know wherein the son of Severus resembles the giant of Macedon, you shall hear."

He thrummed his thyrsus as though he struck the strings of a lyre, and, having ended the dumb prelude, he sang:

*"Wherein hath the knave Caracalla outdone Alexander?
He killed a brother, the hero a friend, in his rage."*

These lines, however, met with no applause; for they were not so lightly improvised as the former distich, and it was clumsy and tasteless, as well as dangerous thus to name, in connection with such a jest, the potentate at whom it was aimed. And the fears of the jovial party were only too well founded, for a tall, lean Egyptian suddenly stood among the Greeks as if he had sprung from the earth. They were sobered at once, and, like a swarm of pigeons on which a hawk swoops down, they dispersed in all directions.

Melissa beckoned to her brother to follow her; but the Egyptian intruder snatched the mantle, quick as lightning, from Alexander's shoulders, and ran off with it to the nearest pine-torch. The young man hurried after the thief, as he supposed him to be, but there the spy flung the cloak back to him, saying, in a tone of command, though not loud, for there were still many persons among the graves:

"Hands off, son of Heron, unless you want me to call the watch! I have seen your face by the light, and that is enough for this time. Now we know each other, and we shall meet again in another place!"

With these words he vanished in the darkness, and Melissa asked, in great alarm:

"In the name of all the gods, who was that?"

"Some rascally carpenter, or scribe, probably, who is in the service of the night-watch as a spy. At least those sort of folks are often built askew, as that scoundrel was," replied Alexander, lightly. But he knew the man only too well. It was Zminis, the chief of the spies to the night patrol; a man who was particularly inimical to Heron, and whose hatred included the son, by whom he had been befooled and misled in more than one wild ploy with his boon companions. This spy, whose cruelty and cunning were universally feared, might do him a serious mischief, and he therefore did not tell his sister, to whom the name of Zminis was well known, who the listener was.

He cut short all further questioning by desiring her to come at once to the mortuary hall.

"And if we do not find him there," she said, "let us go home at once; I am so frightened."

"Yes, yes," said her brother, vaguely. "If only we could meet some one you could join."

"No, we will keep together," replied Melissa, decisively; and simply assenting, with a brief "All right," the painter drew her arm through his, and they made their way through the now thinning crowd.

CHAPTER IV.

The houses of the embalmers, which earlier in the evening had shone brightly out of the darkness, now made a less splendid display. The dust kicked up by the crowd dimmed the few lamps and torches which had not by this time burned out or been extinguished, and an oppressive atmosphere of balsamic resin and spices met the brother and sister on the very threshold. The vast hall which they now entered was one of a long row of buildings of unburned bricks; but the Greeks insisted on some ornamentation of the simplest structure, if it served a public purpose, and the embalming-houses had a colonnade along their front, and their walls were covered with stucco, painted in gaudy colors, here in the Egyptian and there in the Greek taste. There were scenes from the Egyptian realm of the dead, and others from the Hellenic myths; for the painters had been enjoined to satisfy the requirements and views of visitors of every race. The chief attraction, however, this night was within; for the men whose duties were exercised on the dead had displayed the finest and best of what they had to offer to their customers.

The ancient Greek practice of burning the dead had died out under the Antonines. Of old, the objects used to deck the pyre had also been on show here; now there was nothing to be seen but what related to interment or entombment.

Side by side with the marble sarcophagus, or those of coarser stone, were wooden coffins and mummy-cases, with a place at the head for the portrait of the deceased. Vases and jars of every kind, amulets of various forms, spices and balsams in vials and boxes, little images in burned clay of the gods and of men, of which none but the Egyptians knew the allegorical meaning, stood in long rows on low wooden shelves. On the higher shelves were mummy bands and shrouds, some coarse, others of the very finest texture, wigs for the bald heads of shaven corpses, or woolen fillets, and simply or elaborately embroidered ribbons for the Greek dead.

Nothing was lacking of the various things in use for decking the corpse of an Alexandrian, whatever his race or faith.

Some mummy-cases, too, were there, ready to be packed off to other towns. The most costly were covered with fine red linen, wound about with strings of beads and gold ornaments, and with the name of the dead painted on the upper side. In a long, narrow room apart hung the portraits, waiting to be attached to the upper end of the mummy-cases of those lately deceased, and still in the hands of embalmers. Here, too, most of the lamps were out, and the upper end of the room was already dark. Only in the middle, where the best pictures were on show, the lights had been renewed.

The portraits were painted on thin panels of sycamore or of cypress, and in most of them the execution betrayed that their destiny was to be hidden in the gloom of a tomb.

Alexander's portrait of Korinna was in the middle of the gallery, in a good light, and stood out from the paintings on each side of it as a genuine emerald amid green glass. It was constantly surrounded by a crowd of the curious and connoisseurs. They pointed out the beautiful work to each other; but, though most of them acknowledged the skill of the master who had painted it, many ascribed its superiority to the magical charm of the model. One could see in those wonderfully harmonious features that Aristotle was right when he discerned beauty in order and proportion; while another declared that he found there the evidence of Plato's doctrine of the identity of the good and the beautiful--for this face was so lovely because it was the mirror of a soul which had been disembodied in the plenitude of maiden purity and virtue, unjarred by any discord; and this gave rise to a vehement discussion as to the essential nature of beauty and of virtue.

Others longed to know more about the early-dead original of this enchanting portrait. Korinna's wealthy father and his brothers were among the best-known men of the city. The elder, Timotheus, was high-priest of the Temple of Serapis; and Zeno, the younger, had set the whole world talking when he, who in his youth had been notoriously dissipated, had retired from any concern in the corn-trade carried on by his family, the greatest business of the kind in the world, perhaps, and--for this was an open secret--had been baptized.

The body of the maiden, when embalmed and graced with her portrait, was to be transported to the family tomb in the district of Arsinoe, where they had large possessions, and the gossip of the embalmer was eagerly swallowed as he expatiated on the splendor with which her liberal father proposed to escort her thither.

Alexander and Melissa had entered the portrait-gallery before the beginning of this narrative, and listened to it, standing behind several rows of gazers who were between them and the portrait.

As the speaker ceased, the little crowd broke up, and when Melissa could at last see her brother's work at her ease, she stood speechless for some time; and then she turned to the artist, and exclaimed, from the depths of her heart, "Beauty is perhaps the noblest thing in the world!"

"It is," replied Alexander, with perfect assurance. And he, bewitched once more by the spell which had held him by Korinna's couch, gazed into the dark eyes in his own picture, whose living glance he had never met, and which he nevertheless had faithfully reproduced, giving them a look of the longing of a pure soul for all that is lovely and worthy.

Melissa, an artist's daughter, as she looked at this portrait, understood what it was that had so deeply stirred her

brother while he painted it; but this was not the place to tell him so. She soon tore herself away, to look about for Philip once more and then to be taken home.

Alexander, too, was seeking Philip; but, sharp as the artist's eyes were, Melissa's seemed to be keener, for, just as they were giving it up and turning to go, she pointed to a dark corner and said softly, "There he is."

And there, in fact, her brother was, sitting with two men, one very tall and the other a little man, his brow resting on his hand in the deep shadow of a sarcophagus, between the wall and a mummy-case set on end, which till now had hidden him from Alexander and Melissa.

Who could the man be who had kept the young philosopher, somewhat inaccessible in his pride of learning, so long in talk in that half-dark corner? He was not one of the learned society at the Museum; Alexander knew them all. Besides, he was not dressed like them, in the Greek fashion, but in the flowing robe of a Magian. And the stranger was a man of consequence, for he wore his splendid garment with a superior air, and as Alexander approached him he remembered having somewhere seen this tall, bearded figure, with the powerful head garnished with flowing and carefully oiled black curls. Such handsome and well-chiseled features, such fine eyes, and such a lordly, waving beard were not easily forgotten; his memory suddenly awoke and threw a light on the man as he sat in the gloom, and on the surroundings in which he had met him for the first time.

It was at the feast of Dionysus. Among a drunken crowd, which was rushing wildly along the streets, and which Alexander had joined, himself one of the wildest, this man had marched, sober and dignified as he was at this moment, in the same flowing raiment. This had provoked the feasters, who, being full of wine and of the god, would have nothing that could remind them of the serious side of life. Such sullen reserve on a day of rejoicing was an insult to the jolly giver of the fruits of the earth, and to wine itself, the care-killer; and the mad troop of artists, disguised as Silenus, satyrs, and fauns, had crowded round the stranger to compel him to join their rout and empty the wine-jar which a burly Silenus was carrying before him on his ass.

At first the man had paid no heed to the youths' light mockery; but as they grew bolder, he suddenly stood still, seized the tall faun, who was trying to force the wine-jar on him, by both arms, and, holding him firmly, fixed his grave, dark eyes on those of the youth. Alexander had not forgotten the half-comical, half-threatening incident, but what he remembered most clearly was the strange scene that followed: for, after the Magian had released his enemy, he bade him take the jar back to Silenus, and proceed on his way, like the ass, on all-fours. And the tall faun, a headstrong, irascible Lesbian, had actually obeyed the stately despot, and crept along on his hands and feet by the side of the donkey. No threats nor mockery of his companions could persuade him to rise. The high spirits of the boisterous crew were quite broken, and before they could turn on the magician he had vanished.

Alexander had afterward learned that he was Serapion, the star-gazer and thaumaturgist, whom all the spirits of heaven and earth obeyed.

When, at the time, the painter had told the story to Philip, the philosopher had laughed at him, though Alexander had reminded him that Plato even had spoken of the daimons as being the guardian spirits of men; that in Alexandria, great and small alike believed in them as a fact to be reckoned with; and that he--Philip himself--had told him that they played a prominent part in the newest systems of philosophy.

But to the skeptic nothing was sure: and if he would deny the existence of the Divinity, he naturally must disbelieve that of any beings in a sphere between the supersensual immortals and sentient human creatures. That a man, the weaker nature, could have any power over daimons, who, as having a nearer affinity to the gods, must, if they existed, be the stronger, he could refute with convincing arguments; and when he saw others nibbling whitethorn-leaves, or daubing their thresholds with pitch to preserve themselves and the house from evil spirits, he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, though his father often did such things.

Here was Philip, deep in conversation with the man he had mocked at, and Alexander was flattered by seeing that wise and famous Serapion, in whose powers he himself believed, was talking almost humbly to his brother, as though to a superior. The magician was standing, while the philosopher, as though it were his right, remained seated.

Of what could they be conversing?

Alexander himself was anxious to be going, and only his desire to hear at any rate a few sentences of the talk of two such men detained him longer.

As he expected, it bore on Serapion's magical powers; but the bearded man spoke in a very low tone, and if the painter ventured any nearer he would be seen. He could only catch a few incoherent words, till Philip exclaimed in a louder voice: "All that is well-reasoned. But you will be able to write an enduring inscription on the shifting wave sooner than you will shake my conviction that for our spirit, such as Nature has made it, there is nothing infallible or certain."

The painter was familiar with this postulate, and was curious to hear the Magian's reply; but he could not follow his argument till he ended by saying, rather more emphatically: "You, even, do not deny the physical connection of things; but I know the power that causes it. It is the magical sympathy which displays itself more powerfully in the universe,

and among human beings, than any other force."

"That is just what remains to be proved," was the reply. But as the other declared in all confidence, "And I can prove it," and was proceeding to do so, Serapion's companion, a stunted, sharp-featured little Syrian, caught sight of Alexander. The discourse was interrupted, and Alexander, pointing to Melissa, begged his brother to grant them a few minutes' speech with him. Philip, however, scarcely spared a moment for greeting his brother and sister; and when, in answer to his request that they be brief in what they had to say, they replied that a few words would not suffice, Philip was for putting them off till the morrow, as he did not choose to be disturbed just now.

At this Melissa took courage; she turned to Serapion and modestly addressed him:

"You, sir, look like a grave, kind man, and seem to have a regard for my brother. You, then, will help us, no doubt, to cure him of an illusion which troubles us. A dead girl, he says, met him, and he touched her hand."

"And do you, sweet child, think that impossible?" the Magian asked with gentle gravity. "Have the thousands who bring not merely fruit and wine and money for their dead, but who even burn a black sheep for them--you, perhaps, have done the same--have they, I ask, done this so long in vain? I can not believe it. Nay, I know from the ghosts themselves that this gives them pleasure; so they must have the organs of sense."

"That we may rejoice departed souls by food and drink," said Melissa, eagerly, "and that daimons at times mingle with the living, every one of course, believes; but who ever heard that warm blood stirred in them? And how can it be possible that they should remunerate a service with money, which certainly was not coined in their airy realm, but in the mint here?"

"Not too fast, fair maid," replied the Magian, raising a warning hand. "There is no form which these intermediate beings can not assume. They have the control of all and everything which mortals may use, so the soul of Korinna revisiting these scenes may quite well have paid the ferryman with an obolus."

"Then you know of it?" asked Melissa in surprise; but the Magian broke in, saying:

"Few such things remain hidden from him who knows, not even the smallest, if he strives after such knowledge."

As he spoke he gave the girl such a look as made her eyelids fall, and he went on with greater warmth: "There would be fewer tears shed by death-beds, my child, if we could but show the world the means by which the initiated hold converse with the souls of the dead."

Melissa shook her pretty head sadly, and the Magian kindly stroked her waving hair; then, looking her straight in the eyes, he said: "The dead live. What once has been can never cease to be, any more than out of nothing can anything come. It is so simple; and so, too, are the workings of magic, which amaze you so much. What you call magic, when I practice it, Eros, the great god of love, has wrought a thousand times in your breast. When your heart leaps at your brother's caress, when the god's arrow pierces you, and the glance of a lover fills you with gladness, when the sweet harmonies of fine music wrap your soul above this earth, or the wail of a child moves you to compassion, you have felt the magic power stirring in your own soul. You feel it when some mysterious power, without any will of your own, prompts you to some act, be it what it may. And, besides all this, if a leaf flutters off the table without being touched by any visible hand, you do not doubt that a draught of air, which you can neither hear nor see, has swept through the room. If at noon the world is suddenly darkened, you know, without looking up at the sky, that it is overcast by a cloud. In the very same way you can feel the nearness of a soul that was dear to you without being able to see it. All that is necessary is to strengthen the faculty which knows its presence, and give it the proper training, and then you will see and hear them. The Magians have the key which unlocks the door of the world of spirits to the human senses. Your noble brother, in whom the claims of the spirit have long since triumphed over those of sense, has found this key without seeking it, since he has been permitted to see Korinna's soul. And if he follows a competent guide he will see her again."

"But why? What good will it do him?" asked Melissa, with a reproachful and anxious look at the man whose influence, as she divined would be pernicious to her brother, in spite of his knowledge. The Magian gave a compassionate shrug, and in the look he cast at the philosopher, the question was legible, "What have such as these to do with the highest things?"

Philip nodded in impatient assent, and, without paying any further heed to his brother and sister, besought his friend to give him the proofs of the theory that the physical causation of things is weaker than the sympathy which connects them. Melissa knew full well that any attempt now to separate Philip from Serapion would be futile; however, she would not leave the last chance untried, and asked him gravely whether he had forgotten his mother's tomb.

He hastily assured her that he fully intended to visit it presently. Fruit and fragrant oil could be had here at any hour of the night.

"And your two wreaths?" she said, in mild reproach, for she had observed them both below the portrait of Korinna.

"I had another use for them," he said, evasively; and then he added, apologetically: "You have brought flowers enough, I know. If I can find time, I will go to-morrow to see my father." He nodded to them both, turned to the Magian, and went on eagerly:

"Then that magical sympathy--"

They did not wait to hear the discussion; Alexander signed to his sister to follow him.

He, too, knew that his brother's ear was deaf now to anything he could say. What Serapion had said had riveted even his attention, and the question whether it might indeed be vouchsafed to living mortals to see the souls of the departed, and hear their voices, exercised his mind so greatly that he could not forbear asking his sister's opinion on such matters.

But Melissa's good sense had felt that there was something not quite sound in the Magian's argument--nor did she conceal her conviction that Philip, who was always hard to convince, had accepted Serapion's views, not because he yielded to the weight of his reasons, but because he--and Alexander, too, for that matter--hoped by his mediation to see the beautiful Korinna again.

This the artist admitted; but when he jested of the danger of a jealous quarrel between him and his brother, for the sake of a dead girl, there was something hard in his tone, and very unlike him, which Melissa did not like.

They breathed more freely as they got out into the open air, and her efforts to change the subject of their conversation were happily seconded; for at the door they met the family of their neighbor Skopas, the owner of a stone-quarry, whose grave-plot adjoined theirs, and Melissa was happy again as she heard her brother laughing as gayly as ever with Skopas's pretty daughter. The mania had not taken such deep hold of the light-hearted young painter as of Philip, the poring and gloomy philosopher; and she was glad as she heard her friend Ino call Alexander a faithless butterfly, while her sister Helena declared that he was a godless scoffer.

CHAPTER V.

The crowds on the road were now homeward bound, and they were all in such wild, high spirits that, from what was to be seen and heard, it could never have been supposed that they had come from so mournful a scene. They took the road by the sea leading from the Nekropolis to Eleusis, wandering on in the glowing moonlight.

A great procession of Greeks had been to Eleusis, to celebrate the mysteries after the manner of the Greek Eleusis, on which that of Alexandria was modeled. The newly initiated, and the elder adepts, whose duty it was to superintend their reception, had remained in the temple; but the other mystics now swelled the train of those who were coming from the city of the dead.

Here, indeed, Serapis took the place of Pluto, and much that was Greek had assumed strange and Egyptian forms: even the order of the ceremonies had been entirely changed; still, on the African, as on the Attic shore, the Greek cry went up, "To the sea, O mystics!" and the bidding to Iakchos: "Be with us, O Iakchos!"

It could be heard from afar, but the voices of the shouters were already weary, and most of the torches had burned low. The wreaths of ivy and myrtle in their hair were limp; the singers of the hymn no longer kept their ranks; and even Iambe, whose jests had cheered the mourning Demeter, and whose lips at Eleusis had overflowed with witticisms, was exhausted and silent. She still held in her hand the jar from which she had given the bereaved goddess a reviving draught, but it was empty and she longed for a drink. She was indeed a he: for it was a youth in woman's dress who played the rollicking part of Iambe, and it was Alexander's friend and comrade Diodoros who had represented the daughter of Pan and Echo, who, the legend said, had acted as slave in the house of Metaneira, the Eleusinian queen, when Demeter took refuge there. His sturdy legs had good reason to be as weary as his tongue, which had known no rest for five hours.

But he caught sight of the large vehicle drawn by four horses, in which the vast corn-measure, the kalathos, which Serapis wore as his distinguishing head-gear, had been conveyed to Eleusis. It was empty now, for the contents had been offered to the god, and the four black horses had an easy task with the great wagon. No one had as yet thought of using it as a conveyance back to the town; but Diodoros, who was both ingenious and tired, ran after it and leaped up. Several now wanted to follow his example, but he pushed them off, even thrusting at them with a newly lighted torch, for he could not be quiet in spite of his fatigue. In the midst of the skirmishing he perceived his friend and Melissa.

His heart had been given to the gentle girl ever since they had been playmates in his father's garden, and when he saw her, walking along downcast, while her brother sported with his neighbor's daughters, he beckoned to her, and, as she refused to accompany him in the wagon, he nimbly sprang off, lifted her up in his arms, made strong by exercise in the Palaestra, and gently deposited her, in spite of her struggles, on the flat floor of the car, by the side of the empty kalathos.

"The rape of Persephone!" he cried. "The second performance in one night!"

Then the old reckless spirit seized Alexander too.

With as much gay audacity--as though he were free of every care and grief, and had signed a compact with Fortune, he picked up pretty Ino, lifted her into the wagon, as Diodoros had done with his sister, and exclaiming, "The third performance!" seated himself by her side.

His bold example found immediate imitators. "A fourth!" "A fifth!" cried one and another, shouting and laughing, with loud calls on Iakchos.

The horses found it hard work, for all along the edge of the car, and round the kalathos of the great Serapis, sat the merry young couples in close array. Alexander and Melissa soon were wreathed with myrtle and ivy. In the vehicle and among the crowd there were none but radiant and frolicsome faces, and no sound but triumphant revelry.

Fatigue was forgotten; it might have been supposed that the sinister sisters, Care and Sorrow, had been banished from earth.

There was a smile even on Melissa's sweet, calm face. At first her old friend's audacious jest had offended her maidenly coyness; but if Diodoros had always loved her, so had she always loved him; and as other well-conducted girls had been content to have the like done to them, and her companion so confidently and roguishly sued for pardon, she gave him a smile which filled his heart with rapture, and said more than words.

It was a comfort, too, to sit still and rest.

She spoke but little, but even she forgot what troubled her when she felt her friend's hand on hers, and he whispered to her that this was the most delightful night he had ever known, and that, of all the sweets the gods had created, she was to him the sweetest?

The blue sea spread before them, the full moon mirrored on its scarcely heaving surface like a tremulous column of pure and shining silver. The murmur of the ripples came up from the strand as soothing and inviting as the song of the

Nereids; and if a white crest of foam rose on a wave, she could fancy it was the arm of Thetis or Galatea. There, where the blue was deepest, the sea-god Glaucos must dwell, and his heart be gladdened by the merry doings on shore.

Nature is so great; and as the thought came to her that her heart was not too small to take its greatness in, even to the farthest horizon, it filled her with glad surprise.

And Nature was bountiful too. Melissa could see the happy and gracious face of a divinity in everything she looked upon. The immortals who had afflicted her, and whom she had often bitterly accused, could be kind and merciful too. The sea, on whose shining surface the blue vault of heaven with the moon and stars rocked and twinkled, the soft breeze which fanned her brow, the new delicious longing which filled her heart—all she felt and was conscious of, was a divinity or an emanation of the divine. Mighty Poseidon and majestic Zeus, gentle Selene, and the sportive children of the god of winds, seemed to be strangely near her as she rode along. And it was the omnipotent son of Kypris, no doubt, who stirred her heart to beat higher than it had ever done before.

Her visit to her mother's grave, too, her prayer and her offerings there, had perhaps moved the spirit of the beloved dead to hover near her now as a guardian genius.

Still, now and again the memory of something terrible passed over her soul like a sweeping shadow; but what it was which threatened her and those dear to her she did not see, and would not now inquire. What the morrow might bring should not cloud the enchantment of this hour. For oh, how fair the world was, and how blessed might mortals be!

"Iakchos! Iakchos!" the voices about her shouted, and it sounded as gleeful as though the breasts of the revelers were overflowing with gladness; and as the scented curls of Diodoros bent over her head, as his hand closed on hers, and his whispered words of love were in her ear, she murmured: "Alexander is right; the world is a banqueting-hall, and life is fair."

"So fair!" echoed the youth, pensively. Then he shouted aloud to his companions: "The world is a banqueting-hall! Bring roses, bring wine, that we may sacrifice to Eros, and pour libations to Dionysus. Light the flaming torches! Iakchos! come, Iakchos, and sanctify our glad festival!"

"Come, Iakchos, come!" cried one and another, and soon the enthusiastic youth's cry was taken up on all sides. But wine-skin and jar were long since emptied.

Hard by, below the cliff, and close to the sea, was a tavern, at the sign of the Cock. Here cool drink was to be had; here the horses might rest—for the drivers had been grumbling bitterly at the heavy load added to the car over the deep sand—and here there was a level plot, under the shade of a spreading sycamore, which had often before now served as a floor for the choric dance.

The vehicle soon drew up in front of the whitewashed inn, surrounded on three sides by a trellised arbor, overgrown with figs and vine. The young couples sprang to the ground; and, while the host and his slave dragged up a huge wine-jar with two ears, full of the red juice of the grape, fresh torches were lighted and stuck on poles or fastened to the branches of the sycamore, the youths took their places eager for the dance, and suddenly the festal song went up from their clear throats unbidden, and as though inspired by some mysterious power:

*Iakchos, come! oh, come, Iakchos!
Hither come, to the scene of our revel,
The gladsome band of the faithful.
Shake the fragrant, berried garland,
Myrtle-twined, that crowns thy love-locks,
Shedding its odors!
Tread the measure, with fearless stamp,
Of this our reckless, rapturous dance,
In holy rejoicing!
Hand in hand, thrice beatified,
Lo we thread the rhythmic, fanciful,
Mystical mazes!*

And the dance begins. Youths and maidens advance to meet each other with graceful movements. Every step must be a thing of beauty, every bend and rising, while the double flutes play faster and faster, and the measured rhythm becomes a wild whirl. They all know the dance, and the music is a guide to the feeling to be expressed; the dancing must be suited to it. Every gesture is a stroke of color which may beautify or mar the picture. Body and spirit are in perfect harmony, combining to represent the feelings that stir the soul. It is a work of art, the art of the arms and feet. Even when passion is at the highest the guiding law is observed. Nay, when the dancers fly wildly apart, they, not merely come together again with unerring certainty, but form in new combination another delightful and perfectly harmonious picture.

"Seek and find" this dance might be called, for the first idea is to represent the wandering of Demeter in search of her daughter Persephone, whom Pluto has carried off to the nether world, till she finds her and clasps her in her motherly arms once more. Thus does the earth bewail the reaped fruit of the field, which is buried in the ground in the winter sowing, to rise again in the spring; thus does a faithful heart pine during absence till it is reunited to the beloved one; thus do we mourn our dead till our soul is assured of their resurrection: and this belief is the end and clew to the

mystery.

All this grief and search, this longing and crying for the absent, this final restoration and the bliss of new possession, is set forth by the youths and damsels-now in slow and now in vehement action, but always with infinite grace.

Melissa threw her whole soul into the dance while Demeter was seeking the lost Persephone, her thoughts were with her brothers; and she laughed as heartily as any one at the jests with which Iambe cheered the stricken mother. And when the joy of meeting was to find expression, she need not think of anything but the fact that the youth who held out his hand to her loved her and cared for her. In this, for the moment, lay the end of all her longing and seeking, the fulfillment of every wish; and as the chorus shouted, "Iakchos!" again and again, her soul seemed to have taken wings.

The reserve of her calm and maidenly nature broke down; in her ecstasy she snatched from her shoulder the wreath of ivy with which Diodoros had decked her, and waved it aloft. Her long hair had fallen loose in the dance and flowed wildly about her, and her shout of "Iakchos!" rang clear in the night air.

The youth she loved gazed at her with ravished eyes, as at some miracle; she, heedless of the others, threw her arms round his neck, and, as he kissed her, she said once more, but loud enough now to be heard from afar, "The world is a banqueting-hall!" and again she joined in the shout of "Iakchos!" her eyes bright with excitement. Cups filled high with wine now circulated among the mad-cap mystics; even Melissa refreshed herself, handing the beaker to her lover, and Diodoros raised to his mouth that place on the rim which her lips had touched.

"O life! fount of joys!" cried Diodoros, kissing her and pressing her closer to him. "Come, Iakchos! Behold with envy how thankfully two mortals can bless the gift of life. But where is Alexander? To none but to our Andreas have I ever confided the secret I have borne in my heart since that day when we went to the circus. But now! Oh, it is so much happiness for two hearts! My friend, too, must have part in it!"

At this Melissa clasped her hand to her brow, as though waking from a dream. How hot she was from dancing, and the unusual strength of the wine and water she had drunk!

The danger impending over both her brothers came back to her mind. She had always been accustomed to think of others rather than herself, and her festal mood dropped from her suddenly, like a mantle of which the brooch breaks. She vehemently shook herself free of her lover's embrace, and her eyes glanced from one to another in rapid search.

There stood pretty Ino, who had danced the mazy measure with Alexander. Panting for breath, she stood leaning her weary head and tangled hair against the trunk of the tree, a wine-cup upside down in her right hand. It must be empty; but where was he who had emptied it?

Her neighbor's daughter would surely know. Had the reckless youth quarreled with the girl? No, no!

One of the tavern-keeper's slaves, Ino told her, had whispered something to Alexander, whereupon he had instantly followed the man into the house. Melissa knew that it could be no trivial matter which detained him there, and hurried after him into the tavern.

The host, a Greek, and his buxom wife, affected not to know for whom she was inquiring; but, perceiving the anxiety which spoke in every line of the girl's face, when she explained that she was Alexander's sister, they at first looked at each other doubtingly, and then the woman, who had children of her own, who fondly loved each other, felt her heart swell within her, and she whispered, with her finger on her lips: "Do not be uneasy, pretty maid; my husband will see him well through."

And then Melissa heard that the Egyptian, who had alarmed her in the Nekropolis, was the spy Zminis, who, as her old slave Dido had once told her, had been a rejected suitor of her mother's before she had married Heron, and who was therefore always glad to bring trouble on all who belonged to her father's house. How often had she heard of the annoyances in which this man had involved her father and Alexander, who were apt to be very short with the man!

This tale-bearer, who held the highest position as guardian of the peace under the captain of the night-watch, was of all men in the city the most hated and feared; and he had heard her brother speaking of Caesar in a tone of mockery which was enough to bring him to prison, to the quarries, nay, to death. Glaukias, the sculptor, had previously seen the Egyptian on the bridge, where he had detained those who were returning home from the city of the dead. He and his followers had already stopped the poet Argeios on his way, but the thyrsus staves of the Dionysiac revelers had somewhat spoiled the game for him and his satellites. He was probably still standing on the bridge. Glaukias had immediately run back, at any risk, to warn Alexander. He and the painter were now in hiding, and would remain in safety, come what might, in the cellar at the Cock, till the coast was clear again. The tavern-keeper strongly advised no one to go meddling with his wine-skins and jars.

"Much less that Egyptian dog!" cried his wife, doubling her fist as though the hated mischief-maker stood before her already.

"Poor, helpless lamb!" she murmured to herself, as she looked compassionately at the fragile, town-bred girl, who stood gazing at the ground as if she had been struck by lightning. She remembered, too, how hard life had seemed to her in her own young days, and glanced with pride at her brawny arms, which were able indeed to work and manage.

But what now?

The drooping flower suddenly raised her head, as if moved by a spring, exclaiming: "Thank you heartily, thank you! But that will never do. If Zminis searches your premises he will certainly go into the cellar; for what can he not do in Caesar's name? I will not part from my brother."

"Then you, too, are a welcome guest at the Cock," interrupted the woman, and her husband bowed low, assuring her that the Cock was as much her house as it was his.

But the helpless town-bred damsel declined this friendly invitation; for her shrewd little head had devised another plan for saving her brother, though the tavern-keepers, to whom she confided it in a whisper, laughed and shook their heads over it. Diodoros was waiting outside in anxious impatience; he loved her, and he was her brother's best friend. All that he could do to save Alexander he would gladly do, she knew. On the estate which would some day be his, there was room and to spare to hide the fugitives, for one of the largest gardens in the town was owned by his father. His extensive grounds had been familiar to her from her childhood, for her own mother and her lover's had been friends; and Andreas, the freedman, the overseer of Polybius's gardens and plantations, was dearer to her and her brothers than any one else in Alexandria.

Nor had she deceived herself, for Diodoros made Alexander's cause his own, in his eager, vehement way; and the plan for his deliverance seemed doubly admirable as proceeding from Melissa. In a few minutes Alexander and the sculptor were released from their hiding-place, and all further care for them was left to Diodoros.

They were both very, craftily disguised. No one would have recognized the artists in two sailors, whose Phrygian caps completely hid their hair, while a heavy fisherman's apron was girt about their loins; still less would any one have suspected from their laughing faces that imprisonment, if nothing worse, hung over them. Their change of garb had given rise to so much fun; and now, on hearing how they were to be smuggled into the town, their merriment grew higher, and proved catching to those who were taken into the secret. Only Melissa was oppressed with anxious care, in spite of her lover's eager consolation.

Glaukias, a man of scarcely middle height, was sure of not being recognized, and he and his comrades looked forward to whatever might happen as merely an amusing jest. At the same time they had to balk the hated chief of the city guards and his menials of their immediate prey; but they had played them a trick or two ere now. It might turn out really badly for Alexander; still, it was only needful to keep him concealed till Caesar should arrive; then he would be safe, for the Emperor would certainly absorb all the thoughts and time of the captain of the night-watch and his chief officers. In Alexandria, anything once past was so soon forgotten! When once Caracalla was gone--and it was to be hoped that he would not stay long--no one would ever think again of any biting speech made before his arrival.

The morning must bring what it might, so long as the present moment was gay!

So, refreshed and cheered by rest and wine, the party of mystics prepared to set out again; and, as the procession started, no one who did not know it had observed that the two artists, disguised as sailors, were, by Melissa's advice, hidden inside the kalathos of Serapis, which would easily have held six, and was breast-high even for Alexander, who was a tall man. They squatted on the floor of the huge vessel, with a jar of wine between them, and peeped over now and then with a laugh at the girls, who had again seated themselves on the edge of the car.

When they were fairly on their way once more, Alexander and his companions were so daring that, whenever they could do it unobserved, they pelted the damsels with the remains of the corn, or sprinkled them with wine-drops. Glaukias had the art of imitating the pattering of rain and the humming of a fly to perfection with his lips; and when the girls complained of the tiresome insect buzzing in their faces, or declared, when a drop fell on them, that in spite of the blue and cloudless sky it was certainly beginning to rain, the two men had to cover their mouths with their hands, that their laughter might not betray them.

Melissa, who had comforted Ino with the assurance that Alexander had been called away quite unexpectedly, was now sitting by her side, and perceived, of course, what tricks the men in the kalathos were playing; but, instead of amusing her, they only made her anxious.

Every one about her was laughing and joking, but for her all mirth was at an end. Fear, indeed, weighed on her like an incubus, when the car reached the bridge and rattled across it. It was lined with soldiers and lictors, who looked closely at each one, even at Melissa herself. But no one spoke to her, and when the water lay behind them she breathed more freely. But only for a moment; for she suddenly remembered that they would presently have to pass through the gate leading past Hadrian's western wall into the town. If Zminis were waiting there instead of on the bridge, and were to search the vehicle, then all would be lost, for he had looked her, too, in the face with those strange, fixed eyes of his; and that where he saw the sister he would also seek the brother, seemed to her quite certain. Thus her presence was a source of peril to Alexander, and she must at any cost avert that.

She immediately put out her hand to Diodoros, who was walking at her side, and with his help slipped down from her seat. Then she whispered her fears to him, and begged him to quit the party and conduct her home.

This was a surprising and delightful task for her lover. With a jesting word he leaped on to the car, and even

succeeded in murmuring to Alexander, unobserved, that Melissa had placed herself under his protection. When they got home, they could tell Heron and Andreas that the youths were safe in hiding. Melissa could explain, to-morrow morning, how everything had happened. Then he drew Melissa's arm through his, loudly shouted, "Iakchos!" and with a swift dance-step soon outstripped the wagon.

Not fifty paces beyond, large pine torches sent bright flames up skyward, and by their light the girl could see the dreaded gateway, with the statues of Hadrian and Sabina, and in front of them, in the middle of the road, a horseman, who, as they approached, came trotting forward to meet them on his tall steed. His head towered above every one else in the road; and as she looked up at him her heart almost ceased beating, for her eyes met those of the dreaded Egyptian; their white balls showed plainly in his brown, lean face, and their cruel, evil sparkle had stamped them clearly on her memory.

On her right a street turned off from the road, and saying in a low tone, "This way," she led Diodoros, to his surprise, into the shadow. His heart beat high. Did she, whose coy and maidenly austerity before and after the intoxication of the dance had vouchsafed him hardly a kind look or a clasp of the hand—did she even yearn for some tender embrace alone and in darkness? Did the quiet, modest girl, who, since she had ceased to be a child, had but rarely given him a few poor words, long to tell him that which hitherto only her bright eyes and the kiss of her pure young lips had betrayed?

He drew her more closely to him in blissful expectation; but she shyly shrank from his touch, and before he could murmur a single word of love she exclaimed in terror, as though the hand of the persecutor were already laid on her: "Fly, fly! That house will give us shelter."

And she dragged him after her into the open doorway of a large building. Scarcely had they entered the dark vestibule when the sound of hoofs was heard, and the glare of torches dispelled the darkness outside.

"Zminis! It is he—he is following us!" she whispered, scarcely able to speak; and her alarm was well founded, for the Egyptian had recognized her, and supposed her companion to be Alexander. He had ridden down the street with his torchbearers, but where she had hidden herself his keen eyes could not detect, for the departing sound of hoofs betrayed to the breathless listeners that the pursuer had left their hiding-place far behind him. Presently the pavement in front of the house which sheltered them rang again with the tramp of the horse, till it died away at last in the direction of Hadrian's gate. Not till then did Melissa lift her hand from her painfully throbbing heart.

But the Egyptian would, no doubt, have left his spies in the street, and Diodoros went out to see if the road was clear. Melissa remained alone in the dark entrance, and began to be anxious as to how she could explain her presence there if the inhabitants should happen to discover it; for in this vast building, in spite of the lateness of the hour, there still was some one astir. She had for some minutes heard a murmuring sound which reached her from an inner chamber; but it was only by degrees that she collected herself so far as to listen more closely, to ascertain whence it came and what it could mean.

A large number of persons must be assembled there, for she could distinguish several male voices, and now and then a woman's. A door was opened. She shrank closer to the wall, but the seconds became minutes, and no one appeared.

At last she fancied she heard the moving of benches or seats, and many voices together shouting she knew not what. Then again a door creaked on its hinges, and after that all was so still that she could have heard a needle drop on the floor; and this alarming silence continued till presently a deep, resonant man's voice was audible.

The singular manner in which this voice gave every word its full and equal value suggested to her fancy that something was being read aloud. She could distinctly hear the sentence with which the speech or reading began. After a short pause it was repeated somewhat more quickly, as though the speaker had this time uttered it from his own heart.

It consisted of these six simple words, "The fullness of the time was come"; and Melissa listened no more to the discourse which followed, spoken as it was in a low voice, for this sentence rang in her ears as if it were repeated by an echo.

She did not, to be sure, understand its meaning, but she felt as though it must have some deep significance. It came back to her again and again, like a melody which haunts the inward ear against our will; and her meditative fancy was trying to solve its meaning, when Diodoros returned to tell her that the street was quite empty. He knew now where they were, and, if she liked, he could lead her by a way which would not take them through the gate. Only Christians, Egyptians, and other common folks dwelt in this quarter; however, since his duty as her protector had this day begun, he would fulfill it to the best of his ability.

She went with him out into the street, and when they had gone a little way he clasped her to him and kissed her hair.

His heart was full. He knew now that she, whom he had loved when she walked in his father's garden in her little child's tunic, holding her mother's hand, returned his passion. Now the time was come for asking whether she would permit him to beg her father's leave to woo her.

He stopped in the shadow of a house near, and, while he poured out to her all that stirred his breast, carried away by tender passion, and describing in his vehement way how great and deep his love was, in spite of the utter fatigue

which weighed on her body and soul after so many agitations, she felt with deep thankfulness the immense happiness of being more precious than aught else on earth to a dear, good man. Love, which had so long lain dormant in her as a bud, and then opened so quickly only to close again under her alarms, unfolded once more and blossomed for him again--not as it had done just now in passionate ecstasy, but, as becometh her calm, transparent nature, with moderated joy, which, however, did not lack due warmth and winning tenderness.

Happiness beyond words possessed them both. She suffered him to seal his vows with kisses, herself offering him her lips, as her heart swelled with fervent thanksgiving for so much joy and such a full measure of love.

She was indeed a precious jewel, and the passion of his stormy heart was tempered by such genuine reverence that he gladly kept within the bounds which her maidenly modesty prescribed. And how much they had to say to each other in this first opening of their hearts, how many hopes for the future found utterance in words! The minutes flew on and became hours, till at last Melissa begged him to quit the marble seat on which they had so long been resting, if indeed her feet could still carry her home.

Little as it pleased him, he did her bidding. But as they went on he felt that she hung heavy on his arm and could only lift her little feet with the greatest difficulty. The street was too dark for him to see how pale she was; and yet he never took his eyes off her dear but scarcely distinguishable features. Suddenly he heard a faint whisper as in a dream, "I can go no farther," and at once led her back to the marble seat.

He first carefully spread his mantle over the stone and then wrapped her in it as tenderly as a mother might cover her shivering child, for a cooler breeze gave warning of the coming dawn. He himself crept close under the wall by her side, so as not to be seen, for a long train of people, with servants carrying lanterns before them, now came out of the house they had just left and down the street. Who these could be who walked at so late an hour in such solemn silence neither of them knew. They certainly sent up no joyful shout of "Iakchos!" no wild lament; no cheerful laughter nor sounds of mourning were to be heard from the long procession which passed along the street, two and two, at a slow pace. As soon as they had passed the last houses, men and women alike began to sing; no leader started them, nor lyre accompanied them, and yet their song went up as though with one voice.

Diodoros and Melissa knew every note sung by the Greeks or Egyptians of Alexandria, at this or any other festival, but this melody was strange to them; and when the young man whispered to the girl, "What is it that they are singing?" she replied, as though startled from sleep, "They are no mere mortals!"

Diodoros shuddered; he fancied that the procession was floating above the earth; that, if they had been indeed men of flesh and blood, their steps would have been more distinctly audible on the pavement. Some of them appeared to him to be taller than common mortals, and their chant was certainly that of another world than this where he dwelt. Perhaps these were daimons, the souls of departed Egyptians, who, after a midnight visit to those they had left behind them, were returning to the rock tombs, of which there were many in the stony hills to which this street led. They were walking toward these tombs, and not toward the gate; and Diodoros whispered his suspicion to his companion, clasping his hand on an amulet in the semblance of an eye, which his Egyptian nurse had fastened round his neck long ago with an Anubic thread, to protect him against the evil-eye and magic spells.

But Melissa was listening with such devout attention to the chant that she did not hear him. The fatigue which had reached such a painful climax had, during this peaceful rest, given way to a blissful unconsciousness of self. It was a kind of happiness to feel no longer the burden of exhaustion, and the song of the wanderers was like a cradle-song, lulling her to sweet dreams. It filled her with gladness, and yet it was not glad, not even cheerful. It went to her heart, and yet it was not mournful--not in the least like the passionate lament of Isis for Osiris, or that of Demeter bewailing her daughter. The emotion it aroused in her was a sweetly sorrowful compassion, which included herself, her brothers, her father, her lover, all who were doomed to suffering and death, even the utter stranger, for whom she had hitherto felt no sympathy.

And the compassion bore within it a sense of comfort which she could not explain, or perhaps would not inquire into. It struck her, too, now and then, that the strain had a ring as of thanksgiving. It was, no doubt, addressed to the gods, and for that reason it appealed to her, and she would gladly have joined in it, for she, too, was grateful to the immortals, and above all to Eros, for the love which had been born in her heart and had found such an ardent return. She sighed as she listened to every note of the chant, and it worked upon her like a healing draught.

The struggle of her will against bodily fatigue, and finally against the mental exhaustion of so much bliss, the conviction that her heavy, weary feet would perhaps fail to carry her home, and that she must seek shelter somewhere for the night, had disturbed her greatly. Now she was quite calm, and as much at ease as she was at home sitting with her father, her stitching in her hand, while she dreamed of her mother and her childhood in the past. The singing had fallen on her agitated soul like the oil poured by the mariner on the sea to still the foaming breakers. She felt it so.

She could not help thinking of the time when she could fall asleep on her mother's bosom in the certainty that tender love was watching over her. The happiness of childhood, when she loved everything she knew--her family, the slaves, her father's birds, the flowers in the little garden, the altar of the goddess to whom she made offering, the very stars in the sky--seemed to come over her, and there she sat in dreamy lassitude, her head on her lover's shoulder, till the last

stragglers of the procession, who, were women, many of them carrying little lamps in their hands, had almost all gone past.

Then she suddenly felt an eager jerk in the shoulder on which her head was resting.

"Look--look there!" he whispered; and as her eyes followed the direction of his finger, she too started, and exclaimed, "Korinna!--Did you know her?"

"She had often come to my father's garden," he replied, "and I saw her portrait in Alexander's room. These are souls from Hades that we have seen. We must offer sacrifice, for those to whom they show themselves they draw after them." At this Melissa, too, shuddered, and exclaimed in horror: "O Diodoros, not to death! We will ask the priests to-morrow morning what sacrifice may redeem us. Anything rather than the grave and the darkness of Hades!--Come, I am strong again now. Let us get away from hence and go home."

"But we must go through the gate now," replied the youth. "It is not well to follow in the footsteps of the dead."

Melissa, however, insisted on going on through the street. Terrified as she was of the nether world and the disembodied souls, she would on no account risk falling into the hands of the horrible Egyptian, who might compel her to betray her brother's hiding-place; and Diodoros, who was ashamed to show her the fears which still possessed him, did as she desired.

But it was a comfort to him in this horror of death, which had come over him now for the first time in his life, to kiss the maid once more, and hold her warm hand in his as they walked on; while the strange chant of the nocturnal procession still rang in her ears, and now and then the words recurred to her mind which she had heard in the house where the departed souls had gathered together:

"The fullness of the time was come."

Did this refer to the hour when the dead came to the end of their life on earth; or was there some great event impending on the city and its inhabitants, for which the time had now come? Had the words anything to do with Caesar's visit? Had the dead come back to life to witness the scenes which they saw approaching with eyes clearer than those of mortals?

And then she remembered Korinna, whose fair, pale face had been strangely lighted up by the lamp she carried; and, again, the Magian's assurance that the souls of the departed were endowed with every faculty possessed by the living, and that "those who knew" could see them and converse with them.

Then Serapion had been right in saying this; and her hand trembled in her lover's as she thought to herself that the danger which now threatened Philip was estrangement from the living through intercourse with the dead. Her own dead mother, perhaps, had floated past among these wandering souls, and she grieved to think that she had neglected to look for her and give her a loving greeting. Even Diodoros, who was not generally given to silent meditation, had his own thoughts to pursue; and so they walked on in silence till suddenly they heard a dull murmur of voices. This startled them, and looking up they saw before them the rocky cliffs in which the Egyptians long since, and now in later times the Christians, had hewn caves and tombs. From the door of one of these, only a few paces beyond where they stood, light streamed out; and as they were about to pass it a large dog barked. Immediately on this a man came out, and in a rough, deep voice asked them the pass-word. Diodoros, seized with sudden terror of the dark figure, which he believed to be a risen ghost, took to his heels, dragging Melissa with him. The dog flew after them, barking loudly; and when the youth stooped to pick up a stone to scare him off, the angry brute sprang on him and dragged him down.

Melissa screamed for help, but the gruff voice angrily bade her be silent. Far from obeying him, the girl shouted louder than ever; and now, out of the entrance to the cave, close behind the scene of the disaster, came a number of men with lamps and tapers. They were the same daimons whose song she had heard in the street; she could not be mistaken. On her knees, by the side of her lover as he lay on the ground, she stared up at the apparitions. A stone flew at the dog to scare him off, and a second, larger than the first, whisked past her and hit Diodoros on the head; she heard the dull blow. At this a cold hand seemed to clutch her heart; everything about her melted into one whirling, colorless cloud. Pale as death, she threw up her arms to protect herself, and then, overcome with terror and fatigue, with a faint cry of anguish she lost consciousness.

When she opened her eyes again her head was resting in the lap of a kind, motherly woman, while some men were just bearing away the senseless form of Diodoros on a bier.

CHAPTER VI.

The sun had risen an hour since. Heron had betaken himself to his workshop, whistling as he went, and in the kitchen his old slave Argutis was standing over the hearth preparing his master's morning meal. He dropped a pinch of dill into the barley-porridge, and shook his gray head solemnly.

His companion Dido, a Syrian, whose wavy white hair contrasted strangely with her dark skin, presently came in, and, starting up, he hastily inquired, "Not in yet?"

"No," said the other woman, whose eyes were full of tears. "And you know what my dream was. Some evil has come to her, I am certain; and when the master hears of it--" Here she sobbed aloud; but the slave reproved her for useless weeping.

"You never carried her in your arms," whimpered the woman.

"But often enough on my shoulder," retorted the Gaul, for Argutis was a native of Augusta Trevirorum, on the Moselle. "As soon as the porridge is ready you must take it in and prepare the master."

"That his first fury may fall on me!" said the old woman, peevishly. "I little thought when I was young!"

"That is a very old story," said Argutis, "and we both know what the master's temper is. I should have been off long ago if only you could make his porridge to his mind. As soon as I have dished it I will go to seek Alexander--there is nothing to prevent me--for it was with him that she left the house."

At this the old woman dried her tears, and cried "Yes, only go, and make haste. I will do everything else. Great gods, if she should be brought home dead! I know how it is; she could bear the old man's temper and this moping life no longer, and has thrown herself into the water.

"My dream, my dream! Here--here is the dish, and now go and find the boy. Still, Philip is the elder."

"He!" exclaimed the slave in a scornful tone. "Yes, if you want to know what the flies are talking about! Alexander for me. He has his head screwed on the right way, and he will find her if any man in Egypt can, and bring her back, alive or dead."

"Dead!" echoed Dido, with a fresh burst of sobs, and her tears fell in the porridge, which Argutis, indeed, in his distress of mind had forgotten to salt.

While this conversation was going on the gemcutter was feeding his birds. Can this man, who stands there like any girl, tempting his favorites to feed, with fond words and whistling, and the offer of attractive dainties, be the stormy blusterer of last night? There is not a coaxing name that he does not lavish on them, while he fills their cups with fresh seed and water; and how carefully he moves his big hand as he strews the little cages with clean sand! He would not for worlds scare the poor little prisoners who cheer his lonely hours, and who have long since ceased to fear him. A turtle-dove takes peas, and a hedge-sparrow picks ants' eggs from his lips; a white-throat perches on his left hand to snatch a caterpillar from his right. The huge man was in his garden soon after sunrise gathering the dewy leaves for his feathered pets. But he talks and plays longest with the starling which his lost wife gave him. She had bought it in secret from the Bedouin who for many years had brought shells for sale from the Red Sea, to surprise her husband with the gift. The clever bird had first learned to call her name, Olympias; and then, without any teaching, had picked up his master's favorite lament, "My strength, my strength!"

Heron regarded this bird as a friend who understood him, and, like him, remembered the never-to-be-forsaken dead. For three years had the gem cutter been a widower, and he still thought more constantly and fondly of his lost wife than of the children she had left him. Heron scratched the bird's knowing little head, saying in a tone which betrayed his pity both for himself and his pet "Yes, old fellow, you would rather have a soft white finger to stroke you down. I can hear her now, when she would call you 'sweet little pet,' or 'dear little creature.' We shall neither of us ever hear such gentle, loving words again. Do you remember how she would look up with her dear sweet face--and was it not a lovely face?--when you called her by her name 'Olympias'? How many a time have her rosy lips blown up your feathers, and cried, 'Well done, little fellow!'--Ay, and she would say 'Well done' to me too, when I had finished a piece of work well. Ah, and what an eye she had, particularly for art! But now well, the children give me a good word too, now that her lips are silent!"

"Olympias!" cried the bird loudly and articulately, and the clouds that shadowed the gem-cutter's brow lifted a little, as with an affectionate smile he went on:

"Yes, yes; you would be glad, too, to have her back again. You call her now, as I did yesterday, standing by her grave--and she sends you her love.

"Do you hear, little one? Peck away at the old man's finger; he knows you mean it kindly, and it does not hurt. I was all alone out there, and Selene looked down on us in silence. There was rioting and shouting all round, but I could hear the voice of our dead. She was very near me, and her sad soul showed me that she still cared for me. I had taken a jar of our best wine of Byblos under my cloak; as soon as I had poured oil on her gravestone and shed some of the noble

liquor, the earth drank it up as though it were thirsty. Not a drop was left. Yes, little fellow, she accepted the gift; and when I fell on my knees to meditate on her, she vouchsafed replies to many of my questions.

"We talked together as we used--you know. And we remembered you, too; I gave you her love.

"You understand me, little fellow, don't you? And, I tell you, better times are coming now."

He turned from the bird with a sharp movement of annoyance, for the slave-woman came in with the bowl of barley-porridge.

"You!" exclaimed Heron, in surprise. "Where is Melissa?"

"She will come presently," said the old woman, in a low and doubtful tone.

"Oh, thanks for the oracle!" said the artist, ironically.

"How you mock at a body!" said the old woman. "I meant--But eat first--eat. Anger and grief are ill food for an empty stomach."

Heron sat down to the table and began to eat his porridge, but he presently tossed away the spoon, exclaiming:

"I do not fancy it, eating by myself."

Then, with a puzzled glance at Dido, he asked in a tone of vexation:

"Well, why are you waiting here? And what is the meaning of all that nipping and tugging at your dress? Have you broken another dish? No? Then have done with that cursed head-shaking, and speak out at once!"

"Eat, eat," repeated Dido, retreating to the door, but Heron called her back with vehement abuse; but when she began again her usual complaint, "I never thought, when I was young--" Heron recovered the good temper he had been rejoicing in so lately, and retorted: "Oh! yes, I know, I have the daughter of a great potentate to wait on me. And if it had only occurred to Caesar, when he was in Syria, to marry your sister, I should have had his sister-in-law in my service. But at any rate I forbid howling. You might have learned in the course of thirty years, that I do not eat my fellow-creatures. So, now, confess at once what is wrong in the kitchen, and then go and fetch Melissa." The woman was, perhaps, wise to defer the evil moment as long as possible. Matters might soon change for the better, and good or evil could come only from without. So Dido clung to the literal sense of her master's question, and something noteworthy had actually happened in the kitchen. She drew a deep breath, and told him that a subordinate of the night-watch had come in and asked whether Alexander were in the house, and where his painting-room was.

"And you gave him an exact description?" asked Heron.

But the slave shook her head; she again began to fidget with her dress, and said, timidly:

"Argutis was there, and he says no good can come of the night-watch. He told the man what he thought fit, and sent him about his business."

At this Heron interrupted the old woman with such a mighty blow of his fist on the table that the porridge jumped in the bowl, and he exclaimed in a fury:

"That is what comes of treating slaves as our equals! They begin to think for themselves. A stupid blunder can spoil the best day! The captain of the night-watch, I would have you to know, is a very great man, and very likely a friend of Seleukus's, whose daughter Alexander has just painted. The picture is attracting some attention.--Attention? What am I saying? Every one who has been allowed to see it is quite crazy about it. Everything else that was on show in the embalmers' hall was mere trash by comparison. Often enough have I grumbled at the boy, who would rather be anywhere than here; but, this time, I had some ground for being proud to be his father! And now the captain of the watch sends his secretary, or something of the kind, no doubt, in order to have his portrait, or his wife's or daughter's--if he has one--painted by the artist who did Korinna's; and his own father's slave--it drives me mad to think of it--makes a face at the messenger and sends him all astray. I will give Argutis a lesson! But by this time, perhaps--Just go and fetch him in." With these words Heron again dropped his spoon, wiped his beard, and then, seeing that Dido was still standing before him as though spellbound, twitching her slave's gray gown, he repeated his order in such angry tones--though before he had spoken to her as gently as if she were one of his own children--that the old woman started violently and made for the door, crouching low and whimpering bitterly.

The soft-hearted tyrant was really sorry for the faithful old servant he had bought a generation since for the home to which he had brought his fair young wife, and he began to speak kindly to her, as he had previously done to the birds.

This comforted the old woman so much that again she could not help crying; but, notwithstanding the sincerity of her tears, being accustomed of old to take advantage of her master's moods, she felt that now was the time to tell her melancholy story. First of all she would at any rate see whether Melissa had not meanwhile returned; so she humbly kissed the hem of his robe and hurried away.

"Send Argutis to me!" Heron roared after her, and he returned to his breakfast with renewed energy.

He thought, as he ate, of his son's beautiful work, and the foolish self-importance of Argutis, so faithful, and usually, it must be owned, so shrewd. Then his eyes fell on Melissa's vacant place opposite to him, and he suddenly pushed

away his bowl and rose to seek his daughter.

At this moment the starling called, in a clear, inviting tone, "Olympias!" and this cheered him, reminding him of the happy hour he had passed at his wife's grave and the good augury he had had there. The belief in a better time at hand, of which he had spoken to the bird, again took possession of his sanguine soul; and, fully persuaded that Melissa was detained in her own room or elsewhere by some trifling matter, he went to the window and shouted her name; for hers, too, opened on to the garden.

And it seemed as though the dear, obedient girl had come at his bidding, for, as he turned back into the room again, Melissa was standing in the open door.

After the pretty Greek greeting, "Joy be with you," which she faintly answered, he asked her, as fractiously as though he had spent hours of anxiety, where she had been so long. But he was suddenly silent, for he was astonished to see that she had not come from her room, but, as her dress betrayed, from some long expedition. Her appearance, too, had none of the exquisite neatness which it usually displayed; and then--what a state she was in! Whence had she come so early in the day?

The girl took off the kerchief that covered her head, and with a faint groan pushed her tangled hair off her temples, and her bosom heaved as she panted out in a weary voice: "Here I am! But O, father, what a night I have spent!"

Heron could not for a minute or two find words to answer her.

What had happened to the girl? What could it be which made her seem so strange and unlike her self? He gazed at her, speechless, and alarmed by a hundred fearful suspicions. He felt as a mother might who has kissed her child's fresh, healthy lips at night, and in the morning finds them burning with fever.

Melissa had never been ill from the day of her birth; since she had donned the dress of a full-grown maiden she had never altered; day after day and at all hours she had been the same in her quiet, useful, patient way, always thinking of her brothers, and caring for him rather than for herself.

It had never entered into his head to suppose that she could alter; and now, instead of the gentle, contented face with faintly rosy cheeks, he saw a pallid countenance and quivering lips. What mysterious fire had this night kindled in those calm eyes, which Alexander was fond of comparing to those of a gazelle? They were sunk, and the dark shadows that encircled them were a shock to his artistic eye. These were the eyes of a girl who had raved like a maenad the night through. Had she not slept in her quiet little room; had she been rushing with Alexander in the wild Bacchic rout; or had something dreadful happened to his son?

Nothing could have been so great a relief to him as to rave and rage as was his wont, and he felt strongly prompted to do so; but there was something in her which moved him to pity or shyness, he knew not which, and kept him quiet. He silently followed her with his eyes while she folded her mantle and kerchief in her orderly way, and hastily gathered together the stray, curly locks of her hair, smoothed them, and bound them round her head.

Some one, however, must break the silence, and he gave a sigh of relief when the girl came up to him and asked him, in a voice so husky as to give him a fresh shock:

"Is it true that a Scythian, one of the nightwatch, has been here already?"

Then he broke out, and it really did him good to give vent to his repressed feelings in an angry speech:

"There again--the wisdom of slaves! The so-called Scythian brought a message from his master.

"The captain of the night-watch--you will see--wishes to honor Alexander with a commission."

"No, no," interrupted the girl. "They are hunting my brother down. I thank the gods that the Scythian should have come; it shows that Alexander is still free."

The gem-cutter clasped his bushy hair in both hands, for it seemed to him that the room was whirling round. But his old habits still got the better of him; he roared out with all the power of his mighty lungs: "What is that? What do you say? What has Alexander done? Where have you--both of you--been?" With two long strides the angry man came close up to the terrified girl; the birds fluttered in their cages, and the starling repeated his cries in melancholy tones. Heron stood still, pushing his fingers through his thick gray hair, and with a sharp laugh exclaimed: "I came away from her grave full of fresh hopes for better days, and this is how they are fulfilled! I looked for fame, and I find disgrace! And you, hussy! where have you spent this night--where have you come from? I ask you once more!"

He raised his fist and shook it close in front of Melissa's eyes.

She stood before him as pale as death, and with wide-open eyes, from which the heavy tears dropped slowly, one by one, trickling down her cheeks as if they were tired. Heron saw them, and his rage melted. He staggered to a seat like a drunken man, and, hiding his face in his hands, moaned aloud, "Wretch, wretch that I am!" But his child's soft hand was laid on his head; warm, girlish lips kissed his brow; and Melissa whispered beseechingly: "Peace, father, peace. All may yet be well. I have something to tell you that will make you glad too; yes, I am sure it will make you glad."

Her father shrugged his shoulders incredulously, but wanted to know immediately what the miracle was that could smooth his brow. Melissa, however, would not tell him till it came in its place in her story. So he had to submit; he drew

his seat up to the table, and took up a lump of modeling-wax to keep his restless fingers employed while he listened. She, too, sat down; she could scarcely stand.

At first he listened calmly to her narrative; and when she told him of Alexander's jest at Caesar's expense his face brightened. His Alexandrian blood and his relish for a biting speech got the upper hand; he gave a sounding slap on his mighty leg, and exclaimed: "A cursed good thought! But the boy forgot that when Zeus only lamed his son it was because he is immortal; while Caesar's brother was as feeble a mortal as Caracalla himself is said to be at this day."

He laughed noisily; but it was for the last time that morning; for hardly had he heard the name of Zminis, and learned that it was he who had overheard Alexander, than he threw down the wax and started to his feet in horror, crying:

"That dog, who dared to cast his eyes on your mother, and persecuted her long after she had shown him the door! That sly mischief-maker! Many a time has he set snares in our path. If he succeeds in tightening the noose into which the boy has so heedlessly thrust his head--But first tell me, has he caught him already, or is Alexander still at liberty?"

But no one, not even Argutis, who was still out on the search, could tell him this; and he was now so greatly disturbed that, during the rest of Melissa's narrative, he perpetually paced the room, interrupting her now and then with questions or with outbursts of indignation. And then it occurred to him that he ought himself to seek his son, and he occupied himself with getting ready to go out.

Even when she spoke of the Magian, and his conviction that those who know are able to hold intercourse with the souls of the dead, he shrugged his shoulders incredulously, and went on lacing his sandals. But when Melissa assured him that not she alone, but Diodoros with her, had seen the wandering soul of the departed Korinna in the train of ghosts, he dropped the straps he had bound round his ankle, and asked her who this Magian was, and where he might be found. However, she knew no more than that his name was Serapion, and she briefly described his dignified presence.

Heron had already seen the man, and he seemed still to be thinking of him, when Melissa, with a blush and downcast eyes, confessed that, as soon as he was well again, Diodoros was coming to her father to ask her of him in marriage.

It was a long story before she came at last to her own concerns, but it was always her way not to think of herself till every one else had had his due.

But what about her father? Had she spoken inaudibly, or was he really unable to-day to be glad? or what ailed him, that he paid no heed to the news which, even for him, was not without its importance, but, without a word of consent or disapproval, merely bade her go on with her story?

Melissa called him by name, as if to wake a man from sleep, and asked whether it were indeed possible that he really felt no pleasure in the happy prospect that lay before her, and that she had confessed to him. And now Heron lent an ear, and gave her to understand the satisfaction of his fatherly heart by kissing her. This news, in fact, made up for much that was evil, for Diodoros was a son-in-law after his own heart, and not merely because he was rich, or because his mother had been so great a friend of Olympias's. No, the young man's father was, like himself, one of the old Macedonian stock; he had seen his daughter's lover grow to manhood, and there was not in the city a youth he could more heartily welcome. This he freely admitted; he only regretted that when she should set up house with her husband on the other side of the lake, he (Heron) would be left as lonely as a statue on its pedestal. His sons had already begun to avoid him like a leper!

Then, when he heard of what had befallen Diodoros, and Melissa went on to say that the people who had thrown the stone at the dog were Christians, and that they had carried the wounded youth into a large, clean dwelling, where he was being carefully attended when she had left him, Heron broke out into violent abuse. They were unpatriotic worshipers of a crucified Jew, who multiplied like vermin, and only wanted to turn the good old order of things upside down. But this time they should see--the hypocrites, who pretended to so much humanity, and then set ferocious dogs on peaceful folk!--they should learn that they could not fall on a Macedonian citizen without paying for it.

He indignantly refused to hear Melissa's assurance that none of the Christians had set the dog on her lover; she, however, maintained stoutly that it was merely by an unfortunate accident that the stone had hit Diodoros and cut his head so badly. She would not have quitted her lover but that she feared lest her prolonged absence should have alarmed her father.

Heron at last stood still for a minute or two, lost in thought, and then brought out of his chest a casket, from which he took a few engraved gems. He held them carefully up to the light, and asked his daughter: "If I learn from Polybius, to whom I am now going, that they have already caught Alexander, should I venture now, do you think, to offer a couple of choice gems to Titianus, the prefect, to set him free again? He knows what is good, and the captain of the watch is his subordinate."

But Melissa besought him to give up the idea of seeking out Alexander in his hiding-place; for Heron, the gem-cutter, was known to every one, and if a man-at-arms should see him he would certainly follow him. As regarded the prefect, he would not apprehend any one this day, for, as her father knew, Caesar was to arrive at Alexandria at noon, and Titianus must be on the spot to meet him with all his train.

"But if you want to be out of doors and doing," she added, "go to see Philip. Bring him to reason, and discuss with him what is to be done."

She spoke with firm decision, and Heron looked with amazement at the giver of this counsel. Melissa had hitherto cared for his comfort in silence, without expressing any opinions of her own, and submitting to be the lightning-conductor for all his evil tempers. He did not rate her girlish beauty very high, for there were no ugly faces in his family nor in that of his deceased Olympias. And all the other consolations she offered him he took as a matter of course--nay, he sometimes made them a ground of complaint; for he would occasionally fancy that she wanted to assume the place of his beloved lost wife, and he regarded it as a duty to her to show his daughter, and often very harshly and unkindly, how far she was from filling her mother's place.

Thus she had accustomed herself to do her duty as a daughter, with quiet and wordless exactitude, looking for no thanks; while he thought he was doing her a kindness merely by suffering her constant presence. That he should ever exchange ideas with his daughter, or ask her opinion, would have seemed to Heron absolutely impossible; yet it had come to this, and for the second time this morning he looked in her face with utter amazement.

He could not but approve her warning not to betray Alexander's hiding-place, and her suggestion that he should go to see his eldest son coincided with an unspoken desire which had been lurking in his mind ever since she had told him of her having seen a disembodied soul. The possibility of seeing her once more, whose memory was dearer to him than all else on earth, had such a charm, that it moved him more deeply than the danger of his son, who was, nevertheless, very dear to his strangely tempered heart.

So he answered Melissa coolly, as if he were telling her of a decision already formed:

"Of course! I meant to see Philip too; only"--and he paused, for anxiety about Alexander again came to the front--"I can not bear to remain in such uncertainty about the boy."

At this instant the door opened. The new-comer was Andreas, the man to whom Diodoros had advised Alexander to apply for protection and counsel; and Melissa greeted him with filial affection.

He was a freedman in her lover's family, and was the steward and manager of his master's extensive gardens and lands, which were under his absolute control. No one could have imagined that this man had ever been a slave; his face was swarthy, but his fine black eyes lighted it up with a glance of firm self reliance and fiery energy. It was the look of a man who might be the moving spirit of one of those rebellions which were frequent in Alexandria; there was an imperious ring in his voice, and decision in the swift gestures of his hardened but shapely hands.

For twenty years, indeed, he had ruled over the numerous slaves of Polybius, who was an easy-going master, and an invalid from gout in his feet. He was at this time a victim to a fresh attack, and had therefore sent his confidential steward into the town to tell Heron that he approved of his son's choice, and that he would protect Alexander from pursuit.

All this Andreas communicated in few and business-like words; but he then turned to Melissa, and said, in a tone of kindly and affectionate familiarity: "Polybius also wishes to know how your lover is being cared for by the Christians, and from hence I am going on to see our sick boy."

"Then ask your friends," the gem-cutter broke in, "to keep less ferocious dogs for the future."

"That," replied the freedman, "will be unnecessary, for it is not likely that the fierce brute belongs to the community whose friendship I am proud to claim; and, if it does, they will be as much grieved over the matter as we can be."

"A Christian would never do another an ill turn!" said Heron, with a shrug.

"Never, so far as justice permits," replied Andreas, decisively. Then he inquired whether Heron had any message or news to send to his son; and when the gem-cutter replied that he had not, the freedman was about to go. Melissa, however, detained him, saying:

"I will go with you if you will allow me."

"And I?" said Heron, irritably. "It seems to me that children are learning to care less and less what their fathers' views and requirements may be. I have to go to Philip. Who knows what may happen in my absence? Besides--no offense to you, Andreas--what concern has my daughter among the Christians?"

"To visit her lover," replied Andreas, sharply. And he added, more quietly: "It will be a pleasure to me to escort her; and your Argutis is a faithful fellow, and in case of need would be of more use here than an inexperienced girl. I see no reasonable ground for detaining her, Heron. I should like afterwards to take her home with me, across the lake; it would be a comfort to Polybius and soothe his pain to have his favorite with him, his future daughter.--Get ready, my child."

The artist had listened with growing anger, and a swift surge of rage made him long to give the freedman a sharp lesson. But when his glaring eye met the Christian's steady, grave gaze, he controlled himself, and only said, with a shrug which sufficiently expressed his feeling that he was surrendering his veto against his better judgment, addressing himself to Melissa and ignoring Andreas:

"You are betrothed, and of age. Go, for aught I care, in obedience to him whose wishes evidently outweigh mine."

Polybius's son is your master henceforth."

He folded his mantle, and when the girl hastened to help him he allowed her to do it; but he went on, to the freedman: "And for aught I care, you may take her across the lake, too. It is natural that Polybius should wish to see his future daughter. But one thing I may ask for myself: You have slaves and to spare; if anything happens to Alexander, let me hear of it at once."

He kissed Melissa on the head, nodded patronizingly to Andreas, and left the house.

His soft-hearted devotion to a vision had weakened his combativeness; still, he would have yielded less readily to a man who had once been a slave, but that the invitation to Melissa released him of her presence for a while.

He was not, indeed, afraid of his daughter; but she need not know that he wanted Philip to make him acquainted with Serapion, and that through his mediation he hoped at least to see the spirit of the wife he mourned. When he was fairly out of the house he smiled with satisfaction like a school-boy who had escaped his master.

CHAPTER VII.

Melissa, too, had a sense of freedom when she found herself walking by the side of Andreas.

In the garden of Hermes, where her father's house stood, there were few signs of the excitement with which the citizens awaited Caesar's arrival. Most of those who were out and about were going in the opposite direction; they meant to await the grand reception of Caracalla at the eastern end of the city, on his way from the Kanopic Gate to the Gate of the Sun. Still, a good many--men, women and children--were, like themselves, walking westward, for it was known that Caesar would alight at the Serapeum.

They had scarcely left the house when Andreas asked the girl whether she had a kerchief or a veil in the basket the slave was carrying behind her; and on her replying in the affirmative, he expressed his satisfaction; for Caracalla's soldiery, in consequence of the sovereign's weakened discipline and reckless liberality, were little better than an unbridled rabble.

"Then let us keep out of their way," urged Melissa.

"Certainly, as much as possible," said her companion. "At any rate, let us hurry, so as to get back to the lake before the crowd stops the way.

"You have passed an eventful and anxious night, my child, and are tired, no doubt."

"Oh, no!" said she, calmly; "I had some wine to refresh me, and some food with the Christians."

"Then they received you kindly?"

"The only woman there nursed Diodoros like a mother; and the men were considerate and careful. My father does not know them; and yet--Well, you know how much he dislikes them."

"He follows the multitude," returned Andreas, "the common herd, who hate everything exceptional, everything that disturbs their round of life, or startles them out of the quietude of their dull dreams. Woe to those who call by its true name what those blind souls call pleasure and enjoyment as serving to hasten the flight of time--not too long at the most; woe to those who dare raise even a finger against it!"

The man's deep, subdued tones were strongly expressive of the wrath within him; and the girl, who kept close to his side, asked with eager anxiety, "Then my father was right when he said that you are a member of the Christian body?"

"Yes," he replied, emphatically; and when Melissa curiously inquired whether it were true that the followers of the crucified God had renounced their love for home and country, which yet ought to be dear to every true man, Andreas answered with a superior smile, that even the founder of the Stoa had required not only of his fellow-Greeks but of all human beings, that they should regulate their existence by the same laws, since they were brethren in reason and sense.

"He was right," added Andreas, more earnestly, "and I tell you, child, the time is not far off when men shall no longer speak of Roman and Greek, of Egyptian and Syrian, of free men and slaves; when there shall be but one native land, but one class of life for all. Yea, the day is beginning to dawn even now. The fullness of the time is come!"

Melissa looked up at him in amazement, exclaiming: "How strange! I have heard those words once to-day already, and can not get them out of my head. Nay, when you confirmed my father's report, I made up my mind to ask you to explain them."

"What words?" asked Andreas, in surprise. "The fullness of the time is come."

"And where did you hear them?"

"In the house where Diodoros and I took refuge from Zminis."

"A Christian meeting-house," replied Andreas, and his expressive face darkened. "But those who assemble there are aliens to me; they follow evil heresies. But never mind--they also call themselves Christians, and the words which led you to ponder, stand to me at the very gate of the doctrine of our divine master, like the obelisks before the door of an Egyptian temple. Paul, the great preacher of the faith, wrote them to the Galatians. They are easy to understand; nay, any one who looks about him with his eyes open, or searches his own soul, can scarcely fail to see their meaning, if only the desire is roused in him for something better than what these cursed times can give us who live in them."

"Then it means that we are on the eve of great changes?"

"Yes!" cried Andreas, "only the word you use is too feeble. The old dull sun must set, to rise again with greater glory."

Ill at ease, and by no means convinced, Melissa looked her excited companion in the face as she replied:

"Of course I know, Andreas, that you speak figuratively, for the sun which lights the day seems to me bright enough; and is not everything flourishing in this gay, busy city? Are not its citizens under the protection of the law? Were the gods ever more zealously worshiped? Is my father wrong when he says that it is a proud thing to belong to the mightiest realm on earth, before whose power barbarians tremble; a great thing to feel and call yourself a Roman

citizen?"

So far Andreas had listened to her with composure, but he here interrupted, in a tone of scorn "Oh, yes! Caesar has made your father, and your neighbor Skopas, and every free man in the country a Roman citizen; but it is a pity that, while he gave each man his patent of citizenship, he should have filched the money out of his purse."

"Apion, the dealer, was saying something to that effect the other day, and I dare say it is true. But I can not be persuaded against the evidence of my own eyes, and they light on many good and pleasant things. If only you had been with us to the Nekropolis yesterday! Every man was honoring the gods after his own manner. Some, indeed, were grave enough; still, cheerfulness won the day among the people. Most of them were full of the god. I myself, who generally live so quietly, was infected as the mystics came back from Eleusis, and we joined their ranks."

"Till the spy Zminis spoiled your happiness and imperiled your brother's life for a careless speech."

"Very true!"

"And what your brother heedlessly proclaimed," Andreas went on, with flashing eyes, "the very sparrows twitter on the house-tops. It is the truth. The sovereign of the Roman Empire is a thousand times a murderer. Some he sent to precede his own brother, and they were followed by all--twenty thousand, it is said--who were attached to the hapless Geta, or who even spoke his name. This is the lord and master to whom we owe obedience whom God has set over us for our sins. And when this wretch in the purple shall close his eyes, he, like the rest of the criminals who have preceded him on the throne, will be proclaimed a god! A noble company! When your beloved mother died I heard you, even you, revile the gods for their cruelty; others call them kind. It is only a question of how they accept the blood of the sacrificed beasts, their own creatures, which you shed in their honor. If Serapis does not grant some fool the thing he asks, then he turns to the altar of Isis, of Anubis, of Zeus, of Demeter. At last he cries to Sabazios, or one of the new deities of Olympus, who owe their existence to the decisions of the Roman Senate, and who are for the most part scoundrels and villains. There certainly never were more gods than there are now; and among those of whom the myths tell us things strange enough to bring those who worship them into contempt, or to the gallows, is the countless swarm of good and evil daimons. Away with your Olympians! They ought to reward virtue and punish vice; and they are no better than corruptible judges; for you know beforehand just what and how much will avail to purchase their favors."

"You paint with dark colors," the girl broke in. "I have learned from Philip that the Pythagoreans teach that not the sacrifice, but the spirit of the offering, is what really matters."

"Quite right. He was thinking, no doubt, of the miracle-monger of Tyana, Apollonius, who certainly had heard of the doctrine of the Redeemer. But among the thousand nine hundred and ninety, who here bring beasts to the altar, who ever remembers this? Quite lately I heard one of our garden laborers ask how much a day he ought to sacrifice to the sun, his god. I told him a keration--for that is what the poor creature earns for a whole day's work. He thought that too much, for he must live; so the god must be content with a tithe, for the taxes to the State on his earnings were hardly more."

"The divinity ought no doubt to be above all else to us," Melissa observed. "But when your laborer worships the sun, and looks for its benefits, what is the difference between him and you, or me, or any of us, though we call the sun Helios or Serapis, or what not?"

"Yes, yes," replied Andreas. "The sun is adored here under many different names and forms, and your Serapis has swallowed up not only Zeus and Pluto, but Phoebus Apollo and the Egyptian Osiris and Ammon, and Ra, to swell his own importance. But to be serious, child, our fathers made to themselves many gods indeed, of the sublime phenomena and powers of Nature, and worshiped them admiringly; but to us only the names remain, and those who offer to Apollo never think of the sun. With my laborer, who is an Arab, it is different. He believes the light-giving globe itself to be a god; and you, I perceive, do not think him wholly wrong. But when you see a youth throw the discus with splendid strength, do you praise the discus, or the thrower?"

"The thrower," replied Melissa. "But Phoebus Apollo himself guides his chariot with his divine hands."

"And astronomers," the Christian went on, "can calculate for years to come exactly where his steeds will be at each minute of the time. So no one can be more completely a slave than he to whom so many mortals pray that he will, of his own free-will, guide circumstances to suit them. I, therefore, regard the sun as a star, like any other star, and worship should be given, not to those rolling spheres moving across the sky in prescribed paths, but to Him who created them and guides them by fixed laws. I really pity your Apollo and the whole host of the Olympian gods, since the world has become possessed by the mad idea that the gods and daimons may be moved, or even compelled, by forms of prayer and sacrifices and magic arts, to grant to each worshiper the particular thing on which he may have set his covetous and changeable fancy."

"And yet," exclaimed Melissa, "you yourself told me that you prayed for my mother when the leech saw no further hope. Every one hopes for a miracle from the immortals when his own power has come to an end! Thousands think so. And in our city the people have never been more religious than they are now. The singer of the Ialemos at the feast of

Adonis particularly praised us for it."

"Because they have never been more fervently addicted to pleasure, and therefore have never more deeply dreaded the terrors of hades. The great and splendid Zeus of the Greeks has been transformed into Serapis here, on the banks of the Nile, and has become a god of the nether world. Most of the ceremonies and mysteries to which the people crowd are connected with death. They hope that the folly over which they waste so many hours will smooth their way to the fields of the blest, and yet they themselves close the road by the pleasures they indulge in. But the fullness of time is now come; the straight road lies open to all mankind, called as they are to a higher life in a new world, and he who follows it may await death as gladly as the bride awaits the bridegroom on her marriage day. Yes, I prayed to my God for your dying mother, the sweetest and best of women. But what I asked for her was not that her life might be preserved, or that she might be permitted to linger longer among us, but that the next world might be opened to her in all its glory."

At this point the speaker was interrupted by an armed troop which thrust the crowd aside to make way for the steers which were to be slaughtered in the Temple of Serapis at the approach of Caesar. There were several hundred of them, each with a garland about its neck, and the handsomest which led the train had its horns gilded.

When the road was clear again, Andreas pointed to the beasts, and whispered to his companion "Their blood will be shed in honor of the future god Caracalla. He once killed a hundred bears in the arena with his own hand. But I tell you, child, when the fullness of time is come, innocent blood shall no more be shed. You were speaking with enthusiasm of the splendor of the Roman Empire. But, like certain fruit-trees in our garden which we manure with blood, it has grown great on blood, on the life-juice of its victims. The mightiest realm on earth owes its power to murder and rapine; but now sudden destruction is coming on the insatiate city, and visitation for her sins."

"And if you are right--if the barbarians should indeed destroy the armies of Caesar," asked Melissa, looking up in some alarm at the enthusiast, "what then?"

"Then we may thank those who help to demolish the crumbling house!" cried Andreas, with flashing eyes.

"And if it should be so," said the girl, with tremulous anxiety, "what universal ruin! What is there on earth that could fill its place? If the empire falls into the power of the barbarians, Rome will be made desolate, and all the provinces laid waste which thrive under her protection."

"Then," said Andreas, "will the kingdom of the Spirit arise, in which peace and love shall reign instead of hatred and murder and wars. There shall be one fold and one Shepherd, and the least shall be equal with the greatest."

"Then there will be no more slaves?" asked Melissa, in growing amazement.

"Not one," replied her companion, and a gleam of inspiration seemed to light up his stern features. "All shall be free, and all united in love by the grace of Him who hath redeemed us."

But Melissa shook her head, and Andreas, understanding what was passing in her mind, tried to catch her eye as he went on:

"You think that these are the impossible wishes of one who has himself been a slave, or that it is the remembrance of past suffering and unutterable wrong which speaks in me? For what right-minded man would not desire to preserve others from the misery which once crushed him to earth with its bitter burden?--But you are mistaken. Thousands of free-born men and women think as I do, for to them, too, a higher Power has revealed that the fullness of time is now come. He, the Greatest and Best, who made all the woes of the world His own, has chosen the poor rather than the rich, the suffering rather than the happy, the babes rather than the wise and prudent; and in his kingdom the last shall be first--yea, the least of the last, the poorest of the poor; and they, child, are the slaves."

He ended his diatribe with a deep sigh, but Melissa pressed the hand which held hers as they walked along the raised pathway, and said: "Poor Andreas! How much you must have gone through before Polybius set you free!"

He only nodded, and they both remained silent till they found themselves in a quiet side street. Then the girl looked up at him inquiringly, and began again:

"And now you hope for a second Spartacus? Or will you yourself lead a rebellion of the slaves? You are the man for it, and I can be secret."

"If it has to be, why not?" he replied, and his eyes sparkled with a strange fire. But seeing that she shrank from him, a smile passed over his countenance, and he added in a soothing tone: "Do not be alarmed, my child; what must come will come, without another Spartacus, or bloodshed, or turmoil. And you, with your clear eyes and your kind heart, would you find it difficult to distinguish right from wrong, and to feel for the sorrows of others--? Yes, perhaps! For what will not custom excuse and sanctify? You can pity the bird which is shut into a cage too small for it, or the mule which breaks down under too heavy a load, and the cruelty which hurts them rouses your indignation. But for the man whom a terrible fate has robbed of his freedom, often through the fault of another, whose soul endures even greater torments than his despised body, you have no better comfort than the advice which might indeed serve a philosopher, but which to him is bitter mockery: to bear his woes with patience. He is only a slave, bought, or perhaps inherited. Which of you ever thinks of asking who gave you, who are free, the right to enslave half of all the inhabitants of the

Roman Empire, and to rob them of the highest prerogative of humanity? I know that many philosophers have spoken of slavery as an injustice done by the strong to the weak: but they shrugged their shoulders over it nevertheless, and excused it as an inevitable evil; for, thought they, who will serve me if my slave is regarded as my equal? You only smile at this confusion of the meditative recluses, but you forget"--and a sinister fire glowed in his eyes--"that the slave, too, has a soul, in which the same feelings stir as in your own. You never think how a proud man may feel whose arm you brand, and whose very breath of life is indignity; or what a slave thinks who is spurned by his master's foot, though noble blood may run in his veins. All living things, even the plants in the garden, have a right to happiness, and only develop fully in freedom, and under loving care; and yet one half of mankind robs the other half of this right. The sum total of suffering and sorrow to which Fate had doomed the race is recklessly multiplied and increased by the guilt of men themselves. But the cry of the poor and wretched has gone up to heaven, and now that the fullness of time is come, 'Thus far, and no farther,' is the word. No wild revolutionary has been endowed with a giant's strength to burst the bonds of the victims asunder. No, the Creator and Preserver of the world sent his Son to redeem the poor in spirit, and, above all, the brethren and the sisters who are weary and heavy laden. The magical word which shall break the bars of the prisons where the chains of the slaves are heard is Love.... But you, Melissa, can but half comprehend all this," he added, interrupting the ardent flow of his enthusiastic speech. "You can not understand it all. For you, too, child, the fullness of time is coming; for you, too, freeborn though you are, are, I know, one of the heavy laden who patiently suffer the burden laid upon you. You too--But keep close to me; we shall find it difficult to get through this throng."

It was, in fact, no easy matter to get across the crowd which was pouring noisily down the street of Hermes, into which this narrow way led. However, they achieved it, and when Melissa had recovered her breath in a quiet lane in Rhakotis, she turned to her companion again with the question, "And when do you suppose that your predictions will be fulfilled?"

"As soon as the breeze blows which shall shake the overripe fruit from the tree. It may be tomorrow, or not yet, according to the long-suffering of the Most High. But the entire collapse of the world in which we have been living is as certain to come as that you are walking here with me!"

Melissa walked on with a quaking heart, as she heard her friend's tone of conviction; he, however, was aware that the inmost meaning of his words was sealed to her. To his inquiry, whether she could not rejoice in the coming of the glorious time in store for redeemed humanity, she answered, tremulously:

"All you hope for is glorious, no doubt, but what shall lead to it must be a terror to all. Were you told of the kingdom of which you speak by an oracle, or is it only a picture drawn by your imagination, a vision, and the offspring of your soul's desire?"

"Neither," said Andreas, decidedly; and he went on in a louder voice: "I know it by revelation. Believe me, child, it is as certainly true as that the sun will set this night. The gates of the heavenly Jerusalem stand open, and if you, too, would fain be blessed--But more of this later. Here we are at our journey's end."

They entered the Christian home, where they found Diodoros, on a comfortable couch, in a spacious, shady room, and in the care of a friendly matron.

But he was in an evil case. The surgeon thought his wound a serious one; for the heavy stone which had hit him had injured the skull, and the unhappy youth was trembling with fever. His head was burning, and it was with difficulty that he spoke a few coherent words. But his eyes betrayed that he recognized Melissa, and that it was a joy to him to see her again; and when he was told that Alexander had so far escaped, a bright look lighted up his countenance. It was evidently a comfort to him to gaze on Melissa's pretty face; her hand lay in his, and he understood her when she greeted him from her father, and spoke to him of various matters; but the lids ere long closed over his aching eyes.

Melissa felt that she must leave him to rest. She gently released his hand from her grasp and laid it across his breast, and moved no more, excepting to wipe the drops from his brow. Solemn stillness had reigned for some time in the large, clean house, faintly smelling of lavender; but, on a sudden, doors opened and shut; steps were heard in the anteroom, seats were moved, and a loud confusion of men's voices became audible, among them that of Andreas.

Melissa listened anxiously to the heated discussion which had already become a vehement quarrel. She longed to implore the excited wranglers to moderate their tones, for she could see by her lover's quivering lips that the noise hurt him; but she could not leave him.

The dispute meanwhile grew louder and louder. The names of Montanus and Tertullian, Clemens and Origen, fell on her ear, and at last she heard Andreas exclaim in high wrath: "You are like the guests at a richly furnished banquet who ask, after they have well eaten, when the meat will be brought in. Paraclete is come, and yet you look for another."

He was not allowed to proceed; fierce and scornful contradiction checked his speech, till a voice of thunder was heard above the rest:

"The heavenly Jerusalem is at hand. He who denies and doubts the calling of Montanus is worse than the heathen, and I, for one, cast him off as neither a brother nor a Christian!"

This furious denunciation was drowned in uproar; the anxious girl heard seats overturned, and the yells and shouts of furious combatants; the suffering youth meanwhile moaned with anguish, and an expression of acute pain was stamped on his handsome features. Melissa could bear it no longer; she had risen to go and entreat the men to make less noise, when suddenly all was still.

Diodoros immediately became calmer, and looked up at the girl as gratefully as though the soothing silence were owing to her. She could now hear the deep tones of the head of the Church of Alexandria, and understood that the matter in hand was the readmission into this congregation of a man who had been turned out by some other sect. Some would have him rejected, and commended him to the mercy of God; others, less rigid, were willing to receive him, since he was ready to submit to any penance.

Then the quarrel began again. High above every other voice rose the shrill tones of a man who had just arrived from Carthage, and who boasted of personal friendship with the venerable Tertullian. The listening girl could no longer follow the connection of the discussion, but the same names again met her ear; and, though she understood nothing of the matter, it annoyed her, because the turmoil disturbed her lover's rest.

It was not till the sick-nurse came back that the tumult was appeased; for, as soon as she learned how seriously the loud disputes of her fellow-believers were disturbing the sick man's rest, she interfered so effectually, that the house was as silent as before.

The deaconess Katharine was the name by which she was known, and in a few minutes she returned to her patient's bedside.

Andreas followed her, with the leech, a man of middle height, whose shrewd and well-formed head, bald but for a little hair at the sides, was set on a somewhat ungainly body. His sharp eyes looked hither and thither, and there was something jerky in his quick movements; still, their grave decisiveness made up for the lack of grace. He paid no heed to the bystanders, but threw himself forward rather than bent over the patient, felt him, and with a light hand renewed his bandages; and then he looked round the room, examining it as curiously as though he proposed to take up his abode there, ending by fixing his prominent, round eyes on Melissa. There was something so ruthlessly inquisitive in that look that it might, under other circumstances, have angered her. However, as it was, she submitted to it, for she saw that it was shrewd, and she would have called the wisest physician on earth to her lover's bedside if she had had the power.

When Ptolemaeus--for so he was called--had, in reply to the question, "who is that?" learned who she was, he hastily murmured: "Then she can do nothing but harm here. A man in a fever wants but one thing, and that is perfect quiet."

And he beckoned Andreas to the window, and asked him shortly, "Has the girl any sense?"

"Plenty," replied the freedman, decisively.

"As much, at any rate, as she can have at her age," the other retorted. "Then it is to be hoped that she will go without any leave-taking or tears. That fine lad is in a bad way. I have known all along what might do him good, but I dare not attempt it alone, and there is no one in Alexandria.... But Galen has come to join Caesar. If he, old as he is--But it is not for the likes of us to intrude into Caesar's quarters--Still--"

He paused, laying his hand on his brow, and rubbing it thoughtfully with his short middle finger. Then he suddenly exclaimed: "The old man would never come here. But the Serapeum, where the sick lie awaiting divine or diabolical counsel in dreams--Galen will go there. If only we could carry the boy thither."

"His nurse here would hardly allow that," said Andreas, doubtfully.

"He is a heathen," replied the leech, hotly. "Besides, what has faith to do with the injury to the body? How many Caesars have employed Egyptian and Jewish physicians? The lad would get the treatment he needs, and, Christian as I am, I would, if necessary, convey him to the Serapeum, though it is of all heathen temples the most heathen. I will find out by hook or by crook at what time Galen is to visit the cubicles. To-morrow, or next day at latest; and to-night, or, better still, to-morrow morning before sunrise, I will have the youth carried there. If the deaconess refuses--"

"And she will," Andreas put in.

"Very well.--Come here, maiden," he beckoned to Melissa, and went on loud enough for the deaconess to hear: "If we can get your betrothed to the Serapeum early to-morrow, he may probably be cured; otherwise I refuse to be responsible. Tell your friends and his that I will be here before sunrise to-morrow, and that they must provide a covered litter and good bearers."

He then turned to the deaconess, who had followed him in silence, with her hands clasped like a deserter, laid his broad, square hand on her shoulder, and added:

"So it must be, Widow Katharine, Love endures and suffers all things, and to save a neighbor's life, it is well to suffer in silence even things that displease us. I will explain it all to you afterwards. Quiet, only perfect quiet--No melancholy leave-taking, child! The sooner you are out of the house the better."

He went back again to the bed, laid his hand for a moment on the sick man's forehead, and then left the room.

Diodoros lay still and indifferent on the couch. Melissa kissed him on the brow, and withdrew without his observing it, her eyes full of tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

The sun had passed the meridian when Melissa and Andreas left the house. They walked on in silence through the deserted streets, the girl with her eyes sadly fixed on the ground; for an inward voice warned her that her lover's life was in danger. She did not sob, but more than once she wiped away a large tear.

Andreas, too, was lost in his own thoughts. To win a soul to the Saviour was surely a good work. He knew Melissa's sober, thoughtful nature, and the retired, joyless life she led with her surly old father. So his knowledge of human nature led him to think that she, if any one, might easily be won over to the faith in which he found his chief happiness. Baptism had given such sanctification to his life that he longed to lead the daughter of the only woman for whom his heart had ever beat a shade faster, to the baptismal font. In the heat of summer Olympias had often been the guest for weeks together of Polybius's wife, now likewise dead. Then she had taken a little house of her own for herself and her children, and when his master's wife died, the lonely widower had known no greater pleasure than that of receiving her on his estate for as long as Heron would allow her to remain; he himself never left his work for long. Thus Andreas had become the great ally of the gem-cutter's children, and, as they could learn nothing from him that was not good and worth knowing, Olympias had gladly allowed them to remain in his society, and herself found a teacher and friend in the worthy steward. She knew that Andreas had joined the Christians; she had made him tell her much about his faith; still, as the daughter and wife of artists, she was firmly attached to the old gods, and could only regard the Christian doctrine as a new system of philosophy in which many things attracted her, but many, on the other hand, repelled her. At that time his passion for Melissa's mother had possessed him so wholly that his life was a constant struggle against the temptation to covet his neighbor's wife. And he had conquered, doing severe penance for every glance which might for an instant betray to her the weakness of his soul. She had loved flowers, and he knew the plant-world so well, and was so absolutely master over everything which grew and bloomed in the gardens of which he had charge, that he could often intrust his speechless favorites to tell her things which lips and eyes might not reveal. Now she was no more, and the culture of plants had lost half its charm since her eyes could no longer watch their thriving. He now left the gardens for the most part to his men, while he devoted himself to other cares with double diligence, and to the strictest exercises of his faith.

But, as many a man adores the children of the woman he might not marry, Alexander and Melissa daily grew dearer to Andreas. He took a father's interest in their welfare, and, needing little himself, he carefully hoarded his ample income to promote the cause of Christianity and encourage good works; but he had paid Alexander's debts when his time of apprenticeship was over, for they were so considerable that the reckless youth had not dared confess the sum to his stern father.

Very soon after this, Alexander had become one of the most popular painters of the town; and when he proposed to repay his friend the money he had lent him, Andreas accepted it; but he added it to a capital of which the purpose was his secret, but which, if his prayers were heard, might return once more to benefit Alexander. Diodoros, too, was as dear to the freedman as a son of his own could have been, though he was a heathen. In the gymnasium and the race-course, or in the practice of the mysteries, the good seed which he sowed in the lad's heart was trodden down. Polybius, too, was an utter heathen; indeed, he was one of the priests of Dionysus and Demeter, as his wealth and position in the senate required.

Then, Diodoros had confessed to him that he hoped to win Melissa for his wife, and this had been adverse to Andreas's hope and purpose of making a Christian of the girl; for he knew by experience how easily married happiness was wrecked when man and wife worship different gods. But when the freedman had again seen the gem-cutter's brutality and the girl's filial patience, an inward voice had called to him that this gentle, gifted creature was one of those elect from among whom the Lord chose the martyrs for the faith; and that it was his part to lead her into the fold of the Redeemer. He had begun the work of converting her with the zeal he put into everything. But fresh doubts had come upon him on the threshold of the sick-room, after seeing the lad who was so dear to him, and whose eye had met his with such a trustful, suffering look. Could it be right to sow the seed of discord between him and his future wife? And supposing Diodoros, too, should be converted by Melissa, could he thus alienate from his father the son and heir of Polybius--his benefactor and master?

Then, he remembered, too, to what a position he had risen through that master's confidence in him. Polybius knew nothing of the concerns of his house but from the reports laid before him by Andreas; for the steward controlled not merely the estate but the fortune of the family, and for years had been at the head of the bank which he himself had founded to increase the already vast income of the man to whom he owed his freedom. Polybius paid him a considerable portion of each year's profits, and had said one day at a banquet, with the epigrammatic wit of an Alexandrian, that his freedman, Andreas, served his interests as only one other man could do--namely, himself--but with the industry of ten. The Christian greatly appreciated his confidence; and as he walked on by the side of Melissa, he told himself again and again that it would be dishonorable to betray it.

If only the sweet girl might find the way alone! If she were chosen to salvation, the Lord himself would lead and

guide her. Had he indeed not beckoned her already by impressing on her heart those words, "The fullness of the time is now come?"

That he was justified in keeping this remembrance alive he had no doubt; and he was about to speak of it again, when she prevented him by raising her large eyes beseechingly to his, and asking him:

"Is Diodoros in real danger? Tell me the truth. I would rather endure the worst than this dreadful anxiety."

So Andreas acknowledged that the youth was in a bad way, but that Ptolemaeus, himself well-skilled, hoped to cure him if his greater colleague Galenus would aid him.

"And it is to secure his assistance, then," Melissa went on, "that the leech would have him carried to the Serapeum?"

"Yes, my child. For he is in Caesar's train, and it would be vain to try to speak with him to-day or to-morrow."

"But the journey through the town will do the sufferer a mischief."

"He will be carried in a litter."

"But even that is not good for him. Perfect quiet, Ptolemaeus said, was the best medicine."

"But Galenus has even better remedies at hand," was the reply.

Melissa seemed satisfied with this assurance, for she walked on for some time in silence. But when the uproar of the crowd in the vicinity of the Serapeum became more audible as they advanced, she suddenly stood still, and said:

"Come what may, I will find my way to the great physician's presence and crave his help." "You?" cried the freedman; and when she firmly reiterated her purpose, the strong man turned pale.

"You know not what you say!" he exclaimed, in deep concern. "The men who guard the approaches to Caracalla are ruthless profligates, devoid of courtesy or conscience. But, you may rely upon it, you will not even get into the antechamber."

"Perhaps. Nevertheless, it is my duty, and I will try."

How firmly and decisively she spoke! And what strength of will sparkled in the quiet, modest maiden's eyes! And the closely set lips, which usually were slightly parted, and hardly covered two of her pearly white teeth, gave her a look of such determination, that Andreas could see that no obstacle would check her.

Still, love and duty alike required him to use every means in his power to keep her from taking such a step. He lavished all his eloquence; but she adhered to her purpose with steadfast persistency, and none of the reasons he could adduce to prove the impossibility of the undertaking convinced her. The only point which staggered her was the information that the great leech was an old man, who walked with difficulty; and that Galen, as a heathen and a disciple of Aristotle, would never be induced to enter a Christian dwelling. Both these facts might be a serious hindrance to her scheme; yet she would not now stop to reflect. They had got back to the great street of Hermes, leading from the temple of that god to the Serapeum, and must cross it to reach the lake, their immediate destination. As in all the principal streets of Alexandria, a colonnade bordered the street in front of the houses on each side of the wide and handsome roadway. Under these arcades the foot-passengers were closely packed, awaiting Caesar's passage. He must soon be coming, for the reception, first at the Kanopic Gate, and then at the Gate of the Sun, was long since over; and, even if he had carried out his purpose of halting at the tomb of Alexander the Great, he could not be detained much longer. The distance hither down the Kanopic Way was not great, and swift horses would quickly bring him down the Aspendia street to that of Hermes, leading straight to the Serapeum. His train was not to follow him to the Soma, the mausoleum of the founder of the city, but to turn off to the southward by the Paneum, and make a round into the street of Hermes.

The praetorians, the German body-guard, the imperial Macedonian phalanx, and some mounted standard-bearers had by this time reached the spot where Melissa was proceeding up the street holding Andreas's hand. Close by them came also a train of slaves, carrying baskets full of palm-leaves and fresh branches of ivy, myrtle, poplar, and pine, from the gardens of the Paneum, to be carried to the Serapeum. They were escorted by lictors, endeavoring with their axes and fasces to make a way for them through the living wall which barred their way.

By the help of the mounted troops, who kept the main road clear, space was made for them; and Andreas, who knew one of the overseers of the garden-slaves, begged him as a favor to allow Melissa and himself to walk among his people. This was willingly granted to so well-known a man; and the way was quite free for the moment, because the imperial cartage had not followed immediately on the soldiers who had now all marched past. Thus, among the flower-bearers, they reached the middle of the street; and while the slaves proceeded on their way to the Serapeum, the freedman tried to cross the road, and reach the continuation of the street they had come by, and which led to the lake. But the attempt was frustrated, for some Roman lictors who had just come up stood in their way, and sent them to the southern side of the street of Hermes, to mingle with the gaping crowd under the arcade.

They were, of course, but ill received by these, since they naturally found themselves in front of the foremost rank; but the stalwart frame and determined face of Andreas, and the exceptional beauty of his young companion, over

whose pretty head most of the gazers could easily see, protected her from rough treatment.

Andreas spoke a few words of apology to those standing nearest to them, and a young goldsmith at once courteously made way, so that Melissa, who had taken a place behind a column, might see better.

And in a few minutes--there was that to see which made every one forget the intruders. Vehicles and outriders, litters swung between mules, and a long train of imperial footmen, in red tunics embroidered with gold, huntsmen with leashes of noble dogs, baggage-wagons and loaded elephants, came trooping down toward the Serapeum; while suddenly, from the Aspendia into the Hermes Way, the Numidian horse rushed out, followed by a troop of mounted lictors, who galloped up the street, shouting their orders in loud tones to the imperial train, in a mixture of Latin and Greek, of which Melissa understood only the words "Caesar!" and "Make way to the right!"

The command was instantly obeyed. Vehicles, foot-passengers, and riders alike crowded to the southern or left-hand side of the road, and the many-headed throng, of which Andreas and Melissa formed a part, drew as far back as possible under the colonnade; for on the edge of the footway there was the risk of being trampled on by a horse or crushed by a wheel. The back rows of the populace, who had collected under the arcades, were severely squeezed by this fresh pressure from without, and their outcries were loud of anger, alarm; or pain; while on the other side of the street arose shouts of delight and triumph, or, when anything singular came into view, loud laughter at the wit and irony of some jester. Added to these there were the clatter of hoofs and the roll of wheels, the whinnying of horses, the shouts of command, the rattle of drums, the blare of trumpets, and the shrill pipe of flutes, without a moment's pause. It was a wild and ear-splitting tumult; to Melissa, however, neither painful nor pleasing, for the one idea, that she must speak with the great physician, silenced every other. But suddenly there came up from the east, from the rising of the sun, whose course Caesar had followed, such a tremendous roar that she involuntarily clutched her companion's hand.

Every instant the storm of noise increased, rolling on with irresistible vehemence, gathering force as it came on, receiving, as it were, fresh tributaries on its way, and rapidly swelling from the distance to the immediate vicinity, compelling every one, as with a magic power, to yield to the superior will of numbers and join in the cry. Even Melissa cheered. She, too, was as a drop in the tide, a leaf on the rippling face of the rushing torrent; her heart beat as wildly and her voice rang as clear as that of the rest of the throng, intoxicated with they knew not what, which crowded the colonnades by the roadway, and every window and roof-top, waving handkerchiefs, strewing flowers on the ground, and wiping the tears which this unwonted excitement had brought to their eyes.

And now the shout is so tremendous that it could not possibly be louder. It seems as though it were the union of voices innumerable rather than the seabreeze, which flutters the pennons and flags which wave from every house and arch, and sways the garlands hung across the street. Melissa can see none but flushed faces, eyes swimming in tears, parted lips, wildly waving arms and hands. Then suddenly a mysterious power hushes the loud tones close round her; she hears only here and there the cry of "Caesar!" "He is coming!" "Here he is!"--and the swift tramp of hoofs and the clatter of wheels sounding like the rattle of an iron building after a peal of thunder, above the shouts of ten thousand human beings. Closer it comes and closer, without a pause, and followed by fresh shouting, as a flock of daws follow an owl flying across the twilight, swelling again to irrepressible triumph as the expected potentate rushes past Melissa and her neighbors. They only see Caesar as a form scarcely discerned by the eye during the space of a lightning-flash in a dark night.

Four tawny bay horses of medium size, dappled with black, harnessed abreast and wide apart, fly along the cleared road like hunted foxes, the light Gallic chariot at their heels. The wheels seem scarcely to touch the smooth flags of the Alexandrian pavement. The charioteer wears the red-bordered toga of the highest Roman officials. He is well known by repute, and the subject of many a sharp jest; for this is Pandion, formerly a stableboy, and now one of "Caesar's friends," a praetor, and one of the great men of the empire. But he knows his business; and what does Caracalla care for tradition or descent, for the murmurs and discontent of high or low?

Pandion holds the reins with elegant composure, and urges the horses to a frantic pace by a mere whistle, without ever using the whip. But why is it that he whirls the mighty monarch of half a world, before whose bloodthirsty power every one quakes, so swiftly past these eager spectators? Sunk in the cushions on one side, Bassianus Antoninus is reclining rather than sitting in the four-wheeled open chariot of Gallic make which sweeps past. He does not vouchsafe a glance at the jubilant crowd, but gazes down at the road, his well-shaped brow so deeply furrowed with gloom that he might be meditating some evil deed.

It is easy to discern that he is of middle height; that his upper lip and cheeks are unshaven, and his chin smooth; that his hair is already thin, though he lacks two years of thirty; and that his complexion is pale and sallow; indeed, his aspect is familiar from statues and coins, many of which are of base metal.

Most of those who thus beheld the man who held in his hand the fate of each individual he passed, as of the empire at large, involuntarily asked themselves afterward what impression he had made on them; and Caracalla himself would have rejoiced in the answer, for he aimed not at being attractive or admired, but only at being feared. But, indeed, they had long since learned that there was nothing too horrible to be expected of him; and, now that they had seen him, they were of opinion that his appearance answered to his deeds. It would be hard to picture a more sinister and menacing

looking man than this emperor, with his averted looks and his haughty contempt for the world and mankind; and yet there was something about him which made it difficult to take him seriously, especially to an Alexandrian. There was a touch of the grotesque in the Gallic robe with a red hood in which this ominous-looking contemner of humanity was wrapped. It was called a 'Caracalla', and it was from this garment that Bassianus Antoninus had gained his nickname.

The tyrant who wore this gaudy cloak was, no doubt, devoid alike of truth and conscience; but, as to his being a philosopher, who knew the worthlessness of earthly things and turned his back upon the world, those who could might believe it! He was no more than an actor, who played the part of Timon not amiss, and who made use of his public to work upon their fears and enjoy the sight of their anguish. There was something lacking in him to make one of those thorough-going haters of their kind at whose mere aspect every knee must bend. The appearance, in short, of this false philosopher was not calculated to subdue the rash tongues of the Alexandrians.

To this many of them agreed; still, there was no time for such reflections till the dust had shrouded the chariot, which vanished as quickly as it had come, till the shouting was stilled, and the crowd had spread over the roadway again. Then they began to ask themselves why they had joined in the acclamations, and had been so wildly excited; how it was that they had so promptly surrendered their self-possession and dignity for the sake of this wicked little man. Perhaps it was his unlimited control over the weal and woe of the world, over the life and death of millions, which raised a mortal, not otherwise formed for greatness, so far above common humanity to a semblance of divinity. Perhaps it was the instinctive craving to take part in the grand impulsive expression of thousands of others that had carried away each individual. It was beyond a doubt a mysterious force which had compelled every one to do as his neighbors did as soon as Caesar had appeared.

Melissa had succumbed with the rest; she had shouted and waved her kerchief, and had not heeded Andreas when he held her hand and asked her to consider what a criminal this man was whom she so eagerly hailed. It was not till all was still again that she recollected herself, and her determination to get the famous physician to visit her lover revived in renewed strength.

Fully resolved to dare all, she looked about with calm scrutiny, considering the ways and means of achieving her purpose without any aid from Andreas. She was in a fever of impatience, and longed to force her way at once into the Serapeum. But that was out of the question, for no one moved from his place. There was, however, plenty to be seen. A complete revulsion of feeling had come over the crowd. In the place of Expectancy, its graceless step-child, Disappointment, held sway. There were no more shouts of joy; men's lungs were no longer strained to the utmost, but their tongues were all the busier. Caesar was for the most part spoken of with contempt as Tarautas, and with the bitterness--the grandchild of Expectancy--which comes of disappointment. Tarautas had originally been the name of a stunted but particularly bloodthirsty gladiator, in whom ill-will had traced some resemblance to Caesar.

The more remarkable figures in the imperial train were curiously gazed at and discussed. A worker in mosaic, who stood near Melissa, had been employed in the decoration of the baths of Caracalla at Rome, and had much information to impart; he even knew the names of several of the senators and courtiers attached to Caesar. And, with all this, time was found to give vent to discontent.

The town had done its utmost to make itself fine enough to receive the emperor. Statues had been erected of himself, of his father, his mother, and even of his favorite heroes, above all of Alexander the Great; triumphal arches without number had been constructed. The vast halls of the Serapeum, through which he was to pass, had been magnificently decorated; and in front of the new temple, outside the Kanopic Gate, dedicated to his father, who now ranked among the gods, the elders of the town had been received by Caesar, to do him homage and offer him the gifts of the city. All this had cost many talents, a whole heap of gold; but Alexandria was wealthy, and ready to make even greater sacrifices if only they had been accepted with thanks and condescension. But a young actor, who had been a spectator of the scene at the Kanopic Gate, and had then hurried hither, declared, with dramatic indignation, that Caesar had only replied in a few surly words to the address of the senate, and even while he accepted the gift had looked as if he were being ill-used. The delegates had retired as though they had been condemned to death. To none but Timotheus, the high-priest of Serapis, had he spoken graciously.

Others confirmed this report; and dissatisfaction found expression in muttered abuse or satirical remarks and bitter witticisms.

"Why did he drive past so quickly?" asked a tailor's wife; and some one replied:

"Because the Eumenides, who haunt him for murdering his brother, lash him on with their whips of snakes!"

A spice-merchant; who was not less indignant but more cautious, hearing a neighbor inquire why Tarautas drove panther-spotted horses, replied that such beasts of prey had spotted skins, and that like to like was a common rule. A cynical philosopher, who proclaimed his sect by his ragged garment, unkempt hair, and rough mode of speech, declared that Caesar had a senator to guide his chariot because he had long since succeeded in turning the senate-house into a stable.

To all this, however, Melissa turned a deaf ear, for the thought of the great Roman leech possessed her mind entirely. She listened earnestly to the mosaic-worker, who had come close up to her, and officiously mentioned the names of the

most important personages as they went past. Caesar's train seemed endless. It included not merely horse and foot soldiers, but numberless baggage-wagons, cars, elephants--which Caracalla especially affected, because Alexander the Great had been fond of these huge beasts--horses, mules, and asses, loaded with bales, cases, tents, and camp and kitchen furniture. Mingling with these came sutlers, attendants, pages, heralds, musicians, and slaves of the imperial household, in knots and parties, looking boldly about them at the bystanders. When they caught sight of a young and pretty woman on the edge of the path, they would wave a greeting; and many expressed their admiration of Melissa in a very insolent manner. Woolly-headed negroes and swarthy natives of north Africa mixed with the fairer dwellers on the Mediterranean and the yellow or red haired sons of northern Europe. Roman lictors, and Scythian, Thracian, or Keltic men-at-arms kept every one out of the way who did not belong to the imperial train, with relentless determination. Only the Magians, wonder-workers, and street wenches were suffered to push their way in among the horses, asses, elephants, dogs, vehicles, and mounted troops.

Each time that one of the unwieldy traveling-carriages, drawn by several horses, came in sight, in which the wealthy Roman was wont to take his ease on a long journey, or whenever a particularly splendid litter was borne past, Melissa asked the mosaic-worker for information. In some few instances Andreas could satisfy her curiosity, for he had spent some months at Antioch on a matter of business, and had there come to know by sight some of Caesar's most illustrious companions.

So far the great Galenus was not of the number; for Caracalla, who was ailing, had but lately commanded his presence. The famous physician had sailed for Pelusium, in spite of his advanced age, and had only just joined the sovereign's suite. The old man's chariot had been pointed out to the mosaic-worker at the Kanopic Gate, and he was certain that he could not mistake it for any other; it was one of the largest and handsomest; the side doors of it were decorated with the AEsculapius staff and the cup of Hygeia in silver, and on the top were statuettes in wood of Minerva and of AEsculapius. On hearing all this, Melissa's face beamed with happy and hopeful anticipation. With one hand pressed to her throbbing bosom, she watched each vehicle as it drove past with such intense expectancy that she paid no heed to Andreas's hint that they might now be able to make their way through the crowd.

Now--and the freedman had called her once more--here was another monstrous conveyance, belonging to Julius Paulinus, the former consul, whose keen face, with its bright, merry eyes, looked out between the silken curtains by the side of the grave, unsympathetic countenance of Dion Cassius the senator and historian.

The consul, her informant told her--and Andreas confirmed the statement--had displeased Severus, Caracalla's father, by some biting jest, but, on being threatened with death, disarmed his wrath by saying, "You can indeed have my head cut off, but neither you nor I can keep it steady."

Those of the populace who stood near enough to the speaker to hear this anecdote broke out in loud cheers, in which they were joined by others who had no idea of what had given rise to them.

The consul's chariot was followed by a crowd of clients, domestic officials, and slaves, in litters, on horses or mules, or on foot; and behind these again came another vehicle, for some time concealed from sight by dust. But when at last the ten fine horses which drew it had gone past Melissa, and the top of the vehicle became visible, the color mounted to her cheeks, for on the corners of the front she recognized the figures of AEsculapius and Minerva, which, if the mosaic-worker were right, distinguished the chariot of Galenus. She listened breathlessly to the roll of the wheels of this coach, and she soon perceived the silver AEsculapius staff and bowl on the wide door of this house on wheels, which was painted blue. At an open window by the door a kindly old face was visible, framed in long, gray hair.

Melissa started at hearing the order to halt shouted from the Serapeum, far down the road, and again, close at hand, "Halt!" The procession came to a standstill, the riders drew rein, the blue wheels ceased to turn, the coach was immovable but a few steps in front of her, and her eyes met those of the old man. The thought flashed through her brain that Fate itself had brought about this pause just at this spot; and when she heard the mosaic-worker exclaim, "The great Roman physician!" horses, coach, and everything swam before her eyes; she snatched her hand away from that of Andreas, and stepped out on the roadway. In an instant she was standing face to face with the venerable leech.

She heard the warning voice of her companion, she saw the crowd staring at her, she had, no doubt, a brief struggle with her maidenly shyness, but she carried out her purpose. The thought that the gods themselves were helping her to appeal to the only man who could save her lover, encouraged her to defy every obstacle.

She was standing by the vehicle; and scarcely had she raised her sweet, innocent, blushing face with pathetic and touching entreaty to the white-haired Roman, her large, tear-filled eyes meeting his, when he beckoned her to him, and in pleasant, sympathetic tones desired to know what she wanted. Then she made bold to ask whether he were the great Roman physician, and he replied with a flattered and kindly smile that he was sometimes so called. Her thankful glance to heaven revealed what a comfort his words were, and now her rosy lips moved freely, and she hurriedly, but with growing courage, gave him to understand that her betrothed, the son of a respected Roman citizen of Alexandria, was lying badly wounded in the head by a stone, and that the leech who was treating him had said that none but he, the great Galenus, could save the young man's life. She also explained that Ptolemaeus, though he had said that Diodoros needed quiet above all things, had proposed to carry him to the Serapeum, and to commend him there to the care of his

greater colleague, but that she feared the worst results from the move. She glanced pleadingly into the Roman's eyes, and added that he looked so kind that she hoped that he would go instead to see the sufferer, who had, quite by chance, been taken into a Christian house not very far from the Serapeum, where he was being taken good care of, and--as a matter of course--cure her lover.

The old man had only interrupted her tale with a few sly questions as to her love-affair and her religion; for when she had told him that Diodoros was under the care of Christians, it had occurred to him that this simply but not poorly dressed girl, with her modest ways and sweet, calm face, might herself be a Christian. He was almost surprised when she denied it, and yet he seemed pleased, and promised to grant her request. It was not fitting that a girl so young should enter any house where Caesar and his train took up their abode; he would wait for her, "there"--and he pointed to a small, round temple to Aphrodite, on the left-hand side of the street of Hermes, where the road was rather wider--for the coach had meanwhile slowly moved on.

Next day, at three hours after the rising of the fierce African sun--for he could not bear its meridian heat--he would go thither in his litter. "And be sure you are there in good time!" he added, shaking his finger at her.

"If you come an hour too soon, you will find me waiting!" she cried.

He laughed, and said, "What pretty maid, indeed, would dare to be late for an appointment under the very eyes of the goddess of Love!" He bade her a friendly farewell, and lay back in the chariot.

Melissa, radiant with happiness, looked about her for the place where she had left her companion. However, in spite of the lictors, Andreas had followed her; he drew her hand under his arm, and led her through the now-thinning crowd into a sidelane which led to the lake, opening out of the colonnaded street opposite the little temple.

Melissa's steps were winged. Her joy at having gained her end so quickly and so easily was uppermost in her mind, and as they threaded their way among the people she tried to tell Andreas what the great physician had promised. But the noise drowned her speech, for at this moment Caesar's tame lion, named the "Sword of Persia" was being led through the street by some Numidian slaves.

Every one was looking at the splendid beast; and, as she too turned to gaze, her eye met the ardent glance of a tall, bearded man standing at the window of a house just behind the round temple to Aphrodite. She at once recognized Serapion, the Magian, and whispered his name to Andreas; he, however, without looking round, only drew her along more quickly, and did not breathe easily till they found themselves in the narrow, deserted alley.

The Magian had observed her while she stood by the Roman's chariot, and his conversation with a Syrian of middle age in his company had been of her. His companion's appearance was as insignificant as his own was stately and commanding. Nothing distinguished the Syrian from a thousand of his fellows but the cunning stamped on his sharply-cut features; still, the great Magian seemed to hold him in some esteem, for he readily replied to the little man's questions and remarks.

At this moment the Syrian waved his hand in the air with a gesture common to men of his race when displaying their own superior knowledge, as he said "What did I spend ten years in Rome for, if I do not know Serenus Samonicus? He is the greatest book-collector in the empire. And he regards himself as a second AEsculapius, and has written a book on medicine in verse, which Geta, Caesar's murdered brother, always had about him, for he regarded the physicians here as mere bunglers. He is as rich as the Alabarch, and riding in his coach is Galenus, for whom Caesar sent. What can that girl want of him?"

"H'm!" muttered the other, stroking his beard with thoughtful dignity. "She is a modest maiden; it can only be something urgent and important which has prompted her to address the Roman."

"Your Castor will be able to find out," replied the Syrian Annianus. "That omniscient rascal can get through a key-hole, and by to-morrow will be the best friend of the Roman's people, if you care to know."

"We will see," said Serapion. "Her brother, perhaps, to-morrow evening, will tell me what is going on."

"The philosopher?" said the other, with a contemptuous flourish. "You are a great sage, Serapion, as the people hold; but you often sew with needles too fine for me. Why, just now, when Caesar is here, and gain and honor be in the streets for such a one as you only to stoop for--why, I say, you should waste precious time on that poring fellow from the Museum, I can not understand."

A superior smile parted the Magian's lips; he stepped back into the room, followed by Annianus, and replied:

"You know how many who call themselves Magians will crowd round Caesar, and the fame of Sosibius, Hananja, and Kaimis, is not much behind mine. Each plies his art by his own formulas, though he may call himself a Pythagorean or what not. None dare claim to belong to any recognized school, since the philosophers of the guild pride themselves on condemning the miracle-mongers. Now, in his youth, Caracalla went through his courses of philosophy. He detests Aristotle, and has always attached himself to Plato and the Pythagoreans. You yourself told me that by his desire Philostratus is writing a life of Apollonius of Tyana; and, though he may turn up his nose at the hair-splitting and frittering of the sages of the Museum, it is in his blood to look for marvels from those privileged philosophers. His mother has made courtiers of them again; and he, who looks for everything from the magic arts, has never yet met a

Magian who could have been one of them."

At this the Syrian clapped his hands, exclaiming: "And you propose to use Philip as your signbearer to talk to the emperor of a thaumaturgist who is hand in hand with all the learning of the Museum? A cursed good idea! But the gem-cutter's son does not look like a simpleton; and he is a skeptic into the bargain, and believes in nothing. If you catch him, I shall really and truly believe in your miraculous powers."

"There are harder things than catching him," said the Magian.

"You mean to break his will," said the Syrian, looking down at the ground, "by your eye and the laying on of hands, as you did mine and Triphis's two years ago?"

"That, no doubt, formed the first bond between us," said Serapion. "I now need only your ventriloquism. Philip himself will come half-way to meet me on the main point."

"And what is that?"

"You called him a skeptic, and he does, in fact, pride himself on going further than the old masters of the school. Diligent study has brought him to the point of regarding nothing as certain, but, on the other hand, everything as possible. The last result he can arrive at is the probability--since certainty there is none--that it is impossible ever to know anything, be it what it may. He is always ready to listen with sympathetic attention to the arguments for the reappearance of the souls of the dead in the earthly form they have quitted, to visit and converse with the living. He considers it a fallacy to say that anything is impossible; and my arguments are substantial. Korinna will appear to him. Castor has discovered a girl who is her very image. Your arts will convince him that it is she who speaks to him, for he never heard her voice in life, and all this must rouse his desire to see her again and again. And thus the skeptic will be convinced, in spite of his own doctrine. In this, as in every other case, it is the passionate wish that gives rise to the belief."

"And when you have succeeded in getting him to this point?" asked the Syrian, anxiously.

"Then," replied the Magian, "he will help me, with his triumphant dialectics, to win Caesar over to the same conviction; and then we shall be able to satisfy the emperor's desire to hold intercourse with the dead; and for that I count on your power of making voices proceed from any person present."

He said no more. The little man looked up at him approvingly, and said, modestly: "You are indeed wise, Serapion, and I will do my best to help you. The next thing to be done is to seek representatives of the great Alexander, of Apollonius of Tyana, and of Caesar's brother, father-in-law, and wife."

"Not forgetting Papinian, the noblest of his victims," added the Magian. "Back again already, Castor?"

These words were addressed to a tall and apparently elderly man in a long white robe, who had slipped in without a sound. His demeanor was so grave and dignified that he looked precisely like a Christian priest impressed with the sanctity of his office; but hardly had he got into the room, and greeted the Magian with much unction, than he pulled the white garment off over his head, rubbed from his cheeks the lines which gave him twenty added years, stretched his lithe limbs, and exclaimed with delight:

"I have got her! Old Dorothea will bring her to your theatre!"--and the young fellow's mobile face beamed with the happy radiance of success.

It almost seemed as though fermenting wine flowed in the man's veins instead of blood; for, when he had made his report to the Magian, and had been rewarded with a handful of gold-pieces, he tossed the coins in the air, caught them like flies in the hollow of his hand, and then pitched wheel fashion over head and heels from one end of the room to the other. Then, when he stood on his feet once more, he went on, without a sign of breathlessness:

"Forgive me, my lord! Nature asserts her rights. To play the pious for three whole hours! Eternal gods, that is a hard task, and a man must--"

"I know all about it," Serapion broke in with a smile and a threatening finger. "Now go and stretch your limbs, and then share your lightly earned gains with some pretty flute-player. But I want you again this evening; so, if you feel weak, I shall lock you up."

"Do," said Castor, as earnestly as if he had been promised some pleasure. "What a merry, good-for-nothing set they are!--Dorothea will bring the girl at the appointed hour. Everything is arranged."

Whereupon he danced out of the room, singing a tune.

"An invaluable creature!" said the Syrian, with an admiring glance.

"A better one spoiled," said Serapion. "He has the very highest gifts, but is utterly devoid of conscience to set a limit to his excesses. How should he have one? His father was one of a troupe of Ephesian pantomimists, and his mother a golden-haired Cyprian dancer. But he knows every corner of Alexandria--and then, what a memory! What an actor he would have made! Without even a change of dress, merely by a grimace, he at once becomes an old man, an idiot, or a philosopher."

"And what a genius for intrigue!" Annianus went on enthusiastically. "As soon as he saw the portrait of Korinna he

knew that he had seen her double among the Christians on the other side of the lake. This morning he tracked her out, and now she is caught in the snare. And how sharp of him to make Dorothea bring her here!"

"I told him to do that, and use the name of Bishop Demetrius," observed the Magian. "She would not have come with a stranger, and Dorothea must be known to her in the meetings of their congregation."

CHAPTER IX.

While this conversation was taking place, Melissa and her companion had reached the shore of the lake, the large inland sea which washed the southern side of the city and afforded anchorage for the Nile-boats. The ferry-boat which would convey them to the gardens of Polybius started from the Agathodaemon Canal, an enlarged branch of the Nile, which connected the lake with the royal harbor and the Mediterranean; they had, therefore, to walk some distance along the shore.

The setting sun shot slanting rays on the glittering surface of the glassy waters in which the numberless masts of the Nile-boats were mirrored.

Vessels large and small, with white or gayly-painted lateen sails gleaming in the evening glow, large galleys, light skiffs, and restless, skimming pleasure-boats, were flitting to and fro; and among them, like loaded wagons among chariots and horsemen, the low corn-barges scarcely seemed to move, piled as they were with pyramids of straw and grain as high as a house.

The bustle on the quay was less conspicuous than usual, for all who were free to follow their curiosity had gone into the city. There were, however, many slaves, and Caesar's visit no more affected their day's toil than it did the course of the sun. To-day, as every other day, they had to pack and unload; and though few ships were sailing, numbers were arriving from the south, and throwing out the landing-bridges which connected them with the shore.

The number of pleasure-boats, on the other hand, was greater than usual; for business was suspended, and many who hated the crowd found pleasure in rowing in their own boats. Others had come to see the imperial barge, which had been newly furnished up, and which was splendid enough to attract even the luxurious Alexandrians. Gold and ivory, purple sails, bronze and marble statues at the prow and stern, and in the little shrines on the after-deck, combined in a gorgeous display, made all the more brilliant by the low sun, which added vividness to every hue.

It was pleasant to linger on the strand at this hour. Spreading sycamores and plumed palms cast a pleasant shade; the heat of the day had abated, and a light air, which always blew in from the lake, fanned Melissa's brow. There was no crushing mob, and no dust came up from the well-watered roadway, and yet the girl had lost her cheerful looks, in spite of the success of her bold venture; and Andreas walked by her side, silent and ill-pleased.

She could not understand him; for, as long as she could remember, his grave looks had always brightened at anything that had brought gladness to her or to her mother. Besides, her success with the Roman would be to the advantage of Diodoros, and the freedman was devoted to him. Every now and then she perceived that his eye rested on her with a compassionate expression, and when she inquired whether he were anxious about the sufferer, he gave her some evasive answer, quite unlike his usual decisive speech. This added to her alarm. At last his dissatisfied and unsatisfactory replies vexed the usually patient girl, and she told him so; for she could not suspect how painfully her triumph in her hasty deed jarred on her truth-loving friend. He knew that it was not to the great Galenus, but to the wealthy Serenus Samonicus, that she had spoken; for the physician's noble and thoughtful features were familiar to him from medals, statues, and busts. He had seen Samonicus, too, at Antioch, and held his medical lore, as expressed in verse, very cheap. How worthless would this man's help be! In spite of his promise, Diodoros would after all have to be conveyed to the Serapeum; and yet Andreas could not bear to crush his darling's hopes.

He had hitherto known her as a patient, dutiful child; to-day he had seen with what unhesitating determination she could carry out a purpose; and he feared that, if he told her the truth, she would at once make her way into Caesar's quarters, in defiance of every obstacle, to crave the assistance of the true Galen. He must leave her in error, and yet he could not bear to do so, for there was no art in which he was so inexperienced as that of deceit. How hard it was to find the right answer, when she asked him whether he did not hope everything from the great physician's intervention, or when she inquired what were the works to which Galen owed his chief fame!

As they came near to the landing-stage whence the ferry started, she wanted to know how old he should suppose the Roman leech to be; and again he avoided answering, for Galen was above eighty, and Serenus scarcely seventy.

She looked up at him with large, mournful eyes, saying, "Have I offended you, or is there something you are concealing from me?"

"What could you do to offend me?" he replied; "life is full of sorrows, my child. You must learn to have patience."

"Patience!" echoed Melissa, sadly. "That is the only knowledge I have ever mastered. When my father is more sullen than you are, for a week at a time, I scarcely heed it. But when you look like that, Andreas, it is not without cause, and that is why I am anxious."

"One we love is very sick, child," he said, soothingly; but she was not to be put off so, and exclaimed with conviction:

"No, no, it is not that. We have learned nothing fresh about Diodoro--and you were ready enough to answer me when we came away from the Christian's house. Nothing but good has happened to us since, and yet you look as if the

locusts had come down on your garden."

They had reached a spot on the shore where a ship was being unloaded of its cargo of granite blocks from Syene. Black and brown slaves were dragging them to land. An old blind man was piping a dismal tune on a small reed flute to encourage them in their work, while two men of fairer hue, whose burden had been too heavy for them, had let the end of the column they were carrying sink on the ground, and were being mercilessly flogged by the overseer to make them once more attempt the impossible.

Andreas had watched the scene; a surge of fury had brought the blood to his face, and, stirred by great and genuine emotion, he broke out:

"There--there you see the locusts which destroy my garden--the hail which ruins my crops! It falls on all that bears the name of humanity--on me and you. Happy, girl? None of us can ever be happy till the Kingdom shall arise for which the fullness of the time is come."

"But they dropped the column; I saw them myself," urged Melissa.

"Did you, indeed?" said Andreas. "Well, well, the whip, no doubt, can revive exhausted powers. And that is how you look upon such deeds!--you, who would not crush a worm in the garden, think this is right and just!"

It suddenly struck Melissa that Andreas, too, had once been a slave, and the feeling that she had hurt him grieved her to the heart. She had often heard him speak sternly and gravely, but never in scorn as he did now, and that, too, distressed her; and as she could not think of the right thing to say in atonement for the wrong she had done, she could only look up with tearful entreaty and murmur, "Forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive," he replied in an altered tone. "You have grown up among the unjust who are now in power. How should you see more clearly than they, who all walk in darkness? But if the light should be shown to you by one to whom it hath been revealed, it would not be extinguished again.--Does it not seem a beautiful thing to you to live among none but brethren and sisters, instead of among oppressors and their scourged victims; or is there no place in a woman's soul for the holy wrath that came upon Moses the Hebrew? But who would ever have spoken his great name to you?"

Melissa was about to interrupt his vehement speech, for, in a town where there were so many Jews, alike among the citizens and the slaves, even she had heard that Moses had been their lawgiver; but he prevented her, by adding hastily: "This only, child, I would have you remember--for here is the ferry--the worst ills that man ever inflicts on his fellow-man are the outcome of self-interest; and, of all the good he may do, the best is the result of his achieving self-forgetfulness to secure the happiness and welfare of others."

He said no more, for the ferry-boat was about to put off, and they had to take their places as quickly as possible.

The large flat barge was almost unoccupied; for the multitude still lingered in the town, and more than one seat was empty for the weary girl to rest on. Andreas paced to and fro, for he was restless; but when Melissa beckoned to him he came close to her, and, while he leaned against the little cabin, received her assurance that she now quite understood his desire to see all slaves made free. He, if any one, must know what the feelings of those unhappy creatures were.

"Do I not know!" he exclaimed, with a shake of the head. Then, glancing round at the few persons who were sitting at the other end of the boat, he went on sadly: "To know that, a man must himself have been branded with the marks of his humiliation." He showed her his arm, which was usually hidden by the long sleeve of his tunic, and Melissa exclaimed in sorrowful surprise: "But you were free-born! and none of our slaves bear such a brand. You must have fallen into the hands of Syrian pirates."

He nodded, and added, "I and my father."

"But he," the girl eagerly put in, "was a great man."

"Till Fate overtook him," Andreas said.

Melissa's tearful eyes showed the warm sympathy she felt, as she asked:

"But how could it have happened that you were not ransomed by your relations? Your father was, no doubt, a Roman citizen; and the law--"

"The law forbids that such a one should be sold into slavery," Andreas broke in, "and yet the authorities of Rome left him in misery--left--"

At this, her large, gentle eyes flashed with indignation, and, stirred to the depths of her nature, she exclaimed:

"How was such horrible injustice possible? Oh, let me hear. You know how truly I love you, and no one can hear you."

The wind had risen, the waves splashed noisily against the broad boat, and the song of the slaves, as they plied their oars, would have drowned a stronger voice than the freedman's; so he sat down by her side to do her bidding.

And the tale he had to tell was sad indeed.

His father had been of knightly rank, and in the reign of Marcus Aurelius he had been in the service of Avidius Cassius, his fellow-countryman, the illustrious governor of Asia as 'procurator ab epistolis'. As holding this high post, he found himself involved in the conspiracy of Avidius against the emperor. After the assassination of his patron, who had already been proclaimed emperor by the troops, Andreas's father had been deprived of his offices, his citizenship, and his honors; his possessions were confiscated, and he was exiled to the island of Anaphe. It was to Caesar's clemency that he owed his life.

On their voyage into exile the father and son fell into the hands of Syrian pirates, and were sold in the slave-market of Alexandria to two separate masters. Andreas was bought by a tavern-keeper; the procurator, whose name as a slave was Smaragdus, by the father of Polybius; and this worthy man soon learned to value his servant so highly, that he purchased the son also, and restored him to his father. Thus they were once more united.

Every attempt of the man who had once held so proud a position to get his release, by an act of the senate, proved vain. It was with a broken heart and enfeebled health that he did his duty to his master and to his only child. He pined in torments of melancholy, till Christianity opened new happiness to him, and revived hope brought him back from the very brink of despair; and, even as a slave, he found the highest of all dignities--that, namely, which a Christian derives from his faith.

At this point Melissa interrupted her friend's narrative, exclaiming, as she pointed across the waters:

"There! there! look! In that boat--I am sure that is Alexander! And he is making for the town."

Andreas started up, and after convincing himself that she was indeed right, for the youth himself had recognized his sister, who waved her hand to him, he wrathfully exclaimed:

"Madman!" and by intelligible and commanding signs he ordered the reckless young artist to turn his little skiff, and follow in the wake of the ferry-boat, which was by this time nearing land.

But Alexander signaled a negative, and, after gayly blowing a kiss to Melissa, plied his oars again with as much speed and energy as though he were rowing for a wager. How swiftly and steadily the keel of his little boat cut through the crisply foaming waves on which it rose and fell! The daring youth did not lack strength, that was certain, and the couple who watched him with so much uneasiness soon understood that he was striving to overtake another and larger bark which was at some distance in front of him. It was being pulled by slaves, whose stalwart arms made the pace a good one, and under the linen awning which shaded the middle part of it two women were seated.

The rays of the sun, whose fiery globe was now sinking behind the palm-groves on the western shore, flooded the sky with ruby light, and tinged the white robes of these women, the light canopy over their heads, and the whole face of the lake, with a rosy hue; but neither Andreas nor his companion heeded the glorious farewell of departing day.

Melissa pointed out to her friend the strangeness of her brother's attire, and the hood which, in the evening light, seemed to be bordered with gold. He had on, in fact, a Gallic mantle, such as that which had gained Caesar the nickname of Caracalla, and there was in this disguise something to reassure them; for, if Alexander pulled the hood low enough, it would hide the greater part of his face, and make it difficult to recognize him. Whence he had procured this garment was not hard to divine, for imperial servants had distributed them in numbers among the crowd. Caesar was anxious to bring them into fashion, and it might safely be expected that those Alexandrians who had held out their hands to accept them would appear in them on the morrow, as no order required that they should be worn. Alexander could not do better than wear one, if only by such means he could escape Zminis and his men.

But who were the women he was pursuing? Before Melissa could ask the question, Andreas pointed to the foremost boat, and said:

"Those are Christian women, and the bark they are in belongs to Zeno, the brother of Seleukus and of the high-priest of Serapis. That is his landing-creek. He lives with his family, and those of the faith to whom he affords refuge, in the long, white house you can just see there among the palm-trees. Those vineyards, too, are his. If I am not mistaken, one of the ladies in that boat is his daughter, Agatha."

"But what can Alexander want of two Christian women?" asked Melissa.

Andreas fired up, and a vein started on his high forehead as he retorted angrily:

"What should he not want! He and those who are like him--the blind--think nothing so precious as what satisfies the eye.--There! the brightness has vanished which turned the lake and the shore to gold. Such is beauty!--a vain show, which only glitters to disappear, and is to fools, nevertheless, the supreme object of adoration!"

"Then, is Zeno's daughter fair?" asked the girl.

"She is said to be," replied the other; and after a moment's pause he added: "Yes, Agatha is a rarely accomplished woman; but I know better things of her than that. It stirs my gall to think that her sacred purity can arouse unholy thoughts. I love your brother dearly; for your mother's sake I can forgive him much; but if he tries to ensnare Agatha--"

"Have no fear," said Melissa, interrupting his wrathful speech. "Alexander is indeed a butterfly, fluttering from flower to flower, and apt to be frivolous over serious matters, but at this moment he is enslaved by a vision--that of a dead

girl; and only last night, I believe, he pledged himself to Ino, the pretty daughter of our neighbor Skopas. Beauty is to him the highest thing in life; and how should it be otherwise, for he is an artist! For the sake of beauty he defies every danger. If you saw rightly, he is no doubt in pursuit of Zeno's daughter, but most likely not to pay court to her, but for some other season."

"No praiseworthy reason, you may be sure," said Andreas. "Here we are. Now take your kerchief out of the basket. It is damp and cool after sundown, especially over there where I am draining the bog. The land we are reclaiming by this means will bring your future husband a fine income some day."

They disembarked, and ere long reached the little haven belonging to Polybius's estate. There were boats moored there, large and small, and Andreas hailed the man who kept them, and who sat eating his supper, to ask him whether he had unmoored the green skiff for Alexander.

At this the old fellow laughed, and said: "The jolly painter and his friend, the sculptor, met Zeno's daughter just as she was getting into her boat with Mariamne. Down they came, running as if they had gone mad. The girl must have turned their heads. My lord Alexander would have it that he had seen the spirit of one who was dead, and he would gladly give his life to see her once again."

It was now dark, or it would have alarmed Melissa to see the ominous gravity with which Andreas listened to this tale; but she herself was sufficiently startled, for she knew her brother well, and that no risk, however great, would stop him if his artistic fancy were fired. He, whom she had believed to be in safety, had gone straight into the hands of the pursuers; and with him caution and reflection were flown to the winds when passion held sway. She had hoped that her friend Ino had at last captured the flutterer, and that he would begin to live a settled life with her, as master of a house of his own; and now, for a pretty face, he had thrown everything to the winds, even the duty of self-preservation. Andreas had good reason to be angry, and he spoke no more till they reached their destination, a country house of handsome and important aspect.

No father could have received his future daughter more heartily than did old Polybius. The fiend gout racked his big toes, stabbing, burning, and nipping them. The slightest movement was torture, and yet he held out his arms to her for a loving embrace, and, though it made him shut his eyes and groan, he drew her pretty head down, and kissed her cheeks and hair. He was now a heavy man, of almost shapeless stoutness, but in his youth he must have resembled his handsome son. Silvery locks flowed round his well-formed head, but a habit of drinking wine, which, in spite of the gout, he could not bring himself to give up, had flushed his naturally good features, and tinged them of a coppery red, which contrasted strangely with his snowy hair and beard. But a kind heart, benevolence, and a love of good living, beamed in every look.

His heavy limbs moved but slowly, and if ever full lips deserved to be called sensual, they were those of this man, who was a priest of two divinities.

How well his household understood the art of catering for his love of high living, was evident in the meal which was served soon after Melissa's arrival, and to eat which the old man made her recline on the couch by his side.

Andreas also shared the supper; and not the attendant slaves only, but Dame Praxilla, the sister of their host, whose house she managed, paid him particular honor. She was a widow and childless, and, even during the lifetime of Diodoros's mother, she had given her heart, no longer young, to the freedman, without finding her love returned or even observed. For his sake she would have become a Christian, though she regarded herself as so indispensable to her brother that she had rarely left him to hold intercourse with other Christians. Nor did Andreas encourage her; he doubted her vocation. Whatever happened in the house, the excitable woman made it her own concern; and, although she had known Melissa from childhood, and was as fond of her as she could be of the child of "strangers," the news that Diodoros was to marry the gem-cutter's daughter was displeasing to her. A second woman in the house might interfere with her supremacy; and, as an excuse for her annoyance, she had represented to her brother that Diodoros might look higher for a wife. Agatha, the beautiful daughter of their rich Christian neighbor Zeno, was the right bride for the boy.

But Polybius had rated her sharply, declaring that he hoped for no sweeter daughter than Melissa, who was quite pretty enough, and in whose veins as pure Macedonian blood flowed as in his own. His son need look for no wealth, he added with a laugh, since he would some day inherit his aunt's.

In fact, Praxilla owned a fine fortune, increasing daily under the care of Andreas, and she replied:

"If the young couple behave so well that I do not rather choose to bestow my pittance on worthier heirs."

But the implied threat had not disturbed Polybius, for he knew his sister's ways. The shriveled, irritable old lady often spoke words hard to be forgiven, but she had not a bad heart; and when she learned that Diodoros was in danger, she felt only how much she loved him, and her proposal to go to the town next morning to nurse him was sincerely meant.

But when her brother retorted: "Go, by all means; I do not prevent you!" she started up, exclaiming:

"And you, and your aches and pains! How you get on when once my back is turned, we know by experience. My

presence alone is medicine to you." "And a bitter dose it is very often," replied the old man, with a laugh; but Praxilla promptly retorted: "Like all effectual remedies. There is your ingratitude again!"

The last words were accompanied by a whimper, so Polybius, who could not bear to see any but cheerful faces, raised his cup and drank her health with kindly words. Then refilling the tankard, he poured a libation, and was about to empty it to Melissa's health, but Praxilla's lean frame was standing by his side as quickly as though a serpent had stung her. She was drawing a stick of asparagus between her teeth, but she hastily dropped it on her plate, and with both hands snatched the cup from her brother, exclaiming:

"It is the fourth; and if I allow you to empty it, you are a dead man!"

"Death is not so swift," replied Polybius, signing to a slave to bring him back the cup. But he drank only half of it, and, at his sister's pathetic entreaties, had more water mixed with the wine. And while Praxilla carefully prepared his crayfish--for gout had crippled even his fingers--he beckoned to his white-haired body-slave, and with a cunning smile made him add more wine to the washy fluid. He fixed his twinkling glance on Melissa, to invite her sympathy in his successful trick, but her appearance startled him. How pale the child was--how dejected and weary her sweet face, with the usually bright, expressive eyes!

It needed not the intuition of his kind heart to tell him that she was completely exhausted, and he desired his sister to take her away to bed. But Melissa was already sound asleep, and Praxilla would not wake her. She gently placed a pillow under her head, laid her feet easily on the couch, and covered them with a wrap. Polybius feasted his eyes on the fair sleeper; and, indeed, nothing purer and more tender can be imagined than the girl's face as she lay in dreamless slumber.

The conversation was now carried on in subdued tones, so as not to disturb her, and Andreas completed the history of the day by informing them that Melissa had, by mistake, engaged the assistance not of the great Galen but of another Roman practiced in the healing art, but of less illustrious proficiency. He must, therefore, still have Diodoros conveyed to the Serapeum, and this could be done very easily in the morning, before the populace should again besiege the temple. He must forthwith go back to make the necessary arrangements. Praxilla whispered tenderly:

"Devoted man that you are, you do not even get your night's rest." But Andreas turned away to discuss some further matters with Polybius; and, in spite of pain, the old man could express his views clearly and intelligently.

At last he took his leave; and now Praxilla had to direct the slaves who were to carry her brother to bed. She carefully arranged the cushions on his couch, and gave him his medicine and night-draught. Then she returned to Melissa, and the sight of the sleeping girl touched her heart. She stood gazing at her for some time in silence, and then bent over her to wake her with a kiss. She had at last made up her mind to regard the gem-cutter's daughter as her niece, so, determined to treat her as a child of her own, she called Melissa by name.

This awoke the sleeper, and when she had realized that she was still in Polybius's eating-room, she asked for Andreas.

"He has gone back to the town, my child," replied Praxilla. "He was anxious about your betrothed."

"Is he worse, then?" asked Melissa, in alarm. "No, no," said the widow, soothingly. "It is only--I assure you we have heard nothing new--"

"But what then?" Melissa inquired. "The great Galen is to see him early to-morrow." Praxilla tried to divert her thoughts. But as the girl would take no answer to her declaration that Galen himself had promised to see Diodoros, Praxilla, who was little used to self-command, and who was offended by her persistency, betrayed the fact that Melissa had spoken to the wrong man, and that Andreas was gone to remove Diodoros to the Serapeum.

At this, Melissa suddenly understood why Andreas had not rejoiced with her, and at the same time she said to herself that her lover must on no account be exposed to so great a danger without her presence. She must lend her aid in transporting him to the Serapeum; and when she firmly expressed her views to the widow, Praxilla was shocked, and sincerely repented of having lost her self-control. It was far too late, and when the housekeeper came into the room and gladly volunteered to accompany Melissa to the town, Praxilla threatened to rouse her brother, that he might insist on their remaining at home; but at last she relented, for the girl, she saw, would take her own way against any opposition.

The housekeeper had been nurse to Diodoros, and had been longing to help in tending him. When she left the house with Melissa, her eyes were moist with tears of joy and thankfulness.

CHAPTER X.

The Nubian boat-keeper and his boy had soon ferried them across the lake. Melissa and her companion then turned off from the shore into a street which must surely lead into that where the Christians dwelt. Still, even as she went on, she began to be doubtful whether she had taken the right one; and when she came out by a small temple, which she certainly had not seen before, she knew not which way to go, for the streets here crossed each other in a perfect labyrinth, and she was soon obliged to confess to her companion that she had lost her road. In the morning she had trusted herself to Andreas's knowledge of the town, and while talking eagerly to him had paid no heed to anything else.

What was to be done? She stood meditating; and then she remembered the spot where she had seen Caesar drive past. This she thought she could certainly recognize, and from thence make her way to the street she sought.

It was quite easy to find the street of Hermes, for the noise of the revelers, who were to-night even more numerous than usual in this busy highway, could be heard at a considerable distance. They must follow its guidance till they should come to the little temple of Aphrodite; and that was a bold enterprise, for the crowd of men who haunted the spot at this hour might possibly hinder and annoy two unescorted women. However, the elder woman was sturdy and determined, and sixty years of age; while Melissa feared nothing, and thought herself sufficiently protected when she had arranged her kerchief so as to hide her face from curious eyes.

As she made her way to the wide street with a throbbing heart, but quite resolved to find the house she sought at any cost, she heard men's voices on a side street; however, she paid no heed to them, for how, indeed, could she guess that what they were saying could nearly concern her?

The conversation was between a woman and a man in the white robe of a Christian priest. They were standing at the door of a large house; and close to the wall, in the shadow of the porch of a building opposite, stood a youth, his hair covered by the hood of a long caracalla, listening with breathless attention.

This was Alexander.

He had been standing here for some time already, waiting for the return of Agatha, the fair Christian whom he had followed across the lake, and who had vanished into that house under the guidance of a deaconess. The door had not long closed on them when several men had also been admitted, whom he could not distinguish in the darkness, for the street was narrow and the moon still low.

It was sheer folly--and yet he fancied that one of them was his father, for his deep, loud voice was precisely like that of Heron; and, what was even more strange, that of the man who answered him seemed to proceed from his brother Philip. But, at such an hour, he could more easily have supposed them to be on the top of Mount Etna than in this quarter of the town.

The impatient painter was very tired of waiting, so, seating himself on a feeding-manger for asses which stood in front of the adjoining house, he presently fell asleep. He was tired from the sleepless night he had last spent, and when he opened his eyes once more and looked down the street into which the moon was now shining, he did not know how long he had been slumbering. Perhaps the damsel he wanted to see had already left the house, and he must see her again, cost him what it might; for she was so amazingly like the dead Korinna whom he had painted, that he could not shake off the notion that perhaps--for, after Serapion's discourse, it seemed quite likely--perhaps he had seen the spirit of the departed girl.

He had had some difficulty in persuading Glaukias, who had come across the lake with him, to allow him to follow up the fair vision unaccompanied; and his entreaties and prohibitions would probably alike have proved vain, but that Glaukias held taken it into his head to show his latest work, which a slave was carrying, to some friends over a jar of wine. It was a caricature of Caesar, whom he had seen at the Kanopic Gate, modeled while he was in the house of Polybius, with a few happy touches.

When Alexander woke, he crept into the shadow of the porch opposite to the house into which Korinna's double had disappeared, and he now had no lack of entertainment. A man came out of the tall white house and looked into the street, and the moonlight enabled the artist to see all that took place.

The tall youth who had come to the door wore the robe of a Christian priest. Still, it struck Alexander that he was too young for such a calling; and he soon detected that he was certainly not what he seemed, but that there was some treachery in the wind; for no sooner had a woman joined him, whom he evidently expected, than she blamed him for his want of caution. To this he laughingly replied that he was too hot in his disguise, and, pulling out a false beard, he showed it to the woman, who was dressed as a Christian deaconess, exclaiming, "That will do it!"

He went on to tell her, in a quick, low tone, much of which escaped the listener, that Serapion had dared much that day, and that the performance had ended badly, for that the Christian girl he had so cleverly persuaded to come from the other side of the lake had taken fright, and had insisted on knowing where she was.

At this the deaconess seemed somewhat dismayed, and poured out endless questions in a low voice. He, however,

cast all the blame on the philosopher, whom his master had got hold of the day before. Then, as the woman desired more particular information, he briefly told her the story.

The fair Agatha, he said, after being invited by him, at noon, in the name of Bishop Demetrius, to a meeting that evening, had reached the ferryhouse at about sunset. She had been told that many things of immediate importance were to be announced to the maidens of the Christian congregation; more especially, a discussion was to be held as to the order issued by the prefect for their taking part in a procession in Caesar's honor when he should quit Alexandria. Old Dorothea had met the girl at the ferry-house, and had brought her hither. The woman who had attended her across the lake was certainly none of the wisest, for Dorothea had easily persuaded her to remain in her house during the meeting.

"Once there," the sham priest went on, "the girl's waiting-woman must have had some dose in wine or sirup and water, for she is fast asleep at this moment in the ferry-house, or wherever Dorothea took her, as she could not be allowed to wake under Dorothea's roof.

"Thus every one was out of the way who could make any mischief; and when the Syrian, dressed as a Christian priest, had explained to Agatha what the patriarch required of his maidens, I led her on to the stage, on which the spectators were to see the ghosts through a small opening.

"The Syrian had desired her to put up so many and such prayers for the congregation in its peril from Caesar; and, by Aphrodite! she was as docile as a lamb. She fell on her knees, and with hands and eyes to heaven entreated her god. But hark!

"Did you hear anything? Something is stirring within. Well, I have nearly done.

"The philosopher was to see her thus, and when he had gazed at her as if bewitched for some little time through the small window, he suddenly cried out, 'Korinna! Korinna!' and all sorts of nonsense, although Serapion had strictly forbidden him to utter a sound. Of course, the curtain instantly dropped. But Agatha had heard him call, and in a great fright she wanted to know where she was, and asked to go home.--Serapion was really grand. You should have heard how the foxsoothed the dove, and at the same time whispered to me what you now are to do!"

"I?" said the woman, with some annoyance. "If he thinks that I will risk my good name in the congregation for the sake of his long beard--"

"Just be quiet," said Castor, in a pacifying tone. "The master's beard has nothing to do with the case, but something much more substantial. Ten solidi, full weight, shall be yours if you will take Agatha home with you, or safe across the lake again, and pretend to have saved her from mystics or magicians who have decoyed her to some evil end. She knows you as a Christian deaconess, and will go with you at once. If you restore her to her father, he is rich, and will not send you empty away. Tell him that you heard her voice out in the street, and with the help of a worthy old man--that am I--rescued her from any peril you may invent. If he asks you where the heroic deed was done, name any house you please, only not this. Your best plan is to lay it all on the shoulders of Hananja, the thaumaturgist; we have owed him a grudge this many a day. However, I was not to teach you any lesson, for your wits are at least a match for ours."

"Flattery will not win me," the woman broke in. "Where is the gold?"

Castor handed her the solidi wrapped in a papyrus leaf, and then added:

"Stay one moment! I must remove this white robe. The girl must on no account recognize me. I am going to force my way into the house with you--you found me in the street, an old man, a total stranger, and appealed to me for help. No harm is done, nothing lost but Dorothea's credit among the Christians. We may have to get her safe out of the town. I must escort you and Agatha, for nothing unpleasant must happen to her on the way home. The master is imperative on that point, and so much beauty will certainly not get through the crowded streets without remark. And for my part, I, of course, am thinking of yours."

Here Castor laughed aloud, and rolled the white robe into a bundle. Alexander peeped out of his nook and shook his head in amazement, for the supple youth, who a moment before stood stalwart and upright, had assumed, with a bent attitude and a long, white beard hastily placed on his chin, the aspect of a weary, poor old man.

"I will give you a lesson!" muttered Alexander to himself, and he shook his fist at the intriguing rascal as he vanished into the house with the false deaconess.

So Serapion was a cheat! And the supposed ghost of Korinna was a Christian maiden who was being shamefully deluded. But he would keep watch over her, and bring that laughing villain to account. The first aim of his life was not to lose sight of Agatha. His whole happiness, he felt, depended on that. The gods had, as it were, raised her from the dead for him; in her, everything that he most admired was united; she was the embodiment of everything he cared for and prized; every feeling sank into the shade beside the one desire to make her his. She was, at this moment, the universe to him; and all else--the pursuers at his heels, his father, his sister, pretty Ino, to whom he had vowed his love only the night before--had ceased to exist for him.

Possessed wholly by the thought of her, he never took his eyes off the door opposite; and when at last the maiden came out with the deaconess, whom she called Elizabeth, and with Castor, Alexander followed the ill-matched trio; and

he had to be brisk, for at first they hurried through the streets as though they feared to be overtaken. He carefully kept close to the houses on the shady side, and when they presently stopped, so did he.

The deaconess inquired of Agatha whether she would be taken. But when the girl replied that she must go back to her own boat, waiting at the ferry, and return home, the deaconess represented that this was impossible by reason of the drunken seamen, who at this hour made the strand unsafe; she could only advise Agatha to come home with her and remain till daybreak. "This kind old man," and she pointed to Castor, "would no doubt go and tell the oarsmen that they were not to be uneasy at her absence."

The two women stood talking in the broad moonlight, and the pale beams fell on Agatha's beautiful unveiled features, giving them that unearthly, corpse-like whiteness which Alexander had tried to represent in his picture of Korinna. Again the thought that she was risen from the dead sent a chill through his blood--that she would make him follow her, perhaps to the tomb she had quitted. He cared not! If his senses had cheated him--if,--in spite of what he had heard, that pale, unspeakably lovely image were indeed a lamia, a goblin shape from Hecate's dark abode, yet would he follow wherever she might lead, as to a festival, only to be with her.

Agatha thanked the deaconess, and as she spoke raised her eyes to the woman's face; and they were two large, dark orbs sparkling through tears, and as unlike as possible to the eyes which a ghost might snatch from their sockets to fling like balls or stones in the face of a pursuer. Oh, if only those eyes might look into his own as warmly and gratefully as they now gazed into the face of that treacherous woman!

He had a hard struggle with himself to subdue the impulse to put an end, now and here, to the fiendish tricks which guile was playing on the purest innocence; but the street was deserted, and if he had to struggle with the bent old man, whose powerful and supple limbs he had already seen, and if the villain should plant a knife in his ribs--for as a wrestler he felt himself his match--Agatha would be bereft of a protector and wholly in the deceiver's power.

This, at any rate, must not be, and he even controlled himself when he heard the music of her words, and saw her grasp the hand of the pretended graybeard, who, with an assumption of paternal kindness, dared to kiss her hair, and then helped her to draw her kerchief over her face. The street of Hermes, he explained, where the deaconess dwelt, was full of people, and the divine gift of beauty, wherewith Heaven had blessed her, would attract the baser kind, as a flame attracts bats and moths. The hypocrite's voice was full of unction; the deaconess spoke with pious gravity. He could see that she was a woman of middle age, and he asked himself with rising fury whether the gods were not guilty who had lent mean wretches like these such winning graces as to enable them to lay traps for the guileless? For, in fact, the woman's face was well-favored, gentle, and attractive.

Alexander never took his gaze off Agatha, and his artist-eye reveled in her elastic step and her slender, shapely form. Above all, he was bewitched by the way her head was set, with a little forward bend; and as long as the way led through the silent lanes he was never weary of comparing her with lovely images--with a poppy, whose flower bows the stem; with a willow, whose head leans over the water; with the huntress Artemis, who, chasing in the moonlight, bends to mark the game.

Thus, unwearied and unseen, he had followed them as far as the street of Hermes; there his task became more difficult, for the road was swarming with people. The older men were walking in groups of five or six, going to or coming from some evening assembly, and talking as they walked; or priests and temple servants on their way home, tired from night services and ceremonies; but the greater number were young men and boys, some wearing wreaths, and all more or less intoxicated, with street-wench on the lookout for a companion or surrounded by suitors, and trying to attract a favorite or dismiss the less fortunate.

The flare of the torches which illuminated the street was mirrored in eager eyes glowing with wine and passion, and in the glittering weapons of the Roman soldiery. Most of these were attached to Caesar's train. As in the field, so in the peaceful town, they aimed at conquest, and many a Greek sulkily resigned his claims to some fickle beauty in favor of an irresistible tribune or centurion. Where the courteous Alexandrians made way, they pushed in or thrust aside whatever came in their path, securely confident of being Caesar's favorite protectors, and unassailable while he was near. Their coarse, barbaric tones shook the air, and reduced the Greeks to silence; for, even in his drunken and most reckless moods, the Greek never lost his subtle refinement. The warriors rarely met a friendly glance from the eye of a native; still, the gold of these lavish revelers was as welcome to the women as that of a fellow-countryman.

The blaze of light shone, too, on many a fray, such as flared up in an instant whenever Greek and Roman came into contact. The lictors and townwatch could generally succeed in parting the combatants, for the orders of the authorities were that they should in every case side with the Romans.

The shouts and squabbling of men, the laughing and singing of women, mingled with the word of command. Flutes and lyres, cymbals and drums, were heard from the trellised tavern arbors and cook-shops along the way; and from the little temple to Aphrodite, where Melissa had promised to meet the Roman physician next morning, came the laughter and song of unbridled lovers. As a rule, the Kanopic Way was the busiest and gayest street in the town; but on this night the street of Hermes had been the most popular, for it led to the Serapeum, where Caesar was lodged; and from the temple poured a tide of pleasure-seekers, mingling with the flood of humanity which streamed on to catch a glimpse

of imperial splendor, or to look at the troops encamped on the space in front of the Serapeum. The whole street was like a crowded fair; and Alexander had several times to follow Agatha and her escort out into the roadway, quitting the shelter of the arcade, to escape a party of rioters or the impertinent addresses of strangers.

The sham old man, however, was so clever at making way for the damsel, whose face and form were effectually screened by her kerchief from the passers-by, that Alexander had no opportunity for offering her his aid, or proving his devotion by some gallant act. That it was his duty to save her from the perils of spending a whole night under the protection of this venal deceiver and her worthless colleague, he had long since convinced himself; still, the fear of bringing her into a more painful position by attracting the attention of the crowd if he were to attack her escort, kept him back.

They had now stopped again under the colonnade, on the left-hand side of the road. Castor had taken the girl's hand, and, as he bade her good-night, promised, in emphatic tones, to be with her again very early and escort her to the lake. Agatha thanked him warmly. At this a storm of rage blew Alexander's self-command to the four winds, and, before he knew what he was doing; he stood between the rascal and the Christian damsel, snatched their hands asunder, gripping Castor's wrist with his strong right hand, while he held Agatha's firmly in his left, and exclaimed:

"You are being foully tricked, fair maid; the woman, even, is deceiving you. This fellow is a base villain!"

And, releasing the arm which Castor was desperately but vainly trying to free from his clutch, he snatched off the false beard.

Agatha, who had also been endeavoring to escape from his grasp, gave a shriek of terror and indignation. The unmasked rogue, with a swift movement, snatched the hood of the caracalla off Alexander's head, flew at his throat with the fury and agility of a panther, and with much presence of mind called for help. And Castor was strong too while Alexander tried to keep him off with his right hand, holding on to Agatha with his left, the shouts of the deaconess and her accomplice soon collected a crowd. They were instantly surrounded by an inquisitive mob, laughing or scolding the combatants, and urging them to fight or beseeching them to separate. But just as the artist had succeeded in twisting his opponent's wrist so effectually as to bring him to his knees, a loud voice of malignant triumph, just behind him, exclaimed:

"Now we have snared our scoffer! The fox should not stop to kill the hare when the hunters are at his heels!"

"Zminis!" gasped Alexander. He understood in a flash that life and liberty were at stake.

Like a stag hemmed in by dogs, he turned his head to this side and that, seeking a way of escape; and when he looked again where his antagonist had stood, the spot was clear; the nimble rascal had taken to his heels and vanished among the throng. But a pair of eyes met the painter's gaze, which at once restored him to self-possession, and reminded him that he must collect his wits and presence of mind. They were those of his sister Melissa, who, as she made her way onward with her companion, had recognized her brother's voice. In spite of the old woman's earnest advice not to mix in the crowd, she had pushed her way through, and, as the men-at-arms dispersed the mob, she came nearer to her favorite but too reckless brother.

Alexander still held Agatha's hand. The poor girl herself, trembling with terror, did not know what had befallen her. Her venerable escort was a young man--a liar. What was she to think of the deaconess, who was his confederate; what of this handsome youth who had unmasked the deceiver, and saved her perhaps from some fearful fate?

As in a thunder-storm flash follows flash, so, in this dreadful night, one horror had followed another, to bewilder the brain of a maiden who had always lived a quiet life among good and quiet men and women. And now the guardians of the peace had laid hands on the man who had so bravely taken her part, and whose bright eyes had looked into her own with such truth and devotion. He was to be dragged to prison; so he, too, no doubt, was a criminal. At this thought she tried to release her hand, but he would not let it go; for the deaconess had come close to Agatha, and, in a tone of sanctimonious wrath, desired her to quit this scene.

What was she to do? Terrified and undecided, with deceit on one hand and on the other peril and perhaps disaster, she looked first at Elizabeth and then at Alexander, who, in spite of the threats of the man-at-arms, gazed in turns at her and at the spot where his sister had stood.

The lictors who were keeping off the mob had stopped Melissa too; but while Alexander had been gazing into Agatha's imploring eyes, feeling as though all his blood had rushed to his heart and face, Melissa had contrived to creep up close to him. And again the sight of her gave him the composure he so greatly needed. He knew, indeed, that the hand which still held Agatha's would in a moment be fettered, for Zminis had ordered his slaves to bring fresh ropes and chains, since they had already found use for those they had first brought out. It was to this circumstance alone that he owed it that he still was free. And, above all things, he must warn Agatha against the deaconess, who would fain persuade her to go with her.

It struck his alert wit that Agatha would trust his sister rather than himself, whom the Egyptian had several times abused as a criminal; and seeing the old woman of Polybius's household making her way up to Melissa, out of breath, indeed, and with disordered hair, he felt light dawn on his soul, for this worthy woman was a fresh instrument to his

hand. She must know Agatha well, if the girl were indeed the daughter of Zeno.

He lost not an instant. With swift decision, while Zminis and his men were disputing as to whither they should conduct the traitor as soon as the fetters were brought, he released the maiden's hand, placing it in Melissa's, and exclaiming:

"This is my sister, the betrothed of Diodoros, Polybius's son--your neighbor, if you are the daughter of Zeno. She will take care of you." Agatha had at once recognized the old nurse, and when she confirmed Alexander's statement, and the Christian looked in Melissa's face, she saw beyond the possibility of doubt an innocent woman, whose heart she might fully trust.

She threw her arm round Melissa, as if to lean on her, and the deaconess turned away with well-curbed wrath and vanished into an open door.

All this had occupied but a very few minutes; and when Alexander saw the two beings he most loved in each other's embrace, and Agatha rescued from the deceiver and in safe keeping, he drew a deep breath, saying to his sister, as if relieved from a heavy burden:

"Her name is Agatha, and to her, the image of the dead Korinna, my life henceforth is given. Tell her this, Melissa."

His impassioned glance sought that of the Christian; and when she returned it, blushing, but with grateful candor, his mirthful features beamed with the old reckless jollity, and he glanced again at the crowd about him.

What did he see there? Melissa observed that his whole face was suddenly lighted up; and when Zminis signed to the man who was making his way to the spot holding up the rope, Alexander began to sing the first words of a familiar song. In an instant it was taken up by several voices, and then, as if from an echo, by the whole populace.

It was the chant by which the lads in the Gymnasium of Timagetes were wont to call on each other for help when they had a fray with those of the Gymnasium of the Dioscuri, with whom they had a chronic feud. Alexander had caught sight of his friends Jason and Pappus, of the sculptor Glaukias, and of several other fellow-artists; they understood the appeal, and, before the night-watch could use the rope on their captive, the troop of young men had forced their way through the circle of armed men under the leadership of Glaukias, had surrounded Alexander, and run off with him in their midst, singing and shouting.

"Follow him! Catch him! Stop him!--living or dead, bring him back! A price is on his head--a splendid price to any one who will take him!" cried the Egyptian, foaming with rage and setting the example. But the youth of the town, many of whom knew the artist, and who were at all times ready to spoil sport for the sycophants and spies, crowded up between the fugitive and his pursuers and barred the way.

The lictors and their underlings did indeed, at last, get through the solid wall of shouting and scolding men and women; but by that time the troop of artists had disappeared down a side street.

CHAPTER XI.

Melissa, too, would probably have found herself a prisoner, but that Zminis, seeing himself balked of a triumph, and beside himself with rage, rushed after the fugitive with the rest. She had no further occasion to seek the house where her lover was lying, for Agatha knew it well. Its owner, Proterius, was an illustrious member of the Christian community, and she had often been to see him with her father.

On their way the girls confided to each other what had brought them out into the streets at so unusual an hour; and when Melissa spoke of her companion's extraordinary resemblance to the dead daughter of Seleukus--which, no doubt, had been Alexander's inducement to follow her--Agatha told her that she had constantly been mistaken for her uncle's daughter, so early lost. She herself had not seen her cousin for some few years, for Seleukus had quarreled with his brother's family when they had embraced Christianity. The third brother, Timotheus, the high-priest of Serapis, had proved more placable, and his wife Euryale was of all women the one she loved best. And presently it appeared that Agatha, too, had lost her mother, and this drew the girls so closely together, that they clasped hands and walked on like sisters or old and dear friends.

They were not kept long waiting outside the house of Proterius, for Andreas was in the vestibule arranging the litter for the conveyance of Diodoros, with the willing help of Ptolemaeus. The freedman was indeed amazed when he heard Melissa's voice, and blamed her for this fresh adventure. However, he was glad to see her, for, although it seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility, he had already fancied more than once, as steps had approached and passed, that she must surely be coming to lend him a helping hand.

It was easy to hear in his tone of voice that her bold venture was at least as praiseworthy as it was blameworthy in his eyes, and the grave man was as cheerful as he commonly was only when among his flowers. Never before had Melissa heard a word of compliment from his lips, but as Agatha stood with one arm round Melissa's shoulders, he said to the physician, as he pointed to the pair, "Like two roses on one stem!"

He had good reason, indeed, to be content. Diodoros was no worse, and Galen was certainly expected to visit the sick in the Serapeum. He regarded it, too, as a dispensation from Heaven that Agatha and Melissa should have happened to meet, and Alexander's happy escape had taken a weight from his mind. He willingly acceded to Melissa's request that he would take her and Agatha to see the sick man; but he granted them only a short time to gaze at the sleeper, and then requested the deaconess to find a room for the two damsels, who needed rest.

The worthy woman rose at once; but Melissa urgently entreated to be allowed to remain by her lover's side, and glanced anxiously at the keys in the matron's hand.

At this Andreas whispered to her: "You are afraid lest I should prevent your coming with us? But it is not so; and, indeed, of what use would it be? You made your way past the guards to the senator's coach; you came across the lake, and through the darkness and the drunken rabble in the streets; if I were to lock you in, you would be brave enough to jump out of the window. No, no; I confess you have conquered my objections--indeed, if you should now refuse your assistance, I should be obliged to crave it. But Ptolemaeus wishes to leave Diodoros quite undisturbed till daybreak. He is now gone to the Serapeum to find a good place for him. You, too, need rest, and you shall be waked in good time. Go, now, with Dame Katharine.--As to your relations," he added, to Agatha, "do not be uneasy. A boy is already on his way to your father, to tell him where you are for the night."

The deaconess led the two girls to a room where there was a large double bed. Here the new friends stretched their weary limbs; but, tired as they were, neither of them seemed disposed to sleep; they were so happy to have found each other, and had so much to ask and tell each other! As soon as Katharine had lighted a three-branched lamp she left them to themselves, and then their talk began.

Agatha, clinging to her new friend, laid her head on Melissa's shoulder; and as Melissa looked on the beautiful face, and remembered the fond passion which her heedless brother had conceived for its twin image, or as now and again the Christian girl's loving words appealed to her more especially, she stroked the long, flowing tresses of her brown hair.

It needed, indeed, no more than a common feeling, an experience gone through together, an hour of confidential solitude, to join the hearts of the two maidens; and as they awaited the day, shoulder to shoulder in uninterrupted chat, they felt as though they had shared every joy and sorrow from the cradle. Agatha's weaker nature found a support in the calm strength of will which was evident in many things Melissa said; and when the Christian opened her tender and pitying heart to Melissa with touching candor, it was like a view into a new but most inviting world.

Agatha's extreme beauty, too, struck the artist's daughter as something divine, and her eye often rested admiringly on her new friend's pure and regular features.

When Agatha inquired of her about her father, Melissa briefly replied, that since her mother's death he was often moody and rough, but that he had a good, kind heart. The Christian girl, on the contrary, spoke with enthusiasm of the warm, human loving-kindness of the man to whom she owed her being; and the picture she drew of her home life was

so fair, that the little heathen could hardly believe in its truth. Her father, Agatha said, lived in constant warfare with the misery and suffering of his fellow-creatures, and he was, in fact, able to make those about him happy and prosperous. The poorest were dearest to his loving heart, and on his estate across the lake he had collected none but the sick and wretched. The care of the children was left to her, and the little ones clung to her as if she were their mother. She had neither brother nor sister.--And so the conversation turned on Alexander, of whom Agatha could never hear enough.

And how proud was Melissa to speak of the bright young artist, who till now had been the sun of her joyless life! There was much that was good to be said about him: for the best masters rated his talent highly in spite of his youth; his comrades were faithful; and none knew so well as he how to cheer his father's dark moods. Then, there were many amiable and generous traits of which she had been told, or had herself known. With his very first savings, he had had the Genius with a reversed torch cast in bronze to grace his mother's grave, and give his father pleasure. Once he had been brought home half dead after saving a woman and child from drowning, and vainly endeavoring to rescue another child. He might be wild and reckless, but he had always been faithful to his art and to his love for his family.

Agatha's eyes opened widely when Melissa told her anything good about her brother, and she clung in terror to her new friend as she heard of her excited orgy with her lover.

Scared as though some imminent horror threatened herself, she clasped Melissa's hand as she listened to the tale of the dangers Alexander had so narrowly escaped.

Such things had never before reached the ears of the girl in her retired Christian home beyond the lake; they sounded to her as the tales of some bold seafarer to the peaceful husbandman on whose shores the storm has wrecked him.

"And do you know," she exclaimed, "all this seems delightful to me, though my father, I am sure, would judge it hardly! When your brother risks his life, it is always for others, and that is right--that is the highest life. I think of him as an angel with a flaming sword. But you do not know our sacred scriptures."

Then Melissa would hear more of this book, of which Andreas had frequently spoken; but there was a knock at the door, and she sprang out of bed.

Agatha did the same; and when a slave-girl had brought in fresh, cold water, she insisted on handing her friend the towels, on plaiting her long hair, pinning her peplos in its place, and arranging its folds. She had so often longed for a sister, and she felt as though she had found one in Melissa! While she helped her to dress she kissed her preserver's sister on the eyes and lips, and entreated her with affectionate urgency to come to see her, as soon as she had done all she could for her lover. She must be made acquainted with her father, and Agatha longed to show her her poor children, her dogs, and her pigeons. And she would go to see Melissa, when she was staying with Polybius.

"And there," Melissa put in, "you will see my brother, too."

On which the Christian girl exclaimed: "You must bring him to our house. My father will be glad to thank him--" Here she paused, and then added, "Only he must not again risk his life so rashly."

"He will be well hidden at the house of Polybius," replied Melissa, consolingly. "And Andreas has him fast by this time."

She once more kissed Agatha, and went to the door, but her friend held her back, and whispered "In my father's grounds there is a famous hiding place, where no one would ever find him. It has often been a refuge for weeks and months for persecuted members of our faith. When he is seriously threatened, bring him to us. We will gladly provide for his safety, and all else. Only think, if they should catch him! It would be for my sake, and I should never be happy again. Promise me that you will bring him."

"Yes, certainly," cried Melissa, as she hurried out into the vestibule, where Andreas and the leech were waiting for her.

They had done well to enlist the girl's services, for, since nursing her mother, she knew, as few did, how to handle the sick. It was not till they had fairly set out that Melissa observed that Dame Katharine was of the party; she had no doubt become reconciled to the idea of the sick man's removal to the Serapeum, for she had the same look of kindly calm which had so much attracted the girl at their first meeting.

The streets along which they passed in the pale morning light were now deserted, and a film of mist, behind which glowed the golden light of the newly risen sun, shrouded the horizon. The fresh air of morning was delicious, and at this early hour there was no one to avoid--only the peasants and their wives carrying the produce of their gardens and fields to market on asses, or wagons drawn by oxen. The black slaves of the town were sweeping the roadway. Here there were parties of men, women, and children on their way to work in factories, which were at rest but for a few hours in the bustling town. The bakers and other provision-dealers were opening their shops; the cobblers and metalworkers were already busy or lighting fires in their open stalls; and Andreas nodded to a file of slave-girls who had come across from the farm and gardens of Polybius, and who now walked up the street with large milk-jars and baskets of vegetables poised on their heads and supported with one gracefully raised arm.

They presently crossed the Aspendia Canal, where the fog hung over the water like white smoke, hiding the figure of

the tutelary goddess of the town on the parapet of the bridge from those who crossed by the roadway. The leaves of the mimosa-trees by the quay--nay, the very stones of the houses and the statues, wet with the morning dew--looked revived and newly washed; and a light breeze brought up from the Serapeum broken tones of the chant, sung there every morning by a choir of priests, to hail the triumph of light over darkness.

The crisp morning air was as invigorating to Melissa as her cold bath had been, after a night which had brought her so little rest. She felt as though she, and all Nature with her, had just crossed the threshold of a new day, bidding her to fresh life and labor. Now and then a flame from Lucifer's torch swallowed up a stretch of morning mist, while the Hours escorted Phoebus Apollo, whose radiant diadem of beams was just rising above the haze; Melissa could have declared she saw them dancing forth before him and strewing the path of the sun with flowers. All this was beautiful--as beautiful as the priest's chant, the aromatic sweetness of the air, and the works of art in cast bronze or hewn marble which were to be seen on the bridge, on the temple to Isis and Anubis to the right of the street, under the colonnades of the handsomest houses, on the public fountains--in short, wherever the eye might turn. Her lover, borne before her in a litter, was on the way to the physician in whose hands lay the power to cure him. She felt as though Hope led the way.

Since love had blossomed in her breast her quiet life had become an eventful one. Most of what she had gone through had indeed filled her with alarms. Serious questions to which she had never given a thought had been brought before her; and yet, in this brief period of anxiety she had gained the precious sense of youthfulness and of capacity for action when she had to depend on herself. The last few hours had revealed to her the possession of powers which only yesterday she had never suspected. She, who had willingly yielded to every caprice of her father's, and who, for love of her brothers, had always unresistingly done their bidding, now knew that she had a will of her own and strength enough to assert it; and this, again, added to her contentment this morning.

Alexander had told her, and old Dido, and Diodoros, that she was fair to look upon--but these all saw her with the eyes of affection; so she had always believed that she was a well-looking girl enough, but by no means highly gifted in any respect--a girl whose future would be to bloom and fade unknown in her father's service. But now she knew that she was indeed beautiful; not only because she had heard it repeatedly in the crowd of yesterday, or even because Agatha had declared it while braiding her hair--an inward voice affirmed it, and for her lover's sake she was happy to believe it.

As a rule, she would have been ready to drop with fatigue after so many sleepless hours and such severe exertions; but to-day she felt as fresh as the birds in the trees by the roadside, which greeted the sun with cheerful twitterings.

"Yes, the world is indeed fair!" thought she; but at that very moment Andreas's grave voice was heard ordering the bearers to turn down a dark side alley which led into the street of Hermes, a few hundred paces from the Rhakotis Canal.

How anxious the good man looked! Her world was not the world of the Christian freedman; that she plainly understood when the litter in which Diodoros lay was carried into one of the houses in the side street.

It was a large, plain building, with only a few windows, and those high up--in fact, as Melissa was presently informed, it was a Christian church. Before she could express her surprise, Andreas begged her to have a few minutes' patience; the daemons of sickness were here to be exorcised and driven out of the sufferer. He pointed to a seat in the vestibule to the church, a wide but shallow room. Then, at a sign from Andreas, the slaves carried the litter into a long, low hall with a flat roof.

From where she sat, Melissa could now see that a Christian in priest's robes, whom they called the exorcist, spoke various invocations over the sick man, the others listening so attentively that even she began to hope for some good effect from these incomprehensible formulas; and at the same time she remembered that her old slave-woman Dido, who worshiped many gods, wore round her neck, besides a variety of heathen amulets, a little cross which had been given her by a Christian woman. To her question why she, a heathen, wore this about her, the old woman replied, "You can never tell what may help you some day." So perhaps these exorcisms might not be without some effect on her lover, particularly as the God of the Christians must be powerful and good.

She herself strove to uplift her soul in prayer to the manes of her lost mother; but the scene going on around her in the vestibule distracted her mind with horror. Men, young and old, were slashing themselves with vehement scourgings on their backs. One white-haired old man, indeed, handed his whip of hippopotamus-hide to a stalwart lad whose shoulders were streaming with blood, and begged him as a brother, as fervently as though it were the greatest favor, to let him feel the lash. But the younger man refused, and she saw the weak old fellow trying to apply it to his own back.

All this was quite beyond her comprehension, and struck her as, disgusting; and how haggard and hideous were the limbs of these people who thus sinned against their own bodies--the noble temples of the Divine Spirit!

When, a few minutes later, the litter was borne out of the church again, the sun had triumphed over the mists and was rising with blinding splendor in the cloudless sky. Everything was bathed in light; but the dreadful sight of the penitents had cast a gloom over the clear gladness she had been so full of but just now. It was with a sense of

oppression that she took leave of the deaconess, who left her with cheerful contentment in the street of Hermes, and followed the litter to the open square in front of the Serapeum.

Here every thought of gloom vanished from her mind as at the touch of a magician, for before her stood the vast Temple of Serapis, founded, as it were, for eternity, on a substructure of rock and closely fitted masonry, the noblest building on earth of any dedicated to the gods. The great cupola rose to the blue sky as though it fain would greet the sister vault above with its own splendor, and the copper-plating which covered it shone as dazzling as a second sun. From the wide front of the temple, every being to whom the prayers and worship of mortals could be offered looked down on her, hewn in marble or cast in bronze; for on the roof, on brackets or on pedestals; in niches or as supporting the parapets and balconies, were statues of all the guests at the Olympian banquet, with images or busts of every hero or king, philosopher, poet, or artist whose deeds or works had earned him immortality.

From infancy Melissa had looked up at this temple with admiration and pride, for here every art had done its utmost to make it without parallel on earth. It was the work of her beloved native city, and her mother had often taken her into the Serapeum, where she herself had found comfort in many a sorrow and disappointment, and had taught the child to love it. That it had afterward been spoiled for her she forgot in her present mood.

Never had she seen the great temple surrounded by so much gay and busy life. The front of the building, toward the square, had in the early hours of the morning been decked with garlands and heavy wreaths of flowers, by a swarm of slaves standing on ladders and planks and benches let down from the roof by ropes. The inclined ways, by which vehicles drove up to the great door, were still deserted, and on the broad steps in the middle no one was to be seen as yet but a few priests in gala robes, and court officials; but the immense open space in front of the sanctuary was one great camp, where, among the hastily pitched canvas tents, horses were being dressed and weapons polished. Several maniples of the praetorians and of the Macedonian phalanx were already drawn up in compact ranks, to relieve guard at the gate of the imperial residence, and stand at Caesar's orders.

But more attractive to the girl than all this display were a number of altars which had been erected at the extreme edge of the great square, and on each of which a fire was burning. Heavy clouds of smoke went up from them in the still, pure atmosphere, like aerial columns, while the flames, paling in the beams of the morning sun, flew up through the reek as though striving to rise above it, with wan and changeful gleams of red and yellow, now curling down, and now writhing upward like snakes. Of all these fires there was not one from which the smoke did not mount straight to heaven, though each burned to a different god; and Melissa regarded it as a happy sign that none spread or failed to rise. The embers were stirred from time to time by the priests and augurs of every god of the East and West, who also superintended the sacrifices, while warriors of every province of the empire stood round in prayer.

Melissa passed by all these unwonted and soul-stirring sights without a regret; her hope for the cure soon to be wrought on her lover cast all else into the shade. Still, while she looked around at the thousands who were encamped here, and gazed up at the temple where so many men were busied, like ants, it struck her that in fact all this belonged to one and was done for one alone. Those legions followed him as the dust follows the wind, the whole world trembled at his nod, and in his hand lay the life and happiness of the millions he governed. And it was at this omnipotent being, this god in human form, that her brother had mocked; and the pursuers were at his heels. This recollection troubled her joy, and when she looked in the freedman's grave and anxious face her heart began to beat heavily again.

CHAPTER XII.

Melissa had supposed that, according to custom, the litter would be carried up the incline or the steps, and into the Serapeum by the great door; but in consequence of the emperor's visit this could not be. The sick man was borne round the eastern side of the huge building, which covered a space on which a whole village might have stood. The door at the back, to the south, through which he was finally admitted, opened into a gallery passing by the great quadrangle where sacrifice was made, and leading to the inner rooms of the temple, to the cubicles among others.

In these it was revealed to the sick in dreams by what means or remedies they might hope to be healed: and there was no lack of priests to interpret the visions, nor of physicians who came hither to watch peculiar cases, to explain to the sufferers the purport of the counsel of the gods--often very dark--or to give them the benefit of their own.

One of these, a friend of Ptolemæus, who, though he had been secretly baptized, still was one of the pastophori of the temple, was awaiting the little party, and led the way as guide.

The bellowing of beasts met them on the very threshold. These were to be slaughtered at this early hour by the special command of Caracalla; and, as Caesar himself had promised to be present at the sacrificial rites, none but the priests or "Caesar's friends" were admitted to the court-yard. The litter was therefore carried up a staircase and through a long hall forming part of the library, with large windows looking down on the open place where the beasts were killed and the entrails examined. Diodoros saw and heard nothing, for the injury to the skull had deprived him of all consciousness; Ptolemæus, however, to soothe Melissa, assured her that he was sleeping soundly.

As they mounted the stairs she had kept close to her lover's side; but on this assurance she lingered behind and looked about her.

As the little procession entered the gallery, in which the rolls of manuscript lay in stone or wooden cases on long rows of shelves, the shout was heard of "Hail, Caesar!" mingling with a solemn chant, and announcing the sovereign's approach.

At this the physician pointed to the court-yard, and said to the girl, whose beauty had greatly attracted him: "Look down there if you want to see Caesar. We must wait here, at any rate, till the crowd has gone past in the corridor beyond that door." And Melissa, whose feminine curiosity had already tempted her to the window, looked down into the quadrangle and on to the steps down which a maniple of the praetorian guard were marching, with noble Romans in togas or the uniform of legates, augurs wearing wreaths, and priests of various orders. Then for a few minutes the steps were deserted, and Melissa thought she could hear her own heart beating, when suddenly the cry: "Hail, Caesar!" was again heard, loud trumpets rang out and echoed from the high stone walls which surrounded the inclosure, and Caracalla appeared on the broad marble steps which led down into the court of sacrifice.

Melissa's eyes were riveted as if spell-bound on this figure, which was neither handsome nor dignified, and which nevertheless had a strange attraction for her, she knew not why. What was it in this man, who was short rather than tall, and feeble rather than majestic, which so imperatively forbade all confident advances? The noble lion which walked by his side, and in whose mane his left hand was buried, was not more unapproachable than he. He called this terrible creature, which he treated with as much familiarity as if it were a lapdog, his "Persian sword"; and as Melissa looked she remembered what fate might be in store for her brother through this man, and all the crimes of which he was accused by the world--the murders of his brother, of his wife, and of thousands besides.

For the first time in her life she felt that she could hate; she longed to bring down every evil on that man's head. The blood mounted to her cheeks, and her little fists were clinched, but she never took her eyes off him; for everything in his person impressed her, if not as fine, still as exceptional--if not as great, still as noteworthy.

She knew that he was not yet thirty, but yesterday, as he drove past her, he had looked like a surly misanthropist of more than middle age. To-day how young he seemed! Did he owe it to the laurel crown which rested on his head, or to the white toga which fell about him in ample folds, leaving only the sinewy arm bare by which he led the lion?

From where she stood she could only see his side-face as he came down the steps, and indeed it was not ill-favored; brow, nose, and chin were finely and nobly formed; his beard was thin, and a mustache curled over his lips. His eyes, deeply set under the brows, were not visible to her, but she had not forgotten since yesterday their sinister and terrible scowl.

At this moment the lion crept closer to his master.

If only the brute should spring on that more blood-stained and terrible beast of prey who could kill not only with claws and teeth but with a word from his lips, a wave of his hand!--the world would be rid of the ferocious curse. Ay, his eye, which had yesterday scorned to look at the multitudes who had hailed his advent, was that of a cruel tyrant.

And then--she felt as if he must have guessed her thoughts--while he patted the lion and gently pushed him aside he turned his face full on her, and she knew not whether to be pleased or angry, for the odious, squinting eyes were not now terrible or contemptuous; nay, they had looked kindly on the beast, and with a somewhat suffering expression.

The dreadful face of the murderer was not hideous now, but engaging--the face of a youth enduring torments of soul or of body.

She was not mistaken. On the very next step Caracalla stood still, pressed his right hand to his temples, and set his lips as if to control some acute pain. Then he sadly shook his head and gazed up at the walls of the court, which had been decorated in his honor with hangings and garlands of flowers. First he studied the frieze and the festal display on his right, and when he turned his head to look at the side where Melissa stood, an inward voice bade her withdraw, that the gaze of this monster might not blight her. But an irresistible attraction held her fast; then suddenly she felt as if the ground were sinking from under her feet, and, as a shipwrecked wretch snatches at a floating spar, she clung to the little column at the left of the window, clutching it with her hand; for the dreadful thing had happened--Caracalla's eye had met hers and had even rested on her for a while! And that gaze had nothing bloodthirsty in it, nor the vile leer which had sparkled in the eyes of the drunken rioters she had met last night in the streets; he only looked astonished as at some wonderful thing which he had not expected to see in this place. But presently a fresh attack of pain apparently made him turn away, for his features betrayed acute suffering, as he slowly set his foot on the next step below.

Again, and more closely, he pressed his hand to his brow, and then beckoned to a tall, well-built man with flowing hair, who walked behind him, and accepted the support of his offered arm.

"Theocritus, formerly an actor and dancer," the priest whispered to Melissa. "Caesar's whim made the mimic a senator, a legate, and a favorite."

But Melissa only knew that he was speaking, and did not take in the purport of his speech; for this man, slowly descending the steps, absorbed her whole sympathy. She knew well the look of those who suffer and conceal it from the eyes of the world; and some cruel disease was certainly consuming this youth, who ruled the earth, but whose purple robes would be snatched at soon enough by greedy hands if he should cease to seem strong and able. And now, again, he looked old and worn--poor wretch, who yet was so young and born to be so abundantly happy! He was, to be sure, a base and blood-stained tyrant, but not the less a miserable and unhappy man. The more severe the pain he had to endure, the harder must he find it to hide it from the crowd who were constantly about him. There is but one antidote to hatred, and that is pity; it was with the eager compassion of a woman's heart that Melissa marked every movement of the imperial murderer, as soon as she recognized his sufferings, and when their eyes had met. Nothing now escaped her keen glance which could add to her sympathy for the man she had loathed but a minute before. She noticed a slight limp in his gait and a convulsive twitching of his eyelids; his slender, almost transparent hand, she reflected, was that of a sick man, and pain and fever, no doubt, had thinned his hair, which had left many places bald.

And when the high--priest of Serapis and the augurs met him at the bottom of the steps and Caesar's eye again put on the cruel scowl of yesterday, she would not doubt that it was stern self-command which gave him that threatening glare, to seem terrible, in spite of his anguish, to those whose obedience he required. He had really needed his companion's support as they descended the stair, that she could plainly see; and she had observed, too, how carefully his guide had striven to conceal the fact that he was upholding him; but the courtier was too tall to achieve the task he had set himself. Now, she was much shorter than Caesar, and she was strong, too. Her arm would have afforded him a much better support.

But how could she think of such a thing?--she, the sister of Alexander, the betrothed of Diodoros, whom she truly loved!

Caesar mingled with the priests, and her guide told her that the corridor was now free. She peeped into the litter, and, seeing that Diodoros still slept, she followed him, lost in thought, and giving short and heedless answers to Andreas and the physicians. She had not listened to the priest's information, and scarcely turned her head to look out, when a tall, thin man with a bullet-head and deeply wrinkled brow was pointed out to her as Macrinus, the prefect of the body-guard, the most powerful man in Rome next to Caesar; and then the "friends" of Caracalla, whom she had seen yesterday, and the historian Dion Cassius, with other senators and members of the imperial train.

Now, as they made their way through halls and passages where the foot of the uninitiated rarely intruded, she looked about her with more interest when the priest drew her attention to some particularly fine statue or picture, or some symbolical presentment. Even now, however, though association with her brothers had made her particularly alive to everything that was beautiful or curious, she glanced round with less interest than she otherwise might have done, for she had much else to think of. In the first place, of the benefits Diodoros was to derive from the great Galen; then of her father, who this day must dispense with her assistance; and, finally, of the state of mind of her grave brother Philip. He and Alexander, who usually were such united friends, now both were in love with Agatha, and what could come of that? And from time to time her thoughts flew back to Caesar, and she felt as though some tie, she knew not what, linked them together.

As soon as the litter had to be carried up or down steps, she kept an eye on the bearers, and gave such help as was needed when the sleeper's position was changed. Whenever she looked in his handsome face, flushed as it was by fever and framed in tumbled curls, her heart swelled, and she felt that she had much to thank the gods for, seeing that

her lover was so full of splendid youth and in no respect resembled the prematurely decrepit and sickly wearer of the purple. Nevertheless, she thought a good deal of Caracalla, and it even occurred to her once that if it were he who was being carried instead of Diodoros, she would tend him no less carefully than her betrothed. Caesar, who had been as far out of her ken as a god, and of whose overwhelming power she had heard, had suddenly come down to her. She involuntarily thought of him as one of those few with whom she had come into personal contact, and in whose weal or woe she had some sympathetic interest. He could not be altogether evil and hardened. If he could only know what pain it caused her to see him suffer, he would surely command Zminis to abandon the pursuit of her brother.

Just as they were reaching the end of their walk, the trumpets rang out once more, reminding her that she was under the same roof with him. She was so close to him--and yet how far he was from guessing the desires of a heart which beat with compassion for him!

Several sick persons, eager for some communication from the gods, and some who, without being sick, had slept in the Serapeum, had by this time left their beds, and were taking counsel in the great hall with interpreters and physicians. The bustle was like that of a market-place, and there was one old man with unkempt hair and fiery eyes who repeated again and again in a loud voice, "It was the god himself who appeared to me, and his three-headed dog licked my cheeks." And presently a hideous old woman plucked at Melissa's robe, whispering: "A healing draught for your lover; tears from the eyes of the infant Horus. I have them from Isis herself. The effect is rapid and certain. Come to Hezron, the dealer in balsams in the street of the Nekropolis. Your lover's recovery--for five drachmae."

But Melissa, who was no stranger here since her mother's last sickness, went on without pausing, following the litter down the long hall full of beds, a room with a stone roof resting on two rows of tall columns. Familiar to her too was the aromatic scent of kyphi,--[incense]--which filled the hall, although fresh air was constantly pouring in from outside through the high windows. Red and green curtains hung in front of them, and the subdued light which came through fell in tinted twilight on the colored pictures in relief of the history of the gods, which covered the walls. Speech was forbidden here, and their steps fell noiseless on the thick, heavy mats.

Most of the beds were already empty; only those between the long wall and the nearest row of columns were still for the most part occupied by the sick who sought the help of the god. On one of these Diodoros was laid, Melissa helping in silence, and with such skill as delighted even the physicians. Still, this did not wake him, though on the next bed lay a man who never ceased speaking, because in his dream he had been bidden to repeat the name of Serapis as many times as there were drops in a cup of water filled from the Agathodaemon Canal.

"A long stay in this strong perfume will be bad for him," whispered Ptolemaeus to the freedman. "Galenus sent word that he would visit the sick early to-day; but he is not here yet. He is an old man, and in Rome, they say, it is the custom to sleep late."

He was interrupted by a stir in the long hall, which broke in on the silence, no one knew from whence; and immediately after, officious hands threw open the great double doors with a loud noise.

"He is coming," whispered their priestly guide; and the instant after an old man crossed the threshold, followed by a troop of pastophori, as obsequious as the courtiers at the heels of a prince.

"Gently, brothers," murmured the greatest physician of his age in a low voice, as, leaning on a staff, he went toward the row of couches. It was easy to see the traces of his eighty years, but his fine eyes still gleamed with youthful light.

Melissa blushed to think that she could have mistaken Serenus Samonicus for this noble old man. He must once have been a tall man; his back was bent and his large head was bowed as though he were forever seeking something. His face was pale and colorless, with a well-formed nose and mouth, but not of classic mold. Blue veins showed through the clear white skin, and the long, silky, silvery hair still flowed in unthinned waves round his massive head, bald only on the crown. A snowy beard fell over his breast. His aged form was wrapped in a long and ample robe of costly white woolen stuff, and his whole appearance would have been striking for its peculiar refinement, even if the eyes had not sparkled with such vivid and piercing keenness from under the thick brows, and if the high, smooth, slightly prominent forehead had not borne witness to the power and profundity of his mind. Melissa knew of no one with whom to compare him; he reminded Andreas of the picture of John as an old man, which a wealthy fellow-Christian had presented to the church of Saint Mark.

If this man could do nothing, there was no help on earth. And how dignified and self-possessed were the movements of this bent old man as he leaned on his staff! He, a stranger here, seemed to be showing the others the way, a guide in his own realm. Melissa had heard that the strong scent of the kyphi might prove injurious to Diodoros, and her one thought now was the desire that Galenus might soon approach his couch. He did not, in fact, begin with the sick nearest to the door, but stood awhile in the middle of the hall, leaning against a column and surveying the place and the beds.

When his searching glance rested on that where Diodoros was lying, an answering look met his with reverent entreaty from a pair of beautiful, large, innocent eyes. A smile parted his bearded lips, and going up to the girl he said: "Where beauty bids, even age must obey. Your lover, child, or your brother?"

"My betrothed," Melissa hastened to reply; and the maidenly embarrassment which flushed her cheek became her so well that he added:

"He must have much to recommend him if I allow him to carry you off, fair maid."

With these words he went up to the couch, and looking at Diodoros as he lay, he murmured, as if speaking to himself and without paying any heed to the younger men who crowded round him:

"There are no true Greeks left here; but the beauty of the ancestral race is not easily stamped out, and is still to be seen in their descendants. What a head, what features, and what hair!"

Then he felt the lad's breast, shoulders, and arms, exclaiming in honest admiration, "What a godlike form!"

He laid his delicate old hand, with its network of blue veins, on the sick man's forehead, again glanced round the room, and listened to Ptolemaeus, who gave him a brief and technical report of the case; then, sniffing the heavy scent that filled the hall, he said, as the Christian leech ceased speaking:

"We will try; but not here--in a room less full of incense. This perfume brings dreams, but no less surely induces fever. Have you no other room at hand where the air is purer?"

An eager "Yes," in many voices was the reply; and Diodoros was forthwith transferred into a small cubicle adjoining.

While he was being moved, Galenus went from bed to bed, questioning the chief physician and the patients. He seemed to have forgotten Diodoros and Melissa; but after hastily glancing at some and carefully examining others, and giving advice where it was needful, he desired to see the fair Alexandrian's lover once more.

As he entered the room he nodded kindly to the girl. How gladly would she have followed him! But she said to herself that if he had wished her to be present he would certainly have called her; so she modestly awaited his return. She had to wait a long time, and the minutes seemed hours while she heard the voices of men through the closed door, the moaning and sighing of the sufferer, the splashing of water, and the clatter of metal instruments; and her lively imagination made her fancy that something almost unendurable was being done to her lover.

At last the physician came out. His whole appearance betokened perfect satisfaction. The younger men, who followed him, whispered among themselves, shaking their heads as though some miracle had been performed; and every eye that looked on him was radiant with enthusiastic veneration. Melissa knew, as soon as his eyes met hers, that all was well, and as she grasped the old man's hand she concluded from its cool moisture that he had but just washed it, and had done with his own hand all that Ptolemaeus had expected of his skill. Her eyes were dim with grateful emotion, and though Galenus strove to hinder her from pressing her lips to his hand she succeeded in doing so; he, however, kissed her brow with fatherly delight in her warmhearted sweetness, and said:

"Now go home happy, my child. That stone had hit your lover's brain-roof a hard blow; the pressure of the broken beam--I mean a piece of bone--had robbed him of his consciousness of what a sweet bride the gods have bestowed on him. But the knife has done its work; the beam is in its place again; the splinters which were not needed have been taken out; the roof is mended, and the pressure removed. Your friend has recovered consciousness, and I will wager that at this moment he is thinking of you and wishes you were with him. But for the present you had better defer the meeting. For forty-eight hours he must remain in that little room, for any movement would only delay his recovery."

"Then I shall stay here to nurse him," cried Melissa, eagerly. But Galenus replied, decisively:

"That must not be if he is to get well. The presence of a woman for whom the sufferer's heart is on fire is as certain to aggravate the fever as the scent of incense. Besides, child, this is no place for such as you."

Her head drooped sadly, but he nodded to her cheerfully as he added:

"Ptolemaeus, who is worthy of your entire confidence, speaks of you as a girl of much sense, and you will surely not do anything to spoil my work, which was not easy. However, I must say farewell; other sick require my care."

He held out his hand, but, seeing her eyes fixed on his and glittering through tears, he asked her name and family. It seemed to him of good augury for the long hours before him which he must devote to Caesar, that he should, so early in the day, have met so pure and fair a flower of girlhood.

When she had told him her own name and her father's, and also mentioned her brothers, Philip the philosopher, and Alexander the painter, who was already one of the chief masters of his art here, Galenus answered heartily:

"All honor to his genius, then, for he is the one-eyed king in the land of the blind. Like the old gods, who can scarce make themselves heard for the new, the Muses too have been silenced. The many really beautiful things to be seen here are not new; and the new, alas! are not beautiful. But your brother's work," he added, kindly, "may be the exception."

"You should only see his portraits!" cried Melissa.

"Yours, perhaps, among them?" said the old man, with interest. "That is a reminder I would gladly take back to Rome with me."

Alexander had indeed painted his sister not long before, and how glad she was to be able to offer the picture to the

reverend man to whom she owed so much! So she promised with a blush to send it him as soon as she should be at home again.

The unexpected gift was accepted with pleasure, and when he thanked her eagerly and with simple heartiness, she interrupted him with the assurance that in Alexandria art was not yet being borne to the grave. Her brother's career, it was true, threatened to come to an untimely end, for he stood in imminent danger. On this the old man--who had taken his seat on a bench which the attendant physicians of the temple had brought forward--desired to know the state of the case, and Melissa briefly recounted Alexander's misdemeanor, and how near he had been, yesterday, to falling into the hands of his pursuers. Then she looked up at the old man beseechingly; and as he had praised her beauty, so now--she herself knew not how she had such courage--the praises of his fame, his greatness and goodness, flowed from her lips. And her bold entreaties ended with a prayer that he would urge Caesar, who doubtless revered him as a father, to cease from prosecuting her brother.

The old man's face had grown graver and graver; he had several times stroked his white beard with an uneasy gesture; and when, as she spoke the last words, she ventured to raise her timidly downcast eyes to his, he rose stiffly and said in regretful tones:

"How can I be vexed with a sister who knocks at any door to save a brother's life? But I would have given a great deal that it had not been at mine. It is hard to refuse when I would so gladly accede, and yet so it must be; for, though Claudius Galenus does his best for Bassianus Antoninus as a patient, as he does for any other, Bassianus the man and the emperor is as far from him as fire from water; and so it must ever be during the short space of time which may yet be granted to him and me under the light of the sun."

The last words were spoken in a bitter, repellent tone, and yet Melissa felt that it pained the old man to refuse her. So she earnestly exclaimed:

"Oh, forgive me! How could I guess--" She suddenly paused and added, "Then you really think that Caesar has not long to live?"

She spoke with the most anxious excitement, and her question offended Galenus. He mistook their purport, and his voice was wrathful as he replied, "Long enough yet to punish an insult!"

Melissa turned pale. She fancied that she apprehended the meaning of these stern words, and, prompted by an earnest desire not to be misunderstood by this man, she eagerly exclaimed:

"I do not wish him dead--no, indeed not; not even for my brother's sake! But just now I saw him near, and I thought I could see that he was suffering great pain. Why, we pity a brute creature when it is in anguish. He is still so young, and it must be so hard to die!"

Galenus nodded approvingly, and replied:

"I thank you, in the name of my imperial patient.--Well, send me your portrait; but let it be soon, for I embark before sunset. I shall like to remember you. As to Caesar's sufferings, they are so severe, your tender soul would not wish your worst enemy to know such pain. My art has few means of mitigating them, and the immortals are little inclined to lighten the load they have laid on this man. Of the millions who tremble before him, not one prays or offers sacrifice of his own free-will for the prosperity of the monarch."

A flash of enthusiasm sparkled in Melissa's eye, but Galenus did not heed it; he briefly bade her farewell and turned away to devote himself to other patients.

"There is one, at any rate," thought she, as she looked after the physician, "who will pray and sacrifice for that unhappy man. Diodoros will not forbid it, I am sure."

She turned to Andreas and desired him to take her to her lover. Diodoros was now really sleeping, and did not feel the kiss she breathed on his fore head. He had all her love; the suffering criminal she only pitied.

When they had quitted the temple she pressed her hand to her bosom and drew a deep breath as if she had just been freed from prison.

"My head is quite confused," she said, "by the heavy perfume and so much anxiety and alarm; but O Andreas, my heart never beat with such joy and gratitude! Now I must collect my thoughts, and get home to do what is needful for Philip. And merciful gods! that good-natured old Roman, Samonicus, will soon be expecting me at the Temple of Aphrodite; see how high the sun is already. Let us walk faster, for, to keep him waiting--"

Andreas here interrupted her, saying, "If I am not greatly mistaken, there is the Roman, in that open chariot, coming down the incline."

He was right; a few minutes later the chariot drew up close to Melissa, and she managed to tell Samonicus all that had happened in so courteous and graceful a manner that, far from being offended, he could wish every success to the cure his great friend had begun. And indeed his promise had somewhat weighed upon his mind, for to carry out two undertakings in one day was too much, at his age, and he had to be present in the evening at a banquet to which Caesar had invited himself in the house of Seleukus the merchant.

"The high-priest's brother?" asked Melissa, in surprise, for death had but just bereft that house of the only daughter.

"The same," said the Roman, gayly. Then he gave her his hand, with the assurance that the thought of her would make it a pleasure to remember Alexandria.

As she clasped his hand, Andreas came up, bowed gravely, and asked whether it would be overbold in him, as a faithful retainer of the maiden's family, to crave a favor, in her name, of Caesar's illustrious and familiar friend.

The Roman eyed Andreas keenly, and the manly dignity, nay, the defiant self-possession of the freedman--the very embodiment of all he had expected to find in a genuine Alexandrian--so far won his confidence that he bade him speak without fear. He hoped to hear something sufficiently characteristic of the manners of the provincial capital to make an anecdote for Caesar's table. Then, when he understood that the matter concerned Melissa's brother, and a distinguished artist, he smiled expectantly. Even when he learned that Alexander was being hunted down for some heedless jest against the emperor, he only threatened Melissa sportively with his finger; but on being told that this jest dealt with the murder of Geta, he seemed startled, and the tone of his voice betrayed serious displeasure as he replied to the petitioner, "Do you suppose that I have three heads, like the Cerberus at the feet of your god, that you ask me to lay one on the block for the smile of a pretty girl?"

He signed to his charioteer, and the horses whirled the light vehicle across the square and down the street of Hermes.

Andreas gazed after him, and muttered, with a shrug

"My first petition to a great man, and assuredly my last."

"The coward!" cried Melissa; but Andreas said, with a superior smile.

"Let us take a lesson from this, my child. Those who reckon on the help of man are badly off indeed. We must all trust in God, and each in himself."

CHAPTER XIII.

Andreas, who had so much on his shoulders, had lost much time, and was urgently required at home. After gratifying Melissa's wish by describing how Diodoros had immediately recovered consciousness on the completion of the operation performed by Galen, and painting the deep amazement that had fallen on all the other physicians at the skill of this fine old man, he had done all he could for the present to be of use to the girl. He was glad, therefore, when in the street of Hermes, now swarming again with citizens, soldiers, and horsemen, he met the old nurse, who, after conducting Agatha home to her father, had been sent back to the town to remain in attendance, if necessary, on Diodoros. The freedman left it to her to escort Melissa to her own home, and went back to report to Polybius--in the first place, as to his son's state.

It was decided that Melissa should for the present remain with her father; but, as soon as Diodoros should be allowed to leave the Serapeum, she was to go across the lake to receive the convalescent on his return home.

The old woman assured her, as they walked on, that Diodoros had always been born to good luck; and it was clear that this had never been truer than now, when Galenus had come in the nick of time to restore him to life and health, and when he had won such a bride as Melissa. Then she sang the praises of Agatha, of her beauty and goodness, and told her that the Christian damsel had made many inquiries concerning Alexander. She, the speaker, had not been chary of her praise of the youth, and, unless she was much mistaken, the arrow of Eros had this time pierced Agatha's heart, though till now she had been as a child--an innocent child--as she herself could say, who had seen her grow up from the cradle. Her faith need not trouble either Melissa or Alexander, for gentler and more modest wives than the Christian women were not to be found among the Greeks--and she had known many.

Melissa rarely interrupted the garrulous old woman; but, while she listened, pleasant pictures of the future rose before her fancy. She saw herself and Diodoros ruling over Polybius's household, and, close at hand, on Zeno's estate, Alexander with his beautiful and adored wife. There, under Zeno's watchful eye, the wild youth would become a noble man. Her father would often come to visit them, and in their happiness would learn to find pleasure in life again. Only now and then the thought of the sacrifice which the vehement Philip must make for his younger brother, and of the danger which still threatened Alexander, disturbed the cheerful contentment of her soul, rich as it was in glad hopes.

The nearer they got to her own home, the more lightly her heart beat. She had none but good news to report there. The old woman, panting for breath, was obliged to beg her to consider her sixty years and moderate her pace.

Melissa willingly checked her steps; and when, at the end of the street of Hermes, they reached the temple of the god from whom it was named and turned off to the right, the good woman parted from her, for in this quiet neighborhood she could safely be trusted to take care of herself.

Melissa was now alone. On her left lay the gardens of Hermes, where, on the southern side, stood her father's house and that of their neighbor Skopas. Though the old nurse had indeed talked of nothing that was not pleasant, it was a comfort not to have to listen to her, but to be free to follow her own thoughts. Nor did she meet with anything to distract them, for at this hour the great public garden was left almost entirely to children and their attendants, or to the inhabitants of the immediate neighborhood who frequented the temples of Hermes or Artemis, or the little shrine of Asklepios, which stood in a grove of mimosas on the skirt of the park, and to which Melissa herself felt attracted. It had been a familiar spot at the time when her mother was at the worst. How often had she flown hither from her home near at hand to pour oil on the altar of the god of healing--to make some small offering and find comfort in prayer!

The day was now hot, she was tired, and, when she saw the white marble columns gleaming among the greenery, she yielded to the impulse to enjoy a few minutes' rest in the cool cella and accomplish the vow she had taken an hour or two since. She longed, indeed, to get home, that her father might share the happiness which uplifted her heart; but then she reflected that she would not soon have the opportunity of carrying out, unobserved, the purpose she had in her mind. Now, if ever, was the time to offer sacrifice for Caesar and for the mitigation of his sufferings. The thought that Galenus perhaps was right, and that of Caracalla's myriad subjects she might be the only one who would do so much for his sake, strengthened her resolve.

The chief temple of Asklepios, whom the Egyptians called Imhotep, was at the Serapeum. Imhotep was the son of Ptah, who, at Alexandria, was merged in Serapis. There he was worshiped, conjointly with Serapis and Isis, by Egyptians, Greeks, and Syrians alike. The little sanctuary near her father's house was the resort of none but Greeks. Ptolemæus Philadelphus, the second Macedonian King of Egypt, had built it as an appendage to the Temple of Artemis, after the recovery from sickness of his wife Arsinoë.

It was small, but a masterpiece of Greek art, and the statues of Sleep and of A Dream, at the entrance, with the marble group behind the altar, representing Asklepios with his sister Hygeia and his wife Epione the Soother, was reckoned by connoisseurs as among the noblest and most noteworthy works of art in Alexandria.

The dignity and benevolence of the god were admirably expressed in the features of the divinity, somewhat resembling the Olympian Zeus, who leaned on his serpent staff; and the graceful, inviting sweetness of Hygeia,

holding out her cup as though she were offering health to the sufferer, was well adapted to revive the hopes of the despondent. The god's waving locks were bound with a folded scarf, and at his feet was a dog, gazing up at his lord as if in entreaty.

The sacred snakes lay coiled in a cage by the altar; they were believed to have the power of restoring themselves, and this was regarded as a promise to the sick that they should cast off their disease as a serpent casts its skin. The swift power of the reptile over life and death, was an emblem to the votaries of the power of the god to postpone the death of man or to shorten his days.

The inside of the little sanctuary was a cool and still retreat. Tablets hung on the white marble walls, inscribed with the thanksgivings or vows of those who had been healed. On several, the remedies were recorded which had availed in certain cases; and on the left of the little hall, behind a heavy hanging, a small recess contained the archives of the temple, recipes, records of gifts, and documents referring to the history of the sanctuary.

In this deserted, shady spot, between these thick marble walls, it was much cooler than outside. Melissa lifted her hands in prayer before the statue of the god. She was alone, with the exception of the priest in charge. The temple-servant was absent, and the priest was asleep, breathing heavily, in an arm-chair in a dark nook behind the marble group. Thus she was free to follow the impulse of her heart, and pray, first for her sick lover, and then for the sufferer to whom the whole subservient world belonged.

For Diodoros, indeed, as she knew, other hands and hearts were uplifted in loving sympathy. But who besides herself was praying for the hated sovereign who had at his command the costliest and rarest gifts of fortune, all poisoned by bitter anguish of mind and body? The world thought only of the sufferings he had inflicted on others; no one dreamed of the pangs he had to endure--no one but herself, to whom Galenus had spoken of them. And had not his features and his look betrayed to her that pain was gnawing at his vitals like the vulture at those of Prometheus? Hapless, pitiable youth, born to the highest fortune, and now a decrepit old man in the flower of his age! To pray and sacrifice for him must be a pious deed, pleasing to the gods. Melissa besought the marble images over the altar from the very bottom of her heart, never even asking herself why she was bestowing on this stranger, this cruel tyrant, in whose name her own brother was in danger of the law, an emotion which nothing but her care for those dearest to her had ever stirred. But she did not feel that he was a stranger, and never thought how far apart they were. Her prayers came easily, too, in this spot; the bonds that linked her to these beautiful marble beings were familiar and dear to her. While she gazed up into the face of Asklepios, imploring him to be gracious to the imperial youth, and release him from the pain but for which he might have been humane and beneficent, the stony features seemed to live before her eyes, and the majesty and dignity that beamed on the brow assured her that the god's power and wisdom were great enough to heal every disease. The tender smile which played on his features filled her soul with the certainty that he would vouchsafe to be gracious; nay, she could believe that he moved those marble lips and promised to grant her prayer. And when she turned to the statue of Hygeia she fancied the beautiful, kind face nodded to her with a pledge of fulfillment.

She raised her beseeching arms higher still, and addressed her sculptured friends aloud, as though they could hear her:

"I know that nothing is hidden from you, eternal gods," she began, "and when it was your will that my mother should be taken from me my foolish heart rebelled. But I was then a child without understanding, and my soul lay as it were asleep. Now it is different. You know that I have learned to love a man; and many things, and, the certainty that the gods are good, have come to me with that love. Forgive the maid the sins of the child, and make my lover whole, as he lies under the protection and in the sanctuary of the great Serapis, still needing your aid too. He is mending, and the greatest of thy ministers, O Asklepios, says he will recover, so it must be true. Yet without thee even the skill of Galenus is of little avail; wherefore I beseech you both, Heal Diodoros, whom I love!--But I would fain entreat you for another. You will wonder, perhaps--for it is Bassianus Antoninus, whom they call Caracalla and Caesar.

"Thou, Asklepios, dost look in amazement, and great Hygeia shakes her head. And it is hard to say what moves me, who love another, to pray for the blood-stained murderer for whom not another soul in his empire would say a word to you. Nay, and I know not what it is. Perhaps it is but pity; for he, who ought to be the happiest, is surely the most wretched man under the sun. O great Asklepios, O bountiful and gracious Hygeia, ease his sufferings, which are indeed beyond endurance! Nor shall you lack an offering. I will dedicate a cock to you; and as the cock announces a new day, so perchance shall you grant to Caracalla the dawn of a new existence in better health.

"Alas, gracious god! but thou art grave, as though the offering were too small. How gladly would I bring a goat, but I know not whether my money will suffice, for it is only what I have saved. By and by, when the youth I love is my husband, I will prove my gratitude; for he is as rich as he is handsome and kind, and will, I know, refuse me nothing. And thou, sweet goddess, dost not look down upon me as graciously as before; I fear thou art angry. Yet think not"--and she gave a low laugh--"that I pray for Caracalla because I care for him, or am in love with him. No, no, no, no! my heart is wholly given to Diodoros, and not the smallest part of it to any other. It is Caesar's misery alone that brings me hither. Sooner would I kiss one of those serpents or a thorny hedgehog than him, the fratricide in the purple. Believe

me, it is true, strange as it must seem.

"First and last, I pray and offer sacrifice indeed for Diodoros and his recovery. My brother Alexander, too, who is in danger, I would fain commend to you; but he is well in body, and your remedies are of no effect against the perils which threaten him."

Here she ceased, and gazed into the faces of the statues, but they would not look so friendly as before. It was, no doubt, the smallness of her offering that had offended them. She anxiously drew out her little money-bag and counted the contents. But when, after waking the priest, she had asked how much a goat might cost for sacrifice, her countenance cleared, for her savings were enough to pay for it and for a young cock as well. All she had she left with the old man, to the last sesterce; but she could only wait to see the cock sacrificed, for she felt she must go home.

As soon as the blood of the bird had besprinkled the altar, and she had told the divinities that a goat was also to be killed, she fancied that they looked at her more kindly; and she was turning to the door, as light and gay as if she had happily done some difficult task, when the curtain screening off the library of archives was lifted, and a man came out calling her by name. She turned round; but as soon as she saw that he was a Roman, and, as his white toga told her, of the upper class, she took fright. She hastily exclaimed that she was in a hurry, and flew down the steps, through the garden, and into the road. Once there, she reproached herself for foolish shyness of a stranger who was scarcely younger than her own father; but by the time she had gone a few steps she had forgotten the incident, and was rehearsing in her mind all she had to tell Heron. She soon saw the tops of the palms and sycamores in their own garden, her faithful old dog Melas barked with delight, and the happiness which the meeting with the stranger had for a moment interrupted revived with unchecked glow.

She was weary, and where could she rest so well as at home? She had escaped many perils, and where could she feel so safe as under her father's roof? Glad as she was at the prospect of her new and handsome home on the other side of the lake, and of all the delights promised her by Diodoros's affection, her heart still clung fondly to the pretty, neat little dwelling whose low roof now gleamed in front of her. In the garden, whose shell-strewn paths she now trod, she had played as a child; that window belonged to the room where her mother had died. And then, coming home was in itself a joy, when she had so much to tell that was pleasant.

The dog leaped along by her side with vehement affection, jumping round her and on her, and she heard the starling's cry, first "Olympias!" and then "My strength!"

A happy smile parted her rosy lips as she glanced at the work-room; but the two white teeth which always gleamed when she was gay were presently hidden, for her father, it would seem, was out. He was certainly not at work, for the wide window was unscreened, and it was now nearly noon. He was almost always within at this hour, and it would spoil half her gladness not to find him there.

But what was this? What could this mean? The dog had announced her approach, and old Dido's gray head peeped out of the house-door, to vanish again at once. How strangely she had looked at her--exactly as she had looked that day when the physician had told the faithful creature that her mistress's last hour was at hand!

Melissa's contentment was gone. Before she even crossed the threshold, where the friendly word "Rejoice" greeted her in brown mosaic, she called the old woman by name. No answer.

She went into the kitchen to find Dido; for she, according to her invariable habit of postponing evil as long as possible, had fled to the hearth. There she stood, though the fire was out, weeping bitterly, and covering her wrinkled face with her hands, as though she quailed before the eyes of the girl she must so deeply grieve. One glance at the woman, and the tears which trickled through her fingers and down her lean arms told Melissa that something dreadful had happened. Very pale, and clasping her hand to her heaving bosom, she desired to be told all; but for some time Dido was quite unable to speak intelligibly. And before she could make up her mind to it, she looked anxiously for Argutis, whom she held to be the wisest of mankind, and who, she knew, would reveal the dreadful thing that must be told more judiciously than she could. But the Gaul was not to be seen; so Dido, interrupted by sobs, began the melancholy tale.

Heron had come home between midnight and sunrise and had gone to bed. Next morning, while he was feeding the birds, Zminis, the captain of the night-watch, had come in with some men-at-arms, and had tried to take the artist prisoner in Caesar's name. On this, Heron had raved like a bull, had appealed to his Macedonian birth, his rights as a Roman citizen, and much besides, and demanded to know of what he was accused. He was then informed that he was to be held in captivity by the special orders of the head of the police, till his son Alexander, who was guilty of high-treason, should surrender to the authorities. But her master, said Dido, sobbing, had knocked down the man who had tried to bind him with a mighty blow of his fist. At last there was a fearful uproar, and in fact a bloody fight. The starling shouted his cry through it all, the birds fluttered and piped with terror, and it was like the abode of the damned in the nether world; and strangers came crowding about the house, till Skopas arrived and advised Heron to go with the Egyptian.

"But even at the door," Dido added, "he called out to me that you, Melissa, could remain with Polybius till he should recover his liberty. Philip was to appeal for help to the prefect Titianus, and offer him the gems--you know them, he

said. And, last of all," and again she began to cry, "he especially commended to my care the tomb--and the birds; and the starling wants some fresh mealworms." Melissa heard with dismay; the color had faded from her cheeks, and as Dido ended she asked gloomily:

"And Philip--and Alexander?"

"We have thought of everything," replied the old woman. "As soon as we were alone we held a council, Argutis and I. He went to find Alexander, and I went to Philip. I found him in his rooms. He had come home very late, the porter said, and I saw him in bed, and I had trouble enough to wake him. Then I told him all, and he went on in such mad talk--it will be no wonder if the gods punish him. He wanted to rush off to the prefect, with his hair uncombed, just as he was. I had to bring him to his senses; and then, while I was oiling his hair and helping him into his best new mantle, he changed his mind, for he declared he would come home first, to talk with you and Argutis. Argutis was at home again, but he had not found Alexander, for the poor youth has to hide himself as if he were a murderer." And again she sobbed; nor was it till Melissa had soothed her with kind speeches that she could go on with her story.

Philip had learned yesterday where Alexander was concealed, so he undertook to go across the lake and inform him of what had occurred. But Argutis, faithful and prudent, had hindered him, representing that Alexander, who was easily moved, as soon as he heard that his father was a prisoner would unhesitatingly give himself up to his enemies as a hostage, and rush headlong into danger. Alexander must remain in hiding so long as Caesar was in Alexandria. He (Argutis) would go instead of Philip, who, for his part, might call on the prefect later. He would cross the lake and warn Melissa not to return home, and to tell Alexander what he might think necessary. The watch might possibly follow Argutis; but he knew every lane and alley, and could mislead and avoid them. Philip had listened to reason. The slave went, and must now soon be back again.

Of how different a home-coming had Melissa dreamed! What new and terrible griefs were these! Still, though distressed at the thought of her vehement father in prison, she shed no tears, but told herself that matters could only be mended by rational action on behalf of the victims, and not by lamentations. She must be alone, to collect her strength and consider the situation. So she desired Dido, to her great amazement, to prepare some food, and bring her wine and water. Then, seating herself, with a melancholy glance at her embroidery where it lay folded together, she rested her elbow on the table and her head in her hand, considering to whom she could appeal to save her father.

First she thought of Caesar himself, whose eye had met hers, and for whom she had prayed and offered sacrifice. But the blood fired her cheeks at the thought, and she repelled it at once. Yet her mind would linger at the Serapeum, where her lover, too, still rested his fevered head. She knew that the high-priests' spacious lodgings there, with their splendid rooms and banqueting halls, had been prepared for the emperor; and she remembered various things which her brother had told her of Timotheus, who was at the head not only of the heathen priesthood, but also of the museum. He was said to be a philosopher, and Philip had more than once been distinguished by him, and invited to his house. Her brother must apply to him. He, who was in a way Caracalla's host, would easily succeed in obtaining her father's release, from his imperial guest.

Her grave face brightened at this thought, and, while she ate and drank, another idea struck her. Alexander, too, must be known to the high-priest; for Timotheus was the brother of Seleucus, whose daughter the artist had just painted, and Timotheus had seen the portrait and praised it highly. Thus it was not improbable that the generous man would, if Philip besought him, intercede for Alexander. So all might turn out better than she had ventured to hope.

Firmly convinced that it was her part to rescue her family, she once more reviewed in her mind every acquaintance to whom she might look for aid; but even during her meditations her tired frame asserted its rights, and when Dido came in to remove the remains of the meal and the empty wine-cup, she found Melissa sunk in sleep.

Shaking her head, and saying to herself that it served the old man right for his cruel treatment of a dutiful child--though, for Alexander's sake, she might have tried to keep awake--the faithful soul pushed a cushion under the girl's head, drew the screen across the window, and stood waving off the flies which buzzed about her darling's flushed face, till presently the dog barked, and an energetic knock shook the house-door. Melissa started from her slumbers, the old woman threw aside the fan, and, as she hurried to admit the vehement visitor, cried out to Melissa:

"Be easy, dear child--be easy. It is nothing; depend upon that. I know the knock; it is only Philip."

CHAPTER XIV.

Dido was right. Heron's eldest son had returned from his errand. Tired, disappointed, and with fierce indignation in his eyes, he staggered in like a drunken man who has been insulted in his cups; and, without greeting her--as his mother had taught her children to greet even their slaves--he merely asked in hoarse tones, "Is Melissa come in?"

"Yes, yes," replied Dido, laying her finger to her lips. "You roused her from a nap. And what a state you are in! You must not let her see you so! It is very clear what news you bring. The prefect will not help us?"

"Help us!" echoed Philip, wrathfully. "In Alexandria a man may drown rather than another will risk wetting his feet."

"Nay, it is not so bad as that," said the old woman. "Alexander himself has burned his fingers for others many a time. Wait a minute. I will fetch you a draught of wine. There is some still in the kitchen; for if you appear before your sister in that plight--"

But Melissa had recognized her brother's voice, and, although Philip had smoothed his hair a little with his hands, one glance at his face showed her that his efforts had been vain.

"Poor boy!" she said, when, in answer to her question as to what his news was, he had answered gloomily, "As bad as possible."

She took his hand and led him into the work-room. There she reminded him that she was giving him a new brother in Diodoros; and he embraced her fondly, and wished her and her betrothed every happiness. She thanked him out of a full heart, while he swallowed his wine, and then she begged him to tell her all he had done.

He began, and, as she gazed at him, it struck her how little he resembled his father and brother, though he was no less tall, and his head was shaped like theirs. But his frame, instead of showing their stalwart build, was lean and weakly. His spine did not seem strong enough for his long body, and he never held himself upright. His head was always bent forward, as if he were watching or seeking something; and even when he had seated himself in his father's place at the work-table to tell his tale, his hands and feet, even the muscles of his well-formed but colorless face, were in constant movement. He would jump up, or throw back his head to shake his long hair off his face, and his fine, large, dark eyes glowed with wrathful fires.

"I received my first repulse from the prefect," he began, and as he spoke, his arms, on whose graceful use the Greeks so strongly insisted, flew up in the air as though by their own impulse rather than by the speaker's will.

"Titianus affects the philosopher, because when he was young--long ago, that is very certain--his feet trod the Stoa."

"Your master, Xanthos, said that he was a very sound philosopher," Melissa put in.

"Such praise is to be had cheap," said Philip, "by the most influential man in the town. But his methods are old-fashioned. He crawls after Zeno; he submits to authority, and requires more independent spirits to do the same. To him the divinity is the Great First Cause. In this world of ours he can discern the working of a purposeful will, and confuses his mind with windy, worn-out ideals. Virtue, he says--but to what end repeat such stale old stuff?"

"We have no time for it," said Melissa, who saw that Philip was on the point of losing himself in a philosophical dissertation, for he had begun to enjoy the sound of his own voice, which was, in fact, unusually musical.

"Why not?" he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders, and with a bitter smile. "When he has shot away all his arrows, the Bowman may rest; and, as you will soon hear, our quiver is empty--as empty as this cup which I have drained."

"No, no!" exclaimed Melissa, eagerly. "If this first attempt has failed, that is the very reason for planning another. I, too, can use figures of speech. The archer who is really eager to hit the object on which he has spent his arrows, does not retire from the fight, but fetches more; and if he can find none, he fights with his bow, or falls on the enemy with stones, fists, and teeth."

Philip looked at her in astonishment, and exclaimed in pleased surprise, without any of the supercilious scorn which he commonly infused into his tone when addressing his humble sister:

"Listen to our little girl! Where did those gentle eyes get that determined flash? From misfortune--from misfortune! They rob the gentle dove of her young--I mean her splendid Alexander--and lo, she becomes a valiant falcon! I expected to find you a heart-broken lamb, over your tear-stained stitching, and behold it is you who try to fire me. Well, then, tell me what arrows we have left, when you have heard me out. But, before I proceed, is Argutis at home again? No? He must go across again, to take various things to Alexander--linen, garments, and the like. I met Glaukias the sculptor, and he begged me not to forget it; for he knows where the lad is hidden, and was on the point of going over to see him. The man had made himself perfectly unrecognizable. He is a true friend, if such a thing there be! And how grieved he was to hear of my father's ill fortune! I believe he is envious of Diodoros."

Melissa shook a finger at him; but she turned pale, and curiously inquired whether her brother had remembered to warn Glaukias on no account to tell Alexander that it was in his power to release his father.

Philip struck his brow, and, with a helpless fall of the mouth, which was usually so firmly set and ready to sneer, he exclaimed, like a boy caught in mischief: "That, that--I can not imagine how I forgot it, but I did not mention it. What strange absence of mind! But I can remedy it at once on the spot. Argutis--nay, I will go myself."

He sprang up, and was on the point of carrying out his sudden purpose, but Melissa detained him. With a decisiveness which again amazed him, she desired him to remain; and while he paced the workroom with rapid strides, heaping abuse on himself, now striking his breast, and now pushing his fingers through his disordered hair, she made it clear to him that he could not reach Alexander in time to prevent his knowing all, and that the only result of his visit would be to put the watch on the track. Instead of raving and lamenting, he would do better to tell her whither he had been.

First, he hastily began, he had gone to the prefect Titianus, who was an elderly man of a noble family, many of whose members had ere now occupied the official residence of the prefect in Alexandria, and in other towns of Egypt. He had often met Philip at the disputations he was wont to attend in the Museum, and had a great regard for him. But of late Titianus had been out of health, and had kept his house. He had undergone some serious operation shortly before Caesar's arrival at Alexandria had been announced, and this had made it impossible for him to be present at the grand reception, or even to pay his respects to Caracalla.

When Philip had sent in his name, Titianus had been very ready to receive him; but while the philosopher was still waiting in the anteroom, wondering to find it so empty--for it was usually crowded with the clients, petitioners, and friends of the most important man in the province--a bustle had arisen behind him, and a tall man had been ushered in past him, whom he recognized as the senator on whose arm Caracalla had leaned in the morning. This was the actor, whom the priest of Serapis had pointed out to Melissa as one of Caesar's most powerful favorites. From being a mere dancer he had risen in the course of a few years to the highest dignities. His name was Theocritus, and although he was distinguished by great personal beauty and exceptional cleverness, his unbridled greed had made him hated, and he had proved equally incompetent as a statesman and a general.

As this man marched through the anteroom, he had glanced haughtily about him, and the look of contempt which fell on the philosopher probably reflected on the small number of persons present, for at that hour the anterooms of Romans of rank were commonly thronged. Most visitors had been dismissed, by reason of the prefect's illness, and many of the acquaintances and supplicants who were generally to be found here were assembled in the imperial quarters, or in the rooms of the praetorian prefect and other powerful dignitaries in Caracalla's train. Titianus had failed to be present at the emperor's arrival, and keen courtier noses smelled a fall, and judged it wise to keep out of the way of a tottering power.

Besides all this, the prefect's honesty was well known, and it was strongly suspected that he, as steward of all the taxes of this wealthy province, had been bold enough to reject a proposal made by Theocritus to embezzle the whole freight of a fleet loaded with corn for Rome, and charge it to the account of army munitions. It was a fact that this base proposal had been made and rejected only the evening before, and the scene of which Philip became the witness was the result of this refusal.

Theocritus, to whom an audience was always indispensable, carefully left the curtains apart which divided the prefect's sick-room from the antechamber, and thus Philip was witness of the proceedings he now described to his sister.

Titianus received his visitor, lying down, and yet his demeanor revealed the self-possessed dignity of a high-born Roman, and the calm of a Stoic philosopher. He listened unmoved to the courtier, who, after the usual formal greetings, took upon himself to overwhelm the older man with the bitterest accusations and reproaches. People allowed themselves to take strange liberties with Caesar in this town, Theocritus burst out; insolent jests passed from lip to lip. An epigram against his sacred person had found its way into the Serapeum, his present residence--an insult worthy of any punishment, even of death and crucifixion.

When the prefect, with evident annoyance, but still quite calmly, desired to know what this extraordinary insult might be, Theocritus showed that even in his high position he had preserved the accurate memory of the mime, and, half angry, but yet anxious to give full effect to the lines by voice and gesture, he explained that "some wretch had fastened a rope to one of the doors of the sanctuary, and had written below it the blasphemous words:

*'Hail! For so welcome a guest never came to the sovereign of Hades.
Who ever peopled his realm, Caesar, more freely than thou?
Laurels refuse to grow green in the darksome abode of Serapis;
Take, then, this rope for a gift, never more richly deserved.'*"

"It is disgraceful!" exclaimed the prefect.

"Your indignation is well founded. But the biting tongue of the frivolous mixed races dwelling in this city is well known. They have tried it on me; and if, in this instance, any one is to blame, it is not I, the imprisoned prefect, but the chief and captain of the night-watch, whose business it is to guard Caesar's residence more strictly."

At this Theocritus was furious, and poured out a flood of words, expatiating on the duties of a prefect as Caesar's

representative in the provinces. "His eye must be as omniscient as that of the all-seeing Deity. The better he knew the uproarious rabble over whom he ruled, the more evidently was it his duty to watch over Caesar's person as anxiously as a mother over her child, as a miser over his treasure."

The high-sounding words flowed with dramatic emphasis, the sentimental speaker adding to their impressiveness by the action of his hands, till it was more than the invalid could bear. With a pinched smile, he raised himself with difficulty, and interrupted Theocritus with the impatient exclamation, "Still the actor!"

"Yes, still!" retorted the favorite, in a hard voice. "You, however, have been even longer--what you have, indeed, been too long--Prefect of Egypt!" With an angry fling he threw the corner of his toga over his shoulder, and, though his hand shook with rage, the pliant drapery fell in graceful folds over his athletic limbs. He turned his back on the prefect, and, with the air of a general who has just been crowned with laurels, he stalked through the anteroom and past Philip once more.

The philosopher had told his sister all this in a few sentences. He now paused in his walk to and fro to answer Melissa's question as to whether this upstart's influence were really great enough to turn so noble and worthy a man out of his office.

"Can you ask?" said Philip. "Titianus had no doubts from the first; and what I heard in the Serapeum--but all in good time. The prefect was sorry for my father and Alexander, but ended by saying that he himself needed an intercessor; for, if it were not to-day, at any rate to-morrow, the actor would inveigle Caesar into signing his death-warrant."

"Impossible!" cried the girl, spreading out her hands in horror; but Philip dropped into a seat, saying:

"Listen to the end. There was evidently nothing to be hoped for from Titianus. He is, no doubt, a brave man, but there is a touch of the actor in him too. He is a Stoic; and where would be the point of that, if a man could not appear to look on approaching death as calmly as on taking a bath?"

"Titianus plays his part well. However, I next went to the Serapeum--it is a long way, and it was very hot in the sun--to ask for help from my old patron, the high-priest. Caesar is now his guest; and the prefect, too, had advised me to place my father's cause in his hands."

Here Philip sprang up again, and rushed up and down, sometimes stopping for a moment in front of his sister while he went on with his story.

Theocritus had long since reached the Serapeum in his swift chariot when the philosopher at last arrived there on foot. He was well known as a frequent visitor, and was shown at once into the hall of that part of his abode which Timotheus had reserved for himself when he had given up all the best rooms to his imperial visitor.

The anteroom was crowded, and before he got any farther he heard that the favorite's accusations had already led to serious results, and rumors were rife concerning the luckless witticisms of some heedless youth, which would bring grief upon the peaceable citizens. But before he could ask what was meant, he was admitted to the high-priest's room.

This was a marked favor on such a day as this, and the benevolence with which he was received by the head of the priesthood of the whole city filled him with good hopes of a successful issue. But hardly had Philip begun to speak of his brother's misdemeanor, than Timotheus laid his hand on his bearded lips, as a hint to be cautious, and whispered in his ear, "Speak quickly and low, if you love your life!"

When Philip had hastily explained that Zminis had imprisoned his father, the old man started to his feet with a promptitude to which his majestic person was unaccustomed, and pointed to a curtained doorway on one side of the room.

"Through that door," he whispered, "you will reach the western steps, and the passage leading out of the precincts to the stadium. You are known to the Romans in the anteroom. It is not the god to whom this building is dedicated who now rules within these walls. Your brother's rash words are repeated everywhere, and have even come to Caesar's knowledge; and he has been told that it was the same traitor--who has for the moment escaped Zminis and his men--who nailed a rope on one of our doors, and with it an audacious inscription. To speak a single word in behalf of Alexander or your father would be to fling myself into the fire without putting it out. You do not know how fiercely it is burning. Theocritus is feeding the flame, for he needs it to destroy the prefect. Now, not another word; and, come what may, so long as the Roman visitors dwell under this roof, beware of it!"

And the high-priest opened the door with his own hand.

"I hurried home," Philip added, "and if I forgot, in my dismay at this fresh disaster, to warn Glaukias to be careful--But, no, no! It is unpardonable!--Alexander is by this time crossing the lake, perhaps. I am like Caracalla--my brother's murderer!"

But Melissa laid her arm on his shoulder and besought the poor fellow to be comforted; and her loving words of excuse seemed to have some good effect. But why was he always so reserved? Why could not Philip be as frank with her as Alexander was? She had never been very near to him; and now he was concealing from her something which moved him deeply.

She turned away sadly, for she could not even comfort him. But then again Philip sighed from the bottom of his heart, and she could contain her self no longer. More tenderly than she had ever addressed him before, she besought her brother to open his heart to her. She would gladly help him to endure what oppressed him; and she could understand, for she herself had learned what the joys and sorrows of love were.

She had found the right clew. Philip nodded, and answered gloomily:

"Well, then, listen. It may do me good to speak." And thereupon he began to tell her what she had already heard from Alexander; and, covering her tingling cheeks with her hands, she listened with breathless attention, not missing a word, though the question rose to her mind again and again whether she should tell him the whole truth, which he as yet could not know, or whether it would be better to spare his already burdened soul.

He described his love in glowing colors. Korinna's heart, he said, must have gone forth to him; for, at their last meeting on the northern shore of the lake, her hand had rested in his while he helped her out of the boat; he could still feel the touch of her fingers. Nor had the meeting been pure accident, for he had since seen and recognized the presence on earth of her departed soul in her apparently living form. And she, too, with the subtle senses of a disembodied spirit, must have had a yearning towards him, for she had perceived all the depth and fervor of his passion. Alexander had given him this certainty; for when he had seen Korinna by the lake, her soul had long since abandoned its earthly tenement. Before that, her mortal part was already beyond his reach; and yet he was happy, for the spirit was not lost to him. Only last night magic forces had brought her before him--his father, too, had been present, and no deception was possible. He had gone to bed in rapturous excitement, full of delicious hopes, and Korinna had at once appeared to him in a dream, so lovely, so kind, and at the same time so subtle a vision, ready to follow him in his thoughts and strivings. But just as he had heard a full assurance of her love from her own lips, and was asking her by what name he should call her when the craving to see her again should wax strong in him, old Dido had waked him, to cast him out of elysium into the deepest earthly woes.

But, he added--and he drew himself up proudly--he should soon possess the Magian's art, for there was no kind of learning he could not master; even as a boy he had proved that to his teachers. He, whose knowledge had but yesterday culminated in the assurance that it was impossible to know anything, could now assert with positive conviction, that the human soul could exist apart from the matter it had animated. He had thus gained that fixed footing outside the earth which Archimedes had demanded to enable him to move it; and he should soon be able to exert his power over departed souls, whose nature he now understood as well as--ay, and better than--Serapion. Korinna's obedient spirit would help him, and when once he should succeed in commanding the souls of the dead, as their master, and in keeping them at hand among the living, a new era of happiness would begin, not only for him and his father, but for every one who had lost one dear to him by death.

But here Melissa interrupted his eager and confident speech. She had listened with increasing uneasiness to the youth who, as she knew, had been cheated. At first she thought it would be cruel to destroy his bright illusions. He should at least in this be happy, till the anguish of having thoughtlessly betrayed his brother to ruin should be a thing of the past! But when she perceived that he purposed involving his father in the Magian's snares by calling up his mother's Manes, she could no longer be silent, and she broke out with indignant warning: "Leave my father alone, Philip! For all you saw at the Magian's was mere trickery."

"Gently, child," said the philosopher, in a superior tone. "I was of exactly the same opinion till after sundown yesterday. You know that the tendency of the school of philosophy to which I belong insists, above all, on a suspension of judgment; but if there is one thing which may be asserted with any dogmatic certainty--"

But Melissa would hear no more. She briefly but clearly explained to him who the maiden was whose hand he had held by the lake, and whom he had seen again at Serapion's house; and as she went on his interruptions became fewer. She did her utmost, with growing zeal, to destroy his luckless dream; but when the blood faded altogether from his colorless cheeks, and he clasped his hand over his brow as if to control some physical suffering, she recovered her self-command; the beautiful fear of a woman's heart of ever giving useless pain, made her withhold from Philip what remained to be told of Agatha's meeting with Alexander.

But, without this further revelation, Philip sat staring at the ground as if he were overwhelmed; and what hurt him so deeply was less the painful sense of having been cheated by such coarse cunning, than the annihilation of the treasured hopes which he had founded on the experiences of the past night. He felt as though a brutal foot had trampled down the promise of future joys on which he had counted; his sister's revelations had spoiled not merely his life on earth, but all eternity beyond the grave. Where hope ends despair steps in; and Philip, with reckless vehemence, flung himself, as it were, into its arms. His was an excitable nature; he had never thought of any one but himself, but labored with egotistical zeal to cultivate his own mind and outdo his fellows in the competition for learning. The sullen words in which he called himself the most wretched man on earth, and the victim of the blackest ill-fortune, fell from his lips like stones. He rudely repelled his sister's encouraging words, like a sick child whose pain is the greater for being pitied, till at last she appealed to his sense of duty, reminding him that something must be done to rescue her father and Alexander.

"They also! They also!" he cried. "It falls on us all. Blind Fate drives us all, innocent as we are, to death and despair, like the Tantalides. What sin have you committed, gentle, patient child; or our father, or our happy-hearted and gifted brother; or I--I myself? Have those whom we call the rulers of the universe the right to punish me because I make use of the inquiring spirit they have bestowed on me? Ah, and how well they know how to torture us! They hate me for my learning, and so they turn my little errors to account to allow me to be cheated like a fool! They are said to be just, and they behave like a father who disinherits his son because, as a man, he notes his parent's weakness. With tears and anguish have I striven for truth and knowledge. There is not a province of thought whose deepest depths I have not tried to fathom; and when I recognized that it is not given to mortals to apprehend the essence of the divinity because the organs bestowed on us are too small and feeble; when I refused to pronounce whether that which I can not apprehend exists or not, was that my fault, or theirs? There may be divine forces which created and govern the universe; but never talk to me of their goodness, and reasonableness, and care for human creatures! Can a reasonable being, who cares for the happiness of another, strew the place assigned to him to dwell in with snares and traps, or implant in his breast a hundred impulses of which the gratification only drags him into an abyss? Is that Being my friend, who suffers me to be born and to grow up, and leaves me tied to the martyr's stake, with very few real joys, and finally kills me, innocent or guilty, as surely as I am born? If the divinity which is supposed to bestow on us a portion of the divine essence in the form of reason were constituted as the crowd are taught to believe, there could be nothing on earth but wisdom and goodness; but the majority are fools or wicked, and the good are like tall trees, which the lightning blasts rather than the creeping weed. Titianus falls before the dancer Theocritus, the noble Papinian before the murderer Caracalla, our splendid Alexander before such a wretch as Zminis; and divine reason lets it all happen, and allows human reason to proclaim the law. Happiness is for fools and knaves; for those who cherish and uphold reason--ay, reason, which is a part of the divinity--persecution, misery, and despair."

"Have done!" Melissa exclaimed. "Have the judgments of the immortals not fallen hardly enough on us? Would you provoke them to discharge their fury in some more dreadful manner?"

At this the skeptic struck his breast with defiant pride, exclaiming: "I do not fear them, and dare to proclaim openly the conclusions of my thoughts. There are no gods! There is no rational guidance of the universe. It has arisen self-evolved, by chance; and if a god created it, he laid down eternal laws and has left them to govern its course without mercy or grace, and without troubling himself about the puling of men who creep about on the face of the earth like the ants on that of a pumpkin. And well for us that it should be so! Better a thousand times is it to be the servant of an iron law, than the slave of a capricious master who takes a malignant and envious pleasure in destroying the best!"

"And this, you say, is the final outcome of your thoughts?" asked Melissa, shaking her head sadly. "Do you not perceive that such an outbreak of mad despair is simply unworthy of your own wisdom, of which the end and aim should be a passionless, calm, and immovable moderation?"

"And do they show such moderation," Philip gasped out, "who pour the poison of misfortune in floods on one tortured heart?"

"Then you can accuse those whose existence you disbelieve in?" retorted Melissa with angry zeal. "Is this your much-belauded logic? What becomes of your dogmas, in the face of the first misfortune--dogmas which enjoin a reserve of decisive judgment, that you may preserve your equanimity, and not overburden your soul, in addition to the misfortune itself, with the conviction that something monstrous has befallen you? I remember how much that pleased me the first time I heard it. For your own sake--for the sake of us all--cease this foolish raving, and do not merely call yourself a skeptic--be one; control the passion that is rending you. For love of me--for love of us all--"

And as she spoke she laid her hand on his shoulder, for he had sat down again; and although he pushed her away with some petulance, she went on in a tone of gentle entreaty: "If we are not to be altogether too late in the field, let us consider the situation calmly. I am but a girl, and this fresh disaster will fall more hardly on me than on you; for what would become of me without my father?"

"Life with him has at any rate taught you patient endurance," her brother broke in with a sullen shrug.

"Yes, life," she replied, firmly: "life, which shows us the right way better than all your books. Who can tell what may have detained Argutis? I will wait no longer. The sun will have set before long, and this evening Caesar is to sup with Seleukus, the father of Korinna. I happen to know it from Samonicus, who is one of the guests. Seleukus and his wife have a great regard for Alexander, and will do for him all that lies in their power. The lady Berenike, he told me, is a noble dame. It should be your part to entreat her help for our father and brother; but you must not venture where Caesar is. So I will go, and I shall have no rest till Korinna's mother listens to me and promises to aid us."

At this Philip exclaimed, in horror: "What! you will dare to enter the house where Caracalla is feasting with the rabble he calls his friends? You, an inexperienced girl, young, beautiful, whose mere appearance is enough to stir their evil passions? Sooner than allow that, I will myself find my way into the house of Seleukus, and among the spies who surround the tyrant."

"That my father may lose another son, and I my only remaining brother?" Melissa observed, with grave composure. "Say no more, Philip. I am going, and you must wait for me here."

The philosopher broke out at this in despotic wrath:

"What has come over you, that you have suddenly forgotten how to obey? But I insist; and rather than allow you to bring on us not trouble merely, but shame and disgrace, I will lock you into your room!"

He seized her hand to drag her into the adjoining room. She struggled with all her might; but he was the stronger, and he had got her as far as the door, when the Gaul Argutis rushed, panting and breathless, into the work-room through the anteroom, calling out to the struggling couple:

"What are you doing? By all the gods, you have chosen the wrong time for a quarrel! Zminis is on the way hither to take you both prisoners; he will be here in a minute! Fly into the kitchen, girl! Dido will hide you in the wood-store behind the hearth.-You, Philip, must squeeze into the henhouse. Only be quick, or it will be too late!"

"Go!" cried Melissa to her brother. "Out through the kitchen window you can get into the poultry-yard!"

She threw herself weeping into his arms, kissed him, and added, hastily: "Whatever happens to us, I shall risk all to save my father and Alexander. Farewell! The gods preserve us!"

She now seized Philip's wrist, as he had before grasped hers, to drag him away; but he freed himself, saying, with an indifference which terrified her: "Then let the worst come. Ruin may take its course. Death rather than dishonor!"

"Madman!" the slave could not help exclaiming; and the faithful fellow, though wont to obey, threw his arms round his master's son to drag him away into the kitchen, while Philip pushed him off, saying:

"I will not hide, like a frightened woman!"

But the Gaul heard the approach of marching men, so, paying no further heed to the brother, he dragged Melissa into the kitchen, where old Dido undertook to hide her.

Philip stood panting in the studio. Through the open window he could see the pursuers coming nearer, and the instinct of self-preservation, which asserts itself even in the strongest, prompted him to follow the slave's advice. But before he could reach the door, in fancy he saw himself joining the party of philosophers airing themselves under the arcades in the great court of the Museum; he heard their laughter and their bitter jests at the skeptic, the independent thinker, who had sought refuge among the fowls, who had been hauled out of the hen-house; and this picture confirmed his determination to yield to force rather than bring on himself the curse of ridicule. But at the same time other reasons for submitting to his fate suggested themselves unbidden--reasons more worthy of his position, of the whole course and aim of his thoughts, and of the sorrow which weighed upon his soul. It beseeemed him as a skeptic to endure the worst with equanimity; under all circumstances he liked to be in the right, and he would fain have called out to his sister that the cruel powers whose enmity he had incurred still persisted in driving him on to despair and death, worthy as he was of a better fate.

A few minutes later Zminis came in, and put out his long lean arms to apprehend him in Caesar's name. Philip submitted, and not a muscle of his face moved. Once, indeed, a smile lighted it up, as he reflected that they would hardly have carried him off to prison if Alexander were already in their power; but the smile gave way only too soon to gloomy gravity when Zminis informed him that his brother, the traitor, had just given himself up to the chief of the night-watch, and was now safe under lock and ward. But his crime was so great that, according to the law of Egypt, his nearest relations were to be seized and punished with him. Only his sister was now missing, but they would know how to find her.

"Possibly," Philip replied, coldly. "As justice is blind, Injustice has no doubt all the sharper eyes."

"Well said," laughed the Egyptian. "A pinch of the salt which they give you at the Museum with your porridge--for nothing."

Argutis had witnessed this scene; and when, half an hour later, the men-at-arms had left the house without discovering Melissa's hiding-place, he informed her that Alexander had, as they feared, given himself up of his own free-will to procure Heron's release; but the villains had kept the son, without liberating the father. Both were now in prison, loaded with chains. The slave had ended his tale some minutes, and Melissa still stood, pale and tearless, gazing on the ground as though she were turned to stone; but suddenly she shivered, as if with the chill of fever, and looked up, out through the windows into the garden, now dim in the twilight. The sun had set, night was falling, and again the words of the Christian preacher recurred to her mind: "The fullness of the time is come."

To her and hers a portion of life had come to an end, and a new one must grow out of it. Should the free-born race of Heron perish in captivity and death?

The evening star blazed out on the distant horizon, seeming to her as a sign from the gods; and she told herself that it must be her part, as the last of the family who remained free, to guard the others from destruction in this new life.

The heavens were soon blazing with stars. The banquet in Seleukus's house, at which Caesar was to appear, would begin in an hour. Irresolution and delay would ruin all; so she drew herself up resolutely and called to Argutis, who had watched her with faithful sympathy:

"Take my father's blue cloak, Argutis, to make you more dignified; and disguise yourself, for you must escort me,

and we may be followed. You, Dido, come and help me. Take my new dress, that I wore at the Feast of Adonis, out of my trunk; and with it you will see my mother's blue fillet with the gems. My father used to say I should first wear it at my wedding, but--Well, you must bind my hair with it to-night. I am going to a grand house, where no one will be admitted who does not look worthy of people of mark. But take off the jewel; a suppliant should make no display."

CHAPTER XV.

Nothing delighted old Dido more than to dress the daughter of her beloved mistress in all her best, for she had helped to bring her up; but to-day it was a cruel task; tears dimmed her old eyes. It was not till she had put the finishing touches to braiding the girl's abundant brown hair, pinned her peplos on the shoulders with brooches, and set the girdle straight, that her face cleared, as she looked at the result. Never had she seen her darling look so fair. Nothing, indeed, remained of the child-like timidity and patient submissiveness which had touched Dido only two days since, as she plaited Melissa's hair. The maiden's brow was grave and thoughtful, the lips firmly set; but she seemed to Dido to have grown, and to have gained something of her mother's mature dignity. She looked, the old woman told her, like the image of Pallas Athene; adding, to make her smile, that if she wanted an owl, she, Dido, could fill the part. Jesting had never been the old woman's strong point, and to-day it was less easy than ever; for, if the worst befell, and she were sent in her old age to a strange house--and Argutis, no doubt, to another--she would have to turn the handmill for the rest of her days.

But it was a hard task which the motherless--and now fatherless--girl had set herself, and she must try to cheer her darling. While she was dressing her, she never ceased praying to all the gods and goddesses she could think of to come to the maiden's aid and move the souls of those who could help her. And though she was, as a rule, ready to expect the worst, this time she hoped for the best; for Seleukus's wife must have a heart of stone if she could close it to such innocence, such beauty, and the pathetic glance of those large, imploring eyes.

When at length Melissa quitted the house, deeply veiled, with Argutis to escort her, she took his arm, and he, wearing his master's mantle, and exempted long since from keeping his hair cropped, was so proud of this that he walked with all the dignity of a freeman, and no one could have guessed that he was a slave. Melissa's face was completely hidden, and she, like her companion, was safe from recognition. Argutis, nevertheless, led her through the quietest and darkest lanes to the Kanopic way. Both were silent, and looked straight before them. Melissa, as she walked on, could not think with her usual calm. Like a suffering man who goes to the physician's house to die or be cured by the knife, she felt that she was on her way to something terrible in itself, to remedy, if possible, something still more dreadful. Her father--Alexander, so reckless and so good-hearted--Philip, whom she pitied--and her sick lover, came in turn before her fancy. But she could not control her mind to dwell on either for long. Nor could she, as usual, when she had any serious purpose in hand, put up a prayer to her mother's manes or the immortals; and all the while an inner voice made itself heard, confidently promising her that Caesar, for whom she had sacrificed, and who might be kinder and more merciful than others fancied, would at once grant all she should ask. But she would not listen; and when she nevertheless ventured to consider how she could make her way into Caesar's presence, a cold shiver ran down her back, and again Philip's last words sounded in her ears, "Death rather than dishonor!"

Other thoughts and feelings filled the slave's soul. He, who had always watched over his master's children with far more anxious care than Heron himself, had not said a word to dissuade Melissa from her perilous expedition. Her plan had, indeed, seemed to him the only one which promised any success. He was a man of sixty years, and a shrewd fellow, who might easily have found a better master than Heron had been; but he gave not a thought to his own prospects--only to Melissa's, whom he loved as a child of his own. She had placed herself under his protection, and he felt responsible for her fate. Thus he regarded it as great good fortune that he could be of use in procuring her admission to the house of Seleukus, for the door-keeper was a fellow-countryman of his, whom Fate had brought hither from the banks of the Moselle. At every festival, which secured a few hours' liberty to all the slaves, they had for years been boon companions, and Argutis knew that his friend would do for him and his young mistress all that lay in his power. It would, of course, be difficult to get an audience of the mistress of a house where Caesar was a guest, but the door-keeper was clever and ingenious, and would do anything short of the impossible.

So he walked with his head high and his heart full of pride, and it confirmed his courage when one of Zminis's men, whom they passed in the brightly illuminated Kanopic street, and who had helped to secure Philip, looked at him without recognizing him.

There was a great stir in this, the handsomest road through the city. The people were waiting for Caesar; but stricter order was observed than on the occasion of his arrival. The guard prohibited all traffic on the southern side of the way, and only allowed the citizens to walk up and down the footpath, shaded by trees, between the two roadways paved with granite flags, and the arcades in front of the houses on either side. The free inhabitants, unaccustomed to such restrictions, revenged themselves by cutting witticisms at Caesar's expense, "for clearing the streets of Alexandria by his men-at-arms as he did those of Rome by the executioner. He seemed to have forgotten, as he kept the two roads open, that he only needed one, now that he had murdered his brother and partner."

Melissa and her companion were ordered to join the crowd on the footway; but Argutis managed to convince a man on guard that they were two of the mimes who were to perform before Caesar--the door-keeper at the house of Seleukus would confirm the fact--and the official himself made way for them into the vestibule of this splendid dwelling.

But Melissa was as little in the humor to admire all the lavish magnificence which surrounded her as Alexander had been a few days since. Still veiled, she modestly took a place among the choir who stood on each side of the hall ready to welcome Caesar with singing and music. Argutis stopped to speak with his friend. She dimly felt that the whispering and giggling all about her was at her expense; and when an elderly man, the choir-master, asked her what she wanted, and desired her to remove her veil, she obeyed at once, saying: "Pray let me stand here, the Lady Berenike will send for me."

"Very well," replied the musician; and he silenced the singers, who were hazarding various impertinent guesses as to the arrival of so pretty a girl just when Caesar was expected.

As Melissa dropped her veil the splendor of the scene, lighted up by numberless tapers and lamps, forced itself on her attention. She now perceived that the porphyry columns of the great hall were wreathed with flowers, and that garlands swung in graceful curves from the open roof; while at the farther end, statues had been placed of Septimus Severus and Julia Domna, Caracalla's parents. On each side of these works of art stood bowers of plants, in which gay-plumaged birds were fluttering about, excited by the lights. But all these glories swam before her eyes, and the first question which the artist's daughter was wont to ask herself, "is it really beautiful or no?" never occurred to her mind. She did not even notice the smell of incense, until some fresh powder was thrown on, and it became oppressive.

She was fully conscious only of two facts, when at last Argutis returned: that she was the object of much curious examination and that every one was wondering what detained Caesar so long.

At last, after she had waited many long minutes, the door-keeper approached her with a young woman in a rich but simple dress, in whom she recognized Johanna, the Christian waiting-maid of whom Alexander had spoken. She did not speak, but beckoned her to come.

Breathing anxiously, and bending her head low, Melissa, following her guide, reached a handsome impluvium, where a fountain played in the midst of a bed of roses. Here the moon and starlight mingled with that of lamps without number, and the ruddy glare of a blaze; for all round the basin, from which the playing waters danced skyward, stood marble genii, carrying in their hands or on their heads silver dishes, in which the leaping flames consumed cedar chips and aromatic resins.

At the back of this court, where it was as light as day, at the top of three steps, stood the statues of Alexander the Great and Caracalla. They were of equal size; and the artist, who had wrought the second in great haste out of the slightest materials, had been enjoined to make Caesar as like as possible in every respect to the hero he most revered. Thus they looked like brothers. The figures were lighted up by the fires which burned on two altars of ivory and gold. Beautiful boys, dressed as armed Erotes, fed the flames.

The whole effect was magical and bewildering; but, as she followed her guide, Melissa only felt that she was in the midst of a new world, such as she might perhaps have seen in a dream; till, as they passed the fountain, the cool drops sprinkled her face.

Then she suddenly remembered what had brought her hither. In a minute she must appear as a supplicant in the presence of Korinna's mother--perhaps even in that of Caesar himself--and the fate of all dear to her depended on her demeanor. The sense of fulfilling a serious duty was uppermost in her mind. She drew herself up, and replaced a stray lock of hair; and her heart beat almost to bursting as she saw a number of men standing on the platform at the top of the steps, round a lady who had just risen from her ivory seat. Giving her hand to a Roman senator, distinguished by the purple edge to his toga, she descended the steps, and advanced to meet Melissa.

This dignified matron, who was awaiting the ruler of the world and yet could condescend to come forward to meet a humble artist's daughter, was taller by half a head than her illustrious companion; and the few minutes during which Berenike was coming toward her were enough to fill Melissa with thankfulness, confidence, and admiration. And even in that short time, as she gazed at the magnificent dress of blue brocade shot with gold and sparkling with precious stones which draped the lady's majestic figure, she thought how keen a pang it must cost the mother, so lately bereft of her only child, to maintain a kindly, nay, a genial aspect, in the midst of this display, toward Caesar and a troop of noisy guests.

The sincerest pity for this woman, rich and preeminent as she was, filled the soul of the girl, who herself was so much to be pitied. But when the lady had come up to her, and asked, in her deep voice, what was the danger that threatened her brother, Melissa, with unembarrassed grace, and although it was the first time she had ever addressed a lady of such high degree, answered simply, with a full sense of the business in hand:

"My name is Melissa; I am the sister of Alexander the painter. I know it is overbold to venture into your presence just now, when you have so much else to think of; but I saw no other way of saving my brother's life, which is in peril."

At this Berenike seemed surprised. She turned to her companion, who was her sister's husband, and the first Egyptian who had been admitted to the Roman Senate, and said, in a tone of gentle reproach:

"Did not I say so, Coeranus? Nothing but the most urgent need would have brought Alexander's sister to speak with me at such an hour."

And the senator, whose black eyes had rested with pleasure on Melissa's rare beauty, promptly replied, "And if she had come for the veriest trifle she would be no less welcome to me."

"Let me hear no more of such speeches," Berenike exclaimed with some annoyance.--"Now, my child, be quick. What about your brother?"

Melissa briefly and truthfully reported Alexander's heedless crime and the results to her father and Philip. She ended by beseeching the noble lady with fervent pathos to intercede for her father and brothers.

Meanwhile the senator's keen face had darkened, and the lady Berenike's large eyes, too, were downcast. She evidently found it hard to come to a decision; and for the moment she was relieved of the necessity, for runners came hurrying up, and the senator hastily desired Melissa to stand aside.

He whispered to his sister-in-law:

"It will never do to spoil Caesar's good-humor under your roof for the sake of such people," and Berenike had only time to reply, "I am not afraid of him," when the messenger explained to her that Caesar himself was prevented from coming, but that his representatives, charged with his apologies, were close at hand.

On this Coeranus exclaimed, with a sour smile: "Admit that I am a true prophet! You have to put up with the same treatment that we senators have often suffered under."

But the matron scarcely heard him. She cast her eyes up to heaven with sincere thanksgiving as she murmured with a sigh of relief, "For this mercy the gods be praised!"

She unclasped her hands from her heaving bosom, and said to the steward who had followed the messengers:

"Caesar will not be present. Inform your lord, but so that no one else may hear. He must come here and receive the imperial representatives with me. Then have my couch quietly removed and the banquet served at once. O Coeranus, you can not imagine the misery I am thus spared!"

"Berenike!" said the senator, in a warning voice, and he laid his finger on his lips. Then turning to the young supplicant, he said to her in a tone of regret: "So your walk is for nothing, fair maid. If you are as sensible as you are pretty, you will understand that it is too much to ask any one to stand between the lion and the prey which has roused his ire."

The lady, however, did not heed the caution which her brother-in-law intended to convey. As Melissa's imploring eyes met her own, she said, with clear decision:

"Wait here. We shall see who it is that Caesar sends. I know better than my lord here what it is to see those dear to us in peril. How old are you, child?"

"Eighteen," replied Melissa.

"Eighteen?" repeated Berenike, as if the word were a pain to her, for her daughter had been just of that age. Then she said, louder and with encouraging kindness:

"All that lies in my power shall be done for you and yours.--And you, Coeranus, must help me."

"If I can," he replied, "with all the zeal of my reverence for you and my admiration for beauty. But here come the envoys. The elder, I see, is our learned Philostratus, whose works are known to you; the younger is Theocritus, the favorite of fortune of whom I was telling you. If the charm of that face might but conquer the omnipotent youth--"

"Coeranus!" she exclaimed, with stern reproof; but she failed to hear the senator's excuses, for her husband, Seleukus, followed her down the steps, and with a hasty sign to her, advanced to meet his guests.

Theocritus was spokesman, and notwithstanding the mourning toga which wrapped him in fine folds, his gestures did not belie his origin as an actor and dancer. When Seleukus presented him to his wife, Theocritus assured her that when, but an hour since, his sovereign lord, who was already dressed and wreathed for the banquet, had learned that the gods had bereft of their only child the couple whose hospitality had promised him such a delightful evening, he had been equally shocked and grieved. Caesar was deeply distressed at the unfortunate circumstance that he should have happened in his ignorance to intrude on the seclusion which was the prerogative of grief. He begged to assure her and her husband of the high favor of the ruler of the world. As for himself, Theocritus, he would not fail to describe the splendor with which they had decorated their princely residence in Caesar's honor. His imperial master would be touched, indeed, to hear that even the bereaved mother, who, like Niobe, mourned for her offspring, had broken the stony spell which held her to Sipylos, and had decked herself to receive the greatest of all earthly guests as radiant as Juno at the golden table of the gods.

The lady succeeded in controlling herself and listening to the end of these pompous phrases without interrupting the speaker. Every word which flowed so glibly from his tongue fell on her ear as bitter mockery; and he himself was so repugnant to her, that she felt it a release when, after exchanging a few words with the master of the house, he begged leave to retire, as important business called him away. And this, indeed, was the truth. For no consideration would he have left this duty to another, for it was to communicate to Titianus, who had offended him, the intelligence that Caesar had deprived him of the office of prefect, and intended to examine into certain complaints of his administration.

The second envoy, however, remained, though he refused Seleukus's invitation to fill his place at the banquet. He exchanged a few words with the lady Berenike, and presently found himself taken aside by the senator, and, after a short explanation, led up to Melissa, whom Coeranus desired to appeal for help to Philostratus, the famous philosopher, who enjoyed Caesar's closest confidence.

Coeranus then obeyed a sign from Berenike, who wished to know whether he would be answerable for introducing this rarely pretty girl, who had placed herself under their protection--and whom she, for her part, meant to protect--to a courtier of whom she knew nothing but that he was a writer of taste.

The question seemed to amuse Coeranus, but, seeing that his sister-in-law was very much in earnest, he dropped his flippant tone and admitted that Philostratus, as a young man, had been one of the last with whom he would trust a girl. His far-famed letters sufficiently proved that the witty philosopher had been a devoted and successful courtier of women. But that was all a thing of the past. He still, no doubt, did homage to female beauty, but he led a regular life, and had become one of the most ardent and earnest upholders of religion and virtue. He was one of the learned circle which gathered round Julia Domna, and it was by her desire that he had accompanied Caracalla, to keep his mad passions in check when it might be possible.

The conversation between Melissa and the philosopher had meanwhile taken an unexpected turn. At his very first address the reply had died on her lips, for in Caesar's representative she had recognized the Roman whom she had seen in the Temple of Asklepios, and who had perhaps overheard her there. Philostratus, too, seemed to remember the meeting; for his shrewd face--a pleasing mixture of grave and gay--lighted up at once with a subtle smile as he said:

"If I am not mistaken, I owe the same pleasure this evening to divine Caesar as to great Asklepios this morning?"

At this, Melissa cast a meaning glance at Coeranus and the lady, and, although surprise and alarm sealed her lips, her uplifted hands and whole gesture sufficiently expressed her entreaty that he would not betray her. He understood and obeyed. It pleased him to share a secret with this fair child. He had, in fact, overheard her, and understood with amazement that she was praying fervently for Caesar.

This stirred his curiosity to the highest pitch. So he said, in an undertone:

"All that I saw and heard in the temple is our secret, sweet maid. But what on earth can have prompted you to pray so urgently for Caesar? Has he done you or yours any great benefit?"

Melissa shook her head, and Philostratus went on with increased curiosity:

"Then are you one of those whose heart Eros can fire at the sight of an image, or the mere aspect of a man?"

To this she answered hastily:

"What an idea! No, no. Certainly not."

"No?" said her new friend, with greater surprise. "Then perhaps your hopeful young soul expects that, being still but a youth, he may, by the help of the gods, become, like Titus, a benefactor to the whole world?"

Melissa looked timidly at the matron, who was still talking with her brother-in-law, and hastily replied:

"They all call him a murderer! But I know for certain that he suffers fearful torments of mind and body; and one who knows many things told me that there was not one among all the millions whom Caesar governs who ever prays for him; and I was so sorry--I can not tell you--"

"And so," interrupted the philosopher, "you thought it praiseworthy and pleasing to the gods that you should be the first and only one to offer sacrifice for him, in secret, and of your own free will? That was how it came about? Well, child, you need not be ashamed of it."

But then suddenly his face clouded, and he asked, in a grave and altered voice:

"Are you a Christian?"

"No," she replied, firmly. "We are Greeks. How could I have offered a sacrifice of blood to Asklepios if I had believed in the crucified god?"

"Then," said Philostratus, and his eyes flashed brightly, "I may promise you, in the name of the gods, that your prayer and offering were pleasing in their eyes. I myself, noble girl, owe you a rare pleasure. But, tell me--how did you feel as you left the sanctuary?"

"Light-hearted, my lord, and content," she answered, with a frank, glad look in her fine eyes. "I could have sung as I went down the road, though there were people about."

"I should have liked to hear you," he said, kindly, and he still held her hand, which he had grasped with the amiable geniality that characterized him, when they were joined by the senator and his sister-in-law.

"Has she won your good offices?" asked Coeranus; and Philostratus replied, quickly, "Anything that it lies in my power to do for her shall certainly be done."

Berenike bade them both to join her in her own rooms, for everything that had to do with the banquet was odious to her; and as they went, Melissa told her new friend her brother's story. She ended it in the quiet sitting-room of the

mistress of the house, an artistic but not splendid apartment, adorned only with the choicest works of early Alexandrian art. Philostratus listened attentively, but, before she could put her petition for help into words, he exclaimed:

"Then what we have to do is, to move Caesar to mercy, and that--Child, you know not what you ask!"

They were interrupted by a message from Seleukus, desiring Coeranus to join the other guests, and as soon as he had left them Berenike withdrew to take off the splendor she hated. She promised to return immediately and join their discussion, and Philostratus sat for a while lost in thought. Then he turned to Melissa and asked her:

"Would you for their sakes be able to make up your mind to face bitter humiliation, nay, perhaps imminent danger?"

"Anything! I would give my life for them!" replied the girl, with spirit, and her eyes gleamed with such enthusiastic self-sacrifice that his heart, though no longer young, warmed under their glow, and the principle to which he had sternly adhered since he had been near the imperial person, never to address a word to the sovereign but in reply, was blown to the winds.

Holding her hand in his, with a keen look into her eyes, he went on:

"And if you were required to do a thing from which many a man even would recoil--you would venture?"

And again the answer was a ready "Yes." Philostratus released her hand, and said:

"Then we will dare the worst. I will smooth the way for you, and to-morrow--do not start--tomorrow you yourself, under my protection, shall appeal to Caesar."

The color faded from the girl's cheeks, which had been flushed with fresh hopes, and her counselor had just expressed his wish to talk the matter over with the lady Berenike, when she came into the room. She was now dressed in mourning, and her pale, beautiful face showed the traces of the tears she had just shed. The dark shadows which, when they surround a woman's eyes, betray past storms of grief, as the halo round the moon--the eye of night--gives warning of storms to come, were deeper than ever; and when her sorrowful gaze fell on Melissa, the girl felt an almost irresistible longing to throw herself into her arms and weep on her motherly bosom.

Philostratus, too, was deeply touched by the appearance of this mother, who possessed so much, but for whom everything dearest to a woman's heart had been destroyed by a cruel stroke of Fate. He was glad to be able to tell her that he hoped to soften Caesar. Still, his plan was a bold one; Caracalla had been deeply offended by the scornful tone of the attacks on him, and Melissa's brother was perhaps the only one of the scoffers who had been taken. The crime of the Alexandrian wits could not be left unpunished. For such a desperate case only desperate remedies could avail; he therefore ventured to propose to conduct Melissa into Caesar's presence, that she might appeal to his clemency.

The matron started as though a scorpion had stung her. In great agitation, she threw her arm round the girl as if to shelter her from imminent danger, and Melissa, seeking help, laid her head on that kind breast. Berenike was reminded, by the scent that rose up from the girl's hair, of the hours when her own child had thus fondly clung to her. Her motherly heart had found a new object to love, and exclaiming, "Impossible!" she clasped Melissa more closely.

But Philostratus begged to be heard. Any plea urged by a third person he declared would only be the ruin of the rash mediator.

"Caracalla," he went on, looking at Melissa, "is terrible in his passions, no one can deny that; but of late severe suffering has made him irritably sensitive, and he insists on the strictest virtue in all who are about his person. He pays no heed to female beauty, and this sweet child, at any rate, will find many protectors. He shall know that the high-priest's wife, one of the best of women, keeps an anxious eye on Melissa's fate; and I myself, his mother's friend, shall be at hand. His passion for revenge, on the other hand, is boundless--no one living can control it; and not even the noble Julia can shield those who provoke it from a cruel end. If you do not know it, child, I can tell you that he had his brother Geta killed, though he took refuge in the arms of the mother who bore them both. You must understand the worst; and again I ask you, are you ready to risk all for those you love? Have you the courage to venture into the lion's den?"

Melissa clung more closely to the motherly woman, and her pale lips answered faintly but firmly, "I am ready, and he will grant my prayer."

"Child, child," cried Berenike in horror, "you know not what lies before you! You are dazzled by the happy confidence of inexperienced youth. I know what life is. I can see you, in your heart's blood, as red and pure as the blood of a lamb! I see--Ah, child! you do not know death and its terrible reality."

"I know it!" Melissa broke in with feverish excitement. "My dearest--my mother--I saw her die with these eyes. What did I not bury in her grave! And yet hope still lived in my heart; and though Caracalla may be a reckless murderer, he will do nothing to me, precisely because I am so feeble. And, lady, what am I? Of what account is my life if I lose my father, and my brothers, who are both on the high-road to greatness?"

"But you are betrothed," Berenike eagerly put in. "And your lover, you told me, is dear to you. What of him? He no doubt loves you, and, if you come to harm, sorrow will mar his young life."

At this Melissa clasped her hands over her face and sobbed aloud. "Show me, then, any other way--any! I will face the worst. But there is none; and if Diodoros were here he would not stop me; for what my heart prompts me to do is right, is my duty. But he is lying sick and with a clouded mind, and I can not ask him. O noble lady, kindness looks out of your eyes; cease to rub salt into my wounds! The task before me is hard enough already. But I would do it, and try to get speech with that terrible man, even if I had no one to protect me."

The lady had listened with varying feelings to this outpouring of the young girl's heart. Every instinct rebelled against the thought of sacrificing this pure, sweet creature to the fury of the tyrant whose wickedness was as unlimited as his power, and yet she saw no other chance of saving the artist, whom she held in affectionate regard. Her own noble heart understood the girl's resolve to purchase the life of those she loved, even with her blood; she, in the same place, would have done the same thing; and she thought to herself that it would have made her happy to see such a spirit in her own child. Her resistance melted away, and almost involuntarily she exclaimed, "Well, do what you feel to be right."

Melissa flew into her arms again with a grateful sense of release from a load, and Berenike did all she could to smooth the thorny way for her. She discussed every point with Philostratus as thoroughly as though for a child of her own; and, while the tumult came up from the banquet in the men's rooms, they settled that Berenike herself should conduct the girl to the wife of the high-priest of Serapis, the brother of Seleukus, and there await Melissa's return. Philostratus named the hour and other details, and then made further inquiries concerning the young artist whose mocking spirit had brought so much trouble on his family.

On this the lady led him into an adjoining room, where the portrait of her adored daughter was hanging. It was surrounded by a thick wreath of violets, the dead girl's favorite flower. The beautiful picture was lighted up by two three-branched lamps on high stands; and Philostratus, a connoisseur who had described many paintings with great taste and vividness, gazed in absorbed silence at the lovely features, which were represented with rare mastery and the inspired devotion of loving admiration. At last he turned to the mother, exclaiming:

"Happy artist, to have such a subject! It is a work worthy of the early, best period, and of a master of the time of Apelles. The daughter who has been snatched from you, noble lady, was indeed matchless, and no sorrow is too deep to do her justice. But the divinity who has taken her knows also how to give; and this portrait has preserved for you a part of what you loved. This picture, too, may influence Melissa's fate; for Caesar has a fine taste in art, and one of the wants of our time which has helped to embitter him is the paralyzed state of the imitative arts. It will be easier to win his favor for the painter who did this portrait than for a man of noble birth. He needs such painters as this Alexander for the Pinakothek in the splendid baths he has built at Rome. If you would but lend me this treasure to-morrow--"

But she interrupted him with a decisive "Never!" and laid her hand on the frame as if to protect it. Philostratus, however, was not to be put off; he went on in a tone of the deepest disappointment: "This portrait is yours, and no one can wonder at your refusal. We must, therefore, consider how to attain our end without this important ally." Berenike's gaze had lingered calmly on the sweet face while he spoke, looking more and more deeply into the beautiful, expressive features. All was silent.

At last she slowly turned to Melissa, who stood gazing sadly at the ground, and said in a low voice: "She resembled you in many ways. The gods had formed her to shed joy and light around her. Where she could wipe away a tear she always did so. Her portrait is speechless, and yet it tells me to act as she herself would have acted. If this work can indeed move Caracalla to clemency, then--You, Philostratus, really think so?"

"Yes," he replied, decisively. "There can be no better mediator for Alexander than this work." Berenike drew herself up, and said:

"Well, then, to-morrow morning early, I will send it to you at the Serapeum. The portrait of the dead may perish if it may but save the life of him who wrought it so lovingly." She turned away her face as she gave the philosopher her hand, and then hastily left the room.

Melissa flew after her and, with overflowing gratitude, besought the sobbing lady not to weep.

"I know something that will bring you greater comfort than my brother's picture: I mean the living image of your Korinna--a young girl; she is here in Alexandria."

"Zeno's daughter Agatha?" said Berenike; and when Melissa said yes, it was she, the lady went on with a deep sigh: "Thanks for your kind thought, my child; but she, too, is lost to me."

And as she spoke she sank on a couch, saying, in a low voice, "I would rather be alone."

Melissa modestly withdrew into the adjoining room, and Philostratus, who had been lost in the contemplation of the picture, took his leave.

He did not make use of the imperial chariot in waiting for him, but returned to his lodgings on foot, in such good spirits, and so well satisfied with himself, as he had not been before since leaving Rome.

When Berenike had rested in solitude for some little time she recalled Melissa, and took as much care of her young guest as though she were her lost darling, restored to her after a brief absence. First she allowed the girl to send for

Argutis; and when she had assured the faithful slave that all promised well, she dismissed him with instructions to await at home his young mistress's orders, for that Melissa would for the present find shelter under her roof.

When the Gaul had departed, she desired her waiting-woman, Johanna, to fetch her brother. During her absence the lady explained to Melissa that they both were Christians. They were freeborn, the children of a freedman of Berenike's house. Johannes had at an early age shown so much intelligence that they had acceded to his wish to be educated as a lawyer. He was now one of the most successful pleaders in the city; but he always used his eloquence, which he had perfected not only at Alexandria but also at Carthage, by preference in the service of accused Christians. In his leisure hours he would visit the condemned in prison, speak comfort to them, and give them presents out of the fine profits he derived from his business among the wealthy. He was the very man to go and see her father and brothers; he would revive their spirits, and carry them her greeting.

When, presently, the Christian arrived he expressed himself as very ready to undertake this commission. His sister was already busied in packing wine and other comforts for the captives--more, no doubt, as Johannes told Berenike, than the three men could possibly consume, even if their imprisonment should be a long one. His smile showed how confidently he counted on the lady's liberality, and Melissa quickly put her faith in the young Christian, who would have reminded her of her brother Philip, but that his slight figure was more upright, and his long hair quite smooth, without a wave or curl. His eyes, above all, were unlike Philip's; for they looked out on the world with a gaze as mild as Philip's were keen and inquiring.

Melissa gave him many messages for her father and brothers, and when the lady Berenike begged him to take care that the portrait of her daughter was safely carried to the Serapeum, where it was to contribute to mollify Caesar in the painter's favor, he praised her determination, and modestly added: "For how long may we call our own any of these perishable joys? A day, perhaps a year, at most a lustrum. But eternity is long, and those who, for its sake, forget time and set all their hopes on eternity--which is indeed time to the soul--soon cease to bewail the loss of any transitory treasure, were it the noblest and dearest. Oh, would that I could lead you to place your hopes on eternity, best of women and most true-hearted mother! Eternity, which not the wisest brain can conceive of!--I tell you, lady, for you are a philosopher--that is the hardest and therefore the grandest idea for human thought to compass. Fix your eye on that, and in its infinite realm, which must be your future home, you will meet her again whom you have lost--not her image returned to you, but herself."

"Cease," interrupted the matron, with impatient sharpness. "I know what you are aiming at. But to conceive of eternity is the prerogative of the immortals; our intellect is wrecked in the attempt. Our wings melt like those of Ikarus, and we fall into the ocean--the ocean of madness, to which I have often been near enough. You Christians fancy you know all about eternity, and if you are right in that--But I will not reopen that old discussion. Give me back my child for a year, a month, a day even, as she was before murderous disease laid hands on her, and I will make you a free gift of your cuckoo-cloud-land of eternity, and of the remainder of my own life on earth into the bargain."

The vehement woman trembled with renewed sorrow, as if shivering with ague; but as soon as she had recovered her self-command enough to speak calmly, she exclaimed to the lawyer:

"I do not really wish to vex you, Johannes. I esteem you, and you are dear to me. But if you wish our friendship to continue, give up these foolish attempts to teach tortoises to fly. Do all you can for the poor prisoners; and if you--"

"By daybreak to-morrow I will be with them," Johannes said, and he hastily took leave.

As soon as they were alone Berenike observed "There he goes, quite offended, as if I had done him a wrong. That is the way with all these Christians. They think it their duty to force on others what they themselves think right, and any one who turns a deaf ear to their questionable truths they at once set down as narrow-minded, or as hostile to what is good. Agatha, of whom you were just now speaking, and Zeno her father, my husband's brother, are Christians. I had hoped that Korinna's death would have brought the child back to us; I have longed to see her, and have heard much that is sweet about her: but a common sorrow, which so often brings divided hearts together, has only widened the gulf between my husband and his brother. The fault is not on our side. Nay, I was rejoiced when, a few hours after the worst was over, a letter from Zeno informed me that he and his daughter would come to see us the same evening. But the letter itself"--and her voice began to quiver with indignation--"compelled us to beg him not to come. It is scarcely credible--and I should do better not to pour fresh oil on my wrath--but he bade us 'rejoice'; three, four, five times he repeated the cruel words. And he wrote in a pompous strain of the bliss and rapture which awaited our lost child--and this to a mother whose heart had been utterly broken but a few hours before by a fearful stroke of Fate! He would meet the bereaved, grieving, lonely mourner with a smile on his lips! Rejoice! This climax of cruelty or aberration has parted us forever. Why, our black gardener, whose god is a tree-stump that bears only the faintest likeness to humanity, melted into tears at the news; and Zeno, our brother, the uncle of that broken dower, could be glad and bid us rejoice! My husband thinks that hatred and the long-standing feud prompted his pen. For my part, I believe it was only this Christian frenzy which made him suggest that I should sink lower than the brutes, who defend their young with their lives. Seleukus has long since forgiven him for his conduct in withdrawing his share of the capital from the business when he became a Christian, to squander it on the baser sort; but this 'Rejoice' neither he nor I can forgive, though

things which pierce me to the heart often slide off him like water off grease."

Her black hair had come down as she delivered this vehement speech, and, when she ceased, her flushed cheeks and the fiery glow of her eyes gave the majestic woman in her dark robes an aspect which terrified Melissa.

She, too, thought this "Rejoice," under such circumstances, unseemly and insulting; but she kept her opinion to herself, partly out of modesty and partly because she did not wish to encourage the estrangement between this unhappy lady and the niece whose mere presence would have been so great a comfort to her.

When Johanna returned to lead her to a bedroom, she gave a sigh of relief; but the lady expressed a wish to keep Melissa near her, and in a low voice desired the waiting-woman to prepare a bed for her in the adjoining room, by the side of Korinna's, which was never to be disturbed. Then, still greatly excited, she invited Melissa into her daughter's pretty room.

There she showed her everything that Korinna had especially cared for. Her bird hung in the same place; her lap-dog was sleeping in a basket, on the cushion which Berenike had embroidered for her child. Melissa had to admire the dead girl's lute, and her first piece of weaving, and the elegant loom of ebony and ivory in which she had woven it. And Berenike repeated to the girl the verses which Korinna had composed, in imitation of Catullus, on the death of a favorite bird. And although Melissa's eyes were almost closing with fatigue, she forced herself to attend to it all, for she saw now how much her sympathy pleased her kind friend.

Meanwhile the voices of the men, who had done eating and were now drinking, came louder and louder into the women's apartments. When the merriment of her guests rose to a higher pitch than usual, or something amusing gave rise to a shout of laughter, Berenike shrank, and either muttered some unintelligible threat or besought the forgiveness of her daughter's manes.

It seemed to be a relief to her to rush from one mood to the other; but neither in her grief, nor when her motherly feeling led her to talk, nor yet in her wrath, did she lose her perfect dignity. All Melissa saw and heard moved her to pity or to horror. And meanwhile she was worn out with anxiety for her family, and with increasing fatigue.

At last, however, she was released. A gay chorus of women's voices and flutes came up from the banqueting-hall. With a haughty mien and dilated nostrils Berenike listened to the first few bars. That such a song should be heard in her house of woe was too much; with her own hand she closed the shutters over the window next her; then she bade her young guest go to bed.

Oh, how glad was the overtired girl to stretch herself on the soft couch! As usual, before going to sleep, she told her mother in the spirit all the history of the day. Then she prayed to the manes of the departed to lend her aid in the heavy task before her; but in the midst of her prayer sleep overcame her, and her young bosom was already rising and falling in regular breathing when she was roused by a visit from the lady Berenike.

Melissa suddenly beheld her at the head of the bed, in a flowing white night-dress, with her hair unpinned, and holding a silver lamp in her hand; and the girl involuntarily put up her arms as if to protect herself, for she fancied that the daemon of madness stared out of those large black eyes. But the unhappy woman's expression changed, and she looked down kindly on Melissa. She quietly set the lamp on the table, and then, as the cool nightbreeze blew in through the open window, to which there was no shutter, she tenderly wrapped the white woolen blanket round Melissa, and muttered to herself, "She liked it so."

Then she knelt down by the side of the bed, pressed her lips on the brow of the girl, now fully awake, and said:

"And you, too, are fair to look upon. He will grant your prayer!"

Then she asked Melissa about her lover, her father, her mother, and at last she, unexpectedly, asked her in a whisper:

"Your brother Alexander, the painter--My daughter, though in death, inspired his soul with love. Yes, Korinna was dear to him. Her image is living in his soul. Am I right? Tell me the truth!"

On this Melissa confessed how deeply the painter had been impressed by the dead girl's beauty, and that he had given her his heart and soul with a fervor of devotion of which she had never imagined him capable. And the poor mother smiled as she heard it, and murmured, "I was sure of it."

But then she shook her head, sadly, and said "Fool that I am!"

At last she bade Melissa good-night, and went back to her own bedroom. There Johanna was awaiting her, and while she was plaiting her mistress's hair the matron said, threateningly:

"If the wretch should not spare even her"--She was interrupted by loud shouts of mirth from the banqueting-hall, and among the laughing voices she fancied that she recognized her husband's. She started up with a vehement movement, and exclaimed, in angry excitement:

"Seleukus might have prevented such an outrage! Oh, I know that sorrowing father's heart! Fear, vanity, ambition, love of pleasure--"

"But consider," Johanna broke in, "to cross Caesar's wish is to forfeit life!"

"Then he should have died!" replied the matron, with stern decision.

CHAPTER XVI.

Before sunrise the wind changed. Heavy clouds bore down from the north, darkening the clear sky of Alexandria. By the time the market was filling it was raining in torrents, and a cold breeze blew over the town from the lake. Philostratus had only allowed himself a short time for sleep, sitting till long after midnight over his history of Apollonius of Tyana. His aim was to prove, by the example of this man, that a character not less worthy of imitation than that of the lord of the Christians might be formed in the faith of the ancients, and nourished by doctrines produced by the many-branched tree of Greek religion and philosophy. Julia Domna, Caracalla's mother, had encouraged the philosopher in this task, which was to show her passionate and criminal son the dignity of moderation and virtue. The book was also to bring home to Caesar the religion of his forefathers and his country in all its beauty and elevating power; for hitherto he had vacillated from one form to another, had not even rejected Christianity, with which his nurse had tried to inoculate him as a child, and had devoted himself to every superstition of his time in a way which had disgusted those about him. It had been particularly interesting to the writer, with a view to the purpose of this work, to meet with a girl who practiced all the virtues the Christians most highly prized, without belonging to that sect, who were always boasting of the constraining power of their religion in conducting to pure morality.

In his work the day before he had taken occasion to regret the small recognition his hero had met with among those nearest to him. In this, as in other respects, he seemed to have shared the fate of Jesus Christ, whose name, however, Philostratus purposely avoided mentioning. Now, to-night, he reflected on the sacrifice offered by Melissa for Caesar whom she knew not, and he wrote the following words as though proceeding from the pen of Apollonius himself: "I know well how good a thing it is to regard all the world as my home, and all mankind as my brethren and friends; for we are all of the same divine race, and have all one Father."

Then, looking up from the papyrus, he murmured to himself: "From such a point of view as this Melissa might see in Caracalla a friend and a brother. If only now it were possible to rouse the conscience of that imperial criminal!"

He took up the written sheet on which he had begun a dissertation as to what conscience is, as exerting a choice between good and evil. He had written: "Understanding governs what we purpose; consciousness governs what our understanding resolves upon. Hence, if our understanding choose the good, consciousness is satisfied."

How flat it sounded! It could have no effect in that form.

Melissa had confessed with far greater warmth what her feelings had been after she had sacrificed for the suffering sinner. Every one, no doubt, would feel the same who, when called on to choose between good and evil, should prefer the good; so he altered and expanded the last words: "Thus consciousness sends a man with song and gladness into the sanctuaries and groves, into the roads, and wherever mortals live. Even in sleep the song makes itself heard, and a happy choir from the land of dreams lift up their voices about his bed."

That was better! This pleasing picture might perhaps leave some impression on the soul of the young criminal, in whom a preference for good could still, though rarely, be fanned to a flame. Caesar read what Philostratus wrote, because he took pleasure in the form of his work; and this sentence would not have been written in vain if only it should prompt Caracalla in some cases, however few, to choose the good.

The philosopher was fully determined to do his utmost for Melissa and her brothers. He had often brought pictures under Caesar's notice, for he was the first living authority as a connoisseur of painting, and as having written many descriptions of pictures. He built some hopes, too, on Melissa's innocence; and so the worthy man, when he retired to rest, looked forward with confidence to the work of mediation, which was by no means devoid of danger.

But next morning it presented itself in a less promising light. The clouded sky, the storm, and rain might have a fatal effect on Caesar's temper; and when he heard that old Galen, after examining his patient and prescribing certain remedies, had yesterday evening taken ship, leaving Caracalla in a frenzy of rage which had culminated in slight convulsions, he almost repented of his promise. However, he felt himself pledged; so as early as possible he went to Caesar's rooms, prepared for the worst.

His gloomy anticipations were aggravated by the scene which met his eyes.

In the anteroom he found the chief men of the city and some representative members of the Alexandrian Senate, who were anxious for an audience of their imperial visitor. They had been commanded to attend at an unusually early hour, and had already been kept a long time waiting.

When Philostratus—who was always free to enter Caesar's presence—made his appearance, Caracalla was seating himself on the throne which had been placed for him in the splendidly fitted audience-chamber. He had come from his bath, and was wrapped in the comfortable white woolen robe which he wore on leaving it. His "friends" as they were called, senators, and other men of mark, stood round in considerable numbers, among them the high-priest of Serapis. Pandion, Caesar's charioteer, was occupied, under the sovereign's instructions, in fastening the lion's chain to the ring fixed for the purpose in the floor by the side of the throne; and as the beast, whose collar had been drawn too tight, uttered a low, complaining growl, Caracalla scolded the favorite. As soon as he caught sight of Philostratus, he signed

to him to approach:

"Do you see nothing strange in me?" he whispered. "Your Phoebus Apollo appeared to me in a dream. He laid his hand on my shoulder toward morning; indeed, I saw only horrible faces." Then he pointed out of the window, exclaiming:

"The god hides his face to-day. Gloomy days have often brought me good fortune; but this is a strange experience of the eternal sunshine of Egypt! Men and sky have given me the same kind welcome; gray, gray, and always gray--without and within--and my poor soldiers out on the square! Macrinus tells me they are complaining. But my father's advice was sound: 'Keep them content, and never mind anything else.' The heads of the town are waiting outside; they must give up their palaces to the bodyguard; if they murmur, let them try for themselves how they like sleeping on the soaking ground under dripping tents. It may cool their hot blood, and perhaps dilute the salt of their wit.--Show them in, Theocritus."

He signed to the actor, and when he humbly asked whether Caesar had forgotten to exchange his morning wrapper for another dress, Caracalla laughed contemptuously, and replied:

"Why, an empty corn-sack over my shoulders would be dress enough for this rabble of traders!" He stretched his small but muscular frame out at full length, resting his head on his hand, and his comely face, which had lost the suffering look it had worn the day before, suddenly changed in expression. As was his habit when he wished to inspire awe or fear, he knit his brows in deep furrows, set his teeth tightly, and assumed a suspicious and sinister scowl.

The deputation entered, bowing low, headed by the exegetes, the head of the city, and Timotheus, the chief-priest of Serapis. After these came the civic authorities, the members of the senate, and then, as representing the large Jewish colony in the city, their alabarch or head-man. It was easy to see in each one as he came in, that the presence of the lion, who had raised his head at their approach, was far from encouraging; and a faint, scornful smile parted Caracalla's lips as he noted the cowering knees of these gorgeously habited courtiers. The high-priest alone, who, as Caesar's host, had gone up to the side of the throne, and two or three others, among them the governor of the town, a tall, elderly man of Macedonian descent, paid no heed to the brute. The Macedonian bowed to his sovereign with calm dignity, and in the name of the municipally hoped he had rested well. He then informed Caesar what shows and performances were prepared in his honor, and finally named the considerable sum which had been voted by the town of Alexandria to express to him their joy at his visit. Caracalla waved his hand, and said, carelessly:

"The priest of Alexander, as idiologos, will receive the gold with the temple tribute. We can find use for it. We knew that you were rich. But what do you want for your money? What have you to ask?"

"Nothing, noble Caesar," replied the governor. "Thy gracious presence--"

Caracalla interrupted him with a long-drawn "Indeed!" Then, leaning forward, he gave him a keen, oblique look. "No one but the gods has nothing to wish for; so it must be that you are afraid to ask. What can that avail, unless to teach me that you look for nothing but evil from me; that you are suspicious of me? And if that is so, you fear me; and if you fear, you hate me. The insults I have received in this house sufficiently prove the fact. And if you hate me," and he sprang up and shook his fist, "I must protect myself!"

"Great Caesar," the exegetes began, in humble deprecation, but Caracalla went on, wrathfully:

"I know when I have to protect myself, and from whom. It is not well to trifle with me! An insolent tongue is easily hidden behind the lips; but heads are less easy to hide, and I shall be content with them. Tell that to your Alexandrian wits! Macrinus will inform you of all else. You may go."

During this speech the lion, excited by his master's furious gestures, had risen on his feet and showed his terrible teeth to the delegates. At this their courage sank. Some laid their hands on their bent knees, as if to shield them; others had gradually sidled to the door before Caesar had uttered the last word. Then, in spite of the efforts of the governor and the alabarch to detain them, in the hope of pacifying the potentate, as soon as they heard the word "go," they hurried out; and, for better or for worse, the few bolder spirits had to follow.

As soon as the door was closed upon them, Caesar's features lost their cruel look. He patted the lion with soothing words of praise, and exclaimed, contemptuously:

"These are the descendants of the Macedonians, with whom the greatest of heroes conquered the world! Who was that fat old fellow who shrank into himself so miserably, and made for the door while I was yet speaking?"

"Kimon, the chief of the night-watch and guardian of the peace of the city," replied the high-priest of Alexander, who as a Roman had kept his place by the throne; and Theocritus put in:

"The people must sleep badly under the ward of such a coward. Let him follow the prefect, noble Caesar."

"Send him his dismissal at once," said Caracalla; "but see that his successor is a man."

He then turned to the high-priest, and politely requested him to assist Theocritus in choosing a new head for the town-guard, and Timotheus and the favorite quitted the room together.

Philostratus took ingenious advantage of the incident, by at once informing the emperor that it had come to his

knowledge that this coward, so worthily dismissed from office, had, on the merest suspicion, cast into prison a painter who was undoubtedly one of the first of living artists, and with him his guiltless relations.

"I will not have it!" Caesar broke out. "Nothing but blood will do any good here, and petty aggravations will only stir their bile and increase their insolence. Is the painter of whom you speak an Alexandrian?--I pine for the open air, but the wind blows the rain against the windows."

"In the field," the philosopher remarked, "you have faced the weather heroically enough. Here, in the city, enjoy what is placed before you. Only yesterday I still believed that the art of Apelles was utterly degenerate. But since then I have changed my opinion, for I have seen a portrait which would be an ornament to the Pinakothek in your baths. The northern windows are closed, or, in this land of inundations, and in such weather as this, we might find ourselves afloat even under cover of a roof; so it is too dark here to judge of a painting, but your dressing-room is more favorably situated, and the large window there will serve our purpose. May I be allowed the pleasure of showing you there the work of the imprisoned artist?"

Caesar nodded, and led the way, accompanied by his lion and followed by the philosopher, who desired an attendant to bring in the picture.

In this room it was much lighter than in the audience-chamber, and while Caracalla awaited, with Philostratus, the arrival of the painting, his Indian body-slave, a gift from the Parthian king, silently and skillfully dressed his thin hair. The sovereign sighed deeply, and pressed his hand to his brow as though in pain. The philosopher ventured to approach him, and there was warm sympathy in his tone as he asked:

"What ails you, Bassianus? Just now you bore all the appearance of a healthy, nay, and of a terrible man!"

"It is better again already," replied the sovereign. "And yet--!"

He groaned again, and then confessed that only yesterday he had in the same way been tortured with pain.

"The attack came on in the morning, as you know," he went on, "and when it was past I went down into the court of sacrifice; my feet would scarcely carry me. Curiosity--and they were waiting for me; and some great sign might be shown! Besides, some excitement helps me through this torment. But there was nothing--nothing! Heart, lungs, liver, all in their right place.--And then, Galenus--What I like is bad for me, what I loathe is wholesome. And again and again the same foolish question, 'Do you wish to escape an early death?' And all with an air as though Death were a slave at his command--He can, no doubt, do more than others, and has preserved his own life I know not how long. Well, and it is his duty to prolong mine.

"I am Caesar. I had a right to insist on his remaining here. I did so; for he knows my malady, and describes it as if he felt it himself. I ordered him--nay, I entreated him. But he adhered to his own way. He went--he is gone!"

"But he may be of use to you, even at a distance," Philostratus said.

"Did he do anything for my father, or for me in Rome, where he saw me every day?" retorted Caesar. "He can mitigate and relieve the suffering, but that is all; and of all the others, is there one fit to hand him a cup of water? Perhaps he would be willing to cure me, but he can not; for I tell you, Philostratus, the gods will not have it so. You know what sacrifices I have offered, what gifts I have brought. I have prayed, I have abased myself before them, but none will hear. One or another of the gods, indeed, appears to me not infrequently as Apollo did last night. But is it because he favors me? First, he laid his hand on my shoulder, as my father used to do; but his was so heavy, that the weight pressed me down till I fell on my knees, crushed. This is no good sign, you think? I see it in your face. I do not myself think so. And how loudly I have called on him, of all the gods! The whole empire, they say, men and women alike, besought the immortals unbidden for the welfare of Titus. I, too, am their lord; but"--and he laughed bitterly--"who has ever raised a hand in prayer for me of his own impulse? My own mother always named my brother first. He has paid for it.--But the rest!"

"They fear rather than love you," replied the philosopher. "He to whom Phoebus Apollo appears may always expect some good to follow. And yesterday--a happy omen, too--I overheard by chance a young Greek girl, who believed herself unobserved, who of her own prompting fervently entreated Asklepios to heal you. Nay, she collected all the coins in her little purse, and had a goat and a cock sacrificed in your behalf."

"And you expect me to believe that!" said Caracalla, with a scornful laugh.

But Philostratus eagerly replied:

"It is the pure truth. I went to the little temple because it was said that Apollonius had left some documents there. Every word from his pen is, as you know, of value to me in writing his history. The little library was screened off from the cella by a curtain, and while I was hunting through the manuscripts I heard a woman's voice."

"It spoke for some other Bassianus, Antoninus, Tarautus, or whatever they choose to call me," Caesar broke in.

"Nay, my lord, not so. She prayed for you, the son of Severus. I spoke to her afterwards. She had seen you yesterday morning, and fancied she had noted how great and severe your sufferings were. This had gone to her heart. So she went thither to pray and sacrifice for you, although she knew that you were prosecuting her brother, the very

painter of whom I spoke. I would you too could have heard how fervently she addressed the god, and then Hygeia!"

"A Greek, you say?" Caracalla remarked. "And she really did not know you, or dream that you could hear her?"

"No, my lord; assuredly not. She is a sweet maid, and if you would care to see her--"

Caesar had listened to the tale with great attention and evident expectancy; but suddenly his face clouded, and, heedless of the slaves who, under the guidance of his chamberlain Adventus, had now brought in the portrait, he sprang up, went close to Philostratus, and stormed out:

"Woe to you if you lie to me! You want to get the brother out of prison, and then, by chance, you come across the sister who is praying for me! A fable to cheat a child with!"

"I am speaking the truth," replied Philostratus, coolly, though the rapid winking of Caesar's eyelids warned him that his blood was boiling with wrath.

"It was from the sister, whom I overheard in the temple, that I learned of her brother's peril, and I afterward saw that portrait."

Caracalla stared at the floor for a moment in silence; then he looked up, and said, in a tone husky with agitation:

"I only long for anything which may bring me nearer to the perverse race over whom I rule, be it what it may. You offer it me. You are the only man who never asked me for anything. I have believed you to be as righteous as all other men are not. And now if you, if this time--"

He lowered his tones, which had become somewhat threatening, and went on very earnestly: "By all you hold most sacred on earth, I ask you, Did the girl pray for me, and of her own free impulse, not knowing that any one could hear her?"

"I swear it, by the head of my mother!" replied Philostratus, solemnly.

"Your mother?" echoed Caesar, and his brow began to clear. But suddenly the gleam of satisfaction, which for a moment had embellished his features, vanished, and with a sharp laugh he added: "And my mother! Do you suppose that I do not know what she requires of you? It is solely to please her that you, a free man, remain with me. For her sake you are bold enough to try now and then to quell the stormy sea of my passions. You do it with a grace, so I submit. And now my hand is raised to strike a wretch who mocks at me; he is a painter, of some talent, so, of course, you take him under your protection. Then, in a moment, your inventive genius devises a praying sister. Well, there is in that something which might indeed mollify me. But you would betray Bassianus ten times over to save an artist. And then, how my mother would fly to show her gratitude to the man who could quell her furious son! Your mother!--But I only squint when it suits me. My eye must become dimmer than it yet is before I fail to see the connection of ideas which led you to swear by your mother. You were thinking of mine when you spoke. To please her, you would deceive her son. But as soon as he touches the lie it vanishes into thin air, for it has no more substance than a soap bubble!" The last words were at once sad, angry, and scornful; but the philosopher, who had listened at first with astonishment and then with indignation, could no longer contain himself.

"Enough!" he cried to the angry potentate, in an imperious tone. Then, drawing himself up, he went on with offended dignity:

"I know what the end has been of so many who have aroused your wrath, and yet I have courage enough to tell you to your face, that to injustice, the outcome of distrust, you add the most senseless insult. Or do you really think that a just man--for so you have called me more than once--would outrage the manes of the beloved woman who bore him to please the mother of another man, even though she be Caesar's? What I swear to by the head of my mother, friend and foe alike must believe; and he who does not, must hold me to be the vilest wretch on earth; my presence can only be an offense to him. So I beg you to allow me to return to Rome."

The words were manly and spoken firmly, and they pleased Caracalla; for the joy of believing in the philosopher's statement outweighed every other feeling. And since he regarded Philostratus as the incarnation of goodness--though he had lost faith in that--his threat of leaving disturbed him greatly. He laid his hand on his brave adviser's arm, and assured him that he was only too happy to believe a thing so incredible.

Any witness of the scene would have supposed this ruthless faciticide, this tyrant--whose intercourse with the visions of a crazed and unbridled fancy made him capable of any folly, and who loved to assume the aspect of a cruel misanthrope--to be a docile disciple, who cared for nothing but to recover the favor and forgiveness of his master. And Philostratus, knowing this man, and the human heart, did not make it too easy for him to achieve his end. When he at last gave up his purpose of returning to Rome, and had more fully explained to Caesar how and where he had met Melissa, and what he had heard about her brother the painter, he lifted the wrapper from Korinna's portrait, placed it in a good light, and pointed out to Caracalla the particular beauties of the purely Greek features.

It was with sincere enthusiasm that he expatiated on the skill with which the artist had reproduced in color the noble lines which Caracalla so much admired in the sculpture of the great Greek masters; how warm and tender the flesh was; how radiant the light of those glorious eyes; how living the waving hair, as though it still breathed of the scented oil! And when Philostratus explained that though Alexander had no doubt spoken some rash and treasonable words, he

could not in any case be the author of the insulting verses which had been found at the Serapeum with the rope, Caracalla echoed his praises of the picture, and desired to see both the painter and his sister.

That morning, as he rose from his bed, he had been informed that the planets which had been seen during the past night from the observatory of the Serapeum, promised him fortune and happiness in the immediate future. He was himself a practiced star-reader, and the chief astrologer of the temple had pointed out to him how peculiarly favorable the constellation was whence he had deduced his prediction. Then, Phoebus Apollo had appeared to him in a dream; the auguries from the morning's sacrifices had all been favorable; and, before he dispatched Philostratus to fetch Melissa, he added:

"It is strange! The best fortune has always come to me from a gloomy sky. How brightly the sun shone on my marriage with the odious Plautilla! It has rained, on the contrary, on almost all my victories; and it was under a heavy storm that the oracle assured me the soul of Alexander the Great had selected this tortured frame in which to live out his too early ended years on earth. Can such coincidence be mere chance? Phoebus Apollo, your favorite divinity--and that, too, of the sage of Tyana--may perhaps have been angry with me. He who purified himself from blood-guiltiness after killing the Python is the god of expiation. I will address myself to him, like the noble hero of your book. This morning the god visited me again; so I will have such sacrifice slain before him as never yet was offered. Will that satisfy you, O philosopher hard to be appeased?"

"More than satisfy me, my Bassianus," replied Philostratus. "Yet remember that, according to Apollonius, the sacrifice is effective only through the spirit in which it is offered."

"Always a 'but' and an 'if!'" exclaimed Caracalla, as his friend left the room to call Melissa from the high-priest's quarters, where she was waiting.

For the first time for some days Caesar found himself alone. Leading the lion by the collar, he went to the window. The rain had ceased, but black clouds still covered the heavens. Below him lay the opening of the street of Hermes into the great square, swarming with human life, and covered with the now drenched tents of the soldiery; and his eyes fell on that of a centurion, a native of Alexandria, just then receiving a visit from his family, to whom the varied fortunes of a warrior's life had brought him back once more.

The bearded hero held an infant in his arms--assuredly his own--while a girl and boy clung to him, gazing up in his face with wondering black eyes; and another child, of about three, paying no heed to the others, was crowing as it splashed through a puddle with its little bare feet. Two women, one young and one elderly, the man's mother and his wife, no doubt, seemed to hang on his lips as he recounted perhaps some deed of valor.

The tuba sounded to arms. He kissed the infant, and carefully laid it on its mother's bosom; then he took up the boy and the girl, laughingly caught the little one, and pressed his bearded lips to each rosy mouth in turn. Last of all he clasped the young wife to his breast, gently stroked her hair, and whispered something in her ear at which she smiled up at him through her tears and then blushing looked down. His mother patted him fondly on the shoulder, and, as they parted, he kissed her too on her wrinkled brow.

Caracalla had remarked this centurion once before; his name was Martialis, and he was a simple, commonplace, but well-conducted creature, who had often distinguished himself by his contempt for death. The imperial visit to Alexandria had meant for him a return home and the greatest joy in life. How many arms had opened to receive the common soldier; how many hearts had beat high at his coming! Not a day, it was certain, had passed since his arrival without prayers going up to Heaven for his preservation, from his mother, his wife, and his children. And he, the ruler of the world, had thought it impossible that one, even one of his millions of subjects, should have prayed for him. Who awaited him with a longing heart? Where was his home?

He had first seen the light in Gaul. His father was an African; his mother was born in Syria. The palace at Rome, his residence, he did not care to remember. He traveled about the empire, leaving as wide a space as possible between himself and that house of doom, from which he could never wipe out the stain of his brother's blood.

And his mother? She feared--perhaps she hated him--her first-born son, since he had killed her younger darling. What did she care for him, so long as she had her philosophers to argue with, who knew how to ply her with delicate flattery?

Then Plautilla, his wife? His father had compelled him to marry her, the richest heiress in the world, whose dowry had been larger than the collected treasure of a dozen queens; and as he thought of the sharp features of that insignificant, sour-faced, and unspeakably pretentious creature, he shuddered with aversion.

He had banished her, and then had her murdered. Others had done the deed, and it did not strike him that he was responsible for the crime committed in his service; but her loveless heart, without a care for him--her bird-sharp face, looking out like a well-made mask from her abundant hair--and her red, pinched lips, were very present to him. What cutting words those lips could speak; what senseless demands they had uttered; and nothing more insolent could be imagined than her way of pursuing them up if at any time he had suggested a kiss!

His child? One had been born to him, but it had followed its mother into exile and to the grave. The little thing, which

he had scarcely known, was so inseparable from its detested mother that he had mourned it no more than her. It was well that the assassins, without any orders from him, should have cut short that wretched life. He could not long for the embraces of the monster which should have united Plautilla's vices and his own.

Among the men about his person, there was not one for whom other hearts beat warmer; no creature that loved him excepting his lion; no spot on earth where he was looked for with gladness. He waited, as for some marvel, to see the one human being who had spontaneously entreated the gods for him. The girl must probably be a poor, tearful creature, as weak of brain as she was soft-hearted.

There stood the centurion at the head of his maniple, and raised his staff. Envidable man! How content he looked; how clearly he spoke the word of command! And how healthy the vulgar creature must be--while he, Caesar, was suffering that acute headache again! He gnashed his teeth, and felt a strong impulse to spoil the happiness of that shameless upstart. If he were sent packing to Spain, now, or to Pontus, there would be an end of his gladness. The centurion should know what it was to be a solitary soul.

Acting on this malignant impulse, he had raised his hand to his mouth to shout the cruel order to a tribune, when suddenly the clouds parted, and the glorious sun of Africa appeared in a blue island amid the ocean of gray, cheering the earth with glowing sheaves of rays. The beams were blinding as they came reflected from the armor and weapons of the men, reminding Caesar of the god to whom he had just vowed an unparalleled sacrifice.

Philostratus had often praised Phoebus Apollo above all gods, because wherever he appeared there was light, irradiating not the earth alone but men's souls; and because, as the lord of music and harmony, he aided men to arrive at that morally pure and equable frame of mind which was accordant and pleasing to his glorious nature. Apollo had conquered the dark heralds of the storm, and Caracalla looked up. Before this radiant witness he was ashamed to carry out his dark purpose, and he said, addressing the sun:

"For thy sake, Phoebus Apollo, I spare the man." Then, pleased with himself, he looked down again. The restraint he had laid upon himself struck him as in fact a great and noble effort, accustomed as he was to yield to every impulse. But at the same time he observed that the clouds, which had so often brought him good fortune, were dispersing, and this gave him fresh uneasiness. Dazzled by the flood of sunshine which poured in at the window, he withdrew discontentedly into the room. If this bright day were to bring disaster? If the god disdained his offering?

But was not Apollo, perhaps, like the rest of the immortals, an idol of the fancy, living only in the imagination of men who had devised it? Stern thinkers and pious folks, like the skeptics and the Christians, laughed the whole tribe of the Olympians to scorn. Still, the hand of Phoebus Apollo had rested heavily on his shoulders in his dream. His power, after all, might be great. The god must have the promised sacrifice, come what might. Bitter wrath rose up in his soul at this thought, as it had often done before, with the immortals, against whom he, the all-powerful, was impotent. If only for an hour they could be his subjects, he would make them rue the sufferings by which they spoiled his existence.

"He is called Martialis. I will remember that name," he thought, as he cast a last envidious look at the centurion.

How long Philostratus was gone! Solitude weighed on him, and he looked about him wildly, as though seeking some support. An attendant at this moment announced the philosopher, and Caracalla, much relieved, went into the tablinum to meet him. There he sat down on a seat in front of the writing-table strewn with tablets and papyrus-rolls, rearranged the end of the purple toga for which he had exchanged his bathing-robe, rested one foot on the lion's neck and his head on his hand. He would receive this wonderful girl in the character of an anxious sovereign meditating on the welfare of his people.

CHAPTER XVII.

The philosopher announced the visitor to Caesar, and as some little time elapsed before Melissa came in, Caracalla forgot his theatrical assumption, and sat with a drooping head; for, in consequence, no doubt, of the sunshine which beat on the top of his head, the pain had suddenly become almost unendurably violent.

Without vouchsafing a glance at Melissa, he swallowed one of the alleviating pills left him by Galenus, and hid his face in his hands. The girl came forward, fearless of the lion, for Philostratos had assured her that he was tamed, and most animals were willing to let her touch them. Nor was she afraid of Caesar himself, for she saw that he was in pain, and the alarm with which she had crossed the threshold gave way to pity. Philostratus kept at her side, and anxiously watched Caracalla.

The courage the simple girl showed in the presence of the ferocious brute, and the not less terrible man, struck him favorably, and his hopes rose as a sunbeam fell on her shining hair, which the lady Berenike had arranged with her own hand, twining it with strands of white Bombyx. She must appear, even to this ruthless profligate, as the very type of pure and innocent grace.

Her long robe and peplos, of the finest white wool, also gave her an air of distinction which suited the circumstances. It was a costly garment, which Berenike had had made for Korinna, and she had chosen it from among many instead of the plainer robe in which old Dido had dressed her young mistress. With admirable taste the matron had aimed at giving Melissa a simple, dignified aspect, unadorned and almost priestess-like in its severity. Nothing should suggest the desire to attract, and everything must exclude the idea of a petitioner of the poorer and commoner sort.

Philostratus saw that her appearance had been judiciously cared for; but Caesar's long silence, of which he knew the reason, began to cause him some uneasiness: for, though pain sometimes softened the despot's mood, it more often prompted him to revenge himself, as it were, for his own sufferings, by brutal attacks on the comfort and happiness of others. And, at last, even Melissa seemed to be losing the presence of mind he had admired, for he saw her bosom heave faster and higher, her lips quivered, and her large eyes sparkled through tears.

Caesar's countenance presently cleared a little. He raised his head, and as his eye met Melissa's she pronounced in a low, sweet voice the pleasant Greek greeting, "Rejoice!"

At this moment the philosopher was seized with a panic of anxiety; he felt for the first time the weight of responsibility he had taken on himself. Never had he thought her so lovely, so enchantingly bewitching as now, when she looked up at Caracalla in sweet confusion and timidity, but wholly possessed by her desire to win the favor of the man who, with a word, could make her so happy or so wretched. If this slave of his passions, whom a mere whim perhaps had moved to insist on the strictest morality in his court, should take a fancy to this delightful young creature, she was doomed to ruin. He turned pale, and his heart throbbed painfully as he watched the development of the catastrophe for which he had himself prepared the way.

But, once more, the unexpected upset the philosopher's anticipations. Caracalla gazed at the girl in amazement, utterly discomposed, as though some miracle had happened, or a ghost had started from the ground before him. Springing up, while he clutched the back of his chair, he exclaimed:

"What is this? Do my senses deceive me, or is it some base trickery? No, no! My eyes and my memory are good. This girl--"

"What ails thee, Caesar?" Philostratus broke in, with increasing anxiety.

"Something--something which will silence your foolish doubts--" Caesar panted out. "Patience--wait. Only a minute, and you shall see.--But, first"--and he turned to Melissa--"what is your name, girl?"

"Melissa," she replied, in a low and tremulous voice.

"And your father's and your mother's?"

"Heron is my father's name, and my mother--she is dead--was called Olympias, the daughter of Philip."

"And you are of Macedonian race?"

"Yes, my lord. My father and mother both were of pure Macedonian descent."

The emperor glanced triumphantly at Philostratus, and briefly exclaiming, "That will do, I think," he clapped his hands, and instantly his old chamberlain, Adventus, hurried in from the adjoining room, followed by the whole band of "Caesar's friends." Caracalla, however, only said to them:

"You can wait till I call you.--You, Adventus! I want the gem with the marriage of Alexander." The freedman took the gem out of an ebony casket standing on Caesar's writing-table, and Caracalla, holding the philosopher by the arm, said, with excited emphasis:

"That gem I inherited from my father, the divine Severus. It was engraved before that child came into the world. Now

you shall see it, and if you then say that it is an illusion--But why should you doubt it? Pythagoras and your hero Apollonius both knew whose body their souls had inhabited in a former existence. Mine--though my mother has laughed at my belief, and others have dared to do the same--mine, five hundred years ago, dwelt in the greatest of heroes, Alexander the Macedonian--a right royal tabernacle!"

He snatched the gem from the chamberlain's hand, and while he devoured it with his eyes, looking from time to time into Melissa's face, he eagerly ran on:

"It is she. None but a blind man, a fool, a malignant idiot, could doubt it! Any who henceforth shall dare mock at my conviction that I was brought into the world to fulfill the life-span of that great hero, will learn to rue it! Here--it is but natural--here, in the city he founded and which bears his name, I have found positive proof that the bond which unites the son of Philip with the son of Severus is something more than a mere fancy. This maiden--look at her closely--is the re-embodiment of the soul of Roxana, as I am of that of her husband. Even you must see now how naturally it came about that she should uplift her heart and hands in prayer for me. Her soul, when it once dwelt in Roxana, was fondly linked with that of the hero; and now, in the bosom of this simple maiden, it is drawn to the unforgotten fellow-soul which has found its home in my breast."

He spoke with enthusiastic and firm conviction of the truth of his strange imagining, as though he were delivering a revelation from the gods. He bade Philostratus approach and compare the features of Roxana, as carved in the onyx, with those of the young supplicant.

The fair Persian stood facing Alexander; they were clasping each other's hands in pledge of marriage, and a winged Hymen fluttered above their heads with his flaming torch.

Philostratus was, in fact, startled as he looked at the gem, and expressed his surprise in the liveliest terms, for the features of Roxana as carved in the cameo, no larger than a man's palm, were, line for line, those of the daughter of Heron. And this sport of chance could not but be amazing to any one who did not know--as neither of the three who were examining the gem knew--that it was a work of Heron's youth, and that he had given Roxana the features of his bride Olympias, whose living image her daughter Melissa had grown to be.

"And how long have you had this work of art?" asked Philostratus.

"I inherited it, as I tell you, from my father," replied Caracalla. "Severus sometimes wore it.--But wait. After the battle of Issos, in his triumph over Pescennius Niger--I can see him now--he wore it on his shoulder, and that was--"

"Two-and-twenty years ago," the philosopher put in; and Caracalla, turning to Melissa, asked her:

"How old are you, child?"

"Eighteen, my lord." And the reply delighted Caesar; he laughed aloud, and looked triumphantly at Philostratus.

The philosopher willingly admitted that there was something strange in the incident, and he congratulated Caesar on having met with such strong confirmation of his inward conviction. The soul of Alexander might now do great things through him.

During this conversation the alarm which had come over Melissa at Caesar's silence had entirely disappeared. The despot whose suffering had appealed to her sympathetic soul, now struck her as singular rather than terrible. The idea that she, the humble artist's daughter, could harbor the soul of a Persian princess, amused her; and when the lion lifted his head and lashed the floor with his tail at her approach, she felt that she had won his approbation. Moved by a sudden impulse, she laid her hand on his head and boldly stroked it. The light, warm touch soothed the fettered prince of the desert, and, rubbing his brow against Melissa's round arm, he muttered a low, contented growl.

At this Caesar was enchanted; it was to him a further proof of his strange fancy. The "Sword of Persia" was rarely so friendly to any one; and Theocritus owed much of the favor shown him by Caracalla to the fact that at their first meeting the lion had been on particularly good terms with him. Still, the brute had never shown so much liking for any stranger as for this young girl, and never responded with such eager swinging of his tail excepting to Caesar's own endearments. It must be instinct which had revealed to the beast the old and singular bond which linked his master and this new acquaintance. Caracalla, who, in all that happened to him, traced the hand of a superior power, pointed this out to Philostratus, and asked him whether, perhaps, the attack of pain he had just suffered might not have yielded so quickly to the presence of the revived Roxana rather than to Galen's pills.

Philostratus thought it wise not to dispute this assumption, and soon diverted the conversation to the subject of Melissa's imprisoned relations. He quietly represented to Caracalla that his noblest task must be to satisfy the spirit of her who had been so dear to the hero whose life he was to fulfill; and Caesar, who was delighted that the philosopher should recognize as a fact the illusion which flattered him, at once agreed. He questioned Melissa about her brother Alexander with a gentleness of which few would have thought him capable; and the sound of her voice, as she answered him modestly but frankly and with sisterly affection, pleased him so well that he allowed her to speak without interruption longer than was his wont. Finally, he promised her that he would question the painter, and, if possible, be gracious to him.

He again clapped his hands, and ordered a freedman named Epagathos, who was one of his favorite body-servants,

to send immediately for Alexander from the prison.

As before, when Adventus had been summoned, a crowd followed Epagathos, and, as Caesar did not dismiss them, Melissa was about to withdraw; the despot, however, desired her to wait.

Blushing, and confused with shyness, she remained standing by Caesar's seat; and though she only ventured to raise her eyes now and then for a stolen look, she felt herself the object of a hundred curious, defiant, bold, or contemptuous glances.

How gladly would she have escaped, or have sunk into the earth! But there she had to stand, her teeth set, while her lips trembled, to check the tears which would rise.

Caesar, meanwhile, took no further notice of her. He was longing to relate at full length, to his friends and companions, the wonderful and important thing that had happened; but he would not approach the subject while they took their places in his presence. Foremost of them, with Theocritus, came the high-priest of Serapis, and Caracalla immediately desired them to introduce the newly appointed head-guardian of the peace. But the election was not yet final. The choice lay, Theocritus explained, between two equally good men. One, Aristides, was a Greek of high repute, and the other was only an Egyptian, but so distinguished for zealous severity that, for his part, he should vote for him.

At this the high-priest broke in, saying that the man favored by Theocritus did in fact possess the qualities for which he was commended, but in such a measure that he was utterly hated by the Greek population; and in Alexandria more could be achieved by justice and mercy than by defiant severity.

But at this the favorite laughed, and said that he was convinced of the contrary. A populace which could dare to mock at the divine Caesar, the guest of their city, with such gross audacity, must be made to smart under the power of Rome and its ruler. The deposed magistrate had lost his place for the absurd measures he had proposed, and Aristides was in danger of following in his footsteps.

"By no means," the high-priest said, with calm dignity. "The Greek, whom I would propose, is a worthy and determined man. Now, Zminis the Egyptian, the right hand of the man who has been turned out, is, it must be said, a wretch without ruth or conscience."

But here the discussion was interrupted. Melissa, whose ears had tingled as she listened, had started with horror as she heard that Zminis, the in former, was to be appointed to the command of the whole watch of the city. If this should happen, her brothers and father were certainly lost. This must be prevented. As the high-priest ceased speaking, she laid her hand on Caesar's, and, when he looked up at her in surprise, she whispered to him, so low and so quickly that hardly any one observed it "Not Zminis; he is our mortal enemy!"

Caracalla scarcely glanced at the face of the daring girl, but he saw how pale she had turned. The delicate color in her cheeks, and the dimple he had seen while she stroked the lion had struck him as particularly fascinating. This had helped to make her so like the Roxana on the gem, and the change in her roused his pity. She must smile again; and so, accustomed as he was to visit his annoyance on others, he angrily exclaimed to his "Friends":

"Can I be everywhere at once? Can not the simplest matter be settled without me? It was the praetorian prefect's business to report to me concerning the two candidates, if you could not agree; but I have not seen him since last evening. The man who has to be sought when I need him neglects his duty! Macrinus usually knows his. Does any one know what has detained him?"

The question was asked in an angry, nay, in an ominous tone, but the praetorian prefect was a powerful personage, whose importance made him almost invulnerable. Yet the praetor Lucius Priscillianus was ready with an answer. He was the most malicious and ill-natured scandal-monger at court; and he hated the prefect, for he himself had coveted the post, which was the highest in the state next to Caesar's. He had always some slaves set to spy upon Macrinus, and he now said, with a contemptuous shrug:

"It is a marvel to me that so zealous a man--though he is already beginning to break down under his heavy duties--should be so late. However, he here spends his evenings and nights in special occupations, which must of course be far from beneficial to the health and peace of mind which his office demands."

"What can those be?" asked Caracalla; but the praetor added without a pause:

"Merciful gods! Who would not crave to glance into the future?"

"And it is that which makes him late?" said Caesar, with more curiosity than anger.

"Hardly by broad daylight," replied Priscillianus. "The spirits he would fain evoke shun the light of day, it is said. But he may be weary with late watching and painful agitations."

"Then he calls up spirits at night?"

"Undoubtedly, great Caesar. But, in this capital of philosophy, spirits are illogical it would seem. How can Macrinus interpret the prophecy that he, who is already on the highest step attainable to us lower mortals, shall rise yet higher?"

"We will ask him," said Caesar, indifferently. "But you--guard your tongue. It has already cost some men their heads, whom I would gladly see yet among the living. Wishes can not be punished. Who does not wish to stand on the step

next above his own? You, my friend, would like that of Macrinus.--But deeds! You know me! I am safe from them, so long as each of you so sincerely grudges his neighbor every promotion. You, my Lucius, have again proved how keen your sight is, and, if it were not too great an honor for this refractory city to have a Roman in the toga praetexta at the head of its administration, I should like to make you the guardian of the peace here. You see me," he went on, "in an elated mood to-day.--Cilo, you know this gem which came from my father. Look at it, and at this maiden.--Come nearer, priest of the divine Alexander; and you too consider the marvel, Theocritus, Antigonus, Dio, Pandion, Paulinus. Compare the face of the female figure with this girl by my side. The master carved this Roxana long before she was born. You are surprised? As Alexander's soul dwells in me, so she is Roxana, restored to life. It has been proved by irrefragable evidence in the presence of Philostratus."

The priest of Alexander here exclaimed, in a tone of firm conviction:

"A marvel indeed! We bow down to the noble vessel of the soul of Alexander. I, the priest of that hero, attest that great Caesar has found that in which Roxana's soul now exists." And as he spoke he pressed his hand to his heart, bowing low before Caesar; the rest imitated his example. Even Julius Paulinus, the satirist, followed the Roman priest's lead; but he whispered in the ear of Cassius Dio "Alexander's soul was inquisitive, and wanted to see how it could live in the body which, of all mortal tenements on earth, least resembles his own."

A mocking word was on the ex-consul's lips as to the amiable frame of mind which had so suddenly come over Caesar; but he preferred to watch and listen, as Caracalla beckoned Theocritus to him and begged him to give up the appointment of Zminis, though, as a rule, he indulged the favorite's every whim. He could not bear, he said, to intrust the defense of his own person and of the city of Alexander to an Egyptian, so long as a Greek could be found capable of the duty. He proposed presently to have the two candidates brought before him, and to decide between them in the presence of the prefect of the praetorians. Then, turning to those of his captains who stood around him, he said:

"Greet my soldiers from me. I could not show myself to them yesterday. I saw just now, with deep regret, how the rain has drenched them in this luxurious city. I will no longer endure it. The praetorians and the Macedonian legion shall be housed in quarters of which they will tell wonders for a long time to come. I would rather see them sleeping in white wool and eating off silver than these vile traders. Tell them that."

He was here interrupted, for Epagathos announced a deputation from the Museum, and, at the same time, the painter Alexander, who had been brought from prison. At this Caracalla exclaimed with disgust:

"Spare me the hair-splitting logicians!--Do you, Philostratus, receive them in my name. If they make any impudent demands, you may tell them my opinion of them and their Museum. Go, but come back quickly. Bring in the painter. I will speak with him alone.--You, my friends, withdraw with our idilogos, the priest of Alexander, who is well known here, and visit the city. I shall not require you at present."

The whole troop hastened to obey. Caracalla now turned to Melissa once more, and his eye brightened as he again discerned the dimple in her cheeks, which had recovered their roses. Her imploring eyes met his, and the happy expectation of seeing her brother lent them a light which brought joy to the friendless sovereign. During his last speech he had looked at her from time to time; but in the presence of so many strangers she had avoided meeting his gaze. Now she thought that she might freely show him that his favor was a happiness to her. Her soul, as Roxana, must of course feel drawn to his; in that he firmly believed. Her prayer and sacrifice for him sufficiently proved it--as he told himself once more.

When Alexander was brought in, it did not anger him to see that the brother, who held out his arms to Melissa in his habitual eager way, had to be reminded by her of the imperial presence. Every homage was due to this fair being, and he was, besides, much struck by Alexander's splendid appearance. It was long since any youthful figure had so vividly reminded him of the marble statues of the great Athenian masters. Melissa's brother stood before him, the very embodiment of the ideal of Greek strength and manly beauty. His mantle had been taken from him in prison, and he wore only the short chiton, which also left bare his powerful but softly modeled arms. He had been allowed no time to arrange and anoint his hair, and the light-brown curls were tossed in disorderly abundance about his shapely head. This favorite of the gods appeared in Caesar's eyes as an Olympic victor, who had come to claim the wreath with all the traces of the struggle upon him.

No sign of fear, either of Caesar or his lion, marred this impression. His bow, as he approached the potentate, was neither abject nor awkward, and Caesar felt bitter wrath at the thought that this splendid youth, of all men, should have selected him as the butt of his irony. He would have regarded it as a peculiar gift of fortune if this man--such a brother of such a sister--could but love him, and, with the eye of an artist, discern in the despot the great qualities which, in spite of his many crimes, he believed he could detect in himself. And he hoped, with an admixture of anxiety such as he had never known before, that the painter's demeanor would be such as should allow him to show mercy.

When Alexander besought him with a trustful mien to consider his youth, and the Alexandrian manners which he had inherited both from his parents and his grandparents, if indeed his tongue had wagged too boldly in speaking of the all-powerful Caesar, and to remember the fable of the lion and the mouse, the scowl he had put on to impress the youth with his awfulness and power vanished from Caesar's brow. The idea that this great artist, whose sharp eye

could so surely distinguish the hideous from the beautiful, should regard him as ill-favored, was odious to him. He had listened to him in silence; but suddenly he inquired of Alexander whether it was indeed he, whom he had never injured, who had written the horrible epigram nailed with the rope to the door of the Serapeum and when the painter emphatically denied it, Caesar breathed as though a burden had fallen from his soul. He nevertheless insisted on hearing from the youth's own lips what it was that he had actually dared to say. After some hesitation, during which Melissa besought Caesar in vain to spare her and her brother this confession, Alexander exclaimed:

"Then the hunted creature must walk into the net, and, unless your clemency interferes, on to death! What I said referred partly to the wonderful strength that you, my lord, have so often displayed in the field and in the circus; and also to another thing, which I myself now truly repent of having alluded to. It is said that my lord killed his brother."

"That--ah! that was it!" said Caesar, and his face, involuntarily this time, grew dark.

"Yes, my lord," Alexander went on, breathing hard. "To deny it would be to add a second crime to the former one, and I am one of those who would rather jump into cold water both feet at once, when it has to be done. All the world knows what your strength is; and I said that it was greater than that of Father Zeus; for that he had cast his son Hephaestos only on the earth, and your strong fist had cast your brother through the earth into the depths of Hades. That was all. I have not added nor concealed anything."

Melissa had listened in terror to this bold confession. Papinian, the brave praetorian prefect, one of the most learned lawyers of his time, had incurred Caracalla's fury by refusing to say that the murder of Geta was not without excuse; and his noble answer, that it was easier to commit fratricide than to defend it, cost him his life.

So long as Caesar had been kind to her, Melissa had felt repelled by him; but now, when he was angry, she was once more attracted to him.

As the wounds of a murdered man are said to bleed afresh when the murderer approaches, Caracalla's irritable soul was wont to break out in a frenzy of rage when any one was so rash as to allude to this, his foulest crime. This reference to his brother's death had as usual stirred his wrath, but he controlled it; for as a torrent of rain extinguishes the fire which a lightning-flash has kindled, the homage to his strength, in Alexander's satire, had modified his indignation. The irony which made the artist's contemptuous words truly witty, would not have escaped Caracalla's notice if they had applied to any one else; but he either did not feel it, or would not remark it, for the sake of leaving Melissa in the belief that his physical strength was really wonderful. Besides, he thus could indulge his wish to avoid pronouncing sentence of death on this youth; he only measured him with a severe eye, and said in threatening tones, to repay mockery in kind and to remind the criminal of the fate imperial clemency should spare him:

"I might be tempted to try my strength on you, but that it is worse to try a fall with a vapoing wag, the sport of the winds, than with the son of Caesar. And if I do not condescend to the struggle, it is because you are too light for such an arm as this." And as he spoke he boastfully grasped the muscles which constant practice had made thick and firm. "But my hand reaches far. Every man-at-arms is one of its fingers, and there are thousands of them. You have made acquaintance already, I fancy, with those which clutched you."

"Not so," replied Alexander, with a faint smile, as he bowed humbly. "I should not dare resist your great strength, but the watch-dogs of the law tried in vain to track me. I gave myself up."

"Of your own accord?"

"To procure my father's release, as he had been put in prison."

"Most magnanimous!" said Caesar, ironically. "Such a deed sounds well, but is apt to cost a man his life. You seem to have overlooked that."

"No, great Caesar; I expected to die."

"Then you are a philosopher, a contemner of life."

"Neither. I value life above all else; for, if it is taken from me, there is an end of enjoying its best gifts."

"Best gifts!" echoed Caesar. "I should like to know which you honor with the epithet."

"Love and art."

"Indeed?" said Caracalla, with a swift glance at Melissa. Then, in an altered voice, he added, "And revenge?"

"That," said the artist, boldly, "is a pleasure I have not yet tasted. No one ever did me a real injury till the villain Zminis robbed my guiltless father of his liberty; and he is not worthy to do such mischief, as a finger of your imperial hand."

At this, Caesar looked at him suspiciously, and said in stern tones:

"But you have now the opportunity of trying the fine flavor of vengeance. If I were timid--since the Egyptian acted only as my instrument--I should have cause to protect myself against you."

"By no means," said the painter, with an engaging smile, "it lies in your power to do me the greatest benefit. Do it, Caesar! It would be a joy to me to show that, though I have been reckless beyond measure, I am nevertheless a grateful

man."

"Grateful?" repeated Caracalla, with a cruel laugh. Then he rose slowly, and looked keenly at Alexander, exclaiming:

"I should almost like to try you."

"And I will answer for it that you will never regret it!" Melissa put in. "Greatly as he has erred, he is worthy of your clemency."

"Is he?" said Caesar, looking down at her kindly. "What Roxana's soul affirms by those rosy lips I can not but believe."

Then again he paused, studying Alexander with a searching eye, and added:

"You think me strong; but you will change that opinion--which I value--if I forgive you like a poor-spirited girl. You are in my power. You risked your life. If I give it you, I must have a gift in return, that I may not be cheated."

"Set my father free, and he will do whatever you may require of him," Melissa broke out. But Caracalla stopped her, saying: "No one makes conditions with Caesar. Stand back, girl."

Melissa hung her head and obeyed; but she stood watching the eager discussion between these two dissimilar men, at first with anxiety and then with surprise.

Alexander seemed to resist Caesar's demands; but presently the despot must have proposed something which pleased the artist, for Melissa heard the low, musical laugh which had often cheered her in moments of sadness. Then the conversation was more serious, and Caracalla said, so loud that Melissa could hear him:

"Do not forget to whom you speak. If my word is not enough, you can go back to prison." Then again she trembled for her brother; but some soft word of his mollified the fury of the terrible man, who was never the same for two minutes together. The lion, too, which lay unchained by his master's seat, gave her a fright now and then; for if Caesar raised his voice in anger, he growled and stood up.

How fearful were this beast and his lord! Rather would she spend her whole life on a ship's deck, tossed to and fro by the surges, than share this man's fate. And yet there was in him something which attracted her; nay, and it nettled her that he should forget her presence.

At last Alexander humbly asked Caracalla whether he might not tell Melissa to what he had pledged his word.

"That shall be my business," replied Caesar. "You think that a mere girl is a better witness than none at all. Perhaps you are right. Then let it be understood: whatever you may have to report to me, my wrath shall not turn against you. This fellow--why should you not be told, child?--is going into the town to collect all the jests and witty epigrams which have been uttered in my honor."

"Alexander!" cried Melissa, clasping her hands and turning pale with horror. But Caracalla laughed to himself, and went on cheerfully:

"Yes, it is dangerous work, no doubt; and for that reason I pledged my word as Caesar not to require him to pay for the sins of others. On the contrary, he is free, if the posy he culls for me is sufficient."

"Ay," said Alexander, on whom his sister's white face and warning looks were having effect. "But you made me another promise on which I lay great stress. You will not compel me to tell you, nor try to discover through any other man, who may have spoken or written any particular satire."

"Enough!" said Caracalla, impatiently; but Alexander was not to be checked. He went on vehemently: "I have not forgotten that you said conditions were not to be made with Caesar; but, in spite of my impotence, I maintain the right of returning to my prison and there awaiting my doom, unless you once more assure me, in this girl's presence, that you will neither inquire as to the names of the authors of any gibes I may happen to have heard, nor compel me by any means whatever to give up the names of the writers of epigrams. Why should I not satisfy your curiosity and your relish of a sharp jest? But rather than do the smallest thing which might savor of treachery--ten times rather the axe or the gallows!"

And Caracalla replied with a dark frown, loudly and briefly:

"I promise."

"And if your rage is too much for you?" wailed Melissa, raising her hands in entreaty; but the despot replied, sternly:

"There is no passion which can betray Caesar into perjury."

At this moment Philostratus came in again, with Epagathos, who announced the praetorian prefect. Melissa, encouraged by the presence of her kind protector, went on:

"But, great Caesar, you will release my father and my other brother?"

"Perhaps," replied Caracalla. "First we will see how this one carries out his task."

"You will be satisfied, my lord," said the young man, looking quite happy again, for he was delighted at the prospect of saying audacious things to the face of the tyrant whom all were bent on flattering, and holding up the mirror to him

without, as he firmly believed, bringing any danger on himself or others.

He bowed to go. Melissa did the same, saying, as airily as though she were free to come and go here:

"Accept my thanks, great Caesar. Oh, how fervently will I pray for you all my life, if only you show mercy to my father and brothers!"

"That means that you are leaving me?" asked Caracalla.

"How can it be otherwise?" said Melissa, timidly. "I am but a girl, and the men whom you expect--"

"But when they are gone?" Caesar insisted.

"Even then you can not want me," she murmured.

"You mean," said Caracalla, bitterly, "that you are afraid to come back. You mean that you would rather keep out of the way of the man you prayed for, so long as he is well. And if the pain which first aroused your sympathy attacks him again, even then will you leave the irascible sovereign to himself or the care of the gods?"

"Not so, not so," said Melissa, humbly, looking into his eyes with an expression that pierced him to the heart, so that he added, with gentle entreaty:

"Then show that you are she whom I believe you to be. I do not compel you. Go whither you will, stay away even if I send for you; but"--and here his brow clouded again--"why should I try to be merciful to her from whom I looked for sympathy and kindness, when she flees from me like the rest?"

"O my lord!" Melissa sighed distressfully. "Go!" Caesar went on. "I do not need you."

"No, no," the girl cried, in great trouble. "Call me, and I will come. Only shelter me from the others, and from their looks of scorn; only--O immortal gods!--If you need me, I will serve you, and willingly, with all my heart. But if you really care for me, if you desire my presence, why let me suffer the worst?" Here a sudden flood of tears choked her utterance. A smile of triumph passed over Caesar's features, and drawing Melissa's hands away from her tearful face, he said, kindly:

"Alexander's soul pines for Roxana's; that is what makes your presence so dear to me. Never shall you have cause to rue coming at my call. I swear it by the manes of my divine father--you, Philostratus, are witness."

The philosopher, who thought he knew Caracalla, gave a sigh of relief; and Alexander gladly reflected that the danger he had feared for his sister was averted. This craze about Roxana, of which Caracalla had just now spoken to him as a certain fact, he regarded as a monstrous illusion of this strange man's, which would, however, be a better safeguard for Melissa than pledges and oaths.

He clasped her hand, and said with cheerful confidence: "Only send for her when you are ill, my lord, as long as you remain here. I know from your own lips that there is no passion which can betray Caesar into perjury. Will you permit her to come with me for the present?"

"No," said Caracalla, sharply, and he bade him go about the business he had in hand. Then, turning to Philostratus, he begged him to conduct Melissa to Euryale, the high-priest's noble wife, for she had been a kind and never-forgotten friend of his mother's.

The philosopher gladly escorted the young girl to the matron, who had long been anxiously awaiting her return.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The statue of Serapis, a figure of colossal size, carved by the master-hand of Bryaxis, out of ivory overlaid with gold, sat enthroned in the inner chamber of the great Temple of Serapis, with the kalathos crowning his bearded face, and the three-headed Cerberus at his feet, gazing down in supreme silence on the scene around. He did not lack for pious votaries and enthusiastic admirers, for, so long as Caesar was his guest, the curtain was withdrawn which usually hid his majestic form from their eyes. But his most devoted worshipers thought that the god's noble, benevolent, grave countenance had a wrathful look; for, though nothing had been altered in this, the finest pillared hall in the world; though the beautiful pictures in relief on the walls and ceiling, the statues and altars of marble, bronze, and precious metals between the columns, and the costly mosaic-work of many colors which decked the floor in regular patterns, were the same as of yore, this splendid pavement was trodden to-day by thousands of feet which had no concern with the service of the god.

Before Caesar's visit, solemn silence had ever reigned in this worthy home of the deity, fragrant with the scarcely visible fumes of kyphi; and the worshipers gathered without a sound round the foot of his statue, and before the numerous altars and the smaller images of the divinities allied to him or the votive tablets recording the gifts and services instituted in honor of Serapis by pious kings or citizens. On feast-days, and during daily worship, the chant of priestly choirs might be heard, or the murmur of prayer; and the eye might watch the stolistas who crowned the statues with flowers and ribbons, as required by the ritual, or the processions of priests in their various rank. Carrying sacred relics and figures of the gods on trays or boats, with emblematic standards, scepters, and cymbals, they moved about the sacred precinct in prescribed order, and most of them fulfilled their duties with devotion and edification.

But Caesar's presence seemed to have banished these solemn feelings. From morning till night the great temple swarmed with visitors, but their appearance and demeanor were more befitting the market-place or public bath than the sanctuary. It was now no more than the anteroom to Caesar's audience-chamber, and thronged with Roman senators, legates, tribunes, and other men of rank, and the clients and "friends" of Caesar, mingled with soldiers of inferior grades, scribes, freedmen, and slaves, who had followed in Caracalla's train. There were, too, many Alexandrians who expected to gain some benefit, promotion, or distinction through the emperor's favorites. Most of these kept close to his friends and intimates, to make what profit they could out of them. Some were corn and wine dealers, or armorers, who wished to obtain contracts for supplying the army; others were usurers, who had money to lend on the costly objects which warriors often acquired as booty; and here, as everywhere, bedizened and painted women were crowding round the free-handed strangers. There were Magians, astrologers, and magicians by the dozen, who considered this sacred spot the most suitable place in which to offer their services to the Romans, always inquisitive for signs and charms. They knew how highly Egyptian magic was esteemed throughout the empire; though their arts were in fact prohibited, each outdid the other in urgency, and not less in a style of dress which should excite curiosity and expectancy.

Serapion held aloof. Excepting that he wore a beard and robe, his appearance even had nothing in common with them; and his talar was not like theirs, embroidered with hieroglyphics, tongues, and flames, but of plain white stuff, which gave him the aspect of a learned and priestly sage.

As Alexander, on his way through the temple to fulfill Caesar's commission, went past the Magian, Castor, his supple accomplice, stole up behind a statue, and, when the artist disappeared in the crowd, whispered to his master:

"The rascally painter is at liberty!"

"Till further notice!" was the reply, and Serapion was about to give his satellite some instructions, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Zminis said in a low voice:

"I am glad to have found you here. Accusations are multiplying against you, my friend; and though I have kept my eyes shut till now, that cannot last much longer."

"Let us hope you are mistaken," replied the Magian, firmly. And then he went on in a hurried whisper: "I know what your ambition is, and my support may be of use to you. But we must not be seen together. We will meet again in the instrument-room, to the left of the first stairs up to the observatory. You will find me there."

"At once, then," said the other. "I am to be in Caesar's presence in a quarter of an hour."

The Magian, as being one of the most skillful makers of astronomical instruments, and attached to the sanctuary, had a key of the room he had designated. Zminis found him there, and their business was quickly settled. They knew each other well, and each knew things of the other which inspired them with mutual fear. However, as time pressed, they set aside all useless antagonisms, to unite against the common foe.

The Magian knew already that Zminis had been named to Caesar as a possible successor to the chief of the night-watch, and that he had a powerful rival. By the help of the Syrian, whose ventriloquism was so perfect that he never failed to produce the illusion that his feigned voice proceeded from any desired person or thing, Serapion had enmeshed the praetorian prefect, the greatest magnate in the empire next to Caesar himself, and in the course of the

past night had gained a firm hold over him.

Macrinus, a man of humble birth, who owed his promotion to Severus, the father of Caracalla, had, the day before, been praying in the Pantheon to the statue of his deceased patron. A voice had proceeded from the image, telling him that the divine Severus needed him for a great work. A pious seer was charged to tell him more exactly what this was; and he would meet him if he went at about sunset to the shrine of Isis, and called three times on the name of Severus before the altar of the goddess.

The Syrian ventriloquist had, by Serapion's orders, hidden behind a pillar and spoken to the prefect from the statue; and Macrinus had, of course, obeyed his instructions. He had met the Magian in the Temple of Isis, and what he had seen, heard, and felt during the night had so deeply affected him that he had promised to revisit Serapion the next evening. What means he had used to enslave so powerful a man the Magian did not tell his ally; but he declared that Macrinus was as wax in his hands, and he came to an agreement with the Egyptian that if he, Serapion, should bring about the promotion for which Zminis sighed, Zminis, on his part, should give him a free hand, and commend his arts to Caesar.

It needed but a few minutes to conclude this compact; but then the Magian proceeded to insist that Alexander's father and brother should be made away with.

"Impossible," replied Zminis. "I should be only too glad to wring the necks of the whole brood; but, as it is, I am represented to Caesar as too stern and ruthless. And a pretty little slut, old Heron's daughter, has entangled him in her toils."

"No," said Serapion, positively. "I have seen the girl, and she is as innocent as a child. But I know the force of contrast: when depravity meets purity--"

"Come, no philosophizing!" interrupted the other. "We have better things to attend to, and one or the other may turn to your advantage."

And he told him that Caesar, whose whim it was to spare Alexander's life, regarded Melissa as an incarnation of Roxana.

"That is worth considering," said the Magian, stroking his beard meditatively; then he suddenly exclaimed:

"By the law, as you know, all the relatives of a state criminal are sent to the quarries or the mines. Dispatch Heron and his philosopher son forthwith. Whither?--that is your concern; only, for the next few days they must be out of reach."

"Good!" said the Egyptian, and an odious smile overspread his thin brown face. "They may go as galley-slaves and row themselves to the Sardinian mines. A good idea!"

"I have even better ideas than that to serve a friend," replied Serapion. "Only get the philosopher out of the way. If Caesar lends an ear to his ready tongue, I shall never see you guardian of the peace. The painter is less dangerous."

"He shall share their fate," cried the spy, and he licked his thick lips as if tasting some dainty morsel. He waved an adieu to the Magian, and hastened back to the great hall. There he strictly instructed one of his subordinates to take care that the gem-cutter and his son Philip found places on board a galley bound for Sardinia.

At the great door he again met Serapion, with the Syrian at his heels, and the Magian said:

"My friend here has just seen a clay figure, molded by some practiced hand. It represents Caesar as a defiant warrior, but in the shape of a deformed dwarf. It is hideously like him; you can see it at the Elephant tavern."

The Egyptian pressed his hand, with an eager "That will serve," and hastily went out.

Two hours slipped by, and Zminis was still waiting in Caesar's anteroom. The Greek, Aristides, shared his fate, the captain hitherto of the armed guard; while Zminis had been the head of the spies, intrusted with communicating written reports to the chief of the night-watch. The Greek's noble, soldierly figure looked strikingly fine by the slovenly, lank frame of the tall Egyptian. They both knew that within an hour or so one would be supreme over the other; but of this they thought it best to say nothing. Zminis, as was his custom when he wished to assume an appearance of respect which he did not feel, was alternately abject and pressingly confidential; while Aristides calmly accepted his hypocritical servility, and answered it with dignified condescension. Nor had they any lack of subjects, for their interests were the same, and they both had the satisfaction of reflecting what injury must ensue to public safety through their long and useless detention here.

But when two full hours had elapsed without their being bidden to Caesar's presence, or taken any notice of by their supporters, Zminis grew wroth, and the Greek frowned in displeasure. Meanwhile the anteroom was every moment more crowded, and neither chose to give vent to his anger. Still, when the door to the inner chambers was opened for a moment, and loud laughter and the ring of wine-cups fell on their ears, Aristides shrugged his shoulders, and the Egyptian's eyes showed an ominous white ring glaring out of his brown face.

Caracalla had meanwhile received the praetorian prefect; he had forgiven him his long delay, when Macrinus, of his own accord, had told him of the wonderful things Serapion had made known to him. The prefect's son, too, had been

invited to the banquet of Seleucus; and when Caracalla heard from him and others of the splendor of the feast, he had begun to feel hungry. Even with regard to food, Caesar acted only on the impulse of the moment; and though, in the field, he would, to please his soldiers, be content with a morsel of bread and a little porridge, at home he highly appreciated the pleasures of the table. Whenever he gave the word, an abundant meal must at once be ready. It was all the same to him what was kept waiting or postponed, so long as something to his taste was set before him. Macrinus, indeed, humbly reminded him that the guardians of the peace were awaiting him; but he only waved his hand with contempt, and proceeded to the dining-room, which was soon filled with a large number of guests. Within a few minutes the first dish was set before his couch, and, as plenty of good stories were told, and an admirable band of flute-playing and singing girls filled up the pauses in the conversation, he enjoyed his meal. In spite, too, of the warning which Galenus had impressed on his Roman physician, he drank freely of the fine wine which had been brought out for him from the airy lofts of the Serapeum, and those about him were surprised at their master's unwonted good spirits.

He was especially gracious to the high-priest, whom he bade to a place by his side; and he even accepted his arm as a support, when, the meal being over, they returned to the tablinum.

There he flung himself on a couch, with a burning head, and began feeding the lion, without paying any heed to his company. It was a pleasure to him to see the huge brute rend a young lamb. When the remains of this introductory morsel had been removed and the pavement washed, he gave the "Sword of Persia" pieces of raw flesh, teasing the beast by snatching the daintiest bits out of his mouth, and then offering them to him again, till the satiated brute stretched himself yawning at his feet. During this entertainment, he had a letter read to him from the senate, and dictated a reply to a secretary. His eyes twinkled with a tipsy leer in his flushed face, and yet he was perfectly competent; and his instructions to the senate, though imperious indeed, were neither more nor less rational than in his soberest moods.

Then, after washing his hands in a golden basin, he acted on Macrinus's suggestion, and the two candidates who had so long been waiting were at last admitted. The prefect of the praetorians had, by the Magian's desire, recommended the Egyptian; but Caesar wished to see for himself, and then to decide. Both the applicants had received hints from their supporters: the Egyptian, to moderate his rigor; the Greek, to express himself in the severest terms. And this was made easy for him, for the annoyance which had been pent up during his three hours' waiting was sufficient to lend his handsome face a stern look. Zminis strove to appear mild by assuming servile humility; but this so ill became his cunning features that Caracalla saw with secret satisfaction that he could accede to Melissa's wishes, and confirm the choice of the high-priest, in whose god he had placed his hopes.

Still, his own safety was more precious to him than the wishes of any living mortal; so he began by pouring out, on both, the vials of his wrath at the bad management of the town. Their blundering tools had not even succeeded in capturing the most guileless of men, the painter Alexander. The report that the men-at-arms had seized him had been a fabrication to deceive, for the artist had given himself up. Nor had he as yet heard of any other traitor whom they had succeeded in laying hands on, though the town was flooded with insolent epigrams directed against the imperial person. And, as he spoke, he glared with fury at the two candidates before him.

The Greek bowed his head in silence, as if conscious of his short-comings; the Egyptian's eyes flashed, and, with an amazingly low bend of his supple spine, he announced that, more than three hours since, he had discovered a most abominable caricature in clay, representing Caesar as a soldier in a horrible pygmy form.

"And the perpetrator," snarled Caracalla, listening with a scowl for the reply.

Zminis explained that great Caesar himself had commanded his attendance just as he hoped to find the traces of the criminal, and that, while he was waiting, more than three precious hours had been lost. At this Caracalla broke out in a fury:

"Catch the villain! And let me see his insolent rubbish. Where are your eyes? You bungling louts ought to protect me against the foul brood that peoples this city, and their venomous jests. Past grievances are forgotten. Set the painter's father and brother at liberty. They have had a warning. Now I want something new. Something new, I say; and, above all, let me see the ringleaders in chains; the man who nailed up the rope, and the caricaturists. We must have them, to serve as an example to the others."

Aristides thought that the moment had now come for displaying his severity, and he respectfully but decidedly represented to Caesar that he would advise that the gem-cutter and his son should be kept in custody. They were well-known persons, and too great clemency would only aggravate the virulence of audacious tongues. The painter was free, and if his relatives were also let out of prison, there was nothing to prevent their going off to the other end of the world. Alexandria was a seaport, and a ship would carry off the criminals before a man could turn round.

At this the emperor wrathfully asked him whether his opinion had been invited; and the cunning Egyptian said to himself that Caracalla was anxious to spare the father and his sons for the daughter's sake. And yet Caesar would surely wish to keep them in safety, to have some hold over the girl; so he lied with a bold face, affirming that, in obedience to the law of the land, he had removed Heron and Philip, at any rate for the moment, beyond the reach of

Caesar's mercy. They had in the course of the night been placed on board a galley and were now on the way to Sardinia. But a swift vessel should presently be sent to overtake it and bring them back.

And the informer was right, for Caesar's countenance brightened. He did, indeed, blame the Egyptian's overhasty action; but he gave no orders for following up the galley.

Then, after reflecting for a short time, he said:

"I do not find in either of you what I require; but at a pinch we are fain to eat moldy bread, so I must need choose between you two. The one who first brings me that clay figure, and the man who modeled it, in chains and bonds, shall be appointed chief of the night-watch."

Meanwhile Alexander had entered the room. As soon as Caracalla saw him, he beckoned to him, and the artist informed him that he had made good use of his time and had much to communicate. Then he humbly inquired as to the clay figure of which Caesar was speaking, and Caracalla referred him to Zminis. The Egyptian repeated what the Magian had told him.

Alexander listened calmly; but when Zminis ceased speaking, the artist took a deep breath, drew himself up, and pointing a contemptuous finger at the spy, as if his presence poisoned the air, he said: "It is that fellow's fault, great Caesar, if the citizens of my native town dare commit such crimes. He torments and persecutes them in your name. How many a felony has been committed here, merely to scoff at him and his creatures, and to keep them on the alert! We are a light-headed race. Like children, we love to do the forbidden thing, so long as it is no stain on our honor. But that wretch treats all laughter and the most innocent fun as a crime, or so interprets it that it seems so. From this malignant delight in the woes of others, and in the hope of rising higher in office, that wicked man has brought misery on hundreds. It has all been done in thy great name, O Caesar! No man has raised you up more foes than this wretch, who undermines your security instead of protecting it."

Here Zminis, whose swarthy face had become of ashy paleness, broke out in a hoarse tone: "I will teach you, and the whole rabble of traitors at your back--"

But Caesar wrathfully commanded him to be silent, and Alexander quietly went on: "You can threaten, and you will array all your slanderous arts against us, I know you. But here sits a sovereign who protects the innocent--and I and mine are innocent. He will set his heel on your head when he knows you--the curse of this city--for the adder that you are! He is deceiving you now in small things, great Caesar, and later he will deceive you in greater ones. Listen now how he has lied to you. He says he discovered a caricature of your illustrious person in the guise of a soldier. Why, then, did he not bring it away from the place where it could only excite disaffection, and might even mislead those who should see it into the belief that your noble person was that of a dwarf? The answer is self-evident. He left it to betray others into further mockery, to bring them to ruin."

Caesar had listened with approval, and now sternly asked the Egyptian:

"Did you see the image?"

"In the Elephant tavern!" yelled the man.

But Alexander shook his head doubtfully, and begged permission to ask the Egyptian a question. This was granted, and the artist inquired whether the soldier stood alone.

"So far as I remember, yes," replied Zminis, almost beside himself.

"Then your memory is as false as your soul!" Alexander shouted in his face, "for there was another figure by the soldier's side. The clay, still wet, clung to the same board as the figure of the soldier, modeled by the same hand. No, no, my crafty fellow, you will not catch the workman; for, being warned, he is already on the high-seas."

"It is false!" shrieked Zminis.

"That remains to be proved," said Alexander, scornfully.--"Allow me now, great Caesar, to show you the figures. They have been brought by my orders, and are in the anteroom-carefully covered up, of course, for the fewer the persons who see them the better."

Caracalla nodded his consent, and Alexander hurried away; the despot heaping abuse on Zminis, and demanding why he had not at once had the images removed. The Egyptian now confessed that he had only heard of the caricature from a friend, and declared that if he had seen it he should have destroyed it on the spot. Macrinus here tried to excuse the spy, by remarking that this zealous official had only tried to set his services in a favorable light. The falsehood could not be approved, but was excusable. But he had scarcely finished speaking, when his opponent, the praetor, Lucius Priscillianus, observed, with a gravity he but rarely displayed:

"I should have thought that it was the first duty of the man who ought to be Caesar's mainstay and representative here, to let his sovereign hear nothing but the undistorted truth. Nothing, it seems to me, can be less excusable than a lie told to divine Caesar's face!"

A few courtiers, who were out of the prefect's favor, as well as the high-priest of Serapis, agreed with the speaker. Caracalla, however, paid no heed to them, but sat with his eyes fixed on the door, deeply wounded in his vanity by the

mere existence of such a caricature.

He had not long to wait. But when the wrapper was taken off the clay figures, he uttered a low snarl, and his flushed face turned pale. Sounds of indignation broke from the bystanders; the blood rose to his cheeks again, and, shaking his fist, he muttered unintelligible threats, while his eyes wandered again and again to the caricatures. They attracted his attention more than all else, and as in an April day the sky is alternately dark and bright, so red and white alternated in his face. Then, while Alexander replied to a few questions, and assured him that the host of the "Elephant" had been very angry, and had gladly handed them over to him to be destroyed, Caracalla seemed to become accustomed to them, for he gazed at them more calmly, and tried to affect indifference. He inquired of Philostratus, as though he wished to be informed, whether he did not think that the artist who had modeled these figures must be a very clever fellow; and when the philosopher assented conditionally, he declared that he saw some resemblance to himself--in the features of the apple-dealer. And then he pointed to his own straight legs, only slightly disfigured by an injury to the ankle, to show how shamefully unfair it was to compare them with the lower limbs of a misshapen dwarf. Finally, the figure of the apple-dealer--a hideous pygmy form, with the head of an old man, like enough to his own--roused his curiosity. What was the point of this image? What peculiarity was it intended to satirize? The basket which hung about the neck of the figure was full of fruit, and the object he held in his hand might be an apple, or might be anything else.

With eager and constrained cheerfulness, he inquired the opinion of his "friends," treating as sheer flattery a suggestion from his favorite, Theocritus, that this was not an apple-dealer, but a human figure, who, though but a dwarf in comparison with the gods, nevertheless endowed the world with the gifts of the immortals.

Alexander and Philostratus could offer no explanation; but when the proconsul, Julius Paulinus, observed that the figure was offering the apples for money, as Caesar offered the Roman citizenship to the provincials, he knew for what, Caracalla nodded agreement.

He then provisionally appointed Aristides to the coveted office. The Egyptian should be informed as to his fate. When the prefect was about to remove the figures, Caesar hastily forbade it, and ordered the bystanders to withdraw. Alexander alone was commanded to remain. As soon as they were together, Caesar sprang up and vehemently demanded to know what news he had brought. But the young man hesitated to begin his report. Caracalla, of his own accord, pledged his word once more to keep his oath, and then Alexander assured him that he knew no more than Caesar who were the authors of the epigrams which he had picked up here and there; and, though the satire they contained was venomous in some cases, still he, the sovereign of the world, stood so high that he could laugh them to scorn, as Socrates had laughed when Aristophanes placed him on the stage.

Caesar declared that he scorned these flies, but that their buzzing annoyed him.

Alexander rejoiced at this, and only expressed his regret that most of the epigrams he had collected turned on the death of Caesar's brother Geta. He knew now that it was rash to condemn a deed which--

Here Caesar interrupted him, for he could not long remain quiet, saying sternly:

"The deed was needful, not for me, but for the empire, which is dearer to me than father, mother, or a hundred brothers, and a thousand times dearer than men's opinions. Let me hear in what form the witty natives of this city express their disapproval."

This sounded so dignified and gracious that Alexander ventured to repeat a distich which he had heard at the public baths, whither he had first directed his steps. It did not, however, refer to the murder of Geta, but to the mantle-like garment to which Caesar owed the nickname of Caracalla. It ran thus:

*"Why should my lord Caracalla affect a garment so ample?
'Tis that the deeds are many of evil he needs to conceal."*

At this Caesar laughed, saying: "Who is there that has nothing to conceal? The lines are not amiss. Hand me your tablets; if the others are no worse--"

"But they are," Alexander exclaimed, anxiously, "and I only regret that I should be the instrument of your tormenting yourself--"

"Tormenting?" echoed Caesar, disdainfully. "The verses amuse me, and I find them most edifying. That is all. Hand me the tablets."

The command was so positive, that Alexander drew out the little diptych, with the remark that painters wrote badly, and that what he had noted down was only intended to aid his memory. The idea that Caesar should hear a few home-truths through him had struck him as pleasant, but now the greatness of the risk was clear to him. He glanced at the scrawled characters, and it occurred to him that he had intended to change the word dwarf in one line to Caesar, and to keep the third and most trenchant epigram from the emperor. The fourth and last was very innocent, and he had meant to read it last, to mollify him. So he did not wish to show the tablets. But, as he was about to take them back, Caracalla snatched them from his hand and read with some difficulty:

"Fraternal love was once esteemed

A virtue even in the great,

*And Philadelphos then was deemed
A name to grace a potentate.
But now the dwarf upon the throne,
By murder of his mother's son,
As Misadelphos must be known."*

"Indeed!" murmured Caesar, with a pale face, and then he went on in a low, sullen tone: "Always the same story--my brother, and my small stature. In this town they follow the example of the barbarians, it would seem, who choose the tallest and broadest of their race to be king. If the third epigram has nothing else in it, the shallow wit of your fellow-citizens is simply tedious.--Now, what have we next? Trochaics! Hardly anything new, I fear!--There is the water-jar. I will drink; fill the cup." But Alexander did not immediately obey the command so hastily given; assuring Caesar that he could not possibly read the writing, he was about to take up the tablets. But Caesar laid his hand on them, and said, imperiously: "Drink! Give me the cup."

He fixed his eyes on the wax, and with difficulty deciphered the clumsy scrawl in which Alexander had noted down the following lines, which he had heard at the "Elephant":

*"Since on earth our days are numbered,
Ask me not what deeds of horror
Stain the hands of fell Tarautas.
Ask me of his noble actions,
And with one short word I answer,
'None!'--replying to your question
With no waste of precious hours."*

Alexander meanwhile had done Caracalla's bidding, and when he had replaced the jar on its stand and returned to Caesar, he was horrified; for the emperor's head and arms were shaking and struggling to and fro, and at his feet lay the two halves of the wax tablets which he had torn apart when the convulsion came on. He foamed at the mouth, with low moans, and, before Alexander could prevent him, racked with pain and seeking for some support, he had set his teeth in the arm of the seat off which he was slipping. Greatly shocked, and full of sincere pity, Alexander tried to raise him; but the lion, who perhaps suspected the artist of having been the cause of this sudden attack, rose on his feet with a roar, and the young man would have had no chance of his life if the beast had not happily been chained down after his meal. With much presence of mind, Alexander sprang behind the chair and dragged it, with the unconscious man who served him as a shield, away from the angry brute.

Galen had urged Caesar to avoid excess in wine and violent emotions, and the wisdom of the warning was sufficiently proved by the attack which had seized him with such fearful violence, just when Caracalla had neglected it in both particulars. Alexander had to exert all the strength of his muscles, practised in the wrestling-school, to hold the sufferer on his seat, for his strength, which was not small, was doubled by the demons of epilepsy. In an instant the whole Court had rushed to the spot on hearing the lion's roar of rage, which grew louder and louder, and could be heard at no small distance, and then Alexander's shout for help. But the private physician and Epagathos, the chamberlain, would allow no one to enter the room; only old Adventus, who was half blind, was permitted to assist them in succoring the sufferer. He had been raised by Caracalla from the humble office of letter-carrier to the highest dignities and the office of his private chamberlain; but the leech availed himself by preference of the assistance of this experienced and quiet man, and between them they soon brought Caesar to his senses. Caesar then lay pale and exhausted on a couch which had hastily been arranged, his eyes fixed on vacancy, scarcely able to move a finger. Alexander held his trembling hand, and when the physician, a stout man of middle age, took the artist's place and bade him retire, Caracalla, in a low voice, desired him to remain.

As soon as Caesar's suspended faculties were fully awake again, he turned to the cause of his attack. With a look of pain and entreaty he desired Alexander to give him the tablets once more; but the artist assured him--and Caracalla seemed not sorry to believe--that he had crushed the wax in his convulsion. The sick man himself no doubt felt that such food was too strong for him. After he had remained staring at nothing in silence for some time, he began again to speak of the gibes of the Alexandrians. Surrounded as he was by servile favorites, whose superior he was in gifts and intellect, what had here come under his notice seemed to interest him above measure.

He desired to know where and from whom the painter had got these epigrams. But again Alexander declared that he did not know the names of the authors; that he had found one at the public baths, the second in a tavern, and the third at a hairdresser's shop. Caesar looked sadly at the youth's abundant brown curls which had been freshly oiled, and said: "Hair is like the other good gifts of life. It remains fine only with the healthy. You, happy rascal, hardly know what sickness means!" Then again he sat staring in silence, till he suddenly started up and asked Alexander, as Philostratus had yesterday asked Melissa:

"Do you and your sister belong to the Christians?"

When he vehemently denied it, Caracalla went on: "And yet these epigrams show plainly enough how the

Alexandrians feel toward me. Melissa, too, is a daughter of this town, and when I remember that she could bring herself to pray for me, then--My nurse, who was the best of women, was a Christian. I learned from her the doctrine of loving our enemies and praying for those who despitely treat us. I always regarded it as impossible; but now--your sister--What I was saying just now about the hair and good health reminds me of another speech of the Crucified one which my nurse often repeated--how long ago!--"To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath." How cruel and yet how wise, how terribly striking and true! A healthy man! What more can he want, and what abundant gifts that best of all gifts will gain for him! If he is visited by infirmity--only look at me!--how much misery I have suffered from this curse, terrible enough in itself, and tainting everything with the bitterness of wormwood!"

He laughed softly but scornfully, and continued: "But I! I am the sovereign of the universe. I have so much--oh yes, so much!--and for that reason more shall be given to me, and my wildest wishes shall be satisfied!"

"Yes, my liege!" interrupted Alexander, eagerly. "After pain comes pleasure!"

*'Live, love, drink, and rejoice,
And wreath thyself with me!'*

sings Sappho, and it is not a bad plan to follow Anakreon's advice, even at the present day. Think of the short suffering which now and then embitters for you the sweet cup of life, as being the ring of Polykrates, with which you appease the envy of the gods who have given you so much. In your place, eternal gods! how I would enjoy the happy hours of health, and show the immortals and mortals alike how much true and real pleasure power and riches can procure!"

The emperor's weary eyes brightened, and with the cry--

"So will I! I am still young, and I have the power!" he started suddenly to his feet. But he sank back again directly on the couch, shaking his head as if to say, "There, you see what a state I am in!" The fate of this unhappy man touched Alexander's heart even more deeply than before.

His youthful mind, which easily received fresh impressions, forgot the deeds of blood and shame which stained the soul of this pitiable wretch. His artistic mind was accustomed to apprehend what he saw with his whole soul and without secondary considerations, as if it stood there to be painted; and the man that lay before him was to him at that moment only a victim whom a cruel fate had defrauded of the greatest pleasures in life. He also remembered how shamelessly he and others had mocked at Caesar. Perhaps Caracalla had really spilled most of the blood to serve the welfare and unity of the empire.

He, Alexander, was not his judge.

If Glaukias had seen the object of his derision lying thus, it certainly would never have occurred to him to represent him as a pygmy monster. No, no! Alexander's artistic eye knew the difference well between the beautiful and the ugly--and the exhausted man lying on the divan, was no hideous dwarf. A dreamy languor spread over his nobly chiselled features. An expression of pain but rarely passed over them, and Caesar's whole appearance reminded the painter of the fine Ephesian gladiator hallistos as he lay on the sand, severely wounded after his last fight, awaiting the death-stroke. He would have liked to hasten home and fetch his materials to paint the likeness of the misjudged man, and to show it to the scoffers.

He stood silent, absorbed in studying the quiet face so finely formed by Nature and so pathetic to look at. No thoroughly depraved miscreant could look like that. Yet it was like a peaceful sea: when the hurricane should break loose, what a boiling whirl of gray, hissing, tossing, foaming waves would disfigure the peaceful, smooth, glittering surface!

And suddenly the emperor's features began to show signs of animation. His eye, but now so dull, shone more brightly, and he cried out, as if the long silence had scarcely broken the thread of his ideas, but in a still husky voice:

"I should like to get up and go with you, but I am still too weak. Do you go now, my friend, and bring me back fresh news."

Alexander then begged him to consider how dangerous every excitement would be for him; yet Caracalla exclaimed, eagerly:

"It will strengthen me and dome good! Everything that surrounds me is so hollow, so insipid, so contemptible--what I hear is so small. A strong, highly spiced word, even if it is sharp, refreshes me--When you have finished a picture, do you like to hear nothing but how well your friends can flatter?"

The artist thought he understood Caesar. True to his nature, always hoping for the best, he thought that, as the severe judgment of the envious had often done him (Alexander) good, so the sharp satire of the Alexandrians would lead Caracalla to introspection and greater moderation; he only resolved to tell the sufferer nothing further that was merely insulting.

When he bade him farewell, Caracalla glanced up at him with such a look of pain that the artist longed to give him his

hand, and speak to him with real affection. The tormenting headache which followed each convulsion had again come on, and Caesar submitted without resistance to what the physician prescribed.

Alexander asked old Adventus at the door if he did not think that the terrible attack had been brought on by annoyance at the Alexandrians' satire, and if it would not be advisable in the future not to allow such things to reach the emperor's ear; but the man, looking at him in surprise with his half-blind eyes, replied with a brutal want of sympathy that disgusted the youth: "Drinking brought on the attack. What makes him ill are stronger things than words. If you yourself, young man, do not suffer for Alexandrian wit, it will certainly not hurt Caesar!"

Alexander turned his back indignantly on the chamberlain, and he became so absorbed in wondering how it was possible that the emperor, who was cultivated and appreciated what was beautiful, could have dragged out of the dust and kept near him two such miserable 'creatures as Theocritus and this old man, that Philostratus, who met him in the next room, had almost to shout at him.

Philostratus informed him that Melissa was staying with the chief priest's wife; but just as he was about to inquire curiously what had passed between the audacious painter and Caesar--for even Philostratus was a courtier--he was called away to Caracalla.

CHAPTER XIX.

In one of the few rooms of his vast palace which the chief priest had reserved for the accommodation of the members of his own household, the youth was received by Melissa, Timotheus's wife Euryale, and the lady Berenike.

This lady was pleased to see the artist again to whom she was indebted for the portrait of her daughter. She had it now in her possession once more, for Philostratus had had it taken back to her house while the emperor was at his meal.

She rested on a sofa, quite worn out. She had passed through hours of torment; for her concern about Melissa, who had become very dear to her, had given her much more anxiety than even the loss of her beloved picture. Besides, the young girl was to her for the moment the representative of her sex, and the danger of seeing this pure, sweet creature exposed to the will of a licentious tyrant drove her out of her senses, and her lively fancy had resulted in violent outbreaks of indignation. She now proposed all sorts of schemes, of which Euryale, the more prudent but not less warm-hearted wife of the chief priest, demonstrated the impossibility.

Like Berenike, a tender-hearted woman, whose smooth, brown hair had already begun to turn gray, she had also lost her only child. But years had passed since then, and she had accustomed herself to seek comfort in the care of the sick and wretched. She was regarded all over the city as the providence of all in need, whatever their condition and faith. Where charity was to be bestowed on a large scale--if hospitals or almshouses were to be erected or endowed--she was appealed to first, and if she promised her quiet but valuable assistance, the result was at once secured. For, besides her own and her husband's great riches, this lady of high position, who was honored by all, had the purses of all the heathens and Christians in the city at her disposal; both alike considered that she belonged to them; and the latter, although she only held with them in secret, had the better right.

At home, the society of distinguished men afforded her the greatest pleasure. Her husband allowed her complete freedom; although he, as the chief Greek priest of the city, would have preferred that she should not also have had among her most constant visitors so many learned Christians. But the god whom he served united in his own person most of the others; and the mysteries which he superintended taught that even Serapis was only a symbolical embodiment of the universal soul, fulfilling its eternal existence by perpetually re-creating itself under constant and immutable laws. A portion of that soul, which dwelt in all created things, had its abode in each human being, to return to the divine source after death. Timotheus firmly clung to this pantheist creed; still, he held the honorable post of head of the Museum--in the place of the Roman priest of Alexander, a man of less learning--and was familiar not only with the tenets of his heathen predecessors, but with the sacred scriptures of the Jews and Christians; and in the ethics of these last he found much which met his views.

He, who, at the Museum, was counted among the skeptics, liked biblical sentences, such as "All is vanity," and "We know but in part." The command to love your neighbor, to seek peace, to thirst after truth, the injunction to judge the tree by its fruit, and to fear more for the soul than the body, were quite to his mind.

He was so rich that the gifts of the visitors to the temple, which his predecessors had insisted on, were of no importance to him. Thus he mingled a great deal that was Christian with the faith of which he was chief minister and guardian. Only the conviction with which men like Clemens and Origen, who were friends of his wife, declared that the doctrine to which they adhered was the only right one--was, in fact, the truth itself--seemed to the skeptic "foolishness."

His wife's friends had converted his brother Zeno to Christianity; but he had no need to fear lest Euryale should follow them. She loved him too much, and was too quiet and sensible, to be baptized, and thus expose him, the heathen high-priest, to the danger of being deprived of the power which she knew to be necessary to his happiness.

Every Alexandrian was free to belong to any other than the heathen creeds, and no one had taken offence at his skeptical writings. When Euryale acted like the best of the Christian women, he could not take it amiss; and he would have scorned to blame her preference for the teaching of the crucified God.

As to Caesar's character he had not yet made up his mind.

He had expected to find him a half-crazy villain, and his rage after he had heard the epigram against himself, left with the rope, had strengthened the chief priest's opinion. But since then he had heard of much that was good in him; and Timotheus felt sure that his judgment was unbiased by the high esteem Caesar showed to him, while he treated others like slaves. His improved opinion had been raised by the intercourse he had held with Caesar. The much-abused man had on these occasions shown that he was not only well educated but also thoughtful; and yesterday evening, before Caracalla had gone to rest exhausted, the high-priest, with his wise experience, had received exactly the same impressions as the easily influenced artist; for Caesar had bewailed his sad fate in pathetic terms, and confessed himself indeed deeply guilty, but declared that he had intended to act for the best, had sacrificed fortune, peace of mind, and comfort to the welfare of the state. His keen eye had marked the evils of the time, and he had acknowledged that his efforts to extirpate the old maladies in order to make room for better things had been a failure, and that, instead

of earning thanks, he had drawn down on himself the hatred of millions.

It was for this reason that Timotheus, on rejoining his household, had assured them that, as he thought over this interview, he expected something good--yes, perhaps the best--from the young criminal in the purple.

But the lady Berenike had declared with scornful decision that Caracalla had deceived her brother-in-law; and when Alexander likewise tried to say a word for the sufferer, she got into a rage and accused him of foolish credulity.

Melissa, who had already spoken in favor of the emperor, agreed, in spite of the matron, with her brother. Yes, Caracalla had sinned greatly, and his conviction that Alexander's soul lived in him and Roxana's in her was foolish enough; but the marvelous likeness to her of the portrait on the gem would astonish any one. That good and noble impulses stirred his soul she was certain. But Berenike only shrugged her shoulders contemptuously; and when the chief priest remarked that yesterday evening Caracalla had in fact not been in a position to attend a feast, and that a portion, at least, of his other offenses might certainly be put down to the charge of his severe suffering, the lady exclaimed:

"And is it also his bodily condition that causes him to fill a house of mourning with festive uproar? I am indifferent as to what makes him a malefactor. For my part, I would sooner abandon this dear child to the care of a criminal than to that of a madman."

But the chief priest and the brother and sister both declared Caesar's mind to be as sound and sharp as any one's; and Timotheus asked who, at the present time, was without superstition, and the desire of communicating with departed souls. Still the matron would not allow herself to be persuaded, and after the chief priest had been called away to the service of the god, Euryale reproved her sister-in-law for her too great zeal. When the wisdom of hoary old age and impetuous youth agree in one opinion, it is commonly the right one.

"And I maintain," cried Berenike--and her large eyes flamed angrily--"it is criminal to ignore my advice. Fate has robbed you as well as me of a dear child. I will not also lose this one, who is as precious to me as a daughter."

Melissa bent over the lady's hands and kissed them gratefully, exclaiming with tearful eyes, "But he has been very good to me, and has assured me--"

"Assured!" repeated Berenike disdainfully. She then drew the young girl impetuously toward her, kissed her on her forehead, placed her hands on her head as if to protect her, and turned to the artist as she continued:

"I stand by what I recommended before. This very night Melissa must get far away from here. You, Alexander, must accompany her. My own ship, the 'Berenike and Korinna'--Seleukus gave it to me and my daughter--is ready to start. My sister lives in Carthage. Her husband, the first man in the city, is my friend. You will find protection and shelter in their house."

"And how about our father and Philip?" interrupted Alexander. "If we follow your advice, it is certain death to them!"

The matron laughed scornfully.

"And that is what you expect from this good, this great and noble sovereign!"

"He proves himself full of favors to his friends," answered Alexander, "but woe betide those who offend him!"

Berenike looked thoughtfully at the ground, and added, more quietly:

"Then try first to release your people, and afterward embark on my ship. It shall be ready for you. Melissa will use it, I know.--My veil, child! The chariot waits for me at the Temple of Isis.--You will accompany me there, Alexander, and we will drive to the harbor. There I will introduce you to the captain. It will be wise. Your father and brother are dearer to you than your sister; she is more important to me. If only I could go away myself--away from here, from the desolate house, and take her with me!"

And she raised her arm, as if she would throw a stone into the distance.

She impetuously embraced the young girl, took leave of her sister-in-law, and left the room with Alexander.

Directly Euryale was alone with Melissa, she comforted the girl in her kind, composed manner; for the unhappy matron's gloomy presentiments had filled Melissa with fresh anxieties.

And what had she not gone through during the day!

Soon after her perilous interview with Caracalla, Timotheus, with the chief of the astrologers from the Serapeum, and the emperor's astronomer, had come to her, to ask her on what day and at what hour she was born. They also inquired concerning the birthdays of her parents, and other events of her life. Timotheus had informed her that the emperor had ordered them to cast her nativity.

Soon after dinner she had gone, accompanied by the lady Berenike, who had found her at the chief priest's house, to visit her lover in the sick-rooms of the Serapeum. Thankful and happy, she had found him with fully recovered consciousness, but the physician and the freedman Andreas, whom she met at the door of the chamber, had impressed on her the importance of avoiding all excitement. So it had not been possible for her to tell him what had happened to her people, or of the perilous step she had taken in order to save them. But Diodoros had talked of their wedding, and

Andreas could confirm the fact that Polybius wished to see it celebrated as soon as possible.

Several pleasant subjects were discussed; but between whiles Melissa had to dissemble and give evasive answers to Diodoros's questions as to whether she had already arranged with her brother and friends who should be the youths and maidens to form the wedding procession, and sing the hymeneal song.

As the two whispered to one another and looked tenderly at each other--for Diodoros had insisted on her allowing him to kiss not only her hands but also her sweet red lips--Berenike had pictured her dead daughter in Melissa's place. What a couple they would have been! How proudly and gladly she would have led them to the lovely villa at Kanopus, which her husband and she had rebuilt and decorated with the idea that some day Korinna, her husband, and--if the gods should grant it--their children, might inhabit it! But even Melissa and Diodoros made a fine couple, and she tried with all her heart not to grudge her all the happiness that she had wished for her own child.

When it was time to depart, she joined the hands of the betrothed pair, and called down a blessing from the gods.

Diodoros accepted this gratefully.

He only knew that this majestic lady had made Melissa's acquaintance through Alexander, and had won her affection, and he encouraged the impression that this woman, whose Juno-like beauty haunted him, had visited him on his bed of sickness in the place of his long-lost mother.

Outside the sick-room Andreas again met Melissa, and, after she had told him of her visit to the emperor, he impressed on her eagerly on no account to obey the tyrant's call again. Then he had promised to hide her securely, either on Zeno's estate or else in the house of another friend, which was difficult of access. When Dame Berenike had again, and with particular eagerness, suggested her ship, Andreas had exclaimed:

"In the garden, on the ship, under the earth--only not back to Caesar!"

The last question of the freedman's, as to whether she had meditated further on his discourse, had reminded her of the sentence, "The fullness of the time is come"; and afterward the thought occurred to her, again and again, that in the course of the next few hours some decisive event would happen to her, "fulfilling the time," as Andreas expressed it.

When, therefore, somewhat later, she was alone with the chief priest's wife, who had concluded her comforting, pious exhortations, Melissa asked the lady Euryale whether she had ever heard the sentence, "When the fullness of the time is come."

At this the lady cried, gazing at the girl with surprised inquiry:

"Are you, then, after all, connected with the Christians?"

"Certainly not," answered the young girl, firmly. "I heard it accidentally, and Andreas, Polybius's freedman, explained it to me."

"A good interpreter," replied the elder lady. "I am only an ignorant woman; yet, child, even I have experienced that a day, an hour, comes to every man in the course of his life in which he afterward sees that the time was fulfilled. As the drops become mingled with the stream, so at that moment the things we have done and thought unite to carry us on a new current, either to salvation or perdition. Any moment may bring the crisis; for that reason the Christians are right when they call on one another to watch. You also must keep your eyes open. When the time--who knows how soon?--is fulfilled for you, it will determine the good or evil of your whole life."

"An inward voice tells me that also," answered Melissa, pressing her hands on her panting bosom. "Just feel how my heart beats!"

Euryale, smiling, complied with this wish, and as she did so she shuddered. How pure and lovable was this young creature; and Melissa looked to her like a lamb that stood ready to hasten trustfully to meet the wolf!

At last she led her guest into the room where supper was prepared.

The master of the house would not be able to share it, and while the two women sat opposite one another, saying little, and scarcely touching either food or drink, Philostratus was announced.

He came as messenger from Caracalla, who wished to speak to Melissa.

"At this hour? Never, never! It is impossible!" exclaimed Euryale, who was usually so calm; but Philostratus declared, nevertheless, that denial was useless. The emperor was suffering particularly severely, and begged to remind Melissa of her promise to serve him gladly if he required her. Her presence, he assured Euryale, would do the sick man good, and he guaranteed that, so long as Caesar was tormented by this unbearable pain, the young woman had nothing to fear.

Melissa, who had risen from her seat when the philosopher had entered, exclaimed:

"I am not afraid, and will go with you gladly--"

"Quite right, child," answered Philostratus, affectionately. Euryale, however, found it difficult to keep back her tears while she stroked the girl's hair and arranged the folds of her garment. When at last she said good-bye to Melissa and was embracing her, she was reminded of the farewell she had taken, many years ago, of a Christian friend before she

was led away by the lictors to martyrdom in the circus. Finally, she whispered something in the philosopher's ear, and received from him the promise to return with Melissa as soon as possible.

Philostratus was, in fact, quite easy. Just before, Caracalla's helpless glance had met his sympathizing gaze, and the suffering Caesar had said nothing to him but:

"O Philostratus, I am in such pain!" and these words still rang in the ears of this warm-hearted man.

While he was endeavoring to comfort the emperor, Caesar's eyes had fallen on the gem, and he asked to see it. He gazed at it attentively for some time, and when he returned it to the philosopher he had ordered him to fetch the prototype of Roxana.

Closely enveloped in the veil which Euryale had placed on her head, Melissa passed from room to room, keeping near to the philosopher.

Wherever she appeared she heard murmuring and whispering that troubled her, and tittering followed her from several of the rooms as she left them; even from the large hall where the emperor's friends awaited his orders in numbers, she heard a loud laugh that frightened and annoyed her.

She no longer felt as unconstrained as she had been that morning when she had come before Caesar. She knew that she would have to be on her guard; that anything, even the worst, might be expected from him. But as Philostratus described to her, on the way, how terribly the unfortunate man suffered, her tender heart was again drawn to him, to whom--as she now felt--she was bound by an indefinable tie. She, if any one, as she repeated to herself, was able to help him; and her desire to put the truth of this conviction to the proof--for she could only regard it as too amazing to be grounded in fact--was seconded by the less disinterested hope that, while attending on the sufferer, she might find an opportunity of effecting the release of her father and brother.

Philostratus went on to announce her arrival, and she, while waiting, tried to pray to the manes of her mother; but, before she could sufficiently collect her thoughts, the door opened. Philostratus silently beckoned to her, and she stepped into the tablinum, which was but dimly lighted by a few lamps.

Caracalla was still resting here; for every movement increased the pain that tormented him.

How quiet it was! She thought she could hear her own heart beating.

Philostratus remained standing by the door, but she went on tiptoe toward the couch, fearing her light footsteps might disturb the emperor. Yet before she had reached the divan she stopped still, and then she heard the plaintive rattle in the sufferer's throat, and from the background of the room the easy breathing of the burly physician and of old Adventus, both of whom had fallen asleep; and then a peculiar tapping. The lion beat the floor with his tail with pleasure at recognizing her.

This noise attracted the invalid's attention, and when he opened his closed eyes and saw Melissa, who was anxiously watching all his movements, he called to her lightly with his hand on his brow:

"The animal has a good memory, and greets you in my name. You were sure to come--, I knew it!"

The young girl stepped nearer to him, and answered, kindly, "Since you needed me, I gladly followed Philostratus."

"Because I needed you?" asked the emperor.

"Yes," she replied, "because you require nursing."

"Then, to keep you, I shall wish to be ill often," he answered, quickly; but he added, sadly, "only not so dreadfully ill as I have been to-day."

One could hear how laborious talking was to him, and the few words he had sought and found, in order to say something kind to Melissa, had so hurt his shattered nerves and head that he sank back, gasping, on the cushions.

Then for some time all was quiet, until Caracalla took his hand from his forehead and continued, as if in excuse:

"No one seems to know what it is. And if I talk ever so softly, every word vibrates through my brain."

"Then you must not speak," interrupted Melissa, eagerly. "If you want anything, only make signs. I shall understand you without words, and the quieter it is here the better."

"No, no; you must speak," begged the invalid. "When the others talk, they make the beating in my head ten times worse, and excite me; but I like to hear your voice."

"The beating?" interrupted Melissa, in whom this word awoke old memories. "Perhaps you feel as if a hammer was hitting you over the left eye?"

"If you move rapidly, does it not pierce your skull, and do you not feel as sick as if you were on the rocking sea?"

"Then you also know this torment?" asked Caracalla, surprised; but she answered, quietly, that her mother had suffered several times from similar headaches, and had described them to her.

Caesar sank back again on the pillows, moved his dry lips, and glanced toward the drink which Galen had prescribed for him; and Melissa, who almost as a child had long nursed a dear invalid, guessed what he wanted, brought him the goblet, and gave him a draught.

Caracalla rewarded her with a grateful look. But the physic only seemed to increase the pain. He lay there panting and motionless, until, trying to find a new position, he groaned, lightly:

"It is as if iron was being hammered here. One would think others might hear it."

At the same time he seized the girl's hand and placed it on his burning brow.

Melissa felt the pulse in the sufferer's temple throbbing hard and short against her fingers, as she had her mother's when she laid her cool hand on her aching forehead; and then, moved by the wish to comfort and heal, she let her right hand rest over the sick man's eyes. As soon as she felt one hand was hot, she put the other in its place; and it must have relieved the patient, for his moans ceased by degrees, and he finally said, gratefully:

"What good that does me! You are--I knew you would help me. It is already quite quiet in my brain. Once more your hand, dear girl!"

Melissa willingly obeyed him, and as he breathed more and more easily, she remembered that her mother's headache had often been relieved when she had placed her hand on her forehead. Caesar, now opening his eyes wide, and looking her full in the face, asked why she had not allowed him sooner to reap the benefit of this remedy.

Melissa slowly withdrew her hand, and with drooping eyes answered gently:

"You are the emperor, a man... and I..." But Caracalla interrupted her eagerly, and with a clear voice:

"Not so, Melissa! Do not you feel, like me, that something else draws us to one another, like what binds a man to his wife?--There lies the gem. Look at it once again--No, child, no! This resemblance is not mere accident. The short-sighted, might call it superstition or a vain illusion; I know better. At least a portion of Alexander's soul lives in this breast. A hundred signs--I will tell you about it later--make it a certainty to me. And yesterday morning.... I see it all again before me.... You stood above me, on the left, at a window.... I looked up;... our eyes met, and I felt in the depths of my heart a strange emotion.... I asked myself, silently, where I had seen that lovely face before. And the answer rang, you have already often met her; you know her!"

"My face reminded you of the gem," interrupted Melissa, disquieted.

"No, no," continued Caesar. "It was some thing else. Why had none of my many gems ever reminded me before of living people? Why did your picture, I know not how often, recur to my mind? And you? Only recollect what you have done for me. How marvelously we were brought together! And all this in the course of a single, short day. And you also.... I ask you, by all that is holy to you... Did you, after you saw me in the court of sacrifice, not think of me so often and so vividly that it astonished you?"

"You are Caesar," answered Melissa, with increasing anxiety.

"So you thought of my purple robes?" asked Caracalla, and his face clouded over; "or perhaps only of my power that might be fatal to your family? I will know. Speak the truth, girl, by the head of your father!"

Then Melissa poured forth this confession from her oppressed heart:

"Yes, I could not help remembering you constantly,... and I never saw you in purple, but just as you had stood there on the steps;... and then--ah! I have told you already how sorry I was for your sufferings. I felt as if... but how can I describe it truly?--as if you stood much nearer to me than the ruler of the world could to a poor, humble girl. It was... eternal gods!..."

She stopped short; for she suddenly recollected anxiously that this confession might prove fatal to her. The sentence about the time which should be fulfilled for each was ringing in her ears, and it seemed to her that she heard for the second time the lady Berenike's warning.

But Caracalla allowed her no time to think; for he interrupted her, greatly pleased, with the cry:

"It is true, then! The immortals have wrought as great a miracle in you as in me. We both owe them thanks, and I will show them how grateful I can be by rich sacrifices. Our souls, which destiny had already once united, have met again. That portion of the universal soul which of yore dwelt in Roxana, and now in you, Melissa, has also vanquished the pain which has embittered my life... You have proved it!--And now... it is beginning to throb again more violently--now--beloved and restored one, help me once more!"

Melissa perceived anxiously how the emperor's face had flushed again during this last vehement speech, and at the same time the pain had again contracted his forehead and eyes. And she obeyed his command, but this time only in shy submission. When she found that he became quieter, and the movement of her hand once more did him good, she recovered her presence of mind. She remembered how often the quiet application of her hand had helped her mother to sleep.

She therefore explained to Caracalla, in a low whisper directly he began to speak again, that her desire to give him relief would be vain if he did not keep his eyes and lips closed. And Caracalla yielded, while her hand moved as lightly over the brow of the terrible man as when years ago it had soothed her mother to sleep.

When the sufferer, after a little time, murmured, with closed eyes

"Perhaps I could sleep," she felt as if great happiness had befallen her.

She listened attentively to every breath, and looked as if spell-bound into his face, until she was quite sure that sleep had completely overcome Caesar.

She then crept gently on tiptoe to Philostratus, who had looked on in silent surprise at all that had passed between his sovereign and the girl. He, who was always inclined to believe in any miraculous cure, of which so many had been wrought by his hero Apollonius, thought he had actually witnessed one, and gazed with an admiration bordering on awe at the young creature who appeared to him to be a gracious instrument of the gods.

"Let me go now," Melissa whispered to her friend. "He sleeps, and will not wake for some time."

"At your command," answered the philosopher, respectfully. At the same moment a loud voice was heard from the next room, which Melissa recognized as her brother Alexander's, who impetuously insisted on his right of being allowed at any time to see the emperor.

"He will wake him," murmured the philosopher, anxiously; but Melissa with prompt determination threw her veil over her head and went into the adjoining room.

Philostratus at first heard violent language issuing from the mouth of Theocritus and the other courtiers, and the artist's answers were not less passionate. Then he recognized Melissa's voice; and when quiet suddenly reigned on that side of the door, the young girl again crossed the threshold.

She glanced toward Caracalla to see if he still slept, and then, with a sigh of relief, beckoned to her friend, and begged him in a whisper to escort her past the staring men. Alexander followed them.

Anger and surprise were depicted on his countenance, which was usually so happy. He had come with a report which might very likely induce Caesar to order the release of his father and brother, and his heart had stood still with fear and astonishment when the favorite Theocritus had told him in the anteroom, in a way that made the blood rush into his face, that his sister had been for some time endeavoring to comfort the suffering emperor--and it was nearly midnight.

Quite beside himself, he wished to force his way into Caesar's presence, but Melissa had at that moment come out and stood in his way, and had desired him and the noble Romans, in such a decided and commanding tone, to lower their voices, that they and her brother were speechless.

What had happened to his modest sister during the last few days? Melissa giving him orders which he feebly obeyed! It seemed impossible! But there was something reassuring in her manner. She must certainly have thought it right to act thus, and it must have been worthy of her, or she would not have carried her charming head so high, or looked him so freely and calmly in the face.

But how had she dared to come between him and his duty to his father and brother?

While he followed her closely and silently through the imperial rooms, the implicit obedience he had shown her became more and more difficult to comprehend; and when at last they stood in the empty corridor which divided Caesar's quarters from those of the high-priest, and Philostratus had returned to his post at the side of his sovereign, he could hold out no longer, and cried to her indignantly:

"So far, I have followed you like a boy; I do not myself know why. But it is not yet too late to turn round; and I ask you, what gave you the right to prevent my doing my best for our people?"

"Your loud talking, that threatened to wake Caesar," she replied, seriously. "His sleeping could alone save me from watching by him the whole night."

Alexander then felt sorry he had been so foolishly turbulent, and after Melissa had told him in a few words what she had gone through in the last few hours he informed her of what had brought him to visit the emperor so late.

Johannes the lawyer, Berenike's Christian freedman, he began, had visited their father in prison and had heard the order given to place Heron and Philip as state prisoners and oarsmen on board a galley.

This had taken place in the afternoon, and the Christian had further learned that the prisoners would be led to the harbor two hours before sunset. This was the truth, and yet the infamous Zminis had assured the emperor, at noon, that their father and Philip were already far on their way to Sardinia. The worthless Egyptian had, then, lied to the emperor; and it would most likely cost the scoundrel his neck. But for this, there would have been time enough next day. What had brought him there at so late an hour was the desire to prevent the departure of the galley; for John had heard, from the Christian harbor-watch that the anchor was not yet weighed. The ship could therefore only get out to sea at sunrise; the chain that closed the harbor would not be opened till then. If the order to stop the galley came much after daybreak, she would certainly be by that time well under way, and their father and Philip might have succumbed to the hard rowing before a swift trireme could overtake and release them.

Melissa had listened to this information with mixed feelings. She had perhaps precipitated her father and brother into misery in order to save herself; for a terrible fate awaited the state-prisoners at the oars. And what could she do, an ignorant child, who was of so little use?

Andreas had told her that it was the duty of a Christian and of every good man, if his neighbor's welfare were concerned, to sacrifice his own fortunes; and for the happiness and lives of those dearest to her--for they, of all others, were her "neighbors"--she felt that she could do so. Perhaps she might yet succeed in repairing the mischief she had done when she had allowed the emperor to sleep without giving one thought to her father. Instead of waking him, she had misused her new power over her brother, and, by preventing his speaking, had perhaps frustrated the rescue of her people.

But idle lamenting was of as little use here as at any other time; so she resolutely drew her veil closer round her head and called to her brother, "Wait here till I return!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Alexander, startled.

"I am going back to the invalid," she explained, decisively.

On this her brother seized her arm, and, wildly excited, forbade this step in the name of his father.

But at his vehement shout, "I will not allow it!" she struggled to free herself, and cried out to him:

"And you? Did not you, whose life is a thousand times more important than mine, of your own free-will go into captivity and to death in order to save our father?"

"It was for my sake that he had been robbed of his freedom," interrupted Alexander; but she added, quickly:

"And if I had not thought only of myself, the command to release him and Philip would by this time have been at the harbor. I am going."

Alexander then took his hand from her arm, and exclaimed, as if urged by some internal force, "Well, then, go!"

"And you," continued Melissa, hastily, "go and seek the lady Euryale. She is expecting me. Tell her all, and beg her in my name to go to rest. Also tell her I remembered the sentence about the time, which was fulfilled. ... Mark the words. If I am running again into danger, tell her that I do it because a voice says to me that it is right. And it is right, believe me, Alexander!"

The artist drew his sister to him and kissed her; yet she hardly understood his anxious good wishes; for his voice was choked by emotion.

He had taken it for granted that he should accompany her as far as the emperor's room, but she would not allow it. His reappearance would only lead to fresh quarrels.

He also gave in to this; but he insisted on returning here to wait for her.

After Melissa had vanished into Caesar's quarters he immediately carried out his sister's wish, and told the lady Euryale of all that had happened.

Encouraged by the matron, who was not less shocked than he had been at Melissa's daring, he returned to the anteroom, where, at first, greatly excited, he walked up and down, and then sank on a marble seat to wait for his sister. He was frequently overpowered by sleep. The things that cast a shadow on his sunny mind vanished from him, and a pleasing dream showed him, instead of the alarming picture which haunted him before sleeping, the beautiful Christian Agatha.

CHAPTER XX.

The waiting-room was empty when Melissa crossed it for the second time. Most of the emperor's friends had retired to rest or into the city when they had heard that Caesar slept; and the few who had remained behaved quietly when she appeared, for Philostratus had told them that the emperor held her in high esteem, as the only person who was able to give him comfort in his suffering by her peculiar and wonderful healing power.

In the tablinum, which had been converted into a sick-room, nothing was heard but the breathing and gentle snoring of the sleeping man. Even Philostratus was asleep on an arm-chair at the back of the room.

When the philosopher had returned, Caracalla had noticed him, and dozing, or perhaps in his dreams, he had ordered him to remain by him. So the learned man felt bound to spend the night there.

Epagathos, the freedman, was lying on a mattress from the dining-room; the corpulent physician slept soundly, and if he snored too loudly, old Adventus poked him and quietly spoke a word of warning to him. This man, who had formerly been a post messenger, was the only person who was conscious of Melissa's entrance; but he only blinked at her through his dim eyes, and, after he had silently considered why the young girl should have returned, he turned over in order to sleep himself; for he had come to the conclusion that this young, active creature would be awake and at hand if his master required anything.

His wondering as to why Melissa had returned, had led to many guesses, and had proved fruitless. "You can know nothing of women," was the end of his reflections, "if you do not know that what seems most improbable is what is most likely to be true. This maid is certainly not one of the flute-players or the like. Who knows what incomprehensible whim or freak may have brought her here? At any rate, it will be easier for her to keep her eyes open than it is for me."

He then signed to her and asked her quietly to fetch his cloak out of the next room, for his old body needed warmth; and Melissa gladly complied, and laid the caracalla over the old man's cold feet with obliging care.

She then returned to the side of the sick-bed, to wait for the emperor's awaking. He slept soundly; his regular breathing indicated this. The others also slept, and Adventus's light snore, mingling with the louder snoring of the physician, showed that he too had ceased to watch. The slumbering Philostratus now and then murmured incomprehensible words to himself; and the lion, who perhaps was dreaming of his freedom in his sandy home, whined low in his sleep.

She watched alone.

It seemed to her as if she were in the habitation of sleep, and as if phantoms and dreams were floating around her on the unfamiliar noises.

She was afraid, and the thought of being the only woman among so many men caused her extreme uneasiness.

She could not sit still.

Inaudibly as a shadow she approached the head of the sleeping emperor, holding her breath to listen to him. How soundly he slept! And she had come that she might talk to him. If his sleep lasted till sunrise, the pardon for her people would be too late, and her father and Philip, chained to a hard bench, would have to ply heavy oars as galley slaves by the side of robbers and murderers. How terribly then would her father's wish to use his strength be granted! Was Philip, the narrow-chested philosopher, capable of bearing the strain which had so often proved fatal to stronger men?

She must wake the dreaded man, the only man who could possibly help her.

She now raised her hand to lay it on his shoulder, but she half withdrew it.

It seemed to her as if it was not much less wicked to rob a sleeping man of his rest, his best cure, than to take the life of a living being. It was not too late yet, for the harbor-chain would not be opened till the October sun had risen. He might enjoy his slumbers a little longer.

With this conclusion she once more sank down and listened to the noises which broke the stillness of the night.

How hideous they were, how revolting they sounded! The vulgarest of the sleepers, old Adventus, absolutely sawed the air with his snoring.

The emperor's breathing was scarcely perceptible, and how nobly cut was the profile which she could see, the other side of his face leaning on the pillow! Had she any real reason to fear his awakening? Perhaps he was quite unlike what Berenike thought him to be. She remembered the sympathy she had felt for him when they had first met, and, in spite of all the trouble she had experienced since, she no longer felt afraid. A thought then occurred to her which was sufficient excuse for disturbing the sick man's sleep. If she delayed it, she would be making him guilty of a fresh crime by allowing two blameless men to perish in misery. But she would first convince herself whether the time was pressing. She looked out through the open window at the stars and across the open place lying at her feet. The third hour after midnight was past, and the sun would rise before long.

Down below all was quiet. Macrinus, the praetorian prefect, on hearing that the emperor had fallen into a refreshing

sleep, in order that he might not be disturbed, had forbidden all loud signals, and ordered the camp to be closed to all the inhabitants of the city; so the girl heard nothing but the regular footsteps of the sentries and the shrieks of the owls returning to their nests in the roof of the Serapeum. The wind from the sea drove the clouds before it across the sky, and the plain covered with tents resembled a sea tossed into high white waves. The camp had been reduced during the afternoon; for Caracalla had carried out his threat of that morning by quartering a portion of the picked troops in the houses of the richest Alexandrians.

Melissa, bending far out, looked toward the north. The sea-breeze blew her hair into her face. Perhaps on the ocean whence it came the high waves would, in a few hours, be tossing the ship on which her father and brother, seated at the oar, would be toiling as disgraced galley-slaves. That must not, could not be!

Hark! what was that?

She heard a light whisper. In spite of strict orders, a loving couple were passing below. The wife of the centurion Martialis, who had been separated for some time from her husband, had at his entreaty come secretly from Ranopus, where she had charge of Seleukus's villa, to see him, as his services prevented his going so far away. They now stood whispering and making love in the shadow of the temple. Melissa could not hear what they said, yet it reminded her of the sacred night hour when she confessed her love to Diodoros. She felt as if she were standing by his bedside, and his faithful eyes met hers. She would not, for all that was best in the world, have awakened him yesterday at the Christian's house, though the awakening would have brought her fresh promises of love; and yet she was on the point of robbing another of his only cure, the sleep the gods had sent him. But then she loved Diodoros, and what was Caesar to her? It had been a matter of life and death with her lover, while disturbing Caracalla would only postpone his recovery a few hours at the utmost. It was she who had procured the imperial sleeper his rest, which she could certainly restore to him even if she now woke him. Just now she had vowed for the future not to care about her own welfare, and that had at first made her doubtful about Caracalla; but had it not really been exceedingly selfish to lose the time which could bring freedom to her father and brother, only to protect her own soul from the reproach of an easily forgiven wrong? With the question:

"What is your duty?" all doubts left her, and no longer on tiptoe, but with a firm, determined tread, she walked toward the slumberer's couch, and the outrage which she shrank from committing would, she saw, be a deed of kindness; for she found the emperor with perspiring brow groaning and frightened by a severe nightmare. He cried with the dull, toneless voice of one talking in his sleep, as if he saw her close by:

"Away, mother, I say! He or I! Out of the way! You will not? But I, I--If you--"

At the same he threw up his hands and gave a dull, painful cry.

"He is dreaming of his brother's murder," rushed through Melissa's mind, and in the same instant she laid her hand on his arm and with urgent entreaty cried in his ear: "Wake up, Caesar, I implore you! Great Caesar, awake!"

Then he opened his eyes, and a low, prolonged "Ah!" rang from his tortured breast.

He then, with a deep breath and perplexed glance, looked round him; and as his eyes fell on the young girl his features brightened, and soon wore a happy expression, as if he experienced a great joy.

"You?" he asked, with pleased surprise. "You, maiden, still here! It must be nearly dawn? I slept well till just now. But then at the last--Oh, it was fearful!--Adventus!"

Melissa, however, interrupted this cry, exhorting the emperor to be quiet by putting her finger to her lips; and he understood her and willingly obeyed, especially as she had guessed what he required from the chamberlain, Adventus. She handed him the cloth that lay on the table for him to wipe his streaming forehead. She then brought him drink, and after Caracalla had sat up refreshed, and felt that the pain, which, after a sharp attack, lasted sometimes for days, had now already left him, he said, quite gently, mindful of her sign:

"How much better I feel already; and for this I thank you, Roxana; yes, you know. I like to feel like Alexander, but usually--It is certainly a pleasant thing to be ruler of the universe, for if we wish to punish or reward, no one can limit us. You, child, shall learn that it is Caesar whom you have laid under such obligations. Ask what you will, and I will grant it you."

She whispered eagerly to him:

"Release my father and brother."

"Always the same thing," answered Caracalla, peevishly. "Do you know of nothing better to wish for?"

"No, my lord, no!" cried Melissa, with importunate warmth. "If you will give me what I most care for--"

"I will, yes, I will," interrupted the emperor in a softer voice; but suddenly shrugging his shoulders, he continued, regretfully: "But you must have patience; for, by the Egyptian's orders, your people have been for some time afloat and at sea."

"No!" the girl assured him. "They are still here. Zminis has shamefully deceived you;" and then she informed him of what she had learned from her brother.

Caracalla, in obedience to a softer impulse, had wished to show himself grateful to Melissa. But her demand displeased him; for the sculptor and his son, the philosopher, were the security that should keep Melissa and the painter attached to him. But though his distrust was so strong, offended dignity and the tormenting sense of being deceived caused him to forget everything else; he flew into a rage, and called loudly the names of Epagathos and Adventus.

His voice, quivering with fury, awakened the others also out of their sleep; and after he had shortly and severely rebuked them for their laziness, he commissioned Epagathos to give the prefect, Macrinus, immediate orders not to allow the ship on which Heron and Philip were, to leave the harbor; to set the captives at liberty; and to throw Zminis, the Egyptian, into prison, heavily chained.

When the freedman remarked, humbly, that the prefect was not likely to be found, as he had purposed to be present again that night at the exorcisms of the magician, Serapion, Caesar commanded that Macrinus should be called away from the miracle-monger's house, and the orders given him.

"And if I can not find him?" asked Epagathos.

"Then, once more, events will prove how badly I am served," answered the emperor. "In any case you can act the prefect, and see that my orders are carried out."

The freedman left hastily, and Caracalla sank back exhausted on the pillows.

Melissa let him rest a little while; then she approached him, thanked him profusely, and begged him to keep quiet, lest the pain should return and spoil the approaching day.

He then asked the time, and when Philostratus, who had walked to the window, explained that the fifth hour after midnight was past, Caracalla bade him prepare a bath.

The physician sanctioned this wish, and Caesar then gave his hand to the girl, saying, feebly and in a gentle voice: "The pain still keeps away. I should be better if I could moderate my impatience. An early bath often does me good after a bad night. Only go. The sleep that you know so well how to give to others, you scarcely allow to visit you. I only beg that you will be at hand. We shall both, I think, feel strengthened when next I call you."

Melissa then bade him a grateful farewell; but as she was approaching the doorway he called again after her, and asked her with an altered voice, shortly and sternly:

"You will agree with your father if he abuses me?"

"What an idea!" she answered, energetically. "He knows who robbed him of his liberty, and from me shall he learn who has restored it to him."

"Good!" murmured the emperor. "Yet remember this also: I need your assistance and that of your brother's, the painter. If your father attempts to alienate you--"

Here he suddenly let fall his arm, which he had raised threateningly, and continued in a confidential whisper: "But how can I ever show you anything but kindness? Is it not so? You already feel the secret tie--You know? Am I mistaken when I fancy that it grieves you to be separated from me?"

"Certainly not," she replied, gently, and bowed her head.

"Then go," he continued, kindly. "The day will come yet when you will feel that I am as necessary to your soul as you are to mine. But you do not yet know how impatient I can be. I must be able to think of you with pleasure--always with pleasure--always."

Thereupon he nodded to her, and his eyelids remained for some time in spasmodic movement. Philostratus was prepared to accompany the young girl, but Caracalla prevented him by calling:

"Lead me to my bath. If it does me good, as I trust it will, I have many things to talk over with you."

Melissa did not hear the last words. Gladly and quickly she hurried through the empty, dimly lighted rooms, and found Alexander in a sitting position, half asleep and half awake, with closed eyes. Then she drew near to him on tiptoe, and, as his nodding head fell on his breast, she laughed and woke him with a kiss.

The lamps were not yet burned out, and, as he looked into her face with surprise, his also brightened, and jumping up quickly he exclaimed:

"All's well; we have you back again, and you have succeeded! Our father-I see it in your face--and Philip also, are at liberty!"

"Yes, yes, yes," she answered, gladly; "and now we will go together and fetch them ourselves from the harbor."

Alexander raised his eyes and arms to heaven in rapture, and Melissa imitated him; and thus, without words, though with fervent devotion, they with one accord thanked the gods for their merciful ruling.

They then set out together, and Alexander said: "I feel as if nothing but gratitude flowed through all my veins. At any rate, I have learned for the first time what fear is. That evil guest certainly haunts this place. Let us go now. On the way you shall tell me everything."

"Only one moment's patience," she begged, cheerfully, and hurried into the chief priest's rooms. The lady Euryale was still expecting her, and as she kissed her she looked with sincere pleasure into her bright but tearful eyes.

At first she was bent on making Melissa rest; for she would yet require all her strength. But she saw that the girl's wish to go and meet her father was justifiable; she placed her own mantle over her shoulders--for the air was cool before sunrise--and at last accompanied her into the anteroom. Directly the girl had disappeared, she turned to her sister-in-law's slave, who had waited there the whole night by order of his mistress, and desired him to go and report to her what he had learned about Melissa.

The brother and sister met the slave Argutis outside the Serapeum. He had heard at Seleukus's house where his young mistress was staying, and had made friends with the chief priest's servants.

When, late in the evening, he heard that Melissa was still with Caesar, he had become so uneasy that he had waited the whole night through, first on the steps of a staircase, then walking up and down outside the Serapeum. With a light heart he now accompanied the couple as far as the Aspendia quarter of the town, and he then only parted from them in order that he might inform poor old Dido of his good news, and make preparations for the reception of the home-comers.

After that Melissa hurried along, arm in arm with her brother, through the quiet streets.

Youth, to whom the present belongs entirely, only cares to know the bright side of the future; and even Melissa in her joy at being able to restore liberty to her beloved relations, hardly thought at all of the fact that, when this was done and Caesar should send for her again, there would be new dangers to surmount.

Delighted with her grand success, she first told her brother what her experiences had been with the suffering emperor. Then she started on the recollections of her visit to her lover, and when Alexander opened his heart to her and assured her with fiery ardor that he would not rest till he had won the heart of the lovely Christian, Agatha, she gladly allowed him to talk and promised him her assistance. At last they deliberated how the favor of Caesar--who, Melissa assured him, was cruelly misunderstood--was to be won for their father and Philip; and finally they both imagined the surprise of the old man if he should be the first to meet them after being set at liberty.

The way was far, and when they reached the sea, by the Caesareum in the Bruchium, the palatial quarter of the town, the first glimmer of approaching dawn was showing behind the peninsula of Lochias. The sea was rough, and tossed with heavy, oily waves on the Choma that ran out into the sea like a finger, and on the walls of the Timoneum at its point, where Antonius had hidden his disgrace after the battle of Actium.

Alexander stopped by the pillared temple of Poseidon, which stood close on the shore, between the Choma and the theatre, and, looking toward the flat, horseshoe-shaped coast of the opposite island which still lay in darkness, he asked:

"Do you still remember when we went with our mother over to Antirhodos, and how she allowed us to gather shells in the little harbor? If she were alive to-day, what more could we wish for?"

"That the emperor was gone," exclaimed the girl from the depths of her heart; "that Diodoros were well again; that father could use his hands as he used, and that I might stay with him until Diodoros came to fetch me, and then... oh, if only something could happen to the empire that Caesar might go away--far away, to the farthest hyperborean land!"

"That will soon happen now," answered Alexander. "Philostratus says that the Romans will remain at the utmost a week longer."

"So long?" asked Melissa, startled; but Alexander soon pacified her with the assurance that seven days flew speedily by, and when one looked back on them they seemed to shrink into only as many hours.

"But do not," he continued, cheerfully, "look into the future! We will rejoice, for everything is going so well now!"

He stopped here suddenly and gazed anxiously at the sea, which was no longer completely obscured by the vanishing shadows of night. Melissa looked in the direction of his pointing hand, and when he cried with great excitement, "That is no little boat, it is a ship, and a large one, too!" Melissa added, eagerly, "It is already near the Diabathra. It will reach the Alveus Steganus in a moment, and pass the pharos."

"But yonder is the morning star in the heavens, and the fire is still blazing on the tower," interrupted her brother. "Not till it has been extinguished will they open the outside chain. And yet that ship is steering in a northwesterly direction. It certainly comes out of the royal harbor." He then drew his sister on faster, and when, in a few minutes, they reached the harbor gate, he cried out, much relieved:

"Look there! The chain is still across the entrance. I see it clearly."

"And so do I," said Melissa, decidedly; and while her brother knocked at the gate-house of the little harbor, she continued, eagerly:

"No ships dare go out before sunrise, on account of the rocks--Epagathos said so just now--and that one near the pharos--"

But there was no time to put her thoughts into words; for the broad harbor gate was thrown noisily open, and a

troop of Roman soldiers streamed out, followed by several Alexandrian men-at-arms. After them came a prisoner loaded with chains, with whom a leading Roman in warrior's dress was conversing. Both were tall and haggard, and when they approached the brother and sister they recognized in them Macrinus the praetorian prefect, while the prisoner was Zminis the informer.

But the Egyptian also noticed the artist and his companion. His eyes sparkled brightly, and with triumphant scorn he pointed out to sea.

The magician Serapion had persuaded the prefect to let the Egyptian go free. Nothing was yet known in the harbor of Zminis's disgrace, and he had been promptly obeyed as usual, when, spurred on by the magician and his old hatred, he gave the order for the galley which carried the sculptor and his son on board to weigh anchor in spite of the early hour.

Heron and Philip, with chains on their feet, were now rowing on the same bench with the worst criminals; and the old artist's two remaining children stood gazing after the ship that carried away their father and brother into the distance. Melissa stood mute, with tearful eyes, while Alexander, quite beside himself, tried to relieve his rage and grief by empty threats.

Soon, however, his sister's remonstrances caused him to restrain himself, and make inquiry as to whether Macrinus, in obedience to the emperor's orders, had sent a State ship after the galley.

This had been done, and comforted, though sadly disappointed, they started on their way home.

The sun in the mean time had risen, and the streets were filling with people.

They met the old sculptor Lysander, who had been a friend of their father's, outside the magnificent pile of buildings of the Caesareum. The old man took a deep interest in Heron's fate; and, when Alexander asked him modestly what he was doing at that early hour, he pointed to the interior of the building, where the statues of the emperors and empresses stood in a wide circle surrounding a large court-yard, and invited them to come in with him. He had not been able to complete his work—a marble statue of Julia Domna, Caracalla's mother—before the arrival of the emperor. It had been placed here yesterday evening. He had come to see how it looked in its new position.

Melissa had often seen the portrait of Julia on coins and in various pictures, but to-day she was far more strongly attracted than she had ever been before to look in the face of the mother of the man who had so powerfully influenced her own existence and that of her people.

The old master had seen Julia many years ago in her own home at Emesa, as the daughter of Bassianus the high-priest of the Sun in that town; and later, after she had become empress, he had been commanded to take her portrait for her husband, Septimus Severus. While Melissa gazed on the countenance of the beautiful statue, the old artist related how Caracalla's mother had in her youth won all hearts by her wealth of intellect, and the extraordinary knowledge which she had easily acquired and continually added to, through intercourse with learned men. They learned from him that his heart had not remained undisturbed by the charms of his royal model, and Melissa became more and more absorbed in her contemplation of this beautiful work of art.

Lysander had represented the imperial widow standing in flowing draperies, which fell to her feet. She held her charming, youthful head bent slightly on one side, and her right hand held aside the veil which covered the back of her head and fell lightly on her shoulders, a little open over the throat. Her face looked out from under it as if she were listening to a fine song or an interesting speech. Her thick, slightly waving hair framed the lovely oval of her face under the veil, and Alexander agreed with his sister when she expressed the wish that she might but once see this rarely beautiful creature. But the sculptor assured them that they would be disappointed, for time had treated her cruelly.

"I have shown her," he continued, "as she charmed me a generation ago. What you see standing before you is the young girl Julia; I was not capable of representing her as matron or mother. The thought of her son would have spoiled everything."

"He is capable of better emotions," Alexander declared.

"May be," answered the old man—"I do not know them. May your father and brother be restored to you soon!--I must get to work!"

CHAPTER XXI.

The high-priest of Serapis presided over the sacrifices to be offered this morning. Caesar had given beasts in abundance to do honor to the god; still, the priest had gone but ill-disposed to fulfill his part; for the imperial command that the citizens' houses should be filled with the troops, who were also authorized to make unheard-of demands on their hosts, had roused his ire against the tyrant, who, in the morning, after his bath, had appeared to him unhappy indeed, but at the same time a gifted and conscientious ruler, capable of the highest and grandest enterprise.

Melissa, in obedience to the lady Euryale, had taken an hour's rest, and then refreshed herself by bathing. She now was breakfasting with her venerated friend, and Philostratus had joined them. He was able to tell them that a swift State galley was already on its way to overtake and release her father and brother; and when he saw how glad she was to hear it, how beautiful, fresh, and pure she was, he thought to himself with anxiety that it would be a wonder if the imperial slave to his own passions should not desire to possess this lovely creature.

Euryale also feared this, and Melissa realized what filled them with anxiety; yet she by no means shared the feeling, and the happy confidence with which she tried to comfort her old friends, at the same time pacified and alarmed them. It seemed to her quite foolish and vain to suppose that the emperor, the mighty ruler of the world, should fall in love with her, the humble, obscure gem-cutter's child, who aspired to one suitor alone. It was merely as a patient wishes for the physician, she assured herself, that the emperor wished for her presence--Philostratus had understood that. During the night she had certainly been seized with great fears, but, as she now thought, without any cause. What she really had to dread was that she might be falsely judged by his followers; still, she cared nothing about all these Romans. However, she would beg Euryale to see Diodoros, and to tell him what forced her to obey the emperor's summons, if he should send for her. It was highly probable that the sick man had been informed of her interview with Caracalla, and, as her betrothed, he must be told how she felt toward Caesar; for this was his right, and jealous agitation might injure him.

Her face so expressed the hope and confidence of a pure heart that when, after a little time, she withdrew, Euryale said to the philosopher:

"We must not alarm her more! Her trustful innocence perhaps may protect her better than anxious precautions."

And Philostratus agreed, and assured her that in any case he expected good results for Melissa, for she was one of those who were the elect of the gods and whom they chose to be their instruments. And then he related what wonderful influence she had over Caesar's sufferings, and praised her with his usual enthusiastic warmth.

When Melissa returned, Philostratus had left the matron. She was again alone with Euryale, who reminded her of the lesson conveyed in the Christian words that she had explained to her yesterday. Every deed, every thought, had some influence on the way in which the fulfillment of time would come for each one; and when the hour of death was over, no regrets, repentance, or efforts could then alter the past. A single moment, as her own young experience had taught her, was often sufficient to brand the name of an estimable man. Till now, her way through life had led along level paths, through meadows and gardens, and others had kept their eyes open for her; now she was drawing near to the edge of a precipice, and at every turning, even at the smallest step, she must never forget the threatening danger. The best will and the greatest prudence could not save her if she did not trust to a higher guidance; and then she asked the girl to whom she raised her heart when she prayed; and Melissa named Isis and other gods, and lastly the manes of her dead mother.

During this confession, old Adventus appeared, to summon the girl to his sovereign. Melissa promised to follow him immediately; and, when the old man had gone, the matron said:

"Few here pray to the same gods, and he whose worship my husband leads is not mine. I, with several others, know that there is a Father in heaven who loves us men, his creatures, and guards us as his children. You do not yet know him, and therefore you can not hope for anything from him; but if you will follow the advice of a friend, who was also once young, think in the future that your right hand is held firmly by the invisible, beloved hand of your mother. Persuade yourself that she is by you, and take care that every word, yes, every glance, meets with her approval. Then she will be there, and will protect you whenever you require her aid."

Melissa sank on the breast of her kind friend, embracing her as closely and kissing her as sincerely as if she had been the beloved mother to whose care Euryale had commended her.

The counsels of this true friend agreed with those of her own heart, and so they must be right. When at last they had to part, Euryale wished to send for one of the gentlemen of the court, whom she knew, that he might escort her through the troops of Caesar's attendants and friends who were waiting, and of the visitors and petitioners; but Melissa felt so happy and so well protected by Adventus, that she followed him without further delay. In fact, the old man had a friendly feeling for her, since she had covered his feet so carefully the day before; she knew it by the tone of his voice and by the troubled look in his dim eyes.

Even now she did not believe in the dangers at which her friends trembled for her, and she walked calmly across the lofty marble halls, the anteroom, and the other vast rooms of the imperial dwelling. The attendants accompanied her

respectfully from door to door, in obedience to the emperor's commands, and she went on with a firm step, looking straight in front of her, without noticing the inquisitive, approving, or scornful glances which were aimed at her.

In the first rooms she needed an escort, for they were crowded with Romans and Alexandrians who were waiting for a sign from Caesar to appeal for his pardon or his verdict, or perhaps only wishing to see his countenance. The emperor's "friends" sat at breakfast, of which Caracalla did not partake. The generals, and the members of his court not immediately attached to his person, stood together in the various rooms, while the principal people of Alexandria--several senators and rich and important citizens of the town--as well as the envoys of the Egyptian provinces, in magnificent garments and rich gold ornaments, held aloof from the Romans, and waited in groups for the call of the usher.

Melissa saw no one, nor did she observe the costly woven hangings on the walls, the friezes decorated with rare works of art and high reliefs, nor the mosaic floors over which she passed. She did not notice the hum and murmur of the numerous voices which surrounded her; nor could she indeed have understood a single coherent sentence; for, excepting the ushers and the emperor's immediate attendants, at the reception-hour no one was allowed to raise his voice. Expectancy and servility seemed here to stifle every lively impulse; and when, now and then, the loud call of one of the ushers rang above the murmur, one of those who were waiting spontaneously bowed low, or another started up, as if ready to obey any command. The sensation, shared by many, of waiting in the vicinity of a high, almost godlike power, in whose hands lay their well-being or misery, gave rise to a sense of solemnity. Every movement was subdued; anxious, nay, fearful expectation was written on many faces, and on others impatience and disappointment. After a little while it was whispered from ear to ear that the emperor would only grant a few more audiences; and how many had already waited in vain yesterday, for hours, in the same place!

Without delay Melissa went on till she had reached the heavy curtain which, as she already knew, shut off Caesar's inner apartments.

The usher obligingly drew it back, even before she had mentioned her name, and while a deputation of the town senators, who had been received by Caracalla, passed out, she was followed by Alexandrian citizens, the chiefs of great merchant-houses, whose request for an audience he had sanctioned. They were for the most part elderly men, and Melissa recognized among them Seleukus, Berenike's husband.

Melissa bowed to him, but he did not notice her, and passed by without a word. Perhaps he was considering the enormous sum to be expended on the show at night which he, with a few friends, intended to arrange at the circus in Caesar's honor.

All was quite still in the large hall which separated the emperor's reception-room from the anteroom. Melissa observed only two soldiers, who were looking out of window, and whose bodies were shaking as though they were convulsed with profound merriment.

It happened that she had to wait here some time; for the usher begged her to have patience until the merchants' audience was over. They were the last who would be received that day. He invited her to rest on the couch on which was spread a bright giraffe's skin, but she preferred to walk up and down, for her heart was beating violently. And while the usher vanished from the room, one of the warriors turned his head to look about him, and directly he caught sight of Melissa he gave his comrade a push, and said to him, loud enough for Melissa to hear:

"A wonder! Apollonaris, by Eros and all the Erotes, a precious wonder!"

The next moment they both stepped back from the window and stared at the girl, who stood blushing and embarrassed, and gazed at the floor when she found with whom she had been left alone.

They were two tribunes of the praetorians, but, notwithstanding their high grade, they were only young men of about twenty. Twin brothers of the honorable house of the Aurelia, they had entered the army as centurions, but had soon been placed at the head of a thousand men, and appointed tribunes in Caesar's body-guard. They resembled one another exactly; and this likeness, which procured them much amusement, they greatly enhanced by arranging their coal-black beards and hair in exactly the same way, and by dressing alike down to the rings on their fingers. One was called Apollonaris, the other Nemesianus Aurelius. They were of the same height, and equally well grown, and no one could say which had the finest black eyes, which mouth the haughtiest smile, or to which of them the thick short beard and the artistically shaved spot between the under lip and chin was most becoming. The beautifully embossed ornaments on their breast-plates and shirts of mail, and on the belt of the short sword, showed that they grudged no expense; in fact, they thought only of enjoyment, and it was merely for the honor of it that they were serving for a few years in the imperial guard. By and by they would rest, after all the hardships of the campaign, in their palace at Rome, or in the villas on the various estates that they had inherited from their father and mother, and then, for a change, hold honorary positions in the public service. Their friends knew that they also contemplated being married on the same day, when the game of war should be a thing of the past.

In the mean time they desired nothing in the world but honor and pleasure; and such pleasure as well-bred, healthy, and genial youths, with amiability, strength, and money to spend, can always command, they enjoyed to the full, without carrying it to reckless extravagance. Two merrier, happier, more popular comrades probably did not exist in the

whole army. They did their duty in the field bravely; during peace, and in a town like Alexandria, they appeared, on the contrary, like mere effeminate men of fashion. At least, they spent a large part of their time in having their black hair crimped; they gave ridiculous sums to have it anointed with the most delicate perfumes; and it was difficult to imagine how effectively their carefully kept hands could draw a sword, and, if necessary, handle the hatchet or spade.

To-day Nemesianus was in the emperor's anteroom by command, and Apollonaris, of his own freewill, had taken the place of another tribune, that he might bear his brother company. They had caroused through half the night, and had begun the new day by a visit to the flower market, for love of the pretty saleswomen. Each had a half-opened rose stuck in between his cuirass and shirt of mail on the left breast, plucked, as the charming Daphnion had assured them, from a bush which had been introduced from Persia only the year before. The brothers, at any rate, had never seen any like them.

While they were looking out of the window they had passed the time by examining every girl or woman who went by, intending to fling one rose at the first whose perfect beauty should claim it, and the other flower at the second; but during the half-hour none had appeared who was worthy of such a gift. All the beauties in Alexandria were walking in the streets in the cool hour before sunset, and really there was no lack of handsome girls. The brothers had even heard that Caesar, who seemed to have renounced the pleasures of love, had yielded to the charms of a lovely Greek.

Directly they saw Melissa they were convinced that they had met the beautiful plaything of the imperial fancy, and each with the same action offered her his rose, as if moved by the same invisible power.

Apollonaris, who had come into the world a little sooner than his brother, and who, by right of birth, had therefore a more audacious manner, stepped boldly up to Melissa and presented his, while Nemesianus at the same instant bowed to her, and begged her to give his the preference.

Though their speeches were flattering and well-worded, Melissa repulsed them by remarking sharply that she did not want their flowers.

"We can easily believe that," answered Apollonaris, "for are you not yourself a lovely, blooming rose?"

"Vain flattery," replied Melissa; "and I certainly do not bloom for you."

"That is both cruel and unjust," sighed Nemesianus, "for that which you refuse to us poor fellows you grant to another, who can obtain everything that other mortals yearn for."

"But we," interrupted his brother, "are modest, nay, and pious warriors. We had intended offering up these roses to Aphrodite, but lo! the goddess has met us in person."

"Her image at any rate," added the other.

"And you should thank the foam-born goddess," continued Apollonaris; "for she has lent you, in spite of the danger of seeing herself eclipsed, her own divine charms. Do you think she will be displeased if we withdraw the flowers and offer them to you?"

"I think nothing," answered Melissa, "excepting that your honeyed remarks annoy me. Do what you like with your roses, I will not accept them."

"How dare you," asked Apollonaris, approaching her--"you, to whom the mother of love has given such wonderfully fresh lips--misuse them by refusing so sternly the humble petition of her faithful worshipers? If you would not have Aphrodite enraged with you, hasten to atone for this transgression. One kiss, my beauty, for her votary, and she will forgive you."

Here Apollonaris stretched out his hand toward the girl to draw her to him, but she motioned him back indignantly, declaring that it would be reprehensible and cowardly in a soldier to use violence toward a modest maid.

At this the two brothers laughed heartily, and Nemesianus exclaimed, "You do not belong to the Temple of Vesta, most lovely of roses, and yet you are well protected by such sharp thorns that it requires a great deal of courage to venture to attack you."

"More," added Apollonaris, "than to storm a fortress. But what camp or stronghold contains booty so well worth capturing?"

Thereupon he threw his arm round Melissa and drew her to him.

Neither he nor his brother had ever conducted themselves badly towards an honorable woman; and if Melissa had been but the daughter of a simple craftsman, her reproachful remarks would have sufficed to keep them at a distance. But such immunity was not to be granted to the emperor's sweetheart, who could so audaciously reject two brothers accustomed to easy conquests; her demure severity could hardly be meant seriously. Apollonaris therefore took no notice of her violent resistance, but held her hands forcibly, and, though he could not succeed in kissing her for her struggling, he pressed his lips to her cheek, while she endeavored to free herself and pushed him off, breathless with real indignation.

Till now, the brothers had taken the matter as a joke; but when Apollonaris seized the girl again, and she, beside herself with fear, cried for help, he at once set her free.

It was too late; for the curtains of the audience-room were already withdrawn, and Caracalla approached. His countenance was red and distorted; he trembled with rage, and his angry glance fell like a flash of lightning on the luckless brothers. Close by his side was the prefect Macrinus, who feared lest he should be attacked by a fresh fit; and Melissa shared his fears, as Caracalla cried to Apollonaris in an angry voice, "Scoundrel that you are, you shall repent of this!"

Still, Aurelius had, by various wanton jokes, incurred the emperor's wrath before now, and he was accustomed to disarm it by some insinuating confession, so he answered him with a roguish smile, while raising his eyes to him humbly:

"Forgive me, great Caesar! Our poor strength, as you well know, is easily defeated in conflicts against overpowering beauty. Dainties are sweet, not only for children. Long ago Mars was drawn to Venus; and if I--"

He had spoken these words in Latin, which Melissa did not understand; but the color left the emperor's face, and, pale with excitement, he stammered out laboriously:

"You have--you have dared--"

"For this rose," began the youth again, "I begged a hasty kiss from the beauty, which certainly blooms for all, and she--" He raised his hands and eyes imploringly to the despot; but Caracalla had already snatched Macrinus's sword from its sheath, and before Aurelius could defend himself he was struck first on the head with the flat of the blade, and then received a series of sharp cuts on his brow and face.

Streaming with blood from the gaping wounds which the victim, trembling with fear and rage, covered with his hands, he surrendered himself to the care of his startled brother, while Caesar overwhelmed them both with a flood of furious reproaches.

When Nemesianus began to bind up his wounded brother's head with a handkerchief handed to him by Melissa, and Caracalla saw the gaping wounds he had inflicted, he became quieter, and said:

"I think those lips will not try to steal kisses again for some time from honorable maidens. You and Nemesianus have forfeited your lives; how ever, the beseeching look of those all-powerful eyes has saved you--you are spared. Take your brother away, Nemesianus. You are not to leave your quarters until further orders."

With this he turned his back on the twins, but on the threshold he again addressed them and said:

"You were mistaken about this maiden. She is not less pure and noble than your own sister."

The merchants were dismissed from the tablinum more hastily than was due to the importance of their business, in which, until this interruption, the sovereign had shown a sympathetic interest and intelligence which surprised them; and they left Caesar's presence disappointed, but with the promise that they should be received again in the evening.

As soon as they had retired, Caracalla threw himself again on the couch.

The bath had done him good. Still somewhat exhausted, though his head was clear, he would not be hindered from receiving the deputation for which he had important matters to decide; but this fresh attack of rage revenged itself by a painful headache. Pale, and with slightly quivering limbs, he dismissed the prefect and his other friends, and desired Epagathos to call Melissa.

He needed rest, and again the girl's little hand, which had yesterday done him good, proved its healing power. The throbbing in his head yielded to her gentle touch, and by degrees exhaustion gave way to the comfortable languor of convalescence.

To-day, as yesterday, he expressed his thanks to Melissa, but he found her changed. She looked timidly and anxiously down into her lap excepting when she replied to a direct question; and yet he had done everything to please her. Her relations would soon be free and in Alexandria once more, and Zminis was in prison, chained hand and foot. This he told her; and, though she was glad, it was not enough to restore the calm cheerfulness he had loved to see in her.

He urged her, with warm insistence, to tell him what it was that weighed on her, and at last, with eyes full of tears, she forced herself to say:

"You yourself have seen what they take me for."

"And you have seen," he quickly replied, "how I punish those who forget the respect they owe to you."

"But you are so dreadful in your wrath!" The words broke from her lips. "Where others blame, you can destroy; and you do it, too, when passion carries you away. I am bound to obey your call, and here I am. But I fancy myself like the little dog--you may see him any day--which in the beast-garden of the Panaeum, shares a cage with a royal tiger. The huge brute puts up with a great deal from his small companion, but woe betide the dog if the tiger once pats him with his heavy, murderous paw--and he might, out of sheer forgetfulness!"

"But this hand," Caesar broke in, raising his delicate hand covered with rings, "will never forget, any more than my heart, how much it owes to you."

"Until I, in some unforeseen way--perhaps quite unconsciously--excite your anger," sighed Melissa. "Then you will be carried away by passion, and I shall share the common fate."

Caracalla was about to reply indignantly, but just then Adventus entered the room, announcing the chief astrologer of the Temple of Serapis. Caracalla refused to receive him just then, but he anxiously asked whether he had any signs to report. The reply was in the affirmative, and in a few minutes Caesar had in his hand a wax tablet covered with words and figures. He studied it eagerly, and his countenance cleared; still holding the tablets, he exclaimed to Melissa:

"You, daughter of Heron, have nothing to fear from me, you of all the world! In some quiet hour I will explain to you how my planet yearns to yours, and yours--that is, yourself--to mine. The gods have created us for each other, child; I am already under your influence, but your heart still hesitates, and I know why; it is because you distrust me."

Melissa raised her large eyes to his face in astonishment, and he went on, pensively:

"The past must stand; it is like a scar which no water will wash out. What have you not heard of my past? What did they feel, in their self-conscious virtue, when they talked of my crimes? Did it ever occur to any one, I wonder, that with the purple I assumed the sword, to protect my empire and throne? And when I have used the blade, how eagerly have fingers pointed at me, how gladly slanderous tongues have wagged! Who has ever thought of asking what compulsion led me to shed blood, or how much it cost me to do it? You, fair child--and the stars confirm it--you were sent by fate to share the burden that oppresses me, and to you I will ease my heart, to you I will confide all, unasked, because my heart prompts me to do so. But first you must tell me with what tales they taught you to hate the man to whom, as you yourself confessed, you nevertheless felt drawn."

At this Melissa raised her hands in entreaty and remonstrance, and Caesar went on:

"I will spare you the pains. They say that I am ever athirst for fresh bloodshed if only some one is rash enough to suggest it to me. You were told that Caesar murdered his brother Geta, with many more who did but speak his victim's name. My father-in-law, and his daughter Plautilla, my wife, were, it is said, the victims of my fury. I killed Papinian, the lawyer and prefect, and Cilo--whom you saw yesterday--nearly shared the same fate. What did they conceal? Nothing. Your nod confesses it--well, and why should they, since speaking ill of others is their greatest delight? It is all true, and I should never think of denying it. But did it ever occur to you, or did any one ever suggest to you, to inquire how it came to pass that I perpetrated such horrors; I--who was brought up in the fear of the gods and the law, like you and other people?"

"No, my lord, never," replied Melissa, in distress. "But I beg you, I beseech you, say no more about such dreadful things. I know full well that you are not wicked; that you are much better than people think."

"And for that very reason," cried Caesar, whose cheeks were flushed with pleasure in the hard task he had set himself, "you must hear me. I am Caesar. There is no judge over me; I need give account to none for my actions. Nor do I. Who, besides yourself, is more to me than the flies on that cup?"

"And your conscience?" she timidly put in.

"It raises hideous questions from time to time," he replied, gloomily. "It can be obtrusive, but we can teach ourselves not to answer--besides, what you call conscience knows the motives for every action, and, remembering them, judges leniently. You, child, should do the same; for you--"

"O my lord, what can my poor judgment matter?" Melissa panted out; but Caracalla exclaimed, as if the question pained him:

"Must I explain all that? The stars, as you know, proclaim to you, as to me, that a higher power has joined us as light and warmth are joined. Have you forgotten how we both felt only yesterday? Or am I mistaken? Has not Roxana's soul entered into that divinely lovely form because it longed for its lost companion spirit?"

He spoke vehemently, with a quivering of his eyelids; but feeling her hand tremble in his own, he collected himself, and went on in a lower tone, but with urgent emphasis:

"I will let you glance into this bosom, closed to every other eye; for my desolate heart is inspired by you to fresh energy and life; I am as grateful to you as a drowning man to his deliverer. I shall suffocate and die if I repress the impulse to open my heart to you!"

What change was this that had come over this mysterious being? Melissa felt as though she was gazing on the face of a stranger, for, though his eyelids still quivered, his eyes were bright with ecstatic fire and his features looked more youthful. On that noble brow the laurel wreath he wore looked well. Also, as she now observed, he was magnificently attired; he wore a close-fitting tunic, or breast-plate made of thick woollen stuff, and over it a purple mantle, while from his bare throat hung a precious medallion, shield-shaped, and set in gold and gems, the center formed by a large head of Medusa, with beautiful though terrible features. The lion-heads of gold attached to each corner of the short cloak he wore over the sham coat of mail, were exquisite works of art, and sandals embroidered with gold and gems covered his feet and ankles. He was dressed to-day like the heir of a lordly house, anxious to charm; nay, indeed, like an emperor, as he was; and with what care had his body-slave arranged his thin curls!

He passed his hand over his brow and cast a glance at a silver mirror on the low table at the head of his couch.

When he turned to her again his amorous eyes met Melissa's.

She looked down in startled alarm. Was it for her sake that Caesar had thus decked himself and looked in the mirror? It seemed scarcely possible, and yet it flattered and pleased her. But in the next instant she longed more fervently than she ever had before for a magic charm by which she might vanish and be borne far, far away from this dreadful man. In fancy she saw the vessel which the lady Berenike had in readiness. She would, she must fly hence, even if it should part her for a time from Diodoros.

Did Caracalla read her thought? Nay, he could not see through her; so she endured his gaze, tempting him to speak; and his heart beat high with hope as he fancied he saw that she was beginning to be affected by his intense agitation. At this moment he felt convinced, as he often had been, that the most atrocious of his crimes had been necessary and inevitable. There was something grand and vast in his deeds of blood, and that--for he flattered himself he knew the female heart--must win her admiration, besides the awe and love she already felt.

During the night, at his waking, and in his bath, he had felt that she was as necessary to him as the breath of life and hope. What he experienced was love as the poets had sung it. How often had he laughed it to scorn, and boasted that he was armed against the arrows of Eros! Now, for the first time, he was aware of the anxious rapture, the ardent longing of which he had read in so many songs. There stood the object of his passion. She must hear him, must be his--not by compulsion, not by imperial command, but of the free impulse of her heart.

His confession would help to this end.

With a swift gesture, as if to throw off the last trace of fatigue, he sat up and began in a firm voice, with a light in his eyes:

"Yes, I killed my brother Geta. You shudder. And yet, if at this day, when I know all the results of the deed, the state of affairs were the same as then, I would do it again! That shocks you. But only listen, and then you will say with me that it was Fate which compelled me to act so, and not otherwise."

He paused, and then mistaking the anxiety which was visible in Melissa's face for sympathetic attention, he began his story, confident of her interest:

"When I was born, my father had not yet assumed the purple, but he already aimed at the sovereignty. Augury had promised it to him; my mother knew this, and shared his ambition. While I was still at my nurse's breast he was made consul; four years later he seized the throne. Pertinax was killed, the wretched Didius Julianus bought the empire, and this brought my father to Rome from Pannonia. Meanwhile he had sent us children, my brother Geta and me, away from the city; nor was it till he had quelled the last resistance on the Tiber that he recalled us.

"I was then but a child of five, and yet one day of that time I remember vividly. My father was going through Rome in solemn procession. His first object was to do due honor to the corpse of Pertinax. Rich hangings floated from every window and balcony in the city. Garlands of flowers and laurel wreaths adorned the houses, and pleasant odors were wafted to us as we went. The jubilation of the people was mixed with the trumpet-call of the soldiers; handkerchiefs were waved and acclamations rang out. This was in honor of my father, and of me also, the future Caesar. My little heart was almost bursting with pride; it seemed to me that I had grown several heads taller, not only than other boys, but than the people that surrounded me.

"When the funeral procession began, my mother wished me to go with her into the arcade where seats had been placed for the ladies to view, but I refused to follow her. My father became angry. But when he heard me declare that I was a man and the future Emperor, that I would rather see nothing than show myself to the people among the women, he smiled. He ordered Cilo, who was then the prefect of Rome, to lead me to the seats of the past consuls and the old senators. I was delighted at this; but when he allowed my younger brother Geta to follow me, my pleasure was entirely spoiled."

"And you were then five years old?" asked Melissa, astonished.

"That surprises you!" smiled Caracalla. "But I had already traveled through half the empire, and had experienced more than other boys of twice my age. I was, at any rate, still child enough to forget everything else in the brilliant spectacle that unfolded before my eyes. I remember to this day the colored wax statue which represented Pertinax so exactly that it might have been himself risen from the grave. And the procession! It seemed to have no end; one new thing followed another. All walked past in mourning robes, even the choir of singing boys and men. Cilo explained to me who had made the statues of the Romans who had served their country, who the artists and scholars were, whose statues and busts were carried by. Then came bronze groups of the people of every nation in the empire, in their costumes. Cilo told me what they were called, and where they lived; he then added that one day they would all belong to me; that I must learn the art of fighting, in case they resisted me, and should require suppressing. Also, when they carried the flags of the guilds past, when the horse and foot soldiers, the race-horses from the circus and several other things came by, he continued to explain them. I only remember it now because it made me so happy. The old man spoke to me alone; he regarded me alone as the future sovereign. He left Geta to eat the sweets which his aunts had given him, and when I too wanted some my brother refused to let me have any. Then Cilo stroked my hair, and said: 'leave him

his toys. When you are a man you shall have the whole Roman Empire for your own, and all the nations I told you of! Geta meanwhile had thought better of it, and pushed some of the sweetmeats toward me. I would not have them, and, when he tried to make me take them, I threw them into the road."

"And you remember all that?" said Melissa.

"More things than these are indelibly stamped on my mind from that day," said Caesar. "I can see before me now the pile on which Pertinax was to be burned. It was splendidly decorated, and on the top stood the gilt chariot in which he had loved to ride. Before the consuls fired the logs of Indian wood, my father led us to the image of Pertinax, that we might kiss it. He held me by the hand. Wherever we went, the senate and people hailed us with acclamations. My mother carried Geta in her arms. This delighted the populace. They shouted for her and my brother as enthusiastically as for us, and I recollect to this day how that went to my heart. He might have the sweets and welcome, but what the people had to offer was due only to my father and me, not to my brother. At that moment I first fully understood that Severus was the present and I the future Caesar. Geta had only to obey, like every one else.

"After kissing the image, I stood, still holding my father's hand, to watch the flames. I can see them now, crackling and writhing as they gained on the wood, licking it and fawning, as it were, till it caught and sent up a rush of sparks and fire. At last the whole pile was one huge blaze. Then, suddenly, out of the heart of the flames an eagle rose. The creature flapped its broad wings in the air, which was golden with sunshine and quivering with heat, soaring above the smoke and fire, this way and that. But it soon took flight, away from the furnace beneath. I shouted with delight, and cried to my father: 'Look at the bird! Where is he flying?' And he eagerly answered: 'Well done! If you desire to preserve the power I have conquered for you always undiminished, you must keep your eyes open. Let no sign pass unnoticed, no opportunity neglected.'

"He himself acted on this rule. To him obstacles existed only to be removed, and he taught me, too, to give myself neither peace nor rest, and not to spare the life of a foe.--That festival secured my father the suffrages of the Romans. Meanwhile Pescennius Niger rose up in the East with a large army and took the field against Severus. But my father was not the man to hesitate. Within a few months of the obsequies of Pertinax his opponent was a headless corpse.

"There was yet another obstacle to be removed. You have heard of Clodius Albinus. My father had adopted him and raised him to share his throne. But Severus could not divide the rule with any man.

"When I was nine years old I saw, after the battle of Lugdunum, the dead face of Albinus's head; it was set up in front of the Curia on a lance.

"I now was the second personage in the empire, next to my father; the first among the youth of the whole world, and the future emperor. When I was eleven the soldiers hailed me as Augustus; that was in the war against the Parthians, before Ktesiphon. But they did the same to Geta. This was like wormwood in the sweet draught; and if then--But what can a girl care about the state, and the fate of rulers and nations?"

"Yes, go on," said Melissa. "I see already what you are coming to. You disliked the idea of sharing your power with another."

"Nay," cried Caracalla, vehemently, "I not only disliked it, it was intolerable, impossible! What I want you to see is that I did not grudge my brother his share of my father's inheritance, like any petty trader. The world--that is the point--the world itself was too small for two of us. It was not I, but Fate, which had doomed Geta to die. I am certain of this, and so must you be. Yes, it was Fate. Fate prompted the child's little hand to attempt its brother's life. And that was long before my brain could form a thought or my baby-lips could stammer his hated name."

"Then you tried to kill your brother even in infancy?" asked Melissa, and her large eyes dilated with horror as she gazed at the terrible narrator. But Caracalla went on, in an apologetic tone:

"I was then but two years old. It was at Mediolanum, soon after Geta's birth. An egg was found in the court of the palace; a hen had laid it close to a pillar. It was of a purple hue--red all over like the imperial mantle, and this indicated that the newly born infant was destined to sovereignty. Great was the rejoicing. The purple marvel was shown even to me who could but just walk. I, like a naughty boy, flung it down; the shell cracked, and the contents poured out on the pavement. My mother saw it, and her exclamation, 'Wicked child, you have murdered your brother!' was often repeated to me in after-years. It never struck me as particularly motherly."

Here he paused, gazing meditatively into vacancy, and then asked the girl, who had listened intently:

"Were you never haunted by a word so that you could not be rid of it?"

"Oh, yes," cried Melissa; "a striking rhythm in a song, or a line of poetry--"

Caracalla nodded agreement, and went on more vehemently: "That is what I experienced at the words, 'You have murdered your brother!' I not only heard them now and then with my inward ear, but incessantly, like the dreary hum of the flies in my camp-tent, for hours at a time, by day and by night. No fanning could drive these away. The diabolical voice whispered loudest when Geta had done anything to vex me; or if things had been given him which I did not wish him to have. And how often that happened! For I--I was only Bassianus to my mother; but her youngest was her dear little Geta.

"So the years passed. We had, while still quite young, our own teams in the circus. One day, when we were driving for a wager--we were still boys, and I was ahead of the other lads--the horses of my chariot shied to one side. I was thrown some distance on the course. Geta saw this. He turned his horses to the right where I lay. He drove over his brother as he would over straw and apple-parings in the dust; and his wheel broke my thigh. Who knows what else it crushed in me? One thing is certain--from that date the most painful of my sufferings originated. And he, the mean scoundrel, had done it intentionally. He had sharp eyes. He knew how to guide his steeds. He had never driven his wheel over a hazel-nut in the sand of the arena against his will; and I was lying some distance from the driving course."

Caesar's eyelids blinked spasmodically as he uttered this accusation, and his very glance revealed the raging fire that was burning in his soul. Melissa's sad cry of:

"What terrible suspicion!" he answered with a short, scornful laugh and the furious assertion:

"Oh, there were friends enough who informed me what hope Geta had founded on this act of treachery. The disappointment made him irritable and listless, when Galenus had succeeded in curing me so far that I was able to throw away my Crutch; and my limp--at least so they tell me--is hardly perceptible."

"Not at all, most certainly not at all," Melissa sympathetically assured him. He, however, went on:

"Yet what I endured meanwhile!--and while I passed so many long weeks of pain and impatience on a couch, the words my mother had said about the brother whom I murdered rang constantly in my ears as though a reciter were engaged by day and night to reiterate them.

"But even this passed away. With the pain, which had spoiled many good hours for me, the quiet had brought me something more to the purpose--thoughts and plans. Yes, during those peaceful weeks the things my father and tutor had taught me became clear and real for the first time. I realized that I must become energetic if I meant ever to be a thorough sovereign. As soon as I could use my foot again I became an industrious and docile pupil under Cilo. From a child up to the time of this cruel experience, my youthful heart had clung to my nurse. She was a Christian from my father's African home--I knew she loved me best on earth. My mother knew of no higher destiny than that of being the Domna,--[Domna, lady or mistress, in corrupt Latin. Hence her name of Julia Domna] the lady of the soldiers, the mother of the camp, and the lady philosopher among the sages. What she gave me in the way of love was but copper alms. She threw golden solidi of love into Geta's lap in lavish abundance. And her sister and her nieces, who often lived with us, treated me exactly as she did. They were distantly civil, or they shunned me; but my brother was their spoiled plaything. I was as incapable as Geta was master of the art of stealing hearts; but in my childhood I needed none of them: for, if I wished for a kind word, a sweet kiss, or the love of a woman, my nurse's arms were open to me. Nor was she an ordinary woman. As the widow of a tribune who had fallen in my father's service, she had undertaken to attend on me. She loved me as no one else ever did. She was also the only person whom I would willingly obey. I came into the world full of wild instincts, but she knew how to tame them kindly. My aversion to my brother was the one thing she checked but feebly, for he was a thorn in her side too. I learned this when she, who was so gentle, explained to me, with asperity in her tone, that there was but one God in heaven, and on earth but one emperor, who should govern the world in his name. She also imparted these convictions to others, and this turned to her disadvantage. My mother parted us, and sent her back to her African home. She died soon after." He was silent, and gazed pensively into vacancy; soon, however, he collected his thoughts and said, lightly:

"Well, I became Cilo's diligent pupil."

"But," asked Melissa, "did you not say that at one time you attempted his life?"

"I did so," replied Caracalla darkly; "for a moment arrived when I cursed his teaching, and yet it was certainly wise and well meant. You see, child, all of you who go through life humbly and without power are trained to submit obediently to the will of Heaven. Cilo taught me to place my own power, and the greatness of the realm which it would be incumbent on me to reign over, above everything, even above the gods. It was impressed upon you and yours to hold the life of another sacred; to us, our duty as the sovereign transcends this law. Even the blood of a brother must flow if it is for the good of the state intrusted to us. My nurse had taught me that being good meant doing unto others as we would be done by; Cilo cried to me: 'Strike down, that you may not be struck down--away with mercy, if the welfare of the state is threatened!' And how many hands are raised against Rome, the universal empire, which I rule over! It needs a strong hand to keep its antagonistic parts together. Otherwise it would fall apart like a bundle of arrows when the string that bound them is broken. And I, even as a boy, had sworn to my father, by the Terminus stone in the Capitol, never to abandon a single inch of his ground without fighting for it. He, Severus, was the wisest of the rulers. Only the blind love for his second son, encouraged by the women, caused him to forget his moderation and prudence. My brother Geta was to reign together with me over the empire, which ought to have been mine alone as the first-born. Every year festivals were kept, with prayers and sacrifices, to the 'love of the brothers.' You have perhaps seen the coins, which show us hand in hand, and have on them the inscription, 'Eternal union'!

"I in union--I hand in hand with the man I most hated under the sun! It almost maddened me only to hear his voice. I would have liked best of all to spring at his throat when I saw him with his learned fellows squandering their time. Do you know what they did? They invented the names by which the voices of different animals were to be known. Once I

snatched the pencil out of the hand of the freedman as he was writing the sentences, 'The horse neighs, the pig grunts, the goat bleats, the cow lows, the sheep baas.' 'He, himself,' I added, 'croaks like a hoarse jay.'

"That I should share the government with this miserable, faint-hearted, poisonous nobody could never be,—this enemy, who, when I said 'Yes,' cried 'No!' Who frustrated all my measures,—it was impossible! It would have caused the destruction of the state, as certainly as it was the unfairest and unwisest of the deeds of Severus, to place the younger brother as co-regent with the first-born, the rightful heir to the throne. I, whom my father had taught to watch for signs, was reminded every hour that this unbearable position must come to an end.

"After the death of Severus, we lived at first close to one another in separate parts of the same palace like two lions in a cage across which a partition has been erected, so that they may not reciprocally mangle each other.

"We used to meet at my mother's.

"That morning my mastiff had bitten Geta's wolfhound and killed him, and they had found a black liver in the beast he had sent for sacrifice. I had been informed of this. Destiny was on my side. This indolent inactivity must be brought to a close. I myself do not know how I felt as I mounted the steps to my mother's rooms. I only remember distinctly that a demon cried continually in my ear, 'You have murdered your brother!' Then I suddenly found myself face to face with him. It was in the empress's reception-room. And when I saw the hated flat-shaped head so close to me, when his beardless mouth with its thick underlip smiled at me so sweetly and at the same time so falsely, I felt as if I again heard the cry with which he had cheered on his horse. And I felt ... I even felt the pain—as if he broke my thigh again with his wheel. And at the same time a fiend whispered in my ear: 'Destroy him, or he will kill you, and through him Rome will perish!'

"Then I seized my sword. In his odious, peevish voice he said something—I forget what nonsense—to me. Then it appeared to me as if all the sheep and goats over which he had squandered his time were bleating at me. The blood rushed to my head. The room spun round me in a circle. Black spots on a red ground danced before my eyes.

"And then—What flashed in my right hand was my own naked sword! I neither heard nor said anything further. Nor had I planned, nor ever thought of, what then occurred.... But suddenly I felt as if a mountain of oppressive lead had fallen from my breast. How easily I could breathe again! All that had just before turned round me in a mad, whirling dance stood still. The sun shone brightly in the large room; a shaft of light, showing dancing dust, fell on Geta. He sank on his knees close to me, with my sword in his breast. My mother made a fruitless effort to shield him. His blood trickled over her hand. I can still see every ring on those slender, white fingers. I also remember distinctly how, when I raised my sword against him, my mother rushed in between us to protect her favorite. The sharp blade, as she tried to seize it, accidentally grazed her hand—I know not how—only the skin was slightly cut. Yet what a scream she gave over the wound which the son had given his mother! Julia Maesa, her daughter Mammara, and the other women, rushed in. How they exaggerated! They made a river out of every drop of blood.

"So the dreadful deed was done; and yet, had I let the wretch live, I should have been a traitor to Rome, to myself, and to my father's life's work. That day, for the first time, I was ruler of the world. Those who accuse me of fratricide no doubt believe themselves to be right. But they certainly are not. I know better. You also know now with me that destiny, and not I, struck Geta out from among the living."

Here he sat for some time in breathless silence. Then he asked Melissa:

"You understand now how I came to shed my brother's blood?"

She started, and repeated gently after him: "Yes, I understand it."

Deep compassion filled her heart, and yet she felt she dare not sanction what she had heard and deplored. Torn by deep and conflicting feelings she threw back her head, brushed her hair off her face, and cried: "Let me go now; I can bear it no longer!"

"So soft-hearted?" asked he, and shook his head disapprovingly. "Life rages more wildly round the throne than in an artist's home. You will have to learn to swim through the roaring torrent with me. Believe me, even enormities can become quite commonplace. And, besides, why does it still shock you when you yourself know that it was indispensable?"

"I am only a weak girl, and I feel as if I had witnessed these fearful deeds, and had to bear the terrible blood-guiltiness with you!" broke from her lips.

"That is what you must and shall do! It is to that end that I have confided to you what no one else has ever heard from my mouth!" cried Caracalla, his eyes flashing more brightly. She felt as though this cry called her from her slumbers and revealed the precipice to which she had strayed in her sleepwalking.

When Caracalla had begun telling her of his youth, she had only listened with half an ear; for she could not forget Berenike's rescuing ship. But soon his confessions completely attracted her attention, and the lament of this powerful man on whom so many injuries and wrongs had fallen, who even in childhood had been deprived of the happiness of a mother's love, had touched her tender heart. That which was afterward told to her she had identified with her own humble life; she heard with a shudder that it was to the malice of his brother that this unhappy being owed the injury

which, like a poisonous blight, had marred for him all the joys of existence, while she owed all that was loveliest and best in her young life to a brother's love.

The grounds on which Caracalla had based the assertion that destiny had compelled him to murder Geta appeared to her young and inexperienced mind as indisputable. He was only the pitiable victim of his birth and of a cruel fate. Besides, the humblest and most sober-minded can not resist the charm of majesty; and this hapless man, who had honored Melissa with his confidence, and who had assured her so earnestly that she was of such importance to him and could do so much for him, was the ruler of the universe.

She had also felt, after Caesar's confession, that she had a right to be proud, since he had thought her worthy to take an interest in the tragedy in the imperial palace, as if she had been a member of the court. In her lively imagination she had witnessed the ghastly act to which he--as she had certainly believed, even when she had replied to his question--had been forced by fate.

But the demand which had followed her answer now recurred to her. The picture of Diodoros, which had completely vanished from her thoughts while she had been listening, suddenly appeared to her, and, as she fancied, he looked at her reproachfully.

Had she, then, transgressed against her betrothed?

No, no, indeed she had not!

She loved him, and only him; and for that very reason, her upright judgment told her now, that it would be sinning against her lover to carry out Caracalla's wish, as if she had become his fellow-culprit, or certainly the advocate of the bloody outrage. She could think of no answer to his "That is what you must and shall do!" that would not awaken his wrath. Cautiously, and with sincere thanks for his confidence in her, she begged him once more to allow her to leave him, because she needed rest after such a shock to her mind. And it would also do him good to grant himself a short rest. But he assured her he knew that he could only rest when he had fulfilled his duty as a sovereign. His father had said, a few minutes before he drew his last breath:

"If there is anything more to be done, give it me to do," and he, the son, would do likewise.

"Moreover," he concluded, "it has done me good to bring to light that which I had for so long kept sealed within me. To gaze in your face at the same time was, perhaps, even better physic."

At this he rose and, seizing the startled girl by both hands, he cried:

"You, child, can satisfy the insatiable! The love which I offer you resembles a full bunch of grapes, and yet I am quite content if you will give me back but one berry."

At the very commencement, this declaration was drowned by a loud shout which rang through the room in waves of sound.

Caracalla started, but, before he could reach the window, old Adventus rushed in breathless; and he was followed, though in a more dignified manner, with a not less hasty step and every sign of excitement, by Macrinus, the prefect of the praetorians, with his handsome young son and a few of Caesar's friends.

"This is how I rest!" exclaimed Caracalla, bitterly, as he released Melissa's hand and turned inquiringly to the intruders.

The news had spread among the praetorians and the Macedonian legions, that the emperor, who, contrary to his custom, had not shown himself for two days, was seriously ill, and at the point of death. Feeling extremely anxious about one who had showered gold on them, and given them such a degree of freedom as no other emperor had ever allowed them, they had collected before the Serapeum and demanded to see Caesar. Caracalla's eyes lighted up at this information, and, excitedly pleased, he cried:

"They only are really faithful!"

He asked for his sword and helmet, and sent for the 'paludamentum', the general's cloak of purple, embroidered with gold, which he never otherwise wore except on the field. The soldiers should see that he intended leading in future battles.

While they waited, he conversed quietly with Macrinus and the others; when, however, the costly garment covered his shoulders, and when his favorite, Theocritus, who had known best how to support him during his illness, offered him an arm, he answered imperiously that he required no assistance.

"Nevertheless, you should, after so serious an attack--" the physician in ordinary ventured to exhort him; but he interrupted him scornfully, and, glancing toward Melissa, exclaimed:

"Those little hands there contain more healing power than yours and the great Galenus's put together."

Thereupon he beckoned to the young girl, and when she once more besought his permission to go, he left the room with the commanding cry, "You are to wait!"

He had rather far to go and some steps to mount in order to reach the balcony which ran round the base of the

cupola of the Pantheon which his father had joined to the Serapeum, yet he undertook this willingly, as thence he could best be seen and heard.

A few hours earlier it would have been impossible for him to reach this point, and Epagathos had arranged that a sedan-chair and strong bearers should be waiting at the foot of the steps; but he refused it, for he felt entirely restored, and the shouts of his warriors intoxicated him like sparkling wine.

Meanwhile Melissa remained behind in the audience-chamber. She must obey Caesar's command. Yet it frightened her; and, besides, she was woman enough to feel it as an offense that the man who had assured her so sincerely of his gratitude, and who even feigned to love her, should have refused so harshly her desire to rest. She foresaw that, as long as he remained in Alexandria, she would have to be his constant companion. She trembled at the idea; yet, if she tried to fly from him, all she loved would be lost. No, this must not be thought of! She must remain.

She threw herself on a divan, lost in thought, and as she realized the confidence of which the unapproachable, proud emperor had thought her worthy, a secret voice whispered to her that it was certainly a delightful thing to share the overwhelming agitations of the highest and greatest. And was he then really bad, he who felt the necessity of vindicating himself before a simple girl, and to whom it appeared so intolerable to be misjudged and condemned even by her? Besides being the emperor and a suffering man, Caracalla had also become her wooer. It never once entered her mind to accept him; but still it flattered her extremely that the greatest of men should declare his love for her. Why, then, need she fear him? She was so important to him, she could do so much for him, that he would surely take care not to insult or offend her. This modest child, who till quite lately had trembled before her own father's temper, now, in the consciousness of Caesar's favor, felt herself strong to triumph over the wrath and passions of the most powerful and most terrible of men. In the mean time she dared not risk confessing to him that she was another's bride, for that might determine him to let Diodoros feel his power. The thought that the emperor could care about her good opinion greatly pleased her; it even had the effect of raising the hope in her inexperienced mind that Caracalla would moderate his passion for her sake--when old Adventus came into the room.

He was in a hurry; for preparations had to be made in the dining-hall for the reception of the ambassadors. But when at his appearance Melissa rose from the divan he begged her good-naturedly to continue resting. No one could tell what humor Caracalla might be in when he returned. She had often seen how rapidly that chameleon could change color. Who that had seen him just now, going to meet his soldiers, would believe that he had a few hours before sent away, with hard words, the widow of the Egyptian governor, who had come to beg mercy for her husband?

"So that wretch, Theocritus, has really carried out his intention of ruining the honest Titianus?" asked Melissa, horrified.

"Not only of ruining him," answered the chamberlain; "Titianus is by this time beheaded."

The old man bowed and left the room; but Melissa remained behind, feeling as if the floor had opened in front of her. He, whose ardent assurance she had just now believed, that he had been forced to shed the blood of an impious wretch, in obedience to an overpowering fate, was capable of allowing the noblest of men to be beheaded, unjudged, merely to please a mercenary favorite! His confession, then, had been nothing but a revolting piece of acting! He had endeavored to vanquish the disgust she felt for him merely to ensnare her and her healing hand more surely--as his plaything, his physic, his sleeping draught. And she had entered the trap, and acquitted him of the most horrible blood-guiltiness.

He had that very day rejected, without pity, a noble Roman lady who petitioned for her husband's life, and with the same breath he had afterwards befooled her!

She started up, indignant and deeply wounded. Was it not ignominious even to wait here like a prisoner in obedience to the command of this wretch? And she had dared for one moment to compare this monster with Diodoros, the handsomest, the best, and most amiable of youths!

It seemed to her inconceivable. If only he had not the power to destroy all that was dearest to her heart, what pleasure it would have been to shout in his face:

"I detest you, murderer, and I am the betrothed of another, who is as good and beautiful as you are vile and odious!"

Then the question occurred to her whether it was only for the sake of her healing hands that he had felt attracted to her, and had made her an avowal as if she were his equal.

The blood mounted to her face at this thought, and with a burning brow she walked to the open window.

A crowd of presentiments rushed into her innocent and, till then, unsuspecting heart, and they were all so alarming that it was a relief to her when a shout of joy from the panoplied breasts of several thousand armed men rent the air. Mingling with this overpowering demonstration of united rejoicing from such huge masses, came the blare of the trumpets and horns of the assembled legions. What a maddening noise!

Before her lay the square, filled with many legions of warriors who surrounded the Serapeum in their shining armor, with their eagles and vexilla. The praetorians stood by the picked men of the Macedonian phalanx, and with these were all the troops who had escorted the imperial general hither, and the garrisons of the city of Alexander who hoped to be

called out in the next war.

On the balcony, decorated with statues which surrounded the colonnade of the Pantheon on which the cupola rested, she saw Caracalla, and at a respectful distance a superb escort of his friends, in red and white togas, bordered with purple stripes, and wearing armor. Having taken off his gold helmet, the imperial general bowed to his people, and at every nod of his head, and each more vigorous movement, the enthusiastic cheers were renewed more loudly than ever.

Macrinus then stepped up to Caesar's side, and the lictors who followed him, by lowering their fasces, signaled to the warriors to keep silence.

Instantly the ear-splitting din changed to a speechless lull.

At first she still heard the lances and shields, which several of the warriors had waved in enthusiastic joy, ringing against the ground, and the clatter of the swords being put back in their sheaths; then this also ceased, and finally, although only the superior officers had arrived on horseback, the stamping of hoofs, the snorting of the horses, and the rattle of the chains at their bits, were the only sounds.

Melissa listened breathlessly, looking first at the square and the soldiers below, then at the balcony where the emperor stood. In spite of the aversion she felt, her heart beat quicker. It was as if this immeasurable army had only one voice; as if an irresistible force drew all these thousands of eyes toward one point--the one little man up there on the Pantheon.

Directly he began to speak, Melissa's glance was also fixed on Caracalla.

She only heard the closing sentence, as, with raised voice, he shouted to the soldiers; and from it she gathered that he thanked his companions in arms for their anxiety, but that he still felt strong enough to share all their difficulties with them. Severe exertions lay behind them. The rest in this luxurious city would do them all good. There was still much to be conquered in the rich East, and to add to what they had already won, before they could return to Rome to celebrate a well-earned triumph. The weary should make themselves comfortable here. The wealthy merchants in whose houses he had quartered them had been told to attend to their wants, and if they neglected to do so every single warrior was man enough to show them what a soldier needed for his comfort. The people here looked askance at him and his soldiers, but too much moderation would be misplaced.

There certainly were some things even here which the host was not bound to supply to his military; he, Caesar, would provide them with these, and for that purpose he had put aside two million denarii out of his own poverty to distribute among them.

This speech had several times been interrupted by applause, but now such a tremendous shout of joy went up that it would have drowned the loudest thunder. The number of voices as well as their power seemed to have doubled.

Caracalla had added another link to the golden chain which already bound him to these faithful people; and, as he smiled and nodded to the delighted crowd from the balcony, he looked like a happy, light-hearted youth who had prepared a great treat for himself and several beloved friends.

What he said further was lost in the confusion of voices in the square. The ranks were broken up, and the cuirasses, helmets, and arms of the moving warriors caught the sun and sent bright beams of light crossing one another over the wide space surrounded with dazzling white marble statues.

When Caracalla left the balcony, Melissa drew back from the window.

The compassionate impulse to lighten the lot of a sufferer, which had before drawn her so strongly to Caracalla, had now lost its sense and meaning for this healthy, high-spirited man. She considered herself cheated, as if she had been fooled by sham suffering into giving excessively large alms to an artful beggar.

Besides, she loved her native town, and Caracalla's advice to the soldiers to force the citizens to provide luxurious living for them, had made her considerably more rebellious. If he ever put her again in a position to speak her mind freely to him, she would tell him all undisguisedly; but instantly it again rushed into her mind that she must keep guard over her tongue before the easily unchained wrath of this despot, until her father and brothers were in safety once more.

Before the emperor returned, the room was filled with people, of whom she knew none, excepting her old friend the white-haired, learned Samonicus. She was the aim and center of all eyes, and when even the kindly old man greeted her from a distance, and so contemptuously, that the blood rushed to her face, she begged Adventus to take her into the next room.

The Chamberlain did as she wished, but before he left her he whispered to her: "Innocence is trusting; but it is not of much avail here. Take care, child! They say there are sand-banks in the Nile which, like soft pillows, entice one to rest. But if you use them they become alive, and a crocodile creeps out, with open jaws. I am talking already in metaphor, like an Alexandrian, but you will understand me."

Melissa bowed acknowledgment to him, and the old man went on:

"He may perhaps forget you; for many things had accumulated during his illness. If the mass of business, as it comes in, is not settled for twenty four hours, it swells like a mill-stream that has the sluice down. But when work is begun, it quite carries him away. He forgets then to eat and drink. Ambassadors have arrived also from the Empress-mother, from Armenia, and Parthia. If he does not ask for you in half an hour, it will be suppertime, and I will let you out through that door."

"Do so at once," begged Melissa, with raised, petitioning hands; but the old man replied: "I should then reward you but ill for having warmed my feet for me. Remember the crocodile under the sand! Patience, child! There is Caesar's zithern. If you can play, amuse yourself with that. The door shuts closely and the curtains are thick. My old ears just now were listening to no purpose."

But Caracalla was so far from forgetting Melissa that although he had attended to the communication brought to him by the ambassadors, and the various dispatches from the senate, he asked for her even at the door of the tablinum. He had seen her from the balcony looking out on the square; so she had witnessed the reception his soldiers had given him. The magnificent spectacle must have impressed her and filled her with joy. He was anxious to hear all this from her own lips, before he settled down to work.

Advertus whispered to him where he had taken her, to avoid the persecuting glances of the numerous strangers, and Caracalla nodded to him approvingly and went into the next room.

She sat there with the zithern, letting her fingers glide gently over the strings.

On his entering, she drew back hastily; but he cried to her brightly: "Do not disturb yourself. I love that instrument. I am having a statue erected to Mesomedes, the great zithern-player--you perhaps know his songs. This evening, when the feast and the press of work are over, I will hear how you play. I will also play a few airs to you."

Melissa then plucked up courage and said, decidedly: "No, my lord; I am about to bid you farewell for to-day."

"That sounds very determined," he answered, half surprised and half amused. "But may I be allowed to know what has made you decide on this step?"

"There is a great deal of work waiting for you," she replied, quietly.

"That is my affair, not yours," was the crushing answer.

"It is also mine," she said, endeavoring to keep calm; "for you have not yet completely recovered, and, should you require my help again this evening, I could not attend to your call."

"No?" he asked, wrathfully, and his eyelids began to twitch.

"No, my lord; for it would not be seemly in a maiden to visit you by night, unless you were ill and needed nursing. As it is, I shall meet your friends--my heart stands still only to think of it--"

"I will teach them what is due to you!" Caracalla bellowed out, and his brow was knit once more.

"But you can not compel me," she replied, firmly, "to change my mind as to what is seemly," and the courage which failed her if she met a spider, but which stood by her in serious danger as a faithful ally, made her perfectly steadfast as she eagerly added: "Not an hour since you promised me that so long as I remained with you I should need no other protector, and might count on your gratitude. But those were mere words, for, when I besought you to grant me some repose, you scorned my very reasonable request, and roughly ordered me to remain and attend on you."

At this Caesar laughed aloud.

"Just so! You are a woman, and like all the rest. You are sweet and gentle only so long as you have your own way."

"No, indeed," cried Melissa, and her eyes filled with tears. "I only look further than from one hour to the next. If I should sacrifice what I think right, merely to come and go at my own will, I should soon be not only miserable myself, but the object of your contempt."

Overcome by irresistible distress, she broke into loud sobs; but Caracalla, with a furious stamp of his foot, exclaimed:

"No tears! I can not, I will not see you weep. Can any harm come to you? Nothing but good; nothing but the best of happiness do I propose for you. By Apollo and Zeus, that is the truth! Till now you have been unlike other women, but when you behave like them, you shall--I swear it--you shall feel which of us two is the stronger!"

He roughly snatched her hand away from her face and thereby achieved his end, for her indignation at being thus touched by a man's brutal hand gave Melissa strength to suppress her sobs. Only her wet cheeks showed what a flood of tears she had shed, as, almost beside herself with anger, she exclaimed:

"Let my hand go! Shame on the man who insults a defenseless girl! You swear! Then I, too, may take an oath, and, by the head of my mother, you shall never see me again excepting as a corpse, if you ever attempt violence! You are Caesar--you are the stronger. Who ever doubted it? But you will never compel me to a vile action, not if you could inflict a thousand deaths on me instead of one!"

Caracalla, without a word, had released her hand and was staring at her in amazement.

A woman, and so gentle a woman, defying him as no man would have dared to do!

She stood before him, her hand raised, her bosom heaving; a flame of anger sparkled in her eyes through their tears, and he had never before thought her so fair. What majesty there was in this girl, whose simple grace had made him more than once address her as "child"! She was like a queen, an empress; perhaps she might become one. The idea struck him for the first time. And that little hand which now fell--what soothing power it had, how much he owed to it! How fervently he had wished but just now to be understood by her, and to be thought better of by her than by the rest! And this wish still possessed him. Nay, he was more strongly attracted than ever to this creature, worthy as she was of the highest in the land, and made doubly bewitching by her proud willfulness. That he should see her for the last time seemed to him as impossible as that he should never again see daylight; and yet her whole aspect announced that her threat was serious.

His aggrieved pride and offended sense of absolute power struggled with his love, repentance, and fear of losing her healing presence; but the struggle was brief, especially as a mass of business to be attended to lay before him like a steep hill to climb, and haste was imperative.

He went up to her, shaking his head, and said in the superior tone of a sage rebuking thoughtlessness:

"Like all the rest of them--I repeat it. My demands had no object in view but to make you happy and derive comfort from you. How hot must the blood be which boils and foams at the contact of a spark! Only too like my own; and, since I understand you, I find it easy to forgive you. Indeed, I must finally express myself grateful; for I was in danger of neglecting my duties as a sovereign for the sake of pleasing my heart. Go, then, and rest, while I devote myself to business."

At this, Melissa forced herself to smile, and said, still somewhat tearfully: "How grateful I am! And you will not again require me to remain, will you, when I assure you that it is not fitting?"

"Unluckily, I am not in the habit of yielding to a girl's whims."

"I have no whims," she eagerly declared. "But you will keep your word now, and allow me to withdraw? I implore you to let me go!"

With a deep sigh and an amount of self-control of which he would yesterday have thought himself incapable, he let go her hand, and she with a shudder thought that she had found the answer to the question he had asked her. His eyes, not his words, had betrayed it; for a woman can see in a suitor's look what color his wishes take, while a woman's eyes only tell her lover whether or no she reciprocates his feelings.

"I am going," she said, but he remarked the deadly paleness which overspread her features, and her colorless cheeks encouraged him in the belief that, after a sleepless night and the agitations of the last few hours, it was only physical exhaustion which made Melissa so suddenly anxious to escape from him. So, saying kindly:

"Till to-morrow, then," he dismissed her.

But when she had almost left the room, he added: "One thing more! To-morrow we will try our zitherns together. After my bath is the time I like best for such pleasant things; Adventus will fetch you. I am curious to hear you play and sing. Of all sounds, that of the human voice is the sweetest. Even the shouting of my legions is pleasing to the ear and heart. Do you not think so, and does not the acclamation of so many thousands stir your soul?"

"Certainly," she replied hastily; and she longed to reproach him for the injustice he was doing the populace of Alexandria to benefit his warriors, but she felt that the time was ill chosen, and everything gave way to her longing to be gone out of the dreadful man's sight.

In the next room she met Philostratus, and begged him to conduct her to the lady Euryale; for all the anterooms were now thronged, and she had lost the calm confidence in which she had come thither.

CHAPTER XXII.

As Melissa made her way with the philosopher through the crowd, Philostratus said to her: "It is for your sake, child, that these hundreds have had so long to wait to-day, and many hopes will be disappointed. To satisfy all is a giant's task. But Caracalla must do it, well or ill."

"Then he will forget me!" replied Melissa, with a sigh of relief.

"Hardly," answered the philosopher. He was sorry for the terrified girl, and in his wish to lighten her woes as far as he could, he said, gravely: "You called him terrible, and he can be more terrible than any man living. But he has been kind to you so far, and, if you take my advice, you will always seem to expect nothing from him that is not good and noble."

"Then I must be a hypocrite," replied Melissa. "Only to-day he has murdered the noble Titianus."

"That is an affair of state which does not concern you," replied Philostratus. "Read my description of Achilles. I represent him among other heroes such as Caracalla might be. Try, on your part, to see him in that light. I know that it is sometimes a pleasure to him to justify the good opinion of others. Encourage your imagination to think the best of him. I shall tell him that you regard him as magnanimous and noble."

"No, no!" cried Melissa; "that would make everything worse."

But the philosopher interrupted her.

"Trust my riper experience. I know him. If you let him know your true opinion of him, I will answer for nothing. My Achilles reveals the good qualities with which he came into the world; and if you look closely you may still find sparks among the ashes."

He here took his leave, for they had reached the vestibule leading to the high-priest's lodgings, and a few minutes later Melissa found herself with Euryale, to whom she related all that she had seen and felt. When she told her older friend what Philostratus had advised, the lady stroked her hair, and said: "Try to follow the advice of so experienced a man. It can not be very difficult. When a woman's heart has once been attached to a man--and pity is one of the strongest of human ties--the bond may be strained and worn, but a few threads must always remain."

But Melissa hastily broke in:

"There is not a spider's thread left which binds me to that cruel man. The murder of Titianus has snapped them all."

"Not so," replied the lady, confidently. "Pity is the only form of love which even the worst crime can not eradicate from a kind heart. You prayed for Caesar before you knew him, and that was out of pure human charity. Exercise now a wider compassion, and reflect that Fate has called you to take care of a hapless creature raving in fever and hard to deal with. How many Christian women, especially such as call themselves deaconesses, voluntarily assume such duties! and good is good, right is right for all, whether they pray to one God or to several. If you keep your heart pure, and constantly think of the time which shall be fulfilled for each of us, to our ruin or to our salvation, you will pass unharmed through this great peril. I know it, I feel it."

"But you do not know him," exclaimed Melissa, "and how terrible he can be! And Diodoros! When he is well again, if he hears that I am with Caesar, in obedience to his call whenever he sends for me, and if evil tongues tell him dreadful things about me, he, too, will condemn me!"

"No, no," the matron declared, kissing her brow and eyes. "If he loves you truly, he will trust you."

"He loves me," sobbed Melissa; "but, even if he does not desert me when I am thus branded, his father will come between us."

"God forbid!" cried Euryale. "Remain what you are, and I will always be the same to you, come what may; and those who love you will not refuse to listen to an old woman who has grown gray in honor."

And Melissa believed her motherly, kind, worthy friend; and, with the new confidence which revived in her, her longing for her lover began to stir irresistibly. She wanted a fond glance from the eyes of the youth who loved her, and to whom, for another man's sake, she could not give all his due, nay, who had perhaps a right to complain of her. This she frankly confessed, and the matron herself conducted the impatient girl to see Diodoros.

Melissa again found Andreas in attendance on the sufferer, and she was surprised at the warmth with which the high-priest's wife greeted the Christian.

Diodoros was already able to be dressed and to sit up. He was pale and weak, and his head was still bound up, but he welcomed the girl affectionately, though with a mild reproach as to the rarity of her visits.

Andreas had already informed him that Melissa was kept away by her mediation for the prisoners, and so he was comforted by her assurance that if her duty would allow of it she would never leave him again. And the joy of having her there, the delight of gazing into her sweet, lovely face, and the youthful gift of forgetting the past in favor of the present, silenced every bitter reflection. He was soon blissfully listening to her with a fresh color in his cheeks, and

never had he seen her so tender, so devoted, so anxious to show him the fullness of her great love. The quiet, reserved girl was to-day the wooer, and with the zeal called forth by her ardent wish to do him good, she expressed all the tenderness of her warm heart so frankly and gladly that to him it seemed as though Eros had never till now pierced her with the right shaft.

As soon as Euryale was absorbed in conversation with Andreas, she offered him her lips with gay audacity, as though in defiance of some stern dragon of virtue, and he, drunk with rapture, enjoyed what she granted him. And soon it was he who became daring, declaring that there would be time enough to talk another day; that for the present her rosy mouth had nothing to do but to cure him with kisses. And during this sweet give and take, she implored him with pathetic fervor never, never to doubt her love, whatever he might hear of her. Their older friends, who had turned their backs on the couple and were talking busily by a window, paid no heed to them, and the blissful conviction of being loved as ardently as she loved flooded her whole being.

Only now and then did the thought of Caesar trouble for a moment the rapture of that hour, like a hideous form appearing out of distant clouds. She felt prompted indeed to tell her lover everything, but it seemed so difficult to make him understand exactly how everything had happened, and Diodoros must not be distressed. And, indeed, intoxicated as he was with heated passion, he made the attempt impossible.

When he spoke it was only to assure her of his love; and when the lady Euryale at last called her to go, and looked in the girl's glowing face, Melissa felt as though she were snatched from a rapturous dream.

In the anteroom they were stopped by Andreas. Euryale had indeed relieved his worst fears, still he was anxious to lay before the girl the question whether she would not be wise to take advantage of this very night to make her escape. She, however, her eyes still beaming with happiness, laid her little hand coaxingly on his bearded mouth, and begged him not to sadden her high spirits and hopes of a better time by warnings and dismal forecasts. Even the lady Euryale had advised her to trust fearlessly to herself, and sitting with her lover she had acquired the certainty that it was best so. The freedman could not bear to disturb this happy confidence, and only impressed on Melissa that she should send for him if ever she needed him. He would find her a hiding-place, and the lady Euryale had undertaken to provide a messenger. He then bade them godspeed, and they returned to the high-priest's dwelling.

In the vestibule they found a servant from the lady Berenike; in his mistress's name he desired Euryale to send Melissa to spend the night with her.

This invitation, which would remove Melissa from the Serapeum, was welcome to them both, and the matron herself accompanied the young girl down a private staircase leading to a small side-door. Argutis, who had come to inquire for his young mistress, was to be her escort and to bring her back early next morning to the same entrance.

The old slave had much to tell her. He had been on his feet all day. He had been to the harbor to inquire as to the return of the vessel with the prisoners on board; to the Serapeum to inquire for her; to Dido, to give her the news. He had met Alexander in the forenoon on the quay where the imperial galleys were moored. When the young man learned that the trireme could not come in before next morning at the soonest, he had set out to cross the lake and see Zeus and his daughter. He had charged Argutis to let Melissa know that his longing for the fair Agatha gave him no peace.

He and old Dido disapproved of their young master's feather-brain, which had not been made more steady and patient even by the serious events of this day and his sister's peril; however, he did not allow a word of blame to escape him. He was happy only to be allowed to walk behind Melissa, and to hear from her own lips that all was well with her, and that Caesar was gracious.

Alexander, indeed, had also told the old man that he and Caesar were "good friends"; and now the slave was thinking of Pandion, Theocritus, and the other favorites of whom he had heard; and he assured Melissa that, as soon as her father should be free, Caracalla would be certain to raise him to the rank of knight, to give him lands and wealth, perhaps one of the imperial residences on the Bruchium. Then he, Argutis, would be house steward, and show that he knew other things besides keeping the workroom and garden in order, splitting wood, and buying cheaply at market.

Melissa laughed and said he should be no worse off if only the first wish of her heart were fulfilled, and she were wife to Diodoros; and Argutis declared he would be amply content if only she allowed him to remain with her.

But she only half listened and answered absently, for she breathed faster as she pictured to herself how she would show Caesar, on whom she had already proved her power, that she had ceased to tremble before him.

Thus they came to the house of Seleukus.

A large force had taken up their quarters there. In the pillared hall beyond the vestibule bearded soldiers were sitting on benches or squatting in groups on the ground, drinking noisily and singing, or laughing and squabbling as they threw the dice on the costly mosaic pavement. A riotous party were toying and reveling in the beautiful garden of the impluvium round a fire which they had lighted on the velvet turf. A dozen or so of officers had stretched themselves on cushions under one of the colonnades, and, without attempting to check the wild behavior of their men, were watching the dancing of some Egyptian girls who had been brought into the house of their involuntary host. Although Melissa was closely veiled and accompanied by a servant, she did not escape rude words and insolent glances. Indeed, an

audacious young praetorian had put out his hand to pull away her veil, but an older officer stopped him.

The lady Berenike's rooms had so far not been intruded on; for Macrinus, the praetorian prefect, who knew Berenike through her brother-in-law the senator Coeranus, had given orders that the women's apartments were to be exempt from the encroachments of the quartermaster of the body-guard. Breathing rapidly and with a heightened color, Melissa at last entered the room of Seleukus's wife.

The matron's voice was full of bitterness as she greeted her young visitor with the exclamation "You look as if you had fled to escape persecution! And in my house, too! Or"--and her large eyes flashed brightly--"or is the blood-hound on the track of his prey? My boat is quite ready--" When Melissa denied this, and related what had happened, Berenike exclaimed: "But you know that the panther lies still and gathers himself up before he springs; or, if you do not, you may see it to-morrow at the Circus. There is to be a performance in Caesar's honor, the like of which not even Nero ever saw. My husband bears the chief part of the cost, and can think of nothing else. He has even forgotten his only child, and all to please the man who insults us, robs and humiliates us! Now that men kiss the hands which maltreat them, it is the part of women to defy them. You must fly, child! The harbor is now closed, but it will be open again to-morrow morning, and, if your folks are set free in the course of the day, then away with you at once! Or do you really hope for any good from the tyrant who has made this house what you now see it?"

"I know him," replied Melissa, "and I look for nothing but the worst."

At this the elder woman warmly grasped the girl's hand, but she was interrupted by the waiting woman Johanna, who said that a Roman officer of rank, a tribune, craved to be admitted.

When Berenike refused to receive him, the maid assured her that he was a young man, and had expressed his wish to bring an urgent request to the lady's notice in a becoming and modest manner.

On this the matron allowed him to be shown in to her, and Melissa hastily obeyed her instructions to withdraw into the adjoining room.

Only a half-drawn curtain divided it from the room where Berenike received the soldier, and without listening she could hear the loud voice which riveted her attention as soon as she had recognized it.

The young tribune, in a tone of courteous entreaty, begged his hostess to provide a room for his brother, who was severely wounded. The sufferer was in a high fever, and the physician said that the noise and rattle of vehicles in the street, on which the room where he now lay looked out, and the perpetual coming and going of the men, might endanger his life. He had just been told that on the side of the women's apartments there was a row of rooms looking out on the impluvium, and he ventured to entreat her to spare one of them for the injured man. If she had a brother or a child, she would forgive the boldness of his request.

So far she listened in silence; then she suddenly raised her head and measured the petitioner's tall figure with a lurid fire in her eye. Then she replied, while she looked into his handsome young face with a half-scornful, half-indignant air: "Oh, yes! I know what it is to see one we love suffer. I had an only child; she was the joy of my heart. Death--death snatched her from me, and a few days later the sovereign whom you serve commanded us to prepare a feast for him. It seemed to him something new and delightful to hold a revel in a house of mourning. At the last moment--all the guests were assembled--he sent us word that he himself did not intend to appear. But his friends laughed and reveled wildly enough! They enjoyed themselves, and no doubt praised our cook and our wine. And now--another honor we can duly appreciate!--he sends his praetorians to turn this house of mourning into a tavern, a wine-shop, where they call creatures in from the street to dance and sing. The rank to which you have risen while yet so young shows that you are of good family, so you can imagine how highly we esteem the honor of seeing your men trampling, destroying, and burning in their camp-fires everything which years of labor and care had produced to make our little garden a thing of beauty. 'Only look down on them!' Macrinus, who commands you, promised me, moreover, that the women's apartments should be respected. 'No praetorian, whether common soldier or commander,' and here she raised her voice, 'shall set foot within them!' Here is his writing. The prefect set the seal beneath it in Caesar's name."

"I know of the order, noble lady," interrupted Nemesianus, "and should be the last to wish to act against it. I do not demand, I only appeal humbly to the heart of a woman and a mother."

"A mother!" broke in Berenike, scornfully; "yes! and one whose soul your lord has pierced with daggers--a woman whose home has been dishonored and made hateful to her. I have enjoyed sufficient honor now, and shall stand firmly on my rights."

"Hear but one thing more," began the youth, timidly; but the lady Berenike had already turned her back upon him, and returned with a proud and stately carriage to Melissa in the adjoining apartment.

Breathing hard, as if stunned by her words, the tribune remained standing on the threshold where the terrible lady had vanished from his sight, and then, striving to regain his composure, pushed back the curling locks from his brow. But scarcely had Berenike entered the other room than Melissa whispered to her: "The wounded man is the unfortunate Aurelius, whose face Caracalla wounded for my sake."

At this the lady's eyes suddenly flashed and blazed so strangely that the girl's blood ran cold. But she had no time to

ask the reason of this emotion, for the next moment the queenly woman grasped the weaker one by the wrist with her strong right hand, and with a commanding "Come with me," drew her back into the room they had just quitted. She called to the tribune, whose hand was already on the door, to come back.

The young man stood still, surprised and startled to see Melissa; but the lady Berenike said, calmly, "Now that I have learned the honor that has been accorded to you, too, by the master whom you so faithfully serve, the poor injured man whom you call your brother shall be made welcome within these walls. He is my companion in suffering. A quiet, airy chamber shall be set apart for him, and he shall not lack careful attention, nor anything which even his own mother could offer him. Only two things I desire of you in return: that you admit no one of your companions-in-arms, nor any man whatever, into this dwelling, save only the physician whom I shall send to you. Furthermore, that you do not betray, even to your nearest friend, whom you found here besides myself."

Under the mortification that had wounded his brotherly heart, Aurelius Nemesianus had lost countenance; but now he replied with a soldier's ready presence of mind: "It is difficult for me to find a proper answer to you, noble lady. I know right well that I owe you my warmest thanks, and equally so that he whom you call our master has inflicted as deep a wrong on us as on you; but Caesar is still my military chief."

"Still!" broke in Berenike. "But you are too youthful a tribune for me to believe that you took up the sword as a means of livelihood."

"We are sons of the Aurelia," answered Nemesianus, haughtily, "and it is very possible that this day's work may be the cause of our deserting the eagles we have followed in order to win glory and taste the delights of warfare. But all that is for the future to decide. Meanwhile, I thank you, noble lady, and also in the name of my brother, who is my second self. On behalf of Apollinaris, too, I beg you to pardon the rudeness which we offered to this maiden--"

"I am not angry with you any more," cried Melissa, eagerly and frankly, and the tribune thanked her in his own and his brother's name.

He began trying to explain the unfortunate occurrence, but Berenike admonished him to lose no time. The soldier withdrew, and the lady Berenike ordered her handmaiden to call the housekeeper and other serving-women. Then she repaired quickly to the room she had destined for the wounded man and his brother. But neither Melissa nor the other women could succeed in really lending her any help, for she herself put forth all her cleverness and power of head and hand, forgetting nothing that might be useful or agreeable in the nursing of the sick. In that wealthy, well-ordered house everything stood ready to hand; and in less than a quarter of an hour the tribune Nemesianus was informed that the chamber was ready for the reception of his brother.

The lady then returned with Melissa to her own sleeping apartment, and took various little bottles and jars from a small medicine-chest, begging the girl at the same time to excuse her, as she intended to undertake the nursing of the wounded man herself. Here were books, and there Korinna's lute. Johanna would attend to the evening meal. Tomorrow morning they could consult further as to what was necessary to be done; then she kissed her guest and left the room.

Left to herself, Melissa gave herself up to varying thoughts, till Johanna brought her repast. While she hardly nibbled at it, the Christian told her that matters looked ill with the tribune, and that the wound in the forehead especially caused the physician much anxiety. Many questions were needed to draw this much from the freedwoman, for she spoke but little. When she did speak, however, it was with great kindness, and there lay something so simple and gentle in her whole manner that it awakened confidence. Having satisfied her appetite, Melissa returned to the lady Berenike's apartment; but there her heart grew heavy at the thought of what awaited her on the morrow. When, at the moment of leaving, Johanna inquired whether she desired anything further, she asked her if she knew a saying of her fellow-believers, which ran, "The fullness of time was come."

"Yes, surely," returned the other; "our Lord himself spoke them, and Paul wrote them to the Galatians."

"Who is this Paul?" Melissa asked; and the Christian replied that of all the teachers of her faith he was the one she most dearly loved. Then, hesitating a little, she asked if Melissa, being a heathen, had inquired the meaning of this saying.

"Andrew, the freedman of Polybius and the lady Euryale, explained it to me. Did the moment ever come to you in which you felt assured that for you the time was fulfilled?"

"Yes," replied Johanna, with decision; "and that moment comes, sooner or later, in every life."

"You are a maiden like myself," began Melissa, simply. "A heavy task lies before me, and if you would confide to me--"

But the Christian broke in: "My life has moved in other paths than yours, and what has happened to me, the freedwoman and the Christian, can have no interest for you. But the saying which has stirred your soul refers to the coming of One who is all in all to us Christians. Did Andrew tell you nothing of His life?"

"Only a little," answered the girl, "but I would gladly hear more of Him."

Then the Christian seated herself at Melissa's side, and, clasping the maiden's hand in hers, told her of the birth of the Saviour, of His loving heart, and His willing death as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The girl listened

with attentive ear. With no word did she interrupt the narrative, and the image of the Crucified One rose before her mind's eye, pure and noble, and worthy of all love. A thousand questions rose to her lips, but, before she could ask one, the Christian was called away to attend the lady Berenike, and Melissa was again alone.

What she had already heard of the teaching of the Christians occurred to her once more, and above all that first saying from the sacred Scriptures which had attracted her attention, and about which she had just asked Johanna. Perhaps for her, too, the time was already fulfilled, when she had taken courage to defy the emperor's commands.

She rejoiced at this action, for she felt that the strength would never fail her now to set her will against his. She felt as though she bore a charm against his power since she had parted from her lover, and since the murder of the governor had opened her eyes to the true character of him on whom she had all too willingly expended her pity. And yet she shuddered at the thought of meeting the emperor again, and of having to show him that she felt safe with him because she trusted to his generosity.

Lost in deep thought, she waited for the return of the lady and the Christian waiting-woman, but in vain. At last her eye fell upon the scrolls which the lady Berenike had pointed out to her. They lay in beautiful alabaster caskets on an ebony stand. If they had only been the writings of the Christians, telling of the life and death of their Saviour! But how should writings such as those come here? The casket only held the works of Philostratus, and she took from it the roll containing the story of the hero of whom he had himself spoken to her. Full of curiosity, she smoothed out the papyrus with the ivory stick, and her attention was soon engaged by the lively conversation between the vintner and his Phoenician guest. She passed rapidly over the beginning, but soon reached the part of which Philostratus had told her. Under the form of Achilles he had striven to represent Caracalla as he appeared to the author's indulgent imagination. But it was no true portrait; it described the original at most as his mother would have wished him to be. There it was written that the vehemence flashing from the hero's bright eyes, even when peacefully inclined, showed how easily his wrath could break forth. But to those who loved him he was even more endearing during these outbursts than before. The Athenians felt toward him as they did toward a lion; for, if the king of beasts pleased them when he was at rest, he charmed them infinitely more when, foaming with bloodthirsty rage, he fell upon a bull, a wild boar, or some such ferocious animal.

Yes, indeed! Caracalla, too, fell mercilessly upon his prey! Had she not seen him hewing down Apollinaris a few hours ago?

Furthermore, Achilles was said to have declared that he could drive away care by fearlessly encountering the greatest dangers for the sake of his friends. But where were Caracalla's friends?

At best, the allusion could only refer to the Roman state, for whose sake the emperor certainly did endure many a hardship and many a wearisome task, and he was not the only person who had told her so.

Then she turned back a little and found the words: "But because he was easily inclined to anger, Chiron instructed him in music; for is it not inherent in this art to soothe violence and wrath--And Achilles acquired without trouble the laws of harmony and sang to the lyre."

This all corresponded with the truth, and tomorrow she was to discover what had suggested to Philostratus the story that when Achilles begged Calliope to endow him with the gifts of music and poetry she had given him so much of both as he required to enliven the feast and banish sadness. He was also said to be a poet, and devoted himself most ardently to verse when resting from the toils of war.

To hear that man unjustly blamed on whom her heart is set, only increases a woman's love; but unmerited praise makes her criticise him more sharply, and is apt to transform a fond smile into a scornful one. Thus the picture that raised Caracalla to the level of an Achilles made Melissa shrug her shoulders over the man she dreaded; and while she even doubted Caesar's musical capacities, Diodoros's young, fresh, bell-like voice rose doubly beautiful and true upon her memory's ear. The image of her lover finally drove out that of the emperor, and, while she seemed to hear the wedding song which the youths and maidens were so soon to sing for them both, she fell asleep.

It was late when Johanna came to admonish her to retire to rest. Shortly before sunrise she was awakened by Berenike, who wished to take some rest, and who told her, before seeking her couch, that Apollinaris was doing well. The lady was still sleeping when Johanna came to inform Melissa that the slave Argutis was waiting to see her.

The Christian undertook to convey the maiden's farewell greetings to her mistress.

As they entered the living-room, the gardener had just brought in fresh flowers, among them three rose-bushes covered with full-blown flowers and half-opened, dewy buds. Melissa asked Johanna timidly if the lady Berenike would permit her to pluck one--there were so many; to which the Christian replied that it would depend on the use it was to be put to.

"Only for the sick tribune," answered Melissa, reddening. So Johanna plucked two of the fairest blooms and gave them to the maiden--one for the man who had injured her and one for her betrothed. Melissa kissed her, gratefully, and begged her to present the flowers to the sick man in her name.

Johanna carried out her wish at once; but the wounded man, gazing mournfully at the rose, murmured to himself:

"Poor, lovely, gentle child! She will be ruined or dead before Caracalla leaves Alexandria!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

The slave Argutis was waiting for Melissa in the antechamber. It was evident that he brought good news, for he beamed with joy as she came toward him; and before she left the house she knew that her father and Philip had returned and had regained their freedom.

The slave had not allowed these joyful tidings to reach his beloved mistress's ear, that he might have the undivided pleasure of bringing them himself, and the delight she expressed was fully as great as he had anticipated. Melissa even hurried back to Johanna to impart to her the joyful intelligence that she might tell it to her mistress.

When they were in the street the slave told her that, at break of day, the ship had cast anchor which brought back father and son. The prisoners had received their freedom while they were still at sea, and had been permitted to return home at once. All was well, only--he added, hesitatingly and with tears in his eyes--things were not as they used to be, and now the old were stronger than the young. Her father had taken no harm from the heavy work at the oars, but Philip had returned from the galleys very ill, and they had carried him forthwith to the bedchamber, where Dido was now nursing him. It was a good thing that she had not been there to hear how the master had stormed and cursed over the infamy they had had to endure; but the meeting with his birds had calmed him down quickly enough.

Melissa and her attendant were walking in the direction of the Serapeum, but now she declared that she must first see the liberated prisoners. And she insisted upon it, although Argutis assured her of her father's intention of seeking her at the house of the high-priest, as soon as he had removed all traces of his captivity and his shameful work at the galleys in the bath. Philip she would, of course, find at home, he being too weak to leave the house. The old man had some difficulty in following his young mistress, and she soon stepped lightly over the "Welcome" on the threshold of her father's house. Never had the red mosaic inscription seemed to shine so bright and friendly, and she heard her name called in delighted tones from the kitchen.

This joyful greeting from Dido was not to be returned from the door only. In a moment Melissa was standing by the hearth; but the slave, speechless with happiness, could only point with fork and spoon, first to the pot in which a large piece of meat was being boiled down into a strengthening soup for Philip, then to a spit on which two young chickens were browning before the fire, and then to the pan where she was frying the little fish of which the returned wanderer was so fond.

But the old woman's struggle between the duty that kept her near the fire and the love that drew her away from it was not of long duration. In a few minutes Melissa, her hands clasping the slave's withered arm, was listening to the tender words of welcome that Dido had ready for her. The slave woman declared that she scarcely dared to let her eyes rest upon her mistress, much less touch her with the fingers that had just been cleaning fish; for the girl was dressed as grandly as the daughter of the high-priest. Melissa laughed at this; but the slave went on to say that they had not been able to detain her master. His longing to see his daughter and the desire to speak with Caesar had driven him out of the house, and Alexander had, of course, accompanied him. Only Philip, poor, crushed worm, was at home, and the sight of her would put more strength into him than the strong soup and the old wine which his father had fetched for him from the store-room, although he generally reserved it for libations on her mother's grave.

Melissa soon stood beside her brother's couch, and the sight of him cast a dark shadow over the brightness of this happy morn. As he recognized her, a fleeting smile crossed the pale, spiritualized face, which seemed to her to have grown ten years older in this short time; but it vanished as quickly as it had come. Then the great eyes gazed blankly again from the shadows that surrounded them, and a spasm of pain quivered from time to time round the thin, tightly closed lips. Melissa could hardly restrain her tears. Was this what he had been brought to--the youth who only a few days ago had made them all feel conscious of the superiority of his brilliant mind!

Her warm heart made her feel more lovingly toward her sick brother than she had ever done when he was in health, and surely he was conscious of the tenderness with which she strove to comfort him.

The unaccustomed, hard, and degrading work at the oars, she assured him, would have worn out a stronger man than he; but he would soon be able to visit the Museum again and argue as bravely as ever. With this, she bent over him to kiss his brow, but he raised himself a little, and said, with a contemptuous smile:

"Apathy--ataraxy--complete indifference--is the highest aim after which the soul of the skeptic strives. That at least"--and here his eyes flashed for a moment--"I have attained to in these cursed days. That a thinking being could become so utterly callous to everything--everything, be it what it may--even I could never have believed!" He sank into silence, but his sister urged him to take courage--surely many a glad day was before him yet.

At this he raised himself more energetically, and exclaimed:

"Glad days?--for me, and with you? That you should still be of such good cheer would please or else astonish me if I were still capable of those sentiments. If things were different, I should ask you now, what have you given the imperial bloodhound in return for our freedom?"

Here Melissa exclaimed indignantly, but he continued unabashed:

"Alexander says you have found favor with our imperial master. He calls, and you come. Naturally, it is for him to command. See how much can be made of the child of a gem-cutter! But what says handsome Diodoros to all this?-- Why turn so pale? These, truly, are questions which I would fling in your face were things as they used to be. Now I say in all unconcern, do what you will!"

The blood had ebbed from Melissa's cheeks during this attack of her brother's. His injurious and false accusations roused her indignation to the utmost, but one glance at his weary, suffering face showed her how great was the pain he endured, and in her compassionate heart pity strove against righteous anger. The struggle was sharp, but pity prevailed; and, instead of punishing him by a sharp retort, she forced herself to explain to him in a few gentle words what had happened, in order to dispel the unworthy suspicion that must surely hurt him as much as it did her. She felt convinced that the sufferer would be cheered by her words; but he made no attempt to show that he appreciated her kindly moderation, nor to express any satisfaction. On the contrary, when he spoke it was in the same tone as before.

"If that be the case," he said, "so much the better; but were it otherwise, it would have to be endured just the same. I can think of nothing that could affect me now, and it is well. Only my body troubles me still. It weighs upon me like lead, and grows heavier with every word I utter. Therefore, I pray you, leave me to myself!"

But his sister would not obey. "No, Philip," she cried, eagerly, "this may not be. Let your strong spirit arise and burst asunder the bonds that fetter and cripple it."

At this a groan of pain escaped the philosopher, and, turning again to the girl, he answered, with a mournful smile:

"Bid the cushion in that arm-chair do so. It will succeed better than I!" Then crying out impatiently and as loudly as he could, "Now go--you know not how you torture me!" he turned away from her and buried his face in the pillows.

But Melissa, as if beside herself, laid her hands upon his shoulder, and, shaking him gently, exclaimed: "And even if it vexes you, I will not be driven away thus. The misfortunes that have befallen you in these days will end by destroying you, if you will not pull yourself together. We must have patience, and it can only come about slowly, but you must make an effort. The least thing that pains you hurts us too, and you, in return, may not remain indifferent to what we feel. See, Philip, our mother and Andrew taught us often not to think only of ourselves, but of others. We ask so little of you; but if you--"

At this the philosopher shook himself free of her hand, and cried in a voice of anguish:

"Away, I say! Leave me alone! One word more, and I die!" With this he hid his head in the coverlet, and Melissa could see how his limbs quivered convulsively as if shaken by an ague.

To see a being so dear to her thus utterly broken down cut her to the heart. Oh, that she could help him! If she did not succeed, or if he never found strength to rouse himself, he, too, would be one of Caesar's victims. Corrupted and ruined lives marked the path of this terrible being, and, with a shudder, she asked herself when her turn would come.

Her hair had become disordered, and as she smoothed it she looked in the mirror, and could not but observe that in the simple but costly white robe of the dead Korinna she looked like a maiden of noble birth rather than the lowly daughter of an artist. She would have liked to tear it off and replace it by another, but her one modest festival robe had been left behind at the house of the lady Berenike. To appear in broad daylight before the neighbors or to walk in the streets clad in this fashion seemed to her impossible after her brother's unjust suspicion, and she bade Argutis fetch her a litter.

When they parted, Dido could see distinctly that Philip had wounded her. And she could guess how, so she withheld any questions, that she might not hurt her. Over the fire, however, she stabbed fiercely into the fowl destined for the philosopher, but cooked it, nevertheless, with all possible care.

On the way to the Serapeum, Melissa's anxiety increased. Till now, eagerness for the fray, fear, hope, and the joyful consciousness of right-doing, had alternated in her mind. Now, for the first time, she was seized with a premonition of misfortune. Fate itself had turned against her. Even should she succeed in escaping, she could not hope to regain her lost peace of mind.

Philip's biting words had shown her what most of them must think of her; and, though the ship should bear her far away, would it be right to bring Diodoros away from his old father to follow her? She must see her lover, and if possible tell him all. The rose, too, which the Christian had given her for him, and which lay in her lap, she wished so much to carry to him herself. She could not go alone to the chamber of the convalescent, and the attendance of a slave counted for nothing in the eyes of other people. It was even doubtful if a bondsman might be admitted into the inner apartments of the sanctuary. However, she would, she must see Diodoros and speak to him; and thus planning ways and means by which to accomplish this, looking forward joyfully to the meeting with her father, and wondering how Agatha, the Christian, had received Alexander, she lost the feeling of deep depression which had weighed on her when she had left the house.

The litter stopped, and Argutis helped her to descend. He was breathless, for it had been most difficult to open a way for her through the dense crowds that were already thronging to the Circus, where the grand evening performance

in honor of the emperor was to begin as soon as it was dark. Just as she was entering the house, she perceived Andreas coming toward them along the street of Hermes, and she at once bade the slave call him. He was soon at her side, and declared himself willing to accompany her to Diodoros.

This time, however, she did not find her lover alone in the sick-room. Two physicians were with him, and she grew pale as she recognized in one of them the emperor's Roman body-physician.

But it was too late to escape detection; so she only hastened to her lover's side, whispered warm words of love in his ear, and, while she gave him the rose, conjured him ever and always to have faith in her and in her love, whatever reports he might hear.

Diodoros was up and had fully recovered. His face lighted up with joy as he saw her; but, when she repeated the old, disquieting request, he anxiously begged to know what she meant by it. She assured him, however, that she had already delayed too long, and referred him to Andreas and the lady Euryale, who would relate to him what had befallen her and spoiled every happy hour she had. Then, thinking herself unobserved by those present, she breathed a kiss upon his lips. But he would not let her go, urging with passionate tenderness his rights as her betrothed, till she tore herself away from him and hurried from the room.

As she left, she heard a ringing laugh, followed by loud, sprightly talking. It was not her lover's voice, and endeavoring, while she waited for Andreas, to catch what was being said on the other side of the door, she distinctly heard the body-physician (for no other pronounced the Greek language in that curious, halting manner) exclaim, gayly: "By Cerberus, young man, you are to be envied! The beauty my sovereign lord is limping after flies unbidden into your arms!"

Then came loud laughter as before, but this time interrupted by Diodoros's indignant question as to what this all meant. At last Melissa heard Andreas's deep voice promising the young man to tell him everything later on; and when the convalescent impatiently asked for an immediate explanation, the Christian exhorted him to be calm, and finally requested the physician to grant him a few moments' conversation.

Then there was quiet for a time in the room, only broken by Diodoros's angry questions and the pacifying exclamations of the freedman. She felt as if she must return to her lover and tell him herself what she had been forced to do in these last days, but maidenly shyness restrained her, till at last Andreas came out. The freedman's honest face expressed the deepest solicitude, and his voice sounded rough and hasty as he exclaimed, "You must fly--fly this day!"

"And my father and brother, and Diodoros?" she asked, anxiously.

But he answered, urgently: "Let them get away as they may. There is no hole or corner obscure enough to keep you hidden. Therefore take advantage of the ship that waits for you. Follow Argutis at once to the lady Berenike. I can not accompany you, for it lies with me to occupy for the next few hours the attention of the body-physician, from whom you have the most to fear. He has consented to go with me to my garden across the water. There I promised him a delicious, real Alexandrian feast, and you know how gladly Polybius will seize the opportunity to share it with him. No doubt, too, some golden means may be found to bind his tongue; for woe to you if Caracalla discovers prematurely that you are promised to another, and woe then to your betrothed! After sundown, when every one here has gone to the Circus, I will take Diodoros to a place of safety. Farewell, child, and may our heavenly Father defend you!"

He laid his right hand upon her head as if in blessing; but Melissa cried, wringing her hands: "Oh, let me go to him once more! How can I leave him and go far away without one word of farewell or of forgiveness?"

But Andreas interrupted her, saying: "You can not. His life is at stake as well as your own. I shall make it my business to look after his safety. The wife of Seleukus will assist you in your flight."

"And you will persuade him to trust me?" urged Melissa, clinging convulsively to his arm.

"I will try," answered the freedman, gloomily. Melissa, dropped his arm, for loud, manly voices were approaching down the stairs near which they stood.

It was Heron and Alexander, returning from their audience with the emperor. Instantly the Christian went to meet them, and dismissed the temple servant who accompanied them.

In the half-darkness of the corridor, Melissa threw herself weeping into her father's arms. But he stroked her hair lovingly, and kissed her more tenderly on brow and eyes than he had ever done before, whispering gayly to her: "Dry your tears, my darling. You have been a brave maiden, and now comes your reward. Fear and sorrow will now be changed into happiness and power, and all the glories of the world. I have not even told Alexander yet what promises to make our fortunes, for I know my duty." Then, raising his voice, he said to the freedman, "If I have been rightly informed, we shall find the son of Polybius in one of the apartments close at hand."

"Quite right," answered the freedman, gravely, and then went on to explain to the gem-cutter that he could not see Diodoros just now, but must instantly leave the country with his son and daughter on Berenike's ship. Not a moment was to be lost. Melissa would tell him all on the way.

But Heron laughed scornfully: "That would be a pretty business! We have plenty of time, and, with the greatness that lies before us, everything must be done openly and in the right way. My first thought, you see, was to come here,

for I had promised the girl to Diodoros, and he must be informed before I can consent to her betrothal to another."

"Father!" cried Melissa, scarcely able to command her voice. But Heron took no notice of her, and continued, composedly: "Diodoros would have been dear to me as a son-in-law. I shall certainly tell him so. But when Caesar, the ruler of the world, condescends to ask a plain man for his daughter, every other consideration must naturally be put aside. Diodoros is sensible, and is sure to see it in the right light. We all know how Caesar treats those who are in his way; but I wish the son of Polybius no ill, so I forbore to betray to Caesar what tie had once bound you, my child, to the gallant youth."

Heron had never liked the freedman. The man's firm character had always gone against the gemcutter's surly, capricious nature; and it was no little satisfaction to him to let him feel his superiority, and boast before him of the apparent good luck that had befallen the artist's family.

But Andreas had already heard from the physician that Caracalla had informed his mother's envoys of his intended marriage with an Alexandrian, the daughter of an artist of Macedonian extraction. This could only refer to Melissa, and it was this news which had caused him to urge the maiden to instant flight.

Pale, incapable of uttering a word, Melissa stood before her father; but the freedman grasped her hand, looked Heron reproachfully in the face, and asked, quietly, "And you would really have the heart to join this dear child's life to that of a bloody tyrant?"

"Certainly I have," returned Heron with decision, and he drew his daughter's hand out of that of Andreas, who turned his back upon the artist with a meaning shrug of the shoulders. But Melissa ran after him, and, clinging to him, cried as she turned first to him and then to her father:

"I am promised to Diodoros, and shall hold fast to him and my love; tell him that, Andreas! Come what may, I will be his and his alone! Caesar--"

"Swear not!" broke in Heron, angrily, "for by great Serapis--"

But Alexander interposed between them, and begged his father to consider what he was asking of the girl. Caesar's proposals could scarcely have been very pleasing to him, or why had he concealed till now what Caracalla was whispering to him in the adjoining room? He might imagine for himself what fate awaited the helpless child at the side of a husband at whose name even men trembled. He should remember her mother, and what she would have said to such a union. There was little, time to escape from this terrible wooer.

Then Melissa turned to her brother and begged him earnestly: "Then you take me to the ship Alexander; take charge of me yourself!"

"And I?" asked Heron, his eye cast gloomily on the ground.

"You must come with us!" implored the girl, clasping her hands.--"O Andreas! say something! Tell him what I have to expect!"

"He knows that without my telling him," replied the freedman. "I must go now, for two lives are at stake, Heron. If I can not keep the physician away from Caesar, your daughter, too, will be in danger. If you desire to see your daughter forever in fear of death, give her in marriage to Caracalla. If you have her happiness at heart, then escape with her into a far country."

He nodded to the brother and sister, and returned to the sick-room.

"Fly!--escape!" repeated the old man, and he waived his hand angrily. "This Andreas--the freedman, the Christian--always in extremes. Why run one's head against the wall? First consider, then act; that was what she taught us whose sacred memory you have but now invoked, Alexander."

With this he walked out of the half-dark corridor into the open court-yard, in front of his children. Here he looked at his daughter, who was breathing fast, and evidently prepared to resist to the last. And as he beheld her in Korinna's white and costly robes, like a noble priestess, it occurred to him that even before his captivity she had ceased to be the humble, unquestioning instrument of his capricious temper. Into what a haughty beauty the quiet embroideress had been transformed!

By all the gods! Caracalla had no cause to be ashamed of such an empress.

And, unaccustomed as he was to keep back anything whatever from his children, he began to express these sentiments. But he did not get far, for the hour for the morning meal being just over, the court-yard began to fill from all sides with officials and servants of the temple. So, father and son silently followed the maiden through the crowded galleries and apartments, into the house of the highpriest.

Here they were received by Philostratus, who hardly gave Melissa time to greet the lady Euryale before he informed her, but with unwonted hurry and excitement, that the emperor was awaiting her with impatience.

The philosopher motioned to her to follow him, but she clung, as if seeking help, to her brother, and cried: "I will not go again to Caracalla! You are the kindest and best of them all, Philostratus, and you will understand me. Evil will come of it if I follow you--I can not go again to Caesar."

But it was impossible for the courtier to yield to her, in the face of his monarch's direct commands; therefore, hard as it was to him, he said, resolutely: "I well understand what holds you back; still, if you would not ruin yourself and your family, you must submit. Besides which, you know not what Caesar is about to offer you--fortunate, unhappy child!"

"I know--oh, I know it!" sobbed Melissa; "but it is just that... I have served the emperor willingly, but before I consent become the wife of such a monster--"

"She is right," broke in Euryale, and drew Melissa toward her. But the philosopher took the girl's hand and said, kindly:--"You must come with me now, my child, and pretend that you know nothing of Caesar's intentions toward you. It is the only way to save you. But while you are with the emperor, who, in any case, can devote but a short time to you to-day, I will return here and consult with your people. There is much to be decided, of the greatest moment, and not to you alone." Melissa turned with tearful eyes to Euryale, and questioned her with a look; whereupon the lady drew the girl's hand out of that of the philosopher, and saying to him, "She shall be with you directly," took her away to her own apartment.

Here she begged Melissa to dry her eyes, and arranging the girl's hair and robe with her own hands, she promised to do all in her power to facilitate her flight. She must do her part now by going into Caesar's presence as frankly as she had done yesterday and the day before. She might be quite easy; her interests were being faithfully watched over.

Taking a short leave of her father, who was looking very sulky because nobody seemed to care for his opinion, and of Alexander, who lovingly promised her his help, she took the philosopher's hand and walked with him through one crowded apartment after another. They often had difficulty in pressing through the throng of people who were waiting for an audience, and in the antechamber, where the Aurelians had had to pay so bitterly for their insolence yesterday, they were detained by the blonde and red-haired giants of the Uermanian body-guard, whose leader, Sabinus, a Thracian of exceptional height and strength, was acquainted with the philosopher.

Caracalla had given orders that no one was to be admitted till the negotiations with the Parthian ambassadors, which had begun an hour ago, were brought to a conclusion. Philostratus well knew that the emperor would interrupt the most important business if Melissa were announced, but there was much that he would have the maiden lay to heart before he led her to the monarch; while she wished for nothing so earnestly as that the door which separated her from her terrible wooer might remain closed to the end of time. When the chamberlain Adventus looked out from the imperial apartments, she begged him to give her a little time before announcing her.

The old man blinked consent with his dim eyes, but the philosopher took care that Melissa should not be left to herself and the terrors of her heart. He employed all the eloquence at his command to make her comprehend what it meant to be an empress and the consort of the ruler of the world. In flaming colors he painted to her the good she might do in such a position, and the tears she might wipe away. Then he reminded her of the healing and soothing influence she had over Caracalla, and that this influence came doubtless from the gods, since it passed the bounds of nature and acted so beneficently. No one might reject such a gift from the immortals merely to gratify an ordinary passion. The youth whose love she must give up would be able to comfort himself with the thought that many others had had much worse to bear, and he would find no difficulty in getting a substitute, though not so beautiful a one. On the other hand, she was the only one among millions whose heart, obedient to a heaven-sent impulse, had turned in pity toward Caracalla. If she fled, she would deprive the emperor of the only being on whose love he felt he had some claim. If she listened to the wooing of her noble lover, she would be able to tame this ungovernable being and soothe his fury, and would gain in return for a sacrifice such as many had made before her, the blissful consciousness of having rendered an inestimable service to the whole world. For by her means and her love, the imperial tyrant would be transformed into a beneficent ruler. The blessing of the thousands whom she could protect and save would make the hardest task sweet and endurable.

Here Philostratus paused, and gazed inquiringly at her; but she only shook her head gently, and answered:

"My brain is so confused that I can scarcely hear even, but I feel that your words are well meant and wise. What you put before me would certainly be worth considering if there were anything left for me to consider about. I have promised myself to another, who is more to me than all the world--more than the gratitude and blessings of endangered lives of which I know nothing. I am but a poor girl who only asks to be happy. Neither gods nor men expect more of me than that I should do my duty toward those whom I love. And, then, who can say for certain that I should succeed in persuading Caesar to carry out my desires, whatever they might be?"

"We were witnesses of the power you exercised over him," replied the philosopher; but Melissa shook her head, and continued eagerly: "No, no! he only values in me the hand that eases his pain and want of sleep. The love which he may feel for me makes him neither gentler nor better. Only an hour or two before he declared that his heart was inclined to me, he had Titianus murdered!"

"One word from you," the philosopher assured her, "and it would never have happened. As empress, they will obey you as much as him. Truly, child, it is no small thing to sit, like the gods, far above the rest of mankind."

"No, no!" cried Melissa, shuddering. "Those heights! Only to think of them makes everything spin round me. Only one who is free from such giddiness dare to occupy such a place. Every one must desire to do what he can do best. I

could be a good housewife to Diodoros, but I should be a bad empress. I was not born to greatness. And, besides--what is happiness? I only felt happy when I did what was my duty, in peace and quiet. Were I empress, fear would never leave me for a moment. Oh. I know enough of the hideous terror which this awful being creates around him; and before I would consent to let it torture me to death by day and by night--morning, noon, and evening--far rather would I die this very day. Therefore, I have no choice. I must flee from Caesar's sight--away hence--far, far, away!"

Tears nearly choked her voice, but she struggled bravely against them. Philostratus, however, did not fail to observe it, and gazed, first mournfully into her face and then thoughtfully on the ground. At length he spoke with a slight sigh:

"We gather experience in life, and yet, however old we may be, we act contrary to it. Now I have to pay for it. And yet it still lies in your hands to make me bless the day on which I spoke on your behalf. Could you but succeed in rising to real greatness of soul, girl--through you, I swear it, the subjects of this mighty kingdom would be saved from great tribulations!"

"But, my lord," Melissa broke in, "who would ask such lofty things of a lowly maiden? My mother taught me to be kind and helpful to others in the house, to my friends, and fellow-citizens; my own heart tells me to be faithful to my betrothed. But I care not greatly for the Romans, and what to me are Gauls, Dacians, or whatever else these barbarians may be called?"

"And yet," said Philostratus, "you offered a sacrifice for the foreign tyrant."

"Because his pain excited my compassion," rejoined Melissa, blushing.

"And would you have done the same for any masterless black slave, covered with pitiably deep wounds?" asked the philosopher.

"No," she answered, quickly; "him I would have helped with my own hand. When I can do without their aid, I do not appeal to the gods. And then--I said before, his trouble seemed doubly great because it contrasted so sharply with all the splendor and joy that surrounded him."

"Aye," said the philosopher, earnestly, "and a small thing that affects the ruler recoils tenfold--a thousand-fold--on his subjects. Look at one tree through a cut glass with many facets, and it becomes a forest. Thus the merest trifle, when it affects the emperor, becomes important for the millions over whom he rules. Caracalla's vexation entails evil on thousands--his anger is death and ruin. I fear me, girl, your flight will bring down heavy misfortune on those who surround Caesar, and first of all upon the Alexandrians, to whom you belong, and against whom he already bears a grudge. You once said your native city was dear to you."

"So it is," returned Melissa, who, at his last words had grown first red and then pale; "but Caesar can not surely be so narrow-minded as to punish a whole great city for what the poor daughter of a gem-cutter has done."

"You are thinking of my Achilles," answered the philosopher. "But I only transferred what I saw of good in Caracalla to the figure of my hero. Besides, you know that Caesar is not himself when he is in wrath. Has not experience taught me that no reasons are strong enough to convince a loving woman's heart? Once more I entreat you, stay here! Reject not the splendid gift which the gods offer you, that trouble may not come upon your city as it did on hapless Troy, all for a woman's sake."

"What says the proverb? 'Zeus hearkens not to lovers' vows'; but I say that to renounce love in order to make others happy, is greater and harder than to hold fast to it when it is menaced."

These words reminded her of many a lesson of Andreas, and went to her heart. In her mind's eye she saw Caracalla, after hearing of her flight, set his lions on Philostratus, and then, foaming with rage, give orders to drag her father and brothers, Polybius and his son, to the place of execution, like Titianus. And Philostratus perceived what was going on in her mind, and with the exhortation, "Remember how many persons' weal or woe lies in your hands!" he rose and began a conversation with the Thracian commander of the Germanic guard.

Melissa remained alone upon the divan. The picture changed before her, and she saw herself in costly purple raiment, glittering with jewels, and seated by the emperor's side in a golden chariot. A thousand voices shouted to her, and beside her stood a horn of plenty, running over with golden solidi and crimson roses, and it never grew empty, however much she took from it. Her heart was moved; and when, in the crowd which her lively imagination had conjured up before her, she caught sight of the wife of the blacksmith Herophilus, who had been thrown into prison through an accusation from Zminis, she turned to Caracalla whom she still imagined seated beside her, and cried, "Pardon!" and Caracalla nodded a gracious consent, and the next moment Herophilus's wife lay on her liberated husband's breast, while the broken fetters still clanked upon his wrists. Their children were there, too, and stretched up their arms to their parents, offering their happy lips first to them and then to Melissa.

How beautiful it all was, and how it cheered her compassionate heart!

And this, said the newly awakened, meditative spirit within her, need be no dream; no, it lay in her power to impart this happiness to herself and many others, day by day, until the end.

Then she felt that she must arise and cry to her friend, "I will follow your counsel and remain!" But her imagination had already begun to work again, and showed her the widow of Titianus, as she entreated Caesar to spare her noble,

innocent husband, while he mercilessly repulsed her. And it flashed through her mind that her petitions might share the same fate, when at that moment the emperor's threatening voice sounded from the adjoining room.

How hateful its strident tones were to her ear! She dropped her eyes and caught sight of a dark stain on the snow-white plumage of the doves in the mosaic pavement at her feet.

That was a last trace of the blood of the young tribune, which the attendants had been unable to remove. And this indelible mark of the crime which she had witnessed brought the image of the wounded Aurelius before her: just as he now lay, shaken with fever, so had she seen her lover a few days before. His pale face rose before her inward sight; would it not be to him a worse blow than that from the stone, when he should learn that she had broken her faith to him in order to gain power and greatness, and to protect others, who were strangers to her, from the fury of the tyrant?

His heart had been hers from childhood's hour, and it would bleed and break if she were false to the vows in which he placed his faith. And even if he succeeded at last in recovering from the wound she must deal him, his peace and happiness would be destroyed for many a long day. How could she have doubted for a moment where her real duty lay?

If she followed Philostratus's advice--if she acceded to Caracalla's wishes--Diodoros would have every right to condemn and curse her. And could she then feel so entirely blameless? A voice within her instantly said no; for there had been moments in which her pity had grown so strong that she felt more warmly toward the sick Caesar than was justifiable. She could not deny it, for she could not without a blush have described to her lover what she felt when that mysterious, inexplicable power had drawn her to the emperor.

And now the conviction rapidly grew strong in her that she must not only preserve her lover from further trouble, but strive to make good to him her past errors. The idea of renouncing her love in order to intercede for others, most likely in vain, and lighten their lot by sacrificing herself for strangers, while rendering her own and her lover's life miserable, now seemed to her unnatural, criminal, impossible; and with a sigh of relief she remembered her promise to Andreas. Now she could once more look freely into the grave and earnest face of him who had ever guided her in the right way.

This alone was right--this she would do!

But after the first quick step toward Philostratus, she stood still, once more hesitating. The saying about the fulfilling of the time recurred to her as she thought of the Christian, and she said to herself that the critical moment which comes in every life was before her now. The weal or woe of her whole future depended on the answer she should give to Philostratus. The thought struck terror to her heart, but only for a moment. Then she drew herself up proudly, and, as she approached her friend, felt with joy that she had chosen the better part; yea, that it would cost her but little to lay down her life for it.

Though apparently absorbed in his conversation with the Thracian, Philostratus had not ceased to observe the girl, and his knowledge of human nature showed him quickly to what decision she had come. Firmly persuaded that he had won her over to Caracalla's side, he had left her to her own reflections. He was certain that the seed he had sown in her mind would take root; she could now clearly picture to herself what pleasures she would enjoy as empress, and from what she could preserve others. For she was shrewd and capable of reasoning, and above all--and from this he hoped the most--she was but a woman. But just because she was a woman he could not be surprised at her disappointing him in his expectations. For the sake of Caracalla and those who surrounded him he would have wished it to be otherwise; but he had become too fond of her, and had too good a heart, not to be distressed at the thought of seeing her fettered to the unbridled young tyrant.

Before she could address him, he took his leave of the Thracian. Then, as he led her back to the divan, he whispered: "Well, I have gained one more experience. The next time I leave a woman to come to a decision, I shall anticipate from the first that she will come to an opposite conclusion to that which, as a philosopher and logical thinker, I should expect of her. You are determined to keep faith with your betrothed and stab the heart of this highest of all woovers--after death he will be ranked among the gods--for such will be the effect of your flight."

Melissa nodded gayly, and rejoined, "The blunt weapon that I carry would surely not cost Caesar his life, even if he were no future immortal."

"Scarcely," answered Philostratus; "but what he may suffer through you will drive him to turn his own all-too-sharp sword against others. Caracalla being a man, my calculations regarding him have generally proved right. You will see how firmly I believe in them in this case, when I tell you that I have already taken advantage of a letter brought by the messengers of the empress-mother to take my leave of the emperor. For, I reasoned, if Melissa listens to the emperor, she will need no other confederate than the boy Eros; if, however, she takes flight--then woe betide those who are within range of the tyrant's arm, and ten times woe to me who brought the fugitive before his notice! Early to-morrow, before Caracalla leaves his couch, I shall return with the messengers to Julia; my place in the ship--"

"O my lord," interrupted Melissa, in consternation, "if you, my kind protector, forsake me, to whom shall I look for help?"

"You will not require it if you carry out your intentions," said the philosopher. "Throughout this day you will doubtless need me; and let me impress upon you once more to behave before Caracalla in such a manner that even his suspicious mind may not guess what you intend to do. To-day you will still find me ready to help you. But, hark! That is Caesar raging again. It is thus he loves to dismiss ambassadors, when he wishes they should clearly understand that their conditions are not agreeable to him. And one word more: When a man has grown gray, it is doubly soothing to his heart that a lovely maiden should so frankly regret the parting. I was ever a friend of your amiable sex, and even to this day Eros is sometimes not unfavorably inclined to me. But you, the more charming you are, the more deeply do I regret that I may not be more to you than an old and friendly mentor. But pity at first kept love from speaking, and then the old truth that every woman's heart may be won save that which already belongs to another."

The elderly admirer of the fair sex spoke these words in such a pleasant, regretful tone that Melissa gave him an affectionate glance from her large, bright eyes, and answered, archly: "Had Eros shown Philostratus the way to Melissa instead of Diodoros, Philostratus might now be occupying the place in this heart which belongs to the son of Polybius, and which must always be his in spite of Caesar!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

The door of the tablinum flew open, and through it streamed the Parthian ambassadors, seven stately personages, wearing the gorgeous costume of their country, and followed by an interpreter and several scribes. Melissa noticed how one of them, a young warrior with a fair beard framing his finely molded, heroic face, and thick, curling locks escaping from beneath his tiara, grasped the hilt of his sword in his sinewy hand, and how his neighbor, a cautious, elderly man, was endeavoring to calm him.

Scarcely had they left the antechamber than Adventus called Melissa and Philostratus to the emperor. Caracalla was seated on a raised throne of gold and ivory, with bright scarlet cushions. As on the preceding day, he was magnificently dressed, and wore a laurel wreath on his head. The lion, who lay chained beside the throne, stirred as he caught sight of the new-comers, which caused Caracalla to exclaim to Melissa: "You have stayed away from me so long that my 'Sword of Persia' fails to recognize you. Were it not more to my taste to show you how dear you are to me, I could be angry with you, coy bird that you are!"

As Melissa bent respectfully before him, he gazed delighted into her glowing face, saying, as he turned half to her and half to Philostratus: "How she blushes! She is ashamed that, though I could get no sleep during the night, and was tortured by an indescribable restlessness, she refused to obey my call, although she very well knows that the one remedy for her sleepless friend lies in her beautiful little hand. Hush, hush! The high-priest has told me that you did not sleep beneath the same roof as I. But that only turned my thoughts in the right direction. Child, child!--See now, Philostratus--the red rose has become a white one. And how timid she is! Not that it offends me, far from it--it delights me.--Those flowers, Philostratus! Take them, Melissa; they add less to your beauty than you to theirs." He seized the splendid roses he had ordered for her early that morning and fastened the finest in her girdle himself. She did not forbid him, and stammered a few low words of thanks.

How his face glowed! His eyes rested in ecstatic delight upon his chosen one. In this past night, after he had called for her and waited in vain with feverish longing for her coming, it had dawned on him with convincing force that this gentle child had awakened a new, intense passion in him. He loved her, and he was glad of it--he who till now had taken but a passing pleasure in beautiful women. Longing for her till it became torture, he swore to himself to make her his, and share his all with her, even to the purple.

It was not his habit to hesitate, and at daybreak he had sent for his mother's messengers that they might inform her of his resolve. No one dared to gainsay him, and he expected it least of all from her whom he designed to raise so high. But she felt utterly estranged from him, and would gladly have told him to his face what she felt.

Still, it was absolutely necessary that she should restrain herself and endure his insufferable endearments, and even force herself to speak. And yet her tongue seemed tied, and it was only by the utmost effort of her will that she could bring herself to express her astonishment at his rapid return to health.

"It is like magic," she concluded, and he heartily agreed. Attacks of that kind generally left their effects for four days or more. But the most astonishing thing was that in spite of being in the best of health, he was suffering from the gravest illness in the world. "I have fallen a victim to the fever of love, my Philostratus," he cried, with a tender glance at Melissa.

"Nay, Caesar," interrupted the philosopher, "love is not a disease, but rather not loving."

"Prove this new assertion," laughed the emperor; and the philosopher rejoined, with a meaning look at the maiden, "If love is born in the eyes, then those who do not love are blind."

"But," answered Caracalla, gayly, "they say that love comes not only from what delights the eye, but the soul and the mind as well."

"And have not the mind and the spirit eyes also?" was the reply, to which the emperor heartily assented.

Then he turned to Melissa, and asked with gentle reproach why she, who had proved herself so ready of wit yesterday, should be so reserved today; but she excused her taciturnity on the score of the violent emotions that had stormed in upon her since the morning.

Her voice broke at the end of this explanation, and Caracalla, concluding that it was the thought of the grandeur that awaited her through his favor which confused her and brought the delicate color to her cheeks, seized her hand, and, obedient to an impulse of his better nature, said:

"I understand you, child. Things are befalling you that would make a stouter heart tremble. You have only heard hints of what must effect such a decisive change in your future life. You know how I feel toward you. I acknowledged to you yesterday what you already knew without words. We both feel the mysterious power that draws us to one another. We belong to each other. In the future, neither time nor space nor any other thing may part us. Where I am there you must be also. You shall be my equal in every respect. Every honor paid to me shall be offered to you likewise. I have shown the malcontents what they have to expect. The fate which awaits the consul Claudius Vindex and his

nephew, who by their want of respect to you offended me, will teach the others to have a care."

"O my lord, that aged man!" cried Melissa, clasping her hands, imploringly.

"He shall die, and his nephew," was the inexorable answer. "During my conference with my mother's messengers they had the presumption to raise objections against you and the ardent desire of my heart in a manner which came very near to being treason. And they must suffer for it."

"You would punish them for my sake?" exclaimed Melissa. "But I forgive them willingly. Grant them pardon! I beg, I entreat you."

"Impossible! Unless I make an example, it will be long before the slanderous tongues would hold their peace. Their sentence stands."

But Melissa would not be appeased. With passionate eagerness she entreated the emperor to grant a pardon, but he cut her short with the request not to interfere in matters which he alone had to decide and answer for.

"I owe it to you as well as to myself," he continued, "to remove every obstacle from the path. Were I to spare Vindex, they would never again believe in my strength of purpose. He shall die, and his nephew with him! To raise a structure without first securing a solid foundation would be an act of rashness and folly. Besides, I undertake nothing without consulting the omens. The horoscope which the priest of this temple has drawn up for you only confirms me in my purpose. The examination of the sacrifices this morning was favorable. It now only remains to be seen what the stars say to my resolve. I had not yet taken it when I last questioned the fortune-tellers of the sky. This night we shall learn what future the planets promise to our union. From the signs on yonder tablet it is scarcely possible that their answer should be otherwise than favorable. But even should they warn me of misfortune at your side, I could not let you go now. It is too late for that. I should merely take advantage of the warning, and continue with redoubled severity to sweep away every obstacle that threatens our union. And one thing more--"

But he did not finish, for Epagathos here reminded him of the deputation of Alexandrian citizens who had come to speak about the games in the Circus. They had been waiting several hours, and had still many arrangements to make.

"Did they send you to me?" inquired Caracalla, with irritation, and the freedman answering in the affirmative, he cried: "The princes who wait in my antechamber do not stir until their turn comes. These tradesmen's senses are confused by the dazzle of their gold! Tell them they shall be called when we find time to attend to them."

"The head of the night-watch too is waiting," said the freedman; and to the emperor's question whether he had seen him, and if he had anything of consequence to report, the other replied that the man was much disquieted, but seemed to be exercising proper severity. He ventured to remind his master of the saying that the Alexandrians must have 'Panem et circenses'; they did not trouble themselves much about anything else. In these days, when there had been neither games, nor pageants, nor distribution of corn, the Romans and Caesar had been their sole subjects of conversation. However, there was to be something quite unusually grand in the Circus to-night. That would distract the attention of the impudent slanderers. The night-watchman greatly desired to speak to the emperor himself, to prepare him for the fact that excitement ran higher in the Circus here than even in Rome. In spite of every precaution, he would not be able to keep the rabble in the upper rows quiet.

"Nor need they be," broke in the emperor; "the louder they shout the better; and I fancy they will see things which will be worth shouting for. I have no time to see the man. Let him thoroughly realize that he is answerable for any real breach of order."

He signed to Epagathos to retire, but Melissa went nearer to Caesar and begged him gently not to let the worthy citizens wait any longer on her account.

At this Caracalla frowned ominously, and cried: "For the second time, let me ask you not to interfere in matters that do not concern you! If any one dares to order me--" Here he stopped short, for, as Melissa drew back from him frightened, he was conscious of having betrayed that even love was not strong enough to make him control himself. He was angry with himself, and with a great effort he went on, more quietly:

"When I give an order, my child, there often lies much behind it of which I alone know. Those who force themselves upon Caesar, as these citizens do, must learn to have patience. And you--if you would fill the position to which I intend to raise you--must first take care to leave all paltry considerations and doubts behind you. However, all that will come of itself. Softness and mercy melt on the throne like ice before the sun. You will soon learn to scorn this tribe of beggars who come whining round us. If I flew in a passion just now, it was partly your fault. I had a right to expect that you would be more eager to hear me out than to shorten the time of waiting for these miserable merchants."

With this his voice grew rough again, but as she raised her eyes to him and cried beseechingly, "O, my lord!" he continued, more gently:

"There was not much more to be said. You shall be mine. Should the stars confirm their first revelations, I shall raise you to-morrow to my side, here in the city of Alexandria, and make the people do homage to you as their empress. The priest of Alexandria is ready to conduct the marriage ceremonial. Philostratus will inform my mother of my determination."

Melissa had listened to these arrangements with growing distress; her breath came fast, and she was incapable of uttering a word; but Caesar was delighted at the lovely confusion painted on her features, and cried, in joyful excitement:

"How I have looked forward to this moment--and I have succeeded in surprising her! This is what makes imperial power divine; by one wave of the hand it can raise the lowest to the highest place!"

With this he drew Melissa toward him, kissed the trembling girl upon the brow, and continued, in delighted tones:

"Time does not stand still, and only a few hours separate us from the accomplishment of our desires. Let us lend them wings. We resolved yesterday to show one another what we could do as singers and lute-players. There lies my lyre--give it me, Philostratus. I know what I shall begin with."

The philosopher brought and tuned the instrument; but Melissa had some difficulty in keeping back her tears. Caracalla's kiss burned like a brand of infamy on her brow. A nameless, torturing restlessness had come over her, and she wished she could dash the lyre to the ground, when Caracalla began to play, and called out to Philostratus:

"As you are leaving us to-morrow, I will sing the song which you honored with a place in your heroic tale."

He turned to Melissa, and, as she owned to having read the work of the philosopher, he went on "You know, then, that I was the model for his Achilles. The departed spirit of the hero is enjoying in the island of Leuke, in the Pontus, the rest which he so richly deserves, after a life full of heroic deeds. Now he finds time to sing to the lyre, and Philostratus put the following verses--but they are mine--into his mouth.--I am about to play, Adventus! Open the door!"

The freedman obeyed, and the emperor peered into the antechamber to see for himself who was waiting there.

He required an audience when he sang. The Circus had accustomed him to louder applause than his beloved and one skilled musician could award him. At last he swept the strings, and began singing in a well-trained tenor, whose sharp, hard quality, however, offended the girl's critical ear, the song to the echo on the shores of Pontus:

*Echo, by the rolling waters
Bathing Pontus' rocky shore,
Wake, and answer to the lyre
Swept by my inspired hand!*

*Wake, and raise thy voice in numbers
Sing to Homer, to the bard
Who has given life immortal
To the heroes of his lay.*

*He it was from death who snatched me;
He who gave Patroclus life;
Rescued, in perennial glory,
Godlike Ajax from the dead!*

*His the lute to whose sweet accents,
Ilium owes undying fame,
And the triumph and the praises
Which surround her deathless name.*

The "Sword of Persia" seemed peculiarly affected by his master's song, which he accompanied by a long-drawn howl of woe; and, before the imperial virtuoso had concluded, a discordant cry sounded for a short time from the street, in imitation of the squeaking of young pigs. It arose from the crowd who were waiting round the Serapeum to see Caesar drive to the Circus; and Caracalla must have noticed it, for, when it waxed louder, he gave a sidelong glance toward the place from which it came, and an ominous frown gathered upon his brow.

But it soon vanished, for scarcely had he finished when stormy shouts of applause rose from the antechamber. They proceeded from the friends of Caesar, and the deep voices of the Germanic bodyguard, who, joining in with the cries they had learned in the Circus, lent such impetuous force to the applause, as even to satisfy this artist in the purple.

Therefore, when Philostratus spoke words of praise, and Melissa thanked him with a blush, he answered with a smile: "There is something frank and untrammelled in their manner of expressing their feelings outside. Forced applause sounds differently. There must be something in my singing that carries the hearers away. My Alexandrian hosts, however, are overready to show me what they think. It did not escape me, and I shall add it to the rest."

Then he invited Melissa to make a return for his song by singing Sappho's Ode to Aphrodite. Pale, and as if obeying some strange compulsion, she seated herself at the instrument, and the prelude sounded clear and tuneful from her skillful fingers.

"Beautiful! Worthy of Mesomedes!" cried Caracalla, but Melissa could not sing, for at the first note her voice was broken by stormy sobs.

"The power of the goddess whom she meant to extol!" said Philostratus, pointing to her; and the tearful, beseeching look with which she met the emperor's gaze while she begged him in low tones--"Not now! I can not do it to-day!"--

confirmed Caracalla in his opinion that the passion he had awakened in the maiden was in no way inferior to his own--perhaps even greater. He relieved his full heart by whispering to Melissa a passionate, "I love you," and, desiring to show her by a favor how kindly he felt toward her, added: "I will not let your fellow-citizens wait outside any longer--Adventus! The deputation from the Circus!"

The chamberlain withdrew at once, and the emperor throwing himself back on the throne, continued, with a sigh:

"I wonder how any of these rich tradesmen would like to undertake what I have already gone through this day. First, the bath; then, while I rested, Macrinus's report; after that, the inspection of the sacrifices; then a review of the troops, with a gracious word to every one. Scarcely returned, I had to receive the ambassadors from my mother, and then came the troublesome affair with Vindex. Then the dispatches from Rome arrived, the letters to be examined, and each one to be decided on and signed. Finally the settling of accounts with the idologos, who, as high-priest of my choosing, has to collect the tribute from all the temples in Egypt.... Next I gave audience to several people--to your father among the rest. He is strange, but a thorough man, and a true Macedonian of the old stock. He repelled both greeting and presents, but he longed to be revenged--heavily and bloodily--on Zminis, who denounced him and brought him to the galleys.... How the old fellow must have raged and stormed when he was a prisoner! I treated the droll old gray-beard like my father. The giant pleases me, and what skillful fingers he has on his powerful hands! He gave me that ring with the portraits of Castor and Pollux."

"My brothers were the models," remarked Melissa, glad to find something to say without dissembling.

Caracalla examined the stone in the gold ring more closely, and exclaimed in admiration: "How delicate the little heads are! At the first glance one recognizes the hand of the happily gifted artist. Your father's is one of the noblest and most refined of the arts. If I can raise a statue to a lute-player, I can do so to a gem-cutter."

Here the deputation for the arrangement of the festival was announced, but the emperor, calling out once more, "Let them wait," continued:

"You are a handsome race--the men powerful, the women as lovely as Aphrodite. That is as it should be! My father before me took the wisest and fairest woman to wife. You are the fairest--the wisest?--well, that too, perhaps. Time will show. But Aphrodite never has a high forehead, and, according to Philostratus, beauty and wisdom are hostile sisters with you women."

"Exceptions," interposed the philosopher, as he pointed to Melissa, "prove the rule."

"Describe her in that manner to my mother," said Caracalla. "I would not let you go from me, were you not the only person who knows Melissa. I may trust in your eloquence to represent her as she deserves. And now," he continued, hurriedly, "one thing more. As soon as the deputation is dismissed and I have received a few other persons, the feast is to begin. You would perhaps be entertained at it. However, it will be better to introduce you to my 'friends' after the marriage ceremony. After dark, to make up for it, there is the Circus, to which you will, of course, accompany me."

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed the maiden, frightened and unwilling. But Caracalla cried, decisively: "No refusal, I must beg! I imagine that I have proved sufficiently that I know how to shield you from what is not fitting for a maiden. What I ask of you now is but the first step on the new path of honor that awaits you as future empress."

Melissa raised both voice and hands in entreaty, but in vain. Caracalla cut her short, saying in authoritative tones:

"I have arranged everything. You will go to the Circus. Not alone with me--that would give welcome work to scandalous tongues. Your father shall accompany you--your brothers, too, if you wish it. I shall not join you till after the performance has begun. Your fellow-citizens will divine the meaning of this visit. Besides, Theocritus and the rest have orders to acquaint the people with the distinction that awaits you and the Alexandrians. But why so pale? Your cheeks will regain their color in the Circus. I know I am right--you will leave it delighted and enthralled. You have only to learn for the first time how the acclamations of tens of thousands take hold upon the heart and intoxicate the senses. Courage, courage, Macedonian maiden! Everything grand and unexpected, even unforeseen happiness, is alarming and bewildering. But we become accustomed even to the impossible. A strong spirit like yours soon gets over anything of the kind. But the time is running on. One word more: You must be in the Circus by sunset. In any case, you must be in your place before I come. Adventus will see that you have a chariot or a litter, whichever you please. Theocritus will be waiting at the entrance to lead you to your seats."

Melissa could restrain herself no longer, and, carried away by the wild conflict of passions in her breast, she threw control and prudence to the winds, and cried:

"I will not!" Then throwing back her head as if to call the heavens to witness, she raised her great, wide-open eyes and gazed above.

But not for long. Her bold defiance had roused Caesar's utmost fury, and he broke out with a growl of rage:

"You will not, you say? And you think, unreasoning fool, that this settles the matter?"

He uttered a wild laugh, pressed his hand firmly on his left eyelid, which began to twitch convulsively, and went on in a lower but defiantly contemptuous tone:

"I know better! You shall! And you will not only go to the Circus, but you will do it willingly, or at least with smiling lips. You will start at sunset! At the time appointed I shall find you in your place. If not!--Must I begin so soon to teach you that I can be serious? Have a care, girl! You are dear to me; yet--by the head of my father!--if you defy me, my Numidian lion-keepers shall drag you to the place you belong to!"

Thus far Melissa had listened to the emperor's raging with panting bosom and quivering nostrils, as at a performance, which must sooner or later come to an end; and now she broke in regardless of the consequences:

"Send for them," she cried, "and order them to throw me to the wild beasts! It will doubtless be a welcome surprise to the lookers-on. Which of them can say they have ever seen the daughter of a free Roman citizen who never yet came before the law, torn to pieces in the sand of the arena? They delight in anything new! Yes, murder me, as you did Plautilla, although I never offended either you or your mother! Better die a hundred deaths than parade my dishonor before the eyes of the multitude in the open Circus!"

She ceased, incapable of further resistance, threw herself weeping on the divan, and buried her face in the cushions.

Confounded and bewildered by such audacity, the emperor had heard her out. The soul of a hero dwelt in the frail body of this maiden! Majestic as all-conquering Venus she had resisted him for the second time, and now how touching did she appear in her tears and weakness! He loved her, and his heart yearned to raise her in his arms, to beg her forgiveness, and fulfill her every wish. But he was a man and a monarch, and his desire to show Melissa to the people in the Circus as his chosen bride had become a fixed resolve during the past sleepless night. And indeed he was incapable of renouncing any wish or a plan, even if he felt inclined to do so. Yet he heartily regretted having stormed at the gentle Greek girl like some wild barbarian, and thus himself thrown obstacles in the way of attaining his desire. His hot blood had carried him away again. Surely some demon led him so often into excesses which he afterward repented of. This time the fiend had been strong in him, and he must use every gentle persuasion he knew of to bend the deeply offended maiden to his will.

He was relieved not to meet her intense gaze as he advanced toward her and took Philostratus's place, who whispered to her to control herself and not bring death and ruin upon them all.

"I Truly I meant well toward you, dearest," he began, in altered tones. "But we are both like overfull vessels--one drop will make them overflow. You--confess now that you forgot yourself. And I--On the throne we grow unaccustomed to opposition. It is fortunate that the flame of my anger dies out so quickly. But it lies with you to prevent it from ever breaking out; for I should always endeavor to fulfill a kindly expressed wish, if it were possible. This time, however, I must insist--"

Melissa turned toward the emperor, and stretching out beseeching hands, she cried:

"Bid me do anything, however hard, and it shall be done, but do not force me to go with you to the Circus. If my mother were only alive! Wherever I could go with her was right. But my father, not to speak of my madcap brother Alexander, do not know what befits a maiden, nor does anybody expect it of them."

"And rightly," interposed Caracalla. "Now I understand your opposition, and thank you for it. But it fortunately lies in my power to remove your objection. The women have to obey me, too. I shall at once issue the necessary orders. You shall appear in the Circus surrounded by the noblest matrons of the city. The wives of these citizens shall accompany you. Even my mother will be sure to approve of this arrangement. Farewell, then, till we meet again in the Circus!"

He spoke the last words with proud satisfaction, and with the grave demeanor that Cilo had taught him to adopt in the curia.

He then gave the order to admit the Alexandrian citizens, and the words of entreaty died upon the lips of the unfortunate imperial bride, for the folding doors were thrown open and the deputation advanced through them.

Old Adventus signed to Melissa, and with drooping head she followed him through the rooms and corridors that led to the apartments of the highpriest.

CHAPTER XXV.

Melissa had wept her fill on the breast of the lady Euryale, who listened to her woes with motherly sympathy, and yet she felt as if a biting frost had broken and destroyed the blossoms which only yesterday had so richly and hopefully decked her young heart. Diodoros's love had been to her like the fair and sunny summer days that turn the sour, hard fruit into sweet and juicy grapes. And now the frost had nipped them. The whole future, and everything round her, now looked gray, colorless, and flat. Only two thoughts held possession of her mind: on the one hand, that of her betrothed, from whom this visit to the Circus threatened to separate her forever; and on the other, that of her imperial lover, to escape whom she would have flown anywhere, even to the grave.

Euryale remarked with concern how weary and broken Melissa looked--so different from her usual bright self, while she listened to her father and Alexander as they consulted with the lady as to the future. Philostratus, who had promised his advice, did not appear; and to the gem-cutter, no proposal could seem so unwelcome as that of leaving his native city and his sick favorite, Philip.

He considered it senseless, and a result of the thoroughly wrong-headed views of sentimental women, to reject the monarch of the world when he made honorable proposals to an unpretending girl. But the lady Euryale--of whom his late wife had always spoken with the highest respect--and, supported by her, his son Alexander, had both represented to him so forcibly that a union with the emperor would render Melissa most unhappy, if it did not lead to death, that he had been reduced to silence. Only, when they spoke of the necessity of flight, he burst out again, declaring that the time had not yet come for such extreme measures.

When Melissa now rejoined them, he spoke of the emperor's behavior toward her as being worthy of a man of honor, and endeavored to touch her heart by representing what an old man must feel who should be forced to leave the house where his father and grandfather had lived before him, and even the town whose earth held all that was dearest to him.

Here the tears which so easily rose to his eyes began to flow, and, seeing that Melissa's tender heart was moved by his sorrow, he gained confidence, and reproached his daughter for having kindled Caracalla's love, by her radiant eyes--so like her mother's! Honestly believing that his affection was returned, Caesar was offering her the highest honor in his power; if she fled from him, he would have every right to complain of having been basely deceived, and to call her a heartless wanton.

Alexander now came to his sister's aid, and reminded him how Melissa had hazarded life and liberty to save him and her brothers. She had been forced to look so kindly into the tyrant's face if only to sue for their pardon, and it became him ill to make this a reproach to his daughter.

Melissa nodded gratefully to her brother, but Heron remained firm in his assertion that to think of flight would be foolish, or at least premature.

At this, Alexander repeated to him that Melissa had whispered in his ear that she would rather die at once than live in splendor, but in perpetual fear, by the side of an unloved husband; whereupon Heron began to breathe hard, as he always did before an outburst of anger.

But a message, calling him to the emperor's presence, soon calmed him.

At parting, he kissed Melissa, and murmured "Would you really drive your old father out of our dear home, away from his work, and his birds--from his garden, and your mother's grave? Is it then so terrible to live as empress, in splendor and honor? I am going to Caesar--you can not hinder me from greeting him kindly from you?"

Without waiting for an answer, he left the room; but when he was outside he took care to glance at himself in the mirror, arrange his beard and hair, and place his gigantic form in a few of the dignified attitudes he intended to adopt in the presence of the emperor.

Meanwhile Melissa had thrown off the indifference into which she had fallen, and her old doubts raised their warning heads with renewed force.

Alexander swore to be her faithful ally; Euryale once more assured her of her assistance; and yet, more especially when she was moved with pity for her father, who was to leave all he loved for her sake, she felt as if she were being driven hither and thither, in some frail bark, at the mercy of the waves.

Suddenly a new idea flashed through her mind. She rose quickly.

"I will go to Diodoros," she cried, "and tell him all! He shall decide."

"Just now?" asked Euryale, startled. "You would certainly not find your betrothed alone, and since all the world knows of Caracalla's intentions, and gazes curiously after you, your visit would instantly be reported to Caesar. Nor is it advisable for you to present yourself before your offended lover, when you have neither Andreas nor any one else to speak for you and take your part."

Melissa burst into tears, but the matron drew her to her and continued tenderly:

"You must give that up--but, Alexander, do you go to your friend, and be your sister's mouthpiece!"

The artist consented with all the ardor of brotherly affection, and having received from Melissa, whose courage began to rise again, strict injunctions as to what he was to say to her lover, he departed on his errand.

Wholly absorbed by the stormy emotions of her heart, the maiden had forgotten time and every external consideration; but the lady Euryale was thoughtful for her, and now led her to her chamber to have her hair dressed for the Circus. The matron carefully avoided, for the present, all mention of her young friend's flight, though her mind was constantly occupied with it--and not in vain.

The skillful waiting-woman, whom she had bought from the house of the priest of Alexander, who was a Roman knight, loosened the girl's abundant brown hair, and, with loud cries of admiration, declared it would be easy to dress such locks in the most approved style of fashion. She then laid the curling-irons on the dish of coals which stood on a slender tripod, and was about to twist it into ringlets; but Melissa, who had never resorted to such arts, refused to permit it. The slave assured her, however, as earnestly as if it were a matter of the highest importance, that it was impossible to arrange the curls of a lady of distinction without the irons. Euryale, too, begged Melissa to allow it, as nothing would make her so conspicuous in her overdressed surroundings as excessive simplicity. That was quite true, but it made the girl realize so vividly what was before her, that she covered her face with her hands and sobbed out:

"To be exposed to the gaze of the whole city--to its envy and its scorn!"

The matron's warning inquiry, what had become of her favorite's high-minded calm, and her advice to restrain her weeping, lest she should appear before the public in the Amphitheater with tear-stained eyes, helped her to compose herself.

The tire-woman had not finished her work when Alexander returned, and Melissa dared not turn her head for fear of disturbing her in her task. But when Alexander began his report with the exclamation, "Who knows what foolish gossip has driven him to this?" she sprang up, regardless of the slave's warning cry. And as her brother went on to relate how Diodoros had left the Serapeum, in spite of the physician's entreaty to wait at least until next morning, but that Melissa need not take it greatly to heart, it was too much for the girl who had already that day gone through such severe and varied experiences. The ground seemed to heave beneath her feet; sick and giddy she put out her hand to find some support, that she might not sink on her knees; in so doing, she caught the tall tripod which held the dish of coals. It swayed and fell clattering to the ground, bringing the irons with it. Its burning contents fell partly on the floor and partly on the festal robe which Melissa had thrown over a chair before loosening her hair. Alexander caught her just in time to prevent her falling.

With her healthy nature, Melissa soon regained consciousness, and during the first few moments her distress over the spoiled garment threw every other thought into the background. Shaking her head gravely over the black-edged holes which the coals had burned in the peplos and the under-ropes, Euryale secretly rejoiced at the accident. She remembered that when her heart was torn and bleeding, after the death of her only child, her thoughts were taken off herself by the necessary duty of providing mourning garments for herself, her husband, and the slaves. This trivial task had at least helped her to forget for a few hours the bitterness of her grief.

Only anxious to lighten in some sort the fate of the sweet young creature whom she had learned to love, she made much of the difficulty of procuring a fresh dress for Melissa, though she was perfectly aware that her sister-in-law possessed many such. Alexander was commissioned to take one of the emperor's chariots--which always stood ready for the use of the courtiers between the Serapeum and the springs on the east--and to hasten to the lady Berenike. The lady begged that he, as an artist, would assist in choosing the robe; and the less conspicuous and costly it was the better.

To this Melissa heartily agreed, and, after Alexander had gone, Euryale bore off her pale young charge to the eating-room, where she forced her to take some old wine and a little food, which she would not touch before. As the attendant filled the wine-cup, the high-priest himself joined them, greeted Melissa briefly and with measured courtesy, and begged his wife to follow him for a moment into the tablinum.

The attendant, a slave who had grown gray in the service of Timotheus, now begged the young guest, as though he represented his mistress, to take a little food, and not to sip so timidly from the winecup. But the lonely repast was soon ended, and Melissa, strengthened and refreshed, withdrew to the sleeping-apartment. Only light curtains hung at the doors of the high-priest's hurriedly furnished rooms, and no one noticed Melissa's entrance into the adjoining chamber.

She had never played the eavesdropper, but she had neither the presence of mind to withdraw, nor could she avoid hearing that her own name was mentioned.

It was the lady who spoke, and her husband answered in excited tones:

"As to your Christianity, and whatever there may be in it that is offensive to me as high-priest of a heathen god, we will speak of that later. It is not a question now of a difference of opinion, but of a serious danger, which you with your easily-moved heart will bring down upon yourself and me. The gem-cutter's daughter is a lovely creature--I will not

deny it--and worthy of your sympathy; besides which, you, as a woman, can not bear to see her most sacred feelings wounded."

"And would you let your hands be idle in your lap," interposed his wife, "if you saw a lovable, innocent child on the edge of a precipice, and felt yourself strong enough to save her from falling? You can not have asked yourself what would be the fate of a girl like Melissa if she were Caracalla's wife."

"Indeed I have," Timotheus assured her gravely, "and nothing would please me better than that the maiden should succeed in escaping that fate. But--the time is short, and I must be brief--the emperor is our guest, and honors me with boundless confidence. Just now he disclosed to me his determination to make Melissa his wife, and I was forced to approve it. Thus he looks to me to carry out his wishes; and if the maiden escapes, and there falls on you, or, through you, on me, the shadow of a suspicion of having assisted in her flight, he will have every right to regard me as a traitor and to treat me as such. To others my life is made sacred by my high office, but the man to whom a human life--no matter whose--is no more than that of a sacrificial animal is to you or me, that man would shed the blood of us both without a quiver of the eyelid."

"Then let him!" cried Euryale, hotly. "My bereaved and worn-out life is but a small price to pay for that of an innocent, blameless creature, glowing with youth and all the happiness of requited love, and with a right to the highest joys that life can offer."

"And I?" exclaimed Timotheus, angrily. "What am I to you since the death of our child? For the sake of the first person that came to you as a poor substitute for our lost daughter, you are ready to go to your death, and to drag me with you into the gloom of Hades. There speaks the Christian! Even that gentle philosopher on the throne, Marcus Aurelius, was disgusted at your fellow-believers' hideous mania for death. The Christian expects in the next world all that is denied to him in this. But we think of this life, in which the Deity has placed us. To me life is the highest blessing, and yours is dearer to me than my own. Therefore I say, firmly and decidedly: Melissa must not make her escape from this house. If she is determined to fly this night, let her do so--I shall not hinder her. If your counsel is of service to her, I am glad; but she must not enter this house again after the performance in the Circus, unless she be firmly resolved to become Caesar's wife. If she can not bring herself to this, the apartments which belong to us must be closed against her, as against a dangerous foe."

"And whither can she go?" asked Euryale, sadly and with tearful eyes, for there was no gainsaying so definite an order from her lord and master. "The moment she is missed, they will search her father's house; and, if she takes advantage of Berenike's ship, it will soon be discovered that it was your brother's wife who helped her to escape from Caracalla."

"Berenike will know what to do," answered Timotheus, composedly. "She, if any one, knows how to take care of herself. She has the protection of her influential brother-in-law, Coeranus; and just now there is nothing she would not do to strike a blow at her hated enemy."

"How sorrow and revenge have worked upon that strange woman!" exclaimed the lady, sadly. "Caracalla has injured her, it is true--"

"He has, and to-day he has added a further, deeper insult, for he forces her to appear in the Amphitheater, with the wives of the other citizens who bear the cost of this performance. I was there, and heard him say to Seleukus, who was acting as spokesman, that he counted on seeing his wife, of whom he had heard so much, in her appointed place this evening.

"This will add fuel to the fire of her hatred. If she only does not allow her anger to carry her away, and to show it in a manner that she will afterward regret!--But my time is short. I have to walk before the sacred images in full ceremonial vestments, and accompanied by the priest of Alexander. You, unfortunately, take no pleasure in such spectacles. Once more, then--if the girl is determined to fly, she must not return here. I repeat, if any one can help her to get away, it is Berenike. Our sister-in-law must take the consequences. Caesar can not accuse her of treason, at any rate, and her interference in the matter will clear us of all suspicion of complicity."

No word of this conversation had escaped Melissa. She learned nothing new from it, but it affected her deeply.

Warm-hearted as she was, she fully realized the debt of gratitude she owed to the lady Euryale; and she could not blame the high-priest, whom prudence certainly compelled to close his doors against her. And yet she was wounded by his words. She had struggled so hard in these last days to banish all thought of her own happiness, and shield her dear ones from harm, that such selfishness appeared doubly cruel to her. Did it not seem as if this priest of the great Deity to whom she had been taught to pray, cared little what became of his nearest relatives, so long as he and his wife were unmolested? That was the opposite of what Andreas had praised as the highest duty, the last time she had walked with him to the ferry; and since then Johanna had told her the story of Christ's sufferings, and she understood the fervor with which the freedman had spoken of the crucified Son of God--the great example of all unselfishness.

In the enthusiasm of her warm young heart she felt that what she had heard of the Christians' teacher was beautiful, and that she too would not find it hard to die for those she loved.

With drooping head Euryale re-entered the room, and gazed with kind, anxious eyes into the girl's face, as if asking her forgiveness. Following the impulse of her candid heart, Melissa threw her fair young arms round the aged lady, and, to her great surprise, after kissing her warmly on brow and mouth and eyes, cried in tones of tender entreaty:

"Forgive me. I did not want to listen, and yet I could not choose but hear. No word of your discourse escaped me. I know now that I must not fly, and that I must bear whatever fate the gods may send me. I used often to say to myself, 'Of how little importance is my life or my happiness!' And now that I must give up my lover, come what may I care not what the future has in store for me. I can never forget Diodoros; and, when I think that everything is at an end between us, it is as if my heart were torn in pieces. But I have found out, in these last days, what heavy troubles one may bear without breaking down. If my flight is to bring danger, if not death and ruin, upon so many good people, I had better stay. The man who lusts after me--it is true, when I think of his embrace my blood runs cold! But perhaps I shall be able to endure even that. And then--if I crush my heart into silence, and renounce Diodoros forever, and give myself up to Caesar--as I must--tell me you will not then close your doors against me, but that I may stay with you till the horrid hour comes when Caracalla calls me?"

The matron had listened with deep emotion to Melissa's victory over her desires and her aversions. This heathen maiden, brought up in the right way by a good mother, and to whom life had taught many a hard lesson, was she not already treading in the footsteps of the Saviour? This child was offering up the great and pure love of her heart to preserve others from sorrow and danger; and what a different course of action was she herself to pursue in obedience to her husband's orders--her husband, whose duty it was to offer a shining example to the whole heathen world!

She thought of Abraham's sacrifice, and wondered if the Lord might not perhaps be satisfied with Melissa's willingness to lay her love upon the altar. In any case, whatever she, Euryale, could do to save her from the worst fate that could befall a woman, that should be done, and this time it was she who drew the other toward her and kissed her.

Her heart was full to overflowing, and yet she did not forget to warn Melissa to be careful, when she was about to lay her head with its artificially arranged curls upon the lady's breast.

"No, no," she said, tenderly warding off the maiden's embrace. Then, laying her hands on the girl's shoulders, she looked her straight in the face, and continued: "Here you will ever find a resting-place. When your hair lies smoothly round your sweet face, as it did yesterday, then lay it on my breast as often as you will. Aye, and it can and shall be here in the Serapeum; though not in these rooms, which my lord and master closes against you. I told you of the time being fulfilled for each one of us, and when yours came you proved yourself to be the good tree of which our Lord speaks as bearing good fruit. You look at me inquiringly; how indeed should you understand the words of a Christian? But I shall find time enough in the next few days to explain them to you; for--I say it again--you shall remain near me while the emperor searches the city and half the world over for you. Keep that firmly in your mind and let it help to give you courage in the Circus."

"But my father?" cried Melissa, pointing to the curtain, through which Heron's loud voice now became audible.

"Depend on me," whispered the lady, hurriedly; "and rest assured that he will be warned in time. Do not betray my promise. If we were to take him into our confidence now, he would spoil all. As soon as he is gone, and your brother has returned, you two shall hear--"

They were interrupted by the steward, who, with a peculiar smile upon his clean-shaven lips, came to announce Heron's visit.

The communicative gem-cutter had already confided to the servant what it was that agitated him so greatly, but Melissa was astonished at the change in her father's manner.

The shuffling gait of the gigantic, unwieldy man, who had grown gray stooping over his work, had gained a certain majestic dignity. His cheeks glowed, and the gray eyes, which had long since acquired a fixed look from straining over the gemcutting, now beamed with a blissful radiance. Something wonderful must have happened to him, and, without waiting to be questioned by the lady, he poured out to her the news that he would have been overjoyed to have shouted in the market-place for all to hear.

The reception accorded to him at Caesar's table, he declared, had been flattering beyond all words. The godlike monarch had treated him more considerately, nay, sometimes with more reverence, than his own sons. The best dishes had been put before him, and Caracalla had asked all sorts of questions about his future consort, and, on hearing that Melissa had sent him greetings, he had raised himself and drunk to him as if he were a friend.

His table-companions, too, had treated Heron with every distinction. Immediately on his arrival the monarch had desired them to honor him as the father of the future empress. They had all agreed with him in demanding that Zminis the Egyptian should be punished with death, and had even encouraged him to give the reins to his righteous anger. He, if any one, was in the habit of being moderate in all things, if only as a good example to his sons; and he had proved in many a Dionysiac feast that the god could not easily overpower him. The amount of wine he had drunk to-day would generally have had no more effect upon him than water, and yet he had felt now and then as if he were drunken, and the whole festal hall turned round with him. Even now he would be quite incapable of walking forward in a given straight

line.

With the exclamation, "Such is life!--a few hours ago on the rowing-bench, and fighting with the brander of the galleys for trying to brand me with the slave-mark, and now one of the greatest among the great!" he closed his tale, for a glance through the window showed him that time pressed.

With strange bashfulness he then gazed at a ring upon his right hand, and said hesitatingly that his own modesty made the avowal difficult to him; but the fact was, he was not the same man as when he last left the ladies. By the grace of the emperor he had been made a praetorian. Caesar had at first wanted to make him a knight; but he esteemed his Macedonian descent higher than that class, to which too many freed slaves belonged for his taste. This he had frankly acknowledged, and the emperor must have considered his objections valid, for he immediately spoke a few words to the prefect Macrinus, and then told the others to greet him as senator with the rank of praetorian.

Then indeed he felt as if the seat beneath him were transformed into a wild steed carrying him away, through sea and sky--wherever it pleased. He had had to hold tightly to the arm of the couch, and only remembered that some one--who it was he did not know--had whispered to him to thank Caesar.

"This," continued the gem-cutter, "restored me so far to myself that I could express my gratitude to your future husband, my child. I am only the second Egyptian who has entered the senate. Coeranus was the only one before me. What favor! And how can I describe what followed? All the distinguished members of the senate and the past consuls offered me a brotherly embrace as their new colleague. When Caesar commanded me to appear at your side in the Circus, wearing the white toga with the broad purple stripe, and I remarked that the shops of the better clothes-sellers would be shut by this time on account of the performance, and that such a toga was not to be obtained, there was a great laugh over the Alexandrian love of amusement. From all sides they offered me what I required; but I gave the preference to Theocritus, on account of his height. What is long enough for him will not be too short for me.--And now one of the emperor's chariots is waiting for me. If only Alexander were at home! The house ought to have been illuminated and hung with garlands for my arrival, and a crowd of slaves waiting to kiss my hands.

"There will soon be more than our two. I hope Argutis may understand how to fasten on the shoes with the straps and the crescent! Philip knows even less of these things than I do myself, besides which the poor boy is laid low. It is lucky that I remembered him. I had very nearly forgotten his existence. Ah!--if your mother were still alive! She had clever-fingers! She--Ah, lady Euryale, Melissa has perhaps told you about her. Olympias she was called, like the mother of the great Alexander, and, like her, she bore good children. You yourself were praising my boys just now. And the girl!.. Only a few days ago, it was a pretty, shy thing that no one would ever have expected to do anything great; and now, what have we not to thank that gentle child for? The little one was always her mother's darling. Eternal gods! I dare not think of it! If only she who is gone might have had the joy of hearing me called senator and praetor! O child! if she could have sat with us to-day in the emperor's seats, and we two could have seen you there--you, our pride, honored by the whole city, Caesar's future bride."

Here the strong man with the soft heart broke down, and, clasping his hands over his face, sobbed aloud, while Melissa clung to him and stroked his bearded cheeks.

Under her loving words of consolation he soon regained his composure, and, still struggling against the rising tears, he cried:

"Thank Heaven, there can be no more foolish talk of flight! I shall stay here; I shall never take advantage of the ivory chair that belongs to me in the curia in Rome. Your husband, my child, and the state, would scarcely expect it of me. If, however, Caesar presents me as his father, with estates and treasures, my first thought shall be to raise a monument to your mother. You shall see! A monument, I tell you, without a rival. It shall represent the strength of man submissive to womanly charm."

He bent down to kiss his daughter's brow, and whispered in her ear:

"Gaze confidently into the future, my girl. A father's eye is not easily deceived, and so I tell you--that the emperor has been forced to shed blood do insure the safety of the throne; but, in personal intercourse with him, I learned to know your future husband as a noble-hearted man. Indeed, I am not rich enough to thank the gods for such a son-in-law!"

Melissa gazed after her father, incapable of speaking. It went to her heart that all these hopes should be changed to sorrow and disappointment through her. And so she said, with tearful eyes, and shook her head when the lady assured her that with her it was a question of a cruelly spoiled life, whereas her father would only have to renounce some idle vanities which he would forget as easily as he had seized upon them.

"You do not know him," answered the maiden, sadly. "If I fly, then he too must hide himself in a far country. He will never be happy again if they take him from the little house--his birds--our mother's grave. It was for her sake alone that he took no thought for the ivory seat in the curia. If you only knew how he clings to everything that reminds him of our mother, and she never left our city."

Here she was interrupted by the entrance of Philostratus. He was not alone; an imperial slave accompanied him,

bringing a graceful basket with gifts from the emperor to Melissa.

First came a wreath of roses and lotos-flowers, looking as if they had been plucked just before sunrise, for among the blossoms and leaves there flashed and sparkled a glittering dew of diamonds, lightly fastened on delicate silver wires. Next came a bunch of flowers, round whose stems a supple golden snake was twined, covered with rubies and diamonds and destined to coil itself round a woman's arm. The third was a necklace of extremely costly Persian pearls, which had once belonged--so the merchant had declared--to great Cleopatra's treasure.

Melissa loved flowers; and the costly gifts that accompanied them could not fail to rejoice a woman's heart. And yet she only gave them a passing glance, reddening painfully as she did so.

What the bearer had to say to her was of more importance to her than the gifts he brought, and in fact the troubled manner of the usually composed philosopher betrayed that he had something more serious to deliver than the gifts of his love-sick lord.

The lady Euryale, perceiving that he meant to try once more to persuade Melissa to yield, hastened to declare that she had found ways and means to help the maiden to escape; but he shook his head with a sigh, and said, thoughtfully:

"Well--well--I shall go on board the ship while the wild beasts are doing their part in the Circus. May we meet again happily, either here or else where! My way leads me first to Caesar's mother, to inform her of his choice of a wife. Not that he needs her consent: whose consent or disapproval does Caracalla care for? But I am to win Julia's heart for you. Possibly I may succeed; but you--you scorn it, and fly from her son. And yet--believe me, child--the heart of that woman is a treasure that has no equal, and, if she should open her arms to you, there would be little that you could not endure. When I left you, just now, I put myself in your place, and approved of your resolve; but it would be wrong not to remind you once more of what you must expect if you follow your own will, and if Caesar considers himself scorned, ill-treated, and deceived by you."

"In the name of all the gods, what has happened?" broke in Melissa, pallid with fear. Philostratus pressed his hand to his brow, and his voice was hoarse with suppressed emotion as he continued: "Nothing new--only things are taking their old course. You know that Caracalla threatened old Claudius Vindex and his nephew with death because of their opposition to his union with you. We all hoped, however, that he would be moved to exercise mercy. He is in love--he was so gracious at the feast! I myself was foremost among those who did their utmost to dispose Caesar to clemency.. But he would not be moved, and, before the sun goes down upon this day, the old man and the young one--the chiefest among the nobles of Rome--will be no more. And it is Caracalla's love for you, child, that sheds this blood. Ask yourself after this how many lives will be sacrificed when your flight causes hatred and fury to reign supreme in the soul of the cheated monarch!"

With quickened breath Euryale had listened to the philosopher, without regarding the girl; but scarcely had Philostratus uttered his last words than Melissa ran to her, and, clasping her hands passionately on the matron's arm, she cried, "Ought I to obey you, Euryale, and the terrors of my own heart, and flee?"

Then releasing the lady, she turned again to the philosopher, and burst out: "Or are you in the right, Philostratus? Must I stay, to prevent the misery that threatens to overtake others?"

Beside herself, torn by the storm that raged in her soul, she clasped her hands upon her brow and continued, wildly: "You are both of you so wise, and surely wish the best. How can you give me such opposite advice? And my own heart?--why have the gods struck it dumb? Time was when it spoke loudly enough if ever I was in doubt. One thing I know for certain: if by the sacrifice of my life I could undo it all, I would joyfully cast myself before the lions and panthers, like the Christian maiden whom my mother saw smiling radiantly as she was led into the arena. Splendor and power are as hateful to me as the flowers yonder with their false dew. I was ever taught to close my ear to the voice of selfishness. If I have any wish for myself, it is that I may keep my faith with him to whom it was promised. But for love of my father, and if I could be certain of saving many from death and misery, I would stay, though I should despise myself and be separated forever from my beloved!"

"Submit to the inevitable," interposed the philosopher, with eager entreaty. "The immortal gods will reward you with the blessings of hundreds whom a word from you will have saved from ruin and destruction."

"And what say you?" asked the maiden, gazing with anxious expectancy into the matron's face. "Follow your own heart!" replied the lady, deeply moved.

Melissa had hearkened to both counselors with eager ear, and both hung anxiously on her lips, while, as if taken out of herself, she gazed with panting bosom into the empty air. They had not long to wait. Suddenly the maiden approached Philostratus and said with a firmness and decision that astonished her friend:

"This will I do--this--I feel it here--this is the right. I remain, I renounce the love of my heart, and accept what Fate has laid upon me. It will be hard, and the sacrifice that I offer is great. But I must first have the certainty that it shall not be in vain."

"But, child," cried Philostratus, "who can look into the future, and answer for what is still to come?"

"Who?" asked Melissa, undaunted. "He alone in whose hand lies my future. To Caesar himself I leave the decision. Go you to him now and speak for me. Bring him greeting from me, and tell him that I, whom he honors with his love, dare to entreat him modestly but earnestly not to punish the aged Claudius Vindex and his nephew for the fault they were guilty of on my account. For my sake would he deign to grant them life--and liberty? Add to this that it is the first proof I have asked of his magnanimity, and clothe it all in such winning words as Peitho can lay upon your eloquent lips. If he grants pardon to these unfortunate ones, it shall be a sign to me that I may be permitted to shield others from his wrath. If he refuses, and they are put to death, then will he himself have decided our fate otherwise, and he sees me for the last time alive in the Circus. Thus shall it be--I have spoken."

The last words came like a stern order, and Philostratus seemed to have some hopes of the emperor's clemency, for his love's sake, and the philosopher's own eloquence. The moment Melissa ceased, he seized her hand and cried, eagerly:

"I will try it; and, if he grant your request, you remain?"

"Yes," answered the maiden, firmly. "Pray Caesar to have mercy, soften his heart as much as you are able. I expect an answer before going to the Circus."

She hurried back into the sleeping-room without regarding Philostratus's answer. Once there, she threw herself upon her knees and prayed, now to the manes of her mother, now--it was for the first time--to the crucified Saviour of the Christians, who had taken upon himself a painful death to bring happiness to others. First she prayed for strength to keep her vow, come what might; and then she prayed for Diodoros, that he might not be made wretched if she found herself compelled to break her troth with him. Her father and brothers, too, were not forgotten, as she commended their lives to a higher power.

When Euryale looked into the room, she found Melissa still upon her knees, her young frame shaken as with fever. So she withdrew softly, and in the Temple of Serapis, where her husband served as high-priest, she prayed to Jesus Christ that he who suffered little children to come unto him would lead this wandering lamb into the right path.

CHAPTER XXVI

The lady Euryale's silent prayer was interrupted by the return of Alexander. He brought the clothes which Seleukus's wife had given him for Melissa. He was already dressed in his best, and crowned like all those who occupied the first seats in the Circus; but his festal garb accorded ill with the pained look on his features, from which every trace had vanished of the overflowing joy in life which had embellished them only this morning.

He had seen and heard things which made him feel that it would no longer be a sacrifice to give his life to save his sister.

Sad thoughts had flitted across his cheerful spirit like dark bats, even while he was talking with Melissa and her protectress, for he knew well how infinitely hard his father would find it to have to quit Alexandria; and if he himself fled with Melissa he would be obliged to give up the winning of fair Agatha. The girl's Christian father had indeed received him kindly, but had given him to understand plainly enough that he would never allow a professed heathen to sue for his daughter's hand. Besides this, he had met with other humiliations which placed themselves like a wall between him and his beloved, the only child of a rich and respected man. He had forfeited the right of appearing before Zeus as a suitor; for indeed he was no longer such as he had been only yesterday.

The news that Caracalla proposed to marry Melissa had been echoed by insolent tongues, with the addition that he, Alexander, had ingratiated himself with Caesar by serving him as a spy. No one had expressly said this to him; but, while he was hurrying through the city in Caesar's chariot, on the ladies' message, it had been made very plain to his apprehension. Honest men had avoided him--him to whom hitherto every one for whose regard he cared had held out a friendly hand; and much else that he had experienced in the course of this drive had been unpleasant enough to give rise to a change of his whole inner being.

The feeling that every one was pointing at him the finger of scorn, or of wrath, had never ceased to pursue him. And he had been under no illusion; for when he met the old sculptor Lysander, who only yesterday had so kindly told him and Melissa about Caesar's mother, as he nodded from the chariot his greeting was not returned; and the honest artist had waved his hand with a gesture which no Alexandrian could fail to understand as meaning, "I no longer know you, and do not wish to be recognized by you."

He had from his childhood loved Diodoros as a brother, and in one of the side streets, down which the chariot had turned to avoid the tumult in the Kanopic way, Alexander had seen his old friend. He had desired the charioteer to stop, and had leaped out on the road to speak to Diodoros and give him at once Melissa's message; but the young man had turned his back with evident displeasure, and to the painter's pathetic appeal, "But, at any rate, hear me!" he answered, sharply: "The less I hear of you and yours the better for me. Go on--go on, in Caesar's chariot!"

With this he had turned away and knocked at the door of an architect who was known to them both; and Alexander, tortured with painful feelings, had gone on, and for the first time the idea had taken possession of him that he had indeed descended to the part of spy when he had betrayed to Caesar what Alexandrian wit had to say about him. He could, of course, tell himself that he would rather have faced death or imprisonment than have betrayed to Caracalla the name of one of the gibbers; still, he had to admit to himself that, but for the hope of saving his father and brother from death and imprisonment, he would hardly have done Caesar such service. The mercy shown to them was certainly too like payment, and his own part in the matter struck him as hateful and base. His fellow-townsmen had a right to bear him a grudge, and his friends to keep out of his way. A feeling came over him of bitter self-contempt, hitherto strange to him; and he understood for the first time how Philip could regard life as a burden and call it a malicious Danaus-gift of the gods. When, finally, in the Kanopic way, close in front of Seleukus's house, a youth unknown to him cried, scornfully, as the chariot was slowly making its way through the throng, "The brother-in-law of Tarautas!" he had great difficulty in restraining himself from leaping down and letting the rascal feel the weight of his fists. He knew, too, that Tarautas was the name of a hateful and bloodthirsty gladiator which had been given as a nickname to Caesar in Rome; and when he heard the insolent fellow's cry taken up by the mob, who shouted after him, "Tarautas's brother-in-law!" wherever he went, he felt as though he were being pelted with mire and stones.

It would have been a real comfort to him if the earth would have opened to swallow him with the chariot, to hide him from the sight of men. He could have burst out crying like a child that has been beaten. When at last he was safe inside Seleukus's house, he was easier; for here he was known; here he would be understood. Berenike must know what he thought of Caesar's suit, and seeing her wholesome and honest hatred, he had sworn to himself that he would snatch his sister from the hands of the tyrant, if it were to lead him to the most agonizing death.

While she was engaged in selecting a dress for her protegee, he related to the lady Euryale what had happened to him in the street and in the house of Seleukus. He had been conducted past the soldiers in the vestibule and impluvium to the lady's private rooms, and there he had been witness to a violent matrimonial dispute. Seleukus had previously delivered to his wife Caesar's command that she should appear in the Amphitheater with the other noble dames of the city. Her answer was a bitter laugh, and a declaration that she would mingle with the spectators in none but mourning

robes. Thereupon her husband, pointing out to her the danger to which such conduct would expose them, had raised objections, and she at last had seemed to yield. When Alexander joined her he had found her in a splendid dress of shining purple brocade, her black hair crowned with a wreath of roses, and a splendid diadem; a garland of roses hung across her bosom, and precious stones sparkled round her throat and arms. In short, she was arrayed like a happy mother for her daughter's wedding-day.

Soon after Alexander's arrival Seleukus had come in, and this conspicuously handsome dress, so unbecoming to the matron's age, and so unlike her usual attire--chosen, evidently, to put the monstrosity of Caesar's demand in the strongest light--had roused her husband's wrath. He had expressed his dissatisfaction in strong terms, and again pointed out to her the danger in which such a daring demonstration might involve them; but this time there was no moving the lady; she would not despoil herself of a single rose. After she had solemnly declared that she would appear in the Circus either as she thought fit or not at all, her husband had left her in anger.

"What a fool she is!" Euryale exclaimed.

Then she showed him a white robe of beautiful bombyx, woven in the isle of Kos, which she had decided on for Melissa, and a peplos with a border of tender sea-green; and Alexander approved of the choice.

Time pressed, and Euryale went at once to Melissa with the new festal raiment. Once more she nodded kindly to the girl, and begged her, as she herself had something to discuss with Alexander, to allow the waiting-woman to dress her. She felt as if she were bringing the robe to a condemned creature, in which she was to be led to execution, and Melissa felt the same.

Euryale then returned to the painter, and bade him end his narrative.

The lady Berenike had forthwith desired Johanna to pack together all the dead Korinna's festal dresses. Alexander had then followed her guidance, accompanying her to a court in the slaves' quarters, where a number of men were awaiting her. These were the captains of Seleukus's ships, which were now in port, and the superintendents of his granaries and offices, altogether above a hundred freedmen in the merchant's service. Each one seemed to know what he was here for.

The matron responded to their hearty greetings with a word of thanks, and added, bitterly:

"You see before you a mourning mother whom a ruthless tyrant compels to go to a festival thus--thus--only look at me--bedizened like a peacock!"

At this the bearded assembly gave loud expression to their dissatisfaction, but Berenike went on "Melapompus has taken care to secure good places; but he has wisely not taken them all together. You are all free men; I have no orders to give you. But, if you are indeed indignant at the scorn and heart-ache inflicted on your lord's wife, make it known in the Circus to him who has brought them on her. You are all past your first youth, and will carefully avoid any rashness which may involve you in ruin. May the avenging gods aid and protect you!"

With this she had turned her back on the multitude; but Johannes, the Christian lawyer, the chief freedman of the household, had hurried into the court-yard, just in time to entreat her to give up this ill-starred demonstration, and to extinguish the fire she had tried to kindle. So long as Caesar wore the purple, rebellion against him, to whom the Divinity had intrusted the sovereignty, was a sin. The scheme she was plotting was meant to punish him who had pained her; but she forgot that it might cost these brave men, husbands and fathers, their life or liberty. The vengeance she called on them to take might be balm to the wounds of her own heart; but if Caesar in his wrath brought destruction down on these, her innocent instruments, that balm would turn to burning poison.

These words, whispered to her with entire conviction, had not been without their effect. For some minutes Berenike had stared gloomily at the ground; but then she had again approached the assembly, to repeat the warning given her by the Christian, whom all respected, and by whom some indeed had been persuaded to be baptized.

"Johannes is right," she ended. "This ill-used heart did wrong when it sent up its cry of anguish before you. Rather will I be trodden under foot by the enemy, as is the manner of the Christians, than bring such misfortune on innocent men, who are so faithful to our house. Be cautious, then. Give no overt expression to your feelings. Let each one who feels too weak to control his wrath, avoid the Circus; and those who go, keep still if they feel moved to act in my behalf. One thing only you may do. Tell every one, far and wide, what I had purposed. What others may do, they themselves must answer for."

The Christian had strongly disapproved of this last clause; but Berenike had paid no heed, and had left the court-yard, followed by Alexander.

The shouts of the indignant multitude had rung in their ears, and, in spite of her warning, they had sounded like a terrible threat. Johannes, to be sure, had remained, to move them to moderation by further remonstrances.

"What were the mad creatures plotting?" Euryale anxiously broke in; and he hastily went on "They call Caesar by no name but Tarautas; every mouth is full of gibes and rage at the new and monstrous taxes, the billeting of the troops, and the intolerable insolence of the soldiery, which Caracalla wickedly encourages. His contemptuous indifference has deeply offended the heads of the town. And then his suit to my sister! Young and old are wagging their tongues over

it."

"It would be more like them to triumph in it," said the matron, interrupting him. "An Alexandrian in the purple, on the throne of the Caesars!"

"I too had hoped that," cried Alexander, "and it seemed so likely. But who can understand the populace? Every woman in the place, I should have thought, would hold her head higher, at the thought that an Alexandrian girl was empress; but it was from the women that I heard the most vindictive and shameless abuse. I heard more than enough; for, as we got closer to the Serapeum, the more slowly was the chariot obliged to proceed, to make its way through the crowd. And the things I heard! I clinch my fists now as I only think of them.--And what will it be in the Circus? What will not Melissa have to endure!"

"It is envy," the matron murmured to herself, but she was immediately silent, for the young girl came toward them, out of the bedroom. Her toilet was complete; the beautiful white dress became her well. The wreath of roses, with diamond dewdrops, lay lightly on her hair, the snake-shaped bracelet which her imperial suitor had sent her clasped her white arm, and her small head, somewhat bent, her pale, sweet face, and large, bashful, inquiring, drooping eyes formed such an engaging, modest, and unspeakably touching picture, that Euryale dared to hope that even in the Circus none but hardened hearts could harbor a hostile feeling against this gentle, pure blossom, slightly drooping with silent sorrow. She could not resist the impulse to kiss Melissa, and the half-formed purpose ripened within her to venture the utmost for the child's protection. The pity in her heart had turned to love; and when she saw that to this sweet creature, at the mere sight of whom her heart went forth, the most splendid jewels, in which any other girl would have been glad to deck herself, were as a heavy burden to be borne but sadly, she felt it a sacred duty to comfort her and lighten this trial, and shelter Melissa, so far as was in her power, from insult and humiliation.

It was many years since she had visited the Amphitheater, where the horrible butchery was an abomination to her; but to-day her heart bade her conquer her old aversion, and accompany the girl to the Circus.

Had not Melissa taken the place in her heart of her lost daughter? Was not she, Euryale, the only person who, by showing herself with Melissa and declaring herself her friend, could give the people assurance that the girl, who was exposed to misapprehension and odium by the favor she had met with from the ruthless and hated sovereign, was in truth pure and lovable? Under her guardianship, by her side, the girl, as she knew, would be protected from misapprehension and insult; and she, an old woman and a Christian, should she evade the first opportunity of taking up a cross in imitation of the Divine Master, among whose followers she joyfully counted herself--though secretly, for fear of men? All this flashed through her mind with the swiftness of lightning, and her call, "Doris!" addressed to her waiting-woman, was so clear and unexpected that Melissa's overstrung nerves were startled. She looked up at the lady in amazement, as, without a word of explanation, she said to the woman who had hurried in:

"The blue robe I wore at the festival of Adonis, my mother's diadem, and a large gem with the head of Serapis for my shoulder. My hair--oh, a veil will cover it! What does it matter for an old woman?--You, child, why do you look at me in such amazement? What mother would allow a pretty young daughter to appear alone in the Circus? Besides, I may surely hope that it will confirm your courage to feel that I am at your side. Perhaps the populace may be moved a little in your favor if the wife of the high-priest of their greatest god is your companion."

But she could scarcely end her speech, for Melissa had flown into her arms, exclaiming, "And you will do this for me?" while Alexander, deeply touched by gratitude and joy, kissed her thin arm and the hem of her peplos.

While Melissa helped the matron to change her dress--in the next room Alexander paced to and fro in great unrest. He knew the Alexandrians, and there was not the slightest doubt but that the presence of this universally revered lady would make them look with kindlier eyes on his sister. Nothing else could so effectually impress them with the entire propriety of her appearance in the Circus. The more seriously he had feared that Melissa might be deeply insulted and offended by the rough demonstrations of the mob, the more gratefully did his heart beat; nay, his facile nature saw in this kind act the first smile of returning good fortune.

He only longed to be hopeful once more, to enjoy the present--as so many philosophers and poets advised--and especially the show in the Circus, his last pleasure, perhaps; to forget the imminent future.

The old bright look came back to his face; but it soon vanished, for even while he pictured himself in the amphitheatre, he remembered that there, too, his former acquaintances might refuse to speak to him; that the odious names of "Tarautas' brother-in-law" or of "traitor" might be shouted after him on the road. A cold chill came over him, and the image of pretty Ino rose up before him--Ino, who had trusted in his love; and to whom, of all others, he had given cause to accuse him of false-heartedness. An unpleasant sense came over him of dissatisfaction with himself, such as he, who always regarded self-accusation, repentance, and atonement as a foolish waste of life, had never before experienced.

The fine, sunny autumn day had turned to a sultry, dull evening, and Alexander went to the window to let the sea-breeze fan his dewy brow; but he soon heard voices behind him, for Euryale and Melissa had re-entered the room, followed by the house-steward, who presented to his mistress a sealed tablet which a slave had just brought from Philostratus. The women had been talking of Melissa's vow; and Euryale had promised her that, if Fate should decide

against Caesar, she would convey the girl to a place of safety, where she could certainly not be discovered, and might look forward in peace to the future. Then she had impressed on her that, if things should be otherwise ordered, she must endure even the unendurable with patience, as an obedient wife, as empress, but still ever conscious of the solemn and beneficent power she might wield in her new position.

The tablets would now settle the question; and side by side the two women hastily read the missive which Philostratus had written on the wax, in his fine, legible hand. It was as follows:

"The condemned have ceased to live. Your efforts had no effect but to hasten their end. Caesar's desire was to rid you of adversaries even against your will. Vindex and his nephew are no more; but I embarked soon enough to escape the rage of him who might have attained the highest favors of fortune if he had but known how to be merciful."

"God be praised!--but alas, poor Vindex!" cried Euryale, as she laid down the tablets. But Melissa kissed her, and then exclaimed to her brother:

"Now all doubts are at an end. I may fly. He himself has settled the matter!"

Then she added, more gently, but still urgently "Do you take care of my father, and Philip, and of yourself. The lady Euryale will protect me. Oh, how thankful am I!"

She looked up to heaven with fervent devotion Euryale whispered to them: "My plan is laid. As soon as the performance is over, Alexander shall take you home, child, to your father's house; you must go in one of Caesar's chariots. Afterward come back here with your brother; I will wait for you below. But now we will go together to the Circus, and can discuss the details on our way. You, my young friend, go now and order away the imperial litter; bid my steward to have the horses put to my covered harmamaxa. There is room in it for us all three."

By the time Alexander returned, the daylight was waning, and the clatter of the chariots began to be audible which conveyed Caesar's court to the Circus.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The great Amphitheatre of Dionysus was in the Bruchium, the splendid palatial quarter of the city, close to the large harbor between the Choma and the peninsula of Lochias. Hard by the spacious and lofty rotunda, in which ten thousand spectators could be seated, stood the most fashionable gymnasias and riding-schools. These buildings, which had been founded long since by the Ptolemaic kings, and had been repeatedly extended and beautified, formed, with the adjoining schools for gladiators and beast-fighters, and the stables for wild beasts from every part of the world, a little town by themselves.

At this moment the amphitheatre looked like a beehive, of which every cell seems to be full, but in which a whole swarm expects yet to find room. The upper places, mere standing-room for the common people, and the cheaper seats, had been full early in the day. By the afternoon the better class of citizens had come in, if their places were not reserved; and now, at sunset, those who were arriving in litters and chariots, just before the beginning of the show, were for the most part in Caesar's train, court officials, senators, or the rich magnates of the city.

The strains of music were by this time mingling with the shouting and loud talk of the spectators, or of the thousands who were crowding round the building without hoping to obtain admission. But even for them there was plenty to be seen. How delightful to watch the well-dressed women, and the men of rank and wealth, crowned with wreaths, as they dismounted; to see the learned men and artists arrive--more or less eagerly applauded, according to the esteem in which they were held by the populace! The most splendid sight of all was the procession of priests, with Timotheus, the high-priest of Serapis, at their head, and by his side the priest of Alexander, both marching with dignity under a canopy. They were followed by the animals to be slaughtered for sacrifice, and the images of the gods and the deified Caesars, which were to be placed in the arena, as the most worshipful of all the spectators. Timotheus wore the splendid insignia of his office; the priest of Alexander was in purple, as being the *idiologos* and head of all the temples of Egypt, and representative of Caesar.

The advent of the images of the Caesars gave rise to a sort of judgment of the dead: for the mob hailed that of Julius Caesar with enthusiasm, that of Augustus, with murmurs of disapproval; when Caligula appeared, he was hissed; while the statues of Vespasian, Titus, Hadrian, and Antonine, met with loud acclamations. That of Septimius Severus, Caracalla's father, to whom the town owed many benefits, was very well received. The images of the gods, too, had very various fates. Serapis, and Alexander, the divine hero of the town, were enthusiastically welcomed, while scarcely a voice was heard on the approach of Zeus-Jupiter and Ares-Mars. They were regarded as the gods of the hated Romans.

The companies of the imperial body-guard, who were placed about the amphitheatre, found no great difference, so long as it was daylight, between the crowd round the Circus of Alexandria and that by the Tiber. What chiefly struck them was the larger number of dusky faces, and the fanciful garb of the Magians. The almost naked rabble, too, with nothing on but a loin-cloth, who wriggled in and out of the throng, ready for any service or errand, formed a feature unknown at Rome. But, as it grew darker, the Romans began to perceive that it was not for nothing that they had come hither.

At Rome, when some great show was promised, of beast-fighting, gladiators, and the like, there were, no doubt, barbarian princes to be seen, and envoys from the remotest ends of the earth in strange and gorgeous array; and there, too, small wares of every kind were for sale. By the Tiber, again, night shows were given, with grand illuminations, especially for the feast of Flora; but here, as soon as the sun had set, and the sports were about to begin, the scene was one never to be forgotten. Some of the ladies who descended from the litters, wore garments of indescribable splendor; the men even displayed strange and handsome costumes as they were helped out of their gilt and plated chariots by their servants. What untold wealth must these men have at their command, to be able to dress their slaves in gold and silver brocade; and the runners, who kept up with the swiftest horses, must have lungs of iron! The praetorians, who had not for many a day seen anything to cause them to forget the motto of the greatest philosopher among their poets--never to be astonished at anything--repeatedly pushed each other with surprise and admiration; nay, the centurion Julius Martialis, who had just now had a visit in camp from his wife and children, in defiance of orders, while Caesar himself was looking on, struck his fist on his greaves, and, exclaiming loudly, "Look out!" pointed to Seleukus's chariot, for which four runners, in tunics with long sleeves, made of sea-green bombyx, richly embroidered with silver, were making a way through the crowd.

The barefooted lads, with their nimble, gazellelike legs, were all well looking, and might have been cast all in one mold. But what struck the centurion and his comrades as most remarkable in their appearance were the flash and sparkle from their slender ankles, as the setting sun suddenly shot a fleeting ray through a rift in the heavy clouds. Each of these fellows wore on his legs gold bands set with precious stones, and the rubies which glittered on the harness of Seleukus's horse were of far greater value.

He, as master of the festival, had come betimes, and this was the first of many such displays of wealth which

followed each other in quick succession, as soon as the brief twilight of Egypt had given way to darkness, and the lighting up of the Circus was begun.

Here came a beautifully dressed woman in a roomy litter, over which waved a canopy entirely of white ostrich-plumes, which the evening breeze swayed like a thicket of fern-leaves. This throne was borne by ten black and ten white slave-girls, and before it two fair children rode on tame ostriches. The tall heir of a noble house, who, like Caesar at Rome, belonged to the "Blues," drove his own team of four splendid white horses; and he himself was covered with turquoises, while the harness was set with cut sapphires.

The centurion shook his head in silent admiration. His face had been tanned in many wars, both in the East and West, and he had fought even in distant Caledonia, but the low forehead, loose under lip, and dull eye spoke of small gifts of intellect. Nevertheless, he was not lacking in strength of will, and was regarded by his comrades as a good beast of burden who would submit to a great deal before it became too much for him. But then he would break out like a mad bull, and he might long ago have risen to higher rank, had he not once in such a fit of passion nearly throttled a fellow-soldier. For this crime he had been severely punished, and condemned to begin again at the bottom of the ladder. He owed it chiefly to the young tribune Aurelius Apollinaris that he had very soon regained the centurion's staff, in spite of his humble birth; he had saved that officer's life in the war with the Armenians--to be here, in Alexandria, cruelly mutilated by the hand of his sovereign.

The centurion had a faithful heart. He was as much attached to the two noble brothers as to his wife and children, for indeed he owed them much; and if the service had allowed it he would long since have made his way to the house of Seleukus to learn how the wounded tribune was faring. But he had not time even to see his own family, for his younger and richer comrades, who wanted to enjoy the pleasures of the city, had put upon him no small share of their own duties. Only this morning a young soldier of high birth, who had begun his career at the same time as Martialis, had promised him some tickets of admission to the evening's performance in the Circus if he would take his duty on guard outside the amphitheatre. And this offer had been very welcome to the centurion, for he thus found it possible to give those he loved best, his wife and his mother, the greatest treat which could be offered to any Alexandrian. And now, when anything noteworthy was to be seen outside, he only regretted that he had already some time since conducted them to their seats in one of the upper rows. He would have liked that they, too, should have seen the horses and the chariots and the "Blue" charioteer's turquoises and sapphires; although a decurion observed, as he saw them, that a Roman patrician would scorn to dress out his person with such barbaric splendor, and an Alexandrian of the praetorian guard declared that his fellow-citizens of Greek extraction thought more of a graceful fold than of whole strings of precious stones.

"But why, then, was this 'Blue' so vehemently hailed by the mob!" asked a Pannonian in the guard.

"The mob!" retorted the Alexandrian, scornfully. "Only the Syrians and other Asiatics. Look at the Greeks. The great merchant Seleukus is the richest of them all, but splendid as his horses, his chariots, and his slaves are, he himself wears only the simple Macedonian mantle. Though it is of costly material, who would suspect it? If you see a man swaggering in such a blaze of gems you may wager your house--if you have one--that his birthplace lies not very far from Syria."

"Now, that one, in a mother-of-pearl shell on two wheels, is the Jew Poseidonius," the Pannonian put in. "I am quartered on his father. But he is dressed like a Greek."

At this the centurion, in his delight at knowing something, opened his mouth with a broad grin: "I am a native here," said he, "and I can tell you the Jew would make you answer for it if you took him for anything but a Greek."

"And quite right," added another soldier, from Antioch. "The Jews here are many, but they have little in common with those in Palestine. They wish to pass for Greeks; they speak Greek, assume Greek names, and even cease to believe in the great God their father; they study Greek philosophy, and I know one who worships in the Temple of Serapis."

"Many do the same in Rome," said a man of Ostia. "I know an epigram which ridicules them for it."

At this point they were interrupted, for Martialis pointed to a tall man who was coming toward them, and whom his sharp eye had recognized as Macrinus, the prefect of the praetorians. In an instant the soldiers were erect and rigid, but still many a helmeted head was turned toward the spot where their chief stood talking in an undertone to the Magian Serapion.

Macrinus had persuaded Caesar to send for the exorciser, to test his arts. Immediately after the performance, however late it might be, the Magian was to be admitted to his presence.

Serapion thanked the prefect, and then whispered to him, "I have had a second revelation."

"Not here!" exclaimed Macrinus, uneasily, and, leading away his handsome little son, he turned toward the entrance.

Dusk, meanwhile, had given way to darkness, and several slaves stood ready to light the innumerable little lamps which were to illuminate the outside of the Circus. They edged the high arches which surrounded the two lower stories, and supported the upper ranks of the enormous circular structure. Separated only by narrow intervals, the rows of

lights formed a glittering series of frames which outlined the noble building and rendered it visible from afar.

The arches on the ground-floor led to the cells from which the men and beasts were let out into the arena; but some, too, were fitted with shops, where flowers and wreaths, refreshments, drinks, handkerchiefs, fans, and other articles in request, were sold. On the footway between the building and the row of pitch torches which surrounded it, men and women in thousands were walking to and fro. Smart, inquisitive girls were pushing their way singly or in groups, and their laughter drowned the deep, tragical voices of the soothsayers and Magians who announced their magic powers to the passersby. Some of these even made their way into the waiting-rooms of the gladiators and wrestlers, who to-day so greatly needed their support that, in spite of severe and newly enforced prohibitions, many a one stole out into the crowd to buy some effectual charm or protecting amulet.

Where the illuminations were completed, attempts of another kind were being made to work upon the mood of the people; nimble-tongued fellows--some in the service of Macrinus and some in that of the anxious senate--were distributing handkerchiefs to wave on Caesar's approach, or flowers to strew in his path. More than one, who was known for a malcontent, found a gold coin in his hand, with the image of the monarch he was expected to hail; and on the way by which Caesar was to come many of those who awaited him wore the caracalla. These were for the most part bribed, and their acclamations were to mollify the tyrant's mood.

As soon as the prefect had disappeared within the building, the praetorian ranks fell out again. It was lucky that among them were several Alexandrians, besides the centurion Martialis, who had not long been absent from their native town; for without them much would have remained incomprehensible. The strangest thing to foreign eyes was a stately though undecorated harmamaxa, out of which stepped first a handsome wreathed youth, then a matron of middle age, and at last an elegantly dressed girl, whose rare beauty made even Martialis--who rarely noticed women--exclaim, "Now, she is to my taste the sweetest-thing of all."

But there must have been something very remarkable about these three; for when they appeared the crowd broke out at first in loud shouts and outcries, which soon turned to acclamations and welcome, though through it all shrill whistles and hisses were heard.

"Caesar's new mistress, the daughter of a gemcutter!" the Alexandrian muttered to his comrades. "That handsome boy is her brother, no doubt. He is said to be a mean sycophant, a spy paid by Caesar."

"He?" said an older centurion, shaking his scarred head. "Sooner would I believe that the shouts of the populace were intended for the old woman and not for the young one."

"Then a sycophant he is and will remain," said the Alexandrian with a laugh. "For, as a matter of fact, it is the elder lady they are greeting, and, by Heracles, she deserves it! She is the wife of the high-priest of Serapis. There are few poor in this city to whom she has not done a kindness. She is well able, no doubt, for her husband is the brother of Seleukus, and her father, too, sat over his ears in gold."

"Yes, she is able," interrupted Martialis, with a tone of pride, as though it were some credit to himself. "But how many have even more, and keep their purse-strings tight! I have known her since she was a child, and she is the best of all that is good. What does not the town owe to her! She risked her life to move Caesar's father to mercy toward the citizens, after they had openly declared against him and in favor of his rival Pescennius Niger. And she succeeded, too."

"Why, then, are they whistling?" asked the older centurion.

"Because her companion is a spy," repeated the Alexandrian. "And the girl--In Caesar's favor! But, after all, which of you all would not gladly see his sister or his niece Caesar's light of love?"

"Not I!" cried Martialis. "But the man who speaks ill of that girl only does so because he likes blue eyes best. The maiden who comes in the lady Euryale's chariot is spotless, you may swear."

"Nay, nay," said the younger Alexandrian soothingly. "That black-haired fellow and his companions would whistle another tune if they knew any evil of her, and she would not be in the lady Euryale's company--that is the chief point--. But, look there! The shameless dogs are stopping their way! 'Green' to a man.--But here come the lictors."

"Attention!" shouted Martialis, firmly resolved to uphold the guardians of the peace, and not to suffer any harm to the matron and her fair companion; for Euryale's husband was the brother of Seleukus, whom his father and father-in-law had served years ago, while in the villa at Kanopus his mother and wife were left in charge to keep it in order. He felt that he was bound in duty to the merchant, and that all who were of that household had a right to count on his protection. But no active measures were needed; a number of "Blues" had driven off the "Greens" who had tried to bar Alexander's way, and the lictors came to their assistance.

A young man in festal array, who had pushed into the front rank of the bystanders, had looked on with panting breath. He was very pale, and the thick wreath he wore was scarcely sufficient to hide the bandage under it. This was Diodoros, Melissa's lover. After resting awhile at his friend's house he had been carried in a litter to the amphitheatre, for he could yet hardly walk. His father being one of the senators of the town, his family had a row of seats in the lowest and best tier; but this, on this occasion, was entirely given up to Caesar and his court. Consequently the

different members of the senate could have only half the usual number of seats. Still, the son of Polybius might in any case claim two in his father's name; and his friend Timon--who had also provided him with suitable clothing--had gone to procure the tickets from the curia. They were to meet at the entrance leading to their places, and it would be some little time yet before Timon could return.

Diodoros had thought he would behold his imperial rival; however, instead of Caracalla he had seen the contemptuous reception which awaited Alexander and Melissa, from some at least of the populace. Still, how fair and desirable had she seemed in his eyes, whom, only that morning, he had been blessed in calling his! As he now moved away from the main entrance, he asked himself why it was such torture to him to witness the humiliation of a being who had done him such a wrong, and whom he thought he hated and scorned so utterly. Hardly an hour since he had declared to Timon that he had rooted his love for Melissa out of his heart. He himself would feel the better for using the whistle he wore, in derision of her, and for seeing her faithlessness punished by the crowd. But now? When the insolent uproar went up from the "Greens," whose color he himself wore, he had found it difficult to refrain from rushing on the cowardly crew and knocking some of them down.

He now made his way with feeble steps to the entrance where he was to meet his friend. The blood throbbed in his temples, his mouth was parched, and, as a fruit-seller cried her wares from one of the archways, he took a few apples from her basket to refresh himself with their juice. His hand trembled, and the experienced old woman, observing the bandage under his wreath, supposed him to be one of the excited malcontents who had perhaps already fallen into the hands of the lictors. So, with a significant grin, she pointed under the table on which her fruit-baskets stood, and said "I have plenty of rotten ones. Six in a wrapper, quite easy to hide under your cloak. For whom you will. Caesar has given the golden apple of Paris to a goddess of this town. I should best like to see these flung at her brother, the sycophant."

"Do you know them?" asked Diodoros, hoarsely.

"No," replied the old woman. "No need for that. I have plenty of customers and good ears. The slut broke her word with a handsome youth of the town for the sake of the Roman, and they who do such things are repaid by the avenging gods." Diodoros felt his knees failing under him, and a wrathful answer was on his lips, when the huckster suddenly shouted like mad: "Caesar, Caesar! He is coming."

The shouts of the crowd hailing their emperor had already become audible through the heavy evening air, at first low and distant, and louder by degrees. They now suddenly rose to a deafening uproar, and while the sound rolled on like approaching thunder, broken by shrill whistles suggesting lightning, the sturdy old apple-seller clambered unaided on to her table, and shouted with all her might:

"Caesar! Here he is!--Hail, hail, hail to great Caesar!"

At the imminent risk of tumbling off her platform, she bent low down to reach under the table for the blue cloth which covered her store of rotten apples, snatched it off, and waved it with frantic enthusiasm, as though her elderly heart had suddenly gone forth to the very man for whom a moment ago she had been ready to sell her disgusting missiles. And still she shouted in ringing tones, "Hail, hail, Caesar!" again and again, with all her might, till there was no breath left in her overbuxom, panting breast, and her round face was purple with the effort. Nay, her emotion was so vehement that the bright tears streamed down her fat cheeks.

And every one near was shrieking like the applewoman, "Hail, Caesar!" and it was only where the crowd was densest that a sharp whistle now and then rent the roar of acclamations.

Diodoros, meanwhile, had turned to look at the main entrance, and, carried away by the universal desire to see, had perched himself on an unopened case of dried figs. His tall figure now towered far above the throng, and he set his teeth as he heard the old woman, almost speechless with delight, gasp out:

"Lovely! wonderful! He would never have found the like in Rome. Here, among us--"

But the cheers of the multitude now drowned every other sound. Fathers or mothers who had children with them lifted them up as high as they could; where a small man stood behind a tall one, way was willingly made, for it would have been a shame to hinder his view of such a spectacle. Many had already seen the great monarch in his shining, golden chariot, drawn by four splendid horses; but such an array of torch-bearers as now preceded Caracalla was a thing never seen within the memory of the oldest or most traveled man. Three elephants marched before him and three came behind, and all six carried in their trunks blazing torches, which they held now low and now aloft to light his road. To think that beasts could be trained to such a service! And that here, in Alexandria, such a display could be made before the haughty and pampered Romans!

The chariot stood still, and the black Ethiopians who guided the huge four-footed torch-bearers took the three leaders to join their fellows behind the chariot. This really was a fine sight; this could not but fill the heart of every one who loved his native town with pride and delight. For what should a man ever shout himself hoarse, if not for such a splendid and unique show? Diodoros himself could not take his eyes off the elephants. At first he was delighted with them, but presently the sight annoyed him even more than it had pleased him; for he reflected that the tyrant, the

villain, his deadly enemy, would certainly take to himself the applause bestowed on the clever beasts. With this, he grasped the reed pipe in the breast of his tunic. He had been on the point of using it before now, to retaliate on Melissa for some portion of the pain she had inflicted on him. At this thought, however, the paltriness of such revenge struck him with horror, and with a hasty impulse he snapped the pipe in two, and flung the pieces on the ground in front of the apple-stall. The old woman observed it and exclaimed:

"Ay, ay, such a sight makes one forgive a great deal"; but he turned his back on her in silence, and joined his friend at the appointed spot.

They made their way without difficulty to the seats reserved for the senators' families, and when they had taken their places, the young man replied but briefly to the sympathetic inquiries as to his health which were addressed to him by his acquaintances. His friend Timon gazed anxiously into his handsome but pale, sad face, as Diodoros sat crushed and absorbed in thought. He would have liked to urge him to quit the scene at once, for the seats just opposite were those destined to Caesar and his court--among them, no doubt, Melissa. In the dim light which still prevailed in the vast amphitheatre it was impossible to recognize faces. But there would soon be a blaze of light, and what misery must await the hapless victim of her faithlessness, still so far from perfect health! After the glare of light outside, which was almost blinding, the twilight within was for the moment a relief to Diodoros. His weary limbs were resting, a pleasant smell came up from the perfumed fountains in the arena, and his eyes, which could not here rest on anything to gratify him, were fixed on vacancy.

And yet it was a comfort to him to think that he had broken his pipe. It would have disgraced him to whistle it; and, moreover, the tone would have reached the ear of the noble lady who had accompanied Melissa, and whom he himself had, only yesterday, revered as a second mother.

Loud music now struck up, he heard shouts and cheers, and just above him--for it could only proceed from the uppermost tiers--there was an extraordinary tumult. Still he paid no heed, and as he thought of that matron the question suddenly arose in his mind, whether she would have consented to be seen with Melissa if she thought that the girl was indeed capable of ruthless falsehood or any other unworthy act. He, who never missed a show in the arena, had never seen the lady Euryale here. She could hardly have come to-day for her own pleasure; she had come, then, for Melissa's sake; and yet she knew that the girl was betrothed to him. Unless Caesar had commanded the matron's presence, Melissa must still be worthy of the esteem and affection of this best of women; and at this reflection Hope once more raised her head in his tortured soul.

He now suddenly wished that brighter light might dispel the gloom which just now he had found so restful; for the lady Euryale's demeanor would show him whether Melissa were still a virtuous maiden. If the matron were as friendly with her as ever, her heart was perhaps still his; it was not the splendor of the purple that had led her astray, but the coercion of the tyrant.

His silent reflections were here interrupted by the loud sounding of trumpets, battle-cries, and, immediately after, the fall of some heavy body, followed by repeated acclamations, noisy outcries, and the applause of those about him. Not till then had he been aware that the performances had begun. Below him, indeed, on the arena from which he had not once raised his eyes, nothing was to be seen on the yellow sand but the scented fountain and a shapeless body, by which a second and a third were soon lying; but overhead something was astir, and, from the right-hand side, bright rays flashed across the wide space. Above the vast circle of seats, arranged on seven tiers, suns and huge, strangely shaped stars were seen, which shed a subdued, many-tinted radiance; and what the youth saw over his head was not the vault of heaven, which to-night bent over his native city darkened by clouds, but a velarium of immense size on which the nocturnal firmament was depicted. This covered in the whole of the open space. Every constellation which rose over Alexandria was plainly recognizable. Jupiter and Mars, Caesar's favorites, outdid the other planets in size and brightness; and in the center of this picture of the sky, which slowly revolved round it, stars were set to form the letters of Caracalla's names, Bassianus and Antoninus. But their light, too, was dim, and veiled as it were with clouds. Soft music was heard from these artificial heavens, and in the stratum of air immediately beneath, the blare of war-trumpets and battle-cries were heard. Thus all eyes were directed upward, and Diodoros's with the rest.

He perceived, with amazement, that the givers of the entertainment, in their anxiety to set something absolutely new before their imperial guest, had arranged that the first games should take place in the air. A battle was being fought overhead, on a level with the highest places, in a way that must surely be a surprise even to the pampered Romans. Black and gold barks were jostling each other in mid-air, and their crews were fighting with the energy of despair. The Egyptian myth of the gods of the great lights who sail the celestial ocean in golden barks, and of the sun-god who each morning conquers the demons of darkness, had suggested the subject of this performance.

The battle between the Spirits of Darkness and of Light was to be fought out high above the best rows of seats occupied by Caesar and his court; and the combatants were living men, for the most part such as had been condemned to death or to the hardest forced labor. The black vessels were manned by negroes, the golden by fair-haired criminals, and they had embarked readily enough; for some of them would escape from the fray with only a few wounds and some quite unhurt, and each one was resolved to use his weapons so as to bring the frightful combat to a speedy end.

The woolly-haired blacks did not indeed know that they had been provided with loosely made swords which would go to pieces at the first shock, and with shields which could not resist a serious blow; while the fair-haired representatives of the light were supplied with sharp and strong weapons of offense and defense. At any cost the spirits of darkness must not be allowed to triumph over those of light. Of what value was a negro's life, especially when it was already forfeited?

While Euryale and Melissa sat with eyes averted from the horrible scene going on above them, and the matron, holding her young companion's hand, whispered to her:

"O child, child! to think that I should be compelled to bring you here!" loud applause and uproarious clapping surrounded them on every side.

The gem-cutter Heron, occupying one of the foremost cushioned seats, radiant with pride and delight in the red-bordered toga of his new dignity, clapped his big hands with such vehemence that his immediate neighbors were almost deafened. He, too, had been badly received, on his arrival, with shrill whistling, but he had been far from troubling himself about that. But when a troop of "Greens" had met him, just in front of the imperial dais, shouting brutal abuse in his face, he had paused, chucked the nearest man under the chin with his powerful fist, and fired a storm of violent epithets at the rest. Thanks to the lictors, he had got off without any harm, and as soon as he found himself among friends and men of rank, on whom he looked in speechless respect, he had recovered his spirits. He was looking forward with intense satisfaction to the moment when he might ask Caesar what he now thought of Alexandria.

Like his father, Alexander was intent on the bloody struggle--gazing upward with breathless interest as the combatants tried to fling each other into the yawning depth below them. But at the same time he never for an instant forgot the insults he had endured outside. How deeply he felt them was legible in his clouded face. Only once did a smile pass over it--when, toward the end of this first fight, the place was made lighter, he perceived in the row of seats next above him the daughter of his neighbor Skopas, pretty Ino, whom but a few days since he had vowed to love. He was conscious of having treated her badly, and given her the right to call him faithless. Toward her, indeed, he had been guilty of treachery, and it had really weighed on his soul. Their eyes met, and she gave him to understand in the plainest way that she had heard him stigmatized as Caesar's spy, and had believed the calumny. The mere sight of him seemed to fill her with anger, and she did her utmost to show him that she had quickly found a substitute for him; and it was to Alexander, no doubt, that Ktesias, her young kinsman, who had long paid her his addresses, owed the kindness with which Ino now gazed into his eyes. This was some comfort to the luckless, banished lover. On her account, at any rate, he need reproach himself no longer. Diodoros was sitting opposite to him, and his attention, too, was frequently interrupted.

The flashing swords and torches in the hands of the Spirits of Light, and the dimly gleaming stars above their heads, had not so far dispelled the darkness as that the two young people could identify each other. Diodoros, indeed, even throughout this absorbing fight, had frequently glanced at the imperial seats, but had failed to distinguish his beloved from the other women in Caracalla's immediate vicinity. But it now grew lighter, for, while the battle was as yet undecided, a fresh bark, full of Spirits of Light, flourishing their torches, was unexpectedly launched to support their comrades, and Heaven seemed to have sent them forth to win the fight, which had already lasted longer than the masters of the ceremonies had thought possible.

The wild shouts of the combatants and the yells of the wounded had long since drowned the soft music of the spheres above their heads. The call of tubas and bugles rang without ceasing through the great building, to the frequent accompaniment of the most horrible sound of all in this hideous spectacle--the heavy fall of a dead man dropping from above into the gulf.

But this dreadful thud was what gave rise to the loudest applause among the spectators, falling on their satiated ears as a new sound. This frenzied fight in the air, such as had never before been seen, gave rise to the wildest delight, for it led the eye, which was wont in this place to gaze downward, in a direction in which it had never yet been attracted. And what a glorious spectacle it was when black and white wrestled together! How well the contrast of color distinguished the individual combatants, even when they clung together in close embrace! And when, toward the end of the struggle, a bark was overturned bodily, and some of the antagonists would not be parted, even as they fell, trying to kill each other in their rage and hatred, the very walls of the great structure shook with the wild clamor and applause of thousands of every degree.

Only once did the roar of approval reach a higher pitch, and that was after the battle was ended, at what succeeded. Hardly had the victorious Spirits of Light been seen to stand up in their barks, waving their torches, to receive from fluttering genii wreaths of laurel which they flung down to where Caesar sat, than a perfumed vapor, emanating from the place where the painted sky met the wall of the circular building, hid the whole of the upper part of it from the sight of the spectators. The music stopped, and from above there came a strange and ominous growling, hissing, rustling, and crackling. A dull light, dimmer even than before, filled the place, and anxious suspicions took possession of the ten thousand spectators.

What was happening? Was the velarium on fire; had the machinery for lighting up refused to work; and must they

remain in this uncomfortable twilight?

Here and there a shout of indignation was heard, or a shrill whistle from the capricious mob. But the mist had already gradually vanished, and those who gazed upward could see that the velarium with the sun and stars had made way for a black surface. No one knew whether this was the real cloudy sky, or whether another, colorless awning closed them in. But suddenly the woven roof parted; invisible hands drew away the two halves. Quick, soft music began as if at a signal from a magician, and at the same time such a flood of light burst down into the theatre that every one covered his eyes with his hand to avoid being blinded. The full glory of sunshine followed on the footsteps of night, like a triumphant chorus on a dismal mourning chant.

The machinists of Alexandria had done wonders. The Romans, who, even at the night performances of the festival of Flora, had never seen the like, hailed the effect with a storm of applause which showed no signs of ceasing, for, when they had sufficiently admired the source of the light which flooded the theatre, reflected from numberless mirrors, and glanced round the auditorium, they began again to applaud with hands and voices. At a given signal thousands of lights appeared round the tiers of seats, and, if the splendor of the entertainment answered at all to that of the Alexandrian spectators, something fine indeed was to be expected.

It was now possible to see the beauty of the women and the costliness of their attire; not till now had the precious stones shown their flashing and changeful radiance. How many gardens and lotus-pools must have been plundered, how many laurel-groves stripped to supply the wreaths which graced every head in the upper rows! And to look round those ranks and note the handsome raiment in which men and women alike were arrayed, suggested a belief that all the inhabitants of Alexandria must be rich. Wherever the eye turned, something beautiful or magnificent was to be seen; and the numerous delightful pictures which crowded on the sight were framed with massive garlands of lotos and mallow, lilies and roses, olive and laurel, tall papyrus and waving palm, branches of pine and willow--here hanging in thick festoons, there twining round the columns or wreathing the pilasters and backs of seats.

Of all the couples in this incomparable amphitheatre one alone neither saw nor heard all that was going on. Scarcely had the darkness given way to light, when Melissa's eyes met those of her lover, and recognition was immediately followed by a swift inquiry and reply which filled the unhappy pair with revived hopes. Melissa's eyes told Diodoros that she loved him and him alone, and she read in his that he could never give her up. Still, his also expressed the doubt and anxiety of his tortured soul, and sent question after question across to Melissa.

And she understood the mute appeal as well as though looks were words. Without heeding the curious crowd about her, or considering the danger of such audacity, she took up her nosegay and waved it toward him as though to refresh him with its fragrance, and then pressed a hasty kiss on the finest of the half-opened buds. His responsive gesture showed that she had been understood, for her lover's expressive eyes beamed with unqualified love and gratitude. Never, she thought, had he gazed more fervently in her face, and again she bent over the bunch of roses.

But even in the midst of her newly found happiness her cheeks tingled with maidenly modesty at her own boldness. Too happy to regret what she had done, but still anxious lest the friend whose opinion was all in all to her should disapprove, she forgot time and place, and, laying her head on Euryale's shoulder, looked up at her in inquiry with her large eyes as though imploring forgiveness. The matron understood, for she had followed the girl's glance and felt what it was that stirred her heart; and, little thinking of the joy she was giving to a third person, she clasped her closely and kissed her on the temple, regardless of the people about them.

At this Diodoros felt as though he had won the prize in a race; and his friend Timon, whose artistic eye was feasting on the magnificent scene, started at the vehement and ardent pressure which Diodoros bestowed on his hand.

What had come over the poor, suffering youth whom he, Timon, had escorted to the Circus out of sheer compassion? His eyes sparkled, and he held his head as high as ever. What was the meaning of his declaring that everything would go well with him now? But it was in vain that he questioned the youth, for Diodoros could not reveal, even to his best friend, what it was that made him happy. It was enough for him to know that Melissa loved him, and that the woman to whom he looked up with enthusiastic reverence esteemed her as highly as ever. And now, for the first time, he began to feel ashamed of his doubts of Melissa. How could he, who had known her from childhood, have believed of her anything so base and foul? It must be some strong compulsion which bound her to Caesar, and she could never have looked at him thus unless she had some scheme--in which, perhaps, the lady Euryale meant to abet her--for escaping her imperial suitor before it was too late. Yes, it must be so; and the oftener he gazed at her the more convinced he felt.

Now he rejoiced in the blaze of light about him, for it showed him his beloved. The words which Euryale had whispered in her ear must have been an admonition to prudence, for she only rarely bestowed on him a loving glance, and he acknowledged that the mute but eager exchange of signals would have been fraught with danger for both of them.

The first sudden illumination had revealed too many things to distract the attention of the spectators, including Caesar's, for their proceedings to be observed. Now curiosity was to some extent satisfied, and even Diodoros felt that reserve was imperative.

Caracalla had not yet shown himself to the people. A golden screen, in which there were holes for him to look through without being seen, hid him from public gaze; still Diodoros could recognize those who were admitted to his presence. First came the givers of the entertainment; then the Parthian envoys, and some delegates from the municipal authorities of the town. Finally, Seleukus presented the wives of the magnates who had shared with him the cost of this display, and among these, all magnificently dressed, the lady Berenike shone supreme by the pride of her demeanor and the startling magnificence of her attire. As her large eyes met those of Caesar with a flash of defiance, he frowned, and remarked satirically:

"It seems to be the custom here to mourn in much splendor!"

But Berenike promptly replied:

"It has nothing to do with mourning. It is in honor of the sovereign who commanded the presence of the mourner at the Circus."

Diodoros could not see the flame of rage in, Caesar's threatening eye, nor hear his reply to the audacious matron:

"This is a misapprehension of how to do me honor, but an opportunity will occur for teaching the Alexandrians better."

Even across the amphitheatre the youth could see the sudden flush and pallor of the lady's haughty face; and immediately after, Macrinus, the praetorian prefect, approached Caracalla with the master of the games, the superintendent of the school of gladiators.

At the same time Diodoros heard his next neighbor, a member of the city senate, say:

"How quietly it is going off! My proposal that Caesar should come in to a dim light, so as to keep him and his unpopular favorites out of sight for a while, has worked capitally. Who could the mob whistle at, so long as they could not see one from another? Now they are too much delighted to be uproarious. Caesar's bride, of all others, has reason to thank me. And she reminds me of the Persian warriors who, before going into battle, bound cats to their bucklers because they knew that the Egyptian foe would not shoot at them so long as the sacred beasts were exposed to being hit by his arrows."

"What do you mean by that?" asked another, and received the brisk reply:

"The lady Euryale is the cat who protects the damsel. Out of respect for her, and for fear of hurting her, too, her companion has hitherto been spared even by those fellows up there."

And he pointed to a party of "Greens" who were laying their heads together in one of the topmost tiers. But his friend replied:

"Something besides that keeps them within bounds. The three beardless fellows just behind them belong to the city watch, who are scattered through the general mass like raisins in doughcakes."

"That is very judicious," replied the senator.

"We might otherwise have had to quit the Circus a great deal quicker than we came in. We shall hardly get home with dry garments as it is. Look how the lights up there are flaring; you can hear the lashing of the storm, and such flashes are not produced by machinery. Zeus is preparing his bolts, and if the storm bursts--"

Here his discourse was interrupted by the sound of trumpets, mingling with the roar of distant thunder following a vivid flash. The procession now began, which was the preliminary to every such performance.

The statues of the gods had, before Caesar's arrival, been placed on the pedestals erected for them to prevent any risk of a demonstration at the appearance of the deified emperors. The priests now first marched solemnly round these statues, and Timotheus poured a libation on the sand to Serapis, while the priest of Alexandria did the same to the tutelary hero of the town. Then the masters of the games, the gladiators, and beast-fighters came out, who were to make proof of their skill. As the priests approached Caesar's dais, Caracalla came forward and greeted the spectators, thus showing himself for the first time.

While he was still sitting behind the screen, he had sent for Melissa, who had obeyed the command, under the protection of Euryale, and he had spoken to her graciously. He now took no further notice of her, of her father, or her brother, and by his orders their places had been separated by some little distance from his. By the advice of Timotheus he would not let her be seen at his side till the stars had once more been consulted, and he would then conduct Melissa to the Circus as his wife--the day after to-morrow, perhaps. He thanked the matron for having escorted Melissa, and added, with a braggart air of virtue, that the world should see that he, too, could sacrifice the most ardent wish of his heart to moral propriety.

The elephant torch-bearers had greatly delighted him, and in the expectation of seeing Melissa again, and of a public recognition that he had won the fairest maid there, he had come into the Circus in the best spirits. He still wore his natural expression; yet now and then his brow was knit, for he was haunted by the eyes of Seleukus's wife. The haughty woman--"that bedizened Niobe" he had contemptuously called her in speaking to Macrinus--had appeared to him as an avenging goddess; strangely enough, every time he thought of her, he remembered, too, the consul Vindex

and his nephew, whose execution Melissa's intercession had only hastened, and he was vexed now that he had not lent an ear to her entreaties. The fact that the name Vindex signified an avenger disturbed him greatly, and he could no more get it out of his mind than the image of the "Niobe" with her ominous dark eyes.

He would see her no more; and in this he was helped by the gladiators, for they now approached him, and their frantic enthusiasm kept him for some time from all other thoughts. While they flourished their weapons--some the sword and buckler, and others the not less terrible net and harpoon--the time-honored cry rose from their husky throats in eager acclamation: "Hail, Caesar! those about to die salute thee!" Then, in rows of ten men each, they crossed the arena at a rapid pace.

Between the first and second group one man swaggered past alone, as though he were something apart, and he strutted and rolled as he walked with pompous self-importance. It was his prescriptive right, and in his broad, coarse features, with a snub nose, thick lips, and white, flashing teeth like those of a beast of prey, it was easy to see that the adversary would fare but ill who should try to humble him. And yet he was not tall; but on his deep chest, his enormous square shoulders, and short, bandy legs, the muscles stood out like elastic balls, showing the connoisseur that in strength he was a giant. A loin-cloth was all he wore, for he was proud of the many scars which gleamed red and white on his fair skin. He had pushed back his little bronze helmet, so that the terrible aspect of the left side of his face might not be lost on the populace. While he was engaged in fighting three panthers and a lion, the lion had torn out his eye and with it part of his cheek. His name was Tarautas, and he was known throughout the empire as the most brutal of gladiators, for he had also earned the further privilege of never fighting but for life or death, and never under any circumstances either granting or asking quarter. Where he was engaged corpses strewed the plain.

Caesar knew that he himself had been nicknamed Tarautas after this man, and he was not ill pleased; for, above all things, he aimed at being thought strong and terrible, and this the gladiator was without a peer in his own rank of life. They knew each other: Tarautas had received many a gift from his imperial patron after hard-won victories in which his blood had flowed. And now, as the scarred veteran, who, puffed up with conceit, walked singly and apart in the long train of gladiators, cast a roving and haughty glance on the ranks of spectators, he was filled out of due time with the longing to center all eyes on himself, the one aim of his so frequently risking his life in these games. His chest swelled, he braced up the tension of his supple sinews, and as he passed the imperial seats he whirled his short sword round his head, describing a circle in the air, with such skill and such persistent rapidity, that it appeared like a disk of flashing steel. At the same time his harsh, powerful voice bellowed out, "Hail, Caesar!" sounding above the shouts of his comrades like the roar of a lion; and Caracalla, who had not yet vouchsafed a friendly word or pleasant look to any Alexandrian, waved his hand graciously again and again to this audacious monster, whose strength and skill delighted him.

This was the instant for which the "Greens" in the third tier were waiting. No one could prohibit their applauding the man whom Caesar himself approved, so they forthwith began shouting "Tarautas!" with all their might. They knew that this would suggest the comparison between Caesar and the sanguinary wretch whose name had been applied to him, and all who were eager to give expression to their vexation or dissatisfaction took the hint and joined in the outcry. Thus in a moment the whole amphitheatre was ringing with the name of "Tarautas!"

At first it rose here and there; but soon, no one knew how, the whole crowd in the upper ranks joined in one huge chorus, giving free vent to their long-suppressed irritation with childish and increasing uproar, shouting the word with steady reiteration and a sort of involuntary rhythm. Before long it sounded as though the multitude must have practiced the mad chant which swelled to a perfect roar.

"Tarau-Tarau-Tarautas!" and, as is always the case when a breach has been made in the dam, one after another joined in, with here the shrill whistle of a reed pipe and there the clatter of a rattle. Mingling with these were the angry outcries of those whom the lictors or guardians of the peace had laid hands on, or their indignant companions; and the thunder outside rolled a solemn accompaniment to the mutinous tumult within.

Caesar's scowling brow showed that a storm threatened in that quarter also; and no sooner had he discerned the aim of the crowd than, foaming with rage, he commanded Macrinus to restore order.

Then, above the chaos of voices, trumpet-calls were sounded. The masters of the games perceived that, if only they could succeed in riveting the attention of the mob by some exciting or interesting scene, that would surely silence the demonstration which was threatening ruin to the whole community; so the order was at once given to begin the performance with the most important and effective scene with which it had been intended that the whole should conclude.

The spectacle was to represent a camp of the Alemanni, surprised and seized by Roman warriors. In this there was a covert compliment to Caesar, who, after a doubtful victory over that valiant people, had assumed the name of Alemannicus. Part of the gladiators, clothed in skins, represented the barbarians, and wore long flowing wigs of red or yellow hair; others played the part of Roman troops, who were to conquer them. The Alemanni were all condemned criminals, who were allowed no armor, and only blunt swords wherewith to defend themselves. But life and freedom were promised to the women if, after the camp was seized, they wounded themselves with the sharp knives with which

each one was provided, at least deeply enough to draw blood. And any who succeeded in feigning death really deceptively were to earn a special reward. Among the Germans there were, too, a few gladiators of exceptional stature, armed with sharp weapons, so as to defer the decision for a while.

In a few minutes, and under the eyes of the spectators, carts, cattle, and horses were placed together in a camp, and surrounded by a wall of tree trunks, stones, and shields. Meanwhile shouts and whistles were still heard; nay, when Tarautas came out on the arena in the highly decorated armor of a Roman legate, at the head of a troop of heavily armed men, and again greeted the emperor, the commotion began afresh. But Caracalla's patience was exhausted, and the high-priest saw by his pale cheeks and twitching eyelids what was passing in his mind; so, inspired by the fervent hope of averting some incalculable disaster from his fellow-citizens, he took his place in front of the statue of the god, and, lifting up his hands, he began:

"In the name of Serapis, O Macedonians!" His deep, ringing tones sounded above the voices of the insurgents in the upper rows, and there was silence.

Not a sound was to be heard but the long-drawn howling of the wind, and now and then the flap of a strip of cloth torn from the velarium by the gale. Mingling with these might be heard the uncanny hooting of owls and daws which the illumination had brought out of their nests in the cornice, and which the storm was now driving in again.

Timotheus, in a clear and audible address, now appealed to his audience to remain quiet, not to disturb the splendid entertainment here set before them, and above all to remember that great Caesar, the divine ruler of the world, was in their midst, an honor to each and all. As the guest of the most hospitable city on earth, their illustrious sovereign had a right to expect from every Alexandrian the most ardent endeavors to make his stay here delightful. It was his part as high-priest to uplift his warning voice in the name of the greatest of the gods, that the ill-will of a few malcontents might not give rise to an idea in the mind of their beloved guest that the natives of Alexandria were blind to the blessings for which every citizen had to thank his beneficent rule.

A shrill whistle here interrupted his discourse, and a voice shouted: "What blessings? We know of none."

But Timotheus was not to be checked, and went on more vehemently

"All of you who, by the grace of Caesar, have been made Roman citizens--"

But again a voice broke in--the speaker was the overseer of the granaries of Seleukus, sitting in the second tier-- "And do you suppose we do not know what the honor costs us?"

This query was heartily applauded, and then suddenly, as if by magic, a perfect chorus arose, chanting a distich which one man in the crowd had first given out and then two or three had repeated, to which a fourth had given a sort of tune, till it was shouted by every one present at the very top of his voice, with marked application to him of whom it spoke. From the topmost row of places, on every side of the amphitheatre, rang out the following lines, which but a moment before no one had ever heard:

*"Death to the living, to pay for burying those that are dead;
Since, what the taxes have spared, soldiers have ruthlessly seized."*

And the words certainly came from the heart; of the people, for they seemed never weary of repeating them; and it was not till a tremendous clap of thunder shook the very walls that several were silent and looked up with increasing alarm. The moment's pause was seized on to begin the fight. Caesar bit his lip in powerless fury, and his hatred of the towns-people, who had thus so plainly given him to understand their sentiments, was rising from one minute to the next. He felt it a real misfortune that he was unable to punish on the spot the insult thus offered him; swelling with rage, he remembered a speech made by Caligula, and wished the town had but one head, that he might sever it from the body. The blood throbbed so fiercely in his temples, and there was such a singing in his ears, that for some little time he neither saw nor heard what was going on. This terrible agitation might cost him yet some hours of great suffering. But he need no longer dread them so much; for there sat the living remedy which he believed he had secured by the strongest possible ties.

How fair she was! And, as he looked round once more at Melissa, he observed that her eye was turned on him with evident anxiety. At this a light seemed to dawn in his clouded soul, and he was once more conscious of the love which had blossomed in his heart. But it would never do to make her who had wrought the miracle so soon the confidante of his hatred. He had seen her angry, had seen her weep, and had seen her smile; and within the next few days, which were to make him a happy man instead of a tortured victim, he longed only to see her great eyes sparkle and her lips overflow with words of love, joy, and gratitude. His score with the Alexandrians must be settled later, and it was in his power to make them atone with their blood and bitterly rue the deeds of this night.

He passed his hand over his furrowed brow, as though to wake himself from a bad dream; nay, he even found a smile when next his eyes met hers; and those spectators to whom his aspect seemed more absorbing than the horrible slaughter in the arena, looked at each other in amazement, for the indifference or the dissimulation, whichever it might be, with which Caesar regarded this unequalled scene of bloodshed, seemed to them quite incredible.

Never, since his very first visit to a circus, had Caracalla left unnoticed for so long a time the progress of such a

battle as this. However, nothing very remarkable had so far occurred, for the actual seizure of the camp had but just begun with the massacre of the Alemanni and the suicide of the women.

At this moment the gladiator Tarautas, as nimble as a cat and as bloodthirsty as a hungry wolf, sprang on to one of the enemy's piled-up wagons, and a tall swordsman, with a bear-skin over his shoulder, and long, reddish-gold hair, flew to meet him.

This was no sham German! Caracalla knew the man. He had been brought to Rome among the captive chiefs, and, as he had proved to be a splendid horseman, he had found employment in Caesar's stables. His conduct had always been blameless till, on the day when Caracalla had entered Alexandria, he had, in a drunken fit, killed first the man set over him, a hot-headed Gaul, and then the two lictors who had attempted to apprehend him. He was condemned to death, and had been placed on the German side to fight for his life in the arena.

And how he fought! How he defied the most determined of gladiators, and parried his strokes with his short sword! This was a combat really worth watching; indeed, it so captivated Caracalla that he forgot everything else. The name of the German's antagonist had been applied to him--Caesar. Just now the many-voiced yell "Tarautas!" had been meant for him; and, accustomed as he was to read an omen in every incident, he said to himself, and called Fate to witness, that the gladiator's doom would foreshadow his own. If Tarautas fell, then Caesar's days were numbered; if he triumphed, then a long and happy life would be his.

He could leave the decision to Tarautas with perfect confidence; he was the strongest gladiator in the empire, and he was fighting with a sharp sword against the blunt one in his antagonist's hand, who probably had forgotten in the stable how to wield the sword as he had done of yore. But the German was the son of a chief, and had followed arms from his earliest youth. Here it was defense for dear life, however glorious it might be to die under the eyes of the man whom he had learned to honor as the conqueror and tyrant of many nations, among them his own. So the strong and practiced athlete did his best.

He, like his opponent, felt that the eyes of ten thousand were on him, and he also longed to purge himself of the dishonor which, by actual murder, he had brought on himself and on the race of which he was still a son. Every muscle of his powerful frame gained more rigid tension at the thought, and when he was presently hit by the sword of his hitherto unconquered foe, and felt the warm blood flow over his breast and left arm, he collected all his strength. With the battle-cry of his tribe, he flung his huge body on the gladiator. Heedless of the furious sword-thrust with which Tarautas returned the assault, he threw himself off the top of the packed wagon on to the stones of the camp inclosure, and the combatants rolled, locked together like one man, from the wall into the sand of the arena.

Caracalla started as though he himself had been the injured victim, and watched, but in vain, to see the supple Tarautas, who had escaped such perils before now, free himself from the weight of the German's body.

But the struggle continued to rage round the pair, and neither stirred a finger. At this Caesar, greatly disturbed, started to his feet, and desired Theocritus to make inquiry as to whether Tarautas were wounded or dead; and while the favorite was gone he could not sit still. Agitated by distressing fears, he rose to speak first to one and then to another of his suite, only to drop on his seat again and glance once more at the butchery below. He was fully persuaded that his own end must be near, if indeed Tarautas were dead. At last he heard Theocritus's voice, and, as he turned to ask him the news, he met a look from the lady Berenike, who had risen to quit the theatre.

He shuddered!--the image of Vindex and his nephew rose once more before his mind's eye; at the same moment, however, Theocritus hailed him with the exclamation:

"That fellow, Tarautas, is not a man at all! I should call him an eel if he were not so broad shouldered. The rascal is alive, and the physician says that in three weeks he will be ready again to fight four bears or two Alemanni!"

A light as of sudden sunshine broke on Caesar's face, and he was perfectly cheerful again, though a fearful clap of thunder rattled through the building, and one of those deluges of rain which are known only in the south came pouring down into the open theatre, extinguishing the fires and lights, and tearing the velarium from its fastenings till it hung flapping in the wind and lashing the upper tiers of places, so as to drive the spectators to a hasty retreat.

Men were flying, women screaming and sobbing, and the heralds loudly proclaimed that the performance was suspended, and would be resumed on the next day but one.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The amphitheatre was soon emptied, amid the flare of lightning and the crash and roll of thunder. Caracalla, thinking only of the happy omen of Tarautas's wonderful escape, called out to Melissa, with affectionate anxiety, to fly to shelter as quickly as possible; a chariot was in waiting to convey her to the Serapeum. On this she humbly represented that she would rather be permitted to return under her brother's escort to her father's house, and Caracalla cheerfully acceded. He had business on hand this night, which made it seem desirable to him that she should not be too near him. He should expect her brother presently at the Serapeum.

With his own hand he wrapped her in the caracalla and hood which old Adventus was about to put on his master's shoulders, remarking, as he did so, that he had weathered worse storms in the field.

Melissa thanked him with a blush, and, going close up to her, he whispered: "To-morrow, if Fate grants us gracious answers to the questions I shall put to her presently after this storm--tomorrow the horn of happiness will be filled to overflowing for you and me. The thrifty goddess promises to be lavish to me through you."

Slaves were standing round with lighted lanterns; for the torches in the theatre were all extinguished, and the darkened auditorium lay like an extinct crater, in which a crowd of indistinguishable figures were moving to and fro. It reminded him of Hades and a troop of descending spirits; but he would not allow anything but what was pleasant to occupy his mind or eye. By a sudden impulse he took a lantern from one of the attendants, held it up above Melissa's head, and gazed long and earnestly into her brightly illuminated face. Then he dropped his hand with a sigh and said, as though speaking in a dream: "Yes, this is life! Now I begin to live."

He lifted the dripping laurel crown from his head, tossed it into the arena, and added to Melissa: "Now, get under shelter at once, sweetheart. I have been able to see you this whole evening, even when the lamps were out; for lightning gives light. Thus even the storm has brought me joy. Sleep well. I shall expect you early, as soon as I have bathed."

Melissa wished him sound slumbers, and he replied, lightly:

"If only all life were a dream, and if to-morrow I might but wake up, no longer the son of Severus, but Alexander; and you, not Melissa, but Roxana, whom you so strongly resemble! To be sure I might find myself the gladiator Tarautas. But, then, who would you be? And your stalwart father, who stands there defying the rain, certainly does not look like a vision, and this storm is not favorable to philosophizing."

He kissed his hand to her, had a dry caracalla thrown over his shoulders, ordered Theocritus to take care of Tarautas and carry him a purse of gold--which he handed to the favorite--and then, pulling the hood over his head, led the way, followed by his impatient courtiers; but not till he had answered Heron, who had come forward to ask him what he thought of the mechanical arts of the Alexandrians, desiring him to postpone that matter till the morrow.

The storm had silenced the music. Only a few stanch trumpeters had remained in their places; and when they saw by the lanterns that Caesar had left the Circus, they sounded a fanfare after him, which followed the ruler of the world with a dull, hoarse echo.

Outside, the streets were still crowded with people pouring out of the amphitheatre. Those of the commoner sort sought shelter under the archways of the building, or else hurried boldly home through the rain. Heron stood waiting at the entrance for his daughter, though the purple-hemmed toga was wet, through and through. But she had, in fact, hurried out while he was pushing forward to speak to Caesar, and in his excitement overlooked everything else. The behavior of his fellow-citizens had annoyed him, and he had an obscure impression that it would be a blunder to claim Caesar's approval of anything they had done; still, he had not self-control enough to suppress the question which had fluttered on his lips all through the performance. At last, in high dudgeon at the inconsiderateness of young people and at the rebuff he had met with--with the prospect, too, of a cold for his pains--he made his way homeward on foot.

To Caracalla the bad weather was for once really an advantage, for it put a stop to the unpleasant demonstrations which the "Green" party had prepared for him on his way home.

Alexander soon found the closed carruca intended for Melissa, and placed her in it as soon as he had helped Euryale into her harmamaxa. He was astonished to find a man inside it, waiting for his sister. This was Diodoros, who, while Alexander was giving his directions to the charioteer, had, under cover of the darkness, sprung into the vehicle from the opposite side. An exclamation of surprise was followed by explanations and excuses, and the three young people, each with a heart full almost to bursting, drove off toward Heron's house. Their conveyance was already rolling over the pavement, while most of the magnates of the town were still waiting for their slaves to find their chariots or litters.

For the lovers this was a very different scene from the terrible one they had just witnessed in the Circus, for, in spite of the narrow space and total darkness in which they sat, and the rain rattling and splashing on the dripping black leather hood which sheltered them, in their hearts they did not lack for sunshine. Caracalla's saying that the lightning, too, was light, proved true more than once in the course of their drive, for the vivid flashes which still followed in quick

succession enabled the reunited lovers to exchange many confidences with their eyes, for which it would have been hard to find words. When both parties to a quarrel are conscious of blame, it is more quickly made up than when one only needs forgiveness; and the pair in the carruca were so fully prepared to think the best of each other that there was no need for Alexander's good offices to make them ready and willing to renew their broken pledges. Besides, each had cause to fear for the other; for Diodoros was afraid that the lady Euryale's power was not far-reaching enough to conceal Melissa from Caesar's spies, and Melissa trembled at the thought that the physician might too soon betray to Caesar that she had been betrothed before he had ever seen her, and to whom; for, in that case, Diodoros would be the object of relentless pursuit. So she urged on her lover to embark, if possible, this very night.

Hitherto Alexander had taken no part in the conversation. He could not forget the reception he had met with outside the amphitheatre. Euryale's presence had saved his sister from evil imputations, but had not helped him; and even his gay spirits could make no head against the consciousness of being regarded by his fellow-citizens as a hired traitor. He had withdrawn to one of the back seats to see the performance; for as soon as the theatre was suddenly lighted up, he had become the object of dark looks and threatening gestures. For the first time in his life he had felt compassion for the criminals torn by wild beasts, and for the wounded gladiators, whose companion in misfortune he vaguely felt himself to be. But, what was worst of all, he could not regard himself as altogether free from the reproach of having accepted a reward for the service he had so thoughtlessly rendered.

Nor did he see the remotest possibility of ever making those whose opinion he cared for understand how it had come to pass that he should have acceded to the desire of the villain in the purple, now that his father, by showing himself to the people in the 'toga pretexta', had set the seal to their basest suspicions. The thought that henceforth he could never hope to feel the grasp of an honest man's hand gnawed at his heart.

The esteem of Diodoros was dear to him, and, when his young comrade spoke to him, he felt at first as though he were doing him an unexpected honor; but then he fell back into the suspicion that this was only for his sister's sake.

The deep sigh that broke from him induced Melissa to speak a few words of comfort, and now the unhappy man's bursting heart overflowed. In eloquent words he described to Diodoros and Melissa all he had felt, and the terrible consequences of his heedless folly, and as he spoke acute regret filled his eyes with tears.

He had pronounced judgment on himself, and expected nothing of his friend but a little pity. But in the darkness Diodoros sought and found his hand, and grasped it fervently; and if Alexander could but have seen his old playfellow's face, he would have perceived that his eyes glistened as he said what he could do to encourage him to hope for better days.

Diodoros knew his friend well. He was incapable of falsehood; and his deed, which under a false light so easily assumed an aspect of villainy, had, in fact, been no more than an act of thoughtlessness such as he had himself often lent a hand in. Alexander, however, seemed determined not to hear the comfort offered him by his sister and his friend. A flash of lightning revealed him to them, sitting with a bent head and his hands over his brow; and this gloomy vision of one who so lately had been the gayest of the gay troubled their revived happiness even more than the thought of the danger which, as each knew, threatened the others.

As they passed the Temple of Artemis, which was brightly illuminated, reminding them that they were reaching their destination, Alexander at last looked up and begged the lovers to consider their immediate affairs. His mind had remained clear, and what he said showed that he had not lost sight of his sister's future.

As soon as Melissa should have effected her escape, Caesar would undoubtedly seize, not only her lover, but his father as well. Diodoros must forthwith cross the lake and rouse Polybius and Praxilla, to warn them of the imminent danger, while Alexander undertook to hire a ship for the party. Argutis would await the fugitives in a tavern by the harbor, and conduct them on board the vessel which would be in readiness. Diodoros, who was not yet able to walk far, promised to avail himself of one of the litters waiting outside the Temple of Artemis.

Just before the vehicle stopped, the lovers took leave. They arranged where and how they might have news of each other, and all they said, in brief words and a fervent parting kiss, in this moment, when death or imprisonment might await them, had the solemn purport of a vow.

The swift horses stopped. Alexander hastily leaned over to his friend, kissed him on both cheeks, and whispered:

"Take good care of her; think of me kindly if we should never meet again, and tell the others that wild Alexander has played another fool's trick, at any rate, not a wicked one, however badly it may turn out for him."

For the sake of the charioteer, who, after Melissa's flight, would be certainly cross-examined, Diodoros could make no reply. The carruca rattled off by the way by which it had come; Diodoros vanished in the darkness, and Melissa clasped her hands over her face. She felt as though this were her last parting from her lover, and the sun would never shine on earth again.

It was now near midnight. The slaves had heard the approach of the chariot, and received them as heartily as ever, but in obedience to Heron's orders they added the most respectful bows to their usual well-meant welcome. Since their master had shown himself to Dido, in the afternoon, with braggart dignity, as a Roman magnate, she had felt as though

the age of miracles had come, and nothing was impossible. Splendid visions of future grandeur awaiting the whole family, including herself and Argutis, had not ceased to haunt her; but as to the empress, something seemed to have gone wrong, for why had the girl wet eyes and so sad a face? What was all this long whispering with Argutis? But it was no concern of hers, after all, and she would know all in good time, no doubt. "What the masters plot to-day the slaves hear next week," was a favorite saying of the Gauls, and she had often proved its truth.

But the cool way in which Melissa received the felicitations which the old woman poured out in honor of the future empress, and her tear-reddened eyes, seemed at any rate quite comprehensible. The child was thinking, no doubt, of her handsome Diodoros. Among the splendors of the palace she would soon forget. And how truly magnificent were the dress and jewels in which the damsel had appeared in the amphitheatre!

"How they must have hailed her!" thought the old woman when she had helped Melissa to exchange her dress for a simpler robe, and the girl sat down to write. "If only the mistress had lived to see this day! And all the other women must have been bursting with envy. Eternal gods! But, after all, who knows whether the good luck we envy others is great or small? Why, even in this house, which the gods have filled to the roof with gifts and favors, misfortune has crept in through the key hole. Poor Philip!

"Still, if all goes well with the girl. Things have befallen her such as rarely come to any one, and yet no more than her due. The fairest and best will be the greatest and wealthiest in the empire."

And she clutched the amulets and the cross which hung round her arm and throat, and muttered a hasty prayer for her darling.

Argutis, for his part, did not know what to think of it all. He, if any one, rejoiced in the good fortune of his master and Melissa; but Heron's promotion to the rank of praetor had been too sudden, and Heron demeaned himself too strangely in his purple-bordered toga. It was to be hoped that this new and unexpected honor had not turned his brain! And the state in which his master's eldest son remained caused him the greatest anxiety. Instead of rejoicing in the honors of his family, he had at his first interview with his father flown into a violent rage; and though he, Argutis, had not understood what they were saying, he perceived that they were in vehement altercation, and that Heron had turned away in great wrath. And then--he remembered it with horror, and could hardly tell what he had seen to Alexander and Melissa in a reasonable and respectful manner--Philip had sprung out of bed, had dressed himself without help, even to his shoes, and scarcely had his father set out in his litter before Philip had come into the kitchen. He looked like one risen from the grave, and his voice was hollow as he told the slaves that he meant to go to the Circus to see for himself that justice was done. But Argutis felt his heart sink within him when the philosopher desired him to fetch the pipe his father used to teach the birds to whistle, and at the same time took up the sharp kitchen knife with which Argutis slaughtered the sheep.

The young man then turned to go, but even on the threshold he had stumbled over the straps of his sandals which dragged unfastened, and Argutis had had to lead him, almost to carry him in from the garden, for a violent fit of coughing had left him quite exhausted. The effort of pulling at the heavy oars on board the galley had been too much for his weak chest. Argutis and Dido had carried him to bed, and he had soon fallen into a deep sleep, from which he had not waked since.

And now what were these two plotting? They were writing; and not on wax tablets, but with reed pens on papyrus, as though it were a matter of importance.

All this gave the slave much to think about, and the faithful soul did not know whether to weep for joy or grief when Alexander told him, with a gravity which frightened him in this light-hearted youth, that, partly as the reward of his faithful service and partly to put him in a position to aid them all in a crisis of peculiar difficulty, he gave him his freedom. His father had long since intended to do this, and the deed was already drawn out. Here was the document; and he knew that, even as a freedman, Argutis would continue to serve them as faithfully as ever. With this he gave the slave his manumission, which he was in any case to have received within a month, at the end of thirty years' service, and Argutis took it with tears of joy, not unmixed with grief and anxiety, while only a few hours since it would have been enough to make him the happiest of mortals.

While he kissed their hands and stammered out words of gratitude, his uncultured but upright spirit told him that he had been blind ever to have rejoiced for a moment at the news that Melissa had been chosen to be empress. All that he had seen during the last half-hour had convinced him, as surely as if he had been told it in words, that his beloved young mistress scorned her imperial suitor, and firmly intended to evade him--how, Argutis could not guess. And, recognizing this, a spirit of adventure and daring stirred him also. This was a struggle of the weak against the strong; and to him, who had spent his life as one of the oppressed, nothing could be more tempting than to help on the side of the weak.

Argutis now undertook with ardent zeal to get Diodoros and his parents safely on board the ship he was to engage, and to explain to Heron, as soon as he should have read the letter which Alexander was now writing, that, unless he could escape at once with Philip, he was lost. Finally, he promised that the epistle to Caesar, which Melissa was composing, should reach his hands on the morrow.

He could now receive his letter of freedom with gladness, and consented to dress up in Heron's garments; for, as a slave, he would have been forbidden to conclude a bargain with a ship's captain or any one else.

All this was done in hot haste, for Caesar was awaiting Alexander, and Euryale expected Melissa. The ready zeal of the old man, free for the first time to act on his own responsibility in matters which would have been too much for many a free-born man, but to which he felt quite equal, had an encouraging effect even on the oppressed hearts of the other two. They knew now that, even if death should be their lot, Argutis would be faithful to their father and sick brother, and the slave at once showed his ingenuity and shrewdness; for, while the young people were vainly trying to think of a hiding-place for Heron and Philip, he suggested a spot which would hardly be discovered even by the sharpest spies.

Glaukias, the sculptor, who had already fled, was Heron's tenant. His work-room, a barn-like structure, stood in the little vegetable-garden which the gem-cutter had inherited from his father-in-law, and none but Heron and the slave knew that, under the flooring, instead of a cellar, there was a vast reservoir connected with the ancient aqueducts constructed by Vespasian. Many years since Argutis had helped his master to construct a trap-door to the entrance to these underground passages, of which the existence had remained unknown even to Glaukias during all the years he had inhabited the place. It was here that Heron kept his gold, not taking his children even into his confidence; and only a few months ago Argutis had been down with him and had found the old reservoir dry, airy, and quite habitable. The gem-cutter would be quite content to conceal himself where his treasure was, and the garden and work-room were only distant a few hundred paces from his own home. To get Philip there without being seen was to Argutis a mere trifle. Alexander, too, old Dido, and, if needful, Diodoros, could all be concealed there. But for Melissa, neither he nor Alexander thought it sufficiently secure.

As she took leave of him the young girl once more charged the newly freed man to greet her father from her a thousand times, to beseech his forgiveness of her for the bitter grief she must cause him, and to assure him of her affection.

"Tell him," she added, as the tears streamed down her cheeks, "that I feel as if I were going to my death. But, come what may, I am always his dutiful child, always ready to sacrifice anything--excepting only the man to whom, with my father's consent, I pledged my heart. Tell him that for love of him I might have been ready even to give my hand to the blood-stained Caesar, but that Fate--and perhaps the manes of her we loved, and who is dead--have ordered it otherwise."

She then went into the room where her mother had closed her eyes. After a short prayer by that bed, which still stood there, she hastened to Philip's room. He lay sleeping heavily; she bent over him and kissed the too high brow, which looked as though even in sleep the brain within were still busy over some difficult and painful question.

Her way led her once more through her father's work-room, and she had already crossed it when she hastily turned back to look once more--for the last time--at the little table where she had sat for so many years, busy with her needle, in modest contentment by the artist's side, dreaming with waking eyes, and considering what she, with her small resources and great love, could do that would be of use to those she loved, or relieve them if they were in trouble. Then, as though she knew that she was bidding a last farewell to all the pleasant companionship of her youth, she looked at the birds, long since gone to roost in their cages. In spite of his recent curule honors Heron had not forgotten them, and, before quitting the house to display himself to the populace in the 'toga pretexa', he had as usual carefully covered them up. And now, as Melissa lifted the cloth from the starling's cage, and the bird muttered more gently than usual, and perhaps in its sleep, the cry, "Olympias!" a shudder ran through her; and, as she stepped out into the road by Alexander's side, she said, dejectedly:

"Everything is coming to an end! Well, and so it may; for what has come over us all in these few days? Before Caesar came, what were you--what was Philip? In my own heart what peace reigned!

"And my father? There is one comfort, at any rate; even as praetor he has not forgotten his birds, and he will find feathered friends go where he may.

"But I--And it is for my sake that he must hide like a criminal!"

But here Alexander vehemently broke in: "It was not you, it was I who brought all this misery on us!" And he went on to accuse himself so bitterly that Melissa regretted having alluded to the misfortunes of their family, and did her best to inspire him with courage.

As soon as Caesar should have left the city and she had evaded his pursuit, the citizens would be easily persuaded of his innocence. They would see then how little she had cared for the splendor and wealth of empire; why, he himself knew how quickly everything was forgotten in Alexandria. His art, too, would be a comfort to him, and if he only had the chance of making his way in his career he would have no difficulty in winning Agatha. He would have her on his side, and Diodoros, and the lady Euryale.

But to all these kind speeches the young man only sadly shook his head. How could he, despised and contemned, dare to aspire to the daughter of such a man as Zeno? He ended with a deep sigh; and Melissa, whose heart grew heavier as they approached the Serapeum through the side streets, still forced herself to express her confidence as

though the lady Euryale's protection had relieved her of every anxiety. It was so difficult to appear calm and cheerful that more than once she had to wipe her eyes; still, their eager talk shortened the way, and she stood still, surprised to find herself so near her destination, when Alexander showed her the chain which was stretched across the end of the street of Hermes to close in the great square in front of the Serapeum.

The storm had passed away and the rain had ceased; the sky was clear and cloudless, and the moon poured its silvery light in lavish splendor, as though revived, on the temple and on the statues round the square. Here they must part, for they saw that it was impossible that they should cross the open space together.

It was almost deserted, for the populace were not allowed to go there. Of the hundreds of tents which till lately had covered it, only those of the seventh cohort of the praetorian guard remained; for these, having to protect the person of the emperor, had not been quartered in the town. If Alexander and Melissa had crossed this vast square, where it was now as light as clay, they would certainly have been seen, and Melissa would have brought not herself only but her protectress also into the greatest danger.

She still had so much on her mind that she wanted to say to her brother, especially with regard to her father's welfare; and then--what a leavetaking was this when, as her gloomy forebodings told her, they were parting never to meet again! But Euryale must have been long and anxiously waiting for her, and Alexander, too, was very late for his appointment.

It was impossible to let the girl cross the square alone, for it was guarded by soldiers. If she could but reach the side of the sanctuary where she was expected, and where the road was in the shadow of the riding-school opposite, all would be well, and it seemed as though there was no alternative but for Alexander to lead his sister through by-ways to her destination. They had just made up their minds to this inevitable waste of time, when a young woman was seen coming toward them from one of the tents with a swift, light step, winged with gladness. Alexander suddenly released his sister's hand, and saying:

"She will escort you," he advanced to meet her. This was the wife of Martialis, who had charge of the villa at Kanopus, and whose acquaintance the artist had made when he was studying the Galatea in the merchant's country-house for the portrait of Korinna. Alexander had made friends with the soldier's wife in his winning, lively way, and she was delighted to meet him again, and quite willing to escort his sister across the square, and hold her tongue about it. So, after a short grasp of the hand, and a fervent last appeal to her brother, "Never for a moment let us forget one another, and always remember our mother!" Melissa followed her companion.

This evening the woman had sought her husband to tell him that she and her mother had got safely out of the Circus, and to thank him for the entertainment, of which the splendor, in spite of the various disturbances and interruption, had filled their hearts and minds.

The first words she spoke to the girl led to the question as to whether she, too, had been at the Circus; and when Melissa said yes, but that she had been too frightened and horrified to see much, the chattering little woman began to describe it all.

Quite the best view, she declared, had been obtained from the third tier of places. Caesar's bride, too, had been pointed out to her. Poor thing! She would pay dearly for the splendor of the purple. No one could dispute Caracalla's taste, however, for the girl was lovely beyond description; and as she spoke she paused to look at Melissa, for she fancied she resembled Caesar's sweetheart. But she went on again quicker than before, remarking that Melissa was not so tall, and that the other was more brilliant looking, as be seemed an emperor's bride.

At this Melissa drew her kerchief more closely over her face; but it was a comfort to her when the soldier's wife, after describing to her what she herself had worn, added that Caracalla's choice had fallen on a modest and well-conducted maiden, for, if she had not been, the high-priest's wife would never have been so kind to her. And the lady Euryale was sister-in-law to the master she herself served, and she had known her all her life.

Then, when Melissa, to change the subject, asked why the public were forbidden to approach the Serapeum, her companion told her that since his return from the Circus Caesar had been devoting himself to astrology, soothsaying, and other abstruse matters, and that the noise of the city disturbed him. He was very learned in such things, and if she only had time she could have told Melissa wonderful things. Thus conversing, they crossed the square, and when it lay behind them and they were under the shadow of the stadium, Melissa thanked her lively companion for her escort, while she, on her part, declared that it had been a pleasure to do the friendly painter a service.

The western side of the immense temple stood quite detached from the town. There were on that side but few bronze doors, and these, which were opened only to the inhabitants of the building, had long since been locked for the night and needed no guard. As the inhabitants were forbidden to cross the space dividing the stadium from the Serapeum, all was perfectly still. Dark shadows lay on the road, and the high structures which shut it in like cliffs seemed to tower to the sky. The lonely girl's heart beat fast with fears as she stole along, close under the wall, from which a warm vapor breathed on her after the recent rain. The black circles which seemed to stare at her like dark, hollow eye-sockets from the wall of the stadium, were the windows of the stables.

If a runaway slave, an escaped wild beast, or a robber were to rush out upon her! The owls swept across over her

head on silent wings, and bats flitted to and fro, from one building to the other, almost touching the frightened girl. Her terrors increased at every step, and the wall which she must follow to the end was so long--so endlessly long!

Supposing, too, that the lady Euryale had been tired of waiting and had given her up! There would then be nothing for it but to make her way back to the town past the guards, or to enter the temple through the great gates--where that dreadful man was--and where she would at once be recognized! Then there could be no escape, none--and she must, yes, she must evade her dreadful suitor. Every thought of Diodoros cried, "You must!"--even at the cost of her young life, of which, indeed, she saw the imminent end nearer and nearer with every step. She knew not whither her flight might take her, but a voice within declared that it would be to an early grave.

Only a narrow strip of sky was visible between the tall buildings, but, as she looked up to the heavens, she perceived that it was two hours past midnight. She hurried on, but presently checked her pace again. From the square, three trumpet-calls, one after another, rang through the silence of the night. What could these signals mean at so unwonted an hour?

There could be but one explanation--Caesar had again condemned some hapless wretch to death, and he was being led to execution. When Vindex and his nephew were beheaded, three trumpet-calls had sounded; her brother had told her so.

And now, before her inward eye, rose the crowd of victims to Caracalla's thirst for blood. She fancied that Plautilla, whom her imperial consort had murdered, was beckoning her to follow her to an early grave. The terrors of the night were too much for her; and, as when a child, at play with her brothers, she flew on as fast as her feet would carry her. She fled as though she were pursued, her long dress hampering her steps, along by the temple wall, till her gaze, fixed on her left, fell on the spot which had been designated to her.

Here she stopped, out of breath; and, while she was identifying the landmarks which she had impressed on her memory to guide her to the right doorway, the temple wall seemed to open before her as if by a charm, and a kind voice called her name, and then exclaimed, "At last!" and in a moment she had grasped Euryale's hand and was drawn into the building.

Here, as if at the touch of a magician's wand, all fear and horror vanished; and, although she still panted for breath, she would at once have explained to her beloved protectress what it was that had prompted her to run so fast, but that Euryale interrupted her, exclaiming: "Only make haste! No one must see that block of porphyry turn on its pin. It is invisible from the outside, and closes the passage by which the mystics and adepts find their way to the mysteries after dedication. All who know of it are sworn to secrecy."

With this she led the way into a dark vestibule adjoining the temple, and in a few moments the great block of stone which had admitted them had turned into its place again. Those who passed by, even in broad sunshine, could not distinguish it from all the other blocks of which the ground-floor of the edifice was built.

CHAPTER XXIX.

While the lady Euryale preceded her young charge with a lamp up a narrow, dark staircase, Alexander waited in one of the audience-rooms till the emperor should call him. The high-priest of Serapis, several soothsayers of the temple, Aristides, the new head of the night-watch, and other "friends" of the monarch had accompanied him thus far. But admittance to the innermost apartments had not been permitted, for Caracalla had ordered the magician Serapion to call up spirits before him, and was having the future declared to him in the presence of the prefect of the praetorians and a few other trusty followers.

The deputation of citizens, who had come to apologize to Caesar for the annoying occurrences in the Circus, had been told to wait till the exorcisms were over. Alexander would have preferred to hold aloof from the others, but no one here seemed to think ill of him for his thoughtless behavior. On the contrary, the courtiers pressed round him--the brother of the future empress--with the greatest assiduity: the high-priest inquired after his brother Philip; and Seleukus, the merchant, who had come with the deputation, addressed many flattering remarks to him on his sister's beauty. Some of the Roman senators whose advances he had received coldly enough at first, now took up his whole attention, and described to him the works of art and the paintings in the new baths of Caracalla; they advised him to offer himself as a candidate for the ornamentation of some of the unfinished rooms with frescoes, and led him to expect their support. In short, they behaved toward the young man as if he might command their services, in spite of their gray hairs. But Alexander saw through their purpose.

Their discourse ceased suddenly, for voices were audible in the emperor's apartments, and they all listened with outstretched necks and bated breath if they might catch a word or two.

Alexander only regretted not having either charcoal or tablets at hand, that he might fix their intent faces on the wood; but at last he stood up, for the door was opened and the emperor entered from the tablinum, accompanied by the magician who had shown Caesar several spirits of the departed. In the middle of the demonstration, at Caracalla's desire, the beheaded Papinian had appeared in answer to Serapion's call. Invisible hands replaced his severed head upon his shoulders, and, having greeted his sovereign, he promised him good fortune. Last of all great Alexander had appeared, and assured the emperor in verse, and with many a flowery phrase, that the soul of Roxana had chosen the form of Melissa to dwell in. Caracalla would enjoy the greatest happiness through her, as long as she was not alienated from him by love for another man. Should this happen, Roxana would be destroyed and her whole race with her, but Caesar's glory and greatness would reach its highest point. The monarch need have no misgivings in continuing to live out his (Alexander's) life. The spirit of his godlike father Severus watched over him, and had given him a counselor in the person of Macrinus, in whose mortal body the soul of Scipio Africanus had awakened to a new life.

With this, the apparition, which, like the others, had shown itself as a colored picture moving to and fro upon the darkened wall of the tablinum, vanished. The voice of the great Macedonian sounded hollow and unearthly, but what he said had interested the emperor deeply and raised his spirits.

However, his wish to see more spirits had remained unsatisfied. The magician, who remained upon his knees with uplifted hands while the apparitions were visible, declared that the forces he was obliged to employ in exercising his magic power over the spirits had exhausted him. His fine, bearded face was deathly pale, and his tall form trembled and shook. His assistants had silently disappeared. They had kept themselves and their great scrolls concealed behind a curtain. Serapion explained that they were his pupils, whose office it was to support his incantations by efficient formulas.

Caracalla dismissed him graciously, then turning to the assembled company, he gave with much affability a detailed account of the wonders he had seen and heard.

"A marvelous man, this Serapion," he exclaimed to the high-priest Timotheus--"a master in his art. What he said before proceeding to the incantations is convincing, and explains much to me. According to him, magic holds the same relation to religion as power to love, as the command to the request. Power! What magic effect it has in real life? We have seen its influence upon the spirits, and who among the children of men can resist it? To it I owe my greatest results, and hope to be still further indebted. Even reluctant love must bow to it."

He gave a self-satisfied laugh, and continued: "As the pious worshiper of the gods can move the heavenly ones by prayer and sacrifice, so--the wondrous man declared--the magician can force them by means of his secret lore to do his will. Therefore, he who knows and can call the gods and spirits by the right name, him they must obey, as the slave his master. The sages who served the Pharaohs in the gray dawn of time succeeded in fathoming the mystery of these names given to the everlasting ones at their birth, and their wisdom has come down to him through the generations as a priceless secret. But it is not sufficient to murmur the name to one's self, or be able to write it down. Every syllable has its special meaning like every member of the human frame. It depends, too, on how it is pronounced and where the emphasis lies; and this true name, containing in itself the spiritual essence of the immortals, and the outward sign of their presence, is different again from the names by which they are known among men.

"Could I have any suspicion--and here Serapion addressed himself to me--which god he forced to obey him when he uttered the words, 'Abar Barbarie Eloce Sabaoth Pachnuphis,' and more like it! I have only remembered the first few words. But, he continued, it was not enough to be able to pronounce these words. The heavenly spirits would submit only to those mortals who shared in some of their highest characteristics. Before the Magian dared to call them, he must purify his soul from all sensual taint, and sanctify his body by long and severe fasting. When the Magian succeeded, as he had done in these days, in rendering himself impervious to the allurements of the senses, and in making his soul, as far as was humanly possible, independent of the body, only then had he attained to that degree of godliness which entitled him to have intercourse with the heavenly ones and the entire spirit-world as with his equals, and to subdue them to his will.

"He exerted his power, and we saw with our bodily eyes that the spirits came to his call. But we discovered that it was not done by words alone. What a noble-looking man he is! And the mortifications that he practices--these, too, are heroic deeds! The cavilers in the Museum might take example from him. Serapion performed an action and a difficult one. They waste their time over words, miserable words! They will prove to you by convincing argument that yonder lion is a rabbit. The Magian waved his hands and the king of beasts cringed before him. Like the worthies of the Museum, every one in this city is merely a mouth on two legs. Where but here would the Christians--I know their doctrines--have invented that term for their sublime teacher--The Word become flesh? I have heard nothing here," he turned to the deputation, "but words and again words--from you, who humbly assure me of your love and reverence; from those who think that their insignificant persons may slip through my fingers and escape me, paltry, would-be witty words, dipped in poison and gall. In the Circus, even, they aimed words at me. The Magian alone dared to offer me deeds, and he succeeded wonderfully; he is a marvelous man!"

"What he showed you," said the high-priest, "was no more than what the sorcerers achieved, as the old writings tell us, under the builders of the Pyramids. Our astrologers, who traced out for you the path of the stars--"

"They, too," interrupted Caesar, bowing slightly to the astrologers, "have something better to show than words. As I owe to the Magian an agreeable hour, so I thank you, my friends, for a happy one."

This remark had reference to the information which had been brought to Caesar, during a pause in the incantations, that the stars predicted great happiness for him in his union with Melissa, and that this prediction was well-founded, was proved by the constellations which the chief astrologer showed and explained to him.

While Caracalla was receiving the thanks of the astrologers, he caught sight of Alexander, and at once graciously inquired how Melissa had got back to her father's house. He then asked, laughingly, if the wits of Alexandria were going to treat him to another offering like the one on his arrival. The youth, who had determined in the Circus to risk his life, if need be, in order to clear himself of the taint of suspicion, judged that the moment had come to make good the mistake which had robbed him of his fellow-citizens' esteem.

The presence of so many witnesses strengthened his courage; and fully expecting that, like the consul Vindex, his speech would cost him his head, he drew himself up and answered gravely, "It is true, great Caesar, that in a weak moment and without considering the results, I repeated some of those witticisms to you--"

"I commanded, and you had to obey," retorted Caesar, and added, coldly, "But what does this mean?"

"It means," began Alexander--who already saw the sword of execution leap from its scabbard--with pathetic dignity, which astonished the emperor as coming from him, "it means that I herewith declare before you, and my Alexandrian fellow-citizens here present, that I bitterly repent my indiscretion; nay, I curse it, since I heard from your own lips how their ready wit has set you against the sons of my beloved native city."

"Ah, indeed! Hence these tears?" interposed Caesar, adopting a well-known Latin phrase. He nodded to the painter, and continued, in a tone of amused superiority: "Go on performing as an orator, if you like; only moderate the tragic tone, which does not become you, and make it short, for before the sun rises we all--these worthy citizens and myself--desire to be in bed."

Blushes and pallor alternated on the young man's face. Sentence of death would have been more welcome to him than this supercilious check to a hazardous attempt, which he had looked upon as daring and heroic. Among the Romans he caught sight of some laughing faces, and hurt, humiliated, confused, scarcely capable of speaking a word, and yet moved by the desire to justify himself, he stammered out: "I have--I meant to assure--No, I am no spy! May my tongue wither before I--You can, of course--It is in your power to take my life!"

"Most certainly it is," interposed Caracalla, and his tone was more contemptuous than angry. He could see how deeply excited the artist was, and to save him--Melissa's brother--from committing a folly which he would be obliged to punish, he went on with gracious consideration: "But I much prefer to see you live and wield the brush for a long time to come. You are dismissed."

The young man bent his head, and then turned his back upon the emperor, for he felt that he was threatened now with what, to an Alexandrian, was the most unbearable fate--to appear ridiculous before so many.

Caracalla allowed him to go, but, as he stepped across the threshold, he called after him: "Tomorrow, then, with your

sister, after the bath! Tell her the stars and the spirits are propitious to our union."

Caesar then beckoned to the chief of the nightwatch, and, having laid the blame of the unpleasant occurrences in the Circus on his carelessness, cut the frightened officer short when he proposed to take every one prisoner whom the lictors had marked among the noisy.

"Not yet! On no account to-morrow," Caracalla ordered. "Mark each one carefully. Keep your eyes open at the next performance. Put down the names of the disaffected. Take care that the rope hangs about the neck of the guilty. The time to draw it tight will come presently. When they think themselves safe, the cowardly show their true faces. Wait till I give the signal--certainly not in the next few days; then seize upon them, and let none escape!"

Caesar had given these orders with smiling lips. He wanted first to make Melissa his, and, like a shepherd, to revel with her in the sweetness of their love. No moment of this time should be darkened for him by the tears and prayers of his bride. When she should hear, later on, of her husband's bloody vengeance upon his enemies, she would have to accept it as an accomplished fact; and means, no doubt, would be found to soothe her indignation.

Those who after the insulting occurrences in the Circus had expected to see Caesar raging and storming, were hurried from one surprise to another; for even after his conversation with the night-watch he looked cheerful and contented, and exclaimed: "It is long since you have seen me thus! My own mirror will ask itself if it has not changed owners. It is to be hoped it may have cause to accustom itself to reflect me as a happy man as often as I look in it. The two highest joys of life are before me, and I know not what would be left for me to desire if only Philostratus were here to share the coming days with me."

The grave senator Cassius Dio here stepped forward and observed that there were advantages in their amiable friend's withdrawal from the turmoil of court life. His Life of Apollonius, to which all the world was looking forward, would come all the sooner to a close.

"If only that I might talk to him of the man of Tyana," cried the emperor, "I wish his biographer were here to-day. To possess little and require nothing is the wish of the sage; and I can well imagine circumstances in which one who has enjoyed power and riches to satiety should consider himself blessed as a simple countryman following out the precept of Horace, 'procul negotiis,' plowing his fields and gathering the fruit of his own trees. According to Apollonius, the wise man must also be poor, and, though the citizens of his state are permitted to acquire treasures, the wealthy are looked upon as dishonorable. There is some sense in this paradox, for the possessions that are to be obtained with money are but vulgar joys. I know by experience what it is that purifies the soul, that lifts it up and makes it truly blessed. It does not come of power or riches. Whoso has known it, he to whom it has been revealed--"

He stopped short, surprised at himself; then laughed as he shook his head and exclaimed, "Behold, the tragedy hero in the purple with one foot in an idyl!" and wished the assembled company pleasant slumbers for the short remains of the night.

He gave his hand to a few favored ones; but, as he clasped that of the proconsul Julius Paulinus, who, with unheard-of audacity, had put on mourning garments for his brother-in-law Vindex, beheaded that day, Caesar's countenance grew dark, and, turning his back upon them all, he walked rapidly away. Scarcely had he disappeared when the mourning proconsul exclaimed in his dry manner, as if speaking to himself:

"The idyl is to begin. Would it might be the satyr-play that closes the bloodiest of tragedies!"

"Caesar has not been himself to-day," said the favorite Theocritus; and the senator Cassius Dio whispered to Paulinus, "And therefore he was more bearable to look at."

Old Adventus gazed in astonishment as Arjuna, the emperor's Indian body-slave, disrobed him; for, though Caracalla had entered the apartment with a dark and threatening brow, while his sandals were being unfastened, he laughed to himself, and cried to his old servant with beaming eyes, "To-morrow!" and the chamberlain called down a blessing on the morrow, and on her who was destined to fill the coming years with sunshine for mighty Caesar.

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Caracalla, generally an early riser, slept this time longer than on other days. He had retired very late to rest, and the chamberlain therefore put off waking him, especially as he had been troubled by evil dreams, in spite of his happy frame of mind when he sought his couch. When at last he rose he first inquired about the weather, and expressed his satisfaction when he heard that the sun had risen with burning rays, but was now veiled in threatening clouds.

His first visit led him to the court of sacrifice. The offerings had fallen out most favorably, and he rejoiced at the fresh and healthy appearance of the bullocks' hearts and livers which the augurs showed him. In the stomach of one of the oxen they had found a flint arrow-head, and, on showing it to Caracalla, he laughed, and observed to the high-priest Timotheus: "A shaft from Eros's quiver! A hint from the god to offer him a sacrifice on this happy day."

After his bath he caused himself to be arrayed with peculiar care, and then gave orders for the admittance, first, of the prefect of the praetorians, and then of Melissa, for whom a mass of gorgeous flowers stood ready.

But Macrinus was not to be found, although Caesar had commanded him yesterday to give in his report before

doing anything else. He had twice come to the antechamber, but had gone away again shortly before, and had not yet returned.

Determined to let nothing damp his spirits, Caesar merely shrugged his shoulders, and gave orders to admit the maiden, and--should they have accompanied her--her father and brother. But neither Melissa nor the men had appeared as yet, though Caracalla distinctly remembered having commanded all three to visit him after the bath, which he had taken several hours later than usual.

Vexed, and yet endeavoring to keep his temper, he went to the window. The sky was overcast, and a sharp wind from the sea drove the first rain-drops in his face.

In the wide square at his feet a spectacle presented itself which would have delighted him at another time, when in better spirits.

The younger men of the city--as many as were of Greek extraction--were trooping in. They were divided into companies, according to the wrestling-schools or the Circus and other societies to which they belonged. The youths marched apart from the married men, and one could see that they came gladly, and hoped for much enjoyment from the events of the day. Some of the others looked less delighted. They were unaccustomed to obey the orders of a despot, and many were ill-pleased to lose a whole day from their work or business. But no one was permitted to absent himself; for, when the chief citizens had invited the emperor to visit their wrestling-schools, he replied that he preferred to inspect the entire male youths of Alexandria in the Stadium. This was situated close by his residence in the Serapeum, and in this great space a spectacle would be afforded to him at one glance, which he could otherwise only enjoy by journeying laboriously from one gymnasium to another. He loved the strong effects produced by great masses; and being on the race-course, the wrestlers and boxers, the runners and discus-throwers, could give proof of their strength, dexterity, and endurance.

It occurred to him at the moment that among these youths and men there might be some of the descendants of the warriors who, under the command of the great Alexander, had conquered the world. Here, then, was an opportunity of gathering round him--rejuvenated and, so to speak, born anew--those troops who, under the guidance of the man whose mission on earth he was destined to accomplish, had won such deathless victories. That was a pleasure he had every right to permit himself, and he wished to show to Melissa the re-created military forces of him to whom, in a former existence, as Roxana, she had been so dear.

Quick as ever to suit the deed to the word, he at once ordered the head citizens to assemble the youth of Alexandria on the morning of the day in question, and to form them into a Macedonian phalanx. He wished to inspect them in the stadium, and they were now marching thither.

He had ordered helmets, shields, and lances to be made after well-known Macedonian patterns and to be distributed to the new Hellenic legion. Later on they might be intrusted with the guarding of the city, should there be a Parthian war; and he required the attendance of the Alexandrian garrison.

The inspection of this Greek regiment would be certain to give pleasure to Melissa. He expected, too, to see Alexander among them. When once his beloved shared the purple with him, he could raise her brother to the command of this chosen phalanx.

Troop after troop streamed on to the course, and he thought he had seldom seen anything finer than these slender youths, marching along with elastic step, and garlands in their black, brown, or golden locks.

When the young noblemen who belonged to the school of Timagetes filed past him, he took such delight in the beauty of their heads, the wonderful symmetry of their limbs strengthened by athletic games, and the supple grace of most of them, that he felt as if some magic spell had carried him back to the golden age of Greece and the days of the Olympian games in the Altis.

What could be keeping Melissa? This sight would assuredly please her, and for once he would be able to say something flattering about her people. One might easily overlook a good deal from such splendid youths.

Carried away by his admiration he waved his scarf to them, which being remarked by the gymnasiarch, who with his two assistants--herculean athletes--walked in front, was answered by him with a loud "Hail, Caesar!"

The youths who followed him imitated his example, and the troop that came after them returned his greeting loud and heartily. The young voices could be heard from afar, and the news soon spread to the last ranks of the first division to whom these greetings were addressed. But, among the men who already were masters of households of their own, there were many who deemed it shameful and unworthy to raise their voices in greeting to the tyrant whose heavy hand had oppressed them more than once; and a group of young men belonging to the party of the "Greens," who ran their own horses, had the fatal audacity to agree among themselves that they would leave Caesar's greeting unanswered. A many-headed crowd is like a row of strings which sound together as soon as the note is struck to which they are all attuned; and so each one now felt sure that his acclamation would only increase the insolence of this fratricide, this bloodstained monster, this oppressor and enemy of the citizens. The succeeding ranks of "Greens" followed the example, and from the midst of a troop of young married men, members in the gymnasium of the society of

the Dioscuri, one foolhardy spirit had the reckless temerity to blow a shrill, far-sounding whistle between his fingers.

He found no imitators, but the insulting sound reached the emperor's ear, and seemed to him like the signal-call of Fate; for, before it had died away, the clouds broke, and a stream of brilliant sunshine spread over the race-course and the assembled multitude. The cloudy day that was to have brought happiness to Caesar had been suddenly transformed by the sun of Africa into a bright one; and the radiant light which cheered the hearts of others seemed to him to be a message from above to warn him that, instead of the highest bliss, this day would bring him disappointment and misfortune. He said nothing of this, for there was no one there in whom it would be any relief to confide, or of whose sympathy he could be sure. But those who watched him as he retired from the window saw plainly that the idyl, which he had promised them should begin to-day, would assuredly not do so for the next few hours at least, unless some miracle should occur. No, he would have to wait awhile for the pastoral joys he had promised himself. And it seemed as if, instead of the satyr-play of which old Julius Paulinus had spoken, that fatal whistle had given the signal for another act in Caracalla's terrible life-tragedy.

The "friends" of the emperor looked at him anxiously as, with furrowed brow, he asked, impatiently: "Macrinus not here yet?"

Theocritus and others who had looked with envy upon Melissa and her relatives, and with distrust upon her union with the emperor, now heartily wished the girl back again.

But the prefect Macrinus came not; and while the emperor, having sent messengers to fetch Melissa, turned with darkly boding brow to his station overlooking the brightly lighted race-course, still hoping the augury would prove false, and the sunny day turn yet in his favor, Macrinus was in the full belief that the gate of greatness and power was opening to him. Superstitious as the emperor himself and every one else of his time, he was to-day more firmly persuaded than ever of the existence of men whose mysterious wisdom gave them powers to which even he must bend--the hard-headed man who had raised himself from the lowest to the highest station, next to the Caesar himself.

In past nights the Magian Serapion had caused him to see and hear much that was incomprehensible. He believed in the powers exerted by that remarkable man over spirits, and his ability to work miracles, for he had proved in the most startling manner that he had perfect control even over such a determined mind as that of the prefect. The evening before, the magician had bidden Macrinus come to him at the third hour after sunrise of the next day, which he had unhesitatingly promised to do. But the emperor had risen later than usual this morning, and the prefect might expect to be called to his master at any moment. In spite of this, and although his absence threatened to rouse Caesar to fury, and everything pointed to the necessity of his remaining within call, Macrinus, drawn by an irresistible craving, had followed the invitation, which sounded more like a command. This, indeed, had seemed to him decisive; for, as the seer ruled over his stern spirit, albeit he was alive, even so must the spirits of the departed do his bidding. His every interest urged him now to believe in the prophecy made to him by Serapion, to-day for the third time, which foretold that he, the prefect, should mount the throne of the Caesars, clad in the purple of Caracalla. But it was not alone to repeat this prophecy that the seer had called Macrinus to him, but to inform him that the future empress was betrothed to a young Alexandrian, and that the tender intercourse between the lovers had not been interrupted during Caracalla's courtship. This had come to Serapion's ears yesterday afternoon, through his adroit assistant Kastor, and he had taken advantage of the information to prepare Caesar during the night for the faithlessness of his chosen bride.

The Magian assured the prefect that what the spirit of the great Macedonian had hinted at yesterday had since been confirmed by the demons in his service. It would now be easy for Macrinus to possibly hinder Melissa, who might have been all-powerful, from coming between him and the great goal which the spirits had set before him.

Serapion then repeated the prophecy, which came with such convincing power from the bearded lips of the sage that the prudent statesman cast his last doubts from him, and, exclaiming, "I believe your words, and shall press forward now in spite of every danger!" he grasped the prophet's hand in farewell.

Up to this point Macrinus, the son of a poor cobbler, who had had difficulty in rearing his children at all, had received these prophetic utterances with cool deliberation, and had ventured no step nearer to the exalted aim which had been offered to his ambition. In all good faith he had done his best to perform the duties of his office as an obedient servant to his master and the state. This had all changed now, and, firmly resolved to risk the struggle for the purple, he returned to the emperor's apartments.

Macrinus had no reason to expect a favorable reception when he entered the tablinum, but his great purpose upheld his courage. He, the upstart, was well aware that Fortune requires her favorites to keep their eyes open and their hands active. He therefore took care to obtain a full account of what had happened from his confidential friend the senator Antigonus, a soldier of mean birth, who had gained favor with Caesar by a daring piece of horsemanship. Antigonus closed his report with the impudent whistle of the Greek athlete; he dwelt chiefly on his astonishment at Melissa's absence. This gave food for thought to the prefect, too; but before entering the tablinum he was stopped by the freedman Epagathos, who handed over to him a scroll which had been given to him for the emperor. The messenger had disappeared directly afterward, and could not be overtaken. Might it not endanger the life of the reader by exhaling a poisonous perfume?

"Nothing is impossible here," answered the prefect. "Ours it is to watch over the safety of our godlike master."

This letter was that which Melissa had intrusted to the slave Argutis for Caesar, and with unwarrantable boldness the prefect and Epagathos now opened it and ran rapidly over its contents. They then agreed to keep this strange missive from the emperor till Macrinus should send to ask whether the youths were assembled in their full number on the race-course. They judged it necessary to prepare Caesar in some sort, to prevent a fresh attack of illness.

Caracalla was standing near a pillar at the window whence he might see without being seen. That whistle still shrilled in his ears. But another idea occupied him so intensely that he had not yet thought of wiping out the insult with blood.

What could be delaying Melissa and her father and brother?

The painter ought to have joined the other Macedonian youths on the race-course, and Caracalla was engaged in looking out for him, stretching forward every time he caught sight of some curly head that rose above the others.

There was a bitter taste in his mouth, and at every fresh disappointment his rebellious, tortured heart beat faster; and yet the idea that Melissa might have dared to flee from him never entered his mind.

The high-priest of Serapis had informed him that his wife had seen nothing of her as yet. Then it suddenly occurred to him that she might have been wet through by the rain yesterday and now lay shaken by fever, and that this must keep her father away, too; a supposition which cheered the egoist more than it pained him, and with a sigh of relief he turned once more to the window.

How haughtily these boys carried their heads; their fleet, elastic feet skimmed over the ground; how daringly they showed off the strength and dexterity that almost seemed their birthright! This reminded him that, prematurely aged as he was by the wild excesses of his younger years, with his ill-set broken leg and his thin locks, he must make a lamentable contrast to these others of his own age; and he said to himself that perhaps the whistle had come from the lips of one of the strongest and handsomest, who had not considered him worth greeting.

And yet he was not weaker than any single individual down there; aye, and if he chose he could crush them all together, as he would the glow-worm creeping on that window-sill. With one quick squeeze of his fingers he put an end to the pretty little insect, and at that moment he heard voices behind him.

Had his beloved come at last?

No, it was only the prefect. He should have been there long ago, if he were obedient to his sovereign's commands. Macrinus was therefore a convenient object on which to vent his anger. How mean was the face of this long-legged upstart, with its small eyes, sharp nose, and furrowed brow! Could the beautiful Diadumenianus really be his son? No matter! The boy, the apple of his father's eye, was in his power, and was a surety for the old man's loyalty. After all, Macrinus was a capable, serviceable officer, and easier to deal with than the Romans of the old noble families.

Notwithstanding these considerations, Caracalla addressed the prefect as harshly as if he had been a disobedient slave, but Macrinus received the flood of abuse with patience and humility. When the emperor reproached him with never being at hand when he was wanted, he replied submissively that it was just because he found he could be of service to Caesar that he had dared to absent himself. The refractory young brood down there were being kept well in hand, and it was entirely owing to his effectual measures that they had contented themselves with that one whistle. Later on it would be their duty to punish such audacity and high-treason with the utmost rigor.

The emperor gazed in astonishment at the counselor, who till now had ever advised him to use moderation, and only yesterday had begged him to ascribe much to Alexandrian manners, which in Rome would have had to be treated with severity. Had the insolence of these unruly citizens become unbearable even to this prudent, merciful man?

Yes, that must be it; and the grudge that Macrinus now showed against the Alexandrians hastened the pardon which Caesar silently accorded him.

Caracalla even said to himself that he had underrated the prefect's intellect, for his eyes flashed and glowed like fire, notwithstanding their smallness, and lending a force to his ignoble face which Caracalla had never noticed before. Had Caesar no premonition that in the last few hours this man had grown to be such another as himself?--for in his unyielding mind the firm resolve had been strengthened to hesitate at nothing--not even at the death of as many as might come between him and his high aim, the throne.

Macrinus knew enough of human nature to observe the miserable inquietude that had seized upon the emperor at his bride's continued absence, but he took good care not to refer to the subject. When Caracalla, however, could no longer conceal his anxiety, and asked after her himself, the prefect gave the appointed sign to Epagathos, who then handed Melissa's freshly re-sealed letter to his master.

"Let me open it, great Caesar," entreated Macrinus. "Even Homer called Egypt the land of poison."

But the emperor did not heed him. No one had told him, and he had never in his life received a letter in a woman's hand, except from his mother; and yet he knew that this delicate little roll had come from a woman--from Melissa.

It was closed with a silken thread, and the seal with which Epagathos had replaced the one they had broken. If Caracalla tore it open, the papyrus and the writing might be damaged. He called impatiently for a knife, and the body

physician, who had just entered with other courtiers, handed him his.

"Back again?" asked Caracalla as the physician drew the blade from its sheath.

"At break of day, on somewhat unsteady legs," was the jovial answer. Caracalla took the knife from him, cut the silk, hastily broke the seal, and began to read.

Till now his hands had performed their office steadily, but suddenly they began to tremble, and while he ran his eye over Melissa's refusal--there were but a few lines--his knees shook, and a sharp, low cry burst from him, like no sound that lies by nature in the throat of man. Rent in two pieces, the strip of papyrus fluttered to the ground.

The prefect caught the despot, who, seized with giddiness, stretched out his hands as if seeking a support. The physician hurriedly brought out the drug which Galenus had advised him to use in such cases, and which he always carried with him, and then, pointing to the letter, asked the prefect:

"In the name of all the gods, from whom?"

"From the gem-cutter's fair daughter," replied Macrinus, with a contemptuous shrug.

"From her?" cried the physician, indignantly. From that light Phryne, who kissed and embraced my rich host's son down there in his sick-room?

"At this the emperor, who had not lost consciousness for one moment, started as if stung by a serpent, and sprang at the physician's throat screaming while he threatened to strangle him:

"What was that? What did you say? Cursed babbler! The truth, villain, and the whole truth, if you love your life!"

The half-choked man, ever prone to talking, had no reason for concealing from Caesar what he had seen with his own eyes, and had subsequently heard in the Serapeum and at the table of Polybius.

When life was at stake a promise to a freedman could be of no account, so he gave free rein to his tongue, and answered the questions Caracalla hoarsely put to him without reserve, and--being a man used to the ways of a court--with insinuations that were doubly welcome to a judge so eager for damning evidence.

Yesterday, the day before, and the day before that--every day on which Melissa had pretended to feel the mysterious ties that bound her heart to his, every day that she had feigned love and led him on to woo her, she had--as he now learned--granted to another what she had refused to him with such stern discretion. Her prayer for him, the sympathy she said she felt, the maidenly sensibility which had charmed him in her--all, all had been lies, deceit, sham, in order to attain an object. And that old man and the brothers to serve whom she had dared to approach him--they all knew the cruel game she was playing with him and his heart's love. The lips that had lured him into the vilest trap with lying words had kissed another. He seemed to hear the Alexandrians laughing at the forsaken bridegroom, to see them pointing the finger of derision at the man whom cunning woman had deceived even before marriage. What a feast for their ribald wit!

And yet--he would have willingly borne it all, and more, for the certainty that she had really loved him once; that her heart had been his, if only for one short hour.

On those shreds of papyrus scattered over the floor she confessed she was not able to accede to his wishes, because she had already given her faith to another before she ever saw Caracalla. It was true she had felt herself drawn to him as to no other but her betrothed; and had he been content to let her be near him as a faithful servant and sicknurse, then indeed... In short, he was informed in so many words that every tie that bound her to him must be broken in favor of another, and the hypocritical regret with which she sought to cover up the hard facts only made him doubly indignant.

Lies, lies--even in this letter nothing but lies and heartless dissimulation!

How it stabbed his heart! But he possessed the power to wound her in return. Wild beasts should tear her fair body limb from limb, as she had torn his soul in this hour.

One wish alone filled his heart--to see her whom he had loved above all others, to whom he had revealed his inmost soul, for whose sake he had amended his actions as he had never done for his own mother--to see her lying in the dust before him, and to inflict upon her such tortures as no mortal had ever endured before. And not only she, but all whom she loved and who were her accomplices, should atone for the torment of this hour. The time of reckoning had come, and every evil instinct of his nature mingled its exulting voice with the anguished cries of his bleeding heart.

The prefect knew his master well, and watched his every expression while apparently listening to the voluble physician, but in reality absorbed in a train of thought. By the twitching of his eyelids, the sharply outlined red patches on his cheeks, the quivering nostrils, and the deep furrows between his eyes, he must be revolving some frightful plan in his mind.

Yesterday, had he found him in this condition, Macrinus would have endeavored by every means in his power to calm his wrath; but to-day, if Caesar had set the world in flames, he would only have added fuel to the fire, for who could more surely upset the firmly established power of this emperor and son of emperors as Caracalla himself? The people of Rome had endured unimaginable sufferings at his hands; but the cup was full, and, judging from Caesar's

looks, he would cause it to overflow this day. Then the rising flood which tore the son of an idolized father from the throne, might possibly bear him, the child of lowliness and poverty, into the palace.

But Macrinus remained silent. No word from him should change the tenor of the emperor's thoughts. The plan he was thinking out must be allowed to ripen to its full horror. The lowering, uncertain glance that Caracalla cast round the tablinum at the close of the physician's narrative showed that the prefect's reticence was an unnecessary precaution.

Caesar's mind and tongue still seemed paralyzed; but at that moment something occurred which recalled him to himself and brought firmness to his wandering gaze.

There was a sudden disturbance in the antechamber, with a confused sound of cries and shouting. Those friends of Caesar who wore swords drew them, and Caracalla, who was unarmed, called to Antigonus to give him his.

"A revolt?" he asked Macrinus with flashing eyes, and as if he wished the answer to be in the affirmative; but the prefect had hastened to the door with drawn sword. Before he reached it, it was thrown open, and Julius Asper, the legate, burst into the tablinum as if beside himself, crying: "Cursed den of murderers! An attempt on your life, great Caesar; but we have him fast!"

"Assassination!" interrupted Caracalla with furious joy. "That was the only thing left undone! Bring the murderer! But first"--and he addressed himself to Aristides--"close the city gates and the harbor. Not a man, not a ship must be let through without being searched. The vessels that have weighed anchor since daybreak must be followed and brought back. Mounted Numidians under efficient officers must scour the high-roads as soon as the gate-keepers have been examined. Every house must be open to your men, every temple, every refuge. Seize Heron, the gem-cutter, his daughter, and his two sons. Also--Diodoros is the young villain's name?--him, his parents, and everybody connected with them! The physician knows where they are to be found. Alive, do you hear?--not dead! I will have them alive! I give you till midnight! Your head, if you let the jade and her brothers escape!"

With drooping head the unhappy officer departed. On the threshold he was met by Martialis, the praetorian centurion. After him, his hands bound behind his back, walked the criminal. A deep flush overspread his handsome face, his eyes glowed under the too lofty brow with the fierce light of fever, his waving locks stood out in wild confusion round his head, while the finely cut upper lip with its disdainful curl seemed the very seat of scorn and bitterest contempt. Every feature wore that same expression, and not a trace of fear or regret. But his panting breast betrayed to the physician's first glance that they had here to deal with a sick man in raging fever.

They had already torn off his mantle and discovered beneath its folds the sharp-edged butcher's knife which plainly betrayed his intentions. He had penetrated to the first antechamber when a soldier of the Germanic body-guard laid hold on him. Martialis had him by the girdle now, and the emperor looked sharply and mistrustfully at the praetorian, as he asked if it were he who had captured the assassin.

The centurion replied that he had not. Ingiomarus, the German, had noticed the knife; he, Martialis, was here only in right of his privilege as a praetorian to bring such prisoners before great Caesar.

Caracalla bent a searching gaze upon the soldier; for he thought he recognized in him the man who had aroused his envy and whose happiness he had once greatly desired to damp, when against orders he had received his wife and child in the camp. Recollections rose in his mind that drove the hot blood to his cheek, and he cried, disdainfully:

"I might have guessed it! What can be expected beyond the letter of their service from one who so neglects his duties? Did you not disport yourself with lewd women in the camp before my very eyes, setting at naught the well-known rules? Hands off the prisoner! This is your last day as praetorian and in Alexandria. As soon as the harbor is opened--to-morrow, I expect--you go on board the ship that carries reinforcements to Edessa. A winter on the Pontus will cool your lascivious blood."

This attack was so rapid and so unexpected to the somewhat dull-witted centurion, that he failed at first to grasp its full significance. He only understood that he was to be banished again from the loved ones he had so long been deprived of. But when he recovered sufficiently to excuse himself by declaring that it was his own wife and children who had visited him, Caesar cut him short by commanding him to report his change of service at once to the tribune of the legion.

The centurion bowed in silence and obeyed. Caracalla then went up to the prisoner, and dragging him, weakly resisting, from the dark back ground of the room to the window, he asked with a sneer:

"And what are assassins like in Alexandria? Ah, ha! this is not the face of a hired cut-throat! Only thus do they look whose sharp wit I will answer with still sharper steel."

"For that answer at least you are not wont to be at a loss," came contemptuously from the lips of the prisoner.

The emperor winced as if he had been struck, and then exclaimed

"You may thank your bound hands that I do not instantly return you the answer you seem to expect of me."

Then turning to his courtiers, he asked if any of them could give him information as to the name and history of the assassin; but no one appeared to know him. Even Timotheus, the priest of Serapis, who as head of the Museum had so

often delighted in the piercing intellect of this youth, and had prophesied a great future for him, was silent, and looked at him with troubled gaze.

It was the prisoner himself who satisfied Caesar's curiosity. Glancing round the circle of courtiers, and casting a grateful look at his priestly patron, he said:

"It would be asking too much of your Roman table-companions that they should know a philosopher. You may spare yourself the question, Caesar. I came here that you might make my acquaintance. My name is Philippus, and I am son to Heron, the gem-cutter."

"Her brother!" screamed Caracalla, as he rushed at him, and thrusting his hand into the neck of the sick youth's chiton—who already could scarcely stand upon his feet—he shook him violently, crying, with a scoffing look at the high-priest:

"And is this the ornament of the Museum, the free-thinker, the profound skeptic Philippus?"

He stopped suddenly, and his eyes flashed as if a new light had burst upon him; he dropped his hand from the prisoner's robe, and bending his head close to the other, he whispered in his ear, "You have come from Melissa?"

"Not from her," the other answered quickly, the flush deepening on his face, "but in the name of that most unhappy, most pitiable maiden, and as the representative of her noble Macedonian house, which you would defile with shame and infamy; in the name of the inhabitants of this city, whom you despoil and tread under foot; in the interests of the whole world, which you disgrace!"

Trembling with fury Caracalla broke in:

"Who would choose you for their ambassador, miserable wretch?"

To which the philosopher replied with haughty calm:

"Think not so lightly of one who looks forward with longing to that of which you have an abject fear."

"Of death, do you mean?" asked Caracalla, sneering, for his wrath had given place to astonishment.

And Philip answered: "Yes, Death—with whom I have sworn friendship, and who should be ten times blessed to me if he would but atone for my clumsiness and rid the world of such a monster!"

The emperor, still spell-bound by the unheard-of audacity of the youth before him, now felt moved to keep step with the philosopher, whom few could equal in sharpness of wit; and, controlling the raging fury of his blood, he cried, in a tone of superiority:

"So that is the boasted logic of the Museum? Death is your dearest desire, and yet you would give it to your enemy?"

"Quite right," replied Philip, his lip curling with scorn. "For there is something which to the philosopher stands higher than logic. It is a stranger to you, but you know it perhaps by name—it is called justice."

These words, and the contemptuous tone in which they were spoken, burst the flood-gates of Caracalla's painfully restrained passion; his voice rose harsh and loud, till the lion growled angrily and dragged at his chain, while his master flung hasty words of fury in the face of his enemy:

"We shall soon see, my cunning fencer with words, whether I know how to follow your advice, and how sternly I can exercise that virtue denied to me by an assassin. Will any one accuse me now of injustice if I punish the accursed brood that has grown up in this den of iniquity with all the rigor that it deserves? Yes, glare at me with those great, burning eyes! Alexandrian eyes, promising all and granting nothing—persuading him who trusts in them to believe in innocence and chastity, truth and affection. But let him look closer, and he finds nothing but deep corruption, foul cunning, despicable self-seeking, and atrocious faithlessness!

"And everything else in this city is like those eyes! Where are there so many gods and priests, where do they sacrifice so often, where do they fast and apply themselves so assiduously to repentance and the cleansing of the soul? And yet, where does vice display itself so freely and so unchecked? This Alexandria—in her youth as dissolute as she was fair—what is she now but an old hag? Now that she is toothless, now that wrinkles disfigure her face, she has turned pious, that, like the wolf in sheep's clothing, she may revenge herself by malice for the loss of joy and of the admiration of her lovers! I can find no more striking comparison than this; for, even as hags find a hideous pleasure in empty chatter and spiteful slanderings, so she, once so beautiful and renowned, has sunk deeper and deeper in the mire, and can not endure to see anything that has achieved greatness or glory without maliciously bespattering it with poison.

"Justice!--yes, I will exercise justice, oh, sublime and virtuous hero, going forth to murder—a dagger hidden in your bosom! I thank you for that lesson!

"Pride of the Museum!--you lead me to the source whence all your corruption flows. It is that famous nursery of learning where you, too, were bred up. There, yes, there they cherish the heresy that makes the gods into puppets of straw, and the majesty of the throne into an owl for pert and insignificant birds to peck at. Thence comes the doctrine that teaches men and women to laugh at virtue and to break their word. There, where in other days noble minds,

protected by the overshadowing favor of princes, followed out great ideas, they now teach nothing but words--empty, useless words. I saw and said that yesterday, and now I know it for certain--every poison shaft that your malice has aimed at me was forged in the Museum."

He paused for breath, and then continued, with a contemptuous laugh:

"If the justice which you rate higher than logic were to take its course, nothing would be juster than to make an end this day of this hot-bed of corruption. But your unlearned fellow-citizens shall taste of my justice, too. You yourself will be prevented by the beasts in the Circus from looking on at the effect your warning words have produced. But as yet you are alive, and you shall hear what the experiences are which make the severest measures the highest justice.

"What did I hope to find, and what have I really found? I heard the Alexandrians praised for their hospitality--for the ardor with which they pursue learning--for the great proficiency of their astronomers--for the piety which has raised so many altars and invented so many doctrines; and, lastly, for the beauty and fine wit of their women.

"And this hospitality! All that I have known of it is a flood of malicious abuse and knavish scoffing, which penetrated even to the gates of this temple, my dwelling. I came here as emperor, and treason pursued me wherever I went--even into my own apartments; for there you stand, whom a barbarian had to hinder from stabbing me with the knife of the assassin. And your learning? You have heard my opinion of the Museum. And the astrologers of this renowned observatory? The very opposite of all they promised me has come to pass.

"Religion? The people, of whom you know as little from the musty volumes of the Museum as of 'Ultima Thule'--the people indeed practice it. The old gods are necessary to them. They are the bread of life to them. But instead of those you have offered them sour, unripe fruit, with a glittering rind--from your own garden, of your own growing. The fruit of trees is a gift from Nature, and all that she brings forth has some good in it; but what you offer to the world is hollow and poisonous. Your rhetoric gives it an attractive exterior, and that, too, comes from the Museum. There they are shrewd enough to create new gods, which start up out of the earth like mushrooms. If it should only occur to them, they would raise murder to the dignity of god of gods, and you to be his high-priest."

"That would be your office," interposed the philosopher.

"You shall see," returned the emperor, laughing shrilly, "and the wifings of the Museum with you! You use the knife; but hear the words of the master: The teeth of wild beasts and their claws are weapons not to be despised. Your father and brother, and she who taught me what to think of the virtue and faith of Alexandrian women, shall tell you this in Hades. Soon shall every one of those follow you thither who forgot, even by a glance of the eye, that I was Caesar and a guest of this city! After the next performance in the Circus the offenders shall tell you in the other world how I administer justice. No later than the day after to-morrow, I imagine, you may meet there with several companions from the Museum. There will be enough to clap applause at the disputations!" Caracalla ended his vehement speech with a jeering laugh, and looked round eagerly for applause from the "friends" for whose benefit his last words had been spoken; and it was offered so energetically as to drown the philosopher's reply.

But Caracalla heard it, and when the noise subsided he asked his condemned victim:

"What did you mean by your exclamation, 'And yet I would that death might spare me'?"

"In order, if that should come true," returned the philosopher quickly, his voice trembling with indignation, "that I might be a witness of the grim mockery with which the all-requiting gods will destroy you, their defender."

"The gods!" laughed the emperor. "My respect for your logic grows less and less. You, the skeptic, expect the deeds of a mortal man from the gods whose existence you deny!"

Then cried Philip, and his great eyes burning with hatred and indignation sought the emperor's: "Till this hour I was sure of nothing, and therefore uncertain of the existence of a god; but now I believe firmly that Nature, by whom everything is carried out according to everlasting, immutable laws, and who casts out and destroys anything that threatens to bring discord into the harmonious workings of all her parts, would of her own accord bring forth a god, if there be not one already, who should crush you, the destroyer of life and peace, in his all-powerful hand!"

Here his wild outburst of indignation was brought to an abrupt close, for a furious blow from Caracalla's fist sent his enfeebled enemy staggering back against the wall near the window.

Mad with rage, Caracalla shrieked hoarsely

"To the beasts with him! No, not to the beasts--to the torture! He and his sister! The punishment I have bethought me of--scum of the earth--"

But the wild despair of the other, in whose breast hatred and fever burned with equal strength, now reached the highest pitch. Like a hunted deer which stays its flight for a moment to find an outlet or to turn upon his pursuers, he gazed wildly round him, and before the emperor could finish his threat; leaning against the pillar of the window as if prepared to receive his death-blow, he interrupted Caracalla:

"If your dull wit can invent no death to satisfy your cruelty, the blood-hound Zminis can aid you. You are a worthy couple. Curses on you!..."

"At him!" yelled the emperor to Macrinus and the legate, for no substitute had appeared for the centurion he had dismissed.

But while the nobles advanced warily upon the madman, and Macrinus called to the Germanic body-guard in the anteroom, Philip had turned like lightning and disappeared through the window.

The legates and Caesar came too late to hold him back, and from below came cries of: "Crushed!--dead!... What crime has he committed? They cast him down!... He can not have done it himself... Impossible! ... His arms are bound.... A new manner of death invented specially for the Alexandrians!"

Then another whistle sounded, and the shout, "Down with the tyrant!"

But no second cry followed. The place was too full of soldiers and lictors.

"Caracalla heard it all. He turned back into the room, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and said in a voice of studied unconcern, yet with horrible harshness:

"He deserved his death-ten times over. However, I have to thank him for a good suggestion. I had forgotten the Egyptian Zminis. If he is still alive, Macrinus, take him from his dungeon and bring him here. But quickly--in a chariot! Let him come just as he is. I can make use of him now."

The prefect bowed assent, and by the rapidity with which he departed he betrayed how willingly he carried out this order of his master's.

CHAPTER XXX.

Scarcely had Macrinus closed the door behind him, when Caracalla threw himself exhausted on the throne, and ordered wine to be brought.

The gloomy gaze he bent upon the ground was not affected this time. The physician noted with anxiety how his master's breast heaved and his eyelids quivered; but when he offered Caesar a soothing potion, he waved him away, and commanded him to cease from troubling him.

For all that, he listened a little later to the legate, who brought the news that the youths of the city assembled on the race-course were beginning to be impatient. They were singing and applauding boisterously, and the songs they so loudly insisted on having repeated would certainly not contain matter flattering to the Romans.

"Leave them alone," answered Caesar, roughly. "Every line is aimed at me and no other. But the condemned are always allowed their favorite meal before the last journey. The food they love is venomous satire. Let them enjoy it to the full once more!--Is it far to Zminis's prison?"

The reply was in the negative; and as Caracalla exclaimed, "So much the better!" a significant smile played on his lips.

The high-priest of Serapis had looked on in much distress of mind. He, as the head of the Museum, had set high hopes on the youth who had come to such a terrible end. If Caesar should carry his threats into execution, there would be an end to that celebrated home of learning which, in his opinion, bore such noble fruits of study. And what could Caracalla mean by his dark saying that the sport and mockery of those youths below was their last meal? The worst might indeed be expected from the fearful tyrant who was at once so deeply wounded and so grievously offended; and the high-priest had already sent messengers--Greeks of good credit--to warn the insurgent youths in the stadium. But, as the chief minister of the divinity, he also esteemed it his duty, at any risk to himself, to warn the despot, whom he saw on the verge of being carried away to deeds of unparalleled horror. He thought the time had come, when Caracalla looked up from the brooding reverie into which he had again sunk, and with an ominous scowl asked Timotheus whether his wife, under whose protection Melissa had been seen the day before, had known that the false-hearted girl had given herself to another man while she feigned love for him.

The high-priest repelled the suspicion with his usual dignity, and went on to adjure Caesar not to visit on an industrious and dutiful community the sins of a light-minded girl's base folly and falsehood.

But Caracalla would not suffer him to finish; he wrathfully inquired who had given him a right to force his advice on Caesar.

On this Timotheus replied, with calm dignity:

"Your own noble words, great Caesar, when, to your honor be it spoken, you reminded the misguided skeptic of the true meaning of the old gods and of what is due to them. The god whom I serve, great Caesar, is second to none: the heavens are his head, the ocean is his body, and the earth his feet; the sunshine is the light of his all-seeing eye, and everything which stirs in the heart or brain of man is an emanation of his divine spirit. Thus he is the all-pervading soul of the universe, and a portion of that soul dwells in you, in me, in all of us. His power is greater than any power on earth, and, though a well-grounded wrath and only too just indignation urge you to exert the power lent you by him--"

"And I will exert it!" Caesar exclaimed with haughty rage. "It reaches far. I need no help, not even that of your god!"

"That I know," replied Timotheus. "And the god will let those fall into your hands who have sinned against your sacred majesty. Any punishment, even the severest, will be pleasing in his sight which you may inflict on those guilty of high-treason, for you wear the purple as his gift and in his name; those who insult you sin also against the god. I myself, with my small power, will help to bring the criminals to justice. But when a whole population is accused, when it is beyond the power of human justice to separate the innocent from the guilty, punishment is the prerogative of the god. He will visit on this city the crimes it has committed against you; and I implore you, in the name of your noble and admirable mother--whom it has been my privilege to entertain under this roof, and who in gratitude for the favors of Serapis--"

"And have I grudged sacrifices?" Caesar broke in. "I have done my utmost to win the graces of your god--and with what success? Everything that can most aggrrieve the heart of man has befallen me here under his eyes. I have as much reason to complain of him as to accuse the reprobate natives of your city. He, no doubt, knows how to be avenged; the three-headed monster at his feet does not look like a lap-dog. Why, he would despise me if I should leave the punishment of the criminals to his tender mercies! Nay, I can do that for myself. Though you have seen me in many cases show mercy, it has always been for my mother's sake. You have done well to remind me of her. That lady--she is, I know, a votary of your god. But to me the Alexandrians have dared to violate the laws of hospitality; to her they were cordial hosts. I will remember that in their favor. And if many escape unpunished, I would have the traitors to know that they owe it to the hospitality shown to my mother by their parents, or perhaps by themselves."

He was here interrupted by the arrival of Aristides, who entered in great haste and apparently pleased excitement. His spies had seized a malefactor who had affixed an epigram of malignant purport to the statue of Julia Domna in the Caesareum. The writer was a pupil of the Museum, and had been taken in the stadium, where he was boasting of his exploit. A spy, mingling with the crowd, had laid hands on him, and the captain of the watch had forthwith hurried to the Serapeum to boast of a success which might confirm him in his yet uncertain position. The rough sketch of the lines had been found on the culprit, and Aristides held the tablets on which they were written while Caracalla listened to his report. Aristides was breathless with eagerness, and Caesar, snatching the tablets impatiently from his hand, read the following lines:

"Wanton, I say, is this dam of irreconcilable brothers!" "Mean you Jocasta?" "Nay, worse--Julia, the wife of Severus."

"The worst of all--but the last!" Caracalla snarled, as, turning pale, he laid the tablets down. But he almost instantly took them up again, and handing the malignant and lying effusion to the high-priest, he exclaimed, with a laugh:

"This seals the warrant! Here is my mother slandered, too! Now, the man who sues for mercy condemns himself to death!" And, clinching his fist, he muttered, "And this, too, is from the Museum."

Timotheus, meanwhile, had also read the lines. Even paler than Caracalla, and fully aware that any further counsel would be thrown away and only turn the emperor's wrath against himself, he expressed his anger at this calumny directed against the noblest of women, and by a boy hardly free from school!

But Caracalla furiously broke in:

"And woe to you if your god refuses me the only thing I crave in return for so many sacrifices--revenge, complete and sanguinary; atonement from great and small alike!" But he interrupted himself with the exclamation: "He grants it! Now for the tool I need."

The tool was ready--Zminis, the Egyptian, answering in every particular to the image which Caracalla had had in his mind of the instrument who might execute his most bloodthirsty purpose.

With hair in disorder and a blue-black stubble of beard on his haggard yellow cheeks, in a dirty gray prison shirt, barefoot, and treading as silently as Fate when it creeps on a victim, the rascal approached his sovereign. He stood before Caracalla exactly as the prefect, in a swift chariot, had brought him out of prison. The white of his long, narrow eyes, which had so terrified Melissa, had turned yellow, and his glance was as restless and shifting as that of a hyena. His small head on its long neck was never for a moment still; the ruthless wretch had sat waiting day after day in expectation of death, and it was by a miracle that he found himself once more at the height of his ambition. But when at last he inquired of Caracalla, in the husky voice which had gained an added hoarseness from the damp dungeon whence he had been brought, what his commands were, looking up at him like a starving dog which hopes for a titbit from his master's hand, even the fratricide, who himself held the sword sharpened to kill, shuddered at the sight and sound.

But Caesar at once recovered himself, and when he asked the Egyptian:

"Will you undertake to help me, as captain of the night-watch, to punish the traitors of Alexandria?" the answer was confident:

"What man can do, I can do."

"Good!" replied Caracalla. "But this is not a matter of merely capturing one or another. Every one--mark me--every one has merited death who has broken the laws of hospitality, that hospitality which this lying city offered me. Do you understand? Yes? Well, then, how are we to detect the guilty? Where are we to find spies and executioners enough? How can we punish worst those whose wickedness has involved the rest in guilt, especially the epigramatists of the Museum? How are we to discover the ringleaders of those who insulted me yesterday in the Circus, and of those among the youths in the stadium who have dared to express their vile disapproval by whistling in my very face? What steps will you take to hinder a single one from escaping? Consider. How is it to be done so effectually that I may lie down and say 'They have had their deserts. I am content?'"

The Egyptian's eyes wandered round the floor, but he presently drew himself up and answered briefly and positively, as though he were issuing an order to his men:

"Kill them all!"

Caracalla started, and repeated dully, "All?"

"All!" repeated Zminis, with a hideous grin. "The young ones are all there, safe in the stadium. The men in the Museum fear nothing. Those who are in the streets can be cut down. Locked doors can be broken in."

At this, Caesar, who had dropped on to his throne, started to his feet, flung the wine-cup he held across the room, laughed loudly, and exclaimed:

"You are the man for me! To work at once! This will be a day!--Macrinus, Theocritus, Antigonus, we need your troops. Send up the legates. Those who do not like the taste of blood, may sweeten it with plunder."

He looked young again, as if relieved from some burden on his mind, and the thought flashed through his brain whether revenge were not sweeter than love.

No one spoke. Even Theocritus, on whose lips a word of flattery or applause was always ready, looked down in his dismay; but Caracalla, in his frenzy of excitement, heeded nothing.

The hideous suggestion of Zminis seemed to him worthy of his greatness by its mere enormity. It must be carried out. Ever since he had first donned the purple he had made it his aim to be feared. If this tremendous deed were done, he need never frown again at those whom he wished to terrify.

And then, what a revenge! If Melissa should hear of it, what an effect it must have on her!

To work, then!

And he added in a gentler tone, as if he had a delightful surprise in store for some old friend:

"But silence, perfect silence--do you hear?--till all is ready.--You, Zminis, may begin on the pipers in the stadium and the chattering in the Museum. The prize for soldiers and lictors alike lies in the merchants' chests."

Still no one spoke; and now he observed it. His scheme was too grand for these feeble spirits. He must teach them to silence their conscience and the voice of Roman rectitude; he must take on himself the whole responsibility of this deed, at which the timid quaked. So he drew himself up to his full height, and, affecting not to see the hesitancy of his companions, he said, in a tone of cheerful confidence:

"Let each man do his part. All I ask of you is to carry out the sentence I pronounce as a judge. You know the crime of the citizens of this town, and, by virtue of the power I exercise over life and death, be it known to all that I, Caesar, condemn--mark the word, condemn--every free male of Alexandria, of whatever age or rank, to die by the sword of a Roman warrior! This is a conquered city, which has forfeited every claim to quarter. The blood and the treasure of the inhabitants are the prize of my soldiery. Only"--and he turned to Timotheus--"this house of your god, which has given me shelter, with the priests and the treasure of great Serapis, are spared. Now it lies with each of you to show whether or no he is faithful to me. All of you"--and he addressed his friends--"all who do me service in avenging me for the audacious insults which have been offered to your sovereign, are assured of my imperial gratitude."

This declaration was not without effect, and murmurs of applause rose from the "friends" and favorites, though less enthusiastic than Caracalla was accustomed to hear. But the febleness of this demonstration made him all the prouder of his own undaunted resolve.

Macrinus was one of those who had most loudly approved him, and Caracalla rejoiced to think that this prudent counselor should advise his drinking the cup of vengeance to the dregs. Intoxicated already before he had even sipped it, he called Macrinus and Zminis to his side, and with glowing looks impressed on them to take particular care that Melissa, with her father, Alexander, and Diodoros were brought to him alive.

"And remember," he added, "there will be many weeping mothers here by to-morrow morning; but there is one I must see again, and that not as a corpse--that bedizened thing in red whom I saw in the Circus--I mean the wife of Seleukus, of the Kanopic way."

CHAPTER XXXI.

On the wide ascent leading to the Serapeum the praetorians stood awaiting Caesar's commands. They had not yet formed in rank and file, but were grouped round the centurion Martialis, who had come to tell them, sadly, of his removal to Edessa, and to take leave of his comrades. He gave his hand to each one of them in turn, and received a kindly pressure in return; for the stubborn fellow, though not of the cleverest, had proved himself a good soldier, and to many of them a trusty friend. There was not one who did not regret his going from among them. But Caesar had spoken, and there was no gainsaying his orders. In the camp, after service, they might talk the matter over; for the present it were wise to guard their tongues.

The centurion had just said farewell to the last of his cohort, when the prefect, with the legate Quintus Flavius Nobilior, who commanded the legion, and several other higher officers, appeared among them. Macrinus greeted them briefly, and, instead of having the tuba blown as usual and letting them fall into their ranks, he told them to gather close round him, the centurions in front. He then disclosed to them the emperor's secret orders. Caesar, he began, had long exercised patience and mercy, but the insolence and malice of the Alexandrians knew no bounds; therefore, in virtue of his power over life and death, he had pronounced judgment upon them. To them as being nearest to his person he handed over the most remunerative part of the work of punishment. Whomsoever they found on the Kanopic way, the greatest and richest thoroughfare of the city, they were to cut down as they would the rebellious inhabitants of a conquered town. Only the women and children and the slaves were to be spared. If for this task, a hideous one at best, they chose to pay themselves out of the treasures of the citizens, nobody would blame them.

A loud cheer followed these orders, and many an eye gleamed brighter. Even the coolest among them seemed to see a broad, deep pool of blood into which he need only dip his hand and bring out something worth the catching. And the fish that were to be had there were not miserable carp, but heavy gold and silver vessels, and coins and magnificent ornaments. Macrinus then proceeded to inform the higher and lower officers of the course of action he had agreed upon with the emperor and Zminis. Seven trumpet-blasts from the terrace of the Serapeum would give the signal for the attack to begin. Then they were to advance, maniple on maniple; but they were not required to keep their ranks--each man had his own work to do. The legion was to assemble again at sunset at the Gate of the Sun, at the eastern end of the road, after having swept it from end to end.

By order of the emperor, each man, however, must be particularly careful whom he cut down in any hiding-place, for Caesar wished to give the following Alexandrians--who had sinned most flagrantly against him--the benefit of a trial, and they must therefore be taken alive. He then named the gem-cutter Heron, his son Alexander, and his daughter Melissa, the Alexandrian senator Polybius, his son Diodoros, and the wife of Seleukus.

He described them as well as he was able. For each one Caesar promised a reward of three thousand drachmas, and for Heron's daughter twice as much, but only on condition of their being delivered up unhurt. It would therefore be to their own advantage to keep their eyes open in the houses, and to be cautious. Whoever should take the daughter of the gem-cutter--and he described Melissa once more--would render a special service to Caesar and might reckon on promotion.

The centurion Julius Martialis stayed to hear the end of this discourse, and then hurriedly departed. He felt just as he had done in the war with the Alemanni when a red-haired German had dealt him a blow on the helmet with his club. His head whirled and swam as it did then--only to-day blood-red lights danced before his eyes instead of deep blue and gold. It was some time before he could collect his thoughts to any purpose; but when he did, he clinched his fists as he recalled Caesar's malignant cruelty in forcing him away from his family.

Presently his large mouth widened into a satisfied smile. He was no longer in that company, and need take no part in the horrid butchery. In any other place he would no doubt have joined in it like the rest, glad of the rich booty; but here, in his own home, where his mother and wife and child dwelt, it seemed a monstrous and accursed deed. Besides the gemcutter's family, in whom Martialis took no interest, Caesar seemed to have a special grudge against the lady Berenike, whose husband Seleukus had been master to the centurion's father; nay, his own wife was still in the service of the merchant.

Not being skilled in any trade, he had entered the army early. As Evocatus he had married the daughter of a free gardener of Seleukus, and when he was ordered to Rome to join the praetorians his wife had obtained the post of superintendent of the merchant's villa at Kanopus. For this they had to thank the kindness of the lady Berenike and her now dead daughter Korinna; and he was honestly grateful to the wife of Seleukus, for, as his wife was established in the villa, he could leave her without anxiety and go with the army wherever it was ordered.

Having by this time reached the Kanopic street on his way to his family, he perceived the statues of Hermes and Demeter which stood on each side of the entrance to the merchant's house, and his slow mind recapitulated the long list of benefits he had received from Seleukus and his wife; a secret voice urged upon him that it was his duty to warn them.

He owed nothing to Caesar, that crafty butcher, who out of pure malice could deprive an honest soldier of his only joy in life and cheat him of half his pay--for the praetorians had twice the wages of the other troops; and if he only knew some handicraft, he would throw away his sword today.

Here, at least, he could interfere with Caesar's ruthless schemes, besides doing his benefactors a good turn. He therefore entered the house of the merchant, instead of pursuing on his homeward way.

He was well known, and the mistress of the house was at once apprised of his arrival.

All the lower apartments were empty, the soldiers who had been quartered in them having joined the others at the Serapeum.

But what had happened to the exquisite garden in the impluvium? What hideous traces showed where the soldiers had camped, and, drunk with their host's costly wine, had given free play to their reckless spirits!

The velvet lawn looked like a stable-floor; the rare shrubs had been denuded of their flowers and branches. Blackened patches on the mosaic pavement showed where fires had been kindled; the colonnades were turned into drying-grounds for the soldiers' linen, and a rope on which hung some newly washed clothes was wound at one end round the neck of a Venus from the hand of Praxiteles, and at the other round the lyre of an Apollo fashioned in marble by Bryaxis. Some Indian shrubs, of which his father-in-law had been very proud, were trampled underfoot; and in the great banqueting-hall, which had served as sleeping-room for a hundred praetorians, costly cushions and draperies were strewn, torn from the couches and walls to make their beds more comfortable.

Used to the sights of war as he was, the soldier ground his teeth with wrath at this scene. As long as he could remember, he had looked upon everything here with reverence and awe; and to think that his comrades had destroyed it all made his blood boil.

As he approached the women's apartments he took fright. How was he to disclose to his mistress what threatened her?

But it must be done; so he followed the waiting-maid Johanna, who led him to her lady's livingroom.

In it sat the Christian steward Johannes, with writing tablets and scrolls of papyrus, working in the service of his patroness. She herself was with the wounded Aurelius; and Martialis, on hearing this, begged to be admitted to her.

Berenike was in the act of renewing the wounded soldier's bandages, and when the centurion saw how cruelly disfigured was the handsome, blooming face of the young tribune, to whom he was heartily attached, the tears rose to his eyes. The matron observed it, and witnessed with much surprise the affectionate greeting between the young noble and the plain soldier.

The centurion greeted her respectfully; but it was not till Nernesianus asked him how it was that the troops had been called to arms at this hour, that Martialis plucked up courage and begged the lady of the house to grant him an interview.

But Berenike had still to wash and bandage the wounds of her patient--a task which she always performed herself and with the greatest care; she therefore promised the soldier to be at his disposal in half an hour.

"Then it will be too late!" burst from the lips of the centurion; then she knew, by his voice and the terror-stricken aspect of the man whom she had known so long, that he meant to warn her, and there was but one from whom the danger could come.

"Caesar?" she asked. "He is sending out his creatures to murder me?"

The imperious gaze of Berenike's large eyes so overpowered the simple soldier as to render him speechless for a while. But Caesar had threatened his mistress's life--he must collect himself, and thus he managed to stammer:

"No, lady, no! He will not have you killed assuredly not! On the contrary--they are to let you live when they cut down the others!"

"Cut down!" cried Apollinaris, raising himself up and staring horrified at this messenger of terror; but his brother laid his hand upon the centurion's broad shoulder, and, shaking him vigorously, commanded him as his tribune to speak out.

The soldier, ever accustomed to obey, and only too anxious that his warning should not come too late, disclosed in hurried words what he had learned from the prefect. The brothers interrupted him from time to time with some exclamation of horror or disgust, but Berenike remained silent till Martialis stopped with a deep breath.

Then the lady gave a shrill laugh, and as the others looked at her in amazement she said coolly "You men will wade through blood and shame with that reprobate, if he but orders you to do so. I am only a woman, and yet I will show him that there are limits even to his malignity."

She remained for a few moments lost in thought, and then ordered the centurion to go and find out where her husband was.

Martialis obeyed at once, and no sooner was the door closed behind him than she turned to the two brothers, and

addressing herself first to one and then to the other with equal vehemence, she cried "Who is right now? Of all the villains who have brought shame upon the throne and name of mighty Caesar, this is the most dastardly. He has written plainly enough upon Apollinaris's face how much he values a brave soldier, the son of a noble house. And you, Nemesianus--are you not also an Aurelius? You say so; and yet, had he not chanced to let you care for your brother, you would at this moment be wandering through the city like a mad dog, biting all who crossed your path. Why do you not speak? Why not tell me once more, Nemesianus, that a soldier must obey his commander blindly?--And you, Apollinaris, will you dare still to assert that the hand with which Caesar tore your face was guided only by righteous indignation at an insult offered to an innocent maiden? Have you the courage to excuse the murders by Caracalla of his own wife, and many other noble women, by his anxiety for the safety of throne and state? I, too, am a woman, and may hold up my head with the best; but what have I to do with the state or with the throne? My eye met his, and from that moment the fiend was my deadly enemy. A quick death at the hands of one of his soldiers seemed too good for the woman he hated. Wild beasts were to tear me to pieces before his eyes. Is that not sufficient for you? Put every abomination together, everything unworthy of an honorable man and abhorrent to the gods, and you have the man whom you so willingly obey. I am only the wife of a citizen. But were I the widow of a noble Aurelian and your mother--" Here Apollinaris, whose wounds were beginning to burn again, broke in: "She would have counseled us to leave revenge to the gods. He is Caesar!"

"He is a villain!" shrieked the matron--"the curse, the shame of humanity, a damnable destroyer of peace and honor and life, such as the world has never beheld before! To kill him would be to earn the gratitude and blessing of the universe. And you, the scions of a noble house, you, I say, prove that there still are men among so many slaves! It is Rome herself who calls you through me--like her, a woman maltreated and wounded to the heart's core--to bear arms in her service till she gives you the signal for making an end of the dastardly blood hound!"

The brothers gazed at one another pale and speechless, till at last Nemesianus ventured to say "He deserves to die, we know, a thousand deaths, but we are neither judges nor executioners. We can not do the work of the assassin."

"No, lady, we can not," added Apollinaris, and shook his wounded head energetically.

But the lady, nothing daunted, went on: "Who has ever called Brutus a murderer? You are young--Life lies before you. To plunge a sword into the heart of this monster is a deed for which you are too good. But I know a hand that understands its work and would be ready to guide the steel. Call it out at the right moment and be its guide!"

"And that hand?" Apollinaris asked in anxious expectation.

"It is there," replied Berenike, pointing to Martialis, who entered the room at that moment. Again the brothers interchanged looks of doubt, but the lady cried: "Consider for a moment! I would fain go hence with the certainty that the one burning desire shall be fulfilled which still warms this frozen heart."

She motioned to the centurion, left the apartment with him, and preceded him to her own room. Arrived there, she ordered the astonished freedman Johannes, in his office as notary, to add a codicil to her will. In the event of her death, she left to Xanthe, the wife of the centurion Martialis, her lawful property the villa at Kanopus, with all it contained, and the gardens appertaining to it, for the free use of herself and her children.

The soldier listened speechless with astonishment. This gift was worth twenty houses in the city, and made its owner a rich man. But the testator was scarcely ten years older than his Xanthe, and, as he kissed the hem of his mistress's robe in grateful emotion, he cried: "May the gods reward you for your generosity; but we will pray and offer up sacrifices that it may be long before this comes into our hands!"

The lady shook her head with a bitter smile, and, drawing the soldier aside, she disclosed to him in rapid words her determination to quit this life before the praetorians entered the house. She then informed the horror-stricken man that she had chosen him to be her avenger. To him, too, the emperor had dealt a malicious blow. Let him remember that, when the time came to plunge the sword in the tyrant's heart. Should this deed, however, cost Martialis his life--which he had risked in many a battle for miserable pay--her will would enable his widow to bring up their children in happiness and comfort.

The centurion had thrown in a deprecatory word or two, but Berenike continued as if she had not heard him, till at last Martialis cried:

"You ask too much of me, lady. Caesar is hateful to me, but I am no longer one of the praetorians, and am banished the country. How is it possible that I should approach him? How dare I, a common man--"

The lady came closer to him, and whispered:

"You will perform this deed to which I have appointed you in the name of all the just. We demand nothing from you but your sword. Greater men than you--the two Aurelians--will guide it. At their word of command you will do the deed. When they give you the signal, brave Martialis, remember the unfortunate woman in Alexandria whose death you swore to revenge. As soon as the tribunes--"

But the centurion was suddenly transformed. "If the tribunes command it," he interrupted with decision, his dull eye flashing--"if they demand it of me, I do it willingly. Tell them Martialis's sword is ever at their service. It has made short

work of stronger men than that vicious stripling."

Berenike gave the soldier her hand, thanked him hurriedly, and begged him, as he could pass unharmed through the city, to hasten to her husband's counting-house by the water-side, to warn him and carry him her last greetings.

With tears in his eyes Martialis did as she desired. When he had gone, the steward began to implore his mistress to conceal herself, and not cast away God's gift of life so sinfully; but she turned from him resolutely though kindly, and repaired once more to the brothers' room.

One glance at them disclosed to her that they had come to no definite conclusion; but their hesitation vanished as soon as they heard that the centurion was ready to draw his sword upon the emperor when they should give the signal; and Berenike breathed a sigh of relief at this resolution, and clasped their hands in gratitude.

They, too, implored her to conceal herself, but she merely answered:

"May your youth grow into happy old age! Life can offer me nothing more, since my child was taken from me--But time presses--I welcome the murderers, now that I know that revenge will not sleep."

"And your husband?" interposed Nemesianus.

She answered with a bitter smile: "He? He has the gift of being easily consoled.--But what was that?"

Loud voices were audible outside the sick-room. Nemesianus stationed himself in front of the lady, sword in hand. This protection, however, proved unnecessary, for, instead of the praetorians, Johanna entered the room, supporting on her arm the half-sinking form of a young man in whom no one would have recognized the once beautifully curled and carefully dressed Alexander. A long caracalla covered his tall form; Dido the slave had cut off his hair, and he himself had disguised his features with streaks of paint. A large, broad-brimmed hat had slipped to the back of his head like a drunken man's, and covered a wound from which the red blood flowed down upon his neck. His whole aspect breathed pain and horror, and Berenike, who took him for a hired cut-throat sent by Caracalla, retreated hastily from him till Johanna revealed his name.

He nodded his head in confirmation, and then sank exhausted on his knees beside Apollinaris's couch and managed with great difficulty to stammer out: "I am searching for Philip. He went into the town--ill-out of his senses. Did he not come to you?"

"No," answered Berenike. "But what is this fresh blood? Has the slaughter begun?"

The wounded man nodded. Then he continued, with a groan: "In front of the house of your neighbor Milon--the back of my head--I fled--a lance--"

His voice failed him, and Berenike cried to the tribune: "Support him, Nemesianus! Look after him and tend him. He is the brother of the maiden--you know--If I know you, you will do all in your power for him, and keep him hidden here till all danger is over."

"We will defend him with our lives!" cried Apollinaris, giving his hand to the lady.

But he withdrew it quickly, for from the impluvium arose the rattle of arms, and loud, confused noise.

Berenike threw up her head and lifted her hands as if in prayer. Her bosom heaved with her deep breath, the delicate nostrils quivered, and the great eyes flashed with wrathful light. For a moment she stood thus silent, then let her arms fall, and cried to the tribunes:

"My curse be upon you if you forget what you owe to yourselves, to the Roman Empire, and to your dying friend. My blessing, if you hold fast to what you have promised."

She pressed their hands, and, turning to do the same to the artist, found that he had lost consciousness. Johanna and Nemesianus had removed his hat and caracalla, to attend to his wound.

A strange smile passed over the matron's stern features. Snatching the Gallic mantle from the Christian's hand, she threw it over her own shoulders, exclaiming:

"How the ruffian will wonder when, instead of the living woman, they bring him a corpse wrapped in his barbarian's mantle!"

She pressed the hat upon her head, and from a corner of the room where the brothers' weapons stood, selected a hunting-spear. She asked if this weapon might be recognized as belonging to them, and, on their answering in the negative, said:

"My thanks, then, for this last gift!"

At the last moment she turned to the waiting-woman:

"Your brother will help you to burn Korinna's picture. No shameless gaze shall dishonor it again." She tore her hand from that of the Christian, who, with hot tears, tried to hold her back; then, carrying her head proudly erect, she left them.

The brothers gazed shudderingly after her. "And to know," cried Nemesianus, striking his forehead, "that our own comrades will slay her! Never were the swords of Rome so disgraced!"

"He shall pay for it!" replied the wounded man, gnashing his teeth.

"Brother, we must avenge her!"

"Yes--her, and--may the gods hear me!--you too, Apollinaris," swore the other, lifting his hand as for an oath.

Loud screams, the clash of arms, and quick orders sounded from below and broke in upon the tribune's vow. He was rushing to the window to draw back the curtain and look upon the horrid deed with his own eyes, when Apollinaris called him back, reminding him of their duty toward Melissa's brother, who was lost if the others discovered him here.

Hereupon Nemesianus lifted the fainting youth in his strong arms and carried him into the adjoining room, laying him upon the mat which had served their faithful old slave as a bed. He then covered him with his own mantle, after hastily binding up the wound on his head and another on his shoulder.

By the time the tribune returned to his brother the noise outside had grown considerably less, only pitiable cries of anguish mingled with the shouts of the soldiers.

Nemesianus hastily pulled aside the curtain, letting such a flood of blinding sunshine into the room that Apollinaris covered his wounded face with his hands and groaned aloud.

"Sickening! Horrible! Unheard of!" cried his brother, beside himself at the sight that met his eyes. "A battle-field! What do I say? The peaceful house of a Roman citizen turned into shambles. Fifteen, twenty, thirty bodies on the grass! And the sunshine plays as brightly on the pools of blood and the arms of the soldiers as if it rejoiced in it all. But there--Oh, brother! our Marcipor--there lies our dear old Marci!--and beside him the basket of roses he had fetched for the lady Berenike from the flower-market. There they be, steeped in blood, the red and white roses; and the bright sun looks down from heaven and laughs upon it!"

He broke down into sobs, and then continued, gnashing his teeth with rage: "Apollo smiles upon it, but he sees it; and wait--wait but a little longer, Tarautas! The god stretches out his hand already for the avenging bow! Has Berenike ventured among them? Near the fountain-how it flashes and glitters with the hues of Iris!--they are crowding round something on the ground--Mayhap the body of Seleukus. No--the crowd is separating. Eternal gods! It is she--it is the woman who tended you!"

"Dead?" asked the other.

"She is lying on the ground with a spear in her bosom. Now the legate--yes, it is Quintus Flavius Nobilior--bends over her and draws it out. Dead--dead! and slain by a man of our cohort!"

He clasped his hands before his face, while Apollinaris muttered curses, and the name of their faithful Marcipor, who had served their father before them, coupled with wild vows of vengeance.

Nemesianus at length composed himself sufficiently to follow the course of the horrible events going on below.

"Now," he went on, describing it to his brother, "now they are surrounding Rufus. That merciless scoundrel must have done something abominable, that even goes beyond what his fellows can put up with. There they have caught a slave with a bundle in his hand, perhaps stolen goods. They will punish him with death, and are themselves no better than he. If you could only see how they come swarming from every side with their costly plunder! The magnificent golden jug set with jewels, out of which the lady Berenike poured the Byblos wine for you, is there too!--Are we still soldiers, or robbers and murderers?"

"If we are," cried Apollinaris, "I know who has made us so."

They were startled by the approaching rattle of arms in the corridor, and then a loud knock at the chamber-door. The next moment a soldier's head appeared in the doorway, to be quickly withdrawn with the exclamation, "It is true--here lies Apollinaris!"

"One moment," said a second deep voice, and over the threshold stepped the legate of the legion, Quintus Flavius Nobilior, in all the panoply of war, and saluted the brothers.

Like them, he came of an old and honorable race, and was acting in place of the prefect Macrinus, whose office in the state prevented him from taking the military command of that mighty corps, the praetorians. Twenty years older than the twins, and a companion-in-arms of their father, he had managed their rapid promotion. He was their faithful friend and patron, and Apollinaris's misfortune had disgusted him no less than the order in the execution of which he was now obliged to take part. Having greeted the brothers affectionately, observed their painful emotion, and heard their complaints over the murder of their slave, he shook his manly head, and pointing to the blood that dripped from his boots and greaves, "Forgive me for thus defiling your apartments," he said. "If we came from slaughtering men upon the field of battle, it could only do honor to the soldier; but this is the blood of defenseless citizens, and even women's gore is mixed with it."

"I saw the body of the lady of this house," said Nemesianus, gloomily. "She has tended my brother like a mother."

"But, on the other hand, she was imprudent enough to draw down Caesar's displeasure upon her," interposed the Flavian, shrugging his shoulders. "We were to bring her to him alive, but he had anything but friendly intentions toward her; however, she spoiled his game. A wonderful woman! I have scarcely seen a man look death--and self--

sought death--in the face like that! While the soldiers down there were massacring all who fell into their hands--those were the orders, and I looked on at the butchery, for, rather than--well, you can imagine that for yourselves--through one of the doors there came a tall, extraordinary figure. The wide brim of a traveling hat concealed the features, and it was wrapped in one of the emperor's fool's mantles. It hurried toward the maniple of Sempronius, brandishing a javelin, and with a sonorous voice reviling the soldiers till even my temper was roused. Here I caught sight of a flowing robe beneath the caracalla, and, the hat having fallen back, a beautiful woman's face with large and fear-inspiring eyes. Then it suddenly flashed upon me that this grim despiser of death, being a woman, was doubtless she whom we were to spare. I shouted this to my men; but--and at that moment I was heartily ashamed of my profession--it was too late. Tall Rufus pierced her through with his lance. Even in falling she preserved the dignity of a queen, and when the men surrounded her she fixed each one separately with her wonderful eyes and spoke through the death-rattle in her throat:

"Shame upon men and soldiers who let themselves be hounded on like dogs to murder and dishonor!" Rufus raised his sword to make an end of her, but I caught his arm and knelt beside her, begging her to let me see to her wound. With that she seized the lance in her breast with both hands, and with her last breath murmured, 'He desired to see the living woman--bring him my body, and my curse with it! Then with a last supreme effort she buried the spear still deeper in her bosom; but it was not necessary.

"I gazed petrified at the high-bred, wrathful face, still beautiful in death, and the mysterious, wide-open eyes that must have flashed so proudly in life. It was enough to drive a man mad. Even after I had closed her eyes and spread the mantle over her--"

"What has been done with the body?" asked Apollinaris.

"I caused it to be carried into the house and the door of the death-chamber carefully locked. But when I returned to the men. I had to prevent them from tearing Rufus to pieces for having lost them the large reward which Caesar had promised for the living prisoner."

"And you," cried Apollinaris, excitedly, "had to look on while our men, honest soldiers, plundered this house--which entertained many of us so hospitably--as if they had been a band of robbers! I saw them dragging out things which were used in our service only yesterday."

"The emperor--his permission!" sighed Flavius. "You know how it is. The lowest instincts of every nature come out at such a time as this, and the sun shines upon it all. Many a poor wretch of yesterday will go to bed a wealthy man to-day. But, for all that, I believe much was hidden from them. In the room of the mistress of the house whence I have just come, a fire was still blazing in which a variety of objects had been burned. The flames had destroyed a picture--a small painted fragment betrayed the fact. They perhaps possessed masterpieces of Apelles or Zeuxis. This woman's hatred would lead her to destroy them rather than let them fall into the hands of her imperial enemy; and who can blame her?"

"It was her daughter's portrait," said Nemesianus, unguardedly.

The legate turned upon him in surprise. "Then she confided in you?" he asked.

"Yes," returned the tribune, "and we are proud to have been so honored by her. Before she went to her death she took leave of us. We let her go; for we at least could not bring ourselves to lay hands upon a noble lady."

The officer looked sternly at him and exclaimed, angrily:

"Do you suppose, young upstart, that it was less painful to me and many another among us? Cursed be this day, that has soiled our weapons with the blood of women and slaves, and may every drachma which I take from the plunder here bring ill-luck with it! Call the accident that has kept you out of this despicable work a stroke of good fortune, but beware how you look down upon those whose oath forces them to crush out every human feeling from their hearts! The soldier who takes part with his commander's enemy--"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Johanna, the Christian, who saluted the legate, and then stood confused and embarrassed by the side of Apollinaris's bed. The furtive glance she cast first at the side-room and then at Nemesianus did not pass unobserved by the quick eye of the commander, and with soldierly firmness he insisted on knowing what was concealed behind that door.

"An unfortunate man," was Apollinaris's answer.

"Seleukus, the master of this house?" asked Quintus Flavius, sternly.

"No," replied Nemesianus. "It is only a poor, wounded painter. And yet--the praetorians will go through fire and water for you, if you deliver up this man to them as their booty. But if you are what I hold you to be--"

"The opinion of hot-headed boys is of as little consequence to me as the favor of my subordinates," interposed the commander. "Whatever my conscience tells me is right, I shall do. Quick, now! Who is in there?"

"The brother of the maiden for whose sake Caesar--" stammered the wounded man.

"The maiden whom you have to thank for that disfigured face?" cried the legate. "You are true Aurelians, you boys; and, though you may doubt whether I am the man you take me for, I confess with pleasure that you are exactly as I would wish to have you. The praetorians have slain your friend and servant; I give you that man to make amends for

it."

With deep emotion Nemesianus seized his old friend's hands, and Apollinaris spoke words of gratitude to him from his couch. The officer would not listen to their thanks, and walked toward the door; but Johanna stood before him, and entreated him to allow the twins, whose servant had been killed, to take another, from whom they need have no fear of treachery. He had been captured in the impluvium by the praetorians while trying, in the face of every danger, to enter the house where the painter lay, to whose father he had belonged for many years. He would be able to tend both Apollinaris and Melissa's brother, and make it possible to keep Alexander's hiding-place a secret. The soldiery would be certain to penetrate as far as this, and other lives would be endangered if they should bear off the faithful servant and force him on the rack to disclose where Melissa's father and relatives were hidden.

The legate promised to insure the freedom of Argutis.

A few more words of thanks and farewell, and Quintus had fulfilled his mission to the Aurelians. Shortly afterward the tuba sounded to assemble the plunderers still scattered about Seleukus's house, and Nemesianus saw the men marching in small companies into the great hall. They were followed by their armor-bearers, loaded with treasure of every kind; and three chariots, drawn by fine horses, belonging to Seleukus and his murdered wife, conveyed such booty as was too heavy for men to carry. In the last of these stood the statue of Eros by Praxiteles. The glorious sunshine lighted up the smiling marble face; with the charm of bewitching beauty he seemed to gaze at the lurid crimson pools on the ground, and at the armed cohorts which marched in front to shed more blood and rouse more hatred.

As Nemesianus withdrew from the window, Argutis came into the room. The legate had released him; and when Johanna conducted the faithful fellow to Alexander's bedside, and he saw the youth lying pale and with closed eyes, as though death had claimed him for his prey, the old man dropped on his knees, sobbing loudly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

While Alexander, well nursed by old Argutis and Johanna, lay in high fever, raving in his delirium of Agatha and his brother Philip, and still oftener calling for his sister, Melissa was alone in her hiding-place. It was spacious enough, indeed, for she was concealed in the rooms prepared to receive the Exoterics before the mysteries of Serapis. A whole suite of apartments, sleeping-rooms and halls, were devoted to their use, extending all across the building from east to west. Some of these were square, others round or polygonal, but most of them much longer than they were wide. Painters and sculptors had everywhere covered the walls with pictures in color and in high relief, calculated to terrify or bewilder the uninitiated. The statues, of which there were many, bore strange symbols, the mosaic flooring was covered with images intended to excite the fancy and the fears of the beholder.

When Melissa first entered her little sleeping room, darkness had concealed all this from her gaze. She had been only too glad to obey the matron's bidding and go to rest at once. Euryale had remained with her some time, sitting on the edge of the bed to hear all that had happened to the girl during the last few hours, and she had impressed on her how she should conduct herself in case of her hiding-place being searched.

When she presently bade her good-night, Melissa repeated what the waiting-woman Johanna had told her of the life of Jesus Christ; but she expressed her interest in the person of the Redeemer in such a strange and heathen fashion that Euryale only regretted that she could not at once enlighten the exhausted girl. With a hearty kiss she left her to rest, and Melissa was no sooner alone than sleep closed her weary young eyes.

It was near morning when she fell asleep; and when she awoke, accustomed as she was to early hours, she was startled to see how much of the day was spent. So she rose hastily, and then perceived that the lady Euryale must already have come to see her, for she found fresh milk by the bedside, and some rolls of manuscript which had not been there the day before. Her first thought was for her imperiled relatives--her father, her brothers, her lover--and she prayed for each, appealing first to the manes of her mother, and then to mighty Serapis and kindly Isis, who would surely hear her in these precincts dedicate to them.

The danger of those she loved made her forget her own, and she vividly pictured to herself what might be happening to each, what each one might be doing to protect her and save her from the spies of the despot, who by this time must have received her missive. Still, the doubt whether he might not, after all, be magnanimous and forgive her, rose again and again to her mind, though everything led her to think it impossible.

During her prayer and in her care for the others she had felt reasonably calm; but at the first thought of Caesar a painful agitation took possession of her soul, and to overcome it she began an inspection of her spacious hiding-place, where the lady Euryale had prepared her to be amazed. And, indeed, it was not merely strange, but it filled her heart and mind with astonishment and terror. Wherever she looked, mystic figures puzzled her; and Melissa turned from a picture in relief of beheaded figures with their feet in the air, and a representation of the damned stewing in great caldrons and fanning themselves with diabolical irony, only to see a painting of a female form over whose writhing body boats were sailing, or a four-headed ram, or birds with human heads flying away with a mummified corpse. On the ceiling, too, there was strange imagery; and when she looked at the floor to rest her bewildered fancy, her eyes fell on a troop of furies pursuing the wicked, or a pool of fire by which horrible monsters kept guard.

And all these pictures were not stiff and formal like Egyptian decorative art, but executed by Greek artists with such liveliness and truth that they seemed about to speak; and Melissa could have fancied many times that they were moving toward her from the ceiling or the walls.

If she remained here long, she thought she must go out of her mind; and yet she was attracted, here by a huge furnace on whose metal floor large masses of fuel seemed to be, and there by a pool of water with crocodiles, frogs, tortoises, and shells, wrought in mosaic.

Besides these and other similar objects, her curiosity was aroused by some large chests in which book-rolls, strange vessels, and an endless variety of raiment of every shape and size were stored, from the simple chiton of the common laborer to the star-embroidered talar of the adept.

Her protectress had told her that the mystics who desired to be admitted to the highest grades here passed through fire and water, and had to go through many ceremonies in various costumes. She had also informed her that the uninitiated who desired to enter these rooms had to open three doors, each of which, as it was closed, gave rise to a violent ringing; so that she might not venture to get away from the room, into which, however, she could bar herself. If the danger were pressing, there was a door, known only to the initiated, which led to the steps and out of the building. Her sleeping-place, happily, was not far from a window looking to the west, so that she was able to refresh her brain after the bewildering impressions which had crowded on her in the inner rooms.

The paved roadway dividing the Serapeum from the stadium was at first fairly crowded; but the chariots, horsemen, and foot-passengers on whose heads she looked down from her high window interested her as little as the wide inclosure of the stadium, part of which lay within sight.

A race, no doubt, was to be held there this morning, for slaves were raking the sand smooth, and hanging flowers about a dais, which was no doubt intended for Caesar. Was it to be her fate to see the dreadful man from the place where she was hiding from him? Her heart began to beat faster, and at the same time questions crowded on her excited brain, each bringing with it fresh anxiety for those she loved, of whom, till now, she had been thinking with calm reassurance.

Whither had Alexander fled?

Had her father and Philip succeeded in concealing themselves in the sculptor's work-room?

Could Diodoros have escaped in time to reach the harbor with Polybius and Praxilla?

How had Argutis contrived that her letter should reach Caesar's hands without too greatly imperiling himself?

She was quite unconscious of any guilt toward Caracalla. There had been, indeed, a strong and strange attraction which had drawn her to him; even now she was glad to have been of service to him, and to have helped him to endure the sufferings laid upon him by a cruel fate. But she could never be his. Her heart belonged to another, and this she had confessed in a letter--perhaps, indeed, too late. If he had a heart really capable of love, and had set it on her, he would no doubt think it hard that he should have bestowed his affections on a girl who was already plighted to another, even when she first appeared before him as a suppliant, though deeply moved by pity; still, he had certainly no right to condemn her conduct. And this was her firm conviction.

If her refusal roused his ire--if her father's prophecy and Philostratus's fears must be verified, that his rage would involve many others besides herself in ruin, then--But here her thought broke off with a shudder.

Then she recalled the hour when she had been ready and willing to be his, to sacrifice love and happiness only to soften his wild mood and protect others from his unbridled rage. Yes, she might have been his wife by this time, if he himself had not proved to her that she could never gain such power over him as would control his sudden fits of fury, or obtain mercy for any victim of his cruelty. The murder of Vindex and his nephew had been the death-blow of this hope. She best knew how seriously she had come to the determination to give up every selfish claim to future happiness in order that she might avert from others the horrors which threatened them; and now, when she knew the history of the Divine Lord of the Christians, she told herself that she had acted at that moment in a manner well-pleasing to that sublime Teacher. Still, her strong common sense assured her that to sacrifice the dearest and fondest wish of her heart in vain would not have been right and good, but foolish.

The evil deeds which Caracalla was now preparing to commit he would have done even if she were at his side. Of what small worth would she have seemed to him, and to herself!--When this tyranny should be overpast, when he should be gone to some other part of his immense empire, if those she loved were spared she could be happy--ah! so happy with the man to whom she had given her heart--as happy as she would have been miserable if she had become the victim to unceasing terrors as Caesar's wife.

Euryale was right, and Fate, to which she had appealed, had decided well for her. That, the greatest conceivable sacrifice, would have been in vain; for the sake of a ruthless tyrant's foul desire she would have been guilty of the basest breach of faith, have poisoned her lover's heart and soul, and have wrecked his whole future life as well as her own. Away, then, with foolish doubts! Pythagoras was wise in warning her against torturing her heart. The die was cast. She and Caracalla must go on divergent roads, Her duty now was to fight for her own happiness against any who threatened it, and, above all, against the tyrant who had compelled her, innocent as she was, to hide like a criminal.

She was full of righteous wrath against the sanguinary persecutor, and holding her head high she went back into her sleeping-room to finish dressing. She moved more quickly than usual, for the bookrolls which Euryale had laid by her bed while she was still asleep attracted her eye with a suggestion of promise. Eager to know what their contents were, she took them up, drew a stool to the window, and tried to read.

But many voices came up to her from outside, and when she looked down into the road she saw troops of youths crowding into the stadium. What fine fellows they were, as they marched on, talking and singing; and she said to herself that Diodoros and Alexander were taller even than most of these, and would have been handsome among the handsomest! She amused herself for some time with watching them; but when the last man had entered the stadium, and they had formed in companies, she again took up the rolls.

One contained the gospel of Matthew and the other that of Luke.

The first, beginning with the genealogy, gave her a string of strange, barbarous names which did not attract her; so she took up the roll of Luke, and his simple narrative style at once charmed her. There were difficulties in it, no doubt, and she skipped sundry unintelligible passages, but the second chapter captivated her attention. It spoke of the birth of the great Teacher whom the Christians worshiped as their God. Angels had announced to the shepherds in the field that great joy should come on the whole world, because the Saviour was born; and this Saviour and Redeemer was no hero, no sage, but a child wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger.

At this she smiled, for she loved little children, and had long known no greater pleasure than to play with them and help them. How many delightful hours did she owe to the grandchildren of their neighbor Skopas!

And this child, hailed at its birth by a choir of angels, had become a God in whom many believed! and the words of the angels' chant were: "Glory to God on high, and on earth peace, good-will toward men!"

How great and good it sounded! With eager excitement she fastened the rolls together, and on her features was depicted impatient longing to put an end to an intolerable state of things, as she exclaimed, though there was no one but herself to hear: "Ay, peace, salvation, good-will! Not this hatred, this thirst for revenge, this blood, this persecution, and, as their hideous fruit, this terror, these horrible, cruel fears--"

Here she was interrupted by the clatter of arms and rapping of hammers which came up from below. Caesar's Macedonian guard and other infantry troops were silently coming up in companies and vanishing into the side-doors which led to the upper tiers of the stadium. What could this mean? Meanwhile carpenters were busy fastening up the chief entrance with wooden beams. It looked like closing up sluice-gates to hinder the invasion of a high tide. But the stadium was already full of men. She had seen thousands of youths march in, and there they stood in close ranks in the arena below her. Besides these, there were now an immense number of soldiers. They must all get out again presently, and what a crush there would be in the side exits if the vomitorium were closed! She longed to call down, to warn the carpenters of the folly of their act. Or was it that the youth of the town were to be pent into the stadium to hear some new and more severe decree, while some of the more refractory were secured?

It must be so. What a shame!

Then came a few vexilla of Numidian troopers at a slow pace. At their head, on a particularly high horse, rode the legate, a very tall man. He glanced up to the side where she was, and Melissa recognized the Egyptian Zminis. At this her hand sought the place of her heart, for she felt as though it had ceased to beat. What! This wretch, the deadly foe of her father and brother, here, at the head of the Roman troops? Something horrible, impossible, must be about to happen!

The sun was mirrored in the shining coat of his horse, and in the lictor's axe he bore, carrying it like a commander's staff. He raised it once, twice, and, high as she was above him, she could see how sharp the contrast was between the yellow whites of his eyes and the swarthy color of his face.

Now, for the third time, the bright steel of the axe flashed in the sunshine, and immediately after trumpet-calls sounded and were repeated at short intervals, which still, to her, seemed intolerably long. How Melissa had presence of mind enough to count them she knew not, but she did. At the seventh all was still, and soon after a short blast on the tuba rang out from above, below, and from all sides of the stadium. Each went like an arrow to the heart of the anxious, breathless girl. From the moment when she had seen Zminis she had expected the worst, but the cry of rage and despair from a thousand voices which now split her ear told her how far the incredible reality outdid her most horrible imaginings.

Breathless, and with a throbbing brain, she leaned out as far as she could, and neither felt the burning sun-which was now beginning to fall on the western face of the temple--nor heeded the risk of being seen and involving herself and her protectress in ruin. Trembling like a gazelle in a frosty winter's night, she would gladly have withdrawn from the window, but she felt as if some spell held her there. She longed to shut her ears and eyes, but she could not help looking on. Her every instinct prompted her to shriek for help, but she could not utter a sound.

There she stood, seeing and hearing, and her low moaning changed to that laughter which anguish borrows from gladness when it has exhausted all forms of expression. At last she sank on her knees on the floor, and while she shed tears of pain still laughed shrilly, till she understood with sudden horror what was happening. She started violently; a sob convulsed her bosom; she wept and wept, and these tears did her good.

When, at one in the afternoon, the sun fell full on her window, she had not yet found strength to move. A flood of bright light, in which whirled millions of motes, danced before her eyes; and as her breath sent the atoms flying, it passed through her mind that at this very moment the reprobate utterance of a madman's lips was blowing happiness, joy, peace, and hope out of the lives of many thousands--blowing them into nothingness, like the blast of a storm.

Then she commanded herself, for the horrible scene before her threatened to stamp itself on her eye like the image her father could engrave on an onyx; and she must avoid that, or give up all hope of ever being light-hearted again. Hardly an hour since she had seen the arena looking like a basket of fresh flowers, full of splendid, youthful men. Then the warriors of the Macedonian phalanx had taken their places on the long ranks of seats on which she looked down, with several cohorts of archers, brown Numidians and black Ethiopians, like inquisitive spectators of the expected show--but all in full armor. At first the youths and men had formed in companies, with singing, talk, and laughter, and here and there a satirical chant; but presently there had been squabbles with the town-watch, and while the younger and more careless still were gay enough, whole companies on the other hand had looked up indignantly at the Romans; some had anxiously questioned each other's eyes, or stared down in sullen dismay at the sand.

The hot, seething blood of these men--the sons of a free city, and accustomed to a life of rapid action in hard work and frenzied enjoyment--took the delay very much amiss; and when it was rumored that the doors were being locked, impatience and distrust found emphatic utterance. Timid whistling and other expressions of disapproval had been followed by louder demonstrations, for to be locked up was intolerable. But the lictors and guards took no notice, after

removing the member of the Museum who had perpetrated the epigram on Caesar's mother. This one, who had certainly gone too far, was to pay for all, it would seem.

Then the trumpets sounded, and the most heedless of the troop of youths began to feel acute anxiety and alarm. From her high post of observation Melissa could see that, although the appearance of Zminis on the scene had caused a fever of agitation, they now broke their serried squares, wandered about as if undecided what to do, but prepared for the worst, and turned their curly heads now to this side and now to that, till the trumpetblast from the seats attracted every eye upward, and the butchery began.

Did the cry, "Stop, wretches!" really break from Melissa's lips, or had she only intended to shout it down to the people in the stadium? She did not know; but as she recollected the long rank of Numidians who, quick as lightning, lifted their curved bows and sent a shower of arrows down on the defenseless lads in the arena, she felt as though she had again shrieked out: "Stop!" Then it seemed as though a storm of wind had torn thousands of straight boughs with metallic leaves that flashed in the sunshine from some huge invisible tree, and flung them into the arena; and, as her eye followed their fall, she could have fancied that she looked on a corn-field beaten down by a terrific hail-storm; but the boughs and leaves were lances and arrows, and each ear of corn cut down was a young and promising human being.

Zminis's preposterous suggestion had been acted on. Caracalla was avenged on the youth of Alexandria.

Not a tongue could wag now in abuse; every pair of young lips which had dared utter a scornful cry or purse up to whistle at the sight of Caesar, was silenced forever--and, with the few guilty, a hundred times more who were innocent. She knew now why the great gate had been barred with beams, and why the troop had entered by the side-doors. The scene of the brilliant display had become a lake of blood, full of the dead and dying. Death had invaded the rows of seats; instead of laurel wreaths and prizes, deadly weapons were showered down into the arena. It seemed now as though the sun, with its blinding radiance, were mercifully fain to hinder the human eye from looking down on the horrible picture. To avoid the sickening sight, Melissa closed her eyes and dragged herself to her feet with an effort, to hide herself she knew not where.

But again there was a flourish of trumpets and loud acclamations, and again an irresistible power dragged her to the window.

A splendid quadriga had stopped at the gate of the stadium, surrounded by courtiers and guards. It was Caracalla's, for Pandion held the reins. Could Caracalla approve of this most horrible crime, organized by the wretch Zminis, by appearing on the scene; or might it not be that, in his wrath at the bloodthirsty zeal of his vile tool, he had come to dismiss him?

She hoped it was this; and, at any cost, she must know the truth as to this question, which was not based on mere curiosity. Holding one hand to her wildly beating heart, she looked across the bloodstained arena to the rows of seats and the dais decorated for Caesar. There stood Caracalla, with the Egyptian at his side, pointing down at the arena with his finger. And what was to be seen on the spot he indicated was so horrible that she again shut her eyes, and this time she even covered them with her hands. But she would and must see, and once more she looked across; and the man whose assurances she had once believed, that it was only his care for the throne and state and the compulsion of cruel fate which had ever made him shed blood--that man was standing side by side with the vile, ruthless spy whose tall figure towered far above his master's. His hand lay on the villain's arm, his eye rested on the corpse-strewn arena beneath; and now he raised his head, he turned his face, whose look of suffering had once moved her soul, toward her--and he laughed--she could see every feature--laughed so loud, so heartily, so gleefully, as she had never before seen him laugh. He laughed till his whole body and shoulders shook. Now he took his hand from the Egyptian's arm and pointed to the dead lying at his feet.

As she saw that laugh, of which she could not hear a sound, Melissa felt as though a hyena had yelled in her ear, and, yielding to an irresistible impulse, she looked down once more at the destruction of youthful life and happiness which had been wrought in one short hour--at the stream of blood after which so many bitter tears must flow. The sight indeed cut her to the heart, and yet she was thankful for it; for the first time the reckless cruelty of that laughing monster was evident in all its naked atrocity. Horror, aversion, loathing for that man to whom everything but power, cruelty, and cunning, was as nothing, left no room for fear or pity, or even the least shade of self-reproach for having aroused in him a desire which she could not gratify.

She clenched her little fists, and, without vouchsafing another glance at the detestable butcher who had dared to cast his eyes on her, she withdrew from the window and cried out aloud, though startled at the sound of her own voice: "The time, the time! It is fulfilled for him this day!"

And how her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved and fell! With what a firm step did she pace the long suite of rooms, while the conviction was borne in on her that this deed of the vile assassin in the purple must bring the day of salvation and peace nearer--that day of which Andreas dreamed! As in her silent walk she passed the book-rolls which the lady Euryale had so quietly laid by her bedside, she took up the glad message of Luke with enthusiastic excitement, held it on high, and shouted the angels' greeting which had impressed itself on her memory out of the window, as

though she longed that Caracalla should hear it--"Peace on earth and good-will toward men!"

Then she resumed her walk through the rooms of the heathen mystics, repeating to herself all the comfortable words she had ever heard from Euryale and the freedman Andreas. The image of the divine Lord, who had come to bestow love on the world, and seal his sublime doctrine by sacrificing his life, rose up before her soul, and all that the Christian Johanna had told her of him made the picture clear, till he stood plainly before her, beautiful and gentle, in a halo of love and kindness, and yet strong and noble, for the crucified One was a heroic Saviour.

At this she remembered with satisfaction the struggle she herself had fought, and her comfort when she had decided to sacrifice her own happiness to save others from sorrow. She now resolutely grasped the lady Euryale's book-rolls, for they contained the key to the inner chambers of the wondrous structure into whose forecourt life itself and her own intimate experience had led her. She was soon sitting with her back to the window, and unrolled the gospel of Matthew till she came to the first sentence which Euryale had marked for her with a red line.

Melissa was too restless to read straight on; as impatient as a child who finds itself for the first time in a garden which its parents have bought, she rushed from one tempting passage to another, applying each to herself, to those whom she loved, or in another sense to the disturber of her peace.

With a joyful heart she now believed the promise which at first had staggered her, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

But her eye ran swiftly over the open roll, and was attracted by a mark drawing her attention to a whole chapter. She there read how Jesus Christ had gone up on to a mountain to address the vast multitude who followed him. He spoke of the kingdom of heaven, and of who those were that should be suffered to enter there. First, they were the poor in spirit--and she no doubt was one of those. Among those who were rich in spirit her brother Philip was certainly one of the richest, and whither had an acute understanding and restless brain led him that they so seldom gave his feelings time to make themselves heard?

Then the mourners were to be comforted. Oh, that she could have called the lady Berenike to her side and bid her participate in this promise! And the meek--well, they might come to power perhaps after the downfall of the wretch who had flooded the world with blood, and who, of all men on earth, was the farthest removed from the spirit which gazed at her from this scripture, so mild and genial. Of those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness she again was one: they should be filled, and the lady Euryale and Andreas had already loaded the board for her.

The merciful, she read, should obtain mercy; and she, if any one, had a right to regard herself as a peacemaker: thus to her was the promise that she should be called one of the children of God.

But at the next verse she drew herself up, and her face was radiant with joy, for it seemed to have been written expressly for her; nay, to find it here struck her as a marvel of good fortune, for there stood the words: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you."

All these things had come upon her in these last days--though not, indeed, for the sake of Jesus Christ and righteousness, but only for the sake of those she loved; yet she would have been ready to endure the worst.

And the hapless victims in the arena! Might not the promised bliss await them too? Oh, how gladly would she have bestowed on them the fairest reward! And if this should indeed be their lot after death, where was the revenge of their bloodthirsty murderer?

Oh, that her mother were still alive--that she, Melissa, had been permitted to share this great consolation with her! In a brief aspiration she uplifted her soul to the beloved dead, and as she further unrolled the manuscript her eye fell on the words: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you." No, she could not do this; this seemed to her to be too much to ask; even Andreas had not attained to this; and yet it must be good and lovely, if only because it helped to cement the peace for which she longed more fervently than for any other blessing.

Next she read: "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged," and she shuddered as she thought of the future fate of the man who had by treachery brought murder and death on an industrious and flourishing city as a punishment for the light words and jests of a few mockers, and the disappointment he had suffered from an insignificant girl.

But then, again, she breathed more freely, for she read: "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened." Could there be a more precious promise? And to her, she felt, it was already fulfilled; for her trembling finger had, as it were, but just touched the door, and, to! it stood open before her, and that which she had so long sought she had now found. But it was quite natural that it should be so, for the God of the Christians loved those who turned to him as His own children. Here it was written why those who asked should receive, and those who sought should find: "For what man is there of you whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?"

If it were only as a peacemaker, she was already a child of Him who had asked this, and she might look for none but good gifts from Him. And what was commanded immediately after seemed to her so simple, so easy to obey, and yet so wise. She thought it over a little, and saw that in this precept--of which it was said that it was all the law and the

prophets--there was in fact a rule which, if it were obeyed, must keep all mankind guiltless, and make every one happy. These words, she thought, should be written over every door and on every heart, as the winged sun was placed over every Egyptian temple gate, so that no one should ever forget them for an instant. She herself would bear them in mind, and she repeated them to herself in an undertone, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them." Her eye wandered to the window and out to the stadium. How happy might the world be under a sovereign who should obey that law! And Caracalla?--No, she would not allow the contentment which filled her to be troubled by a thought of him.

With a hasty gesture she placed the ivory rod which she had found in the middle of the roll so as to flatten it out, and her eye fell on the words, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." To her, if to any one, was this glorious bidding addressed, for few had a heavier burden to bear. But indeed she already felt it lighter, after the terrors she had gone through on the very verge of despair; and now, even though she was still surrounded by dangers, she was far from feeling oppressed or terrified. Now her heart beat higher with hopeful gladness, and she was full of fervent gratitude as she told herself with lively and confident assurance that she had found a new guide, and, holding His loving and powerful hand, could walk in the way in safety. She felt as though some beloved hand had given her a vial of precious medicine that would cure every disease, when she had learned this verse, too, by heart. She would never forget the friendly promise and invitation that lay in those words. And to Alexander, at least--poor, conscience-stricken Alexander--they might bring some comfort, if not to her father and Philip, since the call of the Son of God was addressed to him too. And she looked as happy as though she had heard something to rejoice her heart and soul. Her red lips parted once more, showing the two white teeth which were never to be seen but when she smiled and some real happiness stirred her soul.

She fancied she was alone, but, even while she was reading the words in which the Saviour called to him the weary and heavy-laden, the lady Euryale had noiselessly opened a secret door leading to Melissa's hiding-place, known only to herself and her husband, and had come close to her. She now stood watching the girl with surprise and astonishment, for she had expected to find her beside herself, desperate, and more than ever needing comfort and soothing. The unhappy girl must have been drawn to the window by the cries of the massacred, and at least have glanced at the revolting scene in the stadium. She would have thought it more natural if she had found Melissa overcome by the horrors she had witnessed, half-distraught or paralyzed by distress and rage. And there sat the young creature, whom she knew to be soft-hearted and gentle, smiling and with beaming eyes--though those eyes must have rested on the most hideous spectacle--looking as though the roll in her lap were the first enchanting raptures of a lover. The book lying on Melissa's knees was the gospel of Matthew, which she herself early this morning, while the girl was still sleeping, had laid by her side to comfort her and give her some insight into the blessings of Christianity. But these scriptures, so sacred to Euryale, had seemed to count for less than nothing to this heathen girl, the sister of Philip the skeptic.

Euryale loved Melissa, but far dearer to her was the book to whose all-important contents the maiden seemed to have closed her heart in coldness.

It was for Melissa's sake that, when the high-priest's dwelling was searched by the new magistrate's spies from cellar to garret, she had patiently submitted to her husband's hard words. She had liked to think that she might bring this girl as a pure white lamb into the fold of the Good Shepherd, who to herself was so dear, and through whom her saddened life had found new charm, her broken heart new joys. A few hours since she had assured her friend Origen that she had found a young Greek who would prove to him that a heathen who had gone through the school of suffering with a pure and compassionate heart needed but a sign, a word of flame, to recognize at once the beatitude of Christianity and long to be baptized. And here she discovered the maiden of whom she had such fair hopes, with a smile on her lips and beaming looks, while so many innocent men were being slaughtered, as though this were a joy to her!

What had become of the girl's soft, tender heart, which but yesterday had been ready for self-sacrifice if only she might secure the well-being of those she loved? Was she, Euryale, in her dotage, that she could be so deceived by a child?

Her heart beat faster with disappointment; and yet she would not condemn the sinner unheard. So, with a swift impulse she took the roll up from Melissa's lap, and her voice was sorrowful rather than severe as she exclaimed:

"I had hoped, my child, that these scriptures might prove to you, as to so many before you, a key to open the gates of eternal truth. I thought that they would comfort you, and teach you to love the sublime Being whose exemplary life and pathetic death are no longer unknown to you, since Johanna told you the tale. Nay, I believed that they might presently arouse in you the desire to join us who--"

But here she stopped, for Melissa had fallen on her neck, and while Euryale, much amazed, tried to release herself from her embrace, the girl cried out, half laughing and half in tears:

"It has all come about as you expected! I will live and die faithful to that sublime Saviour, whom I love. I am one of you--yes, mother, now--even before the baptism I long for. For I was weary and heavy-laden above any, and the word of the Lord hath refreshed me. This book has taught me that there is but one path to true happiness, and it is that

which is shown us by Jesus Christ. O lady, how much fairer would our life on earth be if what is written here concerning blessedness were stamped on every heart! I feel as though in this hour I had been born again. I do not know myself; and how is it possible that a poor child of man, in such fearful straits and peril as I, and after such a scene of horror, should feel so thankful and so full of the purest gladness?"

The matron clasped her closely in her arms, and her tears bedewed the girl's face while she kissed her again and again; and the cheerfulness which had just now hurt her so deeply she now regarded as a beautiful miracle.

Her time was limited, for she was watched; and she had seized the half-hour during which the town-guard had been mustered in the square to report progress. So Melissa had to be brief, and in a few hasty words she told her friend all that she had seen and heard from her high window, and how the gospel of Matthew had been to her glad tidings; how it had given her comfort and filled her soul with infinite happiness in this the most terrible hour of her life. At this, Euryale also forgot the horrors which surrounded them, till Melissa called her back to the dreadful present; for, with bowed head and in deep anxiety, she desired to know whether her friend knew anything of her relations and Diodoros.

The matron had a painful struggle with herself. It grieved her to inflict anxiety on Melissa's heart, as she stood before her eyes like one of the maidens robed in white and going to be baptized, to whom presents were given on the festive occasion, and who were carefully sheltered from all that could disturb them and destroy the silent, holy joy of their souls. And yet the question must be answered: so she said that of the other two she knew nothing, any more than of Berenike and Diodoros, but that of Philip she had bad news. He was a noble man, and, notwithstanding his errors in the search after truth, well worthy of pity. At this, Melissa in great alarm begged to be told what had happened to her brother, and the lady Euryale confessed that he no longer walked among the living, but she did not relate the manner of his death; and she bade the weeping girl to seek for comfort from the Friend of all who grieve and whom she now knew; but to keep herself prepared for the worst, in full assurance that none are tried beyond what they are able to bear, for that the fury of the bloodthirsty tyrant hung like a black cloud over Alexandria and its inhabitants. She herself, merely by coming to Melissa, exposed herself to great danger, and she could not see her again till the morrow. To Melissa's inquiry as to whether it was her refusal to be his which had brought such a fearful fate on the innocent youth of Alexandria, Euryale could reply in the negative; for she had heard from her husband that it was a foul epigram written by a pupil of the Museum which had led to Caesar's outbreak of rage.

With a few soothing words she pointed to a basket of food which she had brought with her, showed the girl once more the secret door, and embraced her at parting as fondly as though Heaven had restored to her in Melissa the daughter she had lost.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Melissa was once more alone.

She now knew that Philip walked no longer among the living. He must have fallen a victim to the fury of the monster, but the thought that he might have been slain for her sake left her mind no peace.

She felt that with the death of this youth--so gifted, and so dear to her--a corner-stone had been torn from the paternal house.

In the loving circle that surrounded her, death had made another gap which yawned before her, dismal and void.

One storm more, and what was left standing would fall with the rest.

Her tears flowed fast, and the torturing thought that the emperor had slain her brother as a punishment for his sister's flight pierced her to the heart.

Now she belonged indeed to the afflicted and oppressed; and as yesterday, in the trouble of her soul, she had called upon Jesus Christ, though she scarcely knew of Him then, so now she lifted up her heart to Him who had become her friend, praying to Him to remember His promise of comfort when she came to Him weary and heavy-laden.

And while she tried to realize the nature of the Saviour who had laid down His life for others, she remembered all she had dared for her father and brothers, and what fate had been her's during the time since; and she felt she might acknowledge to herself that even if Philip had met his death because of Caracalla's anger toward her, at any rate she would never have approached Caesar had she not wanted to save her father and brothers. She had never glossed over any wrong-doing of her own; but her open and truthful nature was just as little inclined to the torment of self-reproach when she was not absolutely certain of having committed a fault.

In this case she was not quite sure of herself; but she now remembered a saying of Euryale and Andreas which she had not understood before. Jesus Christ, it said, had taken upon Himself the sins of the world. If she understood its meaning aright, the merciful Lord would surely forgive her a sin which she had committed unwittingly and in no wise for her own advantage. Her prayer grew more and more to be a discourse with her new-found friend; and, as she finished, she felt absolutely sure that He at least understood her and was not angry with her. This reassured her, but her cheerfulness had fled, and she could read no more.

Deeply troubled, and more and more distressed as time went on by new disturbing thoughts, she hurriedly paced from side to side of the long, narrow chamber in the gathering darkness. The revolting images around her began to affect her unbearably once more. Near her chamber, to the west, lay the race-course with its horrible scenes; so she turned to the eastern end that looked out upon the street of Hermes, where the sight could scarcely be so terrible as from the windows at the opposite end. But she was mistaken; for, looking down upon the pavement, she perceived that this, too, swam with blood, and that the ground was covered with corpses.

Seized with a sudden horror, she flew back into the middle of the long room. There she remained standing, for the scene of slaughter in the west was still more appalling than that from which she had just fled. She could not help wondering who could here have fallen a victim to the tyrant after he had swept all the youth of the city off the face of the earth.

The evening sun cast long shafts of golden light across the race-course and in at the western window, and Melissa knew how quickly the night fell in Alexandria. If she wished to find out who they were who had been sacrificed to the fury of the tyrant, it must be done at once, for the immense building of the temple already cast long shadows. Determined to force herself to look out, she walked quickly to the eastern window and gazed below. But it was some moments before she had the fortitude to distinguish one form from another; they melted before her reluctant eyes into one repulsive mass.

At last she succeeded in looking more calmly and critically.

Not heaped on one another as on the racecourse, hundreds of Caracalla's victims lay scattered separately over the open square as far as the entrance to the street of Hermes. Here lay an old man with a thick beard, probably a Syrian or a Jew; there, his dress betraying him, a seaman; and farther on--no, she could not be mistaken--the youthful corpse that lay so motionless just beneath the window was that of Myrtilos, a friend of Philip, and, like him, a member of the Museum.

In a fresh fit of terror she was going to flee again into her dreadful hiding-place, when she caught sight of a figure leaning against the basin of the beautiful marble fountain just in front of the eastern side-door of the Serapeum, and immediately below her. The figure moved, and could therefore only be wounded, not dead; and round the head was bound a white cloth, reminding her of her beloved, and thereby attracting her attention. The youth moved again, turning his face upward, and with a low cry she leaned farther forward and gazed and gazed, unmindful of the danger of being seen and falling a victim to the tyrant's fury. The wounded, living man--there, he had moved again--was no other

than Diodoros, her lover!

Till the last glimmer of light disappeared she stood at the window with bated breath, and eyes fixed upon him. No faintest movement of his escaped her, and at each one, trembling with awakening hope, she thanked Heaven and prayed for his rescue. At length the growing darkness hid him from her sight. With every instant the night deepened, and without thinking, without stopping to reflect--driven on by one absorbing thought--she felt her way back to her couch, beside which stood the lamp and fire-stick, and lighted the wick; then, inspired with new courage at the thought of rescuing her lover from death, she considered for a moment what had best be done.

It was easy for her to get out. She had a little money with her; on her peplos she wore a clasp that had once belonged to her mother, with two gems in it from her father's hand, and on her rounded arm a golden circlet. With these she could buy help. The only thing now was to disguise herself.

On the great, smoke-blackened metal plate over which those mystics passed who had to walk through fire, there lay plenty of charcoal, and yonder hung robes of every description. The next moment she had thrown off her own, in order to blacken her glistening white limbs and her face with soot. Among the sewing materials which the lady Euryale had laid beside the scrolls was a pair of scissors. These the girl seized, and with quick, remorseless hand cut off the long, thick locks that were her brother's and her lover's delight. Then she chose out a chiton, which, reaching only to her knees, gave her the appearance of a boy. Her breath came fast and her hands trembled, but she was already on her way to the secret door through which she should flee from this place of horror, when she came to a standstill, shaking her head gently. She had looked around her, and the wild disorder she was leaving behind her in the little room went against her womanly feelings. But though this feeling would not in itself have kept her back, it warned her to steady her mind before leaving the refuge her friend had accorded to her. Thoughtful, and accustomed to have regard for others, she realized at once how dangerous it might prove to Euryale if these unmistakable traces of her presence there should be discovered by an enemy. The kindness of her motherly friend should not bring misfortune upon her. With active presence of mind she gathered up her garments from the floor, swept the long locks of hair together, and threw them all, with the sewing and the basket that had contained the food, into the stove on the hearth, and set them alight. The scissors she took with her as a weapon in case of need.

Then, laying the books of the gospels beside the other manuscripts, and casting a last look round to assure herself that every sign of her presence had been destroyed, she addressed one more prayer to the tender Comforter of the afflicted, who has promised to save those that are in danger.

She then opened the secret door.

With a beating heart, and yet far more conscious of the desire to save her lover while there was yet time than of the danger into which she was rushing headlong, she flitted down the hidden staircase as lightly as a child at play. So much time had been lost in clearing the room--and yet she could not have left it so!

She had not forgotten where to press, so that the heavy stone which closed the entrance should move aside; but as she sprang from the last step her lamp had blown out, and blackest darkness concealed the surface of the smooth granite wall which lay between her and the street.

What if, when she got outside, she should be seen by the lictors or spies?

At this thought fear overcame her for the first time. As she felt about the door her hands trembled and beads of perspiration stood upon her brow. But she must go to her wounded lover! When any one was bleeding to death every moment might bring the terrible "too late." It meant Diodoros's death if she did not succeed in opening the granite slab.

She took her hands from the stone and forced herself, with the whole strength of her will, to be calm.

Where had been the place by pressing which the granite might be moved?

It must have been high up on the right side. She carefully followed with her fingers the groove in which the stone lay, and having recalled its shape by her sense of touch, she began her search anew. Suddenly she felt something beneath her finger-tips that was colder than the stone. She had found the metal bolt! With a deep breath, and without stopping to think of what might be before her, she pressed the spring; the slab turned--one step--and she was in the street between the racecourse and the Serapeum.

All was still around her. Not a sound was to be heard except from the square to the north of the temple, where all who carried arms had gathered together to enjoy the wine which flowed in streams as a mark of the emperor's approbation, and from the inner circle of the race-course voices were audible. Of the citizens not one dared show himself in the streets, although the butchery had ceased at sundown. All who did not carry the imperial arms had shut themselves up in their houses, and the streets and squares were deserted since the soldiers had assembled in front of the Serapeum.

No one noticed Melissa. The dangers that threatened her from afar troubled her but little. She only knew that she must go on--go on as fast as her feet would carry her, if she were to reach her loved one in time.

Skirting the south side of the temple, in order to get to the fountain, her chief thought was to keep in its shadow. The moon had not yet risen, and they had forgotten to light either the pitch-pans or the torches which usually burned in front of the south facade of the temple. They had been too busy with other matters to-day, and now they needed all

hands in heaping the bodies together. The men whose voices sounded across to her from the race-course had already begun the work. On--she must hurry on!

But it was not so easy as last night. Her light sandals were wet through, and there was ever a fresh impediment in her way. She knew what it was that had wetted her foot--blood--noble, human blood--and every obstacle against which she stumbled was a human body. But she would not let herself dwell upon it, and hurried on as though they were but water and stones, ever seeing before her the image of the wounded youth who leaned against the basin.

Thus she reached the east side of the temple. Already she could hear the splashing of the fountain, she saw the marble gleaming through the darkness, and began seeking for the spot where she had seen her lover. She suddenly stopped short; at the same time as herself, lights faint and bright were coming along from the south, from the entrance of the street that led to Rhakotis, and down to the water. She was in the middle of the street, without a possibility of concealing herself except in one of the niches of the Serapeum.

Should she abandon him? She must go on, and to seek protection in the outer wall of the temple meant turning back. So she stood still and held her breath as she watched the advancing lights. Now they stopped. She heard the rattle of arms and men's voices. The lantern-bearers were being detained by the watch. They were the first soldiers she had seen, the others being engaged in drinking, or in the work on the race-course. Would the soldiers find her, too? But, no! They moved on, the torch-bearers in front, toward the street of Hermes.

Who were those people who went wandering about among the slain, turning first to this side and then to that, as if searching for something?

They could not be robbing the dead, or the watch would have seized them.

Now they came quite close to her, and she trembled with fright, for one of them was a soldier. The light of the lantern shone upon his armor. He went before a man and two lads who were following a laden ass, and in one of them Melissa recognized with beating heart a garden slave of Polybius, who had often done her a service.

And now she took courage to look more closely at the man--and it was--yes, even in the peasant's clothes he wore he could not deceive her quick eyes--it was Andreas!

She felt that every breath that came from her young bosom must be a prayer of thanksgiving; nor was it long before the freedman recognized Melissa in the light-footed black boy who seemed to spring from the earth in order to show them the way, and he, too, felt as if a miracle had been wrought.

Like fair flowers that spring up round a scaffold over which the hungry ravens croak and hover, so here, in the midst of death and horror, joy and hope began to blossom in thankful hearts. Diodoros lived! No word--only a fleeting pressure of the hand and a quick look passed between the elderly man and the maiden--who looked like a boy scarcely passed his school-days--to show what they felt as they knelt beside the wounded youth and bound up the deep gash in his shoulder dealt by the sword that had felled him.

A little while afterward, Andreas drew from the basket which the ass carried, and from which he had already taken bandages and medicine, a light litter of matting. He then lifted Melissa on to the back of the beast of burden, and they all moved onward.

The sights that surrounded them as long as they were near the Serapeum forced her to close her eyes, especially when the ass had to walk round some obstruction, or when it and its guide waded through slimy pools. She could not forget that they were red, nor whence they came; and this ride brought her moments in which she thought to expire of shuddering horror and sorrow and wrath.

Not till they reached a quiet lane in Rhakotis, where they could advance without let or hindrance, did she open her eyes. But a strange, heavy pain oppressed her that she had never felt before, and her head burned so that she could scarcely see Andreas and the two slaves, who, strong in the joy of knowing that their young lord was alive, carried Diodoros steadily along in the litter. The soldier--it was the centurion Martialis, who had been banished to the Pontus--still accompanied them, but Melissa's aching head pained her so much that she did not think of asking who he was or why he was with them.

Once or twice she felt impelled to ask whither they were taking her, but she had not the power to raise her voice. When Andreas came to her side and pointed to the centurion, saying that without him he would never have succeeded in saving her beloved, she heard it only as a hollow murmur, without any consciousness of its meaning. Indeed, she wished rather that the freedman would keep silent when he began explaining his opportune arrival at the fountain, which must seem such a miracle to her.

The slave-brand on his arm had enabled him to penetrate into the house of Seleukus, where he hoped to obtain news of her. There Johanna had led him to Alexander, and with the Aurelians he had found the centurion and the slave Argutis. Argutis had just returned from the lady Euryale, and swore that he had seen the wounded Diodoros. Andreas had then declared his intention of bringing the son of his former master to a place of safety, and the centurion had been prevailed upon by the young tribunes to open a way for the freedman through the sentinels. The gardeners of Polybius, with their ass, had been detained in an inn on this side of Lake Mareotis by the closing of the harbor, and

Andreas had taken the precaution of making use of them. Had it not been for the centurion, who was known to the other soldiers, the watch would never have allowed the freedman to get so far as the fountain; Andreas therefore begged Melissa to thank their preserver. But his words fell upon her ear unnoticed, and when the strange soldier left her to devote himself again to Diodoros she breathed more freely, for his rapidly spoken words hurt her.

If he would only not come again--only not speak to her!

She had even ceased to look for her lover. Her one desire was to see and hear nothing. When she did force herself to raise her heavy, throbbing lids, she noticed that they were passing poor-looking houses which she never remembered seeing before. She fancied, however, from the damp wind that blew in her face and relieved her burning head, that they must be nearing the lake or the sea. Surely that was a fishing-net hanging yonder on the fence round a but on which the light of the lantern fell. But perhaps it was something quite different, for the images that passed before her heavy eyes began to mingle confusedly, to repeat themselves, and be surrounded by a ring of rainbow colors. Her head had grown so heavy that her mind had lost all sense of hope or fear; only her thoughts stirred faintly as the procession moved on and on through the darkness, without a pause for rest.

When they had passed the last of the huts she managed to look upward.

The evening star stood out clear against the sky, and she seemed to see the other stars revolving quickly round it.

Her mouth was painful and parched, and more than once she had been seized with giddiness, which forced her to hold tightly to the saddle.

Now they stopped beside a large piece of water, and she felt strangely well and light of heart. That must be the dear, familiar lake. And there stood Agatha waving to her, and at her side the lady Euryale under the spreading shade of a mighty palm. Bright sunshine flooded them both, and yet it was the night; for there was the evening star beaming down upon her.

How could that be?

Yet, when she tried to understand it all, her head pained her so, and she turned so giddy, that she clutched the neck of the ass to save herself from falling.

When she raised herself again she saw a large boat, out of which several people came to meet them, the foremost of them a tall man in a long, white garment. That was no dream, she was quite certain. And yet--why did the lantern which one of them held aloft burn her face so much and not his? Oh, how it burned!

Everything turned in a circle round her, and grew dark before her eyes.

But not for long; suddenly it became light as day, and she heard a deep and friendly voice calling her by name. She answered without fear, "Here am I," and saw before her a stranger in a long, white robe, of lofty yet gentle aspect, just as she had imagined the crucified Saviour of the Christians, and in her ear sounded the loving message with which he bids the weary and heavy-laden come to him that he may give them rest.

How gentle, how consoling, and how full of gracious promise were the words, and how gladly would she do his bidding! "Here am I!" she cried again, and saw the arms of the white-robed man stretched out to receive her. She staggered toward him, and felt a firm and manly hand clasp hers, and then rest in blessing on her throbbing brow. All grew dark again before her, and she saw and heard no more.

Andreas had lifted her from the ass and supported her, while the two Christians thanked the soldier for his timely aid.

Having assured them that he had had no thought of helping them, but only of obeying his superior officers, he disappeared into the night, and the freedman lifted Melissa in his strong arms and carried her down to Zeno's boat, which was waiting for them.

"Her mind wanders," said the freedman, with a loving look at the precious burden in his arms. "Her spirit is strong, but the shocks she has sustained this day have been too much for her. 'Thou wilt give me rest,' were her last words before losing consciousness. Can she have been thinking of the promise of the Saviour?"

"If not," answered the deep, musical voice of Zeno, "we will show her Him who called the little children to Him, and the weary and heavy-laden. She belongs to them, and she will see that the Lord fulfills what He so lovingly promises."

"One of Christ's sayings, and repeated by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, has taken great hold upon her," added Andreas, "and I think that in these days of terror, for her, too, the fullness of time has come."

As he spoke he stepped on to the plank which led to the boat from the shore: Diodoros had already been placed on board. When Andreas laid the girl on the cushioned seat in the little cabin, he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, "Now we are safe!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Caracalla's evening meal was ended, and for years past his friends had never seen the gloomy monarch in so mad a mood. The high-priest of Serapis, with Dio Cassius the senator, and a few others of his suite, had not indeed appeared at table; but the priest of Alexander, the prefect Macrinus, his favorites Theocritus, Pandion, Antigonus, and others of their kidney, had crowded round him, had drunk to his health, and wished him joy of his glorious revenge.

Everything which legend or history had recorded of similar deeds was compared with this day's work, and it was agreed that it transcended them all. This delighted the half-drunken monarch. To-day, he declared with flashing eyes, and not till to-day, he had dared to be entirely what Fate had called him to be--at once the judge and the executioner of an accursed and degenerate race. As Titus had been named "the Good," so he would be called "the Terrible." And this day had secured him that grand name, so pleasing to his inmost heart.

"Hail to the benevolent sovereign who would fain be terrible!" cried Theocritus, raising his cup; and the rest of the guests echoed him.

Then the number of the slain was discussed. No one could estimate it exactly. Zminis, the only man who could have seen everything, had not appeared: Fifty, sixty, seventy thousand Alexandrians were supposed to have suffered death; Macrinus, however, asserted that there must have been more than a hundred thousand, and Caracalla rewarded him for his statement by exclaiming loudly "Splendid! grand! Hardly comprehensible by the vulgar mind! But, even so, it is not the end of what I mean to give them. To-day I have racked their limbs; but I have yet to strike them to the heart, as they have stricken me!"

He ceased, and after a short pause repeated unhesitatingly, and as though by a sudden impulse, the lines with which Euripides ends several of his tragedies:

*"Jove in high heaven dispenses various fates;
And now the gods shower blessings which our hope
Dared not aspire to, now control the ills
We deemed inevitable. Thus the god
To these hath given an end we never thought."*

--Potter's translation.

And this was the end of the revolting scene, for, as he spoke, Caesar pushed away his cup and sat staring into vacancy, so pale that his physician, foreseeing a fresh attack, brought out his medicine vial.

The praetorian prefect gave a signal to the rest that they should not notice the change in their imperial host, and he did his best to keep the conversation going, till Caracalla, after a long pause, wiped his brow and exclaimed hoarsely: "What has become of the Egyptian? He was to bring in the living prisoners--the living, I say! Let him bring me them."

He struck the table by his couch violently with his fist; and then, as if the clatter of the metal vessels on it had brought him to himself, he added, meditatively: "A hundred thousand! If they burned their dead here, it would take a forest to reduce them to ashes."

"This day will cost him dear enough as it is," the high-priest of Alexander whispered; he, as idiologos, having to deposit the tribute from the temples and their estates in the imperial treasury. He addressed his neighbor, old Julius Paulinus, who replied:

"Charon is doing the best business to-day. A hundred thousand obolus in a few hours. If Tarautas reigns over us much longer, I will farm his ferry!"

During this whispered dialogue Theocritus the favorite was assuring Caesar in a loud voice that the possessions of the victims would suffice for any form of interment, and an ample number of thank-offerings into the bargain.

"An offering!" echoed Caracalla, and he pointed to a short sword which lay beside him on the couch. "That helped in the work. My father wielded it in many a fight, and I have not let it rust. Still, I doubt whether in my hands and his together it ever before yesterday slaughtered a hundred thousand."

He looked round for the high-priest of Serapis, and after seeking him in vain among the guests, he exclaimed:

"The revered Timotheus withdraws his countenance from us to-day. Yet it was to his god that I dedicated the work of vengeance. He laments the loss of worshipers to great Serapis, as you, Vertinus"--and he turned to the idiologos--"regret the slain tax-payers. Well, you are thinking of my loss or gain, and that I can not but praise. Your colleague in the service of Serapis has nothing to care for but the honor of his god; but he does not succeed in rising to the occasion. Poor wretch! I will give him a lesson. Here Epagathos, and you, Claudius--go at once to Timotheus; carry him this sword. I devote it to his god. It is to be preserved in his holy of holies, in memory of the greatest act of vengeance ever known. If Timotheus should refuse the gift--But no, he has sense--he knows me!"

He paused, and turned to look at Macrinus, who had risen to speak to some officials and soldiers who had entered the room. They brought the news that the Parthian envoys had broken off all negotiations, and had left the city in the

afternoon. They would enter into no alliance, and were prepared to meet the Roman army.

Macrinus repeated this to Caesar with a shrug of his shoulders, but he withheld the remark added by the venerable elder of the ambassadors, that they did not fear a foe who by so vile a deed had incurred the wrath of the gods.

"Then it is war with the Parthians!" cried Caracalla, and his eyes flashed. "My breast-plated favorites will rejoice."

But then he looked grave, and inquired: "They are leaving the town, you say? But are they birds? The gates and harbor are closed."

"A small Phoenician vessel stole out just before sundown between our guard-ships," was the reply. "Curse it!" broke from Caesar's lips in a loud voice, and, after a brief dialogue in an undertone with the prefect, he desired to have papyrus and writing materials brought to him. He himself must inform the senate of what had occurred, and he did so in a few words.

He did not know the number of the slain, and he did not think it worth while to make a rough estimate. All the Alexandrians, he said, had in fact merited death. A swift trireme was to carry the letter to Ostia at daybreak.

He did not, indeed, ask the opinion of the senate, and yet he felt that it would be better that news of the day's events should reach the curia under his own hand than through the distorting medium of rumor.

Nor did Macrinus impress on him, as usual, that he should give his dispatch a respectful form. This crime, if anything, might help him to the fulfillment of the Magian's prophecy.

As Caesar was rolling up his missive, the long-expected Zminis came into the room. He had attired himself splendidly, and bore the insignia of his new office. He humbly begged to be pardoned for his long delay. He had had to make his outer man fit to appear among Caesar's guests, for--as he boastfully explained--he himself had waded in blood, and in the court-yard of the Museum the red life-juice of the Alexandrians had reached above his horse's knees. The number of the dead, he declared with sickening pride, was above a hundred thousand, as estimated by the prefect.

"Then we will call it eleven myriad," Caracalla broke in. "Now, we have had enough of the dead. Bring in the living."

"Whom?" asked the Egyptian, in surprise. Hereupon Caesar's eyelids began to quiver, and in a threatening tone he reminded his bloody-handed tool of those whom he had ordered him to take alive. Still Zminis was silent, and Caesar furiously shrieked his demand as to whether by his blundering Heron's daughter had escaped; whether he could not produce the gem-cutter and his son. The blood-stained butcher then perceived that Caesar's murderous sword might be turned against him also. Still, he was prepared to defend himself by every means in his power. His brain was inventive, and, seeing that the fault for which he would least easily be forgiven was the failure to capture Melissa, he tried to screen himself by a lie. Relying on an incident which he himself had witnessed, he began: "I felt certain of securing the gem-cutter's pretty daughter, for my men had surrounded his house. But it had come to the ears of these Alexandrian scoundrels that a son of Heron's, a painter, and his sister, had betrayed their fellow-citizens and excited your wrath. It was to them that they ascribed the punishment which I executed upon them in your name. This rabble have no notion of reflection; before we could hinder them they had rushed on the innocent dwelling. They flung fire-brands into it, burned it, and tore it down. Any one who was within perished, and thus the daughter of Heron died. That is, unfortunately, proved. I can take the old man and his son tomorrow. To-day I have had so much to do that there has not been time to bind the sheaves. It is said that they had escaped before the mob rushed on the house."

"And the gem-cutter's daughter?" asked Caracalla, in a trembling voice. "You are sure she was burned in the building?"

"As sure as that I have zealously endeavored to let the Alexandrians feel your avenging hand," replied the Egyptian resolutely, and with a bold face he confirmed his lie. "I have here the jewel she wore on her arm. It was found on the charred body in the cellar. Adventus, your chamberlain, says that Melissa received it yesterday as a gift from you. Here it is."

And he handed Caracalla the serpent-shaped bracelet which Caesar had sent to his sweetheart before setting out for the Circus. The fire had damaged it, but there was no mistaking it. It had been found beneath the ruins on a human arm, and Zminis had only learned from the chamberlain, to whom he had shown it, that it had belonged to the daughter of Heron.

"Even the features of the corpse," Zminis added, "were still recognizable."

"The corpse!" Caesar echoed gloomily. "And it was the Alexandrians, you say, who destroyed the house?"

"Yes, my lord; a raging mob, and mingled with them men of every race--Jews, Greeks, Syrians, what not. Most of them had lost a father, a son, or a brother, sent to Hades by your vengeance. Their wildest curses were for Alexander, the painter, who in fact had played the spy for you. But the Macedonian phalanx arrived at the right moment. They killed most of them and took some prisoners. You can see them yourself in the morning. As regards the wife of Seleukus--"

"Well," exclaimed Caesar, and his eye brightened again.

"She fell a victim to the clumsiness of the praetorians."

"Indeed!" interrupted the legate Quintus Flavius Nobilior, who had granted Alexander's life to the prayer of the twins

Aurelius; and Macrinus also forbade any insulting observations as to the blameless troops whom he had the honor to command.

But the Egyptian was not to be checked; he went on eagerly: "Pardon, my lords. It is perfectly certain, nevertheless, that it was a praetorian--his name is Rufus, and he belongs to the second cohort--who pierced the lady Berenike with his spear."

Flavius here begged to be allowed to speak, and reported how Berenike had sought and found her end. And he did so as though he were narrating the death of a heroine, but he added, in a tone of disapproval: "Unhappily, the misguided woman died with a curse on you, great Caesar, on her treasonable lips."

"And this female hero finds her Homer in you!" cried Caesar. "We will speak together again, my Quintus."

He raised a brimming cup to his lips and emptied it at a draught; then, setting it on the table with such violence that it rang, he exclaimed "Then you have brought me none of those whom I commanded you to capture? Even the feeble girl who had not quitted her father's house you allowed to be murdered by those coarse monsters! And you think I shall look on you with favor? By this time to-morrow the gem-cutter and his son Alexander are here before me, or by the head of my divine father you go to the wild beasts in the Circus."

"They will not eat such as he," observed old Julius Paulinus, and Caesar nodded approvingly. The Egyptian shuddered, for this imperial nod showed him by how slender a thread his life hung.

In a flash he reflected whither he might fly if he should fail to find this hated couple. If, after all, he should discover Melissa alive, so much the better. Then, he might have been mistaken in identifying the body; some slave girl might have stolen the bracelet and put it on before the house was burned down. He knew for a fact that the charred corpse of which he had spoken was that of a street wench who had rushed among the foremost into the house of the much-envied imperial favorite--the traitress--and had met her death in the spreading flames.

Zminis had but a moment to rack his inventive and prudent brain, but he already had thought of something which might perhaps influence Caesar in his favor. Of all the Alexandrians, the members of the Museum were those whom Caracalla hated most. He had been particularly enjoined not to spare one of them; and in the course of the ride which Caesar, attended by the armed troopers of Arsinoe, had taken through the streets streaming with blood, he had stayed longest gazing at the heap of corpses in the court-yard of the Museum. In the portico, a colonnade copied from the Stoa at Athens, whither a dozen or so of the philosophers had fled when attacked, he had even stabbed several with his own hand. The blood on the sword which Caracalla had dedicated to Serapis had been shed at the Museum.

The Egyptian had himself led the massacre here, and had seen that it was thoroughly effectual. The mention of those slaughtered hair-splitters must, if anything, be likely to mitigate Caesar's wrath; so no sooner had the applause died away with which the proconsul's jest at his expense had been received, than Zminis began to give his report of the great massacre in the Museum. He could boast of having spared scarcely one of the empty word-pickers with whom the epigrams against Caesar and his mother had originated. Teachers and pupils, even the domestic officials, had been overtaken by the insulted sovereign's vengeance. Nothing was left but the stones of that great institution, which had indeed long outlived its fame. The Numidians who had helped in the work had been drunk with blood, and had forced their way even into the physician's lecture-rooms and the hospital adjoining. There, too, they had given no quarter; and among the sufferers who had been carried thither to be healed they had found Tarautas, the wounded gladiator. A Numidian, the youngest of the legion, a beardless youth, had pinned the terrible conqueror of lions and men to the bed with his spear, and then, with the same weapon, had released at least a dozen of his fellow-sufferers from their pain.

As he told his story the Egyptian stood staring into vacancy, as though he saw it all, and the whites of his eyeballs gleamed more hideously than ever out of his swarthy face. The lean, sallow wretch stood before Caesar like a talking corpse, and did not observe the effect his narrative of the gladiator's death was producing. But he soon found out. While he was yet speaking, Caracalla, leaning on the table by his couch with both hands, fixed his eyes on his face, without a word.

Then he suddenly sprang up, and, beside himself with rage, he interrupted the terrified Egyptian and railed at him furiously:

"My Tarautas, who had so narrowly escaped death! The bravest hero of his kind basely murdered on his sick-bed, by a barbarian, a beardless boy! And you, you loathsome jackal, could allow it? This deed--and you know it, villain--will be set down to my score. It will be brought up against me to the end of my days in Rome, in the provinces, everywhere. I shall be cursed for your crime wherever there is a human heart to throb and feel, and a human tongue to speak. And I--when did I ever order you to slake your thirst for blood in that of the sick and suffering? Never! I could never have done such a thing! I even told you to spare the women and helpless slaves. You are all witnesses, But you all hear me--I will punish the murderer of the wretched sick! I will avenge you, foully murdered, brave, noble Tarautas!--Here, lictors! Bind him--away with him to the Circus with the criminals thrown to the wild beasts! He allowed the girl whose life I bade him spare to be burned to death before his eyes, and the hapless sick were slain at his command by a beardless boy!--And Tarautas! I valued him as I do all who are superior to their kind; I cared for him. He was wounded for our entertainment, my friends. Poor fellow--poor, brave Tarautas!"

He here broke into loud sobs, and it was so unheard-of, so incomprehensible a thing that this man should weep who, even at his father's death had not shed a tear, that Julius Paulinus himself held his mocking tongue.

The rest of the spectators also kept anxious and uneasy silence while the lictors bound Zminis's hands, and, in spite of his attempts to raise his voice once more in self-defense, dragged him away and thrust him out across the threshold of the dining-hall. The door closed behind him, and no applause followed, though every one approved of the Egyptian's condemnation, for Caracalla was still weeping.

Was it possible that these tears could be shed for sick people whom he did not know, and for the coarse gladiator, the butcher of men and beasts, who had had nothing to give Caesar but a few hours of excitement at the intoxicating performances in the arena? So it must be; for from time to time Caracalla moaned softly, "Those unhappy sick!" or "Poor Tarautas!"

And, indeed, at this moment Caracalla himself could not have said whom he was lamenting. He had in the Circus staked his life on that of Tarautas, and when he shed tears over his memory it was certainly less for the gladiator's sake than over the approaching end of his own existence, to which he looked forward in consequence of Tarautas's death. But he had often been near the gates of Hades in the battle-field with calm indifference; and now, while he thus bewailed the sick and Tarautas with bitter lamentations, in his mind he saw no sick-bed, nor, indeed, the stunted form of the braggart hero of the arena, but the slender, graceful figure of a sweet girl, and a blackened, charred arm on which glittered a golden armlet.

That woman! Treacherous, shameless, but how lovely and beloved! That woman, under his eyes, as it were, was swept out of the land of the living; and with her, with Melissa, the only girl for whom his heart had ever throbbed faster, the miracle-worker who had possessed the unique power of exorcising his torments, whose love--for so he still chose to believe, though he had always refused her petitions that he would show mercy--whose love would have given him strength to become a benefactor to all mankind, a second Trajan or Titus. He had quite forgotten that he had intended her to meet a disgraceful end in the arena under fearful torments, if she had been brought to him a prisoner. He felt as though the fate of Roxana, with whom his most cherished dream had perished, had quite broken his heart; and it was Melissa whom he really bewailed, with the gladiator's name on his lips and the jewel before his eyes which had been his gift, and which she had worn on her arm even in death. But he ere long controlled this display of feeling, ashamed to shed tears for her who had cheated him and who had fled from his love. Only once more did he sob aloud. Then he raised himself, and while holding his handkerchief to his eyes he addressed the company with theatrical pathos:

"Yes, my friends, tell whom you will that you have seen Bassianus weep; but add that his tears flowed from grief at the necessity for punishing so many of his subjects with such rigor. Say, too, that Caesar wept with pity and indignation. For what good man would not be moved to sorrow at seeing the sick and wounded thus maltreated? What humane heart could refrain from loud lamentations at the sight of barbarity which is not withheld from laying a murderous hand even on the sacred anguish of the sick and wounded? Defend me, then, against those Romans who may shrug their shoulders over the weakness of a weeping Caesar--the Terrible. My office demands severity; and yet, my friends, I am not ashamed of these tears."

With this he took leave of his guests and retired to rest, and those who remained were soon agreed that every word of this speech, as well as Caesar's tears, were rank hypocrisy. The mime Theocritus admired his sovereign in all sincerity, for how rarely could even the greatest actors succeed in forcing from their eyes, by sheer determination, a flood of real, warm tears--he had seen them flow. As Caesar quitted the room, his hand on the lion's mane, the praetor Priscillianus whispered to Cilo:

"Your disciple has been taking lessons here of the weeping crocodile."

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Out on the great square the soldiers were resting after the day's bloody work. They had lighted large fires in front of the most sacred sanctuary of a great city, as though they were in the open field. Round each of these, foot and horse soldiers lay or squatted on the ground, according to their companies; and over the wine allowed them by Caesar they told each other the hideous experiences of the day, which even those who had grown rich by it could not think of without disgust. Gold and silver cups, the plunder of the city, circulated round those camp-fires and the juice of the vine was poured into them out of jugs of precious metal. Tongues were wagging fast, for, though there was indeed but one opinion as to what had been done, there were mercenaries enough and ambitious pretenders who could dare to defend it. Every word might reach the sovereign's ears, and the day might bring promotion as well as gold and booty. Even the calmest were still in some excitement over the massacre they had helped in; the plunder was discussed, and barter and exchange were eagerly carried on.

As Caracalla passed the balcony he stepped out for a moment, followed by the lamp-bearers, to thank his faithful warriors for the valor and obedience they had shown this day. The traitorous Alexandrians had now met their deserts. The greater the plunder his dear brethren in arms could win, the better he would be pleased. This speech was hailed with a shout of glee drowning his words; but Caracalla had heard his dearly bought troops cheer him with greater zeal

and vigor. There were here whole groups of men who did not join at all, or hardly opened their mouths. And his ear was sharp.

What cause could they have for dissatisfaction after such splendid booty, although they did not yet know that a war with the Parthians was in prospect?

He must know; but not to-day. They were to be depended on, he felt sure, for they were those to whom he was most liberal, and he had taken care that there should be no one in the empire whose means equaled his own. But that they should be so lukewarm annoyed him. To-day, of all days, an enthusiastic roar of acclamations would have been peculiarly gratifying. They ought to have known it; and he went to his bedroom in silent anger. There his freedman Epagathos was waiting for him, with Adventus and his learned Indian body slave Arjuna. The Indian never spoke unless he was spoken to, and the two others took good care not to address their lord. So silence reigned in the spacious room while the Indian undressed Caracalla. Caesar was wont to say that this man's hands were matchless for lightness and delicacy of touch, but to-day they trembled as he lifted the laurel wreath from Caesar's head and unbuckled the padded breast plate. The events of the day had shaken this man's soul to the foundations. In his Eastern home he had been taught from his infancy to respect life even in beasts, living exclusively on vegetables, and holding all blood in abhorrence. He now felt the deepest loathing of all about him; and a passionate longing for the peaceful and pure home among sages, from which he had been snatched as a boy, came over him with increasing vehemence. There was nothing here but what it defiled him to handle, and his fingers shrank involuntarily from their task, as duty compelled him to touch the limbs of a man who, to his fancy, was dripping with human blood, and who was as much accursed by gods and men as though he were a leper.

Arjuna made haste that he might escape from the presence of the horrible man, and Caesar took no heed either of the pallor of his handsome brown face or the trembling of his slender fingers, for a crowd of thoughts made him blind and deaf to all that was going on around him. They reverted first to the events of the day; but as the Indian removed the warm surcoat, the night breeze blew coldly into the room, and he shivered. Was it the spirit of the slain Tarautas which had floated in at the open window? The cold breath which fanned his cheek was certainly no mere draught. It was exactly like a human sigh, only it was cold instead of warm. If it proceeded from the ghost of the dead gladiator he must be quite close to him. And the fancy gained reality in his mind; he saw a floating human form which beckoned him and softly laid a cold hand on his shoulder.

He, Caesar, had linked his fate to that of the gladiator, and now Tarautas had come to warn him. But Caracalla had no mind to follow him; he forbade the apparition with a loud cry of "Away!" At this the Indian started, and though he could scarcely utter the words, he besought Caesar to be seated that he might take off his laced shoes; and then Caracalla perceived that it was an illusion that had terrified him, and he shrugged his shoulders, somewhat ashamed. While the slave was busy he wiped his damp brow, saying to himself with a proud smile that of course spirits never appeared in broad light and when others were present.

At last he dismissed the Indian and lay down. His head was burning, and his heart beat too violently for sleep. At his bidding Epagathos and Adventus followed the Indian into the adjoining room after extinguishing the lamp... Caracalla was alone in the dark. Awaiting sleep, he stretched himself at full length, but he remained as wide awake as by day. And still he could not help thinking of the immediate past. Even his enemies could not deny that it was his duty as a man and an emperor to inflict the severest punishment on this town, and to make it feel his avenging hand; and yet he was beginning to be aware of the ruthlessness of his commands. He would have been glad to talk it all over with some one else. But Philostratus, the only man who understood him, was out of reach; he had sent him to his mother. And for what purpose? To tell her that he, Caesar, had found a wife after his own heart, and to win her favor and consent. At this thought the blood surged up in him with rage and shame. Even before they were wed his chosen bride had been false to him; she had fled from his embraces, as he now knew, to death, never to return.

He would gladly have sent a galley in pursuit to bring Philostratus back again; but the vessel in which the philosopher had embarked was one of the swiftest in the imperial fleet, and it had already so long a start that to overtake it would be almost impossible. So within a few days Philostratus would meet his mother; he, if any one, could describe Melissa's beauty in the most glowing colors, and that he would do so to the empress, his great friend, was beyond a doubt. But the haughty Julia would scarcely be inclined to accept the gem-cutter's child for a daughter; indeed, she did not wish that he should ever marry again.

But what was he to her? Her heart was given to the infant son of her niece Mammaea;--[The third Caesar after Caracalla, Alexander Severus]--in him she discovered every gift and virtue. What joy there would be among the women of Julia's train when it was known that Caesar's chosen bride had disdained him, and, in him, the very purple. But that joy would not be of long duration, for the news of the punishment by death of a hundred thousand Alexandrians would, he knew, fall like a lash on the women. He fancied he could hear their howls and wailing, and see the horror of Philostratus, and how he would join the women in bemoaning the horrible deed! He, the philosopher, would perhaps be really grieved; aye, and if he had been at his side this morning everything might perhaps have been different. But the deed was done, and now he must take the consequences.

That the better sort would avoid him after such an act was self-evident--they had already refused to eat with him. On the other hand, it had brought nearer to him the favorites whom he had attracted to his person. Theocritus and Pandion, Antigonus and Epagathos, the priest of Alexander, who at Rome was overwhelmed with debt, and who in Egypt had become a rich man again, would cling to him more closely.

"Base wretches!" he muttered to himself.

If only Philostratus would come back to him! But he scarcely dared hope it. The evil took so much more care for their own well-being and multiplication than the good. If one of the righteous fell away, all the others forthwith turned their backs on him; and when the penitent desired to return to the fold, the immaculate repelled or avoided him. But the wicked could always find the fallen man at once, and would cling to him and hinder him from returning. Their ranks were always open to him, however closely he might formerly have been attached to the virtuous. To live in exclusive intercourse with these reprobates was an odious thought. He could compel whom he chose to live with him; but of what use were silent and reluctant companions? And whose fault was it that he had sent away Philostratus, the best of them all? Hers--the faithless traitoress, from whom he had looked for peace and joy, who had declared that she felt herself bound to him, the trickster in whom he had believed he saw Roxana--But she was no more. On the table by his bed, among his own jewels, lay the golden serpent he had given her--he fancied he could see it in the dark--and she had worn it even in death. He shuddered; he felt as though a woman's arm, all black and charred, was stretched out to him in the night, and the golden snake uncurled from it and reached forth as though to bite him.

He shivered, and hid his head under the coverlet; but, ashamed and vexed at his own foolish weakness, he soon emerged from the stifling darkness, and an inward voice scornfully asked him whether he still believed that the soul of the great Macedonian inhabited his body. There was an end of this proud conviction. He had no more connection with Alexander than Melissa had with Roxana, whom she resembled.

The blood seethed hotly in his veins; to live on these terms seemed to him impossible.

As soon as it was day it must surely be seen that he was very seriously ill. The spirit of Tarautas would again appear to him--and not merely as a vaporous illusion--and put an end to his utter misery.

But he felt his own pulse; it beat no more quickly than usual. He had no fever, and yet he must be ill, very ill. And again he flushed so hotly that he felt as if he should choke. Breathing hard, he sat up to call his physician. Then he observed a light through the half-closed door of the adjoining room. He heard voices--those of Adventus and the Indian.

Arjuna was generally so silent that Philostratus had vainly endeavored to discover from him any particulars as to the doctrine of the Brahmins, among whom Apollonius of Tyana declared that he had found the highest wisdom, or concerning the manners of his people. And yet the Indian was a man of learning, and could even read the manuscripts of his country. The Parthian ambassador had expressly dwelt on this when he delivered Arjuna to Caesar as a gift from his king. But Arjuna had never favored any of these strangers with his confidence. Only with old Adventus did he ever hold conversation, for the chamberlain took care that he should be supplied with the vegetables and fruit on which he was accustomed to live--for meat never passed his lips; and now he was talking with the old man, and Caracalla sat up and laid his hand to his ear.

The Indian was absorbed in the study of a bookroll in his own tongue, which he carried about him. "What are you reading?" asked Adventus.

"A book," replied Arjuna, "from which a man may learn what will become of you and me, and all these slaughtered victims, after death."

"Who can know that?" said the old man with a sigh; and Arjuna replied very positively:

"It is written here, and there is no doubt about it. Will you hear it?"

"Certainly," said Adventus eagerly, and the Indian began translating out of his book:

"When a man dies his various parts go whither they belong. His voice goes to the fire, his breath to the winds, his eyes to the sun, his spirit to the moon, his hearing becomes one with space, his body goes to the earth, his soul is absorbed into ether, his hairs become plants, the hair of his head goes to crown the trees, his blood returns to water. Thus, every portion of a man is restored to that portion of the universe to which it belongs; and of himself, his own essence, nothing remains but one part what that is called is a great secret."

Caracalla was listening intently. This discourse attracted him.

He, like the other Caesars, must after his death be deified by the senate; but he felt convinced, for his part, that the Olympians would never count him as one of themselves. At the same time he was philosopher enough to understand that no existing thing could ever cease to exist. The restoration of each part of his body to that portion of the universe to which it was akin, pleased his fancy. There was no place in the Indian's creed for the responsibility of the soul at the judgment of the dead. Caesar was already on the point of asking the slave to reveal his secret, when Adventus prevented him by exclaiming:

"You may confide to me what will be left of me--unless, indeed, you mean the worms which shall eat me and so

proceed from me. It can not be good for much, at any rate, and I will tell no one."

To this Arjuna solemnly replied: "There is one thing which persists to all eternity and can never be lost in all the ages of the universe, and that is--the deed."

"I know that," replied the old man with an indifferent shrug; but the word struck Caesar like a thunder-bolt. He listened breathlessly to hear what more the Indian might say; but Arjuna, who regarded it as sacrilege to waste the highest lore on one unworthy of it, went on reading to himself, and Adventus stretched himself out to sleep.

All was silent in and about the sleeping-room, and the fearful words, "the deed," still rang in the ears of the man who had just committed the most monstrous of all atrocities. He could not get rid of the haunting words; all the ill he had done from his childhood returned to him in fancy, and seemed heaped up to form a mountain which weighed on him like an incubus.

The deed!

His, too, must live on, and with it his name, cursed and hated to the latest generations of men. The souls of the slain would have carried the news of the deeds he had done even to Hades; and if Tarautas were to come and fetch him away, he would be met below by legions of indignant shades--a hundred thousand! And at their head his stern father, and the other worthy men who had ruled Rome with wisdom and honor, would shout in his face: "A hundred thousand times a murderer! robber of the state! destroyer of the army!" and drag him before the judgment-seat; and before judgment could be pronounced the hundred thousand, led by the noblest of all his victims, the good Papinian, would rush upon him and tear him limb from limb.

Dozing as he lay, he felt cold, ghostly hands on his shoulder, on his head, wherever the cold breath of the waning night could fan him through the open window; and with a loud cry he sprang out of bed as he fancied he felt a touch of the shadowy hand of Vindex. On hearing his voice, Adventus and the Indian hurried in, with Epagathos, who had even heard his shriek in the farther room. They found him bathed in a sweat of horror, and struggling for breath, his eyes fixed on vacancy; and the freedman flew off to fetch the physician. When he came Caesar angrily dismissed him, for he felt no physical disorder. Without dressing, he went to the window. It was about three hours before sunrise.

However, he gave orders that his bath should be prepared, and desired to be dressed; then Macrinus and others were to be sent for. Sooner would he step into boiling water than return to that bed of terror. Day, life, business must banish his terrors. But then, after the evening would come another night; and if the sufferings he had just gone through should repeat themselves then, and in those to follow, he should lose his wits, and he would bless the spirit of Tarautas if it would but come to lead him away to death.

But "the deed"! The Indian was right--that would survive him on earth, and mankind would unite in cursing him.

Was there yet time--was he yet capable of atoning for what was done by some great and splendid deed? But the hundred thousand--

The number rose before him like a mountain, blotting out every scheme he tried to form as he went to his bath--taking his lion with him; he reveled in the warm water, and finally lay down to rest in clean linen wrappers. No one had dared to speak to him. His aspect was too threatening.

In a room adjoining the bath-room he had breakfast served him. It was, as usual, a simple meal, and yet he could only swallow a few mouthfuls, for everything had a bitter taste. The praetorian prefect was roused, and Caesar was glad to see him, for it was in attending to affairs that he most easily forgot what weighed upon him. The more serious they were, the better, and Macrinus looked as if there was something of grave importance to be settled.

Caracalla's first question was with reference to the Parthian ambassadors. They had, in fact, departed; now he must prepare for war. Caesar was eager to decide at once on the destination of each legion, and to call the legates together to a council of war; but Macrinus was not so prompt and ready as usual on such occasions. He had that to communicate which, as he knew, would to Caesar take the head of all else. If it should prove true, it must withdraw him altogether from the affairs of government; and this was what Macrinus aimed at when, before summoning the legates, he observed with a show of reluctance that Caesar would be wroth with him if, for the sake of a council of war, he were to defer a report which had just reached his ears.

"Business first!" cried Caracalla, with decisive prohibition.

"As you will. I thought only of what I was told by an official of this temple, that the gem-cutter's daughter--you know the girl--is still alive--"

But he got no further, for Caesar sprang to his feet, and desired to hear more of this.

Macrinus proceeded to relate that a slaughterer in the court of sacrifice had told him that Melissa had been seen last evening, and was somewhere in the Serapeum. More than this the prefect knew not, and Caesar forthwith dismissed him to make further inquiry before he himself should take steps to prove the truth of the report.

Then he paced the room with revived energy. His eye sparkled, and, breathing fast, he strove to reduce the storm of schemes, plans, and hopes which surged up within him to some sort of order. He must punish the fugitive--but yet

more surely he would never again let her out of his sight. But if only he could first have her cast to the wild beasts, and then bring her to life again, crown her with the imperial diadem, and load her with every gift that power and wealth could procure! He would read every wish in her eyes, if only she would once more lay her hand on his forehead, charm away his pain, and bring sleep to his horror-stricken bed. He had done nothing to vex her; nay, every petition she had urged--But suddenly the image rose before him of old Vindex and his nephew, whom he had sent to execution in spite of her intercession; and again the awful word, "the deed," rang in his inward ear. Were these hideous thoughts to haunt him even by day?

No, no! In his waking hours there was much to be done which might give him the strength to dissipate them.

The kitchen-steward was by this time in attendance; but what did Caracalla care for dainties to tickle his palate now that he had a hope of seeing Melissa once more? With perfect indifference he left the catering to the skillful and inventive cook; and hardly had he retired when Macrinus returned.

The slaughterer had acquired his information through a comrade, who said that he had twice caught sight of Melissa at the window of the chambers of mystery in the upper story of the Serapeum, yesterday afternoon. He had hoped to win the reward which was offered for the recovery of the fugitive, and had promised his colleague half the money if he would help him to capture the maiden. But just at sunset, hearing that the massacre was ended, the man had incautiously gone out into the town, where he had been slain by a drunken soldier of the Scythian legion. The hapless man's body had been found, but Macrinus's informant had assured him that he could entirely rely on the report of his unfortunate colleague, who was a sober and truthful man, as the chief augur would testify.

This was enough for Caracalla. Macrinus was at once to go for the high-priest, and to take care that he took no further steps to conceal Melissa. The slaughterer had ever since daybreak kept secret watch on all the doors of the Serapeum, aided by his comrades, who were to share in the reward, and especially on the stairway leading from the ground floor up to the mystic's galleries.

The prefect at once obeyed the despot's command. On the threshold he met the kitchen-steward returning to submit his list of dishes for Caesar's approval.

He found Caracalla in an altered mood, rejuvenescent and in the highest spirits. After hastily agreeing to the day's bill of fare, he asked the steward in what part of the building the chambers of mystery were; and when he learned that the stairs leading up to them began close to the kitchens, which had been arranged for Caesar's convenience under the temple laboratory, Caracalla declared in a condescending tone that he would go to look round the scene of the cook's labors. And the lion should come too, to return thanks for the good meat which was brought to him so regularly.

The head cook, rejoiced at the unwonted graciousness of a master whose wrath had often fallen on him, led the way to his kitchen hearth. This had been constructed in a large hall, originally the largest of the laboratories, where incense was prepared for the sanctuary and medicines concocted for the sick in the temple hospital. There were smaller halls and rooms adjoining, where at this moment some priests were busy preparing kyphi and mixing drugs.

The steward, proud of Caesar's promised visit, announced to his subordinates the honor they might expect, and he then went to the door of the small laboratory to tell the old pastophoros who was employed there, and who had done him many a good turn, that if he wished to see the emperor he had only to open the door leading to the staircase. He was about to visit the mystic chambers with his much-talked-of lion. No one need be afraid of the beast; it was quite tame, and Caesar loved it as a son.

At this the old drug-pounder muttered some reply, which sounded more like a curse than the expected thanks, and the steward regretted having compared the lion to a son in this man's presence, for the pastophoros wore a mourning garment, and two promising sons had been snatched from him, slain yesterday with the other youths in the stadium.

But the cook soon forgot the old man's ill-humor; he had to clear his subordinates out of the way as quickly as possible and prepare for his illustrious visitor. As he bustled around, here, there, and everywhere, the pastophoros entered the kitchen and begged for a piece of mutton. This was granted him by a hasty sign toward a freshly slaughtered sheep, and the old man busied himself for some time behind the steward's back. At last he had cut off what he wanted, and gazed with singular tenderness at the piece of red, veinless meat. On returning to his laboratory, he hastily bolted himself in, and when he came out again a few minutes later his calm, wrinkled old face had a malignant and evil look. He stood at the bottom of the stairs, looking about him cautiously; then he flew up the steps with the agility of youth, and at a turn in the stairs he stuck the piece of meat close to the foot of the balustrade.

He returned as nimbly as he had gone, cast a sorrowful glance through the open laboratory window at the arena where all that had graced his life lay dead, and passed his hand over his tearful face. At last he returned to his task, but he was less able to do it than before. It was with a trembling hand that he weighed out the juniper berries and cedar resin, and he listened all the time with bated breath.

Presently there was a stir on the stairs, and the kitchen slaves shouted that Caesar was coming. So he went out of the laboratory, which was behind the stairs, to see what was going forward, and a turnspit at once made way for the old man so as not to hinder his view.

Was that little young man, mounting the steps so gayly, with the high-priest at his side and his suite at his heels, the dreadful monster who had murdered his noble sons? He had pictured the dreadful tyrant quite differently. Now Caesar was laughing, and the tall man next him made some light and ready reply--the head cook said it was the Roman priest of Alexander, who was not on good terms with Timotheus. Could they be laughing at the high-priest? Never, in all the years he had known him, had he seen Timotheus so pale and dejected.

The high-priest had indeed good cause for anxiety, for he suspected who it was that Caesar hoped to find in the mystic rooms, and feared that his wife might, in fact, have Melissa in hiding in that part of the building to which he was now leading the way. After Macrinus had come to fetch him he had had no opportunity of inquiring, for the prefect had not quitted him for a moment, and Euryale was in the town busy with other women in seeking out and nursing such of the wounded as had been found alive among the dead.

Caesar triumphed in the changed, gloomy, and depressed demeanor of a man usually so self-possessed; for he fancied that it betrayed some knowledge on the part of Timotheus of Melissa's hiding-place; and he could jest with the priest of Alexander and his favorite Theokritus and the other friends who attended him, while he ignored the high-priest's presence and never even alluded to Melissa.

Hardly had they gone past the old man when, just as the kitchen slaves were shouting "Hail, Caesar!" the lady Euryale, as pale as death, hurried in, and with a trembling voice inquired whither her husband was conducting the emperor.

She had turned back when half way on her road, in obedience to the impulse of her heart, which prompted her, before she went on her Samaritan's errand, to visit Melissa in her hiding-place, and let her see the face of a friend at the beginning of a new, lonely, and anxious day. On hearing the reply which was readily given, her knees trembled beneath her, and the steward, who saw her totter, supported her and led her into the laboratory, where essences and strong waters soon restored her to consciousness. Euryale had known the old pastophoros a long time, and, noticing his mourning garb, she asked sympathetically: "And you, too, are bereft?"

"Of both," was the answer. "You were always so good to them--Slaughtered like beasts for sacrifice--down there in the stadium," and tears flowed fast down the old man's furrowed cheeks. The lady uplifted her hands as though calling on Heaven to avenge this outrageous crime; at the same instant a loud howl of pain was heard from above, and a great confusion of men's voices.

Euryale was beside herself with fear. If they had found Melissa in her room her husband's fate was sealed, and she was guilty of his doom. But they could scarcely yet have opened the chambers, and the girl was clever and nimble, and might perhaps escape in time if she heard the men approaching. She eagerly flew to the window. She could see below her the stone which Melissa must move to get out; but between the wall and the stadium the street was crowded, and at every door of the Serapeum lictors were posted, even at that stone door known only to the initiated, with the temple slaughterers and other servants who seemed all to be on guard. If Melissa were to come out now she would be seized, and it must become known who had shown her the way into the hiding-place that had sheltered her.

At this moment Theokritus came leaping down the stairs, crying out to her: "The lion--a physician--where shall I find a leech?"

The matron pointed to the old man, who was one of the medical students of the sanctuary, and the favorite shouted out to him, "Come up!" and then rushed on, paying no heed to Euryale's inquiry for Melissa; but the old man laughed scornfully and shouted after him, "I am no beast-healer."

Then, turning to the lady, he added:

"I am sorry for the lion. You know me, lady. I could never till yesterday bear to see a fly hurt. But this brute! It was as a son to that bloodhound, and he shall feel for once something to grieve him. The lion has had his portion. No physician in the world can bring him to life again."

He bent his head and returned to his laboratory; but the matron understood that this kind, peaceable man, in spite of his white hair, had become a poisoner, and that the splendid, guiltless beast owed its death to him. She shuddered. Wherever this unblest man went, good turned to evil; terror, suffering, and death took the place of peace, happiness, and life. He had forced her even into the sin of disobedience to her husband and master. But now her secret hiding of Melissa against his will would be avenged. He and she alike would probably pay for the deed with their life; for the murder of his lion would inevitably rouse Caesar's wildest passions.

Still, she knew that Caracalla respected her; for her sake, perhaps, he would spare her husband. But Melissa? What would her fate be if she were dragged out of her hiding-place?--and she must be discovered! He had threatened to cast her to the beasts; and ought she not to prefer even that fearful fate to forgiveness and a fresh outburst of Caesar's passion?

Pale and tearless, but shaken with alarms, she bent over the balustrade of the stairs and murmured a prayer commending herself, her husband, and Melissa to God. Then she hastened up the steps. The great doors leading to the chambers of mystery stood wide open, and the first person she met was her husband.

"You here?" said he in an undertone. "You may thank the gods that your kind heart did not betray you into hiding the girl here. I trembled for her and for ourselves. But there is not a sign of her; neither here nor on the secret stair. What a morning--and what a day must follow! There lies Caesar's lion. If his suspicion that it has been poisoned should be proved true, woe to this luckless city, woe to us all!"

And Caesar's aspect justified the worst anticipations. He had thrown himself on the floor by the side of his dead favorite, hiding his face in the lion's noble mane, with strange, quavering wailing. Then he raised the brute's heavy head and kissed his dead eyes, and as it slipped from his hand and fell on the floor, he started to his feet, shaking his fist, and exclaiming:

"Yes, you have poisoned him! Bring the miscreant here, or you shall follow him!"

Macrinus assured him that if indeed some basest of base wretches had dared to destroy the life of this splendid and faithful king of beasts, the murderer should infallibly be found. But Caracalla screamed in his face:

"Found? Dare you speak of finding? Have you even brought me the girl who was hidden here? Have you found her? Where is she? She was seen here and she must be here!"

And he hurried from room to room in undignified haste, like a slave hunting for some lost treasure of his master's, tearing open closets, peeping behind curtains and up chimneys, and snatching the clothes, behind which she might have hidden, from the pegs on which they hung. He insisted on seeing every secret door, and ran first down and then up the hidden stairs by which Melissa had in fact escaped.

In the great hall, where by this time physicians and courtiers had gathered round the carcass of the lion, Caesar sank on to a seat, his brow damp with heat, and stared at the floor; while the leeches, who, as Alexandrians for the most part, were anxious not to rouse the despot's rage, assured him that to all appearance the lion, who had been highly fed and getting little exercise, had died of a fit. The poison had indeed worked more rapidly than any the imperial body physician was acquainted with; and he, not less anxious to mollify the sovereign, bore them out in this opinion. But their diagnosis, though well meant, had the contrary effect to that they had intended. The prosecution and punishment of a murderer would have given occupation to his revengeful spirit and have diverted his thoughts, and the capture of the criminal would have pacified him; as it was, he could only regard the death of the lion as a fresh stroke of fate directed against himself. He sat absorbed in sullen gloom, muttering frantic curses, and haughtily desired the high-priest to restore the offering he had wasted on a god who was so malignant, and as hostile to him as all else in this city of abomination.

He then rose, desired every one to stand back from where the lion lay, and gazed down at the beast for many minutes. And as he looked, his excited imagination showed him Melissa stroking the noble brute, and the lion lashing the ground with his tail when he heard the light step of her little feet. He could hear the music of her voice when she spoke coaxingly to the lion; and then again he started off to search the rooms once more, shouting her name, heedless of the bystanders, till Macrinus made so bold as to assure him that the slaughterer's report must have been false. He must have mistaken some one else for Melissa, for it was proved beyond a doubt that Melissa had been burned in her father's house.

At this Caesar looked the prefect in the face with glazed and wandering eyes, and Macrinus started in horror as he suddenly shrieked, "The deed, the deed!" and struck his brow with his fist.

From that hour Caracalla had lost forever the power of distinguishing the illusions which pursued him from reality.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A week later Caracalla quitted Alexandria to make war on the Parthians. What finally drove the unhappy man to hurry from the hated place was the torturing fear of sharing his lion's fate, and of being sent after the murdered Tarautas by the friends who had heard his appeal to fate.

Quite mad he was not, for the illusions which haunted him were often absent for several hours, when he spoke with perfect lucidity, received reports, and gave orders. It was with peculiar terror that his soul avoided every recollection of his mother, of Theokritus, and all those whose opinion he had formerly valued and whose judgment was not indifferent to him.

In constant terror of the dagger of an avenger--a dread which, with many other peculiarities, the leech could hardly ascribe to the diseased phenomena of his mental state--he only showed himself to his soldiers, and he might often be seen making a meal off a pottage he himself had cooked to escape the poison which had been fatal to his lion. He was never for an instant free from the horrible sense of being hated, shunned, and persecuted by the whole world.

Sometimes he would remember that once a fair girl had prayed for him; but when he tried to recall her features he could only see the charred arm with the golden snake held up before him as he had pictured it that night after the most hideous of his massacres; and every time, at the sight of it, that word came back to him which still tortured his soul above all else--"The deed." But his attendants, who heard him repeating it day and night, never knew what he meant by it.

When Zminis met his end by the wild beasts in the arena, it was before half-empty seats, though several legions had been ordered into the amphitheatre to fill them. The larger number of the citizens were slain, and the remainder were in mourning for relatives more or less near; and they also kept away from the scene to avoid the hated despot.

Macrinus now governed the empire almost as a sovereign, for Caesar, formerly a laborious and autocratic ruler, shrank from all business. Even before they left Alexandria the plebeian prefect could see that Serapion's prophecy was fulfilling itself. He remained in close intimacy with the soothsayer; but only once more, and just before Caesar's departure, could the magian be induced to raise the spirits of the dead, for his clever accomplice, Castor, had fallen a victim in the massacre because, prompted by the high price set on Alexander's head, and his own fierce hatred of the young painter, he would go out to discover where he and his sister had concealed themselves.

When at last the unhappy monarch quitted Alexandria one rainy morning, followed by the curses of innumerable mourners--fathers, mothers, widows, and orphans--as well as of ruined artisans and craftsmen, the ill-used city, once so proudly gay, felt itself relieved of a crushing nightmare. This time it was not to Caesar that the cloudy sky promised welfare--his life was wrapped in gloom--but to the people he had so bitterly hated. Thousands looked forward hopefully to life once more, in spite of their mourning robes and widows' veils, and notwithstanding the serious hindrances which the malice of their "afflicted" sovereign had placed in the way of the resuscitation of their town, for Caracalla had commanded that a wall should be built to divide the great merchant city into two parts.

Nay, he had intended to strike a death-blow even at the learning to which Alexandria owed a part of her greatness, by decreeing that the Museum and schools should be removed and the theatres closed.

Maddening alike to heart and brain was the memory that he left behind him, and the citizens would shake their fists if only his name were spoken. But their biting tongues had ceased to mock or jest. Most of the epigramatists were silenced forever, and the nimble wit of the survivors was quelled for many a month by bitter curses or tears of sorrow.

But now--it was a fortnight since the dreadful man had left--the shops and stores, which had been closed against the plunderers, were being reopened. Life was astir again in the deserted and silent baths and taverns, for there was no further fear of rapine from insolent soldiers, or the treacherous ears of spies and delators. Women and girls could once more venture into the highways, the market was filled with dealers, and many an one who was conscious of a heedless speech or suspected of whistling in the circus, or of some other crime, now came out of his well-watched hiding-place.

Glaukias, the sculptor, among others, reopened his work-rooms in Heron's garden-plot. In the cellar beneath the floor the gem-cutter had remained hidden with Polybius and his sister Praxilla, for the easy-going old man could not be induced to embark in the vessel which Argutis had hired for them. Sooner would he die than leave Alexandria. He was too much petted and too infirm to face the discomforts of a sea voyage. And his obstinacy had served him well, for the ship in which they were to have sailed, though it got out before the harbor was closed, was overtaken and brought back by an imperial galley.

Polybius was, however, quite willing to accept Heron's invitation to share his hiding-place.

Now they could both come out again; but these few weeks had affected them very differently. The gem-cutter looked like the shadow of himself, and had lost his upright carriage. He knew, indeed, that Melissa was alive, and that Alexander, after being wounded, had been carried by Andreas to the house of Zeno, and was on the way to recovery; but the death of his favorite son preyed on his mind, and it was a great grievance that his house should have been

wrecked and burned. His hidden gold, which was safe with him, would have allowed of his building a far finer one in its stead, but the fact that it should be his fellow-citizens who had destroyed it was worst of all. It weighed on his spirits, and made him morose and silent.

Old Dido, who had risked her life more than once, looked at him with mournful eyes, and besought all the gods she worshiped to restore her good master's former vigor, that she might once more hear him curse and storm; for his subdued mood seemed to her unnatural and alarming--a portent of his approaching end.

Praxilla, too, the comfortable widow, had grown pale and thin, but old Dido had learned a great deal from her teaching. Polybius only was more cheerful than ever. He knew that his son and Melissa had escaped the most imminent dangers. This made him glad; and then his sister had done wonders that he might not too greatly miss his cook. His meals had nevertheless been often scanty enough, and this compulsory temperance had relieved him of his gout and done him so much good that, when Andreas led him out into daylight once more, the burly old man exclaimed: "I feel as light as a bird. If I had but wings I could fly across the lake to see the boy. It is you, my brother, who have helped to make me so much lighter." He laid his arm on the freedman's shoulder and kissed him on the cheeks. It was for the first time; and never before had he called him brother. But that his lips had obeyed the impulse of his heart might be seen in the tearful glitter of his eyes, which met those of Andreas, and they, too, were moist.

Polybius knew all that the Christian had done for his son and for Melissa, for him and his, and his jest in saying that Andreas had helped to make him lighter referred to his latest achievement. Julianus, the new governor of the city, who now occupied the residence of the prefect Titianus, had taken advantage of the oppressed people to extract money, and Andreas, by the payment of a large sum, had succeeded in persuading him to sign a document which exonerated Polybius and his son from all criminality, and protected their person and property against soldiers and town guards alike. This safe-conduct secured a peaceful future to the genial old man, and filled the measure of what he owed to the freedman, even to overflowing. Andreas, on his part, felt that his former owner's kiss and brotherly greeting had sealed his acceptance as a free man. He asked no greater reward than this he had just received; and there was another thing which made his heart leap with gladness. He knew now that the fullness of time had come in the best sense for the daughter of the only woman he had ever loved, and that the Good Shepherd had called her to be one of His flock. He could rejoice over this without a pang, for he had learned that Diodoros, too, had entered on the path which hitherto he had pointed out to him in vain.

A calm cheerfulness, which surprised all who knew him, brightened the grave man; for him the essence of Christian love lay in the Resurrection, and he saw with astonishment that a wonderful new vitality was rising out of death. For Alexandria, too, the time was fulfilled. Men and women crowded to the rite of baptism. Mothers brought their daughters, and fathers their sons. These days of horror had multiplied the little Christian congregation to a church of ten thousand members. Caracalla turned hundreds from heathenism by his bloody sacrifices, his love of fighting, his passion for revenge, and the blindness which made him cast away all care for his eternal soul to secure the enjoyment of a brief existence. That the sword which had slain thousands of their sons should have been dedicated to Serapis, and accepted by the god, alienated many of the citizens from the patron divinity of the town. Then the news that Timotheus the high-priest had abdicated his office soon after Caesar's departure, and, with his revered wife Euryale, had been baptized by their friend the learned Clemens, confirmed many in their desire to be admitted into the Christian community.

After these horrors of bloodshed, these orgies of hatred and vengeance, every heart longed for love and peace and brotherly communion. Who of all those that had looked death in the face in these days was not anxious to know more of the creed which taught that the life beyond the grave was of greater importance than that on earth?--while those who already held it went forth to meet, as it were, a bridegroom. They had seen men trodden down and all their rights trampled on, and now every ear was open when a doctrine was preached which recognized the supreme value of humanity, by ascribing, even to the humblest, the dignity of a child of God. They were accustomed to pray to immortal beings who lived in privileged supremacy and wild revelry at the golden tables of the Olympian banquet; and now they were told that the church of the Christians meant the communion of the faithful with their fatherly God, and with His Son who had mingled with other mortals in the form of man and who had done more for them than a brother, inasmuch as He had taken upon Himself to die on the cross for love of them.

To a highly cultured race like the Alexandrians it had long seemed an absurdity to try to purchase the favor of the god; by blood-offerings. Many philosophical sects, and especially the Pythagoreans, had forbidden such sacrifices, and had enjoined the bringing of offerings not to purchase good fortune, but only to honor the gods; and now they saw the Christians not making any offerings at all, but sharing a love-feast. This, as they declared, was to keep them in remembrance of their brotherhood and of their crucified Lord, whose blood, once shed, His heavenly Father had accepted instead of every other sacrifice. The voluntary and agonizing death of the Redeemer had saved the soul of every Christian from sin and damnation; and many who in the late scenes of horror had been inconsolable in anticipation of the grave, felt moved to share in this divine gift of grace.

Beautiful, wise, and convincing sentences from the Bible went from lip to lip; and a saying of Clemens, whose

immense learning was well known, was especially effective and popular. He had said that "faith was knowledge of divine things through revelation, but that learning must give the proof thereof"; and this speech led many men of high attainments to study the new doctrines.

The lower classes were no doubt those most strongly attracted, the poor and the slaves; and with them the sorrowing and oppressed. There were many of these now in the town; ten thousand had seen those dearest to them perish, and others, being wounded, had within a few days been ruined both in health and estate.

As to Melissa in her peril, so to all these the Saviour's call to the heavy-laden that He would give them rest had come as a promise of new hope to ear and heart. At the sound of these words they saw the buds of a new spring-time for the soul before their eyes; any one who knew a Christian improved his intimacy that he might hear more about the tender-hearted Comforter, the Friend of children, the kind and helpful Patron of the poor, the sorrowful, and the oppressed.

Assemblies of any kind were prohibited by the new governor; but the law of Aelius Marcianus allowed gatherings for religious purposes, and the learned lawyer, Johannes, directed his fellow-Christians to rely on that. All Alexandria was bidden to these meetings, and the text with which Andreas opened the first, "Now the fullness of time is come," passed from mouth to mouth.

Apart from that period which had preceded the birth of Christ, these words applied to none better than to the days of death and terror which they had just gone through. Had a plainer boundary-stone ever been erected between a past and a future time? Out of the old vain and careless life, which had ended with such fearful horrors, a new life would now proceed of peace and love and pious cares.

The greater number of the citizens, and at their head the wealthy and proud, still crowded the heathen temples to serve the old gods and purchase their favor with offerings; still, the Christian churches were too small and few to hold the faithful, and these had risen to higher consideration, for the community no longer consisted exclusively of the lower rank of people and slaves. No, men and women of the best families came streaming in, and this creed--as was proclaimed by Demetrius, the eloquent bishop; by Origen, who in power and learning--was the superior of any heathen philosopher; by the zealous Andreas, and many another chosen spirit--this creed was the religion of the future.

The freedman had never yet lived in such a happy and elevated frame of mind; as he looked back on his past existence he often remembered with thankful joy the promise that the last should be first, and that the lowly should be exalted. If the dead had risen from their graves before his eyes it would scarcely have surprised him, for in these latter days he had seen wonder follow on wonder. The utmost his soul had so fervently desired, for which he had prayed and longed, had found fulfillment in a way which far surpassed his hopes; and through what blood and fear had the Lord led His own, to let them reach the highest goal! He knew from the lady Euryale that his desire to win Melissa's soul to the true faith had been granted, and that she craved to be baptized. This had not been confirmed by the girl herself, for, attacked by a violent fever, she had during nine days hovered between life and death; and since then Andreas had for more than a week been detained in the town arranging affairs for Polybius.

The task was now ended which he had set himself to carry through. He could leave the city and see once more the young people he loved. He parted from Polybius and his sister at the garden gate, and led Heron and old Dido to a small cottage which his former master had given him to live in.

The gem-cutter was not to be allowed to see his children till the leech should give leave, and the unfortunate man could not get over his surprise and emotion at finding in his new home not only a work-table, with tools, wax, and stones, but several cages full of birds, and among these feathered friends a starling. His faithful and now freed slave, Argutis, had, by Polybius's orders, supplied everything needful; but the birds were a thought of the Christian girl Agatha. All this was a consolation in his grief, and when the gem-cutter was alone with old Dido he burst into sobs. The slave woman followed his example, but he stopped her with loud, harsh scolding. At first she was frightened; but then she exclaimed with delight from the very bottom of her faithful heart, "The gods be praised!" and from the moment when he could storm, she always declared, Heron's recovery began.

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The sun was setting when Andreas made his way to Zeno's house--a long, white-washed building.

The road led through a palm-grove on the Christian's estate. His anxiety to see the beloved sufferers urged him forward so quickly that he presently overtook another man who was walking in the same direction in the cool of the evening. This was Ptolemaeus, the physician.

He greeted Andreas with cheerful kindness, and the freedman knew what he meant when, without waiting to be asked, he said:

"We are out of the wood now; the fever has passed away. The delirious fancies have left her, and since noon she has slept. When I quitted her an hour ago she was sleeping soundly and quietly. Till now the shaken soul has been living in a dream; but now that the fever has passed away, she will soon be herself again. As yet she has recognized no one; neither Agatha nor the lady Euryale; not even Diodoros, whom I allowed to look at her yesterday for a moment. We have taken her away from the large house in the garden, on account of the children, to the little villa opposite the place

of worship. It is quiet there, and the air blows in on her through the open veranda. The Empress herself could not wish for a better sick-room. And the care Agatha takes of her! You are right to hasten. The last glimmer of sunshine is extinct, and divine service will soon begin. I am satisfied with Diodoros too; youth is a soil on which the physician reaps easy laurels. What will it not heal and strengthen! Only when the soul is so deeply shaken, as with Melissa and her brother, matters go more slowly, even with the young. However, as I said, we are past the crisis."

"God be praised!" said Andreas. "Such news makes me young again. I could run like a boy." They now entered the well-kept gardens which lay behind Zeno's house. Noble clumps of tall old trees rose above the green grass plots and splendid shrubs. Round a dancing fountain were carefully kept beds of beautiful flowers. The garden ended at a palm-grove, which cast its shade on Zeno's little private place of worship--an open plot inclosed by tamarisk hedges like walls. The little villa in which Melissa lay was in a bower of verdure, and the veranda with the wide door through which the bed of the sufferer had been carried in, stood open in the cool evening to the garden, the palm-grove, and the place of worship with its garland, as it were, of fragile tamarisk boughs.

Agatha was keeping watch by Melissa; but as the last of the figures, great and small, who could be seen moving across the garden, all in the same direction, disappeared behind the tamarisk screen, the young Christian looked lovingly down at her friend's pale and all too delicate face, touched her forehead lightly with her lips, and whispered to the sleeper, as though she could hear her voice:

"I am only going to pray for you and your brother."

And she went out.

A few moments later the brazen gong was heard--muffled out of regard for the sick--which announced the hour of prayer to the little congregation. It had sounded every evening without disturbing the sufferer, but to-night it roused her from her slumbers.

She looked about her in bewilderment and tried to rise, but she was too weak to lift herself. Terror, blood, Diodoros wounded, Andreas, the ass on which she had ridden that night, were the images which first crowded on her awakening spirit in bewildering confusion. She had heard that piercing ring of smitten brass in the Serapeum. Was she still there? Had she only dreamed of that night-ride with her wounded lover? Perhaps she had lost consciousness in the mystic chambers, and the clang of the gong had roused her.

And she shuddered. In her terror she dared not open her eyes for fear of seeing on all hands the hideous images on the walls and ceiling. Merciful gods! If her flight from the Serapeum and the rescue of Diodoros by Andreas had really been but a dream, then the door might open at any moment, and the Egyptian Zminis or his men might come in to drag her before that dreadful Caesar.

She had half recovered consciousness several times, and as these thoughts had come over her, her returning lucidity had vanished and a fresh attack of fever had shaken her. But this time her head seemed clearer; the cloud and humming had left her which had impeded the use of her ears and eyes.

Her brain too had recovered its faculties. As soon as she tried to think, her restored intelligence told her that if she were indeed still in the Serapeum and the door should open, the lady Euryale might come in to speak courage to her and take her in her motherly arms, and--And she suddenly recollected the promise which had come to her from the Scriptures of the Christians. It stood before her soul in perfect clearness that she had found a loving comforter in the Saviour; she remembered how gladly she had declared to the lady Euryale that the fullness of time had now indeed come to her, and that she had no more fervent wish than to become a fellow-believer with her kind friend--a baptized Christian. And all the while she felt as though light were spreading in her and around her, and the vision she had last seen when she lost consciousness rose again before her inward eye. Again she saw the Redeemer as He had stood before her at the end of her ride, stretching out His arms to her in the darkness, inviting her, who was weary and heavy laden, to be refreshed by him. A glow of thankfulness warmed her heart, and she closed her eyes once more.

But she did not sleep; and while she lay fully conscious, with her hands on her bosom as it rose and fell regularly with her deep breathing, thinking of the loving Teacher, of the Christians, and of all the glorious promises she had read in the Sermon on the Mount, and which were addressed to her too, she could fancy that her head rested on Euryale's shoulder, while she saw the form of the Saviour robed in light and beckoning to her.

Her whole frame was wrapped in pleasant languor. Just so had she felt once before--she remembered it well--and she remembered when it was. She had felt just as she did now after her lover had for the first time clasped her to his heart, when, as night came on, she had sat by his side on the marble bench, while the Christian procession passed. She had taken the chanting train for the wandering souls of the dead and--how strange! No--she was not mistaken. She heard at this moment the selfsame strain which they had then sung so joyfully, in spite of its solemn mode. She did know when it had begun, but again it filled her with a bitter-sweet sense of pity. Only it struck deeper now than before, for she knew now that it applied to all human beings, since they were all the children of the same kind Father, and her own brethren and sisters.

But whence did the wonderful music proceed--Was she--and a shock of alarm thrilled her at the thought--was she

numbered with the dead? Had her heart ceased to beat when the Saviour had taken her in His arms after her ride through blood and darkness, when all had grown dim to her senses? Was she now in the abode of the blest?

Andreas had painted it as a glorious place; and yet she shuddered at the thought. But was not that foolish? If she were really dead, all terror and pain were at an end. She would see her mother once more; and whatever might happen to those she loved, she might perhaps be suffered to linger near them, as she had done on earth, and hope with assurance to meet them again here, sooner or later.

But no! Her heart was beating still; she could feel how strongly it throbbed. Then where was she?

There certainly had not been any such coverlet as this on her bed in the Serapeum, and the room there was much lower. She looked about her and succeeded in turning on her side toward the evening breeze which blew in on her, so pure and soft and sweet. She raised her delicate emaciated hand to her head and found that her thick hair was gone. Then she must have cut it off to disguise herself.

But where was she? Whither had she fled?

It mattered not. The Serapeum was far away, and she need no longer fear Zminis and his spies. Now for the first time she raised her eyes thankfully to Heaven, and next she looked about her; and while she gazed and let her eyes feed themselves full, a faint cry of delight escaped her lips. Before her, in the silvery light of the bright disk of the young moon lay a splendid blooming garden, and over the palms which towered above all else, in shadowy masses, in the distance the evening star was rising just in front, the moonlight twinkled and flashed in the rising and falling drops of the fountain; and as she lay, stirred to the depths of her soul by this silent splendor, thinking of kindly Selene moving on her peaceful path above, of Artemis hunting in the moonlight, of the nymphs of the waters, and the dryads just now perhaps stealing out of the great trees to dance with sportive fauns, the chant suddenly broke out again in solemn measure, and she heard, to deep manly voices, the beginning of the Psalm:

"Give thanks unto the Lord and declare his name; proclaim his wonders among the nations.

"Sing of him and praise him; tell of all his wonders; glorify his holy name; their hearts rejoice that seek the Lord."

Here the men ceased and the women began as though to confirm their praise of the most High, singing the ninetyeth Psalm with enthusiastic joy:

"O Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or, ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

"For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is passed, and as a watch in the night."

Then the men's voices broke in again

"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.

"Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge."

And the women in their turn took up the chant, and from their grateful breasts rose clear and strong the Psalm of David:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.

"Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

Melissa listened breathlessly to the singing, of which she could hear every word; and how gladly would she have mingled her voice with theirs in thanksgiving to the kind Father in heaven who was hers as well as theirs! There lay His wondrous works before her, and her heart echoed the verse:

"Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies," as though it were addressed especially to her and sung for her by the choir of women.

The gods of whom she had but just been thinking with pious remembrance appeared to her now as beautiful, merry, sportive children, as graceful creatures of her own kind, in comparison with the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the universe, whose works among the nations, whose holy name, whose wonders, greatness, and loving-kindness these songs of praise celebrated. The breath of His mouth dispersed the whole world of gods to whom she had been wont to pray, as the autumn wind scatters the many-tinted leaves of faded trees. She felt as though He embraced the garden before her with mighty and yet loving arms, and with it the whole world. She had loved the Olympian gods; but in this hour, for the first time, she felt true reverence for one God, and it made her proud to think that she might love this mighty Lord, this tender Father, and know that she was beloved by Him. Her heart beat faster and faster, and she felt as though, under the protection of this God, she need never more fear any danger.

As she looked out again at the palm-trees beyond the tamarisks, above whose plumy heads the evening star now rode in the azure blue of the night sky, the singing was taken up again after a pause; she heard once more the angelic

greeting which had before struck her soul as so comforting and full of promise when she read it in the Gospel:

"Glory to God on high, on earth peace, good-will toward men."

That which she had then so fervently longed for had, she thought, come to pass. The peace, the rest for which she had yearned so miserably in the midst of terror and bloodshed, now filled her heart--all that surrounded her was so still and peaceful! A wonderful sense of home came over her, and with it the conviction that here she would certainly find those for whom she was longing.

Again she looked up to survey the scene, and she was now aware of a white figure coming toward her from the tamarisk hedge. This was Euryale. She had seen Agatha among the worshipers, and had quitted the congregation, fearing that the sick girl might wake and find no one near her who cared for her or loved her. She crossed the grass plot with a swift step. She had passed the fountain; her head came into the moonlight, and Melissa could see the dear, kind face. With glad excitement she called her by name, and as the matron entered the veranda she heard the convalescent's weak voice and hastened to her side. Lightly, as if joy had made her young again, she sank on her knees by the bed of the resuscitated girl to kiss her with motherly tenderness and press her head gently to her bosom. While Melissa asked a hundred questions the lady had to warn her to remain quiet, and at last to bid her to keep silence.

First of all Melissa wanted to know where she was. Then her lips overflowed with thankfulness and joy, and declarations that she felt as she was sure the souls in bliss must feel, when Euryale had told her in subdued tones that her father was living, that Diodoros and her brother had found a refuge in the house of Zeno, and that Andreas, Polybius, and all dear to them were quite recovered after those evil days. The town had long been rid of Caesar, and Zeno had consented to allow his daughter Agatha to marry Alexander.

In obedience to her motherly adviser, the convalescent remained quiet for a while; but joy seemed to have doubled her strength, for she desired to see Agatha, Alexander, and Andreas, and--she colored, and a beseeching glance met Euryale's eyes--and Diodoros.

But meanwhile the physician Ptolemaeus had come into the room, and he would allow no one to come near her this evening but Zeno's daughter. His grave eyes were dim with tears as, when taking leave, he whispered to the Lady Euryale:

"All is well. Even her mind is saved."

He was right. From day to day and from hour to hour her recovery progressed and her strength improved. And there was much for her to see and hear, which did her more good than medicine, even though she had been moved to fresh grief by the death of her brother and many friends.

Like Melissa, her lover and Alexander had been led by thorny paths to the stars which shine on happy souls and shed their light in the hearts of those to whom the higher truth is revealed. It was as Christians that Diodoros and Alexander both came to visit the convalescent. That which had won so many Alexandrians to the blessings of the new faith had attracted them too, and the certainty of finding their beloved among the Christians had been an added inducement to crave instruction from Zeno. And it had been given them in so zealous and captivating a manner that, in their impressionable hearts, the desire for learning had soon been turned to firm conviction and inspired ardor.

Agatha was betrothed to Alexander.

The scorn of his fellow-citizens, which had fallen on the innocent youth and which he had supposed would prevent his ever winning her love, had in fact secured it to him, for Agatha's father was very ready to trust his child to the man who had rescued her, whom she loved, and in whom he saw one of the lowly who should be exalted.

Alexander was not told of Philip's death till his own wounds were healed; but he had meanwhile confided to Andreas that he had made up his mind to fly to a distant land that he might never again see Agatha, and thus not rob the brother on whom he had brought such disaster of the woman he loved. The freedman had heard him with deep emotion, and within a few hours after Andreas had reported to Zeno the self-sacrificing youth's purpose, Zeno had gone to Alexander and greeted him as his son.

Melissa found in Agatha the sister she had so long pined for; and how happy it made her to see her brother's eyes once more sparkle with gladness! Alexander, even as a Christian and as Agatha's husband, remained an artist.

The fortune accumulated by Andreas--the solidi with which he had formerly paid the scapegrace painter's debts included--was applied to the erection of a new and beautiful house of God on the spot where Heron's house had stood. Alexander decorated it with noble pictures, and as this church was soon too small to accommodate the rapidly increasing congregation, he painted the walls of yet another, with figures whose extreme beauty was famous throughout Christendom, and which were preserved and admired till gloomy zealots prohibited the arts in churches and destroyed their works.

Melissa could not be safe in Alexandria. After being quietly married in the house of Polybius, she, with her young husband and Andreas, moved to Carthage, where an uncle of Diodoros dwelt. Love went them, and, with love, happiness. They were not long compelled to remain in exile; a few months after their marriage news was brought to Carthage that Caesar had been murdered by the centurion Martialis, prompted by the tribunes Apollinaris and

Nemesianus Aurelius. Immediately on this, Macrinus, the praetorian prefect, was proclaimed emperor by the troops.

The ambitious man's sovereignty lasted less than a year; still, the prophecy of Serapion was fulfilled. It cost the Magian his life indeed; for a letter written by him to the prefect, in which he reminded him of what he had foretold, fell into the hands of Caracalla's mother, who opened the letters addressed to her ill-fated son at Antioch, where she was then residing. The warning it contained did not arrive, however, till after Caesar's death, and before the new sovereign could effectually protect the soothsayer. As soon as Macrinus had mounted the throne the persecution of those who had roused the ire of the unhappy Caracalla was at an end. Diodoros and Melissa, Heron and Polybius, could mingle once more with their fellow-citizens secure from all pursuit.

Diodoros and other friends took care that the suspicion of treachery which had been cast on Heron's household should be abundantly disproved. Nay, the death of Philip, and Melissa's and Alexander's evil fortunes, placed them in the ranks of the foremost foes of tyranny.

Within ten months of his accession Macrinus was overthrown, after his defeat at Immae, where, though the praetorians still fought for him bravely, he took ignominious flight; Julia Domna's grandnephew was then proclaimed Caesar by the troops, under the name of Heliogabalus, and the young emperor of fourteen had a statue and a cenotaph erected at Alexandria to Caracalla, whose son he was falsely reputed to be. These two works of art suffered severely at the hands of those on whom the hated and luckless emperor had inflicted such fearful evils. Still, on certain memorial days they were decked with beautiful flowers; and when the new prefect, by order of Caracalla's mother, made inquiry as to who it was that laid them there, he was informed that they came from the finest garden in Alexandria, and that it was Melissa, the wife of the owner, who offered them. This comforted the heart of Julia Domna, and she would have blessed the donor still more warmly if she could have known that Melissa included the name of her crazed son in her prayers to her dying day.

Old Heron, who had settled on the estate of Diodoros and lived there among his birds, less surly than of old, still produced his miniature works of art; he would shake his head over those strange offerings, and once when he found himself alone with old Dido, now a freed-woman, he said, irritably: "If that little fool had done as I told her she would be empress now, and as good as Julia Domna. But all has turned out well--only that Argutis, whom every one treats as if our old Macedonian blood ran in his veins, was sent yesterday by Melissa with finer flowers for Caracalla's cenotaph than for her own mother's tomb--May her new-fangled god forgive her! There is some Christian nonsense at the bottom of it, no doubt. I stick to the old gods whom my Olympias served, and she always did the best in everything."

Old Polybius, too, remained a heathen; but he allowed the children to please themselves. He and Heron saw their grandchildren brought up as Christians without a remonstrance, for they both understood that Christianity was the faith of the future.

Andreas to his latest day was ever the faithful adviser of old and young alike. In the sunshine of love which smiled upon him his austere zeal turned to considerate tenderness. When at last he lay on his death-bed, and shortly before the end, Melissa asked him what was his favorite verse of the Scriptures, he replied firmly and decidedly:

"Now the fullness of time is come."

"So be it," replied Melissa with tears in her eyes. He smiled and nodded, signed to Diodoros to draw off his signet ring--the only thing his father had saved from the days of his wealth and freedom--and desired Melissa to keep it for his sake. Deeply moved, she put it on her finger; but Andreas pointed to the motto, and said with failing utterance:

"That is your road--and mine--my father's motto: *Per aspera ad astra*. It has guided me to my goal, and you--all of you. But the words are in Latin; you understand them? By rough ways to the stars--Nay what they say to me is: Upward, under the burden of the cross, to bliss here and hereafter--And you too," he added, looking in his darling's face. "You too, both of you; I know it."

He sighed deeply, and, laying his hand on Melissa's head as she knelt by his bed, he closed his faithful eyes in the supporting arms of Diodoros.