

The Bride of the Nile, Volume 4.

Georg Ebers

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THE BRIDE OF THE NILE

By Georg Ebers

Volume 4.

CHAPTER XIII.

Paula's report of the day's proceedings, of Orion's behavior, and of the results of the trial angered the leech beyond measure; he vehemently approved the girl's determination to quit this cave of robbers, this house of wickedness, of treachery, of imbecile judges and false witnesses, as soon as possible. But she had no opportunity for a quiet conversation with him, for Philippus soon had his hands full in the care of the sufferers.

Rustem, the Masdakite, who till now had been lying unconscious, had been roused from his lethargy by some change of treatment, and loudly called for his master Haschim. When the Arab did not appear, and it was explained to him that he could not hope to see him before the morning, the young giant sat up among his pillows, propping himself on his arms set firmly against the couch behind him, looked about him with a wandering gaze, and shook his big head like an aggrieved lion--but that his thick mane of hair had been cut off--abusing the physician all the time in his native tongue, and in a deep, rolling, bass voice that rang through the rooms though no one understood a word. Philippus, quite undaunted, was trying to adjust the bandage over his wound, when Rustem suddenly flung his arms round his body and tried with all his might, and with foaming lips, to drag him down. He clung to his antagonist, roaring like a wild beast; even now Philippus never for an instant lost his presence of mind but desired the nun to fetch two strong slaves. The Sister hurried away, and Paula remained the eyewitness of a fearful struggle. The physician had twisted his ankles round those of the stalwart Persian, and putting forth a degree of strength which could hardly have been looked for in a stooping student, tall and large-boned as he was, he wrenched the Persian's hands from his hips, pressed his fingers between those of Rustem, forced him back on to his pillows, set his knees against the brazen frame of the couch, and so effectually held him down that he could not sit up again. Rustem exerted every muscle to shake off his opponent; but the leech was the stronger, for the Masdakite was weakened by fever and loss of blood. Paula watched this contest between intelligent force and the animal strength of a raving giant with a beating heart, trembling in every limb. She could not help her friend, but she followed his every movement as she stood at the head of the bed; and as he held down the powerful creature before whom her frail uncle had cowered in abject terror, she could not help admiring his manly beauty; for his eyes sparkled with unwonted fire, and the mean chin seemed to lengthen with the frightful effort he was putting forth, and so to be

brought into proportion with his wide forehead and the rest of his features. Her spirit quaked for him; she fancied she could see something great and heroic in the man, in whom she had hitherto discovered no merit but his superior intellect.

The struggle had lasted some minutes before Philip felt the man's arms grow limp, and he called to Paula to bring him a sheet--a rope--what not--to bind the raving man. She flew into the next room, quite collected; fetched her handkerchief, snatched off the silken girdle that bound her waist, rushed back and helped the leech to tie the maniac's hands. She understood her friend's least word, or a movement of his finger; and when the slaves whom the nun had fetched came into the room, they found Rustem with his hands firmly bound, and had only to prevent him from leaping out of bed or throwing himself over the edge. Philippus, quite out of breath, explained to the slaves how they were to act, and when he opened his medicine-chest Paula noticed that his swollen, purple fingers were trembling. She took out the phial to which he pointed, mixed the draught according to his orders, and was not afraid to pour it between the teeth of the raving man, forcing them open with the help of the slaves.

The soothing medicine calmed him in a few minutes, and the leech himself could presently wash the wound and apply a fresh dressing with the practised aid of the Sister.

Meanwhile the crazy girl had been waked by the ravings of the Persian, and was anxiously enquiring if the dog--the dreadful dog--was there. But she soon allowed herself to be quieted by Paula, and she answered the questions put to her so rationally and gently, that her nurse called the physician who could confirm Paula in her hope that a favorable change had taken place in her mental condition. Her words were melancholy and mild; and when Paula remarked on this Philippus observed:

"It is on the bed of sickness that we learn to know our fellow-creatures. The frantic girl, who perhaps fell on the son of this house with murderous intent, now reveals her true, sweet nature. And as for that poor fellow, he is a powerful creature, an honest one too; I would stake my ten fingers on it!"

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"Even in his delirium he did not once scratch or bite, but only defended himself like a man.--Thank you, now, for your assistance. If you had not flung the cord round his hands, the game might have ended very differently."

"Surely not!" exclaimed Paula decidedly. "How strong you are, Philip. I feel quite alarmed!"

"You?" said the leech laughing. "On the contrary, you need never be alarmed again now that you have seen by chance that your champion is no weakling.--Pfooh! I shall be glad now of a little rest." She offered him her handkerchief, and while he thankfully used it to wipe his brow--controlling with much difficulty the impulse to press it to his lips, he added lightly:

"With such an assistant everything must go well. There is no merit in being strong; every one can be strong who comes into the world with healthy blood and well-knit bones, who keeps all his limbs well exercised, as I did in my youth, and who does not destroy his inheritance

by dissipated living.--However, I still feel the struggle in my hands; but there is some good wine in the next room yet, and two or three cups of it will do me good." They went together into the adjoining room where, by this time, most of the lamps were extinguished. Paula poured out the wine, touched the goblet with her lips, and he emptied it at a draught; but he was not to be allowed to drink off a second, for he had scarcely raised it, when they heard voices in the Masdakite's room, and Neforis came in. The governor's careful wife had not quitted her husband's couch--even Rustem's storming had not induced her to leave her post; but when she was informed by the slaves what had been going on, and that Paula was still up-stairs with the leech, she had come to the strangers' rooms as soon as her husband could spare her to speak to Philippus, to represent to Paula what the proprieties required, and to find out what the strange noises could be which still seemed to fill the house--at this hour usually as silent as the grave. They proceeded from the sick-rooms, but also from Orion, who had just come in, and from Nilus the treasurer, who had been called by the former into his room, though the night was fast drawing on to morning. To the governor's wife everything seemed ominous at the close of this terrible day, marked in the calendar as unlucky; so she made her way up-stairs, escorted by her husband's night watcher, and holding in her hand a small reliquary to which she ascribed the power of banning vile spirits.

She came into the sick-room swiftly and noiselessly, put the nun through a strict cross-examination with the fretful sharpness of a person disturbed in her night's rest. Then she went into the sitting-room where Philippus was on the point of pledging Paula in his second cup of wine, while she stood before him with dishevelled hair and robe ungirt. All this was an offence against good manners such as she would not suffer in her house, and she stoutly ordered her husband's niece to go to bed. After all the offences that had been pardoned her this day--no, yesterday--she exclaimed, it would have been more becoming in the girl to examine herself in silence, in her own room, to exorcise the lying spirits which had her in their power, and implore her Saviour for forgiveness, than to pretend to be nursing the sick while she was carrying on, with a young man, an orgy which, as the Sister had just told her, had lasted since mid-day.

Paula spoke not a word, though the color changed in her face more than once as she listened to this speech. But when Neforis finally pointed to the door, she said, with all the cold pride she had at her command when she was the object of unworthy suspicions:

"Your aim is easily seen through. I should scorn to reply, but that you are the wife of the man who, till you set him against me, was glad to call himself my friend and protector, and who is also related to me. As usual, you attribute to me an unworthy motive. In showing me the door of this room consecrated by suffering, you are turning me out of your house, which you and your son--for I must say it for once--have made a hell to me."

"! And my--No! this is indeed--" exclaimed the matron in panting rage. She clasped her hands over her heaving bosom and her pale face was dyed crimson, while her eyes flashed wrathful lightnings. "That is too much; a thousand times too much--a thousand times--do you hear?--And I--I condescend to answer you! We picked her up in the street, and have treated her like a daughter, spent enormous sums on her, and now. . . ."

This was addressed to the leech rather than to Paula; but she took up the

gauntlet and replied in a tone of unqualified scorn:

"And now I plainly declare, as a woman of full age, free to dispose of myself, that to-morrow morning I leave this house with everything that belongs to me, even if I should go as a beggar;--this house, where I have been grossly insulted, where I and my faithful servant have been falsely condemned, and where he is even now about to be murdered."

"And where you have been dealt with far too mildly," Neforis shrieked at her audacious antagonist, "and preserved from sharing the fate of the robber you smuggled into the house. To save a criminal--it is unheard of:--you dared to accuse the son of your benefactor of being a corrupt judge."

"And so he is," exclaimed Paula furious. "And what is more, he has inveigled the child whom you destine to be his wife into bearing false witness. More--much more could I say, but that, even if I did not respect the mother, your husband has deserved that I should spare him."

"Spare him-spare!" cried Neforis contemptuously. "You--you will spare us! The accused will be merciful and spare the judge! But you shall be made to speak;--aye, made to speak! And as to what you, a slanderer, can say about false witness. . ."

"Your own granddaughter," interrupted the leech, "will be compelled to repeat it before all the world, noble lady, if you do not moderate yourself."

Neforis laughed hysterically.

"So that is the way the wind blows!" she exclaimed, quite beside herself. "The sick-room is a temple of Bacchus and Venus; and this disgraceful conduct is not enough, but you must conspire to heap shame and disgrace on this righteous house and its masters."

Then, resting her left hand which held the reliquary on her hip, she added with hasty vehemence:

"So be it. Go away; go wherever you please! If I find you under this roof to-morrow at noon, you thankless, wicked girl, I will have you turned out into the streets by the guard. I hate you--for once I will ease my poor, tormented heart--I loathe you; your very existence is an offence to me and brings misfortune on me and on all of us; and besides--besides, I should prefer to keep the emeralds we have left."

This last and cruelest taunt, which she had brought out against her better feelings, seemed to have relieved her soul of a hundred-weight of care; she drew a deep breath, and turning to Philippus, went on far more quietly and rationally:

"As for you, Philip, my husband needs you. You know well what we have offered you and you know George's liberal hand. Perhaps you will think better of it, and will learn to perceive. . ."

"! . . ." said the leech with a lofty smile. "Do you really know me so little? Your husband, I am ready to admit, stands high in my esteem, and when he wants me he will no doubt send for me. But never again will I cross this threshold uninvited, or enter a house where right is trodden underfoot, where defenceless innocence is insulted and abandoned to

despair.

"You may stare in astonishment! Your son has desecrated his father's judgment-seat, and the blood of guiltless Hiram is on his head.--You--well, you may still cling to your emeralds. Paula will not touch them; she is too high-souled to tell you who it is that you would indeed do well to lock up in the deepest dungeon-cell! What I have heard from your lips breaks every tie that time had knit between us. I do not demand that my friends should be wealthy, that they should have any attractions or charm, any special gifts of mind or body; but we must meet on common ground: that of honorable feeling. That you did not bring into the world, or you have lost it; and from this hour I am a stranger to you and never wish to see you again, excepting by the side of your husband when he requires me."

He spoke the last words with such immeasurable dignity that Neforis was startled and bereft of all self-control. She had been treated as a wretch worthy of utter scorn by a man beneath her in rank, but whom she always regarded as one of the most honest, frank and pure-minded she had ever known; a man indispensable to her husband, because he knew how to mitigate his sufferings, and could restrain him from the abuse of his narcotic anodyne. He was the only physician of repute, far and wide. She was to be deprived of the services of this valuable ally, to whom little Mary and many of the household owed their lives, by this Syrian girl; and she herself, sure that she was a good and capable wife and mother, was to stand there like a thing despised and avoided by every honest man, through this evil genius of her house!

It was too much. Tortured by rage, vexation, and sincere distress, she said in a complaining voice, while the tears started to her eyes:

"But what is the meaning of all this? You, who know me, who have seen me ruling and caring for my family, you turn your back upon me in my own house and point the finger at me? Have I not always been a faithful wife, nursing my husband for years and never leaving his sick-bed, never thinking of anything but how to ease his pain? I have lived like a recluse from sheer sense of duty and faithful love, while other wives, who have less means than I, live in state and go to entertainments.--And whose slaves are better kept and more often freed than ours? Where is the beggar so sure of an alms as in our house, where I, and I alone, uphold piety?--And now am I so fallen that the sun may not shine on me, and that a worthy man like you should withdraw his friendship all in a moment, and for the sake of this ungrateful, loveless creature--because, because, what did you call it--because the mind is wanting in me--or what did you call it that I must have before you....?"

"It is called feeling," interrupted the leech, who was sorry for the unhappy woman, in whom he knew there was much that was good. "Is the word quite new to you, my lady Neforis?--It is born with us; but a firm will can elevate the least noble feeling, and the best that nature can bestow will deteriorate through self-indulgence. But, in the day of judgment, if I am not very much mistaken, it is not our acts but our feeling that will be weighed. It would ill-become me to blame you, but I may be allowed to pity you, for I see the disease in your soul which, like gangrene in the body. . ."

"What next!" cried Neforis.

"This disease," the physician calmly went on--"I mean hatred, should be

far indeed from so pious a Christian. It has stolen into your heart like a thief in the night, has eaten you up, has made bad blood, and led you to treat this heavily-afflicted orphan as though you were to put stocks and stones in the path of a blind man to make him fall. If, as it would seem, my opinion still weighs with you a little, before Paula leaves your house you will ask her pardon for the hatred with which you have persecuted her for years, which has now led you to add an intolerable insult--in which you yourself do not believe--to all the rest."

At this Paula, who had been watching the physician all through his speech, turned to Dame Neforis, and unclasped her hands which were lying in her lap, ready to shake hands with her uncle's wife if she only offered hers, though she was still fully resolved to leave the house.

A terrible storm was raging in the lady's soul. She felt that she had often been unkind to Paula. That a painful doubt still obscured the question as to who had stolen the emerald she had unwillingly confessed before she had come up here. She knew that she would be doing her husband a great service by inducing the girl to remain, and she would only too gladly have kept the leech in the house;--but then how deeply had she, and her son, been humiliated by this haughty creature!

Should she humble herself to her, a woman so much younger, offer her hand, make....

At this moment they heard the tinkle of the silver bowl, into which her husband threw a little ball when he wanted her. His pale, suffering face rose before her inward eye, she could hear him asking for his opponent at draughts, she could see his sad, reproachful gaze when she told him to-morrow that she, Neforis, had driven his niece, the daughter of the noble Thomas, out of the house--; with a swift impulse she went towards Paula, grasping the reliquary in her left hand and holding out her right, and said in a low voice.

"Shake hands, girl. I often ought to have behaved differently to you; but why have you never in the smallest thing sought my love? God is my witness that at first I was fully disposed to regard you as a daughter, but you--well, let it pass. I am sorry now that I should--if I have distressed you."

At the first words Paula had placed her hand in that of Neforis. Hers was as cold as marble, the elder woman's was hot and moist; it seemed as though their hands were typical of the repugnance of their hearts. They both felt it so, and their clasp was but a brief one. When Paula withdrew hers, she preserved her composure better than the governor's wife, and said quite calmly, though her cheeks were burning:

"Then we will try to part without any ill-will, and I thank you for having made that possible. To-morrow morning I hope I may be permitted to take leave of my uncle in peace, for I love him; and of little Mary."

"But you need not go now! On the contrary, I urgently request you to stay," Neforis eagerly put in.

"George will not let you leave. You yourself know how fond he is of you."

"He has often been as a father to me," said Paula, and even her eyes shone through tears. "I would gladly have stayed with him till the end.

Still, it is fixed--I must go."

"And if your uncle adds his entreaties to mine?"

"It will be in vain."

Neforis took the maiden's hand in her own again, and tried with genuine anxiety to persuade her,--but Paula was firm. She adhered to her determination to leave the governor's house in the morning.

"But where will you find a suitable house?" cried Neforis. "A residence that will be fit for you?"

"That shall be my business," replied the physician. "Believe me, noble lady, it would be best for all that Paula should seek another home. But it is to be hoped that she may decide on remaining in Memphis."

At this Neforis exclaimed:

"Here, with us, is her natural home!--Perhaps God may turn your heart for your uncle's sake, and we may begin a new and happier life." Paula's only reply was a shake of the head; but Neforis did not see it the metal tinkle sounded for the third time, and it was her duty to respond to its call.

As soon as she had left the room Paula drew a deep breath, exclaiming:

"O God! O God! How hard it was to refrain from flinging in her teeth the crime her wicked son.... No, no; nothing should have made me do that. But I cannot tell you how the mere sight of that woman angers me, how light-hearted I feel since I have broken down the bridge that connected me with this house and with Memphis."

"With Memphis?" asked Philippus.

"Yes," said Paula gladly. "I go away--away from hence, out of the vicinity of this woman and her son!--Whither? Oh! back to Syria, or to Greece--every road is the right one, if it only takes me away from this place."

"And I, your friend?" asked Philippus.

"I shall bear the remembrance of you in a grateful heart."

The physician smiled, as though something had happened just as he expected; after a moment's reflection he said:

"And where can the Nabathæan find you, if indeed he discovers your father in the hermit of Sinai?"

The question startled and surprised Paula, and Philippus now adduced every argument to convince her that it was necessary that she should remain in the City of the Pyramids. In the first place she must liberate her nurse--in this he could promise to help her--and everything he said was so judicious in its bearing on the circumstances that had to be reckoned with, and the facts actual or possible, that she was astonished at the practical good sense of this man, with whom she had generally talked only of matters apart from this world. Finally she yielded, chiefly for the sake of her father and Perpetua; but partly in the hope

of still enjoying his society. She would remain in Memphis, at any rate for the present, under the roof of a friend of the physician's--long known to her by report--a Melchite like herself, and there await the further development of her fate.

To be away from Orion and never, never to see him again was her heartfelt wish. All places were the same to her where she had no fear of meeting him. She hated him; still she knew that her heart would have no peace so long as such a meeting was possible. Still, she longed to free herself from a desire to see what his further career would be, which came over her again and again with overwhelming and terrible power. For that reason, and for that only, she longed to go far, far away, and she was hardly satisfied by the leech's assurance that her new protector would be able to keep away all visitors whom she might not wish to receive. And he himself, he added, would make it his business to stand between her and all intruders the moment she sent for him.

They did not part till the sun was rising above the eastern hills; as they separated Paula said:

"So this morning a new life begins for me, which I can well imagine will, by your help, be pleasanter than that which is past."

And Philippus replied with happy emotion: "The new life for me began yesterday."

CHAPTER XIV.

Between morning and noon Mary was sitting on a low cane seat under the sycamores which yesterday had shaded Katharina's brief young happiness; by her side was her governess Eudoxia, under whose superintendence she was writing out the Ten Commandments from a Greek catechism.

The teacher had been lulled to sleep by the increasing heat and the pervading scent of flowers, and her pupil had ceased to write. Her eyes, red with tears, were fixed on the shells with which the path was strewn, and she was using her long ruler, at first to stir them about, and then to write the words: "Paula," and "Paula, Mary's darling," in large capital letters. Now and again a butterfly, following the motion of the rod, brought a smile to her pretty little face from which the dark spirit "Trouble" had not wholly succeeded in banishing gladness. Still, her heart was heavy. Everything around her, in the garden and in the house, was still; for her grandfather's state had become seriously worse at sunrise, and every sound must be hushed. Mary was thinking of the poor sufferer: what pain he had to bear, and how the parting from Paula would grieve him, when Katharina came towards her down the path.

The young girl did little credit to-day to her nickname of "the water-wagtail;" her little feet shuffled through the shelly gravel, her head hung wearily, and when one of the myriad insects, that were busy in the morning sunshine, came within her reach she beat it away angrily with her fan. As she came up to Mary she greeted her with the usual "All hail!" but the child only nodded in response, and half turning her back went on with her inscription.

Katharina, however, paid no heed to this cool reception, but said in

sympathetic tones:

"Your poor grandfather is not so well, I hear?" Mary shrugged her shoulders.

"They say he is very dangerously ill. I saw Philippos himself."

"Indeed?" said Mary without looking up, and she went on writing.

"Orion is with him," Katharina went on. "And Paula is really going away?"

The child nodded dumbly, and her eyes again filled with tears.

Katharina now observed how sad the little girl was looking, and that she intentionally refused to answer her. At any other time she would not have troubled herself about this, but to-day this taciturnity provoked her, nay it really worried her; she stood straight in front of Mary, who was still indefatigably busy with the ruler, and said loudly and with some irritation:

"I have fallen into disgrace with you, it would seem, since yesterday. Every one to his liking; but I will not put up with such bad manners, I can tell you!"

The last words were spoken loud enough to wake Eudoxia, who heard them, and drawing herself up with dignity she said severely:

"Is that the way to behave to a kind and welcome visitor, Mary?"

"I do not see one," retorted the child with a determined pout.

"But I do," cried the governess. "You are behaving like a little barbarian, not like a little girl who has been taught Greek manners. Katharina is no longer a child, though she is still often kind enough to play with you. Go to her at once and beg her pardon for being so rude."

"!" exclaimed Mary, and her tone conveyed the most positive refusal to obey this behest. She sprang to her feet, and with flashing eyes, she cried: "We are not Greeks, neither she nor I, and I can tell you once for all that she is not my kind and welcome visitor, nor my friend any more! We have nothing, nothing whatever to do with each other any more!"

"Are you gone mad?" cried Eudoxia, and her long face assumed a threatening expression, while she rose from her easy-chair in spite of the increasing heat, intending to capture her pupil and compel her to apologize; but Mary was more nimble than the middle-aged damsel and fled down the alley towards the river, as nimble as a gazelle.

Eudoxia began to run after her; but the heat was soon too much for her, and when she stopped, exhausted and panting, she perceived that Katharina, worthy once more of her name of "water-wagtail," had flown past her and was chasing the little girl at a pace that she shuddered to contemplate. Mary soon saw that no one but Katharina was in pursuit; she moderated her pace, and awaited her cast-off friend under the shade of a tall shrub. In a moment Katharina was facing her; with a heightened color she seized both her hands and exclaimed passionately:

"What was it you said? You--you-- If I did not know what a wrong-headed

little simpleton you were, I could"

"You could accuse me falsely!--But now, leave go of my hands or I will bite you. And as Katharina, at this threat, released her she went on vehemently.

"Oh! I know you now--since yesterday! And I tell you, once for all, I say thank you for nothing for such friends. You ought to sink into the earth for shame of the sin you have committed. I am only ten years old, but rather than have done such a thing I would have let myself be shut up in that hot hole with poor, innocent Perpetua, or I would have let myself be killed, as you want poor, honest Hiram to be! Oh, shame!"

Katharina's crimson cheeks had turned pale at this address and, as she had no answer ready, she could only toss her head and say, with as much pride and dignity as she could assume:

"What can a child like you know about things that puzzle the heads of grown-up people?"

"Grown-up people!" laughed Mary, who was not three inches shorter than her antagonist. "You must be a great deal taller before I call you grown up! In two years time, you will scarcely be up to my eyes." At this the irascible Egyptian fired up; she gave the child a slap in the face with the palm of her hand. Mary only stood still as if petrified, and after gazing at the ground for a minute or two without a cry, she turned her back on her companion and silently went back into the shaded walk.

Katharina watched her with tears in her eyes. She felt that Mary was justified in disapproving of what she had done the day before; for she herself had been unable to sleep and had become more and more convinced that she had acted wrongly, nay, unpardonably. And now again she had done an inexcusable thing. She felt that she had deeply hurt the child's feelings, and this sincerely grieved her. She followed Mary in silence, at some little distance, like a maid-servant. She longed to hold her back by her dress, to say something kind to her, nay, to ask her pardon. As they drew near to the spot where the governess had dropped into her chair again, a hapless victim to the heat of Egypt, Katharina called Mary by her name, and when the child paid no heed, laid her hand on her shoulder, saying in gentle entreaty: "Forgive me for having so far forgotten myself. But how can I help being so little? You know very well when any one laughs at me for it....."

"You get angry and slap!" retorted the child, walking on. "Yesterday, perhaps, I might have laughed over a box on the ear--it is not the first --or have given it to you back again; but to-day!--Just now," and she shuddered involuntarily, "just now I felt as if some black slave had laid his dirty hand on my cheek. You are not what you were. You walk quite differently, and you look--depend upon it you do not look as nice and as bright as you used, and I know why: You did a very bad thing last evening."

"But dear pet," said the other, "you must not be so hard. Perhaps I did not really tell the judges everything I knew, but Orion, who loves me so, and whose wife I am to be. . . ."

"He led you into sin!--Yes; and he was always merry and kind till yesterday; but since--Oh, that unlucky day!"

Here she was interrupted by Eudoxia, who poured out a flood of reproaches and finally desired her to resume her task. The child obeyed unresistingly; but she had scarcely settled to her wax tablets again when Katharina was by her side, whispering to her that Orion would certainly not have asserted anything that he did not believe to be true, and that she had really been in doubt as to whether a gem with a gold back, or a mere gold frame-work, had been hanging to Paula's chain. At this Mary turned sharply and quickly upon her, looked her straight in the eyes and exclaimed--but in Egyptian that the governess might not understand, for she had disdained to learn a single word of it:

"A rubbishy gold frame with a broken edge was hanging to the chain, and, what is more, it caught in your dress. Why, I can see it now! And, when you bore witness that it was a gem, you told a lie--Look here; here are the laws which God Almighty himself gave on the sacred Mount of Sinai, and there it stands written: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' And those who do, the priest told me, are guilty of mortal sin, for which there is no forgiveness on earth or in Heaven, unless after bitter repentance and our Saviour's special mercy. So it is written; and you could actually declare before the judges a thing that was false, and that you knew would bring others to ruin?"

The young criminal looked down in shame and confusion, and answered hesitatingly:

"Orion asserted it so positively and clearly, and then--I do not know what came over me--but I was so angry, so--I could have murdered her!"

"Whom?" asked Mary in surprise. "You know very well: Paula."

"Paula!" said Mary, and her large eyes again filled with tears. "Is it possible? Did you not love her as much as I do? Have not you often and often clung about her like a bur?"

"Yes, yes, very true. But before the judges she was so intolerably proud, and then.--But believe me, Mary you really and truly cannot understand anything of all this."

"Can I not?" asked the child folding her arms.

"Why do you think me so stupid?"

"You are in love with Orion--and he is a man whom few can match, over head and ears in love; and because Paula looks like a queen by the side of you, and is so much handsomer and taller than you are, and Orion, till yesterday--I could see it all--cared a thousand times more for her than for you, you were jealous and envious of her. Oh, I know all about it. --And I know that all the women fall in love with him, and that Mandaile had her ears cut off on his account, and that it was a lady who loved him in Constantinople that gave him the little white dog. The slave-girls tell me what they hear and what I like.--And after all, you may well be jealous of Paula, for if she only made a point of it, how soon Orion would make up his mind never to look at you again! She is the handsomest and the wisest and the best girl in the whole world, and why should she not be proud? The false witness you bore will cost poor Hiram his life: but the merciful Saviour may forgive you at last. It is your affair, and no concern of mine; but when Paula is forced to leave the house and all through you, so that I shall never, never, never see her any more--I cannot forget it, and I do not think I ever shall; but I will pray God to

make me."

She burst into loud sobs, and the governess had started up to put an end to a dialogue which she could not understand, and which was therefore vexatious and provoking, when the water-wagtail fell on her knees before the little girl, threw her arms round her, and bursting into tears, exclaimed:

"Mary--darling little Mary forgive me.

[The German has the diminutive 'Mariechen'. To this Dr. Ebers appends this note. "An ignorant critic took exception to the use of the diminutive form of names (as for instance 'Irenchen', little Irene) in 'The Sisters,' as an anachronism. It is nevertheless a fact that the Greeks settled in Egypt were so fond of using the diminutive form of woman's names that they preferred them, even in the tax-rolls. This form was common in Attic Greek,"]

Oh, if you could but know what I endured before I came out here! Forgive me, Mary; be my sweet, dear little Mary once more. Indeed and indeed you are much better than I am. Merciful Saviour, what possessed me last evening? And all through him, through the man no one can help loving--through Orion!--And would you believe it: I do not even know why he led me into this sin. But I must try to care for him no more, to forget him entirely, although, although,--only think, he called me his betrothed; but now that he has betrayed me into sin, can I dare to become his wife? It has given me no peace all night. I love him, yes I love him, you cannot think how dearly; still, I cannot be his! Sooner will I go into a convent, or drown myself in the Nile!--And I will say all this to my mother, this very day."

The Greek governess had looked on in astonishment, for it was indeed strange to see the young girl kneeling in front of the child. She listened to her eager flow of unintelligible words, wondering whether she could ever teach her pupil--with her grandmother's help if need should be--to cultivate a more sedate and Greek demeanor.

At this juncture Paula came down the path. Some slaves followed her, carrying several boxes and bundles and a large litter, all making their way to the Nile, where a boat was waiting to ferry her up the river to her new home.

As she lingered unobserved, her eye rested on the touching picture of the two young things clasped in each other's arms, and she overheard the last words of the gentle little creature who had done her such cruel wrong. She could only guess at what had occurred, but she did not like to be a listener, so she called Mary; and when the child started up and flew to throw her arms round her neck with vehement and devoted tenderness, she covered her little face and hair with kisses. Then she freed herself from the little girl's embrace, and said, with tearful eyes:

"Good-bye, my darling! In a few minutes I shall no longer belong here; another and a strange home must be mine. Love me always, and do not forget me, and be quite sure of one thing: you have no truer friend on earth than I am."

At this, fresh tears flowed; the child implored her not to go away, not to leave her; but Paula could but refuse, though she was touched and astonished to find that she had reaped so rich a harvest of love, here

where she had sown so little. Then she gave her hand at parting to the governess, and when she turned to Katharina, to bid farewell, hard as it was, to the murderer of her happiness, the young girl fell at her feet bathed in tears of repentance, covered her knees and hands with kisses, and confessed herself guilty of a terrible sin. Paula, however, would not allow her to finish; she lifted her up, kissed her forehead, and said that she quite understood how she had been led into it, and that she, like Mary, would try to forgive her.

Standing by the governor's many-oared barge, to which the young girls now escorted her, she found Orion. Twice already this morning he had tried in vain to get speech with her, and he looked pale and agitated. He had a splendid bunch of flowers in his hand; he bestowed a hasty greeting on Mary and his betrothed, and did not heed the fact that Katharina returned it hesitatingly and without a word.

He went close up to Paula, told her in a low voice that Hiram was safe, and implored her, as she hoped to be forgiven for her own sins, to grant him a few minutes. When she rejected his prayer with a silent shrug, and went on towards the boat he put out his hand to help her, but she intentionally overlooked it and gave her hand to the physician. At this he sprang after her into the barge, saying in her ear in a tremulous whisper:

"A wretch, a miserable man entreats your mercy. I was mad yesterday. I love you, I love you--how deeply!--you will see!"

"Enough," she broke in firmly, and she stood up in the swaying boat. Philippus supported her, and Orion, laying the flowers in her lap, cried so that all could hear: "Your departure will sorely distress my father. He is so ill that we did not dare allow you to take leave of him. If you have anything to say to him. . ."

"I will find another messenger," she replied sternly.

"And if he asks the reason for your sudden departure?"

"Your mother and Philippus can give him an answer."

"But he was your guardian, and your fortune, I know. . ."

"In his hands it is safe."

"And if the physician's fears should be justified?"

"Then I will demand its restitution through a new Kyrios."

"You will receive it without that! Have you no pity, no forgiveness?" For all answer she flung the flowers he had given her into the river; he leaped on shore, and regardless of the bystanders, pushed his fingers through his hair, clasping his hands to his burning brow.

The barge was pushed off, the rowers plied their oars like men; Orion gazed after it, panting with laboring breath, till a little hand grasped his, and Mary's sweet, childish voice exclaimed:

"Be comforted, uncle. I know just what is troubling you."

"What do you know?" he asked roughly.

"That you are sorry that you and Katharina should have spoken against her last evening, and against poor Hiram."

"Nonsense!" he angrily broke in. "Where is Katharina?"

"I was to tell you that she could not see you today. She loves you dearly, but she, too, is so very, very sorry."

"She may spare herself!" said the young man. "If there is anything to be sorry for it falls on me--it is crushing me to death. But what is this!--The devil's in it! What business is it of the child's? Now, be off with you this minute. Eudoxia, take this little girl to her tasks."

He took Mary's head between his hands, kissed her forehead with impetuous affection, and then pushed her towards her governess, who dutifully led her away.

When Orion found himself alone, he leaned against a tree and groaned like a wounded wild beast. His heart was full to bursting.

"Gone, gone! Thrown away, lost! The best on earth!" He laid his hands on the tree-stem and pressed his head against it till it hurt him. He did not know how to contain himself for misery and self-reproach. He felt like a man who has been drunk and has reduced his own house to ashes in his intoxication. How all this could have come to pass he now no longer knew. After his nocturnal ride he had caused Nilus the treasurer to be waked, and had charged him to liberate Hiram secretly. But it was the sight of his stricken father that first brought him completely to his sober senses. By his bed-side, death in its terrible reality had stared him in the face, and he had felt that he could not bear to see that beloved parent die till he had made his peace with Paula, won her forgiveness, brought her whom his father loved so well into his presence, and besought his blessing on her and on himself.

Twice he had hastened from the chamber of suffering to her room, to entreat her to hear him, but in vain; and now, how terrible had their parting been! She was hard, implacable, cruel; and as he recalled her person and individuality as they had struck him before their quarrel, he was forced to confess that there was something in her present behavior which was not natural to her. This inhuman severity in the beautiful woman whose affection had once been his, and who, but now, had flung his flowers into the water, had not come from her heart; it was deliberately planned to make him feel her anger. What had withheld her, under such great provocation, from betraying that she had detected him in the theft of the emerald? All was not yet lost; and he breathed more freely as he went back to the house where duty, and his anxiety for his father, required his presence. There were his flowers, floating on the stream.

"Hatred cast them there," thought he, "but before they reach the sea many blossoms will have opened which were mere hard buds when she flung them away. She can never love any man but me, I feel it, I know it. The first time we looked into each other's eyes the fate of our hearts was sealed. What she hates in me is my mad crime; what first set her against me was her righteous anger at my suit for Katharina. But that sin was but a dream in my life, which can never recur; and as for Katharina--I have sinned against her once, but I will not continue to sin through a whole, long lifetime. I have been permitted to trifle with love unpunished so often, that at last I have learnt to under-estimate its

power. I could laugh as I sacrificed mine to my mother's wishes; but that, and that alone, has given rise to all these horrors. But no, all is not yet lost! Paula will listen to me; and when she sees what my inmost feelings are--when I have confessed all to her, good and evil alike--when she knows that my heart did but wander, and has returned to her who has taught me that love is no jest, but solemn earnest, swaying all mankind, she will come round--everything will come right."

A noble and rapturous light came into his face, and as he walked on, his hopes rose:

"When she is mine I know that everything good in me that I have inherited from my forefathers will blossom forth. When my mother called me to my father's bed-side, she said: 'Come, Orion, life is earnest for you and me and all our house, your father. . .' Yes, it is earnest indeed, however all this may end! To win Paula, to conciliate her, to bring her near to me, to have her by my side and do something great, something worthy of her--this is such a purpose in life as I need! With her, only with her I know I could achieve it; without her, or with that gilded toy Katharina, old age will bring me nothing but satiety, sobering and regrets--or, to call it by its Christian designation: bitter repentance. As Antaeus renewed his strength by contact with mother earth, so, father do I feel myself grow taller when I only think of her. She is salvation and honor; the other is ruin and misery in the future. My poor, dear Father, you will, you must survive this stroke to see the fulfilment of all your joyful hopes of your son. You always loved Paula; perhaps you may be the one to appease her and bring her back to me; and how dear will she be to you, and, God willing, to my mother, too, when you see her reigning by my side an ornament to this house, to this city, to this country--reigning like a queen, your son's redeeming and guardian angel!"

Uplifted, carried away by these thoughts, he had reached the viridarium. He there found Sebek the steward waiting for his young master: "My lord is asleep now," he whispered, "as the physician foretold, but his face... Oh, if only we had Philippus here again!"

"Have you sent the chariot with the fast horses to the Convent of St. Cecilia?" asked Orion eagerly; and when Sebek had replied in the affirmative and vanished again indoors, the young man, overwhelmed with painful forebodings, sank on his knees near a column to which a crucifix was hung, and lifted up his hands and soul in fervent prayer.

CHAPTER XV.

The physician had installed Paula in her new home, and had introduced her to the family who were henceforth to be her protectors, and to enable her to lead a happier life.

He had but a few minutes to devote to her and her hosts; for scarcely had he taken her into the spacious rooms, gay with flowers, of which she now took possession, when he was enquired for by two messengers, both anxious to speak with him. Paula knew how critical her uncle's state was, and now, contemplating the probability of losing him, she first understood what he had been to her. Thus sorrow was her first companion in her new abode--a sorrow to which the comfort of her pretty, airy rooms added keenness.

One of the messengers was a young Arab from the other side of the river, who handed to Philippus a letter from the merchant Haschim. The old man informed him that, in consequence of a bad fall his eldest son had had, he was forced to start at once for Djiddah on the Red Sea. He begged the physician to take every care of his caravan-leader, to whom he was much attached, to remove him when he thought fit from the governor's house, and to nurse him till he was well, in some quiet retreat. He would bear in mind the commission given him by the daughter of the illustrious Thomas. He sent with this letter a purse well-filled with gold pieces.

The other messenger was to take the leech back again in the light chariot with the fast horses to the suffering Mukaukas. He at once obeyed the summons, and the steeds, which the driver did not spare, soon carried him back to the governor's house.

A glance at his patient told him that this was the beginning of the end; still, faithful to his principle of never abandoning hope till the heart of the sufferer had ceased to beat, he raised the senseless man, heedless of Orion, who was on his knees by his father's pillow, signed to the deaconess in attendance, an experienced nurse, and laid cool, wet cloths on the head and neck of the sufferer, who was stricken with apoplexy. Then he bled him.

Presently the Mukaukas wearily opened his eyes, turned uneasily from side to side, and recognizing his kneeling son and his wife, bathed in tears, he murmured, almost inarticulately, for his paralyzed tongue no longer did his will: "Two pillules, Philip!"

The physician unhesitatingly acceded to the request of the dying man, who again closed his eyes; but only to reopen them, and to say, with the same difficulty, but with perfect consciousness: "The end is at hand! The blessing of the Church--Orion, the Bishop."

The young man hastened out of the room to fetch the prelate, who was waiting in the viridarium with two deacons, an exorcist, and a sacristan bearing the sacred vessels.

The governor listened in devout composure to the service of the last sacrament, looked on at the ceremonies performed by the exorcist as, with waving of hands and pious ejaculations he banned the evil spirits and cast out from the dying man the devil that might have part in him; but he could no longer swallow the bread which, in the Jacobite rite, was administered soaked in the wine. Orion took the holy elements for him, and the dying man, with a smile, murmured to his son:

"God be with thee, my son! The Lord, it seems, denies me His precious Blood--and yet--let me try once more."

This time he succeeded in swallowing the wine and a few crumbs of bread; and the bishop Ptolimus, a gentle old man of a beautiful and dignified presence, spoke comfort to him, and asked him whether he felt that he was dying penitent and in perfect faith in the mercy of his Lord and Saviour, and whether he repented of his sins and forgave his enemies.

The sick man bowed his head with an effort and murmured:

"Even the Melchites who murdered my sons--and even the head of our Church, the Patriarch, who was only too glad to leave it to me to achieve

things which he scrupled to do himself. That--that--But you, Ptolimus-- a wise and worthy servant of the Lord--tell me to the best of your convictions: May I die in the belief that it was not a sin to conclude a peace with the Arab conquerors of the Greeks?--May I, even at this hour, think of the Melchites as heretics?"

The prelate drew his still upright figure to its full height, and his mild features assumed a determined--nay a stern expression as he exclaimed:

"You know the, decision pronounced by the Synod of Ephesus--the words which should be graven on the heart of every true Jacobite as on marble and brass 'May all who divide the nature of Christ--and this is what the Melchites do--be divided with the sword, be hewn in pieces and be burnt alive!--No Head of our Church has ever hurled such a curse at the Moslems who adore the One God!"

The sufferer drew a deep breath, but he presently added with a sigh:

"But Benjamin the Patriarch, and John of Niku have tormented my soul with fears! Still, you too, Ptolimus, bear the crosier, and to you I will confess that your brethren in office, the shepherds of the Jacobite fold, have ruined my peace for hundreds of days and nights, and I have been near to cursing them. But before the night fell the Lord sent light into my soul, and I forgave them, and now, through you, I crave their pardon and their blessing. The Church has but reluctantly opened the doors to me in these last years; but what servant can be allowed to complain of the Master from whom he expects grace? So listen to me. I close my eyes as a faithful and devoted adherent of the Church, and in token thereof I will endow her to the best of my power and adorn her with rich and costly gifts; I will--but I can say no more.--Speak for me, Orion. You know--the gems--the hanging. . . ."

His son explained to the bishop what a splendid gift, in priceless jewels, the dying man intended to offer to the Church. He desired to be buried in the church of St. John at Alexandria by his father's side, and to be prayed for in front of the mortuary chapel of his ancestors in the Necropolis; he had set aside a sum of money, in his will, to pay for the prayers to be offered for his soul. The priests were well pleased to hear this, and they absolved him unconditionally and completely; then, after blessing him fervently, they quitted the room.

Philippus heaved a sigh of relief when the ecclesiastics had departed, and constantly renewed the wet compress, while the dying governor lay for a long time in silence with his eyes shut. Presently he rubbed them as though he felt revived, raised his head a little with the physician's help, and looking up, said:

"Draw the ring off my finger, Orion, and wear it worthily.--Where is little Mary, where is Paula? I should wish to bid them farewell too."

The young man and his mother exchanged uneasy glances, but Neforis collected herself at once and replied:

"We have sent for Mary; but Paula--you know she never was happy with us--and since the events of yesterday. . . ."

"Well?" asked the invalid.

"She hastily quitted the house; but we parted friends, I can assure you of that; she is still in Memphis, and she spoke of you most affectionately and wished to see you, and charged me with many loving messages for you; so, if you really care to see her. . . ."

The sick man tried to nod his head, but in vain. He did not, however, insist on her being sent for, but his face wore an expression of deep melancholy and the words came faintly from his lips.

"Thomas' daughter! The noblest and loveliest of all."

"The noblest and loveliest," echoed Orion, in a voice that was tremulous with strong, deep and sincere emotion; then he begged the leech and the deaconess to leave him alone with his parents. As soon as they had left the room the young man spoke softly but urgently into his father's ear:

"You are quite right, Father," he said. "She is better and more noble, more beautiful and more highminded than any girl living. I love her, and will stake everything to win her heart. Oh, God! Oh, God! Merciful Heaven!--Are you glad, do you give your consent, Father? You dearest and best of men; I see it in your face."

"Yes, yes, yes," murmured the governor; his yellow, bloodshot eyes looked up to Heaven, and with a terrible effort he stammered out: "Blessing--my blessing, on you and Paula.--Tell her from me.... If she had confided in her old uncle, as she used to do, the freedman would never have robbed us.--She is a brave soul; how she fought for the poor fellow. I will hear more about it if my strength holds out.--Why is she not here?"

"She wished so much to bid you farewell," replied Neforis, "but you were asleep."

"Was she in such a hurry to be gone?" asked her husband with a bitter smile. "Fear about the emerald may have had something to do with it? But how could I be angry with her? Hiram acted without her knowledge, I suppose? Yes, I knew it!--Ah; that dear, sweet face! If I could but see it once more. The joy--of my eyes, and my companion at draughts! A faithful heart too; how she clung to her father! she was ready to sacrifice everything for him.--And you, you, my old.... But no--no reproaches at such a time. You, Mother--you, my Neforis, thanks, a thousand thanks for all your love and kindness. What a mystical and magic bond is that of a Christian marriage like ours? Mark that, Orion. And you, Mother: I am anxious about this. You--do not hurt the girl's feelings again. Say--say you bless this union; it will make me happier at the last.--Paula and Orion; both of them--both.--I never dared before --but what better could we wish?"

The matron clasped her hands and sobbed out:

"Anything, everything you wish! But Father, Orion, our faith!-- And then, merciful Saviour, that poor little Katharina!"

"Katharina!" repeated the sick man, and his feeble lips parted in a compassionate smile. "Our boy and the water--water--you know what I would say."

Then his eyes began to sparkle more brightly and he said in a low voice, but still eagerly, as though death were yet far from him:

"My name is George, the son of the Mukaukas; I am the great Mukaukas and our family--all fine men of a proud race; all: My father, my uncle, our lost sons, and Orion here--all palms and oaks! And shall a dwarf, a mere blade of rice be grafted on to the grand old stalwart stock? What would come of that?--Oh, ho! a miserable little brood! But Paula! The cedar of Lebanon--Paula; she would give new life to the grand old race."

"But our faith, our faith," moaned Neforis. "And you, Orion, do you even know what her feeling is towards you?"

"Yes and no. Let that rest for the present," said the youth, who was deeply moved. "Oh Father! if I only knew that your blessing. . ."

"The Faith, the Faith," interrupted the Mukaukas in a broken voice.

"I will be true to my own!" cried Orion, raising his father's hand to his lips. "But think, picture to yourself, how Paula and I would reign in this house, and how another generation would grow up in it worthy of the great Mukaukas and his ancestors!"

"I see it, I see it," murmured the sick man sinking back on his pillows, unconscious.

Philippus was immediately called in, and, with him, little Mary came weeping into the room. The physician's efforts to revive the sufferer were presently successful; again the sick man opened his eyes, and spoke more distinctly and loudly than before:

"There is a perfume of musk. It is the fragrance that heralds the Angel of Death."

After this he lay still and silent for a long time. His eyes were closed, but his brows were knit and showed that he was thinking with a painful effort. At length, with a sigh, he said, almost inaudibly: "So it was and so it is: The Greek oppressed my people with arbitrary cruelty as if we were dogs; the Moslem, too, is a stranger, but he is just. That which happened it was out of my power to prevent; and it is well, it is very well that it turned out so.--Very well," he repeated several times, and then he shivered and said with a groan:

"My feet are so cold! But never mind, never mind, I like to be cool."

The leech and the deaconess at once set to work to heat blocks of wood to warm his feet; the sick man looked up gratefully and went on: "At church, in the House of God, I have often found it deliciously cool and to-day it is the Church that eases my death-bed by her pardon. Do you, my Son, be faithful to her. No member of our house should ever be an apostate. As to the new faith--it is overspreading land after land with incredible power; ambition and covetousness are driving thousands into its fold. But we--we are faithful to Christ Jesus, we are no traitors. If I, I the Mukaukas, had consented to go over to the Khaliff I might have been a prince in purple, and have governed my own country in his name. How many have deserted to the Moslems! And the temptation will come to you, too, and their faith offers much that is attractive to the crowd. They imagine a Paradise full of unspeakably alluring joys--but we, my son--we shall meet again in our own, shall we not?"

"Yes, yes, Father!" cried the young man. "I will remain a Christian, staunch and true. . ."

"That is right," interrupted the sick man. He was determined to forget that his son wished to marry a Melchite and went on quickly: "Paula... But no more of that. Remain faithful to your own creed--otherwise... However, child, seek your own road; you are--but you will walk in the right way, and it is because I know that, know it surely, that I can die so calmly.

"I have provided abundantly for your temporal welfare. I have been a good husband, a faithful father, have I not, O Saviour?--Have I not, Neforis? And that which is my best and surest comfort is that for many long years I have administered justice in this land, and never, never once--and Thou my Refuge and Comforter art my witness!--never once consciously or willingly have I been an unrighteous judge. Before me the poor were equal with the rich, the powerful with the helpless widow. Who would have dared..." Here he broke off; his eyes, wandering feebly round the room, fell on Mary who had sunk on her knees, opposite to Orion on the other side of the bed. The dying man, who had thus summed up the outcome of a long and busy life, ceased his reflections, and when the child saw that he was vainly trying to turn his powerless head towards her, she threw her arms round him with passionate grief; unscared by his fixed gaze or the altered hue of his beloved face, she kissed his lips and cheeks, exclaiming:

"Grandfather, dear grandfather, do not leave us; stay with us, pray, pray stay with us!"

Something faintly resembling a smile parted his parched lips, and all the tenderness with which his soul was overflowing for this sweet young bud of humanity would have found expression in his voice but that he could only mutter huskily:

"Mary, my darling! For your sake I should be glad to live a long while yet, a very long while; but the other world--I am standing already on its threshold. Good-bye--I must indeed say good-bye."

"No, no--I will pray; oh! I will pray so fervently that you may get well again!" cried the child. But he replied:

"Nay, nay. The Saviour is already taking me by the hand. Farewell, and again farewell. Did you bring Paula? I do not see her. Did you bring Paula with you, sweetheart? She--did she leave us in anger? If she only knew; ah! your Paula has treated us ill." The child's heart was still full of the horrible crime which had so revolted her truthful nature, and which had deprived her of rest all through an evening, a long night and a morning; she laid her little head close to that of the old man--her dearest and best friend. For years he had filled her father's place, and now he was dying, leaving her forever! But she could not let him depart with a false idea of the woman whom she worshipped with all the fervor of her child's heart; in a subdued voice, but with eager feeling, she said, close to his ear:

"But Grandfather, there is one thing you must know before the Saviour takes you away to be happy in Heaven. Paula told the truth, and never, never told a lie, not even for Hiram's sake. An empty gold frame hung to her necklace and no gem at all. Whatever Orion may say, I saw it myself and cannot be mistaken, as truly as I hope to see you and my poor father in heaven! And Katharina, too, thought better of it, and confessed to me just now that she had committed a great sin and had borne false witness

before the judges to please her dear Orion. I do not know what Hiram had done to offend him; but on the strength of Katharina's evidence the judges condemned him to death. But Paula--you must understand that Paula had nothing, positively nothing whatever to do with the stealing of the emerald."

Orion, kneeling there, was condemned to hear every word the little girl so vehemently whispered, and each one pierced his heart like a dagger-thrust. Again and again he felt inclined to clutch at her across the bed and fling her on the ground before his father's eyes; but grief and astonishment seemed to have paralyzed his whole being; he had not even the power to interrupt her with a single word.

She had spoken, and all was told.

He clung to the couch like a shattered wretch; and when his father turned his eyes on him and gasped out: "Then the Court--our Court of justice pronounced an unrighteous sentence?" he bowed his head in contrition.

The dying man murmured even less articulately and incoherently than before: "The gem--the hanging--you, you perhaps--was it you? that emerald--I cannot. . ."

Orion helped his father in his vain efforts to utter the dreadful words. Sooner would he have died with the old man than have deceived him in such a moment; he replied humbly and in a low voice:

"Yes, Father--I took it. But as surely as I love you and my mother this, the first reckless act of my life, which has brought such horrors in its train. . . Shall be the last," he would have said; but the words "I took it," had scarcely passed his lips when his father was shaken by a violent trembling, the expression of his eyes changed fearfully, and before the son had spoken his vow to the end the unhappy father was, by a tremendous effort, sitting upright. Loud sobs of penitence broke from the young man's heaving breast, as the Mukaukas wrathfully exclaimed, in thick accents, as quickly as the heavy, paralyzed tongue would allow:

"You, you! A disgrace to our ancient and blameless Court! You?--Away with you! A thief, an unjust judge, a false witness,--and the only descendant of Menas! If only these hands were able--you--you--Go, villain!" And with this wild outcry, George, the gentle and just Mukaukas, sank back on his pillows; his bloodshot eyes were staring, fixed on vacancy; his gasping lips repeated again and again, but less and less audibly the one word "Villain;" his swollen fingers clutched at the light coverlet that lay over him; a strange, shrill wheezing came through his open mouth, and the heavy corpse of the great dignitary fell, like a falling palm-tree, into Orion's arms.

Orion started up, his eyes inflamed, his hair all dishevelled, and shook the dead man as though to compel him back to life again, to hear his oath and accept his vow, to see his tears of repentance, to pardon him and take back the name of infamy which had been his parting word to his loved and spoilt child.

In the midst of this wild outbreak the physician came back, glanced at the dead man's distorted features, laid a hand on his heart, and said with solemn regret as he led little Mary away from the couch:

"A good and just man is gone from the land of the living."

Orion cried aloud and pushed away Mary, who had stolen close to him; for, young as she was, she felt that it was she who had brought the worst woe on her uncle, and that it was her part to show him some affection.

She ran then to her grandmother; but she, too, put her aside and fell on her knees by the side of her wretched son to weep with him; to console him who was inconsolable, and in whom, a few minutes since, she had hoped to find her own best consolation; but her fond words of motherly comfort found no echo in his broken spirit.

CHAPTER XVI.

When Philippus had parted from Paula he had told her that the Mukaukas might indeed die at any moment, but that it was possible that he might yet struggle with death for weeks to come. This hope had comforted her; for she could not bear to think that the only true friend she had had in Memphis, till she had become more intimate with the physician, should quit the world forever without having heard her justification. Nothing could be more unlikely than that any one in Neforis' household--excepting her little grandchild should ever remember her with kindness; and she scarcely desired it; but she rebelled against the idea of forfeiting the respect she had earned, even in the governor's house. If her friend should succeed in prolonging her uncle's life, by a confidential interview with him she might win back his old affection and his good opinion.

Her new home she felt was but a resting-place, a tabernacle in the desert-journey of her solitary pilgrimage, and she here meant to avail herself of the information she had gathered from her Melchite dependents. Hope had now risen supreme in her heart over grief and disappointment. Orion's presence alone hung like a threatening hail-cloud over the sprouting harvest of her peace of mind. And yet, next to the necessity of waiting at Memphis for the return of her messenger, nothing tied her to the place so strongly as her interest in watching the future course of his life, at any rate from a distance. What she felt for him--and she told herself it was deep aversion--nevertheless constituted a large share of her inner life, little as she would confess it to herself.

Her new hosts had received her as a welcome guest, and they certainly did not seem to be poor. The house was spacious, and though it was old and unpretentious it was comfortable and furnished with artistic taste. The garden had amazed her by the care lavished on it; she had seen a hump-backed gardener and several children at work in it. A strange party--for every one of them, like their chief, was in some way deformed or crippled.

The plot of ground--which extended towards the river to the road-way for foot passengers, vehicles and the files of men towing the Nile-boats--was but narrow, and bounded on either side by extensive premises. Not far from the spot where it lay nearest to the river was the bridge of boats connecting Memphis with the island of Rodah. To the right was the magnificent residence--a palace indeed--belonging to Susannah; to the left was an extensive grove, where tall palms, sycamores with spreading foliage, and dense thickets of blue-green tamarisk trees cast their shade. Above this bower of splendid shrubs and ancient trees rose a

long, yellow building crowned with a turret; and this too was not unknown to her, for she had often heard it spoken of in her uncle's house, and had even gone there now and then escorted by Perpetua. It was the convent of St. Cecilia, the refuge of the last nuns of the orthodox creed left in Memphis; for, though all the other sisterhoods of her confession had long since been banished, these had been allowed to remain in their old home, not only because they were famous sick-nurses, a distinction common to all the Melchite orders, but even more because the decaying municipality could not afford to sacrifice the large tax they annually paid to it. This tax was the interest on a considerable capital bequeathed to the convent by a certain wise predecessor of the Mukaukas', with the prudent proviso, ratified under the imperial seal of Theodosius II., that if the convent were at any time broken up, this endowment, with the land and buildings which it likewise owed to the generosity of the same benefactor, should become the property of the Christian emperor at that time reigning.

Mukaukas George, notwithstanding his well-founded aversion for everything Melchite, had taken good care not to press this useful Sisterhood too hardly, or to deprive his impoverished capital of its revenues only to throw them into the hands of the wealthy Moslems. The title-deed on which the Sisters relied was good; and the governor, who was a good lawyer as well as a just man, had not only left them unmolested, but in spite of his fears--during the last few years--for his own safety, had shown himself no respecter of persons by defending their rights firmly and resolutely against the powerful patriarch of the Jacobite Church. The Senate of the ancient capital naturally, approved his course, and had not merely suffered the heretic Sisterhood to remain, but had helped and encouraged it.

The Jacobite clergy of the city shut their eyes, and only opened them to watch the convent at Easter-tide; for on the Saturday before Easter, the nuns, in obedience to an agreement made before the Monophysite Schism, were required to pay a tribute of embroidered vestments to the head of the Christian Churches, with wine of the best vintages of Kochome near the Pyramid of steps, and a considerable quantity of flowers and confectionary. So the ancient coenobium of women was maintained, and though all Egypt was by this time Jacobite or Moslem, and many of the older Sisters had departed this life within the last year, no one had thought of enquiring how it was that the number of the nuns remained still the same, till the Jacobite archbishop Benjamin filled the patriarchal throne of Alexandria in the place of the Melchite Cyrus.

To Benjamin the heretical Sisters at Memphis--the hawks in a dove-cote, as he called them--were an offence, and he thought that the deed might bear a new interpretation: that as there was no longer a Christian emperor, and as the word "Christian" was used in the document, if the convent were broken up the property should pass into the hands of the only Christian magnate then existing in the country: himself, namely, and his Church. The ill-feeling which the Patriarch fostered against the Mukaukas had been aggravated to hostility by their antagonism on this matter.

A musical dirge now fell on Paula's ear from the convent chapel. Was the worthy Mother Superior dead? No, this lament must be for some other death, for the strange skirling wail of the Egyptian women came up to her corner window from the road, from the bridge, and from the boats on the river. No Jacobite of Memphis would have dared to express her grief so publicly for the death of a Melchite; and as the chorus of voices

swelled, the thought struck her with a chill that it must be her uncle and friend who had closed his weary eyes in death.

It was with deep emotion and many tears that she perceived how sincerely the death of this righteous man was bewailed by all his fellow-citizens. Yes, he only, and no other Egyptian, could have called forth this great and expressive regret. The wailing women in the road were daubing the mud of the river on their foreheads and bosoms; men were standing in large groups and beating their heads and breasts with passionate gestures. On the bridge of boats the men would stop others, and from thence, too, piercing shrieks came across to her.

At last Philippus came in and confirmed her fears. The governor's death had shocked him no less than it did her, and he had to tell Paula all he knew of the dead man's last hours.

"Still, one good thing has come out of this misery," he said. "There is nothing so comforting as the discovery that we have been deceived in thinking ill of a man and of his character. This Orion, who has sinned so basely against himself and against you, is not utterly reprobate."

"Not?" interrupted Paula. "Then he has taken you in too!"

"Taken me in?" said the leech. "Hardly, I think. I have, alas! stood by many a death-bed; for I am too often sent for when Death is already beckoning the sick man away. I have met thousands of mourners in these melancholy scenes, which, I can assure you, are the very best school for training any one who desires to search the hearts of his fellow-creatures. By the bed of death, or in the mart, where everything is a question of Mine and Thine, it is easy to see how some--we for instance --are as careful to hide from the world all that is great and noble in us as others are to conceal what is petty and mean--we read men's hearts as an open page. From my observations of the dying and of those who sorrow for them, I, who am not Menander nor Lucian, could draw a series of portraits which should be as truthful likenesses as though the men had turned themselves inside out before me."

"That a dying man should show himself as he really is I can well believe," replied Paula. "He need have no further care for the opinions of others; but the mourners? Why, custom requires them to assume an air of grief and to shed tears."

"Very true; regret repeats itself by the side of the dead," replied the physician. "But the chamber of the dying is like a church. Death consecrates it, and the man who stands face to face with death often drops the mask by which he cheats his fellows. There we may see faces which you would shudder to look on, but others, too, which merely to see is enough to make us regard the degenerate species to which we belong with renewed respect."

"And you found such a comforting vision in Orion,--the thief, the false witness, the corrupt judge!" exclaimed Paula, starting up in indignant astonishment.

"There! you see," laughed Philippus. "Just like a woman! A little juggling, and lo! what was only rose color is turned to purple. No. The son of the Mukaukas has not yet undergone such a dazzling change of hue; but he has a feeling and impressible heart--and I hold even that in high esteem. I have no doubt that he loved his father deeply, nay

passionately; though I have ample reason to believe him capable of the very worst. So long as I was present at the scene of death the father and son were parting in all friendship and tenderness, and when the good old man's heart had ceased to beat I found Orion in a state which is only possible to have when love has lost what it held dearest."

"All acting!" Paula put in.

"But there was no audience, dear friend. Orion would not have got up such a performance for his mother and little Mary."

"But he is a poet--and a highly-gifted one too. He sings beautiful songs of his own invention to the lyre; his ecstatic and versatile mind works him up into any frame of feeling; but his soul is perverted; it is soaked in wickedness as a sponge drinks up water. He is a vessel full of beautiful gifts, but he has forfeited all that was good and noble in him--all!"

The words came in eager haste from her indignant lips. Her cheeks glowed with her vehemence, and she thought she had won over the physician; but he gravely shook his head, and said:

"Your righteous anger carries you too far. How often have you blamed me for severity and suspicions but now I have to beg you to allow me to ask your sympathy for an experience to which you would probably have raised no objection the day before yesterday:

"I have met with evil-doers of every degree. Think, for instance, how many cases of wilful poisoning I have had to investigate."

"Even Homer called Egypt the land of poison," exclaimed Paula. "And it seems almost incredible that Christianity has not altered it in the least. Kosmas, who had seen the whole earth, could nowhere find more malice, deceit, hatred, and ill-will than exist here."

"Then you see in what good schools my experience of the wickedness of men has ripened," said Philippus smiling, "and they have taught me chiefly that there is never a criminal, a sinner, or a scapegrace, however infamous he may be, however cruel or lost to virtue, in whom some good quality or other may not be discovered.--Do you remember Nechebt, the horrible woman who poisoned her two brothers and her own father? She was captured scarcely three weeks ago; and that very monster in human form could almost die of hunger and thirst for the sake of her rascally son, who is a common soldier in the imperial army; at last she took to concocting poisons, not to improve her own wretched condition, but to send the shameless wretch means for a fresh debauch. I have known a thousand similar cases, but I will only mention that of one of the wildest and blood-thirstiest of robbers, who had evaded the vigilance of the watch again and again, but at last fell into their hands--and how? Because he had heard that his old mother was ill and he longed to see the withered old woman once more and give her a kiss, since he was her own child! In the same way Orion, however reprobate we may think him, has at any rate one characteristic which we must approve of: a tender affection for his father and mother. Your sponge is not utterly steeped in wickedness; there are still some pores, some cells which resist it; and if in him, as in so many others, the heart is one of them, then I say hopefully, like Horace the Roman: 'Nil desperandum.' It would be unjust to give him up altogether for lost."

To this assurance Paula found no answer; indeed, it struck her that--if Orion had told her the truth--it was only to please his mother that he had asked Katharina to marry him, while she herself occupied his heart. --The physician, wishing to change the subject, was about to speak again of the death of the Mukaukas, when one of the crippled serving girls came to announce a woman who asked to speak with Paula. A few minutes later she was clasped in the embrace of her faithful old friend and nurse, who rejoiced as heartily, laughing and crying for sheer delight, as if no tidings of misfortune had reached her; while Paula, though so much younger, was cut to the heart, and could not shake off the spell of her grief.

Perpetua understood this and owed her no grudge for the coolness with which she met her joyful excitement.

She told Paula that she had been well treated in her hot cell, and that about half an hour since Orion himself, the young Master now, had opened the door of her prison. He had been very gracious to her, but looked so pale and sad. The overbearing young man was quite altered; his eyes, which were dim with weeping, had moved her, Perpetua, to tears. She trusted that God would forgive him for his sins against herself and Paula; he must have been possessed by some evil demon; he had not been at all like himself; for he had a kind, warm heart, and though he had been so hard and unjust yesterday to poor Hiram he had made it up to him the first thing this morning, and had not only let him out of prison but had sent him and his son home to Damascus with large gifts and two horses. Nilus had told her this. He who hoped to be forgiven by his neighbor must also be ready to forgive. The great Augustine, even, had been no model of virtue in his youth and yet he had become a shining light in the Church; and now the son of the Mukaukas would tread in his father's footsteps. He was a handsome, engaging man, who would be the joy of their hearts yet, they might be very sure. Why, he had been as grave and as solemn as a bishop to-day; perhaps he had already turned over a new leaf. He himself had put her into his mother's chariot and desired the charioteer to drive her hither: what would Paula say to that? Her things were to be given over to her to-morrow morning, and packed under her own eyes, and sent after her. Nilus, the treasurer, had come with her to deliver a message to Paula; but he had gone first to the convent.

Paula desired the old woman to go thither and fetch him; as soon as Perpetua had left the room, she exclaimed:

"There, you see, is some one who is quite of your opinion. What creatures we are! Last evening my good Betta would have thought no pit of hell too deep for our enemy, and now? To be led to a chariot by such a fine gentleman in person is no doubt flattering; and how quickly the old body has forgotten all her grievances, how soothed and satisfied she is by the gracious permission to pack her precious and cherished possessions with her own hands.--You told me once that the Jacobites had made a Saint Orion out of the pagan god Osiris, and my old Betta sees a future Saint Augustine in the governor's son. I can see that she already regards him as her tutelary patron, and when we get back to Syria, she will be begging me to join her in a pilgrimage to his shrine!"

"And you will perhaps consent," replied the physician, to whom Paula at this moment, for the first time since his heart had glowed with love for her, did not seem to be quite what a man looks for in the woman he adores. Hitherto he had seen and heard nothing that was not high-minded and worthy of her; but her last words had, been spoken with vehement and

indignant irony--and in Philip's opinion irony, blame which was intended to wound and not to improve its object, was unbecoming in a noble woman. The scornful laugh, with which she had triumphantly ended her speech, had opened as it were a wide abyss between his mind and hers. He, as he freely confessed to himself, was of a coarser and humbler grain than Paula, and he was apt to be satirical oftener than was right. She had been wont to dislike this habit in him; he had been glad that she did; it answered to the ideal he had formed of what the woman he loved should be. But now she had turned satirical; and her irony was no jest of the lips. It sprang, full of passion, from her agitated soul; this it was that grieved the leech who knew human nature, and at the same time roused his apprehensions. Paula read his disapproval in his face, and felt that there was a deep significance in his words And you will perhaps consent."

"Men are vexed," thought she, "when, after they have decisively expressed an opinion, we women dare unhesitatingly to assert a different one," so, as she would on no account hurt the feelings of the friend to whom she owed so much, she said kindly:

"I do not care to enquire into the meaning of your strange prognostication. Thank God, by your kindness and care I have severed every tie that could have bound me to my poor uncle's son!--Now we will drop the subject; we have said too much about him already."

"That is quite my opinion," replied Philippus. "And, indeed, I would beg you quite to forget my 'perhaps.' I live wholly in the present and am no prophet; but I foresee, nevertheless, that Orion will make every effort, cost what it may. . . ."

"Well?"

"To approach you again, to win your forgiveness, to touch your heart, to....."

"Let him dare" exclaimed Paula lifting her hand with a threatening gesture.

"And when he, gifted as he is in every way, has found his better self again and can come forward purified and worthy of the approbation of the best. . . ."

"Still I will never, never forget how he has sinned and what he brought upon me!--Do you think that I have already forgotten your conversation with Neforis? You ask nothing of your friends but honest feeling akin to your own,--and what is it that repels me from Orion but feeling? Thousands have altered their behavior, but--answer me frankly--surely not what we mean by their feeling?"

"Yes, that too," said the leech with stern gravity. "Feeling, too, may change. Or do you range yourself on the side of the Arab merchant and his fellow-Moslems, who regard man as the plaything of a blind Fate?--But our spiritual teachers tell us that the evil to which we are predestined, which is that born into the world with us, may be averted, turned and guided to good by what they call spiritual regeneration. But who that lives in the tumult of the world can ever succeed in 'killing himself' in their sense of the word, in dying while yet he lives, to be born again, a new man? The penitent's garb does not suit the stature of an Orion; however, there is for him another way of returning to the path he has lost. Fortune has hitherto offered her spoilt favorite so much

pleasure, that sheer enjoyment has left him no time to think seriously on life itself; now she is showing him its graver side, she is inviting him to reflect; and if he only finds a friend to give him the counsel which my father left in a letter for me, his only child, as a youth--and if he is ready to listen, I regard him as saved."

"And that word of counsel--what is it?" asked Paula with interest.

"To put it briefly, it is this: Life is not a banquet spread by fate for our enjoyment, but a duty which we are bound to fulfil to the best of our power. Each one must test his nature and gifts, and the better he uses them for the weal and benefit of the body of which he was born a member, the higher will his inmost gladness be, the more certainly will he attain to a beautiful peace of mind, the less terrors will Death have for him. In the consciousness of having sown seed for eternity he will close his eyes like a faithful steward at the end of each day, and of the last hour vouchsafed to him on earth. If Orion recognizes this, if he submits to accept the duties imposed on him by existence, if he devotes himself to them now for the first time to the best of his powers, a day may come when I shall look up to him with respect--nay, with admiration. The shipwreck of which the Arab spoke has overtaken him. Let us see how he will save himself from the waves, and behave when he is cast on shore."

"Let us see!" repeated Paula, "and wish that he may find such an adviser! As you were speaking it struck me that it was my part.--But no, no! He has placed himself beyond the pale of the compassion which I might have felt even for an enemy after such a frightful blow. He! He can and shall never be anything to me till the end of time. I have to thank you for having found me this haven of rest. Help me now to keep out everything that can intrude itself here to disturb my peace. If Orion should ever dare, for whatever purpose, to force or steal a way into this house, I trust to you, my friend and deliverer!"

She held out her hand to Philippus, and as he took it the blood seethed in his veins with tender emotion.

"My strength, like my heart, is wholly yours!" he exclaimed ardently. "Command them, and if the devoted love of a faithful, plain-spoken man--"

"Say no more, no, no!" Paula broke in with anxious vehemence. "Let us remain closely bound together by friendship-as brother and sister."

"As brother and sister?" he dully echoed with a melancholy smile. "Aye, friendship too is a beautiful, beautiful thing. But yet--let me speak-- I have dreamed of love, the tossing sea of passion; I have felt its surges here--in here; I feel them still.... But man, man," and he struck his forehead with his fist, "have you forgotten, like a fool, what your image is in the mirror; have you forgotten that you are an ugly, clumsy fellow, and that the gorgeous flower you long for. . . ."

Paula had shrunk back, startled by her friend's vehemence; but she now went up to him, and taking his hand with frank spirit, she said impressively:

"It is not so, Philippus, my dear, kind, only friend. The gorgeous flower you desire I can no longer give you--or any one. It is mine no longer; for when it had opened, once for all, cruel feet trod it down. Do not abuse your mirrored image; do not call yourself a clumsy fellow. The best and fairest might be proud of your love, just as you are.

Am I not proud, shall I not always be proud of your friendship?"

"Friendship, friendship!" he retorted, snatching away his hand.
"This burning, longing heart thirsts for other feelings! Oh, woman!
I know the wretch who has trodden down the flower of flowers in your
heart, and I, madman that I am, can sing his praises, can take his part;
and cost what it may, I will still do so as long as you.... But perhaps
the glorious flower may strike new roots in the soil of hatred and I, the
hapless wretch who water it, may see it."

At this, Paula again took both his hands, and exclaimed in deep and
painful agitation of mind:

"Say no more, I beg and entreat you. How can I live in peace here, under
your protection and in constant intercourse with you, without knowing
myself guilty of a breach of propriety such as the most sacred feelings
of a young girl bid her avoid, if you persist in overstepping the limits
which bound true and faithful friendship? I am a lonely girl and should
give myself up to despair, as lost, if I could not take refuge in the
belief that I can rely upon myself. Be satisfied with what I have to
offer you, my friend, and may God reward you! Let us both remain worthy
of the esteem which, thank Heaven! we are fully justified in feeling for
each other."

The physician, deeply moved, bent his head; scarcely able to control
himself, he pressed her firm white hand to his lips, while, just at this
moment, Perpetua and the treasurer came into the room.

This worthy official--a perfectly commonplace man, neither tall nor
short, neither old nor young, with a pale, anxious face, furrowed by work
and responsibility, but shrewd and finely cut-glanced keenly at the pair,
and then proceeded to lay a considerable sum in gold pieces before Paula.
His young master had sent it, in obedience to his deceased father's
wishes, for her immediate needs; the rest, the larger part of her
fortune, with a full account, would be given over to her after the
Mukaukas was buried. Nilus could, however, give her an approximate idea
of the sum, and it was so considerable that Paula could not believe her
ears. She now saw herself secure against external anxiety, nay, in such
ease that she was justified in living at some expense.

Philippus was present throughout the interview, and it cut him to the
heart. It had made him so happy to think that he was all in all to the
poor orphan, and could shelter her against pressing want. He had been
prepared to take upon himself the care of providing Paula with the home
she had found and everything she could need; and now, as it turned out,
his protege was not merely higher in rank than himself, but much richer.

He felt as though Orion's envoy had robbed him of the best joy in life.
After introducing Paula to her worthy host and his family, he quitted the
house of Rufinus with a very crushed aspect.

When night came Perpetua once more enjoyed the privilege of assisting her
young mistress to undress; but Paula could not sleep, and when she joined
her new friends next morning she told herself that here, if anywhere, was
the place where she might recover her lost peace, but that she must still
have a hard struggle and a long pilgrimage before she could achieve this.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

In whom some good quality or other may not be discovered
Life is not a banquet

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