

The Emperorz — Volume 05 eBook

The Emperorz — Volume 05 by Georg Ebers

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Contents

The Emperorz — Volume 05 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	8
Page 4.....	9
Page 5.....	10
Page 6.....	12
Page 7.....	13
Page 8.....	15
Page 9.....	17
Page 10.....	19
Page 11.....	21
Page 12.....	23
Page 13.....	25
Page 14.....	26
Page 15.....	28
Page 16.....	30
Page 17.....	32
Page 18.....	34
Page 19.....	36
Page 20.....	37
Page 21.....	39
Page 22.....	41

Page 23.....	43
Page 24.....	45
Page 25.....	47
Page 26.....	48
Page 27.....	50
Page 28.....	52
Page 29.....	54
Page 30.....	56
Page 31.....	58
Page 32.....	59
Page 33.....	61
Page 34.....	63
Page 35.....	64
Page 36.....	66
Page 37.....	68
Page 38.....	70
Page 39.....	72
Page 40.....	74
Page 41.....	76
Page 42.....	78
Page 43.....	79
Page 44.....	80

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	
Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
CHAPTER XIX.	1
CHAPTER XX.	11
CHAPTER XXI.	21
CHAPTER XXII.	30
ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:	39
Information about Project Gutenberg	40
(one page)	
(Three Pages)	41

Page 1

CHAPTER XIX.

Plutarch was one of the richest citizens of Alexandria, and the owner of the papyrus manufactory where Selene and Arsinoe worked; and he had of his own free will offered to provide for the “suitable” entertainment of the wives and daughters of his fellow-citizens, who were, this very day, to assemble in one of the smaller theatres of the city. Every one that knew him, knew too that “suitable” with him meant as much as to say imperial splendor.

The ship-builder’s daughter had prepared Arsinoe for grand doings, but by the time she had reached the entrance only of the theatre her expectations were exceeded, for as soon as she gave her father’s name and her own, a boy, who looked out from an arbor of flowers gave her a magnificent bunch of flowers, and another, who sat perched on a dolphin, handed her, as a ticket of admission, a finely-cut ornament of ivory mounted in gold, with a pin, by which the invited owner was intended to fix it like a brooch in her peplum; and at each entrance to the theatre, the ladies, as they came in, had a similar present made them.

The passage leading to the auditorium was full of perfume, and Arsinoe, who had already visited this theatre two or three times, hardly recognized it, it was so gaily decorated with colored scarfs. And who had ever seen ladies and young girls filling the best places instead of men, as was the case to-day? Indeed the citizens’ daughters were in general not permitted to see a theatrical performance at all, unless on very special and exceptional occasions. She looked up with a smile at the empty topmost rows of the cheapest seats of the semicircular auditorium, as one looks at an old playfellow one had outgrown by a head, for it was there—when she had occasionally been permitted to dip into their scanty common purse—that she had almost fainted many a time, with pleasure, fear, or sympathy, though the draught so high up and under the open heaven which was the only roof, was incessantly blowing; and in summer the discomforts were even greater from the awning which shaded the amphitheatre on the sunny side. The wide breadths of canvas were managed by means of stout ropes, and when these were pulled through the rings they rode in, they made a screech which compelled the bearer to stop his ears; and often it was necessary to duck his head not to be hit by the heavy ropes or by the awning itself. But Arsinoe only remembered these things to-day as a butterfly sporting in the sun may remember the hideous pupa-case that it has burst and left behind it.

Radiant with happy excitement, she was led to her seat with her young companion, the black-haired daughter of the shipwright. She perceived indeed that numerous eyes turned upon her, but that only added to her pleasure, for she knew that she could well bear looking at, and there could be no greater pleasure, as she thought, than to give pleasure to a multitude.

Page 2

To-day at any rate! For those who were looking at her were the chief citizens of Alexandria; they stood on the stage, and among them stood kind tall Pollux, waving his hand to her. She could not keep her feet quiet, but she did contrive to keep her arms still by crossing them in front of her, so that they might not betray how excited she was.

This distribution of parts had already begun, for, by waiting for Selene, she had come in almost half an hour too late. As soon as she saw that the eyes that had been attracted to herself as she entered the theatre had turned to other objects she herself looked round her. She was sitting on a bench at the lowest and narrowest end of one of the wedge-shaped sections of seats, which grew wider at the upper end, and which were divided from each other by gangways for those who came and went, thus forming the semicircular area of the auditorium.

Here she was surrounded only by young girls and women who were to have a part or place in the performances. The places for these interested persons were divided from the stage by a space for the orchestra, whence the stage was easily reached by steps up which the chorus were wont to mount to it.

Behind Arsinoe, in the larger circular rows, sat the parents and husbands of the performers, among whom Keraunus, in his saffron robe, had taken a place, besides a considerable number of sight-loving matrons and older citizens who had accepted Plutarch's invitation.

Among the young women and girls Arsinoe saw several whose beauty struck her, but she admired them ungrudgingly, and it never came into her head to compare herself with them, for she knew very accurately that she was pretty, and that even here she had nothing to conceal, and this was enough for her.

The many-voiced hum which incessantly buzzed in her ears, and the perfume which rose from the attar in the orchestra had something intoxicating in them. Her gaze round the assembled multitude could not disturb any one, and her companion had found some friends with whom she was chattering and laughing. Other ladies and young girls sat staring silently in front of them, or studying the appearance of the rest of the audience, male and female; while others again concentrated their whole attention on the stage. Arsinoe soon followed this example, nor was this solely on account of Pollux who, by the prefect's orders, had been enlisted among the artists to whom the arrangement of the display was entrusted, in spite of the objections of his master Papias. More than once before had she seen the afternoon sun shine as brightly into the theatre as it did to-day, and the blue sky overarching it without a cloud, but with what different feelings did she now direct her gaze to the raised level behind the orchestra. The background, it is true, was the same as usual, the pillared front of a palace built entirely of colored marbles, and ornamented with gold; but on this occasion fresh garlands of fragrant flowers hung gracefully between the pilasters and across from column to column. Several artists, the first of the city, with tablets and styla in their hands were moving

about among fifty girls and ladies, and Plutarch himself, and the gentlemen with him, composed, as it were a grand chorus which sometimes divided, and sometimes stood all together.

Page 3

On the right side of the stage were three purple-covered couches. On one of them sat Titianus, the prefect, who, like the artists, used his pencil; with him was his wife Julia. On another reclined Verus, at full length, and as usual, crowned with roses; the third was for Plutarch, but was unoccupied. The praetor did not hesitate to interrupt any speaker, as though he were the host of the entertainment, and many of his remarks were followed by loud applause, or approving laughter.

The face and figure of the wealthy Plutarch, which could never be forgotten, were not altogether strange to Arsinoe, for, a few days previously he had shown himself for the first time in many years in his papyrus factory, with an architect to settle with him how the courts and rooms could best be cleaned and decorated for the reception of the Emperor; and on this occasion he had gone into the room where she worked and had pinched her cheek with a few roguish and flattering words.

There he was, walking across the stage. He was an old man, said to be about seventy years of age, his legs were half-paralyzed, and they nevertheless moved with a series of incessant and rapid but involuntary jerks under his heavy bowed body, and he was supported on either hand by a tall young fellow. His nobly-formed head, must have been in his youth, of extraordinary beauty. Now his head was covered by a wig of long brown hair, his eyebrows and lashes were darkly dyed, his cheeks daubed with red and white paint, which gave his countenance a fixed expression, as if he had been stricken in the very act of smiling. On his curls he wore a wreath of rare flowers in long racemes. An abundance of red and white roses stuck out from the front folds of his ample toga, and were held in their place by gold brooches, sparkling with precious stones of large size. The hems of his mantle were all edged with rose-buds, and each was fastened in with an emerald that shone like some bright insect. The young men who supported him seemed like a portion of himself; he took no more heed of them than if they had been crutches, and they needed not command to tell them where he wished to go, where to stand still, and where to rest.

At a distance his face was like that of a youth, but seen close it looked like a painted plaster mask, with regular features and large movable eyes.

Favorinus, the sophist, had said of him that one might cry over his handsome locomotive corpse, if one were not obliged to laugh at it, and it was said that he had himself declared that he would force his faithless youth to remain with him. The Alexandrians called him the Adonis with six legs, on account of the lads who supported him, and without whom no one ever saw him and who always accompanied him when he went out. The first time he heard this nickname he remarked: "They had better have called me sixhanded;" and in fact he had a thoroughly good heart, he was liberal and benevolent, took fatherly care of his work-people, treated his slaves well, enriched those whom he set free, and from time to time distributed large sums among the people in money and in grain.

Page 4

Arsinoe looked compassionately on the poor old man who could not buy back his youth with all his money and all his art.

In the supercilious man who at once came up to Plutarch she recognized the art-dealer Gabinius to whom her father had shown the door, on account of the mosaic picture in their sitting-room, but their conversation was interrupted, for the distribution of the women's part for the group of Alexander's entry into Babylon, was now about to take place; about fifty girls and young women were sent away from the stage and went down into the orchestra. The Exegetes, the highest official in the town, now came forward and took a new list out of the hand of Papias the sculptor. After rapidly casting an eye on this, he handed it to a herald who followed him, who proclaimed to all the assembly:

"In the name of the most noble Exegetes I request your attention, all you ladies here assembled, the wives and daughters of Macedonians and of Roman citizens. We now come to a distribution of the characters in our representation of the life and history of the great Macedonian, of the 'Marriage of Alexander and Roxana,' and I hereby request those among you to come upon the stage whom our artists have selected to take part in this scene in the procession." After this exordium he shouted in a deep and resonant voice a long list of names, and while this was going on every other sound was hushed in the wide amphitheatre.

Even on the stage all was still; only Verus whispered a few remarks to Titianus, and the curiosity-dealer spoke into Plutarch's ear, long sentences with the stringent emphasis which was peculiar to him; and the old man answered sometimes with an assenting nod, and sometimes with a deprecatory motion of his hands.

Arsinoe listened with suspended breath to the herald's proclamation; she started and colored all over, with her eyes fixed on the bunch of flowers in her hand, when she heard from the stage loudly uttered and plain to be heard by all present:

"Arsinoe, the second daughter of Keraunus, the Macedonian and a Roman citizen."

The ship-builder's daughter had already been called before her, and had immediately left her seat, but Arsinoe waited modestly till some older ladies rose. She then joined them and went among the last members of the little procession which went down to the orchestra and from thence up the steps for the chorus, on to the stage.

There the ladies and young girls were placed in two ranks, and looked at with amiable consideration by the artists. Arsinoe was not long in perceiving that these gentlemen looked at her longer and more often than at the others; and then, after the masters of the festival had gone aside in groups to discuss the matter they looked at her constantly and were talking, she felt sure, about her. Nor did it escape her that she had become the centre of many glances from the lookers-on who were sitting in the

Page 5

theatre, and it occurred to her that on several sides people were pointing at her with their fingers. She did not know which way she should look and began to feel bashful; still she was pleased at being remarked by so many people, and as she stood looking at the ground out of sheer embarrassment to hide the delight she felt, Verus, who had gone up to the group of artists, called out, putting his hand on the prefect's arm.

"Charming-charming! a Roxana that might have sprung straight out of the picture."

Arsinoe heard these words, and guessing that they referred to her she became more confused than ever, while her awkward smile gradually changed to an expression of joyful but anxious expectation of a delight which was almost painful in its magnitude.

Now one of the artists pronounced her name, and as she ventured to raise her eyes to see if it were not Pollux who had spoken, she observed the wealthy Plutarch who, with his two living crutches and Gabinius, the lean curiosity-dealer, was inspecting the ranks of her companions. Presently he had come quite close to her, and as he was helped towards her with tottering steps, he dug the dealer in the ribs and said, kissing the back of his hand, and winking his great eyes: "I know—I know! It is not easily forgotten. Ivory and red coral!"

Arsinoe started, the blood left her cheeks, and all satisfaction fled from her heart when the old man came to a stand-still in front of her, and said kindly:

"Ah! ah! a bud out of the papyrus factory among all these proud roses and lilies. Ah! ah! out of my work-rooms to join my assembly! Never mind—never mind, beauty is everywhere welcome. I do not ask how you got here. I am only glad that you are here."

Arsinoe covered part of her face with her hand, but he tapped her white arm three times with his middle finger, and then tottered on laughing to himself. The dealer had caught Plutarch's words, and asked him, when they had gone a few steps from Arsinoe, with eager indignation:

"Did I hear you rightly? a work-woman in your factory, and here among our daughters?"

"So it is—two busy hands among so many idle ones," said the old man, gaily.

"Then she must have forced her way in, and must be turned out."

"Certainly she shall not—Why, she is charming."

"It is revolting! here, in this assembly!"

“Revolting?” interrupted Plutarch. “Oh dear, no! we must not be too particular. And how are we to obtain mere children from you antiquity-mongers?” Then he added pleasantly:

“This lovely creature must I should think, delight your fine sense of beauty; or are you afraid that she may seem better suited to the part of Roxana than your own charming daughter? Only listen to the men up there! Let us see what is going on.”

Page 6

These words referred to a loud discussion which had arisen close by the couches of the prefect and Verus, the praetor. They, and with them most of the painters and sculptors present, were of opinion that Arsinoe would be a wonderfully effective Roxana; they maintained that her face and figure answered perfectly to those of the Bactrian princes as they were represented by Action, whose picture was, to a certain extent, to serve as the basis of the living group. Only Papias and two of his fellow-artists, declared against this choice, and eagerly asserted that among all the damsels present one, and one alone, was worthy to appear before the Emperor as Alexander's bride, and that one was Praxilla, the daughter of Gabinius. All three were in close business relations with the father of the young girl, who was tall, and slim, and certainly very lovely, and they wanted to do a pleasure to the rich and knowing purchaser. Their zeal even assumed a tone of vehemence, when the dealer, following in the wake of Plutarch, joined the group of disputants, and they were certain of being heard by him.

"And who is this girl yonder?" asked Papias, pointing to Arsinoe, as the two came up. "Nothing can be said against her beauty, but she is dressed less than simply, and wears no kind of ornament worth speaking of—it is a thousand to one against her parents being in a position to provide her with such a rich dress, and such costly jewels as Roxana certainly ought to display when about to be married to Alexander. The Asiatic princess must appear in silk, gold and precious stones. Now my friend here will be able so to dress his Praxilla that the splendor of her attire might have astonished the great Macedonian himself, but who is the father of that pretty child who is satisfied with the blue ribbon in her hair, her two roses, and her little white frock?"

"Your reflections are just, Papias," interrupted the dealer, with dry incisiveness. "The girl you are speaking of is quite out of the question. I do not say so for my daughter's sake, but because everything in bad taste is odious to me; it is hardly conceivable how such a young thing could have had the audacity to force herself in here. A pretty face, to be sure, opens locks and bars. She is—do not be too much startled—she is nothing more than a work-girl in the papyrus factory of our excellent host, Plutarch."

"That is not the truth," Pollux interrupted, indignantly, as he heard this assertion.

"Moderate your tongue, young man," replied the dealer. "I can call you to witness, noble Plutarch."

"Let her be whom she may," answered the old man, with annoyance. "She is very one of my workwomen, but even if she had come straight here from the gumming-table with such a face and such a figure, she is perfectly in place here and everywhere. That is my opinion."

"Bravo! my fine friend!" cried Verus, nodding to the old man. "Caesar will be far better pleased with such a paragon of charmers as that sweet creature, than with all your old writs of citizenship and heavy purses."

Page 7

"That is true," the prefect said, confirming this statement. "And I dare swear she is a free maiden, and not a slave. But you stood up for her friend Pollux—what do you know about her?"

"That she is the daughter of Keraunus, the palace-steward, and that I have known her from her childhood," answered the youthful artist emphatically. "He is a Roman citizen, and of an old Macedonian house as well."

"Perhaps even of royal descent," added Titianus, laughing.

"I know the man," answered the dealer hastily. "He is an impecunious insolent old fool."

"I should think," interrupted Verus with lofty composure, but rather as being bored, than as reproving the irritated speaker, "it seems to me that this is hardly the place to conduct a discussion as to the nature and disposition of the fathers of all those ladies and young girls."

"But he is poor," cried the dealer angrily. "A few days since he offered to sell me his few miserable curiosities, but really I could not—"

"We are sorry for your sake if the transaction was unsuccessful," Verus again interposed, this time with excessive politeness. "Now, first let us decide on the persons and afterwards on the costumes. The father of the girl is a Roman citizen then?"

"A member of the council, and in his way a man of position," replied Titianus.

"And I," added his wife Julia, "have taken a great fancy to the sweet little maid, and if the principal part is given to her, and her noble father is without adequate means, as you assert my friend, I will undertake to provide for her costume. Caesar will be charmed with such a Roxana."

The dealer's clients were silent, he himself was trembling with disappointment and vexation, and his fury rose to the utmost when Plutarch, whom till then he thought he had won over to his daughter's side, tried to bow his bent old body before dame Julia, and said with a graceful gesture of regret:

"My old eyes have deceived me again on this occasion. The little girl is very like one of my workwomen; very like—but I see now that there is a certain something which the other lacks. I have done her an injustice and remain her debtor. Permit, me, noble lady to add the ornaments to the dress you provide for our Roxana. I may be lucky enough to find something pretty for her. A sweet child! I shall go at once and beg her forgiveness and tell her what we propose. May I do so noble Julia? Have I your permission gentlemen?"

In a very few minutes it was known all over the stage, and soon after all through the amphitheatre, that Arsinoe, the daughter of Keraunus, had been selected to represent the character of Roxana.

“But who was Keraunus?”

“How was it that the children of the most illustrious and wealthy citizens had been overlooked in assigning this most prominent part?”

“This was just what might be expected when every thing was left to those reckless artists!”

Page 8

“And where was a poor little girl like that to find the talents which it would cost to procure the costume of an Asiatic princess, Alexander’s bride?”

“Plutarch, and the prefect’s wife had undertaken that.”

“A mere beggar.”

“How well the family jewels would have suited our daughters!”

“Do we want to show Caesar nothing but a few silly pretty faces?—and not something of our wealth and taste?”

“Supposing Hadrian asks who this Roxana is, and had to be told that a collection had to be made to get her a proper costume.”

“Such things never could happen anywhere but in Alexandria.”

“Every one wants to know whether she worked in Plutarch’s factory. They say it is not true—but the painted old villain still loves a pretty face. He smuggled her in, you may be sure; where there is smoke there is fire, and it is beyond a doubt that she gets money from the old man.”

“What for?”

“Ah! you had better enquire of a priest of Aphrodite. It is nothing to laugh at, it is scandalous, audacious!”

Thus and on this wise ran the comments with which the announcement of Arsinoe’s preferment to the part of Roxana was received, and hatred and bitter animosity had grown up in the souls of the dealer and his daughter. Praxilla was selected as a companion to Alexander’s bride, and she yielded without objecting, but on her way homewards she nodded assent when her father said:

“Let things go on now as they may, but a few hours before the performance begins, I will send them word that you are ill.”

The selection of Arsinoe had however, on the other hand, given pleasure as well as pain. Up in the middle places in the amphitheatre sat Keraunus, his legs far apart, his face glowing, panting and choking with sheer delight, and too haughty to draw in his feet even when the brother of the archidikastes tried to squeeze by his bulky person which filled two seats at once. Arsinoe, whose sharp ears had not failed to catch the dealer’s remonstrances, and the words in which brave Pollux had taken her part, had, at first, felt dying of shame and terror, but now she felt as though she could fly on the wings of her delight. She had never been so happy in her life, and when she got out with her father, in the first dark street she threw her arms round his neck, kissed both his cheeks, and

then told him how kind the lady Julia, the prefect's wife had been to her, and that she had undertaken, with the warmest friendliness, to have her costly dress made for her.

Keraunus had no objection to offer, and, strange to say, he did not consider it beneath his dignity to allow Arsinoe to be supplied with jewels by the wealthy manufacturer.

Page 9

"People have seen," he said, pathetically, "that we need not shrink from doing as much as other citizens do, but to dress a Roxana as befits a bride would cost millions, and I am very willing to confess to my friends that I have not millions. Where the costume comes from is all the same, be that as it may you will still stand the first of all the maidens in the city, and I am pleased with you for that, my child. To-morrow will be the last meeting, and then perhaps Selene too, may have a prominent part given to her. Happily we are able to dress her as befits. When will the prefect's wife fetch you?"

"To-morrow about noon."

"Then early to-morrow buy a nice new dress."

"Will there not be enough for a new bracelet too?" asked Arsinoe, coaxingly. "This one of mine is too narrow and trumpery."

"You shall have one, for you have deserved it," replied Keraunus, with dignity. "But you must have patience till the day after to-morrow; to-morrow the goldsmiths will be closed on account of the festival."

Arsinoe had never seen her father so cheerful and talkative as he was to-day, and yet the walk from the theatre to Lochias was not a very short one, and it was long past the early hour at which he was accustomed to retire to bed.

By the time the father and daughter reached the palace it was already tolerably late, for, after Arsinoe had quitted the stage, suitable representatives of parts had been selected for three other scenes from the life of Alexander, by the light of torches, lamps and tapers; and before the assemblage broke up, Plutarch's guests were entertained with wine, fruit, syrups, sweet cakes, oyster pasties, and other delicacies. The steward had fallen with good will on the noble drink and excellent food, and when he was replete, he was wont to be in a better humor, and after a modicum of wine, in a more cheerful mood than usual. Just now he was content and kind, for although he had done all that lay in his power, the entertainment had not lasted long enough, for him to arrive at a state of intoxication which could make him surly, or to overload his digestion. Towards the end of their walk, he turned thoughtful and said:

"To-morrow the council does not sit on account of the festival, and that is well; all the world will congratulate me, question me, and notice me, and the gilding on my circlet is quite shabby; and in some places the silver shines through. Your outfit will now cost nothing, and it is quite necessary that before the next meeting I should go to a goldsmith and exchange that wretched thing for one of real gold. A man should show what he is."

He spoke the words pompously, and Arsinoe eagerly acquiesced, and only begged him, as they went in at the open door, to leave enough for Selene's costume; he laughed quietly to himself, and said:

“We need no longer be so very cautious. I should like to know who the Alexander will be who will be the first to ask for my Roxana as his wife. Rich old Plutarch’s only son already has a seat in the council, and has not yet taken a wife. He is no longer very young, but he is a fine man still.”

Page 10

The radiant father's dream of the future was interrupted by Doris, who came out of the gate-house and called him by his name. Keraunus stood still. When the old woman went on:

"I must speak with you."

He answered, repellently: "But I shall not listen to you—neither now nor at any time."

"It was certainly not for my pleasure," retorted Doris, "that I called to you; I have only to tell you that you will not find your daughter Selene at home."

"What do you say?" cried Keraunus.

"I say that the poor girl with her damaged foot could at last walk no farther, and that she had to be carried into a strange house where she is being taken care of."

"Selene!" cried Arsinoe, falling from all her clouds of happiness, startled and grieved—"do you know where she is?"

Before Doris could reply, Keraunus stormed out:

"It is all the fault of the Roman architect and his raging beast of a dog. Very good! very good! now Caesar will certainly help me to my rights. He will give a lesson to those who throw Roxana's sister into a sick-bed, and hinder her from taking any part in the processions. Very good! very good indeed!"

"It is sad enough to cry over!" said the gatekeeper's wife, indignantly. "Is this the thanks she gets for all her care of her little brothers and sisters! Only to think that a father can speak so, when his best child is lying with a broken leg, helpless among strangers!"

"With a broken leg," whimpered Arsinoe.

"Broken!" repeated Keraunus slowly, and now sincerely anxious. "Where can I find her?"

"At dame Hannah's little house at the bottom of the garden belonging to the widow of Pudeus."

"Why did they not bring her here?"

"Because the physician forbade it. She is in a fever, but she is well cared for. Hannah is one of the Christians. I cannot bear the people, but they know how to nurse the sick better than any one."

“With Christians! my child is with Christians!” shrieked Keraunus, beside himself. “At once Arsinoe, at once come with me; Selene shall not stay a moment longer among that accursed rabble. Eternal gods! besides all our other troubles this disgrace too!”

“Nay, it is not so bad as that,” said Doris soothingly. “There are very estimable folks even among the Christians. At any rate they are certainly honorable, for the poor hunch-backed creature who first brought the bad news gave me this little bag of money which dame Hannah had found in Selene’s pocket.”

Keraunus took his daughter’s hard-won wages as contemptuously as though he was quite accustomed to gold, and thought nothing of more wretched silver; but Arsinoe began to cry at the sight of the drachmae, for she knew it was for the sake of that money that Selene had left her home, and could divine what frightful pain she must have suffered on the way.

Page 11

“Honorable this, and honorable that!” cried Keraunus, as he tied up his money-bag. “I know well enough how shameless are the goings on in assemblies of that stamp; kissing and hugging slaves! quite the right sort of thing for my daughter! Come Arsinoe, let us find a litter at once!”

“No, no!” exclaimed Doris eagerly. “For the present you must leave her in peace. I should be glad to conceal it from you as a father—but the physician declared it might cost her her life if she were not left just now in perfect quiet. No one goes to any kind of assembly with a burning wound in the head, a high fever and a broken leg.—Poor dear child!”

Keraunus stood silent in grave consternation, while Arsinoe exclaimed through her tears:

“But I must go to her, I must see her Doris.”

“That I cannot blame you for, my pretty one,” said the old woman. I have already been to the house of the Christians, but they would not let me in to see the patient. With you it is rather different as you are her sister.”

“Come father,” begged Arsinoe, “first let us see to the children, and then you shall come with me to see Selene. Oh! why did I not go with her. Oh! if she should die.”

CHAPTER XX.

Keraunus and his daughter reached their rooms less quickly than usual, for the steward dreaded a fresh attack from the blood-hound, which, to-night however, was sharing Antinous’ room. They found the old slavewoman up, and in great excitement, for she loved Selene, she was frightened at her absence, and in the children’s sleeping-room all was not as it should be.

Arsinoe went without delay to see the little ones, but the black woman remained with her master, and told him with many tears, while he exchanged his saffron-colored pallium for an old cloak, that the joy of her heart, little blind Helios had been ill, and could not sleep, even after she had given him some of the drops which Keraunus himself was accustomed to take.

“Idiotic animal!” exclaimed Keraunus, “to give my medicine to the child,” and he kicked off his new shoes to replace them with shabbier ones. “If you were younger I would have you flogged.”

“But you did say the drops were good,” stammered the old woman.

“For me,” shouted the steward, and without fastening his shoe-straps round his ankles, so that they flapped and pattered on the ground, he hurried off into the children’s room. There sat his darling blind child, his ‘neir’ as he liked to call him, with his pretty, fair, curly head resting on Arsinoe’s breast. The child recognized his step, and began his little lament:

“Selene was away, and I was frightened, and I feel so sick, so sick.”

The steward laid his hand on the child’s forehead, and feeling how hot it was he began to walk restlessly up and down by the little bed.

“That is just how it always happens,” he said. “When one misfortune comes another always follows. Look at him Arsinoe. Do you remember how the fever took poor Berenice? Sickness, uneasiness, and a burning head. —“Have you any pain in your head my boy?”

Page 12

"No," answered Helios, "but I feel so sick."

The steward opened the child's little shirt to see if he had any spots on his breast, but Arsinoe said, as she bent over him:

"It is nothing much, he has only overloaded his stomach. The stupid old woman gives him every thing he asks for, and she let him have half of the currant cake, which we sent her to fetch before we went out."

"But his head is burning," repeated Keraunus.

"He will be quite well again by to-morrow morning," replied Arsinoe. "Our poor Selene needs us far snore than he does. Come father. The old woman can stay with him."

"I want Selene to come," whimpered the child. "Pray, pray, do not leave me alone again."

"Your old father will stay with you my pet," said Keraunus tenderly, for it cut him to the soul to see this child suffer. "You none of you know what this boy is to us all."

"He will soon go to sleep," Arsinoe asserted. "Do let us go, or it will be too late."

"And leave the old woman to commit some other stupid blunder?" cried Keraunus. "It is my duty to stay with the poor little boy. You can go to your sister and take the old woman with you."

"Very good, and to-morrow early I will come back."

"To-morrow morning?" said Keraunus surprised. "No, no, that will not do. Doris said just now that Selene will be well nursed by the Christians. Only see how she is, give her my love, and then come back."

"But father—"

"Besides you must remember that the prefect's wife expects you to-morrow at noon to choose the stuff for your dress, and you must not look as if you had been sitting up all night."

"I will rest a little while in the morning."

"In the morning? And how about curling my hair? And your new frock? And poor little Helios?—No child, you are only just to see Selene and then come back again. Early in the morning too the holiday will have begun, and you know what goes on then; the old woman would be of no use to you in the throng. Go and see how Selene is, you are not to stay."

“I will see—”

“Not a word about seeing—you come home again. I desire it; in two hours you are to be in bed.”

Arsinoe shrugged her shoulders, and two minutes after she was standing with the old slave-woman in front of the gate-house.

A broad beam of light still fell through the half-open door of the bowery little room, so Euphorion and Doris had not retired to rest and could at once open the palace-gate for her. The Graces set up a bark as Arsinoe crossed the threshold of her old friends' house, but they did not leave their cushion for they soon recognized her.

Page 13

It was several years since Arsinoe, in obedience to her father's strict prohibition had set foot in the snug the house, and her heart was deeply touched as she saw again all the surroundings she had loved as a child, and had not forgotten as she grew into girlhood. There were the birds, the little dogs, and the lutes on the wall near the Apollo. On worthy dame Doris' table there had always been something to eat, and there, now, good a lovely, golden-brown cake, by the side of the wine-jar. How often as a child had she sneaked in to beg a sweet morsel, how often to see whether tall Pollux were not there, Pollux, whose bold devices and original suggestions, gave his work and his play alike, the stamp of genius, and lent them a peculiar charm. And there sat her saucy playfellow in person, his legs stretched at full length in front of him, and talking, eagerly. Arsinoe heard him relating the end of the history of her being chosen for Roxana, and caught her own name, graced with such epithets as brought the blushes to her cheeks, and gave her double pleasure because he could not guess that she could overhear them. From a boy he had grown to a man, and a fine man, and a great artist—but he was still the old kind and audacious Pollux.

The sudden leap with which he sprang from his seat to welcome her, the frank laughter with which he several times interrupted her speech, the childlike loving way in which he held his arm round his little mother while he greeted her, and asked why she was going out so late, the winning, touching tone of his voice as he expressed his regret at Selene's mishaps—all went home to Arsinoe as a thing known and loved, of which she had long been deprived, and she clung to the two strong hands he held out to her. If at that moment he had taken her up, and clasped her to his heart before the very eyes of Euphiorion and his mother she really would have been incapable of resisting him.

It was with a heavy heart that Arsinoe had gone into dame Doris, but in the gate-keeper's house there reigned an atmosphere in which care and anxiety could not breathe, and the light-hearted girl's vision of her sister as tormented with pain and threatened with danger was changed in a wonderfully short time to that of a sufferer comfortably in bed, with only a severely-injured foot. In the place of consuming anxiety she felt only hearty sympathy, and this sounded in her voice as she begged the singer Euphiorion to open the gate for her, because she wanted to go out with her slave-woman to ascertain how Selene was.

Doris soothed her, repeating her assurance that the patient would be nursed with the utmost care in dame Hannah's hands; still, she thought her wish to see her sister very justifiable, and eagerly seconded Pollux when he entreated Arsinoe to accept his escort; for the festival would be beginning soon after midnight, the streets would be full of rough and impudent people, and a bunch of feathers would be about as much use against the drunken slaves as her black scarecrow, who had been falling into decrepitude even before she had done the stupidest deed of her life and roused the steward's anger against herself.

Page 14

So they went along the dark streets which grew full of people the farther they went, side by side in silence. Presently Pollux said:

"Put your arm through mine; you ought to feel that I am protecting you, and I—I should like to feel at every step that I have found you once more, and am allowed to be near you—so sweet a creature."

The words did not sound impertinent, on the contrary, they sounded very much in earnest, and the sculptor's deep voice trembled with emotion as he spoke them with deep tenderness. They knocked at the door of the girl's heart with the urgent hand of love; she unhesitatingly put her hand through his arm and answered softly:

"You will take care of me now."

"Yes," said he, and he took her little hand, which rested on his right arm, in his left hand. She did not draw it away, and after they had gone on thus for a few paces he sighed and said:

"Do you know how I feel?"

"Well!"

"Nay, I myself cannot put it into words. Rather as if I had triumphed in the Olympian games, or as if Caesar had invested me with the purple!—But who cares for the wealth or the purple! You are hanging on my arm, and I have hold of your hand; compared with this, all is as nought. If it were not for the people about I—I do not know what I could do."

She looked up at him with happy content, but he lifted her hand to his lips and pressed it to them long and fervently. Then he let it go again and said, with a sigh that came up from the bottom of his heart:

"Oh Arsinoe, my sweet Arsinoe, how I love you!"

As the words came softly yet hotly from his lips the girl clasped his arm closely to her bosom, leaned her head on his shoulder, looked up at him with a wide-eyed, tender gaze, and said softly:

"Oh Pollux, I am so happy, the world is so good!"

"Nay, I could hate it!" cried the sculptor. "To hear this—and to have an old mother wide awake at home, and to be obliged to walk steadily on in a street crowded with men—it is unendurable! I shall not hold out much longer—sweetest of girls—here it is quiet and dark."

Yes, in a little nook made by two contiguous houses, and into which Pollux drew Arsinoe, it was pitch dark, as he hastily pressed his first kiss on her innocent lips; but in their hearts it was light-radiant sunshine.

She had thrown her arms round his neck and would willingly have clung to him till day should end; but they heard the approach of a noisy procession of slaves. These unfortunate creatures began soon after midnight singing and shouting so as to avail themselves to the extremist limit of the holiday, which released them for a short time from their tasks and duties; Pollux knew well how unbounded the license of their pleasures could be, and as he walked on with Arsinoe he enjoined her to keep with him as close as possible to the houses.

“How jolly they are!” he said pointing to the merry-makers. “Their masters will wait on themselves a little to-day, and the best day in the year is just beginning for them, but for us the best day in all our lives.”

Page 15

"Yes, yes," cried Arsinoe, and she clasped his strong arm with both her hands.

Then they both laughed merrily, for Pollux had noticed that the old slave-woman had gone on past them with her head sunk on her breast, and was following another pair.

"I will call her," Arsinoe said.

"No, no, let her be," said the artist. "The couple in front certainly require her protection more than we do."

"But how could she possibly mistake that little man for you?" laughed Arsinoe.

"I wish I were a little smaller," replied Pollux with a sigh. "Only picture to yourself the vast amount of burning love and tormenting longing that can be contained in so large a body as mine!" She slapped him on the arm, and to punish her he hastily pressed his lips on her forehead.

"Don't—think of the people," she said reprovingly, but he gaily answered:

"It is not a misfortune to be envied."

Here the streets came to an end, and they found themselves in front of the garden belonging to Pudeus' widow; Pollux knew it, for Paulina who owned it was the sister of Pontius, the architect, who himself owned a magnificent house in the city. But could it be possible? Had invisible hands brought them here already? The gate of the enclosure was locked. Pollux roused a porter, told him what he wanted, and was conducted by him with Arsinoe to apart of the grounds where a bright light shone out from dame Hannah's little abode, for he had had instructions to admit the sick girl's friends even during the night.

A crescent moon lighted the paths, which were strewed with shells; the shrubs and trees in the garden threw sharply-defined shadows on their gleaming whiteness, the sea sparkled brightly, and as soon as the porter had left the happy young pair together, and they found themselves in a shadowy alley, Pollux said, opening his arms to the girl:

"Now—one more kiss, just for a remembrance, while I wait."

"Not now," begged Arsinoe.

"I am no longer happy since we came in here. I cannot help thinking of poor Selene."

"I have not a word to say against that," replied Pollux submissively. "Then when waiting is over may I have my reward?"

“No, no, now, at once,” cried Arsinoe throwing herself on his breast, and then she hurried towards the house.

He followed her, and when she paused in front of a brightly-lighted window on the ground floor, he stopped also. They both looked in on a lofty and spacious room, kept in the most perfect order and cleanliness; it had one door only opening on the roofless forecourt of the house; the walls of the room were plainly painted of a light green color, and the only ornament it contained was one piece of carved work over the door.

On the farther side stood the bed on which Selene was lying; a few paces from it sat the deformed girl asleep, while dame Hannah softly went up to the patient with a wet compress in her hand which she carefully laid on her head.

Page 16

Pollux touched Arsinoe and whispered to her:

“Your sister lies there in her sleep like an Ariadne deserted by Dionysus. How wretched she will feel when she comes to herself.”

“She looks to me less pale than usual.”

“Look now, how she bends her arm, and what a lovely attitude as she puts her hand to her head!”

“Go—” said Arsinoe. “You ought not to be spying here.”

“Directly, directly—but if you were lying there no power should stir me from the spot. How carefully Hannah lifts the wet wrapper from her poor broken ankle. You could not touch your eye more gently than the good woman handles Selene’s foot.”

“Go back, she is looking straight this way.”

“What a wonderful face! It would do for a Penelope, but there is something singular in her eyes. Now if I had to make another star-gazing Urania, or a Sappho full of the deity, and with eyes fixed on the heavens in poetic rapture, that is what I would put into her! She is no longer young, but how pure her face is! It is like a sky when the wind has swept it clear of clouds.”

“Seriously you must go now,” said Arsinoe drawing away her hand, which he had again taken. Pollux saw that his praise of another woman’s beauty annoyed her, and he said soothingly:

“Be easy child. You have not your match here in Alexandria, no, nor so far as Greek is spoken. A perfectly clear sky is certainly not the most beautiful to my taste. Pure light, and pure blue, give no satisfaction to the artist, it is only behind a few moving clouds, lighted up by changing gleams of gold and silver, that the firmament has any true charm, and though your face too is like heaven to me it does not lack sweet movement, never twice alike. Now this matron—”

“Only look,” interrupted Arsinoe, “how tenderly dame Hannah bends over Selene, and now she is gently kissing her brow. No mother could tend her own daughter more lovingly. I have known her for a long time; she is good, very good; it is hardly credible for she is a Christian.”

“The cross up there over the door,” said Pollux “is the token by which these extraordinary people recognize each other.”

“And what is signified by the dove and fish and anchor round it?” asked Arsinoe.

“They are emblems of the mysteries of the Christians,” replied Pollux. “I do not understand them; the things are wretchedly painted; the adherents of the crucified God condemn all art, and particularly my branch of it, for they hate all images of the gods.”

“And yet among such blasphemers we find such good men; I will go in at once; Hannah is wetting another handkerchief.”

“And how unwearied and kind she looks as she does it; still there is something strange, deserted, and graceless in this large bare room. I should not like to live there.”

“Have you noticed the faint scent of lavender that comes through the window?”

Page 17

“Long since—there your sister is moving and has opened her eyes—now she has shut them again.”

“Go back into the garden and wait till I come,” Arsinoe commanded him decidedly. “I will only see how Selene is going on; I will not stop long for my father wishes me to return soon, and no one can nurse her better than Hannah!”

The girl drew her hand out of her lover’s and knocked at the door of the little house; it was opened and the widow herself led Arsinoe to the bedside of her sister. Pollux at first sat a while on a bench in the garden, but soon sprang up and paced with long steps the path he had previously trodden with Arsinoe. A stone table across the path, brought him to a stand-still, and he took a fancy for leaping it. The third time he came up to it he sprang over it with a long jump. But no sooner had he done the frolicsome deed than he paused, shook his head at himself and muttered to himself: “Like a boy!”—He felt indeed like a happy child. But as he waited he became calmer and graver. He acknowledged to himself, with sincere thankfulness, that he had now found the ideal woman, of whom he had dreamed in his hours of best inspiration, and that she was his, wholly and alone. And after all, what was he? A poor rascal who had many mouths to fill, and was no more than two fingers of his master’s hand. This must be altered. He would not reduce his sister’s comforts in any way but he must break with Papias, and stand henceforth on his own feet. His courage mounted fast, and when at last, Arsinoe returned from her sister, he had resolved that he must first finish Balbilla’s bust with all diligence in his own workshop, and that then he would model his beloved; these two female heads he could not fail in. Caesar must see them, they must be exhibited, and already in his mind’s eye, he saw himself refusing order after order, and accepting only the most splendid where all were good.

Arsinoe went home comforted. Selene’s sufferings were certainly less than she had pictured them; she did not wish to be nursed by any one besides dame Hannah. She might perhaps have a little fever, but any one who was capable of discussing every little question of house-keeping, and all that related to the children could not be—as Arsinoe thought while she walked back through the garden, leaning on the artist’s arm— really and properly ill.

“It must revive and delight her to have Roxana for a sister!” cried Pollux; but his pretty companion shook her head and said: “She is always so odd; what most delights me is averse to her.”

“Well Selene is of course the moon, and you are the sun.”

“And what are you?” asked Arsinoe.

“I am tall Pollux, and to-night I feel as if I might some day be great Pollux.”

“If you succeed I shall grow with you.”

“That will be your right, since it is only through you that I can ever succeed in that which I propose to do.

Page 18

“And how should a simple little thing, such as I am, be able to help an artist?”

“By living, and by loving him,” cried the sculptor, lifting her up in his arms before she could prevent him.

Outside the garden-gate the old slave-woman was sitting asleep. She had learnt from the porter that her young mistress had been admitted with her companion, but she herself had been forbidden to enter the grounds. A curbstone had served her for a seat, and as she waited her eyes had closed, in spite of the increasing noise in the street. Arsinoe did not waken her, but asked Pollux, with a roguish laugh:

“We shall find our way alone, shall we not?”

“If Eros does not lead us astray,” answered the artist. And so, as they went on their way, they jested and exchanged little tender speeches.

The nearer they got to Lochias and to the main lines of traffic which intersected at right angles the Canopic way—the widest and longest road in the city—the fuller was the stream of people that flowed onwards in the direction in which they were going; but this circumstance favored them, for those who wish to be unobserved, when they cannot be absolutely alone, have only to mix with the crowd. As they were borne towards the focus and centre of the festive doings, they clung closely together, she to him, and he to her, so that they might not be torn apart by any of the rushing and tumultuous processions of excited Thracian women who, faithful to their native usages, came storming by with a young bull, on this particular night of the year, that following the shortest day. They had hardly gone a hundred paces beyond the Moon-street when they heard proceeding from it a wild roving song of tipsy jollity, and loud above it the sound of drums and pipes, cymbals and noisy shouting, and at the same time in the King's street, a road which crossed the Bruchiom and opened on Lochias, a merry troupe came towards them.

At their head, among other acquaintances, came Teuker, the gem-cutter, the younger brother of Pollux. Crowned with ivy, and flourishing a thyrsus he came dancing on, and behind him, leaping and shouting, a train of men and women, all excited to the verge of folly, singing, hollooming, and dancing.

Garlands of vine, ivy and asphodel fluttered from a hundred heads; poplar, lotus, and laurel wreaths overhung their heated brows; panther-skins, deer and goatskins hung from their bare shoulders and waved in the wind as their bearers hurried onwards. This procession had been first formed by some artists and rich youths returning with some women from a banquet, with a band of music; every one who met this festal party had joined it or had been forced to enlist with it. Respectable citizens and their wives, laborers, maid-servants, slaves, soldiers and sailors, officers, women flute-players,

artisans, ship-captains, the whole chorus of a theatre invited by a friend of art, excited women who dragged with them a goat that was to be

Page 19

slaughtered to Dionysus—none had been able to resist the temptation to join the procession. It turned down the Moon-street, keeping to the middle of the road which was planted with elms, and had on each side of it a raised foot-way, which at this time of night no one used. How clear was the sound of the double-pipes, how bravely the girls hit the calf-skin of the tambourines with their soft fists, how saucily the wind tossed and tangled the dishevelled hair of the riotous women and played with the smoke of the torches which were wielded in the air by audacious youths, disguised as Pan or as Satyrs, and shouting as they went.

Here a girl, holding her tambourine high in the air, rattled the little bells on its hoop, as she flew along, as violently as though she wanted to shake the hollow metal balls out of their frame, and send them whistling through the air on their own account—there, side by side with his comrades, who were excited almost to madness, a handsome lad came skipping along in elaborately graceful leaps, but carrying over his arm, with comic care, a long bull's-tail that he had tied on, and blowing alternately up and down the short scale from the shortest to the longest of the reeds composing his panpipes. Through the noisy crowd as they rushed by, sounded, now and again, a loud roar, that might as easily have been caused by pain as joy; but it was each time hastily drowned in mad laughter, extravagant singing and jubilant music.

Old and young, great and small, all in short that came near this rabble train, were carried off with irresistible force to follow it with shouts of triumph. Even Pollux and Arsinoe had for some time ceased to walk soberly side by side, but moved their feet, laughingly in time to the merry measure.

“How nice it sounds,” cried the artist. “I could dance and be merry too Arsinoe, dance and make merry with you like a madman!”

Before she could find time to say ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ he shouted a loud “To, To, Dionysus,” and flung her up in the air. She too was caught by the spirit of the thing, and waving her hand above her head she joined in his shout of triumph, and let him drag her along to a corner of the Moon-street where a seller of garlands offered her wares for sale. There she let him wreath her with ivy, she stuck a laurel wreath on his head, twisted a streamer of ivy round his neck and breast, and laughed loudly as she flung a large silver coin into the flower-woman's lap and clung tightly to his arm. It was all done in swift haste without reflection, as if in a fit of intoxication, and with trembling hands.

Page 20

The procession was drawing to an end. Six women and girls in wreaths closed it, walking arm in arm with loud singing. Pollux drew his sweetheart behind this jovial crew, threw his arm around Arsinoe once more, while she put hers round him, and then both of them stepped out in a brisk dance-step flinging their arms left free, throwing back their heads, shouting and singing loudly, and forgetting all that surrounded them; they felt as though they were bound to each other by a glory of sunbeams, while some god lifted them above the earth and bore them up through a realm of delight and joy beyond the myriad stars and through the translucent ether; thus they let themselves be led away through the Moon-street into the Canopic way and so back to the sea, and as far as the temple of Dionysus.

There they paused breathless and it suddenly struck them that he was Pollux and she Arsinoe, and that she must get back again to her father and the children.

"Come home," she said softly, and as she spoke she dropped her arm and began to gather up her loosened hair.

"Yes, yes," he said as if in a dream. He released her, struck his hand against his brow, and turning to the open cella of the temple he said:

"Long have I known that thou art mighty O Dionysus, and that thou O Aphrodite art lovely, and that thou art sweet O Eros! but how inestimable your gifts, that I have learnt to-day for the first time."

"We were indeed full of the deity," said Arsinoe. "But here comes another procession and I must go home."

"Then let us go by the Little Harbor," answered Pollux.

"Yes—I must pick the leaves out of my hair and no one will see us there."

"I will help you—"

"No, you are not to touch me," said Arsinoe decidedly. She grasped her abundant soft and shiny hair, and cleared it of the leaves that had got entangled in it, as tiny beetles do in a double flower. Finally she hid her hair under her veil, which had slipped off her head long since, but, almost by a miracle, had caught and remained hanging on the brooch of her peplum. Pollux stood looking at her, and overmastered by the passion that possessed him, he exclaimed:

"Eternal gods! how I love you! Till now my soul has been like a careless child, to-day it is grown to heroic stature.—Wait—only wait, it will soon learn to use its weapons."

"And I will help it in the fight," she said happily, as she put her hand through his arm again, and they hurried back to the old palace, dancing rather than walking.



The late December sun was already giving warning of his approaching rising by cold yellowish-grey streaks in the sky as Pollux and his companion entered the gate, which had long since been opened for the workmen. In the hall of the Muses they took a first farewell, in the passage leading to the steward's room, a second—sad and yet most happy; but this was but a short one for the gleam of a lamp made them start apart, and Arsinoe instantly fled.

Page 21

The disturber was Antinous who was waiting here for the Emperor who was still gazing at the stars from the watch-tower Pontius had erected for him. As she vanished he turned to Pollux and said gaily:

"I need your forgiveness for I have disturbed you in an interview with your sweetheart."

"She will be my wife," said the sculptor proudly.

"So much the better!" replied the favorite, and he drew a deep breath, as though the artist's words had relieved his mind of a burden.

"Ah! so much the better. Can you tell me where to find the fair Arsinoe's sister?"

"To be sure," replied the artist, and he felt pleased that the young Bithynian should cling to his arm. Within the next hour, Pollux, from whose lips there flowed a stream of eager and enthusiastic words, like water from a spring, had completely won the heart of the Emperor's favorite.

The girl found both her father and Helios, who no longer looked like a sick patient—fast asleep. The old slave-woman came in a few minutes after her, and when at last, after unbinding her hair, Arsinoe threw herself on her bed she fell asleep instantly, and in her dreams found herself once more by the side of her Pollux, while they both were flying to the sound of drums, flutes, and cymbals high above the dusty ways of earth, like leaves swept on by the wind.

CHAPTER XXI.

The steward awoke soon after sunrise. He had slept no less soundly, it is true, in his arm-chair than in his bed, but he did not feel refreshed, and his limbs ached.

In the living-room everything was in the same disorder as on the previous evening, and this annoyed him, for he was accustomed to find his room in order when he entered it in the morning. On the table, surrounded by flies, stood the remains of the children's supper, and among the bread crusts and plates lay his own ornaments and his daughter's! Wherever he turned he saw articles of dress and other things out of their place. The old slave-woman came in yawning, her woolly grey hair hung in disorder about her face, and her eyes seemed fixed, her feet carried her unsteadily here and there.

"You are drunk," cried Keraunus; nor was he mistaken, for when the old woman had waked up, sitting by the house of Pudeus, and had learned from the gate keeper that Arsinoe had quitted the garden, she had gone into a tavern with other slave-women. When her master seized her arm and shook her, she exclaimed with a stupid grin on her wet lips:



"It is the feast-day. Every one is free, to-day is the feast."

"Roman nonsense!" interrupted the steward. "is my breakfast ready?"

While the old woman stood muttering some inaudible words, the slave came into the room and said:

"To-day is a general holiday, may I go out too?"

"Oh that would suit me admirably!" cried the steward.

Page 22

"This monster drunk, Selene sick, and you running about the streets."

"But no one stops at home to-day," replied the slave timidly.

"Be off then!" cried Keraunus. "Walk about from now till midnight! Do as you please, only do not expect me to keep you any longer. You are still fit to turn the hand-mill, and I dare say I can find a fool to give me a few drachmae for you."

"No, no, do not sell me," groaned the old man, raising his hands in entreaty; Keraunus however would not hear him, but went on angrily:

"A dog at least remains faithful to his master, but you slaves eat him out of house and home, and when he most needs you, you want to run about the streets."

"But I will stay," howled the old man.

"Nay, do as you please. You have long been like a lame horse which makes its rider a butt for the laughter of children. When, you go out with me everyone looks round as if I had a stain on my pallium. And then the mangy dog wants to keep holiday, and stick himself up among the citizens!"

"I will stay here, only do not sell me!" whimpered the miserable old man, and he tried to take his master's hand; but the steward shoved him off, and desired him to go into the kitchen and light a fire, and throw some water on the old woman's head to sober her. The slave pushed his companion out of the room, while Keraunus went into his daughter's bedroom to rouse her.

There was no light in Arsinoe's room but that which could creep in through a narrow opening just below the ceiling; the slanting rays fell directly on the bed up to which Keraunus went. There lay his daughter in sound sleep; her pretty head rested on her uplifted right arm, her unbound brown hair flowed like a stream over her soft round shoulders and over the edge of the little bed. He had never seen the child look so pretty, and the sight of her really touched his heart, for Arsinoe reminded him of his lost wife, and it was not vain pride merely, but a movement of true paternal love, which involuntarily transformed his earnest wish that the gods might leave him this child and let her be happy, into an unspoken but fervent prayer.

He was not accustomed to waking his daughter who was always up and busy before he was, and he could hardly bear to disturb his darling's sweet sleep; but it had to be done, so he called Arsinoe by her name, shook her arm and said, as at last she sat up and looked at him enquiringly:

"It is I, get up, remember what has to be done today."

"Yes—yes," she said yawning, "but it is so early yet!"

“Early,” said Keraunus, smiling. “My stomach says the contrary. The sun is already high, and I have not yet had my porridge.”

“Make the old woman cook it.”

“No, no, my child—you must get up. Have you forgotten whom you are to represent? And my hair is to be curled, and the prefect’s wife, and then your dress.”

Page 23

“Very well—go; I do not care the least bit about Roxana and all the dressing-up.”

“Because you are not yet quite awake,” laughed the steward. “How did this ivy-leaf get into your hair?” Arsinoe colored, put her hand to the spot indicated by her father, and said reluctantly:

“Out of some bough or another, but now go that I may get up.”

“In a minute—tell me how did you find Selene?”

“Not so very bad—but I will tell you all about that afterwards. Now I want to be alone.”

When, half an hour later, Arsinoe brought her father his porridge he gazed at the child in astonishment. Some extraordinary change seemed to have come over his daughter. Something shone in her eyes that he had never observed before, and that gave her childlike features an importance and significance that almost startled him. While she was making the porridge, Keraunus, with the slave’s help, had taken the children up and dressed them; now they were all sitting at breakfast; Helios among them fresh and blooming. Now, while Arsinoe told her father all about Selene, and the nursing she was having at dame Hannah’s hands, Keraunus kept his eyes fixed on her, and when she noticed this and asked impatiently what there was peculiar in her appearance to-day, he shook his head and answered:

“What strange things are girls! A great honor has been done you. You are to represent the bride of Alexander, and pride and delight have changed you wonder fully in a single night—but I think to your disadvantage.”

“Folly,” said Arsinoe reddening, and stretching herself with fatigue she threw herself back on a couch. She did not feel weary exactly, for the lassitude she felt in every limb had a peculiar pleasure in it. She felt as if she had come out of a hot bath, and since her father had roused her she seemed to hear, again and again, the sound of the inspiring music which she had followed arm in arm with Pollux. Now and again she smiled, now and again she gazed straight before her, and at the same time she said to herself that if at this very moment her lover were to ask her, she would not lack strength to fling herself at once, with him, once more into the mad whirl. Yes—she felt perfectly fresh! only her eyes burned a little; and if Keraunus fancied he saw anything new in his daughter it must be the glowing light which now lurked in them along with the playful sparkle he had always seen there.

When breakfast was over the slave took the children out, and Arsinoe had begun to curl her father’s hair, when Keraunus put on his most dignified attitude and said ponderously.

“My child.”

The girl dropped the heated tongs and calmly asked. “Well”—fully prepared to hear one of the wonderful propositions which Selene was wont to oppose.

“Listen to me attentively.”

Now, what Keraunus was about to say had only occurred to him an hour since when he had spoiled his slave’s desire to go out; but as he said it he pressed his hand to his forehead assuming the expression of a meditative philosopher.

Page 24

"For a long time I have been considering a very important matter. Now I have come to a decision and I will confide it to you. We must buy a new manslave."

"But father!" cried Arsinoe, "think what it will cost you. If we have another man to feed —"

"There is no question of that," replied Keraunus. "I will exchange the old one for a younger one that I need not be ashamed to be seen with. Yesterday I told you that henceforth we shall attract greater attention than hitherto, and really if we appear with that black scarecrow at our heels in the streets or elsewhere—"

"Certainly we cannot make much show Sebek," interrupted Arsinoe, "but we can leave him at home for the future."

"Child, child!" exclaimed Keraunus reproachfully, "will you never remember who and what we are. How would it beseech us to appear in the streets without a slave?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders, and put it to her father that Sebek was an old piece of family property, that the little ones were fond of him because he cared for them like a nurse, that a new slave would cost a great deal and would only be driven by force to many services which the old one was always ready and willing to fulfil.

But Arsinoe preached to deaf ears. Selene was not there; secure from her reproaches and as anxious as a spoiled boy for the thing that was denied him, Keraunus adhered to his determination to exchange the faithful old fellow for a new and more showy slave. Not for a moment did he think of the miserable fate that threatened the decrepit creature, who had grown old in his house, if he were to sell him; but he still had a feeling that it was not quite right to spend the last money that had chanced to come into the house, on a thing that really and truly was not in any way necessary. The more justifiable Arsinoe's doubts seemed to be and the more loudly did an inward voice warn him not to offer this fresh sacrifice to his vain-gloriousness, the more firmly and desperately did he defend his wish to do so; and as he fought for the thing he desired, it acquired in his eyes a semblance of necessity and a number of reasons suggested themselves which made it appear both justifiable and easy of attainment.

There was money in hand; after Arsinoe's being chosen for the part of Roxana he might expect to be able to borrow more; it was his duty to appear with due dignity that he might not scare off the illustrious son-in-law of whom he dreamed, and in the extremity of need he could still fall back on his collection of rarities. The only thing was to find the right purchaser; for, if the sword of Antony had brought him so much, what would not some amateur give him for the other, far more valuable, objects.

Arsinoe turned red and white as her father referred again and again to the bargain she had made; but she dared not confess the truth, and she rued her falsehood all the more

bitterly the more clearly she saw with her own sound sense, that the Honor which had fallen upon her yesterday, threatened to develop all her father's weaknesses in an absolutely fatal manner.

Page 25

To-day she would have been amply satisfied with pleasing Pollux, and she would, without a regret have transferred to another her part with all the applause and admiration it would procure her, and which, only yesterday, had seemed to her so inestimably precious. This she said; but Keraunus would not take the assertion in earnest, laughed in her face, went off into mysterious allusions to the wealth which could not fail to come into the house and—since an obscure consciousness told him that it would be becoming him to prove that it was not solely personal vanity and self-esteem that influenced all his proceedings—he explained that he had made up his mind to a great sacrifice and would be content on the coming occasion to wear his gilt fillet and not buy a pure gold one. By this act of self-denial he fancied he had acquired a full right to devote a very pretty little sum to the acquisition of a fine-looking slave. Arsinoe's entreaties were unheeded, and when she began to cry with grief at the prospect of losing her old house-mate he forbid her crossly to shed a tear for such a cause, for it was very childish, and he would not be pleased to conduct her with red eyes to meet the prefect's wife.

During the course of this argument his hair had got itself duly curled, and he now desired Arsinoe to arrange her own hair nicely and then to accompany him.

They would buy a new dress and peplum, go to see Selene, and then be carried to the prefect's.

Only yesterday he had thought it too bold a step to use a litter, and to-day he was already considering the propriety of hiring a chariot.

No sooner was he alone than a new idea occurred to him. The insolent architect should be taught that he was not the man to be insulted and injured with impunity. So he cut a clean strip of papyrus off a letter that lay in his chest, and wrote upon it the following words:

"Keraunus, the Macedonian, to Claudius Venator, the architect, of Rome:"

"My eldest daughter, Selene, is by your fault, so severely hurt that she is in great danger, is kept to her bed and suffers frightful pain. My other children are no longer safe in their father's house, and I therefore require you, once more, to chain up your dog. If you refuse to accede to this reasonable demand I will lay the matter before Caesar. I can tell you that circumstances have occurred which will determine Hadrian to punish any insolent person who may choose to neglect the respect due to me and to my daughters."

When Keraunus had closed this letter with his seal he called the slave and said coldly:

Page 26

"Take this to the Roman architect, and then fetch two litters; make haste, and while we are out take good care of the children. To-morrow or next day you will be sold. To whom? That must depend on how you behave during the last hours that you belong to us." The negro gave a loud cry of grief that came from the depth of his heart, and flung himself on the ground at the steward's feet. His cry did indeed pierce his master's soul—but Keraunus had made up his mind not to let himself be moved nor to yield. But the negro clung more closely to his knees, and when the children, attracted to the spot by their poor old friend's lamentation, cried loudly in unison, and little Helios began to pat and stroke the little remains of the negro's woolly hair, the vain man felt uneasy about the heart, and to protect himself against his own weakness he cried out loudly and violently:

"Now, away with you, and do as you are ordered or I will find the whip."

With these words he tore himself loose from the miserable—old man who left the room with his head hanging down, and who soon was standing at the door of the Emperor's rooms with the letter in his hand. Hadrian's appearance and manner had filled him with terror and respect, and he dared not knock at the door. After he had waited for some time, still with tears in his eyes, Mastor came into the passage with the remains of his master's breakfast. The negro called to him and held out the steward's letter, stammering out lamentably:

"From Keraunus, for you master."

"Lay it here on the tray," said the Sarmatian. "But what has happened to you, my old friend? you are wailing most pitifully and look miserable. Have you been beaten?"

The negro shook his head and answered, whimpering: "Keraunus is going to sell me."

"There are better masters than he."

"But Sebek is old, Sebek is weak—he can no longer lift and pull, and with hard work he will certainly die."

"Has life been so easy and comfortable then at the steward's?"

"Very little wine, very little meat, very much hunger," said the old man.

"Then you must be glad to leave him."

"No, no," groaned Sebek.

"You foolish old owl," said Mastor. "Why do you care then for that grumpy niggard?"

The negro did not answer for some time, then his lean breast heaved and fell, and, as if the dam were broken through that had choked his utterance, he burst out with a mixture of loud sobs:

“The children, the little ones, our little ones. They are so sweet; and our little blind Helios stroked my hair because I was to go away, here— just here he stroked it”—and he put his hand on a perfectly bald place —“and now Sebek must go and never see them all again, just as if they were all dead.”

And the words rolled out and with difficulty, as if carried on in the flood of his tears. They went to Mastor’s heart, rousing the memory of his own lost children and a strong desire to comfort his unhappy comrade.

Page 27

“Poor fellow!” he said, compassionately. “Aye, the children! they are so small, and the door into one’s heart is so narrow—and they dance in at it a thousand times better and more easily than grown-up folks. I, too, have lost dear children, and they were my own, too. I can teach any one what is meant by sorrow—but I know too now where comfort is to be found.” With these words Mastor held the tray he was carrying on his hip with his right hand, while he put the left on the negro’s shoulder and whispered to him:

“Have you ever heard of the Christians?”

Sebek nodded eagerly as if Mastor were speaking of a matter of which he had heard great things and expected much, and Mastor went on in a low voice “Come early tomorrow before sunrise to the pavement-workers in the ’court, and there you will hear of One who comforts the weary and heavy-laden.”

The Emperor’s servant once more took his tray in both hands and hurried away, but a faint gleam of hope had lighted up in the old slave’s eyes. He expected no happiness, but perhaps there might be some way of bearing the sorrows of life more easily.

Mastor as soon he had given his tray to the kitchen slaves—who were now busy again in the palace at Lochias—returned to his lord and gave him the steward’s letter. It was an ill-chosen hour for Keraunus, for the Emperor was in a gloomy mood. He had sat up till morning, had rested scarcely three hours, and now, with knitted brows, was comparing the results of his night’s observation of the starry sky with certain astronomical tables which lay spread out before him. Over this work he frequently shook his head which was covered with crisp waves of hair; nay—he once flung the pencil, with which he was working his calculations, down on the table, leaned back in his seat and covered his eyes with both hands. Then again he began to write fresh numbers, but his new results seemed to be no more satisfactory than the former one.

The steward’s letter had been for a long time lying before him when at last it again caught his attention as he put out his hand for another document. Needing some change of ideas he tore it open, read it and flung it from him with annoyance. At any other time he would have expressed some sympathy with the suffering girl, have laughed at the ridiculous man, and have thought out some trick to tease or to terrify; but just now the steward’s threats made him angry and increased his dislike for him.

Tired of the silence around him he called to Antinous, who sat gazing dreamily down on the harbor; the youth immediately approached his master. Hadrian looked at him and said, shaking his head:

“Why you too look as if some danger were threatening you. Is the sky altogether overcast?”

“No my lord, it is blue over the sea, but towards the south the black clouds are gathering.”

“Towards the south?” said Hadrian thoughtfully. “Any thing serious can hardly threaten us from that quarter.—But it comes, it is near, it is upon us before we suspect it.”

Page 28

"You sat up too long, and that has put you out of tune."

"Out of tune?" muttered Hadrian to himself. "And what is tune? That subtle harmony or discord is a condition which masters all the emotions of the soul at once; and not without reason—to-day my heart is paralyzed with anxiety."

"Then you have seen evil signs in the heavens?"

"Direful signs!"

"You wise men believe in the stars," replied Antinous. "No doubt you are right, but my weak head cannot understand what their regular courses have to do with my inconstant wanderings."

"Grow gray," replied the Emperor, "learn to comprehend the universe with your intellect, and not till then speak of these things for not till then will you discern that every atom of things created, and the greatest as well as the least, is in the closest bonds with every other; that all work together, and each depends on all. All that is or ever will be in nature, all that we men feel, think or do, all is dependent on eternal and immutable causes; and these causes have each their Daimon who interposes between us and the divinity and is symbolized in golden characters on the vault of heaven. The letters are the stars, whose orbits are as unchanging and everlasting as are the first causes of all that exists or happens."

"And are you quite sure that you never read wrongly in this great record?" asked Antinous.

"Even I may err," replied Hadrian. "But this time I have not deceived myself. A heavy misfortune threatens me. It is a strange, terrible and extraordinary coincidence!"

"What?"

"From that accursed Antioch—whence nothing good has ever come to me—I have received the saying of an oracle which foretells that, that—why should I hide it from you—in the middle of the year now about to begin some dreadful misfortune shall fall upon me, as lightning strikes the traveller to the earth; and tonight—look here. Here is the house of Death, here are the planets—but what do you know of such things? Last night—the night in which once before such terrors were wrought, the stars confirmed the fatal oracle with as much naked plainness, as much unmistakable certainty as if they had tongues to shout the evil forecast in my ear. It is hard to walk on with such a goal in prospect. What may not the new year bring in its course?"

Hadrian sighed deeply, but Antinous went close up to him, fell on his knees before him and asked in a tone of childlike humility:



“May I, a poor foolish lad, teach a great and wise man how to enrich his life with six happy months?” The Emperor smiled, as though he knew what was coming, but his favorite felt encouraged to proceed.

“Leave the future to the future,” he said. “What must come will come, for the gods themselves have no power against Fate. When evil is approaching it casts its black shadow before it; you fix your gaze on it and let it darken the light of day. I saunter dreamily on my way and never see misfortune till it runs up against me and falls upon me unawares—”

Page 29

"And so you are spared many a gloomy day," interrupted Hadrian.

"That is just what I would have said."

"And your advice is excellent, for you and for every other loiterer through the gay fair-time of an idle life," replied the Emperor, "but the man whose task it is to bear millions in safety and over abysses, must watch the signs around him, look out far and near, and never dare close his eyes, even when such terrors loom as it was my fate to see during the past night."

As he spoke, Phlegon, the Emperor's private secretary, came in with letters just received from Rome, and approached his master. He bowed low, and taking up Hadrian's last words he said:

"The stars disquiet you, Caesar?"

"Well, they warn me to be on my guard," replied Hadrian.

"Let us hope that they be," cried the Greek, with cheerful vivacity. "Cicero was not altogether wrong when he doubted the arts of Astrology."

"He was a mere talker!" said the Emperor, with a frown.

"But," asked Phlegon, "would it not be fair that if the horoscopes cast for Cneius or Caius, let us say, were alike, to expect that Cneius or Caius must have the same temperament and the same destiny through life if they had happened to be born in the same hour?"

"Always the old commonplaces, the old silly objections!" interrupted Hadrian, vexed to the verge of rage. "Speak when you are spoken to, and do not trouble yourself about things you do not understand and which do not concern you. Is there anything of importance among these papers?"

Antinous gazed at his sovereign in astonishment; why should Phlegon's objections make him so furious when he had answered his so kindly?

Hadrian paid no farther heed to him, but read the despatches one after another, hastily but attentively, wrote brief notes on the margins, signed a decree with a firm hand, and, when his work was finished desired the Greek to leave him. Hardly was he alone with Antinous when the loud cries and jovial shouting of a large multitude came to their ears through the open window.

"What does this mean?" he asked Mastor, and as soon as he had been informed that the workmen and slaves had just been let out to give themselves up to the pleasures of their holiday, he muttered to himself:



“These creatures can riot, shout, dress themselves with garlands, forget themselves in a debauch—and I, I whom all envy—I spoil my brief span of life with vain labors, let myself be tormented with consuming cares—I—” here he broke off and cried in quite an altered tone:

“Ha! ha! Antinous, you are wiser than I. Let us leave the future to the future. The feast-day is ours too; let us take advantage of this day of freedom. We too will throw ourselves into the holiday whirlpool disguised, I as a satyr, and you as a young faun or something of the kind; we will drain cups, wander round the city and enjoy all that is enjoyable.”



Page 30

"Oh!" exclaimed Antinous, joyfully clapping his hands.

"Evoe Bacche!" cried Hadrian, tossing up his cup that stood on his table. "You are free till this evening, Mastor, and you my boy, go and talk to Pollux, the sculptor. He shall be our guide and he will provide us with wreaths and some mad disguise. I must see drunken men, I must laugh with the jolliest before I am Caesar again. Make haste, my friend, or new cares will come to spoil my holiday mood."

CHAPTER XXII.

Antinous and Mastor at once quitted the Emperor's room; in the corridor the lad beckoned the slave to him and said in a low voice:

"You can hold your tongue I know, will you do me a favor?"

"Three sooner than one," replied the Sarmatian.

"You are free to-day—are you going into the city?"

"I think so."

"You are not known here, but that does not matter. Take these gold pieces and in the flower-market buy with one of them the most beautiful bunch of flowers you can find, with another you may make merry, and out of the remainder spend a drachma in hiring an ass. The driver will conduct you to the garden of Pudeus' widow where stands the house of dame Hannah; you remember the name?"

"Dame Hannah and the widow of Pudeus."

"And at the little house, not the big one, leave the flowers for the sick Selene."

"The daughter of the fat steward, who was attacked by our big dog?" asked Mastor, curiously.

"She or another," said Antinous, impatiently, "and when they ask you who sent the flowers, say 'the friend at Lochias,' nothing more. You understand."

The slave nodded and said to himself: "What! you too-oh! these women."

Antinous signed to him to be silent, impressed on him in a few hasty words that he was to be discreet and to pick out the very choicest flowers, and then betook himself into the hall of the Muses to seek Pollux. From him he had learnt where to find the suffering Selene, of whom he could not help thinking incessantly and wherever he might be. He did not find the sculptor in his screened-off nook; prompted by a wish to speak to his



mother, Pollux had gone down to the gatehouse where he was now standing before her and frankly narrating, with many eager gestures of his long arms, all that had occurred on the previous night. His story flowed on like a song of triumph, and when he described how the holiday procession had carried away Arsinoe and himself, the old woman jumped up from her chair and clapping her fat little hands, she exclaimed:

“Ah! that is pleasure, that is happiness! I remember flying along with your father in just the same way thirty years ago.”

“And since thirty years,” Pollux interposed. “I can still remember very well how at one of the great Dionysiac festivals, fired by the power of the god, you rushed through the streets with a deer-skin over your shoulders.”

Page 31

"That was delightful—lovely!" cried Doris with sparkling eyes. "But thirty years since it was all different, very different. I have told you before now how I went with our maid-servant into the Canopic way to the house of my aunt Archidike to look on at the great procession. I had not far to go for we lived near the Theatre, my father was stage-manager and yours was one of the chief singers in the chorus. We hurried along, but all sorts of people stopped us, and drunken men wanted to joke with me."

"Ah, you were as sweet as a rose-bud then," her son interrupted.

"As a rose-bud, yes, but not like your lovely rose," said the old woman. "At any rate I looked nice enough for the men in disguise—fauns and satyrs and were the cynic hypocrites in their ragged cloaks, to think it worth while to look at me and to take a rap on the knuckles when they tried to put an arm round me or to steal a kiss, I did not care for the handsomest of them, for Euphorion had done for me with his fiery glances—not with words for I was very strictly kept and he had never been able to get a chance to speak to me. At the corner of the Canopic way and the Market street we could get no farther, for the crowd had blocked the way and were howling and storming as they stared at a party of Klodones and other Maenads, who in their sacred fury were tearing a goat to pieces with their teeth. I shuddered at the spectacle, but I must need stare with the rest and shout and halloo as they did. My maid, who I held on to tightly, was seized with the frenzy and dragged me into the middle of the circle close up to the bleeding sacrifice. Two of the possessed women sprang upon us, and I felt one clasping me tightly and trying to throw me down. It was a horrible moment but I defended myself bravely and had succeeded in keeping on my feet when your father sprang forward, set me free and led me away. What happened after I could not tell you now; it was one of those wild happy dreams in which you must hold your heart with both hands for fear it should crack with joy, or fly out and away up to the sky and in the very eye of the sun. Late in the evening I got home and a week after I was Euphorion's wife."

"We have exactly followed your example," said Pollux, "and if Arsinoe grows to be like my dear old woman I shall be quite satisfied."

"Happy and contented," replied Doris. "Keep you health, snap your fingers at care and sorrow, do your duty on work-days and drink till you are jolly in honor of the god on holidays, and then all will be well. Those who do all they are able and enjoy as much as they can get, make good use of their lives and need feel no remorse in their last hours. What is past is done for, and when Atropos cuts our thread some one else will stand in our place and joys will begin all over again. May the gods bless you!"

"You are right," said Pollux embracing his mother, and two together can turn the work out of hand more lightly and enjoy the pleasures of existence better than each alone—can they not?"

Page 32

"I am sure of it; and you have chosen the right mate," cried the old woman. "You are a sculptor and used to simple things; you need no riches, only a sweet face which may every day rejoice your heart, and that you have found."

"There is nowhere a sweeter or a lovelier," said Pollux.

"No, that there is not," continued Doris. "First I cast my eyes on Selene. She need not be ashamed to show herself either, and she is a pattern for girls; but then as Arsinoe grew older, whenever she passed this way I thought to myself: 'that girl is growing up for my boy,' and now that you have won her I feel as if I were once more as young as your sweetheart herself. My old heart beats as happily as if the little Loves were touching it with their wings and rosy fingers. If my feet had not grown so heavy with constantly standing over the hearth and at washing— really and truly I could take Euphorion by the arm and dance through the streets with him to-day."

"Where is father?"

"Out singing."

"In the morning! where?"

"There is some sect that are celebrating their mysteries. They pay well and he had to sing dismal hymns for them behind a curtain; the wildest stuff, in which he does not follow a word, and that I do not understand a half of."

"It is a pity for I wanted to speak to him."

"He will not be back till late."

"There is plenty of time."

"So much the better, otherwise I might have told him what you had to say."

"Your advice is as good as his. I think of giving up working under Papias and standing on my own feet."

"You are quite right; the Roman architect told me yesterday that a great future was open to you."

"There are only my poor sister and the children to be considered. If, during the first few months I should find myself falling short—"

"We will manage to pull through. It is high time that you yourself should reap from what you sow."

“So it seems to me, for my own sake and Arsinoe’s; if only Keraunus—”

“Aye—there will be a battle to fight with him.”

“A hard one, a hard one,” sighed Pollux.

“The thought of the old man troubles my happiness.”

“Folly!” cried Doris. “Avoid all useless anxiety. It is almost as injurious as remorse gnawing at your heart. Take a workshop of your own, do some great work in a joyful spirit, something to astonish the world, and I will wager anything that the old fool of a steward will only be vexed to think that he destroyed the first work of the celebrated Pollux, instead of treasuring it in his cabinet of curiosities. Just imagine that no such person exists in the world and enjoy your happiness.”

“I will stick to that.”

“One thing more my lad: take good care of Arsinoe. She is young and inexperienced and you must not persuade her to do anything you would advise her not to do if she were betrothed to your brother instead of to yourself.”

Page 33

Doris had not done speaking when Antinous came into the gate-house and delivered the commands of the architect Claudius Venator, to escort him through the city. Pollux hesitated with his answer, for he had still much to do in the palace, and he hoped to see Arsinoe again in the course of the day. After such a morning what could noon and evening be to him without her? Dame Doris noticed his indecision and cried:

"Yes, go; the festival is for pleasure, besides, the architect can perhaps advise you on many points, and recommend you to his friends."

"Your mother is right," said Antinous. "Claudius Venator can be very touchy, but he can also be grateful, and I wish you sincerely well—"

"Good then, I will come," Pollux interposed while the Bithynian was still speaking, for he felt himself strongly attracted by Hadrian's imposing personality and considered that under the circumstances, it might be very desirable to revel with him for a while.

"I will come, but first I must let Pontius know that I am going to fly from the heat of the fray for a few hours to-day."

"Leave that to Venator," replied the favorite, "and you must find some amusing disguise and procure masks for him and for me and, if you like, for yourself too. He wants to join the revel as a satyr and I in some other disguise."

"Good," replied the sculptor. "I will go at once and order what is requisite. A quantity of dresses for the Dionysiac processions are lying in our workshop and in half an hour I will be back with the things."

"But pray make haste," Antinous begged him. "My master cannot bear to be kept waiting, and besides—one thing—"

At these words Antinous had grown embarrassed and had gone quite close up to the artist. He laid his hand on his shoulder and said in a low voice but impressively:

"Venator stands very near to Caesar. Beware of saying anything before him that is not in Hadrian's favor."

"Is your master Caesar's spy?" asked Pollux, looking suspiciously at Antinous. "Pontius has already, given me a similar warning, and if that is the case—"

"No, no," interrupted the lad hastily.

"Anything but that; but the two have no secrets from each other and Venator talks a good deal—cannot hold his tongue—"

"I thank you and will be on my guard."

“Aye do so—I mean it honestly.” The Bithynian held out his hand to the artist with an expression of warm regard on his handsome features and with an indescribably graceful gesture. Pollux took it heartily, but dame Doris, whose old eyes had been fixed as if spellbound on Antinous, seized her son’s arm and quite excited by the sight of his beauty cried out:

“Oh! what a splendid creature! moulded by the gods! sacred to the gods! Pollux, boy! you might almost think one of the immortals had come down to earth.”

“Look at my old woman!” exclaimed Pollux laughing, “but in truth friend, she has good reasons for her ecstasies, I could follow her example.”

Page 34

"Hold him fast, hold him fast!" cried Doris. "If he only will let you take his likeness you can show the world a thing worth seeing."

"Will you?" interrupted Pollux turning to Hadrian's favorite.

"I have never yet been able to keep still for any artist," said Antinous. "But I will do any thing you wish to please you. It only vexes me that you too should join in the chorus with the rest of the world. Farewell for the present, I must go back to my master."

As soon as the youth had left the house Doris exclaimed:

"Whether a work of art is good for any thing or not I can only guess at, but as to what is beautiful that I know as well as any other woman in Alexandria. If that boy will stand as your model you will produce something that will delight men and turn the heads of the women, and you will be sought after even in a workshop of your own. Eternal gods! such beauty as that is sublime. Why are there no means of preserving such a face and such a form from old age and wrinkles?"

"I know the means, mother," said Pollux, as he went to the door. "It is called Art: to her it is given to bestow eternal youth on this mortal Adonis."

The old woman glanced at her son with pardonable pride, and confirmed his words by an assenting nod. While she fed her birds, with many coaxing words, and made one which was a special favorite pick crumbs from her lips, the young sculptor was hurrying through the streets with long steps.

He was greeted as he went with many a cross word, and many exclamations rose from the crowd he left behind him, for he pushed his way by the weight of his tall person and his powerful arms, and saw and heard, as he went, little enough of what was going around him. He thought of Arsinoe, and between whiles of Antinous and of the attitude in which he best might represent him—whether as hero or god.

In the flower-market, near the Gymnasium, he was for a moment roused from his reverie by a picture which struck him as being unusual and which riveted his gaze, as did every thing exceptional that came under his eyes. On a very small dark-colored donkey sat a tall, well-dressed slave, who held in his right hand a nosegay of extraordinary size and beauty. By his side walked a smartly dressed-up man with a splendid wreath, and a comic mask over his face followed by two garden-gods of gigantic stature, and four graceful boys. In the slave, Pollux at once recognized the servant of Claudius Venator, and he fancied he must have seen the masked gentlemen too before now, but he could not remember where, and did not trouble himself to retrace him in his mind. At any rate, the rider of the donkey had just heard something he did not like, for he was looking anxiously at his bunch of flowers.

Page 35

After Pollux had hurried past this strange party his thoughts reverted to other, and to him far nearer and dearer subjects. But Mastor's anxious looks were not without a cause, for the gentleman who was talking to him was no less a person than Verus, the praetor, who was called by the Alexandrians the sham Eros. He had seen the Emperor's body-slave a hundred times about his person; he therefore recognized him at once, and his presence here in Alexandria led him directly to the simple and correct inference that his master too must be in the city. The praetor's curiosity was roused, and he at once proceeded to ply the poor fellow with bewildering cross-questions. When the donkey-rider shortly and sharply refused to answer, Verus thought it well to reveal himself to him, and the slave lost his confident demeanor when he recognized the grand gentleman, the Emperor's particular friend.

He lost himself in contradictory statements, and although he did not directly admit it, he left his interrogator in the certainty that Hadrian was in Alexandria.

It was perfectly evident that the beautiful nosegay, which had attracted the praetor's attention to Mastor could not belong to himself. What could be its destination? Verus recommenced his questioning, but the Sarmatian would betray nothing, till Verus tapped him lightly first on one cheek and then on the other, and said gaily:

"Mastor, my worthy friend Mastor, listen to me. I will make you certain proposals, and you shall nod your head, towards that of the estimable beast with two pairs of legs on which you are mounted, as soon as one of them takes your fancy."

"Let me go on my way," the slave implored, with growing anxiety.

"Go, by all means, but I go with you," retorted Verus, "until I have hit on the thing that suits you. A great many plans dwell in my head, as you will see. First I must ask you, shall I go to your master and tell him that you have betrayed his presence in Alexandria?"

"Sir, you will never do that!" cried Mastor.

"To proceed then. Shall I and my following hang on to your skirts and stay with you till nightfall, when you and your steed must return home? You decline—with thanks! and very wisely, for the execution of this project would be equally unpleasant to you and to me, and would probably get you punished. Whisper to me then, softly, in my ear, where your master is lodging, and from whom and to whom you are carrying those flowers; as soon as you have agreed to that proposal I will let you go on alone, and will show you that I care no more for my gold pieces here, in Alexandria, than I do in Italy."

"Not gold—certainly I will not take gold!" cried Mastor.

“You are an honest fellow,” replied Verus in an altered tone, “and you know of me that I treat my servants well and would rather be kind to folks than hard upon them. So satisfy my curiosity without any fear, and I will promise you in return, that not a soul, your master least of all, shall ever know from me what you tell me.” Mastor hesitated a little, but as he could not but own to himself that he would be obliged at last to yield to the stronger will of this imperious man, and as moreover he knew that the haughty and extravagant praetor was in fact one of the kindest of masters, he sighed deeply and whispered:

Page 36

"You will not be the ruin of a poor wretch like me, that I know, so I will tell you, we are living at Lochias."

"There," exclaimed Verus clapping his hands. "And now as to the flowers?"

"Mere trifling."

"Is Hadrian then in a merry mood?"

"Till to-day he was very gay—but since last night—"

"Well?"

"You know yourself what he is when he has seen lead signs in the sky."

"Bad signs," said Verus gravely.

"And yet he sends flowers?"

"Not he, can you not guess?"

"Antinous?"

Mastor nodded assent.

"Only think," laughed Verus. "Then he too is beginning to think it better worth while to admire than to be admired. And who is the fair one who has succeeded in waking up his slumbering heart?"

"Nay—I promised him not to chatter."

"And I promise you the same. My powers of reserve are far greater than my curiosity even."

"Be content, I beseech you with what you already know."

"But to know half is less endurable than to know nothing."

"Nay—I cannot tell you."

"Then am I to begin with fresh suggestions, and all over again?"

"Oh! my lord. I beg you, entreat you—"

"Out with the word, and I go on my way, but if you persist in refusing—"



“Really and truly it only concerns a white-faced girl whom you would not even look at.”

“A girl-indeed!”

“Our big dog threw the poor thing down.”

“In the street?”

“No, at Lochias. Her father is Keraunus the palace-steward.”

“And her name is Arsinoe?” asked Verus with undisguised concern, for he had a pleasant recollection of the beautiful child who had been selected to fill the part of Roxana.

“No, her name is Selene, Arsinoe indeed is her younger sister.”

“Then you bring these flowers from Lochias?”

“She went out, and she could not get back home again, she is now lying in the house of a stranger.”

“Where?”

“That must be quite indifferent to you—”

“By no means, quite the contrary. I beg you to tell me the whole truth.”

“Eternal gods! what can you care about the poor sick creature?”

“Nothing whatever; but I must know whither you are riding.”

“Down by the sea. I do not know the house, but the donkey driver—”

“Is it far from here?”

“About half an hour yet,” said the lad.

“A good way then,” replied Verus. “And Hadrian is particularly anxious to remain unknown.”

“Certainly.”

“And you his body-servant, who are known to numbers of others here from Rome, like myself, you propose to ride half a mile through the streets where every creature that can stand or walk is swarming, with a large nosegay in your hand which attracts every body’s attention. Oh Mastor that is not wise!”

Page 37

The slave started, and seeing at once that Verus was right, he asked in alarm:

“What then can I do?”

Get off your donkey,” said the praetor. “Disguise yourself and make merry to your heart’s content with these gold pieces.”

“And the flowers?”

“I will see to that.”

“You will? I may trust you; and never betray to Antinous what you compelled me to do?”

“Positively not.”

“There—there are the flowers, but I cannot take the gold.”

“Then I shall fling it among the crowd. Buy yourself a garland, a mask and some wine, as much as you can carry. Where is the girl to be found?”

“At dame Hannah’s. She lives in a little house in a garden belonging to the widow of Pudeus. And whoever gives it to her is to say that it is sent by the friend at Lochias.”

“Good. Now go, and take care that no one recognizes you. Your secret is mine, and the friend at Lochias shall be duly mentioned.”

Mastor disappeared in the crowd. Verus put the nosegay into the hands of one of the garden-gods that followed in his train, sprang laughing on to the ass, and desired the driver to show him the way. At the corner of the next street, he met two litters, carried with difficulty through the crowd by their bearers. In the first sat Keraunus, whose saffron-colored cloak was conspicuous from afar, as fat as Silenus the companion of Dionysus, but looking very sullen. In the second sat Arsinoe, looking gaily about her, and so fresh and pretty that the Roman’s easily-stirred pulses beat more rapidly.

Without reflecting, he took the flowers from the hand of the garden-god— the flowers intended for Selene—laid them on the girl’s litter, and said:

“Alexander greets Roxana, the fairest of the fair.” Arsinoe colored, and Verus, after watching her for some time as she was carried onwards, desired one of his boys to follow her litter, and to join him again in the flower-market, where he would wait, to inform him whither she had gone.

The messenger hurried off, and Verus, turning his ass’s head soon reached a semicircular pillared hall on the shady side of a large open space, under which the better sort of gardeners and flower dealers of the city exposed their gay and fragrant

wares to be sold by pretty girls. To-day every stall had been particularly well supplied, but the demand for wreaths and flowers had steadily increased from an early hour, and although Verus had all that he could find of fresh flowers arranged and tied together, still the nosegay, though much larger, was not half so beautiful as that intended for Selene, and for which he substituted it.

Now this annoyed the Roman. His sense of justice prompted him to make good the loss he had inflicted on the sick girl. Gay ribbons were wound round the stalks of the flowers, and the long ends floated in the air, so Verus took a brooch from his dress and stuck it into the bow which ornamented the stem of the nosegay; then he was satisfied, and as he looked at the stone set in a gold border—an onyx on which was engraved Eros sharpening his arrows—he pictured to himself the pleasure, the delight of the girl that the handsome Bithynian loved, as she received the beautiful gift.

Page 38

His slaves, natives of Britain, who were dressed as garden-gods, were charged with the commission to proceed to dame Hannah's under the guidance of the donkey-driver to deliver the nosegay to Selene from 'the friend at Lochias,' and then to wait for him outside the house of Titianus, the prefect; for thither, as he had ascertained from his swift-footed messenger, had Keraunus and his daughter been carried.

Verus needed a longer time than the boy, to make his way through the crowd. At the door of the prefect's residence he laid aside his mask, and in an anteroom where the steward was sitting on a couch waiting for his daughter, he arranged his hair and the folds of his toga, and was then conducted to the lady Julia with whom he hoped, once more, to see the charming Arsinoe.

But in the reception-room, instead of Arsinoe he found his own wife and the poetess Balbilla and her companion. He greeted the ladies gaily, amiably and gracefully, as usual, and then, as he looked enquiringly round the large room without concealing his disappointment, Balbilla came up to him and asked him in a low voice:

"Can you be honest, Verus?"

"When circumstances allow it, yes."

"And will they allow it here?"

"I should suppose so."

"Then answer me truly. Did you come here for Julia's sake, or did you come—"

"Well?"

"Or did you expect to find the fair Roxana with the prefect's wife?"

"Roxana?" asked Verus, with a cunning smile. "Roxana! Why she was the wife of Alexander the Great, and is long since dead, but I care only for the living, and when I left the merry tumult in the streets it was simply and solely—"

"You excite my curiosity."

"Because my prophetic heart promised me, fairest Balbilla, that I should find you here."

And that you call honest!" cried the poetess, hitting the praetor a blow with the stick of the ostrich-feather fan she held in her hand. "Only listen, Lucilla, your husband declares he came here for my sake." The praetor looked reproachfully at the speaker, but she whispered:

"Due punishment for a dishonest man." Then, raising her voice, she said:



“Do you know, Lucilla, that if I remain unmarried, your husband is not wholly innocent in the matter.”

“Alas! yes, I was born too late for you,” interrupted Verus, who knew very well what the poetess was about to say.

“Nay—no misunderstanding!” cried Balbilla. “For how can a woman venture upon wedlock when she cannot but fear the possibility of getting such a husband as Verus.”

“And what man,” retorted the praetor, “would ever be so bold as to court Balbilla, could he hear how cruelly she judges an innocent admirer of beauty?”

“A husband ought not to admire beauty—only the one beauty who is his wife.”

“Ah Vestal maiden,” laughed Verus. “I am meanwhile punishing you by withholding from you a great secret which interests us all. No, no, I am not going to tell—but I beg you my lady wife to take her to task, and teach her to exercise some indulgence so that her future husband may not have too hard a time of it.”

Page 39

"No woman can learn to be indulgent," replied Lucilla. "Still we practise indulgence when we have no alternative, and the criminal requires us to make allowance for him in this thing or the other."

Verus made his wife a bow and pressed his lips on her arm, then he asked. "And where is dame Julia?"

"She is saving the sheep from the wolf," replied Balbilla.

"Which means—?"

"That as soon as you were announced she carried off little Roxana to a place of safety."

"No, no," interrupted Lucilla. "The tailor was waiting in an inner room to arrange the charming child's costume. Only look at the lovely nosegay she brought to Julia. And do you deny my right to share your secret?"

"How could I?" replied Verus.

"He is very much in need of your making allowances!" laughed Balbilla, while the praetor went up to, his wife and told her in a whisper what he had learnt from Mastor. Lucilla clasped her hands in astonishment, and Verus cried to the poetess:

"Now you see what a satisfaction your cruel tongue has deprived you of?"

"How can you be so revengeful most estimable Verus," said the lady coaxingly. "I am dying of curiosity."

"Live but a few days longer fair Balbilla, for my sake," replied the Roman, "and the cause of your early death will be removed."

"Only wait, I will be revenged!" cried the girl threatening him with her finger, but Lucilla led her away saying:

"Come now, it is time we should give Julia the benefit of our advice."

"Do so," said Verus. "Otherwise I am afraid my visit to-day would seem opportune to no one.—Greet Julia from me."

As he went away he cast a glance at the nosegay which Arsinoe had given away as soon as she had received it from him, and he sighed: "As we grow old we have to learn wisdom."

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Avoid all useless anxiety
To know half is less endurable than to know nothing
Who do all they are able and enjoy as much as they can get

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