

Sisters, the — Volume 2 eBook

Sisters, the — Volume 2 by Georg Ebers

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Title: The Sisters, v2

Author: Georg Ebers

Release Date: April, 2004 [EBook #5462] [Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule] [This file was first posted on May 12, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** Start of the project gutenberg EBOOK the Sisters, by Ebers, V2 ***

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THE SISTERS

By Georg Ebers

Volume 2.

CHAPTER VII.

In the very midst of the white wall with its bastions and ramparts, which formed the fortifications of Memphis, stood the old palace of the kings, a stately structure built of bricks, recently plastered, and with courts, corridors, chambers and halls without number, and veranda-like out-buildings of gayly-painted wood, and a magnificent pillared banqueting-hall in the Greek style. It was surrounded by verdurous gardens, and a whole host of laborers tended the flower-beds and shady alleys, the shrubs and the trees; kept the tanks clean and fed the fish in them; guarded the beast-garden, in which quadrupeds of every kind, from the heavy-treading elephant to the light-footed antelope, were to be seen, associated with birds innumerable of every country and climate.

A light white vapor rose from the splendidly fitted bath-house, loud barkings resounded from the dog-kennels, and from the long array of open stables came the neighing of horses with the clatter and stamp of hoofs, and the rattle of harness and chains. A semicircular building of new construction adjoining the old palace was the theatre, and



many large tents for the bodyguard, for ambassadors and scribes, as well as others, serving as banqueting-halls for the various court-officials, stood both within the garden and outside its enclosing walls. A large space leading from the city itself to the royal citadel was given up to the soldiers, and there, by the side of the shady court-yards, were the houses of the police-guard and the prisons. Other soldiers were quartered in tents close to the walls of the palace itself. The clatter of their arms and the words of command, given in Greek, by their captain, sounded out at this particular instant, and up into the part of the buildings occupied by the queen; and her apartments were high up, for in summer time Cleopatra preferred to live in airy tents, which stood among the broad-leaved trees of the south and whole groves of flowering shrubs, on the level roof of the palace, which was also lavishly decorated

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with marble statues. There was only one way of access to this retreat, which was fitted up with regal splendor; day and night it was fanned by currents of soft air, and no one could penetrate uninvited to disturb the queen's retirement, for veteran guards watched at the foot of the broad stair that led to the roof, chosen from the Macedonian "Garde noble," and owing as implicit obedience to Cleopatra as to the king himself. This select corps was now, at sunset, relieving guard, and the queen could hear the words spoken by the officers in command and the clatter of the shields against the swords as they rattled on the pavement, for she had come out of her tent into the open air, and stood gazing towards the west, where the glorious hues of the sinking sun flooded the bare, yellow limestone range of the Libyan hills, with their innumerable tombs and the separate groups of pyramids; while the wonderful coloring gradually tinged with rose-color the light silvery clouds that hovered in the clear sky over the valley of Memphis, and edged them as with a rille of living gold.

The queen stepped out of her tent, accompanied by a young Greek girl—the fair Zoe, daughter of her master of the hunt Zenodotus, and Cleopatra's favorite lady-in-waiting—but though she looked towards the west, she stood unmoved by the magic of the glorious scene before her; she screened her eyes with her hand to shade them from the blinding rays, and said:

"Where can Cornelius be staying! When we mounted our chariots before the temple he had vanished, and as far as I can see the road in the quarters of Sokari and Serapis I cannot discover his vehicle, nor that of Eulaeus who was to accompany him. It is not very polite of him to go off in this way without taking leave; nay, I could call it ungrateful, since I had proposed to tell him on our way home all about my brother Euergetes, who has arrived to-day with his friends. They are not yet acquainted, for Euergetes was living in Cyrene when Publius Cornelius Scipio landed in Alexandria. Stay! do you see a black shadow out there by the vineyard at Kakem; That is very likely he; but no—you are right, it is only some birds, flying in a close mass above the road. Can you see nothing more? No!—and yet we both have sharp young eyes. I am very curious to know whether Publius Scipio will like Euergetes. There can hardly be two beings more unlike, and yet they have some very essential points in common."

"They are both men," interrupted Zoe, looking at the queen as if she expected cordial assent to this proposition.

"So they are," said Cleopatra proudly. "My brother is still so young that, if he were not a king's son, he would hardly have outgrown the stage of boyhood, and would be a lad among other Epheboi,—[Youths above 18 were so called]—and yet among the oldest there is hardly a man who is his superior in strength of will and determined energy. Already, before I married Philometor, he had clutched

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Alexandria and Cyrene, which by right should belong to my husband, who is the eldest of us three, and that was not very brotherly conduct—and indeed we had other grounds for being angry with him; but when I saw him again for the first time after nine months of separation I was obliged to forget them all, and welcome him as though he had done nothing but good to me and his brother—who is my husband, as is the custom of the families of Pharaohs and the usage of our race. He is a young Titan, and no one would be astonished if he one day succeeded in piling Pelion upon Ossa. I know well enough how wild he can often be, how unbridled and recalcitrant beyond all bounds; but I can easily pardon him, for the same bold blood flows in my own veins, and at the root of all his excesses lies power, genuine and vigorous power. And this innate pith and power are just the very thing we most admire in men, for it is the one gift which the gods have dealt out to us with a less liberal hand than to men. Life indeed generally dams its overflowing current, but I doubt whether this will be the case with the stormy torrent of his energy; at any rate men such as he is rush swiftly onwards, and are strong to the end, which sooner or later is sure to overtake them; and I infinitely prefer such a wild torrent to a shallow brook flowing over a plain, which hurts no one, and which in order to prolong its life loses itself in a misty bog. He, if any one, may be forgiven for his tumultuous career; for when he pleases my brother's great qualities charm old and young alike, and are as conspicuous and as remarkable as his faults—nay, I will frankly say his crimes. And who in Greece or Egypt surpasses him in grasp and elevation of mind?"

You may well be proud of him," replied Zoe. Not even Publius Scipio himself can soar to the height reached by Euergetes."

"But, on the other hand, Euergetes is not gifted with the steady, calm self-reliance of Cornelius. The man who should unite in one person the good qualities of those two, need yield the palm, as it seems to me, not even to a god!"

"Among us imperfect mortals he would indeed be the only perfect one," replied Zoe. "But the gods could not endure the existence of a perfect man, for then they would have to undertake the undignified task of competing with one of their own creatures."

"Here, however, comes one whom no one can accuse!" cried the young queen, as she hastened to meet a richly dressed woman, older than herself, who came towards her leading her son, a pale child of two years old. She bent down to the little one, tenderly but with impetuous eagerness, and was about to clasp him in her arms, but the fragile child, which at first had smiled at her, was startled; he turned away from her and tried to hide his little face in the dress of his nurse—a lady of rank—to whom he clung with both hands. The queen threw herself on her knees before him, took hold of his shoulder,

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and partly by coaxing and partly by insistence strove to induce him to quit the sheltering gown and to turn to her; but although the lady, his wet-nurse, seconded her with kind words of encouragement, the terrified child began to cry, and resisted his mother's caresses with more and more vehemence the more passionately she tried to attract and conciliate him. At last the nurse lifted him up, and was about to hand him to his mother, but the wilful little boy cried more than before, and throwing his arms convulsively round his nurse's neck he broke into loud cries.

In the midst of this rather unbecoming struggle of the mother against the child's obstinacy, the clatter of wheels and of horses' hoofs rang through the court-yard of the palace, and hardly had the sound reached the queen's ears than she turned away from the screaming child, hurried to the parapet of the roof, and called out to Zoe:

"Publius Scipio is here; it is high time that I should dress for the banquet. Will that naughty child not listen to me at all? Take him away, Praxinoa, and understand distinctly that I am much dissatisfied with you. You estrange my own child from me to curry favor with the future king. That is base, or else it proves that you have no tact, and are incompetent for the office entrusted to you. The office of wet-nurse you duly fulfilled, but I shall now look out for another attendant for the boy. Do not answer me! no tears! I have had enough of that with the child's screaming." With these words, spoken loudly and passionately, she turned her back on Praxinoa—the wife of a distinguished Macedonian noble, who stood as if petrified—and retired into her tent, where branched lamps had just been placed on little tables of elegant workmanship. Like all the other furniture in the queen's dressing-tent these were made of gleaming ivory, standing out in fine relief from the tent-cloth which was sky-blue woven with silver lilies and ears of corn, and from the tiger-skins which covered all the cushions, while white woollen carpets, bordered with a waving scroll in blue, were spread on the ground.

The queen threw herself on a seat in front of her dressing-table, and sat staring at herself in a mirror, as if she now saw her face and her abundant, reddish-fair hair for the first time; then she said, half turning to Zoe and half to her favorite Athenian waiting-maid, who stood behind her with her other women:

"It was folly to dye my dark hair light; but now it may remain so, for Publius Scipio, who has no suspicion of our arts, thought this color pretty and uncommon, and never will know its origin. That Egyptian headdress with the vulture's head which the king likes best to see me in, the young Greek Lysias and the Roman too, call barbaric, and so every one must call it who is not interested in the Egyptians. But to-night we are only ourselves, so I will wear the chaplet of golden corn with sapphire grapes. Do you think, Zoe, that with that I could

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wear the dress of transparent bombyx silk that came yesterday from Cos? But no, I will not wear that, for it is too slight a tissue, it hides nothing and I am now too thin for it to become me. All the lines in my throat show, and my elbows are quite sharp—altogether I am much thinner. That comes of incessant worry, annoyance, and anxiety. How angry I was yesterday at the council, because my husband will always give way and agree and try to be pleasant; whenever a refusal is necessary I have to interfere, unwilling as I am to do it, and odious as it is to me always to have to stir up discontent, disappointment, and disaffection, to take things on myself and to be regarded as hard and heartless in order that my husband may preserve undiminished the doubtful glory of being the gentlest and kindest of men and princes. My son's having a will of his own leads to agitating scenes, but even that is better than that Philopator should rush into everybody's arms. The first thing in bringing up a boy should be to teach him to say 'no.' I often say 'yes' myself when I should not, but I am a woman, and yielding becomes us better than refusal—and what is there of greater importance to a woman than to do what becomes her best, and to seem beautiful?

"I will decide on this pale dress, and put over it the net-work of gold thread with sapphire knots; that will go well with the head-dress. Take care with your comb, Thais, you are hurting me! Now—I must not chatter any more. Zoe, give me the roll yonder; I must collect my thoughts a little before I go down to talk among men at the banquet. When we have just come from visiting the realm of death and of Serapis, and have been reminded of the immortality of the soul and of our lot in the next world, we are glad to read through what the most estimable of human thinkers has said concerning such things. Begin here, Zoe."

Cleopatra's companion, thus addressed, signed to the unoccupied waiting-women to withdraw, seated herself on a low cushion opposite the queen, and began to read with an intelligent and practised intonation; the reading went on for some time uninterrupted by any sound but the clink of metal ornaments, the rustle of rich stuffs, the trickle of oils or perfumes as they were dropped into the crystal bowls, the short and whispered questions of the women who were attiring the queen, or Cleopatra's no less low and rapid answers.

All the waiting-women not immediately occupied about the queen's person— perhaps twenty in all, young and old-ranged themselves along the sides of the great tent, either standing or sitting on the ground or on cushions, and awaiting the moment when it should be their turn to perform some service, as motionless as though spellbound by the mystical words of a magician. They only made signs to each other with their eyes and fingers, for they knew that the queen did not choose to be disturbed when she was being read to, and that she never hesitated to cast aside anything or anybody that crossed her wishes or inclinations, like a tight shoe or a broken lutestring.

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Her features were irregular and sharp, her cheekbones too strongly developed, and the lips, behind which her teeth gleamed pearly white—though too widely set—were too full; still, so long as she exerted her great powers of concentration, and listened with flashing eyes, like those of a prophetess, and parted lips to the words of Plato, her face had worn an indescribable glow of feeling, which seemed to have come upon her from a higher and better world, and she had looked far more beautiful than now when she was fully dressed, and when her women crowded round her—Zoe having laid aside the Plato—with loud and unmeasured flattery.

Cleopatra delighted in being thus feted, and, in order to enjoy the adulation of a throng, she would always when dressing have a great number of women to attend her toilet; mirrors were held up to her on every side, a fold set right, and the jewelled straps of her sandals adjusted.

One praised the abundance of her hair, another the slenderness of her form, the slimness of her ankles, and the smallness of her tiny hands and feet. One maiden remarked to another—but loud enough to be heard—on the brightness of her eyes which were clearer than the sapphires on her brow, while the Athenian waiting-woman, Thais, declared that Cleopatra had grown fatter, for her golden belt was less easy to clasp than it had been ten days previously.

The queen presently signed to Zoe, who threw a little silver ball into a bowl of the same metal, elaborately wrought and decorated, and in a few minutes the tramp of the body-guard was audible outside the door of the tent.

Cleopatra went out, casting a rapid glance over the roof—now brightly illuminated with cressets and torches—and the white marble statues that gleamed out in relief against the dark clumps of shrubs; and then, without even looking at the tent where her children were asleep, she approached the litter, which had been brought up to the roof for her by the young Macedonian nobles. Zoe and Thais assisted her to mount into it, and her ladies, waiting-women, and others who had hurried out of the other tents, formed a row on each side of the way, and hailed their mistress with loud cries of admiration and delight as she passed by, lifted high above them all on the shoulders of her bearers. The diamonds in the handle of her feather-fan sparkled brightly as Cleopatra waved a gracious adieu to her women, an adieu which did not fail to remind them how infinitely beneath her were those she greeted. Every movement of her hand was full of regal pride, and her eyes, unveiled and untempered, were radiant with a young woman's pleasure in a perfect toilet, with satisfaction in her own person, and with the anticipation of the festive hours before her.

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The litter disappeared behind the door of the broad steps that led up to the roof, and Thais, sighing softly, said to herself, "If only for once I could ride through the air in just such a pretty shell of colored and shining mother-of-pearl, like a goddess! carried aloft by young men, and hailed and admired by all around me! High up there the growing Selene floats calmly and silently by the tiny stars, and just so did she ride past in her purple robe with her torch-bearers and flames and lights—past us humble creatures, and between the tents to the banquet—and to what a banquet, and what guests! Everything up here greets her with rejoicing, and I could almost fancy that among those still marble statues even the stern face of Zeno had parted its lips, and spoken flattering words to her. And yet poor little Zoe, and the fair-haired Lysippa, and the black-haired daughter of Demetrius, and even I, poor wretch, should be handsomer, far handsomer than she, if we could dress ourselves with fine clothes and jewels for which kings would sell their kingdoms; if we could play Aphrodite as she does, and ride off in a shell borne aloft on emerald-green glass to look as if it were floating on the waves; if dolphins set with pearls and turquoises served us for a footstool, and white ostrich-plumes floated over our heads, like the silvery clouds that float over Athens in the sky of a fine spring day. The transparent tissue that she dared not put on would well become me! If only that were true which Zoe was reading yesterday, that the souls of men were destined to visit the earth again and again in new forms! Then perhaps mine might some day come into the world in that of a king's child. I should not care to be a prince, so much is expected of him, but a princess indeed! That would be lovely!"

These and such like were Thais' dreams, while Zoe stood outside the tent of the royal children with her cousin, the chief-attendant of prince Philopator, carrying on an eager conversation in a low tone. The child's nurse from time to time dried her eyes and sobbed bitterly as she said: "My own baby, my other children, my husband and our beautiful house in Alexandria—I left them all to suckle and rear a prince. I have sacrificed happiness, freedom, and my nights'-sleep for the sake of the queen and of this child, and how am I repaid for all this? As if I were a lowborn wench instead of the daughter and wife of noble men; this woman, half a child still, scarcely yet nineteen, dismisses me from her service before you and all her ladies every ten days! And why? Because the ungoverned blood of her race flows in her son's veins, and because he does not rush into the arms of a mother who for days does not ask for him at all, and never troubles herself about him but in some idle moment when she has gratified every other whim. Princes distribute favor or disgrace with justice only so long as they are children. The little one understands very well what I am to him, and sees

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what Cleopatra is. If I could find it in my heart to ill-use him in secret, this mother—who is not fit to be a mother—would soon have her way. Hard as it would be to me so soon to leave the poor feeble little child, who has grown as dear to my soul as my own—aye and closer, even closer, as I may well say—this time I will do it, even at the risk of Cleopatra's plunging us into ruin, my husband and me, as she has done to so many who have dared to contravene her will."

The wet-nurse wept aloud, but Zoe laid her hand on the distressed woman's shoulder, and said soothingly: "I know you have more to submit to from Cleopatra's humors than any of us all, but do not be overhasty. Tomorrow she will send you a handsome present, as she so often has done after being unkind; and though she vexes and hurts you again and again, she will try to make up for it again and again till, when this year is over, your attendance on the prince will be at an end, and you can go home again to your own family. We all have to practise patience; we live like people dwelling in a ruinous house with to-day a stone and to-morrow a beam threatening to fall upon our heads. If we each take calmly whatever befalls us our masters try to heal our wounds, but if we resist may the gods have mercy on us! for Cleopatra is like a strung bow, which sets the arrow flying as soon as a child, a mouse, a breath of air even touches it—like an over-full cup which brims over if a leaf, another drop, a single tear falls into it. We should, any one of us, soon be worn out by such a life, but she needs excitement, turmoil and amusement at every hour. She comes home late from a feast, spends barely six hours in disturbed slumber, and has hardly rested so long as it takes a pebble to fall to the ground from a crane's claw before we have to dress her again for another meal. From the council-board she goes to hear some learned discourse, from her books in the temple to sacrifice and prayer, from the sanctuary to the workshops of artists, from pictures and statues to the audience-chamber, from a reception of her subjects and of foreigners to her writing-room, from answering letters to a procession and worship once more, from the sacred services back again to her dressing-tent, and there, while she is being attired she listens to me while I read the most profound works—and how she listens! not a word escapes her, and her memory retains whole sentences. Amid all this hurry and scurry her spirit must need be like a limb that is sore from violent exertion, and that is painfully tender to every rough touch. We are to her neither more nor less than the wretched flies which we hit at when they trouble us, and may the gods be merciful to those on whom this queen's hand may fall! Euergetes cleaves with the sword all that comes in his way. Cleopatra stabs with the dagger, and her hand wields the united power of her own might and of her yielding husband's. Do not provoke her. Submit to what you cannot avert; just as I never complain when, if I make a mistake in reading, she snatches the book from my hand, or flings it at my feet. But I, of course, have only myself to fear for, and you have your husband and children as well."

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Praxinoa bowed her head at these words in sad assent, and said:

“Thank you for those words! I always think only from my heart, and you mostly from your head. You are right, this time again there is nothing for me to do but to be patient; but when I have fulfilled the duties here, which I undertook, and am at home again, I will offer a great sacrifice to Asclepias and Hygiea, like a person recovered from a severe illness; and one thing I know: that I would rather be a poor girl, grinding at a mill, than change with this rich and adored queen who, in order to enjoy her life to the utmost, carelessly and restlessly hurries past all that our mortal lot has best to offer. Terrible, hideous to me seems such an existence with no rest in it! and the heart of a mother which is so much occupied with other things that she cannot win the love of her child, which blossoms for every hired nurse, must be as waste as the desert! Rather would I endure anything—everything—with patience than be such a queen!”

CHAPTER VIII.

“What! No one to come to meet me?” asked the queen, as she reached the foot of the last flight of porphyry steps that led into the ante-chamber to the banqueting-hall, and, looking round, with an ominous glance, at the chamberlains who had accompanied her, she clinched her small fist. “I arrive and find no one here!”

The “No one” certainly was a figure of speech, since more than a hundred body-guards-Macedonians in rich array of arms-and an equal number of distinguished court-officials were standing on the marble flags of the vast hall, which was surrounded by colonnades, while the star-spangled night-sky was all its roof; and the court-attendants were all men of rank, dignified by the titles of fathers, brothers, relatives, friends and chief-friends of the king.

These all received the queen with a many-voiced “Hail!” but not one of them seemed worthy of Cleopatra’s notice. This crowd was less to her than the air we breathe in order to live—a mere obnoxious vapor, a whirl of dust which the traveller would gladly avoid, but which he must nevertheless encounter in order to proceed on his way.

The queen had expected that the few guests, invited by her selection and that of her brother Euergetes to the evening’s feast, would have welcomed her here at the steps; she thought they would have seen her—as she felt herself—like a goddess borne aloft in her shell, and that she might have exulted in the admiring astonishment of the Roman and of Lysias, the Corinthian: and now the most critical instant in the part she meant to play that evening had proved a failure, and it suggested itself to her mind that she might be borne back to her roof-tent, and be floated down once more when she was sure of the presence of the company. But there was one thing she dreaded more even than pain and remorse, and that was any appearance of the ridiculous; so

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she only commanded the bearers to stand still, and while the master of the ceremonies, waiving his dignity, hurried off to announce to her husband that she was approaching, she signed to the nobles highest in rank to approach, that she might address a few gracious words to them, with distant amiability. Only a few however, for the doors of thyia wood leading into the banqueting hall itself, presently opened, and the king with his friends came forward to meet Cleopatra.

“How were we to expect you so early?” cried Philometor to his wife.

“Is it really still early?” asked the queen, “or have I only taken you by surprise, because you had forgotten to expect me?”

“How unjust you are!” replied the king. “Must you now be told that, come as early as you will, you always come too late for my desires.”

“But for ours,” cried Lysias, “neither too early nor too late, but at the very right time—like returning health and happiness, or the victor’s crown.”

“Health as taking the place of sickness?” asked Cleopatra, and her eyes sparkled keenly and merrily. “I perfectly understand Lysias,” said Publius, intercepting the Greek. “Once, on the field of Mars, I was flung from my horse, and had to lie for weeks on my couch, and I know that there is no more delightful sensation than that of feeling our departed strength returning as we recover. He means to say that in your presence we must feel exceptionally well.”

“Nay rather,” interrupted Lysias, “our queen seems to come to us like returning health, since so long as she was not in our midst we felt suffering and sick for longing. Thy presence, Cleopatra, is the most effectual remedy, and restores us to our lost health.”

Cleopatra politely lowered her fan, as if in thanks, thus rapidly turning the stick of it in her hand, so as to make the diamonds that were set in it sparkle and flash. Then she turned to the friends, and said:

“Your words are most amiable, and your different ways of expressing your meaning remind me of two gems set in a jewel, one of which sparkles because it is skilfully cut, and reflects every light from its mirrorlike facets, while the other shines by its genuine and intrinsic fire. The genuine and the true are one, and the Egyptians have but one word for both, and your kind speech, my Scipio—but I may surely venture to call you Publius—your kind speech, my Publius seems to me to be truer than that of your accomplished friend, which is better adapted to vainer ears than mine. Pray, give me your hand.”

The shell in which she was sitting was gently lowered, and, supported by Publius and her husband, the queen alighted and entered the banqueting-hall, accompanied by her guests.

As soon as the curtains were closed, and when Cleopatra had exchanged a few whispered words with her husband, she turned again to the Roman, who had just been joined by Eulaeus, and said:

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"You have come from Athens, Publius, but you do not seem to have followed very closely the courses of logic there, else how could it be that you, who regard health as the highest good—that you, who declared that you never felt so well as in my presence—should have quitted me so promptly after the procession, and in spite of our appointment? May I be allowed to ask what business—"

"Our noble friend," answered Eulaeus, bowing low, but not allowing the queen to finish her speech, "would seem to have found some particular charm in the bearded recluses of Serapis, and to be seeking among them the key-stone of his studies at Athens."

"In that he is very right," said the queen. "For from them he can learn to direct his attention to that third division of our existence, concerning which least is taught in Athens—I mean the future—"

"That is in the hands of the gods," replied the Roman. "It will come soon enough, and I did not discuss it with the anchorite. Eulaeus may be informed that, on the contrary, everything I learned from that singular man in the Serapeum bore reference to the things of the past."

"But how can it be possible," said Eulaeus, "that any one to whom Cleopatra had offered her society should think so long of anything else than the beautiful present?"

"You indeed have good reason," retorted Publius quickly, "to enter the lists in behalf of the present, and never willingly to recall the past."

"It was full of anxiety and care," replied Eulaeus with perfect self-possession. "That my sovereign lady must know from her illustrious mother, and from her own experience; and she will also protect me from the undeserved hatred with which certain powerful enemies seem minded to pursue me. Permit me, your majesty, not to make my appearance at the banquet until later. This noble gentleman kept me waiting for hours in the Serapeum, and the proposals concerning the new building in the temple of Isis at Philae must be drawn up and engrossed to-day, in order that they may be brought to-morrow before your royal husband in council and your illustrious brother Euergetes—"

"You have leave, interrupted Cleopatra."

As soon as Eulaeus had disappeared, the queen went closer up to Publius, and said:

"You are annoyed with this man—well, he is not pleasant, but at any rate he is useful and worthy. May I ask whether you only feel his personality repugnant to you, or whether actual circumstances have given rise to your aversion—nay, if I have judged rightly, to a very bitterly hostile feeling against him?"

"Both," replied Publius. "In this unmanly man, from the very first, I expected to find nothing good, and I now know that, if I erred at all, it was in his favor. To-morrow I will

ask you to spare me an hour when I can communicate to your majesty something concerning him, but which is too repulsive and sad to be suitable for telling in an evening devoted to enjoyment. You need not be inquisitive, for they are matters that belong to the past, and which concern neither you nor me.”

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The high-steward and the cup-bearer here interrupted this conversation by calling them to table, and the royal pair were soon reclining with their guests at the festal board.

Oriental splendor and Greek elegance were combined in the decorations of the saloon of moderate size, in which Ptolemy Philometor was wont to prefer to hold high-festival with a few chosen friends. Like the great reception-hall and the men's hall—with its twenty doors and lofty porphyry columns—in which the king's guests assembled, it was lighted from above, since it was only at the sides that the walls—which had no windows—and a row of graceful alabaster columns with Corinthian acanthus-capitals supported a narrow roof; the centre of the hall was quite uncovered. At this hour, when it was blazing with hundreds of lights, the large opening, which by day admitted the bright sunshine, was closed over by a gold net-work, decorated with stars and a crescent moon of rock-crystal, and the meshes were close enough to exclude the bats and moths which at night always fly to the light. But the illumination of the king's banqueting-hall made it almost as light as day, consisting of numerous lamps with many branches held up by lovely little figures of children in bronze and marble. Every joint was plainly visible in the mosaic of the pavement, which represented the reception of Heracles into Olympus, the feast of the gods, and the astonishment of the amazed hero at the splendor of the celestial banquet; and hundreds of torches were reflected in the walls of polished yellow marble, brought from Hippo Regius; these were inlaid by skilled artists with costly stones, such as lapis lazuli and malachite, crystals, blood-stone, jasper, agates and chalcedony, to represent fruit-pieces and magnificent groups of game or of musical instruments; while the pilasters were decorated with masks of the tragic and comic Muses, torches, thyrsi wreathed with ivy and vine, and pan-pipes. These were wrought in silver and gold, and set with costly marbles, and they stood out from the marble background like metal work on a leather shield, or the rich ornamentation on a sword-sheath. The figures of a Dionysiac procession, forming the frieze, looked down upon the feasters—a fine relievo that had been designed and modelled for Ptolemy Soter by the sculptor Bryaxis, and then executed in ivory and gold.

Everything that met the eye in this hall was splendid, costly, and above all of a genial aspect, even before Cleopatra had come to the throne; and she—here as in her own apartments—had added the busts of the greatest Greek philosophers and poets, from Thales of Miletus down to Strato, who raised chance to fill the throne of God, and from Hesiod to Callimachus; she too had placed the tragic mask side by side with the comic, for at her table—she was wont to say—she desired to see no one who could not enjoy grave and wise discourse more than eating, drinking, and laughter.

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Instead of assisting at the banquet, as other ladies used, seated on a chair or at the foot of her husband's couch, she reclined on a couch of her own, behind which stood busts of Sappho the poetess, and Aspasia the friend of Pericles.

Though she made no pretensions to be regarded as a philosopher nor even as a poetess, she asserted her right to be considered a finished connoisseur in the arts of poetry and music; and if she preferred reclining to sitting how should she have done otherwise, since she was fully aware how well it became her to extend herself in a picturesque attitude on her cushions, and to support her head on her arm as it rested on the back of her couch; for that arm, though not strictly speaking beautiful, always displayed the finest specimens of Alexandrian workmanship in gem-cutting and goldsmiths' work.

But, in fact, she selected a reclining posture particularly for the sake of showing her feet; not a woman in Egypt or Greece had a smaller or more finely formed foot than she. For this reason her sandals were so made that when she stood or walked they protected only the soles of her feet, and her slender white toes with the roseate nails and their polished white half-moons were left uncovered.

At the banquet she put off her shoes altogether, as the men did; hiding her feet at first however, and not displaying them till she thought the marks left on her tender skin by the straps of the sandals had completely disappeared.

Eulaeus was the greatest admirer of these feet; not, as he averred, on account of their beauty, but because the play of the queen's toes showed him exactly what was passing in her mind, when he was quite unable to detect what was agitating her soul in the expression of her mouth and eyes, well practised in the arts of dissimulation.

Nine couches, arranged three and three in a horseshoe, invited the guests to repose, with their arms of ebony and cushions of dull olive-green brocade, on which a delicate pattern of gold and silver seemed just to have been breathed.

The queen, shrugging her shoulders, and, as it would seem, by no means agreeably surprised at something, whispered to the chamberlain, who then indicated to each guest the place he was to occupy. To the right of the central group reclined the queen, and her husband took his place to the left; the couch between the royal pair, destined for their brother Euergetes, remained unoccupied.

On one of the three couches which formed the right-hand angle with those of the royal family, Publius found a place next to Cleopatra; opposite to him, and next the king, was Lysias the Corinthian. Two places next to him remained vacant, while on the side by the Roman reclined the brave and prudent Hierax, the friend of Ptolemy Euergetes and his most faithful follower.

While the servants strewed the couches with rose leaves, sprinkled perfumed waters, and placed by the couch of each guest a small table-made of silver and of a slab of fine, reddish-brown porphyry, veined with white-the king addressed a pleasant greeting to each guest, apologizing for the smallness of the number.

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“Eulaeus,” he said, “has been forced to leave us on business, and our royal brother is still sitting over his books with Aristarchus, who came with him from Alexandria; but he promised certainly to come.”

“The fewer we are,” replied Lysias, bowing low, “the more honorable is the distinction of belonging to so limited a number of your majesty’s most select associates.”

“I certainly think we have chosen the best from among the good,” said the queen. “But even the small number of friends I had invited must have seemed too large to my brother Euergetes, for he—who is accustomed to command in other folks’ houses as he does in his own—forbid the chamberlain to invite our learned friends—among whom Agatharchides, my brothers’ and my own most worthy tutor, is known to you—as well as our Jewish friends who were present yesterday at our table, and whom I had set down on my list. I am very well satisfied however, for I like the number of the Muses; and perhaps he desired to do you, Publius, particular honor, since we are assembled here in the Roman fashion. It is in your honor, and not in his, that we have no music this evening; you said that you did not particularly like it at a banquet. Euergetes himself plays the harp admirably. However, it is well that he is late in coming as usual, for the day after tomorrow is his birthday, and he is to spend it here with us and not in Alexandria; the priestly delegates assembled in the Bruchion are to come from thence to Memphis to wish him joy, and we must endeavor to get up some brilliant festival. You have no love for Eulaeus, Publius, but he is extremely skilled in such matters, and I hope he will presently return to give us his advice.”

“For the morning we will have a grand procession,” cried the king. “Euergetes delights in a splendid spectacle, and I should be glad to show him how much pleasure his visit has given us.”

The king’s fine features wore a most winning expression as he spoke these words with heart-felt warmth, but his consort said thoughtfully: “Aye! if only we were in Alexandria—but here, among all the Egyptian people—”

CHAPTER IX.

A loud laugh re-echoing from the marble walls of the state-room interrupted the queen’s speech; at first she started, but then smiled with pleasure as she recognized her brother Euergetes, who, pushing aside the chamberlains, approached the company with an elderly Greek, who walked by his side.

“By all the dwellers on Olympus! By the whole rabble of gods and beasts that live in the temples by the Nile!” cried the new-comer, again laughing so heartily that not only his fat cheeks but his whole immensely stout young frame swayed and shook. “By your pretty little feet, Cleopatra, which could so easily be hidden, and yet are always to be seen—

by all your gentle virtues, Philometor, I believe you are trying to outdo the great
Philadelphus

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or our Syrian uncle Antiochus, and to get up a most unique procession; and in my honor! Just so! I myself will take a part in the wonderful affair, and my sturdy person shall represent Eros with his quiver and bow. Some Ethiopian dame must play the part of my mother Aphrodite; she will look the part to perfection, rising from the white sea-foam with her black skin. And what do you think of a Pallas with short woolly hair; of the Charities with broad, flat Ethiopian feet; and an Egyptian, with his shaven head mirroring the sun, as Phoebus Apollo?"

With these words the young giant of twenty years threw himself on the vacant couch between his brother and sister, and, after bowing, not without dignity, to the Roman, whom his brother named to him, he called one of the young Macedonians of noble birth who served at the feast as cup-bearers, had his cup filled once and again and yet a third time, drinking it off quickly and without setting it down; then he said in a loud tone, while he pushed his hands through his tossed, light brown hair, till it stood straight up in the air from his broad temples and high brow:

"I must make up for what you have had before I came.—Another cup-full Diocleides."

"Wild boy!" said Cleopatra, holding up her finger at him half in jest and half in grave warning. "How strange you look!"

"Like Silenus without the goat's hoofs," answered Euergetes. "Hand me a mirror here, Diocleides; follow the eyes of her majesty the queen, and you will be sure to find one. There is the thing! And in fact the picture it shows me does not displease me. I see there a head on which besides the two crowns of Egypt a third might well find room, and in which there is so much brains that they might suffice to fill the skulls of four kings to the brim. I see two vulture's eyes which are always keen of sight even when their owner is drunk, and that are in danger of no peril save from the flesh of these jolly cheeks, which, if they continue to increase so fast, must presently exclude the light, as the growth of the wood encloses a piece of money stuck into a rift in a tree—or as a shutter, when it is pushed to, closes up a window. With these hands and arms the fellow I see in the mirror there could, at need, choke a hippopotamus; the chain that is to deck this neck must be twice as long as that worn by a well-fed Egyptian priest. In this mirror I see a man, who is moulded out of a sturdy clay, baked out of more unctuous and solid stuff than other folks; and if the fine creature there on the bright surface wears a transparent robe, what have you to say against it, Cleopatra? The Ptolemaic princes must protect the import trade of Alexandria, that fact was patent even to the great son of Lagos; and what would become of our commerce with Cos if I did not purchase the finest bombyx stuffs, since those who sell it make no profits out of you, the queen—and you cover yourself, like a vestal virgin, in garments of tapestry. Give me a wreath for my head—aye and another to that, and new wine in the cup! To the glory of

Rome and to your health, Publius Cornelius Scipio, and to our last critical conjecture, my Aristarchus— to subtle thinking and deep drinking!"

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"To deep thinking and subtle drinking!" retorted the person thus addressed, while he raised the cup, looked into the wine with his twinkling eyes and lifted it slowly to his nose—a long, well-formed and slightly aquiline nose—and to his thin lips.

"Oh! Aristarchus," exclaimed Euergetes, and he frowned. "You please me better when you clear up the meaning of your poets and historians than when you criticise the drinking-maxims of a king. Subtle drinking is mere sipping, and sipping I leave to the bitterns and other birds that live content among the reeds. Do you understand me? Among reeds, I say--whether cut for writing, or no."

"By subtle drinking," replied the great critic with perfect indifference, as he pushed the thin, gray hair from his high brow with his slender hand. "By subtle drinking I mean the drinking of choice wine, and did you ever taste anything more delicate than this juice of the vines of Anthylla that your illustrious brother has set before us? Your paradoxical axiom commends you at once as a powerful thinker and as the benevolent giver of the best of drinks."

"Happily turned," exclaimed Cleopatra, clapping her hands, "you here see, Publius, a proof of the promptness of an Alexandrian tongue."

"Yes!" said Euergetes, "if men could go forth to battle with words instead of spears the masters of the Museum in Alexander's city, with Aristarchus at their head, they might rout the united armies of Rome and Carthage in a couple of hours."

"But we are not now in the battle-field but at a peaceful meal," said the king, with suave amiability. "You did in fact overhear our secret Euergetes, and mocked at my faithful Egyptians, in whose place I would gladly set fair Greeks if only Alexandria still belonged to me instead of to you.—However, a splendid procession shall not be wanting at your birthday festival."

"And do you really still take pleasure in these eternal goose-step performances?" asked Euergetes, stretching himself out on his couch, and folding his hands to support the back of his head. "Sooner could I accustom myself to the delicate drinking of Aristarchus than sit for hours watching these empty pageants. On two conditions only can I declare myself ready and willing to remain quiet, and patiently to dawdle through almost half a day, like an ape in a cage: First, if it will give our Roman friend Publius Cornelius Scipio any pleasure to witness such a performance—though, since our uncle Antiochus pillaged our wealth, and since we brothers shared Egypt between us, our processions are not to be even remotely compared to the triumphs of Roman victors—or, secondly, if I am allowed to take an active part in the affair."

"On my account, Sire," replied Publius, "no procession need be arranged, particularly not such a one as I should here be obliged to look on at."

“Well! I still enjoy such things,” said Cleopatra’s husband. “Well-arranged groups, and the populace pleased and excited are a sight I am never tired of.”

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"As for me," cried Cleopatra, "I often turn hot and cold, and the tears even spring to my eyes, when the shouting is loudest. A great mass of men all uniting in a common emotion always has a great effect. A drop, a grain of sand, a block of stone are insignificant objects, but millions of them together, forming the sea, the desert or the pyramids, constitute a sublime whole. One man alone, shouting for joy, is like a madman escaped from an asylum, but when thousands of men rejoice together it must have a powerful effect on the coldest heart. How is it that you, Publius Scipio, in whom a strong will seems to me to have found a peculiarly happy development, can remain unmoved by a scene in which the great collective will of a people finds its utterance?"

"Is there then any expression of will, think you," said the Roman, "in this popular rejoicing? It is just in such circumstances that each man becomes the involuntary mimic and duplicate of his neighbor; while I love to make my own way, and to be independent of everything but the laws and duties laid upon me by the state to which I belong."

"And I," said Euergetes, "from my childhood have always looked on at processions from the very best places, and so it is that fortune punishes me now with indifference to them and to everything of the kind; while the poor miserable devil who can never catch sight of anything more than the nose or the tip of a hair or the broad back of those who take part in them, always longs for fresh pageants. As you hear, I need have no consideration for Publius Scipio in this, willing as I should be to do so. Now what would you say, Cleopatra, if I myself took a part in my procession—I say mine, since it is to be in my honor; that really would be for once something new and amusing."

"More new and amusing than creditable, I think," replied Cleopatra dryly.

"And yet even that ought to please you," laughed Euergetes. "Since, besides being your brother, I am your rival, and we would sooner see our rivals lower themselves than rise."

"Do not try to justify yourself by such words," interrupted the king evasively, and with a tone of regret in his soft voice. "We love you truly; we are ready to yield you your dominion side by side with ours, and I beg you to avoid such speeches even in jest, so that bygones may be bygones."

"And," added Cleopatra, "not to detract from your dignity as a king and your fame as a sage by any such fool's pranks."

"Madam teacher, do you know then what I had in my mind? I would appear as Alcibiades, followed by a train of flute-playing women, with Aristarchus to play the part of Socrates. I have often been told that he and I resemble each other—in many points, say the more sincere; in every point, say the more polite of my friends."

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At these words Publius measured with his eye the frame of the royal young libertine, enveloped in transparent robes; and recalling to himself, as he gazed, a glorious statue of that favorite of the Athenians, which he had seen in the Ilissus, an ironical smile passed over his lips. It was not unobserved by Euergetes and it offended him, for there was nothing he liked better than to be compared to the nephew of Pericles; but he suppressed his annoyance, for Publius Cornelius Scipio was the nearest relative of the most influential men of Rome, and, though he himself wielded royal power, Rome exercised over him the sovereign will of a divinity.

Cleopatra noticed what was passing in her brother's mind, and in order to interrupt his further speech and to divert his mind to fresh thoughts, she said cheerfully:

"Let us then give up the procession, and think of some other mode of celebrating your birthday. You, Lysias, must be experienced in such matters, for Publius tells me that you were the leader in all the games of Corinth. What can we devise to entertain Euergetes and ourselves?"

The Corinthian looked for a moment into his cup, moving it slowly about on the marble slab of the little table at his side, between an oyster pasty and a dish of fresh asparagus; and then he said, glancing round to win the suffrages of the company:

"At the great procession which took place under Ptolemy Philadelphus—Agatharchides gave me the description of it, written by the eye-witness Kallixenus, to read only yesterday—all kinds of scenes from the lives of the gods were represented before the people. Suppose we were to remain in this magnificent palace, and to represent ourselves the beautiful groups which the great artists of the past have produced in painting or sculpture; but let us choose those only that are least known."

"Splendid," cried Cleopatra in great excitement, who can be more like Heracles than my mighty brother there—the very son of Alcmene, as Lysippus has conceived and represented him? Let us then represent the life of Heracles from grand models, and in every case assign to Euergetes the part of the hero."

"Oh! I will undertake it," said the young king, feeling the mighty muscles of his breast and arms, "and you may give me great credit for assuming the part, for the demi-god who strangled the snakes was lacking in the most important point, and it was not without due consideration that Lysippus represented him with a small head on his mighty body; but I shall not have to say anything."

"If I play Omphale will you sit at my feet?" asked Cleopatra.

"Who would not be willing to sit at those feet?" answered Euergetes. "Let us at once make further choice among the abundance of subjects offered to us, but, like Lysias, I would warn you against those that are too well-known."

“There are no doubt things commonplace to the eye as well as to the ear,” said Cleopatra. “But what is recognized as good is commonly regarded as most beautiful.”

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“Permit me,” said Lysias, “to direct your attention to a piece of sculpture in marble of the noblest workmanship, which is both old and beautiful, and yet which may be known to few among you. It exists on the cistern of my father’s house at Corinth, and was executed many centuries since by a great artist of the Peloponnesus. Publius was delighted with the work, and it is in fact beautiful beyond description. It is an exquisite representation of the marriage of Heracles and Hebe—of the hero, raised to divinity, with sempiternal youth. Will Your Majesty allow yourself to be led by Pallas Athene and your mother Alcmena to your nuptials with Hebe?”

“Why not?” said Euergetes. “Only the Hebe must be beautiful. But one thing must be considered; how are we to get the cistern from your father’s house at Corinth to this place by to-morrow or next day? Such a group cannot be posed from memory without the original to guide us; and though the story runs that the statue of Serapis flew from Sinope to Alexandria, and though there are magicians still at Memphis—”

“We shall not need them,” interrupted Publius, “while I was staying as a guest in the house of my friend’s parents—which is altogether more magnificent than the old castle of King Gyges at Sardis—I had some gems engraved after this lovely group, as a wedding-present for my sister. They are extremely successful, and I have them with me in my tent.”

“Have you a sister?” asked the queen, leaning over towards the Roman. “You must tell me all about her.”

“She is a girl like all other girls,” replied Publius, looking down at the ground, for it was most repugnant to his feelings to speak of his sister in the presence of Euergetes.

“And you are unjust like all other brothers,” said Cleopatra smiling, “and I must hear more about her, for”—and she whispered the words and looked meaningly at Publius—“all that concerns you must interest me.”

During this dialogue the royal brothers had addressed themselves to Lysias with questions as to the marriage of Heracles and Hebe, and all the company were attentive to the Greek as he went on: “This fine work does not represent the marriage properly speaking, but the moment when the bridegroom is led to the bride. The hero, with his club on his shoulder, and wearing the lion’s skin, is led by Pallas Athene, who, in performing this office of peace, has dropped her spear and carries her helmet in her hand; they are accompanied by his mother Alcmena, and are advancing towards the bride’s train. This is headed by no less a personage than Apollo himself, singing the praises of Hymenaeus to a lute. With him walks his sister Artemis and behind them the mother of Hebe, accompanied by Hermes, the messenger of the gods, as the envoy of Zeus. Then follows the principal group, which is one of the most lovely works of Greek art that I am acquainted with. Hebe comes forward to meet her bridegroom, gently led on by Aphrodite, the queen of love. Peitho, the goddess of persuasion, lays her hand

on the bride's arm, imperceptibly urging her forward and turning away her face; for what she had to say has been said, and she smiles to herself, for Hebe has not turned a deaf ear to her voice, and he who has once listened to Peitho must do what she desires."

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“And Hebe?” asked Cleopatra.

“She casts down her eyes, but lifts up the arm on which the hand of Peitho rests with a warning movement of her fingers, in which she holds an unopened rose, as though she would say; ‘Ah! let me be—I tremble at the man’—or ask: ‘Would it not be better that I should remain as I am and not yield to your temptations and to Aphrodite’s power?’ Oh! Hebe is exquisite, and you, O Queen! must represent her!”

“I!” exclaimed Cleopatra. “But you said her eyes were cast down.”

“That is from modesty and timidity, and her gait must also be bashful and maidenly. Her long robe falls to her feet in simple folds, while Peitho holds hers up saucily, between her forefinger and thumb, as if stealthily dancing with triumph over her recent victory. Indeed the figure of Peitho would become you admirably.”

“I think I will represent Peitho,” said the queen interrupting the Corinthian. “Hebe is but a bud, an unopened blossom, while I am a mother, and I flatter myself I am something of a philosopher—”

“And can with justice assure yourself,” interrupted Aristarchus, “that with every charm of youth you also possess the characters attributed to Peitho, the goddess, who can work her spells not only on the heart but on the intellect also. The maiden bud is as sweet to look upon as the rose, but he who loves not merely color but perfume too—I mean refreshment, emotion and edification of spirit—must turn to the full-blown flower; as the rose—growers of lake Moeris twine only the buds of their favorite flower into wreaths and bunches, but cannot use them for extracting the oil of imperishable fragrance; for that they need the expanded blossom. Represent Peitho, my Queen! the goddess herself might be proud of such a representative.”

“And if she were so indeed,” cried Cleopatra, “how happy am I to hear such words from the lips of Aristarchus. It is settled—I play Peitho. My companion Zoe may take the part of Artemis, and her grave sister that of Pallas Athene. For the mother’s part we have several matrons to choose from; the eldest daughter of Epitropes appears to me fitted for the part of Aphrodite; she is wonderfully lovely.”

“Is she stupid too?” asked Euergetes. “That is also an attribute of the ever-smiling Cypria.”

“Enough so, I think, for our purpose,” laughed Cleopatra. “But where are we to find such a Hebe as you have described, Lysias? The daughter of Alimes the Arabarch is a charming child.”

“But she is brown, as brown as this excellent wine, and too thoroughly Egyptian,” said the high-steward, who superintended the young Macedonian cup-bearers; he bowed

deeply as he spoke, and modestly drew the queen's attention to his own daughter, a maiden of sixteen. But Cleopatra objected, that she was much taller than herself, and that she would have to stand by the Hebe, and lay her hand on her arm.

Other maidens were rejected on various grounds, and Euergetes had already proposed to send off a carrier-pigeon to Alexandria to command that some fair Greek girl should be sent by an express quadriga to Memphis—where the dark Egyptian gods and men flourish, and are more numerous than the fair race of Greeks—when Lysias exclaimed:

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"I saw to-day the very girl we want, a Hebe that might have stepped out from the marble group at my father's, and have been endued with life and warmth and color by some god. Young, modest, rose and white, and just about as tall as Your Majesty. If you will allow me, I will not tell you who she is, till after I have been to our tent to fetch the gems with the copies of the marble."

"You will find them in an ivory casket at the bottom of my clothes-chest," said Publius; "here is the key."

"Make haste," cried the queen, "for we are all curious to hear where in Memphis you discovered your modest, rose and white Hebe."

CHAPTER X.

An hour had slipped by with the royal party, since Lysias had quitted the company; the wine-cups had been filled and emptied many times; Eulaeus had rejoined the feasters, and the conversation had taken quite another turn, since the whole of the company were not now equally interested in the same subject; on the contrary, the two kings were discussing with Aristarchus the manuscripts of former poets and of the works of the sages, scattered throughout Greece, and the ways and means of obtaining them or of acquiring exact transcripts of them for the library of the Museum. Hierax was telling Eulaeus of the last Dionysiac festival, and of the representation of the newest comedy in Alexandria, and Eulaeus assumed the appearance—not unsuccessfully—of listening with both ears, interrupting him several times with intelligent questions, bearing directly on what he had said, while in fact his attention was exclusively directed to the queen, who had taken entire possession of the Roman Publius, telling him in a low tone of her life—which was consuming her strength—of her unsatisfied affections, and her enthusiasm for Rome and for manly vigor. As she spoke her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled, for the more exclusively she kept the conversation in her own hands the better she thought she was being entertained; and Publius, who was nothing less than talkative, seldom interrupted her, only insinuating a flattering word now and then when it seemed appropriate; for he remembered the advice given him by the anchorite, and was desirous of winning the good graces of Cleopatra.

In spite of his sharp ears Eulaeus could understand but little of their whispered discourse, for King Euergetes' powerful voice sounded loud above the rest of the conversation; but Eulaeus was able swiftly to supply the links between the disjointed sentences, and to grasp the general sense, at any rate, of what she was saying. The queen avoided wine, but she had the power of intoxicating herself, so to speak, with her own words, and now just as her brothers and Aristarchus were at the height of their excited and eager question and answer—she raised her cup, touched it with her lips and handed it to Publius, while at the same time she took hold of his.

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The young Roman knew well enough all the significance of this hasty action; it was thus that in his own country a woman when in love was wont to exchange her cup with her lover, or an apple already bitten by her white teeth.

Publius was seized with a cold shudder—like a wanderer who carelessly pursues his way gazing up at the moon and stars, and suddenly perceives an abyss yawning; at his feet. Recollections of his mother and of her warnings against the seductive wiles of the Egyptian women, and particularly of this very woman, flashed through his mind like lightning; she was looking at him—not royally by any means, but with anxious and languishing gaze, and he would gladly have kept his eyes fixed on the ground, and have left the cup untouched; but her eye held his fast as though fettering it with ties and bonds; and to put aside the cup seemed to the most fearless son of an unconquered nation a deed too bold to be attempted. Besides, how could he possibly repay this highest favor with an affront that no woman could ever forgive—least of all a Cleopatra?

Aye, many a life's happiness is tossed away and many a sin committed, because the favor of women is a grace that does honor to every man, and that flatters him even when it is bestowed by the unloved and unworthy. For flattery is a key to the heart, and when the heart stands half open the voice of the tempter is never wanting to whisper: "You will hurt her feelings if you refuse."

These were the deliberations which passed rapidly and confusedly through the young Roman's agitated brain, as he took the queen's cup and set his lips to the same spot that hers had touched. Then, while he emptied the cup in long draughts, he felt suddenly seized by a deep aversion to the over-talkative, overdressed and capricious woman before him, who thus forced upon him favors for which he had not sued; and suddenly there rose before his soul the image, almost tangibly distinct, of the humble water-bearer; he saw Klea standing before him and looking far more queenly as, proud and repellent, she avoided his gaze, than the sovereign by his side could ever have done, though crowned with a diadem.

Cleopatra rejoiced to mark his long slow draught, for she thought the Roman meant to imply by it that he could not cease to esteem himself happy in the favor she had shown him. She did not take her eyes off him, and observed with pleasure that his color changed to red and white; nor did she notice that Eulaeus was watching, with a twinkle in his eyes, all that was going on between her and Publius. At last the Roman set down the cup, and tried with some confusion to reply to her question as to how he had liked the flavor of the wine.

"Very fine—excellent—" at last he stammered out, but he was no longer looking at Cleopatra but at Euergetes, who just then cried out loudly:

“I have thought over that passage for hours, I have given you all my reasons and have let you speak, Aristarchus, but I maintain my opinion, and whoever denies it does Homer an injustice; in this place ‘siu’ must be read instead of ‘iu’.”

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Euergetes spoke so vehemently that his voice outshouted all the other guests; Publius however snatched at his words, to escape the necessity for feigning sentiments he could not feel; so he said, addressing himself half to the speaker and half to Cleopatra:

“Of what use can it be to decide whether it is one or the other—‘iu’ or ‘siu’. I find many things justifiable in other men that are foreign to my own nature, but I never could understand how an energetic and vigorous man, a prudent sovereign and stalwart drinker—like you, Euergetes—can sit for hours over flimsy papyrus-rolls, and rack his brains to decide whether this or that in Homer should be read in one way or another.”

“You exercise yourself in other things,” replied Euergetes. “I consider that part of me which lies within this golden fillet as the best that I have, and I exercise my wits on the minutest and subtlest questions just as I would try the strength of my arms against the sturdiest athletes. I flung five into the sand the last time I did so, and they quake now when they see me enter the gymnasium of Timagetes. There would be no strength in the world if there were no obstacles, and no man would know that he was strong if he could meet with no resistance to overcome. I for my part seek such exercises as suit my idiosyncrasy, and if they are not to your taste I cannot help it. If you were to set these excellently dressed crayfish before a fine horse he would disdain them, and could not understand how foolish men could find anything palatable that tasted so salt. Salt, in fact, is not suited to all creatures! Men born far from the sea do not relish oysters, while I, being a gourmand, even prefer to open them myself so that they may be perfectly fresh, and mix their liquor with my wine.”

“I do not like any very salt dish, and am glad to leave the opening of all marine produce to my servants,” answered Publius. “Thereby I save both time and unnecessary trouble.”

“Oh! I know!” cried Euergetes. “You keep Greek slaves, who must even read and write for you. Pray is there a market where I may purchase men, who, after a night of carousing, will bear our headache for us? By the shores of the Tiber you love many things better than learning.”

“And thereby,” added Aristarchus, “deprive yourselves of the noblest and subtlest of pleasures, for the purest enjoyment is ever that which we earn at the cost of some pains and effort.”

“But all that you earn by this kind of labor,” returned Publius, “is petty and unimportant. It puts me in mind of a man who removes a block of stone in the sweat of his brow only to lay it on a sparrow’s feather in order that it may not be carried away by the wind.”

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“And what is great—and what is small?” asked Aristarchus. “Very opposite opinions on that subject may be equally true, since it depends solely on us and our feelings how things appear to us—whether cold or warm; lovely or repulsive—and when Protagoras says that ‘man is the measure of all things,’ that is the most acceptable of all the maxims of the Sophists; moreover the smallest matter—as you will fully appreciate —acquires an importance all the greater in proportion as the thing is perfect, of which it forms a part. If you slit the ear of a cart-horse, what does it signify? but suppose the same thing were to happen to a thoroughbred horse, a charger that you ride on to battle!

“A wrinkle or a tooth more or less in the face of a peasant woman matters little, or not at all, but it is quite different in a celebrated beauty. If you scrawl all over the face with which the coarse finger of the potter has decorated a water-jar, the injury to the wretched pot is but small, but if you scratch, only with a needle’s point, that gem with the portraits of Ptolemy and Arsinoe, which clasps Cleopatra’s robe round her fair throat, the richest queen will grieve as though she had suffered some serious loss.

“Now, what is there more perfect or more worthy to be treasured than the noblest works of great thinkers and great poets.

“To preserve them from injury, to purge them from the errors which, in the course of time, may have spotted their immaculate purity, this is our task; and if we do indeed raise blocks of stone it is not to weight a sparrow’s feather that it may not be blown away, but to seal the door which guards a precious possession, and to preserve a gem from injury.

“The chatter of girls at a fountain is worth nothing but to be wafted away on the winds, and to be remembered by none; but can a son ever deem that one single word is unimportant which his dying father has bequeathed to him as a clue to his path in life? If you yourself were such a son, and your ear had not perfectly caught the parting counsels of the dying-how many talents of silver would you not pay to be able to supply the missing words? And what are immortal works of the great poets and thinkers but such sacred words of warning addressed, not to a single individual, but to all that are not barbarians, however many they maybe. They will elevate, instruct, and delight our descendants a thousand years hence as they do us at this day, and they, if they are not degenerate and ungrateful will be thankful to those who have devoted the best powers of their life to completing and restoring all that our mighty forefathers have said, as it must have originally stood before it was mutilated, and spoiled by carelessness and folly.

“He who, like King Euergetes, puts one syllable in Homer right, in place of a wrong one, in my opinion has done a service to succeeding generations—aye and a great service.”

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“What you say,” replied Publius, “sounds convincing, but it is still not perfectly clear to me; no doubt because I learned at an early age to prefer deeds to words. I find it more easy to reconcile my mind to your painful and minute labors when I reflect that to you is entrusted the restoration of the literal tenor of laws, whose full meaning might be lost by a verbal error; or that wrong information might be laid before me as to one single transaction in the life of a friend or of a blood-relation, and it might lie with me to clear him of mistakes and misinterpretation.”

“And what are the works of the great singers of the deeds of the heroes-of the writers of past history, but the lives of our fathers related either with veracious exactness or with poetic adornments?” cried Aristarchus. “It is to these that my king and companion in study devotes himself with particular zeal.”

“When he is neither drinking, nor raving, nor governing, nor wasting his time in sacrificing and processions,” interpolated Euergetes. “If I had not been a king perhaps I might have been an Aristarchus; as it is I am but half a king—since half of my kingdom belongs to you, Philometor—and but half a student; for when am I to find perfect quiet for thinking and writing? Everything, everything in me is by halves, for I, if the scale were to turn in my favor”—and here he struck his chest and his forehead, “I should be twice the man I am. I am my whole real self nowhere but at high festivals, when the wine sparkles in the cup, and bright eyes flash from beneath the brows of the flute-players of Alexandria or Cyrene— sometimes too perhaps in council when the risk is great, or when there is something vast and portentous to be done from which my brother and you others, all of you, would shrink—nay perhaps even the Roman. Aye! so it is—and you will learn to know it.”

Euergetes had roared rather than spoken the last words; his cheeks were flushed, his eyes rolled, while he took from his head both the garland of flowers and the golden fillet, and once more pushed his fingers through his hair.

His sister covered her ears with her hands, and said: “You positively hurt me! As no one is contradicting you, and you, as a man of culture, are not accustomed to add force to your assertions, like the Scythians, by speaking in a loud tone, you would do well to save your metallic voice for the further speech with which it is to be hoped you will presently favor us. We have had to bow more than once already to the strength of which you boast—but now, at a merry feast, we will not think of that, but rather continue the conversation which entertained us, and which had begun so well. This eager defence of the interests which most delight the best of the Hellenes in Alexandria may perhaps result in infusing into the mind of our friend Publius Scipio—and through him into that of many young Romans—a proper esteem for a line of intellectual effort which he could not have condemned had he not failed to understand it perfectly.

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“Very often some striking poetical turn given to a subject makes it, all at once, clear to our comprehension, even when long and learned disquisitions have failed; and I am acquainted with such an one, written by an anonymous author, and which may please you—and you too, Aristarchus. It epitomizes very happily the subject of our discussion. The lines run as follows:

“Behold, the puny Child of Man
Sits by Time’s boundless sea,
And gathers in his feeble hand
Drops of Eternity.

“He overhears some broken words
Of whispered mystery
He writes them in a tiny book
And calls it ‘History!’

“We owe these verses to an accomplished friend; another has amplified the idea by adding the two that follow:

“If indeed the puny Child of Man
Had not gathered drops from that wide sea,
Those small deeds that fill his little span
Had been lost in dumb Eternity.

“Feeble is his hand, and yet it dare
Seize some drops of that perennial stream;
As they fall they catch a transient gleam—
Lo! Eternity is mirrored there!

“What are we all but puny children? And those of us who gather up the drops surely deserve our esteem no less than those who spend their lives on the shore of that great ocean in mere play and strife—”

“And love,” threw in Eulaeus in a low voice, as he glanced towards Publius.

“Your poet’s verses are pretty and appropriate,” Aristarchus now said, “and I am very happy to find myself compared to the children who catch the falling drops. There was a time—which came to an end, alas! with the great Aristotle—when there were men among the Greeks, who fed the ocean of which you speak with new tributaries; for the gods had bestowed on them the power of opening new sources, like the magician Moses, of whom Onias, the Jew, was lately telling us, and whose history I have read in the sacred books of the Hebrews. He, it is true—Moses I mean—only struck water from the rock for the use of the body, while to our philosophers and poets we owe inexhaustible springs to refresh the mind and soul. The time is now past which gave

birth to such divine and creative spirits; as your majesties' forefathers recognized full well when they founded the Museum of Alexandria and the Library, of which I am one of the guardians, and which I may boast of having completed with your gracious assistance. When Ptolemy Soter first created the Museum in Alexandria the works of the greatest period could receive no additions in the form of modern writings of the highest class; but he set us—children of man, gathering the drops—the task of collecting and of sifting them, of eliminating errors in them—and I think we have proved ourselves equal to this task.

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"It has been said that it is no less difficult to keep a fortune than to deserve it; and so perhaps we, who are merely 'keepers' may nevertheless make some credit—all the more because we have been able to arrange the wealth we found under hand, to work it profitably, to apply it well, to elucidate it, and to make it available. When anything new is created by one of our circle we always link it on to the old; and in many departments we have indeed even succeeded in soaring above the ancients, particularly in that of the experimental sciences. The sublime intelligence of our forefathers commanded a broad horizon—our narrower vision sees more clearly the objects that lie close to us. We have discovered the sure path for all intellectual labor, the true scientific method; and an observant study of things as they are, succeeds better with us than it did with our predecessors. Hence it follows that in the provinces of the natural sciences, in mathematics, astronomy, mechanics and geography the sages of our college have produced works of unsurpassed merit. Indeed the industry of my associates—"

"Is very great," cried Euergetes. "But they stir up such a dust that all free-thought is choked, and because they value quantity above all things in the results they obtain, they neglect to sift what is great from what is small; and so Publius Scipio and others like him, who shrug their shoulders over the labors of the learned, find cause enough to laugh in their faces. Out of every four of you I should dearly like to set three to some handicraft, and I shall do it too, one of these days—I shall do it, and turn them and all their miserable paraphernalia out of the Museum, and out of my capital. They may take refuge with you, Philometor, you who marvel at everything you cannot do yourself, who are always delighted to possess what I reject, and to make much of those whom I condemn—and Cleopatra I dare say will play the harp, in honor of their entering Memphis."

"I dare say!" answered the queen, laughing bitterly. "Still, it is to be expected that your wrath may fall even on worthy men. Until then I will practise my music, and study the treatise on harmony that you have begun writing. You are giving us proof to-day of how far you have succeeded in attaining unison in your own soul."

"I like you in this mood!" cried Euergetes. "I love you, sister, when you are like this! It ill becomes the eagle's brood to coo like the dove, and you have sharp talons though you hide them never so well under your soft feathers. It is true that I am writing a treatise on harmony, and I am doing it with delight; still it is one of those phenomena which, though accessible to our perception, are imperishable, for no god even could discover it entire and unmixed in the world of realities. Where is harmony to be found in the struggles and rapacious strife of the life of the Cosmos? And our human existence is but the diminished reflection of that process of birth and decease, of evolution and annihilation, which is going on in all that is perceptible to our senses; now gradually and invisibly, now violently and convulsively, but never harmoniously."

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“Harmony is at home only in the ideal world—harmony which is unknown even among the gods harmony, whom I may know, and yet may never comprehend—whom I love, and may never possess—whom I long for, and who flies from me.

“I am as one that thirsteth, and harmony as the remote, unattainable well—I am as one swimming in a wide sea, and she is the land which recedes as I deem myself near to it.

“Who will tell me the name of the country where she rules as queen, undisturbed and untroubled? And which is most in earnest in his pursuit of the fair one: He who lies sleeping in her arms, or he who is consumed by his passion for her?

“I am seeking what you deem that you possess.—Possess—!

“Look round you on the world and on life—look round, as I do, on this hall of which you are so proud! It was built by a Greek; but, because the simple melody of beautiful forms in perfect concord no longer satisfies you, and your taste requires the eastern magnificence in which you were born, because this flatters your vanity and reminds you, each time you gaze upon it, that you are wealthy and powerful—you commanded your architect to set aside simple grandeur, and to build this gaudy monstrosity, which is no more like the banqueting-hall of a Pericles than I or you, Cleopatra, in all our finery, are like the simply clad gods and goddesses of Phidias. I mean not to offend you, Cleopatra, but I must say this; I am writing now on the subject of harmony, and perhaps I shall afterwards treat of justice, truth, virtue; although I know full well that they are pure abstractions which occur neither in nature nor in human life, and which in my dealings I wholly set aside; nevertheless they seem to me worthy of investigation, like any other delusion, if by resolving it we may arrive at conditional truth. It is because one man is afraid of another that these restraints—justice, truth, and what else you will—have received these high-sounding names, have been stamped as characteristics of the gods, and placed under the protection of the immortals; nay, our anxious care has gone so far that it has been taught as a doctrine that it is beautiful and good to cloud our free enjoyment of existence for the sake of these illusions. Think of Antisthenes and his disciples, the dog-like Cynics—think of the fools shut up in the temple of Serapis! Nothing is beautiful but what is free, and he only is not free who is forever striving to check his inclinations—for the most part in vain—in order to live, as feeble cowards deem virtuously, justly and truthfully.

“One animal eats another when he has succeeded in capturing it, either in open fight or by cunning and treachery; the climbing plant strangles the tree, the desert-sand chokes the meadows, stars fall from heaven, and earthquakes swallow up cities. You believe in the gods—and so do I after my own fashion—and if they have so ordered the course of this life in every class of existence that the strong triumph over the weak, why should not I use my strength, why let it be fettered by those much-belauded soporifics which our prudent ancestors concocted to cool the hot blood of such men as I, and to paralyze our sinewy fists.

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“Euergetes—the well-doer—I was named at my birth; but if men choose to call me Kakergetes—the evil-doer—I do not mind it, since what you call good I call narrow and petty, and what you call evil is the free and unbridled exercise of power. I would be anything rather than lazy and idle, for everything in nature is active and busy; and as, with Aristippus, I hold pleasure to be the highest good, I would fain earn the name of having enjoyed more than all other men; in the first place in my mind, but no less in my body which I admire and cherish.”

During this speech many signs of disagreement had found expression, and Publius, who for the first time in his life heard such vicious sentiments spoken, followed the words of the headstrong youth with consternation and surprise. He felt himself no match for this overbearing spirit, trained too in all the arts of argument and eloquence; but he could not leave all he had heard uncontroverted, and so, as Euergetes paused in order to empty his refilled cup, he began:

“If we were all to act on your principles, in a few centuries, it seems to me, there would be no one left to subscribe to them; for the earth would be depopulated; and the manuscripts, in which you are so careful to substitute ‘siu’ for ‘iu’, would be used by strong-handed mothers, if any were left, to boil the pot for their children—in this country of yours where there is no wood to burn. Just now you were boasting of your resemblance to Alcibiades, but that very gift which distinguished him, and made him dear to the Athenians—I mean his beauty—is hardly possible in connection with your doctrines, which would turn men into ravening beasts. He who would be beautiful must before all things be able to control himself and to be moderate—as I learnt in Rome before I ever saw Athens, and have remembered well. A Titan may perhaps have thought and talked as you do, but an Alcibiades—hardly!”

At these words the blood flew to Euergetes’ face; but he suppressed the keen and insulting reply that rose to his lips, and this little victory over his wrathful impulse was made the more easy as Lysias, at this moment, rejoined the feasters; he excused himself for his long absence, and then laid before Cleopatra and her husband the gems belonging to Publius.

They were warmly admired; even Euergetes was not grudging of his praise, and each of the company admitted that he had rarely seen anything more beautiful and graceful than the bashful Hebe with downcast eyes, and the goddess of persuasion with her hand resting on the bride’s arm.

“Yes, I will take the part of Peitho,” said Cleopatra with decision.

“And I that of Heracles,” cried Euergetes.

“But who is the fair one,” asked King Philometor of Lysias, whom you have in your eye, as fulfilling this incomparably lovely conception of Hebe? While you were away I

recalled to memory the aspect of every woman and girl who frequents our festivals, but only to reject them all, one after the other.”



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"The fair girl whom I mean," replied Lysias, "has never entered this or any other palace; indeed I am almost afraid of being too bold in suggesting to our illustrious queen so humble a child as fit to stand beside her, though only in sport."

"I shall even have to touch her arm with my hand!" said the queen anxiously, and she drew up her fingers as if she had to touch some unclean thing. If you mean a flower-seller or a flute-player or something of that kind—"

"How could I dare to suggest anything so improper?" Lysias hastily interposed. "The girl of whom I speak may be sixteen years old; she is innocence itself incarnate, and she looks like a bud ready to open perhaps in the morning dew that may succeed this very night, but which as yet is still enfolded in its cup. She is of Greek race, about as tall as you are, Cleopatra; she has wonderful gazelle-like eyes, her little head is covered by a mass of abundant brown hair, when she smiles she has delicious dimples in her cheeks—and she will be sure to smile when such a Peitho speaks to her!"

"You are rousing our curiosity," cried Philometor. "In what garden, pray, does this blossom grow?"

"And how is it," added Cleopatra, "that my husband has not discovered it long since, and transplanted it to our palace."

"Probably," answered Lysias, "because he who possesses Cleopatra, the fairest rose of Egypt, regards the violets by the roadside as too insignificant to be worth glancing at. Besides, the hedge that fences round my bud grows in a gloomy spot; it is difficult of access and suspiciously watched. To be brief: our Hebe is a water-bearer in the temple of Serapis, and her name is Irene."

CHAPTER XI.

Lysias was one of those men from whose lips nothing ever sounds as if it were meant seriously. His statement that he regarded a serving girl from the temple of Serapis as fit to personate Hebe, was spoken as naturally and simply as if he were telling a tale for children; but his words produced an effect on his hearers like the sound of waters rushing into a leaky ship.

Publius had turned perfectly white, and it was not till his friend had uttered the name of Irene that he in some degree recovered his composure; Philometor had struck his cup on the table, and called out in much excitement:

"A water-bearer of Serapis to play Hebe in a gay festal performance! Do you conceive it possible, Cleopatra?"



“Impossible—it is absolutely out of the question,” replied the queen, decidedly. Euergetes, who also had opened his eyes wide at the Corinthian’s proposition, sat for a long time gazing into his cup in silence; while his brother and sister continued to express their surprise and disapprobation and to speak of the respect and consideration which even kings must pay to the priests and servants of Serapis.

At length, once more lifting his wreath and crown, he raised his curls with both hands, and said, quite calmly and decisively;

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"We must have a Hebe, and must take her where we find her. If you hesitate to allow the girl to be fetched it shall be done by my orders. The priests of Serapis are for the most part Greeks, and the high-priest is a Hellene. He will not trouble himself much about a half-grown-up girl if he can thereby oblige you or me. He knows as well as the rest of us that one hand washes the other! The only question now is—for I would rather avoid all woman's outcries—whether the girl will come willingly or unwillingly if we send for her. What do you think, Lysias?"

"I believe she would sooner get out of prison to-day than to-morrow," replied Lysias. "Irene is a lighthearted creature, and laughs as clearly and merrily as a child at play—and besides that they starve her in her cage."

"Then I will have her fetched to-morrow!" said Euergetes.

"But," interrupted Cleopatra, "Asclepiodorus must obey us and not you; and we, my husband and I—"

"You cannot spoil sport with the priests," laughed Euergetes. "If they were Egyptians, then indeed! They are not to be taken in their nests without getting pecked; but here, as I have said, we have to deal with Greeks. What have you to fear from them? For aught I care you may leave our Hebe where she is, but I was once much pleased with these representations, and to-morrow morning, as soon as I have slept, I shall return to Alexandria, if you do not carry them into effect, and so deprive me, Heracles, of the bride chosen for me by the gods. I have said what I have said, and I am not given to changing my mind. Besides, it is time that we should show ourselves to our friends feasting here in the next room. They are already merry, and it must be getting late."

With these words Euergetes rose from his couch, and beckoned to Hierax and a chamberlain, who arranged the folds of his transparent robe, while Philometor and Cleopatra whispered together, shrugging their shoulders and shaking their heads; and Publius, pressing his hand on the Corinthian's wrist, said in his ear: "You will not give them any help if you value our friendship; we will leave as soon as we can do so with propriety."

Euergetes did not like to be kept waiting. He was already going towards the door, when Cleopatra called him back, and said pleasantly, but with gentle reproachfulness:

"You know that we are willing to follow the Egyptian custom of carrying out as far as possible the wishes of a friend and brother for his birthday festival; but for that very reason it is not right in you to try to force us into a proceeding which we refuse with difficulty, and yet cannot carry out without exposing ourselves to the most unpleasant consequences. We beg you to make some other demand on us, and we will certainly grant it if it lies in our power."

The young colossus responded to his sister's appeal with a loud shout of laughter, waved his arm with a flourish of his hand expressive of haughty indifference; and then he exclaimed:

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"The only thing I really had a fancy for out of all your possessions you are not willing to concede, and so I must abide by my word—or I go on my way."

Again Cleopatra and her husband exchanged a few muttered words and rapid glances, Euergetes watching them the while; his legs straddled apart, his huge body bent forward, and his hands resting on his hips. His attitude expressed so much arrogance and puerile, defiant, unruly audacity, that Cleopatra found it difficult to suppress an exclamation of disgust before she spoke.

"We are indeed brethren," she said, "and so, for the sake of the peace which has been restored and preserved with so much difficulty, we give in. The best way will be to request Asclepiodorus—"

But here Euergetes interrupted the queen, clapping his hands loudly and laughing:

"That is right, sister! only find me my Hebe! How you do it is your affair, and is all the same to me. To-morrow evening we will have a rehearsal, and the day after we will give a representation of which our grandchildren shall repeat the fame. Nor shall a brilliant audience be lacking, for my complimentary visitors with their priestly splendor and array of arms will, it is to be hoped, arrive punctually. Come, my lords, we will go, and see what there is good to drink or to listen to at the table in the next room."

The doors were opened; music, loud talking, the jingle of cups, and the noise of laughter sounded through them into the room where the princes had been supping, and all the king's guests followed Euergetes, with the exception of Eulaeus. Cleopatra allowed them to depart without speaking a word; only to Publius she said: "Till we meet again!" but she detained the Corinthian, saying:

"You, Lysias, are the cause of this provoking business. Try now to repair the mischief by bringing the girl to us. Do not hesitate! I will guard her, protect her with the greatest care, rely upon me."

"She is a modest maiden," replied Lysias, "and will not accompany me willingly, I am sure. When I proposed her for the part of Hebe I certainly supposed that a word from you, the king and queen, would suffice to induce the head of the temple to entrust her to you for a few hours of harmless amusement. Pardon me if I too quit you now; I have the key of my friend's chest still in my possession, and must restore it to him."

"Shall we have her carried off secretly?" asked Cleopatra of her husband, when the Corinthian had followed the other guests.

"Only let us have no scandal, no violence," cried Philometor anxiously. "The best way would be for me to write to Asclepiodorus, and beg him in a friendly manner to entrust this girl—Ismene or Irene, or whatever the ill-starred child's name is—for a few days to

you, Cleopatra, for your pleasure. I can offer him a prospect of an addition to the gift of land I made today, and which fell far short of his demands.”

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"Let me entreat your majesty," interposed Eulaeus, who was now alone with the royal couple, "let me entreat you not to make any great promises on this occasion, for the moment you do so Asclepiodorus will attribute an importance to your desire—"

"Which it is far from having, and must not seem to have," interrupted the queen. "It is preposterous to waste so many words about a miserable creature, a water-carrying girl, and to go through so much disturbance— but how are we to put an end to it all? What is your advice, Eulaeus?"

"I thank you for that enquiry, noble princess," replied Eulaeus. "My lord, the king, in my opinion, should have the girl carried off, but not with any violence, nor by a man—whom she would hardly follow so immediately as is necessary—but by a woman.

"I am thinking of the old Egyptian tale of 'The Two Brothers,' which you are acquainted with. The Pharaoh desired to possess himself of the wife of the younger one, who lived on the Mount of Cedars, and he sent armed men to fetch her away; but only one of them came back to him, for Batau had slain all the others. Then a woman was sent with splendid ornaments, such as women love, and the fair one followed her unresistingly to the palace.

"We may spare the ambassadors, and send only the woman; your lady in waiting, Zoe, will execute this commission admirably. Who can blame us in any way if a girl, who loves finery, runs away from her keepers?"

"But all the world will see her as Hebe," sighed Philometor, "and proclaim us—the sovereign protectors of the worship of Serapis—as violators of the temple, if Asclepiodorus leads the cry. No, no, the high-priest must first be courteously applied to. In the case of his raising any difficulties, but not otherwise, shall Zoe make the attempt."

"So be it then," said the queen, as if it were her part to express her confirmation of her husband's proposition.

"Let your lady accompany me," begged Eulaeus, "and prefer your request to Asclepiodorus. While I am speaking with the high-priest, Zoe can at any rate win over the girl, and whatever we do must be done to-morrow, or the Roman will be beforehand with us. I know that he has cast an eye on Irene, who is in fact most lovely. He gives her flowers, feeds his pet bird with pheasants and peaches and other sweetmeats, lets himself be lured into the Serapeum by his lady-love as often as possible, stays there whole hours, and piously follows the processions, in order to present the violets with which you graciously honored him by giving them to his fair one—who no doubt would rather wear royal flowers than any others—"

“Liar!” cried the queen, interrupting the courtier in such violent excitement and such ungoverned rage, so completely beside herself, that her husband drew back startled.

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"You are a slanderer! a base calumniator! The Roman attacks you with naked weapons, but you slink in the dark, like a scorpion, and try to sting your enemy in the heel. Apelles, the painter, warns us—the grandchildren of Lagos—against folks of your kidney in the picture he painted against Antiphilus; as I look at you I am reminded of his Demon of Calumny. The same spite and malice gleam in your eyes as in hers, and the same fury and greed for some victim, fire your flushed face! How you would rejoice if the youth whom Apelles has represented Calumny as clutching by the hair, could but be Publius! and if only the lean and hollow-eyed form of Envy, and the loathsome female figures of Cunning and Treachery would come to your aid as they have to hers! But I remember too the steadfast and truthful glance of the boy she has flung to the ground, his arms thrown up to heaven, appealing for protection to the goddess and the king—and though Publius Scipio is man enough to guard himself against open attack, I will protect him against being surprised from an ambush! Leave this room! Go, I say, and you shall see how we punish slanderers!"

At these words Eulaeus flung himself at the queen's feet, but she, breathing hurriedly and with quivering nostrils, looked away over his head as if she did not even see him, till her husband came towards her, and said in a voice of most winning gentleness:

"Do not condemn him unheard, and raise him from his abasement. At least give him the opportunity of softening your indignation by bringing the water-bearer here without angering Asclepiodorus. Carry out this affair well, Eulaeus, and you will find in me an advocate with Cleopatra."

The king pointed to the door, and Eulaeus retired, bowing deeply and finding his way out backwards. Philometer, now alone with his wife, said with mild reproach:

"How could you abandon yourself to such unmeasured anger? So faithful and prudent a servant—and one of the few still living of those to whom our mother was attached—cannot be sent away like a mere clumsy attendant. Besides, what is the great crime he has committed? Is it a slander which need rouse you to such fury when a cautious old man says in all innocence of a young one—a man belonging to a world which knows nothing of the mysterious sanctity of Serapis—that he has taken a fancy to a girl, who is admired by all who see her, that he seeks her out, and gives her flowers—"

"Gives her flowers?" exclaimed Cleopatra, breaking out afresh. "No, he is accused of persecuting a maiden attached to Serapis—to Serapis I say. But it is simply false, and you would be as angry as I am if you were ever capable of feeling manly indignation, and if you did not want to make use of Eulaeus for many things, some of which I know, and others which you choose to conceal from me. Only let him fetch the girl; and when once we have her here, and if I find that the Roman's indictment against Eulaeus—which I will hear to-morrow morning—is well founded, you shall see that I have manly vigor enough for both of us. Come away now; they are waiting for us in the other room."

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The queen gave a call, and chamberlains and servants hurried in; her shell-shaped litter was brought, and in a few minutes, with her husband by her side, she was borne into the great peristyle where the grandees of the court, the commanders of the troops, the most prominent of the officials of the Egyptian provinces, many artists and savants, and the ambassadors from foreign powers, were reclining on long rows of couches, and talking over their wine, the feast itself being ended.

The Greeks and the dark-hued Egyptians were about equally represented in this motley assembly; but among them, and particularly among the learned and the fighting men, there were also several Israelites and Syrians.

The royal pair were received by the company with acclamations and marks of respect; Cleopatra smiled as sweetly as ever, and waved her fan graciously as she descended from her litter; still she vouchsafed not the slightest attention to any one present, for she was seeking Publius, at first among those who were nearest to the couch prepared for her, and then among the other Hellenes, the Egyptians, the Jews, the ambassadors—still she found him not, and when at last she enquired for the Roman of the chief chamberlain at her side, the official was sent for who had charge of the foreign envoys. This was an officer of very high rank, whose duty it was to provide for the representatives of foreign powers, and he was now near at hand, for he had long been waiting for an opportunity to offer to the queen a message of leave-taking from Publius Cornelius Scipio, and to tell her from him, that he had retired to his tent because a letter had come to him from Rome.

“Is that true?” asked the queen letting her feather fan droop, and looking her interlocutor severely in the face.

“The trireme Proteus, coming from Brundisium, entered the harbor of Eunostus only yesterday,” he replied; “and an hour ago a mounted messenger brought the letter. Nor was it an ordinary letter but a despatch from the Senate—I know the form and seal.”

“And Lysias, the Corinthian?”

“He accompanied the Roman.”

“Has the Senate written to him too?” asked the queen annoyed, and ironically. She turned her back on the officer without any kind of courtesy, and turning again to the chamberlain she went on, in incisive tones, as if she were presiding at a trial:

“King Euergetes sits there among the Egyptians near the envoys from the temples of the Upper Country. He looks as if he were giving them a discourse, and they hang on his lips. What is he saying, and what does all this mean?”

“Before you came in, he was sitting with the Syrians and Jews, and telling them what the merchants and scribes, whom he sent to the South, have reported of the lands lying near the lakes through which the Nile is said to flow. He thinks that new sources of wealth have revealed themselves not far from the head of the sacred river which can hardly flow in from the ocean, as the ancients supposed.”

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“And now?” asked Cleopatra. “What information is he giving to the Egyptians?”

The chamberlain hastened towards Euergetes’ couch, and soon returned to the queen—who meanwhile had exchanged a few friendly words with Onias, the Hebrew commander—and informed her in a low tone that the king was interpreting a passage from the Timaeus of Plato, in which Solon celebrates the lofty wisdom of the priests of Sais; he was speaking with much spirit, and the Egyptians received it with loud applause.

Cleopatra’s countenance darkened more and more, but she concealed it behind her fan, signed to Philometor to approach, and whispered to him:

“Keep near Euergetes; he has a great deal too much to say to the Egyptians. He is extremely anxious to stand well with them, and those whom he really desires to please are completely entrapped by his portentous amiability. He has spoiled my evening, and I shall leave you to yourselves.”

“Till to-morrow, then.”

“I shall hear the Roman’s complaint up on my roof-terrace; there is always a fresh air up there. If you wish to be present I will send for you, but first I would speak to him alone, for he has received letters from the Senate which may contain something of importance. So, till to-morrow.”

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Evolution and annihilation
Flattery is a key to the heart
Hold pleasure to be the highest good
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