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[NOTE: There is a short list of bookmarks, or pointers, at the end of the file for those who may wish to sample the author's ideas before making an entire meal of them. D.W.]

# A THORNY PATH

By Georg Ebers

**Volume 11.**

## CHAPTER XXX.

Scarcely had Macrinus closed the door behind him, when Caracalla threw himself exhausted on the throne, and ordered wine to be brought.

The gloomy gaze he bent upon the ground was not affected this time. The physician noted with anxiety how his master's breast heaved and his eyelids quivered; but when he offered Caesar a soothing potion, he waved him away, and commanded him to cease from troubling him.

For all that, he listened a little later to the legate, who brought the news that the youths of the city assembled on the race-course were beginning to be impatient. They were singing and applauding boisterously, and the songs they so loudly insisted on having repeated would certainly not contain matter flattering to the Romans.

"Leave them alone," answered Caesar, roughly. "Every line is aimed at me and no other. But the condemned are always allowed their favorite meal before the last journey. The food they love is venomous satire. Let them enjoy it to the full once more!—Is it far to Zminis's prison?"

The reply was in the negative; and as Caracalla exclaimed, "So much the better!" a significant smile played on his lips.

The high-priest of Serapis had looked on in much distress of mind. He, as the head of the Museum, had set high hopes on the youth who had come to such a terrible end. If Caesar should carry his threats into execution, there would be an end to that celebrated home of learning which, in his opinion, bore such noble fruits of study. And what could Caracalla mean by his dark saying that the sport and mockery of those youths below was their last meal? The worst might indeed be expected from the fearful tyrant who was at once so deeply wounded and so grievously offended; and the high-priest had already sent messengers—Greeks of good credit—to warn the insurgent youths in the stadium. But, as the chief minister of the divinity, he also esteemed it his duty, at any risk to himself, to warn the despot, whom he saw on the verge of being carried away to deeds of unparalleled horror. He thought the time had come, when Caracalla looked up from the brooding reverie into which he had again sunk, and with an ominous scowl asked Timotheus whether his wife, under whose protection Melissa had been seen the day before, had known that the false-hearted girl had given herself to another man while she feigned love for him.

The high-priest repelled the suspicion with his usual dignity, and went on to adjure Caesar not to visit on an industrious and dutiful community the sins of a light-minded girl's base folly and falsehood.

But Caracalla would not suffer him to finish; he wrathfully inquired who had given him a right to force his advice on Caesar.

On this Timotheus replied, with calm dignity:

"Your own noble words, great Caesar, when, to your honor be it spoken, you reminded the misguided skeptic of the true meaning of the old gods and of what is due to them. The god whom I serve, great Caesar, is second to none: the heavens are his head, the ocean is his body, and the earth his feet; the sunshine is the light of his all-seeing eye, and everything which stirs in the heart or brain of man is an emanation of his divine spirit. Thus he is the all-pervading soul of the universe, and a portion of that soul dwells in you, in me, in all of us. His power is greater than any power on earth, and, though a well-grounded wrath and only too just indignation urge you to exert the power lent you by him—"

"And I will exert it!" Caesar exclaimed with haughty rage. "It reaches far. I need no help, not even that of your god!"

"That I know," replied Timotheus. "And the god will let those fall into your hands who have sinned against your sacred majesty. Any punishment, even the severest, will be pleasing in his sight which you may inflict on those guilty of high-treason, for you wear the purple as his gift and in his name; those who insult you sin also against the god. I myself, with my small power, will help to bring the criminals to justice. But when a whole population is accused, when it is beyond the power of human justice to separate the innocent from the guilty, punishment is the prerogative of the god. He will visit on this city the crimes it has committed against you; and I implore you, in the name of your noble and admirable mother—whom it has been my privilege to entertain under this roof, and who in gratitude for the favors of Serapis—"

"And have I grudged sacrifices?" Caesar broke in. "I have done my utmost to win the graces of your god—and with what success? Everything that can most aggrieve the heart of man has befallen me here under his eyes. I have as much reason to complain of him as to accuse the reprobate natives of your city. He, no doubt, knows how to be avenged; the three-headed monster at his feet does not look like a lap-dog. Why, he would despise me if I should leave the punishment of the criminals to his tender mercies! Nay, I can do that for myself. Though you have seen me in many cases show mercy, it has always been for my mother's sake. You have done well to remind me of her. That lady—she is, I know, a votary of your god. But to me the Alexandrians have dared to violate the laws of hospitality; to her they were cordial hosts. I will remember that in their favor. And if many escape unpunished, I would have the traitors to know that they owe it to the hospitality shown to my mother by their parents, or perhaps by themselves."

He was here interrupted by the arrival of Aristides, who entered in great haste and apparently pleased excitement. His spies had seized a malefactor who had affixed an epigram of malignant purport to the statue of Julia Domna in the Caesareum. The writer was a pupil of the Museum, and had been taken in the stadium, where he was boasting of his exploit. A spy, mingling with the crowd, had laid hands on him, and the captain of the watch had forthwith hurried to the Serapeum to boast of a success which might confirm him in his yet uncertain position. The rough sketch of the lines had been found on the culprit, and Aristides held the tablets on which they were written while Caracalla listened to his report. Aristides was breathless with eagerness, and Caesar, snatching the tablets impatiently from his hand, read the following lines:

"Wanton, I say, is this dam of irreconcilable brothers!"

"Mean you Jocasta?"

"Nay, worse—Julia, the wife of Severus."

"The worst of all—but the last!" Caracalla snarled, as, turning pale, he laid the tablets down. But he almost instantly took them up again, and handing the malignant and lying effusion to the high-priest, he exclaimed, with a laugh:

"This seals the warrant! Here is my mother slandered, too! Now, the man who sues for mercy condemns himself to death!" And, clinching his fist, he muttered, "And this, too, is from the Museum."

Timotheus, meanwhile, had also read the lines. Even paler than Caracalla, and fully aware that any further counsel would be thrown away and only turn the emperor's wrath against himself, he expressed his anger at this calumny directed against the noblest of women, and by a boy hardly free from school!

But Caracalla furiously broke in:

"And woe to you if your god refuses me the only thing I crave in return for so many sacrifices—revenge, complete and sanguinary; atonement from great and small alike!" But he interrupted himself with the exclamation: "He grants it! Now for the tool I need."

The tool was ready—Zminis, the Egyptian, answering in every particular to the image which Caracalla had had in his mind of the instrument who might execute his most bloodthirsty purpose.

With hair in disorder and a blue-black stubble of beard on his haggard yellow cheeks, in a dirty gray prison shirt, barefoot, and treading as silently as Fate when it creeps on a victim, the rascal approached his sovereign. He stood before Caracalla exactly as the prefect, in a swift chariot, had brought him out of prison. The white of his long, narrow eyes, which had so terrified Melissa, had turned yellow, and his glance was as restless and shifting as that of a hyena. His small head on its long neck was never for a moment still; the ruthless wretch had sat waiting day after day in expectation of death, and it was by a miracle that he found himself once more at the height of his ambition. But when at last he inquired of Caracalla, in the husky voice which had gained an added hoarseness from the damp dungeon whence he had been brought, what his commands were, looking up at him like a starving dog which hopes for a titbit from his master's hand, even the fratricide, who himself held the sword sharpened to kill, shuddered at the sight and sound.

But Caesar at once recovered himself, and when he asked the Egyptian:

"Will you undertake to help me, as captain of the night-watch, to punish the traitors of Alexandria?" the answer was confident:

"What man can do, I can do."

"Good!" replied Caracalla. "But this is not a matter of merely capturing one or another. Every one—mark me—every one has merited death who has broken the laws of hospitality, that hospitality which this lying city offered me. Do you understand? Yes? Well, then, how are we to detect the guilty? Where are we to find spies and executioners enough? How can we punish worst those whose wickedness has involved the rest in guilt, especially the epigramatists of the Museum? How are we to discover the ringleaders of those who insulted me yesterday in the Circus, and of those among the youths in the stadium who have dared to express their vile disapproval by whistling in my very face? What steps will you take to hinder a single one from escaping? Consider. How is it to be done so effectually that I may lie down and say 'They have had their deserts. I am content'?"

The Egyptian's eyes wandered round the floor, but he presently drew himself up and answered briefly and positively, as though he were issuing an order to his men:

"Kill them all!"

Caracalla started, and repeated dully, "All?"

"All!" repeated Zminis, with a hideous grin. "The young ones are all there, safe in the stadium. The men in the Museum fear nothing. Those who are in the streets can be cut down. Locked doors can be broken in."

At this, Caesar, who had dropped on to his throne, started to his feet, flung the wine-cup he held across the room, laughed loudly, and exclaimed:

"You are the man for me! To work at once! This will be a day!— Macrinus, Theocritus, Antigonus, we need your troops. Send up the legates. Those who do not like the taste of blood, may sweeten it with plunder."

He looked young again, as if relieved from some burden on his mind, and the thought flashed through his brain whether revenge were not sweeter than love.

No one spoke. Even Theocritus, on whose lips a word of flattery or applause was always ready, looked down in his dismay; but Caracalla, in his frenzy of excitement, heeded nothing.

The hideous suggestion of Zminis seemed to him worthy of his greatness by its mere enormity. It must be carried out. Ever since he had first donned the purple he had made it his aim to be feared. If this tremendous deed were done, he need never frown again at those whom he wished to terrify.

And then, what a revenge! If Melissa should hear of it, what an effect it must have on her!

To work, then!

And he added in a gentler tone, as if he had a delightful surprise in store for some old friend:

"But silence, perfect silence—do you hear?—till all is ready.—You, Zminis, may begin on the pipers in the stadium and the chatterers in the Museum. The prize for soldiers and lictors alike lies in the merchants' chests."

Still no one spoke; and now he observed it. His scheme was too grand for these feeble spirits. He must teach them to silence their conscience and the voice of Roman rectitude; he must take on himself the whole responsibility of this deed, at which the timid quaked. So he drew himself up to his full height, and, affecting not to see the hesitancy of his companions, he said, in a tone of cheerful confidence:

"Let each man do his part. All I ask of you is to carry out the sentence I pronounce as a judge. You know the crime of the citizens of this town, and, by virtue of the power I exercise over life and death, be it known to all that I, Caesar, condemn—mark the word, condemn—every free male of Alexandria, of whatever age or rank, to die by the sword of a Roman warrior! This is a conquered city, which has forfeited every claim to quarter. The blood and the treasure of the inhabitants are the prize of my soldiery. Only"—and he turned to Timotheus—"this house of your god, which has given me shelter, with the priests and the treasure of great Serapis, are spared. Now it lies with each of you to show whether or no he is faithful to me. All of you"—and he addressed his friends—"all who do me service in avenging me for the audacious insults which have been offered to your sovereign, are assured of my imperial gratitude."

This declaration was not without effect, and murmurs of applause rose from the "friends" and favorites, though less enthusiastic than Caracalla was accustomed to hear. But the feebleness of this demonstration made him all the prouder of his own undaunted resolve.

Macrinus was one of those who had most loudly approved him, and Caracalla rejoiced to think that this prudent counselor should advise his drinking the cup of vengeance to the dregs. Intoxicated already before he had even sipped it, he called Macrinus and Zminis to his side, and with glowing looks impressed on them to take particular care that Melissa, with her father, Alexander, and Diodoros were brought to him alive.

"And remember," he added, "there will be many weeping mothers here by to-morrow morning; but there is one I must see again, and that not as a corpse—that bedizened thing in red whom I saw in the Circus—I mean the wife of Seleukus, of the Kanopic way."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

On the wide ascent leading to the Serapeum the praetorians stood awaiting Caesar's commands. They had not yet formed in rank and file, but were grouped round the centurion Martialis, who had come to tell them, sadly, of his removal to Edessa, and to take leave of his comrades. He gave his hand to each one of them in turn, and received a kindly pressure in return; for the stubborn fellow, though not of the cleverest, had proved himself a good soldier, and to many of them a trusty friend. There was not one who did not regret his going from among them. But Caesar had spoken, and there was no gainsaying his orders. In the camp, after service, they might talk the matter over; for the present it were wise to guard their tongues.

The centurion had just said farewell to the last of his cohort, when the prefect, with the legate Quintus Flavius Nobilior, who commanded the legion, and several other higher officers, appeared among them. Macrinus greeted them briefly, and, instead of having the tuba blown as usual and letting them fall into their ranks, he told them to gather close round him, the centurions in front. He then disclosed to them the emperor's secret orders. Caesar, he began, had long exercised patience and mercy, but the insolence and malice of the Alexandrians knew no bounds; therefore, in virtue of his power over life and death, he had pronounced judgment upon them. To them as being nearest to his person he handed over the most remunerative part of the work of punishment. Whomsoever they found on the Kanopic way, the greatest and richest thoroughfare of the city, they were to cut down as they would the rebellious inhabitants of a conquered town. Only the women and children and the slaves were to be spared. If for this task, a hideous one at best, they chose to pay themselves out of the treasures of the citizens, nobody would blame them.

A loud cheer followed these orders, and many an eye gleamed brighter. Even the coolest among them seemed to see a broad, deep pool of blood into which he need only dip his hand and bring out something worth the catching. And the fish that were to be had there were not miserable carp, but heavy gold and silver vessels, and coins and magnificent ornaments. Macrinus then proceeded to inform the higher and lower officers of the course of action he had agreed upon with the emperor and Zminis. Seven trumpet-blasts from the terrace of the Serapeum would give the signal for the attack to begin. Then they were to advance, maniple on maniple; but they were not required to keep their ranks—each man had his own work to do. The legion was to assemble again at sunset at the Gate of the Sun, at the eastern end of the road, after having swept it from end to end.

By order of the emperor, each man, however, must be particularly careful whom he cut down in any hiding-place, for Caesar wished to give the following Alexandrians—who had sinned most flagrantly against him—the benefit of a trial, and they must therefore be taken alive. He then named the gem-cutter Heron, his son Alexander, and his daughter Melissa, the Alexandrian senator Polybius, his son Diodoros, and the wife of Seleukus.

He described them as well as he was able. For each one Caesar promised a reward of three thousand drachmas, and for Heron's daughter twice as much, but only on condition of their being delivered up unhurt. It would therefore be to their own advantage to keep their eyes open in the houses, and to be cautious. Whoever should take the daughter of the gem-cutter—and he described Melissa once more—would render a special service to Caesar and might reckon on promotion.

The centurion Julius Martialis stayed to hear the end of this discourse, and then hurriedly departed. He felt just as he had done in the war with the Alemanni when a red-haired German had dealt him a blow on the helmet with his club. His head whirled and swam as it did then—only to-day blood-red lights danced before his eyes instead of deep blue and gold. It was some time before he could collect his thoughts to any purpose; but when he did, he clinched his fists as he recalled Caesar's malignant cruelty in forcing him away from his family.

Presently his large mouth widened into a satisfied smile. He was no longer in that company, and need take no part in the horrid butchery. In any other place he would no doubt have joined in it like the rest, glad of the rich booty; but here, in his own home, where his mother and wife and child dwelt, it seemed a monstrous and accursed deed. Besides the gemcutter's family, in whom Martialis took no interest, Caesar seemed to have a special grudge against the lady Berenike, whose husband Seleukus had been master to the centurion's father; nay, his own wife was still in the service of the merchant.

Not being skilled in any trade, he had entered the army early. As Evocatus he had married the daughter of a free gardener of Seleukus, and when he was ordered to Rome to join the praetorians his wife had obtained the post of superintendent of the merchant's villa at Kanopus. For this they had to thank the kindness of the lady Berenike and her now dead daughter Korinna; and he was honestly grateful to the wife of Seleukus, for, as his wife was established in the villa, he could leave her without anxiety and go with the army wherever it was ordered.

Having by this time reached the Kanopic street on his way to his family, he perceived the statues of Hermes and Demeter which stood on each side of the entrance to the merchant's house, and his slow mind recapitulated the long list of benefits he had received from Seleukus and his wife; a secret voice urged upon him that it was his duty to warn them.

He owed nothing to Caesar, that crafty butcher, who out of pure malice could deprive an honest soldier of his only joy in life and cheat him of half his pay—for the praetorians had twice the wages of the other troops; and if he only knew some handicraft, he would throw away his sword today.

Here, at least, he could interfere with Caesar's ruthless schemes, besides doing his benefactors a good turn. He therefore entered the house of the merchant, instead of pursuing on his homeward way.

He was well known, and the mistress of the house was at once apprised of his arrival.

All the lower apartments were empty, the soldiers who had been quartered in them having joined the others at the Serapeum.

But what had happened to the exquisite garden in the impluvium? What hideous traces showed where the soldiers had camped, and, drunk with their host's costly wine, had given free play to their reckless spirits!

The velvet lawn looked like a stable-floor; the rare shrubs had been denuded of their flowers and branches. Blackened patches on the mosaic pavement showed where fires had been kindled; the colonnades were turned into drying-grounds for the soldiers' linen, and a rope on which hung some newly washed clothes was wound at one end round the neck of a Venus from the hand of Praxiteles, and at the other round the lyre of an Apollo fashioned in marble by Bryaxis. Some Indian shrubs, of which his father-in-law had been very proud, were trampled underfoot; and in the great banqueting-hall, which had served as sleeping-room for a hundred praetorians, costly cushions and draperies were strewn, torn from the couches and walls to make their beds more comfortable.

Used to the sights of war as he was, the soldier ground his teeth with wrath at this scene. As long as he could remember, he had looked upon everything here with reverence and awe; and to think that his comrades had destroyed it all made his blood boil.

As he approached the women's apartments he took fright. How was he to disclose to his mistress what threatened her?

But it must be done; so he followed the waiting-maid Johanna, who led him to her lady's livingroom.

In it sat the Christian steward Johannes, with writing tablets and scrolls of papyrus, working in the service of his patroness. She herself was with the wounded Aurelius; and Martialis, on hearing this, begged to be admitted to her.

Berenike was in the act of renewing the wounded soldier's bandages, and when the centurion saw how cruelly disfigured was the handsome, blooming face of the young tribune, to whom he was heartily attached, the tears rose to his eyes. The matron observed it, and witnessed with much surprise the affectionate greeting between the young noble and the plain soldier.

The centurion greeted her respectfully; but it was not till Nernesianus asked him how it was that the troops had been called to arms at this hour, that Martialis plucked up courage and begged the lady of the house to grant him an interview.

But Berenike had still to wash and bandage the wounds of her patient— a task which she always performed herself and with the greatest care; she therefore promised the soldier to be at his disposal in half an hour.

"Then it will be too late!" burst from the lips of the centurion; then she knew, by his voice and the terror-stricken aspect of the man whom she had known so long, that he meant to warn her, and there was but one from whom the danger could come.

"Caesar?" she asked. "He is sending out his creatures to murder me?"

The imperious gaze of Berenike's large eyes so overpowered the simple soldier as to render him speechless for a while. But Caesar had threatened his mistress's life—he must collect himself, and thus he managed to stammer:

"No, lady, no! He will not have you killed assuredly not! On the contrary—they are to let you live when they cut down the others!"

"Cut down!" cried Apollinaris, raising himself up and staring horrified at this messenger of terror; but his brother laid his hand upon the centurion's broad shoulder, and, shaking him vigorously, commanded him as his tribune to speak out.

The soldier, ever accustomed to obey, and only too anxious that his warning should not come too late, disclosed in hurried words what he had learned from the prefect. The brothers interrupted him from time to time with some exclamation of horror or disgust, but Berenike remained silent till Martialis stopped with a deep breath.

Then the lady gave a shrill laugh, and as the others looked at her in amazement she said coolly "You men will wade through blood and shame with that reprobate, if he but orders you to do so. I am only a woman, and yet I will show him that there are limits even to his malignity."

She remained for a few moments lost in thought, and then ordered the centurion to go and find out where her husband was.

Martialis obeyed at once, and no sooner was the door closed behind him than she turned to the two brothers, and addressing herself first to one and then to the other with equal vehemence, she cried "Who is right now? Of all the villains who have brought shame upon the throne and name of mighty Caesar, this is the most dastardly. He has written plainly enough upon Apollinaris's face how much he values a brave soldier, the son of a noble house. And you, Nemesianus—are you not also an Aurelius? You say so; and yet, had he not chanced to let you care for your brother, you would at this moment be wandering through the city like a mad dog, biting all who crossed your path. Why do you not speak? Why not tell me once more, Nemesianus, that a soldier must obey his commander blindly?—And you, Apollinaris, will you dare still to assert that the hand with which Caesar tore your face was guided only by righteous indignation at an insult offered to an innocent maiden? Have you the courage to excuse the murders by Caracalla of his own wife, and many other noble women, by his anxiety for the safety of throne and state? I, too, am a woman, and may hold up my head with the best; but what have I to do with the state or with the throne? My eye met his, and from that moment the fiend was my deadly enemy. A quick death at the hands of one of his soldiers seemed too good for the woman he hated. Wild beasts were to tear me to pieces before his eyes. Is that not sufficient for you? Put every abomination together, everything unworthy of an honorable man and abhorrent to the gods, and you have the man whom you so willingly obey. I am only the wife of a citizen. But were I the widow of a noble Aurelian and your mother—" Here Apollinaris, whose wounds were beginning to burn again, broke in: "She would have counseled us to leave revenge to the gods. He is Caesar!"

"He is a villain!" shrieked the matron—"the curse, the shame of humanity, a damnable destroyer of peace and honor and life, such as the world has never beheld before! To kill him would be to earn the gratitude and blessing of the universe. And you, the scions of a noble house, you, I say, prove that there still are men among so many slaves! It is Rome herself who calls you through me—like her, a woman maltreated and wounded to the heart's core—to bear arms in her service till she gives you the signal for making an end of the dastardly blood hound!"

The brothers gazed at one another pale and speechless, till at last Nemesianus ventured to say "He deserves to die, we know, a thousand deaths, but we are neither judges nor executioners. We can not do the work of the assassin."

"No, lady, we can not," added Apollinaris, and shook his wounded head energetically.

But the lady, nothing daunted, went on: "Who has ever called Brutus a murderer? You are young—Life lies before you. To plunge a sword into the heart of this monster is a deed for which you are too good. But I know a hand that understands its work and would be ready to guide the steel. Call it out at the right moment and be its guide!"

"And that hand?" Apollinaris asked in anxious expectation.

"It is there," replied Berenike, pointing to Martialis, who entered the room at that moment. Again the brothers interchanged looks of doubt, but the lady cried: "Consider for a moment! I would fain go hence with the certainty that the one burning desire shall be fulfilled which still warms this frozen heart."

She motioned to the centurion, left the apartment with him, and preceded him to her own room. Arrived there, she ordered the astonished freedman Johannes, in his office as notary, to add a codicil to her will. In the event of her death, she left to Xanthe, the wife of the centurion Martialis, her lawful property the villa at Kanopus, with all it contained, and the gardens appertaining to it, for the free use of herself and her children.

The soldier listened speechless with astonishment. This gift was worth twenty houses in the city, and made its owner a rich man. But the testator was scarcely ten years older than his Xanthe, and, as he kissed the hem of his mistress's robe in grateful emotion, he cried: "May the gods reward you for your generosity; but we will pray and offer up sacrifices that it may be long before this comes into our hands!"

The lady shook her head with a bitter smile, and, drawing the soldier aside, she disclosed to him in rapid words her determination to quit this life before the praetorians entered the house. She then informed the horror-stricken man that she had chosen him to be her avenger. To him, too, the emperor had dealt a malicious blow. Let him remember that, when the time came to plunge the sword in the tyrant's heart. Should this deed, however, cost Martialis his life—which he had risked in many a battle for miserable pay—her will would enable his widow to bring up their children in happiness and comfort.

The centurion had thrown in a deprecatory word or two, but Berenike continued as if she had not

heard him, till at last Martialis cried:

"You ask too much of me, lady. Caesar is hateful to me, but I am no longer one of the praetorians, and am banished the country. How is it possible that I should approach him? How dare I, a common man—"

The lady came closer to him, and whispered:

"You will perform this deed to which I have appointed you in the name of all the just. We demand nothing from you but your sword. Greater men than you—the two Aurelians—will guide it. At their word of command you will do the deed. When they give you the signal, brave Martialis, remember the unfortunate woman in Alexandria whose death you swore to revenge. As soon as the tribunes—"

But the centurion was suddenly transformed. "If the tribunes command it," he interrupted with decision, his dull eye flashing—"if they demand it of me, I do it willingly. Tell them Martialis's sword is ever at their service. It has made short work of stronger men than that vicious stripling."

Berenike gave the soldier her hand, thanked him hurriedly, and begged him, as he could pass unharmed through the city, to hasten to her husband's counting-house by the water-side, to warn him and carry him her last greetings.

With tears in his eyes Martialis did as she desired. When he had gone, the steward began to implore his mistress to conceal herself, and not cast away God's gift of life so sinfully; but she turned from him resolutely though kindly, and repaired once more to the brothers' room.

One glance at them disclosed to her that they had come to no definite conclusion; but their hesitation vanished as soon as they heard that the centurion was ready to draw his sword upon the emperor when they should give the signal; and Berenike breathed a sigh of relief at this resolution, and clasped their hands in gratitude.

They, too, implored her to conceal herself, but she merely answered:

"May your youth grow into happy old age! Life can offer me nothing more, since my child was taken from me—But time presses—I welcome the murderers, now that I know that revenge will not sleep."

"And your husband?" interposed Nemesianus.

She answered with a bitter smile: "He? He has the gift of being easily consoled.—But what was that?"

Loud voices were audible outside the sick-room. Nemesianus stationed himself in front of the lady, sword in hand. This protection, however, proved unnecessary, for, instead of the praetorians, Johanna entered the room, supporting on her arm the half-sinking form of a young man in whom no one would have recognized the once beautifully curled and carefully dressed Alexander. A long caracalla covered his tall form; Dido the slave had cut off his hair, and he himself had disguised his features with streaks of paint. A large, broad-brimmed hat had slipped to the back of his head like a drunken man's, and covered a wound from which the red blood flowed down upon his neck. His whole aspect breathed pain and horror, and Berenike, who took him for a hired cut-throat sent by Caracalla, retreated hastily from him till Johanna revealed his name.

He nodded his head in confirmation, and then sank exhausted on his knees beside Apollinaris's couch and managed with great difficulty to stammer out: "I am searching for Philip. He went into the town—ill-out of his senses. Did he not come to you?"

"No," answered Berenike. "But what is this fresh blood? Has the slaughter begun?"

The wounded man nodded. Then he continued, with a groan: "In front of the house of your neighbor Milon—the back of my head—I fled—a lance—"

His voice failed him, and Berenike cried to the tribune: "Support him, Nemesianus! Look after him and tend him. He is the brother of the maiden—you know—if I know you, you will do all in your power for him, and keep him hidden here till all danger is over."

"We will defend him with our lives!" cried Apollinaris, giving his hand to the lady.

But he withdrew it quickly, for from the impluvium arose the rattle of arms, and loud, confused noise.

Berenike threw up her head and lifted her hands as if in prayer. Her bosom heaved with her deep breath, the delicate nostrils quivered, and the great eyes flashed with wrathful light. For a moment she stood thus silent, then let her arms fall, and cried to the tribunes:

"My curse be upon you if you forget what you owe to yourselves, to the Roman Empire, and to your



dying friend. My blessing, if you hold fast to what you have promised."

She pressed their hands, and, turning to do the same to the artist, found that he had lost consciousness. Johanna and Nemesianus had removed his hat and caracalla, to attend to his wound.

A strange smile passed over the matron's stern features. Snatching the Gallic mantle from the Christian's hand, she threw it over her own shoulders, exclaiming:

"How the ruffian will wonder when, instead of the living woman, they bring him a corpse wrapped in his barbarian's mantle!"

She pressed the hat upon her head, and from a corner of the room where the brothers' weapons stood, selected a hunting-spear. She asked if this weapon might be recognized as belonging to them, and, on their answering in the negative, said:

"My thanks, then, for this last gift!"

At the last moment she turned to the waiting-woman:

"Your brother will help you to burn Korinna's picture. No shameless gaze shall dishonor it again." She tore her hand from that of the Christian, who, with hot tears, tried to hold her back; then, carrying her head proudly erect, she left them.

The brothers gazed shudderingly after her. "And to know," cried Nemesianus, striking his forehead, "that our own comrades will slay her! Never were the swords of Rome so disgraced!"

"He shall pay for it!" replied the wounded man, gnashing his teeth.

"Brother, we must avenge her!"

"Yes—her, and—may the gods hear me!—you too, Apollinaris," swore the other, lifting his hand as for an oath.

Loud screams, the clash of arms, and quick orders sounded from below and broke in upon the tribune's vow. He was rushing to the window to draw back the curtain and look upon the horrid deed with his own eyes, when Apollinaris called him back, reminding him of their duty toward Melissa's brother, who was lost if the others discovered him here.

Hereupon Nemesianus lifted the fainting youth in his strong arms and carried him into the adjoining room, laying him upon the mat which had served their faithful old slave as a bed. He then covered him with his own mantle, after hastily binding up the wound on his head and another on his shoulder.

By the time the tribune returned to his brother the noise outside had grown considerably less, only pitiable cries of anguish mingled with the shouts of the soldiers.

Nemesianus hastily pulled aside the curtain, letting such a flood of blinding sunshine into the room that Apollinaris covered his wounded face with his hands and groaned aloud.

"Sickening! Horrible! Unheard of!" cried his brother, beside himself at the sight that met his eyes. "A battle-field! What do I say? The peaceful house of a Roman citizen turned into shambles. Fifteen, twenty, thirty bodies on the grass! And the sunshine plays as brightly on the pools of blood and the arms of the soldiers as if it rejoiced in it all. But there—Oh, brother! our Marcipor—there lies our dear old Marci!—and beside him the basket of roses he had fetched for the lady Berenike from the flower-market. There they be, steeped in blood, the red and white roses; and the bright sun looks down from heaven and laughs upon it!"

He broke down into sobs, and then continued, gnashing his teeth with rage: "Apollo smiles upon it, but he sees it; and wait—wait but a little longer, Tarautas! The god stretches out his hand already for the avenging bow! Has Berenike ventured among them? Near the fountain—how it flashes and glitters with the hues of Iris!—they are crowding round something on the ground—Mayhap the body of Seleukus. No—the crowd is separating. Eternal gods! It is she—it is the woman who tended you!"

"Dead?" asked the other.

"She is lying on the ground with a spear in her bosom. Now the legate—yes, it is Quintus Flavius Nobilior—bends over her and draws it out. Dead—dead! and slain by a man of our cohort!"

He clasped his hands before his face, while Apollinaris muttered curses, and the name of their faithful Marcipor, who had served their father before them, coupled with wild vows of vengeance.

Nemesianus at length composed himself sufficiently to follow the course of the horrible events going on below.

"Now," he went on, describing it to his brother, "now they are surrounding Rufus. That merciless scoundrel must have done something abominable, that even goes beyond what his fellows can put up with. There they have caught a slave with a bundle in his hand, perhaps stolen goods. They will punish him with death, and are themselves no better than he. If you could only see how they come swarming from every side with their costly plunder! The magnificent golden jug set with jewels, out of which the lady Berenike poured the Byblos wine for you, is there too!—Are we still soldiers, or robbers and murderers?"

"If we are," cried Apollinaris, "I know who has made us so."

They were startled by the approaching rattle of arms in the corridor, and then a loud knock at the chamber-door. The next moment a soldier's head appeared in the doorway, to be quickly withdrawn with the exclamation, "It is true—here lies Apollinaris!"

"One moment," said a second deep voice, and over the threshold stepped the legate of the legion, Quintus Flavius Nobilior, in all the panoply of war, and saluted the brothers.

Like them, he came of an old and honorable race, and was acting in place of the prefect Macrinus, whose office in the state prevented him from taking the military command of that mighty corps, the praetorians. Twenty years older than the twins, and a companion-in-arms of their father, he had managed their rapid promotion. He was their faithful friend and patron, and Apollinaris's misfortune had disgusted him no less than the order in the execution of which he was now obliged to take part. Having greeted the brothers affectionately, observed their painful emotion, and heard their complaints over the murder of their slave, he shook his manly head, and pointing to the blood that dripped from his boots and greaves, "Forgive me for thus defiling your apartments," he said. "If we came from slaughtering men upon the field of battle, it could only do honor to the soldier; but this is the blood of defenseless citizens, and even women's gore is mixed with it."

"I saw the body of the lady of this house," said Nemesianus, gloomily. "She has tended my brother like a mother."

"But, on the other hand, she was imprudent enough to draw down Caesar's displeasure upon her," interposed the Flavian, shrugging his shoulders. "We were to bring her to him alive, but he had anything but friendly intentions toward her; however, she spoiled his game. A wonderful woman! I have scarcely seen a man look death—and self-sought death—in the face like that! While the soldiers down there were massacring all who fell into their hands—those were the orders, and I looked on at the butchery, for, rather than—well, you can imagine that for yourselves—through one of the doors there came a tall, extraordinary figure. The wide brim of a traveling hat concealed the features, and it was wrapped in one of the emperor's fool's mantles. It hurried toward the maniple of Sempronius, brandishing a javelin, and with a sonorous voice reviling the soldiers till even my temper was roused. Here I caught sight of a flowing robe beneath the caracalla, and, the hat having fallen back, a beautiful woman's face with large and fear-inspiring eyes. Then it suddenly flashed upon me that this grim despiser of death, being a woman, was doubtless she whom we were to spare. I shouted this to my men; but—and at that moment I was heartily ashamed of my profession—it was too late. Tall Rufus pierced her through with his lance. Even in falling she preserved the dignity of a queen, and when the men surrounded her she fixed each one separately with her wonderful eyes and spoke through the death-rattle in her throat:

"Shame upon men and soldiers who let themselves be hounded on like dogs to murder and dishonor!" Rufus raised his sword to make an end of her, but I caught his arm and knelt beside her, begging her to let me see to her wound. With that she seized the lance in her breast with both hands, and with her last breath murmured, 'He desired to see the living woman—bring him my body, and my curse with it! Then with a last supreme effort she buried the spear still deeper in her bosom; but it was not necessary.

"I gazed petrified at the high-bred, wrathful face, still beautiful in death, and the mysterious, wide-open eyes that must have flashed so proudly in life. It was enough to drive a man mad. Even after I had closed her eyes and spread the mantle over her—"

"What has been done with the body?" asked Apollinaris.

"I caused it to be carried into the house and the door of the death-chamber carefully locked. But when I returned to the men. I had to prevent them from tearing Rufus to pieces for having lost them the large reward which Caesar had promised for the living prisoner."

"And you," cried Apollinaris, excitedly, "had to look on while our men, honest soldiers, plundered this house—which entertained many of us so hospitably—as if they had been a band of robbers! I saw them dragging out things which were used in our service only yesterday."

"The emperor—his permission!" sighed Flavius. "You know how it is. The lowest instincts of every nature come out at such a time as this, and the sun shines upon it all. Many a poor wretch of yesterday will go to bed a wealthy man to-day. But, for all that, I believe much was hidden from them. In the room of the mistress of the house whence I have just come, a fire was still blazing in which a variety of objects had been burned. The flames had destroyed a picture—a small painted fragment betrayed the fact. They perhaps possessed masterpieces of Apelles or Zeuxis. This woman's hatred would lead her to destroy them rather than let them fall into the hands of her imperial enemy; and who can blame her?"

"It was her daughter's portrait," said Nemesianus, unguardedly.

The legate turned upon him in surprise. "Then she confided in you?" he asked.

"Yes," returned the tribune, "and we are proud to have been so honored by her. Before she went to her death she took leave of us. We let her go; for we at least could not bring ourselves to lay hands upon a noble lady."

The officer looked sternly at him and exclaimed, angrily:

"Do you suppose, young upstart, that it was less painful to me and many another among us? Cursed be this day, that has soiled our weapons with the blood of women and slaves, and may every drachma which I take from the plunder here bring ill-luck with it! Call the accident that has kept you out of this despicable work a stroke of good fortune, but beware how you look down upon those whose oath forces them to crush out every human feeling from their hearts! The soldier who takes part with his commander's enemy—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Johanna, the Christian, who saluted the legate, and then stood confused and embarrassed by the side of Apollinaris's bed. The furtive glance she cast first at the side-room and then at Nemesianus did not pass unobserved by the quick eye of the commander, and with soldierly firmness he insisted on knowing what was concealed behind that door.

"An unfortunate man," was Apollinaris's answer.

"Seleukus, the master of this house?" asked Quintus Flavius, sternly.

"No," replied Nemesianus. "It is only a poor, wounded painter. And yet —the praetorians will go through fire and water for you, if you deliver up this man to them as their booty. But if you are what I hold you to be—"

"The opinion of hot-headed boys is of as little consequence to me as the favor of my subordinates," interposed the commander. "Whatever my conscience tells me is right, I shall do. Quick, now! Who is in there?"

"The brother of the maiden for whose sake Caesar—" stammered the wounded man.

"The maiden whom you have to thank for that disfigured face?" cried the legate. "You are true Aurelians, you boys; and, though you may doubt whether I am the man you take me for, I confess with pleasure that you are exactly as I would wish to have you. The praetorians have slain your friend and servant; I give you that man to make amends for it."

With deep emotion Nemesianus seized his old friend's hands, and Apollinaris spoke words of gratitude to him from his couch. The officer would not listen to their thanks, and walked toward the door; but Johanna stood before him, and entreated him to allow the twins, whose servant had been killed, to take another, from whom they need have no fear of treachery. He had been captured in the impluvium by the praetorians while trying, in the face of every danger, to enter the house where the painter lay, to whose father he had belonged for many years. He would be able to tend both Apollinaris and Melissa's brother, and make it possible to keep Alexander's hiding-place a secret. The soldiery would be certain to penetrate as far as this, and other lives would be endangered if they should bear off the faithful servant and force him on the rack to disclose where Melissa's father and relatives were hidden.

The legate promised to insure the freedom of Argutis.

A few more words of thanks and farewell, and Quintus had fulfilled his mission to the Aurelians. Shortly afterward the tuba sounded to assemble the plunderers still scattered about Seleukus's house, and Nemesianus saw the men marching in small companies into the great hall. They were followed by

their armor-bearers, loaded with treasure of every kind; and three chariots, drawn by fine horses, belonging to Seleukus and his murdered wife, conveyed such booty as was too heavy for men to carry. In the last of these stood the statue of Eros by Praxiteles. The glorious sunshine lighted up the smiling marble face; with the charm of bewitching beauty he seemed to gaze at the lurid crimson pools on the ground, and at the armed cohorts which marched in front to shed more blood and rouse more hatred.

As Nemesianus withdrew from the window, Argutis came into the room. The legate had released him; and when Johanna conducted the faithful fellow to Alexander's bedside, and he saw the youth lying pale and with closed eyes, as though death had claimed him for his prey, the old man dropped on his knees, sobbing loudly.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

While Alexander, well nursed by old Argutis and Johanna, lay in high fever, raving in his delirium of Agatha and his brother Philip, and still oftener calling for his sister, Melissa was alone in her hiding-place. It was spacious enough, indeed, for she was concealed in the rooms prepared to receive the Exoterics before the mysteries of Serapis. A whole suite of apartments, sleeping-rooms and halls, were devoted to their use, extending all across the building from east to west. Some of these were square, others round or polygonal, but most of them much longer than they were wide. Painters and sculptors had everywhere covered the walls with pictures in color and in high relief, calculated to terrify or bewilder the uninitiated. The statues, of which there were many, bore strange symbols, the mosaic flooring was covered with images intended to excite the fancy and the fears of the beholder.

When Melissa first entered her little sleeping room, darkness had concealed all this from her gaze. She had been only too glad to obey the matron's bidding and go to rest at once. Euryale had remained with her some time, sitting on the edge of the bed to hear all that had happened to the girl during the last few hours, and she had impressed on her how she should conduct herself in case of her hiding-place being searched.

When she presently bade her good-night, Melissa repeated what the waiting-woman Johanna had told her of the life of Jesus Christ; but she expressed her interest in the person of the Redeemer in such a strange and heathen fashion that Euryale only regretted that she could not at once enlighten the exhausted girl. With a hearty kiss she left her to rest, and Melissa was no sooner alone than sleep closed her weary young eyes.

It was near morning when she fell asleep; and when she awoke, accustomed as she was to early hours, she was startled to see how much of the day was spent. So she rose hastily, and then perceived that the lady Euryale must already have come to see her, for she found fresh milk by the bedside, and some rolls of manuscript which had not been there the day before. Her first thought was for her imperiled relatives—her father, her brothers, her lover—and she prayed for each, appealing first to the manes of her mother, and then to mighty Serapis and kindly Isis, who would surely hear her in these precincts dedicate to them.

The danger of those she loved made her forget her own, and she vividly pictured to herself what might be happening to each, what each one might be doing to protect her and save her from the spies of the despot, who by this time must have received her missive. Still, the doubt whether he might not, after all, be magnanimous and forgive her, rose again and again to her mind, though everything led her to think it impossible.

During her prayer and in her care for the others she had felt reasonably calm; but at the first thought of Caesar a painful agitation took possession of her soul, and to overcome it she began an inspection of her spacious hiding-place, where the lady Euryale had prepared her to be amazed. And, indeed, it was not merely strange, but it filled her heart and mind with astonishment and terror. Wherever she looked, mystic figures puzzled her; and Melissa turned from a picture in relief of beheaded figures with their feet in the air, and a representation of the damned stewing in great caldrons and fanning themselves with diabolical irony, only to see a painting of a female form over whose writhing body boats were sailing, or a four-headed ram, or birds with human heads flying away with a mummified corpse. On the ceiling, too, there was strange imagery; and when she looked at the floor to rest her bewildered fancy, her eyes fell on a troop of furies pursuing the wicked, or a pool of fire by which horrible monsters kept guard.

And all these pictures were not stiff and formal like Egyptian decorative art, but executed by Greek artists with such liveliness and truth that they seemed about to speak; and Melissa could have fancied many times that they were moving toward her from the ceiling or the walls.

If she remained here long, she thought she must go out of her mind; and yet she was attracted, here by a huge furnace on whose metal floor large masses of fuel seemed to be, and there by a pool of water with crocodiles, frogs, tortoises, and shells, wrought in mosaic.

Besides these and other similar objects, her curiosity was aroused by some large chests in which book-rolls, strange vessels, and an endless variety of raiment of every shape and size were stored, from the simple chiton of the common laborer to the star-embroidered talar of the adept.

Her protectress had told her that the mystics who desired to be admitted to the highest grades here passed through fire and water, and had to go through many ceremonies in various costumes. She had also informed her that the uninitiated who desired to enter these rooms had to open three doors, each of which, as it was closed, gave rise to a violent ringing; so that she might not venture to get away from the room, into which, however, she could bar herself. If the danger were pressing, there was a door, known only to the initiated, which led to the steps and out of the building. Her sleeping-place, happily, was not far from a window looking to the west, so that she was able to refresh her brain after the bewildering impressions which had crowded on her in the inner rooms.

The paved roadway dividing the Serapeum from the stadium was at first fairly crowded; but the chariots, horsemen, and foot-passengers on whose heads she looked down from her high window interested her as little as the wide inclosure of the stadium, part of which lay within sight.

A race, no doubt, was to be held there this morning, for slaves were raking the sand smooth, and hanging flowers about a dais, which was no doubt intended for Caesar. Was it to be her fate to see the dreadful man from the place where she was hiding from him? Her heart began to beat faster, and at the same time questions crowded on her excited brain, each bringing with it fresh anxiety for those she loved, of whom, till now, she had been thinking with calm reassurance.

Whither had Alexander fled?

Had her father and Philip succeeded in concealing themselves in the sculptor's work-room?

Could Diodoros have escaped in time to reach the harbor with Polybius and Praxilla?

How had Argutis contrived that her letter should reach Caesar's hands without too greatly imperiling himself?

She was quite unconscious of any guilt toward Caracalla. There had been, indeed, a strong and strange attraction which had drawn her to him; even now she was glad to have been of service to him, and to have helped him to endure the sufferings laid upon him by a cruel fate. But she could never be his. Her heart belonged to another, and this she had confessed in a letter—perhaps, indeed, too late. If he had a heart really capable of love, and had set it on her, he would no doubt think it hard that he should have bestowed his affections on a girl who was already plighted to another, even when she first appeared before him as a suppliant, though deeply moved by pity; still, he had certainly no right to condemn her conduct. And this was her firm conviction.

If her refusal roused his ire—if her father's prophecy and Philostratus's fears must be verified, that his rage would involve many others besides herself in ruin, then—But here her thought broke off with a shudder.

Then she recalled the hour when she had been ready and willing to be his, to sacrifice love and happiness only to soften his wild mood and protect others from his unbridled rage. Yes, she might have been his wife by this time, if he himself had not proved to her that she could never gain such power over him as would control his sudden fits of fury, or obtain mercy for any victim of his cruelty. The murder of Vindex and his nephew had been the death-blow of this hope. She best knew how seriously she had come to the determination to give up every selfish claim to future happiness in order that she might avert from others the horrors which threatened them; and now, when she knew the history of the Divine Lord of the Christians, she told herself that she had acted at that moment in a manner well-pleasing to that sublime Teacher. Still, her strong common sense assured her that to sacrifice the dearest and fondest wish of her heart in vain would not have been right and good, but foolish.

The evil deeds which Caracalla was now preparing to commit he would have done even if she were at his side. Of what small worth would she have seemed to him, and to herself!—When this tyranny should be overpast, when he should be gone to some other part of his immense empire, if those she loved were

spared she could be happy—ah! so happy with the man to whom she had given her heart—as happy as she would have been miserable if she had become the victim to unceasing terrors as Caesar's wife.

Euryale was right, and Fate, to which she had appealed, had decided well for her. That, the greatest conceivable sacrifice, would have been in vain; for the sake of a ruthless tyrant's foul desire she would have been guilty of the basest breach of faith, have poisoned her lover's heart and soul, and have wrecked his whole future life as well as her own. Away, then, with foolish doubts! Pythagoras was wise in warning her against torturing her heart. The die was cast. She and Caracalla must go on divergent roads, Her duty now was to fight for her own happiness against any who threatened it, and, above all, against the tyrant who had compelled her, innocent as she was, to hide like a criminal.

She was full of righteous wrath against the sanguinary persecutor, and holding her head high she went back into her sleeping-room to finish dressing. She moved more quickly than usual, for the bookrolls which Euryale had laid by her bed while she was still asleep attracted her eye with a suggestion of promise. Eager to know what their contents were, she took them up, drew a stool to the window, and tried to read.

But many voices came up to her from outside, and when she looked down into the road she saw troops of youths crowding into the stadium. What fine fellows they were, as they marched on, talking and singing; and she said to herself that Diodoros and Alexander were taller even than most of these, and would have been handsome among the handsomest! She amused herself for some time with watching them; but when the last man had entered the stadium, and they had formed in companies, she again took up the rolls.

One contained the gospel of Matthew and the other that of Luke.

The first, beginning with the genealogy, gave her a string of strange, barbarous names which did not attract her; so she took up the roll of Luke, and his simple narrative style at once charmed her. There were difficulties in it, no doubt, and she skipped sundry unintelligible passages, but the second chapter captivated her attention. It spoke of the birth of the great Teacher whom the Christians worshiped as their God. Angels had announced to the shepherds in the field that great joy should come on the whole world, because the Saviour was born; and this Saviour and Redeemer was no hero, no sage, but a child wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger.

At this she smiled, for she loved little children, and had long known no greater pleasure than to play with them and help them. How many delightful hours did she owe to the grandchildren of their neighbor Skopas!

And this child, hailed at its birth by a choir of angels, had become a God in whom many believed! and the words of the angels' chant were: "Glory to God on high, and on earth peace, good-will toward men!"

How great and good it sounded! With eager excitement she fastened the rolls together, and on her features was depicted impatient longing to put an end to an intolerable state of things, as she exclaimed, though there was no one but herself to hear: "Ay, peace, salvation, good-will! Not this hatred, this thirst for revenge, this blood, this persecution, and, as their hideous fruit, this terror, these horrible, cruel fears—"

Here she was interrupted by the clatter of arms and rapping of hammers which came up from below. Caesar's Macedonian guard and other infantry troops were silently coming up in companies and vanishing into the side-doors which led to the upper tiers of the stadium. What could this mean? Meanwhile carpenters were busy fastening up the chief entrance with wooden beams. It looked like closing up sluice-gates to hinder the invasion of a high tide. But the stadium was already full of men. She had seen thousands of youths march in, and there they stood in close ranks in the arena below her. Besides these, there were now an immense number of soldiers. They must all get out again presently, and what a crush there would be in the side exits if the vomitorium were closed! She longed to call down, to warn the carpenters of the folly of their act. Or was it that the youth of the town were to be pent into the stadium to hear some new and more severe decree, while some of the more refractory were secured?

It must be so. What a shame!

Then came a few vexilla of Numidian troopers at a slow pace. At their head, on a particularly high horse, rode the legate, a very tall man. He glanced up to the side where she was, and Melissa recognized the Egyptian Zminis. At this her hand sought the place of her heart, for she felt as though it had ceased to beat. What! This wretch, the deadly foe of her father and brother, here, at the head of the Roman troops? Something horrible, impossible, must be about to happen!

The sun was mirrored in the shining coat of his horse, and in the lictor's axe he bore, carrying it like a commander's staff. He raised it once, twice, and, high as she was above him, she could see how sharp the contrast was between the yellow whites of his eyes and the swarthy color of his face.

Now, for the third time, the bright steel of the axe flashed in the sunshine, and immediately after trumpet-calls sounded and were repeated at short intervals, which still, to her, seemed intolerably long. How Melissa had presence of mind enough to count them she knew not, but she did. At the seventh all was still, and soon after a short blast on the tuba rang out from above, below, and from all sides of the stadium. Each went like an arrow to the heart of the anxious, breathless girl. From the moment when she had seen Zminis she had expected the worst, but the cry of rage and despair from a thousand voices which now split her ear told her how far the incredible reality outdid her most horrible imaginings.

Breathless, and with a throbbing brain, she leaned out as far as she could, and neither felt the burning sun—which was now beginning to fall on the western face of the temple—nor heeded the risk of being seen and involving herself and her protectress in ruin. Trembling like a gazelle in a frosty winter's night, she would gladly have withdrawn from the window, but she felt as if some spell held her there. She longed to shut her ears and eyes, but she could not help looking on. Her every instinct prompted her to shriek for help, but she could not utter a sound.

There she stood, seeing and hearing, and her low moaning changed to that laughter which anguish borrows from gladness when it has exhausted all forms of expression. At last she sank on her knees on the floor, and while she shed tears of pain still laughed shrilly, till she understood with sudden horror what was happening. She started violently; a sob convulsed her bosom; she wept and wept, and these tears did her good.

When, at one in the afternoon, the sun fell full on her window, she had not yet found strength to move. A flood of bright light, in which whirled millions of motes, danced before her eyes; and as her breath sent the atoms flying, it passed through her mind that at this very moment the reprobate utterance of a madman's lips was blowing happiness, joy, peace, and hope out of the lives of many thousands—blowing them into nothingness, like the blast of a storm.

Then she commanded herself, for the horrible scene before her threatened to stamp itself on her eye like the image her father could engrave on an onyx; and she must avoid that, or give up all hope of ever being light-hearted again. Hardly an hour since she had seen the arena looking like a basket of fresh flowers, full of splendid, youthful men. Then the warriors of the Macedonian phalanx had taken their places on the long ranks of seats on which she looked down, with several cohorts of archers, brown Numidians and black Ethiopians, like inquisitive spectators of the expected show—but all in full armor. At first the youths and men had formed in companies, with singing, talk, and laughter, and here and there a satirical chant; but presently there had been squabbles with the town-watch, and while the younger and more careless still were gay enough, whole companies on the other hand had looked up indignantly at the Romans; some had anxiously questioned each other's eyes, or stared down in sullen dismay at the sand.

The hot, seething blood of these men—the sons of a free city, and accustomed to a life of rapid action in hard work and frenzied enjoyment—took the delay very much amiss; and when it was rumored that the doors were being locked, impatience and distrust found emphatic utterance. Timid whistling and other expressions of disapproval had been followed by louder demonstrations, for to be locked up was intolerable. But the lictors and guards took no notice, after removing the member of the Museum who had perpetrated the epigram on Caesar's mother. This one, who had certainly gone too far, was to pay for all, it would seem.

Then the trumpets sounded, and the most heedless of the troop of youths began to feel acute anxiety and alarm. From her high post of observation Melissa could see that, although the appearance of Zminis on the scene had caused a fever of agitation, they now broke their serried squares, wandered about as if undecided what to do, but prepared for the worst, and turned their curly heads now to this side and now to that, till the trumpetblast from the seats attracted every eye upward, and the butchery began.

Did the cry, "Stop, wretches!" really break from Melissa's lips, or had she only intended to shout it down to the people in the stadium? She did not know; but as she recollected the long rank of Numidians who, quick as lightning, lifted their curved bows and sent a shower of arrows down on the defenseless lads in the arena, she felt as though she had again shrieked out: "Stop!" Then it seemed as though a storm of wind had torn thousands of straight boughs with metallic leaves that flashed in the sunshine from some huge invisible tree, and flung them into the arena; and, as her eye followed their fall, she could have fancied that she looked on a corn-field beaten down by a terrific hail-storm; but the boughs and leaves were lances and arrows, and each ear of corn cut down was a young and promising

human being.

Zminis's preposterous suggestion had been acted on. Caracalla was avenged on the youth of Alexandria.

Not a tongue could wag now in abuse; every pair of young lips which had dared utter a scornful cry or purse up to whistle at the sight of Caesar, was silenced forever—and, with the few guilty, a hundred times more who were innocent. She knew now why the great gate had been barred with beams, and why the troop had entered by the side-doors. The scene of the brilliant display had become a lake of blood, full of the dead and dying. Death had invaded the rows of seats; instead of laurel wreaths and prizes, deadly weapons were showered down into the arena. It seemed now as though the sun, with its blinding radiance, were mercifully fain to hinder the human eye from looking down on the horrible picture. To avoid the sickening sight, Melissa closed her eyes and dragged herself to her feet with an effort, to hide herself she knew not where.

But again there was a flourish of trumpets and loud acclamations, and again an irresistible power dragged her to the window.

A splendid quadriga had stopped at the gate of the stadium, surrounded by courtiers and guards. It was Caracalla's, for Pandion held the reins. Could Caracalla approve of this most horrible crime, organized by the wretch Zminis, by appearing on the scene; or might it not be that, in his wrath at the bloodthirsty zeal of his vile tool, he had come to dismiss him?

She hoped it was this; and, at any cost, she must know the truth as to this question, which was not based on mere curiosity. Holding one hand to her wildly beating heart, she looked across the bloodstained arena to the rows of seats and the dais decorated for Caesar. There stood Caracalla, with the Egyptian at his side, pointing down at the arena with his finger. And what was to be seen on the spot he indicated was so horrible that she again shut her eyes, and this time she even covered them with her hands. But she would and must see, and once more she looked across; and the man whose assurances she had once believed, that it was only his care for the throne and state and the compulsion of cruel fate which had ever made him shed blood—that man was standing side by side with the vile, ruthless spy whose tall figure towered far above his master's. His hand lay on the villain's arm, his eye rested on the corpse-strewn arena beneath; and now he raised his head, he turned his face, whose look of suffering had once moved her soul, toward her—and he laughed—she could see every feature—laughed so loud, so heartily, so gleefully, as she had never before seen him laugh. He laughed till his whole body and shoulders shook. Now he took his hand from the Egyptian's arm and pointed to the dead lying at his feet.

As she saw that laugh, of which she could not hear a sound, Melissa felt as though a hyena had yelled in her ear, and, yielding to an irresistible impulse, she looked down once more at the destruction of youthful life and happiness which had been wrought in one short hour—at the stream of blood after which so many bitter tears must flow. The sight indeed cut her to the heart, and yet she was thankful for it; for the first time the reckless cruelty of that laughing monster was evident in all its naked atrocity. Horror, aversion, loathing for that man to whom everything but power, cruelty, and cunning, was as nothing, left no room for fear or pity, or even the least shade of self-reproach for having aroused in him a desire which she could not gratify.

She clenched her little fists, and, without vouchsafing another glance at the detestable butcher who had dared to cast his eyes on her, she withdrew from the window and cried out aloud, though startled at the sound of her own voice: "The time, the time! It is fulfilled for him this day!"

And how her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved and fell! With what a firm step did she pace the long suite of rooms, while the conviction was borne in on her that this deed of the vile assassin in the purple must bring the day of salvation and peace nearer—that day of which Andreas dreamed! As in her silent walk she passed the book-rolls which the lady Euryale had so quietly laid by her bedside, she took up the glad message of Luke with enthusiastic excitement, held it on high, and shouted the angels' greeting which had impressed itself on her memory out of the window, as though she longed that Caracalla should hear it—"Peace on earth and good-will toward men!"

Then she resumed her walk through the rooms of the heathen mystics, repeating to herself all the comfortable words she had ever heard from Euryale and the freedman Andreas. The image of the divine Lord, who had come to bestow love on the world, and seal his sublime doctrine by sacrificing his life, rose up before her soul, and all that the Christian Johanna had told her of him made the picture clear, till he stood plainly before her, beautiful and gentle, in a halo of love and kindness, and yet strong and noble, for the crucified One was a heroic Saviour.

At this she remembered with satisfaction the struggle she herself had fought, and her comfort when



she had decided to sacrifice her own happiness to save others from sorrow. She now resolutely grasped the lady Euryale's book-rolls, for they contained the key to the inner chambers of the wondrous structure into whose forecourt life itself and her own intimate experience had led her. She was soon sitting with her back to the window, and unrolled the gospel of Matthew till she came to the first sentence which Euryale had marked for her with a red line.

Melissa was too restless to read straight on; as impatient as a child who finds itself for the first time in a garden which its parents have bought, she rushed from one tempting passage to another, applying each to herself, to those whom she loved, or in another sense to the disturber of her peace.

With a joyful heart she now believed the promise which at first had staggered her, that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

But her eye ran swiftly over the open roll, and was attracted by a mark drawing her attention to a whole chapter. She there read how Jesus Christ had gone up on to a mountain to address the vast multitude who followed him. He spoke of the kingdom of heaven, and of who those were that should be suffered to enter there. First, they were the poor in spirit—and she no doubt was one of those. Among those who were rich in spirit her brother Philip was certainly one of the richest, and whither had an acute understanding and restless brain led him that they so seldom gave his feelings time to make themselves heard?

Then the mourners were to be comforted. Oh, that she could have called the lady Berenike to her side and bid her participate in this promise! And the meek—well, they might come to power perhaps after the downfall of the wretch who had flooded the world with blood, and who, of all men on earth, was the farthest removed from the spirit which gazed at her from this scripture, so mild and genial. Of those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness she again was one: they should be filled, and the lady Euryale and Andreas had already loaded the board for her.

The merciful, she read, should obtain mercy; and she, if any one, had a right to regard herself as a peacemaker: thus to her was the promise that she should be called one of the children of God.

But at the next verse she drew herself up, and her face was radiant with joy, for it seemed to have been written expressly for her; nay, to find it here struck her as a marvel of good fortune, for there stood the words: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you."

All these things had come upon her in these last days—though not, indeed, for the sake of Jesus Christ and righteousness, but only for the sake of those she loved; yet she would have been ready to endure the worst.

And the hapless victims in the arena! Might not the promised bliss await them too? Oh, how gladly would she have bestowed on them the fairest reward! And if this should indeed be their lot after death, where was the revenge of their bloodthirsty murderer?

Oh, that her mother were still alive—that she, Melissa, had been permitted to share this great consolation with her! In a brief aspiration she uplifted her soul to the beloved dead, and as she further unrolled the manuscript her eye fell on the words: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you." No, she could not do this; this seemed to her to be too much to ask; even Andreas had not attained to this; and yet it must be good and lovely, if only because it helped to cement the peace for which she longed more fervently than for any other blessing.

Next she read: "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged," and she shuddered as she thought of the future fate of the man who had by treachery brought murder and death on an industrious and flourishing city as a punishment for the light words and jests of a few mockers, and the disappointment he had suffered from an insignificant girl.

But then, again, she breathed more freely, for she read: "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened." Could there be a more precious promise? And to her, she felt, it was already fulfilled; for her trembling finger had, as it were, but just touched the door, and, to! it stood open before her, and that which she had so long sought she had now found. But it was quite natural that it should be so, for the God of the Christians loved those who turned to him as His own children. Here it was written why those who asked should receive, and those who sought should find: "For what man is there of you whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?"

If it were only as a peacemaker, she was already a child of Him who had asked this, and she might look for none but good gifts from Him. And what was commanded immediately after seemed to her so simple, so easy to obey, and yet so wise. She thought it over a little, and saw that in this precept—of

which it was said that it was all the law and the prophets—there was in fact a rule which, if it were obeyed, must keep all mankind guiltless, and make every one happy. These words, she thought, should be written over every door and on every heart, as the winged sun was placed over every Egyptian temple gate, so that no one should ever forget them for an instant. She herself would bear them in mind, and she repeated them to herself in an undertone, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them." Her eye wandered to the window and out to the stadium. How happy might the world be under a sovereign who should obey that law! And Caracalla?—No, she would not allow the contentment which filled her to be troubled by a thought of him.

With a hasty gesture she placed the ivory rod which she had found in the middle of the roll so as to flatten it out, and her eye fell on the words, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." To her, if to any one, was this glorious bidding addressed, for few had a heavier burden to bear. But indeed she already felt it lighter, after the terrors she had gone through on the very verge of despair; and now, even though she was still surrounded by dangers, she was far from feeling oppressed or terrified. Now her heart beat higher with hopeful gladness, and she was full of fervent gratitude as she told herself with lively and confident assurance that she had found a new guide, and, holding His loving and powerful hand, could walk in the way in safety. She felt as though some beloved hand had given her a vial of precious medicine that would cure every disease, when she had learned this verse, too, by heart. She would never forget the friendly promise and invitation that lay in those words. And to Alexander, at least— poor, conscience-stricken Alexander—they might bring some comfort, if not to her father and Philip, since the call of the Son of God was addressed to him too. And she looked as happy as though she had heard something to rejoice her heart and soul. Her red lips parted once more, showing the two white teeth which were never to be seen but when she smiled and some real happiness stirred her soul.

She fancied she was alone, but, even while she was reading the words in which the Saviour called to him the weary and heavy-laden, the lady Euryale had noiselessly opened a secret door leading to Melissa's hiding- place, known only to herself and her husband, and had come close to her. She now stood watching the girl with surprise and astonishment, for she had expected to find her beside herself, desperate, and more than ever needing comfort and soothing. The unhappy girl must have been drawn to the window by the cries of the massacred, and at least have glanced at the revolting scene in the stadium. She would have thought it more natural if she had found Melissa overcome by the horrors she had witnessed, half distraught or paralyzed by distress and rage. And there sat the young creature, whom she knew to be soft-hearted and gentle, smiling and with beaming eyes—though those eyes must have rested on the most hideous spectacle—looking as though the roll in her lap were the first enchanting raptures of a lover. The book lying on Melissa's knees was the gospel of Matthew, which she herself early this morning, while the girl was still sleeping, had laid by her side to comfort her and give her some insight into the blessings of Christianity. But these scriptures, so sacred to Euryale, had seemed to count for less than nothing to this heathen girl, the sister of Philip the skeptic.

Euryale loved Melissa, but far dearer to her was the book to whose all- important contents the maiden seemed to have closed her heart in coldness.

It was for Melissa's sake that, when the high-priest's dwelling was searched by the new magistrate's spies from cellar to garret, she had patiently submitted to her husband's hard words. She had liked to think that she might bring this girl as a pure white lamb into the fold of the Good Shepherd, who to herself was so dear, and through whom her saddened life had found new charm, her broken heart new joys. A few hours since she had assured her friend Origen that she had found a young Greek who would prove to him that a heathen who had gone through the school of suffering with a pure and compassionate heart needed but a sign, a word of flame, to recognize at once the beatitude of Christianity and long to be baptized. And here she discovered the maiden of whom she had such fair hopes, with a smile on her lips and beaming looks, while so many innocent men were being slaughtered, as though this were a joy to her!

What had become of the girl's soft, tender heart, which but yesterday had been ready for self-sacrifice if only she might secure the well-being of those she loved? Was she, Euryale, in her dotage, that she could be so deceived by a child?

Her heart beat faster with disappointment; and yet she would not condemn the sinner unheard. So, with a swift impulse she took the roll up from Melissa's lap, and her voice was sorrowful rather than severe as she exclaimed:

"I had hoped, my child, that these scriptures might prove to you, as to so many before you, a key to open the gates of eternal truth. I thought that they would comfort you, and teach you to love the sublime Being whose exemplary life and pathetic death are no longer unknown to you, since Johanna told you the tale. Nay, I believed that they might presently arouse in you the desire to join us who—"

But here she stopped, for Melissa had fallen on her neck, and while Euryale, much amazed, tried to release herself from her embrace, the girl cried out, half laughing and half in tears:

"It has all come about as you expected! I will live and die faithful to that sublime Saviour, whom I love. I am one of you—yes, mother, now— even before the baptism I long for. For I was weary and heavy-laden above any, and the word of the Lord hath refreshed me. This book has taught me that there is but one path to true happiness, and it is that which is shown us by Jesus Christ. O lady, how much fairer would our life on earth be if what is written here concerning blessedness were stamped on every heart! I feel as though in this hour I had been born again. I do not know myself; and how is it possible that a poor child of man, in such fearful straits and peril as I, and after such a scene of horror, should feel so thankful and so full of the purest gladness?"

The matron clasped her closely in her arms, and her tears bedewed the girl's face while she kissed her again and again; and the cheerfulness which had just now hurt her so deeply she now regarded as a beautiful miracle.

Her time was limited, for she was watched; and she had seized the half-hour during which the town-guard had been mustered in the square to report progress. So Melissa had to be brief, and in a few hasty words she told her friend all that she had seen and heard from her high window, and how the gospel of Matthew had been to her glad tidings; how it had given her comfort and filled her soul with infinite happiness in this the most terrible hour of her life. At this, Euryale also forgot the horrors which surrounded them, till Melissa called her back to the dreadful present; for, with bowed head and in deep anxiety, she desired to know whether her friend knew anything of her relations and Diodoros.

The matron had a painful struggle with herself. It grieved her to inflict anxiety on Melissa's heart, as she stood before her eyes like one of the maidens robed in white and going to be baptized, to whom presents were given on the festive occasion, and who were carefully sheltered from all that could disturb them and destroy the silent, holy joy of their souls. And yet the question must be answered: so she said that of the other two she knew nothing, any more than of Berenike and Diodoros, but that of Philip she had bad news. He was a noble man, and, notwithstanding his errors in the search after truth, well worthy of pity. At this, Melissa in great alarm begged to be told what had happened to her brother, and the lady Euryale confessed that he no longer walked among the living, but she did not relate the manner of his death; and she bade the weeping girl to seek for comfort from the Friend of all who grieve and whom she now knew; but to keep herself prepared for the worst, in full assurance that none are tried beyond what they are able to bear, for that the fury of the bloodthirsty tyrant hung like a black cloud over Alexandria and its inhabitants. She herself, merely by coming to Melissa, exposed herself to great danger, and she could not see her again till the morrow. To Melissa's inquiry as to whether it was her refusal to be his which had brought such a fearful fate on the innocent youth of Alexandria, Euryale could reply in the negative; for she had heard from her husband that it was a foul epigram written by a pupil of the Museum which had led to Caesar's outbreak of rage.

With a few soothing words she pointed to a basket of food which she had brought with her, showed the girl once more the secret door, and embraced her at parting as fondly as though Heaven had restored to her in Melissa the daughter she had lost.

## **CHAPTER XXXIII.**

Melissa was once more alone.

She now knew that Philip walked no longer among the living. He must have fallen a victim to the fury of the monster, but the thought that he might have been slain for her sake left her mind no peace.

She felt that with the death of this youth—so gifted, and so dear to her—a corner-stone had been torn from the paternal house.

In the loving circle that surrounded her, death had made another gap which yawned before her, dismal and void.

One storm more, and what was left standing would fall with the rest.

Her tears flowed fast, and the torturing thought that the emperor had slain her brother as a punishment for his sister's flight pierced her to the heart.

Now she belonged indeed to the afflicted and oppressed; and as yesterday, in the trouble of her soul, she had called upon Jesus Christ, though she scarcely knew of Him then, so now she lifted up her heart to Him who had become her friend, praying to Him to remember His promise of comfort when she came to Him weary and heavy-laden.

And while she tried to realize the nature of the Saviour who had laid down His life for others, she remembered all she had dared for her father and brothers, and what fate had been her's during the time since; and she felt she might acknowledge to herself that even if Philip had met his death because of Caracalla's anger toward her, at any rate she would never have approached Caesar had she not wanted to save her father and brothers. She had never glossed over any wrong-doing of her own; but her open and truthful nature was just as little inclined to the torment of self-reproach when she was not absolutely certain of having committed a fault.

In this case she was not quite sure of herself; but she now remembered a saying of Euryale and Andreas which she had not understood before. Jesus Christ, it said, had taken upon Himself the sins of the world. If she understood its meaning aright, the merciful Lord would surely forgive her a sin which she had committed unwittingly and in no wise for her own advantage. Her prayer grew more and more to be a discourse with her new-found friend; and, as she finished, she felt absolutely sure that He at least understood her and was not angry with her. This reassured her, but her cheerfulness had fled, and she could read no more.

Deeply troubled, and more and more distressed as time went on by new disturbing thoughts, she hurriedly paced from side to side of the long, narrow chamber in the gathering darkness. The revolting images around her began to affect her unbearably once more. Near her chamber, to the west, lay the race-course with its horrible scenes; so she turned to the eastern end that looked out upon the street of Hermes, where the sight could scarcely be so terrible as from the windows at the opposite end. But she was mistaken; for, looking down upon the pavement, she perceived that this, too, swam with blood, and that the ground was covered with corpses.

Seized with a sudden horror, she flew back into the middle of the long room. There she remained standing, for the scene of slaughter in the west was still more appalling than that from which she had just fled. She could not help wondering who could here have fallen a victim to the tyrant after he had swept all the youth of the city off the face of the earth.

The evening sun cast long shafts of golden light across the race-course and in at the western window, and Melissa knew how quickly the night fell in Alexandria. If she wished to find out who they were who had been sacrificed to the fury of the tyrant, it must be done at once, for the immense building of the temple already cast long shadows. Determined to force herself to look out, she walked quickly to the eastern window and gazed below. But it was some moments before she had the fortitude to distinguish one form from another; they melted before her reluctant eyes into one repulsive mass.

At last she succeeded in looking more calmly and critically.

Not heaped on one another as on the racecourse, hundreds of Caracalla's victims lay scattered separately over the open square as far as the entrance to the street of Hermes. Here lay an old man with a thick beard, probably a Syrian or a Jew; there, his dress betraying him, a seaman; and farther on-no, she could not be mistaken—the youthful corpse that lay so motionless just beneath the window was that of Myrtilos, a friend of Philip, and, like him, a member of the Museum.

In a fresh fit of terror she was going to flee again into her dreadful hiding-place, when she caught sight of a figure leaning against the basin of the beautiful marble fountain just in front of the eastern side-door of the Serapeum, and immediately below her. The figure moved, and could therefore only be wounded, not dead; and round the head was bound a white cloth, reminding her of her beloved, and thereby attracting her attention. The youth moved again, turning his face upward, and with a low cry she leaned farther forward and gazed and gazed, unmindful of the danger of being seen and falling a victim to the tyrant's fury. The wounded, living man—there, he had moved again—was no other than Diodoros, her lover!

Till the last glimmer of light disappeared she stood at the window with bated breath, and eyes fixed upon him. No faintest movement of his escaped her, and at each one, trembling with awakening hope, she thanked Heaven and prayed for his rescue. At length the growing darkness hid him from her sight. With every instant the night deepened, and without thinking, without stopping to reflect—driven on by one absorbing thought—she felt her way back to her couch, beside which stood the lamp and fire-stick, and lighted the wick; then, inspired with new courage at the thought of rescuing her lover from death, she considered for a moment what had best be done.

It was easy for her to get out. She had a little money with her; on her peplos she wore a clasp that

had once belonged to her mother, with two gems in it from her father's hand, and on her rounded arm a golden circlet. With these she could buy help. The only thing now was to disguise herself.

On the great, smoke-blackened metal plate over which those mystics passed who had to walk through fire, there lay plenty of charcoal, and yonder hung robes of every description. The next moment she had thrown off her own, in order to blacken her glistening white limbs and her face with soot. Among the sewing materials which the lady Euryale had laid beside the scrolls was a pair of scissors. These the girl seized, and with quick, remorseless hand cut off the long, thick locks that were her brother's and her lover's delight. Then she chose out a chiton, which, reaching only to her knees, gave her the appearance of a boy. Her breath came fast and her hands trembled, but she was already on her way to the secret door through which she should flee from this place of horror, when she came to a standstill, shaking her head gently. She had looked around her, and the wild disorder she was leaving behind her in the little room went against her womanly feelings. But though this feeling would not in itself have kept her back, it warned her to steady her mind before leaving the refuge her friend had accorded to her. Thoughtful, and accustomed to have regard for others, she realized at once how dangerous it might prove to Euryale if these unmistakable traces of her presence there should be discovered by an enemy. The kindness of her motherly friend should not bring misfortune upon her. With active presence of mind she gathered up her garments from the floor, swept the long locks of hair together, and threw them all, with the sewing and the basket that had contained the food, into the stove on the hearth, and set them alight. The scissors she took with her as a weapon in case of need.

Then, laying the books of the gospels beside the other manuscripts, and casting a last look round to assure herself that every sign of her presence had been destroyed, she addressed one more prayer to the tender Comforter of the afflicted, who has promised to save those that are in danger.

She then opened the secret door.

With a beating heart, and yet far more conscious of the desire to save her lover while there was yet time than of the danger into which she was rushing headlong, she flitted down the hidden staircase as lightly as a child at play. So much time had been lost in clearing the room—and yet she could not have left it so!

She had not forgotten where to press, so that the heavy stone which closed the entrance should move aside; but as she sprang from the last step her lamp had blown out, and blackest darkness concealed the surface of the smooth granite wall which lay between her and the street.

What if, when she got outside, she should be seen by the lictors or spies?

At this thought fear overcame her for the first time. As she felt about the door her hands trembled and beads of perspiration stood upon her brow. But she must go to her wounded lover! When any one was bleeding to death every moment might bring the terrible "too late." It meant Diodoros's death if she did not succeed in opening the granite slab.

She took her hands from the stone and forced herself, with the whole strength of her will, to be calm.

Where had been the place by pressing which the granite might be moved?

It must have been high up on the right side. She carefully followed with her fingers the groove in which the stone lay, and having recalled its shape by her sense of touch, she began her search anew. Suddenly she felt something beneath her finger-tips that was colder than the stone. She had found the metal bolt! With a deep breath, and without stopping to think of what might be before her, she pressed the spring; the slab turned—one step—and she was in the street between the racecourse and the Serapeum.

All was still around her. Not a sound was to be heard except from the square to the north of the temple, where all who carried arms had gathered together to enjoy the wine which flowed in streams as a mark of the emperor's approbation, and from the inner circle of the race-course voices were audible. Of the citizens not one dared show himself in the streets, although the butchery had ceased at sundown. All who did not carry the imperial arms had shut themselves up in their houses, and the streets and squares were deserted since the soldiers had assembled in front of the Serapeum.

No one noticed Melissa. The dangers that threatened her from afar troubled her but little. She only knew that she must go on—go on as fast as her feet would carry her, if she were to reach her loved one in time.

Skirting the south side of the temple, in order to get to the fountain, her chief thought was to keep in its shadow. The moon had not yet risen, and they had forgotten to light either the pitch-pans or the torches which usually burned in front of the south facade of the temple. They had been too busy with

other matters to-day, and now they needed all hands in heaping the bodies together. The men whose voices sounded across to her from the race-course had already begun the work. On—she must hurry on!

But it was not so easy as last night. Her light sandals were wet through, and there was ever a fresh impediment in her way. She knew what it was that had wetted her foot—blood—noble, human blood—and every obstacle against which she stumbled was a human body. But she would not let herself dwell upon it, and hurried on as though they were but water and stones, ever seeing before her the image of the wounded youth who leaned against the basin.

Thus she reached the east side of the temple. Already she could hear the splashing of the fountain, she saw the marble gleaming through the darkness, and began seeking for the spot where she had seen her lover. She suddenly stopped short; at the same time as herself, lights faint and bright were coming along from the south, from the entrance of the street that led to Rhakotis, and down to the water. She was in the middle of the street, without a possibility of concealing herself except in one of the niches of the Serapeum.

Should she abandon him? She must go on, and to seek protection in the outer wall of the temple meant turning back. So she stood still and held her breath as she watched the advancing lights. Now they stopped. She heard the rattle of arms and men's voices. The lantern-bearers were being detained by the watch. They were the first soldiers she had seen, the others being engaged in drinking, or in the work on the race-course. Would the soldiers find her, too? But, no! They moved on, the torch-bearers in front, toward the street of Hermes.

Who were those people who went wandering about among the slain, turning first to this side and then to that, as if searching for something?

They could not be robbing the dead, or the watch would have seized them.

Now they came quite close to her, and she trembled with fright, for one of them was a soldier. The light of the lantern shone upon his armor. He went before a man and two lads who were following a laden ass, and in one of them Melissa recognized with beating heart a garden slave of Polybius, who had often done her a service.

And now she took courage to look more closely at the man—and it was—yes, even in the peasant's clothes he wore he could not deceive her quick eyes—it was Andreas!

She felt that every breath that came from her young bosom must be a prayer of thanksgiving; nor was it long before the freedman recognized Melissa in the light-footed black boy who seemed to spring from the earth in order to show them the way, and he, too, felt as if a miracle had been wrought.

Like fair flowers that spring up round a scaffold over which the hungry ravens croak and hover, so here, in the midst of death and horror, joy and hope began to blossom in thankful hearts. Diodoros lived! No word—only a fleeting pressure of the hand and a quick look passed between the elderly man and the maiden—who looked like a boy scarcely passed his school-days—to show what they felt as they knelt beside the wounded youth and bound up the deep gash in his shoulder dealt by the sword that had felled him.

A little while afterward, Andreas drew from the basket which the ass carried, and from which he had already taken bandages and medicine, a light litter of matting. He then lifted Melissa on to the back of the beast of burden, and they all moved onward.

The sights that surrounded them as long as they were near the Serapeum forced her to close her eyes, especially when the ass had to walk round some obstruction, or when it and its guide waded through slimy pools. She could not forget that they were red, nor whence they came; and this ride brought her moments in which she thought to expire of shuddering horror and sorrow and wrath.

Not till they reached a quiet lane in Rhakotis, where they could advance without let or hindrance, did she open her eyes. But a strange, heavy pain oppressed her that she had never felt before, and her head burned so that she could scarcely see Andreas and the two slaves, who, strong in the joy of knowing that their young lord was alive, carried Diodoros steadily along in the litter. The soldier—it was the centurion Martialis, who had been banished to the Pontus—still accompanied them, but Melissa's aching head pained her so much that she did not think of asking who he was or why he was with them.

Once or twice she felt impelled to ask whither they were taking her, but she had not the power to raise her voice. When Andreas came to her side and pointed to the centurion, saying that without him he would never have succeeded in saving her beloved, she heard it only as a hollow murmur, without any consciousness of its meaning. Indeed, she wished rather that the freedman would keep silent when

he began explaining his opportune arrival at the fountain, which must seem such a miracle to her.

The slave-brand on his arm had enabled him to penetrate into the house of Seleukus, where he hoped to obtain news of her. There Johanna had led him to Alexander, and with the Aurelians he had found the centurion and the slave Argutis. Argutis had just returned from the lady Euryale, and swore that he had seen the wounded Diodoros. Andreas had then declared his intention of bringing the son of his former master to a place of safety, and the centurion had been prevailed upon by the young tribunes to open a way for the freedman through the sentinels. The gardeners of Polybius, with their ass, had been detained in an inn on this side of Lake Mareotis by the closing of the harbor, and Andreas had taken the precaution of making use of them. Had it not been for the centurion, who was known to the other soldiers, the watch would never have allowed the freedman to get so far as the fountain; Andreas therefore begged Melissa to thank their preserver. But his words fell upon her ear unnoticed, and when the strange soldier left her to devote himself again to Diodoros she breathed more freely, for his rapidly spoken words hurt her.

If he would only not come again—only not speak to her!

She had even ceased to look for her lover. Her one desire was to see and hear nothing. When she did force herself to raise her heavy, throbbing lids, she noticed that they were passing poor-looking houses which she never remembered seeing before. She fancied, however, from the damp wind that blew in her face and relieved her burning head, that they must be nearing the lake or the sea. Surely that was a fishing-net hanging yonder on the fence round a but on which the light of the lantern fell. But perhaps it was something quite different, for the images that passed before her heavy eyes began to mingle confusedly, to repeat themselves, and be surrounded by a ring of rainbow colors. Her head had grown so heavy that her mind had lost all sense of hope or fear; only her thoughts stirred faintly as the procession moved on and on through the darkness, without a pause for rest.

When they had passed the last of the huts she managed to look upward.

The evening star stood out clear against the sky, and she seemed to see the other stars revolving quickly round it.

Her mouth was painful and parched, and more than once she had been seized with giddiness, which forced her to hold tightly to the saddle.

Now they stopped beside a large piece of water, and she felt strangely well and light of heart. That must be the dear, familiar lake. And there stood Agatha waving to her, and at her side the lady Euryale under the spreading shade of a mighty palm. Bright sunshine flooded them both, and yet it was the night; for there was the evening star beaming down upon her.

How could that be?

Yet, when she tried to understand it all, her head pained her so, and she turned so giddy, that she clutched the neck of the ass to save herself from falling.

When she raised herself again she saw a large boat, out of which several people came to meet them, the foremost of them a tall man in a long, white garment. That was no dream, she was quite certain. And yet—why did the lantern which one of them held aloft burn her face so much and not his? Oh, how it burned!

Everything turned in a circle round her, and grew dark before her eyes.

But not for long; suddenly it became light as day, and she heard a deep and friendly voice calling her by name. She answered without fear, "Here am I," and saw before her a stranger in a long, white robe, of lofty yet gentle aspect, just as she had imagined the crucified Saviour of the Christians, and in her ear sounded the loving message with which he bids the weary and heavy-laden come to him that he may give them rest.

How gentle, how consoling, and how full of gracious promise were the words, and how gladly would she do his bidding! "Here am I!" she cried again, and saw the arms of the white-robed man stretched out to receive her. She staggered toward him, and felt a firm and manly hand clasp hers, and then rest in blessing on her throbbing brow. All grew dark again before her, and she saw and heard no more.

Andreas had lifted her from the ass and supported her, while the two Christians thanked the soldier for his timely aid.

Having assured them that he had had no thought of helping them, but only of obeying his superior officers, he disappeared into the night, and the freedman lifted Melissa in his strong arms and carried

her down to Zeno's boat, which was waiting for them.

"Her mind wanders," said the freedman, with a loving look at the precious burden in his arms. "Her spirit is strong, but the shocks she has sustained this day have been too much for her. "Thou wilt give me rest," were her last words before losing consciousness. Can she have been thinking of the promise of the Saviour?"

"If not," answered the deep, musical voice of Zeno, "we will show her Him who called the little children to Him, and the weary and heavy-laden. She belongs to them, and she will see that the Lord fulfills what He so lovingly promises."

"One of Christ's sayings, and repeated by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, has taken great hold upon her," added Andreas, "and I think that in these days of terror, for her, too, the fullness of time has come."

As he spoke he stepped on to the plank which led to the boat from the shore: Diodoros had already been placed on board. When Andreas laid the girl on the cushioned seat in the little cabin, he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, "Now we are safe!"

## **ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:**

He has the gift of being easily consoled

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A THORNY PATH — VOLUME 11 \*\*\*

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