

THE SISTERS - V5

GEORG EBERS*

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CHAPTER XXII.

On the roof of the tower of the pylon by the gate of the Serapeum stood an astrologer who had mounted to this, the highest part of the temple, to observe the stars; but it seemed that he was not destined on this occasion to fulfil his task, for swiftly driving black clouds swept again and again across that portion of the heavens to which his observations were principally directed. At last he impatiently laid aside his instruments, his waxed tablet and style, and desired the gate-keeper—the father of poor little Philo—whose duty it was to attend at night on the astrologers on the tower, to carry down all his paraphernalia, as the heavens were not this evening favorable to his labors.

”Favorable!” exclaimed the gate-keeper, catching up the astrologer’s words, and shrugging his shoulders so high that his head disappeared between them.

”It is a night of horror, and some great disaster threatens us for certain. Fifteen years have I been in my place, and I never saw such a night but once before, and the very next day the soldiers of Antiochus, the Syrian king, came and plundered our treasury. Aye—and to-night is worse even than that was; when the dog-star first rose a horrible shape with a lion’s mane flew across the desert, but it was not till midnight that the fearful uproar began, and even you shuddered when it broke out in the Apis-cave. Frightful things must be coming on us when the sacred bulls rise from the dead and butt and storm at the door with their horns to break it open. Many a time have I seen the souls of the dead fluttering and wheeling and screaming above the old mausoleums, and rock-tombs of ancient times. Sometimes they would soar up in the air in the form of hawks with men’s heads, or like ibises with a slow lagging flight, and sometimes sweep over the desert like gray shapeless shadows, or glide across the sand like snakes; or they would creep out of the tombs, howling like hungry dogs. I have often heard them barking like jackals or laughing like hyenas when they scent carrion, but to-night is

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the first time I ever heard them shrieking like furious men, and then groaning and wailing as if they were plunged in the lake of fire and suffering horrible torments.

"Look there—out there—something is moving again! Oh! holy father, exorcise them with some mighty bann. Do you not see how they are growing larger? They are twice the size of ordinary mortals." The astronomer took an amulet in his hand, muttered a few sentences to himself, seeking at the same time to discover the figures which had so scared the gate-keeper.

"They are indeed tall," he said when he perceived them. "And now they are melting into one, and growing smaller and smaller—however, perhaps they are only men come to rob the tombs, and who happen to be particularly tall, for these figures are not of supernatural height."

"They are twice as tall as you, and you are not short," cried the gate-keeper, pressing his lips devoutly to the amulet the astrologer held in his hand, "and if they are robbers why has no watchman called out to stop them? How is it their screams and groans have not waked the sentinels that are posted there every night? There—that was another fearful cry! Did you ever hear such tones from any human breast? Great Serapis, I shall die of fright! Come down with me, holy father, that I may look after my little sick boy, for those who have seen such sights do not escape unstricken."

The peaceful silence of the Necropolis had indeed been disturbed, but the spirits of the departed had no share in the horrors which had been transacted this night in the desert, among the monuments and rocktombs. They were living men that had disturbed the calm of the sacred place, that had conspired with darkness in cold-blooded cruelty, greater than that of evil spirits, to achieve the destruction of a fellow-man; but they were living men too who, in the midst of the horrors of a most fearful night, had experienced the blossoming in their own souls of the divinest germ which heaven implants in the bosom of its mortal children. Thus in a day of battle amid blood and slaughter may a child be born that shall grow up blessed and blessing, the comfort and joy of his family.

The lion-maned monster whose appearance and rapid disappearance in the desert had first alarmed the gate-keeper, had been met by several travellers on its way to Memphis, and each and all, horrified by its uncanny aspect, had taken to flight or tried to hide themselves—and yet it was no more than a man with warm pulses, an honest purpose, and a true and loving heart. But those who met him could not see into his soul, and his external aspect certainly bore little resemblance to that of other men.

His feet, unused to walking, moved but clumsily, and had a heavy body to carry, and his enormous beard and the mass of gray hair on his head—which he turned now this way and now that—gave him an aspect that might

well scare even a bold man who should meet him unexpectedly. Two stall-keepers who, by day, were accustomed to offer their wares for sale near the Serapeum to the pilgrims, met him close to the city.

"Did you see that panting object?" said one to the other as they looked after him. "If he were not shut up fast in his cell I could declare it was Serapion, the recluse."

"Nonsense," replied the other. "He is tied faster by his oath than by chains and fetters. It must be one of the Syrian beggars that besiege the temple of Astarte."

"Perhaps," answered his companion with indifference. "Let us get on now, my wife has a roast goose for supper this evening."

Serapion, it is true, was fast tied to his cell, and yet the pedler had judged rightly, for he it was who hurried along the high-road frightening all he met. After his long captivity walking was very painful to him; besides, he was barefoot, and every stone in the path hurt the soles of his feet which had grown soft; nevertheless he contrived to make a by no means contemptible pace when in the distance he caught sight of a woman's figure which he could fancy to be Klea. Many a man, who in his own particular sphere of life can cut a very respectable figure, becomes a laughing-stock for children when he is taken out of his own narrow circle, and thrown into the turmoil of the world with all his peculiarities clinging to him. So it was with Serapion; in the suburbs the street-boys ran after him mocking at him, but it was not till three smart hussys, who were resting from their dance in front of a tavern, laughed loudly as they caught sight of him, and an insolent soldier drove the point of his lance through his flowing mane, as if by accident, that he became fully conscious of his wild appearance, and it struck him forcibly that he could never in this guise find admission to the king's palace.

With prompt determination he turned into the first barber's stall that he saw lighted up; at his appearance the barber hastily retreated behind his counter, but he got his hair and beard cut, and then, for the first time for many years, he saw his own face in the mirror that the barber held before him. He nodded, with a melancholy smile, at the face—so much aged—that looked at him from the bright surface, paid what was asked, and did not heed the compassionate glance which the barber and his assistant sent after him. They both thought they had been exercising their skill on a lunatic, for he had made no answer to all their questions, and had said nothing but once in a deep and fearfully loud voice:

"Chatter to other people—I am in a hurry."

In truth his spirit was in no mood for idle gossip; no, it was full of gnawing anxiety and tender fears, and his heart bled when he reflected

that he had broken his vows, and forsworn the oath he had made to his dying mother.

When he reached the palace-gate he begged one of the civic guard to conduct him to his brother, and as he backed his request with a gift of money he was led at once to the man whom he sought. Glaucus was excessively startled to recognize Serapion, but he was so much engaged that he could only give up a few minutes to his brother, whose proceedings he considered as both inexplicable and criminal.

Irene, as the anchorite now learned, had been carried off from the temple, not by Euergetes but by the Roman, and Klea had quitted the palace only a few minutes since in a chariot and would return about midnight and on foot from the second tavern to the temple. And the poor child was so utterly alone, and her way lay through the desert where she might be attacked by dissolute soldiery or tomb-robbers or jackals and hyenas. Her walk was to begin from the second tavern, and that was the very spot where low rioters were wont to assemble—and his darling was so young, so fair, and so defenceless!

He was once more a prey to the same unendurable dread that had come over him, in his cell, after Klea had left the temple and darkness had closed in. At that moment he had felt all that a father could feel who from his prison-window sees his beloved and defenceless child snatched away by some beast of prey. All the perils that could threaten her in the palace or in the city, swarming with drunken soldiers, had risen before his mind with fearful vividness, and his powerful imagination had painted in glaring colors all the dangers to which his favorite—the daughter of a noble and respected man—might be exposed.

He rushed up and down his cell like a wounded tiger, he flung himself against the walls, and then, with his body hanging far out of the window, had looked out to see if the girl—who could not possibly have returned yet—were not come back again. The darker it grew, the more his anguish rose, and the more hideous were the pictures that stood before his fancy; and when, presently, a pilgrim in the Pastophorium who had fallen into convulsions screamed out loud, he was no longer master of himself—he kicked open the door which, locked on the outside and rotten from age, had been closed for years, hastily concealed about him some silver coins he kept in his chest, and let himself down to the ground.

There he stood, between his cell and the outer wall of the temple, and now it was that he remembered his vows, and the oath he had sworn, and his former flight from his retreat. Then he had fled because the pleasures and joys of life had tempted him forth—then he had sinned indeed; but now the love, the anxious care that urged him to quit his prison were the same as had brought him back to it. It was to keep faith that he now broke faith, and mighty Serapis could read his heart, and his mother was dead, and while she lived she had always been ready and willing to forgive.

He fancied so vividly that he could see her kind old face looking at him that he nodded at her as if indeed she stood before him.

Then, he rolled an empty barrel to the foot of the wall, and with some difficulty mounted on it. The sweat poured down him as he climbed up the wall built of loose unbaked bricks to the parapet, which was much more than a man's height; then, sliding and tumbling, he found himself in the ditch which ran round it on the outside, scrambled up its outer slope, and set out at last on his walk to Memphis.

What he had afterwards learned in the palace concerning Klea had but little relieved his anxiety on her account; she must have reached the border of the desert so much sooner than he, and quick walking was so difficult to him, and hurt the soles of his feet so cruelly! Perhaps he might be able to procure a staff, but there was just as much bustle outside the gate of the citadel as by day. He looked round him, feeling the while in his wallet, which was well filled with silver, and his eye fell on a row of asses whose drivers were crowding round the soldiers and servants that streamed out of the great gate.

He sought out the strongest of the beasts with an experienced eye, flung a piece of silver to the owner, mounted the ass, which panted under its load, and promised the driver two drachmm in addition if he would take him as quickly as possible to the second tavern on the road to the Serapeum. Thus—he belaboring the sides of the unhappy donkey with his sturdy bare legs, while the driver, running after him snorting and shouting, from time to time poked him up from behind with a stick—Serapion, now going at a short trot, and now at a brisk gallop, reached his destination only half an hour later than Klea.

In the tavern all was dark and empty, but the recluse desired no refreshment. Only his wish that he had a staff revived in his mind, and he soon contrived to possess himself of one, by pulling a stake out of the fence that surrounded the innkeeper's little garden. This was a somewhat heavy walking-stick, but it eased the recluse's steps, for though his hot and aching feet carried him but painfully the strength of his arms was considerable.

The quick ride had diverted his mind, had even amused him, for he was easily pleased, and had recalled to him his youthful travels; but now, as he walked on alone in the desert, his thoughts reverted to Klea, and to her only.

He looked round for her keenly and eagerly as soon as the moon came out from behind the clouds, called her name from time to time, and thus got as far as the avenue of sphinxes which connected the Greek and Egyptian temples; a thumping noise fell upon his ear from the cave of the Apis-tombs. Perhaps they were at work in there, preparing for the approaching festival. But why were the soldiers, which were always on guard here,

absent from their posts to-night? Could it be that they had observed Klea, and carried her off?

On the farther side of the rows of sphinxes too, which he had now reached, there was not a man to be seen—not a watchman even though the white limestone of the tombstones and the yellow desert-sand shone as clear in the moonlight as if they had some internal light of their own.

At every instant he grew more and more uneasy, he climbed to the top of a sand-hill to obtain a wider view, and loudly called Klea's name.

There—was he deceived? No—there was a figure visible near one of the ancient tomb-shrines—a form that seemed wrapped in a long robe, and when once more he raised his voice in a loud call it came nearer to him and to the row of sphinxes. In great haste and as fast as he could he got down again to the roadway, hurried across the smooth pavement, on both sides of which the long perspective of man-headed lions kept guard, and painfully clambered up a sand-heap on the opposite side. This was in truth a painful effort, for the sand crumbled away again and again under his feet, slipping down hill and carrying him with it, thus compelling him to find a new hold with hand and foot. At last he was standing on the outer border of the sphinx-avenue and opposite the very shrine where he fancied he had seen her whom he sought; but during his clamber it had become perfectly dark again, for a heavy cloud had once more veiled the moon. He put both hands to his mouth, and shouted as loud as he could, "Klea!"—and then again, "Klea!"

Then, close at his feet he heard a rustle in the sand, and saw a figure moving before him as though it had risen out of the ground. This could not be Klea, it was a man—still, perhaps, he might have seen his darling—but before he had time to address him he felt the shock of a heavy blow that fell with tremendous force on his back between his shoulders. The assassin's sand-bag had missed the exact spot on the nape of the neck, and Serapion's strongly-knit backbone would have been able to resist even a stronger blow.

The conviction that he was attacked by robbers flashed on his consciousness as immediately as the sense of pain, and with it the certainty that he was a lost man if he did not defend himself stoutly.

Behind him he heard another rustle in the sand. As quickly as he could he turned round with an exclamation of "Accursed brood of vipers!" and with his heavy staff he fell upon the figure before him like a smith beating cold iron, for his eye, now more accustomed to the darkness, plainly saw it to be a man. Serapion must have hit straight, for his foe fell at his feet with a hideous roar, rolled over and over in the sand, groaning and panting, and then with one shrill shriek lay silent and motionless.

The recluse, in spite of the dim light, could see all the movements of

the robber he had punished so severely, and he was bending over the fallen man anxiously and compassionately when he shuddered to feel two clammy hands touching his feet, and immediately after two sharp pricks in his right heel, which were so acutely painful that he screamed aloud, and was obliged to lift up the wounded foot. At the same time, however, he did not overlook the need to defend himself. Roaring like a wounded bull, cursing and raging, he laid about him on all sides with his staff, but hit nothing but the ground. Then as his blows followed each other more slowly, and at last his wearied arms could no longer wield the heavy stake, and he found himself compelled to sink on his knees, a hoarse voice addressed him thus:

"You have taken my comrade's life, Roman, and a two-legged serpent has stung you for it. In a quarter of an hour it will be all over with you, as it is with that fellow there. Why does a fine gentleman like you go to keep an appointment in the desert without boots or sandals, and so make our work so easy? King Euergetes and your friend Eulaeus send you their greetings. You owe it to them that I leave you even your ready money; I wish I could only carry away that dead lump there!"

During this rough speech Serapion was lying on the ground in great agony; he could only clench his fists, and groan out heavy curses with his lips which were now getting parched. His sight was as yet undimmed, and he could distinctly see by the light of the moon, which now shone forth from a broad cloudless opening in the sky, that the murderer attempted to carry away his fallen comrade, and then, after raising his head to listen for a moment sprang off with flying steps away into the desert. But the recluse now lost consciousness, and when some minutes later he once more opened his eyes his head was resting softly in the lap of a young girl, and it was the voice of his beloved Klea that asked him tenderly.

"You poor dear father! How came you here in the desert, and into the hands of these murderers? Do you know me—your Klea? And he who is looking for your wounds—which are not visible at all—he is the Roman Publius Scipio. Now first tell us where the dagger hit you that I may bind it up quickly—I am half a physician, and understand these things as you know."

The recluse tried to turn his head towards Klea's, but the effort was in vain, and he said in a low voice: "Prop me up against the slanting wall of the tomb shrine yonder; and you, child, sit down opposite to me, for I would fain look at you while I die. Gently, gently, my friend Publius, for I feel as if all my limbs were made of Phoenician glass, and might break at the least touch. Thank you, my young friend—you have strong arms, and you may lift me a little higher yet. So—now I can bear it; nay, I am well content, I am to be envied—for the moon shows me your dear face, my child, and I see tears on your cheeks, tears for me, a surly old man. Aye, it is good, it is very good to die thus."

"Oh, father, father!" cried Klea. "You must not speak so. You must

live, you must not die; for see, Publius here asks me to be his wife, and the Immortals only can know how glad I am to go with him, and Irene is to stay with us, and be my sister and his. That must make you happy, father.—But tell us, pray tell us where the wound hurts that the murderer gave you?”

”Children, children,” murmured the anchorite, and a happy smile parted his lips. ”The gracious gods are merciful in permitting me to see that—aye, merciful to me, and to effect that end I would have died twenty deaths.”

Klea pressed his now cold hand to her lips as he spoke and again asked, though hardly able to control her voice for tears:

”But the wound, father—where is the wound?” ”Let be, let be,” replied Serapion. ”It is acrid poison, not a dagger or dart that has undone my strength. And I can depart in peace, for I am no longer needed for anything. You, Publius, must now take my place with this child, and will do it better than I. Klea, the wife of Publius Scipio! I indeed have dreamt that such a thing might come to pass, and I always knew, and have said to myself a thousand times that I now say to you my son: This girl here, this Klea is of a good sort, and worthy only of the noblest. I give her to you, my son Publius, and now join your hands before me here—for I have always been like a father to her.”

That you have indeed,” sobbed Klea. ”And it was no doubt for my sake, and to protect me, that you quitted your retreat, and have met your death.”

”It was fate, it was fate,” stammered the old man.

”The assassins were in ambush for me,” cried Publius, seizing Serapion’s hand, ”the murderers who fell on you instead of me. Once more, where is your wound?”

”My destiny fulfils itself,” replied the recluse. ”No locked-up cell, no physician, no healing herb can avail against the degrees of Fate. I am dying of a serpent’s sting as it was foretold at my birth; and if I had not gone out to seek Klea a serpent would have slipped into my cage, and have ended my life there. Give me your hands, my children, for a deadly chill is creeping over me, and its cold hand already touches my heart.”

For a few minutes his voice failed him, and then he said softly:

”One thing I would fain ask of you. My little possessions, which were intended for you and Irene, you will now use to bury me. I do not wish to be burnt, as they did with my father—no, I should wish to be finely embalmed, and my mummy to be placed with my mother’s. If indeed we may meet again after death—and I believe we shall—I would rather see her

once more than any one, for she loved me so much—and I feel now as if I were a child again, and could throw my arms round her neck. In another life, perhaps, I may not be the child of misfortune that I have been in this—in another life—now it grips my heart—in another—Children whatever joys have smiled on me in this, children, it was to you I have owed it—Klea, to you—and there is my little Irene too—”

These were the last words of Serapion the recluse; he fell back with a deep sigh and was dead. Klea and Publius tenderly closed his faithful eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The unwonted tumult that had broken the stillness of the night had not been unobserved in the Greek Serapeum any more than in the Egyptian temple adjoining the Apis-tombs; but perfect silence once more reigned in the Necropolis, when at last the great gate of the sanctuary of Osiris-Apis was thrown open, and a little troop of priests arranged in a procession came out from it with a vanguard of temple servants, who had been armed with sacrificial knives and axes.

Publius and Klea, who were keeping faithful watch by the body of their dead friend, saw them approaching, and the Roman said:

”It would have been even less right in such a night as this to let you proceed to one of the temples with out my escort than to have let our poor friend remain unwatched.”

”Once more I assure you,” said Klea eagerly ”that we should have thrown away every chance of fulfilling Serapion’s last wish as he intended, if during our absence a jackal or a hyena had mutilated his body, and I am happy to be able at least to prove to my friend, now he is dead, how grateful I am for all the kindness he showed us while he lived. We ought to be grateful even to the departed, for how still and blissful has this hour been while guarding his body. Storm and strife brought us together—”

”And here,” interrupted Publius, ”we have concluded a happy and permanent treaty of peace for the rest of our lives.”

”I accept it willingly,” replied Klea, looking down, ”for I am the vanquished party.”

”But you have already confessed,” said Publius, ”that you were never so unhappy as when you thought you had asserted your strength against mine,

and I can tell you that you never seemed to me so great and yet so lovable as when in the midst of your triumph, you gave up the battle for lost. Such an hour as that, a man experiences but once in his lifetime. I have a good memory, but if ever I should forget it, and be angry and passionate—as is sometimes my way—remind me of this spot, or of this our dead friend, and my hard mood will melt, and I shall remember that you once were ready to give your life for mine. I will make it easy for you, for in honor of this man, who sacrificed his life for yours and who was actually murdered in my stead, I promise to add his name of Serapion to my own, and I will confirm this vow in Rome. He has behaved to us as a father, and it behoves me to reverence his memory as though I had been his son. An obligation was always unendurable to me, and how I shall ever make full restitution to you for what you have done for me this night I do not yet know—and yet I should be ready and willing every day and every hour to accept from you some new gift of love. 'A debtor,' says the proverb, 'is half a prisoner,' and so I must entreat you to deal mercifully with your conquerer."

He took her hand, stroked back the hair from her forehead, and touched it lightly with his lips. Then he went on:

"Come with me now that we may commit the dead into the hands of these priests."

Klea once more bent over the remains of the anchorite, she hung the amulet he had given her for her journey round his neck, and then silently obeyed her lover. When they came up with the little procession Publius informed the chief priest how he had found Serapion, and requested him to fetch away the corpse, and to cause it to be prepared for interment in the costliest manner in the embalming house attached to their temple. Some of the temple-servants took their places to keep watch over the body, and after many questions addressed to Publius, and after examining too the body of the assassin who had been slain, the priests returned to the temple.

As soon as the two lovers were left alone again Klea seized the Roman's hand, and said passionately: "You have spoken many tender words to me, and I thank you for them; but I am wont always to be honest, and less than any one could I deceive you. Whatever your love bestows upon me will always be a free gift, since you owe me nothing at all and I owe you infinitely much; for I know now that you have snatched my sister from the clutches of the mightiest in the land while I, when I heard that Irene had gone away with you, and that murder threatened your life, believed implicitly that on the contrary you had lured the child away to become your sweetheart, and then—then I hated you, and then—I must confess it—in my horrible distraction I wished you dead!"

"And you think that wish can offend me or hurt me?" said Publius. "No, my child; it only proves to me that you love me as I could wish to be loved. Such rage under such circumstances is but the dark shadow cast by

love, and is as inseparable from love as from any tangible body. Where it is absent there is no such thing as real love present—only an airy vision, a phantom, a mockery. Such an one as Klea does not love nor hate by halves; but there are mysterious workings in your soul as in that of every other woman. How did the wish that you could see me dead turn into the fearful resolve to let yourself be killed in my stead?”

”I saw the murderers,” answered Klea, ”and I was overwhelmed with horror of them and of their schemes, and of all that had to do with them; I would not destroy Irene’s happiness, and I loved you even more deeply than I hated you; and then—but let us not speak of it.”

”Nay—tell me all.”

”Then there was a moment—”

”Well, Klea?”

”Then—in these last hours, while we have been sitting hand in hand by the body of poor Serapion, and hardly speaking, I have felt it all over again—then the midnight hymn of the priests fell upon my heart, and as I lifted up my soul in prayer at their pious chant I felt as if all my inmost heart had been frozen and hardened, and was reviving again to new life and tenderness and warmth. I could not help thinking of all that is good and right, and I made up my mind to sacrifice myself for you and for Irene’s happiness far more quickly and easily than I could give it up afterwards. My father was one of the followers of Zeno—”

”And you,” interrupted Publius, ”thought you were acting in accordance with the doctrine of the Stoa. I also am familiar with it, but I do not know the man who is so virtuous and wise that he can live and act, as that teaching prescribes, in the heat of the struggle of life, or who is the living representative in flesh and blood of the whole code of ethics, not sinning against one of its laws and embodying it in himself. Did you ever hear of the peace of mind, the lofty indifference and equanimity of the Stoic sages? You look as if the question offended you, but you did not by any means know how to attain that magnanimity, for I have seen you fail in it; indeed it is contrary to the very nature of woman, and—the gods be thanked—you are not a Stoic in woman’s dress, but a woman—a true woman, as you should be. You have learned nothing from Zeno and Chrysippus but what any peasant girl might learn from an honest father, to be true I mean and to love virtue. Be content with that; I am more than satisfied.”

”Oh, Publius,” exclaimed the girl, grasping her friend’s hand. ”I understand you, and I know that you are right. A woman must be miserable so long as she fancies herself strong, and imagines and feels that she needs no other support than her own firm will and determination, no other counsel than some wise doctrines which she accepts and adheres to. Before I could call you mine, and went on my own way, proud of my

own virtue, I was—I cannot bear to think of it—but half a soul, and took it for a whole; but now—if now fate were to snatch you from me, I should still know where to seek the support on which I might lean in need and despair. Not in the Stoa, not in herself can a woman find such a stay, but in pious dependence on the help of the gods.”

”I am a man,” interrupted Publius, ”and yet I sacrifice to them and yield ready obedience to their decrees.”

”But,” cried Klea, ”I saw yesterday in the temple of Serapis the meanest things done by his ministers, and it pained me and disgusted me, and I lost my hold on the divinity; but the extremest anguish and deepest love have led me to find it again. I can no longer conceive of the power that upholds the universe as without love nor of the love that makes men happy as other than divine. Any one who has once prayed for a being they love as I prayed for you in the desert can never again forget how to pray. Such prayers indeed are not in vain. Even if no god can hear them there is a strengthening virtue in such prayer itself.

”Now I will go contentedly back to our temple till you fetch me, for I know that the discreetest, wisest, and kindest Beings will watch over our love.”

”You will not accompany me to Apollodorus and Irene?” asked Publius in surprise.

”No,” answered Klea firmly. ”Rather take me back to the Serapeum. I have not yet been released from the duties I undertook there, and it will be more worthy of us both that Asclepiodorus should give you the daughter of Philotas as your wife than that you should be married to a runaway serving-maid of Serapis.”

Publius considered for a moment, and then he said eagerly:

”Still I would rather you should come with me. You must be dreadfully tired, but I could take you on my mule to Apollodorus. I care little for what men say of me when I am sure I am doing right, and I shall know how to protect you against Euergetes whether you wish to be readmitted to the temple or accompany me to the sculptor. But do come—it will be hard on me to part from you again. The victor does not lay aside the crown when he has just won it in hard fight.”

”Still I entreat you to take me back to the Serapeum,” said Klea, laying her hand in that of Publius.

”Is the way to Memphis too long, are you utterly tired out?”

”I am much wearied by agitation and terror, by anxiety and happiness, still I could very well bear the ride; but I beg of you to take me back to the temple.”

"What—although you feel strong enough to remain with me, and in spite of my desire to conduct you at once to Apollodorus and Irene?" asked Publius astonished, and he withdrew his hand. "The mule is waiting out there. Lean on my arm. Come and do as I request you."

"No, Publius, no. You are my lord and master, and I will always obey you unresistingly. In one thing only let me have my own way, now and in the future. As to what becomes a woman I know better than you, it is a thing that none but a woman can decide."

Publius made no reply to these words, but he kissed her, and threw his arm round her; and so, clasped in each other's embrace, they reached the gate of the Serapeum, there to part for a few hours.

Klea was let into the temple, and as soon as she had learned that little Philo was much better, she threw herself on her humble bed.

How lonely her room seemed, how intolerably empty without Irene. In obedience to a hasty impulse she quitted her own bed, lay herself down on her sister's, as if that brought her nearer to the absent girl, and closed her eyes; but she was too much excited and too much exhausted to sleep soundly. Swiftly-changing visions broke in again and again on her sincerely devotional thoughts and her restless half-sleep, painting to her fancy now wondrously bright images, and now most horrible ones—now pictures of exquisite happiness, and again others of dismal melancholy. And all the time she imagined she heard distant music and was being rocked up and down by unseen hands.

Still the image of the Roman overpowered all the rest.

At last a refreshing sleep sealed her eyes more closely, and in her dream she saw her lover's house in Rolne, his stately father, his noble mother—who seemed to her to bear a likeness to her own mother—and the figures of a number of tall and dignified senators. She felt herself much embarrassed among all these strangers, who looked enquiringly at her, and then kindly held out their hands to her. Even the dignified matron came to meet her with effusion, and clasped her to her breast; but just as Publius had opened his to her and she flew to his heart, and she fancied she could feel his lips pressed to hers, the woman, who called her every morning, knocked at her door and awoke her.

This time she had been happy in her dream and would willingly have slept again; but she forced herself to rise from her bed, and before the sun was quite risen she was standing by the Well of the Sun and, not to neglect her duty, she filled both the jars for the altar of the god.

Tired and half-overcome by sleep, she set the golden vessels in their place, and sat down to rest at the foot of a pillar, while a priest poured out the water she had brought, as a drink-offering on the ground.

It was now broad daylight as she looked out into the forecourt through the many-pillared hall of the temple; the early sunlight played round the columns, and its slanting rays, at this hour, fell through the tall doorway far into the great hall which usually lay in twilight gloom.

The sacred spot looked very solemn in her eyes, sublime, and as it were reconsecrated, and obeying an irresistible impulse she leaned against a column, and lifting up her arms, and raising her eyes, she uttered her thankfulness to the god for his loving kindness, and found but one thing to pray for, namely that he would preserve Publius and Irene, and all mankind, from sorrow and anxiety and deception.

She felt as if her heart had till now been benighted and dark, and had just disclosed some latent light—as if it had been withered and dry, and was now blossoming in fresh verdure and brightly-colored flowers.

To act virtuously is granted even to those who, relying on themselves, earnestly strive to lead moral, just and honest lives; but the happy union of virtue and pure inner happiness is solemnized only in the heart which is able to seek and find a God—be it Serapis or Jehovah.

At the door of the forecourt Klea was met by Asclepiodorus, who desired her to follow him. The high-priest had learned that she had secretly quitted the temple: when she was alone with him in a quiet room he asked her gravely and severely, why she had broken the laws and left the sanctuary without his permission. Klea told him, that terror for her sister had driven her to Memphis, and that she there had heard that Publicus Cornelius Scipio, the Roman who had taken up her father's cause, had saved Irene from king Euergetes, and placed her in safety, and that then she had set out on her way home in the middle of the night.

The high-priest seemed pleased at her news, and when she proceeded to inform him that Serapion had forsaken his cell out of anxiety for her, and had met his death in the desert, he said:

"I knew all that, my child. May the gods forgive the recluse, and may Serapis show him mercy in the other world in spite of his broken oath! His destiny had to be fulfilled. You, child, were born under happier stars than he, and it is within my power to let you go unpunished. This I do willingly; and Klea, if my daughter Andromeda grows up, I can only wish that she may resemble you; this is the highest praise that a father can bestow on another man's daughter. As head of this temple I command you to fill your jars to-day, as usual, till one who is worthy of you comes to me, and asks you for his wife. I suspect he will not be long to wait for."

"How do you know, father,—” asked Klea, coloring.

"I can read it in your eyes," said Asclepiodorus, and he gazed kindly

after her as, at a sign from him, she quitted the room.

As soon as he was alone he sent for his secretary and said:

”King Philometor has commanded that his brother Euergetes’ birthday shall be kept to-day in Memphis. Let all the standards be hoisted, and the garlands of flowers which will presently arrive from Arsinoe be fastened up on the pylons; have the animals brought in for sacrifice, and arrange a procession for the afternoon. All the dwellers in the temple must be carefully attired. But there is another thing; Komanus has been here, and has promised us great things in Euergetes’ name, and declares that he intends to punish his brother Philometor for having abducted a girl—Irene—attached to our temple. At the same time he requests me to send Klea the water-bearer, the sister of the girl who was carried off, to Memphis to be examined—but this may be deferred. For to-day we will close the temple gates, solemnize the festival among ourselves, and allow no one to enter our precincts for sacrifice and prayer till the fate of the sisters is made certain. If the kings themselves make their appearance, and want to bring their troops in, we will receive them respectfully as becomes us, but we will not give up Klea, but consign her to the holy of holies, which even Euergetes dare not enter without me; for in giving up the girl we sacrifice our dignity, and with that ourselves.”

The secretary bowed, and then announced that two of the prophets of Osiris-Apis desired to speak with Asclepiodorus.

Klea had met these men in the antechamber as she quitted the high-priest, and had seen in the hand of one of them the key with which she had opened the door of the rock-tomb. She had started, and her conscience urged her to go at once to the priest-smith, and tell him how ill she had fulfilled her errand.

When she entered his room Krates was sitting at his work with his feet wrapped up, and he was rejoiced to see her, for his anxiety for her and for Irene had disturbed his night’s rest, and towards morning his alarm had been much increased by a frightful dream.

Klea, encouraged by the friendly welcome of the old man, who was usually so surly, confessed that she had neglected to deliver the key to the smith in the city, that she had used it to open the Apis-tombs, and had then forgotten to take it out of the new lock. At this confession the old man broke out violently, he flung his file, and the iron bolt at which he was working, on to his work-table, exclaiming:

”And this is the way you executed your commission. It is the first time I ever trusted a woman, and this is my reward! All this will bring evil on you and on me, and when it is found out that the sanctuary of Apis has been desecrated through my fault and yours, they will inflict all sorts of penance on me, and with very good reason—as for you, they will punish

you with imprisonment and starvation.”

”And yet, father,” Klea calmly replied, ”I feel perfectly guiltless, and perhaps in the same fearful situation you might not have acted differently.”

”You think so—you dare to believe such a thing?” stormed the old man. ”And if the key and perhaps even the lock have been stolen, and if I have done all that beautiful and elaborate work in vain?”

”What thief would venture into the sacred tombs?” asked Klea doubtfully.

”What! are they so unapproachable?” interrupted Krates. ”Why, a miserable creature like you even dared to open them. But only wait—only wait; if only my feet were not so painful—”

”Listen to me,” said the girl, going closer up to the indignant smith. ”You are discreet, as you proved to me only yesterday; and if I were to tell you all I went through and endured last night you would certainly forgive me, that I know.”

”If you are not altogether mistaken!” shouted the smith. ”Those must be strange things indeed which could induce me to let such neglect of duty and such a misdemeanor pass unpunished.”

And strange things they were indeed which the old man now had to hear, for when Klea had ended her narrative of all that had occurred during the past night, not her eyes only but those of the old smith too were wet with tears.

”These accursed legs!” he muttered, as his eyes met the enquiring glance of the young girl, and he wiped the salt dew from his cheeks with the sleeve of his coat. ”Aye—a swelled foot like mine is painful, child, and a cripple such as I am is not always strong-minded. Old women grow like men, and old men grow like women. Ah! old age—it is bad to have such feet as mine, but what is worse is that memory fades as years advance. I believe now that I left the key myself in the door of the Apis-tombs last evening, and I will send at once to Asclepiodorus, so that he may beg the Egyptians up there to forgive me—they are indebted to me for many small jobs.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

All the black masses of clouds which during the night had darkened the blue sky and hidden the light of the moon had now completely disappeared. The north-east wind which rose towards morning had floated them away, and

Zeus, devourer of the clouds, had swallowed them up to the very last. It was a glorious morning, and as the sun rose in the heavens, and pierced and burnt up with augmenting haste the pale mist that hovered over the Nile, and the vapor that hung—a delicate transparent veil of bluish-grey bombyx-gauze—over the eastern slopes, the cool shades of night vanished too from the dusky nooks of the narrow town which lay, mile-wide, along the western bank of the river. And the intensely brilliant sunlight which now bathed the streets and houses, the palaces and temples, the gardens and avenues, and the innumerable vessels in the harbor of Memphis, was associated with a glow of warmth which was welcome even there in the early morning of a winter's day.

Boats' captains and sailors—were hurrying down to the shore of the Nile to avail themselves of the northeast breeze to travel southwards against the current, and sails were being hoisted and anchors heaved, to an accompaniment of loud singing. The quay was so crowded with ships that it was difficult to understand how those that were ready could ever disentangle themselves, and find their way through those remaining behind; but each somehow found an outlet by which to reach the navigable stream, and ere long the river was swarming with boats, all sailing southwards, and giving it the appearance of an endless perspective of camp tents set afloat.

Long strings of camels with high packs, of more lightly laden asses, and of dark-colored slaves, were passing down the road to the harbor; these last were singing, as yet unhurt by the burden of the day, and the overseers' whips were still in their girdles.

Ox-carts were being laden or coming down to the landing-place with goods, and the ship's captains were already beginning to collect round the different great merchants—of whom the greater number were Greeks, and only a few dressed in Egyptian costume—in order to offer their freight for sale, or to hire out their vessels for some new expedition.

The greatest bustle and noise were at a part of the quay where, under large tents, the custom-house officials were busily engaged, for most vessels first cast anchor at Memphis to pay duty or Nile-toll on the "king's table." The market close to the harbor also was a gay scene; there dates and grain, the skins of beasts, and dried fish were piled in great heaps, and bleating and bellowing herds of cattle were driven together to be sold to the highest bidder.

Soldiers on foot and horseback in gaudy dresses and shining armor, mingled with the busy crowd, like peacocks and gaudy cocks among the fussy swarm of hens in a farm yard; lordly courtiers, in holiday dresses of showy red, blue and yellow stuffs, were borne by slaves in litters or standing on handsome gilt chariots; garlanded priests walked about in long white robes, and smartly dressed girls were hurrying down to the taverns near the harbor to play the flute or to dance.

The children that were playing about among this busy mob looked covetously at the baskets piled high with cakes, which the bakers' boys were carrying so cleverly on their heads. The dogs innumerable, put up their noses as the dealers in such dainties passed near them, and many of them set up longing howls when a citizen's wife came by with her slaves, carrying in their baskets freshly killed fowls, and juicy meats to roast for the festival, among heaps of vegetables and fruits.

Gardeners' boys and young girls were bearing garlands of flowers, festoons and fragrant nosegays, some piled on large trays which they carried two and two, some on smaller boards or hung on cross poles for one to carry; at that part of the quay where the king's barge lay at anchor numbers of workmen were busily employed in twining festoons of greenery and flowers round the flag-staffs, and in hanging them with lanterns.

Long files of the ministers of the god-representing the five phyla or orders of the priesthood of the whole country—were marching, in holiday attire, along the harbor-road in the direction of the palace, and the jostling crowd respectfully made way for them to pass. The gleams of festal splendor seemed interwoven with the laborious bustle on the quay like scraps of gold thread in a dull work-a-day garment.

Euergetes, brother of the king, was keeping his birthday in Memphis to-day, and all the city was to take part in the festivities.

At the first hour after sunrise victims had been sacrificed in the temple of Ptah, the most ancient, and most vast of the sanctuaries of the venerable capital of the Pharaohs; the sacred Apis-bull, but recently introduced into the temple, was hung all over with golden ornaments; early in the morning Euergetes had paid his devotions to the sacred beast—which had eaten out of his hand, a favorable augury of success for his plans; and the building in which the Apis lived, as well as the stalls of his mother and of the cows kept for him, had been splendidly decked with flowers.

The citizens of Memphis were not permitted to pursue their avocations or ply their trades beyond the hour of noon; then the markets, the booths, the workshops and schools were to be closed, and on the great square in front of the temple of Ptah, where the annual fair was held, dramas both sacred and profane, and shows of all sorts were to be seen, heard and admired by men, women and children—provided at the expense of the two kings.

Two men of Alexandria, one an AEolian of Lesbos, and the other a Hebrew belonging to the Jewish community, but who was not distinguishable by dress or accent from his Greek fellow-citizens, greeted each other on the quay opposite the landing-place for the king's vessels, some of which were putting out into the stream, spreading their purple sails and dipping their prows inlaid with ivory and heavily gilt.

"In a couple of hours," said the Jew, "I shall be travelling homewards. May I offer you a place in my boat, or do you propose remaining here to assist at the festival and not starting till to-morrow morning? There are all kinds of spectacles to be seen, and when it is dark a grand illumination is to take place."

"What do I care for their barbarian rubbish?" answered the Lesbian. "Why, the Egyptian music alone drives me to distraction. My business is concluded. I had inspected the goods brought from Arabia and India by way of Berenice and Coptos, and had selected those I needed before the vessel that brought them had moored in the Mariotic harbor, and other goods will have reached Alexandria before me. I will not stay an hour longer than is necessary in this horrible place, which is as dismal as it is huge. Yesterday I visited the gymnasium and the better class of baths—wretched, I call them! It is an insult to the fish-market and the horse-ponds of Alexandria to compare them with them."

"And the theatre!" exclaimed the Jew. "The exterior one can bear to look at—but the acting! Yesterday they gave the 'Thals' of Menander, and I assure you that in Alexandria the woman who dared to impersonate the bewitching and cold-hearted Hetaira would have been driven off the stage—they would have pelted her with rotten apples. Close by me there sat a sturdy, brown Egyptian, a sugar-baker or something of the kind, who held his sides with laughing, and yet, I dare swear, did not understand a word of the comedy. But in Memphis it is the fashion to know Greek, even among the artisans. May I hope to have you as my guest?"

"With pleasure, with pleasure!" replied the Lesbian. "I was about to look out for a boat. Have you done your business to your satisfaction?"

"Tolerably!" answered the Jew. "I have purchased some corn from Upper Egypt, and stored it in the granaries here. The whole of that row yonder were to let for a mere song, and so we get off cheaply when we let the wheat lie here instead of at Alexandria where granaries are no longer to be had for money."

"That is very clever!" replied the Greek. "There is bustle enough here in the harbor, but the many empty warehouses and the low rents prove how Memphis is going down. Formerly this city was the emporium for all vessels, but now for the most part they only run in to pay the toll and to take in supplies for their crews. This populous place has a big stomach, and many trades drive a considerable business here, but most of those that fail here are still carried on in Alexandria."

"It is the sea that is lacking," interrupted the Jew; "Memphis trades only with Egypt, and we with the whole world. The merchant who sends his goods here only load camels, and wretched asses, and flat-bottomed Nile-boats, while in our harbors freight fine seagoing vessels. When the winter-storms are past our house alone sends twenty triremes with

Egyptian wheat to Ostia and to Pontus; and your Indian and Arabian goods, your imports from the newly opened Ethiopian provinces, take up less room, but I should like to know how many talents your trade amounted to in the course of the past year. Well then, farewell till we meet again on my boat; it is called the Euphrosyne, and lies out there, exactly opposite the two statues of the old king—who can remember these stiff barbarian names? In three hours we start. I have a good cook on board, who is not too particular as to the regulations regarding food by which my countrymen in Palestine live, and you will find a few new books and some capital wine from Byblos.”

”Then we need not dread a head-wind,” laughed the Lesbian. ”We meet again in three hours.”

The Israelite waved his hand to his travelling companion, and proceeded at first along the shore under the shade of an alley of sycamores with their broad unsymmetrical heads of foliage, but presently he turned aside into a narrow street which led from the quay to the city. He stood still for a moment opposite the entrance of the corner house, one side of which lay parallel to the stream while the other—exhibiting the front door, and a small oil-shop—faced the street; his attention had been attracted to it by a strange scene; but he had still much to attend to before starting on his journey, and he soon hurried on again without noticing a tall man who came towards him, wearing a travelling-hat and a cloak such as was usually adapted only for making journeys.

The house at which the Jew had gazed so fixedly was that of Apollodorus, the sculptor, and the man who was so strangely dressed for a walk through the city at this hour of the day was the Roman, Publius Scipio. He seemed to be still more attracted by what was going on in the little stall by the sculptor’s front door, than even the Israelite had been; he leaned against the fence of the garden opposite the shop, and stood for some time gazing and shaking his head at the strange things that were to be seen within.

A wooden counter supported by the wall of the house—which was used by customers to lay their money on and which generally held a few oil-jars—projected a little way into the street like a window-board, and on this singular couch sat a distinguished looking youth in a light blue, sleeveless chiton, turning his back on the stall itself, which was not much bigger than a good sized travelling-chariot. By his side lay a ”Himation”—[A long square cloak, and an indispensable part of the dress of the Greeks.]—of fine white woolen stuff with a blue border. His legs hung out into the street, and his brilliant color stood out in wonderful contrast to the dark skin of a naked Egyptian boy, who crouched at his feet with a cage full of doves.

The young Greek sitting on the window-counter had a golden fillet on his oiled and perfumed curls, sandals of the finest leather on his feet, and even in these humble surroundings looked elegant—but even more merry

than elegant—for the whole of his handsome face was radiant with smiles while he tied two small rosy-grey turtle doves with ribands of rose-colored bombyx-silk to the graceful basket in which they were sitting, and then slipped a costly gold bracelet over the heads of the frightened birds, and attached it to their wings with a white silk tie.

When he had finished this work he held the basket up, looked at it with a smile of satisfaction, and he was in the very act of handing it to the black boy when he caught sight of Publius, who went up to him from the garden-fence.

"In the name of all the gods, Lysias," cried the Roman, without greeting his friend, what fool's trick are you at there again! Are you turned oil-seller, or have you taken to training pigeons?"

"I am the one, and I am doing the other," answered the Corinthian with a laugh, for he it was to whom the Roman's speech was addressed. "How do you like my nest of young doves? It strikes me as uncommonly pretty, and how well the golden circlet that links their necks becomes the little creatures!"

"Here, put out your claws, you black crocodile," he continued, turning to his little assistant, "carry the basket carefully into the house, and repeat what I say, 'From the love-sick Lysias to the fair Irene'—Only look, Publius, how the little monster grins at me with his white teeth. You shall hear that his Greek is far less faultless than his teeth. Prick up your ears, you little ichneumon—now once more repeat what you are to say in there—do you see where I am pointing with my finger?—to the master or to the lady who shall take the doves from you."

With much pitiful stammering the boy repeated the Corinthian's message to Irene, and as he stood there with his mouth wide open, Lysias, who was an expert at "ducks and drakes" on the water, neatly tossed into it a silver drachma. This mouthful was much to the little rascal's taste, for after he had taken the coin out of his mouth he stood with wide-open jaws opposite his liberal master, waiting for another throw; Lysias however boxed him lightly on his ears, and chucked him under the chin, saying as he snapped the boy's teeth together:

"Now carry up the birds and wait for the answer." "This offering is to Irene, then?" said Publius. "We have not met for a long time; where were you all day yesterday?"

"It will be far more entertaining to hear what you were about all the night long. You are dressed as if you had come straight here from Rome. Euergetes has already sent for you once this morning, and the queen twice; she is over head and ears in love with you."

"Folly! Tell me now what you were doing all yesterday."

"Tell me first where you have been."

"I had to go some distance and will tell you all about it later, but not now; and I encountered strange things on my way—aye, I must say extraordinary things. Before sunrise I found a bed in the inn yonder, and to my own great surprise I slept so soundly that I awoke only two hours since."

"That is a very meagre report; but I know of old that if you do not choose to speak no god could drag a syllable from you. As regards myself I should do myself an injury by being silent, for my heart is like an overloaded beast of burden and talking will relieve it. Ah! Publius, my fate to-day is that of the helpless Tantalus, who sees juicy pears bobbing about under his nose and tempting his hungry stomach, and yet they never let him catch hold of them, only look-in there dwells Irene, the pear, the peach, the pomegranate, and my thirsting heart is consumed with longing for her. You may laugh—but to-day Paris might meet Helen with impunity, for Eros has shot his whole store of arrows into me. You cannot see them, but I can feel them, for not one of them has he drawn out of the wound. And the darling little thing herself is not wholly untouched by the winged boy's darts. She has confessed so much to me myself. It is impossible for me to refuse her any thing, and so I was fool enough to swear a horrible oath that I would not try to see her till she was reunited to her tall solemn sister, of whom I am exceedingly afraid. Yesterday I lurked outside this house just as a hungry wolf in cold weather sneaks about a temple where lambs are being sacrificed, only to see her, or at least to hear a word from her lips, for when she speaks it is like the song of nightingales—but all in vain. Early this morning I came back to the city and to this spot; and as hanging about forever was of no use, I bought up the stock of the old oil-seller, who is asleep there in the corner, and settled myself in his stall, for here no one can escape me, who enters or quits Apollodorus' house—and, besides, I am only forbidden to visit Irene; she herself allows me to send her greetings, and no one forbids me, not even Apollodorus, to whom I spoke an hour ago."

"And that basket of birds that your dusky errand-boy carried into the house just now, was such a 'greeting?'"

"Of course—that is the third already. First I sent her a lovely nosegay of fresh pomegranate-blossoms, and with it a few verses I hammered out in the course of the night; then a basket of peaches which she likes very much, and now the doves. And there lie her answers—the dear, sweet creature! For my nosegay I got this red riband, for the fruit this peach with a piece bitten out. Now I am anxious to see what I shall get for my doves. I bought that little brown scamp in the market, and I shall take him with me to Corinth as a remembrance of Memphis, if he brings me back something pretty this time. There, I hear the door, that is he; come here youngster, what have you brought?" Publius stood with his arms

crossed behind his back, hearing and watching the excited speech and gestures of his friend who seemed to him, to-day more than ever, one of those careless darlings of the gods, whose audacious proceedings give us pleasure because they match with their appearance and manner, and we feel they can no more help their vagaries than a tree can help blossoming. As soon as Lysias spied a small packet in the boy's hand he did not take it from him but snatched up the child, who was by no means remarkably small, by the leather belt that fastened up his loin-cloth, tossed him up as if he were a plaything, and set him down on the table by his side, exclaiming:

"I will teach you to fly, my little hippopotamus! Now, show me what you have got."

He hastily took the packet from the hand of the youngster, who looked quite disconcerted, weighed it in his hand and said, turning to Publius:

"There is something tolerably heavy in this—what can it contain?"

"I am quite inexperienced in such matters," replied the Roman.

"And I much experienced," answered Lysias. "It might be, wait—it might be the clasp of her girdle in here. Feel, it is certainly something hard."

Publius carefully felt the packet that the Corinthian held out to him, with his fingers, and then said with a smile:

"I can guess what you have there, and if I am right I shall be much pleased. Irene, I believe, has returned you the gold bracelet on a little wooden tablet."

"Nonsense!" answered Lysias. "The ornament was prettily wrought and of some value, and every girl is fond of ornaments."

"Your Corinthian friends are, at any rate. But look what the wrapper contains."

"Do you open it," said the Corinthian.

Publius first untied a thread, then unfolded a small piece of white linen, and came at last to an object wrapped in a bit of flimsy, cheap papyrus. When this last envelope was removed, the bracelet was in fact discovered, and under it lay a small wax tablet.

Lysias was by no means pleased with this discovery, and looked disconcerted and annoyed at the return of his gift; but he soon mastered his vexation, and said turning to his friend, who was not in the least maliciously triumphant, but who stood looking thoughtfully at the ground.

"Here is something on the little tablet—the sauce no doubt to the peppered dish she has set before me."

"Still, eat it," interrupted Publius. "It may do you good for the future."

Lysias took the tablet in his hand, and after considering it carefully on both sides he said:

"It belongs to the sculptor, for there is his name. And there—why she has actually spiced the sauce or, if you like it better the bitter dose, with verses. They are written more clearly than beautifully, still they are of the learned sort."

"Well?" asked the Roman with curiosity, as Lysias read the lines to himself; the Greek did not look up from the writing but sighed softly, and rubbing the side of his finely-cut nose with his finger he replied:

"Very pretty, indeed, for any one to whom they are not directly addressed. Would you like to hear the distich?"

"Read it to me, I beg of you."

"Well then," said the Corinthian, and sighing again he read aloud;

'Sweet is the lot of the couple whom love has united;
But gold is a debt, and needs must at once be restored.'

"There, that is the dose. But doves are not human creatures, and I know at once what my answer shall be. Give me the fibula, Publius, that clasps that cloak in which you look like one of your own messengers. I will write my answer on the wax."

The Roman handed to Lysias the golden circlet armed with a strong pin, and while he stood holding his cloak together with his hands, as he was anxious to avoid recognition by the passers-by that frequented this street, the Corinthian wrote as follows:

"When doves are courting the lover adorns himself only;
But when a youth loves, he fain would adorn his beloved."

"Am I allowed to hear it?" asked Publius, and his friend at once read him the lines; then he gave the tablet to the boy, with the bracelet which he hastily wrapped up again, and desired him to take it back immediately to the fair Irene. But the Roman detained the lad, and laying his hand on the Greek's shoulder, he asked him: "And if the young girl accepts this gift, and after it many more besides—since you are rich enough to make her presents to her heart's content—what then, Lysias?"

"What then?" repeated the other with more indecision and embarrassment than was his wont. "Then I wait for Klea's return home and—Aye! you may laugh at me, but I have been thinking seriously of marrying this girl, and taking her with me to Corinth. I am my father's only son, and for the last three years he has given me no peace. He is bent on my mother's finding me a wife or on my choosing one for myself. And if I took him the pitch-black sister of this swarthy lout I believe he would be glad. I never was more madly in love with any girl than with this little Irene, as true as I am your friend; but I know why you are looking at me with a frown like Zeus the Thunderer. You know of what consequence our family is in Corinth, and when I think of that, then to be sure—"

"Then to be sure?" enquired the Roman in sharp, grave tone.

"Then I reflect that a water-bearer—the daughter of an outlawed man, in our house—"

"And do you consider mine as being any less illustrious in Rome than your own is in Corinth?" asked Publius sternly.

"On the contrary, Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica. We are important by our wealth, you by your power and estates."

"So it is—and yet I am about to conduct Irene's sister Klea as my lawful wife to my father's house."

"You are going to do that!" cried Lysias springing from his seat, and flinging himself on the Roman's breast, though at this moment a party of Egyptians were passing by in the deserted street. "Then all is well, then—oh! what a weight is taken off my mind!—then Irene shall be my wife as sure as I live! Oh Eros and Aphrodite and Father Zeus and Apollo! how happy I am! I feel as if the biggest of the Pyramids yonder had fallen off my heart. Now, you rascal, run up and carry to the fair Irene, the betrothed of her faithful Lysias—mark what I say—carry her at once this tablet and bracelet. But you will not say it right; I will write here above my distich: 'From the faithful Lysias to the fair Irene his future wife.' There—and now I think she will not send the thing back again, good girl that she is! Listen, rascal, if she keeps it you may swallow cakes to-day out on the Grand Square till you burst—and yet I have only just paid five gold pieces for you. Will she keep the bracelet, Publius—yes or no?"

"She will keep it."

A few minutes later the boy came hurrying back, and pulling the Greek vehemently by his dress, he cried:

"Come, come with me, into the house." Lysias with a light and graceful leap sprang right over the little fellow's head, tore open the door, and spread out his arms as he caught sight of Irene, who, though trembling

like a hunted gazelle, flew down the narrow ladder-like stairs to meet him, and fell on his breast laughing and crying and breathless.

In an instant their lips met, but after this first kiss she tore herself from his arms, rushed up the stairs again, and then, from the top step, shouted joyously:

"I could not help seeing you this once! now farewell till Klea comes, then we meet again," and she vanished into an upper room.

Lysias turned to his friend like one intoxicated, he threw himself down on his bench, and said:

"Now the heavens may fall, nothing can trouble me! Ye immortal gods, how fair the world is!"

"Strange boy!" exclaimed the Roman, interrupting his friend's rapture. "You can not stay for ever in this dingy stall."

"I will not stir from this spot till Klea comes. The boy there shall fetch me victuals as an old sparrow feeds his young; and if necessary I will lie here for a week, like the little sardines they preserve in oil at Alexandria."

"I hope you will have only a few hours to wait; but I must go, for I am planning a rare surprise for King Euergetes on his birthday, and must go to the palace. The festival is already in full swing. Only listen how they are shouting and calling down by the harbor; I fancy I can hear the name of Euergetes."

"Present my compliments to the fat monster! May we meet again soon—brother-in-law!"

CHAPTER XXV.

King Euergetes was pacing restlessly up and down the lofty room which his brother had furnished with particular magnificence to be his reception-room. Hardly had the sun risen on the morning of his birthday when he had betaken himself to the temple of Ptah with a numerous suite—before his brother Philometor could set out—in order to sacrifice there, to win the good graces of the high-priest of the sanctuary, and to question of the oracle of Apis. All had fallen out well, for the sacred bull had eaten out of his hand; and yet he would have been more glad—though it should have disdained the cake he offered it, if only Eulaeus had brought him the news that the plot against the Roman's life had been successful.

Gift after gift, addresses of congratulation from every district of the country, priestly decrees drawn up in his honor and engraved on tablets of hard stone, lay on every table or leaned against the walls of the vast ball which the guests had just quitted. Only Hierax, the king's friend, remained with him, supporting himself, while he waited for some sign from his sovereign, on a high throne made of gold and ivory and richly decorated with gems, which had been sent to the king by the Jewish community of Alexandria.

The great commander knew his master well and knew too that it was not prudent to address him when he looked as he did now. But Euergetes himself was aware of the need for speech, and he began, without pausing in his walk or looking at his dignified friend:

"Even the Philobasilistes have proved corrupt; my soldiers in the citadel are more numerous and are better men too than those that have remained faithful to Philometor, and there ought to be nothing more for me to do but to stir up a brief clatter of swords on shields, to spring upon the throne, and to have myself proclaimed king; but I will never go into the field with the strongest division of the enemy in my rear. My brother's head is on my sister's shoulders, and so long as I am not certain of her—"

A chamberlain rushed into the room as the king spoke, and interrupted him by shouting out:

"Queen Cleopatra."

A smile of triumph flashed across the features of the young giant; he flung himself with an air of indifference on to a purple divan, and desired that a magnificent lyre made of ivory, and presented to him by his sister, should be brought to him; on it was carved with wonderful skill and delicacy a representation of the first marriage, that of Cadmus with Harmonia, at which all the gods had attended as guests.

Euergetes grasped the chords with wonderful vigor and mastery, and began to play a wedding march, in which eager triumph alternated with tender whisperings of love and longing.

The chamberlain, whose duty it was to introduce the queen to her brother's presence, wished to interrupt this performance of his sovereign's; but Cleopatra held him back, and stood listening at the door with her children till Euergetes had brought the air to a rapid conclusion with a petulant sweep of the strings, and a loud and ear-piercing discord; then he flung his lute on the couch and rose with well-feigned surprise, going forward to meet the queen as if, absorbed in playing, he had not heard her approach.

He greeted his sister affectionately, holding out both his hands to her, and spoke to the children—who were not afraid of him, for he knew how to

play madcap games with them like a great frolicsome boy—welcoming them as tenderly as if he were their own father.

He could not weary of thanking Cleopatra for her thoughtful present—so appropriate to him, who like Cadmus longed to boast of having mastered Harmonia, and finally—she not having found a word to say—he took her by the hand to exhibit to her the presents sent him by her husband and from the provinces. But Cleopatra seemed to take little pleasure in all these things, and said:

”Yes, everything is admirable, just as it has always been every year for the last twenty years; but I did not come here to see but to listen.”

Her brother was radiant with satisfaction; she on the contrary was pale and grave, and, could only now and then compel herself to a forced smile.

”I fancied,” said Euergetes, ”that your desire to wish me joy was the principal thing that had brought you here, and, indeed, my vanity requires me to believe it. Philometor was with me quite early, and fulfilled that duty with touching affection. When will he go into the banqueting-hall?”

”In half an hour; and till then tell me, I entreat you, what yesterday you—”

”The best events are those that are long in preparing,” interrupted her brother. ”May I ask you to let the children, with their attendants, retire for a few minutes into the inner rooms?”

”At once!” cried Cleopatra eagerly, and she pushed her eldest boy, who clamorously insisted on remaining with his uncle, violently out of the door without giving his attendant time to quiet him or take him in her arms.

While she was endeavoring, with angry scolding and cross words, to hasten the children’s departure, Eulaeus came into the room. Euergetes, as soon as he saw him, set every limb with rigid resolve, and drew breath so deeply that his broad chest heaved high, and a strong respiration parted his lips as he went forward to meet the eunuch, slowly but with an enquiring look.

Eulaeus cast a significant glance at Hierax and Cleopatra, went quite close up to the king, whispered a few words into his ear, and answered his brief questions in a low voice.

”It is well,” said Euergetes at last, and with a decisive gesture of his hand he dismissed Eulaeus and his friend from the room.

Then he stood, as pale as death, his teeth set in his under-lip, and gazing blankly at the ground.

He had his will, Publius Cornelius Scipio lived no more; his ambition might reach without hindrance the utmost limits of his desires, and yet he could not rejoice; he could not escape from a deep horror of himself, and he struck his broad forehead with his clenched fists. He was face to face with his first dastardly murder.

"And what news does Eulaeus bring?" asked Cleopatra in anxious excitement, for she had never before seen her brother like this; but he did not hear these words, and it was not till she had repeated them with more insistence that he collected himself, stared at her from head to foot with a fixed, gloomy expression, and then, letting his hand fall on her shoulder so heavily that her knees bent under her and she gave a little cry, asked her in a low but meaning tone:

"Are you strong enough to bear to hear great news?"

"Speak," she said in a low voice, and her eyes were fixed on his lips while she pressed her hand on her heart. Her anxiety to hear fettered her to him, as with a tangible tie, and he, as if he must burst it by the force of his utterance, said with awful solemnity, in his deepest tones and emphasizing every syllable:

"Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica is dead."

At these words Cleopatra's pale cheeks were suddenly dyed with a crimson glow, and clenching her little hands she struck them together, and exclaimed with flashing eyes:

"I hoped so!"

Euergetes withdrew a step from his sister, and said: "You were right. It is not only among the race of gods that the most fearful of all are women!"

"What have you to say?" retorted Cleopatra. "And am I to believe that a toothache has kept the Roman away from the banquet yesterday, and again from coming to see me to-day? Am I to repeat, after you, that he died of it? Now, speak out, for it rejoices my heart to hear it; where and how did the insolent hypocrite meet his end?"

"A serpent stung him," replied Euergetes, turning from his sister. "It was in the desert, not far from the Apis-tombs."

"He had an assignation in the Necropolis at midnight—it would seem to have begun more pleasantly than it ended?"

Euergetes nodded assent to the question, and added gravely:

"His fate overtook him—but I cannot see anything very pleasing in the matter."

"No?" asked the queen. "And do you think that I do not know the asp that ended that life in its prime? Do you think that I do not know, who set the poisoned serpent on the Roman? You are the assassin, and Eulaeus and his accomplices have helped you! Only yesterday I would have given my heart's blood for Publius, and would rather have carried you to the grave than him; but to-day, now that I know the game that the wretch has been playing with me, I would even have taken on myself the bloody deed which, as it is, stains your hands. Not even a god should treat your sister with such contempt—should insult her as he has done—and go unpunished! Another has already met the same fate, as you know—Eustorgos, Hipparchon of Bithynia, who, while he seemed to be dying of love for me, was courting Kallistrata my lady in waiting; and the wild beasts and serpents exercised their dark arts on him too. Eulaeus' intelligence has fallen on you, who are powerful, like a cold hand on your heart; in me, the weak woman, it rouses unspeakable delight. I gave him the best of all a woman has to bestow, and he dared to trample it in the dust; and had I no right to require of him that he should pour out the best that he had, which was his life, in the same way as he had dared to serve mine, which is my love? I have a right to rejoice at his death. Aye! the heavy lids now close those bright eyes which could be falser than the stern lips that were so apt to praise truth. The faithless heart is forever still which could scorn the love of a queen—and for what? For whom? Oh, ye pitiful gods!"

With these words the queen sobbed aloud, hastily lifting her hands to cover her eyes, and ran to the door by which she had entered her brother's rooms.

But Euergetes stood in her way, and said sternly and positively:

"You are to stay here till I return. Collect yourself, for at the next event which this momentous day will bring forth it will be my turn to laugh while your blood shall run cold." And with a few swift steps he left the hall.

Cleopatra buried her face in the soft cushions of the couch, and wept without ceasing, till she was presently startled by loud cries and the clatter of arms. Her quick wit told her what was happening. In frantic haste she flew to the door but it was locked; no shaking, no screaming, no thumping seemed to reach the ears of the guard whom she heard monotonously walking up and down outside her prison.

And now the tumult and clang of arms grew louder and louder, and the rattle of drums and blare of trumpets began to mingle with the sound. She rushed to the window in mortal fear, and looked down into the palace-yard; at that same instant the door of the great banqueting-hall was flung open, and a flying crowd streamed out in distracted confusion—then

another, and a third—all troops in King Philometor's uniform. She ran to the door of the room into which she had thrust her children; that too was locked. In her desperation she once more sprang to the window, shouted to the flying Macedonians to halt and make a stand—threatening and entreating; but no one heard her, and their number constantly increased, till at length she saw her husband standing on the threshold of the great hall with a gaping wound on his forehead, and defending himself bravely and stoutly with buckler and sword against the body-guard of his own brother, who were pressing him sorely. In agonized excitement she shouted encouraging words to him, and he seemed to hear her, for with a strong sweep of his shield he struck his nearest antagonist to the earth, sprang with a mighty leap into the midst of his flying adherents, and vanished with them through the passage which led to the palace-stables.

The queen sank fainting on her knees by the window, and, through the gathering shades of her swoon her dulled senses still were conscious of the trampling of horses, of a shrill trumpet-blast, and at last of a swelling and echoing shout of triumph with cries of, "Hail: hail to the son of the Sun—Hail to the uniter of the two kingdoms; Hail to the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, to Euergetes the god."

But at the last words she recovered consciousness entirely and started up. She looked down into the court again, and there saw her brother borne along on her husband's throne—litter by dignitaries and nobles. Side by side with the traitor's body-guard marched her own and Philometor's Philobasilistes and Diadoches.

The magnificent train went out of the great court of the palace, and then—as she heard the chanting of priests—she realized that she had lost her crown, and knew whither her faithless brother was proceeding.

She ground her teeth as her fancy painted all that was now about to happen. Euergetes was being borne to the temple of Ptah, and proclaimed by its astonished chief-priests, as King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and successor to Philometor. Four pigeons would be let fly in his presence to announce to the four quarters of the heavens that a new sovereign had mounted the throne of his fathers, and amid prayer and sacrifice a golden sickle would be presented to him with which, according to ancient custom, he would cut an ear of corn.

Betrayed by her brother, abandoned by her husband, parted from her children, scorned by the man she had loved, dethroned and powerless, too weak and too utterly crushed to dream of revenge—she spent two interminably long hours in the keenest anguish of mind, shut up in her prison which was overloaded with splendor and with gifts. If poison had been within her reach, in that hour she would unhesitatingly have put an end to her ruined life. Now she walked restlessly up and down, asking herself what her fate would be, and now she flung herself on the couch and gave herself up to dull despair.

There lay the lyre she had given to her brother; her eye fell on the relievo of the marriage of Cadmus and Harmonia, and on the figure of a woman who was offering a jewel to the bride. The bearer of the gift was the goddess of love, and the ornament she gave—so ran the legend—brought misfortune on those who inherited it. All the darkest hours of her life revived in her memory, and the blackest of them all had come upon her as the outcome of Aphrodite's gifts. She thought with a shudder of the murdered Roman, and remembered the moment when Eulaeus had told her that her Bithynian lover had been killed by wild beasts. She rushed from one door to another—the victim of the avenging Eumenides—shrieked from the window for rescue and help, and in that one hour lived through a whole year of agonies and terrors.

At last—at last, the door of the room was opened, and Euergetes came towards her, clad in the purple, with the crown of the two countries on his grand head, radiant with triumph and delight.

"All hail to you, sister!" he exclaimed in a cheerful tone, and lifting the heavy crown from his curling hair. "You ought to be proud to-day, for your own brother has risen to high estate, and is now King of Upper and Lower Egypt."

Cleopatra turned from him, but he followed her and tried to take her hand. She however snatched it away, exclaiming:

"Fill up the measure of your deeds, and insult the woman whom you have robbed and made a widow. It was with a prophecy on your lips that you went forth just now to perpetrate your greatest crime; but it falls on your own head, for you laugh over our misfortune—and it cannot regard me, for my blood does not run cold; I am not overwhelmed nor hopeless, and I shall—"

"You," interrupted Euergetes, at first with a loud voice, which presently became as gentle as though he were revealing to her the prospect of a future replete with enjoyment, "You shall retire to your roof-tent with your children, and there you shall be read to as much as you like, eat as many dainties as you can, wear as many splendid dresses as you can desire, receive my visits and gossip with me as often as my society may seem agreeable to you—as yours is to me now and at all times. Besides all this you may display your sparkling wit before as many Greek and Jewish men of letters or learning as you can command, till each and all are dazzled to blindness. Perhaps even before that you may win back your freedom, and with it a full treasury, a stable full of noble horses, and a magnificent residence in the royal palace on the Bruchion in gay Alexandria. It depends only on how soon our brother Philometor—who fought like a lion this morning—perceives that he is more fit to be a commander of horse, a lute-player, an attentive host of word-splitting guests—than the ruler of a kingdom. Now, is it not worthy of note to those who, like you and me, sister, love to investigate the phenomena of

our spiritual life, that this man—who in peace is as yielding as wax, as weak as a reed—is as tough and as keen in battle as a finely tempered sword? We hacked bravely at each other's shields, and I owe this slash here on my shoulder to him. If Hierax—who is in pursuit of him with his horsemen—is lucky and catches him in time, he will no doubt give up the crown of his own free will."

"Then he is not yet in your power, and he had time to mount a horse!" cried Cleopatra, her eyes sparkling with satisfaction; "then all is not yet lost for us. If Philometor can but reach Rome, and lay our case before the Senate—"

"Then he might certainly have some prospect of help from the Republic, for Rome does not love to see a strong king on the throne of Egypt," said Euergetes. "But you have lost your mainstay by the Tiber, and I am about to make all the Scipios and the whole gens Cornelia my staunch allies, for I mean to have the deceased Roman burnt with the finest cedar-wood and Arabian spices; sacrifices shall be slaughtered at the same time as if he had been a reigning king, and his ashes shall be sent to Ostia and Rome in the costliest specimen of *Vasa murrina* that graces my treasure-house, and on a ship specially fitted, and escorted by the noblest of my friends. The road to the rampart of a hostile city lies over corpses, and I, as general and king—"

Euergetes suddenly broke off in his sentence, for a loud noise and vehement talking were heard outside the door. Cleopatra too had not failed to observe it, and listened with alert attention; for on such a day and in these apartments every dialogue, every noise in the king's antechamber might be of grave purport.

Euergetes did not deceive himself in this matter any more than his sister, and he went towards the door holding the sacrificial sickle, which formed part of his regalia, in his right hand. But he had not crossed the room when Eulaeus rushed in, as pale as death, and calling out to his sovereign:

"The murderers have betrayed us; Publius Scipio is alive, and insists on being admitted to speak with you."

The king's armed hand fell by his side, and for a moment he gazed blankly into vacancy, but the next instant he had recovered himself, and roared in a voice which filled the room like rolling thunder:

"Who dares to hinder the entrance of my friend Publius Cornelius Scipio? And are you still here, Eulaeus—you scoundrel and you villain! The first case that I, as King of Upper and Lower Egypt, shall open for trial will be that which this man—who is your foe and my friend—proposes to bring against you. Welcome! most welcome on my birthday, my noble friend!"

The last words were addressed to Publius, who now entered the room with stately dignity, and clad in the ample folds of the white toga worn by Romans of high birth. He held a sealed roll or despatch in his right hand, and, while he bowed respectfully to Cleopatra, he seemed entirely to overlook the hands King Euergetes held out in welcome. After his first greeting had been disdained by the Roman, Euergetes would not have offered him a second if his life had depended on it. He crossed his arms with royal dignity, and said:

"I am grieved to receive your good wishes the last of all that have been offered me on this happy day."

"Then you must have changed your mind," replied Publius, drawing up his slight figure, which was taller than the king's, "You have no lack of docile instruments, and last night you were fully determined to receive my first congratulations in the realm of shades."

"My sister," answered Euergetes, shrugging his shoulders, "was only yesterday singing the praises of your uncultured plainness of speech; but to-day it is your pleasure to speak in riddles like an Egyptian oracle."

"They cannot, however, be difficult to solve by you and your minions," replied Publius coldly, as he pointed to Eulaeus. "The serpents which you command have powerful poisons and sharp fangs at their disposal; this time, however, they mistook their victim, and have sent a poor recluse of Serapis to Hades instead of one of their king's guests."

"Your enigma is harder than ever," cried the king. "My intelligence at least is unequal to solve it, and I must request you to speak in less dark language or else to explain your meaning."

"Later, I will," said Publius emphatically, "but these things concern myself alone, and I stand here now commissioned by the State of Rome which I serve. To-day Juventius Thalna will arrive here as ambassador from the Republic, and this document from the Senate accredits me as its representative until his arrival."

Euergetes took the sealed roll which Publius offered to him. While he tore it open, and hastily looked through its contents, the door was again thrown open and Hierax, the king's trusted friend, appeared on the threshold with a flushed face and hair in disorder.

"We have him!" he cried before he came in. "He fell from his horse near Heliopolis."

"Philometor?" screamed Cleopatra, flinging herself upon Hierax. "He fell from his horse—you have murdered him?"

The tone in which the words were said, so full of grief and horror that the general said compassionately:

"Calm yourself, noble lady; your husband's wound in the forehead is not dangerous. The physicians in the great hall of the temple of the Sun bound it up, and allowed me to bring him hither on a litter."

Without hearing Hierax to the end Cleopatra flew towards the door, but Euergetes barred her way and gave his orders with that decision which characterized him, and which forbade all contradiction:

"You will remain here till I myself conduct you to him. I wish to have you both near me."

"So that you may force us by every torment to resign the throne!" cried Cleopatra. "You are in luck to-day, and we are your prisoners."

"You are free, noble queen," said the Roman to the poor woman, who was trembling in every limb. "And on the strength of my plenipotentiary powers I here demand the liberty of King Philometor, in the name of the Senate of Rome."

At these words the blood mounted to King Euergetes' face and eyes, and, hardly master of himself, he stammered out rather than said:

"Popilius Laenas drew a circle round my uncle Antiochus, and threatened him with the enmity of Rome if he dared to overstep it. You might excel the example set you by your bold countryman—whose family indeed was far less illustrious than yours—but I—I—"

"You are at liberty to oppose the will of Rome," interrupted Publius with dry formality, "but, if you venture on it, Rome, by me, will withdraw her friendship. I stand here in the name of the Senate, whose purpose it is to uphold the treaty which snatched this country from the Syrians, and by which you and your brother pledged yourselves to divide the realm of Egypt between you. It is not in my power to alter what has happened here; but it is incumbent on me so to act as to enable Rome to distribute to each of you that which is your due, according to the treaty ratified by the Republic.

"In all questions which bear upon that compact Rome alone must decide, and it is my duty to take care that the plaintiff is not prevented from appearing alive and free before his protectors. So, in the name of the Senate, King Euergetes, I require you to permit King Philometor your brother, and Queen Cleopatra your sister, to proceed hence, whithersoever they will." Euergetes, breathing hard in impotent fury, alternately doubling his fists, and extending his quivering fingers, stood opposite the Roman who looked enquiringly in his face with cool composure; for a short space both were silent. Then Euergetes, pushing his hands through his hair, shook his head violently from side to side, and exclaimed:

"Thank the Senate from me, and say that I know what we owe to it, and

admire the wisdom which prefers to see Egypt divided rather than united in one strong hand—Philometor is free, and you also Cleopatra.”

For a moment he was again silent, then he laughed loudly, and cried to the queen:

”As for you sister—your tender heart will of course bear you on the wings of love to the side of your wounded husband.”

Cleopatra’s pale cheeks had flushed scarlet at the Roman’s speech; she vouchsafed no answer to her brother’s ironical address, but advanced proudly to the door. As she passed Publius she said with a farewell wave of her pretty hand.

”We are much indebted to the Senate.”

Publius bowed low, and she, turning away from him, quitted the room.

”You have forgotten your fan, and your children!” the king called after her; but Cleopatra did not hear his words, for, once outside her brother’s apartment, all her forced and assumed composure flew to the winds; she clasped her hands on her temples, and rushed down the broad stairs of the palace as if she were pursued by fiends.

When the sound of her steps had died away, Euergetes turned to the Roman and said:

”Now, as you have fulfilled what you deem to be your duty, I beg of you to explain the meaning of your dark speeches just now, for they were addressed to Euergetes the man, and not the king. If I understood you rightly you meant to imply that your life had been attempted, and that one of those extraordinary old men devoted to Serapis had been murdered instead of you.”

”By your orders and those of your accomplice Eulaeus,” answered Publius coolly.

”Eulaeus, come here!” thundered the king to the trembling courtier, with a fearful and threatening glare in his eyes. ”Have you hired murderers to kill my friend—this noble guest of our royal house—because he threatened to bring your crimes to light?”

”Mercy!” whimpered Eulaeus sinking on his knees before the king.

”He confesses his crime!” cried Euergetes; he laid his hand on the girdle of his weeping subordinate, and commanded Hierax to hand him over without delay to the watch, and to have him hanged before all beholders by the great gate of the citadel. Eulaeus tried to pray for mercy and to speak, but the powerful officer, who hated the contemptible wretch, dragged him

up, and out of the room.

"You were quite right to lay your complaint before me," said Euergetes while Eulaeus cries and howls were still audible on the stairs. "And you see that I know how to punish those who dare to offend a guest."

"He has only met with the portion he has deserved for years," replied Publius. "But now that we stand face to face, man to man, I must close my account with you too. In your service and by your orders Eulaeus set two assassins to lie in wait for me—"

"Publius Cornelius Scipio!" cried the king, interrupting his enemy in an ominous tone; but the Roman went on, calmly and quietly:

"I am saying nothing that I cannot support by witnesses; and I have truly set forth, in two letters, that king Euergetes during the past night has attempted the life of an ambassador from Rome. One of these despatches is addressed to my father, the other to Popilius Lamas, and both are already on their way to Rome. I have given instructions that they are to be opened if, in the course of three months reckoned from the present date, I have not demanded them back. You see you must needs make it convenient to protect my life, and to carry out whatever I may require of you. If you obey my will in everything I may demand, all that has happened this night shall remain a secret between you and me and a third person, for whose silence I will be answerable; this I promise you, and I never broke my word."

"Speak," said the king flinging himself on the couch, and plucking the feathers from the fan Cleopatra had forgotten, while Publius went on speaking.

"First I demand a free pardon for Philotas of Syracuse, 'relative of the king,' and president of the body of the Chrematistes, his immediate release, with his wife, from their forced labor, and their return from the mines."

"They both are dead," said Euergetes, "my brother can vouch for it."

"Then I require you to have it declared by special decree that Philotas was condemned unjustly, and that he is reinstated in all the dignities he was deprived of. I farther demand that you permit me and my friend Lysias of Corinth, as well as Apollodorus the sculptor, to quit Egypt without let or hindrance, and with us Klea and Irene, the daughters of Philotas, who serve as water-bearers in the temple of Serapis.—Do you hesitate as to your reply?"

"No," answered the king, and he tossed up his hand. "For this once I have lost the game."

"The daughters of Philotas, Klea and Irene," continued Publius with

imperturbable coolness, "are to have the confiscated estates of their parents restored to them."

"Then your sweetheart's beauty does not satisfy you!" interposed Euergetes satirically.

"It amply satisfies me. My last demand is that half of this wealth shall be assigned to the temple of Serapis, so that the god may give up his serving-maidens willingly, and without raising any objections. The other half shall be handed over to Dicearchus, my agent in Alexandria, because it is my will that Klea and Irene shall not enter my own house or that of Lysias in Corinth as wives, without the dowry that beseems their rank. Now, within one hour, I must have both the decree and the act of restitution in my hands, for as soon as Juventius Thalna arrives here—and I expect him, as I told you this very day—we propose to leave Memphis, and to take ship at Alexandria."

"A strange conjuncture!" cried Euergetes. "You deprive me alike of my revenge and my love, and yet I see myself compelled to wish you a pleasant journey. I must offer a sacrifice to Poseidon, to the Cyprian goddess, and to the Dioscurides that they may vouchsafe your ship a favorable voyage, although it will carry the man who in the future, can do us more injury at Rome by his bitter hostility, than any other."

"I shall always take the part of which ever of you has justice on his side."

Publius quitted the room with a proud wave of his hand, and Euergetes, as soon as the door had closed behind the Roman, sprang from his couch, shook his clenched fist in angry threat, and cried:

You, you obstinate fellow and your haughty patrician clan may do me mischief enough by the Tiber; and yet perhaps I may win the game in spite of you!

"You cross my path in the name of the Roman Senate. If Philometor waits in the antechambers of consuls and senators we certainly may chance to meet there, but I shall also try my luck with the people and the tribunes.

"It is very strange! This head of mine hits upon more good ideas in an hour than a cool fellow like that has in a year, and yet I am beaten by him—and if I am honest I can not but confess that it was not his luck alone, but his shrewdness that gained the victory. He may be off as soon as he likes with his proud Hera—I can find a dozen Aphrodites in Alexandria in her place!

"I resemble Hellas and he Rome, such as they are at present. We flutter in the sunshine, and seize on all that satisfies our intellect or gratifies our senses: they gaze at the earth, but walk on with a firm

step to seek power and profit. And thus they get ahead of us, and yet—
I would not change with them.”