

A Thorny Path, Volume 3.

Georg Ebers

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A THORNY PATH

By Georg Ebers

Volume 3.

CHAPTER VIII.

The sun had passed the meridian when Melissa and Andreas left the house. They walked on in silence through the deserted streets, the girl with her eyes sadly fixed on the ground; for an inward voice warned her that her lover's life was in danger. She did not sob, but more than once she wiped away a large tear.

Andreas, too, was lost in his own thoughts. To win a soul to the Saviour was surely a good work. He knew Melissa's sober, thoughtful nature, and the retired, joyless life she led with her surly old father. So his knowledge of human nature led him to think that she, if any one, might easily be won over to the faith in which he found his chief happiness. Baptism had given such sanctification to his life that he longed to lead the daughter of the only woman for whom his heart had ever beat a shade faster, to the baptismal font. In the heat of summer Olympias had often been the guest for weeks together of Polybius's wife, now likewise dead. Then she had taken a little house of her own for herself and her children, and when his master's wife died, the lonely widower had known no greater pleasure than that of receiving her on his estate for as long as Heron would allow her to remain; he himself never left his work for long. Thus Andreas had become the great ally of the gem-cutter's children, and, as they could learn nothing from him that was not good and worth knowing, Olympias had gladly allowed them to remain in his society, and herself found a teacher and friend in the worthy steward. She knew that Andreas had joined the Christians; she had made him tell her much about his faith; still, as the daughter and wife of artists, she was firmly attached to the old gods, and could only regard the Christian doctrine as a new system of philosophy in which many things attracted her, but many, on the other hand, repelled her. At that time his passion for Melissa's mother had possessed him so wholly that his life was a constant struggle against the temptation to covet his neighbor's wife. And he had conquered, doing severe penance for every glance which might for an instant betray to her the weakness of his soul. She had loved flowers, and he knew the plant-world so well, and was so absolutely master over everything which grew and bloomed in the gardens of which he had charge, that he could often intrust his speechless favorites to tell her things which lips and eyes might not reveal. Now she was no more, and the culture of plants had lost half its charm since her eyes could no longer watch their thriving. He now left the gardens for the most part to his men, while he devoted himself to other cares with double diligence, and to the strictest exercises of his faith.

But, as many a man adores the children of the woman he might not marry, Alexander and Melissa daily grew dearer to Andreas. He took a father's interest in their welfare, and, needing little himself, he carefully hoarded his ample income to promote the cause of Christianity and encourage good works; but he had paid Alexander's debts when his time of apprenticeship was over, for they were so considerable that the reckless youth had not dared confess the sum to his stern father.

Very soon after this, Alexander had become one of the most popular painters of the town; and when he proposed to repay his friend the money he had lent him, Andreas accepted it; but he added it to a capital of which the purpose was his secret, but which, if his prayers were heard, might return once more to benefit Alexander. Diodoros, too, was as dear to the freedman as a son of his own could have been, though he was a heathen. In the gymnasium and the race-course, or in the practice of the mysteries, the good seed which he sowed in the lad's heart was trodden down. Polybius, too, was an utter heathen; indeed, he was one of the priests of Dionysus and Demeter, as his wealth and position in the senate required.

Then, Diodoros had confessed to him that he hoped to win Melissa for his wife, and this had been adverse to Andreas's hope and purpose of making a Christian of the girl; for he knew by experience how easily married happiness was wrecked when man and wife worship different gods. But when the freedman had again seen the gem-cutter's brutality and the girl's filial patience, an inward voice had called to him that this gentle, gifted creature was one of those elect from among whom the Lord chose the martyrs for the faith; and that it was his part to lead her into the fold of the Redeemer. He had begun the work of converting her with the zeal he put into everything. But fresh doubts had come upon him on the threshold of the sick-room, after seeing the lad who was so dear to him, and whose eye had met his with such a trustful, suffering look. Could it be right to sow the seed of discord between him and his future wife? And supposing Diodoros, too, should be converted by Melissa, could he thus alienate from his father the son and heir of Polybius--his benefactor and master?

Then, he remembered, too, to what a position he had risen through that master's confidence in him. Polybius knew nothing of the concerns of his house but from the reports laid before him by Andreas; for the steward controlled not merely the estate but the fortune of the family, and for years had been at the head of the bank which he himself had founded to increase the already vast income of the man to whom he owed his freedom. Polybius paid him a considerable portion of each year's profits, and had said one day at a banquet, with the epigrammatic wit of an Alexandrian, that his freedman, Andreas, served his interests as only one other man could do--namely, himself--but with the industry of ten. The Christian greatly appreciated his confidence; and as he walked on by the side of Melissa, he told himself again and again that it would be dishonorable to betray it.

If only the sweet girl might find the way alone! If she were chosen to salvation, the Lord himself would lead and guide her. Had he indeed not beckoned her already by impressing on her heart those words, "The fullness of the time is now come?"

That he was justified in keeping this remembrance alive he had no doubt; and he was about to speak of it again, when she prevented him by raising

her large eyes beseechingly to his, and asking him:

"Is Diodoros in real danger? Tell me the truth. I would rather endure the worst than this dreadful anxiety."

So Andreas acknowledged that the youth was in a bad way, but that Ptolemaeus, himself well-skilled, hoped to cure him if his greater colleague Galenus would aid him.

"And it is to secure his assistance, then," Melissa went on, "that the leech would have him carried to the Serapeum?"

"Yes, my child. For he is in Caesar's train, and it would be vain to try to speak with him to-day or to-morrow."

"But the journey through the town will do the sufferer a mischief."

"He will be carried in a litter."

"But even that is not good for him. Perfect quiet, Ptolemaeus said, was the best medicine."

"But Galenus has even better remedies at hand," was the reply.

Melissa seemed satisfied with this assurance, for she walked on for some time in silence. But when the uproar of the crowd in the vicinity of the Serapeum became more audible as they advanced, she suddenly stood still, and said:

"Come what may, I will find my way to the great physician's presence and crave his help." "You?" cried the freedman; and when she firmly reiterated her purpose, the strong man turned pale.

"You know not what you say!" he exclaimed, in deep concern. "The men who guard the approaches to Caracalla are ruthless profligates, devoid of courtesy or conscience. But, you may rely upon it, you will not even get into the antechamber."

"Perhaps. Nevertheless, it is my duty, and I will try."

How firmly and decisively she spoke! And what strength of will sparkled in the quiet, modest maiden's eyes! And the closely set lips, which usually were slightly parted, and hardly covered two of her pearly white teeth, gave her a look of such determination, that Andreas could see that no obstacle would check her.

Still, love and duty alike required him to use every means in his power to keep her from taking such a step. He lavished all his eloquence; but she adhered to her purpose with steadfast persistency, and none of the reasons he could adduce to prove the impossibility of the undertaking convinced her. The only point which staggered her was the information that the great leech was an old man, who walked with difficulty; and that Galen, as a heathen and a disciple of Aristotle, would never be induced to enter a Christian dwelling. Both these facts might be a serious hindrance to her scheme; yet she would not now stop to reflect. They had got back to the great street of Hermes, leading from the temple of that god to the Serapeum, and must cross it to reach the lake, their immediate destination. As in all the principal streets of Alexandria, a colonnade bordered the street in front of the houses on each side of the wide and

handsome roadway. Under these arcades the foot-passengers were closely packed, awaiting Caesar's passage. He must soon be coming, for the reception, first at the Kanopic Gate, and then at the Gate of the Sun, was long since over; and, even if he had carried out his purpose of halting at the tomb of Alexander the Great, he could not be detained much longer. The distance hither down the Kanopic Way was not great, and swift horses would quickly bring him down the Aspendia street to that of Hermes, leading straight to the Serapeum. His train was not to follow him to the Soma, the mausoleum of the founder of the city, but to turn off to the southward by the Paneum, and make a round into the street of Hermes.

The praetorians, the German body-guard, the imperial Macedonian phalanx, and some mounted standard-bearers had by this time reached the spot where Melissa was proceeding up the street holding Andreas's hand. Close by them came also a train of slaves, carrying baskets full of palm-leaves and fresh branches of ivy, myrtle, poplar, and pine, from the gardens of the Paneum, to be carried to the Serapeum. They were escorted by lictors, endeavoring with their axes and fasces to make a way for them through the living wall which barred their way.

By the help of the mounted troops, who kept the main road clear, space was made for them; and Andreas, who knew one of the overseers of the garden-slaves, begged him as a favor to allow Melissa and himself to walk among his people. This was willingly granted to so well-known a man; and the way was quite free for the moment, because the imperial cartage had not followed immediately on the soldiers who had now all marched past. Thus, among the flower-bearers, they reached the middle of the street; and while the slaves proceeded on their way to the Serapeum, the freedman tried to cross the road, and reach the continuation of the street they had come by, and which led to the lake. But the attempt was frustrated, for some Roman lictors who had just come up stood in their way, and sent them to the southern side of the street of Hermes, to mingle with the gaping crowd under the arcade.

They were, of course, but ill received by these, since they naturally found themselves in front of the foremost rank; but the stalwart frame and determined face of Andreas, and the exceptional beauty of his young companion, over whose pretty head most of the gazers could easily see, protected her from rough treatment.

Andreas spoke a few words of apology to those standing nearest to them, and a young goldsmith at once courteously made way, so that Melissa, who had taken a place behind a column, might see better.

And in a few minutes--there was that to see which made every one forget the intruders. Vehicles and outriders, litters swung between mules, and a long train of imperial footmen, in red tunics embroidered with gold, huntsmen with leashes of noble dogs, baggage-wagons and loaded elephants, came trooping down toward the Serapeum; while suddenly, from the Aspendia into the Hermes Way, the Numidian horse rushed out, followed by a troop of mounted lictors, who galloped up the street, shouting their orders in loud tones to the imperial train, in a mixture of Latin and Greek, of which Melissa understood only the words "Caesar!" and "Make way to the right!"

The command was instantly obeyed. Vehicles, foot-passengers, and riders alike crowded to the southern or left-hand side of the road, and the many-headed throng, of which Andreas and Melissa formed a part, drew as

far back as possible under the colonnade; for on the edge of the footway there was the risk of being trampled on by a horse or crushed by a wheel. The back rows of the populace, who had collected under the arcades, were severely squeezed by this fresh pressure from without, and their outcries were loud of anger, alarm; or pain; while on the other side of the street arose shouts of delight and triumph, or, when anything singular came into view, loud laughter at the wit and irony of some jester. Added to these there were the clatter of hoofs and the roll of wheels, the whinnying of horses, the shouts of command, the rattle of drums, the blare of trumpets, and the shrill pipe of flutes, without a moment's pause. It was a wild and ear-splitting tumult; to Melissa, however, neither painful nor pleasing, for the one idea, that she must speak with the great physician, silenced every other. But suddenly there came up from the east, from the rising of the sun, whose course Caesar had followed, such a tremendous roar that she involuntarily clutched her companion's hand.

Every instant the storm of noise increased, rolling on with irresistible vehemence, gathering force as it came on, receiving, as it were, fresh tributaries on its way, and rapidly swelling from the distance to the immediate vicinity, compelling every one, as with a magic power, to yield to the superior will of numbers and join in the cry. Even Melissa cheered. She, too, was as a drop in the tide, a leaf on the rippling face of the rushing torrent; her heart beat as wildly and her voice rang as clear as that of the rest of the throng, intoxicated with they knew not what, which crowded the colonnades by the roadway, and every window and roof-top, waving handkerchiefs, strewing flowers on the ground, and wiping the tears which this unwonted excitement had brought to their eyes.

And now the shout is so tremendous that it could not possibly be louder. It seems as though it were the union of voices innumerable rather than the seabreeze, which flutters the pennons and flags which wave from every house and arch, and sways the garlands hung across the street. Melissa can see none but flushed faces, eyes swimming in tears, parted lips, wildly waving arms and hands. Then suddenly a mysterious power hushes the loud tones close round her; she hears only here and there the cry of "Caesar!" "He is coming!" "Here he is!"--and the swift tramp of hoofs and the clatter of wheels sounding like the rattle of an iron building after a peal of thunder, above the shouts of ten thousand human beings. Closer it comes and closer, without a pause, and followed by fresh shouting, as a flock of daws follow an owl flying across the twilight, swelling again to irrepressible triumph as the expected potentate rushes past Melissa and her neighbors. They only see Caesar as a form scarcely discerned by the eye during the space of a lightning-flash in a dark night.

Four tawny bay horses of medium size, dappled with black, harnessed abreast and wide apart, fly along the cleared road like hunted foxes, the light Gallic chariot at their heels. The wheels seem scarcely to touch the smooth flags of the Alexandrian pavement. The charioteer wears the red-bordered toga of the highest Roman officials. He is well known by repute, and the subject of many a sharp jest; for this is Pandion, formerly a stableboy, and now one of "Caesar's friends," a praetor, and one of the great men of the empire. But he knows his business; and what does Caracalla care for tradition or descent, for the murmurs and discontent of high or low?

Pandion holds the reins with elegant composure, and urges the horses to a frantic pace by a mere whistle, without ever using the whip. But why is

it that he whirls the mighty monarch of half a world, before whose bloodthirsty power every one quakes, so swiftly past these eager spectators? Sunk in the cushions on one side, Bassianus Antoninus is reclining rather than sitting in the four-wheeled open chariot of Gallic make which sweeps past. He does not vouchsafe a glance at the jubilant crowd, but gazes down at the road, his well-shaped brow so deeply furrowed with gloom that he might be meditating some evil deed.

It is easy to discern that he is of middle height; that his upper lip and cheeks are unshaven, and his chin smooth; that his hair is already thin, though he lacks two years of thirty; and that his complexion is pale and sallow; indeed, his aspect is familiar from statues and coins, many of which are of base metal.

Most of those who thus beheld the man who held in his hand the fate of each individual he passed, as of the empire at large, involuntarily asked themselves afterward what impression he had made on them; and Caracalla himself would have rejoiced in the answer, for he aimed not at being attractive or admired, but only at being feared. But, indeed, they had long since learned that there was nothing too horrible to be expected of him; and, now that they had seen him, they were of opinion that his appearance answered to his deeds. It would be hard to picture a more sinister and menacing looking man than this emperor, with his averted looks and his haughty contempt for the world and mankind; and yet there was something about him which made it difficult to take him seriously, especially to an Alexandrian. There was a touch of the grotesque in the Gallic robe with a red hood in which this ominous-looking contemner of humanity was wrapped. It was called a 'Caracalla', and it was from this garment that Bassianus Antoninus had gained his nickname.

The tyrant who wore this gaudy cloak was, no doubt, devoid alike of truth and conscience; but, as to his being a philosopher, who knew the worthlessness of earthly things and turned his back upon the world, those who could might believe it! He was no more than an actor, who played the part of Timon not amiss, and who made use of his public to work upon their fears and enjoy the sight of their anguish. There was something lacking in him to make one of those thorough-going haters of their kind at whose mere aspect every knee must bend. The appearance, in short, of this false philosopher was not calculated to subdue the rash tongues of the Alexandrians.

To this many of them agreed; still, there was no time for such reflections till the dust had shrouded the chariot, which vanished as quickly as it had come, till the shouting was stilled, and the crowd had spread over the roadway again. Then they began to ask themselves why they had joined in the acclamations, and had been so wildly excited; how it was that they had so promptly surrendered their self-possession and dignity for the sake of this wicked little man. Perhaps it was his unlimited control over the weal and woe of the world, over the life and death of millions, which raised a mortal, not otherwise formed for greatness, so far above common humanity to a semblance of divinity. Perhaps it was the instinctive craving to take part in the grand impulsive expression of thousands of others that had carried away each individual. It was beyond a doubt a mysterious force which had compelled every one to do as his neighbors did as soon as Caesar had appeared.

Melissa had succumbed with the rest; she had shouted and waved her kerchief, and had not heeded Andreas when he held her hand and asked her to consider what a criminal this man was whom she so eagerly hailed. It

was not till all was still again that she recollected herself, and her determination to get the famous physician to visit her lover revived in renewed strength.

Fully resolved to dare all, she looked about with calm scrutiny, considering the ways and means of achieving her purpose without any aid from Andreas. She was in a fever of impatience, and longed to force her way at once into the Serapeum. But that was out of the question, for no one moved from his place. There was, however, plenty to be seen. A complete revulsion of feeling had come over the crowd. In the place of Expectancy, its graceless step-child, Disappointment, held sway. There were no more shouts of joy; men's lungs were no longer strained to the utmost, but their tongues were all the busier. Caesar was for the most part spoken of with contempt as Tarautas, and with the bitterness--the grandchild of Expectancy--which comes of disappointment. Tarautas had originally been the name of a stunted but particularly bloodthirsty gladiator, in whom ill-will had traced some resemblance to Caesar.

The more remarkable figures in the imperial train were curiously gazed at and discussed. A worker in mosaic, who stood near Melissa, had been employed in the decoration of the baths of Caracalla at Rome, and had much information to impart; he even knew the names of several of the senators and courtiers attached to Caesar. And, with all this, time was found to give vent to discontent.

The town had done its utmost to make itself fine enough to receive the emperor. Statues had been erected of himself, of his father, his mother, and even of his favorite heroes, above all of Alexander the Great; triumphal arches without number had been constructed. The vast halls of the Serapeum, through which he was to pass, had been magnificently decorated; and in front of the new temple, outside the Kanopic Gate, dedicated to his father, who now ranked among the gods, the elders of the town had been received by Caesar, to do him homage and offer him the gifts of the city. All this had cost many talents, a whole heap of gold; but Alexandria was wealthy, and ready to make even greater sacrifices if only they had been accepted with thanks and condescension. But a young actor, who had been a spectator of the scene at the Kanopic Gate, and had then hurried hither, declared, with dramatic indignation, that Caesar had only replied in a few surly words to the address of the senate, and even while he accepted the gift had looked as if he were being ill-used. The delegates had retired as though they had been condemned to death. To none but Timotheus, the high-priest of Serapis, had he spoken graciously.

Others confirmed this report; and dissatisfaction found expression in muttered abuse or satirical remarks and bitter witticisms.

"Why did he drive past so quickly?" asked a tailor's wife; and some one replied:

"Because the Eumenides, who haunt him for murdering his brother, lash him on with their whips of snakes!"

A spice-merchant; who was not less indignant but more cautious, hearing a neighbor inquire why Tarautas drove panther-spotted horses, replied that such beasts of prey had spotted skins, and that like to like was a common rule. A cynical philosopher, who proclaimed his sect by his ragged garment, unkempt hair, and rough mode of speech, declared that Caesar had a senator to guide his chariot because he had long since succeeded in turning the senate-house into a stable.

To all this, however, Melissa turned a deaf ear, for the thought of the great Roman leech possessed her mind entirely. She listened earnestly to the mosaic-worker, who had come close up to her, and officiously mentioned the names of the most important personages as they went past. Caesar's train seemed endless. It included not merely horse and foot soldiers, but numberless baggage-wagons, cars, elephants--which Caracalla especially affected, because Alexander the Great had been fond of these huge beasts--horses, mules, and asses, loaded with bales, cases, tents, and camp and kitchen furniture. Mingling with these came sutlers, attendants, pages, heralds, musicians, and slaves of the imperial household, in knots and parties, looking boldly about them at the bystanders. When they caught sight of a young and pretty woman on the edge of the path, they would wave a greeting; and many expressed their admiration of Melissa in a very insolent manner. Woolly-headed negroes and swarthy natives of north Africa mixed with the fairer dwellers on the Mediterranean and the yellow or red haired sons of northern Europe. Roman lictors, and Scythian, Thracian, or Keltic men-at-arms kept every one out of the way who did not belong to the imperial train, with relentless determination. Only the Magians, wonder-workers, and street wenches were suffered to push their way in among the horses, asses, elephants, dogs, vehicles, and mounted troops.

Each time that one of the unwieldy traveling-carriages, drawn by several horses, came in sight, in which the wealthy Roman was wont to take his ease on a long journey, or whenever a particularly splendid litter was borne past, Melissa asked the mosaic-worker for information. In some few instances Andreas could satisfy her curiosity, for he had spent some months at Antioch on a matter of business, and had there come to know by sight some of Caesar's most illustrious companions.

So far the great Galenus was not of the number; for Caracalla, who was ailing, had but lately commanded his presence. The famous physician had sailed for Pelusium, in spite of his advanced age, and had only just joined the sovereign's suite. The old man's chariot had been pointed out to the mosaic-worker at the Kanopic Gate, and he was certain that he could not mistake it for any other; it was one of the largest and handsomest; the side doors of it were decorated with the AEsculapius staff and the cup of Hygeia in silver, and on the top were statuettes in wood of Minerva and of AEsculapius. On hearing all this, Melissa's face beamed with happy and hopeful anticipation. With one hand pressed to her throbbing bosom, she watched each vehicle as it drove past with such intense expectancy that she paid no heed to Andreas's hint that they might now be able to make their way through the crowd.

Now--and the freedman had called her once more--here was another monstrous conveyance, belonging to Julius Paulinus, the former consul, whose keen face, with its bright, merry eyes, looked out between the silken curtains by the side of the grave, unsympathetic countenance of Dion Cassius the senator and historian.

The consul, her informant told her--and Andreas confirmed the statement--had displeased Severus, Caracalla's father, by some biting jest, but, on being threatened with death, disarmed his wrath by saying, "You can indeed have my head cut off, but neither you nor I can keep it steady."

Those of the populace who stood near enough to the speaker to hear this anecdote broke out in loud cheers, in which they were joined by others who had no idea of what had given rise to them.

The consul's chariot was followed by a crowd of clients, domestic officials, and slaves, in litters, on horses or mules, or on foot; and behind these again came another vehicle, for some time concealed from sight by dust. But when at last the ten fine horses which drew it had gone past Melissa, and the top of the vehicle became visible, the color mounted to her cheeks, for on the corners of the front she recognized the figures of AEsculapius and Minerva, which, if the mosaic-worker were right, distinguished the chariot of Galenus. She listened breathlessly to the roll of the wheels of this coach, and she soon perceived the silver AEsculapius staff and bowl on the wide door of this house on wheels, which was painted blue. At an open window by the door a kindly old face was visible, framed in long, gray hair.

Melissa started at hearing the order to halt shouted from the Serapeum, far down the road, and again, close at hand, "Halt!" The procession came to a standstill, the riders drew rein, the blue wheels ceased to turn, the coach was immovable but a few steps in front of her, and her eyes met those of the old man. The thought flashed through her brain that Fate itself had brought about this pause just at this spot; and when she heard the mosaic-worker exclaim, "The great Roman physician!" horses, coach, and everything swam before her eyes; she snatched her hand away from that of Andreas, and stepped out on the roadway. In an instant she was standing face to face with the venerable leech.

She heard the warning voice of her companion, she saw the crowd staring at her, she had, no doubt, a brief struggle with her maidenly shyness, but she carried out her purpose. The thought that the gods themselves were helping her to appeal to the only man who could save her lover, encouraged her to defy every obstacle.

She was standing by the vehicle; and scarcely had she raised her sweet, innocent, blushing face with pathetic and touching entreaty to the white-haired Roman, her large, tear-filled eyes meeting his, when he beckoned her to him, and in pleasant, sympathetic tones desired to know what she wanted. Then she made bold to ask whether he were the great Roman physician, and he replied with a flattered and kindly smile that he was sometimes so called. Her thankful glance to heaven revealed what a comfort his words were, and now her rosy lips moved freely, and she hurriedly, but with growing courage, gave him to understand that her betrothed, the son of a respected Roman citizen of Alexandria, was lying badly wounded in the head by a stone, and that the leech who was treating him had said that none but he, the great Galenus, could save the young man's life. She also explained that Ptolemaeus, though he had said that Diodoros needed quiet above all things, had proposed to carry him to the Serapeum, and to commend him there to the care of his greater colleague, but that she feared the worst results from the move. She glanced pleadingly into the Roman's eyes, and added that he looked so kind that she hoped that he would go instead to see the sufferer, who had, quite by chance, been taken into a Christian house not very far from the Serapeum, where he was being taken good care of, and--as a matter of course--cure her lover.

The old man had only interrupted her tale with a few sly questions as to her love-affair and her religion; for when she had told him that Diodoros was under the care of Christians, it had occurred to him that this simply but not poorly dressed girl, with her modest ways and sweet, calm face, might herself be a Christian. He was almost surprised when she denied it, and yet he seemed pleased, and promised to grant her request. It was

not fitting that a girl so young should enter any house where Caesar and his train took up their abode; he would wait for her, "there"--and he pointed to a small, round temple to Aphrodite, on the left-hand side of the street of Hermes, where the road was rather wider--for the coach had meanwhile slowly moved on.

Next day, at three hours after the rising of the fierce African sun--for he could not bear its meridian heat--he would go thither in his litter. "And be sure you are there in good time!" he added, shaking his finger at her.

"If you come an hour too soon, you will find me waiting!" she cried.

He laughed, and said, "What pretty maid, indeed, would dare to be late for an appointment under the very eyes of the goddess of Love!" He bade her a friendly farewell, and lay back in the chariot.

Melissa, radiant with happiness, looked about her for the place where she had left her companion. However, in spite of the lictors, Andreas had followed her; he drew her hand under his arm, and led her through the now-thinning crowd into a sidelane which led to the lake, opening out of the colonnaded street opposite the little temple.

Melissa's steps were winged. Her joy at having gained her end so quickly and so easily was uppermost in her mind, and as they threaded their way among the people she tried to tell Andreas what the great physician had promised. But the noise drowned her speech, for at this moment Caesar's tame lion, named the "Sword of Persia" was being led through the street by some Numidian slaves.

Every one was looking at the splendid beast; and, as she too turned to gaze, her eye met the ardent glance of a tall, bearded man standing at the window of a house just behind the round temple to Aphrodite. She at once recognized Serapion, the Magian, and whispered his name to Andreas; he, however, without looking round, only drew her along more quickly, and did not breathe easily till they found themselves in the narrow, deserted alley.

The Magian had observed her while she stood by the Roman's chariot, and his conversation with a Syrian of middle age in his company had been of her. His companion's appearance was as insignificant as his own was stately and commanding. Nothing distinguished the Syrian from a thousand of his fellows but the cunning stamped on his sharply-cut features; still, the great Magian seemed to hold him in some esteem, for he readily replied to the little man's questions and remarks.

At this moment the Syrian waved his hand in the air with a gesture common to men of his race when displaying their own superior knowledge, as he said "What did I spend ten years in Rome for, if I do not know Serenus Samonicus? He is the greatest book-collector in the empire. And he regards himself as a second AEsculapius, and has written a book on medicine in verse, which Geta, Caesar's murdered brother, always had about him, for he regarded the physicians here as mere bunglers. He is as rich as the Alabarch, and riding in his coach is Galenus, for whom Caesar sent. What can that girl want of him?"

"H'm!" muttered the other, stroking his beard with thoughtful dignity. "She is a modest maiden; it can only be something urgent and important which has prompted her to address the Roman."

"Your Castor will be able to find out," replied the Syrian Annianus.
"That omniscient rascal can get through a key-hole, and by to-morrow will be the best friend of the Roman's people, if you care to know."

"We will see," said Serapion. "Her brother, perhaps, to-morrow evening, will tell me what is going on."

"The philosopher?" said the other, with a contemptuous flourish. "You are a great sage, Serapion, as the people hold; but you often sew with needles too fine for me. Why, just now, when Caesar is here, and gain and honor be in the streets for such a one as you only to stoop for--why, I say, you should waste precious time on that poring fellow from the Museum, I can not understand."

A superior smile parted the Magian's lips; he stepped back into the room, followed by Annianus, and replied:

"You know how many who call themselves Magians will crowd round Caesar, and the fame of Sosibius, Hananja, and Kaimis, is not much behind mine. Each plies his art by his own formulas, though he may call himself a Pythagorean or what not. None dare claim to belong to any recognized school, since the philosophers of the guild pride themselves on condemning the miracle-mongers. Now, in his youth, Caracalla went through his courses of philosophy. He detests Aristotle, and has always attached himself to Plato and the Pythagoreans. You yourself told me that by his desire Philostratus is writing a life of Apollonius of Tyana; and, though he may turn up his nose at the hair-splitting and frittering of the sages of the Museum, it is in his blood to look for marvels from those privileged philosophers. His mother has made courtiers of them again; and he, who looks for everything from the magic arts, has never yet met a Magian who could have been one of them."

At this the Syrian clapped his hands, exclaiming: "And you propose to use Philip as your signbearer to talk to the emperor of a thaumaturgist who is hand in hand with all the learning of the Museum? A cursed good idea! But the gem-cutter's son does not look like a simpleton; and he is a skeptic into the bargain, and believes in nothing. If you catch him, I shall really and truly believe in your miraculous powers."

"There are harder things than catching him," said the Magian.

"You mean to break his will," said the Syrian, looking down at the ground, "by your eye and the laying on of hands, as you did mine and Triphis's two years ago?"

"That, no doubt, formed the first bond between us," said Serapion.
"I now need only your ventriloquism. Philip himself will come half-way to meet me on the main point."

"And what is that?"

"You called him a skeptic, and he does, in fact, pride himself on going further than the old masters of the school. Diligent study has brought him to the point of regarding nothing as certain, but, on the other hand, everything as possible. The last result he can arrive at is the probability--since certainty there is none--that it is impossible ever to know anything, be it what it may. He is always ready to listen with sympathetic attention to the arguments for the reappearance of the souls

of the dead in the earthly form they have quitted, to visit and converse with the living. He considers it a fallacy to say that anything is impossible; and my arguments are substantial. Korinna will appear to him. Castor has discovered a girl who is her very image. Your arts will convince him that it is she who speaks to him, for he never heard her voice in life, and all this must rouse his desire to see her again and again. And thus the skeptic will be convinced, in spite of his own doctrine. In this, as in every other case, it is the passionate wish that gives rise to the belief."

"And when you have succeeded in getting him to this point?" asked the Syrian, anxiously.

"Then," replied the Magian, "he will help me, with his triumphant dialectics, to win Caesar over to the same conviction; and then we shall be able to satisfy the emperor's desire to hold intercourse with the dead; and for that I count on your power of making voices proceed from any person present."

He said no more. The little man looked up at him approvingly, and said, modestly: "You are indeed wise, Serapion, and I will do my best to help you. The next thing to be done is to seek representatives of the great Alexander, of Apollonius of Tyana, and of Caesar's brother, father-in-law, and wife."

"Not forgetting Papinian, the noblest of his victims," added the Magian. "Back again already, Castor?"

These words were addressed to a tall and apparently elderly man in a long white robe, who had slipped in without a sound. His demeanor was so grave and dignified that he looked precisely like a Christian priest impressed with the sanctity of his office; but hardly had he got into the room, and greeted the Magian with much unction, than he pulled the white garment off over his head, rubbed from his cheeks the lines which gave him twenty added years, stretched his lithe limbs, and exclaimed with delight:

"I have got her! Old Dorothea will bring her to your theatre!"--and the young fellow's mobile face beamed with the happy radiance of success.

It almost seemed as though fermenting wine flowed in the man's veins instead of blood; for, when he had made his report to the Magian, and had been rewarded with a handful of gold-pieces, he tossed the coins in the air, caught them like flies in the hollow of his hand, and then pitched wheel fashion over head and heels from one end of the room to the other. Then, when he stood on his feet once more, he went on, without a sign of breathlessness:

"Forgive me, my lord! Nature asserts her rights. To play the pious for three whole hours! Eternal gods, that is a hard task, and a man must--"

"I know all about it," Serapion broke in with a smile and a threatening finger. "Now go and stretch your limbs, and then share your lightly earned gains with some pretty flute-player. But I want you again this evening; so, if you feel weak, I shall lock you up."

"Do," said Castor, as earnestly as if he had been promised some pleasure. "What a merry, good-for-nothing set they are!-Dorothea will bring the girl at the appointed hour. Everything is arranged."

Whereupon he danced out of the room, singing a tune.

"An invaluable creature!" said the Syrian, with an admiring glance.

"A better one spoiled," said Serapion. "He has the very highest gifts, but is utterly devoid of conscience to set a limit to his excesses. How should he have one? His father was one of a troupe of Ephesian pantomimists, and his mother a golden-haired Cyprian dancer. But he knows every corner of Alexandria--and then, what a memory! What an actor he would have made! Without even a change of dress, merely by a grimace, he at once becomes an old man, an idiot, or a philosopher."

"And what a genius for intrigue!" Annianus went on enthusiastically.

"As soon as he saw the portrait of Korinna he knew that he had seen her double among the Christians on the other side of the lake. This morning he tracked her out, and now she is caught in the snare. And how sharp of him to make Dorothea bring her here!"

"I told him to do that, and use the name of Bishop Demetrius," observed the Magian. "She would not have come with a stranger, and Dorothea must be known to her in the meetings of their congregation."

CHAPTER IX.

While this conversation was taking place, Melissa and her companion had reached the shore of the lake, the large inland sea which washed the southern side of the city and afforded anchorage for the Nile-boats. The ferry-boat which would convey them to the gardens of Polybius started from the Agathodaemon Canal, an enlarged branch of the Nile, which connected the lake with the royal harbor and the Mediterranean; they had, therefore, to walk some distance along the shore.

The setting sun shot slanting rays on the glittering surface of the glassy waters in which the numberless masts of the Nile-boats were mirrored.

Vessels large and small, with white or gayly-painted lateen sails gleaming in the evening glow, large galleys, light skiffs, and restless, skimming pleasure-boats, were flitting to and fro; and among them, like loaded wagons among chariots and horsemen, the low corn-barges scarcely seemed to move, piled as they were with pyramids of straw and grain as high as a house.

The bustle on the quay was less conspicuous than usual, for all who were free to follow their curiosity had gone into the city. There were, however, many slaves, and Caesar's visit no more affected their day's toil than it did the course of the sun. To-day, as every other day, they had to pack and unload; and though few ships were sailing, numbers were arriving from the south, and throwing out the landing-bridges which connected them with the shore.

The number of pleasure-boats, on the other hand, was greater than usual; for business was suspended, and many who hated the crowd found pleasure in rowing in their own boats. Others had come to see the imperial barge, which had been newly furnished up, and which was splendid enough to

attract even the luxurious Alexandrians. Gold and ivory, purple sails, bronze and marble statues at the prow and stern, and in the little shrines on the after-deck, combined in a gorgeous display, made all the more brilliant by the low sun, which added vividness to every hue.

It was pleasant to linger on the strand at this hour. Spreading sycamores and plumed palms cast a pleasant shade; the heat of the day had abated, and a light air, which always blew in from the lake, fanned Melissa's brow. There was no crushing mob, and no dust came up from the well-watered roadway, and yet the girl had lost her cheerful looks, in spite of the success of her bold venture; and Andreas walked by her side, silent and ill-pleased.

She could not understand him; for, as long as she could remember, his grave looks had always brightened at anything that had brought gladness to her or to her mother. Besides, her success with the Roman would be to the advantage of Diodoros, and the freedman was devoted to him. Every now and then she perceived that his eye rested on her with a compassionate expression, and when she inquired whether he were anxious about the sufferer, he gave her some evasive answer, quite unlike his usual decisive speech. This added to her alarm. At last his dissatisfied and unsatisfactory replies vexed the usually patient girl, and she told him so; for she could not suspect how painfully her triumph in her hasty deed jarred on her truth-loving friend. He knew that it was not to the great Galenus, but to the wealthy Serenus Samonicus, that she had spoken; for the physician's noble and thoughtful features were familiar to him from medals, statues, and busts. He had seen Samonicus, too, at Antioch, and held his medical lore, as expressed in verse, very cheap. How worthless would this man's help be! In spite of his promise, Diodoros would after all have to be conveyed to the Serapeum; and yet Andreas could not bear to crush his darling's hopes.

He had hitherto known her as a patient, dutiful child; to-day he had seen with what unhesitating determination she could carry out a purpose; and he feared that, if he told her the truth, she would at once make her way into Caesar's quarters, in defiance of every obstacle, to crave the assistance of the true Galen. He must leave her in error, and yet he could not bear to do so, for there was no art in which he was so inexperienced as that of deceit. How hard it was to find the right answer, when she asked him whether he did not hope everything from the great physician's intervention, or when she inquired what were the works to which Galen owed his chief fame!

As they came near to the landing-stage whence the ferry started, she wanted to know how old he should suppose the Roman leech to be; and again he avoided answering, for Galen was above eighty, and Serenus scarcely seventy.

She looked up at him with large, mournful eyes, saying, "Have I offended you, or is there something you are concealing from me?"

"What could you do to offend me?" he replied; "life is full of sorrows, my child. You must learn to have patience."

"Patience!" echoed Melissa, sadly. "That is the only knowledge I have ever mastered. When my father is more sullen than you are, for a week at a time, I scarcely heed it. But when you look like that, Andreas, it is not without cause, and that is why I am anxious."

"One we love is very sick, child," he said, soothingly; but she was not to be put off so, and exclaimed with conviction:

"No, no, it is not that. We have learned nothing fresh about Diodoro--and you were ready enough to answer me when we came away from the Christian's house. Nothing but good has happened to us since, and yet you look as if the locusts had come down on your garden."

They had reached a spot on the shore where a ship was being unloaded of its cargo of granite blocks from Syene. Black and brown slaves were dragging them to land. An old blind man was piping a dismal tune on a small reed flute to encourage them in their work, while two men of fairer hue, whose burden had been too heavy for them, had let the end of the column they were carrying sink on the ground, and were being mercilessly flogged by the overseer to make them once more attempt the impossible.

Andreas had watched the scene; a surge of fury had brought the blood to his face, and, stirred by great and genuine emotion, he broke out:

"There--there you see the locusts which destroy my garden--the hail which ruins my crops! It falls on all that bears the name of humanity--on me and you. Happy, girl? None of us can ever be happy till the Kingdom shall arise for which the fullness of the time is come."

"But they dropped the column; I saw them myself," urged Melissa.

"Did you, indeed?" said Andreas. "Well, well, the whip, no doubt, can revive exhausted powers. And that is how you look upon such deeds!--you, who would not crush a worm in the garden, think this is right and just!"

It suddenly struck Melissa that Andreas, too, had once been a slave, and the feeling that she had hurt him grieved her to the heart. She had often heard him speak sternly and gravely, but never in scorn as he did now, and that, too, distressed her; and as she could not think of the right thing to say in atonement for the wrong she had done, she could only look up with tearful entreaty and murmur, "Forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive," he replied in an altered tone. "You have grown up among the unjust who are now in power. How should you see more clearly than they, who all walk in darkness? But if the light should be shown to you by one to whom it hath been revealed, it would not be extinguished again.--Does it not seem a beautiful thing to you to live among none but brethren and sisters, instead of among oppressors and their scourged victims; or is there no place in a woman's soul for the holy wrath that came upon Moses the Hebrew? But who would ever have spoken his great name to you?"

Melissa was about to interrupt his vehement speech, for, in a town where there were so many Jews, alike among the citizens and the slaves, even she had heard that Moses had been their lawgiver; but he prevented her, by adding hastily: "This only, child, I would have you remember--for here is the ferry--the worst ills that man ever inflicts on his fellow-man are the outcome of self-interest; and, of all the good he may do, the best is the result of his achieving self-forgetfulness to secure the happiness and welfare of others."

He said no more, for the ferry-boat was about to put off, and they had to take their places as quickly as possible.

The large flat barge was almost unoccupied; for the multitude still lingered in the town, and more than one seat was empty for the weary girl to rest on. Andreas paced to and fro, for he was restless; but when Melissa beckoned to him he came close to her, and, while he leaned against the little cabin, received her assurance that she now quite understood his desire to see all slaves made free. He, if any one, must know what the feelings of those unhappy creatures were.

"Do I not know!" he exclaimed, with a shake of the head. Then, glancing round at the few persons who were sitting at the other end of the boat, he went on sadly: "To know that, a man must himself have been branded with the marks of his humiliation." He showed her his arm, which was usually hidden by the long sleeve of his tunic, and Melissa exclaimed in sorrowful surprise: "But you were free-born! and none of our slaves bear such a brand. You must have fallen into the hands of Syrian pirates."

He nodded, and added, "I and my father."

"But he," the girl eagerly put in, "was a great man."

"Till Fate overtook him," Andreas said.

Melissa's tearful eyes showed the warm sympathy she felt, as she asked:

"But how could it have happened that you were not ransomed by your relations? Your father was, no doubt, a Roman citizen; and the law--"

"The law forbids that such a one should be sold into slavery," Andreas broke in, "and yet the authorities of Rome left him in misery--left--"

At this, her large, gentle eyes flashed with indignation, and, stirred to the depths of her nature, she exclaimed:

"How was such horrible injustice possible? Oh, let me hear. You know how truly I love you, and no one can hear you."

The wind had risen, the waves splashed noisily against the broad boat, and the song of the slaves, as they plied their oars, would have drowned a stronger voice than the freedman's; so he sat down by her side to do her bidding.

And the tale he had to tell was sad indeed.

His father had been of knightly rank, and in the reign of Marcus Aurelius he had been in the service of Avidius Cassius, his fellow-countryman, the illustrious governor of Asia as 'procurator ab epistolis'. As holding this high post, he found himself involved in the conspiracy of Avidius against the emperor. After the assassination of his patron, who had already been proclaimed emperor by the troops, Andreas's father had been deprived of his offices, his citizenship, and his honors; his possessions were confiscated, and he was exiled to the island of Anaphe. It was to Caesar's clemency that he owed his life.

On their voyage into exile the father and son fell into the hands of Syrian pirates, and were sold in the slave-market of Alexandria to two separate masters. Andreas was bought by a tavern-keeper; the procurator, whose name as a slave was Smaragdus, by the father of Polybius; and this worthy man soon learned to value his servant so highly, that he purchased the son also, and restored him to his father. Thus they were once more

united.

Every attempt of the man who had once held so proud a position to get his release, by an act of the senate, proved vain. It was with a broken heart and enfeebled health that he did his duty to his master and to his only child. He pined in torments of melancholy, till Christianity opened new happiness to him, and revived hope brought him back from the very brink of despair; and, even as a slave, he found the highest of all dignities--that, namely, which a Christian derives from his faith.

At this point Melissa interrupted her friend's narrative, exclaiming, as she pointed across the waters:

"There! there! look! In that boat--I am sure that is Alexander! And he is making for the town."

Andreas started up, and after convincing himself that she was indeed right, for the youth himself had recognized his sister, who waved her hand to him, he wrathfully exclaimed:

"Madman!" and by intelligible and commanding signs he ordered the reckless young artist to turn his little skiff, and follow in the wake of the ferry-boat, which was by this time nearing land.

But Alexander signaled a negative, and, after gayly blowing a kiss to Melissa, plied his oars again with as much speed and energy as though he were rowing for a wager. How swiftly and steadily the keel of his little boat cut through the crisply foaming waves on which it rose and fell! The daring youth did not lack strength, that was certain, and the couple who watched him with so much uneasiness soon understood that he was striving to overtake another and larger bark which was at some distance in front of him. It was being pulled by slaves, whose stalwart arms made the pace a good one, and under the linen awning which shaded the middle part of it two women were seated.

The rays of the sun, whose fiery globe was now sinking behind the palm-groves on the western shore, flooded the sky with ruby light, and tinged the white robes of these women, the light canopy over their heads, and the whole face of the lake, with a rosy hue; but neither Andreas nor his companion heeded the glorious farewell of departing day.

Melissa pointed out to her friend the strangeness of her brother's attire, and the hood which, in the evening light, seemed to be bordered with gold. He had on, in fact, a Gallic mantle, such as that which had gained Caesar the nickname of Caracalla, and there was in this disguise something to reassure them; for, if Alexander pulled the hood low enough, it would hide the greater part of his face, and make it difficult to recognize him. Whence he had procured this garment was not hard to divine, for imperial servants had distributed them in numbers among the crowd. Caesar was anxious to bring them into fashion, and it might safely be expected that those Alexandrians who had held out their hands to accept them would appear in them on the morrow, as no order required that they should be worn. Alexander could not do better than wear one, if only by such means he could escape Zminis and his men.

But who were the women he was pursuing? Before Melissa could ask the question, Andreas pointed to the foremost boat, and said:

"Those are Christian women, and the bark they are in belongs to Zeno, the

brother of Seleukus and of the high-priest of Serapis. That is his landing-creek. He lives with his family, and those of the faith to whom he affords refuge, in the long, white house you can just see there among the palm-trees. Those vineyards, too, are his. If I am not mistaken, one of the ladies in that boat is his daughter, Agatha."

"But what can Alexander want of two Christian women?" asked Melissa.

Andreas fired up, and a vein started on his high forehead as he retorted angrily:

"What

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