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Author: Georg Ebers

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A THORNY PATH

By Georg Ebers

Volume 4.

CHAPTER XI.

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

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

They were not kept long waiting outside the house of Proterius, for Andreas was in the vestibule arranging the litter for the conveyance of Diodoros, with the willing help of Ptolemaeus. The freedman was indeed amazed when he heard Melissa's voice, and blamed her for this fresh adventure. However,

he was glad to see her, for, although it seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility, he had already fancied more than once, as steps had approached and passed, that she must surely be coming to lend him a helping hand.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Agatha inquired of her about her father, Melissa briefly replied, that since her mother's death he was often moody and rough, but that he had a good, kind heart. The Christian girl, on the contrary, spoke with enthusiasm of the warm, human loving-kindness of the man to whom she owed her being; and the picture she drew of her home life was so fair, that the little heathen could hardly believe in its truth. Her father, Agatha said, lived in constant warfare with the misery and suffering of his fellow-creatures, and he was, in fact, able to make those about him happy and prosperous. The poorest were dearest to his loving heart, and on his estate across the lake he had collected none but the sick and wretched. The care of the children was left to her, and the little ones clung to her as if she were their mother. She had neither brother nor sister.— And so the conversation turned on Alexander, of whom Agatha could never hear enough.

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

dead after saving a woman and child from drowning, and vainly endeavoring to rescue another child. He might be wild and reckless, but he had always been faithful to his art and to his love for his family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They presently crossed the Aspendia Canal, where the fog hung over the water like white smoke, hiding the figure of the tutelary goddess of the town on the parapet of the bridge from those who crossed by the roadway. The leaves of the mimosa-trees by the quay—nay, the very stones of the houses and the statues, wet with the morning dew—looked revived and newly washed; and a light breeze

brought up from the Serapeum broken tones of the chant, sung there every morning by a choir of priests, to hail the triumph of light over darkness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the Divine Spirit!

When, a few minutes later, the litter was borne out of the church again, the sun had triumphed over the mists and was rising with blinding splendor in the cloudless sky. Everything was bathed in light; but the dreadful sight of the penitents had cast a gloom over the clear gladness she had been so full of but just now. It was with a sense of oppression that she took leave of the deaconess, who left her with cheerful contentment in the street of Hermes, and followed the litter to the open square in front of the Serapeum.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XII.

Melissa had supposed that, according to custom, the litter would be carried up the incline or the steps, and into the Serapeum by the great door; but in consequence of the emperor's visit this could not be. The sick man was borne round the eastern side of the huge building, which covered a space on which a

whole village might have stood. The door at the back, to the south, through which he was finally admitted, opened into a gallery passing by the great quadrangle where sacrifice was made, and leading to the inner rooms of the temple, to the cubicles among others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At this moment the lion crept closer to his master.

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

And then—she felt as if he must have guessed her thoughts—while he patted the lion and gently pushed him aside he turned his face full on her, and she knew not whether to be pleased or angry, for the odious, squinting eyes were not now terrible or contemptuous; nay, they had looked kindly on the beast, and with a somewhat suffering expression. The dreadful face of the murderer was not hideous now, but engaging—the face of a youth enduring torments of soul or of body.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, as they made their way through halls and passages where the foot of the uninitiated rarely intruded, she looked about her with more interest when the priest drew her attention to some particularly fine statue or picture, or some symbolical presentment. Even now, however, though association with her brothers had made her particularly alive to everything that was beautiful or curious, she glanced round with less interest than she otherwise might have done, for she had much else to think of. In the first place, of the benefits Diodoros was to derive from the great Galen; then of

her father, who this day must dispense with her assistance; and, finally, of the state of mind of her grave brother Philip. He and Alexander, who usually were such united friends, now both were in love with Agatha, and what could come of that? And from time to time her thoughts flew back to Caesar, and she felt as though some tie, she knew not what, linked them together.

As soon as the litter had to be carried up or down steps, she kept an eye on the bearers, and gave such help as was needed when the sleeper's position was changed. Whenever she looked in his handsome face, flushed as it was by fever and framed in tumbled curls, her heart swelled, and she felt that she had much to thank the gods for, seeing that her lover was so full of splendid youth and in no respect resembled the prematurely decrepit and sickly wearer of the purple. Nevertheless, she thought a good deal of Caracalla, and it even occurred to her once that if it were he who was being carried instead of Diodoros, she would tend him no less carefully than her betrothed. Caesar, who had been as far out of her ken as a god, and of whose overwhelming power she had heard, had suddenly come down to her. She involuntarily thought of him as one of those few with whom she had come into personal contact, and in whose weal or woe she had some sympathetic interest. He could not be altogether evil and hardened. If he could only know what pain it caused her to see him suffer, he would surely command Zminis to abandon the pursuit of her brother.

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

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

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

Most of the beds were already empty; only those between the long wall and the nearest row of columns were still for the most part occupied by the sick who sought the help of the god. On one of these Diodoros was laid, Melissa helping in silence, and with such skill as delighted even the physicians. Still, this did not wake him, though on the next bed lay a man who never ceased speaking, because in his dream he had been bidden to repeat the name of Serapis as many times as there were drops in a cup of water filled from the Agathodaemon Canal.

"A long stay in this strong perfume will be bad for him," whispered Ptolemaeus to the freedman. "Galenus sent word that he would visit the sick early to-day; but he is not here yet. He is an old man, and in Rome, they say, it is the custom to sleep late."

He was interrupted by a stir in the long hall, which broke in on the silence, no one knew from whence; and immediately after, officious hands threw open the great double doors with a loud noise.

"He is coming," whispered their priestly guide; and the instant after an old man crossed the threshold, followed by a troop of pastophori, as obsequious as the courtiers at the heels of a prince.

"Gently, brothers," murmured the greatest physician of his age in a low voice, as, leaning on a staff, he went toward the row of couches. It was easy to see the traces of his eighty years, but his fine eyes still gleamed with youthful light.

Melissa blushed to think that she could have mistaken Serenus Samonicus for this noble old man. He must once have been a tall man; his back was bent and his large head was bowed as though he were forever seeking something. His face was pale and colorless, with a well-formed nose and mouth, but not of classic mold. Blue veins showed through the clear white skin, and the long, silky, silvery hair still flowed in unthinned waves round his massive head, bald only on the crown. A snowy beard fell over his breast. His aged form was wrapped in a long and ample robe of costly white woolen stuff, and his whole

appearance would have been striking for its peculiar refinement, even if the eyes had not sparkled with such vivid and piercing keenness from under the thick brows, and if the high, smooth, slightly prominent forehead had not borne witness to the power and profundity of his mind. Melissa knew of no one with whom to compare him; he reminded Andreas of the picture of John as an old man, which a wealthy fellow-Christian had presented to the church of Saint Mark.

If this man could do nothing, there was no help on earth. And how dignified and self-possessed were the movements of this bent old man as he leaned on his staff! He, a stranger here, seemed to be showing the others the way, a guide in his own realm. Melissa had heard that the strong scent of the kyphi might prove injurious to Diodoros, and her one thought now was the desire that Galenus might soon approach his couch. He did not, in fact, begin with the sick nearest to the door, but stood awhile in the middle of the hall, leaning against a column and surveying the place and the beds.

When his searching glance rested on that where Diodoros was lying, an answering look met his with reverent entreaty from a pair of beautiful, large, innocent eyes. A smile parted his bearded lips, and going up to the girl he said: "Where beauty bids, even age must obey. Your lover, child, or your brother?"

"My betrothed," Melissa hastened to reply; and the maidenly embarrassment which flushed her cheek became her so well that he added:

"He must have much to recommend him if I allow him to carry you off, fair maid."

With these words he went up to the couch, and looking at Diodoros as he lay, he murmured, as if speaking to himself and without paying any heed to the younger men who crowded round him:

"There are no true Greeks left here; but the beauty of the ancestral race is not easily stamped out, and is still to be seen in their descendants. What a head, what features, and what hair!"

Then he felt the lad's breast, shoulders, and arms, exclaiming in honest admiration, "What a godlike form!"

He laid his delicate old hand, with its network of blue veins, on the sick man's forehead, again glanced round the room, and listened to Ptolemaeus, who gave him a brief and technical report of the case; then, sniffing the heavy scent that filled the hall, he said, as the Christian leech ceased speaking:

"We will try; but not here—in a room less full of incense. This perfume brings dreams, but no less surely induces fever. Have you no other room at hand where the air is purer?"

An eager "Yes," in many voices was the reply; and Diodoros was forthwith transferred into a small cubicle adjoining.

While he was being moved, Galenus went from bed to bed, questioning the chief physician and the patients. He seemed to have forgotten Diodoros and Melissa; but after hastily glancing at some and carefully examining others, and giving advice where it was needful, he desired to see the fair Alexandrian's lover once more.

As he entered the room he nodded kindly to the girl. How gladly would she have followed him! But she said to herself that if he had wished her to be present he would certainly have called her; so she modestly awaited his return. She had to wait a long time, and the minutes seemed hours while she heard the voices of men through the closed door, the moaning and sighing of the sufferer, the splashing of water, and the clatter of metal instruments; and her lively imagination made her fancy that something almost unendurable was being done to her lover.

At last the physician came out. His whole appearance betokened perfect satisfaction. The younger men, who followed him, whispered among themselves, shaking their heads as though some miracle had been performed; and every eye that looked on him was radiant with enthusiastic veneration. Melissa knew, as soon as his eyes met hers, that all was well, and as she grasped the old man's hand she concluded from its cool moisture that he had but just washed it, and had done with his own hand all that Ptolemaeus had expected of his skill. Her eyes were dim with grateful emotion, and though Galenus strove to hinder her from pressing her lips to his hand she succeeded in doing so; he, however, kissed her brow with fatherly delight in her warmhearted sweetness, and said:

"Now go home happy, my child. That stone had hit your lover's brain-roof a hard blow; the pressure of the broken beam—I mean a piece of bone—had robbed him of his consciousness of what a sweet bride the gods have bestowed on him. But the knife has done its work; the beam is in its place again; the splinters which were not needed have been taken out; the roof is mended, and the pressure removed. Your friend has recovered consciousness, and I will wager that at this moment he is thinking

of you and wishes you were with him. But for the present you had better defer the meeting. For forty-eight hours he must remain in that little room, for any movement would only delay his recovery."

"Then I shall stay here to nurse him," cried Melissa, eagerly. But Galenus replied, decisively:

"That must not be if he is to get well. The presence of a woman for whom the sufferer's heart is on fire is as certain to aggravate the fever as the scent of incense. Besides, child, this is no place for such as you."

Her head drooped sadly, but he nodded to her cheerily as he added:

"Ptolemaeus, who is worthy of your entire confidence, speaks of you as a girl of much sense, and you will surely not do anything to spoil my work, which was not easy. However, I must say farewell; other sick require my care."

He held out his hand, but, seeing her eyes fixed on his and glittering through tears, he asked her name and family. It seemed to him of good augury for the long hours before him which he must devote to Caesar, that he should, so early in the day, have met so pure and fair a flower of girlhood.

When she had told him her own name and her father's, and also mentioned her brothers, Philip the philosopher, and Alexander the painter, who was already one of the chief masters of his art here, Galenus answered heartily:

"All honor to his genius, then, for he is the one-eyed king in the land of the blind. Like the old gods, who can scarce make themselves heard for the new, the Muses too have been silenced. The many really beautiful things to be seen here are not new; and the new, alas! are not beautiful. But your brother's work," he added, kindly, "may be the exception."

"You should only see his portraits!" cried Melissa.

"Yours, perhaps, among them?" said the old man, with interest. "That is a reminder I would gladly take back to Rome with me."

Alexander had indeed painted his sister not long before, and how glad she was to be able to offer the picture to the reverend man to whom she owed so much! So she promised with a blush to send it him as soon as she should be at home again.

The unexpected gift was accepted with pleasure, and when he thanked her eagerly and with simple heartiness, she interrupted him with the assurance that in Alexandria art was not yet being borne to the grave. Her brother's career, it was true, threatened to come to an untimely end, for he stood in imminent danger. On this the old man—who had taken his seat on a bench which the attendant physicians of the temple had brought forward—desired to know the state of the case, and Melissa briefly recounted Alexander's misdemeanor, and how near he had been, yesterday, to falling into the hands of his pursuers. Then she looked up at the old man beseechingly; and as he had praised her beauty, so now—she herself knew not how she had such courage—the praises of his fame, his greatness and goodness, flowed from her lips. And her bold entreaties ended with a prayer that he would urge Caesar, who doubtless revered him as a father, to cease from prosecuting her brother.

The old man's face had grown graver and graver; he had several times stroked his white beard with an uneasy gesture; and when, as she spoke the last words, she ventured to raise her timidly downcast eyes to his, he rose stiffly and said in regretful tones:

"How can I be vexed with a sister who knocks at any door to save a brother's life? But I would have given a great deal that it had not been at mine. It is hard to refuse when I would so gladly accede, and yet so it must be; for, though Claudius Galenus does his best for Bassianus Antoninus as a patient, as he does for any other, Bassianus the man and the emperor is as far from him as fire from water; and so it must ever be during the short space of time which may yet be granted to him and me under the light of the sun."

The last words were spoken in a bitter, repellent tone, and yet Melissa felt that it pained the old man to refuse her. So she earnestly exclaimed:

"Oh, forgive me! How could I guess—" She suddenly paused and added, "Then you really think that Caesar has not long to live?"

She spoke with the most anxious excitement, and her question offended Galenus. He mistook their purport, and his voice was wrathful as he replied, "Long enough yet to punish an insult!"

Melissa turned pale. She fancied that she apprehended the meaning of these stern words, and, prompted by an earnest desire not to be misunderstood by this man, she eagerly exclaimed:

"I do not wish him dead—no, indeed not; not even for my brother's sake! But just now I saw him near, and I thought I could see that he was suffering great pain. Why, we pity a brute creature when it is in anguish. He is still so young, and it must be so hard to die!"

Galenus nodded approvingly, and replied:

"I thank you, in the name of my imperial patient.—Well, send me your portrait; but let it be soon, for I embark before sunset. I shall like to remember you. As to Caesar's sufferings, they are so severe, your tender soul would not wish your worst enemy to know such pain. My art has few means of mitigating them, and the immortals are little inclined to lighten the load they have laid on this man. Of the millions who tremble before him, not one prays or offers sacrifice of his own free-will for the prosperity of the monarch."

A flash of enthusiasm sparkled in Melissa's eye, but Galenus did not heed it; he briefly bade her farewell and turned away to devote himself to other patients.

"There is one, at any rate," thought she, as she looked after the physician, "who will pray and sacrifice for that unhappy man. Diodoros will not forbid it, I am sure."

She turned to Andreas and desired him to take her to her lover. Diodoros was now really sleeping, and did not feel the kiss she breathed on his fore head. He had all her love; the suffering criminal she only pitied.

When they had quitted the temple she pressed her hand to her bosom and drew a deep breath as if she had just been freed from prison.

"My head is quite confused," she said, "by the heavy perfume and so much anxiety and alarm; but O Andreas, my heart never beat with such joy and gratitude! Now I must collect my thoughts, and get home to do what is needful for Philip. And merciful gods! that good-natured old Roman, Samonicus, will soon be expecting me at the Temple of Aphrodite; see how high the sun is already. Let us walk faster, for, to keep him waiting—"

Andreas here interrupted her, saying, "If I am not greatly mistaken, there is the Roman, in that open chariot, coming down the incline."

He was right; a few minutes later the chariot drew up close to Melissa, and she managed to tell Samonicus all that had happened in so courteous and graceful a manner that, far from being offended, he could wish every success to the cure his great friend had begun. And indeed his promise had somewhat weighed upon his mind, for to carry out two undertakings in one day was too much, at his age, and he had to be present in the evening at a banquet to which Caesar had invited himself in the house of Seleukus the merchant."

"The high-priest's brother?" asked Melissa, in surprise, for death had but just bereft that house of the only daughter.

"The same," said the Roman, gayly. Then he gave her his hand, with the assurance that the thought of her would make it a pleasure to remember Alexandria.

As she clasped his hand, Andreas came up, bowed gravely, and asked whether it would be overbold in him, as a faithful retainer of the maiden's family, to crave a favor, in her name, of Caesar's illustrious and familiar friend.

The Roman eyed Andreas keenly, and the manly dignity, nay, the defiant self-possession of the freedman—the very embodiment of all he had expected to find in a genuine Alexandrian—so far won his confidence that he bade him speak without fear. He hoped to hear something sufficiently characteristic of the manners of the provincial capital to make an anecdote for Caesar's table. Then, when he understood that the matter concerned Melissa's brother, and a distinguished artist, he smiled expectantly. Even when he learned that Alexander was being hunted down for some heedless jest against the emperor, he only threatened Melissa sportively with his finger; but on being told that this jest dealt with the murder of Geta, he seemed startled, and the tone of his voice betrayed serious displeasure as he replied to the petitioner, "Do you suppose that I have three heads, like the Cerberus at the feet of your god, that you ask me to lay one on the block for the smile of a pretty girl?"

He signed to his charioteer, and the horses whirled the light vehicle across the square and down the street of Hermes.

Andreas gazed after him, and muttered, with a shrug

"My first petition to a great man, and assuredly my last."

"The coward!" cried Melissa; but Andreas said, with a superior smile.

"Let us take a lesson from this, my child. Those who reckon on the help of man are badly off indeed. We must all trust in God, and each in himself."

CHAPTER XIII.

Andreas, who had so much on his shoulders, had lost much time, and was urgently required at home. After gratifying Melissa's wish by describing how Diodoros had immediately recovered consciousness on the completion of the operation performed by Galen, and painting the deep amazement that had fallen on all the other physicians at the skill of this fine old man, he had done all he could for the present to be of use to the girl. He was glad, therefore, when in the street of Hermes, now swarming again with citizens, soldiers, and horsemen, he met the old nurse, who, after conducting Agatha home to her father, had been sent back to the town to remain in attendance, if necessary, on Diodoros. The freedman left it to her to escort Melissa to her own home, and went back to report to Polybius—in the first place, as to his son's state.

It was decided that Melissa should for the present remain with her father; but, as soon as Diodoros should be allowed to leave the Serapeum, she was to go across the lake to receive the convalescent on his return home.

The old woman assured her, as they walked on, that Diodoros had always been born to good luck; and it was clear that this had never been truer than now, when Galenus had come in the nick of time to restore him to life and health, and when he had won such a bride as Melissa. Then she sang the praises of Agatha, of her beauty and goodness, and told her that the Christian damsel had made many inquiries concerning Alexander. She, the speaker, had not been chary of her praise of the youth, and, unless she was much mistaken, the arrow of Eros had this time pierced Agatha's heart, though till now she had been as a child—an innocent child—as she herself could say, who had seen her grow up from the cradle. Her faith need not trouble either Melissa or Alexander, for gentler and more modest wives than the Christian women were not to be found among the Greeks—and she had known many.

Melissa rarely interrupted the garrulous old woman; but, while she listened, pleasant pictures of the future rose before her fancy. She saw herself and Diodoros ruling over Polybius's household, and, close at hand, on Zeno's estate, Alexander with his beautiful and adored wife. There, under Zeno's watchful eye, the wild youth would become a noble man. Her father would often come to visit them, and in their happiness would learn to find pleasure in life again. Only now and then the thought of the sacrifice which the vehement Philip must make for his younger brother, and of the danger which still threatened Alexander, disturbed the cheerful contentment of her soul, rich as it was in glad hopes.

The nearer they got to her own home, the more lightly her heart beat. She had none but good news to report there. The old woman, panting for breath, was obliged to beg her to consider her sixty years and moderate her pace.

Melissa willingly checked her steps; and when, at the end of the street of Hermes, they reached the temple of the god from whom it was named and turned off to the right, the good woman parted from her, for in this quiet neighborhood she could safely be trusted to take care of herself.

Melissa was now alone. On her left lay the gardens of Hermes, where, on the southern side, stood her father's house and that of their neighbor Skopas. Though the old nurse had indeed talked of nothing that was not pleasant, it was a comfort not to have to listen to her, but to be free to follow her own thoughts. Nor did she meet with anything to distract them, for at this hour the great public garden was left almost entirely to children and their attendants, or to the inhabitants of the immediate neighborhood who frequented the temples of Hermes or Artemis, or the little shrine of Asklepios, which stood in a grove of mimosas on the skirt of the park, and to which Melissa herself felt attracted. It had been a familiar spot at the time when her mother was at the worst. How often had she flown hither from her home near at hand to pour oil on the altar of the god of healing—to make some small offering and find comfort in prayer!

The day was now hot, she was tired, and, when she saw the white marble columns gleaming among the greenery, she yielded to the impulse to enjoy a few minutes' rest in the cool cella and accomplish the vow she had taken an hour or two since. She longed, indeed, to get home, that her father might share the happiness which uplifted her heart; but then she reflected that she would not soon have the opportunity of carrying out, unobserved, the purpose she had in her mind. Now, if ever, was the time to offer sacrifice for Caesar and for the mitigation of his sufferings. The thought that Galenus perhaps was right, and that of Caracalla's myriad subjects she might be the only one who would do so much for his sake, strengthened her resolve.

The chief temple of Asklepios, whom the Egyptians called Imhotep, was at the Serapeum. Imhotep was the son of Ptah, who, at Alexandria, was merged in Serapis. There he was worshiped, conjointly with Serapis and Isis, by Egyptians, Greeks, and Syrians alike. The little sanctuary near her father's house was the resort of none but Greeks. Ptolemaeus Philadelphus, the second Macedonian King of Egypt, had built it as an appendage to the Temple of Artemis, after the recovery from sickness of his wife Arsinoe.

It was small, but a masterpiece of Greek art, and the statues of Sleep and of A Dream, at the entrance, with the marble group behind the altar, representing Asklepios with his sister Hygeia and his wife Epione the Soother, was reckoned by connoisseurs as among the noblest and most noteworthy works of art in Alexandria.

The dignity and benevolence of the god were admirably expressed in the features of the divinity, somewhat resembling the Olympian Zeus, who leaned on his serpent staff; and the graceful, inviting sweetness of Hygeia, holding out her cup as though she were offering health to the sufferer, was well adapted to revive the hopes of the despondent. The god's waving locks were bound with a folded scarf, and at his feet was a dog, gazing up at his lord as if in entreaty.

The sacred snakes lay coiled in a cage by the altar; they were believed to have the power of restoring themselves, and this was regarded as a promise to the sick that they should cast off their disease as a serpent casts its skin. The swift power of the reptile over life and death, was an emblem to the votaries of the power of the god to postpone the death of man or to shorten his days.

The inside of the little sanctuary was a cool and still retreat. Tablets hung on the white marble walls, inscribed with the thanksgivings or vows of those who had been healed. On several, the remedies were recorded which had availed in certain cases; and on the left of the little hall, behind a heavy hanging, a small recess contained the archives of the temple, recipes, records of gifts, and documents referring to the history of the sanctuary.

In this deserted, shady spot, between these thick marble walls, it was much cooler than outside. Melissa lifted her hands in prayer before the statue of the god. She was alone, with the exception of the priest in charge. The temple-servant was absent, and the priest was asleep, breathing heavily, in an arm-chair in a dark nook behind the marble group. Thus she was free to follow the impulse of her heart, and pray, first for her sick lover, and then for the sufferer to whom the whole subservient world belonged.

For Diodoros, indeed, as she knew, other hands and hearts were uplifted in loving sympathy. But who besides herself was praying for the hated sovereign who had at his command the costliest and rarest gifts of fortune, all poisoned by bitter anguish of mind and body? The world thought only of the sufferings he had inflicted on others; no one dreamed of the pangs he had to endure—no one but herself, to whom Galenus had spoken of them. And had not his features and his look betrayed to her that pain was gnawing at his vitals like the vulture at those of Prometheus? Hapless, pitiable youth, born to the highest fortune, and now a decrepit old man in the flower of his age! To pray and sacrifice for him must be a pious deed, pleasing to the gods. Melissa besought the marble images over the altar from the very bottom of her heart, never even asking herself why she was bestowing on this stranger, this cruel tyrant, in whose name her own brother was in danger of the law, an emotion which nothing but her care for those dearest to her had ever stirred. But she did not feel that he was a stranger, and never thought how far apart they were. Her prayers came easily, too, in this spot; the bonds that linked her to these beautiful marble beings were familiar and dear to her. While she gazed up into the face of Asklepios, imploring him to be gracious to the imperial youth, and release him from the pain but for which he might have been humane and beneficent, the stony features seemed to live before her eyes, and the majesty and dignity that beamed on the brow assured her that the god's power and wisdom were great enough to heal every disease. The tender smile which played on his features filled her soul with the certainty that he would vouchsafe to be gracious; nay, she could believe that he moved those marble lips and promised to grant her prayer. And when she turned to the statue of Hygeia she fancied the beautiful, kind face nodded to her with a pledge of fulfillment.

She raised her beseeching arms higher still, and addressed her sculptured friends aloud, as though

they could hear her:

"I know that nothing is hidden from you, eternal gods," she began, "and when it was your will that my mother should be taken from me my foolish heart rebelled. But I was then a child without understanding, and my soul lay as it were asleep. Now it is different. You know that I have learned to love a man; and many things, and, the certainty that the gods are good, have come to me with that love. Forgive the maid the sins of the child, and make my lover whole, as he lies under the protection and in the sanctuary of the great Serapis, still needing your aid too. He is mending, and the greatest of thy ministers, O Asklepios, says he will recover, so it must be true. Yet without thee even the skill of Galenus is of little avail; wherefore I beseech you both, Heal Diodoros, whom I love!—But I would fain entreat you for another. You will wonder, perhaps—for it is Bassianus Antoninus, whom they call Caracalla and Caesar.

"Thou, Asklepios, dost look in amazement, and great Hygeia shakes her head. And it is hard to say what moves me, who love another, to pray for the blood-stained murderer for whom not another soul in his empire would say a word to you. Nay, and I know not what it is. Perhaps it is but pity; for he, who ought to be the happiest, is surely the most wretched man under the sun. O great Asklepios, O bountiful and gracious Hygeia, ease his sufferings, which are indeed beyond endurance! Nor shall you lack an offering. I will dedicate a cock to you; and as the cock announces a new day, so perchance shall you grant to Caracalla the dawn of a new existence in better health.

"Alas, gracious god! but thou art grave, as though the offering were too small. How gladly would I bring a goat, but I know not whether my money will suffice, for it is only what I have saved. By and by, when the youth I love is my husband, I will prove my gratitude; for he is as rich as he is handsome and kind, and will, I know, refuse me nothing. And thou, sweet goddess, dost not look down upon me as graciously as before; I fear thou art angry. Yet think not"—and she gave a low laugh—"that I pray for Caracalla because I care for him, or am in love with him. No, no, no! my heart is wholly given to Diodoros, and not the smallest part of it to any other. It is Caesar's misery alone that brings me hither. Sooner would I kiss one of those serpents or a thorny hedgehog than him, the fratricide in the purple. Believe me, it is true, strange as it must seem.

"First and last, I pray and offer sacrifice indeed for Diodoros and his recovery. My brother Alexander, too, who is in danger, I would fain commend to you; but he is well in body, and your remedies are of no effect against the perils which threaten him."

Here she ceased, and gazed into the faces of the statues, but they would not look so friendly as before. It was, no doubt, the smallness of her offering that had offended them. She anxiously drew out her little money-bag and counted the contents. But when, after waking the priest, she had asked how much a goat might cost for sacrifice, her countenance cleared, for her savings were enough to pay for it and for a young cock as well. All she had she left with the old man, to the last sesterce; but she could only wait to see the cock sacrificed, for she felt she must go home.

As soon as the blood of the bird had besprinkled the altar, and she had told the divinities that a goat was also to be killed, she fancied that they looked at her more kindly; and she was turning to the door, as light and gay as if she had happily done some difficult task, when the curtain screening off the library of archives was lifted, and a man came out calling her by name. She turned round; but as soon as she saw that he was a Roman, and, as his white toga told her, of the upper class, she took fright. She hastily exclaimed that she was in a hurry, and flew down the steps, through the garden, and into the road. Once there, she reproached herself for foolish shyness of a stranger who was scarcely younger than her own father; but by the time she had gone a few steps she had forgotten the incident, and was rehearsing in her mind all she had to tell Heron. She soon saw the tops of the palms and sycamores in their own garden, her faithful old dog Melas barked with delight, and the happiness which the meeting with the stranger had for a moment interrupted revived with unchecked glow.

She was weary, and where could she rest so well as at home? She had escaped many perils, and where could she feel so safe as under her father's roof? Glad as she was at the prospect of her new and handsome home on the other side of the lake, and of all the delights promised her by Diodoros's affection, her heart still clung fondly to the pretty, neat little dwelling whose low roof now gleamed in front of her. In the garden, whose shell-strewn paths she now trod, she had played as a child; that window belonged to the room where her mother had died. And then, coming home was in itself a joy, when she had so much to tell that was pleasant.

The dog leaped along by her side with vehement affection, jumping round her and on her, and she heard the starling's cry, first "Olympias!" and then "My strength!"

A happy smile parted her rosy lips as she glanced at the work-room; but the two white teeth which always gleamed when she was gay were presently hidden, for her father, it would seem, was out. He

was certainly not at work, for the wide window was unscreened, and it was now nearly noon. He was almost always within at this hour, and it would spoil half her gladness not to find him there.

But what was this? What could this mean? The dog had announced her approach, and old Dido's gray head peeped out of the house-door, to vanish again at once. How strangely she had looked at her—exactly as she had looked that day when the physician had told the faithful creature that her mistress's last hour was at hand!

Melissa's contentment was gone. Before she even crossed the threshold, where the friendly word "Rejoice" greeted her in brown mosaic, she called the old woman by name. No answer.

She went into the kitchen to find Dido; for she, according to her invariable habit of postponing evil as long as possible, had fled to the hearth. There she stood, though the fire was out, weeping bitterly, and covering her wrinkled face with her hands, as though she quailed before the eyes of the girl she must so deeply grieve. One glance at the woman, and the tears which trickled through her fingers and down her lean arms told Melissa that something dreadful had happened. Very pale, and clasping her hand to her heaving bosom, she desired to be told all; but for some time Dido was quite unable to speak intelligibly. And before she could make up her mind to it, she looked anxiously for Argutis, whom she held to be the wisest of mankind, and who, she knew, would reveal the dreadful thing that must be told more judiciously than she could. But the Gaul was not to be seen; so Dido, interrupted by sobs, began the melancholy tale.

Heron had come home between midnight and sunrise and had gone to bed. Next morning, while he was feeding the birds, Zminis, the captain of the night-watch, had come in with some men-at-arms, and had tried to take the artist prisoner in Caesar's name. On this, Heron had raved like a bull, had appealed to his Macedonian birth, his rights as a Roman citizen, and much besides, and demanded to know of what he was accused. He was then informed that he was to be held in captivity by the special orders of the head of the police, till his son Alexander, who was guilty of high-treason, should surrender to the authorities. But her master, said Dido, sobbing, had knocked down the man who had tried to bind him with a mighty blow of his fist. At last there was a fearful uproar, and in fact a bloody fight. The starling shouted his cry through it all, the birds fluttered and piped with terror, and it was like the abode of the damned in the nether world; and strangers came crowding about the house, till Skopas arrived and advised Heron to go with the Egyptian.

"But even at the door," Dido added, "he called out to me that you, Melissa, could remain with Polybius till he should recover his liberty. Philip was to appeal for help to the prefect Titianus, and offer him the gems—you know them, he said. And, last of all," and again she began to cry, "he especially commended to my care the tomb—and the birds; and the starling wants some fresh mealworms." Melissa heard with dismay; the color had faded from her cheeks, and as Dido ended she asked gloomily:

"And Philip—and Alexander?"

"We have thought of everything," replied the old woman. "As soon as we were alone we held a council, Argutis and I. He went to find Alexander, and I went to Philip. I found him in his rooms. He had come home very late, the porter said, and I saw him in bed, and I had trouble enough to wake him. Then I told him all, and he went on in such mad talk—it will be no wonder if the gods punish him. He wanted to rush off to the prefect, with his hair uncombed, just as he was. I had to bring him to his senses; and then, while I was oiling his hair and helping him into his best new mantle, he changed his mind, for he declared he would come home first, to talk with you and Argutis. Argutis was at home again, but he had not found Alexander, for the poor youth has to hide himself as if he were a murderer." And again she sobbed; nor was it till Melissa had soothed her with kind speeches that she could go on with her story.

Philip had learned yesterday where Alexander was concealed, so he undertook to go across the lake and inform him of what had occurred. But Argutis, faithful and prudent, had hindered him, representing that Alexander, who was easily moved, as soon as he heard that his father was a prisoner would unhesitatingly give himself up to his enemies as a hostage, and rush headlong into danger. Alexander must remain in hiding so long as Caesar was in Alexandria. He (Argutis) would go instead of Philip, who, for his part, might call on the prefect later. He would cross the lake and warn Melissa not to return home, and to tell Alexander what he might think necessary. The watch might possibly follow Argutis; but he knew every lane and alley, and could mislead and avoid them. Philip had listened to reason. The slave went, and must now soon be back again.

Of how different a home-coming had Melissa dreamed! What new and terrible griefs were these! Still, though distressed at the thought of her vehement father in prison, she shed no tears, but told herself that matters could only be mended by rational action on behalf of the victims, and not by lamentations.

She must be alone, to collect her strength and consider the situation. So she desired Dido, to her great amazement, to prepare some food, and bring her wine and water. Then, seating herself, with a melancholy glance at her embroidery where it lay folded together, she rested her elbow on the table and her head in her hand, considering to whom she could appeal to save her father.

First she thought of Caesar himself, whose eye had met hers, and for whom she had prayed and offered sacrifice. But the blood fired her cheeks at the thought, and she repelled it at once. Yet her mind would linger at the Serapeum, where her lover, too, still rested his fevered head. She knew that the high-priests' spacious lodgings there, with their splendid rooms and banqueting halls, had been prepared for the emperor; and she remembered various things which her brother had told her of Timotheus, who was at the head not only of the heathen priesthood, but also of the museum. He was said to be a philosopher, and Philip had more than once been distinguished by him, and invited to his house. Her brother must apply to him. He, who was in a way Caracalla's host, would easily succeed in obtaining her father's release, from his imperial guest.

Her grave face brightened at this thought, and, while she ate and drank, another idea struck her. Alexander, too, must be known to the high-priest; for Timotheus was the brother of Seleukus, whose daughter the artist had just painted, and Timotheus had seen the portrait and praised it highly. Thus it was not improbable that the generous man would, if Philip besought him, intercede for Alexander. So all might turn out better than she had ventured to hope.

Firmly convinced that it was her part to rescue her family, she once more reviewed in her mind every acquaintance to whom she might look for aid; but even during her meditations her tired frame asserted its rights, and when Dido came in to remove the remains of the meal and the empty wine-cup, she found Melissa sunk in sleep.

Shaking her head, and saying to herself that it served the old man right for his cruel treatment of a dutiful child—though, for Alexander's sake, she might have tried to keep awake—the faithful soul pushed a cushion under the girl's head, drew the screen across the window, and stood waving off the flies which buzzed about her darling's flushed face, till presently the dog barked, and an energetic knock shook the house-door. Melissa started from her slumbers, the old woman threw aside the fan, and, as she hurried to admit the vehement visitor, cried out to Melissa:

"Be easy, dear child—be easy. It is nothing; depend upon that. I know the knock; it is only Philip."

CHAPTER XIV.

Dido was right. Heron's eldest son had returned from his errand. Tired, disappointed, and with fierce indignation in his eyes, he staggered in like a drunken man who has been insulted in his cups; and, without greeting her—as his mother had taught her children to greet even their slaves—he merely asked in hoarse tones, "Is Melissa come in?"

"Yes, yes," replied Dido, laying her finger to her lips. "You roused her from a nap. And what a state you are in! You must not let her see you so! It is very clear what news you bring. The prefect will not help us?"

"Help us!" echoed Philip, wrathfully. "In Alexandria a man may drown rather than another will risk wetting his feet."

"Nay, it is not so bad as that," said the old woman. "Alexander himself has burned his fingers for others many a time. Wait a minute. I will fetch you a draught of wine. There is some still in the kitchen; for if you appear before your sister in that plight—"

But Melissa had recognized her brother's voice, and, although Philip had smoothed his hair a little with his hands, one glance at his face showed her that his efforts had been vain.

"Poor boy!" she said, when, in answer to her question as to what his news was, he had answered gloomily, "As bad as possible."

She took his hand and led him into the work-room. There she reminded him that she was giving him a new brother in Diodoros; and he embraced her fondly, and wished her and her betrothed every happiness. She thanked him out of a full heart, while he swallowed his wine, and then she begged him

to tell her all he had done.

He began, and, as she gazed at him, it struck her how little he resembled his father and brother, though he was no less tall, and his head was shaped like theirs. But his frame, instead of showing their stalwart build, was lean and weakly. His spine did not seem strong enough for his long body, and he never held himself upright. His head was always bent forward, as if he were watching or seeking something; and even when he had seated himself in his father's place at the work-table to tell his tale, his hands and feet, even the muscles of his well-formed but colorless face, were in constant movement. He would jump up, or throw back his head to shake his long hair off his face, and his fine, large, dark eyes glowed with wrathful fires.

"I received my first repulse from the prefect," he began, and as he spoke, his arms, on whose graceful use the Greeks so strongly insisted, flew up in the air as though by their own impulse rather than by the speaker's will.

"Titianus affects the philosopher, because when he was young—long ago, that is very certain—his feet trod the Stoa."

"Your master, Xanthos, said that he was a very sound philosopher,"
Melissa put in.

"Such praise is to be had cheap," said Philip, by the most influential man in the town. But his methods are old-fashioned. He crawls after Zeno; he submits to authority, and requires more independent spirits to do the same. To him the divinity is the Great First Cause. In this world of ours he can discern the working of a purposeful will, and confuses his mind with windy, worn-out ideals. Virtue, he says—but to what end repeat such stale old stuff?"

"We have no time for it," said Melissa, who saw that Philip was on the point of losing himself in a philosophical dissertation, for he had begun to enjoy the sound of his own voice, which was, in fact, unusually musical.

"Why not?" he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders, and with a bitter smile. "When he has shot away all his arrows, the bowman may rest; and, as you will soon hear, our quiver is empty—as empty as this cup which I have drained."

"No, no!" exclaimed Melissa, eagerly. "If this first attempt has failed, that is the very reason for planning another. I, too, can use figures of speech. The archer who is really eager to hit the object on which he has spent his arrows, does not retire from the fight, but fetches more; and if he can find none, he fights with his bow, or falls on the enemy with stones, fists, and teeth."

Philip looked at her in astonishment, and exclaimed in pleased surprise, without any of the supercilious scorn which he commonly infused into his tone when addressing his humble sister:

"Listen to our little girl! Where did those gentle eyes get that determined flash? From misfortune—from misfortune! They rob the gentle dove of her young—I mean her splendid Alexander—and lo, she becomes a valiant falcon! I expected to find you a heart-broken lamb, over your tear-stained stitching, and behold it is you who try to fire me. Well, then, tell me what arrows we have left, when you have heard me out. But, before I proceed, is Argutis at home again? No? He must go across again, to take various things to Alexander—linen, garments, and the like. I met Glaukias the sculptor, and he begged me not to forget it; for he knows where the lad is hidden, and was on the point of going over to see him. The man had made himself perfectly unrecognizable. He is a true friend, if such a thing there be! And how grieved he was to hear of my father's ill fortune! I believe he is envious of Diodoros."

Melissa shook a finger at him; but she turned pale, and curiously inquired whether her brother had remembered to warn Glaukias on no account to tell Alexander that it was in his power to release his father.

Philip struck his brow, and, with a helpless fall of the mouth, which was usually so firmly set and ready to sneer, he exclaimed, like a boy caught in mischief: "That, that—I can not imagine how I forgot it, but I did not mention it. What strange absence of mind! But I can remedy it at once on the spot. Argutis—nay, I will go myself."

He sprang up, and was on the point of carrying out his sudden purpose, but Melissa detained him. With a decisiveness which again amazed him, she desired him to remain; and while he paced the workroom with rapid strides, heaping abuse on himself, now striking his breast, and now pushing his fingers through his disordered hair, she made it clear to him that he could not reach Alexander in time to prevent his knowing all, and that the only result of his visit would be to put the watch on the track. Instead of raving and lamenting, he would do better to tell her whither he had been.

First, he hastily began, he had gone to the prefect Titianus, who was an elderly man of a noble family, many of whose members had ere now occupied the official residence of the prefect in Alexandria, and in other towns of Egypt. He had often met Philip at the disputations he was wont to attend in the Museum, and had a great regard for him. But of late Titianus had been out of health, and had kept his house. He had undergone some serious operation shortly before Caesar's arrival at Alexandria had been announced, and this had made it impossible for him to be present at the grand reception, or even to pay his respects to Caracalla.

When Philip had sent in his name, Titianus had been very ready to receive him; but while the philosopher was still waiting in the anteroom, wondering to find it so empty—for it was usually crowded with the clients, petitioners, and friends of the most important man in the province—a bustle had arisen behind him, and a tall man had been ushered in past him, whom he recognized as the senator on whose arm Caracalla had leaned in the morning. This was the actor, whom the priest of Serapis had pointed out to Melissa as one of Caesar's most powerful favorites. From being a mere dancer he had risen in the course of a few years to the highest dignities. His name was Theocritus, and although he was distinguished by great personal beauty and exceptional cleverness, his unbridled greed had made him hated, and he had proved equally incompetent as a statesman and a general.

As this man marched through the anteroom, he had glanced haughtily about him, and the look of contempt which fell on the philosopher probably reflected on the small number of persons present, for at that hour the anterooms of Romans of rank were commonly thronged. Most visitors had been dismissed, by reason of the prefect's illness, and many of the acquaintances and supplicants who were generally to be found here were assembled in the imperial quarters, or in the rooms of the praetorian prefect and other powerful dignitaries in Caracalla's train. Titianus had failed to be present at the emperor's arrival, and keen courtier noses smelled a fall, and judged it wise to keep out of the way of a tottering power.

Besides all this, the prefect's honesty was well known, and it was strongly suspected that he, as steward of all the taxes of this wealthy province, had been bold enough to reject a proposal made by Theocritus to embezzle the whole freight of a fleet loaded with corn for Rome, and charge it to the account of army munitions. It was a fact that this base proposal had been made and rejected only the evening before, and the scene of which Philip became the witness was the result of this refusal.

Theocritus, to whom an audience was always indispensable, carefully left the curtains apart which divided the prefect's sick-room from the antechamber, and thus Philip was witness of the proceedings he now described to his sister.

Titianus received his visitor, lying down, and yet his demeanor revealed the self-possessed dignity of a high-born Roman, and the calm of a Stoic philosopher. He listened unmoved to the courtier, who, after the usual formal greetings, took upon himself to overwhelm the older man with the bitterest accusations and reproaches. People allowed themselves to take strange liberties with Caesar in this town, Theocritus burst out; insolent jests passed from lip to lip. An epigram against his sacred person had found its way into the Serapeum, his present residence—an insult worthy of any punishment, even of death and crucifixion.

When the prefect, with evident annoyance, but still quite calmly, desired to know what this extraordinary insult might be, Theocritus showed that even in his high position he had preserved the accurate memory of the mime, and, half angry, but yet anxious to give full effect to the lines by voice and gesture, he explained that "some wretch had fastened a rope to one of the doors of the sanctuary, and had written below it the blasphemous words:

'Hail! For so welcome a guest never came to the sovereign of Hades.
Who ever peopled his realm, Caesar, more freely than thou?
Laurels refuse to grow green in the darksome abode of Serapis;
Take, then, this rope for a gift, never more richly deserved.'

"It is disgraceful!" exclaimed the prefect.

"Your indignation is well founded. But the biting tongue of the frivolous mixed races dwelling in this city is well known. They have tried it on me; and if, in this instance, any one is to blame, it is not I, the imprisoned prefect, but the chief and captain of the night-watch, whose business it is to guard Caesar's residence more strictly."

At this Theocritus was furious, and poured out a flood of words, expatiating on the duties of a prefect as Caesar's representative in the provinces. "His eye must be as omniscient as that of the all-seeing Deity. The better he knew the uproarious rabble over whom he ruled, the more evidently was it his duty to watch over Caesar's person as anxiously as a mother over her child, as a miser over his treasure."

The high-sounding words flowed with dramatic emphasis, the sentimental speaker adding to their impressiveness by the action of his hands, till it was more than the invalid could bear. With a pinched smile, he raised himself with difficulty, and interrupted Theocritus with the impatient exclamation, "Still the actor!"

"Yes, still!" retorted the favorite, in a hard voice. "You, however, have been even longer—what you have, indeed, been too long—Prefect of Egypt!" With an angry fling he threw the corner of his toga over his shoulder, and, though his hand shook with rage, the pliant drapery fell in graceful folds over his athletic limbs. He turned his back on the prefect, and, with the air of a general who has just been crowned with laurels, he stalked through the anteroom and past Philip once more.

The philosopher had told his sister all this in a few sentences. He now paused in his walk to and fro to answer Melissa's question as to whether this upstart's influence were really great enough to turn so noble and worthy a man out of his office.

"Can you ask?" said Philip. "Titianus had no doubts from the first; and what I heard in the Serapeum—but all in good time. The prefect was sorry for my father and Alexander, but ended by saying that he himself needed an intercessor; for, if it were not to-day, at any rate to-morrow, the actor would inveigle Caesar into signing his death-warrant."

"Impossible!" cried the girl, spreading out her hands in horror; but Philip dropped into a seat, saying:

"Listen to the end. There was evidently nothing to be hoped for from Titianus. He is, no doubt, a brave man, but there is a touch of the actor in him too. He is a Stoic; and where would be the point of that, if a man could not appear to look on approaching death as calmly as on taking a bath?"

"Titianus plays his part well. However, I next went to the Serapeum—it is a long way, and it was very hot in the sun—to ask for help from my old patron, the high-priest. Caesar is now his guest; and the prefect, too, had advised me to place my father's cause in his hands."

Here Philip sprang up again, and rushed up and down, sometimes stopping for a moment in front of his sister while he went on with his story.

Theocritus had long since reached the Serapeum in his swift chariot when the philosopher at last arrived there on foot. He was well known as a frequent visitor, and was shown at once into the hall of that part of his abode which Timotheus had reserved for himself when he had given up all the best rooms to his imperial visitor.

The anteroom was crowded, and before he got any farther he heard that the favorite's accusations had already led to serious results, and rumors were rife concerning the luckless witticisms of some heedless youth, which would bring grief upon the peaceable citizens. But before he could ask what was meant, he was admitted to the high-priest's room.

This was a marked favor on such a day as this, and the benevolence with which he was received by the head of the priesthood of the whole city filled him with good hopes of a successful issue. But hardly had Philip begun to speak of his brother's misdemeanor, than Timotheus laid his hand on his bearded lips, as a hint to be cautious, and whispered in his ear, "Speak quickly and low, if you love your life!"

When Philip had hastily explained that Zminis had imprisoned his father, the old man started to his feet with a promptitude to which his majestic person was unaccustomed, and pointed to a curtained doorway on one side of the room.

"Through that door," he whispered, "you will reach the western steps, and the passage leading out of the precincts to the stadium. You are known to the Romans in the anteroom. It is not the god to whom this building is dedicated who now rules within these walls. Your brother's rash words are repeated everywhere, and have even come to Caesar's knowledge; and he has been told that it was the same traitor—who has for the moment escaped Zminis and his men—who nailed a rope on one of our doors, and with it an audacious inscription. To speak a single word in behalf of Alexander or your father would be to fling myself into the fire without putting it out. You do not know how fiercely it is burning. Theocritus is feeding the flame, for he needs it to destroy the prefect. Now, not another word; and, come what may, so long as the Roman visitors dwell under this roof, beware of it!"

And the high-priest opened the door with his own hand.

"I hurried home," Philip added, "and if I forgot, in my dismay at this fresh disaster, to warn Glaukias to be careful—But, no, no! It is unpardonable!—Alexander is by this time crossing the lake, perhaps. I am like Caracalla—my brother's murderer!"

But Melissa laid her arm on his shoulder and besought the poor fellow to be comforted; and her loving words of excuse seemed to have some good effect. But why was he always so reserved? Why could not Philip be as frank with her as Alexander was? She had never been very near to him; and now he was concealing from her something which moved him deeply.

She turned away sadly, for she could not even comfort him. But then again Philip sighed from the bottom of his heart, and she could contain her self no longer. More tenderly than she had ever addressed him before, she besought her brother to open his heart to her. She would gladly help him to endure what oppressed him; and she could understand, for she herself had learned what the joys and sorrows of love were.

She had found the right clew. Philip nodded, and answered gloomily:

"Well, then, listen. It may do me good to speak." And thereupon he began to tell her what she had already heard from Alexander; and, covering her tingling cheeks with her hands, she listened with breathless attention, not missing a word, though the question rose to her mind again and again whether she should tell him the whole truth, which he as yet could not know, or whether it would be better to spare his already burdened soul.

He described his love in glowing colors. Korinna's heart, he said, must have gone forth to him; for, at their last meeting on the northern shore of the lake, her hand had rested in his while he helped her out of the boat; he could still feel the touch of her fingers. Nor had the meeting been pure accident, for he had since seen and recognized the presence on earth of her departed soul in her apparently living form. And she, too, with the subtle senses of a disembodied spirit, must have had a yearning towards him, for she had perceived all the depth and fervor of his passion. Alexander had given him this certainty; for when he had seen Korinna by the lake, her soul had long since abandoned its earthly tenement. Before that, her mortal part was already beyond his reach; and yet he was happy, for the spirit was not lost to him. Only last night magic forces had brought her before him—his father, too, had been present, and no deception was possible. He had gone to bed in rapturous excitement, full of delicious hopes, and Korinna had at once appeared to him in a dream, so lovely, so kind, and at the same time so subtle a vision, ready to follow him in his thoughts and strivings. But just as he had heard a full assurance of her love from her own lips, and was asking her by what name he should call her when the craving to see her again should wax strong in him, old Dido had waked him, to cast him out of elysium into the deepest earthly woes.

But, he added—and he drew himself up proudly—he should soon possess the Magian's art, for there was no kind of learning he could not master; even as a boy he had proved that to his teachers. He, whose knowledge had but yesterday culminated in the assurance that it was impossible to know anything, could now assert with positive conviction, that the human soul could exist apart from the matter it had animated. He had thus gained that fixed footing outside the earth which Archimedes had demanded to enable him to move it; and he should soon be able to exert his power over departed souls, whose nature he now understood as well as—ay, and better than—Serapion. Korinna's obedient spirit would help him, and when once he should succeed in commanding the souls of the dead, as their master, and in keeping them at hand among the living, a new era of happiness would begin, not only for him and his father, but for every one who had lost one dear to him by death.

But here Melissa interrupted his eager and confident speech. She had listened with increasing uneasiness to the youth who, as she knew, had been cheated. At first she thought it would be cruel to destroy his bright illusions. He should at least in this be happy, till the anguish of having thoughtlessly betrayed his brother to ruin should be a thing of the past! But when she perceived that he purposed involving his father in the Magian's snares by calling up his mother's Manes, she could no longer be silent, and she broke out with indignant warning: "Leave my father alone, Philip! For all you saw at the Magian's was mere trickery."

"Gently, child," said the philosopher, in a superior tone. "I was of exactly the same opinion till after sundown yesterday. You know that the tendency of the school of philosophy to which I belong insists, above all, on a suspension of judgment; but if there is one thing which may be asserted with any dogmatic certainty—"

But Melissa would hear no more. She briefly but clearly explained to him who the maiden was whose hand he had held by the lake, and whom he had seen again at Serapion's house; and as she went on his interruptions became fewer. She did her utmost, with growing zeal, to destroy his luckless dream; but when the blood faded altogether from his colorless cheeks, and he clasped his hand over his brow as if to control some physical suffering, she recovered her self-command; the beautiful fear of a woman's heart of ever giving useless pain, made her withhold from Philip what remained to be told of Agatha's meeting with Alexander.

But, without this further revelation, Philip sat staring at the ground as if he were overwhelmed; and what hurt him so deeply was less the painful sense of having been cheated by such coarse cunning, than the annihilation of the treasured hopes which he had founded on the experiences of the past night. He felt as though a brutal foot had trampled down the promise of future joys on which he had counted; his sister's revelations had spoiled not merely his life on earth, but all eternity beyond the grave. Where hope ends despair steps in; and Philip, with reckless vehemence, flung himself, as it were, into its arms. His was an excitable nature; he had never thought of any one but himself, but labored with egotistical zeal to cultivate his own mind and outdo his fellows in the competition for learning. The sullen words in which he called himself the most wretched man on earth, and the victim of the blackest ill-fortune, fell from his lips like stones. He rudely repelled his sister's encouraging words, like a sick child whose pain is the greater for being pitied, till at last she appealed to his sense of duty, reminding him that something must be done to rescue her father and Alexander.

"They also! They also!" he cried. "It falls on us all. Blind Fate drives us all, innocent as we are, to death and despair, like the Tantalides. What sin have you committed, gentle, patient child; or our father, or our happy-hearted and gifted brother; or I—I myself? Have those whom we call the rulers of the universe the right to punish me because I make use of the inquiring spirit they have bestowed on me? Ah, and how well they know how to torture us! They hate me for my learning, and so they turn my little errors to account to allow me to be cheated like a fool! They are said to be just, and they behave like a father who disinherits his son because, as a man, he notes his parent's weakness. With tears and anguish have I striven for truth and knowledge. There is not a province of thought whose deepest depths I have not tried to fathom; and when I recognized that it is not given to mortals to apprehend the essence of the divinity because the organs bestowed on us are too small and feeble; when I refused to pronounce whether that which I can not apprehend exists or not, was that my fault, or theirs? There may be divine forces which created and govern the universe; but never talk to me of their goodness, and reasonableness, and care for human creatures! Can a reasonable being, who cares for the happiness of another, strew the place assigned to him to dwell in with snares and traps, or implant in his breast a hundred impulses of which the gratification only drags him into an abyss? Is that Being my friend, who suffers me to be born and to grow up, and leaves me tied to the martyr's stake, with very few real joys, and finally kills me, innocent or guilty, as surely as I am born? If the divinity which is supposed to bestow on us a portion of the divine essence in the form of reason were constituted as the crowd are taught to believe, there could be nothing on earth but wisdom and goodness; but the majority are fools or wicked, and the good are like tall trees, which the lightning blasts rather than the creeping weed. Titianus falls before the dancer Theocritus, the noble Papinian before the murderer Caracalla, our splendid Alexander before such a wretch as Zminis; and divine reason lets it all happen, and allows human reason to proclaim the law. Happiness is for fools and knaves; for those who cherish and uphold reason—ay, reason, which is a part of the divinity—persecution, misery, and despair."

"Have done!" Melissa exclaimed. "Have the judgments of the immortals not fallen hardly enough on us? Would you provoke them to discharge their fury in some more dreadful manner?"

At this the skeptic struck his breast with defiant pride, exclaiming: "I do not fear them, and dare to proclaim openly the conclusions of my thoughts. There are no gods! There is no rational guidance of the universe. It has arisen self-evolved, by chance; and if a god created it, he laid down eternal laws and has left them to govern its course without mercy or grace, and without troubling himself about the puling of men who creep about on the face of the earth like the ants on that of a pumpkin. And well for us that it should be so! Better a thousand times is it to be the servant of an iron law, than the slave of a capricious master who takes a malignant and envious pleasure in destroying the best!"

"And this, you say, is the final outcome of your thoughts?" asked Melissa, shaking her head sadly. "Do you not perceive that such an outbreak of mad despair is simply unworthy of your own wisdom, of which the end and aim should be a passionless, calm, and immovable moderation?"

"And do they show such moderation," Philip gasped out, "who pour the poison of misfortune in floods on one tortured heart?"

"Then you can accuse those whose existence you disbelieve in?" retorted Melissa with angry zeal. "Is this your much-belauded logic? What becomes of your dogmas, in the face of the first misfortune—dogmas which enjoin a reserve of decisive judgment, that you may preserve your equanimity, and not overburden your soul, in addition to the misfortune itself, with the conviction that something monstrous has befallen you? I remember how much that pleased me the first time I heard it. For your own sake—for the sake of us all—cease this foolish raving, and do not merely call yourself a skeptic—be one; control the passion that is rending you. For love of me—for love of us all—"

And as she spoke she laid her hand on his shoulder, for he had sat down again; and although he pushed her away with some petulance, she went on in a tone of gentle entreaty: "If we are not to be

altogether too late in the field, let us consider the situation calmly. I am but a girl, and this fresh disaster will fall more hardly on me than on you; for what would become of me without my father?"

"Life with him has at any rate taught you patient endurance," her brother broke in with a sullen shrug.

"Yes, life," she replied, firmly: "life, which shows us the right way better than all your books. Who can tell what may have detained Argutis? I will wait no longer. The sun will have set before long, and this evening Caesar is to sup with Seleukus, the father of Korinna. I happen to know it from Samonicus, who is one of the guests. Seleukus and his wife have a great regard for Alexander, and will do for him all that lies in their power. The lady Berenike, he told me, is a noble dame. It should be your part to entreat her help for our father and brother; but you must not venture where Caesar is. So I will go, and I shall have no rest till Korinna's mother listens to me and promises to aid us."

At this Philip exclaimed, in horror: "What! you will dare to enter the house where Caracalla is feasting with the rabble he calls his friends? You, an inexperienced girl, young, beautiful, whose mere appearance is enough to stir their evil passions? Sooner than allow that, I will myself find my way into the house of Seleukus, and among the spies who surround the tyrant."

"That my father may lose another son, and I my only remaining brother?" Melissa observed, with grave composure. "Say no more, Philip. I am going, and you must wait for me here."

The philosopher broke out at this in despotic wrath:

"What has come over you, that you have suddenly forgotten how to obey? But I insist; and rather than allow you to bring on us not trouble merely, but shame and disgrace, I will lock you into your room!"

He seized her hand to drag her into the adjoining room. She struggled with all her might; but he was the stronger, and he had got her as far as the door, when the Gaul Argutis rushed, panting and breathless, into the work-room through the anteroom, calling out to the struggling couple:

"What are you doing? By all the gods, you have chosen the wrong time for a quarrel! Zminis is on the way hither to take you both prisoners; he will be here in a minute! Fly into the kitchen, girl! Dido will hide you in the wood-store behind the hearth.—You, Philip, must squeeze into the henhouse. Only be quick, or it will be too late!"

"Go!" cried Melissa to her brother. "Out through the kitchen window you can get into the poultry-yard!"

She threw herself weeping into his arms, kissed him, and added, hastily: "Whatever happens to us, I shall risk all to save my father and Alexander. Farewell! The gods preserve us!"

She now seized Philip's wrist, as he had before grasped hers, to drag him away; but he freed himself, saying, with an indifference which terrified her: "Then let the worst come. Ruin may take its course. Death rather than dishonor!"

"Madman!" the slave could not help exclaiming; and the faithful fellow, though wont to obey, threw his arms round his master's son to drag him away into the kitchen, while Philip pushed him off, saying:

"I will not hide, like a frightened woman!"

But the Gaul heard the approach of marching men, so, paying no further heed to the brother, he dragged Melissa into the kitchen, where old Dido undertook to hide her.

Philip stood panting in the studio. Through the open window he could see the pursuers coming nearer, and the instinct of self-preservation, which asserts itself even in the strongest, prompted him to follow the slave's advice. But before he could reach the door, in fancy he saw himself joining the party of philosophers airing themselves under the arcades in the great court of the Museum; he heard their laughter and their bitter jests at the skeptic, the independent thinker, who had sought refuge among the fowls, who had been hauled out of the hen-house; and this picture confirmed his determination to yield to force rather than bring on himself the curse of ridicule. But at the same time other reasons for submitting to his fate suggested themselves unbidden—reasons more worthy of his position, of the whole course and aim of his thoughts, and of the sorrow which weighed upon his soul. It beseemed him as a skeptic to endure the worst with equanimity; under all circumstances he liked to be in the right, and he would fain have called out to his sister that the cruel powers whose enmity he had incurred still persisted in driving him on to despair and death, worthy as he was of a better fate.

A few minutes later Zminis came in, and put out his long lean arms to apprehend him in Caesar's

name. Philip submitted, and not a muscle of his face moved. Once, indeed, a smile lighted it up, as he reflected that they would hardly have carried him off to prison if Alexander were already in their power; but the smile gave way only too soon to gloomy gravity when Zminis informed him that his brother, the traitor, had just given himself up to the chief of the night-watch, and was now safe under lock and ward. But his crime was so great that, according to the law of Egypt, his nearest relations were to be seized and punished with him. Only his sister was now missing, but they would know how to find her.

"Possibly," Philip replied, coldly. "As justice is blind, Injustice has no doubt all the sharper eyes."

"Well said," laughed the Egyptian. "A pinch of the salt which they give you at the Museum with your porridge—for nothing."

Argutis had witnessed this scene; and when, half an hour later, the men-at-arms had left the house without discovering Melissa's hiding-place, he informed her that Alexander had, as they feared, given himself up of his own free-will to procure Heron's release; but the villains had kept the son, without liberating the father. Both were now in prison, loaded with chains. The slave had ended his tale some minutes, and Melissa still stood, pale and tearless, gazing on the ground as though she were turned to stone; but suddenly she shivered, as if with the chill of fever, and looked up, out through the windows into the garden, now dim in the twilight. The sun had set, night was falling, and again the words of the Christian preacher recurred to her mind: "The fullness of the time is come."

To her and hers a portion of life had come to an end, and a new one must grow out of it. Should the free-born race of Heron perish in captivity and death?

The evening star blazed out on the distant horizon, seeming to her as a sign from the gods; and she told herself that it must be her part, as the last of the family who remained free, to guard the others from destruction in this new life.

The heavens were soon blazing with stars. The banquet in Seleukus's house, at which Caesar was to appear, would begin in an hour. Irresolution and delay would ruin all; so she drew herself up resolutely and called to Argutis, who had watched her with faithful sympathy:

"Take my father's blue cloak, Argutis, to make you more dignified; and disguise yourself, for you must escort me, and we may be followed. You, Dido, come and help me. Take my new dress, that I wore at the Feast of Adonis, out of my trunk; and with it you will see my mother's blue fillet with the gems. My father used to say I should first wear it at my wedding, but—Well, you must bind my hair with it to-night. I am going to a grand house, where no one will be admitted who does not look worthy of people of mark. But take off the jewel; a supplicant should make no display."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Begun to enjoy the sound of his own voice
Cast off their disease as a serpent casts its skin

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A THORNY PATH — VOLUME 04 ***

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