

# A THORNY PATH

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Galenus—What I like is bad for me, what I loathe is wholesome

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By Georg Ebers

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## CHAPTER XVII.

The philosopher announced the visitor to Caesar, and as some little time elapsed before Melissa came in, Caracalla forgot his theatrical assumption, and sat with a drooping head; for, in consequence, no doubt, of the sunshine which beat on the top of his head, the pain had suddenly become almost unendurably violent.

Without vouchsafing a glance at Melissa, he swallowed one of the alleviating pills left him by Galenus, and hid his face in his hands. The girl came forward, fearless of the lion, for Philostratos had assured her that he was tamed, and most animals were willing to let her touch them. Nor was she afraid of Caesar himself, for she saw that he was in pain, and the alarm with which she had crossed the threshold gave way to pity. Philostratus kept at her side, and anxiously watched Caracalla.

The courage the simple girl showed in the presence of the ferocious brute, and the not less terrible man, struck him favorably, and his hopes rose as a sunbeam fell on her shining hair, which the lady Berenike had arranged with her own hand, twining it with strands of white Bombyx. She must appear, even to this ruthless profligate, as the very type of pure and innocent grace.

Her long robe and peplos, of the finest white wool, also gave her an air of distinction which suited the circumstances. It was a costly garment, which Berenike had had made for Korinna, and she had chosen it from among many instead of the plainer robe in which old Dido had dressed her young mistress. With admirable taste the matron had aimed at giving Melissa a

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simple, dignified aspect, unadorned and almost priestess-like in its severity. Nothing should suggest the desire to attract, and everything must exclude the idea of a petitioner of the poorer and commoner sort.

Philostratus saw that her appearance had been judiciously cared for; but Caesar's long silence, of which he knew the reason, began to cause him some uneasiness: for, though pain sometimes softened the despot's mood, it more often prompted him to revenge himself, as it were, for his own sufferings, by brutal attacks on the comfort and happiness of others. And, at last, even Melissa seemed to be losing the presence of mind he had admired, for he saw her bosom heave faster and higher, her lips quivered, and her large eyes sparkled through tears.

Caesar's countenance presently cleared a little. He raised his head, and as his eye met Melissa's she pronounced in a low, sweet voice the pleasant Greek greeting, "Rejoice!"

At this moment the philosopher was seized with a panic of anxiety; he felt for the first time the weight of responsibility he had taken on himself. Never had he thought her so lovely, so enchantingly bewitching as now, when she looked up at Caracalla in sweet confusion and timidity, but wholly possessed by her desire to win the favor of the man who, with a word, could make her so happy or so wretched. If this slave of his passions, whom a mere whim perhaps had moved to insist on the strictest morality in his court, should take a fancy to this delightful young creature, she was doomed to ruin. He turned pale, and his heart throbbed painfully as he watched the development of the catastrophe for which he had himself prepared the way.

But, once more, the unexpected upset the philosopher's anticipations. Caracalla gazed at the girl in amazement, utterly discomposed, as though some miracle had happened, or a ghost had started from the ground before him. Springing up, while he clutched the back of his chair, he exclaimed:

"What is this? Do my senses deceive me, or is it some base trickery? No, no! My eyes and my memory are good. This girl—"

"What ails thee, Caesar?" Philostratus broke in, with increasing anxiety.

"Something—something which will silence your foolish doubts—" Caesar panted out. "Patience—wait. Only a minute, and you shall see.—But, first"—and he turned to Melissa—"what is your name, girl?"

"Melissa," she replied, in a low and tremulous voice.

"And your father's and your mother's?"

"Heron is my father's name, and my mother—she is dead—was called Olympias, the daughter of Philip."

"And you are of Macedonian race?"

"Yes, my lord. My father and mother both were of pure Macedonian descent."

The emperor glanced triumphantly at Philostratus, and briefly exclaiming, "That will do, I think," he clapped his hands, and instantly his old chamberlain, Adventus, hurried in from the adjoining room, followed by the whole band of "Caesar's friends." Caracalla, however, only said to them:

"You can wait till I call you.—You, Adventus! I want the gem with the marriage of Alexander." The freedman took the gem out of an ebony casket standing on Caesar's writing-table, and Caracalla, holding the philosopher by the arm, said, with excited emphasis:

"That gem I inherited from my father, the divine Severus. It was engraved before that child came into the world. Now you shall see it, and if you then say that it is an illusion—But why should you doubt it? Pythagoras and your hero Apollonius both knew whose body their souls had inhabited in a former existence. Mine—though my mother has laughed at my belief, and others have dared to do the same—mine, five hundred years ago, dwelt in the greatest of heroes, Alexander the Macedonian—a right royal tabernacle!"

He snatched the gem from the chamberlain's hand, and while he devoured it with his eyes, looking from time to time into Melissa's face, he eagerly ran on:

"It is she. None but a blind man, a fool, a malignant idiot, could doubt it! Any who henceforth shall dare mock at my conviction that I was brought into the world to fulfill the life-span of that great hero, will learn to rue it! Here—it is but natural—here, in the city he founded and which bears his name, I have found positive proof that the bond which unites the son of Philip with the son of Severus is something more than a mere fancy. This maiden—look at her closely—is the re-embodiment of the soul of Roxana, as I am of that of her husband. Even you must see now how naturally it came about that she should uplift her heart and hands in prayer for me. Her soul, when it once dwelt in Roxana, was fondly linked with that of the hero; and now, in the bosom of this simple maiden, it is drawn to the unforgotten fellow-soul which has found its home in my breast."

He spoke with enthusiastic and firm conviction of the truth of his strange imagining, as though he were delivering a revelation from the gods. He bade Philostratus approach and compare the features of Roxana, as carved in the onyx, with those of the young suppliant.

The fair Persian stood facing Alexander; they were clasping each other's hands in pledge of marriage, and a winged Hymen fluttered above their heads with his flaming torch.

Philostratus was, in fact, startled as he looked at the gem, and expressed his surprise in the liveliest terms, for the features of Roxana as carved in the cameo, no larger than a man's palm, were, line for line, those of the daughter of Heron. And this sport of chance could not but be amazing to any one who did not know—as neither of the three who were examining the gem knew—that it was a work of Heron's youth, and that he had given Roxana the features of his bride Olympias, whose living image her daughter Melissa had grown to be.

"And how long have you had this work of art?" asked Philostratus.

"I inherited it, as I tell you, from my father," replied Caracalla. "Severus sometimes wore it.—But wait. After the battle of Issos, in his triumph over Pescennius Niger—I can see him now—he wore it on his shoulder, and that was—"

"Two-and-twenty years ago," the philosopher put in; and Caracalla, turning to Melissa, asked her:

"How old are you, child?"

"Eighteen, my lord." And the reply delighted Caesar; he laughed aloud, and looked triumphantly at Philostratus.

The philosopher willingly admitted that there was something strange in the incident, and he congratulated Caesar on having met with such strong confirmation of his inward conviction. The soul of Alexander might now do great things through him.

During this conversation the alarm which had come over Melissa at Caesar's silence had entirely disappeared. The despot whose suffering had appealed to her sympathetic soul, now struck her as singular rather than terrible. The idea that she, the humble artist's daughter, could harbor the soul of a Persian princess, amused her; and when the lion lifted his head and lashed the floor with his tail at her approach, she felt that she had won his approbation. Moved by a sudden impulse, she laid her hand on his head and boldly stroked it. The light, warm touch soothed the fettered prince of the desert, and, rubbing his brow against Melissa's round arm, he muttered a low, contented growl.

At this Caesar was enchanted; it was to him a further proof of his strange fancy. The "Sword of Persia" was rarely so friendly to any one; and Theocritus owed much of the favor shown him by Caracalla to the fact that at their first meeting the lion had been on particularly good terms with him. Still, the brute had never shown so much liking for any stranger as for this young girl, and never responded with such eager

swinging of his tail excepting to Caesar's own endearments. It must be instinct which had revealed to the beast the old and singular bond which linked his master and this new acquaintance. Caracalla, who, in all that happened to him, traced the hand of a superior power, pointed this out to Philostratus, and asked him whether, perhaps, the attack of pain he had just suffered might not have yielded so quickly to the presence of the revived Roxana rather than to Galen's pills.

Philostratus thought it wise not to dispute this assumption, and soon diverted the conversation to the subject of Melissa's imprisoned relations. He quietly represented to Caracalla that his noblest task must be to satisfy the spirit of her who had been so dear to the hero whose life he was to fulfill; and Caesar, who was delighted that the philosopher should recognize as a fact the illusion which flattered him, at once agreed. He questioned Melissa about her brother Alexander with a gentleness of which few would have thought him capable; and the sound of her voice, as she answered him modestly but frankly and with sisterly affection, pleased him so well that he allowed her to speak without interruption longer than was his wont. Finally, he promised her that he would question the painter, and, if possible, be gracious to him.

He again clapped his hands, and ordered a freedman named Epagathos, who was one of his favorite body-servants, to send immediately for Alexander from the prison.

As before, when Adventus had been summoned, a crowd followed Epagathos, and, as Caesar did not dismiss them, Melissa was about to withdraw; the despot, however, desired her to wait.

Blushing, and confused with shyness, she remained standing by Caesar's seat; and though she only ventured to raise her eyes now and then for a stolen look, she felt herself the object of a hundred curious, defiant, bold, or contemptuous glances.

How gladly would she have escaped, or have sunk into the earth! But there she had to stand, her teeth set, while her lips trembled, to check the tears which would rise.

Caesar, meanwhile, took no further notice of her. He was longing to relate at full length, to his friends and companions, the wonderful and important thing that had happened; but he would not approach the subject while they took their places in his presence. Foremost of them, with Theocritus, came the high-priest of Serapis, and Caracalla immediately desired them to introduce the newly appointed head-guardian of the peace. But the election was not yet final. The choice lay, Theocritus explained, between two equally good men. One, Aristides, was a Greek of high repute, and the other was only an Egyptian, but so distinguished for zealous severity that, for his part, he should vote for him.

At this the high-priest broke in, saying that the man favored by

Theocritus did in fact possess the qualities for which he was commended, but in such a measure that he was utterly hated by the Greek population; and in Alexandria more could be achieved by justice and mercy than by defiant severity.

But at this the favorite laughed, and said that he was convinced of the contrary. A populace which could dare to mock at the divine Caesar, the guest of their city, with such gross audacity, must be made to smart under the power of Rome and its ruler. The deposed magistrate had lost his place for the absurd measures he had proposed, and Aristides was in danger of following in his footsteps.

"By no means," the high-priest said, with calm dignity. "The Greek, whom I would propose, is a worthy and determined man. Now, Zminis the Egyptian, the right hand of the man who has been turned out, is, it must be said, a wretch without ruth or conscience."

But here the discussion was interrupted. Melissa, whose ears had tingled as she listened, had started with horror as she heard that Zminis, the in former, was to be appointed to the command of the whole watch of the city. If this should happen, her brothers and father were certainly lost. This must be prevented. As the high-priest ceased speaking, she laid her hand on Caesar's, and, when he looked up at her in surprise, she whispered to him, so low and so quickly that hardly any one observed it "Not Zminis; he is our mortal enemy!"

Caracalla scarcely glanced at the face of the daring girl, but he saw how pale she had turned. The delicate color in her cheeks, and the dimple he had seen while she stroked the lion had struck him as particularly fascinating. This had helped to make her so like the Roxana on the gem, and the change in her roused his pity. She must smile again; and so, accustomed as he was to visit his annoyance on others, he angrily exclaimed to his "Friends":

"Can I be everywhere at once? Can not the simplest matter be settled without me? It was the praetorian prefect's business to report to me concerning the two candidates, if you could not agree; but I have not seen him since last evening. The man who has to be sought when I need him neglects his duty! Macrinus usually knows his. Does any one know what has detained him?"

The question was asked in an angry, nay, in an ominous tone, but the praetorian prefect was a powerful personage, whose importance made him almost invulnerable. Yet the praetor Lucius Priscillianus was ready with an answer. He was the most malicious and ill-natured scandal-monger at court; and he hated the prefect, for he himself had coveted the post, which was the highest in the state next to Caesar's. He had always some slaves set to spy upon Macrinus, and he now said, with a contemptuous shrug:

"It is a marvel to me that so zealous a man—though he is already beginning to break down under his heavy duties—should be so late. However, he here spends his evenings and nights in special occupations, which must of course be far from beneficial to the health and peace of mind which his office demands."

"What can those be?" asked Caracalla; but the praetor added without a pause:

"Merciful gods! Who would not crave to glance into the future?"

"And it is that which makes him late?" said Caesar, with more curiosity than anger.

"Hardly by broad daylight," replied Priscillianus. "The spirits he would fain evoke shun the light of day, it is said. But he may be weary with late watching and painful agitations."

"Then he calls up spirits at night?"

"Undoubtedly, great Caesar. But, in this capital of philosophy, spirits are illogical it would seem. How can Macrinus interpret the prophecy that he, who is already on the highest step attainable to us lower mortals, shall rise yet higher?"

"We will ask him," said Caesar, indifferently. "But you—guard your tongue. It has already cost some men their heads, whom I would gladly see yet among the living. Wishes can not be punished. Who does not wish to stand on the step next above his own? You, my friend, would like that of Macrinus.—But deeds! You know me! I am safe from them, so long as each of you so sincerely grudges his neighbor every promotion. You, my Lucius, have again proved how keen your sight is, and, if it were not too great an honor for this refractory city to have a Roman in the toga praetexta at the head of its administration, I should like to make you the guardian of the peace here. You see me," he went on, "in an elated mood to-day.—Cilo, you know this gem which came to me from my father. Look at it, and at this maiden.—Come nearer, priest of the divine Alexander; and you too consider the marvel, Theocritus, Antigonus, Dio, Pandion, Paulinus. Compare the face of the female figure with this girl by my side. The master carved this Roxana long before she was born. You are surprised? As Alexander's soul dwells in me, so she is Roxana, restored to life. It has been proved by irrefragable evidence in the presence of Philostratus."

The priest of Alexander here exclaimed, in a tone of firm conviction:

"A marvel indeed! We bow down to the noble vessel of the soul of Alexander. I, the priest of that hero, attest that great Caesar has found that in which Roxana's soul now exists." And as he spoke he pressed his hand to his heart, bowing low before Caesar; the rest

imitated his example. Even Julius Paulinus, the satirist, followed the Roman priest's lead; but he whispered in the ear of Cassius Dio "Alexander's soul was inquisitive, and wanted to see how it could live in the body which, of all mortal tenements on earth, least resembles his own."

A mocking word was on the ex-consul's lips as to the amiable frame of mind which had so suddenly come over Caesar; but he preferred to watch and listen, as Caracalla beckoned Theocritus to him and begged him to give up the appointment of Zminis, though, as a rule, he indulged the favorite's every whim. He could not bear, he said, to intrust the defense of his own person and of the city of Alexander to an Egyptian, so long as a Greek could be found capable of the duty. He proposed presently to have the two candidates brought before him, and to decide between them in the presence of the prefect of the praetorians. Then, turning to those of his captains who stood around him, he said:

"Greet my soldiers from me. I could not show myself to them yesterday. I saw just now, with deep regret, how the rain has drenched them in this luxurious city. I will no longer endure it. The praetorians and the Macedonian legion shall be housed in quarters of which they will tell wonders for a long time to come. I would rather see them sleeping in white wool and eating off silver than these vile traders. Tell them that."

He was here interrupted, for Epagathos announced a deputation from the Museum, and, at the same time, the painter Alexander, who had been brought from prison. At this Caracalla exclaimed with disgust:

"Spare me the hair-splitting logicians!—Do you, Philostratus, receive them in my name. If they make any impudent demands, you may tell them my opinion of them and their Museum. Go, but come back quickly. Bring in the painter. I will speak with him alone.—You, my friends, withdraw with our idiologos, the priest of Alexander, who is well known here, and visit the city. I shall not require you at present."

The whole troop hastened to obey. Caracalla now turned to Melissa once more, and his eye brightened as he again discerned the dimple in her cheeks, which had recovered their roses. Her imploring eyes met his, and the happy expectation of seeing her brother lent them a light which brought joy to the friendless sovereign. During his last speech he had looked at her from time to time; but in the presence of so many strangers she had avoided meeting his gaze. Now she thought that she might freely show him that his favor was a happiness to her. Her soul, as Roxana, must of course feel drawn to his; in that he firmly believed. Her prayer and sacrifice for him sufficiently proved it—as he told himself once more.

When Alexander was brought in, it did not anger him to see that the brother, who held out his arms to Melissa in his habitual eager way, had



to be reminded by her of the imperial presence. Every homage was due to this fair being, and he was, besides, much struck by Alexander's splendid appearance. It was long since any youthful figure had so vividly reminded him of the marble statues of the great Athenian masters. Melissa's brother stood before him, the very embodiment of the ideal of Greek strength and manly beauty. His mantle had been taken from him in prison, and he wore only the short chiton, which also left bare his powerful but softly modeled arms. He had been allowed no time to arrange and anoint his hair, and the light-brown curls were tossed in disorderly abundance about his shapely head. This favorite of the gods appeared in Caesar's eyes as an Olympic victor, who had come to claim the wreath with all the traces of the struggle upon him.

No sign of fear, either of Caesar or his lion, marred this impression. His bow, as he approached the potentate, was neither abject nor awkward, and Caesar felt bitter wrath at the thought that this splendid youth, of all men, should have selected him as the butt of his irony. He would have regarded it as a peculiar gift of fortune if this man—such a brother of such a sister—could but love him, and, with the eye of an artist, discern in the despot the great qualities which, in spite of his many crimes, he believed he could detect in himself. And he hoped, with an admixture of anxiety such as he had never known before, that the painter's demeanor would be such as should allow him to show mercy.

When Alexander besought him with a trustful mien to consider his youth, and the Alexandrian manners which he had inherited both from his parents and his grandparents, if indeed his tongue had wagged too boldly in speaking of the all-powerful Caesar, and to remember the fable of the lion and the mouse, the scowl he had put on to impress the youth with his awfulness and power vanished from Caesar's brow. The idea that this great artist, whose sharp eye could so surely distinguish the hideous from the beautiful, should regard him as ill-favored, was odious to him. He had listened to him in silence; but suddenly he inquired of Alexander whether it was indeed he, whom he had never injured, who had written the horrible epigram nailed with the rope to the door of the Serapeum and when the painter emphatically denied it, Caesar breathed as though a burden had fallen from his soul. He nevertheless insisted on hearing from the youth's own lips what it was that he had actually dared to say. After some hesitation, during which Melissa besought Caesar in vain to spare her and her brother this confession, Alexander exclaimed:

"Then the hunted creature must walk into the net, and, unless your clemency interferes, on to death! What I said referred partly to the wonderful strength that you, my lord, have so often displayed in the field and in the circus; and also to another thing, which I myself now truly repent of having alluded to. It is said that my lord killed his brother."

"That—ah! that was it!" said Caesar, and his face, involuntarily this time, grew dark.

"Yes, my lord," Alexander went on, breathing hard. "To deny it would be to add a second crime to the former one, and I am one of those who would rather jump into cold water both feet at once, when it has to be done. All the world knows what your strength is; and I said that it was greater than that of Father Zeus; for that he had cast his son Hephaestus only on the earth, and your strong fist had cast your brother through the earth into the depths of Hades. That was all. I have not added nor concealed anything."

Melissa had listened in terror to this bold confession. Papinian, the brave praetorian prefect, one of the most learned lawyers of his time, had incurred Caracalla's fury by refusing to say that the murder of Geta was not without excuse; and his noble answer, that it was easier to commit fratricide than to defend it, cost him his life.

So long as Caesar had been kind to her, Melissa had felt repelled by him; but now, when he was angry, she was once more attracted to him.

As the wounds of a murdered man are said to bleed afresh when the murderer approaches, Caracalla's irritable soul was wont to break out in a frenzy of rage when any one was so rash as to allude to this, his foulest crime. This reference to his brother's death had as usual stirred his wrath, but he controlled it; for as a torrent of rain extinguishes the fire which a lightning-flash has kindled, the homage to his strength, in Alexander's satire, had modified his indignation. The irony which made the artist's contemptuous words truly witty, would not have escaped Caracalla's notice if they had applied to any one else; but he either did not feel it, or would not remark it, for the sake of leaving Melissa in the belief that his physical strength was really wonderful. Besides, he thus could indulge his wish to avoid pronouncing sentence of death on this youth; he only measured him with a severe eye, and said in threatening tones, to repay mockery in kind and to remind the criminal of the fate imperial clemency should spare him:

"I might be tempted to try my strength on you, but that it is worse to try a fall with a vapping wag, the sport of the winds, than with the son of Caesar. And if I do not condescend to the struggle, it is because you are too light for such an arm as this." And as he spoke he boastfully grasped the muscles which constant practice had made thick and firm. "But my hand reaches far. Every man-at-arms is one of its fingers, and there are thousands of them. You have made acquaintance already, I fancy, with those which clutched you."

"Not so," replied Alexander, with a faint smile, as he bowed humbly. "I should not dare resist your great strength, but the watch-dogs of the law tried in vain to track me. I gave myself up."

"Of your own accord?"

"To procure my father's release, as he had been put in prison."

"Most magnanimous!" said Caesar, ironically. "Such a deed sounds well, but is apt to cost a man his life. You seem to have overlooked that."  
"No, great Caesar; I expected to die."

"Then you are a philosopher, a contemner of life."

"Neither. I value life above all else; for, if it is taken from me, there is an end of enjoying its best gifts."

"Best gifts!" echoed Caesar. "I should like to know which you honor with the epithet."

"Love and art."

"Indeed?" said Caracalla, with a swift glance at Melissa. Then, in an altered voice, he added, "And revenge?"

"That," said the artist, boldly, "is a pleasure I have not yet tasted. No one ever did me a real injury till the villain Zminis robbed my guiltless father of his liberty; and he is not worthy to do such mischief, as a finger of your imperial hand."

At this, Caesar looked at him suspiciously, and said in stern tones:

"But you have now the opportunity of trying the fine flavor of vengeance. If I were timid—since the Egyptian acted only as my instrument—I should have cause to protect myself against you."

"By no means," said the painter, with an engaging smile, "it lies in your power to do me the greatest benefit. Do it, Caesar! It would be a joy to me to show that, though I have been reckless beyond measure, I am nevertheless a grateful man."

"Grateful?" repeated Caracalla, with a cruel laugh. Then he rose slowly, and looked keenly at Alexander, exclaiming:

"I should almost like to try you."

"And I will answer for it that you will never regret it!" Melissa put in. "Greatly as he has erred, he is worthy of your clemency."

"Is he?" said Caesar, looking down at her kindly. "What Roxana's soul affirms by those rosy lips I can not but believe."

Then again he paused, studying Alexander with a searching eye, and added:

"You think me strong; but you will change that opinion—which I value—if I forgive you like a poor-spirited girl. You are in my power. You

risked your life. If I give it you, I must have a gift in return, that I may not be cheated.”

”Set my father free, and he will do whatever you may require of him,” Melissa broke out. But Caracalla stopped her, saying: ”No one makes conditions with Caesar. Stand back, girl.”

Melissa hung her head and obeyed; but she stood watching the eager discussion between these two dissimilar men, at first with anxiety and then with surprise.

Alexander seemed to resist Caesar’s demands; but presently the despot must have proposed something which pleased the artist, for Melissa heard the low, musical laugh which had often cheered her in moments of sadness. Then the conversation was more serious, and Caracalla said, so loud that Melissa could hear him:

”Do not forget to whom you speak. If my word is not enough, you can go back to prison.” Then again she trembled for her brother; but some soft word of his mollified the fury of the terrible man, who was never the same for two minutes together. The lion, too, which lay unchained by his master’s seat, gave her a fright now and then; for if Caesar raised his voice in anger, he growled and stood up.

How fearful were this beast and his lord! Rather would she spend her whole life on a ship’s deck, tossed to and fro by the surges, than share this man’s fate. And yet there was in him something which attracted her; nay, and it nettled her that he should forget her presence.

At last Alexander humbly asked Caracalla whether he might not tell Melissa to what he had pledged his word.

”That shall be my business,” replied Caesar. ”You think that a mere girl is a better witness than none at all. Perhaps you are right. Then let it be understood: whatever you may have to report to me, my wrath shall not turn against you. This fellow—why should you not be told, child?—is going into the town to collect all the jests and witty epigrams which have been uttered in my honor.”

”Alexander!” cried Melissa, clasping her hands and turning pale with horror. But Caracalla laughed to himself, and went on cheerfully:

”Yes, it is dangerous work, no doubt; and for that reason I pledged my word as Caesar not to require him to pay for the sins of others. On the contrary, he is free, if the posy he culls for me is sufficient.”

”Ay,” said Alexander, on whom his sister’s white face and warning looks were having effect. ”But you made me another promise on which I lay great stress. You will not compel me to tell you, nor try to discover through any other man, who may have spoken or written any particular

satire.”

”Enough!” said Caracalla, impatiently; but Alexander was not to be checked. He went on vehemently: ”I have not forgotten that you said conditions were not to be made with Caesar; but, in spite of my impotence, I maintain the right of returning to my prison and there awaiting my doom, unless you once more assure me, in this girl’s presence, that you will neither inquire as to the names of the authors of any gibes I may happen to have heard, nor compel me by any means whatever to give up the names of the writers of epigrams. Why should I not satisfy your curiosity and your relish of a sharp jest? But rather than do the smallest thing which might savor of treachery—ten times rather the axe or the gallows!”

And Caracalla replied with a dark frown, loudly and briefly:

”I promise.”

”And if your rage is too much for you?” wailed Melissa, raising her hands in entreaty; but the despot replied, sternly:

”There is no passion which can betray Caesar into perjury.”

At this moment Philostratus came in again, with Epagathos, who announced the praetorian prefect. Melissa, encouraged by the presence of her kind protector, went on:

But, great Caesar, you will release my father and my other brother?”

”Perhaps,” replied Caracalla. ”First we will see how this one carries out his task.”

”You will be satisfied, my lord,” said the young man, looking quite happy again, for he was delighted at the prospect of saying audacious things to the face of the tyrant whom all were bent on flattering, and holding up the mirror to him without, as he firmly believed, bringing any danger on himself or others.

He bowed to go. Melissa did the same, saying, as airily as though she were free to come and go here:

”Accept my thanks, great Caesar. Oh, how fervently will I pray for you all my life, if only you show mercy to my father and brothers!”

”That means that you are leaving me?” asked Caracalla.

”How can it be otherwise?” said Melissa, timidly. ”I am but a girl, and the men whom you expect—”

"But when they are gone?" Caesar insisted.

"Even then you can not want me," she murmured.

"You mean," said Caracalla, bitterly, "that you are afraid to come back. You mean that you would rather keep out of the way of the man you prayed for, so long as he is well. And if the pain which first aroused your sympathy attacks him again, even then will you leave the irascible sovereign to himself or the care of the gods?"

"Not so, not so," said Melissa, humbly, looking into his eyes with an expression that pierced him to the heart, so that he added, with gentle entreaty:

"Then show that you are she whom I believe you to be. I do not compel you. Go whither you will, stay away even if I send for you; but"—and here his brow clouded again—"why should I try to be merciful to her from whom I looked for sympathy and kindness, when she flees from me like the rest?"

"O my lord!" Melissa sighed distressfully. "Go!" Caesar went on. "I do not need you."

"No, no," the girl cried, in great trouble. "Call me, and I will come. Only shelter me from the others, and from their looks of scorn; only—O immortal gods!—If you need me, I will serve you, and willingly, with all my heart. But if you really care for me, if you desire my presence, why let me suffer the worst?" Here a sudden flood of tears choked her utterance. A smile of triumph passed over Caesar's features, and drawing Melissa's hands away from her tearful face, he said, kindly:

"Alexander's soul pines for Roxana's; that is what makes your presence so dear to me. Never shall you have cause to rue coming at my call. I swear it by the manes of my divine father—you, Philostratus, are witness."

The philosopher, who thought he knew Caracalla, gave a sigh of relief; and Alexander gladly reflected that the danger he had feared for his sister was averted. This craze about Roxana, of which Caracalla had just now spoken to him as a certain fact, he regarded as a monstrous illusion of this strange man's, which would, however, be a better safeguard for Melissa than pledges and oaths.

He clasped her hand, and said with cheerful confidence: "Only send for her when you are ill, my lord, as long as you remain here. I know from your own lips that there is no passion which can betray Caesar into perjury. Will you permit her to come with me for the present?"

"No," said Caracalla, sharply, and he bade him go about the business he had in hand. Then, turning to Philostratus, he begged him to conduct

Melissa to Euryale, the high-priest's noble wife, for she had been a kind and never-forgotten friend of his mother's.

The philosopher gladly escorted the young girl to the matron, who had long been anxiously awaiting her return.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

The statue of Serapis, a figure of colossal size, carved by the master-hand of Bryaxis, out of ivory overlaid with gold, sat enthroned in the inner chamber of the great Temple of Serapis, with the kalathos crowning his bearded face, and the three-headed Cerberus at his feet, gazing down in supreme silence on the scene around. He did not lack for pious votaries and enthusiastic admirers, for, so long as Caesar was his guest, the curtain was withdrawn which usually hid his majestic form from their eyes. But his most devoted worshipers thought that the god's noble, benevolent, grave countenance had a wrathful look; for, though nothing had been altered in this, the finest pillared hall in the world; though the beautiful pictures in relief on the walls and ceiling, the statues and altars of marble, bronze, and precious metals between the columns, and the costly mosaic-work of many colors which decked the floor in regular patterns, were the same as of yore, this splendid pavement was trodden to-day by thousands of feet which had no concern with the service of the god.

Before Caesar's visit, solemn silence had ever reigned in this worthy home of the deity, fragrant with the scarcely visible fumes of kyphi; and the worshipers gathered without a sound round the foot of his statue, and before the numerous altars and the smaller images of the divinities allied to him or the votive tablets recording the gifts and services instituted in honor of Serapis by pious kings or citizens. On feast-days, and during daily worship, the chant of priestly choirs might be heard, or the murmur of prayer; and the eye might watch the stolistes who crowned the statues with flowers and ribbons, as required by the ritual, or the processions of priests in their various rank. Carrying sacred relics and figures of the gods on trays or boats, with emblematic standards, scepters, and cymbals, they moved about the sacred precinct in prescribed order, and most of them fulfilled their duties with devotion and edification.

But Caesar's presence seemed to have banished these solemn feelings. From morning till night the great temple swarmed with visitors, but their appearance and demeanor were more befitting the market-place or public bath than the sanctuary. It was now no more than the anteroom to Caesar's audience-chamber, and thronged with Roman senators, legates, tribunes, and other men of rank, and the clients and "friends" of Caesar,

mingled with soldiers of inferior grades, scribes, freedmen, and slaves, who had followed in Caracalla's train. There were, too, many Alexandrians who expected to gain some benefit, promotion, or distinction through the emperor's favorites. Most of these kept close to his friends and intimates, to make what profit they could out of them. Some were corn and wine dealers, or armorers, who wished to obtain contracts for supplying the army; others were usurers, who had money to lend on the costly objects which warriors often acquired as booty; and here, as everywhere, bedizened and painted women were crowding round the free-handed strangers. There were Magians, astrologers, and magicians by the dozen, who considered this sacred spot the most suitable place in which to offer their services to the Romans, always inquisitive for signs and charms. They knew how highly Egyptian magic was esteemed throughout the empire; though their arts were in fact prohibited, each outdid the other in urgency, and not less in a style of dress which should excite curiosity and expectancy.

Serapion held aloof. Excepting that he wore a beard and robe, his appearance even had nothing in common with them; and his talar was not like theirs, embroidered with hieroglyphics, tongues, and flames, but of plain white stuff, which gave him the aspect of a learned and priestly sage.

As Alexander, on his way through the temple to fulfill Caesar's commission, went past the Magian, Castor, his supple accomplice, stole up behind a statue, and, when the artist disappeared in the crowd, whispered to his master:

"The rascally painter is at liberty!"

"Till further notice!" was the reply, and Serapion was about to give his satellite some instructions, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Zminis said in a low voice:

"I am glad to have found you here. Accusations are multiplying against you, my friend; and though I have kept my eyes shut till now, that cannot last much longer."

"Let us hope you are mistaken," replied the Magian, firmly. And then he went on in a hurried whisper: "I know what your ambition is, and my support may be of use to you. But we must not be seen together. We will meet again in the instrument-room, to the left of the first stairs up to the observatory. You will find me there."

"At once, then," said the other. "I am to be in Caesar's presence in a quarter of an hour."

The Magian, as being one of the most skillful makers of astronomical instruments, and attached to the sanctuary, had a key of the room he had designated. Zminis found him there, and their business was quickly



settled. They knew each other well, and each knew things of the other which inspired them with mutual fear. However, as time pressed, they set aside all useless antagonisms, to unite against the common foe.

The Magian knew already that Zminis had been named to Caesar as a possible successor to the chief of the night-watch, and that he had a powerful rival. By the help of the Syrian, whose ventriloquism was so perfect that he never failed to produce the illusion that his feigned voice proceeded from any desired person or thing, Serapion had enmeshed the praetorian prefect, the greatest magnate in the empire next to Caesar himself, and in the course of the past night had gained a firm hold over him.

Macrinus, a man of humble birth, who owed his promotion to Severus, the father of Caracalla, had, the day before, been praying in the Pantheon to the statue of his deceased patron. A voice had proceeded from the image, telling him that the divine Severus needed him for a great work. A pious seer was charged to tell him more exactly what this was; and he would meet him if he went at about sunset to the shrine of Isis, and called three times on the name of Severus before the altar of the goddess.

The Syrian ventriloquist had, by Serapion's orders, hidden behind a pillar and spoken to the prefect from the statue; and Macrinus had, of course, obeyed his instructions. He had met the Magian in the Temple of Isis, and what he had seen, heard, and felt during the night had so deeply affected him that he had promised to revisit Serapion the next evening. What means he had used to enslave so powerful a man the Magian did not tell his ally; but he declared that Macrinus was as wax in his hands, and he came to an agreement with the Egyptian that if he, Serapion, should bring about the promotion for which Zminis sighed, Zminis, on his part, should give him a free hand, and commend his arts to Caesar.

It needed but a few minutes to conclude this compact; but then the Magian proceeded to insist that Alexander's father and brother should be made away with.

"Impossible," replied Zminis. "I should be only too glad to wring the necks of the whole brood; but, as it is, I am represented to Caesar as too stern and ruthless. And a pretty little slut, old Heron's daughter, has entangled him in her toils."

"No," said Serapion, positively. "I have seen the girl, and she is as innocent as a child. But I know the force of contrast: when depravity meets purity—"

"Come, no philosophizing!" interrupted the other. "We have better things to attend to, and one or the other may turn to your advantage."

And he told him that Caesar, whose whim it was to spare Alexander's life,

regarded Melissa as an incarnation of Roxana.

"That is worth considering," said the Magian, stroking his beard meditatively; then he suddenly exclaimed:

"By the law, as you know, all the relatives of a state criminal are sent to the quarries or the mines. Dispatch Heron and his philosopher son forthwith. Whither?—that is your concern; only, for the next few days they must be out of reach."

"Good!" said the Egyptian, and an odious smile overspread his thin brown face. "They may go as galley-slaves and row themselves to the Sardinian mines. A good idea!"

"I have even better ideas than that to serve a friend," replied Serapion. "Only get the philosopher out of the way. If Caesar lends an ear to his ready tongue, I shall never see you guardian of the peace. The painter is less dangerous."

"He shall share their fate," cried the spy, and he licked his thick lips as if tasting some dainty morsel. He waved an adieu to the Magian, and hastened back to the great hall. There he strictly instructed one of his subordinates to take care that the gem-cutter and his son Philip found places on board a galley bound for Sardinia.

At the great door he again met Serapion, with the Syrian at his heels, and the Magian said:

"My friend here has just seen a clay figure, molded by some practiced hand. It represents Caesar as a defiant warrior, but in the shape of a deformed dwarf. It is hideously like him; you can see it at the Elephant tavern."

The Egyptian pressed his hand, with an eager "That will serve," and hastily went out.

Two hours slipped by, and Zminis was still waiting in Caesar's anteroom. The Greek, Aristides, shared his fate, the captain hitherto of the armed guard; while Zminis had been the head of the spies, intrusted with communicating written reports to the chief of the night-watch. The Greek's noble, soldierly figure looked strikingly fine by the slovenly, lank frame of the tall Egyptian. They both knew that within an hour or so one would be supreme over the other; but of this they thought it best to say nothing. Zminis, as was his custom when he wished to assume an appearance of respect which he did not feel, was alternately abject and pressingly confidential; while Aristides calmly accepted his hypocritical servility, and answered it with dignified condescension. Nor had they any lack of subjects, for their interests were the same, and they both had the satisfaction of reflecting what injury must ensue to public safety through their long and useless detention here.

But when two full hours had elapsed without their being bidden to Caesar's presence, or taken any notice of by their supporters, Zminis grew wroth, and the Greek frowned in displeasure. Meanwhile the anteroom was every moment more crowded, and neither chose to give vent to his anger. Still, when the door to the inner chambers was opened for a moment, and loud laughter and the ring of wine-cups fell on their ears, Aristides shrugged his shoulders, and the Egyptian's eyes showed an ominous white ring glaring out of his brown face.

Caracalla had meanwhile received the praetorian prefect; he had forgiven him his long delay, when Macrinus, of his own accord, had told him of the wonderful things Serapion had made known to him. The prefect's son, too, had been invited to the banquet of Seleukus; and when Caracalla heard from him and others of the splendor of the feast, he had begun to feel hungry. Even with regard to food, Caesar acted only on the impulse of the moment; and though, in the field, he would, to please his soldiers, be content with a morsel of bread and a little porridge, at home he highly appreciated the pleasures of the table. Whenever he gave the word, an abundant meal must at once be ready. It was all the same to him what was kept waiting or postponed, so long as something to his taste was set before him. Macrinus, indeed, humbly reminded him that the guardians of the peace were awaiting him; but he only waved his hand with contempt, and proceeded to the dining-room, which was soon filled with a large number of guests. Within a few minutes the first dish was set before his couch, and, as plenty of good stories were told, and an admirable band of flute-playing and singing girls filled up the pauses in the conversation, he enjoyed his meal. In spite, too, of the warning which Galenus had impressed on his Roman physician, he drank freely of the fine wine which had been brought out for him from the airy lofts of the Serapeum, and those about him were surprised at their master's unwonted good spirits.

He was especially gracious to the high-priest, whom he bade to a place by his side; and he even accepted his arm as a support, when, the meal being over, they returned to the tablinum.

'There he flung himself on a couch, with a burning head, and began feeding the lion, without paying any heed to his company. It was a pleasure to him to see the huge brute rend a young lamb. When the remains of this introductory morsel had been removed and the pavement washed, he gave the "Sword of Persia" pieces of raw flesh, teasing the beast by snatching the daintiest bits out of his mouth, and then offering them to him again, till the satiated brute stretched himself yawning at his feet. During this entertainment, he had a letter read to him from the senate, and dictated a reply to a secretary. His eyes twinkled with a tipsy leer in his flushed face, and yet he was perfectly competent; and his instructions to the senate, though imperious indeed, were neither more nor less rational than in his soberest moods.

Then, after washing his hands in a golden basin, he acted on Macrinus's suggestion, and the two candidates who had so long been waiting were at last admitted. The prefect of the praetorians had, by the Magian's desire, recommended the Egyptian; but Caesar wished to see for himself, and then to decide. Both the applicants had received hints from their supporters: the Egyptian, to moderate his rigor; the Greek, to express himself in the severest terms. And this was made easy for him, for the annoyance which had been pent up during his three hours' waiting was sufficient to lend his handsome face a stern look. Zminis strove to appear mild by assuming servile humility; but this so ill became his cunning features that Caracalla saw with secret satisfaction that he could accede to Melissa's wishes, and confirm the choice of the high-priest, in whose god he had placed his hopes.

Still, his own safety was more precious to him than the wishes of any living mortal; so he began by pouring out, on both, the vials of his wrath at the bad management of the town. Their blundering tools had not even succeeded in capturing the most guileless of men, the painter Alexander. The report that the men-at-arms had seized him had been a fabrication to deceive, for the artist had given himself up. Nor had he as yet heard of any other traitor whom they had succeeded in laying hands on, though the town was flooded with insolent epigrams directed against the imperial person. And, as he spoke, he glared with fury at the two candidates before him.

The Greek bowed his head in silence, as if conscious of his shortcomings; the Egyptian's eyes flashed, and, with an amazingly low bend of his supple spine, he announced that, more than three hours since, he had discovered a most abominable caricature in clay, representing Caesar as a soldier in a horrible pygmy form.

"And the perpetrator," snarled Caracalla, listening with a scowl for the reply.

Zminis explained that great Caesar himself had commanded his attendance just as he hoped to find the traces of the criminal, and that, while he was waiting, more than three precious hours had been lost. At this Caracalla broke out in a fury:

"Catch the villain! And let me see his insolent rubbish. Where are your eyes? You bungling louts ought to protect me against the foul brood that peoples this city, and their venomous jests. Past grievances are forgotten. Set the painter's father and brother at liberty. They have had a warning. Now I want something new. Something new, I say; and, above all, let me see the ringleaders in chains; the man who nailed up the rope, and the caricaturists. We must have them, to serve as an example to the others."

Aristides thought that the moment had now come for displaying his severity, and he respectfully but decidedly represented to Caesar that he

would advise that the gem-cutter and his son should be kept in custody. They were well-known persons, and too great clemency would only aggravate the virulence of audacious tongues. The painter was free, and if his relatives were also let out of prison, there was nothing to prevent their going off to the other end of the world. Alexandria was a seaport, and a ship would carry off the criminals before a man could turn round.

At this the emperor wrathfully asked him whether his opinion had been invited; and the cunning Egyptian said to himself that Caracalla was anxious to spare the father and his sons for the daughter's sake. And yet Caesar would surely wish to keep them in safety, to have some hold over the girl; so he lied with a bold face, affirming that, in obedience to the law of the land, he had removed Heron and Philip, at any rate for the moment, beyond the reach of Caesar's mercy. They had in the course of the night been placed on board a galley and were now on the way to Sardinia. But a swift vessel should presently be sent to overtake it and bring them back.

And the informer was right, for Caesar's countenance brightened. He did, indeed, blame the Egyptian's overhasty action; but he gave no orders for following up the galley.

Then, after reflecting for a short time, he said:

"I do not find in either of you what I require; but at a pinch we are fain to eat moldy bread, so I must need choose between you two. The one who first brings me that clay figure, and the man who modeled it, in chains and bonds, shall be appointed chief of the night-watch."

Meanwhile Alexander had entered the room. As soon as Caracalla saw him, he beckoned to him, and the artist informed him that he had made good use of his time and had much to communicate. Then he humbly inquired as to the clay figure of which Caesar was speaking, and Caracalla referred him to Zminis. The Egyptian repeated what the Magian had told him.

Alexander listened calmly; but when Zminis ceased speaking, the artist took a deep breath, drew himself up, and pointing a contemptuous finger at the spy, as if his presence poisoned the air, he said: "It is that fellow's fault, great Caesar, if the citizens of my native town dare commit such crimes. He torments and persecutes them in your name. How many a felony has been committed here, merely to scoff at him and his creatures, and to keep them on the alert! We are a light-headed race. Like children, we love to do the forbidden thing, so long as it is no stain on our honor. But that wretch treats all laughter and the most innocent fun as a crime, or so interprets it that it seems so. From this malignant delight in the woes of others, and in the hope of rising higher in office, that wicked man has brought misery on hundreds. It has all been done in thy great name, O Caesar! No man has raised you up more foes than this wretch, who undermines your security instead of protecting it."

Here Zminis, whose swarthy face had become of ashy paleness, broke out in a hoarse tone: "I will teach you, and the whole rabble of traitors at your back—"

But Caesar wrathfully commanded him to be silent, and Alexander quietly went on: "You can threaten, and you will array all your slanderous arts against us, I know you. But here sits a sovereign who protects the innocent—and I and mine are innocent. He will set his heel on your head when he knows you—the curse of this city—for the adder that you are! He is deceiving you now in small things, great Caesar, and later he will deceive you in greater ones. Listen now how he has lied to you. He says he discovered a caricature of your illustrious person in the guise of a soldier. Why, then, did he not bring it away from the place where it could only excite disaffection, and might even mislead those who should see it into the belief that your noble person was that of a dwarf? The answer is self-evident. He left it to betray others into further mockery, to bring them to ruin."

Caesar had listened with approval, and now sternly asked the Egyptian:

"Did you see the image?"

"In the Elephant tavern!" yelled the man.

But Alexander shook his head doubtfully, and begged permission to ask the Egyptian a question. This was granted, and the artist inquired whether the soldier stood alone.

"So far as I remember, yes," replied Zminis, almost beside himself.

"Then your memory is as false as your soul!" Alexander shouted in his face, "for there was another figure by the soldier's side. The clay, still wet, clung to the same board as the figure of the soldier, modeled by the same hand. No, no, my crafty fellow, you will not catch the workman; for, being warned, he is already on the high-seas."

"It is false!" shrieked Zminis.

"That remains to be proved," said Alexander, scornfully.—"Allow me now, great Caesar, to show you the figures. They have been brought by my orders, and are in the anteroom-carefully covered up, of course, for the fewer the persons who see them the better."

Caracalla nodded his consent, and Alexander hurried away; the despot heaping abuse on Zminis, and demanding why he had not at once had the images removed. The Egyptian now confessed that he had only heard of the caricature from a friend, and declared that if he had seen it he should have destroyed it on the spot. Macrinus here tried to excuse the spy, by remarking that this zealous official had only tried to set his services

in a favorable light. The falsehood could not be approved, but was excusable. But he had scarcely finished speaking, when his opponent, the praetor, Lucius Priscillianus, observed, with a gravity he but rarely displayed:

"I should have thought that it was the first duty of the man who ought to be Caesar's mainstay and representative here, to let his sovereign hear nothing but the undistorted truth. Nothing, it seems to me, can be less excusable than a lie told to divine Caesar's face!"

A few courtiers, who were out of the prefect's favor, as well as the high-priest of Serapis, agreed with the speaker. Caracalla, however, paid no heed to them, but sat with his eyes fixed on the door, deeply wounded in his vanity by the mere existence of such a caricature.

He had not long to wait. But when the wrapper was taken off the clay figures, he uttered a low snarl, and his flushed face turned pale. Sounds of indignation broke from the bystanders; the blood rose to his cheeks again, and, shaking his fist, he muttered unintelligible threats, while his eyes wandered again and again to the caricatures. They attracted his attention more than all else, and as in an April day the sky is alternately dark and bright, so red and white alternated in his face. Then, while Alexander replied to a few questions, and assured him that the host of the "Elephant" had been very angry, and had gladly handed them over to him to be destroyed, Caracalla seemed to become accustomed to them, for he gazed at them more calmly, and tried to affect indifference. He inquired of Philostratus, as though he wished to be informed, whether he did not think that the artist who had modeled these figures must be a very clever fellow; and when the philosopher assented conditionally, he declared that he saw some resemblance to himself—in the features of the apple-dealer. And then he pointed to his own straight legs, only slightly disfigured by an injury to the ankle, to show how shamefully unfair it was to compare them with the lower limbs of a misshapen dwarf. Finally, the figure of the apple-dealer—a hideous pygmy form, with the head of an old man, like enough to his own—roused his curiosity. What was the point of this image? What peculiarity was it intended to satirize? The basket which hung about the neck of the figure was full of fruit, and the object he held in his hand might be an apple, or might be anything else.

With eager and constrained cheerfulness, he inquired the opinion of his "friends," treating as sheer flattery a suggestion from his favorite, Theocritus, that this was not an apple-dealer, but a human figure, who, though but a dwarf in comparison with the gods, nevertheless endowed the world with the gifts of the immortals.

Alexander and Philostratus could offer no explanation; but when the proconsul, Julius Paulinus, observed that the figure was offering the apples for money, as Caesar offered the Roman citizenship to the provincials, he knew for what, Caracalla nodded agreement.

He then provisionally appointed Aristides to the coveted office. The Egyptian should be informed as to his fate. When the prefect was about to remove the figures, Caesar hastily forbade it, and ordered the bystanders to withdraw. Alexander alone was commanded to remain. As soon as they were together, Caesar sprang up and vehemently demanded to know what news he had brought. But the young man hesitated to begin his report. Caracalla, of his own accord, pledged his word once more to keep his oath, and then Alexander assured him that he knew no more than Caesar who were the authors of the epigrams which he had picked up here and there; and, though the satire they contained was venomous in some cases, still he, the sovereign of the world, stood so high that he could laugh them to scorn, as Socrates had laughed when Aristophanes placed him on the stage.

Caesar declared that he scorned these flies, but that their buzzing annoyed him.

Alexander rejoiced at this, and only expressed his regret that most of the epigrams he had collected turned on the death of Caesar's brother Geta. He knew now that it was rash to condemn a deed which—

Here Caesar interrupted him, for he could not long remain quiet, saying sternly:

"The deed was needful, not for me, but for the empire, which is dearer to me than father, mother, or a hundred brothers, and a thousand times dearer than men's opinions. Let me hear in what form the witty natives of this city express their disapproval."

This sounded so dignified and gracious that Alexander ventured to repeat a distich which he had heard at the public baths, whither he had first directed his steps. It did not, however, refer to the murder of Geta, but to the mantle-like garment to which Caesar owed the nickname of Caracalla. It ran thus:

"Why should my lord Caracalla affect a garment so ample?  
'Tis that the deeds are many of evil he needs to conceal."

At this Caesar laughed, saying: "Who is there that has nothing to conceal? The lines are not amiss. Hand me your tablets; if the others are no worse—"

"But they are," Alexander exclaimed, anxiously, and I only regret that I should be the instrument of your tormenting yourself—"

"Tormenting?" echoed Caesar, disdainfully. "The verses amuse me, and I find them most edifying. That is all. Hand me the tablets."

The command was so positive, that Alexander drew out the little diptych,



with the remark that painters wrote badly, and that what he had noted down was only intended to aid his memory. The idea that Caesar should hear a few home-truths through him had struck him as pleasant, but now the greatness of the risk was clear to him. He glanced at the scrawled characters, and it occurred to him that he had intended to change the word dwarf in one line to Caesar, and to keep the third and most trenchant epigram from the emperor. The fourth and last was very innocent, and he had meant to read it last, to mollify him. So he did not wish to show the tablets. But, as he was about to take them back, Caracalla snatched them from his hand and read with some difficulty:

”Fraternal love was once esteemed  
A virtue even in the great,

And Philadelphos then was deemed  
A name to grace a potentate.  
But now the dwarf upon the throne,  
By murder of his mother’s son,  
As Misadelphos must be known.”

”Indeed!” murmured Caesar, with a pale face, and then he went on in a low, sullen tone: ”Always the same story—my brother, and my small stature. In this town they follow the example of the barbarians, it would seem, who choose the tallest and broadest of their race to be king. If the third epigram has nothing else in it, the shallow wit of your fellow-citizens is simply tedious.—Now, what have we next? Trochaics! Hardly anything new, I fear!—There is the water-jar. I will drink; fill the cup.” But Alexander did not immediately obey the command so hastily given; assuring Caesar that he could not possibly read the writing, he was about to take up the tablets. But Caesar laid his hand on them, and said, imperiously: ”Drink! Give me the cup.”

He fixed his eyes on the wax, and with difficulty deciphered the clumsy scrawl in which Alexander had noted down the following lines, which he had heard at the ”Elephant”

”Since on earth our days are numbered,  
Ask me not what deeds of horror  
Stain the hands of fell Tarautas.  
Ask me of his noble actions,  
And with one short word I answer,  
’None!’—replying to your question  
With no waste of precious hours.”

Alexander meanwhile had done Caracalla’s bidding, and when he had replaced the jar on its stand and returned to Caesar, he was horrified; for the emperor’s head and arms were shaking and struggling to and fro, and at his feet lay the two halves of the wax tablets which he had torn apart when the convulsion came on. He foamed at the mouth, with low moans, and, before Alexander could prevent him, racked with pain and

seeking for some support, he had set his teeth in the arm of the seat off which he was slipping. Greatly shocked, and full of sincere pity, Alexander tried to raise him; but the lion, who perhaps suspected the artist of having been the cause of this sudden attack, rose on his feet with a roar, and the young man would have had no chance of his life if the beast had not happily been chained down after his meal. With much presence of mind, Alexander sprang behind the chair and dragged it, with the unconscious man who served him as a shield, away from the angry brute.

Galen had urged Caesar to avoid excess in wine and violent emotions, and the wisdom of the warning was sufficiently proved by the attack which had seized him with such fearful violence, just when Caracalla had neglected it in both particulars. Alexander had to exert all the strength of his muscles, practised in the wrestling-school, to hold the sufferer on his seat, for his strength, which was not small, was doubled by the demons of epilepsy. In an instant the whole Court had rushed to the spot on hearing the lion's roar of rage, which grew louder and louder, and could be heard at no small distance, and then Alexander's shout for help. But the private physician and Epagathos, the chamberlain, would allow no one to enter the room; only old Adventus, who was half blind, was permitted to assist them in succoring the sufferer. He had been raised by Caracalla from the humble office of letter-carrier to the highest dignities and the office of his private chamberlain; but the leech availed himself by preference of the assistance of this experienced and quiet man, and between them they soon brought Caesar to his senses. Caesar then lay pale and exhausted on a couch which had hastily been arranged, his eyes fixed on vacancy, scarcely able to move a finger. Alexander held his trembling hand, and when the physician, a stout man of middle age, took the artist's place and bade him retire, Caracalla, in a low voice, desired him to remain.

As soon as Caesar's suspended faculties were fully awake again, he turned to the cause of his attack. With a look of pain and entreaty he desired Alexander to give him the tablets once more; but the artist assured him—and Caracalla seemed not sorry to believe—that he had crushed the wax in his convulsion. The sick man himself no doubt felt that such food was too strong for him. After he had remained staring at nothing in silence for some time, he began again to speak of the gibes of the Alexandrians. Surrounded as he was by servile favorites, whose superior he was in gifts and intellect, what had here come under his notice seemed to interest him above measure.

He desired to know where and from whom the painter had got these epigrams. But again Alexander declared that he did not know the names of the authors; that he had found one at the public baths, the second in a tavern, and the third at a hairdresser's shop. Caesar looked sadly at the youth's abundant brown curls which had been freshly oiled, and said: "Hair is like the other good gifts of life. It remains fine only with the healthy. You, happy rascal, hardly know what sickness means!" Then

again he sat staring in silence, till he suddenly started up and asked Alexander, as Philostratus had yesterday asked Melissa:

”Do you and your sister belong to the Christians?”

When he vehemently denied it, Caracalla went on: ”And yet these epigrams show plainly enough how the Alexandrians feel toward me. Melissa, too, is a daughter of this town, and when I remember that she could bring herself to pray for me, then—My nurse, who was the best of women, was a Christian. I learned from her the doctrine of loving our enemies and praying for those who despitefully treat us. I always regarded it as impossible; but now—your sister—What I was saying just now about the hair and good health reminds me of another speech of the Crucified one which my nurse often repeated—how long ago!—’To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath.’ How cruel and yet how wise, how terribly striking and true! A healthy man! What more can he want, and what abundant gifts that best of all gifts will gain for him! If he is visited by infirmity—only look at me!—how much misery I have suffered from this curse, terrible enough in itself, and tainting everything with the bitterness of wormwood!”

He laughed softly but scornfully, and continued: ”But I! I am the sovereign of the universe. I have so much—oh yes, so much!—and for that reason more shall be given to me, and my wildest wishes shall be satisfied!”

”Yes, my liege!” interrupted Alexander, eagerly. ”After pain comes pleasure!”

’Live, love, drink, and rejoice,  
And wreath thyself with me!’

sings Sappho, and it is not a bad plan to follow Anakreon’s advice, even at the present day. Think of the short suffering which now and then embitters for you the sweet cup of life, as being the ring of Polykrates, with which you appease the envy of the gods who have given you so much. In your place, eternal gods! how I would enjoy the happy hours of health, and show the immortals and mortals alike how much true and real pleasure power and riches can procure!”

The emperor’s weary eyes brightened, and with the cry—

”So will I! I am still young, and I have the power!” he started suddenly to his feet. But he sank back again directly on the couch, shaking his head as if to say, ”There, you see what a state I am in!” The fate of this unhappy man touched Alexander’s heart even more deeply than before.

His youthful mind, which easily received fresh impressions, forgot the deeds of blood and shame which stained the soul of this pitiable wretch.

His artistic mind was accustomed to apprehend what he saw with his whole soul and without secondary considerations, as if it stood there to be painted; and the man that lay before him was to him at that moment only a victim whom a cruel fate had defrauded of the greatest pleasures in life. He also remembered how shamelessly he and others had mocked at Caesar. Perhaps Caracalla had really spilled most of the blood to serve the welfare and unity of the empire.

He, Alexander, was not his judge.

If Glaukias had seen the object of his derision lying thus, it certainly would never have occurred to him to represent him as a pygmy monster. No, no! Alexander's artistic eye knew the difference well between the beautiful and the ugly—and the exhausted man lying on the divan, was no hideous dwarf. A dreamy languor spread over his nobly chiselled features. An expression of pain but rarely passed over them, and Caesar's whole appearance reminded the painter of the fine Ephesian gladiator hallistos as he lay on the sand, severely wounded after his last fight, awaiting the death-stroke. He would have liked to hasten home and fetch his materials to paint the likeness of the misjudged man, and to show it to the scoffers.

He stood silent, absorbed in studying the quiet face so finely formed by Nature and so pathetic to look at. No thoroughly depraved miscreant could look like that. Yet it was like a peaceful sea: when the hurricane should break loose, what a boiling whirl of gray, hissing, tossing, foaming waves would disfigure the peaceful, smooth, glittering surface!

And suddenly the emperor's features began to show signs of animation. His eye, but now so dull, shone more brightly, and he cried out, as if the long silence had scarcely broken the thread of his ideas, but in a still husky voice:

"I should like to get up and go with you, but I am still too weak. Do you go now, my friend, and bring me back fresh news."

Alexander then begged him to consider how dangerous every excitement would be for him; yet Caracalla exclaimed, eagerly:

"It will strengthen me and do me good! Everything that surrounds me is so hollow, so insipid, so contemptible—what I hear is so small. A strong, highly spiced word, even if it is sharp, refreshes me—When you have finished a picture, do you like to hear nothing but how well your friends can flatter?"

The artist thought he understood Caesar. True to his nature, always hoping for the best, he thought that, as the severe judgment of the envious had often done him (Alexander) good, so the sharp satire of the Alexandrians would lead Caracalla to introspection and greater moderation; he only resolved to tell the sufferer nothing further that

was merely insulting.

When he bade him farewell, Caracalla glanced up at him with such a look of pain that the artist longed to give him his hand, and speak to him with real affection. The tormenting headache which followed each convulsion had again come on, and Caesar submitted without resistance to what the physician prescribed.

Alexander asked old Adventus at the door if he did not think that the terrible attack had been brought on by annoyance at the Alexandrians' satire, and if it would not be advisable in the future not to allow such things to reach the emperor's ear; but the man, looking at him in surprise with his half-blind eyes, replied with a brutal want of sympathy that disgusted the youth: "Drinking brought on the attack. What makes him ill are stronger things than words. If you yourself, young man, do not suffer for Alexandrian wit, it will certainly not hurt Caesar!"

Alexander turned his back indignantly on the chamberlain, and he became so absorbed in wondering how it was possible that the emperor, who was cultivated and appreciated what was beautiful, could have dragged out of the dust and kept near him two such miserable creatures as Theocritus and this old man, that Philostratus, who met him in the next room, had almost to shout at him.

Philostratus informed him that Melissa was staying with the chief priest's wife; but just as he was about to inquire curiously what had passed between the audacious painter and Caesar—for even Philostratus was a courtier—he was called away to Caracalla.

## CHAPTER XIX.

In one of the few rooms of his vast palace which the chief priest had reserved for the accommodation of the members of his own household, the youth was received by Melissa, Timotheus's wife Euryale, and the lady Berenike.

This lady was pleased to see the artist again to whom she was indebted for the portrait of her daughter. She had it now in her possession once more, for Philostratus had had it taken back to her house while the emperor was at his meal.

She rested on a sofa, quite worn out. She had passed through hours of torment; for her concern about Melissa, who had become very dear to her, had given her much more anxiety than even the loss of her beloved picture. Besides, the young girl was to her for the moment the representative of her sex, and the danger of seeing this pure, sweet

creature exposed to the will of a licentious tyrant drove her out of her senses, and her lively fancy had resulted in violent outbreaks of indignation. She now proposed all sorts of schemes, of which Euryale, the more prudent but not less warm-hearted wife of the chief priest, demonstrated the impossibility.

Like Berenike, a tender-hearted woman, whose smooth, brown hair had already begun to turn gray, she had also lost her only child. But years had passed since then, and she had accustomed herself to seek comfort in the care of the sick and wretched. She was regarded all over the city as the providence of all in need, whatever their condition and faith. Where charity was to be bestowed on a large scale—if hospitals or almshouses were to be erected or endowed—she was appealed to first, and if she promised her quiet but valuable assistance, the result was at once secured. For, besides her own and her husband's great riches, this lady of high position, who was honored by all, had the purses of all the heathens and Christians in the city at her disposal; both alike considered that she belonged to them; and the latter, although she only held with them in secret, had the better right.

At home, the society of distinguished men afforded her the greatest pleasure. Her husband allowed her complete freedom; although he, as the chief Greek priest of the city, would have preferred that she should not also have had among her most constant visitors so many learned Christians. But the god whom he served united in his own person most of the others; and the mysteries which he superintended taught that even Serapis was only a symbolical embodiment of the universal soul, fulfilling its eternal existence by perpetually re-creating itself under constant and immutable laws. A portion of that soul, which dwelt in all created things, had its abode in each human being, to return to the divine source after death. Timotheus firmly clung to this pantheist creed; still, he held the honorable post of head of the Museum—in the place of the Roman priest of Alexander, a man of less learning—and was familiar not only with the tenets of his heathen predecessors, but with the sacred scriptures of the Jews and Christians; and in the ethics of these last he found much which met his views.

He, who, at the Museum, was counted among the skeptics, liked biblical sentences, such as "All is vanity," and "We know but in part." The command to love your neighbor, to seek peace, to thirst after truth, the injunction to judge the tree by its fruit, and to fear more for the soul than the body, were quite to his mind.

He was so rich that the gifts of the visitors to the temple, which his predecessors had insisted on, were of no importance to him. Thus he mingled a great deal that was Christian with the faith of which he was chief minister and guardian. Only the conviction with which men like Clemens and Origen, who were friends of his wife, declared that the doctrine to which they adhered was the only right one—was, in fact, the truth itself—seemed to the skeptic "foolishness."

His wife's friends had converted his brother Zeno to Christianity; but he had no need to fear lest Euryale should follow them. She loved him too much, and was too quiet and sensible, to be baptized, and thus expose him, the heathen high-priest, to the danger of being deprived of the power which she knew to be necessary to his happiness.

Every Alexandrian was free to belong to any other than the heathen creeds, and no one had taken offence at his skeptical writings. When Euryale acted like the best of the Christian women, he could not take it amiss; and he would have scorned to blame her preference for the teaching of the crucified God.

As to Caesar's character he had not yet made up his mind.

He had expected to find him a half-crazy villain, and his rage after he had heard the epigram against himself, left with the rope, had strengthened the chief priest's opinion. But since then he had heard of much that was good in him; and Timotheus felt sure that his judgment was unbiased by the high esteem Caesar showed to him, while he treated others like slaves. His improved opinion had been raised by the intercourse he had held with Caesar. The much-abused man had on these occasions shown that he was not only well educated but also thoughtful; and yesterday evening, before Caracalla had gone to rest exhausted, the high-priest, with his wise experience, had received exactly the same impressions as the easily influenced artist; for Caesar had bewailed his sad fate in pathetic terms, and confessed himself indeed deeply guilty, but declared that he had intended to act for the best, had sacrificed fortune, peace of mind, and comfort to the welfare of the state. His keen eye had marked the evils of the time, and he had acknowledged that his efforts to extirpate the old maladies in order to make room for better things had been a failure, and that, instead of earning thanks, he had drawn down on himself the hatred of millions.

It was for this reason that Timotheus, on rejoining his household, had assured them that, as he thought over this interview, he expected something good—yes, perhaps the best—from the young criminal in the purple.

But the lady Berenike had declared with scornful decision that Caracalla had deceived her brother-in-law; and when Alexander likewise tried to say a word for the sufferer, she got into a rage and accused him of foolish credulity.

Melissa, who had already spoken in favor of the emperor, agreed, in spite of the matron, with her brother. Yes, Caracalla had sinned greatly, and his conviction that Alexander's soul lived in him and Roxana's in her was foolish enough; but the marvelous likeness to her of the portrait on the gem would astonish any one. That good and noble impulses stirred his soul she was certain. But Berenike only shrugged her shoulders

contemptuously; and when the chief priest remarked that yesterday evening Caracalla had in fact not been in a position to attend a feast, and that a portion, at least, of his other offenses might certainly be put down to the charge of his severe suffering, the lady exclaimed:

”And is it also his bodily condition that causes him to fill a house of mourning with festive uproar? I am indifferent as to what makes him a malefactor. For my part, I would sooner abandon this dear child to the care of a criminal than to that of a madman.”

But the chief priest and the brother and sister both declared Caesar’s mind to be as sound and sharp as any one’s; and Timotheus asked who, at the present time, was without superstition, and the desire of communicating with departed souls. Still the matron would not allow herself to be persuaded, and after the chief priest had been called away to the service of the god, Euryale reproved her sister-in-law for her too great zeal. When the wisdom of hoary old age and impetuous youth agree in one opinion, it is commonly the right one.

”And I maintain,” cried Berenike—and her large eyes flamed angrily—”it is criminal to ignore my advice. Fate has robbed you as well as me of a dear child. I will not also lose this one, who is as precious to me as a daughter.”

Melissa bent over the lady’s hands and kissed them gratefully, exclaiming with tearful eyes, ”But he has been very good to me, and has assured me—”

”Assured!” repeated Berenike disdainfully. She then drew the young girl impetuously toward her, kissed her on her forehead, placed her hands on her head as if to protect her, and turned to the artist as she continued:

”I stand by what I recommended before. This very night Melissa must get far away from here. You, Alexander, must accompany her. My own ship, the ’Berenike and Korinna’—Seleukus gave it to me and my daughter—is ready to start. My sister lives in Carthage. Her husband, the first man in the city, is my friend. You will find protection and shelter in their house.”

”And how about our father and Philip?” interrupted Alexander. ”If we follow your advice, it is certain death to them!”

The matron laughed scornfully.

”And that is what you expect from this good, this great and noble sovereign!”

”He proves himself full of favors to his friends,” answered Alexander, ”but woe betide those who offend him!”



Berenike looked thoughtfully at the ground, and added, more quietly:

"Then try first to release your people, and afterward embark on my ship. It shall be ready for you. Melissa will use it, I know.—My veil, child! The chariot waits for me at the Temple of Isis.—You will accompany me there, Alexander, and we will drive to the harbor. There I will introduce you to the captain. It will be wise. Your father and brother are dearer to you than your sister; she is more important to me. If only I could go away myself—away from here, from the desolate house, and take her with me!"

And she raised her arm, as if she would throw a stone into the distance.

She impetuously embraced the young girl, took leave of her sister-in-law, and left the room with Alexander.

Directly Euryale was alone with Melissa, she comforted the girl in her kind, composed manner; for the unhappy matron's gloomy presentiments had filled Melissa with fresh anxieties.

And what had she not gone through during the day!

Soon after her perilous interview with Caracalla, Timotheus, with the chief of the astrologers from the Serapeum, and the emperor's astronomer, had come to her, to ask her on what day and at what hour she was born. They also inquired concerning the birthdays of her parents, and other events of her life. Timotheus had informed her that the emperor had ordered them to cast her nativity.

Soon after dinner she had gone, accompanied by the lady Berenike, who had found her at the chief priest's house, to visit her lover in the sick-rooms of the Serapeum. Thankful and happy, she had found him with fully recovered consciousness, but the physician and the freedman Andreas, whom she met at the door of the chamber, had impressed on her the importance of avoiding all excitement. So it had not been possible for her to tell him what had happened to her people, or of the perilous step she had taken in order to save them. But Diodoros had talked of their wedding, and Andreas could confirm the fact that Polybius wished to see it celebrated as soon as possible.

Several pleasant subjects were discussed; but between whiles Melissa had to dissemble and give evasive answers to Diodoros's questions as to whether she had already arranged with her brother and friends who should be the youths and maidens to form the wedding procession, and sing the hymeneal song.

As the two whispered to one another and looked tenderly at each other—for Diodoros had insisted on her allowing him to kiss not only her hands but also her sweet red lips—Berenike had pictured her dead daughter in Melissa's place. What a couple they would have been! How proudly and

gladly she would have led them to the lovely villa at Kanopus, which her husband and she had rebuilt and decorated with the idea that some day Korinna, her husband, and—if the gods should grant it—their children, might inhabit it! But even Melissa and Diodoros made a fine couple, and she tried with all her heart not to grudge her all the happiness that she had wished for her own child.

When it was time to depart, she joined the hands of the betrothed pair, and called down a blessing from the gods.

Diodoros accepted this gratefully.

He only knew that this majestic lady had made Melissa's acquaintance through Alexander, and had won her affection, and he encouraged the impression that this woman, whose Juno-like beauty haunted him, had visited him on his bed of sickness in the place of his long-lost mother.

Outside the sick-room Andreas again met Melissa, and, after she had told him of her visit to the emperor, he impressed on her eagerly on no account to obey the tyrant's call again. Then he had promised to hide her securely, either on Zeno's estate or else in the house of another friend, which was difficult of access. When Dame Berenike had again, and with particular eagerness, suggested her ship, Andreas had exclaimed:

"In the garden, on the ship, under the earth—only not back to Caesar!"

The last question of the freedman's, as to whether she had meditated further on his discourse, had reminded her of the sentence, "The fullness of the time is come"; and afterward the thought occurred to her, again and again, that in the course of the next few hours some decisive event would happen to her, "fulfilling the time," as Andreas expressed it.

When, therefore, somewhat later, she was alone with the chief priest's wife, who had concluded her comforting, pious exhortations, Melissa asked the lady Euryale whether she had ever heard the sentence, "When the fullness of the time is come."

At this the lady cried, gazing at the girl with surprised inquiry:

"Are you, then, after all, connected with the Christians?"

"Certainly not," answered the young girl, firmly. "I heard it accidentally, and Andreas, Polybius's freedman, explained it to me."

"A good interpreter," replied the elder lady. "I am only an ignorant woman; yet, child, even I have experienced that a day, an hour, comes to every man in the course of his life in which he afterward sees that the time was fulfilled. As the drops become mingled with the stream, so at that moment the things we have done and thought unite to carry us on a new current, either to salvation or perdition. Any moment may bring the

crisis; for that reason the Christians are right when they call on one another to watch. You also must keep your eyes open. When the time—who knows how soon?—is fulfilled for you, it will determine the good or evil of your whole life.”

”An inward voice tells me that also,” answered Melissa, pressing her hands on her panting bosom. ”Just feel how my heart beats!”

Euryale, smiling, complied with this wish, and as she did so she shuddered. How pure and lovable was this young creature; and Melissa looked to her like a lamb that stood ready to hasten trustfully to meet the wolf!

At last she led her guest into the room where supper was prepared.

The master of the house would not be able to share it, and while the two women sat opposite one another, saying little, and scarcely touching either food or drink, Philostratus was announced.

He came as messenger from Caracalla, who wished to speak to Melissa.

”At this hour? Never, never! It is impossible!” exclaimed Euryale, who was usually so calm; but Philostratus declared, nevertheless, that denial was useless. The emperor was suffering particularly severely, and begged to remind Melissa of her promise to serve him gladly if he required her. Her presence, he assured Euryale, would do the sick man good, and he guaranteed that, so long as Caesar was tormented by this unbearable pain, the young woman had nothing to fear.

Melissa, who had risen from her seat when the philosopher had entered, exclaimed:

”I am not afraid, and will go with you gladly—”

”Quite right, child,” answered Philostratus, affectionately. Euryale, however, found it difficult to keep back her tears while she stroked the girl’s hair and arranged the folds of her garment. When at last she said good-by to Melissa and was embracing her, she was reminded of the farewell she had taken, many years ago, of a Christian friend before she was led away by the lictors to martyrdom in the circus. Finally, she whispered something in the philosopher’s ear, and received from him the promise to return with Melissa as soon as possible.

Philostratus was, in fact, quite easy. Just before, Caracalla’s helpless glance had met his sympathizing gaze, and the suffering Caesar had said nothing to him but:

”O Philostratus, I am in such pain!” and these words still rang in the ears of this warm-hearted man.

While he was endeavoring to comfort the emperor, Caesar's eyes had fallen on the gem, and he asked to see it. He gazed at it attentively for some time, and when he returned it to the philosopher he had ordered him to fetch the prototype of Roxana.

Closely enveloped in the veil which Euryale had placed on her head, Melissa passed from room to room, keeping near to the philosopher.

Wherever she appeared she heard murmuring and whispering that troubled her, and tittering followed her from several of the rooms as she left them; even from the large hall where the emperor's friends awaited his orders in numbers, she heard a loud laugh that frightened and annoyed her.

She no longer felt as unconstrained as she had been that morning when she had come before Caesar. She knew that she would have to be on her guard; that anything, even the worst, might be expected from him. But as Philostratus described to her, on the way, how terribly the unfortunate man suffered, her tender heart was again drawn to him, to whom—as she now felt—she was bound by an indefinable tie. She, if any one, as she repeated to herself, was able to help him; and her desire to put the truth of this conviction to the proof—for she could only regard it as too amazing to be grounded in fact—was seconded by the less disinterested hope that, while attending on the sufferer, she might find an opportunity of effecting the release of her father and brother.

Philostratus went on to announce her arrival, and she, while waiting, tried to pray to the manes of her mother; but, before she could sufficiently collect her thoughts, the door opened. Philostratus silently beckoned to her, and she stepped into the tablinum, which was but dimly lighted by a few lamps.

Caracalla was still resting here; for every movement increased the pain that tormented him.

How quiet it was! She thought she could hear her own heart beating.

Philostratus remained standing by the door, but she went on tiptoe toward the couch, fearing her light footsteps might disturb the emperor. Yet before she had reached the divan she stopped still, and then she heard the plaintive rattle in the sufferer's throat, and from the background of the room the easy breathing of the burly physician and of old Adventus, both of whom had fallen asleep; and then a peculiar tapping. The lion beat the floor with his tail with pleasure at recognizing her.

This noise attracted the invalid's attention, and when he opened his closed eyes and saw Melissa, who was anxiously watching all his movements, he called to her lightly with his hand on his brow:

"The animal has a good memory, and greets you in my name. You were sure

to come-, I knew it!"

The young girl stepped nearer to him, and answered, kindly, "Since you needed me, I gladly followed Philostratus."

"Because I needed you?" asked the emperor.

"Yes," she replied, "because you require nursing."

"Then, to keep you, I shall wish to be ill often," he answered, quickly; but he added, sadly, "only not so dreadfully ill as I have been to-day."

One could hear how laborious talking was to him, and the few words he had sought and found, in order to say something kind to Melissa, had so hurt his shattered nerves and head that he sank back, gasping, on the cushions.

Then for some time all was quiet, until Caracalla took his hand from his forehead and continued, as if in excuse:

"No one seems to know what it is. And if I talk ever so softly, every word vibrates through my brain."

"Then you must not speak," interrupted Melissa, eagerly. "If you want anything, only make signs. I shall understand you without words, and the quieter it is here the better."

"No, no; you must speak," begged the invalid. "When the others talk, they make the beating in my head ten times worse, and excite me; but I like to hear your voice."

"The beating?" interrupted Melissa, in whom this word awoke old memories. "Perhaps you feel as if a hammer was hitting you over the left eye?"

"If you move rapidly, does it not pierce your skull, and do you not feel as sick as if you were on the rocking sea?"

"Then you also know this torment?" asked Caracalla, surprised; but she answered, quietly, that her mother had suffered several times from similar headaches, and had described them to her.

Caesar sank back again on the pillows, moved his dry lips, and glanced toward the drink which Galen had prescribed for him; and Melissa, who almost as a child had long nursed a dear invalid, guessed what he wanted, brought him the goblet, and gave him a draught.

Caracalla rewarded her with a grateful look. But the physic only seemed to increase the pain. He lay there panting and motionless, until, trying to find a new position, he groaned, lightly:

"It is as if iron was being hammered here. One would think others might hear it."

At the same time he seized the girl's hand and placed it on his burning brow.

Melissa felt the pulse in the sufferer's temple throbbing hard and short against her fingers, as she had her mother's when she laid her cool hand on her aching forehead; and then, moved by the wish to comfort and heal, she let her right hand rest over the sick man's eyes. As soon as she felt one hand was hot, she put the other in its place; and it must have relieved the patient, for his moans ceased by degrees, and he finally said, gratefully:

"What good that does me! You are—I knew you would help me. It is already quite quiet in my brain. Once more your hand, dear girl!"

Melissa willingly obeyed him, and as he breathed more and more easily, she remembered that her mother's headache had often been relieved when she had placed her hand on her forehead. Caesar, now opening his eyes wide, and looking her full in the face, asked why she had not allowed him sooner to reap the benefit of this remedy.

Melissa slowly withdrew her hand, and with drooping eyes answered gently:

"You are the emperor, a man. . . and I. . . . But Caracalla interrupted her eagerly, and with a clear voice:

"Not so, Melissa! Do not you feel, like me, that something else draws us to one another, like what binds a man to his wife?—There lies the gem. Look at it once again—No, child, no! This resemblance is not mere accident. The short-sighted, might call it superstition or a vain illusion; I know better. At least a portion of Alexander's soul lives in this breast. A hundred signs—I will tell you about it later—make it a certainty to me. And yesterday morning. . . . I see it all again before me. . . . You stood above me, on the left, at a window. . . . I looked up; . . . our eyes met, and I felt in the depths of my heart a strange emotion. . . . I asked myself, silently, where I had seen that lovely face before. And the answer rang, you have already often met her; you know her!"

"My face reminded you of the gem," interrupted Melissa, disquieted.

"No, no," continued Caesar. "It was some thing else. Why had none of my many gems ever reminded me before of living people? Why did your picture, I know not how often, recur to my mind? And you? Only recollect what you have done for me. How marvelously we were brought together! And all this in the course of a single, short day. And you also. . . . I ask you, by all that is holy to you. . . Did you, after you saw me in the court of sacrifice, not think of me so often and

so vividly that it astonished you?"

"You are Caesar," answered Melissa, with increasing anxiety.

"So you thought of my purple robes?" asked Caracalla, and his face clouded over; "or perhaps only of my power that might be fatal to your family? I will know. Speak the truth, girl, by the head of your father!"

Then Melissa poured forth this confession from her oppressed heart:

"Yes, I could not help remembering you constantly, . . . and I never saw you in purple, but just as you had stood there on the steps; . . . and then—ah! I have told you already how sorry I was for your sufferings. I felt as if . . . but how can I describe it truly?—as if you stood much nearer to me than the ruler of the world could to a poor, humble girl. It was . . . eternal gods! . . ."

She stopped short; for she suddenly recollected anxiously that this confession might prove fatal to her. The sentence about the time which should be fulfilled for each was ringing in her ears, and it seemed to her that she heard for the second time the lady Berenike's warning.

But Caracalla allowed her no time to think; for he interrupted her, greatly pleased, with the cry:

"It is true, then! The immortals have wrought as great a miracle in you as in me. We both owe them thanks, and I will show them how grateful I can be by rich sacrifices. Our souls, which destiny had already once united, have met again. That portion of the universal soul which of yore dwelt in Roxana, and now in you, Melissa, has also vanquished the pain which has embittered my life. . . You have proved it!—And now . . . it is beginning to throb again more violently—now—beloved and restored one, help me once more!"

Melissa perceived anxiously how the emperor's face had flushed again during this last vehement speech, and at the same time the pain had again contracted his forehead and eyes. And she obeyed his command, but this time only in shy submission. When she found that he became quieter, and the movement of her hand once more did him good, she recovered her presence of mind. She remembered how often the quiet application of her hand had helped her mother to sleep.

She therefore explained to Caracalla, in a low whisper directly he began to speak again, that her desire to give him relief would be vain if he did not keep his eyes and lips closed. And Caracalla yielded, while her hand moved as lightly over the brow of the terrible man as when years ago it had soothed her mother to sleep.

When the sufferer, after a little time, murmured, with closed eyes

"Perhaps I could sleep," she felt as if great happiness had befallen her.

She listened attentively to every breath, and looked as if spell-bound into his face, until she was quite sure that sleep had completely overcome Caesar.

She then crept gently on tiptoe to Philostratus, who had looked on in silent surprise at all that had passed between his sovereign and the girl. He, who was always inclined to believe in any miraculous cure, of which so many had been wrought by his hero Apollonius, thought he had actually witnessed one, and gazed with an admiration bordering on awe at the young creature who appeared to him to be a gracious instrument of the gods.

"Let me go now," Melissa whispered to her friend. "He sleeps, and will not wake for some time."

"At your command," answered the philosopher, respectfully. At the same moment a loud voice was heard from the next room, which Melissa recognized as her brother Alexander's, who impetuously insisted on his right of-being allowed at any time to see the emperor.

"He will wake him," murmured the philosopher, anxiously; but Melissa with prompt determination threw her veil over her head and went into the adjoining room.

Philostratus at first heard violent language issuing from the mouth of Theocritus and the other courtiers, and the artist's answers were not less passionate. Then he recognized Melissa's voice; and when quiet suddenly reigned on that side of the door, the young girl again crossed the threshold.

She glanced toward Caracalla to see if he still slept, and then, with a sigh of relief, beckoned to her friend, and begged him in a whisper to escort her past the staring men. Alexander followed them.

Anger and surprise were depicted on his countenance, which was usually so happy. He had come with a report which might very likely induce Caesar to order the release of his father and brother, and his heart had stood still with fear and astonishment when the favorite Theocritus had told him in the anteroom, in a way that made the blood rush into his face, that his sister had been for some time endeavoring to comfort the suffering emperor—and it was nearly midnight.

Quite beside himself, he wished to force his way into Caesar's presence, but Melissa had at that moment come out and stood in his way, and had desired him and the noble Romans, in such a decided and commanding tone,



to lower their voices, that they and her brother were speechless.

What had happened to his modest sister during the last few days? Melissa giving him orders which he feebly obeyed! It seemed impossible! But there was something reassuring in her manner. She must certainly have thought it right to act thus, and it must have been worthy of her, or she would not have carried her charming head so high, or looked him so freely and calmly in the face.

But how had she dared to come between him and his duty to his father and brother?

While he followed her closely and silently through the imperial rooms, the implicit obedience he had shown her became more and more difficult to comprehend; and when at last they stood in the empty corridor which divided Caesar's quarters from those of the high-priest, and Philostratus had returned to his post at the side of his sovereign, he could hold out no longer, and cried to her indignantly:

"So far, I have followed you like a boy; I do not myself know why. But it is not yet too late to turn round; and I ask you, what gave you the right to prevent my doing my best for our people?"

"Your loud talking, that threatened to wake Caesar," she replied, seriously. "His sleeping could alone save me from watching by him the whole night."

Alexander then felt sorry he had been so foolishly turbulent, and after Melissa had told him in a few words what she had gone through in the last few hours he informed her of what had brought him to visit the emperor so late.

Johannes the lawyer, Berenike's Christian freedman, he began, had visited their father in prison and had heard the order given to place Heron and Philip as state prisoners and oarsmen on board a galley.

This had taken place in the afternoon, and the Christian had further learned that the prisoners would be led to the harbor two hours before sunset. This was the truth, and yet the infamous Zminis had assured the emperor, at noon, that their father and Philip were already far on their way to Sardinia. The worthless Egyptian had, then, lied to the emperor; and it would most likely cost the scoundrel his neck. But for this, there would have been time enough next day. What had brought him there at so late an hour was the desire to prevent the departure of the galley; for John had heard, from the Christian harbor-watch that the anchor was not yet weighed. The ship could therefore only get out to sea at sunrise; the chain that closed the harbor would not be opened till then. If the order to stop the galley came much after daybreak, she would certainly be by that time well under way, and their father and Philip might have succumbed to the hard rowing before a swift trireme could

overtake and release them.

Melissa had listened to this information with mixed feelings. She had perhaps precipitated her father and brother into misery in order to save herself; for a terrible fate awaited the state-prisoners at the oars. And what could she do, an ignorant child, who was of so little use?

Andreas had told her that it was the duty of a Christian and of every good man, if his neighbor's welfare were concerned, to sacrifice his own fortunes; and for the happiness and lives of those dearest to her—for they, of all others, were her "neighbors"—she felt that she could do so. Perhaps she might yet succeed in repairing the mischief she had done when she had allowed the emperor to sleep without giving one thought to her father. Instead of waking him, she had misused her new power over her brother, and, by preventing his speaking, had perhaps frustrated the rescue of her people.

But idle lamenting was of as little use here as at any other time; so she resolutely drew her veil closer round her head and called to her brother, "Wait here till I return!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Alexander, startled.

"I am going back to the invalid," she explained, decisively.

On this her brother seized her arm, and, wildly excited, forbade this step in the name of his father.

But at his vehement shout, "I will not allow it!" she struggled to free herself, and cried out to him:

"And you? Did not you, whose life is a thousand times more important than mine, of your own free-will go into captivity and to death in order to save our father?"

"It was for my sake that he had been robbed of his freedom," interrupted Alexander; but she added, quickly:

"And if I had not thought only of myself, the command to release him and Philip would by this time have been at the harbor. I am going."

Alexander then took his hand from her arm, and exclaimed, as if urged by some internal force, "Well, then, go!"

"And you," continued Melissa, hastily, "go and seek the lady Euryale. She is expecting me. Tell her all, and beg her in my name to go to rest. Also tell her I remembered the sentence about the time, which was fulfilled. . . . Mark the words. If I am running again into danger, tell her that I do it because a voice says to me that it is right. And

it is right, believe me, Alexander!”

The artist drew his sister to him and kissed her; yet she hardly understood his anxious good wishes; for his voice was choked by emotion.

He had taken it for granted that he should accompany her as far as the emperor’s room, but she would not allow it. His reappearance would only lead to fresh quarrels.

He also gave in to this; but he insisted on returning here to wait for her.

After Melissa had vanished into Caesar’s quarters he immediately carried out his sister’s wish, and told the lady Euryale of all that had happened.

Encouraged by the matron, who was not less shocked than he had been at Melissa’s daring, he returned to the anteroom, where, at first, greatly excited, he walked up and down, and then sank on a marble seat to wait for his sister. He was frequently overpowered by sleep. The things that cast a shadow on his sunny mind vanished from him, and a pleasing dream showed him, instead of the alarming picture which haunted him before sleeping, the beautiful Christian Agatha.

## CHAPTER XX.

The waiting-room was empty when Melissa crossed it for the second time. Most of the emperor’s friends had retired to rest or into the city when they had heard that Caesar slept; and the few who had remained behaved quietly when she appeared, for Philostratus had told them that the emperor held her in high esteem, as the only person who was able to give him comfort in his suffering by her peculiar and wonderful healing power.

In the tablinum, which had been converted into a sick-room, nothing was heard but the breathing and gentle snoring of the sleeping man. Even Philostratus was asleep on an arm-chair at the back of the room.

When the philosopher had returned, Caracalla had noticed him, and dozing, or perhaps in his dreams, he had ordered him to remain by him. So the learned man felt bound to spend the night there.

Epagathos, the freedman, was lying on a mattress from the dining-room; the corpulent physician slept soundly, and if he snored too loudly, old Adventus poked him and quietly spoke a word of warning to him. This man, who had formerly been a post messenger, was the only person who was conscious of Melissa’s entrance; but he only blinked at her through his

dim eyes, and, after he had silently considered why the young girl should have returned, he turned over in order to sleep himself; for he had come to the conclusion that this young, active creature would be awake and at hand if his master required anything.

His wondering as to why Melissa had returned, had led to many guesses, and had proved fruitless. "You can know nothing of women," was the end of his reflections, "if you do not know that what seems most improbable is what is most likely to be true. This maid is certainly not one of the flute-players or the like. Who knows what incomprehensible whim or freak may have brought her here? At any rate, it will be easier for her to keep her eyes open than it is for me."

He then signed to her and asked her quietly to fetch his cloak out of the next room, for his old body needed warmth; and Melissa gladly complied, and laid the caracalla over the old mans cold feet with obliging care.

She then returned to the side of the sick-bed, to wait for the emperor's awaking. He slept soundly; his regular breathing indicated this. The others also slept, and Adventus's light snore, mingling with the louder snoring of the physician, showed that he too had ceased to watch. The slumbering Philostratus now and then murmured incomprehensible words to himself; and the lion, who perhaps was dreaming of his freedom in his sandy home, whined low in his sleep.

She watched alone.

It seemed to her as if she were in the habitation of sleep, and as if phantoms and dreams were floating around her on the unfamiliar noises.

She was afraid, and the thought of being the only woman among so many men caused her extreme uneasiness.

She could not sit still.

Inaudibly as a shadow she approached the head of the sleeping emperor, holding her breath to listen to him. How soundly he slept! And she had come that she might talk to him. If his sleep lasted till sunrise, the pardon for her people would be too late, and her father and Philip, chained to a hard bench, would have to ply heavy oars as galley slaves by the side of robbers and murderers. How terribly then would her father's wish to use his strength be granted! Was Philip, the narrow-chested philosopher, capable of bearing the strain which had so often proved fatal to stronger men?

She must wake the dreaded man, the only man who could possibly help her.

She now raised her hand to lay it on his shoulder, but she half withdrew it.

It seemed to her as if it was not much less wicked to rob a sleeping man of his rest, his best cure, than to take the life of a living being. It was not too late yet, for the harbor-chain would not be opened till the October sun had risen. He might enjoy his slumbers a little longer.

With this conclusion she once more sank down and listened to the noises which broke the stillness of the night.

How hideous they were, how revolting they sounded! The vulgarest of the sleepers, old Adventus, absolutely sawed the air with his snoring.

The emperor's breathing was scarcely perceptible, and how nobly cut was the profile which she could see, the other side of his face leaning on the pillow! Had she any real reason to fear his awakening? Perhaps he was quite unlike what Berenike thought him to be. She remembered the sympathy she had felt for him when they had first met, and, in spite of all the trouble she had experienced since, she no longer felt afraid. A thought then occurred to her which was sufficient excuse for disturbing the sick man's sleep. If she delayed it, she would be making him guilty of a fresh crime by allowing two blameless men to perish in misery. But she would first convince herself whether the time was pressing. She looked out through the open window at the stars and across the open place lying at her feet. The third hour after midnight was past, and the sun would rise before long.

Down below all was quiet. Macrinus, the praetorian prefect, on hearing that the emperor had fallen into a refreshing sleep, in order that he might not be disturbed, had forbidden all loud signals, and ordered the camp to be closed to all the inhabitants of the city; so the girl heard nothing but the regular footsteps of the sentries and the shrieks of the owls returning to their nests in the roof of the Serapeum. The wind from the sea drove the clouds before it across the sky, and the plain covered with tents resembled a sea tossed into high white waves. The camp had been reduced during the afternoon; for Caracalla had carried out his threat of that morning by quartering a portion of the picked troops in the houses of the richest Alexandrians.

Melissa, bending far out, looked toward the north. The sea-breeze blew her hair into her face. Perhaps on the ocean whence it came the high waves would, in a few hours, be tossing the ship on which her father and brother, seated at the oar, would be toiling as disgraced galley-slaves. That must not, could not be!

Hark! what was that?

She heard a light whisper. In spite of strict orders, a loving couple were passing below. The wife of the centurion Martialis, who had been separated for some time from her husband, had at his entreaty come secretly from Ranopus, where she had charge of Seleukus's villa, to see

him, as his services prevented his going so far away. They now stood whispering and making love in the shadow of the temple. Melissa could not hear what they said, yet it reminded her of the sacred night hour when she confessed her love to Diodoros. She felt as if she were standing by his bedside, and his faithful eyes met hers. She would not, for all that was best in the world, have awakened him yesterday at the Christian's house, though the awakening would have brought her fresh promises of love; and yet she was on the point of robbing another of his only cure, the sleep the gods had sent him. But then she loved Diodoros, and what was Caesar to her? It had been a matter of life and death with her lover, while disturbing Caracalla would only postpone his recovery a few hours at the utmost. It was she who had procured the imperial sleeper his rest, which she could certainly restore to him even if she now woke him. Just now she had vowed for the future not to care about her own welfare, and that had at first made her doubtful about Caracalla; but had it not really been exceedingly selfish to lose the time which could bring freedom to her father and brother, only to protect her own soul from the reproach of an easily forgiven wrong? With the question:

"What is your duty?" all doubts left her, and no longer on tiptoe, but with a firm, determined tread, she walked toward the slumberer's couch, and the outrage which she shrank from committing would, she saw, be a deed of kindness; for she found the emperor with perspiring brow groaning and frightened by a severe nightmare. He cried with the dull, toneless voice of one talking in his sleep, as if he saw her close by:

"Away, mother, I say! He or I! Out of the way! You will not? But I, I—if you—"

At the same he threw up his hands and gave a dull, painful cry.

"He is dreaming of his brother's murder," rushed through Melissa's mind, and in the same instant she laid her hand on his arm and with urgent entreaty cried in his ear: "Wake up, Caesar, I implore you! Great Caesar, awake!"

Then he opened his eyes, and a low, prolonged "Ah!" rang from his tortured breast.

He then, with a deep breath and perplexed glance, looked round him; and as his eyes fell on the young girl his features brightened, and soon wore a happy expression, as if he experienced a great joy.

"You?" he asked, with pleased surprise. "You, maiden, still here! It must be nearly dawn? I slept well till just now. But then at the last—Oh, it was fearful!—Adventus!"

Melissa, however, interrupted this cry, exhorting the emperor to be quiet by putting her finger to her lips; and he understood her and willingly obeyed, especially as she had guessed what he required from the

chamberlain, Adventus. She handed him the cloth that lay on the table for him to wipe his streaming forehead. She then brought him drink, and after Caracalla had sat up refreshed, and felt that the pain, which, after a sharp attack, lasted sometimes for days, had now already left him, he said, quite gently, mindful of her sign:

"How much better I feel already; and for this I thank you, Roxana; yes, you know. I like to feel like Alexander, but usually—It is certainly a pleasant thing to be ruler of the universe, for if we wish to punish or reward, no one can limit us. You, child, shall learn that it is Caesar whom you have laid under such obligations. Ask what you will, and I will grant it you."

She whispered eagerly to him:

"Release my father and brother."

"Always the same thing," answered Caracalla, peevishly. "Do you know of nothing better to wish for?"

"No, my lord, no!" cried Melissa, with importunate warmth. "If you will give me what I most care for—"

"I will, yes, I will," interrupted the emperor in a softer voice; but suddenly shrugging his shoulders, he continued, regretfully: "But you must have patience; for, by the Egyptian's orders, your people have been for some time afloat and at sea."

"No!" the girl assured him. "They are still here. Zminis has shamefully deceived you;" and then she informed him of what she had learned from her brother.

Caracalla, in obedience to a softer impulse, had wished to show himself grateful to Melissa. But her demand displeased him; for the sculptor and his son, the philosopher, were the security that should keep Melissa and the painter attached to him. But though his distrust was so strong, offended dignity and the tormenting sense of being deceived caused him to forget everything else; he flew into a rage, and called loudly the names of Epagathos and Adventus.

His voice, quivering with fury, awakened the others also out of their sleep; and after he had shortly and severely rebuked them for their laziness, he commissioned Epagathos to give the prefect, Macrinus, immediate orders not to allow the ship on which Heron and Philip were, to leave the harbor; to set the captives at liberty; and to throw Zminis, the Egyptian, into prison, heavily chained.

When the freedman remarked, humbly, that the prefect was not likely to be found, as he had purposed to be present again that night at the exorcisms of the magician, Serapion, Caesar commanded that Macrinus should be

called away from the miracle-monger's house, and the orders given him.

"And if I can not find him?" asked Epagathos.

"Then, once more, events will prove how badly I am served," answered the emperor. "In any case you can act the prefect, and see that my orders are carried out."

The freedman left hastily, and Caracalla sank back exhausted on the pillows.

Melissa let him rest a little while; then she approached him, thanked him profusely, and begged him to keep quiet, lest the pain should return and spoil the approaching day.

He then asked the time, and when Philostratus, who had walked to the window, explained that the fifth hour after midnight was past, Caracalla bade him prepare a bath.

The physician sanctioned this wish, and Caesar then gave his hand to the girl, saying, feebly and in a gentle voice: "The pain still keeps away. I should be better if I could moderate my impatience. An early bath often does me good after a bad night. Only go. The sleep that you know so well how to give to others, you scarcely allow to visit you. I only beg that you will be at hand. We shall both, I think, feel strengthened when next I call you."

Melissa then bade him a grateful farewell; but as she was approaching the doorway he called again after her, and asked her with an altered voice, shortly and sternly:

"You will agree with your father if he abuses me?"

"What an idea!" she answered, energetically. "He knows who robbed him of his liberty, and from me shall he learn who has restored it to him."

"Good!" murmured the emperor. "Yet remember this also: I need your assistance and that of your brother's, the painter. If your father attempts to alienate you—"

Here he suddenly let fall his arm, which he had raised threateningly, and continued in a confidential whisper: "But how can I ever show you anything but kindness? Is it not so? You already feel the secret tie— You know? Am I mistaken when I fancy that it grieves you to be separated from me?"

"Certainly not," she replied, gently, and bowed her head.

"Then go," he continued, kindly. "The day will come yet when you will feel that I am as necessary to your soul as you are to mine. But you do



not yet know how impatient I can be. I must be able to think of you with pleasure—always with pleasure—always.”

Thereupon he nodded to her, and his eyelids remained for some time in spasmodic movement. Philostratus was prepared to accompany the young girl, but Caracalla prevented him by calling:

”Lead me to my bath. If it does me good, as I trust it will, I have many things to talk over with you.”

Melissa did not hear the last words. Gladly and quickly she hurried through the empty, dimly lighted rooms, and found Alexander in a sitting position, half asleep and half awake, with closed eyes. Then she drew near to him on tiptoe, and, as his nodding head fell on his breast, she laughed and woke him with a kiss.

The lamps were not yet burned out, and, as he looked into her face with surprise, his also brightened, and jumping up quickly he exclaimed:

”All’s well; we have you back again, and you have succeeded! Our father—I see it in your face—and Philip also, are at liberty!”

”Yes, yes, yes,” she answered, gladly; ”and now we will go together and fetch them ourselves from the harbor.”

Alexander raised his eyes and arms to heaven in rapture, and Melissa imitated him; and thus, without words, though with fervent devotion, they with one accord thanked the gods for their merciful ruling.

They then set out together, and Alexander said: ”I feel as if nothing but gratitude flowed through all my veins. At any rate, I have learned for the first time what fear is. That evil guest certainly haunts this place. Let us go now. On the way you shall tell me everything.”

”Only one moment’s patience,” she begged, cheerfully, and hurried into the chief priest’s rooms. The lady Euryale was still expecting her, and as she kissed her she looked with sincere pleasure into her bright but tearful eyes.

At first she was bent on making Melissa rest; for she would yet require all her strength. But she saw that the girl’s wish to go and meet her father was justifiable; she placed her own mantle over her shoulders—for the air was cool before sunrise—and at last accompanied her into the anteroom. Directly the girl had disappeared, she turned to her sister-in-law’s slave, who had waited there the whole night by order of his mistress, and desired him to go and report to her what he had learned about Melissa.

The brother and sister met the slave Argutis outside the Serapeum. He had heard at Seleukus’s house where his young mistress was staying, and

had made friends with the chief priest's servants.

When, late in the evening, he heard that Melissa was still with Caesar, he had become so uneasy that he had waited the whole night through, first on the steps of a staircase, then walking up and down outside the Serapeum. With a light heart he now accompanied the couple as far as the Aspendia quarter of the town, and he then only parted from them in order that he might inform poor old Dido of his good news, and make preparations for the reception of the home-comers.

After that Melissa hurried along, arm in arm with her brother, through the quiet streets.

Youth, to whom the present belongs entirely, only cares to know the bright side of the future; and even Melissa in her joy at being able to restore liberty to her beloved relations, hardly thought at all of the fact that, when this was done and Caesar should send for her again, there would be new dangers to surmount.

Delighted with her grand success, she first told her brother what her experiences had been with the suffering emperor. Then she started on the recollections of her visit to her lover, and when Alexander opened his heart to her and assured her with fiery ardor that he would not rest till he had won the heart of the lovely Christian, Agatha, she gladly allowed him to talk and promised him her assistance. At last they deliberated how the favor of Caesar—who, Melissa assured him, was cruelly misunderstood—was to be won for their father and Philip; and finally they both imagined the surprise of the old man if he should be the first to meet them after being set at liberty.

The way was far, and when they reached the sea, by the Caesareum in the Bruchium, the palatial quarter of the town, the first glimmer of approaching dawn was showing behind the peninsula of Lochias. The sea was rough, and tossed with heavy, oily waves on the Choma that ran out into the sea like a finger, and on the walls of the Timoneum at its point, where Antonius had hidden his disgrace after the battle of Actium.

Alexander stopped by the pillared temple of Poseidon, which stood close on the shore, between the Choma and the theatre, and, looking toward the flat, horseshoe-shaped coast of the opposite island which still lay in darkness, he asked:

"Do you still remember when we went with our mother over to Antirhodos, and how she allowed us to gather shells in the little harbor? If she were alive to-day, what more could we wish for?"

"That the emperor was gone," exclaimed the girl from the depths of her heart; "that Diodoros were well again; that father could use his hands as he used, and that I might stay with him until Diodoros came to fetch me, and then... oh, if only something could happen to the empire that Caesar

might go away-far away, to the farthest hyperborean land!"

"That will soon happen now," answered Alexander. "Philostratus says that the Romans will remain at the utmost a week longer."

"So long?" asked Melissa, startled; but Alexander soon pacified her with the assurance that seven days flew speedily by, and when one looked back on them they seemed to shrink into only as many hours.

"But do not," he continued, cheerfully, "look into the future! We will rejoice, for everything is going so well now!"

He stopped here suddenly and gazed anxiously at the sea, which was no longer completely obscured by the vanishing shadows of night. Melissa looked in the direction of his pointing hand, and when he cried with great excitement, "That is no little boat, it is a ship, and a large one, too!" Melissa added, eagerly, "It is already near the Diabathra. It will reach the Alveus Steganus in a moment, and pass the pharos."

"But yonder is the morning star in the heavens, and the fire is still blazing on the tower," interrupted her brother. "Not till it has been extinguished will they open the outside chain. And yet that ship is steering in a northwesterly direction. It certainly comes out of the royal harbor." He then drew his sister on faster, and when, in a few minutes, they reached the harbor gate, he cried out, much relieved:

"Look there! The chain is still across the entrance. I see it clearly."

"And so do I," said Melissa, decidedly; and while her brother knocked at the gate-house of the little harbor, she continued, eagerly:

"No ships dare go out before sunrise, on account of the rocks—Epagathos said so just now—and that one near the pharos—"

But there was no time to put her thoughts into words; for the broad harbor gate was thrown noisily open, and a troop of Roman soldiers streamed out, followed by several Alexandrian men-at-arms. After them came a prisoner loaded with chains, with whom a leading Roman in warrior's dress was conversing. Both were tall and haggard, and when they approached the brother and sister they recognized in them Macrinus the praetorian prefect, while the prisoner was Zminis the informer.

But the Egyptian also noticed the artist and his companion. His eyes sparkled brightly, and with triumphant scorn he pointed out to sea.

The magician Serapion had persuaded the prefect to let the Egyptian go free. Nothing was yet known in the harbor of Zminis's disgrace, and he had been promptly obeyed as usual, when, spurred on by the magician and his old hatred, he gave the order for the galley which carried the

sculptor and his son on board to weigh anchor in spite of the early hour.

Heron and Philip, with chains on their feet, were now rowing on the same bench with the worst criminals; and the old artist's two remaining children stood gazing after the ship that carried away their father and brother into the distance. Melissa stood mute, with tearful eyes, while Alexander, quite beside himself, tried to relieve his rage and grief by empty threats.

Soon, however, his sister's remonstrances caused him to restrain himself, and make inquiry as to whether Macrinus, in obedience to the emperor's orders, had sent a State ship after the galley.

This had been done, and comforted, though sadly disappointed, they started on their way home.

The sun in the mean time had risen, and the streets were filling with people.

They met the old sculptor Lysander, who had been a friend of their father's, outside the magnificent pile of buildings of the Caesareum. The old man took a deep interest in Heron's fate; and, when Alexander asked him modestly what he was doing at that early hour, he pointed to the interior of the building, where the statues of the emperors and empresses stood in a wide circle surrounding a large court-yard, and invited them to come in with him. He had not been able to complete his work—a marble statue of Julia Domna, Caracalla's mother—before the arrival of the emperor. It had been placed here yesterday evening. He had come to see how it looked in its new position.

Melissa had often seen the portrait of Julia on coins and in various pictures, but to-day she was far more strongly attracted than she had ever been before to look in the face of the mother of the man who had so powerfully influenced her own existence and that of her people.

The old master had seen Julia many years ago in her own home at Emesa, as the daughter of Bassianus the high-priest of the Sun in that town; and later, after she had become empress, he had been commanded to take her portrait for her husband, Septimus Severus. While Melissa gazed on the countenance of the beautiful statue, the old artist related how Caracalla's mother had in her youth won all hearts by her wealth of intellect, and the extraordinary knowledge which she had easily acquired and continually added to, through intercourse with learned men. They learned from him that his heart had not remained undisturbed by the charms of his royal model, and Melissa became more and more absorbed in her contemplation of this beautiful work of art.

Lysander had represented the imperial widow standing in flowing draperies, which fell to her feet. She held her charming, youthful head bent slightly on one side, and her right hand held aside the veil which

covered the back of her head and fell lightly on her shoulders, a little open over the throat. Her face looked out from under it as if she were listening to a fine song or an interesting speech. Her thick, slightly waving hair framed the lovely oval of her face under the veil, and Alexander agreed with his sister when she expressed the wish that she might but once see this rarely beautiful creature. But the sculptor assured them that they would be disappointed, for time had treated her cruelly.

"I have shown her," he continued, "as she charmed me a generation ago. What you see standing before you is the young girl Julia; I was not capable of representing her as matron or mother. The thought of her son would have spoiled everything,"

"He is capable of better emotions," Alexander declared.

"May be," answered the old man—"I do not know them. May your father and brother be restored to you soon!—I must get to work!"

#### A THORNY PATH

By Georg Ebers

Volume 7.

## CHAPTER XXI.

The high-priest of Serapis presided over the sacrifices to be offered this morning. Caesar had given beasts in abundance to do honor to the god; still, the priest had gone but ill-disposed to fulfill his part; for the imperial command that the citizens' houses should be filled with the troops, who were also authorized to make unheard-of demands on their hosts, had roused his ire against the tyrant, who, in the morning, after his bath, had appeared to him unhappy indeed, but at the same time a gifted and conscientious ruler, capable of the highest and grandest enterprise.

Melissa, in obedience to the lady Euryale, had taken an hour's rest, and then refreshed herself by bathing. She now was breakfasting with her venerated friend, and Philostratus had joined them. He was able to tell them that a swift State galley was already on its way to overtake and release her father and brother; and when he saw how glad she was to hear it, how beautiful, fresh, and pure she was, he thought to himself with anxiety that it would be a wonder if the imperial slave to his own passions should not desire to possess this lovely creature.

Euryale also feared this, and Melissa realized what filled them with anxiety; yet she by no means shared the feeling, and the happy confidence with which she tried to comfort her old friends, at the same time pacified and alarmed them. It seemed to her quite foolish and vain to suppose that the emperor, the mighty ruler of the world, should fall in love with her, the humble, obscure gem-cutter's child, who aspired to one suitor alone. It was merely as a patient wishes for the physician, she assured herself, that the emperor wished for her presence—Philostratus had understood that. During the night she had certainly been seized with great fears, but, as she now thought, without any cause. What she really had to dread was that she might be falsely judged by his followers; still, she cared nothing about all these Romans. However, she would beg Euryale to see Diodoros, and to tell him what forced her to obey the emperor's summons, if he should send for her. It was highly probable that the sick man had been informed of her interview with Caracalla, and, as her betrothed, he must be told how she felt toward Caesar; for this was his right, and jealous agitation might injure him.

Her face so expressed the hope and confidence of a pure heart that when, after a little time, she withdrew, Euryale said to the philosopher:

"We must not alarm her more! Her trustful innocence perhaps may protect her better than anxious precautions."

And Philostratus agreed, and assured her that in any case he expected good results for Melissa, for she was one of those who were the elect of the gods and whom they chose to be their instruments. And then he related what wonderful influence she had over Caesar's sufferings, and praised her with his usual enthusiastic warmth.

When Melissa returned, Philostratus had left the matron. She was again alone with Euryale, who reminded her of the lesson conveyed in the Christian words that she had explained to her yesterday. Every deed, every thought, had some influence on the way in which the fulfillment of time would come for each one; and when the hour of death was over, no regrets, repentance, or efforts could then alter the past. A single moment, as her own young experience had taught her, was often sufficient to brand the name of an estimable man. Till now, her way through life had led along level paths, through meadows and gardens, and others had kept their eyes open for her; now she was drawing near to the edge of a precipice, and at every turning, even at the smallest step, she must never forget the threatening danger. The best will and the greatest prudence could not save her if she did not trust to a higher guidance; and then she asked the girl to whom she raised her heart when she prayed; and Melissa named Isis and other gods, and lastly the manes of her dead mother.

During this confession, old Adventus appeared, to summon the girl to his sovereign. Melissa promised to follow him immediately; and, when the old man had gone, the matron said:

”Few here pray to the same gods, and he whose worship my husband leads is not mine. I, with several others, know that there is a Father in heaven who loves us men, his creatures, and guards us as his children. You do not yet know him, and therefore you can not hope for anything from him; but if you will follow the advice of a friend, who was also once young, think in the future that your right hand is held firmly by the invisible, beloved hand of your mother. Persuade yourself that she is by you, and take care that every word, yes, every glance, meets with her approval. Then she will be there, and will protect you whenever you require her aid.”

Melissa sank on the breast of her kind friend, embracing her as closely and kissing her as sincerely as if she had been the beloved mother to whose care Euryale had commended her,

The counsels of this true friend agreed with those of her own heart, and so they must be right. When at last they had to part, Euryale wished to send for one of the gentlemen of the court, whom she knew, that he might escort her through the troops of Caesar’s attendants and friends who were waiting, and of the visitors and petitioners; but Melissa felt so happy and so well protected by Adventus, that she followed him without further delay. In fact, the old man had a friendly feeling for her, since she had covered his feet so carefully the day before; she knew it by the tone of his voice and by the troubled look in his dim eyes.

Even now she did not believe in the dangers at which her friends trembled for her, and she walked calmly across the lofty marble halls, the anteroom, and the other vast rooms of the imperial dwelling. The attendants accompanied her respectfully from door to door, in obedience to the emperor’s commands, and she went on with a firm step, looking straight in front of her, without noticing the inquisitive, approving, or scornful glances which were aimed at her.

In the first rooms she needed an escort, for they were crowded with Romans and Alexandrians who were waiting for a sign from Caesar to appeal for his pardon or his verdict, or perhaps only wishing to see his countenance. The emperor’s ”friends” sat at breakfast, of which Caracalla did not partake. The generals, and the members of his court not immediately attached to his person, stood together in the various rooms, while the principal people of Alexandria—several senators and rich and important citizens of the town—as well as the envoys of the Egyptian provinces, in magnificent garments and rich gold ornaments, held aloof from the Romans, and waited in groups for the call of the usher.

Melissa saw no one, nor did she observe the costly woven hangings on the walls, the friezes decorated with rare works of art and high reliefs, nor the mosaic floors over which she passed. She did not notice the hum and murmur of the numerous voices which surrounded her; nor could she indeed

have understood a single coherent sentence; for, excepting the ushers and the emperor's immediate attendants, at the reception-hour no one was allowed to raise his voice. Expectancy and servility seemed here to stifle every lively impulse; and when, now and then, the loud call of one of the ushers rang above the murmur, one of those who were waiting spontaneously bowed low, or another started up, as if ready to obey any command. The sensation, shared by many, of waiting in the vicinity of a high, almost godlike power, in whose hands lay their well-being or misery, gave rise to a sense of solemnity. Every movement was subdued; anxious, nay, fearful expectation was written on many faces, and on others impatience and disappointment. After a little while it was whispered from ear to ear that the emperor would only grant a few more audiences; and how many had already waited in vain yesterday, for hours, in the same place!

Without delay Melissa went on till she had reached the heavy curtain which, as she already knew, shut off Caesar's inner apartments.

The usher obligingly drew it back, even before she had mentioned her name, and while a deputation of the town senators, who had been received by Caracalla, passed out, she was followed by Alexandrian citizens, the chiefs of great merchant-houses, whose request for an audience he had sanctioned. They were for the most part elderly men, and Melissa recognized among them Seleukus, Berenike's husband.

Melissa bowed to him, but he did not notice her, and passed by without a word. Perhaps he was considering the enormous sum to be expended on the show at night which he, with a few friends, intended to arrange at the circus in Caesar's honor.

All was quite still in the large hall which separated the emperor's reception-room from the anteroom. Melissa observed only two soldiers, who were looking out of window, and whose bodies were shaking as though they were convulsed with profound merriment.

It happened that she had to wait here some time; for the usher begged her to have patience until the merchants' audience was over. They were the last who would be received that day. He invited her to rest on the couch on which was spread a bright giraffe's skin, but she preferred to walk up and down, for her heart was beating violently. And while the usher vanished from the room, one of the warriors turned his head to look about him, and directly he caught sight of Melissa he gave his comrade a push, and said to him, loud enough for Melissa to hear:

"A wonder! Apollonaris, by Eros and all the Erotes, a precious wonder!"

The next moment they both stepped back from the window and stared at the girl, who stood blushing and embarrassed, and gazed at the floor when she found with whom she had been left alone.



They were two tribunes of the praetorians, but, notwithstanding their high grade, they were only young men of about twenty. Twin brothers of the honorable house of the Aurelia, they had entered the army as centurions, but had soon been placed at the head of a thousand men, and appointed tribunes in Caesar's body-guard. They resembled one another exactly; and this likeness, which procured them much amusement, they greatly enhanced by arranging their coal-black beards and hair in exactly the same way, and by dressing alike down to the rings on their fingers. One was called Apollonaris, the other Nemesianus Aurelius. They were of the same height, and equally well grown, and no one could say which had the finest black eyes, which mouth the haughtiest smile, or to which of them the thick short beard and the artistically shaved spot between the under lip and chin was most becoming. The beautifully embossed ornaments on their breast-plates and shirts of mail, and on the belt of the short sword, showed that they grudged no expense; in fact, they thought only of enjoyment, and it was merely for the honor of it that they were serving for a few years in the imperial guard. By and by they would rest, after all the hardships of the campaign, in their palace at Rome, or in the villas on the various estates that they had inherited from their father and mother, and then, for a change, hold honorary positions in the public service. Their friends knew that they also contemplated being married on the same day, when the game of war should be a thing of the past.

In the mean time they desired nothing in the world but honor and pleasure; and such pleasure as well-bred, healthy, and genial youths, with amiability, strength, and money to spend, can always command, they enjoyed to the full, without carrying it to reckless extravagance. Two merrier, happier, more popular comrades probably did not exist in the whole army. They did their duty in the field bravely; during peace, and in a town like Alexandria, they appeared, on the contrary, like mere effeminate men of fashion. At least, they spent a large part of their time in having their black hair crimped; they gave ridiculous sums to have it anointed with the most delicate perfumes; and it was difficult to imagine how effectively their carefully kept hands could draw a sword, and, if necessary, handle the hatchet or spade.

To-day Nemesianus was in the emperor's anteroom by command, and Apollonaris, of his own freewill, had taken the place of another tribune, that he might bear his brother company. They had caroused through half the night, and had begun the new day by a visit to the flower market, for love of the pretty saleswomen. Each had a half-opened rose stuck in between his cuirass and shirt of mail on the left breast, plucked, as the charming Daphnion had assured them, from a bush which had been introduced from Persia only the year before. The brothers, at any rate, had never seen any like them.

While they were looking out of the window they had passed the time by examining every girl or woman who went by, intending to fling one rose at the first whose perfect beauty should claim it, and the other flower at

the second; but during the half-hour none had appeared who was worthy of such a gift. All the beauties in Alexandria were walking in the streets in the cool hour before sunset, and really there was no lack of handsome girls. The brothers had even heard that Caesar, who seemed to have renounced the pleasures of love, had yielded to the charms of a lovely Greek.

Directly they saw Melissa they were convinced that they had met the beautiful plaything of the imperial fancy, and each with the same action offered her his rose, as if moved by the same invisible power.

Apollonaris, who had come into the world a little sooner than his brother, and who, by right of birth, had therefore a more audacious manner, stepped boldly up to Melissa and presented his, while Nemesianus at the same instant bowed to her, and begged her to give his the preference.

Though their speeches were flattering and well-worded, Melissa repulsed them by remarking sharply that she did not want their flowers.

"We can easily believe that," answered Apollonaris, "for are you not yourself a lovely, blooming rose?"

"Vain flattery," replied Melissa; "and I certainly do not bloom for you."

"That is both cruel and unjust," sighed Nemesianus, "for that which you refuse to us poor fellows you grant to another, who can obtain everything that other mortals yearn for."

"But we," interrupted his brother, "are modest, nay, and pious warriors. We had intended offering up these roses to Aphrodite, but lo! the goddess has met us in person."

"Her image at any rate," added the other.

"And you should thank the foam-born goddess," continued Apollonaris; "for she has lent you, in spite of the danger of seeing herself eclipsed, her own divine charms. Do you think she will be displeased if we withdraw the flowers and offer them to you?"

"I think nothing," answered Melissa, "excepting that your honeyed remarks annoy me. Do what you like with your roses, I will not accept them."

"How dare you," asked Apollonaris, approaching her—"you, to whom the mother of love has given such wonderfully fresh lips—misuse them by refusing so sternly the humble petition of her faithful worshipers? If you would not have Aphrodite enraged with you, hasten to atone for this transgression. One kiss, my beauty, for her votary, and she will forgive

you.”

Here Apollonaris stretched out his hand toward the girl to draw her to him, but she motioned him back indignantly, declaring that it would be reprehensible and cowardly in a soldier to use violence toward a modest maid.

At this the two brothers laughed heartily, and Nemesianus exclaimed, "You do not belong to the Temple of Vesta, most lovely of roses, and yet you are well protected by such sharp thorns that it requires a great deal of courage to venture to attack you."

"More," added Apollonaris, "than to storm a fortress. But what camp or stronghold contains booty so well worth capturing?"

Thereupon he threw his arm round Melissa and drew her to him.

Neither he nor his brother had ever conducted themselves badly towards an honorable woman; and if Melissa had been but the daughter of a simple craftsman, her reproachful remarks would have sufficed to keep them at a distance. But such immunity was not to be granted to the emperor's sweetheart, who could so audaciously reject two brothers accustomed to easy conquests; her demure severity could hardly be meant seriously. Apollonaris therefore took no notice of her violent resistance, but held her hands forcibly, and, though he could not succeed in kissing her for her struggling, he pressed his lips to her cheek, while she endeavored to free herself and pushed him off, breathless with real indignation.

'Till now, the brothers had taken the matter as a joke; but when Apollonaris seized the girl again, and she, beside herself with fear, cried for help, he at once set her free.

It was too late; for the curtains of the audience-room were already withdrawn, and Caracalla approached. His countenance was red and distorted; he trembled with rage, and his angry glance fell like a flash of lightning on the luckless brothers. Close by his side was the prefect Macrinus, who feared lest he should be attacked by a fresh fit; and Melissa shared his fears, as Caracalla cried to Apollonaris in an angry voice, "Scoundrel that you are, you shall repent of this!"

Still, Aurelius had, by various wanton jokes, incurred the emperor's wrath before now, and he was accustomed to disarm it by some insinuating confession, so he answered him with a roguish smile, while raising his eyes to him humbly:

"Forgive me, great Caesar! Our poor strength, as you well know, is easily defeated in conflicts against overpowering beauty. Dainties are sweet, not only for children. Long ago Mars was drawn to Venus; and if I—"

He had spoken these words in Latin, which Melissa did not understand; but the color left the emperor's face, and, pale with excitement, he stammered out laboriously:

"You have—you have dared—"

"For this rose," began the youth again, "I begged a hasty kiss from the beauty, which certainly blooms for all, and she—" He raised his hands and eyes imploringly to the despot; but Caracalla had already snatched Macrinus's sword from its sheath, and before Aurelius could defend himself he was struck first on the head with the flat of the blade, and then received a series of sharp cuts on his brow and face.

Streaming with blood from the gaping wounds which the victim, trembling with fear and rage, covered with his hands, he surrendered himself to the care of his startled brother, while Caesar overwhelmed them both with a flood of furious reproaches.

When Nemesianus began to bind up his wounded brother's head with a handkerchief handed to him by Melissa, and Caracalla saw the gaping wounds he had inflicted, he became quieter, and said:

"I think those lips will not try to steal kisses again for some time from honorable maidens. You and Nemesianus have forfeited your lives; how ever, the beseeching look of those all-powerful eyes has saved you—you are spared. Take your brother away, Nemesianus. You are not to leave your quarters until further orders."

With this he turned his back on the twins, but on the threshold he again addressed them and said:

"You were mistaken about this maiden. She is not less pure and noble than your own sister."

The merchants were dismissed from the tablinum more hastily than was due to the importance of their business, in which, until this interruption, the sovereign had shown a sympathetic interest and intelligence which surprised them; and they left Caesar's presence disappointed, but with the promise that they should be received again in the evening.

As soon as they had retired, Caracalla threw himself again on the couch.

The bath had done him good. Still somewhat exhausted, though his head was clear, he would not be hindered from receiving the deputation for which he had important matters to decide; but this fresh attack of rage revenged itself by a painful headache. Pale, and with slightly quivering limbs, he dismissed the prefect and his other friends, and desired Epagathos to call Melissa.

He needed rest, and again the girl's little hand, which had yesterday

done him good, proved its healing power. The throbbing in his head yielded to her gentle touch, and by degrees exhaustion gave way to the comfortable languor of convalescence.

To-day, as yesterday, he expressed his thanks to Melissa, but he found her changed. She looked timidly and anxiously down into her lap excepting when she replied to a direct question; and yet he had done everything to please her. Her relations would soon be free and in Alexandria once more, and Zminis was in prison, chained hand and foot. This he told her; and, though she was glad, it was not enough to restore the calm cheerfulness he had loved to see in her.

He urged her, with warm insistence, to tell him what it was that weighed on her, and at last, with eyes full of tears, she forced herself to say:

"You yourself have seen what they take me for."

"And you have seen," he quickly replied, "how I punish those who forget the respect they owe to you."

"But you are so dreadful in your wrath!" The words broke from her lips. "Where others blame, you can destroy; and you do it, too, when passion carries you away. I am bound to obey your call, and here I am. But I fancy myself like the little dog—you may see him any day—which in the beast-garden of the Panæum, shares a cage with a royal tiger. The huge brute puts up with a great deal from his small companion, but woe betide the dog if the tiger once pats him with his heavy, murderous paw—and he might, out of sheer forgetfulness!"

"But this hand," Caesar broke in, raising his delicate hand covered with rings, "will never forget, any more than my heart, how much it owes to you."

"Until I, in some unforeseen way—perhaps quite unconsciously—excite your anger," sighed Melissa. "Then you will be carried away by passion, and I shall share the common fate."

Caracalla was about to reply indignantly, but just then Adventus entered the room, announcing the chief astrologer of the Temple of Serapis. Caracalla refused to receive him just then, but he anxiously asked whether he had any signs to report. The reply was in the affirmative, and in a few minutes Caesar had in his hand a wax tablet covered with words and figures. He studied it eagerly, and his countenance cleared; still holding the tablets, he exclaimed to Melissa:

"You, daughter of Heron, have nothing to fear from me, you of all the world! In some quiet hour I will explain to you how my planet yearns to yours, and yours—that is, yourself—to mine. The gods have created us for each other, child; I am already under your influence, but your heart still hesitates, and I know why; it is because you distrust me."

Melissa raised her large eyes to his face in astonishment, and he went on, pensively:

"The past must stand; it is like a scar which no water will wash out. What have you not heard of my past? What did they feel, in their self-conscious virtue, when they talked of my crimes? Did it ever occur to any one, I wonder, that with the purple I assumed the sword, to protect my empire and throne? And when I have used the blade, how eagerly have fingers pointed at me, how gladly slanderous tongues have wagged! Who has ever thought of asking what compulsion led me to shed blood, or how much it cost me to do it? You, fair child—and the stars confirm it—you were sent by fate to share the burden that oppresses me, and to you I will ease my heart, to you I will confide all, unasked, because my heart prompts me to do so. But first you must tell me with what tales they taught you to hate the man to whom, as you yourself confessed, you nevertheless felt drawn."

At this Melissa raised her hands in entreaty and remonstrance, and Caesar went on:

"I will spare you the pains. They say that I am ever athirst for fresh bloodshed if only some one is rash enough to suggest it to me. You were told that Caesar murdered his brother Geta, with many more who did but speak his victim's name. My father-in-law, and his daughter Plautilla, my wife, were, it is said, the victims of my fury. I killed Papinian, the lawyer and prefect, and Cilo—whom you saw yesterday—nearly shared the same fate. What did they conceal? Nothing. Your nod confesses it—well, and why should they, since speaking ill of others is their greatest delight? It is all true, and I should never think of denying it. But did it ever occur to you, or did any one ever suggest to you, to inquire how it came to pass that I perpetrated such horrors; I—who was brought up in the fear of the gods and the law, like you and other people?"

"No, my lord, never," replied Melissa, in distress. "But I beg you, I beseech you, say no more about such dreadful things. I know full well that you are not wicked; that you are much better than people think."

"And for that very reason," cried Caesar, whose cheeks were flushed with pleasure in the hard task he had set himself, "you must hear me. I am Caesar. There is no judge over me; I need give account to none for my actions. Nor do I. Who, besides yourself, is more to me than the flies on that cup?"

"And your conscience?" she timidly put in.

"It raises hideous questions from time to time," he replied, gloomily. "It can be obtrusive, but we can teach ourselves not to answer—besides, what you call conscience knows the motives for every action, and, remembering them, judges leniently. You, child, should do the same; for

you—”

”O my lord, what can my poor judgment matter?” Melissa panted out; but Caracalla exclaimed, as if the question pained him:

”Must I explain all that? The stars, as you know, proclaim to you, as to me, that a higher power has joined us as light and warmth are joined. Have you forgotten how we both felt only yesterday? Or am I mistaken? Has not Roxana’s soul entered into that divinely lovely form because it longed for its lost companion spirit?”

He spoke vehemently, with a quivering of his eyelids; but feeling her hand tremble in his own, he collected himself, and went on in a lower tone, but with urgent emphasis:

”I will let you glance into this bosom, closed to every other eye; for my desolate heart is inspired by you to fresh energy and life; I am as grateful to you as a drowning man to his deliverer. I shall suffocate and die if I repress the impulse to open my heart to you!”

What change was this that had come over this mysterious being? Melissa felt as though she was gazing on the face of a stranger, for, though his eyelids still quivered, his eyes were bright with ecstatic fire and his features looked more youthful. On that noble brow the laurel wreath he wore looked well. Also, as she now observed, he was magnificently attired; he wore a close-fitting tunic, or breast-plate made of thick woolen stuff, and over it a purple mantle, while from his bare throat hung a precious medallion, shield-shaped, and set in gold and gems, the center formed by a large head of Medusa, with beautiful though terrible features. The lion-heads of gold attached to each corner of the short cloak he wore over the sham coat of mail, were exquisite works of art, and sandals embroidered with gold and gems covered his feet and ankles. He was dressed to-day like the heir of a lordly house, anxious to charm; nay, indeed, like an emperor, as he was; and with what care had his body-slave arranged his thin curls!

He passed his hand over his brow and cast a glance at a silver mirror on the low table at the head of his couch. When he turned to her again his amorous eyes met Melissa’s.

She looked down in startled alarm. Was it for her sake that Caesar had thus decked himself and looked in the mirror? It seemed scarcely possible, and yet it flattered and pleased her. But in the next instant she longed more fervently than she ever had before for a magic charm by which she might vanish and be borne far, far away from this dreadful man. In fancy she saw the vessel which the lady Berenike had in readiness. She would, she must fly hence, even if it should part her for a time from Diodoros.

Did Caracalla read her thought? Nay, he could not see through her; so

she endured his gaze, tempting him to speak; and his heart beat high with hope as he fancied he saw that she was beginning to be affected by his intense agitation. At this moment he felt convinced, as he often had been, that the most atrocious of his crimes had been necessary and inevitable. There was something grand and vast in his deeds of blood, and that—for he flattered himself he knew the female heart—must win her admiration, besides the awe and love she already felt.

During the night, at his waking, and in his bath, he had felt that she was as necessary to him as the breath of life and hope. What he experienced was love as the poets had sung it. How often had he laughed it to scorn, and boasted that he was armed against the arrows of Eros! Now, for the first time, he was aware of the anxious rapture, the ardent longing of which he had read in so many songs. There stood the object of his passion. She must hear him, must be his—not by compulsion, not by imperial command, but of the free impulse of her heart.

His confession would help to this end.

With a swift gesture, as if to throw off the last trace of fatigue, he sat up and began in a firm voice, with a light in his eyes:

”Yes, I killed my brother Geta. You shudder. And yet, if at this day, when I know all the results of the deed, the state of affairs were the same as then, I would do it again! That shocks you. But only listen, and then you will say with me that it was Fate which compelled me to act so, and not otherwise.”

He paused, and then mistaking the anxiety which was visible in Melissa’s face for sympathetic attention, he began his story, confident of her interest:

”When I was born, my father had not yet assumed the purple, but he already aimed at the sovereignty. Augury had promised it to him; my mother knew this, and shared his ambition. While I was still at my nurse’s breast he was made consul; four years later he seized the throne. Pertinax was killed, the wretched Didius Julianus bought the empire, and this brought my father to Rome from Pannonia. Meanwhile he had sent us children, my brother Geta and me, away from the city; nor was it till he had quelled the last resistance on the Tiber that he recalled us.

”I was then but a child of five, and yet one day of that time I remember vividly. My father was going through Rome in solemn procession. His first object was to do due honor to the corpse of Pertinax. Rich hangings floated from every window and balcony in the city. Garlands of flowers and laurel wreaths adorned the houses, and pleasant odors were wafted to us as we went. The jubilation of the people was mixed with the trumpet-call of the soldiers; handkerchiefs were waved and acclamations rang out. This was in honor of my father, and of me also, the future Caesar. My little heart was almost bursting with pride; it seemed to me



that I had grown several heads taller, not only than other boys, but than the people that surrounded me.

"When the funeral procession began, my mother wished me to go with her into the arcade where seats had been placed for the ladies to view, but I refused to follow her. My father became angry. But when he heard me declare that I was a man and the future Emperor, that I would rather see nothing than show myself to the people among the women, he smiled. He ordered Cilo, who was then the prefect of Rome, to lead me to the seats of the past consuls and the old senators. I was delighted at this; but when he allowed my younger brother Geta to follow me, my pleasure was entirely spoiled."

"And you were then five years old?" asked Melissa, astonished.

"That surprises you!" smiled Caracalla. "But I had already traveled through half the empire, and had experienced more than other boys of twice my age. I was, at any rate, still child enough to forget everything else in the brilliant spectacle that unfolded before my eyes. I remember to this day the colored wax statue which represented Pertinax so exactly that it might have been himself risen from the grave. And the procession! It seemed to have no end; one new thing followed another. All walked past in mourning robes, even the choir of singing boys and men. Cilo explained to me who had made the statues of the Romans who had served their country, who the artists and scholars were, whose statues and busts were carried by. Then came bronze groups of the people of every nation in the empire, in their costumes. Cilo told me what they were called, and where they lived; he then added that one day they would all belong to me; that I must learn the art of fighting, in case they resisted me, and should require suppressing. Also, when they carried the flags of the guilds past, when the horse and foot soldiers, the race-horses from the circus and several other things came by, he continued to explain them. I only remember it now because it made me so happy. The old man spoke to me alone; he regarded me alone as the future sovereign. He left Geta to eat the sweets which his aunts had given him, and when I too wanted some my brother refused to let me have any. Then Cilo stroked my hair, and said: 'leave him his toys. When you are a man you shall have the whole Roman Empire for your own, and all the nations I told you of.' Geta meanwhile had thought better of it, and pushed some of the sweetmeats toward me. I would not have them, and, when he tried to make me take them, I threw them into the road."

"And you remember all that?" said Melissa.

"More things than these are indelibly stamped on my mind from that day," said Caesar. "I can see before me now the pile on which Pertinax was to be burned. It was splendidly decorated, and on the top stood the gilt chariot in which he had loved to ride. Before the consuls fired the logs of Indian wood, my father led us to the image of Pertinax, that we might kiss it. He held me by the hand. Wherever we went, the senate and

people hailed us with acclamations. My mother carried Geta in her arms. This delighted the populace. They shouted for her and my brother as enthusiastically as for us, and I recollect to this day how that went to my heart. He might have the sweets and welcome, but what the people had to offer was due only to my father and me, not to my brother. At that moment I first fully understood that Severus was the present and I the future Caesar. Geta had only to obey, like every one else.

"After kissing the image, I stood, still holding my father's hand, to watch the flames. I can see them now, crackling and writhing as they gained on the wood, licking it and fawning, as it were, till it caught and sent up a rush of sparks and fire. At last the whole pile was one huge blaze. Then, suddenly, out of the heart of the flames an eagle rose. The creature flapped its broad wings in the air, which was golden with sunshine and quivering with heat, soaring above the smoke and fire, this way and that. But it soon took flight, away from the furnace beneath. I shouted with delight, and cried to my father: 'Look at the bird! Where is he flying?' And he eagerly answered: 'Well done! If you desire to preserve the power I have conquered for you always undiminished, you must keep your eyes open. Let no sign pass unnoticed, no opportunity neglected.'

"He himself acted on this rule. To him obstacles existed only to be removed, and he taught me, too, to give myself neither peace nor rest, and not to spare the life of a foe.—That festival secured my father the suffrages of the Romans. Meanwhile Pescennius Niger rose up in the East with a large army and took the field against Severus. But my father was not the man to hesitate. Within a few months of the obsequies of Pertinax his opponent was a headless corpse.

"There was yet another obstacle to be removed. You have heard of Clodius Albinus. My father had adopted him and raised him to share his throne. But Severus could not divide the rule with any man.

"When I was nine years old I saw, after the battle of Lugdunum, the dead face of Albinus's head; it was set up in front of the Curia on a lance.

"I now was the second personage in the empire, next to my father; the first among the youth of the whole world, and the future emperor. When I was eleven the soldiers hailed me as Augustus; that was in the war against the Parthians, before Ktesiphon. But they did the same to Geta. This was like wormwood in the sweet draught; and if then—But what can a girl care about the state, and the fate of rulers and nations?"

"Yes, go on," said Melissa. "I see already what you are coming to. You disliked the idea of sharing your power with another."

"Nay," cried Caracalla, vehemently, "I not only disliked it, it was intolerable, impossible! What I want you to see is that I did not grudge my brother his share of my father's inheritance, like any petty trader.

The world—that is the point—the world itself was too small for two of us. It was not I, but Fate, which had doomed Geta to die. I am certain of this, and so must you be. Yes, it was Fate. Fate prompted the child's little hand to attempt its brother's life. And that was long before my brain could form a thought or my baby-lips could stammer his hated name."

"Then you tried to kill your brother even in infancy?" asked Melissa, and her large eyes dilated with horror as she gazed at the terrible narrator. But Caracalla went on, in an apologetic tone:

"I was then but two years old. It was at Mediolanum, soon after Geta's birth. An egg was found in the court of the palace; a hen had laid it close to a pillar. It was of a purple hue-red all over like the imperial mantle, and this indicated that the newly born infant was destined to sovereignty. Great was the rejoicing. The purple marvel was shown even to me who could but just walk. I, like a naughty boy, flung it down; the shell cracked, and the contents poured out on the pavement. My mother saw it, and her exclamation, 'Wicked child, you have murdered your brother!' was often repeated to me in after-years. It never struck me as particularly motherly."

Here he paused, gazing meditatively into vacancy, and then asked the girl, who had listened intently:

"Were you never haunted by a word so that you could not be rid of it?"

"Oh, yes," cried Melissa; "a striking rhythm in a song, or a line of poetry—"

Caracalla nodded agreement, and went on more vehemently: "That is what I experienced at the words, 'You have murdered your brother!' I not only heard them now and then with my inward ear, but incessantly, like the dreary hum of the flies in my camp-tent, for hours at a time, by day and by night. No fanning could drive these away. The diabolical voice whispered loudest when Geta had done anything to vex me; or if things had been given him which I did not wish him to have. And how often that happened! For I—I was only Bassianus to my mother; but her youngest was her dear little Geta.

"So the years passed. We had, while still quite young, our own teams in the circus. One day, when we were driving for a wager—we were still boys, and I was ahead of the other lads—the horses of my chariot shied to one side. I was thrown some distance on the course. Geta saw this. He turned his horses to the right where I lay. He drove over his brother as he would over straw and apple-parings in the dust; and his wheel broke my thigh. Who knows what else it crushed in me? One thing is certain—from that date the most painful of my sufferings originated. And he, the mean scoundrel, had done it intentionally. He had sharp eyes. He knew

how to guide his steeds. He had never driven his wheel over a hazel-nut in the sand of the arena against his will; and I was lying some distance from the driving course.”

Caesar’s eyelids blinked spasmodically as he uttered this accusation, and his very glance revealed the raging fire that was burning in his soul. Melissa’s sad cry of:

”What terrible suspicion!” he answered with a short, scornful laugh and the furious assertion:

”Oh, there were friends enough who informed me what hope Geta had founded on this act of treachery. The disappointment made him irritable and listless, when Galenus had succeeded in curing me so far that I was able to throw away my Crutch; and my limp—at least so they tell me—is hardly perceptible.”

”Not at all, most certainly not at all,” Melissa sympathetically assured him. He, however, went on:

”Yet what I endured meanwhile!—and while I passed so many long weeks of pain and impatience on a couch, the words my mother had said about the brother whom I murdered rang constantly in my ears as though a reciter were engaged by day and night to reiterate them.

”But even this passed away. With the pain, which had spoiled many good hours for me, the quiet had brought me something more to the purpose—thoughts and plans. Yes, during those peaceful weeks the things my father and tutor had taught me became clear and real for the first time. I realized that I must become energetic if I meant ever to be a thorough sovereign. As soon as I could use my foot again I became an industrious and docile pupil under Cilo. From a child up to the time of this cruel experience, my youthful heart had clung to my nurse. She was a Christian from my father’s African home—I knew she loved me best on earth. My mother knew of no higher destiny than that of being the Domna,—[Domna, lady or mistress, in corrupt Latin. Hence her name of Julia Domna] the lady of the soldiers, the mother of the camp, and the lady philosopher among the sages. What she gave me in the way of love was but copper alms. She threw golden solidi of love into Geta’s lap in lavish abundance. And her sister and her nieces, who often lived with us, treated me exactly as she did. They were distantly civil, or they shunned me; but my brother was their spoiled plaything. I was as incapable as Geta was master of the art of stealing hearts; but in my childhood I needed none of them: for, if I wished for a kind word, a sweet kiss, or the love of a woman, my nurse’s arms were open to me. Nor was she an ordinary woman. As the widow of a tribune who had fallen in my father’s service, she had undertaken to attend on me. She loved me as no one else ever did. She was also the only person whom I would willingly obey. I came into the world full of wild instincts, but she

knew how to tame them kindly. My aversion to my brother was the one thing she checked but feebly, for he was a thorn in her side too. I learned this when she, who was so gentle, explained to me, with asperity in her tone, that there was but one God in heaven, and on earth but one emperor, who should govern the world in his name. She also imparted these convictions to others, and this turned to her disadvantage. My mother parted us, and sent her back to her African home. She died soon after." He was silent, and gazed pensively into vacancy; soon, however, he collected his thoughts and said, lightly:

"Well, I became Cilo's diligent pupil."

"But," asked Melissa, "did you not say that at one time you attempted his life?"

"I did so," replied Caracalla darkly; "for a moment arrived when I cursed his teaching, and yet it was certainly wise and well meant. You see, child, all of you who go through life humbly and without power are trained to submit obediently to the will of Heaven. Cilo taught me to place my own power, and the greatness of the realm which it would be incumbent on me to reign over, above everything, even above the gods. It was impressed upon you and yours to hold the life of another sacred; to us, our duty as the sovereign transcends this law. Even the blood of a brother must flow if it is for the good of the state intrusted to us. My nurse had taught me that being good meant doing unto others as we would be done by; Cilo cried to me: 'Strike down, that you may not be struck down—away with mercy, if the welfare of the state is threatened!' And how many hands are raised against Rome, the universal empire, which I rule over! It needs a strong hand to keep its antagonistic parts together. Otherwise it would fall apart like a bundle of arrows when the string that bound them is broken. And I, even as a boy, had sworn to my father, by the Terminus stone in the Capitol, never to abandon a single inch of his ground without fighting for it. He, Severus, was the wisest of the rulers. Only the blind love for his second son, encouraged by the women, caused him to forget his moderation and prudence. My brother Geta was to reign together with me over the empire, which ought to have been mine alone as the first-born. Every year festivals were kept, with prayers and sacrifices, to the "love of the brothers." You have perhaps seen the coins, which show us hand in hand, and have on them the inscription, 'Eternal union'!

"I in union—I hand in hand with the man I most hated under the sun! It almost maddened me only to hear his voice. I would have liked best of all to spring at his throat when I saw him with his learned fellows squandering their time. Do you know what they did? They invented the names by which the voices of different animals were to be known. Once I snatched the pencil out of the hand of the freedman as he was writing the sentences, 'The horse neighs, the pig grunts, the goat bleats, the cow lows, the sheep baas.' 'He, himself,' I added, 'croaks like a hoarse jay.'

"That I should share the government with this miserable, faint-hearted, poisonous nobody could never be,—this enemy, who, when I said 'Yes,' cried 'No!' Who frustrated all my measures,—it was impossible! It would have caused the destruction of the state, as certainly as it was the unfairest and unwisest of the deeds of Severus, to place the younger brother as co-regent with the first-born, the rightful heir to the throne. I, whom my father had taught to watch for signs, was reminded every hour that this unbearable position must come to an end.

"After the death of Severus, we lived at first close to one another in separate parts of the same palace like two lions in a cage across which a partition has been erected, so that they may not reciprocally mangle each other.

"We used to meet at my mother's.

"That morning my mastiff had bitten Geta's wolfhound and killed him, and they had found a black liver in the beast he had sent for sacrifice. I had been informed of this. Destiny was on my side. This indolent inactivity must be brought to a close. I myself do not know how I felt as I mounted the steps to my mother's rooms. I only remember distinctly that a demon cried continually in my ear, 'You have murdered your brother!' Then I suddenly found myself face to face with him. It was in the empress's reception-room. And when I saw the hated flat-shaped head so close to me, when his beardless mouth with its thick underlip smiled at me so sweetly and at the same time so falsely, I felt as if I again heard the cry with which he had cheered on his horse. And I felt . . . I even felt the pain—as if he broke my thigh again with his wheel. And at the same time a fiend whispered in my ear: 'Destroy him, or he will kill you, and through him Rome will perish!'

"Then I seized my sword. In his odious, peevish voice he said something—I forget what nonsense—to me. Then it appeared to me as if all the sheep and goats over which he had squandered his time were bleating at me. The blood rushed to my head. The room spun round me in a circle. Black spots on a red ground danced before my eyes.

"And then—What flashed in my right hand was my own naked sword! I neither heard nor said anything further. Nor had I planned, nor ever thought of, what then occurred. . . . But suddenly I felt as if a mountain of oppressive lead had fallen from my breast. How easily I could breathe again! All that had just before turned round me in a mad, whirling dance stood still. The sun shone brightly in the large room; a shaft of light, showing dancing dust, fell on Geta. He sank on his knees close to me, with my sword in his breast. My mother made a fruitless effort to shield him. His blood trickled over her hand. I can still see every ring on those slender, white fingers. I also remember distinctly how, when I raised my sword against him, my mother rushed in between us to protect her favorite. The sharp blade, as she tried to seize it,

accidentally grazed her hand—I know not how—only the skin was slightly cut. Yet what a scream she gave over the wound which the son had given his mother! Julia Maesa, her daughter Mammara, and the other women, rushed in. How they exaggerated! They made a river out of every drop of blood.

”So the dreadful deed was done; and yet, had I let the wretch live, I should have been a traitor to Rome, to myself, and to my father’s life’s work. That day, for the first time, I was ruler of the world. Those who accuse me of fratricide no doubt believe themselves to be right. But they certainly are not. I know better. You also know now with me that destiny, and not I, struck Geta out from among the living.”

Here he sat for some time in breathless silence. Then he asked Melissa:

”You understand now how I came to shed my brother’s blood?”

She started, and repeated gently after him: ”Yes, I understand it.”

Deep compassion filled her heart, and yet she felt she dare not sanction what she had heard and deplored. Torn by deep and conflicting feelings she threw back her head, brushed her hair off her face, and cried: ”Let me go now; I can bear it no longer!”

”So soft-hearted?” asked he, and shook his head disapprovingly. ”Life rages more wildly round the throne than in an artist’s home. You will have to learn to swim through the roaring torrent with me. Believe me, even enormities can become quite commonplace. And, besides, why does it still shock you when you yourself know that it was indispensable?”

”I am only a weak girl, and I feel as if I had witnessed these fearful deeds, and had to bear the terrible blood-guiltiness with you!” broke from her lips.

”That is what you must and shall do! It is to that end that I have confided to you what no one else has ever heard from my mouth!” cried Caracalla, his eyes flashing more brightly. She felt as though this cry called her from her slumbers and revealed the precipice to which she had strayed in her sleepwalking.

When Caracalla had begun telling her of his youth, she had only listened with half an ear; for she could not forget Berenike’s rescuing ship. But soon his confessions completely attracted her attention, and the lament of this powerful man on whom so many injuries and wrongs had fallen, who even in childhood had been deprived of the happiness of a mother’s love, had touched her tender heart. That which was afterward told to her she had identified with her own humble life; she heard with a shudder that it was to the malice of his brother that this unhappy being owed the injury which, like a poisonous blight, had marred for him all the joys of existence, while she owed all that was loveliest and best in her

young life to a brother's love.

The grounds on which Caracalla had based the assertion that destiny had compelled him to murder Geta appeared to her young and inexperienced mind as indisputable. He was only the pitiable victim of his birth and of a cruel fate. Besides, the humblest and most sober-minded can not resist the charm of majesty; and this hapless man, who had honored Melissa with his confidence, and who had assured her so earnestly that she was of such importance to him and could do so much for him, was the ruler of the universe.

She had also felt, after Caesar's confession, that she had a right to be proud, since he had thought her worthy to take an interest in the tragedy in the imperial palace, as if she had been a member of the court. In her lively imagination she had witnessed the ghastly act to which he—as she had certainly believed, even when she had replied to his question—had been forced by fate.

But the demand which had followed her answer now recurred to her. The picture of Diodoros, which had completely vanished from her thoughts while she had been listening, suddenly appeared to her, and, as she fancied, he looked at her reproachfully.

Had she, then, transgressed against her betrothed?

No, no, indeed she had not!

She loved him, and only him; and for that very reason, her upright judgment told her now, that it would be sinning against her lover to carry out Caracalla's wish, as if she had become his fellow-culprit, or certainly the advocate of the bloody outrage. She could think of no answer to his "That is what you must and shall do!" that would not awaken his wrath. Cautiously, and with sincere thanks for his confidence in her, she begged him once more to allow her to leave him, because she needed rest after such a shock to her mind. And it would also do him good to grant himself a short rest. But he assured her he knew that he could only rest when he had fulfilled his duty as a sovereign. His father had said, a few minutes before he drew his last breath:

"If there is anything more to be done, give it me to do," and he, the son, would do likewise.

"Moreover," he concluded, "it has done me good to bring to light that which I had for so long kept sealed within me. To gaze in your face at the same time was, perhaps, even better physic."

At this he rose and, seizing the startled girl by both hands, he cried:

"You, child, can satisfy the insatiable! The love which I offer you resembles a full bunch of grapes, and yet I am quite content if you will



give me back but one berry.”

At the very commencement, this declaration was drowned by a loud shout which rang through the room in waves of sound.

Caracalla started, but, before he could reach the window, old Adventus rushed in breathless; and he was followed, though in a more dignified manner, with a not less hasty step and every sign of excitement, by Macrinus, the prefect of the praetorians, with his handsome young son and a few of Caesar’s friends.

”This is how I rest!” exclaimed Caracalla, bitterly, as he released Melissa’s hand and turned inquiringly to the intruders.

The news had spread among the praetorians and the Macedonian legions, that the emperor, who, contrary to his custom, had not shown himself for two days, was seriously ill, and at the point of death. Feeling extremely anxious about one who had showered gold on them, and given them such a degree of freedom as no other emperor had ever allowed them, they had collected before the Serapeum and demanded to see Caesar. Caracalla’s eyes lighted up at this information, and, excitedly pleased, he cried:

”They only are really faithful!”

He asked for his sword and helmet, and sent for the ‘paludamentum’, the general’s cloak of purple, embroidered with gold, which he never otherwise wore except on the field. The soldiers should see that he intended leading in future battles.

While they waited, he conversed quietly with Macrinus and the others; when, however, the costly garment covered his shoulders, and when his favorite, Theocritus, who had known best how to support him during his illness, offered him an arm, he answered imperiously that he required no assistance.

”Nevertheless, you should, after so serious an attack—” the physician in ordinary ventured to exhort him; but he interrupted him scornfully, and, glancing toward Melissa, exclaimed:

”Those little hands there contain more healing power than yours and the great Galenus’s put together.”

Thereupon he beckoned to the young girl, and when she once more besought his permission to go, he left the room with the commanding cry, ”You are to wait!”

He had rather far to go and some steps to mount in order to reach the balcony which ran round the base of the cupola of the Pantheon which his father had joined to the Serapeum, yet he undertook this willingly, as

thence he could best be seen and heard.

A few hours earlier it would have been impossible for him to reach this point, and Epagathos had arranged that a sedan-chair and strong bearers should be waiting at the foot of the steps; but he refused it, for he felt entirely restored, and the shouts of his warriors intoxicated him like sparkling wine.

Meanwhile Melissa remained behind in the audience-chamber. She must obey Caesar's command. Yet it frightened her; and, besides, she was woman enough to feel it as an offense that the man who had assured her so sincerely of his gratitude, and who even feigned to love her, should have refused so harshly her desire to rest. She foresaw that, as long as he remained in Alexandria, she would have to be his constant companion. She trembled at the idea; yet, if she tried to fly from him, all she loved would be lost. No, this must not be thought of! She must remain.

She threw herself on a divan, lost in thought, and as she realized the confidence of which the unapproachable, proud emperor had thought her worthy, a secret voice whispered to her that it was certainly a delightful thing to share the overwhelming agitations of the highest and greatest. And was he then really bad, he who felt the necessity of vindicating himself before a simple girl, and to whom it appeared so intolerable to be misjudged and condemned even by her? Besides being the emperor and a suffering man, Caracalla had also become her wooer. It never once entered her mind to accept him; but still it flattered her extremely that the greatest of men should declare his love for her. Why, then, need she fear him? She was so important to him, she could do so much for him, that he would surely take care not to insult or offend her. This modest child, who till quite lately had trembled before her own father's temper, now, in the consciousness of Caesar's favor, felt herself strong to triumph over the wrath and passions of the most powerful and most terrible of men. In the mean time she dared not risk confessing to him that she was another's bride, for that might determine him to let Diodoros feel his power. The thought that the emperor could care about her good opinion greatly pleased her; it even had the effect of raising the hope in her inexperienced mind that Caracalla would moderate his passion for her sake—when old Adventus came into the room.

He was in a hurry; for preparations had to be made in the dining-hall for the reception of the ambassadors. But when at his appearance Melissa rose from the divan he begged her good-naturedly to continue resting. No one could tell what humor Caracalla might be in when he returned. She had often seen how rapidly that chameleon could change color. Who that had seen him just now, going to meet his soldiers, would believe that he had a few hours before sent away, with hard words, the widow of the Egyptian governor, who had come to beg mercy for her husband?

”So that wretch, Theocritus, has really carried out his intention of

ruining the honest Titianus?" asked Melissa, horrified.

"Not only of ruining him," answered the chamberlain; "Titianus is by this time beheaded."

The old man bowed and left the room; but Melissa remained behind, feeling as if the floor had opened in front of her. He, whose ardent assurance she had just now believed, that he had been forced to shed the blood of an impious wretch, in obedience to an overpowering fate, was capable of allowing the noblest of men to be beheaded, unjudged, merely to please a mercenary favorite! His confession, then, had been nothing but a revolting piece of acting! He had endeavored to vanquish the disgust she felt for him merely to ensnare her and her healing hand more surely—as his plaything, his physic, his sleeping draught. And she had entered the trap, and acquitted him of the most horrible blood-guiltiness.

He had that very day rejected, without pity, a noble Roman lady who petitioned for her husband's life, and with the same breath he had afterwards befooled her!

She started up, indignant and deeply wounded. Was it not ignominious even to wait here like a prisoner in obedience to the command of this wretch? And she had dared for one moment to compare this monster with Diodoros, the handsomest, the best, and most amiable of youths!

It seemed to her inconceivable. If only he had not the power to destroy all that was dearest to her heart, what pleasure it would have been to shout in his face:

"I detest you, murderer, and I am the betrothed of another, who is as good and beautiful as you are vile and odious!"

Then the question occurred to her whether it was only for the sake of her healing hands that he had felt attracted to her, and had made her an avowal as if she were his equal.

The blood mounted to her face at this thought, and with a burning brow she walked to the open window.

A crowd of presentiments rushed into her innocent and, till then, unsuspecting heart, and they were all so alarming that it was a relief to her when a shout of joy from the panoplied breasts of several thousand armed men rent the air. Mingling with this overpowering demonstration of united rejoicing from such huge masses, came the blare of the trumpets and horns of the assembled legions. What a maddening noise!

Before her lay the square, filled with many legions of warriors who surrounded the Serapeum in their shining armor, with their eagles and vexilla. The praetorians stood by the picked men of the Macedonian phalanx, and with these were all the troops who had escorted the imperial

general hither, and the garrisons of the city of Alexander who hoped to be called out in the next war.

On the balcony, decorated with statues which surrounded the colonnade of the Pantheon on which the cupola rested, she saw Caracalla, and at a respectful distance a superb escort of his friends, in red and white togas, bordered with purple stripes, and wearing armor. Having taken off his gold helmet, the imperial general bowed to his people, and at every nod of his head, and each more vigorous movement, the enthusiastic cheers were renewed more loudly than ever.

Macrinus then stepped up to Caesar's side, and the lictors who followed him, by lowering their fasces, signaled to the warriors to keep silence.

Instantly the ear-splitting din changed to a speechless lull.

At first she still heard the lances and shields, which several of the warriors had waved in enthusiastic joy, ringing against the ground, and the clatter of the swords being put back in their sheaths; then this also ceased, and finally, although only the superior officers had arrived on horseback, the stamping of hoofs, the snorting of the horses, and the rattle of the chains at their bits, were the only sounds.

Melissa listened breathlessly, looking first at the square and the soldiers below, then at the balcony where the emperor stood. In spite of the aversion she felt, her heart beat quicker. It was as if this immeasurable army had only one voice; as if an irresistible force drew all these thousands of eyes toward one point—the one little man up there on the Pantheon.

Directly he began to speak, Melissa's glance was also fixed on Caracalla.

She only heard the closing sentence, as, with raised voice, he shouted to the soldiers; and from it she gathered that he thanked his companions in arms for their anxiety, but that he still felt strong enough to share all their difficulties with them. Severe exertions lay behind them. The rest in this luxurious city would do them all good. There was still much to be conquered in the rich East, and to add to what they had already won, before they could return to Rome to celebrate a well-earned triumph. The weary should make themselves comfortable here. The wealthy merchants in whose houses he had quartered them had been told to attend to their wants, and if they neglected to do so every single warrior was man enough to show them what a soldier needed for his comfort. The people here looked askance at him and his soldiers, but too much moderation would be misplaced.

There certainly were some things even here which the host was not bound to supply to his military; he, Caesar, would provide them with these, and for that purpose he had put aside two million denarii out of his own poverty to distribute among them.

This speech had several times been interrupted by applause, but now such a tremendous shout of joy went up that it would have drowned the loudest thunder. The number of voices as well as their power seemed to have doubled.

Caracalla had added another link to the golden chain which already bound him to these faithful people; and, as he smiled and nodded to the delighted crowd from the balcony, he looked like a happy, light-hearted youth who had prepared a great treat for himself and several beloved friends.

What he said further was lost in the confusion of voices in the square. The ranks were broken up, and the cuirasses, helmets, and arms of the moving warriors caught the sun and sent bright beams of light crossing one another over the wide space surrounded with dazzling white marble statues.

When Caracalla left the balcony, Melissa drew back from the window.

The compassionate impulse to lighten the lot of a sufferer, which had before drawn her so strongly to Caracalla, had now lost its sense and meaning for this healthy, high-spirited man. She considered herself cheated, as if she had been fooled by sham suffering into giving excessively large alms to an artful beggar.

Besides, she loved her native town, and Caracalla's advice to the soldiers to force the citizens to provide luxurious living for them, had made her considerably more rebellious. If he ever put her again in a position to speak her mind freely to him, she would tell him all undisguisedly; but instantly it again rushed into her mind that she must keep guard over her tongue before the easily unchained wrath of this despot, until her father and brothers were in safety once more.

Before the emperor returned, the room was filled with people, of whom she knew none, excepting her old friend the white-haired, learned Samonicus. She was the aim and center of all eyes, and when even the kindly old man greeted her from a distance, and so contemptuously, that the blood rushed to her face, she begged Adventus to take her into the next room.

The Chamberlain did as she wished, but before he left her he whispered to her: "Innocence is trusting; but it is not of much avail here. Take care, child! They say there are sand-banks in the Nile which, like soft pillows, entice one to rest. But if you use them they become alive, and a crocodile creeps out, with open jaws. I am talking already in metaphor, like an Alexandrian, but you will understand me."

Melissa bowed acknowledgment to him, and the old man went on:

"He may perhaps forget you; for many things had accumulated during his

illness. If the mass of business, as it comes in, is not settled for twenty four hours, it swells like a mill-stream that has the sluice down. But when work is begun, it quite carries him away. He forgets then to eat and drink. Ambassadors have arrived also from the Empress-mother, from Armenia, and Parthia. If he does not ask for you in half an hour, it will be supertime, and I will let you out through that door."

"Do so at once," begged Melissa, with raised, petitioning hands; but the old man replied: "I should then reward you but ill for having warmed my feet for me. Remember the crocodile under the sand! Patience, child! There is Caesar's zithern. If you can play, amuse yourself with that. The door shuts closely and the curtains are thick. My old ears just now were listening to no purpose."

But Caracalla was so far from forgetting Melissa that although he had attended to the communication brought to him by the ambassadors, and the various dispatches from the senate, he asked for her even at the door of the tablinum. He had seen her from the balcony looking out on the square; so she had witnessed the reception his soldiers had given him. The magnificent spectacle must have impressed her and filled her with joy. He was anxious to hear all this from her own lips, before he settled down to work.

Adverntus whispered to him where he had taken her, to avoid the persecuting glances of the numerous strangers, and Caracalla nodded to him approvingly and went into the next room.

She sat there with the zithern, letting her fingers glide gently over the strings.

On his entering, she drew back hastily; but he cried to her brightly: "Do not disturb yourself. I love that instrument. I am having a statue erected to Mesomedes, the great zithern-player—you perhaps know his songs. This evening, when the feast and the press of work are over, I will hear how you play. I will also play a few airs to you."

Melissa then plucked up courage and said, decidedly: "No, my lord; I am about to bid you farewell for to-day."

"That sounds very determined," he answered, half surprised and half amused. "But may I be allowed to know what has made you decide on this step?"

"There is a great deal of work waiting for you," she replied, quietly.

"That is my affair, not yours," was the crushing answer.

"It is also mine," she said, endeavoring to keep calm; "for you have not yet completely recovered, and, should you require my help again this evening, I could not attend to your call."

"No?" he asked, wrathfully, and his eyelids began to twitch.

"No, my lord; for it would not be seemly in a maiden to visit you by night, unless you were ill and needed nursing. As it is, I shall meet your friends—my heart stands still only to think of it—"

"I will teach them what is due to you!" Caracalla bellowed out, and his brow was knit once more.

"But you can not compel me," she replied, firmly, "to change my mind as to what is seemly," and the courage which failed her if she met a spider, but which stood by her in serious danger as a faithful ally, made her perfectly steadfast as she eagerly added: "Not an hour since you promised me that so long as I remained with you I should need no other protector, and might count on your gratitude. But those were mere words, for, when I besought you to grant me some repose, you scorned my very reasonable request, and roughly ordered me to remain and attend on you."

At this Caesar laughed aloud.

"Just so! You are a woman, and like all the rest. You are sweet and gentle only so long as you have your own way."

"No, indeed," cried Melissa, and her eyes filled with tears. "I only look further than from one hour to the next. If I should sacrifice what I think right, merely to come and go at my own will, I should soon be not only miserable myself, but the object of your contempt."

Overcome by irresistible distress, she broke into loud sobs; but Caracalla, with a furious stamp of his foot, exclaimed:

"No tears! I can not, I will not see you weep. Can any harm come to you? Nothing but good; nothing but the best of happiness do I propose for you. By Apollo and Zeus, that is the truth! Till now you have been unlike other women, but when you behave like them, you shall—I swear it—you shall feel which of us two is the stronger!"

He roughly snatched her hand away from her face and thereby achieved his end, for her indignation at being thus touched by a man's brutal hand gave Melissa strength to suppress her sobs. Only her wet cheeks showed what a flood of tears she had shed, as, almost beside herself with anger, she exclaimed:

"Let my hand go! Shame on the man who insults a defenseless girl! You swear! Then I, too, may take an oath, and, by the head of my mother, you shall never see me again excepting as a corpse, if you ever attempt violence! You are Caesar—you are the stronger. Who ever doubted it? But you will never compel me to a vile action, not if you could inflict a

thousand deaths on me instead of one!"

Caracalla, without a word, had released her hand and was staring at her in amazement.

A woman, and so gentle a woman, defying him as no man would have dared to do!

She stood before him, her hand raised, her bosom heaving; a flame of anger sparkled in her eyes through their tears, and he had never before thought her so fair. What majesty there was in this girl, whose simple grace had made him more than once address her as "child"! She was like a queen, an empress; perhaps she might become one. The idea struck him for the first time. And that little hand which now fell—what soothing power it had, how much he owed to it! How fervently he had wished but just now to be understood by her, and to be thought better of by her than by the rest! And this wish still possessed him. Nay, he was more strongly attracted than ever to this creature, worthy as she was of the highest in the land, and made doubly bewitching by her proud willfulness. That he should see her for the last time seemed to him as impossible as that he should never again see daylight; and yet her whole aspect announced that her threat was serious.

His aggrieved pride and offended sense of absolute power struggled with his love, repentance, and fear of losing her healing presence; but the struggle was brief, especially as a mass of business to be attended to lay before him like a steep hill to climb, and haste was imperative.

He went up to her, shaking his head, and said in the superior tone of a sage rebuking thoughtlessness:

"Like all the rest of them—I repeat it. My demands had no object in view but to make you happy and derive comfort from you. How hot must the blood be which boils and foams at the contact of a spark! Only too like my own; and, since I understand you, I find it easy to forgive you. Indeed, I must finally express myself grateful; for I was in danger of neglecting my duties as a sovereign for the sake of pleasing my heart. Go, then, and rest, while I devote myself to business."

At this, Melissa forced herself to smile, and said, still somewhat tearfully: "How grateful I am! And you will not again require me to remain, will you, when I assure you that it is not fitting?"

"Unluckily, I am not in the habit of yielding to a girl's whims."

"I have no whims," she eagerly declared. "But you will keep your word now, and allow me to withdraw? I implore you to let me go!"

With a deep sigh and an amount of self-control of which he would



yesterday have thought himself incapable, he let go her hand, and she with a shudder thought that she had found the answer to the question he had asked her. His eyes, not his words, had betrayed it; for a woman can see in a suitor's look what color his wishes take, while a woman's eyes only tell her lover whether or no she reciprocates his feelings.

"I am going," she said, but he remarked the deadly paleness which overspread her features, and her colorless cheeks encouraged him in the belief that, after a sleepless night and the agitations of the last few hours, it was only physical exhaustion which made Melissa so suddenly anxious to escape from him. So, saying kindly:

"Till to-morrow, then," he dismissed her.

But when she had almost left the room, he added: "One thing more! To-morrow we will try our zitherns together. After my bath is the time I like best for such pleasant things; Adventus will fetch you. I am curious to hear you play and sing. Of all sounds, that of the human voice is the sweetest. Even the shouting of my legions is pleasing to the ear and heart. Do you not think so, and does not the acclamation of so many thousands stir your soul?"

"Certainly," she replied hastily; and she longed to reproach him for the injustice he was doing the populace of Alexandria to benefit his warriors, but she felt that the time was ill chosen, and everything gave way to her longing to be gone out of the dreadful man's sight.

In the next room she met Philostratus, and begged him to conduct her to the lady Euryale; for all the anterooms were now thronged, and she had lost the calm confidence in which she had come thither.

## CHAPTER XXII.

As Melissa made her way with the philosopher through the crowd, Philostratus said to her: "It is for your sake, child, that these hundreds have had so long to wait to-day, and many hopes will be disappointed. To satisfy all is a giant's task. But Caracalla must do it, well or ill."

"Then he will forget me!" replied Melissa, with a sigh of relief.

"Hardly," answered the philosopher. He was sorry for the terrified girl, and in his wish to lighten her woes as far as he could, he said, gravely: "You called him terrible, and he can be more terrible than any man living. But he has been kind to you so far, and, if you take my advice, you will always seem to expect nothing from him that is not good and

noble.”

”Then I must be a hypocrite,” replied Melissa. ”Only to-day he has murdered the noble Titianus.”

”That is an affair of state which does not concern you,” replied Philostratus. ”Read my description of Achilles. I represent him among other heroes such as Caracalla might be. Try, on your part, to see him in that light. I know that it is sometimes a pleasure to him to justify the good opinion of others. Encourage your imagination to think the best of him. I shall tell him that you regard him as magnanimous and noble.”

”No, no!” cried Melissa; ”that would make everything worse.”

But the philosopher interrupted her.

”Trust my riper experience. I know him. If you let him know your true opinion of him, I will answer for nothing. My Achilles reveals the good qualities with which he came into the world; and if you look closely you may still find sparks among the ashes.”

He here took his leave, for they had reached the vestibule leading to the high-priest’s lodgings, and a few minutes later Melissa found herself with Euryale, to whom she related all that she had seen and felt. When she told her older friend what Philostratus had advised, the lady stroked her hair, and said: ”Try to follow the advice of so experienced a man. It can not be very difficult. When a woman’s heart has once been attached to a man—and pity is one of the strongest of human ties—the bond may be strained and worn, but a few threads must always remain.”

But Melissa hastily broke in:

”There is not a spider’s thread left which binds me to that cruel man. The murder of Titianus has snapped them all.”

”Not so,” replied the lady, confidently. ”Pity is the only form of love which even the worst crime can not eradicate from a kind heart. You prayed for Caesar before you knew him, and that was out of pure human charity. Exercise now a wider compassion, and reflect that Fate has called you to take care of a hapless creature raving in fever and hard to deal with. How many Christian women, especially such as call themselves deaconesses, voluntarily assume such duties! and good is good, right is right for all, whether they pray to one God or to several. If you keep your heart pure, and constantly think of the time which shall be fulfilled for each of us, to our ruin or to our salvation, you will pass unharmed through this great peril. I know it, I feel it.”

”But you do not know him,” exclaimed Melissa, ”and how terrible he can be! And Diodoros! When he is well again, if he hears that I am with Caesar, in obedience to his call whenever he sends for me, and if evil

tongues tell him dreadful things about me, he, too, will condemn me!"

"No, no," the matron declared, kissing her brow and eyes. "If he loves you truly, he will trust you."

"He loves me," sobbed Melissa; "but, even if he does not desert me when I am thus branded, his father will come between us."

"God forbid!" cried Euryale. "Remain what you are, and I will always be the same to you, come what may; and those who love you will not refuse to listen to an old woman who has grown gray in honor."

And Melissa believed her motherly, kind, worthy friend; and, with the new confidence which revived in her, her longing for her lover began to stir irresistibly. She wanted a fond glance from the eyes of the youth who loved her, and to whom, for another man's sake, she could not give all his due, nay, who had perhaps a right to complain of her. This she frankly confessed, and the matron herself conducted the impatient girl to see Diodoros.

Melissa again found Andreas in attendance on the sufferer, and she was surprised at the warmth with which the high-priest's wife greeted the Christian.

Diodoros was already able to be dressed and to sit up. He was pale and weak, and his head was still bound up, but he welcomed the girl affectionately, though with a mild reproach as to the rarity of her visits.

Andreas had already informed him that Melissa was kept away by her mediation for the prisoners, and so he was comforted by her assurance that if her duty would allow of it she would never leave him again. And the joy of having her there, the delight of gazing into her sweet, lovely face, and the youthful gift of forgetting the past in favor of the present, silenced every bitter reflection. He was soon blissfully listening to her with a fresh color in his cheeks, and never had he seen her so tender, so devoted, so anxious to show him the fullness of her great love. The quiet, reserved girl was to-day the wooer, and with the zeal called forth by her ardent wish to do him good, she expressed all the tenderness of her warm heart so frankly and gladly that to him it seemed as though Eros had never till now pierced her with the right shaft.

As soon as Euryale was absorbed in conversation with Andreas, she offered him her lips with gay audacity, as though in defiance of some stern dragon of virtue, and he, drunk with rapture, enjoyed what she granted him. And soon it was he who became daring, declaring that there would be time enough to talk another day; that for the present her rosy mouth had nothing to do but to cure him with kisses. And during this sweet give and take, she implored him with pathetic fervor never, never to doubt her

love, whatever he might hear of her. Their older friends, who had turned their backs on the couple and were talking busily by a window, paid no heed to them, and the blissful conviction of being loved as ardently as she loved flooded her whole being.

Only now and then did the thought of Caesar trouble for a moment the rapture of that hour, like a hideous form appearing out of distant clouds. She felt prompted indeed to tell her lover everything, but it seemed so difficult to make him understand exactly how everything had happened, and Diodoros must not be distressed. And, indeed, intoxicated as he was with heated passion, he made the attempt impossible.

When he spoke it was only to assure her of his love; and when the lady Euryale at last called her to go, and looked in the girl's glowing face, Melissa felt as though she were snatched from a rapturous dream.

In the anteroom they were stopped by Andreas. Euryale had indeed relieved his worst fears, still he was anxious to lay before the girl the question whether she would not be wise to take advantage of this very night to make her escape. She, however, her eyes still beaming with happiness, laid her little hand coaxingly on his bearded mouth, and begged him not to sadden her high spirits and hopes of a better time by warnings and dismal forecasts. Even the lady Euryale had advised her to trust fearlessly to herself, and sitting with her lover she had acquired the certainty that it was best so. The freedman could not bear to disturb this happy confidence, and only impressed on Melissa that she should send for him if ever she needed him. He would find her a hiding-place, and the lady Euryale had undertaken to provide a messenger. He then bade them godspeed, and they returned to the high-priest's dwelling.

In the vestibule they found a servant from the lady Berenike; in his mistress's name he desired Euryale to send Melissa to spend the night with her.

This invitation, which would remove Melissa from the Serapeum, was welcome to them both, and the matron herself accompanied the young girl down a private staircase leading to a small side-door. Argutis, who had come to inquire for his young mistress, was to be her escort and to bring her back early next morning to the same entrance.

The old slave had much to tell her. He had been on his feet all day. He had been to the harbor to inquire as to the return of the vessel with the prisoners on board; to the Serapeum to inquire for her; to Dido, to give her the news. He had met Alexander in the forenoon on the quay where the imperial galleys were moored. When the young man learned that the trireme could not come in before next morning at the soonest, he had set out to cross the lake and see Zeus and his daughter. He had charged Argutis to let Melissa know that his longing for the fair Agatha gave him no peace.

He and old Dido disapproved of their young master's feather-brain, which had not been made more steady and patient even by the serious events of this day and his sister's peril; however, he did not allow a word of blame to escape him. He was happy only to be allowed to walk behind Melissa, and to hear from her own lips that all was well with her, and that Caesar was gracious.

Alexander, indeed, had also told the old man that he and Caesar were "good friends"; and now the slave was thinking of Pandion, Theocritus, and the other favorites of whom he had heard; and he assured Melissa that, as soon as her father should be free, Caracalla would be certain to raise him to the rank of knight, to give him lands and wealth, perhaps one of the imperial residences on the Bruchium. Then he, Argutis, would be house steward, and show that he knew other things besides keeping the workroom and garden in order, splitting wood, and buying cheaply at market.

Melissa laughed and said he should be no worse off if only the first wish of her heart were fulfilled, and she were wife to Diodoros; and Argutis declared he would be amply content if only she allowed him to remain with her.

But she only half listened and answered absently, for she breathed faster as she pictured to herself how she would show Caesar, on whom she had already proved her power, that she had ceased to tremble before him.

Thus they came to the house of Seleukus.

A large force had taken up their quarters there. In the pillared hall beyond the vestibule bearded soldiers were sitting on benches or squatting in groups on the ground, drinking noisily and singing, or laughing and squabbling as they threw the dice on the costly mosaic pavement. A riotous party were toping and reveling in the beautiful garden of the impluvium round a fire which they had lighted on the velvet turf. A dozen or so of officers had stretched themselves on cushions under one of the colonnades, and, without attempting to check the wild behavior of their men, were watching the dancing of some Egyptian girls who had been brought into the house of their involuntary host. Although Melissa was closely veiled and accompanied by a servant, she did not escape rude words and insolent glances. Indeed, an audacious young praetorian had put out his hand to pull away her veil, but an older officer stopped him.

The lady Berenike's rooms had so far not been intruded on; for Macrinus, the praetorian prefect, who knew Berenike through her brother-in-law the senator Coeranus, had given orders that the women's apartments were to be exempt from the encroachments of the quartermaster of the body-guard. Breathing rapidly and with a heightened color, Melissa at last entered the room of Seleukus's wife.

The matron's voice was full of bitterness as she greeted her young visitor with the exclamation "You look as if you had fled to escape persecution! And in my house, too! Or"—and her large eyes flashed brightly—"or is the blood-hound on the track of his prey? My boat is quite ready—" When Melissa denied this, and related what had happened, Berenike exclaimed: "But you know that the panther lies still and gathers himself up before he springs; or, if you do not, you may see it to-morrow at the Circus. There is to be a performance in Caesar's honor, the like of which not even Nero ever saw. My husband bears the chief part of the cost, and can think of nothing else. He has even forgotten his only child, and all to please the man who insults us, robs and humiliates us! Now that men kiss the hands which maltreat them, it is the part of women to defy them. You must fly, child! The harbor is now closed, but it will be open again to-morrow morning, and, if your folks are set free in the course of the day, then away with you at once! Or do you really hope for any good from the tyrant who has made this house what you now see it?"

"I know him," replied Melissa, "and I look for nothing but the worst."

At this the elder woman warmly grasped the girl's hand, but she was interrupted by the waiting woman Johanna, who said that a Roman officer of rank, a tribune, craved to be admitted.

When Berenike refused to receive him, the maid assured her that he was a young man, and had expressed his wish to bring an urgent request to the lady's notice in a becoming and modest manner.

On this the matron allowed him to be shown in to her, and Melissa hastily obeyed her instructions to withdraw into the adjoining room.

Only a half-drawn curtain divided it from the room where Berenike received the soldier, and without listening she could hear the loud voice which riveted her attention as soon as she had recognized it.

The young tribune, in a tone of courteous entreaty, begged his hostess to provide a room for his brother, who was severely wounded. The sufferer was in a high fever, and the physician said that the noise and rattle of vehicles in the street, on which the room where he now lay looked out, and the perpetual coming and going of the men, might endanger his life. He had just been told that on the side of the women's apartments there was a row of rooms looking out on the impluvium, and he ventured to entreat her to spare one of them for the injured man. If she had a brother or a child, she would forgive the boldness of his request.

So far she listened in silence; then she suddenly raised her head and measured the petitioner's tall figure with a lurid fire in her eye. Then she replied, while she looked into his handsome young face with a half-scornful, half-indignant air: "Oh, yes! I know what it is to see one we love suffer. I had an only child; she was the joy of my heart. Death—

death snatched her from me, and a few days later the sovereign whom you serve commanded us to prepare a feast for him. It seemed to him something new and delightful to hold a revel in a house of mourning. At the last moment—all the guests were assembled—he sent us word that he himself did not intend to appear. But his friends laughed and reveled wildly enough! They enjoyed themselves, and no doubt praised our cook and our wine. And now—another honor we can duly appreciate!—he sends his praetorians to turn this house of mourning into a tavern, a wine-shop, where they call creatures in from the street to dance and sing. The rank to which you have risen while yet so young shows that you are of good family, so you can imagine how highly we esteem the honor of seeing your men trampling, destroying, and burning in their camp-fires everything which years of labor and care had produced to make our little garden a thing of beauty. Only look down on them! Macrinus, who commands you, promised me, moreover, that the women's apartments should be respected. No praetorian, whether common soldier or commander, and here she raised her voice, "shall set foot within them! Here is his writing. The prefect set the seal beneath it in Caesar's name."

"I know of the order, noble lady," interrupted Nemesianus, "and should be the last to wish to act against it. I do not demand, I only appeal humbly to the heart of a woman and a mother."

"A mother!" broke in Berenike, scornfully; "yes! and one whose soul your lord has pierced with daggers—a woman whose home has been dishonored and made hateful to her. I have enjoyed sufficient honor now, and shall stand firmly on my rights."

"Hear but one thing more," began the youth, timidly; but the lady Berenike had already turned her back upon him, and returned with a proud and stately carriage to Melissa in the adjoining apartment.

Breathing hard, as if stunned by her words, the tribune remained standing on the threshold where the terrible lady had vanished from his sight, and then, striving to regain his composure, pushed back the curling locks from his brow. But scarcely had Berenike entered the other room than Melissa whispered to her: "The wounded man is the unfortunate Aurelius, whose face Caracalla wounded for my sake."

At this the lady's eyes suddenly flashed and blazed so strangely that the girl's blood ran cold. But she had no time to ask the reason of this emotion, for the next moment the queenly woman grasped the weaker one by the wrist with her strong right hand, and with a commanding "Come with me," drew her back into the room they had just quitted. She called to the tribune, whose hand was already on the door, to come back.

The young man stood still, surprised and startled to see Melissa; but the lady Berenike said, calmly, "Now that I have learned the honor that has been accorded to you, too, by the master whom you so faithfully serve, the poor injured man whom you call your brother shall be made welcome

within these walls. He is my companion in suffering. A quiet, airy chamber shall be set apart for him, and he shall not lack careful attention, nor anything which even his own mother could offer him. Only two things I desire of you in return: that you admit no one of your companions-in-arms, nor any man whatever, into this dwelling, save only the physician whom I shall send to you. Furthermore, that you do not betray, even to your nearest friend, whom you found here besides myself."

Under the mortification that had wounded his brotherly heart, Aurelius Nemesianus had lost countenance; but now he replied with a soldier's ready presence of mind: "It is difficult for me to find a proper answer to you, noble lady. I know right well that I owe you my warmest thanks, and equally so that he whom you call our master has inflicted as deep a wrong on us as on you; but Caesar is still my military chief."

"Still!" broke in Berenike. "But you are too youthful a tribune for me to believe that you took up the sword as a means of livelihood."

"We are sons of the Aurelia," answered Nemesianus, haughtily, "and it is very possible that this day's work may be the cause of our deserting the eagles we have followed in order to win glory and taste the delights of warfare. But all that is for the future to decide. Meanwhile, I thank you, noble lady, and also in the name of my brother, who is my second self. On behalf of Apollinaris, too, I beg you to pardon the rudeness which we offered to this maiden--"

"I am not angry with you any more," cried Melissa, eagerly and frankly, and the tribune thanked her in his own and his brother's name.

He began trying to explain the unfortunate occurrence, but Berenike admonished him to lose no time. The soldier withdrew, and the lady Berenike ordered her handmaiden to call the housekeeper and other serving-women. Then she repaired quickly to the room she had destined for the wounded man and his brother. But neither Melissa nor the other women could succeed in really lending her any help, for she herself put forth all her cleverness and power of head and hand, forgetting nothing that might be useful or agreeable in the nursing of the sick. In that wealthy, well-ordered house everything stood ready to hand; and in less than a quarter of an hour the tribune Nemesianus was informed that the chamber was ready for the reception of his brother.

The lady then returned with Melissa to her own sleeping apartment, and took various little bottles and jars from a small medicine-chest, begging the girl at the same time to excuse her, as she intended to undertake the nursing of the wounded man herself. Here were books, and there Korinna's lute. Johanna would attend to the evening meal. Tomorrow morning they could consult further as to what was necessary to be done; then she kissed her guest and left the room.

Left to herself, Melissa gave herself up to varying thoughts, till



Johanna brought her repast. While she hardly nibbled at it, the Christian told her that matters looked ill with the tribune, and that the wound in the forehead especially caused the physician much anxiety. Many questions were needed to draw this much from the freedwoman, for she spoke but little. When she did speak, however, it was with great kindness, and there lay something so simple and gentle in her whole manner that it awakened confidence. Having satisfied her appetite, Melissa returned to the lady Berenike's apartment; but there her heart grew heavy at the thought of what awaited her on the morrow. When, at the moment of leaving, Johanna inquired whether she desired anything further, she asked her if she knew a saying of her fellow-believers, which ran, "The fullness of time was come."

"Yes, surely," returned the other; "our Lord himself spoke them, and Paul wrote them to the Galatians."

"Who is this Paul?" Melissa asked; and the Christian replied that of all the teachers of her faith he was the one she most dearly loved. Then, hesitating a little, she asked if Melissa, being a heathen, had inquired the meaning of this saying.

"Andrew, the freedman of Polybius and the lady Euryale, explained it to me. Did the moment ever come to you in which you felt assured that for you the time was fulfilled?"

"Yes," replied Johanna, with decision; "and that moment comes, sooner or later, in every life."

"You are a maiden like myself," began Melissa, simply. "A heavy task lies before me, and if you would confide to me—"

But the Christian broke in: "My life has moved in other paths than yours, and what has happened to me, the freedwoman and the Christian, can have no interest for you. But the saying which has stirred your soul refers to the coming of One who is all in all to us Christians. Did Andrew tell you nothing of His life?"

"Only a little," answered the girl, "but I would gladly hear more of Him."

Then the Christian seated herself at Melissa's side, and, clasping the maiden's hand in hers, told her of the birth of the Saviour, of His loving heart, and His willing death as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The girl listened with attentive ear. With no word did she interrupt the narrative, and the image of the Crucified One rose before her mind's eye, pure and noble, and worthy of all love. A thousand questions rose to her lips, but, before she could ask one, the Christian was called away to attend the lady Berenike, and Melissa was again alone.

What she had already heard of the teaching of the Christians occurred to

her once more, and above all that first saying from the sacred Scriptures which had attracted her attention, and about which she had just asked Johanna. Perhaps for her, too, the time was already fulfilled, when she had taken courage to defy the emperor's commands.

She rejoiced at this action, for she felt that the strength would never fail her now to set her will against his. She felt as though she bore a charm against his power since she had parted from her lover, and since the murder of the governor had opened her eyes to the true character of him on whom she had all too willingly expended her pity. And yet she shuddered at the thought of meeting the emperor again, and of having to show him that she felt safe with him because she trusted to his generosity.

Lost in deep thought, she waited for the return of the lady and the Christian waiting-woman, but in vain. At last her eye fell upon the scrolls which the lady Berenike had pointed out to her. They lay in beautiful alabaster caskets on an ebony stand. If they had only been the writings of the Christians, telling of the life and death of their Saviour! But how should writings such as those come here? The casket only held the works of Philostratus, and she took from it the roll containing the story of the hero of whom he had himself spoken to her. Full of curiosity, she smoothed out the papyrus with the ivory stick, and her attention was soon engaged by the lively conversation between the vintner and his Phoenician guest. She passed rapidly over the beginning, but soon reached the part of which Philostratus had told her. Under the form of Achilles he had striven to represent Caracalla as he appeared to the author's indulgent imagination. But it was no true portrait; it described the original at most as his mother would have wished him to be. There it was written that the vehemence flashing from the hero's bright eyes, even when peacefully inclined, showed how easily his wrath could break forth. But to those who loved him he was even more endearing during these outbursts than before. The Athenians felt toward him as they did toward a lion; for, if the king of beasts pleased them when he was at rest, he charmed them infinitely more when, foaming with bloodthirsty rage, he fell upon a bull, a wild boar, or some such ferocious animal.

Yes, indeed! Caracalla, too, fell mercilessly upon his prey! Had she not seen him hewing down Apollinaris a few hours ago?

Furthermore, Achilles was said to have declared that he could drive away care by fearlessly encountering the greatest dangers for the sake of his friends. But where were Caracalla's friends?

At best, the allusion could only refer to the Roman state, for whose sake the emperor certainly did endure many a hardship and many a wearisome task, and he was not the only person who had told her so.

Then she turned back a little and found the words: "But because he was

easily inclined to anger, Chiron instructed him in music; for is it not inherent in this art to soothe violence and wrath—And Achilles acquired without trouble the laws of harmony and sang to the lyre.”

This all corresponded with the truth, and tomorrow she was to discover what had suggested to Philostratus the story that when Achilles begged Calliope to endow him with the gifts of music and poetry she had given him so much of both as he required to enliven the feast and banish sadness. He was also said to be a poet, and devoted himself most ardently to verse when resting from the toils of war.

To hear that man unjustly blamed on whom her heart is set, only increases a woman's love; but unmerited praise makes her criticise him more sharply, and is apt to transform a fond smile into a scornful one. Thus the picture that raised Caracalla to the level of an Achilles made Melissa shrug her shoulders over the man she dreaded; and while she even doubted Caesar's musical capacities, Diodoros's young, fresh, bell-like voice rose doubly beautiful and true upon her memory's ear. The image of her lover finally drove out that of the emperor, and, while she seemed to hear the wedding song which the youths and maidens were so soon to sing for them both, she fell asleep.

It was late when Johanna came to admonish her to retire to rest. Shortly before sunrise she was awakened by Berenike, who wished to take some rest, and who told her, before seeking her couch, that Apollinaris was doing well. The lady was still sleeping when Johanna came to inform Melissa that the slave Argutis was waiting to see her.

The Christian undertook to convey the maiden's farewell greetings to her mistress.

As they entered the living-room, the gardener had just brought in fresh flowers, among them three rose-bushes covered with full-blown flowers and half-opened, dewy buds. Melissa asked Johanna timidly if the lady Berenike would permit her to pluck one—there were so many; to which the Christian replied that it would depend on the use it was to be put to.

“Only for the sick tribune,” answered Melissa, reddening. So Johanna plucked two of the fairest blooms and gave them to the maiden—one for the man who had injured her and one for her betrothed. Melissa kissed her, gratefully, and begged her to present the flowers to the sick man in her name.

Johanna carried out her wish at once; but the wounded man, gazing mournfully at the rose, murmured to himself: “Poor, lovely, gentle child! She will be ruined or dead before Caracalla leaves Alexandria!”