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THE EMPEROR, Part 2.

By Georg Ebers

Volume 9.

CHAPTER XIV.

The entertainment which Verus was giving on the eve of his birthday seemed to be far from drawing to an end, even at the beginning of the third hour of the morning. Besides the illustrious and learned Romans who had accompanied the Emperor to Alexandria, the most famous and distinguished Alexandrians had also been invited by the praetor. The splendid banquet had long been ended, but jar after jar of mixed wine was still being filled and emptied. Verus himself had been unanimously chosen as the king and leader of the feast. Crowned with a rich garland, he reclined on a couch strewn with rose-leaves, an invention of his own, and formed of four cushions piled one on another. A curtain of transparent gauze screened him from flies and gnats, and a tightly-woven mat of lilies and other flowers covered his feet and exhaled sweet odors for him and for the pretty singer who sat by his side.

Pretty boys dressed as little cupids watched every sign of the 'sham Eros.'

How indolently he lay on the deep, soft cushions! And yet his eyes were every where, and though he had not failed to give due consideration to the preparations for his feast, he devoted all the powers of his mind to the present management of it. As at the entertainments which Hadrian was accustomed to give in Rome, first of all short selections from new essays or poems were recited by their authors, then a gay comedy was performed; then Glycera, the most famous singer in the city, had sung a dithyramb to her harp, in a voice as sweet as a bell, and Alexander, a skilled performer on the trigonon, had executed a piece. Finally a troop of female dancers had rushed into the room and swayed and balanced themselves to the music of the double-flute and tambourine.

Each fresh amusement had been more loudly applauded than the last. With every jar of wine a new torrent of merriment went up through the opening in the roof, by which the scent of the flowers and of the perfume burnt on beautiful little altars found an exit into the open air. The wine offered in libations to the gods already lay in broad pools upon the hard pavement of the hall, the music and singing were drowned in shouts the feast had become an orgy.

Verus was inciting the more quiet or slothful of his guests to a freer

enjoyment and encouraging the noisiest in their extravagant recklessness to still more unbridled license. At the same time he bowed to each one who drank to his health, entertained the singer who sat by his side, flung a sparkling jest into one and another silent group, and proved to the learned men who reclined on their couches near to his that whenever it was possible he took an interest in their discussions. Alexandria, the focus of all the learning of the East and the West, had seen other festivals than this riotous banquet. Indeed, even here a vein of grave and wise discourse flavored the meal of the circle that belonged to the Museum; but the senseless revelry of Rome had found its way into the houses of the rich, and even the noblest achievements of the human mind had been made, unawares, subservient to mere enjoyment. A man was a philosopher only that he might be prompt to discuss and always ready to take his share in the talk; and at a banquet a well-told anecdote was more heartily welcome than some profound idea that gave rise to a reflection or provoked a subtle discussion.

What a noise, what a clatter was storming in the hall by the second hour after midnight! How the lungs of the feasters were choked with overpowering perfumes! What repulsive exhibitions met the eye! How shamelessly was all decency trodden under foot! The poisonous breath of unchecked license had blasted the noble moderation of the vapor of wine which floated round this chaos of riotous toppers slowly rose the pale image of Satiety watching for victims on the morrow.

The circle of couches on which lay Florus, Favorinus and their Alexandrian friends stood like an island in the midst of the surging sea of the orgy. Even here the cup had been bravely passed round, and Florus was beginning to speak somewhat indistinctly, but conversation had hitherto had the upper hand.

Two days before, the Emperor had visited the Museum and had carried on learned discussions with the most prominent of the sages and professors there, in the presence of their assembled disciples. At last a formal disputation had arisen, and the dialectic keenness and precision with which Hadrian, in the purest Attic Greek, had succeeded in driving his opponents into a corner had excited the greatest admiration. The Sovereign had quitted the famous institution with a promise to reopen the contest at an early date. The philosophers, Pancrates and Dionysius and Apollonius, who took no wine at all, were giving a detailed account of the different phases of this remarkable disputation and praising the admirable memory and the ready tongue of the great monarch.

"And you did not even see him at his best," exclaimed Favorinus, the Gaul, the sophist and rhetorician. "He has received an unfavorable oracle and the stars seem to confirm the prophecy. This puts him out of tune. Between ourselves let me tell you I know a few who are his superiors in dialectic, but in his happiest moments he is irresistible-irresistible. Since we made up our quarrel he is like a brother to me. I will defend him against all comers, for, as I say, Hadrian is my brother."

The Gaul had poured out this speech in a defiant tone and with flashing

eyes. He grew pale in his cups, touchy, boastful and very talkative.

"No doubt you are right," replied Apollonius, "but it seemed to us that he was bitter in discussion. His eyes are gloomy rather than gay."

"He is my brother," repeated Favorinus, "and as for his eyes, I have seen them flash--by Hercules! like the radiant sun, or merry twinkling stars! And his mouth! I know him well! He is my brother, and I will wager that while he condescended--it is too comical--condescended to dispute with you--with you, there was a sly smile at each corner of his mouth--so--look now--like this he smiled."

"I repeat, he seemed to us gloomy rather than gay," retorted Apollonius, with annoyance; and Panocrates added:

"If he does really know how to jest he certainly did not prove it to us."

"Not out of ill-will," laughed the Gaul, "you do not know him, but I--I am his friend and may follow wherever--he goes. Now only wait and I will tell you a few stories about him. If I chose I could describe his whole soul to you as if it lay there on the surface of the wine in my cup. Once in Rome he went to inspect the newly-decorated baths of Agrippa, and in the undressing-room he saw an old man, a veteran who had fought with him somewhere or other. My memory is greatly admired, but his is in no respect inferior. Scaurus was the old man's name--yes--yes, Scaurus. He did not observe Caesar at first, for after his bath his wounds were burning and he was rubbing his back against the rough stone of a pillar. Hadrian however called to him: 'Why are you scratching yourself, my friend?' and Scaurus, not at once recognizing Caesar's voice, answered without turning round: 'Because I have no slave to do it for me.' You should have heard Caesar laugh! Liberal as he is sometimes--I say sometimes--he gave Scaurus a handsome sum of money and two sturdy slaves. The story soon got abroad, and when Caesar, who--as you believe--cannot jest, a short time after again visited the bath, two old soldiers at once placed themselves in his way, scrubbed their backs against the wall like Scaurus, and called out to him 'Great Caesar, we have no slaves.'--'Then scratch each other,' cried he, and left the soldiers to rub themselves."

"Capital!" laughed Dionysius.

"Now one more true story," interrupted the loquacious Gaul. "Once upon a time a man with white hair begged of him. The wretch was a low fellow, a parasite who wandered round from one man's table to another, feeding himself out of other folks' wallets and dishes. Caesar knew his man and warned him off. Then the creature had his hair dyed that he might not be recognized, and tried his luck a second time with the Emperor. But Hadrian has good eyes; he pointed to the door, saying, with the gravest face: 'I have just lately refused to give your father anything.' And a hundred such jokes pass from mouth to mouth in Rome, and if you like I can give you a dozen of the best."

"Tell us, go on, out with your stories. They are all old friends!" stammered Florus. "But while Favorinus chatters we can drink."

The Gaul cast a contemptuous glance at the Roman, and answered promptly:

"My stories are too good for a drunken man."

Florus paused to think of an answer, but before he could find one, the praetor's body-slave rushed into the hall crying out: "The palace at Lochias is on fire."

Verus kicked the mat of lilies off his feet on to the floor, tore down the net that screened him in, and shouted to the breathless runner.

"My chariot-quick, my chariot! To our next merry meeting another evening my friends, with many thanks for the honor you have done me. I must be off to Lochias."

Verus flew out of the hall, without throwing on his cloak and hot as he was, into the cold night, and at the same time most of his guests had started up to hurry into the open air, to see the fire and to hear the latest news; but only very few went to the scene of the conflagration to help the citizens to extinguish it, and many heavily intoxicated drinkers remained lying on the couches.

As Favorinus and the Alexandrians raised themselves on their pillows Florus cried:

"No god shall make me stir from this place, not if the whole house is burnt down and Alexandria and Rome, and for aught I care every nest and nook on the face of the earth. It may all burn together. The Roman Empire can never be greater or more splendid than under Caesar! It may burn down like a heap of straw, it is all the same to me--I shall lie here and drink."

The turmoil and confusion on the scene of the interrupted feast seemed inextricable, while Verus hurried off to Sabina to inform her of what had occurred. But Balbilla had been the first to discover the fire and quite at the beginning, for after sitting industriously at her studies, and before going to bed, she had looked out toward the sea. She had instantly run out, cried "Fire!" and was now seeking for a chamberlain to awake Sabina.

The whole of Lochias flared and shone in a purple and golden glow. It formed the nucleus of a wide spreading radiance of tender red of which the extent and intensity alternately grew and diminished. Verus met the poetess at the door that led from the garden into the Empress' apartments. He omitted on this occasion to offer his customary greeting, but hastily asked her:

"Has Sabina been told?"

"I think not yet."

"Then have her called. Greet her from me--I must go to Lochias"

"We will follow you."

"No, stay here; you will be in the way there."

"I do not take much room and I shall go. What a magnificent spectacle."

"Eternal gods! the flames are breaking out too below the palace, by the King's harbor. Where can the chariots be?"

"Take me with you."

"No you must wake the Empress."

"And Lucilla?"

"You women must stay where you are."

"For my part I certainly will not. Caesar will be in no danger?"

"Hardly--the old stones cannot burn."

"Only look! how splendid! the sky is one crimson tent. I entreat you, Verus, let me go with you."

"No, no, pretty one. Men are wanted down there."

"How unkind you are."

"At last! here are the chariots! You women stay here; do you understand me?"

"I will not take any orders; I shall go to Lochias."

"To see Antinous in the flames! such a sight is not to be seen every day, to be sure!" cried Verus, ironically, as he sprang into his chariot, and took the reins into his own hand.

Balbilla stamped with rage.

She went to Sabina's rooms fully resolved to go to the scene of the fire. The Empress would not let herself be seen by any one, not even by Balbilla, till she was completely dressed. A waiting-woman told Balbilla that Sabina would get up certainly, but that for the sake of her health she could not venture out in the night-air.

The poetess then sought Lucilla and begged her to accompany her to Lochias; she was perfectly willing and ready, but when she heard that her husband had wished that the women should remain at the Caesareum she declared that she owed him obedience and tried to keep back her friend. But the perverse curly-haired girl was fully determined, precisely because Verus had forbidden her--and forbidden her with mocking words, to carry out her purpose. After a short altercation with Lucilla she left her, sought her companion Claudia, told her what she intended doing,

dismissed that lady's remonstrance with a very positive command, gave orders herself to the house-steward to have horses put to a chariot and reached the imperilled palace an hour and a half after Verus.

An endless, many-headed crowd of people besieged the narrow end of Lochias on the landward side and the harbor wharves below, where some stores and shipyards were in flames. Boats innumerable were crowded round the little peninsula. An attempt was being made, with much shouting, and by the combined exertions of an immense number of men, to get the larger ships afloat which lay at anchor close to the quay of the King's harbor and to place them in security. Every thing far and wide was lighted up as brightly as by day, but with a ruddier and more restless light. The north-east breeze fanned the fire, aggravating the labors of the men who were endeavoring to extinguish it and snatching flakes of flame off every burning mass. Each blazing storehouse was a gigantic torch throwing a broad glare into the darkness of the night. The white marble of the tallest beacon tower in the world, on the island of Pharos, reflected a rosy hue, but its far gleaming light shone pale and colorless. The dark hulls of the larger ships and the flotilla of boats in the background were afloat in a fiery sea, and the still water under the shore mirrored the illumination in which the whole of Lochias was wrapped.

Balbilla could not tire of admiring this varying scene, in which the most gorgeous hues vied with each other and the intensest light contrasted with the deepest shadows. And she had ample time to dwell on the marvellous picture before her eyes, for her chariot could only proceed slowly, and at a point where the street led up from the King's harbor to the palace, lictors stood in her way and declared positively that any farther advance was out of the question. The horses, much scared by the glare of the fire and the crowd that pressed round them, could hardly be controlled, first rearing and then kicking at the front board of the chariot. The charioteer declared he could no longer be answerable. The people who had hurried to the rescue now began to abuse the women, who ought to have staid at home at the loom rather than come stopping the way for useful citizens.

"There is time enough to go out driving by daylight!" cried one man; and another: "If a spark falls in those curls another conflagration will break out."

The position of the ladies was becoming every instant more unendurable and Balbilla desired the charioteer to turn round; but in the swarming mass of men that filled the street this was easier said than done. One of the horses broke the strap which fastened the yoke that rested on his withers to the pole, started aside and forced back the crowd which now began to scold and scream loudly. Balbilla wanted to spring out of the chariot, but Claudia clung tightly to her and conjured her not to leave her in the lurch in the midst of the danger. The spoilt patrician's daughter was not timid, but on this occasion she would have given much not to have followed Verus. At first she thought, "A delightful adventure! still, it will not be perfect till it is over." But presently her bold experiment lost every trace of charm, and repentance that she

had ever undertaken it filled her mind. She was far nearer weeping than laughing already, when a man's deep voice said behind her, in tones of commanding decision:

"Make way there for the pumps; push aside whatever stops the way."

These terrible words reduced Claudia to sinking on to her knees, but Balbilla's quelled courage found fresh wings as she heard them, for she had recognized the voice of Pontius. Now he was close behind the chariot, high on a horse. He then was the man on horseback whom she had seen dashing from the sea-shore up to the higher storehouses that were burning, down to the lake, and hither and thither.

She turned full upon him and called him by his name. He recognized her, tried to pull up his horse as it was dashing forward, and smilingly shook his head at her, as much as to say: "She is a giddy creature and deserves a good scolding; but who could be angry with her?" And then he gave his orders to his subordinates just as if she had been a mere chattel, a bale of goods or something of the kind, and not an heiress of distinction.

"Take out the horses," he cried to the municipal guards; "we can use them for carrying water."--"Help the ladies out of the chariot."--"Take them between you Nonnus and Lucanus."--"Now, stow the chariot in there among the bushes."--"Make way there in front, make way for our pumps." And each of these orders was obeyed as promptly as if it was the word of command given by a general to his well-drilled soldiers.

After the pumps had been fairly started Pontius rode close up to Balbilla and said:

"Caesar is safe and sound. You no doubt wished to see the progress of the fire from a spot near it, and in fact the colors down there are magnificent. I have not time to escort you back to the Caesareum; but follow me. You will be safe in the harbor-guard's stone house, and from the roof you can command a view of Lochias and the whole peninsula. You will have a rare feast for the eye, noble Balbilla; but I beg you not to forget at the same time how many days of honest labor, what rich possessions, how many treasures earned by bitter hardship are being destroyed at this moment. What may delight you will cost bitter tears to many others, and so let us both hope that this splendid spectacle may now have reached its climax, and soon may come to an end."

"I hope so--I hope it with all my heart!" cried the girl.

"I was sure you would. As soon as possible I will come to look after you. You Nonnus and Lucanus, conduct these noble ladies to the harbor-guard's house.

"Tell him they are intimate friends of the Empress. Only keep the pumps going! Till we meet again Balbilla!" and with these words the architect gave his horse the bridle and made his way through the crowd.

A quarter of an hour later Balbilla was standing on the roof of the

little stone guard-house. Claudia was utterly exhausted and incapable of speech. She sat in the dark little parlor below on a rough-hewn wooden bench. But the young Roman now gazed at the fire with different eyes than before. Pontius had made her feel a foe to the flames which only a short time before had filled her with delight as they soared up to the sky, wild and fierce. They still flared up violently, as though they had to climb above the roof; but soon they seemed to be quelled and exhausted, to find it more and more difficult to rise above the black smoke which welled up from the burning mass. Balbilla had looked out for the architect and had soon discovered him, for the man on horseback towered above the crowd. He halted now by one and now by another burning storehouse. Once she lost sight of him for a whole hour, for he had gone to Lochias. Then again he reappeared, and wherever he stayed for a while, the raging element abated its fury.

Without her having perceived it, the wind had changed and the air had become still and much warmer. This circumstance favored the efforts of the citizens trying to extinguish the fire, but Balbilla ascribed it to the foresight of her clever friend when the flames subsided in some places and in others were altogether extinguished. Once she saw that he had a building completely torn down which divided a burning granary from some other storehouses that had been spared, and she understood the object of this order; it cut off the progress of the flames. Another time she saw him high on the top of a rise in the ground. Close before him in a sheet of flame was a magazine in which were kept tow and casks of resin and pitch. He turned his face full towards it and gave his orders, now on this side, now on that. His figure and that of his horse, which reared uneasily beneath him, were flooded in a crimson glow--a splendid picture! She trembled for him, she gazed in admiration at this calm, resolute, energetic man, and when a blazing beam fell close in front of him and after his frightened horse had danced round and round with him, he forced it to submit to his guidance, the praetor's insinuation recurred to her mind, that she clung to her determination to go to Lochias because she hoped to enjoy the spectacle of Antinous in the flames. Here, before her, was a nobler display, and yet her lively imagination which often, sometimes indeed against her will, gave shape to her formless thoughts--called up the image of the beautiful youth surrounded by the glowing glory which still painted the horizon.

Hour after hour slipped by; the efforts of the thousands who endeavored to extinguish the blaze were crowned by increasing success; one burning mass after another was quenched, if not extinguished, and instead of flames smoke, mingled with sparks, rose from Lochias blacker and blacker--and still Pontius came not to look after her. She could not see any stars for the sky was overcast with clouds, but the beginning of a new day could not be far distant. She was shivering with cold, and her friend's long absence began to annoy her. When, presently, it began to rain in large drops, she went down the ladder that led from the roof and sat down by the fire in the little room where her companion had gone fast asleep.

She had been sitting quite half an hour and gazing dreamily into the warming glow, when she heard the sound of hoofs and Pontius appeared.

His face was begrimed, and his voice hoarse with shouting commands for hours. As soon as she saw him Balbilla forgot her vexation, greeted him warmly, and told him how she had watched his every movement; but the eager girl, so readily fired to enthusiasm, could only with the greatest difficulty bring out a few words to express the admiration that his mode of proceeding had so deeply excited in her mind.

She heard him say that his mouth was quite parched and his throat was longing for a draught of some drink, and she--who usually had every pin she needed handed to her by a slave, and on whom fate had bestowed no living creature whom she could find a pleasure in serving--she, with her own hand dipped a cup of water out of the large clay jar that stood in a corner of the room and offered it to him with a request that he would drink it. He eagerly swallowed the refreshing fluid, and when the little cup was empty Balbilla took it from his hand, refilled it, and gave it him again.

Claudia, who woke up when the architect came in, looked on at her foster-child's unheard-of proceedings with astonishment, shaking her head. When Pontius had drained the third cupful that Balbilla fetched for him he exclaimed, drawing a deep breath:

"That was a drink--I never tasted a better in the whole course of my life."

"Muddy water out of a nasty earthen pitcher!" answered the girl.

"And it tasted better than wine from Byblos out of a golden goblet."

"You had honestly earned the refreshment, and thirst gives flavor to the humblest liquor."

"You forget the hand that gave it me," replied the architect warmly.

Balbilla colored and looked at the floor in confusion, but presently raised her face and said, as gayly and carelessly as ever:

"So that you have been deliciously refreshed; and now that is done you will go home and the poor thirsty soul will once more become the great architect. But before that happens, pray inform us what god it was that brought you hither from Pelusium in the very nick of time when the fire broke out, and how matters look now in the palace at Lochias?"

"My time is short," replied Pontius, and he then rapidly told her that, after he had finished his work at Pelusium, he had returned to Alexandria with the imperial post. As he got out of the chariot at the post-house he observed the reflection of fire over the sea and was immediately after told by a slave that it was the palace that was burning. There were horses in plenty at the post-house; he had chosen a strong one and had got to the spot before the crowd had collected. How the fire had originated, so far remained undiscovered. "Caesar," he said, "was in the act of observing the heavens when a flame broke out in a store-shed close to the tower. Antinous was the first to detect it, cried 'Fire,' and

warned his master. I found Hadrian in the greatest agitation; he charged me to superintend the work of rescuing all that could be saved. At Lochias. Verus helped me greatly and indeed with so much boldness and judgment that I owe very much to him. Caesar himself kept his favorite within the palace, for the poor fellow burned both his hands."

"Oh!" cried Balbilla with eager regret. "How did that happen?"

"When Hadrian and Antinous first came down from the tower they brought with them as many of the instruments and manuscripts as they could carry. When they were at the bottom Caesar observed that a tablet with important calculations had been left lying up above and expressed his regret. Meanwhile the fire had already caught the slightly-built turret and it seemed impossible to get into it again. But the dreamy Bithynian can wake out of his slumbers it would seem, and while Caesar was anxiously watching the burning bundles of flax which the wind kept blowing across to the harbor the rash boy rushed into the burning building, flung the tablet down from the top of the tower and then hurried down the stairs. His bold action would indeed have cost the poor fellow his life if the slave Mastor; who meanwhile had hurried to the spot, had not dragged him down the stone stair of the old tower on which the new one stood and carried him into the open air. He was half suffocated at the top of them and had dropped down senseless."

"But he is alive, the splendid boy, the image of the gods! and he is out of danger?" cried Balbilla, with much anxiety.

"He is quite well; only his hands, as I said, are somewhat burnt, and his hair is singed, but that will grow again."

"His soft, lovely curls!" cried Balbilla. "Let us go home, Claudia. The gardener shall cut a magnificent bunch of roses, and we will send it to Antinous to please him."

"Flowers to a man who does not care about them?" asked Pontius, gravely.

"With what else can women reward men's virtues or do honor to their beauty?" asked Balbilla.

"Our own conscience is the reward of our honest actions, or the laurel wreath from the hand of some famous man."

"And beauty?"

"That of women claims and wins admiration, love too perhaps and flowers- that of men may rejoice the eye, but to do it Honor is a task granted to no mortal woman."

"To whom, then, if I may ask the question?"

"To Art, which makes it immortal."

"But the roses may bring some comfort and pleasure to the suffering

youth."

"Then send them-but to the sick boy, and not to the handsome man," retorted Pontius.

Balbilla was silent, and she and her companion followed the architect to the harbor. There he parted from them, putting them into a boat which took them back to the Caesareum through one of the arch-gates under the Heptastadium.

As they were rowed along the younger Roman lady said to the elder:

"Pontius has quite spoilt my fun about the roses. The sick boy is the handsome Antinous all the same, and if anybody could think--well, I shall do just as I please; still it will be best not to cut the nosegay."

CHAPTER XV.

The town was out of danger; the fire was extinct. Pontius had taken no rest till noonday. Three horses had he tired out and replaced by fresh ones, but his sinewy frame and healthy courage had till now defied every strain. As soon as he could consider his task at an end he went off to his own house, and he needed rest; but in the hall of his residence he already found a number of persons waiting, and who were likely to stand between him and the enjoyment of it.

A man who lives in the midst of important undertakings cannot, with impunity, leave his work to take care of itself for several days. All the claims upon him become pent up, and when he returns home they deluge him like water when the sluice-gates are suddenly opened behind which it has been dammed up.

At least twenty persons, who had heard of the architect's return, were waiting for him in his outer hall, and crowded upon him as soon as he appeared. Among them he saw several who had come on important business, but he felt that he had reached the farthest limit of his strength, and he was determined to secure a little rest at any cost. The grave man's natural consideration, usually so conspicuous, could not hold out against the demands made on his endurance, and he angrily and peevishly pointed to his begrimed face as he made his way through the people waiting for him.

"To-morrow, to-morrow," he cried; "nay, if necessary, to-day, after sunset. But now I need rest. Rest! Rest! Why, you yourselves can see the state I am in."

All--even the master-masons and purveyors who had come on urgent affairs, drew back; only one elderly man, his sister Paulina's house-steward, caught hold of his chiton, stained as it was with smoke and scorched in many places, and said quickly and in a low tone:

"My mistress greets you; she has things to speak of to you which will bear no delay; I am not to leave you till you have promised to go to see her to-day. Our chariot waits for you at the garden-door."

"Send it home," said Pontius, not even civilly; "Paulina must wait a few hours."

"But my orders are to take you with me at once."

"But in this state--so--I cannot go with you," cried the architect with vehemence. "Have you no sort of consideration? And yet--who can tell--well, tell her I will be with her in two hours."

When Pontius had fairly escaped the throng he took a bath; then he had some food brought to him, but even while he ate and drank, he was not unoccupied, for he read the letters which awaited him, and examined some drawings which his assistants had prepared during his absence.

"Give yourself an hour's respite," said the old housekeeper, who had been his nurse and who loved him as her own son.

"I must go to my sister," he answered with a shrug. "We know her of old," said the old woman. "For nothing, and less than nothing, she has sent for you be fore now; and you absolutely need rest. There--are your cushions right--so? And let me ask you, has the humblest stone-carrier so hard a life as you have? Even at meals you never have an hour of peace and comfort. Your poor head is never quiet; the nights are turned into day; something to do, always something to do. If one only knew who it is all for?"

"Aye--who for, indeed?" sighed Pontius, pushing his arm under his head, between it and the pillow. "But, you see, little mother, work must follow rest as surely as day follows night or summer follows winter. The man who has something he loves in the House--a wife and merry children, it may be, for aught I care--who sweeten his hours of rest and make them the best of all the day, he, I say is wise when he tries to prolong them; but his case is not mine--"

"But why is it not yours, my son Pontius?"

"Let me finish my speech. I, as you know full well, do not care for gossip in the bath nor for reclining long over a banquet. In the pauses of my work I am alone, with myself and with you, my very worthy Leukippe. So the hours of rest are not for me the fairest scenes, but empty waits between the acts of the drama of life; and no reasonable man can find fault with me for trying to abridge them by useful occupation."

"And what is the upshot of this sensible talk? Simply this: you must get married."

Pontius sighed, but Leukippe added eagerly:

"You have not far to look! The most respectable fathers and mothers are running after you and would bring their prettiest daughters into your door."

"A daughter whom I do not know, and who might perhaps spoil the pauses between the acts, which at present I can at any rate turn to some account."

"They say," the old woman went on, "that marriage is a cast of the dice. One throws a high number, another a low one; one wins a wife who is a match for the busy bee, another gets a tiresome gnat. No doubt there is some truth in it; but I have grown grey with my eyes open and I have often seen it happen, that how the marriage turned out depended on the husband. A man like you makes a bee out of a gnat--a bee that brings honey to the hive. Of course a man must choose carefully."

"How, pray?"

"First see the parents and then the child. A girl who has grown up surrounded by good habits, in the house of a sensible father and a virtuous mother--"

"And where in this city am I to find such a miracle? Nay, nay, Leukippe, for the present all shall be left to my old woman. We both do our duty, we are satisfied with each other and--"

"And time is flying," said the housekeeper, interrupting her master in his speech. "You are nearly thirty-five years of age, and the girls--"

"Let them be! let them be! They will find other men! Now send Cyrus with my shoes and cloak, and have my litter got ready, for Paulina has been kept waiting long enough."

The way from the architect's house to his sister's was long, and on his way he found ample time for reflection on various matters besides Leukippe's advice to marry. Still, it was a woman's face and form that possessed him heart and soul; at first, however, he did not feel inclined to feast his fancy on Balbilla's image, lovely as it appeared to him; on the contrary, with self-inflicted severity he sought everything in her which could be thought to be opposed to the highest standard of feminine perfections. Nor did he find it difficult to detect many defects and deficiencies in the Roman damsel; still he was forced to admit that they were quite inseparable from her character, and that she would no longer be what she was, if she were wholly free from them. Each of her little weaknesses presently began to appear as an additional charm to the stern man who had himself been brought up in the doctrine of the Stoics.

He had learnt by experience that sorrow must cast its shadow over the existence of every human being; but still, the man to whom it should be vouchsafed to walk through life hand-in-hand with this radiant child of fortune could, as it seemed to him, have nothing to look forward to but pure sunshine. During his journey to Pelusium and his stay there he had often thought of her, and each time that her image had appeared to his

inward eye he had felt as though daylight had shone in his soul. To have met her he regarded as the greatest joy of his life, but he dared not aspire to claim her as his own.

He did not undervalue himself and knew that he might well be proud of the position he had won by his own industry and talents; and still she was the grandchild of the man who had had the right to sell his grandfather for mere coin, and was so high-born, rich and distinguished that he would have thought it hardly more audacious to ask the Emperor what he would take for the purple than to woo her. But to shelter her, to warn her, to allow his soul to be refreshed by the sight of her and by her talk--this he felt was permissible, this happiness no one could deprive him of. And this she would grant him--she esteemed him and would give him the right to protect her, this he felt, with thankfulness and joy. He would, then and there, have gone through the exertions of the last few hours all over again if he could have been certain that he should once more be refreshed with the draught of water from her hand. Only to think of her and of her sweetness seemed greater happiness than the possession of any other woman.

As he got out of his litter at the door of his sister's town-house he shook his head, smiling at himself; for he confessed to himself that the whole of the long distance he had hardly thought of anything but Balbilla.

Paulina's house had but few windows opening upon the street and these belonged to the strangers' rooms, and yet his arrival had been observed. A window at the side of the house, all grown round with creepers, framed in a sweet girlish head which looked down from it inquisitively on the bustle in the street. Pontius did not notice it, but Arsinoe--for it was her pretty face that looked out--at once recognized the architect whom she had seen at Lochias and of whom Pollux had spoken as his friend and patron.

She had now, for a week, been living with the rich widow; she wanted for nothing, and yet her soul longed with all its might to be out in the city, and to inquire for Pollux and his parents, of whom she had heard nothing since the day of her father's death. Her lover was no doubt seeking her with anxiety and sorrow; but how was he to find her?

Three days after her arrival she had discovered the little window from which she had a view of the street. There was plenty to be seen, for it led to the Hippodrome and was never empty of foot-passengers and chariots that were proceeding thither or to Necropolis. No doubt it was a pleasure to her to watch the fine horses and garlanded youths and men who passed by Paulina's house; but it was not merely to amuse herself that she went to the bowery little opening; no, she hoped, on the contrary, that she might once see her Pollux, his father, his mother, his bother Teuker or some one else they knew pass by her new home. Then she might perhaps succeed in calling them, in asking what had become of her friends, and in begging them to let her lover know where to seek her.

Her adoptive mother had twice found her at the window and had forbidden her, not unkindly but very positively, to look out into the street. Arsinoe had followed her unresistingly into the interior of the house, but as soon as she knew that Paulina was out or engaged, she slipped back to the window again and looked out for him, who must at every hour of the day be thinking of her. And she was not happy amid her new and wealthy surroundings. At first she had found it very pleasant to stretch her limbs on Paulina's soft cushions, not to stir a finger to help herself, to eat the best of food and to have neither to attend to the children nor to labor in the horrible papyrus-factory; but by the third day she pined for liberty--and still more for the children, for Selene and Pollux. Once she went out driving with Paulina in a covered carriage for the first time in her life. As the horses started she had enjoyed the rapid movement and had leaned out at one side to see the houses and men flying past her; but Paulina had regarded this as not correct--as she did so many other things that she herself thought right and permissible--had desired her to draw in her head, and had told her that a well-conducted girl must sit with her eyes in her lap when out driving.

Paulina was kind, never was irritable, had her dressed and waited upon like her own daughter, kissed her in the morning and when she bid her good-night; and yet Arsinoe had never once thought of Paulina's demand that she should love her. The proud woman, who was so cool in all the friendly relations of life, and who, as she felt was always watching her, was to her only a stranger who had her in her power. The fairest sentiments of her soul she must always keep locked up from her.

Once, when Paulina, with tears in her eyes had spoken to her of her lost daughter, Arsinoe had been softened and following the impulse of her heart, had confided to her that she loved Pollux the sculptor and hoped to be his wife.

"You love a maker of images!" Paulina had exclaimed, with as much horror as if she had seen a toad; then she had paced uneasily up and down and had added with her usual calm decision:

"No, no, my child! you will forget all this as soon as possible; I know of a nobler Bridegroom for you; when once you have learned to know Him you will never long for any other. Have you seen one single image in this house?"

"No," replied Arsinoe, "but so far as regards Pollux--"

"Listen to me" said the widow, "have I not told you of our loving Father in Heaven? Have I not told you that the gods of the heathen are unreal beings which the vain imaginings of fools have endowed with all the weaknesses and crimes of humanity? Can you not understand how silly it is to pray to stones? What power can reside in these frail figures of brass or marble?"

"Idols we call them. He who carves them, serves them and offers sacrifice to them; aye and a great sacrifice, for he devotes his best powers, to their service. Do you understand me?"

"No--Art is certainly a lofty thing, and Pollux is a good man, full of the divinity as he works."

"Wait a while, only wait--you will soon learn to understand," Paulina had answered, drawing Arsinoe towards her, and had added, at first speaking gently but then more sternly: "Now go to bed and pray to your gracious Father in Heaven that he may enlighten your heart. You must forget the carved image-maker, and I forbid you ever to speak in my presence again of such a man."

Arsinoe had grown up a heathen, she clung with affection to the gods of her fathers and hoped for happier days after the first bitterness of the loss of her father and the separation from her brothers and sisters was past. She was little disposed to sacrifice her young love and all her earthly happiness for spiritual advantages of which she scarcely comprehended the value. Her father had always spoken of the Christians with hatred and contempt. She now saw that they could be kind and helpful, and the doctrine that there was a loving God in Heaven who cared for all men as his children appealed to her soul; but that we ought to forgive our enemies, to remember our sins, and to repent of them, and to regard all the pleasure and amusement which the gay city of Alexandria could offer as base and worthless--this was absurd and foolish.

And what great sins had she committed? Could a loving God require of her that she should mar all her best days because as a child she had pilfered a cake or broken a pitcher; or, as she grew older had sometimes been obstinate or disobedient? Surely not. And then was an artist, a kind faithful soul like her tall Pollux, to be odious in the eyes of God the Father of all, because he was able to make such wonderful things as that head of her mother, for instance? If this really was so she would rather, a thousand times rather, lift her hands in prayer to the smiling Aphrodite, roguish Eros, beautiful Apollo, and all the nine Muses who protected her Pollux, than to Him.

An obscure aversion rose up in her soul against the stern woman who could not understand her, and of whose teaching and admonitions she scarcely took in half; and she rejected many a word of the widow's which might otherwise easily have found room in her heart, only because it was spoken by the cold-mannered woman who at every hour seemed to try to lay some fresh restraint upon her.

Paulina had never yet taken her with her to of the Christian assemblies in her suburban villa; wished first to prepare her and to open her soul to salvation. In this task no teacher of the congregation should assist her. She, and she alone, should win to the Redeemer the soul of this fair creature that had walked so resolutely in the ways of the heathen; this was required of her as the condition of the covenant that she felt she had made with Him, it was with the price of this labor that she hoped to purchase her own child's eternal happiness. Day after day she had Arsinoe into her own room, that was decked with flowers and with Christian symbols, and devoted several hours to her instruction. But her disciple proved less impressionable and less attentive every day; while

Paulina was speaking Arsinoe was thinking of Pollux, of the children, of the festival prepared for the Emperor or of the beautiful dress she was to have worn as Roxana. She wondered what young girl would fill her place, and how she could ever hope to see her lover again. And it was the same during Paulina's prayers as during her instruction, prayers that often lasted more than hour, and which she had to attend, on her knees on Wednesday and Friday, and with hands uplifted on all the other days of the week.

When her adoptive mother had discovered how often she looked out into the street she thought she had found out the reason of her pupil's distracted attention and only waited the return of her brother, the architect, in order to have the window blocked up.

As Pontius entered the lofty hall of his sister's house, Arsinoe came to meet him. Her cheeks were flushed, she had hurried to fly down as fast as possible from her window to the ground floor, in order to speak to the architect before he went into the inner rooms or had talked with his sister, and she looked lovelier than ever. Pontius gazed at her with delight. He knew that he had seen this sweet face before, but he could not at once remember where; for a face we have met with only incidentally is not easily recognized when we find it again where we do not expect it.

Arsinoe did not give him time to speak to her, for she went straight up to him, greeted him, and asked timidly:

"You do not remember who I am?"

"Yes, yes," said the architect, "and yet--for the moment--"

"I am the daughter of Keraunus, the palace-steward at Lochias, but you know of course"

"To be sure, to be sure! Arsinoe is your name; I was asking to-day after your father and heard to my great regret--"

"He is dead."

"Poor child! How everything has changed in the old palace since I went away. The gate-house is swept away, there is a new steward and there--but, tell me how came you here?"

"My father left us nothing and Christians took its in. There were eight of us."

"And my sister shelters you all?"

"No, no; one has been taken into one house and others into others. We shall never be together again." And as she spoke the tears ran down Arsinoe's cheeks; but she promptly recovered herself, and before Pontius could express his sympathy she went on:

"I want to ask of you a favor; let me speak before any one disturbs us."

"Speak, my child."

"You know Pollux--the sculptor Pollux?"

"Certainly."

And you were always kindly disposed toward him?"

"He is a good man and an excellent artist."

"Aye that he is, and besides all that--may I tell you something and will you stand by me?"

"Gladly, so far as lies in my power."

Arsinoe looked down at the ground in charming and blushing confusion and said in a low tone:

"We love each other--I am to be his wife."

"Accept my best wishes."

"Ah, if only we had got as far as that! But since my father's death we have not seen each other. I do not know where he and his parents are, and how are they ever to find me here?"

"Write to him."

"I cannot write well, and even if I could my messenger--"

"Has my sister had any search made for him?"

"No--oh, no. I may not even let his name pass my lips. She wants to give me to some one else; she says that making statues is hateful to the God of the Christians."

"Does she? And you want me to seek your lover?"

"Yes, yes, my dear lord! and if you find him tell him I shall be alone to-morrow early, and again towards evening, every day indeed, for then your sister goes to serve her God in her country house."

"So you want to make me a lover's go-between. You could not find a more inexperienced one."

"Ah! noble Pontius, if you have a heart--"

"Let me speak to the end, child! I will seek your lover, and if I find him he shall know where you are, but I cannot and will not invite him to an assignation here behind my sister's back. He shall come openly to Paulina and prefer his suit. If she refuses her consent I will try to take the matter in hand with Paulina. Are you satisfied with this?"

"I must need be. And tell me, you will let me know when you have found out where he and his parents have gone?"

"That I promise you. And now tell the one thing. Are you happy in this house?"

Arsinoe looked down in some embarrassment, then she hastily shook her head in vehement negation and hurried away. Pontius looked after her with compassion and sympathy.

"Poor, pretty little creature!" he murmured to himself, and went on to his sister's room.

The house-steward had announced his visit, and Paulina met him on the threshold. In his sister's sitting-room the architect found Eumenes, the bishop, a dignified old man with clear, kind eyes.

"Your name is in everybody's mouth to-day," said Paulina, after the usual greetings. They say you did wonders last night."

"I got home very tired," said Pontius, "but as you so pressingly desired to speak to me, I shortened my hours of rest."

"How sorry I am!" exclaimed the widow.

The bishop perceived that the brother and sister had business to discuss together, and asked whether he were not interrupting it.

"On the contrary," cried Paulina. "The subject under discussion is my newly-adopted daughter who, unhappily, has her head full of silly and useless things. She tells me she has seen you at Lochias, Pontius."

"Yes, I know the pretty child."

"Yes, she is lovely to look upon," said the widow. "But her heart and mind have been left wholly untrained, and in her the doctrine falls upon stony ground, for she avails herself of every unoccupied moment to stare at the horsemen and chariots that pass on the way to the Hippodrome. By this inquisitive gaping she fills her head with a thousand useless and distracting fancies; I am not always at home, and so it will be best to have the pernicious window walled up."

"And did you send for me only to have that done?" cried Pontius, much annoyed. "Your house-slaves, I should think, might have been equal to that without my assistance."

"Perhaps, but then the wall would have to be freshly whitewashed--I know how obliging you always are." Thank you very much. To-morrow I will send you two regular workmen."

"Nay, to-day, at once if possible."

"Are you in such pressing haste to spoil the poor child's amusement? And besides I cannot but think that it is not to stare at the horsemen and chariots that she looks out, but to see her worthy lover."

"So much the worse. I was telling you, Eumenes, that a sculptor wants to marry her."

"She is a heathen," replied the bishop.

"But on the road to salvation," answered Paulina. "But we will speak of that presently. There is still something else to discuss, Pontius. The hall of my country villa must be enlarged."

"Then send me the plans."

"They are in the book-room of my late husband." The architect left his sister to go into the library, which he knew well.

As soon as the bishop was left alone with Paulina, he shook his head and said:

"If I judge rightly, my dear sister, you are going the wrong way to work in leading this child intrusted to your care. Not all are called, and rebellious hearts must be led along the path of salvation with a gentle hand, not dragged and driven. Why do you cut off this girl, who still stands with both feet in the world, from all that can give her pleasure? Allow the young creature to enjoy every permitted pleasure which can add to the joys of life in youth. Do not hurt Arsinoe needlessly, do not let her feel the hand that guides her. First teach her to love you from her heart, and when she knows nothing dearer than you, a request from you will be worth more than bolts or walled-up windows."

"At first I wished nothing more than that she should love me," interrupted Paulina.

"But have you proved her? Do you see in her the spark which may be fanned to a flame? Have you detected in her the germ which may possibly grow to a strong desire for salvation and to devotion to the Redeemer?"

"That germ exists in every heart-these are your own words."

"But in many of the heathen it is deeply buried in sand and stones; and do you feel yourself equal to clearing them away without injury to the seed or to the soil in which it lies?"

"I do, and I will win Arsinoe to Jesus Christ," said Paulina firmly.

Pontius interrupted the conversation; he remained with his sister some time longer discussing with her and with Eumenes the new building to be done at her country house; then he and the bishop left at the same time and Pontius proceeded to the scene of the fire by the harbor and in the old palace.

CHAPTER XVI.

Pontius did not find the Emperor at Lochias, for Hadrian had moved at mid-day to the Caesareum. The strong smell of burning in every room in the palace had sickened him and he had begun to regard the restored building as a doomed scene of disaster. The architect was waited for with much anxiety, for the rooms originally furnished for the Emperor in the Caesareum had been despoiled and disarranged to decorate the rooms at Lochias, and Pontius was wanted to superintend their immediate rehabilitation. A chariot was waiting for him and there was no lack of slaves, so he began this fresh task at once and devoted himself to it till late at night. It was in vain this time that his anteroom was filled with people waiting for his return.

Hadrian had retired to some rooms which formed part of his wife's apartments. He was in a grave mood, and when the prefect Titianus was announced he kept him waiting till, with his own hand, he had laid a fresh dressing on his favorite's burns.

"Go now, my lord," begged the Bithynian, when the Emperor had finished his task with all the skill of a surgeon: "Titianus has been walking up and down in there for the last quarter of an hour."

"And so he may," said the monarch. "And if the whole world is shrieking for me it must wait till these faithful hands have had their due. Yes, my boy! we will wander on through life together, inseparable comrades. Others indeed do the same, and each one who goes through life side by side with a companion sharing all he enjoys or suffers, comes to think at last that he knows him as he knows himself; still the inmost core of his friend's nature remains concealed from him. Then, some day Fate lets a storm come raging down upon their; the last veil is torn, under the wanderer's eyes, from the very heart of his companion, and at last he really sees him as he is, like a kernel stripped of its shell, a bare and naked body. Last night such a blast swept over us and let me see the heart of my Antinous, as plainly as this hand I hold before my eyes. Yes, yes, yes! for the man who will risk his young and happy existence for a thing his friend holds precious would sacrifice ten lives if he had them, for his friend's person. Never, my friend, shall that night be forgotten. It gives you the right to do much that might pain me, and has graven your name on my heart, the foremost among those to whom I am indebted for any benefit.--They are but few."

Hadrian held out his hand to Antinous as he spoke. The boy, who had kept his eyes fixed on the ground in much confusion, raised it to his lips and pressed it against them in violent agitation. Then he raised his large eyes to the Emperor's and said:

"You must not speak to me so kindly, for I do not deserve such goodness. What is my life after all? I would let it go, as a child leaves go of a beetle it has caught, to spare you one single anxious day."

"I know it," answered Hadrian firmly, and he went to the prefect in the adjoining room.

Titianus had come in obedience to Hadrian's orders; the matter to be settled was what indemnification was to be paid to the city and to the individual owners of the storehouses that had been destroyed, for Hadrian had caused a decree to be proclaimed that no one should suffer any loss through a misfortune sent by the gods and which had originated in his residence. The prefect had already instituted the necessary inquiries and the private secretaries, Phlegon, Heliodorus and Celer, were now charged with the duty of addressing documents to the injured parties in which they were invited, in the name of Caesar, to declare the truth as to the amount of the loss they had suffered. Titianus also brought the information that the Greeks and Jews had determined to express their thankfulness for Caesar's preservation by great thank-offerings.

And the Christians," asked Hadrian.

"They abominate the sacrifice of animals, but they will unite in a common act of thanksgiving."

"Their gratitude will not cost them much," said Hadrian.

"Their bishop, Eumenes, brought me a sum of money for which a hundred oxen might be bought, to distribute among the poor. He said the God of the Christians is a spirit and requires none but spiritual sacrifices; that the best offering a man can bring him is a prayer prompted by the spirit and proceeding from a loving heart."

"That sounds very well for us," said Hadrian. "But it will not do for the people. Philosophical doctrines do not tend to piety; the populace need visible gods and tangible sacrifices. Are the Christians here good citizens and devoted to the welfare of the state?"

"We need no courts of justice for them."

"Then take their money and distribute it among the needy; but I must forbid their meeting for a general thanksgiving; they may raise their hands to their great spirit in my behalf, in private. Their doctrine must not be brought into publicity; it is not devoid of a delusive charm and it is indispensable to the safety of the state that the mob should remain faithful to the old gods and sacrifices."

"As you command, Caesar."

"You know the account given of the Christians by Pliny and Trajan?"

"And Trajan's answer."

"Well then let us leave them to follow their own devices in private after their own fashion; only they must not commit any breach of the laws of the state nor force themselves into publicity. As soon as they show any

disposition to refuse to the old gods the respect that is due to them, or to raise a finger against them, severity must be exercised and every excess must be punished by death."

During this conversation Verus had entered the room; he was following the Emperor everywhere to-day for he hoped to hear him say a word as to his observation of the heavens, and yet he did not dare to ask him what he had discovered from them.

When he saw that Hadrian was occupied he made a chamberlain conduct him to Antinous. The favorite turned pale as he saw the praetor, still he retained enough presence of mind to wish him all happiness on his birthday. It did not escape Verus that his presence had startled the lad; he therefore plied him at first with indifferent questions, introduced pleasing anecdotes into his conversation and then, when he had gained his purpose, he added carelessly:

"I must thank you in the name of the state and of every friend of Caesar's. You carried out your undertaking well to the end, though by somewhat overpowering means."

"I entreat you say no more," interrupted Antinous eagerly, and looking anxiously at the door of the next room.

"Oh! I would have sacrificed all Alexandria to preserve Caesar's mind from gloom and care. Besides we have both paid dearly for our good intentions and for those wretched sheds."

"Pray talk of something else."

"You sit there with your hands bound up and your hair singed, and I feel very unwell."

"Hadrian said you had helped valiantly in the rescue."

"I was sorry for the poor rats whose gathered store of provisions the flames were so rapidly devouring, and all hot as I was from my supper, I flung myself in among the men who were extinguishing the fire. My first reward was a bath of cold, icy-cold sea-water, which was poured over my head out of a full skin. All doctrines of ethics are in disgrace with me, and I have long considered all the dramatic poets, in whose pieces virtue is rewarded and crime punished, as a pack of fools; for my pleasantest hours are all due to my worst deeds; and sheer annoyance and misery, to my best. No hyena can laugh more hoarsely than I now speak; some portion of me inside here, seems to have been turned into a hedgehog whose spines prick and hurt me, and all this because I allowed myself to be led away into doing things which the moralists laud as virtuous."

"You cough, and you do not look well. He down awhile."

"On my birthday? No, my young friend. And now let me just ask you before I go: Can you tell me what Hadrian read in the stars?"

"No."

"Not even if I put my Perseus at your orders for every thing you may require of him? The man knows Alexandria and is as dumb as a fish."

"Not even then, for what I do not know I cannot tell. We are both of us ill, and I tell you once more you will be wise to take care of yourself."
Verus left the room, and Antinous watched him go with much relief.

The praetor's visit had filled him with disquietude, and had added to the dislike he felt for him. He knew that he had been used to base ends by Verus, for Hadrian had told him so much as that he had gone up to the observatory not to question the stars for himself but to cast the praetor's horoscope, and that he had informed Verus of his intention.

There was no excuse, no forgiveness possible for the deed he had done; to please that dissolute coxcomb, that mocking hypocrite, he had become a traitor to his master and an incendiary, and must endure to be overwhelmed with praises and thanks by the greatest and most keen-sighted of men. He hated, he abhorred himself, and asked himself why the fire which had blazed around him had been satisfied only to inflict slight injuries on his hands and hair. When Hadrian returned to him he asked his permission to go to bed. The Emperor gladly granted it, ordered Mastor to watch by his side, and then agreed to his wife's request that he would visit her.

Sabina had not been to the scene of the fire, but she had sent a messenger every hour to inquire as to the progress of the conflagration and the well-being of her husband. When he had first arrived at the Caesareum she had met and welcomed him and then had retired to her own apartments.

It wanted only two hours of midnight when Hadrian entered her room; he found her reclining on a couch without the jewels she usually wore in the daytime but dressed as for a banquet.

"You wished to speak with me?" said the Emperor. "Yes, and this day--so full of remarkable events as it has been--has also a remarkable close since I have not wished in vain."

"You so rarely give me the opportunity of gratifying a wish."

"And do you complain of that?"

"I might--for instead of wishing you are wont to demand."

"Let us cease this strife of idle words."

"Willingly. With what object did you send for me?"

"Verus is to-day keeping his birthday."

"And you would like to know what the stars promise him?"

"Rather how the signs in the heavens have disposed you towards him."

"I had but little time to consider what I saw. But at any rate the stars promise him a brilliant future."

A gleam of joy shone in Sabina's eyes, but she forced herself to keep calm and asked, indifferently:

"You admit that, and yet you can come to no decision?"

"Then you want to hear the decisive word spoken at once, to-day?"

"You know that without my answering you."

"Well, then, his star outshines mine and compels me to be on my guard against him."

"How mean! You are afraid of the praetor?"

"No, but of his fortune which is bound up with you?"

"When he is our son his greatness will be ours."

"By no means, since if I make him what you wish him to be, he will certainly try to make our greatness his. Destiny--"

"You said it favored him; but unfortunately I must dispute the statement."

"You? Do you try too, to read the stars?"

"No, I leave that to men. Have you heard of Ammonius, the astrologer?"

"Yes. A very learned man who observes from the tower of the Serapeum, and who, like many of his fellows in this city has made use of his art to accumulate a large fortune."

"No less a man than the astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus referred me to him."

"The best of recommendation."

"Well, then, I commissioned Ammonius to cast the horoscope for Verus during the past night and he brought it to me with an explanatory key. Here it is."

The Emperor hastily seized the tablet which Sabina held out to him, and as he attentively examined the forecasts, arranged in order according to the hours, he said:

"Quite right. That of course did not escape me! Well done, exactly the same as my own observations--but here--stay--here comes the third hour,

at the beginning of which I was interrupted. Eternal gods! what have we here?"

The Emperor held the wax tablet prepared by Aminonius at arm's length from his eyes and never parted his lips again till he had come to the end of the last hour of the night. Then he dropped the hand that held the horoscope, saying with a shudder:

"A hideous destiny. Horace was right in saying the highest towers fall with the greatest crash."

"The tower of which you speak," said Sabina, "is that darling of fortune of whom you are afraid. Vouchsafe then to Verus a brief space of happiness before the horrible end you foresee for him."

While she spoke Hadrian sat with his eyes thoughtfully fixed on the ground, and then, standing in front of his wife, he replied:

"If no sinister catastrophe falls upon this man, the stars and the fate of men have no more to do with one another than the sea with the heart of the desert, than the throb of men's pulses with the pebbles in the brook. If Ammonius has erred ten times over still more than ten signs remain on this tablet, hostile and fatal to the praetor. I grieve for Verus--but the state suffers with the sovereign's misfortunes.--This man can never be my successor."

"No?" asked Sabina rising from her couch. "No? Not when you have seen that your own star outlives his? Not though a glance at this tablet shows you that when he is nothing but ashes the world will still continue long to obey your nod?"

"Compose yourself and give me time.--Yes, I still say not even so."

"Not even so," repeated Sabina sullenly. Then, collecting herself, she asked in a tone of vehement entreaty:

"Not even so--not even if I lift my hands to you in supplication and cry in your face that you and Fate have grudged me the blessing, the happiness, the crown and aim of a woman's life, and I must and I will attain it; I must and I will once, if only for a short time, hear myself called by some dear lips by the name which gives the veriest beggar-woman with her infant in her arms preeminence above the Empress who has never stood by a child's cradle. I must and I will, before I die, be a mother, be called mother and be able to say, 'my child, my son--our son.'" And as she spoke she sobbed aloud and covered her face with her hands.

The Emperor drew back a step from his wife. A miracle had been wrought before his eyes. Sabina--in whose eyes no tear had ever been seen-- Sabina was weeping, Sabina had a heart like other women. Greatly astonished and deeply moved he saw her turn from him, utterly shaken by the agitation of her feelings, and sink on her knees by the side of the couch she had quitted to hide her face in the cushions. He stood motionless by her side, but presently going nearer to her:

"Stand up, Sabina," he said. "Your desire is a just one. You shall have the son for whom your soul longs."

The Empress rose and a grateful look in her eyes, swimming in tears, met his glance. Sabina could smile too, she could look sweet! It had taken a lifetime, it had needed such a moment as this to reveal it to Hadrian.

He silently drew a seat towards her and sat down by her side; for some time he sat with her hand clasped in his, in silence. Then he let it go and said kindly:

"And will Verus fulfil all you expect of a son?" She nodded assent.

"What makes you so confident of that?" asked the Emperor. "He is a Roman and not lacking in brilliant and estimable gifts. A man who shows such mettle alike in the field and in the council-chamber and yet can play the part of Eros with such success will also know how to wear the purple without disgracing it. But he has his mother's light blood, and his heart flutters hither and thither."

"Let him be as he is. We understand each other and he is the only man on whose disposition I can build, on whose fidelity I can count as securely as if he were my favorite son."

"And on what facts is this confidence based?"

"You will understand me, for you are not blind to the signs which Fate vouchsafes to us. Have you time to listen to a short story?"

"The night is yet young."

"Then I will tell you. Forgive me if I begin with things that seem dead and gone; but they are not, for they live and work in me to this hour. I know that you yourself did not choose me for your wife. Plotina chose me for you--she loved you, whether your regard for her was for the beautiful woman or for the wife of Caesar to whom everything belonged that you had to look for--how should I know?"

"It was Plotina, the woman, that I honored and loved--"

"In choosing me she chose you a wife who was tall and so fitted to wear the purple, but who was never beautiful. She knew me well and she knew that I was less apt than any other woman to win hearts; in my parents' house no child ever enjoyed so slender a share of the gifts of love, and none can know better than you that my husband did not spoil me with tenderness."

"I could repent of it at this moment."

"It would be too late now. But I will not be bitter--no, indeed I will not. And yet if you are to understand me I must own that so long as I was young I longed bitterly for the love which no one offered me."

"And you yourself have never loved?"

"No--but it pained me that I could not. In Plotina's apartments I often saw the children of her relations, and many a time I tried to attract them to me, but while they would play confidently with other women they seemed to shun me. Soon I even grew cross to them--only our Verus, the little son of Celonius Commodus, would give me frank answers when I spoke to him, and would bring me his broken toys that I might mend their injuries. And so I got to love the child."

"He was a wonderfully sweet, attractive boy."

"He was indeed. One day we women were all sitting together in Caesar's garden. Verus came running out with a particularly fine apple that Trajan himself had given him. The rosy-cheeked fruit was admired by every one. Then Plotina, in fun took the apple out of the boy's hand and asked him if he would not give his apple to her. He looked at her with wide-open puzzled eyes, shook his curly head, ran up to me and gave me-- yes, me, and no one else--the fruit, throwing his arms round my neck and saying, 'Sabina you shall have it.'"

"The judgment of Paris."

"Nay, do not jest now. This action of an unselfish child gave me courage to endure the troubles of life. I knew now that there was one creature that loved me, and that one repaid all that I felt for him, all that I was never weary of doing for him with affectionate liking. He is the only being, of whom I know, that will weep when I die. Give him the right to call me his mother and make him our son."

"He is our son," said Hadrian, with dignified gravity, and held out his hand to Sabina. She tried to lift it to her lips but he drew it away and went on:

"Inform him that we accept him as our son. His wife is the daughter of Nigrinus--who had to go, as I desired to stay and stand firm. You do not love Lucilla, but we must both admire her for I do not know another woman in Rome whose virtue a man might vouch for. Besides, I owe her a father, and am glad to have such a daughter; thus we shall be blessed with children. Whether I shall appoint Verus my successor and proclaim to the world who shall be its future ruler I cannot now decide; for that I need a calmer hour. Till to-morrow, Sabina. This day began with a misfortune; may the deed with which we have combined to end it prosper and bring us happiness."

CHAPTER XVII.

There are often fine warm days in February, but those who fancy the spring has come find themselves deceived. The bitter, hard Sabina could

at times let soft and tender emotions get the mastery over her, but as soon as the longing of her languishing soul for maternal happiness was gratified, she closed her heart again and extinguished the fire that had warmed it. Every one who approached her, even her husband, felt himself chilled and repelled again by her manner.

Verus was ill. The first symptoms of a liver complaint which his physicians had warned him might ensue, if he, an European, persisted in his dissipated life at Alexandria as if it were Rome, now began to occasion him many uneasy hours, and this, the first physical pain that fate had ever inflicted on him, he bore with the utmost impatience. Even the great news which Sabina brought him, realizing his boldest aspirations, had no power to reconcile him to the new sensation of being ill. He learnt, at the same time, that Hadrian's alarm at the transcendent brightness of his star had nearly cost him his adoption, and as he firmly believed that he had brought on his sufferings by his efforts to extinguish the fire that Antinous had kindled, he bitterly rued his treacherous interference with the Emperor's calculations. Men are always ready to cast any burden, and especially that of a fault they have committed, on to the shoulders of another; and so the suffering praetor cursed Antinous and the learning of Simeon Ben Jochai, because, if it had not been for them the mischievous folly which had spoilt his pleasure in life would never have been committed.

Hadrian had requested the Alexandrians to postpone the theatrical displays and processions that they had prepared for him, as his observations as to the course of destiny during the coming year were not yet complete. Every evening he ascended the lofty observatory of the Serapeum and gazed from thence at the stars. His labors ended on the tenth of January; on the eleventh the festivities began. They lasted through many days, and by the desire of the praetor the pretty daughter of Apollodorus the Jew was chosen to represent Roxana. Everything that the Alexandrians had prepared to do honor to their sovereign was magnificent and costly. So many ships had never before been engaged in any Naumachia as were destroyed here in the sham sea-fight, no greater number of wild beasts had ever been seen together on any occasion even in the Roman Circus; and how bloody were the fights of the gladiators, in which black and white combatants afforded a varied excitement for both heart and senses. In the processions, the different elements which were supplied by the great central metropolis of Egyptian, Greek and Oriental culture afforded such a variety of food for the eye that, in spite of their interminable length, the effect was less fatiguing than the Romans had feared. The performances of the tragedies and comedies were equally rich in startling effects; conflagrations and floods were introduced and gave the Alexandrian actors the opportunity of displaying their talents with such brilliant success that Hadrian and his companions were forced to acknowledge that even in Rome and Athens they had never witnessed any representations equally perfect.

A piece by the Jewish author Ezekiel who, under the Ptolemies, wrote dramas in the Greek language of which the subject was taken from the history of his own people, particularly claimed the Emperor's attention.

Titianus during all this festive season was unluckily suffering from an attack of old-standing breathlessness, and he also had his hands full; at the same time he did his best in helping Pontius in seeking out the sculptor Pollux. Both men did their utmost, but though they soon were able to find Euphorion and dame Doris, every trace of their son had vanished. Papias, the former employer of the man who had disappeared, was no longer in the city, having been sent by Hadrian to Italy to execute centaurs and other figures to decorate his villa at Tibur. His wife who remained at home, declared that she knew nothing of Pollux but that he had abruptly quitted her husband's service. The unfortunate man's fellow-workmen could give no news of him whatever, for not one of them had been present when he was seized; Papias had had foresight enough to have the man he dreaded placed in security without the presence of any witnesses. Neither the prefect nor the architect thought of seeking the worthy fellow in prison, and even if they had done so they would hardly have found him, for Pollux was not kept in durance in Alexandria itself. The prisons of the city had overflowed after the night of the holiday and he had been transferred to Canopus and there detained and brought up for trial.

Pollux had unhesitatingly owned to having taken the silver quiver and to having been very angry at his master's accusation. Thus he produced from the first an unfavorable impression on the judge, who esteemed Papias as a wealthy man, universally respected. The accused had hardly been allowed to speak at all and judgment was immediately pronounced against him, on the strength of his master's accusation and his own admissions. It would have been sheer waste of time to listen to the romances with which this audacious rascal--who forgot all the respect he owed to his teacher and benefactor--wanted to cram the judges. Two years of reflection, the protectors of the law deemed, might suffice to teach this dangerous fellow to respect the property of others and to keep him from outbreaks against those to whom he owed gratitude and reverence.

Pollux, safe in the prison at Canopus, cursed his destiny and indulged in vain hopes of the assistance of his friends. These were at last weary of the vain search and only asked about him occasionally. He at first was so insubordinate under restraint that he was put under close ward from which he was not released until, instead of raging with fury he dreamed away his days in sullen brooding. The gaoler knew men well, and he thought he could safely predict that at the end of his two years' imprisonment this young thief would quit his cell a harmless imbecile.

Titianus, Pontius, Balbilla and even Antinous had all attempted to speak of him to the Emperor, but each was sharply repulsed and taught that Hadrian was little inclined to pardon a wound to his artist's vanity. But the sovereign also proved that he had a good memory for benefits he had received, for once, when a dish was set before him consisting of cabbage and small sausages he smiled, and taking out his purse filled with gold pieces, he ordered a chamberlain to take it in his name to Doris, the wife of the evicted gate-keeper. The old couple now resided in a little house of their own in the neighborhood of their widowed daughter Diotima. Hunger and external misery came not nigh them, still they had experienced a great change. Poor Doris' eyes were now red and

bloodshot, for they were accustomed to many tears, which were seldom far off and overflowed whenever a word, an object, a thought reminded her of Pollux, her darling, her pride and her hope; and there were few half-hours in the day when she did not think of him.

Soon after the steward's death she had sought out Selene, but dame Hannah could not and would not conduct her to see the sick girl, for she learnt from Mary that she was the mother of her patient's faithless lover; and on a second visit Selene was so shy, so timid and so strange in her demeanor, that the old woman was forced to conclude that her visit was an unpleasant intrusion.

And from Arsinoe, whose residence she discovered from the deaconess, she met with even a worse reception. She had herself announced as the mother of Pollux the sculptor and was abruptly refused admission, with the information that Arsinoe was not to be spoken with by her and that her visits were, once for all, prohibited. After the architect Pontius had been to seek her out and had encouraged her to make another attempt to see and speak to Arsinoe, who clung faithfully to Pollux, Paulina herself had received her and sent her away with such repellent words that she went home to her husband deeply insulted and distressed to tears. Nor had she resisted Euphorion's decision when he prohibited her ever again crossing the Christian's threshold.

The Emperor's donation had been most welcome and timely to the poor old couple, for Euphorion had completely lost the softness of his voice as well as his memory through the agitations and troubles of the last few months; he had been dismissed from the chorus of the theatre and could only find employment and very small pay of a few drachmae, in the mysteries of certain petty sectarians or in singing at weddings or in hymns of lamentation. At the same time the old folks had to maintain their daughter whom Pollux could no longer provide for, and the birds, the Graces and the cat all must eat. That it would be possible to get rid of them was an idea which never occurred to either Euphorion or Doris.

By day the old folks had ceased to laugh; but at night they still had many cheerful hours, for then Hope would beguile them with bright pictures of the future, and tell them all sorts of possible and impossible romances which filled their souls with fresh courage. How often they would see Pollux returning from the distant city whither he had probably fled-from Rome, or even from Athens--crowned with laurels and rich in treasure. The Emperor, who still so kindly remembered them, could not always be angry with him; perhaps he might some day send a messenger to seek Pollux and to make up to him by large commissions for all he had made him suffer. That her darling was alive she was sure; in that she could not be mistaken, often as Euphorion tried to persuade her that he must be dead. The singer could tell many tales of luckless men who had been murdered and never seen or heard of again; but she was not to be convinced, she persisted in hope, and lived wholly in the purpose of sending her younger son, Teuker, on his travels to seek his lost brother as soon as his apprenticeship was over, which would be in a few months.

Antinous, whose burnt hands had soon got well under the Emperor's care, and who had never felt a liking and friendship for any other young man but Pollux, lamented the artist's disappearance and wished much to seek out dame Doris; but he found it harder than ever to leave his master, and was so eager always to be at hand that Hadrian often laughingly reproached him with making his slaves' duties too light.

When at last he really was master of an hour to himself he postponed his intention of seeing his friend's parents; for with him there was always a wide world between the purpose and the deed which he never could overleap, if not urged by some strong impulse; and his most pressing instincts prompted him, when the Emperor was disputing in the Museum or receiving instructions from the chiefs of the different religious communities as to the doctrines they severally professed, to visit the suburban villa where, when February had already begun, Selene was still living. He had often succeeded in stealing into Paulina's garden, but he could not at first realize his hope of being observed by Selene of obtaining speech with her. Whenever he went near Hannah's little house, Mary, the deformed girl, would come in his way, tell him how her friend was, and beg or desire him to go away. She was always with the sick girl, for now her mother was nursed by her sister, and dame Hannah had obtained permission for her to work at home in gumming the papyrus-strips together.

The widow herself was obliged to be at her post in the factory, for her duties as overseer made her presence indispensable in the work-room.

Thus it came to pass that it was always by Mary and never by Hannah that Antinous was received and dismissed. A certain understanding had arisen between the beautiful youth and the deformed girl. When Antinous appeared and she called out to him: "What, again already!" he would grasp her hand and implore her only once to grant his wish; but she was always firm, only she never sent him away sternly but with smiles and friendly admonitions. When he brought rare and lovely flowers in his pallium and entreated her to give them to Selene in the name of her friend at Lochias, she would take them and promise to place them in her room; but she always said it would do neither him nor her any good at all that Selene should know from whom they came. After such repulses he well knew how to flatter and coax her with appealing words, but he had never dared to defy her or to gain his end by force. When the flowers were placed in the room Mary looked at them much oftener than Selene did, and when Antinous had been long absent the deformed girl longed to see him again, and would pace restlessly up and down between the garden gate and her friend's little house. She, like him, dreamed of an angel, and the angel of whom she dreamed was exactly like himself. In all her prayers she included the name of the handsome heathen and a soft tenderness in which a gentle pity was often infused, a grief for his unredeemed soul, was inseparable from all her thoughts of him.

Hannah was informed by her of each of the young man's visits, and as often as Mary mentioned Antinous the deaconess seemed anxious and desired her to threaten to call the gate-keeper to him. The widow knew full well

who her patient's indefatigable admirer was, for she had once heard him speaking to Mastor, and she had asked the slave, who availed himself of every spare moment to attend the services of the Christians, who the lad was. All Alexandria, nay all the Empire, knew the name of the most beautiful youth of his time, the spoilt favorite of Caesar. Even Hannah had heard of him and knew that poets sang his praises and heathen women were eager to obtain a glance from his eyes. She knew how devoid of all morality were the lives of the nobles at Rome, and Antinous appeared to her as a splendid falcon that wheels above a dove to swoop down upon it at a favorable moment and to tear it in its beak and talons. Hannah also knew that Selene was acquainted with Antinous, that it was he who had formerly rescued her from the big dog and afterward saved her from the water; but that Selene, who was now recovering, did not know who her preserver had been on this second occasion was clear from all that she said.

Towards the end of February Antinous had come on three days in succession, and Hannah now took the step of begging the bishop, Eumenes, to give the gate keeper strict injunctions to look out for the young man and to forbid his entering the garden, even with force if it should prove necessary.

But "love laughs at locksmiths" and finds its way through locked doors, and Antinous succeeded all the same in finding his way into Paulina's garden. On one of these occasions he was so happy to surprise Selene, as, supported on a stick and accompanied by a fair-haired boy and dame Hannah herself, she hobbled up and down.

Antinous had learnt to regard everything crippled or defective with aversion, as a monstrous failure of nature's plastic harmony, but to pity it tenderly; but now he felt quite differently. Mary with her humpback had at first horrified him; now he was always glad to see her though she always crossed his wishes; and poor lame Selene, who had been mocked at by the street boys as she limped along, seemed to him more adorable than ever. How lovely were her face and form, how peculiar her way of walking--she did not limp--no, she swayed along the garden. Thus, as he said to himself afterwards, the Nereids are borne along on the undulating waves. Love is easily satisfied, nor is this strange, for it raises all that comes within its embrace to a loftier level of existence. In the light of love weakness is a virtue and want an additional charm.

But the Bithynian's visits were not the widow's only cares; though she bore the others, it is true, not anxiously but with pleasure. Her household had increased by two living souls, and her income was very small. That her patient might not want, she had to work with her own hands while she superintended the girls in the factory, and to carry home with her in the evening papyrus-leaves, not only for Mary, but for herself too, and to glue them together during the long hours of the night. As soon as Selene's condition improved, she too helped willingly and diligently, but for many weeks the convalescent had to give up every kind of employment.

Mary often looked at Hannah in silent trouble, for she looked very pale.

After she had, on one occasion fallen in a fainting fit, the deformed girl had gathered courage and had represented to her that though she ought indeed to put out at interest the talent intrusted to her by the Lord, she ought not to spend it recklessly. She was giving herself no rest, working day and night; visiting the poor and sick in her hours of recreation just as she used, and if she did not give herself more rest would soon need nursing instead of nursing others.

"At any rate," urged Mary, "give yourself a little indispensable sleep at night."

"We must live," replied Hannah, "and I dare not borrow, for I may never be able to repay."

"Then beg Paulina to remit your house-rent; she will do so gladly."

"No," said Hannah, decidedly. "The rent of this little house goes to benefit my poor people, and you know how badly they want it. What we give we lend to the Lord, and he taxes no man above his ability."

Selene was now well, but the physician had said that no human skill could ever cure her of her lameness. She had become Hannah's daughter, and blind Helios the son of the house.

Arsinoe was only allowed to see her sister rarely and always accompanied by her protectress, and she and Selene never were able to have any unchecked and open conversation. The steward's eldest daughter was now contented and cheerful, while the younger was not only saddened by the disappearance of her lover, but also, from being unhappy in her new home, she had become fractious and easily moved to shed tears. All was well with the younger orphans; they were often taken to see Selene, and spoke with affection of their new parents.

As she got well her help diminished the strain on her two friends, and in the beginning of March a call came to the widow which, if she followed it, must give their simple existence a new aspect.

In Upper Egypt certain Christian fraternities had been established, and one of these had addressed a prayer to the great mother-community at Alexandria, that it would send to them a presbyter, a deacon and a deaconess capable of organizing and guiding the believers and catechumens in the province of Hermopolis where they were already numbered by thousands. The life of the community and the care of the poor, and sick in the outlying districts required organization by experienced hands, and Hannah had been asked whether she could make up her mind to leave the metropolis and carry on the work of benevolence at Besa in an extended sphere.

She would there have a pleasant house, a palm-garden, and gifts from the congregation which would secure not merely her own maintenance, but that of her adopted children.

Hannah was bound to Alexandria by many ties; in the first place she clung

to the poor and sick, many of whom had grown very dear to her, and how many girls who had gone astray had she rescued from evil in the factory alone! She begged for a short time for reflection, and this was granted to her. By the fifteenth of March she was to decide, but by the fifth she had already made up her mind, for while Hannah was in the papyrus-factory Antinous had succeeded in getting into Paulina's garden shortly before sunset and in stealing close up to Hannah's house. Mary again observed him as he approached and signed to him to go, in her usual pleasant way; but the Bithynian was more excited than usual; he seized her hand and clasped her with urgent warmth as he implored her to be merciful. She endeavored at once to free herself, but he would not let her go, but cried in coaxing tones:

"I must see her and speak to her to-day, dear, good Mary, only this once!" And before she could prevent it he had kissed her forehead and had flown into the house to Selene. The little hunchback did not know what had happened to her; confused and almost paralyzed by conflicting feelings she stood shame-faced, gazing at the ground. She felt that something quite extraordinary had happened to her, but this wonderful something radiated a dazzling splendor, and since this had risen for her, for poor Mary, a feeling of pride quite new to her mingled with the shame and indignation that filled her soul. She needed a few minutes to collect herself and to recover a sense of her duty, and those few minutes were made good use of by Antinous.

He flew with long steps into the room in which, on that never-to-be-forgotten night, he had laid Selene on the couch, and even at the threshold he called her by her name. She started and laid aside the book out of which she was reading to her blind brother. He called a second time, beseechingly. Selene recognized him and asked calmly:

"Do you want me, or dame Hannah?"

"You, you!" he cried passionately. "Oh Selene, I pulled you out of the water, and since that night I have never ceased to think of you and I must die for love of you. Have your thoughts never, never met mine on the way to you? Are you still and always as cold, as passive as you were then when you belonged half to life and half to death? For months have I prowled round this house as the shade of a dead man haunts the spot where he had left all that was dear to him on earth, and I have never been able to tell you what I feel for you?" As he spoke the lad fell on the ground before her and tried to clasp her knees; but she said reproachfully:

"What does all this mean? Stand up and compose yourself."

"Oh! let me, let me--" he besought her. "Do not be so cold and so hard; have pity on me and do not reject me!"

"Stand up," repeated the girl. "I will certainly not reproach you--I owe you thanks on the contrary."

"Not thanks, but love--a little love is all I ask."

"I try to love all men," replied the girl, "and so I love you because you have shown me very much kindness."

"Selene, Selene!" he exclaimed in joyful triumph. He threw himself again at her feet and passionately seized her right hand; but hardly had he taken it in his own when Mary, scarlet with agitation, rushed into the room. In a husky voice, full of hatred and fury, she commanded him to leave the house at once, and when he attempted again to besiege her ear with entreaties she cried out:

"If you do not obey I will call the men in to help us, who are out there attending to the flowers. I ask you, will you obey or will you not?"

"Why are you so cruel, Mary?" asked the blind boy. "This man is good and kind and tells Selene he loves her."

Antinous pointed to the child with an imploring gesture but Mary was already by the window and was raising her hand to her mouth to make her call heard.

"Don't, don't," cried Antinous. "I am going at once."

And he went slowly and silently towards the door, still gazing at Selene with passionate ardor; then he quitted the room groaning with shame and disappointment, though still with a look of radiant pride as though he had achieved some great deed. In the garden he was met by Hannah, who immediately hastened with accelerated steps to her own house where she found Mary sobbing violently and dissolved in tears.

The widow was soon informed of all that had occurred in her absence, and an hour later she had announced to the bishop that she would accept the call to Besa and was ready to start for Upper Egypt.

"With your foster-children?" asked Eumenes.

"Yes. It was indeed Selene's most earnest wish to be baptized by you, but as a year of probation is required--"

"I will perform the rite to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow, Father?"

"Yes, Sister, in all confidence. She buried the old man in the waves of the sea, and before we were her teachers she had gone through the school and discipline of life. While she was yet a heathen she had taken up her cross and proved herself as faithful as though she were a child of the Lord. All that was lacking to her--Faith, Love and Hope--she has found under your roof. I thank thee for this soul thou hast found Sister, in the name of the Lord."

"Not I, not I," said the widow. "Her heart was frozen, but it is not I but the innocent faith of the blind child that has melted it."

"She owes her salvation to him and to you," replied the bishop, "and they both shall be baptized together. We will give the lovely boy the name of the fairest of the disciples, and call him John. Selene for the future, if she herself likes it, shall be known as Martha."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

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Love laughs at locksmiths
Wide world between the purpose and the deed

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| 2500 | 2000 | December |
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