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THE BRIDE OF THE NILE

By Georg Ebers

Volume 2.

CHAPTER VI.

Pangs of soul and doubtings of conscience had, in fact, prompted the governor to purchase the hanging and he therefore might have been glad if it had cost him still dearer. The greater the gift the better founded his hope of grace and favor from the recipient! And he had grounds for being uneasy and for asking himself whether he had acted rightly. Revenge was no Christian virtue, but to let the evil done to him by the Melchites go unpunished when the opportunity offered for crushing them was more than he could bring himself to. Nay, what father whose two bright young sons had been murdered, but would have done as he did? That fearful blow had struck him in a vital spot. Since that day he had felt himself slowly dying; and that sense of weakness, those desperate tremors, the discomforts and suffering which blighted every hour of his life, were also to be set down to the account of the Melchite tyrants.

His waning powers had indeed only been kept up by his original vigor and his burning thirst for revenge, and fate had allowed him to quench it in a way which, as time went on, seemed too absolute to his peace-loving nature. Though not indeed by his act, still with his complicity he saw the Byzantine Empire bereft of the rich province which Caesar had entrusted to his rule, saw the Greeks and everything that bore the name of Melchite driven out of Egypt with ignominy--though he would gladly have prevented it--in many places slain like dogs by the furious populace who hailed the Moslems as their deliverers.

Thus all the evil he had invoked on the murderers of his children and the oppressors and torturers of his people had come upon them; his revenge was complete. But, in the midst of his satisfaction at this strange fulfilment of the fervent wish of years, his conscience had lifted up its voice; new, and hitherto unknown terrors had come upon him. He lacked the strength of mind to be a hero or a reformer. Too great an event had been wrought through his agency, too fearful a doom visited on thousands of men! The Christian Faith--to him the highest consideration--had been too greatly imperilled by his act, for the thought that he had caused all this to be calmly endurable. The responsibility proved too heavy for his shoulders; and whenever he repeated to himself that it was not he who had invited the Arabs into the land, and that he must have been crushed in the attempt to repel them, he could hear voices all round him denouncing

him as the man who had surrendered his native land to them, and he fancied himself environed by dangers--believing those who spoke to him of assassins sent forth by the Byzantines to kill him.--But even more appalling, was his dread of the wrath of Heaven against the man who had betrayed a Christian country to the Infidels. Even his consciousness of having been, all his life long, a right-minded, just man could not fortify him against this terror; there was but one thing which could raise his quelled spirit: the white pillules which had long been as indispensable to him as air and water. The kind-hearted old bishop of Memphis, Plotinus, and his clergy had forgiveness for all; the Patriarch Benjamin, on the contrary, had treated him as a reprobate sentenced to eternal damnation, though at the time of this prelate's exile in the desert he had hailed the Arabs as their deliverers from the tyranny of the Melchites, and though George had principally contributed to his recall and reinstatement, and had therefore counted on his support. And, although the Mukaukas could clearly see through the secondary motives which influenced the Patriarch, he nevertheless believed that Benjamin's office as Shepherd of souls gave him power to close the Gates of Heaven against any sheep in his flock.

The more firmly the Arabs took root in his land, the wiser their rule, and the, more numerous the Egyptian converts from the Cross to the Crescent, the greater he deemed his guilt; and when, after the accomplishment of his work of vengeance--his double treason as the Greeks called it--instead of the wrath of God, everything fell to his lot which men call happiness and the favors of fortune, the superstitious man feared lest this was the wages of the Devil, into whose clutches his hasty compact with the Moslems had driven so many Christian souls.

He had unexpectedly fallen heir to two vast estates, and his excavators in the Necropolis had found more gold in the old heathen tombs than all the others put together. The Moslem Khaliff and his viceroy had left him in office and shown him friendship and respect; the bulaites--[Town councillors]--of the town had given him the cognomen of "the Just" by acclamation of the whole municipality; his lands had never yielded greater revenues; he received letters from his son's widow in her convent full of happiness over the new and higher aims in life that she had found; his grandchild, her daughter, was a creature whose bright and lovely blossoming was a joy even to strangers; his son's frequent epistles from Constantinople assured him that he was making progress in all respects; and he did not forget his parents; for he was never weary of reporting to them, of his own free impulse, every, pleasure he enjoyed and every success he won.

Thus even in a foreign land he had lived with the father and mother who to him were all that was noblest and dearest.

And Paula! Though his wife could not feel warmly towards her the old man regarded her presence in the house as a happy dispensation to which he owed many a pleasant hour, not only over the draughts-board.

All these things might indeed be the wages of Satan; but if indeed it were so, he--George the Mukaukas--would show the Evil One that he was no

servant of his, but devoted to the Saviour in whose mercy he trusted. With what fervent gratitude to the Almighty was his soul filled for the return of such a son! Every impulse of his being urged him to give expression to this feeling; his terrors and gratitude alike prompted him to spend so vast a sum in order to dedicate a matchless gift to the Church of Christ. He viewed himself as a prisoner of war whose ransom has just been paid, as he handed to the merchant the tablet with the order for the money; and when he was carried to bed, and his wife was not yet weary of thanking him for his pious intention, he felt happier and more light-hearted than he had done for many years. Generally he could hear Paula walking up and down her room which was over his; for she went late to rest, and in the silence of the night would indulge in sweet and painful memories. How many loved ones a cruel fate had snatched from her! Father, brother, her nearest relations and friends; all at once, by the hand of the Moslems to whom he had abandoned her native land almost without resistance.

"I do not hear Paula to-night," he remarked, glancing up as though he missed something. "The poor child has no doubt gone to bed early after what passed."

"Leave her alone!" said Neforis who did not like to be interrupted in her jubilant effusiveness, and she shrugged her shoulders angrily. "How she behaved herself again! We have heard a great deal too much about charity, and though I do not want to boast of my own I am very ready to exercise it--indeed, it is no more than my duty to show every kindness to a destitute relation of yours. But this girl! She tries me too far, and after all I am no more than human. I can have no pleasure in her presence; if she comes into the room I feel as though misfortune had crossed the threshold. Besides!--You never see such things; but Orion thinks of her a great deal more than is good. I only wish she had been safe out of the house!"

"Neforis!" her husband said in mild reproach; and he would have reproved her more sharply but that since he had become a slave to opium he had lost all power of asserting himself vigorously whether in small matters or great.

Ere long the Mukaukas had fallen into an uneasy sleep; but he opened his eyes more frequently than usual. He missed the light footfall overhead to which he had been accustomed for these two years past; but she who was wont to pace the floor above half the night through had not gone to rest as he supposed. After the events of the evening she had indeed retired to her room with tingling cheeks and burning eyes; but the slave-girls, who paid little attention to a guest who was no more than endured and looked on askance by their mistress, had neglected to open her window-shutters after sundown, as she had requested, and the room was oppressively sultry and airless. The wooden shutters felt hot to the touch, so did the linen sheets over the wool mattresses. The water in her jug, and even the handkerchief she took up were warm. To an Egyptian all this would have been a matter of course; but the native of Damascus had always passed the summer in her father's country house on the heights of Lebanon, in cool and lucent shade, and the all-pervading heat of the

past day had been to her intolerable.

Outside it was pleasant now; so without much reflection she pushed open the shutter, wrapped a long, dark-hued kerchief about her head and stole down the steep steps and out through a little side door into the court-yard.

There she drew a deep breath and spread out her arms longingly, as though she would fain fly far, far from thence; but then she dropped them again and looked about her. It was not the want of fresh air alone that had brought her out; no, what she most craved for was to open her oppressed and rebellious heart to another; and here, in the servants' quarters, there were two souls, one of which knew, understood and loved her, while the other was as devoted to her as a faithful dog, and did errands for her which were to be kept hidden from the governor's house and its inhabitants.

The first was her nurse who had accompanied her to Egypt; the other was a freed slave, her father's head groom, who had escorted the women with his son, a lad, giving them shelter when, after the massacre of Abyla, they had ventured out of their hiding-place, and after lurking for some time in the valley of Lebanon, had found no better issue than to fly to Egypt and put themselves under the protection of the Mukaukas, whose sister had been Paula's father's first wife. She herself was the child of his second marriage with a Syrian of high rank, a relation of the Emperor Heraclius, who had died, quite young, shortly after Paula's birth.

Both these servants had been parted from her. Perpetua, the nurse, had been found useful by the governor's wife, who soon discovered that she was particularly skilled in weaving and who had made her superintendent of the slave-girls employed at the loom; the old woman had willingly undertaken the duties though she herself was free-born, for her first point in life was to remain near her beloved foster-child. Hiram too, the groom, and his son had found their place among the Mukaukas' household; in the first instance to take charge of the five horses from her father's stable which had brought the fugitives to Egypt, but afterwards--for the governor was not slow to discern his skill in such matters--as a leech for all sorts of beasts, and as an adviser in purchasing horses.

Paula wanted to speak with them both, and she knew exactly where to find them; but she could not get to them without exposing herself to much that was unpleasant, for the governor's free retainers and their friends, not to mention the guard of soldiers who, now that the gates were closed, were still sitting in parties to gossip; they would certainly not break up for some time yet, since the slaves were only now bringing out the soldiers' supper.

The clatter in the court-yard was unceasing, for every one who was free to come out was enjoying the coolness of the night. Among them there were no slaves; these had been sent to their quarters when the gates were shut; but even in their dwellings voices were still audible.

With a beating heart Paula tried to see and hear all that came within the ken of her keen eyes and ears. The growing moon lighted up half the enclosure, the rest, so far as the shadow fell, lay in darkness. But in the middle of a large semi-circle of free servants a fire was blazing, throwing a fitful light on their brown faces; and now and again, as fresh pine-cones were thrown in, it flared up and illuminated even the darker half of the space before her. This added to her trepidation; she had to cross the court-yard, as she hoped, unseen; for innocent and natural as her proceedings were, she knew that her uncle's wife would put a wrong construction on her nocturnal expedition.

At first Neforis had begged her husband to assist Paula in her search for her father, of whose death no one had any positive assurance. But his wife's urgency had not been needed: the Mukaukas, of his own free will, had for a whole year done everything in his power to learn the truth as to the lost man's end, from Christian or Moslem, till, many months since, Neforis had declared that any further exertions in the matter were mere folly, and her weak-willed husband had soon been brought to share her views and give up the search for the missing hero. He had secured for Paula, not without some personal sacrifice, much of her father's property, had sold the landed estates to advantage, collected outstanding debts wherever it was still possible, and was anxious to lay before her a statement of what he had recovered for her. But she knew that her interests were safe in his hands and was satisfied to learn that, though she was not rich in the eyes of this Egyptian Croesus, she was possessed of a considerable fortune. When once and again she had asked for a portion of it to prosecute her search, the Mukaukas at once caused it to be paid to her; but the third time he refused, with the best intentions but quite firmly, to yield to her wishes. He said he was her Kyrios and natural guardian, and explained that it was his duty to hinder her from dissipating a fortune which she might some day find a boon or indeed indispensable, in pursuit of a phantom--for that was what this search had long since become.

[Kyrios: The woman's legal proxy, who represented her in courts of justice. His presence gave her equal rights with a man in the eyes of the Law.]

The money she had already spent he had replaced out of his own coffers.

This, she felt, was a noble action; still she urged him again and again to grant her wish, but always in vain. He laid his hand with firm determination on the wealth in his charge and would not allow her another solidus for the sole and dearest aim of her life.

She seemed to submit; but her purpose of spending her all to recover any trace of her lost parent never wavered in her determined soul. She had sold a string of pearls, and for the price, her faithful Hiram had been able first to make a long journey himself and then to send out a number of messengers into various lands. By this time one at least might very well have reached home with some news, and she must see the freed-man.

But how could she get to him undetected? For some minutes she stood

watching and listening for a favorable moment for crossing the courtyard. Suddenly a blaze lighted up a face--it was Hiram's.

At this moment the merry semi-circle laughed loudly as with one voice; she hastily made up her mind--drew her kerchief closer over her face, ran quickly along the darker half of the quadrangle and, stooping low, hurried across the moonlight towards the slaves' quarters.

At the entrance she paused; her heart throbbed violently. Had she been observed? No.--There was not a cry, not a following footstep--every dog knew her; the soldiers who were commonly on guard here had quitted their posts and were sitting with their comrades round the fire.

The long building to the left was the weaving shop and her nurse Perpetua lived there, in the upper story. But even here she must be cautious, for the governor's wife often came out to give her orders to the workwomen, and to see and criticise the produce of the hundred looms which were always in motion, early and late. If she should be seen, one of the weavers might only too probably betray the fact of her nocturnal visit. They had not yet gone to rest, for loud laughter fell upon her ear from the large sheds, open on all sides, which stood over the dyers' vats. This class of the governor's people were also enjoying the cool night after the fierce heat of the day, and the girls too had lighted a fire.

Paula must pass them in full moonshine--but not just yet; and she crouched close to the straw thatch which stretched over the huge clay water-jars placed here for the slave-girls to get drink from. It cast a dark triangular shadow on the dusty ground that gleamed in the moonlight, and thus screened her from the gaze of the girls, while she could hear and see what was going on in the sheds.

The dreadful day of torture ending in a harsh discord was at end; and behind it she looked back on a few blissful hours full of the promise of new happiness;--beyond these lay a long period of humiliation, the sequel of a terrible disaster. How bright and sunny had her childhood been, how delightful her early youth! For long years of her life she had waked every morning to new joys, and gone to rest every evening with sincere and fervent thanksgivings, that had welled from her soul as freely and naturally as perfume from a rose. How often had she shaken her head in perplexed unbelief when she heard life spoken of as a vale of sorrows, and the lot of man bewailed as lamentable. Now she knew better; and in many a lonely hour, in many a sleepless night, she had asked herself whether He could, indeed, be a kind and fatherly-loving God who could let a child be born and grow up, and fill its soul with every hope, and then bereave it of everything that was dear and desirable--even of hope.

But the hapless girl had been piously brought up; she could still believe and pray; and lately it had seemed as though Heaven would grant that for which her tender heart most longed: the love of a beloved and love-worthy man. And now--now?

There she stood with an inconsolable sense of bereavement--empty-hearted; and if she had been miserable before Orion's return, now she was far more

so; for whereas she had then been lonely she was now defrauded--she, the daughter of Thomas, the relation and inmate of the wealthiest house in the country; and close to her, from the rough hewn, dirty dyers' sheds such clear and happy laughter rang out from a troop of wretched slave wenches, always liable to the blows of the overseer's rod, that she could not help listening and turning to look at the girls on whom such an overflow of high spirits and light-heartedness was bestowed.

A large party had collected under the wide palm-thatched roof of the dyeing shed--pretty and ugly, brown and fair, tall and short; some upright and some bent by toil at the loom from early youth, but all young; not one more than eighteen years old. Slaves were capital, bearing interest in the form of work and of children. Every slave girl was married to a slave as soon as she was old enough. Girls and married women alike were employed in the weaving shop, but the married ones slept in separate quarters with their husbands and children, while the maids passed the night in large sleeping-barracks adjoining the worksheds. They were now enjoying the evening respite and had gathered in two groups. One party were watching an Egyptian girl who was scribbling sketches on a tablet; the others were amusing themselves with a simple game. This consisted in each one in turn flinging her shoe over her head. If it flew beyond a chalk-line to which she turned her back she was destined soon to marry the man she loved; if it fell between her and the mark she must yet have patience, or would be united to a companion she did not care for.

The girl who was drawing, and round whom at least twenty others were crowded, was a designer of patterns for weaving; she had too the gift which had characterized her heathen ancestors, of representing faces in profile, with a few simple lines, in such a way that, though often comically distorted, they were easily recognizable. She was executing these works of art on a wax tablet with a copper stylus, and the others were to guess for whom they were meant.

One girl only sat by herself by the furthest post of the shed, and gazed silently into her lap.

Paula looked on and could understand everything that was going forward, though no coherent sentence was uttered and there was nothing to be heard but laughter--loud, hearty, irresistible mirth. When a girl threw the shoe far enough the youthful crowd laughed with all their might, each one shouting the name of some one who was to marry her successful companion; if the shoe fell within the line they laughed even louder than before, and called out the names of all the oldest and dirtiest slaves. A dusky Syrian had failed to hit the mark, but she boldly seized the chalk and drew a fresh line between herself and the shoe so that it lay beyond, at any rate; and their merriment reached a climax when a number of them rushed up to wipe out the new line, a saucy, crisp-haired Nubian tossed the shoe in the air and caught it again, while the rest could not cease for delight in such a good joke and cried every name they could think of as that of the lover for whom their companion had so boldly seized a spoke in Fortune's wheel.

Some spirit of mirth seemed to have taken up his quarters in the draughty

shed; the group round the sketcher was not less noisy than the other. If a likeness was recognized they were all triumphant, if not they cried the names of this or that one for whom it might be intended. A storm of applause greeted a successful caricature of the severest of the overseers. All who saw it held their sides for laughing, and great was the uproar when one of the girls snatched away the tablet and the rest fell upon her to scuffle for it.

Paula had watched all this at first with distant amazement, shaking her head. How could they find so much pleasure in such folly, in such senseless amusements? When she was but a little child even she, of course, could laugh at nothing, and these grown-up girls, in their ignorance and the narrow limitations of their minds, were they not one and all children still? The walls of the governor's house enclosed their world, they never looked beyond the present moment--just like children; and so, like children, they could laugh.

"Fate," thought she, "at this moment indemnifies them for the misfortune of their birth and for a thousand days of misery, and presently they will go tired and happy to bed. I could envy these poor creatures! If it were permissible I would join them and be a child again."

The comic portrait of the overseer was by this time finished, and a short, stout wench burst into a fit of uproarious and unquenchable laughter before any of the rest. It came so naturally, too, from the very depths of her plump little body that Paula, who had certainly not come hither to be gay, suddenly caught the infection and had to laugh whether she would or no. Sorrow and anxiety were suddenly forgotten, thought and calculation were far from her; for some minutes she felt nothing but that she, too, was laughing heartily, irrepressibly, like the young healthful human creature that she was. Ah, how good it was thus to forget herself for once! She did not put this into words, but she felt it, and she laughed afresh when the girl who had been sitting apart joined the others, and exclaimed something which was unintelligible to Paula, but which gave a new impetus to their mirth.

The tall slight form of this maiden was now standing by the fire. Paula had never seen her before and yet she was by far the handsomest of them all; but she did not look happy and perhaps was in some pain, for she had a handkerchief over her head which was tied at the top over the thick fair hair as though she had the toothache. As she looked at her Paula recovered herself, and as soon as she began to think merriment was at an end. The slave-girls were not of this mind; but their laughter was less innocent and frank than it had been; for it had found an object which they would have done better to pass by.

The girl with the handkerchief over her head was a slave too, but she had only lately come into the weaving-sheds after being employed for a long time at needle work under two old women, widows of slaves. She had been brought as an infant from Persia to Alexandria with her mother, by the troops of Heraclius, after the conquest of Chosroes II.; and they had been bought together for the Mukaukas. When her little one was but thirteen the mother died under the yoke to which she was not born; the

child was a sweet little girl with a skin as white as the swan and thick golden hair, which now shone with strange splendor in the firelight. Orion had remarked her before his journey, and fascinated by the beauty of the Persian girl, had wished to have her for his own. Servants and officials, in unscrupulous collusion, had managed to transport her to a country-house belonging to the Mukaukas on the other side of the Nile, and there Orion had been able to visit her undisturbed as often as fancy prompted him. The slave-girl, scarcely yet sixteen, ignorant and unprotected, had not dared nor desired to resist her master's handsome son, and when Orion had set out for Constantinople--heedless and weary already of the girl who had nothing to give him but her beauty--Dame Neforis found out her connection with her son and ordered the head overseer to take care that the unhappy girl should not "ply her seductive arts" any more. The man had carried out her instructions by condemning the fair Persian, according to an ancient custom, to have her ears cut off. After this cruel punishment the mutilated beauty sank into a state of melancholy madness, and although the exorcists of the Church and other thaumaturgists had vainly endeavored to expel the demon of madness, she remained as before: a gentle, good-humored creature, quiet and diligent at her work, under the women who had charge of her, and now in the common work-shop. It was only when she was idle that her craziness became evident, and of this the other girls took advantage for their own amusement.

They now led Mandane to the fire, and with farcical reverence requested her to be seated on her throne--an empty color cask, for she suffered under the strange permanent delusion that she was the wife of the Mukaukas George. They laughingly did her homage, craved some favor or made enquiries as to her husband's health and the state of her affairs. Hitherto a decent instinct of reserve had kept these poor ignorant creatures from mentioning Orion's name in her presence, but now a woolly-headed negress, a lean, spiteful hussy, went up to her, and said with a horrible grimace:

"Oh, mistress, and where is your little son Orion?" The crazy girl did not seem startled by the question; she replied very gravely: "I have married him to the emperor's daughter at Constantinople."

"Hey day! A splendid match!" exclaimed the black girl. "Did you know that the young lord was here again? He has brought home his grand wife to you no doubt, and we shall see purple and crowns in these parts!"

These words brought a deep flush into the poor creature's face. She anxiously pressed her hands on the bandage that covered her ears and said: "Really Has he really come home?"

"Only quite lately," said another and more good-natured girl, to soothe her.

"Do not believe her!" cried the negress. "And if you want to know the latest news of him: Last night he was out boating on the Nile with the tall Syrian. My brother, the boatman, was among the rowers; and he went on finely with the lady I can tell you, finely. . . ."

"My husband, the great Mukaukas?" asked Mandane, trying to collect her ideas.

"No. Your son Orion, who married the emperor's daughter," laughed the negress.

The crazy girl stood up, looked about with a restless glance, and then, as though she had not fully understood what had been said to her, repeated: "Orion? Handsome Orion?"

"Aye, your sweet son, Orion!" they all shouted, as loud as though she were deaf. Then the usually placable girl, holding her hand over her ear, with the other hit her tormentor such a smack on her thick lips that it resounded, while she shrieked out loud, in shrill tones:

"My son, did you say? My son Orion?--As if you did not know! Why, he was my lover; yes, he himself said he was, and that was why they came and bound me and cut my ears.--But you know it. But I do not love him--I could, I might wish, I . . ." She clenched her fists, and gnashed her white teeth, and went on with panting breath:

"Where is he?--You will not tell me? Wait a bit--only wait. Oh, I am sharp enough, I know you have him here.--Where is he? Orion, Orion, where are you?"

She sprang away, ran through the sheds and lifted the lids of all the color-vats, stooping low to look down into each as if she expected to find him there, while the others roared with laughter.

Most of her companions giggled at this witless behavior; but some, who felt it somewhat uncanny and whom the unhappy girl's bitter cry had struck painfully, drew apart and had already organized some new amusement, when a neat little woman appeared on the scene, clapping her plump hands and exclaiming:

"Enough of laughter--now, to bed, you swarm of bees. The night is over too soon in the morning, and the looms must be rattling again by sunrise. One this way and one that, just like mice when the cat appears. Will you make haste, you night-birds? Come, will you make haste?"

The girls had learnt to obey, and they hurried past the matron to their sleeping-quarters. Perpetua, a woman scarcely past fifty, whose face wore a pleasant expression of mingled shrewdness and kindness, stood pricking up her ears and listening; she heard from the water-shed a peculiar low, long-drawn Wheeuh!--a signal with which she was familiar as that by which the prefect Thomas had been wont to call together his scattered household from the garden of his villa on Mount Lebanon. It was now Paula who gave the whistle to attract her nurse's attention.

Perpetua shook her head anxiously. What could have brought her beloved child to see her at so late an hour? Something serious must have occurred, and with characteristic presence of mind she called out, to

show that she had heard Paula's signal: "Now, make haste. Will you be quick? Wheeuh! girls--wheeuh! Hurry, hurry!"

She followed the last of the slave-girls into the sleeping-room, and when she had assured herself that they were all there but the crazy Persian she enquired where she was. They had all seen her a few minutes ago in the shed; so she bid them good-night and left them, letting it be understood that she was about to seek the missing girl.

CHAPTER VII.

Paula went into her nurse's room, and Perpetua, after a short and vain search for the crazy girl, abandoned her to her fate, not without some small scruples of conscience.

A beautifully-polished copper lamp hung from the ceiling and the little room exactly suited its mistress both were neat and clean, trim and spruce, simple and yet nice. Snowy transparent curtains enclosed the bed as a protection against the mosquitoes, a crucifix of delicate workmanship hung above the head of the couch, and the seats were covered with good cloth of various colors, fag-ends from the looms. Pretty straw mats lay on the floor, and pots of plants, filling the little room with fragrance, stood on the window-sill and in a corner of the room where a clay statuette of the Good Shepherd looked down on a praying-desk.

The door had scarcely closed behind them when Perpetua exclaimed: "But child, how you frightened me! At so late an hour!"

"I felt I must come," said Paula. I could contain myself no longer."

"What, tears?" sighed the woman, and her own bright little eyes twinkled through moisture. "Poor soul, what has happened now?"

She went up to the young girl to stroke her hair, but Paula rushed into her arms, clung passionately round her neck, and burst into loud and bitter weeping. The little matron let her weep for a while; then she released herself, and wiped away her own tears and those of her tall darling, which had fallen on her smooth grey hair. She took Paula's chin in a firm hand and turned her face towards her own, saying tenderly but decidedly: "There, that is enough. You might cry and welcome, for it eases the heart, but that it is so late. Is it the old story: home-sickness, annoyances, and so forth, or is there anything new?"

"Alas, indeed!" replied the girl. She pressed her handkerchief in her hands as she went on with excited vehemence: "I am in the last extremity, I can bear it no longer, I cannot--I cannot! I am no longer a child, and when in the evening you dread the night and in the morning dread the day which must be so wretched, so utterly unendurable. . . ."

"Then you listen to reason, my darling, and say to yourself that of two

evils it is wise to choose the lesser. You must hear me say once more what I have so often represented to you before now: If we renounce our city of refuge here and venture out into the wide world again, what shall we find that will be an improvement?"

"Perhaps nothing but a hovel by a well under a couple of palm-trees; that would satisfy me, if I only had you and could be free--free from every one else!"

"What is this; what does this mean?" muttered the elder woman shaking her head. "You were quite content only the day before yesterday. Something must have. . . ."

"Yes, must have happened and has," interrupted the girl almost beside herself. "My uncle's son.--You were there when he arrived--and I thought, even I firmly believed that he was worthy of such a reception. --I--I--pity me, for I. . . . You do not know what influence that man exercises over hearts.--And I--I believed his eyes, his words, his songs and--yes, I must confess all--even his kisses on this hand! But it was all false, all--a lie, a cruel sport with a weak, simple heart, or even worse--more insulting still! In short, while he was doing all in his power to entrap me--even the slaves in the barge observed it--he was in the very act--I heard it from Dame Neforis, who is only too glad when she can hurt me--in the very act of suing for the hand of that little doll--you know her--little Katharina. She is his betrothed; and yet the shameless wretch dares to carry on his game with me; he has the face...."

Again Paula sobbed aloud; but the older woman did not know how to help in the matter and could only mutter to herself: "Bad, bad--what, this too! --Merciful Heaven!" But she presently recovered herself and said firmly: "This is indeed a new and terrible misfortune; but we have known worse--much, much worse! So hold up your head, and whatever liking you may have in your heart for the traitor, tear it out and trample on it. Your pride will help you; and if you have only just found out what my lord Orion is, you may thank God that things had gone no further between you!" Then she repeated to Paula all that she knew of Orion's misconduct to the frenzied Mandane, and as Paula gave strong utterance to her indignation, she went on:

"Yes, child, he is a man to break hearts and ruin happiness, and perhaps it was my duty to warn you against him; but as he is not a bad man in other things--he saved the brother of Hathor the designer--you know her --from drowning, at the risk of his own life--and as I hoped you might be on friendly terms with him at least, on his return home, I refrained.... And besides, old fool that I am, I fancied your proud heart wore a breastplate of mail, and after all it is only a foolish girl's heart like any other, and now in its twenty-first year has given its love to a man for the first time."

But Paula interrupted her: "I love the traitor no more! No, I hate him, hate him beyond words! And the rest of them! I loathe them all!"

"Alas! that it should be so!" sighed the nurse. "Your lot is no doubt a

hard one. He--Orion--of course is out of the question; but I often ask myself whether you might not mend matters with the others. If you had not made it too hard for them, child, they must have loved you; they could not have helped it; but ever since you have been in the house you have only felt miserable and wished that they would let you go your own way, and they--well they have done so; and now you find it ill to bear the lot you chose for yourself. It is so indeed, child, you need not contradict me. This once we will put the matter plainly: Who can hope to win love that gives none, but turns away morosely from his fellow-creatures? If each of us could make his neighbors after his own pattern --then indeed! But life requires us to take them just as we find them, and you, sweetheart, have never let this sink into your mind!"

"Well, I am what I am !"

"No doubt, and among the good you are the best--but which of them all can guess that? Every one to some extent plays a part. And you! What wonder if they never see in you anything but that you are unhappy? God knows it is ten thousand times a pity that you should be! But who can take pleasure in always seeing a gloomy face?"

"I have never uttered a single word of complaint of my troubles to any one of them!" cried Paula, drawing herself up proudly.

"That is just the difficulty," replied Perpetua. "They took you in, and thought it gave them a claim on your person and also on your sorrows. Perhaps they longed to comfort you; for, believe me, child, there is a secret pleasure in doing so. Any one who is able to show us sympathy feels that it does him more good than it does us. I know life! Has it never occurred to you that you are perhaps depriving your relations in the great house of a pleasure, perhaps even doing them an injury by locking up your heart from them? Your grief is the best side of you, and of that you do indeed allow them to catch a glimpse; but where the pain is you carefully conceal. Every good man longs to heal a wound when he sees it, but your whole demeanor cries out: 'Stay where you are, and leave me in peace.'--If only you were good to your uncle!"

"But I am, and I have felt prompted a hundred times to confide in him--but then. . ."

"Well--then?"

"Only look at him, Betta; see how he lies as cold as marble, rigid and apathetic, half dead and half alive. At first the words often rose to my lips. . ."

"And now?"

"Now all the worst is so long past; I feel I have forfeited the right to complain to him of all that weighs me down."

"Hm," said Perpetua who had no answer ready. "But take heart, my child. Orion has at any rate learnt how far he may venture. You can hold your

head high enough and look cool enough. Bear all that cannot be mended, and if an inward voice does not deceive me, he whom we seek. . ."

"That was what brought me here. Are none of our messengers returned yet?"

"Yes, the little Nabathaeon is come," replied her nurse with some hesitation, "and he indeed--but for God's sake, child, form no vain hopes! Hiram came to me soon after sun-down. . ."

"Betta!" screamed the girl, clinging to her nurse's arm. "What has he heard, what news does he bring?"

"Nothing, nothing! How you rush at conclusions! What he found out is next to nothing. I had only a minute to speak to Hiram. To-morrow morning he is to bring the man to me. The only thing he told me. . ."

"By Christ's Wounds! What was it?"

"He said that the messenger had heard of an elderly recluse, who had formerly been a great warrior."

"My father, my father!" cried Paula. "Hiram is sitting by the fire with the others. Fetch him here at once--at once; I command you, Perpetua, do you hear? Oh best, dearest Betta! Come with me; we will go to him."

"Patience, sweetheart, a little patience!" urged the nurse. "Ah, poor dear soul, it will turn out to be nothing again; and if we again follow up a false clue it will only lead to fresh disappointment."

"Never mind: you are to come with me."

"To all the servants round the fire, and at this time of night? I should think so indeed!--But do you wait here, child. I know how it can be managed."

"I will wake Hiram's Joseph. He sleeps in the stable yonder--and then he will fetch his father. Ah! what impatience! What a stormy, passionate little heart it is! If I do not do your bidding, I shall have you awake all night, and wandering about to-morrow as if in a dream.--There, be quiet, be quiet, I am going."

As she spoke she wrapped her kerchief round her head and hurried out; Paula fell on her knees before the crucifix over the bed, and prayed fervently till her nurse returned, Soon after she heard a man's steps on the stairs and Hiram came in.

He was a powerful man of about fifty, with a pair of honest blue eyes in his plain face. Any one looking at his broad chest would conclude that when he spoke it would be in a deep bass voice; but Hiram had stammered from his infancy; and from constant companionship with horses he had accustomed himself to make a variety of strange, inarticulate noises in a high, shrill voice. Besides, he was always unwilling to speak. When he

found himself face to face with the daughter of his master and benefactor, he knelt at her feet, looked up at her with faithful, dog-like eyes full of affection, and kissed first her dress, and then her hand which she held out to him. Paula kindly but decidedly cut short the expressions of delight at seeing her again which he painfully stammered out; and when he at length began to tell his story his words came far too slowly for her impatience.

He told her that the Nabathaeon who had brought the rumor that had excited her hopes, was not unwilling to follow up the trace he had found, but he would not wait beyond noon the next day and had tried to bid for high terms.

"He shall have them--as much as he wants!" cried Paula. But Hiram entreated her, more by looks and vague cries than by articulate words, not to hope for too much. Dusage the Nabathaeon--Perpetua now took up the tale--had heard of a recluse, living at Raithu on the Red Sea, who had been a great warrior, by birth a Greek, and who for two years had been leading a life of penance in great seclusion among the pious brethren on the sacred Mount of Sinai. The messenger had not been able to learn what his name in the world had been, but among the hermits he was known as Paulus."

"Paulus!" interrupted the girl with panting breath. "A name that must remind him of my mother and of me, yes, of me! And he, the hero of Damascus, who was called Thomas in the world, believing that I was dead, has no doubt dedicated himself to the service of God and of Christ, and has taken the name of Paulus, as Saul, the other man of Damascus did after his conversion,--exactly like him! Oh! Betta, Hiram, you will see: it is he, it must be! How can you doubt it?"

The Syrian shook his head doubtfully and gave vent to a long-drawn whistle, and Perpetua clasped her hands exclaiming distressfully: "Did I not say so? She takes the fire lighted by shepherds at night to warm their hands for the rising sun--the rattle of chariots for the thunders of the Almighty!--Why, how many thousands have called themselves Paulus! By all the Saints, child, I beseech you keep quiet, and do not try to weave a holiday-robe out of airy mist! Be prepared for the worst; then you are armed against failure and preserve your right to hope! Tell her, tell her, Hiram, what else the messenger said; it is nothing positive; everything is as uncertain as dust in the breeze."

The freedman then explained that this Nabathaeon was a trustworthy man, far better skilled in such errands than himself, for he understood both Syriac and Egyptian, Greek and Aramaic; and nevertheless he had failed to find out anything more about this hermit Paulus at Tor, where the monks of the monastery of the Transfiguration had a colony. Subsequently, however, on the sea voyage to Holzum, he had been informed by some monks that there was a second Sinai. The monastery there--but here Perpetua again was the speaker, for the hapless stammerer's brow was beaded with sweat--the monastery at the foot of the peaked, heaven-kissing mountain, had been closed in consequence of the heresies of its inhabitants; but in the gorges of these great heights there were still many recluses, some in

a small Coenobium, some in Lauras and separate caves, and among these perchance Paulus might be found. This clue seemed a good one and she and Hiram had already made up their minds to follow it up; but the warrior monk was very possibly a stranger, and they had thought it would be cruel to expose her to so keen a disappointment.

Here Paula interrupted her, crying in joyful excitement:

"And why should not something besides disappointment be my portion for once? How could you have the heart to deprive me of the hope on which my poor heart still feeds?--But I will not be robbed of it. Your Paulus of Sinai is my lost father. I feel it, I know it! If I had not sold my pearls, the Nabathaeon. . . . But as it is. When can you start, my good Hiram?"

"Not before a fort--a fortnight at--at--at--soonest," said the man.

"I am in the governor's service now, and the day after to-morrow is the great horse-fair at Niku. The young master wants some stallions bought and there are our foals to. . . ."

"I will implore my uncle to-morrow, to spare you," cried Paula.

"I will go on my knees to him."

"He will not let him go," said the nurse. "Sebek the steward told him all about it from me before the hour of audience and tried to have Hiram released."

"And he said.... ?"

"The lady Neforis said it was all a mere will-o'-the-wisp, and my lord agreed with her. Then your uncle forbade Sebek to betray the matter to you, and sent word to me that he would possibly send Hiram to Sinai when the horse-fair was over. So take patience, sweetheart. What are two weeks, or at most three--and then. . . ."

"But I shall die before then!" cried Paula. "The Nabathaeon, you say, is here and willing to go."

"Yes, Mistress."

"Then we will secure him," said Paula resolutely. Perpetua, however, who must have discussed the matter fully with her fellow-countryman, shook her head mournfully and said: "He asks too much for us!"

She then explained that the man, being such a good linguist, had already been offered an engagement to conduct a caravan to Ctesiphon. This would be a year's pay to him, and he was not inclined to break off his negotiations with the merchant Hanno and search the deserts of Arabia Petraea for less than two thousand drachmae.

"Two thousand drachmae!" echoed Paula, looking down in distress and confusion; but she presently looked up and exclaimed with angry determination: "How dare they keep from me that which is my own? If my

uncle refuses what I have to ask, and will ask, then the inevitable must happen, though for his sake it will grieve me; I must put my affairs in the hands of the judges."

"The judges?" Perpetua smiled. "But you cannot lay a complaint without your kyrios, and your uncle is yours. Besides: before they have settled the matter the messenger may have been to Ctesiphon and back, far as it is."

Again her nurse entreated her to have patience till the horse-fair should be over. Paula fixed her eyes on the ground. She seemed quite crushed; but Perpetua started violently and Hiram drew back a step when she suddenly broke out in a loud, joyful cry of "Father in Heaven, I have what we need!"

"How, child, what?" asked the nurse, pressing her hand to her heart. But Paula vouchsafed no information; she turned quickly to the Syrian:

"Is the outer court-yard clear yet? Are the people gone?" she asked.

The reply was in the affirmative. The freed servants had retired when Hiram left them. The officials would not break up for some time yet, but there was less difficulty in passing them.

"Very good," said the girl. "Then you, Hiram, lead the way and wait for me by the little side door. I will give you something in my room which will pay the Nabathæan's charges ten times over. Do not look so horrified, Betta. I will give him the large emerald out of my mother's necklace." The woman clasped her hands, and cried out in dismay and warning.

"Child, child! That splendid gem! an heirloom in the family--that stone which came to you from the saintly Emperor Theodosius--to sell that of all things! Nay--to throw it away; not to rescue your father either, but merely--yes child, for that is the truth, merely because you lack patience to wait two little weeks!"

"That is hard, that is unjust, Betta," Paula broke in reprovingly. "It will be a question of a month, and we all know how much depends on the messenger. Do you forget how highly Hiram spoke of this very man's intelligence? And besides--must I, the younger, remind you?--What is the life of man? An instant may decide his life or death; and my father is an old man, scarred from many wounds even before the siege. It may make just the difference between our meeting, or never meeting again."

"Yes, yes," said the old woman in subdued tones, "perhaps you are right, and if I. . ." But Paula stopped her mouth with a kiss, and then desired Hiram to carry the gem, the first thing in the morning, to Gamaliel the Jew, a wealthy and honest man, and not to sell it for less than twelve thousand drachmae. If the goldsmith could not pay so much for it at once, he might be satisfied to bring away the two thousand drachmae for the messenger, and fetch the remainder at another season.

The Syrian led the way, and when, after a long leave-taking, she quitted her nurse's pleasant little room, Hiram had done her bidding and was waiting for her at the little side door.

CHAPTER VIII.

As Hiram had supposed, the better class of the household were still sitting with their friends, and they had been joined by the guide and by the Arab merchant's head man: Rustem the Masdakite, as well as his secretary and interpreter.

With the exception only of Gamaliel the Jewish goldsmith, and the Arab's followers, the whole of the party were Christians; and it had gone against the grain to admit the Moslems into their circle--the Jew had for years been a welcome member of the society. However, they had done so, and not without marked civility; for their lord had desired that the strangers should be made welcome, and they might expect to hear much that was new from wanderers from such a distance. In this, to be sure, they were disappointed, for the dragoman was taciturn and the Masdakite could speak no Egyptian, and Greek very ill. So, after various futile attempts to make the new-comers talk, they paid no further heed to them, and Orion's secretary became the chief speaker. He had already told them yesterday much that was fresh and interesting about the Imperial court; to-day he entered into fuller details of the brilliant life his young lord had led at Constantinople, whither he had accompanied him. He described the three races he had won in the Circus with his own horses; gave a lively picture of his forcing his way with only five followers through a raging mob of rioters, from the palace to the church of St. Sophia; and then enlarged on Orion's successes among the beauties of the Capital.

"The queen of them all," he went on in boastful accents, "was Heliodora --no flute-player nor anything of that kind; no indeed, but a rich, elegant, and virtuous patrician lady, the widow of Flavianus, nephew to Justinus the senator, and a relation of the Emperor. All Constantinople was at her feet, the great Gratian himself sought to win her, but of course, in vain. There is no palace to compare with hers in all Egypt, not even in Alexandria. The governor's residence here--for I think nothing of mere size--is a peasant's hut--a wretched barn by comparison! I will tell you another time what that casket of treasures is like. Its door was besieged day and night by slaves and freedmen bringing her offerings of flowers and fruit, rare gifts, and tender verses written on perfumed, rose-colored silk; but her favors were not to be purchased till she met Orion. Would you believe it: from the first time she saw him in Justinus' villa she fell desperately in love with him; it was all over with her; she was his as completely as the ring on my finger is mine!"

And in his vanity he showed his hearers a gold ring, with a gem of some value, which he owed to the liberality of his young master. "From that day forth," he eagerly went on, "the names of Orion and Heliodora were in

every mouth, and how often have I seen men quite beside themselves over the beauty of this divine pair. In the Circus, in the theatre, or sailing about the Bosphorus--they were to be seen everywhere together; and through the hideous, bloody struggle for the throne they lived in a Paradise of their own. He often took her out in his chariot; or she took him in hers."

"Such a woman has horses too?" asked the head groom contemptuously.

"A woman!" cried the secretary. "A lady of rank!--She has none but bright chestnuts; large horses of Armenian breed, and small, swift beasts from the island of Sardinia, which fly on with the chariot, four abreast, like hunted foxes. Her horses are always decked with flowers and ribbons fluttering from the gold harness, and the grooms know how to drive them too!--Well, every one thought that our young lord and the handsome widow would marry; and it was a terrible blow to the hapless Heliadora when nothing came of it--she looks like a saint and is as soft as a kitten. I was by when they parted, and she shed such bitter tears it was pitiable to see. Still, she could not be angry with her idol, poor, gentle, tender kitten. She even gave him her lap-dog for a keepsake--that little silky thing you have seen here. And take my word for it, that was a true love-token, for her heart was as much set on that little beast as if it had been her favorite child. And he felt the parting too, felt it deeply; however, I am his confidential secretary, and it would never do for me to tell tales out of school. He clasped the little dog to his heart as he bid her farewell, and he promised her to send some keepsake in return which should show her how precious her love had been--and it will be no trifle, that any one may swear who knows my master. You, Gamaliel, I daresay he has been to you about it by this time."

The man thus addressed--the same to whom Hiram was to offer Paula's emerald--was a rich Alexandrian of a happy turn of mind; as soon as the incursion of the Saracens had made Alexandria an unsafe residence, so that the majority of his fellow Israelites had fled from the great port, he had found his way to Memphis, where he could count on the protection of his patron, the Mukaukas George.

He shook his grizzled curls at this question, but he presently whispered in the secretary's ear. "We have the very thing he wants. You bring me the cow and you shall have a calf--and a calf with twelve legs too. Is it a bargain?"

"Twelve per cent on the profits? Done!" replied the secretary in the same tone, with a sly smile of intelligence.

When, by-and-bye, an accountant asked him why Orion had not brought home this fair dame, the bearer too of a noble name, to his parents as their daughter-in-law, he replied that, being a Greek, she was of course a Melchite. Those present asked no better reason; as soon as the question of creed was raised the conversation, as usual in these convivial evenings, became a squabble over dogmatic differences; in the course of it a legal official ventured to opine that if the case had been that of a less personage than a son of the Mukaukas--for whom it was, of course,

out of the question--of a mere Jacobite citizen and his Melchite sweetheart, for instance, some compromise might have been effected. They need only have made up their minds each, respectively, to subscribe to the Monothelitic doctrine--though, he, for his part, could have nothing to say to anything of the kind; it was warmly upheld by the Imperial court, and by Cyrus, the deceased patriarch of Alexandria, and was based on the assumption that there were indeed two natures in Christ, but both under the control of one and the same will. By this dogma there were in the Saviour two persons no doubt; still it asserted His unity in a certain qualified sense, and this was the most important point.

Such an heretical proposition was of course loudly disapproved of by the assembled Jacobites; differences of opinion were more and more strongly asserted, and a calm interchange of views turned to a riotous quarrel which threatened to end in actual violence.

This discussion was already beginning when Paula succeeded in slipping unseen across the court-yard.

She silently beckoned to Hiram to follow her; he cautiously took off his shoes, pushed them under the steep servants' stairs, and in a few minutes was standing in the young girl's room. Paula at once opened a chest, and took out a costly and beautifully-wrought necklace set with pearls. This she handed to the Syrian, desiring him to wrench from its setting a large emerald which hung from the middle. The freedman's strong hand, with the aid of a knife, quickly and easily did the work; and he stood weighing the gem, as it lay freed from the gold hemisphere that had held it, larger than a walnut, shining and sparkling on his palm, while Paula repeated the instructions she had already given him in her nurse's room.

The faithful soul had no sooner left his beloved mistress than she proceeded to unplait her long thick hair, smiling the while with happy hope; but she had not yet begun to undress when she heard a knock. She started, flew to the door and hastily bolted it, while she enquired:

"Who is there?"--preparing herself for the worst. "Hiram," was the whispered reply. She opened the door, and he told her that meanwhile the side door had been locked, and that he knew no other way out from the great rambling house whither he rarely had occasion to come.

What was to be done? He could not wait till the door was opened again, for he must carry out her commission quite early in the morning, and if he were caught and locked up for only half the day the Nabathæan would take some other engagement.

With swift decision she twisted up her hair, threw a handkerchief over her head, and said: "Then come with me; the moon is still up; it would not be safe to carry a lamp. I will lead the way and you must keep behind me. If only the kitchen is empty, we can reach the Viridarium unseen. If the upper servants are still sitting in the court-yard the great door will be open, for several of them sleep in the house. At any rate you must go through the vestibule; you cannot miss your way out of the viridarium. But stay! Beki generally lies in front of the tablinum--

the fierce dog from Herrionthis in Thebais; and he does not know you, for he never goes out of the house, but he will obey me.

"When I lift my hand, hang back a little. He is quite quiet with his masters, and does not hurt a stranger if they are by. Now, we must not utter another word.--If we are discovered, I will confess the truth; if you alone are seen, you can say--well, say you were waiting for Orion, to speak to him very early about the horse-fair at Niku."

"A horse was off--off--offered me for sale this very day."

"Good, very good; then you lingered in the vestibule to speak of that--to ask the master about it before he should go out. It must be daylight in a few hours.--Now, come."

Paula went down the stairs with a sure and rapid step. At the bottom Hiram again took off his shoes, holding them in his hand, so as to lose no time in following his mistress. They went on in silence through the darkness till they reached the kitchen. Here Paula turned and said to the Syrian:

"If there is any one here, I will say I came to fetch some water; if there is no one I will cough and you can follow. At any rate I will leave the door open, and then you will hear what happens. If I am obliged to return, do you hurry on before me back by the way we came. In that case I will return to my room where you must wait outside till the side door is opened again, and if you are found there leave the explanation to me.--Shrink back, quite into that corner."

She softly opened the door into the kitchen; the roof was open to the light of the declining moon and myriad stars. The room was quite empty: only a cat lay on a bench by the wide hearth, and a few bats flitted to and fro on noiseless wings; a few live coals still glowed among the ashes under the spits, like the eyes of lurking beasts of prey. Paula coughed gently, and immediately heard Hiram's step behind her; then, with a beating heart and agonizing fears, she proceeded on her way. First down a few steps, then through a dark passage, where the bats in their unswerving flight shot by close to her head. At last they had to cross the large, open dining-hall. This led into the viridarium, a spacious quadrangle, paved at the edges and planted in the middle, where a fountain played; round this square the Governor's residence was built. All was still and peaceful in this secluded space, vaulted over by the high heavens whose deep blue was thickly dotted with stars. The moon would soon be hidden behind the top of the cornice which crowned the roof of the building. The large-leaved plants in the middle of the quadrangle threw strange, ghostly shadows on the dewy grass-plot; the water in the fountain splashed more loudly than by day, but with a soothing, monotonous gurgle, broken now and then by a sudden short pause. The marble pillars gleamed as white as snow, and filmy mists, which were beginning to rise from the damp lawn, floated languidly hither and thither on the soft night breeze, like ghosts veiled in flowing crape. Moths flitted noiselessly round and over the clumps of bushes, and the whole quiet and restful enclosure was full of sweetness from the Lotos

flowers in the marble basin, from the blossoms of the luxuriant shrubs and the succulent tropical herbs at their feet. At any other time it would have been a joy to pause and look round, only to breathe and let the silent magic of the night exert its spell; but Paula's soul was closed against these charms. The sequestered silence lent a threatening accent to the furious wrangling in the court-yard, which was audible even here in bursts of uproar; and it was with an anxious heart that she observed that everything was not in its usual order; for her sharp eyes could discern no one, nothing, at the entrance to the tablinum, which was usually guarded by an armed sentinel or by the watch-dog; and surely-- yes, she was not mistaken--the bronze doors were open, and the moon shone on the bright metal of one half which stood ajar.

She stopped, and Hiram behind her did the same. They both listened with such tension that the veins in their foreheads swelled; but from the tablinum, which was hardly thirty paces from them, came only very faint and intermittent sounds, indistinct in character and drowned by the tumult without.

A few long and anxious minutes, and then the half-closed door was suddenly opened and a man came forth. Paula's heart stood still, but she did not for an instant lose her keenness of vision; she at once and positively recognized the man who came out of the tablinum as Orion and none other, and the big, long-haired dog too came out and past him, sniffed the air and then, with a loud bark, rushed on the two watchers. Trembling and with clenched teeth, but still mistress of herself, she let him come close to her, and then, calling him by his name: "Beki" in low, caressing tones, as soon as he recognized her, she laid her hand on his shaggy head to scratch his ears, as he loved it done.

Paula and her companion were standing behind a column in the deepest shadow. Thus Orion could not see her, and the dog's loud bark had prevented his hearing her coaxing call; so when Beki was quiet and stood still, Orion whistled to him. The obedient and watchful beast, ran back, wagging his tail; and his master, greeting him as "a stupid old cat-hunter," let him spring over his arm, hugged the creature and then pushed him off again in play. Then he closed the door and went into the apartments leading to the courtyard.

"But he must come back this way to go to his own rooms," said Paula to her companion with a sigh of relief. "We must wait. But now we must not lose a minute. Come over to the door of the tablinum. The dog will know me now and will not bark again." They hastened on, and when they had reached the door, which lay in shadow within a deep doorway, Paula asked her companion: "Did you see who the man was who came out?"

"My lord Orion," said Hiram. "He was co--co--coming home from the town when I preceded you across the yard."

"Indeed?" she said with apparent indifference, and as she leaned against the cold metal door-panels she looked back into the garden and thought she was now free to return. She would describe to the freedman the way he must now go--it was quite simple; but she had not had time to do so

when, from a room dividing the viridarium from the vestibule she heard first a woman's shrill voice; then the deeper tones of a man; and hardly had they exchanged a few sentences, when every sound was lost in the furious barking of the hound, and immediately after a loud shriek of pain from a woman fell upon her ear, and the noise of a heavy object falling to the ground.

What had happened? It must be something portentous and terrible; of that there could be no doubt; and ere long Paula's fears were justified. Out from the room where the scene had taken place rushed Orion, and with him the dog, across the grass-plot which was usually respected and cherished as holy ground, towards the side of the house facing the river, which was where he and all the family had their rooms.

"Now!" cried Paula, quickly leading the way.

She flew in breathless haste through the first room and into the unguarded hall; but she had not reached the middle of it when she gave a scream, for before her in the moonlight, lay a body, motionless, at full length, on the hard, marble floor.

"Run, Hiram, fly!" she cried to her companion. "The door is ajar--open--I can see it is."

She fell on her knees by the side of the lifeless form, raised the head, and saw--the beautiful, deathlike face of the crazy Persian slave. She felt her hand wet with the blood that had soaked the hapless girl's thick, fair hair, and she shuddered; but she resisted her impulse of horror and loathing, and perceiving some dark stains on the torn peplos she pulled it aside and saw that the white bosom was bleeding from deep wounds made in the tender flesh by the cruel fangs of the hound.

Paula's heart thrilled with indignation, grief and pity. He--he whom she had only yesterday held to be the epitome of every manly perfection--Orion, was guilty of so foul a deed! He, of whose unflinching, dauntless courage she had heard so much, had fled like a coward, and had left the victim to her fate--twice a victim to him!

But something must be done besides lamenting and raging, and wondering how in one human soul there could be room for so much that was noble and fine with so much that was shameful and cruel. She must save the girl, she must seek help, for Mandane's bosom still faintly rose and fell under Paula's tremulous fingers.

The freedman's brave heart would not allow him to fly to leave her with the injured girl; he flung his shoes on the floor, raised the senseless form, and propped it against one of the columns that stood round the hall. It was not till his mistress had repeated her orders that he hurried away. Paula watched him depart; as soon as she heard the heavy door of the atrium close upon him, heedless of her own suspicious-looking position, she shouted for help, so loudly that her cries rang through the nocturnal silence of the house, and in a few minutes, from this side and that, a slave, a maid, a clerk, a cook, a watchman, came hurrying in.

Foremost of all--so soon indeed that he must have been on his way when he heard her cry--came Orion. He wore a light night-dress, intended, so she said to herself, to give the wretch the appearance of having sprung out of bed. But was this indeed he? Was this man with a flushed face, staring eyes, disordered hair and hoarse voice, that favorite of fortune whose happy nature, easy demeanor, sunny gaze and enchanting song had bewitched her soul? His hand shook as he came close to her and the injured slave; and how forced and embarrassed was his enquiry as to what had happened; how scared he looked as he asked her what had brought her into this part of the house at such an hour.

She made no reply; but when his mother repeated the question soon after, in a sharp voice, she--she who had never in her life told a lie--said with hasty decision: "I could not sleep, and the bark of the dog and a cry for help brought me here."

"I call that having sharp ears!" retorted Neforis with an incredulous shrug. "For the future, at any rate, under similar circumstances you need not be so prompt. How long, pray, have young girls trusted themselves alone when murder is cried?"

"If you had but armed yourself, fair daughter of heroes!" added Orion; but he had no sooner spoken than he bitterly regretted it. What a glance Paula cast at him! It was more than she could bear to hear him address her in jest, almost in mockery: him of all men, and at this moment for the first time--and to be thus reminded of her father! She answered proudly and with cutting sharpness: "I leave weapons to fighting men and murderers!"

"To fighting men, and murderers!" repeated Orion, pretending not to understand the point of her words. He forced a smile; but then, feeling that he must make some defence, he added bitterly: "Really, that sounds like the utterance of a feeble-hearted damsel! But let me beg you to come closer and be calm. These pitiable gashes on the poor creature's shoulder--I care more about her than you do, take my word for it--were inflicted by a four-footed assassin, whose weapons were given by nature. Yes, that is what happened. Rough old Beki keeps watch at the door of the tablinum. What brought the poor child here I know not, but he caught scent of her and pulled her down."

"Or nothing of the kind!" interrupted Neforis, picking up a pair of man's shoes which lay on the ground by the sufferer.

Orion turned as pale as death and hastily took the shoes from his mother's hand; he would have liked to fling them up and away through the open roof. How came they here? Whose were they? Who had been here this night? Before going into the tablinum he had locked the outer door on that side, and had returned subsequently to open it again for the people in the court-yard. It was not till after he had done this that the crazy girl had rushed upon him; she must have been lurking somewhere about when he first went through the atrium but had not then found courage enough to place herself in his way. When she had thrown herself upon him, the dog

had pulled her down before he could prevent it: he would certainly have sprung past her and have come to the rescue but that he must thus have betrayed his visit to the tablinum.

It had required all his presence of mind to hurry to his room, fling on his night garments, and rush back to the scene of disaster. When Paula had first called for help he was already on his way, and with what feelings! Never had he felt so bewildered, so confused, so deeply dissatisfied with himself; for the first time in his life, as he stood face to face with Paula, he dared not look straight into the eyes of his fellow-man.

And now these shoes! The owner must have come there with the crazy girl, and if he had seen him in the tablinum and betrayed what he was doing there, how could he ever again appear in his parents' presence? He had looked upon it as a good joke, but now it had turned to bitter earnest. At any cost he must and would prevent his nocturnal doings from becoming known! Some new wrong-doing-nay, the worst was preferable to a stain on his honor.--Whose could the shoes be? He suddenly held them up on high, crying with a loud voice: "Do these shoes belong to any of you, you people? To the gate-keeper perhaps?"

When all were silent, and the porter denied the ownership, he stood thinking; then he added with a defiant glare, and in a husky voice: "Then some one who had broken into the house has been startled and dropped them. Our house-stamp is here on the leather: they were made in our work-shop, and they still smell of the stable-here, Sebek, you can convince yourself. Take them into your keeping, man; and tomorrow morning we will see who has left this suspicious offering in our vestibule.--You were the first to reach the spot, fair Paula. Did you see a man about?"

"Yes," she replied with a hostile and challenging stare.

"And which way did he go?"

"He fled across the viridarium like a coward, running across the poor, well-kept grass-plot to save time, and vanished upstairs in the dwelling-rooms."

Orion ground his teeth, and a mad hatred surged up in him of this mystery in woman's form in whose power, as it seemed, his ruin lay, and whose eyes mashed with revenge and the desire to undo him. What was she plotting against him? Was there a being on earth who would dare to accuse him, the spoilt favorite of great and small....? And her look had meant more than aversion, it had expressed contempt.... How dare she look so at him? Who in the wide world had a right to accuse him of anything that could justify such a feeling? Never, never had he met with enmity like this, least of all from a girl. He longed to annihilate the high-handed, cold-hearted, ungrateful creature who could humble him so outrageously after he had allowed her to see that his heart was hers, and who could make him quail--a man whose courage had been proved a hundred times. He had to exercise his utmost self-control not to forget that she

was a woman.--What had happened? What demon had been playing tricks on him--What had so completely altered him within this half-hour that his whole being seemed subverted even to himself, and that any one dared to treat him so?

His mother at once observed the terrible change that came over her son's face when Paula declared that a man had fled towards the dwelling-rooms; but she accounted for it in her own way, and exclaimed in genuine alarm: "Towards the Nile-wing, the rooms where your father sleeps? Merciful Heaven! suppose they have planned an attack there! Run--fly, Sebek.

"Go across with some armed men! Search the whole house from top to bottom! Perhaps you will catch the rascal--he had trodden down the grass--you must find him--you must not let him escape."

The steward hurried off, but Paula begged the head gardener, who had come in with the rest, to compare the foot-prints of the fugitive, which must yet be visible on the damp grass, with the shoes; her heart beat wildly, and again she tried to catch the young man's eye. Orion, however, started forward and went into the viridarium, saying as he went: "That is my concern."

But he was ashamed of himself, and felt as if something tight was throttling him. In his own eyes he appeared like a thief caught in the act, a traitor, a contemptible rascal; and he began to perceive that he was indeed no longer what he had been before he had committed that fatal deed in the tablinum.

Paula breathed hard as she watched him go out. Had he sunk so low as to falsify the evidence, and to declare that the groom's broad sole fitted the tracks of his small and shapely feet? She hated him, and yet she could have found it in her heart to pray that this, at least, he might not do; and when he came back and said in some confusion that he could not be sure, that the shoes did not seem exactly to fit the foot-marks, she drew a breath of relief and turned again to the wounded girl and the physician, who, had now made his appearance. Before Neforis followed her example she drew Orion aside and anxiously asked him what ailed him, he looked so pale and upset. He only said with some hesitation: "That poor girl's fate. . . ." and he pointed to the Persian slave.--"It troubles me."

"You are so soft-hearted--you were as a boy!" said his mother soothingly. She had seen the moisture sparkling in his eyes; but his tears were not for the Persian, but for the mysterious something--he himself knew not what to call it--that he had forfeited in this last hour, and of which the loss gave him unspeakable pain.

But their dialogue was interrupted: the first misfortune of this luckless night had brought its attendant: the body of Rustem, the splendid and radiantly youthful Rustem, the faithful Persian leader of the caravan, was borne into the hall, senseless. He had made some satirical remark on the quarrel over creeds, and a furious Jacobite had fallen upon him with a log of wood, and dealt him a deep and perhaps mortal wound. The leech

at once gave him his care, and several of the crowd of muttering and whispering men, who had made their way in out of curiosity or with a wish to be of use, now hurried hither and thither in obedience to the physician's orders.

As soon as he saw the Masdakite's wound he exclaimed angrily:

"A true Egyptian blow, dealt from behind!--What does this mob want here? Out with every man who does not belong to the place! The first things needed are litters. Will you, Dame Neforis, desire that two rooms may be got ready; one for that poor, gentle creature, and one for this fine fellow, though all will soon be over with him, short of a miracle."

"To the north of the viridarium," replied the lady, "there are two rooms at your service."

"Not there!" cried the leech. "I must have rooms with plenty of fresh air, looking out upon the river."

"There are none but the handsome rooms in the visitor's quarters, where my husband's niece has hers, Sick persons of the family have often lain there, but for such humble folk--you understand?"

"No--I am deaf," replied the physician.

"Oh, I know that," laughed Neforis. "But those rooms are really just refurnished for exalted guests."

"It would be hard to find any more exalted than such as these, sick unto death," replied Philippus. "They are nearer to God in Heaven than you are; to your advantage I believe. Here, you people! Carry these poor souls up to the guests' rooms."

CHAPTER IX.

"It is impossible, impossible, impossible!" cried Orion, jumping up from his writing-table. He thought of what he had done as a misfortune, and not as a crime; he himself hardly knew how it had all come about. Yes, there must be demons, evil, spiteful demons--and it was they who had led him to so mad a deed.

Yesterday evening, after the buying of the hanging, he had yielded to his mother's request that he should escort the widow Susannah home. At her house he had met her husband's brother, a jovial old fellow named Chrysippus; and when the conversation turned on the tapestry, and the Mukaukas' purpose of dedicating this work of art with all the gems worked into it, to the Church, the old man had clasped his hands, fully sharing Orion's disapproval, and had exclaimed laughing "What, you the son, and is not even a part of the precious stones to fall to your share? Why Katharina? Just a little diamond, a tiny opal might well add to the

earthly happiness of the young, though the old must lay up treasure in heaven.--Do not be a fool! The Church's maw is full enough, and really a mouthful is your due."

And then they drank a good deal of fine wine, till at last the older man had accompanied Orion home, to stretch his limbs in the cool night air. A litter was carried behind him for him to return in, and all the way he had continued to persuade the youth to induce his father not to fling the whole treasure into the jaws of the Church, but to spare him a few stones at least for a more pleasing use. They had laughed over it a good deal, and Orion in his heart had thought Chrysippus very right, and had remembered Heliodora, and her love of large, handsome gems, and the keepsake he owed her. But that neither his father nor his mother would remove a single stone, and that the whole hanging would be dedicated, was beyond a doubt; at the same time, some of this superfluous splendor was in fact his due as their son, and a prettier gift to Heliodora than the large emerald could not be imagined. Yes--and she should have it! How delighted she would be! He even thought of the chief idea for the verses to accompany the gift.

He had the key of the tablinum, in which the work was lying, about his person; and when, on his return, he found the servants still sitting round the fire, he shut the door of the out-buildings while a feeling came over him which he remembered having experienced last on occasions when he and his brothers had robbed a forbidden fruit-tree. He was on the point of giving up his mad project; and when, in the tablinum itself, a horrible inward tremor again came over him he had actually turned to retreat--but he remembered old Chrysippus and his prompts. To turn and fly now would be cowardice. Heliodora must have the large emerald, and with his verses; his father might give away all the rest as he pleased. When he was kneeling in front of the work with his knife in his hand, that sickening terror had come over him for the third time; if the large emerald had not come off into his hand at the first effort he would certainly have rolled the bale up again and have left the tablinum clean-handed. But the evil demon had been at his elbow, had thrust the gem into his hand, as it were, so that two cuts with the knife had sufficed to displace it from its setting. It rolled into his hand and he felt its noble weight; he cast aside all care, and had thought no more with anything but pleasure of this splendid trick, which he would relate to-morrow to old Chrysippus--of course under seal of secrecy.

But now, in the sober light of day, how different did this mad, rash deed appear; how heavily had he already been punished; what consequences might it not entail? His hatred of Paula grew every minute: she had certainly seen all that had happened and would not hesitate to betray him--that she had shown last night. War, as it were, was declared between them, and he vowed to himself, with fire in his eyes, that he would not shirk it! At the same time he could not deny that she had never looked handsomer than when she stood, with hair half undone, confronting him--threatening him. "It is to be love or hate between us." he muttered to himself.

"No half-measures: and she has chosen hate! Good! Hitherto I have only had to fight against men; but this bold, hard, and scornful maiden, who rejects every gentle feeling, is no despicable foe. She has me at bay.

If she does her worst by me I will return it in kind!--And who is the owner of the shoes? I have taken all possible means to find him. Shameful, shameful! that I cannot hold up my head to look boldly at my own face in the glass. Heliodora is a sweet creature, an angel of kindness. She loved me truly; but this--this--Ah; even for her, this is too great a sacrifice!"

He pressed his hand to his brow and flung himself on a divan. He might well be weary, for he had not closed his eyes for more than thirty hours and had already done much business that morning. He had given orders to Sebek the house-steward and to the captain of the Egyptian guard to hunt out the owner of the sandals by the aid of the dogs, and to cast him into prison; next he had of his own accord--since his father generally did not fall asleep till the morning and had not yet left his room--tried to pacify the Arab merchant with regard to the mishap that had befallen his head man under the governor's roof; but with small success.

Finally the young man had indulged his desire to compose a few lines addressed to the fair Heliodora--for there was no form of physical or mental effort to which he was not trained. He had not lost the idea that had occurred to him yesterday before his theft in the tablinum, and to put it into verse was in his present mood an easy task. He wrote as follows:

"'Like liketh like' saith the saw; and like to like is but fitting.
Yet, in the hardest of gems thy soft nature rejoices?
Nay, but if noble and rare, if its beauty is priceless,
Then, Heliodora, the stone is like thee--akin to thy beauty.
Thus let this emerald please thee;--and know that the fire
That fills it with light burns more fierce in the heart of thy
Friend."

He penned the lines rapidly; and as he did so he felt, he knew not why, an excited thrill, as though every word he threw off was a blow aimed at Paula. Last night he had intended to send the costly jewel to the handsome widow in a suitable setting; but now it would be madly imprudent to order such a thing. He must send it away at once; he had hastened to pack it up with the verses, with his own hand, and entrusted it to Chusar, a horsedealer's groom from Constantinople, who had brought his Pannonian steeds to Memphis. He had himself seen off this trustworthy messenger, who could speak no Egyptian and very little Greek, and when his horse was lost to sight in the dust of the road leading to Alexandria he had returned home in a calmer mood. Ships were constantly putting to sea from that port for Constantinople, and Chusar was enjoined to sail by the first that should be leaving. At least the odious deed should not have been committed in vain; and yet he would have given a year of his life if now he could but know that it had never been done.

"Impossible!" and "Curse it!" were the words he had most frequently repeated in the course of his retrospect during the past night and morning. How he had had to rush and hurry under the broiling sun! and the sense of being compelled to do so for mere concealment's sake seemed to him--who had never in his life before done anything that he could not

justify in the eyes of honest men--so humiliating, that it brought the sweat to his burning brow. He--Orion--to dread discovery as a thief! It was inconceivable, and he was afraid, positively afraid for the first time since his boyhood. His fortunate star, which in the Capital had shone on him so brightly and benevolently, seemed to have proved faithless in this ruinous hole! What had that Persian girl taken into her crazy head that she must rush upon him like some furious beast of prey? He had been bound to her once, no doubt, by a transient passion--and what youth of his age was blind to the charms of a pretty slave-girl? She had been a lovely child, and it was a vexation, nay a grief to him, that she should have been so shamefully punished. If she should recover, and he could have prayed that she might, it would of course be his part to provide for her--of course. To be just, he could not but confess that she indeed had good reason to hate him: but Paula? He had shown her nothing but kindness and yet how unhesitatingly, how openly she had displayed her enmity. He could see her now with the name "murderer" on her quivering lips; the word had stung him like a lance-thrust. What a hideous, degrading and unjust accusation lay in that exclamation! Should he submit to it unrevenged?

Was she as innocent as she was haughty and cold? What was she doing in the viridarium at midnight?--For she must have been there before that ill-starred dog flew at Mandane. An assignation with the owner of the shoes his mother had found was out of the question, for they belonged to some man about the stables. Love, thought he, for a wonder had nothing to do with it; but as he came in he had noticed a man crossing the courtyard who looked like Paula's freedman, Hiram the trainer. Probably she had arranged a meeting with her stammering friend in order--in order?--Well, there was but one thing that seemed likely: She was plotting to fly from his parents' house and needed this man's assistance.

He had seen within a few hours of his return that his mother did not make life sweet to the girl, and yet his father had very possibly opposed her wish to seek another home. But why should she avoid and hate him? In that expedition on the river and on their way home he could have sworn that she loved him, and the remembrance of those hours brought her near to him again, and wiped out his schemes of vengeance against her, of punishment to be visited on her. Then he thought of little Katharina whom his mother intended him to marry, and at the thought he laughed softly to himself. In the Imperial gardens at Constantinople he had once seen a strange Indian bird, with a tiny body and head and an immensely long tail, shining like silver and mother of pearl. This was Katharina! She herself a mere nothing; but then her tail! vast estates and immense sums of money; and this--this was all his mother saw. But did he need more than he had? How rich his father must be to spend so large a sum on an offering to the Church as heedlessly as men give alms to a beggar.

Katharina--and Paula!

Yes, the little girl was a bright, brisk creature; but then Thomas' daughter--what power there was in her eye, what majesty in her gait, how--how--how enchanting her--her voice could be--her voice....

He was asleep, worn out by heat and fatigue; and in a dream he saw Paula lying on a couch strewn with roses while all about her sounded wonderful heart-ensnaring music; and the couch was not solid but blue water, gently moving: he went towards her and suddenly a large black eagle swooped down on him, flapped his wings in his face and when, half-blinded, he put his hand to his eyes the bird pecked the roses as a hen picks millet and barley. Then he was angry, rushed at the eagle, and tried to clutch him with his hands; but his feet seemed rooted to the ground, and the more he struggled to move freely the more firmly he was dragged backwards. He fought like a madman against the hindering force, and suddenly it released him. He was still under this impression when he woke, streaming with perspiration, and opened his eyes. By his couch stood his mother who had laid her hand on his feet to rouse him.

She looked pale and anxious and begged him to come quickly to his father who was much disturbed, and wished to speak with him. Then she hurried away.

While he hastily arranged his hair and had his shoes clasped he felt vexed that, under the influence of that foolish dream, and still half asleep, he had let his mother go before ascertaining what the circumstances were that had given rise to his father's anxiety. Had it anything to do with the incidents of the past night? No.--If he had been suspected his mother would have told him and warned him. It must refer to something else. Perhaps the old merchant's stalwart headman had died of his wounds, and his father wished to send him--Orion--across the Nile to the Arab viceroy to obtain forgiveness for the murder of a Moslem, actually within the precincts of the governor's house. This fatal blow might indeed entail serious consequences; however, the matter might very likely be quite other than this.

When he left his room the brooding heat that filled the house struck him as peculiarly oppressive, and a painful feeling, closely resembling shame, stole over him as he crossed the viridarium, and glanced at the grass from which--thanks to Paula's ill-meant warning--he had carefully brushed away his foot-marks before daybreak. How cowardly, how base, it all was! The best of all in life: honor, self-respect, the proud consciousness of being an honest man--all staked and all lost for nothing at all! He could have slapped his own face or cried aloud like a child that has broken its most treasured toy. But of what use was all this? What was done could not be undone; and now he must keep his wits about him so as to remain, in the eyes of others at least, what he had always been, low as he had fallen in his own.

It was scorchingly hot in the enclosed garden-plot, surrounded by buildings, and open to the sun; not a human creature was in sight; the house seemed dead. The gaudy flag-staffs and trellis-work, and the pillars of the verandah, which had all been newly painted in honor of his return and were still wreathed with garlands, exhaled a smell, to him quite sickening, of melting resin, drying varnish and faded flowers. Though there was no breath of air the atmosphere quivered, as it seemed from the fierce rays of the sun, which were reflected like arrows from everything around him. The butterflies and dragonflies appeared to Orion

to move their wings more languidly as they hovered over the plants and flowers, the very fountain danced up more lazily and not so high as usual: everything about him was hot, sweltering, oppressive; and the man who had always been so independent and looked up to, who for years had been free to career through life uncontrolled, and guarded by every good Genius now felt trammelled, hemmed in and harassed.

In his father's cool fountain-room he could breathe more freely; but only for a moment. The blood faded from his cheeks, and he had to make a strong effort to greet his father calmly and in his usual manner; for in front of the divan where the governor commonly reclined, lay the Persian hanging, and close by stood his mother and the Arab merchant. Sebek, the steward awaited his master's orders, in the background in the attitude of humility which was torture to his old back, but in which he was never required to remain: Orion now signed to him to stand up:

The Arab's mild features wore a look of extreme gravity, and deep vexation could be read in his kindly eyes. As the young man entered he bowed slightly; they had already met that morning. The Mukaukas, who was lying deathly pale with colorless lips, scarcely opened his eyes at his son's greeting. It might have been thought that a bier was waiting in the next room and that the mourners had assembled here.

The piece of work was only half unrolled, but Orion at once saw the spot whence its crowning glory was now missing--the large emerald which, as he alone could know, was on its way to Constantinople. His theft had been discovered. How fearful, how fatal might the issue be!

"Courage, courage!" he said to himself. "Only preserve your presence of mind. What profit is life with loss of honor? Keep your eyes open; everything depends on that, Orion!"

He succeeded in hastily collecting his thoughts, and exclaimed in a voice which lacked little of its usual eager cheerfulness:

"How dismal you all look! It is indeed a terrible disaster that the dog should have handled the poor girl so roughly, and that our people should have behaved so outrageously; but, as I told you this morning, worthy Merchant, the guilty parties shall pay for it with their lives. My father, I am sure, will agree that you should deal with them according to your pleasure, and our leech Philippus, in spite of his youth, is a perfect Hippocrates I can assure you! He will patch up the fine fellow--your head-man I mean, and as to any question of compensation, my father--well, you know he is no haggler."

"I beg you not to add insult to the injury that I have suffered under your roof," interrupted Haschim. "No amount of money can buy off my wrath over the spilt blood of a friend--and Rustem was my friend--a free and valiant youth. As to the punishment of the guilty: on that I insist. Blood cries for blood. That is our creed; and though yours, to be sure, enjoins the contrary, so far as I know you act by the same rule as we. All honor to your physician; but it goes to my heart, and raises my gall to see such things take place in the house of the man to whom the Khaliff

has confided the weal or woe of Egyptian Christians. Your boasted tolerance has led to the death of an honest though humble man in a time of perfect peace--or at least maimed him for life. As to your honesty, it would seem. . ."

"Who dares impugn it?" cried Orion.

"I, young man," replied the merchant with the calm dignity of age.

"I, who sold this piece of work last evening, and find it this morning robbed of its most precious ornament."

"The great emerald has been cut from the hanging during the night." Dame Neforis explained. "You yourself went with the man who carried it to the tablinum and saw it laid there."

"And in the very cloth in which your people had wrapped it," added Orion.

"Our good old Sebek there was with me. Who fetched away the bale this morning; who brought it here and opened it?"

"Happily for us," said the Arab, "it was your lady mother herself, with that man--your steward if I mistake not--and your own slaves."

"Why was it not left where it was?" asked Orion, giving vent to the annoyance which at this moment he really felt.

"Because I had assured your father, and with good reason, that the beauty of this splendid work and of the gems that decorate it show to much greater advantage by daylight and in the sunshine than under the lamps and torches."

"And besides, your father wished to see his new purchase once more," Neforis broke in, "and to ask the merchant how the gems might be removed without injury to the work itself. So I went to the tablinum myself with Sebek."

"But I had the key!" cried Orion putting his hand into the breast of his robe.

"That I had forgotten," replied his mother. "But unfortunately we did not need it. The tablinum was open."

"I locked it yesterday; you saw me do it, Sebek. . ."

"So I told the mistress," replied the steward. "I perfectly recollect hearing the snap of the strong lock."

Orion shrugged his shoulders, and his mother went on:

But the bronze doors must have been opened during the night with a false key, or by some other means; for part of the hanging had been pulled out of the wrapper, and when we looked closely we saw that the large emerald had been wrenched out of the setting."

"Shameful!" exclaimed Orion.

"Disgraceful!" added the governor, vehemently starting up. He had fallen a prey to fearful unrest and horror: he thought that his Lord and Saviour, to whom he had dedicated the precious jewel, regarded him as so sinful and worthless that He would not accept the gift at his hands. But perhaps it was only Satan striving to hinder him from approaching the Most High with so noble an offering. At any rate, human cunning had been at work, so he said with stern resolution:

"The matter shall be enquired into, and in the name of Jesus Christ, to whom the stone already belongs, I will never rest nor cease till the criminal is in my hands."

"And in the name of Allah and the Prophet," added the Arab, "I will aid thee, if I have to appeal for help to the great chief Amru, the Khaliff's representative in this country.--A word was spoken here just now that I cannot and will not forget. And the tone you have chosen to adopt, young man, seems to spring from the same fount: the old fox, you think, put a false gem of impossible size into the hanging, and has had it stolen that his fraud may not be detected when a jeweller examines the work by daylight. This is too much! I am an honest man, Sirs, and I am fain to add a rich one; and the man who tries to cast a stain on the character I have borne through a long life shall learn, to his ruing, that old Haschim has greater and more powerful friends to back him than you may care to meet!"

As he uttered this threat the merchant's eyes glistened through tears; it grieved him to be unjustly suspected and to be forced to express himself so hardly to the Mukaukas for whom he felt both reverence and pity. It was clear from the tone of his speech that he was in fact a determined and a powerful personage, and Orion interrupted him with the eager enquiry: "Who has dared to think so basely of you?"

"Your own mother, I regret to say," replied the Moslem sadly, with an oriental shrug of distress and annoyance--his shoulders up to his ears.

"Forget it, I beg of you," said the governor. "God knows women have softer hearts than men, and yet they more readily incline to think evil of their fellow-creatures, and particularly of the enemies of their faith. On the other hand they are more sensitive to kindness. A woman's hair is long and her wits short, says the saw."

"You have plenty to say against us women!" retorted Neforis. "But scold away--scold if it is a comfort to you!" But she added, while she affectionately turned her husband's pillows and gave him another of his white pillules: "I will submit to the worst to-day for I am in the wrong. I have already asked your pardon, worthy Haschim, and I do so again, with all my heart."

As she spoke, she went up to the Arab and held out her hand; he took it, but lightly, however, and quickly released it, saying:

"I do not find it hard to forgive. But I find it impossible, here or anywhere, to let so much as a grain of dust rest on my bright good name. I shall follow up this affair, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.--And now, one question: Is the dog that guarded the tablinum a watchful, savage beast?"

"How savage he is he unfortunately proved on the person of the poor Persian slave; and his watchfulness is known to all the household," cried Orion.

"But I would beg you, worthy merchant," said Neforis, "and in the name of all present, to give us the help of your experience. I myself--wait a little wait: in spite of her long hair and her short wits a woman often has a happy idea. I, probably, was the first to come on the robber's track. It is clear that he must belong to the household since the dog did not attack him. Paula, who was so wonderfully quick in coming to the rescue of the Persian, is of course not to be thought of. . ."

Here her husband interrupted her with an angry exclamation: "Leave the girl quite out of the question wife!"

"As if I supposed her to be the thief!" retorted Neforis indignantly, and she shrugged her shoulders as Orion, in mild reproach, also cried: "Mother! consider. . . ." and the merchant asked:

"Do you mean the young girl from whom I had to take such hard words last night?--Well, then, I will stake my whole fortune on her innocence. That beautiful, passionate creature is incapable of any underhand dealings."

"Passionate!" Neforis smiled. "Her heart is as cold and as hard as the lost emerald; we have proved that by experience."

"Nevertheless," said Orion, "she is incapable of baseness."

"How zealous men can be for a pair of fine eyes!" interrupted his mother. "But I have not the most remote suspicion of her; I have something quite different in my mind. A pair of man's shoes were found lying by the wounded girl. Did you do what my lord Orion ordered, Sebek?"

"At once, Mistress," replied the steward, "and I have been expecting the captain of the watch for some time; for Psamtik. . . ."

But here he was interrupted: the officer in question, who for more than twenty years had commanded the Mukaukas' guard of honor, was shown into the room; after answering a few preliminary enquiries he began his report in a voice so loud that it hurt the governor, and his wife was obliged to request the soldier to speak more gently.

The bloodhounds and terriers had been let out after being allowed to smell at the shoes, and a couple of them had soon found their way to the side-door where Hiram had waited for Paula. There they paused, sniffing about on all sides, and had then jumped up a few steps.

"And those stairs lead to Paula's room," observed Neforis with a shrug.

"But they were on a false scent," the officer eagerly added. "The little toads might have thrown suspicion on an innocent person. The curs immediately after rushed into the stables, and ran up and down like Satan after a lost soul. The pack had soon pulled down the boy--the son of the freedman who came here from Damascus with the daughter of the great Thomas--and they went quite mad in his father's room: Heaven and earth! what a howling and barking and yelping. They poked their noses into every old rag, and now we knew where the hole in the wine-skin was.-- I am sorry for the man. He stammered horribly, but as a trainer, and in all that has to do with horses, all honor to him!--The shoes are Hiram's as surely as my eyes are in my head; but we have not caught him yet. He is across the river, for a boat is missing and where it had been lying the dogs began again. Unless the unbelievers over there give him shelter we are certain to have him."

"Then we know who is the criminal!" cried Orion, with a sigh as deep as though some great burden were lifted from his soul. Then he went on in a commanding tone--and his voice rang so fiercely that the color which had mounted to his cheeks could hardly be due to satisfaction at this last good news....

"As it is not yet two hours after noon, send all your men out to search for him and deliver him up. My father will give you a warrant, and the Arabs on the other shore will assist you. Perhaps the thief may fall into our hands even sooner and with him the emerald, unless the rogue has succeeded in hiding it or selling it." Then his voice sank, and he added in a tone of regret. It is a pity as concerns the man, we had not one in our stables who knew more about horses! Fresh proof of your maxim, mother: if you want to be well served you must buy rascals!"

"Strictly speaking," said Neforis meditatively, "Hiram is not one of our people. He was a freedman of Thomas' and came here with his daughter. Every one speaks highly of his skill in the stable; but for this robbery we might have kept him for the rest of his life still, if the girl had ever taken it into her head to leave us and to take him with her, we could not have detained him.--You may say what you will, and abuse me and mock me; I have none of what you call imagination; I see things simply as they are: but there must be some understanding between that girl and the thief."

"You are not to say another word of such monstrous nonsense!" exclaimed her husband; and he would have said more, but that at that moment the groom of the chambers announced that Gamaliel, the Jewish goldsmith, begged an audience. The man had come to give information with regard to the fate of the lost emerald.

At this statement Orion changed color, and he turned away from the merchant as the slave admitted the same Israelite who had been sitting over the fire with the head-servants. He at once plunged into his story, telling it in his peculiar light-hearted style. He was so rich that the

loss he might suffer did not trouble him enough to spoil his good-humor, and so honest that it was a pleasure to him to restore the stolen property to its rightful owner. Early that morning, so he told them, Hiram the groom had been to him to offer him a wonderfully large and splendid emerald for sale. The freedman had assured him that the stone was part of the property left by the famous Thomas, his former master. It had decorated the head-stall of the horse which the hero of Damascus had last ridden, and it had come to him with the steed.

"I offered him what I thought fair," the Jew went on, "and paid him two thousand drachmae on account; the remainder he begged me to take charge of for the present. To this I agreed, but ere long a fly began to hum suspicion in my ear. Then the police rushed through the town with the bloodhounds. Good Heavens, what a barking! The creatures yelped as if they would bark my poor house down, like the trumpets round the walls of Jericho--you know. 'What is the matter now,' I asked of the dog-keepers, and behold! my suspicions about the emerald were justified; so here, my lord Governor, I have brought you the stone, and as every suckling in Memphis hears from its nurse--unless it is deaf--what a just man Mukaukas George is, you will no doubt make good to me what I advanced to that stammering scoundrel. And you will have the best of the bargain, noble Sir; for I make no demand for interest or even maintenance for the two hours during which it was mine."

"Give me the stone!" interrupted the Arab, who was annoyed by the Jew's jesting tone; he snatched the emerald from him, weighed it in his hand, put it close to his eyes, held it far off, tapped it with a small hammer that he took out of his breast-pocket, slipped it into its place in the work, examining it keenly, suspiciously, and at last with satisfaction. During all this, Orion had more than once turned pale, and the sweat broke out on his handsome, pale face. Had a miracle been wrought here? How could this gem, which was surely on its way to Alexandria, have found its way into the Jew's hands? Or could Chusar have opened the little packet and have sold the emerald to Hiram, and through him to the jeweller? He must get to the bottom of it, and while the Arab was examining the gem he went up to Gamaliel and asked him: "Are you positively certain--it is a matter of freedom or the dungeon--certain that you had this stone from Hiram the Syrian and from no one else? I mean, is the man so well-known to you that no mistake is possible?"

"God preserve us!" exclaimed the Jew drawing back a step from Orion, who was gazing at him with a sinister light in his eyes. "How can my lord doubt it? Your respected father has known me these thirty years, and do you suppose that I--I do not know the Syrian? Why, who in Memphis can stammer to compare with him? And has he not killed half my children with your wild young horses?--Half killed every one of my children I mean--half killed them, I say, with fright. They are all still alive and well, God preserve them, but none the better for your horsebreaker; for fresh air is good for children and my little Rebecca would stop indoors till he was at home again for fear of his terrifying pranks."

"Well, well!" Orion broke in. "And at what hour did he bring you the emerald for sale? Exactly. Now, recollect: when was it? You surely

must remember."

"Adonai! How should I?" said the Jew. "But wait, Sir, perhaps I may be able to tell you. In this hot weather we are up before sunrise; then we said our prayers and had our morning broth; then. . . ."

"Senseless chatter!" urged Orion. But Gamaliel went on without allowing himself to be checked. "Then little Ruth jumped into my lap to pull out the white hairs that will grow under my nose and, just as the child was doing it and I cried out: 'Oh, you hurt me!' the sun fell upon the earth bank on which I was sitting."

"And at what time does it reach the bank?" cried the young man.

"Exactly two hours after sunrise," replied the Jew, "at this time of year. Do me the honor of a visit tomorrow morning; you will not regret it, for I can show you some beautiful, exquisite things--and you can watch the shadow yourself."

"Two hours after sunrise," murmured Orion to himself, and then with fresh qualms he reflected that it was fully four hours later when he had given the packet to Chusar. It was impossible to doubt the Jew's statement. The man was rich, honest and content: he did not lie. The jewel Orion had sent away and that purchased from Hiram could not in any case be identical. But how could all this be explained? It was enough to turn his brain. And not to dare to speak when mere silence was falsehood--falsehood to his father and mother!--If only the hapless stammerer might escape! If he were caught; then--then merciful Heaven! But no; it was not to be thought of.--On, then, on; and if it came to the worst the honor of a hundred stablemen could not outweigh that of one Orion; horrible as it was, the man must be sacrificed. He would see that his life was spared and that he was soon set at liberty!

The Arab meanwhile had concluded his examination; still he was not perfectly satisfied. Orion longed to interpose; for if the merchant expressed no doubts and acknowledged the recovered gem to be the stolen one, much would be gained; so he turned to him again and said: "May I ask you to show me the emerald once more? It is quite impossible, do you think, that a second should be found to match it?"

"That is too much to assert," said the Arab gravely. "This stone resembles that on the hanging to a hair; and yet it has a little inequality which I do not remember noticing on it. It is true I had never seen it out of the setting, and this little boss may have been turned towards the stuff, and yet, and yet.--Tell me, goldsmith, did the thief give you the emerald bare--unset?"

"As bare as Adam and Eve before they ate the apple," said the Jew.

"That is a pity--a great pity!--And still I fancy that the stone in the work was a trifle longer. In such a case it is almost folly and perversity to doubt, and yet I feel--and yet I ask myself: Is this really the stone that formed that bud?"

"But Heaven bless us!" cried Orion, "the twin of such an unique gem would surely not drop from the skies and at the same moment into one and the same house. Let us be glad that the lost sheep has come back to us. Now, I will lock it into this iron casket, Father, and as soon as the robber is caught you send for me: do you understand, Psantik?" He nodded to his parents, offered his hand to the Arab, and that in a way which could not fail to satisfy any one, so that even the old man was won over; and then he left the room.

The merchant's honor was saved; still his conscientious soul was disturbed by a doubt that he could not away with. He was about to take leave but the Mukaukas was so buried in pillows, and kept his eyes so closely shut, that no one could detect whether he were sleeping or waking; so the Arab, not wishing to disturb him, withdrew without speaking.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Ancient custom, to have her ears cut off
Caught the infection and had to laugh whether she would or no
Gave them a claim on your person and also on your sorrows
How could they find so much pleasure in such folly
Of two evils it is wise to choose the lesser
Prepared for the worst; then you are armed against failure
Who can hope to win love that gives none
Who can take pleasure in always seeing a gloomy face?

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