

The Bride of the Nile — Volume 03 eBook

The Bride of the Nile — Volume 03 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER X.

After the great excitement of the night Paula had thrown herself on her bed with throbbing pulses. Sleep would not come to her, and so at rather more than two hours after sunrise she went to the window to close the shutters. As she did so she looked out, and she saw Hiram leap into a boat and push the light bark from the shore. She dared neither signal nor call to him; but when the faithful soul had reached open water he looked back at her window, recognized her in her white morning dress and flourished the oar high in the air. This could only mean that he had fulfilled his commission and sold her jewel. Now he was going to the other side to engage the Nabathæan.

When she had closed the shutters and darkened the room she again lay down. Youth asserted its rights the weary girl fell into deep, dreamless slumbers.

When she woke, with the heat drops on her forehead, the sun was nearly at the meridian, only an hour till the Ariston would be served, the Greek breakfast, the first meal in the morning, which the family eat together as they also did the principal meal later in the day. She had never yet failed to appear, and her absence would excite remark.

The governor's household, like that of every Egyptian of rank, was conducted more on the Greek than the Egyptian plan; and this was the case not merely as regarded the meals but in many other things, and especially the language spoken. From the Mukaukas himself down to the youngest member of the family, all spoke Greek among themselves, and Coptic, the old native dialect, only to the servants. Nay, many borrowed and foreign words had already crept into use in the Coptic.

The governor's granddaughter, pretty little Mary, had learnt to speak Greek fluently and correctly before she spoke Coptic, but when Paula had first arrived she could not as yet write the beautiful language of Greece with due accuracy. Paula loved children; she longed for some occupation, and she had therefore volunteered to instruct the little girl in the art. At first her hosts had seemed pleased that she should render this service, but ere long the relation between the Lady Neforis and her husband's niece had taken the unpleasant aspect which it was destined to retain. She had put a stop to the lessons, and the reason she had assigned for this insulting step was that Paula had dictated to her pupil long sentences out of her Orthodox Greek prayerbook. This, it was true, she had done; but without the smallest concealment; and the passages she had chosen had contained nothing but what must elevate the soul of every Christian, of whatever confession.

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The child had wept bitterly over her grandmother's fiat, though Paula had always taken the lessons quite seriously, for Mary loved her older companion with all the enthusiasm of a half-grown girl—as a child of ten really is in Egypt; her passionate little heart worshipped the beautiful maiden who was in every respect so far above her, and Paula's arms had opened wide to embrace the child who brought sunshine into the gloomy, chill atmosphere she breathed in her uncle's house. But Neforis regarded the child's ardent love for her Melchite relation as exaggerated and morbid, imperilling perhaps her religious faith; and she fancied that under Paula's influence Mary had transferred her affections from her to the younger woman with added warmth. Nor was this idea wholly fanciful; the child's strong sense of justice could not bear to see her friend misunderstood and slighted, often simply and entirely misjudged and hardly blamed, so Mary felt it her duty, as far as in her lay, to make up for her grandmother's delinquencies in regard to the guest who in the child's eyes was perfection.

But Neforis was not the woman to put up with this demeanor in a child. Mary was her granddaughter, the only child of her lost son, and no one should come between them. So she forbid the little girl to go to Paula's room without an express message, and when a Greek teacher was engaged for her, her instructions were that she should keep her pupil as much as possible out of the Syrian damsel's way. All this only fanned the child's vehement affection; and tenderly as her grandmother would sometimes caress her—while Mary on her part never failed in dutiful obedience—neither of them ever felt a true and steady warmth of heart towards the other; and for this Paula was no doubt to blame, though against her will and by her mere existence.

Often, indeed, and by a hundred covert hints Dame Neforis gave Paula to understand that she it was who had alienated her grandchild; there was nothing for it but to keep the child for whom she yearned, at a distance, and only rarely reveal to her the abundance of her love. At last her life was so full of grievance that she was hardly able to be innocent with the innocent—a child with the child; Mary was not slow to note this, and ascribed Paula's altered manner to the suffering caused by her grandmother's severity.

Mary's most frequent opportunities of speaking to her friend were just before meals; for at that time no one was watching her, and her grandmother had not forbidden her calling Paula to table. A visit to her room was the child's greatest delight—partly because it was forbidden— but no less because Paula, up in her own room, was quite different from what she seemed with the others, and because they could there look at each other and kiss without interference, and say what ever they pleased. There Mary could tell her as much as she dared of the events in their little circle, but the lively and sometimes hoydenish little girl was often withheld from confessing a misdemeanor, or even an inoffensive piece of childishness, by sheer admiration for one who to her appeared nobler, greater and loftier than other beings.

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Just as Paula had finished putting up her hair, Mary, who would rush like a whirlwind even into her grandmother's presence, knocked humbly at the door. She did not fly into Paula's arms as she did into those of Susannah or her daughter Katharina, but only kissed her white arm with fervent devotion, and colored with happiness when Paula bent down to her, pressed her lips to her brow and hair, and wiped her wet, glowing cheeks. Then she took Mary's head fondly between her hands and said:

"What is wrong with you, madcap?"

In fact the sweet little face was crimson, and her eyes swelled as if she had been crying violently.

"It is so fearfully hot," said Mary. "Eudoxia"—her Greek governess—"says that Egypt in summer is a fiery furnace, a hell upon earth. She is quite ill with the heat, and lies like a fish on the sand; the only good thing about it is. . ."

"That she lets you run off and gives you no lessons?"

Mary nodded, but as no lecture followed the confession she put her head on one side and looked up into Paula's face with large roguish eyes.

"And yet you have been crying!—a great girl like you?"

"I—I crying?"

"Yes, crying. I can see it in your eyes. Now confess: what has happened?"

"You will not scold me?"

"Certainly not."

"Well then. At first it was fun, such fun you cannot think, and I do not mind the heat; but when the great hunt had gone by I wanted to go to my grand mother and I was not allowed. Do you know, something very particular had been going on in the fountain-room; and as they all came out again I crept behind Orion into the tablinum—there are such wonderful things there, and I wanted just to frighten him a little; we have often played games together before. At first he did not see me, and as he was bending over the hanging, from which the gem was stolen—I believe he was counting the stones in the faded old thing—I just jumped on to his shoulder, and he was so frightened—I can tell you, awfully frightened! And he turned upon me like a fighting-cock and—and he gave me a box on the ear; such a slap, it is burning now—and all sorts of colors danced before my eyes. He always used to be so nice and kind to me, and to you, too, and so I used to be fond of him—he is my uncle too—but a box on the ears, a slap such as the cook might give to the turnspit—I am too big for that; that I will certainly not put up with it! Since my last birthday all the slaves and upper servants, too, have had to treat me



as a lady and to bow down to me! And now!—it was just here.—How dare he?” She began to cry again and sobbed out: “But that was not all. He locked me into the dark tablinum and left—left me....” her tears flowed faster and faster, “left me sitting there! It was so horrible; and I might have been there now if I had not found a gold plate; I seized my great-grandfather—I mean the silver image of Menas, and hammered on it, and screamed Fire! Then Sebek heard me and fetched Orion, and he let me out, and made such a fuss over me and kissed me. But what is the good of that; my grandfather will be angry, for in my terror I beat his father’s nose quite flat on the plate.”

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Paula had listened, now amused and now grave, to the little girl's story; when she ceased, she once more wiped her eyes and said:

"Your uncle is a man, and you must not play with him as if he were a child like yourself. The reminder you got was rather a hard one, no doubt, but Orion tried to make up for it. —But the great hunt, what was that?"

At this question Mary's eyes suddenly sparkled again. In an instant all her woes were forgotten, even her ancestor's flattened nose, and with a merry, hearty laugh she exclaimed:

"Oh! you should have seen it! You would have been amused too. They wanted to catch the bad man who cut the emerald out of the hanging. He had left his shoes and they had held them under the dogs' noses and then off they went! First they rushed here to the stairs; then to the stables, then to the lodgings of one of the horse-trainers, and I kept close behind, after the terriers and the other dogs. Then they stopped to consider and at last they all ran out at the gate towards the town. I ought not to have gone beyond the court-yard, but—do not be cross with me—it was such fun!—Out they went, along Hapi Street, across the square, and at last into the Goldsmith's Street, and there the whole pack plunged into Gamaliel's shop—the Jew who is always so merry. While he was talking to the others his wife gave me some apricot tartlets; we do not have such good ones at home."

"And did they find the man?" asked Paula, who had changed color repeatedly during the child's story.

"I do not know," said Mary sadly. "They were not chasing any one in particular. The dogs kept their noses to the ground, and we ran after them."

"And only to catch a man, who certainly had nothing whatever to do with the theft.—Reflect a little, Mary. The shoes gave the dogs the scent and they were set on to seize the man who had worn them, but whom no judge had examined. The shoes were found in the hall; perhaps he had dropped them by accident, or some one else may have carried them there. Now think of yourself in the place of an innocent man, a Christian like ourselves, hunted with a pack of dogs like a wild beast. Is it not frightful? No good heart should laugh at such a thing!"

Paula spoke with such impressive gravity and deep sorrow, and her whole manner betrayed such great and genuine distress that the child looked up at her anxiously, with tearful eyes, threw herself against her, and hiding her face in Paula's dress exclaimed: "I did not know that they were hunting a poor man, and if it makes you so sad, I wish I had not been there! But is it really and truly so bad? You are so often unhappy when we others laugh!" She gazed into Paula's face with wide, wondering eyes through her

tears, and Paula clasped her to her, kissed her fondly, and replied with melancholy sweetness:

“I would gladly be as gay as you, but I have gone through so much to sadden me. Laugh and be merry to your heart’s content; I am glad you should. But with regard to the poor hunted man, I fear he is my father’s freedman, the most faithful, honest soul! Did your exciting hunt drive any one out of the goldsmith’s shop?”

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Mary shook her head; then she asked:

“Is it Hiram, the stammerer, the trainer, that they are hunting?”

“I fear it is.”

“Yes, yes,” said the child. “Stay—oh, dear! it will grieve you again, but I think—I think they said—the shoes belonged—but I did not attend. However, they were talking of a groom—a freedman—a stammerer. . . .”

“Then they certainly are hunting down an innocent man,” cried Paula with a deep sigh; and she sat down again in front of her toilet-table to finish dressing. Her hands still moved mechanically, but she was lost in thought; she answered the child vaguely, and let her rummage in her open trunk till Mary pulled out the necklace that had been bereft of its gem, and hung it round her neck. Just then there was a knock at the door and Katharina, the widow Susannah’s little daughter, came into the room. The young girl, to whom the governor’s wife wished to marry her tall son scarcely reached to Paula’s shoulder, but she was plump and pleasant to look upon; as neat as if she had just been taken out of a box, with a fresh, merry lovable little face. When she laughed she showed a gleaming row of small teeth, set rather wide apart, but as white as snow; and her bright eyes beamed on the world as gladly as though they had nothing that was not pleasing to look for, innocent mischief to dream of. She too, tried to win Paula’s favor; but with none of Mary’s devoted and unvarying enthusiasm. Often, to be sure, she would devote herself to Paula with such stormy vehemence that the elder girl was forced to be repellent; then, on the other hand, if she fancied her self slighted, or treated more coolly than Mary, she would turn her back on Paula with sulky jealousy, temper and pouting. It always was in Paula’s power to put an end to the “Water-wagtails tantrums”—which generally had their comic side—by a kind word or kiss; but without some such advances Katharina was quite capable of indulging her humors to the utmost.

On the present occasion she flew into Paula’s arm, and when her friend begged, more quietly than usual that she would allow her first to finish dressing, she turned away without any display of touchiness and took the necklace from Mary’s hand to put it on herself. It was of fine workmanship, set with pearls, and took her fancy greatly; only the empty medallion from which Hiram had removed the emerald with his knife spoiled the whole effect. Still, it was a princely jewel, and when she had also taken from the chest a large fan of ostrich feathers she showed off to her play-fellow, with droll, stiff dignity, how the empress and princesses at Court curtsied and bowed graciously to their inferiors. At this they both laughed a great deal. When Paula had finished her toilet and proceeded to take the necklace off Katharina, the empty setting, which Hiram’s knife had bent, caught in the thin tissue of her dress. Mary disengaged it, and Paula tossed the jewel back into the trunk.

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While she was locking the box she asked Katharina whether she had met Orion.

“Orion!” repeated the younger girl, in a tone which implied that she alone had the right to enquire about him. “Yes, we came upstairs together; he went to see the wounded man. Have you anything to say to him?”

She crimsoned as she spoke and looked suspiciously at Paula, who simply replied: “Perhaps,” and then added, as she hung the ribbon with the key round her neck: “Now, you little girls, it is breakfast time; I am not going down to-day.”

“Oh, dear!” cried Mary disappointed, “my grandfather is ailing and grandmother will stay with him; so if you do not come I shall have to sit alone with Eudoxia; for Katharina’s chariot is waiting and she must go home at once. Oh! do come. Just to please me; you do not know how odious Eudoxia can be when it is so hot.”

“Yes, do go down,” urged Katharina. “What will you do up hereby yourself? And this evening mother and I will come again.”

“Very well,” said Paula. “But first I must go to see the invalids.”

“May I go with you?” asked the Water wagtail, coaxingly stroking Paula’s arm. But Mary clapped her hands, exclaiming:

“She only wants to go to Orion—she is so fond of him. . . .”

Katharina put her hand over the child’s mouth, but Paula, with quickened breath, explained that she had very serious matters to discuss with Orion; so Katharina, turning her back on her with a hasty gesture of defiance, sulkily went down stairs, while Mary slipped down the bannister rail. Not many days since, Katharina, who was but just sixteen, would gladly have followed her example.

Paula meanwhile knocked at the first of the sickrooms and entered it as softly as the door was opened by a nursing-sister from the convent of St. Katharine. Orion, whom she was seeking, had been there, but had just left.

In this first room lay the leader of the caravan; in that beyond was the crazy Persian. In a sitting-room adjoining the first room, which, being intended for guests of distinction, was furnished with royal magnificence, sat two men in earnest conversation: the Arab merchant and Philippus the physician, a young man of little more than thirty, tall and bony, in a dress of clean but very coarse stuff without any kind of adornment. He had a shrewd, pale face, out of which a pair of bright black eyes shone benevolently but with keen vivacity. His large cheek-bones were much too prominent; the lower part of his face was small, ugly and, as it were, compressed, while his high broad forehead crowned the whole and stamped it as that of a thinker, as a fine cupola may crown an insignificant and homely structure.

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This man, devoid of charm, though his strongly-characterized individuality made it difficult to overlook him even in the midst of a distinguished circle, had been conversing eagerly with the Arab, who, in the course of their two-days' acquaintance, had inspired him with a regard which was fully reciprocated. At last Orion had been the theme of their discourse, and the physician, a restless toiler who could not like any man whose life was one of idle enjoyment, though he did full justice to his brilliant gifts and well-applied studies, had judged him far more hardly than the older man. To the leech all forms of human life were sacred, and in his eyes everything that could injure the body or soul of a man was worthy of destruction. He knew all that Orion had brought upon the hapless Mandane, and how lightly he had trifled with the hearts of other women; in his eyes this made him a mischievous and criminal member of society. He regarded life as an obligation to be discharged by work alone, of whatever kind, if only it were a benefit to society as a whole. And such youths as Orion not only did not recognize this, but used the whole and the parts also for base and selfish ends. The old Moslem, on the contrary, viewed life as a dream whose fairest portion, the time of youth, each one should enjoy with alert senses, and only take care that at the waking which must come with death he might hope to find admission into Paradise. How little could man do against the iron force of fate! That could not be forefended by hard work; there was nothing for it but to take up a right attitude, and to confront and meet it with dignity. The bark of Orion's existence lacked ballast; in fine weather it drifted wherever the breeze carried it, He himself had taken care to equip it well; and if only the chances of life should freight it heavily—very heavily, and fling it on the rocks, then Orion might show who and what he was; he, Haschim, firmly believed that his character would prove itself admirable. It was in the hour of shipwreck that a man showed his worth.

Here the physician interrupted him to prove that it was not Fate, as imagined by Moslems, but man himself who guided the bark of life—but at this moment Paula looked into the room, and he broke off. The merchant bowed profoundly, Philippus respectfully, but with more embarrassment than might have been expected from the general confidence of his manner. For some years he had been a daily visitor in the governor's house, and after carefully ignoring Paula on her first arrival, since Dame Neforis had taken to treating her so coolly he drew her out whenever he had the opportunity. Her conversations with him had now become dear and even necessary to her, though at first his dry, cutting tone had displeased her, and he had often driven her into a corner in a way that was hard to bear. They kept her mind alert in a circle which never busied itself with anything but the trivial details of family life in the decayed city, or with dogmatic polemics—for the Mukaukas seldom or never took part in the gossip of the women.

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The leech never talked of daily events, but expressed his views as to other and graver subjects in life, or in books with which they were both familiar; and he had the art of eliciting replies from her which he met with wit and acumen. By degrees she had become accustomed to his bold mode of thought, sometimes, it is true, too recklessly expressed; and the gifted girl now preferred a discussion with him to any other form of conversation, recognizing that a childlike and supremely unselfish soul animated this thoughtful reservoir of all knowledge. Almost everything she did displeased her uncle's wife, and so, of course, did her familiar intercourse with this man, whose appearance certainly had in it nothing to attract a young girl.—The physician to a family of rank was there to keep its members in good health, and it was unbecoming in one of them to converse with him on intimate terms as an equal. She reproached Paula— whose pride she was constantly blaming—for her unseemly condescension to Philippus; but what chiefly annoyed her was that Paula took up many a half-hour which otherwise Philippus would have devoted to her husband; and in him and his health her life and thoughts were centred.

The Arab at once recognized his foe of the previous evening; but they soon came to a friendly understanding—Paula confessing her folly in holding a single and kindly-disposed man answerable for the crimes of a whole nation. Haschim replied that a right-minded spirit always came to a just conclusion at last; and then the conversation turned on her father, and the physician explained to the Arab that she was resolved never to weary of seeking the missing man.

“Nay, it is the sole aim and end of my life,” cried the girl.

“A great mistake, in my opinion,” said the leech. But the merchant differed: there were things, he said, too precious to be given up for lost, even when the hope of finding them seemed as feeble and thin as a rotten reed.

“That is what I feel!” cried Paula. “And how can you think differently, Philip? Have I not heard from your own lips that you never give up all hope of a sick man till death has put an end to it? Well, and I cling to mine—more than ever now, and I feel that I am right. My last thought, my last coin shall be spent in the search for my father, even without my uncle and his wife, and in spite of their prohibition.”

“But in such a task a young girl can hardly do without a man's succor,” said the merchant. “I wander a great deal about the world, I speak with many foreigners from distant lands, and if you will do me the honor, pray regard me as your coadjutor, and allow me to help you in seeking for the lost hero.”

“Thanks—I fervently thank you!” cried Paula, grasping the Moslem's hand with hearty pleasure. “Wherever you go bear my lost father in mind; I am but a poor, lonely girl, but if you find him. . .”

“Then you will know that even among the Moslems there are men. . .”

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"Men who are ready to show compassion and to succor friendless women!" interrupted Paula.

"And with good success, by the blessing of the Almighty," replied the Arab. "As soon as I find a clue you shall hear from me; now, however, I must go across the Nile to see Amru the great general; I go in all confidence for I know that my poor, brave Rustem is in good hands, friend Philippus. My first enquiries shall be made in Fostat, rely upon that, my daughter."

"I do indeed," said Paula with pleased emotion. "When shall we meet again?"

"To-morrow, or the morning after at latest."

The young girl went up to him and whispered: "We have just heard of a clue; indeed, I hope my messenger is already on his way. Have you time to hear about it now?"

"I ought long since to have been on the other shore; so not to-day, but to-morrow I hope." The Arab shook hands with her and the physician, and hastily took his leave.

Paula stood still, thinking. Then it struck her that Hiram was now on the further side of the Nile, within the jurisdiction of the Arab ruler, and that the merchant could perhaps intercede for him, if she were to tell him all she knew. She felt the fullest confidence in the old man, whose kind and sympathetic face was still visible to her mind's eye, and without paying any further heed to the physician she went quickly towards the door of the sick-room. A crucifix hung close by, and the nun had fallen on her knees before it, praying for her infidel patient, and beseeching the Good Shepherd to have mercy on the sheep that was not of His fold. Paula did not venture to disturb the worshipper, who was kneeling just in the narrow passage; so some minutes elapsed before the leech, observing her uneasiness, came out of the larger room, touched the nun on the shoulder, and said in a low voice of genuine kindness:

"One moment, good Sister. Your pious intercession will be heard—but this damsel is in haste." The nun rose at once and made way, sending a wrathful glance after Paula as she hurried down the stairs.

At the door of the court-yard she looked out and about for the Arab, but in vain. Then she enquired of a slave who told her that the merchant's horse had waited for him at the gate a long time, that he had just come galloping out, and by this time must have reached the bridge of boats which connected Memphis with the island of Rodah and, beyond the island, with the fort of Babylon and the new town of Fostat.

CHAPTER XI.

Paula went up-stairs again, distressed and vexed with herself. Was it the heat that had enervated her and robbed her of the presence of mind she usually had at her command? She herself could not understand how it was that she had not at once taken advantage of the opportunity to plead to Haschim for her faithful retainer. The merchant might have interested himself for Hiram.

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The slave at the gate had told her that he had not yet been taken; the time to intercede, then, had not yet come. But she was resolved to do so, to draw the wrath of her relations down on herself, and, if need should be, to relate all she had seen in the course of the night, to save her devoted servant. It was no less than her duty: still, before humiliating Orion so deeply she would warn him. The thought of charging him with so shameful a deed pained her like the need for inflicting an injury on herself. She hated him, but she would rather have broken the most precious work of art than have branded him—him whose image still reigned in her heart, supremely glorious and attractive.

Instead of following Mary to breakfast, or offering herself as usual to play draughts with her uncle, she went back to the sick-room. To meet Neforis or Orion at this moment would have been painful, indeed odious to her. It was long since she had felt so weary and oppressed. A conversation with the physician might perhaps prove refreshing; after the various agitations of the last few hours she longed for something, be it what it might, that should revive her spirits and give a fresh turn to her thoughts.

In the Masdakite's room the Sister coldly asked her what she wanted, and who had given her leave to assist in tending the sufferers. The leech, who at that moment was moistening the bandage on the wounded man's head, at this turned to the nun and informed her decidedly that he desired the young girl's assistance in attending on both his patients. Then he led the way sitting-room, saying in subdued tones into the adjoining tones:

"For the present all is well. Let us rest here a little while."

She sat down on a divan, and he on a seat opposite, and Philippus began:

"You were seeking handsome Orion just now, but you must. . . ."

"What?" she asked gravely. "And I would have you to know that the son of the house is no more to me than his mother is. Your phrase 'Handsome Orion' seems to imply something that I do not again wish to hear. But I must speak to him, and soon, in reference to an important matter."

"To what, then, do I owe the pleasure of seeing you here again? To confess the truth I did not hope for your return."

"And why not?"

"Excuse me from answering. No one likes to hear unpleasant things. If one of my profession thinks any one is not well. . . ."



"If that is meant for me," replied the girl, "all I can tell you is that the one thing on which I still can pride myself is my health. Say what you will—the very worst for aught I care. I want something to-day to rouse me from lethargy, even if it should make me angry."

"Very well then," replied the leech, "though I am plunging into deep waters!—As to health, as it is commonly understood, a fish might envy you; but the higher health—health of mind: that I fear you cannot boast of."

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"This is a serious beginning," said Paula. "Your reproof would seem to imply that I have done you or some one else a wrong."

"If only you had!" exclaimed he. "No, you have not sinned against us in any way.—'I am as I am' is what you think of yourself; and what do you care for others?"

"That must depend on whom you mean by 'others!'"

"Nothing less than all and each of those with whom you live—here, in this house, in this town, in this world. To you they are mere air—or less; for the air is a tangible thing that can fill a ship's sails and drive it against the stream, whose varying nature can bring comfort or suffering to your body."

"My world is within!" said Paula, laying her hand on her heart.

"Very true. And all creation may find room there; for what cannot the human heart, as it is called, contain! The more we require it to take and keep, the more ready it is to hold it. It is unsafe to let the lock rust; for, if once it has grown stiff, when we want to open it no pulling and wrenching will avail. And besides—but I do not want to grieve you. — You have a habit of only looking backwards...."

"And what that is pleasurable lies before me? Your blame is harsh and at the same time unjust.—Indeed, and how can you tell which way I look?"

"Because I have watched you with the eye of a friend. In truth, Paula, you have forgotten how to look around and forward. The life which lies behind you and which you have lost is all your world. I once showed you on a fragmentary papyrus that belonged to my foster father, Horus Apollo, a heathen demon represented as going forwards, while his head was turned on his neck so that the face and eyes looked behind him."

"I remember it perfectly."

Well, you have long been just like him. 'All things move,' says Heraclitus, so you are forced to float onwards with the great stream; or, to vary the image, you must walk forwards on the high-road of life towards the common goal; but your eye is fixed on what lies behind you, feasting on the prospect of a handsome and wealthy home, kindness and tenderness, noble and loving faces, and a happy, but alas! long-lost existence. All the same, on you must go.—What must the result be?"

"I must stumble, you think, and fall?"

The physician's reproof had hit Paula all the harder because she could not conceal from herself that there was much truth in it. She had come hither on purpose to find encouragement, and these accusations troubled even her sense of high health. Why should she submit to be taken to task like a school-girl by this man, himself still young?

If this went on she would let him hear.... But he was speaking again, and his reply calmed her, and strengthened her conviction that he was a true and well-meaning friend.

“Not that perhaps,” he said, “because—well, because nature has blessed you with perfect balance, and you go forward in full self-possession as becomes the daughter of a hero. We must not forget that it is of your soul that I am speaking; and that maintains its innate dignity of feeling among so much that is petty and mean.”

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"Then why need I fear to look back when it gives me so much comfort?" she eagerly enquired, as she gazed in his face with fresh spirit.

"Because it may easily lead you to tread on other people's feet! That hurts them; then they are annoyed, and they get accustomed to think grudgingly of you—you who are more lovable than they are."

"But quite unjustly; for I am not conscious of ever having intentionally grieved or hurt any one in my whole life."

"I know that; but you have done so unintentionally a thousand times."

"Then it would be better I should quit them altogether."

"No, and a thousand times no! The man who avoids his kind and lives in solitude fancies he is doing some great thing and raising himself above the level of the existence he despises. But look a little closer: it is self-interest and egoism which drive him into the cave and the cloister. In any case he neglects his highest duty towards humanity—or let us say merely towards the society he belongs to—in order to win what he believes to be his own salvation. Society is a great body, and every individual should regard himself as a member of it, bound to serve and succor it, and even, when necessary, to make sacrifices for it. The greatest are not too great. But those who crave isolation,—you yourself—nay, hear me out, for I may never again risk the danger of incurring your wrath—desire to be a body apart. What Paula has known and possessed, she keeps locked in the treasure-house of her memory under bolt and key; What Paula is, she feels she still must be—and for whom? Again, for that same Paula. She has suffered great sorrow and on that her soul lives; but this is evil nourishment, unwholesome and bad for her."

She was about to rise; but he bent forward, with a zealous conviction that he must not allow himself to be interrupted, and lightly touched her arm as though to prevent her quitting her seat, while he went on unhesitatingly:

"You feed on your old sorrows! Well and good. Many a time have I seen that trial can elevate the soul. It can teach a brave heart to feel the woes of others more deeply; it can rouse a desire to assuage the griefs of others with beautiful self-devotion. Those who have known pain and affliction enjoy ease and pleasure with double satisfaction; sufferers learn to be grateful for even the smaller joys of life. But you?— I have long striven for courage to tell you so—you derive no benefit from suffering because you lock it up in your breast—as if a man were to enclose some precious seed in a silver trinket to carry about with him. It should be sown in the earth, to sprout and bear fruit! However, I do not blame you; I only wish to advise you as a true and devoted friend. Learn to feel yourself a member of the body to which your destiny has bound you for the

present, whether you like it or not. Try to contribute to it all that your capacities allow you achieve.

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You will find that you can do something for it; the casket will open, and to your surprise and delight you will perceive that the seed dropped into the soil will germinate, that flowers will open and fruit will form of which you may make bread, or extract from it a balm for yourself or for others! Then you will leave the dead to bury the dead, as the Bible has it, and dedicate to the living those great powers and gracious gifts which an illustrious father and a noble mother—nay, and a long succession of distinguished ancestors, have bequeathed to a descendant worthy of them. Then you will recover that which you have lost: the joy in existence which we ought both to feel and to diffuse, because it brings with it an obligation which it which is only granted to us once to fulfil. Kind fate has fitted you above a hundred thousand others for being loved; and if you do not forget the gratitude you owe for that, hearts will be turned to you, though now they shun the tree which has beset itself intentionally with thorns, and which lets its branches droop like the weeping-willows by the Nile. Thus you will lead a new and beautiful life, receiving and giving joy. The isolated and charmless existence you drag through here, to the satisfaction of none and least of all to your own, you can transform to one of fruition and satisfaction—breathing and moving healthily and beneficently in the light of day. It lies in your power. When you came up here to give your care to these poor injured creatures, you took the first step in the new path I desire to show you, to true happiness. I did not expect you, and I am thankful that you have come; for I know that as you entered that door you may have started on the road to renewed happiness, if you have the will to walk in it.—Thank God! That is said and over!”

The leech rose and wiped his forehead, looking uneasily at Paula who had remained seated; her breath came fast, and she was more confused and undecided than he had ever seen her. She clasped her hand over her brow, and gazed, speechless, into her lap as though she wished to smother some pain.

The young physician beat his arms together, like a laborer in the winter when his hands are frozen, and exclaimed with distressful emotion: “Yes, I have spoken, and I cannot regret having done so; but what I foresaw has come to pass: The greatest happiness that ever sweetened my daily life is gone out of it! To love Plato is a noble rule, but greater than Plato is the truth; and yet, those who preach it must be prepared to find that truth scares away friends from the unpleasing vicinity of its ill-starred Apostles!”

At this Paula rose, and following the impulse of her generous heart, offered the leech her hand in all sincerity; he grasped it in both his, pressing it so tightly that it almost hurt her, and his eyes glistened with moisture as he exclaimed: “That is as I hoped; that is splendid, that is noble! Let me but be your brother, high-souled maiden!—Now, come. That poor, crazy, lovely girl will heal of her death-wound under your hands if under any!”

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"I will come!" she replied heartily; and there was something healthy and cheerful in her manner as they entered the sick-room; but her expression suddenly changed, and she asked pensively:

"And supposing we restore the unhappy girl—what good will she get by it?"

"She will breathe and see the sunshine," replied the leech; "she will be grateful to you, and finally she will contribute what she can to the whole body. She will be alive in short, she will live. For life—feel it, understand it as I do—life is the best thing we have." Paula gazed with astonishment in the man's unlovely but enthusiastic face. How radiantly joyful!

No one could have called it ugly at this moment, or have said that it lacked charm.

He believed what he had asserted with such fervent feeling, though it was in contradiction to a view he had held only yesterday and often defended: that life in itself was misery to all who could not grasp it of their own strength, and make something of it worth making. At this moment he really felt that it was the best gift.

Paula went forward, and his eyes followed her, as the gaze of the pious pilgrim is fixed on the holy image he has travelled to see, over seas and mountains, with bruised feet.

They went up to the sick girl's bed. The nun drew back, making her own reflections on the physician's altered mien, and his childlike, beaming contentment, as he explained to Paula what particular peril threatened the sufferer, and by what treatment he hoped to save her; how to make the bandages and give the medicines, and how necessary it was to accept the poor crazy girl's fancies and treat them as rational ideas so long as the fever lasted.

At last he was forced to go and attend to other patients. Paula remained sitting at the head of the bed and gazing at the face of the sufferer.

How fair it was! And Orion had snatched this rose in the bud, and trodden it under foot! She had, no doubt, felt for him what Paula herself felt. And now? Did she feel nothing but hatred of him, or could her heart, in spite of her indignation and scorn, not altogether cast off the spell that had once bound it?

What weakness was this! She was, she must, she would be his foe!

Her thoughts went back to the idle and futile life that she had led for so many years. The physician had hit the mark; and he had been too easy rather than severe. Yes, she would begin to make good use of her powers—but how, in what way, here and among these people? How transfigured poor Philippus had seemed when she had given him her hand; with what energy had he poured forth his words.

“And how false,” she mused, “is the saying that the body is the mirror of the soul! If it were so, Philippus would have the face of Orion, and Orion that of Philippus.” But could Orion’s heart be wholly reprobate? Nay, that was impossible; her every impulse resisted the belief. She must either love him or hate him, there was no third alternative; but as yet the two passions were struggling within her in a way that was quite intolerable.

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The physician had spoken of being a brother to her, and she could not help smiling at the idea. She could, she thought, live very happily and calmly with him, with her nurse Betta, and with the learned old friend who shared his home, and of whom he had often talked to her; she could join him in his studies, help him in his calling, and discuss many things well worth knowing. Such a life, she told herself, would be a thousand times preferable to this, with Neforis. In him she had certainly found a friend; and her glad recognition of the fact was the first step towards the fulfilment of his promise, since it showed that her heart was still ready to go forth to the kindness of another.

Amid these meditations, however, her anxiety for Hiram constantly recurred to her, and it was clear to her mind that, if she and Orion should come to extremities, she could no longer dwell under the governor's roof. Often she had longed for nothing so fervently as to be able to quit it; but to-day it filled her with dread, for parting from her uncle necessarily involved parting from his son. She hated him; still, to lose sight of him altogether would be very hard to bear. To go with Philippus and live with him as his sister would never do; nay, it struck her as something inconceivable, strangely incongruous.

Meanwhile she listened to Mandane's breathing and treated her in obedience to the leech's orders, longing for his return; presently however, not he but the nun came to the bed-side, laid her hand on the girl's forehead, and without paying any heed to Paula, whispered kindly: "That is right child, sleep away; have a nice long sleep. So long as she can be kept quiet; if only she goes on like this!—Her head is cooler. Philippus will certainly say there is scarcely any fever. Thank God, the worst danger is over!"

"Oh, how glad I am!" cried Paula, and she spoke with such warmth and sincerity that the nun gave her a friendly nod and left the sick girl to her care, quite satisfied.

It was long since Paula had felt so happy. She fancied that her presence had had a good affect on the sufferer, that Mandane had already been brought by her nursing to the threshold of a new life. Paula, who but just now had regarded herself as a persecuted victim of Fate, now breathed more freely in the belief that she too might bring joy to some one. She looked into Mandane's more than pretty face with real joy and tenderness, laid the bandage which had slipped aside gently over her ears, and breathed a soft kiss on her long silken lashes.

She rapidly grew in favor with the shrewd nun; when the hour for prayer came round, the sister included in her petitions—Paula—the orphan under a stranger's roof, the Greek girl born, by the inscrutable decrees of God, outside the pale of her saving creed. At length Philippus returned; he was rejoiced at his new friend's brightened aspect, and declared that Mandane had, under her care, got past the first and worst danger, and might be expected to recover, slowly indeed, but completely.

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After Paula had renewed the compress—and he intentionally left her to do it unaided, he said encouragingly:

“How quickly you have learnt your business.—Now, the patient is asleep again; the Sister will keep watch, and for the present we can be of no use to the girl; sleep is the best nourishment she can have. But with us—or at any rate with me, it is different. We have still two hours to wait for the next meal: my breakfast is standing untouched, and yours no doubt fared the same; so be my guest. They always send up enough to satisfy six bargemen.”

Paula liked the proposal, for she had long been hungry. The nun was desired to hasten to fetch some more plates, of drinking-vessels there was no lack—and soon the new allies were seated face to face, each at a small table. He carved the duck and the roast quails, put the salad before her and some steaming artichokes, which the nun had brought up at the request of the cook whose only son the physician had saved; he invited her attention to the little pies, the fruits and cakes which were laid ready, and played the part of butler; and then, while they heartily enjoyed the meal, they carried on a lively conversation.

Paula for the first time asked Philippus to tell her something of his early youth; he began with an account of his present mode of life, as a partner in the home of the singular old priest of Isis, Horus Apollo, a diligent student; he described his strenuous activity by day and his quiet studies by night, and gave everything such an amusing aspect that often she could not help laughing. But presently he was sad, as he told her how at an early age he had lost his father and mother, and was left to depend solely on himself and on a very small fortune, having no relations; for his father had been a grammarian, invited to Alexandria from Athens, who had been forced to make a road for himself through life, which had lain before him like an overgrown jungle of papyrus and reeds. Every hour of his life was devoted to his work, for a rough, outspoken Goliath, such as he, never could find it easy to meet with helpful patrons. He had managed to live by teaching in the high schools of Alexandria, Athens, and Caesarea, and by preparing medicines from choice herbs—drinking water instead of wine, eating bread and fruit instead of quails and pies; and he had made a friend of many a good man, but never yet of a woman—it would be difficult with such a face as his!

“Then I am the first?” said Paula, who felt deep respect for the man who had made his way by his own energy to the eminent position which he had long held, not merely in Memphis, but among Egyptian physicians generally.

He nodded, and with such a blissful smile that she felt as though a sunbeam had shone into her very soul. He noticed this at once, raised his goblet, and drank to her, exclaiming with a flush on his cheek:

“The joy that comes to others early has come to me late; but then the woman I call my friend is matchless!”

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“Well, it is to be hoped she may not prove to be so wicked as you just now described her.—If only our alliance is not fated to end soon and abruptly.”

“Ah!” cried the physician, “every drop of blood in my veins.....”

“You would be ready to shed it for me,” Paula broke in, with a pathetic gesture, borrowed from a great tragedian she had seen at the theatre in Damascus. “But never fear: it will not be a matter of life and death— at worst they will but turn me out of the house and of Memphis.”

“You?” cried Philippus startled, “but who would dare to do so?”

“They who still regard me as a stranger.—You described the case admirably. If they have their way, my dear new friend, our fate will be like that of the learned Dionysius of Cyrene.”

“Of Cyrene?”

“Yes. It was my father who told me the story. When Dionysius sent his son to the High School at Athens, he sat down to write a treatise for him on all the things a student should do and avoid. He devoted himself to the task with the utmost diligence; but when, at the end of four years, he could write on the last leaf of the roll. “Here this book hath a happy ending,” the young man whose studies it was intended to guide came home to Cyrene, a finished scholar.”

“And we have struck up a friendship.... ?”

“And made a treaty of alliance, only to be parted ere long.”

Philippus struck his fist vehemently on the little table in front of his couch and exclaimed: “That I will find means to prevent!—But now, tell me in confidence, what has last happened between you and the family down-stairs?”

“You will know quite soon enough.”

“Whichever of them fancies that you can be turned out of doors without more ado and there will be an end between us, may find himself mistaken!” cried the physician with an angry sparkle in his eyes. “I have a right to put in a word in this house. It has not nearly come to that yet, and what is more, it never shall. You shall quit it certainly; but of your own free will, and holding your head high....”

As he spoke the door of the outer room was hastily opened and the next instant Orion was standing before them, looking with great surprise at the pair who had just finished their meal. He said coldly:

"I am disturbing you, I see."

"Not in the least," replied the leech; and the young man, perceiving what bad taste it would be and how much out of place to give expression to his jealous annoyance, said, with a smile: "If only it had been granted to a third person to join in this symposium!"

"We found each other all-sufficient company," answered Philippus.

"A man who could believe in all the doctrines of the Church as readily as in that statement would be assured of salvation," laughed Orion. "I am no spoilsport, respected friends; but I deeply regret that I must, on the present occasion, disturb your happiness. The matter in question....." And he felt he might now abandon the jesting tone which so little answered to his mood, "is a serious one. In the first instance it concerns your freedman, my fair foe."

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"Has Hiram come back?" asked Paula, feeling herself turn pale.

"They have brought him in," replied Orion. "My father at once summoned the court of judges. Justice has a swift foot here with us; I am sorry for the man, but I cannot prevent its taking its course. I must beg of you to appear at the examination when you are called."

"The whole truth shall be told!" said Paula sternly and firmly.

"Of course," replied Orion. Then turning to the physician, he added: "I would request you, worthy Esculapius, to leave me and my cousin together for a few minutes. I want to give her a word of counsel which will certainly be to her advantage."

Philippus glanced enquiringly at the girl; she said with clear decision: "You and I can have no secrets. What I may hear, Philippus too may know."

Orion, with a shrug, turned to leave the room:

On the threshold he paused, exclaiming with some excitement and genuine distress:

"If you will not listen to me for your own sake, do so at least, whatever ill-feeling you may bear me, because I implore you not to refuse me this favor. It is a matter of life or death to one human being, of joy or misery to another. Do not refuse me.—I ask nothing unreasonable, Philippus. Do as I entreat you and leave us for a moment alone."

Again the physician's eyes consulted the young girl's; this time she said: "Go!" and he immediately quitted the room.

Orion closed the door.

"What have I done, Paula," he began with panting breath, "that since yesterday you have shunned me like a leper—that you are doing your utmost to bring me to ruin?"

"I mean to plead for the life of a trusty servant; nothing more," she said indifferently.

"At the risk of disgracing me!" he retorted bitterly.

"At that risk, no doubt, if you are indeed so base as to throw your own guilt on the shoulders of an honest man."

"Then you watched me last night?"

"The merest chance led me to see you come out of the tablinum..."



"I do not ask you now what took you there so late," he interrupted, "for it revolts me to think anything of you but the best, the highest.—But you? What have you experienced at my hands but friendship—nay, for concealment or dissimulation is here folly—but what a lover....?"

"A lover!" cried Paula indignantly. "A lover? Dare you utter the word, when you have offered your heart and hand to another—you. . . ."

"Who told you so?" asked Orion gloomily.

"Your own mother."

"That is it; so that is it?" cried the young man, clasping his hands convulsively. "Now I begin to see, now I understand. But stay. For if it is indeed that which has roused you to hate me and persecute me, you must love me, Paula—you do love me, and then, noblest and sweetest...." He held out his hand; but she struck it aside, exclaiming in a tremulous voice:

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“Be under no delusion. I am not one of the feeble lambs whom you have beguiled by the misuse of your gifts and advantages; and who then are eager to kiss your hands. I am the daughter of Thomas; and another woman’s betrothed, who craves my embraces on the way to his wedding, will learn to his rueing that there are women who scorn his disgraceful suit and can avenge the insult intended them. Go—go to your judges! You, a false witness, may accuse Hiram, but I will proclaim you, you the son of this house, as the thief! We shall see which they believe.”

“Me!” cried Orion, and his eyes flashed as wrathfully and vindictively as her own. “The son of the Mukaukas! Oh, that you were not a woman! I would force you to your knees and compel you to crave my pardon. How dare you point your finger at a man whose life has hitherto been as spotless as your own white raiment? Yes, I did go to the tablinum—I did tear the emerald from the hanging; but I did it in a fit of recklessness, and in the knowledge that what is my father’s is mine. I threw away the gem to gratify a mere fancy, a transient whim. Cursed be the hour when I did it!—Not on account of the deed itself, but of the consequences it may entail through your mad hatred. Jealousy, petty, unworthy jealousy is at the bottom of it! And of whom are you jealous?”

“Of no one; not even of your betrothed, Katharina,” replied Paula with forced composure. “What are you to me that, to spare you humiliation, I should risk the life of the most honest soul living? I have said: The judges shall decide between you.”

“No, they shall not!” stormed Orion. “At least, not as you intend! Beware, beware, I say, of driving me to extremities! I still see in you the woman I loved; I still offer you what lies within my power: to let everything end for the best for you. . . .”

“For me! Then I, too, am to suffer for your guilt?”

“Did you hear the barking of hounds just now?”

“I heard dogs yelping.”

“Very well.—Your freedman has been brought in, the pack got on his scent and have now been let into the house close to the tablinum. The dogs would not stir beyond the threshold and on the white marble step, towards the right-hand side, the print of a man’s foot was found in the dust. It is a peculiar one, for instead of five toes there are but three. Your Hiram was fetched in, and he was found to have the same number of toes as the mark on the marble, neither more nor less. A horse trod on his foot, in your father’s stable, and two of his toes had to be cut off: we got this out of the stammering wretch with some difficulty. —On the other side of the door-way there was a smaller print, but though the dogs paid no heed to that I examined it, and assured myself—how, I need not tell you—that it was you who had stood there. He, who has no business whatever in the house, must have made his way last night into the tablinum, our treasury. Now, put yourself in the judges’ place. How can such facts be outweighed by

the mere word of a girl who, as every one knows, is on anything rather than good terms with my mother, and who will leave no stone unturned to save her servant.”

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“Infamous!” cried Paula. “Hiram did not steal the gem, as you must know who stole it. The emerald he sold was my property; and were those stones really so much alike that even the seller. . .”

“Yes, indeed. He could not tell one from the other. Evil spirits have been at work all through, devilish, malignant demons. It would be enough to turn one’s brain, if life were not so full of enigmas! You yourself are the greatest.—Did you give the Syrian your emerald to sell in order to fly from this house with the money?—You are silent? Then I am right. What can my father be to you—you do not love my mother—and the son!—Paula, Paula, you are perhaps doing him an injustice—you hate him, and it is a pleasure to you to injure him.”

“I do not wish to hurt you or any one,” replied the girl. “And you have guessed wrongly. Your father refused me the means of seeking mine.”

“And you wanted to procure money to search for one who is long since dead!—Even my mother admits that you speak the truth; if she is right, and you really take no pleasure in doing me a mischief, listen to me, follow my advice, and grant my prayer! I do not ask any great matter.”

“Speak on then.”

“Do you know what a man’s honor is to him? Need I tell you that I am a lost and despised man if I am found guilty of this act of the maddest folly by the judges of my own house? It may cost my father his life if he hears that the word ‘guilty’ is pronounced on me; and I—I—what would become of me I cannot foresee!—I—oh God, oh God, preserve me from frenzy!—But I must be calm; time presses.... How different it is for your servant; he seems ready even now to take the guilt on himself, for, whatever he is asked, he still keeps silence. Do you do the same; and if the judges insist on knowing what you had to do with the Syrian last night—for the dogs traced the scent to your staircase—hazard a conjecture that the faithful fellow stole the emerald in order to gratify your desire to search for your father, his beloved master. If you can make up your mind to so great a sacrifice—oh, that I should have to ask it of you!—I swear to you by all I hold sacred, by yourself and by my father’s head, I will set Hiram free within three days, unbeaten and unhurt, and magnificently indemnified; and I will myself help him on the way whither he may desire to go, or you to send him, in search of your father.—Be silent; remain neutral in the background; that is all I ask, and I will keep my word—that, at any rate, you do not doubt?” She had listened to him with bated breath; she pitied him deeply as he stood there, a suppliant in bitter anguish of soul, a criminal who still could not understand that he was one, and who relied on the confidence that, only yesterday, he still had had the right to exact from all the world. He appeared before her like a fine proud tree struck by lightning, whose riven trunk, trembling to its fall, must be crushed to the earth by the first storm, unless the gardener props it up. She longed to be able to forget all he had brought upon her and to grasp his hand in friendly

consolation; but her deeply aggrieved pride helped her to preserve the cold and repellent manner she had so far succeeded in assuming.

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With much hesitation and reserve she consented to be silent as long as he kept his promise. It was for his father's sake, rather than his own, that she would so far become his accomplice: at the same time everything else was at an end between them, and she should bless the hour which might see her severed from him and his for ever.

The end of her speech was in a strangely hard and repellent tone; she felt she must adopt it to disguise how deeply she was touched by his unhappiness and by the extinction of the sunshine in him which had once warmed her own heart too with bliss. To him it seemed that an icy rigor breathed in her words—bitter contempt and hostile revulsion. He had some difficulty in keeping himself from breaking out again in violent wrath. He was almost sorry that he had trusted her with his secret and begged her for mercy, instead of leaving things to run their course, and if it had come to the worst, dragging her to perdition with him. Sooner would he forfeit honor and peace than humble himself again before this pitiless and cold-hearted foe. At this moment he really hated her, and only wished it were possible to fight her, to break her pride, to see her vanquished and crying for quarter at his feet. It was with a great effort—with tingling cheeks and constrained utterance that he said:

“Severance from you is indeed best for us all.—Be ready: the judges will send for you soon.”

“Very well,” she replied. “I will be silent; you have only to provide for the Syrian's safety. You have given me your word.”

“And so long as you keep yours I will keep mine. Or else. . .” the words would come from his quivering lips—“or else war to the knife!”

“War to the knife!” she echoed with flashing eyes. “But one thing more. I have proof that the emerald which Hiram sold belonged to me. By all the saints—proof!”

“So much the better for you,” he said. “Woe to us both, if you force me to forget that you are a woman!”

And he left the room with a rapid step.

CHAPTER XII.

Orion went down stairs scowling and clenching his fists. His heart ached to bursting.

What had he done, what had befallen him? That a woman should dare to treat him so!—a woman whom he had deigned to love—the loveliest and noblest of women; but at the same time the haughtiest, most vengeful, and most hateful.

He had once read this maxim: "When a man has committed a base action, if only one other knows of it he carries the death-warrant of his peace in the bosom of his garment." He felt the full weight of this sentence; and the other—the one who knew—was Paula, the woman of all others whom he most wished should look up to him. But yesterday it had been a vision of heaven on earth to dream of holding her in his arms and calling her his; now he had but one wish: that he could humble and punish her. Oh, that his hands should be tied, that he should be dependent on her mercy like a condemned criminal! It was inconceivable—intolerable!

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But she should be taught to know him. He had passed through life hitherto as white as a swan; if this luckless hour and this woman made him appear as a vulture, it was not his fault, it was hers. She should soon see which was the stronger of the two. He would punish her in every way in which a woman can be punished, even if the way to it led through crime and misery! He was not afraid that the leech had won her affections, for he knew, with strange certainty that, in spite of the hostility she displayed, her heart was his and his alone. "The gold coin called love," said he to himself, "has two faces: tender devotion and bitter aversion; just now she is showing me the latter. But, however different the image and superscription may be on the two sides, if you ring it, it always gives out the same tone; and I can hear it even in her most insulting words."

When the family met at table he made Paula's excuses; he himself ate only a few mouthfuls, for the judges had assembled some time since and were waiting for him.

The right of life and death had been placed in the hands of the ancestors of the Mukaukas, powerful princes of provinces; they had certainly wielded it even in the dynasty of Psammitichus, whose power had been put to a terrible end by Cambyses the Persian. And still the Uraeus snake—the asp whose bite caused almost instant death, reared its head as the time-honored emblem of this privilege, by the side of St. George the Dragon-slayer, over the palaces of the Mukaukas at Memphis, and at Lykopolis in Upper Egypt. And in both these places the head of the family retained the right of arbitrary judgment and capital punishment over the retainers of his house and the inhabitants of the district he governed, after Justinian first, and then the Emperor Heraclius, had confirmed them in their old prerogative. The chivalrous St. George was placed between the snakes so as to replace a heathen symbol by a Christian one. Formerly indeed the knight himself had had the head of a sparrow-hawk: that is to say of the god Horus, who had overthrown the evil-spirit, Seth-Typhon, to avenge his father; but about two centuries since the heathen crocodile-destroyer had been transformed into the Christian conqueror of the dragon.

After the Arab conquest the Moslems had left all ancient customs and rights undisturbed, including those of the Mukaukas.

The court which assembled to sit in judgment on all cases concerning the adherents of the house consisted of the higher officials of the governor's establishment. The Mukaukas himself was president, and his grown-up son was his natural deputy. During Orion's absence, Nilus, the head of the exchequer, a shrewd and judicious Egyptian, had generally represented his invalid master; but on the present occasion Orion was appointed to take his place, and to preside over the assembly.

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The governor's son hastened to his father's bedroom to beg him to lend him his ring as a token of the authority transferred to him; the Mukaukas had willingly allowed him to take it off his finger, and had enjoined him to exercise relentless severity. Generally he inclined to leniency; but breaking into a house was punishable with death, and in this instance it was but right to show no mercy, out of deference to the Arab merchant. But Orion, mindful of his covenant with Paula, begged his father to give him full discretion. The old Moslem was a just man, who would agree to a mitigated sentence under the circumstances; besides, the culprit was not in strict fact a member of the household, but in the service of a relation.

The Mukaukas applauded his son's moderation and judgment. If only he had been in rather better health he himself would have had the pleasure of being present at the sitting, to see him fulfil for the first time so important a function, worthy of his birth and position.

Orion kissed his father's hand with heart-felt but melancholy emotion, for this praise from the man he so truly loved was a keen pleasure; and yet he felt that it was of ill-omen that his duties as judge, of which he knew the sacred solemnity, should be thus—thus begun.

It was in a softened mood, sunk in thought as to how he could best save Hiram and leave Paula's name altogether out of the matter, that he went to the hall of justice; and there he found the nurse Perpetua in eager discussion with Nilus.

The old woman was quite beside herself. In the clatter of her loom she had heard nothing of what had been going on till a few minutes ago; now she was ready to swear to the luckless Hiram's innocence. The stone he had sold had belonged to his young mistress, and thank God there was no lack of evidence of the fact; the setting of the emerald was lying safe and sound in Paula's trunk. Happily she had had an opportunity of speaking to her; and that she, the daughter of Thomas, should be brought before the tribunal, like a citizen's daughter or slave-girl, was unheard of, shameful!

At this Orion roughly interfered; he desired the old gate-keeper to conduct Perpetua at once to the storeroom next to the tablinum, where the various stuffs prepared for the use of the household were laid by, and to keep her there under safe guard till further notice. The tone in which he gave the order was such that even the nurse did not remonstrate; and Nilus, for his part obeyed in silence when Orion bid him return to his place among the judges.

Nilus went back to the judgment-hall in uneasy consternation. Never before had he seen his young lord in this mood. As he heard the nurse's statement the veins had swelled in his smooth youthful forehead, his nostrils had quivered with convulsive agitation, his voice had lost all its sweetness, and his eyes had a sinister gleam.

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Orion was now alone; he ground his teeth with rage. Paula had betrayed him in spite of her promise, and how mean was her woman's cunning! She could be silent before the judges—yes. Silent in all confidence now, to the very last; but the nurse, her mouthpiece, had already put Nilus, the keenest and most important member of the court, in possession of the evidence which spoke for her and against him. It was shocking, disgraceful! Base and deliberately malicious treachery. But the end was not yet: he still was free to act and to ward off the spiteful stroke by a counterthrust. How it should be dealt was clear from Perpetua's statement; but his conscience, his instincts and long habits of submission to what was right, good, and fitting held him back. Not only had he never himself done a base or a mean action; he loathed it in another, and the only thing he could do to render Paula's perfidy harmless was, as he could not deny, original and bold, but at the same time detestable and shameful.

Still, he could not and he would not succumb in this struggle. Time pressed. Long reflection was impossible; suddenly he felt carried away by a fierce and mad longing to fight it out—he felt as he had felt on a race-day in the hippodrome, when he had driven his own quadriga ahead of all the rest.

Onwards, then, onwards; and if the chariot were wrecked, if the horses were killed, if his wheels maimed his comrades overthrown in the arena—still, onwards, onwards!

A few hasty steps brought him to the lodge of the gate-keeper, a sturdy old man who had held his post for forty years. He had formerly been a locksmith and it still was part of his duty to undertake the repairs of the simple household utensils. Orion as a youth had been a beautiful and engaging boy and a great favorite with this worthy man; he had delighted in sitting in his little room and handing him the tools for his work. He himself had remarkable mechanical facility and had been the old man's apt pupil; nay, he had made such progress as to be able to carve pretty little boxes, prayer-book cases, and such like, and provide them with locks, as gifts to his parents on their birth days—a festival always kept with peculiar solemnity in Egypt, and marked by giving and receiving presents. He understood the use of tools, and he now hastily selected such as he needed. On the window-ledge stood a bunch of flowers which he had ordered for Paula the day before, and which he had forgotten to fetch this terrible morning. With this in one hand, and the tools in the breast of his robe he hastened upstairs.

"Onwards, I must keep on!" he muttered, as he entered Paula's room, bolted the door inside and, kneeling before her chest, tossed the flowers aside. If he was discovered, he would say that he had gone into his cousin's chamber to give her the bouquet.

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“Onwards; I must go on!” was still his thought, as he unscrewed the hinge on which the lid of the trunk moved. His hands trembled, his breath came fast, but he did his task quickly. This was the right way to work, for the lock was a peculiar one, and could not have been opened without spoiling it. He raised the lid, and the first thing his hand came upon in the chest was the necklace with the empty medallion—it was as though some kind Genius were aiding him. The medallion hung but slightly to the elegantly-wrought chain; to detach it and conceal it about his person was the work of a minute.

But now the most resolute. “On, on. . . .” was of no further avail. This was theft: he had robbed her whom, if she only had chosen it, he was ready to load with everything wherewith fate had so superabundantly blessed him. No, this—this....

A singular idea suddenly flashed through his brain; a thought which brought a smile to his lips even at this moment of frightful tension. He acted upon it forth with: he drew out from within his under-garment a gem that hung round his neck by a gold chain. This jewel—a masterpiece by one of the famous Greek engravers of heathen antiquity—had been given him in Constantinople in exchange for a team of four horses to which his greatest friend there had taken a fancy. It was in fact of greater price than half a dozen fine horses. Half beside himself, and as if intoxicated, Orion followed the wild impulse to which he had yielded; indeed, he was glad to have so precious a jewel at hand to hang in the place of the worthless gold frame-work. It was done with a pinch; but screwing up the hinge again was a longer task, for his hands trembled violently—and as the moment drew near in which he meant to let Paula feel his power, the more quickly his heart beat, and the more difficult he found it to control his mind to calm deliberation.

After he had unbolted the door he stood like a thief spying the long corridor of the strangers’ wing, and this increased his excitement to a frenzy of rage with the world, and fate, and most of all with her who had compelled him to stoop to such base conduct. But now the charioteer had the reins and goad in his hand. Onwards now, onwards!

He flew down stairs, three steps at a time, as he had been wont when a boy. In the anteroom he met Eudoxia, Mary’s Greek governess, who had just brought her refractory pupil into the house, and he tossed her the nosegay he still held in his hands; then, without heeding the languishing glances the middle-aged damsel sent after him with her thanks, he hastened back to the gate-keeper’s lodge where he hurriedly disburdened himself of the locksmith’s tools.

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A few minutes later he entered the judgment-hall. Nilus the treasurer showed him to the governor's raised seat, but an overpowering bashfulness kept him from taking this position of honor. It was with a burning brow, and looks so ominously dark that the assembly gazed at him with timid astonishment, that he opened the proceedings with a few broken sentences. He himself scarcely knew what he was saying, and heard his own voice as vaguely as though it were the distant roar of waves. However, he succeeded in clearly stating all that had happened: he showed the assembly the stone which had been stolen and recovered; he explained how the thief had been taken; he declared Paula's freedman to be guilty of the robbery, and called upon him to bring forward anything he could in his own defence. But the accused could only stammer out that he was not guilty. He was not able to defend himself, but his mistress could no doubt give evidence that would justify him.

Orion pushed the hair from his forehead, proudly raised his aching head, and addressed the judges:

"His mistress is a lady of rank allied to our house. Let us keep her out of this odious affair as is but seemly. Her nurse gave Nilus some information which may perhaps avail to save this unhappy man. We will neglect nothing to that end; but you, who are less familiar with the leading circumstances, must bear this in mind to guard yourselves against being misled: This lady is much attached to the accused; she clings to him and Perpetua as the only friends remaining to her from her native home. Moreover, there is nothing to surprise me or you in the fact that a noble woman, as she is, should assume the onus of another's crime, and place herself in a doubtful light to save a man who has hitherto been honest and faithful. The nurse is here; shall she be called, or have you, Nilus, heard from her everything that her mistress can say in favor of her freedman?"

"Perpetua told me, and told you, too, my lord, certain credible facts," replied the treasurer. "But I could not repeat them so exactly as she herself, and I am of opinion that the woman should be brought before the court."

"Then call her," said Orion, fixing his eyes on vacancy above the heads of the assembly, with a look of sullen dignity.

After a long and anxious pause the old woman was brought in. Confident in her righteous cause she came forward boldly; she blamed Hiram somewhat sharply for keeping silence so long, and then explained that Paula, to procure money for her search for her father, had made the freedman take a costly emerald out of its setting in her necklace, and that it was the sale of this gem that had involved her fellow-countryman in this unfortunate suspicion.

The nurse's deposition seemed to have biased the greater part of the council in favor of the accused; but Orion did not give them time to discuss their impressions among

themselves. Hardly had Perpetua ceased speaking, when Orion took up the emerald, which was lying on the table before him, exclaiming excitedly, nay, angrily:

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“And the stone which is recognized by the man who sold it—an expert in gems—as being that which was taken from the hanging, and unique of its kind, is supposed, by some miracle of nature, to have suddenly appeared in duplicate?—Malignant spirits still wander through the world, but would hardly dare to play their tricks in this Christian house. You all know what ‘old women’s tales’ are; and the tale that old woman has told us is one of the most improbable of its class. ‘Tell that to Apelles the Jew,’ said Horace the Roman; but his fellow-Israelite, Gamaliel’—and he turned to the jeweller who was sitting with the other witnesses will certainly not believe it; still less I, who see through this tissue of falsehood. The daughter of the noble Thomas has condescended to weave it with the help of that woman—a skilled weaver, she—to spread it before us in order to mislead us, and so to save her faithful servant from imprisonment, from the mines, or from death. These are the facts.—Do I err, woman, or do you still adhere to your statement?”

The nurse, who had hoped to find in Orion her mistress’ advocate, had listened to his speech with growing horror. Her eyes flashed as she looked at him, first with mockery and then with vehement disgust; but, though they filled with tears at this unlooked-for attack, she preserved her presence of mind, and declared she had spoken the truth, and nothing but the truth, as she always did. The setting of her mistress’ emerald would prove her statement.

Orion shrugged his shoulders, desired the woman to fetch her mistress, whose presence was now indispensable, and called to the treasurer:

“Go with her, Nilus! And let a servant bring the trunk here that the owner may open it in the presence of us all and before any one else touches the contents. I should not be the right person to undertake it since no one in this Jacobite household—hardly even one of yourselves— has found favor in the eyes of the Melchite. She has unfortunately a special aversion for me, so I must depute to others every proceeding that could lead to a misunderstanding.—Conduct her hither, Nilus; of course with the respect due to a maiden of high rank.”

While the envoy was gone Orion paced the room with swift, restless steps, Once only he paused and addressed the judges:

“But supposing the empty setting should be found, how do you account for the existence of two—two gems, each unique of its kind? It is distracting. Here is a soft-hearted girl daring to mislead a serious council of justice for the sake, for the sake of. . . .” he stamped his foot with rage and continued his silent march.

“He is as yet but a beginner,” thought the assembled officials as they watched his agitation. “Otherwise how could he allow such an absurd attempt to clear an accused thief to affect him so deeply, or disturb his temper?”

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Paula's arrival presently put an end to Orion's pacing the room. He received her with a respectful bow and signed to her to be seated. Then he bid Nilus recapitulate the results of the proceedings up to the present stage, and what he and his colleagues supposed to be her motive for asserting that the stolen emerald was her property. He would as far as possible leave it to the others to question her, since she knew full well on what terms she was with himself. Even before he had come into the council-room she had offered her explanation of the robbery to Nilus, through her nurse Perpetua; but it would have seemed fairer and more friendly in his eyes—and here he raised his voice—if she had chosen to confide to him, Orion, her plan for helping the freedman. Then he might have been able to warn her. He could only regard this mode of action, independently of him, as a fresh proof of her dislike, and she must hold herself responsible for the consequences. Justice must now take its course with inexorable rigor.

The wrathful light in his eyes showed her what she had to expect from him, and that he was prepared to fight her to the end. She saw that he thought that she had broken the promise she had but just now given him; but she had not commissioned Perpetua to interfere in the matter; on the contrary, she had desired the woman to leave it to her to produce her evidence only in the last extremity. Orion must believe that she had done him a wrong; still, could that make him so far forget himself as to carry out his threats, and sacrifice an innocent man—to divert suspicion from himself, while he branded her as a false witness? Aye, even from that he would not shrink! His flaming glance, his abrupt demeanor, his laboring breath, proclaimed it plainly enough.—Then let the struggle begin! At this moment she would have died rather than have tried to mollify him by a word of excuse. The turmoil in his whole being vibrated through hers. She was ready to throw herself at his feet and implore him to control himself, to guard himself against further wrong-doing—but she maintained her proud dignity, and the eyes that met his were not less indignant and defiant than his own.

They stood face to face like two young eagles preparing to fight, with feathers on end, arching their pinions and stretching their necks. She, confident of victory in the righteousness of her cause, and far more anxious for him than for herself; he, almost blind to his own danger, but, like a gladiator confronting his antagonist in the arena, far more eager to conquer than to protect his own life and limb.

While Nilus explained to her what, in part, she already knew, and repeated their suspicion that she had been tempted to make a false declaration to save the life of her servant, whose devotion, no doubt, to his missing master had led him to commit the robbery; she kept her eye on Orion rather than on the speaker. At last Nilus referred to the trunk, which had been brought from Paula's room under her own eyes, informing her that the assembly were ready to hear and examine into anything she had to say in her own defence.

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Orion's agitation rose to its highest pitch. He felt that the blood had fled from his cheeks, and his thoughts were in utter confusion. The council, the accused, his enemy Paula—everything in the room lay before him shrouded in a whirl of green mist. All he saw seemed to be tinted with light emerald green. The hair, the faces, the dresses of those present gleamed and floated in a greenish light; and not till Paula went up to the chest with a firm, haughty step, drew out a small key, gave it to the treasurer, and answered his speech with three words: "Open the box!"—uttering them with cold condescension as though even this were too much—not till then did he see clearly once more: her bright brown hair, the fire of her blue eyes, the rose and white of her complexion, the light dress which draped her fine figure in noble folds, and her triumphant smile. How beautiful, how desirable was this woman! A few minutes and she would be worsted in this contest; but the triumph had cost him not only herself, but all that was good and pure in his soul, and worthy of his forefathers. An inward voice cried it out to him, but he drowned it in the shout of "Onwards," like a chariot-driver. Yes—on; still on towards the goal; away over ruins and stones, through blood and dust, till she bowed her proud neck, crushed and beaten, and sued for mercy.

The lid of the trunk flew open. Paula stooped, lifted the necklace, held it out to the judges, pulling it straight by the two ends.... Ah! what a terrible, heartrending cry of despair! Orion even, never, never wished to hear the like again. Then she flung the jewel on the table, exclaiming: "Shameful, shameful! atrocious!" she tottered backwards and clung to her faithful Betta; for her knees were giving way, and she felt herself in danger of sinking to the ground.

Orion sprang forward to support her, but she thrust him aside, with a glance so full of anguish, rage and intense contempt that he stood motionless, and clasped his hand over his heart.—And this deed, which was to work such misery for two human beings, he had smiled in doing! This practical joke which concealed a death-warrant—to what fearful issues might it not lead?

Paula had sunk speechless on to a seat, and he stood staring in silence, till a burst of laughter broke from the assembly and old Psamtik, the captain of the guard, who had long been a member of the council of justice, exclaimed:

"By my soul, a splendid stone! There is the heathen god Eros with his winged sweetheart Psyche smiling in his face. Did you never read that pretty story by Apuleius—'The Golden Ass' it is called? The passage is in that. Holy Luke! how finely it is carved. The lady has taken out the wrong necklace. Look, Gamaliel, where could your green pigeon's egg have found a place in that thing?" and he pointed to the gem.

"Nowhere," said the Jew. "The noble lady. . ." But Orion roughly bid the witness to be silent, and Nilus, taking up the engraved gem, examined it closely. Then he—he the grave, just man, on whose support Paula had confidently reckoned—went up to her and

with a regretful shrug asked her whether the other necklace with the setting of which she had spoken was in the trunk.

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The blood ran cold in her veins. This thing that had happened was as startling as a miracle. But no! No higher Power had anything to do with this blow. Orion believed that she had failed in her promise of screening him by her silence, and this, this was his revenge. By what means—how he had gone to work, was a mystery. What a trick!—and it had succeeded! But should she take it like a patient child? No. A thousand times no! Suddenly all her old powers of resistance came back; hatred steeled her wavering will; and, as in fancy, he had seen himself in the circus, driving in a race, so she pictured herself seated at the chess-board. She felt herself playing with all her might to win; but not, as with his father, for flowers, trifling presents or mere glory; nay, for a very different stake Life or Death!

She would do everything, anything to conquer him; and yet, no—come what might—not everything. Sooner would she succumb than betray him as the thief or reveal what she had discovered in the viridarium. She had promised to keep the secret; and she would repay the father's kindness by screening the son from this disgrace. How beautiful, how noble had Orion's image been in her heart. She would not stain it with this disgrace in her own eyes and in those of the world. But every other reservation must be cast far, far away, to snatch the victory from him and to save Hiram. Every fair weapon she might use; only this treachery she could not, might not have recourse to. He must be made to feel that she was more magnanimous than he; that she, under all conceivable circumstances, kept her word. That was settled; her bosom once more rose and fell, and her eye brightened again; still it was some little time before she could find the right words with which to begin the contest.

Orion could see the seething turmoil in her soul; he felt that she was arming herself for resistance, and he longed to spur her on to deal the first blow. Not a word had she uttered of surprise or anger, not a syllable of reproach had passed her lips. What was she thinking of, what was she plotting? The more startling and dangerous the better; the more bravely she bore herself, the more completely in the background might he leave the painful sense of fighting against a woman. Even heroes had boasted of a victory over Amazons.

At last, at last!—She rose and went towards Hiram. He had been tied to the stake to which criminals were bound, and as an imploring glance from his honest eyes met hers, the spell that fettered her tongue was unloosed; she suddenly understood that she had not merely to protect herself, but to fulfil a solemn duty. With a few rapid steps she went up to the table at which her judges sat in a semi-circle, and leaning on it with her left hand, raised her right high in the air, exclaiming:

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"You are the victims of a cruel fraud; and I of an unparalleled and wicked trick, intended to bring me to ruin!—Look at that man at the stake. Does he look like a robber? A more honest and faithful servant never earned his freedom, and the gratitude Hiram owed to his master, my father, he has discharged to the daughter for whose sake he quitted his home, his wife and child. He followed me, an orphan, here into a strange land.—But that matters not to you.—Still, if you will hear the truth, the strict and whole. . . ."

"Speak!" Orion put in; but she went on, addressing herself exclusively to Nilus, and his peers, and ignoring him completely:

"Your president, the son of the Mukaukas, knows that, instead of the accused, I might, if I chose, be the accuser. But I scorn it—for love of his father, and because I am more high-minded than he. He will understand!—With regard to this particular emerald Hiram, my freedman, took it out of its setting last evening, under my eyes, with his knife; other persons besides us, thank God! have seen the setting, empty, on the chain to which it belonged. This afternoon it was still in the place to which some criminal hand afterwards found access, and attached that gem instead. That I have just now seen for the first time—I swear it by Christ's wounds. It is an exquisite work. Only a very rich man—the richest man here, can give away such a treasure, for whatever purpose he may have in view—to destroy an enemy let us say.—Gamaliel," and she turned to the Jew—"At what sum would you value that onyx?"

The Israelite asked to see the gem once more; he turned it about, and then said with a grin: "Well, fair lady, if my black hen laid me little things like that I would feed it on cakes from Arsinoe and oysters from Canopus. The stone is worth a landed estate, and though I am not a rich man, I would pay down two talents for it at any moment, even if I had to borrow the money."

This statement could not fail to make a great impression on the judges. Orion, however, exclaimed: "Wonders on wonders mark this eventful day! The prodigal generosity which had become an empty name has revived again among us! Some lavish demon has turned a worthless plate of gold into a costly gem.—And may I ask who it was that saw the empty setting hanging to your chain?" Paula was in danger of forgetting even that last reserve she had imposed on herself; she answered with trembling accents:

"Apparently your confederates or you yourself did. You, and you alone, have any cause. . . ."

But he would not allow her to proceed. He abruptly interrupted her, exclaiming: "This is really too much! Oh, that you were a man! How far your generosity reaches I have already seen. Even hatred, the bitterest hostility. . . ."

"They would have every right to ruin you completely!" she cried, roused to the utmost. "And if I were to charge you with the most horrible crime. . . ."

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"You yourself would be committing a crime, against me and against this house," he said menacingly. "Beware! Can self-delusion go so far that you dare to appeal to me to testify to the fable you have trumped up...."

"No. Oh, no! That would be counting on some honesty in you yet," she loudly broke in. "I have other witnesses: "Mary, the granddaughter of the Mukaukas," and she tried to catch his eye.

"The child whose little heart you have won, and who follows you about like a pet dog!" he cried.

"And besides Mary, Katharina, the widow Susannah's daughter," she added, sure of her triumph, and the color mounted to her cheeks. "She is no longer a child, but a maiden grown, as you know. I therefore demand of you—" and she again turned to the assembly—"that you will fulfil your functions worthily and promote justice in my behalf by calling in both these witnesses and hearing their evidence."

On this Orion interposed with forced composure: "As to whether a soft-hearted child ought to be exposed to the temptation to save the friend she absolutely worships by giving evidence before the judges, be it what it may, only her grandparents can decide. Her tender years would at any rate detract from the validity of her evidence, and I am averse to involving a child of this house in this dubious affair. With regard to Katharina, it is, on the contrary, the duty of this court to request her presence, and I offer myself to go and fetch her."

He resolutely resisted Paula's attempts to interrupt him again: she should have a patient hearing presently in the presence of her witness. The gem no doubt had come to her from her father. But at this her righteous indignation was again too much for her; she cried out quite beside herself:

"No, and again no. Some reprobate scoundrel, an accomplice of yours— yes, I repeat it—made his way into my room while I was in the sick-room, and either forced the lock of my trunk or opened it with a false key."

"That can easily be proved," said Orion. In a confident tone he desired that the box should be placed on the table, and requested one of the council, who understood such matters, to give his opinion. Paula knew the man well. He was one of the most respected members of the household, the chief mechanic whose duty it was to test and repair the water-clocks, balances, measures and other instruments. He at once proceeded to examine the lock and found it in perfect order, though the key, which was of peculiar form, could certainly not have found a substitute in any false key; and Paula was forced to admit that she had left the trunk locked at noon and had worn the key round her neck ever since. Orion listened to his opinion with a shrug, and before going to seek Katharina gave orders that Paula and the nurse should be conducted to

separate rooms. To arrive at any clear decision in this matter, it was necessary that any communication between these two should be rendered impossible. As soon as the door was shut on them he hastened into the garden, where he hoped to find Katharina.

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The council looked after him with divided feelings. They were here confronted by riddles that were hard to solve. No one of them felt that he had a right to doubt the good intentions of their lord's son, whom they looked up to as a talented and high-minded youth. His dispute with Paula had struck them painfully, and each one asked himself how it was that such a favorite with women should have failed to rouse any sentiment but that of hatred in one of the handsomest of her sex. The marked hostility she displayed to Orion injured her cause in the eyes of her judges, who knew only too well how unpleasant her relations were with Neforis. It was more than audacious in her to accuse the Mukaukas' son of having broken open her trunk; only hatred could have prompted her to utter such a charge. Still, there was something in her demeanor which encouraged confidence in her assertions, and if Katharina could really testify to having seen the empty medallion on the chain there would be no alternative but to begin the enquiry again from a fresh point of view, and to inculcate another robber. But who could have lavished such a treasure as this gem in exchange for mere rubbish? It was inconceivable; Ammonius the mechanician was right when he said that a woman full of hatred was capable of anything, even the incredible and impossible.

Meanwhile it was growing dusk and the scorching day had turned to the tempered heat of a glorious evening. The Mukaukas was still in his room while his wife with Susannah and her daughter, Mary and her governess, were enjoying the air and chatting in the open hall looking out on the garden and the Nile. The ladies had covered their heads with gauze veils as a protection against the mosquitoes, which were attracted in swarms from the river by the lights, and also against the mists that rose from the shallowing Nile; they were in the act of drinking some cooling fruit-syrup which had just been brought in, when Orion made his appearance.

"What has happened?" cried his mother in some anxiety, for she concluded from his dishevelled hair and heated cheeks that the meeting had gone anything rather than smoothly.

"Incredible things," he replied. "Paula fought like a lioness for her father's freedman. . ."

"Simply to annoy us and put us in a difficulty," replied Neforis.

"No, no, Mother," replied Orion with some warmth. "But she has a will of iron; a woman who never pauses at anything when she wants to carry her point; and at the same time she goes to work with a keen wit that is worthy of the greatest lawyer that I ever heard defend a cause in the high court of the capital. Besides this her air of superiority, and her divine beauty turn the heads of our poor household officers. It is fine and noble, of course, to be so zealous in the cause of a servant; but it can do no good, for the evidence against her stammering favorite is overwhelming, and when her last plea is demolished the matter is ended. She says that she showed a necklace to the child, and to you, charming Katharina."

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"Showed it?" cried the young girl. "She took it away from us—did not she, Mary?"

"Well, we had taken it without her leave," replied the child.

"And she wants our children to appear in a court of justice to bear witness for her highness?" asked Neforis indignantly.

"Certainly," replied Orion. "But Mary's evidence is of no value in law."

"And even if it were," replied his mother, "the child should not be mixed up with this disgraceful business under any circumstances."

"Because I should speak for Paula!" cried Mary, springing up in great excitement.

"You will just hold your tongue," her grandmother exclaimed.

"And as for Katharina," said the widow, "I do not at all like the notion of her offering herself to be stared at by all those gentlemen."

"Gentlemen!" observed the girl. "Men—household officials and such like. They may wait long enough for me!"

"You must nevertheless do their bidding, haughty rosebud," said Orion laughing. "For you, thank God, are no longer a child, and a court of justice has the right of requiring the presence of every grown person as a witness. No harm will come to you, for you are under my protection. Come with me. We must learn every lesson in life. Resistance is vain. Besides, all you will have to do will be to state what you have seen, and then, if I possibly can, I will bring you back under the tender escort of this arm, to your mother once more. You must entrust your jewel to me to-day, Susannah, and this trustworthy witness shall tell you afterwards how she fared under my care."

Katharina was quite capable of reading the implied meaning of these words, and she was not ill-pleased to be obliged to go off alone with the governor's handsome son, the first man for whom her little heart had beat quicker; she sprang up eagerly; but Mary clung to her arm, and insisted so vehemently and obstinately on being taken with them to bear witness in Paula's behalf, that her governess and Dame Neforis had the greatest difficulty in reducing her to obedience and letting the pair go off without her. Both mothers looked after them with great satisfaction, and the governor's wife whispered to Susannah: "Before the judges to-day, but ere long, please God, before the altar at Church!"

To reach the hall of judgment they could go either through the house or round it. If the more circuitous route were chosen, it lay first through the garden; and this was the course taken by Orion. He had made a very great effort in the presence of the ladies to remain master of the agitation that possessed him; he saw that the battle he had begun,

and from which he, at any rate, could not and would not now retire, was raging more and more fiercely, obliging him to drag the young creature who must become his wife—the die was already cast—into the course of crime he had started on.

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When he had agreed with his mother that he was not to prefer his suit for Katharina till the following day, he had hoped to prove to her in the interval that this little thing was no wife for him; and now—oh! Irony of Fate—he found himself compelled to the very reverse of what he longed to do: to fight the woman he loved—Yes, still loved—as if she were his mortal foe, and pay his court to the girl who really did not suit him. It was maddening, but inevitable; and once more spurring himself with the word “Onwards!” he flung himself into the accomplishment of the unholy task of subduing the inexperienced child at his elbow into committing even a crime for his sake. His heart was beating wildly; but no pause, no retreat was possible: he must conquer. “Onwards, then, onwards!”

When they had passed out of the light of the lamps into the shade he took his young companion’s slender hand—thankful that the darkness concealed his features—and pressed the delicate fingers to his lips.

“Oh!—Orion!” she exclaimed shyly, but she did not resist.

“I only claim my due, sunshine of my soul!” he said insinuatingly. “If your heart beat as loud as mine, our mothers might hear them!”

“But it does!” she joyfully replied, her curly head bent on one side.

“Not as mine does,” he said with a sigh, laying her little hand on his heart. He could do so in all confidence, for its spasmodic throbbing threatened to suffocate him.

“Yes indeed,” she said. “It is beating. . .”

“So that they can hear it indoors,” he added with a forced laugh. “Do you think your dear mother has not long since read our feelings?”

“Of course she has,” whispered Katharina. “I have rarely seen her in such good spirits as since your return.”

“And you, you little witch?”

“I? Of course I was glad—we all were.—And your parents!”

“Nay, nay, Katharina! What you yourself felt when we met once more, that is what I want to know.”

“Oh, let that pass! How can I describe such a thing?”

“Is that quite impossible?” he asked and clasped her arm more closely in his own. He must win her over, and his romantic fancy helped him to paint feelings he had never had, in glowing colors. He poured out sweet words of love, and she was only too ready



to believe them. At a sign from him she sat down confidently on a wooden bench in the old avenue which led to the northern side of the house. Flowers were opening on many of the shrubs and shedding rich, oppressive perfume. The moonlight pierced through the solemn foliage of the sycamores, and shimmering streaks and rings of light played in the branches, on the trunks, and on the dark ground. The heat of the day still lingered in the leafy roofs overhead, sultry and heavy even now; and in this alley he called her for the first time his own, his betrothed, and enthralled her heart in chains and bonds. Each fervent word thrilled with the wild and painful agitation that was torturing his soul, and sounded heartfelt and sincere. The scent of flowers, too, intoxicated her young and inexperienced heart; she willingly offered her lips to his kisses, and with exquisite bliss felt the first glow of youthful love returned.

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She could have lingered thus with him for a lifetime; but in a few minutes he sprang up, anxious to put an end to this tender dalliance which was beginning to be too much even for him, and exclaimed:

“This cursed, this infernal trial! But such is the fate of man! Duty calls, and he must return from all the bliss of Paradise to the world again. Give me your arm, my only love, my all!”

And Katharina obeyed. Dazzled and bewildered by the extraordinary happiness that had come to meet her, she allowed him to lead her on, listening with suspended breath as he added: “Out of this beatitude back to the sternest of duties!—And how odious, how immeasurably loathesome is the case in question! How gladly would I have been a friend to Paula, a faithful protector instead of a foe!”

As he spoke he felt the girl’s left hand clench tighter on his arm, and this spurred him on in his guilty purpose. Katharina herself had suggested to his mind the course he must pursue to attain his end. He went on to influence her jealousy by praising Paula’s charm and loftiness, excusing himself in his own eyes by persuading himself that a lover was justified in inducing his betrothed to save his happiness and his honor.

Still, as he uttered each flattering word, he felt that he was lowering himself and doing a fresh injustice to Paula. He found it only too easy to sing her praises; but as he did so with growing enthusiasm Katharina hit him on the arm exclaiming, half in jest and half seriously vexed:

“Oh, she is a goddess! And pray do you love her or me? You had better not make me jealous! Do you hear?”

“You little simpleton!” he said gaily; and then he added soothingly: “She is like the cold moon, but you are the bright warming sun. Yes, Paula!—we will leave Paula to some Olympian god, some archangel. I rejoice in my gladsome little maiden who will enjoy life with me, and all its pleasures!”

“That we will!” she exclaimed triumphantly; the horizon of her future was radiant with sunshine.

“Good Heavens!” he exclaimed as if in surprise. “The lights are already shining in that miserable hall of justice! Ah, love, love! Under that enchantment we had forgotten the object for which we came out.—Tell me, my darling, do you remember exactly what the necklace was like that you and Mary were playing with this afternoon?”

“It was very finely wrought, but in the middle hung a rubbishy broken medallion of gold.”

“You are a pretty judge of works of art! Then you overlooked the fine engraved gem which was set in that modest gold frame?”

“Certainly not.”

“I assure you, little wise-head!”

“No, my dearest.” As she spoke she looked up saucily, as though she had achieved some great triumph. “I know very well what gems are. My father left a very fine collection, and my mother says that by his will they are all to belong to my future husband.”

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"Then I can set you, my jewel, in a frame of the rarest gems."

"No, no," she cried gaily. "Let me have a setting indeed, for I am but a fugitive thing; but only, only in your heart."

"That piece of goldsmith's work is already done.—But seriously my child; with regard to Paula's necklace: it really was a gem, and you must have happened to see only the back of it. That is just as you describe it: a plain setting of gold."

"But Orion. . . ."

"If you love me, sweetheart, contradict me no further. In the future I will always accept your views, but in this case your mistake might involve us in a serious misunderstanding, by compelling me to give in to Paula and make her my ally.—Here we are! But wait one moment longer.—And once more, as to this gem. You see we may both be wrong—I as much as you; but I firmly believe that I am in the right. If you make a statement contrary to mine I shall appear before the judges as a liar. We are now betrothed—we are but one, wholly one; what damages or dignifies one of us humiliates or elevates the other. If you, who love me—you, who, as it is already whispered, are soon to be the mistress of the governor's house—make a statement opposed to mine they are certain to believe it. You see, your whole nature is pure kindness, but you are still too young and innocent quite to understand all the duties of that omnipotent love which beareth and endureth all things. If you do not yield to me cheerfully in this case you certainly do not love me as you ought. And what is it to ask? I require nothing of you but that you should state before the court that you saw Paula's necklace at noon to-day, and that there was a gem hanging to it—a gem with Love and Psyche engraved on it."

"And I am to say that before all those men?" asked Katharina doubtfully.

"You must indeed, you kind little angel!" cried Orion tenderly. "And do you think it pretty in a betrothed bride to refuse her lover's first request so grudgingly, suspiciously, and ungraciously? Nay, nay. If there is the tiniest spark of love for me in your heart, if you do not want to see me reduced to implore Paula for mercy. . . ."

"But what is it all about? How can it matter so much to any one whether a gem or a mere plate of gold....?"

"All that I will explain later," he hastily replied.

"Tell me now...."

"Impossible. We have already put the patience of the judges to too severe a test. We have not a moment to lose."

“Very well then; but I shall die of confusion and shame if I have to make a declaration. . . .”

“Which is perfectly truthful, and by which you can prove to me that you love me,” he urged.

“But it is dreadful!” she exclaimed anxiously. “At least fasten my veil closely over my face.—All those bearded men. . . .”

“Like the ostrich,” said Orion, laughing as he complied. “If you really cannot agree with your.... What is it you called me just now? Say it again.”

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"My dearest!" she said shyly but tenderly.

She helped Orion to fold her veil twice over her face, and did not thrust him aside when he whispered in her ear: "Let us see if a kiss cannot be sweet even through all that wrapping!—Now, come. It will be all over in a few minutes."

He led the way into the anteroom to the great hall, begged her to wait a moment, and then went in and hastily informed the assembly that Dame Susannah had entrusted her daughter to him only on condition that he should escort her back again as soon as she had given her testimony. Then Paula was brought in and he desired her to be seated.

It was with a sinking and anxious heart that Katharina had entered the anteroom. She had screened herself from a scolding before now by trivial subterfuges, but never had told a serious lie; and every instinct rebelled against the demand that she should now state a direct falsehood. But could Orion, the noblest of mankind, the idol of the whole town, so pressingly entreat her to do anything that was wrong? Did not love—as he had said—make it her duty to do everything that might screen him from loss or injury? It did not seem to her to be quite as it should be, but perhaps she did not altogether understand the matter; she was so young and inexperienced. She hated the idea, too, that, if she opposed her lover, he would have to come to terms with Paula. She had no lack of self-possession, and she told herself that she might hold her own with any girl in Memphis; still, she felt the superiority of the handsome, tall, proud Syrian, nor could she forget how, the day before yesterday, when Paula had been walking up and down the garden with Orion the chief officer of Memphis had exclaimed: "What a wonderfully handsome couple!" She herself had often thought that no more beautiful, elegant and lovable creature than Thomas' daughter walked the earth; she had longed and watched for a glance or a kind word from her. But since hearing those words a bitter feeling had possessed her soul against Paula, and there had been much to foster it. Paula always treated her like a child instead of a grown-up girl, as she was. Why, that very morning, had she sought out her betrothed—for she might call him so now—and tried to keep her away from him? And how was it that Orion, even while declaring his love for her, had spoken more than warmly—enthusiastically of Paula? She must be on her guard, and though others should speak of the great good fortune that had fallen to her lot, Paula, at any rate, would not rejoice in it, for Katharina felt and knew that she was not indifferent to Orion. She had not another enemy in the world, but Paula was one; her love had everything to fear from her—and suddenly she asked herself whether the gold medallion she had seen might not indeed have been a gem? Had she examined the necklace closely, even for a moment? And why should she fancy she had sharper sight than Orion with his large, splendid eyes?

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He was right, as he always was. Most engraved gems were oval in form, and the pendant which she had seen and was to give evidence about, was undoubtedly oval. Then it was not like Orion to require a falsehood of her. In any case it was her duty to her betrothed to preserve from evil, and prevent him from concluding any alliance with that false Siren. She knew what she had to say; and she was about to loosen a portion of her veil from her face that she might look Paula steadfastly in the eyes, when Orion came back to fetch her into the hall where the Court was sitting. To his delight—nay almost to his astonishment—she stated with perfect confidence that a gem had been hanging to Paula's necklace at noon that day; and when the onyx was shown her and she was asked if she remembered the stone, she calmly replied:

"It may or it may not be the same; I only remember the oval gold back to it: besides I was only allowed to have the necklace in my hands for a very short time."

When Nilus, the treasurer, desired her to look more closely at the figures of Eros and Psyche to refresh her memory, she evaded it by saying: "I do not like such heathen images: we Jacobite maidens wear different adornments."

At this Paula rose and stepped towards her with a look of stern reproof; little Katharina was glad now that it had occurred to her to cover her face with a double veil. But the utter confusion she felt under the Syrian girl's gaze did not last long. Paula exclaimed reproachfully: "You speak of your faith. Like mine, it requires you to respect the truth. Consider how much depends on your declaration; I implore you, child. . ."

But the girl interrupted her rival exclaiming with much irritation and vehement excitement:

"I am no longer a child, not even as compared with you; and I think before I speak, as I was taught to do."

She threw back her little head with a confident air, and said very decidedly:

"That onyx hung to the middle of the chain."

"How dare you, you audacious hussy!" It was Perpetua, quite unable to contain herself, who flung the words in her face. Katharina started as though an asp had stung her and turned round on the woman who had dared to insult her so grossly and so boldly. She was on the verge of tears as she looked helplessly about her for a defender; but she had not long to wait, for Orion instantly gave orders that Perpetua should be imprisoned for bearing false witness. Paula, however, as she had not perjured herself, but had merely invented an impossible tale with a good motive, was dismissed, and her chest was to be replaced in her room.

At this Paula once more stepped forth; she unhooked the onyx from the chain and flung it towards Gamaliel, who caught it, while she exclaimed:

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"I make you a present of it, Jew! Perhaps the villain who hung it to my chain may buy it back again. The chain was given to my great-grandmother by the saintly Theodosius, and rather than defile it by contact with that gift from a villain, I will throw it into the Nile! —You—you, poor, deluded judges—I cannot be wroth with you, but I pity you!—My Hiram..." and she looked at the freedman, "is an honest soul whom I shall remember with gratitude to my dying day; but as to that unrighteous son of a most righteous father, that man. . ." and she raised her voice, while she pointed straight at Orion's face; but the young man interrupted her with a loud:

"Enough!"

She tried to control herself and replied:

"I will submit. Your conscience will tell you a hundred times over what I need not say. One last word. . ." She went close up to him and said in his ear:

"I have been able to refrain from using my deadliest weapon against you for the sake of keeping my word. Now you, if you are not the basest wretch living, keep yours, and save Hiram."

His only reply was an assenting nod; Paula paused on the threshold and, turning to Katharina, she added: "You, child—for you are but a child—with what nameless suffering will not the son of the Mukaukas repay you for the service you have rendered him!" Then she left the room. Her knees trembled under her as she mounted the stairs, but when she had again taken her place by the side of the hapless, crazy girl a merciful God granted her the relief of tears. Her friend saw her and left her to weep undisturbed, till she herself called him and confided to him all she had gone through in the course of this miserable day.

Orion and Katharina had lost their good spirits; they went back to the colonnade in a dejected mood. On the way she pressed him to explain to her why he had insisted on her making this declaration, but he put her off till the morrow. They found Susannah alone, for his mother had been sent for by her husband, who was suffering more than usual, and she had taken Mary with her.

After bidding the widow good-night and escorting her to her chariot, he returned to the hall where the Court was still sitting. There he recapitulated the case as it now stood, and all the evidence against the freed man. The verdict was then pronounced: Hiram was condemned to death with but one dissentient voice that of Nilus the treasurer.

Orion ordered that the execution of the sentence should be postponed; he did not go back into the house, however, but had his most spirited horse saddled and rode off alone into the desert. He had won, but he felt as though in this race he had rushed into a morass and must be choked in it.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Love has two faces: tender devotion and bitter aversion
Self-interest and egoism which drive him into the cave
The man who avoids his kind and lives in solitude
You have a habit of only looking backwards

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