

Sisters, the — Volume 1 eBook

Sisters, the — Volume 1 by Georg Ebers

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THE SISTERS

By Georg Ebers

Volume 1.

Translated from the German by Clara Bell

DEDICATION TO HERR EDUARD von HALLBERGER

Allow me, my dear friend, to dedicate these pages to you. I present them to you at the close of a period of twenty years during which a warm and fast friendship has subsisted between us, unbroken by any disagreement. Four of my works have first seen the light under your care and have wandered all over the world under the protection of your name. This, my fifth book, I desire to make especially your own; it was partly written in your beautiful home at Tutzing, under your hospitable roof, and I desire to prove to you by some visible token that I know how to value your affection and friendship and the many happy hours we have passed together, refreshing and encouraging each other by a full and perfect interchange of thought and sentiment.

PREFACE.

By a marvellous combination of circumstances a number of fragments of the Royal Archives of Memphis have been preserved from destruction with the rest, containing petitions written on papyrus in the Greek language; these were composed by a recluse of Macedonian birth, living in the Serapeum, in behalf of two sisters, twins, who served the god as “Pourers out of the libations.”

At a first glance these petitions seem scarcely worthy of serious consideration; but a closer study of their contents shows us that we possess in them documents of the greatest value in the history of manners. They prove that the great Monastic Idea—which under the influence of Christianity grew to be of such vast moral and historical significance—first struck root in one of the centres of heathen religious practices; besides affording us a quite unexpected insight into the internal life of the temple of Serapis, whose ruined walls have, in our own day, been recovered from the sand of the desert by the indefatigable industry of the French Egyptologist Monsieur Mariette.

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I have been so fortunate as to visit this spot and to search through every part of it, and the petitions I speak of have been familiar to me for years. When, however, quite recently, one of my pupils undertook to study more particularly one of these documents—preserved in the Royal Library at Dresden—I myself reinvestigated it also, and this study impressed on my fancy a vivid picture of the Serapeum under Ptolemy Philometor; the outlines became clear and firm, and acquired color, and it is this picture which I have endeavored to set before the reader, so far as words admit, in the following pages.

I did not indeed select for my hero the recluse, nor for my heroines the twins who are spoken of in the petitions, but others who might have lived at a somewhat earlier date under similar conditions; for it is proved by the papyrus that it was not once only and by accident that twins were engaged in serving in the temple of Serapis, but that, on the contrary, pair after pair of sisters succeeded each other in the office of pouring out libations.

I have not invested Klea and Irene with this function, but have simply placed them as wards of the Serapeum and growing up within its precincts. I selected this alternative partly because the existing sources of knowledge give us very insufficient information as to the duties that might have been required of the twins, partly for other reasons arising out of the plan of my narrative.

Klea and Irene are purely imaginary personages, but on the other hand I have endeavored, by working from tolerably ample sources, to give a faithful picture of the historical physiognomy of the period in which they live and move, and portraits of the two hostile brothers Ptolemy Philometor and Euergetes II., the latter of whom bore the nickname of Physkon: the Stout. The Eunuch Eulaeus and the Roman Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica, are also historical personages.

I chose the latter from among the many young patricians living at the time, partly on account of the strong aristocratic feeling which he displayed, particularly in his later life, and partly because his nickname of Serapion struck me. This name I account for in my own way, although I am aware that he owed it to his resemblance to a person of inferior rank.

For the further enlightenment of the reader who is not familiar with this period of Egyptian history I may suggest that Cleopatra, the wife of Ptolemy Philometor—whom I propose to introduce to the reader—must not be confounded with her famous namesake, the beloved of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. The name Cleopatra was a very favorite one among the Lagides, and of the queens who bore it she who has become famous through Shakespeare (and more lately through Makart) was the seventh, the sister and wife of Ptolemy XIV. Her tragical death from the bite of a viper or asp did not occur until 134 years later than the date of my narrative, which I have placed 164 years B.C.

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At that time Egypt had already been for 169 years subject to the rule of a Greek (Macedonian) dynasty, which owed its name as that of the Ptolemies or Lagides to its founder Ptolemy Soter, the son of Lagus. This energetic man, a general under Alexander the Great, when his sovereign—333 B.C.—had conquered the whole Nile Valley, was appointed governor of the new Satrapy; after Alexander's death in 323 B.C., Ptolemy mounted the throne of the Pharaohs, and he and his descendants ruled over Egypt until after the death of the last and most famous of the Cleopatras, when it was annexed as a province to the Roman Empire.

This is not the place for giving a history of the successive Ptolemies, but I may remark that the assimilating faculty exercised by the Greeks over other nations was potent in Egypt; particularly as the result of the powerful influence of Alexandria, the capital founded by Alexander, which developed with wonderful rapidity to be one of the most splendid centres of Hellenic culture and of Hellenic art and science.

Long before the united rule of the hostile brothers Ptolemy Philometor and Euergetes—whose violent end will be narrated to the reader of this story—Greek influence was marked in every event and detail of Egyptian life, which had remained almost unaffected by the characteristics of former conquerors—the Hyksos, the Assyrians and the Persians; and, under the Ptolemies, the most inhospitable and exclusive nation of early antiquity threw open her gates to foreigners of every race.

Alexandria was a metropolis even in the modern sense; not merely an emporium of commerce, but a focus where the intellectual and religious treasures of various countries were concentrated and worked up, and transmitted to all the nations that desired them. I have resisted the temptation to lay the scene of my story there, because in Alexandria the Egyptian element was too much overlaid by the Greek, and the too splendid and important scenery and decorations might easily have distracted the reader's attention from the dramatic interest of the persons acting.

At that period of the Hellenic dominion which I have described, the kings of Egypt were free to command in all that concerned the internal affairs of their kingdom, but the rapidly-growing power of the Roman Empire enabled her to check the extension of their dominion, just as she chose.

Philometor himself had heartily promoted the immigration of Israelites from Palestine, and under him the important Jewish community in Alexandria acquired an influence almost greater than the Greek; and this not only in the city but in the kingdom and over their royal protector, who allowed them to build a temple to Jehovah on the shores of the Nile, and in his own person assisted at the dogmatic discussions of the Israelites educated in the Greek schools of the city. Euergetes II., a highly gifted but vicious and violent man, was, on the contrary, just as inimical to them; he persecuted

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them cruelly as soon as his brother's death left him sole ruler over Egypt. His hand fell heavily even on the members of the Great Academy—the Museum, as it was called— of Alexandria, though he himself had been devoted to the grave labors of science, and he compelled them to seek a new home. The exiled sons of learning settled in various cities on the shores of the Mediterranean, and thus contributed not a little to the diffusion of the intellectual results of the labors in the Museum.

Aristarchus, the greatest of Philometor's learned contemporaries, has reported for us a conversation in the king's palace at Memphis. The verses about "the puny child of man," recited by Cleopatra in chapter X., are not genuinely antique; but Friedrich Ritschl—the Aristarchus of our own days, now dead—thought very highly of them and gave them to me, some years ago, with several variations which had been added by an anonymous hand, then still in the land of the living. I have added to the first verse two of these, which, as I learned at the eleventh hour, were composed by Herr H. L. von Held, who is now dead, and of whom further particulars may be learned from Varnhagen's 'Biographischlaen Denkmalen'. Vol. VII. I think the reader will thank me for directing his attention to these charming lines and to the genius displayed in the moral application of the main idea. Verses such as these might very well have been written by Callimachus or some other poet of the circle of the early members of the Museum of Alexandria.

I was also obliged in this narrative to concentrate, in one limited canvas as it were, all the features which were at once the conditions and the characteristics of a great epoch of civilization, and to give them form and movement by setting the history of some of the men then living before the reader, with its complications and its denouement. All the personages of my story grew up in my imagination from a study of the times in which they lived, but when once I saw them clearly in outline they soon stood before my mind in a more distinct form, like people in a dream; I felt the poet's pleasure in creation, and as I painted them their blood grew warm, their pulses began to beat and their spirit to take wings and stir, each in its appropriate nature. I gave history her due, but the historic figures retired into the background beside the human beings as such; the representatives of an epoch became vehicles for a Human Ideal, holding good for all time; and thus it is that I venture to offer this transcript of a period as really a dramatic romance.

Leipzig November 13, 1879.

Georg Ebers.

THE SISTERS.

CHAPTER I.

On the wide, desert plain of the Necropolis of Memphis stands the extensive and stately pile of masonry which constitutes the Greek temple of Serapis; by its side are the smaller sanctuaries of Asclepios, of Anubis and of Astarte, and a row of long, low houses, built of unburnt bricks, stretches away behind them as a troop of beggar children might follow in the train of some splendidly attired king.

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The more dazzlingly brilliant the smooth, yellow sandstone walls of the temple appear in the light of the morning sun, the more squalid and mean do the dingy houses look as they crouch in the outskirts. When the winds blow round them and the hot sunbeams fall upon them, the dust rises from them in clouds as from a dry path swept by the gale. Even the rooms inside are never plastered, and as the bricks are of dried Nile-mud mixed with chopped straw, of which the sharp little ends stick out from the wall in every direction, the surface is as disagreeable to touch as it is unpleasing to look at. When they were first built on the ground between the temple itself and the wall which encloses the precincts, and which, on the eastern side, divides the acacia-grove of Serapis in half, they were concealed from the votaries visiting the temple by the back wall of a colonnade on the eastern side of the great forecourt; but a portion of this colonnade has now fallen down, and through the breach, part of these modest structures are plainly visible with their doors and windows opening towards the sanctuary—or, to speak more accurately, certain rudely constructed openings for looking out of or for entering by. Where there is a door there is no window, and where a gap in the wall serves for a window, a door is dispensed with; none of the chambers, however, of this long row of low one-storied buildings communicate with each other.

A narrow and well-trodden path leads through the breach in the wall; the pebbles are thickly strewn with brown dust, and the footway leads past quantities of blocks of stone and portions of columns destined for the construction of a new building which seems only to have been intermitted the night before, for mallets and levers lie on and near the various materials. This path leads directly to the little brick houses, and ends at a small closed wooden door so roughly joined and so ill-hung that between it and the threshold, which is only raised a few inches above the ground, a fine gray cat contrives to squeeze herself through by putting down her head and rubbing through the dust. As soon as she finds herself once more erect on her four legs she proceeds to clean and smooth her ruffled fur, putting up her back, and glancing with gleaming eyes at the house she has just left, behind which at this moment the sun is rising; blinded by its bright rays she turns away and goes on with cautious and silent tread into the court of the temple.

The hovel out of which pussy has crept is small and barely furnished; it would be perfectly dark too, but that the holes in the roof and the rift in the door admit light into this most squalid room. There is nothing standing against its rough gray walls but a wooden chest, near this a few earthen bowls stand on the ground with a wooden cup and a gracefully wrought jug of pure and shining gold, which looks strangely out of place among such humble accessories. Quite in the background lie two mats of woven bast,

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each covered with a sheepskin. These are the beds of the two girls who inhabit the room, one of whom is now sitting on a low stool made of palm-branches, and she yawns as she begins to arrange her long and shining brown hair. She is not particularly skilful and even less patient over this not very easy task, and presently, when a fresh tangle checks the horn comb with which she is dressing it, she tosses the comb on to the couch. She has not pulled it through her hair with any haste nor with much force, but she shuts her eyes so tightly and sets her white teeth so firmly in her red dewy lip that it might be supposed that she had hurt herself very much.

A shuffling step is now audible outside the door; she opens wide her tawny-hazel eyes, that have a look of gazing on the world in surprise, a smile parts her lips and her whole aspect is as completely changed as that of a butterfly which escapes from the shade into the sunshine where the bright beams are reflected in the metallic lustre of its wings.

A hasty hand knocks at the ill-hung door, so roughly that it trembles on its hinges, and the instant after a wooden trencher is shoved in through the wide chink by which the cat made her escape; on it are a thin round cake of bread and a shallow earthen saucer containing a little olive-oil; there is no more than might perhaps be contained in half an ordinary egg-shell, but it looks fresh and sweet, and shines in clear, golden purity. The girl goes to the door, pulls in the platter, and, as she measures the allowance with a glance, exclaims half in lament and half in reproach:

“So little! and is that for both of us?”

As she speaks her expressive features have changed again and her flashing eyes are directed towards the door with a glance of as much dismay as though the sun and stars had been suddenly extinguished; and yet her only grief is the smallness of the loaf, which certainly is hardly large enough to stay the hunger of one young creature—and two must share it; what is a mere nothing in one man’s life, to another may be of great consequence and of terrible significance.

The reproachful complaint is heard by the messenger outside the door, for the old woman who shoved in the trencher over the threshold answers quickly but not crossly.

“Nothing more to-day, Irene.”

“It is disgraceful,” cries the girl, her eyes filling with tears, “every day the loaf grows smaller, and if we were sparrows we should not have enough to satisfy us. You know what is due to us and I will never cease to complain and petition. Serapion shall draw up a fresh address for us, and when the king knows how shamefully we are treated—”

“Aye! when he knows,” interrupted the old woman. But the cry of the poor is tossed about by many winds before it reaches the king’s ear. I might find a shorter way than that for you and your sister if fasting comes so much amiss to you. Girls with faces like hers and yours, my little Irene, need never come to want.”

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“And pray what is my face like?” asked the girl, and her pretty features once more seemed to catch a gleam of sunshine.

“Why, so handsome that you may always venture to show it beside your sister’s; and yesterday, in the procession, the great Roman sitting by the queen looked as often at her as at Cleopatra herself. If you had been there too he would not have had a glance for the queen, for you are a pretty thing, as I can tell you. And there are many girls would sooner hear those words than have a whole loaf—besides you have a mirror I suppose, look in that next time you are hungry.”

The old woman’s shuffling steps retreated again and the girl snatched up the golden jar, opened the door a little way to let in the daylight and looked at herself in the bright surface; but the curve of the costly vase showed her features all distorted, and she gaily breathed on the hideous travestie that met her eyes, so that it was all blurred out by the moisture. Then she smilingly put down the jar, and opening the chest took from it a small metal mirror into which she looked again and yet again, arranging her shining hair first in one way and then in another; and she only laid it down when she remembered a certain bunch of violets which had attracted her attention when she first woke, and which must have been placed in their saucer of water by her sister some time the day before. Without pausing to consider she took up the softly scented blossoms, dried their green stems on her dress, took up the mirror again and stuck the flowers in her hair.

How bright her eyes were now, and how contentedly she put out her hand for the loaf. And how fair were the visions that rose before her young fancy as she broke off one piece after another and hastily eat them after slightly moistening them with the fresh oil. Once, at the festival of the New Year, she had had a glimpse into the king’s tent, and there she had seen men and women feasting as they reclined on purple cushions. Now she dreamed of tables covered with costly vessels, was served in fancy by boys crowned with flowers, heard the music of flutes and harps and—for she was no more than a child and had such a vigorous young appetite— pictured herself as selecting the daintiest and sweetest morsels out of dishes of solid gold and eating till she was satisfied, aye so perfectly satisfied that the very last mouthful of bread and the very last drop of oil had disappeared.

But so soon as her hand found nothing more on the empty trencher the bright illusion vanished, and she looked with dismay into the empty oil-cup and at the place where just now the bread had been.

“Ah!” she sighed from the bottom of her heart; then she turned the platter over as though it might be possible to find some more bread and oil on the other side of it, but finally shaking her head she sat looking thoughtfully into her lap; only for a few minutes however, for the door opened and the slim form of her sister Klea appeared, the sister whose meagre rations she had dreamily eaten up, and Klea had been sitting up half the

night sewing for her, and then had gone out before sunrise to fetch water from the Well of the Sun for the morning sacrifice at the altar of Serapis.

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Klea greeted her sister with a loving glance but without speaking; she seemed too exhausted for words and she wiped the drops from her forehead with the linen veil that covered the back of her head as she seated herself on the lid of the chest. Irene immediately glanced at the empty trencher, considering whether she had best confess her guilt to the wearied girl and beg for forgiveness, or divert the scolding she had deserved by some jest, as she had often succeeded in doing before. This seemed the easier course and she adopted it at once; she went up to her sister quickly, but not quite unconcernedly, and said with mock gravity:

“Look here, Klea, don’t you notice anything in me? I must look like a crocodile that has eaten a whole hippopotamus, or one of the sacred snakes after it has swallowed a rabbit. Only think when I had eaten my own bread I found yours between my teeth—quite unexpectedly—but now—”

Klea, thus addressed, glanced at the empty platter and interrupted her sister with a low-toned exclamation. “Oh! I was so hungry.”

The words expressed no reproof, only utter exhaustion, and as the young criminal looked at her sister and saw her sitting there, tired and worn out but submitting to the injury that had been done her without a word of complaint, her heart, easily touched, was filled with compunction and regret. She burst into tears and threw herself on the ground before her, clasping her knees and crying, in a voice broken with sobs:

“Oh Klea! poor, dear Klea, what have I done! but indeed I did not mean any harm. I don’t know how it happened. Whatever I feel prompted to do I do, I can’t help doing it, and it is not till it is done that I begin to know whether it was right or wrong. You sat up and worried yourself for me, and this is how I repay you—I am a bad girl! But you shall not go hungry—no, you shall not.”

“Never mind; never mind,” said the elder, and she stroked her sister’s brown hair with a loving hand.

But as she did so she came upon the violets fastened among the shining tresses. Her lips quivered and her weary expression changed as she touched the flowers and glanced at the empty saucer in which she had carefully placed them the day before. Irene at once perceived the change in her sister’s face, and thinking only that she was surprised at her pretty adornment, she said gaily: “Do you think the flowers becoming to me?”

Klea’s hand was already extended to take the violets out of the brown plaits, for her sister was still kneeling before her, but at this question her arm dropped, and she said more positively and distinctly than she had yet spoken and in a voice, whose sonorous but musical tones were almost masculine and certainly remarkable in a girl:

“The bunch of flowers belongs to me; but keep it till it is faded, by mid-day, and then return it to me.”

“It belongs to you?” repeated the younger girl, raising her eyes in surprise to her sister, for to this hour what had been Klea’s had been hers also. “But I always used to take the flowers you brought home; what is there special in these?”

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"They are only violets like any other violets," replied Klea coloring deeply. "But the queen has worn them."

"The queen!" cried her sister springing to her feet and clasping her hands in astonishment. "She gave you the flowers? And you never told me till now? To be sure when you came home from the procession yesterday you only asked me how my foot was and whether my clothes were whole and then not another mortal word did you utter. Did Cleopatra herself give you this bunch?"

"How should she?" retorted Klea. "One of her escort threw them to me; but drop the subject pray! Give me the water, please, my mouth is parched and I can hardly speak for thirst."

The bright color dyed her cheeks again as she spoke, but Irene did not observe it, for—delighted to make up for her evil doings by performing some little service—she ran to fetch the water-jar; while Klea filled and emptied her wooden bowl she said, gracefully lifting a small foot, to show to her sister:

"Look, the cut is almost healed and I can wear my sandal again. Now I shall tie it on and go and ask Serapion for some bread for you and perhaps he will give us a few dates. Please loosen the straps for me a little, here, round the ankle, my skin is so thin and tender that a little thing hurts me which you would hardly feel. At mid-day I will go with you and help fill the jars for the altar, and later in the day I can accompany you in the procession which was postponed from yesterday. If only the queen and the great foreigner should come again to look on at it! That would be splendid! Now, I am going, and before you have drunk the last bowl of water you shall have some bread, for I will coax the old man so prettily that he can't say 'no.'"

Irene opened the door, and as the broad sunlight fell in it lighted up tints of gold in her chestnut hair, and her sister looking after her could almost fancy that the sunbeams had got entangled with the waving glory round her head. The bunch of violets was the last thing she took note of as Irene went out into the open air; then she was alone and she shook her head gently as she said to herself: "I give up everything to her and what I have left she takes from me. Three times have I met the Roman, yesterday he gave me the violets, and I did want to keep those for myself—and now—" As she spoke she clasped the bowl she still held in her hand closely to her and her lips trembled pitifully, but only for an instant; she drew herself up and said firmly: "But it is all as it should be."

Then she was silent; she set down the water-jar on the chest by her side, passed the back of her hand across her forehead as if her head were aching, then, as she sat gazing down dreamily into her lap, her weary head presently fell on her shoulder and she was asleep.

CHAPTER II.

The low brick building of which the sisters' room formed a part, was called the Pastophorium, and it was occupied also by other persons attached to the service of the temple, and by numbers of pilgrims. These assembled here from all parts of Egypt, and were glad to pass a night under the protection of the sanctuary.

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Irene, when she quitted her sister, went past many doors—which had been thrown open after sunrise—hastily returning the greetings of many strange as well as familiar faces, for all glanced after her kindly as though to see her thus early were an omen of happy augury, and she soon reached an outbuilding adjoining the northern end of the Pastophorium; here there was no door, but at the level of about a man's height from the ground there were six unclosed windows opening on the road. From the first of these the pale and much wrinkled face of an old man looked down on the girl as she approached. She shouted up to him in cheerful accents the greeting familiar to the Hellenes "Rejoice!" But he, without moving his lips, gravely and significantly signed to her with his lean hand and with a glance from his small, fixed and expressionless eyes that she should wait, and then handed out to her a wooden trencher on which lay a few dates and half a cake of bread.

"For the altar of the god?" asked the girl. The old man nodded assent, and Irene went on with her small load, with the assurance of a person who knows exactly what is required of her; but after going a few steps and before she had reached the last of the six windows she paused, for she plainly heard voices and steps, and presently, at the end of the Pastophorium towards which she was proceeding and which opened into a small grove of acacias dedicated to Serapis—which was of much greater extent outside the enclosing wall—appeared a little group of men whose appearance attracted her attention; but she was afraid to go on towards the strangers, so, leaning close up to the wall of the houses, she awaited their departure, listening the while to what they were saying.

In front of these early visitors to the temple walked a man with a long staff in his right hand speaking to the two gentlemen who followed, with the air of a professional guide, who is accustomed to talk as if he were reading to his audience out of an invisible book, and whom the hearers are unwilling to interrupt with questions, because they know that his knowledge scarcely extends beyond exactly what he says. Of his two remarkable-looking hearers one was wrapped in a long and splendid robe and wore a rich display of gold chains and rings, while the other wore nothing over his short chiton but a Roman toga thrown over his left shoulder.

His richly attired companion was an old man with a full and beardless face and thin grizzled hair. Irene gazed at him with admiration and astonishment, but when she had feasted her eyes on the stuffs and ornaments he wore, she fixed them with much greater interest and attention on the tall and youthful figure at his side.

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“Like Hui, the cook’s fat poodle, beside a young lion,” thought she to herself, as she noted the bustling step of the one and the independent and elastic gait of the other. She felt irresistibly tempted to mimic the older man, but this audacious impulse was soon quelled for scarcely had the guide explained to the Roman that it was here that those pious recluses had their cells who served the god in voluntary captivity, as being consecrated to Serapis, and that they received their food through those windows—here he pointed upwards with his staff when suddenly a shutter, which the cicerone of this ill-matched pair had touched with his stick, flew open with as much force and haste as if a violent gust of wind had caught it, and flung it back against the wall.—And no less suddenly a man’s head of ferocious aspect and surrounded by a shock of gray hair like a lion’s mane—looked out of the window and shouted to him who had knocked, in a deep and somewhat overloud voice.

“If my shutter had been your back, you impudent rascal, your stick would have hit the right thing. Or if I had a cudgel between my teeth instead of a tongue, I would exercise it on you till it was as tired as that of a preacher who has threshed his empty straw to his congregation for three mortal hours. Scarcely is the sun risen when we are plagued by the parasitical and inquisitive mob. Why! they will rouse us at midnight next, and throw stones at our rotten old shutters. The effects of my last greeting lasted you for three weeks—to-day’s I hope may act a little longer. You, gentlemen there, listen to me. Just as the raven follows an army to batten on the dead, so that fellow there stalks on in front of strangers in order to empty their pockets—and you, who call yourself an interpreter, and in learning Greek have forgotten the little Egyptian you ever knew, mark this: When you have to guide strangers take them to see the Sphinx, or to consult the Apis in the temple of Ptah, or lead them to the king’s beast-garden at Alexandria, or the taverns at Hanopus, but don’t bring them here, for we are neither pheasants, nor flute-playing women, nor miraculous beasts, who take a pleasure in being stared at. You, gentlemen, ought to choose a better guide than this chatter-mag that keeps up its perpetual rattle when once you set it going. As to yourselves I will tell you one thing: Inquisitive eyes are intrusive company, and every prudent house holder guards himself against them by keeping his door shut.”

Irene shrank back and flattened herself against the pilaster which concealed her, for the shutter closed again with a slam, the recluse pulling it to with a rope attached to its outer edge, and he was hidden from the gaze of the strangers; but only for an instant, for the rusty hinges on which the shutter was hanging were not strong enough to bear such violent treatment, and slowly giving way it was about to fall. The blustering hermit stretched out an arm to support it and save it; but it was heavy, and his efforts would not have succeeded had not the young man in Roman dress given his assistance and lifted up the shutter with his hand and shoulder, without any effort, as if it were made of willow laths instead of strong planks.

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"A little higher still," shouted the recluse to his assistant. "Let us set the thing on its edge! so, push away, a little more. There, I have propped up the wretched thing and there it may lie. If the bats pay me a visit to-night I will think of you and give them your best wishes."

"You may save yourself that trouble," replied the young man with cool dignity. "I will send you a carpenter who shall refix the shutter, and we offer you our apologies for having been the occasion of the mischief that has happened."

The old man did not interrupt the speaker, but, when he had stared at him from head to foot, he said: "You are strong and you speak fairly, and I might like you well enough if you were in other company. I don't want your carpenter; only send me down a hammer, a wedge, and a few strong nails. Now, you can do nothing more for me, so pack off"

"We are going at once," said the more handsomely dressed visitor in a thin and effeminate voice. "What can a man do when the boys pelt him with dirt from a safe hiding-place, but take himself off"

"Be off, be off," said the person thus described, with a laugh. "As far off as Samothrace if you like, fat Eulaeus; you can scarcely have forgotten the way there since you advised the king to escape thither with all his treasure. But if you cannot trust yourself to find it alone, I recommend you your interpreter and guide there to show you the road."

The Eunuch Eulaeus, the favorite councillor of King Ptolemy—called Philometor (the lover of his mother)—turned pale at these words, cast a sinister glance at the old man and beckoned to the young Roman; he however was not inclined to follow, for the scolding old oddity had taken his fancy—perhaps because he was conscious that the old man, who generally showed no reserve in his dislikes, had a liking for him. Besides, he found nothing to object to in his opinion of his companions, so he turned to Eulaeus and said courteously:

"Accept my best thanks for your company so far, and do not let me detain you any longer from your more important occupations on my account."

Eulaeus bowed and replied, "I know what my duty is. The king entrusted me with your safe conduct; permit me therefore to wait for you under the acacias yonder."

When Eulaeus and the guide had reached the green grove, Irene hoped to find an opportunity to prefer her petition, but the Roman had stopped in front of the old man's cell, and had begun a conversation with him which she could not venture to interrupt. She set down the platter with the bread and dates that had been entrusted to her on a projecting stone by her side with a little sigh, crossed her arms and feet as she leaned against the wall, and pricked up her ears to hear their talk.

“I am not a Greek,” said the youth, “and you are quite mistaken in thinking that I came to Egypt and to see you out of mere curiosity.”

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"But those who come only to pray in the temple," interrupted the other, "do not—as it seems to me—choose an Eulaeus for a companion, or any such couple as those now waiting for you under the acacias, and invoking anything rather than blessings on your head; at any rate, for my own part, even if I were a thief I would not go stealing in their company. What then brought you to Serapis?"

"It is my turn now to accuse you of curiosity!"

"By all means," cried the old man, "I am an honest dealer and quite willing to take back the coin I am ready to pay away. Have you come to have a dream interpreted, or to sleep in the temple yonder and have a face revealed to you?"

"Do I look so sleepy," said the Roman, "as to want to go to bed again now, only an hour after sunrise?"

"It may be," said the recluse, "that you have not yet fairly come to the end of yesterday, and that at the fag-end of some revelry it occurred to you that you might visit us and sleep away your headache at Serapis."

"A good deal of what goes on outside these walls seems to come to your ears," retorted the Roman, "and if I were to meet you in the street I should take you for a ship's captain or a master-builder who had to manage a number of unruly workmen. According to what I heard of you and those like you in Athens and elsewhere, I expected to find you something quite different."

"What did you expect?" said Serapion laughing. "I ask you notwithstanding the risk of being again considered curious."

"And I am very willing to answer," retorted the other, "but if I were to tell you the whole truth I should run into imminent danger of being sent off as ignominiously as my unfortunate guide there."

"Speak on," said the old man, "I keep different garments for different men, and the worst are not for those who treat me to that rare dish—a little truth. But before you serve me up so bitter a meal tell me, what is your name?"

"Shall I call the guide?" said the Roman with an ironical laugh. "He can describe me completely, and give you the whole history of my family. But, joking apart, my name is Publius."

"The name of at least one out of every three of your countrymen."

"I am of the Cornelia gens and of the family of the Scipios," continued the youth in a low voice, as though he would rather avoid boasting of his illustrious name.



“Indeed, a noble gentleman, a very grand gentleman!” said the recluse, bowing deeply out of his window. “But I knew that beforehand, for at your age and with such slender ankles to his long legs only a nobleman could walk as you walk. Then Publius Cornelius—”

“Nay, call me Scipio, or rather by my first name only, Publius,” the youth begged him. “You are called Serapion, and I will tell you what you wish to know. When I was told that in this temple there were people who had themselves locked into their little chambers never to quit them, taking thought about their dreams and leading a meditative life, I thought they must be simpletons or fools or both at once.”

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“Just so, just so,” interrupted Serapion. “But there is a fourth alternative you did not think of. Suppose now among these men there should be some shut up against their will, and what if I were one of those prisoners? I have asked you a great many questions and you have not hesitated to answer, and you may know how I got into this miserable cage and why I stay in it. I am the son of a good family, for my father was overseer of the granaries of this temple and was of Macedonian origin, but my mother was an Egyptian. I was born in an evil hour, on the twenty-seventh day of the month of Paophi, a day which it is said in the sacred books that it is an evil day and that the child that is born in it must be kept shut up or else it will die of a snake-bite. In consequence of this luckless prediction many of those born on the same day as myself were, like me, shut up at an early age in this cage. My father would very willingly have left me at liberty, but my uncle, a caster of horoscopes in the temple of Ptah, who was all in all in my mother’s estimation, and his friends with him, found many other evil signs about my body, read misfortune for me in the stars, declared that the Hathors had destined me to nothing but evil, and set upon her so persistently that at last I was destined to the cloister—we lived here at Memphis. I owe this misery to my dear mother and it was out of pure affection that she brought it upon me. You look enquiringly at me—aye, boy! life will teach you too the lesson that the worst hate that can be turned against you often entails less harm upon you than blind tenderness which knows no reason. I learned to read and write, and all that is usually taught to the priests’ sons, but never to accommodate myself to my lot, and I never shall.—Well, when my beard grew I succeeded in escaping and I lived for a time in the world. I have been even to Rome, to Carthage, and in Syria; but at last I longed to drink Nile-water once more and I returned to Egypt. Why? Because, fool that I was, I fancied that bread and water with captivity tasted better in my own country than cakes and wine with freedom in the land of the stranger.

“In my father’s house I found only my mother still living, for my father had died of grief. Before my flight she had been a tall, fine woman, when I came home I found her faded and dying. Anxiety for me, a miserable wretch, had consumed her, said the physician—that was the hardest thing to bear. When at last the poor, good little woman, who could so fondly persuade me—a wild scamp—implored me on her death-bed to return to my retreat, I yielded, and swore to her that I would stay in my prison patiently to the end, for I am as water is in northern countries, a child may turn me with its little hand or else I am as hard and as cold as crystal. My old mother died soon after I had taken this oath. I kept my word as you see—and you have seen too how I endure my fate.”

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"Patiently enough," replied Publius, "I should writhe in my chains far more rebelliously than you, and I fancy it must do you good to rage and storm sometimes as you did just now."

"As much good as sweet wine from Chios!" exclaimed the anchorite, smacking his lips as if he tasted the noble juice of the grape, and stretching his matted head as far as possible out of the window. Thus it happened that he saw Irene, and called out to her in a cheery voice:

"What are you doing there, child? You are standing as if you were waiting to say good-morning to good fortune."

The girl hastily took up the trencher, smoothed down her hair with her other hand, and as she approached the men, coloring slightly, Publius feasted his eyes on her in surprise and admiration.

But Serapion's words had been heard by another person, who now emerged from the acacia-grove and joined the young Roman, exclaiming before he came up with them:

"Waiting for good fortune! does the old man say? And you can hear it said, Publius, and not reply that she herself must bring good fortune wherever she appears."

The speaker was a young Greek, dressed with extreme care, and he now stuck the pomegranate-blossom he carried in his hand behind his ear, so as to shake hands with his friend Publius; then he turned his fair, saucy, almost girlish face with its finely-cut features up to the recluse, wishing to attract his attention to himself by his next speech.

"With Plato's greeting 'to deal fairly and honestly' do I approach you!" he cried; and then he went on more quietly: "But indeed you can hardly need such a warning, for you belong to those who know how to conquer true—that is the inner—freedom; for who can be freer than he who needs nothing? And as none can be nobler than the freest of the free, accept the tribute of my respect, and scorn not the greeting of Lysias of Corinth, who, like Alexander, would fain exchange lots with you, the Diogenes of Egypt, if it were vouchsafed to him always to see out the window of your mansion—otherwise not very desirable—the charming form of this damsel—"

"That is enough, young man," said Serapion, interrupting the Greek's flow of words.

"This young girl belongs to the temple, and any one who is tempted to speak to her as if she were a flute-player will have to deal with me, her protector. Yes, with me; and your friend here will bear me witness that it may not be altogether to your advantage to have a quarrel with such as I. Now, step back, young gentlemen, and let the girl tell me what she needs."

When Irene stood face to face with the anchorite, and had told him quickly and in a low voice what she had done, and that her sister Klea was even now waiting for her return, Serapion laughed aloud, and then said in a low tone, but gaily, as a father teases his daughter:

“She has eaten enough for two, and here she stands, on her tiptoes, reaching up to my window, as if it were not an over-fed girl that stood in her garments, but some airy sprite. We may laugh, but Klea, poor thing, she must be hungry?”

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Irene made no reply, but she stood taller on tiptoe than ever, put her face up to Serapion, nodding her pretty head at him again and again, and as she looked roguishly and yet imploringly into his eyes Serapion went on:

“And so I am to give my breakfast to Klea, that is what you want; but unfortunately that breakfast is a thing of the past and beyond recall; nothing is left of it but the date-stones. But there, on the trencher in your hand, is a nice little meal.”

“That is the offering to Serapis sent by old Phibis,” answered the girl.

“Hm, hm—oh! of course!” muttered the old man. “So long as it is for a god—surely he might do without it better than a poor famishing girl.”

Then he went on, gravely and emphatically, as a teacher who has made an incautious speech before his pupils endeavors to rectify it by another of more solemn import.

“Certainly, things given into our charge should never be touched; besides, the gods first and man afterwards. Now if only I knew what to do. But, by the soul of my father! Serapis himself sends us what we need. Step close up to me, noble Scipio—or Publius, if I may so call you—and look out towards the acacias. Do you see my favorite, your cicerone, and the bread and roast fowls that your slave has brought him in that leathern wallet? And now he is setting a wine-jar on the carpet he has spread at the big feet of Eulaeus—they will be calling you to share the meal in a minute, but I know of a pretty child who is very hungry—for a little white cat stole away her breakfast this morning. Bring me half a loaf and the wing of a fowl, and a few pomegranates if you like, or one of the peaches Eulaeus is so judiciously fingering. Nay—you may bring two of them, I have a use for both.”

“Serapion!” exclaimed Irene in mild reproof and looking down at the ground; but the Greek answered with prompt zeal, “More, much more than that I can bring you. I hasten—”

“Stay here,” interrupted Publius with decision, holding him back by the shoulder. “Serapion’s request was addressed to me, and I prefer to do my friend’s pleasure in my own person.”

“Go then,” cried the Greek after Publius as he hurried away. “You will not allow me even thanks from the sweetest lips in Memphis. Only look, Serapion, what a hurry he is in. And now poor Eulaeus has to get up; a hippopotamus might learn from him how to do so with due awkwardness. Well! I call that making short work of it—a Roman never asks before he takes; he has got all he wants and Eulaeus looks after him like a cow whose calf has been stolen from her; to be sure I myself would rather eat peaches than see them carried away! Oh if only the people in the Forum could see him now! Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica, own grandson to the great Africanus, serving like a slave at a

feast with a dish in each hand! Well Publius, what has Rome the all conquering brought home this time in token of victory?"

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“Sweet peaches and a roast pheasant,” said Cornelius laughing, and he handed two dishes into the anchorite’s window; “there is enough left still for the old man.”

“Thanks, many thanks!” cried Serapion, beckoning to Irene, and he gave her a golden-yellow cake of wheaten bread, half of the roast bird, already divided by Eulaeus, and two peaches, and whispered to her: “Klea may come for the rest herself when these men are gone. Now thank this kind gentleman and go.”

For an instant the girl stood transfixed, her face crimson with confusion and her glistening white teeth set in her nether lip, speechless, face to face with the young Roman and avoiding the earnest gaze of his black eyes. Then she collected herself and said:

“You are very kind. I cannot make any pretty speeches, but I thank you most kindly.”

“And your very kind thanks,” replied Publius, “add to the delights of this delightful morning. I should very much like to possess one of the violets out of your hair in remembrance of this day—and of you.”

“Take them all,” exclaimed Irene, hastily taking the bunch from her hair and holding them out to the Roman; but before he could take them she drew back her hand and said with an air of importance:

“The queen has had them in her hand. My sister Klea got them yesterday in the procession.”

Scipio’s face grew grave at these words, and he asked with commanding brevity and sharpness:

“Has your sister black hair and is she taller than you are, and did she wear a golden fillet in the procession? Did she give you these flowers? Yes—do you say? Well then, she had the bunch from me, but although she accepted them she seems to have taken very little pleasure in them, for what we value we do not give away—so there they may go, far enough!”

With these words he flung the flowers over the house and then he went on:

“But you, child, you shall be held guiltless of their loss. Give me your pomegranate-flower, Lysias!”

“Certainly not,” replied the Greek. “You chose to do pleasure to your friend Serapion in your own person when you kept me from going to fetch the peaches, and now I desire to offer this flower to the fair Irene with my own hand.”

“Take this flower,” said Publius, turning his back abruptly on the girl, while Lysias laid the blossom on the trencher in the maiden’s hand; she felt the rough manners of the young Roman as if she had been touched by a hard hand; she bowed silently and timidly and then quickly ran home.

Publius looked thoughtfully after her till Lysias called out to him:

“What has come over me? Has saucy Eros perchance wandered by mistake into the temple of gloomy Serapis this morning?”

“That would not be wise,” interrupted the recluse, “for Cerberus, who lies at the foot of our God, would soon pluck the fluttering wings of the airy youngster,” and as he spoke he looked significantly at the Greek.

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"Aye! if he let himself be caught by the three-headed monster," laughed Lysias. "But come away now, Publius; Eulaeus has waited long enough."

"You go to him then," answered the Roman, "I will follow soon; but first I have a word to say to Serapion."

Since Irene's disappearance, the old man had turned his attention to the acacia-grove where Eulaeus was still feasting. When the Roman addressed him he said, shaking his great head with dissatisfaction:

"Your eyes of course are no worse than mine. Only look at that man munching and moving his jaws and smacking his lips. By Serapis! you can tell the nature of a man by watching him eat. You know I sit in my cage unwillingly enough, but I am thankful for one thing about it, and that is that it keeps me far from all that such a creature as Eulaeus calls enjoyment—for such enjoyment, I tell you, degrades a man."

"Then you are more of a philosopher than you wish to seem," replied Publius.

"I wish to seem nothing," answered the anchorite.

"For it is all the same to me what others think of me. But if a man who has nothing to do and whose quiet is rarely disturbed, and who thinks his own thoughts about many things is a philosopher, you may call me one if you like. If at any time you should need advice you may come here again, for I like you, and you might be able to do me an important service."

"Only speak," interrupted the Roman, "I should be glad from my heart to be of any use to you."

"Not now," said Serapion softly. "But come again when you have time— without your companions there, of course—at any rate without Eulaeus, who of all the scoundrels I ever came across is the very worst. It may be as well to tell you at once that what I might require of you would concern not myself but the weal or woe of the water-bearers, the two maidens you have seen and who much need protection."

"I came here for my parents' sake and for Klea's, and not on your account," said Publius frankly. "There is something in her mien and in her eyes which perhaps may repel others but which attracts me. How came so admirable a creature in your temple?"

"When you come again," replied the recluse, "I will tell you the history of the sisters and what they owe to Eulaeus. Now go, and understand me when I say the girls are well guarded. This observation is for the benefit of the Greek who is but a heedless fellow; but you, when you know who the girls are, will help me to protect them."

“That I would do as it is, with real pleasure,” replied Publius; he took leave of the recluse and called out to Eulaeus.

“What a delightful morning it has been!”

“It would have been pleasanter for me,” replied Eulaeus, “if you had not deprived me of your company for such a long time.”

“That is to say,” answered the Roman, “that I have stayed away longer than I ought.”

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"You behave after the fashion of your race," said the other bowing low. "They have kept even kings waiting in their ante-chambers."

"But you do not wear a crown," said Publius evasively. "And if any one should know how to wait it is an old courtier, who—"

"When it is at the command of his sovereign," interrupted Eulaeus, the old courtier may submit, even when youngsters choose to treat him with contempt."

"That hits us both," said Publius, turning to Lysias. "Now you may answer him, I have heard and said enough."

CHAPTER III.

Irene's foot was not more susceptible to the chafing of a strap than her spirit to a rough or an unkind word; the Roman's words and manner had hurt her feelings.

She went towards home with a drooping head and almost crying, but before she had reached it her eyes fell on the peaches and the roast bird she was carrying. Her thoughts flew to her sister and how much the famishing girl would relish so savory a meal; she smiled again, her eyes shone with pleasure, and she went on her way with a quickened step. It never once occurred to her that Klea would ask for the violets, or that the young Roman could be anything more to her sister than any other stranger.

She had never had any other companion than Klea, and after work, when other girls commonly discussed their longings and their agitations and the pleasures and the torments of love, these two used to get home so utterly wearied that they wanted nothing but peace and sleep. If they had sometimes an hour for idle chat Klea ever and again would tell some story of their old home, and Irene, who even within the solemn walls of the temple of Serapis sought and found many innocent pleasures, would listen to her willingly, and interrupt her with questions and with anecdotes of small events or details which she fancied she remembered of her early childhood, but which in fact she had first learnt from her sister, though the force of a lively imagination had made them seem a part and parcel of her own experience.

Klea had not observed Irene's long absence since, as we know, shortly after her sister had set out, overpowered by hunger and fatigue she had fallen asleep. Before her nodding head had finally sunk and her drooping eyelids had closed, her lips now and then puckered and twitched as if with grief; then her features grew tranquil, her lips parted softly and a smile gently lighted up her blushing cheeks, as the breath of spring softly thaws a frozen blossom. This sleeper was certainly not born for loneliness and privation, but to enjoy and to keep love and happiness.

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It was warm and still, very still in the sisters' little room. The buzz of a fly was audible now and again, as it flew round the little oil-cup Irene had left empty, and now and again the breathing of the sleeper, coming more and more rapidly. Every trace of fatigue had vanished from Klea's countenance, her lips parted and pouted as if for a kiss, her cheeks glowed, and at last she raised both hands as if to defend herself and stammered out in her dream, "No, no, certainly not—pray, do not! my love—" Then her arm fell again by her side, and dropping on the chest on which she was sitting, the blow woke her. She slowly opened her eyes with a happy smile; then she raised her long silken lashes till her eyes were open, and she gazed fixedly on vacancy as though something strange had met her gaze. Thus she sat for some time without moving; then she started up, pressed her hand on her brow and eyes, and shuddering as if she had seen something horrible or were shivering with ague, she murmured in gasps, while she clenched her teeth:

"What does this mean? How come I by such thoughts? What demons are these that make us do and feel things in our dreams which when we are waking we should drive far, far from our thoughts? I could hate myself, despise and hate myself for the sake of those dreams since, wretch that I am! I let him put his arm round me—and no bitter rage—ah! no—something quite different, something exquisitely sweet, thrilled through my soul."

As she spoke, she clenched her fists and pressed them against her temples; then again her arms dropped languidly into her lap, and shaking her head she went on in an altered and softened voice:

"Still—it was only in a dream and—Oh! ye eternal gods—when we are asleep—well! and what then? Has it come to this; to impure thoughts I am adding self-deception! No, this dream was sent by no demon, it was only a distorted reflection of what I felt yesterday and the day before, and before that even, when the tall stranger looked straight into my eyes—four times he has done so now—and then—how many hours ago, gave me the violets. Did I even turn away my face or punish his boldness with an angry look? Is it not sometimes possible to drive away an enemy with a glance? I have often succeeded when a man has looked after us; but yesterday I could not, and I was as wide awake then as I am at this moment. What does the stranger want with me? What is it he asks with his penetrating glance, which for days has followed me wherever I turn, and robs me of peace even in my sleep? Why should I open my eyes—the gates of the heart—to him? And now the poison poured in through them is seething there; but I will tear it out, and when Irene comes home I will tread the violets into the dust, or leave them with her; she will soon pull them to pieces or leave them to wither miserably—for I will remain pure-minded, even in my dreams—what have I besides in the world?"

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At these words she broke off her soliloquy, for she heard Irene's voice, a sound that must have had a favorable effect on her spirit, for she paused, and the bitter expression her beautiful features had but just now worn disappeared as she murmured, drawing a deep breath:

"I am not utterly bereft and wretched so long as I have her, and can hear her voice."

Irene, on her road home, had given the modest offerings of the anchorite Phibis into the charge of one of the temple-servants to lay before the altar of Serapis, and now as she came into the room she hid the platter with the Roman's donation behind her, and while still in the doorway, called out to her sister:

"Guess now, what have I here?"

"Bread and dates from Serapion," replied Klea.

"Oh, dear no!" cried the other, holding out the plate to her sister, "the very nicest dainties, fit for gods and kings. Only feel this peach, does not it feel as soft as one of little Philo's cheeks? If I could always provide such a substitute you would wish I might eat up your breakfast every day. And now do you know who gave you all this? No, that you will never guess! The tall Roman gave them me, the same you had the violets from yesterday."

Klea's face turned crimson, and she said shortly and decidedly:

"How do you know that?"

"Because he told me so himself," replied Irene in a very altered tone, for her sister's eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of stern gravity, such as Irene had never seen in her before.

"And where are the violets?" asked Klea.

"He took them, and his friend gave me this pomegranate-flower," stammered Irene. "He himself wanted to give it me, but the Greek—a handsome, merry man—would not permit it, and laid the flower there on the platter. Take it—but do not look at me like that any longer, for I cannot bear it!"

"I do not want it," said her sister, but not sharply; then, looking down, she asked in a low voice: "Did the Roman keep the violets?"

"He kept—no, Klea—I will not tell you a lie! He flung them over the house, and said such rough things as he did it, that I was frightened and turned my back upon him quickly, for I felt the tears coming into my eyes. What have you to do with the Roman? I feel so anxious, so frightened—as I do sometimes when a storm is gathering and I am



afraid of it. And how pale your lips are! that comes of long fasting, no doubt —eat now, as much as you can. But Klea! why do you look at me so—and look so gloomy and terrible? I cannot bear that look, I cannot bear it!”

Irene sobbed aloud, and her sister went up to her, stroked her soft hair from her brow, kissed her kindly, and said:

“I am not angry with you, child, and did not mean to hurt you. If only I could cry as you do when clouds overshadow my heart, the blue sky would shine again with me as soon as it does with you. Now dry your eyes, go up to the temple, and enquire at what hour we are to go to the singing-practice, and when the procession is to set out.”

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Irene obeyed; she went out with downcast eyes, but once out she looked up again brightly, for she remembered the procession, and it occurred to her that she would then see again the Roman's gay acquaintance, and turning back into the room she laid her pomegranate-blossom in the little bowl out of which she had formerly taken the violets, kissed her sister as gaily as ever, and then reflected as to whether she would wear the flower in her hair or in her bosom. Wear it, at any rate, she must, for she must show plainly that she knew how to value such a gift.

As soon as Klea was alone she seized the trencher with a vehement gesture, gave the roast bird to the gray cat, who had stolen back into the room, turning away her head, for the mere smell of the pheasant was like an insult. Then, while the cat bore off her welcome spoils into a corner, she clutched a peach and raised her hand to fling it away through a gap in the roof of the room; but she did not carry out her purpose, for it occurred to her that Irene and little Philo, the son of the gate-keeper, might enjoy the luscious fruit; so she laid it back on the dish and took up the bread, for she was painfully hungry.

She was on the point of breaking the golden-brown cake, but acting on a rapid impulse she tossed it back on the trencher saying to herself: "At any rate I will owe him nothing; but I will not throw away the gifts of the gods as he threw away my violets, for that would be a sin. All is over between him and me, and if he appears to-day in the procession, and if he chooses to look at me again I will compel my eyes to avoid meeting his—aye, that I will, and will carry it through. But, Oh eternal gods! and thou above all, great Serapis, whom I heartily serve, there is another thing I cannot do without your aid. Help me, oh! help me to forget him, that my very thoughts may remain pure."

With these words she flung herself on her knees before the chest, pressed her brow against the hard wood, and strove to pray.

Only for one thing did she entreat the gods; for strength to forget the man who had betrayed her into losing her peace of mind.

But just as swift clouds float across the sky, distracting the labors of the star-gazer, who is striving to observe some remote planet—as the clatter of the street interrupts again and again some sweet song we fain would hear, marring it with its harsh discords—so again and again the image of the young Roman came across Klea's prayers for release from that very thought, and at last it seemed to her that she was like a man who strives to raise a block of stone by the exertion of his utmost strength, and who weary at last of lifting the stone is crushed to the earth by its weight; still she felt that, in spite of all her prayers and efforts, the enemy she strove to keep off only came nearer, and instead of flying from her, overmastered her soul with a grasp from which she could not escape.

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Finally she gave up the unavailing struggle, cooled her burning face with cold water, and tightened the straps of her sandals to go to the temple; near the god himself she hoped she might in some degree recover the peace she could not find here.

Just at the door she met Irene, who told her that the singing-practice was put off, on account of the procession which was fixed for four hours after noon. And as Klea went towards the temple her sister called after her.

“Do not stay too long though, water will be wanted again directly for the libations.”

“Then will you go alone to the work?” asked Klea; “there cannot be very much wanted, for the temple will soon be empty on account of the procession. A few jars-full will be enough. There is a cake of bread and a peach in there for you; I must keep the other for little Philo.”

CHAPTER IV.

Klea went quickly on towards the temple, without listening to Irene's excuses. She paid no heed to the worshippers who filled the forecourt, praying either with heads bent low or with uplifted arms or, if they were of Egyptian extraction, kneeling on the smooth stone pavement, for, even as she entered, she had already begun to turn in supplication to the divinity.

She crossed the great hall of the sanctuary, which was open only to the initiated and to the temple-servants, of whom she was one. Here all around her stood a crowd of slender columns, their shafts crowned with gracefully curved flower calyxes, like stems supporting lilies, over her head she saw in the ceiling an image of the midnight sky with the bright, unresting and ever-restful stars; the planets and fixed stars in their golden barks looked down on her silently. Yes! here were the twilight and stillness befitting a personal communion with the divinity.

The pillars appeared to her fancy like a forest of giant growth, and it seemed to her that the perfume of the incense emanated from the gorgeous floral capitals that crowned them; it penetrated her senses, which were rendered more acute by fasting and agitation, with a sort of intoxication. Her eyes were raised to heaven, her arms crossed over her bosom as she traversed this vast hall, and with trembling steps approached a smaller and lower chamber, where in the furthest and darkest background a curtain of heavy and costly material veiled the brazen door of the holy of holies.

Even she was forbidden to approach this sacred place; but to-day she was so filled with longing for the inspiring assistance of the god, that she went on to the holy of holies in spite of the injunction she had never yet broken, not to approach it. Filled with reverent

awe she sank down close to the door of the sacred chamber, shrinking close into the angle formed between a projecting door-post and the wall of the great hall.

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The craving desire to seek and find a power outside us as guiding the path of our destiny is common to every nation, to every man; it is as surely innate in every being gifted with reason—many and various as these are—as the impulse to seek a cause when we perceive an effect, to see when light visits the earth, or to hear when swelling waves of sound fall on our ear. Like every other gift, no doubt that of religious sensibility is bestowed in different degrees on different natures. In Klea it had always been strongly developed, and a pious mother had cultivated it by precept and example, while her father always had taught her one thing only: namely to be true, inexorably true, to others as to herself.

Afterwards she had been daily employed in the service of the god whom she was accustomed to regard as the greatest and most powerful of all the immortals, for often from a distance she had seen the curtain of the sanctuary pushed aside, and the statue of Serapis with the Kalathos on his head, and a figure of Cerberus at his feet, visible in the half-light of the holy of holies; and a ray of light, flashing through the darkness as by a miracle, would fall upon his brow and kiss his lips when his goodness was sung by the priests in hymns of praise. At other times the tapers by the side of the god would be lighted or extinguished spontaneously.

Then, with the other believers, she would glorify the great lord of the other world, who caused a new sun to succeed each that was extinguished, and made life grow up out of death; who resuscitated the dead, lifting them up to be equal with him, if on earth they had revered truth and were found faithful by the judges of the nether world.

Truth—which her father had taught her to regard as the best possession of life—was rewarded by Serapis above all other virtues; hearts were weighed before him in a scale against truth, and whenever Klea tried to picture the god in human form he wore the grave and mild features of her father, and she fancied him speaking in the words and tones of the man to whom she owed her being, who had been too early snatched from her, who had endured so much for righteousness' sake, and from whose lips she had never heard a single word that might not have beseemed the god himself. And, as she crouched closely in the dark angle by the holy of holies, she felt herself nearer to her father as well as to the god, and accused herself pitilessly, in that unmaidenly longings had stirred her heart, that she had been insincere to herself and Irene, nay in that if she could not succeed in tearing the image of the Roman from her heart she would be compelled either to deceive her sister or to sadden the innocent and careless nature of the impressionable child, whom she was accustomed to succor and cherish as a mother might. On her, even apparently light matters weighed oppressively, while Irene could throw off even grave and serious things, blowing them off as it were into the air, like a feather. She was like wet clay on which even the light touch of a butterfly leaves a mark, her sister like a mirror from which the breath that has dimmed it instantly and entirely vanishes.

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"Great God!" she murmured in her prayer, "I feel as if the Roman had branded my very soul. Help thou me to efface the mark; help me to become as I was before, so that I may look again in Irene's eyes without concealment, pure and true, and that I may be able to say to myself, as I was wont, that I had thought and acted in such a way as my father would approve if he could know it."

She was still praying thus when the footsteps and voices of two men approaching the holy of holies startled her from her devotions; she suddenly became fully conscious of the fact that she was in a forbidden spot, and would be severely punished if she were discovered.

"Lock that door," cried one of the new-comers to his companion, pointing to the door which led from the prosekos into the pillared hall, "none, even of the initiated, need see what you are preparing here for us—"

Klea recognized the voice of the high-priest, and thought for a moment of stepping forward and confessing her guilt; but, though she did not usually lack courage, she did not do this, but shrank still more closely into her hiding-place, which was perfectly dark when the brazen door of the room; which had no windows, was closed. She now perceived that the curtain and door were opened which closed the inmost sanctuary, she heard one of the men twirling the stick which was to produce fire, saw the first gleam of light from it streaming out of the holy of holies, and then heard the blows of a hammer and the grating sound of a file.

The quiet sanctum was turned into a forge, but noisy as were the proceedings within, it seemed to Klea that the beating of her own heart was even louder than the brazen clatter of the tools wielded by Krates; he was one of the oldest of the priests of Serapis, who was chief in charge of the sacred vessels, who was wont never to speak to any one but the high-priest, and who was famous even among his Greek fellow-countrymen for the skill with which he could repair broken metal-work, make the securest locks, and work in silver and gold.

When the sisters first came into the temple five years since, Irene had been very much afraid of this man, who was so small as almost to be a dwarf, broad shouldered and powerfully knit, while his wrinkled face looked like a piece of rough cork-bark, and he was subject to a painful complaint in his feet which often prevented his walking; her fears had not vexed but only amused the priestly smith, who whenever he met the child, then eleven years old, would turn his lips up to his big red nose, roll his eyes, and grunt hideously to increase the terror that came over her.

He was not ill-natured, but he had neither wife nor child, nor brother, nor sister, nor friend, and every human being so keenly desires that others should have some feeling about him, that many a one would rather be feared than remain unheeded.

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After Irene had got over her dread she would often entreat the old man— who was regarded as stern and inaccessible by all the other dwellers in the temple—in her own engaging and coaxing way to make a face for her, and he would do it and laugh when the little one, to his delight and her own, was terrified at it and ran away; and just lately when Irene, having hurt her foot, was obliged to keep her room for a few days, an unheard of thing had occurred: he had asked Klea with the greatest sympathy how her sister was getting on, and had given her a cake for her.

While Krates was at his work not a word passed between him and the high-priest. At length he laid down the hammer, and said:

“I do not much like work of this kind, but this, I think, is successful at any rate. Any temple-servant, hidden here behind the altar, can now light or extinguish the lamps without the illusion being detected by the sharpest. Go now and stand at the door of the great hall and speak the word.”

Klea heard the high-priest accede to this request and cry in a chanting voice: “Thus he commands the night and it becomes day, and the extinguished taper and lo! it flames with brightness. If indeed thou art nigh, Oh Serapis! manifest thyself to us.”

At these words a bright stream of light flashed from the holy of holies, and again was suddenly extinguished when the high-priest sang: “Thus showest thou thyself as light to the children of truth, but dost punish with darkness the children of lies.”

“Again?” asked Krates in a voice which conveyed a desire that the answer might be ‘No.’

“I must trouble you,” replied the high-priest. “Good! the performance went much better this time. I was always well assured of your skill; but consider the particular importance of this affair. The two kings and the queen will probably be present at the solemnity, certainly Philometor and Cleopatra will, and their eyes are wide open; then the Roman who has already assisted four times at the procession will accompany them, and if I judge him rightly he, like many of the nobles of his nation, is one of those who can trust themselves when it is necessary to be content with the old gods of their fathers; and as regards the marvels we are able to display to them, they do not take them to heart like the poor in spirit, but measure and weigh them with a cool and unbiassed mind. People of that stamp, who are not ashamed to worship, who do not philosophize but only think just so much as is necessary for acting rightly, those are the worst contemners of every supersensual manifestation.”

“And the students of nature in the Museum?” asked Krates. “They believe nothing to be real that they cannot see and observe.”

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“And for that very reason,” replied the high-priest, “they are often singularly easy to deceive by your skill, since, seeing an effect without a cause, they are inclined to regard the invisible cause as something supersensual. Now, open the door again and let us get out by the side door; do you, this time, undertake the task of cooperating with Serapis yourself. Consider that Philometor will not confirm the donation of the land unless he quits the temple deeply penetrated by the greatness of our god. Would it be possible, do you think, to have the new censer ready in time for the birthday of King Euergetes, which is to be solemnly kept at Memphis?”

“We will see,” replied Krates, “I must first put together the lock of the great door of the tomb of Apis, for so long as I have it in my workshop any one can open it who sticks a nail into the hole above the bar, and any one can shut it inside who pushes the iron bolt. Send to call me before the performance with the lights begins; I will come in spite of my wretched feet. As I have undertaken the thing I will carry it out, but for no other reason, for it is my opinion that even without such means of deception—”

“We use no deception,” interrupted the high-priest, sternly rebuking his colleague. “We only present to short-sighted mortals the creative power of the divinity in a form perceptible and intelligible to their senses.”

With these words the tall priest turned his back on the smith and quitted the hall by a side door; Krates opened the brazen door, and as he gathered together his tools he said to himself, but loud enough for Klea to hear him distinctly in her hiding-place:

“It may be right for me, but deceit is deceit, whether a god deceives a king or a child deceives a beggar.”

“Deceit is deceit,” repeated Klea after the smith when he had left the hall and she had emerged from her corner.

She stood still for a moment and looked round her. For the first time she observed the shabby colors on the walls, the damage the pillars had sustained in the course of years, and the loose slabs in the pavement.

The sweetness of the incense sickened her, and as she passed by an old man who threw up his arms in fervent supplication, she looked at him with a glance of compassion.

When she had passed out beyond the pylons enclosing the temple she turned round, shaking her head in a puzzled way as she gazed at it; for she knew that not a stone had been changed within the last hour, and yet it looked as strange in her eyes as some landscape with which we have become familiar in all the beauty of spring, and see once more in winter with its trees bare of leaves; or like the face of a woman which we

thought beautiful under the veil which hid it, and which, when the veil is raised, we see to be wrinkled and devoid of charm.

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When she had heard the smith's words, "Deceit is deceit," she felt her heart shrink as from a stab, and could not check the tears which started to her eyes, unused as they were to weeping; but as soon as she had repeated the stern verdict with her own lips her tears had ceased, and now she stood looking at the temple like a traveller who takes leave of a dear friend; she was excited, she breathed more freely, drew herself up taller, and then turned her back on the sanctuary of Serapis, proudly though with a sore heart.

Close to the gate-keeper's lodge a child came tottering towards her with his arms stretched up to her. She lifted him up, kissed him, and then asked the mother, who also greeted her, for a piece of bread, for her hunger was becoming intolerable. While she ate the dry morsel the child sat on her lap, following with his large eyes the motion of her hand and lips. The boy was about five years old, with legs so feeble that they could scarcely support the weight of his body, but he had a particularly sweet little face; certainly it was quite without expression, and it was only when he saw Klea coming that tiny Philo's eyes had lighted up with pleasure.

"Drink this milk," said the child's mother, offering the young girl an earthen bowl. "There is not much and I could not spare it if Philo would eat like other children, but it seems as if it hurt him to swallow. He drinks two or three drops and eats a mouthful, and then will take no more even if he is beaten."

"You have not been beating him again?" said Klea reproachfully, and drawing the child closer to her. "My husband—" said the woman, pulling at her dress in some confusion. "The child was born on a good day and in a lucky hour, and yet he is so puny and weak and will not learn to speak, and that provokes Pianchi."

"He will spoil everything again!" exclaimed Klea annoyed. "Where is he?"

"He was wanted in the temple."

"And is he not pleased that Philo calls him 'father,' and you 'mother,' and me by my name, and that he learns to distinguish many things?" asked the girl.

"Oh, yes of course," said the woman. "He says you are teaching him to speak just as if he were a starling, and we are very much obliged to you."

"That is not what I want," interrupted Klea. "What I wish is that you should not punish and scold the boy, and that you should be as glad as I am when you see his poor little dormant soul slowly waking up. If he goes on like this, the poor little fellow will be quite sharp and intelligent. What is my name, my little one?"

"Ke-ea," stammered the child, smiling at his friend. "And now taste this that I have in my hand; what is it?—I see you know. It is called— whisper in my ear. That's right, mil—"



mil-milk! to be sure, my tiny, it is milk. Now open your little mouth and say it prettily after me— once more—and again—say it twelve times quite right and I will give you a kiss— Now you have earned a pretty kiss—will you have it here or here? Well, and what is this? your ea-? Yes, your ear. And this?—your nose, that is right.”

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The child's eyes brightened more and more under this gentle teaching, and neither Klea nor her pupil were weary till, about an hour later, the re-echoing sound of a brass gong called her away. As she turned to go the little one ran after her crying; she took him in her arms and carried him back to his mother, and then went on to her own room to dress herself and her sister for the procession. On the way to the Pastophorium she recalled once more her expedition to the temple and her prayer there.

"Even before the sanctuary," said she to herself, "I could not succeed in releasing my soul from its burden—it was not till I set to work to loosen the tongue of the poor little child. Every pure spot, it seems to me, may be the chosen sanctuary of some divinity, and is not an infant's soul purer than the altar where truth is mocked at?"

In their room she found Irene; she had dressed her hair carefully and stuck the pomegranate-flower in it, and she asked Klea if she thought she looked well.

"You look like Aphrodite herself," replied Klea kissing her forehead. Then she arranged the folds of her sister's dress, fastened on the ornaments, and proceeded to dress herself. While she was fastening her sandals Irene asked her, "Why do you sigh so bitterly?" and Klea replied, "I feel as if I had lost my parents a second time."

CHAPTER V.

The procession was over.

At the great service which had been performed before him in the Greek Serapeum, Ptolemy Philometor had endowed the priests not with the whole but with a considerable portion of the land concerning which they had approached him with many petitions. After the court had once more quitted Memphis and the procession was broken up, the sisters returned to their room, Irene with crimson cheeks and a smile on her lips, Klea with a gloomy and almost threatening light in her eyes.

As the two were going to their room in silence a temple-servant called to Klea, desiring her to go with him to the high-priest, who wished to speak to her. Klea, without speaking, gave her water-jar to Irene and was conducted into a chamber of the temple, which was used for keeping the sacred vessels in. There she sat down on a bench to wait. The two men who in the morning had visited the Pastophorium had also followed in the procession with the royal family. At the close of the solemnities Publius had parted from his companion without taking leave, and without looking to the right or to the left, he had hastened back to the Pastophorium and to the cell of Serapion, the recluse.

The old man heard from afar the younger man's footstep, which fell on the earth with a firmer and more decided tread than that of the softly-stepping priests of Serapis, and he greeted him warmly with signs and words.

Publius thanked him coolly and gravely, and said, dryly enough and with incisive brevity:

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"My time is limited. I propose shortly to quit Memphis, but I promised you to hear your request, and in order to keep my word I have come to see you; still—as I have said—only to keep my word. The water-bearers of whom you desired to speak to me do not interest me—I care no more about them than about the swallows flying over the house yonder."

"And yet this morning you took a long walk for Klea's sake," returned Serapion.

"I have often taken a much longer one to shoot a hare," answered the Roman. "We men do not pursue our game because the possession of it is any temptation, but because we love the sport, and there are sporting natures even among women. Instead of spears or arrows they shoot with flashing glances, and when they think they have hit their game they turn their back upon it. Your Klea is one of this sort, while the pretty little one I saw this morning looks as if she were very ready to be hunted, I however, no more wish to be the hunter of a young girl than to be her game. I have still three days to spend in Memphis, and then I shall turn my back forever on this stupid country."

"This morning," said Serapion, who began to suspect what the grievance might be which had excited the discontent implied in the Roman's speech, "This morning you appeared to be in less hurry to set out than now, so to me you seem to be in the plight of game trying to escape; however, I know Klea better than you do. Shooting is no sport of hers, nor will she let herself be hunted, for she has a characteristic which you, my friend Publius Scipio, ought to recognize and value above all others—she is proud, very proud; aye, and so she may be, scornful as you look—as if you would like to say 'how came a water-carrier of Serapis by her pride, a poor creature who is ill-fed and always engaged in service, pride which is the prescriptive right only of those, whom privilege raises above the common herd around them?—But this girl, you may take my word for it, has ample reason to hold her head high, not only because she is the daughter of free and noble parents and is distinguished by rare beauty, not because while she was still a child she undertook, with the devotion and constancy of the best of mothers, the care of another child—her own sister, but for a reason which, if I judge you rightly, you will understand better than many another young man; because she must uphold her pride in order that among the lower servants with whom unfortunately she is forced to work, she may never forget that she is a free and noble lady. You can set your pride aside and yet remain what you are, but if she were to do so and to learn to feel as a servant, she would presently become in fact what by nature she is not and by circumstances is compelled to be. A fine horse made to carry burdens becomes a mere cart-horse as soon as it ceases to hold up its head and lift its feet freely. Klea is proud because she must be proud; and if you are just you will not condemn the

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girl, who perhaps has cast a kindly glance at you—since the gods have so made you that you cannot fail to please any woman—and yet who must repel your approaches because she feels herself above being trifled with, even by one of the Cornelia gens, and yet too lowly to dare to hope that a man like you should ever stoop from your height to desire her for a wife. She has vexed you, of that there can be no doubt; how, I can only guess. If, however, it has been through her repellent pride, that ought not to hurt you, for a woman is like a soldier, who only puts on his armor when he is threatened by an opponent whose weapons he fears.”

The recluse had rather whispered than spoken these words, remembering that he had neighbors; and as he ceased the drops stood on his brow, for whenever any thing disturbed him he was accustomed to allow his powerful voice to be heard pretty loudly, and it cost him no small effort to moderate it for so long.

Publius had at first looked him in the face, and then had gazed at the ground, and he had heard Serapion to the end without interrupting him; but the color had flamed in his cheeks as in those of a schoolboy, and yet he was an independent and resolute youth who knew how to conduct himself in difficult straits as well as a man in the prime of life. In all his proceedings he was wont to know very well, exactly what he wanted, and to do without any fuss or comment whatever he thought right and fitting.

During the anchorite’s speech the question had occurred to him, what did he in fact expect or wish of the water-bearer; but the answer was wanting, he felt somewhat uncertain of himself, and his uncertainty and dissatisfaction with himself increased as all that he heard struck him more and more. He became less and less inclined to let himself be thrown over by the young girl who for some days had, much against his will, been constantly in his thoughts, whose image he would gladly have dismissed from his mind, but who, after the recluse’s speech, seemed more desirable than ever. “Perhaps you are right,” he replied after a short silence, and he too lowered his voice, for a subdued tone generally provokes an equally subdued answer. “You know the maiden better than I, and if you describe her correctly it would be as well that I should abide by my decision and fly from Egypt, or, at any rate, from your proteges, since nothing lies before me but a defeat or a victory, which could bring me nothing but repentance. Klea avoided my eye to-day as if it shed poison like a viper’s tooth, and I can have nothing more to do with her: still, might I be informed how she came into this temple? and if I can be of any service to her, I will—for your sake. Tell me now what you know of her and what you wish me to do.”

The recluse nodded assent and beckoned Publius to come closer to him, and bowing down to speak into the Roman’s ear, he said softly: “Are you in favor with the queen?” Publius, having said that he was, Serapion, with an exclamation of satisfaction, began his story.

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“You learned this morning how I myself came into this cage, and that my father was overseer of the temple granaries. While I was wandering abroad he was deposed from his office, and would probably have died in prison, if a worthy man had not assisted him to save his honor and his liberty. All this does not concern you, and I may therefore keep it to myself; but this man was the father of Klea and Irene, and the enemy by whose instrumentality my father suffered innocently was the villain Eulaeus. You know—or perhaps indeed you may not know—that the priests have to pay a certain tribute for the king’s maintenance; you know? To be sure, you Romans trouble yourselves more about matters of law and administration than the culture of the arts or the subtleties of thought. Well, it was my father’s duty to pay these customs over to Eulaeus, who received them; but the beardless effeminate vermin, the glutton—may every peach he ever ate or ever is to eat turn to poison!—kept back half of what was delivered to him, and when the accountants found nothing but empty air in the king’s stores where they hoped to find corn and woven goods, they raised an alarm, which of course came to the ears of the powerful thief at court before it reached those of my poor father. You called Egypt a marvellous country, or something like it; and so in truth it is, not merely on account of the great piles there that you call Pyramids and such like, but because things happen here which in Rome would be as impossible as moonshine at mid-day, or a horse with his tail at the end of his nose! Before a complaint could be laid against Eulaeus he had accused my father of the peculation, and before the Epistates and the assessor of the district had even looked at the indictment, their judgment on the falsely accused man was already recorded, for Eulaeus had simply bought their verdict just as a man buys a fish or a cabbage in the market. In olden times the goddess of justice was represented in this country with her eyes shut, but now she looks round on the world like a squinting woman who winks at the king with one eye, and glances with the other at the money in the hand of the accuser or the accused. My poor father was of course condemned and thrown into prison, where he was beginning to doubt the justice of the gods, when for his sake the greatest wonder happened, ever seen in this land of wonders since first the Greeks ruled in Alexandria. An honorable man undertook without fear of persons the lost cause of the poor condemned wretch, and never rested till he had restored him to honor and liberty. But imprisonment, disgrace and indignation had consumed the strength of the ill-used man as a worm eats into cedar wood, and he fell into a decline and died. His preserver, Klea’s father, as the reward of his courageous action fared even worse; for here by the Nile virtues are punished in this world, as crimes are with you. Where injustice holds sway frightful things occur, for the gods seem to take the side of the wicked. Those who do not hope for a reward in the next world, if they are neither fools nor philosophers—which often comes to the same thing—try to guard themselves against any change in this.

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“Philotas, the father of the two girls, whose parents were natives of Syracuse, was an adherent of the doctrines of Zeno—which have many supporters among you at Rome too—and he was highly placed as an official, for he was president of the Chrematistoi, a college of judges which probably has no parallel out of Egypt, and which has been kept up better than any other. It travels about from province to province stopping in the chief towns to administer justice. When an appeal is brought against the judgment of the court of justice belonging to any place—over which the Epistates of the district presides—the case is brought before the Chrematistoi, who are generally strangers alike to the accuser and accused; by them it is tried over again, and thus the inhabitants of the provinces are spared the journey to Alexandria or— since the country has been divided—to Memphis, where, besides, the supreme court is overburdened with cases.

“No former president of the Chrematistoi had ever enjoyed a higher reputation than Philotas. Corruption no more dared approach him than a sparrow dare go near a falcon, and he was as wise as he was just, for he was no less deeply versed in the ancient Egyptian law than in that of the Greeks, and many a corrupt judge reconsidered matters as soon as it became known that he was travelling with the Chrematistoi, and passed a just instead of an unjust sentence.

“Cleopatra, the widow of Epiphanes, while she was living and acting as guardian of her sons Philometor and Euergetes—who now reign in Memphis and Alexandria—held Philotas in the highest esteem and conferred on him the rank of ‘relation to the king’; but she was just dead when this worthy man took my father’s cause in hand, and procured his release from prison.

“The scoundrel Eulaeus and his accomplice Lenaeus then stood at the height of power, for the young king, who was not yet of age, let himself be led by them like a child by his nurse.

“Now as my father was an honest man, no one but Eulaeus could be the rascal, and as the Chrematistoi threatened to call him before their tribunal the miserable creature stirred up the war in Caelo-Syria against Antiochus Epiphanes, the king’s uncle.

“You know how disgraceful for us was the course of that enterprise, how Philometor was defeated near Pelusium, and by the advice of Eulaeus escaped with his treasure to Samothrace, how Philometor’s brother Euergetes was set up as king in Alexandria, how Antiochus took Memphis, and then allowed his elder nephew to continue to reign here as though he were his vassal and ward.

“It was during this period of humiliation, that Eulaeus was able to evade Philotas, whom he may very well have feared, as though his own conscience walked the earth on two legs in the person of the judge, with the sword of justice in his hand, and telling all men what a scoundrel he was.

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“Memphis had opened her gates to Antiochus without offering much resistance, and the Syrian king, who was a strange man and was fond of mixing among the people as if he himself were a common man, applied to Philotas, who was as familiar with Egyptian manners and customs as with those of Greece, in order that he might conduct him into the halls of justice and into the market-places; and he made him presents as was his way, sometimes of mere rubbish and sometimes of princely gifts.

“Then when Philometor was freed by the Romans from the protection of the Syrian king, and could govern in Memphis as an independent sovereign, Eulaeus accused the father of these two girls of having betrayed Memphis into the hands of Antiochus, and never rested till the innocent man was deprived of his wealth, which was considerable, and sent with his wife to forced labor in the gold mines of Ethiopia.

“When all this occurred I had already returned to my cage here; but I heard from my brother Glaucus—who was captain of the watch in the palace, and who learned a good many things before other people did— what was going on out there, and I succeeded in having the daughters of Philotas secretly brought to this temple, and preserved from sharing their parents’ fate. That is now five years ago, and now you know how it happens, that the daughters of a man of rank carry water for the altar of Serapis, and that I would rather an injury should be done to me than to them, and that I would rather see Eulaeus eating some poisonous root than fragrant peaches.”

“And is Philotas still working in the mines?” asked the Roman, clenching his teeth with rage.

“Yes, Publius,” replied the anchorite. “A ‘yes’ that it is easy to say, and it is just as easy too to clench one’s fists in indignation—but it is hard to imagine the torments that must be endured by a man like Philotas; and a noble and innocent woman—as beautiful as Hera and Aphrodite in one—when they are driven to hard and unaccustomed labor under a burning sun by the lash of the overseer. Perhaps by this time they have been happy enough to die under their sufferings and their daughters are already orphans, poor children! No one here but the high-priest knows precisely who they are, for if Eulaeus were to learn the truth he would send them after their parents as surely as my name is Serapion.”

“Let him try it!” cried Publius, raising his right fist threateningly.

“Softly, softly, my friend,” said the recluse, “and not now only, but about everything which you under take in behalf of the sisters, for a man like Eulaeus hears not only with his own ears but with those of thousand others, and almost everything that occurs at court has to go through his hands as epistolographer. You say the queen is well-disposed towards you. That is worth a great deal, for her husband is said to be guided by her will, and such a thing as Eulaeus cannot seem particularly estimable in Cleopatra’s eyes if princesses are like other women—and I know them well.”

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"And even if he were," interrupted Publius with glowing cheeks, "I would bring him to ruin all the same, for a man like Philotas must not perish, and his cause henceforth is my own. Here is my hand upon it; and if I am happy in having descended from a noble race it is above all because the word of a son of the Cornelii is as good as the accomplished deed of any other man."

The recluse grasped the right hand the young man gave him and nodded to him affectionately, his eyes radiant, though moistened with joyful emotion. Then he hastily turned his back on the young man, and soon reappeared with a large papyrus-roll in his hand. "Take this," he said, handing it to the Roman, "I have here set forth all that I have told you, fully and truly with my own hand in the form of a petition. Such matters, as I very well know, are never regularly conducted to an issue at court unless they are set forth in writing. If the queen seems disposed to grant you a wish give her this roll, and entreat her for a letter of pardon. If you can effect this, all is won."

Publius took the roll, and once more gave his hand to the anchorite, who, forgetting himself for a moment, shouted out in his loud voice:

"May the gods bless thee, and by thy means work the release of the noblest of men from his sufferings! I had quite ceased to hope, but if you come to our aid all is not yet wholly lost."

CHAPTER VI.

"Pardon me if I disturb you."

With these words the anchorite's final speech was interrupted by Eulaeus, who had come in to the Pastophorium softly and unobserved, and who now bowed respectfully to Publius.

"May I be permitted to enquire on what compact one of the noblest of the sons of Rome is joining hands with this singular personage?"

"You are free to ask," replied Publius shortly and drily, "but every one is not disposed to answer, and on the present occasion I am not. I will bid you farewell, Serapion, but not for long I believe."

"Am I permitted to accompany you?" asked Eulaeus.

"You have followed me without any permission on my part."

"I did so by order of the king, and am only fulfilling his commands in offering you my escort now."

“I shall go on, and I cannot prevent your following me.”

“But I beg of you,” said Eulaeus, “to consider that it would ill-become me to walk behind you like a servant.”

“I respect the wishes of my host, the king, who commanded you to follow me,” answered the Roman. “At the door of the temple however you can get into your chariot, and I into mine; an old courtier must be ready to carry out the orders of his superior.”

“And does carry them out,” answered Eulaeus with deference, but his eyes twinkled—as the forked tongue of a serpent is rapidly put out and still more rapidly withdrawn—with a flash first of threatening hatred, and then another of deep suspicion cast at the roll the Roman held in his hand.

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Publius heeded not this glance, but walked quickly towards the acacia-grove; the recluse looked after the ill-matched pair, and as he watched the burly Eulaeus following the young man, he put both his hands on his hips, puffed out his fat cheeks, and burst into loud laughter as soon as the couple had vanished behind the acacias.

When once Serapion's midriff was fairly tickled it was hard to reduce it to calm again, and he was still laughing when Klea appeared in front of his cell some few minutes after the departure of the Roman. He was about to receive his young friend with a cheerful greeting, but, glancing at her face, he cried anxiously;

"You look as if you had met with a ghost; your lips are pale instead of red, and there are dark shades round your eyes. What has happened to you, child? Irene went with you to the procession, that I know. Have you had bad news of your parents? You shake your head. Come, child, perhaps you are thinking of some one more than you ought; how the color rises in your cheeks! Certainly handsome Publius, the Roman, must have looked into your eyes—a splendid youth is he—a fine young man—a capital good fellow—"

"Say no more on that subject," Klea exclaimed, interrupting her friend and protector, and waving her hand in the air as if to cut off the other half of Serapion's speech. "I can hear nothing more about him."

"Has he addressed you unbecomingly?" asked the recluse.

"Yes!" said Klea, turning crimson, and with a vehemence quite foreign to her usual gentle demeanor, "yes, he persecutes me incessantly with challenging looks."

"Only with looks?" said the anchorite. "But we may look even at the glorious sun and at the lovely flowers as much as we please, and they are not offended."

"The sun is too high and the soulless flowers too humble for a man to hurt them," replied Klea. "But the Roman is neither higher nor lower than I, the eye speaks as plain a language as the tongue, and what his eyes demand of me brings the blood to my cheeks and stirs my indignation even now when I only think of it."

"And that is why you avoid his gaze so carefully?"

"Who told you that?"

"Publius himself; and because he is wounded by your hard-heartedness he meant to quit Egypt; but I have persuaded him to remain, for if there is a mortal living from whom I expect any good for you and yours—"

"It is certainly not he," said Klea positively. "You are a man, and perhaps you now think that so long as you were young and free to wander about the world you would not have



acted differently from him—it is a man's privilege; but if you could look into my soul or feel with the heart of a woman, you would think differently. Like the sand of the desert which is blown over the meadows and turns all the fresh verdure to a hideous brown—like a storm that transforms the blue mirror of the sea into a crisped chaos of black whirl pools and foaming

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ferment, this man's imperious audacity has cruelly troubled my peace of heart. Four times his eyes pursued me in the processions; yesterday I still did not recognize my danger, but to-day—I must tell you, for you are like a father to me, and who else in the world can I confide in?—to-day I was able to avoid his gaze, and yet all through long endless hours of the festival I felt his eyes constantly seeking mine. I should have been certain I was under no delusion, even if Publius Scipio—but what business has his name on my lips?—even if the Roman had not boasted to you of his attacks on a defenceless girl. And to think that you, you of all others, should have become his ally! But you would not, no indeed you would not, if you knew how I felt at the procession while I was looking down at the ground, and knew that his very look desecrated me like the rain that washed all the blossoms off the young vine-shoots last year. It was just as if he were drawing a net round my heart—but, oh! what a net! It was as if the flax on a distaff had been set on fire, and the flames spun out into thin threads, and the meshes knotted of the fiery yarn. I felt every thread and knot burning into my soul, and could not cast it off nor even defend myself. Aye! you may look grieved and shake your head, but so it was, and the scars hurt me still with a pain I cannot utter.”

“But Klea,” interrupted Serapion, “you are quite beside yourself—like one possessed. Go to the temple and pray, or, if that is of no avail, go to Asclepios or Anubis and have the demon cast out.”

“I need none of your gods!” answered the girl in great agitation. “Oh! I wish you had left me to my fate, and that we had shared the lot of our parents, for what threatens us here is more frightful than having to sift gold-dust in the scorching sun, or to crush quartz in mortars. I did not come to you to speak about the Roman, but to tell you what the high-priest had just disclosed to me since the procession ended.”

“Well?” asked Serapion eager and almost frightened, stretching out his neck to put his head near to the girl's, and opening his eyes so wide that the loose skin below them almost disappeared.

“First he told me,” replied Klea, “how meagrely the revenues of the temple are supplied
—”

“That is quite true,” interrupted the anchorite, “for Antiochus carried off the best part of its treasure; and the crown, which always used to have money to spare for the sanctuaries of Egypt, now loads our estates with heavy tribute; but you, as it seems to me, were kept scantily enough, worse than meanly, for, as I know—since it passed through my hands—a sum was paid to the temple for your maintenance which would have sufficed to keep ten hungry sailors, not speak of two little pecking birds like you, and besides that you do hard service without any pay. Indeed it would be a more

profitable speculation to steal a beggar's rags than to rob you! Well, what did the high-priest want?"

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“He says that we have been fed and protected by the priesthood for five years, that now some danger threatens the temple on our account, and that we must either quit the sanctuary or else make up our minds to take the place of the twin-sisters Arsinoe and Doris who have hitherto been employed in singing the hymns of lamentation, as Isis and Nephthys, by the bier of the deceased god on the occasion of the festivals of the dead, and in pouring out the libations with wailing and outcries when the bodies were brought into the temple to be blessed. These maidens, Asclepiodorus says, are now too old and ugly for these duties, but the temple is bound to maintain them all their lives. The funds of the temple are insufficient to support two more serving maidens besides them and us, and so Arsinoe and Doris are only to pour out the libations for the future, and we are to sing the laments, and do the wailing.”

“But you are not twins!” cried Serapion. “And none but twins—so say the ordinances—may mourn for Osiris as Isis and Neplithys.”

“They will make twins of us!” said Klea with a scornful turn of her lip. “Irene’s hair is to be dyed black like mine, and the soles of her sandals are to be made thicker to make her as tall as I am.”

“They would hardly succeed in making you smaller than you are, and it is easier to make light hair dark than dark hair light,” said Serapion with hardly suppressed rage. “And what answer did you give to these exceedingly original proposals?”

“The only one I could very well give. I said no—but I declared myself ready, not from fear, but because we owe much to the temple, to perform any other service with Irene, only not this one.”

“And Asclepiodorus?”

“He said nothing unkind to me, and preserved his calm and polite demeanor when I contradicted him, though he fixed his eyes on me several times in astonishment as if he had discovered in me something quite new and strange. At last he went on to remind me how much trouble the temple singing-master had taken with us, how well my low voice went with Irene’s high one, how much applause we might gain by a fine performance of the hymns of lamentation, and how he would be willing, if we undertook the duties of the twin-sisters, to give us a better dwelling and more abundant food. I believe he has been trying to make us amenable by supplying us badly with food, just as falcons are trained by hunger. Perhaps I am doing him an injustice, but I feel only too much disposed to-day to think the worst of him and of the other fathers. Be that as it may; at any rate he made me no further answer when I persisted in my refusal, but dismissed me with an injunction to present myself before him again in three days’ time, and then to inform him definitively whether I would conform to his wishes, or if I proposed to leave the temple. I bowed and went towards the door, and was already on the threshold when he called me back once more, and said: ‘Remember your parents

and their fate!' He spoke solemnly, almost threateningly, but he said no more and hastily turned his back on me. What could he mean to convey by this warning? Every day and every hour I think of my father and mother, and keep Irene in mind of them."

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The recluse at these words sat muttering thoughtfully to himself for a few minutes with a discontented air; then he said gravely:

“Asclepiodorus meant more by his speech than you think. Every sentence with which he dismisses a refractory subordinate is a nut of which the shell must be cracked in order to get at the kernel. When he tells you to remember your parents and their sad fate, such words from his lips, and under the present circumstances, can hardly mean anything else than this: that you should not forget how easily your father’s fate might overtake you also, if once you withdrew yourselves from the protection of the temple. It was not for nothing that Asclepiodorus—as you yourself told me quite lately, not more than a week ago I am sure—reminded you how often those condemned to forced labor in the mines had their relations sent after them. Ah! child, the words of Asclepiodorus have a sinister meaning. The calmness and pride, with which you look at me make me fear for you, and yet, as you know, I am not one of the timid and tremulous. Certainly what they propose to you is repulsive enough, but submit to it; it is to be hoped it will not be for long. Do it for my sake and for that of poor Irene, for though you might know how to assert your dignity and take care of yourself outside these walls in the rough and greedy world, little Irene never could. And besides, Klea, my sweetheart, we have now found some one, who makes your concerns his, and who is great and powerful—but oh! what are three clays? To think of seeing you turned out—and then that you may be driven with a dissolute herd in a filthy boat down to the burning south, and dragged to work which kills first the soul and then the body! No, it is not possible! You will never let this happen to me—and to yourself and Irene; no, my darling, no, my pet, my sweetheart, you cannot, you will not do so. Are you not my children, my daughters, my only joy? and you, would you go away, and leave me alone in my cage, all because you are so proud!”

The strong man’s voice failed him, and heavy drops fell from his eyes one after another down his beard, and on to Klea’s arm, which he had grasped with both hands.

The girl’s eyes too were dim with a mist of warm tears when she saw her rough friend weeping, but she remained firm and said, as she tried to free her hand from his:

“You know very well, father Serapion, that there is much to tie me to this temple; my sister, and you, and the door-keeper’s child, little Philo. It would be cruel, dreadful to have to leave you; but I would rather endure that and every other grief than allow Irene to take the place of Arsinoe or the black Doris as wailing woman. Think of that bright child, painted and kneeling at the foot of a bier and groaning and wailing in mock sorrow! She would become a living lie in human form, an object of loathing to herself, and to me—who stand in the place of a mother to her—from morning

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till night a martyring reproach! But what do I care about myself—I would disguise myself as the goddess without even making a wry face, and be led to the bier, and wail and groan so that every hearer would be cut to the heart, for my soul is already possessed by sorrow; it is like the eyes of a man, who has gone blind from the constant flow of salt tears. Perhaps singing the hymns of lamentation might relieve my soul, which is as full of sorrow as an overbrimming cup; but I would rather that a cloud should for ever darken the sun, that mists should hide every star from my eyes, and the air I breathe be poisoned by black smoke than disguise her identity, and darken her soul, or let her clear laugh be turned to shrieks of lamentation, and her fresh and childlike spirit be buried in gloomy mourning. Sooner will I go way with her and leave even you, to perish with my parents in misery and anguish than see that happen, or suffer it for a moment.”

As she spoke Serapion covered his face with his hands, and Klea, hastily turning away from him, with a deep sigh returned to her room.

Irene was accustomed when she heard her step to hasten to meet her, but to-day no one came to welcome her, and in their room, which was beginning to be dark as twilight fell, she did not immediately catch sight of her sister, for she was sitting all in a heap in a corner of the room, her face hidden, in her hands and weeping quietly.

“What is the matter?” asked Klea, going tenderly up to the weeping child, over whom she bent, endeavoring to raise her.

“Leave me,” said Irene sobbing; she turned away from her sister with an impatient gesture, repelling her caress like a perverse child; and then, when Klea tried to soothe her by affectionately stroking her hair, she sprang up passionately exclaiming through her tears:

“I could not help crying—and, from this hour, I must always have to cry. The Corinthian Lysias spoke to me so kindly after the procession, and you—you don’t care about me at all and leave me alone all this time in this nasty dusty hole! I declare I will not endure it any longer, and if you try to keep me shut up, I will run away from this temple, for outside it is all bright and pleasant, and here it is dingy and horrid!”

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

A mere nothing in one man’s life, to another may be great
A subdued tone generally provokes an equally subdued answer
Air of a professional guide
Before you serve me up so bitter a meal (the truth)

Blind tenderness which knows no reason
By nature she is not and by circumstances is compelled to be
Deceit is deceit
Desire to seek and find a power outside us
Inquisitive eyes are intrusive company
Many a one would rather be feared than remain unheeded
Not yet fairly come to the end of yesterday
The altar where truth is mocked at
Virtues are punished in this world
Who can be freer than he who needs nothing
Who only puts on his armor when he is threatened

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