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THE BRIDE OF THE NILE

By Georg Ebers

Volume 6.

CHAPTER XXII.

Up to within a few days Katharina had still been a dependent and docile child, who had made it a point of honor to obey instantly, not only her mother's lightest word, but Dame Neforis, too; and, since her own Greek instructress had been dismissed, even the acid Eudoxia. She had never concealed from her mother, or the worthy teacher whom she had truly loved, the smallest breach of rules, the least naughtiness or wilful act of which she had been guilty; nay, she had never been able to rest till she had poured out a confession, before evening prayer, of all that her little heart told her was not perfectly right, to some one whom she loved, and obtained full forgiveness. Night after night the "Water-wagtail" had gone to sleep with a conscience as clear and as white as the breast of her whitest dove, and the worst sin she had ever committed during the day was some forbidden scramble, some dainty or, more frequently, some rude and angry word.

But a change had first come over her after Orion's kiss in the intoxicating perfume of the flowering trees; and almost every hour since had roused her to new hopes and new views. It had never before occurred to her to criticise or judge her mother; now she was constantly doing so. The way in which Susannah had cut herself off from her neighbors in the governor's house, to her daughter seemed perverse and in bad taste; and the bitterly vindictive attacks on her old friends, which were constantly

on Susannah's lips, aggrieved the girl, and finally set her in opposition to her mother, whose judgment had hitherto seemed to her infallible. Thus, when the governor's house was closed against her, there was no one in whom she cared to confide, for a barrier stood between her and Paula, and she was painfully conscious of its height each time the wish to pass it recurred to her mind. Paula was certainly "that other" of whom Orion had spoken; when she had stolen away to see her in the evening after the funeral, she had been prompted less by a burning wish to pour out her heart to a sympathizing hearer, than by torturing curiosity mingled with jealousy. She had crept through the hedge with a strangely-mixed feeling of tender longing and sullen hatred; when they had met in the garden she had at first given herself up to the full delight of being free to speak, and of finding a listener in a woman so much her superior; but Paula's reserved replies to her bold questioning had revived her feelings of envy and grudge. Any one who did not hate Orion must, she was convinced, love him.

Were they not perhaps already pledged to each other! Very likely Paula had thought of her as merely a credulous child, and so had concealed the fact!

This "very likely" was torture to her, and she was determined to try, at any rate, to settle the doubt. She had an ally at her command; this was her foster-brother, the son of her deaf old nurse; she knew that he would blindly obey all her wishes—nay, to please her, would throw himself to the crocodiles in the Nile. Anubis had been her comrade in all her childish sports, till at the age of fourteen, after learning to read and write, her mother had obtained an appointment for him in the governor's household, as an assistant to be further trained by the treasurer Nilus. Dame Susannah intended to find him employment at a future date on her estates, or at Memphis, the centre of their administration, as he might prove himself capable. The lad was still living with his mother under the rich widow's roof, and only spent his working days at the governor's house, he was industrious and clever during office hours, though between whiles he busied himself with things altogether foreign to his future calling. At Katharina's request he had opened a communication between the two houses by means of carrier-pigeons, and many missives were thus despatched with little gossip, invitations, excuses, and the like, from Katharina to Mary and back again. Anubis took great pleasure in the pretty creatures, and by the permission of his superiors a dovecote was erected on the roof of the treasurer's house. Mary was now lying ill, and their intercourse was at an end; still, the well-trained messengers need not be idle, and Katharina had begun to use them for a very different purpose.

Orion's envoy had been detained a long time at Rufinus' door the day before; and she had since learnt from Anubis, who was acquainted with all that took place in Nilus' office, that Paula's moneys were to be delivered over to her very shortly, and in all probability by Orion himself. They must then have an interview, and perhaps she might succeed in overhearing it. She knew well how this could be managed; the only thing was to be on the spot at the right moment.

On the morning after the full-moon, at two hours and a half before noon, the little boy whose task it was to feed the feathered messengers in their dove-cote brought her a written scrap, on which Anubis informed her that Orion was about to set out; but he was not very warmly welcomed, for the hour did not suit her at all. Early in the morning Bishop Plotinus had come to inform Susannah that Benjamin, Patriarch of Alexandria, was visiting Amru on the opposite shore, and would presently honor Memphis with his presence. He proposed to remain one day; he had begged to have no formal reception, and had left it to the bishop to find suitable quarters for himself and his escort, as he did not wish to put up at the governor's house. The vain widow had at once pressingly urged her readiness to receive the illustrious guest under her roof: The prelate's presence must bring a blessing on the house, and she thought, too, that she might turn it to advantage for several ends she just now happened to have in view.

A handsome reception must be prepared; there were but a few hours to spare, and even before the bishop had left her, she had begun to call the servants together and give them orders. The whole house must be turned upside down; some of the kitchen staff were hurried off into the town to make purchases, others bustled round the fire; the gardeners plundered the beds and bushes to weave wreaths and nosegays for decorations; from cellar to roof half a hundred of slaves, white, brown and black, were toiling with all their might, for each believed that, by rendering a service to the Patriarch, he might count on the special favor of Heaven, while their unresting mistress never ceased screaming out her orders as to what she wished done.

Susannah, who as a girl had been the eldest of a numerous and not wealthy family, and had been obliged to put her own hand to things, quite forgot now that she was a woman of position and fortune whom it ill-beseemed to do her own household work; she was here, there, and everywhere, and had an eye on all—excepting indeed her own daughter; but she was the petted darling of the house, brought up to Greek refinement, whose help in such arduous labors was not to be thought of; indeed, she would only have been in the way.

When the bishop had taken his leave Katharina was merely desired to be ready in her best attire, with a nosegay in her hand, to receive the Patriarch under the awning spread outside the entrance. More than this the widow did not require of her, and as the girl flew up the stairs to her room she was thinking: "Orion will be coming directly: it still wants fully two hours of noon, and if he stays there half an hour that will be more than enough. I shall have time then to change my dress, but I will put my new sandals on at once as a precaution; nurse and the maid must wait for me in my room. They must have everything ready for my return— perhaps he and Paula may have much to say to each other. He will not get off without a lecture, unless she has already found an opportunity elsewhere of expressing her indignation."

A few minutes later she had sprung to the top of a mound of earth covered with turf, which she had some time since ordered to be thrown up close behind the hedge through which she had yesterday made her way. Her little feet were shod with handsome gold sandals set with sapphires, and she seated herself on a low bench with a satisfied smile, as though to assist at a theatrical performance. Some broad-leaved shrubs, placed behind this place of ambush, screened her to some extent from the heat of the sun, and as she sat watching and listening in this lurking place, which she was not using for the first time, her heart began to beat more quickly; indeed, in her excitement she quite forgot some sweetmeats which she had brought to wile away the time and had poured into a large leaf in her lap.

Happily she had not long to wait; Orion arrived in his mother's four-wheeled covered chariot. By the side of the driver sat a servant, and a slave was perched on the step to the door on each side of the vehicle. It was followed by a few idlers, men and women, and a crowd of half-naked children. But they got nothing by their curiosity, for the carruca did not draw up in the road, but was driven into Rufinus' garden, and the trees and shrubs hid it from the gaze of the expectant mob, which presently dispersed.

Orion got out at the principal door of the house, followed by the treasurer; and while the old man welcomed the son of the Mukaukas, Nilus superintended the transfer of a considerable number of heavy sacks to their host's private room.

Nothing of all this had seemed noteworthy to Katharina but the quantity and size of the bags—full, no doubt, of gold—and the man, whom alone she cared to see. Never had she thought Orion so handsome; the long, flowing mourning robe, which he had flung over his shoulder in rich folds, added to the height of his stately form; his abundant hair, not curled but waving naturally, set off his face which, pale and grave as it was, both touched and attracted her irresistibly. The thought that this splendid creature had once courted her, loved her, kissed her—that he had once been hers, and that she had lost him to another, was a pang like physical agony, mounting from her heart to her brain.

After Orion had vanished indoors, she still seemed to see him; and when she thrust his image from her fancy, forced to remind herself that he was now standing face to face with that other, and was looking at Paula as, a few days since, he had looked at her, the anguish of her soul was doubled. And was Paula only half as happy as she had been in that hour of supreme bliss? Ah! how her heart ached! She longed to leap over the hedge—she could have rushed into the house and flung herself between Paula and Orion.

Still, there she sat; restless but without moving; wholly under the dominion of evil thoughts, among which a good one rarely and timidly intruded, with her eyes fixed on Rufinus' dwelling. It stood in the broad sunshine as silent as death, as if all were sleeping. In the garden, too, all was motionless but the thin jet of water, which danced up from the marble tank with a soft and fitful, but monotonous tinkle, while butterflies, dragonflies, bees, and beetles, whose hum she could not hear, seemed to circle round the flowers without a sound. The birds must be asleep, for not one was to be seen or broke the oppressive stillness by a chirp or a twitter. The chariot at the door might have been spellbound; the driver had dismounted, and he, with the other slaves, had stretched himself in the narrow strips of shade cast by the pillars of the verandah; their chins buried in their breasts, they spoke not a word. The horses alone were stirring-flicking off the flies with their flowing tails, or turning to bite the burning stings they inflicted. This now and then lifted the pole, and as the chariot crunched backwards a few inches, the charioteer growled out a sleepy "Brrr."

Katharina had laid a large leaf on her head for protection against the sun; she did not dare use a parasol or a hat for fear of being seen. The shade cast by the shrubs was but scanty, the noontide heat was torment; still, though minute followed minute and one-quarter of an hour after another crept by at a snail's pace, she was far too much excited to be sleepy. She needed no dial to tell her the time; she knew exactly how late it was as one shadow stole to this point and another to that, and, by risking the danger to her eyes of glancing up at the sun, she could make doubly sure.

It was now within three-quarters of an hour of noon, and in that house all was as still as before; the Patriarch, however, might be expected to be punctual, and she had done nothing towards dressing but putting on those gilt sandals. This brought her to swift decision she hurried to her room, desired the

maid not to dress her hair, contenting herself with pinning a few roses into its natural curls. Then, in fierce haste, she made her throw on her sea-green dress of bombyx silk edged with fine embroidery, and fasten her peplos with the first pins that came to hand; and when the snap of her bracelet of costly sapphires broke, as she herself was fastening it, she flung it back among her other trinkets as she might have tossed an unripe apple back upon a heap. She slipped her little hand into a gold spiral which curled round half her arm, and gathered up the rest of her jewels, to put them on out of doors as she sat watching. The waiting-woman was ordered to come for her at noon with the flowers for the Patriarch, and, in a quarter of an hour after leaving her lurking place, she was back there again. Just in time;—for while she was putting on the trinkets Nilus came out, followed by some slaves with several leather bags which they replaced in the chariot. Then the treasurer stepped in and with him Philippus, and the vehicle drove away.

"So Paula has entrusted her property to Orion again," thought Katharina. "They are one again; and henceforth there will be endless going and coming between the governor's house and that of Rufinus. A very pretty game!—But wait, only wait." And she set her little white teeth; but she retained enough self-possession to mark all that took place.

During her absence indoors Orion's black horse had been brought into the garden; a groom on horseback was leading him, and as she watched their movements she muttered to herself with a smile of scorn: "At any rate he is not going to carry her home with him at once."

A few minutes passed in silence, and at last Paula came out, and close behind her, almost by her side, walked Orion.

His cheeks were no longer pale, far from it, no more than Katharina's were; they were crimson! How bright his eyes were, how radiant with satisfaction and gladness!—She only wished she were a viper to sting them both in the heel!—At the same time Paula had lost none of her proud and noble dignity—and he? He gazed at his companion like a rapt soul; she fancied she could see the folds of his mourning cloak rising and falling with the beating of his heart. Paula, too, was in mourning. Of course. They were one; his sorrow must be hers, although she had fled from his father's house as though it were a prison. And of course this virtuous beauty knew full well that nothing became her better than dark colors! In manner, gait and height this pair looked like two superior beings, destined for each other by Fate; Katharina herself could not but confess it.

Some spiteful demon—a friendly one, she thought—led them past her, so close that her sharp ears could catch every word they said as they slowly walked on, or now and then stood still, dogged by the agile water-wagtail, who stole along parallel with them on the other side of the hedge.

"I have so much to thank you for," were the first words she caught from Orion, "that I am shy of asking you yet another favor; but this one indeed concerns yourself. You know how deep a blow was struck me by little Mary's childish hand; still, the impulse that prompted her had its rise in her honest, upright feeling and her idolizing love of you."

"And you would like me to take charge of her?" asked Paula. "Such a wish is of course granted beforehand -only. . . ."

"Only?" repeated Orion.

"Only you must send her here; for you know that I will never enter your doors again."

"Alas that it should be so!—But the child has been very ill and can hardly leave the house at present; and—since I must own it—my mother avoids her in a way which distresses the child, who is over-excited as it is, and fills her with new terrors."

"How can Neforis treat her little favorite so?"

"Remember," said Orion, "what my father has been to my poor mother. She is now completely crushed: and, when she sees the little girl, that last scene of her unhappy husband's life is brought back to her, with all that came upon my father and me, beyond a doubt through Mary. She looks on the poor little thing as the bane of the family?"

"Then she must come away," said Paula much touched. "Send her to us. Kind and comforting souls dwell under Rufinus' roof."

"I thank you warmly. I will entreat my mother most urgently. . . ."

"Do so," interrupted Paula. "Have you ever seen Pulcheria, the daughter of my worthy host?"

"Yes.—A singularly lovable creature!"

"She will soon take Mary into her faithful heart—"

"And our poor little girl needs a friend, now that Susannah has forbidden her daughter to visit at our house."

The conversation now turned on the two girls, of whom they spoke as sweet children, both much to be pitied; and, when Orion observed that his niece was old for her tender years, Paula replied with a slight accent of reproach: "But Katharina, too, has ripened much during the last few days; the lively child has become a sober girl; her recent experience is a heavy burden on her light heart."

"But, if I know her at all, it will soon be cast off," replied Orion. "She is a sweet, happy little creature; and, of all the dreadful things I did on that day of horrors, the most dreadful perhaps was the woe I wrought for her. There is no excuse possible, and yet it was solely to gratify my mother's darling wish that I consented to marry Katharina.— However, enough of that.—Henceforth I must march through life with large strides, and she to whom love gives courage to become my wife, must be able to keep pace with me."

Katharina could only just hear these last words. The speakers now turned down the path, sparsely shaded from the midday sun by a few trees, which led to the tank in the centre of the garden, and they went further and further from her.

She heard no more—still, she knew enough and could supply the rest. The object of her ambush was gained: she knew now with perfect certainty who was "the other." And how they had spoken of her! Not as a deserted bride, whose rights had been trodden in the dust, but as a child who is dismissed from the room as soon as it begins to be in the way. But she thought she could see through that couple and knew why they had spoken of her thus. Paula, of course, must prevent any new tie from being formed between herself and Orion; and as for Orion, common prudence required that he should mention her—her, whom he had but lately loaded with tenderness—as a mere child, to protect himself against the jealousy of that austere "other" one. That he had loved her, at any rate that evening under the trees, she obstinately maintained in her own mind; to that conviction she must cling desperately, or lose her last foothold. Her whole being was a prey to a frightful turmoil of feeling. Her hands shook; her mouth was parched as by the midday heat; she knew that there were withered leaves between her feet and the sandals she wore, that twigs had got caught in her hair; but she could not care and when the pair were screened from her by the denser shrubs she flew back to her raised seat—from which she could again discover them. At this moment she would have given all she held best and dearest, to be the thing it vexed her so much to be called: a water-wagtail, or some other bird.

It must be very near noon if not already past; she dusted her sandals and tidied her curly hair, picking out the dry leaves and not noticing that at the same time a rose fell out on the ground. Only her hands were busy; her eyes were elsewhere, and suddenly they brightened again, for the couple on which she kept them fixed were coming back, straight towards the hedge, and she would soon be able again to hear what they were saying.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Orion and Paula had had much to talk about, since the young man had arrived. The discussion over the safe keeping of the girl's money had been tedious. Finally, her counsellors had decided to entrust half of it to Gamaliel the jeweller and his brother, who carried on a large business in Constantinople. He happened to be in Memphis, and they had both declared themselves willing each to take half of the sum in question and use it at interest. They would be equally responsible for its security, so that each should make good the whole of the property in their hands in case of the other stopping payment. Nilus undertook to procure legal sanction and the necessary sixteen witnesses to this transaction.

The other half of her fortune was, by the advice of Philippus, to be placed in the hands of a brother of Haschim's, the Arab merchant, who had a large business as money changer in Fostat, the new town on the further shore, in which the merchant himself was a partner. This investment had the advantage of being perfectly safe, at any rate so long as the Arabs ruled the land.

After all this was settled Nilus departed with that half of the money which Orion was to hand over to the keeping of the Moslem money changer on the following morning.

Paula, though she had taken no part in the men's discussion, had been present throughout, and had

expressed her grateful consent. The clearness, gravity, and decision which Orion had displayed had not escaped her notice; and though the treasurer's shrewd remarks, briefly and modestly made, had in every case proved final, it was Orion's reasoning and explanations that had most come home to her, for it seemed to her that he was always prompted by loftier, wider, and more statesmanlike considerations than the others.

When this was over she and Orion were left together, and neither she nor the young man had been able to escape a few moments of anxious heart-beating.

It was not till the governor's son had summoned up his courage and, sinking on his knees, was imploring her pardon, that she recovered some firmness and reminded him of the letter he had sent her. But her heart drew her to him almost irresistibly, and in order not to yield to its urgent prompts, she hastily enquired what he had meant by the exchange he had written about.

At this he went up to her with downcast eyes, drew a small box out of the breast of his robe, and took out the emerald with the damaged setting. He held them towards her with a beseeching gesture, exclaiming, with all the peculiar sweetness of his deep voice:

"It is your property! Take it and give me in return your confidence, your forgiveness."

She drew back a little, looking first at him and then at the stone and its setting—surprised, pleased, and deeply moved, with a bright light in her eyes. The young man found it impossible to utter a single word, only holding the jewel and the broken setting closer to her, and yet closer, like some poor man who makes bold to offer the best he has to a wealthy superior, though conscious that it is all too humble a gift to find favor.

And Paula was not long undecided; she took the proffered gem and feasted her glistening eyes with glad thankfulness on her recovered treasure.

Two days ago she had thought of it as defiled and desecrated; it had gratified her pride to fancy that she had cast the precious jewel at the feet, as it were, of Neforis and her son, never to see it again. So hard is it to forego the right of hating those who have basely brought grief into our lives and anguish to our souls!—and yet Paula, who would not have yielded this right at any price a short time since, now waived it of her own free will—nay, thrust it from her like some tormenting incubus which choked her pulses and kept her from breathing freely. In this gem she saw once more a cherished memorial of her lost mother, the honorable gift of a great monarch to her forefathers; and she was happy to possess it once more. But it was not this that gave life to the warm, sunny glow of happiness which thrilled through her, or occasioned its quick and delightful growth; for her eye did not linger on the large and glittering stone, but rested spellbound on the poor gold frame which had once held it, and which had cost her such hours of anguish. This broken and worthless thing, it is true, was powerful to justify her in the opinions of her judges and her enemies; with this in her hand she would easily confute her accusers. Still, it was not that which so greatly consoled her. The physician's remark, that there was no greater joy than the discovery that we have been deceived in thinking ill of another, recurred to her mind; and she had once loved the man who now stood before her open to every good influence, deeply moved in her presence; and her judgment of him had been a hundred, a thousand times too hard. Only a noble soul could confidently expect magnanimity from a foe and he, he had put himself defenceless into the power of her who had been mortally stricken by the most fateful, and perhaps the only disgraceful act of his life. In giving up this gold frame Orion also gave himself up; with this talisman in her possession she stood before him as irresistible Fate. And now, as she looked up at him and met his large eyes, full of life and intellect but sparkling through tears of violent agitation, she felt absolutely certain that this favorite of Fortune, though he had indeed sinned deeply and disastrously, was capable of the highest and greatest aims if he had a friend to show him what life required of him and were but ready to follow such guidance. And such a friend she would be to him!

She, like Orion, could not for some time speak; but he, at last, was unable to contain himself; he hastened towards her and pressed her hand to his lips with fervent gratitude, while she—she had to submit; nay, she would have been incapable of resisting him if, as in her dream, he had clasped her in his arms, to his heart. His burning lips had rested fervently on her hand, but it was only for an instant that she abandoned herself to the violent agitation that mastered her. Then with a great effort her instinct and determination to do right enabled her to control it; she pushed him from her decisively but not ungently, and then, with some emotion and an arch sweetness which he had never before seen in her, and which charmed him even more than her noble and lofty pride, she said, threatening him with her finger.

"Take care, Orion! Now I have the stone and the setting; yes, that very setting. Beware of the consequences, rash man!"

"Not at all. Say rather: Fool, who at last has succeeded in doing something rational," he replied joyfully. "What I have brought you is not a gift; it is your own. To you it can be neither more nor less than it was before; but to me it has gained inestimably in value since it places my honor, perhaps my life even, in your keeping; I am in your power as completely as the humblest slave in the palace is in that of the Emperor. Keep the gem, and use it and this fateful gold trifle till the day shall come when my weal and woe are one with yours."

"For your dead father's sake," she answered, coloring deeply, "your weal lies already very near my heart. Am not I, who brought upon you your father's curse, bound indeed to help you to free yourself from the burden of it? And it may perhaps be in my power to do so, Orion, if you do not scorn to listen to the counsels of an ignorant girl?"

"Speak," he cried; but she did not reply immediately. She only begged him to come into the garden with her; the close atmosphere of the room had become intolerable to both, and when they got out and Katharina had first caught sight of them their flushed cheeks had not escaped her watchful eye.

In the open air, a scarcely perceptible breath from the river moderated the noontide heat, and then Paula found courage to tell him what Philippus had called his apprehension in life. It was not new to him; indeed it fully answered to the principles he had laid down for the future. He accepted it gratefully: "Life is a function, a ministry, a duty!" the words were a motto, a precept that should aid him in carrying out his plans.

"And the device," he exclaimed, "will be doubly precious to me as having come from your lips.—But I no longer need its warning. The wisest and most practical axioms of conduct never made any man the better. Who does not bring a stock of them with him when he quits school for the world at large? Precepts are of no use unless, in the voyage of life, a manly will holds the rudder. I have called on mine, and it will steer me to the goal, for a bright guiding star lights the pilot on his way. You know that star; it is. . . ."

"It is what you call your love," she interposed, with a deep blush.—"Your love for me, and I will trust it."

"You will!" he cried passionately. "You allow me to hope. . . ."

"Yes, yes, hope!" she again broke in, "but meanwhile. . . ."

"Meanwhile," he said, "'do not press me further,' ought to end your sentence. Oh! I quite understand you; and until I feel that you have good reason once more to respect the maniac who lost you by his own fault, I, who fought you like your most deadly foe, will not even speak the final word. I will silence my longing, I will try....."

"You will try to show me—nay, you will show me—that in you, my foe and persecutor, I have gained my dearest friend!—And now to quite another matter. We know how we stand towards each other and can count on each other with glad and perfect confidence, thanking the Almighty for having opened out a new life to us. To Him we will this day. . . ."

"Offer praise and thanksgiving," Orion joyfully put in.

And here began the conversation relating to little Mary which Katharina had overheard.

They had gone out of hearing again when Orion explained to Paula that all arrangements for the little girl must be postponed till the morrow, as he had business now with Amru, on the other shore of the Nile. He decisively confuted her fears lest he should allow himself to be perverted by the Moslems to their faith; for though he ardently desired to let the Patriarch feel that he had no mind to submit patiently to the affront to his deceased father, he clung too firmly to his creed, and knew too well what was due to the memory of the dead, and to Paula herself, ever to take this extreme step. He spoke in glowing terms as he described how, for the future, he purposed to devote his best powers to his hapless and oppressed country, whether it were in the service of the Khaliff or in some other way; and she eagerly entered into his schemes, quite carried away by his noble enthusiasm, and acknowledging to herself with silent rapture the superiority of his mind and the soaring loftiness of his soul.

When, presently, they began talking again of the past she asked him quite frankly, but in a low voice and without looking up, what had become of the emerald he had taken from the Persian hanging. He turned pale at this, looked at the ground, and hesitatingly replied that he had sent it to Constantinople—"to have it set—set in an ornament—worthy of her whom—whom he. . . ."

But here he broke off, stamped angrily with his foot, and looking straight into the girl's eyes exclaimed:

"A pack of lies, foul and unworthy lies!—I have been truthful by nature all my life; but does it not seem as though that accursed day forced me to some base action every time it is even mentioned? Yes, Paula; the gem is really on its way to Byzantium. But the stolen gift was never meant for you, but for a fair, gentle creature, in nothing blameworthy, who gave me her heart. To me she was never anything but a pretty plaything; still, there were moments when I believed—poor soul!—I first learnt what love meant through you, how great and how sacred it is!—Now you know all; this, indeed, is the truth!"

They walked on again, and Katharina, who had not been able to gather the whole of this explanation, could plainly hear Paula's reply in warm, glad accents:

"Yes, that is the truth, I feel. And henceforth that horrible day is blotted out, erased from your life and mine; and whatever you tell me in the future I shall believe."

And the listener heard the young man answer in a tremulous voice:

"And you shall never be deceived in me. Now I must leave you; and I go, in spite of my griefs, a happy man, entitled to rejoice anew. O Paula, what do I not owe to you! And when we next meet you will receive me, will you not, as you did that evening on the river after my return?"

"Yes, indeed; and with even more glad confidence," replied Paula, holding out her hand with a lovely graciousness that came from her heart; he pressed it a moment to his lips, and then sprang on to his horse and rode off at a round trot, his slave following him.

"Katharina, child, Katharina!" was shouted from Susannah's house in a woman's high-pitched voice. The water-wagtail started up, hastily smoothing her hair and casting an evil glance at her rival, "the other," the supplanter who had basely betrayed her under the sycamores; she clenched her little fist as she saw Paula watching Orion's retreating form with beaming eyes. Paula went back into the house, happy and walking on air, while the other poor, deeply-wounded child burst into violent weeping at the first hasty words from her mother, who was not at all satisfied with the disorder of her dress; and she ended by declaring with defiant audacity that she would not present the flowers to the patriarch, and would remain in her own room, for she was dying of headache.—And so she did.

CHAPTER XXIV.

In the course of the afternoon Orion paid his visit to the Arab governor. He crossed the bridge of boats on his finest horse.

Only two years since, the land where the new town of Fostat was now growing up under the old citadel of Babylon had been fields and gardens; but at Amru's word it had started into being as by a miracle; house after house already lined the streets, the docks were full of ships and barges, the market was alive with dealers, and on a spot where, during the siege of the fortress, a sutler's booth had stood, a long colonnade marked out the site of a new mosque.

There was little to be seen here now of native Egyptian life; it looked as though some magician had transported a part of Medina itself to the shores of the Nile. Men and beasts, dwellings and shops, though they had adopted much of what they had found in this ancient land of culture, still bore the stamp of their origin; and wherever Orion's eye fell on one of his fellow-countrymen, he was a laborer or a scribe in the service of the conquerors who had so quickly made themselves at home.

Before his departure for Constantinople one of his father's palm-groves had occupied the spot where Amru's residence now stood opposite the half-finished mosque. Where, now, thousands of Moslems, some on foot, some on richly caparisoned steeds, were passing to and fro, turbaned and robed after the manner of their tribe, with such adornment as they had stolen or adopted from intercourse with splendor-loving nations, and where long trains of camels dragged quarried stones to the building, in former times only an occasional ox-cart with creaking wheels was to be seen, an Egyptian riding an ass or a bare-backed nag, and now and then a few insolent Greek soldiers. On all sides he heard the sharper and more emphatic accent of the sons of the desert instead of the language of his forefathers and their Greek conquerors. Without the aid of the servant who rode at his side he could not have made himself understood on the soil of his native land.

He soon reached Amru's house and was there informed by an Egyptian secretary that his master was gone out hunting and would receive him, not in the town, but at the citadel. There, on a pleasant site on

the limestone hills which rose behind the fortress of Babylon and the newly-founded city, stood some fine buildings, originally planned as a residence for the Prefect; and thither Amru had transported his wives, children, and favorite horses, preferring it, with very good reason, to the palace in the town, where he transacted business, and where the new mosque intercepted the view of the Nile, while this eminence commanded a wide prospect.

The sun was near setting when Orion reached the spot, but the general had not yet come in from the chase, and the gate-keeper requested that he would wait.

Orion was accustomed to be treated in his own country as the heir of the greatest man in it; the color mounted to his brow and his Egyptian heart revolted at having to bend his pride and swallow his wrath before an Arab. He was one of the subject race, and the thought that one word from his lips would suffice to secure his reception in the ranks of the rulers forced itself suddenly on his mind; but he repressed it with all his might, and silently allowed himself to be conducted to a terrace screened by a vine-covered trellis from the heat of the sun.

He sat down on one of the marble seats by the parapet of this hanging garden and looked westward. He knew the scene well, it was the playground of his childhood and youth; hundreds of times the picture had spread before him, and yet it affected him to-day as it had never done before. Was there on earth—he asked himself—a more fertile and luxuriant land? Had not even the Greek poets sung of the Nile as the most venerable of rivers? Had not great Caesar himself been so fascinated by the idea of discovering its source that to that end—so he had declared—he would have thought the dominion of the world well lost? On the produce of those wide fields the weal and woe of the mightiest cities of the earth had been dependent for centuries; nay, imperial Rome and sovereign Constantinople had quaked with fears of famine, when a bad harvest here had disappointed the hopes of the husbandman.

And was there anywhere a more industrious nation of laborers, had there ever been, before them, a thriftier or a more skilful race? When he looked back on the fate and deeds of nations, on the remotest horizon where the thread of history was scarcely perceptible, that same gigantic Sphinx was there—the first and earliest monument of human joy in creative art—those Pyramids which still proudly stood in undiminished and inaccessible majesty beyond the Nile, beyond the ruined capital of his forefathers, at the foot of the Libyan range. He was the son of the men who had raised these imperishable works, and in his veins perchance there still might flow a drop of the blood of those Pharaohs who had sought eternal rest in these vast tombs, and whose greater progeny, had overrun half the world with their armies, and had exacted tribute and submission. He, who had often felt flattered at being praised for the purity of his Greek—pure not merely for his time: an age of bastard tongues—and for the engaging Hellenism of his person, here and now had an impulse of pride of his Egyptian origin. He drew a deep breath, as he gazed at the sinking sun; it seemed to lend intentional significance to the rich beauty of his home as its magical glory transmuted the fields, the stream, and the palm-groves, the roofs of the city, and even the barren desert-range and the Pyramids to burning gold. It was fast going to rest behind the Libyan chain. The bare, colorless limestone sparkled like translucent crystal; the glowing sphere looked as though it were melting into the very heart of the mountains behind which it was vanishing, while its rays, shooting upwards like millions of gold threads, bound his native valley to heaven—the dwelling of the Divine Power who had blessed it above all other lands.

To free this beautiful spot of earth and its children from their oppressors—to restore to them the might and greatness which had once been theirs—to snatch down the crescent from the tents and buildings which lay below him and plant the cross which from his infancy he had held sacred—to lead enthusiastic troops of Egyptians against the Moslems—to quell their arrogance and drive them back to the East like Sesostrius, the hero of history and legend—this was a task worthy of the grandson of Menas, of the son of George the great and just Mukaukas.

Paula would not oppose such an enterprise; his excited imagination pictured her indeed as a second Zenobia by his side, ready for any great achievement, fit to aid him and to rule.

Fully possessed by this dream of the future, he had long ceased to gaze at the glories of the sunset and was sitting with eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly his soaring visions were interrupted by men's voices coming up from the street just below the terrace. He looked over and perceived at its foot about a score of Egyptian laborers; free men, with no degrading tokens of slavery, making their way along, evidently against their will and yet in sullen obedience, with no thought of resistance or evasion, though only a single Arab held them under control.

The sight fell on his excited mood like rain on a smouldering fire, like hail on sprouting seed. His eye, which a moment ago had sparkled with enthusiasm, looked down with contempt and disappointment on the miserable creatures of whose race he came. A line of bitter scorn curled his lip, for this troop of voluntary slaves were beneath his anger—all the more so as he more vividly pictured to himself what his people had once been and what they were now. He did not think of all this precisely, but as dusk

fell, one scene after another from his own experience rose before his mind's eye—occasions on which the Egyptians had behaved ignominiously, and had proved that they were unworthy of freedom and inured to bow in servitude. Just as one Arab was now able to reduce a host of his fellow-countrymen to subjection, so formerly three Greeks had held them in bondage. He had known numberless instances of almost glad submission on the part of freeborn Egyptians—peasants, village magnates, and officials, even on his father's estates and farms. In Alexandria and Memphis the sons of the soil had willingly borne the foreign yoke, allowing themselves to be thrust into the shade and humbled by Greeks, as though they were of a baser species and origin, so long only as their religious tenets and the subtleties of their creed remained untouched. Then he had seen them rise and shed their blood, yet even then only with loud outcries and a promising display of enthusiasm. But their first defeat had been fatal and it had required only a small number of trained soldiers to rout them.

To make any attempt against a bold and powerful invader as the leader of such a race would be madness; there was no choice but to rule his people in the service of the enemy and so exert his best energies to make their lot more endurable. His father's wiser and more experienced judgment had decided that the better course was to serve his people as mediator between them and the Arabs rather than to attempt futile resistance at the head of Byzantine troops.

"Wretched and degenerate brood!" he muttered wrathfully, and he began to consider whether he should not quit the spot and show the arrogant Arab that one Egyptian, at any rate, still had spirit enough to resent his contempt, or whether he should yet wait for the sake of the good cause, and swallow down his indignation. No! he, the son of the Mukaukas, could not—ought not to brook such treatment. Rather would he lose his life as a rebel, or wander an exile through the world and seek far from home a wider field for deeds of prowess, than put his free neck under the feet of the foe.

But his reflections were disturbed by the sound of footsteps, and looking round he saw the gleam of lanterns moving to and fro on the terrace, turned directly on him. These must be Amru's servants come to conduct him to their master, who, as he supposed, would now do him the honor to receive him—tired out with hunting, no doubt, and stretched on his divan while he imperiously informed his guest, as if he were some freed slave, what his wishes were.

But the steps were not those of a messenger. The great general himself had come to welcome him; the lantern-bearers were not to show the way to Amru's couch, but to guide Amru to the "son of his dear departed friend." The haughty Vicar of the Khaliffs was the most cordial host, prompted by hospitality to make his guest's brief stay beneath his roof as pleasant as possible, and giving him the right hand of welcome.

He apologized for his prolonged absence in very intelligible Greek, having learnt it in his youth as a caravan-leader to Alexandria; he expressed his regret at having left Orion to wait so long, blamed his servants for not inviting him indoors and for neglecting to offer him refreshment. As they crossed the garden-terrace he laid his hand on the youth's shoulder, explained to him that the lion he had been pursuing, though wounded by one of his arrows, had got away, and added that he hoped to make good his loss by the conquest of a nobler quarry than the beast of prey.

There was nothing for it but that the young man should return courtesy for courtesy; nor did he find it difficult. The Arab's fine pleasant voice, full of sincere cordiality, and the simple distinction and dignity of his manner appealed to Orion, flattered him, gave him confidence, and attracted him to the older man who was, besides, a valiant hero.

In his brightly-lighted room hung with costly Persian tapestry, Amru invited his guest to share his simple hunter's supper after the Arab fashion; so Orion placed himself on one side of the divan while the Governor and his Vekeel—[Deputy]—Obada—a Goliath with a perfectly black moorish face squatted rather than sat on the other, after the manner of his people.

Amru informed his guest that the black giant knew no Greek, and he only now and then threw in a few words which the general interpreted to Orion when he thought fit; but the negro's remarks were not more pleasing to the young Egyptian than his manner and appearance.

Obada had in his childhood been a slave and had worked his way up to his present high position by his own exertions; his whole attention seemed centred in the food before him, which he swallowed noisily and greedily, and yet that he was able to follow the conversation very well, in spite of his ignorance of Greek, his remarks sufficiently proved. Whenever he looked up from the dishes, which were placed in the midst on low tables, to put in a word, he rolled his big eyes so that only the whites remained visible; but when he turned them on Orion, their small, black pupils transfixed him with a keen and, as the young man thought, exceedingly sinister glare.

The presence of this man oppressed him; he had heard of his base origin, which to Orion's lofty ideas

rendered him contemptible, of his fierce valor, and remarkable shrewdness; and though he did not understand what Obada said, more than once there was something in the man's tone that brought the blood into his face and made him set his teeth. The more kindly and delightful the effect of the Arab's speech and manner, the more irritating and repulsive was his subordinate; and Orion was conscious that he would have expressed himself more freely, and have replied more candidly to many questions, if he had been alone with Amru.

At first his host made enquiries as to his residence in Constantinople and asked much about his father; and he seemed to take great interest in all he heard till Obada interrupted Orion, in the midst of a sentence, with an enquiry addressed to his superior. Amru hastily answered him in Arabic and soon after gave a fresh turn to the conversation.

The Vekeel had asked why Amru allowed that Egyptian boy to chatter so much before settling the matter about which he had sent for him, and his master had replied that a man is best entertained when he has most opportunity given him for hearing himself talk; that moreover the young man was well-informed, and that all he had to say was interesting and important.

The Moslems drank nothing; Orion was served with capital wine, but he took very little, and at length Amru began to speak of his father's funeral, alluding to the Patriarch's hostility, and adding that he had talked with him that morning and had been surprised at the marked antagonism he had confessed towards his deceased fellow-believer, who seemed formerly to have been his friend. Then Orion spoke out; he explained fully what the reasons were that had moved the Patriarch to display such conspicuous and far-reaching animosity towards his father. All that Benjamin cared for was to stand clear in the eyes of Christendom of the reproach of having abandoned a Christian land to conquerors who were what Christians termed "infidels" and his aim at present was to put his father forward as the man wholly and solely responsible for the supremacy of the Moslems in the land.

"True, true; I understand," Amru put in, and when the young man went on to tell him that the final breach between the Patriarch and the Mukaukas George had been about the convent of St. Cecilia, whose rights the prelate had tried to abrogate by an illegal interpretation of certain ancient and perfectly clear documents; the Arab exchanged rapid glances with the Vekeel and then broke in:

"And you? Are you disposed to submit patiently to the blow struck at you and at your parent's worthy memory by this restless old man, who hates you as he did your father before you?"

"Certainly not," replied the youth proudly.

"That is right!" cried the general. "That is what I expected of you; but tell me now, with what weapons you, a Christian, propose to defy this shrewd and powerful man, in whose hands—as I know full well—you have placed the weal and woe, not of your souls alone...."

"I do not know yet," replied Orion, and as he met a glance of scorn from the Vekeel, he looked down.

At this Amru rose, went closer to him, and said "And you will seek them in vain, my young friend; nor, if you found them, could you use them. It is easier to hit a woman, an eel, a soaring bird, than these supple, weak, unarmed, robed creatures, who have love and peace on their tongues and use their physical helplessness as a defence, aiming invisible but poisoned darts at those they hate—at you first and foremost, Son of the Mukaukas; I know it and I advise you: Be on your guard! If indeed manly revenge for this slight on your father's memory is dear to your heart you can easily procure it—but only on one condition."

"Show it me!" cried Orion with flaming eyes. "Become one of us."

"That is what I came here for. My brain and my arm from this day forth are at the service of the rulers of my country: yourself and our common master the Khaliff."

"Ya Salaam—that is well!" cried Amru, laying his hand on Orion's shoulder. "There is but one God, and yours is ours, too, for there is none other but He! you will not have to sacrifice much in becoming a Moslem, for we, too, count your lord Jesus as one of the prophets; and even you must confess that the last and greatest of them is Mohammed, the true prophet of God. Every man must acknowledge our lord Mohammed, who does not wilfully shut his eyes to the events which have come about under his government and in his name. Your own father admitted. . ."

"My father?"

"He was forced to admit that we are more zealous, more earnest, more deeply possessed by our faith than you, his own fellow-believers."

"I know it."

"And when I told him that I had given orders that the desk for the reader of the Koran in our new mosque should be discarded, because when he stepped up to it he was uplifted above the other worshippers, the weary Mukaukas was quite agitated with satisfaction and uttered a loud cry of approbation. We Moslems—for that was what my commands implied—must all be equal in the presence of God, the Eternal, the Almighty, the All-merciful; their leader in prayer must not be raised above them, even by a head; the teaching of the Prophet points the road to Paradise, to all alike, we need no earthly guide to show us the way. It is our faith, our righteousness, our good deeds that open or close the gates of heaven; not a key in the hand of a priest. When you are one of us, no Benjamin can embitter your happiness on earth, no Patriarch can abrogate your claims and your father's to eternal bliss. You have chosen well, boy! Your hand, my convert to the true faith!"

And he held out his hand to Orion with glad excitement. But the young man did not take it; he drew back a little and said rather uneasily:

"Do not misunderstand me, great Captain. Here is my hand, and I can know no greater honor than that of grasping yours, of wielding my sword under your command, of wearing it out in your service and in that of my lord the Khaliff; but I cannot be untrue to my faith."

"Then be crushed by Benjamin—you and all your people!" cried Amru, disappointed and angry. He waved his hand with a gesture of disgust and dismissal, and then turned to the Vekeel with a shrug, to answer the man's scornful exclamation.

Orion looked at them in dumb indecision; but he quickly collected himself, and said in a tone of modest but urgent entreaty:

"Nay; hear me and do not reject my petition. It could only be to my advantage to go over to you; and yet I can resist so great a temptation; but for that very reason I shall keep faith with you as I do to my religion."

"Until the priests compel you to break it," interrupted the Arab roughly.

"No, no!" cried Orion. "I know that Benjamin is my foe; but I have lost a beloved parent, and I believe in a meeting beyond the grave."

"So do I," replied the Moslem. "And there is but one Paradise and one Hell, as there is but one God."

"What gives you this conviction?"

"My faith."

"Then forgive me if I cling to mine, and hope to see my father once more in that Heaven...."

"The heaven to which, as you fools believe, no souls but your own are admitted! But supposing that it is open only to the immortal spirit of Moslems and closed against Christians?—What do you know of that Paradise? I know your sacred Scriptures—Is it described in them? But the All-merciful allowed our Prophet to look in, and what he saw he has described as though the Most High himself had guided his reed. The Moslem knows what Heaven has to offer him,—but you? Your Hell, you do know; your priests are more ready to curse than to bless. If one of you deviates by one hair's breadth from their teaching they thrust him out forthwith to the abode of the damned.—Me and mine, the Greek Christians, and—take my word for it boy—first and foremost you and your father!"

"If only I were sure of finding him there!" cried Orion striking his breast. "I really should not fear to follow him. I must meet him, must see him again, were it in Hell itself!"

At these words the Vekeel burst into loud laughter, and when Amru reproved him sharply the negro retorted and a vehement dialogue ensued.

Obada's contumely had roused Orion's wrath; he was longing, burning to reduce this insolent antagonist to silence. However, he contained himself by a supreme effort of will, till Amru turned to him once more and said in a reserved tone, but not unkindly:

"This clear-sighted man has mentioned a suspicion which I myself had already felt. A worldly-minded young Christian of your rank is not so ready to give up earthly joys and happiness for the doubtful bliss of your Paradise and when you do so and are prepared to forego all that a man holds most dear: Honor, temporal possessions, a wide field of action, and revenge on your enemies, to meet the spirit of the departed once more after death, there must be some special reason in the background. Try to compose

yourself, and believe my assurances that I like you and that you will find in me a zealous protector and a discreet friend if you will but tell me candidly and fully what are the motives of your conduct. I myself really desire that our interview should be fruitful of advantages on both sides. So put your trust in a man so much your senior and your father's friend, and speak."

"On no consideration in the presence of that man!" said Orion in a tremulous voice. "Though he is supposed not to understand Greek, he follows every word I say with malicious watchfulness; he dared to laugh at me, he. . ."

"He is as discreet as he is brave, and my Vekeel," interrupted Amru reprovingly. "If you join us you will have to obey him; and remember this, young man. I sent for you to impose conditions on you, not to have them dictated to me. I grant you an audience as the ruler of this country, as the Vicar of Omar, your Khaliff and mine."

"Then I entreat you to dismiss me, for in the presence of that man my heart and lips are sealed; I feel that he is my enemy."

"Beware of his becoming so!" cried the governor, while Obada shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

Orion understood this gesture, and although he again succeeded in keeping cool he felt that he could no longer be sure of himself; he bowed low, without paying any heed to the Vekeel, and begged Amru to excuse him for the present.

Amru, who had not failed to observe Obada's demeanor and who keenly sympathized with what was going on in the young man's mind, did not detain him; but his manner changed once more; he again became the pressing host and invited his guest, as it was growing late, to pass the night under his roof. Orion politely declined, and when at length he quitted the room—without deigning even to look at the Negro—Amru accompanied him into the anteroom. There he grasped the young man's hand, and said in a low voice full of sincere and fatherly interest:

"Beware of the Negro; you let him perceive that you saw through him—it was brave but rash. For my part I honestly wish you well."

"I believe it, I know it," replied Orion, on whose perturbed soul the noble Arab's warm, deep accents fell like balm. "And now we are alone I will gladly confide in you. I, my Lord, I—my father—you knew him. In cruel wrath, before he closed his eyes, he withdrew his blessing from his only son."

The memory of the most fearful hour of his life choked his voice for a moment, but he soon went on: "One single act of criminal folly roused his anger; but afterwards, in grief and penitence, I thought over my whole life, and I saw how useless it had been; and now, when I came hither with a heart full of glad expectancy to place all I have to offer of mind and gifts at your disposal, I did so, my Lord, because I long to achieve great and noble, and difficult or, if it might be, impossible deeds—to be active, to be doing. . ."

Here he was interrupted by Amru, who said, laying his sinewy arm across the youth's shoulders:

"And because you long to let the spirit of your dead father, that righteous man, see that a heedless act of youthful recklessness has not made you unworthy of his blessing; because you hope by valiant deeds to compel his wrath to turn to approval, his scorn to esteem. . ."

"Yes, yes, that is the thing, the very thing!" Orion broke in with fiery enthusiasm; but the Arab eagerly signed to him to lower his voice, as though to cheat some listener, and whispered hastily, but with warm kindness:

"And I, I will help you in this praiseworthy endeavor. Oh, how much you remind me of the son of my heart who, like you, erred, and who was permitted to atone for all, for more than all by dying like a hero for his faith on the field of battle!—Count on me, and let your purpose become deed. In me you have found a friend.—Now, go. You shall hear from me before long. But, once more: Do not provoke the Negro; beware of him; and the next time you meet him subdue your pride and make as though you had never seen him before."

He looked sadly at Orion, as though the sight of him revived some loved image in his mind, kissed his brow, and as soon as the youth had left the anteroom he hastily drew open the curtain that hung across the door into the dining-room.—A few steps behind it stood the Vekeel, who was arranging the straps of his sword-belt.

"Listener!" exclaimed the Arab with intense scorn, "you, a man of gifts, a man of deeds! A hero in battle and in council; lion, serpent, and toad in one! When will you cast out of your soul all that is

contemptible and base? Be what you have made yourself, not what you were; do not constantly remind the man who helped you to rise that you were born of a slave!"

"My Lord!" began the Moor, and the whites of his rolling eyes were ominously conspicuous in his black face. But Amru took the words out of his mouth and went on in stern and determined reproof:

"You behaved to that noble youth like an idiot, like a buffoon at a fair, like a madman."

"To Hell with him!" cried Obada, "I hate the gilded upstart."

"Envious wretch! Do not provoke him! Times change, and the day may come when you will have reason to fear him."

"Him?" shrieked the other. "I could crush the puppet like a fly! And he shall live to know it."

"Your turn first and then his!" said Amru. "To us he is the more important of the two—yes, he, the upstart, the puppet. Do you hear? Do you understand? If you touch a hair of his head, it will cost you your nose and ears! Never for an hour forget that you live—and ought not to live—only so long as two pairs of lips are sealed. You know whose. That clever head remains on your shoulders only as long as they choose. Cling to it, man; you have only one to lose! It was necessary, my lord Vekeel, to remind you of that once more!"

The Negro groaned like a wounded beast and sullenly panted out: "This is the reward of past services; these are the thanks of Moslem to Moslem!— And all for the sake of a Christian dog."

"You have had thanks, and more than are your due," replied Amru more calmly. "You know what you pledged yourself to before I raised you to be my Vekeel for the sake of your brains and your sword, and what I had to overlook before I did so—not on your behalf, but for the great cause of Islam. And, if you wish to remain where you are, you will do well to sacrifice your wild ambition. If you cannot, I will send you back to the army, and to-day rather than to-morrow; and if you carry it with too high a hand you will find yourself at Medina in fetters, with your death-warrant stuck in your girdle."

The Negro again groaned sullenly; but his master was not to be checked.

"Why should you hate this youth? Why, a child could see through it! In the son and heir of George you see the future Mukaukas, while you are cherishing the insane wish to become the Mukaukas yourself."

"And why should such a wish be insane?" cried the other in a harsh voice. "Putting you out of the question, who is there here that is shrewder or stronger than I?"

"No Moslem, perhaps. But neither you nor any other true believer will succeed to the dead man's office, but an Egyptian and a Christian. Prudence requires it, and the Khaliff commands it."

"And does he also command that this curled ape shall be left in possession of his millions?"

"So that is what you covet, you greedy curmudgeon—that is it? Do not all the crimes you have committed out of avarice weigh upon you heavily enough? Gold, and yet more gold—that is the end, the foul end, of all your desires. A fat morsel, no doubt: the Mukaukas' estates, his talents of gold, his gems, slaves, and horses; I admit that. But thank God the All-merciful, we are not thieves and robbers!"

"And who was it that dug out the hidden millions from beneath the reservoir of Peter the Egyptian, and who made him bite the dust?"

"I—I. But—as you know—only to send the money to Medina. Peter had hidden it before we killed him. The Mukaukas and his son have declared all their possessions to the uttermost dinar and hide of land; they have faithfully paid the taxes, and consequently their property belongs to them as our swords, our horses, our wives belong to you or me. What will not your grasping spirit lead you to!—Take your hand from your dagger!— Not a copper coin from them shall fall into your hungry maw, so help me God! Do not again cast an evil eye on the Mukaukas' son! Do not try my patience too far, man, or else—Hold your head tight on your shoulders or you will have to seek it at your feet; and what I say I mean!—Now, good-night! To-morrow morning in the divan you are to explain your scheme for the new distribution of the land; it will not suit me in any way, and I shall have other projects to propose for discussion."

With this the Arab turned his back on the Vekeel; but no sooner had the door closed on him than Obada clenched his fist in fury at his lord and master, who had hitherto said nothing of his having had purloined a portion of the consignment of gold which Amru had charged him to escort to Medina. Then he rushed up and down the room, snorting and foaming till slaves came in to clear the tables.

CHAPTER XXV.

Orion made his way home under the moonlit and starry night. He held his head high, and not since that evening on the water with Paula had he felt so glad or so hopeful. On the other side of the bridge he did not at once turn his horse's head homewards; the fresh night air was so delightful, his heart beat so high that he shrunk from the oppression of a room. Full of renewed life, freed from a burden as it were, he made his way at a round pace to the house that held his beloved, picturing to himself how gladly she would welcome the news that he had found Amru ready to encourage him in his projects, indeed, to be a fatherly friend.

The Arab general, whose lofty character, intellect, and rectitude his father had esteemed highly, had impressed him, too, as the ideal of noble manliness, and as he compared him with the highest officials and warriors he had met at the Court of Byzantium he could not help smiling. By the side of this dignified, but impetuous and warm-hearted man they appeared like the old, rigid idols of his ancestors in comparison with the freely-wrought works of Greek art. He could bless the memory of his father for having freed the land from that degenerate race. Now, he felt, that lost parent, whose image lived in his soul, was satisfied with him, and this gave him a sense of happiness which he meant to cling to and enhance by every thought and deed in the future. "Life is a function, a ministry, and a duty!" this watchword, which had been given him by those beloved lips, should keep him in the new path; and soon he hoped to feel sure of himself, to be able to look back on such deeds of valor as would give him a right in his own judgment to unite his lot to that of this noblest of women.

Full of such thoughts as these, he made his way to the house of Rufinus. The windows of the corner room on the upper floor were lighted up; two of these windows looked out on the river and the quay. He did not know which rooms were Paula's, but he looked up at the late-burning light with a vague feeling that it must be hers; a female figure which now appeared framed in the opening, showed him that he was not mistaken; it was that of Perpetua. The sound of hoofs had roused her curiosity, but she did not seem to recognize him in the dim starlight.

He slowly rode past, and when he presently turned back and again looked up, in the hope this time of seeing Paula, the place was vacant: however, he perceived a tall dark shadow moving across from one side of the room to the other, which could not be that of the nurse nor of her slender mistress. It must indeed be that of a remarkably big man, and stopping to gaze with anxious and unpleasant apprehension, he plainly recognized Philippus.

It was past midnight. How could he account for his being with Paula at this hour?—Was she ill?—Was this room hers after all?—Was it merely by chance that the nurse was in Rufinus' room with the physician.

No. The woman whom he could now see pass across the window and go straight up to the man, with outstretched hands, was Paula and none other. Isis heart was already beating fast, and now a suspicion grew strong in him which his vanity had hitherto held in check, though he had often seen the friendly relations that subsisted between Paula and the leech.—Perhaps it was a warmer feeling than friendship and guileless trust, which had led her so unreservedly to claim this man's protection and service. Could he have won Paula's heart—Paula's love?

Was it conceivable!—But why not?

What was there against Philippus but his homely face and humble birth? And how many a woman had he not seen set her heart on quite other things! The physician was not more than five years his senior; and recalling the expression in his eyes as he looked at Paula only that morning Orion felt more and more uneasy.

Philippus loved Paula.—A trifling incident suddenly occurred to his mind which made him certain on that point; he had only too much experience in such matters. Yesterday, it had struck him that ever since his father's death—that was ever since Paula's change of residence—Philippus dressed more carefully than had been his wont. "Now this," thought he, "is a change that does not come over so serious a man unless it is caused by love."

A mingled torment of pain and rage shot through him as he again saw the tall shadow cross the window. For the first time in his life he felt the pangs of jealousy, which he had so often laughed at in his friends; but was it not absurd to allow it to torture him; was he not sure, since that morning's meeting, quite sure of Paula? And Philippus! Even if he, Orion, must retire into the background before a higher judge, in the eyes of a woman he surely had the advantage!—But in spite of all this it troubled him to know that the physician was with Paula at such an hour; he angrily pulled his horse's head

round, and it was a pleasure to him to feel the fiery creature, unused as it was to such rough treatment, turn restive at it now. By the time he had gone a hundred steps from those windows with their cursed glare, the horse was displaying all the temper and vice that had been taken out of him as a foal. Orion had to fight a pitched battle with his steed, and it was a relief to him to exercise his power with curb and knee. In vain did the creature dance round and round; in vain did he rear and plunge; the steady rider was his master; and it was not till he had brought him to quietness and submission that Orion drew breath and looked about him while he patted the horse's smooth neck.

Close at hand, behind a low hedge, spread the thick, dark groves of Susannah's garden and between them the back of the house was visible, being more brilliantly lighted than even Paula's rooms. Three of the windows showed lights; two were rather dim, however, the result probably of one lamp only.

All this could not matter to him; nevertheless he remained gazing at the roof of the colonnade which went round the house below the upper floor; for, on the terrace it formed, leaning against a window-frame, stood a small figure with her head thrust so far forth to listen that the light shone through the curls that framed it. Katharina was trying to overhear a dialogue between the Patriarch Benjamin—whose bearded and apostolic head Orion could clearly recognize—and the priest John, an insignificant looking little man, of whom, however, the deceased Mukaukas had testified that he was far superior to old Plotinus the Bishop in intellect and energy.

The young man could easily have watched Katharina's every movement, but he did not think it worth while. Nevertheless, as he rode on, the water-wagtail's little figure dwelt in his mind; not alone, however, for that of Paula immediately rose by her side; and the smaller Katharina's seemed, the more ample and noble did the other appear. Every word he had heard that day from Paula's lips rushed to his remembrance, and the vivid and lovely memory drove out all care. That woman, who only a few hours since, had declared herself ready, with him, to hope all things, to believe all things, and to accept his protection—that lordly maiden whom he had been glad to bid fix her eye, with him, on the goal of his future efforts, whose pure gaze could restrain his passion and impetuosity as by a charm, and who yet granted him the right to strive to possess her—that proud daughter of heroes, whom even his father would have clasped to his heart as a daughter—was it possible that she should betray him like some pleasure-seeking city beauty? Could she forget her dignity as a woman?—No! and a thousand times no. To doubt her was to insult her—was to wrong her and himself.

The physician loved her; but it certainly was not any warmer feeling than friendship on her part that made her receive him at this late hour. The shame would be his own, if he ever again allowed such base suspicion to find place in his soul!

He breathed a deep sigh of relief. And when his servant, who had lingered to pay the toll at the bridge, came up with him, Orion dismounted and desired him to lead his horse home, for he himself wished to return on foot, alone with his thoughts. He walked meditatively and slowly under the sycamores, but he had not gone far when, on the other side of the deserted road, he heard some one overtaking him with long, quick strides. He recognized the leech Philippus at a glance and was glad, for this proved to him how senseless and unjust his doubts had been, and how little ground he had for regarding the physician as a rival; for indeed this man did not look like a happy lover. He hurried on with his head bent, as though under a heavy burthen, and clasped his hand to his forehead with a gesture of despair. No, this nocturnal wanderer had left no hour of bliss behind him; and if his demeanor was calculated to rouse any feeling it was not envy, but pity.

Philippus did not heed Orion; absorbed in himself, he strode on, moaning dully, as if in pain. For a few minutes he disappeared into a house whence came loud cries of suffering, and when he came out again, he walked on, shaking his head now and then, as a man who sees many things happen which his understanding fails to account for.

The end of his walk was a large, palatial building. The stucco had fallen off in places, and in the upper story the windows had been broken away till their open ings were a world too wide. In former times this house had accommodated the State officers of Finance for the province, and the ground-floor rooms had been suitably and comfortably fitted up for the Ideologos—the supreme controller of this department, who usually resided at Alexandria, but who often spent some weeks at Memphis when on a tour of inspection. But the Arabians had transferred the management of the finances of the whole country to the new capital of Fostat on the other shore of the river, and that of the monetary affairs of the decaying city had been incorporated with the treasurer's department of the Mukaukas' household. The senate of the city had found the expense of this huge building too heavy, and had been well content to let the lower rooms to Philippus and his Egyptian friend, Horapollo.

The two men occupied different rooms, but the same slaves attended to their common housekeeping and also waited on the physician's assistant, a modest and well-informed Alexandrian.

When Philippus entered his old friend's lofty and spacious study he found him still up, sitting before a great number of rolls of manuscript, and so absorbed in his work that he did not notice his late-coming comrade till the leech bid him good-evening. His only reply was an unintelligible murmur, for some minutes longer the old man was lost in study; at last, however, he looked up at Philippus, impatiently tossing an ivory ruler—which he had been using to open and smooth the papyrus on to the table; and at the same moment a dark bundle under it began to move—this was the old man's slave who had long been sleeping there.

Three lamps on the writing-table threw a bright light on the old man and his surroundings, while the physician, who had thrown himself on a couch in a corner of the large room, remained in the dark.

What startled the midnight student was his housemate's unwonted silence; it disturbed him as the cessation of the clatter of the wheel disturbs a man who lives in a mill. He looked at his friend with surprised enquiry, but Philippus was dumb, and the old man turned once more to his rolls of manuscript. But he had lost the necessary concentration; his brown hand, in which the blue veins stood out like cords, fidgeted with the scrolls and the ivory rule, and his sunken lips, which had before been firmly closed, were now twitching restlessly.

The man's whole aspect was singular and not altogether pleasing: his lean brown figure was bent with age, his thoroughly Egyptian face, with broad cheekbones and outstanding ears, was seamed and wrinkled like oak-bark; his scalp was bare of its last hair, and his face clean-shaved, but for a few tufts of grey hair by way of beard, sprouting from the deep furrows on his cheeks and chin, like reeds from the narrow bed of a brook; the razor could not reach them there, and they gave him an untidy and uncared-for appearance. His dress answered to his face—if indeed that could be called dress which consisted of a linen apron and a white kerchief thrown over his shoulders after sundown. Still, no one meeting him in the road could have taken him for a beggar; for his linen was fine and as white as snow, and his keen, far-seeing eyes, above which, exactly in the middle, his bristly eyebrows grew strangely long and thick, shone and sparkled with clear intelligence, firm self-reliance, and a repellent severity which would no more have become an intending mendicant than the resolute and often scornful expression which played about his lips. There was nothing amiable, nothing prepossessing, nothing soft in this man's face; and those who knew what his life had been could not wonder that the years had failed to sweeten his abrupt and contradictory acerbity or to transmute them into that kindly forbearance which old men, remembering how often they have stumbled and how many they have seen fall, sometimes find pleasure in practising.

He had been born, eighty years before, in the lovely island of Philae, beyond the cataract in the district of the temple of Isis, and under the shadow of the only Egyptian sanctuary in which the heathen cultus was kept up, and that publicly, as late as in his youth. Since Theodosius the Great, one emperor and one Praefectus Augustalis after another had sent foot-soldiers and cavalry above the falls to put an end to idolatry in the beautiful isle; but they had always been routed or destroyed by the brave Blemmyes who haunted the desert between the Nile and the Red Sea. These restless nomad tribes acknowledged the Isis of Philae as their tutelary goddess, and, by a very ancient agreement, the image of their patroness was carried every year by her priests in a solemn procession to the Blemmyes, and then remained for a few weeks in their keeping. Horapollo's father was the last of the horoscope readers, and his grandfather had been the last high-priest of the Isis of Philae. His childhood had been passed on the island but then a Byzantine legion had succeeded in beating the Blemmyes, in investing the island, and in plundering and closing the temple. The priests of Isis escaped the imperial raid and Horapollo had spent all his early years with his father, his grandfather, and two younger sisters, in constant peril and flight. His youthful spirit was unremittingly fed with hatred of the persecutors, the cruel contemners and exterminators of the faith of his forefathers; and this hatred rose to irreconcilable bitterness after the massacre at Antioch where the imperial soldiery fell upon all his family, and his grandfather and two innocent sisters were murdered. These horrors were committed at the instigation of the Bishop, who denounced the Egyptian strangers as idolaters, and to whom the Roman prefect, a proud and haughty patrician, had readily lent the support of an armed force. It was owing to the narrowest chance—or, as the old man would have it, to the interposition of great Isis, that his father had been so happy as to get away with him and the treasures he had brought from the temple at Philae. Thus they had means to enable them to travel farther under an assumed name, and they finally settled in Alexandria. Here the persecuted youth changed his name, Horus, to its Greek equivalent, and henceforth he was known at home and in the schools as Apollo. He was highly gifted by nature, and availed himself with the utmost zeal of the means of learning that abounded in Alexandria; he labored indefatigably and dug deep into every field of Greek science, gaining, under his father's guidance, all the knowledge of Egyptian horoscopy, which was not wholly lost even at this late period.

In the midst of the contentious Christian sects of the capital, both father and son remained heathen and worshippers of Isis; and when the old priest died at an advanced age, Horapollo moved to Memphis where he led the quiet and secluded life of a student, mingling only now and then with the

astronomers, astrologers, and calendar-makers at the observatory, or visiting the alchemists' laboratories, where, even in Christian Egypt, they still devoted themselves to attempts to transmute the baser into the noble metals. Alchemists and star-readers alike soon detected the old man's superior knowledge, and in spite of his acrid and often offensively-repellent demeanor, took counsel of him on difficult questions. His fame had even reached the Arabs, and, when it was necessary to find the exact direction towards Mecca for the prayer niche in Amru's new mosque, he was appealed to, and his decision was final.

Philippus had, some years since, been called to the old man's bedside in sickness, and being then a beginner and in no great request, he had given the best of his time and powers to the case. Horapollo had been much attracted by the young physician's wide culture and earnest studiousness; he had conceived a warm liking for him, the warmest perhaps that he had ever felt for any fellow-human since the death of his own family. At last the elder took the younger man into his heart with such overflowing affection, that it seemed as though his spirit longed to make up now for the stint of love it had hitherto shown. No father could have clung to his son with more fervent devotion, and when a relapse once more brought him to death's door he took Philippus wholly into his confidence, unrolled before his eyes the scroll of his inner and outer life from its beginnings, and made him his heir on condition that he should abide by him to the end.

Philippus, who, from the first, had felt a sympathetic attraction to this venerable and talented man, agreed to the bargain; and when he subsequently became associated with the old man in his studies, assisting him from time to time, Horapollo desired that he would help him to complete a work he hoped to finish before he died. It was a treatise on hieroglyphic writing, and was to interpret the various signs so far as was still possible, and make them intelligible to posterity.

The old man disliked writing anything but Egyptian, using Greek unwillingly and clumsily, so he entrusted to his young friend the task of rendering his explanations into that language. Thus the two men— so different in age and character, but so closely allied in intellectual aims—led a joint existence which was both pleasant and helpful to both, in spite of the various eccentricities, the harshness and severity of the elder.

Horapollo lived after the manner of the early Egyptian priests, subjecting himself to much ablution and shaving; eating little but bread, vegetables, and poultry, and abstaining from pulse and the flesh of all beasts—not merely of the prohibited animal, swine; wearing nothing but pure linen clothing, and setting apart certain hours for the recitation of those heathen forms of prayer whose magic power was to compel the gods to grant the desires of those who thus appealed to them.

And if the old man had given his full confidence to Philippus, the leech, on his part, had no secrets from him; or, if he withheld anything, Horapollo, with wonderful acumen, was at once aware of it. Philippus had often spoken of Paula to his parental friend, describing her charms with all the fervor of a lover, but the old man was already prejudiced against her, if only as the daughter of a patrician and a prefect. All who bore these titles were to him objects of hatred, for a patrician and a prefect had been guilty of the blood of those he had held most dear. The Governor of Antioch, to be sure, had acted only under the orders of the bishop; but old Horapollo, and his father before him, from the first had chosen to throw all the blame on the prefect, for it afforded some satisfaction to the descendant of an ancestral race of priests to be able to vent all his wrathful spite on any one rather than on the minister of a god—be that god who or what he might.

So when Philippus praised Paula's dignified grandeur, her superior elegance, the height of her stature or the loftiness of her mind, the old man would bound up exclaiming: "Of course—of course!—Beware boy, beware! You are disguising haughtiness, conceit, and arrogance under noble names. The word 'patrician' includes everything we can conceive of as most insolent and inhuman; and those apes in purple who disgrace the Imperial throne pick out the worst of them, the most cold-hearted and covetous, to make prefects of them. And as they are, so are their children! Everything which they in their vainglory regard as 'beneath them' they tread into the dust—and we—you and I, all who labor with their hands in the service of the state—we, in their dull eyes, are beneath them. Mark me, boy! To-day the governor's daughter, the patrician maiden, can smile at you because she needs you; tomorrow she will cast you aside as I push away the old panther-skin which keeps my feet warm in winter, as soon as the March days come!"

Nor was his aversion less for the son of the Mukaukas, whom, however, he had never seen; when the leech had confessed to him how deep a grudge against Orion dwelt in the heart of Paula, old Horapollo had chuckled scornfully, and he exclaimed, as though he could read hearts and look into the future—: "They snap at each other now, and in a day or two they will kiss again! Hatred and love are the opposite ends of the same rod; and how easily it is reversed!—Those two!—Like in blood is like in kind;—such people attract each other as the lodestone tends towards the iron and the iron towards the

lodestone!"

But these and similar admonitions had produced little effect on the physician's sentiments; even Paula's repulse of his ardent appeal after she had moved to the house of Rufinus had failed to extinguish his hope of winning her at last. This very morning, in the course of the discussion as to the stewardship of her fortune, Paula had been ready and glad to accept him as her Kyrios—her legal protector and representative; but he now thought that he could perceive by various signs that his venerable friend was right: that the rod had been reversed, and that aversion had been transformed to love in the girl's heart. The anguish of this discovery was hard to bear. And yet Paula had never shown him such hearty warmth of manner, never had she spoken to him in a voice so soft and so full of feeling, as this evening in the garden. More cheerful and talkative than usual, she had constantly turned to address him, while he had felt his pain and torment of mind gradually eased, till in him too, sentiment had blossomed anew, and his intellectual power had expanded. Never—so he believed—had he expressed his thoughts better or more brilliantly than in that hour. Nor had she withheld her approval; she had heartily agreed with his views; and when, half an hour before midnight, he had gone with her to visit his patients, rapturous hopes had sprung once more in his breast. Ecstatically happy, like a man intoxicated, he had, by her own desire, accompanied her into her sitting-room, and then—and there....

Poor, disappointed man, sitting on the divan in a dark corner of the spacious room! In his soul hitherto the intellect had alone made itself heard, the voice of the heart had never been listened to.

How he had found his way home he never knew. All he remembered was that, in the course of duty, he had gone into the house of a man whose wife—the mother of several children—he had left at noon in a dying state; that he had seen her a corpse, surrounded by loud but sincere mourners; that he had gone on his way, weighed down by their grief and his own, and that he had entered his friend's rooms rather than his own, to feel safe from himself. Life had no charm, no value for him now; still, he felt ashamed to think that a woman could thus divert him from the fairest aims of life, that he could allow her to destroy the peace of mind he needed to enable him to carry out his calling in the spirit of his friend Rufinus. He knew his house-mate well and felt that he would only pour vitriol into his wounds, but it was best so. The old man had already often tried to bring down Paula's image from its high pedestal in his soul, but always in vain; and even now he should not succeed. He would mar nothing, scatter nothing to the winds, tread nothing in the dust but the burning passion, the fevered longing for her, which had fired his blood ever since that night when he had vanquished the raving Masdakite. That old sage by the table, on whose stern, cold features the light fell so brightly, was the very man to accomplish such a work of destruction, and Philippus awaited his first words as a wounded man watches the surgeon heating the iron with which to cauterize the sore.

Poor disappointed wretch, sorely in need of a healing hand!

He lay back on the divan, and saw how his friend leaned over his scroll as if listening, and fidgeted up and down in his arm-chair.

It was clear that Horapollo was uneasy at Philippus' long silence, and his pointed eyebrows, raised high on his brow, plainly showed that he was drawing his own conclusions from it—no doubt the right ones. The peace must soon be broken, and Philippus awaited the attack. He was prepared for the worst; but how could he bring himself to make his torturer's task easy for him. Thus many minutes slipped away; while the leech was waiting for the old man to speak, Horapollo waited for Philippus. However, the impatience and curiosity of the elder were stronger than the young man's craving for comfort; he suddenly laid down the roll of manuscript, impatiently snatched up the ivory stick which he had thrown aside, set his heavy seat at an angle with a shove of amazing vigor for his age, turned full on Philippus, and asked him, in a loud voice, pointing his ruler at him as if threatening him with it:

"So the play is out. A tragedy, of course!"

"Hardly, since I am still alive," replied the other.

"But there is inward bleeding, and the wound is painful," retorted the old man. Then, after a short pause, he went on: "Those who will not listen must feel! The fox was warned of the trap, but the bait was too tempting! Yesterday there would still have been time to pull his foot out of the spring, if only he had sincerely desired it; he knew the hunter's guile. Now the foe is down on the victim; he has not spared his weapons, and there lies the prey dumb with pain and ignominy, cursing his own folly.—You seem inclined for silence this evening. Shall I tell you just how it all came about?"

"I know only too well," said Philippus.

"While I, to be sure, can only imagine it!" growled the old man. "So long as that patrician hussy needed the poor beast of burthen she could pet it and throw barley and dates to it. Now she is rolling in

gold and living under a sheltering roof, and hey presto, the discarded protector is sent to the right about in no time. This mistress of the hearts of our weak and bondage-loving sex raises this rich Adonis to fill the place of the hapless, overgrown leech, just as the sky lets the sun rise when the pale moon sinks behind the hills. If that is not the fact give me the lie!"

"I only wish I could," sighed Philippus. "You have seen rightly, wonderfully rightly—and yet, as wrongly as possible."

"Dark indeed!" said the old man quietly. "But I can see even in the dark. The facts are certain, though you are still so blinded as not to see their first cause. However, I am satisfied to know that your delusion has come to so abrupt, and in my opinion so happy, an end. To its cause—a woman, as usual—I am perfectly indifferent. Why should I needlessly ascribe to her any worse sin than she had committed? If only for your sake I will avoid doing so, for an honorable soul clings to those whom it sees maligned. Still, it seems to me that it is for you to speak, not for me. I should know you for a philosopher, without such persistent silence; and as for myself, I am not altogether bereft of curiosity, in spite of my eighty years."

At this Philippus hastily rose and pacing the room while he spoke, or pausing occasionally in front of the old man, he poured out with glowing cheeks and eager gestures, the history of his hopes and sufferings—how Paula had filled him with fresh confidence, and had invited him to her rooms—only to show him her whole heart; she had been strongly moved, surprised at herself, but unable and unwilling to conceal from him the happiness that had come into her life. She had spoken to him, her best friend, as a burthened soul pours itself out to a priest: had confessed all that she had felt since the funeral of the deceased Mukaukas, and said that she felt convinced now that Orion had come to a right mind again after his great sin.

"And that there, was so much joy over him in heaven," interrupted Horapollo, "that she really could not delay doing her cast-off lover the honor of inviting his sympathy!"

"On the contrary. It was with the utmost effort that she uttered all her heart prompted her to tell; she had nothing to look for from me but mockery, warning, and reproach, and yet she opened her heart to me."

"But why? To what end?" shrieked the old man. "Shall I tell you. Because a man who is a friend must still be half a lover, and a woman cannot bear to give up even a quarter of one."

"Not so!" exclaimed Philippus, indignantly interrupting him. "It was because she esteems and values me,—because she regards me as a brother, and—I am not a vain man—and could not bear—those were her very words—to cheat me of my affection for even an hour! It was noble, it was generous, worthy of her! And though every fibre of my nature rebelled I found myself compelled to admire her sincerity, her true friendship, her disregard of her own feelings, and her womanly tenderness!—Nay, do not interrupt me again, do not laugh at me. It is no small matter for a proud girl, conscious of her own dignity, to lay bare her heart's weakness to a man who, as she knows, loves her, as she did just now to me. She called me her benefactor and said she would be a sister to me; and whatever motive you—who hate her out of a habit of prejudice without really knowing her—may choose to ascribe her conduct to, I—I believe in her, and understand her.

"Could I refuse to grasp the hand she held out to me as she entreated me with tears in her eyes to be still her friend, her protector, and her Kyrios! And yet, and yet!—Where shall I find resolution enough to ask of her who excites me to the height of passion no more than a kind glance, a clasp of the hand, an intelligent interest in what I say? How am I to preserve self-control, calmness, patience, when I see her in the arms of that handsome young demi-god whom I scorned only yesterday as a worthless scoundrel? What ice may cool the fire of this burning heart? What spear can transfix the dragon of passion which rages here? I have lived almost half my life without ever feeling or yearning for the love of which the poets sing. I have never known anything of such feelings but through the pangs of some friend whose weakness had roused my pity; and now, when love has come upon me so late with all its irresistible force—has subjugated me, cast me into bondage—how shall I, how can I get free?"

"My faithful friend, you who call me your son, whom I am glad to hear speak to me as 'boy,' and 'child,' who have taken the place of the father I lost so young—there is but one issue: I must leave you and this city—flee from her neighborhood—seek a new home far from her with whom I could have been as happy as the Saints in bliss, and who has made me more wretched than the damned in everlasting fire. Away, away! I will go—I must go unless you, who can do so much, can teach me to kill this passion or to transmute it into calm, brotherly regard."

He stood still, close in front of the old man and hid his face in his hands. At his favorite's concluding words, Horapollo had started to his feet with all the vigor of youth; he now snatched his hand down

from his face, and exclaimed in a voice hoarse with indignation and the deepest concern:

"And you can say that in earnest? Can a sensible man like you have sunk so deep in folly? Is it not enough that your own peace of mind should have been sacrificed, flung at the feet of this—what can I call her?— Do you understand at last why I warned you against the Patrician brood? —The faith, gratitude, and love of a good man!—What does she care for them? Unhook the whiting; away with him in the dust! Here comes a fine large fish who perhaps may swallow the bait!—Do you want to ruin, for her sake, and the sake of that rascally son of the governor, the comfort and happiness of an old man's last years when he has become accustomed to love you, who so well deserve it, as his own son? Will you—an energetic student, you—a man of powerful intellect, zealous in your duty, and in favor with the gods—will you pine like a deserted maiden or spring from the Leucadian rock like love-sick Sappho in the play while the spectators shake with laughter? You must stay, Boy, you must stay; and I will show you how a man must deal with a passion that dishonors him."

"Show me," replied Philippus in a dull voice. "I ask no more. Do you suppose that I am not myself ashamed of my own weakness? It ill beseems me of all men, formed by fate for anything rather than to be a sighing and rapturous lover. I will struggle with it, wrestle with it with all the strength that is in me; but here, in Memphis, close to her and as her Kyrios, I should be forced every day to see her, and day after day be exposed to fresh and humiliating defeat! Here, constantly near her and with her, the struggle must wear me out—I should perish, body and soul. The same place, the same city, cannot hold her and me."

"Then she must make way for you," croaked Horus. Philippus raised his bowed head and asked, in some surprise and with stern reproof:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," replied the other airily. He shrugged his shoulders and went on more gently: "Memphis has greater need of you than of the patrician hussy." Then he shook himself as if he were cold, struck his breast and added: "All is turmoil here within; I can neither help nor advise you. Day must soon be dawning in the east; we will try to sleep. A knot can often be untied by daylight which by lamplight seems inextricable, and perhaps on my sleepless couch the goddess may reveal to me the way I have promised to show you. A little more lightness of heart would do neither of us any harm.—Try to forget your own griefs in those of others; you see enough of them every day. To wish you a good night would probably be waste of words, but I may wish you a soothing one, You may count on my aid; but you will not let me, a poor old man, hear another word about flight and departure and the like, will you? No, no. I know you better, Philippus—you will never treat your lonely old friend so!"

These were the tenderest words that the leech had ever heard from the old man's lips, and it comforted him when Horapollo pressed him to his heart in a hasty embrace. He thought no more of the hint that it was Paula's part to make room for him. But the old man had spoken in all seriousness, for, no sooner was he alone than he petulantly flung down the ivory ruler on the table, and murmured, at first angrily and then scornfully, his eyes sparkling the while:

"For this true heart, and to preserve myself and the world from losing such a man, I would send a dozen such born hussies to Amentis—[The Nether world of the ancient Egyptians.]—Hey, hey! My beauty! So this noble leech is not good enough for the like of us; he may be tossed away like a date-stone that we spit out? Well, every one to his taste; but how would it be if old Horapollo taught us his value? Wait a bit, wait! —With a definite aim before my eyes I have never yet failed to find my way—in the realm of science, of course; but what is life—the life of the sage but applied knowledge? And why should not old Horapollo, for once before he dies, try what his brains can contrive to achieve in the busy world of outside human existence? Pleasant as you may think it to be in Memphis with your lover, fair heart-breaker, you will have to make way for the plaything you have so lightly tossed aside! Aye, you certainly will, depend upon that my beauty, depend upon that!—Here, Anubis!"

He gave the slave, who had fallen asleep again under the table, a kick with his bare foot, and while Anubis lighted his master to his sleeping-room, and helped him in his long and elaborate ablutions, Horapollo never ceased muttering broken sentences and curses, or laughing maliciously to himself.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A knot can often be untied by daylight

Hatred and love are the opposite ends of the same rod
Life is a function, a ministry, a duty
So hard is it to forego the right of hating
Those who will not listen must feel
Use their physical helplessness as a defence

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BRIDE OF THE NILE — VOLUME 06 ***

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