

The Emperor — Volume 04 eBook

The Emperor — Volume 04 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XV.

After the Emperor's body-slave had started up to go to the aid of Selene, who was attacked by his sovereign's dog, something had happened to him which he could not forget; he had received an impression which he could not wipe out, and words and tones had stirred his mind and soul which incessantly echoed in them, so that it was in a preoccupied and half-dreamy way that he had done his master those little services which he was accustomed to perform every morning, briskly and with complete attention.

Summer and winter Mastor was accustomed to leave his master's bedroom before sunrise to prepare everything that Hadrian could need when he rose from his slumbers. There was the gold plating to clean on the narrow greaves and the leather straps which belonged to his master's military boots, his clothes to air and to perfume with the slight, hardly perceptible scent that he liked, but the preparations for Hadrian's bath were what took up most of his time. At Lochias there were not as yet— as there were in the imperial palace at Rome—properly-filled baths; still his servant knew that here, as there, his master would use a due abundance of water. He had been told that if he required anything for his master he was to apply to Pontius. Him he found, without seeking him, outside the room meant for Hadrian's sitting-room, to which, while the Emperor still slept, he was endeavoring, with the help of his assistants, to give a comfortable and pleasing aspect. The architect referred the slave to the workmen who were busy laying the pavement in the forecourt of the palace; these men would carry in for him as much water as ever he could need. The body-servant's position relieved him of such humble duties, still, when on the chase, when travelling, or as need arose, he was accustomed to perform them unasked, and very willingly.

The sun had not yet risen when he went out into the court, a number of slaves were lying on their mats asleep, others had camped round a fire and were waiting for their early broth, which was being stirred with wooden sticks by an old man and a boy. Mastor would not disturb either group; he went up to a party of workmen, who seemed to be talking together, and yet remained attentive to the speech of an old man who was evidently telling them a story.

The poor fellow's heart was heavy and his mind was little bent on tales and amusements. All life was embittered. The services required of him usually seemed to him of paramount importance, beyond everything else; but to-day it was different. He had an obscure feeling as though fate herself had released him from all his duties, as if misfortune had cut the bonds which bound him to his service to the Emperor, and had made him an isolated and lonely being. It even came into his head whether he should not take in his hand all the gold pieces given him sometimes by Hadrian, or which the wealthy folks who wished to be the foremost of those introduced into the Emperor's presence, after waiting in the antechamber, had flung to him or slipped into his hand—

make his escape and carouse away all that he possessed in the taverns of the great city, in wine and the gay company of women. It was all the same to him what might happen to him.

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If he were caught he would probably be flogged to death; but he had had kicks and blows in plenty before he had got into the Emperor's service, nay; when he was brought to Rome he had once even been hunted with dogs. If he lost his life, after all what would it matter? He would have done with it then, once for all, and the future offered him no prospect but perpetual fatigue in the service of a restless master, anxiety and contempt. He was a thoroughly good-hearted being who could not bear to hurt any one, and who found it equally hard to disturb a fellow-man in his pleasures or amusement. He felt particularly disinclined to do so just now, for a wounded soul is keenly alive to the moods and feelings of others; so, as he approached the group of workmen, from among whom he proposed to choose his water-carrier, he determined that he would not interrupt the story-teller, on whose lips the gaze of his audience was riveted with interest.

The glare of the blaze under the soup-kettle fell full on the speaker's face. He was an old laborer, but his long hair proclaimed him a freeman. His abundant white beard induced Mastor to suppose that he must be a Jew or a Phoenician, but there was nothing remarkable in the old man, who was dressed in a poor and scanty tunic, excepting his peculiarly brilliant eyes, which were immovably fixed on the heavens, and the oblique position in which he held his head, supporting it on the left side with his raised hands.

"And now," said the speaker, dropping his arms, "let us go back to our labors, my brethren. 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' it is written. It is often hard to us old men to heave stones and bend our stiff backs for so long together, but we are nearer than you younger ones to the happy future. Life is not easy to all of us, but it is we who labor and are heavy laden—we above all others—that the Lord has bidden to be his guests, and not last among us the slaves."

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you," interrupted one of the younger men repeating the words of Christ.

"Yea, thus saith the Saviour," said the old man approvingly, "and he surely then was thinking of us. I said just now our load is not light, but how much heavier was the burden he took upon him of his own free will to release us from woe. Every one must work, nay even Caesar himself, but he who could dwell in the glory of his Father let himself be mocked and scorned and spit in the face, let the crown of thorns be pressed on his suffering head, bore his heavy cross, sinking under its weight, and endured a death of torment, and all for our sakes, without a murmur. But he suffered not in vain, for God accepted the sacrifice of his Son, and did his will and said, 'All that believe on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' And though a new and weary day is now beginning, and though it should be followed by a thousand wearier

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still, though death is the end of life—still we believe in our Redeemer, we have God's word bidding us out of sorrows and sufferings into his Heaven, promising us for a brief time of misery in this world, endless ages of joy.—Now go to work. Our sturdy friend Krates will work for you dear Knakias until your finger is healed. When the bread is distributed remember, each of you, the children of our poor deceased brother Philammon. You, poor Gibbus, will find your labors bitter to-day. This man's master, my dear brethren, sold both his daughters yesterday to a dealer from Smyrna; but if you never see them again in Egypt, or in any other country, my friend, you will meet them in the home of your Heavenly Father—of that you may rest assured. Our life on earth is but a pilgrimage, and Heaven is the goal, and the Guide who teaches us never to miss the way, is our Saviour. Weariness and toil, sorrow and suffering are easy to bear, to him who knows that when the solemn hour is near, the King of Kings shall throw open his dwelling-place, and invite him to enter as a favored guest to inhabit there, where all we have loved have found joy and rest."

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you," said a man's loud voice again from the circle that sat round the old man. The old man stood up, signed to a boy who distributed the bread in equal shares to the workmen, and took up a jar with handles, out of which he filled a large wooden cup with wine.

Not a word of this discourse had escaped Mastor, and the often repeated verse, "Come unto me all ye that labor," dwelt in his mind like the invitation of a hospitable friend bidding him to happy days of freedom and enjoyment. A distant gleam shone through the weight of his troubles, seeming to promise the dawn of a new day, and he reverently went up to the old man, in the first place to ask him if he was the overseer of the workmen who stood round him.

"I am," replied the old man, and as soon as he learnt what Mastor required as a commission from the controlling architect, he pointed out some young slaves who quickly brought the water that he needed.

Pontius met the Emperor's servant and his water-carriers and remarked, loudly enough for Mastor to understand him, to Pollux who was with him:

"The architect's servant is getting Christians to wait upon his master to-day. They are regular and sober workmen who do their duty silently and well."

While Mastor was giving his master towels, and helping to dry and dress him, he was far less attentive than usual, for he could not get the words he had heard from the overseer's lips out of his mind. He had not understood them all, but he had fully comprehended that there was a kind and loving God who had suffered in his own person the utmost torments, who was especially gracious to the poor, the miserable,

and the bondsman, and who promised to refresh them and comfort them, and to reunite them to those who

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had once been dear to them. "Come unto me," sounded again and again in his ears, and struck so warmly to his heart that he could not help thinking first of his mother, who, so many a time, when he was a child, had called to him only to clasp him in her arms as he ran towards her, and to press him to her heart. Just so had he often called his poor little dead son, and the feeling that there could be any one who might still call to him—the forsaken lonely man—with loving words to release him from his griefs, to reunite him to his mother, his father, and all the dear ones left behind in his lost and distant home, took half the bitterness from his pain.

He was accustomed to listen to all that was said in the Emperor's presence, and year by year he had learnt to understand more of what he heard. He had often heard the Christians discussed, and usually as deluded but dangerous fools. Many of his fellow-slaves, too, he had heard called Christian idiots, but still not unfrequently very reasonable men, and sometimes even Hadrian himself, had taken the part of the Christians.

This was the first time that Mastor had heard from their own lips what they believed and hoped, and now, while fulfilling his duties he could hardly bear the delay before he could once more seek out the old pavement-worker, to enquire of him, and to have the hopes confirmed which his words had aroused in his soul.

No sooner had Hadrian and Antinous gone into the living-room than Mastor had hastened off across the court to find the Christians. There he tried to open a conversation with the overseer concerning his faith, but the old man answered that there was a season for everything; just now he could not interrupt the work, but that he might come again after sundown, and that he then would tell him of Him who had promised to refresh the sorrow-laden.

Mastor thought no more of making his escape. When he appeared again in his master's presence there was such a sunny light in his blue eyes that Hadrian left the angry words he had prepared for him unspoken, and cried to Antinous, laughing and pointing to the slave:

"I really believe the rascal has consoled himself already, and found a new mate. Let us, too, follow the precept of Horace, so far as we may, and enjoy the present day. The poet may let the future go as it will, but I cannot, for, unfortunately, I am the Emperor."

"And Rome may thank the gods that you are," replied Antinous.

"What happy phrases the boy hits upon sometimes," said Hadrian with a laugh, and he stroked the lad's brown curls. "Now till noon I must work with Phlegon and Titianus, whom I am expecting, and then perhaps we may find something to laugh at. Ask the tall

sculptor there behind the screens, at what hour Balbilla is to sit to him for her bust. We must also inspect the architect's work, and that of the Alexandrian artists by daylight; that, their zeal has well deserved."

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Hadrian retired to the room where his private secretary had ready for him the despatches and papers for Rome and the provinces, which the Emperor was required to read and to sign. Antinous remained alone in the sitting-room, and for an hour he continued to gaze at the ships which came to anchor in the harbor, or sailed out of the roads, and amused himself with watching the swift boats which swarmed round the larger vessels, like wasps round ripe fruit. He listened to the songs of the sailors, and the music of the flute-players, to the measured beat of the oars, which came up from the triremes in the private harbor of the Emperor as they went out to sea. Even the pure blue of the sky and the warmth of the delicious morning were a pleasure to him, and he asked himself whether the smell of tar, which pervaded the seaport, were agreeable or not.

Presently as the sun mounted in the sky, its bright sphere dazzled him; he left the window with a yawn, stretched himself on a couch, and stared absently up at the ceiling of the room without thinking of the subject which the faded picture on it was intended to represent.

Idleness had long since grown to be the occupation of his life; but accustomed to it as he was, he was sometimes conscious of its dark attendant shadow ennui—as of a disagreeable and intrusive interruption to the enjoyment of life. Generally in such lonely hours of idle reverie his thoughts reverted to his belongings in Bithynia, of whom he never dared to speak before the Emperor, or perhaps of the hunting excursions he had made with Hadrian, of the slaughtered game, of the fish he—an experienced angler—had caught, or such like. What the future might bring him troubled him not, for to the love of creativeness, to ambition—to all, in short, that bore any resemblance to a passionate excitement his soul had, so far, remained a stranger. The admiration which was universally excited by his beauty gave him no pleasure, and many a time he felt as though it was not worth while to stir a limb or draw a breath. Almost everything he saw was indifferent to him excepting a kind word from the lips of the Emperor, whom he regarded as great above all other men, whom he feared as Destiny incarnate, and to whom he felt himself bound as intimately as the flower to the tree, the blossom that must die when the stem is broken, on which it flaunts as an ornament and a grace.

But, to-day, as he flung himself on the divan his visions took a new direction. He could not help thinking of the pale girl whom he had saved from the jaws of the blood-hound—of the white cold hand which for an instant had clung to his neck—of the cold words with which she had afterwards repelled him.

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Antinous began to long violently to see Selene. That same Antinous, to whom in all the cities he had visited with the Emperor, and in Rome particularly, the noble fair ones had sent branches of flowers and tender letters, and who nevertheless, since the day when he left his home, had never felt for any woman or girl half so tender a sentiment, as for the hunter the Emperor had given him, or for the big dog. This girl stood before his memory like breathing marble. Perchance the man might be doomed to death who should rest on her cold breast, but such a death must be full of ecstasy, and it seemed to him that it would be far more blissful to die with the blood frozen in his veins, than of the too rapid throbbing of his heart.

“Selene,” he murmured, now and again, with soft hesitation; a strange unrest foreign to his calm nature seemed to propagate itself through all his limbs, and he who commonly would be stretched on a couch for hours without stirring, lost in dreams, now sprang up and paced the room, sighing deeply, and with long strides.

It was a passionate longing for Selene that drove him up and down, and his wish to see her again crystallized into resolve, and prompted him to contrive the ways and means of meeting her once more before the Emperor’s return.

Simply to invade her father’s lodging without farther ceremony, seemed to him out of the question, and yet he was certain of finding her there, since her injured foot would of course keep her at home. Should he once more go to the steward with a request for bread and salt? But he dared not ask anything of Keraunus in Hadrian’s name after the scene which had so recently taken place. Should he go there to carry her a new pitcher in the place of the broken one? But that would only freshly enrage the arrogant official.

Should he—should he—should he not? But no, it was quite impossible— still, that no doubt—that was the right idea. In his medicine-chest there were a few extracts which had been given to him by the Emperor; he would offer her one of these to dilute with water and apply to her bruised foot. And this act of sympathy could not displease even his master, who liked to prove his healing art on the sick or suffering. He at once called Mastor, and desired him to take charge of the hound which had followed his steps as he paced the room, then he went into his sleeping-room, took out a phial of a most costly essence, which Hadrian had given him on his last birthday, and which had formerly belonged to Trajan’s wife, Kotina, and then proceeded to the steward’s rooms. On the steps where he had found Selene, he found the black slave with some children. The old man had sat down them and got no farther for fear of the Roman’s dog. Antinous went up to him and begged him to guide him to his master’s quarters, and the negro immediately showed him the way, opened the door of the antechamber, and pointing to the living-room said:

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"There—but Keraunus is absent."

Without troubling himself any further about Antinous the slave went back to the children, but the Bithyman stood irresolute, with his flask in his hand, for besides Selene's voice he heard that of another girl and the deeper tones of a man. He was still hesitating when Arsinoe's loud exclamation of "Who's there?" obliged him to advance.

In the sitting-room Selene was standing dressed in a long light-colored robe with a veil over her head, as if prepared to go out, but Arsinoe was perched on the edge of a table, in such a way as that the tips of her toes only touched the ground, and on the table lay a quantity of old-fashioned things. Before her stood a Phoenician, of middle age, holding in his hand a finely-carved cup; apparently he was in treaty for it with the young girl.

Keraunus had been again to-day to a dealer in curiosities, but he had not found him at home, so he had left word at his shop that Hiram might call upon him in his rooms at Lochias, where he could show him several valuable rarities. The Phoenician had arrived before the return of the steward himself, who had been detained at a meeting of the town council, and Arsinoe was displaying her father's treasures, whose beauties she was extolling with much eloquence. Hiram unfortunately offered a no higher price than Gabinius, whom the steward had sent off so indignantly the previous evening.

Selene had been convinced from the first of the bootlessness of the attempt, and was now anxious to bring the transaction to a speedy conclusion, as the hour was approaching when she and Arsinoe had to go to the papyrus factory. To her sister's refusal to accompany her, and to the old slave-woman's entreaty that she would rest her foot, at any rate for to-day, she had responded only with a resolute, "I am going."

The appearance of the youth on the scene occasioned the girls some embarrassment. Selene recognized him at once, Arsinoe thought him handsome but awkward, while the curiosity-dealer gazed at him in perfect admiration, and was the first to offer him a greeting. Antinous returned it, bowed to the sisters, and then said turning to Selene:

"We heard that your head was cut, and your foot hurt, and as we were guilty of your mishap, we venture to offer you this phial which contains a good remedy for such injuries."

"Thank you," replied the girl. "But I feel already so well that I shall try to go out."

"That you certainly ought not to do," said Antinous, beseechingly.

"I must," replied Selene, gravely.

"Then, at any rate, take the phial to use for a lotion when you return. Ten drops in such a cup as that, full of water."



"I can try it when I come in."

"Do so, and you will see how healing it is. You are not vexed with us any longer?"

"No."

"I am glad of that!" cried the boy, fixing his large dreamy eyes on Selene with silent passion. This gaze displeased her, and she said more coldly than before to the Bithyman.

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"To whom shall I give the phial when I have used the stuff in it?"

"Keep it, pray keep it," begged Antinous. "It is pretty, and will be twice as precious in my eyes when it belongs to you."

"It is pretty-but I do not wish for presents."

"Then destroy it when you have done with it. You have not forgiven us our dog's bad behavior, and we are sincerely sorry that our dog—"

"I am not vexed with you. Arsinoe pour the medicine into a saucer."

The steward's younger daughter immediately obeyed, and noticing as she did so, how pretty the phial was, sparkling with various colors, she said frankly enough:

"If my sister will not have it, give it to me. How can you make such a pother about nothing, Selene?"

"Take it," said Antinous, looking anxiously at the ground, for it had now just occurred to him how highly the Emperor had valued this little bottle, and that he might possibly ask him some time what had become of it. Selene shrugged her shoulders, and drawing her veil round her head, she exclaimed, with a glance of annoyance at her sister:

"It is high time!"

"I am not going to-day," replied Arsinoe, defiantly, "and it is folly for you to walk a quarter of a mile with your swollen foot."

"It would be wiser to take some care of it," observed the dealer, politely, and Antinous anxiously added:

"If you increase your own suffering you will add to our self-reproach."

"I must go," Selene repeated resolutely, "and you with me, sister."

It was not out of mere wilfulness that she spoke, it was bitter necessity, that forced her to utter the words. To-day, at any rate, she must not miss going to the papyrus factory, for the week's wages for her work and Arsinoe's were to be paid. Besides, the next day, and for four days after, the workshops and counting-house would be closed, for the Emperor had announced to the wealthy proprietor his intention of visiting them, and in his honor various dilapidations in the old rooms were to be repaired, and various decorations added to the bare-looking building. Hence, to remain away from the works to-day meant, not merely the loss of a week's pay, but the sacrifice of twelve days, since it had been announced to the work-people, that as a token of rejoicing, and in honor of

the imperial visit, full pay would be given for the unemployed days; and Selene needed money to maintain the family, and must therefore persist in her intention.

When she saw that Arsinoe showed no sign of accompanying her, she once more asked with stern determination:

“Are you coming?—Yes, or no.”

“No,” cried Arsinoe, defiantly, and sitting farther on the table.

“Then I am to go alone?”

“You are to stay here.”

Selene went close up to her sister and looked at her enquiringly and reproachfully; but Arsinoe adhered to her refusal. She pouted like a sulky child, and slapping the hand on which she was leaning three times on the table, she repeated, “No—no—no.”

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Selene called to the old slave-woman, and desired her to remain in the sitting-room till her father should return, greeted the dealer politely, and Antinous with a careless nod, and then left the room. The lad had followed her, and they both met the children. Selene pulled their dresses straight, and strictly enjoined them not to go near the corridor on account of the strange dog. Antinous stroked the blind boy's pretty curly head, and then, as Selene was about to descend the stairs, he asked her:

"May I help you?"

"Yes," said the girl, for at the very first step an acute pain in the ankle checked her, and she put out her arm to the young man that he might support her elbow on his hand. But her answer would assuredly have been "no," if she had had the smallest feeling of liking for the Emperor's favorite; but she bore the image of another in her heart, and did not even perceive that Antinous was beautiful. The Bithynian's heart, on the other hand, had never beaten so violently as during the brief moments when he was permitted to hold Selene's arm. He felt intoxicated, while he was alive to the fact that during the descent of the few steps she was suffering great pain.

"Stay at home, and spare yourself!" he begged her once more in a trembling voice.

"You worry me!" she said, in a tone of vexation. "I must go, and it is not far."

"May I accompany you?"

She laughed aloud and answered somewhat scornfully:

"Certainly not. Only conduct me through the corridor that the dog may not attack me again, then go where you will—but not with me."

He obeyed when at the end of the passage where it opened into a large hall, he bid her farewell, and she thanked him with a few friendly words.

There were two ways out from her father's rooms into the road, one led through the rotunda where the Ptolemaic Queens were placed, and across several terraces up and down steps through the forecourt; the other, on a level all the way, through the rooms and halls of the palace. She was forced to choose the latter, for it would have been impossible for her with her aching foot to clamber up a number of steps without help and down them again, but she came to this conclusion much against her will, for she knew what numbers of men were engaged in the works of restoration; and to get through them safely it struck her that she might ask her old playfellow to escort her through the crowd of workmen and rough slaves as far as his parent's gatehouse. But she did not easily decide on this course, for, since the afternoon when Pollux had shown her mother's bust to Arsinoe before showing it to her, she had felt a grudge towards the sculptor, who so lately before had touched and opened her weary and loveless soul;

and this sore feeling had not diminished, but had rather increased with time. At every hour of the day, and whatever she was occupied in, she could not help repeating to herself, that she had every reason to be vexed with him.

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She had stood to him a second time as a model for his work, had spoken to him many times, and when last they parted had promised to allow him this very evening to study once more the folds of her mantle. With what pleasure she had looked forward to each meeting with Pollux, how truly lovable she had thought him on every fresh occasion; how frankly he too, expressed his pleasure as often as they met! They had talked of all sorts of things, even of love, and how eager he had been when he told her that the only thing she needed to make her happy was a good husband who would succor and comfort her as she deserved, and as he spoke he had looked at his own strong hands while she had turned red, and had thought to herself that if he liked it she would willingly make the experiment of enjoying life heartily by his side.

It seemed to her as though they belonged to each other, as if she had been born for him alone, and he for her. Why then yesterday had he shown Arsinoe her mother's bust before her?

Well, now she would ask him plainly whether he had placed it on the rotunda for her or for her sister, and let him see she was not pleased. She must tell him, too, that she could not stand as his model that evening; if only on account of her foot that would be impossible.

With increasing pain and effort she crossed the threshold of the hall of the Muses, and went up to the screen behind which her friend was concealed. He was not alone, for she heard voices within—and it was not a man but a woman who was with him; she could hear her clear laugh at some distance. When she came close up to the screen to call Pollux, the woman, who was certainly sitting to him as a model, spoke louder than before, and called out merrily:

"But this is delicious! I am to let you fulfil the office of my maid, what audacity these artists have!"

"Say yes," begged the artist, in the gay and cordial tone which more than once had helped to ensnare Selene's heart. "You are beautiful, Balbilla, but if you would allow me, you might be far handsomer than you are even."

And again there was a merry laugh behind the screen. The pleasant voice must have hurt poor Selene acutely for she drew up her shoulders, and her fair features were stamped with an expression of keen suffering, and she pressed both hands over her heart as she went on past the screen and her handsome flirting playfellow, limping across the courtyard and into the road.

What tortured the poor child so cruelly? The poverty of her house, and her bodily pain, which increased at every step, or her numbed and sore heart, betrayed of her newly-blossoming, last, and fairest hope?

CHAPTER XVI.

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Usually when Selene went out walking, many people looked at her with admiration, but to-day a couple of street-boys composed her escort. They ran after her calling out impudently, 'dot, and go one,' and tried ruthlessly to snatch at the loosely-tied sandal on her injured foot, which tapped the pavement at every step. While Selene was thus making her way with cruel pain, satisfaction and happiness had visited Arsinoe; for hardly had Selene and Antinous quitted her father's apartments, when Hiram begged her to show him the little bottle which the handsome youth had just given her. The dealer turned it over and over in the sunlight, tested its ring, tried to scratch it with the stone in his ring, and then muttered, "Vasa Murrhma."

The words did not escape the girl's sharp ears, and she had heard her father say that the costliest of all the ornamental vessels with which the wealthy Romans were wont to decorate their reception-rooms, were those called Vasa Murrhina; so she explained to him at once, that she knew what high prices were paid for such vases, and that she had no mind to sell it cheaply. He began to bid, she laughingly demanded ten times the price, and after a long battle between the dealer and the owner, fought now half in jest, and now in grave earnest, the Phoenician said:

"Two thousand drachmae; not a sesterce more." That is not enough by a long way, but then it is yours."

"I would hardly have given half to a less fair customer."

"And I only let you have it because you are such a polite man."

"I will send you the money before sundown."

At these words the girl, who had been radiant with surprise and delight, and who would have liked to throw her arms round the bald-headed merchant's neck, or round that of her old slave, who was even less attractive, or for that matter, would have embraced the world—the triumphant girl became thoughtful; her father would certainly come home ere long, and she could not conceal from herself that he would disapprove of the whole proceeding, and would probably send the phial back to the young man, and the money to the dealer. She herself would never have asked the stranger for the bottle if she had had the slightest suspicion of its value; but now it certainly belonged to her, and if she had given it back again she would have given no one any pleasure; on the contrary, she would have offended the stranger, and probably have lost the greatest pleasure that she had ever enjoyed.

What was to be done now? She was still perched on the table; she had taken her left foot in her right hand, and sitting in this quaint position, she looked down on the ground as gravely as if she were trying to find an idea, or a way out of the difficulty, in the pattern on the floor.

The dealer for a moment amused himself in studying her bewilderment, which he thought charming—only wishing that his son, a young painter, were standing in his place. At last he broke the silence however, saying:

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"Your father, perhaps, will not agree to our bargain; and yet it is for him you want the money?"

"Who says so?"

"Would he have offered me his own treasures if he had not wanted money?"

"It is only—I can—only—" stammered Arsinoe, who was unaccustomed to falsehood—I would merely not confess to him—"

"I myself saw how innocently you came by the phial," said the dealer, "and Keraunus never need know anything about such a trifle. Fancy yourself, that you have broken it, and that the pieces are lying at the bottom of the sea. Which of all these things does your father value least?"

"This old sword of Antony," answered the child, her face brightening once more. "He says it is much too long, and too slender to be what it pretends to be. For my part I do not believe that it is a sword at all, but a roasting-spit."

"I shall apply it to that very purpose to-morrow morning in my kitchen," said the dealer, "but I offer you two thousand drachmae for it, and will take it with me and send you the amount in a few hours. Will that do?"

Arsinoe dropped her foot, glided from the table, and instead of answering, clapped her hands with glee.

"Only tell him," continued Hiram, "that I am able just now to pay so much for this kind of thing, because Caesar is certain to look about him for the things that belonged to Julius Caesar, Marc Antony, Octavianus, Augustus, and other great Romans who have lived in Egypt. The old woman there may bring the spit after me. My slave is waiting outside, and can hide it under his chiton as far as my kitchen door, for if he carried it openly the connoisseurs passing by might covet the priceless treasure, and we must protect ourselves from the evil eye."

The dealer laughed, took the little bottle into his own keeping, gave the sword to the old woman, and then took a friendly leave of the young girl.

As soon as Arsinoe was alone, she flew into the bedroom to put on her sandals, threw her veil over her head, and hastened to the papyrus manufactory. Selene must know of the unexpected good fortune that had befallen her, and all of them, and then she would have the poor girl carried home in a litter, for there were always plenty for hire on the quay.

Things did not always go smoothly—very often very unsmoothly and stormily between the sisters, but still anything of importance that happened to Arsinoe, whether it were good or evil, she must at once tell Selene.

Ye gods! what happiness! She could take her place among the daughters of the great citizens in the processions, no less richly apparelled than they, and still there would remain a nice little sum for her father and sister; and the work in the factory, the nasty dirty work, which she hated and loathed, would be at an end, it was to be hoped, for ever.

The old slave was still sitting on the steps with the children; Arsinoe tossed them up one after the other, and whispered in each child's ear:

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"Cakes this evening!" and she kissed the blind child's eyes, and said:

"You may come with me, dear little man. I will find a litter for Selene and put you in, and you will be carried home like a little prince."

The little blind boy threw his arms up with delight, exclaiming: "Through the air, and without falling." While she was still holding him in her arms, her father came up the steps that led from the rotunda to the passage, his face streaming with heat and excitement; and after wiping his brow and panting to regain his breath, he said:

"Hiram, the curiosity-dealer, met me just outside, with the sword that belonged to Antony; and you sold it to him for two thousand drachmae! you little fool!"

"But, father, you would have given the old spit for a pasty and a draught of wine," laughed Arsinoe.

"I?" cried Keraunus. "I would have had three times the sum for that venerable relic, for which Caesar will give its weight in silver; however, sold is sold. And yet-and yet, the thought that I no longer possess the sword of Antony, will give me many sleepless nights."

"If this evening we set you down to a good dish of meat, sleep will soon follow," answered Arsinoe, and she took the handkerchief out of her father's hand, and coaxingly wiped his temples, going on vivaciously: "We are quite rich folks, father, and will show the other citizens' daughters what we can do."

"Now you shall both take part in the festival," said Keraunus, decidedly. "Caesar shall see that I shun no sacrifice in his honor, and if he notices you, and I bring my complaint against that insolent architect before him—"

"You must let that pass," begged Arsinoe, "if only poor Selene's foot is well by that time."

"Where is she?"

"Gone out."

"Then her foot cannot be so very bad. She will soon come in, it is to be hoped."

"Probably—I mean to fetch her with a litter."

"A litter?" said Keraunus, in surprise.

"The two thousand drachmae have turned the girl's head."

"Only on account of her foot. It was hurting her so much when she went out."

“Then why did she not stay at home? As usual she has wasted an hour to save a sesterce, and you, neither of you have any time to spare.”

“I will go after her at once.”

“No—no, you at any rate, must remain here, for in two hours the matrons and maidens are to meet at the theatre.”

“In two hours! but mighty Serapis, what are we to put on?”

“It is your business to see to that,” replied Keraunus, “I myself will have the litter you spoke of, and be carried down to Tryphon, the ship-builder. Is there any money left in Selene’s box?”

Arsinoe went into her sleeping-room, and said, as she returned:

“This is all—six pieces of two drachmae.”

“Four will be enough for me,” replied the steward, but after a moment’s reflection he took the whole half-dozen.

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"What do you want with the ship-builder?" asked Arsinoe.

"In the Council," replied Keraunus, "I was worried again about you girls. I said one of my daughters was ill, and the other must attend upon her; but this would not do, and I was asked to send the one who was well. Then I explained that you had no mother, that we lived a retired life for each other, and that I could not bear the idea of sending my daughter alone, and without any protectress to the meeting. So then Tryphon said that it would give his wife pleasure to take you to the theatre with her own daughter. This I half accepted, but I declared at once that you would not go, if your elder sister were not better. I could not give any positive consent—you know why."

"Oh, blessings on Antony and his noble spit!" cried Arsinoe. "Now everything is settled, and you can tell the ship-builder we shall go. Our white dresses are still quite good, but a few ells of new light blue ribbon for my hair, and of red for Selene's, you must buy on the way, at Abibaal, the Phoenician's."

"Very good."

"I will see at once to both the dresses—but, to be sure, when are we to be ready?"

"In two hours."

"Then, do you know what, dear old father?"

"Well?"

"Our old woman is half blind, and does everything wrong. Do let me go down to dame Doris at the gate-house, and ask her to help me. She is so clever and kind, and no one irons so well as she does."

"Silence!" cried the steward, angrily, interrupting his daughter. "Those people shall never again cross my threshold."

"But look at my hair; only look at the state it is in," cried Arsinoe, excitedly, and thrusting her fingers into her thick tresses which she pulled into disorder. "To do that up again, plait it with new ribbons, iron our dresses, and sew on the brooches—why the Empress' ladies-maid could not do all that in two hours."

"Doris shall never cross this threshold," repeated Keraunus, for all his answer.

"Then tell the tailor Hippias to send me an assistant; but that will cost money."

"We have it, and can pay," replied Keraunus, proudly, and in order not to forget his commissions he muttered to himself while he went to get a litter:

“Hippias the tailor, blue ribbon, red ribbon, and Tryphon the ship-builder.”

The tailor’s nimble apprentice helped Arsinoe to arrange her dress and Selene’s, and was never weary of praising the sheen and silkiness of Arsinoe’s hair, while she twisted it with ribbons, built it up and twisted it at the back so gracefully with a comb, that it fell in a thick mass of artfully-curled locks down her neck and back. When Keraunus came back, he gazed with justifiable pride at his beautiful child; he was immensely pleased, and even chuckled softly to himself as he laid out the gold pieces which were brought to him by the curiosity-dealer’s servant, and set them in a row and counted them. While he was thus occupied, Arsinoe went up to him and asked laughing: “Hiram has not cheated me then?” Keraunus desired her not to disturb him, and added:

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"Think of that sword, the weapon of the great Antony, perhaps the very one with which he pierced his own breast.—Where can Selene be?"

An hour, an hour and a half had slipped by, and when the fourth half-hour was well begun, and still his eldest daughter did not return, the steward announced that they must set out, for that it would not do to keep the ship-builder's wife waiting. It was a sincere grief to Arsinoe to be obliged to go without Selene. She had made her sister's dress look as nice as her own, and had laid it carefully on the divan near the mosaic pavement. She had taken a great deal of trouble. Never before had she been out in the streets alone, and it seemed impossible to enjoy anything without the companionship and supervision of her absent sister. But her father's assertion, that Selene would have a place gladly found for her, even later, among the maidens, reassured the girl who was overflowing with joyful expectation.

Finally she perfumed herself a little with the fragrant extract which Keraunus was accustomed to use before going to the council, and begged her father to order the old slave-woman to go and buy the promised cakes for the little ones during her absence. The children had all gathered round her, admiring her with loud ohs! and ahs! as if she were some wondrous incarnation, not to be too nearly approached, and on no account to be touched. The elaborate dressing of her hair would not allow of her stooping over them as usual. She could only stroke little Helios' curls, saying: "Tomorrow you shall have a ride in the air, and perhaps Selene will tell you a pretty story by-and-bye."

Her heart beat faster than usual as she stepped into the litter, which was waiting for her just in front of the gate-house. Old Doris looked at her from a distance with pleasure, and while Keraunus stepped out into the street to call a litter for himself, the old woman hastily cut the two finest roses from her bush, and pressing her fingers to her lips with a sly smile, put them into the girl's hand.

Arsinoe felt as if it were in a dream that she went to the ship-builder's house, and from thence to the theatre, and on her way she fully understood, for the first time, that alarm and delight may find room side by side in a girl's mind, and that one by no means hinders the existence of the other.

Fear and expectation so completely overmastered her, that she neither saw nor heard what was going on around her; only once she noticed a young man with a garland on his head, who, as he passed her, arm in arm with another, called out to her gaily: "Long live beauty!"

From that moment she kept her eyes fixed on her lap and on the roses dame Doris had given her. The flowers reminded her of the kind old woman's son, and she wondered whether tall Pollux had perhaps seen her in her finery. That, she would have liked very much; and after all, it was not at all impossible, for, of course, since Pollux had been working at Lochias he must often have gone to his parents. Perhaps even he had

himself picked the roses for her, but had not dared to give them to her as her father was so near.

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CHAPTER XVII.

But the young sculptor had not been at the gatehouse when Arsinoe went by. He had thought of her often enough since meeting her again by the bust of her mother; but on this particular afternoon his time and thoughts were fully claimed by another fair damsel. Balbilla had arrived at Lochias about noon, accompanied, as was fitting, by the worthy Claudia, the not wealthy widow of a senator, who for many years had filled the place of lady-in-attendance and protecting companion to the rich fatherless and motherless girl. At Rome, she conducted Balbilla's household affairs with as much sense and skill as satisfaction in the task. Still she was not perfectly content with her lot, for her ward's love of travelling, often compelled her to leave the metropolis, and in her estimation, there was no place but Rome where life was worth living. A visit to Baiae for bathing, or in the winter months a flight to the Ligurian coast, to escape the cold of January and February—these she could endure; for she was certain there to find, if not Rome, at any rate Romans; but Balbilla's wish to venture in a tossing ship, to visit the torrid shores of Africa, which she pictured to herself as a burning oven, she had opposed to the utmost. At last, however, she was obliged to put a good face on the matter, for the Empress herself expressed so decidedly her wish to take Balbilla with her to the Nile, that any resistance would have been undutious. Still; in her secret heart, she could not but confess to herself that her high-spirited and wilful foster-child—for so she loved to call Balbilla—would undoubtedly have carried out her purpose without the Empress' intervention.

Balbilla had come to the palace, as the reader knows, to sit for her bust.

When Selene was passing by the screen which concealed her playfellow and his work from her gaze, the worthy matron had fallen gently asleep on a couch, and the sculptor was exerting all his zeal to convince the noble damsel that the size to which her hair was dressed was an exaggeration, and that the super-incumbence of such a mass must disfigure the effect of the delicate features of her face. He implored her to remember in how simple a style the great Athenian masters, at the best period of the plastic arts, had taught their beautiful models to dress their hair, and requested her to do her own hair in that manner next day, and to come to him before she allowed her maid to put a single lock through the curling-tongs; for to-day, as he said, the pretty little ringlets would fly back into shape, like the spring of a fibula when the pin was bent back. Balbilla contradicted him with gay vivacity, protested against his desire to play the part of lady's maid, and defended her style of hair-dressing on the score of fashion.

"But the fashion is ugly, monstrous, a pain to one's eyes!" cried Pollux. "Some vain Roman lady must have invented it, not to make herself beautiful, but to be conspicuous."

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"I hate the idea of being conspicuous by my appearance," answered Balbilla. "It is precisely by following the fashion, however conspicuous it may be, that we are less remarkable than when we carefully dress far more simply and plainly—in short, differently to what it prescribes. Which do you regard as the vainer, the fashionably-dressed young gentleman on the Canopic way, or the cynical philosopher with his unkempt hair, his carefully-ragged cloak over his shoulders, and a heavy cudgel in his dirty hands?"

"The latter, certainly," replied Pollux. "Still he is sinning against the laws of beauty which I desire to win you over to, and which will survive every whim of fashion, as certainly as Homer's Iliad will survive the ballad of a street-singer, who celebrates the last murder that excited the mob of this town.—Am I the first artist who has attempted to represent your face?"

"No," said Balbilla, with a laugh. "Five Roman artists have already experimented on my head."

"And did any one of their busts satisfy you?"

"Not one seemed to me better than utterly bad."

"And your pretty face is to be handed down to posterity in five-fold deformity?"

"Ah! no—I had them all destroyed."

"That was very good of them!" cried Pollux, eagerly. Then turning with a very simple gesture to the bust before him he said: "Hapless clay, if the lovely lady whom thou art destined to resemble will not sacrifice the chaos of her curls, thy fate will undoubtedly be that of thy predecessors."

The sleeping matron was roused by this speech. "You were speaking," she said, "of the broken busts of Balbilla?"

"Yes," replied the poetess.

"And perhaps this one may follow them," sighed Claudia. "Do you know what lies before you in that case?"

"No, what?"

"This young lady knows something of your art."

"I learnt to knead clay a little of Aristaeus," interrupted Balbilla.

“Aha! because Caesar set the fashion, and in Rome it would have been conspicuous not to dabble in sculpture.”

“Perhaps.”

“And she tried to improve in every bust all that particularly displeased her,” continued Claudia.

“I only began the work for the slaves to finish,” Balbilla threw in, interrupting her companion. “Indeed, my people became quite expert in the work of destruction.”

“Then my work may, at any rate, hope for a short agony and speedy death,” sighed Pollux. “And it is true—all that lives comes into the world with its end already preordained.”

“Would an early demise of your work pain you much?” asked Balbilla.

“Yes, if I thought it successful; not if I felt it to be a failure.”

“Any one who keeps a bad bust,” said Balbilla, “must feel fearful lest an undeservedly bad reputation is handed down to future generations.”

“Certainly! but how then can you find courage to expose yourself for the sixth time to a form of calumny that it is difficult to counteract?”

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"Because I can have anything destroyed that I choose," laughed the spoilt girl.
"Otherwise sitting still is not much to my taste."

"That is very true," sighed Claudia. "But from you I expect something strikingly good."

"Thank you," said Pollux, "and I will take the utmost pains to complete something that may correspond to my own expectations of what a marble portrait ought to be, that deserves to be preserved to posterity."

"And those expectations require—?"

Pollux considered for a moment, and then he replied:

"I have not always the right words at my command, for all that I feel as an artist. A plastic presentiment, to satisfy its creator, must fulfil two conditions; first it must record for posterity in forms of eternal resemblance all that lay in the nature of the person it represents; secondly, it must also show to posterity what the art of the time when it was executed, was capable of."

"That is a matter of course—but you are forgetting your own share."

"My own fame you mean?"

"Certainly."

"I work for Papias and serve my art, and that is enough; meanwhile Fame does not trouble herself about me, nor do I trouble myself about her."

"Still, you will put your name on my bust?"

"Why not?"

"You are as prudent as Cicero."

"Cicero?"

"Perhaps you would hardly know old Tullius' wise remark that the philosophers who wrote of the vanity of writers put their names to their books all the same."

"Oh! I have no contempt for laurels, but I will not run after a thing which could have no value for me, unless it came unsought, and because it was my due."

"Well and good; but your first condition could only be fulfilled in its widest sense if you could succeed in making yourself acquainted with my thoughts and feelings, with the whole of my inmost mind."

"I see you and talk to you," replied Pollux. Claudia laughed aloud, and said:

"If instead of two sittings of two hours you were to talk to her for twice as many years you would always find something new in her. Not a week passes in which Rome does not find in her something to talk about. That restless brain is never quiet, but her heart is as good as gold, and always and everywhere the same."

"And did you suppose that that was new to me?" asked Pollux. "I can see the restless spirit of my model in her brow and in her mouth, and her nature is revealed in her eyes."

"And in my snub-nose?" asked Balbilla.

"It bears witness to your wonderful and whimsical notions, which astonish Rome so much."

"Perhaps you are one more that works for the hammer of the slaves," laughed Balbilla.

"And even if it were so," said Pollux, "I should always retain the memory of this delightful hour." Pontius the architect here interrupted the sculptor, begging Balbilla to excuse him for disturbing the sitting; Pollux must immediately attend to some business of importance, but in ten minutes he would return to his work. No sooner were the two ladies alone, than Balbilla rose and looked inquisitively round and about the sculptor's enclosed work-room; but her companion said:

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"A very polite young man, this Pollux, but rather too much at his ease, and too enthusiastic."

"An artist," replied Balbilla, and she proceeded to turn over every picture and tablet with the sculptor's studies in drawing, raised the cloth from the wax model of the Urania, tried the clang of the lute which hung against one of the canvas walls, was here, there, and everywhere, and at last stood still in front of a large clay model, placed in a corner of the studio, and closely wrapped in cloths.

"What may that be?" asked Claudia.

"No doubt a half-finished new model."

Balbilla felt the object in front of her with the tips of her fingers, and said: "It seems to me to be a head. Something remarkable at any rate. In these close covered dishes we sometimes find the best meat. Let its unveil this shrouded portrait."

"Who knows what it may be?" said Claudia, as she loosened a twist in the cloths which enveloped the bust. There are often very remarkable things to be seen in such workshops.

"Hey, what, it is only a woman's head! I can feel it," cried Balbilla.

"But you can never tell," the older lady went on, untying a knot. "These artists are such unfettered, unaccountable beings."

"Do you lift the top, I will pull here," and a moment later the young Roman stood face to face with the caricature which Hadrian had moulded on the previous evening, in all its grimacing ugliness. She recognized herself in it at once, and at the first moment, laughed loudly, but the longer she looked at the disfigured likeness, the more vexed, annoyed and angry she became. She knew her own face, feature for feature, all that was pretty in it, and all that was plain, but this likeness ignored everything in her face that was not unpleasing, and this it emphasized ruthlessly, and exaggerated with a refinement of spitefulness. The head was hideous, horrible, and yet it was hers. As she studied it in profile, she remembered what Pollux had declared he could read in her features, and deep indignation rose up in her soul.

Her great inexhaustible riches, which allowed her the reckless gratification of every whim, and secured consideration, even for her follies, had not availed to preserve her from many disappointments which other girls, in more modest circumstances, would have been spared. Her kind heart and open hand had often been abused, even by artists, and it was self-evident to her, that the man who could make this caricature, who had so enjoyed exaggerating all that was unlovely in her face, had wished to exercise his art on her features, not for her own sake, but for that of the high price she might be



inclined to pay for a flattering likeness. She had found much to please her in the young sculptor's fresh and happy artist nature, in his frank demeanor and his honest way of speech. She felt convinced that Pollux, more readily than anybody else, would understand what it was that lent a charm to her face, which was in no way strictly beautiful, a charm which could not be disputed in spite of the coarse caricature which stood before her.

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She felt herself the richer by a painful experience, indignant, and offended. Accustomed as she was to give prompt utterance even to her displeasure, she exclaimed hotly, and with tears in her eyes:

"It is shameful, it is base. Give me my wraps Claudia. I will not stay an instant longer to be the butt of this man's coarse and spiteful jesting."

"It is unworthy," cried the matron, "so to insult a person of your position. It is to be hoped our litters are waiting outside."

Pontius had overheard Balbilla's last words. He had come into the work-place without Pollux, who was still speaking to the prefect, and he said gravely as he approached Balbilla:

"You have every reason to be angry, noble lady. This thing is an insult in clay, malicious, and at the same time coarse in every detail; but it was not Pollux who did it, and it is not right to condemn without a trial."

"You take your friend's part!" exclaimed Balbilla. "I would not tell a lie for my own brother."

"You know how to give your words the aspect of an honorable meaning in serious matters, as he does in jest."

"You are angry and unaccustomed to bridle your tongue," replied the architect. "Pollux, I repeat it, did not perpetrate the caricature, but a sculptor from Rome."

"Which of them? I know them all."

"I may not name him."

"There—you see.—Come away Claudia."

"Stay," said Pontius, decisively. "If you were any one but yourself, I would let you go at once in your anger, and with the double charge on your conscience of doing an injustice to two well-meaning men. But as you are the granddaughter of Claudius Balbillus, I feel it to be due to myself to say, that if Pollux had really made this monstrous bust he would not be in this palace now, for I should have turned him out and thrown the horrid object after him. You look surprised—you do not know who I am that can address you so."

"Yes, yes," cried Balbilla, much mollified, for she felt assured that the man who stood before her, as unflinching as if he were cast in bronze, and with an earnest frown, was speaking the truth, and that he must have some right to speak to her with such unwonted decision. "Yes indeed, you are the principal architect of the city; Titianus,

from whom we have heard of you, has told us great things of you; but how am I to account for your special interest in me?"

"It is my duty to serve you—if necessary, even with my life."

"You," said Balbilla, puzzled. "But I never saw you till yesterday."

"And yet you may freely dispose of all that I have and am, for my grandfather was your grandfather's slave."

"I did not know"—said Balbilla, with increasing confusion.

"Is it possible that your noble grandfather's instructor, the venerable Sophinus, is altogether forgotten. Sophinus, whom your grandfather freed, and who continued to teach your father also."

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"Certainly not—of course not," cried Balbilla. "He must have been a splendid man, and very learned besides."

"He was my father's father," said Pontius.

"Then you belong to our family," exclaimed Balbilla, offering him a friendly hand.

"I thank you for those words," answered Pontius. "Now, once more, Pollux had nothing to do with that image."

"Take my cloak, Claudia," said the girl. "I will sit again to the young man."

"Not to-day—it would spoil his work," replied Pontius. "I beg of you to go, and let the annoyance you so vehemently expressed die out some where else. The young sculptor must not know that you have seen this caricature, it would occasion him much embarrassment. But if you can return to-morrow in a calmer and more happy humor, with your lively spirit tuned to a softer key, then Pollux will be able to make a likeness which may satisfy the granddaughter of Claudius Balbillus."

"And, let us hope, the grandson of his learned teacher also," answered Balbilla, with a kindly farewell greeting, as she went with her companion towards the door of the hall of the Muses, where her slaves were waiting. Pontius escorted her so far in silence, then he returned to the work-place, and safely wrapped the caricature up again in its cloths.

As he went out into the hall again, Pollux hurried up to meet him, exclaiming:

"The Roman architect wants to speak to you, he is a grand man!"

"Balbilla was called away, and bid me greet you," replied Pontius. "Take that thing away for fear she should see it. It is coarse and hideous."

A few moments later he stood in the presence of the Emperor, who expressed the wish to play the part of listener while Balbilla was sitting. When the architect, after begging him not to let Pollux know of the incident, told him of what had occurred in the screened-off studio, and how angry the young Roman lady had been at the caricature, which was certainly very offensive, Hadrian rubbed his hands and laughed aloud with delight. Pontius ground his teeth, and then said very earnestly:

"Balbilla seems to me a merry-hearted girl, but of a noble nature. I see no reason to laugh at her." Hadrian looked keenly into the daring architect's eyes, laid his hand on his shoulder, and replied with a certain threatening accent in his deep voice:

"It would be an evil moment for you, or for any one, who should do so in my presence. But age may venture to play with edged tools, which children may not even touch."

CHAPTER XVIII.

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Selene entered the gate-way in the endlessly-long walk of sun-dried bricks which enclosed the wide space where stood the court-yards, water-tanks and huts, belonging to the great papyrus manufactory of Plutarch, where she and her sister were accustomed to work. She could generally reach it in a quarter of an hour, but to-day it had taken more than four times as long and she herself did not know how she had managed to hold herself up, and to walk-limp-stumble along, in spite of the acute pain she was suffering. She would willingly have clung to every passer-by, have held on to every slow passing vehicle, to every beast of burden that overtook her—but man and beast mercilessly went on their way, without paying any heed to her. She got many a push from those who were hurrying by and who scarcely turned round to look at her, when from time to time she stopped to sink for a moment on to the nearest door-step, or some low cornice or bale of goods; to dry her eyes, or press her hand to her foot, which was now swollen to a great size, hoping, as she did so, to be able to forget, under the sense of a new form of pain, the other unceasing and unendurable torment, at least for a few minutes.

The street boys who had run after her, and laughed at her, ceased pursuing her when they found that she constantly stopped to rest. A woman with a child in her arms once asked her, as she stopped to rest a minute on a threshold, whether she wanted anything, but walked on when Selene shook her head and made no other answer.

Once she thought she must give up altogether, when suddenly the street was filled with jeering boys and inquisitive men and women—for Verus, the superb Verus, came by in his chariot, and what a chariot! The Alexandrian populace were accustomed to see much that was strange in the busy streets of their crowded city; but this vehicle attracted every eye, and excited astonishment, admiration and mirth, wherever it appeared, and not unfrequently the bitterest ridicule. The handsome Roman stood in the middle of his gilt chariot, and himself drove the four white horses, harnessed abreast; on his head he wore a wreath, and across his breast, from one shoulder, a garland of roses. On the foot-board of the quadriga sat two children, dressed as Cupids; their little legs dangled in the air, and they each held, attached by a long gilt wire, a white dove which fluttered in front of Verus.

The dense and hurrying crowd, crushed Selene remorselessly against the wall; instead of looking at the wonderful sight she covered her face with her hands to hide the distortion of pain in her features; still she just saw the splendid chariot, the gold harness on the horses, and the figure of the insolent owner glide past her, as if in a dream that was blurred by pain, and the sight infused into her soul, that was already harassed by pain and anxiety, a feeling of bitter aversion, and the envious thought that the mere trappings of the horses of this extravagant prodigal would suffice to keep her and her family above misery for a whole year.

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By the time the chariot had turned the next corner, and the crowd had followed it, she had almost fallen to the ground. She could not take another step, and looked round for a litter, but, while generally there was no lack of them, in this spot, to-day there was not one to be seen. The factory was only a few hundred steps farther, but in her fancy they seemed like so many stadia. Presently some of the workmen and women from the factory came by, laughing and showing each other their wages, so the payment must be now going on. A glance at the sun showed her how long she had already been on her way, and remind her of the purpose of her walk.

With the exertion of all her strength, she dragged herself a few steps farther; then, just as her courage was again beginning to fail, a little girl came running towards her who was accustomed to wait upon the workers at the table where Selene and Arsinoe were employed, and who held in her hand a pitcher. She called the dusky little Egyptian, and said:

"Hathor, pray come back to the factory with me. I cannot walk any farther, my foot is so dreadfully painful; but if I lean a little on your shoulder, I shall get on better."

"I cannot," said the child. "If I make haste home I shall have some dates," and she ran on.

Selene looked after her, and an inward voice, against which she had had to rebel before to-day, asked her why she of all people must be a sufferer for others, when they thought only of themselves, and with a heavy sigh, she made a fresh attempt to proceed on her way.

When she had gone a few steps, neither seeing nor hearing anything that passed her, a girl came up to her, and asked her timidly, but kindly, what was the matter. It was a leaf-joiner who sat opposite to her at the works, a poor, deformed creature, who, nevertheless, plied her nimble fingers contentedly and silently, and who at first had taught Selene and Arsinoe many useful tricks of working. The girl offered her crooked shoulder unasked as a support to Selene, and measured her step; to those of the sufferer with as much nicety as if she felt everything that Selene herself did; thus, without speaking, they reached the door of the factory; there, in the first court-yard the little hunchback made Selene sit down on one of the bundles of papyrus-stems which lay all about the place, by the side of the tanks in which the plants were dipped to freshen them, and arranged in order, built up into high heaps, according to the localities whence they were brought. After a short rest, they went on through the hall in which the triangular green stems were sorted, according to the quality of the white pith they contained. The next rooms, in which men stripped the green sheath from the pith, and the long galleries where the more skilled hands split the pith with sharp knives into long moist strips about a finger wide, and of different degrees of fineness, seemed to Selene to grow longer the farther she went, and to be absolutely interminable.

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Generally the pith-splitters sat here in long rows, each at his own little table, on each side of a gangway left for the slaves, who carried the prepared material to the drying-house; but, to-day, most of them had left their places and stood chatting together and packing up their wooden clips, knives, and sharpening-stones. Half way down this room Selene's hand fell from her companion's shoulder, she turned giddy, and said in a low tone:

"I can go no farther—"

The little hunchback held her up as well as she could, and though she herself was far from strong, she succeeded in dragging, rather than carrying, Selene to an empty couch and in laying her upon it. A few workmen gathered around the senseless girl, and brought some water, then when she opened her eyes again, and they found that she belonged to the rooms where the prepared papyrus-leaves were gummed together, some of them offered to carry her thither, and before Selene could consent they had taken up the bench and lifted it with its light burden. Her damaged foot hung down, and gave the poor girl such pain that she cried out, and tried to raise the injured limb and hold her ankle in her band; her comrade helped by taking the poor little foot in her own hand, and supporting it with tender and cautious care.

As she thus went by, carried, as it were, in triumph by the men, and borne high in the air, everyone turned to look at her, and the suffering girl felt this rather as if she were some criminal being carried through the streets to exhibit her disgrace to the citizens. But when she found herself in the large rooms where, in one place men, and in another the most skilled of the women and girls were employed in laying the narrow strips of papyrus crosswise over each other, and gumming them together, she had recovered strength enough to pull her veil over her face which she held down. Arsinoe, and she herself, in order to remain unrecognized had always been accustomed to walk through these rooms closely veiled, and not to lay their wraps aside till they reached the little room where they sat with about twenty other women to glue the sheets together.

Every one looked at her with curious enquiry. Her foot certainly hurt her, the cut in her head was burning, and she felt altogether intensely miserable; still there was room and to spare in her soul for the false pride that she inherited from her father, and for the humiliating consciousness that she was regarded by these people as one of themselves.

In the room in which she worked, none but free women were employed, but more than a thousand slaves worked in the factory and she would as soon have eaten with beasts without plate or spoon, as have shared a meal with them. At one time, when every thing in their house seemed going to ruin, it was her own father who had suggested the papyrus factory to her attention, by telling her, with indignation, that the daughter of an impoverished citizen had degraded herself and her whole class by devoting herself to working in the papyrus factory to earn money. She was pretty well paid, to be sure, and

in answer to Selene's enquiry, he had stated the amount she earned and mentioned the name of the rich manufacturer to whom she had sold her social standing for gold.

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Soon after this Selene had gone alone to the factory, had discussed all that was necessary with the manager, and had then begun, with Arsinoe, to work regularly in the factory where they now for two years had spent some hours of every day in gumming the papyrus-leaves together.

How many a time at the beginning of a new week, or when under the influence of a special fit of aversion to her work, had Arsinoe refused to go with her ever again to the factory; how much persuasive eloquence had she expended, how many new ribbons had she bought, how often had she consented to allow her to go to some spectacle, which consumed half a week's wages, to induce Arsinoe to persist in her work, or to avert the fulfilment of her threat to tell her father, whither her daily walk—as she called it—tended.

When Selene, who had been carried as far as the door of her own work-room, was sitting once more in her usual place in front of the long table on which she worked, and where hundreds of prepared papyrus strips were to be joined together, she felt scarcely able to raise the veil from her face. She drew the uppermost sheets towards her, dipped the brush in the gum-jar, and began to touch the margin of the leaf with it—but in the very act, her strength forsook her, the brush fell from her fingers, she dropped her hands on the table and her face in her hands, and began to cry softly.

While she sat thus, her tears slowly flowing, her shoulders heaving, and her whole body shaken with shuddering sobs, a woman who sat opposite to her, beckoned to the deformed girl, and after whispering to her a few words grasped her hand firmly and warmly and looked straight into her eyes with her own, which though lustreless were clear and steady; then the little hunchback silently took Arsinoe's vacant place by Selene, and pushed the smaller half of the papyrus leaves over to the woman, and both set diligently to work on the gumming.

They had been thus occupied for some time when Selene at last raised her head and was about to take up her brush again. She looked round for it and perceived her companion, whom she had not even thanked for her helpfulness, busily at work in Arsinoe's seat. She looked at her neighbor with eyes still full of tears, and as the girl, who was wholly absorbed in her task, did not notice her gaze, Selene said in a tone of surprise rather than kindness.

"This is my sister's place; you may sit here to-day, but when the factory opens again she must sit by me again."

"I know, I know," said the workwoman shyly. "I am only finishing your sheets because I have no more of my own to do, and I can see how badly your foot is hurting you."

The whole transaction was so strange and novel to Selene that she did not even understand her neighbor's meaning, and she only said, with a shrug:

“You may earn all you can, for aught I can do; I cannot do anything to-day.”

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Her deformed companion colored and looked up doubtfully at her opposite neighbor, who at once laid aside her brush and said, turning to Selene:

"That is not what Mary means, my child. She is doing one-half of your day's task and I am doing the other, so that your suffering foot may not deprive you of your day's pay."

"Do I look so very poor then?" exclaimed Keraunus' daughter, and a faint crimson tinged her pale cheeks.

"By no means, my child," replied the woman. "You and your sister are evidently of good family—but pray let us have the pleasure of being of some help to you."

"I do not know—" Selene stammered.

"If you saw that it hurt me to stoop when the wind blows the strips of papyrus on to the floor, would you not willingly pick them up for me?" continued the woman. "What we are doing for you is neither less nor yet much more than that. In a few minutes we shall have finished and then we can follow the others, for every one else has left. I am the overseer of the room, as you know, and must in any case remain here till the last work-woman has gone."

Selene felt full well that she ought to be grateful for the kindness shown her by these two women, and yet she had a sense of having a deed of almsgiving forced upon her acceptance, and she answered quickly, still with the blood mounting to her cheeks. "I am very grateful for your good intentions, of course, very grateful; but here each one must work for herself, and it would ill-become me to allow you to give me the money you have earned."

The girl spoke these words with a decisiveness which was not free from arrogance, but this did not disturb the woman's gentle equanimity—"widow Hannah," as she was called by the workwoman—and fixing the calm gaze of her large eyes on Selene, she answered kindly:

"We have been very happy to work for you, dear daughter, and a divine Sage has said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Do you understand all that that means? In our case it is as much as to say that it makes kind-hearted folks much happier to do others a pleasure than to receive good gifts. You said just now that you were grateful; do you want now to spoil our pleasure?"

"I do not quite understand—" answered Selene. "No?" interrupted widow Hannah. "Then only try for once to do some one a pleasure with sincere and heartfelt love, and you will see how much good it does one, how it opens the heart and turns every trouble to a pleasure. Is it not true Mary, we shall be sincerely obliged to Selene if only she will not spoil the pleasure we have had in working for her?"

“I have been so glad to do it,” said the deformed girl, “and there—now I have finished.”

“And I too,” said the widow, pressing the last leaf on to its fellow with a cloth, and then adding her pile of finished sheets to Mary’s.

“Thank you very much,” murmured Selene, with downcast eyes, and rising from her seat, but she tried to support herself on her lame foot and this caused her such pain, that with a low cry, she sank back on the stool. The widow hastened to her side, knelt clown by her, took the injured foot with tender care in her delicate and slender hands, examined it attentively, felt it gently, and then exclaimed with horror:

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“Good Lord! and did you walk through the streets with a foot in this state?” and looking up at Selene she said affectionately. “Poor child, poor child! it must have hurt you! Why the swelling has risen above your sandal-straps. It is frightful! and yet—do you live far from this?”

“I can get home in half an hour.”

“Impossible! First let me see on my tablets how much the paymaster owes you that I may go and fetch it, and then we will soon see what can be done with you. Meanwhile you sit still daughter dear, and you Mary rest her foot on a stool and undo the straps very gently from her ankle. Do not be afraid my child, she has soft, careful hands.” As she spoke she rose and kissed Selene on her forehead and eyes, and Selene clung to her and could only say with swimming eyes, and a voice trembling with feeling:

“Dame Hannah, dear widow Hannah.”

As the warm sunshine of an October day reminds the traveller of the summer that is over, so the widow’s words and ways brought back to Selene the long lost love and care of her good mother; and something soothing mingled in the bitterness of the pain she was suffering. She looked gratefully at the kind woman and obediently sat still; it was such a comfort once more to obey an order, and to obey willingly—to feel herself a child again and to be grateful for loving care.

Hannah went away, and Mary knelt down in front of Selene to loosen and remove the straps which were half buried in the swelled muscles. She did it with the greatest caution, but her fingers had hardly touched her, when Selene shrank back with a groan, and before she could undo the sandal, the patient had fainted away. Mary fetched some water and bathed her brow, and the burning wound in her head, and by the time Selene had once more opened her eyes, dame Hannah had returned. When the widow stroked her thick soft hair, Selene looked up with a smile and asked: “Have I been to sleep?”

“You shut your eyes my child,” replied the widow. “Here are your wages and your sister’s, for twelve days; do not move, I will put it in your little bag. Mary has not succeeded in loosening your sandal, but the physician who is paid to attend on the factory people will be here directly, and will order what is proper for your poor foot. The manager is having a litter fetched for you.—Where do you live?”

“We?” cried Selene, alarmed. “No, no, I must go home.”

“But my child you cannot walk farther than the court-yard even if we both help you.”

“Then let me get a litter out in the street. My father—no one must know—I cannot.”



Hannah signed to Mary to leave them, and when she had shut the door on the deformed girl, she brought a stool, sat down opposite to Selene, laid a hand on the knee that was not hurt, and said:

“Now, dear girl, we are alone. I am no chatterbox, and will certainly not betray your confidence. Tell me quietly who you belong to. Tell me —you believe that I mean well by you?”

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"Yes," replied Selene, looking the widow full in the face— a regularly-cut face, set in abundant smooth brown hair, and with the stamp of genuine and heart-felt goodness. "Yes—you remind me of my mother."

"Well, I might be your mother."

"I am nineteen years old already."

"Already," replied Hannah, with a smile. "Why my life has been twice as long as yours. I had a child, too, a boy; and he was taken from me when he was quite little. He would be a year older than you now, my child— is your mother still alive?"

"No," said Selene, with her old dry manner, that had become a habit. "The gods have taken her from us. She would have been, like you, not quite forty now, and she was as pretty and as kind as you are. When she died she left seven children besides me, all little, and one of them blind. I am the eldest, and do what I can for them, that they may not be starved."

"God will help you in the loving task."

"The gods!" exclaimed Selene, bitterly. "They let them grow up, the rest I have to see to—oh! my foot, my foot!"

"Yes, we will think of that before anything else. Your father is alive?"

"Yes."

"And he is not to know that you work here?"

Selene shook her head.

"He is in moderate circumstances, but of good family?"

"Yes."

"Here, I think, is the doctor. Well? May I know your father's name? I must if I am to get you safe home."

"I am the daughter of Keraunus, the steward of the palace, and we have rooms there, at Lochias," Selene answered, with rapid decision, but in a low whisper, so that the physician, who just then opened the room door, might not hear her. "No one, and least of all, my father, must know that I work here."

The widow made a sign to her to be easy, greeted the grey-haired leech who came in with his assistant; and then, while the old man examined the injured limb, and cut the

straps with a sharp pair of scissors, she bathed the girl's face and cut head with a wet handkerchief, supported the poor child in her arms, and, when the pain seemed too much for her, kissed her pale cheeks.

Many sighs from the bottom of her heart, and many shrill little cries betrayed how intense was the pain Selene was enduring. When at length, her delicate and graceful foot-distorted just now by the extensive swelling,—was freed from the bands and straps, and the ankle had been felt and pressed in every direction by the leech, he exclaimed, turning to the assistant who stood ready to lend a helping hand:

“Look here, Hippolytus, the girl came along the streets with her ankle in this state. If any one else had told me of such a thing, I should have desired him to keep his lies to himself. The fibula is broken at the joint, and with this injured limb the child has walked farther than I could trust myself at all—without my litter. By Sirius! child, if you are not crippled for life it will be a miracle.”

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Selene had listened with closed eyes, and exhausted almost to unconsciousness; but at his last words she slightly shrugged her shoulders with a faint smile of scorn on her lips.

"You think nothing of being lame!" said the old man, who let no gesture of his patient escape him. "That, of course, is your affair, but it is mine to see that you do not become a cripple in my hands. The opportunity for working a miracle is not given to one of us every day, and happily for me, you yourself bring a powerful coadjutor to help me. I do not mean a lover or anything of that kind, though you are much too pretty, but your lovely, vigorous, healthy youth. The hole in your head is hotter than it need be—keep it properly cool with fresh water. Where do you live, child?"

"Almost half an hour from here," said Hannah, answering for Selene.

"She cannot be taken so far as that, even in a litter, at present," said the old man.

"I must go home!" cried Selene, resolutely, and trying to sit up.

"Nonsense," exclaimed the physician. "I must forbid your moving at all. Be still, and be patient and obedient, or your foolish joke will come to a bad end; fever has already set in, and it will increase by the evening. It has nothing much to do with the leg, but all the more with the inflamed scalp-wound. Do you think," he added, turning to the widow, "that perhaps a bed could be made here on which she might lie, and remain here till the factory reopens?"

"I would rather die," shrieked Selene, trying to draw away her foot from the leech.

"Be still—be still, my dear child," said the good woman, soothingly. "I know where I can take you. My house is in a garden belonging to Paulina, the widow of Pudeus, near this and close to the sea; it is not above a thousand paces off, and there you will have a soft couch and tender care. A good litter is waiting, and I should think—"

"Even that is a good distance," said the old man. "However, she cannot possibly be better cared for than by you, dame Hannah. Let us try it then, and I will accompany you to lash those accursed bearers' skins if they do not keep in step."

Selene made no attempt to resist these orders, and willingly drank a potion which the old man gave her; but she cried to herself as she was lifted into the litter and her foot was carefully propped on pillows. In the street, which they soon reached through a side door, she again almost lost consciousness, and half awake but half as in a dream, she heard the leech's voice as he cautioned the bearers to walk carefully, and saw the people, and vehicles, and horsemen pass her on their way. Then she saw that she was being carried through a large garden, and at last she dimly perceived that she was being laid on a bed. From that moment every thing was merged in a dream, though the frequent convulsions of pain that passed over her features and now and then a rapid

movement of her hand to the cut in her head, showed that she was not altogether oblivious to the reality of her sufferings.

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Dame Hannah sat by the bed, and carried out the physician's instructions with exactness; he himself did not leave his patient till he was perfectly satisfied with her bed and her position. Mary stayed with the widow helping her to wet handkerchiefs and to make bandages out of old linen.

When Selene began to breathe more calmly Hannah beckoned her assistant to come close to her and asked in a low voice.

"Can you stay here till early to-morrow, we must take it in turns to watch her, most likely for several nights—how hot this wound on her head is!"

"Yes, I can stay, only I must tell my mother that she may not be frightened."

"Quite right, and then you may undertake another commission for I cannot leave the poor child just now."

"Her people will be anxious about her."

"That is just where you must go; but no one besides us two must know who she is. Ask for Selene's sister and tell her what has happened; if you see her father tell him that I am taking care of his daughter, and that the physician strictly forbids her moving or being moved. But he must not know that Selene is one of us workers, so do not say a word about the factory before him. If you find neither Arsinoe nor her father at home, tell any one that opens the door to you that I have taken the sick child in, and did it gladly. But about the workshop, do your hear, not a word. One thing more, the poor girl would never have come down to the factory in spite of such pain, unless her family had been very much in need of her wages; so just give these drachmae to some one and say, as is perfectly true, that we found them about her person."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Enjoy the present day
Idleness had long since grown to be the occupation of his life
It was such a comfort once more to obey an order
Philosophers who wrote of the vanity of writers

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(Three Pages)

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