

The Emperor, Part 1, Volume 2.

Georg Ebers

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Title: The Emperor, Part 1, Volume 2.

Author: Georg Ebers

Release Date: April, 2004 [EBook #5484]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on May 28, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE EMPEROR, BY GEORG EBERS, V2

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THE EMPEROR, Part 1.

By Georg Ebers

Volume 2.

CHAPTER V.

Pontius had gone to the steward's room, with a frowning brow, but it was with a smile on his strongly-marked lips, and a brisk step that he returned to his work-people. The foreman came to meet him with looks of enquiry as he said. "The steward was a little offended and with reason; but now we are capital friends and he will do what he can in the matter of lighting."

In the hall of the Muses he paused outside the screen, behind which Pollux was working, and called out:

"Friend sculptor, listen to me, it is high time to have supper."

"It is, indeed," replied Pollux, "else it will be breakfast."

"Then lay aside your tools for a quarter of an hour and help me and the palace-steward to demolish the food that has been sent me."

"You will need no second assistant if Keraunus is there. Food melts before him like ice before the sun."

"Then come and save him from an overloaded stomach."

"Impossible, for I am just now dealing most unmercifully with a bowl full of cabbage and sausages. My mother had cooked that food of the gods and my father has brought it in to his first-born son."

"Cabbage and sausages!" repeated the architect, and its tone betrayed that his hungry stomach would fain have made closer acquaintance with the savory mess.

"Come in here," continued Pollux, "and be my guest. The cabbage has experienced the process which is impending over this palace--it has been warmed up."

"Warmed-up cabbage is better than freshly-cooked, but the fire over which we must try to make this palace enjoyable again, burns too hotly and must be too vigorously stirred. The best things have been all taken out, and cannot be replaced."

"Like the sausages, I have fished out of my cabbages," laughed the sculptor. "After all I cannot invite you to be my guest, for it would be a compliment to this dish if I were now to call it cabbage with sausages. I have worked it like a mine, and now that the vein of sausages is nearly exhausted, little remains but the native soil in which two or three miserable fragments remain as memorials of past wealth. But my mother shall cook you a mess of it before long, and she prepares it with incomparable skill."

"A good idea, but you are my guest."

"I am replete."

"Then come and spice our meal with your good company."

"Excuse me, sir; leave me rather here behind my screen. In the first place, I am in a happy vein, and on the right track; I feel that something good will come of this night's work."

"And tomorrow--"

"Hear me out."

"Well."

"You would be doing your other guest an ill-service by inviting me."

"Do you know the steward then?"

"From my earliest youth, I am the son of the gatekeeper of the palace."

"Oh, ho! then you came from that pretty little lodge with the ivy and the birds, and the jolly old lady."

"She is my mother--and the first time the butcher kills she will concoct for you and me a dish of sausages and cabbage without an equal."

"A very pleasing prospect."

"Here comes a hippopotamus--on closer inspection Keraunus, the steward."

"Are you his enemy?"

"I, no; but he is mine--yes," replied Pollux. "It is a foolish story. When we sup together don't ask me about it if you care to have a jolly companion. And do not tell Keraunus that I am here, it will lead to no good."

"As you wish, and here are our lamps too."

"Enough to light the nether world," exclaimed Pollux, and waving his hand to the architect in farewell he vanished behind the screens to devote himself entirely to his model.

It was long past midnight, and the slaves who had set to work with much zeal had finished their labors in the hall of the Muses. They were now allowed to rest for some hours on straw that had been spread for them in another wing of the building. The architect himself wished to take advantage of this time to refresh himself by a short sleep, for the

exertions of the morrow, but between this intention and its fulfilment an obstacle was interposed, the preposterous dimensions namely of his guest. He had invited the steward on purpose to give him his fill of meat, and Keraunus had shown himself amenable to encouragement in this respect. But after the last dish had been removed the steward thought that good manners demanded that he should honor his entertainer by his illustrious presence, and at the same time the prefect's good wine loosened the tongue of the man, who was not usually communicative.

First he spoke of the manifold infirmities which tormented him and endangered his life, and when Pontius, to divert his talk into other channels, was so imprudent as to allude to the Council of Citizens, Keraunus gave full play to his eloquence, and, while he emptied cup after cup of wine, tried to lay down the reasons which had made him and his friends decide on staking everything in order to deprive the members of the extensive community of Jews in the city of their rights as citizens, and to expel them, if possible, from Alexandria. So warm was his zeal that he totally forgot the presence of the architect, and his humble origin, and declared to be indispensable, that even the descendants of freed-slaves should be disenfranchised.

Pontius saw in the steward's inflamed eyes and cheeks that it was the wine which spoke within him, and he made no answer; and determined that the rest he needed should not be thus abridged, he rose from table and briefly excusing himself he retired to the room in which the couch had been prepared for him. After he had undressed he desired his slave to see what Keraunus was about, and soon received the reassuring information that the steward was fast asleep and snoring.

"Only listen," said the slave, to confirm his report. "You can hear him grunting and snuffing as far as this. I pushed a cushion under his head, for otherwise, so full as he is, the stout gentleman might come to some harm."

Love is a plant which springs up for many who have never sown it, and grows into a spreading tree for many who have neither fostered nor tended it. How little had Keraunus ever done to win the heart of his daughter, how much on the contrary which could not fail to overshadow and trouble her young life. And yet Selene, whose youth--for she was but nineteen--needed repose and to whom the evening with the reprieve of sleep brought more pleasure than the morning with its load of cares and labor, sat by the three-branched lamp and watched, and tormented herself more and more as it grew later and later, at her father's long absence. About a week before the strong man had suddenly lost consciousness; only, it is true, for a few minutes, and the physician had told her that though he appeared to be in superabundant health, the attack indicated that he must follow his prescriptions strictly and avoid all kinds of excess. A single indiscretion, he had declared, might swiftly and suddenly cut the thread of his existence. After her father had gone out in obedience to the architect's invitation, Selene had brought out her youngest brothers' and sisters' garments, in order to mend them. Her sister Arsinoe, who was her junior by two years, and whose fingers were as nimble as her own, might indeed have helped her, but she had gone to bed early and was sleeping by the children who could not be left untended at night. Her female slave, who had been in her grandmother's service, ought to have assisted her; but the old half-blind negress saw even worse by lamp-light than by daylight, and after a few stitches could do no more. Selene sent her to bed and sat down alone to her work.

For the first hour she sewed away without looking up, considering, meanwhile, how she could best contrive to support the family till the end of the month on the few drachmae she could dispose of. As it got later she grew wearier and wearier, but still she sat at the work, though her pretty head often sank upon her breast. She must await her father's return, for a potion prepared by the physician stood waiting for him, and she feared he would forget it if she did not remind him.

By the end of the second hour sleep overcame her, and she felt as if the chair she was sitting on was giving way under her, and as if it was sinking at first slowly and then quicker and quicker, into a deep abyss that opened beneath her. Looking up for help in her dream, she could see nothing but her father's face, which looked aside with indifference. As her dream went on she called him and called him again, but for a long time he did not seem to hear her. At last he looked down at her and when he perceived her he smiled, but instead of helping her he picked up stones and clods from the edge of the gulf and threw them on her hands with which she had clutched the brambles and roots that grew out of the rift of the rocks. She entreated him to cease, implored him, shrieked to him to spare her, but not a muscle moved in the face above her; it seemed set in a vacant smile, and even his heart was dead too, for he ruthlessly flung down now a pebble, now a clod, one after the other, till her hands were losing their last feeble hold and she was on the point of falling into the fatal gulf below. Her own cry of terror aroused her, but during the brief process of returning from her dream to actuality, she saw through swiftly parting mists--only for an instant, and yet quite plainly--the tall grass of a meadow, spangled with ox-eye daisies, white and gold, with violet-hued blue bells and scarlet poppies, among which she was lying--as in a soft green bed, while near the sward lay a sparkling blue lake and behind it rose beautiful swelling hills, with red cliffs, and green groves, and meadows bright in the clear sunshine. A clear sky, across which a soft breeze gently blew light silvery flakes of cloud, bent over the lovely but fleeting picture, which she could not compare with anything she had ever seen near her own home.

She had only slept for a short time, but when, once more thoroughly awake, she rubbed her eyes, she thought her dream must have lasted for hours.

One flame of the three-branched lamp had flickered into extinction and the wick of another was beginning to waste. She hastily put it out with a pair of tongs that hung by a chain, and then after pouring fresh oil into the lamp that was still burning she carried the light into her father's sleeping room.

He had not yet returned. She was seized with a mortal terror. Had the architect's wine bereft him of his senses? Had he on his way back to his rooms been seized with a fresh attack of giddiness? In spirit she saw the heavy man incapable of raising himself, dying perhaps where he had fallen.

No choice remained to her; she must go at once to the hall of the Muses and see what had happened to her father, pick him up, give him help or--if he still were feasting--endeavor to tempt him back by any excuse she could find. Everything was at stake; her father's life and with it maintenance and shelter for eight helpless creatures.

The December night was stormy, a keen and bitter wind blew through the ill-closed opening in the roof of the room as Selene, before she began

her expedition, tied a handkerchief over her head and threw over her shoulders a white mantle which had been worn by her dead mother. In the long corridor which lay between her father's rooms and the front portion of the palace, she had to screen the flickering light of the little lamp with her left hand, carrying it in her right; the flame blown about by the draught and her own figure were mirrored here and there in the polished surface of the dark marble. The thick sandals she had tied on to her feet roused loud echoes in the empty rooms as they fell on the stone pavements, and terror possessed Selene's anxious soul. Her fingers trembled as they held the lamp and her heart beat audibly as, with bated breath, she went through the cupolaed hall in which Ptolemy Euergetes 'the fat' was said, some years ago, to have murdered his own son, and in which even a deep breath roused an echo.

But even in this room she did not forget to look to the right and left for her father. She breathed a sigh of relief when she perceived a streak of light which shone through the gaping rift of a cracked side-door of the hall of the Muses and fell in a broken reflection on the floor and the wall of the last room through which she had to pass. She now entered the large hall which was dimly lighted by the lamps behind the sculptor's screen, and by several tapers, now burnt down low. These were standing on a table knocked together out of blocks of wood and planks at the extreme end of the hall, and behind this her father was sound asleep.

The deep notes brought out of the sleeper's broad chest, were echoed in a very uncanny way from the bare walls of the vast empty room, and she was frightened by them and still more by the long black shadows of the pillars, that lay, like barriers, across her path. She stood listening in the middle of the hall and soon recognized in the alarming tones a sound that was only too familiar. Without a moment's hesitation she started to run, and hastened to the sleeper, shook him, pushed him, called him, sprinkled his forehead with water, and appealed to him by the tenderest names with which her sister Arsinoe was wont to coax him. When, in spite of all this, he neither spoke nor stirred, she flung the full light of the lamp on his face. Then she thought she perceived that a bluish tinge had overspread his bloated features, and she broke into the deep, agonized, weeping which, a few hours previously had touched the architect's heart.

There was a sudden stir behind the screens which enclosed the sculptor and the work in progress. Pollux had been working for a long time with zeal and pleasure, but at last the steward's snoring had begun to disturb him. The body of the Muse had already taken a definite form and he could begin to work out the head with the earliest dawn of day. He now dropped his arms wearily, for as soon as he ceased to create with his whole heart and mind he felt tired, and saw plainly that without a model he could do nothing satisfactory with the drapery of his Urania. So he pulled his stool up to a great chest full of gypsum to get a little repose by leaning against it.

But sleep avoided the artist who was too much excited by his rapid night's work, and as soon as Selene opened the door he sat upright and peeped through an opening between the frames of his place of retirement. When he saw the tall draped figure in whose hand a lamp was trembling, when he watched her cross the spacious hall, and then suddenly stand still, he was not a little startled, but this did not hinder him from noting every step of the nocturnal spectre with far more curiosity than alarm. Then, when Selene looked round her, and the lamp illuminated her

face, he recognized the steward's daughter, and immediately knew what she must be seeking.

Her vain attempts to rouse the sleeper, though somewhat pathetic, had in them at the same time something irresistibly ludicrous, and Pollux felt sorely tempted to laugh. But as soon as Selene began to weep so bitterly he hastily pushed apart two of the laths of the screen, went up and called her name, at first softly not to frighten her, and then more loudly. When she turned her head he begged her warmly not to be alarmed for he was no ghost, only a very humble and ordinary mortal, in fact--as she might see--nothing more, alas! than the son of Euphorion, the gate-keeper, good for nothing as yet, but treading the path to something better.

"You, Pollux?" asked the girl with surprise.

"The very man. But you--can I help you?"

"My poor father," sobbed Selene. "He does not stir, he is immovable--and his face--oh! merciful gods."

"A man who snores is not dead," said the sculptor. "But the doctor told him--"

"He is not even ill! Pontius only gave him stronger wine to drink than he is used to. Let him be; he is sleeping with the pillow under his neck, as comfortably as a child. When he began just now to trumpet a little too loud I whistled as loud as a plover, for that often silences a snorer; but I could more easily have made those stone Muses dance than have roused him."

"If only we could get him to bed."

"Well, if you have four horses at hand."

"You are as bad as you ever were!"

"A little less so, Selene, only you must become accustomed again to my way of speaking. This time I only mean that we two together are not strong enough to carry him away."

"But what can I do, then? The doctor said--"

"Never mind the doctor. The complaint your father is suffering from is one I know well. It will be gone to-morrow, perhaps by sundown, and the only pain it will leave behind, he will feel under his wig. Only leave him to sleep."

"But it is so cold here."

"Take my cloak and cover him with that."

"Then you will be frozen."

"I am used to it. How long has Keraunus had dealings with the doctor?"

Selene related the accident that had befallen her father and how justified were her fears. The sculptor listened to her in silence and then said in a quite altered tone:

"I am truly sorry to hear it. Let us put some cold water on his forehead, and until the slaves come back again I will change the wet cloth every quarter of an hour. Here is a jar and a handkerchief--good, they might have been left on purpose. Perhaps, too, it will wake him, and if not the people shall carry him to his own rooms."

"Disgraceful, disgraceful!" sighed the girl.

"Not at all; the high-priest of Serapis even is sometimes unwell. Only let me see to it."

"It will excite him afresh if he sees you. He is so angry with you--so very angry."

"Omnipotent Zeus, what harm have I done you, fat father! The gods forgive the sins of the wise, and a man will not forgive the fault committed by a stupid lad in a moment of imprudence."

"You mocked at him."

"I set a clay head that was like him on the shoulders of the fat Silenus near the gate, that had lost its own head. It was my first piece of independent work."

"But you did it to vex my father."

"Certainly not, Selene; I was delighted with the joke and nothing more."

"But you knew how touchy he is."

"And does a wild boy of fifteen ever reflect on the consequences of his audacity? If he had but given me a thrashing his annoyance would have discharged itself like thunder and lightning, and the air would have been clear again. But, as it was, he cut the face off the work with a knife, and deliberately trod the pieces under foot as they lay on the ground. He gave me one single blow--with his thumb--which I still feel, it is true, and then he treated me and my parents with such scorn, so coldly and hardly, with such bitter contempt--"

"He never is really violent, but wrath seems to eat him inwardly, and I have rarely seen him so angry as he was that time."

"But if he had only settled the account with me on the spot! but my father was by, and hot words fell like rain, and my mother added her share, and from that time there has been utter hostility between our little house and you up here. What hurt me most was that you and your sister were forbidden to come to see us and to play with me."

"That has spoilt many pleasant hours for me, too."

"It was nice when we used to dress up in my father's theatrical finery and cloaks."

"And when you made us dolls out of clay."

"Or when we performed the Olympian games."

"I was always the teacher when we played at school with our little

brothers and sisters."

"Arsinoe gave you most trouble."

"Oh! and what fun when we went fishing!"

"And when we brought home the fishes and mother gave us meal and raisins to cook them."

"Do you remember the festival of Adonis, and how I stopped the runaway horse of that Numidian officer?"

"The horse had knocked over Arsinoe, and when we got home mother gave you an almond-cake."

"And your ungrateful sister bit a great piece out of it and left me only a tiny morsel. Is Arsinoe as pretty as she promised to become? It is two years since I last saw her; at our place we never have time to leave work till it is dark. For eight months I had to work for the master at Ptolemais, and often saw the old folks but once in the month."

"We go out very little, too, and we are not allowed to go into your parents' house. My sister--"

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes, I think she is. Whenever she can get hold of a piece of ribbon she plaits it in her hair, and the men in the street turn round to look at her. She is sixteen now."

"Sixteen! What, little Arsinoe! Why, how long then is it since your mother died?"

"Four years and eight months."

"You remember the date very exactly; such a mother is not easily forgotten, indeed. She was a good woman and a kinder I never met. I know, too, that she tried to mollify your father's feeling, but she could not succeed, and then she need must die!"

"Yes," said Selene gloomily. "How could the gods decree it! They are often more cruel than the hardest hearted man."

"Your poor little brothers and sisters!"

The girl bowed her head sadly and Pollux stood for some time with his eyes fixed on the ground. Then he raised his head and exclaimed:

"I have something for you that will please you."

"Nothing ever pleases me now she is dead."

"Yes, yes indeed," replied the young sculptor eagerly. "I could not forget the good soul, and once in my idle moments I modelled her bust from memory. To-morrow I will bring it to you."

"Oh!" cried Selene, and her large heavy eyes brightened with a sunny gleam.

"Now, is not it true, you are pleased?"

"Yes indeed, very much. But when my father learns that it is you who have given me the portrait--"

"Is he capable of destroying it?"

"If he does not destroy it, he will not suffer it in the house as soon as he knows that you made it." Pollux took the handkerchief from the steward's head, moistened it afresh, and exclaimed as he rearranged it on the forehead of the sleeping man:

"I have an idea. All that matters is that my bust should serve to remind you often of your mother; the bust need not stand in your rooms. The busts of the women of the house of Ptolemy stand on the rotunda, which you can see from your balcony, and which you can pass whenever you please; some of them are badly mutilated and must be got rid of. I will undertake to restore the Berenice and put your mother's head on her shoulders. Then you have only to go out and look at her. Will that do?"

"Yes, Pollux; you are a good man."

"So I told you just now. I am beginning to improve. But time--time! if I am to undertake to repair Berenice I must begin by saving the minutes."

"Go back to your work now; I know how to apply a wet compress only too well."

With these words Selene threw back her mantle over her shoulders so as to leave her hands free for use, and stood with her slender figure, her pale face, and the fine broadly-flowing folds of rich stuff, like a statue in the eyes of the young sculptor.

"Stop--stay so--just so," cried Pollux to the astonished girl, so loudly and eagerly that she was startled.

"Your cloak hangs with a wonderfully-free flow from your shoulders--in the name of all the gods do not touch it. If only I might model from it I should in a few minutes gain a whole day for our Berenice. I will wet the handkerchief at intervals in the pauses." Without waiting for Selene's answer the sculptor hastened into his nook and returned first with one of the lamps he worked by in each hand, and some small tools in his mouth, and then fetched his wax model which he placed on the outer side of the table, behind which the steward was sleeping. The tapers were put out, the lamps pushed aside, and raised or lowered, and when at last a tolerably suitable light was procured Pollux threw himself on a stool, straddled his legs, craned his head forward as far as his neck would allow, looking, with his hooked nose, like a vulture that strives to descry his distant prey--cast his eyes down, raised them again to take in something fresh, and after a long gaze looked down again while his fingers and nails moved over the surface of the wax-figure, sinking into the plastic material, applying new pieces to apparently complete portions, removing others with a decided nip and rounding them off with bewildering rapidity to use them for a fresh purpose.

He seemed to be seized with cramp in his hands, but still under his knotted brow his eye shone earnest, resolute and calm, and yet full of profound and speechless inspiration. Selene had said not a word that

permitted his using her as a model; but, as if his enthusiasm was infectious, she remained motionless, and when, as he worked, his gaze met hers she could detect the stern earnestness which at this moment possessed her eager companion.

Neither of them opened their lips for some time. At last he stood back from his work, stooping low to look first at Selene and then at his statuette with keen examination from head to foot; and then, drawing a deep breath, and rubbing the wax over with his finger, he said:

"There, that is how it must go! Now I will wet your father's handkerchief and then we can go on again. If you are tired you can rest."

She availed herself but little of this permission and presently he began work again. As he proceeded carefully to replace some folds of her drapery which had fallen out of place, she moved her foot as if to draw back, but he begged her earnestly to stand still and she obeyed his request.

Pollux now used his fingers and modelling tools more calmly; his gaze was less wistful and he began to talk again.

"You are very pale," he said. "To be sure the lamp-light and a sleepless night have something to do with it."

"I look just the same by daylight, but I am not ill."

"I thought Arsinoe would have been like your mother, but now I see many features of her face in yours again. The oval of their form is the same and, in both, the line of the nose runs almost straight to the forehead; you have her eyes and the same bend of the brow, but your mouth is smaller and more sharply cut, and she could hardly have made such a heavy knot of her hair. I fancy, too, that yours is lighter than hers."

"As a girl she must have had still more hair, and perhaps she may have been as fair as I was--I am brown now."

"Another thing you inherit from her is that your hair, without being curly, lies upon your head in such soft waves."

"It is easy to keep in order."

"Are not you taller than she was?"

"I fancy so, but as she was stouter she looked shorter. Will you soon have done?"

"You are getting tired of standing?"

"Not very."

"Then have a little more patience. Your face reminds me more and more of our early years; I should be glad to see Arsinoe once more. I feel at this moment as if time had moved backwards a good piece. Have you the same feeling?"

Selene shook her head.

"You are not happy?"

"No."

"I know full well that you have very heavy duties to perform for your age."

"Things go as they may."

"Nay, nay. I know you do not let things go haphazard. You take care of your brothers and sisters like a mother."

"Like a mother!" repeated Selene, and she smiled a bitter negative.

"Of course a mother's love is a thing by itself, but your father and the little ones have every reason to be satisfied with yours."

"The little ones are perhaps, and Helios who is blind, but Arsinoe does what she can."

"You certainly are not content, I can hear it in your voice, and you used formerly to be as merry and happy as your sister, though perhaps not so saucy."

"Formerly--"

"How sadly that sounds! And yet you are handsome, you are young, and life lies before you."

"But what a life!"

"Well, what?" asked the sculptor, and taking his hands from his work he looked ardently at the fair pale girl before him and cried out fervently:

"A life which might be full of happiness and satisfied affection."

The girl shook her head in negation and answered coldly:

"'Love is joy,' says the Christian woman who superintends us at work in the papyrus factory, and since my mother died I have had no love. I enjoyed all my share of happiness once for all in my childhood, now I am content if only we are spared the worst misfortunes. Otherwise I take what each day brings, because I can not do otherwise. My heart is empty, and if I ever feel anything keenly, it is dread. I have long since ceased to expect any thing good of the future."

"Girl!" exclaimed Pollux. "Why, what has been happening to you? I do not understand half of what you are saying. How came you in the papyrus factory?"

"Do not betray me," begged Selene. "If my father were to hear of it."

"He is asleep, and what you confide to me no one will ever hear of again."

"Why should I conceal it? I go every day with Arsinoe for two hours to the manufactory, and we work there to earn a little money."

"Behind your father's back?"

"Yes, he would rather that we should starve than allow it. Every day I feel the same loathing for the deceit; but we could not get on without it, for Arsinoe thinks of nothing but herself, plays draughts with my father, curls his hair, plays with the children as if they were dolls, but it is my part to take care of them."

"And you, you say, have no share of love. Happily no one believes you, and I least of all. Only lately my mother was telling me about you, and I thought you were a girl who might turn out just such a wife as a woman ought to be."

"And now?"

"Now, I know it for certain."

"You may be mistaken."

"No, no! your name is Selene, and you are as gentle as the kindly moonlight; names, even, have their significance."

"And my blind brother who has never even seen the light is called Helios!" answered the girl.

Pollux had spoken with much warmth, but Selene's last words startled him and checked the effervescence of his feelings. Finding he did not answer her bitter exclamation, she said, at first coolly, but with increasing warmth:

"You are beginning to believe me, and you are right, for what I do for the children is not done out of love, or out of kindness, or because I set their welfare above my own. I have inherited my father's pride, and it would be odious to me if my brothers and sisters went about in rags, and people thought we were as poor and helpless as we really are. What is most horrible to me is sickness in the house, for that increases the anxiety I always feel and swallows up my last coin; the children must not perish for want of it. I do not want to make myself out worse than I am; it grieves me too to see them drooping. But nothing that I do brings me happiness--at most it moderates my fears. You ask what I am afraid of? --of everything, everything that can happen to me, for I have no reason to look forward to anything good. When there is a knock, it may be a creditor; when people look at Arsinoe in the street, I seem to see dishonor lurking round her; when my father acts against the advice of the physician I feel as if we were standing already roofless in the open street. What is there that I can do with a happy mind? I certainly am not idle, still I envy the woman who can sit with her hands in her lap and be waited on by slaves, and if a golden treasure fell into my possession, I would never stir a finger again, and would sleep every day till the sun was high and make slaves look after my father and the children. My life is sheer misery. If ever we see better days I shall be astonished, and before I have got over my astonishment it will all be over."

The sculptor felt a cold chill, and his heart which had opened wide to his old playfellow shrank again within him. Before he could find the right words of encouragement which he sought, they heard in the hall, where the workmen and slaves were sleeping, the blast of a trumpet intended to awake them. Selene started, drew her mantle more closely round her, begged Pollux to take care of her father, and to hide the

wine-jar which was standing near him from the work-people and then, forgetting her lamp, she went hastily toward the door by which she had entered. Pollux hurried after her to light the way and while he accompanied her as far as the door of her rooms, by his warm and urgent words which appealed wonderfully to her heart, he extracted from her a promise to stand once more in her mantle as his model.

A quarter of an hour later the steward was safe in bed and still sleeping soundly, while Pollux, who had stretched himself on a mattress behind his screen, could not for a long time cease to think of the pale girl with her benumbed soul. At last sleep overcame him too, and a sweet dream showed him pretty little Arsinoe, who but for him must infallibly have been killed by the Numidian's restive horse, taking away her sister Selene's almond-cake and giving it to him. The pale girl submitted quietly to the robbery and only smiled coldly and silently to herself.

CHAPTER VI.

Alexandria was in the greatest excitement.

The Emperor's visit now immediately impending had tempted the busy hive of citizens away from the common round of life in which, day after day, --swarming, hurrying, pushing each other on, or running each other down-- they raced for bread and for the means of filling their hours of leisure with pleasures and amusements. The unceasing wheel of industry to-day had pause in the factories, workshops, storehouses and courts of justice, for all sorts and conditions of men were inspired by the same desire to celebrate Hadrian's visit with unheard-of splendor. All that the citizens could command of inventive skill, of wealth, and of beauty was called forth to be displayed in the games and processions which were to fill up a number of days. The richest of the heathen citizens had undertaken the management of the pieces to be performed in the Theatre, of the mock fight on the lake, and of the sanguinary games in the Amphitheatre; and so great was the number of opulent persons that many more were prepared to pay for smaller projects, for which there was no opening. Nevertheless the arrangements for certain portions of the procession, in which even the less wealthy were to take a share, the erection of the building in the Hippodrome, the decorations in the streets, and the preparations for entertaining the Roman visitors absorbed sums so large that they seemed extravagant even to the prefect Titianus, who was accustomed to see his fellow-officials in Rome squander millions.

As the Emperor's viceroy it behoved him to give his assent to all that was planned to feast his sovereign's eye and ear. On the whole, he left the citizens of the great town free to act as they would; but he had, more than once, to exert a decided opposition to their overdoing the thing; for though the Emperor might be able to endure a vast amount of pleasure, what the Alexandrians originally proposed to provide for him to see and hear would have exhausted the most indefatigable human energy.

That which gave the greatest trouble, not merely to him, but also to the masters of the revels chosen by the municipality, were the never-dormant hostility between the heathen and the Jewish sections of the inhabitants, and the processions, since no division chose to come last, nor would any number be satisfied to be only the third or the fourth.

It was from a meeting, where his determined intervention had at last brought all these preliminaries to a decision beyond appeal, that Titianus proceeded to the Caesareum to pay the Empress the visit which she expected of him daily. He was glad to have come to some conclusion, at any rate provisionally, with regard to these matters, for six days had slipped away since the works had been begun in the palace of Lochias, and Hadrian's arrival was nearing rapidly.

He found Sabina, as usual, on her divan, but on this occasion the Empress was sitting upright on her cushions. She seemed quite to have got over the fatigues of the sea-voyage, and in token that she felt better she had applied more red to her cheeks and lips than three days ago, and because she was to receive a visit from the sculptors, Papias and Aristeas, she had had her hair arranged as it was worn in the statue of Venus Victrix, with whose attributes she had, five years previously--though not, it is true, without some resistance--been represented in marble. When a copy of this statue had been erected in Alexandria, an evil tongue had made a speech which was often repeated among the citizens.

"This Aphrodite is triumphant to be sure, for all who see her make haste to fly; she should be called Cypris the scatterer."

Titianus was still under the excitement of the embittered squabbles and unpleasing exhibitions of character at which he had just been present when he entered the presence of the Empress, whom he found in a small room with no one but the chamberlain and a few ladies-in-waiting. To the prefect's respectful inquiries after her health, she shrugged her shoulders and replied:

"How should I be? If I said well it would not be true; if I said ill, I should be surrounded with pitiful faces, which are not pleasant to look at. After all we must endure life. Still, the innumerable doors in these rooms will be the death of me if I am compelled to remain here long."

Titianus glanced at the two doors of the room in which the Empress was sitting, and began to express his regrets at their bad condition, which had escaped his notice; but Sabina interrupted him, saying:

"You men never do observe what hurts us women. Our Verus is the only man who can feel and understand--who can divine it, as I might say. There are five and thirty doors in my rooms! I had them counted-five and thirty! If they were not old and made of valuable wood I should really believe they had been made as a practical joke on me."

"Some of them might be supplemented with curtains."

"Oh! never mind--a few miseries, more or less in any life do not matter. Are the Alexandrians ready at last with their preparations?"

"I am sure I hope so," said the prefect with a sigh. They are bent on giving all that is their best; but in the endeavor to outvie each other every one is at war with his neighbor, and I still feel the effects of the odious wrangling which I have had to listen to for hours, and that I have been obliged to check again and again with threats of 'I shall be down upon you.'"

"Indeed," said the Empress with a pinched smile, as if she had heard some

thing that pleased her.

"Tell me something about your meeting. I am bored to death, for Verus, Balbilla and the others have asked for leave of absence that they may go to inspect the work doing at Lochias; I am accustomed to find that people would rather be any where than with me. Can I wonder then that my presence is not enough to enable a friend of my husband's to forget a little annoyance--the impression left by some slight misunderstanding? But my fugitives are a long time away; there must be a great deal that is beautiful to be seen at Lochias."

The prefect suppressed his annoyance and did not express his anxiety lest the architect and his assistants should be disturbed, but began in the tone of the messenger in a tragedy:

"The first quarrel was fought over the order of the procession."

"Sit a little farther off," said Sabina pressing her jewelled right-hand on her ear, as if she were suffering a pain in it. The prefect colored slightly, but he obeyed the desire of Caesar's wife and went on with his story, pitching his voice in a somewhat lower key than before:

"Well, it was about the procession, that the first breach of the peace arose."

"I have heard that once already," replied the lady, yawning. "I like processions."

"But," said the prefect, a man in the beginning of the sixties--and he spoke with some irritation, "here as in Rome and every where else, where they are not controlled by the absolute will of a single individual, processions are the children of strife, and they bring forth strife, even when they are planned in honor of a festival of Peace."

"It seems to annoy you that they should be organized in honor of Hadrian?"

"You are in jest; it is precisely because I care particularly that they should be carried out with all possible splendor, that I am troubling myself about them in person, even as to details; and to my great satisfaction I have been able even to subdue the most obstinate; still it was scarcely my duty--"

"I fancied that you not only served the state but were my husband's friend."

"I am proud to call myself so."

"Aye--Hadrian has many, very many friends since he has worn the purple. Have you got over your ill temper Titianus? You must have become very touchy. Poor Julia has an irritable husband!"

"She is less to be pitied than you think," said Titianus with dignity, "for my official duties so entirely claim my time that she is not often likely to know what disturbs me. If I have forgotten to dissimulate my vexation before you, I beg you to pardon me, and to attribute it to my zeal in securing a worthy reception for Hadrian."

"As if I had scolded you! But to return to your wife--as I understand

she shares the fate I endure. We poor women have nothing to expect from our husbands, but the stale leavings that remain after business has absorbed the rest! But your story--go on with your story."

"The worst moments I had at all were given me by the bad feeling of the Jews towards the other citizens."

"I hate all these infamous sects--Jews, Christians or whatever they are called! Do they dare to grudge their money for the reception of Caesar?"

"On the contrary Alabarchos, their wealthy chief, has offered to defray all the cost of the Naumachia and his co-religionist Artemion."

"Well, take their money, take their money."

"The Greek citizens feel that they are rich enough to pay all the expenses, which will amount to many millions of sesterces, and they wish to exclude the Jews, if possible, from all the processions and games."

"They are perfectly right."

"But allow me to ask you whether it is just to prohibit half the population of Alexandria doing honor to their Emperor!"

"Oh! Hadrian will, with pleasure, dispense with the honor. Our conquering heroes have thought it redounded to their glory to be called Africanus, Germanicus and Dacianus, but Titus refused to be called Judaicus when he had destroyed Jerusalem."

"That was because he dreaded the remembrance of the rivers of blood which had to be shed in order to break the fearfully obstinate resistance of that nation. The besieged had to be conquered limb by limb, and finger by finger, before they would make up their minds to yield."

"Again you are speaking half poetically, or have these people elected you as their advocate?"

"I know them and make every effort to secure them justice, just as much as any other citizen of this country which I govern in the name of the Empire and of Caesar. They pay taxes as well as the rest of the Alexandrians; nay more, for there are many wealthy men among them who are honorably prominent in trade, in professions, learning and art, and I therefore mete to them the same measure as to the other inhabitants of this city. Their superstition offends me no more than that of the Egyptians."

"But it really is above all measure. At Aelia Capitolina which Hadrian had decorated with several buildings, they refused to sacrifice to the statues of Zeus and Hera. That is to say they scorn to do homage to me and my husband!"

"They are forbidden to worship any other divinity than their own God. Aelia rose up on the very soil where their ruined Jerusalem had stood, and the statues of which you speak stand in their holy places."

"What has that to do with us?"

"You know that even Caius--[Caligula]--could not reduce them by placing his statue in the Holy of Holies of their temple; and Petronius, the

governor, had to confess that to subdue them meant to exterminate them."

"Then let them meet with the fate they deserve, let them be exterminated!" cried Sabina.

"Exterminated?" asked the prefect. "In Alexandria they constitute nearly half of the citizens, that is to say several hundred thousand of obedient subjects, exterminated!"

"So many?" asked the Empress in alarm. "But that is frightful. Omnipotent Jove! supposing that mass were to revolt against us! No one ever told me of this danger. In Cyrenaica, and at Salamis in Cyprus, they killed their fellow-citizens by thousands."

"They had been provoked to extremities and they were superior to their oppressors in force."

"And in their own land one revolt after another is organized."

"By reason of the sacrifices of which we were speaking."

"Tinnius Rufus is at present the legate in Palestine. He has a horribly shrill voice--but he looks like a man who will stand no trifling, and will know how to quell the venomous brood."

"Possibly" replied Titianus. "But I fear that he will never attain his end by mere severity; and if he should he will have depopulated his province."

"There are already too many men in the empire."

"But never enough good and useful citizens."

"Outrageous contemners of the gods and useless citizens!"

"Here in Alexandria, where many have accommodated themselves to Greek habits of life and thought, and where all have adopted the Greek tongue, they are undoubtedly good citizens, and wholly devoted to Caesar."

"Do they take part in the rejoicings?"

"Yes, as far as the Greek citizens will allow them."

"And the arrangement of the water-fight?"

"That will not be given over to them, but Artemion will be permitted to supply the wild beasts for the games in the Amphitheatre."

"And he was not avaricious about it?"

"So far from it that you will be astonished. The man must know the secret of Midas, of turning stones into gold."

"And are there many like him among your Jews?"

"A good number."

"Then I wish that they would attempt a revolt, for if this led to the

destruction of the rich ones, their gold, at any rate, would remain."

"Meanwhile I will try and keep them alive, as being good rate-payers."

"And does Hadrian share your wish?"

"Without doubt."

"Your successor may perhaps bring him to another mind."

"He always acts according to his own judgment, and for the present I am in office," answered Titianus haughtily.

"And may the God of the Jews long preserve you in it!" retorted Sabina scornfully.

CHAPTER VII.

Before Titianus could open his lips to reply, the principal door of the room was opened cautiously but widely, and the praetor Lucius Aurelius Verus, his wife Domitia Lucilla, the young Balbilla and, last of all, Annaeus Florus, the historian, entered. All four were in the best spirits, and immediately after the preliminary greetings, were eager to report what they had seen at Lochias; but Sabina waved silence with her hand, and breathed out:

"No, no; not at present. I feel quite exhausted. This long waiting, and then--my smelling-bottle, Verus. Leukippe, bring me a cup of water with some fruit-syrup--but not so sweet as usual."

The Greek slave-girl hastened to execute this command, and the Empress, as she waved an elegant bottle carved in onyx, under her nostrils, went on:

"It is a little eternity--is it not, Titianus, that we have been discussing state affairs? You all know how frank I am and that I cannot be silent when I meet with perverse opinions. While you have been away I have had much to hear and to say; it would have exhausted the strength of the strongest. I only wonder you don't find me more worn out, for what can be more excruciating for a woman, that to be obliged to enter the lists for manly decisiveness against a man who is defending a perfectly antagonistic view? Give me water, Leukippe."

While the Empress drank the syrup with tiny sips twitching her thin lips over it, Verus went up to the prefect and asked him in an under tone:

"You were a long while alone with Sabina, cousin?"

Yes," replied Titianus, and he set his teeth as he spoke and clenched his fist so hard that the praetor could not misunderstand, and replied in a low voice:

"She is much to be pitied, and particularly just now she has hours--"

"What sort of hours?" asked Sabina taking the cup from her lips.

"These," replied Verus quickly, "in which I am not obliged to occupy myself in the senate or with the affairs of state. To whom do I owe them but to you?"

With these words he approached the mature beauty, and taking the goblet out of her hand with affectionate subservience, as a son might wait on his honored and suffering mother, he gave it to the Greek slave. The Empress bowed her thanks again and again to the praetor with much affability, and then said, with a slight infusion of cheerfulness in her tones:

"Well--and what is there to be seen at Lochias?"

"Wonderful things," answered Balbilla readily and clasping her little hands.

"A swarm of bees, a colony of ants, have taken possession of the palace. Hands black, white and brown--more than we could count, are busy there and of all the hundreds of workmen which are astir there, not one got in the way of another, for one little man orders and manages them all, just as the prescient wisdom of the gods guides the stars through the 'gracious and merciful night' so that they may never push or run against each other."

"I must put in a word on behalf of Pontius the architect," interposed Verus. "He is a man of at least average height."

"Let us admit it to satisfy your sense of justice," returned Balbilla.

"Let us admit it--a man of average height, with a papyrus-roll in his right-hand and a stylus in the left, controls them. Now, does my way of stating it please you better?"

"It can never displease me," answered the praetor. "Let Balbilla go on with her story," commanded the Empress.

"What we saw was chaos," continued the girl, "still in the confusion we could divine the elements of an orderly creation in the future; nay, it was even visible to the eye."

"And not unfrequently stumbled over with the foot," laughed the praetor. "If it had been dark, and if the laborers had been worms, we must have trodden half of them to death--they swarmed so all over the pavement."

"What were they doing?"

"Every thing," answered Balbilla quickly. "Some were polishing damaged pieces, others were laying new bits of mosaic in the empty places from which it had formerly been removed, and skilled artists were painting colored figures on smooth surfaces of plaster. Every pillar and every statue was built round with a scaffolding reaching to the ceiling on which men were climbing and crowding each other just as the sailors climb into the enemy's ships in the Naumachia."

The girl's pretty cheeks had flushed with her eager reminiscence of what she had seen, and, as she spoke, moving her hands with expressive gestures, the tall structure of curls which crowned her small head shook from side to side.

"Your description begins to be quite poetical," said the Empress,

interrupting her young companion. "Perhaps the Muse may even inspire you with verse."

"All the Pierides," said the praetor, "are represented at Lochias. We saw eight of them, but the ninth, that patroness of the arts, who protects the stargazer, the lofty Urania, has at present, in place of a head--allow me to leave it to you to guess divine Sabina?"

"Well--what?"

"A wisp of straw."

"Alas," sighed the Empress. "What do you say, Florus? Are there not among your learned and verse spinning associates certain men who resemble this Urania?"

"At any rate," replied Florus, "we are more prudent than the goddess, for we conceal the contents of our heads in the hard nut of the skull, and under a more or less abundant thatch of hair. Urania displays her straw openly."

"That almost sounds," said Balbilla laughing and pointing to her abundant locks, "as if I especially needed to conceal what is covered by my hair."

"Even the Lesbian swan was called the fair-haired," replied Florus.

"And you are our Sappho," said the praetor's wife, drawing the girl's arm to her bosom.

"Really! and will you not write in verse all that you have seen to-day?" asked the Empress.

Balbilla looked down on the ground a minute and then said brightly: "It might inspire me, everything strange that I meet with prompts me to write verse."

"But follow the counsel of Apollonius the philologist," advised Florus. "You are the Sappho of our day, and therefore you should write in the ancient Aeolian dialect and not Attic Greek." Verus laughed, and the Empress, who never was strongly moved to laughter, gave a short sharp giggle, but Balbilla said eagerly:

"Do you think that I could not acquire it and do so? To-morrow morning I will begin to practise myself in the old Aeolian forms."

"Let it alone," said Domitia Lucilla; "your simplest songs are always the prettiest."

"No one shall laugh at me!" declared Balbilla pertinaciously. "In a few weeks I will know how to use the Aeolian dialect, for I can do anything I am determined to do--anything, anything."

"What a stubborn little head we have under our curls!" exclaimed the Empress, raising a graciously threatening finger.

"And what powers of apprehension," added Florus.

"Her master in language and metre told me his best pupil was a woman of noble family and a poetess besides--Balbilla in short."

The girl colored at the words, and said with pleased excitement:

"Are you flattering me or did Hephaestion really say that?"

"Woe is me!" cried the praetor, "for Hephaestion was my master too, and I am one of the masculine scholars beaten by Balbilla. But it is no news to me, for the Alexandrian himself told me the same thing as Florus."

"You follow Ovid and she Sappho," said Florus; "you write in Latin and she in Greek. Do you still always carry Ovid's love-poems about with you?"

"Always," replied Verus, "as Alexander did his Homer."

"And out of respect for his master your husband endeavors, by the grace of Venus, to live like him," added Sabina, addressing herself to Domitia Lucilla.

The tall and handsome Roman lady only shrugged her shoulders slightly in answer to this not very kindly-meant speech; but Verus said, while he picked up Sabina's silken coverlet, and carefully spread it over her knees:

"My happiest fortune consists in this: that Venus Victrix favors me. But we are not yet at the end of our story; our Lesbian swan met at Lochias with another rare bird, an artist in statuary."

"How long have the sculptors been reckoned among birds?" asked Sabina. "At the utmost can they be compared to woodpeckers."

"When they work in wood," laughed Verus. "Our artist, however, is an assistant of Papias, and handles noble materials in the grand style. On this occasion, however, he is building a statue out of a very queer mixture of materials."

"Verus may very well call our new acquaintance a bird," interrupted Balbilla, "for as we approached the screen behind which he is working he was whistling a tune with his lips, so pure and cheery, and loud, that it rang through the empty hall above all the noise of the workmen. A nightingale does not pipe more sweetly. We stood still to listen till the merry fellow, who had no idea that we were by, was silent again; and then hearing the architect's voice, he called to him over the screen. 'Now we must clap Urania's head on; I saw it clearly in my mind and would have had it finished with a score of touches, but Papias said he had one in the workshop. I am curious to see what sort of a sugarplum face, turned out by the dozen, he will stick on my torso--which will please me, at any rate, for a couple of days. Find me a good model for the bust of the Sappho I am to restore. A thousand gadflies are buzzing in my brain --I am so tremendously excited! What I am planning now will come to something!'"

Balbilla, as she spoke the last words, tried to mimic a man's deep voice, and seeing the Empress smile she went on eagerly.

"It all came out so fresh, from a heart full to bursting of happy vigorous creative joy, that it quite fired me, and we all went up to the screen and begged the sculptor to let us see his work."

"And you found?" asked Sabina.

"He positively refused to let us into his retreat," replied the praetor; "but Balbilla coaxed the permission out of him, and the tall young fellow seems to have really learnt something. The fall of the drapery that covers the Muse's figure is perfectly thought out with reference to possibility--rich, broadly handled, and at the same time of surprising delicacy. Urania has drawn her mantle closely round her, as if to protect herself from the keen night-air while gazing at the stars. When he has finished his Muse, he is to repair some mutilated busts of women; he was fixing the head of a finished Berenice to-day, and I proposed to him to take Balbilla as the model for his Sappho."

"A good idea" said the Empress. "If the bust is successful I will take him with me to Rome."

"I will sit to him with pleasure," said the girl. "The bright young fellow took my fancy."

"And Balbilla his," added the praetor's wife; he gazed at her as a marvel, and she promised him that, with your permission, she would place her face at his disposal for three hours to-morrow."

"He begins with the head," interposed Verus. "What a happy man is an artist such as he! He may turn about her head, or lay her peplum in folds without reproof or repulse, and to-day when we had to get past bogs of plaster, and lakes of wet paint, she scarcely picked up the hem of her dress, and never once allowed me--who would so willingly have supported her--to lift her over the worst places."

Balbilla reddened and said angrily:

"Really Verus, in good earnest, I will not allow you to speak to me in that way, so now you know it once for all; I have so little liking for what is not clean that I find it quite easy to avoid it without assistance."

"You are too severe," interrupted the Empress with a hideous smile. "Do not you think Domitia Lucilla, that she ought to allow your husband to be of service to her?"

"If the Empress thinks it right and fitting," replied the lady raising her shoulders, and with an expressive movement of her hands. Sabina quite took her meaning, and suppressing another yawn she said angrily:

"In these days we must be indulgent toward a husband who has chosen Ovid's amatory poems as his faithful companion. What is the matter Titianus?"

While Balbilla had been relating her meeting with the sculptor Pollux, a chamberlain had brought in to the prefect an important letter, admitting of no delay. The state official had withdrawn to the farther side of the room with it, had broken the strong seal and had just finished reading it, when the Empress asked her question.

Nothing of what went on around her escaped Sabina's little eyes, and she had observed that while the governor was considering the document addressed to him he had moved uneasily. It must contain something of

importance.

"An urgent letter," replied Titianus, "calls me home. I must take my leave, and I hope ere long to be able to communicate to you something agreeable."

"What does that letter contain?"

"Important news from the provinces," said Titianus.

"May I inquire what?"

"I grieve to say that I must answer in the negative. The Emperor expressly desired that this matter should be kept secret. Its settlement demands the promptest haste, and I am therefore unfortunately obliged to quit you immediately."

Sabina returned the prefect's parting salutations with icy coldness and immediately desired to be conducted to her private rooms to dress herself for supper.

Balbilla escorted her, and Florus betook himself to the "Olympian table," the famous eating-house kept by Lycortas, of whom he had been told wonders by the epicures at Rome.

When Verus was alone with his wife he went up in a friendly manner and said:

"May I drive you home again?"

Domitia Lucilla had thrown herself on a couch, and covered her face with her hands, and she made no reply. "May I?" repeated the praetor. As his wife persisted in her silence, he went nearer to her, laid his hand on her slender fingers that concealed her face, and said:

"I believe you are angry with me!" She pushed away his hand, with a slight movement, and said: "Leave me."

"Yes, unfortunately I must leave you. Business takes me into the city and I will--"

"You will let the young Alexandrians, with whom you revelled through the night, introduce you to new fair ones--I know it."

"There are in fact women here of incredible charm," replied Verus quite coolly. White, brown, copper-colored, black--and all delightful in their way. I could never be tired of admiring them."

"And your wife?" asked Lucilla, facing him, sternly. "My wife? yes, my fairest. Wife is a solemn title of honor and has nothing to do with the joys of life. How could I mention your name in the same hour with those of the poor children who help me to beguile an idle hour."

Domitia Lucilla was used to such phrases, and yet on this occasion they gave her a pang. But she concealed it, and crossing her arms she said resolutely and with dignity:

"Go your way--through life with your Ovid, and your gods of love, but do not attempt to crush innocence under the wheels of your chariot."

"Balbilla do you mean," asked the praetor with a loud laugh. "She knows how to take care of herself and has too much spirit to let herself get entangled in erotics. The little son of Venus has nothing to say to two people who are such good friends as she and I are."

"May I believe you?"

"My word for it, I ask nothing of her but a kind word," cried he, frankly offering his hand to his wife. Lucilla only touched it lightly with her fingers and said:

"Send me back to Rome. I have an unutterable longing to see my children, particularly the boys."

"It cannot be," said Verus. "Not at present; but in a few weeks, I hope."

"Why not sooner?"

"Do not ask me."

"A mother may surely wish to know why she is separated from her baby in the cradle."

"That cradle is at present in your mother's house, and she is taking care of our little ones. Have patience, a little longer for that which I am striving after, for you, and for me, and not last, for our son, is so great, so stupendously great and difficult that it might well outweigh years of longing."

Verus spoke the last words in a low tone, but with a dignity which characterized him only in decisive moments, but his wife, even before he had done speaking, clasped his right-hand in both of hers and said in a low frightened voice:

"You aim at the purple?" He nodded assent.

"That is what it means then!"

"What?"

"Sabina and you--"

"Not on that account only; she is hard and sharp to others, but to me she has shown nothing but kindness, ever since I was a boy."

"She hates me."

"Patience, Lucilla; patience! The day is coming when the daughter of Nigrinus, the wife of Caesar, and the former Empress--but I will not finish. I am, as you know, warmly attached to Sabina, and sincerely wish the Emperor a long life."

"And he will adopt."

"Hush!--he is thinking of it, and his wife wishes it."

"Is it likely to happen soon?"

"Who can tell at this moment what Caesar may decide on in the very next hour. But probably his decision may be made on the thirtieth of December."

"Your birthday."

"He asked what day it was, and he is certainly casting my horoscope, for the night when my mother bore me--"

"The stars then are to seal our fate?"

"Not they alone. Hadrian must also be inclined to read them in my favor."

"How can I be of use to you?"

"Show yourself what you really are in your intercourse with the Emperor"

"I thank you for those words--and I beg you do not provoke me any more. If it might yet be something more than a mere post of honor to be the wife of Verus, I would not ask for the new dignity of becoming wife to Caesar."

"I will not go into the town to-day; I will stay with you. Now are you happy?"

"Yes, yes," cried she, and she raised her arm to throw it round her husband's neck, but he held her aside and whispered:

"That will do. The idyllic is out of place in the race for the purple."

CHAPTER VIII.

Titianus had ordered his charioteer to drive at once to Lochias. The road led past the prefect's palace, his residence on the Bruchiom, and he paused there; for the letter which lay hidden in the folds of his toga, contained news, which, within a few hours, might put him under the necessity of not returning home till the following morning. Without allowing himself to be detained by the officials, subalterns, or lictors, who were awaiting his return to make communications, or to receive his orders, he went straight through the ante-room and the large public rooms for men, to find his wife in the women's apartments which looked upon the garden. He met her at the door of her room, for she had heard his step approaching and came out to receive him.

"I was not mistaken," said the matron with sincere pleasure. "How pleasant that you have been released so early to-day. I did not expect you till supper was over."

"I have come only to go again," replied Titianus, entering his wife's room. "Have some bread brought to me and a cup of mixed wine; why--really! here stands all I want ready as if I had ordered it. You are right, I was with Sabina a shorter time than usual; but she exerted herself in that short time to utter as many sour words as if we had been

talking for half a day. And in five minutes I must quit you again, till when?--the gods alone know when I shall return. It is hard even to speak the words, but all our trouble and care, and all poor Pontius' zeal and pains-taking labor are in vain."

As he spoke the prefect threw himself on a couch; his wife handed him the refreshment he had asked for, and said, as she passed her hand over his grey hair:

"Poor man! Has Hadrian then determined after all to inhabit the Caesareum?"

"No. Leave us, Syra--you shall see directly. Please read me Caesar's letter once more. Here it is." Julia unfolded the papyrus, which was of elegant quality, and began:

"Hadrian to his friend Titianus, the Governor of Egypt. The deepest secrecy--Hadrian greets Titianus, as he has so often done for years at the beginning of disagreeable business letters, and only with half his heart. But to-morrow he hopes to greet the dear friend of his youth, his prudent vicegerent, not merely with his whole soul, but with hand and tongue. And "now to be more explicit, as follows: I come to-morrow morning, the fifteenth of December, towards evening, to Alexandria, with none but Antinous, the slave Mastor, and my private secretary, Phlegon. We land at Lochias, in the little harbor, and you will know my ship by a large silver star at the prow. If night should fall before I arrive there, three red lanterns at the end of the mast shall inform you of the friend that is approaching. I have sent home the learned and witty men whom you sent to meet me, in order to detain me, and gain time for the restoration of the old nest in which I had a fancy to roost with Minerva's birds--which have not, I hope, all been driven out of it--in order that Sabina and her following may not lack entertainment, nor the famous gentlemen themselves be unnecessarily disturbed in their labors. I need them not. If perchance it was not you who sent them, I ask your pardon. An error in this matter would certainly involve some humiliation, for it is easier to explain what has happened than to foresee what is to come. Or is the reverse the truth? I will indemnify the learned men for their useless journey by disputing this question with them and their associates in the Museum. The rapid movement to which the philologer was prompted on my account will prolong his existence; he bristles with learning at the tip of every hair, and he sits still more than is good for him.

"We shall arrive in modest disguise and will sleep at Lochias; you know that I have rested more than once on the bare earth, and, if need be, can sleep as well on a mat as on a couch. My pillow follows at my heels--my big dog, which you know; and some little room, where I can meditate undisturbed on my designs for next year, can no doubt be found.

"I entreat you to keep my secret strictly. To none--man nor woman--and I beseech you as urgently as friend or Caesar ever besought a favor--let the least suspicion of my arrival be known. Nor must the smallest preparation betray whom it is you receive. I cannot command so dear a friend as Titianus, but I appeal to his heart to carry out my wishes.

"I rejoice to see you again; what delight I shall find in the whirl of confusion that I hope to find at Lochias. You shall take me to see the artists, who are, no doubt, swarming in the old castle, as the architect Claudius Venator from Rome, who is to assist Pontius with his advice.

But this Pontius, who carried out such fine works for Herodes Atticus, the rich Sophist, met me at his house, and will certainly recognize me. Tell him, therefore, what I propose doing. He is a serious and trustworthy man, not a chatterbox or scatter-brained simpleton who loses his head. Thus you may take him into the secret, but not till my vessel is in sight. May all be well with you."

"Well, what do you say to that?" asked Titianus, taking the letter from his wife's hand. "Is it not more than vexatious--our work was going on so splendidly."

"But," said Julia thoughtfully and with a meaning smile. "Perhaps it might not have been finished in time. As matters now stand it need not be complete, and Hadrian will see the good intention all the same. I am glad about the letter, for it takes a great responsibility off your otherwise overloaded shoulders."

"You always see the right side," cried the prefect. "It is well that I came home, for I can await Caesar with a much lighter heart. Let me lock up the letter, and then farewell. This parting is for some hours from you, and from all peace for many days."

Titianus gave her his hand. She held it firmly and said:

"Before you go I must confess to you that I am very proud."

"You have every right to be."

"But you have not said a word to me about keeping silence."

"Because you have kept other tests--still, to be sure, you are a woman, and a very handsome one besides."

"An old grandmother, with grey hair!"

"And still more upright and more charming than a thousand of the most admired younger beauties."

"You are trying to convert my pride into vanity, in my old age."

"No, no! I was only looking at you with an examining eye, as our talk led me to do, and I remembered that Sabina had lamented that handsome Julia was not looking well. But where is there another woman of your age with such a carriage, such unwrinkled features, so clear a brow, such deep kind eyes, such beautifully-polished arms--"

"Be quiet," exclaimed his wife. "You make me blush."

"And may I not be proud that a grandmother, who is a Roman, as my wife is, can find it so easy to blush? You are quite different from other women."

"Because you are different from other men."

"You are a flatterer; since all our children have left us, it is as if we were newly married again."

"Ah! the apple of discord is removed."

"It is always over what he loves best that man is most prompt to be jealous. But now, once more, farewell."

Titianus kissed his wife's forehead and hurried towards the door; Julia called him back and said:

"One thing at any rate we can do for Caesar. I send food every day down to the architect at Lochias, and to-day there shall be three times the quantity."

"Good; do so."

"Farewell, then."

"And we shall meet again, when it shall please the gods and the Emperor."

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When the prefect reached the appointed spot, no vessel with a silver star was to be seen.

The sun went down and no ship with three red lanterns was visible.

The harbor-master, into whose house Titianus went, was told that he expected a great architect from Rome, who was to assist Pontius with his counsel in the works at Lochias, and he thought it quite intelligible that the governor should do a strange artist the honor of coming to meet him; for the whole city was well aware of the incredible haste and the lavish outlay of means that were being given to the restoration of the ancient palace of the Ptolemies as a residence for the Emperor.

While he was waiting, Titianus remembered the young sculptor Pollux, whose acquaintance he had made, and his mother in the pretty little gate-house. Well disposed towards them as he felt, he sent at once to old Doris, desiring her not to retire to rest early that evening, since he, the prefect, would be going late to Lochias.

"Tell her, too, as from yourself and not from me," Titianus instructed the messenger, "that I may very likely look in upon her. She may light up her little room and keep it in order."

No one at Lochias had the slightest suspicion of the honor which awaited the old palace.

After Verus had quitted it with his wife and Balbilla, and when he had again been at work for about an hour the sculptor Pollux came out of his nook, stretching himself, and called out to Pontius, who was standing on a scaffold:

"I must either rest or begin upon something new. One cures me of fatigue as much as the other. Do you find it so?"

"Yes, just as you do," replied the architect, as he continued to direct the work of the slave-masons, who were fixing a new Corinthian capital in the place of an old one which had been broken.

"Do not disturb yourself," Pollux cried up to him. "I only request you to tell my master Papias when he comes here with Gabinius, the dealer in antiquities, that he will find me at the rotunda that you inspected with

me yesterday. I am going to put the head on to the Berenice; my apprentice must long since have completed his preparations; but the rascal came into the world with two left-hands, and as he squints with one eye everything that is straight looks crooked to him, and--according to the law of optics--the oblique looks straight. At any rate, he drove the peg which is to support the new head askew into the neck, and as no historian has recorded that Berenice ever had her neck on one side, like the old color-grinder there, I must see to its being straight myself. In about half an hour, as I calculate, the worthy Queen will no longer be one of the headless women."

"Where did you get the new head?" asked Pontius. "From the secret archives of my memory," replied Pollux. "Have you seen it?"

"Yes."

"And do you like it?"

"Very much."

"Then it is worthy to live," sang the sculptor, and, as he quitted the hall, he waved his left-hand to the architect, and with his right-hand stuck a pink, which he had picked in the morning, behind his ear.

At the rotunda his pupil had done his business better than his master could have expected, but Pollux was by no means satisfied with his own arrangements. His work, like several others standing on the same side of the platform, turned its back on the steward's balcony, and the only reason why he had parted with the portrait of Selene's mother, of which he was so fond, was that his playfellow might gaze at the face whenever she chose. He found, however, to his satisfaction, that the busts were held in their places on their tall pedestals only by their own weight, and he then resolved to alter the historical order of the portrait-heads by changing their places, and to let the famous Cleopatra turn her back upon the palace, so that his favorite bust might look towards it.

In order to carry out this purpose then and there, he called some slaves up to help him in the alteration. This gave rise, more than once, to a warning cry, and the loud talking and ordering on this spot, for so many years left solitary and silent, attracted an inquirer, who, soon after the apprentice had begun his work, had shown herself on the balcony, but who had soon retreated after casting a glance at the dirty lad, splashed from head to foot with plaster. This time, however, she remained to watch, following every movement of Pollux as he directed the slaves; though, all the time and whatever he was doing, he turned his back upon her.

At last the portrait-head had found its right position, shrouded still in a cloth to preserve it from the marks of workmen's hands. With a deep breath the artist turned full on the steward's house, and immediately a clear merry voice called out:

"What, tall Pollux! It really is tall Pollux; how glad I am!"

With these words the girl on the balcony loudly clapped her hands; and as the sculptor hailed her in return, and shouted:

"And you are little Arsinoe, eternal gods! What the little thing has come to!" She stood on tip-toe to seem taller, nodded at him pleasantly,

and laughed out: "I have not done growing yet; but as for you, you look quite dignified with the beard on your chin, and your eagle's nose. Selene did not tell me till to-day that you were living down there with the others."

The artist's eyes were fixed on the girl, as if spellbound. There are poetic natures in which the imagination immediately transmutes every new thing that strikes the eyes or the intelligence, into a romance, or rapidly embodies it in verse; and Pollux, like many of his calling, could never set his eyes on a fine human form and face, without instantly associating them with his art.

"A Galatea--a Galatea without an equal!" thought he, as he stood with his eyes fixed on Arsinoe's face and figure. "Just as if she had this instant risen from the sea--that form is just as fresh, and joyous, and healthy; and her little curls wave back from her brow as if they were still floating on the water; and now as she stoops, how full and supple in every movement. It is like a daughter of Nereus following the line of the waves as they rise into crests and dip again into watery valleys. She is like Selene and her mother in the shape of her head and the Greek cut of her face, but the elder sister is like the statue of Prometheus before it had a soul, and Arsinoe is like the Master's work after the celestial fire coursed through her veins."

The artist had felt and thought all this out in a few seconds, but the girl found her speechless admirer's silence too long, and exclaimed impatiently:

"You have not yet offered me any proper greeting. What are you doing down there?"

"Look here," he replied, lifting the cloth from the portrait, which was a striking likeness.

Arsinoe leaned far over the parapet of the balcony, shaded her eyes with her hand and was silent for more than a minute. Then she suddenly cried out loudly and exclaiming:

"Mother--it is my mother!" She flew into the room behind her.

"Now she will call her father and destroy all poor Selene's comfort," thought Pollux, as he pushed the heavy marble bust on which his gypsum head was fixed, into its right place.

"Well, let him come. We are the masters here now, and Keraunus dare not touch the Emperor's property." He crossed his arms and stood gazing at the bust, muttering to himself:

"Patchwork--miserable patchwork. We are cobbling up a robe for the Emperor out of mere rags; we are upholsterers and not artists. If it were only for Hadrian, and not for Diotima and her children, not another finger would I stir in the place."

The path from the steward's residence led through some passages and up a few steps to the rotunda, on which the sculptor was standing, but in little more than a minute from Arsinoe's disappearance from the balcony she was by his side. With a heightened color she pushed the sculptor away from his work and put herself in the place where he had been standing, to be able to gaze at her leisure at the beloved features.

Then she exclaimed again:

"It is mother--mother!" and the bright tears ran over her cheeks, without restraint from the presence of the artist, or the laborers and slaves whom she had flown past on her way, and who stared at her with as much alarm as if she were possessed.

Pollux did not disturb her. His heart was softened as he watched the tears running down the cheeks of this light-hearted child, and he could not help reflecting that goodness was indeed well rewarded when it could win such tender and enduring love as was cherished for the poor dead mother on the pedestal before him.

After looking for some time at the sculptor's work Arsinoe grew calmer, and turning to Pollux she asked:

"Did you make it?"

"Yes," he replied, looking down.

"And entirely from memory?"

"To be sure."

"Do you know what?"

"Well."

"This shows that the Sibyl at the festival of Adonis was right when she sang in the Jalemus that the gods did half the work of the artist."

"Arsinoe!" cried Pollux, for her words made him feel as if a hot spring were seething in his heart, and he gratefully seized her hand; but she drew it away, for her sister Selene had come out on the balcony and was calling her.

It was for his elder playfellow and not for Arsinoe that Pollux had set his work in this place, but, just now, her gaze fell like a disturbing chill on his excited mood.

"There stands your mother's portrait," he called up to the balcony in an explanatory tone, pointing to the bust.

"I see it," she replied coldly. "I will look at it presently more closely. Come up Arsinoe, father wants to speak to you."

Again Pollux stood alone.

As Selene withdrew into the room, she gently shook her pale head, and said to herself:

"'It was to be for me,' Pollux said; something for me, for once--and even this pleasure is spoilt."

CHAPTER IX.

The palace-steward, to whom Selene had called up his younger daughter, had just returned from the meeting of the citizens; and his old black slave, who always accompanied him when he went out, took the saffron-colored pallium from his shoulders, and from his head the golden circlet, with which he loved to crown his curled hair when he quitted the house. Keraunus still looked heated, his eyes seemed more prominent than usual and large drops of sweat stood upon his brow, when his daughter entered the room where he was. He absently responded to Arsinoe's affectionate greeting with a few unmeaning words, and before making the important communication he had to disclose to his daughters, he walked up and down before them for some time, puffing out his fat cheeks and crossing his arms. Selene was alarmed, and Arsinoe had long been out of patience, when at last he began:

"Have you heard of the festivals which are to be held in Caesar's honor?"

Selene nodded and her sister exclaimed:

"Of course we have! Have you secured places for us on the seats kept for the town council?"

"Do not interrupt me," the steward crossly ordered his daughter. "There is no question of staring at them. All the citizens are required to allow their daughters to take part in the grand things that are to be carried out, and we all were asked how many girls we had."

"And how are we to take part in the show?" cried Arsinoe, joyfully clapping her hands.

"I wanted to withdraw before the summons was proclaimed, but Tryphon, the shipwright, who has a workshop down by the King's Harbor, held me back and called out to the assembly that his sons said that I had two pretty young daughters. Pray how did he know that?"

With these words the steward lifted his grey brows and his face grew red to the roots of his hair. Selene shrugged her shoulders, but Arsinoe said:

"Tryphon's shipyard lies just below and we often pass it; but we do not know him or his sons. Have you ever seen them Selene? At any rate it is polite of him to speak of us as pretty."

"Nobody need trouble themselves about your appearance unless they want to ask my permission to marry you," replied the steward with a growl.

"And what did you say to Tryphon?" asked Selene.

"I did as I was obliged. Your father is steward of a palace which at present belongs to Rome and the Emperor; hence I must receive Hadrian as a guest in this, the dwelling of my fathers, and therefore I, less than any other citizen--cannot withhold my share in the honors which the city council has decreed shall be paid to him."

"Then we really may," said Arsinoe, and she went up to her father to give him a coaxing pat. But Keraunus was not in the humor to accept caresses; he pushed her aside with an angry: "Leave me alone," and then went on:

"If Hadrian were to ask me 'Where are your daughters on the occasion of the festival?' and if I had to reply, 'They were not among the daughters

of the noble citizens,' it would be an insult to Caesar, to whom in fact I feel very well disposed. All this I had to consider, and I gave your names and promised to send you to the great Theatre to the assembly of young girls. There you will be met by the noblest matrons and maidens of the city, and the first painters and sculptors will decide to what part of the performance your air and appearance are best fitted."

"But, father," cried Selene, "we cannot show ourselves in such an assembly in our common garments, and where are we to find the money to buy new ones?"

"We can quite well show ourselves by any other girls, in clean, white woollen dresses, prettily smartened with fresh ribbons," declared Arsinoe, interposing between her father and her sister.

"It is not that which troubles me," replied the steward; "it is the costumes, the costumes! It is only the daughters of the poorer citizens who will be paid by the council, and it would be a disgrace to be numbered among the poor--you understand me, children."

"I will not take part in the procession," said Selene resolutely, but Arsinoe interrupted her.

"It is inconvenient and horrible to be poor, but it certainly is no disgrace! The most powerful Romans of ancient times, regarded it as honorable to die poor. Our Macedonian descent remains to us even if the state should pay for our costumes."

"Silence," cried the steward. "This is not the first time that I have detected this low vein of feeling in you. Even the noble may submit to the misfortunes entailed by poverty, but the advantages it brings with it he can never enjoy unless he resigns himself to being so no longer."

It had cost the steward much trouble to give due expression to this idea, which he did not recollect to have heard from another, which seemed new to him, and which nevertheless fully represented what he felt; and he slowly sank, with all the signs of exhaustion, into a couch which formed a divan round a side recess in the spacious sitting-room.

In this room Cleopatra might have held with Antony those banquets of which the unequalled elegance and refinement had been enhanced by every grace of art and wit. On the very spot where Keraunus now reclined the dining-couch of the famous lovers had probably stood; for, though the whole hall had a carefully-laid pavement, in this recess there was a mosaic of stones of various colors of such beauty and delicacy of finish that Keraunus had always forbidden his children to step upon it. This, it is true, was less out of regard for the fine work of art than because his father had always prohibited his doing so, and his father again before him. The picture represented the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, and the divan only covered the outer border of the picture, which was decorated with graceful little Cupids.

Keraunus desired his daughter to fetch him a cup of wine, but she mixed the juice of the grape with a judicious measure of water. After he had half drunk the diluted contents of the goblet, with many faces of disgust, he said:

"Would you like to know what each of your dresses will cost if it is to be in no respect inferior to those of the others?"

"Well," said Arsinoe anxiously.

"About seven hundred drachmae;--[\$115 in 1880]--Philinus, the tailor, who is working for the theatre, tells me it will be impossible to do anything well for less."

"And you are really thinking of such insane extravagance," cried Selene. "We have no money, and I should like to know the man who would lend us any more."

The steward's younger daughter looked doubtfully at the tips of her fingers and was silent, but her eyes swimming in tears betrayed what she felt. Keraunus was rejoiced at the silent consent which Arsinoe seemed to accord to his desire to let her take part in the display at whatever cost. He forgot that he had just reproached her for her low sentiments, and said:

"The little one always feels what is right. As for you, Selene, I beg you to reflect seriously that I am your father, and that I forbid you to use this admonishing tone to me; you have accustomed yourself to it with the children and to them you may continue to use it. Fourteen hundred drachmae certainly, at the first thought of it, seems a very large sum, but if the material and the trimming required are bought with judgment, after the festival we may very likely sell it back to the man with profit."

"With profit!" cried Selene bitterly, "not half is to be got for old things--not a quarter! And even if you turn me out of the house--I will not help to drag us into deeper wretchedness; I will take no part in the performances."

The steward did not redden this time, he was not even violent; on the contrary, he simply raised his head and compared his daughters as they stood--not without an infusion of satisfaction. He was accustomed to love his daughters in his own way, Selene as the useful one, and Arsinoe as the beauty; and as on this occasion all he cared for was to satisfy his vanity, and as this end could be attained through his younger daughter alone, he said:

"Stay with the children then, for all I care. We will excuse you on the score of weak health, and certainly, child, you do look extremely pale. I would far rather find the means for the little one only."

Two sweet dimples again began to show in Arsinoe's cheeks, but Selene's lips were as white as her bloodless cheeks as she exclaimed:

"But, father--father! neither the baker nor the butcher has had a coin paid him for the last two months, and you will squander seven hundred drachmae!"

"Squander!" cried Keraunus indignantly, but still in a tone of disgust rather than anger. "I have already forbidden you to speak to me in that way. The richest of our noble youths will take part in the games; Arsinoe is handsome and perhaps one of them may choose her for his wife. And do you call it squandering, when a father does his utmost to find a suitable husband for his daughter. After all, what do you know of what I may possess?"

"We have nothing, so I cannot know of it," cried the girl beside herself.

"Indeed!" drawled Keraunus with an embarrassed smile. "And is that nothing which lies in the cup board there, and stands on the cornice shelf? For your sakes I will part with these--the onyx fibula, the rings, the golden chaplet, and the girdle of course."

"They are of mere silver-gilt!" Selene interrupted, ruthlessly. "All my grandfather's real gold you parted with when my mother died."

She had to be cremated and buried as was due to our rank," answered Keraunus; "but I will not think now of those melancholy days."

"Nay, do think of them, father."

"Silence! All that belongs to my own adornment of course I cannot do without, for I must be prepared to meet Caesar in a dress befitting my rank; but the little bronze Eros there must be worth something, Plutarch's ivory cup, which is beautifully carved, and above all, that picture; its former possessor was convinced that it had been painted by Apelles himself herein Alexandria. You shall know at once what these little things are worth, for, as the gods vouchsafed, on my way home I met, here in the palace, Gabinius of Nicaea, the dealer in such objects. He promised me that when he had done his business with the architect he would come to me to inspect my treasures, and to pay money down for anything that might suit him. If my Apelles pleases him, he will give ten talents for that alone, and if he buys it for only the half or even the tenth of that sum, I will make you enjoy yourself for once, Selene."

"We will see," said the pale girl, shrugging her shoulders, and her sister exclaimed:

"Show him the sword too, that you always declared belonged to Caesar, and if he gives you a good sum for it you will buy me a gold bracelet."

"And Selene shall have one, too. But I have the very slenderest hopes of the sword, for a connoisseur would hardly pronounce it genuine. But I have other things, many others. Hark! that is Gabinius, no doubt. Quick, Selene, throw the chiton round me again. My chaplet, Arsinoe. A well-to-do man always gets a higher price than a poor one. I have ordered the slave to await him in the ante-room; it is always done in the best houses."

The curiosity dealer was a small, lean man, who, by prudence and good luck, had raised himself to be one of the most esteemed of his class and a rich man. Having matured his knowledge by industry, and experience, he knew better than any man how to distinguish what was good from what was indifferent or bad, what was genuine from what was spurious. No one had a keener eye; but he was abrupt in his dealings with those from whom he had nothing to gain. In circumstances where there was profit in view, he could, to be sure, be polite even to subservience and show inexhaustible patience. He commanded himself so far as to listen with an air of conviction to the steward as he told him in a condescending tone that he was tired of his little possessions, that he could just as well keep them as part with them; he merely wanted to show them to him as a connoisseur and would only part with them if a good round sum were offered for what was in fact idle capital. One piece after another passed through the dealer's slender fingers, or was placed before him that he might contemplate it; but the man spoke not, and only shook his head as he

examined every fresh object. And when Keraunus told him whence this or that specimen of his treasures had been obtained, he only murmured-- "Indeed" or "Really,"

"Do you think so?" After the last piece of property had passed through his hands, the steward asked:

"Well, what do you think of them?"

The beginning of the sentence was spoken confidently, the end almost in fear, for the dealer only smiled and shook his head again before he said:

"There are some genuine little things among them, but nothing worth speaking of. I advise you to keep them, because you have an affection for them, while I could get very little by them."

Keraunus avoided looking towards Selene, whose large eyes, full of dread, had been fixed on the dealer's lips; but Arsinoe, who had followed his movements with no less attention, was less easily discouraged, and pointing to her father's Apelles, she said: And that picture, is that worth nothing?"

"It grieves me that I cannot tell so fair a damsel that it is inestimably valuable," said the dealer, stroking his gray whiskers. "But we have here only a very feeble copy. The original is in the Villa belonging to Phinius on the Lake of Larius, and which he calls Cothurnus. I have no use whatever for this piece."

"And this carved cup?" asked Keraunus. "It came from among the possessions of Plutarch, as I can prove, and it is said to have been the gift of the Emperor Trajan."

"It is the prettiest thing in your collection," replied Gabinius; "but it is amply paid for with four hundred drachmae."

"And this cylinder from Cyprus, with the elegant incised work?" The steward was about to take up the polished crystal, but his hand was trembling with agitation and pushed instead of lifting it from the table. It rolled away on the floor and across the smooth mosaic picture as far as the couches. Keraunus was about to stoop to pick it up, but his daughters both held him back, and Selene cried out:

"Father, you must not; the physician strictly forbade it."

While the steward pushed the girls away grumbling, the dealer had gone down on his knees to pick up the cylinder, but it seemed to cost the slightly-built man much less effort to stoop than to get up again, for some minutes had elapsed before he once more stood on his feet, in front of Keraunus. His countenance had put on an expression of eager attention, and he once more took up the painting attributed to Apelles, sat down with it on the couch, and appeared wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the picture, which hid his face from the bystanders.

But his eye was not resting on the work before him, but on the marriage-scene at his feet, in which he detected each moment some fresh and unique beauty. As the dealer sat there for some minutes with the little picture on his knee, the steward's face brightened, Selene drew a deep breath, and Arsinoe went up to her father to cling to his arm and whisper in his ear:

"Do not let him have the Apelles cheap--remember my bracelet."

Gabinus now rose, glanced at the various objects lying on the table and said in a much shorter and more business-like tone than before:

"For all these things I can give you--wait a minute--twenty-seventy-four hundred--four hundred and fifty--I can give you six hundred and fifty drachmae, not a sesterce more!"

"You are joking," cried Keraunus.

"Not a sesterce more," answered the other coldly. "I do not want to make anything, but you as a business man will understand that I do not wish to buy with a certain prospect of loss. As regards the Apelles--"

"Well?"

"It may be of some value to me, but only under certain conditions. The case is quite different as regards buying pictures. Your two young damsels know of course that my line of business leads me to admire and value all that is beautiful, but still I must request you to leave me alone with your father for a little while. I want to speak with him about this curious painting." Keraunus signed to his daughters, who immediately left the room. Before the door was closed upon them the dealer called after them:

"It is already growing dark, might I ask you to send me as bright a light as possible by one of your slaves."

"What about the picture?" asked Keraunus.

"Till the light is brought let us talk of something else," said Gabinus.

"Then take a seat on the couch," said Keraunus. "You will be doing me a pleasure and perhaps yourself as well."

As soon as the two men were seated on the divan, Gabinus began:

"Those little things which we have collected with particular liking, we do not readily part with--that I know by long experience. Many a man who has come into some property after he has sold all his little antiquities has offered me ten times the price I have paid him to get them back again, generally in vain, unfortunately. Now, what is true of others is true of you, and if you had not been in immediate need of money you would hardly have offered me these things."

"I must entreat you," began the steward, but the dealer interrupted him, saying:

"Even the richest are sometimes in want of ready money; no one knows that better than I, for I--I must confess--have large means at my command. Just at present it would be particularly easy for me to free you from all embarrassment."

"There stands my Apelles," exclaimed the steward. "It is yours if you make a bid that suits me."

"The light--here comes the light!" exclaimed Gabinus, taking from the

slave's hand the three-branched lamp which Selene had hastily supplied with a fresh wick, and he placed it, while he murmured to Keraunus, "By your leave," down on the centre of the mosaic. The steward looked at the man on his left hand, with puzzled inquiry, but Gabinius heeded him not but went down on his knees again, felt the mosaic over with his hand, and devoured the picture of the marriage of Peleus with his eyes.

"Have you lost anything?" asked Keraunus.

"No-nothing whatever. There in the corner--now I am satisfied. Shall I place the lamp there, on the table? So--and now to return to business."

"I beg to do so, but I may as well begin by telling you that in my case it is a question not of drachmae but of Attic talents."--[The Attic talent was worth about L200, or \$1000 dollars in the 1880 exchange rate.]

"That is a matter of course, and I will offer you five; that is to say a sum for which you could buy a handsome roomy house."

Once more the blood mounted to the steward's head; for a few minutes he could not utter a word, for his heart thumped violently; but presently he so far controlled himself as to be able to answer. This time at any rate, he was determined to seize Fortune by the forelock and not to be taken advantage of, so he said:

"Five talents will not do; bid higher."

"Then let us say six."

"If you say double that we are agreed."

"I cannot put it beyond ten talents; why, for that sum you might build a small palace."

"I stand out for twelve."

"Well, be it so, but not a sesterce more."

"I cannot bear to part with my splendid work of art," sighed Keraunus. "But I will take your offer, and give you my Apelles."

"It is not that picture I am dealing for," replied Gabinius. "It is of trifling value, and you may continue to enjoy the possession of it. It is another work of art in this room that I wish to have, and which has hitherto seemed to you scarcely worth notice. I have discovered it, and one of my rich customers has asked me to find him just such a thing."

"I do not know what it is."

"Does everything in this room belong to you?"

"Whom else should it belong to?"

"Then you may dispose of it as you please?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Very well, then--the twelve Attic talents which I offer you are to be paid for the picture that is under our feet."

"The mosaic! that? It belongs to the palace."

"It belongs to your residence, and that, I heard you say yourself, has been inhabited for more than a century by your forefathers. I know the law; it pronounces that everything which has remained in undisputed possession in one family, for a hundred years, becomes their property."

"This mosaic belongs to the palace."

"I assert the contrary. It is an integral portion of your family dwelling, and you may freely dispose of it."

"It belongs to the palace."

"No, and again no; you are the owner. Tomorrow morning early you shall receive twelve Attic talents in gold, and, with the help of my son, later in the day I will take up the picture, pack it, and when it grows dark, carry it away. Procure a carpet to cover the empty place for the present. As to the secrecy of the transaction--I must of course insist on it as strongly--and more so--than yourself."

"The mosaic belongs to the palace," cried the steward, this time in a louder voice, "Do you hear? it belongs to the palace, and whoever dares touch it, I will break his bones."

As he spoke Keraunus stood up, his huge chest panting, his cheeks and forehead dyed purple, and his fist, which he held in the dealer's face, was trembling. Gabinius drew back startled, and said:

"Then you will not have the twelve talents!"

"I will--I will!" gasped Keraunus, "I will show you how I beat those who take me for a rogue. Out of my sight, villain, and let me hear not another word about the picture, and the robbery in the dark, or I will send the prefect's lictors after you and have you thrown into irons, you rascally thief!"

Gabinius hurried to the door, but he there turned round once more to the groaning and gasping colossus, and cried out, as he stood on the threshold:

"Keep your rubbish! we shall have more to say to each other yet."

When Selene and Arsinoe returned to the sitting-room they found their father breathing hard and sitting on the couch, with his head drooping forward. Much alarmed, they went close up to him, but he exclaimed quite coherently:

"Water--a drink of water!--the thief!--the scoundrel!"

Though hardly pressed, it had not cost him a struggle or a pang to refuse what would have placed him and his children in a position of ease; and yet he would not have hesitated to borrow it, aye, or twice the sum, from rich or poor, though he knew full certainly that he would never be in a position to restore it. Nor was he even proud of what he had done; it seemed to him quite natural in a Macedonian noble. It was to him altogether out of the pale of possibility that he should entertain the dealer's proposition for an instant.

But where was he to get the money for Arsinoe's outfit? how could he keep the promise given at the meeting?

He lay meditating on the divan for an hour; then he took a wax tablet out of a chest and began to write a letter on it to the prefect. He intended to offer the precious mosaic picture which had been discovered in his abode, to Titianus for the Emperor, but he did not bring his composition to an end, for he became involved in high-flown phrases. At last he doubted whether it would do at all, flung the unfinished letter back into the chest, and disposed himself to sleep.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A well-to-do man always gets a higher price than a poor one
I must either rest or begin upon something new

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